

*Heleen Zorgdrager*

## **Does Hope Need Heroes? Towards a Feminist Political Theology in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict**

### **Introduction**

The following is a quotation from my 22-year-old student Nina from Lviv, describing her Maidan experience: “There were people from all regions in Ukraine. The cooperation was great. It didn’t matter which language you spoke. People did not think about themselves but about the other. They were prepared to sacrifice their lives, so strong was the feeling of community.” Her friend Ulyana adds, “Maidan was like a big church in the open air. We could breathe in that open air. That was the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

Half a year later, after the annexation of Crimea and the Russian-backed separatist war in Eastern Ukraine, the students are tired and disappointed, and express their feelings of helplessness.<sup>2</sup> They now wonder what they can do and believe that only prayer can unite them. They simply hope for something better. They try to reduce their feelings of powerlessness by volunteering: collecting goods and money for the army, visiting wounded soldiers in the hospitals, helping refugees, and attending prayer services at church for peace and the wellbeing of the nation.

The non-declared but very real war in the east of the country has changed the lives of all Ukrainians. Many families are anxious about husbands, fathers, and sons serving in the Anti-Terrorist Operation [ATO] zone. Many families are mourning the death of loved ones, be it civilians killed by shelling or soldiers on the battlefield. Relatives have become separated from one another by new physical borders and by mental borders of diverging pro-Ukrainian or

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished interviews conducted with students of the Ukrainian Catholic University and Ivano Franko State University, Lviv, 26 and 28 March 2014. The interviews were conducted in English or Ukrainian; the quotations here and henceforth are all taken from interviews conducted in the English language.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished interviews conducted with students of the Ukrainian Catholic University and Ivano Franko State University, Lviv, 7 November 2014.

pro-Russian loyalties. Friends have decided to reduce their conversations to an indispensable minimum or to freeze relationships completely till better times come. Ukrainians face a situation that is usually ignored in descriptions of wars: the shelling and shooting is destroying friendships and relationships more often than lives. Russian friends tell me that this collateral damage (or is it the core damage?) of war is also splitting their circle of friends, relatives, and colleagues.

In this article I want to reflect on the following questions:

1. What is the post-Maidan situation and what roles do Ukrainian women play in it, and how do they respond creatively and critically to that reality?
2. Regarding the political theology of the churches, which road maps to the future, which narratives of salvation do the churches offer to the faithful?
3. Why is it that right in the midst of wartime the churches continue their “war on gender”?
4. How can women build a peace-promoting, de-escalating theology in the context of this war today? How might our narrative of salvation look?

In the end, I suggest building blocks for a feminist political theology in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.<sup>3</sup> My position is that of a committed outsider. I am only partially entitled to give voice to Ukrainian women’s concerns and hopes. But I can give voice to my own hopes. The method can only be that of dialogue, or polylogue. Therefore, I am grateful for the responses and comments of my colleagues and friends both from Ukraine and Russia which have enriched the contents of this article.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As for the part of a theology of reconciliation in the context of this conflict, I am inspired by reflections of Fr Cyril Hovorun, Alfons Brüning, Cinta Depondt, Lydia Lozova, and Frans Hoppenbrouwer, shared at the conference “The Churches and the War in Ukraine,” 4 April 2015, Tilburg (Netherlands), organised by Foundation Communicantes and the “Endowed Chair of Orthodoxy and Peacebuilding” of Protestant the Theological University and VU University.

<sup>4</sup> This article is based on a keynote lecture presented at the ESWTR conference, Orthodox Academy of Crete, 17-21 August 2015. Halyna Teslyuk of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv was the first invited to respond to the paper, followed by Marina Shishova of the Orthodox Christian Academy in St Petersburg, and Elena Volkova, former professor at the Moscow State University and currently active at the Sacharov Centre. Their responses were followed by a panel discussion.

## **Ukrainian Women in the Post-Maidan Situation**

### *Women's Agency in Wartime*

Participation in the EuroMaidan protest increased civic and political awareness and agency among women. Men and women participated in the Maidan movement in near equal numbers: 41 to 47 percent of the participants were women. Their roles were manifold.<sup>5</sup> They were engaged in traditional, supportive tasks such as kitchen work and distributing food for protesters; sorting donated clothes, food, and medication; cleaning up the protest spaces; coordinating logistics; administering services; and writing press reports. Women were also active in roles that placed them in riskier situations, as on-site doctors and nurses, on-the-scene journalists and photographers, and lawyers for arrested protesters. When the protests turned more violent, women were excluded from the barricades. The narrative on Maidan became man-centred. Men were celebrated as the new Cossacks. Heightened patriotic discourse and expansion of violent protest strategies strengthened patriarchal attitudes towards women. (Neo)traditionalist gender-scripts assigned them the roles of “mothers of the nation” and “inspiration for male protesters.” It sparked heated discussions among women about the relation between the feminist and nationalist-patriotic agenda. Loyalty to the nation’s struggle for independence is deeply entrenched in the history of the Ukrainian women’s movement and needs our particular attention below.

Despite the rule excluding them from the barricades, some female protesters still joined the clashes and prepared Molotov cocktails or threw them themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> Olga Onuch, “EuroMaidan Protest Participant Survey. Ukrainian Protest Project”. (<http://ukrainianprotestproject.com/>, 6 November 2015) [The Ukrainian Protest Participant Survey was conducted from November 26, 2013 – January 10, 2014. It is the only on-site continuous multi-day survey of the EuroMaidan Protest Participants]; Olga Onuch, *Mapping Mass Mobilizations: Understanding Revolutionary Moments in Ukraine and Argentina* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2014); Olga Onuch and Tamara Martsenyuk, “Mothers and Daughters of the Maidan: Gender, Repertoires Of Violence & The Division of Labour in Ukrainian Protests,” in: *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal* 1 (2014) 1, 105-126; Sarah Phillips, “The Women’s Squad in Ukraine’s Protests: Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism on Maidan,” in: *American Ethnologist*, 41 (2014) 3, 414-426, here 415; Olesya Khromeychuk, “Gender and Nationalism on the Maidan,” in: David R. Marples and Frederick V. Mills (eds.), *Ukraine’s Euromaidan: Analyses of a Civil Revolution* (Columbia University Press: New York 2015), 123-146; Olena Petrenko, “Women and Men of the Euromaidan: Revitalizations of the Heroic National Narrative,” paper presented at Danyliw Seminar 2014. (<http://www.danyliwseminar.com/#!olena-petrenko/c4sv>, 6 November 2015); Heleen Zorgdrager, “Women’s Bonding in a Spiritual Revolution: The Maidan and Post-Maidan Experience,” to be published in the conference proceedings of the ESWTR conference Gniezno, Poland, 2014.

There were also three all-female self-defence brigades formed, called the *Zhinocha Sotnias* (Women's Squads or Women's Hundreds).

After Maidan, many young women continued their activist roles in the volunteer movement, which is a rather new phenomenon in Ukrainian society. They have become involved in NGOs, in grassroots initiatives for social and political reform, in critical art projects, in university initiatives promoting exchanges between East and West Ukraine, and in numerous initiatives to support the army with food, clothes, bulletproof vests, and medical supplies. While men continue to dominate the traditional political sphere (the new government of Ukraine has only one woman, the Minister of Finance, Natalie Jaresko), women are expressing their political engagement in new civil and local networks, as leaders of NGOs and as undertakers of volunteer initiatives.

