Ioulia Shukan

[Paryż]

**Embarking on the routes
of revolution:
why and how ordinary
Ukrainian citizens
joined their forces on the Maidan
(Winter 2013–2014)**

Wrocławski Rocznik

Historii Mówionej

Rocznik VII, 2017

ISSN 2084-0578

DOI: 10.26774/wrhm.172

The Maidan was a large-scale protest movement which sparked off on 21 November 2013 in Kyiv, in the Independence Square, a city-center location (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*)¹. Several hundred individuals – journalists, citizen activists and students – gathered there to voice their opposition against the decision of the country’s President, Viktor Yanukovich, to suspend the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union, scheduled for the following week. Following a violent police intervention launched on the night of 29 and 30 November to rid the place of protesters, the movement turned into a mass rebellion of ordinary citizens who, from 1 December on, pursued the permanent occupation of the square. Beforehand, the large majority of those people had distanced themselves from political life, and had not been involved in any civic activism and exercised their citizen’s rights occasionally on election days: in fact, 92% of them were not members of any political party, trade union or association².

¹ This paper was written within the framework of the “3 Revolutions” project implemented by the College of Europe in Natolin.

² Survey carried out by the “Democratic Initiatives” foundation, in cooperation with the International Institute of Sociology in Kyiv, December 7–8, 2013, see: <http://dif.org.ua/article/maydan-2013-khto-stoit-chomu-i-za-shcho> (access: 10.09.2017).

These ordinary protesters took over everyday chores on the occupied Maidan: they removed snow, cooked meals, built barricades and provided medical assistance. They took part in protests: in rallies organized on Sundays at noon, labelled *vitché*, in everyday evening meetings and in one-off marches outside the square. They also became involved in clashes with law enforcement units, either on the front lines or behind the front: they dismantled the pavement to throw it at policemen, collected used tires and organized logistic support for workshops which produced Molotov cocktails. Thus, the name of Maidan signifies both the very site of this protest and the community of the protesters.

The primary aim of this analysis is to discuss the involvement of these ordinary citizens³, and to describe their progressive conversion into revolutionaries who were determined to resist the intransigence of the Yanukovych regime. By adopting their perspective – distant from the circles of power, political parties and the political establishment – we will be able to grasp some common representations that motivated them to join the marching revolution. This approach will help us to better capture the modalities of their common action in the Independence Square, in particular within their mini-groupings; by doing so, we will also contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms that made them increasingly attached to the Maidan movement and made their mobilization even more lasting. This approach also provides the opportunity to describe the developments of these protesters in everyday life and to outline the various lessons which they gained from the experience of such an unprecedented revolutionary politicization⁴.

Our analysis is based, following the lead of the Chicago school of sociology⁵, on the field of ethnographic research carried out between November 2013 and May 2014 in the form of participant observation of the everyday

³ This approach is central to the book by Haim Burstin, *Révolutionnaires. Pour une anthropologie politique de la Révolution française*, Paris 2013. I worked with the same approach, using it in my own book, see: I. Shukan, *Génération Maïdan. Vivre la crise ukrainienne*, Paris 2016.

⁴ On the similar process of politicization at protest squares during the “Arab spring”, see: M. Bennani-Chraïbi, O. Fillieule, *Pour une sociologie des situations révolutionnaires. Retour sur les révoltes arabes*, “Revue française de science politique”, 62, no. 5 (2012).

⁵ See: *A second Chicago school? The Development of a Postwar American Sociology*, ed. by G. A. Fine, Chicago 1995.

life on the Maidan⁶. We watched ordinary revolutionaries in both peaceful actions and violent events and observed how they behaved during them. We also took part in some of their on-site activities, which helped us engage in informal discussions in situ with them and discover their interpretations of those events and of their engagement in protests. In addition, our analysis is based on a number of more formal interviews held with some of them after the events. On the basis of gathered stories of protest participation, we distinguished three typical routes of revolutionary involvement of ordinary citizens. These routes are not typical in the sense of Max Weber's "ideal-types"⁷, but as representative trajectories of protest engagement which are similar to many other stories that we collected on the ground and which have, consequently, a "magnifying effect". As typical trajectories, they explain why and how in December 2013 hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens let themselves become entangled into the Maidan's whirlwind.

AutoMaidan four-wheeled activists: Denis Sergiyenko and Yulia Volkova

If you owned a car, you had the best chance to become the part of AutoMaidan – a grouping of driver revolutionaries. This is what happened to 34-year-old Yulia Volkova and 33-year-old Denis Sergiyenko⁸. Before the Maidan, this couple of managers had worked at a large Ukrainian automotive supplier and led a comfortable life, in line with the standards of the Kyiv's new middle class: a downtown apartment, holidays abroad and, most of all, a brand new, trendy and beautiful car – a red Nissan X-Trail.

Yulia and Denis did not support a political party and had little interest in political life. Yulia was shortly involved as a civic activist during the time of the Orange Revolution in 2004⁹. As for Denis, he had lived unaffected by those waves of protests in his home town of Luhansk, Eastern Ukraine. Yet, during the Yanukovych presidency, the couple grew angry while witnessing the prevailing practices of the business world: endless tax inspections, colossal

⁶ See: H.S. Becker, *Sociological Work. Method and Substance*, New Brunswick 1970.

