Revolution, Glory and Sacrifice: Ukraine's Maidan and the Revival of a European Identity[1]

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Abstract
The article deals with the Maidan revolution in Ukraine in 2013/14 and how it was connected to the European idea. It analyzes the performative, revolutionary and theopolitical character of the event and raises the question of what meaning the experience of the Maidan can have for the renewal of European identity. In linking the idea of Europe with the struggle for freedom and dignity, the Maidan event unfolds a communitarian and meaningful political force that connects the Ukrainian nation, the idea of Europe, and the desire for self-determination, for which people stake their lives. The essay takes a look at the forms and functions of political liturgy as well as the meaning of martyrdom and its ritualized remembrance. The revolutionary appropriation of political sovereignty by the people and the theopolitical dimensions of the event are reflected upon, both in their political power and significance for a European identity and in the associated dangers of mythologizing and idealizing Europe.

Key-Words
Europe, Ukraine, Maidan, Revolution, Identity, Orthodoxy

1. Introduction

"It is hard […] to imagine at present men and women throwing themselves on the barricades crying 'Long live the European Union!'", wrote Terry Eagleton in 2000 (Eagleton 2000: 61). The 2013-2014 Maidan Revolution in Kyiv, Ukraine, made the unimaginable a reality. This paper focuses on the Maidan Revolution, and on how it was linked to the idea of Europe. It analyses Maidan's performative, revolutionary and theopolitical nature, and raises the question of whether the Maidan experience can help us in thinking about how to revive European identity.

There are at least two reasons why the case of Maidan merits consideration as a reflection on performative theology for Europe. Firstly, the 2013-14 Maidan was a place where people died carrying the EU flag in

1 I am grateful to my students from the "Nationalism as Religion" course at the UCU, who helped me to reflect on Maidan, and to Helen L. Haft for her comments and edits. The paper was completed in February 2022, weeks before Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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their hands. Whatever significance one chooses to give to these deaths, it was a moment when Europe, its ideals, and institutions embodied something worth dying for. Secondly, Maidan—the most recent revolution in Europe—through its revolutionary and performative nature, tells us something about a people's sovereignty and the making of a political body. If Europe wishes to conceive of itself as *one* body, there is something to learn from Maidan, in its revolutionary and celebratory dimension.

European identity is constantly being created and contested. On the one hand, European integration has led to the creation of a common cultural, political and economic space, where its pre-existing shared heritage is being articulated in a new way, leading to the formation of a European (cosmopolitan or supra-national) identity. On the other hand, the EU has neither replaced the nation-state nor the nation - "there is no 'European people'", as Delanty and Rumford put it (Delanty/Rumford 2005: 102) - and the European identity of Europe, which is being forged, struggles to be easily distinguishable from a more generic category of the West (Delanty 2019: 143-144).[2]

This paper explores Maidan's relevance to current debates on Europe[3]. More specifically, it approaches Maidan as a moment of performing and narrating Europe, in order to formulate several questions: How does Europe celebrate itself? What narratives does it live on? How does Europe create unity between numerous national and regional identities? Can the crisis of European identity (and the EU)[4] be addressed by recovering their doxological, revolutionary, and theopolitical dimensions? Finally, in reflecting on what happened in Ukraine during the Maidan Revolution, the paper itself will engage in the act of narrating Europe through the lens of Maidan.

The 2013-2014 Maidan protest in Ukraine was triggered when President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the

2 See also Guénoun, who expresses a hypothesis that European "singularity may consist in denying that it is singular and in affirming or giving rise only to that which it shares with everyone else. […] [T]he deep value of European culture may lie precisely in the fact that Europe has been […] the place that constructed the unreasonable dream of a humanity open to all" (Guénoun 2013: xi). In other words, the specificity of Europe is *not* to have a specific identity.

3 For a short overview of the debates and competing narratives about European identity, see Delanty 2019: chapter 12.

4 While often used as synonyms, EU and Europe are not the same thing. Several European countries, e.g. Ukraine, do not belong to the EU. Here lies one of many complexities, which make definition of European identity difficult.

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EU[5]. After a small group of unarmed activists was brutally beaten by the police on November 30, 2013, the situation escalated, and erupted into a national protest, with the flashpoint on Independence Square ("maidan" means square in Ukrainian) in Kyiv. More than one hundred people were killed during the most violent days of the protest, between the 18th and 21st of February 2014. Shortly after the massacre, President Yanukovych fled the country, and Russia began preparing for the annexation of Crimea, and supporting and coordinating the separatist movement in Donbass and elsewhere.

After the initial phase of the Revolution, which was focused on the Association Agreement, and which was violently suppressed, the narrative of protest evolved in the direction of respect for democracy, freedom, and dignity (Димид 2020: 149). It would thus be incorrect to explain all of Maidan's force and endurance as resulting from the failed agreement with the EU. However, the European dimension of the movement was central in a variety of phases of the protest, which has entered the history books as "Euromaidan" (Lyubashenko 2014: 63).

