

# Epiphany between the Barricades

## The Ukrainian *Maidan* as a Sacred Space

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. A civil uprising and its bloody end

On the evening of February 21, 2014, Independence Square (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*) in Kiev was flooded with an angry crowd. During the day and the night before, snipers, hidden on the roofs of buildings, had bloodily ended the civil uprising that had lasted for three months. In the morning, dead bodies were laid side by side in the lobby of Hotel Ukraina. Over a hundred people were killed. Churches close to the square (the Orthodox Sv Mykhailivsky Cathedral and monastery, and the Lutheran St. Katharina Kirche<sup>1</sup>) were transformed into hospitals and shelters where the injured were given first aid. Smoke of burnt tires hung over the square. The burnt-down tents and the fumigated Trade Union Building, headquarters of the demonstrators, offered a macabre picture. That night, the people gathered on the *Maidan* to share their shock, anger and grief. Everything could be watched via live stream through the independent Ukrainian internet channels *Espresso TV* and *Hromadske TV*.

The uprising had begun with the unexpected refusal of President Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, scheduled for November 21, 2013, during the EU summit in Vilnius. His rejection gave rise to a protest movement that was unique for twenty-first century Europe in its size and character. The students who took the initiative called their protest '*Euromaidan*', after the central square of Kiev where the core of the protest was located. Rapidly, the protest expanded into a mass movement that included all generations and social layers of the population.<sup>2</sup> A key

<sup>1</sup> Church building of the German Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Ukraine (DELKU), close to the Presidential Administration.

<sup>2</sup> A. CHEBOTARIOVA: 'Voices of resistance and hope': On the motivations and expectations of Euromaidaners', in D.R. MARPLES & F.V. MILLS (eds.): *Ukraine's Euromaidan. Analyses of a Civil Revolution* (Stuttgart 2015) 163-176. In February 2014, the socio-demographic profile of protesters is as follows: people in the age of 18-29: 33.2%; 30-54: 56%; 55 and older: 10.8%. A majority of protesters were well-educated people, while skilled specialists with higher education were the biggest professional group. The presence of entrepreneurs (17.4%) and workers/service-sector employers (19.4%) had increased significantly since December 2013. The regional differentiation: Western Ukraine: 54.8%; Central and Northern Ukraine: 23%; Eastern and Southern Ukraine: 21%. See the statistics in CHEBOTARIOVA, 165-166.

moment was the beating of the students in the night of November 30 by the *Berkut*, the riot police. The excessive violence against peaceful protesters aroused wide public indignation and changed the nature of the protest. The original pro-European Union protest transformed into an anti-governmental uprising that united people with often contradictory ideological and political views.<sup>3</sup> The resignation of the president and a structural reform of the corrupt system became the main goal of the protesters. A renewed patriotic mood prevailed amongst them. “We looked for Europe and we found Ukraine,” became a popular saying.<sup>4</sup> From there on, the movement of *Euromaidan* was ever more simply called ‘*Maidan*’. In icy temperatures, protesters persevered between the barricades that closed off the very center of Kiev. Several times, the armed police force, backed by military, tried to break the protest and attacked the square, while protesters, organized in squads, defended themselves with sticks, rods, stones, shields and Molotov cocktails. The final clashes took place on February 18-21, 2014. That evening after the crushing of the revolt, the gathering on the square turned into a collective mourning ritual.

In this article I address the following question: in what sense can the protest space of *Maidan* be interpreted as a sacred space, and what role did liturgical rituals play in the transformation into a sacred space? I will focus on the specific case of the ritualized collective mourning on the evening of February 21, 2014, while including the role of rituals, prayer, religious symbols, clergy, tent chapels, and church buildings in the months before.

## 1.2. Auto-ethnographic excursus

A month before the bloody end, on January 25-26, I was physically present in the *Maidan* protest zone. I witnessed the diversity of the people (men and women, of all generations, from all strata of society, from the Ukrainian-speaking west and the Russian-speaking center and east of the country). I saw the tent camp, the field kitchens, the barricades, the way *Maidan* was organized logistically. I was amazed about the outfits of protesters with all kind of creative helmets and shields, and felt a bit uncomfortable at the sight of well-trained men in paramilitary uniforms, wearing black balaclavas and carrying iron rods. I smelled the smoke of burning tires, and heard the hypnotizing sound of rhythmical beating on oil drums right behind the barricades. From nearby I could see the armed forces arranged in line. I visited the tent chapels on the square, both the Catholic/Orthodox and the interdenominational Protestant one. On Sunday morning, in the open air, I attended the prayer service led by priests on the central stage. A couple of my students from the Catholic University in Lviv guided me through the *Maidan* space and shared their hopes, fears and thoughts

<sup>3</sup> CHEBOTARIOVA: ‘Voices of Resistance and Hope’ 170-172.

<sup>4</sup> N. OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the square: the real and symbolic landscapes of the Euromaidan’, in MARPLES & MILLS: *Ukraine’s Euromaidan* 147-161.

with me. This was my real live framework and my sensory memories when a month later I watched the events online on the evening of February 21.

## 2. Methodological reflections

In this article, I will investigate the emergence of the Ukrainian *Maidan* as a sacred space, primarily focusing on the mourning ritual on the evening of February 21, 2014. I will analyze and interpret the character of *Maidan* as a sacred space using theoretical approaches and concepts from the field of liturgical ritual studies. The proposed analysis is inspired by the ‘spatial approach’, a theoretical avenue that is based on the assumption of “the production of space” (Lefebvre).<sup>5</sup> The guiding concepts for my analysis are a constructivist and a-centric understanding of the ‘sacred’, and the understanding of liturgical ritual space as a liminal space (see below).

