**Afterlives & Other Lives:**

**Semiosis & History in 21ˢᵗ Century Ukraine**

by

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very first iteration of what would become the "Soil" chapter in this dissertation. Alaina Lemon encouraged me to channel both fascination and frustration into research and teaching, to think through perspectives I'd never considered, and to help students do the same. Stuart Kirsch cultivated my interests in property and environment, helped me locate this project's ethnographic backbone, and always had my back. Bruce Mannheim guided this dissertation with a gentle hand, but his rich thinking permeates every page.

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I follow a modified version of the Library of Congress (LOC) system for the transliteration of Slavic languages, making adjustments as needed for ease of readership, and for marking distinctions between Russian and Ukrainian.

As in the LOC system, palatalized ("soft") consonants are represented by an apostrophe (eg. национальность, Rus. "nationality," is rendered *natsional'nost'*). Unlike in the LOC system, palatalized vowels are marked with *j* (eg. Rus. мясо, "meat," is rendered *mjaso,* and Ukr. М'ясо, "meat," is rendered *m'jaso*). I use *j* to represent й in both languages, *i* for front high vowels (и in Russian and i in Ukrainian) and *y* for central vowels (ы in Russian and и in Ukrainian; these sounds are not identical, but their morphological roles as genitive and plural markers is similar). Ukrainian "super soft" ї is rendered *ji.* Thus, the adjective "Ukrainian" (Rus. украинский; Ukr. український) is transliterated from Russian as *ukrainskij* or from Ukrainian as *ukrajins'kyj*.

I abandon these rules for names and places that have English equivalents or that have become fairly standardized in English language media (eg. Crimea rather than *Krym,* Maidan rather than *Majdan,* and Kyiv rather than *Kyjiv*).

I also follow the Ukrainian government's convention of rendering word-initial palatalized vowels with *y* rather than *j* or, as in LOC, *i* (eg. Yalta rather than *Jalta,* Yanukovych instead of Janokovych).

Finally, I primarily use Ukrainian place names as they existed during time of research (eg. "Kyiv" rather than "Kiev," but pre-Maidan's "Dnipropetrovsk" rather than post-Maidan's de-Sovietized "Dnipro"). I make exception for the Black Sea port of

Odessa (Ukr. *Odesa*). My rendering of Odessa in accordance with its Russian spelling (two s's rather than one) should not be read as a stance on the city's contemporary geopolitical identity. Rather, I have simply found that using only one 's' confuses many readers otherwise familiar with this city and region.

A letter-by-letter guide to the transliteration system appears on the next page. All translations in this text are mine, and all translations are from Ukrainian unless noted otherwise.

| Ukrainian | Russian | Transliteration |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Аа | Аа | Aa |
| Бб | Бб | Bb |
| Вв | Вв | Vv |
| Гг | -- | Hh |
| Ґґ | Гг | Gg |
| Дд | Дд | Dd |
| Ее | Ээ | Ee |
| Єє | Ее | Je, je* |
| Жж | Жж | Zh, zh |
| Зз | Зз | Zz |
| Ии | ы | Yy |
| Іі | Ии | Ii |
| Її | -- | Ji, ji* |
| Йй | Йй | J* |
| Кк | Кк | Kk |
| Лл | Лл | Ll |
| Мм | Мм | Mm |
| Нн | Нн | Nn |
| Оо | Оо | Oo |
| Пп | Пп | Pp |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Рр | Рр | Rr |
| Сс | Сс | Ss |
| Тт | Тт | Tt |
| Уу | Уу | Uu |
| Фф | Фф | Ff |
| Хх | Хх | Kh, kh |
| Цц | Цц | Ts, ts |
| Чч | Чч | Ch, ch |
| Шш | Шш | Sh, sh |
| Щщ | Щщ | Shch, shch |
| ь | ь | ' ** |
| Юю | Юю | Ju, ju* |
| Яя | Яя | Ja, ja* |
| ' | -- | ' *** |
| -- | Ёё | Jo, jo* |
| -- | ъ | [omitted] |

\* Word initial [j] spelled as [y], eg. Yanukovych rather than Janukovych.
\*\* Soft sign indicating palatalization of preceding consonant.
\*\*\* Apostrophe in Ukrainian that serves to separate sounds in a way someone similar to the Russian "hard sign." Following convention, I have elected to omit marking Russian hard signs, but have included Ukrainian apostrophes.

**ABSTRACT**

*Afterlives and Other Lives* is an ethnography of Ukraine on the eve of the Maidan

Revolution, and during the first several months following its climax, as the country

descended into war (autumn 2012–autumn 2014). Grounded in a study of former

collective farming communities, this dissertation demonstrates that many of the ideals of

the Maidan movement—national sovereignty; government accountability; equality before

the law; freedom of movement across borders; increased opportunity at home—not only

reverberated in the countryside, but were deeply implicated in agrarian experience to

begin with.

This dissertation shows how two powerful semiotic processes, iconicity and

interdiscursivity, made linkages between certain rural things and particular political

commitments or social types feel intuitive *beyond* the villages, propelling specific

readings of the past, assessments of the present, and expectations for the future. Mapping

how soil became tied to narratives of economic potential, and land deeds to dreams of

"rule of law", how invasive beetles were equated with separatists, and sunflowers with

victims of a plane crash, the chapters cohere in a narrative of how Ukraine's Maidan

Revolution came to be, and why the violence that has erupted from it has been so difficult

to contain.

This project, while focused on Ukraine, responds to the anthropological

imperative to study how certain perspectives on the social world come to feel natural,

legitimate, or inevitable. In tracing how some people, histories, and landscapes become

cast as native, desirable, or heroic, while others are neglected, dismissed, or undermined, it speaks to more widespread struggles over historical memory and national identity. Finally, this dissertation offers insight into how the frontiers of war, and the afterlives they generate, are ever expanding, and unexpected.

CHAPTER 1

**Introduction**

> The past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something
> over there only because I am here. But nothing is inherently over there or here.
> —Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 1995.

This dissertation is about people who felt their lives could have been different imagined

leading other ones. It focuses on Ukraine on the eve of the Maidan Revolution, and

during the first several months following its climax, as the country descended into war

(autumn 2012–autumn 2014). Grounded in an ethnography of former collective farming

communities, in a country often described as both a former and an aspiring

"breadbasket," it traces how some people, histories, and landscapes were cast as national,

desirable, or heroic, while others were neglected or undermined. Drawing on work in

linguistic anthropology, I show how semiotic processes that made linkages between

certain rural things and particular political commitments or social types—soil and

economic potential; privatized plots of land and rule of law; invasive beetles and

separatists; sunflowers and war dead—feel intuitive, also propelled readings of the past,

assessments of the present, and expectations for the future. Such appraisals, I find,

created strong senses of who was advancing the country, and who was holding it back.

I began research for this project during a time between two revolutions: the first,

the "Orange Revolution," was named for the color of a struggling, then triumphant, pro-

Western political party, and the second, the "Maidan Revolution," was named for the Kyiv square, *Majdan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) where the first revolution had taken place. Both uprisings took place in winter (2004–2005 and 2013–2014, respectively); both claimed to be democratic movements that evidenced Ukraine's readiness for a European future; and both were identified, at the time, as moments of rupture that would catapult Ukraine, independent only since 1991, out of its post-Soviet limbo and into a brighter future. Finally, both had the same villain, the Ukrainian political leader Viktor Yanukovych. In the winter of 2004–2005, protestors decried Yanukovych's fraudulent election to the presidency. Pointing to international monitors' extensive reports of voter intimidation and ballot box stuffing, as well as the mysterious poisoning of Yanukovych's opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, with dioxins, the demonstrators argued that the contest had been rigged in Yanukovych's favor with help from Ukraine's outgoing president, Leonid Kuchma, as well as Russian agents committed to keeping Ukraine in Moscow's orbit. They demanded a new run-off election, and the courts agreed. Yushchenko prevailed in the ensuing vote, but the dioxins had weakened and aged him, and his fights with his former-ally, the gutsy and glamorous Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, soon broke up the Orange Coalition. Meanwhile, Yanukovych and his Party of Regions recovered, regaining first the premiership (2006–2007) and then, in 2010, the presidency. This time, international monitors certified the election clean.

Thus, in 2013–2014, demonstrators were protesting the same man, Viktor Yanukovych, on the same square, as during the first revolution in the winter of 2004–2005. Likewise, the protestors had similar suspicions that Russia, whose empire much of Ukraine had for centuries been part, was meddling in their affairs. The prevailing

narrative of the second revolution, Maidan, is that in November of 2013, Yanukovych, at the eleventh hour and against the wishes of many Ukrainian citizens, decided not to sign a political and economic Association Agreement with the European Union that would have steered Ukraine away from Russia, and toward Europe.[1] Instead, he indicated he would have Ukraine join the Russian-led Customs Union (now "the Eurasian Union") composed of several other post-Soviet states. Protestors, incensed by what they saw as a bait and switch, wary of Moscow's hand, and suspecting that Yanukovych was acting to protect his own interests (such as keeping his political rival, Tymoshenko, jailed, or avoiding investigations into his questionable finances), rather than those of the Ukrainian people, took to the streets in the urban-based, elite-led demonstrations initially known as the "Euromaidan." Later, as the protests became more diverse, spilling beyond Kyiv, taking on issues beyond Ukraine's relationship with the European Union, and demanding Yanukovych's removal, "Euromaidan" became, for many, simply "Maidan." Since the revolution's violent climax in February of 2014, in memory of those who died defending what they believed was the right future for Ukraine, and in order to unite the population around a discourse of human rights rather than geopolitics, the new government led by Petro Poroshenko has rebranded the uprising *Revoljutsija Hidnosti*, the "Revolution of Dignity." However, my interlocutors in the countryside still called it "Maidan."

The people I worked with were not ones usually included in narratives of the two revolutions. The majority were rural residents over forty years old, and living in former collective farming villages in central and southern Ukraine—Vinnytsja and (northern) Odessa regions, to be precise. In a country in which geography, politics, and language are

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[1] For the "Eastern Partnership," the European Union's program for several former Soviet states. Note that while many Ukrainians viewed the political and economic association with the EU a stepping-stone to eventual membership, the Eastern Partnership in no way promised accession.

often presumed to layer in binaries of east and west, in which "east" stands in for Russian-aligned and Russian-speaking, and "west" for EU-aligned and Ukrainian speaking, they were neither. Many were ambivalent about the proposed Association Agreement with the European Union, fearing that the political benefits it promised (such as streamlined travel to and work permits in the EU Member States) would be outweighed by a free trade deal that might create even more volatility in their communities, which had been economically and socially devastated by the dismantling of the collectives and opening of agricultural markets following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Most of my rural interlocutors, even if they expressed disapproval of Yanukovych—support for whom had already considerably declined since his election to the presidency—harbored suspicions of the demonstrators, particularly in the early days of "Euromaidan," when the protests were led by young, urban elites whose backgrounds (and often, neoliberal devotions) they found difficult to relate to.[2]

In the chapters that follow, I track my interlocutors' experiences, frustrations, and dreams *between* the revolutions, and how they, and many other Ukrainians, mapped rural things (soil, fields, crops, pests) to discursive forms (historical narratives, legal language, commemorative activities, hate speech). Doing so, I find, can give us insight into why the second uprising occurred, and why it played out as violently as it did. Forty years after Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams (1973) pointed out that country and city are co-constituting, emerging from the *same* historical processes (for Williams, capitalism), and

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[2] The former collective farmers I worked with were not necessarily nostalgic for communism, though they often conveyed warm feelings for the sense of community their collectives had given them. Many were quite proud of their self-sufficiency, but this didn't necessarily translate into support for economic reforms that exposed them to volatile markets or cut their pensions. One of my interlocutors described himself as an "anarchist" who felt he and his family were best off when the government, whom he deeply distrusted, simply left them alone.

always interdependent, there remains a tendency to view the urban as dynamic and politically dominant, and the rural as stagnant and submissive. (This, Williams notes, despite the fact that the major socialist revolutions of the 20th century took hold not in the industrialized nations, as Marx and Engels had predicted, but in the "developing" ones, and in the countryside at that.) I do not suggest here that the Maidan Revolution began anywhere other than the Kyiv square for which it is named, but I do find that many of the professed ideals of the Maidan movement—national sovereignty; government accountability; equality before the law; freedom of movement across borders; increased opportunity at home—not only reverberated in the countryside, but were often grounded in agrarian experience to begin with.

This dissertation approaches history as a semiotic product, and semiosis as a historical process, that together create senses of what was, what is, what could have been, and what still might be (Parmentier 1994; Trouillot 1995; Palmié 2013; Wirtz 2016). In the subsequent sections of the introduction, and the following chapters, I show how a semiotic approach explains why the rural things I discuss—soil, fields, beetles, sunflowers—did not simply become entangled in larger discourses about Ukraine's elusive prosperity, fraught legal system, historical incohesions, and descent into war by happenstance. Rather, I show how their uptake was mediated by two powerful and interdependent semiotic forces that naturalize connections across contexts, allowing linkages between disparate things (or cultural forms, or social phenomena) to go relatively unquestioned (Mannheim 2000, Lemon 2000, 2002; Fehérváry 2014). I build my argument over the next two sections, first by defining the terms and bodies of literature I am engaging, and then by showing how they can be applied to an analysis of

common tropes in and about Ukraine. Thereafter, I situate my thesis with regards to other scholarship on how nation states come to be imagined as cohesive. I consider my interlocutors' sense that the Maidan Revolution evidenced the maturation of "Ukrainian" as a civic identity—and question how different "civic" identities are from "ethnic" ones. I then introduce my fieldsites, and conclude with a brief overview of the chapters to come.

**Naturalizing the Social**

The Ukrainian conflict has prompted many questions for scholars of the former Soviet Bloc and researchers of political violence: Why did some Ukrainians come to think of their country's relationship to Russia as one of subjugation, rather than friendship or fraternity? Why did protestors who described themselves as "pro-democracy" resort to violence, rather than elections, courts, or legislative channels, in their efforts to change their political system? How did people develop empathy for some of their neighbors but not it for others? What makes revolt—especially violent revolt—seem not only reasonable, but inevitable? In later chapters, I draw on my ethnography to suggest some preliminary answers to these queries, bearing in mind that there is no one causal explanation for what has been unfolding in Ukraine.

Here, however, I engage the question that I think encompasses the others: how do people make sense of their situations, and why do their situations make sense to them as they do? Rephrased, why do certain readings of circumstances seem not merely justified, but intuitive? To probe this question, I turn to literature from linguistic anthropology on *iconicity* and *interdiscursivity*, two semiotic forces that are particularly efficient at making the socially mediated feel natural (or intuitive, or simply make sense). First,

though, I offer a short primer on some of the terminology from Peircean semiotics I will be using throughout the dissertation. My use of this vocabulary is meant to allow me to be as precise as possible in describing the patterning I am discussing, but it requires some introduction.

In Peircean semiotics, *icons* are signs, such as photos of a person or maps of a place, "in which the form of the sign *recapitulates* its object in some way," (Mannheim 2000: 107, following Peirce 1955[1902], emphasis mine). They are distinguished from *indices*, which *point to* their objects through contiguity (munched-upon leaves index the presence of pests; the redness of beets points to the acidity of the soil), and symbols, which are connected to their objects via *convention* (standardized languages and writing systems connect words and what they represent, eg. English "beet;" Russian свёкла *(svjokla)*; Ukrainian буряк *(burjak)*). A single sign is not necessarily only iconic, indexical, or symbolic; rather, all three often work in concert. For example, a cross necklace indexes the wearer as a Christian; the cross itself is an icon of the one Christ was said to have been crucified on; and the cross is tied to Christianity by convention. A single sign is likewise not limited in the meanings it can generate. In Ukraine, where Orthodox Christianity predominates, a simple cross necklace—as opposed to an Orthodox cross with a footrest —may index the wearer as Christian, but it also may suggest that the wearer is not a member of the Communist Party, or is a Catholic from the west of the country, or is a convert to one of the evangelical movements that have recently taken hold there (Wanner 2007).

Just as the Peircean sign (sometimes called the "Representaman," or that which represents) may be divided in to icons, indices, and symbols, so icons may be further

divided icons into images, diagrams, and metaphors. Again, we move from an especially

tight relationship between sign and object to one of increasing abstraction. *Images*, such

as photos or portraits, but also onomatopoeia or other replications of sensory experience,

*mirror* their objects most "directly and concretely" (Mannheim 2000: 107). *Diagrams*, in

contrast, *analogize* relationships among parts. Examples include a map of a place, a

kinship chart, or as we will see in chapter 3, a sketch of a land plot. *Metaphors* represent

"a parallel in something else" (Peirce 1955[1902]). One understands a Peircean metaphor

by sensing an *affinity* between it and another form. In chapter 5, the height and radiance

of sunflowers will, for some mourners, evoke their lost loved ones. A summarizing

example meaningful to residents of Ann Arbor is three ways to represent the geography

of Michigan: a satellite photo of the state is a Peircian image; a map of the state a

diagram; using one's right palm and fingers as a make-shift map of the lower peninsula is

a metaphor.[3]

Peirce's taxonomy of icons is useful not merely for the vocabulary it provides, but

for how it illustrates multiple ways though which signs' connections to their objects can

come to be taken for granted.[4] People do not necessarily look much like the photos on

their ID cards (nor are they necessarily the people, ages, or weights their IDs say they

are). Maps are taken as scientific objects, but always the product of some perspective or

method. We have no idea whether Christ's crucifix had a footrest.

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[3] To be fair, the Michigan hand map has become highly conventionalized. T-shirts declare Michigan "the high-five state" and one can buy oven mitts in the shape of the lower peninsula. But Peirce accounted for this, too: "Every symbol is, in its origin, either an image of the idea signified, or a reminiscence of some individual occurrence, person, or thing, connected with its meaning *or is a metaphor*" (Peirce, 2.222, 1903, emphasis mine).
[4] Likewise, iconicity (governed by "Firstness"), indexicality ("Secondness"), and symbolism ("Thirdness") are not merely taxonomic, but processual. They are different types of "ground" that generate a prism of effects on the mind ("Interpretants"), resulting in the diversity and constant evolution of meaning—that is, semiosis.

Iconicity, as a concept, is particularly useful for studying how people make sense of their situations because of how it contours the way people perceive their environs and assess opportunities. In linking signs and objects via (some degree of) form, images, diagrams, and metaphors set parameters that limit their own interpretation or contestation. They string together formations of people, places, language, and politics—Ukraine as divided between "east" and "west," for example—that have deep social histories so that they feel simultaneously primal as well as relevant to the current moment. They take—as we shall see in chapter 2, on soil, and 5, on sunflowers—landscapes that are defined by modern scientific knowledge and etched with work of generations and tie them to contemporary nations, as if those nations had been there all along. (This is the case whether said nation defines itself ethnically or civically, as I discuss below.) They make what is not natural seem so, thereby making other, similarly socially-mediated phenomena seem especially distorted or "arbitrary" (I expand on this point in chapter 3, on land deeds, legal systems, on Ukraine's quest for "rule of law.")

Moreover, iconicity may root and propel other semiotic processes, particularly those linguistic anthropologists call *interdiscursive.* A central task of this dissertation is to show how iconicities that make one socially-mediated sign-object relation appear "outside culture" (Mannheim 2000: 107) can then provide the foundation for another.[5] (For those that need something to hang onto, we will be turning in a few pages to how soil maps of Ukraine—diagrams—undergird tropes of Ukraine as breadbasket.) The literature on interdiscursivity is principally concerned with how multiple semiotic events may be connected within single discursive frames. (For origins, see especially

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[5] This is, of course, a necessary outcome of Peirce's infinite semiosis, in which objects may become signs that generate other Interpretants.

Voloshinov 1986 [1929] on "linear" vs. "pictorial" reported speech, Bakhtin 1981 [1934]

on "heteroglossia," and Kristeva 1982 on "intertextuality"; for uptakes and extensions,

see especially the 2005 special issue of the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15(1),

from which I cite several articles.) A great deal of this work has focused on

interdiscursivity as an indexical relationship; that is, how one semiotic event points to or

becomes contiguous with, another, thereby shaping interpretations of both events. My

interest is in how iconicity may facilitate this process by providing an "intuitive" starting

point (eg. Ukraine is covered in rich soil) from which other connections can be made

(Ukraine should be an agricultural powerhouse). That is, I argue for the primacy of

iconicity in interdiscursive processes, in which "primacy" does not mean "dominance,"

so much as a starting point, a place from which to jump.

In making this argument, I also draw inspiration from Michael Silverstein's

(2005) analysis of how interdiscursive connections rely on the calibration of *chronotopes*.

Chronotopes, a concept pioneered by Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin, are formations

of time, space, and personhood that serve not merely as "backdrop[s] or surround of

period and place," but provide "the logic by which events unfurl" (Lemon 2009: 839).

For Silverstein, interdiscursive processes work by making disparate time-spaces feel

similar, illuminating likeness, and obscuring difference. (For example, in chapter 4, I

describe how Odessans took different views of Russia's relationship to Ukraine, but both

pondered the idea that Ukraine 2014 was in some way a "replay" of the World War II

period, when the Soviets and (some) western Ukrainians were adversaries.) My interest in

this work is two-fold: first, I aim to investigate in how interdiscursive processes, like

iconicity, allow connections across contexts to feel intuitive. To what extent does

iconicity wind the axis upon which interdiscursivity spins? Do chronotopes come into alignment because they are already felt to be somehow similar, or is it alignment that makes them feel so? Or both? Second, and relatedly, I am interested in how interdiscursive processes are power-laden, maximizing or minimizing "gaps" between the citing and cited (Bauman & Briggs 1992); erasing as much as they highlight (Irvine 2005); delimiting further interpretation, or making space for new creative appropriations (Nakassis 2012).

How do people make sense of their situations, and why do their situations make sense to them as they do? In this section I have provided an introduction to how iconicity, as a sign relation and semiotic process, can make the highly mediated seem instinctual. I have argued for the primacy of iconicity in interdiscursive connections, suggesting that an icon, in naturalizing one sign-object relationship, thereby provides a springboard for a subsequent one based on the first naturalization. (A less precise, but more familiar way to think of this: one unexamined assumption easily yields another.)

What is at stake here is not merely "semiosis" in some vague sense meaningful only to a small number of linguistic anthropologists, but semiosis as a *historical* process of meaning unfolding, and *history* as a semiotic product left by the creases. How people read those creases—as progress, as break, as missed opportunity, as nothing of note— affects how they construe the past, evaluate the present, and calculate their options for the future. As the title of this dissertation suggests, "afterlives" are complemented by "other lives"; that is, those lives *not* lived. There is an extensive literature in the social sciences and humanities on the multiplicity of ways that rupture textures social relations over the longer term, shaping experiences of continuity and separation. This is particularly the

case in postsocialist studies, where discourses of "transition" have wrought critiques of teleologies that prescribe particular paths to achieving western-centric notions of modernity in which capitalism and democracy are presumed to be co-constituent.[6] "Afterlives" is a useful analytic for Ukraine, where, as my ethnography shows, one often feels they have never quite escaped the 20th century.

This dissertation touches on afterlives in various forms: the traumas of history; the writing of wills; the letdowns of uprisings; multiple means of mourning; the moments of rupture that force one to start anew. But it is also about how afterlives drive imaginings of *other lives.* By "other lives," I mean the lives that my interlocutors felt to be measurably different from their own. These were lives that they desired, dismissed, or disdained, and which they frequently drew on when discussing Ukraine's progress, potential, and shortcomings. "Other lives" were lives that might be had in the future, for example, if Ukraine should ever join the European Union. But they were also lives that, perhaps, could have already been had certain episodes in history—pivots remembered as particularly key—had yielded different results. Finally, and most importantly for understanding the present conflict in Ukraine, "other lives" were also the lives of *Others*: lives lived by people whom my pro-revolution interlocutors increasingly perceived as having fundamentally different values than they did, and who were preventing Ukraine from achieving the afterlife, the better life, that other countries in postsocialist Europe had already reached.

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[6] In recent decades, anthropologists have increasingly committed themselves to exploring how experiences of rupture are not only felt but *enacted*. Millennial scholarship has emphasized the social relationships, be they local, cross-border, face-to-face, or electronically mediated, which allow human beings to make their own breaks, demanding changes in belief and behavior of themselves, and of others. See, among many, Appadurai 1996, Wenzel 2009, and Resnick 2016.

Ultimately, to study how the social is naturalized is to analyze how history is made, recycled, and reimagined—and why it can feel so difficult to break free from. In the next section, I track how iconicity undergirds two longstanding (and one newer) tropes of Ukraine that cast the country as exceptionally fertile but politically marginal and economically unrealized. Such tropes, pervasive in Ukraine, and also beyond it, were key reference points that directed how my interlocutors assessed their country's past, present, and potential.

**Borderland, Breadbasket, Basket Case**

Iconicity makes things stick. It makes things stick together, but it also makes things stick in one's head.[7] While the previous section highlighted theoretically how iconicity and interdiscursivity work to make connections between disparate things feel intuitive, this section demonstrates methodologically how these semiotic forces drive narratives about Ukraine's geotemporal location and promise for the future.

Our primary focus is two recurring tropes in and about Ukraine: the country as "breadbasket," and the country as "borderland." A third trope, Ukraine as "basket case," is, I suggest, a riff on the first two that links Ukraine to other struggling states. Key to our analysis will be Bruce Mannheim's observation that iconicity "*naturalizes one set of semiotic distinctions by referring it to another* that is understood by the speakers to be more basic, essential, outside volitional control, or outside culture. It allows particular linguistic and cultural patterns to be referred to each other, *such that they become*

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[7] On cognitive retention, see work on structure mapping Gentner & Medina (1998). A more colloquial approach can be found in Heath & Heath's 2006 tradebook, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die.*

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*mutually interpreting*" [thereby] "enhance[ing] their cognitive retention by individuals"

(2000: 107, emphasis mine).

A useful demonstration of the mutual interpretation of which Mannheim writes is

Ukraine's flag—horizontal, yellow on the bottom, light blue on the top—which was often

said resemble the country's agrarian landscapes. My interlocutors frequently described

the flag's lower yellow band as depicting wheat, and the light blue a clear sky; that is,

they connected a political symbol to a landscape taken to be both national, and natural.

(Note that East Slavic languages make strong distinctions between light blue and other,

darker blues, similar to how English makes clear distinctions between pink and red.)

The flag is also a useful example of how the iconic can work as a springboard for

other connections across contexts. Light blue and yellow was taken to recapitulate the

landscape, which in turn, for many of my interlocutors, was taken to recapitulate

something essential about Ukraine: its reputation as an agricultural powerhouse.

However, the flag, which was selected by Ukraine's first post-Soviet government in

1991, was also a product of substantial social mediation. A conventionalized symbol of

the independent Ukraine, it pointed indexically to the contemporary state, but also back

in time to the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917–1921, in various tenuous forms), which

arose during the chaos of the Russian Revolution. That small and short-lived state flew

the same light blue and yellow flag before being absorbed by the Ukrainian Soviet

Socialist Republic, one of the republics that made up the Soviet Union.[8] Thus, in

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[8] Another version of the flag from that time period (typically flown by the partisans fighting for the Western Ukrainian People's Republic in what was then Poland) had the bands reversed: yellow on top and the light blue on the bottom; in this case, the light blue was said to represent the Dnipro river, and the yellow the shiny cupolas cathedrals. In the second decade of the 21st century, Ukrainians, whether for reasons historical or phonological, commonly referred to their flag's color scheme as "yellow-light blue," *zhovto-blakytnyj*. Some took this as evidence that the official flag's bands should have been reversed.

choosing the light blue and yellow flag for the Soviet successor state, the leadership of

newly independent Ukraine acknowledged a longer history of movements for Ukrainian

sovereignty and unity, and the prominence of light blue and yellow designs extending

back to the Cossack Hetmanate (1649–1764, on the Dnipro River, generally considered

the modern Ukrainian predecessor state) and even medieval Galicia-Volhynia (1199–

1349), one of the successors of Kyivan Rus' (882–1054). (Modern Ukraine and Russia

both trace their origins to Kyivan Rus'—see footnote 9 for a historical overview.[9])

      However, at the time I was conducting research, my project participants, both

urban and rural, seemed unaware of, or unconcerned with, their flag's historical

significance; rather, the iconicity between the flag and the countryside was frequently

reinforced. On sunny summer days, many of my younger interlocutors paused by the side

of roads to take photos with equal bands of wheat and sky. They made more than social-

media ready snapshots, they made good landscape: charming, peaceful, and also iconic in

the colloquial sense. In diagramming the Ukrainian flag, they quite literally naturalized

the connection between Ukrainian land and one type of agrarian landscape: the

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[9] Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians all trace the origins of their nations to medieval Kyivan Rus'. Following the disintegration of Rus' (due to economic distress and rivalries among princes—the Mongol invasions in the 1240s were merely the final blow), three principalities emerged: Galicia-Volhynia in the west, Vladimir-Suzdal in the east, and Novgorod in the north. Galicia-Volhynia soon came under the control of Poland, and then Polish-Lithuania, and still later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The territory was known in English as Ruthenia and the people as Ruthenians. In Polish and Ukrainian, however, Ruthenia was known as the *ruskie* or *rus'ke* voivodeship, with *rus* referring to Kyivan Rus', not Russia. Vladimir-Suzdal, meanwhile, was absorbed by its daughter state, Moscow, which later conquered Novgorod (plus quite a bit of additional territory). The resulting Grand Duchy of Muscovy was the predecessor state to the Tsardom of Russia, which later became the Russian Empire. Thus, while Kyivan Rus' was centered, of course, on Kyiv, and encompassed much of contemporary Ukraine, the powers that would come to control most of its territory in the centuries were consolidated first on Rus' periphery, and were all initially vassal states of the Mongol Empire's Golden Horde. On that note, we should not forget about the legacy of the Mongols in Ukraine: the Crimean Khanate, a successor state to the Golden Horde, and a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire, controlled the entire Black Sea coast until its defeat in the Russo-Turkish War in 1774. Odessa, where much of this dissertation is set, was once a Turkish-speaking fort known as Hacıbey. Under Catherine the Great, it became the western frontier of what was then referred to as *Novorossija,* "New Russia." For more on Ukraine's early history, see Plokhy 2006 and Subtelny 2009.

breadbasket. That good landscape doesn't just occur, but rather is *produced* (or captured iconically, and thereby naturalized) is a focus of chapters 2 (soil) and 5 (sunflowers).

The trope of the breadbasket (Ukr. *zhytnytsja*; Rus. *zhitnitsa*) in studies of Ukraine is second only to the trope of Ukraine as a borderland (Dickinson 1999; Brown 2004; Richardson 2008). Long sandwiched between empires—the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman—Ukraine's very name, *Ukrajina,* is frequently said to mean "on the edge." In both Russian and Ukrainian, the word for "edge" or "limit" is *kraj.* Standing in Russia, Ukraine is indeed *u kraj,* the land at Russia's western border, much of which was under Moscow's control for centuries. The eastern reaches of what is now Ukraine came under Muscovite rule following the decline of the Mongol's Golden Horde; the southern steppe and seashore (including Crimea) comprised the frontier known as *Novorossija* (New Russia), which was annexed in the late 18th century by Tsarina Catherine the Great. The center-west was won through the late 18th and 19th century partitions of Poland, and the far west integrated only in the 20th century, via World War II. The borders that independent Ukraine inherited in 1991 were those of its predecessor state: the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, one of the 15 republics of the former Soviet Union.

A handful of my Ukrainian interlocutors concerned with making a historical case for Ukrainian territorial sovereignty argued against tropes of Ukraine as imperial borderland by noting that, in Ukrainian, the word for "country" or "nation state" is *kraijina,* so *Ukrajina* could also be understood as meaning "within the edges" or simply, "our land." With this explanation, they countered one instance of iconicity between language and geography with another. In actuality, the use of the term "Ukrainian" to

refer to an ethnic group, language, and territory arose only in the 19th century with the rise of the modern nation state. "Ukrainian" largely came to replace "Ruthenian" (Ukr. *rus'kyj,* Pol. *ruski,* from (Kyivan) Rus') and "Little Russian" (Rus. *malorusskij*) in the west and east, respectively, mobilizing drives for independence across the Austro-Hungarian and Russian imperial borders.[10] But, as noted above, early Ukrainian national movements enjoyed little success, and often did not embrace many of the people who identified (or would come to identify) themselves as ethnically or civically Ukrainian. The entire western third of the country became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic only in 1939. In other words, it actually is not surprising that many of my interlocutors were either unaware of, or de-emphasized, the way their flag recalled earlier pushes for western Ukrainian self-rule: in 1991, as Ukraine gained independence for the first time, much of the country would be united not by a shared sense of deep history, or even a shared sense of 20th century history, but perhaps by the agreement that much of their country had wheat fields beneath light blue skies.

What is at stake in Ukraine as "borderland" in the 21st century is not only the naturalization of a mutually interpreting relationship between geography and language (*kraj* meaning "on the edge") but the naturalization of the relationship between geography and political belonging (Ukraine as part of Russia's "near abroad," or as the European Union's cushion). Ukraine may have been a historical borderland, but in the

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[10] It should be noted that "Ruthenian" remains a preferred ethnonym in some pockets of Western Ukraine, particularly in the Carpathians, where it is especially used to distinguish highland populations. However, there, the preferred ethnic marker is *rusyn,* rather than *rus'kyj.* As always, it is important to keep in mind that the use of any ethnic identifiers in official paperwork often says little about the meaningfulness of such descriptors to those that use them. In both historical and contemporary Ukraine, people may find locality, religion, profession, or political leanings more potent ways of describing themselves.

early 2000s, it became a *buffer*.[11] Consider this: during the Soviet era, Ukraine was on the western edge of the USSR, but from 1945 onward, its neighbors (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania) were all part of the Soviet bloc. Ukraine was in the middle, rather than at the threshold. In the post-Soviet era, however, newly independent Ukraine's neighbors were quickly integrated into the European Union: Poland, Slovakia (now divorced from the Czech Republic, also an EU member), and Hungary completed the accession process in 2004. So did Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—all former Soviet states. Romania and fellow Black Sea state Bulgaria were invited to join the EU in 2007 despite having notoriously corrupt governments, high rates of poverty and organized crime, and troublesome human rights records. My Ukrainian interlocutors, particularly those living in Odessa region, which borders Romania at its (Odessa's) southern tip, were decidedly peeved about the accession of their Black Sea neighbors, whom they described as less deserving—or at least as *un*deserving—of EU membership than themselves.

Within a generation, Ukraine went from being at the crossroads of (eastern) Europe to being outside of it. Long permeable borders became tightly restricted; once numerous crossings were reduced in number, or their use limited to only local residents with the right paperwork. Major regional arteries became dead-end roads; once vibrant border towns withered (Dickinson 2005, 2007a; Schlegel 2016). "Europe" became a political entity, rather than a geographical one, and Ukraine became a cushion between

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[11] Talk of Ukraine as a "buffer," or the suggestion it follow the model of Finland (participating in European life, but carefully avoiding antagonism with Russia), has recently been attributed to former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. However, insistence that Ukraine remain neutral predates the Maidan Revolution, and in my view, was precisely one of the policies that sparked it.

the EU and Russia. In Ukraine, the largest country located entirely within the continent of Europe, the people I worked with often referred to *Yevropa* as *tam,* "over there."

Ukraine as politically marginal "borderland" also intersects with the notion of Ukraine as economically unrealized "breadbasket." Having shown how these two tropes were grounded in iconicity, I now show how they provided (at least some of) the basis for a third trope: Ukraine as dysfunctional state, or "basket case." That Ukraine should be an agrarian powerhouse was a truism that went unchallenged by most of my Ukrainian interlocutors, as well as all of the foreign agricultural investors I interviewed.[12] How Ukraine came to be recognized internationally for its exceptionally fertile "black earth" soil will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. But it is also important to understand that the "breadbasket" trope is about much more than soil and crops: "breadbasket" has also become shorthand for "export economy." This is despite the fact that Ukraine's most valuable exports are not agricultural goods but ferrous and non-ferrous metals (less than 10% of export revenue vs. well over 40%). Ukraine is not even a top-five global exporter of wheat. (It is the world leader in sunflower, however, which is the focus of chapter 5.)[13]

Yet English language news coverage of Ukraine, unless specifically focused on Ukrainian markets or trade in metals, rarely mentions industries other than agriculture. Ukrainian news media similarly celebrates Ukrainian leadership in the export of agricultural commodities in a way it rarely does industrial ones. There are reasons for this: the Soviet emphasis on heavy industry (recall that Stalin's name was an invented

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[12] On occasion, I encountered or read editorials by Ukrainian detractors, who noted that agrarian countries were rarely wealthy ones, and that it was foolish to build an economy around agriculture as climate change was accelerating, but such arguments were few and far between.

[13] As of June 2017, the U.S. Department of Commerce (via export.gov) described Ukraine as "the world's largest exporter of sunflower oil, third largest exporter of barely, fourth largest exporter of corn, sixth largest exporter of wheat, and ninth largest exporter of poultry." These statistics are similar to ones from years prior. Other significant exports include soy, beet, and rapeseed products.

one meaning "man of steel"); the post-Soviet entanglement of gas, coal, and organized

crime; the legacy of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster; the simple fact that landscapes of

wheat and sky are generally more visually appealing than those of mines and

smokestacks. The end result, however, is that on Ukrainian television, the words "metal

worker," "miner," and "steel" are as likely to refer to football teams (Kharkiv *Metalurh;*

Donetsk *Shakhtar*, now displaced to L'viv; and Dniprodzerzhynsk *Stal',* created from a

merger of a second league team and Donetsk's *Metalist*, which went bankrupt during the

ongoing armed conflict in Donbas) as they are the economic foundation of the country's

industrial east.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, western coverage of Ukraine made frequent

references to the newly independent state as "the former breadbasket of the Soviet

Union," or "the aspiring breadbasket of Europe." However, articles on the country's

struggling economy were less often concerned with agricultural endeavors than they were

with Ukraine's failure to emerge from post-Soviet "transition" as quickly or successfully

as expected. In English-language press, "breadbasket" as export-economy, and

specifically market-based export-economy, was further solidified by the term's frequent

pairing with a derogatory name for the psychologically dysfunctional and economically

undisciplined: "basket case."[14] Since 1992, news sources including *Businessweek* (1992)*,*

*The Washington Post* (1993), *The Economist* (1998), *Newsweek* (2009), *National Public*

*Radio* (2014), *Agence France-Presse* (2015), and *The Financial Times* (2015) have

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[14] The origins of the expression "basket case" seem to come from the post-World War I era, when it was used to refer to veterans who lost all four limbs in conflict, and literally had to be carried in a basket. The distress these people experienced was said to cause them to lose their minds, thus the association with "basket case" and an inability to function "normally." My limited, English language searches of "basket case," "economic basket case," and "basket case economy" suggest that such phrases gained steam in the 1980s (perhaps most notably after Ronald Reagan referred to Cuba as such), and have come to dominate present usage in media.

highlighted Ukrainian mismanagement, underperformance, and general distress with now-clichéd titles such as "Ukraine: Breadbasket or Basket Case?" or "Ukraine: From Breadbasket to Basket Case."[15] Such glib headlines turned on more than bad puns. Rather, using the "breadbasket" trope as a springboard, they interdiscursively aligned Ukraine with a larger cohort of politically precarious, economically flailing, typically non-western and often (post)socialist states.[16] Moreover, they suggested only two futures for Ukraine: appropriately neoliberal export-economy, or freak show.[17]

Quite a few of my Ukrainian interlocutors bought into this dichotomy, though not merely because transition-logic required it of them. Rather, many were morally invested in the idea of Ukraine as a food producer. They proudly recalled the country's role in feeding the Soviet Union, and imagined Ukraine nurturing a globalized world, as well. They did not speak of "breadbaskets," however, but of *zhytnytsi,* a word pungent with antiquity. The librarian in one of my village fieldsites wrote it out for me one day in her impeccable script, and underlined the beginning of the word: *zhyt*. "Like *zhyttja,*" I breathed. Life. She explained to me that both *zhytnytsja* (granary) and *zhyttja* (life;

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[15] The earliest "basket case" quip seems to have come shortly after Ukraine gained independence, and as soon as it became clear that the new country's transition to a market economy was not going to happen quickly or smoothly. In October, 1992, *Businessweek* published a short piece by Rose Brady (Moscow bureau chief from 1989-1993 and a prominent chronicler of post-Soviet transition) on the trials of first Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk, noting that both the International Monetary Fund and many of Kravchuk's rivals within Ukraine felt that he was not moving quickly enough to open markets. "One reason for Kravchuk's stubborn insistence on gradual change is his background," wrote Brady, sentences after noting that Ukraine was suffering from 30% inflation, a 15% contraction in industrial production, and the freezing of its trade payments by the Russian Central Bank. "Typically, the ideological head of a Communist Party is a conservative dogmatist. Kravchuk fits that mold." The Bloomberg piece was titled "Ukraine: Breadbasket or Basket Case?"; it is unclear who wrote the headline.

[16] The spread of "economic basket case" notably paralleled the expansion of international development banks and rise of loans requiring "structural adjustment." While in the 2010s, it seems that most any place in crisis may be declared a "basket case" (Greece most notably, but also the state of California, or Brazil in preparation for the 2016 Olympics, or the entire EU, or some anticipate, the UK following "Brexit"), historically, the expressions seems to have been most frequently used to describe debtor states of the "global south" and the former Soviet bloc.

[17] While I focus on English-language mentions of "basketcase" here, in chapter 4 we will see how, within Ukraine, references to African nations do similar work.

existence; being) were derived from Old Slavic *zhito,* which in turn can be traced to the proto-Indo-European for "to live" or "to survive."[18] (Russian *zhitnitsa* and *zhizen"* have the same origins, as well.) *Dyvovyzhne*—amazing, marvelous, a wonder—I agreed. We paused to savor the seemingly primordial. And in that moment, the idea that grain was Ukraine's ticket to the future, as well as its authentic past, felt perfectly legitimized through language.

