Part III

Crises and gender

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9 Shaping public Orthodoxy

Women's peace activism and the Orthodox Churches in the Ukrainian crisis

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The Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) protests in Kyiv began in November 2013 as a student-led protest against President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. The protests finished at the end of February 2014 with sniper shootings that killed more than a hundred people. During the protests, religion played a visible and influential role (Fylypovych and Horkusha 2015; Kalenychenko 2018a, 2018b). Clergy of all confessions led the prayers at Maidan, provided pastoral assistance, performed a peacekeeping role as human shields during nightly clashes between protesters and the Berkut (the riot police), and acted as mediators in the negotiations between state authorities and political opposition. Churches close to the central square—the Orthodox St. Michael's Monastery and the Lutheran St. Katharina Church—opened their doors for protesters who sought safety from police violence. In the final stage, the churches even served as provisional hospitals where injured activists were given medical treatment. During the protests, religious symbols such as icons, banners, candles, and crosses were all over the tent camp and the streets. After the protests ended, religion continued to play a public role in mourning rituals for the “Heavenly Hundred” and in the people's particular arrangements of memorial shrines for them. The memorial space was sacralized (Wanner 2017; Zorgdrager 2016b), as were the Maidan protests themselves, as a “Revolution of Dignity” (Dymyd, 2014; Fylypovych and Horkusha 2015). The civic uprising of Maidan transformed the role of religion and religious institutions in Ukraine (Hovorun 2015). At Maidan, religion, including Orthodoxy, went public.

The growing civic awareness and activism of the protesters at Maidan not only transformed the role of religion, but also that of women. The Maidan uprising engendered civil society as a third sector in post-Soviet Ukraine. This had a significant impact on the public role and empowerment of women. As activists and volunteers, they took on manifold leadership roles during Maidan and continued their civic activism afterward (Onuch 2014; Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014, 2015¹; Phillips 2014; Petrenko 2014; Khromeychuk 2015). Though still underrepresented on traditional decision-making levels in politics and the economy, women are now at the forefront of the civic

activist movements, NGOs, and nonprofit organizations that have come into existence since 2014. Thus, as an effect of Maidan, religion has a more public role and women have taken up significant positions as leaders and activists in civic organizations. These are not two separate movements of “going public”; we may assume that women who have become active in civil society also play a role in shaping the public appearance of religion, whether in a strengthening, affirmative, or more critical mode.

In this chapter, I am interested in the way in which Ukrainian women today articulate and embody religious practices, values, and beliefs in new forms of sociopolitical engagement and how this could provide a resource for renewal of theology, religious life, and church practices. I investigate the peacebuilding potential of women’s civic activism in Ukraine, their understanding of gender in relation to their work, and how they mobilize, embody, and shape religious values, motives, and goals in their grassroots work. How does women’s civic activism as a response to the war contribute to shaping Orthodoxy as a public religion?

I describe the implicit theology in women’s peace activism by showing how its key values, thoughts, and practices connect to notions of Orthodox tradition and ecumenical theology. To do this, I employ theories from different disciplines, including peace studies, religious studies, ecumenical studies, and theology. The methods used are review of the literature, analysis of primary documents such as public speeches, interviews, Facebook posts, and blogs, and modest fieldwork in the form of in-depth interviews with four women activists in the Ukrainian civil society.

The context of Orthodoxy in Ukraine

Ukraine is multi-confessional and multireligious. No single church enjoys a monopoly. While all branches of Christianity have a well-established place in Ukrainian society, the majority of the population (67 percent) declares adherence to one or another strand of Orthodoxy. Until January 2019, the major churches in Ukraine were the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), which is affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The Statute of the ROC reads that the UOC-MP is “a self-governing church with the rights of wide autonomy”; in practice, however, external relations are dealt with by the ROC and the primate is elected by the Synod of Bishops of the ROC. Since the conflict with Russia, the largest number of Orthodox believers, close to one-third of the population, has adhered to UOC-KP (Razumkov Center 2018); however, the church had no canonical status. The war sharpened the divisions between the churches and made the position of the UOC-MP complicated and contested (Jarzynska 2014; Korniiichuk 2016; Krawchuk 2016; Suslov 2016).

On December 15, 2018, backed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, representatives of the UOC-KP gathered with the bishops of

the small (noncanonical) Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church and with a few bishops of the UOC-MP for a unification council in St. Sofia Cathedral in Kyiv. Three weeks later, on January 6, 2019, the elected head of the unified church, Metropolitan Epifaniy, traveled to Istanbul accompanied by the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, to receive the *Tomos*, the document granting the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), from the hands of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. The unified, independent OCU opens a new chapter of Orthodox history in Ukraine and in global Orthodoxy. In reaction to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's decision to grant autocephaly to the UCO, the ROC broke off Eucharistic communion with Constantinople (The Russian Orthodox Church 2018).