2. *Maidan and the Churches*

Maidan's focus on dignity and freedom (hence another title of the uprising, "the Revolution of Dignity") was acknowledged, very early on, by the Christian churches in Ukraine. As soon as the first demonstrators were beaten by the police, the churches drew their attention to the conflict and protested the government's overreaction. This reaction was manifested independently[6], by senior leaders of various religious communities, and jointly, through declarations by the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO)[7]. This Council, founded in 1996, is assembled of leaders of 16 major religious organisations present in Ukraine, including Orthodox, Catholics, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim

5 For a chronology and analysis of the Maidan Revolution, see Plokhy 2015: chapter 27, Bertelsen 2017, Wynnyckyj 2019.

6 See a rich anthology of statements by leaders of various Ukrainian churches and religious communities in Филипович/Горкуша 2014: 203-646. Cf. Stepanenko 2020: 107-127.

7 The texts of these statements can be found in Васін 2021.

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representatives[8]. From the very beginning of the crisis, AUCCRO issued several declarations, where it condemned the violence and invited authorities and the opposition to negotiate. Churches asked the government to take into account the demands of the protesters and to punish those who used violence against peaceful manifestations of dissent. Churches also attempted to act as a mediator between the protesters and authorities. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion with Moscow largely tried, in its declarations, not to take sides, although paradoxically, most of the protestors at Maidan were arguably members of this church. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) called upon the government to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, as was demanded by the protestors and blamed the authorities for the escalation of the conflict. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church expressed its support and solidarity with the Maidan protesters, while the head of its external relations office declared that "[t]he Maidan movement is a reaction against the general atmosphere of fear and intimidation in Ukraine and against wanton corruption in the country […]. It is a movement of principle and dignity, with spiritual expression"[9]. Many emerging Protestant pastors and theologians also took a stand in defense of the protestors and their demands, thus challenging the position of the official leaders of their denominations (Cherenkov 2017, Soloviy 2020).

At the same time, bishops, priests, and pastors of various churches visited Maidan, spoke from the central stage, and prayed with the protestors (Zorgdrager 2016: 174). Many clergymen physically settled on Maidan, in the provisory tents, where they celebrated daily liturgies, heard confession, and comforted the protestors[10]. Their presence was not only a way of protecting the demonstrators but also of providing legitimacy to the uprising. As Kalenychenko puts it, churches' participation at, and focus on, Maidan was a way of "sacralising social changes" (Kalenychenko 2017: 32).

8 On the AUCCRO, see Krawchuk 2014. Cyril Hovorun calls AUCCRO "one of the most successful examples of inter-Christian and inter-faith cooperation in Europe" (Hovorun 2020: 4).

9 Borys Gudziak, as synthesised by Ieraci 2014.

10 For some first-hand accounts, see Фінберг/Головач 2016.

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3. Doxology

Giorgio Agamben, in *The Kingdom and The Glory*, argues:

> The analysis of doxologies and liturgical acclamations […] [is] more useful for the understanding of the structures and functioning of power than many pseudo-philosophical analyses of popular sovereignty, the rule of law, or the communicative procedures that regulate the formation of public opinion and political will. […] The society of the spectacle—if we can call contemporary democracies by this name—is, from this point of view, a society in which power in its 'glorious' aspect becomes indiscernible from *oikonomia* and government (Agamben 2017a: 370).

It is thus the "glory", where—so the argument goes—the very heart of power resides. In what follows, I would like to argue that part of Maidan's success was its "glory", *doxa*, its performative dimension.

Ukrainian culturologist Tamara Hundorova approaches Maidan as an "aesthetic" and "carnivalesque" event, "penetrated by theatricality and performance"[11]. She refers to the Ukrainian writer Iurii Andrukhovych, who described Maidan as "a Don-Quixote-like masquerade where hundreds of Ukrainians were wearing 'colanders and pots' instead of helmets: this was a rebellious attempt to express their discontent and their mocking and contemptuous attitudes toward the government's abusive power"[12].

But what kind of festival was Maidan? Scholars point to the religious dimension of Maidan's festivity. For Cyril Hovorun, a theologian and priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, "[t]he Maidan was not only a political and social event but also a religious phenomenon. It explained itself in religious terms and articulated its demands through religious symbols" (Hovorun 2015: 3). Heleen Zorgdrager, drawing on interviews and reflections of the protest participants, concludes that "the *Maidan* transformed into one liturgical space without clear boundaries in which everybody participated" (Zorgdrager 2016: 182). Mykhailo Dymyd, a Greek Catholic priest and theologian who participated in the protest, describes Maidan in terms of a theological community. In his *Liberation Theology: A Ukrainian Version*, he argues that Maidan was a "space to share love and good", where people were able to "build horizontal relations without order from above" (Димид 2020: 69, 87). For Dymyd, Maidan was more than just

