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### *Article*

# **Mothers and Daughters of the Maidan:**

**Gender, repertoires of violence, and the division of labour in Ukrainian protests**

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### **Abstract**

The Euromaidan shocked most observers of Ukrainian politics, not only for its longevity (November 21, 2013 – February 22, 2014), but also for its turn to violent repertoires<sup>1</sup> of protest in the later stages. What was at first a peaceful mass protest event which saw nearly equal participation of men and women (Onuch, 2014d; Onuch & Martsenyuk, 2013), turned into what seemed to be a violent and male dominated riot. While much attention has been paid to the brave ‘women of the Euromaidan’ who also engaged in violent protests (Khromeychuk, 2014; Phillips, 2014), female activists and other protest

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<sup>1</sup> Repertoire of contention is common term in social movement theory. The term was popularized by Charles Tilly. Repertoire here refers to a toolkit of actions available to activists to engage in protest. These can include: public meetings, processions and marches, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions, boycotts, strikes and pamphleteering among others. Direct action repertoires can include everything from road-blocks to a variety of violent acts. The use of Molotov cocktails for instance, would be considered part of a violent repertoire of protest (see: Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995; Kousis & Tilly, 2005; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, 2007).

participants ('ordinary' citizens) have reported a gendered division of labour in the protest zone. Thus, it is still not clear what the role of gender was during the different stages of protest - and if the participation of women was in fact, any different from that of male protest participants. This paper employs original data from rapid interviews and onsite surveys of protest participants, and the authors' in-depth interviews with 48 activists to investigate how violent repertoires and the general militarization of the Euromaidan protests reproduced patriarchal gender stereotypes.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, Euromaidan, Orange Revolution, women, protest, gender stereotypes, militarism

## Introduction

The Euromaidan, shocked most observers of Ukraine, not only for its longevity (November 21 2013 – February 22, 2014), but also for its turn to violent repertoires of protest in the later stages. What was at first a peaceful mass protest event, which saw nearly equal participation of men and women (Onuch, 2014; Onuch & Martsenyuk, 2013), turned into what seemed to be a violent and male dominated riot. While some attention has been paid to the 'women of the Euromaidan,' it is still not clear what their main role was—and if was in fact, any different from that of male protest participants (Khromeychuk 2014; Phillips, 2014). In post-Soviet Ukraine, gender<sup>2</sup> has been a critically debated issue in the process of democratization and liberalization of the polity (Bilaniuk, 2003; Brainerd, 2000; Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004; Tolstokorova, 2012; Zhurzhenko, 2001). This has also been the case in the democratizing world more broadly, where gender has been seen as an important prism for understanding both democratic backsliding (i.e. inequality in the political and private sphere), as well as, achieving consolidation (i.e. equality in political engagement) (Ashwin, 2000; Brainerd, 2000; Burawoy, 2000; Diamond, 1994; Funk & Mueller, 1993; Pickles & Smith, 2005; Pollert, 2003; Schild, 1998; Viterna & Fallon, 2008; Waylen, 1994; Yoon, 2001). On the other hand, protest, an important aspect of civic engagement with the power to overturn regimes, is typically seen as violent, disruptive, and male dominated. Yet, the academy has also identified a global history of important regime changing protest movements initiated and coordinated by women (Alvarez, 1990; Cloward & Piven, 1979; Einwohner, Hollander, & Olson, 2000; Holton, 2000; Katzenstein, 1999). Of these, perhaps the most famous being the mothers and grandmothers of the plaza de mayo in Argentina (Agosin, Amico, Sanguinetti, & Kostopulos-Cooperman, 1992; Eckstein, 2001; Madres de Plaza de Mayo, 2003; Navarro, 2001; Stédile, Fernandes, & de Mayo, 2005; Taylor, 1994). Eastern Europe has

<sup>2</sup> We understand the term 'woman' to denote gender and 'female' to denote sex.

also not been immune to the rise of all-female radical activist groups and movements, recent examples include the much talked about FEMEN in Ukraine and Pussy Riot in Russia. Yet, at the same time, the feminist movement specifically, in post-Soviet countries, has not achieved mass membership, diffusion, or approval. Furthermore, as has been argued elsewhere by Martsenyuk (2012; 2013) the feminist movement has not been recognized as a key actor in post-Soviet political and human rights arenas. This, it has been argued, is especially the case in Ukraine. These contradictions lead us to ask: If women have both internationally and in the region, played a crucial role in the development of a democratic, rights focused, and civil society, then why does it seem that there persists to be a gendered<sup>3</sup> division of labour among protesters and specifically when protests turn to include a repertoire of violence?

The focus on the recent Euromaidan protest wave (2013-2014) has produced two different theses on the role of gender. One thesis states that women were the central machine of coordination on the *Maidan* [square] (Phillips, 2014).<sup>4</sup> The other focuses on the use of violence and the fact that women were forced to diminish their participation when the Euromaidan protest turned violent (Mayerchuk, 2014). This leaves us with an interesting puzzle and thus, we pose the following questions: What was the role of women in the Euromaidan protests? Were women the central driving force behind the protest movement, or were they sidelined and peripheral participants due to the violent and masculine nature of protest repertoires? Or perhaps, can both these be simultaneously true? Could there have been a serious gender

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<sup>3</sup> We understand this to mean that different tasks and roles in the protest zone were divided along gender-lines.

