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Gender Performance in Contentious Politics: A case study of the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus & the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine

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Introduction

A woman in white kneels in front of a line of riot police that blocks opposition supporters in the center of Minsk, Belarus on August 30, 2020. A photographer from the Associated Press captures this powerful moment: the woman is on her knees and fiercely staring down the militant officers. Her white clothing and innocent body gestures present a stark and powerful contrast to the armed police officers, who are dressed in military uniforms, their faces covered by black masks. This photo has become one of the most popular images of the 2020-21 political protests in Belarus, which turned out to be the largest in the country's history and which were marked by a clear gendered dynamic.

Image 1: Photography by AP

After the presidential elections in August 2020, which granted Alyaksandr Lukashenka a sixth term in office but were widely seen to be rigged, hundreds of thousands of Belarusian people across the country took to the streets. Mr. Lukashenka has been in power in Belarus since 1994, holding nearly absolute control over the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the government. On August 10, official results handed him nearly 80% of the vote, while his main rival, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, only won 10.1 % of the vote (*BBC News* 11 Sept. 2020). Such a result in the election widely viewed by the public as rigged sparked the 2020-21 political upheaval in Belarus, at the heart of which stood Belarusian women.

Women's active participation in the uprising started on the third day of the protests, on August 12, 2020, when several hundred women built solidarity chains in Minsk opposing police brutality and violence on the streets. Some women wore white clothes and held flowers, other women dressed in white-red-white colors and sang the Belarusian lullaby 'Kalyhanka.' Such female protest activity continued throughout the following days as women understood the power of gender roles within the Belarusian society and used them to their advantage. Women's chains of solidarity with flowers, Saturday female marches, and flash mobs with white-red-white colors were among the many creative ways women

participated in the protests. Through these performances, which mobilized stereotypes of female purity, nonviolence, and maternal care, Belarusian women leveraged their femininity to protect their loved ones and ensure a non-violent nature of the uprising. The 2020-21 Belarusian protests were named by many as a 'female revolution,' referring to the Belarusian female trio Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kalesnikava, and Veranika Tsapkala, who created the united headquarter to participate in the 2020 presidential elections, as well as the symbol of the 'Women in White:' innocent, caring, beautiful, and pacifying.

Similar to Belarus, women have also participated in gendered protest activities across other post-Soviet Eurasian states. In particular, there was a significant female presence in the protest space during the 2013-14 Euromaidan uprising in Ukraine. After then-president Viktor Yanukovych chose not to sign an agreement that would integrate the country with the European Union, many Ukrainians took to the streets in peaceful protests across the country, with the largest protests at Kyiv's Independence Square, or Maidan.

At the beginning of these peaceful protests, women composed almost half of the protesters on Maidan.They participated in all forms of activities, evoking both traditional and egalitarian gender scenarios (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 150). Along with taking on traditionally feminine activities of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the protesters, Ukrainian women also fought on barricades, participated in negotiation activities, and provided medical and information support when the uprising took a violent course in January 2014. Accordingly, women were able to become full members and participants in the revolution. They both instrumentalized traditional gender roles such as Mother and Ukrainian Beauty, and contested them through more unconventional female images of Warrior and Peacekeeper (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 151). Such female activity during the protests led many to conclude that women were the central force behind the protest movement in Ukraine, pushing not only for changes in the government but also for changes in the country's gender culture.

This thesis aims to explore women's participation in contentious politics in post-Soviet Eurasia states. In both Belarus and Ukraine, women were both visible and invisible drivers of demonstrations: attending marches, creating solidarity chains, supporting other protestors, providing medical assistance, participating in peace-keeping, etc. By performing different gender roles and utilizing particular gender symbols, women were able to claim their presence in these protest spaces. However, such moments of upheaval tend to create both opportunities and threats for women. The thesis will identify what gender roles, symbols, and discourses women utilized in the 2020-21 Belarus uprising and the 2013-14 Euromaidan protest in Ukraine, and assess the socio-political significance of gendered performances in these specific contexts.

Research Design

Research questions:

Over the last few decades, a substantial body of literature has explored women's participation in contentious politics. Scholars have noted that in protests across the globe, ranging from the Arab Spring uprisings to the democratization movements in Latin America, women have invoked their gender identities to join public spaces and make political demands as women. For example, Argentinian women used their roles as mothers to protest abductions of young individuals at Plaza de Mayo during the 1980s,

while Egyptian women leveraged their feminity to subvert the conservative gender discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood during the resistance movement of Baheya Ya Masr in the early 2000s. This thesis will contribute to this literature by analyzing women's participation in recent protests in post-Soviet Eurasian states (e.g., Belarus and Ukraine). Specifically, the key research questions of this thesis are:

1. What gender roles, symbols, and discourses do women use to create opportunities for participation in the protest space? To what degree do these gender performances reinforce or depart from established gender norms?
2. What are the effects of such explicitly gendered female participation in protests on feminist collective organizing and on women's socio-political standing in society at large?

Case studies:

To answer these research questions, I will undertake two case studies of women's participation in protest movements in the post-Soviet Eurasian region. Specifically, I will consider the 2020-2021 political protests in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. The case study method will allow me to closely investigate and analyze women's participation in political protests in the same region, using a range of data collection methods. It will also help me to compare and contrast women's protest tactics and gender performance between the two states as the cases are sufficiently similar.

The case studies of Ukraine and Belarus were chosen for three reasons. First, Belarus and Ukraine are neighboring states that share a range of social, cultural, and political characteristics. They have a common history of having belonged to the Soviet Union, share the same ethnolinguistic background as Eastern Slavs, and their citizens utilize the Russian language in daily life. Second, the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine were political movements directed against authoritarian rule. At the time of the protests, Ukraine was a competitive authoritarian regime, and Belarus was an established authoritarian regime.[1] Third, the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan in Ukraine have been characterized by a significant female presence and women's notable use of public gender performances. Women were not only visible drivers of demonstrations but also utilized a range of specific gendered roles, ranging from traditional feminine roles of cooks and cleaners to more egalitarian roles of being peacekeepers and warriors.

Data collection:

To identify what gender roles, symbols, and discourses women utilize in the protest space, I will implement qualitative content analysis along with a close reading of primary and secondary sources. I will use relevant sampling to find and select textual, visual, and audio materials that contribute to answering my research questions and provide sufficient information about women's participation in the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. The sampling of relevant electronic materials will be based on the keywords searched in various search engines, including such

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[1] The term *competitive authoritarian regime* was coined by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way in their 2010 book of the same name, where they discuss this type of hybrid regime. Competitive authoritarian regimes differ from fully authoritarian regimes for two reasons: they have regular, free, and competitive elections, and the opposition can operate without significant political risks to contest for power.

phrases as "women," "Belarus protests," "women leading protests in Belarus," "women and Euromaidan," "women and Ukraine protests." Other criteria for sampling will include the period of the publication and the language of text materials. I will analyze textual materials in English, Belarusian, and Ukrainian, as well as limit the search to a given time frame: 2013 – 2021.

Furthermore, I am planning to incorporate the analysis of visual and audio materials available online. The abundance of visual material from various media platforms and their symbolic and performative communication will allow me to identify certain repetitions of gendered imagery and performances within the protests. Based on the obtained information, I will systemize and structure the data to point out certain sub-categories of women's roles in the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine.

Initially, I had planned my research and data analysis around conducting semi-structured interviews with gender experts, female activists, and female protestors in Belarus and Ukraine. This would have deepened my understanding of gender performance by collecting women's perspectives and opinions. However, I decided to abandon my plans for two main reasons. The first reason was the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions in travel, which prevented me from doing in-person fieldwork in the region. The second reason was the danger that I could be putting my informants in by asking them to conduct online interviews. In the case of Belarus, this risk is even higher due to the ongoing political instability. People are generally expressing fear and anxiety of disclosing information to the "wrong" individual, including foreign researchers. In the case of Ukraine, it would be difficult to ensure anonymity and privacy of information, despite the availability of private and encrypted media platforms. For these reasons, I decided, instead, to utilize the available primary and secondary sources, as well as reflect on the events through my personal connections to the region (e.g., my family, friends, and acquaintances).

Defining Data Analysis Methods:

This thesis draws on a range of methods to analyze women's gender performances in protest movements. To consider all aspects of such performance, the following Rubric 1 (below) was developed. This rubric classifies gender performance in four distinct categories: traditional and reinforcing gender performance; traditional and subverting gender performance; egalitarian and reinforcing gender performance; egalitarian and subverting gender performance. The rows of the rubric refer to the gender roles adopted by women, while the columns of the rubric indicate the discourses, symbols, and perspectives of women according to the contributions and functions they performed. Traditional gender roles will be defined as behavioral expectations for women based on their biological sex. These roles often represent women as those who serve the needs of others by providing empathetic and moral support (e.g., Motherhood or Female Beauty). In contrast, egalitarian gender roles will be conceptualized in terms of gender equality in the public domain. These egalitarian roles tend to provide opportunities for women to perform gender differently and are seen as emancipatory for women. They allow women to transcend the social expectations of gender and underscore their leadership skills and knowledge (e.g., Female Warrior or Peacekeeper).

However, certain gender roles are not mutually exclusive: while some gender roles will perfectly fall into one category, others may take a few categories at the same time due to the variations in their meaning (e.g., the traditional role of Motherhood can allow women to exercise and claim their agency, while also maintain and reproduce existing power and gender relations). Whether one's gender

performance reinforces or transforms hegemonic gender norms is a nuanced question, which will be discussed in more detail in the literature review. My analysis will draw on Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity and agency to determine the strengths and limitations of women's use of gendered imagery and symbolism to participate in protest movements, as well as on the work of Saba Mahmood to identify different modes of agency enacted by women. The flexibility of Rubric 1 will allow me to account for the variations of gender performances and their different meanings in the specific contexts.

Rubric 1: Classification of Gender Performance

	Reinforcing the established gender norms	Subverting the established gender norms
Traditional gender roles	Traditional and reinforcing gender performance	Traditional and subverting gender performance
Egalitarian gender roles	Egalitarian and reinforcing gender performance	Egalitarian and subverting gender performance

To ascertain the effects of women's explicitly gendered protest activities on feminist collective organizing and on women's socio-political standing in Belarus and Ukraine, I will focus on identifying both objective and subjective outcomes of the protest. My data collection and analysis will include researching the actions taken by the state to improve gender equality (e.g., new legislation and gender quotas), comparing gender indicators (e.g., Gender Equity Index, Gender Gap Index), and assessing the state of active debates in the public sphere in the aftermath of the protests. I use a range of primary and secondary sources, including local newspapers and magazines, online Telegram and Facebook chats, government documents and press releases, and academic articles on the relevant topics. However, my analysis of political efficacy will not be limited to the set of criteria discussed above. Given the variations in time and outcomes of the protests in Belarus and Ukraine, other relevant findings will be considered as useful outcome indicators. In particular, the rise of female consciousness (women's critial awareness of their feminity and their reflection on the asymmetries of power and opportunities that they have in society) among female participants and the changes in one's values and lifestyles will be treated as subjective outcomes. Furthermore, the thesis will attempt to determine the political significance of women's participation in contentious politics, utilizing the literature on political performance by Diana Taylor and Hannah Arendt's account of collective action as an enactment of political freedom.

Literature Review

Feminist scholars have shown that the social construction of gender determines differences in the allocation of resources, distribution of power, and opportunity structures between men and women. Men are traditionally associated with productive labor and the public sphere, for instance, while women are confined to reproductive labor and the private sphere (Tucker 2011). Gender roles, therefore, do not simply shape individual identities, they are connected to a gendered division of labor and space, which individuals internalize and transmit in various realms of life. Socio-political movements are not an exception: they also reflect constructions and hierarchies, including the unequal levels of resources,

power, and opportunity structures between men and women (Kuumba 2001, 14). Accordingly, existing gender distinctions, hierarchies, and roles shape women's participation in the protest space.

This gendered nature of protest spaces has long been neglected in the mainstream scholarly literature on socio-political movements. For instance, in her analysis of the 1979 revolution in Iran and the 1989 revolutions in East-Central Europe, Valentine Moghadam noticed the lack of attention to gender in the sociological research on revolutionary processes (Moghadam 1995). Similarly, Georgian Waylen criticized the orthodox political science literature of the early 1990s for the lack of a gendered analysis in studying political transitions from autocracy to democracy (Waylen 1994). Nevertheless, the plethora of postwar women's organizing at the grassroots levels and the increase in women's rights movements in the 1960s - 1970s encouraged social movement scholars to underscore gender in contentious politics.

The initial impulse of scholarship on gender and socio-political movements was to make women visible. Scholars aimed to highlight the roles of women as social movement leaders, participants, and supporters (Barnett 1993; Jaquette 1989; Randall 1981). Given that women occupy a subordinate position in almost all realms of the public sphere, subsequent studies explored the broader effects of gender hierarchies on resistance and protests. Some scholars examined how gender divisions differently encourage and impede participation in socio-political movements (McAdam 1992; Cable 1992). Others focused on understanding the impact of gender on organizational structures and movement roles (Neuhouser 1995; Shin 2014). A significant part of the scholarly literature on socio-political movements attends to the study of gender performance in protest spaces, which is particularly relevant for this research project. The following section provides an overview of this discussion, drawing on the major scholars in the field of gender performance and women's agency.

Gender performance and women's agency

The study of gender performance in socio-political movements serve to explore how new gender identities and subjectivities emerge in moments of resistance and how these interact with hegemonic gender divisions and norms. In line with this literature, several scholars have focused their research on egalitarian gender roles, through which women can challenge the existing gender hierarchies. For example, in her study of the Uruguayan democratization movement in the late 1960s, Carina Perelli suggests that female guerrilla fighters, who joined the Tupamaros guerilla group, clearly countered the traditional notions of femininity (Perelli 1989). As Perelli writes, these female guerrilla fighters were not bound by the limits of their private life and daily routines, but rather became free by abandoning their femininity and their families (Perelli 1989, 135). On the basis of this view, scholars tend to highlight how protest spaces provide opportunities for women to take egalitarian or so-called "male" roles (Kampwirth 2004; Martesenyuk and Troian 2018). These egalitarian gender roles are emancipatory for women, these scholars assert, as they make visible women's skills and knowledge, allowing them to transcend the social expectations of the female gender.

In contrast, other scholars have argued that traditional gender roles can also provide opportunities for women for subversion. For instance, Hala Sami, Sahar Alnaas, and Nicola Pratt point out how women in Egypt and Libya during the Arab Spring utilized their respective national heritage and traditional gender identities to challenge the existing power structures (El Said et al. 2015, 11). These scholars argue that Egyptian women were able to legitimize their presence in the public sphere and make their claims visible by re-signifying, i.e. creating different meanings for existing gender roles (El Said et al. 2015, 11). Likewise, in her study of the McCartney campaign in Ireland in 2005, Fidelma Ashe shows how Irish

women gained an effective public voice by deploying their familial identity as mothers (Ashe 2006, 163). As Ashe claims, this performance of motherhood both justified their involvement in a male-dominated public arena and altered it by linking certain aspects of private life (such as emotion and grief) to public politics (Ashe 2006, 163). From this perspective, the very roles that had traditionally delimited women's political participation in the public sphere can help women to become visible in society and resist the restrictive and oppressive character of their roles.

Most scholarship on the subversion of hegemonic gender norms through gender performance draws on Judith Butler's influential theory of performativity, first articulated in the late 1980s and developed most fully in the influential book *Gender Trouble*. For Butler, gender is created by daily acts of performance. It is an identity that is instituted through "a stylized repetition of acts" and constituted in both time and body (Butler 1988, 519). Accordingly, gender is the repetition of certain language, actions, and styles, which are naturalized and internalized by the subject. As Butler further argues, precisely in the fluidity of such gender performance lies the possibility of subversion (Butler 2011). Butler sometimes suggests that such subversion requires that the gender performance intentionally reflects on the imitative structure of gender and disputes the claims on gender's naturalness and originality (Butler 2011). However, the subversion of gender norms is not a voluntarist performance with regard to one's will and intention. Rather, it depends on concrete conditions that generate subversive political force, including the context of the performance, its audience, and the actor (McNay 2015). Therefore, according to Butler, the resistance to hegemonic gender norms comes from alternative signification in the course of one's repetition of these acts. The protest spaces can provide such opportunities for women to resignify their traditional gender roles and challenge the oppressive binaries of the heterosexist structure. Butler's theory of performativity, thus, indicates that the subversion of identity is the political project, where the resistance to the existing gender norms constitutes one's agency (Jagger 2008, 20). This view of agency as resistance further implies that there is no direct way for emancipation. Rather, the acts of freedom are spontaneous and unpredictable. They are seen when individuals enact gendered identities and cultural norms, but in ways of precisely resisting them.

At the same time, feminist scholars who study women's participation in non-Western societies assert that the category of agency as resistance is not always relevant to interpreting the agency and practices of women. In her research on women's participation in the Islamic piety movement in Cairo in the 1970s, Saba Mahmood critiques Butler's notion of agency and its assumption of an emancipatory agenda (Mahmood 2011). Mahmood demonstrated in her ethnography that women's agency may be conducted for the purpose of cultivating norms that constitute or reinforce gender hierarchies, rather than resisting them. According to this view, Egyptian women's active support for the socio-religious piety movement is an expression of agency, oriented toward acting certain gendered roles and moral principles, even if they take place within a system of inequality (Mahmood 2011). As such, Mahmood proposes to view the agency as a modality of actions that do not always aim at subverting hegemonic structures. This notion of agency is particularly useful for analyzing women's participation in a repressive environment, where female voices and actions must function within the structures of subordination and not simply against them.

Mahmood's critique of agency as resistance is a part of a longstanding debate in feminist theory about women's freedom and gender norms. Specifically, feminist scholars have argued about the degree to which traditional gender roles can constitute expressions of agency. This debate is largely related to the politics of motherhood, which centers women's activism around the appropriate roles of women as mothers (Fidelma 2006; Walker 1982). Some of the most well-known examples of the politics of

motherhood are found in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s. Groups such as Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and Co-Madres in El Salvador protested publicly to demand information from the government about the disappearance of their loved ones, utilizing their identities as mothers and wives (Jaquette 1989). While this performance can challenge the hegemonic gender norms as discussed earlier, several scholars point out its limitations for women at large. For instance, in her work on the politics of motherhood in Latin America, Diana Taylor highlights the dubious nature of performing motherhood in contentious politics. On the one hand, the performance of motherhood was empowering women: the movement when the Argentinian women decided to protest and agitate as mothers liberated them (Taylor 2001, 106). It allowed women to win significant political power and manipulate the images that previously controlled them (Taylor 2001,105). On the other hand, such performance did not alter the politics of the private. The subordinate position and the gendered division of labor stayed unchanged in their homes (Jetter et al. 1997, 105). This latter view is further supported by feminist cultural critique, which suggests that the perpetual cultural representation of female stereotypes reinforces women's subordination. According to this perspective, the mandate to perform gender roles is imposed by both external and internal forces. This, in turn, means that women's complicity with gendered roles is seen as a result of women's internalization of oppression, which can further normalize women's status quo and deny their autonomy (Bartky 1990).

Therefore, the performance of motherhood and other traditional gender roles can be conflicting for women as it both liberates and constrains them. While women's resistance in the protest space can advance egalitarian gender norms, where women exercise and claim their agency, women's strategic use of gendered norms can also maintain and reproduce existing power and gender relations. Indeed, by dramatizing stereotypical female identities like "the mother," women risk further normalizing the logic of a specific gender order even as they strive to overcome it (Ziemer 2020, 81). In contrast, the use of egalitarian gender roles in contentious politics seems to have an emancipatory character for women, allowing them to access new gender roles. Nonetheless, the literature on analyzing women's performance in relation to ones' agency seems to be limited. It does not move beyond the theoretical framework of interpreting one's performance as either reproducing or subverting existing gender norms. Accordingly, to understand the significance of women's participation in the protest spaces beyond the question of agency, it will be useful to consider the outcomes and socio-political transformations of such participation. The subsequent section of the literature review provides a discussion of the relevant work, which will be later drawn upon in analyzing gender performance in the specific contexts.