11 Hundorova 2017: 161-179. Cf. also Stepnisky 2020: 80-97.
12 Andrukhovych, as synthesised by Hundorova 2017: 164.

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a gathering of dissenters or a "festival": "From a theological perspective, Maidan was similar to the Last Supper, where the Lord found a place for everybody and all social classes" (Димид 2020: 121).[13] Dymyd, who would routinely celebrate the liturgy at Maidan, emphasises the Eucharistic dimension of Maidan (Димид 2020: 17). Similarly, Hundorova and Rudeiko describe Maidan in terms of a temple and liturgical assembly (Hundorova 2017: 165-166, Рудейко 2018: 205). Vasyl Rudeiko, another Maidan participant, who happens to be a liturgical theologian, argues that "Maidan was liturgical in both meanings of the term: in the ancient and contemporary senses—as a public work [*leitourgia*]" (Рудейко 2018: 201)[14]. Maidan became "a model of an ideal society, in which everybody knew their place, accomplished what was needed from them and would take initiatives, which would enhance the survival of all" (Рудейко 2018: 201-202). He observes that "every hour, during the nocturnal prayer for Ukraine on Maidan, people would light lanterns—a symbol of light within us, which should dispel the darkness of lies, injustice and inhumanity" (Рудейко 2018: 201). Rudeiko also draws an analogy between standing on Maidan and the oriental tradition of *stylites*, or pillar dwellers, ascetics who spent years on top of a pillar (*stylos*) in prayer[15]. Both the ancient stylite practice and the Maidan posture were signs of fastness and perseverance. In Ukraine, this perseverance took the form of civil disobedience and refusal to disperse and stop the protest.

4. Martyrology

The ultimate doxological moment for Maidan was the death of over one hundred protestors, most of whom were shot in February of 2014. The victims are now commonly referred to as "the Heavenly Hundred", while their death has been interpreted in terms of sacrifice[16]. Zorgdrager speaks of the "cult" of the Heavenly Hundred, manifested through commemorative acts, and dedicated material objects, such as icons, monuments, national orders of merit (Zorgdrager 2016: 184).

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13 If not otherwise specified, the translation from Ukrainian and Russian is mine. Cf. also Hundorova, who argues that Maidan "challenged the boundaries of political, social, national and gender relations" and "annihilated social hierarchies" (Hundorova 2017: 169-171).

14 On the political content of the term *leitourgia*, see Agamben 2017b: chapter 1.

15 On the stylites, see Casiday 2011: 585-586.

16 On the Heavenly Hundred, see Bezborodova 2018: 101-138.

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The Greek Catholic Major Archbishop Sviatoslav (Shevchuk) has drawn an analogy between the Maidan massacre and the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Commemorating the first anniversary of the massacre, Sviatoslav said:

> Some will speak of victims of Maidan, others will talk about the fusillade at Maidan […]. But we, Christians, realize something much deeper here. We talk about the Easter sacrifice of the Heavenly Hundred. […] [We] recognize this free-willed sacrifice of giving one's own life for a better future for our people. […] The holy blood of the Heavenly Hundred Heroes sanctified the freedom of Ukraine. […] [T]his sacrifice is the beginning of life. A death, which is life creating (Sviatoslav (Shevchuk), cited in: УГКЦ 2015).

Taras Tymo, a theologian and Maidan participant, explains why the sacrifice was needed, by comparing Euromaidan to the Orange revolution of 2004[17]. The latter, which was entirely peaceful, "was a complete failure in terms of practical outcomes, because it has not been *payed* for. […] In order to give birth to a child, you need to experience pain, to lose blood […]. It is unpleasant, unsightly and painful, but it is how you bear a child. The same happened here" (Тимо 2016: 17; Emphasis added). An insight in line with this argument can be found in Terry Eagleton's approach to sacrifice:

> If sacrifice is often violent, it is because the depth of the change it promises cannot be a matter of smooth evolution […]. In this sense, the practice of ritual sacrifice nurtures a wisdom beyond the rationality of the modern […]. It sets its face against the consoling illusion that fulfilment can be achieved without a fundamental rupture and rebirth (Eagleton 2018: 7-8).[18]

The emphasis on the necessity of the sacrifice, expressed in non-theological terms by Tymo and Eagleton, is very reminiscent of the divine necessity of the Gospels: Christ "must" (*dei*) suffer and die for the salvation of humanity (Kasper 2011: 155).

According to Dymyd, "sacrifice" at Maidan "sacralised" protest (Димид 2020: 17). The point made here is of considerable importance. The etymol-

17 On the Orange Revolution, see Wilson 2005.

18 Another point by Eagleton, relevant for the argument of this paper, is the connection between sacrifice and power: sacrifice "concerns the passage of the lowly, unremarkable thing from weakness to power" (Eagleton 2018: 7-8).

