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Left of Maidan: Self-Organization and the Ukrainian State on the Edge of Europe

Emily S. Channell-Justice
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Left of Maidan: Self-Organization and the Ukrainian State on the Edge of Europe

Emily S. Channell-Justice
LEFT OF MAIDAN:
SELF-ORGANIZATION AND THE UKRAINIAN STATE ON THE EDGE OF EUROPE

by

EMILY S. CHANNELL-JUSTICE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016
Left of Maidan: Self-Organization and the Ukrainian State on the Edge of Europe

by

Emily S. Channell-Justice

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Katherine Verdery
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
This dissertation examines the intersection of processes of Europeanization and decommunization in Ukraine during a time of war and upheaval. Through the lens of leftist and feminist activists, it explores how political action was renegotiated during and after the mass mobilizations of 2013-2014, known as Euromaidan or Maidan. I use the concept of “self-organization” to consider ways these activists have engaged with a dominant national ideology, which draws from specific political ideas about Europe and communism. I trace how self-organization has roots within socialist-era political forms, how it was enacted during the Maidan mobilizations, and its path since the end of the protests and the onset of war in Ukraine’s eastern regions. In the dissertation, I consider the relationship between self-organization and neoliberalism, as this latter force has permeated activist discourses.

I use three specific ethnographic examples from participant observation with leftist and feminist activists to make these arguments. During the Maidan period and after, I consider the ways leftist activists organized volunteer-based initiatives in order to engage during the protests without using violence and without supporting right-wing national ideologies. Second, I use the example of education-based activism to understand how the leftist student population made criticisms of state institutions that they integrated into the broader anti-state protests of Maidan. Finally, I examine how feminist activists’ views of Europe widely diverged from those of the
majority of protesters on Maidan, and I follow how these feminists—like leftists—reconfigured their own participation through self-organization.

Together, these elements provide both an ethnographic analysis of this significant moment of disorder and a lens onto a more complex understanding of the relationship between the state and political action. More specifically, examining how marginalized groups participated in this form of collective political action has led me to determine that these protests have reformulated people’s expectations of their governing regimes and their notions of what political participation can and should achieve. I conclude, ultimately, that this reformulation has great bearing on the future of Ukraine’s relationship with its more dominant neighbors—namely, Russia and the European Union.
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Chapter 1: Introduction:

Europeanization, Decommunization, and War in a Perpetual Borderland

Ukraine has long been framed as a borderland. The word *Ukraina* itself means “borderland” or “frontier,” but the way this notion of Ukraine-as-border has been read onto the various territorially-based versions of Ukraine has influenced its residents' perceptions of themselves variously as Ukrainians, Soviets, or Europeans (Brown 2004; Follis 2012; Petryna 2002; Allina-Pisano 2009; Snyder 2010), in addition to multiple local self-conceptualizations (for instance, see Dickinson 2010; Richardson 2008). Since Ukraine’s independence in 1991, its territorial sovereignty has been relatively secure,¹ but the place of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the world remains contested. This contestation occurs in everyday practices as well as in recurring moments of upheaval, including, most significantly, the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan (Maidan) mobilizations. This dissertation explores the latter as a site in which contested versions of Ukraine came to a head, resulting in the overthrow of the government in favor of a new regime.

The current territory of Ukraine ranges from the Donbas in the East, on Russia’s southwestern border, to Belarus in the north, and then to European Union borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania; Ukraine’s southwestern regions, or *oblasts*, border Moldova, including the contested Transnistria region. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea was part of Ukraine from 1954, when Khrushchev “gifted” the peninsula to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic on the 300th anniversary of the 1654 Treaty of Periaslav (Subtelny 2000:499), an

¹ This security has been jeopardized by Russian incursions into Ukraine’s territory since March 2014, including the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the current conflict in the Eastern regions of Donets’k and Luhans’k. Both issues are discussed at length in Chapter 6.
agreement that had brought Ukraine and Russia into an official political relationship.\(^2\) Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed the Crimean peninsula for Russia in March 2014. Contemporary Ukraine is divided by the Dnipro River,\(^3\) with its capital city, Kyiv, in the north-central part of the country (Figure 1.1).

Thus, Ukraine’s physical positioning places it in between two major geopolitical formations, Russia and the European Union (see Dunn and Bobick 2014). Historically, the land east of the Dnipro was dominated by Russia—first, by the Russian Empire, and second, as part of the Soviet Union. The regions of Western Ukraine were variously part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Habsburg Empire, post-partition Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, until Stalin’s Red Army expanded its reach. After World War II, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkSSR) encompassed the far western regions of Galicia and Volhynia (gained from Poland), as well as Zakarpattia (from Czechoslovakia) and Bukovina (from Romania).

Each of these regions contains myriad ethnic and linguistic groups, all of whom were granted Ukrainian citizenship in 1991 (Arel 1995; Shulman 2002). However, their affiliations—to local, national, or supranational entities—were not unified upon Ukraine’s independence. Many have studied this “regionalism” as challenging, if not detrimental, to establishing an effective Ukrainian national identity (Barrington and Herron 2004; Dickinson 2010). It has led to a

\(^2\) This treaty has had multiple interpretations that have various implications for the relationship between contemporary Ukraine and Russia (Subtelny counts five distinct interpretations; 2000:135). The most prominent Russian interpretation of the treaty was that it began a phase of gathering all Slavic peoples together—defined as all those who descended from the Kyivan Rus’—that was led by Catherine II and that secured the Muscovite and Russian empires as the true inheritors of the Kyivan Rus’ (Kappeler 2001:64; Subtelny 2000:135; Wilson 1997:6). The Ukrainian interpretation that informs my discussion of “national ideology” in Chapter 2 understands Pereiaslav as an agreement of mutual respect between the Cossacks and the growing Russian powers (Wilson 1997:7) which was subsequently ignored by the Russians, who used the treaty to crush the Cossack powers, dissolve their settlements, and extend the borders of the Empire to the Black sea (ibid.). So, in this version of Ukrainian historiography, the Treaty of Pereiaslav is the “start of 350 years of colonial oppression” at the hands of Russia (Morrison 1993:681; Subtelny 2000:138).

\(^3\) Throughout the dissertation I will refer to “Eastern” and “Western” Ukraine; unless otherwise indicated, this designation means east or west of the Dnipro River.
significant politicization of regional identities, in which stereotypes of “the East,” represented most authentically by the industrial Donbas, portray the region as a bastion of Soviet nostalgia nurturing a desire to return to Russia. “The West,” with its Hapsburg history, is concomitantly used as proof that Ukraine is really European and singled out as a haven for Ukrainian nationalism based on fascist-inspired 20th-century national movements. This perceived schism has contributed to narratives of Ukraine as a borderland, pulled between Europe and Russia and powerless to decide its own fate.

In political terms, this division has strongly influenced Ukrainian governance. Many of Ukraine’s most prominent political figures, including Viktor Yanukovych and Yulia Tymoshenko, came from major cities in the East (Donets’k and Dnipropetrovs’k, respectively), where they contributed to oligarchic “clans” that made millions from the consolidation of industries after the fall of state socialism. Serhiy Kudelia notes that Yanukovych’s Party of Regions (PR) in particular was effective in further politicizing these regional differences. Specifically, the PR “position[ed] itself as representing Russophone voters generally, defending their identity and promoting their policy preferences” (2014:20), which included promoting the status of the Russian language to an official language of Ukraine, as well as forging closer ties with Russia and delegating more authority to the regional level within Ukraine (ibid.). It was on such promises that Yanukovych effectively mobilized his regional demographic in the 2010 presidential elections, appearing to represent those most disenfranchised in independent Ukraine and promising to stop the spread of fanatical nationalism, represented by Oleh Tyahnybok and the Svoboda Party.4

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4 Rumors abound, somewhat expectedly, that Yanukovych managed to rig these elections as he and his mentor, Leonid Kuchma, had rigged the 2004 elections that sparked the Orange Revolution. Further rumors suggest that Yanukovych and his allies created and planted the Svoboda Party—known in the mid-2000s for its anti-Semitic, xenophobic discourses—to discredit Ukrainian nationalism and gain more support for the Party of Regions.
In 2004, Yanukovych was widely perceived as incapable and undesirable as a representative of Ukraine. Famously poor at using the Ukrainian language, his criminal past discredited him as a positive political figure (Kudelia 2014:20; Wilson 2005:8), despite his support from Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine’s second president. Viktor Yushchenko, his 2004 opponent who worked in the banking industry before taking up politics (Wilson 2005:14-15), represented progress, as he promised to bring Ukraine into line with Europeanization policies that would (theoretically) allow Ukraine eventually to become a member of the European Union. Yulia Tymoshenko, who consolidated Ukraine’s gas import business with oligarch Viktor Pinchuk in the 1990s (Wilson 2005:19), supported Yushchenko and his European aspirations, lending a further “Ukrainian” air to their campaign with her peasant-inspired clothing and hairstyles (this despite her Dnipropetrovs’k origins, a city largely associated with Soviet industry). Yushchenko and Tymoshenko clearly attempted to represent a pro-Ukraine, pro-Europe perspective. Yanukovych and his support from Kuchma—whose own regime was responsible for the 2000 murder of the independent journalist Heorhiy Gongadze (Leshchenko 2014:54; Wilson 2005:51-55), which led, in part, to the unsuccessful “Ukraine Without Kuchma” movement to unseat the president in 2000-2001 (Wilson 2005:58-60)—were a regression into oligarchy and Soviet-inspired relations with Russia.

The clear falsification of the 2004 elections (outlined in Wilson 2005, Chapter 6) led to 200,000 to 300,000 people massing in Kyiv’s Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti, or simply Maidan) on November 22, 2004 (Wilson 2005:125). The tent camp they created there, filled with the orange color of Yushchenko’s campaign and giving the protests the name Orange Revolution, lasted for little more than two weeks. In late December, a new “third round” of voting

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5 Tymoshenko won 80% of the votes in Western regions in the 2010 elections runoff against Yanukovych (Kudelia 2014:21).
was held, in which Yushchenko won over 50% of the vote (Wilson 2005:153). This moment was thought to herald a new era in Ukraine—the development of civil society organizations and a new enthusiasm for institutional politics in Ukraine, as well as putting the country on the path to Europe. However, infighting in the Yushchenko government led to the ousting of Prime Minister Tymoshenko and the creation of a coalition government in which Yanukovych gained power in conjunction with Yushchenko. The latter, unable to enact any effective economic reforms, left office with some of the lowest approval ratings of any Ukrainian president. Thus, in 2010, Yanukovych’s ascent to power came as a result of a more mobilized voting population in Yanukovych’s home regions and because Yanukovych was seen as an antidote to the ills created by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko.

After consolidating power through reinstating the country’s 1996 constitution, which gave more powers to the president (Kudelia 2014:21), and by subordinating the judicial system to his government (23)—which allowed Yanukovych to prosecute Tymoshenko for abuse of authority during 2009 gas deals with Russia—the president appeared to have successfully been instated as a Putin-friendly head of the Ukrainian state. However, his approval ratings fell from 47 to 26 percent in his first year in office (26). Subsequently, Yanukovych turned to Ukraine’s European interests as a strategy to regain some of his former legitimacy. As Kudelia has written,

He had no clear ideological message and sent confusingly mixed signals. He came to office as the champion of Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine, vowing to uphold the social-welfare paternalism that is popular there. Then, in a stab at triangulation, he suddenly began talking up Ukraine’s European roots and its ambitions to join the EU. (2014:24)
Importantly, the European Union’s offer for an Association Agreement was contingent not only on economic reforms but also on the release of Tymoshenko from prison (Kudelia 2014:27). As part of what Kudelia calls “triangulation,” Yanukovych was also considering integrating Ukraine into Putin’s Customs Union (Мутный Союз, together with Belarus and Kazakhstan). Indeed, in November 2013, Yanukovych committed to the latter path: “Once again seeking Russia’s financial assistance—including reduced gas prices—would offer a way to keep social payments up, utility rates down, and short-term debt safely rolled over” (Kudelia 2014:28).

By 2013, Yanukovych and his regime—the bundle of institutions and representatives that I refer to as the “state”—made it clear that it was time for Ukraine to no longer be a borderland but take its inevitable place on the side of Russia. When it became apparent that Yanukovych did not intend to sign the Association Agreement, people again flooded the streets of Ukraine’s major cities, particularly in the center and west (Киев and Львов in particular), but eventually in eastern cities including Харьков, Днепропетровск, and Донецк; in the southern centers Одесса and Херсон; and even in Crimea (see Onuch 2014a:48). Not only did they declare their affiliation for Europe, which was supposed to be secured officially through the Association Agreement, they also declared that the state—meant to represent its citizens, who had elected its members democratically—was no longer representative of them.

I refer to this moment as a rupture between the state and the nation. This latter notion is further contested, and I explain in Chapter 2 my conceptualization of Ukraine and the protests in relation to the “nation.” While the Euromaidan mobilizations—so named at the outset because of their claim to be European—were the apex of this rupture, I conceptualize it within a long break in the state’s ability (and desire) to actually represent any version of the nation. Rather than seeing a geographically- or linguistically-based regional division as the root of Ukraine’s troubles in its
borderland position, I see the competing visions of Ukraine as “truly” European or Russian as ensuring its precarious position.

The Euromaidan mobilizations had various goals, strategies, and effects. One of the major goals of the protests and of the ensuing government was to prove Ukraine’s place as part of Europe. In the section that follows, I will describe how Europe was perceived and constructed during the mobilizations. Then, I engage the work of other scholars considering the complexity of the idea of “Europe,” particularly in relation to the nation-state, a problem of central import during and after the protests. What I wish to make clear is that both the Europe presented during Euromaidan and the Europe of national referenda and Association Agreements are distinct from “actually existing” Europe or the lived realities of European citizenships. In other words, the “Europe” I am concerned with is one of the main political symbols of this period of Ukraine's history.

A Note “on Maidan”

Before I describe the protests in more detail, it is necessary to clarify the terms I use to discuss them. First, I refer to gatherings “on Maidan.” Maidan means “square” in Ukrainian and is an alternative to the Russianized ploshcha (Rus. ploshchad). “Maidan” is a common word in various Turkic and South Asian languages that suggests an “open space.” This “Maidan” refers to Maidan Nezalezhnosti, or Independence Square (October Revolution Square [Ploshcha Zhovtnevoi Revoliutsii] during Soviet times), the capital city’s main site for mass demonstrations since Ukraine’s independence in 1991. In Kyiv, there is only one “Maidan,” so the square is a commonly-used meeting place, centrally connected by two subway lines. The square now features a tall independence monument, topped with a berehynia, the ancient pagan goddess of Ukraine.

6 I most often hear Ukrainians reference the Turkic origins of the word; I thank Mohamad Junaid for pointing out that this word is related to a much larger linguistic geography.
(discussed in Chapter 5; see also Rubchak 2001), and it is surrounded by a large, glass-fronted mall called Globus. The square is cut in half by Khreshchatyk, Kyiv’s main street, which is closed to traffic on the weekends for pedestrians. Across Khreshchatyk are the Trade Unions Building, the main post office building, and several other smaller monuments. Continuing down Khreshchatyk toward the Dnipro River is European Square and the Ukrainian House, and walking up steep Hrushevs’kyi Street (Vulytsia Hrushevs’koho) leads to Ukraine’s Parliament building, or Verkhovna Rada. Following Khreshchatyk the other direction continues south and out of the city center, passing the City Hall (KMDA; Kyivs’ka mis’ka derzhavna administratsiia), the famous Bessarabs’kyi Market, and (formerly) a Lenin statue across from the market. These points in the city center, among others, became extremely significant throughout the demonstrations, and I find this geography to have played a significant and even active role in aiding the long-term protest camps built around the square (see Figure 1.2).

I will continue to use this terminology of being “on Maidan” for two main reasons. The protesters lacked a unified voice in terms of how they viewed the Ukrainian nation, as well as in their goals and demands for the protests themselves. There were people on Maidan from all backgrounds (see Onuch 2014a & 2014b) who had various goals for their presence and who took part in different kinds of actions and demonstrations, which I describe in detail below. I do not feel that the names used to describe the mobilizations, including (but not limited to) EuroMaidan and the Revolution of Dignity, represent the multivocality of the protests, and they even work to erase much of the diversity among protesters that continued throughout the winter. The other reason I insist on this terminology is because everyone I knew who participated in the demonstrations also referred to being “on Maidan” or going “to Maidan”; in other words, the place of Maidan...
Nezalezhnosti worked as a synecdoche for the protests themselves. The place itself had the effect of unifying people far more than slogans or demands.

The 2013-2014 mobilizations were not the first time Maidan was the site of political upheaval. It has been the site of various “revolutions”: the Revolution on Granite of 1990-1991, the Ukraine Without Kuchma movement of 2000-2001, and the Orange Revolution of 2004. Each of these protest movements included tent camps in the space of the square, which was “occupied” largely by student protesters. However, none of these movements is known as “Maidan.” It is only the most recent—and largest—protest movement, which was the only one to see the deaths of protesters at the hands of state forces, that is referred to as “Maidan.” The fact that the word refers to a physical space (rather than a group name or a presidential candidate or campaign) reflects the central role that space itself played in the protests.

Drawing from Habermas (1989), many scholars have recognized the significance of space in establishing a “public sphere” in which ordinary citizens can participate in modern democracy because they come into contact with those who are unlike them and can, therefore, contribute to the “development of public opinion and debate” (Ruddick 1996:133). The spaces of the public sphere, then, have the potential to create “unpredictable confrontation” or, alternatively “the building of new understandings between groups” (Ruddick 1996:134). Ruddick sees the importance of these spaces in being “an active medium through which new identities are created or contested” (1996:135), and they function at both local—contained in the space itself—and

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7 This student movement was in support of Rukh, Ukraine’s independence movement that began in the late 1980s and culminated in a referendum winning Ukrainian independence on August 24, 1991.
8 These protests targeted the Kuchma presidential regime (1994-2005) following allegations that the president had played a role in the beheading of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze in 2000.
9 The Orange Revolution called for new elections after allegations of fraud following Yanukovych’s successful bid for the presidency (supported by Kuchma and Vladimir Putin) against Viktor Yushchenko, widely known to be the more popular candidate. See Wilson 2005.
national levels. In the case of Maidan, a protest contained largely in the capital’s central square came to signify the entire country’s dreams of “real” democracy, reflected in the commonly-used name “Revolution of Dignity” (Revoliutsiia hidnosti).\(^{10}\) The space of Maidan, used to signify the shared views of the nation, drew attention and sympathy to the protesters themselves, because they appeared unified in the space itself.

“\textbf{They Don’t Let Slaves into Heaven}”: Europe and a Free Ukraine

In the early days of Euromaidan, two specific kinds of narratives were used to draw attention and sympathy to the protests. The first focused on Ukraine and Ukrainians as “free.” In particular, this trend used the language of “slaves” and “free” people and a “free” country. One organization, Democratic Alliance,\(^{11}\) circulated a flier (Figure 1.3) using this rhetoric:

\begin{quote}
Kyiv, Wake up!

Right now, Kyivites are risking their lives to protect our right to live in a free country— they cripple them and throw them behind bars.\(^{12}\)

They are lying to us, that they [these Kyivites] are fascists and provocateurs. Open your eyes: these are our neighbors, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances.
\end{quote}

\(^{10}\) To be clear, I did not hear this name until I returned to the U.S. after completing fieldwork. When I saw it used, it was by American scholars of Ukraine and by a few particular Ukrainian scholars writing in English and, in my view, attempting to gain sympathy for a movement that was largely being interpreted in the U.S. as a fascist coup. I am extremely critical of this name, in the use of both the word “revolution,” which I am not convinced applies, and the term “dignity.” I presume that “dignity” refers to “Ukrainians,” but many people on Maidan were not treated with what I would consider dignity, suggesting that “dignity” only extends to certain kinds of Ukrainians—those who put Ukraine above all.

\(^{11}\) Democratic Alliance began as a youth organization in 1996 and became a political party in 2010 (www.dem-alliance.org/about).

\(^{12}\) In the Ukrainian, the pronoun “they” does not appear, suggesting an invisible actor in power over the Kyivites who are risking their lives. The “they” that is lying by suggesting these Kyivites are fascists and provocateurs are the people who sit in political power—representatives of the state. Note that the word “state” is not used here. I show later on how language referencing the “state” began to be used in place of the invisible power actor.
Continue to sit on the sofa—tomorrow they will arrest your friends and family, and the day after tomorrow they will come for you.
Right now it is being decided whether our children will live as slaves or as free people.
How will we look them in the eye?

Now we can come out and protect our freedom and dignity.
Tomorrow it will be too late.

EVERYONE IN THE STREET!
Don’t be intimidated!
Our actions are legal and protected by the Constitution.

(translation by author)

This flier used various kinds of language to motivate passive Kyivites to go into the streets. First, it attempts to relate the protesters to ordinary inhabitants of the city, by declaring that people risking their lives are “neighbors, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances.” It further suggests that “they”—the arms of the state—will not stop at arresting the protesters but instead will continue to repress people until even those who do not protest have no rights. Finally, the flier attempts to draw sympathy from referencing children and the future—that ordinary people must decide if the next generation will be free or slaves (one poster I photographed in late November read, “They don’t let slaves into heaven”).

This latter type of language—evoking children and the future—became very common as the protests progressed. At the center of the Maidan, at the Independence Monument, someone had distributed pieces of paper that were blank except for the opening phrase, “I am here because…” Many people had filled out these papers with future-oriented language: “I’m not passive about the future of Ukraine”; “I want my children and grandchildren to live in Free Ukraine”; “I want to live
in Ukraine!” (see Photo 1.1) and “I want to live in EUROPE!” The idea of “freedom” was extended to Ukraine as a country, but, importantly, it also meant that Ukraine was filled with people who felt themselves to be free. This self-perception as free meant Ukrainians could decide for themselves if they wanted to be connected with Europe or Russia. Only “slaves,” according to the rhetoric of Maidan, would choose Russia.

The choice, as presented on Maidan, was obvious. One unmarked flier compared the Russian Customs Union side-by-side with the European Union (Figure 1.4):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
<th>European Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custom Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Portion of world GDP</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12,310</td>
<td>Nominal GDP per capita</td>
<td>35,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(in dollars per year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Investment in Ukraine</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(from general volume of investment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 (W)</td>
<td>Average life expectancy</td>
<td>80 (W)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>75 (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Access to Internet</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(from the general population)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>569</td>
<td>Prisoners (per 100,000 people)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257</td>
<td>Cars (per 1,000 people)</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>Average salary for intermediate school teacher (in UAH)</td>
<td>25,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,240</td>
<td>Average pension (in UAH)</td>
<td>6,341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other posters around Maidan presented even more information, scoring each Union on how it would benefit or hurt Ukraine. On one poster, the EU was assessed to be beneficial to Ukraine in
terms of “sovereignty,” “modernization,” access to new markets (whereas the Customs Union would benefit Ukraine’s existing markets, the only positive point exclusive to the Customs Union). These posters and fliers presented Ukraine as sharing European interests and values. Presenting economic arguments was essential in promoting the EU alongside notions of “sovereignty” and “modernization,” which remained relatively undefined but appealed to a certain demographic.

These two trends in language about Europe that appeared on Maidan appealed to the three generational groups that dominated the protest space, according to Olga Onuch. Onuch identifies three major trends that were relative to specific age groups. First, “Respondents under 30 were able to express themselves using a media- and NGO-savvy lexicon of ‘EU accession’ and ‘global human rights’” (2014a:50). Onuch assesses this group as most interested in the “new markets” that EU association promised. The second (and largest) group, those aged 30-55, hoped for “economic security” and “the chance to live in a Ukraine that is a ‘normal, European democracy’” (ibid.). The long-term economic benefits of EU association, as presented on the ubiquitous fliers and posters, would theoretically appeal most to this group. Finally, the smallest group of protesters was those over 55. They “saw themselves as the protests’ guardians, retirees able to spend time out in the Maidan while younger protest sympathizers saw to work and family commitments” (ibid.). These protesters most often mentioned the “future” as their main concern, with connections to family and stability, as reflected particularly in the first flier.

Importantly, the Europe envisioned by Ukrainians on Maidan was multi-faceted. It promised real democracy, a respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty and for human rights, as well as long-term economic advantages that Ukraine could otherwise never hope to achieve. This

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13 Onuch and her research team completed intercept surveys with over 1,000 participants between November 26, 2013 and January 10, 2014 as part of the Ukrainian Protest Project. According to Onuch, it is the only multiday survey of participants.
complexity represents the makeup of protesters; while Maidan was often presented as a student protest, at least at first (Diuk 2014; Leshchenko 2014; Onuch 2014a), the protests were ultimately made up of people from a multitude of backgrounds.

Europeanization and Decommunization

This point was not lost on activists whose continual attempts to participate on Maidan were rejected and met with violence—non-party leftist activists. Here, I wish to add an as yet unrecognized element of Europe and Europeanization that was integral to the mobilizations—the role of decommunization. I suggest that decommunization has become one of the most significant parts of Ukraine’s path to Europe. Journalist and leftist activist Andriy Movchan pointed out the centrality of decommunization for the mobilizations at a conference, “The Left and Maidan,” which was held in Kyiv in April 2014. When asked to present about his views and interpretations of leftists’ roles on Maidan, Movchan replied:

Leftist groups’ attempt at intervention into the movements of Maidan happened regularly. Each attempt that appeared on Maidan, as a separate group, separate block, with its own subjectivity, each ended either with some misunderstanding or with violence from the side of the right and ultra-right. It seems to me that the question that stands before us is this situation and the reason for it. And the reason, it seems to me, doesn’t have to do with the weakness of leftist groups, which is factional to today. The reason has to do with the exact character of these protests under the name “Maidan.” Now, I will express my [hypothesis] as to the unifying idea in all of these protests. There was one unifying idea—the idea of anti-communism. In other words, the idea that unified absolutely different groups, different
political views, different social projects, wasn’t nationalism, or fascism, or patriotism, or even Euro-integration, but precisely anti-communism united these groups.

Movchan suggested that, instead of a view in which European integration and anti-Yanukovych activism brought people together, anti-communist attitudes informed protesters’ desires to be part of Europe as well as their adherence to certain national narratives that became prominent in the protests. While his claims incensed many of the conference’s attendees, I would like to take them seriously, as decommunization through legislation has become one of the post-Maidan government’s crucial political platforms.

Decommunization and anti-communist positions have played a complex role in those countries in the former Soviet sphere that gained membership in the European Union in 2004 and 2007 (including Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary; and Romania and Bulgaria). Here, I consider that “anti-communism” refers to the positions and attitudes of participants in political society, ranging from party leaders to voters and ordinary citizens. As Appel has suggested, anti-communism is a “set of ethical beliefs about the legitimacy of the past political and economic system” that “rejects the moral authority of the past regime” at the same time that it “implies a duty for anti-communist leaders not only to condemn but also to redress the injustices perpetuated under the past system” (2005:380). Decommunization, then, is the process of implementing anti-communism as a political platform, the combination of the condemnation and rectification of wrongs committed by communist regimes that Appel describes.

What exactly has decommunization entailed? Is it simply a government “dealing with the communist past” (Kopeček 2010:200), or is it more, the active effort to reject and erase communism and its perceived influence on society, politics, and economics, from the contemporary landscape? In Ukraine, decommunization has included a complete condemnation of
the communist regime and everything associated with it from street names to symbols to the Communist Party itself. It has also incorporated the rejuvenation of historical anticommunists, like Stepan Bandera and other members of controversial Ukrainian organizations of the 20th century. Most recently, decommunization has resulted in the full ban of the Ukrainian Communist Party from standing for elections.14 In this dissertation, I explore the kinds of decommunization being put into place in Ukraine through daily political practices, and I ask how it is linked to complex visions of Europe that I describe below.

Many scholars have considered the role of decommunization in encouraging burgeoning democracies in Eastern and Central Europe (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2003; Halmai and Scheppele 1997; Kopeček 2010; Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Sadurski 2003). In particular, the use and effects of lustration laws to “cleanse” new democracies of former communists and their collaborators has provided a complex view of the possible paths of decommunization (Appel 2005; Calhoun 2002). Ukraine never pursued lustration (although the term became common on Maidan in the spring of 2014), and decommunization as a political platform or project has arguably never existed until now. The importance of decommunization has been secured since May 2015, when President Petro Poroshenko signed into law a package of legislation colloquially known as “Decommunization Laws.” The various elements of this legislation both make denial of the criminality of the Soviet and Nazi regimes a crime in itself and change the legal status of “fighters for Ukraine’s independence,” or members of controversial Ukrainian nationalist organizations in the 20th century, to provide their families recognition and social guarantees (see Channell-Justice 2015, as well as the multifaceted discussion on the Krytyka blog15).

14 The Communist Party was banned in Ukraine in 1991 following the country's independence, but it re-formed in 1993 (Ishchenko 2016:13)
15 See their website: https://krytyka.com/en (in English).
Decommunization-as-politics is a useful tool for a new governing elite to secure its power. For new governments, displaying an anti-communist position serves as proof of an authentic break with a communist past. Alternatively, as Gonzalez-Enriquez has pointed out, “The political elites have also found retribution a useful way to signal their intention to break with the past, and their need to mark such a break is stronger wherever they are the same old elites” (2001:4). In other words, even in the case of governments whose members did not change substantially following the end of state socialism (the case of Ukraine, for instance), decommunization and even lustration can still be mobilized as tactics to gain legitimacy among newly democratic constituents.

This continued use of decommunization as a political platform and tool is distinct from other instances around Central and Eastern Europe. In Hungary, for example, Halmai and Scheppele argue that “living well” has been a better option for the post-communist government than actively pursuing lustration: “If the newly democratic polity is to fully repudiate the antidemocratic one of the recent past, then the best way to do so, in the Hungarian view, is to refuse to be tempted by having the power to use power against its enemies” (1997:182). By not pursuing decommunization and lustration through political and legislative means, the new Hungarian regime shows its own authentic break with the past. While the postsocialist Ukrainian government did not initially pursue such policies, it seems doubtful that a similar logic applies; more likely, this was to protect the large number of former Communist Party members who gained power in Ukraine’s independent governing structures. Indeed, scholars such as Volodymyr Viatrovych (a supporter of the decommunization laws) claims that “the lack of decommunization policy in Ukraine after its declaration of independence in 1991 was in part responsible for the revanchist neo-Soviet regime of Yanukovych” (2015).
Decommunization also plays a crucial role in the creation of new democratic subjects. Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, in analyzing various responses to Romania’s anti-communist governance, suggests that “recent anticommunism has not been a discourse of emancipation and resistance, but the dominant discourse of transition and an instrument of power. The idea that anticommunism is a universal ‘moral obligation’ was an ideological principle put in the service of a particular group of interests” (2010:30). In order to fully integrate postsocialist spaces into Euro-American global capitalist systems, the residents of these countries must be “decommunized,” as deemed by political leaders convinced that capitalism is the only way to survive the initial postsocialism. Similarly, Gil Eyal has explored the depths of the perceived “communization” that must now be rejected at bodily levels in order to truly participate in neoliberal capitalism:

In the eyes of the Czech reformers, the communist past constitutes an immense obstacle to the development of market capitalism and civil society, not so much because of the excesses of socialist industrialization that inhibited efficiency and polluted the environment, but because of the pollution of minds and souls wrought by communist institutions: the dependency fostered by state redistribution, which allowed people to collect an income [without] working hard for it; the irresponsibility of socialist consumerism, which allowed the whole society to spend beyond its means, without regard for the future; the pollution of people’s bodies by over-eating, drinking, and smoking. (2000:55)

These “pollutions,” so entrenched in Communist bodies, are part of the “backwardness” of the region, preventing it from joining Western capitalist modernity (Țichindeleanu 2010:26; see also Todorova 2005). Only active policies of decommunization—and their support by the populace—can bring Eastern and Central Europe into the modern sphere.
To secure this shift, then, communism and its effects must be condemned. While perhaps an understandable (if contestable and contested) step in the early and mid-1990s, the question of how to decommunize a country that has not been communist for 25 years presents a challenge. As Ţichindeleanu describes, “the postcommunist culture industries excelled in the fetishistic production of *accursed symbols* linked with communism, left thought, and the common man, and the converse import of works and figures of the *masters of thought* from the right side of the political spectrum, a cultural tradition forbidden and censored by communism” (2010:27). I find this description apt for Ukraine: the project of decommunization consists of demonizing *anything* related to Ukraine’s Communist past—up to and including the Communist Party and any other leftist political configurations—and of valorizing those parts of history that were hidden or rejected during communism.

As leftist academic Volodymyr Ishchenko has written, the Communist Party—banned in Ukraine in December 2015—became a scapegoat in an “ideological war to divert attention from rising prices and austerity” (2015). Further, the far reaches and fuzzy definitions of the Decommunization Laws make current non-party leftist organizations easy targets of the legislation. These organizations’ interest in Marxism and class-based analyses of social problems, while completely unrelated to the Communist Party of Ukraine of the 2000s, is regularly collapsed into the goals of decommunization, making non-party leftists targets of anti-communist activism. Returning, ultimately, to Andriy Movchan’s conclusions, we can see that decommunization and anti-communism were, in fact, underlying the multiplicity of voices on Maidan and were used to justify a broad rejection of leftist presence during the protests.

These decommunizing projects present great challenges to the growth of any leftist sentiment in postsocialist spaces. Florin Poenaru has argued that anti-anti-communist projects,
such as the 2008 publication of a book by a group of intellectuals that challenged a widely spread report condemning communism in Romania, helped challenge the hegemony of anti-communism and was also a form of class struggle for the post-communist generation (2013:271), but he acknowledges, following Žižek (2001), that this type of criticism is most often met with charges of totalitarianism or fanaticism. In the case of Ukraine, however, the only alternative discourse to challenge the hegemony of anti-communism has been pro-European Union arguments. As critics of neoliberal capitalism—in which the EU is inherently engrained, in the eyes of the left—a staunchly pro-EU position provides a no more encouraging option than anti-anti-communism.

Some regional networks of leftist intellectual criticism and activism exist and have grown in the past several years thanks to more widespread Internet access in the region (see Kennedy 2015 for a global discussion of knowledge circulation and intellectuals). For instance, Poenaru discusses CriticAtac, a groups whose goals include “the redefinition of the Left and of Marxism in the contemporary global context” and which publishes extensively on their online platform as well as organizes public events (2013:360). The Polish journal Political Critique (Krytyka Polityczna)\(^\text{16}\) has gained increasing recognition around Ukraine thanks to activists’ and journalists’ initiatives to organize critical readings at the Ukrainian Catholic University in L’viv, and a Ukrainian edition of the journal was recently established. Finally, the Ukrainian journal Commons (Spil’ne)\(^\text{17}\), established in 2010, has also presented a space for leftist criticism of global issues and events, regularly organizing conferences in Kyiv. Since Maidan, however, a growing ideological split between Political Critique and Commons has detracted from a more robust discussion of the fate of the Ukrainian left, based on the impression that Commons authors present a more dogmatic, class-oriented position rather than promoting a broad, accessible leftist perspective.

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\(^{16}\) See their website: [http://politicalcritique.org/](http://politicalcritique.org/) (in English).

The Resurgence of Right and Left in the Context of Europe

National and other political identities, including notions of “right” and “left,” remain crucial aspects of fluctuating ideas about Europe and the possibility of an inclusive European citizenship (Holmes 2011; Kalb and Halmai 2011; Shore 2004). Right and left are not always the most significant political designations, and what right and left do, say, or mean is equally shifting. Often, the stance of right or left is defined by a particular issue; for instance, the current right can be so designated because of its stance on immigration, diversity, and tolerance. Because of the prominence of this particular issue, both right and left are defined by their stances toward it. Thus, if the right is known for xenophobia and anti-immigrant politics, the left encompasses tolerance, respect for diversity, and support for more open migration.

The idea of Europe has also been tied to leftist version of these politics; Borneman and Fowler state that “Europeanism” is linked to values such as progress, liberty, and freedom (1997:490). With open internal borders and the circulation of a shared currency, in theory, the European project draws independent nations into the European Union on equal footing (Bellier and Wilson 2000). Once a person gains access to a European passport, she then has the freedom to pursue her desires in the same way as any other European passport-holder. However, Karolina Follis has described the European Union as an “entity in a perpetual state of emergence” (2012:7), through which new hierarchies are constantly being created and reinforced through border regimes. Thus, “the ability to experience the world as borderless is, however, a privilege whose distribution hinges on the variables of class or economic status, nationality and citizenship, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, politics, and geopolitics” (Follis 2012:6). Even European accession, as demanded on Maidan, cannot guarantee all the advantages of European citizenship for Ukrainians.
The reality of Europe, then, is much more complex than a simple statement of equality and tolerance. This is in part because, despite the lack of internal borders, nation-states are still the major actors within the European system, meaning that those nation-states still provide credible identities for citizens that function in competition with the theoretically more powerful European citizenship (see Petryna and Follis 2015). The history and politics that these nation-states bring into the European orbit fundamentally influence how the EU is and can be structured. Particularly following 2004 and 2007 expansions to include formerly socialist countries, the European Union has worked to create and reinforce hierarchies between Western and Eastern Europe (Dunn 2005; Follis 2012). Stef Jansen, in the context of the former Yugoslavia, has described this process as “the making of [Europe’s] ‘immediate outside’—an outside that was to become an inside” (2009:820). The European Union has used border-based privilege to change where its own external borders lie while still allowing internal borders to create hierarchies within the Union.

The process of Europeanization theoretically entails adopting “progressive” values and European identity along with the significant economic changes required by potential member states. Andrew Asher has described the challenges of this process on the German-Polish border just before Poland held a referendum in favor of joining the European Union. As he writes, cities on both sides of the border must discover what it means to be a “European city,” particularly in the context of open borders that “promote a sometimes-uncomfortable confrontation between individuals participating in everyday cross-border interactions” (2005:145). For the residents of Słubice (Poland) and Frankfurt an der Oder (Germany), this confrontation pits national identity against the “hybridized identity of a ‘European’ citizen” (ibid.).

Asher concludes that national and European identities are not mutually exclusive because they continue to be negotiated and contested through processes like European expansion and
national referenda. Borneman and Fowler have also shown that nations will not disappear with more effective Europeanization. However, they conclude that “unlike belonging to the nation, which has a specific cultural content, identification with Europe is an empty sign” because European identities are built on “categories of exchange, difference, and value” (1997:492). Depending on the actor and his location, the nation may become more or less meaningful as Europe expands; as Borneman and Fowler write, “nations are being brought into new relations with each other, creating new alliances and enmities, and even recreating themselves under the changing conditions of membership and action” (1997:495). Asher further concludes that “If a transnational ‘European’ identity is to exist as a long-term continental identity, as the EU is pursuing through its policy actions, it must find ways to encompass multiple and competing nationalities and ethnicities rather than supersede them” (2005:146).

Hilary Appel has suggested the links between processes of decommunization and recreating national and political identities: “The formal programs that help East Europeans come to terms with the communist past also help them to redefine themselves within the construction of the new democratic political system and the new geopolitical and social order” (2005:405). Specifically, a functional national identity is a crucial aspect of European-ness, but this national identity is perceived to be non-existent when communist influence continues to permeate places like Ukraine. Thus, decommunization of politics, economics, and national culture must be a part of establishing a Europeanized national identity. This helps explain why national narratives were so crucial to establishing Ukraine as European during the Euromaidan mobilizations, as well as what those narratives contained. Further, they help explain why these national narratives took precedence over other issues of Europeanization, including economic development requirements.
and non-discrimination legislation, both of which have proven to be problematic since Ukraine’s Association Agreement was signed in June 2014.

Defining Contemporary “Left” and “Right”

In this dissertation, I show how the connections of national narratives, anti-communism, and Europeanization played out in the relationship between radical right- and left-wing activists during Euromaidan. While my ethnographic research is heavily focused on leftist activism, the role of the right is crucial to understanding the development of a certain kind of national ideology (Verdery 1991) that became, in the words of one leftist activist, “hegemonic” during Maidan. I argue that this national ideology is based on the concurrent demonization of state socialist practices and veneration of anti-Soviet groups; I explore the ways this ideology permeated the mobilizations in Chapter 2. Throughout the dissertation, I use the terms “right” and “left” because my interlocutors have used these terms in describing the groups whose actions I discuss. I recognize that these terms are both limiting and full of preconceived assumptions, but my use of them reflects my attempt not to oppose “leftists” and “nationalists,” because that would presume that no one on the left could support any implications of a broad idea of “nationalism.” In his discussion of the continued usefulness of the categories “right” and “left,” Norberto Bobbio reminds us that “the two concepts…are relative, not absolute…‘left’ and ‘right’ are not words which designate immutable meanings, but can signify different things in different times and situations” (1996:56).

Young, twenty-first century Ukrainian leftists—what Volodymyr Ishchenko (2016) has termed the “new left”—encompass a broad spectrum of identifications, ranging from just “left” to socialist, communist, Marxist, anarchist, or democratic socialist. They are not members of the Communist Party, and they do not support a return to the Soviet Union or even an economic
association with Russia. They are all Ukrainian, they speak Ukrainian (as well as Russian and often English), have Ukrainian educations, and, for the most part, want to live in Ukraine. In other words, their leftism is not mutually exclusive with being Ukrainian. Leftists as a group do not want Ukraine to become part of Russia. Indeed, most leftists have a distinctively anti-colonial perspective in their analysis of the Russia-Ukraine relationship, as well as of the relationship between Ukraine and the European Union. They would prefer to see Ukraine not be in a position of subordination to either of these two entities. At the same time, most leftists are vocally critical of political ideologies that place any version of “the nation” or of establishing a “legitimate” nation above the rights of ordinary people. In other words, whereas many of the slogans used on Maidan referenced “Ukraine above all” (Ukraina ponad use), leftists were promoting slogans for LGBT rights, gender equality, and access to free and accessible education, health care, and transportation. In response to the slogan “Ukraine above all,” many leftists began carrying signs with the slogan, “Human rights above all” (Prava liudyny ponad use; Photo 1.2).

At the same time, what being a “leftist” means and what a “leftist” should do are still topics of intense conversation among Ukrainians who identify with a left spectrum. Two dominant trends divide the left into those like participants of groups such as Left Opposition (Liva opozytsiia), who are more sympathetic to labor unions and see the disintegration of the working class and social support as the root of Ukraine’s problems. The other side leans toward a more radical anarchist perspective and is grounded in university student activists who focus largely on education issues as their focus for change.18 However, there is an extensive middle ground in which many,

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18 See Ishchenko 2016 for more discussion about the formation of these and other leftist groups since Ukraine's independence in 1991. In particular, Ishchenko discusses Borot'ba (Struggle), a neo-Marxist group that took a strongly anti-Maidan stance during the mobilizations. My research participants were mostly members of Left Opposition or Priama Diia, the main student activist group, and several expressed concerns about the stances of Borot'ba toward Russia, although they collaborated with Borot'ba on anti-fascist and anti-racist programs.
particularly newer activists, are attempting to discover how they can be part of the left as well as how the left represents them. In this context, the future of a unified left movement is precarious at this point, in part because of the negative attitudes toward leftists held by many, if not most, Ukrainians. In this dissertation, I use “left” as a descriptor when my interlocutors do, but I intend for it to be understood as the fluid spectrum they describe it to be rather than a rigid position. The stories they told me about how they became leftists reflect this fluidity; there is not one unique path one must take to become a leftist. Rather, leftists come out of punk music and anti-fascist groups, from reading Marx, Engels, and Trotsky, and from bad experiences with university administrations. Enacting the left can take many forms, too. Importantly, leftism also comes directly from feminism: some leftist-feminist activists I interviewed stated that they were feminists first and, when they came to universities, they found that leftist student groups were the most receptive to their feminist perspectives. This has led to an intertwining of leftist and feminist views among young, educated activists in contemporary Ukraine.

Being an “out” leftist, feminist, or both, is a dangerous thing. Mainstream attitudes toward left-wing activists are very negative, mainly because any leftist ideas remain associated with state socialism, the Soviet period and the Communist Party (Ishchenko 2016). Many Ukrainians are extremely critical of this period of history and the perceived negative influence it has had on contemporary Ukraine. Despite that, new leftists are not affiliated with current or former iterations of the Communist Party (and very few even associate themselves with communism at all). Instead, they often align themselves with socialism and Marxism, which are still extremely difficult to detach from their Soviet influence for most Ukrainians. For them, it is easier to assume that left still means communism, and in contemporary Ukraine, it is easy to condemn and reject

However, I did not interview any Borot'ba activists and only went to two Borot'ba-organized protest events (one in October 2013 and one on January 19, 2014, the group's anti-fascist day of action).
communism. Further, as leftist activists are also strongly associated with radical feminist groups, and many radical feminists also consider themselves leftists, a commitment to feminism, gender equality, and LGBT rights further marginalizes leftist groups (see Chapter 5 for a deeper discussion of the links between leftists and feminists).

Other examples from the post-communism region, however, show complicating factors in people’s relationship with socialism and communism after 1989. Gerald Creed documents the trajectory of the Bulgarian Communist Party throughout the 1990s, a party which won free parliamentary elections in 1990 and 1994, only losing in 1997 while still garnering over 25% of the votes (1999:223). Instead of interpreting this as a resurgence or even nostalgia for the communist past, Creed concludes that such a tendency “includes elements of post-communist resistance and even civic empowerment—it is not only resistant socialism but a form of socialist resistance” (225). Voting for the Communist Party enables people who have become disenfranchised following the collapse of state socialism to reject the hierarchies imposed by a new neoliberal capitalist order; scholars documenting postsocialist citizens’ commitment to the welfare state (Scheppele 2009, for instance, also discussed in Chapter 6) is another form of “socialist resistance” that rejects new capitalism hierarchies while, at the same time, complicating contemporary interpretations of socialist and communist political action.

Because of the regularity of widespread negative attitudes toward leftists in Ukraine, they are also easy targets of violence and ridicule, which I will show in detail. While there has been a further strengthening of ultra-radical nationalism during and following Maidan, the growth of popularity of the Svoboda party before the 2012 parliamentary elections and the rejection of Viktor Yanukovych and his Party of Regions (at least in central and western Ukraine) show that Ukrainian attitudes toward the right are becoming more accommodating while the left is being rejected even
more strongly than ever before. For many, this is not a negative trend: Ukrainian independence in 1991 is not generally associated with a strong nationalist movement, and many see that the time has been ripe for many years for a turn toward Ukrainian nationalism. This shift toward the right has had a hugely negative impact on leftist activism, particularly the kind that intentionally disassociates itself with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union.

War and the Contraction of the State

The protests on Maidan resulted in the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych, the establishment of an interim government, and, in May 2014, the presidential election of Petro Poroshenko. At the same time, conflict began in southern and eastern Ukraine, beginning with Vladimir Putin’s annexation of the territory of Crimea. This ongoing conflict has troubled the nature of the post-Maidan state, as the government’s resources cannot meet the demands for equipment and troops in the Donbas and, at the same time, provide for its citizens and their theoretical path to Europe. Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Bobick suggest that these effects were precisely the kinds of goals Putin had in mind in annexing Crimea and encouraging separatism in the Donbas, creating “a prolonged sense of liminality that provokes anxiety and fear on a national scale” (2014:410). Such fear further “may well force the post-Maidan Ukrainian government to capitulate to Russian demands, and, in doing so, will damage its autonomy as much as if Russia had in fact invaded” (ibid.).

Putin’s interest in Ukraine, as these authors document, has strongly influenced the role of state institutions in serving expected purposes; the current government has focused on

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19 At the time their piece was written, Putin had annexed Crimea via a referendum, and his position and media propaganda showed major support for separatist groups in the Donbas, but Russian troops were not openly in Donets’k and Luhans’k regions. See Chapter 6, note 5 for further clarification.
implementing IMF-required austerity measures, on passing the Decommmunization Laws described above, and on its attempts to win the war against, or at least quell, the advancing separatist and Russian troops. These issues have taken priority over long-term economic restructuring and people’s demands for state support as their economic situation has taken a turn for the worse since February 2014. Chapter 6 explores in detail the ways the government has mobilized neoliberal rhetoric about citizenship and volunteering on behalf of “the state,” but it is important to note here that this theme is only one of many ways the state form in Ukraine continues to transform following Maidan.

This shifting state has changed the ways activists of all kinds engage with the Ukrainian government. As I elaborate in Chapter 6, a host of new political parties developed in various forms for the 2014 elections (both presidential and parliamentary), with diverse levels of success. The integration of volunteer groups—ranging from military brigades to simple crowdfunding sources—into governance, or even into oligarchic circles whose inhabitants wish to influence governance as invisibly as possible, is an uncertain process at this time whose development will certainly impact the future stability of any version of a Ukrainian state (Minakov 2016). Dunn and Bobick’s analysis of Putin’s “techniques” to establish “Russia’s resurgent empire” (2014:405) enlightens just one crucial aspect of this process of national and state-based transformation, which will extend not just to Ukraine and its borderlands with Russia, but onto Europe and the EU’s own stability. This dissertation offers another view of these transformations taking place through the lens of activism, political discourse, and state-citizen relationships during and after Maidan.

Research Methodology during Maidan
My project began thanks to a serendipitous meeting when I first visited Ukraine as a teenager. I met Lesik in 2004. We became friends during a school exchange program in Kyiv just months before the Orange Revolution. I did not return to Ukraine until June of 2011, when I visited Kyiv for a short week. When we met, he told me he had become an activist in his university and was interested in Marxism and other leftist ideologies. The problems he faced as an activist fascinated me, and I began to develop a research project to document the work of these leftist student activists. I began this research in 2012, following intensive language study in the Western Ukrainian city of L'viv. During this time, I spent one weekend traveling in the region with Lesik and another comrade, who began to enlighten me about the state of leftist and feminist activism and scholarship at the time. After my language program, I spent several weeks in Kyiv with Lesik, meeting other leftist activists in the student activist group Priama Diia—including developing connections with Volodymyr Ishchenko, an activist and academic who worked with the Center for Social Research, a group that monitored protests through media analysis. In August 2012, I attended Priama Diia's student organizing summer camp in Crimea, where I spent a week camping with other activists from across Ukraine and Russia. Over 100 people attended the camp, over half from Ukraine. Here, I began to connect with activists from regional centers in Ukraine including Simferopol (Crimea), Kharkiv, and Odesa, as well as from the smaller but extremely active Western city of Khmel'nyts'kyi.

From this camp experience, I planned a project to map and analyze the social networks of these activists. I intended to study their political campaigns at the university, city, and national level; this would document the differential relationships among activists and between cities, as many camp attendees who were from somewhere other than Kyiv discussed regional stratification as a problem for student activists. I returned to Ukraine in September 2013, and I began
interviewing activists about their social networks. I attended several demonstrations with leftist activists, and I began to participate in self-defense classes organized by and for leftists. My early interviews proved problematic for these activists, as I intended to map connections among most active members. Activists typically responded that their group was non-hierarchical and horizontal, so no one was more active than anyone else. I began to correct the problems in the framing of my questions by asking about specific issues, campaigns, and initiatives, questions I continued to pose throughout my fieldwork.

However, on November 21, 2013, protests started on Maidan Nezalezhnosti, or Independence Square, in the center of Kyiv. It rapidly became clear that the activists participating in my research were going to participate in these protests, and that the way they could negotiate the mobilizations was a much more interesting question than that of social networks. Additionally, the networks that had functioned before the protests, including complex relationships between right- and left-wing student groups, were no longer relevant. I began to follow leftists around Maidan during protests and to their planning meetings; I visited Maidan nearly every day that I was in Kyiv until I left the country on June 30, 2014 (the protest camp was cleared just days after I left in the beginning of July). I lived in an apartment approximately a 45-minute walk from Maidan, or two subway stops away; even on the days when the subway and other transportation had shut down, I could still visit Maidan because of this proximity, but the neighborhood was also a safe enough distance away that I could return there without concern that the protests would spill into the area.

I was unable to complete systematic and formal interviews with leftist activists, because the situation in the country was extremely unclear. For many months, these activists (as well as others on Maidan) were threatened with arrest and other harassment simply for participating in the
protests, and I did not want to be visibly conducting research among this group, already targeted by the radical right for their political positions. I was afraid both that these leftists would become more obvious targets for arrests or violence, or that I would be arrested or kidnapped (as was happening to journalists throughout the more volatile periods) because of the information I had about a politically active group. The U.S. Embassy sent nearly daily warnings to U.S. citizens against visiting Maidan; embassy staff encouraged Fulbright grantees in the country to leave in February, but they could not require this and I decided to stay and complete my research.

Over time, I developed a symbiotic relationship with the activists who participated in my research. As activists who were so often ignored or misrepresented during mobilizations, they appreciated the possibility of having someone who would write honestly about them and their organizations. They encouraged my close participant observation by including me on listservs, Facebook groups, and sometimes even by calling me to make sure I would attend a particular event. I always brought my DSLR camera to protest actions, and, as the owner of such a high-quality camera (and a person unknown to non-leftists) I was regularly asked to share pictures of actions with activists. This included requests to photograph people who had attacked activists, and once to even track down a suspicious figure, in order to help protect organizers in the future. Because of these mutual investments, I felt confident that these leftist activists would do their best to ensure my safety during the mobilizations; I always checked in with particular activists I knew best before events to be sure I would endanger neither myself nor the other activists with my presence. When major violence broke out on Maidan, several activists contacted me immediately to make sure I was not in danger, and one even offered for his father to drive me to the airport if I needed to evacuate the country.
Thanks to this deep rapport I shared with these activists, I was able to complete effective research despite the unevenness of the methods I used. I did formal interviews with 20 leftist activists, mostly in the spring after the political situation appeared to have stabilized somewhat. I pursued a strategy of intermittent informal questioning throughout the course of Maidan. I asked similar questions to multiple activists at various times, which provided me a relatively holistic—while also fluid and flexible—view of Maidan, of individual activists' ideologies and positions, and what the left, most broadly, was doing and thinking on Maidan. Some of my interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, others in English, and still others in both languages (all based on the interviewee's preference and the common language we had used together over the course of my research). For this reason, some interview data is translated from Ukrainian while other data was originally in English. Throughout the dissertation, I have tried to preserve this distinction, correcting the interviewee's English only when it prevents a long explanation of the person's intended meaning.

Aside from interviews and field notes, I generated several thousand photos from Kyiv's Maidan. These feature protest events (leftist, feminist, and otherwise) as well as posters and signs, the tent camp, and the constantly changing barricades. I visited occupied buildings (the Kyiv City Hall and the Ukrainian House), and I once spent the night on Maidan with some comrades. I attempted to avoid contact with the police, but this was difficult, as they appeared on seemingly every corner in the city center. I did not ever speak to a police officer because I did not want to show my temporary residency permit and reveal that I was American. I also used Facebook as a resource quite extensively. Many activists posted “status updates” about Maidan, protest events, 20 Additionally, I completed interviews with a dozen university students in the regional center Cherkasy about their city's local Maidan, which was extremely active but also harshly repressed. This data and analysis of it does not appear in the dissertation, as these students were not activists or leftists, and as the question of regionalism in Ukraine deserves its own analysis.
or just information about activism or life in general. As these are publicly shared, I have used them to inform my analysis but I do not rely on them without clarifying a person's stance through an interview (formal or otherwise). Facebook is an interesting tool to consider someone's public self-representation, but it cannot replace a deeper discussion of one's opinions and experiences, particularly during such a major moment as Maidan.

