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## **The Freak Cabaret on the Revolution Stage: On the Ambivalent Politics of Femininity, Rurality, and Nationalism in Ukrainian Popular Music**

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In the winter of 2013, as dramatic political demonstrations overtook central Kyiv, Ukraine, screens around the world projected live video feeds of the protests first referred to as “Euromaidan,” and later simply as “Maidan.”<sup>1</sup> Social media was pivotal in inciting the groundswell of opposition that eventually led to the abdication of power by President Viktor Yanukovich, who fled for safe harbor to Russia after ordering government troops to open fire on citizen protestors. Much like the 2011 “Arab Spring” (Hounshell), this Ukrainian revolution was live-tweeted, shared on Facebook, streamed on various media sites, and witnessed, often in real time, by a global community of interested watchers (Pinkham). Key moments, images, and sounds from the Maidan—violent clashes between protestors and police, public art installations, and musical performances on the stage erected in downtown Kyiv—became viral Internet phenomena. Videos of popular musical performances, in particular, became digitally remediating acts of retitling, reposting, and editing. As part of the broad social contest over meaning that has characterized the Ukrainian Maidan and the ongoing war in Ukraine’s eastern borderlands, online communities interpreted such music videos in dialectically opposing ways, engaging in bitter feuds over the meanings of politically charged tropes on the comment boards of websites and social media feeds, each side accusing the other of propagandizing on behalf of either Putin’s Russia or the US and European Union.<sup>2</sup> This polarized battle over interpretation often mirrored the entrenched discourse over Ukraine’s liminal geopolitical position: forever the quintessential borderland, buffering an expanding Europe from the Russian sphere of influence.

This article considers one such contested performance that circulated in the form of an edited music video, the Euromaidan performance of the piece “Hannusya” by the Ukrainian “freak cabaret” act known as the Dakh Daughters, a Kyiv-based collective of female actors and musicians known for their dramatic, collage-based musical performance pieces.<sup>3</sup> Their

performance links Ukrainian nationalism, femininity, indigeneity, and Soviet antifascist propaganda through a juxtaposition of polysemic elements. I consider how different publics read vastly different meanings into the Dakh Daughters' video, as, alternately, a fascist call-to-arms, an ironic subversion of Russian propaganda, or a new form of progressive politics articulated as aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Fusing an ethnographic approach to the "prosaics" of digital media with an interview conducted with Ruslana Khazipova of the Dakh Daughters, I seek to pull apart a few strands of the semiotic layers of the performance to elucidate how symbols of femininity, rurality, and nationalism came to stand for such opposing things (Coleman 2010).<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, I assess the Dakh Daughters' public disavowal of the political in favor of an *l'art pour l'art* stance—what I term the privilege of political ambivalence. I see this stance as part of a trend that characterized the small but influential demographic of young, urban, cosmopolitan Ukrainian popular musicians for the decade before the Maidan Revolution to the Maidan. Leading up to their appearance on the Maidan, interviews and television appearances given by various Dakh Daughters were marked by outward denial of political intent in their artistic work, even as they drew on charged political tropes. This stance of political ambivalence emerged as a reaction to the late- and post-Soviet generation of politicized popular music, during which the very possibility of a Ukrainian music divorced from Soviet cultural policy was inherently politicized. Ukraine's 2004 prodemocratic Orange Revolution intensified the link between music and politics in a variety of ways, most of all through the staging of that revolution as a music festival (Klid, Helbig). The post-Orange Revolution, post-post-Soviet generation of cosmopolitan, Internet-savvy popular musicians began to reject this outright politicization of music, recovering instead a bourgeois notion of aesthetic pleasure and provocation toward its own ends. Such a notion of pure aesthetics also came to signify freedom from the endemic political corruption of the Ukrainian state. The Dakh Daughters, emblematic of this shift, publicly rejected the political in their performances while incorporating sonic, visual, and poetic elements that spoke directly to the contemporary political moment in Ukraine.

This stance of artistic apoliticism was made untenable by the Maidan itself, which again forced prominent artists and musicians to take political sides, and to recognize and instrumentalize the ethical potential of their aesthetic projects. Ultimately, for musicians of the urban cosmopolitan scene, this resulted in a shift from the privileged stance of political ambivalence to one of political ambivalence *as* political conviction. In the

pastiche-based aesthetic of the Dakh Daughters, the layers of sonic, visual, and textual signifiers produced meanings that activated complex narratives of national belonging, ultimately suggesting a third way for Ukrainian politics beyond the binary of Europe versus Russia.

Homi K. Bhabha's influential idea of the "third space" (1990) as a zone of interactivity, hybridity, and ambiguity resonates with this new imaginary of the Ukrainian state, though the ways in which such future imaginaries become "enunciated" are varied and not often coherent. Laura Junka refines Bhabha's notion of hybridity as a feature of subaltern empowerment by recognizing the emergent qualities of third space hybridities: "instead of being an end in itself, the condition of hybridity . . . becomes a starting point that enables a movement beyond dominating representations of . . . conflict" (351). In the world of cosmopolitan Ukrainian popular music that is largely defined by semiotic hybridity, artists such as the Dakh Daughters direct the polysemic nature of pastiche towards a politicized aesthetic that embodies the ambivalence that they feel about the available binary modes of affiliation between Russia and the "West." In turn, online publics receive the semiotic mash-up of this popular music and derive meanings that validate their particular political orientations.