An interesting shift in public opinion has occurred. According to a poll on public trust conducted in May 2016 by the Razumkov Centre,<sup>6</sup> Ukrainians mostly trust volunteer organisations (trusted by 63.7% of respondents) and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (61.8%). They have taken over the lead from churches, which were until March 2015 still the most trusted institution (66.2%),<sup>7</sup> and now follow as third with a trust level of 60.5%.

Volunteer organisations	63.7%
Armed forces	61.8%
Churches	60.5%
Volunteer battalions	58.5%
National Guard of Ukraine	57.3%
New patrol police	43.9%
NGO's	46.8%
President of Ukraine	24.3%
Government	15.8%
Parliament	14.6%
National Bank	11.2%
Courts	10.5%
Prosecutor's office	9%

Figure 1. Public trust poll, Razumkov Centre, May 2016

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society\\_and\\_culture/2015941-poll-ukrainians-trust-volunteers-army-and-church.html](http://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society_and_culture/2015941-poll-ukrainians-trust-volunteers-army-and-church.html), 26 May 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Poll conducted by the Razumkov Centre, March 2015. ([http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/poll.php?poll\\_id=1030](http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/poll.php?poll_id=1030), 20 May 2016)

The traditional political sphere, dominated by men and notorious for its corruption, is highly mistrusted. The voluntary organisations, with their high degree of female participation, and the churches, traditional citadels of male power, are competing for the first position.

### *Gendering the Front*

A process of militarisation, which had already begun during Maidan, sped up after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas.

Militarism sharpens gender dichotomies. The social reality gets divided into the categories of fighting front and home front, a gendered division of reality. Politics of masculinity and femininity are produced to support the war effort.<sup>8</sup> The ideology of “man-making” serves the, in theory, absolute separation of military and civilian worlds of the battlefield and the home front.<sup>9</sup> The symbol for the home front is the mother. There is a firewall between the battle zone and the home front, namely the security policy of maintaining strict control over communication and information, suggestively ‘for the good of the mothers’.<sup>10</sup> In Russia, this information ban is complete: mothers know nothing and are deceived about the fate of their sons, at times carrying empty coffins because the bodies of their sons killed in the “war that does not exist” are not given back to them.<sup>11</sup>

Expert Cynthia Enloe shows that the military system, in reality, is not separate from, but profoundly dependent on manipulations of motherhood, family and kinship.<sup>12</sup> The maternal sacrifice is the fertile soil from which the military draws its lifeblood. While men are fighting, women are mourning – or praying, as they are every Saturday morning in Lviv at the special Mothers of Soldiers prayer service.

The tight intertwinement between patriarchy and militarism is also evident in a policy that promotes births and motherhood, a pro-natalist policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (University of California Press: Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2000); Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Steven L. Gardiner and Angie Reed Garner, “Relationships of War: Mothers, Soldiers, Knowledge,” in: Robin M. Chandler, Linda K. Fuller, Lihua Wang (eds.), *Women, War, and Violence: Personal Perspectives and Global Activism* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2010).

<sup>10</sup> See Gardiner and Reed, “Relationships of War”; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Sage Publications: London 1997).

<sup>11</sup> See Elena Volkova, “Every Son’s Mother: Human Rights Mariology,” in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 244-260.

“Militarizing motherhood often starts with conceptualizing the womb as a recruiting station,” as Enloe puts it.<sup>13</sup> Militarised regimes tend to see mothers as breeders of the nation and of future soldiers. The ideological intertwining is succinctly captured in a phrase that is attributed to Benito Mussolini: “War is to man what motherhood is to woman.”<sup>14</sup> Military war and demographic war tend to ally. This can be observed in the Ukrainian situation as well.

The empirical reality of the demarcation between the fronts, however, has always been more complicated. In Ukraine there are women present at the front, as soldiers, as liaison officers, as doctors and nurses, as engineers, and as prostitutes.<sup>15</sup>

A special case is Nadiya Savchenko, a 34-year-old first lieutenant in the Ukrainian Ground Forces and Air Force pilot. Nadiya, whose name means “hope,” joined as a volunteer the Aidar battalion in the ATO in Donbass. She was captured by pro-Russian rebels and handed over to Russia. While in captivity, Savchenko was elected as deputy to the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) in November 2014. Savchenko has become a symbol of the struggle for Ukraine. President Poroshenko awarded her with the title “Hero of Ukraine”, the highest national honor.<sup>16</sup> He said, “Nadiya is a symbol of unbroken Ukrainian spirit and heroism, a symbol of the way one should defend and love Ukraine, a symbol of our victory.”<sup>17</sup> Patriarch Filaret awarded her with the Holy Order of St George for her brave fight against the evil dragon of Putin’s Russia.<sup>18</sup>

Savchenko is Christ-like, Mary-like, and Pussy Riot-like. Like Pussy Riot, she writes letters from prison, is supported by a famous French philosopher (Bernard-Henry Lévi in her case),<sup>19</sup> and the pictures of her behind bars and on hunger strike for 83 days have become iconic.

Ukraine has in Savchenko its “*Berehynia* of the war”. The *Berehynia* was a female spirit in Slavic mythology that transformed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century discourse

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<sup>13</sup> Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 248.

<sup>14</sup> Source unknown.

<sup>15</sup> According to statistics from 2009, in peacetimes, women made up almost 13% of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; 7% of these women were officers. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_the\\_military\\_by\\_country#Ukraine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_the_military_by_country#Ukraine), 6 November 2015)

<sup>16</sup> “Poroshenko Awards Savchenko Highest National Honor,” 2 March 2015. (<http://www.rferl.org/content/savchenko-award-highest-national-honor/26878078.html>, 1 November 2015)

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_heroes\\_of\\_Ukraine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_heroes_of_Ukraine), accessed 1 November 2015

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “Nadiya Savchenko’s Letters From Prison,” Part 2, 12 May 2015. ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-levy/nadiya-savchenkos-letters\\_b\\_7264172.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-levy/nadiya-savchenkos-letters_b_7264172.html), 1 November 2015)

into the mother and protector of the nation.<sup>20</sup> As a young, slender yet tough woman with big eyes, she symbolises in the popular representation the human face of the Ukrainian armed forces that will gain the world's sympathy for Ukraine's unequal struggle.<sup>21</sup>

As the following examples will show, women are breaking down the barrier between home front and battlefield in alternative ways as well. In the powerful movement of volunteers supporting the Ukrainian army with food, goods, technical equipment, and medical supplies, women often carry out the transport themselves and deliver the goods right behind the frontlines. Mothers of soldiers sometimes take to the streets and demand that Russia stop the war. Female journalists and photographers cross the front lines, and subvert the information ban by reporting about the ambiguous, ugly, and not so heroic realities of the war (such as violence against women in the war-zone and the increase of domestic violence committed by servicemen on leave). And finally, there have been explicit dialogue initiatives by women who seek communication with those on the other side of the frontline.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Dialogue Initiatives by Women*

We should be cautious to call these “dialogue initiatives” rather than “anti-war” or “peace-building” initiatives, since Russian internet trolls have seized the name of a so-called Ukrainian Peace Movement.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Oksana Kis, “‘Beauty Will Save the World’: Feminine Strategies in Ukrainian Politics and the Case of Yulia Tymoshenko,” in: *spacesofidentity.net*, 7 (2007) 2. (<http://soi.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/soi/article/view/7970/7101> , 6 November 2015). In a more profound feminist analysis, following Enloe, the case of Savchenko would perfectly demonstrate the efforts military officials and political leaders make to divide groups of militarised women (women soldiers, wives, mothers, prostitutes, nurses, raped women) to ensure that each of these groups feels special and separate, and will not join in alliance. See Enloe, *Maneuvers*, xiii.