For the case study of the collective mourning ritual on the square, I make use of various resources, ranging from internet materials, interviews with some key persons and participants in the events, as well as published and not yet published scholarly reflections on the social, political, and religious dimensions of the *Maidan* protest movement. My participant observation can be called indirect, mediated through livestream television channels, yet informed by own personal observations and sensory experiences at the spot less than a month before. In my approach, I try to balance the information from the wide range of resources, giving voice to multiple perspectives while reconstructing the social and liturgical ritual dynamics of that evening.

## 3. Description of the case

On Friday evening 21 February 2014, I was watching the events on *Maidan* through the livestream of *Espresso TV*. In front of the packed crowd, politicians of the opposition parties appeared on stage. During the outbreak of violence, they had negotiated with representatives of the Yanukovych government, the EU and Russia. They came on stage to present the result of the negotiations, a political compromise between the opponents. Behind them stood a line of priests of different churches of Ukraine.

The most popular of the politicians – and certainly the most courageous –, boxing champion Vitaliy Klitchko, took the microphone to address the crowd. He didn’t come through, the people jeered at him. They yelled: “Down with the gang”.<sup>6</sup> Suddenly an activist of the Right Sector (*Pravyi Sektor*), Volodymyr Parshuk, came in camouflage uniform on stage, grabbed the microphone, and,

<sup>5</sup> H. LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* (Malden 2004).

<sup>6</sup> “Банда Геть”, by which they meant the Yanukovych gang with its criminal activities.

surrounded by comrades with balaclavas. He loudly and clearly announced that Yanukovych had to resign immediately, and if not “we would know where to find him”. In the tumult several priests went to the microphone to try to calm down the people, but unsuccessfully. The chaos and anger reached a boiling point.

In a next moment the camera captured how, through the tightly packed crowd, a coffin was moved forward. An open coffin containing the body of a young man with a white bandage around his head. Friends carried the coffin forward and put it right in front of the stage. Another coffin came, and yet one more, almost as an indictment against the politicians: ‘What more evidence do you need?’



**Illustration 1:** From left to right the politicians Petro Poroshenko, Yuri Lutsenko, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitaliy Klitschko, and the second to last in the row Oleh Tiahnybok<sup>7</sup>

The confusion on the stage now was complete. At that moment, as I was told later,<sup>8</sup> one of the priests said to the others: “Let us pray”. And in a small group they stepped forward and began reciting the Our Father. Instantly a calm descended on the square. People took off their helmets, many joined in the prayers, with tear filled eyes.

<sup>7</sup> [http://rian.com.ua/photolents/20140222/340277043\\_340275946.html](http://rian.com.ua/photolents/20140222/340277043_340275946.html) [accessed October 24, 2016]. Picture taken by Andrey Stenin, RIA Novosti Ukraina. Printed with permission.

<sup>8</sup> Interview by Heleen Zorgdrager with Fr. Vasyl Rudeyko, Lviv, May 4, 2015. The interview was taken in German language.

Then, on the stage, one by one the politicians knelt down, Vitaliy Klitschko as the last. They remained on their knees for minutes, and have not spoken anymore.<sup>9</sup>

My colleague from the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Fr. Vasyl Rudeyko, was one of the priests that night on stage. During all these months he had been present on *Maidan*. He had ministered as a pastor for those at the barricades and for the wounded, but he was not prepared for this confrontation. He told me:

First the politicians were booed and then the priests were booed. Most of us tried to calm down, but there was also a priest who said: "Now we must take action." You know, there were people with weapons on the square, Afghanistan veterans and others. It could get completely out of hand. Then I came to the microphone, and said: "We have persevered so long, let's not spoil it by shedding more blood." But they shouted "down with you". Then we discussed as priests: "What shall we do, what shall we do?" Someone said: "Let us pray, there's nothing else left."

In Ukrainian tradition, the first prayer for the dead, the *Panikhida*, is recited where the dead body is. In this case that was on the square. Already during the first funeral prayer there was total tranquility. For me, it was like a cross experience. The people who had first shouted: "away with him", were now completely silent. We continued all night with prayers for the dead. All the time new coffins came forward. Every half an hour a memorial service was conducted. It went on until the next morning 8 o'clock. Then there were only thirty people left in the square, and from the ten priests, I had remained as the only one.<sup>10</sup>

In the collective mourning ritual not only traditional Orthodox prayers were performed. Time and again the folksong *Plyve Kacha* ("the duckling swims on the river Tysyn") sounded through the speakers.<sup>11</sup> It is a moving lament. The song is about a young soldier going off to fight in foreign wars, having a dialogue with his mother saying "My dear mother, what will happen to me if I die in a foreign land?" and she tells him "Well, my dearest, you will be buried by other people." In the public space of *Maidan* people and clergy together performed their own hybrid liturgy of mourning.

<sup>9</sup> A video impression of this event can be watched on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgKo84kHVfg> [accessed June 20, 2016]. The music in the video is the song "*Plyve kacha po Tysyn*" ("The duckling swims on the river Tysyn").

<sup>10</sup> Interview by Heleen Zorgdrager with Vasyl Rudeyko in Lviv, May 4, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> See for the story of *Plyve Kacha* <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-04-16/old-ukrainian-folk-song-takes-new-meaning-current-crisis>. The song was recorded by the vocal *a capella* group Pikkardiyska Tertsia.