### Counterculture Hipsters to Revolutionary Heroines

After their performance on the Euromaidan, the Dakh Daughters were described by a British journalist as "Spice Girls with Molotov Cocktails," though their art director, Vlad Troitsky, preferred to compare them to "Pussy Riot—with good music" (Culshaw). The group is composed of seven women who play 15 instruments, including accordion, keyboards, bass, flute, and cello. Its members are trained actresses and musicians, and all seven alternate at center stage in the performance. Originating in Kyiv, the Dakh Daughters came together under the aegis of the influential cultural impresario Vlad Troitsky, the founder of the art space known as Theater Dakh.<sup>5</sup> Troitsky also founded GogolFest, one of Kyiv's premier annual arts events, where the Dakh Daughters premiered in 2012. In October of 2013 (one month before the Euromaidan protests began), GogolFest and the Dakh Daughters were touted by *The Economist* as evidence of Ukraine's emerging "hipster counterculture."<sup>6</sup> That report portrayed Troitsky as frustrated by the inevitable association of creativity and artistry in Ukraine with political motives: "This is not supposed to be a political event, yet in the end it is political" (ibid.).



Figure 1: Promotional poster for a Dakh Daughters concert in Lviv, Ukraine.

Troitsky has a professed ambivalence for the role of art, theater and music in the political processes of the state, and this position has become a defining characteristic of the influential musical acts with which he is associated. As part of this “hipster counterculture,” political ambivalence emerged as an option for musicians and performers who had naturalized the idea of being career musicians (that is, being compensated for making art in the global marketplace) without feeling obliged to be defined as “Ukrainian” musicians (and thus serving the agendas of particular actors within the state). The possibility of expressing ambivalence over the embeddedness of the political in the sonic and performative dimensions of popular music was a privilege, a relatively new phenomenon for musicians like the Dakh Daughters, who effectively denied the political while engaging

with and theatricalizing inherently charged political aspects of Ukrainian identity.

The consistent toying with and public disavowal of political messages in politicized tropes characterized the Dakh Daughters' first breakout piece, which became an online sensation in June of 2013, five months before the Euromaidan protests began. This original composition, titled "Rozy/Donbass," presents a mash-up of Shakespeare's accusatory 35th sonnet<sup>7</sup> with a traditional Ukrainian song and the menacing repetition of a semiotically dense word: "Donbass." "Donbass," conventionally transliterated as "Donbas," refers to the industrial region of Eastern Ukraine that was the political home and stronghold of the former president Viktor Yanukovich, the target of the Maidan movement. Donetsk, the monumental capital city of Donbas, was known in the USSR as the "city of a million roses," and was an important coal-mining center during Soviet times. (It is also the area that remains, at the time of this writing, mired in violent conflict between Ukrainian troops and militias and Russian-backed rebels).

The video garnered over a quarter of a million views in its first two months online. In it, the Dakh Daughters are dressed monochromatically. Their lips are painted with bright red lipstick. They wear short white dresses cinched at the waist, white tights, and powder-white faces that conjure associations with the French mime Marcel Marceau. They complete the look with black headbands, and accents of black and white lace. They are stone-faced. The piece begins with a melodic, unison declamation of Shakespeare's sonnet in English. After some time, the bass player interjects with the word "Donbass," which she utters with gravel in her voice. Timbrally, the aggressive utterance of "Donbass" acts as a kind of rupture, and propels the piece forward rhythmically, dramatically, and lyrically. Despite the strong voicing of the word "Donbass" in the piece, the group denied that the song had any political significance. In a television interview given in August of 2013, Dakh Daughter Solomia Melnyk said, "It's not political, it just sounded good and fit in the rhyme scheme."<sup>8</sup>

Such a rejection of political interpretations of the ambiguous, yet charged, tropes of their performances underwent a profound transformation as the Dakh Daughters aligned themselves with the Euromaidan protests and redirected their ambiguous meanings toward an explicit politics of protest. Early in the Maidan movement, members of the Dakh Daughters took part in a variety of activities beyond performance, including food preparation and volunteer organizing. A journalist writing for *The Guardian* and Vice Media's *Noisey* blog described the group as "heroines of the

Revolution” for playing as the “house band” on the Maidan stage and also for performing on the barricades (Culshaw). Tanya Hawrylyuk, who plays piano and accordion with the group, was interviewed on the subject of her involvement and expressed that the Euromaidan went beyond questions of national politics. Describing the “lack of joy” in both “the puritanism of the west and repressiveness of the east,” she stated her desire for the articulation of Ukraine’s future as a middle ground between Europe and Russia, one with a progressive feminist and sexual politics (*ibid.*). This shift from a stated apoliticism to a critique of the received notion of the political as defined either with or against Russia and the West echoes the set of values that motivated many Maidan protestors.

#### “Hannusya” on the Euromaidan

“Hannusya,” the piece portrayed in the Euromaidan video, is based on the monologue of an elderly indigenous Carpathian Mountain highlander, or Hutsul, woman known as Baba Hannusya (the monologue was recorded during a field expedition by the former spouse of Dakh Daughter Ruslana Khazipova (personal communication, July 8, 2015)).<sup>9</sup> In an interview with a Kyiv-based newspaper, Vlad Troitsky, the group’s director, explained that

‘Hannusya’ [is] a kind of Ukrainian spiritual based on the words of a grandmother from the mountains—and the ‘Testament’ (Заповіт) of Shevchenko, which they yell, and it’s not *stio*b.<sup>10</sup> There is irony—on the one hand, and on the other—maximum sincerity and openness, truly dramatic music. Here, between that Scylla and Charybdis, we are trying to pass.<sup>11</sup>

Baba Hannusya’s narrative is juxtaposed against fragments of poetry taken from Taras Shevchenko’s 1845 poem “Testament,” one of the most celebrated and overtly patriotic poems in the canon of Ukrainian literature (Fedynsky).<sup>12</sup> The video of the Dakh Daughters on the Euromaidan edits together their live performance of “Hannusya” on the Euromaidan stage in collage with images and sounds from the Maidan, including protestors’ controversial toppling of the last remaining Lenin monument in central Kyiv.