<sup>21</sup> See for example “Бог нам послав НАДИЮ!” July 11, 2014, by Yuriy Havrylyuk (<http://www.halynaklymuk.com/nadiya-means-hope-in-ukrainian/>) This Facebook post honours her in ecstatic wordings: “For Ukrainian woman, she is the sun and the air around us. She is mother – one that gives birth; and wife – one that makes a man a human being. Nadiya Savchenko – she is even *Berehinya* the Protectoress who is not afraid to stand up against those who are tearing Ukraine apart and spill its blood! She is like the Mother of God. And the picture of Nadiya with the helmet – it is like an icon. [...] God has given us Nadiya – HOPE.”

<sup>22</sup> International Centre for Policy Studies [ICPS], *Mapping of Dialogue Initiatives to Resolve the Conflict in Ukraine*, January 2015.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance “Victoria Shilova – Leader of the Ukrainian Anti-War Movement Has Been Abducted and Imprisoned by the Kiev Regime”. ([http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=a46\\_1428573966#MQCPUCAi81D3RoeA.99](http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=a46_1428573966#MQCPUCAi81D3RoeA.99), 6 November 2015)

In late August 2014, the popular singer Ruslana (Stepanivna Lyzjytsjko), who acted as a courageous moderator on the Maidan stage, made a trip to Donbas. After the trip, she gave a press conference in Kiev. Her main message was “Stop firing at countrymen.” Ruslana is convinced that Ukrainians from both sides should stop shooting countrymen and unite against the real enemy, the foreign aggressor.<sup>24</sup>

In December 2014, the journalist, lawyer, and politician Tetiana Montian went to the rebel-controlled territories of Luhansk and Donetsk. The trip resulted from agreements reached during a teleconference on Channel 17 between Tetiana Montian and Oleksii Mozgovyi, field commander in the so-called LPR (Luhansk People’s Republic). During Montian’s visit to Donbas, Mozgovyi released a soldier who had been held captive since August 2014. Moreover, Montian held public meetings in Luhansk and Donetsk and answered journalists’ questions. After coming back to Kiev, Tetiana Montian together with Channel 17 journalist Dmytro Filatov gave a press conference titled “Humanitarian disaster in Donbas.”<sup>25</sup>

The initiatives of these women are characterised by the readiness to have a face-to-face encounter with the enemy, and a deliberate kind of *naïveté*. The expectation is that perhaps the other side can teach one something that one does not yet know. Perhaps reality is different from the propaganda both sides want people to believe. By challenging the dichotomy of home front and battlefield, and listening and talking to real people, civilians, and combatants, these women at least trouble the mythologies of war.<sup>26</sup>

The women’s movement as a collective is not really visible in the initiatives for dialogue. In June-July 2014, there was an initiative of the “Union of Ukrainian Women” to appoint the organisation’s leader Valentyna Semeniuk-Samsonenko and her deputy Hanna Osova as heads of Donetsk and Luhansk Regional State Administrations. The initiative was meant to promote de-escalation of violence and conflict resolution. After the death of Semeniuk-Samsonenko under unclarified circumstances on 27 August 2014, there were no further reports on dialogue initiatives by the Union of Ukrainian Women.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> ICPS Report, *Mapping of Dialogue Initiatives*, 25f.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Debra White-Stanley, “Cultural Perceptions of Gender in War Films,” in: Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Jakub Kazecki (eds.), *Heroism and Gender in War Films* (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2014), 135.

<sup>27</sup> ICPS Report, *Mapping of Dialogue Initiatives*, 25. Valentyna Semeniuk-Samsonenko was the former Head of the State Property Fund of Ukraine.

### *Feminism and Patriotism*

Why are women's initiatives for dialogue so exceptional? To answer this question, we have to discuss the relation between feminism and patriotism. Can patriotic goals serve the interests of women? For Westerners, feminism and patriotism appear to be incompatible. As far as I can see, Western feminists have become deeply suspicious of any kind of nationalism. Their moral compass has been shaped by the historic experiences of national-socialism and fascism. They associate nationalism with war-making, imperialistic aspirations, and compulsory motherhood policies that assign to women the function of biological and symbolical reproduction of the nation. Mainstream Western feminists feel comfortable with the trajectory of cosmopolitanism and anti-militarism. They fail to understand the specific Central- and Eastern-European situation. In these regions, women's emancipation in the nineteenth and twentieth century went hand in hand with the formation of nation states and the fight against imperialistic powers. Though not without problems and ambiguities, the interests of women and nation, both victims of totalitarian statehood, could converge in numerous ways.<sup>28</sup>

Feminism is not imported from the West. Historian Oksana Kis dryly comments:

In analyzing the process of feminism's flourishing in independent Ukraine, both in the sphere of public activism and in the academic milieu, it should be remembered above all that feminism can hardly be seen as alien. It had taken root and borne fruit in Ukrainian scholarship and public life a century ago. Feminism in its essence and consequences (though perhaps not in its declared goals and form) was the powerful women's movement in Galicia and in eastern Ukraine in the early twentieth century.<sup>29</sup>

Ukrainian women significantly expanded their range of social and political roles by joining the nationalist organisations that from the 1920s till the 1950s fought for the ideal of an independent Ukrainian state.<sup>30</sup> Significant numbers

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<sup>28</sup> Tatiana Zhurzenko, "Feminist (De)Constructions of Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space," in: Marian J. Rubchak, *Mapping Difference: The Many Faces of Women in Contemporary Ukraine* (Berghahn Books: New York/Oxford 2011), 173-192.

<sup>29</sup> Oksana Kis, "Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine: From 'Allergy' to Last Hope," 2013. ([https://www.academia.edu/4890934/Feminism\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Ukraine\\_From\\_Allergy\\_to\\_Last\\_Hope](https://www.academia.edu/4890934/Feminism_in_Contemporary_Ukraine_From_Allergy_to_Last_Hope), 1 November 2015)

<sup>30</sup> Olena Petrenko, "Makellose Heldinnens des Terrors. Die Organisation der Ukrainischen Nationalisten im Spannungsfeld zwischen Heroisierung und Diffamierung," in: Christine Hikel

of women participated in the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists [OUN] and its military wing, the Ukrainian Resistance Army [UPA].