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ogy of the term sacrifice can help us to see the core of the argument: "sacrifice" comes from the Latin *sacrum facere*—to make holy. The sacrifice is thus in direct relationship with the sacred, and constitutes an act by which the sacred is defined and preserved (Benveniste 1969: 223. Cf. Girard 1977). Dying for a community or for an ideal is more important than life itself (Marvin/Ingle 1996: 767-780). This becoming the highest value is what is often proposed as the very definition of what it means to be "sacred". Gavin Flood—in a way that resonates with Archbishop Sviatoslav's point, cited earlier—interprets sacrifice as an instance of the transcendence of death and of giving meaning to life (Flood 2013: 115-131). Flood's conception of sacrifice as an act of symbolic transcendence over death finds an echo in the way in which dying for one's nation is conceived. Scholars point out that nationalism proposes its own version of immortality. Anthony D. Smith speaks about "the overcoming of death through fame" as one of the "motifs in the national salvation drama" (Smith 2003: 219).[19] What is also important, is that this martyrdom imposes some duties on those who commemorate it, or could be considered the martyrs' "heirs". As Zygmunt Bauman writes, "[t]he inherited immortality of nationhood endows mortal life with meaning, but perpetuation of that immortality gives mortal acts an added value of transcendence" (Bauman 1999: 36). According to this perspective, one can achieve immortality not only by dying for a community but also through "conformity", "abiding by standards" and "observing the limits", imposed by the community (Bauman 1999: 36). Zorgdrager's Ukrainian students grasped this point, without reading Baumann: "Since they [the Heavenly Hundred] have given their lives, it is our moral obligation to fight corruption in the educational system and everywhere, otherwise their sacrifice would be in vain" (Zorgdrager 2015: 9). In other words: martyrs make us hostages, they impose duties. One should not profane what they sacralised with their deaths.

The value of those who were shot at Maidan was perceptible from the very moment of the massacre. The funeral services for them were performed at the square itself, in the presence of thousands of people, transforming Maidan both into a family and a sacred space (Zorgdrager 2016: 170ff). A "bricolage liturgy", as Zorgdrager calls it, incorporated a popular song into the Byzantine *Panikhida*, which can be interpreted as a blurring of borders between "religious" and "secular" sacrality.

19 Smith argues that the immortality of the martyrs for a country is achieved through gratitude and regular commemorations (Smith 1999: 43-44, 154).

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5. Narrating Europe

During the Maidan protests, Europe was depicted as a concentration of dignity and freedom. The protest became a *topos* wherein civil society, churches, and politicians enunciated the idea, which was the principal refrain shouted on Maidan square: "Ukraine is Europe". Ukrainian citizens hoped that the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, "would save and strengthen Ukraine's democratic institutions, protect the rights of the opposition, and bring European business standards to Ukraine" (Plokhy 2015: 338). As Serhy Yekelchyk puts it, "[v]ery few protesters knew the details of the proposed Association Agreement, but 'Europe' served as a popular shorthand slogan implying democracy, rule of law, and economic opportunity—all the things ordinary citizens found lacking in Yanukovych's Ukraine" (Yekelchyk 2015: 102).

Dymyd offers a theological foundation to explain the struggle for Europe. Dymyd considers the EU as, to a large degree, an ethical endeavour, "a project of reconciliation" between the post-WWII nations (Димид 2020: 111). More importantly, many of the values—in particular dignity and freedom, upon which Europe was built, and for which Maidan stood—are Christian (Димид 2020: 58-59, 137ff, 150).[20] The fact that they have been secularised, does not implicitly make them foreign to Christianity.

6. Lessons

What lessons can we deduce from Maidan regarding the performative construction of European identity and the way Europe is narrated? I would like to propose three: revolutionary, doxological, and theopolitical.

The first lesson concerns the link between *revolution* and sovereignty. "The nation is revolutionary through its genesis and lineage", claims Denis Guénoun in his *About Europe: Philosophical Hypotheses* (Guénoun 2013: 84). It is the revolution that creates popular sovereignty, and endows a nation with power:

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20 Similarly, Markus Vogt, who claims that the principles for which Maidan fought were "not about the question of political alliances, but about the values of dignity, freedom and peace. These are indivisible and anchored in the core of the Christian faith" (Vogt 2021: 122-123). This argument could be extended with a general reference to the Christian roots of Europe, although one could wonder to what extend such an approach is currently contemplated by the leaders of European institutions. On the question of Christian roots, see Faltin/Wright 2007.

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> The Revolution finishes off the kingdom: it elevates the people in lieu of the sovereign, enthroning and crowning them. The Revolution *bestows sovereignty on the assembly*, thus outlining a new figure, of a hyper-sovereign and an archi-assembly, the chiasm of the king-people, a theocracy of upside-down parallels, headless caesarism, millenarianism in the present tense, now and fulfilled. This figure has a name, *nation* (Guénoun 2013: 83).[21]

Guénoun connects etymology (*revolutio* points to a return, or rolling back) to the observation that during the revolution, people claim back authority, which has been "stolen" from them by the monarch, thus returning to an original, pre-monarchical moment (Guénoun 2013: 77, 82). Guénoun's account resonates with the experience of the Euromaidan: Ukrainians felt that Yanukovych's decisions were against the will of the people—and thus Maidan constituted a clawing back of power by the people, and redefining the very way in which political power works.[22]