Despite their public rejection of the political, they volunteered to perform on the Euromaidan stage, where the ambiguous nature of their pastiche-based musical style became radically reoriented toward the political. As their performance was re-articulated explicitly in the register

of opposition, its inherent political content came into focus, charged with intense layers of meaning. In “Hannusya,” such charged meanings provoked discourse around past and future national imaginaries of the Ukrainian state. On the Euromaidan, the Dakh Daughters’s “Hannusya” was redefined as a protest song beyond the “essentialized stylistic categories” that often mark protest songs (McDonald 5); rather, the song and accompanying video became redirected toward protest through the context of its performance.

The viral video of the Dakh Daughters’ performance—and its radically different interpretation by different publics—is analogous in some ways to the controversial “Punk Prayer” video of Pussy Riot.<sup>13</sup> Both videos are edited to include non-diegetic footage and sounds, they draw on genres with deep historical roots and emotional resonance for national audiences (Dakh Daughters reinvent the national lament and stereotype of Hutsul exoticism; Pussy Riot parodies Russian Orthodox liturgical song and applies the anarchic sound and spirit of hardcore punk), international audiences interpreted both performances differently from national audiences, both were articulated by groups of women as performative feminist statements, and both spoke directly to the leaders of corrupt regimes.<sup>14</sup> However, unlike Pussy Riot, until their appearance at the Euromaidan, the Dakh Daughters defined themselves as apolitical artists.<sup>15</sup>

Following performance studies scholar Diana Taylor, I treat the viral video of the Dakh Daughter’s performance of “Hannusya” on the Euromaidan as an episteme, an “act of transfer” that “transmit[s] social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated . . . behavior” (3). In knowingly recontextualizing this indigenous female voice as a feminist incitement for revolution, the Dakh Daughters activated complex historical narratives of national belonging while simultaneously toying with the propagandistic allegations of fascism levied against Euromaidan activists by the Russian media (Struve). In particular, by indexing Hutsul, and thus Western Ukrainian, femininity and defiance, the Dakh Daughters constructed a symbolic link to a gendered archetype of the Maidan with deep historical roots: the *Banderivka*. Born out of the history of the controversial WWII-era Ukrainian national liberation movement that was led by Stepan Bandera (his followers were known as *Banderivtsi* [or *Banderovtsi* in Russian]; *Banderivka* is the feminine form of that term), the *Banderivka* became an important term of reclamation for some feminist activists on the Maidan (Phillips 417). Thus, the Dakh Daughters redirected a repertoire of vocal, gestural, and narrative knowledge toward the political by summoning of stereotypes of female, indigenous, and historical resistance.



On November 30, 2013, the first police crackdown on the Euromaidan provoked growing numbers of protestors to flock to Kyiv's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square), the central node of the unrest. Reporters and locals streamed video of that day's protest. The following Sunday, December 8, was designated as the "March of a Million" by Euromaidan organizers. Reports from that morning's *Kyiv Post* live Twitter feed described metro trains clogged with protestors *en route* from the city's peripheries to its center.<sup>16</sup> Protestors came from various class positions, generations, education levels, and political convictions to unite in opposition to the rampant corruption of then-President Yanukovich's regime. By mid-afternoon in Kyiv, thousands of protestors had blocked the entry to the Cabinet of Ministers building, expanding the footprint of the Maidan's occupation of central Kyiv. Media reports at that time estimated that the crowd had swelled to 100,000 people. At 6:15 PM, protestors toppled a monument of Vladimir Lenin that stood at one end of Kyiv's central promenade, kickstarting the "Leninopad" that brought the felling of Lenin statues throughout Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> That evening, the *Kyiv Post* reported that the rally's atmosphere was "festive, with protestors seen singing and dancing" (*ibid.*)<sup>18</sup>

Within the climate of heightened sentiment that marked the initial Euromaidan protests, and in response to the inflammatory Russian rhetoric depicting the protests as a fascist takeover, Ukrainian musicians took to the Maidan stage. Musical performances were framed by rhetoric supporting a vision of a "European Ukraine," one governed by the rule of law and respect for its citizens. Ruslana, the first Ukrainian pop star to achieve international acclaim with her victory in the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest, led the crowd through the national anthem of Ukraine hourly throughout the night despite the bone-searing cold.<sup>19</sup> On New Year's Eve, Ruslana played John Lennon's "Imagine" and the Beatles' "Let It Be" on the yellow and blue upright piano that had become a symbol of the Maidan's quirky revolutionary power. Numerous other prominent acts performed, just as musicians had done during the Orange Revolution almost a decade earlier.

When they took to the Euromaidan stage in early December of 2013, the Dakh Daughters wore enormous overcoats that alluded to (and exaggerated) the traditional woolen overcoats worn by Hutsul mountaineers. They stood on the Maidan stage against a blue background with large yellow script that read, "For a European Ukraine" (За Європейську Україну). Most of the performers wore folkloric scarves and accessories in addition to the band's signature pantomime makeup—white faces, dark eye makeup, and vermilion lips.



Figure 2: Ruslana Khazipova on the Euromaidan stage.