⁷ M. Weber, *Essais sur la théorie de la science*, Paris 1965.

⁸ Our first contact and informal discussion with Yulia and Denis took place in the mid-December 2013 on Maidan. We then kept tracking their activities as to conduct a more formalized interview later on.

⁹ See : A. Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, Yale University Press 2006.

bribes, distributed commission fees and hostile raids organized at the premises of private companies. In the evening of 29 November, the wrath against such omnipresent arbitrary behaviors pushed Yulia and Denis to join the Maidan of Independence.

It was just a few hours after the closing of the Vilnius Summit in Lithuania where President Victor Yanukovych said his final “no” to the conclusion of the Association Agreement with the European Union. Then, citizens who had been gathering on the Maidan square since 21 November lost hope that their voice would be heard by the head of the state and that he would change his mind in the end. The perspective of moving closer to Europe was definitely ruled out as an option that until then, had enjoyed a large political consensus. Europe was a dream world for Yulia, Denis and for many others. The European perspective had also given them the assurance that Yanukovych’s rule and his practices would finally become a thing of the past.

We had enough. We didn’t want to live this nightmare – says Yulia – Of course, at first glance, our little ordered life didn’t seem nightmarish at all. My mother used to tell me: “Yulia. Why do you think there’s anything wrong about Yanukovych. You are just fine right now!”. This was true. We were just fine. We weren’t extremely rich, and we weren’t very poor either. We could buy things that were unaffordable to lots of people around. But in the world of business, this was a truly bloody mess. No chance to work normally. Europe was our only hope. That’s why we took to the streets. This was not that much for ourselves but for all of us: people who decided to stand in protest. This was also about the future of my son who was with us that evening¹⁰.

Yulia and Denis felt that the arbitrary decision to leave Europe behind and to turn to Russia instead was deeply unfair. In addition, there was a feeling of shock and outrage against the gathering of young protesters which were being brutally and violently dispersed on 30 November around 4 a.m., just a few hours after Denis, Yulia and her son Fiodor had left the Maidan square.

On-site recordings of the events show policemen of the elite unit “Berkut” (“Royal Eagle”) sweeping the square in full anti-riot equipment. They

¹⁰ Author’s interview, Kyiv, 3 May 2014.

are heading on, launching sound grenades, and hitting people with bludgeons¹¹. Officially speaking, they were there to enable municipality services to finally mount the giant artificial Christmas tree. Confronted with the assault, demonstrators move back and start to swarm up around the Independence Monument. Police forces fence around them and tighten their grip. Those who try to escape are caught and beaten up. Some others, bloodied, choose Mikhailovska Street to find refuge in St.-Michel's Church. But the police are in pursuit. They fiercely go after those who have unluckily fallen down. During that first police assault, dozens were injured and nearly twenty missing. Thirty-five were arrested to be released some hours later following the intervention of the MPs from the opposition parties.

The following day, images of police brutality were widely covered by the media, and delegitimized both the state and its representatives. Never, in the history of Ukraine, had there been another gathering dispersed with such violence. "By extension" they won the hearts of Denis, Yulia and tens of thousands of Ukrainians, creating outrage against such a disproportionate use of violence against young protesters. Their outrage turned out to be a strong mobilizing force for citizens. From that moment on, Yulia and Denis decided to fully embrace the movement. Such as many other couples, they went through the Maidan together.

Once the news had broken out, Yulia and Denis decided to go to the courtyard of St.-Michel's Church without delay. From 7 a.m., Kyiv inhabitants started to flood the site. They came with food for demonstrators who were hiding there and clothes for those who needed to change to get rid of their blood-stained garments. A huge wave of solidarity between people, the key feature of the Maidan movement, was striking its roots there. Yulia and Denis were among the protesters who blocked the police forces from accessing the church. During the day, the courtyard was filled with people: nearly five thousand gathered there and were shouting: "Down with the rule of the bandits". In the evening, Yulia and Denis came back home but, as many others, they were already getting ready for the "day of rage" that was set to take place the very next day.

¹¹ See the report by Ukrainian television station "5Kanal", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vzmkw-Zj2iA> (access: 10.09.2017).

On Sunday, 1 December, protesters came in numbers that were beyond what could have been expected. Several hundred thousand Ukrainians took to the streets. Repressive measures became a much more powerful mobilizing force than the desire for Europe and the aspiration for change had been just one week earlier. “All children are our children” – sighs Yulia. “We just cannot let such brutality happen against young people”¹².

This December, on the Maidan, the words “children” could be heard everywhere¹³. “We need to protect our children” (*Zakhistimo detei*), “Do not hit our children” (*Ne bei detei*) – said posters hanging on the steel structure of the Christmas tree which had already become the integral part of the revolutionary landscape. Covered with Ukrainian flags with the names of places whose inhabitants were involved in demonstrations, the tree displayed the wide geographical reach of the movement. It was used to pin streamers with political slogans claiming “Yanukovych behind bars” (*Yanoukovitch za graty*). Settled for good in the city center, the Maidan people were now asking not only for Europe but also, and most importantly, for sanctions to be imposed on police officials who ordered the repression. Their demands were also about the government stepping down, if not Yanukovych himself.