Departments of gender studies in Ukraine (in Lviv, Kiev, Odessa) embrace the concept of “national or patriotic feminism.”<sup>31</sup> It is a concept of pragmatic feminism. The scholars in these departments have set out to participate critically as feminists in the process of nation building, and in the process of constructing collective memory and national identity.

For example, feminist historian Oksana Kis works on the ethnological discourse that has been developed since the 1990s in the field of “Ukrainian Studies.” She deconstructs the essentialist concept of Ukrainian culture that dominates the scene, focuses on family, kinship, customs, tradition, and promotes maternalistic discourses.

Not all gender scholars share the “national (or patriotic) feminism” approach. The defining narrative in western Ukraine is the nation-centred narrative, whereas in parts of eastern Ukraine, the transnational narrative of the Soviet past still shapes minds and hearts.<sup>32</sup> The Charkiv feminist scholar Irina Zherebkina, who elaborates on the gender theories of Judith Butler, criticises her Ukrainian colleagues for their narrow ethnocentrism, whereas the latter defame the Russo-centric, anti-Ukrainian, imperialistic attitude of the Charkiv school.

It is important to note that Ukrainian “national feminism” is not as provincialist as it may seem. Women scholars from the Ukrainian diaspora in the U.S. and Canada actively take part in research and discussions, and there is a steady exchange of scholars, students, programs, methods, and ideas between the continents.

## **The Role of Churches and their Narratives of Salvation**

### *Salvation and the Nation*

Which road maps to the future, which visions of hope do the churches offer to the faithful? What kind of political theology do they present? It is important

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and Sylvia Schraut (eds.), *Terrorismus und Geschlecht: Politische Gewalt in Europa seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Campus Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 2012), 191-208.

<sup>31</sup> Zhurzenko, “Feminist (De)Constructions of Nationalism.”

<sup>32</sup> Oksana Kis has analysed women’s biographical narratives in eastern and western Ukraine, and shows on the basis of oral history research the fundamental differences in their patriotic sentiments, as determined by their differing political loyalties – whether to the Soviet regime or to the independent Ukrainian nation-state. Kis, “Biography as Political Geography: Patriotism in Ukrainian Women’s Life Stories,” in: Marian Rubchak (ed.), *Mapping Difference: The Many Faces of Women in Contemporary Ukraine* (Berghahn Books: New York/Oxford 2011), 89-108.

to note, that there is no clearly dominant (majority) church in Ukraine, and the confessional landscape is very pluralistic (see figure 1). In order to trace the political theology of the churches, I shall look at both the Russian Orthodox Church and two important Ukrainian churches and analyse the latest Easter messages issued by their leaders (April 2015). These messages have a major public impact. They are read aloud after the Easter liturgy and widely spread through the media.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate	26%
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate	31%
Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church	2%
Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church	8%
Roman-Catholic Church	0.6%
Protestant Churches: Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Reformed (Hungarian & Ukrainian), Charismatic, Seventh-Day Adventist, Methodist...	2-3%
Muslims (Crimean Tatars)	500,000
Jews	100,000

(Source: U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom Report 2011)

Figure 2. Plural confessional landscape of Ukraine

Patriarch Kirill (Gundyayev) of the Russian Orthodox Church calls the Resurrection of Christ a gift of hope. He calls Christ “the First Warrior in the battle for our salvation.”<sup>33</sup> The military metaphor inspires him to dwell on “spiritual heroism” as the way to imitate Christ. This heroism consists of active love and the willingness to sacrifice oneself in service. First it is service to the suffering, the sick, the lonely, and the downcast, but, in a rhetoric shift, the Patriarch expands this service to the “entire people,” and it becomes a forthright patriotic speech. He pictures spiritual heroism as “the hearts of millions of people [...] ready to defend their Fatherland.” By great spiritual achievements, “the nation acquires enormous strength which no disasters or enemies are capable of overcoming.” The “enemies” are not clearly identified,

<sup>33</sup> Paschal Message by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, 1 April 2015. (<https://mospat.ru/en/2015/04/11/news117689>, 1 November 2015)

and could basically be anyone from inside or outside who attacks the homeland.<sup>34</sup>

The image of hope is the glorious resurrection of the Russian people and nation, surely affirmed by the Resurrection of Christ, but even so, “evidently attested by the Victory in the Great Patriotic War.” It is difficult to determine which event is most decisive. The suffering nation will stand up in eternal glory. Patriarch Kirill speaks here of the resurrection of Holy Russia, in modern terms: *Russkiy Mir*, the Russian World.

The Russian World is a sketchy yet undoubtedly divisive ideology of what Russia is (or at least pretends to be). As a political concept, it is vague and imprecise. It is a sacralised view of Russian national identity. It asserts that Russia has the mission to expand its influence and authority until it dominates the Eurasian lands by means of a strong, centralised Russian state aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church. Based on the idea of a “clash of civilisations,” Russian Christian civilisation is opposed to Western liberalism, which is equated with barbarism.<sup>35</sup>

Patriarch Kirill’s Easter message also addresses his flock in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, and aims to include them and preferably all Orthodox believers in Ukraine in the imagined community of the Russian World. Ukraine should not exist as an own nation. The Patriarch’s political theology around Christ the Warrior is built on the logic of victory and defeat.<sup>36</sup>

What kind of messages are the Ukrainian church leaders sending? Patriarch Filaret (Denisenko) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate (one of the independent Orthodox churches in Ukraine) matches his Moscow colleague’s militant tone and nationalist worldview. He says: “we firmly believe that soon the Lord will send us victory over the aggressor, for where the truth is, there are God and victory.”<sup>37</sup> The image of hope is the speedy

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<sup>34</sup> In her response to the paper, Elena Volkova called these messages “Jihad-like sermons.”

<sup>35</sup> Paul Coyer, “Putin’s Holy War and the Disintegration of the ‘Russian World’,” 4 June 2015. (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/06/04/putins-holy-war-and-the-disintegration-of-the-russian-world>, 1 November 2015); “Appeal by Metropolitan Hilarion on the Celebration of the 1,025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus,” 19 June 2013. ([http://www.synod.com/synod/eng2013/20130619\\_enmhappeal1025.html](http://www.synod.com/synod/eng2013/20130619_enmhappeal1025.html), 1 November 2015)

<sup>36</sup> An excellent analysis of this new civic religion in Russia is offered by Andrei Desnitsky, “Die Orthodoxie und die ‘Religion des Sieges’ in Russland,” in: *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 34 (2015) 8, 14-16.

<sup>37</sup> “Church Leaders’ Easter Messages to Ukrainians,” 8 April 2015. ([http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/culture/religious\\_holidays/59674](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/culture/religious_holidays/59674), 1 November 2015)

victory over the enemy. There is no doubt that God is on the side of Ukraine. In an interview, Patriarch Filaret declared that “God is on the side of truth, and since Putin and the Kremlin committed an act of falsehood, they will be defeated by God.”<sup>38</sup> His patriotic theology is clearly black-and-white, building on the oppositions of good and evil, truth and lie, victory and defeat. Is there any room for a future relationship with the enemy?