#### 4. Spatial approaches to *Maidan*

*Maidan* is a space with manifold dimensions.<sup>12</sup> First, it is shorthand for the concrete geographical space, the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* in the center of Kiev. The word ‘*maidan*’ itself has Arabic origins (from ‘*medina*’) and its first meaning is an urban space, a public square. “It is part of an urban landscape localized in the physical space of a concrete city.”<sup>13</sup>

*Maidan*, however, is much more than a name of a concrete place. It is also a symbolic landscape, a space with the characteristics of geographical location, but also with an investment of cultural and social meanings and values. The Independence Square in Kiev was already a constructed symbolic space saturated with collective memory. It is a landmark of historical continuity for Ukrainian political desires. All recent uprisings took place on *Maidan*. In 1990, it was the location of the students’ hunger strike to gain independence for Ukraine, called the Revolution on Granite. It was a center for the “Ukraine without Kuchma” actions in 2000-2001. And, probably most prominently in personal and collective memory, it was the heart of the Orange Revolution in 2004. For many Ukrainians, the Orange Revolution became a crucial historic-biographical experience that was a constant reference point for participants of *Euromaidan*. According to surveys conducted by the Center for Urban History in Lviv, approximately 62% of *Maidan* protesters had taken part in the civil protest of 2004.<sup>14</sup>

People stressed the historic continuity and illustrated it with their personal memories. As sociologist Maurice Halbwachs had stated: memory is socially contextualized. Individual memory can only be recalled within a social framework and needs the support of the group, which limits space and time for the totality of past events.<sup>15</sup> *Maidan* was a valuable marker for collective memory. It was a powerful *lieu de mémoire*, a place of remembrance containing visions for the future.

At the same time, participants emphasized the uniqueness of *Euromaidan*. The surveys disclose that there was a feeling of exceptionalism, and a perception of the conflict as a ‘now or never’ struggle. People described the special atmosphere of the place with words like ‘energy’, ‘spirit’, ‘aura’. “Probably there is some energy that works [here] which is not felt physically, but it makes people

<sup>12</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’; R. CYBRIWSKYA: ‘Kyiv’s Maidan: from Duma Square to sacred space’, in *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 55/3 (2014) 270-285. Special Issue: Ukrainian political crisis 2013-2014.

<sup>13</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 147.

<sup>14</sup> CHEBOTARIOVA: ‘Voices of Resistance and Hope’ 173. Surveys conducted in the framework of the research project ‘Voices of Resistance and Hope: Kyiv-Lviv-Kharkiv’, December 2013 - February 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Otrishchenko referring to Halbwachs in ‘Beyond the Square’ 149; M. HALBWACHS: *On Collective Memory* (Chicago 1992).

go back to these places.”<sup>16</sup> As sociologist Natalia Otrishchenko comments in her analysis of *Maidan* as a real and symbolic landscape: “The Square turned into a *sacred place* in a very personal and mystic way.”<sup>17</sup> She does not further analyze the notion of sacred, but, following explanations of the participant, connects it to religious justifications of the ‘saving’ role of church buildings. The Orthodox Sv Mykhailivsky monastery opened its doors as shelter for fleeing and wounded protesters during nightly clashes with the *Berkut*. The church space was considered “under the wing of God.”<sup>18</sup>

*Maidan* as a geographically defined place exceeded the borders of Independence Square. Also greater parts of Khreshchatyk Street, Institutska Street and Hrushevskiy Street belonged to the occupied protest zone. People lived in tents and public buildings for up to three months. Facilities like field kitchens, medical centers, tent chapels, and information centers were established. There was a feeling of closeness and safety that people usually associate with home. The public space of *Maidan* was privatized. *Maidan* was experienced as a domestic space.<sup>19</sup>

From a very different angle, *Maidan* was also a digital space.<sup>20</sup> Through live streams, people from elsewhere in Lviv, Warsaw, Ontario, or Amsterdam could feel connected, could be exposed to the visible and symbolic landscape of *Maidan*, and could attribute their own meanings and values to the space.

Above all, *Maidan* as a symbolic landscape refers to a group of people with similar ideas, values, and expectations.<sup>21</sup> It became a synonym for the social movement of change in Ukraine. One could take part in *Maidan* without physically being on *Maidan*. *Maidan* transformed into a state of mind, a sense of self, an idea of protest, freedom, independence, self-determination, dignity. As a 40-year old man said: “The tents of *Maidan* will go home. But *Maidan* as a state of mind will continue until the destruction of the current system of power.”<sup>22</sup> A new system of values was created, which redefined existing spaces and places. Otrishchenko acknowledges how this also applied to the church buildings. Within the renewed framework of values, the perception of, for instance, Sv Mykhailivsky cathedral and monastery (Kiev Patriarchate) transformed from the merely historic or decorative role of the building to a consecrated meaning of the space because of the engagement of the abbot and monks in giving shel-

<sup>16</sup> Interview with 56-year old man, quoted by Otrishchenko, 151.

<sup>17</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 151.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 152-153.

<sup>20</sup> Compare OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 153.