I had also planned to complete a portion of my research with the Feminist Offensive (Feministychna ofenzyva; FO), one of the most radical feminist groups in Ukraine. Feminism has been an important issue for radical activists throughout Ukraine since independence, which I will discuss throughout the dissertation and especially in Chapter 5. Leftist activists often make special efforts to support feminist agendas, and particularly that of FO, and vice versa. Radical leftist and feminist groups are deeply intertwined in Ukraine today: most leftist women consider themselves feminists, as do many leftist men.\(^1\) I met several members and affiliates of the group in 2012, and leftist and student activists had already often collaborated with FO on gender-based initiatives. However, by the time my field work began, FO had ceased to exist because of an apparent difference of opinion in the question of whether to prioritize theoretical engagements or protest actions in order to promote feminism in Ukraine. Before long, feminists were engaging with the Maidan mobilizations both in conjunction with leftist actions and independently of leftists. In addition to focusing on leftist events, I also completed participant observation at feminist-organized events and conducted interviews with active feminists who were also involved with both leftist and feminist projects.

\(^1\) This was particularly true for those with whom I worked, but I met with at least one circumstance in which a woman who represented a feminist group did not want to work with leftists because of their intention to compromise with non-leftist student groups that might not have an anti-sexist agenda during a student protest on Maidan.
The leftist activists whose work and ideas make up much of ethnographic work of this dissertation are indeed a small group. In Kyiv alone, I interacted with at least 50 leftist activists on a regular basis; I met with activists in Odesa early on in my fieldwork (before Maidan began) and was planning to meet with an activist group in L’viv as well. Importantly, I had planned two additional field sites in Khmel’nyts’kyi (in Western Ukraine) and Simferopol (in Crimea), but nearly all the activists from these two cities had moved to Kyiv by the time I began my fieldwork or during its course. I did complete several interviews in L’viv, but most of those activists were regularly shuttling between Kyiv and L’viv during Maidan, so I talked to and observed them in both places.

Of the activists with whom I worked closely, over 50% were originally from Kyiv. Every person I interviewed formally and informally had completed a university degree; approximately 25% had completed or were pursuing a master’s degree or higher (and most of these degrees came from outside Ukraine, particularly from Central European University in Budapest or from other English-language programs in Central European countries). Their studies encompassed a large range of subjects: a majority studied in a social science or humanities field, such as sociology, economics, political science, history, or cultural studies, while other activists pursued biomedical engineering, fashion and design, film and cinematography, and computer science. Of those activists who were not still students, some worked within their fields in one of two ways. Those who studied hard sciences had jobs in their fields, like the biomedical engineer and the computer scientist; many of those with degrees in social sciences worked for one of two major left-oriented research organizations, the Center for Social and Labor Research and the Center for Society
The youngest activist I interviewed was 20, and the oldest 31. The average age of activists who participated in an interview was 25.

I did not delve into each activist’s personal or familial background as part of my interviews, as this research became more an ethnography of an event than of a group of people. However, from informal conversations, I know that a disproportionate number of these activists’ parents are members of university faculty, typically in their hometowns (and several in Kyiv). This sets a number of these activists apart from the majority of Ukrainian society, in which many families do not necessarily have a several-generations-long tradition of higher education. In addition, these activists are also set apart by the fact that many of them live together in communal apartments rather than with their parents. This is a response to both necessity and ideology: many of these apartments are referred to as “communes,” and the activists who inhabit them attempt to live a communal, non-proprietary lifestyle. Some of these activists are from Kyiv and have moved out of their parents’ homes in order to pursue this ideological way of living; others, however, are students who came from other cities to live in Kyiv to study and needed a place to live. Of the latter, several lived in dormitories but were displaced in the summer of 2012 for the European Football Championships, which led them to seek alternatives in shared apartments.

All of this is to show that leftists, while a small community, are very tightly knit together. They attempt to live in a way that allows them to practice their vision of the future. However, they are also tied to the expectations of ordinary life and hold jobs in order to pay their rent. Outside of protest events and meetings, I spent time with activists at their communal apartments and at the

22 These two organizations were once only one united group, the Center for Society Research, but this group split after Maidan because of ideological differences. I currently volunteer as an English-language editor for the Center for Social and Labor Research (a job I did previously for the Center for Society Research) and remain closely affiliated with many of its researchers. I am associated with some of the researchers at the Center for Society Research, but many of them have spent the past few years working in policy areas rather than appearing at street demonstrations or organizing camps, where I met most leftists.
homes of those who lived with their parents, at their jobs, and occasionally traveling with them. Thus, I am able to present a relatively complete picture of the “new” or “young” left of contemporary Ukraine, in part thanks to the small size of the group and in part because of their willingness to invite me into their intimate spaces.

Since I left Ukraine, I have continued contact with many of the activists who participated in my research project. They have encouraged me to use the real names of groups like Priama Diia, Left Opposition, and Feminist Offensive. However, I have used pseudonyms for the activists themselves, except in some circumstances when I am quoting a person’s public presentation or publication, and, in that case, only when I did not also interview that person. When I transliterate words, phrases, or names from Ukrainian, I use the Library of Congress rules, unless I am referring to a person whose name is commonly translated in another way. I insist on using this transliteration for place names, even if they appear somewhat unwieldy, because they more accurately reflect the Ukrainian names, rather than Russian ones (for instance, Kyiv rather than Kiev). My interlocutors continue to use both languages but never had a problem when I asked them to use Ukrainian in conversation with me.

Organization of the Chapters

This dissertation suggests several interrelated arguments. First, Europe is in a long moment of upheaval, and politically dichotomous groups of “right” and “left” are re-emerging throughout the moment. In Ukraine, proving its European-ness has become an essential task, thanks largely to the Maidan mobilizations. However, specific elements of Europeanization legislation—including

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23 LOC rules for Ukrainian transliteration denote soft vowels with an “и”; for instance, е as “ie,” я as “ia.” The vowel и is transliterated as “y,” and й, a diphthong letter, as “i” in combination with other vowels: синий as synyi (blue) or as “y” if preceded by the Ukrainian “и” (as in the name Serhiy). LOC rules also reflect the soft sign (ь) as an apostrophe: будьмо as bud’mo (cheers). See Indiana University’s transliteration page for a complete table (http://www.indiana.edu/~libslav/slavcatman/trukr.html).
anti-discrimination clauses and higher education laws—have presented challenges to the views of Europe presented on Maidan and to Maidan supporters’ self-perceptions as Europeans. I argue that decommunization is an integral element of the process of Europeanization; at the same time, decommunization further makes political dichotomies more salient as the left—in its broadest sense—becomes both a real and a negative force. Additionally, this process of decommunization allows the space for the right to mobilize its own historical narratives of dominance and to show itself as the agent of decommunization by aiding in the destruction of the left—both party-based and not. Ukraine’s Europeanization is fundamentally linked with decommunization, and both are further tied to national ideologies about Ukrainian freedom. But this leaves us with the question of what, if any, space has remained for the left.

Chapter 2, “What Was Ukraine’s Maidan? National Ideology and Political Action,” explores the national ideology promoted by right-wing groups before the mobilizations, how it became dominant through certain practices on Maidan, and the impacts it had on collective political action. I suggest that a particular kind of national ideology, promoted by radical right-wing groups and heavily focused on decommunization, became dominant on Maidan. Then, I identify the various actors involved in Maidan, their relationships, the claims they made, and the mechanisms they used to make those claims. In this way, I view Maidan as a constantly shifting process that led to various outcomes, including the growth of pro-Russian separatism and armed conflict in the Eastern regions since the spring of 2014.

In Chapter 3, “#LeftMaidan: Self-Organization and Political Legitimacy,” homes in on leftists’ participation during the Maidan mobilizations. The chapter begins with an exploration of the ways leftists maneuvered through the expansion of the national ideology described in Chapter 2 and continued to create spaces for themselves to promote leftist political ideas. Even though
leftists often disagreed with the national ideology being promoted on Maidan, they felt it was important to participate in the protests; this chapter considers how leftists shifted their discourses in order to integrate themselves into the mobilizations. I argue that specific leftist discourses, some promoting “self-organization” and others criticizing the “police state,” became popular on Maidan, even as they lost their leftist associations.

Chapter 4, “Direct Action,” considers how education activism was integrated on Maidan. It follows the activism of Priama Diia (Direct Action), a student organization with whom I had planned to do the majority of my fieldwork, before the mobilizations began. I suggest that activism that criticized the Ministry of Education’s policies was an acceptable form of leftist activism because it challenged state policies that were understood as detrimental to Ukrainians and to Ukraine. Leftist activists gained crucial experience from their effective protests in the late 2000s, which they then used to encourage student activism on Maidan. However, the ultimate impact of student activism on Maidan has largely been to promote Europeanization policies in higher education, which many fear will have negative effects on Ukraine’s university system.

In Chapter 5, “These Aren’t Your Values’: Gender, Nation, and Feminist (Im)Possibilities,” I use the lens of gender-based and feminist activism to explore multiple conceptualizations of Europe that circulated as political symbols on Maidan. I examine the historical presence of women’s activism in Ukraine’s history but argue that contemporary feminists, because of their association with leftists and therefore with Ukraine’s Soviet past, continue to be politically marginal figures. On Maidan, feminist activists promoted an idea of Europe that included legislation for gender equality and anti-discrimination policies, but these ideas proved to be at odds with how many others on Maidan envisioned Europe. I argue that this divergence of opinion led feminists, like leftists, to focus on self-organized initiatives, particularly
as the dominant national ideology promoted during the mobilizations incorporated strict gender roles that limited the ways women could participate.

Finally, my last chapter, “Without the State: Volunteerism After Maidan,” considers the expansion of self-organized initiatives following the end of the mobilizations and the beginning of the armed conflict in the Eastern regions. I use several examples of volunteer-based initiatives to examine the impacts of Maidan on the unity of the new left in Ukraine, which has seen major disagreements among activists in response to their attitudes toward the conflict. These self-organized initiatives in some ways continue leftist criticisms of the state, but, at the same time, they are being co-opted by the state under rhetorics of patriotism and good citizenship. While this has generated some productive discussions among leftists, these initiatives have also caused a severe fragmentation of activists that may seriously hinder any hope of a unified leftist future.

This dissertation contributes an ethnographic understanding of how the event of Maidan and its various participants have challenged typical understandings of nation, state, and political action. It uses the examples of leftist and feminist activists to show how governance before and during the protest was called into question. Further, it explores how Ukraine’s interstitial position between Russia and Europe enabled these protests, somewhat effectively, to reframe the role of state institutions and their representatives in the contemporary moment. At the same time, it asks whether political forms developed during upheaval can or should be sustained throughout a time of war and a redrawing of borders in the postsocialist world.
November 21, 2013: Last night there were some gatherings on Maidan to protest the decision not to allow Tymoshenko to go abroad to seek treatment, thus ending the likelihood of signing the Association Agreement this month.

This was my first fieldnote entry mentioning “EuroMaidan,” the shorthand often used to describe the mass mobilizations that took over my research for the next seven months. My lack of enthusiasm and detail reflect my skepticism; I can honestly say that I did not anticipate that the small protests of November 21 would become anything more than a few disappointed young people who had hoped European accession was close at hand. However, I was wrong. Over the next few months, the protesters expanded into the tens of thousands, set up a tent camp, and, in the end, 100 protesters were killed at the hands of militarized riot police and the president fled the country.

Over the next few days I explored the protests, both alone and with leftist activists whose reactions to the growing crowds were extremely telling about both the unity of the demonstrations and the protesters’ goals as well as about perceptions of what it meant to claim to be both Ukrainian and European. On Friday, November 22, 2013, I stood in the rain on Maidan with an anarchist friend, Havryil, and we listened to those present proclaim that Ukraine and Ukrainians are part of Europe. We also heard what would become one of the most prominent and most problematic slogans of the protest, a call and response chant of “Slava Ukraini!”—Glory to Ukraine!—“Heroiam slava!”—Glory to the heroes! A slogan of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) of the
1940s and 1950s, it marked the protests with a distinct dynamic that continued throughout their entire existence.

When Havryil and I decided to visit the protests that morning, it was because he was convinced that this was the moment leftist activists had been waiting for to integrate their ideas and initiatives with a mass mobilization. It might be the spark, he believed, that would set off the next big revolution. He was hoping to convince other leftists to distribute material, not necessarily to criticize the protests but to ask participants to be critical of the EU and IMF conditionality that was part of the long-term expectations of the Association Agreement. At the same time, he wanted to find a way to clarify that leftists were sympathetic to the protesters’ anti-Russian sentiments. He wanted other leftist activists to help promote the idea that Ukrainians don’t have to choose only between Europe or Russia, a challenge in a context where many people viewed the European Union and the Association Agreement its leaders were offering as Ukraine’s only savior from Russian dominance. And when we walked down the steep hill to European Square and Khreshchatyk, we heard the first inklings of chants glorifying the heroes of Ukraine. As soon as we were in the shadow of the Independence monument, Havryil's enthusiasm dissipated. Aside from the UPA slogans, we heard other nationalist chants, including “Slava natsii”—Glory to the nation!—“Smert’ voroham”—Death to the enemies; and “Ukraina ponad use”—Ukraine above all (reminiscent of the Nazi slogan Deutschland uber alles). Havryil was devastated.

Later that day I wrote in my fieldnotes that nationalism is what galvanizes people in 21st-century Ukraine because it is seen as the easiest response to Yanukovych’s actions as president. In other words, I perceived that “nationalism” was an opposing force to Yanukovych’s oligarch-dominated, Russophilic government. I presumed that Ukrainians saw themselves as part of Europe; if they saw Yanukovych as anti-Europe then, by extension, he was anti-Ukraine. While
Yanukovych and his resignation remained one of the major issues throughout the protests, this was not because of a shared “Ukrainian nationalism” that all the protesters mobilized. Instead, protesters were critical of a government that they saw did not represent them, but their explanations as to why and how that government did not represent them varied. As the protests progressed, problems of police violence against protesters became a more pressing issue, and targeting Yanukovych’s regime for all its violations against Ukrainians dominated the rhetoric of the mobilizations. Europe became an afterthought.

In the end, Havryil was right. That rainy morning on Maidan was, indeed, the spark that ignited the next big “revolution” in Ukraine. And, despite his initial disappointment, Havryil became one of the most prominent leftist activists committed to promoting leftist ideas on Maidan and to organizing student activists against the increasingly authoritarian regime. This tendency of leftists and other alternative political identities—critical of anything that seemed “nationalist” but equally critical of the current government—to participate in demonstrations that constantly left them bleeding, frightened, or crying from pepper spray, is just one instance of the multivocality of the protests. In other words, the presence of leftists shows that Maidan, Ukraine, and Europe were all contested notions whose definitions were worked out through interactions among protesters who quite often disagreed with one another. The mobilizations were messy, and the stakes, tactics, and goals of the protesters changed rapidly through the winter.

What Was Ukraine’s Maidan?

This dissertation does not intend to give a complete picture of the ten-month long protests. Scholars like Olga Onuch and Tamara Martsenyuk have analyzed large-scale surveys of the protesters (Onuch 2014a & 2014b; Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014) to provide helpful data about the
makeup of the protests. Several edited volumes document a variety of aspects of Maidan but without major analytical arguments (Bachmann and Lyubashenko 2014; Marples and Mills 2015; Stepanenko and Pylynskyi 2015). Anthropologists Jennifer Carroll (2014) and Catherine Wanner (2014) have attempted to contribute analyses that challenge the narratives of nationalism—and even fascism—that accompanied the mobilizations; however, these arguments use a perceived (or desired) unity to erase the multiplicity of voices and claims on Maidan.

What I provide in this dissertation is a combination of two perspectives: an account of the protests, which I carried out by going to the main square and participating in related demonstrations from November 2013 until I left Ukraine on June 30, 20141; and a critical view of what happened during this time from the viewpoint of leftist activists with whom I had been doing research since 2012. My evidence is shaped by my identification and participation with leftist activists, because this meant that I could not gain access to right-wing organizations without jeopardizing the safety of leftists as well as my own. This perspective allowed me to hear criticisms of the protests, the protesters, and their goals expressed by Ukrainians who were not convinced that the protests in fact constituted a revolution.

I began to hear the word “revolution” (revoliutsiia) to describe the protests in late November (Photo 2.1). I believe the word was mobilized quickly in order to link previous mass demonstrations that took place on Maidan, particularly the Orange Revolution in 2004 which resulted in new presidential elections. However, leftist activists rarely used this word, because most protesters were not demanding substantial change in the political system itself, only in representatives. To leftists, the result would be more of the same governance, which they did not see as revolutionary. I adopt leftists’ hesitation to use the word “revolution” too swiftly and agree

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1 I left before newly-elected Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko’s mandate forced the square to be cleared at the beginning of July.
with their criticisms. My leftist colleagues also encouraged me to question the positive associations attached to the buzzwords of the protests, like “democracy” and “Europe” while at the same time impressing upon me the significance of the moment with their constant insistence on participating even among unfriendly crowds.

Thus, while there is a plethora of texts describing Maidan and analyzing its effects on current Ukrainian politics, most scholars have already disregarded the question of what Maidan was. This is in part because the protests have ended. The main square of Kyiv’s capital is no longer home to hundreds of protesters, and those who gave their lives are buried. Now we must call them heroes and martyrs, labels that evoke a past, no matter how recent. I am unconvinced, however, that Maidan’s official end means that we have exhausted the ways to think about this moment and what it can mean for Ukraine and Ukrainians, now embroiled in a violent territorial dispute with Russia over Crimea and the Donbass in the East and suffering from massive economic decline because of the high cost of this ongoing war.

This chapter draws from literature on social movements generated from sociology and political science (Bevington and Dixon 2005; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). I have found Tilly and Tarrow’s work on “contentious politics” to be particularly enlightening because of the authors’ insistence on the presence of multiple actors with possibly shifting goals throughout examples of collective action. Using this framework to explore the Maidan mobilizations allows me to answer several questions: Was Maidan a social movement? Should the results of the mobilizations be considered a revolution? Who were people making political claims on Maidan, and what were their relationships with one another? Further, how did the relationships among these actors change over time? These questions inform the remaining dissertation chapters, which explore specific sites of contention, as well as the shifting
relationships among groups that continue through today. This framework allows me to envision Maidan not simply as a moment in time but as a site in which political action itself was redefined through contentious politics. It also allows me to explore the ways that specific versions of a Ukrainian national ideology were promoted and enacted during Maidan, further contributing to shifting engagements with those forms of contentious politics.

Most participants, including leftist activists I interviewed, agreed that Maidan went through three significant shifts over its lifespan. The first stage, which lasted from November 21, the first day, to November 30, when students sleeping on the square were brutally beaten by the Berkut (Riot Police), was a reactionary space that was extremely dangerous for leftist activists. In this stage, leftist activists negotiated for space on Maidan with shifting discourses until they found frames that other protesters accepted and could adapt to their own demands. From November 30 through January 16, when the so-called Dictatorship Laws passed in Parliament, Maidan was a space of uncertainty, in which leftist activists had, to some extent, discovered ways to participate in protests while protecting themselves from violence, but they lacked long-term goals for their participation. Finally, from January 16-19 (between the passage of the Laws and the first protester death) until the end of February 2014, following the greatest violence against Ukrainians in the country’s history, Maidan became a space of possibility. For leftists as well as other protesters, the sense that ordinary people could change the course of Ukrainian history became a prominent sentiment, and these activists followed targeted initiatives against the Yanukovych regime through to a resolution. Through the spring of 2014, which begins the “post-Maidan” period, many of the successful leftist initiatives dissolved, while new attempts to penetrate the new government were created.

Key Players and Their Political Backgrounds
The fieldnote that opens this chapter reflects the party-level issues and figures that were driving Ukrainian politics. While their roles diminished over the course of the protests, it is necessary to clarify the struggles for control over party politics that provide the background for Maidan. Up until Yanukovych's decision not to let Tymoshenko access medical care in Germany, it appeared that the president had been on track to sign the Association Agreement. People gathered on Maidan on the night of the 21st because they were surprised and disappointed—they had not gathered to support the Agreement before it was clear that it would not be signed. Many went to Maidan in response to a Facebook post by journalist Mustafa Nayem, asking people not just to “like” his post to show support, but actually to go to Maidan (Nayem 2014); over 1,000 people did just that. They stood throughout the night with signs proclaiming that Ukraine is Europe, with Ukrainian and EU flags, and singing the Ukrainian national anthem (Ukrains’ka Pravda 2013). They were joined by leaders of the Opposition, Arseniy Yatseniuk (who took Tymoshenko’s place at the head of Bat’kivshchyna when she was imprisoned), Vitaliy Klitschko (leader of the UDAR party and world-famous boxer), and Oleh Tyahnybok, as well as the recently-pardoned Yuri Lutsenko.2 I distinguish here between the opposition, which includes anyone who opposes the ruling party in general, and the Opposition (Opozytsiia), a coalition made up of the three main parties opposing Yanukovych and the Party of Regions.

During the first stage of the mobilizations, many protesters on Maidan carried party flags from the three Opposition parties—Bat’kivshchyna, UDAR, and Svoboda—which were likely distributed by party representatives.3 The three Opposition leaders appeared at every major

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2 Lutsenko was the former Minister of Internal Affairs who, along with Tymoshenko, was imprisoned under Yanukovych for abuse of office charges. He was released in April 2013 in an apparent attempt to placate those demanding Tymoshenko’s release, although he was banned from participating in politics as a condition of his release.

3 I heard regular speculation that people were paid to hold party flags.
protest—indeed, I saw Arseniy Yatseniuk himself handing out flyers for one of the initial protests in the Metro at Maidan Nezalezhnosti—and were attempting to present themselves as the “democratic” alternative to the increasingly authoritarian Yanukovych. Once a large stage was set up on Maidan in December, I heard these three leaders speak quite often. Some early calls for donations through a newspaper called “The Voice of EuroMaidan” (Holos Yevromaidanu) both evoked the Opposition and attempted to gloss over its presence. The newspaper asked for help for the protesters on the square, requesting donations ranging from tents, snow shovels, generator gas, tea kettles, and tools, to warm clothing and medical supplies to be brought to “headquarters of the national opposition” (shtab natsional’noho sprotyvu) at the occupied Trade Unions Building on Maidan. It used active language to call “non-passive” (nebaiduzhni) Kyivites to come to Maidan to help the protests succeed. “All the roads of consciousness lead through Maidan,” the newspaper proclaimed—“In the morning, to work—through Maidan! In the evening going home—through Maidan! At lunch—through Maidan! There’s free time—to Maidan!” This language centralized Kyiv’s Maidan, rather than the Opposition, as the reason for the protests, deflecting concerns that the Opposition was controlling the protests. However, at the bottom of the paper, an advertisement for legal aid made sure to clarify that the funders and founders of the legal aid center were the three major opposition parties (Bat’kivshchyna, UDAR, and Svoboda).

The Opposition parties were an important claimant during the first and into the second stages of Maidan. Because of their history of participation in party politics and their theoretical ability to access the President in order to generate compromises, Opposition leaders likely felt their

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4 Other “leaders” were not career politicians but cultural figures including Ruslana, 2004 winner of the Eurovision song contest, and Sv’iatoslav Vakharchuk, singer for the popular rock band Okean El’zy. The protests in Kyiv differed significantly in this regard from other cities, L’viv in particular, which, many participants told me, had almost no party representation at all and had even banned Svoboda and other party representatives from controlling the stage.
participation on Maidan legitimized the protests. However, while they were certainly sympathetic to the protesters, the Opposition leaders were attempting to turn the protests into votes for their parties, and most protesters saw through this scheme quite quickly. As the Opposition leaders continually appeared weak against Yanukovych’s crackdowns—this interpretation came from their constant negotiations with him; protesters demanded harsher responses from the Opposition, which they did not receive—they lost credibility among the protesters. During the first weeks of protest, the crowds were simply swarms of Opposition party flags (Photo 2.2). But as the weeks wore on, party flags were replaced with flags and banners of non-party organizations, including Democratic Alliance, the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, and Ukrainian and EU flags.

I believe that, in part, protesters were motivated by their memories of the Orange Revolution, in which rallying around a clear leader did not bring the changes to Ukrainian society that they had hoped. Many people over the course of my research mentioned disappointment with the Orange regime, even ten years later. Thus the Opposition leaders never drove the protests, and when they did not deliver the demands of the protesters, they became the targets of criticism. During the second stage of the mobilizations, the Opposition leaders moved from being a central claimant against the Yanukovych regime to being seen as an extension of that regime. The relationship between Opposition party leaders and ordinary protesters changed during this time,

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5 One problem with this development, however, is that it makes efforts to clarify who was funding and supporting the protests very difficult, and it leaves open room for speculation that, for example, the United States government was providing resources for protesters. I suspect that the great majority of people on Maidan had no real concern about this, as long as there was free tea and food as the winter grew colder. Some of these resources were donated by ordinary people—Internet sources provided extensive lists of what was needed on Maidan, largely food and medical supplies—but the scale of the available resources was mind-boggling. There were always sandwiches, cookies, soups, and teas being handed out among protesters, and there were several medical points throughout the Maidan-Khreshchatyk area (even a “psychological medical” point for counseling). I heard at times that the Opposition parties were funding the majority of the protests, but this seems somewhat unlikely as the protests went on and those parties lost support among protesters. I point this out not to suggest some kind of conspiracy but simply to highlight the level at which there were no real answers about what was going on at a given time.
particularly as new non-party organization-based claimants appeared on Maidan (in other words, not just individuals, but named groups that took strong stances against compromise).  

Rupture and Reintegration: Nation and State

The mass mobilizations in Ukraine resulted in President Yanukovych and his cabinet fleeing the country (mostly for Russia), despite the fact that Yanukovych became president following what is generally agreed to have been a fair election in 2010. In other words, Yanukovych was the legitimate leader of a democratic Ukraine. I argue that since Ukraine’s independence in 1991 a gradual rupture between nation and state has developed, one in which the “state” and its practices are represented by the Yanukovych regime. I do not suggest that Maidan represents the nation, however; the “nation” is itself a contested concept, and most people on Maidan had their own idea of what it might mean. Rather, I posit that Maidan is a manifestation of the rupture that has occurred between nation and state. Thus “Maidan” is not an ersatz “Ukrainian nation” but represents the varied and contentious claims that ordinary Ukrainians tried to make—some successfully—on the state and its representatives. For this reason, leftist and other politically marginal groups felt it was important and necessary to be part of the mobilizations because they were perceived as an extraordinary moment in which extraordinary claims could be made.

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6 This analysis is somewhat clouded by present developments. Some of these organizations, including the Right Sector, became prominent on Maidan but have only earned their highly regarded status because of members' ability to coalesce this once weakly-tied umbrella group into a political party. What is important here is that Right Sector and other similar groups were not actual political parties during the mobilizations, which lent them credibility because actual political parties (like Bat’kivshchyna, UDAR, and Svoboda) had lost legitimacy.

7 Roman Cybriwsky (2014), for example, suggests that Yanukovych used fraudulent methods to win this election as well. Andrew Wilson recounts the opposite, that divisions among opposition candidates like Tymoshenko and Yushchenko created the opportunity for Yanukovych to win outright (2014:49).
For many protesters, participating in Maidan was seen as a way to reintegrate nation and state, to reject the anti-Ukrainian state and replace it with one that would actually represent the “nation” (ensured through the practice of new democratic presidential elections). These protesters relied on the reproduction of specific national narratives in order to validate their claims of being representative of a unified version of Ukraine. I employ Katherine Verdery’s concept of “national ideology” (1991) to help better understand the political concepts mobilized by those who were attempting to use national narratives to encourage this reintegration. In her discussion of the Romanian national ideology in which “the nation” and its existence—not what the nation was or who was in it, both of which remained contested—were taken as a given, allowing a national idea to permeate Romanian state socialism. As she writes, “In talking of ideology that is national, I refer to discursive struggles in which the concept of ‘the nation’ or ‘the Romanian people’ has formed a central preoccupation, sometimes intersecting with other sorts of discursive struggles” (10). Further,

Not only did positions in the debates entail prescriptions for politics, not only did they establish a language of political argument, but the entire field of discourse, with its overlapping domains of ‘state,’ ‘development,’ ‘religion,’ and so forth, continually created and recreated the Nation in relationship to those other elements. These were not, then, ‘merely’ intellectual arguments: they formed the rhetoric and laid down the premises of political discourse. They reproduced a hegemonic ideology in which the Nation occupied a central place. (29)

Unlike in Verdery’s Romanian example “‘the nation’ and ‘the people’ had become the unquestioned basis for every statement made in the debate: nowhere was anyone asking the question, ‘Is there such a thing as ‘the Romanian people’?’” (70), the Ukrainian right has been
insisting that Soviet (and now Russian) leaders and supporters were, in fact, constantly questioning whether or not there was such a thing as “the Ukrainian people.” Thus, nationalism—a political ideology in which the definition of an independent nation must be the primary goal of political action—is not only based on establishing who and what constitute the Ukrainian nation, but also on the assumption that the Ukrainian nation is more important than other political issues. In other words, Ukrainian nationalism should be seen as a political ideology that assumes the primacy of the nation even as various nationalist groups might have different ideas about what that nation should look like.

There are certainly many people in Ukraine who believe that the territory on which they live is indeed a nation, which should have political institutions in the form of a “state.” There are even leftists who support this idea (even if they are critical of the forms “nation” and “state” have historically taken). The radical right, in opposition to the radical left, however, often further believes that Ukraine should only be home to Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speakers, and their national ideas dovetail with exclusionary attitudes toward LGBT-identified people, as well as immigrants, for instance. They enact these beliefs in various ways. First, they often target leftist-organized demonstrations and actions because leftists support these minority groups’ rights. But they also enact these beliefs by mobilizing versions of Ukrainian history that were suppressed during Ukraine’s years of state socialism, suggesting that these historical elements constitute an “authentic” Ukraine. Therefore, because leftist ideas and practices are still being linked to socialism and communism, they become fair targets for the radical right, as they embody two kinds of challenges to Ukrainian authenticity (support for socialism and support for minority rights) that is necessary for the full establishment of the Ukrainian nation.
National Ideology on Maidan

The mobilizations on Maidan were a site for the crystallization of three main elements of the national ideology promoted by the radical right: a historical narrative of repression, a veneration of violent nationalist organizations, and a demonization of communism. By framing this as a national ideology, I move away from defining (and evaluating) the idea of “nationalism” in contemporary Ukraine; I also am able to trace how Maidan provided the opportunity for this particular ideology, rather than some other one, to gain traction among more people than would ordinarily be seen as part of the right wing. This national ideology is also largely grounded in a glorification of certain historical figures and groups from Western Ukraine, creating further discord within the country while purportedly being used to unite all Ukrainians.

This section explores where and how these three elements have been grounded in Ukraine’s history. However, their importance remains contested. Aside from robust leftist criticism of the acceptance of this national ideology, it is particularly divisive in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, where the nationalist “heroes” of Ukraine have long been presented as villains, and where the positive effects of industrialization and development—which allowed many Eastern Ukrainians access to jobs, education, and stability they would otherwise not have had as peasants—during the Soviet period are still valued. A second criticism, discussed further in Chapter 5, comes from feminists, who challenge the masculine domination of these “heroes” and the exclusion of women from most of the active roles in these national historical narratives.

Soviet Policies of Repression

An event celebrating a publication of Ukrainian Trotsky, a small volume of collected essays and speeches about Ukrainian independence by Leon Trotsky, illustrates the typical attitude of
right-wing activists toward attempts to rejuvenate the legacies of Soviet figures. Leftist activists
and academics organized a presentation of the recent publication in mid-November 2013 at a
prominent bookstore in the center of Kyiv. The five presenters included two members of the group
who sponsored the book's publication, Left Opposition (*Liva Opozytsiia* or LO) and three
academics, including one who came from London for the event. When I arrived, the presenters
took their seats as I looked around for some familiar faces. Instead, I found many attendees dressed
in full-body camouflage and combat boots, a style I later learned is usually associated with right-
wing activists and neo-Nazis groups. Joining a group of LO associates in a corner, I noticed the
presenters looking anxious as they began to introduce themselves. Before they could begin
discussing the book, however, a man in a baseball cap in the front row stood up and began ranting
at the presenters that Trotsky—and by extension, the presenters themselves—had perpetrated the
Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 (known as *Holodomor*), was homosexual, and supported
Satanism. The man in the baseball cap was soon joined by others yelling slurs about Trotsky, the
presenters, and the book, and they refused to let the presenters speak about the book, saying it was
a political project for leftists and communists, despite the organizers’ claims that they were
attempting to lead an academic discussion.

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8 Marko Bojcun, who wrote the introduction to the book, is an adjunct professor at London Metropolitan
University. Vasyl' Cherepanyn is a professor at Kyiv Mohyla Academy and the director of the Visual Cultural
Research Center. Yuriy Shapoval is an historian from the National Academy of Sciences, also in Kyiv.
9 Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party in 1927 and exiled in 1929, suggesting that his role in planning
the famine was quite limited.
10 In this context, the suggestion that Trotsky was a homosexual is meant to discredit Trotsky and disgust the
audience. Nationalists using homosexuality as a slur in this way intend for it to be linked with pedophilia
 (*pederast* is a slang word for homosexual that directly evokes pedophilia).
11 My reconstruction of this anecdote is taken from my own field notes, a reflection written by Bojcun after the
presentation (in English), and various posts on Facebook from leftists that I gathered following the presentation
(in Ukrainian).
Before long, about half the audience\textsuperscript{12} was on its feet, chanting loudly—\textit{han’ba} (shame), which is a common way to show anger and displeasure; \textit{smert’ voroham} (death to the enemies), the enemy being Trotsky and his current supporters; and \textit{komuniaky—na hilliaku} (hang the communists). The presenters, their supporters, and the bookstore employees tried to calm these instigators, but to no avail. After a quarter of an hour of this disruption, the police arrived and attempted to clear the space. They forced everyone out of the bookstore, but many of the ultra-nationalists waited outside for the presenters to leave, going so far as to slash the tires of the LO members’ van. The presenters remained in a back room until an escort arrived to take them home safely; I tried to wait for the presenters with a group of women from various leftist organizations, but we were forced to leave through a back door so as not to draw attention to the presenters.\textsuperscript{13}

These right-wing \textit{provokatory}\textsuperscript{14} are well-known by members of LO and other leftist activists who were present at the bookstore. The man in the baseball cap was Artem Skoropads’ky, notorious among leftist activists for stunts like the one at the Trotsky event, for which he was noticeably inebriated. A self-proclaimed Ukrainian nationalist, Skoropads’ky was born in Moscow and worked as a journalist for the Russian-language news outlet Kommersant, whose editors fired him the next day for disrupting the event with such indecent behavior.\textsuperscript{15} In Facebook posts

\textsuperscript{12} The authors of the Facebook posts agree that of the 60 attendees, about half were from far-right groups.

\textsuperscript{13} One of my companions half-jokingly referred to this as “positive gender discrimination”—the ultra-nationalists were less likely to attack us than the presenters because we were women.

\textsuperscript{14} The word \textit{provokatory}, or \textit{provocateurs}, can be loosely translated in English as instigators. In Ukrainian and Russian, it suggests a group of people who come to an event or protest with the sole aim of disturbing it with actions like those described above, and sometimes with violence. This term is rarely used by leftists to describe incidents like these (I did not see anyone use it in the Facebook posts I gathered), but people like those I am calling \textit{provokatory} in this context often use it to describe leftists when a leftist group comes to a protest that is dominated by nationalists. In other words, who is a \textit{provokator} in a given context is very fluid and flexible, but the designation is always used in a derogatory way. I see the actions of the right-wing attendees of the Trotsky presentation to fall in line with what they would call a provocation (\textit{provokatsiia}), so I use it here to show its fluid nature, even if leftists do not use it themselves but are usually the targets of it.

\textsuperscript{15} I include Skoropads’ky’s real name and real information about him here, as they were shared among leftists on Facebook as well as in news articles after the event. Leftists shared several other names of \textit{provokatory} but I cannot confirm their participation in other sources. I obtained details about Skoropads’ky’s background from a
following the event, most leftists agreed that the rest of the ultra-nationalists were members of the right-wing Svoboda party and the party's paramilitary group C14.16

Why did the book presentation of Trotsky's ideas about Ukraine create such an antagonistic atmosphere between left and right activists? Right-wing national ideology presents one narrative about Ukraine's relationship with the Soviet Union: that it was bad, and that Ukrainians were always the victims of Soviet policies. Certainly, the inhabitants of the territory of contemporary Ukraine were often the targets of Soviet policies with negative impacts. Particularly, the man-made famine of 1932-1933, known as Holodomor, killed at least three million people in the eastern regions of Ukraine and replaced many of them with Soviet Russian inhabitants, completely transforming the ethnic and linguistic makeup of this territory (Snyder 2010; Chapter 1 in particular).17 Kate Brown has documented a different policy of deportation and relocation of Ukrainians in the Western territories in the Polish borderlands, which removed the Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish populations of the region and repopulated it with Sovietized citizens (2004). Undoubtedly, Stalin is the most demonized of the earliest leaders, but Lenin and Trotsky remain linked to these policies, perceived as anti-Ukrainian and even genocidal.

However, Leon Trotsky was a vocal supporter of the existence of a united, independent Ukraine within the Soviet Union, and, according to the compilers of Ukrainian Trotsky, he

discussion with a British journalist who had interviewed him in the early days of the protests on Maidan. Skoropads’ky volunteered to be the press representative for the right-wing paramilitary group Right Sector, because in the first months of Maidan, Right Sector participants refused to be interviewed or show their faces. Skoropads’ky represented the group and was quoted in multiple local and international news sources, and I even saw him several times on Maidan during the protests and tent camp.

16 The group name “C14” evokes the Ukrainian word sich (CІЧ), which refers to Cossack settlements in the Ukrainian territory from the 16th to 18th centuries; Cossacks are major figures in Ukrainian nationalist historiography (see, for example, Popson 2001).

17 As Snyder has written, “We will never know with precision” how many people were killed during the famine of these years because of lack of documentation; however, “it seems reasonable to propose a figure of approximately 3.3 million deaths by starvation and hunger-related disease in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-1933” (2010:53).
understood the “indivisibility of the social and the national in the struggle for Ukrainian revival” through the 1930s (Liva Opozytsiia 2013:6; translation by the author).¹⁸ Such a stance reflects Lenin's nationalities policies: according to Marxist-Leninist ideology, certain “oppressed” nationalisms (as opposed to “oppressor” ones) should be encouraged, a conceptualization which influenced Lenin’s early policies toward nationalism in the expanding USSR (Slezkine 1994:414). Lenin’s view imagined an equality of nations, but in practice, he attempted to “compensate” for previous experiences of domination and oppression in favor of “oppressed” nations and at the expense of “oppressor” nations (namely, Russia) (Slezkine 1994:425).

Catherine Wanner has suggested that the development of a shared national sentiment of being “Ukrainian” was based not on a shared territory or language, necessarily, but on shared experiences of victimization. In particular, Wanner uses the examples of the Great Famine (Holodomor) of 1932-3 and the Chernobyl explosion of 1986 as events that galvanized glasnost-era Ukrainians to begin to view their state system as exploitative and repressive:

The abuse of power during the Famine inspired cultural and political leaders in the final years of glasnost to mobilize the Famine and hold it up, along with Chernobyl, as a symbol of the Ukrainian experience of Soviet rule. The Famine savagely killed off peasants as Chernobyl viciously poisoned the land. For a peasant-based people, this meant the nation and its ‘soul’ had been destroyed. (1998:43)

¹⁸ “Certainly, Trotsky was not the first who posited the indivisibility of the social and the national in the struggle for Ukrainian revival, but he was the last of the leaders of the October Revolution whose voice was further heard in favor of the freedom of Ukraine up until his death at the hands of an agent of the Stalinist regime in 1940” (Liva Opozytsiia 2013:6).
Wanner argues that these events became part of the foundation of a Ukrainian national consciousness that was mobilized in 1991 toward independence from the Soviet Union. This is particularly because these events are vivid in individual memories of people living in Ukraine, so they resonate when interpreted as elements of a shared national sentiment (1998:36-7).

This national ideology, promoted by radical right-wing groups, insists on narratives of Ukrainian repression and victimization during the Soviet period. This is linked to the broader process of decommunization, discussed in the Introduction. To these groups, contemporary leftists continue Soviet narratives of socialism, and these leftists must be rooted out if Ukraine is to be completely free of communist influences. They cannot, then, support any discussion of the complex roles of Soviet historical figures, because their national ideology cannot integrate the idea that someone like Trotsky could have promoted Ukrainian independence. For right-wing national ideology, the Soviets only repressed Ukrainians and their claim for territorial integrity, even killing them in order to homogenize the Soviet Union. Because even new leftists are perceived as being associated with the Communist Party, this element of decommunization—the destruction of the new left, as well as any leftover aspects of the historical left—are generally accepted in society at large.

**Narratives of Power**

Not all of the most popular historical narratives among the right focus on repression and victimhood. One of the main narratives that coexisted with the former focused on the trope of the Ukrainian Cossack.¹⁹ The Cossacks of Ukraine, bands of Orthodox farmers and patrolmen who

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¹⁹ There are also Russian Cossacks, but these groups are usually portrayed more as law enforcement rather than freedom fighters. This is most evident in contemporary mobilizations of the trope: during the Sochi Olympics, bands of men dressed as Cossacks enforced some version of local law, most visibly by beating up members of Pussy Riot during a protest (Lally 2014; Lee 2014).
settled in camps known as *sich*, most famously in the central territory of Zaporizhzhia, in the 15th-18th centuries, are acclaimed as a self-governing group that fought constantly against encroaching forces and established various traditions and customs over generations: “All had equal rights and could participate in the frequent, boisterous councils (*rady*) in which the side that shouted the loudest usually carried the day” (Subtelny 2000:110). These characteristics have long made the Cossacks popular historical figures in various versions of Ukraine's national narrative. Nancy Popson’s analysis of fifth-grade school textbooks concludes that Cossacks are portrayed as “heroes”; the books stress “the democratic nature of Cossack society and the Cossacks’ love of freedom” (2001:331).

On Maidan, the image of the Cossack was mobilized to illustrate both Ukraine's European-ness and the essentially “free” nature of Ukrainians. Because the Cossack proto-state was democratic,20 their place in Ukrainian history purportedly suggests that Ukrainians are somehow naturally or inherently democratic. Additionally, the Cossack commitment to freedom from external domination reflects the current attitudes toward Russia; as a mobilization against the relationship between Yanukovych and Putin, Maidan was in some ways seen as a continuation of the Cossacks' struggle. Over the course of Maidan, I saw many men dressed as Cossacks and living in tents on Maidan. Once, a group of them even rode horses down Khreshchatyk (Photo 2.3). The Cossack forelock hairstyle, called a *chub*, became popular among men of all ages.21 I once watched a video projected from the main stage on Maidan in which a group of men, training as a Cossack brigade, called on their (male) Cossack brethren to unite for Ukraine. In January 2014, a video circulated of one of these men, Mykhailo Gavryliuk, something of a symbol of the Cossack

20 For men; Subtelny writes that women and children were seen as a “hindrance” to the Cossack Sich (2000:110).
21 *Chub* is a typical Ukrainian word that means a “forelock” in general; more specific words denote variations on this hairstyle. A second word meaning “forelock,” *khokhol*, is used in Russian as a derogatory word for an ethnic Ukrainian. I thank Ali Kinsella for clarifying this terminology.
rejuvenation on Maidan, who had been kidnapped by the Berkut and was stripped naked and beaten in the freezing cold. That he lived to tell the tale—and to return to Maidan—proved the tenacity of the Cossacks in the face of adversity (Kozłowska 2014).

Ironically, it was the Zaporizhzhian Cossacks, under the leadership of Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi, who first placed Ukraine in Russia’s official orbit in 1654 when they signed the Treaty of Pereiaslav (Kappeler 2001:63; Morrison 1993:681; Subtelny 2000:135; Wilson 1997:6). But the right-wing national ideology promoted on Maidan was able to ignore this hiccup because of the resonance of the Cossack trope particularly among men on Maidan. The Cossacks were Ukraine’s first example, in this narrative, of using force to fight domination, which, as I will establish in later chapters, became essential to the self-definition of Maidan.

**Venerating Nationalist Groups**

In April 2015, a new set of laws was passed in Ukraine’s parliament, known collectively as Decommunization Laws. Not only did these laws outlaw the promotion of Communism and Nazism, they also codified the status of certain groups from the 20th century as “patriots” and “heroes of the nation” (Channell-Justice 2015). These groups, including the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA; Ukrains’ka povstans’ka armiia), fought against the Soviets in Western Ukraine throughout the 20th century, making them and their descendants the targets of a new national policy. These two groups were led by multiple figures but are most often represented by Stepan Bandera, the leader of one of the branches of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists from 1938. Bandera’s arm of the group integrated UPA into OUN in the 1940s, pursuing an insurgency against the Soviets throughout that decade (see Risch 2011; Subtelny 2000; Wilson 1997). These groups have historically been extremely
polarizing in Ukraine, largely because they were formed in the Western regions of Galicia and Volhynia (which Magocsi has referred to as Ukraine’s “Piedmont” [2002] in reference to the Italian region that is seen as essential to Italy’s unification), the last territories to be incorporated into contemporary Ukraine. These groups also entered into various associations with Nazi Germany, through alliances with local governments or through volunteering in the German Army in special brigades (Khromeychuk 2013)\(^\text{22}\); their members also contributed to the decimation of Volhynia’s Polish population after World War II (Risch 2011:35-6).

The appearance of references to OUN and UPA was perhaps inevitable on Maidan. From early on, protesters embraced the moniker “Banderites” (Banderivtsi—supporters of Bandera), previously used in a derogatory way to designate a nationalist. In my preliminary fieldwork in 2012, I saw homages to Stepan Bandera in various Western Ukrainian cities (Photo 2.4). During and after Maidan, Bandera became prominent in Kyiv: the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists placed a large banner honoring Bandera right next to the central stage (Photo 2.5). UPA slogans—in particular, “Slava Ukraini”—“Glory to Ukraine”—began to be used as a greeting. To mark oneself as having sympathetic views (as was the case when marking oneself as an UPA sympathizer or member in the 20th century), one simply must respond “Heroiam slava”—“Glory to the heroes.” Leftists began to tell stories of people in crowds chanting the slogan (as a call and response) and then being harassed when they did not respond with “Glory to the heroes.” Not only were the nationalist slogans marking participants off as the “right” kind of participants on Maidan,

\(^{22}\) Many historians writing about Ukraine are sympathetic to these alliances. They interpret the motives of these groups as being more afraid of the Soviets than of the Germans, thus making strategic and understandable alliances in order to protect themselves against the Soviets. However, Risch (2011) and others have documented extensive sympathy for Nazi ideologies, including anti-Semitism, that must be taken into consideration when discussing the actions of these organizations.
they were a way to allow the most active nationalists to police others into behaving “appropriately” as patriots of Ukraine.

The usage of these slogans was simply the first marker of the increasing hegemony of a particular national ideology that was then used to designate the patriots and fighters for Ukraine who were on Maidan. I found inklings of what would become a prominent part of the tent camp and occupied buildings on Maidan, the organization known as Right Sector (Pravyi Sektor), at a December 8 protest. A small tent across the street from the Trade Unions building with a banner reading Right Sector and an UPA flag were all that marked the group then, but its presence was disconcerting, as I had also seen a tent for the right-wing group Spil’na Sprava (Common Cause) as well as Svoboda’s leader Oleh Tyahnybok in a prominent position on the main stage. Anton Shekhovstov, who has been studying the Ukrainian far right for several years, traces the origins of Right Sector to November 2013, when three groups of various radical nationalist views came together. These groups were Tryzub (Trident), the Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian People’s Self Defense (UNA-UNSO), and Patriot of Ukraine (PU) (Shekhovstov 2015:83-84). Shekhovstov notes that

Ideologically these organizations ranged from the national conservatism of Tryzub to the right-wing radicalism of UNA-UNSO and the neo-Nazism of PU. However, none of these ideological strands represented a unifying force for Right Sector activists…These disparate groups were loosely united at the grassroots level by vehement opposition to Yanukovych’s regime, the desire for ‘national liberation,’ and romantic militarism. (2015:84)

As Shekhovtsov mentions, and of particular interest for those studying right-wing groups, around 40% of the movement—which claimed from 300 to 500 members between January and February 2014—were ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking Ukrainians (2015:84). This is a significant shift
away from the stereotype of Ukrainian nationalists from Western Ukraine, who are thought to see language as a sort of proof of one’s Ukrainian status (that one cannot be truly Ukrainian unless one speaks Ukrainian in all circumstances). My own observations of militants on Maidan matches Shekhovtsov’s conclusions: I often heard them speaking Russian to others and among one another. This suggests that contemporary nationalist organizations are shifting away from an ethnically-based inclusion and are more focused on Ukraine’s territorial integrity. It further suggests that these contemporary nationalist groups are reinterpreting certain national narratives to suit their own projects and goals.

Right Sector became a prominent feature of Maidan through the winter. They continually and quietly occupied various buildings—sometimes storefronts near Maidan—from which to stage their actions, and their members dressed in camouflage, giving their group the militaristic, threatening look they were trying to achieve. Further, through the winter, their members nearly always covered their faces with black cloths or balaclavas, obscuring their identities. They also refused to speak to the press. Artem Skoropads’ky, who engineered the Trotsky event protest, volunteered to be the group’s media liaison. Skoropads’ky openly spoke about the possibility of an armed uprising led by the Right Sector, even before the government used force against protesters. Right Sector did indeed gain access to a large number of weapons and became a group of armed militants, beginning in January and February.

The national ideology promoted by groups like Right Sector was, somewhat surprisingly, not based on a linguistically exclusive position. This contradicts to some extent the Western Ukrainian nationalist images circulated by this and other groups, but they mobilized these images because of their common currency among other “patriotic” groups and citizens. Many images relating to OUN and UPA, and connecting these groups with freedom and anti-communism,
continued to appear throughout the Maidan period, particularly as militarized groups attempted to gain larger membership. The “Glory to Ukraine—Glory to the Heroes” slogan was constantly used; the people killed on Maidan were referred to as “heroes,” again evoking these slogans. Ultimately this ideology, while perhaps not fully exclusive of linguistic diversity, had a commitment to Ukraine’s territorial integrity, which its promoters felt echoed the goals of 20th-century anti-Soviet militants. Thus anti-communism was an essential element of the Right Sector and others’ stances, which helped anti-communist attitudes become such a central unifying factor on Maidan (recall from the introduction Andriy Movchan’s statement that anti-communism was the unifying factor of the protests).

Demonizing Socialism and its Symbols

Perhaps one of the best examples of the intersection between the demonization of Ukraine’s Soviet past and the veneration of increasingly radical right-wing groups is the destruction of Kyiv’s most important remaining Lenin statue in December 2013.23 The “Bessarabian Lenin,” so named because it stood across Khreshchatyk from the eponymous market, was unveiled in 1946 on the 29th anniversary of the October Revolution (Cybriwsky 2014:102; Istorychna Pravda 2013). This Lenin statue had been vandalized in 2009 and restored, protected by round-the-clock guards from the Communist Party (Cybriwsky 2014:103), but an attempt to destroy the statue was made in November 2013 at the beginning of the Maidan protests, and a police guard protected the statue during mass demonstrations. On the night of December 8, 2013, protesters successfully brought down the Bessarabian Lenin. Some news accounts credited representatives of the Svoboda Party with toppling the monument (Istorychna Pravda 2013), though in the following days, many

23 Cybriwsky counted 18 other “minor” Lenin statues around the city as late as 2008 (2014:102).
protesters—mostly men—appeared at the square to chop up the monument with small hammers (Photo 2.6; I was lucky enough to get a small piece of marble from Lenin’s body before they started appearing for a hefty price online).

It is possible that many protesters saw the destruction of Lenin as a necessary step for these mobilizations to show that they had more of an impact than previous “pro-democracy” or “pro-Western” protests had had before (namely, the Orange Revolution, which most people did not feel produced the decisive break with Ukraine’s Soviet/Russian-influenced past that was desired). Others simply saw the event as a provocation to attempt to radicalize more protesters, or even to urge the government to respond. In the days and weeks that followed, the base of the statue was covered with stickers and graffiti, ranging from slogans like “Glory to Ukraine” and suggestions for new statues to place there (“a statue for the freedom fighters of Ukraine”) to neo-Nazi symbols and “white power” slogans (Photo 2.7).

The removal of Soviet-era statues, as several scholars have recognized, was an important step in many former republics in visualizing a break with the Soviet Union; as Verdery has put it, “Statues falling was one of the earliest visible signs of regime change in 1989” (1999:5). While some cities, particularly in Western Ukraine, had removed their Lenin statues as early as possible in the 1990s (Cybriwsky 2014:101; Wanner 1998: 185 [L’viv]; 188 [Mukachevo]) and Kyiv’s other great Lenin statue which stood on what is now Independence Square was dismantled in 1991 (Cybriwsky 2014:102), the particular statue that remained standing grew as a symbol of the “old” regime over its continued existence during Ukraine’s independence. Gaining that representational power, it became even more important to destroy it—and violently—almost 25 years after the end of Soviet rule.
Catherine Wanner has suggested that city and state governments focused on these monuments following independence because they became “contested political terrain, the sites of shifting conceptions and emotions about the past” (1998:72). Therefore, they became places of reinterpretation of the Soviet period, a reinterpretation which would “support the legitimacy of the nascent Ukrainian state” (ibid.). Put another way, “changing the political order, no matter where, often means changing the bronzed human beings who both stabilize the landscape and temporally freeze particular values in it” (Verdery 1999:6). Verdery’s inclusion of the notion of “values,” spatially and temporally frozen, is significant for an interpretation of the targeting of Bessarabian Lenin in 2013. Lenin had come to signify not only the period of Soviet rule in Ukraine but also, and perhaps more importantly, the current regime’s sympathy toward that period and perceived similarities in the current Ukraine-Russia (Yanukovych-Putin) relationship. Thus, destroying Lenin in 2013 was not simply a statement that protesters were ready for a real break between Ukraine and communism; it was also a stance against continued Russian domination in Ukraine. The fact that many Kyiv residents were ready for the statue to be gone likely made them more sympathetic to the violent destruction of the statue—in other words, a mainstream sense that it was time for Lenin to be gone meant that the radical nature of Lenin’s destruction (and of those doing the destruction) was accepted.