In the very heart of Kyiv city, a fierce battle broke out, between outraged citizens and the political regime. Yulia and Denis became involved to the best of their ability and availability and according to a traditional gender-based division of labor¹⁴. First, after a day of work, Yulia cooked meals at home for those who stayed on the Maidan permanently. Every evening, around midnight, Denis delivered two 10-liter saucepans, each with soup and kasha to the central kitchen, located on the ground floor of the Trade Unions House – the HQ of the revolution. “This is too burdensome and rather ineffective” – thought Yulia back then¹⁵. It was just a drop of water in the ocean of needs of this movement which, within just one week, grew to nearly ten thousand people, not to mention hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who met in the same place for traditional Sunday rallies labelled *vitche* in Ukrainian. A drop in the ocean

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Author's observation in situ, December 2013.

¹⁴ O. Khromeychuk, *Negotiating Protest Spaces on the Maidan: A Gender Perspective*, “Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society”, 2, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁵ Author's interview, Kyiv, 3 May 2014.

if compared with giant fire pots installed on the Maidan. The couple then decided to contribute by buying food.

Cooking was not the most satisfying job for Yulia. She was looking for her proper place in the movement. During one of her regular visits to numerous Facebook pages dedicated to the Maidan movement¹⁶, she came across mobile patrols named “AutoMaidan” – ordinary protesters connected through social media, helping recruit people for an action or to find a job to do within the already well-established communities.

AutoMaidan patrols had been moving around the city since 30 November. On that day, some car owners and their friends put together an improvised four-wheeled procession in the streets of Kyiv. With the noise of their horns and under the flags of Ukraine and the EU, they called the people of Kyiv to voice their range on the streets. Others would join them, including activists of “*Dorozhnyi kontrol*” (“Road Control”) – a civic initiative established to fight against police racketeering on the roads. It was in this way that AutoMaidan was born.

“Let’s go and meet them” – Yulia said to Denis. “Hundreds of thousands of protesters are on foot. Fewer are those who own a car. We have our Nissan. Let’s then join the AutoMaidan”¹⁷.

On 13 December, Yulia enlisted as a volunteer on the AutoMaidan Facebook page. She received an SMS with the time and place of the meeting: 9.30 p.m., European Square, the usual assembly point for the drivers. From that moment on, the life of Denis and Yulia took a new turn. It actually narrowed to the AutoMaidan community. “I didn’t even see my son too much” – says Yulia. “He was at his grandmother’s all the time or at his friends’. If we didn’t have to work to earn a living and to finance the Maidan, we would have quit our jobs altogether” – adds Denis with a hint of a smile¹⁸.

Their words reveal how a revolutionary action can profoundly change the everyday life of ordinary citizens. The continuum of the activists’ involvement was observable on site, depending on their availability: from the total relinquishment of usual existence to attempts at maintaining a modicum of

¹⁶ On the role of Facebook during the Maidan protests see: O. Onuch, “*Facebook Helped Me Do It*”: *Understanding the EuroMaidan Protester “Tool-Kit”*, “*Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*”, 15, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁷ Author’s interview, Kyiv, 3 May 2014.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

“normality”. For some revolutionaries, named “permanent” [protestors] of the Maidan, the revolt became their new daily routine: they quit their jobs, temporarily discontinued their studies or took a leave of absence to become involved on a full-time basis. Others, such as Yulia and Denis, participated more “occasionally”. They headed to the square after work and came back home in the early morning hours to get some short hours of sleep before going to work again. They dropped their everyday routines, neglected their professional duties and put their family life aside.

The micro-community of AutoMaidan became Yulia’s and Denis’ reality in a number of ways. First of all, there was a technological reality. Group members connected via the Zello app. The software changed Wi-Fi and connected mobile phones into walkie-talkies which fused into a radio communication system for its users. Zello was activated on Yulia’s and Denis’ mobiles all the time, day and night, to display news of what was going on. The application sent warning messages and calls for help if any of the drivers in the community were in trouble, as well as a “Good night” message from the ones who went to bed. It would also deliver long monologues for those who could not fall asleep.

Moreover, AutoMaidan became their reality through a number of joint actions which acted as a mobilizing force for its members. Every evening, around 9.30 p.m., Yulia and Denis would take their Nissan and join 20 to 25 crews who were parking at the European Square. AutoMaidan crews were on a mission all of the time: as vehicle patrols around the city, to block police buses, to deliver wood, fuel, and food, and to welcome the incoming buses with volunteers from the provinces at Kyiv gates¹⁹. In December 2013, they were still doing everything by their own means. Only later, parts of their activities were financed by third party donations.

The couple also took part in motorcades, travelling to the compounds of wealthy dignitaries of the regime. On 29 December, their red Nissan was among some 1,500 vehicles which drove to Mezhyhriya – a luxury private residence of President Yanukovych. As in the case of other motorcade participants, this cheeky procession nearly cost Yulia her driving license. Fortunately, as her case was filed to court too late, she was not convicted.