Gender performance: outcomes and transformations

Scholarly literature on outcomes and socio-political transformations in relation to gender performance provides a rich ground for this research project. Given that the impact of such performance in protest spaces has mixed results for women, scholars have examined its significance on two levels: objective and subjective.

On the one hand, scholars have looked at objective socio-political transformations in society related to gender interests, both practical and strategic (Molyneux 1985; Henderson and Alana 2007, 96). Practical gender interests tend to derive from concrete conditions of women's positions within the gendered division of labor (Molyneux 1985, 233). They can include the desire for better provision of welfare and economic support, as well as the demands for opening up the political process and increasing women's elevation to elected offices. These practical gender interests, thus, are related to the immediate

improvement in women's life after their participation in socio-political movements (Molyneux 1985,233). In contrast, strategic gender interests are focused on challenging women's subordination and gender inequalities in society at large (Molyneux 1985,232). This type of gender interest includes broader goals of abolishing the sexual division of labor, attaining political equality, and removing institutional discrimination (Molyneux 1985, 232). An example of such strategic gender interests can be seen in the analysis of gender activism in South Africa during the anti-Apartheid movement (Kuumba 2001). As Bahati Kuumba highlights, gender equality became a part of the broader goal of the democratic movement as a result of women's participation in the uprising. Women's agenda was incorporated in the concept of a "new South Africa," leading to the growth of gender-focused organizations, feminist movements, and policy changes in South Africa (Kuumba 2001, 130). However, women's strategic gender interests are not always realized by politicians and political leaders, despite their promises. In analyzing the impact of guerrilla struggles in Latin America, Nikki Craske concludes that although post-revolutionary regimes made improvements in women's lives by increasing their participation in formal political institutions and the workplace, they failed to address gender inequalities in the private sphere (Craske 1999). Therefore, as the scholarly literature shows, the practical gender interests in the form of political and economic policies tend to be more achievable in the aftermath of women's participation in contentious politics, as opposed to the strategic interests of challenging women's subordination in the private sphere and gender inequalities in society at large.

The literature on women's participation also consideres the outcomes at the subjective level, including the rise of female consciousness and changes in one's values or lifestyles (McAdam 1992; Carroll 1989). From this perspective, women's participation in socio-political movements can foster an awareness of gender roles, meanings, and relations, even if the movement is not originally focused on issues of gender equality (Kuumba 2001, 20). Such scholars as Rodriguez (1994) and Neuhouser (1995) noted that the struggles in Brazil's barrios prompted the development of a gender identity that further transformed into a feminist identity. Specifically, these scholars claim that women recognize their interest as women, further enhancing the advance of strategic gender roles (Rodriguez 1994). Likewise, Karen Kampwirth argues that women's participation in the revolutionary struggles in Latin America helped to create a feminist consciousness and lay the ground for a feminist movement (Kampwirth 2004). As Kampwirth claims, women's work during the guerrilla struggles was important for them as it allowed them to make decisions and develop some authority (Kampwirth 2004, 10). However, it was not enough to gain political influence after the revolution ended, which, in turn, made women more aware of issues of sexism and gender inequality in society (Kampwirth 2004, 10). As such, women's participation in protest spaces can transform women on a subjective level: by participating in political movements, without necessarily emphasizing their identity as women, women can gain new skills, obtain confidence, and exercise authority, leading to their empowerment. These transformations on the subjective level can further aid the outcomes on the political-institutional level, leading to the alternation of socio-political institutions and vice versa.

The scholarly literature examines the significance of women's participation in contentious politics through measurable transformation, specifically in terms of objective and subjective outcomes. But what if women's performance has not led to any tangible outcomes, specifically in the case of repressive political environments? How shall we assess the significance of such performance beyond looking at one's agency as discussed earlier in this section? In this case, it might be useful to assess the power of women's performance in relation to their collective action. Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of power as concerted group action provides a useful framework.

For Arendt, the political is a "space of appearance," where individuals appear to one another in a particular kind of way (Arendt 1958, 17). Such appearance is distinct from one's physical identities and does not depend on one's physical features and gender. According to Arendt, by acting and speaking in the public space, individuals show who they truly are in unique ways (Arendt 1958, 178). These acts of appearance, thus, reveal a certain identity of an individual in a performative way through speech and action in the public realm. As Arendt writes, the context and actors' attitudes signify the political act and its transformative power (Yokum 101, 2012). This notion of appearance and power as collective action can further contribute to Butler's theory of performativity. Although Arendt has come under attack for the implications of her strict and sharp public/private divide by feminist scholars, her conception of power helps to reveal how women's collective action is a political act itself (Benhabib 1993). This power of appearance, however, is not exclusive to the public realm. Instead, it can be observed in the spaces that are organized along with the principles of equality and solidarity (Arendt 1958, 179). As such, protest spaces could provide opportunities for women to exercise their power of appearance, where the political outcome is the collective actions of women themselves. This ability of women to collectively organize and identify in the protest space by reference to their gender articulates their political freedoms. Thus, Arendt's conception of power provides a valuable framework for analyzing women's participation in socio-political movements. By acting with one another in a certain way to achieve common goals, women exercise their political power in the presence of others.

All in all, socio-political movements can be viewed as spaces of gendered transformation, where gender is constantly redefined through public performances. Despite the fact that such performativity of gender reflects political, social, and cultural norms that form a male-centric gender order, it can also provide opportunities for women to explore their agency and power. Women's participation in contentious politics can catalyze the emergence of new forms of resistance, reconstruct gendered hierarchies, and have a transformative effect on society at large. Therefore, taking gender performance into account opens up a range of new questions around the socio-political significance of such participation for women, which this thesis aims to explore in the context of the 2020-2021 political protests in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine

Chapter Outline

This thesis builds on the previous studies of gender performance in socio-political movements and moves the theoretical debate forward by assessing the significance of such performance beyond its measurable outcomes. The thesis is divided into four chapters. This introductory chapter provided an overview of the relevant scholarly literature, discussesed the intellectual progression of the field, and stated the research questions and methodology. The following chapters of the thesis are dedicated to the case studies of Belarus and Ukraine.

Chapter Two focuses on women's participation in the 2020-2021 political uprising in Belarus and consists of two parts. The first part of the chapter will provide background information on the existing gender norms and stereotypes in Belarusian society. It will also describe the state of women's socio-political rights in the country, including their role in politics and government. The second half of the chapter will investigate women's participation in the 2020-2021 political uprising. In this section, I will identify certain sub-categories of gender performance and assess their influence on feminist collective organizing and women's socio-political standing.

Chapter Three covers women's participation in the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. It follows a similar structure as the previous chapter: the first part of Chapter Three will provide background information on the existing gender norms and women's rights in Ukraine, which will then transition into the discussion of women's participation during the Euromaidan protests.

Chapter Four will summarize this study's main findings of gender performance in contentious politics in post-Soviet Eurasian states. I will compare and contrast women's participation in my case studies, explaining their major differences and similarities. This chapter will also assess the overall significance of women's participation in contentious politics and conclude by presenting avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Gender Performance during the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus

One of the most popular images of the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus was the photo of Belarusian Women, dressed in white and singing the Belarusian lullaby at the Victory square on August 12, 2022. Image 2 captures this moment well: Belarusian women are standing together at the square in white clothes and bare feet to protest in solidarity with activists injured during the rallies. In the background, there is the famous slogan of the Victory Square - "People's feat." This slogan somehow echoes the strength of the Belarusian people and, in particular, the courage of Belarusian women to stand up against the fraudulent presidential elections of 2020. Image 2 shows the beginning of what was called by many a "female revolution" (e.g., the protest movement of Belarusian women throughout the 2020-2021 uprising).

Image 2: Photo by Sergei Gapon/AFP

Chapter 2 aims to provide an in-depth analysis of such women's participation during the 2020-2021 protest in Belarus. It identifies the five subcategories of gender performance such as Mother, Wife, Belarusian Beauty, Female Leader, and Activist, and classifies these performances according to the two main categories: traditional and egalitarian. The former represents women as those who serve the needs of others through empathetic and moral support (e.g., Mother, Wife, or Beauty), while the latter is focused on providing opportunities for women to perform gender as they want (e.g., Female Leader and Activist). However, the binary of traditional and egalitarian fails to capture the complexity of gender performances as observed in Belarus and Ukraine. The following sections of Chapter 2 discuss the nuanced nature of gender performance: it can be both subversive and reinforcing, depending on its context, actor, and audience. The last section of Chapter 2 investigates the socio-political outcomes of women's participation and assesses the significance of such participation for women in Belarusian society. It suggests that although there were no objective transformations at the national level, the protests resulted in the rise of female consciousness and individual changes in Belarusian women.

2.1. Background Information

Existing Gender Roles in Belarus

Traditionally, there is a distinct division of gender roles and norms in Belarusian society. A man is seen as the head of the family and the house, whereas a woman is perceived as the natural homemaker and the keeper of the family (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 4). As a result of these stereotypes of women, raising children and caring for family members become predominantly female responsibility: women are three times more likely than men to engage in four or more activities with their preschool children, and they perform around 75% of household chores (Fein 2020). Following these traits, Belarusian women are often assessed by their status as a wife, a mother, and a housewife, while men are judged by their engagement in the public sphere and military activities. Ideal traits for women, typically, include tenderness, gentleness, care, and agreeableness, whereas, for men, they are assertiveness, independence, and strength of will (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 4).

Women in the public sphere: high participation, but still patriarchal

Patriarchal pattern of gender division has been preserved in Belarusian society since Soviet times from 1922 to 1991. Although women received certain state benefits and privileges during the Soviet period in Belarus, hidden discrimination of women was evident in a double load at work and the family (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 14). The interests of women were largely sidelined and often ignored in the framework of constructing communism in the state (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2014). The only women's public organization that existed in Belarus during that time was the Soviet Women's Committee, a social organization of women across the Soviet Union, which had tens of millions of people and was strictly controlled by the Communist Party (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2014). The direct successor of the Soviet Women's Committee in Belarus was the Belarusian Women's Union (BMU), which was created in 1991. The main goal of the BMU is to promote the rights and interests of women in Belarus, along with protecting women's dignity and enhancing their socio-political roles (Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus [OIPRB] 2021). However, the BMU works as a pro-governmental organization, and its members make up the majority of the parliament, the National Council on Gender Policy, and the National Commission on the Rights of the Child. This is done with the goal to promote a state agenda on women's issues by advancing "the right" female candidates who are loyal to the regime.

As some gender experts argue, after Lukashenka came to power in 1994, the Belarusian government has subsequently created a so-called "femocracy," a multilevel and institutionalized system that highlights the patriarchal roles of women in Belarusian society (Solomatina and Schmidt 2021). The concept presumes an active recruitment of women into the state structures such the national and local governments, while also reinforcing the machismo of Lukashenka's regime and his image as "a father" (Solomatina and Schmidt 2021). For example, with the goal of overcoming gender discrimination in society, the regime ratified and signed a number of international documents, and it established the National Council on Gender Policy in 2000 (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 6). The government has also increased the number of women in parliament and launched a range of gender initiatives and organizations such as the BMU. However, all of these steps do not contradict the traditional gender roles and norms in Belarusian society, but rather serve to reinforce them. For instance, the BMU aims to strengthen the role

of mother and wife in Belarusian society, and with this in mind, the most popular projects of the Union are "A healthy woman, a healthy nation," "Strong family, strong state," and "The family of the year." These three projects, highlighted on the website of the BMU, confirm the aforementioned patriarchal roles where women are expected to serve their husbands and children.

At the legislative level, Belarusian women make up around 30% of all members in the National Assembly, which is relatively high compared to other countries. In the Council of the Republic, around 24% of members are women, while in the House of Representatives, there are 44 women, which constituted almost 40% of the lower house (Ilyicheva 2019). In terms of the civil servants, Belarusian women make up 68.6% of all government workers, whereas 58.2% of civil servants are managers and deputies (Reformation 2012). The regime touts these high numbers as evidence of its commitment to gender equality, which, in fact, is the reflection of Lukashenka's femocracy. Despite women's high presence in governmental bodies, they lack meaningful decision-making power and are poorly involved in the legislative process. As Lukashenka claimed himself, the primary responsibility of women at the decision-making level is "decorating" the environment and disciplining men (Fein 2020).

The government has not made much progress on gender policy in the area of domestic violence and sexual assault. Even though the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection reports that domestic violence is the most common type of gender-based violence in the country, there is still no law regarding this issue in Belarus (Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus n.d.) A draft of potential legislation, proposed by the Interior Ministry and Lukashenka's own administration, was rejected by Lukashenka in 2018, who described it as "nonsense" taken from the West (Los Angeles Times 2018). The current legislation neither ensures adequate punishment of domestic violence nor provides necessary assistance for women. The neglect of this issue by the regime not only worsens the situation of violence against women in Belarus but also indicates the unwillingness of the government to engage with public policies that would challenge the traditional notions of gender. This is because the goal of the so-called femocracy strucure is to preserve Lukashenka's machismo image and power, instead of advancing the agenda of gender equality in Belarusian society.

Moreover, many of the current public policies reinforce traditional gender roles, which are in line with the regime's idea of femocracy. In terms of maternity benefits, Belarusian women can take a paid parental leave of almost 969 days (Kremer 2018). After their leave, employers are obliged to give women the same job, and the dismissal of pregnant women is penalized by the law. If women have young children and work, they can also have additional legal rights to a flexible or part-time work schedule (Kremer 2018). While these benefits help women to cope with their responsibilities as mothers, they also indirectly reinforce such a gender role as they are not made available to fathers. Women are seen as 'not serious' employees in the public sphere, who often take various leaves related to caring for a family or child. As a result, with other things the same, employers in Belarus will prefer to hire a man instead of a woman or they will pay a woman less (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 16).

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Belarus is ranked 33 out of 156 countries in 2020 in terms of gender equity (World Economic Forum 2021). But despite such a high ranking, women face more discrimination in the labor market than men. Some reports indicate that female workers remain underpaid in the same positions compared to males, where the least attractive jobs become "feminized" (Navumau and Matveieva 2021). There is also a traditional division of labor into "female" and "male" sectors (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 15). Around 80% of employees in the healthcare sector are women, 81% of employees in education are female workers, and more than 70% of all employees in culture, art, and other non-production services are women as well (Ananyeu et al. 2013, 15). Belarusian women also tend to

seek work in the lower-paid and less socially prestigious industries than men, which again confirms and reinforces the traditional notions of gender roles, because these jobs tend to be located in the service and non-production industries.

It is also important to mention that gender stereotypes are exploited by politicians in their speeches. For instance, Lydia Yermoshina, the head of the Central Election Commission, addressed women, who participated in the protest against the falsification of the election results on December 19, 2010, in the following way: "You had better sit at home and cooked borsch instead of pottering around the streets" (Zerkalo 2021b). This statement reiterated the traditional function of women in society as one who belongs to the private sphere, as well as supporting the function of femocracy: Belarusian women in the government reinforce male supremacy in the public sphere. Lukashenka himself also stresses the role of a woman in the public sphere during his speeches. One of the most recent statements that he made was about the inability of women to be president. During his visit to a tractor factory in Minsk before the 2020 election, Lukashenka said that "The [Belarusian] constitution is not for women [and] society has not matured enough to vote for a woman" (Petkova 2020). This shows how the regime forms patriarchal gender attitudes in society and orientates people toward certain political performances. In particular, it conditions people to equate the president of the country with the "the father of the nation," leaving no room for women's leadership.

As discussed in this section, the high rankings of Belarus in the area of gender equality do not reflect the real situation on the ground. Although Belarusian women, in theory, do not have legal barriers to their participation in the public sphere, they still have very limited access to decision-making at all levels and in all spheres of socio-political life. Until now, there is a strong binary conception of gender in society, and women's roles are defined primarily as wives and mothers (UN Women 2019). Furthermore, the regime encourages the reproduction of the patriarchal systems of values through the so-called femocracy. This makes gender norms and stereotypes entrenched systematically in governmental policies and initiatives related to gender, which are then also reinforced by social pressure.

The 2020-2021 protests in Belarus or the so-called female revolution

The famous Belarusian female trio appeared when Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, a former teacher and translator, who was registered as a presidential candidate after the electoral commission denied the registration of her husband, formed a pact with two other female opposition figures, Marya Kalesnikava and Veranika Tsapkala (Serhan 2020). What was not originally planned as such turned out to be a strong political campaign with a large following across the country. Initially, there were three popular male presidential candidates in Belarus, who aimed to participate in the 2020 presidential elections: Siarhei Tsikanouski, a YouTube blogger with a large following, Viktar Babaryka, a former director of the Belgazprombank (the country's largest private bank owned by the Russian gas monopoly Gazprom), and Valery Tsapkala, a former high-ranking diplomat. All three candidates were well known in Belarus before the 2020 presidential election, which contributed to their support, respect, and popularity during the first stage of the election process. However, fearing the growing popularity of these candidates, the Belarusian authorities used all the means available to bar them from participating: Babaryka and Tsikanouski were jailed, while Tsapkala was forced to exile.

Following the arrest of Siarhei Tsikanouski in May of 2020, his wife Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya decided to continue collecting signatures and submit the required documents for her registration for the 2020 presidential elections. Despite the arrest of the members of her initiative groups and various threats

from local authorities, she managed to gather the required 100,000 signatures and was registered as a presidential candidate. The head of Babaryka's team, Marya Kalesnikava, and the wife of Tsapkala, Veranika Tsapkala, later decided to join Tsikhanouskaya and form a united front. The team of three women continued their political campaign with Tsikhanouskaya as a presidential candidate, presenting a significant challenge for Lukashenka. The symbol of their election campaign – a heart (Babaryka), a fist (Tsikhanuskay), and a victory sign (Tsapkala) – which seems to have emerged spontaneously, went viral and inspired many individuals, including women, to become more politically active. In particular, the combination of traditional and feminist values allowed the female trio to reach many women of different ages and across socio-economic backgrounds. Feministic and empowering messages such as "Together we can!" or "Do not be afraid!" from Kalensikave and Tspakala appealed to those who valued women's empowerment, while the loving and shy image of Tsikhanouskaya resembled the traditional role of a wife and a mother (Dryndova 2021). Overall, many women supported the female trio and expressed feelings inspired by their courage and strength.

When the polling stations closed on August 9, 2020, and a landslide victory was declared for Lukashenka, hundreds of thousands of Belarusian people took to the streets across the country to protest the election results, which they deemed fraudulent. The demonstrations gained momentum during the following days, while police unleashed appalling violence on peaceful protesters. Reports of physical abuse spread across the Belarusian and international media, revealing how police used tear gas, stun grenades, water cannons, and rubber bullets to disperse and beat protestors (*Euronews* 2020). On the third day of the uprising against electoral fraud, on August 12, 20202, the so-called female protests started in Belarus: several hundred women built solidarity chains in Minsk opposing police brutality and violence on the streets. These women organized protest performances in two different locations in Minsk. The first group of women came together in white clothes and held flowers near Komarovka market, while the second group of women was dressed in white colors, barefoot, and sang the Belarusian lullaby 'Kalyhanka" at the Victory square. The powerful images of these women in white spread across the Internet, inspiring more women across Belarus to join the protests and demand new elections. Women's chains of solidarity in white with flowers, Saturday female marches, flash mobs with white-red-white colors, and other creative ways of women's participation continued throughout the following weeks and months. The 2020-2021 protests were named by many as a "female revolution," referring to the role of the powerful female trio and the symbol of women in white. The following section of this Chapter describes such women's participation in the uprisings in detail.

2.2. Gender Performance in Belarus

Based on the obtained data from primary and secondary sources, the following five sub-categories of gender performance were identified: Mother, Wife, Belarusian Beauty, Female Leader, Activist. Their descriptions and explanations are provided below.