Importantly, Lenin’s destruction in Kyiv led to an expansion of the practice across Ukraine, called “Leninopad” (from the word snihopad, or “snowfall”). Participating in Leninopad became an important way for the populations of various cities and towns to mark themselves as authentically Ukrainian.24 Eventually, as part of the new government’s “decommunization” plans,

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24 In Kharkiv, activists (including the author Serhiy Zhadan) replaced a street named after Vladimir Lenin with new nameplates honoring John Lennon (a nod to both the anti-Soviet and pro-Western aspects of the protests, as well as the significance of the Beatles’ music in challenging dominant Soviet norms; see Yurchak 2006).
the removal of communist-era signifiers—from monuments to town and street names—became a priority and was required by law. This uprooting is a response to those radical right-wing protesters who destroyed Kyiv’s last important Lenin statue, accepting their demands to legally demonize the Soviet period of Ukraine’s history and replace it with new, Ukrainian narratives. However, scholars in and of Ukraine are vocalizing criticisms of this obsession with monuments and names (see, for example, Hrytsak 2015; Krytyka’s online forum ran multiple pieces considering this problem in relation to the decommunization laws) instead of what they consider to be more substantial reforms for Ukraine. However, as Verdery and others have noted, statues and monuments are the representations of those regimes and narratives, and the practice of creating new symbols, as well as that of destroying old ones, also creates the symbols of new, “authentically” Ukrainian values.

I have provided an extensive discussion about a national ideology that was circulated among radical right-wing groups before Maidan and which became dominant during the protests. I have provided several ethnographic examples of how this ideology works in practice in order to show how national ideologies, while they may always be contested, must play out in people’s daily lives in order to gain meaning and relevance. In the following chapter, I discuss the ways this national ideology has given little ground to other dissenting political voices, shaping both discourses, actions, and possibilities for the left. Further, I have shown that this national ideology, while it became one of the main discourses that characterized the mobilizations, was created and shared far before the protests began. This explains how people somewhat easily shifted from peaceful protesters into militants, once the symbols and practices of this national ideology became engrained on Maidan. I now turn to use of and responses to violence there.
Violence and Change

By late November, people had begun sleeping on the square, largely students and other young people. On November 30, the militarized riot police, or Berkut, brutally attacked the people sleeping on Maidan. In a media frenzy, it was unclear how many people had been attacked or what condition they were in (Andrew Wilson has written that “official figures” claimed 79 people were beaten; 2014:68). One news story circulated that a girl had been beaten to death (it turned out to be false). A large number of those who were beaten were also arrested. Of course, this was not the first instance of violence on or near Maidan; Wilson refers to “staccato repression” to describe the varied and unpredictable use of force at the hands of the state in the early weeks of Maidan (2014:76), including attacks on journalists and the use of paid thugs (titushki) to beat up protesters and activists outside of the central square (Wilson 2014:78). However, particularly this beating of students and other young activists—who had come to represent the protests with their “European” views—was unacceptable.

This episode illustrates the convalescence of several important claimants, as well as shifts in their relationships with one another. The beating of students was a mechanism that changed relations among actors on Maidan and encouraged further mobilization. It also changed the status of a contentious performance—gathering and sleeping on Maidan—from a “confrontational” episode into a “violent” one. Its clear link to the same kind of performance used during the Orange Revolution made this type of gathering appear threatening to the regime, even though peaceful gatherings were theoretically legal under Ukrainian law. The repressive response of the Berkut changed protesters' attitudes toward the riot police, and protesters began to see them as agents of a state that now allowed violence against citizens.
The claimants that appeared at this moment were multiple. First, those sleeping on the square were identified as students. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this was not an organized body of students, but “students” were mobilized as a class in order to show the absurdity of the attack: How could the police attack students, people asked? Further, more people who were not associated with political parties began to mobilize in response to this episode. Again, this was not an organized group, but it formed the general “protest body” of Maidan that participated outside of Oppositional politics. Next, the Berkut became a target for the protesters. As an arm of the Yanukovych regime, Berkut officers who organized and participated in the beatings were understood as all that was wrong with the governing regime. Finally, titushki became active participants from this point. While not necessarily responding to a political platform, titushki were mobilized by the regime to commit violence, theoretically without implicating the state itself.

These claimants had complex and shifting relationships with one another. Importantly, while Opposition leaders spoke out against the violence, the beatings led more non-party citizens to participate in larger numbers on Maidan. The division between the state (and its representatives, including Yanukovych, Berkut, and titushki) and the Maidan protest body (to reiterate, this group was not united as “the nation” but can be said to agree that they were not represented by “the state”) became more stark at this moment, strengthening the boundaries between protesters and their enemies. Importantly, at this time, many protesters promoted slogans such as “The Police are With the People” (Militsiia z narodom). This also evoked the Orange Revolution, during which many police officers refused to use violence against protesters and defected from their posts to support them (Wilson 2005). However, in 2013, such hopes did not come to fruition, and the boundaries between the state and Maidan remained.
Aside from these broad trends, my daily visits to Maidan enabled me to see the precise ways violence was restructuring the protests and protesters’ relationships. Violence began to come from either side: the constant police presence around Maidan suggested that they were mobilized with the possibility of an attack on the growing tent camp. At the same time, protesters were increasingly well-armed and beginning to divide into sotnia, or “hundreds,” modeled after Cossack military groupings of one hundred men (in February 2014, the Maidan self-defense claimed 12,000 participants; see Radio Svoboda 2014). Protesters also began to occupy buildings around the square, sometimes damaging property in order to claim the space for themselves. Because the protesters perceived that the police would have to use violence to force them out of the square, they were ready to respond with violence as well. Further, the initial use of even calculated force against the protesters on November 30 had largely discredited Yanukovych, whereas he had probably anticipated that such a response would scare other protesters off. The state’s own legitimacy was under scrutiny, and how Yanukovych and his regime decided to use force to end the protests would define if the protests would be seen as a “revolution” or as an anti-government provocation.

Journalists reported 100,000 people at protests on December 1, 2013 (Herszenhorn 2013); throughout December and January, hundreds of thousands of protesters flowed into and out of Maidan. The space of Maidan itself became increasingly militarized. Protesters built barricades out of every material they could find, including park benches, tires, wood fragments, sandbags, the branches of the intended New Year’s tree, and, later, snow (Photo 2.8). They began wearing plastic construction helmets and carrying shields (these “defense forces” were extremely male dominated; the gender dynamic on Maidan is discussed at length in Chapter 5). They closed the barricades at night because of rumors that the Berkut were ready to attack the square, while at the
same time, rumors abounded that the police were about to join the protesters, as had happened during the Orange Revolution (the Berkut did eventually attack the square on December 11, but the protesters were prepared for this and successfully protected the protest camp).

Black Thursday and The Dictatorship Laws: Shifting Possibilities for Political Action

In November and December 2013, people were legally able to use mass protest to make claims on the governing regime, although they were somewhat limited in what was considered acceptable. Over the course of Maidan, however, there were various changes in the ways this structure enabled protesters to make coherent demands and in the ways the governing regime responded. Yanukovych had worked over the years of his tenure to consolidate power in the hands of the president, having reinstated the 1996 constitution which gave the president significantly larger powers than the Parliament. He further had been drawing the judiciary into this orbit (as discussed in the Introduction), thus preventing the function of checks and balances among the branches of government. Often-shifting coalitions—among both the Opposition and the Party of Regions and its supporters—had the effect of strengthening Yanukovych's party rather than drawing more support to Opposition candidates.

The most significant shift during the course of Maidan, however, was in the regime’s response to protesters, which could have either encouraged or repressed their claim making, a problem to which I now turn. I described above that protesters and police alike were more inclined toward violent response as the protests wore on and the tent camp on Maidan became more entrenched. Instead of responding to this increased militarization with direct violence, the Yanukovych regime decided instead to make the protests and tent camp illegal. I was returning from L'viv on an overnight train when I received news of the Yanukovych government’s most
recent repressions of the protesters, making January 16, 2014, become known as *Chornyi Chetverh*, or “Black Thursday.” The Parliament had passed a set of laws with just over half the lawmakers voting in favor—by a show of hands rather than the usual electronic voting system—of what they called the “Anti-Protest Laws” and what protesters and their supporters called the “Dictatorship Laws.” The package of laws—which included amendments to various laws and codes—basically made all actions taking place on Maidan illegal, criminal, and punishable.

Others have analyzed the effects of these laws in greater detail than I will here (see Civic Solidarity 2014; Snyder 2014). The authors of the former document, an anonymous legal analysis, declare the entire package of laws unconstitutional:

Based on the official Parliament’s web-site all the bills were submitted on January 14, 2014. At that, based on the mentioned web-site, all the bills were considered by 15 relevant Parliamentary Committees on January 15, 2014. On January 16, 2014, that is to say the same day the document has been voted for, the Speaker has signed the bills in violation of the Parliamentary Procedure. Moreover, already on January 17, 2014 the President of Ukraine signed the considered bills.

Regular proceedings to sign legislation into law—by both the Speaker of the Parliament and the President—must follow three separate readings and discussion before being accepted by the general population of the Parliament. These legal analysts show that the laws were submitted on

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25 Ukrainian legislation (Ukrainian: *zakonoproekt*, from “law,” *zakon*) is always similarly titled. These laws, as well as laws discussed in the next chapter, are officially called “Law of Ukraine ‘On…””; for example, “Law of Ukraine ‘On Higher Education.’” Legislation also has a designated number; the “Law of Ukraine ‘On Higher Education’” is No. 1187-2. However, laws are often known colloquially by those who introduce them. The Higher Education law was introduced by former Education Minister M. Zgurovs’ky, so they are often referred to as “Zgurovs’ky’s Laws.” The January 16 laws are a large package of 12 laws and resolutions, each with its own designated number and its own lengthy title (see Verkhovna Rada 2014). The laws were introduced by Party of Regions representatives Vadym Kolesnychenko and Volodymyr Oliynyk, but I rarely heard these names used in the typical colloquial fashion. This is certainly because most people with whom I spoke about the laws preferred the colloquial “Dictatorship Laws” instead (*zakony pro dyktaturu* or *dyktators’ki zakony*).
the 14th, passed by Parliament and signed by the Speaker on the 16th, and then signed into law by the President on the following day. Furthermore, because of the rapid nature of the submission and voting, many non-coalition (that is, mainly the Party of Regions plus the Communist Party) Parliament members were not present at all. Typically, deputies vote through an electronic system which provides the official record; voting through show of hands is only allowed when the system is not functioning properly, a rule which was not followed during this particular vote (Kotliar 2014; Snyder 2014).

Despite the obvious unconstitutionality of the laws, most protesters considered the laws a threat (see Appendix 1 for a detailed description of the main changes that would impact protesters). The legislation made many Maidan-based actions that had already been taken illegal, including the use of tents, stages, and sound equipment; the occupation or “blocking” of administrative and other buildings; wearing masks and helmets to obscure one’s identifying features; and wearing clothing that resembles a uniform of a law enforcement agent.26 The distribution of “extremist” material—both in paper form and online—was made illegal, without a clear definition of “extremist.” Among leftists, it was assumed that the material they distributed on Maidan, as well as what they exchanged online, would fall under the purview of “extremist.” Similarly, slander and defamation were re-criminalized, and law enforcement officers, executives, and judges were protected from the publication or distribution of any “offensive” information about them or their families. Any material circulating on Maidan or on the Internet that condemned the President or any of his allies was now considered a criminal act.

26 This last segment was targeted at the increasing trend of wearing military-style fatigues on Maidan. While many of these uniformed men and women may have been wearing official military uniforms from their military service, I also saw an increase in the availability of military uniforms and footwear for purchase at a second-hand market on the outskirts of Kyiv.
Additionally, several aspects of this legislation allowed the government full access to this information via the Internet. Online media were required to register as “information agencies,” subjecting them to the limitations of other (state-sanctioned) media forms. This was a significant blow to new, citizen-run media sources that appeared as the honest mouthpieces of the protests, including the still-functioning Hromadske TV, Espreso, and EuroMaidan PR websites. Further pieces of the legislation restricted access to certain Internet content and criminalized any interference into state-owned information and telecommunications resources. International NGOs (and their employees and grantees) were named as “foreign agents” and subject to new legal limitations, accountability, and taxation; the laws introduced criminal proceedings in absentia. Finally, the legislation protected police and other law enforcement agencies from being prosecuted for previous or future uses of excessive force.

Opposition leaders, including Vitaliy Klitschko and Oleh Tyahnybok, spoke out against the laws, describing them as without legal basis and “simply a usurping of power” (Balmforth and Polityuk 2014). However, neither leader was present in Parliament to vote against the laws. The way the vote was counted did away with legitimate voting, so there was no way Opposition parties could come together to present either a challenge to the laws or a package of laws that would protect protesters or grant them amnesty. Because of this impotence, protesters on Maidan began to question their faith in these political leaders. Unable to take a credible stance against the laws, the Opposition leaders appeared to be simply spewing anti-Yanukovych rhetoric that was, in

27 The above-cited legal analysis suggested this ominous use of the latter piece of legislation: “In view of the ongoing civil unrest in the country, these provisions are clearly aimed at dealing with the online civil protest in the form of Ddos attacks [distributed denial of service, meaning a disruption of access to certain websites by overwhelming them with access requests, causing them to crash; see Coleman 2014] on government websites. It may seem like a legitimate aim to protect government-owned Internet resources. However, given harsh penalties and objectively weak processing capacities of the servers hosting the nationally-critical IT infrastructure (downtime of government websites has always been a major issue) in practice this could mean random or targeted criminal prosecutions of persons who unknowingly contribute to the failure of the elements of this infrastructure by attempting to access or use it legitimately.”
reality, useless against the President’s powers. During the increasingly violent clashes a few days later, protesters even attacked Vitaliy Klitschko with a fire extinguisher (Parusinski 2014; Wilson 2014:82). Such an attack on Klitschko, a world-famous boxer, shows not only that protesters ceased to value his presence but also that they found him completely powerless and therefore non-threatening. This was a drastic turn from previous adoration of Klitschko and support for him as possibly a national leader.\textsuperscript{28} Opposition leaders’ reactions to these laws simply confirmed the growing lack of interest in political or legislative solutions to the protests and Yanukovych’s desire to destroy them.

The January 16 Laws significantly changed the possibilities for political action for Maidan protesters. First, they were proof that whatever independent centers of power had existed before no longer did, as the Yanukovych regime was in full control of every arm of the government. The failures of the Opposition leaders to effectively respond to and condemn the legislation meant that their coalition was functionally useless and meaningless to protesters. This generated even more instability in political alignments and encouraged the consolidation of previously disparate umbrella groups, like the Right Sector. Finally, this type of repression was different than the direct violence that was used before. It was an attempt to end the protests through threat of repression rather than active repression itself. Perhaps this is because Yanukovych was concerned he would lose too much credibility if he mobilized troops to raze the square, and perhaps he felt that this legislation would appear to be a more legitimate way to end the protests.

However, the response to these laws was not what Yanukovych and his allies expected. Instead of instilling fear into the protesters that they would all be thrown in jail—which was a

\textsuperscript{28} I did not see this incident referenced often, leading me to believe that many people felt some shame that it had happened. In May 2014, Klitschko was elected mayor of Kyiv and has been generally perceived as an effective leader, despite some unpopular policies toward the remnants of Maidan.
legitimate possibility—it galvanized them. One response was to mock the absurdity of the legislation (Photo 2.9). For many leftist activists, the passage of the laws was the proof that they needed that to be on Maidan was to be on the “right” side. Specifically concerning the left, the legislation was unifying in a way that previously, no mass protest on Maidan or organization present there had been. It changed the aims of leftist protesters from simply wanting to present their own ideas to other protesters, to having a real motivation to really influence the direction of the protests, particularly into a massive, nationwide strike. But the response of non-leftist protesters to the laws was the confirmation that the use of violence was a legitimate response against the police as an arm of the government that was especially protected by this legislation. The use of violence, more than the laws themselves, was the focus of conversations following the passage of the laws.

“All the lines have already been crossed”

In the afternoon of January 19, protesters on Maidan had decided to march to the Verkhovna Rada in order to protest directly against the members of Parliament who had voted for the Dictatorship Laws. However, a massive column of Berkut stood across Hrushevs’koho Street, which leads up a hill to the Rada. While the protests had been largely peaceful until then, some people on Hrushevs’koho decided they had had enough and attacked the Berkut blocking their way. What followed was a standoff that included throwing Molotov cocktails and cobblestones at the Berkut; tear gas, rubber bullets, a water cannon, and finally live ammunition directed at protesters; and the construction of massive barricades backed by tire fires used to protect protesters. In the end, two protesters, Serhiy Nihoyan and Mykhailo Zhizdnevs’kyi,29 were shot.

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29 Zhizdnevs’kyi was a Belorusian citizen who had participated in the protests since their early days. Nihoyan was from Dnipropetrovs’k and was a central organizer since the beginning, as well; Nihoyan was a Ukrainian
and killed; on January 21, two protesters, Igor Lutsenko and Yuri Verbits’kyi, were kidnapped from a hospital and tortured, and Verbits’kyi’s body was found in the woods near Kyiv a few days later (Kotaleichuk 2014); and Roman Senyk died on January 22 from gunshot wounds suffered on Hrushevskoho (Ukrains’ka Pravda 2014).

As Ukrainian academic Volodymyr Kulyk posits, because of Opposition leaders’ perceived weakness in challenging Yanukovych’s laws or in protecting the protesters in any capacity, “radicals among the protesters resorted to violence and, rather unexpectedly, found support from the majority of the Maidan participants” (2014:101). Several large-scale sociological studies documented an increasing willingness to use and sanction violence (Onuch 2014b; Shevchenko 2014), and Kulyk documents the growth of self-defense units that were “reoriented toward [Maidan’s] protection from external threats” (2014:102) from their previous existence as internal police. Kulyk traces the rise of the Right Sector and the group’s leader, Dmytro Yarosh, to this moment, suggesting that the weaknesses in right-wing opposition leaders like Tyahnybok were countered with the strong rhetoric of Right Sector. The group claimed “headquarters” on Hrushevskoho, its members appearing exclusively in black masks and military fatigues. Yarosh and Right Sector clearly supported the use of force against the Berkut, and protesters looked toward the organization as a strong leader for others aiming to create self-defense groups in a similar manner.

I photographed a small poster near European Square just over a week after the attack on protesters (Photo 2.5). It featured the faces of the Verbits’kyi, Nihoyan, and Zhizdnevs’kyi, underscored with the fully capitalized phrase proclaiming “All the lines have already been crossed” (Vsi mezhi vzhe pereideno). It symbolized the disbelief that people who had been spending every citizen but his Armenian background was often commented upon, as was his use of the Ukrainian language, which was somewhat unexpected in light of his Dnipropetrovs’k origins.
day on Maidan felt—while many had suspected the police would use violence against them, the graphic manner in which each of these men had been killed was beyond what anyone had imagined. The poster galvanized those who otherwise would have been critical of protesters responding with violence to refuse to accept the disparity of force between the Berkut and the protesters.

These images mark the beginning of the third stage of Maidan, which I have referred to as a “space of possibility.” In this space, the protesters were facing a constantly shifting political atmosphere, which created possibilities that may have previously been unimaginable under a more strict political regime with the ability to enact controls and repressions. To some extent, it led to the consolidation of protesters against the government, including leftists who had previously been unwilling to commit to the pro-Maidan camp (a challenge I discuss in the following chapter). At the same time, it placed violence at the forefront of the protests, because protesters could no longer see any way to avoid using violence as the government became more repressive.30

“Put Your Mask On”: Proof and Displays of Violence

Throughout the month of January, violence became the focus of most conversations around Maidan. This took two forms. Because of the major crackdowns on media services and freedom of the press following the passage of the January 16 laws, it was extremely difficult to access

30 Some protesters and groups were likely supportive of the use of force even before the January 16 Laws. Indeed, throughout the protests, there were often stories of provocatory who would instigate violence; some of the time these provocateurs were assumed to be paid by the Yanukovych camp, but it is equally possible that they were protesters who wished to promote violent responses to police repressions. Ivan Katchanovski has written extensively on the issue, particularly around the violence that took place in late February, suggesting that Maidan protesters may have shot police officers first, provoking a response that led to 100 deaths (2015). Katya Gorchinskaya (2016) describes the experience of interviewing Maidan protester Ivan Bubenchik on Hromadske TV, who openly discusses having shot police officers with the intention of killing them on February 20, 2014. Katchanovski’s conclusions are not widely accepted in the scholarly community, but, as Gorchinskaya points out, police officers are being tried for their crimes in February 2014, whereas protesters like Bubenchik and others who have admitting to shooting police officers have not.
accurate information; or, the accuracy of the information available was in question. One of the ways Maidan became violence-focused after January 19 was through the collection of materials and weapons used against protesters, a practice that continued on an even greater scale through February. Many people displayed photos of tear gas canisters and rubber and live ammunition casings they had found, and one man living in a tent on the square collected a large amount of these materials to display for passersby. The man painstakingly displayed what had been collected with descriptions, and he was always available outside the tent to answer questions.

The second way Maidan became more focused on violence was through participants’ own displays of their ability to become violent. There was a growing number of people wearing military fatigues and black masks or balaclavas, and people began carrying weapons as well. The weapons ranged from home-made clubs to shields made from wood or road signs (Photo 2.11); several times, I saw people openly carrying guns. Molotov cocktails were another weapon of choice, and empty bottles filled the streets around the tents for the later manufacture of cocktails (a task often completed by women otherwise not allowed on the front lines). These displays moved violence to the center of discourses about what was happening on Maidan, supported by the proof of violence used against protesters. These behaviors showed that, as the center of discourse production, Maidan—and the protesters on it—now sanctioned violence.

The organizations that were central to these discursive shifts—including the Right Sector and the Svoboda party, among others—took care to represent their violence as the logical next step in the protests, because the government and its representatives had crossed a line. Artem Skoropads’ky, the Right Sector’s media liaison, predicted the group’s wide access to weapons and declared the government responsible for any violence on Maidan. But another interview with a Svoboda party representative at the occupied Ukrainian House also reflected these new attitudes
toward violence. These attitudes focused on an attempt to normalize violence through organizational practices that would appear justified to observers; namely, by creating hierarchized, militaristic structures that appeared responsible—in contrast with provokatory, who would appear irresponsible and reactionary—and protective of protesters, these groups were able to justify their actions, including radical tactics of occupation and occasional violence.

The Svoboda representative, wearing camouflage pants and a bulletproof vest, first spoke against the police who had previously occupied the building in order to stage attacks against protesters on Hrushevs’koho. According to him, the police occupants broke into the archives held on the fourth and fifth floors of the building. However, when Maidan protesters occupied the space, one of their first steps was to place security at those archives so no one could damage them. This, he said, showed that Maidan protesters were different from the police; his underlying suggestion was that the protesters obviously cared about Ukraine, while the police did not, which they proved by damaging an important Ukrainian space and the history housed within it. He described the makeup of the occupants: middle class, with higher education, and no one was paying them. “We ask people to help,” he said, “and they gladly help.” His concern with bettering Ukraine’s future also allowed him to justify the violence being used by everyday people:

There are always people who are more or less radical, but a lot of these people are teachers, lawyers, doctors, and will take a Molotov cocktail to fight the police if they have to make a better future for their children. The police are criminals and are just there to protect Yanukovych and his family.

By creating a stark contrast between the protesters as ordinary people and the police as criminals, the Svoboda representative justified violence being done in order to protect Ukraine. At the same time, the space of the Ukrainian House—sparkling clean thanks to cleaning machines found in the
basement—was organized in a way that reflected the hierarchical organizations in control of it. These Maidan activists were very aware that media representations of them and their actions were central in gaining sympathy for the protesters, despite their use of violence and radical, illegal tactics.

But other buildings, including the KMDA (City Hall) and private businesses that were taken over to house food and medical supplies, or the Right Sector headquarters—which I stumbled upon near Hrushevs’koho, identifiable only by the threatening armed man standing outside and the sign reading “Put your mask on”—still showed signs of vandalism and chaos that did not appear at the Ukrainian House. A layer of ice remained outside the occupied Agricultural Ministry, as police attempting to vacate the building had sprayed the sidewalk with a water cannon, a tactic that backfired and simply prevented the police from entering the building. By this time, the Opposition leaders were still negotiating with President Yanukovych, and the latter had extended an Amnesty Law through which the regime would not prosecute those guilty of breaking the January 16 laws if they vacated the government-owned buildings occupied around Maidan (in theory, the Ukrainian House did not count as a building affected by the Amnesty Laws). But protesters refused the terms of the laws, and by this time, they had more clout than the Opposition leaders.

The political shifts during phase two of Maidan led to the discrediting of Opposition leaders and the rise of groups like Right Sector whose members legitimized the use of force by presenting themselves as non-aligned and uncorrupted by the current state of Ukrainian politics. The legislation passed on January 16 only threatened mass repressions, but it generated an

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31 Eventually, the Right Sector did become a political party, although their leader, Dmytro Yarosh, did not fare well in the May 2014 presidential elections, nor did the party receive enough votes to be represented in Parliament during those elections in October 2014.
unprecedented response among protesters, including among leftist activists. Ultimately, it led to the end of stage two, marked by a clash between the police and protesters that led to the deaths of 100 people at the end of February.

The narrative that follows describes the events of February 18-20. It is reconstructed from live updates by the Kyiv Post and other news sources, as well as from my observations of Internet live streams. It is not based on ethnographic evidence because I did not enter Maidan during these days; it is also not based on interview data, because the actions that took place during those days were illegal and violent in nature. I did not ask any interviewee to describe what they did on Maidan during these days because I did not want to implicate them in these actions, nor did I want to collect such information. This was in part because, when I was completing interviews, it remained unclear who would gain power in Ukraine and whether people would be prosecuted for their actions or if this information would be dangerous to have. Furthermore, the experience of these three days was extremely traumatic, for me as an observer and more so for my friends and colleagues who were present on Maidan. I felt that questions about their experience during these days would be invasive and would contribute to the trauma they were certainly already feeling, for which I am not equipped to provide care. For this reason, I have written this section in a somewhat detached manner; however, the information contained in this section is central to understand the rest of the events I will describe in this dissertation.

February 18-20, 2014
Early in the morning of February 18, gunfire erupted on Maidan between protesters and police. Fighting continued throughout the day, and at 4 p.m., the head of Security Services of Ukraine (SBU) and the Interior Ministry issued a warning for people to clear the streets of Maidan within two hours. By 4:30 p.m., the metro was closed and much other public transportation shut down. Roads leading to the center were blocked by the police, and the only exit from Maidan was up the hill to Mykhailivs’ka Square and Cathedral, where there was a field hospital as well as food and other supplies.

Police forces surrounded the entire Lypky district around Maidan in the afternoon, gaining higher ground above Maidan itself from Hrushevs’koho and Instituts’ka Streets and beating protesters as they claimed the territory. The police also evacuated the occupied Ukrainian House, re-occupying it for their own purposes. In Marins’kyi Park, next to Hrushevs’koho Street, government-hired thugs known as “titushki” beat and captured protesters, whom they turned over to the police in the area. The police continued to advance on protesters in Independence Square, using live ammunition, water cannons, and an armored personnel carrier (a small tank) against the protesters.

In response, protesters set massive fires with tires they had collected around Maidan, creating a giant smoke screen to protect protesters from the police and their weapons. Protesters continued to use Molotov cocktails and fireworks against the police, and they began to tear up the cobblestones around the square and into Hrushevs’koho and Instituts’ka Streets to lob at police. Protesters remained on Maidan through the night, with the Kyiv Post counting 20,000 people on the square at 11:30 pm on February 18, including many women who remained on the square despite specific requests that they leave and allow men to fight. The Trade Union building on the square had been evacuated, but it remained under protesters’ control.
At the end of the day, 25 people were reported dead, including both civilians and police officers, and doctors guessed that thousands were injured. In the following two days, police began to use the tall buildings around Maidan to install snipers who shot and killed protesters. In the early hours of February 19, the Trade Union building was set on fire by police who had retaken the building (this according to EuroMaidan PR, whose office had been in the building). Even though the building had been evacuated, people were trapped inside, and police blockages of the streets delayed and prevented rescue crews from evacuating them. Titushky continued to attack people around the square, even shooting and killing a journalist.

Opposition leaders continued to meet with Yanukovych and Parliament members throughout these days. The Opposition leaders attempted to balance support for protesters with brokering a cease-fire, which failed. The leaders spoke out about their frustrations with the President, who viewed the problem as one-sided and continued to try to get protesters to give up their arms and stop fighting. But protesters continued to reinforce their barricades, stoke their tire fires, and make Molotov cocktails. More protesters were attempting to join those in Kyiv, but many cities were blocked and busses of protesters prevented from coming to the capital.

On February 19 at nearly 5 p.m., the Security Services of Ukraine (Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy; SBU) confirmed that an “Anti-Terrorist Operation,” or ATO, had begun. According to the Kyiv Post, this meant that the SBU could

- search, seize property, detain protesters at will, without a court order or other legal safeguards. They can detain and interrogate anyone who they suspect of being a terrorist.
- They can kidnap you from the street and keep you in jail without notifying families for up to 72 hours. Moreover, the SBU can force mobile phone and Internet service providers to cease operations. (February 19, 2014)
Kyiv’s metro remained closed, and schools and other service centers remained closed on February 19 (I lived in an apartment about half an hour’s walk from where the protest camps began, and all the businesses in that area were closed for several days. This was partly because there were no customers, as there was no transportation, but also because no workers could have gotten to these places either). Police used the ATO status to search vehicles trying to enter the city through blocked roads, searching for weapons, tires, or other supplies (including food or medical supplies).

On February 19, at 11 p.m., Yanukovych and Opposition leaders declared a truce. But by 8:30 the next morning, explosions began again on Maidan, as police and protesters exchanged fire with Molotov cocktails. A Kyiv Post writer found the absurd humor in the “shortest truce in history,” writing, “It appears the politicians forgot to tell the police and front-line fighters there was a truce, or the protesters and police simply are following different orders.” Sniper fire continued from Shovkovychna Street above Maidan, but protesters began a new offensive up Instituts’ka Street, occupying buildings and capturing police officers as they went. From all sides of Maidan, protesters reinforced barricades and created new field hospitals in the Hotel Ukraina and in the KMDA.

By 11 a.m., Kyiv Post journalists counted 35 bodies around the square.32 They found that most victims had been shot by police, sometimes with armor-piercing ammunition for which protesters’ shields and bulletproof vests were no protection. As the body count grew, members of Yanukovych’s Party of Regions began to show a change in allegiance, declaring their support for

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32 Various KP journalists updated these numbers as bodies continued to appear. The KP’s live updates would collect each journalist’s counts and combine them at various intervals. I found this to be the most accurate count to follow, and it (and injury reports) were corroborated by on-site doctors.
“the people of Ukraine” and asking the police to stop their attacks. But the violence continued through February 20, resulting eventually in 77 people being killed in three days.33

On February 21, President Yanukovych proposed a deal, in which he offered a truce for early presidential elections and a coalition government. Protesters, Opposition leaders, and international ministers refused to accept this deal. At around 2:30 p.m., Kyiv Post journalists reported that police had begun to pull back from their own barricades in several places around Maidan. According to the journalists, many protesters were suspicious that this meant a deal had been reached. While Opposition leaders supported the deal, protesters and protest leaders, like Dmytro Yarosh of Right Sector, did not. At the same time, lawmakers and members of Parliament from the Party of Regions continued to defect from the party.

The next day, Yanukovych and most of the remaining Party of Regions ministers had disappeared. Parliament had convened in order to vote to impeach the President, but instead, they voted for an interim government. Rumors floated that Yanukovych had fled Ukraine entirely, or was in the eastern city of Kharkiv, but his estate, Mezhyhiria, was abandoned, with obvious efforts to destroy documents left behind there. The remaining members of the Party of Regions continued to defect or flee, while journalists flocked to Mezhyhiria to salvage what was left and explore the greatest evidence of Yanukovych’s appropriation of government funds for his own projects.

Ultimately, Oleksandr Turchynov was elected interim speaker of Parliament and acting prime minister by the Parliament convened by Opposition parties and recently-defected Party of Regions members. That Parliament also immediately voted to release Yulia Tymoshenko from prison in Kharkiv. The discussion of impeachment of the disappeared president continued, as

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33 This number does not count the four protesters killed in January but it does include police officer deaths; ultimately, close to 20 more people died because of wounds sustained on Maidan, bringing the total number of deaths to 100.
rumors circulated that he had resigned before he fled, and later that he had planned to resign but changed his mind. Eventually, around 5 p.m., the new government voted 328-0 to impeach Yanukovych and set an election date for May 25. In the following days, the Mezhyhiria estate remained open for journalists and visitors, and eventually the masses of art and other collections from the estate were exhibited in a fantastically curated exhibit at the National Art Museum of Ukraine. Eventually Yanukovych reappeared in Russia, claiming he still saw himself as the president of Ukraine and intended to return to reverse the illegal seizure of power by the Opposition.

Many have discussed whether the Opposition seizure of power was, in fact, legal. During his tenure, President Yanukovych had reverted Ukraine back to its 1996 Constitution, which gave the President significantly more power than the Parliament. While the February 22 government voted to restore the 2004 Constitution, which gave Parliament the power to impeach the President, as one of their first moves, this vote was technically not sanctioned by the existing (1996) Constitution. Thus, in legal terms, there are grounds to refer the February 22 votes as a coup d’état or otherwise illegal seizure of power, based on the existing laws. However, this argument was mobilized only by those attempting to discredit the interim government, whereas most others, including Maidan protesters, saw the new leadership as legitimate.

Was Maidan a Revolution?

Activists and scholars alike regularly call the events described above a “revolution.” However, I am not convinced that this characterization applies to the results of the mass mobilizations and the violence that came from them. Power transferred from Yanukovych—who made the transfer possible with his disappearance—to the Opposition, whose members, as
described, did not actually control any part of the government. However, a crucial component of
the assessment of this “revolution” is that Opposition parties and leaders had, as I have established,
lost credibility. They claimed to be the face of Maidan, but in reality, they were not. They gained
control of the government simply because they were prepared to do so and they were in a position
to take power. Recall that the interim government was not formed by any elections; voters were
not asked about their preferences for political leaders until May 2014, three months later. In this
circumstance, the goals of the claimants—the body of protesters on Maidan and the Opposition—
were different. If this was a revolution, it was not a revolution to put Opposition leaders in power.
However, the Opposition took advantage of the shift to the third stage of Maidan, the “space of
possibility,” to reform the government with their goals in mind.

At the same time, protesters did not condemn the way power changed hands; indeed, they
considered the events of late February as a victory. By Sunday, February 23, 2014, once the smoke
had cleared, Yanukovych had fled, Party of Regions deputies condemned the violence, and public
transportation was running again, it seemed like the entire city wanted to go back to Maidan. The
outer edges of Maidan, down Khreshchatyk toward where Lenin had stood, was a victory
celebration. Truckfulls of men in uniforms and helmets drove toward Maidan, swarmed by
cheering crowds (most often shouting “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!”) and waving
Ukrainian flags. Visitors young and old took photos with captured tanks and water cannons, as
well as with serious-looking fighters who still obscured their faces with masks and scarves (Photo
2.12). Closer to the center of the square, however, the mood became more somber. Tents where
fighters who had been killed had slept featured memorials with the images and names of those
fighters, and memorials to Serhiy Nihoyan and Mykhailo Zhizdnev’s’kyi remained. Stacks of
cement bricks, pulled up from the sidewalks and unused in the fighting, remained around Maidan.
In or around some, mourners piled flowers, lit candles, and topped them with helmets, shields, and rosaries. The flowers—mostly carnations, and largely red—were the most visible sign of mourning that also represented an individual connection to the events that had happened that, when they appeared together, symbolized the collective grief of Kyiv inhabitants and Maidan sympathizers. Maidan had been burned beyond recognition, covered for days in black soot, and the bright colors of the flowers were proof that Kyiv had survived this ordeal. In stark contrast to the grey and black square, flowers were placed on the streets, in walls of unused bricks, in patterns on the hills overlooking Maidan, and in leftover tires. The flowers also marked mourners; I saw people carrying flowers (not bouquets, but, rather, small, even numbers of flowers that would typically be used in cases of mourning) throughout Kyiv for the next week. As I wrote then, “It’s obvious where the flowers are going...they are a symbol that yes, I too am in mourning.”

Renato Rosaldo has cautioned against analyzing such moments exclusively as a single ritual that reinforces a particular social structure (1993 [1989])—in this case, that of national belonging. Rather, such rituals reflect “a busy intersection” in which “a number of distinct social processes intersect. The crossroads simply provides a space for distinct trajectories to traverse, rather than containing them in complete encapsulated form” (174). The experience of mourning on Maidan reflected an intersection of various circumstances that created a remarkable mood of both sadness and joy. Of course, the deaths of nearly 100 protesters was the motor of these days of mourning, and such an event was unprecedented in Ukraine. At the same time, the sense that Ukrainians (represented by those who fought the Berkut) had won something was pervasive, expressed by those men (and women) dressed in military uniforms and parading Ukrainian flags around the square and by the photographs with the militants and with captured equipment that now lay dormant around the square. By simply appearing on and around the square, with flowers or
not, one marked oneself as sharing in this contradictory experience of mourning and celebration, which signified a final rupture with the Yanukovych regime and the moment when Maidan could be considered as having an end because the protesters had succeeded.

However, following the establishment of the interim government and continuing once Petro Poroshenko was elected president in May 2014, the Ukrainian economy went into a severe downturn. Ongoing conflict in the eastern regions, which I discuss in Chapter 6, created major problems for the government's implementation of IMF requirements and left the new regime unable to prevent further economic instability. The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the further encroachment of Russian and separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine led to placing questions of federalization of Ukraine at the forefront of political discourses, all while Poroshenko promoted decommunization legislation and tasks, including changing city and street names across the country. In the case of Maidan, a revolution was achieved in terms of power changing hands, but it was not the type of change demanded by the people who generated the possibility for revolution.

Violence, National Ideology, and Multivocal Political Action

Throughout the mobilizations, protesters rarely, if ever, had one unified position or claim against the government. Central claims on Maidan ranged from Ukraine's European status to the resignation of Yanukovych to a condemnation of violence against protesters; considering all these claims as equally valid aspects of Maidan prevents an erasure of the multiplicity of voices participating in the mobilizations. The backdrop of these claims was an increasingly dominant national ideology that structured—but did not entirely limit, as I show in the following chapter—people’s possibilities for action on Maidan. Because the major proponents of the national ideology
had been inclined to defend it with violence in the past, such a practice became commonplace, and even commendable, on Maidan.

Within these confines, and without any actually existing unity of voices, participants with various affiliations used public performances to show strength. These performances included building a tent camp on Independence Square—which echoed the same performance from the 2004 Orange Revolution—as well as the occupation of buildings around Maidan. The most prominent occupied buildings included the Trade Unions Building, the Kyiv City Hall, and the Ukrainian House, each of which symbolized a way to reclaim important sites of Ukrainian history and governance for the “real” Ukraine, as it appeared on Maidan. Further public performances included meetings of the protest body, called Viche, which took place every Sunday throughout the winter. Additionally, the formation of different councils (for instance, the Rada Maidanu, the Maidan Council) for non-Opposition leaders to come together lent an air of legitimacy to the otherwise relatively unorganized protests, which encouraged some international support for the protests against the regime.

These peaceful performances were balanced out with violent acts sanctioned by most people on the square. Importantly, however, once police and protesters began to use force against one another, protesters worked to make clear that their use of violence was distinct from that of the police, because they were ordinary people fighting for their country's future. The militarization of Maidan was also an effort to display unity, particularly through various sotnia wearing military uniforms and sometimes matching armbands as well as bulletproof vests. The bulletproof vest itself became an important signifier of the gravity of the situation on Maidan—local Kyiv politician Lesia Orobets’ even wore one on the floor of Parliament on January 28, 2014. Importantly, these militarized displays of unity were targeted by the Dictatorship Laws, and
wearing anything military-esque, including helmets, became illegal.

Those who did not want to participate in violence but also wanted to promote this national ideology found other forms of self-representation that would adhere to the themes on Maidan. For instance, they sang the Ukrainian national anthem on every hour, and people wore Ukrainian and EU flags as well as blue and yellow ribbons (blue and yellow are the colors of both these flags); or traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirts (vyshyvanky), especially as the weather improved. The presence of priests, particularly once the standoffs between police and protesters began, also contributed to this sense of fighting for a worthy cause (the nation). Protesters also showed their commitment to whatever claim was dominant at a given time as they continued to stand on the square throughout a freezing winter, using snow to build barricades instead of breaking up the protest because of bad weather. Several scholars have also documented the participation of elderly people and people with disabilities as elements that show the widespread commitment to the various claims presented on the square (Onuch 2014a; Dickinson 2015; Phillips 2016; see also Carroll 2015, although the author documents that the presence of addicts was contested).

Protesters' public self-representation was a crucial aspect of gaining credibility for Maidan and justifying the use of violence to protect and support protesters. There are many links between the public self-representation that appeared on Maidan and the Orange Revolution, with the major difference being that the social movement base that was mobilized on Maidan was not exclusively from Opposition political parties. In other words, Maidan protesters selected the elements of the Orange Revolution that would show worthiness, unity, and commitment, but they rejected what most people perceive as what led to disappointments after 2004: protest for a political candidate. At the same time, not uniting around a political candidate led protesters to widely disagree on demands and tactics. While protesters perhaps wished to present their social movement as a unified
political action in order to gain international recognition and credibility, this was not an accurate
reflection of the actually-existing protest camp, documented through ethnographic research.

From this multivocality came a significant development of new social networks (Onuch 2014a) and the spread of non-party organizations like the Democratic Alliance (*Demokratychnyi Alians*), the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (*Konhres ukrainskykh natsionalistiv*), and later, the Right Sector. The fluctuating relationships between members of these groups and unaffiliated protesters shows that this type of political action is in part sustained by flexibility rather than simply the staunch commitment to only one claim made by one powerful group. This flexibility is further important because it allowed leftist activists to intervene in the protests in ways which they could not ordinarily access. My assessment of Maidan through various “stages” further allows me to better understand this flexibility and the way it aided this particular social action to move beyond a political party or candidate, even though these types of groups were present on the square.

In sum, Maidan is an important contribution to the broad study of social movements and political action because it insists on the complexity of a campaign and its constant fluctuations. Such a long-term and flexible challenge to power structures creates space for many groups to make many claims, some of which will resonate with power holders and some of which get erased or lost. Leftist activists negotiated this space in order to find ways to participate in that challenge to power holders, even as they were often not accepted as equally committed to the claims some protesters were making. In the next chapter, I discuss the role of leftists in the context of this shifting national ideology, and in the final three chapters I explore the ways leftists have used the moment of Maidan to change the nature of political action itself.
Chapter 3: #Leftmaidan: Self-Organization and Political Legitimacy

Despite the fragmented nature of contemporary non-party leftist groups, many leftist activists mobilized on the square during the first days of Maidan. As Havryil described to me on November 22, 2013, even though the masses of people who gathered in late November seemed inclined toward nationalist slogans, he felt that leftists should try to intervene in the protests as early as possible. He thought it might be possible that leftists could direct people toward social issues, like economic inequality, if they mobilized early and often. This chapter discusses the various kinds of interventions leftists made on Maidan and assesses their success in influencing the majority of protesters’ opinions and actions. These interventions shifted according to the change in “stages” as outlined in Chapter 2: stage one, November 21-30, 2013; stage two, November 30-January 16, 2014; and stage three, January 16-February 22, 2014. Importantly, leftist activists had diverging attitudes about whether or not to support Maidan in the name of whole organizations (such as Priama Diiia), up until the passage of the Dictatorship Laws on January 16. As several activists mentioned to me, and as Volodymyr Ishchenko documented, this was the “point of no return” (Ishchenko 2016:35) at which it became clear that the protests had very little to do with Europe and everything to do with police violence and state repression. Leftists took advantage of this shift to become more united in their response to the repressions, even as their political ideology became less prominent in their self-representation.

This chapter thus examines leftist engagement in the Ukrainian political sphere and particularly through the lens of Maidan. First, it discusses leftist interactions with the increasingly popular national ideology that became prominent on Maidan and the actors who promoted it. Turning to Maidan, I consider leftist attempts to discuss Europe on their own terms during the first
days of protests, as well as to present their notion of “self-organization” to protesters in order to encourage non-party mobilization. However, leftist interventions during the first stage often used radical leftist rhetoric, which was extremely unwelcome on Maidan and was met with violence by other protesters, a continuation of the typical relationship between radical right and leftist activists. After November 30, when the Berkut cleared the square and sleeping protesters, leftists played a crucial role in the direction of protest discourses by using the language of the “state” in their interventions. Stage two was marked by the circulation of discourses among protesters—including, but not exclusively, leftists—of the “police state” (politseis’ka derzhava). Finally, learning from their positive impact in stage two, leftists continued to move away from identifiably leftist projects during stage three and instead responded to growing violence between police and protesters with non-ideological initiatives that embodied leftist principles without requiring visible (and dangerous) leftist words and slogans that would mark them as targets for continued right-wing violence. By stage three, Maidan had achieved an equilibrium in which both radical right and left activists could engage with the mobilizations without feeling threatened by one another; indeed, by then, it was clear that the real threat was the state and its armed police.

National Ideology against the Left

This section discusses the ways leftist activists have attempted to negotiate for space in which to be politically active in the face of an increasingly threatening national ideology based largely on an anti-communist position. I describe the ways leftists have been the targets of violence at the hands of right-wing activists since before Maidan began, and, based on participant observation during leftist-organized self-defense classes, I show some of the ways leftists re-imagined their own political possibilities. The relationship between radical left- and right-wing
activists began far before Maidan, and it established, at least initially, what leftists were able to do during the protests and how they presented themselves and their ideas.

Thus far in the dissertation, I have shown that Maidan created a space for some of the most active right-wing sympathizers in Ukraine to promote a certain kind of national ideology that relied on a narrative of repression, venerated the figures who challenged that repression, and demonized Ukraine’s Soviet past because of its role in repression. Contemporary leftists recognize the increasing hegemony of this type of narrative. As one leftist described, on Maidan, leftists were unable to promote their own ideas because of the popularity of those of groups like Right Sector, which was able to achieve this hegemonic force because of the ways they mobilized popular, albeit divisive, images and discourses from Ukrainian history. Even when they were teenagers, long before Maidan, many leftists explained to me that they felt limited in their political options because this kind of national ideology was already more prominent than others.

One leftist activist, Ivan, who was one of a half dozen activists who had been attacked by violent right-wing gangs in 2012 and 2013, told me about his own experiences as a self-identified nationalist that made him more perceptive of (and even unsurprised by) right-wing attacks. Like many other Ukrainians who were born or grew up following independence, Ivan was a nationalist when he was in school because, as he described, it was the only discourse available in Ukraine. His father was a nationalist who voted for the Svoboda Party in parliamentary elections, and they both had negative views toward the left when Ivan was growing up. “The whole left-wing [lexicon] was written by the Soviet Union, […] like capitalists are West and they are awesome, they are wealthy, and communists killed our grandfathers and it was horrible. At this time I believed in this.” He described a feeling of solidarity when he was a pre-teen during the Orange Revolution; he did not participate, but he remembers the impact the protests had on his young mind.
Other leftists mentioned the 2004 Orange Revolution as an important moment in their development as activists, outside of being “right” or “left.” Petro, for example, told me about reading Engels, Fromm, and Kropotkin as a school-aged “nerd,” but that he did not link these texts to activism until the Orange Revolution. His knowledge of critical theory allowed Petro to be skeptical of Viktor Yushchenko, the opposition candidate of the 2004 elections, while also being very strongly against Viktor Yanukovych, the hand-picked candidate of incumbent President Leonid Kuchma.¹ Many activists, particularly those who grew up outside of Kyiv, like Petro, pointed at the Orange Revolution as having an important influence on their politicization. They describe a feeling of solidarity with others in the street, having positive interactions with people who supported Yushchenko, and that the desire to reproduce such feelings impelled them toward other activists. While all of these activists are now critical of Yushchenko’s term in office and are generally quite skeptical of the effectiveness of political representatives, the Orange Revolution remains a common point in many of their stories of becoming politicized (this is broadly true among young Ukrainians, even outside of those who are regularly politically active; see Diuk 2012; Nikolayenko 2011).

Many leftists were drawn into politics through nationalist organizations. For many—including those based in Kyiv—these nationalist organizations appeared as the only option for engaging in politics. Some of these activists, like Ivan, had to wait until they entered university to discover that there was a whole spectrum of ways to be politically active. Accessibility continues to be a major issue for new left groups: because they are so concentrated among university students.

¹ The year 2000 saw protests against Kuchma, known as the Ukraine Without Kuchma movement (Ukraina bez Kuchmy) which many leftists see as influential in terms of a broader politicization of young leftists in Ukraine, but most of them were too young to have participated in the 2000 protests. The Orange Revolution, which took place when many of them were adolescents, was much more impactful and is reflected as such in these origin stories.
students, or in major cities, many young people did not know a left even existed outside of the Communist Party, in part because of that party’s dominant voice in leftist “lexicons,” as Ivan put it.

The Orange Revolution deepened the negative associations with the Communist Party and Ukraine’s relationship with Russia while at the same time, it strengthened the connections between Ukraine’s European and national future. Anthropologist Anna Fournier has suggested that the repoliticization of the nation and nationalism was an effect of the Orange Revolution (rather than a cause or catalyst), because “the specific practices of community and solidarity found on Independence Square allowed the nation to become relevant to broader struggles” (2007:101). Fournier further suggests that the nation became significant because it was articulated outside the confines of state ideology and even in contrast to the state, which was perceived to have failed the nation (114). The election of Yushchenko would theoretically repair the relationship between nation and state—with the state once again representing national interests (including European aspirations). When Yushchenko continued to be bogged down by the same problems as previous regimes, however, those political activists who became integrated into the leftist spectrum began to question the notion that “nation” was itself meaningful, useful, and unifying for political action.

Ultimately, this criticism is what differentiates the left from the right in contemporary Ukraine. Where the right supports a national ideology that assumes the primacy of nation and therefore criticizes the state when it does not represent that nation, the left is critical of both nation and state, because both take the form of political institutions that, as leftists see it, work to exclude certain people and are founded on a rejection of political multiplicity. For leftists, both nation and state are agents of marginalization. This extends to leftist interpretations of political parties in contemporary Ukraine. As leftists see it, no matter a politician’s stance, every person in political
power in Ukraine today gained that power from amassing economic resources and using this leverage to start a political party. Alternatively, leaders of the Communist and Socialist Parties remained constant before and after Ukraine’s independence. Thus all political institutions, including parties and their representatives, are based on an oligarchic capitalism that marginalizes most people and creates stratification in Ukrainian society. For these reasons, leftists position themselves outside of any typical or traditional political institutions.

In recent years, radical right activists have worked to link leftists’ criticism of the nation with a pro-communist agenda. Because leftists are critical of the increasingly dominant national ideology, and because that ideology is anti-communist, they say that leftists must love communism and hate the nation. This easily continues the narrative that leftists can and should be targets of grassroots decommunization activists, who present themselves as the saviors of the nation against both the state and other localized “communist” threats. Returning to Ivan’s words, that the Soviets wrote the entire “lexicon” of the left, it is easy to see the perceived continuity between the new left and communism, even if new leftists reject it.

There is little sympathy for leftists, even when they are attacked: Ivan was still filing police reports about his attack in the fall of 2013, and his own father suggested Ivan deserved such an attack by identifying with the left. Leftists take a major risk when they attempt to spark a conversation about Ukrainian history and nation that refuses to see all Soviet history as negative, precisely because there are positive and distinctly Ukrainian elements in Ukrainian Soviet history. Rather than engage these ideas, right-wing activists generate persuasive anti-communist discourses that help justify their use of violence against leftists. This provoked leftists to attempt to take control over the antagonistic relationship between left and right. During my fieldwork, this
took the form of organizing self-defense classes in which leftists learned to protect themselves from attacks while also creating new discourses about the leftist community.

**Fighting Back: Leftist Responses to Violence**

While I never came across a circumstance in which a leftist activist targeted someone from the far right with violence, the continued attacks on leftists show that right-wing attackers perceived them as weak and unable to fight, if not committed to complete nonviolence (I further discuss leftists’ complex relationship with violence on Maidan later on in this chapter). Leftists condemned the targeted attacks against their comrades as well as the ways radical right-wing activists justified their attacks, but many leftists were also willing to fight back.² In October 2013, a group of leftist activists from various organizations created a self-defense class, based on principles of *krav maga*, the Israeli street fighting practice.

These classes shifted focus over time, initially helping participants develop quick responses to possible attacks and ways to protect themselves and escape from the types of attacks faced previously among leftists. Later, following the expansion of mobilizations on Maidan, the classes focused more on dealing with possibly dangerous crowd situations, with police officers, pepper spray, and attacks on journalists and photographers. The initial classes assumed a leftist would be attacked going home alone; the later ones responded to attacks on whole groups and the more real dangers of being present on Maidan. The group first practiced at a large hall far from the metro, which had enough space for the large number of people interested but also housed a highly militarized group of men, some of whom were wearing “white power” t-shirts and had the look of

² Further, the Center for Social and Labor Research has completed extensive research documenting increased repressions against various kinds of protests even following the end of the Maidan mobilizations (in 2014), suggesting that self-defense is increasingly necessary for those who will continue to be involved in protest actions, such as leftist groups.
neo-Nazis (shaved heads, camouflage, combat boots). The possible danger of this space led to a central but expensive location, where the group spent several months training in krav maga and occasionally mixed martial arts. In March, in response to the major violence on Maidan and the increase of interest in participation in the self-defense classes, it was moved to a final location which would not require a rent payment, just a small fee for common usage of the space, allowing the trainings to double in size.

Krav maga itself was an appropriate martial art to learn, as it fit within liberation pedagogy-based conceptualizations of how learning can be shared. As Einat Bar-on Cohen describes,

Krav maga draws its learning from ‘natural’, ‘instinctive’ fighting body movements and tendencies, conditioning the fighter’s brain to react automatically, and improving performance through closely scrutinising actual violent events. Krav maga is therefore very adaptable to a broad range of needs and situations… Since krav maga movements are purportedly based on how children naturally grapple and fight, they can be taught at a basic level to anyone within a short period of time. (2010:272)

Indeed, our instructor, Kolia, explained to me that he hoped that the participants would all be able to learn enough from the classes that they could teach someone else at least basic techniques. Further, the classes focused as much on being prepared to expect violence as on fighting techniques themselves. In one repeated task, everyone stood in a circle and slapped the person next to them in the face, and that person was expected not to blink or flinch. When participants practiced defense tactics, they were required, at least sometimes, to push their partner as far as possible so that each person would know how such an attack might feel. Everyone was given tasks to increase vigilance of the situation around them, for example, counting the number of people wearing hats or the color red on their journeys home.
These basic tactics of vigilance and preparedness were, of course, enhanced with fighting and defense techniques (with varying levels of possible damage to the person who might be doing the attacking). Kolia was often very focused on keeping the classes relevant to actual possible attacks rather than preparing participants only for controlled situations. In one special session on crowds, the instructor lectured about how crowd situations can change people’s mentality, and he explained that a person’s position in a crowd would have a significant influence on how he or she must respond to violence (if a person is in the center of a crowd, he or she cannot escape, but if one is on the periphery, he or she becomes the first line of defense). The group also simulated a situation that activists were likely to meet in reality. They divided into two teams called *Han’ba* (shame) and *Provokatsiia* (provocation), two of the most commonly-used epithets against leftists at protests. Kolia turned off the lights, placed a pile of punching mats in the middle of the teams, and made everyone run around shouting *han’ba* or *provokatsiia* while a strobe light flickered. The exercise—in which people used the punching mats to push “enemies” and protect “friends”—attempted to prepare the group, both physically and mentally, for violent crowd situations.