Public religion and ambient faith in Ukraine

Sociologist Tetiana Kalenychenko (2018a, 10, 2018b) analyzes how religion has returned to the public sphere and regained social influence since the Maidan uprising. She suggests that this can be seen as a process of desecularization. Following Vyacheslav Karpov (2013), three aspects of desecularization can be distinguished: rapprochement between secular institutions and religious norms, a revival of religious practices and beliefs, and an intensified presence of religion in public space. The first two characteristics were already manifest from Ukraine's independence in 1991; the third aspect, the public, social influence of religion, became manifest during the Maidan protests. Kalenychenko, drawing on Peter Beyer (1994), differentiates between five types of social influence of public religion: it can serve as a source of collective duties, a legitimization of collective action, a shaping of collective identity, a generation of values, and a sacralization of new historic developments. In all five aspects, she argues, the significance of religion has increased so much during and after Maidan that we can speak of the emergence of public religion at Maidan.

I use the term public religion instead of civil religion, even though they are often used synonymously. Civil religion usually refers to the implicit, often state-constructed religious values of a nation, as expressed through public rituals, symbols, and ceremonies on festive days and in sacred places. This is how Robert N. Bellah (1967) first introduced the concept, including a certain top-down mode in how it was shaped. In the 1990s, the term public religion became increasingly popular. Casanova (1994) describes how, since the 1980s, religion has left the private sphere to which it was relegated by modernity to thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation. Although the relationship between private and public forms of religion appears to be more complex and paradoxical than Casanova seems to acknowledge (Beckford 2010), I consider his concept of public religion applicable to developments in Ukraine because it is a more bottom-up approach than Bellah's and can be used to analyze the agency of civilians.

Another helpful concept for analyzing the changing role of religion in the course of sociopolitical changes in Ukraine is ambient faith.² The concept was coined by Michael Engelke (2012) and it has already been applied productively by several scholars investigating the religious developments in Ukraine. A conceptual tool to overcome the problematic distinction between public and private religion, ambient faith appeals to the sensual registers of social spaces in the ambience of lived life. The concept helps to make visible the role of multiple social actors in creating and shaping new religious practices and meanings. Maidan was saturated with such sensory articulations of ambient faith. After Maidan, the creative processes continued.

Orthodox Churches' responses to the war

Religion in its public presence during Maidan served as a cultural resource for the process of identity transformation in Ukrainian society. The unity of religious churches and organizations enabled this. This bond, created by the emotional and spiritual context of Maidan, was also maintained when Crimea was annexed by Russia shortly afterwards and the war in the Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk broke out between separatists backed by Russia and the Ukrainian government. Through the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, churches spoke with one voice in condemning separatist aspirations and the attack on the territorial integrity of Ukraine (All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations 2014). But soon the ecumenical tone evaporated. The war revived and sharpened older, unresolved conflicts between the churches. The situation of transition with a weak central government caused the churches to return to their traditional patterns of behavior: mutual distrust, defining identity through differentiation, competition, and conflict (Hovorun 2015; Krawchuk 2016; Kalenychenko 2018a). As religious discourse and practices became intertwined with nationalism, ethnicity, language, and geopolitics, this type of top-down public Orthodoxy can be better called civil religion, as in Bellah's original (1967) understanding.

Ukrainian theologian Cyril Hovorun (2017) has identified two ideological narratives and types of civil religion that are promoted by the major Orthodox Churches in Ukraine today. A Russian-style imperialist narrative is widely supported in the east and south, whereas a Balkan-style nationalist paradigm is promoted in the west. The divided Orthodox Churches associated themselves with these opposing civil religions. The UOC-MP embraced the Russian-imperial paradigm of *Russki Mir*, the Russian World, a new kind of transnational nationalism. The UOC-KP relied on a nation-based civil religion, with the vision of *Kyivan Rus* serving as the horizon for a unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Hovorun 2017, 259).

From its nation-based civil-religion framework, the UOC-KP has accepted and openly supported the militarization of society and justified the

conflict as a legitimate defensive war against a foreign aggressor. From its *Ruski-Mir*-oriented civil-religion framework, the UOC-MP has silently accepted Russia's armed support for the separatists.

Women's civic activism in Ukraine

Since the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war between separatists backed by Russia and the Ukrainian army in the Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, numerous initiatives of women's civic activism have emerged as responses to the war and to the militarization of society. The war in the East has claimed more than 10,000 victims so far and has left more than 3 million Ukrainians in need of assistance. Ceasefire agreements, signed in Minsk in 2014 and 2015, have failed, as parts of Donetsk and Luhansk still remain under the control of pro-Russia separatists, while daily shelling and shooting continues. There are about 1.6 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine, of whom over 60 percent are women.