In the piece, Baba Hannusya's narrative outlines what could be a typical lament: it is late in her life, she is alone, sustained in part by the kindness of strangers (чужі). Her husband died, "he was too weak." This is a line that Khazipova and the Dakh Daughters return to emphatically later in the piece. When she was well enough, she kept livestock. She receives a small pension: it is not enough, but at least something to live on. There were very poor times in her life, when she was not well, all kind of things happened, war. There were times when she was eating "all kinds of nothing" . . . but, she says, [pause] I survived! (Я вижила!) Following this dramatic pause and declaration of perseverance, Khazipova voices the refrain: Glory to Jesus Christ! (Слава Ісусу Христу!) This typical greeting among Hutsuls stimulates a response from the crowd. Khazipova then continues by crying out, Glory to God for eternity! (Слава на віки Божу!)

Following these lines, the full band enters suddenly, adding a broad instrumental palette to the solo drum and voice act, and introducing a new, driving tempo. The rest of the band enters singing the syllable "Yo" (Йо) in a strident, vibrato-free style—most of them sing in unison, while one singer improvises a lament-style melody above. ("Yo" is also a common greeting among Hutsuls.) Departing from the relaxed opening, the rest of "Hannusya" is propulsive, with Khazipova narrating on the edge of a scream, shifting from the voice of Baba Hannusya to a grittier, less dialect-inflected, punk-rock howl. Later, Khazipova declares, "I have no fear, achoo! . . . my husband died, he was weak; I can not, I can not." (Я не годна, я не годна.) The indigenous voice, transplanted from the mountain village to the protest stage,

filtered through the sensibility of the “freak-cabaret,” becomes a rallying cry in this heightened political context. Baba Hannusya’s litany takes on the familiar theme of the nation’s victimhood, articulated by a strong female voice. This is not lost on the performers or the crowd, who respond to lines that resonate with the challenges of the protesters’ conditions: I am cold, I am hungry, I am disenfranchised, but I am strong. At the Euromaidan, unlike other performances, the Dakh Daughters end the piece with a protest chant, “If not now, when? If not us, who?” (“Коли як не зараз, і хто як не ми?”).

In the days following the December 8 “Leninopad,” the 11-minute video of the Dakh Daughters performing “Hannusya” on the Euromaidan stage was posted on YouTube (“Dakh Daughters Band euromaidan 2013”) and Vimeo (“Dakh Daughters Hannusya Euromaidan 2013,” with French subtitles).<sup>20</sup> The video opens with three minutes of footage of the Dakh Daughters preparing for their performance. One musician reports that the Lenin monument was torn down and sheds tears about the present state of affairs while on her cell phone. As the performers apply their signature heavy mime-like makeup, Dakh Daughter Solomia Melnyk says, “What people need now is love and movement [пых], you understand, not these little aesthetic and intellectual things of ours.” The women turn this into a joke, concluding, “everything that happens now is a provocation.” Another member of the group explains that she is going to perform because she supports her friends who support the Maidan.

After three minutes, the video cuts to Ruslana Khazipova on stage, wearing a typical Ukrainian headscarf and a massive woolen overcoat, with an EU flag and a space heater visible in the frame. One of the other performers (outside of the frame) says “Let’s go to the mountain valley!” in Hutsul dialect into the microphone. As Khazipova negotiates for the soundman to amplify the bass drum, which she beats steadily, she speaks as if caricaturing the high-pitched lilting speech associated with Hutsul women. As Khazipova begins the monologue, the crowd responds rowdily. Audience members call out to Khazipova, who responds by flirting, cajoling, and sticking out her tongue between lines of text; she shifts rapidly between the persona of the grandmother figure of Baba Hannusya and the “freak-cabaret” performer.

The rest of the video cuts together live footage of their performance on the Maidan stage with their arrival to the Euromaidan, shots of the crowd, police activity, the toppling of Lenin in Kyiv, a pianist draped in the Ukrainian flag playing the iconic Euromaidan upright piano, and other scenes from that week’s protest. As it circulated on social media, the

original YouTube quickly accumulated over 100,000 views. A week later, it was reposted on YouTube with the title “Banderite group Dakh Daughters on the Maidan” (“Бендеровская группа Dakh Daughters на майдане”), recasting the performance as one by Western Ukrainian nationalist radicals (the video also features a variety of pop-up ads for the user to click such as “Find out the terrible truth about the Maidan”, and “For YOU: Best videos of Putin”).<sup>21</sup> In linking the idea of the Banderite to a group of female performers, these Internet publics were also drawing on an emergent Maidan feminist archetype: the *Banderivka*, the female nationalist warrior.

### Of Fascists and Goddesses

The Dakh Daughters’ performance of “Hannusya” on the Maidan is a musical performance that subverts and recasts current Russian propaganda with Soviet roots while also drawing on feminine stereotypes linked to indigeneity, spirituality, and the nation-state. Scholars of gender in post-Soviet Ukraine have mapped a variety of broad trends in Ukrainian feminism since the fall of the Soviet Union. Sociologist Alexandra Hrycak has critiqued the elite “foundation feminists” who, in attempting to bridge the gap between Western NGOs and local women’s organizers in the post-Soviet era, actually alienated grassroots associations. Hrycak and literary scholar Rewakowicz describe various “indigenous feminisms” exemplified, in part, by intellectuals such the writer and public intellectual Oksana Zabuzhko, as well as with the rise of academic centers in Kharkiv and Kyiv devoted to the study of gender. Key figures in Ukrainian public life typify other varieties of Ukrainian feminisms such as former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, whose “two bodies” (the impeccably coiffed and polished politician, and the tortured prisoner) represent differing ideas and ideals of Ukrainian femininity (Zhurzhenko); the Eurovision-champion-cum-activist Ruslana Lyzhychko (Sonevytsky); and the radical “sextremist” group known as FEMEN, whose exhibitionistic and sensationalist acts have stirred controversy within Ukrainian feminist circles (Mayerchuk and Plakhotnik, Zychowicz).<sup>22</sup> Tracing how both feminine and fascist discourses have operated on the Maidan and in Russian state media representations of contemporary Ukrainian revolutionaries adds further complexity to the ways in which online publics received the Dakh Daughters’ video of “Hannusya.”