<sup>4</sup> For more see:

“We Don’t Just Make Sandwiches, or Why the Maidan Needs a Women’s Squadron (Ukrainska Pravda),” accessed October 14, 2014, <http://maidan.ucu.edu.ua/en/texts-by-other-authors/we-dont-just-make-sandwiches-or-why-the-maidan-needs-a-womens-squadron-ukrainska-pravda/>;

“Ukraine Girls Really Knock Me Out: Women Playing Crucial Roles In Euro-Maidan Protests,” *International Business Times*, February 28, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/ukraine-girls-really-knock-me-out-women-playing-crucial-roles-euro-maidan-protests-1558508>;

“Women of EuroMaidan Featured in New Exhibition,” *KyivPost*, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.kyivpost.com/multimedia/photo/7-madonnas-349978.html>;

*Filmmaker Captures Women’s Efforts in Ukraine*, accessed October 14, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/world/filmmaker-captures-womens-efforts-in-ukraine/2014/02/22/2b853276-9bf8-11e3-8112-52fd646027b\\_video.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/world/filmmaker-captures-womens-efforts-in-ukraine/2014/02/22/2b853276-9bf8-11e3-8112-52fd646027b_video.html);

“Women of Maidan,” *The Aquinian*, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://theaquinian.net/women-maidan/>;

“Ukraine: ‘Women of Maidan - to Women of Crimea,’” *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.boell.de/en/2014/03/17/ukraine-women-maidan-women-crimea>;

“Women Stand at the Frontlines of the Euromaidan Protest in Kiev,” *Elle*, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.elle.com/news/culture/womens-opposition-euromaidan-protest-kiev>.

imbalance, a gendered division of labour, as well as, several instances of active and radical participation of women in even the most violent phases of the protests?

In order to investigate this puzzle, we have decided to further break down the broader question of the role of women and gender in the Euromaidan by asking the following sub-question. What was the ‘general participation’<sup>5</sup> of women in the Euromaidan protests and was it different to that of their male counterparts? Second, did women participate similarly throughout the different protest waves or were there fewer women participating in protest-events as violence intensified? Third, what happened at the activist and coordination level; was there a gender-based division of labor in SMO networks? Fourth, did the expansion of violent protest repertoires change or exacerbate gender roles?

In order to provide a cohesive answer to the above questions, we divide the below discussion in the following manner: First, we briefly outline the methodology and reflect on the data used in the analysis. Second, we unpack the relevant literature on gender issues in Ukraine and identify the intersection between gender, nation, and protest discourse. This is followed by an empirical examination of the protest participation in the Euromaidan.<sup>6</sup> Using survey and interview data from the earlier phases of the protests (November 26 - January 10) we compare and identify any convergence or divergence in general patterns of male and female protest participation. We then turn to the role of gender at the activist level and explore whether patriarchal gender norms were present among Social Movement Organizations (SMOs). We then assess and demonstrate if there was a gendered division of protest labour on the *Maidan* [square]. We examine the impact of a heightened discourse of patriotism and repertoires of violence on gender roles. And finally, we show that the women of the Euromaidan did try to strike-back and combat gender stereotypes, but that they were only partly successful. We argue that while women played a crucial role during the Euromaidan protests, the protests were from the beginning ‘unequal,’ and gender norms were reproduced among the participants early on and at all levels of engagement. We show that the gendered division of labour was only further exacerbated when the protests turned violent. And although there were feminist responses to the masculinized militarization of the Euromaidan, these were a minority and thus, patriarchal

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<sup>5</sup> We understand ‘general participation’ to mean the average or most typical rate and patterns of participation by female informants/respondents as far as our data allows us to generalize. We take this term from electoral studies which often refer to the general rates and patterns of voter behavior.

<sup>6</sup> Although we are not able to account for all differences among female protest participants such as age, socio-economic status, education, among other variables may account for - we do distinguish in our analysis between ‘ordinary’ citizen protest participants and activists. We find this distinction is necessary for, as has been discussed by Onuch (2014) elsewhere, activists are qualitatively different from ‘ordinary’ citizens, who are generally less politically engaged (i.e.: they may or may not vote, have little if any experience of protest), than activists, who are generally high politicized, more engaged and in the business of protest.

attitudes towards women were reproduced in the unlikely setting of a liberal and pro-democracy protest.

### **Methodology and Data**

The analysis below relies on original data collected as part of the on-going Ukrainian Protest Project hosted at the University of Oxford. The empirical findings discussed below consist of data collected during two periods. Contemporary data (focus only on Euromaidan engagement) were collected by the authors and a team of research assistants from November 26, 2013, through to July 24, 2014, in Kyiv, Ukraine. This includes data from an on-site Protest Participant survey (n=1475)<sup>7</sup>, rapid on-site interviews with protest participants, a digital photographic archive of slogans and posters held by protesters in the first four weeks of the protests, visual and textual analysis of online materials (i.e. posters, pictures, video, articles, and speeches, etc. conducted by Martsenyuk) and forty eight interviews and correspondences with activists, journalists, and politicians, including both opposition and regime insiders (conducted by Onuch). Our analysis has also been informed by historical data (focusing on past protest-events and activist experiences) collected by Onuch between 2005 and 2010. This includes interview (n=98) and focus group (n=15) data. (For more information about this data see Onuch, 2011, 2014a.) Due to the on-going geopolitical crisis and recent attacks on activists, all interviewees have been anonymized. We employ Chatham House rules to protect our informants' identities.