In return, the AutoMaidan community became the source of solidarity and bonding for individuals who came from different social backgrounds

¹⁹ Author’s in situ participation, December 2013.

and with different incomes. It was the glue that held them together, despite all of their hardships. Denis describes AutoMaidan in the following way: “Some of us had a lot of money. Others didn’t. Some worked as taxi drivers, some others had big businesses. Some drove a Ford Sienna, 1980 model. Some others a brand new Range Rover. But there was great solidarity among us. We were ready to rescue our own in the middle of the night, despite fear and against all dangers”²⁰.

Olesya Zhukovska: a woman passionate about the Maidan’s spirit of celebration

Olesya Zhukovska was a young, 21-year-old nurse from the Ternopil region in Western Ukraine. Due to an unfortunate twist of events, she was pushed into the very heart of the drama unfolding on the Maidan in the morning of 20 February 2014. While police bullets were taking their deadly toll among those who stood in defense of the Maidan on the hills of Instytutska Street, Olesya was working as a medical volunteer on the other side of the square. She was carrying medications from St.-Michel’s Church to emergency field hospitals accommodated in two cafés located at the back of the square. When she was near Kozatskiy Hotel, a bullet pierced her neck. Blood spurted from the wound, flew over her hands and stained her clothes. She thought that her carotid artery had been hit and that she was going to die. She tweeted “I’m dying” on her Internet-connected mobile phone, and wanted to bid farewell to her mother and her friends. An ambulance took her to hospital. Her story quickly spread across the Maidan. The photo of wounded Olesya was relayed by the media parallelly²¹. Hours later, news surfaced that she had only been wounded.

Olesya became a true “legend” of the movement²². Just two months before the occurrence, she was a young woman who was passionate about the Maidan, inspired by the solidarity of its members, carried away by the atmosphere of celebration and driven by people that she had just met there. Her story is more about the joyful passion for the Maidan whose festive air

²⁰ Author’s interview, Kyiv, 3 May 2014.

²¹ For an example, see the report by Ukrainian television station 1+1: <https://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/ranennaya-na-maydane-devushka-medik-prostila-snayperov-no-do-sih-por-ne-mozhet-spokoyno-spat-358777.html> (access: 10.09.2017).

²² See, in particular, K. Berdyskikh, *E-lioudi. Tepli istorii z Maïdany (Maidaners. Warm stories from Maïdan)*, Kyiv 2014, p. 118.

was lingering there in December 2013, powerfully attracting young people and their peers that they would meet at this come-together²³.

As a young graduate, Olesya worked as a nurse in a village in the Ternopil Region. Kyiv seemed like a distant place for her and she was not very concerned with politics. However, as she says, Ukraine was then at the point of choosing between Russia and the European Union. As for Europe, she had never known it, had never gone there. Yet, Europe was the embodiment of a vague hope for change for her: a change in the Ukrainian health-care system, just as plagued with corruption as other state agencies, and of some more specific change in her everyday life, as well.

“When I got my medical degree, I was posted 259 kilometers far from home, to some godforsaken settlement. I needed to work there for three years, gaining my poverty wage of 1,100 hryvnias” – says Olesya²⁴. This obligatory scheme of soviet-like atavistic mandatory positing, was relied upon by the State of Ukraine to address the issue of white spots in its healthcare system. There was no equality in the scheme, though. “If you paid a huge bribe you could avoid drudgery” – adds Olesya. “Many of my colleagues did it. My family had no money so I had to comply. Otherwise, I would have to repay the State the total costs of my studies”²⁵.

Impacted by the hands-on experience of corruption in public services, Olesya started to develop an increasingly strong feeling of injustice, convinced that injustice of that kind would not be her experience if Ukraine joined Europe. Once she heard the news on the TV that the EU association process had been dropped out, she felt sympathy towards the Maidan movement that was still in the organizational stage. The movement was in tune with her own hopes, and sparked a feeling of immense curiosity in this young woman. As she only knew the Maidan from TV broadcasts, she wished to discover it herself, to join these young people who were gathering every evening, at 6 p. m., and who were dancing and singing on the square through the night. Unfortunately, it was too far: Kyiv was 550 kilometers from her place of residence, conflicting with the location of her work obligations.

²³ On the same role of music and festivities on Maidan during the 2004 Orange Revolution, see: A. Helbig, *The Cyberpolitics of Music in Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution*, “Current Musicology”, no. 82 (Fall 2006).

²⁴ Author's interview, Kyiv, 5 May 2014.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

When in the night of 29 and 30 November repressions hit young protesters, Olesya had no more doubts and decided to go there. She travelled from her village to Monastyriska – the administrative center of the district. As in many other towns in Western Ukraine, the city already had its own mini-Maidan in its main square. A tent had been put up there to organize a recruitment point for volunteers who wanted to go to Kyiv. Olesya enrolled and left immediately, in the night. Onboard the minibus which transported volunteers to the capital city, she was the only young woman among the remaining 16 male passengers.

Olesya reached the Maidan in the early days of December 2013. She felt impressed on the spot by a fortified and permanent encampment, by numerous barricades made of heaps of odd items, by occupied public buildings changed into shelters for protesters and into their rear bases. The camping site conveyed the message of power and resistance and had a mobilizing influence on ordinary protesters who, once inside and after being charged with surveillance and cleaning tasks, started to fully identify with the Maidan.