Women's activist responses to the war range from organizations of soldiers' mothers via initiatives to improve the position and working conditions of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, volunteer organizations providing the army with material support, and civic organizations that aim to promote dialog in Ukraine by nonviolent methods to patriotic women's civic activism. Organizations are secular, religious, or, quite often, formally secular but with religiously inspired activists. While women play a prominent role in grassroots organizations, they are significantly underrepresented in peace negotiation and monitoring, at both lower and higher levels (Gast 2016).³

In Ukraine, civil society has become more important since the Maidan protests, and more people are getting involved in NGO activities and civil movements. Four years after its outbreak, the grim reality of the war and its effects on the people are manifest. Mothers mourn lost sons, wives their lost husbands, and children their fathers who were killed during battle. Soldiers return home wounded or disabled. Veterans suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, often leading to alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence, and crime. There is a lack of social, economic, and psychological support for the veterans and their families. In times of war, women are especially vulnerable. They are disproportionally hit by the economic consequences such as the lack of access to work, social services, education, medical care, humanitarian assistance, and childcare. Women living on the border of the Ukrainian warzone face a myriad of problems, as psychotherapy centers in these regions testify (The Voice of Non-Militants 2015; Gast 2016).

Since the outbreak of the military conflict, women have started to organize themselves in their own civic initiatives that address specific problems of the war in relation to women. Various associations of mothers and wives of servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine provide economic, social, and

psychological support to their families (Strelnyk 2016). The Invisible Battalion is a feminist initiative of Mariya Berlinska to study and improve the vulnerable position of women in the armed forces who face specific problems. Journalist, television moderator, and (voluntary) military chaplain Olesya Dolina leads an initiative called Heart of the Dove (*Sertze Horlytschi*) to support and promote the patriotic role of women in the Ukrainian army. Civic initiatives, often with women in leadership roles, question the system of militarism and search for alternative, nonviolent ways of resolving the conflict (Snyder and Stobbe 2011).

I have selected four groups for case studies. The first is a civic activist organization, the Association of Wives and Mothers of Soldiers Participating in the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation). The second is Dolina's civic initiative, Heart of the Dove. The third is the feminist scholarly activism of Mariya Mayerchuk and Olga Plakhotnik, who criticize the system of militarism. The fourth is the Dialogue in Action project, which is an example of grassroots engagement in peacebuilding. I now discuss these four cases in terms of religion, gender, and peacebuilding.

Mothers' civic activism

Since the outbreak of war, different maternal civic organizations have emerged (Strelnyk 2016) such as the Association of Wives and Mothers of Soldiers Participating in the ATO, the Mothers Union "Defense," the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Ukraine (CSMU), the Anti-War Movement, and Soldiers' Mothers for the New Army.

Maternal activism is a specific type of social activism. Often grief energizes mothers' movements for collective action (Flam 2013). Besides their own losses, mothers grieve for the insecurity and future of their (own) children and grandchildren. They draw attention to the disappearance or murder of political activists or—potential or actual—victimized military recruits, endangered deserters, missing, maimed, or killed soldiers. These mothers themselves stress that, as a shared emotion, grief can evoke immediate mutual understanding and accelerated bonding among those affected by it (Schirmer 1989; Oushakine 2009; Jagudina 2009).

Maternal civic activism in Ukraine has grown rapidly since Maidan. Even during the Maidan protests, the group Mothers of Maidan asked the riot police not to use force against "our children" (Strelnyk 2016; Zorgdrager 2016a). They wore banners with the slogan "Do not shoot the heart of the mothers."

Sociologist Olesya Strelnyk analyzes how these activists' identification as mothers resonates with dominant gender expectations and stereotypes of women and motherhood in Ukrainian society. Demands for change are justified through appeal to motherhood. Concerned and grieving mothers' movements tend to play on the venerated, sacred mother figure in their societies for greater legitimacy (Flam 2013).

In the ideological context of Ukraine, the fusion of the Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, and the mythical symbol of Berehynia, “the one who protects, takes care of,” represents and undergirds the cult of motherhood (Kis 2007). The symbol of Berehynia from old Slavonic mythology reemerged in the Ukrainian national renaissance in the 1980s and had become one of the elements of official state ideology during the 1990s. It is materialized in the Independence Monument on Maidan in Kyiv. The monument consists of a statue of a young woman dressed in national costume with a banner of stars above her head, symbolizing the young Ukrainian nation. By presenting themselves in the role of a “protecting, caring mother,” the Mothers of Maidan took on their public role as mediators and peace builders in the protests.

Strelnyk points out that mothers in different contexts have engaged in activism, both in favor of and in opposition to war and militarism. Gender ideologies are central to the arguments on both sides. The maternal groups supporting militarism argue that they have a duty to care for their country, their nation, and their sons. Mothers opposing the war also base their arguments on their responsibility to care and protect: because they are life givers, women are “by nature” more caring than men, and therefore oppose the military system with its intrinsic violence (Yuval-Davis 1997). In Ukraine, we find both these types of maternal activism, although there is a much stronger allegiance to the patriotic one.

As Strelnyk makes clear, gender ideology alone does not fully explain the positions of mothers’ organizations toward militarism. The sociopolitical context of the war is important. In Ukraine, the patriotic mood that swept over the country since the beginning of the armed conflict has led to broad support for the ATO. Groups that in the beginning used anti-war rhetoric, such as the CSMU, have become more cautious.