### **Gender (In)Equality in Ukraine**

Before we discuss the role of gender in the Euromaidan, it is crucial to unpack the broader literature on gender issues in Ukraine. Although this is still a developing literature, there have been a number of studies that have focused on the state of post-Soviet women's rights and gender inequality (Bilaniuk, 2003; Funk & Mueller, 1993; Hankivsky & Salnykova, 2012; Hrycak, 2006; Phillips, 2008; Rubchak, 2011). Moreover, the subject of women's rights and gender inequality has been a priority issue for most inter-governmental, non-governmental and foreign diplomatic missions working in Ukraine—each having commissioned reports on the matter and have made the promotion of gender equality a priority issue (this includes the *International Labour Organization, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, Open Society Foundation, Swedish International Development Agency, Canadian International Development Agency, United States Agency for International Development, PACT Uniter*, among others). One example is the work by *UN Women* in Ukraine. In a national review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>8</sup> by *UN Women* in Ukraine, major

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<sup>7</sup> For more detailed information about the survey, see: Onuch 2014b, 2014c, 2014d.

<sup>8</sup> The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed by all member states of the United Nations, is a global pledge to attain equality, development and peace for women worldwide.

achievements and challenges in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are discussed (Ukraine, 2014). Three major positive developments are mentioned: the achievement of a legislative framework on gender equality, the expansion of non-governmental organizations that focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the extension of gender-based education (Ukraine, 2014, pp. 7-8). At the same time, several problems have been identified in the report. These include: the low level of female representation in social and public life, the low level of citizens' awareness of gender discrimination laws, and the more general failure to promote women's rights in different spheres including in the labour market, property rights, family and social relations, and political engagement, etc. (Ukraine, 2014, pp. 9-10).

Moreover, there is general agreement in the policy and academic literatures that while *de jure* women in Ukraine enjoy equal status with men, *de facto* they face consistent discrimination (Martsenyuk, 2012; Phillips, 2008; Women's Consortium of Ukraine, 2008). This discrimination is based on gender stereotypes, which are considered by experts to be deeply rooted in Ukrainian society (Ukrainian Women's Fund, 2011, p. 12). In her previous work, Martsenyuk has unpacked how socially accepted stereotypes have affected female political engagement. Kis (2005) has argued that women are generally seen as more connected with the private sphere and less with the public one. Simply put, politics is a 'male' business and women, as Martsenyuk (2012; 2013) has argued, are understood to belong in the home. To many in Ukrainian society, this stereotype justifies patriarchal dominance in politics and the consistent exclusion of women from public life (Ukrainian Women's Fund, 2011; Women's Consortium in Ukraine, 2008). Furthermore, most studies also point out that Ukrainian women tend to have a lower social status and depend economically on men (Phillips, 2008; Zhurzhenko, 2001). Phillips (2008) has found that familial roles are typically not distributed equally, so that women have to take care of all household and child rearing and education duties alone. It has been identified in these studies that even women who hold professional degrees and are employed at the managerial level still take on the majority of family duties. Generally, all studies show that there are serious gender inequalities in Ukrainian society.

### **Women and the Political and Public Spheres in Ukraine**

The problem of gender inequality in Ukraine is not restricted to the private sphere. Zhurzhenko (2001) has found that it is precisely due to their uneven role in the home, that Ukrainian women are generally not engaged in the public sphere. An interesting finding here, is that Ukrainian women are connected to few social networks which could facilitate entry into the public and political spheres. Scholars have explained that even when Ukrainian women do break through the 'glass ceiling' and enter in to the public sphere, when in public office, few such 'successful' women tend to stress the importance of women being better represented in politics.

As explained by Kis (2005), women are seen as not belonging in politics because it is difficult to marry the two ideals of Ukrainian womanhood—mothers and beautiful—with the

culture notions of a ‘strong leader.’ In many ways, Ukrainian women have been portrayed as a frail yet “beautiful commodity” – something to look at, perhaps to inspire politicians,” but certainly not as strong leaders (Martsenyuk, 2012). Moreover, it seems that the few high profile female politicians and activists that have made it onto the national political stage have exploited their attractiveness, sexuality, and motherhood. Several studies for instance, have highlighted how former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko exploited her femininity and beauty in order to attract voters (Hrycak, 2011; Kis, 2007; Martsenyuk, 2013; Matamoros, 2010; M. J. Rubchak, 2009; Vlasova & Vlasova, 2012; Zhurzhenko, 2014). FEMEN, the extremely media friendly feminist group, have also taken advantage of female beauty and sexuality, but according to them this was done in order to battle patriarchy and sexism in Ukraine (and elsewhere) (Channell, 2014; Eileraas, 2014; Kim, 2013; Martsenyuk, 2013; O’Keefe, 2011; M. Rubchak, 2012; van den Berg, 2014; Zychowicz, 2011). It seems, at least at face value, that when women enter the public and political spheres in Ukraine, they have to “use” gendered stereotypes to “get noticed” (Onuch’s interview with unnamed FEMEN activist, 19/09/2011). Thus, as reiterated by several politicians and activists in interviews, it is difficult for women to perform ‘other’ ‘stronger’ roles, and this they have argued, is especially the case during protests. As we will see below, Ukrainian activism (and democratic politics) has been fused with the ideas of the National Liberation Movement and thus, activist rhetoric has reproduced historical gendered stereotypes of patriotism and battle against oppression.