<sup>21</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 155.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 156.

ter to the wounded and caring for the funeral of the first victims in January, 2014.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. *Maidan* as a sacred space

From the early beginnings, clergy of Ukrainian churches supported the *Euro-maidan* protest movement with their pastoral, moral and liturgical presence.<sup>24</sup> Priests, monks and nuns of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church were to be found among the first people on the square. They established a tent chapel and started to hold prayer services there. Soon, religious representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate and of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church followed and shared the prayer tent with the Greek-Catholics. After some hesitation, young intellectual leaders, among them several pastors of the traditionally apolitical evangelical Protestant churches also became visible and active on *Maidan*. Protestants set up a second interdenominational prayer tent, like the first one welcoming believers of all confessions. Joint ecumenical prayers were organized on the main stage, on the initiative of lay people. It became a custom to recite the Our Father every hour. On several occasions, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders joined the stage for supportive declarations. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate opted for a neutral position, but some of its monks and priests were present on the square, as were many of its believers. During violent nightly clashes with the riot police on December 10-11, January 19-22 and February 18-21, the prayers on stage intensified, and the bells of Sv Mykhailivsky Cathedral rang all night, giving alarm and calling the people to defense, just as in the Middle Ages.

Religious symbols were present everywhere on the square. Icons and crosses were in the hands of monks and priests, but also of ordinary people – often women – who tried to seek an end to the violence acting as a human shield between the armed police and the protesters. The stage was decorated with icons, banners with religious symbols, and crosses, side by side with the Ukrain-

<sup>23</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: 'Beyond the Square' 157.

<sup>24</sup> Ukrainian books on the role of the churches on Maidan: Майдан і Церква. Хроніка подій та експертна оцінка. / За заг. ред. Филипович Л.О. і Горкуші О.В. – К.: Самміт-Книга, 2014 [L.O. FILIPOVYCH & O.V. HORKUSHI: *Maidan and the Church: chronicle of events and expert evaluation* (Kiev 2014)]; Гордеев А. Церковь на Майдане. – К.: Изд-во "Книгоноша", 2015 [A. HORDEEV: *Church on Maidan* (Kiev 2015)]. Other key publications: С. HOVORUN: 'Churches in the Ukrainian Public Square', in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31/1 (2015) 3-14; Themenheft Ukraine. 'Religionsgemeinschaften nach dem Majdan', in *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 43/2 (2015) [thematic issue on Ukrainian religious communities after Maidan]; J.T. SEARLE & M.N. CHERENKOV: *A future and a hope: mission, theological education, and the transformation of post-Soviet society* (Eugene 2014); А. МЫХАЛЕЙКО: 'Gott auf dem Majdan', in *Sonderausgabe ContoCor* 17 (2015).

ian flag and other national symbols. The prayer tents were naturally recognizable as religious places by icons and/or crosses on the outside. For many people the *Berehynia*, the angel-like figurine of a woman with guilder-rose branch in her arms high on top of the Independence Monument on *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, became a symbol of heavenly protection.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the religious places can be defined as fragmented spaces: symbolic meanings are being attributed to these places, sites, objects, artifacts.<sup>26</sup> They distinguish them from the surrounding area; yet for particular groups of people these fragmented spaces can become generalized images associated with the entire location. Different groups invest their own meanings into the whole by preference of a specific fragmented space. Religious people might say that “the Church was (everywhere) on *Maidan*”, while for others this presence was only marginal or topical, just a fragment in the wider space.

In the self-perception of the churches, they felt to be called to the *Maidan*, “because the Church must be there where the people are”, and because the churches recognized the values that were defended on *Maidan* as Christian values.<sup>27</sup> Many could agree with Bishop Borys Gudziak (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) who characterized the *Maidan* movement as a “Revolution of Dignity”:

In a nutshell, it was a pilgrimage from fear to dignity. After the experiences of the twentieth century, two World Wars, the Soviet Union, the worst kinds of persecution with fifteen maybe seventeen million people killed, [...] after twenty years of independence and openness to the outside world, Ukrainians began dropping their fear. They were claiming their human, God given dignity. That is the essence of the *Maidan* and what is continuing to happen now.<sup>28</sup>

Such characterizations of prominent religious leaders were very powerful in shaping *Maidan* as a symbolic landscape. In a country where about 70% of the population identifies as religious and where churches enjoy a high trust among the citizens,<sup>29</sup> interpretations of *Maidan* as essentially a moral, spiritual revolution are rather likely to be embraced.

<sup>25</sup> OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 153. The Monument of Independence is popularly called the Stella. The Berehynia is a mythical female character from Ukrainian folk tales, a kind of mother goddess.

<sup>26</sup> See for the concepts of fragmented spaces and solid entity: OTRISHCHENKO: ‘Beyond the Square’ 153-155.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance HOVORUN: ‘Churches in the Ukrainian Public Square’; Themenheft Ukraine. ‘Religionsgemeinschaften nach dem Majdan’; SEARLE & CHERENKOV: *A future and a hope*.

<sup>28</sup> Interview by Frans Hoppenbrouwers with Bishop Borys Gudziak, June 11, 2014. <http://ucu.edu.ua/eng/digest/3225/> [accessed June 22, 2016].

<sup>29</sup> According to a poll on public trust conducted in May 2016 by the Razumkov Centre in Kiev, Ukrainians mostly trust volunteer organizations (trusted by 63.7% of respondents) and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (61.8%). They have taken over the lead from

Plural Confessional Landscape of Ukraine	
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate	15.0 %
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate	25.0 %
Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church	1.8 %
“Just an Orthodox believer”	21.2 %
“I don’t know (which patriarchate)”	2.0 %
Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church	6.5 %
Roman-Catholic Church	1.0 %
Protestant Churches: Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Reformed (Hungarian & Ukrainian), Charismatic, Seventh-Day Adventist, Methodist	1.9 %
“Just Christian”	7.1 %
Islam (Crimean Tatars)	1.1 %
Judaism	0.2 %

**Table 1:** Religious self-identification of Ukrainian population [Source: Razumkov Center Kiev, national survey March 2016]<sup>30</sup>

## 6. Theoretical perspectives

In ritual studies since the 1990s, the concept of sacred space is reconsidered within the broader context of ritual and religious dynamics and what is called the ‘spatial turn’.<sup>31</sup> Sacred spaces came to be understood as contested fields that also involve contested grounds. The contested places/spaces where identities, appropriations, and ownerships are being negotiated, are an arena of conflict. To understand these dynamics on *Maidan*, the interaction of places/spaces, ideas and representations, and practices should be analyzed and interpreted in a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, including social sciences, cul-

churches, which were until March 2015 still the most trusted institution (66.2%), and now follow as third with a trust of 60.5%.