The Association of Wives and Mothers of Soldiers Participating in the ATO started from rather traditional gender assumptions and practical goals. However, after the first five years, they moved toward multifaceted empowerment of women by critically questioning gender stereotypes and injustices in society. In the new initiative of a Women Resource Center in Kyiv (2018), the organization aims to promote women’s civil activity and representation at the decision-making level by systematically addressing “gender stereotypes, low self-esteem of women, physical, sexual, and psychological violence, psychological trauma of war, ignorance of their rights and mechanisms for their implementation” (Familyto 2017).

The Association of Wives and Mothers of Soldiers Participating in the ATO is not faith based, but refers to (Christian) religion as a shared source of inspiration. A telling example of this is the new name of the association newspaper, *Schid ta Zachid Razom* (*East and West Together*). The editor in chief, Natalia Moskovets, explains how the newspaper redirects its journalistic attention from covering mainly militaristic themes to the problem of disunity in Ukrainian society (Moskovets n.d.). She promotes an

inclusive patriotism, aiming to overcome the fractures in Ukrainian society, even across the frontlines, by the fact of shared moral and religious values. She calls Ukraine “the common home of both East and West.”

The mobilization of public (Orthodox) religion by the association is also illustrated by the commemorative event held near St. Michael’s Monastery in Kyiv on August 28, 2017, called “Ilovaysk 2014: time does NOT heal all wounds” (Religious Information Service of Ukraine 2017). Families of fallen and missing soldiers, together with official representatives, remembered their beloved ones, victims in the Battle of Ilovaysk.⁴ A memorial prayer service for the fallen defenders of Ukraine was led by a UOC-KP priest from St. Michael’s. In their speeches, the women expressed their refusal to forget or be silent about the wounds of the war, and demanded clarification from the government about what happened in the Battle of Ilovaysk. This is a very sensitive political issue in Ukraine. The inclusion of Orthodox prayers in the commemorative ceremony shows how the women are actively shaping public religion; it is a source not only of national unity, but also of collective resistance against military power systems.

Charismatic-patriotic civic activism

A second type of women’s response to the war in Ukraine could be called charismatic-patriotic civic activism. It is here represented by Olesya Dolina, former military pilot, author, journalist, television moderator, and poet. She volunteers in the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a military chaplain, which is an exceptional phenomenon in a country where churches do not ordain women (Dolina_radio 2017). In public, by wearing the camouflage dress with the insignia *kapelan* (Ukrainian for chaplain) on the breast, she challenges the image of a male pastor. If asked for her confessional and professional affiliation, Dolina shortly states: “I am a Christian and a military chaplain” (Dolina_int 2018). Her background is in Evangelical churches, but she refuses now to identify with a particular church: “At the front there are no religions, at the front there is only faith. We seek the communion of faith” (Dolina_radio 2017). With a group of four other female voluntary chaplains, she is ministering “in the invisible church” (Dolina_int 2018). She considers it her mission as a military chaplain to help and support soldiers and volunteers at the front and their families at home.

I call her chaplaincy “charismatic,” in the sense that no institutional church authorizes or legitimizes the mission. Dolina understands it as a prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit, who operates through feminine functions of love, support, and peace, whereas men are on the side of law, defense, and time. She purposely challenges the profoundly male image of the chaplain in Ukraine. As long as she feels supported by the soldiers in the field (“they are my friends and pray for me”), she does not need the church to confirm her calling (Dolina_radio 2017).

Dolina also understands her mission as a journalist and television program director in religious-charismatic terms. From 2016 to 2018, Dolina hosted the program *Neslamni Duchom* (Indestructible in Spirit) on Centralny Canal. In the program, she conducted interviews with “heroes of our time,” soldiers and officers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who despite great trials have not lost their hope or morale. Dolina also considers the widows and mothers of the fallen soldiers to be true heroes. She publicly supports them and raises awareness of the problems the veterans’ families face, even sensitive issues such as domestic and sexual violence (Dolina_comment 2017). Although she does not call herself a feminist (Dolina_radio 2017), she strives to empower women, both within the army and on the home front (Dolesya_int 2018). Dolina made a documentary film on military chaplains serving in the ATO zone, also entitled *Neslamni Duchom*. The film won a prize at a secular media festival.⁵

Dolina’s mission of creating the correct image of a “Christian warrior” also includes the women who serve in the army. She set up her Heart of the Dove project to promote the role of female soldiers. The project included a photo shoot with female soldiers of the President’s Division (a special unit), a photo exhibition in Kyiv, a women’s conference with various NGOs in 2018, and a concert, all supported by the Ministries of Defense and Culture. For the photo shoot, the female soldiers were dressed in Ukrainian folk costumes and/or in military camouflage dress. Dolina herself features prominently in the pictures. The photos aim to present the image of the female soldier as both brave and beautiful, both courageous and feminine (Dolina_fb March 23, 2018). “The idea of a photo exhibition is to show the image of a woman protector, in which the military form will be combined with ethnic and fictional elements” (Dolina_fb February 7, 2018). In her choice of words, it is easy to hear the Bereheniya ideology. In Dolina’s eyes, the female soldiers represent the perfect image of the Ukrainian woman—and of the nation. This is her gender philosophy:

The image of a Ukrainian woman—she is a warrior, mother, and wife. (...) The image of a Ukrainian woman merges with the image of Ukraine not only because it is raised to a symbol, but above all because it embodies the best moral features of the Ukrainian people, its highest spiritual upsurge, and best moral convictions. Despite their hard life, Ukrainian women have not lost their benevolence and compassion. Proud, honest, decent, intelligent, educated, freedom-loving, noble, friendly, and very hospitable. They cherish beauty and heroism.