In particular, the trope of the *Banderivka* sits at the nexus of feminist and (anti-)fascist discourse; the resonance of this deeply contested term points to the broader context of dispute over the ongoing conflict

between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2014. This conflict has been defined to large degree by the propaganda campaigns of the Russian and Ukrainian states as well as ideologically charged representations in various European and US media outlets. “It is crucial,” the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak writes, “to refuse all reductionist diagnoses of the current situation, whichever side they come from. An example is the term ‘fascism’ constantly used to describe one or the other position in this conflict” (*Revolutions . . .*). Yurchak calls attention to the incendiary allegation of “fascism” from multiple sides of the conflict: the Russian state has consistently portrayed the Maidan protestors and new political leadership of post-Yanukovych Ukraine as fascists and neo-Nazis; Ukraine and the West have drawn facile comparisons between Putin and Hitler, equating today’s encroachment on sovereign Ukraine (including Russia’s March 2014 annexation of Crimea) to Hitler’s incursion into the Sudetenland. Within Ukraine, the term “Putler”—a portmanteau of Putin and Hitler—emerged as a common nickname for the Russian President.

Contemporary Russian allegations of Ukrainian fascism stem from the role of the Ukrainian national liberation movement that fought to defend Ukraine from all foreign invaders during World War II.<sup>23</sup> The most controversial aspect of this history has to do with the various alliances that were (often temporarily) forged with Nazi forces against the Soviet Red Army (a fact that, if anything, underscores the degree to which drawing clear moral judgments in the simplistic binary of “good” or “evil” is impossible in the current conflict, as Yurchak suggests). The radical OUN leader Stepan Bandera became conflated with the history of German cooperation on the part of Ukrainian nationalists, despite the fact that he was imprisoned in a Nazi camp until 1944.<sup>24</sup> The Ukrainian nationalist battle against Soviet occupation persisted in some areas of Western Ukraine into the early 1950s, especially in remote regions inhabited by Hutsuls.<sup>25</sup> In response to this militarized resistance movement, Soviet propaganda returned at crucial historical moments to the latent threat of Ukrainian fascists on the Soviet border, and inhabitants of Western Ukraine (including Galicians, Lemkos, Rusyny, Boikos, and Hutsuls) became associated with the term *Banderivtsi*—the followers of Stepan Bandera.

Though Hutsuls—the romanticized indigenous mountaineers celebrated for their subsistent lifestyles and independence—did not often join the ranks of Ukrainian nationalist militants, they did frequently provide support and shelter to soldiers. Subsequently, Hutsuls and nationalist soldiers shared a figurative space in Ukrainian narratives of twentieth-century Western

Ukrainian resistance. After the Orange Revolution, Hutsuls invested in rewriting the history of Ukrainian nationalist resistance (the same history coded as fascism by Soviet historians) to include their prominent roles. During my fieldwork in Hutsul villages in 2008–2009, the role of Hutsul villagers—particularly women—in giving safe haven to UPA soldiers was told and retold. In the important market town of Kosiv, a museum to UPA soldiers was opened in the center of town. In Kosmach, villagers proudly spoke of how they resisted Soviet forces until 1953, largely due to the villagers' cooperation with UPA soldiers. In numerous Hutsul villages, locals pointed out the places where *kryjivky*, the underground bunkers where UPA soldiers hid in the 1940s, were said to have existed.

In post-Soviet propaganda, and concurrent with the rehabilitation of the image of the UPA in Western Ukraine following the 2004 Orange Revolution, the semantic meanings of “Banderivtsi” and “fascists” further blurred (Struve, Marples, Snyder “A Fascist Hero . . .”). Despite the fact that the Euromaidan protests were initiated on social media by an Afghan-born, Kyiv-based, cosmopolitan journalist, and that the first few casualties from the Ukrainian side were not ethnic Ukrainians, Putin's media depicted the Euromaidan as the takeover of the Ukrainian government by xenophobic radicals, reactivating the panic of “fascism” held over from a previous century, as detailed by historian Kai Struve:

Its central motif is that the Euromaidan and the change of government in the end of February 2014 in Ukraine were a “fascist coup” and, in a way, a recurrence of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The evil, hostile forces from the West, now mostly the EU and the United States, took over power in Kiev, as in 1941, with the support of the extremely brutal and cruel Ukrainian “fascists”, the *banderovtsy*, from Western Ukraine. When they tried to extend their brutal regime of suppression and murder to the eastern parts of Ukraine, the “people” began a heroic fight against them.<sup>26</sup>

An April 2014 *Kyiv Weekly* interview with a historian from Donetsk—whose name is not given beyond the initials “Y.Y.”—detailed how the term *Banderivets* has come to be synonymous with “enemy” for residents of the Donbas region in the post-Maidan era.<sup>27</sup>

In response to the circulation of such stereotypes in Russian media representation of Ukrainian protestors, Maidan activists reclaimed the term as one of defiant national—and multicultural—pride. T-shirts and images

proclaiming, “I am a Banderite,” “Jewish Banderite,” and “Crimean Tatar Banderite” were mass-produced and circulated on social media. Some feminist Maidan activists, fearing the “retraditionalization of gender ideals,” reacted by militarizing women’s participation and creating social media spaces dedicated to repurposing the revolution “in a manner that contributed to overturning patriarchal discourses”—thus stoking the image of the *Banderivka* (Phillips 417). A 2007 painting by the artist Ihor Pereklita, made to look like Soviet propaganda, was printed onto stickers and posters. It depicted a sexy Ukrainian woman in “national costume with a machine gun. In one hand she holds a grenade, and in the other, a bough of snowberries. . . . The picture has the text, ‘I am a *Banderivka*. I am a Ukrainian. Death to the Muscovite Occupiers’ (Buryechak and Petrenko, cited in Phillips 417). This provocative image, as Phillips documents, was one of many of Ukrainian female partisans that circulated on the Euromaidan.