**The Ethnic and the Civil**

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the social sciences and humanities saw a surge in works on "nationality." This was particularly the case in studies of the former Eastern Bloc, where the collapse of state socialism had been accompanied by the splintering of lands whose borders had been propped up by now-dissolved political systems. As borders shifted, and different countries emerged, scholars traced the sleight of hand involved in making newfangled states feel like they had always been there. We saw works on the construction of founding myths and the invention of tradition; on the layering and squeezing of ethnicities, language, and religion onto and into territories that did not quite fit; on sudden minorities in states with new majorities; on identity and all the ways it could be problematized. The focus was not solely on the present moment, but also on historical ones during which similar projects had been realized. In (post-)Soviet studies, there was a strong emphasis on the Leninist nationalities policies of the 1920s, especially on the "rooting" campaigns (Rus. *korenizatsija*) that created the linguistic standards and

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[18] *Zhito,* in Pokorny's preparation of pro-Indo-European, can be traced to an earlier root meaning "to live" or "to survive." See also Watkins' dictionary of Indo-European roots (2000).

bounded, often territorially-based notions of ethnicity that would become the foundations of cultural "revival" in the 1990s.[19]

This dissertation draws on and contributes to this body of work by showing how certain readings of landscape, history, and destiny become semiotically legitimized, helping sediment shared senses of what it means to live in Ukraine, and/or be Ukrainian. Like its predecessors, it gives due attention to the creation of the primordial, showing in particular how black earth soil and fields of sunflowers have been naturalized as essential and eternal features of Ukraine. However, this dissertation resists approaching the rural as a backdrop, as a necessary repository of "folk culture," or as an obvious incubator of "ethnicity." Rather, it posits that, in the decade between the revolutions, icons and discourses of the rural were instrumental in naturalizing ideas of a *civic* Ukraine, united by land and law rather than blood, language, or religion.

In the chapters that follow, I track how agrarian experience was implicated in conversations that cast Ukraine not as an ancient, ethnically-defined space, but as a contemporary, legally-defined territory, whose sovereignty was repeatedly being tested. The next chapter, on soil, shows how narratives about "black earth"—an especially rich soil found in large deposits in Ukraine—and its abuse by Soviet agricultural planners and German invaders, helped cast the country as postcolonial, a geographical, and geological victim of both Stalin and Hitler.[20] Thereafter, I track how discourses of "rule of law" among my rural interlocutors were informed by their experiences navigating a series of

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[19] A very small sampling of relevant works include: Suny 1993, Slezkine 1994, Wanner 1998, Lemon 2000, Martin 2001, Stauter-Halsted 2001, Bilaniuk 2005, Hirsch 2005, Arel & Ruble 2006, and Faller 2012.
[20] The question of whether the "posts" in postsocialism and postcolonialism are the same is one that has been of some interest in studies of the former Soviet Bloc for more than a few years now (Chari & Verdery 2009, most notably, but see various origins in places such as Appiah 1991, Hall 1996, Petryna 2002, Comaroff & Comaroff 2006, and intersections and extensions in recent work by Chernetsky 2007, Maiorova 2008, Grant 2009, Oushakine 2013b, and Bilianiuk 2016.

land reforms. The dismantling of the collective farms and allotment of agricultural land had privileged work tenure and citizenship over ethnicity—that is, there were no Soviet-style quotas based on "nationality": one was entitled to petition their village council for land provided one had a history of working for the local former collective, intended to use the plot for agrarian purposes, and had obtained Ukrainian citizenship. But the process was notoriously rife with corruption—made worse, some said, by a complete moratorium on agricultural land sales—leaving my village interlocutors lamenting laws unevenly applied and inconsistently respected, and imagining that in "Europe," and "the West" more generally, the legal word was more potent. This belief would be severely undermined by the Russian annexation of Crimea. In the final two body chapters, I track Ukraine's descent into war, and how the invocation of widely familiar imagery and experiences of the rural—the grandeur of a vast field of sunflowers; the tedium of controlling a universally detested pest, the Colorado beetle—helped emphasize cross-regional commonalities within Ukraine…and erased the fact that these commonalities, among many others, continue across the border into Russia.

The notion that the development of a "civic" identity requires the sublimation of "ethnic" or "local" ones is one that has been extensively explored by scholars of modern nation states.[21] However, it has special resonance in the post-Soviet context because "Soviet" was arguably the ultimate civic identity. Independent Ukraine is the successor state of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which was one of 15 constituent republics of the Soviet Union; however, these constituent republics also comprised over 100 autonomous regions, most of which had some sort of "national" designation (eg.

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[21] Eugene Weber's now-classic *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914* (1976) is particularly foundational.

Crimea, or Chechnya-Ingushetiya in Russia), but all of which were multiethnic. Thus, upon independence, the new state of Ukraine had to convince much of its population that "Ukrainian" need not be only a "nationality" in the Soviet sense, but could also be a citizenship and civic identity that superseded ethnicity. And the people who needed to be convinced were not only those who did not identify as ethnic Ukrainian, but also, and perhaps especially, those people who were zealous about their Ukrainianness, and seeking an ethnonational state. Indeed, the notion that Ukraine is inevitably split between east and west is exploited not only by those who wish to keep the country within Russia's orbit, but also by those who take the most narrow view of what qualifies as "authentic" Ukrainian language and culture, and cast difference as degeneracy.[22]

The perniciousness of east-west binaries became particularly clear during the 2004–2005 Orange Revolution, when Russian and other international media correlated voting patterns with census data to suggest that Ukraine was splitting along ethno-linguistic lines.[23] This tidy story rang false to many Ukrainians and scholars of Ukraine, who pointed out, first, that there were other socioeconomic factors driving the divide, and second, that census statistics failed to capture the complexity of ethnic identity, language use, or political choice in the young country. Dominique Arel, who had recently published on the problems of "native language" and "nationality" in the 2001 Ukrainian census, affirmed that such data tells one only how respondents chose to identity themselves within the specific social and political climate on the day of the survey (2002; 2006). Laada Bilaniuk researched *surzhyk,* often glossed as an "impure" mixture of

[22] See Portnov 2014 on "Galician reductionism."

[23] I was living in Irkutsk, Russia at this time, and followed both Russian and English-language coverage of the Orange Revolution closely.

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Russian and Ukrainian (and also, rye and wheat, which recapitulates the staple grains of north and south), revealing the patterning beneath supposedly messy non-standards, and showing how speakers draw on the resources of multiple codes depending on with whom they are speaking with (2004; 2005). Volodymyr Kulyk (2006) tracked how, although Ukrainian was the sole official language, bilingual practices were legitimized in the mass media (eg. television shows having two anchors or hosts, one speaking Ukrainian and the other Russian) and promoted as a "common sense" solution for a country in which two closely related languages were spoken. Bilaniuk (2010) subsequently characterized the widespread practice in Ukraine of speaking one's language of choice, despite what one's interlocutor is speaking, as "non-accommodating bilingualism."[24]

Other scholars have likewise emphasized the spirit of compromise, or at least the mediation of difference, in Ukraine. Catherine Wanner (2014), for example, notes that Ukraine could be understood as split east and west by competing Christianities (including both Russian and Ukrainian Orthodoxies, as well as Catholicism), as well as by more pervasive secular / religious divides. However, she finds spiritual life in Ukraine to be far from dramatic, explaining how Orthodoxy operates as an "ambient faith" that *can* infuse public life, but is explicitly *not* institutionally anchored, thereby coexisting uneventfully with the Soviet-era legacy of atheism as well as other forms of contemporary secularism.[25] Sarah Phillips, in her work on women's and disabled people's movements (2002; 2008), demonstrates that the identities that may be most significant to Ukrainians,

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[24] I drew on an early version of Bilaniuk 2010 in my 2009 MA thesis, arguing that because non-standard (*surzhyk*) codes can be so stigmatized, native Russian speakers concerned about their competence in Ukrainian may elect to engage in "non-accommodating bilingual conversation," even if they support having Ukrainian as the sole state language.

[25] But, Wanner warns, these compromises are always precarious and can be undone at anytime. The conflict in East Ukraine, she writes "provided an incentive to categorize [people] with spurious precision as compatriots of one state or the other…impos[ing] a rigidity on everyday practices that reifies a fiction of minority–majority groups in confrontation" (2014: 437).

the communities that they feel most tied to, and the political commitments they hold most dear, may cross regions, languages, and ethnicities.

In some respects, all of this scholarship seems motivated by the urge to upset narratives of Ukraine as inevitably divided, or driven by ethnonational impulses. To describe Ukraine as areligious, tolerant, and concerned with human and civil rights is to suggest that it not so different from more "developed" or "progressive" states to the west. At the same time, Ukraine's history as a crossroads of empires, and the object of both numerous population transfers during the Soviet era, ensures it would be quite difficult to write an ethnography based there that would *not* complicate just-so stories about language, ethnicity, and east and west. This, I find, is true whether one works in a city (more typical sites for studies of diversity) or a tiny village.

My two rural fieldsites provide particularly useful illustration of the impact of the 20th century on demographics and language, so I shall take a moment to introduce them here; they and some of their key residents will be described more amply in the next two chapters. The village I call *Sonjachne* (approximately "Sunnyville"), in Odessa region, was a predominately ethnic German settlement up until World War II, when some Bessarabian Germans[26]—*Volksdeutsche*, to the Nazis—voluntarily left for Germany, and others were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan by the Soviet government, which feared collaborators. To compensate for the population loss, families from the northwest of Ukraine, annexed from Poland in 1939, were resettled on the steppe. The couple I lived

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[26] The eastern border of the historical region of Bessarabia is typically defined as the Dniester River, but this border seems to have been less a barrier than a route along which settlements and trade routes were established. Ethnic Germans living just east of the Dniester were nonetheless considered Bessarabian Germans, and distinct from the Black Sea Germans centered around Kherson.

with in Sonjachne, "the Marchenkos,"[27] traced their roots to the west: Olena's parents

both migrated from Rivne; Pasha's mother was from the western province of L'viv, but

his father was, he claimed, a mixture of Ukrainian, Moldovan, Jewish, and Romani—as

he put it, typically Bessarabian.[28] Olena and Pasha had grown up in the next village over,

and described themselves as "from Odessa" whenever they traveled beyond the region,

though they acknowledged that Odessa urbanites might turn up their noses at such a

statement. The Marchenkos' neighbors in Sonjachne and the surrounding area were

largely Ukrainian citizens, but they included many people born in Russia who had come

to work on the collective, *Druzhba* (Ukr./Rus. "Friendship") during the 1970s and 1980s

and then stayed, as well as a large contingent of ethnic Bulgarians whose families had

long settled the northern coast of the Black Sea. The Bulgarians spoke their dialect of

Bulgarian among themselves, but otherwise, people engaged in non-accommodating

bilingualism, speaking their version of "Russian" or "Ukrainian" (assuming they made

such distinctions) with few problems.

In contrast, the village I call *Zelene Pole* ( "Greenfield"), located in Vinnytsja

region, was almost uniformly ethnic Ukrainian at time of research, but had been in the

vicinity of many Jewish settlements before the war. While Odessa, which was primarily

under Romanian control during World War II, fared better than many places during the

Holocaust, Vinnytsja was overwhelmed by the Nazis, and, with the collaboration of some

Ukrainians, nearly cleared of its once sizeable Jewish minority. Therefore, the

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[27] I have given pseudonyms to all my interlocutors apart from those who worked in a more public capacity as expert representatives of organizations I discuss.

[28] Such migrations were not necessarily voluntary, and yielded strange and sad stories. For example, Olena's mother and father were both from Rivne, but her mother had arrived with people from her own village, while her father arrived in Odessa independently. Olena's father was a fair bit older than Olena's mother, and after he died, Olena and her siblings learned that they had half-siblings in Rivne: her father had either lost track of his first wife and children during the war, or simply left them behind in its aftermath.

experiences of Sonjachne and Zelene Pole were somewhat opposite: Sonjachne and its surrounds had gained diversity after the war, while Zelene Pole's was wiped out. Marta, my host in Zelene Pole, could trace her family back to the same general area for multiple generations. She found Russian and Ukrainian "all the same," perhaps because her own dialect—one she seemed to share with other older people in the area—strayed so far from either standard. Marta resisted calling her language "mixed," because, again, she did not think of Russian and Ukrainian as actually different. This became most apparent to me one evening as we watched her favorite show, "Ukraine's Got Talent," which employed both Ukrainian and Russian speaking hosts and judges. "Listen, Marta," I said, gesturing toward the screen, "Russian and Ukrainian *are* different." "*On TV*," she replied.

Together, Zelene Pole and Sonjachne reflected the reality of language in Ukraine: a historic East Slavic dialect continuum running from the Carpathian Mountains to the Don River, which has become pocked, pocketed, and transformed by migration, and is overlain by two standards (Ukrainian and Russian) that function as registers. That is, one shifts between varieties of speech depending with whom they are speaking, and for what occasion. Marta spoke *surzhyk* in her garden and fairly standard Ukrainian in her classroom. When she gave toasts, she did so with literary flourish—until the third or fourth drink in, at which point she simply declared *budmo!* (Ukr., short form of "may we live forever"), downed her *horilka* (vodka), and slammed her glass on the table with satisfied thump.

The autumn after the Maidan Revolution, as Ukraine slid into war, Marta retired from teaching at Zelene Pole's school, and left for an extended trip to Italy, where her daughter and grandchildren lived. The daughter had Italian residency, and the children

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citizenship as well. Marta was the envy of much of Zelene Pole, for her daughter was not merely a migrant worker, but the owner of a shop. She could sponsor Marta for a visa, and even permanent residency, which would allow Marta to live and travel freely in the Schengen Zone. Marta, who relished being at home in the village, was apathetic, but to many of her neighbors, "Europe" was a siren song.

How does one get to Europe? Many of my interlocutors dreamed of obtaining a Schengen visa for work or travel, but others dreamed of having the border encompass them. "Why can't we be [like] Poland?" a middle-aged woman from Zelene Pole asked me one evening, wondering why Ukraine's fate had been so different from that of its neighbor, which was, at that time, widely considered a postsocialist success story. She had been lamenting her grandson's departure for a construction job on the other side of the border, and was concerned he might never return. "We don't need to be [as rich as] Germany, but Poland should be doable." In the months preceding the Maidan Revolution, anticipating the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union, my interlocutors wondered how soon full EU membership might follow. How could they convince the Brussels they were ready—and deserved—to join the 28 other member states? What did they need to prove?

Earlier, I suggested that some of the scholarship on Ukraine that has attempted to complicate binaries of east and west, and undermine narratives of ethnolinguistic divide, has also served to portray Ukraine in ways palatable to "Western" audiences, and demonstrate that it isn't so different from its more "European" neighbors. I am in no way suggesting that this excellent scholarship was invalid. Rather, I wish to point out that not every country has to make this sort of case for itself. While Ukraine and other

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postsocialist central-east European states are often cast as inherently susceptible to ethnonationalist fervor, many northern and western European countries are presumed to be consistently level-headed and civically-minded. People in these countries need not to tout their commitments to "rule of law," "human rights," or "dignity," or emphasize that their land is one bound by treaty rather than common blood. When, in these countries, ethnonationalists rear their heads, they are treated as a fringe anomaly, or a product of economic distress, rather than typical of the populace at large.[29]

In tracking how, in the months surrounding the Maidan Revolution, icons and discourses of the rural were being folded into a civic imaginary, I am not suggesting that there is an innate difference between the city and the countryside, or the ethnic and the civil. Instead, I aim to show the processes that make such distinctions such as "rural" vs. "urban"; "ethnic" vs. "civic"; "eastern" vs. "western"; and "authoritarian" vs. "democratic" feel intuitive are ones that recur in other domains, and create the distance between the poles they produce (Williams 1973; Irvine & Gal 2000).[30]

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[29] Certainly, the post-Maidan Ukrainian government has not been nearly as consistent as it needs to be about condemning creeping right-wing influence. Likewise, as I argue in chapter 4, the mainstreaming of ethnonationalist narratives is of great concern. Similarly, the present governments in Hungary and Poland do little to undermine the stereotype of the east as xenophobic and authoritarian. Still, I cannot help but observe the differences in how right-wing presence has been interpreted—or justified—in eastern European countries compared to "Western" ones, such as France or the U.S.

[30] As Williams (1973) notes, conceptions of the rural are constructed in opposition to those of the urban. For the city to be conceived of as modern, dynamic, cosmopolitan, and corrupt, the countryside must be imagined stagnant, uniform, and authentic. Following Judith Irvine & Susan Gal's (2000) discussion of "fractal recursivity," or how binary oppositions perceived in one space may be projected into another, one may track how the differences embedded in juxtapositions like "city" vs. "countryside" reappear in similar forms in pairs such as "civic" vs. "ethnic" identities and "patriotism" vs. "nationalism." Williams further describes how the separation of the city from the country was achieved because both were subject to the same forces of capitalism. Irvine & Gal, likewise observe that contrast is not inherent, but socially produced. They isolate isolate three processes that make difference (or sameness) feel obvious: the aforementioned "fractal recursivity," "erasure," and its obverse, "iconization." The last, the linking of specific features to larger groups of people, often because they are presumed to share some sort of form, influences how difference is commonly articulated (eg. people who speak slowly are presumed mentally slow). However, these articulations of difference gain authority only because they are accompanied by the other two processes: the erasing of what would undermine them, and subtle replication in other spaces.

It is tempting to believe that peoples and states behave differently depending on whether they consider themselves ethnically or civically bound, whether they recognize blood or laws as the ties that bind. It is tempting to think that ethnic and civic nationalism—or "nationalism" and "patriotism" as they are sometimes described—are quite different, and that shifting from the former to the latter renders one a "liberal democracy," "western," or "European." But both are produced by the same semiotic processes, and both are capable of tremendous destruction (Porter-Szűcs 2009). Either may legitimize violence, and in Ukraine, where the Maidan Revolution was touted as the harbinger of a new era in which "Ukrainian" was not only an ethnic, but a civic identity, both have. The chapters to come help explain why this is the case.

**Overview of Chapters**

The body of this dissertation is organized around four things that captured the interest of my interlocutors during the time I was doing research: soil, fields, beetles, and sunflowers. In each chapter, I trace how iconicity and interdiscursivity worked to both ensnare the titular object in larger discourses about Ukraine's history and future, as well as make certain perspectives on the social world feel intuitive, legitimate, or inevitable. The chapters cohere in a narrative of how Ukraine's Maidan Revolution came to be, and offer insight into why the violence that erupted from it has been so difficult to contain.

Chapter 2, "Soil," asks how some Ukrainians came to conceive of their country not only as post-Soviet, but postcolonial—that is, how they came to think of Ukraine's relationship to Russia as one of exploitation and subjugation, rather than of brotherhood and shared history. Sketching the history of soil science on the Eurasian steppe, the

mapping of the black earth region, and the development of early Soviet agricultural policy, I show how the naturalization of the relationship between "good soil" and "high yields" drove the fetishization—and abuse—of Ukrainian soil during the 20th century, to horrific effect. Moreover, I show how this same flawed linkage has persisted in 21st century Ukraine, underscoring past traumas, augmenting the breadbasket trope, and legitimizing a complete moratorium on the sale of agricultural lands.

In chapter 3, "Fields," I consider some of the consequences of the frozen land market, including off-the-books transfers of plots, and the rise of large agribusinesses who supported the moratorium because it kept rents low. However, my primary focus is how my interlocutors navigated the seemingly never-ending land reforms that threatened the performativity of their land deeds, and moreover, how, in doing so, they came to assess Ukraine's progress toward "rule of law." Drawing on recent work in anthropology and history on bureaucratic documents, I show how the people I worked with sought to tame paper, fix meaning, and extract value from icons of land ownership. However, I also track how some people, particularly oligarchs, were more successful than others in harnessing the legal word to their benefit. This chapter culminates with the Maidan Revolution, and the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych from his ill-gotten estate, Mezhyhirya, as well as the presidency and Ukraine at large.

Chapter 4, "Beetles," picks up shortly after the Russian annexation of Crimea, when Odessa region was experiencing rumbles of separatism. The chapter centers on a shocking episode of political violence—the May 2nd clashes in Odessa city center—and how people tried to make sense of what had precipitated it. Employing the concept of chronotopes, I attend to how my interlocutors oriented to different formations of time,

space, and personhood to explain the origins of the conflict, and anticipate its trajectory. I give particular attention to their concern that certain language, specifically the dubbing of people opposed to the revolution *kolorady* (plural)*,* a short name for the invasive Colorado beetle, had contributed to the the Othering of fellow citizens, and thereby the grisly deaths of 42 people. I unpack the interdiscursive threads that bind *kolorad* (singular), and show how my interlocutors' assessments of whether such language was harmless or hurtful depended on the "lenses configured by chronotopes" through which they viewed Odessa, its history, and its people (Lemon 2009).

Chapter 5, "Sunflowers" returns to the question of how national landscape is produced, and charts how the mighty crop *Helianthus annuus* became celebrated in Ukraine as a pan-regional sign of economic prosperity, bucolic beauty, and rural resilience. But the chapter's scope stretches far beyond Ukraine, as I track how, following the accidental shooting-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Eastern Ukraine (Donbas, the Don Basin), images of, and actual seeds from, sunflower fields where parts of the plane had landed circulated around the world. The chapter is an effort to, on the one hand, recover the particularity of rural communities forgotten in the conflict, and on the other, explore how the frontiers of war, and the afterlives they generate, are ever-expanding, and unexpected.

The dissertation concludes with a summary of themes, and a brief epilogue about how, in the autumn of 2014, a few of the over 2 million people displaced by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine were trying to start anew.

CHAPTER 2

**Soil**


Fertility is not so natural a quality as might be thought;
it is closely bound up with the social relations of the times.
—Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847


Over a year after I had left Ukraine, I received an email from an unfamiliar address that

contained two photo attachments: one of an elderly woman, kerchiefed and carrying a

pair of Soviet cavalry trousers, and another of a single sheet of paper, on which the

sender, the director of a small regional museum I had visited, had scrawled the woman's

testimony [some identifying details withheld; emphasis mine]:

> Kateryna K_____, born 1929, in the former Korostynskyj region of the former Volyn' governate,
> now Barashivskyj region of Zhytomyr province. Resident of _____, Vinnytsja province:
>
> Testifies that, in 1943, during the fascist occupation, near the train station stop Ushytsja,
> Yemel'janovka, where her brother _____ lived, **the German invaders dug up the top layer of
> black earth soil [chornozem], loaded it into train cars, and sent it to Germany**. This region
> also contains red granite and other minerals. These were also mined, and the slabs lowered into
> train cars. Kateryna, along with her sisters Nina and Tat'jana, observed the loading of the wagons.
> They warned _____, a forester, who had contact with the guerillas [*partisany*] and advised them of
> the echelon of soil and granite, ready for shipment to Germany. The guerrillas often blew up such
> echelons in order to prevent the removal of Ukrainian land to Germany.
>
> Written in words I believe to be true, and signed 6 June, 2016.

I knew why the museum director had sent the document, and more specifically, why she

had taken the testimony herself. When I was doing research in Vinnytsja province in

2013 and 2014, I had asked her about something I had heard many of the people I worked

with in the region claim: that the Nazis (the "fascists" Kateryna K. refers to above) had

dug up Ukraine's prized topsoil, the "black earth," and sent it back to Germany. I had wondered if there were any archival evidence of this, noting that while the plundering of Ukrainian foodstuffs, art, and labor had been well documented, I had never come across anything about the theft of soil in a major scholarly publication. Why would the Nazis take topsoil when they had the whole of Ukraine?, I had asked. The museum director was taken aback, explaining that there were eyewitnesses to such events, and that in this area, which was crisscrossed with train tracks, people had seen the Nazis loading train cars with earth. Our subsequent inquiries into local and provincial archives, as well as diaspora-maintained archives in North America, yielded no previously documented sources, however. The museum director was puzzled, directing me toward school textbooks, popular histories, and news articles that mentioned the theft of soil, and trying to determine where written testimony supporting the stories had been found. Ultimately, it seemed, she had a local eyewitness, albeit a young teenager at the time, record her memories. This way, there would be something to point to.

Since Ukraine gained independence in 1991, there has been a notable effort to document the experiences of citizens who witnessed some of the most horrific events of the 20th century, including war, mass famine, and nuclear disaster. Often, such documentation was designed to serve as a corrective to Soviet-era historiography felt to understate the suffering of Ukrainian populations under Russian rule, or omit Ukrainian contributions, or erase the excesses of the Soviet regime, or deny the existence of a historical Ukrainian national identity. This chapter does not seek to add to, argue with, or otherwise evaluate those efforts. Rather, it traces how one specific substance, black earth soil, undergirded narratives of occupation, resource extraction, and civic disorder in

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Ukraine. I chart how black earth shows up again and again in accounts of exploitation of the land and people at the hands of the Soviets and the Nazis, but also other powerful interlopers, including Ukrainians themselves. Moreover, I explore the semiotic processes that root and reify the prominence of the soil in the first place. This chapter asks: how did one specific type of soil, "chernozem," come to be so valued that national narratives of suffering, colonization, even genocide became centered upon it?

Key to my analysis is the interrogation of the assumption that Ukraine's wealth lies in its land, and particularly in its soil. In the introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that the trope of Ukraine as "breadbasket" is as much about agricultural production as it is about agricultural *export*, and the expectation that those exports, properly managed, will bring wealth, stability, and economic independence to the nation. I proposed that the label "breadbasket" is less often applied in relation to the observed yield of the land than to the *anticipated yield*—that is, Ukraine is constantly described as a potential "breadbasket" that is underperforming. Finally, in the introduction I drew on work on Peircean iconicity to argue that tropes of Ukraine as a essentially agrarian state were often legitimized in the eyes of my informants by signs that naturalized what was already taken to be God-given: the light blue and yellow Ukrainian flag was taken to diagram agrarian landscapes; the words for "life" and "grain" had the same roots.

In this chapter, I expand on those observations to argue that Ukrainian narratives of agrarian potential—and relatedly, I show, national oppression—are anchored by another type of icon: the soil map. Soil maps and the development of modern soil science on the Russian imperial steppe were key to the appraisal of Ukrainian land as highly productive, highly valuable, and in finite supply. The international scientific term

"chernozem" (a calque of Rus. *чернозём [chernozjom]*; Ukr. *чорнозем [chornozem]*) translates as "black earth," and is a regional term much older than soil science. However, the development of a "genetic" or "evolutionary" theory of soil formation in the late 19th century gave temporality to a substance previously defined in terms of its most readily observable qualities, such as color, softness, depth, and fertility. At the same time, the theory encouraged the sorting of soils by their perceived evolutionary endpoints, or taxonomic types. The sketching of soil maps—that is, the diagramming of those types— lent a sense of fixity to the land that belied the dynamism of soil formation, as well as the many other factors that influence the fertility of the land, or the size of a harvest.

The development of soil science also elevated chernozem to what Russian soil science disciplinary founder Vasily Dokuchaev called "the emperor of soils" (Rus. *tsar pchov'*).[31] This status, I show, was not merely taxonomic, but created new scales of anticipated agricultural potential. Following Summerson Carr & Michael Lempert (2016), I consider how scales, whether rankings of soil types or targets for grain production, "are assembled, made recognizable, and stabilized through various communicative practices" (10). I propose that soil science is a "scale-making project" that also became an "institutionalizing projects [sic], in which a particular way of seeing and being [was] socially enforced" (9). Soil taxonomies, like many products of scientific knowledge, legitimized particular rankings of types while masquerading "as 'a view from nowhere,' as though the social interests and purposes for which phenomena are compared make no difference" (Gal, in Carr & Lempert 2016: 92; see also Irvine, same volume; for work on scientific knowledge and standards, Scott 1998 and Lampland & Star 2009 are especially appropriate; for work on soil maps, see Latour 1999 and Selcer 2015).

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[31] English translation from Sunderland 2004.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the motivations behind the development of soil science most certainly made a difference, and that the application of pedological knowledge—at times to extremes—transformed the lives of rural people and the land itself. Drawing on the work of historian David Moon (2010, 2013), I describe how the research late imperial and early Soviet soil science was predicated upon had been commissioned not solely to create typologies, maps, or theories of soil formation, but to increase settlement and agricultural production on the southern steppe. These chernozem-rich regions were expected to produce bumper crops of grain for the empire provided that they were properly documented, and scientifically managed. Yet, as James Scott has argued, the "legibility" of land and people, when combined with authoritarianism and a "muscle-bound…self-confidence about scientific and technical progress...[and] the mastery of nature (including human nature)" can have devastating effects (Scott 1999: 4).

The most notable example of this in modern Ukrainian history is the great famine of 1932–1933, known in Ukraine as the *Holodomor*, literally, killing by starvation. Based on a variety of scholarly and general audience writings on the famine, I find that the high-quality of chernozem was "interscaled" with high expectations for agricultural yields: that is, it was frequently assumed—by both Soviet agricultural planners, as well as many of those studying the famine—that better soil necessarily yields bigger harvests, greater food security, and even wealth.[32] Moreover, I show that this "conflat[ion] of one scaled dimension with another" (Philips, in Carr & Lempert 2016: 112) pervaded "breadbasket" discourse, both in the Soviet period, and perhaps especially as Ukraine opened to foreign investors and global commodities markets. Interscaling may also amplify how one

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[32] Philips (2016: 112) offers a helpful (and more lighthearted) illustration of interscaling via the example of weddings: a bigger event is often understood to not only have more guests, but cost more and include more bells and whistles than a smaller one.

perceives the magnitude of an event that affects just one axis of two or more phenomena that are presumed interconnected (Carr & Fisher, same volume). For those who shared stories of topsoil stealing during World War II, such as the one that the museum director sent me, the Nazis did not take just any soil, but the cream, and by extension, the crop. Contemporary iterations of soil stealing narratives likewise emphasize the loss not only of the harvest local soil could have produced, but of national wealth. In such narratives, I show, 21st century soil "poachers" (*brakonery*), corrupt officials, and land-grabbing foreigners become interdiscursively linked to World War II era "fascists" that prey upon the land, extracting its resources, and preventing Ukraine from becoming the self-sustaining, export economy soil science suggests it could be.

By exploring the semiotic processes by which chernozem came to be so valued in Ukraine, and how that value—and thereby, the value of Ukrainian *territory*—was reified in narratives of oppression, I reveal some of the paths through which the idea that Ukraine is not only post-Soviet but post-*colonial* was naturalized. Additionally, I explain why, for some Ukrainians, the "West" was also perceived as a potential exploiter of the black earth. Suspicion of foreigners, and fear of losing control of the land and food supply, I make clear, is not merely a "Cold War legacy," but a product of the multiple traumas of the 20th century, and moreover, how those traumas have been made meaningful to those who never experienced them firsthand. I proceed in three sections. First, I provide an overview of the development of modern soil science on the Eurasian steppe, giving particular attention to the intellectual and political atmosphere that drove scholarship on chernozem. Next, I argue that while pioneering imperial Russian and Soviet ecologists were concerned with understanding the relationship between the

material and organic components of soil, climate, and human activity so as to *sustain* the

land, the knowledge they produced was ultimately used to legitimize agricultural policies

that emphasized maximizing yields at the *expense* of both land and people. I also show

how historiography of the famine of 1932–1933 that focuses on the exceptionality of the

chernozem, or the irony of starvation in the breadbasket, simplifies causes of suffering

that were heterogenous and complex. Finally, I compare and contrast accounts of soil

stealing from (or about) World War II with other soil stealing narratives circulating

during and following my fieldwork. I conclude with some thoughts on the work

narratives about chernozem do in casting Ukraine as both a postcolony recovering from

centuries of Russian exploitation, as well as a target of 21st century Western imperialism.



**Figure 1: Did' Vas'ja's house in Sonjachne.** Blue-washed houses, known as *synky*, were common among older residents, but few were so charmingly decorated.

**The Emperor of Soils**

I met Did' (Grandpa) Vas'ja one day in June when he was gathering linden blossoms for tea. In Ukrainian, the word for "July" (*lypen'*) comes from the word for linden (*lypa*), and I jokingly asked Did' Vas'ja why he was gathering "July" in June. We were in the village I call Sonjachne, in Odessa region, about 100 kilometers from the Black Sea, and I imagined he might say something about the climate being hotter in the south. Instead, he stretched his stooped frame to grab a cluster of flowers, grunted, and declared, "global warming!"

That the climate was changing was not in doubt for the villagers I worked with. Severe drought bookended my fieldwork in Odessa region (2010 and 2014), cracking the earth and turning the normally thick, pleasantly sticky soil pebbly, and in 2010, sparking a rash of wildfires in Eastern Ukraine and Russia.[33] There was also an uptick in powerful storms that formed over the Black Sea and then charged inward, flattening fields, uprooting trees, shredding powerlines, and leaving city and countryside puddled in mud. Farmers lost yield; needy pensioners like Vas'ja and his wife, Stefa, lost their kitchen gardens, and were forced to divert money for heat and medicine toward purchasing food. Vas'ja had feared not having enough to eat at other times in his life. He was born just after the great famine of 1932–1933, but was old enough to remember the drought and famine that followed World War II (1946–7). At that time, Sonjachne was nearly drained of fieldhands. Millions of young Soviet men had lost their lives in the war, and Sonjachne's historical ethnic German population (see introduction) had either migrated or been deported to Kazakhstan out of concern they would collaborate with Axis invaders.

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[33] These fires led to the destruction of grain crops, particularly in Russia, and the imposition of export restrictions in both Russia and Ukraine. The restrictions sent global grain prices soaring, and have been considered a factor in the onset of the Arab Spring, particularly the protests in Egypt's Tahrir Square.

Not a decade later, Central and Eastern Europe were devastated by the march of the Colorado potato beetle, an invasive species that destroyed basic foodstuffs, including the most critical winter storage crop (see chapter 4). In the 1990s, open markets and the dismantling of the collectives brought new concerns of food insecurity to Ukraine and the former Soviet Bloc (Allina-Pisano 2007, 2009; Dunn 2008; Caldwell, ed. 2009; Ries 2009; Caldwell 2011; Jung, Klein, and Caldwell, eds. 2014, among many). Under such circumstances, knowing how to raise one's own food, as well as what could be found wild, was essential. Ukrainian month names, rooted in a much older Slavic system that diagrams the changing of the seasons, and tasks to be done at those times (gathering linden, making dyes, bringing in the harvest, chopping wood) were calibrated, approximately, to the astronomical calendar.[34] While my interlocutors did not take the calendar literally, Vas'ja suggested that global warming was forcing some adjustment.

Although climate change, and specifically the impact of human activity on climate change, tends to be thought of as a contemporary problem, it has been a well-documented preoccupation for those farming the Eurasian steppe for nearly 200 years. Moon (2010; 2013), an environmental historian, finds that anxieties about climate change were of utmost importance in the 19th century Russian Empire, of which approximately two-thirds of contemporary Ukraine was part. Of particular concern were deforestation and drought on the already sparsely wooded plain then known as "New Russia," (*Novorossija*). The great steppe stretching from the Don river basin ("Donbas") to the

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[34] Some Slavic languages, most notably those in countries with a strong Eastern Orthodox presence (eg. Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia), have adopted Latinate names for months; others, including standard Ukrainian, Polish, and Czech, employ older names that diagram qualities of the changing seasons. Calendars are variable across Slavic-speaking areas, eg. flowers and herbs (April and May, respectively, in Ukrainian) come earlier in some areas, or are reversed, leaves yellow and fall (October and November) later in others; in some languages, winter months are "sleepy" and "snowy," rather than, as in Ukrainian, "icy" (December) and "cruel" (February).

Danube and down to the Black Sea included the lands of the historical Cossack

Hetmanate (a self-governing state considered a predecessor to contemporary independent

Ukraine), the Crimean Khanate (a vassal of the Ottoman Empire), and the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth. Thus, while Russian annexation increased settlement,

farming, and exploration of the region, the land was hardly untouched. As residents of

this area reported increased wind, parched earth, hotter summers and colder winters, all

with devastating effects on harvests, scientists debated whether the observed changes

were progressive, cyclical, or even happening at all. And if they were happening, they

wondered, were they happening at the level of the earth, the atmosphere, or both?

Such discussions were hardly limited to the Russian Empire, or linked specifically

to its expansion. (See Khodarkovsky 2004 and Sunderland 2004 for detailed discussions

of settler colonialism on the newly acquired steppe.) Rather, they were part of pan-

continental debate about population growth, carrying capacity, and food insecurity.

Western European classical economists had conceived of soil as "gifts of nature to man"

(Malthus 1798) having "original and indestructible powers" (Ricardo 1817) that could

only be marginally improved. Malthus, presuming all fertile land was already under

cultivation, hypothesized that population, surging geometrically, would inevitably

surpass food supply, which grows only arithmetically. Thus, farmers' observations that

their soil was becoming overworked, dried out, or otherwise less productive both

prompted alarm as well as sparked scientific inquiry. By the mid-19th century,

agricultural chemist Justus von Liebig had identified nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium

as the nutrients depleted in intensive farming. What remained unclear was how to avoid

the problem of soil exhaustion in the first place. While some sought quick fixes in bone

yards and bird excrement, other thinkers sought more sustainable means of ensuring the land remained fertile, or wondered whether there was better land to be had altogether.[35]

Karl Marx was notably concerned with such matters, writing extensively on soil in his published works as well as in other communications. John Bellamy Foster (2000), traces how Marx drew on the work of von Liebig and his contemporaries, who argued that soil degradation was exacerbated by the increasingly large distance between centers of cultivation and the markets they catered to, in order to develop his [Marx's] own theory of "metabolic rift," which argued that the essential metabolic nature of exchange between humans and the earth had been disrupted with industrialization and urbanization. Liebig and his contemporaries had gone so far as to characterize the British and American farming systems as "robbery" of soil and livelihood from those who historically worked the land, a point that Marx picked up on, writing "capitalist production…[undermines] the original sources of all wealth: soil and the worker…All progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility" (*Capital*, Vol. 1). As an alternative to capitalist agriculture, Marx imagined a communal agricultural system in which people would be more evenly distributed across landscapes, not merely concentrated in the cities, not merely exploiting the soil. While such ideas

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[35] Foster (1999: 375), drawing on von Liebig's writings, describes "a phenomenal increase in the demand for fertilizer. European farmers in this period raided the Napoleonic battlefields of Waterloo and Austerlitz and reportedly dug up catacombs, so desperate were they for bones to spread over their fields." There was also a rush on guano, bird excrement, first from Peru and later from Chile. By 1843, J.B. Lawes had determined how to make phosphate soluble, thereby setting the stage for the development of the first synthetic fertilizers. However, commercial fertilizer was slow to become available (a process for synthesizing nitrogen fertilizer was not developed until 1913), and in the interim, seafaring imperial powers, most notably the United States (see the Guano Islands Act of 1856) and Britain, systematically claimed well over a hundred islands covered in bird crap in order to fuel intensive agriculture.

certainly anticipate the creation of collective farms, they also undermine the notion that, at least for Marx, the sole motivation for collectivization was the abolishment of private property.

Without denying the very real violence experienced by victims of collectivization (Scott 1998; Mueggler 2001; Kligman & Verdery 2011, among many), Foster reminds us that Marx's writings reveal a strikingly different approach to ecology than the Soviet record would suggest. The contrast is made all the more remarkable by the fact that late Russian imperial and early Soviet scholars were pioneers in ecology. Vasily Dokuchaev, whose theory of soil formation was based on work on chernozem, laid the foundation for modern soil science. His student, Vladimir Vernadsky, developed the concept of "biosphere" scientists worldwide are most familiar with today. Nikolai Vavilov was a renowned botanist (and incidentally, a student of geneticist William Bateson, father of anthropologist and naturalist Gregory Bateson) who studied plant diversity and worked toward ending famine. Politician Nikolai Bukharin, though not a trained scientist himself, is often credited with the development of science policy, and edited the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1926). (See also Cohen 1973; Tolz 1997; Nabhan 2012.)

The lives of these men became tragically intertwined in the Stalinist era: Vernadsky, a leader of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was deposed and his work attacked and suppressed. His party-approved replacement as head of the Commission for the History of Scientific Knowledge was the Bolshevik Bukharin. Bukharin later spoke out against intensive collectivization projects and grain requisitions, and defended the New Economic Policy (NEP), which permitted some private land ownership and enterprise. He was subsequently executed in the purges of 1936. Vavilov's fate was

particularly twisted: a critic of Trofim Lysenko's genetics (which, not dissimilar to Lamarkian approaches—or in some respects, contemporary epigenetics—posited that heritable traits were environmentally-acquired, and that genes could be changed within an organism's lifetime), which were favored by Soviet policymakers at that time, he was first made a scapegoat for the famines he had investigated, then sentenced to death, and later, after his sentence was commuted to 20 years imprisonment, starved to death in the gulag. It was a particularly poignant end for a scientist who had dedicated his life to combating famine through the study of genetics. "Genetics," historian Tolz writes, "was a field of science...particularly strongly hit under Stalin. Linguistics was probably the only other sphere that experienced such direct intervention by the political leadership, with Stalin personally taking sides in the polemic" (1997: 167).

Dokuchaev, however, emerged not only unscathed, but was celebrated as the father of an entirely new field, soil science. However, in a politically-driven intellectual milieu that emphasized that ability of nature to be *improved upon* (that is, again, the state-supported Lysenkonian view) Dokuchaev's findings were soon warped to serve the push for high yield agriculture. Moon (2010: 292) translates a portion of soil scientists Krupenikov & Krupenikov's 1950 biography of their field's founder: "[Dokuchaev] studied the soil so that it could be subjugated to man, in order to give reliable methods to take it into the possession of its native peoples." However, as Moon (as well as the Krupenikovs' later work[36]) demonstrates, Dokuchaev's primary interest was not in agriculture, but in ecology. In 1876, following a spate of droughts on the steppe,

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[36] The Krupenikovs were highly respected, highly adept scholars whose reputation and later work makes clear they were actually extremely committed to sustaining the soil, not exploiting it. This 1950 quote is perhaps a better reflection of the Soviet drive to defeat drought and famine in the post-war years than it is of their longer-term scholarly concerns.

Dokuchaev, a trained geologist, was commissioned to lead an expedition to document the most fertile soils of the steppe, from southern Russia across Ukraine to Bessarabia, now Moldova. The focus of the expedition was chernozem.