Olesya spent 72 hours on the square altogether, practically without a minute of sleep. She took a walk around the square, went to Kyiv's Town Hall, seized by the movement members, entered into military tents erected on both sides of the Maidan square and on Khreshchatyk Street. She sat down near campfires lit either in large metal barrels or right on the ground. The Maidan owed its delightful fragrance to these fires. Near the barrels, Olesya met people and talked to them for hours.

"My first stay there was more like a tourist visit" – says Olesya with a smile. She holds a vivid memory of these days:

There were so many people around. Everybody took care of one another. Everybody showed solidarity to the movement. And there was this feeling of celebration in the air, the Maidan was filled with music. Our nighttime vigils were organized as discos led by Ruslana [the pop singer who became the "night" voice of the Maidan]. One could say that this was an open-air festival²⁶.

As for festivals, Olesya is an expert. As a matter of fact, for many years she was a regular attendee to a number of summer events organized in Western Ukraine where she slept under the stars or in a tent.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

Although festive in spirit, these nighttime vigils fostered a sense of belonging to the Maidan. When Ruslana, the singer, went on stage, she always started by asking “Maidan, can you hear me?”, and Olesya, together with thousands of others answered with a massive “yes”²⁷. Ruslana, like other public figures (politicians, journalists, civic activists) spoke to the Maidan audience as if they were a collective being, easy for anyone to identify with – a collective being that echoed the people of Ukraine when it sang in chorus and the national anthem every hour: “Neither Ukraine nor its glory or its freedom are dead”.

During her first stay, Olesya joined a group of young people camping around a metal barrel, near the Independence Monument. These were people of different ages and different backgrounds who had come there from four corners of Ukraine: from Chernihiv, Poltava, Zaporizhia, Luhansk and Ternopil. As Olesya, they were all young and joyful. She spent her first night with them, having fun, singing, telling stories, and toured the Maidan with them. The informal group decided to call their barrel “*Pekel’na botchka*”, for “the Hell Barrel”. “When it was cold outside, we lit a big fire inside the barrel” – explains Olesya. “Powerful heat came out of it, as if we were in hell”²⁸.

After a 72-hour stay, Olesya came back to her village, but left again for Kiev only a few days later. This opened a period of incessant trips. She made thirteen trips in total, with two to three day stays in the capital, plus a one-week stay in January. The Maidan in celebration was like “a drug” for Olesya and like many other Ukrainians, she developed an addiction to its revolutionary spirit.

I could no longer do without the Maidan, without its atmosphere and my “Hell Barrel” friends. Our discussions, our nights of singing, moments of foolish laughing, our volunteer rounds in the square... I was missing all of that. A few minutes after departure I already wanted to see them again, even if it meant long travelling hours, in a bus or in a car, in cold weather and on bumpy roads. It didn’t matter for me where I had to set off. I was ready to go to Ternopil or to Ivano-Frankivsk from where it was easier to get to Kiev²⁹.

²⁷ Author’s observation in situ, December 2013.

²⁸ Author’s interview, Kyiv, 5 May 2014.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

In fact, new acquaintances and the spirit of celebration reigning on the Maidan in December tied Olesya more to the movement than any political demands could.

When travelling, Olesya took a small backpack packed with the bare necessities: a toothbrush and toothpaste, two pairs of underwear, socks, and her make-up kit, to still have the fun of making herself attractive. "Above all, no food! This is a beginner error that must be avoided. There was tons of food there. I had some food with me the first time, and I didn't know what to do with it"³⁰. In December, Olesya brought a flower crown and a tambourine with her. An improvised orchestra was arranged near their "Hell Barrel" as she played this percussion instrument.

During her stays, Olesya worked as a volunteer in the Maidan's kitchens and took part in building and reinforcing barricades. She performed other routine tasks of the revolution: "little" jobs which worked together for the "great" cause of the revolution. She slept in Kyiv's City Hall, in the tents or in private flats. She wasn't bothered by such hardy conditions of living. What bothered her, however, was the cold. In January, temperatures dropped below -20°C. She has very bad memories of these moments. The cold was the main cause of her discomfort and of her recurring conditions: cough, sore throat, high fevers and serious bronchitis. Because she was of frail health, once back home, she began to heal herself to be able to return quickly and to withstand, again and again, the test of the cold.

With Christmas on the horizon and after several active weeks spent in cold, the Maidan staff started to suffer from respiratory conditions. The call was launched for people to volunteer as medical personnel. Olesya responded and enrolled to the Maidan medical staff in Kiev's Town Hall. The service was set up on 30 November as a fusion of countless private initiatives. Over time, it was structured around several permanent health assistance points held in occupied buildings and around mobile groups of nurses³¹. Olesya was christened by the fire of the revolution on 31 December in Kiev's Town Hall, when she got the job of handling the assistance point located on the premises.

As a person experienced in home visits, this young woman said that she would like to join the mobile nurse duos the next day. Somebody gave her

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Author's in situ observation, December 2013–January 2014.

a white hard hat, with a red cross in front and behind, a large white T-shirt, also with the cross and the red letters saying “Medical Aid” (*Medychna dopomoha*).