Though interpretations of their performance emphasized the link to *Banderivstvo*, the Dakh Daughters actually invoked two prominent and opposing gendered archetypes of contemporary Ukraine in their performance of “Hannusya” on the Euromaidan: the *Banderivka*, which links Ukrainian nationalism, the subversion of Russian propaganda, and a militarized femininity; and the domestic figure of the *Berehynia*, the pagan Goddess of the hearth, who became popularized in post-Soviet Ukraine as the mother and protector of the nation (Rubchak).<sup>28</sup> Kis explains that the “life stories of women partisans [*Banderivka*] are used to exemplify the extreme patriotism, self-sacrifice, and unconditional devotion to the nation of female champions of the struggle . . . their stories are used to articulate and substantiate the utter superiority of national interests” (166). Despite the seeming incompatibility of the radicalized warrior women with the domestic hearth goddess, the performance of “Hannusya” opens a syncretic space for these disparate modes of femininity. By recasting a narrative of lament as one of resilience and revolutionary potential, by resituating the utterance from the rural home to the urban stage, and by revoicing the elderly speech and dialect of a Hutsul women as a punk scream, the Dakh Daughters blur the lines between the *Banderivka* and the *Berehynia*, and offer a third space for feminine expression.

Thus, the Dakh Daughters’ sonic representation of Hutsul female biography on the Euromaidan stage was charged with the politics of both the pacific *Berehynia* and the bellicose *Banderivka*, though only the latter archetype was seized upon by anti-Maidan critics. These critics focused on the symbolic connection to the *Banderivka*, and remediated the video by

retitling it (otherwise unchanged) with the Russian-language title “Banderite group Dakh Daughters” (Бендеровская группа Dakh Daughters). Despite the fact that the Dakh Daughters are neither Western Ukrainian nor mention Bandera in the performance, this association of their performance with the *Banderivka* functioned as evidence to indict the Maidan as a hostile, fascist takeover. On the original video posted of their performance, pro-Maidan commenters flooded the page with enthusiastic appraisals of the performance, seizing on the piece as a statement of survival and resilience. In both cases, “Hannusya” was explicitly politicized, but continued to generate ambiguous, even ambivalent, meanings.

To a Ukrainian speaker, the dialect and Khazipova’s lilting manner of delivery index Hutsul feminine identity. In the performance, the indigenous voice of this elderly woman—familiar in summoning the stereotypical tropes of Hutsul rurality, defiance, female lament, folkloric quaintness—becomes a voice of riotous resistance. Baba Hannusya—a Hutsul voice reimagined as a Euromaidan voice of protest—is amplified in the context of the Euromaidan as a *Banderivka*, a nationalist warrior. The invocation of the *Banderivka* activates a body of cultural memory with particular resonances, most of which imagine an exclusive Ukraine: the Western borderlands, WWII-era atrocities, even xenophobia. However, this polysemic and problematic term also circulates as a feminist reclamation and inversion of Russian propaganda on the Euromaidan. Voiced by urban cosmopolitans, it suggests a distinctly new mode of identifying with the Ukrainian nation, one that encodes generations of cultural memory and refigures them as part of a multicultural, self-conscious revolution of dignity. Yet, it also engages symbols that easily lend themselves to an opposing interpretation.

Through the strategic redirection of cultural tropes adjacent to WWII-era Ukrainian nationalism, the Dakh Daughters activate signs ripe for conflicting interpretation: the *mélange* of indigenous, feminine, cosmopolitan, and Soviet sounds and images become redirected toward an explicit pro-Ukrainian politics that is progressive, cosmopolitan, inclusive, yet, at its core, ambivalent. Far from the radical Right or Left of the Maidan, the Dakh Daughters mark a middle direction without charting the course. Their professed political ambivalence leading up to their performance on the Euromaidan coupled with the stark juxtapositions of their musical-dramatic pieces activate an unexpected constellation of meanings. Through the contested political history of the *Banderite* and the contemporary iteration of the *Banderivka*, through feminist critique and stereotypes of Hutsul authenticity, the Dakh Daughters create a collage that embodies



the contemporary ambivalence of the political, even as it is articulated on the revolution stage. In adopting this position, however, they have also abandoned the privileged stance of political ambivalence, which is one that artists can only afford to adopt in places that are in a state of relative stability and openness. A state of revolution and political upheaval forces political meaning on those performers who do not explicitly intend it, or even actively refuse it. In fact, one might say, the privilege of declaring artistic apoliticism is a value of the kind of idealized liberal society for which the Maidan protests were fought (though not, as many Ukrainians feel, won).

Revolutions are messy things, and they bring unexpected and often unwanted consequences. In the case of Ukraine, the vulnerabilities that the Maidan exposed led to Russia's opportunistic seizing of Crimea and ongoing provocations in the eastern Donbas region. These acts have had profound destabilizing effects for the political and economic organization of the Ukrainian state and for the quality of life of its citizens. However, if we begin to look past what Yurchak calls "the state's monopoly on representing 'the nation'" and pay attention to cultural trends—such as the summertime music festivals that draw together diverse populations and music for days of revelry, or the "days of culture" being sponsored in mainland Ukraine to promote the music and art of the embattled Crimean Tatar indigenous population of Crimea—perhaps the Maidan, rather than re-inscribing early twentieth-century xenophobic notions of statehood, celebrated an emergent sense of Ukrainian identity predicated on citizenship and affect rather than ethnicity. In this cosmopolitan imaginary, the Afghan-born Kyiv-based journalist, the young Internet-savvy activists, musicians of the freak cabaret, urbanites, and indigenes embrace ambivalence as a position of conviction in order to remake their world. The question remains as to how such ambivalence, rendered in this example as popular music pastiche, will be understood by audiences on opposing sides of the ongoing war.