In another exercise, groups of two played “police-vs-protester,” in an attempt to engage with the question of police violence. Similarly, Kolia lectured the group first, explaining that the police (specifically, riot police, pervasive on and around the protests in the city center) are trained not to fear what is happening because they are prepared to respond to it, and they can predict what kind of violence will happen in what circumstance. However, people on the “other side”—non-police—are not prepared for violence, so they are frightened and can behave in ways that provoke more violence. Therefore, everyone must be prepared in the same way the police are prepared (but without an intent to do harm). Kolia recommended that participants should avoid fighting with a police officer but, if necessary, there are ways to engage with him (I never saw a female officer
among the riot police), such as asking strange questions if he tries to attack a protester—“What are the last four digits of your phone number?”—which can help one gain an advantage. He further taught participants ways to attempt to control a police officer’s baton to prevent an attack if the person could not otherwise run away.

The significance of these exercises is that, even when partnered or in small groups, they used the rhetoric of “us” and “them” that was established by real-life attacks against leftist activists. First, the police were considered part of the “them” as representatives of the governing regime, which did not support the right of radical leftist activists to organize and resist. Second, in the crowd exercise, Kolia used the trope of “us” and “them” to help participants learn to identify an “in-group” in an overstimulated, dangerous environment, but he used common anti-leftist rhetoric to define those groups. This was in part a joke that helped establish a discourse around an external, right-wing other against whom leftists would be united, but it was also evoked quite seriously as two of the most probable words to be yelled at them in a crowd. Through these exercises, the participants in krav maga mobilized discourses about the “other” that were commonly accepted by leftists, and their circulation as jokes and targets for the exercises created a solidarity in the perception of who was a leftist.

These self-defense courses brought attention to the recurring attacks on activists and events in a way that mainstream media—in Ukraine and elsewhere—had thus far refused to do. It allowed leftists to see that their fears were legitimate and shared, but were also controllable. Leftists who did not want to back down in their activism and views but wanted to be free of the constant fear of an attack decided to control some of the circumstances surrounding those attacks: namely, their own preparation to respond to violence. These courses taught activists not only how to defend themselves if they were attacked, but also small techniques for anticipating such attacks in order
to be able to respond in a way that could keep a person out of the hospital. After class, the participants stopped wearing hoods and listening to headphones so that they could not be taken by surprise. While established in response to seeming impunity toward their right-wing attackers, these tactics proved useful once Maidan began and leftists’ notions of violence were no longer exclusively defensive.

Attending these classes allowed me to access a site of leftist formation based on a response to increasingly systemic violence, but it also opened up a realm of internal dynamics in which left or radical ideas structured every interaction. As the classes included both women and men, these radical ideas impacted how gender was enacted and reproduced within our classes. At the first gym, many suspected no women had ever breached such a masculinized space, contributing to the discomfort. The men working out before the leftist group had a militarized, unified kind of organization and appeared shocked and amused when they saw a co-ed group. In the practices, Kolia and the other organizers were committed to treating men and women equally in our group, both driving the women as hard as the men but also rejecting the idea of “positive gender discrimination” that would assume women to be less likely to be attacked because of their status in mainstream Ukrainian society. While thus far, women have rarely been targets of physical violence by ultra-nationalist men, except during LGBT-rights demonstrations, leftist gender conceptions did not allow women to be excluded based on this trend. Women (including myself) often paired off with other women during our training sessions, but they were also required to practice with men, who did not hold their strength back to protect women. Most of the women refused to be seen as a weaker sex, fighting as hard as the men in the class, although two times women came to participate and changed their minds once they realized we would actually be punching and kicking each other.
At the same time, these classes were a place for men to create and perform a radical leftist version of masculinity that does not gel with mainstream attitudes toward men. Most of the men in the class had not completed military service\(^3\) because of their student status, so their presence in the first gym was nearly as strange as the women’s. However, they were not training to achieve this kind of militarized masculinity; instead, they were creating a form of protective gendered behavior toward which all of us could strive. In this mentality, men are not the automatic protectors of women, but those who know more are the protectors of those who know less. Allowing this group to generate a protective camaraderie in the context of targeted violence rejected gender norms that would ordinarily put men in competition with one another. This space was an enactment of gender equality in the eyes of the participants, an equality that was not based just on accepting women but also on creating a non-militarized and well-prepared activist group that cares for and protects everyone involved.

Thus far, I have established that leftist activists lived with antagonistic relationships between their groups and radical right-wing activists for several years before Maidan. Despite these antagonisms, leftists organized in various ways, including by establishing self-defense classes, to resist their own marginalized position. Such practices of resistance became crucial experience for Maidan, where leftists remained marginalized but were committed to participating, even in the context of further threats from police as well as right-wing protesters. The remainder of the chapter will examine the ways leftists used this experience to negotiate for space on Maidan in the context of small- and large- scale violence.

\(^3\) Men are required to complete 12 months of military service between the ages of 18-25; students are exempt from this service, so many leftists stay enrolled in universities until they are 25 in order to avoid service. I imagine that this is a common practice among others critical of military requirements but cannot comment on their regularity.
Euro-Left: Visions of Europe among Leftist Activists on Maidan

From November 21, the protesters began using the moniker “EuroMaidan” (Yevromaidan; often as #euromaidan to gain attention on social media), and “Euro” was everywhere—signs and banners proclaimed that Ukraine was “for Eurointegration” (za yevrointehratsiiu), that Ukraine should go “To Europe without Yanukovych!” (v Yevropu bez Yanukovycha) (Photo 3.1). Some leftists wanted to turn the attention of the protests to what they saw as more concrete ideas about Europe. They felt that most protesters had imagined Europe in a positive way because of an unsubstantiated promise of better employment in the EU and a visa-free regime to ease international travel (recall Figure 1.3 which provides comparative numbers to prove that Europe was “better” than the Customs Union, without providing evidence that these figures could improve the Ukrainian situation). Early leftist interventions turned attention to state-sponsored education and transportation programs in Europe, attempting to make the claim that Ukraine becoming part of “Europe” also meant that the state would have to take more responsibility for its citizens (Photo 3.2). One leftist used the slogan “European values above all!” playing off the slogan “Ukraine above all!” which evoked the radical 20th-century nationalist groups. She hoped that this slogan would catch on as being more representative of the protests than ideas from these nationalist groups (Photo 3.3).

Ishchenko, who criticizes the “New Left” (including Priama Diia and Left Opposition) for participating in protests that supported “the overall imperialist and neoliberal nature of [the Association Agreement]” (2016:32), suggests that leftists were unable “to break with middle class ideologies and prejudices, forcing the left to go with the stream of the people around [them] and trying to accommodate their European illusions” (2016:34). In other words, leftists put up with pro-Europe discourses despite their criticisms of, for instance, the acceptance of an IMF loan as a
condition for the Agreement, detrimental to leftist ideologies because it ignores the inequalities that do exist in Europe. While Ishchenko interprets this as inherently negative for building a leftist movement in Ukraine, it is necessary to recognize that leftists were constantly assessing and reassessing protesters’ receptiveness to their social-oriented ideas.

I asked those leftists who participated throughout Maidan what their earlier impressions of the protests were. One activist described trying to promote anti-discrimination policies that he saw as an instrumental part of “European values,” but which he assumed other Maidan protesters would not recognize as part of those values. The shifting position of the Yanukovych government on the question of Europe encouraged Danylo to bring these “themes” to the protests:

The course of the Party of Regions [is that] some unexpected pro-Russian views became pro-European. And then everyone waited for this signature about the Association, and [when] that didn’t happen, it was like everything returned to how it was before. Support was declared for the Russian-speaking population and friendship with Russia, and so on. To me, it wasn’t so strongly unexpected. So when the young people, students came to protest, it seemed to me that maybe they wouldn’t stay that long. I was skeptical. But on the third or fourth evening, I went there to see what was happening, painted some signs, because more and more people were gathering each evening. So I went with the sign “To Europe Without Phobias” (V Yevropu bez fobii), to bring a little anti-discrimination thematic.

Danylo’s skepticism was not uncommon, especially in the first stage of the protests. Much of this skepticism was related to the framing of the protests’ goal as being officially part of Europe, even in a limited way. Many leftists were critical of the protests’ focus on Europe as Ukraine’s savior: “Of course we were not for Association,” said one leftist, “because we didn’t think it would change
anything for the better.” Another student activist, Heorhiy, simply felt that protesting for an Association Agreement was nonsense:

I can say I was there from some of the first days, where I came there to look at what was going on. I thought it was bizarre, stupid. Why would you protest to sign some Association Agreement? [But my attitude toward Maidan] has changed several times. First my attitude was negative because I didn’t see that much sense in those demands about the Association Agreement.

However, these criticisms and uncertainties did not prevent leftists from appearing on Maidan at various times over the course of the first week in November. Ishchenko asserts that “the left’s activism was often sporadic and chaotic, without coordination between the different groups, sometimes even taking the form of just individual participation in the Maidan events” (2016:35). For Ishchenko, this was a major weakness of the left on Maidan. Later on, I describe one particular night in which this fragmentation resulted in violence against leftists, indeed suggesting a weak left. However, I also see that this lack of unity allowed for a certain flexibility among leftists that enabled them to shift discourses and positions as the protests wore on and as certain other discourses—particularly those linking national narratives and anti-communism, as described in the Introduction—became increasingly hegemonic.

“The Substance of Our Protest”: Leftist Self-Organization

In Chapter 2, I established that Opposition party flags and figures dominated the landscape of Maidan’s first stage. Leftists challenged the Opposition parties’ leadership from their first days on Maidan. They used the concept of “self-organization” (samoorhanizatsiia) to suggest that protesters stop looking to party leaders to help them; instead, protesters should decide what they want and work together to demand it. Leftists’ view of self-organization was the basic notion that
if a person has an ability or skill that is needed in a given context to help others, that person should contribute according to their ability. Ideally, if all people in a community contribute according to their abilities, that community could sustain itself without the intervention from, for example, state entities. This conceptualization was inspired by the Marxist framework, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (which one activist cited explicitly in an interview: Vid kozhnoho za ioho zdibnostiam, kozhnому za ioho potrebамy).

While leftist activists had been part of self-organized, non-partisan (bezpartiini) groups since before Maidan began, the gap in typical party leadership that was created as Opposition party leaders increasingly lost credibility between stages one and two of Maidan was the first opportunity leftists had to promote their position. Further, leftists made connections between Opposition leaders who touted “European values” and current leaders, suggesting that both benefited from the current economic system in which wealth is unevenly distributed among citizens. They used the concept of self-organization to place the mass of protesters at the center of the demonstrations, further setting this Maidan apart from previous iterations of mass protest which had been driven by political figures.

Leftists’ notion of self-organization draws more from recent global protest movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, but their language also reflects the influence of Soviet-era practices and discourses that promoted active engagement with communities and the state as “good citizenship” and the way toward becoming New Soviet Men and Women (Sinyavsky 1990). Soviet regimes, from the early Leninist period (Gorsuch 2000) and throughout the Stalinist period (Hellbeck 2009; Furst 2010; Yekelchyk 2014), targeted each new generation with novel rhetoric about how their social and political participation would bring about the revolution. The most influential mechanism through which such rhetoric was promoted was the Komsomol, or the
Communist Youth League (Rus. Kommunisticheskii soyuz molodyozhi). Youth political participation became a central element in discourses promoting the socialist revolution, but young people’s actions and practices reflect a complex relationship with such discourses (shown in detail in Yurchak’s work on late socialism [2002, 2006]).

Indeed, several scholars have documented the ways that, while these discourses were hegemonic throughout state socialism, people living within communist regimes negotiated within and beyond them in order to challenge state-determined notions of citizenship and to create self-organized forms of social and political participation. Diana Georgescu, studying children’s socialization in post-Stalinist Romania, shows how youth practices created “a middle path between approaches that emphasize formal engagement with ideology and those that uncover meaningful lives and appealing socialist values” (2014:29). While Georgescu found that both students and teachers contextualized their lives in a “general climate of political apathy,” at the same time,

Teachers, parents, and children resonated with many of the inextricably mixed socialist and national principles actively promoted by Ceausescu’s regime during the last two decades of communism, among which professional fulfillment and self-realization, the ideal of cultured life, the role of education as an engine of upward social mobility, the centrality of children and youth to family and social life, as well as patriotism, national allegiance, and pride. (2014:30)

For Georgescu, this “dissociation” of these elements of life from the communist regime suggests the “extreme delegitimation of Ceausescu’s rule in the 1980s,” leading young people to see these

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4 Youth are also often examined as a central component of nation-building, a subject which falls outside the purview of this research. For the region, see Blum 2007; Fournier 2012; Hemment 2015; Markowitz 2000; for the former Yugoslavia, see Hajdarpasic 2015 and Hromadzic 2011.
acts as part of “universal human and cultural values” rather than ones associated specifically with state socialism.

Georgescu’s historical examples—including diaries from student ethnographic programs and children’s camps—show that young people were continually negotiating the ideals placed upon them, at the same time that they embraced socialist principles in order to become productive participants in an actually-existing version of increasingly global socialism. In a related process, Alexei Yurchak traces the ways that Soviet citizens in the late 1980s “were not supposed to be good at inventing and running private businesses because their generation was raised in a society in which private business was practically nonexistent” (2002:278), yet these young people were indeed able to create functional and successful private businesses in the 1990s. As Yurchak argues, people had acquired an “entrepreneurial language” during the Soviet era thanks to their interactions with that system. He documents a hybridity in the ways Komsomol secretaries, for instance, adhered to state laws that they felt were productive and useful, whereas they subverted or skirted laws that were a drain on the ways resources could (or in their eyes, should) be used. As he puts it,

In the officialized-public sphere, such officials conscientiously act as guardians of the state’s law, making sure that no contraband is brought into or taken out of the country. At the same time, the same officials may act in ways that contradict the state’s interests by transferring the official state’s resources, to which they have unique access, into the personalized-public sphere. These officials use their position as a valve for connecting the two public spheres. (301)

In Yurchak’s framing, young people in late socialism “were less critical of the system because they no longer experienced its ideological claims as ideas to be taken at face value” (285). While
Soviet ideology and its ensuing structures still constrained or enabled their access to resources, once certain people gained access, they were able to “create their own alternative universe of meaning” (285) in practice.

Thus, those in positions as Komsomol secretaries used the flexibility that had guided their engagement with the state in order to find ways to create and run successful business once the economy opened in the late 1980s during *glasnost*. For instance, economic reforms allowed Komsomol committees to control their own finances; many Komsomol secretaries, already in a position of power in relation to other Komsomol members, “managed to transfer the financial resources of the Komsomol into starting capital for their future businesses, making these operations invisible to the higher Komsomol bodies and to the rank-and-file Komsomol members, depriving them of an opportunity to lay claim to these resources” (292). This allowed certain strata of Komsomol representatives to gain an advantage not only during *glasnost* but also after the fall of the Soviet Union and the greater opening of regional markets.

Such accounts force a rethinking of the ways people living under state socialism were able and willing to think beyond seemingly all-encompassing ideology in order to create new forms of sociality that both incorporated and subverted the state forms that represented this ideology. Butterfield and Sedaitis (1991) describe the concurrent rise of social movements during *perestroika*, when the social policies of democratization enabled those invested in government representation to use the newly adopted election cycles to change institutional structures from within. In their view, Communist Party-based organizations like the Komsomol, while historically contributing to a totalitarian state, now worked as “transmission belts” to greater social participation in criticism of the state (1991:7). Importantly, however, Bova (1991) suggests that such “opening” and “restructuring” were more a reflection of Gorbachev’s interest in creating “an
alliance between the reform-minded leadership at the top and a newly assertive public at the bottom” (29), generating “just enough ‘democracy’ to stir up managerial interest in reform but not so much as to totally undercut the key institutions of the Soviet party-state” (32).

This last point is crucial in understanding the apparent lack of mass participation in effective social movements in the Soviet Union and other formerly communist countries after 1989, including feminist social and political activism (see Chapter 5). As the economies of these newly independent countries shifted throughout the 1990s, many documented a weakening of civil society and demobilization of civic activism coinciding with major distrust in state institutions (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). Petrova and Tarrow, however, follow more closely the views of Georgescu and Yurchak, suggesting instead that the development of civil society is more effective in the region when based on “lateral ties”; that is, “among civil society groups” and in “vertical ties between these groups and public officials” (2007:78-9). This enables an interpretation of effective social movements and activism that is not based on the numbers of people who have mobilized but instead on the strength of ties among groups and in the relationships which are most beneficial to both state and civic groups. Particularly, the authors document “a richer picture of transactions consisting of coalition formation around single issues, network formation, and negotiation with elites on the part of civic groups in Central and Eastern Europe than would be predicted from the levels of individual participation that have been observed” (80).

Such a formulation provides a better vantage point for understanding how leftist activism in Ukraine today works, despite its perceived marginalization and ineffectiveness, and why it was a crucial aspect of the protests on Maidan. While leftists certainly do not mobilize large numbers of people, the strength of the ties among leftists—and the ways these ties overlap with, for example, tightly knit feminist groups—enables them to effectively organize around ideas rather
than political parties. Self-organization became the major theme around which leftist activists continued to organize throughout Maidan, which they promoted from the earliest days of the protests. In Figure 3.1, I present a leaflet, “The Substance of Our Protest,” that I helped leftist activists distribute on Maidan in late November.

Today we all came to support the “Ukraine’s European Choice.” European values are good, beneficial, progressive, and so on. But specifically? Let’s catch our breath for a moment and think about what we want specifically.

**We don’t always recognize the advantages and disadvantages of the Association contract with the EU.** This is not surprising, since neither the media, nor experts, nor relevant departments have published an independent, thorough, critical analysis of this text. We have heard that the first question is that of economic cooperation. Of establishing trade, a warmer investment climate and better conditions for big business. But will people who stand together on #EuroMaidan receive immediate economic benefits from the agreement? Do not forget that the total economic growth of the country does not guarantee equal distribution of wealth among citizens: money will accumulate where it already is—in the pockets of the richest.

**What specific common interests unite us?** We require decisive political, social, and economic change! We seek valid and permanent influence on the adoption of important political decisions which immediately concern our rights and freedoms, the conditions and quality of our life. We demand public governance that relieves us from the torment of
bureaucracy. A fair trial and the termination of police arbitrariness. We demand dignified conditions and decent wages. We advocate for quality and accessible education, the development of culture and science, and the implementation of the latest technologies. We demand ecologically conscious use of natural resources. Quality, free medical care. We seek useful and accessible public transport infrastructure for all. We dream of living in a world without borders. Eventually, we seek civil and tolerant attitudes toward one another. All of this provides the content of our presence on Maidan. *We provide the content of Maidan!*

No one can solve our problems except for us. It is naive to think that parliamentary politics will protect our interests at this time. We were already on Maidan in 2004, we already saw that the parliamentary opposition fundamentally changes nothing. Today, politicians are again proposing that we choose between two evils, but before us stands a quality new perspective—grassroots self-organization and solidarity. **Only everyone’s immediate participation will gain the real Europe. EU Association is the first step.**

**Get involved in the grassroots self-organization of #euromaidan:** [email redacted]

(translation by author)

In this flier, leftists describe “grassroots self-organization” (*nyzova samoorghannizatsiia*), but it most significantly denotes a position in which activists do activism because they feel they can create better political structures than can the state. Similarly to Georgescu’s and Yurchak’s examples,
leftists have worked within the structures available to them to analyze and criticize how those structures work. From these criticisms, leftists have used the notion of self-organization as a way to take their experiences as activists and create new means of social and political engagement.

This presented other protesters with language to criticize the state which, as I have established, no longer served their interests. In an interview, Danylo described self-organization in a way that reflected the notion of “the personal is political”:

It would be really good if they developed so that pressure on the government, the mechanisms of pressure on those who make decisions, on legislative initiatives, that the pressure continues and the government doesn’t relax. And only in this way when each citizen⁵ feels his or her own responsibility and takes a personal part in the decisions of questions and takes part in political life. And then some changes are possible.

Danylo’s understanding of “responsibility” was not quite the same as the American interpretation of “personal responsibility” in which each citizen is responsible for his or her own well-being. Instead, Danylo saw “responsibility” (vidpovidal’nist’) in a collective way; when citizens begin to care about governmental politics—which Danylo saw as unrepresentative of citizen concerns—only then can ordinary people change how politics works in Ukraine. This can only be done, as Danylo and many other leftists saw it, through self-organization, rather than joining political parties and attempting to change the system from within. Another activist suggested that Maidan made people change their entire view of government:

I see a lot of positive things which this Maidan experience gave people. Self-organization.

People left in a situation where they have no one to take responsibility for them, they are

⁵ In our interview, Danylo used both feminine and masculine forms of nouns when he spoke as an inclusive gesture. So here, he said, kozhen hromadianyn, kozhna hromadianka, in order to say “each citizen.”
forced to self-organize. People don’t see government as something sacred. I think it’s a very good turn.

Many leftists saw the increased interest in self-organization on Maidan as the most important intervention by leftist groups. Ultimately, the tent camps and ongoing protests themselves became “self-organized” because they did not rely on the presence of leaders or parties to unify people. As Danylo reflected later,

I think that three months of protests, from the beginning almost two months of peaceful protests, and then another month, even more now, some tents stand on Maidan, the KMDA lives, in all of this there was really a lot of self-organization. A lot of initiatives to hold this Maidan, these barricades, these tents, this existence, car tires…in other words, a lot of this was without order from politicians, or from someone. I think that this is a very useful experience and it will help in the future, the next protests.

For Danylo, not only the fact that people practiced self-organization, but that it worked, was the most important aspect of Maidan as a whole. And as many leftists assessed, this practice originated with leftist activists and continued to impact the nature of leftist activism following the end of the protests (see Chapter 6).

In the following sections, I use ethnographic anecdotes and discussions among leftists to trace the ways leftist interventions on Maidan shifted during different stages. I begin with a protest episode that resulted in violence against leftists to demonstrate a failed leftist attempt to participate on Maidan. Then, I describe the mobilization of language of the “police state” following the attack on protesters on November 30 and its circulation on and around Maidan. Finally, I examine a leftist-founded initiative called Varto u likarni (the Hospital Guards) that was created in response to the increasingly extreme violence against protesters. I conclude with a discussion of leftist
ideology on Maidan, engaging with the question of how Maidan impacted leftists’ self-representation and their own assessments of their successes.

“Glory to the Enemies”: Failed Stiob in Early Leftist Interventions

As established in the previous chapter, leftist activists and their ideas have not been a dominant force in ordinary Ukrainian political discussions. Both law enforcement and bystanders often do not intervene when leftist activists have been attacked at their own demonstrations. While they knew that their critical ideas might be somewhat unwelcome on Maidan, leftists felt it was important to speak directly to protesters about how their ideas of Europe might be unrealistic, or that the conditions of the EU deal were not going to be directly beneficial to regular people (zvychaini liudy). With this in mind, a group of about 15 leftists gathered near Maidan to paint various signs and banners to take to the protests a few days after they began. Among several red EU flags, leftist banners continued with the theme of Europe, suggesting that Europe is “tolerance” (in English, written in rainbow colors) and “equality” (rivnist’). Others were more provocative (Photo 3.4): “Solidarity with EuroPeople = Struggle with EuroBosses” (Solidarnist’ z ievronarodom = borot’ba z ievrobosamy) and “Organize a trade union, don’t pray for the EuroUnion” (Orhanizui profspilku, a ne molys’ na Yevrospilku; the letter ye in the word Euro was stylized as €, like the Euro currency, and the slogan also plays on the word “spilka,” the Ukrainian word for union that is not usually used to refer to the European Union (the word soiuz is used instead). Finally, in an attempt to play on the UPA slogans “Glory to the heroes” and “Death to the enemies,” one activist wrote “Glory to the enemies” in multi-neon colors. This last sign was meant to mock the contemporary use of slogans from anti-Soviet campaigns in the mid-20th century by provoking observers to think about who they thought were the “enemies.”
The group entered the center of the square with a lot of enthusiasm, but the crowd was rapidly incensed. They shouted that the leftists were *provokatory*, coming to stir up trouble, who should be ashamed (*han’ba*). People tried to shove the group down the short stairway on the square, ripping and breaking the signs (instigated by an inebriated young woman with a red and black UPA flag attacking the girl holding the “Europe is Tolerance” sign). Everyone in the leftist group linked arms to prevent anyone from getting separated, and they asked me to photograph people who were harassing the group to see if they were people who were already known as anti-leftist or if these were just angry protesters. My photos show a variety of people, mostly men, with Ukrainian flags or blue and yellow ribbons pinned to their coats. One man had a button that said “Clean Ukraine” (*Chysta Ukraina*), suggesting a Ukraine for ethnic Ukrainians only. Others wore the red and black colors of 20th-century Ukrainian nationalist organizations, and some displayed the *tryzub*, or trident (another Ukrainian national symbol), prominently. Some covered their faces, while others snarled or even smiled at my camera. Most of the leftist activists kept calm, later explaining that they were used to this kind of response. They attempted to break off the main instigators of the attack and talk to them one-on-one, which appeared to be a relatively successful tactic to stave off further violence. Other activists distributed leftist materials to try to help explain their presence. A few bystanders even joined the leftists’ human chain to help protect them from the attackers. In the end, though, the only banner that survived the night was a long, large, silky, red banner that read “Glory to Reason!” (*Slava ratsio!*).6

When it finally appeared that enough people had calmed down and the group could leave without being followed, the participants of this action sat in a cheap cafeteria to discuss what had

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6 This banner was painted by the prominent young artist Nikita Kadan, who was extremely active on Maidan and who supported leftist initiatives but was not present with his banner at the demonstration. The activist who saved the banner by putting it in her purse pulled it out later and exclaimed, “Wow! Now I have an original Kadan!”—as that was the only positive thing that happened during the evening.
happened and what went wrong. As they saw it, there was no message to the action and everyone was saying something different, so no one observing their protest could get anything out of it. In particular, the “glory to the enemies” banner prompted a lot of sighing and eye-rolling—they could not believe that this seemed funny just a few hours before. While they felt it was stiob—a form of sarcasm or irony that articulates complicated attitudes toward authorities and dominant discourses that are otherwise often unspoken (Yurchak 2006)—they now assessed this type of stiob, that commented both on the problem of the nationalist slogans and on the lack of clarity in who “enemies” means in any given situation, was either too “individualized” or too “intellectual,” as they put it. Because their stiob was lost on observers, plenty of whom may have been paid to stand there, it was just read as offensive. On the other hand, the leftists agreed that the banner reading “Glory to Reason!” was funny to everyone because the agreed-upon sentiment on Maidan was that the Yanukovych regime had lost any reason or logic. That was a successful example of stiob in part because it did not invoke any other political ideology and was not an overtly leftist banner.

I asked some activists who participated in this action about it much later, and it had become infamous. I only had to mention “that night” and people who had participated knew which night I meant. As one activist, Zhenia, put it, “It was pretty clear that the stuff written on our posters would insult many people.” The group had not planned any unified message, and so each person wanted to be as creative as possible—“We just got so encouraged suddenly!” she explained. Another participant told me this was normal, comparing it to previous LGBT-rights demonstrations in which attackers had screamed at protesters and destroyed their banners. I asked Zhenia if she

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7 I make this suggestion because, during the previous evening, a protester asked me and another leftist activists who paid us to stand on Maidan with signs. He was surprised when the activist responded that no one had paid us; when she asked him if he was being paid, he replied, “Of course!” (Kaniechna; in Russian).
8 Interestingly enough, the slogan “Glory to Reason” was picked up on Maidan and beyond—I saw graffiti with the slogan all across the city until the summer when I left Ukraine.

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learned anything. “I guess it was a useful experience,” she said. “Like, open your eyes, put your feet on the ground. It was bad, but…I don’t consider it the worst moment.” Another activist who had been present that night, Masha, reflected that she never felt really comfortable on Maidan because of these violent early experiences. But at the same time, she said “I was always sure that there is a strong reason to be at Maidan.” While these responses might seem counterintuitive, they were very common among leftist participants. The very next day, Havryil, with whom I first went to Maidan, was pepper sprayed in the face by a right-wing thug for being part of an anarcho-feminist group. The day after that, I helped him and several other activists plan a leftist presence for that night on Maidan. Clearly, a very intangible sentiment drove these leftists to continue to participate on Maidan despite the dangers that were very apparent.

This ethnographic vignette and the discussions that followed show that leftists were extremely motivated to participate on Maidan, even if they did it among people who were not going to sanction their presence. As Zhenia’s and others’ comments relate, most leftists who were on Maidan that night learned a great deal from the experience. Not only that, they applied what they learned to their future engagements. At the same time, however, just a few days after this particular evening, the Berkut forcibly removed sleeping protesters from Maidan. Leftists used this opportunity in two ways. First, they used language of the “police state” to help other protesters name their enemy more clearly. Second, and relatedly, they took advantage of the presence of this new and clearly more dangerous enemy: I suggest that violence among protesters (particularly between left- and right-wing protesters) on Maidan decreased precisely because the forces available to state power were a much greater threat to the lives of the protests and, eventually, the protesters themselves.
“Against a Police State”: Shifting Targets and Tactics

Two concomitant shifts changed protesters’ attitudes to leftists’ presence on Maidan. First, leftists used their experience of “that night” to implement major changes in how they interacted with other protests. After their negative early experiences on Maidan, leftists tried to find ways to avoid being designated as “provokatory,” as this would encourage other protesters to try to get the leftists to leave the square. They also wanted to find a more organized message to present on Maidan so that their observers’ confusion could not manifest itself with violence. They discussed both issues extensively during planning meetings they held over the last week of November, considering different options that would allow them to participate in the protests without being called provocatory and without being fully ignored.

The night of November 30, when sleeping students were beaten on the square, gave them a unified theme around which to organize themselves and for which they had ready-made critical discourses available. On Sunday, December 1, a massive demonstration on Khreshchatyk took place, directly in response to the police clearing Maidan. I wrote in my notes that I felt that the atmosphere was different, not as fast, and that people were more cheerful. I noted that perhaps this was because they were not longer waiting for “Europe.” Indeed, over the course of the day, I noted that most protesters were targeting their energy toward President Yanukovych, as they had assumed he had approved the attack on sleeping protesters the night before. They also felt the excuse for clearing the square—the upcoming New Year’s celebrations—was absurd. Noting this shift to focus on Yanukovych, leftist activists began employing rhetoric about “the state” (derzhava; words like vlada and uriad can also refer to the government itself but do not have the same sense as derzhava). The violence against students played a necessary role both in motivating more people (including leftists) to participate on Maidan and in bringing leftists’ ideas to the
foreground of the protests, where they were accepted and even embraced by a significant majority of protesters. As one leftist activist described to me, these ideas included being “anti-police, against repressions, for the freedom of peaceful gathering, for the freedom of perspectives.” These ideas are not inherently leftist, but leftists were the first people present on Maidan who used this type of language to describe the attitudes of protesters.

Furthermore, leftists became more perceptive concerning reactions to their protest banners and their presence on Maidan. I attended several longer meetings before various mass protests where activists had lengthy conversations about what to put on banners, both in order to make their message clear and in order to try to gain support from other protesters. For example, in a meeting to decide what to write on large banners that would be dropped from strategic points around Maidan, the slogan “Better anarchy than oligarchs” (luchshe anarkhiia nizh oligarky; my transliteration reflects a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian words in the structure of the slogan) was deemed too “provocative” because of the word “anarchy.” Even “death to oligarchs” (smert’ oliharkam) was rejected because the use of the word “death” not only evoked the nationalist slogan “death to the enemies” but also promoted a generally negative and violent attitude. In the end, one slogan that was used was “Government changes, problems remain” (vlada zminiaet’ sia, problemy zalyshaiut’ sia); another was the more simple “We Are Against a Police State” (proty politseis’ koi derzhavy).

Many leftists realized the significance of the police action on November 30 in shifting the protests’ focus as well as in their ability to challenge the state itself through their own actions on Maidan. The “We Are Against a Police State” banner lived on Maidan throughout the rest of the tent camp’s existence—the occupants of the City Hall (KMDA) moved it from its original hanging to first use it in the main room of the City Hall, where protesters slept (see Photo 3.5), and I later
photographed it hanging above the building’s main entrance. It is unlikely that the occupants of
the KMDA knew what the origins of the banner were, which was part of its success—leftist
language became unrelated to political affiliation after the students were beaten, and this was part
of leftists’ shift to gain a broader audience on the square while avoiding violence.

The first week in December was an extremely significant moment for the development and
continuation of the protests. Many people suspected that Yanukovych thought the crackdown on
the sleeping protesters on November 30 would scare people away, especially if they would not be
allowed to amass at Maidan the next day. Instead, it simply made the protests seem more necessary.
The target of the protests became the state and its representatives: namely, the police, Yanukovych,
and his cabinet of ministers. I gathered stickers (sponsored by the Spil’na Sprava organization)
that read “I’m not here for the money” and “I’m not leaving until Yanukovych resigns!” Again,
these signified a shift from earlier protests—in which the assumption would be that people would
be paid, and that they would leave when the money ran out—and an intentionality that had not
existed before when the protests were focused on Europe. More and more tents appeared on
Khreshchatyk and around Maidan, with giant stakes holding them into the asphalt, even as snow
began to cover the streets. People on Maidan did not seem to have any intention of leaving.

Leftists who had described themselves as “skeptical” at the beginning of the protests began
to feel more strongly that it was important and necessary to be present there. Heorhiy specifically
mentioned November 30th as the point at which he began to fully support Maidan precisely because
it became “anti-government” and “anti-police violence.” Another longtime student activist said
that the choice was clearer for leftists to take a stand at that moment because “the question was
different. It was not about Association with the European Union, it was about police brutality. So
it was different for the left because of course we were against police brutality.” At the same time,
it became very unclear what protesters—both leftist and otherwise—actually expected to happen. The main demand, as proclaimed by many banners and signs around Maidan, was the resignation of Yanukovych. However, as the main leaders of the Opposition were proving unable to secure this demand, it was unclear how the protesters envisioned this demand being met.

I began asking people around me what they thought might happen next and how long they thought the protests would continue. Most had no idea. One protester from L’viv who came to see the protests in Kyiv—a common action, as there was a common understanding that the L’viv protests were somewhat less useful against Yanukovych because the mayor of the city was participating and supporting them, and the protest camp in Kyiv was constantly being threatened—suggested that this uncertainty was not necessarily a bad thing, because it meant that there were still opportunities and that the people standing on Maidan had at least some power. On the other hand, he reflected, how can you motivate people if there is no real plan or goal, other than the somewhat unlikely demand of Yanukovych’s resignation? But the only way was forward, as he saw it: “We can’t turn back,” he said, because too much had already happened to give up now.

Heorhiy felt that it was inevitable that people eventually would decide they had had enough of this government. In some sense, as he saw it, it was better that these mobilizations happened sooner rather than later, because the status quo had become detrimental to ordinary people. But, like many around him, he couldn’t predict what might happen. He made a statement that resonated deeply with me during a conversation in May, when the protests had mostly concluded:

I lost my sense of prediction somewhere in the middle of Maidan. I thought that, well, they’re gonna stand for two weeks and then they’re gonna leave. If somebody told me that 100 people will be killed in the streets… I couldn’t believe it.
While I suspect Heorhiy meant over the course of the mobilizations when he said “the middle,” but his words also provide a spatial reference for the sense of uncertainty and unpredictability that was palpable on the square itself. His words captured my feelings exactly when I stood on Maidan throughout the winter, watching people of various stripes committed to an idea of a better Ukraine that had no clear path for its realization. But yet, people continued to stay in that square, not knowing why.

As the winter encroached on the city, I found the protest camp to become increasingly less friendly. Policing of people present in the square was at a peak, even if more and more events were set up to keep people entertained during their long days of occupation. At an “Open University,” speakers discussed current economic trends, good versus bad oligarchs, earlier protest movements in Ukraine, and they even screened films, including a leftist-promoted one about a workers’ uprising in Kazakhstan in which protesters were killed by government forces. But I found that people—ordinary protesters, not tourists—were taking photos and videos constantly (myself included) but my and others’ inability to tell who was a protester and who was a provokator seemed ominous.9 An “Anti-Maidan” had appeared in the neighboring Marins’kyi Park, though many suspected that the pro-Party of Regions population was largely paid to be there (Ishchenko’s [2016] assessment of leftist participation on Maidan includes a thorough discussion of Anti-Maidan, including leftist support for this counter-protest). And all throughout the immediate area around Maidan, a region of the city known as Lypky, fully-dressed riot police barricaded every intersection and sometimes the streets themselves. These police made many people afraid to go to Maidan at all, as it was obviously unclear what they might do to protesters and even bystanders. It

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9 I collected a leaflet featuring a drawing of three hooded faces that provided tips on identifying a “titushko” or a “provokator.” It read, “Don’t yield to the criminal regime’s provocations! Ten people can discredit 500 000! And remember, if you yield to provocation, you help the regime!”
became impossible to get around the city center normally, which, in conjunction with closed metro stations and regular rumors of bomb threats, created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that made the protests riskier than ever before—or at least, it seemed that they could be.

These experiences characterized the second stage of Maidan, what I call the “space of uncertainty” that continued until mid-January. Leftists used this space to attempt to integrate themselves into the fabric of Maidan, with varying successes. Stage two for leftists was marked by a shift in their increasingly more coded uses of leftist ideologies. In other words, they learned from the “reactionary space” of Maidan during the first stage, in which their overtly leftist presence was dangerous, to find alternative ways to be more engaged with the protests. This was aided by the more repressive responses of state organizations like the Berkut, for which leftists readily provided criticisms that evoked their stance against a police state but without mentioning leftist ideologies. Not only did their ability to be flexible encourage leftists to keep participating, but the positive reception of their anti-state language made them more sympathetic to the protests as a whole, even if some participants' political ideologies remained at odds with those of leftists.

Leftist Responses to the Use of Force

Leftist groups had previously focused on peaceful protest, highlighting their stance against violence and for peaceful organizing on their protest signs as well as in the literature they distributed about self-organization. This was related to their oppositional relationship with members of radical right-wing groups who regularly used violence against leftists. Leftists largely presented their position as against violence, whether used by the state or by members of radical groups. However, individual leftist activists had differential attitudes toward violence. Ishchenko documented the existence of the Chorna sotnia (Black Brigade), an anarchist self-defense brigade
created on Maidan but, according to Ishchenko, the group was “forced to leave the [tent] camp by extreme right-wingers close to the Svoboda party [who outnumbered them]” because of their perceived “anti-Ukrainian” identity (2016:36).

As described in Chapter 2, the passage of the anti-protest laws on January 16, followed by the deaths of several protesters on January 19, began the third stage of Maidan, what I refer to as a “space of possibility.” As many activists recounted, the Dictatorship Laws had solidified the necessity of participating on Maidan for any leftist who had yet to make up his or her mind. In an interview (in English) in March, Anton described the impact of the Laws on leftist activists:

It was actively (sic) each group started participating on Maidan after these Dictatorship Laws because everyone understood that. There were still a lot of far right and that shit, and it’s dangerous for the left, but if Yanukovych will stay, there would be no place for far right, left wing. Each one, because we would all be foreign agents, extremists. We would have no chance at all.

However, to some extent, the obvious effectiveness of a violent response to police force in bringing protesters together against the regime and its representatives made some leftists reconsider their attitudes toward violence. Several active leftists posted on Facebook after January 19, considering how to move forward now. Maria, a leftist and feminist, wrote that personally, she was against violence, but that “since it was already used, it must be seen through to the end—after today, tomorrow will be worse.” But she also recognized the confusion wrought by violence, creating a situation in which “young and very young people don’t know what to do,” and everyone was grappling for control but neither side could move more than a few meters in either direction.

10 At least one self-identified anarchist, Serhiy Kems'kyi, was killed in February during the violence against protesters, but I cannot be sure if he was a member of the Chorna Sotnia; I also heard that he was volunteering as a medic when he was shot and killed. Kems'kyi participated in some leftist-organized protests through the mobilizations but was not a member of one of the groups with whom I conducted fieldwork.
she is referencing the physical standoff on Hrushevskoho Street). While Maria was not directly participating in the violent standoff, she observed the gas and stun grenades being used against protesters and heard many people mention the water cannon that was being used to disperse the crowds (the standoff itself was physically contained, and it was very easy to simply go and watch).

Another leftist activist, Vitalyk, was even more provocative: “Let’s be honest,” he wrote. “It makes your head spin. The success of the militarized protesters, especially the ultra-right, makes us think, and even envy. Political life will now be even more connected with violence.” Vitalyk’s assessment was that groups like the Right Sector had gained some validity with their presence during these violent clashes because they were understood to have moved the stagnating protests forward in an effective way. Because of the failures of the political Opposition’s leaders, it seemed likely that the Right Sector and other organized groups would be taking part in representative politics, as well as during street demonstrations. For Vitalyk, this logic suggested that leftists would also have to participate in similar forms of political organization—and would have to accept the use of violence as part of the validation of those forms—in order to continue to be part of that “political life.” But, in his view, “many leftists today are not ready for such a responsibility and cannot effectively do it,” despite their training in self-defense practices (as described earlier). This was both because Vitalyk did not see leftists as willing to use violence against others in an offensive way, and because he felt that such use of violence went against leftist philosophies and self-images:

Bravado with helmets and batons—it is childish. A stick must be used to beat someone, not just held in one’s hands. In general, we understand that agitating for the left using the example of military units is not possible. People reaching only for power—it’s not us. But it’s power we need to show and prove.
Vitalyk suggested organizing more small groups for various kinds of training, including in self-defense, but without necessarily adhering to the right’s established mechanisms of effectiveness, that is, as military brigades. These concerns also resonate with discussions among feminists about the women’s self-defense brigades created in January and February that also mirrored right-wing and militarized organizations and that met with extensive criticisms from some feminist groups (see Chapter 5 for discussion of these criticisms).

**Vibrant Re-Creations: the Hospital Guards**

Amidst their criticisms of the use of violence and its embrace among protesters, leftist activists’ active responses to the violence of Maidan followed more closely Carolyn Nordstrom’s suggestion that “in the midst of a violent breakdown of order…most people [do] not respond with disorder and discord, but with vibrant ways of re-creation” (1997:213). As she concludes, the statement people are making when they choose re-creations over violence is that “they did not need political institutions to forge community structure and keep social order” (1997:220). Vitalyk’s message reflected both the desire to participate in the continued protests, particularly now that they were so clearly against the oppressive governing regime, but also the conundrum faced now that the protests had become violent and to support the protests meant to support the use of force. Vitalyk’s idea of small groups that could be organized and trained around particular issues or with particular goals became a prominent way that leftists engaged with the protests in order to support them. Many leftists began to participate in an initiative called *Varto u Likarni*, or the Hospital Guards, following the violence against protesters on Hrushevskoho.

On January 22, a leftist activist sent the following message to the leftist Maidan-based email list:
Comrades, you all know that victims are now being surrendered for trial en masse from hospitals. At the strike meetings there was an idea that it’s necessary to mobilize in order to get some hospital from those in the Center [of Kyiv] under control. Now, volunteers went to explore several options. But to begin to put the plan into place, we need a normal mobilization. So we request for everyone to try to come themselves and agitate others. We will gather in approximately two hours. It’s also important, if someone has contacts, to draw other protest communities into this issue now or later. And also contacts with heads of hospitals for potential support of our actions in their hospitals.

As another leftist activist told me, when I asked her to explain the initiative,

When it began, there was no one who did the same thing. The problem was that people were hurt on Hrushevs'koho and the ambulance took them, and after the ambulance got to the hospital, the police and Berkut waited for them. They were unconscious, many of them couldn’t respond or say their names, so [the police] just took them and they could do anything, make them sign anything. They arrested them at first, I guess there were even people who were kidnapped. They were kidnapping them and they hit them hard…on the first day, when Varto was only starting, some people were really hurt. So we had to know where the ambulance is going, which hospital, do these people need to stay at the hospital? Or can they just go? The point is they couldn’t go so easily. But after it became clear that police and Berkut can just kidnap a person, there were many activists, and not even left activists, many people came there.

The coordination of the initiative was extremely complex; most of my interlocutors participated in some aspect of Varto at least once. From following ambulances and protecting people when they entered and left hospitals, to recording their hospital stays on camera, to bringing food and
medicine to victims, the volunteers for Varto made sure there was a protective presence in hospitals at all times of day.

This idea—which one leftist organizer later referred to as a “humanitarian project with a leftist view”—proved resonant with leftist activists for a number of reasons. First, it allowed them, without engaging in violence themselves, to fight against violence and against the police—who were kidnapping patients and bringing them to courts for trials, or, in the cases of Maidan activists Yuri Verbyts’kyi and Igor Lutsenko, torturing them in the woods. Second, it enabled them to use their leftist networks and “small group” strategies to do very effective activism. Finally, as their ensuing conversations show, it was an initiative that leftists used to draw in other activists and would-be Maidan participants who were uneasy about the idea of engaging in violent actions against the police.

Much of the early discussion about Varto focused on which hospitals would be most effective to take control over. Vitalyk suggested Oleksandrivs'ka Hospital in the center of Kyiv (commonly known as “October Hospital” after its Soviet name, October Revolution Hospital), while another activist suggested the emergency hospital across the river, because it appeared that more police were attempting to take victims from that location. Initially, one group of leftists went to October Hospital, while another went to the emergency hospital. But eventually, the group decided to concentrate their power on October Hospital, since many Maidan victims were being taken there and it was close to the action on the square. But throughout the next few weeks, leftists traveled to various hospitals around the city, checking to see if people needed help that the initiative could provide. One activist even used his laptop to livestream the protests so that hospital patients could watch what was happening around Maidan while they could not participate.
Most of the coordination for “duty” or “rotations” (cherhuvannia) was done via Facebook or by calling a central number to see where help was needed. When activists described the work they were doing to me, I felt that it sounded extremely dangerous. However, they did not perceive it as such. This was partly because to them, it was safer than being on or around Maidan—as one male activist put it, “It’s less dangerous than Hrushev's'koho!”—and partly because so many other leftists were participating. The initiative’s intent was to attempt to re-establish hospitals as safe spaces for protesters and victims, for those of both right and left views. Indeed, I never heard any leftist participant in Varto use any judgmental words about the victims they volunteered to protect. Leftists further used the initiative to encourage others, including non-leftists, to participate in a “safer” way. Vitalyk mentioned a classmate who had wanted to go to Maidan, but, with two small children, was convinced that it was too unsafe. Vitalyk felt that working with Varto was a better option for this classmate, as it was perceived in a very positive way as a necessary citizen-driven initiative on Maidan.

Varto was also a crucial way for leftist women to engage in the protests on equal footing with men. In Chapter 5, I describe how the space of Maidan became defined by military masculinity. Women were excluded from militarized roles and limited to behind-the-scenes work in kitchens, on cleaning crews, or as medical careworkers. Varto u likarni was an initiative that allowed men and women to participate in a non-hierarchical way. Several of the main coordinators were women, but equally as many women participated in the initiatives by going to hospitals. I knew women who volunteered to escort ambulances and women who worked until two o’clock in the morning on hotlines helping people find hospitalized family members or connect with legal aid organizations. In this way, Varto was an effective reflection of leftist principles of gender
equality, even if creating an opportunity for men and women to participate equally in Maidan was not an overt part of the initiative’s ideology.

In an interview much later, a feminist activist mentioned to me that everything that was successful on Maidan was done without the help of the state. In the context of having completely lost faith and trust in the state and its representatives, from the President to his cabinet to the police, she could have gone so far as to say that many of these initiatives were citizens’ ways to challenge the state, which, instead of taking care of its citizens, was actively endangering them. From the beginning of the protests, leftists were focused on “self-organizing” outside of any political party, but initiatives like Varto were their most successful examples of self-organization that were recognized by other participants on Maidan as making a positive and even necessary contribution to the protests. That Varto did not overtly promote leftist ideas did not seem to detract from leftists’ willingness to participate, nor did it prevent them from mentioning it to me when I asked them about the most successful events or actions during the protests. This is a distinct aspect of the shifts described earlier in this chapter, when the January 16 laws and the ensuing violence convinced leftists to take a more unified stand in support of the protests, and Varto was one of the best ways of doing this without committing to the tactics or ideologies of the majority of protesters. Initiatives like Varto showed that leftists were not anti-Maidan, as radical right-wing Maidan activists often accused them of being. More than anything, leftists were against state violence, and their motivation and ability to organize outside of party frameworks allowed them to create one of the most successful initiatives during the violence on Maidan.11

11 People continued to volunteer with Varto through the February violence, at which time the coordination was much easier because the initial networks and infrastructures already existed. However, I never saw the initiative mentioned in English-language press. One Varto organizer was featured in the book Ye Liudy, which began as a Facebook page that documented the ordinariness of people participating on Maidan and was eventually published in a diary-like book (Berdyns’kykh 2014).
The presence of the use of force on Maidan created a conundrum for leftists. Some leftists, including the anarchists of the Black Sotnia and members of other leftist groups, did support and participate in the standoff against police forces and snipers in February. Others condemned the violence but wanted to work against the police and the state, forming extremely useful and successful initiatives like Varto u likarni, as well as the crucial Student Assembly, discussed in Chapter 6. Most significantly, both of these forms of participation on Maidan were not focused around promoting a leftist platform, as activists had attempted to do in the first weeks of Maidan. Instead, leftists discovered how to support the protests on their own terms. This led to some additional fragmentation of leftists, because many did not agree with those who were present on Maidan in late February during the major violence. Further, leftists like Ishchenko (2016) have been critical of the ways leftists moved beyond ideology in order to participate, suggesting instead that opting out of Maidan would have strengthened leftists' position as a group. While Ishchenko's analysis is certainly apt, it does not fit with leftists' own assessments of Maidan. The final section of this chapter discusses how leftists evaluated their participation in the protests and its impact on the left as a whole.

“It's Better to Forget Humanism”: Maidan's Influence on the Left

Maidan remained a tent camp for several months following the end of the violence, in part because people largely saw it as an ongoing memorial site for those who had given their lives for Ukraine. Through the month of March—the 200th birthday of national poet Taras Shevchenko—poetry readings continued on the main stage and the flowers and other commemorations remained. By this time, general consensus seemed that Instituts’ka Street, where the most protesters had been killed, would be renamed Heaven’s Hundred Street (vulytsia Nebesnoi sotni); the “Heaven’s
Hundred” referred to all those killed on Maidan. Maidan continued to represent a victory, and those who remained on the square now began to discuss mobilizing against Russian encroachments in Crimea and the Eastern region, as well as implementing lustration against Yanukovych and those Party of Regions members who had stayed by his side through the protests.

Among leftists, there was no consensus about whether or not they could consider their experience and efforts on Maidan as a success. Leftists even organized an extensive conference about the question “Left and Maidan” and published a special edition of the Commons journal with a similar name. While some simply said that no, Maidan was not a leftist space and was not successful for leftists, others considered that whether Maidan was “left” or not did not matter as much as the real changes in society that had appeared directly because of Maidan. Some felt that while Maidan had an overall impact on changing Ukrainian politics, leftists were limited by the small scale of the initiatives they had created and the stronger sympathy for right-wing organizations. Danylo reflected on this problem in an interview in the spring of 2014.

There are cool initiatives, but in comparison with these common ideas (achieved by), for example, Right Sector, right? That they in some sense had a kind of hegemony, even, on Maidan. It started everything. They just put up some tents and gathered these activists from the right circle, ultra-right circle, and in the left there wasn’t anything like this. Well, there were some tents, there were anarchists who didn’t especially push themselves forward. Ultimately, social rhetoric from the left movement didn’t succeed. Other than some things, like the open accounting of the Ministry of Education, it’s cool, it’s good.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^\text{12}\) Students occupied the Ministry of Education at the end of February 2014 (discussed at length in Chapter 4). An economist and leftist activist created an important initiative to implement open accounting for the Ministry. Now, the Ministry is required to publish its financial information online (it is published in raw data form, so one must be trained to read this type of information in order to understand and analyze it). Activists hoped to implement this open accounting system in other Ministries to encourage transparency throughout the government.
comparison with the scale of this protest, that affected all of Ukraine, the President, at this scale, we can say it’s almost nothing. That’s why I can say that on Maidan, the left didn’t conduct itself like it needed to. It’s important that more about these ideas would be heard and taken to people. I have the impression that only now do they start to bring this consciousness to the majority of activists. They must also be able to defend their own views, including physically, right? In other words, be able to give opposition, defend their views in the street, against whatever encroachment of nationalists, Nazis, and others.

Danylo did not necessarily think the left failed, but their presence was not as strong as that of the radical right, whose members were able to take advantage of the situation and promote their political ideology. He saw the positive effects of initiatives like *Varto u likarni* in bringing something positive to Maidan, but he did not see the left's social platform as successfully disseminated among the larger protest body.

Alternatively, Havryil, my friend with whom I visited Maidan on its first day, told me, in a second interview near the end of my fieldwork, after he had had significant time to reflect, that he had really “awesome” impressions from Maidan, and he felt that “we [leftists] won some stuff” and had done more than he had thought possible, given their lack of resources. He specifically mentioned *Varto u likarni* and the Student Assembly (discussed in Chapter 6) as examples of “winning” for leftists, initiatives that were arguably some of the most successful in recent leftist history in Ukraine. At the same time, Havryil recognized that there was a long way to go, and that another “revolution” was necessary:

The revolution is time for intensive change. We can do more than we can do in normal life. We have resources to manipulate. We did more during EuroMaidan than we did in the last five years. And EuroMaidan wasn’t even such a fucking awesome revolution. We will get
new wind and people can do a lot, but now they are tired from the winter. So they didn’t get all the way to the last step. I was really sick after being in the Ministry, physically exhausted. And these are people who will give their last breath for fighting.

He contrasted beautiful, tranquil moments standing on the roof of the occupied Ministry of Education (see Chapter 4), describing his nice impressions from watching the streets, with eight-year-old boys making Molotov cocktails and old women bringing militants bricks to throw at the police on Maidan. He captured the contrast poetically:

It was terrifying while you are in the violence but it is also emancipatory, the spirit of violence. You have to be the first one to kick, be more aggressive. You can be dead in one moment so it’s better to forget humanism.

Havryil may have presented one of the more radical perspectives, but many other leftists assessed Maidan as having been a positive experience. These assessments were built around the notion that people learned that they had the ability to make change happen based on their own skills and commitment—precisely the way leftists framed “self-organization.” In other words, leftists felt that self-organization became a common organizing point for all people on Maidan, even if it was used for varying goals—Heorhiy even commented once that “not all self-organization is good,” specifically referencing the way groups like Right Sector used self-organizing principles.