I had this T-shirt on me during every visit I made. I was given a hard hat and a first response kit which I filled in with medications myself. Thanks to solidary efforts, there was never a shortage of medications on the Maidan. People came to us to know what the needs were. It was enough to give them the name of the product whose stocks were running out and they were back with such volumes that we had surpluses³².

In January, Olesya found herself entirely devoted to the Maidan. “I spent only five days at home, in my village. I practically quit my job to be able to stay in Kyiv”³³. There was also a romantic involvement that kept her in the capital city: on New Year’s Day, her first day as a medical volunteer, she met a boy who would later join the “Hell Barrel” group too.

Moreover, she had to stay in Kyiv following the first violent clashes between the protesters and police forces in Hrushevskiy Street. From 19 January on, skilled medical staff was acutely needed. The young woman joined one of the mobile brigades which operated on the front line and ran a number of risks. This episode of insurrection, remembered by Olesya as a long series of endless medical interventions, left her with acute bronchitis that ended in emergency hospitalization. She was stopped by exhaustion and cold. But this was nothing compared to the bullet that shot her in the neck on the morning of 20 February, while she was devoutly performing her medical duties.

From the construction worker to a Maidan

“permanent protestor”: Evhen Hut

The Maidan’s “permanent” protestors consist of several thousand people, men in 85% of cases, coming from the provinces in 81% of cases³⁴, who lived

³² Author’s interview, Kyiv, 5 May 2014.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Survey carried out by the “Democratic Initiatives” Foundation, in cooperation with the International Institute of Sociology in Kyiv on December 26, 2013, <http://dif.org.ua/article/maydan-miting-i-maydan-tabir-skhozhe-i-vidminne> (access: 10.09.2017).

on the square, stayed there over the weeks, day and night, in tents, in occupied buildings or in private premises. They were the core group of the movement; the core group able to stand the test of time, the core group which Kyiv's inhabitants joined after leaving their offices during the week and above all on Sundays, for mass rallies. Evhen Hut, 39-year-old, was one of them.

Evhen came from Lutsk, a city in Northwestern Ukraine. He was a construction worker, used to leaving his wife and his three-year-old daughter to go to work on construction sites for months at a time. He worked on the construction sites of villas situated in the suburbs of Kyiv and built for high officials of Yanukovych's government. This is how he discovered the excessive lifestyle of the wealthy.

I've seen so many scandals, so many excesses: imposing castles, landlord-like manor houses, sculpted columns, gildings. I was in deep shock. I wondered where all this wealth was coming from. Well, from misappropriated funds, for sure. From the corruption on the highest levels of government. In my place, in Lutsk, daily life is hard. The only way for honest people to make it through is to take seasonal jobs in Europe or in Russia. The seasonal worker never rhymes with wealth³⁵.

Evhen felt even more helpless when his-coworkers told him about the excesses of the president himself. Some of them had worked on the Mezhyhriya construction site, the former state residence taken over by Yanukovych and converted into his luxury private residence. "This is an outrageous story. A complete injustice" – exclaims Evhen. "A president who is corrupted and above the law". Evhen's outrage went hand in hand with a feeling of helplessness. "What could we do, we, ordinary people, to oppose such injustice?" – he asks himself³⁶. They were all lads whose citizenship was, as in Evhen's case, all about the occasional ballot casting or about the unconditional yielding of power to the elites.

The Maidan movement gave Evhen and those who shared the same feeling of "being fed up" the opportunity to regain their decision-making powers and to move from silent anger to action. In late November 2013, when the first rallies were held in Kyiv, Evhen was in Lutsk. He heard the news

³⁵ We met Evhen on the Maidan and engaged in an informal discussion with him in mid-December 2013. A more formalized interview was conducted on May 2, 2014.

³⁶ Informal discussion on Maidan, December 2013.

about the movement of protest and watched its TV-broadcast images. He identified fully with the claims for Europe, however, was split between two options: either go to the capital or take up a new construction job. Yet, after the police assault of 30 November, he departed for Kyiv immediately at dawn. The beating up of demonstrators was truly the last straw for him. On 1 December, Evhen was already involved in the occupation of the Independence Square. He helped to put up tents on the road and to make campfires, either on the ground or in metal barrels.

"I simply had enough. Enough of seeing this excessive wealth in the midst of poverty. Enough of this overwhelming spirit of the arbitrary. Enough of seeing how the government is blind to the desire for Europe among Ukrainians"³⁷. These words of Evhen echo the saying displayed in Russian on a streamer "*Poïmite nas. Zadolbalo!*" ("You must understand. We've had enough!") which hung on one of the Maidan's barricades³⁸. That barricade at Marrinsky Park where Yanukovych's government was just producing the show of alleged popular support best encapsulated the Maidan's supporter's reasons for their actions.