Patriarch Sviatoslav (Shevchuk)<sup>39</sup> of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church proclaims that “[C]elebrating Easter during war is being able to see the Risen Christ in our victory today.”<sup>40</sup> Here again we hear a story of sacrifice, heroism, and victory, though first of all of a spiritual kind. When it comes to attitudes toward the enemy, “those who let themselves be deceived by insatiable imperial ideology of lie and violence” – the foreign aggressor Russia but also the pro-Russian rebels in the Donbas – Patriarch Sviatoslav makes efforts to speak in a nuanced way. The Truth of Christ does not simply refer to the “truth” of the Ukrainian position. He states that the Truth of Christ comes to the fore where people speak and show the truth about what is happening in Ukraine. This nuance is significant. It keeps open the possibility that the truth might be inconvenient. Such people, according to the Patriarch, can become the true apostles of the gospel of peace and love. He insists that we debunk the propaganda that deceives the minds of many Europeans. We should not perceive the conflict as a civil war, or as a war between two nationalisms; it is a conflict between an authoritarian state system and a statehood built on free and responsible citizenship.

### *Cult of the Heavenly Hundred*

The Cult of the Heavenly Hundred (*Nebesna Sotnia*) is a symbol for the political theology of Ukrainian churches. This is the glorious title for the more than one hundred people (among them three women) who were killed by snipers during the bloody attack of 19-20 February 2014. It was the gruesome end of the Revolution of Dignity.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview in *Den'*, the Day newspaper, 1 April 2014. (<http://www.day.kiev.ua/en/article/society/church-not-silent>, 1 November 2015)

<sup>39</sup> Officially the ecclesial title is: Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. For the Greek -Catholic faithful, in everyday speech, he is their patriarch. In its ecclesiology, the UGCC claims the title of patriarchate, according to the tradition of the Eastern churches, but so far the Holy Father refused to give the blessing. Antoine Arjakovsky, *Conversations with Lubomyr Cardinal Husar. Towards a Post-Confessional Christianity* (Ukrainian Catholic University Press: Lviv 2007), 139-152.

<sup>40</sup> “Church Leaders’ Easter Messages to Ukrainians.”

On the first anniversary of the massacre, Patriarch Sviatoslav said: “Some-one will think of victims of Maidan, another will talk about a fusillade at Maidan. But we Christians realise something much deeper here. We talk about an Easter sacrifice of the Heavenly Hundred.”<sup>41</sup> Their free-willed sacrifice is a beginning of new life for the nation. With their “holy blood” they sanctified the freedom of Ukraine.

Searching for a shared, inspiring national narrative, Patriarch Sviatoslav does not back a narrow nationalism. The national unity of Ukraine should be inclusive, like the community of the Heavenly Hundred, some of whom were “sons of Belarus and Armenia.” Nevertheless, the outcome is a sacralisation of events and victims. The Heavenly Hundred are viewed as the celestial patrons who invisibly guard Ukraine. Chapels are built in memory of the *Nebesna Sotnia*. They are the subject of an entire iconostasis (by Roman Bonchuk, Ivano Frankivsk).<sup>42</sup> And the Ukrainian state has installed An Order of the Heaven’s Hundred Heroes.

I wish to question this growing cult of the Heavenly Hundred. Elevating them to the status of an Easter sacrifice makes their individual stories, motives, and dreams invisible and impalpable, and reduces them to a single story. Does honouring the risk they took automatically mean that I agree with each of them? The sacralisation makes it impossible to criticise the narrative behind the cult. Does the Gospel compel one to love one’s own country above everything else? Is a violent death in a people’s protest life-giving or perhaps sometimes or many times just tragic, without sense, a reason to cry to God in despair?

## **Patriotic Religion and War on Gender**

### *Military War and War on Gender*

In the midst of the military war with Russia, a war on gender, led by churches and right-wing organisations, has restarted in Ukraine with fresh energy.<sup>43</sup> How can this simultaneity be explained?

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<sup>41</sup> “The Head of the UGCC: ‘A Victim of the Heavenly Hundred Is an Easter Sacrifice’,” 23 February 2015. ([http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/the\\_head\\_of\\_the\\_ugcc\\_a\\_victim\\_of\\_the\\_heavenly\\_hundred\\_is\\_an\\_easter\\_sacrifice\\_73043.html](http://news.ugcc.ua/en/news/the_head_of_the_ugcc_a_victim_of_the_heavenly_hundred_is_an_easter_sacrifice_73043.html), 20 May 2016)

<sup>42</sup> <http://ahamot.org/en/celestial-sotnya-heroes-never-die/>, 6 November 2015.

<sup>43</sup> For this term and phenomenon, see Heinrich Boell Stiftung, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe* (Heinrich Boell Stiftung: Berlin 2015); Jadranka Rebeka Anić, “Anti-Gender Bewegung: Ein Beitrag zur Bewertung

The anti-gender movement has some history in Ukraine. I would like to mention two events to illustrate this. In April 2012, the Dognal Group, a break-away sect that calls itself the “Ukrainian Orthodox Greek-Catholic Church,”<sup>44</sup> held a public manifestation. A group of about 30 people had gathered in front of the city hall in Lviv, carrying billboards with pictures and slogans against homosexuality, abortion, and juvenile justice reform. In the centre of the stage there was an act of performance art: a hangman entirely clothed in black and with a black hood, held a scythe in his hand while sitting on a coffin. On his chest was a sandwich board with only one big word painted in red: GENDER. It was a perfect visual illustration of the idea that gender ideology is the “culture of death.” Though the Dognal group has very few supporters in Ukrainian society, with this anti-gender campaign they play on sentiments and fears that are widespread among Ukrainian people.

Later, on 27 November 2012, a conference seminar on “Gender Theory” took place at the Ukrainian Catholic University, organised by the “Institute of Marriage and Family.” The invited keynote speaker was Italian Professor Maria Luisa Di Pietro (endocrinologist and specialist in bioethics), who warned against the dangers of gender ideology. The head of the Theology Department of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church [UGCC], Bishop Yaroslav Pryriz, commented on that occasion:

Until recently, the term ‘gender’ was completely unknown by the general public, not only in Ukraine but throughout the whole world. But suddenly it became one of the leading principles of certain ideologies. The aim of gender ideology is to create a new type of man who is endowed with the freedom to choose and implement his sexual identity, regardless of biological sex. It is clear that such a position is unacceptable from the point of view of Christian morality. But even more disturbing is that gender ideology is protected by national and multinational institutions, and traditional moral values are discriminated against and persecuted. If its further

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des Phänomens,” in this volume; Rita Perintfalvi, “The True Face of the ‘Gender Ideology’ Discourse: Religious Fundamentalism, or Questioning the Principle of Democracy?” in this volume.