It is important that so many leftists said that their experience of Maidan was positive. Each of these people were the targets of violence, first at the hands of the radical right, and later at the hands of the state. Yet they felt pleased with how they had continued to participate despite these setbacks. They assessed the centrality of self-organization and state criticism as discourses provided by the left, the intersection of which I discuss further in Chapter 6. They recognized the importance of Maidan for Ukraine and knew that it was necessary to participate in some capacity.
Leftists' participation on Maidan and people's assessment of it has reinforced pre-existing fragmentation among the new Ukrainian left, however. This is well-documented in Ishchenko's report (2016)\(^\text{13}\) and in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. Most significantly, leftist activists in Kyiv split with the group Borot'ba (Struggle), which did not support Maidan or the pro-Russian position; Borot'ba attempted (and failed) to promote a “third camp that would be critical both to the government and to the right-wing opposition” (Ishchenko 2016:31). Borot'ba was unable to present its position in a way that distanced itself from the pro-Russia/pro-Yanukovych Anti-Maidan, and other leftists groups did not want to be affiliated with a possibly anti-Ukraine organization, and so the alliance among these leftist groups (built especially around Borot'ba's anti-fascist platform and actions) ended.

This relationship was again complicated during a moment in which, evoking Havryil, people forgot humanism. On May 2, clashes between pro-Maidan demonstrators and anti-Maidan/pro-government protesters in Odesa resulted in a massive fire in the occupied Trade Unions building, killing 48 people (Wilson 2014:129). Many Borot'ba activists were members of the latter camp and had been active in Odesa in criticizing the Maidan protests there. Several Borot'ba activists were among those killed in the fire in the Trade Unions Building, prompting some leftists to rethink their broad support of the Maidan movement.

But now I see how it has grown really ugly, like what we spoke about in Odesa. Why would you set the building on fire? There are people inside it. I think that everybody, people who

\(^{13}\) It is perhaps necessary to recognize that Ishchenko himself is a controversial figure not only among Ukrainian academics but among leftists as well. I personally find that his excessive criticism comes from a desire to see the Ukrainian left take the unlikely form of a national working-class based union, rather than accepting that there are many leftist forms and positions. However, because he has completed research among political activists throughout the 2000s and beyond, his source base is extensive, and his work with the Center for Social and Labour Research features wide-ranging media data about protests of all kinds, so his perspective is an essential one in any discussion of contemporary Ukrainian politics.
are obsessed with Maidan kind of went blind. They don’t see themselves in the mirror of what’s going on. It’s stupid, people don’t see that they don’t have a general vision of what’s going on, I clearly cannot support that.

While leftists felt it necessary to participate on Maidan, and, in their Kyiv-based participation, were able to assess the mobilizations as a positive experience, they were also critical of its impact on the left and on protest action in general, particularly on the apparent acceptance of the use of violence against oppositional forces.

This chapter has presented the complex relationship leftist activists had with Maidan. It began by describing the negative reactions to leftist ideologies experienced in stage one of Maidan. In stage two, leftists began to renegotiate their position in order to more effectively participate and to promote state criticism. Finally, leftists were able to create non-violent initiatives that enabled them to continue to participate without sanctioning the use of violence. Ultimately, leftist presence on Maidan was self-organized anti-state activism. Leftists used the space of Maidan to discuss the state with other Maidan activists and to promote self-organization, which, as I argue in Chapter 6, have both become major factors in current post-Maidan political activism.

But whether the impact of Maidan on the left can be assessed in such a positive way remains to be seen. Ishchenko's argument that the left has become weaker—when considered as a united political position in the first place, itself debatable—is not incorrect. The deaths of Borot'ba activists in Odesa, the later arrests of Borot'ba activists, and the arrest of another anti-state activist, Oleksandr Kol’chenko, in Crimea following the annexation of the territory, have complicated leftists' ability to find a unified position. Additionally, as I discuss in Chapter 6, the spread of volunteerism has further challenged what is appropriate leftist activism in the post-Maidan period. Certainly, leftists have not been satisfied with the lack of change in social programs during the
Poroshenko presidency, and the continued presence of right-wing groups at leftist events—and their continued violence against leftists—suggests that not much has changed for leftist activists in Ukraine, despite their successes and positive experiences during Maidan.
Chapter 4: Direct Action: Education Activism and Maidan

In the early days of Maidan, the mobilizations were strongly associated with the European Union, although protesters’ conceptualizations of Europe were diverse. Leftist activists focused on European social policies that they felt would be beneficial in a European Ukraine. On the first day of mass marches around the Kyiv city center, Sunday, November 24, I met with a cohort of almost 20 leftist activists to march to Maidan. One of their large signs told fellow participants that they were “For Free Education” [“free” here in the monetary sense; za bezkoshtovnu osvitu], “like in Germany, France, and the Czech Republic” (see Photo 4.1). A sign used the following day among a much smaller audience linked Europe not only with better support for education but with better education overall. “Europe: Quality education,” read the sign (Yevropa: Yakisna osvita; see Photo 4.2).

While leftists were speaking to the entire protest body on Maidan, their focus on education contributes to the common perception that students were the first people on Maidan on November 21 and 22. Students gathered around Independence Square at least in part in response to a widely shared tweet by journalist Mustafa Nayem:

[Retweet]!! Meet at 10:30 p.m. at the Independence monument [on Independence Square]. Dress warmly, bring umbrellas, tea, coffee, and friends.¹

The quick spread of a tweet and the subsequent mobilization of bodies led many to perceive the protests as youth-driven, not necessarily incorrect in those first weeks (both Dickinson 2014 and

¹ In the original: RT!! Встречаемся в 22:30 под монументом Независимости. Одевайтесь тепло, берите зонтики, чай, кофе, и друзей.
Onuch 2014a & 2014b document how protesters of various age groups used virtual and real-life social networks to circulate information and mobilize bodies.

However, Katia, a student activist, was hesitant to give Nayem’s tweet too much credit. “But he didn’t believe the students would come,” she told me, because “he wasn’t involved in any of the student organizing.” In other words, while Nayem expected virtual social networks to allow him to reach many young people, he did not anticipate the massive role students could play and the possible effectiveness of student organizing. Katia suggested that students had more at stake when President Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement—she believed more university-age students had been to Europe than any other contingent of Ukrainians and they therefore “know what is the difference with the EU.” This included knowledge of the better and less expensive educational opportunities available in the European Higher Education Area, which many students have been anxious to access.

This chapter explores higher education activism in Ukraine before and during Maidan. It begins by examining the role of education in both nation- and state-making. Then, it considers how leftist student activism became an outlet for leftists to make interventions into state and national discourses by making claims on the educational system. It traces this history up to the Maidan period and examines how education issues were used on Maidan to complete three interrelated goals: to mobilize student bodies by making something that was personal to them into a political issue; to bring together various political ideologies into an effective coalition that shifted higher education policies after the new government was installed; and to continue critiques of both the state and Europe, critiques that could be made only because of the strong history of student activism in Ukraine. Finally, I expand this last point into a broader contextualization of the higher
education system within Europeanizing processes, which have had mixed effects and responses in Ukraine since 2014.

**Educational Systems: Reproduction, Nation, and State**

In this chapter, I argue that higher education policies have been the main site of leftist intervention into Ukrainian national politics. As I have established, since at least Yanukovych’s tenure, there has been widening rupture between nation and state in which state practices are seen as unrepresentative of the nation (broadly conceived). The educational system, centralized in the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Sciences (*Ministerstvo osvity i nauky*, often referred to by the acronym MON; see Figure 4.1 for a map of important sites for education activism around Kyiv), controls not only primary and secondary education but also universities and other institutions of higher education across the country. Thus the system of education in Ukraine—including curricula, standards and evaluations, and instruction—is largely understood as controlled by the *state* and therefore subject to the whims of government representatives like Dmytro Tabachnyk, Yanukovych’s hated Minister of Education.²

I argue that leftist student activists, otherwise thoroughly marginalized on the Ukrainian political scene, are able to intervene into education politics because those interventions are understood as criticisms of the state, which is not representative of the nation or its citizens. Additionally, however, educational systems are *also* part of the process of creating a national citizenry and developing and ensuring certain national practices. Therefore, I suggest that these interventions, in the eyes of leftist student activists, are understood as a criticism of national

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² Tabachnyk has been seen as holding anti-Ukrainian positions, and he has attempted to implement programs in schools to move away from certain national narratives, as well as from the Ukrainian language (Sindelar 2014). In 2011, Daria Stepanenko, a university student, hit Tabachnyk around the head with a bouquet of flowers she was supposed to deliver to him as a protest at a summit of European ministers (Lozowy 2011).
narratives. These criticisms of national and nationalist ideas are made acceptable because educational practices are seen as the realm of the state, which it is acceptable, even commendable, to criticize.

In Louis Althusser’s construction, education systems are one of many Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that work in conjunction with Repressive State Apparatuses (a singularity based on violence; Althusser notes that no real state apparatus works without ideology or repression—both work differentially in social reproduction through the various apparatuses). Ruling classes, which sometimes constitute the state itself, control the ideologies which are produced and reproduced in ISAs. Thus schools, as ISAs, reproduce the ideologies of the ruling classes and/or the state, which also controls the function of the ISAs. He concludes that “all ideological State apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production; i.e., of capitalist relations of exploitation” (2001:104). Althusser suggests that the school is the dominant ISA because of its long-term impact on children’s socialization and precisely because it is presented as a neutral site (free of ideology) in which knowledge—a necessity in capitalist societies—is imparted equally to the population.

Pierre Bourdieu (1969; and with Passeron 1990) expands the conceptualization of the goals for education; educational systems do not simply reproduce a labor force to exploit, they also reproduce sets of values—“cultural capital”—which some students can obtain, while others, based on their background and existing status in society, cannot. In other words, schools establish “cultural fields” in which “certain themes” are “brought to the fore while others are set to one side without being completely eliminated, so that continuity of communication between intellectual generations remains possible” (1969:342). Only educated people—not just those who have gone to school but those who are able to gain, through their own work or by inheritance, a generation’s
established cultural capital—can engage with these themes that have been secured as representative of a person’s educated-ness and valued knowledge. Again, schools are not neutral sites but a place for the transmission of hierarchical social structures:

Just as the differentiation of schooling threatens the cultural integration of the educated class, so the *de facto* segregation which tends to reserve secondary education...and higher education almost exclusively to the economically and, above all, culturally most favoured classes, tends to create a cultural rift. (1969:351)

Increasingly, ethnographers have used studies of schools as sites of resistance to show that educational policies and systems are not simply mechanisms of social control, in spite of their strong influence on social stratification (Bénéï 2008; Garcia 2005; Lazar 2010; Luykx 1999; Reed-Danahay 2004). Many of these further explore the role of schooling in nation-building and citizen-creation, stratified and stratifying processes in themselves. Luykx (1999) examines the role of varying ethnicities in Bolivian attempts to consolidate a national idea and narrative and considers the role of schools in transmitting a notion of national citizenship, suggesting that “it is the school’s task to construct a bond between students and the nation, to embrace students within a network of meanings and practices that define them as ‘Bolivians’ and make this relationship an enduring part of their ideological repertoire” (128). Focusing on daily, bodily practices of nationhood and citizenship, Bénéï sees schools as sites of confirming the “banality” of nationalism (2008:41). In her view, schooling situates local, regional, and national “attachments” (256) in embodied forms, making them appear inherent to educated citizens.

In Ukraine in particular, schools “reflect the complexities and contradictions of cultural change” (Wanner 1998:79). Wanner notes that educational reform was a task of national-democrats, including President Kravchuk, who were seen as nationalists at the time of the reform
Schools were understood as the best site of naturalizing a new (non-Soviet) Ukrainian identity among the first post-Soviet generation; however, she recognizes that schools were similarly viewed during the Soviet period as essential in the creation of ideal Soviet citizens (81). She further traces the emergence of private schools as elements contributing to class- and gender-based stratification (100-118). Fournier’s more recent study in Ukrainian schools has shown that, while the trends highlighted by Wanner were still in place, “there were also attempts at making the substance of national history compatible with Russian historiography” (2012:38). Fournier found that young people learned of themselves as citizens and “rights-bearers” not only through their formal education but also in the streets, where they engaged with the unpredictabilities of socialization by the “bandit-state,” the “perceived entanglement between government and violent entrepreneurs” (2012:14).

While most of these authors do not consider the role of higher education in these processes, I suggest that higher education does continue many of these processes of stratification as well as of nation-building. While Wanner noted a decrease in the attraction of higher education because it could not guarantee prestigious jobs at the time of her writing in the mid-1990s (87), I see that the implementation of the European Higher Education Area³ in Ukraine in 2005 rejuvenated interest in university education, particularly in degrees that would be recognized in the European Union and came with the possible promise of European jobs. At the same time, there is an increased interest in making Ukrainian universities attractive and accessible to other European students, suggesting that there is still concern with how the “nation” is represented and learned in higher education, not simply at elementary levels. However, the implementation of Europeanizing

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³ The European Higher Education Area was established as a result of the Bologna Accords in 1999. It helped create a compatible European educational system in which, in part, credits earned in a higher education institution in one signatory country would be of equal value in another. See the EHEA’s website: [http://www.ehea.info/](http://www.ehea.info/).
standards has not helped advance a national Ukrainian higher education system; rather, it has led to increased regional stratification in higher educational institutions, which I will discuss in detail below.

This section has argued that education works both as a site of the creation and reproduction of national ideologies, and of state attempts to consolidate these national ideologies for its own gains. Because of the major role state institutions play in establishing the Ukrainian educational system at multiple levels, and because of perceptions that this Yanukovych-era state is more beholden to Russian interests than Ukrainian and European ones, activism that criticizes this educational system is an acceptable form of intervention into state practices. Importantly, these activists have also seen success because of the forms of their organization, which are independent of university administrations and therefore of state influence. I now turn to a discussion of the independent student union Priama Diia.

Direct Action: University Student Unions around Ukraine

Once again, I focus on leftist activism, particularly in discussing the history of student activism in Ukraine. The main reason for this is that leftist activists have created the first intentionally independent student union (nezalezhna students’ka profspilka) to represent universities around the country. Other student unions, based on Soviet models, are sanctioned and paid by the university itself, leading to student “representation” that supports university policies because their own financial stability depends on being in the union. The budgets for these university student unions were paid in part via student stipends (which come from university and national budgets), but, until recently, the budgets of both unions and universities were not public, so it was unclear how much money student unions were channeling toward student representatives.
This sum of money can be quite large; one student activist broke down a possible budget for a university student union:

At KPI (Kyiv Polytechnic Institute) there are over 30,000 students, and more than half of them have budget support [stipends], which means that 15,000 pay into the union budget. One percent of every student’s stipend goes to fund the budget of the unions. The one percent is about 7 UAH per month, times 12 months, which is [1.26] million UAH, which makes the budget for the student union.4

Student union representatives can make significantly more money than provided by a typical stipend, making the position desirable to gain and retain.

However, leftist students were critical of the relationship between university administrations and student unions, so they created Priama Dii a or “Direct Action” (known often as PD). Founded in 2008, the current iteration of PD uses the same name as a similar student trade union that existed throughout the 1990s.5 A national organization, much of PD’s work happens in Kyiv, where various universities (including Taras Shevchenko, Kyiv Mohyla, Kyiv Polytechnic, and Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design) each have their own chapters.6 Certain

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4 At the time of this conversation, the Ukrainian hryvnia was traded at about 8 UAH to the U.S. dollar. This makes the budget of KPI’s student union close to $160,000.
5 The PD union from the 1990s is referred to as the “first generation.” I would speculate that the “second generation” of PD lasted from 2008 until 2013. I had intended to do a large part of my fieldwork with PD members to explore the organization, whose members I met during my 2012 preliminary fieldwork, and I attended one meeting in October 2013. However, that was, as far as I am aware, the only meeting the group had during the 2013-2014 academic year. This was in part, of course, because of the mass mobilizations that began in November in 2013, which the organization did not take a unified stand on until the spring of 2014, in response to the statements of Borot’ba, another leftist organization, against the protests. In an early interview, a former PD activist mentioned that the organization had very few active members at the time, and in a late interview (May 2014), another PD activist said the organization basically did not exist any longer. PD began a new “generation” in fall 2014 and has lately been protesting against increased transportation fares and religion encroaching into higher education.
6 A note on Ukrainian university names. Most names I reference here are of Kyiv National Universities. Some of these universities are further designated by specialty (as pedagogical universities, for example, or for medicine). Further, most universities are named after a notable figure in the field. For example, in Ukrainian, Taras Shevchenko National University is called Kyivs’kyi Natsional’nyi Universytet imeny Tarasa Shevchenka; literally, Kyivan National University named Taras Shevchenko. I have chosen a smoother translation but have
issues are focused at individual universities, while for other issues, PD members from multiple universities work together on a city-wide or national campaign. PD members do not work exclusively at universities at which there is a chapter; in some cases, one person from a university will come to PD members with a problem, and PD will organize for that university, both around the issue and to attempt to establish a PD chapter at that university.

The “second generation” of PD has been centered around three universities: Taras Shevchenko National University, Kyiv Mohyla Academy, and Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. The Kyiv-based movement was perceived as Kyiv-centric by regional activists, as well. At a student organizing camp I attended in the summer of 2012 in Crimea, regional activists described their own feelings of autonomy, suggesting that they saw themselves as independent from Kyiv’s PD and sometimes even as unsupported by the capital’s group.\(^7\) Student activists from Eastern cities, including Mariupol, Mikolaev, Luhansk, and Kharkiv, described a lack of interest in participating in PD activities among students or other community members. In Kharkiv, a larger problem (and one that was thematic during the camp and my further research) was confrontations with members of the far right. Kharkiv activists described spending as much time organizing protection for their rallies as for the campaigns themselves, a problem that was exacerbated by a lack of community support and left-wing student activists.

Crimea itself provided an interesting case. Prior to its annexation by Russia in 2014, the region was considered autonomous from the central Ukrainian government, with an established

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\(^7\) Western Ukrainian cities and regions were under-represented at the camp, with only a few activists from those cities in attendance. PD had members in places like L’viv, Rivne, and Ternopil, but the only people I met from those cities at the camp had moved to other cities.
autonomous Parliament and Ministry of Education. Thus Crimean activists had a different, and sometimes more successful, relationship with their educational system. Their independent student union was called “Student Action” (Rus. Studencheskoie deistvie) and considered itself “fraternal” to PD. For example, the Student Action activists successfully campaigned to have 24-hour access to their dormitories and campuses, a campaign that was reproduced in Kyiv and failed. On one hand, some of Student Action’s efforts were easier because Crimea has its own Ministry of Education and fewer universities, making regional legislation easier to influence. On the other hand, education legislation in Crimea was more directly influenced by Russian education policies, which took a different direction from Ukrainian national policies at the time.8

National-level Success: The Campaign against Paid Services9

Significant changes to national policies began soon after the founding of Priama Diia, in 2008. At this time, Yulia Tymoshenko was Prime Minister, and Ivan Vakharchuk was Minister of Education. The first change was an effort to introduce new student fees for publicly-funded universities.10 These fees included requiring students to pay to work in laboratories, for using libraries and sports centers, and for Internet access. Nearly every person I interviewed with whom

8 At the time of writing, Crimea is legally a Russian territory, meaning that Russian education policy has been established in Crimean universities. It is unclear if Student Action is still in existence, particularly because several active leftists in Simferopol were arrested following the annexation of the territory in March 2014, accused of being Maidan sympathizers and are now being held in prison in Russia. Most others live in cities within the territory of Ukraine.
9 I was not present in Ukraine during this campaign. However, I had read about each wave of protest via the Internet, so when I interviewed activists about it in 2013 and 2014, I had a general idea of the issues surrounding the protest and some of the tactics they used in major campaigns. In these interviews, many activists remembered great detail about the protests. In addition, many of them made connections between the success of these protests with the rise of the right wing in the late 2000s; this distance and time for reflection may have changed their assessment of their own successes. Some of these interviews were completed in September and October 2013, before Maidan began, while others took place during or after Maidan, which also influenced activists’ assessments of the importance of the campaign against paid services.
10 Most universities in Ukraine are still publically funded, but there is a growing number of private universities. The most prominent are Krok University in Kyiv and the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv.
I discussed PD’s activism before Maidan mentioned this campaign as the group’s most successful one. The issue faced PD multiple times over the course of several years and overlapped with the government’s attempts to introduce new higher education legislation (legislation that would govern the requirements of students and professors at higher educational institutions and the functioning of those institutions). Most activists described the second part of the campaign against paid services, in 2009, in which record numbers of students gathered around the country to protest the fees, but one long-term PD member made sure to point out the origins of the entire anti-paid services campaign in 2008, the first time the resolution was introduced by Vakharchuk.

That campaign included a smaller mobilization, but it had a very quick result. That campaign only took several weeks, less than a month. We learned late about, well…. The government’s statement that it was going to introduce a concrete resolution, it came late and unexpectedly, before the summer vacation. And so it was necessary to react effectively, do everything immediately before vacation, but it was practically impossible to gather students. It was the end of the academic year, already June, there were exams. So we organized several meetings around universities, Shevchenko, Mohyla, KPI. Priama Diia was just born, this was its first big campaign. From our side…we held an action with maybe 100, 150 people in front of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, well, after we had these meetings to inform students. It was a single action, but we were ready for it to be a week-long campaign, maybe to continue to autumn, after vacation. But literally on that same day we got the reaction from the side of the government, and the Minister of Education announced that, about the resolution for paid services, that it will not be introduced. The government stepped back, they even rejected what they planned to do. It was almost an instantaneous victory.
For a brand new organization that only had the support of one other group, the Foundation for Regional Initiatives (FRI; a liberal youth organization focused on legislative changes), and a disparate group of leftist activists well-versed in street protests, the success of this short campaign was unprecedented and gave PD important momentum. As another activist described, the alliance between PD and FRI was beneficial, as FRI representatives negotiated with Ministers and administrations while PD members were “in the street.”

While government ministers knew the possible impact of mass street protests, such actions were not exactly common at this time, particularly among young people in Ukraine, and particularly about education issues. Thus, an organization of young people who were able to gather people to the streets, and who were willing to remain in the streets for as long as it would take to get the attention of the government, was clearly a threat to that government, if an uncommon one. Perhaps this was why the government backtracked so quickly to a demonstration of only 100 people. And, as activists noted, PD was the first group “whose main aim was to become a mass movement.” Perhaps the Tymoshenko/Vakharchuk Ministry was attempting to stall the success of PD; perhaps the government was simply trying to gain back something of its plummeting popularity. Activists did not spend much time reflecting on why the government had backtracked, and indeed, the next year, a new government was in place.

In 2010, Viktor Yanukovych, whose false election triggered the Orange Revolution in 2004, was elected president. He named Mykola Azarov as Prime Minister and Dmytro Tabachnyk—already then a notorious Russophile who had made claims against the legitimacy of the Ukrainian language and in favor of aligning the Ukrainian higher education system with that of Russia instead of Europe (Lozowy 2011; Sindelar 2014)—as Minister of Education. That same year, Tabachnyk’s Ministry attempted to introduce a nearly identical list of university fees as the
Vakharchuk Ministry had rejected a year earlier. Again, PD banded together with FRI to campaign against the fees, and this time, thousands of students came to the streets.

Significantly, this campaign was a broad-based, national one. While Kyiv was the center of PD’s work and of the campaign, students mobilized in various cities across the country. Anton, a PD founder and organizer of the anti-paid services campaign, claimed that 1,000 people came to the protests in Kyiv—“At that time,” he said, “everything was very passive and 1,000 people was a very big demonstration.” Anton claimed 7,000 students came to protest in L’viv in Western Ukraine, and another activist said 10,000 mobilized students were counted across the country. Again, the government responded quickly to the student mobilization and the resolution for paid services was not adopted. As the only organization committed to this type of work, PD became a widely known group following the successful second part of the anti-paid services campaign. They were recognized for being able to bring thousands of students into the streets for extremely visible, well-informed protests. Following the paid services campaign, other organizations attempted to mirror PD’s successful methods, including far right groups as well as right-leaning liberal groups. This latter designation included a group called Vidsich, also an independent (i.e., non-university, non-partisan) organization similar in structure to PD but which diverged in ideological affiliation, leaning toward nationalist sympathies.

PD began attempting to work with Vidsich on large-scale campaigns, including the paid services mobilizations, as well as on their following campaign against the new higher education legislation. But other, more right-wing groups began to become more present in universities than they had been before, as their leaders saw that students could be more mobilized around particular issues than the rest of the Ukrainian population (or so it was perceived at the time). As Anton described it,
It became popular [to organize street protests] and it became harder for us. They did the same, a lot of far-right student unions after this. It became harder to work because far right ideas are more or less popular in our society and left ideas are not. They made a lot of stupid things but they had much more resources, especially the Svoboda party [which supported a youth-oriented wing]. So it became harder for us to function.

At the same time, Nadia, a leftist and feminist activist, saw that the right-wing unions were not really “student unions,” because “they didn’t engage in student issues, student problems.” Rather, they “had a cultural agenda,” which they promoted by organizing poetry and literary readings, for example. And, Nadia said, “people are more receptive to them.”

However, many PD members felt it was important and necessary to affiliate with Vidsich, as well as with FRI, in their next major campaign against the 2010 higher education legislation. For many activists, the campaign against the adoption of the higher education legislation was a key part of becoming an activist. PD was continually successful not only in getting students to mobilize but also in securing the government’s retraction of the law. The legislation was brought to Parliament three different times, and each time, PD was essential in ensuring that the law was not adopted. Activists had different ideas for why PD was so successful. One KPI graduate suggested that the variation in tactics was key: “Sometimes they were mass actions, sometimes they were some kind of informational picket, sometimes a theatrical performance. They couldn’t adopt [the law] because we protested it.” Another activist, Natalia, saw the campaign’s symbolism as its most unifying element:

I remember that the primary symbol of the campaign became a pencil. Not a portrait or some symbol. In other words, it was clearly a student protest, not from some political organization, just students who weren’t passive about their lives. And the law was never
adopted. They attacked painful points for students. This mobilized students because they straightforwardly didn’t want it.

But Heorhiy felt that exactly this point, that students mobilized because the legislation was painful for them, was a problem for future student organizing. People mobilized because it was in their “private interests,” as he put it. For example, the legislation would change the status of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy from a university to a less prestigious type of institution. Because students were so concerned about the status of KMA, they were willing to mobilize. And only in these types of cases can a “mass of students who are not connected to an organization” be mobilized. Nadia saw a similar conflict in the affiliation between PD and Vidsich, because “PD wanted to put the emphasis on structural issues and Vidsich, they were focusing on persons.”

Certainly, the notion that “the personal is political” has successfully mobilized otherwise disinterested people around all sorts of issues. But, returning to the foundational principles of PD, the group was attempting to create a successful political movement that could attract a mass of students from universities across the country. This meant not simply responding negatively to legislation that would obviously hurt students but also creating what PD activists call a “positive program” (pozytivna prohrama). Many activists noted that PD was not very successful in “promoting something,” only in rapid response protests, even if those were creative and often achieved organizers’ goals. As Natalia noted, it is only when you press people that they begin to stir; only reactions to negative issues allowed PD to mobilize students. “Unfortunately, that’s how it is,” said Natalia.

This general passivity was a commonly-mentioned problem facing PD when I began interviewing members in 2013. As Natalia described, students are passive, even in the face of issues including constant practices of bribery and gift-giving to secure grades and university
places. “Students aren’t doing anything about it. They aren’t even thinking about it. So if you say to them they have to pay for student cards, they’ll say okay, that’s fine. But it’s not fine, they don’t have to. It’s easier to pay and that’s it. Students think that the education process is a repressive, authoritarian one.” Other activists recognized that general passivity in society contributed to students’ views that their efforts wouldn’t change anything: “Very few people believe that collective action can change something,” said another PD member.

Importantly, several activists mentioned that higher education imported from Europe was a challenge for future student activists, particularly changes that student activists link to trends of neoliberalism. The new Minister of Education, Serhiy Kvit, exemplifies certain neoliberal policies that could be introduced into Ukrainian higher education. Heorhiy gave an example:

In [Kvit’s] view, education should be reserved to the best universities, which will [based on] exams, get the best students, but everybody else, I don't know what they will be left with. I think many universities might close. Not the way it was planned before, because there were many talks about [how] we have so many universities, and they are producing those dumb students who don't know anything, so we should close them. But Kvit's vision is kind of different, he simply doesn't want to give those state-funded places to those universities. In that way, there will be less and less students there, and I don't know if they will be able to function. He would prefer to keep [state-funded places] in the universities which are seen as the better ones, and to take those places away from the ones that are seen as worse.

It is likely that Kyiv universities—already largely regarded as the most prestigious—would gather the top students, and other universities (including lower-tier institutions in Kyiv and universities in regional centers) would only be able to host students who did not have a government stipend.
Most students would be unlikely to pay for their own education, which would lead to those universities being unable to sustain themselves without any government support. PD activists drew connections between this stratification and neoliberal educational practices, such as the marketization of universities and increased privatization of education (discussed later on in this chapter).

This section has shown that PD and other non-leftist student activist groups united in their criticism of state practices around education for several years before the mobilizations began on Maidan. Returning to Katia’s comments from early in this chapter, she pointed out that Mustafa Nayem did not really understand what it would mean to mobilize students. Based on her experiences in these campaigns, she knew that students had amassed power before and had wielded it successfully. Furthermore, Heorhiy and other activists suggested that mobilizing student bodies through making personal problems into political issues was a problem, but Yanukovych’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement showed otherwise—many students, as Katia described, knew what was at stake and therefore came to Maidan. In the next section, I further examine these issues—mobilizing students and bringing different ideologies together into effective coalitions—as they played out on Maidan, and I consider their relationship to criticism of both the state and Europe.

Students Turn to Maidan

The students who participated most actively on Maidan are part of the first generation in Ukraine to be educated under a fully Ukrainian system (reformed in 1992 following Ukraine’s independence). Catherine Wanner has suggested that part of this reform aimed to develop students’ “individuality,” along with “nationality” and “morality” (1998:82; see also Fournier 2012:39).
Student-specific actions began on Maidan in the first weeks of the protest, when students organized city-wide strikes across Kyiv in November and December 2013. Following threats against striking students—one university administration met in early December to decide whether to punish students who had been on Maidan—violent police crackdowns on protesters led those same administrations to support student protesters while undermining university-based strikes. In January 2014, students gained access to the occupied Ukrainian House, where they set up the Student Assembly, a consensus-based body that used small working groups to achieve goals ranging from providing arrested students with legal counsel, creating media liaisons, and organizing workshops, lectures, and film screenings for the occupants of the Ukrainian House (discussed in Chapter 6). Following the deaths of 100 people at the end of February, students successfully and non-violently occupied the Ministry of Education in Kyiv for one week, after which a new Minister of Education was selected, new legislation for higher education was drafted, and a system of open accounting was adopted in the Ministry.

Leftists played a central role in organizing and promoting student strikes as well as the occupation of the Ministry of Education, an idea which had been circulated among leftists since the first week in December. Leftists realized that bringing education into the broader picture of Maidan was a way to make student activism more effective in the long term, and they also knew that education was one way to engage with the nationalist groups that began to dominate the protests, because those nationalists (as citizens) were also concerned about education. They saw a focus on improved higher education—reforms that would be supported by most other protesters—as a way to participate in the central threads of Maidan, rather than on the margins.
The Emergence of Police Violence

Students were the first victims of police violence on Maidan. During the night of November 30, students who were sleeping on the square were beaten and arrested by the Berkut, the government’s militarized riot police. That day, riot police and contracted security workers in their long, black coats and rounded helmets—an outfit that earned them the nickname kosmonauty, or “spacemen”—stood behind metal barriers protecting the small wooden houses that would make up the market as well as the metal structure of the giant New Year's Tree, or ialynka. For hours, protesters came to Maidan to berate the police protecting the promised festivities for supporting the Yanukovych government and for beating the students. The metal barriers had been plastered with pro-Europe signs, such as “Students for the EU” or “[insert town name here; e.g. Rivne, Buchach] is Europe!” Protesters had inserted carnations into the barriers, just below eye level of the helmeted officers behind the metal wall (see Photo 4.3.). From this day on, these Berkut officers became the symbol of the Yanukovych regime on the ground on Maidan, and they were demonized by protesters throughout the winter.

The atmosphere on Maidan this day was tense. For the first time, protesters realized that the Yanukovych regime—a group that was previously largely the target of mockery rather than perceived as intensely threatening—would not hesitate to use force against its own citizens. Not only that, but these citizens were students: a privileged group of young people were doing what many, especially in Kyiv, saw as the right thing to stand up against Yanukovych's refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement. Observers on Maidan that day felt that it was outrageous that students—educated, political citizens who, to reiterate Katia’s description, had actually experienced Europe and knew what was lost in Yanukovych’s refusal—had been the targets of this attack. In other words, the students on Maidan were playing a positive role as active, political
citizens by protesting against the government, so the Berkut attack challenged participants' very notion of who and what “political” meant. Many analysts have speculated that if the initial attack on the students had never happened, the protests would have ended before Christmas. Instead, the attacks motivated more protesters than ever before to fight for stakes far beyond association with the European Union.

Katia described to me that, before the 30th, most students on Maidan were unorganized groups of individuals. Even leftist activists recognized in later discussions that they did not form an organized group with a recognized opinion or statement about Maidan before the 30th (and many claim that the left remained a disparate group of participants until the January 16 laws were passed [see Chapters 2 & 3, as well as later in this chapter, for details]). Students had attempted to organize a general strike on November 27, marching from their various universities to Maidan, but too many students were skeptical about the effectiveness of such an action, as well as being concerned about potential ramifications of participation, to give the strike much momentum. However, the Berkut attack on students provided a catalyst for leftists to begin talking about police violence and anti-state activism. These ideas were adopted throughout the protests, including among student activists.

Leftists and some other student activists began to focus their energies on more radical tactics, particularly in targeting the Ministry of Education and universities to criticize their complicity with the regime. Inspired by the widespread support on Maidan for the occupation of various government buildings around the city, leftist students decided that an occupation (okupatsiia or zakhoplennia) of a university building was the essential next step to show that students were serious about holding the government accountable for problems in higher education. The organization of several unsuccessful occupations highlights the problems leftist activists faced
when attempting to work with other student organizations. Important to note is that the most active organizers considered themselves members of Priama Diia but had recently graduated and were no longer technically students in Ukrainian universities. A few others were master’s-level students, and a few were about to finish their bachelor’s degrees. Furthermore, because PD had not taken a unified stance on Maidan from the beginning, it was unclear to participants whether student activists were working as PD or as independently interested parties. Maidan caused (or at least confirmed) several significant splits among leftist and radical groups, as questions about fascism, unionizing, and Europe versus Russia forced many to show true, and somewhat ugly, colors (recall the discussion of the split with Borot’ba in Chapter 3). PD members wanted to be cautious about how their organization represented itself, if at all, on Maidan, particularly while trying to draw in student support and protect activists from attacks.

“Today You Sit in Class, Tomorrow an Innocent Sits in Jail”

On January 16, 2014, President Yanukovych signed the “Dictatorship Laws,” adopted by the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament).11 For many, including many members of Priama Diia, these laws were the last straw. Many who had been skeptical of the mobilizations and tent camp participants began to come to demonstrations and protests following the adoption of these laws on “Black Thursday.” Students called for another strike:

After the adoption of the Dictatorship Laws, it became clear that in these conditions, the university cannot remain a bastion of freedom and free thought. On the 20th of January students of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy were called to strike against the anti-constitutional changes in the state.

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11 I use the charged moniker “Dictatorship Laws” here because students referred to them this way. Officially the Kolesnichenko-Oliynyk laws, I discuss them in more detail in Chapter 2.
In the minds of activists, in the current conditions only a full strike is an effective, nonviolent form of protest action. Further, thanks to the suspension of studies, we will be able to attract students in solidarity from other universities to decisive action. Finally, this is just the first step in preparation for a general Ukrainian strike.12

Students circulated a flyer around the campus, a Ukrainian “Strike FAQ” that claimed a strike was necessary because of the “adoption of absolutely illegitimate and anticonstitutional laws which cultivate a police state.” These laws had also provoked violent clashes between protesters on Hrushevs’koho Street and a line of Berkut protecting the Verkhovna Rada at the top of the hilly street (the circumstances of which are discussed in detail in Chapter 2). Snipers shot and killed two protesters on Hrushevs’koho Street, Serhiy Nihoyan and Mikhail Zhizdnevs’kyi, the first two people to die in the protests. The Strike FAQ evoked this, asking students to “look at what happened yesterday and today on Hrushevs’koho. If we don’t do anything now,” we will be lost to this police regime. The Strike FAQ distanced the current strike from previous ones, however, referring to the first strike in November as “only an imitation of a strike” because “students did not stop studying and only went to protests and marches after class. A real strike (spravzhnii straik) is a full suspension of the educational process. During the strike, all participants should spend all their time on resistance… Don’t be a strike-breaker, set an example.” They referenced past examples of student strikes during the Revolution on Granite of 2000 and the Orange Revolution of 2004 that were successful for the broader movements. To allay students’ fears of strikes being illegal, the flyer described that students have a de facto right to protest, which they used in these

12 Students, along with other leftist groups, were attempting to call for a nation-wide general strike. However, three days after the adoption of the Dictatorship Laws, three people were killed on Maidan and protesters focused their attention on the violence rather than on calls for strike. Before the violence, it had seemed feasible that a strike might occur, as it was being strongly promoted around Maidan.
historical examples, and, anyway, “Now, any peaceful protest is officially against the law” (according to the January 16 laws).

A further concern had prompted KMA students to call for a strike. As the protest camp on Maidan began to become more entrenched and violence seemed inevitable, self-defense brigades that had formed on Maidan expanded to other areas of the city. One of those areas was Podil and the student-heavy Kontraktova Ploshcha, where multiple KMA buildings stand. Also present in the area were "titushki," or government-hired thugs who appeared on Maidan as "provokatory" or who came to harass students at Kontraktova Ploshcha. In the morning of the 20th of January, some unknown men detained seven students from the Karpenko-Kary National University of Theatre, Cinema, and Television around Kontraktova Ploshcha. Students noticed unfamiliar cars and jeeps that carried police or other militarized persons. The strike call warned students to be careful in the area but also called them to action, asking them to come to the main police station to support the students.

For strike organizers, all of a sudden, it appeared that being a student was a crime, because these students were assumed to have been on Maidan. According to the authorities, “an examination showed that there were traces of substances for Molotov cocktails on their bodies,” which, under the January 16 laws, made them subject to arrest. The seven students were taken to a jail outside the city center and threatened with up to 15 years of imprisonment. According to the Dictatorship Laws, wearing helmets or uniforms while participating in a gathering could result in arrest, as could “distribution of extremist materials” and “mass disruption” (see Appendix 1). Many students had been doing what could fall under these new laws for months, and the detention of the Karpenko-Kary students was a terrifying reminder of that reality.
I arrived at the main building of KMA around ten in the morning on January 20. About 30 people were amassed in front of the building when I arrived, which swelled to around 50 before we entered the building. We listened to several speakers with megaphones discussing the importance of the strike in light of the new laws, linking these laws to education and academic freedom in Ukraine. They reiterated the claim that “in a police state, the university cannot remain a bastion of freedom and free thought” and stated that “in a police state, everything is outside the law. In it, we can’t study and work normally!” The goals of the strike were the repeal of the anti-constitutional laws, dismissal of the Berkut, university autonomy, a ban on defense groups from entering university territory, a guarantee that (university) teachers would be paid their wages for all of 2014 (changing the current guarantee for only nine months of wages), a termination of cuts and decreased work load for students, and a guarantee for the right of (university) teachers to strike. “Our goal,” they said, “is to melt down the dictatorial system and create a new society!” Whether these rallying cries were being heard outside of the initial group is questionable. The crowd was noticed by passersby and students attempting to enter the university, but only a few protesters actually used the megaphones, while others stood quietly with signs or stood slightly aside from the main crowd, seeming unsure about whether to join the chants of “Freedom! Equality! Student solidarity!” (Svoboda! Rivnist’! Students’ka solidarnist’!)

At this point, students were still coming to classes, although KMA Rector Serhiy Kvit had suspended studies and had imposed a “distance education” program on the university. Striking students were encouraging the last remaining students who were in classes—and their professors, whose interests students were also hoping to represent—to walk out of their classes and support the strike. Strike organizers, many of whom were recent graduates and a few of whom were KMA
professors, tried to draw in students, teachers, and workers in a more general strike, which would be more effective and could possibly grow into a general, nation-wide strike. Leftist organizers mobilized rhetoric about the police state, linking it to effects on education, to draw people into the strike. By the time I left the main building in the afternoon, over 100 people had gathered in the “strike hall,” a large staircase leading into the building which most students would have to pass or go through in order to attend class (Photo 4.4).

Many students in the staircase created and hung new posters, highlighting the harsh language of the Dictatorship Laws, with slogans like “Free thought—it isn’t extremism” (vil’nodumstvo—tse ne ekstremizm) and “Today You Sit in Class, Tomorrow an Innocent Sits in Jail.” At the suggestion of Inna Sovsun, a KMA professor who was one of the main strike supporters, many students traveled to different departments in the university in order to spread the word to students and faculty about the strike and its goals. Finally, a group managed to set up a computer with a live stream of the standoff between protesters and Berkut on Hrushevs’koho Street, where the first protesters had been killed the day before.

Student organizers, many of whom were also leftist activists, worked hard to link language about police violence and police state with universities and free thought. Particularly, KMA has been known to stand independently from the Ukrainian government and Ministry of Education, taking a stand against Dmytro Tabachnyk, the Minister of Education at the time, and his attempts to pass laws that would seriously hinder the Ukrainian education system (discussed earlier in the chapter). In many ways, KMA has been seen as a beacon of free thought within Ukrainian higher education so KMA students and professors were already versed in linking state and education  

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13 This assessment is not always accurate. In 2012, the Visual Cultural Research Center, a leftist artistic and research group housed at KMA, curated an exhibit called “Ukrainian Body” (Ukrains’ke tilo) which was shut down by Kvit, who called it “shit” and claimed it was pornographic (Art Leaks, 2012). Following this conflict,
politics, as they understood the impacts of government policies on education and students. In so doing, they were attempting to confirm the position of students as a unified political voice taking a stand against repressive government policies. By showing the ways higher education would be affected by the Dictatorship Laws, students would have to stand against the laws and the government, no matter their ideological stances. While many students who participated in this strike did not necessarily agree on what tactics would be most effective, they did find unity in their condemnation of the January 16 laws.

Strike organizers even hoped to get Kvit to support the strike: “To strike or not to strike can only be the decision of students… [But] when Serhiy Myronovych sees that the strike is a real power, we believe that he will join our call and begin to organize a teachers’ strike.” This attitude toward the administration was somewhat different than during the December strike, when students approached administrative support with skepticism because the same administration was deciding whether or not to punish student protesters. In the context of late January, it was clear that all student protest—and all anti-government action on behalf of university administration—would be considered illegal. Therefore, having the support of Kvit as well as of professors at KMA would have a massive impact in gaining student support as well as on providing new fuel to the protests on Maidan. A group of strikers was organized to speak with the university administration, where they were told that Kvit would not stand in the way of striking students or punish them, but that he would not encourage other students to strike as well.

However, Kvit did not exactly stay out of the strikers’ way. By the evening of January 22, he had closed the university entirely and had banned two important organizers, both recent graduates of the university, from the campus. The rector claimed this was in response to the current Kvit forced the VCRC to move to a different space. Many activists considered the actions to be a form of censorship.
political situation, but this decision was also connected to the impact the occupation of the main building was having on the university and Kvit’s perceived ability to control the student body.

Several student activists told me that the January 16 laws were the first instance since Maidan began in which all leftists could come together and support the protests, because these laws had crossed the line—they confirmed that the state’s representatives were only trying to gain further power. While at this point, the protest body on Maidan had become much more diverse in terms of age and occupation, students were still the targets of repressions based on these laws, and students wanted their universities to help preserve their right to protest. It is important to remember that even Kyiv Mohyla Academy, one of the most independent universities in Ukraine, was still beholden to the Ministry of Education, so its rector’s response to the student occupation was still inflected by the state. In other words, the university itself became a site of contention between the state and citizens, and the university administrations—as obligated to both—were caught in a challenging decision.

The response to the Dictatorship Laws and the first deaths on Maidan show several significant shifts in terms of student activism. First, the laws brought students of various political ideologies together successfully for the first time; the legislation made it clear that any political participation—by students or otherwise—was a punishable offense. This was a threat to students with any political affiliation, as well as those who were not part of organizations. It led students to mobilize together much more effectively than they had been able to previously. Second, the strike organizers adopted the leftist language of a “police regime” that provided non-leftist students with a way to criticize the state’s practices. Even without marking the strike as a leftist tactic, students were drawn to leftists’ experiences and discourses in organizing, reinforcing the students’ ability and desire to coalesce into a stronger protest body.
The occupation of Kyiv Mohyla Academy ended on January 22, 2014, because Kvit insisted on fully closing the university, but the students did not want to lose their momentum. For three days, they worried about where to go, engaging with the uncertainties that had been prevalent throughout the protests. They contacted a supportive publishing house, but they were unable to obtain a permanent space there. One activist wrote to a Maidan coordinator with the problem, and the coordinator suggested the students contact the leaders of the newly occupied Ukrainian House at the bottom of Hrushevs’koho Street on the aptly named European Square. On January 27, students moved into the Ukrainian House, and the Student Assembly began (I consider the role of the Student Assembly in Chapter 6). However, following the violence that took place in February, students returned their focus to educational politics. They began by adopting Maidan’s most successful non-violent tactic, that of occupation, and took over the Ministry of Education. From there, they condemned the Yanukovych administration and ushered in a new era of student influence on education policy.

“We’ll Just Wait for Him Inside”: How students (peacefully) took over the Ministry

The occupation of the Ministry of Education was the culmination of the widespread tactic of occupation used on Maidan that mobilized students to action (Photo 4.5). As I had initially intended to study student activism and had therefore attended many education-based meetings and events with leftists, activists made sure that I was aware of this particular event nearly as soon as it had happened. On Sunday, February 23, a leftist activist called me to tell me that students had occupied the Ministry. “I think you’re going to want to write about this,” he said. I attended several general assemblies in the Ministry as well as invited lectures and organizing meetings, and I observed the final day of occupation, during which the Ministry was re-opened to workers. One
activist contacted me specifically to make sure I would bring my camera in case we could capture the moment Serhiy Kvit took over the Ministry (unfortunately, he arrived without much notice and I did not get to take photos). I also gathered social media posts and messages from various activists about the occupation, some of which I include below.

*How the Ministry was Won*

On February 21, students mobilized in response to the deaths of protesters on Maidan. They organized an action at the Ministry to request a meeting with Minister of Education Dmytro Tabachnyk to demand he condemn the violence of this regime. Several leftist activists, including Sasha and Zhenia, called the demand stupid (because they did not think the Minister would meet with students, no matter what), and they were skeptical of its effectiveness, but they came to the action anyway just to see what would happen. Several columns of students came down Prospekt Peremohy (Victory Avenue, a large main street in the northwestern part of the city), from Kyiv Polytechnic University on one side and from Taras Shevchenko National University on the other. The students asked for Tabachnyk or his deputy Sulyma to come and speak with them, but an administrative staff member came out to tell the students that neither Minister was at work (even at two o’clock in the afternoon on a Friday). The students then asked the administrator to call the Ministers, but the administrator didn’t have either man’s phone number, so the students informed him that they would wait inside the building until a Minister could be contacted. The administrator had no choice and, of course, many of Yanukovych’s closest cabinet members—including the Ministers of Education as well as the Berkut and other security forces that would have protected government buildings—had fled with him, and neither Tabachnyk nor Sulyma ever reappeared.

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14 Having asked multiple participants to relive this moment for me in interviews, I reconstruct here a composite version of events from multiple perspectives, as well as from my own observations inside the occupied Ministry.
From there, students established medical points and gathered food and other supplies in order to remain in the Ministry as long as they deemed necessary.

According to leftist organizers, occupying the Ministry was never in students’ concrete plans. When I interviewed Sasha about student activism on Maidan, she told me, “The occupation was a secret plan from mid-January…but the idea was to occupy a university building, like either the Pedagogical University…or the Red Building… The idea to occupy the Ministry was like a dream.” Heorhiy, another leftist student activist, credited Vasyl, a longtime leftist activist, with the idea of the occupation: “He really wanted to occupy something… and I told him the only building worth occupying is the Ministry of Education. I didn’t think it was a good idea, we were not ready for that and we would just be thrown out of that place, but when they did that it was a time when nobody was guarding anything anymore so they just walked in and nothing happened to them.” Students took over the Ministry building to reclaim it from the state and for the people it was supposed to represent. The fact that no state representatives were there any longer simply confirmed that they had never had people’s best interests in mind in their policies and practices, and as such, the students gained support from the greater Maidan protests.

Sasha described that the Student Assembly of the preceding weeks had already amassed enough resources—material as well as media contacts and support from Maidan groups—that the occupation of the Ministry was automatically seen as legitimate in the broader picture of Maidan and the ensuing political turnover. The student occupiers organized a self-defense brigade to protect students from outside attacks (either from the fallen government’s own forces or from military wings of radical right-wing parties, which threatened the students multiple times). Sasha claimed the brigade had up to 40 people at a given time, led by Vasyl; the group was made up of
anarchist football hooligans for Kyiv’s Arsenal team, leftist activists, and students who had come to support the occupation.

Students protected the front gates from provocateurs or unfriendly armed groups. Each time I entered the Ministry, they asked for my student card, so I showed them my temporary residency permit and explained that I was a researcher and American. While they were mildly surprised—as no other foreigners had been present at the Ministry—they easily accepted my interest in their occupation. I was shocked by the mountain of food in the students’ kitchen, a feature which did not go unnoticed. As Zhenia told me, “Someone called Maidan and said the students occupied the Ministry and they are hungry,” laughing. “If you are a student and you want to eat, just go to the Ministry! You can eat really well there.” The students gathered in a large assembly hall for most of their meetings, including small working-group and self-defense organizing meetings as well as the larger general assemblies, held every evening.

General assemblies were organized around consensus methods, suggested by leftist activists beginning during the Student Assembly. Many leftists worked as moderators during these assemblies to keep people from talking for too long or about irrelevant issues, and once preventing a fight between members of the self-defense brigade. According to Sasha,

this training [from Student Assembly] to make these gatherings short and productive proved to be useful when we moved to the Ministry of Education. There we had to demand something, we couldn’t just come and go, we had to form some groups, deal with the security of the building, defense of the building because there were some attacks and we were informed there would be some attacks. So we had different things to do there in the Ministry and we already had a couple [of people] who learned how to manage a big assembly and it was very useful.
However, these general assemblies did not go as swiftly as they had in Student Assembly once students around Kyiv understood that a new government was in formation and that students might in fact have a say in what happened. Leftists who had successfully organized the non-hierarchical Student Assembly wanted to keep the structure of the occupation the same, but many other students felt having a “representative committee” was necessary to liaise with government officials. Here, Sasha described an ideological divide between leftists and liberals, the latter of whom represented official university student unions (which were funded by fees paid by students but which worked as a mouthpiece for university administrations, as described earlier) and who were very interested in how the Ministry would function after students left. Because these liberal students knew that many of the leftists would be critical of any government, and because of historic antagonism against leftist students, no leftist student was elected to the representative committee. Furthermore, several of the most outspoken leftists, including both Vasyl and Sasha, identified as anarchists. In so doing, they marginalized themselves even more in the eyes of “liberal” activists, but they also openly presented themselves as critical of any government formation, even one in which students have a strong influence.

These ideological divisions presented a challenge in terms of building a student coalition, precisely because students of different political affiliations had differing ideas about how to criticize the state. Leftists, including anarchists, based their criticisms on an understanding of an entrenched police regime, and they felt that changing to a new Minister of Education, or even electing a new president, was not going to make an impact on Ukraine’s broader problems. Those whom Sasha characterized as “liberals,” on the other hand, believed that changing the people who made up the “state” could make state bodies become more representative. They felt that influencing who became the next Minister would help institutionalize student participation in the
governance of education. While these two camps were not necessarily the only political voices represented at the Ministry, their ideas often came to a head, leading leftists to compromise on their anti-government stances in order to ensure the ability of the student coalition to function.

**Vetting the Candidates**

There was excessive speculation during the last week of February 2014 about who would make up the provisional government’s new cabinet. While theoretically, Ministers named by interim president Turchynov would not necessarily stay in their posts following the elections promised in May, it seemed quite likely that if students helped select a suitable candidate, such a person might remain in the position for the long term. Over the course of the week in the Ministry, they deliberated over a list of possible candidates and selected three acceptable people: Serhiy Kvit, Lilia Hrynevych, and Mykhailo Zgurovs’ky. Leftists preferred Zgurovs’ky, who had proposed a reform law for higher education that was generally supported by student activists. However, Zgurovs’ky decided not to accept the students’ nomination for Minister, leaving them to choose between Kvit and Hrynevych.

Student influence on the next Minister was an important step in confirming students’ influence on state policy through education. Where once the Minister of Education was a target for criticism because of his failed national policy, now the Minister would have to be seen as a representative of students, because the students had chosen the Minister themselves (at least in part). Further, university administrations could no longer be seen as extensions of state practices that worked to students’ detriment; instead, they would be seen as intermediaries equally between

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15 A member of Parliament, Hrynevych chaired the Parliamentary Committee for Science and Education.
16 Zgurovs’ky was at the time the rector of Kyiv Polytechnic University and had previously been Minister of Education from 1994-1999, under President Leonid Kuchma.
the Ministry and students (this was further codified in the Road Map and ensuing legislation, which included new rules on how these Academic Councils [Vcheni radi] could be formed, described below). A particular group of student volunteers worked as liaisons between these new candidates and the general assembly at the Ministry—part of what Sasha had described as the “liberal” camp of students—while leftist students focused on organizational tactics, legislation, and the defense brigade.

Both Kvit and Hrynevych came to meet with students at the Ministry, and both were accepted as possible candidates that would be supported by students. By this time, it was clear that Kvit was Turchynov’s top choice as well, and the former rector of KMA was offered the position.\(^{17}\) As I have mentioned before, leftist activists are no great fans of Serhiy Kvit, as he worked against them at KMA. In Zhenia’s explanation,

> Leftist activists just hate Kvit. The leftist activists from KMA know who this guy is, know that the university got worse because he’s authoritarian, nationalist. But for the majority of students, Kvit was more than just the accepted candidate, because he’s from KMA and he’s a national intellectual. [For other students] the fact that he’s a nationalist isn’t anything against Kvit, it’s just a bad thing for the leftists.

And indeed, his nomination was greeted enthusiastically by Ministry occupants, and in the end, leftists did not protest his assuming the position of Minister.\(^{18}\) Kvit came to the Ministry on Friday, February 28, to meet with students after being named Minister, and according to both Sasha and

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\(^{17}\) Hrynevych was re-elected to Parliament and remained the chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Science and Education, and she was a great supporter of efforts to pass higher education reform legislation.