Gender Performance: Mother and Wife

The most prominent gender performance during the 2020-2021 Belarusian uprising was centered around the roles of Mother and Wife. Belarusian women were often described by media and news outlets as mothers, caregivers, and devoted wives, who went to the streets to protect their children and husbands.

For instance, Natalia Skibska, a translator and psychologist, told journalists from the *Reuters* that she decided to participate in the protests because of her son, who was arrested, jailed for six days, and beaten for doing nothing wrong (Goldsmith 2020). She said that "[she] want[s] to live in a country where [she] can be sure [her] son comes home safely every night" (Goldsmith 2020). Such a statement indicates that Natalia considered her role in the public sphere as a mother, who is responsible for caring for and the safety of her children. Similarly, Marina, another female protestor, in an interview for the *Guardian* said that she has "a son and [does not] want him to live in this kind of country" (Walker 2020). Through such a statement, Marina refers to the auxiliary function of women, their self-sacrifice and altruism for the family, which motivated her and many other Belarusian women to join the protests. Given that female protesters were also wearing white colors and holding white or red flowers,[2] this helped them to build and communicate an image of innocent, fragile, and loving Mothers and Wives, who have "duties" to protect others (Dryndova 2021). The white color in Belarusian culture often indicates the notion of moral purity and wisdom, which Belarusian mothers are considered to possess. That is why wearing white colors do help women to project the image of love, innocence, and wisdom. However, when white is used with red, it indicates a different meaning: white and red colors are the colors of the first national flag of Belarus, which was changed by Lukashenka's regime in 1995 to the current red and green flag. The white-red-white flag is seen by many Belarusians as the ancient and historical flag of the country, which symbolizes national unity, sovereignty, and freedom. As such, when women use white-red color cloth, they highlight their aspirations for freedom and their opposition to the current regime.
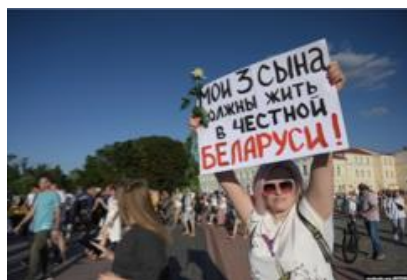

Image 3: Photography by RFE/RL (Poster with the slogan "My three children should leave in honest Belarus")

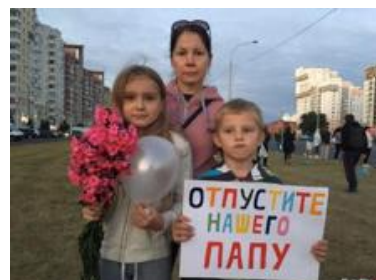Image 4: Photography by Euroradio (Poster with the slogan "So that my son can grow, I would not be silent!")

Image 5: Photography by Nasha Niva (Poster with the slogan "Release our father")

Many female participants also highlighted these roles in their posters. For example, some women hold posters with such slogans as "My three children should live in honest Belarus," (Image 3) "Mothers won't forgive the torture and death of children," "So that my son can grow, I would not be silent!" (Image 4), "Release our father" (Image 5), or "Woman is your mother" All these posters contained the message of women wanting to protect their husband and children from the brutality of the regime. From a liberal-feminist lens, such appeals to motherhood are seen as reinforcing the traditional gender performance of women: they underscore women's traditional responsibilities and refer to the feminine traits of being peaceful and caring. Being responsible for raising children places women in the private sphere, where they are seen as providers of care and support, as well as allocating to women the responsibility for future

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[2] The discussion about flowers and their meaning is presented in the following section - Gender performance: Belarusian beauty (p.22)

citizens. As such, the performance of motherhood in the public sphere presumes these traditional gender traits and notions for women.

The performance of motherhood was also observed during the marches of the senior citizens, which were also called "wisdom marches." During these marches, many elderly women often mentioned that they participated in the protests because of their duty to ensure a better future for their grandchildren in Belarus. For example, Alla, a 60-year-old participant of the wisdom marches in Minsk, mentioned that Belarusian pensioners see how the regime is taking the future away from their children and they can not stay aside from such injustices (Nevedomskaya 2020). Many female participants of the 'wisdom marches' also came out because their children were directly affected by the regime: they were either detained or beaten by the police forces (Nevedomskaya 2020). These marches were also characterized by a larger presence of women than men, which many explain by the low life expectancy of men in the country compared to women: many men simply do not live up to their retirement as their average life expectancy is around 69.3 years compared with 79.4 of women (Statista 2021). Accordingly, the large presence of elderly women during the protests and their motivation in terms of self-sacrifice and care for family members further strengthens the image of Mother in the 2020-2021 Belarusian uprisings.

It should be noted that the role of Motherhood was also prominent in the performance of the female trio itself, particularly in the actions and speeches of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Since the beginning of her campaign, she projected herself as a loving wife and mother, who appreciates family values. During her early speeches, she often referred to her husband's arrest as the main reason for her political activity: "I am doing this for [my husband] and those who believed [him]... I wanted my husband back and children [with me to] continue frying cutlets" (*Nasha Niva* 2020). In this and other similar statements, Tsikhanouskaya expresses sacrifices that she made as a woman in the name of her husband and highlights her role as such. This echoed the motivation of other Belarusian women who joined the protests and came as Mothers to the public sphere.

Another member of the female trio, Veranika Tsapkala, also mobilized an image of a dedicated wife and mother at the beginning of her political activity. In particular, during one of her early interviews, she mentioned that her participation in the election campaign was driven by the support of her husband. For instance, she stressed in the interview that it has become "absolute natural for [her] to be close to [the] husband" in many events, including the 2020 presidential elections (Sugak 2020). Once her husband announced his candidacy, she took a leave from work to be with him and travelled around Belarus (Sugak 2020). Tsapkala further reinforced her role as "a good wife" by saying that their family duties are distributed "according to the classics: all women's worries are on me" (Sugak 2020). By the so-called "women's worries," she meant such tasks as cooking, washing, and taking care of children. In the same interview, on the question of which role is more appealing for her – the role of a first lady or a politician, Tsapkala answered that she was "interested in the role of wife and mother," while also growing professionally in her career (Sugak 2020). Through this answer, it becomes clear that she wants to project her image as a Mother and Wife, who is dedicated to serving the family. At the same time, along with highlighting traditional female roles, she also incorporates the message of gender empowerment by mentioning her professional growth as a woman. The combination of traditional and feminist messages later became a distinct characteristic of her political activity during the protests.

Overall, the performance of Mother and Wife was based on the traditional gender roles in Belarusian society. Women often felt the responsibility to care for and protect others, which motivated them to participate in the protests. Wearing white clothes and holding protests with the relevant messages further confirmed the presence of this gender performance during the protests.

Gender Performance: Belarusian Beauty

The third gender performance identified during the 2020-2021 Belarusian protests was the role of Belarusian Beauty. This gender performance underlines the physical attractiveness and appearance of Belarusian women, who were often wearing beautiful white-red-white cloth and red lipstick (Image 6). Such performance of beauty started with the first female marches in Minsk when women wore white color cloth and sang the Belarusian lullaby 'Kalyhanka' at the Victory square. From then on, many women went to the streets across the country, wearing white-red-white clothes, putting on colorful make-up, singing songs, and smiling at each other (*Charter 97* 2020). Among the most popular photos to demonstrate this performance of Belarusian Beauty are the images of Alexandra Varab'uva, who was detained during one of the female protests in Minsk (Image 8). In this photo, she is dressed in a classy outfit, wearing red lipstick, and holding a red rose in her hand. She seems to look calm and even smile for the camera while being detained by a police officer in black and with a face mask. This image became iconic in Belarus and was later stylized as a Vogue cover in black and white colors (Image 8) (Kudrin 2020). Some of the online users even commented that the detention of Belarusian women looks like "an extravagant fashion show" (Kudrin 2020).

Along with the white-red-white cloth and red lipstick, another important aspect of this "beauty" performance was flowers (Image 7). After the first initiative "Women with flowers," Belarusian women continued this form of protest across the country, where flowers symbolized their peace, innocence, and beauty. It was also popular for men to distribute multiple bouquets of flowers during the female marches as a sign of acknowledgment and appreciation of women's participation. However, while some women saw this as a positive gesture from men, others perceived this ritual as a stereotype: men give flowers to women without acknowledging their active role in society. Furthermore, the act of giving and protesting with flowers gave an impetus for many people to call Belarusian women "Flowers of Victory," which again refers to this aesthetic function of women during the protests.

Image 6: Photography by TUT.BY

Image 7: Photography by TK /Belsat.eu

Image 8: Photography by TUT.BY/AFP, later stylized as "Vogue" Cover

From time to time, the performance of Belarusian Beauty was also used by the organizers of the Saturday Women Marches. These Saturday Women Marches were organized by a group of Belarusian female activists (some of them preferred to stay anonymous) via Telegram channels, where the information and themes about Saturday's marches were announced weekly. The marches began right after the first women's solidarity chains on August 12, 2020, and continued throughout the following weeks.

As mentioned earlier, the organizers sometimes evoked the performance of Beauty during the marches. This was evident on August 19, 2020, when the organizers of the female march called it "brilliant" or "shiny." The organizers of this march used the name "shiny" as a metaphor. On the one hand, as the organizers mentioned, "shiny" referred to the brilliance of female tears over the victims of the protests and aimed to highlight the police brutality on the streets (*Belsat* 2020a). On the other hand, it also alluded to women's beauty and style. The organizers of the march asked Belarusian women to wear the most shiny and beautiful cloth, as well as bring tinsel and sparkles to the streets. Accordingly, the idea of "looking brilliant" behind the protests incorporated the traditional gender stereotype, underscoring female beauty and their physical features. It could be further argued that this "brilliant" march pushed many women to dress beautifully for the upcoming protests, setting the course for female participation. Many online photo and video materials show how Belarusian women used to dress classy, look fashionable, and bring flowers to the streets. Some of the slogans created and used by various online media channels specifically referred to such women's participation as "March of beautiful women," "Women bring love and beauty to the world!," "Beauty will save the world!"(Potarskaya 2020).

Gender Performance: Female Leader & Activist

The last two gender performances observed during the protests were the roles of Female Leader and Activist. Belarusian women were initiators of protest activities and various volunteering initiatives, including online campaigns and flash mobs. These gender performances allowed women to be visible in public discourses and take more active roles of participation.

Image 9: Photography by Volha Shukaila

Image 10: Photography by Euroradio/RFE

Belarusian women provided communication and logistical support, as well as food and water during some sit-ins demonstrations. They were also good at maintaining the so-called social ties during mass rallies, particularly when protestors had to disperse into small groups and then converge back. As one of the female protestors mentioned, Belarusian women were successful in connecting with people as this was something that they were "taught well through culture" (Abubekirova 2020). Specifically, women are socialized in a culture that teaches them how to be more sensitive, flexible, caring, and understanding to other people. Accordingly, Belarusian women learn how to keep social ties by listening to and helping other individuals, rather than commanding or ignoring individuals' needs. This became helpful during the 2020-2021 protests when people needed to stay connected and support each other. Besides keeping social ties, Belarusian women often took courage during the protest: they acted as human

shields between male protestors and the police officers. There are a lot of photos and videos that show how Belarusian women were forming human chains to protect male protestors, or they were fighting verbally and physically with police officers to free detained individuals (Images 9 and 10) (Bekova 2021).

Along with participating in the protest activity, many women joined volunteering initiatives to help individuals who were detained and beaten by the police officers. For example, there were a lot of female volunteers in the volunteering camp near the detention center on Akrestsina Street in Minsk (*Belsat* 2020b). At the camp, women provided psychological, medical, and legal support, as well as helped to coordinate the work of other volunteers (Nevedomskaya 2020b). Similar initiatives were also organized in other Belarusian cities and regional centers, sometimes driven by women's desire to help those in need. Among the most famous and widespread grassroots projects and initiatives were: Viasna Human Rights Volunteers, Probono.by (a platform that united over 2250 organizations to help those who faced repression by Lukashenka's regime and provide volunteering help), #Ineedhelp (a social initiative that helped with grocery products to those who have suffered from political repression and are in a difficult financial situation), Belarusian Sports Solidarity Foundations (its chairwoman is Aliaksandra Herasimenia, a famous Belarusian swimmer), and others. In many of these volunteering initiatives, women were leaders and active participants.

Some Belarusian women were also active in socio-political organizations during the protests. For instance, the stories of Yulia Sliuko and Volha Britikova show how women organized in the workplace to protest against the regime. Sliuko worked as a plasterer at the "Grodnopromstroy" factory, and in August 2020 she headed a strike at the enterprise (*Zerkalo* 2021a). She performed on the stage during several regional rallies and was later forced to emigrate due to her activism. Similarly, Britkova worked at the state factory "Naftan" and was the head of the petroleum product sales department. During the protests, she was an active member of the protest movement at the factory, which led to her being fired (*Salidarnast* 2020). These women are an example of many other Female Activists, who did not want to be passive during the uprising and came to the forefront of the struggles for freedom and human rights in Belarus.

The presence of this gender performance and the rise of female activity could be partially attributed to the female trio of Tsikhanouskaya, Kalesnikava, and Tsapkala. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, women are more often employed as civil servants in Belarus, while men take the majority of leadership positions in the public sphere. The rise of a female presidential candidate during the 2020-2021 election can be seen as an act of empowerment for women: Tsikhanouskaya was a symbol of a woman, who is entering the public sphere, while also showing a different leadership style, namely showing the Belarusian people that they are heard and cared for (Edwards 2020). After fleeing to Vilnius, Tsikhanouskaya did not stop her activity: she managed to create a team of experts, establish the representative body of the Coordination Council, and started to actively promote the Belarusian agenda on the international level. For instance, since September 2020, she went on working visits to more than 15 countries and held at least 24 talks with government representatives from around the world, including the United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, the European Union High Representative Josep Borrell, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mark Garneau, and others (Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 2021). Without a doubt, such activity motivated many Belarusian women to mobilize their potential and take action in the public sphere.

Marya Kalesnikava, another member of the female trio, was also an inspiration for women, particularly with her empowering and empathetic messages of "We are legitimate!" and "Belarusians, you are incredible!" (Dryndova 2021). Kalesnikava saw herself as a free global citizen and openly identified

as a feminist. She talked about feminism in her interviews, once suggesting that Lukashenka "accidentally did more for the development of feminism in Belarus than anyone else" (Motorin and Varshavskaya 2020). In this statement, Kalesnikava referred to Lukashenka's oppressive politics and the sexist statement about female leaders, which offended many women in Belarus and brought them to the streets. In the eyes of many Belarusian women, Kalesnikava was an image of a fearless and powerful woman. When she was taken by force to the border with Poland, she tore her passport so that the law-enforcement agents could not expel her from the country. Although she was sentenced to 11 years in prison in September 2021, her actions resonated with Belarusian women, particularly those, who were active before, but stayed in the shade of the private sphere (*BBC Russian Services* 2021).

2.3. Discussion and Analysis:

Drawing on the notions of traditional and egalitarian gender roles, the performances of Wife, Mother, Belarusian Beauty, Female Leaders, and Activists can be classified accordingly. The first three sub-categories are traditional gender roles as they evoke patriarchal gender norms and stereotypes found in Belarusian society. The last two gender roles are egalitarian gender performance as they allow women to transcend the social expectations of gender and underscore their leadership skills and knowledge. However, adopting a more nuanced approach by looking at the intent and effects of gender performance, I classify the five gender performances in the following way:

Rubric 2: Classification of Gender Performance

	Reinforcing the established gender norms	Subverting the established gender norms
Traditional gender roles	Mother & Wife Belarusian Beauty	Mother & Wife
Egalitarian gender roles	Activists	Female Leaders Activists

First, the gender performance of Mother and Wife is placed into the category of traditional and reinforcing gender norms. This is because women affirmed traditional gender stereotypes and feminine traits through their performance. Based on various online interviews with female protestors, many women stated that their participation was based on the desire to "protect" others: women saw themselves to be responsible for caring for and serving their male members of the family during the protests and, as such, coming to the streets. Such activity has auxiliary character as it is centered around the themes of helping, supporting, and providing for family members. As mentioned earlier, several posters also reflected this message of care and protection, which was later mobilized by media and news agencies (Image 11, Image 12).

Women as mothers and wives were often represented in the media as "weaker" participants in the protests. This was evident through the sudden admiration for women's strength and courage both in online and offline news channels, framed in terms of self-sacrifice and care for their men. Moreover, some media outlets amplified sexist stereotypes about Belarusian women. For example, Tsikhanouskaya

was often introduced in news articles as a "housewife and English teacher," whereas other leaders of the female trio were associated with their affiliation to the male candidates they represented. The Belarusian press sometimes called the trio "Girls" and their activism as "a sacrifice for their men." This has a negative connotation because calling the members of the female trio "Girls" undermines their professionalism and leadership skills. It also implies women's immaturity and lack of responsibility, which altogether sent a negative message to the public (e.g., "they are not leaders").

Additionally, there were a few online media that focused solely on describing the beauty of female protestors and their self-sacrifice without little attention to women's psychological and physical traumas resulting from their participation in the uprising. Women's power was seen in their weakness: it is not widely accepted in Belarusian culture to beat women.[3] As such, the protestors hoped that women's marches and their active involvement in the protests would prevent the security forces from neutralizing the movement (Shipacheva and Zhukova 2020). Nonetheless, while this strategy worked at the beginning of the uprisings, the security forces quickly adopted their repressive strategies, including beating, arresting, and in some cases even raping the detained Belarusian women. Such police brutality left many women with both physical and psychological scars, which were obscured by many media and news channels. Instead, the media portrayed women as "Belarusian beauties" and "Mothers," who sacrificed themselves for a better future in Belarus. In this vein, the gender performance of Belarusian Beauty was limiting for women: women's function was perceived to adorn the protest and "make them look nice." Women wore white-red-white colors, held flowers, and aimed to look beautiful in the streets. The contribution of women to the protest movement was also assessed by their beauty, which neglected women's active position as regular citizens and obscured their physical and physiological costs of protesting.

Therefore, the gender performance of Mother, Wife, and Belarusian Beauty did not allow women to bring their agenda upfront. For example, a group of Belarusian feminist activists organized a flash mob #сиделазасвободу (#prisonforfreedom), which aimed to attract the public attention to the problems of incarcerated women: some NGO groups also created online chats and hotlines for assisting affected women. Nonetheless, while there were several instances of women speaking up about their agenda (e.g., sexual assault, domestic violence, or the problems of incarcerated women,) the main drive and focus of female participation was on stopping the violence and calling for new elections. As many female protestors mentioned, they "go out every day and will continue to do so until [they] achieve the truth and the departure of Europe's last dictator" (Odnaiznas 2021a). This statement confirms that women's agenda of gender equality was sidelined and mainly stayed in the background. Accordingly, the gender performance of Mother, Wife, and Belarusian Beauty reinforced the traditional roles of women: it highlighted an image of an innocent, beautiful, fragile, and loving woman, whose primary function is to provide and care for the family. Because of this, such performances were placed in the category of traditional and reinforcing gender norms.