[http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/poll.php?poll\\_id=1030](http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/poll.php?poll_id=1030) [accessed June 22, 2016].

<sup>30</sup> Results of the survey are published in *РЕЛИГІЯ, ЦЕРКВА, СУСПІЛЬСТВО І ДЕРЖАВА: ДВА РОКИ ПІСЛЯ МАЙДАНУ* (Religion, Church, Society and State: Two Years after Maidan, Kiev 2016), on the website of the Razumkov Centre ([www.razumkov.org.ua](http://www.razumkov.org.ua)). There are no reliable statistics on church affiliations in Ukraine. Official statistics only present data about the number of parishes and religious organizations of the different denominations, not about the number of believers.

<sup>31</sup> P. POST, P. NELL & W. VAN BEEK: *Sacred spaces and contested identities. Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton 2014) 1-7.

ture studies, cultural geography, architectural studies, and ritual and religious studies.

In my approach, I draw on the theoretical perspectives of Post, Nell and Van Beek (2014) who propose not to define the 'sacred' beforehand, but to work with a "taxonomy of the sacred domain",<sup>32</sup> not so much a precise description of the sacred dimension but rather the broad range that a taxonomy, a way of grouping things together, can bring within our reach. This approach to the sacred domain includes religion connected to tradition as much as a broad sacrality, what people usually call spirituality. It acknowledges that religion is in a complex transformation process in contemporary society and culture, and new locations of sacrality, religiosity and worship are being constructed and appropriated constantly in never-ending dynamics. In liturgical-ritual studies it is emphasized that only an a-centric perspective can account for that, not a reference to a specific center, a typical standard, nor a normative original of religious tradition.<sup>33</sup>

I will further draw on the theoretical concept of 'liturgical ritual space' introduced by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014). They propose to conceive of liturgical ritual space as a fourth dimension of space.<sup>34</sup> Social studies in the footsteps of thinkers such as Lefebvre and Soja have distinguished three dimensions of space: the first space, which can be geographically mapped; the second space, which is the imagined, idealized space (the symbolic landscape); and the third space, which is the immediate, actual environment in which people live and move from day to day, which is expressed with personal items, or aesthetically decorated with cultural markers or communal arrangements.<sup>35</sup> The fourth space which the liturgical-ritual scholars would like to add, is the liturgical ritual space.

The liturgical ritual space responds to the second, imaginary space, but exceeds it. It exceeds it in such a way that one not only visualizes it as a symbolic landscape, but one already participates in it. The authors compare it to the celebration of the Eucharist: "The transcending reality really enters your immanent reality – not so that you are in control of it, but rather believe in it in anticipation."<sup>36</sup> The fourth space incorporates the physical and existential space (the

<sup>32</sup> POST, NELL & VAN BEEK: *Sacred spaces and contested identities* 4.

<sup>33</sup> POST, NELL & VAN BEEK: *Sacred spaces and contested identities* 6; M. BARNARD, J. CILLIERS & C. WEPENER: *Worship in the network culture: liturgical ritual studies. Fields and methods, concepts and metaphors* (Leuven 2014) 38-39. Reference here to M. BARNARD & P. POST: 'Balance and perspective: some critical observations regarding the historiography of the era of the Liturgical Movement in the Netherlands', in L. VAN TONGEREN, M. BARNARD, P. POST & G. ROUWHORST (eds.): *Patterns and persons. A historiography of Liturgical Studies in the Netherlands in the twentieth century* (= Liturgia condenda 25) (Leuven / Paris / Walpole 2010) 469-485.

<sup>34</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 296.

<sup>35</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 294.

<sup>36</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 296.

first and third space) as well, but wants to transform and transcend these spaces into second and fourth spaces so that they become imaginative and anticipatory places.<sup>37</sup>

The authors point out that the liturgical-ritual space is always a liminal space. A sacred space bears the hallmarks of a liminal space, full of ambiguity and indeterminacy of quality:

It represents a creative space and place where the combination of new forms and relationships is possible. It is a space of new revelations and transformations, of life and death, of hope and resurrection. The borders of these spaces are porous on all sides.<sup>38</sup>

Important for our approach to the *Maidan* as a liturgical-ritual space is the social meaning and impact that should be attributed to the fourth dimension of space. Alternative forms of human interrelatedness come into existence. Liminality and structured society presuppose each other. Alternative *communitates* are shaped that challenge the existing society and its organization.

## 7. *Maidan* as space of a new holy beginning

Amongst the *Maidan* participants, one experience stood out especially. In many ways, they bore witness to an overwhelming sense of community. They felt it to be the emergence of a new Ukraine. Student Nina, 22 years-old, from Lviv, talks about her *Maidan* experience:

There were people from all parts of Ukraine. The collaboration was fantastic. It didn't matter what language you spoke. People did not think about themselves but about the other. They were willing to sacrifice their lives, so strong was the sense of community.<sup>39</sup>

Her friend Ulyana, 23-years old, adds: "*Maidan* was like a big church in the open air. We were able to breathe in that open air. That was the Holy Spirit."<sup>40</sup>

Vasyl Rudeyko, who is a specialist in Liturgical Studies, speaks of "the spirit of liturgy" on *Maidan*.<sup>41</sup> He clarifies that everything was embedded in tones of

<sup>37</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 297.