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### Notes

1. Supporters of the Maidan also use the term "Revolution of Dignity" (in Ukrainian: Революція Гідності) to refer to the protests. Critics of the Maidan

frame the protests as a *coup d'état*; Russian media has often portrayed the *coup* as one spearheaded by neo-Nazi fascists (Struve).

2. Freedom House reported that in 2014, Ukraine and Russia were “Partly Free” societies when it came to freedom to access online information (though Ukraine’s score of 33 places it significantly closer to the “Best” end of the spectrum than Russia’s score of 60, where 0 is “Best” and 100 is “Worst”). According to the report, close to 50% of Ukrainian adults regularly use the Internet. Among users, the vast majority (82%) reside in urban areas, though usage in rural areas is on the rise. The report also includes data on the explosion of social media users that occurred during the Euromaidan protests, with 230,000 new users joining Facebook in Ukraine in January and February 2014, and half a million users checking Twitter daily in January of 2014. In 2014, a central controversy emerged over the management of popular Russian-owned social media sites such as VKontakte, which cracked down on Euromaidan activists and pro-Ukrainian sentiment. Russian attacks on pro-Ukrainian media, such as a January 2014 article in the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, swelled and numerous outlets reported “insulting, combative” anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian comments “on any articles posted online related to Russia or Ukraine.” The full reports can be accessed online at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2014/ukraine> and <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2014/russia> (Accessed November 6, 2015).

3. The Dakh Daughters feature women associated with the experimental Dakh Theater in Kyiv, and grew out of one member’s fantasy of a Parisian cabaret act that could test the borders of theater and music. Some performers are also key members in other prominent Ukrainian musical and theatrical acts. The seven multi-instrumentalists are: Nina Haretska (also of Dakha Brakha), Ruslana Khazipova (Perkalaba), Tanya Havrylyuk (Tanya Tanya), Solomia Melnyk, Anna Nikitina, Natalia Hanalevych, and Natalia Zozul (known simply as Zo).

4. In her survey of ethnographic approaches to digital media, Coleman categorizes the ways that digital media “feed into, reflect, and shape other kind of social practices” as the “prosaics of digital media.” In this regard, an attention to lexical and dialect use in YouTube comments on the contested video of the Dakh Daughters demonstrates how the political is embedded in the everyday language of the Internet publics that consume, share, and comment on this video.

5. Dakh also spawned the “ethno-chaos” “avant-garde folk” band and WOMEX darlings DakhaBrakha, who, due to their busy international touring schedule, did not perform at Maidan, but considered themselves “Ambassadors of the Maidan” around the world. DakhaBrakha’s cellist, Nina Haretska, also performed with the Dakh Daughters.

6. The article was called “Signs of a Hipster Rebellion” and was posted on *The Economist* blog “Prospero” at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/10/culture-ukraine>, accessed on April 27, 2015.

7. “No more be grieved at that which thou hast done: / Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud, / Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun, / And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud. / All men make faults, and even I in this, / Authorizing thy trespass with compare, / Myself corrupting salving thy amiss, / Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are; / For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense— / Thy adverse party is thy advocate— / And ‘gainst myself a lawful plea commence. / Such civil war is in my love and hate, / That I an accessory needs must be / To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.” (Shakespeare 2000: 32)

8. <[http://tvi.ua/program/2013/08/15/solomiya\\_melnyk\\_u\\_prohrami\\_rankovi\\_kurasany](http://tvi.ua/program/2013/08/15/solomiya_melnyk_u_prohrami_rankovi_kurasany)>. Accessed November 8, 2014.

9. In Soviet and post-Soviet representations, Hutsuls are most often referred to as an “ethnographic group.” Francine Hirsch (2005) has documented the semantic confusion over Soviet terms used to refer to discrete populations within states. The designation of “ethnographic group” appears to be a holdover from the language of Soviet nationalities policy. In this article, I prefer to use the term “indigenous” to refer to the Hutsul people.

10. *Stiob* describes a particular manner of creating satire through overidentification with a subject, a humorous modality associated with late Soviet society (Boyer and Yurchak).

11. <http://www.day.kiev.ua/ru/article/kultura/iskusstvo-nezhnogo-skandala>; author’s translation. Accessed October 23, 2013.

12. “When I die, then bury me / Atop a mound / Amid the steppe’s expanse / In my beloved Ukraine, / So I may see / The great broad fields, / The Dnipro and the cliffs, / So I may hear the river roar. / When it carries hostile blood / From Ukraine into the azure sea . . . / I will then forsake the / Fields and hills – / I’ll leave it all, / Taking wing to pray / To God Himself . . . till / Then I know not God. / Bury me, rise up, / And break your chains / Then sprinkle liberty / With hostile wicked blood. / And in a great new family, / A family of the free, / Forget not to remember me / With a kind and gentle word.” (Fedynsky ix)

13. Many versions of the “Punk Prayer” (called “Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away”) exist online. The following link has English subtitles, accessed April 22, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPDkJbTQRCY>.

14. For more on Pussy Riot’s reception in the West, see Tochka (2013); for more on Pussy Riot’s involvement (or lack thereof) in the Russian punk scene, see Steinholt (2013).