While the quality of steppe's black soil had been recognized since ancient times (Herodotus, for example, wrote of the "good, deep soil" of the land he knew as Scythia in his *Histories,* circa 440 BC), Dokuchaev observed that there were inconsistencies in how chernozem—"black earth"—was described colloquially and in the existing literature (Dokuchaev 1883: 26; Moon 2013: 77). He sought to more precisely define chernozem, and account for its features and distribution, by attending to the places and process by which it formed. Building on local knowledge, earlier work by members of the Russian Academy of Sciences (who had completed smaller samplings), and Austrian botanist Franz-Joseph Ruprecht, who had argued that the black earth's deep layer of humus was formed from the decomposition of steppe grasses, Dokuchaev developed the theory of soil formation that launched modern soil science.

In his landmark publication, *Russian Black Earth (*Rus. *Russkij chernozjom,* 1883*),* Dokuchaev argues that soil formation is influenced by the continual interaction between five factors: climate, parent material, living organisms, topography, and time. He described his theory of one of "genetics," in which "genetics" might be best understood to refer to origins, not genes, and moreover, to the *evolutionary* process of soil formation. Dokuchaev explained how soil formation has its own temporal pacing, moving faster than geological time and slower than human history, and posited that the famous soil of the steppes were at least four to seven thousand years old. He advocated— unsuccessfully—for soil to be considered a fourth kingdom, in addition to and

interdependent with plants, animals and minerals. As his decedents summarize, "Soil is both biological and mineral; it is dynamic, but at the same time, there are limits to its composition and architecture that define its behavior." (Krupenikov, et al 2011: 15).

Thus, Dokuchaev's work is better approached as a set of parameters rather than a taxonomic absolute. For example, in his studies of chernozem, Dokuchaev identified gradients in the "thickness" of the soil (how deep the topsoil descends) and proportion of humus (the nitrogen-rich organic material that forms from decaying plants and makes the soil appear very black) that varied in relationship to precipitation. Additionally, he found that topography, or "relief," could prevent the formation of chernozem—for instance, black earth was rarer in mountainous Crimea. Finally, further studies of soil around the world have made clear that chernozem belts in places as diverse as northern China, southern Canada, and northern Argentina may form upon different types of parent rock. Scientists have employed Dokuchaev's theory of soil formation to predict what type of soil exists in places that have not yet been sampled (Selcer 2015), as it is the interaction between the soil forming factors that is most critical, not their mere coincidence.

While Dokuchaev emphasized the dynamic nature of soil in his writings, he was also invested in the production of scientific diagrams that reflected soil as it was observable synchronically. His work featured sketches of the "horizons" of soil matter, (topsoil, transition, parent rock) and cartographies of regions he had sampled. The visual centerpiece of *Russkij chernozjom,* however, is a map that displayed the expanse of the black earth in the rapidly expanding Russian Empire (see Figure 2). The chernozem-rich steppe is shown extending from the medieval fortresses of western Ukraine to new Russian military outposts of Central Asia (approximately Kamjanets' Podil'sky to

Orenburg). Such maps—diagrams, in Peirce's typology of icons—not only naturalized the relationship between political geography and soil type, but created a new nature for the Russian Empire, and later, the Soviet Union, to cherish. Whereas 18th and 19th century settlers and scientists from more wooded and watered parts of the Empire initially felt disoriented and disconcerted by the nearly treeless steppe, later writers and artists found beauty in the vastness (Moon 2013: 87-88 notes the work of writers Aksakov, Gogol (Ukr. *Hohol*), and Chekhov, and the painter Kuindzhi). Properly harnessed, it seemed, the steppes promised a boon to the empire.
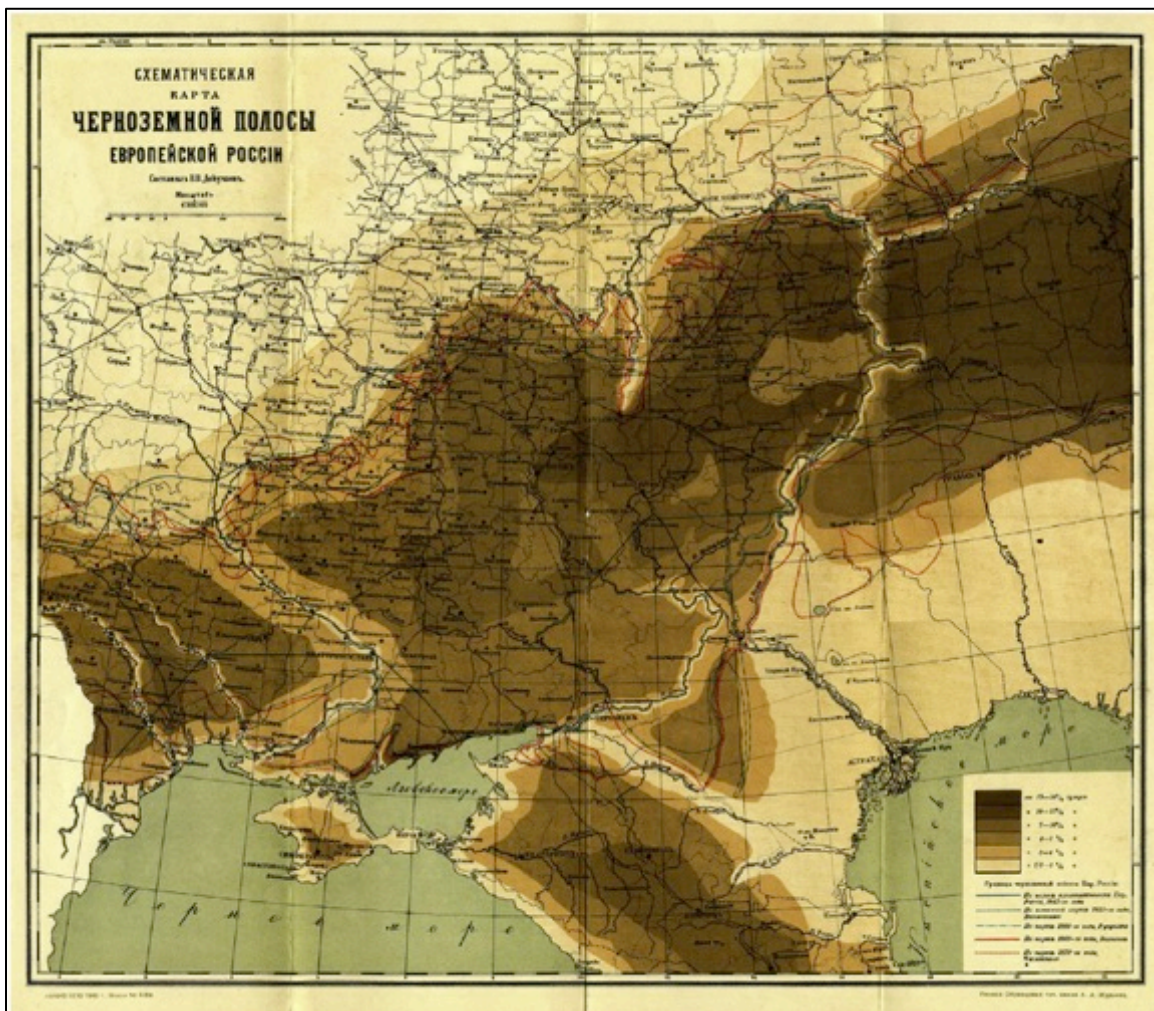


**Figure 2: Dokuchaev's 1883 map of chernozem regions of European Russia.** The research for this dissertation took place primarily in the westernmost swath of deep chernozem.

The breadbasket had begun to be mapped, and by science. Soviet scholars

continued the work that Dokuchaev and his colleagues began, producing maps that had a

tremendous impact not only on the development of soil science in the Soviet Union, but

also internationally (Selcer 2015). Within the Soviet Union, soil studies were conducted

to bolster agricultural planning. Work in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic peaked

between 1957 and 1961, when approximately 2 million soil samples were taken across

the country's 45 million hectares (approximately one sample per 10–25 hectares),

resulting in a detailed map of each region as well as customized reports and

recommendations for each collective or state-owned farm. These mid-century studies

provided the basis for every soil map in Ukraine I encountered during my fieldwork; lack

of funding, particularly since Ukrainian independence, had prevented them from being

substantially updated (Tykhonenko & Gorin 2008; Achasova 2016). A half-century after

the all-republic sampling project had been completed, my project participants in Odessa

and Vinnytsja regions approached soil maps as products of expert knowledge, and

approached them quite differently than they did, for example, the Slavic month names

that diagrammed the changing of the seasons. The latter were typically described as

poetic, evidence of Ukrainians' deep ties to the land, and a reflection of folk knowledge

that was imperfect, but still occasionally useful. Such names, not unlike "chernozem," or

its often neighboring "kashtanozem" (chestnut earth), summarize lexically a single

quality of the landscape with which they are associated, rending that quality iconic of a

space or time delineated through other scales (see Keane 2003, 2006 on "bundling,"

discussed in subsequent sections).[37] Yet "chernozem," anchored by science, rose to

become an international term, and the soil it described the "emperor" of them all.

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[37] Keane (2003) characterizes clustering of qualia as "bundling," noting, "material things always combine

Global warming, grandfather Vas'ja deduced, had caused the linden to bloom earlier, and prompted other shifts in seasonal patterns as well. "Heather" (*veresen*) did not necessarily arrive in September, nor "birch sap" (*berezen*) in March. Vas'ja noted that the time calibrated to the astronomical month of June, *cherven*, was likely named for insects from which red (*chervonyj)* dye had been derived, rather than red berries, or fire, or heat, but in Sonjachne, where the fields began to bake by the equinox, people presumed the name came from the warm weather. To most of my interlocutors, the names of months were merely guidelines, easily affected by annual fluctuations and changing climate. Soil types, in contrast, were geographically fixed.



**Figure 3: Beet seeds for sale at Olena's store.** The beet varietal on display is called "Detroit." Also visible, "Rio-Grande" tomatoes. As discussed in Chapter 5, the names of seed varietals—not only in Ukraine, but internationally—often evoke far away places.

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an indefinite number of physical properties and qualities, whose particular juxtapositions may be mere happenstance. In any given practical or interpretive context, only some of these properties and relevant and come into play." Thus, we might say that "chernozem" as "black earth" not only highlights the color of the soil (which, in Keane's terms, is in "excess"), but elevates it as the quality by which the soil is to be principally defined.

**Cartographies of Famine**

Tanja set the steaming bowl of borshch before me, apologizing for its rusty color.

Borshch (Ukr./Rus. борщ, sometimes rendered "borscht" in English, perhaps via

Yiddish), or beet root soup, is a staple food in Ukraine, and while every cook has their

own recipe, it is widely thought that adding the beets after cooking the other ingredients

is the best way to ensure a brilliantly colored broth. Overcooking the beets, in contrast,

makes for a dull, reddish-brownish stew that turns muddy, rather than magenta, with the

addition of sour cream. However, Tanja explained, the rusty color of her borshch was due

to the beets themselves. Like most people I knew in Sonjachne, Tanja grew her beets

herself in the kitchen garden (*ohorod*) behind her home. "In principle," she explained, her

soil was chernozem. However, the acidity of the soil was discoloring her beets, leaving

the insides a pale pink, or even white.[38]

    As Dong-ju Kim (2012), writing about sugar beet production in Poland, observes,

the health of the soil, not always visible to the naked eye, is often inferred through the

plant itself (Tanja's discolored beets) or what surrounds it (weeds, for example). Such

indices, well-read by those familiar with agriculture, are examples of what Alaina Lemon

(2009), drawing on Munn (1986), calls "qualic signs." Lemon notes that "Peircean

qualisigns need not be limited to abstractions from sensation (e.g. 'redness')" and "in

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[38] In my village fieldsites, sweetness and softness were desirable, and sourness (acidity) and dryness were fretted over. Foods that I never knew could be "sweet" (*solodkyj*)—nuts, potatoes, milk, even what English speakers call "sour" cream (*smitana*)—were described as such as an indicator of their high quality. Softness (*m'jakist'*) was desirable in dumpling *(varenyky)* dough, speech ("softness" seems to refer here not only to palatalized consonants, but also the soothing shushing of sh/shch/zh sibilance), and soil. A light acidity (*kyslinkyj),* as in sorrel soup or sour cherries (*vyshni,* as opposed to sweet cherries *chereshy*—my interlocutors make a sharp, informed distinction), could be satisfying, but was often offset in cooking with a dollop of sour cream (which, again, is considered sweet) or a sprinkling of sugar. Even the wide array of famously fermented foods were often accompanied by something to mitigate the bite: kefir was mixed with jam; pickles were consumed with meats and cheese; *horilka* (vodka) was paired with buttery *salo,* fatback. Too much acidity could ruin your stomach, your soil, and, as as Tanja pointed out, your borsch.

practice…apparently general qualisigns come to life …through specific, sense-grounded qualic sinsigns" (85). Thus, Lemon explains, the perceived luster (Rus. *blesk*) in someone's eyes is a manifestation of a qualia that has a particular association depending upon the "someone" reading the sign (78). The rusty color of Tanja's borshch, for some a sign of overcooked beets, was to her evidence that her soil had turned acidic.

The pH of soil is affected by several factors, including rainfall, the use of fertilizers, and the interaction between crops and the surrounding organic and mineral structure of the soil. It can be manipulated through the addition of lime (to make it more alkaline) or gypsum (to increase acidity), or to some extent, through the sowing or avoidance of plants known to affect pH (some plant roots acidify soil in order to increase their own uptake of minerals). While acidity, and other variables in cultivation, such as the presence of pests (see chapter 4), fungi (chapter 5), even viruses, are of deep concern to farmers and soil scientists, they are not central to theories of soil formation nor to taxonomies of soil types. Dokuchaev did attend to the effects of rainfall, parent material, and various organisms on soil formation—all factors that impact pH—but his work was not designed to account for the everyday challenges of farming. Precisely because Dokuchaev was well aware of the impact of agriculture and animal husbandry on soil, he focused on sampling soils that seemed not to have been cultivated. Such "pristine" or "virgin" soils, it was presumed, would provide a baseline to which overworked soils could be restored, or possibly even improved upon (Moon 2013). While later soil science became much more sophisticated, and taxonomies much more narrowly defined, soil *maps* still principally diagram soil *types* without regard for how the soil has been worked, or even if there is anyone working it at all. When produced at great scale, soil maps are

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more "heuristic device[s]" that exhibit scientific consensus regarding broad soil taxonomies rather than locally observed characteristics or contemporary land uses (Selcer 2015: 178, 196).

Tanja's observation that her land was "in principle" (*v printsypi*) chernozem acknowledges this disconnect, but it also suggests that she expected the soil to be reasonably productive precisely because it was "black earth." In this respect, she was not particularly different from early ecologists who, while concerned about soil exhaustion, deforestation, and drought, believed that the chernozem, properly managed, would yield great harvests. I have explained how such valuations of chernozem anchored discourses of Ukraine as "breadbasket," both in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. In this section, I consider how such discourses, and the cartographies that informed them, may have resulted in one of the greatest catastrophes of the Soviet period: the famine of 1932–1933 (1934 by some analyses; see Wolowyna 2016). (This was the largest of three famines that crippled the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in the first half of the 20th century; the others were in 1921–23 and 1946–7.) Additionally, I probe how the seeming paradox of mass starvation on some of the most fertile farmland in the world shaped historiography of the disaster. I turn first to theories of famines, and then to historiography of the Holodomor. Finally, I return to the soil maps, and what the young Soviet state may or may not have seen when it devised its agricultural policy (Scott 1998).

Economist Amartya Sen famously wrote, "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough to eat" (1981: 1). He was writing about the Bengal famine of 1943, but his work had tremendous impact on late/post-Soviet studies of Soviet-era famines. For Sen, famine is

not a problem of overall supply, but of shortfalls in food supply with respect to demand, which send prices spiraling. In Bengal, Sen argues, the trouble was not that there wasn't enough rice produced or stored, but that it had been requisitioned and hoarded by governmental and corporate parties, such that the rice available for purchase by the populace was far less and far more expensive. Wartime scarcity affected the prices of other foodstuffs as well: the lack of wheat, for example, only increased demand for rice. Put simply, people couldn't afford to eat. Sen's model, in suggesting that famine was never solely environmental, prompted other questions: why were people allowed to starve? To what extent was the government aware of the problem? If there was food available, why wasn't aid provided?

Sen's landmark *Poverty and Famines: an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1983[1981]) revealed the political economy of famine. In *Democracy and Freedom* (2000[1999]), he further declared that "no famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy" arguing that in countries with free press and elections, governments were under pressure to avert and manage such disasters. While Sen never in fact stated that famines *were not* caused by environmental factors, and has more recently acknowledged that "it would be a misapprehension to believe that democracy solves the problem of hunger,"[39] his work refocused scholarship on famine on questions of governance and economic actors that impact the *distribution* of food. Literature on the Bengal famine has since highlighted the callousness of the ruling British Empire (Madhusree Mukerjee (2010) specifically takes Winston Churchill to task), which failed to redirect supply to Calcutta, as well as requisitioning by local administrators, who prospered supplying the urban black market (again, at inflated prices), but left the

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[39] Quoted in Massing, Michael. "Does Democracy Avert Famine?" *The New York Times.* March 1, 2013.

countryside to starve (Mukherjee 2015). Janam Mukherjee summarizes, "it was at least as much profit that motivated the rapacity that ravaged Bengal, as it was the colonial creed of racial and cultural superiority" (6).

Development economists' rethinking of the causes of famine coincided with the advent of widely circulated, English-language work on the Soviet famine of 1932-1933, most notably Robert Conquest's 1986 publication of *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror Famine.*[40] Conquest's book, written with the assistance of James Mace, was the first to bring the notion that the Holodomor was not only man-made (as Sen had suggested most famines are), but *intentional*, to a wide, international audience. Moreover, Conquest was the first to argue in an academic work that the famine was a state-sponsored genocide directed specifically against an ethnic Ukrainian population that was resisting Stalinist policies of collectivization. His work was taken up as a banner in Ukrainian diaspora communities, particularly in North America and Britain, to which some survivors of the famine had fled, and whose own efforts to raise awareness of the famine had been, according to Alexander Motyl (2010), "dismissed as émigré delusions" or right-wing propaganda by the Soviet and Western establishments alike. While Conquest's book was also heavily criticized for relying on the testimonies—and funding—of the Ukrainian diaspora,[41] it ultimately legitimized the Holodomor as an object of scholarly inquiry, and situated it within a longer history of Stalinist repression

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[40] It is unclear whether Conquest read Sen's work. Sen is not cited, but narratives about the constructed nature of famine had certainly been circulating prior to his work on Bengal.

[41] See, for example, Jeff Coplon's scathing "In Search of a Soviet Holocaust: A 55-Year Old Famine Feeds the Right" (*Village Voice,* January 12, 1988). It does appear that Conquest was handpicked by the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI) and a Ukrainian diaspora association to study the Holodomor, and that this was likely because of his previous condemnation of the famine in his 1968 book *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties.* The anti-communist agenda of Cold War era Ukrainian diaspora groups cannot be denied, and its critics were right to take to task those who exaggerated the famine or exploited it for political ends. However, there has been more than enough independent research on the Holodomor in the 30 years since to confirm many of Conquest's findings and add nuance to others.

in Ukraine that included dispossession, collectivization, the purging of Ukrainian elites, and the end of *korenizatsija* (Rus. approx. "rooting"), Lenin's progressive policies toward national minorities.

In the years following the publication of *The Harvest of Sorrow,* the emerging field of Ukrainian Studies saw a profusion of writings on the Holodomor. One prominent trend in these new histories and commentaries, whether journalistic, academic, or intended for basic public education, was the tendency to reflect on the irony of mass starvation in the black earth region. While in some cases the quality of the soil seems to have been taken as a given, authors also drew on soil maps or eyewitness testimonies that mentioned chernozem (or Ukrainian "chornozem"). I have bolded each mention for ease of reading:

> "I come from a family that suffered because of these Stalinist repressions. In the Poltava region, land of **chornozem**, my great grandparents died during the winter of 1933, my father's aunts and cousins grandfather Ivan Kolomayets saved his wife and two sons from a similar fate by escaping to the big city, Dnipropetrovsk. Despite this family history, I learned about this "deep dark secret" 1980s, long after he died." (Marta Kolomayets, American journalist and Ukrainian diaspora leader, in *The Ukrainian Weekly,* December 14, 2003.)

> "The areas of greatest [demographic] decline coincide with the fertile **chernozem** belt. The famine was less severe in the podzolized soil regions of the forest steppe, the intrazonal regions and the chestnut soil regions along the Black Sea. *This suggests that the famine was the result of a decision to extract from the most fertile regions of Ukraine and the North Caucasus the maximum amount of grain in order to finance the industrialization* [emphasis Bilinsky's]." (Carynnyk et al., 1988, p xlix; Bilinsky (1999) notably highlights this passage in his article in the *Journal of Genocide Research,* before arguing that the geography of the famine suggested not only economic but ethnic targeting.)

> "To properly understand the narrative of the *Holodomor*, one must start with Ukraine's highly unique geological makeup. The earth beneath much of the country is some of the most fertile soil in the world. It is known as ***chornozem***, literally meaning "black earth," and is up to six meters deep in some regions. Unfortunately—and no matter how inherently fruitful the land—the year 1921 brought an extreme period of despair for the Ukrainian peasantry due to its first major famine." (Emphasis original. Note this educational website, genocideofukraine.com, considers the famine of 1921, possibly caused by the export of needed grain, a precursor to that of 1932–33. Other scholars consider 1921 more akin to earlier steppe famines caused by drought.)

> "The devastation and poverty in the Ukrainian countryside defy description. Furthermore—and characteristically—this state of affairs applies not to the south of Russia per se, but exclusively to Ukraine, for as soon as one crosses the southern border of the USSR the scene chances drastically. In the central **chernozem** area, which differs little from Ukraine in terms of climate and

agriculture, the farmers are incomparably better off. This speaks to the fact that the central administrations agricultural politics in Ukraine were far more rapacious than in other provinces in the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic], with the sole exception of the Northern Caucuses." (Jan Karszo-Siedlewski, head of the Polish consulate in Kharkiv. Dispatch to Polish Embassy in Moscow dated May 8, 1933, and cited in Snyder 2007; Wysocki & Redko 2008; Noack, Janssen, & Comerford 2014.)

As the last excerpt notes, Ukraine is not the only part of the former Soviet Union with chernozem, nor was it the only Soviet Republic to suffer from famine in the early 1930s—even if, Karszo-Siedlewski notes, the requisitions policies were especially "rapacious" there and in the Northern Caucasus. Some scholars have thus been troubled by the historiographic separation of the Ukrainian "Holodomor" from the broader Soviet famine of 1931–1933, which was especially severe in Kazakhstan, and also plagued the black earth belts of southern Russia (Tauger 1991, 2001; Davies & Wheatcroft 2004). While most scholarship on the famine acknowledges that Ukraine suffered mightily, and that excessive grain requisitions were often to blame, what role environmental disaster played and the extent to which ethnicity mattered was less obvious.

With the opening of the Soviet archives in the 1990s, researchers investigating the genocide and/or ethnic cleansing claims began to look for a smoking gun—that is, some evidence of a directive that Ukrainians specifically be denied food. Meanwhile, other researchers focused on environmental data and agricultural records. That there was mass famine, and that the Kremlin knew about it, seems not to have been in doubt. What was in question was the scale of the famine (how many excess deaths there were due to starvation; estimates for the Holodomor range from 2 to 10 million, with most scholars I cite here settling around 3-5 million[42]); whether it was caused by droughts similar to

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[42] There are various methods for counting mortality due to famine. One method is to count only those deaths specifically recorded as being due to starvation during the timeframe defined as one of famine ("registered deaths"). Another method is to include those deaths in which malnutrition was either a proximate cause or an exacerbating factor, but not documented as such; in such cases, one may also

those that plagued the steppe in the past, or if the environmental patterning in this case

was different; to what extent collectivization and dekulakization (the liquidation of small

land and enterprise owners) was to blame; and most importantly, why some places and

people received relief aid and others did not.

Much of the early scholarship on the 1932–1933 famine in Ukraine tended to

emphasize either its environmental causes, and relatedly, the pan-Soviet nature of its

effects (Tauger 1991 and 2001, most notably), or its political ones, and relatedly, its

disproportionate impact on ethnic Ukrainian communities (Conquest 1986; Graziosi

1996; Snyder 2007). However, more recent work has exhibited more nuance on the

periodization of the famine(s), the question of ethnic targeting and/or genocide, and also

employed a wider variety of archival sources (Graziosi 2005 is particularly thoughtful on

all of these counts[43], and notably manages a discussion of "genocide" that sensitively

account for deaths that occurred after the famine "officially" ended. Finally, some demographers include
birth deficits in their calculations—that is, babies not born because mothers were too starved to carry the
fetus to term, or become pregnant at all ("indirect deaths"). In the case of the Holodomor, ethnic Ukrainians
living outside of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (in southern Russia, for example) have at times
also been included in estimated totals. The most recent estimates of excess deaths from the Holodomor tend
to employ the first two methodologies, and also try to account for census data that likely undercounted the
population of Ukraine in 1932—that is, if there were in fact more people than appeared in the census data,
then the losses were likely larger than reported. It seems widely agreed, however, that there will never be a
precise count of the dead, and that even at lower-end Soviet estimates, the famine was catastrophic.
Wolowyna et al (2016) and Rudnytskyi et al (2015) offer especial detailed demographic analyses.

[43] Graziosi (2005) distinguishes between the pan-Soviet famine of 1931–32, and the Ukrainian famine that
continued after the summer of 1932, when other parts of the Soviet Union, including ethnic Russian regions
just across the border from Ukrainian ones, had experienced relief. Drawing on archival evidence including
Stalin's own correspondence, reports from Communist Party officials, and Italian diplomatic wires, he
argues that what began as a perfect storm of unreasonable grain requisitions by Moscow, shortages of labor
and expertise brought on by collectivization and the liquidation of the *kulaky* (kulaks, the landowning class,
often called *pany*, approximately "lords," where I work), and poor weather (although less severe than in
1921–23 and 1946–47), was artificially prolonged as Stalin saw starvation as a useful means of subduing
resistance in the countryside. Graziosi further observes that while the Soviet countryside as a whole was
multinational, this was less the case in Ukraine, where the cities were diverse, but the countryside,
particularly in the affected area, was predominately Ukrainian. "The *peasant* problem was a *national*
problem [emphasis mine]," he explains. "The countryside was indeed targeted to break the peasants, but
with full awareness that the village represented the nation's spine" (104). Thus, he argues that the
exacerbation of the famine had two interlinked outcomes: subduing the countryside, and greatly weakening
Ukrainian nationalist movements, which, the Party had argued, were spurred by Polish spies and other
capitalist enemies of the Soviet project. Graziosi further notes that the Holodomor coincided with the end

considers the Holodomor and the Holocaust in concert, without, as too often happens,

pitting Ukrainian and Jewish suffering against each other[44]). Additionally, scholars have

considered the role of the Holodomor in post-Soviet Ukrainian politics, including

exploring why Eastern Ukrainians—whose ancestors were among those most affected by

the famine—were often less likely to embrace narratives that cast the famine as a

genocide (Motyl 2010; Zhurzhenko 2011). Finally, led by historian Serhii Plokhy, the

Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute (hencefore, HURI) has developed a

multidisciplinary geographical information systems (GIS) project scrutinizing the effects

of the famine both across the southern Soviet Union, as well as *within* the Ukrainian

Soviet Socialist Republic.[45]

The HURI project reveals several trends that give insight into Soviet agricultural

policy at the time of the famine, as well as reveal how soil science, and ecological

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(1932) of "Ukrainianization," the state-sponsored promotion of Ukrainian language, education, and culture supported by *korenizatsija* (Rus., literally "rooting") legislation of 1923. Finally, Graziosi carefully considers to what extent the Holodomor qualifies as a "genocide", engaging both UN definitions, as well as the original work of Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term following World War II. He argues for the use of the term with regard to the Holodomor, but takes pains to distinguish it from the Holocaust, explaining that the Ukrainian famine "did not aim at exterminating the *whole* nation, it did not kill people *directly,* and it was motivated and constructed theoretically and *politically*—might one say 'rationally'?—rather than ethnically or racially" (108, emphasis original).

[44] The comparison of the Holodomor and the Holocaust, however cautious, is uncomfortable for many. This unease is further exacerbated by the documented collaboration (see chapter 4) between some ethnic Ukrainians (particularly in western Ukraine, which was incidentally part of Poland during the Holodomor) and the Nazi regime during World War II, and the involvement of members of groups like the Galician Division of the Waffen SS, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the massacre of Jews and Poles. Indeed, even some contemporary Ukrainian nationalists seem to use the Holodomor as an excuse, or even justification for Ukrainian participation in the massacre of local Jewish populations. (Unfortunately, one need only Google "Holodomor" to quickly fall upon sites blaming Jewish Bolsheviks for the famine.) While this view is certainly not espoused by mainstream Ukrainian or Ukrainian diaspora leadership, the fight to have the Holodomor, and the suffering of Ukrainians under Soviet rule more generally, recognized by the international community has resulted in some bitter, deeply misguided moments. See, for example, the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association's exceptionally tasteless response to the Holodomor's assignment of a comparatively small space in the Canadian Museum of Human Rights—larger spaces were allocated for the Holocaust and to persecution of the First Nations of Canada. University of Ottawa's Ukraine List #452 and #453 archive related news coverage and various scholarly responses.

[45] See gis.huri.harvard.edu for Plokhy's summary, ongoing updates, and more of the "Mapa" project.

mapping more generally, may have shaped those programs. Most notably, it shows that the greatest loss of life occurred not on the southern steppe, where earlier famines had been caused by drought, but further north, in the boreal (forested) regions, or forest-steppe zones (Wheatcroft n.d.; Wolowyna et al 2016; see Figure 4). Also significantly, it finds no clear correlation between mortality and collectivization, nor between ethnicity and death rate. Plokhy (n.d.), summarizing the work of several researchers, notes that these observations complicate both environmental and political explanations of famine: the maps suggest that the famine of 1932–1933 was not merely another episode of drought on the steppe (5), but it also was not solely caused by collectivization and the purging of small landowners (7), nor necessarily a desire to specifically target ethnic Ukrainians (21; see Plokhy's discussion of the famine's impact on rural Jewish communities, but see also Graziosi's discussion of the "peasant problem [as] a national problem" in footnote 43).

Rather, Plokhy finds that Soviet planners continuously prioritized grain production on the steppe, while the boreal regions were assigned to a less familiar crop: sugar beet (7). As the presumed breadbasket for the Soviet Union, the southern steppe regions of Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, and Donetsk were the first to be collectivized, in part because it was thought that collectivized work might be an asset in an area known to suffer droughts (Note that there were only seven regions at this time; the others were Vinnytsja, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv.) While Plokhy makes clear that collectivization drives, which purged small landowners and disrupted extant agricultural practices, likely contributed to the famine, he points out that collectives were the first to receive technological investments that helped off-set some of the loss of labor. The comparative

availability of tractors meant people in the steppe regions were able to sow and harvest more. Finally, Plokhy explains that the steppe received famine relief aid first. "Moscow needed peasants to live, or least die at a slower rate, in areas that produced most grain—a policy that benefited southern Ukraine," he acridly concludes (16).
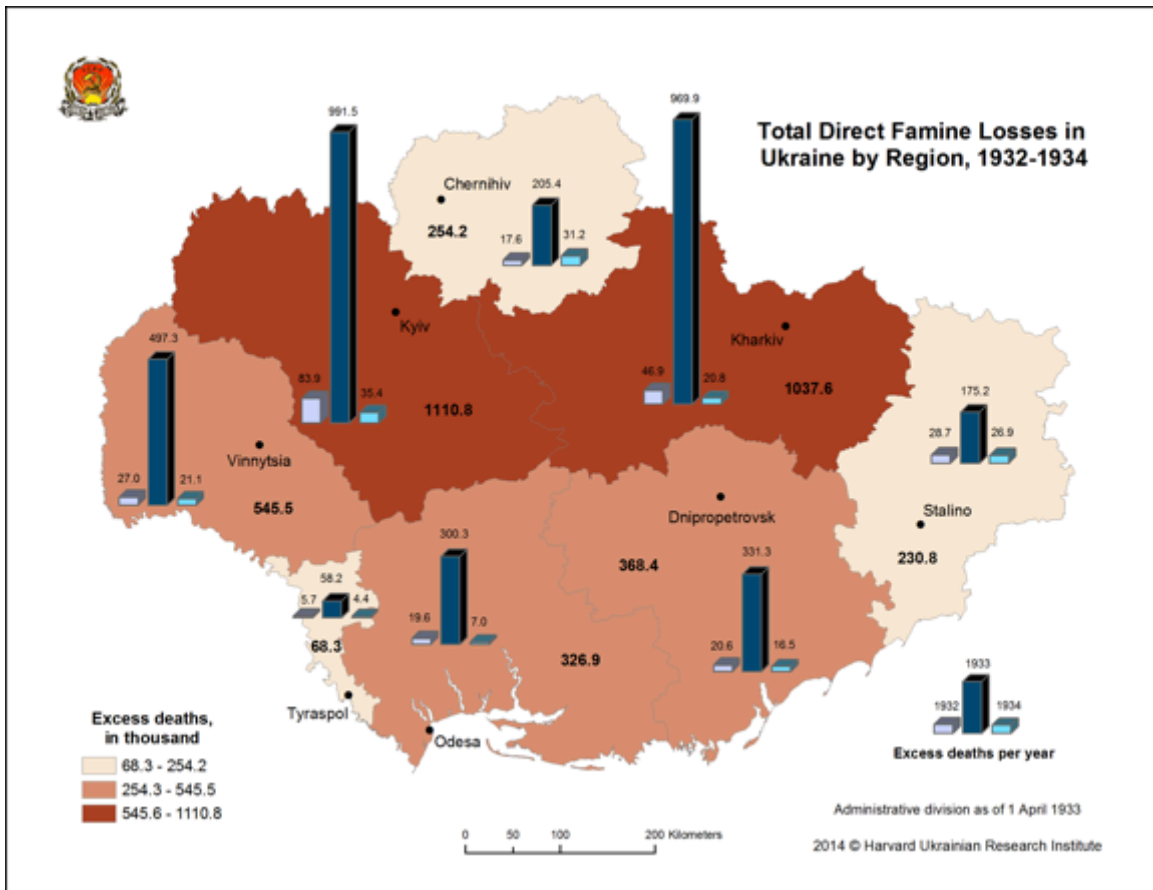


**Figure 4: Map of population loss during the famine of 1932–1934.** The darker regions had lower rates of collectivization and were more likely to be focused on sugar beets rather than wheat. "Sonjachne" was in Odessa region at this time; "Zelene Pole" was part of Kyiv region, but became Vinnytsja region in 1932.

In contrast, the forested and forest-steppe transition zones to the north (Vinnytsja, Kyiv, and Kharkiv) were less collectivized, and therefore had received less technological investment. Additionally, to encourage collectivization—or rather, to discourage resistance—Moscow initially set grain requisition rates *higher* for rural people *not* part of a collective (this changed after the onset of famine, with the southern regions bearing more of the burden, 12). Finally, these regions had recently been charged with the

production of sugar beet, which meant that there was less land available for traditional wheat in the first place, and that labor resources were often diverted for the beets. When villages inevitably failed to reach their quotas, they were blacklisted: stores were closed and stripped of their inventory; local leadership was purged, and in many cases, arrested; government loans were required to be immediately repaid; and the NKVD (secret police) sealed the territory to prevent the flow of goods in and out (21; see also Wolowyna, et al 2016: 193, citing Andriewsky 2015). Most critically, as penalty, police confiscated families' personal food supplies: their animals, storage crops, homecanned goods, even seed stock. The lack of food in the countryside led villagers, particularly men, to head to the cities to find provisions, even though the new internal passport system had placed strict restrictions on villagers' movements, such that those who left risked being severely punished (10; see also the testimony from Kolomayets, above, and Snyder 2007, who notes that these restrictions specifically targeted Ukrainian citizens). In their absence, and because of the weakness of the starving, even fewer fields were worked, and production fell further. This cascade of effects was what led to over 2 million excess deaths between 1932–1934 in Kyiv and Kharkiv regions alone.[46]

Mortality rates were lower in industrial centers, near forests (where one could find berries, mushrooms, and birds), and also close to the (then) Soviet-Romanian and Soviet-Polish borders, which were well-stocked to discourage locals from fleeing (19). But in central, rural, sugar beet producing areas, such as northeastern Vinnytsja, where the village I call Zelene Pole is located, the local archives are filled with testimonies of people who survived on nettles, shrubs, weeds, the tiniest bit of hoarded flour. Many

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[46] Population losses as depicted by HURI 2014. See here for related map and bibliography. http://gis.huri.harvard.edu/historical-atlas/the-great-famine/famine-galleries/famine-map-gallery/demography/population-losses/direct-famine-losses-in-ukraine-by-region-1932-1934.html

mention the distress of having their family's animals and storage crops taken away as compensation—or punishment—for failure to meet requisitions. Others note that there was food for purchase in the cities, but that villagers had nothing with which to buy it. Their pantries bare, they turned to eating their dairy cows, or even their horses, which further limited their ability to work fields.[47] Among the most disturbing testimonies are those that allude to cannibalism: one mentions a desperate woman who butchered her child, and was taken to the village rada still carrying its remains in a sack, then banished to who knows where. Among the most heart-wrenching are those that document how the horror of the famine continues to torment those who survived it: one guilt-ridden witness describes how her mother stole a small amount of grain from the harvest to make ten very thin pancakes (*mlyntsi*) for the family's five children. When the witnesses' youngest sister, only five at the time, finished just one pancake before dying, the witness explains that she was not even sad at the time, just relieved to have a little more to eat.[48]

Weeds, horses, crepes from stolen grain: these are not foodstuffs that show up on any Ukrainian or Soviet agricultural map or production plan. They are not anticipated products of the black earth. The testimonies taken near Zelene Pole do not meditate on soil types or agricultural policies. Rather, they focus on the experience of hunger itself. This may be because the collections I have consulted here were largely assembled in the post-independence era, and gathered from people who were still quite small during the peak of the famine. Perhaps hunger is all they recall. However, it may also be because for

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[47] Horses and dairy cows are likely often mentioned not only because they are not regularly eaten in Ukraine, or because they represent a loss of both investment and food supply, but because villagers grow close to these animals because of how they work with them.

[48] A selection of these testimonies, and ones similar to them, can be found in Kasatkina, et al. 2009. *Likholittja Holodomoru: Khronika Kozjatins'koho Rajonu.* Vinnytsja, Ukraine: TOV Konsol'. See also Vilchins'ka, Zoja. 2013. *Nasha Historija: Administratyvno-Terytorial'no Ustrij, Suspil'no-Polytychna Istorija Kozjatynshchyny v Konteksti Istoriji Ukrajiny z Najdavnishykh Chasiv do S'ohodennja.* Vinnytsja, Ukraine: Vinnyts'ka Kartografichna Fabrika.

these witnesses, there is no argument about whether the famine happened, or why it happened. For them, there is nothing "ironic" about starvation on the black earth, because there is no mystery in the origins of the famine. The answer is simple: people starved because their food was taken away. The result would have been the same no matter what kind of soil they had.

In tracking the trajectory of the famine, and in arguing that it was the result of specific decisions made on the part of the Soviet government, historiographers of the Holodomor have often "zoomed out," employing cartographies that diagram knowledge of the land from above. The twist to such an approach is that one risks falling prey to the "high modernism" (Scott 1998) of the Soviet agricultural planners, who, convinced by the potential of the black earth and science's ability to harness it, imposed exorbitant requisitions on precisely those areas that soil maps of the time depicted having great swathes of chernozem. Ukrainians who died during the famine perished not *in spite of* the country's grain producing ability, but *because* of it. Aid came first to the grain-planted southern steppe to ensure there would bread for Soviet tables. On a most crude level, we might say what made the difference in who perished in the Holodomor, and who did not, was whether their farm was charged with producing beets or wheat.

Scalar projects that map the land, assigning qualities, purposes, and potentials to different spaces, are constructed by humans, and are artifacts of their commitments. Soil taxonomies and maps reflect the discipline's "bundling" of certain qualia, such that some features (color, in the case of chernozem) are "in excess," while others (acidity, for example) are obscured, or not accounted for at all (Keane 2003, 2006). Such diagrams outline what is—as Tanja reminds us—"in principle" true, based on the principles the

producers have devised, ranked, elected to represent, or simply assumed. Just as important as the production of diagrams, however, are their subsequent uses. Ecological maps that were, for the scientists who developed them, active and contested, became bedrock for the agricultural planners deciding where to focus collectivization efforts and, relatedly, the distribution of tractors and the production of wheat. Later, such maps guided the allocation of famine relief. Decades onward, researchers investigating the political origins of the famine layered together soil maps and data on population loss, commenting on the paradox of such great loss of life in the black earth belt. By the time I was doing my fieldwork, my interlocutors were concerned with a related paradox: a rich land filled with poor people. And this time, the extractions they were most concerned with were not of food, but of the soil itself.



**Figure 5: Topsoil near Zelene Pole.**

**The Soil Stealers**

In the peak of Ukrainian summer, sprawling fields undulate with wheat and dazzle with sunflowers. In the introduction, I described how my Ukrainian friends would capture the color and design of the national flag in photos of harvest yellow fields beneath blue skies. In my travels on public buses and trains, however, I found that there was another agrarian scene that could prompt excitement from my fellow passengers: a freshly tilled field of black earth. The smell of such topsoil—pleasantly damp, clean, a bit chilly—rarely permeated the moving vehicles, but the dark color was vivid. Invariably, it would happen that the person sitting next to me, having determined I was a foreigner, would urge me to look at the upturned earth, and tell me that this substance was their country's greatest treasure. If the person were especially exuberant, they would further point out that about 30 percent of the world's total chernozem lies within the borders of Ukraine. And not infrequently, this fact would be followed by the declaration that because of its rich soil, Ukraine *should* be a wealthy country, but it's not.

Chernozem, or soil more generally, while often considered a natural, God-given gift, is etched with the social relations of the community in which it is found (Marx 1847). It is material in how it is seeded, tended, traded, and mapped by the human population that depends on it. Harvest is never guaranteed, nor do bumper crops automatically bring profits. Nevertheless, during my time in Ukraine, I found that my interlocutors, both rural and urban, repeatedly contrasted the richness of the country's soil with the poverty of the citizenry in a manner that suggested that this was ironic, unnatural, or the result of deviant behavior. Farmers, investors, development workers, taxi drivers, school teachers, computer programmers, and urbanites who, as, Olena, my

host in Sonjachne, would say, "think potatoes grow on trees"—time and again, people would tell me that a country as wealthy in soil as Ukraine shouldn't be so poor.