(Dolina_fb February 7, 2018)

Dolina’s gender ideology remains in the service of a patriotic, heroic discourse. It is typical of Ukrainian national feminism, a concept coined by the gender scholar Tetiana Zhurzenko (2011). To Dolina, patriotism means

loyalty to Ukraine, and defense of the nation is a Christian duty. She can frame the conflict in a dichotomist way, as a religious narrative of “us” versus “them”:

God protects the borders of the nation and those who defend their land! And whoever went with the sword, whom Satan pushes, is a servant of the Satanic army, and he will perish by the sword. (...) Shame to those who work in the hands of the enemy.

(Dolina_fb December 6, 2017)

Yet, her position on the war is not straightforward nationalism. Dolina’s mother lives in Russia and her brothers live in Kazakhstan. She has co-operated with the Russian Association of Mothers of Soldiers. For her, the enemy is not Russia, but sin, evil. In her perception, Russia is an “an immature nation, like enslaved children.” Ukraine has much to share with Russia, including the “brilliant gift of forgiveness” (Dolina_int 2018).

The charismatic activism of Dolina is a manifestation of public religion in Ukraine. She is an interesting example of a woman who gives herself a central, authoritative role in shaping religious practices and meanings for society. She reactivates symbols and narratives of Ukrainian tradition and Christian/Orthodox religion and blends them into a powerful resource to generate values, collective action, and a certain sacralization of war. She idealizes Ukrainian female soldiers as beautiful hero-warriors who embody the moral and spiritual excellence of the nation. With the iconic representations of herself and others in social media and public exhibitions, she engages in the production of ambient faith where the private and public spheres fuse with sensorial effects to change the consciousness of individuals.

Feminist-intellectual civic activism

A third form of women’s activism is primarily intellectually shaped and expressed in critical feminist analysis of developments from the Maidan protests to the armed conflict. Maria Mayerchyk, historian and social anthropologist, and Olga Plakhotnik, social philosopher, identify themselves as feminist activist-scholars. Their public platform, besides conferences, is the bilingual Ukrainian/English online academic journal *Krytyka. Thinking Ukraine*.

The core of their critique is that, because of the growing dominance and recognition of far-right groups, nationalism took over the agenda and managed to shape the women’s activism at Maidan (Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik 2015). Although the far right was a minority at Maidan, in the course of the events they put their stamp on the discourse of the protests, presenting them as the time for militant male bodies to be glorified as the nation’s defenders against the criminal government. According to Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik, this discursive frame gave way to white, normative, military,

and tradition-oriented figures, and narrowed the feminist discussion on women's agency at Maidan. Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik see the rhetoric of "othering" at play, as people from Donbas were depicted as improper Ukrainians.

In my interview with Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik in June 2016, they commented on the role of church and religion in the public sphere (Mayerchyk_int 2016). Their assessment is nuanced but critical. Mayerchyk is from an Orthodox family. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, she became a committed religious person inspired by the religious renaissance in Ukraine. However, when she saw the church becoming the strongest conservative force in society, she turned away from it. Plakhotnik is not from an actively religious family and does not consider herself a believer. Both appreciate religion and share a genuine respect for some individual priests.

They have a critical stance toward how church representatives performed religion at Maidan. Religion was used to legitimate a process of militarization and gender segregation. Mayerchuk and Plakhotnik differentiate between Maidan in Kyiv and the protests in other cities. They participated themselves in the "Maidan" in Kharkiv, only twenty kilometers from the Russian border. In their city, protests took place every evening. An Orthodox priest, Fr. Viktor Marynychak, a former professor of linguistics and a moral authority in Kharkiv's intellectual community, led the prayer at the beginning of the meetings.⁶

In the Maidan protests in Kyiv, however, it was different, as Mayerchyk comments: "prayer filled up the whole space when there were no political speeches from the stage" (Mayerchyk_int 2016). Her point is not so much that the church was present, but that the church became complicit in the processes of othering:

The church was included in the process of normalization of domination [of violence] and, in feminist terms, of gender segregation. (...) the church was part of this mood of the Maidan, this conservative, women-excluding environment.