Nontheless, although such gender performance functioned within a patriarchal framework, this does not mean that women as mothers or wives lacked agency during the 2020-2021 protests in Belarus. Applying Butler's approach to agency and performance, we can see that Belarusian women were subverting the dominant association of care/family with society/nation by performing their gendered roles. In other words, the fact that Belarusian women were subjected to established gendered norms still

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[3] This refers to the stereotypical notions of women in Belarusian culture. Women are seen as fragile and in need of protection, hence, men can not beat them. However, de facto, domestic and sexual violence against women is still one of the most prevalent gender issues in Belarusian society.

provides opportunities for transgressing them. From my analysis of various online and printed sources, it seems that women perceived their ability to be a mother in a different way compared to the patriarchal notion of care and love. In particular, the association of care and love with the reproductive function equipped women with a strong moral ground in Belarusian society. This then allowed women to stretch their traditional role of care and protection beyond families to encompass society at large (Paulovich 2021, 42). Throughout Belarusian history, particularly during and after periods of war, women often took the roles of "caring" for the country: not only maintaining the household and family but also participating in the reconstruction of the country at large (Paulovich 2021, 44). Accordingly, motherhood became almost "sacral," providing women with the space for their freedom and agency. During the protests, the roles of mothers and wives thus helped women to claim pride and self-esteem. Women were not uncritical objects of manipulation but acted in a conscious manner. For instance, Natalia Kharytaniuk, a 35-year-old English tutor, mentioned that participating in protests for her is a combination of family and politics (Goldsmith 2020). She mentioned that she is proud to be a mother and after the protests are over, "[the patriarchal society along with the current regime] will have to change" (Goldsmith 2020). Through these answers, we can see that women legitimize their activity in the protest spaces and claim their rights throughout motherhood. Similarly, another female participant from Minsk mentioned that she "forgot for several months [about her and other women's roles as] housewives who need to cook and clean apartments" (Keiner and Kozenko 2020). She felt empowered to participate in the protests together with other women and fight for the "common good" (Keiner and Kozenko 2020). She also mentioned that women "[would] not be the same again" after the protests are over (Keiner and Kozenko 2020). These statements once again indicate women's agency and their ability to negotiate and subvert the normative status quo of gendered roles.

Image 11: Photography by RFE/RL
(Poster with the slogan "Sasha, sexism has destroyed you")

Image 12: Photogprahy by Darya Byryakina/TUT.BY (Poster with the slogan "Women should be in the house, in the Government House")
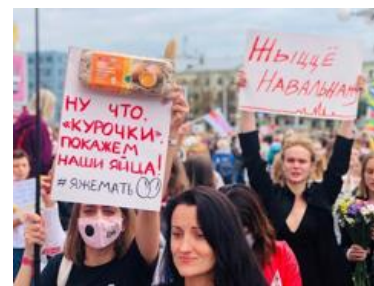
Image 13: Photogprahy by Adarya Gushtyn/TUT.BY (Poster with the slogan "So what 'chickens,' let's show our eggs #Iammother")

Nevertheless, the acts of agency through subversion of traditional roles were also present in the protest space. The most prominent examples of such subversion were ironic slogans that drew on stereotypical gender roles. For example, some posters reworked patriarchal stereotypes in the following way: "Sasha [referring to Aliaskandar Lukashenka], sexism has destroyed you" (Image 11); "I am coordinating myself"; "Even blond women showed up"; "Women should be in the house, in the Government House" (Image 12); and "So what 'chickens,' let's show our eggs #Iammother" (Image 13). Using these slogans, women subverted the patriarchal-prescribed gender roles in a humorous manner,

asserting their power and assigning different meanings to the dominant gender roles. They made fun of the typical gender expressions and stereotypes (e.g., women are weak) that defined them in the private sphere and challenged their meaning in the public sphere. Accordingly, because of such subversion and the aforementioned negotiation of gender roles, the performance of Mother and Wife should be also in the category of traditional and subverting gender performance.

As for the gender performances of Female Leaders and Activists, they were assigned the category of egalitarian and subverting performance. This is because the performance of Female Leaders and Activists allowed women to formalize their presence in the protest space, achieve recognition, and overcome certain gender stereotypes and obstacles. Women were able to transcend the social expectations of their traditional roles as mothers and wives and underscore their leadership and creative skills. As mentioned earlier, Belarusian women became active members of many protest initiatives: they participated in volunteering projects, coordinated strike groups, and provided logistical, legal, and informational support. Through such activity, they challenged not only the stereotypical perspectives of fragile, gentle, and weak women but also the power relations between men and women in society.

Nevertheless, as seen from the table, the gender performance of Female Activists was also placed in the category of egalitarian and reinforcing performance. This is partially due to the type of work that female activities carried out during the protest. Specifically, many women were involved in the provision of care and love for others. They were involved in helping the victims of police brutality, providing food and water for the protestors, and cheering up people. Such activity reflects the traditional division of labor into "female" and "male" sectors, where women take the majority in non-production services. Accordingly, the performance of Female Activists, to some extent, reinforces the traditional gender role, limiting women to certain areas of activity.

In contrast, the gender performance of Female Leaders seems to have a different effect on women. This performance allowed women to shift the traditional discourses and challenge sexism. Showing that a woman can be a leader made female political participation more fashionable and mainstream in Belarusian society (Dryndova 2021). Specifically, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya played an important role here as she introduced a new style of leadership: a leader that cares about citizens. Throughout her campaign and work in exile, Tsikhanouskaya asserted herself as an independent and conscious political actor, who is skilled, educated, and listens to people (Gapova 2020). Her sincerity, openness, and readiness to act allowed her to be recognized and accepted by people. The female trio inspired many women to become visible agents in society and not be afraid to take roles in the public sphere. Along with them, the stories of Yulia Sliuko and Volha Britikova, who became active leaders in their workplace, further stressed women's potential to lead others. By showing their skills and abilities of self-organization, women as leaders were able to achieve the same recognition for their contributions to the protests as men. As a result, the gender performance of Female Leaders (and Activists as well) transformed the image of a woman in the Belarusian society: instead of attractive and loving figures, women are now associated with bravery and seen as responsible citizens, who are ready to act.

2.4. Outcomes and Transformations

Given that the 2020-2021 uprisings in Belarus are characterized by a highly visible gender dimension, it is possible to identify a range of socio-political transformations in Belarusian society, particularly on the subjective level. As discussed in the introductory chapter, these transformations

include the changes in women's values and lifestyles, as well as the rise of female consciousness and activism in society (McAdam 1992; Carroll 1989; Rodriguez 1994).

In the case of Belarus, active female engagement allowed women to become more confident in their public participation and challenge traditional gender stereotypes both within themselves and outside of society. For example, several women mentioned that they conquered their traits of being passive and compliant. Evushka, a 31-year-old female participant, mentioned that during the protest, she saw women's determination to "uphold their values … [and] their reluctance to agree to the terms of the rapists [referring here to the police brutality and beatings], which helped her to "defeat the victim" inside herself (Odnaiznas 2021b). Similarly, Valeria, a 20-year-old female student, also said that the protests showed her that "women have both strength and voice" (Odnaiznas 2021c). Seeing women with flowers on the streets and participating herself, Valeriya "found out how much [she] can do and how others can be proud of [her]" (Odnaiznas 2021c). These statements show that women were empowered to exercise their agency and become active citizens in the public sphere. As Irina Khalip, a famous Belarusian journalist, mentioned in her online interview with the *Culture* magazine, the 2020-2021 uprising allowed women to more actively demonstrate their positions in the public sphere and recognized their contribution to the movement (Gavina 2020). Women, who took part in the pre-election campaign, were also active afterward: they went to picket lines and protests, lined up in chains of solidarity with flowers, volunteered, and organized local initiatives. According to Khalip, such female activism "will be difficult to disperse [back] to homes," as well as make women "be quiet" again (Gavina 2020). Accordingly, the 2020-2021 uprisings showed many Belarusian women the possibility of being active in socio-political life and participating in decision-making activities.

In turn, such female activism and courage allowed some women to also recognize their interests as women. From the available online interviews, these changes are seen in the way women talk about their gender roles and Belarusian society. For example, a few women said that "men's dominating role in society has collapsed," or that "[Belarus has] a very patriarchal society, but when the revolution is over, this will have to change" (Nechepurenko 2020; Goldsmith 2020). The statements highlight the fact that women were aware of sexism and gender inequality in Belarus, which has the potential to enhance both practical and strategic gender interests in the future. Furthermore, it also lay the ground for the development of the feminist movement in Belarus. Although the terms "feminism" or "feminist" is not popular in Belarus, they were actively introduced during the protests, particularly through the speeches of Maria Kalesnikava, who often talked about herself as a feminist and the work of women's NGOs and online groups during the 2020-2021 uprising.

In regular times, the work of women's organizations in Belarus such as March on Baby (an NGO that works in the field of domestic violence in Belarus), We-do (an NGO that conducts self-defense training for women), or Her Rights (an NGO that works toward strengthening women's awareness of their rights in Belarus) tends to stay invisible to a wider audience. However, during the protests, these groups became active on the ground and online, reaching more people across different socio-economic groups. In several online Facebook and Telegram channels, there was a slight rise in online discussions and clubs related to feminism: the NGO Aktyŭnymi Być Fajna [Актыўнымі Быць Файна] organized a discussion of female sexuality, as well as created a club "Feminism for 99%" in May 2021 (Aktyŭnymi Być Fajna 2021a; Aktyŭnymi Być Fajna 2021b); the NGO March on Baby organized a discussion about masculinity and feminism in April 2021 (March on Baby 2021); the Radio Freedom BL started the project "Only Women," where they took interviews with female activists and participants of the project throughout 2020-2021 (Radio Svaboda. n.d.).

Some Belarusian NGOs also created projects dedicated to female participation in the protests. For instance, March on Baby created the "One of Us" story-telling project, through which they highlighted the diverse experiences of women in post-election Belarus (Odnaiznas 2021a). Another example includes a photo project by Julia Szlabowska, who dedicated a series of her photos to female marches in Belarus (Erizanu 2020). In her photo project, she shows that revolution in Belarus is a Woman by sharing images and voices of female participants (Erizanu 2020). Similarly, Veronika Tsepkalo and other female activists created the Belarus Women's Foundation (BWF), which aims to address the repression of women in Belarus by the Lukashenka regime (Belarus Women's Foundation. n.d.).The BWF advocates for the release of female political prisoners and provides assistance to repressed Belarusian women (Belarus Women's Foundation. n.d.). They organized a range of small projects to assist Belarusian women in need, as well as released short movies, highlighting the stories of female political prisoners. These aforementioned initiatives became vital in the process of increasing women's solidarity and awareness of their participation in the 2020-2021 uprisings. It also shows that Belarusian women and female activists wanted to maintain the female agenda during the protests, instead of putting the struggles for women's rights "for later."

An important achievement of these efforts is the creation of a Fem Group, a working group under the Coordination Council, the representative body created by Tsikanouskaya after she was forced to flee from Belarus to Lithuania. The Fem Group was made to ensure that Belarusian women would be involved in all future transformation processes that follow the regime change in Belarus (*Belsat* 2021). The groups worked directly with the Coordination Council and aimed to advise Tsikhanouskaya on gender policies. The group's main vectors of work include increasing the visibility of women's political participation in Belarus, documenting state violence against women, and raising awareness of state violence against men (Coordination Council 2021.). Last year, the group also conducted an anonymous study on the needs of Belarusian women, which will be later used to develop future policies to support women (Murphy 2020). Overall, the creation of this group and its activity is a positive result for women in Belarus. It indicates that there is a need to bring women's agenda to the table and voice gender interests in Belarusian society.

At the same time, Belarusian politicians are not fully receptive to the subject of gender equality, including Belarusian politicians in the current government and the democratic forces of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. On the one hand, the political regime did not change in Belarus as a result of the 2020-2021 uprisings, which meant that there will be no new legislative policies related to the topic of gender equality. What makes the situation even worse is the ongoing crackdown on NGOs and independent media, which were active actors in highlighting women's participation and addressing current gender issues in Belarusian society. As a part of this crackdown, the Belarusian authorities are planning to liquidate Radislava, an NGO in Minsk that specializes in helping victims of domestic violence, as well as already closed a range of independent media channels that draw public attention to gender inequality in Belarus (Lokot 2021). On the other hand, the politicians of the democratic forces were not fully receptive to the Fem Group and its agenda. As one of the leaders of the Fem Group mentioned in her interview with Belsat media, the Office of Tsikhanouskaya refused to have a representative on gender issues in their Cabinet (*Belsat* 2021). Further attempts to connect with the Office and propose their initiatives were not successful, meaning that women's agenda will stay silent at the political level. This sentiment of silence is further shared by other feminist scholars in Belarus, who argue that a significant transformation of the role of women in Belarusian society is still underway (Navumau and Matveieva 2021; Fein 2020). Accordingly, the subject of gender equality is placed in the background of the democratic agenda, which

creates a situation where Belarusian politicians only temporarily highlight women's interests, without taking active steps to implement these gender interests in their programs.

As such, while there is a rise of female consciousness in Belarusian society as a result of the uprisings, the gender stereotypes in Belarus will not be changed quickly nor will political leaders accept the ideas of gender equality fast. There is still a strong presence of patriarchal gender norms in society, where many women continue experiencing the same problems. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women's participation in the protests was meaningless for gender activism or women. In addition to the positive results discussed above, it is important to state that the transformation of women as a political subject has already occurred in Belarus. Drawing on Arendt's conception of power, the 2020-2021 uprisings in Belarus led to the revolution in the political subjectivity of women: along with recognizing their societal and political role, women collectively organized and identified in the public sphere. Accordingly, this ability of women to collectively organize and identity as Belarusian women articulates their political freedoms, which, in turn, creates wider opportunities for future developments in the sphere of gender equality in Belarus.

Chapter 3: Gender Performance during the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine

The images of the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests as "made by the man on barricades" have become entrenched in the media and the minds of many citizens. However, these heroic images of male warriors often do not show the reality of the protests. As the journalist and author of the book "Maidan. Women's Business" Iryna Vyrtosu writes, the Euromaidan would not have taken place without the participation of Ukrainian women:

"But the Maidan - it's hundreds of female roles! Activists, journalists, women who organized the work of volunteer services, the coordinators of the Open University, the initiators of the Maidan Library… Women transported the wounded to other areas for medical care…. Women were translators of information for foreign media outlets, fundraisers… [They were members of] the Maidan self-defense units, trained under the guidance of army officers, doctors ….. car riders, lawyers, psychologists, hairdressers, singers, politicians …" (Vyrtosu 2014b, 4)

Accordingly, Vyrtosu and other scholars highlight that Ukrainian women were actively involved in the protests and performed a variety of roles on the Maidan. In line with this literature, Chapter 3 aims to underscore and classify such women's participation in Ukraine.

Chapter 3 identifies five gender performances on the Maidan: Motherhood, Ukrainian Beauty, Activist & Peacekeeper, and Female Fighter. These gender performances are further classified into subcategories as presented in Rubric 3 (below). In short, the gender performances of Motherhood and Ukrainian Beauty are placed into the category of traditional and reinforcing gender performance, while the performances of Activists, Peacekeepers, and Female Fighter are categorized as egalitarian with the potential to either reinforce or subvert the established gender norm. Section 3.3. provides a more nuanced discussion of this classification, suggesting the duality of certain gender performances. The last part of Chapter 3 assesses the significance of the aforementioned gender performance for women. It argues that women's participation in the Maidan resulted in a range of socio-political transformations, ranging from the adoption of various legislative reforms to the rise of female involvement in all aspects of public life in Ukraine.

3.1. Background Information

Traditional Gender Roles in Ukraine

Gender roles and stereotypes are still powerful influences in Ukrainian society. According to the traditional gender roles, Ukrainian women are associated with two major roles: "to be mothers and to be beautiful" (Martsenyuk 2015, 74). Ideal traits for women, typically, include being kind, loving, genuine, compassionate, and modest. Such perceptions of women's identity in Ukraine are largely based on the notion of *Berehynia*, a pagan goddess of the hearth, which first originated in the world of Ukrainian ethnographers and folklorists who published at the end of the 19th century (Kis 2012, 155). Initially, the notion of *Berehynia* aimed at highlighting women's special roles in Ukrainian society and their relative

autonomy (Kis 2012, 155). It was closely connected to the idea of the Ukrainian matriarchal past, often indicating the progressive character of the nation.

However, at the time of Ukrainian national upheaval during *perestroika* in the late 1980s, the concept of *Berehynia* took a slightly different meaning, no longer indicating women's actual power: "a symbolic matriarch and guardian of Ukrainian national culture and ethnic identity" (Kis 2012, 155). This concept was actively mobilized by politicians, who emphasized only its part of motherhood and guardian of the nation while neglecting other possible implications of the concept (Kis 2012, 158). Therefore, the notion of *Berehynia* was merged with the symbols of national culture and ethnic identity, highlighting women's natural roles as mothers. From then on, as an embodiment of *Berehynia,* Ukrainian women are seen as protectors of their families and by extension guardians of the country's physical survival and Ukrainian culture (Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018, 735). Accordingly, traditional roles of women are seen as mothers and wives, where their primary responsibilities are household chores, childbearing, and care (NDI 2016, 11). In contrast, Ukrainian men are positioned as active actors in public life, breadwinners, and protectors of women (Lucas et al. 2017, 7). Men are expected to take the traditional roles of soldiers, protectors, and providers. They are not restricted from holding positions of political power compared to women and are often encouraged to take leadership roles in the public sphere.

Ukrainian Women and the Socio-political Sphere

The constitution of Ukraine dating from 1996 guarantees equality for men and women, and the country has ratified a range of international legal instruments in the field of gender equality, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Ukraine also signed the 2005 Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men, as well as the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women (Klatzer and Ivanina 2015, 6). However, while Ukraine is a part of these Conventions, it failed to ratify certain provisions and implement them in national legislation. For example, in 2016, the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukranian national parliament) failed to ratify the Council of Europe's Convention, citing the text of the Conventions with the reference to sexual orientation and gender as the main reason: it contradicted Ukrainian traditions and Christian values (Possamai 2020). This leaves women in Ukraine with no legal framework to address domestic violence and respond to other types of violence against women (Possamai 2020). Furthermore, while most legislation in Ukraine is gender-neutral, it does not promote the advancement of gender equality and prevents gender discrimination in the areas where women are being most discriminated against (Koriukalov 2014, 38). As such, this creates the following situation: de jure women in Ukraine enjoy equal status with men, but de facto they experience consistent discrimination (Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014; Phillips 2014; UN Ukraine 2018). This discrimination is often based on gender stereotypes and norms, which are considered by many experts to be deeply rooted in Ukranian society (Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014, 110).

In social and public life, women have limited opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives, communities, or the country (Koriukalov 2014, 8). There are no effective mechanisms implemented by the government to improve women's access to power and decision-making processes, while political parties often do not engage women in their organizational structures and programs (Koriukalov 2014, 8; OSCE 2015, 8). This indicates that there is a lack of political will at the legislative and executive levels to advance women's interests and implement gender transformation (MoSP and UNFPAv2014, 9). As for the share of parliamentary seats, 10% of seats in 2014 were held by women, while the proportion of

women at the ministerial level was around 14% during the same year (Moss 2014; World Bank 2015). In 2013, women made up 76.8% of civil servants and comprised 12% of the members of the city council (Koriukalov 2014, 33). Nevertheless, although women were represented better in lower-level governmental bodies, only a small proportion of these women were responsible for decision-making, particularly related to matters of national importance (Lucas et al. 2017, 12). According to the study of Tatiana Zhurzhenko, women are generally not engaged in the public sphere precisely due to their uneven roles in the home (Zhurzhenko 2001). They also have fewer social networks that could facilitate their entry into the public, which further impedes their participation in the political sphere (Zhurzhenko 2001).

Similarly, women's participation in the labor force lags behind that of men: based on the data from the World Bank, in 2013 labor force participation rate for women was 48.45% (World Bank 2021a), while for men it was 64.37% (World Bank 2021b). Women are traditionally concentrated in the so-called "female" occupation areas, including education, health, care, and support services (UN Women n.d.). Around 67% of employed women worked in the service sector in 2013, while only 45% of employed men took the same positions (Lucas et al. 2017, 13). Gender stereotypes further prevent women from occupying higher positions in both the public and private sectors of the economy, which created vertical labor segregation with men as the top managers (UN Women n.d.). Based on the data from 2013, the average economy-wide gender wage gap was 23%, which is slightly higher than the average number of 20% across the world (Lucas et al. 2017, 13).

Overall, women's participation in the socio-political sphere in Ukraine has a dubious character. On the one hand, Ukraine made significant achievements in creating a legislative framework on gender equality and supporting non-government organizations that focus on gender equality. At the same time, Ukrainian women still have a low level of representation in social and public life, and the government is failing to promote women's rights in such spheres as the labor market, family, social relations, and political engagement (Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014, 110). Traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms still limit the capacity and ability of Ukrainian women to fulfill their human rights and become active citizens in the country. Furthermore, the conflict in eastern Ukraine[4] and the ensuing socio-economic crisis as a result of the 2014 Russian invasion have exacerbated these challenges and created new problems, including the violations of women's human rights, women's poverty, and security risks (UN Women 2019).