Linguistic and semiotic anthropology offers several ways to think about how seemingly disparate discursive domains come to be aligned. I have mentioned two already: *iconicity*, in which signs (such as soil maps) "recapitulate" their objects (the land such maps diagram) and naturalize a socially-mediated linkage (Mannheim 2000); and *interscaling*, in which one scalable variable is presumed to be in direct relationship with another (Carr & Lempert 2016; Philips 2016). After pointing out the richness of chernozem, and Ukraine's sizeable reserves of it, many of my interlocutors would quickly jump to Ukraine's economic fragility, and lament the country's failure to harness its agricultural potential. For them, more and better soil (as diagrammed on maps) was presumed interscaled with greater exports and profits.

Another way to think about such statements, however, is to consider how specific qualia (or "qualic signs," or "qualities," if we refer to their material manifestations) become tied to particular ideologies about social and economic well-being. Above, I mentioned how "redness" (Peirce's classic example of qualia), when manifested in beet or borshch, was taken to index the health of the soil. For urbanites zipping by fields on intercity trains, however, the inky color of the upturned soil was taken as a sign not only of fertility, but of productivity, even potential for income. Krisztina Fehérváry (2014), writing about home design in socialist and post-socialist Hungary, elaborates on how different "qualities"—grayness, boxiness, openness, naturalness—prompted "affective responses to the sociopolitical and economic ideologies with which they were aligned" (3). She further notes that there was often a certain iconicity between the qualities and the

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meanings or sentiments they were presumed to provoke. Following Fehérváry, then, presumed connections between the richness of the soil, the abundance of its deposits, and the would-be wealth of the nation reveal familiar patterning. Fehérváry's larger project, however, is to explore how the alignment between "aesthetic regimes" and "wider sociocultural values" "naturalize" connections across domains, such as "the relationship between state socialism and grayness, or capitalism with color" (8).[49] She does not suggest that there is any limit on the number of qualities that can become associated with a particular regime or value, nor on the number of regimes or values that can become associated with a particular quality. Rather, such multiplicities are what facilitate reconfigurations of meaning.

I find Fehérváry's insights useful for analyzing soil stealing narratives such as the one with which I opened this chapter, and to which I return to here. While I have focused thus far on the "blackness" and "richness" of the soil, narratives about the extraction of the black earth require attending to another quality, which I will call "portability." Following Webb Keane (2003, 2006), I suggest that "portability" is a quality of chernozem that is "bundled" with, and normally subordinate to, "blackness," "richness," and "fixity"—all qualities that soil science and the production of soil maps have tended to naturalize. "Portability" becomes salient, however, when the soil is intentionally moved away from the location where it was formed. (Or near where it was formed. Also lost in soil maps is the reality that soil is naturally mobile, and is constantly being redistributed by water and wind. This is why, for my purposes, "portability" is more precise than

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[49] Fehérváry is drawing here on Keane's notions of semiotic ideology, and of *representational economy,* which he defines as "the dynamic interconnections among different modes of signification at play within a particular historical and social formation" (Keane 2003: 2).

"mobility."). During my fieldwork, I found that "portability," and relatedly, "exchangeability," of agricultural products was more often than not understood to bring wealth to the nation. Ease of transport was associated with open markets and entrepreneurship; the ability to engage in trade without restriction was considered something that could benefit both the dairywomen who sold milk in recycled plastic bottles at local bazaars, as well as the farmers who sold sunflower seed to foreign-operated crushers (see chapter 5). In contrast, the detachment of chernozem from the land was usually described as threat and theft. Soil miners were described as "poachers," even "fascists." In what follows, I argue that topsoil removal was perceived as an extraction of both extant wealth, as well as future earnings. Additionally, looking toward the next chapter, I aim to show that the *partibility* of the land—its ability to be divided into plots and sold, or re-sectioned among countries, or, in the case of topsoil, separated from its geographic anchor—troubled not only its presumed immobility, but the permanence of Ukraine itself.

To be clear, not all instances of topsoil removal in Ukraine were considered problematic, or threatening to national security. For example, provided one obtained a soil removal permit, it was perfectly legal to sell the earth removed during the course of a construction project. One was actually expected to find a way to put the soil to good use. Thus, soil was not necessarily "inalienable wealth" that was to be forever kept from circulation (Weiner 1985). This was also true for soil classified as chernozem: Kyiv Metro cars were plastered with homemade fliers specifically advertising "black earth." In fact, chernozem appeared to function as either a synonym for "topsoil" in Ukraine, or was the only sort of soil anyone was willing to purchase in the first place. The soil stealing

narratives I discuss below, however, are about chernozem that was extracted by foreign invaders or mined by locals while authorities looked the other way. I return first to the stories from the World War II era, and then compare and contrast them with news reports about illegal soil mines from my research period. Finally, I consider the interdiscursive work of a 2016 "fake news" story about Sweden's intent to purchase topsoil from Ukraine.

I arrived in Ukraine already familiar with soil stealing narratives. I had heard about the World War II era variants from a Ukrainian language teacher shortly after beginning to study the country. However, as I had not seen theft of soil mentioned in the numerous Ukrainian history books I had consulted, I had tended to think of the soil stealing stories as rumors that pointed to the traumas of invasion and, in a harrowing echo of the Holodomor, loss of control over the food supply.[50] While the 21st century soil stealing narratives I will discuss shortly likely have purchase because of these ordeals (or rather, because of how these ordeals continue to be made meaningful to contemporary Ukrainians), there are reasons to think that topsoil removal did occur during the Third Reich's occupation of Ukraine (1941–1944), or at least in the area where I was working. First, the Reichskommisariat Ukraine, which stretched across the length of the Ukrainian SSR (minus the southwest, including Odessa, which was allotted to Axis-aligned Romania), was headquartered in the west-central town of Rivne (Rus. Rovno; Ger. Rowno). Southeast of Rivne, just north of Vinnytsja, was the "Werwolf" complex, where

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[50] "Extraction" rumors are found in other place that have been subjected to colonization, invasion, or other processes in which one population comes to be dominated by another. For example, White (1993, 2000) analyzes rumors about firemen and game rangers who sucked the blood of East Africans under British colonization. Mannheim & Van Vleet (1998) scrutinize narratives about fat-sucking machines that turn bus-riding Andean peasants' lipids into Nivea cream for urban elites. Kirsch (2002) traces rumors about poisoned pigs and HIV positive prostitutes in West Papua.

Hitler himself spent the summer and autumn of 1942. The complex included bunkers and a swimming pool, both of which would have required the removal of soil. The place where Kateryna K. (see testimony at the outset of this chapter) witnessed the loading of train cars lies approximately midway between these two points. The bulk of soil stealing stories I have heard come this general area, which was near major Nazi command centers and train lines. Soil could have been unearthed or redistributed in local Reich projects, or easily transported westward.

Second, Hitler's concern with the German need for living space (*Lebensraum*) has been well-documented.[51] Most recently, in a book called *Black Earth,* Timothy Snyder (2015) built upon this work to detail Hitler's plan for the German colonization of Ukrainian soil, the extermination of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" threat, and the eventual enslavement of Slavs. One of Hitler's motivations, Snyder writes, was that Germany had lost World War I in part because of the effectiveness of the Allied blockade, which left import-dependent Germany short of food. Additionally, Germany was stung from the loss of its colonies in Africa. Referencing *Mein Kampf*, Snyder argues that Hitler saw the future of German colonization not in Africa, but in Eastern Europe. For Hitler, Snyder explains, Slavs were not only *Untermenschen* inferior to the Aryan race, but undeserving of the rich land they inhabited. Drawing on *Table Talk*[52], an edited collection of remarks made by Hitler during his private conversations and transcribed by his secretaries, Snyder

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[51] See Smith 1980 for a classic discussion of the origins of the ideology of *Lebensraum*. In recent years, historians of Germany have turned their attention to understanding the origins of Nazi imperialism and the Holocaust through studies of late 19th / early 20th century German colonization of Africa, including the mass extermination of Herero and Namaqua peoples in Namibia (eg. Baranowski 2010; Langbehn & Salama 2011). They have also compared and contrasted U.S. expansionism in the American West to Nazi colonization in Europe's East (eg. Guettel 2012; Kakel 2013).

[52] *Table Talk* is considered a valid primary source, but there is some controversy about the accuracy of the translated versions. Snyder cites *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–1944*. Translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens. New York: Enigma Books, 2000.

extracts cringe-worthy commentary: "It is inconceivable," Hitler is described as stating,

"that a higher people should painfully exist on a soil too narrow for it, while amorphous

masses, which contribute nothing to civilization, occupy infinite tracts of soil that is one

of the richest in the world."[53] As for what should be done with the people of the black

earth once it was under German control, Hitler apparently suggested (whether this was

sarcastic seems besides the point) giving them "opportunities to dance," as well as

"scarves, glass beads, and everything colonial peoples like" (Snyder, 18).

Relatedly, and finally, the Reichskommisariat that occupied Ukraine did treat the

land and people as a colony to be exploited. The Nazis—and some collaborating

Ukrainians—emptied the country of undesirables: Jews, Roma, the disabled,

homosexuals, Communists. The Nazis also seized objects of value, including food,

artwork, raw materials, and heavy machinery, and loaded it onto trains bound for

Germany. Finally, they requisitioned the people. Some 2 million *Ostarbeiter* (Ger.

"Eastern Workers"), including girls as young as twelve, were sent to Germany to labor in

Axis factories. While some of these Ukrainian (as well as other Slavic) workers migrated

willingly, others were forced, and all were subject to Nazi law that denied them freedom

of movement, safe living and working conditions, adequate nutrition, or even subsistence

wages. Meanwhile, those who remained in Ukraine were put to work in fields and

factories to produce food and equipment for the Axis.[54] Thus, while it does seems odd

that the Nazis would the mine the soil of a land they intended to exploit for agriculture,

doing so would not have been out of line with their broader treatment of Ukraine as a

colony from which to extract resources. David Dent, a British soil scientist who has spent

[53] It should be acknowledged that the concept of "manifest destiny" in the 19th century United States was hardly different.

[54] Useful sources for this history include Subtelny 2009 (fourth edition), Berkhoff 2008, and Liber 2016.

much of his life studying chernozem in Moldova and Ukraine, makes another reasonable

point: "Common sense, as opposed to soil science and economics, suggest that it is a

good idea to transport that best soil in the world to where you might want it. After all,

keen gardeners buy bags and bags of compost and even topsoil."[55]

However widespread Nazi soil stealing was, or was not, my interlocutors were

overwhelmingly certain that this crime had occurred, and encountered sources that

seemed to confirm it on a regular basis. (A few people described the stories as rumors

cooked up by Moscow to mobilize Ukrainians against the Nazis.) While older people

sometimes mentioned knowing, or knowing someone who knew, an eyewitness, younger

people often pointed to the history textbooks they had used in school. In the Ukrainian

history textbooks I examined, I found that Nazi soil stealing was generally presented as

short, crisp historical fact. I have translated one typical passage:

> From the beginning of the occupation until March of 1944, the occupiers removed from Ukraine 9.2 million tons of grain, 622,000 tons of meat and millions of tons of other produce, filling 1418 thousand [sic] train cars. There was a mass heist [*prohrabuvannja*] of factory equipment, raw materials, agricultural commodities, even black earth [*navit' chornozem*]. More than 40,000 of the most valuable works of art, historical relics, and other collections were taken to Germany. 2.4 million people were sent to Germany as forced laborers, the majority young people. (Levydska, N.M., 2010).[56]

Passages such as these in school textbooks, as well as other histories of the Nazi

occupation of the Soviet Union, add authority and heft to narratives about soil stealing.

In the excerpt above, "*even* black earth" (emphasis mine) further underlines the avarice of

the invading Nazis: to seize agricultural commodities (as happened during the

Holodomor) is brutal, but to demand the very soil they grow in is even more extreme.

Hitler's desire for the black earth is documented in other Soviet and Ukrainian-

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[55] Personal communication, March 20, 2014. Dent also shared a most harrowing rumor with me about trains from occupied Transnistria leaving filled with Jews, and returning filled with soil. He was working in what is now Moldova, in an area to the west of the Vapnjarka concentration camp in Vinnytsja region.
[56] In addition to skimming textbooks from community schools, I conducted online research. I accessed this passage through *pidruchniky.com,* an open-access program for searching Ukrainian textbooks.

produced writings on World War II as well. One recurring event described is a 1941 meeting in Uman (central Ukraine) in which Hitler showed off his new land to Mussolini when the latter visited him to oversee Italian Blackshirts fighting on the Eastern Front. Eberle & Uhl (2006), drawing on a dossier prepared for Stalin about Hitler, include a quite literary conversation in which Hitler contrasted the "most fertile soil on earth" of Ukraine with the "stony soil" of Italy, and declared Ukraine "the breadbasket of the new Europe" (74). While the dossier prepared for Stalin was supposedly a state secret, other accounts of this meeting, and Hitler's comments on the chernozem, circulate in other venues. A popular history written by a veteran of the Axis-aligned Ukrainian National Army describes the same meeting in Uman, and a speech Hitler supposedly gave on the occasion, in terms almost Biblical:

> Hitler spoke to foreign diplomats after a trip with Mussolini to the headquarters in Uman in late 1941. "Ukrainian chornozem is enthralling, and the harvests coming from the endless fields of Ukraine are marvelous." After these spectacular images he continued further with unrestrained enthusiasm: "I found the environment flowing with milk and honey; the land here is the most productive in Europe. However the people here are so miserably poor that it's difficult to believe" (Burtyk, 1994, translation mine).[57]

I include this excerpt here despite its obvious exaggerations because of what is evident in the last line: the contrasting of the wealth of the land with the poverty of the people, a familiar trope at least as meaningful to contemporary Ukrainians as it was to the Nazis.

Narratives about the Nazi desire for the black earth add to the mystique of the chernozem while reinforcing the notion that Ukraine is so rich in soil, and therefore food-producing potential, that foreigners want to occupy and exploit it. However, these narratives have also colored discourse about contemporary soil "poaching", or the illegal

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[57] The author Ivan Burtyk, a committed Ukrainian nationalist, cites Holocaust denier David Irving's largely discredited *Hitler's War* (1977) with regard to this meeting, and elsewhere in his text. Burtyk's *Ternystyj shljakh druhoji dyviziji UNA* (The thorny path of the 2nd division of the Ukrainian National Army), and similar popular histories (some quite problematic) can be found at: galiciadivision.national.org.ua/library/.

mining and sale of topsoil by (presumably) fellow Ukrainians. As noted above, topsoil

advertised as "chernozem" circulates freely in the Ukrainian economy, and not all of it is

illicitly obtained. However, during my fieldwork, news reports regularly covered the

discovery of great hollowed-out fields from which soil had been mined, and the

condemnation of the 21st century "fascists" who abused the land. For example, in May of

2013, the popular Ukrainian online news outlet *Tsensor* published a photo of a fit young

man standing in a ravine near the eastern city of Luhansk (now under separatist rule).

However, it was not a ravine, but rather an enormous pit that had been cut out of

meadow. "Yesterday I was relaxing in the countryside near the village of Rozkoshnoe,

and I saw a place from which a large quantity of chernozem had been stolen," the man in

the photo explained. "Earlier there were gardens[58] in this place; now the grounds have

been abandoned. But that doesn't mean just anyone can take (Rus. *snimat'*) the fertile

topsoil, as only the fascists did (Rus. *tak tol'ko fashisty delaly*)."[59]

Illegal soil sales should not be taken as an Eastern Ukrainian phenomenon.

Rather, the largest market for illegal black earth was found near the ring road around

Kyiv, where newly built suburbs of mini-mansions requiring landscaping swallowed up

aging villages of blue-washed houses (*syn'ky*) and kitchen gardens. In 2012, the

discovery of soil extractions two meters deep near the town of Hostomel commanded a

flurry of news coverage. A TSN news network story on the Hostomel soil "poachers"

noted that they were likely working in league with corrupt officials from the local

government and state land agency.[60] The report also alleged that the "fascists" (meaning

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[58] Probably dachas, or small plots where urbanites could grow food for themselves during the Soviet era.
[59] May 6, 2013: *Na Luganshchyne vyvoziat chernozem: "tak tol'ko fashisty delaly."* Censor.net.ua.
[60] May 15, 2012. *Vitchyznjani "fashisty" torhujut chornozemom pid nosom u pravookhorontsiv.* TSN News.

the Nazis) took only the first 10–20 centimeters of topsoil, a statistic whose source I have yet to locate, but which made the contemporary soil miners look especially brazen.

In contrast to the Nazi soil stealing stories, which circulated without images and largely without details, the 21st century reports of soil mining featured shareable smartphone images of individuals standing in the great ditches left behind by the extraction. My sense is that, for many of my interlocutors, reports of contemporary soil mining added credence to the World War II era accounts, which in turn reinforced other national narratives about the victimhood of Ukraine by a stream of foreign occupiers. However, in the lead up to the Maidan Revolution, news about soil mining was informed by other accounts of theft, corruption, and poor governance in Ukraine, as well. The equation of soil poachers with "fascists," as seen in the examples above, typifies soil stealing as particularly aberrant behavior. However, in indexing the Nazi occupation, it also suggests that soil miners, and those that enable them, are acting *like* invaders that exploit the land and citizenry. This time, those labeled "fascists" are not foreign aggressors, but rather enemies within.

The interdiscursive work of the term "fascist" (Ukr./Rus. *fashist*), and its role in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, will be further discussed in chapter 4. However, the question of who imperils or protects Ukrainian agricultural lands has been a major theme in the "information war" between Kyiv and Moscow that has been ongoing since the Maidan Revolution. For example, publications skeptical of the revolutionary government, or of the interests of the "West" in Ukraine, have circulated a barrage of articles about the role of U.S.-based agrochemical companies grabbing land and factories in Ukraine, or

introducing genetically modified seed.[61] (Not surprisingly, Monsanto is frequently mentioned; meanwhile, the outsized role of Russian as well Ukrainian domestic agroholdings goes ignored.) More recently, European businesses have also been depicted as threatening the Ukrainian countryside.

In 2015, Russian news outlets and social media platforms (including anti-Maidan groups followed by Ukrainians) began to report that Sweden was negotiating the purchase of 50 to 100 million tons of Ukrainian chernozem for just 5 euros per ton. The soil, it was said, would come from the chernozem-rich Poltava region and be used for a nature reserve in the Scandinavian country.[62] When asked about the rumors, however, Swedish officials appeared puzzled. In after-the-fact analyses of the kerfuffle, some commentators suggested that the rumor was meaningful because: first, Sweden, aligned with the Ukrainian Cossack Hetmanate, had actually battled Russia for administrative control of Poltava in 1709 and lost, accelerating its decline as a great Northern power; and second, European and Russian agribusinesses (and Europe and Russia more generally) have recently competed for land and influence in Ukraine.[63] Such analyses peel back only the outermost layers, however. In my view, what gave this rumor legs, particularly among people skeptical of the new, pro-revolutionary government in Kyiv, was its entanglement with other, more recent reports of soil mining—reports which condemned not only "poachers," but "fascist" officials who allowed extractions to happen in the first place. In the Swedish soil sale rumor, in which the only players listed

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[61] See, for example, a series of articles from the rather dubious "Center for Research on Globalization."

[62] July 8, 2015. "Sweden extracts unique Ukrainian chernozem at 5 euros per ton" (*Shvetsija vyvozit unikal'nye ukrainskie chernozjomy po 5 jevro za tonnu)*. Antifashist.com. Similar stories can be found on ukraina.ru and novorosinform.org, both pro-separatist sites. Bizarrely, as I prepare to submit this dissertation in 2017, this rumor has resurfaced, now with claims that the Swedes have already bought and retrieved the topsoil.

[63] July 22, 2015. "Why Sweden and Russia are fighting over soil." thelocal.se; July 28, 2015. "Fake: Sweden's Purchase of Ukrainian Black Soil" stopfake.org.

are "Sweden" and "Ukraine," "Ukraine" appears at best corrupt and incapable of self-governance, and at worst, an enemy of her own land and people.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has surveyed how black earth soil figures in narratives of occupation, resource extraction, and civic disorder in contemporary Ukraine, giving specific attention to the semiotic processes through which "chernozem" came to be valued as key to the country's elusive prosperity. I emphasized the role of diagrams, specifically soil maps, in naturalizing scientifically-defined categories, erasing the reasons for which they produced, and depicting a "view from nowhere." I argued that the charting of the reserves of black earth soil across the Russian Empire, and the designation of chernozem as the "emperor of soils," created new scales of anticipated production, as well as the expectation that black earth regions could be "breadbaskets" for people living far beyond their borders. I analyzed how the interscaling of the richness of the soil and the size of expected yields belies the complexity of agricultural production, and the people, policies, and unpredictabilities that affect the success of a harvest. Finally, I showed how one less conspicuous quality of soil, "portability," became salient when chernozem was (or was rumored to be) extracted in volume by, or sold to, foreigners.

This chapter has also served as a rough introduction to the history that inflects much of this project: the settlement of the steppe; collectivization; famine; World War II. Readers will notice that I have not yet discussed the nuclear disaster at Chornobyl, which resulted in the contamination of some 2,600 square kilometers of Ukrainian land alone (and more in Belarus), some of which was black earth, or other quality farmland. I will

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turn my attention to Chornobyl, and relatedly, nuclear disarmament, in chapters 4 and 5.

This is in part because this chapter is focused on the first half of the 20th century, but

primarily because, at least in my field research, chernozem and nuclear disaster were not

discussed in tandem. While anti-nuclear movements had gained traction in other post-

Soviet states, they quickly petered out in Ukraine, where nuclear energy actually become

increasingly valued as a means of becoming independent of Russian gas (Dawson 1996).

Meanwhile, particularly following the 2004 election of President Viktor Yushchenko, the

Holodomor was "instrumentalized" to build a new national identity in which Ukraine was

a ""postgenocide" community, a collective victim of the Communist regime"

(Zhurzhenko 2011: 633). The Holodomor was emphasized in school curricula; tiny

villages like Sonjachne (which otherwise had little budget for new books) had prominent

displays of new volumes on the famine. That the Holodomor was *intentional*, and then

suppressed or denied, was central to the narrative—this, too, set it apart from Chornobyl,

which was widely understood as an accident followed by a cover-up. In 2010, however,

Viktor Yanukovych became president. On day one in office, he removed the

"Holodomor" link from the presidential website. His education minister, Dmytro

Tabachnyk, declared the Holodomor was not a genocide, and set about revising the state

history curriculum to reflect his own view that the famine was primarily environmental in

origins, and a pan-Soviet disaster rather than particularly Ukrainian experience. In many

parts of the country, however, this move seemed to only entrench educators' and

activists' commitments to teaching about the Holodomor, and about Ukrainian suffering

under Soviet rule more generally.

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork (2010–2014), in multinational Sonjachne as well as almost uniformly Ukrainian Zelene Pole, the Holodomor was the primary historical narrative through which my informants described the excesses of the Soviet regime. Soil stealing stories do similar work in the sense that they also point to the exploitation of the land, and the extraction of resources. However, the villains in these narratives are always *non-Soviets*. The World War II accounts stressed the brutality of the Nazis—and, as in Kateryna K.'s testimony, the heroics of ordinary people. The news reports on contemporary soil mines chastised those who would steal the wealth of the people, as well as the corrupt officials who look the other way. The "fake news" stories that claimed Sweden was purchasing the rich soil of Poltava for a pittance preyed upon fears of increasing Western influence in the agricultural sector, as well as a government that seemed too beholden to Brussels and Washington.

Where Holodomor narratives and soil stealing stories intersect is in their deep concern with the loss of control over the land, and consequently, the food supply. These anxieties persist in contemporary Ukraine: since 2001, there has been a complete moratorium on the buying and selling of privatized agricultural lands. Those who wish to farm a field that is not their own may lease a plot, but they cannot buy it outright. As decollectivization only proceeded in the late 1990s, and land only became available for titling in late 2001, this means that independent Ukraine has never had a land market open to either foreign or domestic traders—not a legal one, that is. The next chapter connects the ideological work of the moratorium, and legal language more generally, to discourses about Ukraine's supposedly stalled "transition" from post-Soviet life, and its failure to establish "rule of law."

**Fields**

*Bez bumazhki ty bukashka; s bumashkoj, chelovek.*
Without papers, you're a bug; with them, you're a person.
—Vasiliy Lebedev Kumach, "Songs of the Bureaucrat," 1931

The moratorium on agricultural land sales that was put in place in 2001 was actually a reconfiguration of the 1992 ban on the sale of the "cooperatives" that had succeeded the collective farms of the Soviet era. While state-owned industries had been snapped up by enterprising oligarchs-to-be, agricultural lands were intentionally withheld from the market. Decollectivization and privatization proceeded slowly. In the late 1990s, former collective farmers were issued vouchers (*sertifikaty*) that guaranteed them the right to a certain amount of land, usually around 4 hectares, but not a specific piece of land. The process of assigning private plots began only after the turn of the millennium, and it took some time for the paperwork to catch up with the legislation. The first land deeds (*derzhavni akty,* literally, "government acts") issued in independent Ukraine were on red printed cardstock, folded in half so as to form booklets. The covers bear the blue and yellow state trident and a red border reminiscent of Ukrainian embroidery. Inside, there is information about the deed holder and the location and dimensions of the specified land

share, which is known as a *paj*.[64] A diagram of the plot itself is superimposed over an outline of Ukraine, flanked by two sprigs of wheat. The back of the deed offers space for more details about the plots in question: its size, its quality, whether it is covered by buildings or woods. However, these early deeds lacked a piece of information that would later become critical: cadastral numbers.

Prior to 2002, there was no national land cadaster in Ukraine. Records of who owned what piece of land, to the extent that they existed, were relegated to regional and district archives, rather than a central compiler. Decollectivization was a process organized largely at the local level, and in many communities, it was delayed as long as possible out of concern that, without their collectives, villages—and the food supply— would collapse. Vouchers for land issued in the 1990s not only did not correspond to particular plots, but in some cases, were not even in the possession of their recipients. Jessica Allina-Pisano (2008), for example, describes collective-turned-cooperative farm directors who kept members' vouchers in the farm offices, not so much for safekeeping as to prevent the members from removing land from the cooperative. Property rights, Allina-Pisano argues, were "parchment institutions" that provided a "façade" of privatization, while actually "entrench[ing]" the control of Soviet-era authorities.

Evidence of the delays remained etched in the early land deeds, which my project participants usually described as "the red ones." (See Figures 6 & 7, end of section.) The blank forms for these deeds included a printed space for the date that reads "199_," a reflection of the 1992 legislation that established a private property system including land, and also of the anticipation that Ukraine, like other former Eastern Bloc states,

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[64]Pronounced "pie," as in "piece of the pie," though there is no etymological relation.

would distribute and privatize farmland quickly.[65] But because the presidential decree authorizing the actual assignment of plots came only in December 1999, and a national cadastral system was developed only in 2001, the first agricultural land deeds my interlocutors received had the dates (usually 2001 or 2002, occasionally as late as 2003) handwritten in, and lacked cadastral numbers entirely. Subsequent land reforms yielded two more phases of deeds, in two more colors (2002–2008, in green, with 19-digit cadastral numbers; 2009–2012, in blue, with cadastral numbers for the plots as well as identification numbers for the owners). However, many small landowners did not update their documents.[66] The bureaucratic procedure was expensive, time-consuming, and it did not seem to offer any real benefits (a point made most succinctly in Allina-Pisano 2009, "Property: What Is It Good For?"). Tamara, the village secretary in Zelene Pole, explained that people with the red deeds had little incentive to obtain a cadastral number or a newer deed unless the owner of the parcel had died, and inheritance was to be claimed. One did not need the latest document type to let land, or enroll it in a cooperative for an in-kind payment, and because of the moratorium, selling remained out of the question. Plots were transferable, but not convertible; that is, one could will their land to a person of their choosing, but the deed could not (legally) be exchanged for cash. In Zelene Pole, Tamara explained, the appearance of green and blue deeds marked the passage of time, and loss of community members, but they did not point to any practical changes in property rights.

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[65] Private property in the Soviet era included personal property. Land was not considered personal property, but rural workers did have the right to space and equipment that allowed them to grow their own food (Ukr. *hospodarstvo*, Rus. *khozajstvo,* approx. "homestead").

[66] I use the somewhat clunky term "small landowners" rather than, for example, "smallholders" or simply "landowners" to make clear that I am writing about former collective farmers (or their heirs) who owned plots averaging four hectares, but didn't necessarily farm them themselves.

In the summer of 2011, however, the Ukrainian Parliament (the Verkhovna Rada) passed yet a fourth land reform. The reform had multiple components with far-reaching effects. First, the deputies decided to allow the then decade-old moratorium on agricultural land sales expire at the end of 2012 (it had been renewed in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010, ostensibly out of concern that Ukraine lacked the legal framework prevent land-grabbing). To prepare for an open land market, they voted to accelerate work on a public electronic cadaster project.[67] Relatedly, and most importantly for small landowners, the deputies approved the separation of the right to own land from the right to earn a profit from it ("usus" and "fructus"). People with green and blue deeds (those with cadastral numbers) were automatically enrolled in the electronic cadaster as landowners. However, if they wished to work, let, transfer, otherwise use their land, they needed to acquire permits that would designate its purpose in the new registry. Those with red deeds lacking cadastral numbers (or in some cases, with one handwritten in) needed to take steps to "formalize" their ownership rights before they could do anything else with their land. Paper land deeds became, as one village council member put it, "souvenirs" (*na pam'jat''*).[68] What counted was what was in the electronic cadaster.

While plans to lift the moratorium on farmland sales were scuttled in the eleventh hour, the other elements of the land reform were enacted. The electronic cadaster went online as scheduled in January, 2013, albeit with incomplete data, and by the State Land Agency's own admission, an unfortunate number of errors. Plots were depicted as overlapping, or dipping into rivers and lakes. Kitchen gardens ran through houses. Some plots did not appear at all. The trouble was not that land had changed over time, rendering

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[67] Parliamentary resolution "On the State Land Cadastre," signed August 11, 2011.
[68] From a public question and answer session for village council workers in Dnipropetrovsk region, August, 2013.

deeds of the past invalid, or that old cadasters were inaccurate or lost (by contrast, see Verdery 1994, 2003 on "the elasticity of land" in Romania). Unlike in other postsocialist states, there was no restitution of collectivized land in Ukraine; rather, the land had been surveyed and distributed around the turn of the millennium (for descriptions of these processes, and comparative cases, Hann et al 2003 and Verdery & Humphrey 2004 are notable). The "mistakes" (Ukr. *pomilky,* Rus. *oshibki*; my interlocutors' characterization) were spread across the surveys, the legal documents, and the new land registry, and one needed to locate the origin of the error in order to correct it. Tamara spent much of 2012 helping villagers with red land deeds obtain cadastral numbers. In 2013, though, her tasks shifted to assisting citizens with green and blue deeds whose plots did not appear in the cadaster, or whose boundaries were incorrect. The need was urgent: without resolving these issues, it would be more difficult—and technically illegal—for the owners to let their land to local farmers. Even worse, people whose plots were not registered risked having their land marked as abandoned, and losing it to the state. And the owners, like the majority of *paj* recipients in Ukraine, were senior citizens: poor, dependent upon rents or in-kind payments to supplement their meager state pensions, and often unsure how to navigate an ever-changing legal system.

The previous chapter in this dissertation traced the semiotic processes through which Ukrainian chernozem came to be valued as both national treasure as well as a liability that made the country vulnerable to exploitation and occupation. This chapter details how my interlocutors—small landowners, land rights activists, village council members, and what I call "front-line legal professionals"—worked to secure agricultural plots for those families that had been allotted them. In most cases, this involved the

careful production of paperwork, including land deeds, as well as a variety of other documents, including wills, writs of power of attorney, and leases, thought to bolster the deeds' effectiveness or enable their transfer. This ethnography is not merely an addendum to prior studies of privatization. Rather, it is a study of one of the most common ways in which Ukrainians, particularly older and rural citizens, encountered the legal system. And keeping with the broader themes of this dissertation, it is about the role that icons both readily identifiable (sketches of the dimensions of plots; maps of privatized land) and less so (wills and testaments that diagram familial relations; legislation presumed to reflect, or enforce, a certain reality) play in shaping perceptions of Ukraine's political economy—its history, remnants, and prospects for the future.

Drawing on recent work in anthropology and history about how documents configure social relations (see especially Hull 2012b, who builds on earlier efforts such as Riles 2006), I find that struggles for land rights, and for legal protections more generally, informed how my interlocutors assessed Ukraine's post-Soviet "transition," and the country's broader relationship to "Europe" and "the West." This was not simply because they were rural people invested in owning farmland, but because the private property system was entangled in so many of life's intimacies: marriage and divorce; death and inheritance; whether one's family could afford to stay in the village, or was forced to migrate elsewhere. In the lead-up to the Maidan Revolution, property rights, and legal rights more generally, came easily to some but not to others. Tamara painstakingly guided the poor and elderly through the paperwork necessary to ensure they would continue receiving in-kind payments of flour and cooking oil from the farmers leasing their fields. Meanwhile, the very wealthy, including then-president Viktor Yanukovych,

were acquiring and privatizing large swathes of previously public land with seemingly no legal barriers whatsoever. In both the cities and the villages, these discrepancies were noticed, and constantly discussed. For some, Yanukovych's ill-gotten estate, Mezhyhirya, became an obsession.[69]

A prominent subtheme of this chapter is the relationship between private property rights and the rule of law, two cornerstones of post-Soviet transition that my interlocutors understood Ukraine as lacking. The anthropological literature on the privatization of property is expansive, and ethnographies of post-Soviet space are often bursting with accounts of criminality and corruption. Comparatively less attention has been given to theorizing what exactly "rule of law" means, or how it is made meaningful to people and places presumed not to have it. Ugo Mattei & Laura Nader (2008) trace how "rule of law" initiatives in development programs replicated the "civilizing" discourses of colonial eras, and Western legal systems gifted to non-Western societies ultimately expedited Western "plunder" rather than local protection. Sally Merry (2011, 2016) is similarly critical of the idea of rule of law as a universal, explaining how statistical indicators of good governance and human rights create the very concepts they claim to measure. Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff (2006) critique the "culture of legality" that actually creates lawlessness by defining it, and then poses law & order solutions to fix it. I share some of their critiques, and in the next section, show how rule of law initiatives were packaged with other post-Soviet transition policies.

However, in this chapter, my first priority is to take seriously what my interlocutors understood as rule of law, and how they navigated its seeming non-presence

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[69] My Ukrainian rendering would be *Mezhyhir'ja,* but I have adopted the spelling most frequently used by English-language international press for ease of reading. See also Hetherington 2011 on "ill-gotten property" in Paraguay.

as they sought to secure plots of land that provided them with critical income (through rents), the promise of conversion (sale, for real funds), and the pride of having something to hand down to their children. My project participants did not necessarily refer directly to "rule of law" as it is typically translated into Ukrainian or Russian (*verkhovenstvo prava,* approximately "supremacy of the law," see section 3.2 for discussion), but they did frequently gesture toward one of its key concerns: what legal specialists call "arbitrariness."[70] The "arbitrary" wielding of power—the deployment of legislation, courts, and other legal resources to advantage some, at the expense of others—was pervasive in Ukraine at both state and local levels. Among my interlocutors, this led to the strong sense that one needed to take defensive action to protect the performativity of their legal documents—that is, to ensure that they produced the effects they were designed to. Although a few of the small landowners I encountered reacted to the rainbow of land deeds and the pay-to-play courts by opting out of property registration altogether, far more attempted to traverse the shape-shifting legal system, expending their limited time, energy, and money acquiring and amending documents that, they believed, could at least serve as stop-gaps in case their rights were questioned. They lay paper trails, armored themselves with the legal word, and sought the help of experts who might help them employ it more effectively. They were well-aware that when it comes to asserting one's rights, it matters who is speaking.

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[70] The United Nations' working definition of "rule of law" is fairly representative: "a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency." Retrieved 2/20/17: https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/what-is-the-rule-of-law/.

But did all this effort make a difference? Certainly, the assumption that one can fix meaning to paper, and ensure words mean precisely what one intends them to, is both widespread and fraught. Scholars of language have long pointed out that we "live in a world of other's words," all with their own histories and associations (Bakhtin 1984). Likewise, scholars of Ukraine, particularly medical anthropologists, have frequently observed how their interlocutors created records to enact realities, rather than reflect them—but with mixed degrees of success (Petryna 2002; Phillips 2010; Bazylevych 2011; Carroll 2011). Matthew Hull (2012a; 2012b), working in Pakistan, argues that the inability to pin down meaning is not merely a product of the words on the paper, but of the paper itself. Following Bruno Latour's work on the agency of material things, Hull points out that people tend to think of documents as instruments they can control, as, in Latour's vocabulary, "intermediaries" that have no effect on social relations. But, Hull suggests, the very materiality of paperwork—that it may circulated, modified, stamped, filed, rearranged, paper-clipped, bent, spilled on, crumpled, torn, misplaced, thrown out—affects how we interact with it, and, part and parcel, how its contents are taken up. Documents, Hull writes, don't merely "store" information about social relations, but actively create them. They are not intermediaries, but "mediators," objects that "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry (Latour 2005: 39).

Nevertheless, most people approach documents as objects to be managed and manipulated. They have firm ideas about how certain documents are supposed to be look or feel, what (or who) makes them authoritative, and how to spot a fake. (Hull, drawing on Keane's "semiotic ideology" calls these notions "graphic ideologies.") They presume

that, with enough effort, they will be able to make paperwork do their bidding: lock in meaning, tell a particular story, or, as we'll see in the last section, reveal certain truths. This was certainly the case in Ukraine, where, I found, many of my interlocutors were obsessed with what I call *taming paper*: chasing down documents, coaxing them into better form, ridding them of undesirable traits, and hoping, if handled correctly, they wouldn't bite back.

"You probably find this ridiculous," Tamara, a committed paper-tamer, remarked one day, her arms filled with documents for the notary, who would verify, stamp, and sign them, and file back-up copies. I did not. I had learned by then that, in Ukraine, Tamara was unusual only in her commitment to helping others secure their property: the documents she was carrying were not her own, but those of elderly pensioners who could not travel to the notary or land agency offices themselves. But I understood what she was saying: my interlocutors were firm in their belief that in the U.S. one did not need to invest so much time in collecting paperwork because the legal system was fair, consistent, and worked for the people, not against them. On the one hand, this is quite a rosy view of the U.S. legal system. On the other hand, that Tamara, and others, believed that things were different in in the U.S. or the E.U. was not mere "transition" thinking, nor the product of a once distant, imaginary West.[71] In communities like Zelene Pole, where most families had one or more close relatives working in the European Union, the West was known, at least secondhand. The steady flow of cash and trinkets from abroad (Spanish olive oil by the stove; French hand cream in the bathroom; Italian pasta in the pantry), the influx of imported cars, and the returned migrants themselves furthered the

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[71] Yurchak 2006, though see Fehérváry 2002 and extensions, such as Silverstova 2017, on how the imaginary West persists in consumer aspirations.

perception that quality of life was not only better in "Europe," but that one could make

plans there. Across the border, they explained, one was paid on time. In Ukraine,

everyone knew someone who had not been paid in months.[72]

Why tame paper? (More precisely: why attempt to tame paper?) Why were my

project participants so consumed with refining their documents, and how did this practice

create meaning beyond the page? In the coming sections, I argue that traversing land

reforms, and keeping up with the associated paperwork, shaped how my interlocutors

assessed Ukraine's post-Soviet political and economic achievements, and movement

toward "the West." I begin by tracing "rule of law" discourse to the 1990s, showing how

it spread in the wake of neoliberal reforms run awry, but continued to promote "the

West" as a model of lawfulness and development. Next, I survey how the people I

worked with described the challenges they faced registering land when laws kept

changing, were inconsistently applied, or seemed more politically-motivated than

pragmatic. I catalog what I call "idioms of arbitrariness," showing how my interlocutors'

notions of transparency, good governance, and good citizenship were informed by their

experience of the latest land reform. I then return to the ethnography with which I began

this chapter, charting how my project participants sought to give land deeds—paper with

potential—performative power by correcting "mistakes" in the data, manufacturing

consistency across other critical documents, such as passports, wills, and leases, and

enlisting the aid of legal "ventriloquists" to speak authoritatively on their behalf (Burns

2010). And following Hull, I show how the materiality of documents could cause such

efforts to misfire. Finally, drawing on investigations by Ukrainian journalists, I compare

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[72] Withholding salaries was a strikingly common practice in both private and public sectors. At time of research, budget shortfalls had led to teachers not receiving their salaries on a regular basis. Late payment was also common in the farming sector, tourism, and private language schools.

my rural interlocutors' proficiency in paper taming with that of Viktor Yanukovych—or rather, his lawyers. Neither group managed to immutably fix meaning to form, but I suggest this was less of a problem for the oligarchs; in fact, they seemed to thrive on chaos. I conclude with some thoughts on the Maidan Revolution, and what, beyond the catchphrases of "European integration" and "rule of law," the demonstrators hoped to achieve.