It is worth reflecting on revolutionary sovereignty in the context of European identity and the current EU crisis. Brexit—the most recent anti-European *revolutio* in the history of the continent—presented itself as a return to a pre-existing condition, and a way of claiming power from Brussels and EU bureaucrats.[23] It was perceived as a revolution, as taking back control—in glory—as an act of assembly becoming sovereign (again). The European project was not born out of revolution but rather started as a political (and economic) reaction to the post-WWII world (Delanty

21 Cf. a very similar account of "people" becoming "king" during revolution in Lefort 2006: 148-187.

22 I am well aware of the ambivalence of the idea of "the will of the people". However, it seems acceptable to use it while describing a revolutionary setting. Martin Loughlin, reflecting on the concept of *constituent power*—the foundation of political sovereignty, which transcends juridical categories—argues that it "exists only when that multitude can project itself not just as the expression of the many (a majority) but–in some senses at least–of the all (unity). Without this dimension of symbolic representation, there is no constituent power" (Loughlin 2014: 231-232). Maidan, and, perhaps, any other revolution, is a moment when protestors pretended to speak for the entire country, for everybody, while, in fact they represent only a section of the whole society. Cf. Risch 2021: 129-157. While I disagree with many of Risch's conclusions and his usage of dubious sociological data, his point about Maidan not representing the totality of the Ukrainian population remains valid.

23 See Ali 2022. In chapter 4, entitled "'Let's Take Back Control': Brexit and the Assertion of Sovereignty", Ali describes the sovereignty, preached by the Brexiteers, as "populist", "confused" and tending towards totalitarianism (Ali 2022: 74-88).

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2019: 292ff). The unique nature of the way authority is exercised in the EU between national and European institutions—described by Delanty as "a post-sovereign political order" (Delanty 2019: 300)—makes the perception of popular sovereignty even weaker than within the nation-states. The question that arises is whether there is space for a pro-European *revolutio*, i.e. for something that would allow the people to have a feeling of possessing sovereignty within the EU, to have control in their hands.

Revolution is important not merely for the values it seeks to defend, or for its outcomes. It is relevant also as a performative event, in which the ideals preached are lived. Revolution is the "experience of being free" in a very practical, empirical way, says Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1990: 34). She argues that the revolutionaries of the 18th-19th centuries "were enjoying what they were doing far beyond the call of duty". In a way, which recalls Agamben's link between power and glory, Arendt argues that both the lived revolutionary experience and the perception of novelty "are at the root of the enormous pathos which we find in both the American and the French Revolutions, this ever-repeated insistence that nothing comparable in grandeur and significance had ever happened" (Arendt 1990: 34).[24] These observations resonate with the way Maidan is described by Dymyd and Rudeiko, namely as a community which has transcended social, cultural, and confessional borders. Maidan has been interpreted and retold as an instance of the lived experience of solidarity, altruism, and self-sacrifice (Говорун 2014: 28), as a place where personalism has transcended individualism (Wynnyckyj 2019: 317-322), and as an example of a "network of trust" and the "economy of gift" (Дацюк 2014). How can these ideals and community practices be internalised in Europe? How can they be experienced and enjoyed?

Second, the *doxological* lesson. Maidan was successful because it became a place in which freedom and dignity (articulated explicitly as *European* values) were celebrated in a performative and sacrificial way. Hundorova, building on Mikhail Bakhtin, argues that the performative character of Maidan has allowed for the construction of new social and political identities, and, in this way, "accelerated the processes of forming a new modern Ukrainian nation" (Hundorova 2017: 161, 174). Maidan thus can be read as a performative enhancement of community identity. The importance of performance for social unity has been grasped by Emile Durkheim,

24 The reader will notice the contrast between Arendt's accent on the absolute novelty of the revolution and Guénoun's consideration of revolution in terms of "return".

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who claimed that social cohesion needs "effervescence"—an excitement and unity produced by a common action. Society cannot exist without regularly performing common actions, described by Durkheim in terms of liturgy—participating in rituals, saying the same words, etc.—which produces "a fusion of all the individual feelings into a common one" (Durkheim 1995: 231-232). These liturgical actions

> [b]y the very act of serving the manifest purpose of strengthening the ties between the faithful and their god—the god being only a figurative representation of the society—[…] at the same time strengthen the ties between the individual and the society (Durkheim 1995: 227).

Although specific ways, in which collective feelings are being celebrated change throughout history, their very necessity is never ceasing. Large popular disturbances also strengthen collective feelings and patriotism, contributing to more profound integration within society (Durkheim 2002: 166. Cf. Malešević 2010: 20-22).

