'I will show you everyone I love'
Local networks of support for the military in an East Ukrainian town

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Abstract: Russia's full-scale invasion prompted mass mobilisation of civilian support for the army and those heavily affected in Ukraine. Whether military equipment such as grenade shells or tourniquets, evacuations of civilians or the wounded, or rebuilding homes in frontline territories, a broad coalition of volunteers have come together to keep basic services running or enhance the comfort and safety of those fighting. The role of online crowdfunders and younger, more urban, internet-based networks of support is well understood in this, but very different coalitions operate in villages and smaller towns. This talk follows a museum worker in the towns Kharkiv region, who assembles weekly shipments of aid for brigades along the Donbas frontline. Tracing the origins of a trunk-load of items I will argue that culture workers and local state workers more broadly are crucial in local economies of care, and their work tells us much about enduring networks of patronage, cross-class ties and the dynamics of wartime community work. I will show how and why such unlikely candidates, low-earning state employees, most of them middle-aged or elderly women, are crucial in building and maintaining networks of support across groups as diverse as local agribusiness, church choirs, widows and wives of soldiers and middle-class professionals in regional urban centres. Finally, I will show how these networks shape the emerging memory of the war, enabling the acquisition of paraphernalia of the war by local museums and other cultural institutions, and supporting the commemoration of fallen local soldiers.

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