**Figure 6: Early post-Soviet Ukrainian land deed (outside); Figure 7: Early post-Soviet land deed (inside).** A "red" land deed, hand-dated 2002. Vinnytsja region, other identifying information redacted.
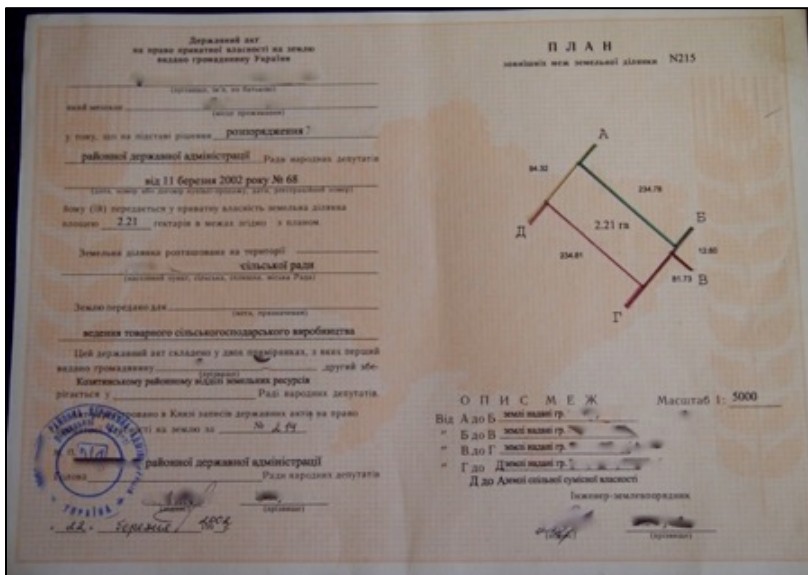
**Unruly Law**

A cornerstone of 20th century liberalism was that private property regimes and legal
institutions reinforce each other, creating a favorable climate for economic growth. Such
ideas were not new, and can be traced to Locke's 1690 argument that private property
rights are a natural liberty *prior* to government, and that government forms in order to
protect private property rights. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, new
governments and private property rights were formed simultaneously, and the architects
of postsocialist "transition" anticipated that their relationship would be symbiotic, that the
institutions necessary to defend legal contracts—whether land deeds, labor agreements,
or business deals—would follow the economic reforms. Moreover, they presumed that
reliable legal contracts would encourage confident investment, thereby furthering
development. One of the most notable examples of such thinking was Hernando de
Soto's (1989, 2000) argument that land-titling programs would alleviate poverty by
giving small landowners collateral they could use to obtain credit.[73] The Washington
Consensus, shorthand for a set of "neoliberal" macroeconomic policies emphasizing free
trade, fiscal austerity, and private property rights in Latin America, and then in other
"non-Western" countries, reflected similar assumptions about the mechanisms that
promote infusions of capital (domestic or foreign), as well as what effects such capital
can produce.[74]

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[73] Social scientists across the disciplines have pointed out the failings of the de Soto thesis. Among the
most potent critiques is Mitchell (2007), who points out that de Soto glosses over histories of eviction and
dispossession, which suggest that titling doesn't necessarily protect the poor.
[74] Economist John Williamson, who coined the term "the Washington Consensus," has since attempted to
clarify that the 10 policies he identified were not meant as a prescription, but rather a catalog of the
initiatives "Washington" was promoting in the 1980s, particularly in Latin America (Williamson 2004).

The post-Soviet period posed significant challenges to liberal economic orthodoxy. Scholars and policy analysts studying states in "transition" learned that "get[ting] the policies right" did not necessarily mean reforms were actually occurring, or occurring in such a way that they promoted strong democratic institutions or benefitted the average citizen ("Order in the Jungle." *The Economist.* March 13, 2008). Rather, in much of the former Soviet Bloc, the 1990s saw the rise of "wild capitalism" among oligarchs who snatched up state-owned industries and bought political influence, advancing their own interests at the expense of the populace. A profusion of new, confusing, and often contradictory legislation provided fruitful ground for those who knew how to exploit legal institutions to their own ends. For citizens of limited financial means, the loss of the state socialist safety net—full employment, pensions, and other services, such as free healthcare and childcare—encouraged workers to find other ways to pad their paychecks. Demanding favors and kickbacks; receiving part of one's salary under the table to avoid taxes ("envelope money"); or even bribing admissions boards to ensure one's child a place in a university program were strategies for navigating the immense precarity that came with state collapse.

As some of these strategies closely resembled ones employed in the preceding decades (Soviet-era *blat* systems being rather legendary, see especially Ledeneva 2006), and contributed to what economists had dubbed "the shadow economy," transitologists sometimes identified them as socialist "legacies"—bad habits, rather than calculated responses to new instabilities. Anthropologists and sociologists have been notably skeptical of such accusations, observing that "the past enters the present not as legacy, but as novel adaptation" (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 4). Talk of legacies, leftovers, and

residue, elide the ordeal of capitalist "shock therapy" and the forced dismantling of community-binding institutions central to life under state socialism.[75] Moreover, such talk suggests that people who in the Soviet bloc were in some way damaged, succumbing to bad behavior because they knew nothing else. Jonathan Larson (2013) observed a similar arrogance in claims that people who have lived under authoritarian regimes lack "critical thinking skills," and therefore struggle with the responsibilities of democracy. Such assumptions, I suggest, also inform discourses that define "rule of law" based on how it is presumed to exist in "the West," and brand deviations from this standard as cultural, rather than circumstantial.

Thus, Eastern European "wild capitalism" in the 1990s and "democratic backsliding" in the 2000s were as much the consequence of rushed liberalization as they were patterns of practice developed in the decades prior. Transition policy makers recognized this to some extent, but the emphasis on the relationship between capitalism and democracy remained firm in international development circles. By the turn of the millennium, development programs advancing property rights, such as those in Ukraine, had been coupled with initiatives emphasizing "good governance" and "rule of law." In Ukraine, organizations employing these buzzwords tended to be less concerned with limiting the power of the executive than with promoting *citizens'* respect for legal contracts and an independent judiciary.[76] Projects of the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the American Bar Association, and various

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[75] This literature is substantial: a smattering of citations include Berdahl 1999; Caldwell 2004; Dickinson 2005; Dunn 2004; Humphrey and Mandel, eds. 2002; Lemon 1998; Oushakine 2009; and Ries 2012.
[76] Programs certainly involved professional training for judges and lawyers, as well; involved organizations included the World Bank, USAID, the American Bar Association, and various EU-based initiatives. I should note that in the years since the revolution and the outbreak of violence in the east, many of these programs have broadened their agendas to encompass more work on human rights.

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European governments, while designed to serve the local populace, were also implemented to attract foreign investment and increase Ukrainian participation in free global markets. Stronger legal institutions, it was presumed, would not only protect Ukrainians, but reassure international businesses spooked by the wild '90s that Ukraine was a safe and productive place to invest. Ultimately, "rule of law" initiatives did not change the fundamental logic of "transition," but shifted the focus from the *policies* to the *people.*

This is not to suggest that "rule of law," or lack thereof, wasn't a large and meaningful problem in Ukraine. Indeed, this chapter finds that abuse of power, lack of equal protection, fraudulent documents, corrupt courts, and the mass theft of public resources were of such concern to my interlocutors that most supported the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych, even if they did not support the Maidan Revolution more broadly. It also finds that the unreliability of legal institutions had a disproportionate impact upon many of Ukraine's most marginalized citizens. However, I propose that development initiatives designed to bolster legal contracts, and relatedly land rights, had two inadvertent effects in Ukraine: first, they effectively transferred responsibility for post-Soviet chaos onto post-Soviets themselves, especially the most vulnerable among them. The constant restructuring of legal institutions did little to restrain land-grabbing oligarchs—rather, they often seemed to benefit from the confusion—but it created tangles of legislation that hampered Ukrainians of lesser means. Small landowners I worked with found themselves engaging in "illegal" leasing practices not because they didn't wish to obey rules, but because land reforms requiring new paperwork and even court appearances were expensive, time-consuming, or simply confusing. (See also Allina-

Pisano 2009, following Verdery 2003, on how a focus on "rule of law" in studies of rural disenfranchisement obscures the difficulty small landowners in Russia had in extracting value from their fields.)

Second, Western "rule of law" initiatives reinforced the impression that Ukraine was a place, and Ukrainians a people, that lacked order. Likewise, they suggested that there were other places, and peoples, that had already achieved good governance, and could be looked to as models, or even drawn upon to enforce accountability in Ukraine. Development programs often follow a "twinning" model, in which representatives from an aid-giving country train people working in a similar function in the aid-recipient country. Such transfers of expertise, which appear neutral, even collaborative on their surface, suggest that it is by becoming more like the trainer, or the donor nation more generally, that the recipient nation can overcome its troubles. As a consequence, local ways of doing things—and moreover, the people who do them—may become marked as inadequate, inefficient, or even immoral, and the circumstances that gave rise to those practices are erased.[77]

Certainly, this also happened in Ukraine. Yet one of the things that surprised me most during fieldwork was how convinced most of my interlocutors seemed that western, and especially western European ways of doing things were superior to their own practices. Moreover, they did not necessarily see practices brought in from abroad as foreign: "transition" was not merely understood as the reform of institutions, but as a means of "returning" Ukraine to Europe, and Europeanness to Ukraine. For many of my project participants, the absence of "rule of law" was presumed a temporary condition, a Soviet residue that could be overcome through closer relations with the European Union.

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[77] Beyond the postsocialist context, see, for example, Mitchell 2002 and McKee 2015.

More contact with Europe, they felt, would result in a more sophisticated democracy and a more law-abiding citizenry: eventually, Ukrainians would respect legal contracts, refuse to pay bribes, demand ethical and professional courts, and hold their leadership accountable for their actions.

In the interim, they expected Brussels to reign in their politicians. Yanukovych was of particular concern to many of my interlocutors, including some who had supported him in the 2010 presidential election. Since entering office, the president had come under increased scrutiny for throwing rival Yuliya Tymoshenko in jail on trumped up charges; advancing the interests of his cronies (whom critics called "the Family") over those of the electorate; abusing administrative resources to bolster the performance of his Party of Regions during the 2012 parliamentary elections; restricting freedom of speech by paying hooligans to beat up protestors and journalists; and, of course, for his shady acquisition of Mezhyhirya.[78] Therefore, in November 2013, when Yanukovych declined to sign the European Association agreement, indicating he would instead have Ukraine join the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union (now the Eurasian Economic Union), my interlocutors were overwhelmingly more concerned with the political consequences than the economic ones.[79] Yanukovych, they felt, was increasingly exercising power without accountability, governing in accordance with his personal whims, rather than the powers and duties granted him by the Ukrainian constitution. In the language of "rule of law," he was governing *arbitrarily*.

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[78] Full disclosure: I was an international election observer in Odessa for both the 2012 and 2014 parliamentary elections.

[79] I write here about my *own* interlocutors, who often had more to gain from closer ties with the European Union than people from parts of the country were the economy was more integrated with Russia's. I also hasten to add that my rural respondents were ambivalent about the economic component of the Association Agreement, which they feared would force them to adhere to new standards and compete with European farmers, creating instability in the commodities market.

**Figure 8: Land rights literature for distribution at USAID-sponsored event.** The literature was produced by the Land Union of Ukraine, a partner of the USAID project AgroInvest. The top left brochure reads "My Land, My Right," also the name of a Land Union produced radio show. Other brochures direct readers toward zem.ua, a webportal for land rights.

## Idioms of Arbitrariness

Notions of "arbitrariness" in the philosophy of language and discourses surrounding rule

of law may initially seem to have little more than lexical overlap. After all, in linguistics,

"arbitrary" is often glossed as something akin to "random," which is precisely the

opposite of how a politician funneling resources to their cronies is behaving.[80] However,

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[80] While discussions of "arbitrariness" in language are usually associated with Ferdinand de Saussure, Saussure actually borrowed the concept from William Dwight Whitney (see Michael Silverstein's 1971 edited volume of Whitney's work). Also, Saussure's argument was that relationship between an "acoustic image" and its referent (a "word" and a "thing"), is not *necessarily* motivated; he certainly left the door open for motivation in his discussion of onomatopoeia. Paul Friedrich (1979), critical of the "theoretical empty baggage" (5) that arbitrariness had become in linguistics, subsequently argued for the relative *non-*arbitrariness of the symbol (in which the "symbol" is one or more "aspects of the relation between idea and form" (18), whether iconic, indexical, or conventional). For Friedrich, Saussure's focus on "etymological transparency" was in itself "arbitrary" (26), and observed that, if one works at other levels of analysis, patterning abounds.

both are deeply concerned with the transparency of language, the matching of signs with experience, and the human ability to identify patterns and inconsistencies. In short, both philosophy of language and discourses about rule of law are deeply concerned with problems of *form*—adherence to, deviations from, and awareness of—and therefore with iconic sign relations, which are always socially mediated, and socially mediating.[81] Thus, we may speak of "arbitrariness," whether in studies of language or governance[82], less as something unfailingly recognizable, and more as something differentially experienced or perceived. As Paul Friedrich noted, there are multiple metrics and analytical approaches to interrogating the relationship between signs and "reality"; individual symbols that seem arbitrary when viewed atomistically are proven much less so when studied as part of a larger system (1979). And yet, most of us have very firm ideas about what consistency means (the person in the photograph is the person we know in "real life"; the plot diagrammed on the land deed corresponds with an actual field; the law was obeyed), and our ability to identify it.

It is with this in mind that I open this section on what I call "idioms of arbitrariness", or ways in which my interlocutors described—and bemoaned— disjunctures between the law as written and practically navigated, and also anticipated that such fissures would be overcome in a society where the law was applicable to, and respected by, all citizens. On the eve of the revolution, my interlocutors grappled with a legal system constantly in flux, often by engaging in practices that seemed to contradict their own professed commitments to a law-abiding society. Based on field research

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[81] Jakobson (1965: 35 quoted in Friedrich 1979: 30) doesn't go so far as to say that iconicity and arbitrariness are opposite poles, but observes that "the principle of iconicity, patent and compulsory in syntax and morphology, invalidates the dogma of arbitrariness."
[82] Disciplinarily, I mean. Governance is, of course, all about language.

conducted in villages and among Kyiv-based land rights activists, I document how some

small landowners claimed to pay bribes *in order to* otherwise stay within the law; how

land rights activists tried to educate citizens on how to properly register their land—while

fully aware that the processes they laid out were likely impossible to follow; and how

policies that sounded just in principle ("free land" for all Ukrainians; a moratorium to

prevent land-grabbing) may have actually entrenched corruption. In doing so, I show how

my interlocutors' notions of transparency, good governance, and good citizenship shaped,

and were shaped by, their experience of the latest land reform. And, following Friedrich,

I track how arbitrariness identified at one level of the land registration process could

seem entirely non-arbitrary when considered through a different lens or scale.

Before turning to my ethnographic examples, it is instructive to consider

recognized Ukrainian translations of "rule of law" that were circulating at the time of

research. In Ukrainian, one may distinguish between *verkhovenstvo prava* and

*verkhovenstvo zakonu.* The former is typically translated into English as "rule of law,"

but literally means "supremacy of the law," in which "law" is best understood as

fundamental rights or protections.[83] The latter is typically translated as "supremacy of

statute," in which the enforced statutes (*zakony*) may or may not be lawful, but are

consistently—and sometimes brutally—applied. We might make the same contrast in

English by comparing "rule of law" with "rule by law," or "natural law" vs. statutes

decided by those in power. In the former (I will use the U.S. system for a familiar

example, albeit with some reservations), there is a balance of powers between the

executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government; free elections, free press,

judicial review, and other institutions are designed to make the government responsive to

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[83] *Prava* may also be translated as "rights"; "human rights," for example, are *prava ljudinu*.

the people, protect fundamental rights, and advance equal protection before the law. In the latter, the balance of power is lacking, and the executive, by controlling the legislature, the courts, and the police, may enact and enforce statues that suppress the rights of the citizenry.

One other expression that came up with some regularity was *zakonnist',* which I translate as "law-abidingness" or "respect for the law." *Zakonnist'* might also be translated as "law and order," but my impression was that my interlocutors invoked *zakonnist'* when calling for collaborative respect for the law, rather than top-down police enforcement of rules. *Zakonnist'*, in this respect, occupied a convenient space either between, or side-stepping *verkhovenstvo zakonu* and *prava*. My project participants who some familiarity with the latter terms typically connected "supremacy of the statute" to authoritarian systems and "supremacy of the law" to democratic ones. But, they explained, "supremacy of the law" struck many Ukrainians, sometimes including themselves, as too abstract, too dependent upon notions of human rights that seemed foreign to them. *Zakonnist',* law-abidingness, circumvented this problem by suggesting that the laws should be just, but they also should be obeyed.

In explaining this supposed preference for rules, rather than ideals, my interlocutors would often invoke the problem of Soviet "mentality" (*mentalitet*), which, they explained, cast the citizenry as dependent upon, and therefore subject to, the state. (Simultaneously, *mentalitet* was also used to explain practices of circumventing the paternal state.) Such thinking can also be found in the work of Ukrainian legal scholars. For example, Olga Burlyuk (2015) argues that the adoption of a "human-centric" rather than "state-centric" understanding of law is a "precondition" for rule of law in Ukraine.

She suggests that the "equating of rule by law and the rule of law" in post-Soviet Ukraine is an "inheritance of the recent past," and contrasts Ukraine's exposure to more liberal European traditions (eg. via the Austro-Hungarian Empire) with Russia's "Eurasian (Mongol)" influence. "Ukraine," she argues, "should return to the European legal space and rid itself of the negative components inherited from the past."[84] Some of my rural interlocutors did not see it that way, however. "In the past," they said, "we knew what the rules were." Oppressive or not, many had found the Soviet system far easier to traverse.

What "supremacy of the law" and "supremacy of the statute" have in common is the presumption of a dominant (or "supreme") authority, be it a set of values, or a (group of) leader(s) whose word is recognized as law. Western accounts of Soviet authoritarianism often focus on repression—for example, the corruption of the courts, and the subjugation of political dissidents (or even the not-so-dissident) to random charges, "telephone justice," and lengthy imprisonments, or even death.[85] My interlocutors had no illusions about the brutality of the Soviet system, but they also recalled having a strong sense of which rules had to be followed, which boundaries could be pushed, and when they were being taken advantage of. U.S. citizens of most political persuasions confidently point to the Constitution as a legal institution in which the core values of the country, the core rights of the citizenry, and the core tenants of governance are inscribed. (How they choose to interpret or apply the Constitution is, of course, another matter.) In the Soviet Union, there were also clear sets of values, and institutions designed to advance those values, that one could point to. But, my project participants

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[84] I admit to cherry-picking Berlyuk a bit here; her article is overall quite worth reading to understand scholarly discourses of "rule of law" in Ukraine around the time of the revolution, and the motivations of protestors on the Maidan, who were fed up with "a system of justice that had become one of *in*justice."
[85] These persist; see, for example, the fates of Soviet characters in "The Americans," or Anthony Marra's 2015 short story collection *The Tsar of Love and Techno*.

explained, in independent Ukraine, Soviet institutions had been actively dismantled, or simply no longer made sense, and it was not always clear what had replaced or should replace them. There was an onslaught of new legislation, but what it added up to was anyone's guess.

The stakes for not knowing one's rights in relation to all these new rules were high. For example, a neighbor of mine in Sonjachne who had spent over a year trying to formalize her and her husband's land shares expressed her frustration with unanticipated expenditures. While the Soviet system had emphasized the communal ownership of land, in independent Ukraine, the land was said to belong to those who would work it, and anyone who wanted to farm could (theoretically) obtain a parcel for their own use. Former collective farmers, who were older, and had already mixed their labor with the soil, were permitted to claim land that they could then let. "Your first privatization [one's first plot] is supposed to be free, but now there are so-called 'service fees' for every part of the process," Ljuba explained. "Besides, I have to go back and forth to [the regional center] all the time, so that's time and bus fare, too." She nodded toward her barn, where she and her husband, Volodymyr, kept a pair of dairy cows and a giant sow who regularly birthed large litters of piglets. Pensioners, they primarily lived off of income from their land share, and paid for Volodymyr's substantial medical care by selling milk and meat. "Piglets," Ljuba continued. That was how she had paid her fees, many of which she was not even certain she was legally required to pay. While I am not certain my neighbors were in fact being swindled, I did find out that they were often paying for "express" services out of fear that the law would change before they had finished the privatization process (the revised process, that is). "'Express' is just another name for a bribe," Ljuba

shook her head. "But what to do?" As was common in Sonjachne, Ljuba and Voldymyr's children had moved to the city to seek work, and it was unclear whether they would ever farm, or even return to the village. But Ljuba took pride in securing the land for her descendants. "We would never sell our land," she asserted, as most of the smallholders I encountered did. "But we would like to give our children the option."

"Not knowing what the rules are" was one expression my interlocutors often used to explain problematic encounters with the legal system—or to defend their creative navigations of it. Another was "the rules are only on paper," or variants thereof. Both of these idioms of arbitrariness point to anxieties about transparency and governance in Ukraine, as well as the expectation that things should work differently, and do work better elsewhere. For people like my neighbors, they reflect the exasperating experience of having the rules change on you, and the awareness that social position, rather than standard procedure, often dictates how efficiently bureaucratic matters can be resolved.

But such frustrations were hardly limited to less educated and poor. Rather, some legal experts spoke of being similarly baffled. I had a running joke with a friend of my hosts in Sonjachne (the Marchenkos), a retired judge who maintained a small apiary on Pasha's strawberry farm. "Where are your laws?," I would ask the judge, after we had been discussing some incident of injustice, or even observing a speeding car. "In the books," he would reply. All of the people I worked with were quick to point out disconnect between legislation and everyday practice; my experience has been that Americans do this quite frequently as well. While the beekeeping judge's flippancy always struck me as a bit stark, he contended that the profusion of new legislation, some of it contradictory, meant that courts were forced to make "practical" decisions. What

seemed arbitrary to a petitioner, he argued, could in fact be the result of a judge trying their best to find a solution consistent with the latest regulations. But, the judge acknowledged, some decisions were informed by other relationships, including those lubricated by bribes.

Although my interlocutors agreed that no one should be required to pay bribes, most argued that there were situations in which not doing so would actually hurt the petitioner more. This was often the case when it came to formalizing land rights: the loss of the plot, or even a season's rent, was a far greater threat financially than paying an unofficial "express" fee at the local notary, land agency office, or court. The irony for many of the people I worked with was that in order to exercise their rights—including, but not limited property rights—they needed to work outside the law. The even greater irony, it was pointed out to me, was that very powerful people did not need to pay petty bribes. They exploited personal connections, indulged in intimidation, or even bought their way into public office so that they could write legislation that would favor them in the first place.

While smallholders spoke of not knowing what the rules were, or paying bribes in order to secure the paperwork needed to operate within the law, the front-line legal professionals I observed (notaries and village council workers trained in land and property matters) often grew frustrated with villagers who, from their perspective, constantly cut corners. Even Tamara, the empathetic and resourceful village council worker I introduced earlier, threw up her hands at times. She was exceptionally patient with the villagers who sought her advice at the offices of the *sels'ka rada*—at least while they were present. When they had left, she would make tea for us, and then, hot liquid

sloshing dangerously in her dainty cup, rant about people who deliberately ignored procedure, made decisions that went against her advice, or indulged in off-the-books practices. For example, a common problem was villagers making verbal contracts with local farmers regarding the lease of their fields, and the farmers either delaying payment (cash or in-kind), or not paying at all. The villagers would then come to the village council for assistance, but because they had not signed a formal lease agreement (often because they had not formalized their landshare), there was little Tamara could do. "But can't they make an exception?" Tamara mimicked her clients. "I try to help, and I accept some types of bribes"—she winked, nodding toward a box of chocolates I had brought her as a thank-you gift—"but if they don't have their documents in order, there isn't much I can do."

In 2011, anticipating the land reform discussed at the outset of this chapter, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) opened a project in Kyiv called "AgroInvest" that was designed to support private property rights and the growth of small to mid-sized farms.[86] While land rights and rural development initiatives had certainly been in Ukraine for many years prior to them, the AgroInvest project increased their cross-country coordination, and their funding. In addition to sponsoring policy research, programs increasing access to credit (a serious problem across Ukraine, especially in rural areas, and even with titles), and practical trainings for farmers, AgroInvest sought to educate citizens about their land rights, as well as the proper way to exercise them. One of the program's most visible achievements was the production and distribution of a wide variety of educational literature for small landowners that outlined

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[86] What constitutes a small to mid-sized farm was a question of much dispute. In Sonjachne and Zelene Pole, having 60-80 hectares at one's disposal already made one a notable local farmer. To business people from agroholdings, however, "small" meant something ten times this size.

precisely which steps one needed to take to secure land deeds and ensure they were properly registered in the new electronic cadaster. These resources were published by the Land Union of Ukraine (*Zemelna Spilka Ukrajiny*), which also developed a radio series ("My Land, My Right"), a web portal housing a range of legal research and advice, and a seminar for front-line legal professionals they delivered in the capital of every region. Tamara had a collection of Land Union fliers and brochures in her office, but the resource she appreciated most of all was a poster that detailed the seven steps to obtaining a cadastral number for a land deed that lacked one (that is, "the red ones"). The poster included information about why a cadastral number was necessary in the first place, which documents were necessary to obtain one, how to secure said documents, and what the cost would (officially) be. Bright yellow and green bubbles pointed the reader toward points of special attention (*uvaha!*) or useful information to know (*vazhlyvo znaty*), including details such as when it might be necessary to consult with a land surveyor to clarify boundaries, and how to avoid paying unnecessary fees.

Tamara hung this poster and another one that explained how to privatize a kitchen garden just next to her desk, so that she could sit in her chair and gesture while her clients stood and squinted at the dense print. She lacked the third poster in the series, which detailed, in a mere eleven steps, how to secure state-owned land in any part of the country for certain specified purposes (farming, a kitchen garden, or in some cases, building a home). At time of writing, over a fifth of agrarian land in Ukraine remains state-owned, and in theory, any citizen of Ukraine has the right to obtain and privatize a small piece of it if they can demonstrate need and a concrete plan. Zelene Pole bordered other former collective farming villages, however, and the available land had overwhelmingly already

been allotted, so Tamara did not have as many requests for help with obtaining new plots. Besides, she laughed, with three large posters, she would no longer have room for her wall map of the Soviet Union, which she had always meant to replace with a map of independent Ukraine. "We're still in transition," she joked, soberly.

In designing the posters and other educational materials, the Land Union, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and the AgroInvest project, acknowledged how complicated and confusing four land reforms (and three types of land deeds) in 20 years had been for the citizenry. They sought to communicate that if people followed the steps laid out for them, they would secure their plots, and the courts would stand behind them. They worked collaboratively to make the educational materials as accessible as possible, while still precise. The process was grueling, noted one of the AgroInvest liaisons, who was charged with networking between her own office, the Kyiv-based Land Union and regional organizations that were conducting on-the-ground legal consultations in the countryside (see next section). There were two significant challenges: first, the lawyers had initially composed text that was impenetrable to non-specialists; the team went several rounds before settling on wording that people with no higher education might understand. Second, and perhaps more disconcertingly, the authors were quite aware that the steps they were laying out were but an ideal. My neighbor's experience selling piglets to pay for her legal fees might have been somewhat extreme, but her observations about hidden fees, and everything taking much longer that expected, were not at all unusual. The poster in Tamara's office on how to obtain a cadastral number listed only three required fees, totaling 188 hryvnia (about 24 USD at time of research). Yet everyone knew that small landowners, including elderly people with little to spare, were regularly

paying much more than this. And the procedure for securing state land, which in some cases required participation in an auction, was notoriously even more fraught.

"There is something almost quaint about the suggestion that what poor people need is a little more, and a little better, information about their condition," writes Kregg Hetherington (2011: 5) with regards to campesinos navigating a new titling system in neoliberal Paraguay. "Information's value is not intrinsic, but emerges only to the extent that it grants access to something real." Ukrainian land rights activists were not naïve to this, and their inability to guarantee "access to something real" was among their greatest frustrations. "We need *zakonnost'* (Rus.; Ukr. *zakonnist'*)," Andrej Koshyl, the head of the Land Union, told me one day in the fall following the revolution.[87] "Law-abidingness," or "respect for the law," was a word on many of my interlocutors' lips as they assessed their new government, wary of whether it would in fact be less corrupt than the ones prior, and whether the ideals of the revolution would be upheld. It was six months after the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the war in Donbas was raging; by mid-September, it had become clear that the Minsk Protocol had failed to produce a ceasefire. It seemed almost petty to be discussing wheat fields and kitchen gardens when rural communities were bearing the brunt of the violence, but new president Petro Poroshenko had announced that the government was going to give land for homes and farms to soldiers who had fought in Donbas, and I was curious to know what the Land Union's position was. Koshyl was cynical: according to Ukrainian law, citizens already had the right to petition the state for land. This program for veterans, while it made for

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[87] I met with affiliates of the Land Union on several occasions in 2013 and 2014, both at their Kyiv offices as well as in Lutsk and Vinnytsja (August and September, 2013), where I attended seminars they were conducting, and participated in related networking events. I completed some small translation/editing projects for them as well, both as a favor, and to sharpen my own understanding of their work.

good press, was not offering anything new, and given how corruption-ridden the process of securing land already was, it could easily take years for poorer veterans to receive parcels, if they received them at all. "It would be better not to have a war," he asserted.

For Koshyl and his partner, law professor Andrij Martyn, one of the biggest problems with the entire Ukrainian land sector was the government's habit of making policies that were, they said, "ideologically" and "politically" powerful, but either practically problematic, or shadily self-serving. For the Land Union, it was the policies that were haphazard; the unruly behaviors that followed from them were fairly predictable, and could be remedied through revising legislation. They were particularly critical of the policy that land be free of charge. It was not that they felt that former collective farmers should have had to pay full-price for their shares—this was not the case at all. Rather, the Land Union argued that decentralized bureaucracy, combined with the government's failure to define fees that reflected the actual costs of registration, had resulted in unmonitored and poorly paid small-town bureaucrats charging for every stamp, signature, and photocopy. Moreover, while former collective farmers were struggling to secure their small plots, the policy that permitted the landless to petition for parcels from the state was being abused: there were dozens of cases of people who had claimed they need acreage for farming, gardening, or a house, but, upon receiving land, used the fields for commercial purposes, such as constructing gas stations. Thus, the government lost money on land it could have profitably sold, and people who might have used the land as intended lost the opportunity to do so. Finally, the Land Union pointed out, the notion of free land for every Ukrainian was a ruse: there was not actually enough hectarage in the country to allow every, or even most citizens to exercise their right to

land. "Free land," although it sounds marvelous in theory, was really only available to those who both had connections at the land agency and could afford to pay bribes (Martyn & Bilenko 2014).

The Land Union identified similar problems with the moratorium on land sales. While it enjoyed much popular support, the moratorium had done little to stem the tide of illegal land sales (off the books deals, or increasingly, through a workaround: inheritable, perpetual lease agreements—Ukr. *emfitevzys;* Eng. approximate "emphyteusis," though with some differences). Moreover, there were increasing reports of forced long-term leases that stripped landowners of their rights to decide for themselves to whom they wished to let their land, and for how long.

One Ukrainian-American agroholding executive admitted to me that the moratorium was entirely to the benefit of big agriculture: without an open market, the rents for land remained suppressed, and long-term leases meant that businesses could lock in rates.[88] Agroholdings secured large tracts of land through negotiations with cash-strapped village councils, who rounded up the lease agreements necessary for the businesses to secure contiguous fields. Interestingly, as Natalia Mamanova has documented, there has been strikingly little resistance to these takeovers, suggesting that narratives of peasant resistance in the literature on land-grabbing may be exceptional, rather than the norm (Mamanova 2015). The agroholding executive was unequivocal when I asked him what happened if, in a large-tract lease, a plotholder had not signed a lease agreement, or had not registered their land with the state. "Then they don't get

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[88] Leases averaged 5-10 years during time of research, but could be up to 50 years; the minimum is now 7 years to encourage proper crop rotation. As far as prices per hectare, a general rule of thumb was that land in Ukraine rented at about 1/8 to 1/12 the price of land in Poland; the going rate was about 800 hryvnia per month, which was around 100 USD at time of research, and under 40 USD at time of writing.

paid," he stated flatly. "There are no lines out there; we can't just farm around someone's plot. We're happy to pay rent, of course, but they need to get their paperwork in order."[89]

There is a Russian language, Soviet-era proverb that makes the quote from the outset of this chapter a bit more brash: *bez bumashki, ty kakasha; s bumashkoj—chelovek*. "Without papers, you're a turd; with them, you're a person." Marta, my septuagenarian host in Zelene Pole, repeated this to me one day, and then added, cheekily, "here you're a turd with or without papers." A math teacher and former school principal who insisted on order in her classroom, she was one of a handful of people I knew in Ukraine who had opted out of land registration, who proclaimed to have no interest in it whatsoever. Marta had formalized her own land share, and was receiving in-kind payments from an off-shoot of the former collective-turned-cooperative, which had broken apart upon the death of the Soviet-era farm director. But when her husband died, she did not bother transferring his share to her name, which she had the right to do.

As best I understood it, Marta's husband had died suddenly, before his land formalization was complete, and without leaving a will. But this was not the problem. The quandary was that Marta's husband had died before replacing his Soviet internal passport (effectively a state ID) with one from independent Ukraine. Thus, under Ukrainian law, he did not officially exist.[90] That Marta was the heir was not in dispute, but she would need to go before the court to petition for recognition of both herself, and

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[89] I conducted five separate interviews with agribusiness executives and investors in Kyiv between August and October, 2013. The individual quoted above had extensive experience negotiating with village councils to acquire large tracts of land in western and central Ukraine, but not near either of my fieldsites. He pointed out something I had also heard: that sometimes villagers preferred to work with foreign companies, especially western ones, because they anticipated that these companies would be more likely to pay them in full and on time.

[90] While the government officially started issuing Ukrainian IDs in 1992, many rural people seem not to have had obtained them until the late '90s, or occasionally even into the new millennium. I have also heard that some of the people displaced from the conflict in Eastern Ukraine were still holding their Soviet passports, which prevented them from being registered for state benefits.

her dead husband, and then begin the process of claiming and privatizing his land all over again. Whether Marta was indifferent to land registration or distressed by the thought of securing new documents for her deceased partner was unclear to me. She did, however, point out she was old, her children had moved to the city and abroad, and that she plain didn't have the energy to claim another plot. A staunch communist, if no longer a member of the Communist Party, Marta also claimed to be uncomfortable taking more than she needed. "Let the land go to someone who can use it," she said.

While Marta's troubles with her husband's passport would seem to add credence to the proverb—without documents, one doesn't exist—from her perspective it was precisely the opposite: one could have all the paperwork they were required to have, but the state that issued it could cease to exist. You were a turd no matter what. Such was her experience with Soviet-era documents, and she was yet to be convinced that independent Ukraine was more sustainable than the USSR. As Marta explained it, she knew how to formalize her land share, or at least knew what resources to consult. She did not fear negotiating with people in positions of authority; she could be very authoritative herself. Finding money for "service fees" or petty bribes was of no concern either—her children had decent salaries, and could assist if necessary. For Marta, it was not the ever-changing laws, the bribe-demanding bureaucrats, the law-skirting citizenry, or the poorly designed populist policies that were arbitrary. For Marta, non-fixity and unpredictability were a quality of the state itself.

Figure 9: An old tractor on a residential street in Sonjachne.

**Paper With Potential**

But most of the small landowners I knew were not like Marta. They were rather quite

interested in securing private property, and, following the 2011 reform, put much effort

into perfecting the documents that, they believed, would lock in their rights to their plots.

More importantly, they anticipated that their documents would have future value: they

assumed that the Ukrainian state would continue to exist, that their deeds would remain

valid, and that their land would eventually command European-level rents or sales. Few

of my respondents admitted to planning to sell their plots once the moratorium was lifted;

however, many claimed that their neighbors would do so—and for much too low a price.

When I asked what an acceptable price for land would be, they had difficulty giving a

specific figure, but would describe their plot's value in terms of what it could be exchanged for. Selling land to buy a car or bankroll a kitchen renovation was considered imprudent; an apartment, however, might be worthwhile. In other words, land, as immovable, inheritable property, should be replaced with other immovable, inheritable property. This was not feasible at time of research, but my interlocutors anticipated that one day it would be. For them, land deeds were paper with potential.

This section delves into the practice of paper taming, focusing on the practical ways small landowners and front-line legal professions sought to make their documents work—to preserve their potential by "disciplin[ing] the[ir] interpretation," advancing not only the document holders' claims to the land, but to their version of "the *really real*"— or at least the version of reality that was most to their advantage (Hetherington 2011: 159). I detail three tactics the people I observed used to construct paper fences around their fields: manufacturing consistency across documents; using power of attorney (*doverennist'*) to pass the right to speak legally to the person deemed most proficient; and engaging the services of a lawyer, ideally free of charge. Before delving into these strategies, I consider the "graphic ideology" that underlies the,, and explore how many of my small landowner interlocutors conceived of their plots (and the deeds to those plots) less as land, and more as promise for the future. I argue that their tendency to approach their *paji* less as objects in the world, and more as malleable potential, shaped how they engaged the multitude of legal documents that mediated their relationship with their property, the government, and each other. I ask several questions: why were small landowners, for the most part, willing to spend time, money, and energy they didn't have to fix legal paperwork whose effectiveness was dubious? Under what circumstances did

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they expect the legal word to have performative power? How did legal documents create and transform social relationships *beyond* those of citizen and state? And another puzzle: why did small landowners often not know where their land was?

The last question irked me early in my fieldwork. When devising my research project, which was originally focused on the planned 2013 opening of the farmland market, I envisioned walking the fields with proud landowners who would know precisely—or at least approximately—where their land ended and another plot began. This never happened. Pasha took me to the fields he leased near Sonjachne; we rumbled along to the *baza* where equipment and grain were kept in his yellow work van, transporting extra canisters of gas for the machinery and hand pies (*piroshki*) Olena had fried up for the field hands. I spent some mornings on his strawberry farm, also leased, helping plant seedlings. I jogged along the tractor trail behind the Marchenkos house that formed the border between the kitchen gardens and the pasture, alternately amusing and frightening the neighbors, who warned me to stay away from the bull staked at the south end of the field. But no one ever took me to their *paj,* not because they weren't willing, and not because they didn't value their land, but because most of the time, they didn't know where their plot was.

The first time I realized this was the case, an interlocutor of mine had been waxing poetic about the black earth and Ukrainians' innate ties to the land. When I asked where the plot she claimed to so love was located, she waved her arm broadly and said, "oh, somewhere in that field over there." I was surprised, but later noticed this was not unusual, at least in Sonjachne, perhaps a bit less so in Zelene Pole due to how the allotted land abutted the village. My observations were confirmed by national surveys that

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reported that up to half of small landowners did not know where their plot was, and two-thirds had never set foot upon their own soil.[91] A series of news reports shamed former collective farmers for being so detached from the land, pointing out that they had received their free of charge, and were benefitting from the rents even though they did not work the fields.

But is it that odd that small landowners did not necessarily know where their plots were located? As I established in the previous chapter, iconic relationships to land aren't unusual: soil maps, for instance, mediate the experience of running one's hands through the black earth; agribusiness executives, with their portfolios of plots, are not expected to know the land so well. Additionally, there were also practical reasons why the small landowners did not know where their land was. Ukrainian former collective farming villages tend to have concentrated clusters of houses surrounded by vast fields. A *paj* (plot) is a mere slice of one of these much larger fields, and more often than not borders other *paji,* rather than, say, a road. Finally, in both the Soviet era and at time of research, workers reached the fields by motor vehicles, not on foot. Many of the small landowners I encountered were widows without vehicles, and without the knees for long walks. Therefore, for most of my respondents, taking a leisurely stroll along the perimeter of their plot was neither practical nor feasible. "What am I supposed to do, trample the wheat?" Marta scoffed when I asked her if she had walked her own land.

Still, focusing on the reasons why small landowners did not know where plots were elides the fact that, for a good number of my interlocutors, *what* their property was was not nearly as important to them as the fact that it could be handed down to their

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[91] USAID *Barometer* report, 2013, prepared by AgroInvest. There is some regional variation in this. Jennifer Dickinson, for example, has told me that her interlocutors in Zakarpattja often know *exactly* where their plots are located.

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children. Property is often conceptualized as "a bundle of rights" that determines what an owner may do with a particular object; these rights may be enjoyed in concert, or separately from each other (this stems from Maine (1876), but has long since entered more general use). For example, in Ukraine, the right to own land ("usus") was distinct from the right to earn a profit from the land ("fructus"); because of the moratorium, there is technically no right to alienate oneself from the land ("abusus"). All of these are rights regarding what a person may do with a thing. However, anthropologists and other social theorists have argued for approaching property *triangularly*, in terms of the social relations *between* people *in relation to* things. Max Gluckman famously argued that "property law for tribal society defines no so much rights of persons over things, as obligations owed between persons in respect of things" (1965: 46). While Gluckman was writing about the Barotse (south central Africa) legal system in relation to the English one, his observation has broader resonance. A farmer in Ukraine, for instance, may lease land from a small landowner for a certain period of time, gaining the right to use and make profit from the plot. However, the landowner must ensure access to the land, as well as its good condition, and the farmer must pay for the use of the land, as well as return it in equally good condition (eg. some leases include the stipulation that the farmer follow certain crop rotation practices). The contract between the farmer and the landowner is not merely a distribution of rights, but a sorting out of responsibilities that results in consensus as to how the land is to be used. In linguistic anthropological terms, we might compare property to "stance": what matters is not merely one speaker's assessment of an object, but how that assessment aligns him or her with other interactants (DuBois 2007).

Gluckman also distinguished between immoveable and movable property, arguing that "in tribal society at least" the former (land and water, for example) offered historical and social continuity, "provid[ing] fixed positions which endure through the passing of generations, through quarrels, and even through invasions and revolutions, and many social relationships are stabilized about these positions." The latter, "moveables" (readily gifted or otherwise exchangeable items, such as food), "establish links between individuals occupying different immovable properties." Gluckman suggested that this "difference in social function" was due to the different rates at which land and social relations change—land "but slowly," and "interrelations…comparatively rapidly" (1965: 116-117).

Post-Soviet decollectivized farmland presents particular challenges for these categories. First, for most of the people I worked with, the creation of immoveable property actually shattered the sociohistorical structures with which they were most familiar, because it dismantled not only the collective farm, but the *kollektiv*.[92] As discussed in the introduction, while Zelene Pole comprised a mixture of long-standing families and more recent arrivals, the population of Sonjachne at time of research was made up predominantly of displaced persons from northwestern Ukraine, migrants from Russia, and their descendants. The land may have provided a "fixed position," and it may have anchored the social relations of the collective farm because the collective farm of course required the land. And certainly, over two and three generations, people developed some affection for the soil they worked. But my sense is that for many of my

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[92] For a thorough discussion of Soviet Ukrainian social formations spent, broken, and reconfigured, see Eppinger 2010.

interlocutors, it was the *kollektiv,* that made the land most meaningful and productive, rather than the other way around.