This reflection allows us to formulate a number of questions regarding Europe: In which ways does Europe celebrate itself? How is it represented performatively? While nations regularly celebrate themselves through independence days, war memorials, monuments, sporting events, Europe and the EU seem to lack such "moments", or appear to be totally uninterested in them (Zuelow, et al. 2007: 10). Yet, it is this performative side of group identity, that keeps societies together. As Ulf Hedetoft points out, rituals of belonging are essential for developing national identity, due to their capacity to unite people, institutions, and beliefs on various levels. According to Hedetoft, "state liturgies" enhance social unity in various ways: through "forging overlapping 'vertical' and 'horizontal' solidarities, that is, deep-seated sentiments of belonging between state and nation and among different sections of the population", through "creating an imaginary bridge between past, present, and future", and by combining "the realm of the profane with that of sacrality and faith, and thus the imaginaries of life and death, fatality and eternity" (Hedetoft 2008: 500).

A further important issue, underlined by Durkheim, is that initial enthusiasm and effervescence have the tendency to decline with time, creating, thus, a crisis for social cohesion and communal identity:

> The great things of the past that excited our fathers no longer arouse the same zeal among us, either because they have passed so completely into common custom that we lose awareness of them or because they no longer suit our aspirations. […] the former gods are growing old or dying, and others have not been born (Durkheim 1995: 429).

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Durkheim hopes that one day, enthusiasm will return, driven by new ideals and values. What Durkheim wrote at the beginning of the 20th century regarding the diminishing enthusiasm in the aftermath of the French Revolution, might be true when referred to the Old Continent at the start of the 21st century. Brexit and Euroscepticism in many countries call for ways in which European identity could be (re-)invented and (re-)invigorated. Ritual and narrative dimensions could be useful in building a new European societal identity in a situation where political, economic, and academic links seem to be insufficient. "Is there a European commemorative event?", ask Delanty and Rumford (Delanty/Rumford 2005: 95). Among the possible candidates, they mention the Allied landing in Normandy and the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, as commemorative events with a "cosmopolitan dimension", which transcend the nation-state. However, at the end of the day, they conclude that the EU is "relatively memory-less" and "[un]able to create powerful memories" (Delanty/Rumford 2005: 96-100). Can Ukraine's Maidan Revolution—as a tragic historical moment of struggle for European ideals and identity—become a moment in European memory, worth recognizing and celebrating?

Dymyd claims that "[t]he Europeans need an example, where freedom and dignity can be fought for not through declarations but with one's life. […] [T]he achievement of the Maidan protestors has enriched every European, who was in solidarity with these events" (Димид 2020: 158). He further suggests that Maidan revealed the primacy of freedom over individualism and consumerism, and thus provided a fresh impetus to Europe (Димид 2020: 152-153). Similarly, Hovorun, argues that Maidan, which "has 'gathered for the sake of Europe', has outgrown Europe itself" (Говорун 2014: 29). In this sense, Maidan can serve as an example to stand for values of freedom and dignity, even when they are contrary to momentary economic interests.

The doxological approaches to enhancing identity, are not unproblematic, since they can create an illusion of actual political participation (Mosse 1989: 8), or lapse into a civil religion, to which I will return later. However, the question remains of whether one can have a political community that does not celebrate and commemorate itself in one way or another.

The third lesson is *theopolitical*. We live in a world, which is re-discovering that the theological is political, and vice-versa (Smytsnyuk 2021b: 106-127). But even if we take this theopolitical reality as a given, the involvement of churches in Maidan raises questions. Is the religious dimension of Maidan a model for the post-secular age, in which fluidity between the sacred and profane, between religion and revolution, between

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martyrdom and heroism, should be embraced and promoted? Or, on the contrary, is ecclesial involvement a rudiment of religious nationalism, or ethno-phyletism, as it has developed in the Orthodox context (Kalaitzidis 2002, Leustean 2014)?

One could suggest that since political culture and social environments directly affect churches, the churches feel empowered to promote social changes. Hovorun highlights the extent to which the changes in the social imaginary brought about by Maidan, require changes within the churches themselves and the way they relate to civil society and the government (Hovorun 2015: 3-14). This resonates with Dymyd's argument that the lack of agency (and subjectivity) by the state produces a similar malaise within the churches (Димид 2020: 144). In brief, churches and the environment they live in are mutually dependent. At the same time, as Dymyd suggests, the churches' support of the Maidan protest, can be read as an implicit recognition that the values invoked during the Revolution—freedom and dignity—are Christian in their nature. I would like to push Dymyd's argument further and suggest that by supporting Maidan ideals, the churches have seen sacrality within secular narratives of dignity and freedom. Of course, the acknowledgment of sacrality within the secular realm should not be uncritical. One can see many instances of when the sacralisation of politics risked taking on the form of political idolatry or civil religion.[25] Keeping this in mind, one could argue that the churches' contribution to the political realm can be precisely through playing one critical function, namely saving the political from being a hegemonic, totalitarian force. Major Archbishop Sviatoslav (Shevchuk) has argued: "It is precisely because our Church has taught us to place only God at the centre of our lives, it has always been nation-building (*derzhavnytska*). She taught people to be free" (УГКЦ 2018). If the Christian contribution to the political will be understood in terms of protection of human freedom and awareness of the sovereignty of God—then the churches' role in nation-building can be purified from state-serving overtones that mark the Eastern Christian model of *symphonia*.[26]

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25 It is worth noting, that Durkheim does not distinguish between what we could call "transcendental" and "secular" religiosity; both are civil religions, as it were (Durkheim 1995: 215-216). On civil/political religion, in a more technical sense, see Bellah 1967, Smith 2003, Gentile/Mallett 2000. For a theological critique, see Cavanaugh 2011.