At the end of Maidan, when religion was overwhelmingly visible in the public rituals of mourning, they found it appropriate because "in Ukrainian society and culture, there is no other way of mourning for people who were killed, besides religion" (Plakhotnik_int 2016). They are less positive about the fusing of religion and politics into the concept of "Revolution of Dignity." They criticize the concurring idea of a Ukrainian nation that had finally emancipated itself from the Soviet past, apparently leaving "others" behind. Mayerchyk comments:

Dignity is a necessary word in order to make *koloradi* [scolding name for pro-Russian separatists and those who have pro-Russian positions]. It is the language of racism, stating that "we" are dignified, emancipated

from a terrible past: we are not Soviet people anymore, but “they” are Soviet, *kolorado*, non-human: it is a rhetorical strategy of dehumanization of the enemy. (...) It is a nationalist language which makes some people extra valuable and some people beneath dignity.

(Mayerchyk_int 2016)

In their view, the leading churches at Maidan (UOC-KP, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church) have strengthened the narrative of “us” versus “them.” Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik reject the type of public (civil) religion that is shaped by the institutional churches, while they have more appreciation for how individuals express religion in its public dimensions. Their intellectual strategy is inspired by feminist postcolonial theory and aims at dismantling the discursive system that creates “others.” They plead for a solidarity that is neither caught within the frame of the nation state nor exclusive to “dignified” people. Peacebuilding begins with understanding how exclusion works, and it must take those who are excluded as its starting point.

Women’s peacebuilding activism: dialogue in action

The Dialogue in Action project (full title: Dialog Involving Religious Communities: promoting tolerance, acceptance, and peacebuilding in Ukraine) was active from August 2016 till November 2017 in several towns in Ukraine (Final Report 2017). It aimed to promote a culture of dialog in the public sphere through professionally organized and facilitated dialogs. The project was supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Ukraine. The organization, which now operates as a department within the NGO Spirit and Letter (*Duh-i-Litera*) in Kyiv, is not based on shared women’s identity, but on an egalitarian framework (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2011). In practice, however, as in many other NGOs in Ukraine, women are the leaders and facilitators. The initiators are Lidiya Lozova, editor at the NGO’s publishing house and project coordinator of St. Clement’s Center for Communion and Dialog of Cultures in Kyiv, and Tetiana Kalenychenko, journalist, dialog facilitator, and sociologist of religion (Kalenychenko 2018a, 2018b).

The project addressed the lack of dialog and cooperation between different social agents, among them churches and other religious organizations, in small Ukrainian towns and villages (Final Report 2017). The involvement of religious communities was one of its unique characteristics. Traditionally, religious communities are among the chief agents in small towns and villages, and the clergy enjoy a high level of trust and authority. However, they tend to stick to traditional, one-way interaction with people and close themselves off from secular organizations, which also often avoid cooperation with religious communities. A further complicating factor is that churches, in particular the major Orthodox Churches, are competitive and hostile toward each other, a situation that has deteriorated since the war.

Through training, mainly in nonviolent communication and do-no-harm methodology, the project gave civic and religious activists the skills to organize public dialogs in their local communities. Six Ukrainian facilitators assisted international trainers from Denmark⁷ and the Netherlands.⁸ One-third of the participants were from religious organizations (UOC-KP, UOC-MP, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, Protestant Churches, Muslim communities, and the Ukrainian Bible Society). Two participants were connected with Jewish communities. After their own training, the participants organized dialogs on local issues in their hometowns. The project did not directly address the war in the East, but it dealt very concretely with one of the main roots of conflict in post-Communist societies: the lack of dialog and cooperation and the high level of mistrust between different groups.

The peacebuilding strategy was to create a “third space” of transformation. The methodology of nonviolent constructive communication can serve as a neutral platform. Lozova, who identifies herself as a committed Orthodox Christian (UOC-MP), stressed the nonreligious character of the dialog techniques used. In an interview in Kyiv, on December 3, 2017, Lozova identified the leading moral and spiritual values of the project:

Respect for human dignity which we help people to discover in themselves and the other. Seeing yourself and the other as humans who share the same human dignity and have the same needs and can do something together. This doing something together brings me to solidarity which is a more beneficial way to exist than doing things for yourself alone. Trust. Sometimes I think it is friendship and love and everything but I am not sure if it is not too much when you talk about a project, then, you know, you have to have concrete results [laughs].

(Lozova_int 2017)

The training was about learning a certain life attitude toward the other and oneself. The learning process could be painful. Lozova recalled that people sometimes got hurt in the dialog sessions. Reactions were strong and emotional, and “to still see the human behind this person from a different camp is a very, very painful thing. You have to have a lot of trust in the human.” She saw a parallel between the dialog training and religion: through a journey to the level of basic needs (safety, security, trust), both help to revive “a desire for life.” Helping people rediscover this desire for life and the values that sustain it (trust, respect, understanding, solidarity, love) made the dialog training for her a real peacebuilding project. She commented:

I was very inspired by what this Dignity Space⁹ did before. They did a facilitation series with Maidan protesters and the Berkut in Kyiv and in Lviv, and this was something that really struck me a lot. I thought: this is what is very much needed in Ukrainian society: not only to prevent a war but to inspire people to live together. Because there is this kind of

negative peace possible when there is no war but you don't really want to see the other person. And it can be as torturous as a war. But there can be a different level of peace. You can discover this common ground very basic, not ideological, not on the level of ideological positions, but on the level of your being human.