Second—and this is relevant beyond the post-Soviet context—land deeds blur the line between moveable and immoveable property. This is most evident in their importance as inheritance (that is, one inherits the deed, even if one never goes to the land) but I am concerned with more than the transferability of rights. For my interlocutors, the multicolored *derzhavni akty* were representations of place in the broadest sense. Land deeds were indexical icons that diagrammed the land itself, and pointed to its geographic location. But they also pointed to the plot—and the plot-owner's—political position within independent Ukraine, and perhaps within "Europe."[93] For many of the people I worked with, land deeds were valued not only as documents granting property, but for how they evidenced movement toward a different type of political system, and hopefully a brighter future. In my interviews with small landowners I found that, whether or not the deed-holder planned to sell their land themselves, they relished the idea of their children having options—and hoped they would spend the money wisely.

To be bold: the thing of value promised by the deed was not land, but *potential.* While Gluckman described immoveable and moveable property as complementary, in Ukraine, the continuity that immoveables provide (paraphrasing from above: "fixed positions which endure…generations…even through invasions and revolutions, and [stabilize] many social relationships") was an end-goal, not a given. Having land—or an apartment, a family business, and heirloom—to pass down to one's children was

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[93] For similar observations in a rather different time, see Kivelson (2006) on how serfs gained political idenitity through being tied to Russian land.

something that my interlocutors very much desired. (The small landowners I spoke to talked far more often about land as inheritance than as collateral—recall the de Soto thesis—but this may have had more to do with their age than anything else.) However, the location and particularities of the land were less important than its suppleness, its ability to be transformed into something else.

Having established how my interlocutors approached their "paper with potential," I now turn to the strategies they used to try to retain its value. In doing so, I draw on insights from three recent works on documents, with full recognition that there are increasingly more to choose from. First, Hetherington's superb research on "guerilla auditors" working to help campesinos claim land on the Paraguayan frontiers deeply resonates with my own observations in Ukraine. "Guerilla auditors," Hetherington writes, "never see documents as the end point, but as the site of possibility, not a store of information as a static thing but as a tool for making it as a political effect" (2011: 166). Small landowners and front-line legal professionals in Ukraine were similarly invested in making and mending documents for future uses. This often meant ridding paperwork of inconsistencies, not only within single documents, but across a range of them, so that they would tell a cohesive story. I detail how my paper-taming interlocutors worked to make the spellings of names and borders of plots match across passports and wills, land deeds and maps, in order to limit wayward readings that could lead to unfavorable outcomes. I also note how, sometimes, they omitted information from one document that might compromise the integrity of another one.

Second, and relatedly, I am taken by historian Burns' observation that "archives are less like mirrors than chessboards." Writing about a sudden profusion of notarized

documents in colonial Peru, Burns asserts that "The overall point [of these documents] was not transparency…[but] to prevail, should one's version of what was right and just be legally challenged" (2010: 124). In comparing document-making to a game of chess, Burns joins Hetherington and other scholars in calling for the probing of written records' histories of production, as well as what possibilities those involved in their production saw in what they were writing (Strathern 2000; Riles 2003, 2006; Papalias 2005). One of her most unique contributions, however, is her focus on the notaries who were enlisted to create, and add stamps of legitimacy to, legal paper trails. For Burns, notaries are not mere paper pushers, but "ventriloquist[s]" (2) who could lend other people an official voice when they needed to speak with more authority. I pick up on Burns' discussion of ventriloquism in my analysis of how Ukrainian small landowners used writs of power of attorney in order to pass the right to speak legally to people they deemed to be most capable of traversing the legal minefield.

Finally, I return to Hull's (2012) work on Pakistani bureaucracy to illuminate how paperwork, presumed the product of human actors, actually generates networks of social relations around itself. Following him, I suggest that land deeds and other documents my interlocutors attempted to tame sometimes ran feral because, as material forms, they were mediators in their own right. Hull's work forces my study of Ukrainian land deeds to reckon with some additional questions: why does paperwork tend to proliferate? Who produces arbitrariness—people, states, or documents themselves? Is there something satisfying about taming paper (or believing you can do so)? I offer thoughts on this last set of questions later in this section, and in the conclusion of this chapter. For now, we

return to Zelene Pole, to a paper-tamer par excellence, who spent an inordinate amount of time preoccupied with spelling mistakes.

One of the things I have not yet mentioned is that Tamara was not even supposed to work on land. As the village secretary, she was principally in charge of demographic matters, such as births, deaths, marriages, and wills. Another woman, the *zemlevporjadnyk* (literally, "land fixer"), dealt with the allocation of the plots themselves. In reality, however, there was much overlap in their work, and as Tamara was in the office more days per week, and had worked for the village council for much longer, many villagers came to her first. Moreover, in Zelene Pole, the aging population meant that Tamara was constantly managing the transfer of land through inheritance, a procedure that pulls together piles of documents prepared at different times, by different offices. As all of these documents include proper names, any one of them could bear spelling mistakes (or worse, the wrong appellation altogether), seriously complicating the inheritance process. Mismatches in the spellings of names in wills, which were typically written by hand at the village council, and those on state-issued documents, such as passports, death certificates, and land deeds, were a frequent challenge, and left uncorrected, could invalidate claims to property. For example, Tamara told me about a woman who had gone by the nickname "Ljuda" her entire life, and those around her, including her own children, had assumed her given name was "Ljudmila." She had several documents issued that dubbed her "Ljudmila," including her will, her land deeds, even her Ukrainian passport, but upon her death, other documents made clear that her given name had in fact been the less common "Ljudviha." Not only did Ljuda's children have the startling realization that they had never in fact known their own mother's name,

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but they had to petition the court for permission to settle her affairs. "Never mind the land," Tamara shook her head. "They had to reissue the death certificate!"

More often, however, the spelling problems involved single letter substitutions that stemmed from the adoption of Ukrainian as the sole state language in a country where about half of the population spoke Russian as their native tongue, and had given their children Russian names. Ukrainian law mandates that citizens have Ukrainian names, as defined by a list of officially recognized appellations. (Immigrants are exempt, and names from some religious minorities are also permissible; the effect of this law has mostly been to force people with names that have Ukrainian equivalents to use the Ukrainian version.) Therefore, for many Ukrainian citizens, independence meant a change not only of passport, but a change in the name on their passport. Mismatches in documents could snarl a range of bureaucratic procedures; fortunately, most of my interlocutors found these changes a mere annoyance, as the sound changes were both minimal and easily discernable, and appeared only on official documents: Russian "Aleksandr" became "Oleksandr"; "Yelena" became "Olena"; "Igor'" become "Ihor'."

However, two pairs of Ukrainian vowels were widely known for causing confusion: **і** vs. **и** (IPA: /i/ and /ɪ/), and **е** vs. **є** (IPA: /ɛ/ and /e/). In each case, the trouble basically boiled down to what looks to be the same letter in Russian and Ukrainian being assigned to different sounds. The problem with the first pair of sounds stemmed from differences in the distribution of high vowels in Russian and Ukrainian (/i/ and /ɨ/ in Russian, vs. /i/, and /ɪ/ in Ukrainian), combined with the assignment of the letter **и** to—I will revert to transliteration here—[i] in Russian, but [y] in Ukrainian. Though there is often a one-to-one correlation between Russian and Ukrainian [i] (eg. Russian "Igor'"

and Ukrainian "Ihor'" are written with **и** and **i**, respectively), this isn't always the case. "Karina," a name that became popular for baby girls a few years back, provides a useful illustration. While the name is pronounced with [i] in Russian, the official Ukrainian version of the name is written and pronounced with [y]: "Karyna." In Cyrillic, however, both of these names appear Кар<u>и</u>на (I have underlined the vowel in question for emphasis)—that is, there is a slight sound difference, but the spelling looks the same. However, some Ukrainian parents familiar with the Russian version "Karina," with the long [i] sound, assumed they could write their child's name as Кар<u>і</u>на. They were subsequently shocked to find out that, while they were free to write Кар<u>і</u>на on baby blankets and wall-hangings, their children would need to be Кар<u>и</u>на at school and on all official documentation.[94] Fortunately, Tamara noted, she and other government workers usually caught the problem before Кар<u>і</u>на showed up on either a birth certificate or a kindergarten roster, giving a child a misspelled start in life. Nevertheless, it happened fairly regularly that documents needed to be re-issued to correct spelling inconsistencies.

Problems with [e] and [je] (**е** and **є**), in my experience, seemed to show up more often among adults, particularly among native speakers of Russian and ethnic minorities who spoke other languages (Bulgarian, for example) that were also written in Cyrillic. Readers who know Russian will note that that the Ukrainian letters corresponding to [e] and [je] seem "flipped" in two ways. First, while in Ukrainian the letter **е** sounds like the "eh" in "Elena," in Russian the letter **е** adds palatalization, as in "Yelena." Second, Ukrainian **є** looks like the mirror image of Russian **э**, but makes the opposite sound ([je] vs. [e]). To summarize, Ukrainian **е** and **є** make the sounds [e] and [je], but Russian **е** and

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[94] Especially confusing was that Ukrainian is otherwise known for its "softness" and abundance of /i/ sounds, especially in relation to Russian: Ukrainian "night" [nich'] is Russian [noch']; Ukrainan "honey" [mid] is Russian [mjod], etc. Granted, these tend to be [o] to [i] variations, rather than [y] to [i].

э make the sounds [je] and [e]. Misspellings in single names were compounded by the use of patronymics, which, while not required in Ukrainian (respect can be shown through the use of the honorifics "Pan" and "Pani" plus the first name), persisted throughout much of the country. As an example, consider a woman with the Russian name and patronymic <u>Ye</u>lena <u>I</u>gor<u>j</u>evna (<u>Е</u>лена <u>И</u>горевна). In Ukrainian, her name would be <u>O</u>lena <u>I</u>hor<u>i</u>vna and written <u>О</u>лена <u>I</u>горівна. Thus, an interlocutor pointed out to me, there are three opportunities for "mistakes" with vowels.[95] If a will lists an heir as Olena *Ihorjevna*, for example, and Elena/Olena's documents say Ihor*i*vna, she may have to petition the court. Front line legal professions including Tamara, as well as other village council members and notaries, noted that the spelling errors and inconsistences were not necessarily that difficult to iron out. However, they took time and guidance to fix, and it often happened that people were not aware they needed to make their documents consistent until already deep into a bureaucratic maneuver.

Manufacturing consistency in documents could be quite a drawn out process, and, didn't necessarily mean matching up "representation" and "reality" most precisely, but rather making certain all the "representations" matched each other. Ensuring that all of one's documents bore official Ukrainian spellings in no way meant that someone who had gone their entire life by one name ("Aleksandr" vs. "Oleksandr," for example) was suddenly going to present themselves differently. (As Jennifer Dickinson (2007) notes, under both the Soviet and independent Ukrainian systems, rural communities preserved the use of local names, in part because their dialects often departed severely from the standards—this was certainly the case in Zakarpattja, where Dickinson was working—

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[95] The name *Igor'* ends in a soft sign Игорь which prompts the "jevna" ending in Russian as opposed to the more familiar "ovna." The well-known Russian/Ukrainian g/h variation is not important in this instance, Russian [g] and Ukrainian [h] happen to be written the same: г. Ukrainian [g] has a slight hook: ґ.

and in part because local names indexed intimacy and insider-status.) Likewise, small landowners and frontline legal professionals took care to ensure that the dimensions of plots were consistently enumerated across deeds, leases, and cadasters. What the actual dimensions were was less important than that rents were paid consistently. As such, when people found errors in the electronic cadaster, they had to decide whether reporting the error was more likely to be helpful, or hurtful. For example, a plot that the electronic cadaster depicted as extending into a creek was of little concern, provided the farmer to whom it was rented continued to pay for its listed dimensions. If the farmer argued he shouldn't have to pay for the full plot, as part of it was underwater, one could petition that State Land Agency to fix the mistake (ie. bring the plot back to dry land), or if necessary, re-survey the field. (Correcting errors was supposed to be free of charge, but like other aspects of land registration came with unpredictable "service fees.") But re-surveying came with risks: for example, the State Land Agency might determine that the plot was indeed smaller than reported, resulting in a loss of income *and* the need to reissue other documents. As such, some villagers felt it better to let sleeping dogs lie. The State Land Agency, of course, could and did re-survey land and correct errors of its own initiative.

The maps diagramming parcels of privatized land were far from the only cartographies of the countryside, of course. Archaeologists, for example, had produced their own maps, which marked the presence of hundreds of Bronze Age burial mounds (*kurgany*) in the eastern part of the country. (These maps, in turn, had been based on Soviet military maps documenting changes in terrain.) Some of these mounds were still quite prominent, easily rising 10 meters high, but others were very eroded, or had been

plowed over in the decades prior, and only obvious to experts. When farmland was decollectivized, and plots allotted, the kurgans were sometimes included in the shares. This was quite a concern for the national association for the protection of historical monuments, which worked with the State Land Agency to mark the mounds in the cadaster, legally obligating the owners of the privatized kurgans to leave them undisturbed. However, the cadaster initially only reflected those kurgans registered as historical monuments during the *Soviet* era. Archaeologists, however, had identified hundreds more that they wished to have documented and protected. Some of these had been registered in the new Ukrainian list of monuments, but many more lingered in spreadsheets and on websites maintained by archaeologists, threatening the consistency of cadastral maps.

In most cases, the kurgans had already been excavated, and it was difficult to convince villagers that the mounds were valuable even if they contained no treasures. Moreover, small landowners feared that registering a kurgan on their property would not only drastically reduce the size of their plot available for farming, but discourage farmers from renting their land more generally, as a small but sudden hill would inconvenience tractors and combines. While some small landowners and village councils worked with the archaeologists to protect mounds, it often happened that they refused to cooperate, claimed archaeology was merely a vehicle for corruption, or denied there were any kurgans on their land at all. Land rights advocates I followed in Dnipropetrovsk region were supportive of the archaeologists to a point, explaining that they wanted to help protect the country's heritage, but that it seemed that the archaeologists were constantly coming up with new things that needed to be protected. Whose list of burial mounds

should they follow? The one that corresponded to the cadaster, or the one produced by the local commissioner for protection of historical monuments? What was more important: the protection of yet another kurgan that only an expert could see, or property rights for the vulnerable?
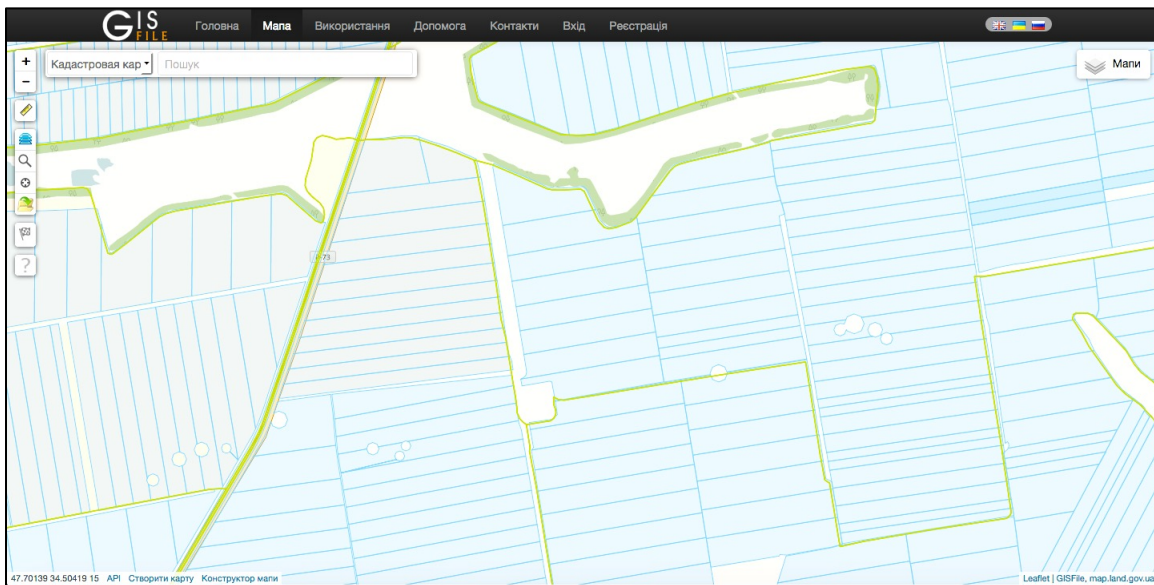
Hull observes that "graphic artifacts draw objects into associations, and circulation of documents draws people into the bureaucratic process" (2012: 18). In the examples above, I have shown how discontinuities across documents drew my interlocutors into an ever-expanding spiral of people and paperwork that produced ever more inconsistencies. My research participants worked hard to create uniformity across passports, deeds, and wills to make them less susceptible to legal challenges, and more likely to perform as intended. At the same time, the people I worked with challenged—or more often, ignored—the validity of documents that threw their own claims into question. These chessboard moves illustrate how legal documents can be used to construct a particular version of reality, but they also underline the impossibility of fixing meaning.

However much my interlocutors tried to discipline the documents, the documents remained unruly. The more they tried to iron out the inconsistencies, the more people and paper they ended up drawing in.

Earlier in this chapter I noted that my interlocutors were concerned not only with laws that were "only in the books," but with the lack of equal protection. It mattered who was speaking, and villagers, especially those who were older or less educated, worried about their ability to assert their rights when negotiating with farmers or visiting the offices of the Land Agency. They could study the steps on the posters and fliers, don professional dress, keep all their documents crisp and clean in individual plastic sleeves, and still, but they couldn't erase the uncertainty in their voices, or their non-standard speech. Thus, some villagers who were concerned about their ability to navigate the legal process granted power of attorney to a representative whom they thought would better be able to protect their protect their property. As Burns (2010) might put it, they found "ventriloquists" in those they deemed to have more authority, experience, or aptitude.

Goffman (1981), in his discussion of "production format," complicated the notion of "speaker" and "listener" by dividing each into multiple roles, and showing how a single participant may occupy several or none of them. Most notably for this chapter, he distinguished between the "author," "animator," and "principal" of speech: the first is the person who composes the words; the second is the person who delivers them; and the third is the person on whose behalf the words are being delivered. Regarding villagers giving power of attorney to someone they trusted to manage legal affairs—for example, an elderly dairymaid asking her university-educated niece to assist her—we might say that the former are the principals, and the latter the animators. Either may be authors,

depending on the interactions that take place. But, as I will show here, whom power of attorney was supposed to serve was sometimes a muddled affair. Writs of *doverennist'* ("entrustment") were at once tools that small landowners deployed to try to enhance their claims, as well as unwieldy documents whose uses sometimes escaped their creators.

In Ukraine, writs of power of attorney could be prepared at the village council, or in some more complex cases (or if one wished to keep their business more private) at a notary's office. One pays a small fee for the note; the notary (or other frontline legal professional) prepares a letter saying that X person grants Y person the right to represent their interests in performing a specific task during a specific time frame. As such, the documents diagram social relationships: the right to speak legally may be passed between spouses; parents and children; friends; neighbors; urban and rural populations; people of different educational backgrounds; and also clients and service providers. Such was the case in 2012–2013, when small landowners were scrambling to finish registering their plots. By the time I was doing my fieldwork, a cottage industry of paperwork pros had already cropped up: landshare specialists who promised to manage the formalization of *paji* from start to finish, for a fee. While my interlocutors often described using writs of power of attorney to ensure their affairs were handled by competent and trustworthy people, they had practical reasons to employ such services as well. As land needed to be registered in the *raion* (approximately: "county") in which it was located, completing the process involved a fair bit of travel. Tamara, for example, had power of attorney for elderly villagers who did not have the stamina for trips to the regional center, much less the long lines that would await them upon arrival. Urbanites holding onto the family plot often made use of paid specialists so that they did not need to take time off of work to

visit the land agency, which was of course only open on weekdays. Through

*doverennist',* small landowners killed two birds with one stone: they had someone speak

on their behalf whom they thought to be better qualified to manage a confusing process,

and they saved their own time and sanity.

But power of attorney could also backfire: each writ cost money, and granted the

right (or more accurately, the responsibility) to complete only one specified task. This

task could only be completed by the person named in the legal document, within a

specified period of time. *Dovernnist'* cannot be extended, nor passed to a third party.

Thus, people who saw power of attorney as a simple solution to their bureaucratic woes

were often taken aback when they realized the limitations—and expense—of the

documents. For example, I accompanied lawyers from the Dnipropetrovsk "Public

Platform" on some of their day trips to villages to provide free legal aid to small

landowners. In one village, a mother and her grown son inquired about how to claim a

kitchen garden that abutted the house in which the grown son and his wife now lived. The

house had belonged to a former resident of the village who, after having a stroke, had

moved to Kharkiv to be closer to her daughter. She had limited mobility but had agreed

to sell her home and garden to the young couple (or rather, to their parents) for cash,

provided that they took care of all the bureaucratic matters. This included completing the

privatization of the kitchen garden, which apparently needed to be done before the

woman could officially transfer it.

The parties had thought that they could use a single writ of power of attorney to

manage all of the affairs they had discussed, but it turned out they were going to need

two, possibly three separate writs of *doverennist',* each of which would require the

services of a notary, who would charge per document as well as for the consultation itself. Moreover, the old woman was the one who needed to go to the notary offices in Kharkiv and pay to prepare the necessary documents. "Couldn't the old woman's daughter take care of the paperwork?," the clients wondered. Certainly, this appeared the easiest solution: all parties wanted to resolve the sale of the home and garden. But because *dovernnist'* could only exist between two parties, and could not be passed to a third, speech sometimes got stuck in transit. Writs of power of attorney, which had seemed such a useful, single-document solution, instead produced maelstroms of paperwork that sucked in ever more people, and ever more money.

The Public Platform was one of the local organizations funded by the AgroInvest project. Unlike the Land Union (see previous section), it was less involved in creating policy than it was in providing bare-bones, on-the-ground support for small landowners and village councils. While my travels with the Land Union were punctuated by (literally) whole-hog banquets with local politicians and officers from the State Land Agency and Ministry of Justice, the roving team from Public Platform, which usually visited three villages in a day, was fortunate to find time for a quick tea of bread and cheese between meetings. We bounced around the countryside in the director's compact sedan, her husband at the wheel, and me, the day's lawyer, and a law student observer squeezed in the back. Locating our destinations meant hoping the GPS was at least somewhat accurate, and then driving slowly through the dusty villages until we spotted a building flying a Ukrainian flag. In 2013, before the revolution, it was rare to see the Ukrainian flags flown anywhere but administrative centers and schools, so in the absence of numbered houses or street signs, they were as good a guide as anything.

At the council offices, the director of the Public Platform and the lawyer on duty gave short presentations followed by question and answer sessions, and then individual consultations if necessary. While the lawyer managed the consultations one at a time, they were hardly private: the director of Public Platform sometimes joined her at the table, as did members of the village council. The law students and I hung around the perimeter, listening in (and in my case, taking notes; I was not permitted to record), trying to hear what was happening over the chatter of the villagers who were standing nearby—that is, the chatter of the villagers who were not also listening in, and in some cases, adding their own commentary.

I asked one of the lawyers why she involved so many people in the consultation; what if the clients didn't want the village council (not to mention half the village!) involved? She laughed, and then explained that having others present typically helped the client, as it made clear to everyone which responsibilities were theirs alone, and which the village council needed to assist them with. Additionally, for many of the villagers, the consultations with a lawyer from the big city were an opportunity to have their voices heard, and to gain the upper hand if they felt the village council was being unfair, not helping them as they were supposed to, or not including them in decision making processes, such as negotiations with farms renting large tracts of land. Working for the Public Platform brought the lawyer interesting cases from time to time, and she felt pride in helping people who were quite genuinely confused by the all the steps and changes. But, she noted, it was not infrequent that she encountered clients who just wanted her to make their own arguments more assertively, or even "tell off the *holova* (mayor)" if need be. She was often content to oblige. Originally from a tiny village herself, she was well

aware that in matters of the law, it mattered who was speaking. Besides, she noted,

kicking the dust off of her high heels before sliding into the car, "these are poor people;

their homes and their *paji* are all really all they have got."



Figure 11: A legal consultation in Dnipropetrovsk region.


## Open access

Most of this chapter is about enclosure, and how people who had little experience with

land as private property came to think of plots of previously collectivized land as their

own. This last section focuses on borders that some Ukrainians wanted to open up. It

takes its name from the title of a 2013 documentary film that was gaining attention in the

months preceding the start of the Maidan Revolution.[96] *Vidkrytyj Dostup* comprises five

vignettes about Ukrainians trying to take advantage of the country's recent "open access"

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[96] I saw "Open Access" twice, first in April 2013 at the Odessa Cultural Center, and again in July of that
year at a festival in Ivano-Frankivsk region called "Art Pole." The film premiered prior to then at the
Docudays Human Rights Film Festival in Kyiv in early 2013 and toured all the regions. Some screenings
were disrupted by protestors, and in Simferopol (Crimea), even smoke bombs. The film was released in its
entirety on YouTube during the peak of the Maidan Revolution.

law, which allowed them to petition for information about government matters not readily available to the public. One vignette is about a veteran of the Afghan war living in a rustic cabin trying to find out why it is taking over 20 years for him to be rehoused. Another focuses on a professor in Kyiv living in a historic building to which basic services have been cut off. Two stories offer poignant pictures of the emptying out of the countryside: in one, a community petitions to know why their school must be closed, and their children forced to cross dangerous railroad tracks to attend another one; in the second, a middle-aged woman from a dying village wants to know there is no longer any bus service in her area, albeit once a week. But the vignette which received the most attention, and later circulated independently of the others, was the first one, titled "Mezhyhirya." This segment was an investigation into how then-president Viktor Yanukvoych had appropriated public lands, and public funds, for his personal estate. On the eve of the revolution, this short spotlighted how legal documents, so difficult for average Ukrainians to tame, were propagated and unleashed by oligarchs.

Mezhyhirya, "the land between the hills," was once the site of a monastery. During the Soviet era, it was transformed into summer residences for high-level Communist Party officials, and in the decade following Ukrainian independence, it was used to host foreign delegations. However, in 2002, when Viktor Yanukovych first became prime minister, he began renting part of the property. After the Orange Revolution, Yanukovych briefly left Mezhyhirya, but in 2005, when he regained the premiership, he returned, benefitting from an ambiguous charity (registered to the school-age daughter of one of his associates) called "Ukrainian Revival," which rented seven hectares for his benefit. In 2007, in his last days as prime minister, Yanukovych and his

government privatized Mezhyhirya. Whatever documents detailing the sale there might have been seem to have been buried, but it is clear that there was no competitive process, little oversight, and probably no significant payment. Yanukovych received a title to a 1.7 hectare residential plot, where he renovated the home he had been previously living in. The remaining land (about 140 hectares—for comparison, this is about twice the size of Camp David, and approaching the size of Monaco) were sold to a company called MedInvestTraid, which prompty turned around, resold the property to a company called Tantalit, and then declared bankruptcy. According to the work of Ukrainian investigative journalists,[97] Tantalit was 99.97% owned by Euro East Beteiligungs GmbH, an Austrian shell company, and .03% by a lawyer representing Yanukovych's son (apparently the minimum percentage necessary to give him the directorship). East Euro Beteiligungs GmbH was in turn held by shell companies registered in Austria and the United Kingdom, which were held by still other shell companies. Through these shells, Yanukvoych and his partners funneled millions of dollars to construct themselves an exclusive waterfront retreat on stolen land abutting the Kyiv Sea (an enormous water reservoir north of the capital). They freely helped themselves to taxpayer money, building a private road to the site using funds designated for the 2012 European Cup, which Ukraine co-hosted with Poland, and renting a helicopter for the president's personal use from yet another shell company associated with the ones that owned Mezhyhirya.

In other words, Mezhyhirya was public land, illegally privatized, and costing the state millions in lost revenue and maintenance expenses. The "Mezhyhirya" segment of the "Open Access" film tells the story of two of the investigative journalists who became

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[97] Sergii Leshchenko was the most prominent of these. Some of his key articles on this subject matter include "The Secrets of Mezhyhirya," *Ukrajinska Pravda,* June 5, 2012; "Yanukovych, the luxury residence, and the money trail that leads to London" *Open Democracy,* June 8, 2012.

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obsessed with understanding how Yanukovych, who reported a salary of 2000 USD per month, had acquired the estate, and what lay beyond the six meter wall that surrounded it. The vignette opens in 2010, at a press conference marking Yanukovych's first 100 days in the presidency. Journalists from the "Stop Censorship" activist group are in attendance, and Mustafa Nayyem[98], who would later be credited for initiating some of the anti-government protests that became the Maidan Revolution, asks Yanukovych if he will keep his promise to show the press his home at Mezhyhirya. Yanukovych, in a show of what Hetherington (2011: 207, 218) has called "populist transparency," grandly declares that the journalists may visit "right now," and has them to write down their names on a list. However, when the journalists arrive at Mezhyhirya, an aid refuses to let them in, saying that the president is busy, and that his invitation was, regrettably, all rather "impromptu." "Then why did we make the lists?" one of the journalists asks.

The film then cuts to a year later. Sergii Leshchenko, Nayyem's frequent collaborator, is driving to the administrative center of the village of Novi Petrivtsi, where Mezhyhirya is located. Leshchenko turns to the camera to explain the paper trail he's been tracing, and the day's mission: to file a request for information about the sale of Mezhyhirya to this mysterious company called "Tantalit." His request is resolved, or

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[98] I write the names of these Ukrainian journalists as they themselves write them when publishing in English. Both were well known reporters prior to the Maidan Revolution, and had held fellowships in the United States. (See: Yaffa, Joshua. "Reforming Ukraine after the Revolutions" *The New Yorker,* September 5, 2016.) Mustafa Nayyem is of Afghan origin but was raised in Ukraine; he usually writes and speaks in Russian, and worked extensively in both print and television, including on the popular political talk show "Schuster Live." In 2013, he co-founded Hromadske ("Public") television, Ukraine's first news network not owned by an oligarch. Sergii Leshchenko got his start in journalism at the then-new internet-based newspaper *Ukrajinska Pravda*. He was hired by the paper's founder, who was violently killed two weeks later, plunging Leschenko into the volatile world of investigative journalism. Although Leshchenko usually publishes in Ukrainian, he is a consummate bilingual. At time of research, he freely code-switched on social media, and accommodated his interlocutors in interviews (ie. responding to a question in Russian with Russian, and to a question in Ukrainian with Ukrainian). While constantly maintained, non-accommodating bilingual conversation (ie. one interlocutor speaks Russian, and the other Ukrainian) was entirely common in Ukraine (Bilianiuk 2005, 2010; Jones 2009), Leshchenko's seamless switching was far less so.

rather, shown to be unsuccessful, toward the end of the short, when he receives a reply acknowledging a 2010 agreement between Yanukovych and the local administration, but blocking his request for further information. The letter states that because Leshchenko's request pertains to private property and the legally protected rights and interests of another person, additional details cannot be provided. Leshchenko, not surprised by the result, is amused to see that the letter cites a resolution from the Council of Europe condemning the exploitation of private life as public commodity. "Apparently, it's not of interest that [Yanukovych] got the money [for his private property] from the state budget," he quips. He concludes, "I think that the information on this paper costs less than the paper itself."

Between these two scenes, we see the "Stop Censorship" team watching footage of a tour of Yanukovych's home—a tour they were not invited to. In 2011, the president invited a group of six talk-show hosts and television journalists for a tour of the home that is officially his, showing them polished, prosperous, but not particularly extravagant living spaces: his bedroom; a nursery for his grandchildren; a home office; some gardens; and a small swimming pool in which he claimed to swim five kilometers per day. (*Bez vody ne mahu*—"I can't live without water," he rumbles in his deep Donetsk accent.) At one point, Yanukvoych shows off his physical fitness on a backyard agility course of tree stumps. Watching the footage, Nayyem is visibly exasperated, not only by Yanukovych playing the unassuming family man, but by the obliviousness of the well-to-do talking heads on the tour: "You know what's bizarre?," Nayyem says. "They really seem to think that [showing] this won't annoy ordinary people. They think [this home] is normal. They think this is a standard that can be shown to people and for them, it will be normal."

The closing scene of the short brings us to another presidential press conference, about two years after the first. Nayyem once again asks Yanukovych when he will be transparent about the ownership of Mezhyhirya, and chides him for giving a "tour" solely to those who supported him. By now Yanukovych is impatient with Nayyem, and tells him he "doesn't deal in ultimatums" and has "more important business to attend to." He suggests that the journalists look for Mezhyhirya's owners themselves, noting that they sometimes come to Ukraine, and can surely be found. The vignette closes with evidence the journalists rose to the challenge, flashing the cover of *Korrespondent* magazine, which, in October 2011, published aerial photos and building plans for Mezhyhirya, revealing its true expanse, as well as the extravagance of the private club Yanukovych was building. The president's official home—the one he had shown to television reports— was a bungalow in comparison to the palatial "clubhouse" of timber and stone he and his cronies had commissioned the Finnish company Honka to build. Among the other amenities planned or already built were a sports center, a bowling ally, tennis courts, a shooting range, a sauna, a golf course, a yacht club, horse stables, an airplane hanger, a helipad, greenhouses, and an aviary. ("Dom, kotoroj postroil—ja." [The house that I built.] *Korrespondent.* October, 2011.)

The cut to the subsequent vignette in *Vidkrytyj Dostup*—about the impoverished veteran living in a rickety cabin—is stark, to say the least. However, what was most striking to the Ukrainians I discussed the film with was neither the poverty of some of their compatriots, nor the eye-popping excess of the oligarchy, but rather how Yanukovych and company spun webs of paperwork around themselves. Like the small landowners I discussed in the section prior, the ruling class employed the services of

those who could advance their claims, but rather than striving for consistency across their legal documents, or struggling to pin down paperwork that kept proliferating, they seemed to trade in chaos. While the other shorts in "Open Access" depicted citizens trying to understand the logic of government ("why haven't I received housing yet?"; "why is our school closing?"; "why don't I have utilities?"; "why is there no more bus service?"), the Mezhyhirya segment showed how those in power can conceal their activity behind nearly impenetrable walls of documents, even while donning the mask of transparency. Moreover, the segment conveyed how the law itself can be exploited to mask illicit activity: Leshchenko catches whiffs of fraud and abuse in shell companies registered to Yanukovych associates, but when he attempts (however cynically) to make use of "open access," he is slapped with a Council of Europe resolution warning him against defaming a public figure.

Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff, in their introduction to *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony,* observe that "criminal violence does not so much repudiate the rule of law or the licit operations of the market as appropriate their forms—and recommission their substance. Its perpetrators create parallel modes of production and profiteering, sometimes even of governance and taxation, thereby establishing simulacra of social order" (2006: 5, see also Tilley 1985 on how governments may "operate…as racketeers"). So it was in Ukraine, where tax evasion, the siphoning of state property, the expropriation of private property, and the general consolidation of power, were conducted via legal channels, leaving paper trails replete with loose threads, dead ends, and red herrings, but all the right stamps and signatures. Transparency exercises, such as

elections, the "open access" program, even Yanukovych's "tour" of his home, furthered the hall of mirrors.

The Mezhyhirya exposé became a touchstone in Ukrainian discourses about rule of law, but did not incapacitate the Yanukvoych administration so much as force it to reorganize. When parliamentary elections were held the following fall, they featured a hybrid competitions in which voters cast ballots both for the party they supported as well as for an individual candidate to represent their district. According to the Yanukovych government, this was supposed to give voters greater voice at the polls. However, the candidates in the latter "first past the post" competitions, who sometimes claimed affiliation with bogus political parties, were overwhelmingly loyal to the Party of Regions. The result was a net gain in seats for Yanukovych's administration. By aligning with the Communist Party (which had long since lost any claim to being concerned with social justice), the Party of Regions maintained control. The opposition was thus composed of the three remaining parties: the Bloc of Yuliya Tymoshenko, boxer Vitalij Klitchko's UDAR (fittingly, "punch") party, and Svoboda, the far right "Freedom" party. Yuliya Tymoshenko's Bloc suffered losses, in part because Tymoshenko herself was imprisoned, and perhaps also because her claim to moral authority had fallen: the same *Korrespondent* article about Mezhyhirya (as well as several other news sources) revealed that Tymoshenko had been evading taxes by claiming to be living in her mother's one-room apartment in Dnipropetrovsk, rather than at her own lavish estate near Kyiv. However, UDAR put in a strong performance in its first election, and more ominously, Svoboda surged to secure 10 percent of the votes. The leaders of these three parties—Arsenij Yatsenjuk, Vitalij Klitchko, and Oleh Tjanibok—along with eventual president

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Petro Poroshenko, would figure prominently in the Maidan Revolution and in the new government that would follow.

For many Ukrainians, however, the revolution had no obvious leadership. My interlocutors who participated in the demonstrations in Kyiv and in the regions listed their reasons for protesting—government accountability, Ukrainian self-determination, closer ties with Europe, human rights, rule of law—but they expressed solidarity with other protestors, not support for a particular political party. They did, however, often repeat the same story as to how the protests began: after Yanukovych announced on November 21st that he would not sign the EU Association Agreement, the journalist Mustafa Nayyem had posted on Facebook calling for people to gather at Maidan Nezalezhnosti ("Independence Square") to show their support for European integration. Undoubtedly, people came to the Maidan that day, and the days that followed, with a variety of motivations, and at the behest of any number of influential people. But there was something commanding about the idea of Nayyem, already famous for demanding "open access" to Mezhyhirya, helping fling open the doors to Europe, too.

What followed has been well-documented by others: the first demonstrations and the first encampment in Kyiv, and then the night of November 30th, the first attempt by the government to clear the square. Attacks on sleeping students did little to rouse sympathy for the police. Nor did the brutal beating (by assailants) of journalist Tetiana Chornovol, who had scaled the walls of Mezhyhirya in 2012, and was well known for her combative relationship with the Yanukovych administration. The demonstrations grew and spilled beyond Kyiv, attracting people who were skeptical of the European Association Agreement, but firm in their opposition to Yanukovych. The tents on Maidan

Nezalezhnosti spread, spiraling out pioneer-style[99] from the scaffolding for an artificial Christmas tree, its branches never delivered. Instead, demonstrators covered the conical frame with Ukrainian flags bearing the names of their hometowns; E.U. flags, and those of demonstrators from other countries—Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Canada, Poland, the U.S., Israel, and others, and Russia, too—were added. There was a festive, family-friendly atmosphere with music, crafts, and teach-ins; hot tea, bread, cheese, and borshch for all; and no alcohol. Street vendors who previously sold flowers, magnets, and Soviet memorabilia changed their merchandise, hawking Ukrainian flags and nylon *vinky,* folk-style head wreaths adorned with flowers and trails of ribbons. Visitors from other cities carpooled to Kyiv, and "AutoMaidan" caravans clogged the road to Mezhyhirya in an act of defiance.

As the protests grew, so did concerns about provocateurs. The December 8th toppling of Kyiv's red granite Lenin, the last standing in the city, drew condemnation from Nayyem, amusement from Leshchenko, and spurred strings of statue-razing across the country. The increasing prominence of the far right, with their red and black "blood and soil" flags and Nazi-era slogans—"glory to Ukraine, glory to the heroes"; but also "death to the enemies" and "Ukraine above all"—galvanized some demonstrators, and made others deeply uncomfortable. Activists with more progressive agendas were isolated or harassed (Channell-Justice 2017). Masked men stormed provincial administrations. The government grew impatient, and stationed more *berkut* ("golden eagle") riot police in Kyiv. A handful of protestors were abducted, beaten, left for dead;

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[99] Soviet "pioneers" (somewhat akin to American and British scouts) traditionally pitch their tents in concentric circles, with the smallest children in the center, and the oldest children and adults along the edges. While there was no demographic organization to the tents on Maidan—demonstrators from Carpathian Kolomyja abutted those from Donetsk—the layout was indeed more ring than grid-like.

more simply disappeared. Anti-Maidan demonstrations sprung up in a neighboring square

and in other parts of the country—Maidan protestors contended that most of these people

had been bused in from the countryside, and paid to participate. Barricades went up;

militia—*samooborony*—formed to protect the encampment. Weapons were acquired.

Foreign officials, including those from the U.S., nonetheless visited the Maidan, arousing

the Ukrainian government's ire, and Russia's suspicion.

On January 16, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada rammed through a set of ten anti-

protest laws in an afterhours session, by a show of hands, and without the attendance of

the opposition. The laws criminalized, among other things, "extremist activity,"

unauthorized tents and sound systems, the blocking of buildings, motorcades of more

than ten cars, the wearing of masks, and defamation of government officials. They also

allowed for trials in absentia, stripped immunity from members of Parliament

(presumably those in the opposition), gave amnesty to riot police accused of violent

crimes, required the registration of organizations receiving international funding as

"foreign agents," required the (re)licensing of internet providers, and set out provisions

for censoring internet usage. A week later, the Parliament yielded to international

pressure and repealed the laws (minus the criminalization of destroying most

monuments), but for my interlocutors—even those who opposed the demonstrations—

any trust they had in Yanukovych was gone.

Yanukovych offered to call early elections, but in ten months time, and in

February, December did not seem soon enough. The demonstrators refused to concede,

and refused to go. Clashes began in Kyiv on February 18th when government forces

attacked with water cannons and stun grenades, and protestors fought back with bricks,

bats, and fire. Eighteen demonstrators were killed. The 19th was quiet, but the

revolutionaries regrouped. On the 20th, snipers—whose allegiance remains unclear—

began shooting at people from the rooftop of the Hotel Ukrajina and other buildings

adjacent to the Maidan.[100] Eighty-eight demonstrators were killed, 50 from snipers alone,

over 48 hours. These 96 victims, combined with those who would die later from their

injuries, or who had lost their lives to kidnapping and torture earlier in the revolution,

would be commemorated as the Heavenly Hundred (*Nebesna Sotnja*).



Figure 12: The Maidan *yolka* in March, 2014.

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[100] Who these snipers were, and who ordered them to fire remains a subject of much controversy. Maidan supporters maintain they were aligned with the Yanukovych administration and/or Russia; Maidan opponents and skeptics believe the snipers were associated with the nationalist right, and the assassinations used as a pretext for the overthrow of the government. In 2016, Ukrainian independent news outlet *Hromadske* reported on one pro-Maidan sniper who admitted to having shot riot police, thereby escalating the conflict. This was a major break with the revolutionary narrative in which the protestors were always the victims rather than perpetrators of violence.