<sup>38</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 300. On the concept of liminality see also 67-81.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews by Heleen Zorgdrager with students of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, on March 26 and 28, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> IDEM.

<sup>41</sup> V. RUDEYKO: 'Christians on the Maidan were brought there by the Holy Spirit', Ukrainian Catholic University <http://ucu.edu.ua/eng/news/2474/>; Interview by Natalia Lech with Vasyl Rudeyko, May 2014, in *Chrystyany i Svit*.

liturgy, through constant prayer and worship. According to him, the liturgy did not only begin where the priests were leading the prayer services or the Eucharist was celebrated. *Maidan* itself was a celebration of Eucharist. This was true on a very practical level. People came from their villages and brought food, clothing and blankets to the square. The food was prepared in soup kitchens by dedicated volunteers and freely distributed to all who needed. As Nina said, the willingness to sacrifice (your goods, your talents, your time and energy, eventually your life) was rooted in a deep sense of community, “I for you” and “you for me”. People were present, most of them with nothing more than their embodied lives, among many other vulnerable others on the square. The readiness to sacrifice intensified after the first casualties had occurred, and contributed substantially to the experience of *Maidan* as a sacred space.<sup>42</sup> The concrete experiences of the sharing of food and drink, friendship and care, fear and hope, compassion and courage, were so to speak not imperialistically ‘Christianized’ in the liturgical-ritual moments of prayer and Eucharist, but they were being recognized as authentic elements of the liturgical-ritual practice itself. They were identified, celebrated, and highlighted in their sacramental significance: through ordinary experiences a divine presence was felt, encountered and endorsed. In such a sense, worship on *Maidan* was a truly liminal event.

Rudeyko terms his *Maidan* experience a “field of experience [*Erlebnisfeld*] for what I believe.”<sup>43</sup> By this, he means that the Christian faith became experientially felt in the immediate present. “You learned to pray just as Christ has taught you and you helped one another just as Christ has commanded.”<sup>44</sup> Here, Rudeyko touches upon the ‘here and now’ dimension of liturgical ritual time. The transcendent reality already enters into the immanent reality, and is anticipated in participation.

To describe this event where time and space coalesce, Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener quote Friedland and Hecht:

Central places, holy places, sacred places, memory places are those in which time is concentrated, thickened. They are places where the beginning of time presses into the present and the present bleeds into the end of time. Beginning and end are there, but central places, holy places, sacred places, and memory places are intensely present.<sup>45</sup>

<http://www.xic.com.ua/z-zhyttja/11-intervju/294-qzavdannja-cerkvy-svidchytty-istynu-i-cogo-namagalysja-dotrymuvatysja-svjashchenyky-na-majdaniq-o-vasyl-rudejko> [accessed June 20, 2016].

<sup>42</sup> An indication for this is that the barricades, where most casualties occurred, were increasingly considered the most sacred places, guarded with special rules. Women were prohibited to enter this area, similar to their exclusion from the altar space in Orthodox churches.

<sup>43</sup> Interview by Heleen Zorgdrager with Vasyl Rudeyko in Lviv, May 4, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> IDEM.

<sup>45</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 289.

Rudeyko and the students testify to this intense presence on the sacred space of *Maidan*. The place became an atmosphere of imagination and anticipation, of new revelations of alternative forms of human interrelatedness. Student Ulyana had been deeply impressed by an incident that she witnessed at the Mariinsky Park, one of the places where protesters and riot police opposed each other. A woman had bravely walked up to the *Berkut* and lifted the front of the helmet of one of the heavily armed men. Ulyana told how she saw the eyes of the young man, she saw the fear in his eyes, and immediately felt compassion. It was a lesson for her: "I learned to see God in bad people, in dark souls. I felt I had to change, that we all have to change."<sup>46</sup> The experience of transformation which she describes here, could be termed the experience of encountering and welcoming the 'epiphanic space' of the other person.<sup>47</sup> God's salvific and liberating presence is disclosed through the face-to-face encounter with the foreigner, the strange other, even the enemy. This is just one example of how participants came to witness the historic moment, the 'here and now' character of *Maidan*, as an epiphany, a manifestation of the divine presence in history.<sup>48</sup>

Theologically we could call such encounters, with a key concept of Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 'places of redemption' or 'places to appear' (derived from Hannah Arendt).<sup>49</sup> Redemption occurs where people come together, where for the first time a genuine public space is created in which people can fully see, recognize and honor one another. This brings about a change of attitude, that breaks with condemnation and discrimination, and in this transformation, as McClintock Fulkerson concludes from qualitative fieldwork in congregations, a transcendent power of liberation may be experienced.