15. Another difference between the two groups is that the Dakh Daughters were a theatrical/musical group from their inception, situated within a network of Kyiv-based artists, while Pussy Riot grew out of the radical art collective “Voyna” and were not part of the network of punk musicians in Russia (Steinholt).

16. <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/euromaidan-rallies-in-ukraine-dec-8-333297.html>, Accessed 18 November 2014.

17. The fall of the Lenin monument in Kyiv was met with mixed reactions. Notably, the pop star and activist, Ruslana Lyzhychko, whose participation in the Euromaidan protests figured heavily in November and December, warned against participating in such “barbaric acts.” In a blog post written for the independent Ukrainian newspaper *Ukrainian Pravda*, she wrote, “We judge acts of vandalism, wildness, violence, and all that can divide and split Ukrainians. No monument should be worth the fate of the Maidan. We do not want to be far from European standards and humanistic principles. At a time when our peaceful initiative needs organization and the unification of everyone around the Maidan and the peaceful protests for the resignation of our criminal government, toppling monuments and calls for aggression are nothing else than a movement in the opposite directions from European integration and civil society. We must act civilized! We do not want for this Creative Revolution to turn into a riot...” (<http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/ruslana/52a4c2e3b8b13>, accessed November 18 2013, author’s translation).

18. In late February, Maidan protesters succeeded in ousting the corrupt president Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia and remains there under President Vladimir Putin’s protection. Other outcomes of the Maidan have undermined Ukraine’s territorial integrity: in March of 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea using a new “political technology of non-occupation” (Yurchak, *Little Green Men*); subsequently, violent skirmishes on Ukraine’s eastern borders began between Russian-backed “rebels” and the Ukrainian military. At the time of this writing, the conflict remains unresolved.

19. Ruslana’s Eurovision-winning song, “Wild Dances,” was inspired by Hutsul (Western Ukrainian Carpathian mountaineer) sounds and imagery. For more on the meanings associated with Hutsul identity in Ruslana’s “Wild Dances” project, see Pavlyshyn (2006), Wickström (2008), and Sonevytsky (2012).

20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VowNgMWcubA>, accessed April 12, 2015; <https://vimeo.com/87701105>, accessed April 12, 2015. At the time of writing, the YouTube video had over 115,000 views and 243 comments.

21. Rolikov, the YouTube user who posted the “Banderite” version of the video writes that his or her YouTube channel is “designed for those who are interested in what is happening in Ukraine, and wants to be in the middle of

Maidan . . .” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYPBqwuqLkA>, accessed April 12, 2015. At the time of writing, this video had over 38,000 views and 156 comments.

22. FEMEN, like Pussy Riot and Voina, deploy sexuality in acts of extreme social protests. For more on the similarities and differences of these Ukrainian and Russian “sextremist” activists, see Channell (2014).

23. In 1942, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which grew out of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), began a guerilla-style warfare against all of forces that sought to occupy Ukrainian territories—Soviet, Polish, or German.

24. Bandera was assassinated by the KGB in 1959 in München.

25. After 1945, and Stalin’s re-annexation of Western Ukraine into the USSR, a massive policy of deporting Ukrainians from the West to the Gulag was enacted. Snyder reports that “between 1944 and 1946 . . . 182,543 Ukrainians were deported from Soviet Ukraine to the Gulag: not for committing a particular crime, not even for being Ukrainian nationalists, but for being related to or acquainted with Ukrainian nationalists” (328).

26. Struve further details the effects that this propaganda campaign had on the reluctance of European and US leaders to get involved in the conflict: “A central part of the Russian government’s struggle against the Euromaidan, its activities instigating a violent conflict in eastern Ukraine, and its support for the Donetsk and Luhans’k Republics is a massive, extremely distorting and manipulating campaign of Russian television and other media . . . This narrative had a strong impact in Russia and eastern Ukraine, pushed the separatist movement, and contributed to the violent escalation of the conflict. It mobilized fighters from Russia and legitimized the increasingly open Russian interference. But the view of the events as driven by “fascists” had also an impact on Western attitudes. It contributed to the fact that the public in western countries was reluctant in the support of the Euromaidan and the Ukrainian struggle with the Russian aggression.”

27. In response to the journalist Ivanov’s question of whether Donbas residents have a historical justification for fearing Western Ukrainian “banderivtsi,” the historian responds by saying that “there are some reasons, but they are greatly exaggerated”:

For example, my grandfather fought in the Western Ukraine, he had personal reasons to dislike “banderivtsi”. But he worked at the mine, in his brigade, there were people from Western Ukraine (at the time it was a regular practice). And all of them were called “banderivtsi,” because it was typical for Donetsk, but behind such nickname, there was no implication. Now the word “banderivets”

means “enemy,” and then it simply meant “stranger,” nothing more. People treated them as outsiders, but they were trusted in the mines, everyone knew nothing bad would happen. There were some common myths—for example, that one cannot speak Russian in L’viv, but no one was able to confirm such information.

28. The emergence of a post-Soviet “cult of motherhood” that was partially rooted in the depopulation that accompanied the social and economic collapse of the Soviet Union further blurred the roles of women-as-mothers with women-as-propagators, and stewards of, the nation (Pavlychko). Anthropologist Maureen Murney describes how this elision of motherhood with nationhood exerts pressures on post-Soviet women who negotiate problems such as drug addiction, and who are perceived widely to be “women who have consciously rejected the very essence of Ukrainian womanhood” because of their inability to function as good wives and mothers (141). Sarah Phillips (2014) traces how the stereotype of the *Berehynia* operated on the Maidan to activate a feminist backlash against the conflation of female bodies with maternal-nationalist discourse.

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