26 On *symphonia* between church and state, see the first two chapters of Papanikolaou 2012.

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Dymyd claims that Maidan demonstrated to Europe the possibility of a more fruitful relationship between churches and civil society than that which is often practiced within the Western secular framework (Димид 2020: 159). Perhaps this experience can be inspiring to churches in Europe when they attempt to play a critical and constructive role in the life of the continent. They must protect human freedom and be able to appreciate sacrality, even when it comes from secular actors.

7. Limits

Maidan's potential to become a model for European performativity and narration is of course limited. The fact that Maidan was a spontaneous moment with a tragic and deadly side, makes its replication highly undesirable. The question here, pertinent to our argument on Europe, would be whether the sacrificial aspect of Maidan can be *efficiently ritualised* within European memory, without the necessity of spilling more blood, as it were.[27] Another violent side of Maidan, besides the massacre, is that the Ukrainian revolution was used by Russia as a pretext to annex Crimea and instigate support of separatist movements in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. This has led to a bloody war, which, although currently at a low level of conflict, can explode at any moment. This development raises an important question regarding the relationship between revolution and war. One can wonder, whether the Ukrainians (who prior to Maidan had only experienced the peaceful Orange Revolution) ignored the link between revolution and war. This relationship has been explored by Hannah Arendt, who points out that there exists an "interrelationship of war and revolution, their reciprocation and mutual dependence", and that revolutions have an "ominous inclination to unleash wars" (Arendt 1990: 17-18).

This leads to the question of the possibility of identity making without this process being directed at, or at least imagined, against an "other". Carl Schmitt[28], in *The Concept of the Political*, argues that the friend/foe distinction constitutes the basis of "the political", and in fact "underlies every

27 Cf. Agamben's interpretation of Christian sacramentology, in which the *once for all* sacrifice of Christ coincides in its efficacy with the *sacramental* commemoration of this sacrifice in the liturgy (Agamben 2017b: 658ff).

28 The literature on Schmitt is extensive. For more recent engagements, see Meierhenrich/Simons 2016.

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political idea" (Schmitt 2007: 35).[29] In this sense, the political means "antithesis"[30]. The antithesis was very clear in various aspects of the Ukrainian Revolution. As Dymyd rightly claims, "Maidan opposes the 'Russian world'" (Димид 2020: 185).[31] For Ukrainians, Europe was perceived as an option (out of a series of options), as an alternative to the Russian way of doing politics.

The question regarding the crisis of European identity can be formulated as follows: Does the taken-for-grantedness of key European ideals to the average European, the so called "end of history" and the apparent absence of "others" (Delanty 2019: 308), make Europe into a depoliticised space, or a u-*topia*? The tension between Russia and the West in the winter of 2021/22, creates the impression that some EU countries do not want to take sides in the conflict, and thus avoid making Russia into the "other" in opposition to which European identity is being constructed. Some Europeans see in Islam a candidate to fill the lack of a viable oppositional identity. They use Islam to fill this gap in the oppositional identity process, hoping that this will reawaken the dormant political soul of the continent.[32]

The "othering" leads to my last point, that of "mythicization". The process of identity construction often involves the cultural essentialization of a community and border construction. If one looks at this process through the lens of a Schmittian friend/foe dichotomy, one sees that such an identity construction implies the idealisation of the "friend" and demonization of the "enemy" (Young 1999: chapter 4). I would argue that Ukrainians conceived of an idealised Europe; Europe became for them not just an alternative to injustice and corruption, but, rather, and more importantly, a *mythos*, an eschatological dream, celebrated, in an almost liturgical way, on Maidan. Moreover, Maidan itself—both in its self-presentation and in the ways it is narrated—is not immune to this idealised mythicization. Paraphrasing Brandon Gallaher, one could say that for Maidan and those

29 Arendt points out that the importance of (the idea of) an enemy for social cohesion and political unity, was already present in Rousseau (Arendt 1990: 77).

30 "Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other *antithesis* transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy" (Schmitt 2007: 37, emphasis added).

31 Cf. also Shekhovtsov, who argues that Maidan, *among other things*, was "a nationalist uprising against Russia's destructive influence on Ukraine and a national revolution against the Kremlin's imperialism; […] [and] a revolution against the persistent spirit of Sovietism" (Shekhovtsov 2013).