### **Gender, Nation and Protest: Understanding How They Intersect**

While the above studies’ findings about the role of gender roles in the home and in politics in Ukraine may not be surprising—what may be is that the activist sphere is not immune to the reproduction of sexist images of femininity and a gendered division of labour. More importantly, our research shows that the stereotypes of a need for ‘strong [male] leadership’ have been also reproduced in activist circles (even where self-proclaimed feminist activists were party to the coordination). Over the last decade of research into activist networks in Ukraine, Onuch has found that female activists repeatedly detail in interviews that, “gender roadblocks exist in the activist world” (Onuch’s interview, Unnamed Yellow *Pora* Activist, 07/13/2007). Female, activists have also explained in focus groups that women tend to do much of the organizational and administrative work for Social Movement Organizations (SMOs), while male activists tend to “go to the front lines... take the microphones... and are ready to be the face of the movements...” (Onuch’s activist focus group Ukraine #4, yellow *Pora* (women only), 7/7/2008, Kyiv). These same activists have pointed out that while it is the case that a consolidated women’s movement is still missing in Ukraine—hampering their ability to promote gender equality in Ukrainian society more broadly—human rights abuses, political violence, a lack of basic electoral freedoms, have been prioritized throughout the last two decades since independence, as “more important, more pressing issues” (Onuch’s activist focus group Ukraine #4, yellow *Pora* (women only), 7/7/2008, Kyiv). Female activists (even self-identified feminist activists) involved in past protest-events (i.e. the Revolution on the Granite, 1990/1991; Ukraine Without Kuchma,

2000/2001, and the Orange Revolution 2004), have explained that they themselves have tried not to argue with their male counterparts about traditional gender roles being reproduced in their organizations because the quest for “democracy was more important” (Onuch’s activist focus group Ukraine #4, yellow Pora (women only), 7/7/2008, Kyiv). This ‘prioritization’ and reproduction of gender stereotypes in past waves of activist engagement (by male and female activists) has done little to prevent the continuity of what Kis (2005) has identified as sexist ideals of Ukrainian women as being ‘mothers’ and being ‘beautiful’. This phenomenon is even been more problematic when we consider that Ukrainian pro-democracy activism has been consistently blurred with the National Liberation Movement (NLM). The NLM has its roots in militarized patriotism and even (in the most radical but still rare instances) with nationalist rhetoric. As explained by many activists and politicians, Ukrainian democratization has been in many ways also seen as a nation building pursuit (Onuch’s interview with Vladyslav Kaskiv, yellow Pora activist and National Deputy Pora Party, 4/19/2008, Kyiv). The quest for a democratic or European Ukraine has often been presented in activist rhetoric as the simultaneous quest for an independent and united nation, free of Russian imperialist intrusion. Many activists have in the past discussed their activism as “civic patriotism” and the ‘Orange Revolution’ as an evolution of national civic identity. This, as we will see below, was also a reality of the Euromaidan.

In the nation building process, there is a dilemma of reconciling national and gender identities (or feminism and nationalism) (Mason & Gainor, 2001; McFadden, 1992; Nishime, 1995). There are a number of debates among feminist scholars and activists about reconciling the two. Gender roles are ascribed along the binary of the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ sphere, in which the former is the realm of women and the latter of men. The public realm of citizenship and thus the commitment for political rights has been mainly seen as “men’s task” and “...women [were] usually ‘hidden’ in the various theorizations of the nationalist phenomena” (Yuval-Davis, 1993, p. 622). In the so-called ‘grand narrative’ our history is constructed as ‘his’ ‘story’ – large events connected with violence and battles, where there is almost no place for the ‘private’ sphere. Revolutions are portrayed as glorification of violence where women are excluded and only some type of men are normalized (strong and brave, willing to die for their nation) (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The role of women in the symbolic reconstruction of the nation is connected mainly with reproduction, while for men – with protection (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Onuch has found that in many ways, at least a portion of, SMOs have reproduced this militant discourse of nationhood, in their networks (Onuch, 2014b). And while in the past, Ukrainian activists have been able to promote non-violent protest repertoires and have in the past only employed (in 2000/2001 and 2004) NLM discourse and organizational structures (organizing in military style *kurini* [unit]<sup>9</sup> and *sotnias* [one hundreds], and making references to historical patriotic male figures). In January

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<sup>9</sup> *Kurin*’ is a military term established by the cossacks. In WWII the combat unit of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was a kurin. *Sotnia* is a military term used in most slavic languages the equivalent of company.

2014, the radicalization of protest tactics and the general militarization of protest, exacerbated the use of NLM rhetoric and thus, the gendered divisions in national building and of patriotism on the *Maidan* (Onuch & Sasse, 2014). Yet, before we delve deeper into this development of the later phases of the Euromaidan, it is important to explore the differences – if any - in male and female participation before the escalation of violence. Thus, we ask the following question: Did women participate in the Euromaidan protests, and what was different when compared to the patterns of participation of their male counterparts?