In many stories of *Maidan*, such spaces become visible, where people appear to one another as public persons, accountable and responsible, and dependent on each other's grace. In a religious sense, this refers to the experience of conversion, being the liberation from bondage to attitudes of hatred, hostility, cynicism, to a sense of communality and trust, by unexpected, disrupting confrontations that are viscerally experienced and urge an overall reconfiguration of values and meanings. A person's spiritual autobiography is profoundly displaced and needs re-scripting. The 'places to appear' thus can become spaces of a new holy beginning. I use the word 'holy' here as different from 'sacred' in the sense

<sup>46</sup> Interviews by Heleen Zorgdrager with students of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, on March 26 and 28, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> The term 'epiphanic space' is coined in the empirical hermeneutics of H. DE WIT: "My God," she said, 'ships make me so crazy.' Empirical reflections on hermeneutics, interculturality, and Holy Scripture". Inaugural address at the VU University of Amsterdam, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> On epiphany as 'a point of revelation' with respect to the Eucharist, see BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 290-291.

<sup>49</sup> M. MCCLINTOCK FULKERSON: 'Interpreting a Situation: When is 'Empirical' also 'Theological'?' In P. WARD (eds.): *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography* (Grand Rapids 2012) 124-144.

that holiness refers more to a quality, an inner attitude in the person, whereas the taxonomy of the 'sacred' aims to distinguish something from the 'worldly' or 'profane' realm.

In such and similar ways, ordinary people in their openness, creativity and perseverance went ahead of the *Maidan* movement; the representatives (clergy) of the church followed. For a moment, the churches forgot about their inclination to self-perseverance and were looking for unprecedented opportunities that might disclose themselves in the middle of life. In the words of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965): "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the human beings of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."<sup>50</sup>

The church and its worship decentered and became mobile. The space for the encounter with God was the public square, and on that square it was a fluid and flexible presence in a tent or on a stage in the open air, between artists, activists, and politicians. Rituals such as the Eucharist, confession, prayer, funerals had to be improvised outside the familiar frameworks and without any protection of a separate sacred space. The liminal character of these rituals became apparent in multicolored hybrid forms with evocative power.

The ordinary practice of sharing pickled cabbage and gherkins, donated by *babuschka's* from their village gardens, and the sharing of Eucharistic bread merged in a fluid celebration.

The sacred space of church buildings was transformed into a medical supplies storage<sup>51</sup> or make-shift hospital where the wounded were carried to and received first aid and surgery<sup>52</sup>, while the public square became the site of *leitourgia*, the public service and worship of the people. The church took part in a movement of kenosis that had no precedent so far in Ukrainian history.<sup>53</sup>

## 8. In conclusion

### 8.1. *Maidan* as a liturgical ritual space

Let us return to the evening of February 21, 2014, to that most dense 'now or never' moment when the people's fury peaked.

<sup>50</sup> *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965). Compare E. BORGMAN: *Metamorfosen. Over religie en moderne cultuur* (Kampen 2006) 246-265.

<sup>51</sup> The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Kiev.

<sup>52</sup> The Sv Mykhailivsky Cathedral and monastery in Kiev.

<sup>53</sup> See for a more critical discussion of the role of the churches on Maidan: H. ZORGDRAGER: 'Does hope need heroes? Towards a feminist political theology in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict', in *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* (2016) [forthcoming].

“Let us pray, there’s nothing else left”. With that humble recognition by one of the priests, a direction was found. After all formal authority of the church had been rejected and booed by the people, the clergy led the way into prayer. From that moment onwards, the *Maidan* transformed into one liturgical space without clear boundaries in which everybody participated. In this *leitourgia*, the politicians bowed down.

Those present on the square created their own bricolage liturgy<sup>54</sup> for the dead in which, side by side with traditional Orthodox prayers, the folksong *Plyve Kacha* time and again sounded through the speakers. We could term this a ‘transfer’ of popular folk music in the context of funeral liturgy.<sup>55</sup> For many, this song became the hallmark of the mourning rituals of *Maidan*.

For the audience/participants it needed no explanation. The rituals, symbols and sounds of the traditional *Panikhida* liturgy resonated meaningfully with the folk song. The requiem office for the deceased consists of a blessing, *Psalm* 90, the Great Litany, *troparia* and a canon for the dead, the prayer “Our Father”, and priestly dismissal.<sup>56</sup> The folk song was added to this. The images of friends and combatants carrying their fallen brothers forward to the stage, evoked the sense of a new family present here, the family of *Maidan* united in a memorial service (before the funeral) that is usually conducted in a private home setting. The whole community participated in the atmosphere of imagination and anticipation that the prayers and folk song represented and kindled. Lights of cell-phones all over the dark square replaced the candles.

As the liturgical theory suggests, the liturgical act of lament takes place in the tension between ‘what is’ on the one hand – and the crying out for an answer and solution on the other. The Christian liturgical act of lament is about remembrance and presence, but also about (anticipation of) the future.<sup>57</sup> *Maidan* became a space where this future was anticipated, where new forms and relationships were possible, a space of revelations and transformations, of life and death, of hope and resurrection.

The liturgical ritual reaffirmed the human dignity of the killed persons, as did the memorial shrines on the square that were erected soon after February 21, 2014. Particular spaces of *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* have transformed into memorial sites, where people keep alive the memories of the fallen protesters with por-

<sup>54</sup> See BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 117-131.

<sup>55</sup> See for the term ‘transfer’ M. HOONDEERT & M. KLOMP, “The streets of Gouda are our Jerusalem!” A popular Passion performed in the market square of a Dutch city”, in: POST, NEIL & VAN BEEK: *Sacred spaces and contested identities* 313-330.

<sup>56</sup> P.T. HAMALIS: ‘Death (and funeral)’, in: J.A. MCGUCKIN (eds.): *The encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Chichester 2011); I.F. HAPGOOD: *Service book of the holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church* (New York 1956<sup>3</sup>); T. HOPKO: *The Orthodox faith* (New York 1997) Volume II: Worship, section Sacraments, item Funeral. Link: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/funeral> [accessed August 16, 2016].