\(^{18}\) Interestingly, Katia, who is highly engaged in higher education reform from a liberal democratic (not leftist) background, was also critical of Kvit because of his experience at US and Canadian universities. She found this experience detrimental because it precluded any experience with European universities. For her, Ukrainian universities should be striving for a European system, and how can the Minister contribute to that if his only international experience is with North America?
Zhenia, he made many promises to student occupiers to support their demands for higher education reform.

Kvit presented himself as an antidote to a state that did not represent Ukrainians—a point he had made before in his political stances as rector of KMA. Kvit’s support for and participation in Maidan further made him appear as a more authentic candidate, one who would have Ukraine’s European interests in mind. Crucially, though, as many activists told me, Kvit would not have the ability to lustrate the entire Ministry of Education, and indeed, the majority of people who worked at the Ministry under Yanukovych kept their jobs following Kvit’s installation. This continuity was part of leftists’ general criticism of “liberal” students’ focus on government institutions and establishing a representative face for state bodies.

Road Map for Higher Education Reform

One major area where leftist activists focused their energy following the election of the representative committee was the working group that created a list of demands for the future Minister to accept, known as the Road Map for Higher Education Reform (Dorozhnia karta reformuvannia vyshchoi osvity). Heorhiy, one of my close colleagues and a leftist activist, headed this working group. He told me that initially, the non-leftist students only wanted to secure the passage of Zgurovs’ky’s higher education law, an alternative piece of legislation from the Tabachnyk-era reform attempts, but, “even though the law was better than the one that exists and the alternative ones, it’s still not good enough because there are many other problems in universities that could be dealt with. There was a long list of demands but me (sic) and some other Student Assembly people were the only ones who were trying to deal with it.” These demands were wide ranging, including important changes in higher education regulation, such as the
decentralization of the system of higher education to give universities “real academic, financial, and administrative autonomy,” each of which the Road Map described in detail. The Road Map reflected the Zgurovs’ky law’s suggested changes in crediting systems and decrease in work load for students and teachers as well as specifications for fair elections—and the possibility for impeachment—of rectors and other university leaders. Finally, the Road Map provided for students’ rights, ranging from securing the right to transfer majors and the right to dormitory space, preventing universities from “using students as a free work force” via internships outside of their interests, and requiring a student representative on university Academic Councils.

The Road Map was an expansive document, and it was edited by working group members in person and online, as a constantly changing document that was eventually adopted by the group and presented to a general student assembly. When Kvit arrived at the Ministry, he immediately signed a short list of the demands, and later he signed the full Road Map and promised students to try to do something with it, including the public accounting project. Although there could be no guarantees that he would implement anything, Heorhiy recognized that “the fact that they occupied the place had a huge impact on our power to bargain on something with the new Minister.” Zhenia even found the new Minister to be scared of the student occupiers, as he knew that he would have to adopt their demands in order for them to leave peaceably. And, considering the violence that preceded Tabachnyk’s departure, Kvit had to work carefully to ensure that the occupiers would leave without it seeming that they had been forced out.

Departure: The System is Flipped

On Saturday, March 1, the students “liberated” the Ministry. They spent the preceding day opening offices one by one, followed by a livestream. When they occupied the building, students and workers had taped and sealed every office in the building; for students, this proved that they
had not broken into offices to steal or manipulate documents, and for workers, they knew students would be held accountable for any damage. When the students decided to leave, they spent Friday opening each office in turn as bureaucrats waited outside or inspected their offices for any problems. Volodia, running the livestream, said he was enjoying the spectacle: usually when students come to the Ministry to meet with workers there and maneuver the bureaucracy, students were the ones being told to wait outside, and for once, he was on the other end, getting to tell the bureaucrats to wait for students.

After the dust settled from the Ministry occupation, real questions about implementation and long-term change arose. Serhiy Kvit named Inna Sovsun as his Deputy Minister; Sovsun was a known leftist activist and had been researching higher education reform for many years. Sasha saw that the Ministry became more approachable, and that it would be easier to communicate with the Ministry because of the activist experience of people like Sovsun. Zhenia described her as a “great administrator” and believed that she could make concrete change happen because she has been working in problems of higher education for so long and really supported reform. Further, she was named to the post because she wanted to change something: “She is really working to change the Ukrainian education system for the better.” Since assuming her post, Sovsun has posted weekly updates on the workings of the Ministry on Facebook, where she has even engaged with commenters on issues she has written about. This is a remarkable shift from all previous Ministry administrations, and one that is highly appreciated by leftists.

However, some were less convinced. A student I spoke with following the end of the occupation felt that, despite the seeming successes of students at the Ministry, the fundamental problems in the Ukrainian government have not changed. He used Sovsun as an example: “She is left wing, but still she doesn’t change that the government is neoliberal.” This reflected the
problems for leftist activism more broadly, because, even if leftists were active in student protests, most students weren’t leftists, and most students’ behavior toward leftists during the occupation showed that their attitudes toward leftists had not changed. In response to my question if students had become more active following the occupation, Zhenia’s said, “The main question wasn’t about educational reform but the new candidate for Minister. A bad Minister became a good Minister, and everything will be okay.” Students’ perception, particularly the liberal, non-anarchist students, was that a new Minister was all that was needed to enact change in higher education.

As I have argued in this chapter, the Ukrainian educational system has been an acceptable target for protest before and during Maidan because it was perceived as a representative of an ineffective and eventually violent state. Leftist activists have successfully used this perception to enact campaigns about higher education before Maidan, and they were again successful in this task during Maidan. However, despite the prominent role of leftists and the wide usage of anti-state language among other student protesters, the majority of students did not remain anti-state once they felt that the head of the Ministry would represent them. While many leftists understood that their marginalization in Ukrainian political society led to their having a limited impact among students, others felt that the occupation could have even more deeply convinced the student body that they could make change. However, following the broader Maidan protest, students ended their mass mobilization once a new government formed.

Because of the mass student support for the new Minister of Education, leftist students found a challenge in targeting him and his administration in their criticisms (in part because many of them hoped Inna Sovsun would help implement substantial changes). Following the end of the occupation, leftists and other student activists focused on the passage of higher education legislation, which I describe in the next section. Discussions about this legislation have allowed
leftist criticisms to move beyond the state and onto the problems of Europeanization and its effects on higher education.

**Law 1187-2 and the Future of Ukrainian Higher Education**

Throughout the spring, student activists, educators, and legislators alike focused their attention on the Zgurovsky laws, now known by the more official-sounding “Law 1187-2 on Higher Education Reform.” I discussed this law particularly with Heorhiy, who had helped promote it through various channels, and attended presentations about the law that focused on increasing student interest and support for its adoption. Lilia Hrynevych, in her position as chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Science, supported the adoption of the law, inasmuch as it intended to bring the Ukrainian education system into a “European path of development, increase the quality of education, and make Ukrainian graduates more competitive in the job market” (Vyshcha osvita 2014). After concerns that certain parties would not support the law during its parliamentary reading, the law was passed in Parliament on July 1, 2014. President Poroshenko signed it into law on July 31, although his delay in signing it nearly caused the law to be revoked.

The passage of this law was the goal of many student occupiers, and many leftists were relatively pleased with its adoption, as well. But the long-term effects of the law call into question some of the major, large-scale questions that activists had grappled with on Maidan from its inception. In particular, this law reflects a change in Ukraine’s relationship with Europe, as its emphasis is on further integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and a higher education system compatible with other European systems. As Katia described students as most aware of the concrete differences between Ukraine and the EU in the beginning of this chapter,
this education law highlights some of the most significant complications in Ukraine’s ongoing integration with EU administrations and bureaucracies. Questions of power—who can access it, and who is denied access—are built into this law, and only the legislation’s perfect implementation can change the imbalance of power that currently exists between Ukrainian students and educational governing bodies. Further, the law fundamentally changes the financing possibilities for universities in favor of a market model. Finally, the law provokes a discussion of the notion of “autonomy” as it is mobilized in discourses around higher education legislation as well as how it might look in practice.

The Intertwined Problems of Degree Equivalence and State Funds

A common problem facing former socialist education systems is that of degree equivalence as old systems become integrated into the EHEA.19 KMA professor Mychailo Wynnyckyj highlights the problem of the “three cycle system of higher education” including bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programs (2014). Wynnyckyj describes the superficial implementation of the three cycle system over the 2000s, in which Ukrainian university credits were worth less than their European counterparts, meaning that Ukrainian students were in school 20-30% more than EU students in order to get the same amount of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System). Only following the passage of Law 1187-2 are Ukrainian classroom hours actually considered equivalent to others within the EHEA, thus decreasing student as well as professorial course load.

This does not attend to the students who have already partially completed their degrees or have completed other, non-EHEA versions of degrees, however. This is particularly problematic in terms of the EHEA’s PhD programs, which, as Wynnyckyj describes, require 30-60 ECTS as

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19 The Ukrainian government began integrating into the European Higher Education Area in 2005.
well as successful thesis defense. Currently, in Ukraine, students may continue on to a *kandydat nauk* program (Candidate of Sciences) following a master’s program, after which they can become professors in higher educational institutions. This degree is now being integrated into the EHEA as a PhD program, but with new requirements for Candidates in order to complete their degree so as to make it look more like a European PhD. According to Wynnyckyj, this process can only be done gradually, with current *kandydat nauk* programs running in parallel with new PhD programs, the latter being developed by institutions “seeking to demonstrate their western orientation” (2014).

While Wynnyckyj does not come down harshly on this parallel system, such a practice does not have positive precedents if we examine other examples. Jana Bacevic (2010) describes student mobilizations in response to a similar process in Serbia, in which students who had received a Serbian *magistar* degree asked that their degrees be given the equivalence of a EHEA master’s degree. Linking changing degree programs to changing funding patterns, including a decrease in state funding for university places that Ukraine is also facing, Serbian students argued that legislators’ hesitation to grant EU-equivalent master’s degrees was based on an attempt to draw in more paying students who would now need a new, EU-accepted master’s degree in order to be competitive in European markets. Students’ success in demanding equivalent degrees allowed them to challenge processes of marketization facing the Serbian education system (2010:54).

Ukrainian students face a similar problem in their funding situation. Heorhiy described Kvit’s vision for universities, which is confirmed as a EHEA- and market-influenced perspective by Wynnyckyj. Heorhiy told me that Kvit’s interest in improving higher education focuses on reserving the best students for the best universities based on their exam performance, which will
also determine who gets state funding. In other words, while each university currently has a certain number of state-funded places for students, in Kvit’s ideal system, only the best students would receive funding, and these students could choose where to take their funding, leaving other universities without any state funding at all, possibly forcing them to close. Wynnyckyj describes that, eventually, according to Law 1187-2, “all state-funded places will be allocated to universities based on the choices made by top students throughout the country as determined by entrance exam results…a university’s reputation—its ability to attract top students from throughout the country—will determine the amount of state funding it receives” (2014). In other words, each university will have to produce top students in order to attract top students, which in this case means students who have the potential to be competitive in European job markets. This likely means a decrease in “unmarketable” specialties like humanities with a concurrent increase in interest in business, marketing, and technology fields (see Stadny 2015).

Wynnyckyj recognizes that universities like KMA, Taras Shevchenko National University, and Kyiv Polytechnic University have established these reputations through their long, historical presence within Ukrainian education, but many smaller, particularly regional universities have not and will not be able to do so (2014). This will solidify the already robust practice of moving to major cities, including Kyiv and L’viv, and perhaps Kharkiv and Odesa, in order to obtain a top education. Regional universities will not be able to grow their reputations, leaving students uninterested in them, and resulting in their receiving no state funding and ultimately being forced to close, as local students will be unlikely to be able to finance their own education. This process will further deteriorate into poor, rural students being unable to obtain higher education at all, considering their overall limited financial and spatial mobility. Those who are already able to pay for university places will still be able to pay for these places, securing an economic elite centered
in major cities, which are already economic centers. Thus, with this process, the “Europeanization” of Ukraine’s student body will be limited to those with access to major cities and the university places they offer. Europe, in this scenario, means an even greater stratification between Ukraine’s rich and poor, made possible through reforms in higher education, creating a spatialized expansion of Bourdieu’s conclusions about the distinctions that higher education systems create (Bourdieu 1969; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

**Autonomy: What Kind, and For Whom?**

As I discussed earlier, the notion of autonomy for universities began to appear prominently as part of student concerns during the final strike at KMA. It was also a main demand in the Road Map, which asked for academic, financial, and administrative autonomy for universities. The Road Map framed “autonomy” as the “maximum decentralization of the system of higher education,” according universities the rights to decide how and to whom to grant degrees (academic autonomy); what to fund within universities, particularly in terms of academic research (financial autonomy); and allowing universities to adopt decisions outside of the influence of government “in favor of democratic self-governance of the university community” (administrative autonomy). Furthermore, Law 1187-2 allows universities to establish endowments and decreases tax obligations, which will provide new sources of income for higher education institutions other than the state budget (Stadny 2014).

Education researcher Yegor Stadny supports the notion of “smart” autonomy, describing how academic and financial autonomy will benefit universities: “[The law] creates a non-governmental agency for quality assurance in higher education, which…will enforce minimal requirements for the learning process according to ministry-approved standards… Quality should
be a factor because universities will be required to implement internal monitoring of the quality of education they offer and regularly publish their results” (2014). In other words, universities can create their own curricula and establish their own degree programs, but they must reach standards set forth by the Ministry of Education. In order to ensure these standards, quality assurance monitoring groups (independent from both universities and the Ministry) will provide public reports on universities’ degree programs and whether they uphold Ministry standards. Thus, universities have academic autonomy that is held to a Ministry standard, and those standards are defined for the European Higher Education Area.

Stadny further supports financial autonomy, particularly in allowing universities access to new forms of funds, simply because there are not enough accessible state funds for universities in the old system. In the old system, the Ministry established universities’ budgets, and now, “this function was simply passed to non-governmental bodies and members of the university community” (2014). Financial autonomy further includes the open-access accounting system, in which administrations are required to publish university budgets online, as well as “information on property, data concerning the distribution of wages and other documents” (ibid.). Finally, in terms of administrative autonomy, Stadny describes that rectors will now be elected by university employees and students, and the impeachment of rectors will be made possible by a similar vote. Rectors can only be in their post for up to two terms of five years each, ending, as Stadny writes, “the supremacy of rectors in Ukrainian universities” (ibid.).

For a system in which centralization in the Ministry has been the norm for decades, even following Ukraine’s independence, these are welcome changes. However, in an analysis of European educational standards, Susan Wright and Annika Rabo caution against putting too much faith in idealized versions of concepts like autonomy: “Academics often ‘misrecognize’ these
words, assuming that governments are giving them the same meaning as they do themselves, and not seeing how they are shifting in meaning as they become used to express a new rationality of governance” (2010:5). Considering the mechanisms described earlier that encourage the marketization of European universities, “autonomy” may mean taking decisions out of the hands of the few and placing them in the hands of European economic shifts. New budgets not based entirely on state provision will also be linked to university reputation and production of hirable graduates, so the decisions of autonomous bodies on how a curriculum should be structured or what research will be funded will be contingent on demand. Wright and Rabo further fear that “autonomy” simply encourages fragmentation within the university, as “each teacher or researcher is becoming a lone entrepreneur utilizing the trademark of the university as a badge when applying for funds, bidding for contracts, or attracting new students” (2010:7). As all of these problems face Ukraine’s reformed higher education system, it seems as if faculty, as well as students, are being denied positions of power outside the law’s defined spaces of autonomy, which are largely inaccessible to them.

For many leftist activists, “autonomy” has been a strongly positive word, because they associate university autonomy with freedom from the overbearing influence of the Ministry of Education. However, those who are critical of being forced to work within the confines of existing structures have already begun to express their skepticism of the newly autonomous university system. Calling the reforms “cosmetic renovations,” one writer is still waiting for “revolutionary change in the format and principles in higher education.” He highlights the ways that power has simply shifted from the hands of the Ministry to the hands of university governing bodies—not to students and teachers, who should be making these decisions.20

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20 I have chosen not to cite this article, published on a Ukrainian blog, as the writer is an interviewee whose identity I wish to keep anonymous.
Conclusion: Neoliberalizing Ukraine’s Post-Maidan Universities

This chapter has examined higher education activism in Ukraine and its effectiveness at various scales, including its integration into the fabric of the Maidan protests. The educational system was important during Maidan because it provided an example of the negative ramifications of the current regime, and the promises of better integration into the European Higher Education Area was presented as a clear example of how Europeanization would benefit Ukraine, particularly young Ukrainians. Education-based activism was also effective because students were a large and mobilizable population, particularly after the use of violence and other repressions became the norm.

Leftist activists were integral in all the successful higher education campaigns that I mentioned in this chapter, from the early protests against higher education reform to the ultimate passage of Law 1187-2. Their success comes partly because of their ability and willingness to form coalitions with non-leftists, even with those they distinctly disagreed with about the role of government. Now, leftists, who have been concerned about the “commercialization” of education for several years, are expanding their criticisms of the government to the processes of Europeanization, which, as they see it, will encourage competition for fewer places in universities and an increased focus on perceived lucrative majors and professions, like business, instead of encouraging and supporting student choice. Education continues to be of critical importance for leftist activists, because activists know from experience they can have a real impact on education policy in Ukraine.

Importantly, both of the processes described above—the question of degree equivalence and that of autonomy—reflect issues that leftists have characterized as part of the neoliberalization
of the Ukrainian economic system. The focus on students graduating with degrees that are valuable not only because of their field of study but also because they are globally recognized is a shift to prioritizing education for the market, rather than for the development of knowledge. As Olena Aydarova writes, the introduction of European standards and other Western models “infuse[s] educational systems and institutions with neoliberal ideology, manifested in prioritizing choice, competition, individual responsibility, and market values” (2015:147; see also Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Shear et. al. 2015). Scholars have already begun to examine the ways these neoliberalizing education processes impact universities themselves (Shore 2010) and how they change the notion of educated people and intellectuals (Davies 2005). In the case of Ukraine, the implementation of autonomy, rather than decentralizing the educational system, may be used as a mechanism of governance, if the standards to which universities are held are based on markets, student perception, and university reputations (see Strathern 2000).

These processes are further complicated by the continuation of the war in Eastern Ukraine. The conflict has entrenched the Kyiv-centric educational system, even with growing autonomy to the regions. The Donets’k and Luhans’k People’s Republics have attempted to establish their own educational systems, and Serhiy Kvit has promised to block teachers who supported Eastern “terrorists” from working within the Ukrainian system (Hromadske TV 2014). If such attitudes and practices continue, education will be mobilized to secure divisions rather than to bring people together, as students in the Ministry attempted to do.
On November 24, 2013, I gathered with a group of 15 leftist activists at a bookstore north of Khreshchatyk, Kyiv’s main street leading to Independence Square. It was the first large-scale march organized by opposition parties and their leaders. The leftist column, as they called it, had a variety of signs, including banners about free transportation and education, and a large red-and-gold version of the European Union flag. Two young women, one from southeastern Ukraine and one from the Western city of L’viv, brought signs proclaiming feminism and gender equality. One read, “Feminism is a European value,” and the other asked, “Do you want to go to [to be part of] Europe? (Khochesh v Yevropu?) Say no to sexism and homophobia!” Both signs engaged with the rhetoric of Europe that was apparent in the beginning of the protests: Ukraine was presented as part of Europe and Ukrainians as Europeans, who claimed to have “European” values. But the use of “feminism” on one sign, as well as suggesting that viewers contemplate nondiscrimination, was a quite dangerous step for these two activists to take.¹

Indeed, even in the relatively celebratory context of the mass march, the girl holding the latter sign was attacked by a man who tried to hit her over the head with a metal pipe, thankfully only grazing her cheek but damaging her sign (Photo 5.1). She managed to protect herself from more harm, but without the help from others around her except those with the leftist group. A woman began yelling at us—at this point, three others and I had been separated from the rest of the group—that sexism wasn't real and it was wrong to bring such rhetoric to the protests,

¹ This may be related to an apparently successful advertising campaign on the part of “Ukrainian Choice,” a pro-Yanukovych organization that placed anti-EU signs all over the city center before EuroMaidan began in November. One provocative sign claimed that “The Association Agreement is Same-Sex Marriage.” This was related to anti-discrimination laws that Ukraine would be required to adopt if the Agreement was signed, suggesting that the country would be forced to allow same-sex marriages (which was not the case).
essentially suggesting we were *provokatory* coming to the protests to stir up trouble. We were finally able to reconnect with our column at European Square, where the Opposition leaders were rallying the crowd. Over the course of the first week on Maidan, I saw harassment and direct attacks on people with signs evoking feminism three more times, including one evening when extreme-right *provokatory* assaulted feminist protesters with pepper spray.

Why were gender-based and feminist themes so inflammatory on Maidan? The responses to these protesters require a consideration of the relationship among feminism, national ideology, and Europeanization, as well as an understanding of the way these feminists were related to leftist political organizations. As established in the Introduction, the role of the nation-state within the constantly shifting entity of the European Union has presented challenges for those negotiating Europeanization at the same time that they are attempting to establish a legitimate post-communist nation and state. Feminist activism—long seen as being at odds with national unity, as I describe in this chapter—further complicates this problem, because it challenges non-feminists' ideas of what “Europe” is and how to embody “European values.” In this chapter, I ask how feminism has become mutually exclusive with Ukraine's currently dominant national ideology (as established in Chapter 2), and, relatedly, what kind of nation Ukrainian feminists envision.

In the Introduction, I described how leftists’ political positions are limited by anti-communism on the one hand, which they do not embrace, and a strong pro-Europe position on the other, of which they are critical. Feminist activists provide one instance in which a strongly leftist political group has taken an explicitly pro-Europe position because of its promised benefits for gender equality and LGBT rights. Thus, an exploration of leftist feminism provides an example of the ways in which Europe is a contested political symbol, not only generally in Ukraine but also among radical political activists.
I begin with a discussion of the visions of Europe held by Ukrainian feminists, which focused heavily on gender equality legislation and anti-discrimination policies. I link these visions of Europe with the suspicion of Ukrainian feminists' support for the nation because of these “Westernized” political platforms, creating challenges when feminists tried to “vernacularize” (Merry 2006) their politics for Ukrainian audiences. Then I turn to Maidan, considering how militarized masculine identities limited women's possibilities for participation, except in their own development of military forms. Next, I discuss how feminists attempted to create spaces for themselves on Maidan, with limited success that outsiders promoted through equality discourses. Feminists instead began to focus on localized, self-organized initiatives to more effectively bring feminist frameworks to women in Ukraine. These initiatives reflect leftist self-organized projects discussed in Chapter 3, and will lead into a deeper consideration of these types of initiatives that have continued following the end of Maidan, the subject of Chapter 6.

Europe and Gender Equality

This chapter uses the example of gender-based activism to argue that discourses about Europe that gained traction during the Euromaidan mobilizations were used to establish a specific vision of Ukraine as not Russian (and therefore not Soviet), rather than being a realistic interpretation of European reality. Feminist activists, who engaged in Ukrainian politics throughout the mobilizations, felt that they had a more realistic and even critical conceptualization of Europe than most protesters and attempted to intervene into the protests in order to promote it. However, the majority of protesters quickly shifted their focus away from Europe and onto establishing a Ukrainian nation-state that could represent the protesters’ demands. This idealized nation-state—based on restrictive gender norms that limited the ways women could participate in
the protests—was reproduced in the space of the protests through a dominant, militarized masculinity (described in detail below). As critics of these restrictive norms, feminists had to find creative ways to participate in the mobilizations. I argue that feminists were forced to “vernacularize” (Merry 2006) their political views by adopting a similar language and organization to these masculine forms in order to find ways to contribute to the broader protests, shifting their focus away from Europe altogether.

I suggest that dominant participants attempted to use the mobilizations to promote specific national narratives about Ukraine. These narratives were deeply engaged with establishing the ways gender roles could and should be enacted by participants and supporters. An examination of the ways gender roles were created and reinforced on Maidan is essential to understanding how these roles have influenced the new national narratives about Ukraine that appeared during the protests and which have been somewhat definitive following their conclusion. While Ukraine’s accession to the European Union did not remain protesters’ primary concern throughout the protests, contradictory ideas about establishing what Ukraine’s European-ness would mean for gender- and sexuality-based equality further informed these national narratives.

Traditional, patriarchal notions of gender roles have become more dominant since Ukraine’s independence, supported by attempts to detach Ukraine from its Soviet past and its state-sponsored “gender equality” programs (Bureychak 2012; Riabchuk 2012; I will discuss this issue in more detail below). Theoretically, better job opportunities gained by entrance into a free trade area with Europe would allow men to sustain their families’ livelihoods more easily, thus ensuring male dominance in various spheres. It is important to note that it is not just men who support these traditional, patriarchal gender roles as anti-Soviet. Many researchers have documented that postsocialist women have been drawn to the idea of a male breadwinner and a female
homemaker/caretaker simply because it was exactly what they had been denied under socialism (see, for example, Drakulić 1993).

While these feminist discourses appeared to adhere to anti-communist attitudes because of their position in support of European accession, instead—and perhaps because these feminists were so strongly linked to leftist activist groups—their form of anti-communism was not what was promoted in the dominant national ideology on Maidan. An embrace of traditional gender roles was seen as a more effective practice of decommunization because it would further benefit traditional family structures, also understood to have been under attack during the communist era. These feminist interventions allow us to explore not only the dominant national ideology on Maidan but also the way this ideology promoted only certain forms of decommunization and anti-communist attitudes—attitudes that appeared regressive to feminists, along with leftists.

Many feminists perceived Europe as a sort of status that would increase gender parity as well as protect the rights of LGBT people—and they therefore saw themselves as more representative of Europe than radical, anti-feminist, anti-gay, right-wing activists because feminists already supported these ideas. Their response to their own marginalization on Maidan was at first one of shock. As Maria, a feminist activist told me, “It was interesting that these right-wing people who pursued us because we supported LGBT, because we did some feminist initiatives, they really wanted to get to Europe.” She felt that the majority of the protesters did not understand what might be called the social values of Europe, in which tolerance of difference is the norm, as is a plurality of political opinions. “What, did you forget?” she asked. “These aren’t your values. Why are you here? We need to be here, and not you. This was more our theme.” She felt that feminist activists better understood what Europe would actually mean for Ukraine as a
nation, so their presence was more authentically European than those who were protesting for an economic deal.

I suggest that feminist criticisms of the Europe being referenced on Maidan diverged from those of the majority of the Maidan protest body. Here, we can perhaps best see the ways that “Europe” was a contested symbol on Maidan. In her essay discussing elites’ and intellectuals’ discourses about Europe and other contested symbols, such as “democracy” and “nation,” Verdery shows the development of links between “civil society” in postsocialist Romania and its own European position (1996b; discussed further in the following chapter); to feminists, the establishment of gender equality legislation and practices would secure Ukraine’s European position. More similarly to the Romanian case, in some ways, the dominant voices on Maidan were more focused on presenting the Ukrainian nation as democratic and therefore European; the protests themselves became proof of Ukraine’s democracy, allowing discourses about the nation to dominate the protests. Whereas feminists felt that their association of tolerance and equality with Europe was a more accurate picture of how Europeanization would look, these discourses were not part of the idea of Europe that was dominant during the protests. For most protesters, European “values” meant respect for the sovereignty of the Ukrainian nation, however that nation’s citizens defined it. For many Maidan protesters, that nation was based on a certain conceptualization of the Ukrainian nation that did not allow space for discussion of gender equality. This resulted in a form of masculinity that dominated the protest space on Maidan and limited women’s choices for how they could participate.

Verdery focuses on elites’ and intellectuals’ discussions of these political symbols, but she questions whether such symbols have the same relevance to those outside of these urban elite circles. In the Ukrainian context, these concerns are also valid; however, the most apparent rejection of the importance of these symbols has come from vocal groups in Eastern Ukraine, where dominant national ideologies do not include local or regional history and where the benefits of Europeanization are seen as even more abstract.
Women who consider themselves feminists, and particularly those who see women’s rights as fundamentally necessary to establishing an independent Ukraine, have been forced to try to “indigenize” (Verdery 1991) or “vernacularize” feminism for the Ukrainian context. As “translators” of feminism for the Ukrainian context, they are “both powerful and vulnerable,” as the translation itself “takes place within fields of unequal power” (40). In this case, Ukrainian women who use the word “feminist” to describe themselves are taking a calculated risk in so doing, because their work is considered both irrelevant and dangerous to Ukraine and Ukrainian unity. How, then, do Ukrainian women vernacularize feminism for an antipathetic population? Can they be successful?3

Feminist Suspects: “Western” and “European” Narratives

Uma Narayan has referred to the “suspect location” of non-Western feminists vis-à-vis local populations, calling these perspectives “suspiciously tainted and problematic products of our ‘Westernization’” (1997:3).4 Ukrainian feminists fall into a “suspect location” because their position runs counter to the widely accepted political ideologies available today, which reject both Western and Soviet domination on Ukraine, even while claiming “European-ness” for Ukraine. However, because women’s and other civil society NGOs were often seen as a form of elite

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3 The most visible “feminist” group since Ukraine’s independence is Femen, whose activists famously do topless protests for various issues, beginning with sex tourism. Significant research has been undertaken on this group (for instance, see Zychowicz 2011; and Channell 2014; and the films Ukraine is Not a Brothel [2013] and Je suis Femen [2014]), so I will not include a lengthy discussion of their work here. It is sufficient to note that, while many of the group’s participants have engaged with feminist scholarship (from both the Western canon and that of Soviet feminism), they have been widely discredited because of revelations about their funding sources from men encouraging them to use toplessness as a tactic. Leading Ukrainian feminist scholar and activist Oksana Kis stated in a recent interview that “Femen has nothing in common with feminism.” (Lazurkevych 2015; Ukr. «FEMEN» не має нічого спільного з фемінізмом). Further, Femen members did not appear on Maidan, and I never found any evidence that they had made statements about the protests at all.

4 Mohanty (2003) and Narayan both comment on the problematic nature of the concepts of “Third World” and West/non-West, which I also recognize as limiting. However, I preserve this usage to a certain extent because Ukrainian feminists’ relationship with an imagined “West” is itself at issue in this chapter.
advancement through the attainment of Western funding (and therefore validation) (see Ghodsee
2004; Hemment 2007; Phillips 2008, 2011), feminism was easily targeted and denounced as a
Western import, irrelevant to the lives of postsocialist women (Funk and Mueller 1993:1-2;
Hemment 2007:12; Johnson and Robinson 2007:11; see also Channell 2014; Gal and Kligman

In the early 1990s, Nanette Funk documented the problematic hierarchy between “East”
and “West” discourses about feminism in which, as she writes, “Western feminist discourse is
hegemonic in feminism,” and which risked “the suppression and distortion of post-communist
women’s concerns” (1993:319). This remains a significant problem for leftist-feminist activists in
Ukraine, albeit for somewhat novel reasons. Many of them have either been educated or spent
extensive time outside of Ukraine, in Europe or the United States, and have read feminist texts that
originate in these places (often in their original languages, as translations of any Western
theoretical texts into Ukrainian is rare). With the spread of Internet access, more activists spend
time finding contemporary feminist materials, from blogs to Facebook groups, available online
from sources around the world. While at the time of Funk’s writing, the author was more concerned
about collaboration between Eastern and Western women, whose communication seemed to exist
on different planes, now, post-communist feminists are faced with the problem of translating these
still-dominant Western models of feminism for a local context.

Many scholars have discussed the limited kinds of feminist participation available to
women in postsocialism. Particularly, postsocialist “feminist” projects with US- and European-
based funding impose a narrow definition of women’s issues onto organizations (Hemment
2007:3), what Alex Hrycak has called “foundation feminism” (2006). Alternatively, Kristen
Ghodsee has suggested that feminism is simply less resonant for postsocialist women because of
the dominance of class as a unifying category for struggle and the bourgeois associations of imported Western feminism (2004). As Katja Guenther puts it, “While women never experienced equality under socialism, they did experience some solidarity with men, particularly in their efforts to maintain the family as a site free from state intervention” (2011:869). She suggests that this has led women to be “reluctant to adopt any stance that seems anti-men” (ibid.), including a feminist one. These same scholars have documented that the word “gender” itself is a direct adaptation of the English word into local languages (hender in Ukrainian5), which leaves the idea of “gender” as a political category unlikely to resonate among postsocialist women.

Thus, contemporary Ukrainian feminism’s association with being more “Western” and more “European” does not necessarily serve to help the cause. Similarly, leftist feminists are at a further disadvantage because their leftist ideas remain associated with state socialism, even if leftist activists are entirely critical of the country’s Communist and Socialist Parties (and often of political parties in general). Feminism can also be associated with Soviet gender equality policies. Katherine Verdery and Joanna Goven have both suggested the root of the rejection of feminism in postsocialism is the Soviet co-optation of feminist ideas; “feminism” can now be seen as a reflection of Soviet “emancipation” projects that were part of “the Party’s broadly homogenizing goals” which attempted “to erase difference of almost every kind from the social landscape” (Verdery 1996a:61; see also Goven 1993). However, in reality, gender-based differences continued to exist, because, as Sarah Ashwin has written, men and women were expected to “serve

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5 When I asked interviewees in Ukraine how to talk about gender in Ukrainian, they overwhelmingly used the Ukrainian hender, which begins with the Ukrainian letter г; however, diasporic Ukrainian-Americans tend to say gender, beginning with the letter g. According to linguist Yuri Shevchuk, the Russification of the Ukrainian language throughout the Soviet period led to a decreased usage of “g” in Ukrainian in favor of “h” (personal communication; this is even though “g” is a letter in Russian whereas “h” is not). Young Ukrainians’ usage of hender rather than gender is a reflection of these shifts in the Ukrainian language during socialism, while diasporic Ukrainians preserve a less Sovietized, more historical form of the language.
the state in the way implied by their assumed ‘natural’ characteristics” (2000:11). Ashwin concludes that this led to women being integrated into the work force as “second-class workers” while domestic work was concomitantly still perceived as “inalienably feminine,” leading to an entrenchment of the “double burden” (Corrin 1992, for instance) rather than to women’s emancipation from reproductive tasks.

When state socialism ended, so did women’s (and men’s) dependence on a paternal state form (what Verdery calls the “zadruga-state” [1996a:64]). New national narratives emerged to replace unifying Soviet ones, and many of these returned to a re-traditionalized view of women in which men were cultural actors who established a state for a feminized nation (Verdery 1996a:78). Goven further highlights the ways these new narratives showed Soviet gender parity projects as antithetical to biological, “natural” differences between male and female sexes (1993:227); only by reinstating these “natural” differences between men and women could postsocialist regimes reverse the damage done by socialist gender equality policies. Verdery suggests that support for these re-traditionalized, nationalized narratives has itself become an anti-communist view, and it follows that “feminism becomes socialist and can be attacked as antinational” (1996:82). As both Verdery and Goven argue, democratic and postsocialist governing regimes must establish newly male-dominant forms. The view is, as Goven writes, that “the restoration of patriarchy is needed to set things right again” (1993:230).

This process shows how decommunization is deeply linked to gender norms; or, that an anti-communist national ideology relies directly on traditional ideas about gender in order to work. Because ideas about women’s equality are so deeply linked to the communist period, only a reversal of these notions can be truly anti-communist. This further explains women’s own propensity to consider male breadwinners in a positive light, as it reflects their perception of a
successfully decommunized family structure. Such ideas are contrary to pan-European gender equality projects that encourage non-discrimination policies for women as well as equal pay; however, these may also be seen as problematic because of their reliance on major state interventions in order to implement such plans, an apparent reflection of the socialist state.

At its worst, this “restoration of patriarchy” takes the form of “Stop Gender” or “Anti-Gender” campaigns, found across the region and documented in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. Using the term “genderism” and driven by the Catholic Church in Poland, this right-wing mobilization aimed “to demonize gender as an enemy of the family, to link it with pedophilia and to equate it with moral chaos” (Graff 2014:432). Similarly, in Ukraine, the STOP Gender campaign also claims to stand in favor of protecting children and family values, suggesting that gender-based policies are “bound to result in the dictatorship of a pro-homosexual minority over the tradition-oriented majority” (Rubchak 2015:14). That such gender-based policies—including non-discrimination legislation protecting women as well as homosexual and transgender people—are presented in these campaigns as unnatural and, further, non-native stances. As these policies are linked with European integration, then, pro-gender or feminist stances become antithetical to a pro-nation and anti-communist position.

Narratives of Ukrainian Women’s Activism

In contemporary Ukraine, feminism’s divisiveness is often understood in the context of the continuing national project, in which the status of a unified Ukrainian nation remains tenuous at best. While feminists have been active throughout the history of Ukraine (see Bohachevsky-Chomiak 1988; Kebalo 2011), feminist and other gender-based issues are often seen as secondary

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6 Janet Johnson, personal communication.
to the establishment of a lasting, independent nation-state, or feminist movements themselves have had a “preoccuption with nationalist goals” (Kebalo 2007:54). Women who choose to focus first on feminist issues—even if they also consider themselves Ukrainians and/or nationalists—are stigmatized because they reject the primacy of the nation.

Martha Kichorowska Kebalo divides Ukrainian women’s activism into four phases, which parallel with the growth of national consciousness and the struggle for self-determination (2007:39). The first phase begins in the mid-1800s and continues to the end of World War I and “includes significant trans-state interaction between ‘eastern’ Ukrainians (in the Russian empire’s Dnieper Ukraine territories) and ‘western’ Ukrainians (in Austria-ruled Eastern Galicia) across these imperial boundaries” (ibid.). The second phase falls during the inter-war period, focusing largely on Galician women’s mobilizations in the Polish Second Republic (ibid.). Kebalo traces the third phase through World War II, examining international links between the Ukrainian diaspora in Europe and North America and women in Ukrainian territory (ibid.). Finally, phase four includes post-Soviet women’s activism since 1991 (ibid.; Kebalo’s ethnographic research coincides with this period). In the earlier two phases, as Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak describes, effective women’s organizations focused on community issues rather than so-called women’s or feminist ones (1988:xviii). Bohachevsky-Chomiak points out that issues of voting and equal rights were not solely women’s issues in the 19th and 20th centuries, but were rather linked to the (seemingly) non-gendered problem of national liberation for all Ukrainians (1988:xix). Thus, Bohachevsky-Chomiak traces examples of activists and organizations focused on women’s rights as well as on the establishment of an independent Ukrainian nation-state (including, but not limited

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7 Kebalo’s paper does not consider women’s activism and feminism in Sovietized Ukraine from 1945-1991; this work focuses on Western Ukrainian regions, not part of the Soviet Union until 1945, and activism among diaspora groups in the US and Europe during these periods.
to, active and well-known figures such as Olena Pchilka, her daughter Lesya Ukrainka, Maria Rudnyts’ka, Natalia Kobryns’ka, and Ol’ha Kobylians’ka) beginning in 1884 and continuing through the Soviet period.

For Bohachevsky-Chomiak and Kebalo, feminism and nationalism have been inherently linked throughout the history of the existence of women’s organizations in Ukraine. Bohachevsky-Chomiak suggests that women’s concerns were subordinated to the national liberation struggle because, unlike socialism, “nationalism did not co-opt the cause of women’s rights and women’s liberation into its programmes” (1988:xix). At the same time, these early examples of what the author calls community or pragmatic feminism “failed to provide an integrating ideology or symbolism which would combine national and women’s liberation” (ibid.). While Sovietizing narratives about women and feminism attempted to detach the historical connections between feminism and nationalism in Ukraine, the problems of balancing these political perspectives have resurfaced following Ukraine’s independence in 1991. This is at least in part because of negative backlash about feminism that has been dominant in Ukraine since the end of state socialism.

In Ukraine, a re-traditionalization of gendered national narratives has been aided by longstanding matriarchal myths about Ukraine as a nation. Marian Rubchak describes the myth of the pagan goddess Berehynia, or hearth mother, who protects the Ukrainian language and culture (2001; see also Pavlychko 2002) and represents the nation itself. Rubchak has interpreted the Berehynia model as a basis for Ukrainian indigenous feminism: she sees that traditional Ukrainian attitudes about gender are based on equal contributions of men and women, even if those roles are understood as inherently different (the traditional man being a warrior, protecting Ukraine’s borders; 2001:153). Alternatively, following Pavlychko (2002), leftist feminist critic Tamara

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8 The exception to this is Natalia Kobryns’ka, who was both a socialist and a feminist and who, Kebalo notes, established the first secular women’s organization in Western Ukraine in 1884 (2007:46).
Zlobina calls this “Berehynia model” a “conservative discourse about returning to one’s roots, national traditions, spirituality, and morality” (2015:75), and this model is quite explicitly linked to women’s roles in reproducing a Ukrainian nation, both biologically and spiritually (see also Verderay 1996a; Yuval Davis 1997). Such female-gendered representations of the nation are common to many national ideologies and should not be understood as a “feminist” achievement, particularly as they tend to create a binary model in which the “state” is seen as masculine, and the repository of power.

Because of Soviet anti-national discourses about women, attempts to de-link woman and nation are understood as an extension of Soviet projects of gender emancipation. This has been further exemplified in two of the more dominant trends of postsocialist Ukrainian feminists. Most scholars recognize two camps of feminist thought that developed in independent Ukraine (see Zhurzhenko 2001). The first, in Kyiv, is the Institute of Literary Studies, headed by the late Solomea Pavlychko and Nila Zborovska. Both Pavlychko and Zborovska have dealt with the questions of nationalism and feminism, and Zborovska has encouraged the development of a Ukrainian cultural feminism that speaks directly against dominant—in this case both Russian and Western/European—narratives about gender equality and feminism. The second train of feminist thought comes from Kharkiv in Eastern Ukraine, where Iryna Zherebkina established the Center for Gender Studies. Zherebkina’s and the Center’s work is known for its criticism of nation-state discourses and sees feminism in opposition and as a challenge to these globally dominant ideas (Zhurzhenko 2001:7). However, Kharkiv historically has been a Russian-speaking city and was the former capital of Soviet Ukraine; Zherebkina’s and other Center authors’ writing has largely been in Russian. This linguistic choice has caused many to interpret the Kharkiv Center’s research as a further Russian-backed or Sovietizing imposition on Ukrainian national development. As
Tatiana Zhurzhenko puts it, “Russian-speaking feminism is inevitably considered an agent of ‘Russian cultural imperialism’” (2001:10).

Both trends in feminism that privilege women’s issues—however defined—are understood in Ukraine to come from an external, anti-national position (from either the “West” or from Russia). In this logic, the only way to reject external domination is through a focus on the nation. Leftist feminists like Zlobina see this interest in women’s relationship to the nation and the “Berehynia model” as one of two bad options for women in postsocialist Ukraine, the other being what she terms the “Barbie model” that promotes the “commercialization and exploitation of women’s bodies” (2015:75; from Kis 2002, who herself draws from Solomea Pavlychko’s framing [Bulakh 2015:208, note 10]). Both models, according to Zlobina, are focused on “serving men and attending to their needs through the performance of an array of services such as reproduction, nurture, rearing, and the pleasures of sex. Neither model confirms the woman as an independent, self-sufficient being” (ibid.), thus foreclosing the possibility of the development of a feminist consciousness. Zlobina’s view encourages a consideration of feminism’s divisiveness in the context of the continuing national project and as a contributing factor to economic instability. The status of a unified Ukrainian nation had been threatened by recent economic challenges and unpredictability. Feminism, which presents alternatives to women’s roles as caretakers, reproducers, and supporters of men, is perceived to contribute to the uncertainty of the nation and its economic productivity. This intertwining of nation and economy helps reinforce women’s subordinate roles, because they are not only expected to reproduce the nation, they are also expected not to gain economic independence (Kis and Bureychak 2015:136), as this threatens the precarious balance in which Ukrainians find themselves.
Pre-Maidan Feminist Efforts

The struggle to reconcile feminism with these perceived threats in Ukraine has resulted in feminists’ difficulty in vernacularizing their views for a broader audience. Leftist and radical feminists in contemporary Ukraine represent a *bricolage* feminism that draws from all various versions of feminism in Ukraine while attempting to reject their exclusionary and essentialist tendencies. These feminists combine theoretical development (much of which still comes out of Kharkiv, although the Center’s journal *Krona* now publishes in both Ukrainian and Russian) along with thoroughly organized protests, street demonstrations, concerts, educational series, and conferences (these take place particularly in Kyiv and L’viv). Scholar-activists like Oksana Kis, based in L’viv, have begun to look critically at how women use national narratives as “empowerment,” challenging the ways these hegemonic historical discourses limit options for “appropriate” women’s activism (Kis 2012; see also Lazurkevych 2015).

Groups like the Feminist Offensive (*Feministychna ofenzyva*; FO), strongly linked to leftist groups and founded in 2010, have attempted to bring attention to women’s issues and gender discrimination during the Yanukovych political era. FO’s most recognized work was their continual protests on International Women’s Day; each year, they held feminist parades and demonstrations on March 8. They attempted to bring a feminist critique of women’s roles to the holiday, which since Soviet times had focused on appreciating women’s beauty and contributions to the family, usually by presenting women with flowers, candy, and cards. FO’s goal was to make International Women’s Day a moment to bring attention to women’s struggles around the world, and particularly in Ukraine, with varying levels of success. As described in the Introduction,
however, FO disbanded in 2013 following disagreements between more “theory” and more “practice” oriented feminists in the group. Despite this, feminists have continued to organize street demonstrations for the 8th of March, especially in Kyiv, in 2014, 2015, and 2016, all with large numbers of participants and little to no violence against the groups.

Leftist feminists also spent the years between Yanukovych’s election in 2010 and the beginning of the Maidan demonstrations attempting to tackle gender-based problems within leftist organizations. At the student organizing camp I attended in the summer of 2012, feminists organized a “gender block” discussion session in which women gathered together to discuss problems they had faced as women. These issues ranged from discrimination at universities to pressure to look a certain way to annoyance that they were responsible for most of the cooking at the camp. One feminist representative brought these issues to the group of activists at the camp, suggesting that everyone—even those who identified as feminists—think about how to fix these issues at local levels. Many activists with whom I completed interviews before the protests on Maidan began did recognize that there were ways leftist groups reproduced normative gender ideas in their relationships, even if they felt that they were more aware of feminism and even considered themselves to be feminists. Thus, for leftists, a feminist presence on Maidan was an important intervention, and leftists and feminists regularly worked together on the square to present feminist ideas, despite the challenges they faced.

**Men and “Micro-Cultures”: Reinforcing Militarism and Nation**

To understand feminists’ difficulties in vernacularizing their positions to gain interest in gender on Maidan, it is necessary to explore the focus on Ukrainian national masculinity that was prevalent on the square. This dominant national masculinity was based on historical narratives that
contradicted progressive ideals, like the European values of tolerance and equality, which feminists promoted on Maidan. These narratives were deeply intertwined with the increasingly accepted national ideology that I described in Chapter 2, based strongly on discourses about active men. The influence of these narratives on establishing an idealized Ukrainian nation that Maidan supporters would fight for helped solidify feminists’ marginalized position in the protests because their politics were seen as a threat to that nation.

In an essay analyzing the gendered politics of nationalism and its links with militarization of masculine identities, Cynthia Enloe uses the example of Serbian militias in the 1990s to explore the process through which men and nationalized or ethnic violence become linked. The militias that men volunteered for, she suggests, were “micro-culture[s]” which were “simultaneously masculinized, militarized, and ethnically politicized” (2004:105). She finds that “the warrior is a central element in the modern cultural construction of the Serbian ideal of masculinity” and that “researchers are also demonstrating that the ideals of Serbian femininity have been constructed in ways deliberately intended to bolster the militarization of masculinity” (106). I find these suggestions to resonate with the Ukrainian context, particularly in the way that men created sotnia, or volunteer defense brigades, on Maidan in order to protect the nation.

These sotnia regularly evoked historical ideals of Ukrainian masculinity, ranging from images of Cossacks of the 15th-18th centuries, who for many years fought for freedom from Russian imperialism (Bureychak 2014; Morrison 1993; Subtelny 2000), to those of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), whose members fought against the Soviet takeover of Western Ukraine through 1945 (Wilson 1997:51). Both of these groups are central players in the national ideology that rejuvenates historical heroes and demonizes the Soviet past. The Fourth Sotnia plastered posters around Maidan calling for “Free Cossacks” to
sign up with them and featuring sinewy Cossack men with traditional red pants and a *chub*, the traditional hairstyle of shaved head with a long forelock (Photo 5.2). And, as Bureychak and Petrenko remind us, “The Ukrainian Cossack is represented as an inclusive, masculine community, in which the role of women is marginal or symbolic” (2014). That contemporary Ukrainian men are representing themselves as the “descendants of the Cossacks reproduces this androcentric vision of the Ukrainian nation” (ibid.).

Similarly, posters for the general Maidan self-defense organization reproduced images resonant of OUN/UPA asking volunteers to join their ranks. While women did participate in UPA, and such stories have become popular gender-focused historical narratives (see Kis 2012), the generic image of OUN/UPA volunteers is a masculine one. The image of Stepan Bandera, leader of one faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, appeared constantly on Maidan, including in the form of a giant banner honoring Bandera, subsidized by the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (see Photo 2.5). More interesting was a sticker with Bandera’s face with the text “Bandera wasn’t afraid—are you?” (Photo 5.3). Such rhetoric reinforced that the burden of fighting for Ukraine rested on the shoulders of men who could be unafraid like Bandera. Other posters updated the image of the army green-clad UPA fighter with images resonant for people who had been on Maidan, including the skeleton of the proposed New Year’s Tree, a circle of gold stars (signifying Europe), and handmade wooden shields (Photo 5.4).

These two examples link national struggle with men, who are expected to participate in that struggle on behalf of the nation—and on behalf of women, who are *not* expected to fight. As Bureychak and Petrenko describe, “The representation of Cossacks and UPA fighters as national heroes implies a masculine concept of the nation that provides it a gender homogeneity and symbolically and factually displaces women from the public sphere” (2014). Returning to Enloe,
this “micro-culture” that reproduces the (male) warrior as a central element of national narratives limits women’s roles—both in the struggle for the nation and after the nation has been “established.” While women are necessary to the biological reproduction of the nation, “more fundamental to the nation’s continuity is its life eternal, ensured through culture, heroic deeds, and qualities of the spirit: the realm of men” (Verdery 1996a:73). Women’s roles are then limited to local, home-based biological and physical reproduction of the family; these roles lack the sanctioned forms of power that appear inherent in men’s active, heroic roles.

This is reflected in the lack of images of women that appeared on Maidan; almost all of my photos that include human referents in posters or banners feature men, except for several prominent posters of imprisoned opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko or a few widespread images of women weeping. This lack of representation of women playing varied roles on Maidan suggests that women do not actively participate in social and political realms; or, at least, that their participation does not warrant recognition. In the post-Maidan period, then, such a lack of recognition has led to difficulty in challenging these patriarchal-hierarchal relations that used Maidan to establish links to Ukraine’s national-historical gender narratives. The one exception to this statement is a widely circulated and highly debated image of a blond, female Banderivka, or anti-Soviet freedom fighter, produced by artist Ihor Pereklita in 2007 (Photo 5.5). The literal interpretation of the image suggests an idealized form of female militancy for the struggle of the nation, an interpretation which has inspired a complex form of women’s engagement with the militarism on Maidan that questions the typical relationship between nation and feminism presented in this chapter.  

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9 Bureychak and Petrenko (2014) present an alternative interpretation of this image as “anarcho-nationalist sarcasm or irony” (stiob, see Yurchak 2006, especially chapter 7). I first saw this image in 2012 as a color poster being sold at a small shop in L’viv, but it was widely circulated as a black-and-white image on Maidan.
The Zhinocha Sotnia: Women at the Front Line

Some women responded to their exclusion on Maidan by creating their own sotnia that would theoretically be ready to fight on the front lines if the necessity presented itself. Multiple Women’s Brigades (Zhinocha Sotnia) cropped up in the days and weeks following the violence in February 2014. Olga Onuch and Tamara Martsenyuk counted five different registered groups (2014:94). One particular brigade, founded by feminist and labor activists, called the Ol’ha Kobylians’ka Brigade (after the late 19th-/early 20th-century Ukrainian feminist), has been championed by Western observers as a successful feminist project (Phillips 2014; Rubchak 2014); this is despite criticisms from other Ukrainian feminists about its militarized structure, which I discuss later. Established because of these activists’ frustration with limited roles for women on Maidan, it began only semi-seriously as a Facebook group. Soon, one of its founders, whom I will call Olia, told me in an interview, “there were 30 people asking what we were doing, like [it was] a serious project.” Olia said that 15-20 people attended early meetings and helped the group organize lectures, film screenings, and self-defense trainings in buildings that had been occupied by protesters. “For me,” she said, “it was really a surprise that so many women felt the need for it… For me it became an indicator that yes, we have to do more. Not academic feminism, or some kind of pop-feminism, like the usual example that every woman considers herself a feminist when she says, ‘I don’t have to cook you borscht every day!’”

10 Women’s brigades only appeared since March 2014, after the major violence during Maidan – they were not mobilized during the violence between police and protesters in January or February, although some individual women did participate. However, some of these brigades have mobilized to the front in Eastern Ukraine.
For Olia, the most important aspect of the Women’s Brigade was that it allowed like-minded women—who were engaged with questions about nation-building but refused to ignore discrimination against women—to find each other and make connections that had been unavailable before the protests. Olia hoped that the Brigade could help vernacularize feminism and change people’s consciousness about women and feminism, but her assessment was that helping feminists find each other on Maidan was the biggest achievement of the Brigade. Her reflection that so many women “needed” this kind of organization or initiative because feminism had seemed inaccessible before showed that so far, Ukrainian feminists have been largely unable to vernacularize feminism, even among women. The sotnia, because it used the militaristic language circulating on Maidan and because it was not a self-defined feminist sotnia (although many members did consider themselves feminists), made such an initiative accessible and interesting to women who sympathized with both leftist and feminist ideas.

But not all feminist activists in Ukraine supported the zhinocha sotnia. Before the celebration of the 8th of March (International Women’s Day), for which the Brigade sponsored a letter-writing event to show support for women in Crimea fighting against the recent Russian invasion of the peninsula, Mariya Mayerchyk (her real name), a well-known feminist academic who lives in the Eastern city of Kharkiv, published a well-circulated article criticizing the Ol’ha Kobylians’ka Women’s Brigade. Having previously worked with many members of the Women’s Brigade through the Feminist Offensive, Mayerchyk criticized the Women’s Brigade for adopting militarized and right-wing structures and rhetoric:

Inspired by the ideas of justice and equality, these activists planned to demonstrate that women were of equal importance at the Maidan. Then, according to the rules of the genre, their actions took a turn in the direction of right-wing discursive logic. The Women’s
Company (sotnia) used in its very name the rhetoric of military structures, announced its right to carry out its mission on the barricades, and began teaching self-defense classes… And even though women activists say they are against violence, this has become…a confirmation of their second-rate status as women-wives-mothers-sisters-comrades-peacekeepers-helpers. Women participating in this initiative weren’t able to come up with consistent war criticism, or to denounce the destructive role that military hierarchies play in peaceful resistance. In fact, they did quite the opposite: they attempted to ‘meet’ the male standards—power and barricades—and became themselves the mechanisms of reinforcing this androcentrism. (2014; emphasis in original)

Mayerchyk criticized precisely the sotnia’s efforts to vernacularize feminism in the militarized language of Maidan. She suggested that women on Maidan should have tried to create their own criticism of the male standards created through national historical narratives of militarized masculinity. Instead, women needed to become like men in order to be valued, which, according to Mayerchyk, supports androcentrism rather than challenging male dominance.