<sup>44</sup> Named after their leader, the Czech Republic citizen Antonin Dognal, the group consists of fundamentalist Catholic clerics and nuns, and its activities are characterised by aggressive actions and an anti-European Union agenda. The group is suspected of having allegiances to Moscow. Andrew Higgins, “Ukrainian Church Faces Obscure Pro-Russia Revolt in Its Own Ranks,” in: *New York Times*, 21 June 2014. ([http://trisu.org.ua/en/index/monitoring/society\\_digest/56840/](http://trisu.org.ua/en/index/monitoring/society_digest/56840/), 6 November 2015)

movement is not stopped, then soon Christians and all those who follow the eternal moral precepts risk becoming delinquents.<sup>45</sup>

### *Battle for Traditional Values*

Oksana Kis calls gender a litmus test for Ukrainian democracy. Already in 2013 she wrote, “the sharpness of the conservative reaction was [is] conditioned precisely by the maturity and increasing influence of the women’s movement and gender studies, along with the shift in the appropriate legal basis [concerning gender equality].”<sup>46</sup> She comments on the conservative forces, that include the churches:

Turning to glaring disinformation and manipulation of the Ukrainians’ consciousness, exploiting their national and religious sentiment, and homophobic prejudice, they present gender policy as a phenomenon aimed exclusively at propagating homosexuality and subverting traditional family values in Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>

The reason for the current re-emergence of the anti-gender campaign is the intended reform of the Constitution of Ukraine, to bring it in accord with European legislation. In March 2015, the President of Ukraine set up the Constitutional Commission for this purpose. Its Working Group on Human Rights has already made proposals ensuring gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities.

The churches have fiercely opposed these reforms. In general, as Alfons Brüning observes, religiosity in Ukraine, as in other areas of the former Soviet Union, bears characteristics of a post-soviet morality that gives stability preference over freedom.<sup>48</sup> In the current situation, however, this devotion to conservative values takes more militant forms.

The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations [AUC-CRO], which played a wonderful, connective, and courageous role during the

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<sup>45</sup> “Expert from Italy Speaks at UCU about Dangers of Gender Ideology,” 1 December 2012. (<http://ucu.edu.ua/eng/news/1241>, 6 November 2015)

<sup>46</sup> Kis, “Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine”; Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “Gender, Nation, and Reproduction: Demographic Discourses and Politics in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution,” in: Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova (eds.), *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto 2012), 131-151.

<sup>47</sup> Kis, “Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine,” 10.

<sup>48</sup> Alfons Brüning, “‘Project Ukraine’ under Threat – Christian Churches in Ukraine and their Relations 1991-2015,” in: *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 67 (2015). 1-2, 101-140.

Maidan revolution and in the following months,<sup>49</sup> is now in the forefront of defending the “principles of human relation that are traditional for Ukrainians.”<sup>50</sup> They campaign to enshrine in the Constitution the right to life “from conception to natural death” and keep marriage defined as a “family union between a man and a woman.” According to the AUCCRO, “justifying such dubious proposals [of the Constitutional Commission] by reference to European experience is irrelevant, because the European Union has opposing views on the issue of anti-discrimination legislation, marriage and family, and legal opportunities for sexual minorities.”

Local churches support the campaign of the Council of Churches and Religious Organisations. The rectorate of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv backed the amendments of AUCCRO with an “Appeal to Government Leaders”, delivered on 29 July 2015.<sup>51</sup>

In the short introduction the public appeal reads,

In our opinion the health of the family and the promotion of family values is a real challenge in ensuring the basic rights of Ukrainian citizens. Only in this way is it possible to overcome the practice of abortion and reduce the number of divorces, the level of family violence, the number of children abandoned by their parents, social orphans, the fall in the birth rate [demographic anxiety!], and other severe social problems.

Protection of the traditional patriarchal family is believed to be the panacea for a huge range of social evils. It is shocking that a letter from a public university lacks a modicum of academic reasoning. It is even more painful that the letter reflects an unawareness of the often harmful reality of patriarchal family relations to the lives and rights of women and children.

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<sup>49</sup> See Heleen Zorgdrager, “Patriotism, Peacebuilding and Patrons in Heaven: The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Times of War,” paper presented at the conference “The Churches and the War in Ukraine,” 4 April 2015, Tilburg, Netherlands. (<https://pthu.academia.edu/HeleenZorgdrager>)

<sup>50</sup> [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/state/legislation/60272](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/legislation/60272), 6 November 2015; [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/confessional/aucro/60611](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/confessional/aucro/60611), 6 November 2015.

<sup>51</sup> <http://ucu.edu.ua/eng/news/4258>. See also Matthew Matuszak, “Ukrainian Catholic University Defends Christian Values,” in: The Cardinal Newman Society Issue Bulletin, *Examining Critical Issues in Faithful Catholic Education*, 26 August 2015, 1-7. ([http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/Portals/0/CENTER/Ukrainian%20Catholic%20U\\_Issue%20Bulletin%202.pdf](http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/Portals/0/CENTER/Ukrainian%20Catholic%20U_Issue%20Bulletin%202.pdf), 6 November 2015)

This position does not necessarily reflect the opinion of all members of the university. There are more nuanced voices in the ranks of the Ukrainian Catholic University. Since 2012, the UNWLA Lectorium on Women's Studies has organised lectures that discuss in a more academic and informed way social, historical, political, and religious issues concerning women, men, sexuality, and the family in the Ukrainian context.

On 20 October 2015, the AUCCRO declared once again that the draft proposal of the Constitution (and consecutive legislative initiatives) was unacceptable to them because they believed it would undermine the legal basis of the traditional family and impermissibly violate the rights and freedom of the citizens. AUCCRO stated that the Constitution should be based on the traditional moral values of the Ukrainian people.<sup>52</sup> According to them, these corrections lead to positive discrimination of sexual minorities, propaganda, and discrimination of other parts of society. On 19 November, the target was the bill on amendments to the Labour Code.<sup>53</sup> AUCCRO condemned the bill and asked the President to refrain from signing it. The Council sees the main threat in the introduction of new terms into the legal environment of Ukraine. In particular these terms include the definition of "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" which would, according to the Council, open further way for the implementation of other provisions that are common in Europe: a ban on criticism, introducing quotas in employment, and legalising gay marriage.

The pro-life and traditional values agenda has become the major unifying factor among the churches in Ukraine and shapes their involvement in the public discourse. It is a well-structured and coordinated campaign to misrepresent the concept of gender, to create an enemy image of "gender-ideology," and to introduce a new kind of religious and moral fundamentalism.<sup>54</sup> At the moment of writing, it is still unclear how this battle over the Constitution will end.

To gain a better understanding of the popular concept of the "traditional Ukrainian family," we can consult a schoolbook series of Christian Ethics, in this case one that considers itself modern and even ecumenical: *Osnovy Chrystyanskojy Etyky* [Foundations of Christian Ethics], published in 2010.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> [http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all\\_news/state/church\\_state\\_relations/61448](http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/state/church_state_relations/61448), 1 November 2015.

<sup>53</sup> [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_society/61734](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/religion_and_society/61734), 26 November 2015.

<sup>54</sup> See Anić, "Anti-Gender-Bewegung," and Perintfalvi, "The True Face," in this volume.

<sup>55</sup> Halyna Dobosh, *Zhivu i navichayus' u rodyni*, Osnovy Chrystianskojy Etyky 2 (Svit: Lviv 2010).

The title of volume two is “Live and learn in the family.” It reads, in Chapter 4:

The father is the head of the family. He protects the family. He rules and is respected always as head of the family. The word of the father is always and for everyone important. The saying is: ‘Father knows how to educate, and mother how to caress.’ [...] We call God Father. We honour our fathers because they represent God on earth.<sup>56</sup>

Then, some chapters later, we find the saying “as the family, so the nation.”<sup>57</sup> Family and nation are both declared patriarchal and sacrosanct institutions, according to this Christian textbook intended for primary school pupils.