On February 21st, in the midst of the bloodbath, Yanukovych fled for Russia. Security cameras from his own helicopter pad captured his hasty pre-dawn departure, before which he or one of his accomplices dumped tens of thousands of incriminating files into the Kyiv Sea. Once it was clear that Mezhyhirya had been abandoned, a group of militia entered and secured the estate, initially allowing in only journalists and divers, who painstakingly recovered the waterlogged files from the reservoir, peeling apart the pages and drying them one by one, so that they could be scanned and posted online for all to see. By the afternoon, the grounds of Mezhyhirya were opened to the people. Stunned civilians wandered the estate, reveling in the opulence suddenly accessible to them, and gawking at the more questionable design elements. They stood face to face with the famous five-story chalet revealed by the *Korrespondent* photos, overwhelmed by its imported woods, copper rooftop, and rumored golden toilet seats. They strolled the golf course, played tennis, and relaxed in the gardens. They were astonished to encounter racing horses, ostriches, and exotic pheasants, as well as a full farm (including greenhouses for tropical fruits), built so that Yanukovych, who reportedly feared being poisoned, could have his food grown on site. When the buildings were opened, the golden toilet seat was proven to be real, and only one of several golden bathroom fixtures. A solid gold loaf of bread became a particular symbol of excess, and replicas of it, in magnet form, soon dotted many a refrigerator, including mine.

Overall, the worth of Mezhyhirya was valued at over 1 billion US dollars. Out of all the ridiculous amenities at the estate, the one that always makes my skin prickle is this: in the harbor, there was a floating restaurant modeled on a pirate ship. Perhaps this, too, was for Yanukovych's grandchildren. But I always think that Yanukovych knew he

was a pirate. His booty was real estate, and he buried it deep, in loopholes, beneath reams and reams of paper.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has found that navigating land reforms was one of the primary ways in which rural Ukrainians came to understand their relationship to the state, chart "transition," and measure integration with the West. I began by outlining the origins and critiques of "rule of law" discourse in Ukraine, explaining how neoliberal "development" programs cast Ukraine as unruly and the West as law-abiding, even while poor Ukrainians bore the burden of constantly changing legislation, bureaucracy-intensive "transparency" initiatives, and oligarchs who hid their money in the very countries Ukraine was supposed to be modeling itself after. I then surveyed some of the idioms through which my interlocutors described their experiences of "arbitrariness" in legal settings, drawing on Friedrich's work to explain how what seemed arbitrary to one party could seem entirely logical to another. Thereafter, I described how small landowners approached their plots, and their paperwork, as having potential that might be realized in the future. I detailed how they sought to preserve this potential by tending and mending documents, and also by seeking out animators to give them muscle and bite. Finally, I contrasted my interlocutors' approaches to claiming property with those used to mask the ownership of Mezhyhirya, noting that while my interlocutors strove for consistency in their paperwork, Yanukovych and his lawyers prospered through chaos.

Is there something satisfying about taming paper? My interlocutors thought of their legal documents as tools that they could use to fight back against the ambiguities and arbitrariness of their legal system and protect what was theirs. The journalists who

tried to open Mezhyhirya, and later, rescue the files that were dumped in the Kyiv Sea, were convinced that documents were puzzles that they could piece together, revealing the reality that Yanukovoych and his "Family" had distorted. Criminals attempted to wall off their dealings with paper fortresses and labyrinths. In all of these cases, documents were supposed susceptible to manipulation.

Yet Hull points out that documents are not simply intermediaries, but mediators. They create social relations at least as often as they are made to reflect them. Paper proliferates. In Ukraine, legislation birthed land deeds that begot wills which required death certificates to open. Documents with spelling "errors" required more documents to correct them. Laws were drafted, finalized, revised, repealed, with new writs, stamps, and signatures needed each time. Paperwork pulled people into new relationships, both planned (the writs of power of attorney, for example) and not (the archaeologists with their lists of burial mounds). As files swelled, inconsistencies multiplied. Arbitrariness, presumed a problem of a corrupt state, was perhaps also a product of paper itself.

Early in this chapter, I argued that post-Soviet "rule of law" initiatives shifted the focus of transition from the policies to the people. I do not wish to suggest here that this was the wrong approach, or that paper as mediator means people are off the hook. Clearly not. Ukraine, and many other states, have suffered immensely due to the actions of powerful individuals wielding authority—and legal documents—to their own benefit. It is indeed critical that Ukraine build legal institutions that serve the common person, rather than provide cover for oligarchs. But the ethnography in this chapter suggests that Ukraine's more vulnerable citizens were often hurt more than they were helped by rule of law and transparency-inspired initiatives that saddled them with new legal obligations

they had difficulty fulfilling, and simply provided new habitats for corruption. Ukrainian former collective farmers turned small landowners were, like Hetherington's campesinos, "either subject to [the rule of law], or violators of it, but they were never its authors" (93).

Despite these frustrations, my fieldwork left me with the distinct impression that some of my interlocutors *liked* taming paper. For them, document-dives and bureaucratic schleps promised brighter futures, more security, a feeling of control. I certainly saw this in Tamara, who gained a great sense of purpose from sharing her expertise. Ljuba, my piglet-selling neighbor, despite all the obstacles she encountered, maintained crisp files of all her documents, and relished having something to give her children. (She even admitted to enjoying dressing up for her trips to the land registry office.) I thought of these people and others I knew, as I watched the "Open Access" documentary I discussed in the previous section. I do not know whether the filmmakers prompted their subjects to take advantage of the freedom of information legislation to resolve their situations; this is quite possible. But the people profiled, some of who made repeated requests for answers, often showed such satisfaction, commitment to, and even delight in navigating the paper trail. Why was this?

"Open Access" portends to be about transparency and citizen empowerment, but it is also about something more subtle: home. Each of the five vignettes is about claiming space—an apartment, a school, a bus route, public lands—for oneself and one's community. Some of the claims are configured by discourses of property, but they feel less about closing borders than having a warm, dry place to put one's feet up at the end of the day. The vignettes in "Open Access" are about the quieter promise of rule of law: everyday well-being. What I have referred to as the Maidan Revolution throughout this

text has, in Ukraine, increasingly been recast as the "Revolution of Dignity," a reference to the cries for *hidnist'* that arose as the movement crescendoed.

But dignity, home, and well-being for whom? This was not yet clear.

# CHAPTER 4

## Beetles

And we comforted ourselves with "manuscripts don't burn."
Oh, but they do burn. And cannot be restored.
—Oksana Zabuzhko, *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, 2009.

The judge and I were standing in the strawberry fields when he told me that if Vladimir

Putin came onto *his* land, he would kill him. It was early April, 2014, and everyone I

spoke to had been rattled by the Russian annexation of Crimea two weeks prior.[101] It was

hard to imagine this aging man, standing there with a box of seedlings, his hands slightly

swollen from honeybee stings, killing anyone, let alone Vladimir Putin. But if anything

could have prompted the judge, who had taken up beekeeping and berry farming in his

retirement, to kill, it was the threat of losing the few hectares of land his late parents had

received during the dismantling of *Druzhba,* Friendship, the collective farm to which they

had dedicated their lives. "My mother, rest her soul, was ethnic Russian," the judge

continued, "but I consider myself Ukrainian, and this land is Ukraine." And then he

turned to me, looked me in the eye, and invoked our old joke: "I thought that in the West,

the laws weren't only in the books."

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[101] I use the term "annexation" here with full awareness that many Crimeans, especially those who strongly identified as ethnic Russians, had long wished to join Russia. However, the illegitimacy of the hastily organized March 18th "referendum" that awarded Crimea to Russia must be recognized. Russian boots were on the ground; there was no debate about options other than joining Russia. The desires of the indigenous Crimean Tatar population were systematically ignored, and their governing institutions criminalized.

I knew the judge was talking about the Budapest Memorandum before he even said so, because in the days prior, I had found that many of my interlocutors, and especially the rural ones, were preoccupied with the nuclear disarmament agreement newly independent Ukraine, the U.S., the U.K., and Russia had signed twenty years prior. As my informants understood it, by signing the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances in 1994, Ukraine had relinquished its Soviet-era nuclear weapons in return for a—this was their wording—"guarantee" that their borders would be respected by the signatories. In their view, and the view of the Ukrainian government and political commentators, Russia had violated the memorandum by annexing Crimea, and the U.S. and the U.K. had violated it by letting that happen.

In the spring of 2014, in the aftermath of the Maidan revolution, as rumbles of separatism in the south and east grew stronger, my rural research participants mentioned the toothlessness of international legislation with reference to the loss of Crimea and the fragility of Ukraine's international borders. However, some would also, within very few conversational turns, move swiftly from talking about the Budapest Memorandum, Crimea, and Ukraine's difficultly securing its territory, to talking about protecting their own small plots of decollectivized farmland. The judge moved almost seamlessly from ranting about the "polite, little green men"—unmarked Russian soldiers—who had occupied Crimea, to how he would threaten Putin if he came to Odessa region, to asking me, as an American, why the U.S. had disregarded the Budapest Memorandum and its responsibility to protect Ukrainian territorial sovereignty. I had similar conversations with Tamara, with Bohdan, a young employee of a land rights NGO, with various people on the bus and train, and even with Marta, who had experienced a surge of patriotism

during the revolution, belting out the national anthem, *Shche ne vmerla Ukraijina* ("Ukraine has not yet perished") during her birthday jubilee. Ljuba, my neighbor with the piglets, was dismal when I visited her, saying, *"chi u nas chi u vas"*—whether here in Ukraine or there in your country—"the people in power do whatever they want."

What propelled these sorts of statements? While I have no doubt my presence as an American studying land rights affected how these conversations unfolded, I think they were also propelled by a pair of semiotic forces: first, ideologically anchored assumptions about the effects language can produce, especially when wielded by a certain type of actor; and second, interdiscursive processes through which disparate time-spaces come to feel alike. My short interaction with the judge saw the evocation, and layering, of multiple chronotopes: the here-and-now of the strawberry patch and the there-and-precarity of Crimea, but also "Ukraine," with its turbulent history and corrupt leadership, and "the West," where people were presumably more polished, predictable, and likely to keep promises.[102] So when the judge talked about "his land," he was speaking both in highly particular terms about the berry farm where we stood, as well as about Ukraine more broadly, and merging these time-spaces within a single frame of vulnerability. Likewise, when the judge invoked the Budapest Memorandum, he was not scaling *up* so much as chaining *across*, noticing that something about the way in which legal agreements were handled in his country, Ukraine, was uncannily similar to that of countries he had been told handled things differently, and better.[103]

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[102] On the multiplicity of chronotopes, and their "layering," see Lemon 2009.

[103] Scale, the scholars in the Carr & Lempert (2016) volume make clear, is always about comparison, and how certain cultural forms come to be taken as compare-able. What I mean to point out here is that what looks to be a case of vertical comparison (local borders of a land share : international borders of Ukraine : : unreliability of local law : unreliability of international law) may better be approached as a horizontal one between countries. Hence, my interlocutors' observations that the supposedly more law-abiding western countries were not necessarily that dissimilar to Ukraine.

Michael Silverstein (2005) characterizes "interdiscursivity" as the linking of distinct discursive events within single semiotic frames.[104] Such linkages, he writes, turn on "axes" that solder spaces, times, and speakers into "chronotopes of -evalness." That is, within interdiscursive frames, signs no longer simply point to one another (indexicality), but become "coeval," and mutually interpreting (iconicity). As a result, different semiotic forms—literary texts that appear to reference each other, historical moments that seem to echo in the present, a strawberry patch and a peninsula under foreign occupation, even, as we shall we, the stripes of a World War II commemorative ribbon and the stripes of an invasive beetle—may feel unquestionably connected, parallel, even the same. Similarities previously unnoticed suddenly seem blatant; differences are dulled. But the soldering is always incomplete: gaps persist, and may be contested or exploited (Briggs & Bauman 1992). People are quick to point out that *feels like* is not the same as *is like,* and to offer their analyses of why, for example, a berry farm isn't the same as a battlefield, or why domestic law shouldn't be conflated with international law, or why Ukraine in 2014 was not like Poland in 1939, or the Soviet Union in 1941. The judge, a few sentences after blustering about killing Vladimir Putin, made similar hedges. And still, on that April morning in Sonjachne, the atmosphere felt ominous, eerie.[105]

I open with this vignette to set the scene: Odessa region, spring 2014, just as it was becoming clear that the Maidan Revolution would not catapult Ukraine into "Europe," but rather reify its geo-temporal position as "borderland." I also open with my

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[104] Silverstein's definition is hardly the only on in use in linguistic anthropological literature, but it is, I think, the one most helpful for this chapter. I also draw heavily on Constantine Nakassis' extensions of Silverstein's approach, and closely follow his wording here (2012; 2013).

[105] As a person with a legal education, the judge was actually quite aware of the fragility of international law. But the annexation of Crimea left many of the people I worked with, rural and not, wondering whether the liberal European democracy to which their country aspired even existed, or if the people on the other side of the border simply didn't care.

interlocutors' thoughts about the Budapest Memorandum to highlight a theoretical focus of this chapter: how expectations about what language can do—protect property, stop invasion, incite violence—are guided by chronotopes, and consequently by interdiscursivity. Chronotopes, as I noted in the introduction, are not merely nexuses of time and space, or well-traveled historical narratives (although historical narratives and chronotopes do puncture and contour each other). Rather, chronotopes are constellations of space, time, and personhood that shape how events are narrated and interpreted within a single discursive event (an interaction, a text), or, just as likely, across a series of them (Agha 2007; Lemon 2009; Wirtz 2016). Chronotopes need not be organized around a place or date, and may be more more evocative than particular. Mikhail Bakhtin's original discussion of chronotopes in "Forms of Time in the Novel" included "motifs" such as "the road" or "the idyll," as well as attention to patterns of "genres" such as how "adventure time" transects the "Greek romance" (Bakhtin 1981, trans. Holquist). More recent works in anthropology describe chronotopes as varied as "immanence" (Wirtz 2016, tracking how the spirit world may congeal with the material one in an interaction), "Cold War" (Lemon 2009, noting how guiding chronotopes can be different for people of different generations, or from the U.S. vs. the former Soviet Union), and "Africa" (Palmié 2013, observing that the continent is evoked as a site of authenticity in the Caribbean). What all of these chronotopic formations have in common is that they bundle not merely time and space, but characters and storylines, that is, as Lemon puts it, "the logic by which events unfurl" (2009: 839).

I find chronotopes useful for understanding the conflict in Ukraine, and particularly in Odessa, for three reasons. First, linguistic anthropologists have shown how

chronotopes can embed (and produce) social types who are presumed to speak and act in patterned, readily-identifiable ways (Agha 2007; Dick 2010; Stasch 2011). Consider, for example, the Shakespearean jester who can "speak truth to power," Cold War tropes of devious Russians and money-hungry Americans, or, as we have already seen, my Ukrainian interlocutors' assumption that, in "the West," the legal word stood on its own, and that people were more likely to keep promises there. As I shall show, language (code, words, political symbols, performative effect) was constantly under scrutiny during the revolution and the weeks following, and what different choices might suggest about the speakers who made them was a frequent topic of discussion. Such discussions, I find, triggered chronotopes that in turn guided how speakers were assessed. Second, chronotopes are fundamentally historical, but "also offers [sic] a concept of unstable time, where chutes into the past can suddenly open and afford time transportation." The deictic suspension that comes from chronotopic alignment—"why, in usage, it is not always clear if [a] chronotope refers to a present 'here' or a temporally removed 'there'"—helps explain the vulnerability that people like the judge felt after the annexation of Crimea, and why they feared that war could come to their land, as it had decades before (Palmié & Stewart 2016: 219). Finally, chronotopes are, as Kristina Wirtz explains, "semiotic products and interactional accomplishments" that do not simply bear down upon actors, but can be evoked, contested, and transformed dialogically (2016: 349; see also Mannheim & Tedlock 1995). Thus, an analysis of them furthers my commitment to studying history as a semiotic product, and semiosis as a historical process, and how, in the aftermath of a striking revolution, both were countouring people's understandings of what had happened, and what might happen next.

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In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I trace how, in the weeks after the revolution, my Odessan interlocutors read the political climate—and the fate of their region—in divergent ways, interpreting their situation "through lenses configured by [different] chronotopes" (Lemon 2009).[106] I show how they conjured varied formations of time, space, and personhood in their interactions, and how the actors and storylines embedded in those formations guided their understandings of how the revolution might further unfold, and what, or who, would drive it to triumph, or disaster. Ultimately, my aim for this chapter is both narrow, and overwhelming: to provide some explanation of how Odessa, my home for much of this project, became so divided, and why, for many of my interlocutors, this came as a complete surprise.

To pursue this objective, I return regularly to the phenomenon of "coevalness" of which Silverstein writes, as its discussion of interdiscursivity, or how two or more discursive events become linked in a single semiotic frame, intersects with questions that were very much on the minds of Odessans—questions such as: what happens when people begin to feel that their present situation is *just like* another one they may have previously perceived as more distant? What happens when people start comparing an initially contained political conflict (but still a political conflict, and a violent one) to the most massive, and destructive, one in their country's recent history—that is, World War II? And, what what happens if people begin to perceive their neighbors as "fascists," "traitors," or "beetles?" (And do they actually?) The last of these questions, and specifically the last of these epithets, "beetles," is the central focus of the pages to come. We now turn to why it became so controversial.

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[106] Lemon's phrasing here reminds me of the work of Benjamin Whorf on how a language's large-scale grammatical patterning might guide—but never constrain—the thoughts of its speakers.

For a short time after the revolution and the annexation of Crimea, many of my interlocutors projected a sort of indignant self-assurance that, for once, their country was in the right. Ukrainians, they affirmed, were defending human rights and the rule of law, while Western powers were complicit in appeasing Putin.[107] For my Odessan interlocutors, however, this confidence would be severely challenged in a month's time, when, on May 2nd, clashes in the city center between those who supported the new government in Kyiv (and Ukrainian unity more broadly) and those who opposed it (and/or desired Odessan autonomy), left 48 people dead. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' reports on the matter, six "pro-unity" participants died from gunshot wounds during street fighting in the heart of the city. Forty-two "pro-federalism" participants were killed, 32 from carbon monoxide poisoning after a massive fire swept the building in which they had barricaded themselves, and ten more from jumping from the windows. The fire brigade, located a mere 650 meters from the site of the blaze, took 40 minutes to reach the scene.[108]

As the building burned, and in the hours that followed, Ukrainian social media was flooded with jeers from Maidan supporters (or those that otherwise supported Ukrainian unity and the government in Kyiv), who hailed the extermination of people they called *kolorady,* short for *koloradski zhuky,* Colorado beetles. Some of those who

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[107] The World War II references began quickly, and on all sides. Also, I should note that my interlocutors were generally supportive of the new government, and even those who had qualms about the revolution were quite upset about the annexation of Crimea, and suspicious of Russian intentions. That said, I acknowledge that, being American, I tended to not meet people with strong anti-Western feelings to begin with—that is, our interlocutors choose us as much as we choose them.

[108] The media coverage of the Odessa tragedy was expansive. I draw here on Ukrainian, Russian, and international news sources, blogs, social media, as well as my own informants' accounts. I give final authority to the reports published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which are based on the work of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, and unrestrained in its criticism of all involved parties. It is particularly critical of Odessa's police force, which did not take steps to prevent clashes, and to some extent, seems to have facilitated them. The report most relevant to this piece is: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/HRMMUReport15June2014.pdf.

feted the burning of separatist "insects" were from the far-right, but a striking number were not. Denunciations of *kolorady* came in both Ukrainian and Russian, and from all parts of the country. The final, bloody days of the revolution, the annexation of Crimea, and the declarations of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic had jumbled familiar indices of political orientation: left and right, east and west, urban and rural, Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking. Initial news reports and online speculations about the Odessa clashes claimed that those involved were not locals, but external infiltrators from Russia, Transdnistria (on the anti-Maidan side) and Western Ukraine (on the pro-Maidan side). Subsequent investigations, however, found that the belligerents were overwhelmingly Odessans—either residents of the city itself, or from nearby towns and villages. Odessans, many of whom had long imagined their seaside perch a cradle of tolerance, diversity and good humor, fell into shock.[109] Then, they asked questions: How had things gotten so bad? Did people really just let fellow human beings burn? Was Ukraine headed toward civil war?[110] Was 2014 more like 1939, when the Soviets invaded Eastern Poland (including what is now Western Ukraine), and annexed the territory against the wishes the people who lived there? Or was it more like 1941, when Axis-aligned Romanians occupied Odessa (administratively part of Transdnistria), murdering tens of thousands of Jews and Roma, sometimes by burning them alive? And, when it

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[109] Odessa's reputation as a beacon of tolerance belies its history of pogroms (literally, "thunder strikes"), particularly against the Jewish population. In literature, see, for example, Babel's autobiographical "The Story of My Dovecet" ([1925] 2002) and Jabotinsky's *The Five* ([1936] 2005). Recent English-language academic work on Odessa's troubled cosmopolitanism include King (2011) and Humphrey (2012).
[110] Some of my colleagues in Ukraine (and in Ukrainian Studies) have decried the use of the term "civil war" to describe the fighting in Donbas, arguing that it elides Russia's role in inciting the belligerence, and prolonging it through military support. I agree that "civil war" is a label that should be used carefully and with qualification. However, the fact remains that far from all Ukrainians supported the Maidan Revolution, and many were actively opposed to it. And some of those opposed became engaged in separatist activity, with or without Russian prompting. Their motivations deserve exploration, not erasure.

came to inciting the violence, was language like *kolorad,* which had also circulated in advance of the clashes, to blame?

In the remainder of this chapter, I unpack *kolorad,* the neologism used to index foes of the revolution that came under scrutiny following the violence of May 2nd, showing how interdiscursive processes propelled both its circulation as well as its censure. The explanation generally given by my Ukrainian interlocutors for the advent of *kolorad* is that the people who were opposed to Maidan took up the orange and black striped St. George ribbon as a symbol of protest.[111] Their adversaries—the pro-revolutionaries—likened the stripes of that ribbon to the stripes of a well-known garden pest, the Colorado beetle. (It was about the *stripes,* not the beetle, they insisted after the clashes.) Yet this just-stripes story sidesteps the historical significance and contemporary meaningfulness of the St. George ribbons, which replicate the ribbon affixed to the medals awarded to Soviet soldiers for victory over Germany, and, since 2005, have been used in World War II Victory Day exercises in many parts of the former Soviet Union. Likewise, it elides the impact of *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*, an invasive species that caused massive crop losses in fragile, post-war Europe, and was rumored to have been intentionally introduced by the United States in an act of bio-warfare. Most importantly, it ignores that relationships among signs, whether iconic, indexical, or symbolic, are always socially mediated. That a single feature (orange and black stripes) came to point to a certain social type (people with separatist, anti-revolutionary, and/or anti-nationalist leanings) was hardly an accident of overlapping color schemes. Mutually interpreting

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[111] I treat *kolorad* as it was used in Ukraine in 2014 as a neologism associated with the revolution, as that is how my interlocutors overwhelmingly understood it. However, people involved in or otherwise familiar with the 2011 anti-government protests in Russia have told me that *kolorad* was also used then to refer to those supporting Putin (then the prime minister) and Dmitrij Medvedev (then the president), or otherwise adhering to Russian nationalist narratives.

stripes may have helped naturalize the connection between beetles, ribbons, and the people who wore them, but they were not all that made *kolorad* move.

I argue that *kolorad* knit together multiple interdiscursive threads that informed the Maidan revolution, crosshatching chronotopes in ways enabled, even seemingly legitimized, Ukraine's rapid turn to violence. In the previous chapter, aspirational chronotopes of "Europe," "the West" and "rule of law" guided how my interlocutors assessed Ukraine's "transition" on the eve of the revolution, and the readiness of their fellow citizens for European integration.[112] During the revolution, appeals to "heroism," "dignity," and "perserverance" were prominent—one might even say that "Maidan" itself became chronotopic. Yet far from all Ukrainians saw the revolution as a triumph. Many were simply concerned about the social movement's gruesome climax, and disappointed that the protesters did not try to oust Yanukovych through legal channels. But others perceived Independence Square as a debauched space full of "fascists," *bandery* (followers of World War II era Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera), and other undesirables. For them, the new government represented not a step toward European integration, but a "coup" by Western powers and ultranationalists, and an affront to memory of those who gave their lives defending Soviet space during World War II. The anti-revolutionaries adopted the St. George ribbon, which commemorates Soviet soldiers, as a brand of protest. The clashes of May 2nd, with their jeers about burning separatist beetles, furthered their outrage.

In a later section, I detail ethnographically how Soviet (and contemporary Russian) narratives of "The Great Patriotic War" (Rus. *velikaja otechestvennaja vojna*) informed opposition to the Maidan movement, and provided a reservoir of images and

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[112] On "transition" and "Europe" as chronotopes, see Graan 2015.

rhetoric that characterized those who supported Ukrainian sovereignty (historically or in the present day) as traitors to the Soviet cause, Nazi collaborators, or simply "fascists." Here, I propose interrogating the Great Patriotic War as a discursive formation and "lenses [sic] configured by chronotopes" (Lemon 2009) that may also function chronotopically. In doing so, I attend to how chronotopic motifs and genres, such as "the battlefield," "heroes and villains," "adventure time" that organize the (supposedly) collective memory of the Great Patriotic War reappear in other post-Soviet discourses as well, most notably ones of *represija* ("repression") that emphasize suffering under Stalin. Thus, while the Great Patriotic War functions as an "invokable tropic chunks [sic] of history" by itself, the ability to summon it, and link it to another time-space, presupposes the interactants' ability to recognize, and follow, the more generic types and storylines the Great Patriotic War embeds (Blommaert 2015: 112-113). But, I show, it was precisely those more generic types (eg. "heroes") that made chronotopic formations like the Great Patriotic War, *represija*, and, perhaps, Maidan vulnerable to disruption. Anti-revolutionaries exploited nationalist and revolutionary discourses of heroism, recasting demonstrators as "fascists."[113] And when anti-revolutionaries branded themselves "anti-fascists" by adopting a hero's badge, Maidan supporters reassigned the St. George ribbon's stripes, rendering the wearers "beetles." In doing so, I argue, they disputed the relevance of World War II, and the relevance of the 20th century more broadly, to a 21st century revolutionary moment.

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[113] To be clear, there *were* people with fascist inclinations on the Maidan, just as there *were* Ukrainians who fought alongside the Nazis during World War II. However, the anti-Maidan faction's tendency to speak of the entire revolution as a "fascist coup"—thereby ignoring the very real reasons people had for protesting, as well as the Yanukovych's government deployment of violence against the demonstrators from the movement's earliest days—seems to have made discussions about the mainstreaming of right-wing discourse that much more difficult in Ukraine.

*Kolorad*, I show, both played upon the idea that 2014 was in some way a replay of 1939 (when what is now western Ukraine was annexed by the Soviet Union), as well as distorted or delegitimized the Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War. At the same time, *kolorad* was redolent of more contemporary debates in Ukraine: to what extent Moscow was meddling in Ukraine's affairs; whether the West could be trusted; and which part of the country was "feeding" the other—the east with its mines, factories, and sticky-fingered politicians, or the poorer center and west, which generated lower revenues, but ate up less of the state budget, and literally put food on the table.[114] *Kolorad* also appealed to the mundane frustration, familiar to every Ukrainian villager, of keeping pests from devouring the winter food supply, as well as the post-revolutionary imperative to weed out whoever seemed to be threatening the new agenda and national unity. Finally, in Odessa, *kolorad* was a linguistic innovation in a place that prizes verbal creativity, celebrates its own sense of humor with an annual comedy festival (the Yumorina) and, I think, often regards stinging expressions as more astute than harmful. In short, what gave *kolorad* legs was neither stripes nor beetles.

Yet taken most literally, *kolorad* is indeed about pests: insects that can be crushed underfoot; life that is not only expendable, but undesirable; vermin. Specifically, it is about a notorious parasite, the Colorado beetle, whose larvae can defoliate a plant overnight. This insect, first documented in the Rocky Mountains, was of little concern to farmers until the mid-19th century, when it jumped from its native host, the buffalo bur, to feast upon potato plants sown near its historic range. From there, the "potato bug"

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[114] A graphic that was making the rounds during the revolution was from Artjem Zacharchenko "Zona projedanija" in *Investgazeta* (January 20, 2014). It showed that, contrary to narratives about East Ukraine financing the rest of the country, East Ukrainian politicians were demanding more of the state budget for themselves and their constituencies. censor.net.ua/resonance/268512/zona_proedaniya_kto_kogo_kormit _v_ukraine

traveled across the plains to the Eastern seaboard, taking up residence anywhere nightshades were found. The Colorado beetle was first documented in Europe in the early 20th century, but did not become endemic. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, it became the scourge of Central and Eastern Europe, devastating the production of nightshades—potatoes especially, but also eggplant and some tomatoes—from East Germany to Eastern Ukraine and beyond. The Colorado beetle continues to plague food producers, not least because of its alarming adaptability: the pests have become immune to every pesticide agricultural science has thrown at them.[115] In Ukraine, where 90 percent of vegetables—including nearly all potatoes—are grown by families on household plots, controlling the beetles has tremendous stakes.[116] And doing so requires backbreaking work: hours a day, weeks at a time, spent squatting between plants, inspecting leaves, and removing adults, eggs, and larvae by hand.



**Figure 13: Colorado beetle larvae on a potato plant.** The small red larvae are recently hatched; the large pink larvae are a few days older. The black marks are beetle feces. Photo taken in Michigan, but the beetles are just as voracious in Ukraine.

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[115] Alyokhin 2009 provides an excellent overview.
[116] Moroz 2013 notes that household production is in part a post-Soviet trend: in 1990, 71.4% of Ukrainian potatoes were grown on household plots; ten years later, this figure was 98.6%. More recent estimates hover around 97%. On "potato" and postsocialist survival, see Ries 2009.

**Figure 14: Adult Colorado beetle.** Open access photo by Scott Bauer, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

To see a Colorado beetle in your garden is to take steps to remove it. But what does it mean to call someone a *kolorad*? After May 2nd, criticism of *kolorad* in Odessa centered on its potential to "dehumanize" segments of the population.[117] As questions emerged about the nature of the conflict in post-Maidan Ukraine, and along what lines the country was splitting, new chronotopes were triggered: "ethnic cleansing;" "Yugoslavia;" "Rwanda." But how similar was *kolorad* to Tutsis calling Hutus "cockroaches," or to Nazi propaganda that compared Jews to lice?

In the next section, I situate *kolorad* among other insect-to-human comparisons to which it initially seems to be similar, before analyzing how it was actually used in Odessa in the weeks before May 2nd. Doing so helps explain why many of my Odessan interlocutors initially perceived *kolorad* as more punny than pernicious. Thereafter, I return to my analysis of the Great Patriotic War as a discursive formation, organized by familiar chronotopes, that also functioned as its own invokable time-space. I give

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[117] Konstantinov, Oleg. Editorial: "Obyknovennoe zverstvo: pochemu stalo vozmozhnym 2-ogo maja." (Everyday atrocity: why the 2nd of May became possible.) *Dumskaya*. May 8, 2014.

particular attention to the anti-Maidan encampment in Odessa as it appeared before May 2nd, describing how it not only repeatedly referenced the "Great Patriotic War," but equated Maidan supporters with the "fascists" fought by the Soviets, and Maidan opponents as "anti-fascists." I delve into the semiotics of the St. George ribbon, and, drawing on work by linguistic anthropologists on "brand," trace how *kolorad* commandeered the ribbon's orange and black stripes, undermining its ability to consistently index "anti-fascism," and ridiculing the idea that the wearers were morally superior. But a beetle cannot be separated from its stripes. In the last section, I explain the broader cultural significance of the Colorado potato beetle as an invasive species, and how, in the aftermath of May 2nd, my interlocutors evaluated the connection between violent language, and actual violence. Would the city become, as one alarmed Russian-language bookseller described it to me, "Rwanda by the sea" (*Ruanda u morja*)? Could it heal from what some Odessans called a "tragedy," and others a "massacre" (thereby indexing the Odessa massacre of 1941)? Ultimately, I circle back to the observation I made in the opening of this chapter: that language, and expectations about what language can *do,* is shaped by interdiscursive processes that calibrate chronotopes. *Kolorad* was set in motion by interdiscursive processes, and condemned by the same.

Before I proceed, a word on names: the parties I henceforth identify as "pro-Maidan" and "anti-Maidan" were liquid and heterogenous, comprising people across generations, ethnicities, and political preferences. As the revolution gave way to arguments over Ukrainian cohesiveness, and then physical violence, these groups were deeply transformed. What they stood for was difficult to discern from day to day, even for the organizers. As Richardson (2014) has noted, when conversation facilitators began

to work with parties in conflict after May 2nd, the Odessan participants could not agree how to define themselves, except by the locations where they met.[118] (The United Nations High Commisser for Human Rights' use of "pro-unity" and "pro-federalism," as cited above, is quite nimble, but, I think, is neither entirely accurate, nor does it capture the voltage of the moment.) Many of my interlocutors identified with neither group, but some expressed very strong allegiances. Given the unwieldiness of location names, as well as how, in the spring of 2014, the semiotics of the revolution still pervaded the demonstrations, I use "pro-Maidan" and "anti-Maidan." I do so with full awareness of the complexity I am eliding.



**Figure 15: The judge's apiary at Pasha's strawberry farm.**

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[118] This parallels Richardson's 2008 observation that in Odessa, *place* is often prior to other forms of identity, such as nationality.

### *Kolorad* in Context

Ukraine 2014 was, of course, far from the only time in recent history in which people have been likened to insects. How was it that people who described Maidan as a revolution of "dignity" did not hear the gruesome parallels? Silverstein, in his *Axes of Evals* piece, at one point refers to his undergraduate students as "intertextually deaf," lamenting their inability to recognize a seemingly trite passage of Shakespeare not as poor wordsmithing, but as Shakespeare's sly play on the hackneyed language used by *other* writers (2005: 13). However, Silverstein goes on to point out that interdiscursive threads are woven at multiple levels: his students took the clichéd passage as a token of a strong type, as an instance representative of Shakespeare's greater writing style, or his similarity to other, less esteemed writers. Silverstein, however, recognized the passage as parody, as a token-token imitation, perhaps (see also Lempert 2014: 385). The students were not "deaf" so much as hearing on a different frequency.

But what of selective hearing? Did pro-revolutionaries who used *kolorad* recognize its similarity to other instances in history and literature in which humans were compared to insects, and simply choose to ignore them? Perhaps this was the case for some people, particularly after May 2nd, when what happened in Odessa was being characterized as inter-ethnic violence, triggering chronotopes of "Rwanda." I also have no doubt that there were pro-Maidan populations who did perceive those who were not on their side as bugs to be squashed. *Kolorad*, like anything else, meant different things to different people at different times.

The connections that people make across contexts are neither consistent nor finite; patterning is most easily found after the fact. Irvine writes, "there is no limit to what a

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discourse could be said to be like; instead, we have to pick out the likeness we deem to be relevant within some discursive practice and some historical moment" (2005: 15). In this section, I sort through some of the likenesses that have been posed for *kolorad,* ultimately concluding that analyzing it solely as a token of a type has limited purchase. Thereafter, I explain how *kolorad* was used interactionally in the weeks before May 2nd. I find that this second approach better locates *kolorad* discursively, and also explains why some of my Odessan project participants initially found it clever, rather than insulting.

In my investigations into *kolorad*, it quickly became clear that the trope of human-as-insect in history and literature yields less of a "type" and more of a spectrum. Central and East European literature of the past century and a half includes numerous examples of people being compared to insects, and insects to humans, in ways that both undermine and reassert their humanity. Recall Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915)*,* in which the traveling salesman Gregor Samsa is outwardly transformed into a "monstrous insect," but perhaps retains more of a human spirit than many of the humans that surround him.[119] Lev Tolstoy, in *War and Peace,* mournfully described the city of Moscow, abandoned as Napolean's army advanced, as an empty, queenless beehive, "neglected and befouled," the "artful, complex structure of the combs no longer in their pristine state" (1868; see also Maiorova 2010 and Hollingsworth 2001 for discussion of this passage). For early Soviet dissident poet Osip' Mandelstam, the fingers of dictator Joseph Stalin were "thick worms" and Stalin's mustache "cockroach whiskers" ("The Stalin Epigram," 1933, trans. W.S. Merwin 1989).

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[119] German "ungeheueres Ungeziefer" is, translator Susan Bernofsky notes, "famously ambiguous because it does not refer to a particular animal or insect per se but in a general way to harmful, parasitic animals" (Kafka 2015[1915]: 3).

If cockroaches, lice and other disease vectors are at the more vile end of human-insect comparison, and industrious, socially-organized, communicative honeybees (and perhaps beautiful butterflies?) are toward the other, where do beetles fit in? And what place for Colorado potato beetles, an invasive pest now endemic to Eastern Europe that regularly devastates potato—and tomato, and eggplant—crops year in and year out? When I discussed the origin and meanings of *kolorad* with my Ukrainian interlocutors, they typically first stated that that the stripes were most important in making the connection between the insects and the anti-revolutionaries. However, some would also trouble the idea that it was even problematic to call someone a "beetle," pointing out that there is an expression in Russian, *khitryj zhuk*, "clever beetle," that is used to convey a sort of amused endearment. "Cute as a bug" is likely the closest English translation, but there's also an element of mischief to this phrase. A Google image search of *khitryj zhuk* might turn up pictures of naughty puppies, rascally cats, impish babies, even sexy young women. One of my respondents pointed out she had a much-loved dog named "Zhuk"—a reference to this very trope.

But referring to someone as a *kolorad*—its foreignness encoded in its very name—clearly isn't the same as calling them a "clever beetle." Another approach to understanding *kolorad* is to consider it less as an insect, and more as an insult, and situate it among other linguistic innovations cast about in the Ukrainian conflict. *Kolorad* was far from the only conflict-inspired neologism circulating at this time, and name-calling, including accusations of stupidity, parasitism, and fascism were rampant on all sides. For example, some of those opposed to the Maidan revolution called its supporters *majdauny*, blending "Maidan" with "down syndrome."

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If we look at glossaries of new vocabulary associated with the Maidan movement

and the subsequent civil war in Ukraine's East, we might locate *kolorad* in a constellation

of expressions that drew on, and often mocked, life in the countryside and smaller cities.

For example, according to language guides I have seen assembled by Ukrainian, Russian,

and English news sources, some pro-Maidan people called anti-Maidan people, who were

more likely to be ethnic Russians, *valenki*, in reference to the felt boots traditionally worn

in the Russian countryside.[120] Meanwhile, anti-Maidan people were said to call pro-

Maidan people *ukrop*, which means "dill," and of course also contains the first three

letters *u-k-r,* as in "Ukrainian." Of course, neither these glossaries, nor the memes, t-

shirts, and coffee mugs they generated, guarantee that these expressions were actually

being widely used in face-to-face interaction. I find *ukrop*, dill, or perhaps "dill-brain,"

particularly suspect as a supposed insult for Ukrainians, not least because, apart from the

"*ukr*" part, there is no reason to associate dill, a widely appreciated herb in Eastern

Europe, with Ukrainians rather than anyone else. (Interestingly for this chapter, dill is

also planted to keep Colorado beetles away—or more accurately, to attract beneficial

insects, such as ladybugs, that will eat the larvae. I am not sure there's a clear relationship

between *ukrop* and *kolorad* though, other than perhaps the back-formed one I am making.

At time of writing, "Ukrop" had also become a name for yet another new political party.)

One item from these lexicons that I did frequently encounter in 2014 was *vatnik.*

Like *valenki*, the felt boots, *vatnik* also refers to a type of clothing worn by non-urbanites.

The term itself comes from the word for poor quality quilted jackets, made from *vata,*

approximately "batting," that were standard issue in the Soviet army, the gulags (for both

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[120] Two widely circulated glossaries came from *Korrespondent* (June 6, 2014) and Radio Free Europe /
Radio Liberty (September 17, 2014).

prisoners and guards), and on collective farms. This was the clothing of the lowest social strata, the attire of people who were understood to be physical and psychological captives of the Soviet regime. During the time I was conducting my research, *vatnik* came to index poorly educated, working class Russian men who were believed to exhibit blind faith in Russian dominance and be aggressive (sometimes physically) in defending their position. A series of internet memes by (now exiled) Russian citizen Anton Chadskij depicted the *vatnik* as a sort of dystopian SpongeBob: grey, scratched and patched, with an alcoholic's red nose, missing teeth, a shiner over one eye, usually accompanied by a Russian flag. (For those familiar with *sovok, vatnik,* at least as used in Ukraine, seemed to emphasize less nostalgia for the Soviet era, and more contemporary Russian jingoism.)



**Figure 16: "Vatnik" meme.** Drawn by Anton Chadskij.

Like *kolorad, vatnik* first circulated in Russia as a critique of Russian nationalism before finding its way to Ukraine, and exploding in usage during the Maidan era. (I treat both of these expressions as neologisms, as most of my Ukrainian interlocutors were not aware of this prior history.) However, *vatnik* differs from *kolorad* in at least two ways. First, while my respondents often talked about the stripes of *kolorad* as an example of

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metonymy, *vatnik* is a far better example of metonymy, and specifically synechdoche. Second, this "suit," or rather, "batting-filled jacket," is no clever beetle. One interlocutor of mine explained *kolorad* as "what a *vatnik* might be if he weren't so drunk and stupid." One way to think of *kolorad,* then, is as a sign that merges the *vatnik* with his more capable counterpart, the provocateur—I will return to this in a moment.

By now it should be clear that I am wary of labeling *kolorad* an insult, or treating it as an obvious token of a type more generally. This is less because of *kolorad*'s capacity to insult—I think it is obvious that it is not a compliment—and more because I did not observe it used interactionally as a form of verbal abuse. (This was actually the case for most of the so-called insults documented in the glossaries; people talked about *kolorady* and *vatniki*, but they were unlikely to call an interlocutor this to their face.) As in the United States, Ukrainian social media users often shared memes within networks of people who shared their political beliefs; I use "meme" here to mean a shareable, image-based post, accompanied by pithy, witty text, often political in nature, that circulates, with slight variation, and may work to characterize a certain social type. (Note that, in reifying types, and rendering them identifiable "in real life," internet memes function somewhat like chronotopes, or as we shall see, brands.)