For instance, instead of challenging the limitations placed on women on Maidan, the sotnia fed into the narrative that the only valuable ways to support Ukraine were through training and fighting. The self-defense classes for women that the Brigade offered were part of Mayerchyk’s criticism. However, leftist activists had also organized an ongoing self-defense class since October 2013, before the protests began, that was widely well-received and included both female and male participants. Mayerchyk’s problem seemed to be that other male brigades, including right-wing brigades and those affiliated with fascist ideologies, were also promoting self-defense training not as a tactic of liberation but as a tactic of domination. This ignores the fact that self-defense
participants (leftists and feminists alike) had various motivations for participating in those training sessions, which were indeed viewed as empowering for many activists.

I discussed Mayerchyk’s critique with several feminists after the media attention garnered by the Women’s Brigade. The impacts of the Brigade on Ukrainian attitudes toward women and feminism were fairly disparate. One feminist who lived in L’viv felt that the impression that women should be relegated to kitchens during a revolution had been challenged by women’s participation in the Brigade during Maidan, even impacting people “who are very far from feminists.” However, the Women’s Brigade gave feminists “a very popular image of a strong, eroticized, militarized woman who participated in revolution and it’s actually the opposite of what we want,” she said, laughing. Others, however, shared Mayerchyk’s criticism of the Women’s Brigade. Ania, a feminist living outside of Ukraine who watched the events from a distance, felt that women created the Brigade only because of their exclusion: “You are pushed to do something, at least something, to show we are here,” she said in an interview (in English).

A lot of people were so proud, there were numerous reports about [the Brigade]. But I see it as going along with the only option which people think is left, which is reproducing the militaristic initiatives. At some point when there was such a big threat of physical violence, I feel completely disarmed literally and symbolically because any other possibility of having discussions or any other ways are completely devalued. If you are not a man, if you don't have a gun, if you don't have stuff to protect yourself. This is war, and you cannot do anything unless you are participating.

Ania is correct in suggesting that Maidan devalued non-military, non-violent ways of discussing difference and inequality, as early feminist experiences in the protests showed. Feminists responded through vernacularization: they adopted masculine, military rhetoric in order to make
women’s equality seem less threatening and something that could be naturally integrated into the post-Maidan gender order. As an alternative, other leftist groups preferred to avoid vernacularization by creating what they saw as non-ideological initiatives to help protesters. Recall from Chapter 3, however, that those leftists faced similar conundrums as feminists in terms of how to deal with the dominance of violent discourses on Maidan.

Mayerchyk’s criticism and feminists’ various responses to it show that there is, evoking Chela Sandoval’s framework of “differential oppositional consciousness” (1991), a movement “between and among” discourses about feminism and political mobilization in Ukraine. In other words, feminists who participated in the Ol’ha Kobylians’ka Brigade had various reasons to see its organization as an effective way to vernacularize feminism, even if they understood that the Brigade itself was reflective of more dominant masculine narratives about political participation. In the context of vernacularization, the Brigade is an instance of feminists using “tactical subjectivity with the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted” (Sandoval 1991:14). As I show below, the Brigade was the most effective way of organizing for feminists because it was the most visible and the most suited to the context of the mobilizations, whereas other efforts to insert feminist criticisms into the protests were much more easily marginalized because they did not fit into the dominant discourses of Maidan.

Vam treba zhinky! You Need Women!

The problem of women’s visibility was a central concern for women and feminist activists from December 2013. Following multiple threats to the protest camp, in response to which calls for men to protect Maidan were spread across social media outlets, a group of feminist activists decided to hold a Women’s Solidarity Night (Nich zhinochoi solidarnosti) on December 12 (Photo
At around 1 a.m., I gathered with a little over a dozen leftist activists, largely women, with a large banner proclaiming the name of the event and with a drum group known as Rhythms of Resistance (ROR) or Rytm sprotyvu in Ukrainian. Participants encouraged me to drum along with them during the December 12 action, and I attended one of their practices later in the spring to learn the rhythms and discover how the group functioned. This local branch of ROR appeared at many other demonstrations outside of feminist ones, including leftist-organized economic demonstration and, later, a protest against the commercialization of outdoor spaces in Kyiv. ROR’s own non-hierarchical structure was grounded in a leftist feminist ideology that encouraged participation of both men and women, but the group gained recognition from participation in Feminist Offensive’s 8th of March demonstrations before its widespread presence on Maidan.

On December 12, we spent several hours in the cold, drumming and listening to different women discuss the importance of women’s participation not just in the kitchens but in the protection of Maidan as well: as one protester proclaimed, “Night Maidan, you need women!” (Nichnyi Maidan, vam treba zhinky!) In other words, women aren’t just there to hand out cookies and tea and clean up after men, who are standing outside in the cold all night. Women should be part of the Night Maidan, protecting the barricades alongside men. Many of the men at the barricades that night seemed interested in our demonstration and even congratulated our efforts. We further turned one of the common slogans of Maidan, “Glory to Ukraine, glory to the heroes” (Slava Ukraini, heroiam slava) into a feminist chant: “Glory to the heroines, to the heroines glory!” (Slava heroinam, heroinam slava!). This reversal of such a widely used slogan reflected a feminist rejection not only of masculinizing discourses but also how they are mobilized; instead

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11 In her assessment of the “Night of Women’s Solidarity,” in which she bases her analysis on videos of the event, Sarah Phillips (2014:416) suggests that participants used the regular “Glory to the Heroes” at the event. My experience was that every participant was careful to keep the focus on women and use the feminine form of the word “hero,” heroina.
of accepting men as the only possible national heroes, the use of *heroïna* allowed women to take the active, powerful role of heroes and to redefine their place in the space of Maidan.

While some of the men who stood behind the barricades supported our efforts, and a few even joined our group, quite a few observers were seriously annoyed at our loud demonstration and even asked us to stop drumming because people were sleeping. A close friend and activist, who participated in the Women’s Solidarity Night with me, suggested that most of the people who joined the demonstration did not understand the event’s basic message, which was, in the eyes of organizers, a feminist one. She did not have the impression that what we were saying about women—that they should have an active choice in how they participated on Maidan—was understood. Sarah Phillips describes how the Women’s Solidarity Night evolved into an “informal, nonhierarchical grassroots initiative (with an active presence on Facebook) called ‘Half the Maidan: Women’s Voices of Protest’ that has continued to promote and document the diverse protest activities of women and women’s groups” (2014:417). I am skeptical, however, of her assessment of Half the Maidan (*Polovyna Maidanu*) as an initiative in itself; its “activism” remains Facebook-based, although the group has been a significant source of information sharing that continues to promote various feminist activities and women-focused initiatives.

While I hoped that the Women’s Solidarity Night would lead to a more active and safe presence of feminist initiatives on Maidan, my impression is rather that it influenced women (and some men) to praise other women for participating on Maidan, but it did not encourage women to participate outside of the established support roles. The Night was the only instance throughout the winter of a specifically feminist-organized attempt to challenge women’s limited roles on Maidan. It did not succeed in vernacularizing feminism for protesters, who largely misunderstood the Night’s feminist origins. Because of these activists’ ongoing fear of hostility toward feminism
in the space of the protests, most discussions about feminism were relegated to the Internet. Reflective of other instances of women’s and feminist activism being devalued in relation to activism and political participation of men (Sperling, Feree, and Risman 2001), feminist criticisms were pushed out of the shared, public space of Maidan and into the semi-public but extremely self-contained world of social networks.

“Participation, Partnership, and the Future”: Failures of Equality Discourses

The Women’s Solidarity Night began a trend which continued through to spring, which recognized women’s participation without allowing women to have the space to decide what their participation would be. Multiple exhibitions and news articles praised women for being on Maidan and brought attention to their supportive roles in the kitchens, at medical points, and as cleaning crews for occupied buildings (Chernichkin and Trach 2014; Ghosh 2014; Kerry 2014). At one of these photo exhibitions in mid-May, entitled “Women of Maidan,” several speakers from international granting agencies who co-sponsored the event were thrilled at the idea of “representation” and “recognition” of women on Maidan. One enthusiastic supporter championed women’s “participation, partnership, and future” (uchast’, partnerstvo, i maibutnie); in other words, photos of women standing on Maidan represented a more egalitarian future for women because men saw them as “partners” in the struggle for the nation.

Maria, the feminist mentioned earlier who associated her own values with Europe, had a different interpretation. She felt that the women who co-sponsored the event—who did not live in Ukraine and appeared to her to be out of touch with contemporary Ukrainian feminism—did not recognize the value judgments being made in assigning women supporting roles. In her view,

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12 See also Gal and Kligman 2000, especially Chapter 3, to further problematize the notions of public and private for women and feminism.
women were not seen as equal partners of men, because sexism and gender-based discrimination were still continuing, even on Maidan. Even though she participated in the Ol’ha Kobylians’ka Women’s Brigade, she did not think that the events of Maidan had fundamentally changed women’s roles in Ukrainian society. Maria gave a short speech at the event, criticizing the lack of women’s representation in politics and the continued silencing of women’s voices:

The experience of Maidan has been really important for making concepts like ‘self-organization’ understood, we know what it entails and we can do it… So we created the Sotnia to unite women and women’s society on Maidan. And in this way we can change the views of people. We’re not just sandwiches, we’re not just berehynia (my ne til’ky kanapky, my ne til’ky berehyni). We have to keep struggling.13

I spoke with Maria later about the speech, asking her why she was so direct among these powerful international representatives of women’s organizations. She said she knew some of those women were looking at her during her speech as if she was being inappropriate, but others came up to her afterwards to thank her for having the courage to say something about sexism and discrimination rather than simply praising women’s efforts. “Mainly,” she said, “it’s that women that are working on a women’s program, in an international funding program, can say something like that. I didn’t believe it.” She couldn’t believe that these women—who Maria had assumed would embody her idea of “European values”—had such a stereotypical attitude toward Ukrainians, that they were simply passive, beautiful, flower-crown-wearing berehynia women who should just be content with being visible.

13 Recall that the berehynia is the symbolic feminine form of the Ukrainian nation, a pagan goddess and protectress of the Ukrainian language and culture. These comments are reproduced from my notes of the event and translated from Ukrainian. The comments were not published elsewhere.
Maria could not understand how her Ukrainian feminism was so at odds with these Western women’s ideas about Ukrainian women’s potential for feminist activism and their ongoing struggle for gender equality. In their attempts to vernacularize feminist ideas in Ukraine, Maria and other feminists assumed that these European women would be more progressive and more engaged with discourses around anti-discrimination and gender equality. Despite her notion of what “Europe” could signify for Ukraine and the risks she took to promote this idea on Maidan, Maria found herself at odds with European and North American women activists’ conceptions of how Ukrainian women should act and how they should participate in protests, in similar ways described by Nanette Funk in 1993.

Maria’s surprise came in part from her understanding of what feminism is. Like other feminists, and like young leftists, much activist discourse comes from North American and European sources—for instance, many activists were inspired by Occupy Wall Street, which they followed closely via the Internet. Feminists, even those who studied in Ukraine, were not necessarily spending most of their time reading about feminism from the historical Ukrainian perspective of Lesya Ukrainka or Natalia Kobryns’ka, mentioned earlier as central figures among early Ukrainian women’s groups. Instead, much of their understanding about feminism came from elsewhere; Maria and others expected women who came to Ukraine from the places that produced contemporary feminism to represent precisely that feminism. When those women did not, Maria began to question whether such symbols like “Europe” and “democracy” actually did reflect a stronger commitment to women’s rights, as she and many others had promoted in the early days of Maidan. That these women seemed more inclined to support a national ideology that relied on decommunization through the rejuvenation of traditional gender roles challenged Maria’s relationship with feminism as a “European value.”
As “translators” of feminism for a local audience, Maria and other Ukrainian feminists were engaged in power relations that became apparent in these exchanges. And translators, as Merry has suggested, “are restricted by the discursive fields in which they work” (2006:48). In a context in which ideas of feminism and gender equality in political representation are construed as threats to national stability, discourses praising women for supporting roles, like the ones circulated at this exhibition, support local gender-based inequalities. Thus feminists like Maria were limited not only by the militarized masculinity produced on Maidan—that women had to adopt in order to participate actively in the protests—but also by the Western conceptualizations of Ukrainian women that encouraged them to accept these limitations. Such events changed feminists’ views that “European values” were, in reality, based on tolerance and equality, as they had claimed earlier on during the protests. As Maria stated, changing people’s views had to come from “self-organization,” non-party, non-state activism, which was most successfully interpreted at a local level.

This is best reflected in a late conversation I had with Olia from the Brigade, in June, when members of the Brigade were visiting Eastern Ukraine to speak to other women about Maidan and women’s and anti-war activism. She described that the Brigade had evolved out of the “practical initiatives” of Feminist Offensive, and they were able to meet with the more “theoretical” part of FO in Kharkiv (including Mariya Mayerchyk). Olia understood that the Kharkiv feminists were responding negatively to the Brigade based on press coverage of the group, not on the actual goals that its members had, and once they were able to meet and discuss the goals of the Brigade, there was no conflict between the two groups. Olia described the rapidity with which the Brigade formed, mentioning that they had no documents, they simply had time to create the group and hold events in its name. “We didn’t have the chance to think about what we’re doing, reflect on it,” she
said. “Even when we write [about it], we don’t have a unified idea.” In other words, the perception that the Women’s Brigade has caused some kind of rift among feminists in Ukraine is a misunderstanding; instead, these women have always known that there is not only one Ukrainian feminism. Since the end of the mobilizations in 2014, feminists around Ukraine are taking the time to think about and reflect on the impact of the Women’s Brigade for the future of Ukrainian feminism(s).

**Self-Organized Vernacularization**

At the end of Maidan, feminists in Ukraine were left in a precarious position. There seemed to be perhaps less widespread acceptance among politicians and their parties of gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation from the EU Association Agreement (eventually signed in June 2014). In June 2015, a year after the end of the mobilizations on Maidan, LGBT, feminist, and leftist activists organized a Pride Parade in Kyiv. Russian LGBT activist Masha Gessen recounted the events, noting 250 marchers and nearly 500 police officers at the event (Gessen 2015). Radical right-wing activists—including Artem Skoropads’ky, who was present at the Trotsky book presentation—harassed and attacked the march, injuring several protesters and police officers, one severely. For Ukrainian leftist and feminist activists, who later set up a website to crowdfund the medical costs for the injured police officer, this march was a success. Despite the violence, and the cancellation of other Pride-related events following the march, the fact that a Pride Parade happened at all, and that police protected the marchers instead of joining their attackers, shows a significant shift in perceptions of protest and activism following the mobilizations on Maidan. Gessen, however, compares the parade with one held in Warsaw, Poland, Ukraine’s “more European” neighbor, which, she describes, “draw[s] thousands of people to an extravaganza of
floats and flags that looks as much like a party as any other western Pride celebration” (2015). Yet again, a non-resident participant suggests that Ukrainian activists cannot define their own successes and failures, that they cannot establish what it means to be a “feminist” or an “activist” or what “Equality March” (the Ukrainian name for the Pride Parade; *marsh rivnosti*) really looks like.

But these activists are not yet fighting for floats and parties. They are fighting for a Ukraine in which being LGBT, or a feminist, or a leftist does not make you afraid to walk down the street. Thanks to their experiences on Maidan—which most of my interviewees described as positive, even those who had been attacked and harassed multiple times—they understand that this work remains in progress, and that they all need to keep fighting. As Maria described earlier, “The experience of Maidan has been really important for making concepts like ‘self-organization’ understood, we know what it entails and we can do it.” While a Europeanized version of a Pride Parade, like the Polish one described by Gessen, is an institutionalized recognition of LGBT rights, in Ukraine activists are not convinced that such events actually help end discrimination and marginalization. And these activists are inspired by the work of self-defined feminists, like the Feminist Offensive, in working toward goals they made for themselves rather than definitions established by outsiders. One leftist activist at the Equality March, bloodied by the right-wing thugs, wrote that those institutionalized Pride Parades have little to do with the struggle for human rights, just as celebrating Mother’s Day has nothing to do with the struggle for women’s rights. When we get to that point, he wrote, we have to create our own Equality Marches; in other words, we must return to self-organization, free from party influences and institutionalized politics.

Leftist feminists realized that their ideas about “European” and “Western” discourses about equality were not grounded in a radical commitment to real political representation but only in the
acts of recognition and praise for being present. Both feminist and leftist activists are more focused now on generating effective local initiatives—which fall outside of the realm of state as well as European policies—to improve their own lives based on feminist and leftist principles. Maidan served to help connect like-minded people who are, as Maria put it, “self-organized” around certain issues. As she said, before Maidan, “we thought there were maybe 20 feminists in Kyiv. Only after the Women’s Brigade we found a lot of active women who sometimes talk to us in the same language. For me it was a shock. We didn’t know where to find them. And they didn’t know where to find us.” The Women’s Brigade helped these like-minded groups connect with each other and build a country-wide network of contacts. Instead of being a divisive political ideology, Maria and other leftist feminists have used feminist principles to find commonalities among those who might otherwise be at odds with each other. Like leftist groups on Maidan, feminists also shifted their actions and platforms throughout the protest in order to maximize their impact on the participants.

There are many examples of leftists who have volunteered their time and abilities for community-building activities, as well as for initiatives to support the Ukrainian army troops fighting separatists and Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine (discussed in Chapter 6). Leftist feminists also embraced this development following the end of Maidan. Maria described how members of the Women’s Brigade began traveling to different cities in Eastern Ukraine to meet with other female activists, sometimes from Anti-Maidan protest groups. She said these women, like the members of the sotnia, were mostly interested in anti-war themes. “In the beginning,” she said, “they wanted to beat us up. They asked questions like if we killed people, and how many people did I kill.” But, after an hour and a half, she said, these women all realized “that in general we want the same thing. We don’t want to have poverty. We want to have more rights. We want
it to be calm, we want there to be peace. We don’t want there to be corruption. And we really don’t have anything to argue about.”

While I do not wish to inflate the impact of feminism or leftism in Ukraine, as both of these political ideologies remain marginalized in Ukrainian politics and unrepresented in official political institutions, I conclude with two points about how these political ideologies shifted during Maidan. First, where feminism and feminist activists had previously grounded themselves as more European, and even as participants in transnational feminist discourses, responses to their initiatives on Maidan, both from Ukrainians as well as from Western European and North American women’s rights activists, made them reconsider this position. Where Maria may have felt that “Europe” was more the theme of feminists in the early days of Maidan, by the end of the protests, they had become more focused on local Ukrainian initiatives and collaborations.

Second, this shift to focus on local initiatives allows me to highlight leftist feminists’ most important impact on Maidan and on Ukraine today: the promotion of the concept of “self-organization” for governing one’s political commitments. Self-organized groups do not rely on state or state-like bodies but instead meet their and others’ needs because of their own abilities and investments. This is true for volunteers helping support those fighting in Eastern Ukraine as well as members of the Ol’ha Kobylians’ka Women’s Brigade who are attempting to renew dialogue among divided groups of Ukrainians. This is a new kind of vernacularization of both feminist and leftist perspectives that has the potential to be more effective than street protest and interventions into mass mobilizations.

As I discuss further in the following chapter, this shift to self-organization is an essential part of the Ukrainian state’s shift from communism to neoliberalism. Under communism, women’s and men’s roles, and their potential to participate in politics, were defined by the Communist Party.
Self-organization was not a realistic option for any kind of political activism, including feminism. Following the collapse of the socialist state, however, political participation and self-organization have come to be seen as effective mechanisms to challenge state policy and practice. At the same time, these projects accept the post-Euromaidan neoliberal state’s limitations as fact. By attempting to fill the gaps left by the state, these groups are allowing the state not to be accountable for gender equality and promoting non-discrimination, an accountability that is supposed to be part of full European integration. This focus on self-organization shifts the burden off the state and onto ordinary citizens to make change among themselves that, so far, has no promise of being implemented at a higher level. Feminists and leftists may no longer occupy the same “suspect location” as they did when they were more strongly associated with both Europe and state socialism, but they also have a weakening claim on the contemporary state and its representatives. Through self-organization, they adopt an attitude that does not expect the state to do everything or anything, as was the case in socialism.

Rather than bring Ukrainians closer to Europe, the Maidan protests may have alienated those who truly believed Europe represented something better than what existed. While feminists and others still see themselves as more representative of values like equality and tolerance, they no longer feel obliged to associate these views as more European than the values of the right-wing thugs screaming slurs and hurling homemade explosives at the crowd. These activists see that what they can accomplish by self-organizing, without the support of their own government, let alone European ones, is actually more effective in starting a conversation with everyday Ukrainians about LGBT or women’s rights than asking for official recognition. As long as people like those who attacked the Pride Parade crowd continue to define national ideology for Ukraine, it seems obvious that this movement will be at odds with feminism. Only by establishing new, self-
organized ways to fight these violent, exclusionary versions of nationalism will feminists find paths toward a Ukrainian nationalism that does not preclude gender equality and women’s rights.

**Conclusion: Feminism Without the State**

In this chapter, I have shown that, although discourses about women and gender have been present throughout Ukraine’s history, feminists remain marginalized in the political sphere. This is in part because the issues they present challenge traditional gender norms in which men hold positions of political and economic power and women reproduce and protect the Ukrainian nation. The feminists featured in this chapter are also associated with leftist activists, which further marginalizes their political position because it encourages a view that they support socialist-era notions of gender equality through state policy. In many ways, they do adhere to such notions; in their view, however, this conceptualization of how to enact better gender policies is linked toward a progressive Europe rather than a regression to state socialism.

While the Maidan mobilizations became, over time, a space for leftist activists to find new ways to reformulate their leftist ideology in order to participate in the protests, feminists were less successful. Even when women defined their own ways to participate, such as in the form of Women’s Brigades, they were limited by the already-existing discourses about national ideology and political participation on Maidan, as defined by men. Only when feminist activists adapted to the protests in the same way as leftists—that is, through a focus on self-organization—did they finally vernacularize their positions as feminists who also support Ukraine.

Such a trend has become extremely prominent in Ukraine following the end of Maidan and the beginning of the conflict in the Eastern Regions. While self-organization began with leftist and feminist initiatives, it has become inextricably linked with processes of decommunization. Because
self-organization was not an option under the communist regime, it has now become part of the arsenal of political tactics that proves Ukraine’s position as democratic and European. This is not necessarily a great leap away from feminists’ original conceptualizations of Europe that were so at odds with those of the majority of protesters. But this linking of self-organization and decommunization has contributed to the further neoliberalization of the post-Maidan Ukrainian state, leaving feminists to continue to fight for gender equality without the help of the state.
Chapter 6: Without the State: Volunteerism after Maidan

In March of 2015, Vitalyk posted a “coming out” on Facebook.¹ He had volunteered with a special rapid-response emergency medical² unit to deploy to the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zone in Eastern Ukraine. Vitalyk wrote that “this is a division of medical volunteers which has been providing emergency medical aid and evacuation of the wounded in the area of the ATO.” Trained as a medical equipment engineer and having worked in hospitals in nearly all the regions of Ukraine, he volunteered for instructor training in Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) in the ATO zone and for soldiers. He specifically wrote that he was not serving in the army or working for other state or private security forces. Instead, he said, he was motivated by his previous experiences as an activist and the events of the past two years in Ukraine, referencing the mass mobilizations of 2013-2014. He thanked everyone who had supported his decision and asked people to respect his choice: “If you find this totally unacceptable,” he wrote, “do the decent thing and remove me from your friends.”

Vitalyk’s story, shared a year after the end of the Maidan mobilizations, reflects the effects of “self-organization” (samoorhanizatsiia) on Maidan and beyond.³ The protest camp on Maidan was cleared at the beginning of July 2014. Cars began to use Khreshchatyk as usual, and the occupied buildings were returned to the city. In May 2014, presidential elections were held, and Petro Poroshenko won the majority in the first round of voting. Two months earlier, in March, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the residents of the Autonomous Republic of

¹ In Ukraine, I have seen many people use the phrase “coming out” to describe any kind of secret-telling or admission of information that has previously been unknown to most others. I once saw someone use the term “coming out” to joke that he was a superhero, accompanied by a photo of himself in a flesh-colored bodysuit.
² In Ukrainian, okrema medychna bryhada shvydkoho pryznachennia.
³ While some leftists used the word “grassroots” (nyzovyi in Ukrainian) to describe their activism, they did not present grassroots mobilizing as the same as “self-organization.”
Crimea, part of Ukraine since 1954, would rather be part of Russia and offered them a referendum. As Dunn and Bobick have demonstrated, this is part of Putin’s broader strategy to incite instability and thus gain greater control in the region; as the authors write, this is one of several “interventions on behalf of ‘compatriots,’ sootechestvenniki—individuals who often are Russian citizens, speak Russian, and consider themselves to be culturally Russian yet who live within the boundaries of other states” (2014:407). Although the ultimate status of the territory was decided based on a referendum, in which Crimean citizens voted to return the governance of their territory to the Russian Federation, the referendum is widely accepted among scholars of Ukraine as not having been legitimate (Dunn and Bobick 2014; Yurchak 2014). This has to do both with the way the referendum questions were phrased—in short, they asked if citizens wanted to be part of Russia now or in the future—and with widespread intimidation of Ukrainian voters (rather than Russian inhabitants) and a boycott promoted by Crimean Tatar groups.

In the same months, two Ukrainian oblasts, Luhans'k and Donets'k, saw demonstrations in favor of having a similar referendum, led by groups eventually called “separatists” or “rebels.” Thus many people in the region felt that Russia would provide more economic stability than could the centralized Ukrainian government, and, thanks to Russian news media, many of them also believed that Maidan had been led by the radical right and that Poroshenko's takeover was nothing more than a fascist junta. These separatist groups gained major power in certain areas of these two regions, which together make up the Donets'k Basin (Donbas), historically Soviet Ukraine's most industrialized region but one of the most hard-hit following the economic downturn Ukraine

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4 Monica Eppinger, an anthropologist and lawyer who contributed to legislation that helped Crimean Tatars whose families had been deported to Central Asia under Stalin return to Crimea, referred to an opinion poll taken in late February in which over 50% of the Crimean population would choose to remain an autonomous territory of Ukraine, rather than choosing Russian jurisdiction. This poll is possibly more reflective of the actual population of Crimea than the Russian referendum and provides further documentation of the illegitimacy of the referendum (personal communication).
experienced after independence. Separatists from these regions created the so-called Luhans’k People’s Republic (LNR; Luhans’ka narodna respublika) and the Donets’k People’s Republic (DNR; Donets’ka narodna respublika), neither of which is recognized by Poroshenko’s government.

In this environment, Poroshenko declared an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) to root out the separatists and reclaim the Donbas for Ukraine. Since the summer of 2014, there have been several broken ceasefires, leading up to the most recent Minsk Agreement of February 2015. As recently as February 2016, however, clashes have continued between the Ukrainian military groups, volunteer groups contracted to work with the Ukrainian army, and Russian-backed separatist groups. In this chapter, I discuss the effects of this ongoing conflict on political activism following Maidan. This war has had a powerful impact on the radical left, causing major schisms around the issue of volunteer-based support. I argue, however, that the leftist notion of self-organization, promoting non-party political mobilization, underlies these post-Maidan political shifts in crucial ways.

In this chapter, I explore two main paths of expansion for self-organization since the mass mobilizations ended. First, I discuss various civic initiatives that began during Maidan to respond to the state’s limitations; I contrast several initiatives that continued following the end of the protests with that of Student Assembly, arguably one of the most effective self-organized

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5 Putin has spent most of the time since the beginning of the conflict stating that no Russian troops were in Ukraine. Journalist Simon Ostrovsky used one Russian soldier’s digital footprint to trace his path into Ukraine and back to Russia (2015). This complicates the question of whether Ukraine is in a “civil war”; even the terminology used to describe what I call “Russian-backed separatists” has been a significant conversation. Kyiv Post, Ukraine's popular English-language newspaper, requires its writers to use the name “terrorists” and refers to the conflict as “Russia's war in Ukraine” (Bonner 2015), a decision not all journalists agree with (Christopher Miller, personal communication). Returning again to Tilly and Tarrow, I would like to suggest that this conflict falls into the category of “internationalized internal,” which takes place “between the government of a state and internal opposition groups, with military intervention from other states” (2007:152). This allows us to see that there are various groups participating, including volunteer brigades on both sides, which are the main subject of this chapter.
initiatives, which was intentionally discontinued in February 2014. Second, I describe leftist efforts to create a party-like structure that would act through direct (Internet-based) voting and the varied responses among leftists to this initiative. Finally, I consider the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which is supported by myriad self-organized initiatives as an extension of the principles of Maidan and as a possible criticism of the limitations of the state, even as they fight for Ukraine.

These self-organized forms are part of the continuing rupture between “nation” and “state” that began before the Maidan mobilizations and has continued even since the election of Petro Poroshenko as president in May 2014. Self-organization among leftists was also motivated by the idea that they could create better political structures that would be more representative of Ukrainians than the recent regimes have been able to do. After the protests had ended, many leftists said they felt that the most important impact of Maidan was that people had experienced real self-organization, knew what it entailed, and knew that they could do it. Some activists felt that the impact of self-organization on Maidan was to change protesters’ views of the government itself. As one activist put it, “People [are] left in a situation where they have no one to take responsibility for them, [and] they are forced to self-organize. People don’t see the government as something sacred.”

On Maidan, self-organization took various forms that expanded from the leftist-inspired political ideologies. The long-term occupation of the main square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti, as well as of many of the surrounding building, was only the most visible. The constant presence of volunteers in kitchens and hospitals, and those working as cleaning crews, ensured that self-organization was the motor of Maidan. As when Maidan ended, many activists told me about other

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6 This did not mean that there was no party presence on Maidan. While party flags became much less present throughout the winter, many of the speakers on the main stage were party representatives, and there was further speculation that party funds were supporting the protest camp.
examples of “self-organization,” several of which I discuss in this chapter. Some were very localized, focusing on specific districts of the city or even one apartment block. Others were targeted at the municipal level, including the Assembly for Social Revolution, the leftist party-like structure that vied for city council seats in the spring of 2014 (they did not win any seats). Initiatives supporting the Ukrainian military and volunteer brigades in Eastern Ukraine show that discourses of self-organization have spread nationally, in part thanks to the extremely varied forms self-organization can take.

Each of these examples of self-organization (local, municipal, and national) provide important views on the effects of Maidan on the new left in Ukraine. Each of these initiatives is an object of contention, even at the most localized levels, because there has, of late, been no consensus on the role of the Ukrainian left in the post-Maidan period. Should leftists focus on mobilizing people’s newfound ability to self-organize to reclaim city spaces for themselves? Should leftists attempt to reframe the government by infiltrating it? Should leftists aid the resolution of the conflict in the East in order to encourage stability before focusing on social policies? While most leftists assessed the effects of Maidan positively, at least in its impact on most Ukrainians, it appears that Maidan has had distinctly divisive effects on the left itself.

State Criticism and Neoliberalism

Self-organization as a criticism of the state has come largely in the form of volunteerism assuming the role of the state when state bodies are incapable of fulfilling promises to citizens. The “state”—in terms of what is expected of it as an institution, which bodies collectively become interpellated as the “state,” and what those bodies do—shifts over time, growing and contracting depending on various social, political, and economic factors. The advent and global spread of
neoliberal economic policies, which propose that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2005:2), have led to an intertwining of economic and political systems (Greenhouse 2009). This intertwining is preserved by a state form that intervenes as little as possible into markets; at the same time, Harvey argues, neoliberal economic policies are a “political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (19). One of the major processes within this type of governance, documented in various global contexts, is the withdrawal or retreat of the “state” within society, and its replacement by other actors (Harvey 2005:3; according to Harvey, this withdrawal goes along with major moments of deregulation and privatization). These actors have included non-governmental organizations and their representatives (Phillips 2008; 2011); other “civil society” actors linked with supportive government agencies (Song 2009); charities (Caldwell 2004); and civilian volunteers (Hemment 2009; 2012; Hyatt 2001; this last category is the main subject of this chapter).

Scholars of postsocialism have documented the various shifts that state forms have taken, particularly considering the state-citizen relationship and questioning what states' duties to citizens can realistically be. Read and Thelen (2007), for instance, argue against this focus on state withdrawal. They suggest that such a perspective “implies a rather one-dimension view of ‘the state’ as a singular entity with clearly defined boundaries” (2007:9), which leads researchers to misunderstand how “a range of state bodies, actors, and institutions, far from being in retreat, continue to shape social life in the region” (ibid.), although in a different form from socialist-era welfare-based entities. The authors identify how governments have, in some cases, enlarged welfare entitlements in response to popular demands, and they suggest that a more crucial
difference between socialist and postsocialist is that the responsibility for social security, once tied to central state institutions, is now the purview of local representative bodies (ibid.). Linda Cook (2007) agrees with the assessment that postsocialist states did not necessarily remove social welfare provisions from their agendas, because of the probability that reigning regimes would lose power if they did so. Instead, she suggests, governments implemented a combination of “retrenchment,” or spending cuts, and “liberalization,” which restructured the welfare state and public programs into insurance markets and privatized social services (2007:10).

Lynne Haney views the state in terms of layers, “comprised of multiple and even conflicting apparatuses” (2002:7), which are made up of “redistributive and interpretive apparatuses,” for instance, but also “social policies and institutional practices” (ibid.). This view of the state allows Haney to examine the shifting regimes of power in Hungary, from early state socialism through to the “liberal” welfare state which developed after 1985, during which the state’s priorities changed both according to people’s needs and according to how those people could be framed as needy. Haney shows how this restructuring has shifted the nature of the citizen-state relationship, thus making the citizen body easier targets of neoliberal governance. Similarly, in the South Korean context, Jesook Song shows how certain categories of “IMF-homeless,” or, those perceived as temporarily homeless because of the economic crisis brought on by the adoption of IMF-sponsored reforms in Korea, changed discourses about need to shift focus away from long-term homeless populations and onto those who could be “helped” by state policies (2009:39). This served to change social opinions about homelessness at the same time, as she argues, that they encouraged a reproduction of traditional gender norms in which women were encouraged to focus on families while men, particularly young, educated men, were encouraged to use social benefits to re-enter the workforce (50).
Whereas the Soviet state’s project was (theoretically) premised on providing for people’s needs, that people should and would take only what was needed, and that they should contribute according to their abilities, the states that have developed in postsocialism have never adhered to any similar promises. Now, “need” is established based on new categories and qualifications, as Haney has documented. Tova Höjdestrand (2009) traces the novel ways homelessness emerged in Russia following the end of socialism, at a time in which certain state-based administrative structures remained but a quasi-capitalist economic system had been implemented, forcing the welfare arm of the state to contract. The shift to private ownership of, for example, residences, and changing patterns of migration left people who might previously have been aided by state welfare services outside of the state’s reach, changing the meaning of homelessness itself. Höjdestrand documents differing policies toward “willing” and “unwilling” homelessness, as well as “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, terms that have gained new meaning compared with those they had in the much less stratified Soviet society. State practices reinforce these meanings through their continued support of exclusionary policies and the lack of federal focus on the problem of homelessness. Höjdestrand describes how the burden of providing services for homeless populations, as well as of changing social attitudes toward homeless people, fell onto local and municipal administrations with the support of non-governmental organizations (2009:42-43).

The dismantling of the Soviet-era welfare state in the region should also be understood as part of the process of decommunization. As Kim Lane Scheppele has put it, “neoliberalism asserts that states that are soft on socialism must be brought to see a simple truth: coddling their populations with a safety net that ensures a decent life without hard work will simply make them

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7 This conclusion does not consider whether Soviet-era states were actually effective in their support. Haney, among others, has discussed the complicated nature of the socialist state’s welfare systems. The point here is to establish the significant changes to those states following the end of socialism.
lazy” (2009:45). As she concludes, however, and related to Read and Thelen’s argument, social welfare states were “reconfigured” in the 1990s, rather than simply retreating. Importantly, Scheppel shows that constitutional courts in Hungary upheld citizens’ rights to certain welfare provisions, thus requiring state bodies to continue some sort of social support, while at the same time enabling courts to promote the “rule of law” ideology, itself an important aspect of post-Soviet democratization, to enforce implementation of their rulings (53-55).

Privatization, Volunteerism, and State Processes

Thus, Read and Thelen’s suggestion to move beyond a simple view of state retraction or withdrawal has not been the only attempt to generate a more complex understanding of the multidirectional shifts of postsocialist states and their relationships with their citizens. While using the language of “the state” does, to some extent, reify that entity (Abrams 2006), it does not preclude an understanding of the complex relationships the bodies that make up the state require in order to secure functional governance. Here, Béatrice Hibou’s framework of the “privatization of the state” (2004) is apt. The “metamorphosis” (2) of the state in this case includes the “extended use of private intermediaries for an increasing number of functions previously devolving upon the state, and redeployment by the state” (3). In other words, the shift in governance from a centralized state body controlling welfare regimes or security services, for instance, to privatized provisioning of such services, does not simply show a unidirectional state retreat. Instead, it is an example of a growing trend in which state bodies use these privatizing mechanisms in order to redistribute and further reconsolidate power to new ends. As Hibou describes, these relationships are “deliberately unstable, even volatile, and secret and up for negotiation all the time” (15). This opacity is precisely

8 I prefer to use the terminology of “the state” because it was a crucial element of leftist discourses before and during Maidan (Ukr. derzhava; Rus. gosudarstvo).
part of the power of the state; it encourages the “multiplication of the points of the exercise of state power” (24) because it diversifies the state’s influence and the actors which work in conjunction with the state.

Hibou traces the historically localized ways that this privatization has developed over time; it is not simply a product of the neoliberalization of the global economy but instead has long been entrenched in state forms and functions (25). Indeed, the globalization of economies—including foreign investment as a major contributor to state economies, as well as the intervention of international non-governmental organizations into state processes—further encourages the effective privatizing of the state: “Thanks to the numerous levers for intervention and increasing possibilities of coordination, these same opportunities can provide the central power with an improved capacity for reducing subordinate actors to submission” (39). Those authors whose work describes a growing emphasis on individual autonomy and self-sufficiency (Davis 2006:3; Ong 2006:11; see also Hyatt 2001; Song 2009) are not necessarily suggesting simply that a state retreat has displaced responsibility onto the “individual.” Rather, we can see this trend as part of the whole reconfiguration of the citizen-state relationship. As Aihwa Ong writes, “neoliberalism considered as a technology of government is a profoundly active way of rationalizing governing and self-governing in order to ‘optimize’” (2006:3). In other words, neoliberal governance includes a shifting relationship between governing and the governed in which the governed take an active role in creating the mechanisms through which such governance works.

An example of one of these mechanisms is civic participation, part of the ongoing process of “privatization” of the state as well as a way to spread new discourses about how citizens should relate to their state. Volunteers, for example, those who once criticized the state’s inability to perform certain functions and completed them in spite of this inability, are promoted through state
discourses as, in fact, those actors who were always meant to perform such duties. These processes absolve state bodies of their responsibilities, displace those responsibilities onto citizens and civic groups, and at the same time draw these actors more tightly into the state’s power structure because they are now seen as necessary to the state’s ability to govern. Andrea Muehlebach describes the process in Italy: “The Italian state has in the last three decades sought to mobilize parts of the population into a new voluntary labor regime—a regime that has allowed for the state to conflate voluntary labor with good citizenship, and unwaged work with gifting” (2012:6). She finds a circulation of a new spirit of “solidarity” or “compassion” that counters the atomization or isolation typically found in neoliberal political and economic forms.

Julie Hemment’s research among young organizations in Putin’s Russia confirms the “hybrid features” of the state-civil society relationship (2009, 2012; in the latter, Hemment also describes “civil society” as a “contested political symbol” rather than an “objective descriptor” [237; see also Verdery 1996b]). In Hemment’s view, these organizations do not take the place of state functions, but instead “work in conjunction with the state as it goes about redrawing population categories” in order to find new ways to govern (2009:44). Like Yurchak’s entrepreneurs (2002; see Chapter 3) participants in groups such as Nashi, the youth wing of Putin’s United Russia party, see their participation as a way to access new mechanisms of social mobility and political power (Sperling 2015), at the same time that their similarity to former Soviet forms, such as the Komsomol, signals a “new authoritarianism” (Hemment 2012:234) under Putin. Because of the popularity of these groups and their work on issues with important contemporary value, including veterans’ well-being and the promotion of patriotic holidays (Hemment 2009:37), and because of the Putin regime’s control over the funding sources of democratization (Hemment 2012:241), these groups consolidate power in the hands of the ruling government at the same time
that they provide perceived mobility and power to participants who adhere to such rules and standards.

At the same time, the reliance on volunteerism reproduces further social stratification. Hyatt (2001), for instance, uses the example of three various urban United States housing projects and the female volunteers that attempt to ameliorate residents’ situations to show that volunteerism is a framework that helps establish notions of “good” or “deserving” poor—those who are attempting to help themselves rather than relying on the state for aid, an essential component of neoliberal citizenship—at the same time that it reinforces women’s roles as caretakers for others. Hyatt argues that “the current emphasis on volunteerism as a necessary and laudable public virtue has served to mask poverty as a site of social and material inequality and to obscure the role that state action continues to play in reproducing such inequalities” (2001:206; emphasis in original). That women are often expected to be the first to volunteer—in both impoverished and middle-class communities, according to Hyatt—suggests a convenient reproduction of gender roles, in which women act as unremunerated caretakers, which is advantageous to the state.

In the context of Ukraine, volunteerism has a crucial gendered component. As I show in Chapter 5, militarized masculinity has been an important aspect of the image of Maidan. The majority of the military volunteers in the Donbas are certainly men (Goujon 2016; Lebedev 2016), although several researchers have focused on the participation of female military volunteers (Rubchak 2014; UN Women 2015). Importantly, those who work behind the front lines, providing medical services, distributing food and clothes, and helping organize evacuations from the region, tend to be women (Shukan 2016; Stepaniuk 2016). Ioulia Shukan’s research among the “Sisters of
“Mercy” in Kharkiv shows an example of this tendency\(^9\) as well as the ease with which a women-run volunteer organization generates legitimacy. Sarah Phillips’s recent work with groups that organize the evacuation of disabled people from the ATO zone has also shown a predominance of women in such organizations.\(^{10}\) These tendencies help encourage women to take on roles of caretakers, without remuneration, in a case in which state representatives have confirmed their own inability to provide these services and in which people’s lives and livelihoods are at stake. Stepaniuk (2016) suggests that the reification of traditional gender roles in volunteer groups through care work further prevents women from taking on decision-making roles, reinforcing the stereotypical assumption that women should not participate in politics or political decisions.

In sum, discourses about and practices of volunteerism benefit the new Ukrainian state in various ways. First, these volunteer organizations take the burden of certain services away from the state and move it onto citizens. These range from simple collections of food for volunteer troops to the volunteer basis of much of the military action in the Donbas to the evacuation of Donbas inhabitants from the war zone. Second, the circulation of discourses that confirm volunteering as an essential part of good citizenship fits into the web of neoliberalization. Importantly, in the case of Ukraine, the process of neoliberalization is linked with those of decommunization and Europeanization; the volunteer-as-citizen discourses that permeate neoliberal ideas about citizenship confirm that volunteerism in Ukraine, rather than being proof of the state’s inability to properly provide for its citizens, shows instead that Ukraine is truly a European-style democracy.

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\(^9\) See her blog post about this group (https://carnetsdeterrain.wordpress.com/2015/05/30/entre-paix-factice-et-guerre-larvee-la-difference-est-minime-a-l-hopital-militaire-de-kharkiv/#more-259) and the organization’s own Facebook group (Сестра милосердия АТО/ Харьков).

\(^{10}\) Phillips and her collaborators suggest that up to 90% of the volunteers in these groups across Ukraine are women.
Civil Society and/as Self-Organization

A significant development from this shifting role of the state has been the growth and legitimacy of both the concept and reality of “civil society.” As part of the spread of neoliberal policies in the 1980s, during the restructuring of the Soviet economy (glasnost’ and perestroika): “governance that had once been the purview of the state became the purview of non-governmental organizations and so called ‘civil society’ groups like churches, development agencies, and other international bodies and organizations” (West 2010:691). Many working in the region have also seen the emergence of NGOs and other groups considered part of “civil society” as part of the expansion of neoliberalism in the former Soviet Union (see Hemment 2007, for instance). Further, international agencies’ focus on the growth of “civil society” as a reflection of a country’s or region’s successful “democratization” has led to a rapid influx of funding for such groups, without an evaluation of their relevance or positive effects. Sometimes the presence of NGOs is used simply to show civil society “development” without actually implementing changes.

However, a widespread perception exists that many postsocialist countries, Ukraine included, has a “weak” civil society (see Petrova and Tarrow 2007; although this assessment depends on one’s interpretation of the role of civil society [Way 2014]). There are two major explanations for this perceived weakness. First, according to NATO and EU researcher Rosaria Puglisi, Ukrainian civil society development has been weakened by “a general distrust for any kind of structured social activity, the persistence of informal connections and networks and the deep disillusionment with partial democratic and market reforms” (2015b:4); furthermore, the NGO

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11 In this section, I draw largely from a panel presented at the 2016 World Convention for the Association for the Study of Nationalities called “State and Civil Society in Post-Maidan Ukraine.” I thank panelists Mykhailo Minakov, Alexandra Goujon, Anna Colin Lebedev, Natalia Stepaniuk, and Ioulia Shukan for sharing their papers on this topic to inform this chapter.
sphere in Ukraine has long been perceived as elitist because of its international funding sources (5). Additionally, some postsocialist governments are disinclined to encourage NGO proliferation. Before the recent protests, significant challenges to NGO work were documented in Ukraine: “bureaucratic red tape, inhibitive tax laws and laws governing humanitarian aid, financial vulnerability, interorganizational competition, and negative social perception” (Phillips 2011:104).

Following the Maidan mobilizations, however, according to Puglisi, there has been a “qualitative change in social participation” because the concept of civil society itself has been “widened and redefined” (6) through examples of successful self-organization. In a 2014 survey in a Ukrainian weekly asking people in whom they place their trust, the “volunteer sector”—including volunteers and volunteer military battalions, which I discuss below, civil society, and the church—ranked higher than the state. ¹² This shift should not simply force observers of Ukraine to re-rank it on global scales of democratization. Instead, I suggest that people’s views on civil society as a concept have themselves shifted following Maidan. Here, I draw on Katherine Verdery’s framing of the nature of such concepts. She refers to “civil society,” among other concepts like “democracy” or “Europe” that gained popularity after 1989, as “key symbolic operators, elements in ideological fields, rather than organizational realities” (1996:105). Instead of asking how civil society works, she asks, “What [can] a political economy of the symbolism around these notions reveal about that country’s postsocialist politics?” (ibid.; Julie Hemment effectively takes on this task in her research with youth groups in Putin’s Russia [2012]). The renegotiation of roles taking place between state and civil society in Ukraine—particularly what can and should be expected from actors representing each sphere—should be understood both

through examples of people’s participation and through their understanding of what each of these ideas means.

While this documented shift in attitudes merits a new discussion of “civil society” in the region, it is further important that, according to recent surveys, Ukrainian citizens now recognize volunteers as more responsible, more effective, and more valuable than the state. This should not suggest that Ukrainians ever had a particular trust in the state; what it does show is that now they believe that there are people who are worth trusting, as long as they are affiliated with a non-state entity or idea. Such attitudes do not necessarily hurt the state, given that the Ukrainian government is required to reduce its welfare programs as provisions of the Association Agreement with the European Union. Instead, this shift to a positive assessment of volunteerism and “civil society” programs means that governing bodies can relinquish responsibility when NGOs and volunteers can meet people’s needs instead. While these volunteer initiatives may be composed of people who are critical of the state’s limitations, they may ultimately serve the state in their practices.

Puglisi and others acknowledge that this shifting attitude toward volunteerism has not come exclusively as a result of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The entire period of the Euromaidan mobilizations influenced people’s attitudes about what they were capable of—as one activist told me, “people saw what it entailed and that they could do it.” In her words, this changed people’s “consciousness” (svidomist’) about self-organization and volunteerism. I suggest that the notion of self-organization, originally based in leftist ideology, has become linked, if not synonymous with, the notion of “civil society” during and following Maidan. This discursive shift has enabled an offloading of state responsibility onto citizens—as was proven to be possible and successful during Maidan—with the added legitimating notion that civil society is itself an extension of the values and goals of Maidan (see Shukan 2016). This shift has two related results: first, bodies and
institutions making up the state do not suffer from a lack of trust, because they have removed responsibility for certain needs onto groups that are now perceived as trustworthy. Second, the notion of “civil society” has itself become blurred—now, many groups claiming Maidan origins act in the name of the “people” but would certainly not fall into the category of an NGO or other legitimate institution (nor would those groups desire to be part of such organizations; see Shukan’s discussion of Odesa vigilantes pursuing “justice” [2016]).

Self-organization has shifted far away from its roots following Maidan. What people now call “self-organized” groups range from those volunteering to collect basic amenities for soldiers and volunteer combatants to groups of Afghan War veterans who organize prisoner exchanges across the LNR/DNR frontlines because their social networks enable them to more successfully complete such exchanges than could state representatives (Lebedev 2016). In this chapter, I trace the movement of the concept of self-organization, particularly focusing on leftists’ own interpretation of those shifts. Leftists themselves regularly reflected on the possible impact of the spread of the principles of self-organization; most fundamentally, this meant the valuing of people’s ideas and trust in their ability to accomplish their goals. I suggest that this spread of self-organization began in localized forms on Maidan but, once the protests were understood as successful and effective, self-organization expanded even further, first overlapping and then overtaking the realm of state practice and policies. Among leftists, this led to a complete re-envisioning of possibilities for leftist forms of governance and for leftist forms of activism.

Student Center in the Former Lenin Museum

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The information in this section comes from my field notes and photos, several key interviews, and a reflective article from a Ukrainian journal by a participant and one of my interviewees. I choose not to cite this article so as to preserve the anonymity of the interviewee.
The first crucial self-organized initiative I discuss is the Student Assembly (*students’ka asambleia*; SA), which formed in late January 2014 following the passage of the Dictatorship Laws and the attempt to organize a student strike at Kyiv Mohyla Academy. SA was crucial because it was the first Maidan-based initiative to put into practice not only self-organization but also consensus-based methods. The occupied Ukrainian House, previously the Lenin Museum in Kyiv and more recently a site for exhibitions and some museum archives on the top floors, was a prime opportunity for students to reach out to other Maidan participants about their educational concerns and even about leftist issues. One of the organizers, Sasha, told me that the Student Center created in the Ukrainian House was a departure from previous education-based initiatives like strikes (discussed in Chapter 4). It was formed around the governing principle of “assembly”; organizers held a general assembly each day in which all students had an equal say and no leaders ran the platform.

From the assembly, students broke into smaller affinity or action groups (*hrupa dïi*) around issues or interests, of 5-15 people, which could then meet on their own time and bring their decisions to the general assembly when they were ready. In this way, the general assembly did not get bogged down with ideological arguments or small details but was able to gather and share all necessary information from each action group, which could then gain more members. Action groups included those working with the Student Assembly’s social media presence, a group that organized film screenings for occupants of the Ukrainian House, a group focused on boycotting oligarch-owned businesses and restaurants, and a group dealing with the technical aspects of keeping a student space in the occupied Ukrainian House, such as a rotation of students who would sleep in the space each night.

14 *Varto u likarni*, the Hospital Guards, was perhaps the earliest effective self-organized initiative. However, it did not function based on consensus but rather on volunteer initiative to go to a specific hospital.
Sasha, a confident and eloquent young woman whose participation in leftist activism was inspired by liberation pedagogy and the theater of the oppressed\(^{15}\) and who had studied in Europe, described the general assemblies as “short and productive.” Organizers chose the name “Student Assembly” intentionally in order to emphasize the character of the initiative, that all decisions were not made by a center or leader, but in a general meeting that was held in the same space at the same time every day. Around the Student Assembly space, posters describing in detail how meetings would be held, how decisions would be made, and how action groups should function let participants know how the SA was organized. I attended one of the first general assemblies at the end of January, which had about 50 students in attendance from KMA, Taras Shevchenko National University, Kyiv Polytechnic University, Drahomanov National Pedagogical University, and others. At the assembly, Vasyl, another activist, described the non-hierarchical functioning of the SA, as well as the importance of remaining outside of party affiliation, because existing political parties do not represent students’ interests.

Student suggestions at the meeting for what the SA should do ranged from simply going to Maidan as a group to organizing a further occupation of an educational building to calling for a general strike. Vasyl and Sasha encouraged the division of the general assembly into action groups to focus on more specific ideas, such as the boycott initiative, picketing courts and working with lawyers to support students who had been arrested, and working with other civic initiatives such as Hospital Guards and other medical services. Vasyl reiterated the importance of always having

\(^{15}\) Leftists dedicated to liberation pedagogy and the theater of the oppressed were largely inspired by the work of Paolo Freire. In the years before Maidan, they had run a free school, offering classes in foreign languages, gender and feminist theory, and skills like knitting. I participated in the English discussion club throughout my fieldwork, but many of the other courses were canceled due to a combination of lack of space to hold classes and the disruptions of the mass mobilizations.
a physical presence in the student space, asking those assembled to volunteer to spend the night or at least to bring sleeping bags and mats for those who would spend the night.

The Student Assembly was a unique example of student activism on Maidan in that it was perhaps the moment of students’—and leftists’—most thorough integration into the fabric of the mobilizations. Their presence in the occupied Ukrainian House as part of Student Assembly was seen as an opportunity to reach out to a new, non-student population about the idea of self-organization. One leftist activist, Maksym, posted an interesting reflection on Facebook on the possibility of launching a leftist “Trojan Horse” via the Student Assembly’s film screenings and discussions:

Today I was witness to a quite atypical situation. In the occupied Ukrainian House (where our comrades have set up the Student Center) at the film screening about Argentinian workers’ occupation of their factory sat (other than students) older guys [diad’ky; uncles] who came from other regions of the country to Maidan... Perhaps if they heard about the left, it’s only in the spirit of “communists” and “hang them” [he evokes the common anti-communist/anti-leftist phrase komuniaky na hilliaku, “Hang the communists,” used in Chapter 2]. But they sit here and stick with this “red” film with interest, some even giving lively commentary. […]

All of this is to say that, although it is not our revolution, we can really launch our own Trojan Horse of social-critical thought among the masses, who were previously inaccessible to us… Understand that our Maidan friends are unlikely, immediately inspired by the example of Argentinian workers, to start taking enterprises under worker control.
However, it provides a first and very important precondition for some further left political development which, until now, has been absolutely deaf in terms of the regions.