The 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine

The Euromaidan was a mass protest movement in Ukraine that lasted from November 21, 2013, until February 22, 2014. The main cause of the peaceful protests was the refusal of then-president Viktor Yanukovych to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU). This Agreement would have integrated the country with the EU more closely, including lowering trade barriers with the EU and launching reforms to bring Ukrainian political institutions up to European standards (Traynor and Grytsenko 2013.). Under pressure from Russia, Yanukovych suspended talks on the Agreement and instead accepted a multi-billion-dollar "bailout" package from Russia (Welt 2013). This led hundreds of Ukrainians to gather in Ukraine's main square in Kyiv or the Maidan to demand the president's resignation.

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[4] The conflict in eastern Ukraine dramatically intensified on February 24, 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale military invasion. The Russian invasion has devastated cities around Ukraine and forced millions to flee the country.

After the protests intensified on the Maidan in the following days, the government began cracking down on the demonstrations. The police beat protesters with batons on November 30, sending several individuals to the hospital. When the images of such police brutality went viral online, thousands of Ukrainians went to the streets across the country, turning the demonstrations into "the revolution of dignity" (Chupryna 2021). In Kyiv, protesters built barricades, organized self-defense groups, and erected a stage on the Maidan, where various activities, politicians, and famous Ukrainian pop groups performed (Chupryna 2021). The Coordination Center of National Resistance was further formed by the opposition leaders of the parliament and civil society activists (Chupryna 2021). However, the government did not step down, and instead, the Ukrainian parliament passed the so-called "dictatorship laws" on January 16, 2014, a package of laws targeting protesters and shutting down the internet (*Open Society Foundation* 2019). These laws provoked a further surge in protest activity, and riot police began to violently crackdown on demonstrators. Subsequently, the protests radicalized and violent clashes increased across the country, but particularly in Kyiv. On January 22, the first protesters were killed in the clashes on the Maidan.

In February 2014, violence further escalated between protesters and the police forces. The climax of the classes was on February 20, when the riot police opened fire with live ammunition. As a result, over 100 civilian protesters died between February 20 and 21 (*Open Society Foundation* 2019). Following such violence, EU representatives brokered a deal with the Yanukovych government and the opposition political leader to call for elections and restoration of the country's 2004 constitution. However, protesters on the Maidan angrily denounced the deal and threatened to storm the presidential building the next morning (Malik, Gani, and McCarthy 2014). Losing his support among allies, Yanukovych secretly fled Kyiv the next day on February 22 (*Open Society Foundation* 2019). After his departure, the parliament voted to oust Yanukovych and hold new elections.

A few days later, unmarked Russian troops surrounded Ukrainian military bases in Crimea and took control of the region. In the subsequent months, Russian troops annexed the Crimean Peninsula through a disputed local referendum, where Crimeans supposedly voted to join the Russian Federation (Council on Foreign Affairs [CfA] 2022). The annexation of Crimea began a new phase of the crisis: violence erupted in Eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatist forces and the Ukrainian military. Prior to the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia, more than 10,300 people have been killed and nearly 24,000 have been injured (CfA 2022).[5]

3.2. Gender Performance in Ukraine

There were several mass demonstrations throughout the history of Ukraine, but the Euromaidan protests were marked by greater visibility of women compared to the past. During the Euromaidan, women were taking on a range of responsibilities, often challenging the gendered division of labor and criticizing sexism. Based on the obtained data from both primary and secondary sources, it is possible to identify the following five gender performances: Motherhood, Ukrainian Beauty, Activist & Peacekeepers, and Female Fighter.[6]

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[5] This thesis considers the socio-political developments in Ukraine before February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine and launched a large-scale attack.

[6] The gender performances of Motherhood and Activist are closely intertwined with each other due to the shared activities of Ukrainian women (e.g. provision of care). However, it is important to separate these gender

Gender performance: Motherhood

The first gender performance of women during the Euromaidan was based on the notion of Motherhood. Ukrainian women were often described in the context of care and support: providing psychological, emotional, and moral support for protestors. For example, the following quotations from articles and online media reflect such a gender performance: "Our strong and brave men need attention, assistance, and just talk! With women, men are more brave and courageous" or "Women had to be there at least to support emotionally the men" (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 142). Furthermore, Bohdana, a Ukrainian woman who participated in the protests, mentioned in her interview that she "went to the square because [her] students had gone there, and they were in danger and in need of mass support" (Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018, 743). These statements show that many Ukrainian women considered their primary role on the Maidan as taking care of others. They saw a need to expand their traditional functions of care from the private into the public sphere, which then provided a basis for their participation on the Maidan: women cared for Ukrainian society at large.

Image 14: Photo by Vitaly Gregor (Women standing with self-made cloth signs "Mother")
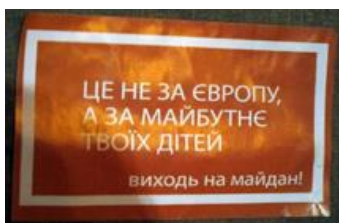

Image 15: From personal archives of Andrii/Starashafe World Press (A poster "This is not for Europe, but for the future of your children")
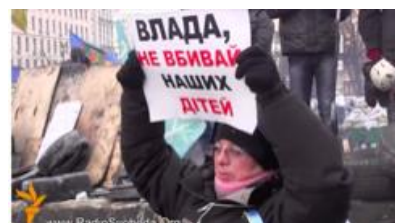

Image 16: Screenshot from RFE/RL (A woman holding a poster "Do not kill our children"

Additionally, women also evoked the notion of family and children through their performance of Motherhood. In particular, many women were motivated to participate in the protests because they wanted to protect their children and their future in Ukraine. For example, Melaniia, a Ukrainian female protester, mentioned that "Women are first and foremost mothers, and it is important to us which kind of country our children will live in" (Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018, 743). Similarly, Solomiia, a thirty-year-old mother of two children, stated: "I am interested in what will happen to my country, where my children will live … I would like to see [Ukraine] flourish. I would like my children to live in a civilized country and have a good life" (Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018, 746). In these statements, it is possible to see that Motherhood provided a powerful motivation for women to protest on the Maidan. Women wanted to protect their children and grandchildren against police violence and, as such, secure a better future for new generations of Ukrainians (Image 15). This was further evoked through resistance

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performances into two distinct categories. This is because the performance of Motherhood is associated with women's self-identification and visible use of signs related to the family and motherhood (e.g. care for their children). In contrast, the performance of Activist did not presume women to be either identified as mothers or performing staged activities to evoke the image of mothers. As such, although these two performances share similarities in terms of care activities, they are distinct from each other. The following sections of this Chapter will clarify the distinction further.

activities when Ukrainian women organized to perform Motherhood as a form of protest (Image 14; Image 19). In February 2014, a few dozen women with self-made signs "Mother" organized a march in front of the police cordon on the Maidan (*Radio Svoboda/Radio Free Europe* 2014a). They addressed the government with posters "Do not kill our children!" and "There are no other children" (Image 16).

Image 17: Photography by Maidaners, Facebook group (The portrait of Olena, who came to pick up litter from the street)

Image 18: Photography by Bohdana Kostiuk, RFE/RL

Image 19: Photography by Maidaners, Facebook group (Women brought food to the Maidan and organized a stand)

It is important to mention that Ukrainian women also consider Motherhood to encompass their voluntary work for the betterment of their community (Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018, 746). Women were ready to accept the gendered division of labor and perform the so-called "invisible" work as long as it was directed at securing a better future. This notion is seen in Oksana's interview, a twenty-four-year-old Ukrainian mother of two children, who said: "Many women, including myself, participated because they understood that we, as womankind, bear responsibility for our children and our husbands… There is a certain maternal instinct in all women, and I think women deeply understand their social role and public needs, and perform even if they get nothing in return" (Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018, 746). Therefore, Ukrainian women were ready to perform the roles of caregivers, including serving the needs of others through both cooking and cleaning. Various online photo and video material show how Ukrainian women were in charge of preparing food in the kitchen for protest, bringing the necessary medical aid, and cleaning up the spaces on the Maidan. For example, Image 17 shows Olena, a twenty-eight years old woman, who came to the Maidan to pick up litter from the street (Image 17). As she told the photographer, she loves her city (Kyiv) and wants it to be clean, as well as other protesters to be responsible for keeping Maiden clean. Similarly, other Ukrainian women were in charge of food provision and cooking, which they again considered being their primary duty for the betterment of Ukraine (Image 18; Image 19). The heightened militarism and the subsequent increase of violent reactions on the Maidan further reinforced these responsibilities of women for providing support for the male heroes.

Overall, the actions and discourses of gender performance of the Motherhood aligned with the broad understanding of *Berehynia*. The performance of Motherhood, thus, reflected the gender division of labor in Ukrainian society. Women often participated in the activities of care and provision of support, as well as organized demonstrations by evoking their moral responsibilities as mothers to protect their children.

Gender performance: Ukrainian Beauty

The second gender performance observed during the Euromaidan protests was the performance of Ukrainian Beauty. Female protestors were often referred to as "Beautiful Women of Maidan" and/or called "The Muses of Revolution" (Mukan 2013). These statements underlined the beauty of female protestors, which is an important aspect of the patriarchal perception of femininity in Ukrainian society. Given such a focus on beauty, women were seen as making spaces beautiful: they painted barricades with bright colors, wore nice and colorful cloth, and performed ballet or other dances directly on barricades (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018; Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014). For example, one of the Ukrainian media sources highlighted this performance of beauty by saying that women were adding "a festive carnival atmosphere [to the Mainda] .. giving a feeling of uplift and joy" for other protestors (Mukan 2013).

Several online photo and video materials demonstrate this "visible femininity" and "female beauty," where women wore bright clothes, put flowers in their heads, and smiled on camera. For example, in December 2013, Ukrainian women organized a demonstration "Do not beat! Love and Protect," which was characterized by beautiful and colorful images of Ukrainian women (*TSN UA* 2013). The main message of these protests was to spread love and ask Ukrainian soldiers from the other side for protection (*TSN UA* 2013). Women wore traditional color clothing and wreaths, as well as held paper hearts and the images of doves (Image 20). They also brought a lot of flowers, which later became a part of this performance. Ukrainian women were bringing flowers to various demonstrations to highlight their peaceful and loving nature.

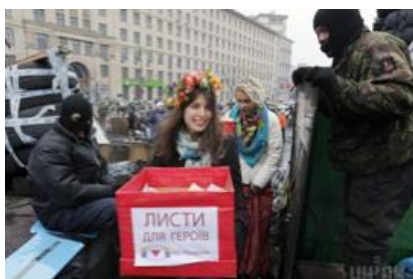Image 20: Photography by Alexander Pilyugin / Facebook

Image 21: Photography by UNIAH (A woman is holding a box with love letters)

Image 22: Illustration by Maidan.org

In addition to flowers, the act of smiling also became a prominent aspect of the performance of Ukrainian Beauty. It was even requested in the protest spaces though such statements as "Men need to show their documents, and women just need to smile" or "Entrance to Ukrainian House is given to men with a permit and girls with a smile" (Vyrtosu 2014a). As Martseynuk and Troian suggest, "smile" is a traditional feminine feature of Ukrainian women, and it is often associated with their beauty (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018). Accordingly, it is not surprising that this aspect of beauty became prominent in the gender performance of Ukraine Beauty.

Another aspect of this gender performance was "love": women were often seen in the romantic scenarios on the Maidan or the context of the female admirers of Ukrainian soldiers. For example, assuming the performance of Ukrainian Beauty, some women organized such initiatives as distributing Valentine's cards to male protestors (Khromeychuk 2016, 34). On February 14, 2014, female volunteers carried around the Maidan a box with the following sign "Letters for the [male] heroes" (Image 21) (*TSN*

UA 2014). Respectively, the box included love letters and notes, which were presented to male protesters on the Maidan from beautiful Ukrainian women. Other women distributed notes in the style of "Love is…" chewing gum[7], which sometimes were rephrased to "Euromaidan is…" (Khromeychuk 2016, 34). These notes usually served to entertain and flatter the male protesters. They depicted women dressed in a skirt and with a traditional wreath, who were sending love and caring messages to male protestors (Image 22). In some way, these images depicted the expected behavior of Ukrainian women during the Euromaidan. Besides love letters and images, another group of female protestors organized a raffle with the prize of a romantic dinner with a loved one in a restaurant (Khromeychuk 2016, 34). If the winner did not have a significant other, "the girls who were given the love notes will compete for the opportunity to dine with the lucky man" (*Maidan.org* 2014). Therefore, some women went beyond the performance of beauty and love, showing their willingness to become the so-called "prizes" for male demonstrators themselves (Khromeychuk 2016, 34).

As a result, the performance of Ukrainian Beauty was based on the traditional feminine features of Ukrainian women in society. It included the notions of beauty, bright color, smile, inspiration, and love. Assuming this performance, women not only made physical spaces beautiful by decorating barricades and bringing colors to the streets, but they also provided the non-material or emotional "beauty" by entertaining male demonstrators and spreading the messages of love and happiness.

Gender performance: Activist & Peacekeeper

The third and fourth gender performances observed during the Euromaidan protests were the roles of Female Activist and Peacekeeper. Ukrainian women were on-site doctors and nurses, on-the-scene journalists, advocates of wounded protesters, lawyers, mediators, public relation managers, etc. Many of these activities are interconnected with each other and because of that, the gender performance of Female Activist and Peacekeeper are considered together. The following section describes the most prominent activities of women within these gender performances.

First, women ensured the provision of medical care for protestors, particularly when state violence escalated. Hundreds of women with professional experiences in healthcare volunteered as nurses and doctors on the Maidan, providing first aid on the post and supporting the wounded protestors (Image 23) (Nikolayenko 2020, 459). Some women were joining the first aid units in response to the rising need for medical personnel. For example, Yulia, a female protester, mentioned that after being on the Institutskaya Street during an attempted police attack on December 11, she decided to "learn something about first aid" and attend a master class with other women, where she was taught "how to provide first aid, put a bandage, do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, how to put salt on a cotton pad when a person is unwell" (Nikolayenko 2020, 460). Similar to Yulia, many other women followed the same steps to become nurses on the Maidan. There were such initiatives as "Safety transportation," "Initiative E+," and "Hospital guard," which provided both medical and logistical support. These organizations can be also seen as nonviolent peacekeeping initiatives, where women took the leading roles (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 147).

Following the aforementioned initiatives, the second type of activity within these gender performances was the information and logistics provision on the Maidan (Image 24). A steady flow of information and resources was important to the maintenance of infrastructure on the Maidan and the

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[7] Love is … gum is Turkish chewing gum that includes lines and quotes about love. The gum was popular in Eastern Europe in the 1990s and is still been selling there.

physical well-being of the protestors, and women played a vital role in this field (Nikolayenko 2020, 462). Specifically, women were leaders and participants of many crowdsourcing and crowdfunding initiatives: they coordinated the provision of medical supplies for medical stations inside the encampment, spread news about protest events, and fundraised money online for the needs of the protestors (Nikolayenko 2020, 462). For instance, Oleksandra, a twenty-eight-year-old woman, was a founding member of the civil initiative People's Hospital (Nikolayenko 2020, 462). She assumed there the responsibility for the provision of medical instruments and equipment, along with being "a person on the phone, in front of [her] laptop" (Nikolayenko 2020, 462). Similar to these initiatives, women also participated in such projects as "Euromaidan SOS," a hotline helping people find hospitalized family members or connect with legal aid organizations, "Student Center," "Civic sector of Maidan," an initiative providing the protest with everything needed such as food, warm closing, and transport, and "Элюди – Maidaners," a social projects that collected life stories about people from Maidan (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018). These initiatives were mostly managed and coordinated by women, as well as among their founders, we could see several female names (e.g., Oleksandra Matviichuk, co-founder of the hotline Euromaidan SOS, and Christina Berdinsky, a Ukrainian journalist who took part in "Элюди – Maidaners").

Image 23: Photography by @Akymenko_o

Image 24: Photography from Facebook, Gurt.org

Image 25: Photography from Facebook, Gurt.org

Women further played a vital role in spreading the news about protest events both within the Maidan and to a wider audience. Some of such local journalism was curated by women. For example, Tetianna Movhcan contributed to the daily "Territory of Freedom," which became one of the main news sources on the Maidan, or Tetiana Mostak wrote stories for the news portal *Sil* (Salt), an online website that was transformed into a news outlet for protestors (Nikolayenko 2020, 462). Accordingly, women were at the forefront of providing informational, logistical, educational, legal, and crowdfunding support during the Euromaidan, which was crucial for the success of the protests.

Last, but not least, women also played a peacekeeping role by being mediators of peaceful actions and flash-mobs, which aimed to prevent clashes and escalations of violence. Through these activities, women performed the function of mediators between conflicting forces (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 148). A vivid example of such peacekeeping activities can be the action "Pray for Ukraine," a campaign organized by women that called people to turn to God, reflect on their place in the foundation, and remember humanity (Image 25) (BABYLON'13 2014). During this campaign, women were dressed as angels with white wings and went around the Maidan, particularly focusing on communication with male soldiers and protesters. Tina Presunko, one of the female participants of the campaign mentioned that "a woman on the Maidan is a peacemaker … [and through our campaign] we did not protest but tried to

build a dialogue with the authorities" (Pochtarenko 2014). From these words, it becomes clear that some Ukrainian women consider their presence on the Maidan as an affirmation of life and peace, which motivated them to call for more non-violent actions and a peaceful dialogue. Similarly, a different group of women organized a protest with mirrors in front of the police cordon to encourage the coercive apparatus to refrain from violence (Nikolayenko 2020, 461). During this demonstration, women approached military units stationed in downtown Kyiv and used their mirrors so that policy offices could see their reflections and unearth some humanity in their souls (Nikolayenko 2020, 461). The civic initiative AutoMaidan was another avenue for women's activism: hundreds of car owners united and started to organize regular swift raids to stage protest events outside the homes of politicians (Dzhygyr 2014). In particular, the participants of AutoMaidan aimed to bring the disruption to the regular life of politicians by means of audio and visual noise. Kateryna, a twenty-eight years old female car owner, reflected that this type of activity was perfect for her lifestyle, and she enjoyed participating in the rides (Nikolayenko 2020, 461). Ukrainian women also painted combat vehicles in different colors (Image 15), became a living shield between the parties to the conflict, and pulled men from under the fire, which further reinforced their message of peace and life (Pochtarenko 2014). In some sense, women embodied in themselves the spaces of life and aimed through their actions to create similar but physical spaces on the Maidan.

As a result, women performed a variety of tasks and activities during the Euromaidan, both implementing critical tasks and influencing the development of the movement. They assumed leadership roles in various civic initiatives such as the Euromaidan SOS, the Automaidan, the People's Hospital, etc. Among the aforementioned functions, women raised funds via social media, managed the purchase of supplies and critical equipment, organized nonviolent protests, facilitated the provision of temporary housing, provided legal support, posted and spread news, and coordinated the transportation of protesters. Through all these activities, women challenged the sexist media bias in the coverage of the Maidan (e.g., Ukrainian women were often portrayed as helpers and cleaners on the Maidan) and underscored their diverse contribution to the success of the Revolution.

Gender performance: Female Fighter

The fifth gender performance of women on the Maidan is Female Fighter, which refers to the phenomenon of women's participation on the front lines and in all-women self-defense brigades during the Euromaidan. Specifically, Ukrainian women were building barricades together with men, carried scarce resources such as tires and firewood to the front lines, made Molotov cocktails along with male protestors, and patrolled the barricades day and night. An example of the latter activity is the Night Guard initiative, which aimed to maintain public order inside the encampment on the Maidan (Nikolayenko 2020, 460). The initiative was spearheaded by the 2004 Eurovision winner Ruslana, and many of its members were women (Nikolayenko 2020, 460). Together with men, these women patrolled the streets from midnight until dawn to prevent the arrests of the injured protesters from Maidan hospitals to regional police stations (Image 26) (Pasimok 2014). By engaging in these activities, women moved beyond "caretaking" roles on the Maidan and challenged the traditional gender division of labor.