Evhen mentions Europe, too. He presents his idealized image, far from what its reality actually is. Yet, he uses this Europe, with its values and principles, as an imaginary benchmark for his actions. "In Europe, politicians do not line their pockets. There is no corruption in the state's machinery. In our country, the son of the President, an average dentist, has become a billionaire thanks to his daddy"³⁹. On the Maidan square, many others spoke to me about the political racketeering surrounding the presidential family. Denounced by investigative reporters, the nepotism of the Ukrainian head of State who favored his family and friends was seen by the public as just another sign of injustice.

"In Europe, there is equality" – continues Evhen. "Average people are treated as equals and not as social waste. What matters for me is the equality of treatment" – says Evhen. "In our country there is an abyss between those at the bottom and those at the top"⁴⁰. A Europe based on the equality of rights is what Evhen would like to reproduce in Ukraine. That's where he

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Author's observation in situ, December 2013.

³⁹ Informal discussion on Maidan, December 2013.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

sees the hope for his own future and the future of his family. This should be Europe, and not Russia, which as a true “driving force”, will boost Ukraine, pulling the country out of its own slump of corruption and of injustice. Other interviewees expressed their desire for Europe in similar terms.

Evhen spent his first nights on the Maidan in one of two hundred military tents set up on both sides of the square and in Khreshchatyk Street. The conditions of living of the Maidan’s staff were spartan, and the site was worthy of the name of an open-air camp, with the small exception of its location in the very city center. “This was no luxury, of course” – jokes Evhan⁴¹. Tents were frugal inside and had only minimal equipment: wooden pallets on the ground, floor mats, sleeping bags and blankets, stacked in a heap. This was the place where “the staff” could get some rest after a night of vigil on the barricades. They could regularly take a shower in one of the flats located nearby the Maidan, and had their daily toilet in the WCs in the occupied buildings⁴².

Some days after his arrival to the Maidan, Evhen met the activists of the “Civic Sector” (*Hromads'kyi Sektor*). The grouping organized a wide range of initiatives managed by civil society activists on the Maidan. One was aimed at handling some of the everyday logistics for the encampment, but there were also protest actions, cultural projects and shows. Evhen decided to join the grouping and was assigned to logistic duties: welcome of demonstrators coming from the provinces, organization of their accommodations in private flats or on the premises turned into shelters, fuel supplies for power generators, picking up of food supplies for the main kitchen in the camp. Throughout the day, the kitchen offered hot tea and coffee, sandwiches with bacon, sausage or cheese, Ukrainian borscht or kasha.

Evhen became completely absorbed by his duties, by his service to the Maidan and to his peers – ordinary revolutionaries just like him. The gratitude he was shown in return and most of all the recognition of his qualities within the “Civic Sector” made him even more attached to the Maidan. He moved to a flat turned into a dormitory for activists. “At some times there were ten of us in one tiny room. We were cramped but we stayed in the warmth. And most of all, we could keep an eye on the Maidan”⁴³.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Author’s observation in situ, December 2013.

⁴³ Author’s interview, Kyiv, May 2, 2014.

Keeping an eye on the Maidan was imperative as people in power used repressive measures and a new attempted police assault took place in the night of 10 and 11 December. After the event, the works to establish the Self-Defense (*Samooborona*) unit sped up. The group recruited volunteers among ordinary citizens, mostly men. Some of its members were better trained though, especially those who were the veterans of the Afghan war in which the USSR was involved between 1979 and 1989, or those who were former secret service officers.

The organization of the Self-Defense troops followed the model of the Cossacks and their warrior units, named companies (*sotnia*) and composed of 80 to 300 combatants. Some companies were formed according to geographic criteria and grouped together the inhabitants of one location⁴⁴. Others were set up based on already existing groups, such as “the Civic Sector” which also formed its own company – number 26. Evhen joined the unit in mid-December. As a part of this, he was performing policing tasks on the Maidan and in its neighborhood.

However, for Evhen, the Maidan meant more than just a series of revolutionary routines to be performed on a daily basis. This was also, as he says, “a university of life”⁴⁵. There, together with peer activists from the Civic Sector, he learnt a great deal about political processes, the wrongdoings of Yanukovich’s government and of its officials and politicized himself. He listened to mobilized activists when they spoke out from the stage mounted in the middle of the Maidan square, in front of the Independence Monument. He also happened to attend their everyday meetings where they discussed the developments of the movement and the actions that were needed to bring the people in power to their knees. All this contributed, step-by-step, to Evhen’s political subjectification as a citizen and member of the political community⁴⁶. Indeed, he acquired a new self-image, more positive than the one of the construction worker that he was beforehand. “At first I felt intimidated by all those extremely smart people who knew so many things. Over time, I understood that I counted too as a citizen and that my involvement in the movement, at my level, was equally important. Over time I even dared to speak and to give my opinion”⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Author’s observation in situ, December 2013–January 2014.

⁴⁵ Author’s interview, Kyiv, May 2, 2014.

⁴⁶ On the creation of political subjectivities throughout a revolutionary participation in Venezuela, see: F. Tarragoni, *L’énigme révolutionnaire*, Paris 2015.

⁴⁷ Author’s interview, Kyiv, May 2, 2014.

Evhen's new acquaintances from the Civic Sector and his socializing experiences on the Maidan strengthened his revolutionary vocation and consolidated his ties with this living movement, as did the solidarity between people that he admired and the self-organizational capabilities to which he contributed. During the whole period of revolution, Evhen returned home to Lutsk only for a few days at Christmas. He allowed himself no long absences on the Maidan and was one of the last ones to leave the square in July 2014.