### *Homophobia*

It is difficult to assess whether homophobia has increased since Maidan. Favourable factors for the strengthening of domestic homophobia include the further radicalisation and militarisation of the society as well as the economic and social dislocations caused by the political crisis. Nazariy Boyarsky, of the “Coalition against discrimination in Ukraine,” states that Ukrainian society idealises the supporters of the radical right-wing organisations, who carried out attacks on the members of the LGBT community in the past, as “Defenders” and “Warriors of Light” as a result of their involvement in the revolutionary events and ATO. At the same time, “the law enforcement agencies do not pay enough attention to the activities of such [homophobic] organizations... and compared to other countries Ukrainian society treats it [homophobic activities] more passively.”<sup>58</sup>

The gay pride rally in Kiev was allowed to take place on 6 June 2015. Although for the first time in history it was guarded by the police, several dozen assailants attacked the police and the participants.<sup>59</sup>

On 12 August 2015, the leaders of churches in Odessa appealed to the city authorities not to allow a gay pride festival “for the sake of peace among residents and visitors.”<sup>60</sup> The churches that foment the hatred and intolerance

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 (my translation from Ukrainian).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 55 (my translation from Ukrainian).

<sup>58</sup> “Homophobia in Ukraine after EuroMaidan: research”, 30 May 2015. ([http://upogau.org/eng/inform/ourview/ourview\\_2292.html](http://upogau.org/eng/inform/ourview/ourview_2292.html), 6 November 2015)

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33034247>, 6 November 2015.

<sup>60</sup> [http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_society/60806](http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/religion_and_society/60806), 6 November 2015 (my translation from Ukrainian).

against LGBT people, now hypocritically refer to possible violence as an argument to prohibit the gay pride event. The district court in Odessa has banned the rally and one of its arguments for doing so is “for the sake of national security.”<sup>61</sup>

The “heroic narrative” that emerged from Maidan might also influence the perception of homosexuality in society. In a highly militarised society, homosexuality is considered and condemned as “emasculated masculinity.” Homosexual males do not fit the image of a hero-warrior. Another example of how the heroic narrative can merge with the traditional values discourse is illustrated by a poster presented in the centre of Lviv shortly after Maidan. It pictured a sweet baby and the text read: “In order to become a hero, one first has to be born. Do not commit abortion.” The city council of Lviv is mentioned as one of the sponsors of the pro-life campaign.<sup>62</sup>

### **Towards a Feminist Political Theology in the Ukrainian Context**

I wish to contribute to Aristotle Papanikolaou’s attempt at designing an Orthodox (and profoundly ecumenical) political theology that goes beyond nationalist, anti-Western, and imperial schemes.<sup>63</sup> In his book *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (2012), Papanikolaou lays the groundwork for an Orthodox political theology that endorses democratic principles. The guiding theological concept in his proposal is divine-human communion, or *theosis*. In Papanikolaou’s understanding, *theosis* is far from the individualised goal of moral self-perfection. Deification as a mystical principle refers to creation’s and human beings’ eternal capacity for transformation. They are meant to grow into the all-encompassing divine-human communion. Politics, for Papanikolaou, is the practice of learning, despite all difficulties and conflicts of interest, to love the neighbour/the stranger.

According to Papanikolaou, the Orthodox attitude toward modern democracy is half-hearted. Orthodox churches in post-Communist countries never unequivocally support democratic forms of government and democratic values,

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<sup>61</sup> [http://upogau.org/eng/inform/uaneews/worldnews\\_2618.html](http://upogau.org/eng/inform/uaneews/worldnews_2618.html), 6 November 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Picture of the poster in Heleen Zorgdrager’s photo-archive.

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame 2012). A critical political theology in Ukrainian context is also envisioned by Cyril Hovorun, “Political Orthodoxy: an Ideology? a Civil Religion? a Heresy?” paper dated 28 May 2015 ([https://www.academia.edu/12662544/Political\\_Orthodoxy\\_an\\_Ideology\\_a\\_Civil\\_Religion\\_a\\_Heresy](https://www.academia.edu/12662544/Political_Orthodoxy_an_Ideology_a_Civil_Religion_a_Heresy), 6 November 2015); see also Cyril Hovorun, “Christian Duty in Ukraine,” in: *First Things*, August 2015 (<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/08/christian-duty-in-ukraine>, 6 November 2015).

but are always pushing to ensure their own cultural hegemony. For Papanikolaou and also for Pantelis Kalaitzidis,<sup>64</sup> democracy and human rights are not a threat to the Orthodox spiritual ideal, but rather conditions necessary for achieving *theosis*.

From a feminist perspective, we can contribute to the concept and praxis of a different political theology. There is a rich source of feminist liberation theology, developed from Latin America to South Africa and Indonesia, to connect with and to draw on. We can also connect with the design of a feminist public theology that emphasises the deeply hybrid and ambiguous representations of female religious agency in the post-secular world (Anne-Marie Korte).<sup>65</sup>

I propose the following elements as important building blocks for a feminist public theology in the Ukrainian (and Russian) context:

**1. Truth-telling about the patriarchal ideology and power relations in state, society, and church as well as truth-telling about what is happening on the ground**

Women must claim the right of freedom of speech in the churches, and extend the space and rights of civil society into the walls of the church itself. Today, in Ukraine, there is no public discussion in the churches or theological institutions about women's rights, reproductive rights, or the rights of sexual minorities. The teaching of the church is unidirectional: from the church that "possesses the truth" to the people in society. Women and men do not feel free to express their doubts and various opinions.

**2. Deconstruction of heroic narratives and of salvation framed in the logic of victory and defeat, and the creation of alternative salvific images like "human rights Mariology" (Elena Volkova)<sup>66</sup> and divinisation as the path of the cross and the sword (Maria Skobtsova)**

We must continue to collect post-heroic narratives of grassroots heroes that reveal the truth in a more human, tentative, provisional form. Interestingly, a research in the U.S. has shown that real heroes adhere to a broad definition

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<sup>64</sup> Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (World Council of Churches: Geneva 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Anne-Marie Korte, "Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* as a Case of/for Feminist Public Theology," in: Ulrike Auga, Sigridur Gudmarsdottir, Stefanie Knauss, Sivia Martínez Cano (eds.), *Resistance and Visions – Postcolonial, Post-secular and Queer Contributions to Theology and the Study of Religions*, Journal of the ESWTR, 22 (Peeters: Leuven/Paris/Walpole 2014), 31-54.

<sup>66</sup> Volkova, "Every Son's Mother," in this volume.

of the “in group”. Most people only include relatives, friends, and colleagues, but the potential hero considers all humanity to be his/her neighbour.<sup>67</sup> That would be a great starting point for alternative concepts of heroism. It could begin by showing how the Gospel is misrepresented when church leaders limit the meaning of John 15:13 to the sacrifice of the soldier for his Fatherland.