Image 26: Photography by Maidaners, Facebook group (The portrait of Oksana, who patrolled barricades from 9:00 pm until 9:00 am)

Image 27: Photography by 7days-ua (The 16th Women's Squad of Maidan Self-Defense painted vehicles of the Internal Troops)

Image 28: Photography by Shalmaza, Personal archive (The 39th Women's Squad of Euromaidan Self-Defense with their flag)

Perhaps, the most prominent example of this gender performance was the creation of both military and nonmilitary women's *sotnia* or "Women's Squads." There were formal squadrons (the 39th Women's Squad of Euromaidan Self-Defense (Image 28), female platoon squadrons (the 16th Women's Squad of Maidan Self-Defense), and informal or non-registered units (the 1st Women's Squad, the Sisterhood Squadron in Dnipropetrovsk, or the Olga Kobylianska Women's Squad) (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 147). These Women's Squads performed a range of activities from organizing art protests and doing first aid training to joining male units and learning martial arts. For example, the 16th Women's Squad of Maidan Self-Defense in Kyiv carried out various street art protests to promote peace and unite on the Maidan (Image 27) (Phillips 2014, 417). Similarly, the Women's Squad of Zaporizhzhya and the Sisterhood Squadron in Dnipropetrovsk also practiced non-violent methods of resistance (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 148). Through such tactics, these Women's Squads wanted to draw public attention to the peaceful nature of the Euromaidan protests and made obvious the unjustified violence against unarmed people (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 148). In contrast, the 39th Women's Squadron of Euromaidan Self-Defense adopted more masculine norms and joined other existing male units (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 148). Members of this Women's Squad provided spaces for Ukrainian women to match their desires of frontline participation with corresponding capabilities and train women in martial arts (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 148).

Overall, the presence of such all-female units was an attempt to formalize women's participation and achieve the recognition of women as prominent actors in the Revolution. By joining the Women's Squad movement and coming to the barricades, Ukrainian women revealed their strength and capabilities to fight for the future of Ukraine no less than their male counterparts.

3.3. Discussion and Analysis

Drawing on the notions of traditional and egalitarian gender roles, the performances of Motherhood, Ukrainian Beauty, Female Fighter, Activist, and Peacekeeper can be classified horizontally in the following way. The sub-categories of Motherhood and Ukrainian Beauty are traditional gender roles as they are based on the notion of *Berehynia* and evoke patriarchal gender norms found in Ukrainian society. The last three gender roles are egalitarian gender performances as they allow women to go

beyond the traditional gendered division of labor and underscore their leadership skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, the classification of these gender performances requires a more nuanced approach, which is presented in Rubric 3 and discussed in the subsequent sections.

Rubric 3: Classification of Gender Performance - Ukraine

	Reinforcing the established gender norms	Subverting the established gender norms
Traditional gender roles	Motherhood Ukrainian Beauty	Ukrainian Beauty
Egalitarian gender roles	Activist & Peacekeeper Female Fighter	Activist & Peacekeeper Female Fighter

First, the gender performances of Motherhood and Ukrainian Beauty are placed into the category of reinforcing the established gendered norms. This is because women's contribution to the protests in these roles was often reduced to reproductive and auxiliary work. Women were seen as taking care of others, cooking meals, cleaning protest spaces, providing emotional help, brightening the barricades, organizing medical assistance, and inspiring others. All these functions of women reflect the traditional gender order in Ukraine and are based on the notion of *Berehynia* discussed earlier in this chapter. Respectively, these gendered performances reinforced the patriarchal structures on the Maidan, portraying women as mothers, caregivers, and beauty actors, whose labor was secondary, voluntary, and with low prestige. Such announcements on the Maidan as "Dear women, if you see garbage - clean it up, [the male] revolutionary will be pleased" are clear examples of a patriarchal attitude toward women and their contributions (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 143). Several scholars point out that many Ukrainian women accepted these traditionally gender performances without much hesitation and were ready to take the functions of men's helpmates (Rossmann 2016, 213).

Some women went even further in reinforcing the notion of caregivers for others. In particular, they saw their contribution to the protests by "freeing" men from daily duties and family responsibilities. For example, one of the female protesters mentioned in her interview: "One active member of the family is enough. I freed my husband of any family obligations. That was my contribution" (Rossmann 2016, 207). Accordingly, some Ukrainian women accepted the dominant idea in society that men should be involved in public life and be active on the Maidan, while women supported them by taking care of the family and supporting men. Therefore, while the gender performance of Motherhood and Peacekeeper challenged the separation of private/public life by providing women with an effective public voice and moral ground to participate in the Maidan, these performances largely reinforced traditional gender identities of Ukrainian women.

Furthermore, the reduction of women's contribution to the traditional female functions of inspiration, care, and assistance during the protests was also caused by the presence of nationalistic rhetoric and the militarization of the Maidan, which had mixed effects on women (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018; Popova 2014). On the one hand, the deployment of the nationalistic discourses stimulated discussions about the role of women in establishing the Ukrainian nation and national identity in Ukraine's feminist movement (Phillips 2014, 416). On the other hand, the maternalistic-nationalist rhetoric reinforced the reconstruction of patriarchal structures and gender ideals on the Maidan. It evoked

the analogies of previous resistance movements in Ukraine, glorifying male warriors and setting up the boundaries of "appropriate" action for women (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 141).

The subsequent militarization of the protests strengthened such sexist rhetoric and gender segregation in the division of labor (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 141). The glorification of men as fighters for Ukraine's freedom and dignity resulted in the exclusion of women from participation in the hostilities and restricted their access to the frontline areas. The violence on the Maidan was used to justify the exclusionary policies and curfew for women, who were considered to be "weaker" members of the protests and in need of help and protection (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 141). For example, during the conformations on January 19th - 22nd in Kyiv, women were prohibited from entering Hrushevskoho Street in the name of their "safety" (Popova 2014). What was interesting about this ban is that women who were doing the so-called "care" work (e.g., doctors, journalists, and cooks) were allowed to come, while women as fighters could not pass (Popova 2014). This shows that unlike men, women were not regarded as complete and responsible individuals who could assess or decide to risk their lives for the sake of the homeland (Phillips 2014, 416). In the eyes of men, women could not take the role of the hero-fighter but rather were supposed to protect the family from afar. Accordingly, this over-protective strategy limited the opportunities for women to participate in the Maidan and boxed their participation into the expected traditional gender roles in Ukrainian society.

At the same time, the performance of Ukrainian Beauty was also subverting the established gender norms by the means of humor. Specifically, women used a range of ironic slogans that drew on stereotypical gender roles, but which aimed to assign them different meanings. For example, some posters that Ukrainian women used revoked patriarchal stereotypes in the following ways: "Black eyebrows, brown eyes- I do not want Putin!" (Image 29); "Black eyebrows, brown eyes - I do not want Yanukovich!"; "I am a girl. I do not want a dress, I want to change the system (Titis 2013)"; "Putin if you love us [refers to Ukraine] - Let us go!"; "I am a girl! I don't want EACU [The Eurasian Customs Union]! I want lace panties and EU!" (Image 30). These and other similar slogans show that women humorously subverted the patriarchal-prescribed gender roles on the Maidan. They mobilized the traditional feminine traits observed in Ukrainian society and adopted their meanings to the public sphere. As such, this allowed women to assert power and claim their agency during the protests, which places the performance of Ukrainian Beauty in the category of traditional and subverting gender performance.
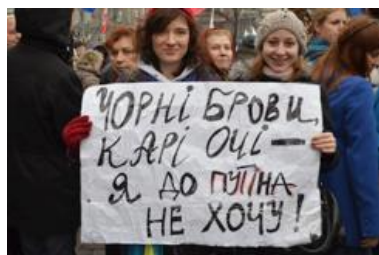

Image 29: Photography by Aleksandr, Livejournal (Poster "Black eyebrows, brown eyes- I do not want Putin!")

Image 30: Photographer is unknown (Poster with slogan "I am a girl! I don't want EACU! I want lace panties and EU!")

Image 31: Photography by Iryna Stelmakh, RFE/RL (Pan Protesrs)

Second, the performances of Female Activist and Peacekeeper were placed in two categories: a) egalitarian and reinforcing gender performance, and b) egalitarian and subverting gender performance. The first category refers to the fact that although women were active members of the Euromaidan protests, the majority of their work was involved in the provision of care for others. Women helped to cook, took care of injured people, coordinated housing initiatives, and protected protestors from police brutality. Such activities reflect the traditional gender division of labor, where women tend to dominate the "female" sectors. These activities further reinforced certain gender stereotypes, which was seen in the way men talked about women protestors: "Women mostly cooked, worked as medics, and collected stones. They were great! I told all my guy friends to come out and marry one of our many good girls" (Rossmann 2016, 208); "Women supported and calmed men. And this was also very important" or "Ukrainian women have once again confirmed their femininity and courage! … This is really a manifestation of the fact that a Ukrainian woman is a guardian" (Pochtarenko 2014). Therefore, many Ukrainian men considered women's participation in the protest as a secondary or supplemental to their work. In describing women's activities, they referred to the traditional roles of women such as of a guardian or *Berehynia*. Moreover, this also affected the self-perception of some women, who adopted similar rhetoric. For instance, Natalia, a coordinator of volunteers in Kyiv during the protests, said: "I believe that women played a very important role on the Maidan. After all, our strong and brave men needed attention, help, and just a conversation!" (Pochtarenko 2014). Following these words, it could be argued that some Ukrainian women did not realize their potential to subvert gender stereotypes and, as such, saw their work as Female Activities or Peacekeepers in relation to male protestors. For these reasons, the performances of Female Activist and Peacekeeper are classified as egalitarian and reinforcing.

Nonetheless, while women performed the tasks that were either connected to the functions of "care" or centered around supporting male protestors, the performances of Female Activist and Peacekeeper still provided means for women to challenge certain stereotypes and exercise their agency. Being involved and leading various civic initiatives, crowdsourcing, and logistics tasks, women were able to transcend the social expectation of their traditional roles of motherhood and utilize their capabilities and skills to the fullest potential. As feminist scholars Tetiana Buryechak and Olena Petrenko argued, women were no longer willing to give men the first place on the Maidan: "they act and speak as conscious, autonomous and active subjects of history" (Phillips 2014, 416). Such events as a "Night of Women's Solidarity" on Kyiv's Maidan Square reinforce the statement about women's willingness to make their voices loud.

The Night of Women's Solidarity was organized in late January 2014 by a group of feminists, who wanted to draw attention to women's participation in the Revolution (Phillips 2014, 416). The organization used a range of colorful handmade posters featuring photographs of women and their diverse activities with captions like "Women on the Maidan don't just make sandwiches, they also build barricades. Glory to the Heroes!" (Phillips 2014, 416). The Night of Women's Solidarity further evolved into an informal and non-hierarchical grassroots initiative, which was called "Half the Maidan: Women's Voices of Protests" (Phillips 2014, 417). The organization continued to promote and document womens' participation in the Euromaidan, as well as created and maintained an active presence on social media. Indeed, such activity both online and offline confirm women's desire to be recognized as active participants of the Euromaidan. It also signifies that women wanted to transform an image of "a hero" and include their activities in its meaning. By insisting on active participation in the Maidan and continuing to

highlight the importance of their contributions, Ukrainian women asserted their autonomy and showed a future commitment to making equal contributions to building a more inclusive Ukraine.

Another aspect of such performances was the so-called "pan" protests on the Maidan, which also indicated the subversion of certain gender norms (Image 31). On January 16, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a package of laws to limit the rules for conducting rallies. One of the provisions of such laws was a ban on wearing protective helmets and masks during the protests (Dewey 2014). A fine of UAH 3,400 or an arrest for 15 days was set as a punishment for violating this law. In response to such absurd measures, many protestors organized a flash mob "Kastrulyada" (Pan): they came to the Maidan wearing on their heads various kitchen utensils (Image 31) (*Radio Svoboda/Radio Free Europe* 2014b). Both men and women were creative and wore on their heads kitchen pans, colander, bowl, etc. While the flash mob provided avenues for people to continue protesting, what was interesting here is the use of traditionally female objects in the public sphere. By appropriating kitchen utensils, both men and women re-signified the meaning of courage and strength. In other words, the daily objects of private life provided avenues for people to show their dissatisfaction and underscore the absurdity of the law. Accordingly, such actions allow us to classify the performance of Female Activist and Peacekeeper as egalitarian and subverting.

Third, the gender performance of Female Fighter is placed into the category of egalitarian and subverting gender performance as it allowed women to challenge the androcentrism of the Maidan rhetoric and secure their recognition on the Maidan. Although several female activists have raised questions about whether such participation in the masculine military institutions transformed women based on their feminine interests and needs, the Women's Squad movement did signify the manifestation of collective women's agency and their response to patriarchal exclusion policy on the Maidan (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 147). Particularly, it could be argued that precisely because women were excluded from barricades once the Euromaidan protests radicalized and militarized, it pushed women to adopt and transform certain military rhetoric to challenge the traditional gender division of labor. For example, one of the female members of Women's Squad mentioned in her interview that "[she] was getting sick of just making tea for the 'heroes' and standing in the second line all the time" (Rossmann 2016, 208). Similarly, another female member said that "[she] came to Kyiv to fight. To fight in the front line like all the men. Women don't just sit in kitchens, smiling, giving out soup" (Rossmann 2016, 208). These statements show that women did not want to comply with their roles of being supporters to the men on the Maidan and welcomed alternative avenues for more egalitarian participation. The Women's Squad Movement provided such spaces for women, through which they challenged the traditional gender structures and reinforced the idea of making the revolution along with men.

It would be wrong to neglect that certain Women's Squads adopted nationalistic symbols and military discourses. For example, the 1st Women's Squad was closely associated with the Far Right. It was formed as one of the first *sotnia* ["Hundred"][8], but it did not get much support and eventually dissolved (Philips 2014, 417). Similarly, the 39th Women's Squadron had appropriate new masculine norms and partially enjoyed masculine privileges (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 147). It was considered by other male *sotnias* as "sister in arms," which led to mixed results for women. On the one hand, the organization contributed to the coverage of women's participation in the uprising and provided spaces for Ukrainian women to take on more "male" roles. On the other hand, the Squad supported patriarchal discourse and adopted certain masculinity manners, along with attributing different qualities to women

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[8] A *sotnia* is a military term of Slavic origin, which literally means "hundred." In the context of military, it refers to a military unit of about 100-150 people.

and men (Pochtarenko 2014). For instance, in its manifesto, the 39th Women's Squadron of Euromaidan Self-Defense noted that men defend [Ukraine's] integrity with strength and courage, while women defend Ukraine with intelligence and kindness. This statement shows that the organization attributes such qualities as strength and courage to be inherited in men and intelligence and kindness to be part of women.

Additionally, as Roman writes in her 2016 study of women's participation in the Euromaidan, while women who were members of the Squads challenged traditional gender stereotypes by being members, it was still important to them to be seen as women (Rossmann 2016, 210). One female member of the Women's Squad mentioned that "I didn't want to be a man-woman. I did try to dress nice [. . .] sort of, to the degree that was possible. We often put flower wreaths into our hair when we kept guard" (Rossmann 2016, 210). Other women did not have any problems with accepting different treatments in the Squads or using different fields of operation than men (Rossmann 2016, 210). Therefore, even the tasks that are not always seen as feminine could confirm and reinforce the exciting gender divisions. Taking this into account, the gender performance of Female Fighter, thus, should be also placed in the egalitarian and reinforcing category.

However, although some Women's Squads utilized nationalistic symbols and military discourses, there were many more Women's Squads that aimed to use non-violent methods and advocate for women's empowerment. In addition to the non-violent Squads discussed above, the most visible and influential Women's Squad in this regard was the Olha Kobylianska Women's Squad. It was established by young leftist and trade union activists under the leadership of well-known feminist and LGBTQ+ rights advocates as Olena Shevchenko, Madia Parfan, Maria Berlins'ka, and Nina Potarska (Phillips 2014, 417). The Squad was not officially registered as part of Maidan self-defense and stayed outside of its patriarchal structure (Martsenyuk and Troian 2018, 147). It aimed to reveal publicly different types of women's contributions to the Revolutions, along with advocating women's rights and combating sexism. In an interview, its leaders mentioned that the Squad used the methods of enlightenment, non-violent resistance, and self-defense with the minimum required impact as needed in its work (Phillips 2014, 420). They organized various events where women could learn more about their rights, express their attitudes towards themselves, and acquire certain knowledge and skills they needed (Pochtarenko 2014). For example, the group offered free self-defense classes to women, organized a screening of documentaries by women filmmakers, and moderated a lecture by Dmitriyeva on the history of the Ukrainian women's movement (Phillips 2014, 420). The Squad also created a Facebook page, which had more than 3,000 followers as of June 2015 (Women's Squad 2014).

Accordingly, the Olha Kobylianska Women's Squad and similar civic initiatives used the Euromaidan protests as a window of opportunity to introduce new discussions about women's rights and sexism in Ukrainian society. They also balanced the nationalistic and militarist rhetorics during the Maidan, while distancing themselves from violent protest methods and right-wing groups. As a result, the Women's Squad Movement with all its downsides was able to imbue old concepts with new meanings: women signified their collective agency by exercising solidarity on the Maidan and challenged their role in the formation of the nation.

3.4. Outcomes and Transformations

Active female participation during the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests resulted in various outcomes, ranging from the adoption of legislative reforms and the rise of gender-focused initiatives to the changes in socio-political attitudes and values in Ukrainian society. This section of Chapter 3 aims to identify and discuss such socio-political transformations in Ukrainian society on both objective and subjective levels.

On the objective level, the new Ukrainian government established the necessary legal and institutional frameworks for promoting gender equality and encouraging women's political participation in the country. Perhaps one of the biggest legislative changes was the adoption of a gender quota by the Verkhovna Rada. In 2013, Ukraine adopted the voluntary 30% gender quota, while in 2019, the government ratified the compulsory 40% gender quota. Such quotas presented legal mechanisms to increase and safeguard women's presence in the parliament, as well as recruit more Ukrainian women to become officials at both national and regional levels. In the national parliament, there was a slight increase in the proportion of women from 9.44% in 2012 to 12% in 2014 (IPU 2014; IPU 2014). The composition of the local governments across Ukraine also demonstrates positive changes: there were two women ministers in the Yatsenyuk government (2014–2016), six women in the Groysman government (2016–2019), and six in the Honcharuk government (2019) (Gritsenko 2022). Nonetheless, the main pitfall of this legislation was the unsatisfactory political party system in Ukraine and the prevalent gender stereotypes in society (Polegky 92). Although political parties expanded their electoral lists to include female candidates, the parties were often controlled by a few oligarchs and impeded women's access to power. As Polegky writes, political parties did not act as real representative institutions in Ukraine and sometimes placed female politicians at the bottom of their electoral lists, in largely unwinnable positions (Polegky 92). These practices, along with the traditional gender stereotypes, hindered the immediate success of the gender quota in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the new government continued to incorporate gender equality into its agenda, adopting legislative reforms to ensure women's access to power and create a balanced representation of men and women in the elected offices. For instance, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine created the position of Government Commissioner for Gender Policy in 2017 with the goal to coordinate and monitor the work of central and local executive bodies on equal rights and opportunities for women and men (Government Portal of Ukraine 2018). The position also entails assisting the government in developing state programs on gender equality and cooperating with civil society (Government Portal of Ukraine 2018). Kateryna Levchenko, the president of La Strada - Ukraine (a human rights organization working toward achieving gender equality in Ukraine) was appointed to this post. Additionally, the Cabinet of Ministers also approved the Concept of State Social Policy for Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women on April 5, 2019, which further indicates the willingness of the new government to move toward gender equality in Ukraine. Other important legislative changes included the adoption and strengthening of anti-discrimination legislation. In 2017, the Ministry of Health repealed the decree that prohibited Ukrainian women from a list of 450 professions (Gritsenko 2022). The list removed previously set restrictions for women to work in timber harvesting, electrical and chemical industries, metallurgical and underground work, and many others. Altogether, the aforementioned legislative reforms strengthened women's involvement in socio-political life in Ukraine and reinforced the government's commitment to gender equality. They resulted in higher numbers of Ukrainian women in political offices, providing new avenues for women's involvement in public life.