Conclusions

The three typical trajectories of protest engagement discussed in this paper reveal the impact of this revolutionary action on ordinary participants. These stories firstly shed light on the reasons for ordinary protest involvement which are discrepant and sometimes far from being strictly political: personal experience of corruption or feelings of injustice, simple curiosity, willingness to celebrate in the festive spirit of the Maidan square or out-range caused by police violence.

Secondly, the revolutionary experience made ordinary participants come across other new affiliates, inscribed them into micro-groups and involved them in a processual way, step by step and each time somewhat more, into the protest movement. Thanks to those new acquaintances and experiences of Maidan's everyday life, ordinary citizens discovered and consolidated their identity as protestors, as well as their revolutionary vocation. Finally, for these ordinary demonstrators, as for Evhen, the protests were the high moment of politicization and of awakening of their political subjectivities which strengthened their determination to resist on Maidan against all odds and which transformed them into citizens-revolutionaries.

This experience of revolutionary citizenship, especially after the violent episodes which took place on the Maidan in January⁴⁸ and in February 2014, also predisposed some of its ordinary participants to further engagement in citizens' actions. The armed conflict in Donbas, in the east of Ukraine, which followed the Maidan, came to activate this particular predisposition

⁴⁸ In January 2014, Yulia and Denis fall into a sophisticated trap set by the police against AutoMaidan. Denis spent the rest of the revolutionary time in hospital, under police surveillance. Yulia needed to temporarily leave the country to escape prosecution. On that topic, see: I. Shukan, *Génération Maidan...*, pp. 47–49.

for all of individuals whose stories are discussed here. Since 2014, in their free time and far beyond, Yulia and Denis have been providing assistance to soldiers: together with their colleagues from their volunteer group “Talisman”, they help wounded soldiers at the Kyiv military hospital. They also sponsor some army units, providing them with diverse equipment items. Evhen Hut uses his organizational know-how acquired during the winter of 2013 and 2014 to help one Cossack organization. Established following the Maidan experience, the organization runs patriotic education programs for young generations and handles some part of logistic supplies to the soldiers deployed on the front line. Olesya Zhukovska continues her medical education at one of Kyiv’s best universities and works as a volunteer for the army in her free time. From the viewpoint of awakened political subjectivities and citizenship practices of ordinary people, the Maidan may thus be considered as a true revolution.

Bibliography

A second Chicago school? The Development of a Postwar American Sociology, ed. by G.A. Finen, Chicago 1995

Becker H.S., *Notes on the concept of commitment*, "American Journal of Sociology", 66, no. 1 (1960), p. 32–40

Becker H.S., *Sociological Work. Method and Substance*, New Brunswick 1970

Berdynskikh K., *E-lioudi. Teply istorii z Maïdany (Maïdaners. Warm stories from Maïdan)*, Kyiv 2014

Burstin H., *Révolutionnaires. Pour une anthropologie politique de la Révolution française*, Paris 2013

Fillieule O., *Pour une sociologie des situations révolutionnaires. Retour sur les révoltes arabes*, "Revue française de science politique", 62, no. 5 (2012), p. 767–796

Helbig A., *The Cyberpolitics of Music in Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution*, "Current Musicology", no. 82, (Fall 2006), p. 81–101

Khromeychuk O., *Negotiating Protest Spaces on the Maidan: A Gender Perspective*, "Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society", 2, no. 1 (2016), p. 9–47

Onuch O., *'Facebook Helped Me Do It': Understanding the EuroMaidan Protester 'Tool-Kit'*, "Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism", 15, no. 1 (2015), p. 170–184

Maïdan. Svidchennya. Kyiv, 2013–2014 [Maïdan. Testimonies, Kyiv in 2013–2014], ed. by L. Finberg, U. Holovach, Kyiv 2016

Shukan I., *Génération Maïdan. Vivre la crise ukrainienne*, Tours d'Aigues 2016

Tarragoni F., *L'énigme révolutionnaire*, Paris 2015

Teren T., Zabuzhko O., *Litopys samovydsiv. Devyat misyatsiv ukrainskogo sprotyvu* [Stories of eyewitnesses. Nine months of Ukrainian resistance], Kyiv 2014

Weber M., *Essais sur la théorie de la science*, Paris 1965

Wilson A., *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, New Haven 2006

Ioulia Shukan

*Embarking on the
routes of revolution:
why and how ordinary
Ukrainian citizens
joined their forces
on the Maidan
(Winter 2013–2014)*

On the basis of three typical stories of ordinary citizens' commitment to Maidan protests, this article sheds light on the representations and endured experiences which motivated them and many other Ukrainians to join the marching revolution. It also depicts the modalities of those citizens' common protest action, in particular, within their mini-groupings (AutoMaidan, "Hell barrel", "Hromads'kyi Sector"), as well as the politicization process that they have experienced at the protest place and that turned them into revolutionaries who were determined to resist.

Keywords: Maïdan, protest, ordinary citizenship, commitment, politicization, Ukraine