(Lozova_int 2017)

For Lozova, such a radical inclusive peace, which is based on the acknowledgment of common humanity, is ultimately a gift from God. She understands the transcendence of God as a critical boundary against the attempt to claim God for a certain religious or political camp. It prevented her from affirming, as many activist Christians did, that "God was at Maidan":

A lot of messages [from Maidan] were just very kind of counter something, very conflicting and I couldn't really identify with that to participate fully. So, I lacked a God there in a way which wouldn't be only for human rights or for Ukraine; it is difficult to explain, but like for everybody.

(Lozova_int 2017)

The Dialogue in Action project was inspired by a practice-oriented ecumenism (Enns 2012, 49). Lozova believes that ecumenical dialogs are not helpful as long as church officials do not discover, accept, and nourish the human level from which mercy and kindness come. The project coordinators experienced serious difficulties with engaging participants from the churches. However, according to Lozova, churches and church officials are called to "descend" into society and learn to go back to the human level. In this sense, the project profoundly challenges institutional churches' relationship with secular society. Lozova continues to contribute to a public religion or public Orthodoxy that is relevant to civil society, which offers an alternative to the logic of armed violence, and finds its core in the incarnational truth that "the human level is the theological level" (Lozova_int 2017).

Theological viewpoints

From the perspective of ecumenical theology, I want to highlight the notion of Just Peace. It represents a new ecumenical paradigm in theology and social ethics (Enns 2012, 229–249, 2017, 240). A comprehensive conception of Just Peace was presented at the end of the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–2010).¹⁰ Just Peace is defined as:

a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

(WCC JPC 2011, par. 11)

This comprehensive approach to peace as a process going beyond the silencing of weapons is reflected in the aims and methods of Dialogue in Action and, to a lesser extent, in the programs of the Association of Wives and Mothers of Soldiers Participating in the ATO. Notably, ecumenical discussions stress that nonviolent methods are important not only as a civic-dialog technique, but also as part of a national defensive strategy (Iersel 2018). These ecumenical insights have not yet been incorporated by Ukrainian and Russian churches in their attitudes and strategies toward the military conflict.

From the perspective of Orthodox tradition, the emphasis in women's activism on living with multiple perspectives, wounds, ambiguities, and complexities of conflict rather than stressing the "nationalist" or "imperialist" narratives, reflects an authentic spirit of Orthodox peace theology. The UOC-KP solves the complexities of conflict by employing an oppositional scheme and by glorifying the homeland. The UOC-MP does not distance itself from the vision of *Ruski Mir* with its dualistic narrative of Russia and "the West," its idealization of a supranational pan-Slavic entity and its denial of the imperial powers at play. Ukrainian women's activism for peace, by not giving up a relationship with the other, appears to stay closer to the sources of Orthodox tradition than the institutional churches do. In these sources, the value of homeland is relativized in the light of the Kingdom of God. Hildo Bos (2011) has shown that the Byzantine liturgies of so-called "warrior saints" reflect a fundamental hierarchy of values, which bears witness to the Kingdom of God as the highest value, against the possible absolutist temptations of the Empire. Warriors' sanctity comes not from their military heroism, but from their good deeds or martyrdom. To take Bos' argument a step further, the value of the earthly homeland has to be subsumed under the value of *sobornost*, not understood in an ethnic, nationalist, or imperialistic way, but as the catholicity of all God's people. Ukrainian women's civic activism, in its inclusivist attitude, is a reminder of such moral and spiritual values expressed in Orthodox theology.

Further, Orthodox tradition offers helpful theological notions to reflect on the spiritual meaning of dialog practices. In particular, the notions of personhood and asceticism may shed light on the spiritual meaning of dialog as a way of attaining and maintaining peace. According to John Zizioulas (1997, 2007), a Trinitarian understanding of personhood sees it as a relational event in which the human being is constituted as irreducibly unique and free. In Zizioulas' theology, as Aristotle Papanikolaou (2017, 58) summarizes:

Personhood is a Eucharistic event, and as such, is the realization to love God with all one's heart, mind and soul, and to love the neighbour as oneself; it is an event of communion, of unity-in-difference, of the one and the many.

As a necessary addition to Zizioulas' concept of personhood, Papanikolaou brings in the notion of asceticism. Personhood as "being in communion," as love, is not simply an event but is just as much a virtue that must be learned. Training is required to shape and strengthen the person in his/her capacity to love (Papanikolaou 2012, 87–130, 2017, 51–67). Ascetical discernment and practices need to be learned in order to grow into the divine-human communion. In my view, this notion of social asceticism helps to reveal the theological relevance of what happened in the training organized by Dialogue in Action. As the project demonstrates, ascetical practice includes painful confrontations with the self, the other, and with memories of the past.

With the training on how to learn to love and to build community, Dialogue in Action offered something indispensable to Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Churches of the Eastern tradition tend to keep their theology of peace and reconciliation focused primarily on the individual and the need of *meta-noia* (conversion) of the heart (Rap 2015, 417¹¹; Elsner 2018). The problem is the lack of reflection on practical implementation in the gap between the individual and the state. How should the moral claims be translated into strategies, actions, community work, or other practical steps? The grass-roots work of Dialogue in Action and similar organizations promoting a culture of dialog aims at filling the gap.