Likewise, the military of Ukraine was changed to accommodate the growing interest of women in this sector. For instance, on June 3, 2016, the Ministry of Defense expanded the list of combat positions for female contracted servicewomen by almost 100 jobs, allowing women to apply for these new job functions (Gritsenko 2022). This was a significant step toward gender equality in the Ukrainian army. Previously, women who performed combat tasks were registered as paperwork managers and/or heads of a field bathhouse, which constrained their activity and often diminished the value of their work. Additionally, the President of Ukraine signed the law on October 12, 2018, which introduced amendments to certain legislative acts in the armed forces and other military formations: they included the establishment of a legal framework of equal rights and opportunities for women in the armed forces, the removal of restrictions on the service of female servicewomen in reserve, and the abolishment of all limits on the assignment of female soldiers to daily duties (Gritsenko 2022). As a result of these reforms, the number of women who serve and work in the Armed Forces of Ukraine significantly increased. According to official data, over 20,000 women served in the Armed Forces as of summer 2017, while the following year, this number almost doubled to 55,000 women (Gritsenko 2022). Women also took leadership positions such as Lyudmila Shugaley, who was appointed to the post of Major General of Medical Service in 2018 (Gritsenko 2022). Shugaley became the second female general in Ukraine since the country's independence in 1991.

Moreover, this increase in the number of Ukrainian women in the military transformed the traditional stereotypes associated with the national military holidays. For instance, the public holiday of the "Day of Defenders of Ukraine" was evolved to recognize Ukraine women as equal defenders of the nation, and for the first time in Ukraine's history, a column of female military personnel marched during Ukraine's Independence Day parade in 2018 (Gritsenko 2022). Therefore, we can argue that the legislative reforms in the military sphere challenged the notion of protection and its association with the male domain. They allowed more women to get involved in the military sector at different stages, ranging from studying in national military lyceums to becoming police officers and military generals in Ukraine.

At the same time, women's activism during the Euromaidan protest also resulted in transformations on the subjective level, particularly in women's values and lifestyles. As some feminist scholars argue, the Maidan provided a space for women to generate critical reflections and productive conversations about women's rights and democratization in Ukraine (Philips 2014). For example, during the protests, journalist and human rights activist Olha Vesnianka initiated the project "Women's Voices of Maidan," during which she shared the stories of different female activities with the audience (Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014, 119). Maria Dmytrieva, another feminist activist and blogger, gave a public lecture on the history of women's movement in the world and Ukraine as a part of the Open University educational initiative (Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014, 119). In turn, these activities led to the changes on individual and personal levels: Ukrainian women became more self-confident in their strengths and abilities and more aware and critical of discrimination and of limits placed on their autonomy (Philips 2008; Nikolayenko and DeCaper 2018). They developed a higher sense of political efficacy, which contributed to the increasing involvement of women in the political life of the country. As one female protestor mentioned: "For the first time since 2004, there emerged a feeling that you could make a difference, you could yourself change something" (Nikolaynko 2020, 464). Accordingly, this statement supports the fact that women developed female consciousness and reflected on their socio-political position within Ukranian society during the Euromaidan protests.

Once the protests were over, this active socio-political position of women was transferred into a range of female activities and initiatives. Some of these activities include the creation of the Facebook

group Half of Maidan: Women's Voice of Protest, which was set up to provide a platform for coordinating protest activities and advocating women's rights both during and after the Maidan. Another example include a flash mob #яНеБоюсьСказати (#I'mNotAfraidToSay), which was initiated by Nastya Melnychenko, a Ukrainian social activist, in 2016. The flash mob aimed to raise awareness about the issue of sexual assault and violence in Ukrainian society (Strelnik 2017). It gathered momentum in the Ukrainian Facebook segment and then spread across the post-Soviet space. Thousands of women not only in Ukraine but also in Russia and Belarus went on social media to share their experiences of sexual violence (Marie Davies and Evdokimova 2016). This also helped to draw the attention of state authorities to the issue of domestic violence in Ukraine, which has been a central focus of many women's advocacy non-governmental organizations. Although some gender experts might argue that this attention was temporary, it nontheless helped to secure some state funding for online hotlines and shelter initiatives for abused women in Ukraine (Hrycak 2004).

The rise of female consciousness and grassroots feminist movement in Ukraine was also seen in offline activities such as the March 8th marches. These marches became more organized and grew larger across the country, coming to the regions of Kherson, Mariupol, and Lysychansk (Gritsenko 2022). As some scholars further noted, these marches became more proactive and resulted in wider conversations about gender in Ukrainian society (Gritsenko 2022). Specifically, since 2014 the marches' demands were transformed from passive responses to conservative draft laws in Ukraine such as a potential tax on childlessness to more active pushes for new progressive legislation such as the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women (Gritsenko 2022). These marches also helped to bring the subject of gender to public discussions in Ukraine, including the topics of active fatherhood, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender marking in job titles in Ukraine (Gritsenko 2022).

Additionally, there was an increase in gender initiatives in media and education in Ukraine. For instance, a number of specialized media outliers that focused on gender issues appeared in Ukraine. These media platforms included such channels as Update, Povaha (Respect), 50%, and The Devochki (The girls), which all aimed to push back on sexism in Ukrainian media and politics (Gritsenko 2022). Together with the Women's Rights League NGO, some of these media platforms organized an advertising campaign to identify and fine advertisers for sexist images and messages. The online platform Povaha also posted several online articles, in which they analyzed the damaging impact of sexist coverage in Ukrainian society (NDI 2018). These campaigns helped to raise questions about sexist attitudes toward women leaders in Ukrainian media, leading to greater inclusion of women's perspectives in news stories and the use of feminitives (NDI 2018). As for education, the Ukrainian government established a task group under the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in 2015 and introduced the post of Advisor to the Minister of Education and Science on gender equality and anti-discrimination. Among various results of the work of the task group, there was the abolishment of gender-segregated education and lessons in Ukraine and the revision of all texts and illustrations in school textbooks on the subject of gender stereotyping and prejudices (Gritsenko 2022). Throughout 2016–2019 around 845 textbooks completed a gender assessment in Ukraine, which resulted in greater attention and sensitivity to gender stereotypes by writing teams and publishing companies.

Overall, women's participation in the Euromaidan protests led to a range of socio-political transformations in society: there have been several important legislative reforms adopted by the government; many women have become active in Ukraine's public space and politics; social attitudes and gender stereotypes have been challenged. Accordingly, feminist changes have become an important part of the overall process of democratization and development in Ukraine. After the 2013-2014 Euromaidan

protests, a growing number of women saw themselves as full-fledged and equal participants in social, economic, and political processes, which helped them to become more active citizens and involved in regional and national politics. And although the country has faced certain challenges in advancing gender equality due to the war in eastern Ukraine since 2014, not to mention the recent full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the aforementioned transformations and the growing number of grassroots initiatives in various domains of life speak to the conclusion: Ukraine is becoming a better place for women, as gender equality is increasingly embraced both on paper and in practice.

Chapter 4: Discussion & Conclusion

Women's participation in contentious politics has long been silenced in the mainstream literature on socio-political movements. Only after the rise of women's rights movements and female organizations at the grassroots levels during the 1960s – 1970s, did more scholars begin to highlight the subject of gender in contentious politics. In line with this scholarship, the following thesis aims to underscore women's participation in the protest space and recognize women as full participants in the public sphere. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, women were the main drivers of demonstrations: they attended marches, participated in negotiations, made barricades, provided medical support, participated in peace-keeping, etc.

The following chapter provides the overall discussion of such female participation in Belarus and Ukraine, along with presenting the avenues for future research on gender performance. Chapter 4 suggests that both case studies shared a range of similarities in terms of the observed gender performances (e.g., Motherhood, Beauty, and Wife) and differed based on the egalitarian gender performances (e.g. Female Leader, Activist, Peacekeeper, and Female Fighter) due to the variations in the nature of protest movements and the socio-political situation in the specific context. This chapter further argues that such participation in contentious politics resulted in visible transformations for women on the subjective or personal level. In both case studies, the collective action of women contributed to their greater consciousness of gender and legitimacy in the public sphere. Belarusian and Ukrainian women developed a higher sense of political efficacy and became more aware of their roles and positions within society. In the case of Ukraine, these transformations were further aided by the changes on the institutional level (e.g., legislative reforms). The chapter ultimately ends by highlighting the main takeaways of this thesis: the prominence of care and auxiliary work among women's protest activities, the limiting understanding of gender performance in scholarly literature, and the question of meaning-making or narration of protest activities.

4.1. Women's Standing in Society

Belarus and Ukraine - different, but similar

Gender roles and stereotypes are still powerful influences in Belarusian and Ukrainian society. In both countries, women are associated with the gender roles of mothers, housekeepers, and wives. Ideal traits for women include being kind, loving, generous, supportive, and compassionate. These common feminine traits and stereotypes observed in Belarus and Ukraine are partially attributed to the shared history of the two countries. Specifically, Belarus and Ukraine are Eastern European states that were a part of the Soviet Union in the 20th century. Since Soviet times, they have preserved certain patriarchal patterns of gender divisions in society. However, it is important to point out that in Ukraine, traditional gender traits are also based on the notion of *Berehynia,* which was actively mobilized by various political actors for the national cause. Such mobilization of the concept, thus, was merged with the ideas of nation and patriotism in Ukraine, highlighting women's roles as Ukrainian mothers and guardians.

Nontheless, Belarus and Ukraine seemingly exhibit important differences in women's participation in various facets of society, at least as per international rankings. According to the UNDP

gender inequality index[9] in 2019, Belarus was ranked 31 out of 162 countries, having a gender inequality index of 0.118, while Ukraine was placed 52 out of 162 countries with a gender inequality index of 0.234 (UNDP n.d.). The gender gap index[10] of the two countries, interestingly, reflects a similar dynamic: Belarus was ranked 29 out of 153 countries with an index of 0.746, and Ukraine took the 59th position with an index of 0.721 (World Economic Forum 2020). Even with the relatively new index measure such as Women Peace and Security Index (WPSI), which evaluates women's comprehensive well-being, autonomy, and empowerment in society, the two countries still take the respective rankings. In 2021, Belarus had the WPS Index of 0.814 and ranked 38 out of 170 countries, while Ukraine had the WPS Index of 0.748 and ranked 66 out of 170 countries (GIWPS and PRIO 2021). In general, it seems that Belarus has higher international rankings compared to Ukraine: the country often falls into the top 30 countries and is ranked above Ukraine by around 20 to 30 positions. With respect to other post-Soviet states like Russia, Armenia, and Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine rank much higher. Nevertheless, given the pitfalls of the data and index measures, along with the various on-the-ground research, Belarus is not as far from Ukraine as the index data shows.

As described in Chapter 2, the high ratings of Belarus do not reflect the real situation on the ground. Belarusian women face discrimination both at home and in society, specifically related to the issues of domestic violence and labor markets. Similar to Ukraine, Belarus does not have a proper legal framework to address domestic violence and failed to adopt important laws in this regard. It also has more men in the labor market than women, and female workers are largely concentrated in service, education, and healthcare industries. Accordingly, women's rights in Belarus are de facto infringed in many aspects of everyday life, which makes Belarusian society similar to Ukraine. Furthermore, the lower international rankings of Ukraine can be also explained by the military crisis in Eastern Ukraine since April 2014 (UN Women. n.d.). Political instabilities and violence in Eastern Ukraine had a significant detrimental impact on gender equality, affecting the situation of women and their rights in Ukraine (UN Women. n.d). Since 2014, more than one million women and children have been internally displaced and suffered from impeded access to healthcare, housing, and employment (UN Women. n.d.). Gender-based violence has further increased and combined altogether, it explains the relatively low rankings of Ukraine by the WPS Index or UNDP gender inequality index. As such, this makes Belarus and Ukraine relatively similar in terms of gender equality: women have limited opportunities for participation in decision-making and the labor market.

At the same time, the two countries seem to be different in relation to women's participation in the political sphere. This is because Belarus and Ukraine have different political systems, where Belarus appears to have more women in the government, but with less political power than Ukraine. For instance, Belarusian women, on average, take up around 30% of all members in the National Assembly and make up around 68% of all civil servants (Reformation 2012). In contrast, Ukrainian women took around 10-15% of all legislative seats before the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests and made up around 77% of civil servants (Koriukalov 2014; Moss 2014). These data show that while Belarusian and Ukrainian women are

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[9] According to the UNDP data, the gender inequality index measures gender inequalities in three aspects of human development: reproductive health, empowerment (measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education), and economic status.

[10] According to the World Economic Forum, the gender gap index measures gender-based gaps in four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

almost equally employed as civil servants, there is a big difference in women's participation in legislative and executive branches. Belarusian women are more involved in the government and take higher positions there (e.g., Natalya Kochanova, a speaker of the Council of the Republic of Belarus; Marianna Shetkina, a deputy Chairman of the Council of the Republic of Belarus; Natalya Eismant, a press secretary of Lukashenka; Iruna Kostevich, Minister of Labor and Social Protection; and others). However, while there are a lot of women in the Belarusian government, their presence is ineffective of the authoritarian nature of Lukashenka's regime.

The idea of "femocracy" aimed to highlight Belarus' progressive vision toward gender equality and the regime's commitment to women's rights. It was presumed to include more Belarusian women in the governmental bodies and deputies' positions, creating an image of high female participation at the legislative level. Nonetheless, these women do not have much influence on decision-making and lack political autonomy. Their presence in the Belarusian government is rather symbolic and aimed at supporting the current regime in its goal of reinforcing the traditional gender roles. Taking this into account, the low number of Ukrainian women in the government does not seem to be as bad, particularly given that Ukrainian women have more autonomy in decision-making than in Belarus. In the case of Ukraine, women in the government can advance more progressive reforms and work toward achieving gender equality. For example, after the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protest, women were able to push for and initiate a range of legislative policies, among which is a 40% gender quota in the Verkhovna Rada, the adoption of the State Social Policy for Equal Rights, and Opportunities for Men and Women, and the creation of the position of Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. These and other reforms on gender equality in Ukraine happened due to the increasing engagement of women in the government and the democratic nature of the political institutions, which is not the case in Belarus, where women play a symbolic character in the femocracy system.

Overall, Belarus and Ukraine share more similarities than not concerning gender equality. In both countries, women have limited opportunities in the socio-political sphere and face discrimination on a daily basis. They are honored by both Belarusian and Ukrainian society when performing traditional gender roles of Mothers and Wives. In turn, this affects what gender roles women utilize in contentious politics and how they choose to present themselves in the public space. As discussed in the next section, the gender performances of Wives, Mothers, and Beauty were present in both case studies. The gender performance of Female Leader and Activist was also observed during the protests, however, it encompassed different types of activties in two case studies. The following section presents further details about the aforementioned gender performances, including their similarities and differences.

4.2. Gender Performance: Belarus vs. Ukraine

The first goal of this thesis was to understand the gender performance of women in the protest spaces in Belarus 2020-2021 and Ukraine 2013-2014. Specifically, my research questions were a) what gender roles, symbols, and discourses do women use to create opportunities for participation in the protest space? and b) to what degree do these gender performances reinforce or depart from established gender norms? Although more detailed answers to these questions can be found in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the summary of my analysis is presented in Table 1.

From Table 1, we can see that five gender performances were identified in both case studies. In Belarus, these gender performances were Wives, Mothers, Belarusian Beauty, Female Leaders, and

Activists, while in Ukraine they included Mothers, Ukrainian Beauty, Female Fighters, Female Activists, and Peacekeepers. Based on my research, I classified the gender performances of Motherhood, Wives, and Belarusian/Ukrainian Beauty as traditional gender norms: they evoke patriarchal gender norms found in Belarusian and Ukrainian society. The other four performances of Female Leader, Activist, Peacekeeper, and Female Fighter are placed in the category of egalitarian gender roles as they provide avenues for women to challenge the traditional gender norms. Yet, this dichotomous classification only providde a partial picture. As my thesis suggests, gender performances are fluid and contextualized, which means their meanings and potential for subversion depends on the time of such performance, its actors, and the audience. This echoes Butler's theory of performativity: the subversions of traditional gender norms emerge in spontaneous and unpredictable moments when individuals enact cultural norms in multifarious ways (Butler 1988). The following section of this Chapter discusses the identified gender performances in both case studies, drawing certain conclusions on whether such performances reinforce or depart from the established gender norms in Belarus and Ukraine.

Table 1: Classification of Gender Performance during the protests in Belarus 2020-2021 and Ukraine 2013-2014

	Reinforcing the established gender norms		Subverting the established gender norms	
Traditional gender roles	- Mother (Motherhood) & Wife - Belarusian Beauty	- Mother (Motherhood) - Ukrainian Beauty	- Mother (Motherhood) & Wife	- Ukrainian Beauty
Egalitarian gender roles	- Activist	- Activist & Peacekeeper - Female Fighter	- Activists - Female Leaders	- Activist & Peacekeeper - Female Fighter
	Belarus	Ukraine	Belarus	Ukraine

Gender Performances of Motherhood, Wives, and Beauty

According to Table 1, the gender performances of Motherhood, Wives, and Beauty are placed in the category of traditional and reinforcing gender roles. This is because they emphasized women's reproductive and auxiliary work in both case studies: women as mothers, wives, and beauty subjects were associated with care and support for the protestors, as well as with their desire to protect children and husbands.

In both Belarus and Ukraine, the performances of Motherhood, Wives, and Beauty are divided into theatrical actions and practical activities. The first category of actions (i.e. theatrical) refers to the staged and planned activities of women. In particular, it includes organized women's marches in Belarus, Mothers' demonstrations in Ukraine, and Beauty protests in both case studies. These theatrical actions presumed certain types of women's attire and behavior. For instance, in the case of Belarus, Women's

marches were characterized by women wearing white-red-white colored clothes, bringing flowers to the streets, and putting on make-up to protest. In Ukraine, such staged performances were observed during the "Mother" March in February 2014, the "Do not beat! Love and Protect!" demonstration in December 2013, and the Maiden activities in February 2014. Altogether, these theatrical performances of Motherhood and Beauty comprise women wearing white or colorful clothes, holding signs with slogans about family, putting flower wreaths on their heads, and evoking the messages of peace and protection.

At the same time, the theatrical performances of Motherhood, Wives, and Beauty were also accompanied by the practical activities of women during the protest. Whilst these activities (e.g., the provision of logistical and administrative support) were often classified into the category of egalitarian gender roles (e.g., Female Activists and Leaders), it is necessary to acknowledge that gender performance is fluid and so are its boundaries. As discussed in the previous chapters, some activities that women performed overlap with each other. In the case of Ukraine, this overlap becomes clear in the performance of Motherhood: many Ukrainian women, who performed the roles of Mothers, provided food, care, and medical aid for the protestors on the Maidan, which was also assigned to the performances of Female Activists. Therefore, although the practical activities performed by women during the protests do reflect their proactive and leadership positions, they were also attributed to the performance of Motherhood due to their auxiliary nature of work.

This thesis suggests that auxiliary and supportive work was limiting for both Ukrainian and Belarusian women, largely because women performed their gender as expected by society. According to Butler, the expectations of authoritative gender discourses and meanings become the means through which power relations are established and reproduced (Butler 1988). This means that by agreeing to take on the traditional gender roles, women often supported the established gender structures both on the Maidan and during the Belarusian protests, whether they intended to or not. In certain instances, women even diminished the importance of their contributions to the protests: they considered their participation in the Maidan and the Belarusian uprising as supporting their husbands and male protestors. In turn, this reinforced the patriarchal structures during the protests as women acknowledged men's active position in the public sphere.