<sup>57</sup> BARNARD, CILLIERS & WEPENER: *Worship in the Network Culture* 290-292.

traits, flowers, candles, rosaries, helmets, and other personalized objects. Here, individual items and religious kinds of objects are very much intertwined. As Catherine Wanner analyzes, the sacralization of memorial space on *Maidan* redefines and reconnects the self in relation to the collective.<sup>58</sup> The fallen protesters are commemorated and glorified as martyrs, the Heavenly Hundred (*nebesna sotnia*<sup>59</sup>), and their memorial shrines in public space connect people by way of a strong moral obligation.

Similar to these memorial shrines, the *Panikhida* liturgy on the square combined popular and traditional religious elements in a fluid manner. The 'liturgy of the street', condensed in the anthem *Phyre Kacha* from the Carpathian mountains, depicting the grief of a mother about her son, merged almost naturally with the traditional Orthodox chants, which were liturgical texts from the eighth century and about, on Byzantine or Slavic melodies. The hybrid character of the *Maidan Panikhida* liturgy is striking for its freedom of going beyond liturgical-canonical boundaries. Performing a folksong as *part* of the liturgy is really unusual.<sup>60</sup> The priests on the stage took refuge in a centuries old liturgy that from the depths of its symbols and sounds appeared to be able to speak and appeal to the people when all other languages and discourses fail to express the horror and grief. Simultaneously, they trusted themselves to the new route of an emotional folk song. In this *kairos* moment, tradition and innovation found each other.

"Let us pray, there's nothing else left." Here also begins the transformation of the political realm. Such a prayer of solidarity from the abyss, a prayer that is receptive, chaste, and compassionate, can unleash a subversive divine power as an antidote to despair and repression.<sup>61</sup> The politicians kneeled down and arrived at eye sight with the people. This particular moment of *Maidan* history has entered into Ukrainian collective memory as a sign and anticipation of a future

<sup>58</sup> C. WANNER: 'Sacred space and Maidan: popular memorials and the rites of mourning', paper presented at the ASEES-MAG Summer Convention at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine, 26-28 June, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> '*Sotnia*' is a term from Cossack history meaning a squad of a hundred warriors. The self-defense brigades on Maidan were organized in the way of *sotnia*'s.

<sup>60</sup> The crossing of liturgical-canonical boundaries is striking from a liturgical-ritual viewpoint. From an ethnomusicological viewpoint, however, performing a folksong is less striking, since the multicultural nature of the Orthodox Church has always allowed for new musical forms to surface. Unlike the view of some Orthodox traditionalists, organic indigenization of the Eastern Church in new geographical-cultural areas has always given rise to new musical forms. See A. WIGGLESWORTH: 'The Indigenization of Church Music: Issues in Orthodox Ethnomusicology', in *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 6/3 (2011) 72-95.

<sup>61</sup> Compare S. COAKLEY: *God, sexuality, and the self: an essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge 2013); S. COAKLEY: 'Jail break. Meditation as a subversive activity', in *Christian Century* 121/13 (2004) 18-21.

where alternative, more righteous, more human relationships are possible in the public sphere.

## 8.2. *Maidan* as contested space

*Euromaidan* was certainly an ecumenical event. Have the events added to or changed the ecclesial frameworks of sacred space and rituality defined so far? Analysts observe that *Euromaidan* made visible that there is a gap in the form of mismatched positions or parallel lives of the bishops (the senior hierarchs in different churches) and the church community represented by laity and ordinary priests and pastors.<sup>62</sup> This may result in the emergence of a dual-power-system, embodied on the one hand by authorized church spokespersons or representatives, and, on the other hand, by often younger leaders, men and women, who represent the informal, horizontal network of the religious community and the volunteer movement. People, disappointed in the hierarchs, will start building alternative structures. The experiential discovery that a liminal sacred space could emerge bottom up on *Maidan* will continue to challenge the existing frameworks of sacred space and sacred structures that so far legitimized the ecclesial power relations in the Ukrainian churches.

As for the function of the ritual liminality, it strengthened the unity of the *communitas* that was taking shape on *Maidan* and it provided the sense of a larger family, in effacing the boundaries of private and public. After the dissolving of *Euromaidan*, this sense of community continued to be upheld by the construction of memorial spaces on the square to commemorate the fallen protesters, and in the emergence of the cult of the 'Heavenly Heroes', including chapels, icons, state medal of honors, poems, songs, prayers, and memorial days dedicated to them. Tensions, however, appear in the way this further ritualization takes place: people's spontaneous initiatives tend to come into conflict with or are in danger of getting instrumentalized for political aims, by state or church authorities, or by political movements like the far right. The war in the East of the country, ignited by Russian-backed separatists shortly after the *Maidan* revolt, has created a climate for such political instrumentalization by power elites. In this way, the sacred space of *Maidan* has also become a contested ground. Who, in the end, will identify the *communitas* that emerged on *Maidan*? Who will faithfully preserve the legacy of *Maidan* as an orientation for shaping the future? Understanding the role of religious symbols and practices in the dynamics of resistance contributes to a careful and critical dealing with this legacy.

<sup>62</sup> See for instance the interview by Tetyana Kalenychenko with Mykhailo Cherenkov: 'Religion was a Peacemaker during Maidan and Became a Mobilizer in War Time', November 20, 2015, [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert\\_thought/interview/61746/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/expert_thought/interview/61746/) [accessed August 18, 2016].

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