Conclusion

The peacebuilding potential of women's civic activism in Ukraine has been analyzed, paying special attention to the gendered dimensions and the way women actively shape and negotiate public Orthodoxy, based on four case studies. They differ with regard to their gender assumptions, their diagnosis of the roots of the conflict, and their strategies for conflict resolution. All four forms of civic activism are attentive to gendered aspects of war and peace making, although in different ways.

Interestingly in terms of women's agency in shaping public Orthodoxy, these women's civic organizations tend to acknowledge religion not only for its cohesive power, but also for its capacity to relate to the "other" in the conflict. To various degrees, they appeal to religion as a source of moral imagination, that is, the capacity of individuals and communities to imagine themselves in a web of relationships, across existing borders, even with their enemies (Lederach 2005, 34). All forms of women's activism discussed in this chapter refuse to go along with narratives that divide the parties into "us" and "them."

Whether based on shared female identities across regions and the frontlines of the conflict (maternal activism) or on the sense of a shared humanity (Dialogue in Action), the image of the enemy is likely to become less absolute. Processes of "othering" are interrupted by self-critical reflection on primary needs and priorities, on a form of solidarity that goes beyond

the boundaries of the in-group, and on imagining a better future for all. The excluding discourses of good and evil, victim and aggressor, truth and falsehood are questioned and replaced by a moral attitude to endure living in the affirmation of complexities, ambiguities, and historic entanglements—and to find a way forward.

I have shown how Ukrainian women's grassroots activism has the capacity to revitalize the Orthodox Christian tradition as a spiritual and cultural resource for social transformation and enhancement of the common good. It does so in close affinity with the ecumenical movement's inclusive vision of Just Peace. Key elements of the public Orthodox religion shaped by women's activism are its practical ecumenical outlook, attention to the effects of war and militarization on everyday life, expression of a basic sense of belonging to each other, cohesive function across various fractures in society, and determined resistance to politicization or instrumentalization within the existing political structures. Public Orthodoxy shaped by women offers a much-needed alternative to the forms of public or civil religion that remain attached to particular interest politics, namely the imperial paradigm embraced by the UOC-MP and the nationalist paradigm promoted by the UOC-KP.

The effect that the newly established, unified OCU will have on the conflict is not yet known. Will it lead to further escalations or be an instrument of conflict resolution? The leadership of the OCU will gain credibility and trust in the wider society by entering into a real dialog with the various forms of civic activism, including women's activism, acknowledging its rich spiritual and theological potential. Scholars of religion and theologians in and outside Ukraine are challenged to reflect further on collective practices of peace and grief generated by women's active engagement with the realities of conflict and war.

Notes

- 1 The Ukrainian Protester Survey of Maidan was conducted from November 26, 2013, to January 10, 2014. It is the only on-site continuous multiday survey of the participants in the EuroMaidan protests.
- 2 See the Public Religion, Ambient Faith: Religious Institutions and Socio-Political Change in the Black Sea Region Conference, Kyiv, September 30 to October 10, 2016, organized by the Religion in the Black Sea Region Working Group, headed by Catherine Wanner. <http://www.uaregio.org/en/about/stage-4/> (Accessed April 16, 2018).
- 3 The higher peace negotiation level here is the Normandy contact group and the trilateral contact group (Russian Federation, Ukraine, OSCE); the lower peace negotiation and monitoring level is the special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE (15 percent female) and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (12 percent female).
- 4 Ilovaysk, the site of a battle in which up to a thousand Ukrainian soldiers were killed, became a symbol of the horror of war and the failing leadership of the ATO in Eastern Ukraine.
- 5 In 2015 at the All-Ukrainian Festival of Television and Radio Programs of Kobzar.

- 6 A film on the life and thoughts of Marynychak, priest of the UOC-KP, "Man's Way to Freedom," was screened for the first time in Kharkiv in 2017. <http://kharkivobserver.com/mans-way-to-freedom/> (Accessed April 16, 2018).
- 7 Carl Plesner, director of Dignity Space, a center for nonviolent communication and reconciliation in Kyiv.
- 8 Jan van Kourt and Sonja van der Meulen.
- 9 Shortly after the Maidan revolt, Carl Plesner from Denmark and Olena Hant-syak from Ukraine established Dignity Space as a center to promote nonviolent communication and reconciliation. <https://dignityspace.org/en/> (Accessed May 16, 2019).
- 10 The Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, 2006, formulated the vision of the "Way of Just Peace." The Assembly in Busan, 2013, called upon the churches to walk the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (Enns 2012, 229–249).
- 11 Rap analyzes this for the case of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, but her findings are applicable to Orthodox Churches in the post-Soviet regions. "In their discourse the leadership of the Church does not primarily focus on action but rather on prayer, on the inner world of the people, on the reflection about one's own shortcomings" (Rap 2015, 417).

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