32 Cf. Doyle 2013. For a Schmittian reading of the opposition to Islam in Europe, see Derrida 2005: 88ff.

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who supported it, Europe has represented an ideal, capable of inspiring a renewal of Ukraine, while Russia (which was backing Yanukovych) stood for a demonic virus, meant to destroy Ukraine both from within and outside.[33] Along similar lines, Hundorova reads Maidan as an eschatological and apocalyptical event, "the clash between Good and Evil" (Hundorova 2017: 167).

By saying that for Ukrainians Europe is a *mythos*, I do not merely mean that many Ukrainians have not been exposed to a European style of life and worldview in a robust way, but that declarative adherence to European values coexists with ingrained corruption, occasional expressions of xenophobia, Russophobia, anti-Semitism, and negative attitudes towards LGBT+ people (Mierzejewski-Voznyak 2018: 608-629, Shevtsova 2020: 500-510).[34] Maidan itself, however, was an inclusive place where the protest was joined by people of various nationalities.[35]

Although the churches in Ukraine have been critical of certain liberal tendencies in the West, most of them gave their unconditional support to both the Maidan protest and the European integration of Ukraine. There is an interesting contrast with Russia here. While for Ukrainian churches, Europe's liberalism is a "collateral issue", in spite of which European integration should be supported, for Russia it (liberalism) became a pretext to argue for the need for an alternative, to the European, ways of conceiving of state and society.[36]

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33 Gallaher refers to *mythos* when speaking of the critique of the West by 'traditional Orthodoxy'. He reads this polemic as a narration of *mythos*, in which the 'West' stands for "a sort of ontological-cum-spiritual virus", while the 'East' represents "a sort of idyll of a lost political, liturgical and ontological paradise which inspires us to renew our world" (Gallaher 2018: 211-214).

34 In chapter 6, Shevtsova points out how right-wing Ukrainian movements—which gained popularity thanks to Maidan, and their sharp opposition to Russia—on many issues use the same rhetoric as Russia does. Cfr. also Smytsnyuk 2021a: 249-266.

35 Maidan is sometimes considered as a nationalistic and xenophobic movement. This narrative—promoted by Russia (Fedor, et al. 2017: chapters 1, 4 and 12)—is inaccurate in so far as it presents the marginal presence of nationalists and neo-Nazis at Maidan as the core driving force of the uprising. On the role of the Ukrainian radical right in the revolution, see Shekhovtsov 2015: 216-237, Yekelchyk 2015: 104-107. Even scholars critical of Maidan, as e.g. Risch, recognize that the right-wing movements represented a minority there (Risch 2021: 129-157).

36 In the discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church, Europe is often perceived as the mirror opposite of Russia. In a 2006 speech the then Metropolitan Kirill (Gundiaev) said: "An important factor influencing the development of Russian civilization remains its relations with the West. […] The Orthodox tradition,

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Paradoxically, however, both Ukrainian pro-Europeanism and Russian anti-Europeanism are *mythical*. While for Ukrainian Christians, Europe is viewed as an ethical, and quasi-Christian force (the latter is clearly visible from Dymyd's account, cited earlier), the Russian Orthodox Church proposes a very different narrative. To a large extent, the Ukrainian mythos of idealised Europe constitutes the opposite of the Russian *mythos* of a demonic Europe.

Dymyd rightly claims that the declaration of adherence to European values by the Yanukovych government was a "simulation (*imitatsiya*)" (Димид 2020: 147). One could wonder to what extent those who fought against Yanukovych were immune to this simulation, and whether the latter conditions the whole post-Maidan period. Having said this, however, it is impossible not to acknowledge the progress, which Ukrainian society has undergone due to Maidan, and which never would have been possible had Yanukovych remained in power. Although one could wonder whether Ukraine has fully availed itself of the chance provided by the Revolution of Dignity, it was an important step forward: it has stimulated an incredible development of civil society, volunteering, and ecumenical relations.[37] It has enhanced the European trajectory of Ukraine's political development.

At a symbolic level, Maidan has constituted a tragic celebration of European values, and with its doxological and narrative dimensions, it offers important points of reflection in the debates on Europe.

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which is culturally forming for Russian civilization, cannot but respond to this challenge, otherwise the Russian world will become a marginal phenomenon in the modern world" (Гундяев 2006). Kirill speaks of the West, but the examples of "Western civilization", cited by Kirill in his speech, are European. The Western worldview is described by Kirill as based on egoism and individualism. On the contrary, "Orthodoxy has always promoted sacrificial love towards one's neighbours, i.e. towards one's family and the Motherland". While this statement on the West refers to an empirical (yet caricaturised) situation, the statement about Orthodoxy speaks of an ideal—which makes the entire argument logically incoherent, or *mythical*, at best.

37 Hovorun 2015: 3-14, Soloviy 2020: 290-292, Рудейко 2018: 202, Димид 2020: 84-85, 119-120, 181-189. Kalenychenko laments that feelings of ecumenical solidarity during Maidan were "short-lived" (Kalenychenko 2017: 32).

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