In other words, Maksym, a student himself, felt that the Student Assembly was giving leftists an opportunity to speak to sympathetic Maidan participants about thinking outside of the typical, hierarchical forms of political organization. Because SA was so staunchly leader- and party-free, and because it functioned so well and provided daily, visible examples of its success, other participants could see that student activists were not relegated to only dealing with education issues. Further, within the broader context of the protests, leaders of the parties that stood in opposition to the governing regime (including Bat’kivshchyna, UDAR, and Svoboda; together constituting the Opposition) had lost a significant amount of credibility by late January because they were continuously negotiating with Yanukovych and his regime to establish amnesty for the protesters, and they were wholly ineffective. Protesters condemned the Opposition leaders because protesters’ first priority was the resignation of Yanukovych, while Opposition leaders were still treating the President as a legitimate leader. Protesters began to look for new forms of representation, as they no longer felt that Opposition leaders had their interests in mind.

Students used the Student Assembly to respond to this crisis of representation by reflecting on bigger political concerns, drawing in even those from “the regions,” in other words, rural spaces with populations that do not have the same access to higher education as these Kyiv university students. The simple proposition of self-organization and self-representation in politics, without relying on ineffective Opposition leaders, was a very timely theme for the occupants of the Ukrainian House. In Sasha’s later reflections, she describes that before SA, “people often didn’t believe that they could show initiative, that their ideas are worthy of attention.” Because of the way SA functioned, it treated everyone’s ideas equally, and SA participants attracted the attention
of other Maidan activists with their interesting films and lectures (capitalizing on the fact that living in the occupied Ukrainian House for weeks on end was not particularly stimulating).

The SA was further separated from other Maidan initiatives in its short lifespan. As Sasha described, the SA ceased to exist because “it was relevant to those conditions in which it emerged, and it is not relevant today.” But many activists mentioned their experience in SA as essential to the way Maidan changed their mindsets. According to Sasha, SA gave the mass of students on Maidan skills and confidence they needed to, for instance, successfully occupy a government building and use the occupation to bring about significant, long-term change (discussed in Chapter 4). Another activist, Danylo, described the consensus methods that SA used as “the most useful thing I learned in the time of Maidan.”

I had heard of consensus decision-making, but in practice, in use, I didn’t know how to do it. And here, almost every action we prepared, even not almost, really every action, we made decisions by consensus. I really liked those different symbols you can give, hand signs. That means you work faster when you’re talking about anything, you can see at once reactions to words, someone supports, doesn’t support. It’s maybe the most democratic way I know to make a decision. When you vote 51%, the other 49, or less, they can really be against it, but it’s a majority. When you do consensus, when you don’t have any categoric opposition, those who have something against it can propose an alternative to change something so that the decision is accepted, or they give a proposition themselves. This counts the ideas of every person. And that’s very important.

Student Assembly was effective both in giving people who were not typically activists confidence in their ideas, enhancing their ability to participate, and in spreading the concept of
self-organization to other, non-leftist protesters. SA disintegrated as soon as students occupied the Ministry of Education, where they used assemblies, affinity groups, and consensus methods to create and promote new higher education legislation and name a new Minister of Education. These same tactics and successes encouraged other volunteer initiatives during and after Maidan: in the end, Maksym’s “Trojan Horse of social-critical thought among the masses” came in the form of self-organized volunteerism.

SA was a crucial Maidan-based initiative that promoted self-organization—in both theory and practice—to a broad population. This helped spread effective non-party organizing throughout Maidan, especially because of the growing lack of credibility among Opposition parties and representatives. Importantly, SA ended when the need for it no longer existed, which is a fundamental component of a self-organized initiative. Self-organized groups respond to people's needs according to their abilities, so when the need arose for such a group, people like Sasha used their experience to help others. When the circumstances of Maidan no longer demanded the presence of SA, the initiative disappeared, although its impact remained.

**Euromaidan/Krym SOS**

Earlier in the dissertation, I discussed the leftist initiative *Varto u likarni* (Hospital Guards), which tracked those injured on Maidan, followed them to hospitals, and stood guard to protect them from the police (from the threat of both kidnapping and of forced confession for crimes related to Maidan). Some leftists referred to *Varto* as a leftist-humanitarian initiative. Despite its widespread presence and recognition, it was not the only humanitarian initiative on Maidan. Even more prominent was Euromaidan SOS (written in English but pronounced as *sos* instead of as separate letters), which preceded the Krym SOS initiative that developed in March 2013. Danylo
described the origins of Euromaidan SOS, which responded to the first detentions and arrests on Maidan. Euromaidan SOS was “the first to propose a hotline (hariacha linia) and could help from the legal side. And this was on volunteer principles, in other words, free legal aid.” Various people—not one organization—volunteered for the hotline. Euromaidan SOS also became a primary source of information on missing people, collecting photos and spreading information across social media as well as on the physical space of Maidan. According to the hotline coordinator, Alina, anywhere from one to ten people volunteered in the Euromaidan SOS offices depending on the situation in the streets, and others monitored social media to find and share information about new developments.16

Following the occupation of the Crimean peninsula in late February 2014, a similar initiative called Krym SOS was developed to “provide timely and reliable information about the situation in Crimea.” Initially, it was an entirely volunteer-based group, like Euromaidan SOS. One feminist activist I interviewed, Maria, recounted a story of her visit to Crimea in March to help a photographer who wanted to document the experiences of Crimean women. “I said to them, we want to talk to you, do interviews with you, photograph you. And they said, oh, girls, we can’t now, we have these problems. There are 500 people, and we need to get them out [of Crimea].” For Maria, this instance showed her that serious questions were being solved with the help of networks, rather than the state, something that she recounted as a positive impact of Maidan itself.

We really knew a lot of people from this initiative Euromaidan SOS, and we coordinated different things with them and Krym SOS, and we helped them find buses, we helped them find transport and money. And this was all only with the help of the Internet, telephones,

16 Alina was featured in the published collection called Ye Liudy, There Are People (Berdyns’kykh 2014); I did not interview her myself but did visit the Euromaidan SOS office space and knew several volunteers and coordinators.
and communication with ordinary people who were just looking for opportunities. And it was done without any help from the state. And after that I understood that maybe the state needs to have less of a function.

Maria linked the effectiveness of the impromptu evacuation—as well as people’s willingness to help—to Maidan itself and the initiatives that grew there and that came out of a change in mentality. As Maria put it, “Even in this kind of event, mass protests like Maidan, when people get practical experience of protest and self-organization and actions with other people, they can’t forget that and can’t reject it. They treat it really seriously.” I knew many people, including non-activists, who volunteered for the Krym SOS hotline, which helped resettle those who left Crimea. One volunteer in the western city of L’viv told me that she helped find a place in the city for a family with three children and a horse!

Krym SOS has solidified its position as one of the most prominent self-organized initiatives to come from Maidan, in part because of the Russian annexation of the territory by referendum in March 2014. Now that Crimea is no longer part of Ukraine, many organizations (including the UN High Commission on Refugees) have partnered with Krym SOS to expand the reach of this organization. In addition to offering legal aid, there are Krym SOS humanitarian aid centers in Kyiv, Kherson (the first city north of the peninsula in Ukraine), and L’viv, where most evacuees came to try to find new work and housing. Other organizations are working to help with the integration of Crimeans (and those who have left Eastern Ukraine), who predominately speak Russian, into communities in Western Ukraine (where most people speak Ukrainian). Problematic stereotypes arise on both ends: evacuees assume that Western Ukrainians are staunch nationalasts and Russophobes, while many in those western communities think that evacuees are sympathizers with separatists and the Russian government. Civic education-based initiatives are attempting to
target young people from both of these groups in order to support and promote dialogue in these communities despite a distinct lack of state support (financial or otherwise).\footnote{Aside from my research with leftist activists, I participated in several events organized by a non-governmental education group, whose workshops for high school students feature discussions of tolerance and non-discrimination; they also travel around the country with exhibits about diversity. Currently, these groups are required to find funding from external (mostly international) sources, and have little to no support from the Ministry of Education (personal communication).}

Initiatives like Euromaidan and Krym SOS have been two of the most prominent and widespread civic, volunteer-based initiatives that developed from Maidan. While these organizations’ platforms are not overtly anti-state or critical of the fact that they developed because the state had left an integral gap, many volunteers understand the work of these groups as anti-state activism and as evidence that anti-state discourses have become commonplace after Maidan. Even Maria, a staunch “Ukrainian socialist” who has historically supported the idea that state bodies should provide for citizens, began to criticize her assumptions about the state’s role once she saw that people working to help each other could be more effective.

\textbf{New Subbotniky: Local self-organization}

Self-organization appeared on a much smaller scale as well, particularly targeted toward local, district-based initiatives around Kyiv. Sasha, the activist from Student Assembly, commented that she felt “decentralization” was taking place in every district in the city. She recounted that several self-defense brigades had reorganized after Maidan particularly around city districts, in a sort of community policing initiative.\footnote{Since my conversation with Sasha, an entirely new police force has been trained for the city of Kyiv. The training was extremely Americanized, and many new recruits are young people. Many have also been documented because of their attractiveness—through the Fall of 2015, I saw hundreds of “police selfies” circulating around social media as civilians posed with the new, beautiful, shiny police recruits (who are, importantly, both men and women).} Sasha also wanted to get more involved in these district-based initiatives, focusing on a dilapidated stadium area where leftists had
occasionally held concerts and other events. Organizers were attempting to make the stadium area into a commons for the neighborhood, which had no other parks, in order to prevent high-rise apartments from being built there.\footnote{Sasha mentioned that the stadium was being rented by a company which “most likely” belonged to the son of former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov. I did not confirm this or ask how she knew, but there is widespread assumption that the companies attempting to build high rises tend to be owned by already-existing oligarchs and their families.} Activists began to hold gatherings every Saturday in order to encourage the community to support the initiative as well as to reclaim the space through improving its appearance.

Some activists made the connection between these processes of reclamation and earlier Soviet practices of \textit{subbotnik}, weekend volunteer work that was expected to help instill revolutionary values into Soviet citizens as well as to promote the idea that each person was an essential part of communism. While Sasha’s vision of the stadium reclamation meant that the community would control the space, Maria framed several post-Maidan volunteer events in the language of a \textit{subbotnik}. Leftist activists used this language, risking alienation from possible participants, while others have circulated the idea of the “volunteer” (\textit{dobrovolets’}), a word that appears less ideological. Even in her own apartment complex, where many people owned their apartment and thus were relatively wealthy in comparison to other Ukrainians, Maria said that a lot of residents had been involved in Maidan and it changed their consciousness (\textit{svidomist’}). She described their spring \textit{subbotnik}, in which the residents painted benches in the courtyard and then had a picnic—usually, she said, “it was maybe about ten people who came. And this year, there were so many people!” Maria praised the social effects of the event; as she put it, “very often people say it’s some kind of Soviet tradition, but it’s very pleasant when you go out with people you know, with your neighbors. Why not paint something, a bench, or a fence?”
Even something as banal as painting a bench had become symbolic of a shift in consciousness, especially for those who had been committed to activism since before Maidan began. Maria’s neighbors had never been able to make any sense of what she did as an activist until they also participated in similar kinds of actions and felt that their presence had been effective. As Maria put it, people “can’t forget it and can’t reject it.” At the same time that participants were filling the gap of the state in their volunteer efforts, they were also forming new socialities based on being active contributors to their communities, a change in consciousness that came only from having seen the effects of mass mobilization. All of these kinds of local, self-organized initiatives were done without the help of the state or any political party, which led leftists to conclude that self-organization had been broadly successful in infiltrating the protests and their participants.

These new socialities that were formed outside of a relationship with the state, however, are not necessarily novel in the greater postsocialist sphere. As others have documented, throughout postsocialism, informal networks regularly function outside of the state (Humphrey 2002; Ledeneva 2006; Wanner 2005). That such networks are now being understood as more effective than official practices reflects a fundamental questioning that the Ukrainian state is needed in order to ensure social well-being. Importantly, this attitude toward the state benefits Russian aggression in Ukraine, as it encourages further fragmentation and localization of social solidarities; additionally, it confirms the decreased significance of European aspirations among Ukrainians who participated on Maidan, as they are no longer confident that any government, including the EU’s, can adequately meet their needs. This is not to suggest that Ukrainians should look to the state to discourage fragmentation but simply that local self-organization is actively changing the nature of the relationship between citizens, states, and international forces.
New Party Forms: Assembly for Social Revolution and Liquid Democracy

Some leftists decided to use the widespread acceptability of anti-party self-organization to create a new political platform. They created a group called the Assembly for Social Revolution (ASR, Asambleia sotsial’noi revoliutsii), which would function as a party but without reliance on single or static party representatives. Ideally, the party would get elected to the Kyiv City Council with designated members running as figureheads (Sasha referred to them as “administrators”). They would then take a seat on the Council and vote based on Assembly voting decisions that were collected online via a platform called Liquid Democracy. While not conceived of as an ordinary political party—many of which appeared in the months following Maidan, including the Right Sector militant group that formed an official party—it would have to take the form of a party in order for its members to take part in elections.

According to Sasha, this would work because it was an Assembly rather than a party, in which “we don’t have representatives but the people who just do what the Internet community says to do, so the community decides and not one person.” However, the group had to be registered as an official party in order to stand in elections, which Sasha and others found limiting in terms of creating alternative political representations. But, as she put it, ASR was different because people did not conceive of their support for ASR as having the same “ideology” and expecting representatives to act based on ideologies. Instead, the administrators would act based on issues that the community voted for online. “We are focused on particular demands and particular places.” This new attitude that privileged issues over ideology reflects the shifts among leftists during Maidan, discussed in Chapter 3, in which promoting a “leftist ideology” became secondary to ensuring effective participation in the protests.
ASR would, in theory, be better than the current party system because the community would have control over its representatives and would also change how people made demands on their politicians. With Liquid Democracy, any community member could propose a vote on an issue, which the administrator would then take to the Council. Sasha envisioned that “in the future, we don’t need this [City] Council, we’re just gonna rule the city through Liquid Democracy and the group of organizers.” She further saw the possibility for the internet platform to expand throughout government, allowing people to make demands, for instance, about education reform. Activists envisioned the internet as a way to make politics more accessible and to hold representatives accountable, at least at the level of the city.

However, the Assembly for Social Revolution did not win any seats on the Kyiv City Council in the spring of 2014. It became an extremely volatile point for leftists after Maidan. While some remain committed to this type of organizing (under a new name, Social Movement [Sotsial'nyi Rukh]), others have vehemently denounced leftist efforts to produce a party-like structure, even though they know that municipal-level participation requires at least a party form (even if its members did not consider ASR a party). Those who supported ASR felt that there was no other option for effective efforts to completely change the governing structure than to create a party-like structure. One activist, Anton, made a connection with right-wing grassroots-type groups that turned local power into a political party.

Something [the] Svoboda (Freedom) [Party] has done is something that should be done for the left. There would be a party and there would be some kind of organization that could mobilize people from below. The party should be directly linked to the organization. I think that building up political, I don’t know if it could be called a party, but a political organization, it could be elected.
However, Anton thought that the ASR would not be successful, because they were too focused on getting leftists to join the group. As Anton put it, leftists “have their own beliefs, no matter right or wrong. Why should you persuade the people who already have their ideas?” Instead, he felt that ASR should promote their platform among people who were motivated to participate in politics to a greater degree following Maidan—those whose consciousness had changed—but who had not yet made up their minds about precisely how to participate. Like Sasha, he felt that many leftists were too dogmatic; as he said, “I guess it’s a huge problem of the movement that everyone’s too embedded in those theoretical traditions rather than trying to analyze what’s happening” in Ukraine and with the left itself.

Despite leftists’ continued commitment to ASR and what has developed since its administrators did not gain any seats on the City Council, Anton was correct that ASR would not have a lot of success in convincing leftists to support the initiative if they did not initially support it. Vasyl, one of the prominent student organizers who identified as an anarchist before Maidan but became even more militant during the mobilizations, did not mince words:

ASR is ridiculous. They are trying to win elections, but it won’t work. To change society in a profound way, we need the emancipation of the people. Their method is the wrong method. This is the moment where the roads go apart. The anarchist movement has enough force to make our own politics. I am beginning to stop identifying as a leftist because “anarchist” is more concrete and makes more sense.

Vasyl’s perspective rejected any structure that resembled existing ones as able to reflect accurately what people on Maidan had fought to establish. To Vasyl, the ASR did not even work to criticize the state or its main mechanism of support, capitalism. Vasyl felt that the only way to encourage
people to see real ways to change politics was to make them target capitalism itself: “Most people don’t realize it but they feel it. It’s anarchism for a new society.”

As Anton saw, leftists like Vasyl became increasingly committed to ideological terms and positions following Maidan, whereas others like Anton and Sasha felt that the platform that focused on issues rather than on naming and uniting would be more representative for leftists. At their cores, both of these ways of thinking reflect leftists’ criticisms of the current mechanisms of political representation, as well as of the principle of self-organization that people can create better structures of governance than currently exist. But in actual practice, this divergence in response to ASR became a divisive problem for leftists. Some, like Vasyl, hoped that Maidan would radicalize people. He concluded that some participants did become more interested in anarchism the more they saw themselves distanced from the state and future state representatives. But Vasyl felt that Maidan was the beginning of a worldwide, anti-capitalist revolution. Those who supported ASR realized that, as long as the current governing system remained in place (with a President and Parliament elected through parties), there were limited ways that social issues would be represented in the government. This was confirmed when President Poroshenko began the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in Eastern Ukraine, devoting a huge amount of Ukraine’s budget toward the military and conscription. Resonant of the other localized, self-organized initiatives, the Assembly for Social Revolution’s focus on particular issues would allow leftist participants to continue activism around those issues but with the possibility of greater recognition in government.

ASR was an important self-organized initiative because it continued leftist anti-state activism even as it attempted to integrate leftists into the structures supported by the state. Those who supported ASR and continue to support this platform truly believe that they can promote discourses critical of state practices without necessarily committing to starting another revolution,
on which Vasyl seemed fixated, and that these discourses would be appealing to others frustrated by the lack of change in the government after Maidan. However, austerity measures taken early in the Poroshenko period have shown that the government itself is not so concerned about these social issues, even if its representatives had promised to support them during Maidan.

The ATO and a Leftist Anti-War Movement

The main outcome that leftists did not necessarily expect once Maidan ended and they attempted to consolidate their post-Maidan position was the Anti-Terrorist Operation, which began in April 2014. The appearance of separatists in the eastern regions prompted lengthy discussion among leftists, who initially considered supporting these groups as anti-state organizations. Once it became clear, however, that the separatists in Donets’k and Luhans’k regions based their principles on military masculinity, Orthodox family structures, and pro-Russian sentiments, leftists quickly distanced themselves from separatists’ criticisms of the central Ukrainian state.\(^{20}\) However, partly because of the divisive effects of the ASR, leftists were unable to present a unified anti-war platform. This section argues that this can be partially explained by the widespread volunteer-based support for the war effort, which has presented a challenge for leftists to develop a unified position in their attitude about the conflict.

Vitaly Ky was one of several radical leftist activists who recently volunteered their services to fight on the side of the Ukrainian army in the conflict between Ukrainian and Russian-backed separatist forces. Crucially, the “side of the Ukrainian army” has been made up of state-funded military units, along with extensive support from contracted volunteer military brigades, many of

\(^{20}\) This did not prevent right-wing groups from assuming leftists were sympathetic to the separatists. In two separate attacks on leftist activists after Maidan, one of the epithets used against the leftists was that they were separatists, as well as communists.
which were formed on Maidan. Rosaria Puglisi has documented that the Ukrainian security forces were severely impacted by both the dissolution of domestic special forces (including the Berkut, the militarized riot police that was mobilized against protesters on Maidan) and the defection of police and other security forces to the side of the separatists in the East (2015a:5). As of March 2015, Puglisi had counted 40-50 volunteer battalions of varied sizes supporting the Ukrainian army; in April 2016, Minakov counted 30 battalions with 13,500 members (2016:4). Both volunteer and army soldiers are “clothed, equipped and fed thanks to the generosity of friends and family as well as the relentless activism of the wide network of civil society organizations that emerged in the beginning with the hostilities in the Donbas” (Puglisi 2015a:15).

Returning to Hibou’s framework of “privatizing the state,” this reliance on volunteer, non-unified forces to fight a war that the governing regime continues to support, appears as an attempt to control these volunteer militaries that began during Maidan as anti-government activists. Theoretically, the incorporation of these battalions into a pro-government platform would help consolidate the regime’s power at the same time that it would show a more widespread support for Poroshenko’s austerity actions. In this case, however, because of the great influence of oligarchs around the country and particularly in Eastern Ukraine, where the conflict zones are located, whether state forces can effectively coordinate with these battalions—or if the battalions will declare loyalty to oligarchs, or if their leaders will attempt to transfer their military networks into political power—are all questions that continue to complicate the legitimacy of the new post-Maidan Ukrainian state and the functioning of its governing forces.

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21 The Ukrainian military does not draft men above the age of 55, so conscripts tend to be young men (largely between 18 and 25 years old; the draft does not extend to registered university students). The volunteer brigades, however, do not have such rules, so many of these participants are in their mid-50s and 60s, skewing the statistics about the age of fighters.
While the volunteer battalions have mostly worked in what Puglisi calls “law and order functions,” including at checkpoints and in liberated areas, these battalions have gained both notoriety and “popular trust”—they “rank second, after civil society organizations, and before the church and the army, among the institutions the Ukrainians trust the most” (Puglisi 2015a:13). Puglisi argues that their popularity comes both from the fact that these battalions seem to embody the spirit of Maidan, which includes a commitment to self-organization, and that these groups promise a level of transparency that the Ukrainian government, and therefore the military, cannot provide. Further, their contributions to the military have forced that and related institutions—particularly those dealing with procurement of weaponry and supplies for the armed forces—to be more accountable to citizens (2015b:14).

Like other civic initiatives, from the Hospital Guards to Euromaidan and Krym SOS, as well as Vitalyk’s medical brigade, Puglisi sees this widespread volunteerism around the war effort as a “collective commitment to perform functions, like security and defense, which the state has proved unable to fulfill” (2015b:20). She optimistically interprets the increase in trust and participation in these organizations as doing away with the “post-Soviet tradition of societal apathy,” while claiming that mistrust in state institutions is a problematic motivator of this “wave of civic activism” (ibid.). In other words, Puglisi lauds the break with a Soviet tradition of apathy but is wary that mistrust in government is not productive for investment in long-term change. The volunteer structures created because of this mistrust are not meant to last, or if they do, it will be through the questionable co-optation by government bodies.

Currently, all the brigades formed in the winter and spring of 2014 are officially integrated into the Ministry of Defense structure (Lebedev 2016; Minakov 2016). However, two further developments challenge the success of this tactic of integrating “self-organized” battalions into
official structures. First, several battalions have been working in recent months to create or become civilian political structures in the form of parties; this includes, for instance, the Azov battalion, a group whose civilian platform promotes fascism in the same vein as its military brethren (see Spil’ne 2016, a response to an attack on an anti-fascist demonstration by the Azov “civilian corps”). Second, oligarchic groups have a deep interest in gaining influence over volunteer military brigades, particularly in eastern regions near the front. Mykhailo Minakov describes how the “organizational flexibility” of these oligarchic groups (2016:18) has allowed their leaders to shift positions according to the political climate of the country. During Maidan, major oligarchs such as Ihor Kolomois’kyi came out in support of protesters in order to distance himself and his beneficiaries from the Yanukovych regime; now, Kolomois’kyi and others have continued this claim for legitimacy by fundraising for and otherwise supporting troops (Minakov 2016:19). In the same way self-organized vigilante justice groups have claimed their own legitimacy by promoting the “values of Maidan,” oligarchic groups continue to do the same, and in so doing, they gain control or at least influence over volunteer military brigades, even after the latter have been officially integrated into the Ministry of Defense.

Despite the regime change following Maidan, it appears that people’s attitudes toward the government, including widespread mistrust, have not changed significantly. As Puglisi argues, “part of the civil society mobilization in Maidan and afterwards has been demanding radical change in the functioning of the state” (2015a:13), and self-organization has allowed and encouraged people to create those radical changes themselves. This explains leftists’ complex relationship with the largely volunteer-based war effort. Leftists have been offering such criticisms of the state and its limitations for many years. Even if they are critical of war and militarism, the conflict has enabled ordinary people to see the effects of their participation in alternative forms of
social supports for one another. Thus many leftists interpret this obvious adoption of self-organization as a success for the left, while others are critical that widespread self-organization has only been successful in terms of aiding the military, which promotes militarization of society and ultimately helps the state. Volunteering around medical needs is a popular form of support, as shown by the work of Vitalyk’s group and interest in educating more people about tactical care, as well as in the extensive volunteer efforts for Kharkiv’s war hospital.\textsuperscript{22} Importantly, while the work on the front lines, like Vitalyk’s tactical combat care, appears to be the purview of men, Natalia Stepaniuk (2016) has documented that post-war care work—including psychological care—falls into women’s hands, encouraging the conceptualization of a natural division of sexes.

There is little record of the quantity—both monetary and in kind—of donations being made on behalf of the military. According to Stepaniuk, “Often times, a group of volunteers would pick a voluntary battalion or an army unit (because of family or private ties, etc.) and supply whatever is needed (starting from water, socks, food and finishing with military equipment, cars and military uniforms. The range of support is very wide!).”\textsuperscript{23} Some groups simply post online long lists of what is needed and where to bring supplies, such as the “Odesa for Army” group.\textsuperscript{24} The Ukrainian army itself requested donations: “Responding to an appeal of the Armed Forces, already by the end of March 2014, donors deposited around UAH 70 million (about 5.4 million euros at the exchange rate of the time) on a ‘Support the Ukrainian Army’ bank account” (Puglisi 2015b:13). Before I left Ukraine at the end of June 2014, advertisements in the Kyiv metro showed that companies would make a donation to the armed forces if customers purchased special products; I

\textsuperscript{22} Ioulia Shukan’s ongoing blog focuses extensively on this site: https://carnetsdeterrain.wordpress.com/.

\textsuperscript{23} Personal communication.

\textsuperscript{24} http://Odesa4army.org.ua
know of many examples of American and Canadian people and organizations who collected money, equipment, and medical supplies to send to both the military and volunteer battalions.

For many leftists, these uses of self-organization are nothing more than politicians within the government recognizing that they can take advantage of citizen initiatives in the name of a unified “state,” which enable them to ignore the responsibilities that are actually expected of state forms. These leftists see Vitalyak and others who work as volunteers as aiding the government with their presence and practices. Importantly, Vitalyak made it clear that he was volunteering as an individual person, not as part of some political group, so he was not attempting to change the leftists’ position on the war. However, he has generally received positive responses to his “coming out” and has even taken a comrade with him into the ATO zone on at least one occasion. I see Vitalyak’s volunteerism as part of the longer-lasting effects of self-organization resulting from Maidan that so many activists described to me as the most positive impact of the protests. Vitalyak has volunteered to serve a population who might otherwise be neglected by the state. In this case, the state’s inability to protect its citizens might result in their death because they cannot be evacuated from the combat zone or, once evacuated, they do not have access to medical supplies or technology that would save their lives. I see an alternative interpretation of Vitalyak’s volunteerism as a continuation of leftists’ critique of the state through the practice of filling the gaps in its undertakings.

Conclusion: Leftist State Criticisms

25 Because my analysis of Vitalyak’s volunteerism comes from what he and others posted on Facebook, I do not examine people’s negative opinions of his actions. For the most part, people respected Vitalyak’s wishes and did not publicly berate him for this choice, although they may have done so in a more private space.

26 I know of at least one other leftist activist who volunteered in the ATO zone with major controversy when Borot’ba activists suggested he participated in a volunteer battalion called “Tornado,” whose leaders allegedly committed war crimes (again, I elect not to cite the article about this activist to preserve his anonymity).
I argue that leftists differed from the other protesters on Maidan because they never assumed that a state form would provide promised services for its citizens. Other protesters, in contrast, assumed that they could elect a new governing regime whose policies would provide for citizens (thus rejuvenating the nation-state relationship). To leftists, this assumption about the state was justified by immediate austerity measures the post-Maidan government took by the second month of Poroshenko's term. In her study of Italian volunteerism, however, Muehlebach suggests that leftists are particularly active in adapting the framework of volunteer-as-citizen, because they see its basis in morality as a way to reimagine the neoliberal social order:

Their participation in the privatizing service economy thus appears to them not as a radical break with their political past but as a continuation, even recuperation of it. Morality, in short, allows members of the Left to participate in the moral neoliberal [system] in both wholehearted and yet also critical-complicit ways, and to forge out of this historical moment practices that are both oppositional and complicit at the same time. (2012:9)

While Ukrainian leftists originally saw their notion of self-organization in this way—a mechanism through which to challenge past and current forms of neoliberal governance—the path that the self-organization concept has taken, and its conflation with civil society, have led leftists to question whether they are contributing to a “reimagining” of the social order or simply reinforcing what already exists.

It is no surprise to many leftists, well-versed in the ways a neoliberal order has shifted the relationship between governing and governed, that volunteerist efforts are being co-opted by state bodies, presented as examples of good citizenship rather than understood as anti-state activism.

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27 One leftist recognized the irony: “We must really be part of Europe now,” he said, referencing the original motivation to mobilize on Maidan in November 2013. “We’re implementing austerity just like everyone else in Europe!”
Recently Vitalyk and some other medical instructors visited his old school—where I met him as a teenager over a decade ago—to teach students about combat first aid. The school administrators thanked him and his co-instructors for the “time and energy they gave to the education of the young generation of patriots!” The actions of Vitalyk’s generation, now seen to embody the honored ideas of volunteerism and civic duty, are being translated into a new patriotism being taught to the younger generation of Ukrainians. Through these types of discourses, this generation will learn *not* to expect the state to provide such services for them. State discourses take the “activism” out of civic initiatives started on Maidan and de-politicizing them through state and national expectations of volunteer participation.

Even now, leftist activists are using connections they made during the Maidan mobilizations to create new networks of support for themselves and to help others where the state cannot. Vitalyk described meeting several comrades from the occupation of the Ministry of Education in February 2014 while he was deployed in the Anti-Terrorist Operation zone. “I don’t believe in fate,” he said. “But I understand the importance and the incompleteness of the occupation of the Ministry and the reconquest of the elite political system more than a year ago. I hope that the war will end soon and we will meet again with friends and comrades and see the thing through to the end.” For Vitalyk, volunteering in the ATO zone was not about compromising with the state he had once been so critical of. Instead, this form of activism enabled him to keep connections with others from Maidan and to support the notion that the revolution was not over. Volunteering in the ATO zone kept the idea of self-organization alive because it relied on those ephemeral connections with other activists and volunteers to envision a future for the Maidan generation without war and in critical dialogue with state practices.
Chapter 7: Conclusion:

Post-Maidan Promises, the Neoliberal State and the Future of the Left

This dissertation has examined the effects of two intersecting trends, Europeanization and decommunization, on Ukrainian political activism, and how these have shifted during and after Maidan and now in the context of an unceasing war. I have used the concept of “self-organization” to follow the ways leftist political activism was adapted by various groups during the protests and, eventually, as a mechanism of neoliberal governance embraced among state representatives. This use of self-organization is itself a reflection of how certain discourses about Europe and citizenship have permeated post-Maidan Ukraine, leaving little room for activism to develop outside of these frames.

First, I discussed the processes of Europeanization and decommunization, arguing that, in Ukraine, they are tightly linked in certain national ideologies. These national ideologies that promote decommunization at all levels of political society have become dominant—even hegemonic—with the success of certain groups on Maidan, like the Right Sector. Even though leftist activists presented a socialized version of Europe on Maidan, their political position and ideology were widely understood to be at odds with a post-communist Ukraine. For these reasons, leftists were targeted during the protests with violence and harassment.

However, leftists truly believed in their social platform. This encouraged them to shift their positions to focus on issues they wished to promote rather than on committing to a leftist ideology that would garner negative attention. This resulted in a focus on self-organization. Throughout the dissertation, I have discussed some of the most important self-organized initiatives as recognized by these leftists. These included the Hospital Guards, the Student Assembly, the Ol’ha
Kobylians’ka Women’s Brigade, and, more recently, participation in the armed conflict with Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

I argue that self-organization presents a criticism of the state that is related to leftists’ pre-Maidan state criticism. I suggest that Maidan was a moment of rupture between “nation” and “state,” but that this rupture had been developing since at least the election of Viktor Yanukovych, if not more directly following the Orange Revolution of 2004. Leftist activists had been dedicated to using activism to criticize the state throughout the 2000s and 2010s, with mixed results. As I show, their focus on education issues led to successful campaigns to prevent the passage of certain legislation. On Maidan, these discourses and this activist experience helped leftists integrate themselves into the protests, not necessarily as overtly leftist activists, but as political people with an extensive knowledge of street protest tactics and anti-state discourses.

Now, however, the post-Maidan government is taking advantage of this widespread commitment to self-organization that developed on Maidan. The Ukrainian economy has been in a massive downturn since the end of the mobilizations, in part because government representatives have not changed their practices. They are widely seen not to be particularly different from the Yanukovych regime, even if they support the national ideology that right-wing protesters promoted on Maidan. This leaves the changed consciousness about politics and activism that many leftists described to me in a precarious position.

This development leads me to use the example of Maidan and self-organization as a lens onto processes of neoliberalization and their effects on people’s everyday practices. The spread of self-organized practices is not fully distinct from neoliberal discourses promoting non-dependence on and autonomy from the state. Drawing from Jesook Song’s study of the impact of liberalism and neoliberalism on South Koreans’ perceptions of welfare, the state, and civil society, I question
whether or not a pro- or anti-state position is a reflection of one’s position as pro- or anti-neoliberalism. Here, we must examine the ways that, for instance, leftist activists have interpreted the spread of self-organization as people’s broader recognition that they can no longer rely on state services. For leftists, this view of self-organization has always been both an anti-state and anti-neoliberal platform, because it works around these mechanisms and institutions that promote state-based neoliberal developments and forms of governance.

If self-organization takes the place of state services, however, does self-organization remain an anti-state position? Has self-organization been depoliticized since the end of Maidan because it has been detached from its leftist roots? Further, does state promotion of volunteer-based initiatives turn self-organized actions into humanitarianism, desperately needed in a time of war and displacement and difficult to criticize? As Song suggests, “Giving too much attention to the state risks reproducing a stagnant understanding of neoliberalism as something that only concerns macro forces, such as state machinery, international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, or financial capitalists or elites” (2009:138). In order to fully answer these complex questions at local levels, more research not only on self-organized initiatives but also on how they are perceived within Ukrainian society—and not solely among the leftists who initially promoted these ideas—is needed.

At the same time, the development of self-organized initiatives and the attitudes people have circulated about them show several interconnected processes that enlighten the shifting role of the state in Europe and the future of the Ukrainian nation-state as a whole. First, the Ukrainian government’s own reliance on self-organized initiatives is working to reorganize post-Maidan citizenship. Discourses about volunteerism are deeply tied up with ideas about Europe and one’s commitment to supporting and improving one’s government; in other words, many Ukrainians
who stood on Maidan believed that citizens of Europe did trust in their governments, whereas those Ukrainians never had. The current Poroshenko government has taken advantage of these notions by exploiting the widespread growth of volunteerism—which can be portrayed as aiding state institutions—as proof of a citizenry with an increased investment in a functional governing regime, necessary for recognition as a European democracy.

In reality, however, these volunteer initiatives are not always working in favor of a stronger, more unified state, as I have shown throughout this dissertation. In some ways, volunteerism has contributed to a fragmentation of Ukraine: governance has become more localized, and many see that this local governance functions better than federal-level forms. People’s notions of “good citizenship” may now diverge with those of the governing elites; as I have assessed throughout this dissertation, the symbol of “Europe” has gone from being an ultimate goal for Ukrainians to seeming even further removed from an actually-existing future for Ukraine, and further disinterested in Ukraine’s independent future.

I see these shifts as part of a greater process of what Dunn and Bobick have called a “new form of liminality” contributing to a “miniaturized Cold War” (2014:410) in which global geopolitical relations stagnate in a constant position of uncertainty because no clear aggression has taken place. Here, Russian influence over Ukraine continues without Putin’s regime having any responsibility toward the Ukrainian state or people—recall that Yanukovych did not get far enough to sign Ukraine into Putin’s Customs Union. Further, while Poroshenko did sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, this economic relationship creates no new political relationship between Ukraine and the EU. In other words, the EU faces no new obligations to Ukraine, leaving Putin to play out his utopia there with little external intervention.

Next Directions
What impact has this national-level fragmentation had on possibilities for political action following Maidan? Most leftist activists I interviewed said they had a positive experience of the mass mobilization, even if their more detailed responses appeared much more complex. Now, however, the left appears to be more fragmented than when I began my research in 2012. Even then, the student group Priama Diia was facing a lack of interest, and several former student activists began to form other activist groups. The main problem facing these groups is their opinion on political representation. Some of them would like to develop a political party form that will be functionally more representative of citizens than current parties. Others see that continued anti-state action outside of party politics is necessary to truly challenge the current state form. This has led to major disagreements among leftists and an even lower likelihood that some kind of future “united left” can exist.

Furthermore, the political climate in Ukraine has not improved. The Center for Social and Labour Research, an NGO that monitors protests in Ukraine through media reporting, has found that there have been more repressions against protests than during Yanukovych’s term (CSLR 2015). These researchers found that, even outside of repressions against violent actions in the Donbas, “the frequency of repressions against peaceful protests raising social, economic, and civil rights issues [has] also increased substantially” between April and August 2015 (ibid.). Some of these repressions are at the hands of police, while others are the responses of popular right-wing groups.

Despite the lack of presence of right-wing parties in Parliament (most of them had a dismal showing in the October 2014 Parliamentary elections), right-wing groups have grown thanks to the popularity of several contracted battalions that have served for the Ukrainian Army against the separatists in the Donbas. In particular, this includes members of the Azov Battalion, whose leader
is openly a Nazi. The Azov Battalion has formed a “civil corps” that is attempting to create a political party based on fascist principles. This civil corps prevented leftists from holding a demonstration for the annual anti-fascist day of action on January 19, 2016, even beating up one of the protesters in the middle of the day.

The political situation for leftists has not seemed to improve significantly since I began this research in 2012. Additionally, any systemic research of leftists will be more difficult in the coming years as their movement becomes more fragmented and more activists leave the country to seek a better life in Europe and North America. Decommunization in Ukraine has become more important than Europeanization, as the latter proves to be costing the government a huge amount of money that it does not have, and the former can be taken care of with brute force. Those leftists who remain in Ukraine and committed to their political ideology continue to take risks in order to be activists. In this way, nothing has changed since my research began.

The question of leftist relationships with the ongoing armed conflict in the Donbas has become most critical. As more leftists volunteer—some with a leftist platform, like those who have represented an “anti-imperialist movement” in their battalions—leftist political ideologies must either prove to be more flexible than they have been until now, or the left must give up on the possibility of a united movement. Leftists’ views of the ways their notion of self-organization was adopted, adapted, and appropriated during and after Maidan are important to explore, particularly as the state continues to fail its citizens in providing necessary services.

Comparative Possibilities
This last problem lends itself to a more critical view of the questions of state and nation in contemporary Europe. As I discussed in the Introduction, Europeanization has not historically been mutually exclusive with the establishment of a strong nation-state. Indeed, in some cases, the strength of the nation-state and the national identities of those living within such a territory have become a crucial element of Europeanization. The case of Ukraine continues to show that the nation-state is an essential part of Europeanization, but it also pushes us to consider the lengths to which people feel they should go in order to achieve it. As this ground war in Ukrainian territories continues, the government of Ukraine will continue to lose its grip both on Europe and on an effective, united Ukraine. This case thus encourages researchers to rethink the relationship of the nation-state with Europe, as well as with the attempted expansion of Russian dominance. In other words, will Ukrainian EU accession continue if both nation and state continue to be fragmented politically and territorially? Will the EU accept a Ukraine that faces growing threats of Russian domination over more of its territory? Most likely, the answer is no.

I have also argued that Ukraine is just one example of the reemergence of right and left as valuable oppositional political identities. This is a process that is happening across the world, as various campaigns against governments and issues alike create new social and political actors and generate new relationships with old ones. Many researchers have studied the radical right extensively, in Ukraine and elsewhere. These studies are crucial for understanding why such groups gain dominance even though their ideologies often seem archaic. Equally important, though, are effective studies of leftist activism, particularly as those overtly leftist groups face violence and other dangers simply for their presence.

However, this latter question presents a challenge at this point. My study of leftists in Ukraine, and that of Ishchenko (2016), are both extremely biased in their own ways, in part because
we are both affiliated with leftist politics. As an anthropologist, I find this type of engagement through sympathy and empathy has helped me immensely, especially in building rapport and gaining the trust of those who participated in my research project. They were very invested in it precisely because they hoped I would represent them in a positive way, rather than in the ways they were used to being represented in Ukraine (as communists or separatists, often). Similarly, Ishchenko has his own desires for the outcome of leftist politics in Ukraine, and it diverges from many leftists’ own opinions. His manuscript appears judgmental of some of the campaigns leftists have promoted because they do not fall into his own priorities. If the left is as important as the right in establishing an effective form of political multiplicity—and I am convinced that it is—it is necessary to grow the study of the left, not just as activist-anthropologists but in order to understand what a leftist ideology can look like.

**Appendix 1**: Description of changes from “Ukraine: Brief Legal Analysis of ‘Dictatorship Law’” (2014). See full article for legal analysis based on Ukraine’s Constitution as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
1. Participants of peaceful assemblies may be jailed for up to 15 days for installation of a tent, stage, any small construction or audio equipment used for holding a rally, without having previously obtained a permission of the internal affairs authorities.

2. Provision, support, and facilitation of peaceful assemblies, which are deemed non-compliant with the established procedure, by businesses, organizations, and their leaders can result in up to 10 days in jail.

3. Participants of peaceful assemblies may be jailed for 15 days for wearing a mask or a helmet that prevents identification of a person, or for wearing clothing “which resembles uniform of law enforcement agencies.” The arrest may take place without the person having any harmful intentions or participating in such activities.

4. Both organizers and participants of peaceful assemblies for, among others, organizing of peaceful protests which do not comply with requirements of the established procedure. However, no such established procedure that is applicable to the peaceful assembly currently exists. Liability allows for up to 15 days jail time. This lays grounds for potential mass arrests of participants of peaceful protests based on subjective and unclear grounds.

5. Article on extremist activity assumes liability for production, possession for sale or distribution, and sale or distribution of extremist materials. Such actions committed via mass media or Internet will be sanctioned by a fine, or a 3-year imprisonment term in case of the repeated offence.

6. Slander is re-introduced in the Criminal Code of Ukraine after it was decriminalized in 2001. The law introduces criminal liability for defamation, enabling criminal prosecution rather than civil law procedures.

7. Based on the adopted bills, it is forbidden to collect and disseminate information concerning law enforcement officers, executives and judges. Criminal liability is now envisaged for illegal collection and dissemination of confidential information about a judge (or one’s family members), as well as for dissemination of materials or information which are clearly offensive and demonstrate flagrant contempt to a judge or justice. The sanction for the crime is up to 4 years of imprisonment. The sanction for the similar actions against law enforcement officer or executive (or members of their families) is up to 3 years of imprisonment. Herewith the same criminal liability falls due even when “clearly offensive” information is truthful.

8. More strict criminal responsibility is introduced for the following:
   a. Blocking of administrative buildings and premises (up to 5 years restriction of liberty, or up to 5 years of imprisonment)
   b. Seizure of buildings (up to 6 years of imprisonment)
   c. Blocking of roads and transport (up to 2 years of imprisonment)
   d. Violation of public order as member of a group, mass disorder which leads to, among others, interference with transportation (up to 2 years of imprisonment)
   e. Resisting law enforcement officers, etc.)

9. **Criminal liability for blocking lodgings, buildings and other facilities.** Based on the passed bill, criminal liability for up to 6 years of imprisonment is envisaged for blocking access to lodgings, buildings and other facilities.

10. **Introduced requirement for the registration of all online media** as information agencies and established fines if any media functions without state registration.
11. **New Article 361-3 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine** introduces three new articles into the Criminal Code of Ukraine, formally designed to protect the integrity and operability of state-owned websites and networks. It establishes criminal liability for "unauthorized interference with the operation of state electronic information resources, objects of nationally-critical information and telecommunication infrastructure, which lead to leakage, loss, forgery or blockage of information, distortion of processing or routing of the information." The punishment consists of 2 to 5 years of imprisonment with a ban on occupying certain positions for up to 3 years. Further, the Criminal Code expands the term "objects of nationally-critical information and telecommunication infrastructure" to include any information or telecommunication system, the disruption of which affects any aspect of the operation of the government or its bodies, including any informational efforts.

12. A new provision grants the National Committee on State Regulation of Communication and Development of Information Systems the power to restrict access to any website containing "content, the dissemination of which is contrary to the law" based on a the decision of an “expert.” Neither a clear definition of “content, the dissemination of which is contrary to the law”, nor the procedure for appointment and requirements of the “expert” are given. Also, these changes introduce a mandatory state license for the provision of Internet access, which results in total government control over the activities of ISPs (Internet service providers), and thereby total control over the population’s use of the Internet.

13. NGOs as foreign agents. NGOs receiving any material support from abroad are now considered to be “foreign agents.” The bill sets forth a special procedure for the registration of NGOs as foreign agents if they intend to receive any material support or donations from abroad ("International NGOs"); all material support received by these International NGOs is subject to the local corporate tax; International NGOs will have to bear the wording of “Foreign Agent” in their names and this wording may not be shortened; and International NGOs will have to publish the results of their activities in Ukraine on the Internet and one of the governmental newspapers quarterly.

14. Criminal proceeding in absentia is introduced. The prejudicial inquiry and criminal court proceedings may be conducted without the presence of a person suspected and charged with a crime. The decision on criminal proceeding in absentia is made by the criminal investigator (adhere to the prosecutor’s position), the prosecutor, or the court.

15. *Berkut* officers and other officials are free from prosecution for crimes against Maidan activists.

**Photos and Figures**

**Figure 1.1**: Map of Ukraine
Figure 1.2: “Maidan Will Help” (translation by author; image edits by Suzanna Goldblatt Clark)
Figure 1.3: Democratic Alliance flier, “Kyiv, Wake Up!”
КИЇВ, ВСТАВАЙ!

Прямо зараз кияни, ризикуючи життям,
захищають наше право жити у вільній
країні — їх калічать та кидають за грата.

Нам брешуть, що вони фашисти
та провокатори. Відкрийте очі: це наші
сусіди, колеги, друзі та знайомі.

Сидітимемо й далі на дивані — завтра
заарештують друзів і родичів, післязавтра
прийдуть за нами.

Прямо зараз вирішується, будуть наші діти
рабами або вільними людьми. Як потім ми
dивитимемося їм у вічі?

Зраз ми можемо вийти
і захистити свою свободу
та гідність.
Завтра буде запізно.

ВСІ НА ВУЛИЦІ!

Не дайте себе залякати!
Наші з вами дії законні
та захищені Конституцією.
Figure 1.4: A comparison of the economic and social impact of the Customs Union (left) versus the European Union (right).
Photo 1.1 (by author). November 25, 2013. “I am here because I want to live in Ukraine!”

Photo 1.2 (by author) December 1, 2013. The sign on the left reads “Human rights above all”; in the center, “Down with the police”; on the right, “Stop police terror!/#leftmaidan.”

Photo 2.2 (by author). November 24, 2013. People march down Khreshchatyk Street holding red flags for the UDAR Party (Vitaliy Klitschko) and, in the background, white flags for Yulia Tymoshenko’s Bat’kivshchyna Party.
Photo 2.3 (by author) December 8, 2013. Men dressed as Cossacks ride horses down Khreshchatyk.

Photo 2.5 (by author) January 2, 2014. Stepan Bandera’s image is on the center banner with the text, “Win the Ukrainian state, or die in the struggle for it!” The poster’s sponsor’s logo is on the bottom left-hand corner (the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists.).

Photo 2.6 (by author) December 9, 2013. Men pose with the downed state of Lenin (sans head) and use a small hammer to chop pieces from the body.
Photo 2.7 (by author) December 9, 2013. The text spray-painted onto the statue’s pedestal reads “Glory to Ukraine.” The slogan “White Pride” is accompanied by a cross with a circle around it, also known as the Halychynian cross, a symbol used by white power groups, usually in Western Ukraine (the symbol is often associated with the L’viv soccer team’s Ultras, or dedicated devotees) but extremely popular on Maidan.

Photo 2.8 (by author) December 12, 2013. Barricades block the width of Khreshchatyk Street, made from snow, benches, scraps of wood, and Christmas decorations.
Photo 2.9 (author unknown; circulated on Facebook) A leftist activist’s commentary on the absurdity of the January 16 Laws. On the left, an “illegal protest” in which the activist is covering his face (his sign reads “The MVS [Ukrainian military police] echoes the SS [Schutzstaffel; Nazi paramilitaries]”). On the right, a “legal protest,” in which the protester wears no clothes at all; his sign reads “Law-abiding citizen.”
Photo 2.10 (by author) January 31, 2014. “All the lines have already been crossed.” The photos on the top are of Yuri Verbits’kyi, Serhiy Nihoyan, and Mykhailo Zhizdnev’s’kyi, the first three people who were the victims of the Yanukovych regime during Maidan
Photo 2.11 (by author) January 24, 2014. Volunteer fighters on Hrushevs’koho Street appropriated bus schedules and street signs to use as shields. The helmets they were wearing were illegal under the January 16 Laws.
Photo 2.12 (by author) February 21, 2014. Visitors to Maidan get their photo taken with Right Sector volunteers on a captured tank.

Photo 3.1 (by author) November 30, 2013. “To Europe Without Yanukovych,” a sign hanging on the skeleton of the New Year’s Tree, whose construction was given as the justification for Berkut officers violently clearing protesters out of Maidan.
Photo 3.2 (by author) November 23, 2014. “No to increased [cost of] transportation/In Tallinn public transport is free. #kyivFREETrans.” Leftists carry a social issues-oriented banner during the first mass march on Maidan. They had been promoting free public transportation for several months amid ongoing discussions in Kyiv about the increase in prices for the Metro and city bus networks. They referenced an EU city that had successfully implemented the type of free transportation they felt Kyiv should adopt as a truly “European” city.
Photo 3.3 (by author) November 26, 2013. “European values are people above all.”
Photo 3.4 (by author) November 26, 2013. The posters read as follows (from top to bottom): “Solidarity with EuroPeople = Struggle with EuroBosses”; “Organize a trade union, don’t pray for the EuroUnion”; “Glory to Reason.”

Photo 3.5 (by author) December 12, 2013. This photo features, at center, the leftist banner reading “We Are Against a Police State” that leftist activists brought to the December 8, 2013 mass demonstration. In this photo, the banner is hanging in the occupied Kyiv City Hall (KMDA), somewhat ironically flanked by the Opposition party flags (from left, UDAR, Bat’kivshchyna, and Svoboda).
Суть нашого протесту

Сьогодні усі ми вийшли підтримати "Європейський вибір України", Європейські цінності - це добре, вигідно, прогресивно і т.д. А конкретно? Давайте із міць затамуємо годіх і подумавмо, чого конкретно хочемо?

Ми не завжди усвідомлюємо переваги та недоліки договору Асоціації з ЄС. Це не дивно, але і зМІ, ні експерти, ні профільні департаменти досі не оприлюднили незалежного, грунтовного та критичного аналізу цього тексту. Ми чули, що в першу чергу йдеться про економічну співпрацю. Про налагодження торгівлі, та європейський клімат та кращі умови для великого бізнесу. Але хба люди, які стоять разом на #Євромайдані отримують безпосередній економічний ефект з угоди? Не варто забувати, що сумарний економічний ріст країни - це ще не гарантія рівного розподілу благ між громадянами; гроші накопичуються там, де і були - у кишенях найбагатших.

Які конкретні спільні інтереси нас об'єднують? Ми вимагаємо рішучих політичних, соціальних та економічних змін! Прагнемо дійсного і постійного впливу на прийняття важливих політичних по рішення, які безпосередньо стосуються наших прав і свобод, умов та якості нашого життя. Прагнемо публічного врядування, що позбавить нас від музі біржократії. Справедливого суду та припинення міліційського савілля. Ми прагнемо рідних умов та достойної оплати праці. Ми виступаємо за якість та доступну освіту, розвиток культури і науки, та інновації новітніх технологій. Вимагаємо екологічно відповідної підготовки природних ресурсів. Ряженого, беззбитного медичного забезпечення. Ми прагнемо зручної і доступної для всіх інфраструктури громадського транспорту. Ми мріємо жити у світі без кордонів. Та в решти реалії, ми прагнемо коректного та толерантного ставлення одне до одного. Усе це і надає зміст нашій присутності на Майдані. Ми надаємо зміст Майдану!

Наші проблеми не вирішить ніхто, окрім нас. Навіть думати, що парламентська політична церква змогу зацікавитися наші інтереси. Ми вже були на Майдані в 2004, ми вже побачили, що парламентська опозиція нічого принципово не змінює. Сьогодні політиків знову пропонують обирати з двох зоп, але перед нами стоїть яскрава перспектива - низова самоорганізація та союзництва. Лише безпосередня участь кожного здобуде справжню Європу. Асоціація з ЄС - перший крок.

Допустимо до низового самоорганізації на #Євромайдані:
Photo 4.1 (by author) November 24, 2013. The banner on the right reads “For Free Education (like in Germany, France, Czech Republic).” Below, an activist holds a sign reading “For the EU: Socialist Europe” – in Ukrainian, the letters ie and es, which make the acronym for EU, are the same as for “socialist Europe.”

Photo 4.2 (by author) November 25, 2016. “Europe: Quality Education.” This photo was staged in front of hundreds of riot police officers in front of the Hotel Dnipro on European Square.
Photo 4.3 (by author) November 30, 2013. Police protect the Christmas Village from being re-occupied by protesters after the Berkut (Riot Police) cleared the square during the night. Protesters placed carnations in the fence in front of the police.

Photo 4.5 (by author) December 4, 2013. An early student protest at the Ministry of Education, during which students attempted to storm the building but found it protected by Berkut. Students easily occupied the building in February after the Yanukovych government fled the country.

Figure 4.1 Map showing significant sites for education protests during Maidan.
Photo 5.1 (by author) November 24, 2013. “Do you want to go to Europe? Say no to sexism and no to homophobia.”

Photo 5.2 (by author). “Have you signed up with the Cossacks?” Advertisements for the Fourth Sotnia.
Photo 5.3 (by author) “Bandera wasn’t afraid – are you?”

Photo 5.4 (by author) “Join the ranks of the Maidan Self-Defense!”
Photo 5.5 (by author) On the right, Ihor Pereklita’s portrait of a “Banderivka,” taped to a column on the Independence Monument on Maidan. The text of the poster reads, “I am a Banderivka/I am a Ukrainian woman/Death to the Muscovite Occupiers.”

Photo 5.6 (by author) December 12, 2013. Women’s Solidarity Night.
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