The imagery of the “cross and sword” of Maria Skobtsova can be inspiring here.<sup>68</sup> For Skobtsova, two images symbolise – on an equal basis – the love of the neighbour: the path of the Mother and the path of the Son. The Son symbolises the active sacrificial service to the world, while the Mother/Mary symbolises the path of compassion, co-suffering, co-bearing the other’s pain. Skobtsova calls it “the way of the cross” and “the way of the sword.” She explains that the soul of every religious person walks both the path of the Mother and the path of the Son. This opens up an alternative kind of spiritual heroism. The sword that pierced the soul of the Mother (we are all mothers of all of humanity) becomes the cross, leading to acts involving suffering and sacrifice.

### **3. Rethinking the relation between feminism and patriotism**

How can women contribute to “good forms” of patriotism and to “inclusive expressions” of national identity? What can we learn here from the experiences of Central and Eastern European women and their studies of the past and present? How does a philosopher like Hannah Arendt reflect on the relation of the individual to the nation and state, from the perspective of statelessness?

### **4. Clearly opting for a model of the Church in partnership with (and not as the moral voice of) civil society**

The attitude of Orthodox churches towards modern democracy is ambivalent, as Papanikolaou shows.<sup>69</sup> There is never unequivocal support for democratic forms of government over other options, while the churches express a clear concern for maintaining or re-establishing a cultural hegemony. This

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<sup>67</sup> Tonie Mudde, “Heldenbrein” [Brains of Heroes], column in *Volkskrant*, 25 april 2015.

<sup>68</sup> “De l’imitation de la Mère de Dieu” (1939), in: Hélène Arjakovsky-Klepinine (ed.), *Mère Marie Skobtsov (1891-1945), Le sacrement du frère* (Editions du Cerf: Paris 2001), 175-190. It is important to note that the symbols – the cross and the sword – are found in the poem “Snow Maiden” of Aleksandr Blok, dated 17 October 1907.

<sup>69</sup> Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 50-52.

cultural hegemony is manifested in the claim of a privileged status of traditional churches in public education and legislation. All-male church leadership presents itself as the moral voice of society in its aggressive policy to shape public morality on issues such as family, abortion, and homosexuality from supposed and non-disputable moral Christian principles. As long as the Church is not open to dialogue with liberal parts of society and to partner with other social organisations on the basis of equality, it will not be able to fulfil a truly constructive, peacebuilding role in society.<sup>70</sup>

## **5. Building postcolonial alliances**

Alliances between Ukrainian and Russian women, and relationships with other European women, are needed to unravel geopolitical conflicts and the impact they have on women, motherhood, human relations, reproductive rights, and so on. It is also necessary to influence the social teachings of churches by coordinated action and to work through transnational networks and ecumenical organisations to pursue women's goals and objectives. Women who are in leadership positions in the World Council of Churches should raise their voices and urge the WCC to openly condemn the misuse of religion in this war for imperialistic goals, and the severe violation of the rights of religious communities in Crimea and Donbas. The WCC should end its Moscow-friendly policy.

## **6. Acknowledging that reconciliation begins here and now, and consists of the not-so-glorious work of practicing hope according to a recovery model of long-term care<sup>71</sup>**

Reconciliation is supported by the face-to-face encounters of common women and men and of symbolic figures of the contesting groups. Reconciliation is practiced by everyone who does not give up in a situation of despair and tries to remain human. I put my hope in my Ukrainian students, who do not only act for the wellbeing of fellow Ukrainians, but also let the question of forgiveness of the enemy torment their hearts and souls.

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<sup>70</sup> Compare Viktor Yelenski, Церква повинна вступати у дискусію з ліберальною частиною суспільства [Church must enter into a dialogue with liberal part of society], 31 December 2015. ([http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all\\_news/community/religion\\_and\\_society/62097](http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/religion_and_society/62097), 14 March 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Laura J. Shepherd, "The Road to (and from) Recovery: A Multidisciplinary Feminist Approach to Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding," in: Gina Heathcote and Dianne Otto (eds.), *Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality, and Collective Security*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2014), 99-117.

Based on interviews with Ukrainian students and dialogue with Russian and Ukrainian scholars, this paper aims to investigate the roles of Ukrainian women in the current society of Ukraine in the light of the current “war on gender.” Whereas men and women participated in near equal numbers in the Maidan movement, the militarism now seems to sharpen gender dichotomies. The ideology of “man-making” serves the – in theory – absolute separation of military and civilian worlds of the battlefield and the home front. This paper shows how this propagated dichotomy is broken down by various women who challenge the alleged barrier between the home front and the battlefield. In the midst of the military war with Russia, however, Ukraine also faces a renewed war on gender, led by churches and right-wing organisations. This consists of a well-structured campaign to misrepresent the concept of gender, creating an enemy image of “gender-ideology.” Both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate build upon an enemy image in their political theology based on a divisive ideology of victory and defeat, whereas the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church shows a more ambivalent perspective. It applies to all these churches, however, that in times of military and ideological war, family and nation are represented as patriarchal and sacrosanct institutions, leading to paternalistic, pro-life, and homophobic tendencies. In conclusion, this paper seeks to contribute to an Orthodox (and profoundly ecumenical) political theology that goes beyond nationalist, anti-Western, and imperial schemes, proposing several building blocks for a feminist political theology in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Dieser Artikel, der auf Interviews mit ukrainischen Studierenden und dem Dialog russischer und ukrainischer Wissenschaftlerinnen basiert, untersucht die Rolle der ukrainischen Frauen in der heutigen Gesellschaft der Ukraine im Lichte des aktuellen “Genderkrieges”. Während Männer und Frauen fast gleichbeteiligt waren an der Maidan Bewegung, scheint der Militarismus die Gender-Dichotomien jetzt zu verschärfen. Die Ideologie des “Man-making”’s dient der – theoretisch – absoluten Trennung von der militärischen und zivilen Welt und dem Unterschied zwischen Schlachtfeld und Heimatfront. Dieser Artikel zeigt wie diese propagierte Dichotomie von mehreren Frauen in Frage gestellt und abgelehnt wird ist. Mitten im militärischen Krieg mit Russland sieht sich die Ukraine zusätzlich einem erneuten Genderkrieg ausgesetzt, angeführt von Kirchen und rechts-politischen Organisationen. Mithilfe einer gut strukturierten Kampagne wird ein Feindbild der „Gender-Ideologie“ geschaffen. Sowohl die Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche als auch die Ukrainisch-Orthodoxe Kirche und das Kiewer Patriarchat bauen ihre politische Theologie von einer trennenden Ideologie von Sieg und Niederlage auf einem Feindbild auf. Die Ukrainische Griechisch-Katholische Kirche dagegen, zeigt eine ambivalente Perspektive. All diese Kirchen aber erklären in der Zeit des militärischen und ideologischen Krieges sowohl Familie als auch Nation zu patriarchalischen und sakrosankten Institutionen. Hierdurch entstehen paternalistische, Pro-Life und homophobe Tendenzen.

Abschließend soll dieses Papier zu einer orthodoxen (und zutiefst ökumenischen) politischen Theologie beitragen, die über nationalistische, anti-westliche und imperialistische Ideologien hinausgeht. Dazu werden mehrere Bausteine für eine feministische politische Theologie im Rahmen des russisch-ukrainischen Konfliktes benannt.

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