### **Gender and General Patterns of Participation in the Euromaidan Protests**

When we assess the general rates and patterns of participation by ‘ordinary’ citizens in the earlier phases of the protest, we already find some divergence between male and female participants. According to the Ukrainian Protest Participant Survey conducted by the author and her team of research assistants (for more information about the survey see: Onuch, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e), on the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* between November 26, 2013 and January 10, 2014, men did in fact represent a slim majority of overall protesters at 59 percent, and women represented 41 percent (Onuch, 2014a; Onuch & Martsenyuk, 2013). According to our surveying of the protest participants, we found that men were also more likely, from the very beginning, to protest more frequently and later at night. But, we can still confidently say that until January 10, 2014, women made up almost half of the protest participants. Participant observation, as conducted by the author’s research team in Kyiv, points to a heightening of this gender trend, with each week of protests, as protests became more violent, and in violent ‘zones’ of protest. Moreover, as confirmed in interviews and focus groups conducted with protest participants, of the protesters who set up camp in the *Maidan*, women were, even if significant, a minority group. We also find that women tended to participate in higher numbers on days of larger more organized protests (i.e. November 24, December 1, December 16, and December 31). All of these findings of gendered trends in the average participation of women in the Euromaidan protests are in line with surveys conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS). KIIS conducted isolated surveys on large organized protest days (on December 7-8, 2013 and on December 10, 2014), as well as surveyed people residing on the *Maidan* (on February 3, 2014). KIIS’s findings also showed that women constituted 44 percent of protest participants in the early days of the protests, and that the number of women (who lived in the protest square) was only 12 percent in February. Thus, confirming our own finding of male-female trends of participation.

Yet, while participating at slightly different rates, interestingly enough, in our surveys male and female participants reported relying on similar sources of information and similar claims and triggers of their protest participation. According to our survey, in order to find out general information about the protests, as well as, to find out where and when to protest, 51 percent of female and 53 percent of male participants reported using television and radio as the most important source. The second most important sources of information was Facebook and other

social media, and friends and family; here, it seems that women relied on these sources slightly more often. For instance, 45 percent of female protest participants surveyed relied on Facebook, whereas only 32 percent of male respondents relied on the same medium. Furthermore, when it comes to protest claims and reasons for protesting, survey respondents, male and female also reported similar triggers for their participation. For both, the fact a) that they wanted a better quality of life and b) that their civic rights were abused by the Yanukovich government, were the top two most influential reasons for participating in the protests. These were followed by the desire that Ukraine join the EU, and a reaction to the extreme violence committed against student protesters on the 29/30 of November 2013. Here among the secondary reasons for protest participation, we do see a slight difference between female and male participants. According to our survey, women seem to be slightly less influenced by the goal to join the EU (10 percent), than men (14 percent). And men were slightly less influenced by the extreme repression of students (11 percent) than women (13 percent). This pattern was confirmed through rapid interviews. In rapid on-site interviews, female protest participants often referred to the violent repressions as a key trigger for their participation. Some women even reflected on their role as a mother, fearing for their children's safety and explaining a desire for their children to grow up in a 'safe' and 'democratic' society. This response was slightly less typical among male participants, who far less often reflected on their role as parents, but did speak more of the economy and other socio-political reasons for their engagement. Unfortunately, at this stage we are unable to further extrapolate from our data and fully examine what these distinctions mean—as such analysis would require a larger study—but, we do believe that this data points out clearly and rather eloquently that there were some important differences between general rates and patterns of protest participation among male and female participants prior to turning to violent repertoires.

Although the Ukrainian Protest Participant survey ended on January 10, 2014, Onuch has conducted limited focus groups and interviews with protest participants concentrating on the later stages of the protests. Onuch found that most interview and some focus group informants discuss the fact that after January 16, 2014, the *Maidan* became divided on gender grounds. Protest participants explained that “women would help during the day... would cook...” would provide supplies and during the most violent stages would “...provide medical care,” while men “provided the security, threw the Molotov cocktails and engaged in the battles” (Onuch's interview, unnamed protest participants, Civic Sector, 07/20/2014). Focus group and interview respondents talked about the fact that the *Maidan* at night “was no place for a women.” Some female focus group participants discussed this, with annoyance that their husbands forbade them to go to the major protest sites (Onuch's Euromaidan, Ordinary 'Citizens' Focus Group, Kyiv, 08/25/2014). While others remembered how they went to the *Maidan* during the day-time and begged the police on behalf of their “sons and husbands” to refrain from using violence (Onuch's Euromaidan, Ordinary 'Citizens' Focus Group, Kyiv, 08/25/2014). In many ways, the stereotypical societal gender norms and roles were reproduced on the *Maidan* among the

participants. While this does not surprise us among participants who can be deemed as ‘ordinary’ citizens, who rarely participate in protests and generally not very politicized (Onuch, 2011), we would expect not to find such gender differences among activist circles, specifically when self-identified feminists are leaders in SMO networks. Yet, as we will see below, our findings show that this gender distinction was also reproduced in SMOs.