The traditional expectations of gender were also reflected in the language describing women's performances and their slogans. Belarusian women were often referred to as "Flowers of Victory," while Ukrainian women were called "The Muses of Revolution." These slogans underline the patriarchal perceptions of femininity in Belarus and Ukraine, where women are associated with beauty, color, and love. This further allowed many to perceive women's performances of Beauty as simply making the protest spaces beautiful.

Furthermore, the language of Motherhood and Beauty was used to draw parallels with the meaning of the protests themselves. In particular, the image of Belarus and Ukraine was portrayed as a young woman who was chased by the aggressor. In the case of Belarus, artists represented the country as beautiful women in white-red-white color clothes that stood up against the regime (Image 32). Similarly, the violent side of the protest was depicted through the image of a young woman. For instance, Yana Charnava, a Belarusian artist, created the "Belarusian Venus" painting (Image 33). This painting depicted a naked woman, who is covered in bruises and lies on the floor, embracing the contour of red Belarus. In the case of Ukraine, a similar situation was observed: the country was depicted as a young woman in a beautiful wreath, resisting the aggressor (Image 34). Sometimes, the image of Mother and its religious meaning was evoked in the art to represent the country's struggles to move toward European values and democracy (Image 35). Altogether, these artworks and images suggest that the protest was gendered not

only through *women's* specific gender performances but also through the broader process of meaning-making by artists and journalists, as well as by regular citizens. The gendered language of the protests reinforced the patriarchal structures of society, making it harder for women to subvert their roles of Motherhood and Beauty.

Image 32 : Art by @askarbinidze

Image 33: Art by Yana Charnava, "Belarusian Venus"

Image 34: The cover of Oscar-nominated documentary movie "Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom"

Image 35: Art by Ola Rondiak, "Maty Revolution"

It could certainly be argued that despite these performances limiting women to certain roles and activities, they were also used as means to legitimize women's participation in the public sphere. Given that society often silences and constrains women, the performance of Motherhood, and Wives equipped women with a strong moral ground to participate in the protests and speak out. To some extent, this made women's presence more visible and recognized by others. Yet, the faact remains that these performances for the most part reinforced traditional gender roles.

But there were exceptions to this overall trend. As seen in the previous chapters, the gender performances of Beauty in Ukraine and Mother & Wife in Belarus was occasionally utulized to subvert established gender norms, specifically by the means of humor and irony.[11] In both case studies, women utilized ironic slogans and images that drew on stereotypical gender roles, but re-signified different meanings. The examples include such slogans as "Black eyebrows, brown eyes - I do not want Putin!" "Sasha [referring to Aliaskandar Lukashenka], sexism has destroyed you," or "Women should be in the house, in the Government House." For instance, the first slogan "Black eyebrows, brown eyes - I do not want Putin!" refers to the stereotypical notion of beauty in Ukraine: women with brown eyes and black eyebrows are considered beautiful. However, during the Euromaidan protests, such a stereotype of beauty was used as a political meme to express the message of rejection: Ukraine does not want to be in close alliance with Russia. Similarly, the second slogan "Sasha, sexism has destroyed you" was also used as an irony to show resistance in Belarus. This phrase was initially used by Maria Kalesnikava in one of her

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[11] As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the gender performances of Beauty was subversive only in the case of Ukraine, while the gender performance of Mother and Wive was subversive in Belarus and not in Ukraine. This difference in terms of gender performance and its subversive character can be explained by two reasons: the limitation of my data collection (e.g., online primary sources) and the difference in classification. Specifically, the gender performance of Mother and Wive in Belarus was classified and included more instances of women holding posters with ironic slogans than the performance of Beaty. In the case of Ukraine, the performance of Beauty was characterized by this type of activity rather than the performance of Mother. As such, this resulted in different classification. Further research could provide more insights into these differences.

online interviews and later on became popular among Belarusian women. They held posters with this phrase to express their dissatisfaction and project the power of nonviolent female protests. Accordingly, these and other instances of ironic slogans related to beauty and gender show how women redefined traditional stereotypes and changed their meanings during the protests. They transform the stereotypical slogans from the private to the public sphere, changing the public perceptions of their roles. As such, deploying humor has the potential to subvert and challenge the established norms through gender performance. By turning things upside down and presenting them in a new light via humor, women can claim their agency and space in the male sphere of influence.

Gender Performances of Female Leader, Activist, Fighter, and Peacekeeper

Women's gender performances as Female Leaders and Activists were observed in both case studies. Belarusian and Ukrainian women were on-site journalists, advocates, lawyers, doctors, and nurses. They assumed multiple leadership roles and started various civil initiatives during the protests, often supporting the organizational part of the protests. According to Table 1, these gender performances were placed in the category of egalitarian and subverting gender norms because they allowed women to transcend the social expectations of their gender. By taking more leadership roles and claiming their spaces during the protests, women asserted their autonomy and recognized themselves as citizens, who were equally influencing the protest movements.

In Belarus, the gender performances of Female Leaders further helped to transform the meaning of active citizenship. Specifically, the work of the Female Trio and a strong political figure of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya broadened the meaning of heroism to include Belarusian women. Instead of being seen as attractive and loving figures in Belarusian society, women are now associated with bravery, responsibility, and self-sacrifice. Although the latter quality, self-sacrifice, is often seen as a feminine trait, in the context of the Belarusian uprising, its meaning was changed. Women were braver and took high risks by coming to the streets, which made their self-sacrifice to be perceived as less feminine and more heroic. Therefore, Belarusian women now share the status of heroes with men, who in the past were seen as the main drivers of political uprisings and revolutions. In turn, this also made female socio-political participation attractive in Belarusian society, which has the potential to change gendered norms and stereotypes in the future.

In contrast, the gender performance of Female Activists did not have the same effect in Ukrainian society. During the 2013-2014 protests in Ukraine, the Maidan became a space for the public performance of revolutionary activity, which was centered around the notions of patriotism and heroism. When the protest got militarized and violent, it reinforced the traditional perceptions of gender roles on the Maidan, setting certain gender expectations for women. As a result, the glorification of male fighters and the presence of the nationalist rhetoric created the patriarchal structures on the Maidan, limiting women's participation in the "appropriate activities." These activities are often connected to the provision of care and support, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Ukrainian women were also excluded from participating in the Maidan hostilities and restricted from entering the frontline areas. Therefore, the militarization of the Euromaidan protests sidelined women's participation and diminished the value of their contributions to the protests, particularly by men. As evident from various online sources, many Ukrainian men considered women's participation in the protest as secondary or supplemental to their work. When they described women's activities, men often referred to women as guardians or supporters of the Maidan.

Nonetheless, the militarization of the Euromaidan protests gave rise to new gender performances in Ukraine such as Female Fighter and Peacekeeper. These performances were absent in Belarus, where the demonstrations had a peaceful character and protestors did not engage in violent actions. The performances of Female Fighter and Peacekeeper drew on the traditional female traits of peace and martyr, which provided women with new means of participation when violent clashes broke out. These new performances had mixed results for Ukrainian women. On the one hand, the performances of Female Fighter and Peacekeeper allowed women to signify their collective agency and challenge the dominant position of men in the formation of the nation. Women were recognized as strong and courageous citizens, who were making the revolution along with men. Some Women's Squads (e.g., the Olha Kobylianska Women's Squad) also challenged the patriarchal structures of the Maidan by forming their units outside of these structures. They further empowered women by providing various educational and training opportunities, centered around non-violent activities.

On the other hand, these gender performances reinforced the traditional gender norms on the Maidan in two ways. First, by performing peacekeeping activities, Ukrainian women naturalized the feminine gender traits of peace and care. They staged theatrical performances of beauty and appealed to the humanity of male protestors, which echoes the gendered divisions of the labor market (e.g., "female" sectors of care and non-governmental services). Second, when women organized Women's Squads and performed the roles of Female Fighters, they became a part of the patriarchal discourses on the Maidan and adopted certain masculine manners. To make things worse, the attention to women in clashes and violent resistance efforts was often paid not with the goal to highlight their active participation but to embarrass men who did not take part in the protest (Khromeychuk 2015). As several online blogs report, male soldiers on the Maidan used to compare female fighters to cowardly Ukrainian men, who chose to stay at home during the protests. On the 8th of March, male protestors went further in mocking Ukrainian men by underscoring women's military images and their bravery both online and offline (Martsenyuk 2021). Ironically, International Women's Day was marked by this campaign of mockery, which was centered around the celebration of masculinity and domestic misogyny (Martsenyuk 2021). Therefore, the aforementioned performances take two categories in Table 1: egalitarian & subverting and egalitarian & reinforcing gender performance. Such positioning indicates the fluidity and contextual nature of gender performances, which can confirm and unsettle different meanings at the same time.

Still, acknowledging different instances of gender performance (e.g., when it reaffirms or contests traditional norms) does not allow us to move beyond the contextual interpretation of women's participation. To identify whether such a performance was successful for women at large in the given context, it is necessary to consider the outcomes and socio-political transformations after the protests ended. The following sections attempt to conclude my findings from the two case studies by assessing such outcomes and transformations.

4.3. Outcomes and Transformations: Belarus & Ukraine

The second goal of this thesis was to assess the socio-political significance of women's participation in the protests and its effect in the given society. To this end, I examined the aftermath of the 2020-2021 Belarus uprising and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in the last sections of Chapters 2 and 3. These sections provide more details about the changes observed in Belarus and Ukraine, focusing on both socio-political transformations and personal changes in women. However, before drawing certain

generalizations, it is important to mention that the success of the protests themselves is different in the two case studies. In Ukraine, the Euromaidan protests succeeded in regime and leadership change in the country, while in Belarus, the protests were brutally suppressed and led to Lukashenka's regime survival. These different outcomes of the protest also affected the socio-political transformations on both objective and subjective levels in the sphere of gender equality.

On the objective level, Ukraine achieved better results than Belarus. The new Ukrainian government incorporated both strategic and practical gender interests into its agenda. It adopted a range of legislative initiatives that aimed to increase women's participation across the public sphere. For instance, the government adopted a 40% gender quota in the Verkhovna Rada, ratified the State Social Policy for Equal Rights, and Opportunities for Men and Women, and created the position of Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. This further increased women's political activity at all levels, from town councils to regional governorships. In addition to the two women who ran for president in the May 2014 national elections, women were also appointed as the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Health, and the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration (Philips 2014). There were also changes observed in education, workforce, and the arts in Ukraine, which were all discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In a nutshell, gender initiatives and feminist changes have become a part of the overall process of democratization and development in Ukrainian society after the Euromaidan protests.

In contrast, such changes were not possible in Belarus. Given the outcomes of the 2020-2021 uprisings, there were no official legislative reforms or national initiatives observed. Instead, the government launched a wide crackdown on non-government organizations in Belarus, including many of which were working on the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, gender pay gap, and women's rights more broadly. Yet, the creation of a Fem Group under the Coordination Council[12] can be seen as an important achievement for Belarusian women given the circumstance. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Fem Group was made to ensure the involvement of Belarusian women in all future transformation processes that follow the regime change in Belarus (Belsat 2021). Although the groups worked directly with the Coordination Council, it did not reach the desired influence within the structure and was often informed by opposition leaders. Therefore, the subject of gender equality was placed in the background of the democratic agenda in Belarus: neither Lukashenka's regime nor politicians of the democratic forces were not receptive to advancing gender interests and/or bringing them to the table.

As for the transformations on the subjective level, they are quite similar in Belarus and Ukraine. The findings in Chapters 2 and 3 show that women's participation in the protests resulted in changes in women's values and lifestyles, as well as led to the rise of female consciousness and awareness in society. Many Belarusian and Ukrainian women developed a higher sense of political efficacy during the protests, which increased their awareness and self-confidence in personal abilities. They often spoke about their readiness to be active citizens and work toward gender equality in society. The previous way of life (e.g., staying at home and being quiet) seems to be rejected by many Belarusian and Ukrainian women, particularly when they talk to various journalists about their plans after the protests.

Given the subversive character of gender performances, women's participation also spurred a revision of traditional gender models and norms in Belarusian and Ukrainian society. As several scholars suggest, the protest movements allowed women to have spaces for critical reflections and productive conversations about women's rights and democratization, both within and beyond feminist organizations

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[12] Belarusian non-governmental body created by presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to facilitate a democratic transfer of power.

(Philips 2014; Hrytsenko 2022). For instance, in Belarus, several activist groups organized online discussions about gender initiatives during the protests (e.g., We-do, March on Baby, and Her Rights) and provided training and spaces for women's organizations. Similarly, many organizations in Ukraine also aimed to equip women with new skills and raise awareness about their rights in society (e.g., the Olha Kobylianska Women's Squad or the Night of Women's Solidarity). Accordingly, the subject of gender equality and women's rights was discussed in almost all areas of public life in Belarus and Ukraine during the protests, which, in turn, empowered women to claim their autonomy and power in decision-making.

In the case of Ukraine, the transformations on the subjective level further aided the changes in socio-political institutions and vice versa. It can be argued that precisely because of women's willingness to advocate for their rights in the public sphere, gender equality was incorporated into the new state agenda after the Euromaidan protests. The incorporation of gender equality in the project of democratization in Ukraine state resulted in several important legislative innovations across various areas of life. Some of these innovations are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. However, what is more important to mention here is that the legislative transformations also empowered women to continue exercising their agency. This creates a feedback loop, where one positive transformation leads to another one: the objective changes were supported by the subjective transformations on the personal level. Yet, while it is hard to measure the success of this feedback loop, it is obvious from the research that Ukrainian society is moving in the right direction and toward creating better spaces for women.

The situation in Belarus is different. The transformations on the personal level were not supported by the changes on the institutional level (e.g. legislative reforms). Given the worsening of the political situation and increasing repression afterward, prospects of improving the social landscape for women in Belarus are very bleak. There is still a strong presence of patriarchal gender norms in society, and many women continue experiencing the same problems. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to conclude that women's participation in the 2020-2021 protests was meaningless for gender activism in the country. In addition to the transformations on the personal level, the uprisings altered the political subjectivity of Belarusian women. In addition to recognizing their societal and political roles, women were able to collectively organize and identify themselves in the public sphere. Such ability of women to organize and articulate their demands, even within the dominant agenda of the protest space, represents women's freedom in itself. According to Arendt, the collective actions of individuals is a political act with its power (Arendt 1958). Drawing on this conception of power, women's participation during the Belarusian uprising allowed them to appear and recognize each other in the public realm. Women became distinctive political actors, who exercised their freedom and generated power through collectively coordinated actions. Consequently, women's participation in the protests did not only empower them temporarily but also created a range of opportunities for future development in the sphere of gender equality. Using the words of some female protectors, Belarusian women will not "go back" after knowing how freedom feels.

4.4. Conclusion

The thesis aimed to examine women's participation in contentious politics, focusing on the case studies of the 2020-2021 uprising in Belarus and the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. Specifically, I was interested in classifying and categorizing gender performance, as well as accessing their socio-political significance for women in society at large. As my research shows, six gender performances were identified. They include the performances of Motherhood, Beauty, Female Activist,

and Leader, which were present in both case studies, and the performances of Female Fighter and Peacekeeper, which were unique to Ukraine. Table 1 presented in this Chapter helps to visualize my analysis. According to Table 1, some gender performances are placed in several sub-categories (e.g., traditional and subversive or traditional and reinforcing), which reflects the fluid and contextualized nature of such performances. In other words, the same gender performance can combine the features of both patriarchal and egalitarian gender norms, as well as reinforce and subvert the traditional gender meanings.

Throughout my research, I aimed to provide a nuanced analysis of women's participation in contentious politics including the effects of such performances in the given societies afterward. My analysis was based on collecting the available primary data and looking at scholarly research on women's participation in the region. Given the limitations of my data, my findings can not be treated as definitive: the aforementioned description of women's participation is not exhaustive, and my analysis can be further contested. That being said, this thesis provides a few things that can be useful for future research on the subject of gender performance.

First, what unites all gender performances analyzed in this thesis is the prominence of care and auxiliary work among women's protest activities. Some prominent examples of such auxiliary work are seen in the performance of Motherhood, when women mobilized to protect their children and husbands, and in the performances of Female Activist and Leader, when women support male protests by providing care, cleaning, and cooking services, among other things. In the case of the last two gender performances (i.e. Female Activist and Leader), this auxiliary aspect of women's work made such performance both egalitarian and reinforcing: although women were doing less passive and supporting work, the notion of care was still present in their performance and evoked the traditional gender stereotypes. It was even noticed in the performance of Female Fighter, when women provided support for the male soldiers on the barricades. As such, it can be argued that all gender performances have the potential to reinforce the traditional gender roles due to a strong association of care and nurturance with women. Traditionally, the activities of care and nurturance are excluded from the public sphere and placed into the private realm of the family. Once women enter the public sphere, these feminine traits set particular expectations for women: they ought to focus on caring and supporting other protestors. Such auxiliary work also shapes how women's participation and contribution to the protests will be remembered afterward. In the case of Ukraine, although women performed a range of roles during the Euromaidan protests, many male protestors considered women as guardians, who "supported and calmed men." Accordingly, to fully acknowledge women's participation in the protest spaces and society at large, it is important to re-evaluate the notion of care and detach it from femininity. Alternative interpretations of masculinity should encompass caring practices and values (traditionally associated with femininity), which then provides avenues for advancing gender equality in society.

Second, the traditional understanding of gender performance as theatrical acts is limited. Typically, gender performance is seen as something planned and staged, where the actors agree on certain behaviors, clothes, speeches, etc. and perform it for the audience. In the case of women's participation in contentious politics, such theatrical acts of performance include staged marches and demonstrations, where women dress and behave in a particular way (e.g., as mothers or wives). However, the focus on these staged acts does now allow us to acknowledge the broad array of activities that women do in the protest space. Given that gender is closely integrated into socio-political power structures, any form of women's participation in the public sphere (or men's, for that matter) has its gendered aspect. Therefore, this thesis suggests that gender performance as a phenomenon should include both theatrical actions and

practical activity. The latter consists of such tasks as organizing and fundraising, providing medical assistance and collecting information, patrolling streets and protesting on the barricades. In other words, being a leader, an activist, or a fighter presumes that women transform their skills and knowledge in line with the protest space. They appear in a new and different way in public, and in so doing, expand narrow understanding of what women are capable of. Quite often, this so-called practical aspect of performance is neglected by scholars and/or considered simply as a protest activity. Yet, focusing only on the theatrical gender performances such as Motherhood or Beauty affect how women are recognized in protest spaces and what meaning is attributed to their activity.

This brings me to the final point of this conclusion, which is about how meaning is constructed. Gender performance is a subject to the process of meaning-making, where women are often silenced or allowed to speak only in certain gender roles. As feminist studies reveal, this comes from the fact that women are often perceived as voiceless actors by nature (De Beauvoir 1952; Anderson and Christman 2005; Benson 2005). They are subordinated subjects to the culture that invariably appears to be masculine, logical, and active. Following this, agency and choice are, thus, closely associated with masculinity, where femininity is left to be given meaning by the opposite male subject. This is also true in the sphere of political participation and revolutionary resistance, which are associated with the male sphere of activity. That being said, when women participate in protest movements, they enter the field of male activity and become an object of their meaning-making. In this realm, men hold disproportionate power to export meaning, which then influences how our accounts of certain events. Therefore, the narration of women's participation in protest spaces is shaped by these middle actors, who impose their own gender meaning and set expectations for women's behavior. Nonetheless, women do exercise their agency and move beyond the set boundaries by choosing how they want to participate and be recognized during the protest movements. While these choices are not always independent of external structures, the fact that women engage with the so-called "male" activities and challenge the narration of their participation attenuates gender. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge a variety of women's roles in contentious policies and bring their voices upfront. Future research should focus more on exploring how women's activities are narrated and who construct the meaning during the protest movements.

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