### **Gender and Activist Coordination On and Off the Maidan**

What was perhaps most surprising from our interviews is that long-time activists tended to focus on the gendered division of labour of the Euromaidan more than in the past. In interviews, female activists repeatedly described the distinction between female and male gender roles during the Euromaidan. It is important that these claims were not prompted by specific questions at first; they arose organically (unlike in past interviews) and thus, the author decided to include questions on gender roles as the activists themselves seemed more preoccupied with these inequalities this time around. Several female activists explained that they helped in the coordination office, in a residence allocation center, or at home writing press reports and news bulletins. They also explained that they were very aware that this was a different ‘type’ and ‘level’ of engagement from their male counterparts who were at the front lines consistently. Female activists, could typically name the exact dates they participated in protest events, while male activists tended to lose count. Female activists also rarely discussed or admitted to using *molotov cocktails* or engaging in acts of violence, while male activists repeatedly—both in interviews and focus groups—referenced their more frequent use of violent tactics and typically discussed the adrenaline of the protest events. The interview and focus group data point to the fact that female activists tended to (on average - not all) participate in the administrative tasks and were less frequent participants in direct action repertoires. Or, as one activist from the SMO Civic Sector put it, women were in charge of “the two Ks, *Kukhnia* [kitchen] and *Kreativ* [creative, design and PR]” (Onuch’s interview, Unnamed Civic Sector Activist, 07/22/2014). While less willing to discuss this in focus groups, in interviews female activists frequently shared moments when they were confronted with sexism and patriarchy on the *Maidan*. They explained that these instances increased significantly with the turn to violence after January. One long-time activist, a self-described member of the feminist movement and no stranger to direct action, described her attempts at helping in medical field clinics during the most violent days. She explained that both the male doctors, as well as, her male activist colleagues would repeatedly turn her away from the clinics, while they accepted men without necessarily checking medical credentials. She remembered that she was told by one doctor that “this is no place for a women... this is a war” (Onuch’s interview, Unnamed Civic Sector Activist, 08/26/2014). She recalled how he explained that “even qualified nurses are finding this difficult... you won’t be able to handle what you will see here.” Interestingly enough, many female activists took it upon themselves to coordinate ambulatory services and the identification of bodies at the *Mykhailivskii* Monastery. So, while they were turned away from the clinics, they were still exposed to the same images of violence, but their tasks in these cases were deemed to be less hands on. This distinction between ‘male’

active engagement and ‘female’ coordination was a frequent theme in interviews, highlighting that the gendered division of labour was intensely felt by the women who were most active, and ironically most prepared for direct action.

The role of female activists as ‘pseudo mothers’ also was frequently discussed. Some female activists joke that they took it upon themselves to “mother” male activists, making sure “they had enough to eat” and they “had warm clothes and tea” (Onuch’s Euromaidan, Activist Focus Group, 08/27/2014). Others discussed the fact that they were ‘real mothers’ themselves, and how this changed their ability to participate more actively in protests in 2013/2014, as opposed to previous mass mobilizations. Interestingly, this was a typical problem among female activists who were the partners of male activists. These female activists complained, or explained, that they had to stay at home with the children, because they could not convince their engaged partners to do so. One woman even reiterated that she “wanted to go throw some Molotov cocktails...” but she could not “while holding a baby” (Onuch’s Euromaidan, Activist Focus Group, 08/27/2014). Thus, much like the sentiment of the female ‘ordinary’ citizens discussed above, whose husbands forbade them to participate in the protests, many female activists who were also mothers, had no choice but not to engage in the protests when they became more violent. Thus, the above discussed Ukrainian social stereotypes and gender roles of femininity and motherhood were reproduced in the protest zone, and among the least likely candidates - the activists.

What is most interesting in this division of protest labour between male and female participants during the Euromaidan is that in interviews and focus groups the male activists rarely mention any of these gendered distinctions without being prodded. Moreover, in some instances, it seems that they did not see anything wrong with such inequality. Many male activists proudly discussed their participation in protests during the most violent days, several even clearly exaggerating or lying about their participation. In interviews, the male activist more-often used the rhetoric of a war to describe the Euromaidan protests. They saw this as a continuation of battle begun during past experiences of protest engagement. Remarkably, in focus group discussions where their female counterparts were present, this rhetoric was less prominent. In these instances, female activists would even contradict the “bravery” of the male activists. When asked what the role of women was, and if women played an important role in the Euromaidan, male activists agreed. But it was clear that they saw women—be it ‘ordinary’ citizens or activists—as playing a supporting role. One male activist explained “women were brave to let husbands and sons go to the *Maidan*” (Onuch’s interview unnamed activist *SamoOborona* 08/25/2014). Another male activist aptly explained the following:

...women played a very important role... if it wasn’t for the support of women in the kitchens, the medication drop-off points, the coordination of sleeping arrangements, the *Maidan* would have not survived... **we were able to continue**

**our fight with the help of the mothers and daughters of the Maidan**

(Onuch's interview unnamed activist *SamoOborona* 08/25/2014).

Alas, most male activists did not see anything odd about discussing women as “helpers,” “supporters,” “mothers,” and “daughters,” referring to themselves as those “who fought.” Thus, not only were gender roles reproduced by activists in terms of the activities they engaged in, gendered rhetoric was also frequently used by (especially male) activists. Women as “mothers and daughters” were to be protected. An example of a patriarchal attitude never touched upon by male activists was a sign hanging in the kitchen on the *Maidan*. The sign read “Dear women, if you see garbage—clean it up, the *revoliutsionery* [male revolutionary] will be pleased.” In Martsenyuk's interviews, this sign was heavily criticized by female activists of the Euromaidan; yet, not one male activist brought this up.

Another telling moment highlighting the division of labour between men and women in the protest zone, and how they discussed it, took place during a focus group with Civic Sector activists. It was clear that the women present were highly active, organized, and ‘in charge’ of the SMO and its activities; yet, when it came to discussing the violent event on the *Maidan*, two men took control of the conversation. When the focus group facilitator asked (at-random) a woman on how she participated in the protests, she explained she was not “that active during the most violent days.” The respondent was then interrupted by another female activist who said “but you were helping in the medical clinic... I would call that pretty active.” The respondent then replied “yes, but that was only one night” (Onuch's Euromaidan, Activist Focus Group, 08/29/2014). While male activists were ready to discuss their engagement freely, female activists would even play down their participation. Thus, as described by activists previously, it seems that the quest for democracy in 2014 was more pressing than other issues, such as the quest for gender equality.

**Rhetoric of Patriotism, Repertoires of Violence, and Gender in the Protest Zone**

It is clear from our research that while there were differences in the rates of even early male and female participation, the gendered division of labour was accelerated by the militarization of the *Maidan*. The gendered language of violence, militarism, and patriotism have been a much debated phenomenon in critical and feminist international relations literature (Di Leonardo, 1985; Higate & Hopton, 2005; Morgan, 1994; Nagel, 1998; Segal, 2008; Sjoberg & Via, 2010; Toktas, 2002). Our tracing of the events shows that the Euromaidan was no different. While the original protests in November were focused on civic rights and organized in reaction to the regime's oppressive actions, the protests quickly turned into a “patriotic nation building project” (Onuch's interview unnamed activist *SamoOborona* 08/25/2014). The use of patriotic rhetoric was coupled with the militarization of civic engagement, which as we already know took on a masculine image. As one online poster aptly put it, a “Nation exists while there are men ready to fight for her” (Martsenyuk's, personal digital archive and analysis). This quote illustrates general perception of the Euromaidan—a protest site with barricades, Molotov cocktails, fights, walls of

fire, burning tires, and death of ‘heroes.’ In many ways, the Euromaidan ‘revolution’ has been constructed as a glorification of violence.

Through an analysis of speeches and placards from the protest zone, we have found a patriarchal discourse in gender division of labour of protest space. Also present in the interviews and focus groups and in mainstream media, this discourse describes women’s participation in the Euromaidan as *mothers* (careers and helpers), *beautiful objects* (to inspire protesters), or *daughters* (young women needing protection). The heightened militarism and the increased danger of violent repressions and repertoires resulted in many women’s exclusion from the protest zone. As was explained on numerous occasions by participants in interviews and focus groups, when the protests became violent, women were physically banned from the participation in the ‘dangerous’ protest zones (for example, by establishing men’s controlled roadblocks, by organizing bus trips to Euromaidan from other cities for men only, etc.). When the protests became violent, women were turned away from the barricades by men “for their own protection.” On the one hand, it could be interpreted as “caring about women;” on the other, it looks like women were not perceived as ‘responsible’ people capable of making such choices on their own. The militarization of the Euromaidan allowed women to only take on three roles; women could provide support for the ‘heroes’ (i.e. cooking food, cleaning up), could act out the role of the ‘weak’ citizens requiring protection, and could provide feminine beauty.

The ‘beautiful women’ of the *Maidan*, often referred to as the ‘Muses of Revolution’ were involved in a number of ‘special’ ‘female’ activities. One example is an article that described the importance of female participation in the Euromaidan which was entitled *The Most Beautiful Girls of Maidan Light the Spirit of the Revolution*.<sup>10</sup> Another example was the so-called *Anhelska Sotnia* [Angels’ Squadron] which set out its mission to ‘beautify’ the *Maidan*. There is much evidence that at least in some instances women were understood as providing inspiration to the men, and were in charge of making the protest zone beautiful (by decorating and painting the barricades and helmets with bright colours and flowers), or by performing a ballet or other dances directly on the barricades.

On the other hand, as we already mentioned women were in need of protection. They were weaker. They were unwilling bystanders and sufferers of violence and not active protest participants. Some women willingly took on this role. Women were frequently seen holding self-made posters that demanded that the police protect them (“*protect me*”). Martsenyuk documented (digital photography archive) a young woman holding a poster that read: “I will marry the policeman who will come to the side of the people.” Such examples where female participants of the Euromaidan, who were expected not to (be able to, or want to) participate in patriotic and violent repertoires of protests, could still ‘offer’ more passive forms of assistance to the fight

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<sup>10</sup> Read a title in Ukrainian «Найкрасивіші дівчата Євромайдану запалюють дух революції». accessed September 21, 2014. <http://gazeta.ua/articles/politics/najkrasivishi-divchata-evromajdanu-zapalyuyut-duh-revoljuciji/533352>

against the regime, in the form of their need to be protected, or their femininity. Such gendered discourse and stereotypical gender roles, were difficult to shake, and as we have observed many female participants took on this patriarchal protest discourse as their own. Although this may have in fact represented the mainstream (and majority of) protest participants, the authors want to make clear that there was a minority willing to fight back.

### **The Mothers and Daughters of the Euromaidan Strike Back**

A small group of female activists not only criticized the sexist discourse of Euromaidan, but also proposed alternatives through their own radical activism and direct actions. One often cited article, published in *Elle* magazine entitled ‘Women Stand at the Frontlines of the Euromaidan Protest in Kiev,’ portrayed a minority group of organized activists that participated in the violent repertoires, as equal to their male counterparts. Moss (2014), writes that “in the increasingly violent Euromaidan protest between anti-government advocates and riot police, women are donning gas masks and padded vests to fight alongside men.” These now well-known initiatives organized by female activists were the First Women’s Squadron (officially registered as the 39<sup>th</sup> Squadron of Euromaidan SamoOborona [Self-Defense])<sup>11</sup>, The *Zhinocha Sotnia* [Women’s Platoon] of 16<sup>th</sup> Squadron of ‘Maidan SamoOborona’, The Women’s Squadron of *Zaporizhzhia*,<sup>12</sup> The Sisterhood Squadron,<sup>13</sup> and The Olga Kobylanska Female Squadron.<sup>14</sup> Yet, these women’s squadrons were not able to completely challenge the division of gender roles, or prevent the widespread acceptance of patriarchal discourse. Many of their participants were still in fact, in charge of cleaning the *Maidan*, preparing food in the kitchen, or working as medical care providers.<sup>15</sup> But nonetheless, several of their participants were active in more radical direct action campaigns against the *militsiia* [police] in January and February, 2014.

There were also several feminist projects of the Euromaidan. For example, journalist and human rights activist Olha Vesnianka initiated a project titled ‘women’s voices’ of *Maidan*, where she told the stories of different female activists. Feminist blogger Maria Dmytrieva gave public lectures on the history of women’s movement (in the world and in Ukraine) as part of the ‘Open University’ public educational space initiative. Another collective feminist project was the activity of the facebook group ‘Half of Maidan: Women’s Voice of Protest’ (*Polovyna Maidanu: Zhinochyi*

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<sup>11</sup> Facebook page, accessed September 21, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/39sotnya>

<sup>12</sup> City in the Southern part of Ukraine.

<sup>13</sup> Dnipropetrovsk, Eastern Ukraine. Facebook page, accessed September 21, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sestrynska.sotnya/>

<sup>14</sup> Facebook page, accessed September 21, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/zhinocha.sotnya>

<sup>15</sup> Women were the leaders of the self-organization initiatives such as: the guarding of hospitals [*Varta v likarni*],<sup>15</sup> Transportation Safety or Initiative E +,<sup>15</sup> Euromaidan SOS or Euromaidan SOS Europe, Automaidan, Education project ‘Open University’, among others. Yet, again, women’s activity tended to be framed as supporters of the patriotic and militarized *Maidan*.

*Holos Protestu*).<sup>16</sup> They proposed to coordinate and communicate the activities on women on the *Maidan*. Phillips (2014) calls the women's squadrons and other feminist activity on the *Maidan* "creative responses of feminists to" the exclusion of women from the mainstream patriotic and militarized environment of the Euromaidan. Phillips stresses that such "creative responses... potentially paved the way for broadening the base of Ukrainian feminism, introducing women's rights and principles to segments of the population previously reluctant to embrace feminism" (Phillips, 2014). While the jury is still out on this development, based on the data available to us, we suspect that Phillips is too optimistic, as even the most radical female activist participants and initiators of these activities admitted to at times themselves succumbing to gender stereotypes and allowing the division of protest labour to continue along gender lines.

### Conclusions

The Euromaidan was a heterogeneous space with a great deal of initiatives and a complicated mixture of national/patriotic and patriarchal gendered discourses. Women did participate in a variety of activities in the Euromaidan protests. In the earlier stages while there were differences between male and female participants, we can say that women made up half of the protest participants. But even in the earlier phases, we saw the reproduction of generalized socially accepted gender stereotypes on the *Maidan*. Alas, when the protests turned violent, women were excluded from much of the protest zone activities. According to our research, within the protest zones, but also in Social Movement Organizations themselves, the divisions of protest labour were drawn along gender lines. Men would be at the dangerous and violent front lines, and women support the 'real' protesters by providing a variety of support services (food, medical, administrative, coordinating, etc.). Socially accepted patriarchal views on the role of women in Ukrainian society as 'mothers,' 'weak' (i.e. daughters), and 'beautiful objects,' were reproduced on the *Maidan*. And, even though feminist activists attempted to alter this, the lack of women's access in decision making made it difficult for women to fulfill alternative gender roles and demonstrate that women were not simply "helpers" but actually the "makers" of Revolution. As we have seen, while not representing the significant majority, the 'mothers and daughters' of the *Maidan* struck back. And while the mainstream practices and discourse of the Euromaidan protests were patriarchal (the exclusion of women from protest due to the militarization and masculinization of patriotic heroism), thanks to feminist coordination, egalitarian and inclusive discourse were promoted. And thus, it provided women with at least a possibility to question militarism, deconstruct the traditional perception of protests and participate in the protest movement on all the different levels.

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<sup>16</sup> Facebook page, accessed September 21, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/255422234633303/>

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