Some of these memes poked more innocent-looking fun at people who wore the St. George ribbon, while others were overt in their disdain for those they perceived to be undermining the revolution. For example, one meme circulating in the spring of 2014 depicted Colorado potato beetles on plants, with speech bubbles that read "fascism will not prevail!; we protect the harvest from pests!; [and] we're defenders of the potato!", along with a St. George ribbon and the caption, "Colorado beetles: they believe in their

great mission." Another depicted Vladimir Putin as a giant beetle over a map of Ukraine,

and the words, "*Rashism* [a portmanteau of English "Russia" and "racism"]: *Kolorady*

attack Ukraine."[121] One particularly disturbing meme showed a blue and yellow broom

stamped with a Ukrainian trident sweeping up beetles. The caption read: "Cleanliness

guarantees health." This meme was also in Ukrainian. However, I must caution against

connecting language and stance on the conflict: the vast majority of Ukrainians are at

least passively bilingual, and readily consume, share, and even produce media in both

languages. Additionally, it is difficult to know what prompted people to share these

memes, and to what extent they approved of them. (The "cleanliness guarantees health"

meme, for example, was brought to my attention by someone who objected to it.) Among

people in my own networks in Ukraine, sharing or "liking" these memes—as opposed to

authoring them—seemed to offer them a means of expressing their political stances, but

also allowed them to distance themselves from responsibility for their contents.



Figure 17: *Kolorad* meme "they believe in their great mission." Note the St. George ribbon on the lower right hand side.

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[121] In a presentation I gave on these memes, one audience member noted that Putin was depicted here with exaggerated features not dissimilar to those used in anti-Semitic cartooning.

**Figure 18:** *Kolorad* **meme "Rashizm: Kolorady attack Ukraine."**



ЧИСТОТА-
запорука здоров'я

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durdom.in.ua

**Figure 19:** *Kolorad* **meme "cleanliness is the guarantee of health."**

*Kolorad* was used offline, as well, but again, rarely in direct confrontations. For example, at pro-Maidan rallies in Odessa in the spring of 2014, demonstration organizers used *kolorad* as a means of indexing people they thought might be *provokatory—*

"provocateurs" who could infiltrate a crowd and disrupt peaceful assembly. Provocateurs were what I call, following Bateson (1971), "frame-breakers": people who could tip an interactional frame from calm and cohesiveness into disarray, even violence. Concerns about provocateurs have a long history in the former Soviet Union, going at least as far back as the late Russian imperial period, when the tsar's secret police (the Okhrana) implanted agents among the revolutionaries to incite illegal acts for which the revolutionaries could then be arrested.

Here, I focus only on how I observed the label *provokator* used during the Maidan era. As an accusation, *"provokator"* was directed not only at "covert" demonstrators, but also at "overt" protest participants whose beliefs or actions were thought to be divisive, or possibly delegitimizing for the larger movement. For example, the right-wing activists who toppled Kyiv's red granite Lenin monument were widely denounced as provocateurs before Maidan stretched to accommodate more explicitly anti-Soviet, pro-Ukrainian nationalist views. Among the most well-known provocateurs were *titushky,* young, athletic men who were paid to work alongside the police, either visibly, or by penetrating crowds and starting fights. *Titushky* were so named after one of these young men, a martial arts expert with the last name Titushko, was filmed attacking journalists at a pro-Yanukovych "anti-fascist" demonstration in the spring of 2013. (Before *titutshky* was mainstreamed, I heard these men referred to as *sportsmeny*, "athletes," with a knowing eye-roll.) Titushko, counterintuitively, was present as an "anti-fascist." In the next section, I detail how constructions of "fascism" and "anti-fascism" in the Maidan conflict (and to some extent, in post-Soviet politics more generally) inflected who supported the revolution and who did not, and why the opposing parties were each convinced they held

the moral high ground. For the moment, it is enough to know that one person's "anti-fascist" could be another's *kolorad*, and that in Odessa, in the spring of 2014, both "anti-fascists" and *kolorady* were feared provocateurs.

Looking at how *kolorad* was used interactionally makes further apparent why it may have been that some Ukrainians failed to "hear" similarities to Rwandan cockroaches or Nazi lice until Odessa had ignited. A few weeks after the Russian annexation of Crimea, I attended a pro-Maidan rally in Odessa. Tensions were running high. While the city had a strong contingent of Maidan supporters, it also had an encampment of anti-Maidan activists who had taken over Kulykove Field, a sprawling square where the annual World War II Victory Day celebrations were held every May 9th. The pro-Maidan people, in contrast, had never been able to secure a camp,[122] but met daily (with larger demonstrations once weekly) on the promenade at the top of the Potemkin Steps, near the statue of the French Duc de Richelieu. The duke, appointed by Russian Tsarina Catherine the Great, was the city/region's first governor in the early 19th century. He stands facing the sea, his arm outstretched, as if welcoming the ships arriving in the port below. In choosing their respective sites, the activists asserted their preferred historical narratives, and oriented to different chronotopes. For those at Kulykove Field, Odessa was first and foremost a Soviet "hero city" (Rus. *gorod geroj*) that had fought the fascists, persevered under Axis occupation, and was tied in history, victory, and sacrifice to Russia. For those at the Duke, Odessa was, and had always been, European.

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[122] Revolutionary activists in Odessa met both governmental and non-governmental resistance in their attempts to establish a Kyiv-style encampment. In December 2013, protestors affiliated with the westward-looking civic organization Democratic Alliance (which, at time of writing, has become a political party favored by many urban intelligentsia) were beaten by police and forced to disperse. Thereafter, Odessan Maidan activists turned to more ephemeral means of protesting. For example, they held flash mobs, gathering in public places and then unfurling Ukrainian flags and singing the national anthem at a predetermined time. They also created YouTube videos designed to go viral, such as this one in which prominent Odessans tell Vladimir Putin to "go home." www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaaDbW9mBFU.

By March, calls for Odessan autonomy had begun, and both sides were organizing

militia (usually called *samooborony,* approximately "self-defenders," on the pro-Maidan

side, and *druzhiny,* closer to "militia" at anti-Maidan). A far-right political party and

militia called Right Sector (*Pravyj Sektor)* had become very influential on Odessa's

Maidan. Right Sector distinguished itself from other right-wing groups by touting a civic

as opposed to ethnically-based nationalism. It formed during the early days of Maidan

through the merger of multiple nationalist fringe groups as well as soccer fans ("ultras").

While Right Sector had initially taken an ambivalent stance on neo-Nazism, it attempted

to scrub its image following the revolution, and transform itself into a more respectable

political actor. Its then-leader, Dmytro Yarosh, expelled a white nationalist group

("White Hammer"), banned the use of swastikas and Wolfsangels[123], and cultivated ties

with religious minorities. (It retained, however, the red and black "blood and soil" flag of

the anti-Soviet, Nazi-ambivalent Ukrainian Insurgent Army.) Right Sector's Odessan

leadership, for example, made a great show of helping clean anti-Semitic graffiti from a

local synagogue, and through accommodating the ritual practices of observant Jews (and

in other cities, Muslim Crimean Tatars) who wanted to join militia. Later, as the war in

Donbas developed, Right Sector's violent tactics and disregard for human rights would

earn them condemnation. But in the spring of 2014, when Odessans were truly frightened

of losing control of their city, Right Sector's proclaimed mission to protect Ukrainian

territorial sovereignty resonated among the multiethnic population.

On the day of the pro-Maidan rally, a friend of mine, whom I will call Danylo,

was charged with monitoring the protest site for provocateurs. At one point, another

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[123] The Slavic *kolovrat,* a spinning wheel that appears a slightly spun swastika, with more legs, occupied a more ambiguous position.

activist approached us. He cocked his head toward the mobile coffee carts ringing the

rally, saying, *kolorad.* A husky man with an orange and black ribbon affixed to his jacket

zipper pull had just purchased a cup of coffee. It was early April, and St. George ribbons

were typically worn in May to commemorate World War II Victory Day, so it was not

unreasonable for the activist to presume that the man was wearing the ribbon because he

was anti-Maidan. Danylo, who had a camera with a long lens, snapped a photo of the

man, and then, telling me to stay back, went to inquire about his presence at a pro-

Maidan rally. He did so ever so casually. First, Danylo purchased coffee from the same

truck, and then he approached the man from the side, physically aligning himself with the

man, rather than confronting him. They stood side-by-side, sipping coffee, and watching

the induction of young people into *sotni.* A rock song played, and some of the new militia

members, wearing army green helmets, several festooned with Right Sector stickers,

waved wooden batons in time to the music. A small boy wearing military fatigues and a

brightly colored backpack raised a bright yellow flag that I feared would have a

Wolfsangel on it. It was only the usual Ukrainian trident, but I still felt sick to my

stomach.[124] I glanced back at Danylo and the man. I couldn't hear what they were saying,

but I saw from a distance that they talked calmly, and at one point even laughed and

smiled. When Danylo returned, he told me that the man had expressed support for the

revolution that ousted Yanukovych, but said that he wore the St. George ribbon as a

means of protesting the increasing dominance of the far right on Odessa's Maidan. Also,

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[124] I'm not sure I was aware at this time of the far-right Azov Battalion's use of a bright yellow flag with a Wolfsangel on it. I do not believe so, and suspect my nauseated feeling came less from any one political symbol circulating at that time, and more from my concern that a group such as Right Sector had developed such a stranglehold on Odessa's Maidan, and was recruiting its young people. Carroll (2014) makes the point that Right Sector and Svoboda rose to prominence less because of their ideology, and more because they were well-organized, and offered people looking for the opportunity to participate in the resistance an avenue to do so. I suspect she was correct at the time, but the consequences of radicalizing and militarizing these young people is something Ukraine is still struggling with.

he liked that particular coffee truck's blend. Danylo, a fellow caffeine addict similarly skeptical of nationalists, accepted this answer. So, Danylo concluded, the man wasn't a *kolorad* after all.

Danylo's assessment was not unusual. In the spring of 2014, the most prevalent function of *kolorad* I observed was not to insult wearers of the St. George ribbon, but to classify them, at a distance, as belonging to one group or another. (And, as we saw with Danylo, to assess the likelihood they would provoke trouble.) But the importance of this should not be underestimated. The act of calling someone a *kolorad,* whether online or at a rally, typified not only the object of speech, but the speaker themselves. To say that *someone else* is a pest is to say that is to say that *you* are not. To say that someone else does not belong is to say that you do.
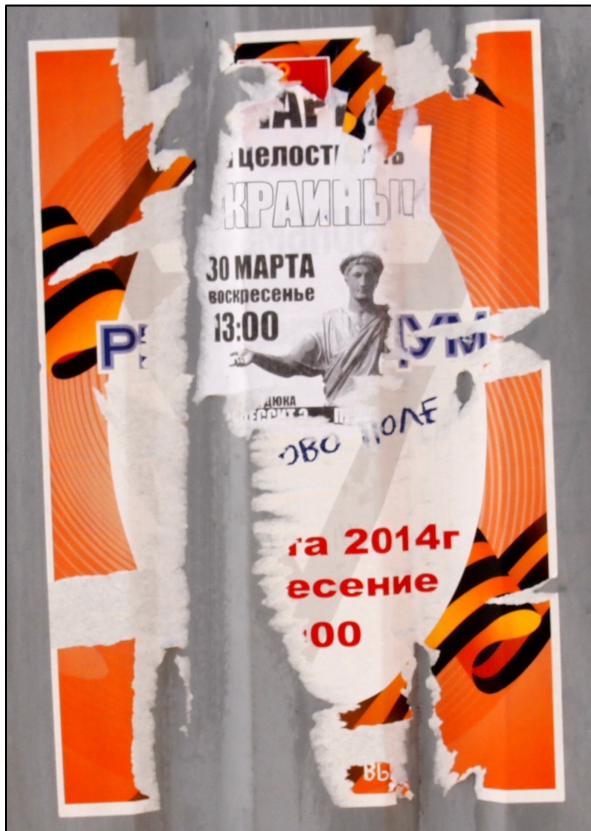


**Figure 20: Competing protest posters in Odessa.** The orange layer is calling for a referendum on making Odessa autonomous. The layer with the duke is pro-Maidan/pro-Ukrainian unity. People have attempted to tear down both.

**Fascists and Anti-Fascists**

On the same Sunday in early April that I accompanied Danylo to the pro-Maidan

demonstration near the Duke, I also visited the anti-Maidan encampment on Kulykove

Field. Kulykove Field is a large square in Odessa that stretches out before the old Trade

Unions Building (the one that would burn May 2$^{nd}$), which, in the post-Soviet era, was

occupied by a variety of administrative offices. It was the site of the annual May 9$^{th}$

Victory Day commemoration exercises; in 2013, these included a parade of veterans, the

laying of red carnations at memorials, and an outdoor exhibition of Soviet military

equipment, which children and teenagers scrambled atop of for photo opportunities. At

the anti-Maidan demonstration in April of 2014, there were no trucks or tanks, but

allusions to the "Great Patriotic War" were everywhere, and the atmosphere and

attendees seemed of another space and time. Passerby, generally older, wore St. George

ribbons; marching music and old songs about Odessa, "hero city," were piped from the

speakers.[125] The center of the square was dominated by a soundstage flanked by two

towers of scaffolding, upon which hung two banners. (See Figure 21.) On the left banner

was a Soviet sailor and local battalion flag, and the words: "We're for referendum,

federalization, and the [Russian-led] customs union." On the right were fierce-looking

men with guns, and the words: "Join the people's militia! We're against neo-Nazis,

oligarchs, and the corrupt." A recruiting station for the *Odesskaja druzhina* was nearby.

Around the square's perimeter stood several large tents, sandbagged against the

spring rain, and cordoned off against potential intruders. On these makeshift fences hung

homemade signs, all in Russian, that tended to fall into one of three groups. One cluster

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[125] Leonid Utesov's "Akh, Odessa," and "U Chornovo Morje." There was also, interestingly, a fair bit of Russian chanson, but presumably only the type that was not critical of the Soviet state.

celebrated Odessa's history as a Russian-speaking city, touting the poets and writers who had spent time in the city (Pushkin and Gorki being those best known to foreigners). Another belittled Maidan's European aspirations: one sign showed a photo-edited laundry detergent ad, with a woman holding her nose before a dirty sock bearing the European Union's circle of stars; next to it was a photo of a winking Putin, with the caption "don't wet yourself, we'll make it through;" nearby, a large banner read "Russia, Ukraine, Belarus: together we are holy Rus'." The third group appealed to the collective memory of the "Great Patriotic War" and warned against tolerance for western Ukrainian ethno-nationalists: one photo of children in concentration camps was tagged, "When you vote for Svoboda, you vote for this"; other photos showed Svoboda supporters, dressed in black and wearing a Cossack *chuprina* ("forelock," Rus. *khokhol*) in a torchlight march commemorating Stepan Bandera, who led the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) against the Soviets during World War II. I was moved by a photo of a Soviet soldier raising a flag over a war-battered city, and the text, "We died standing, so that you wouldn't have to live on your knees," less because of the words themselves, and more because I had seen the same ones, in Ukrainian, spray-painted on a wall near Kyiv's Maidan a week prior. Some of the signs combined themes. One cartoon showed a man using Crimea as a raft, paddling toward a buxom young Russian woman who welcomes him with wine and a piglet on a platter, and away from a Ukrainian couple—he short, with a red and black Wolfsangel t-shirt, Cossack forelock, arm raised in a Nazi salute, and she ogre-like, with a rolling pin, tattered floral head-wreath, and sagging boobs. Another sign, written in looping, schoolmarmish cursive, declared: "Odessa is the city of [writers] Vorontsov and Pushkin, but not Bandery [followers of Bandera] or other filth [*shushval'*]."

**Figure 21: The anti-Maidan encampment at Kulykove Field.**

To say that someone else doesn't belong is to say that you do. While the

demonstrators at the Duke feared *kolorady*, their counterparts at Kulykove Field feared

*fashisty,* "fascists." In the previous section, I positioned *kolorad* in relation to 1) other

instances of insect-as-human in history and literature, and 2) other "insulting" neologisms

from the revolutionary period, before suggesting that *kolorad*, at least as used on

Odessa's Maidan, might be a relative of *provokator,* "provocateur." However, I also

pointed out that *provokator* sometimes indexed (usually) young men who either

infiltrated demonstrations to instigate violence that would discredit protestors, or simply

attacked them.[126] In the summer of 2013, these gentlemen, who were dubbed "anti-

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[126] My first real encounter with these delightful sorts came in June of 2013, when Odessans were demonstrating against their city government's "General Plan" to sell off several public parks and squares, including the cliffs (*skaly*) leading down to the beaches, to cronies of the mayor (who was in turn a crony of Yanukovych). I went to observe the demonstration, which I had heard about through acquaintances active in "Democratic Alliance" (whom I had met through a Ukrainian language promotion group called "Language Renaissance"), an organization that would ultimately play a large role in organizing Odessa's Maidan. I arrived fairly early for the demonstration, and the first crowd of people I spotted were not my acquaintances, but rather a clutch of burly young men with closely-cropped haircuts, muscle shirts, and

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fascists" by the Yanukovych government, were rechristened *titushky* by some of the people they sought to contain. The westward leaning Ukrainian magazine *Tyzhden'* went further, placing Titushko on its cover with the headline, "The fascists of the future will be the anti-fascists" (June, 2013).[127]

This section considers *kolorad* as a response to Soviet discourses of Ukrainian fascism that had spilled into the 21st century. As I noted earlier, the earliest reported uses of *kolorad* were not in Ukraine, but in Russia during the 2011 anti-government protests. There, I am told, *kolorad* was a critique of the Russian government's exploitation of the "Great Patriotic War" narrative to reinforce its own moral authority, and of people who, by wearing St. George ribbons, were succumbing to this misuse. In Ukraine, the situation was different. For some Ukrainians, the narrative of the Great Patriotic War was itself highly troubling, even offensive or violent, because, they felt, it erased the involuntary annexation of western Ukraine (then eastern Poland) into the Soviet Union in 1939, and cast those who questioned Soviet authority as "fascists," whether or not they held fascist views or had collaborated with the Nazis. Likewise, it glossed over Stalin's mass expulsion of Crimean Tatars from their homeland in 1944, also due to charges that some in their number had aided the enemy (although many times more were serving in the Red Army): 190,000 Crimean Tatars were rounded up in a matter of days, forced into cattle cars, and transported for nearly three weeks with inadequate food, water, even air to Central Asia, where both dead and survivors were dumped in the desert (see Uehling

track pants or acid-washed jeans. I quickly realized they were not the activists I would be observing. As more people arrived, the police set up barricades, and the "athletes"—moving, squad-like, all at once— joined them for reinforcement. They were not counter-demonstrators. They were there to intimidate. Fortunately, the demonstration proceeded without incident. The "anti-GenPlan" group fractured somewhat as the revolution took hold, but overall, it was instrumental in laying the foundation for Odessa's Maidan.
[127] This quote is often attributed, without evidence, to Winston Churchill.

2004 for an extensive discussion of this deportation, and the Crimean Tatars return from exile in the 1980s and 1990s). Collaboration was rampant across the Soviet Union, and not limited to any one geographic area or ethnicity.[128] Yet in some parts of the former Soviet Union, western Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars retained the reputation for having tolerated, even welcomed the Nazi presence; for putting their own bids for independence ahead of the suffering of their fellow Soviets; and, in the case of western Ukrainians, for having committed untold atrocities—and celebrating the people who committed them. *Bandery* (Ukr.)*, or *banderovtsy* (Rus.), followers of Stepan Bandera and other Ukrainian nationalists, became a synonym for "fascists."

I do not wish to suggest here that Russians or other nationalities beyond Ukraine didn't recognize problematic aspects of the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, nor to disregard the well-documented role of Ukrainian militia both within the Third Reich (the Galician Division of the Waffen SS, for example) or independently of it (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, among other militarized factions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists). To be clear: western Ukrainian militia were deeply implicated in heinous crimes against Jews, Poles, and Roma, as well as against Soviets and fellow Ukrainians. The Maidan revolution's mainstreaming of right-wing heroes like Bandera seriously threatens recent advances in Ukrainian historiography of World War II,[129] and should be viewed just as warily as historiographical initiatives to de-emphasize Stalinist oppression.

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[128] The Chabad-designed Holocaust museum in Dnipropetrovsk does not skimp on discussing instances of Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazis, nor anti-Semitism among factions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. However, it is striking for its dedication to presenting the Holocaust as a Ukrainian*, rather than merely a Jewish tragedy, and its emphasis on collaboration as something that occurred throughout Axis-occupied territory.

[129] Ukrainian historiography has become increasingly nuanced. The HURI analysis of the Holodomor—one which finds no clear evidence for genocide, and points out the role of local authorities, not merely Kremlin-based ones, in perpetuating the famine—would likely not have been possible a decade ago. John-Paul Himka, once nearly alone in his research on the darker side of Ukrainian nationalist movements, has been

What I do argue is that *kolorad*, as used in Ukraine in 2014, both indulged the notion that 2014 was somehow like 1939 (or 1941, or the World War II period more generally) as well as mocked the idea of anti-Maidan activists as "anti-fascists." I build my argument as follows: first, I revisit the "Great Patriotic War" not simply a period of time or closed historical narrative, but as a discursive formation organized by multiple chronotopes embedding specific social types, most notably "heroes" and "fascists." These social types, I argue, were not captives of the past, but could be interdiscursively evoked, ported to the present, and identified in the "here-and-now," even among one's fellow citizens. Similarly, I suggest that another sizable discursive formation, which I call *represija* ("repression"), offered both a parallel, and sometimes contradictory, lens for interpreting the mid-section of the 20th century.[130] This assemblage of chronotopes (which, like the Great Patriotic War, could also function chronotopically in itself) yielded more "heroes," as well as another social type: "Stalinist oppressors."[131] Again, these characters could be linked to the contemporary, and spotted locally, triggering senses of the uncanny—and perhaps the urge to take up arms. In short, I track how the Great Patriotic War and *represija* offered 21st century Ukrainians different ways to think about 20th century events, and how these formations comprised not single, but numerous portals for connecting past and present.

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joined by historians such as Andriy Portnov, Oksana Kis' and Marta Havryshko. Unfortunately, these scholars have sometimes found it difficult to find academic homes within Ukraine.

[130] I refer to the Great Patriotic War and *represija* as such, rather than as, for example, "World War II" and "Stalinist repression," to emphasize the local nature of these discursive formations.

[131] It is tempting to categorize both "fascists" and "Stalinist oppressors" as "villains," and then juxtapose them with "heroes." However, while the groups I discuss seemed to orient to "heroes" in similar ways— their post-revolution shrines to the fallen, for example, were nearly identical—"fascists" and "Soviet oppressors" were presumed to move and speak in different ways, and these differences are significant for how these types were located in the present. Thus, I maintain my distinction.

However, I next affirm that we should not be too quick to presume that most people imagined 2014 a precise "replay" of the World War II period, or even particularly similar. Rather, I find that pro- and anti-Maidan activists (as well as people I call "Maidan skeptics") took an eclectic approach to negotiating the meaningfulness of 20th century history in a 21st century revolution, linking and layering time-spaces in ways that suggest they understood the World War II period as more provocative than relevant. Finally, following Constantine Nakassis (2012), I posit that the St. George ribbon, *in the context of anti-Maidan*, was a "brand" whose performativity was dependent upon its "citationality"—that is, its ability to point back to that which it reanimated, and calibrate consistent relationships between token, type, and ontology.[132] Ultimately, I argue that *kolorad,* in linking the orange-and-black stripes to Colorado potato beetles, rather than Soviet military honors, disrupted the performativity of the St. George brand, undermining the self-identification of anti-Maidan activists as "anti-fascists," and repudiating the relevance of the Great Patriotic War to the Maidan moment more generally.

A note before proceeding: I outline these steps as building blocks in my own argument. However, they may also be considered separately as examples of the range of ways my interlocutors in Ukraine assessed the significance of World War II history in the context of contemporary Ukrainian politics. Some, I find, took their ancestors' roles in World War II extremely seriously; this informed how they perceived their adversaries, as well as their willingness to use violence against them. More, it seems to me, exploited known symbols from that era in order to goad, criticize, or demand accountability from those they disagreed with. And others, I submit, sought to explode the idea that World

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[132] Constantine Nakassis gave marvelous comments on a very early version of this chapter at the 2015 American Anthropological Association meeting.

War II, or discourses of facism/anti-fascism, had ever been relevant to the Maidan Revolution in the first place. These three categories are not mutually exclusive; indeed, I take pains to show how my interlocutors straddled, merged, or moved between them as they made sense of which history mattered, and when and how.

My interlocutors often spoke of family trees with missing branches: a child had died young; a loved one had been displaced, and lost track of; a dissident family member had been sent away, never to return. For many, the traumas of the past were made most meaningful not by historical education, but by the everyday observation of absence. (What did the world lose when someone was starved, deported, censored, killed? Do manuscripts really not burn?)[133] However, in the 1980s, and into the post-Soviet period, there was an explosion of research on atrocities committed in "Stalin's time": forced collectivization; mass famine; denunciations, disappearances, imprisonment and execution. (See also Lemon 2009 on "Stalin's time" as chronotopic.) While work on Stalinism highlighted victimhood, it also embedded storylines of defiance, dissidence, and everyday heroes who stood up to the state. For some of my Ukrainian interlocutors, *represija* extended into and after World War II, when what is now western Ukraine came under Soviet control and Crimea was cleared of Crimean Tatars. For them, those who resisted the Soviet Army, or even fought alongside the Nazis, were recalled as "heroes."

Ukrainian conceptions of *represija*, when they include the war, and paint the Soviets as oppressors, bump up against the Soviet (and later Russian) notion of the Great Patriotic War. In the latter, the Soviets (including Soviet Ukrainians) are the heroes, and

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[133] "Manuscripts don't burn," a quote from Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, suggests that censorship will never suppress great literature, that stories remain within the writer. However Oksana Zabuzhko, in her epic family history *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (2009), points out that some stories are indeed lost forever.

western Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars are often fascists and traitors. The suffering of other peoples is acknowledged, but the staggering Soviet sacrifice of 12 million citizens is underlined. Like *represija,* the Great Patriotic War emphasizes not merely misery, but strength and pride: "hero cities" that held out under harrowing circumstances; soldiers that traversed snowy landscapes to liberate concentration camps; sweethearts who defended the homefront, and waited faithfully for their young men to return home. (Such motifs have already informed this dissertation: Kateryna K.'s story of partisans blowing up a rail line to prevent the removal of black earth soil is an archetypal example of a Great Patriotic War story.)

In the post-Soviet era, the discursive formation of *represija* enabled the new construction of memorials; in Ukraine, the most notable example of this is the profusion of monuments to the victims of the Holodomor. However, the discursive formation of the Great Patriotic War produced a different type of commemorative activity: the observance, and moreover, the reenactment of *Den' Pobedy,* Victory Day, on May 9th. Sergeui Oushakine (2013a), writing about May 9th celebrations in Moscow, tracks how, in the 21st century, *Den' Pobedy* became a spectacle of public mourning in which parades deploying "historical props," including blimps, tanks, and uniforms, "were used to provoke a sense of authentic connection with the past." Tweaking Victor Turner's classic work on ritual (1967), Oushakine writes that in Moscow Victory Day celebrations "the 'ordering' work of the ritual—usually achieved by the *narrative* structuring—is done now mainly through the *emotional* encoding…Tangible traces of the past are used as material pretexts to produce an affective cartography of history that was not experienced firsthand."

Moreover, Oushakine explains that "affective management of history" does not strive to replicate history precisely, but rather to reanimate feelings, and "link remembering people together" (274-275). St. George ribbons (*georgievski lentochki*) were thus key threads in the "embodiment," "suturing" and "synchronization" of memory (275; 282). Introduced in 2005 via a state-run news initiative, the ribbons referenced not only the medal of the Soviet Guards, but also the recently revived imperial Order of St. George, the Russian Federation's highest military honor. The ribbon in these two medals was the same: three black and four orange stripes (the imperial version was gold and black), which were said to symbolize smoke and fire. The ribbons given to civilians were 50 centimeters long and 3.5 centimeters wide, and distributed by businesses, state, and civic organizations in the weeks prior to May 9th, akin to how poppies are distributed in countries of the British Commonwealth.[134] Recipients were instructed to pin the ribbons to their lapels or handbags, tie them around their wrists, or affix them to their car antennae. The campaign included slogans: "I remember! I am proud!" (Rus. *ja pomnju! Ja gorzhus'!*) and "My grandpa's victory is my victory!" (Rus. *pobeda deda—moja pobeda*). Oushakine summarizes, "the action was aimed at marking a sociosymbolic community that was united not so much by a shared experience as by a newly learned vocabulary of public gestures" (287).

The St. George ribbons spread quickly across post-Soviet space, becoming particularly popular in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The 2013 Victory Day

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[134] The poppy has recently gained popularity as an alternative World War II commemorative symbol in post-Maidan Ukraine. Since 2015, Ukraine has recognized both May 8th and May 9th as Victory Days. The 8th is officially known as the "Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation," and the 9th is called the "Victory Day Over Nazism in World War II." It is notable that, with regard to the 9th, the Ukrainian government recognized "World War II" rather than "the Great Patriotic War," and victory over "Nazis' rather than "fascists."

celebrations I observed in Odessa were much smaller than those Oushakine describes in Moscow, but employed some of the same affective elements. Veterans wore large, intricately tied St. George ribbons on their uniforms; old women carried photos of their deceased husbands wearing medals; the song *"Den' Pobedy,"* "Victory Day," was played in stereo. In a touch particular to Odessa, or at least port cities, some marchers wore navy and white sailor stripes. The parade started at Kulykove Field and ended near the sea, at the eternal flame honoring the fallen. Thereafter, families returned to Kulykove Field to clamber atop old tanks and trucks, or peek inside tents replicating military hospitals and headquarters. Some flew the red flags of the Soviet era; more threaded past and present with orange and black ribbons; Ukrainian flags were scarce, if present at all.

Some of my interlocutors felt ambivalent about Victory Day activities, however, not solely because they were of the Soviet era, but also because they perceived Odessa as a sort of refuge from politics—they didn't observe Ukrainian state holidays either. Odessa, Danylo told me that day he apprehended the *kolorad* that wasn't, was a good-time town, where people either abstained from political discussions, or settled differences over a cup of coffee and a laugh. But for others, Victory Day seemed to enlarge Odessa, dust it off, make it something more than a crumbling provincial center trading on sunshine and kitsch. On May 9th, Odessa was once again a *gorod geroj*, a "hero city."

Chronotopes are neither singular nor totalizing. Just as people may orient to multiple interlocutors across an interaction, so may they orient to, or layer, multiple chronotopes. In doing so, they recalibrate relationships among those time-spaces, and morph understandings of those persons presumed to inhabit them. We saw this with the judge at the start of this chapter, when he placed "lawful Europe" and "unruly Ukraine"

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within the same discursive frame, highlighting a similarity previously less apparent. We also saw this on Odessa's Maidan: Danylo oriented to chronotopes of *represija* when he told me of his motivations for supporting Ukrainian self-determination, but to chronotopes of "old Odessa" when, after encountering the *kolorad* that wasn't, he spoke of the city's reputation for bonhomie. Linking the two, he stood heartbreakingly confident that the antagonism we were observing at that time would be resolved through conversation, not confrontation. The man he encountered with the St. George ribbon on his jacket zipper pull was seemingly more wary. This man may not have thought of Right Sector as "fascist," but he certainly seemed to perceive it as "trouble."

He was hardly alone in his apprehensions about the far right. In the months prior, groups long on the political margins in Ukraine gained substantial influence. As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, the nationalist political party, Svoboda, garnered 10 percent of the vote in the 2012 parliamentary elections. At the time, the phenomenon had been described as a "protest vote" by Ukrainians who were increasingly frustrated not only with Yanukovych, but with their political options more generally. But during the revolution, the semiotics of the far right, which drew on the semiotics of the anti-Soviet Ukrainian Insurgent Army, became prominent on the Maidan. Red and black "blood and soil" flags were flown from early on, both in Ukraine, as well as in pro-Maidan protests abroad.[135] Nationalist slogans, some of which paralleled Nazi ones, were mainstreamed: *slava Ukrajini—slava heroem* (call and response: "glory to Ukraine—glory to the

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[135] I attended a pro-Maidan demonstration in Chicago in December of 2013. Many of the demonstrators were descendants of Ukrainian Insurgent Army fighters and Ostarbeiter who were displaced after the war. I was struck by the presence of blood and soil flags, as well as slogans like "Ukraine above all." Moreover, I was struck by how unproblematic diaspora members found these flags. To them, the red and black flag meant (I quote one woman here) "Ukraine without Russia." The Nazis, Poles, and even the Soviets had been erased, and Ukraine itself had been shrunk to merely western Ukraine.

heroes'); *slava Ukrajini—smert' voroham* (call and response: "glory to Ukraine—death to the enemies'); and *Ukrajina ponad use* ("Ukraine above all," which translates "Deutschland über alles"). On the night January 1, 2014, some 15,000 nationalists held a torchlight march in Kyiv on what would have been Stepan Bandera's 105th birthday.[136]

The use of symbols and slogans of anti-Soviet insurgents by some pro-Maidan demonstrators sparked much discussion among scholars of Ukraine. Some, such as anthropologist Jennifer Carroll (2014) and political scientist Andreas Umland (2014), pointed out that many of these signs were recontextualized in the months during and following the revolution, or were never understood as having Nazi associations to begin with, but rather anti-Russian ones. That is, the "heroes" indexed in the call and response *slava Ukrajini—slava heroem* were no longer anti-Soviet militants, but the pro-democracy demonstrators who had been killed in February. *Bandery*, some of my interlocutors argued, had ceased to refer to Nazi collaborators, and became a bold name for unflinching supporters of Ukrainian sovereignty—a key example was Ihor Kolomojskyj, the Jewish governor of Dnipropetrovsk, who referred to himself as a *zhidobandera* (Yid-Banderite). Historian Serhy Yekelchyk, however, argues against recontextualization, writing that the problematic nature of the insurgents' symbols and slogans was precisely what made them powerful. Invoking Bandera's army was "the strongest possible expression of protest against the pro-Russian orientation of the [Yanukovych] government."[137]

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[136] Three months later, I spotted photos of a similar event in L'viv at Odessa's anti-Maidan encampment, with the caption, "who marches harmoniously in line? Cock and whore squads." It was a perversion of a Soviet pioneer chant (Rus. *kto shagajet druzhbo v rjad?*), in which the detachments are made up of scouts.
[137] Quoted in Stuart Williams (AFP) "UPA: Controversial Partisans Who Inspire Ukrainian Protestors," Jan. 30, 2014. See also Yekelchyk 2015.

**Figure 22: A young militia recruit at Odessa's Maidan.** She wears a bulletproof vest with a photo of Putin stylized as Hitler (the text declares him "Putler") and a *vinok* flower crown. Her dress is unusual, but I include it as an example of how young people responded to the call to protect the nation with their own aesthetics, layering time-spaces and bringing history to bear on the present in unexpected ways. Note also the red and black flag in the background, as well as the Ukrainian flag printed with the European Union's circle of stars.

Where these parties overlap is in their skepticism that the average pro-Maidan demonstrator was in fact embracing the ideology of the far right. But Yekelchyk suggests that red and black color combinations, portraits of Bandera, and insurgent slogans were not so much absorbed as toyed with. (He is not, however, suggesting such flirtations were harmless.) While some pro-Maidan activists undoubtedly viewed their Nazi-collaborating ancestors as freedom fighters, and interpreted the revolution through the lens of *represija*, others seemed to view nationalist slogans as primarily provocative. This was, in my

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experience, particularly the case among ethnic minorities: "Kostja," a native Russian (by birth and ethnicity; he held a Ukrainian passport) acquaintance of mine who joined an Odessan self-defense unit, described his own adoption of red and black clothing as a means of troubling the idea that Maidan had ever been anti-Russian, rather than, as he put it, "anti- a government that treats us like crap." Kostja was vehemently anti-Putin, but maintained that he wished for his friends and relatives in Russia the same freedoms and opportunities he wished for his fellow Ukrainian citizens. To him, Maidan had been about fighting corruption and other affronts to Ukrainian democracy, and the insinuation that it was about anything but was insulting. The revolution was never about World War II, Kostja argued, but it became *like* World War II when Russia annexed Crimea.

Yekelchyk's insight about the use of far-right colors, symbols, and slogans on the Maidan colors my thinking about use of St. George ribbons in anti-Maidan. I propose that orange-and-black was first and foremost a response to red-and-black. In selecting the St. George ribbon, anti-Maidan activists were branding themselves *anti-fascists*. In doing so, they insinuated that supporters of Maidan were the reverse: *fascists.* However, the choice of the St. George ribbon was likely forceful within Ukraine (and perhaps particularly in "hero cities" like Odessa) *not* because it suggested that all Maidan demonstrators were Nazis, but because it acknowledged the opposite: the vast majority of Ukrainians did not subscribe to the values of right wing groups, but rather abhorred them. The use of the St. George ribbon thereby forced those who supported Maidan to defend a movement that presented itself as (and for many of my interlocutors, truly felt) progressive, egalitarian, and pro-democracy, but which had a creeping right-wing presence. For some Maidan skeptics, like Danylo's *kolorad* that wasn't, the St. George ribbon served as a small

protest against growing influence of groups like Right Sector. For those more flatly

opposed to the revolution, the ribbon was a marker of who was loyal to the Soviet-era

notion of "anti-fascism," which celebrated the USSR's defense of human rights abroad,

even while the government suppressed them at home. In either case, the wearers branded

themselves with the moral authority of the people who had defeated Hitler.

I propose that the black and orange stripes of the St. George ribbon, as used in

Ukraine in 2014, was a brand whose potency depended upon its ability to be recognized

as "anti-fascist." Moreover, I suggest that its performative power—its ability to mark its

wearer as also "anti-fascist", or at least *not* fascist—depended upon its ability to

consistently cite the ribbon that accompanied the medals of the Soviet Guards *and* the

heroic chronotopes of the Great Patriotic War more broadly. By "brand," I mean signs

that carry a strong and often highly managed set of associations, and which in some way

assign the producer and/or the consumer to a particular category.[138] By "cite," I mean

point clearly and consciously to other signs, including previous iterations of the brand

itself, and make explicit when and how one is drawing on the other.

I draw here on Nakassis, who, following Silverstein on interdiscursivity (2005: 7),

defines citation as a sort of *reflexive* interdiscursivity, in which different discursive events

are linked together within a single semiotic frame, but one is clearly marked as a

reanimation. That is, a "gap"—as I have maintained here with quotation marks—brackets

what was reanimated, as well as what was not (Nakassis 2012: 626-627; see also

Nakassis 2013; Derrida 1988[1972]; Briggs & Bauman 1992). (Such gaps may exist to

different degrees—consider Voloshinov's discussion of "pictorial" reported speech, in

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[138] The literature on brand is increasingly expansive, and definitions vary. I draw here most directly on
Manning's 2010 *Annual Review* piece, further informed by Nakassis' 2012 work on brand and citation.

which the voice of the reporter colors the voice of the reportee.) Nakassis argues that brands are citational to the extent that their imprints (a Nike swoosh on a shoe, for example) are taken as tokens of a type (Nike as a brand with particular qualities and associations), and that these types are recognized as actually existing brands (what he calls "brand ontology"). A brand's performativity—following Derrida, its ability to be transported to a new context, and have tokens continue to index type—depends upon the cohesiveness of all three of these layers. For Nakassis, careful "suturing" of token, type, and ontology, via meticulous brand management, is what allows the brand to be recognized, and to reproduce and re-cite itself. When the melding of token-type-ontology weakens, however, "we start to shade off into the world of counterfeits, generics, and other brand monsters of capitalism" (628).

I suggest we may also encounter beetles. While the St. George ribbon may initially seem rather distinct from a Nike swoosh or half-eaten Apple, approaching it through the analytic of "brand" helps explain why pro-Maidan groups were able to, for a time, render "anti-fascists" *kolorady.* First, let me review the case for the orange and black stripes as a brand, and specifically one with weak ties between token, type, and ontology. Then, I will turn to how *kolorad* exploited citational gaps, "remixing" materials such that the anti-fascist brand was literally bugged (Luvaas 2010; Nakassis 2012).

The meaning of a brand is necessarily in flux; brand "identity" comes not solely from producers, but from consumers, and then how producers respond to consumers, and vice-versa, in a feedback loop.[139] The changing uses and indexicalities of the St. George ribbon evince this process. The physical ribbons, first introduced in 2005 by a journalist at RIA Novosti, and subsequently adopted by the Russian government as an official

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[139] Apple (and/or Mac) is a particularly good example of this.

symbol, were initially restricted to non-commercial uses connected with Victory Day celebrations. Recipients were given instructions on how to wear them properly and respectfully, and thereby honor the veterans of the Great Patriotic War that the ribbon's design tied them to. However, the ribbons, and their likenesses, quickly wound their way into unapproved contexts: as belts, hair ties, and shoelaces; as decoration for commemorative vodka bottles; as candy wrappers; as dog collars; as marketing logos. The groups sponsoring the distribution of St. George ribbons (businesses as well as civic organizations that tended to be pro-government and/or nationalist) first chastised companies that exploited their likeness, but by the new decade commercial uses abounded. The loose "brand management" for the St. George ribbons had not merely turned a blind eye to the public's appropriation of the orange and black stripes, but rather seemed to have accommodated it. Additionally, the ribbons themselves had become increasingly associated with some of the more socially conservative groups that distributed them—the pro-Putin youth group Nashi, for instance—declaring their commitment to "anti-fascism" while supporting a government whose commitment to human rights was deeply questionable (on "Potemkin NGOs," see Hemment 2012; 2015).

As with any brand, *who* adopted the St. George ribbon was instrumental in defining its identity. For some, the ribbon indexed a commitment to anti-fascism, or to honoring veterans who had fought in the Great Patriotic War. For others, the ribbon seemed vague and dissipated, an unhappy sign of Russian attempts to revive national pride and international prominence.

Applying Nakassis' requirements for cohesive brand, we begin to see hints of trouble. One wrinkle was the shaky relationship between token and type. "The ribbon

promised some meaning rather than revealed it; it indexed rather than signified," writes Oushakine. By what did it index? A connection to the past? The absence of veterans who had actually fought in the Great Patriotic War—that is, the people who had worn the ribbon as part of a medal, rather than tied to their jacket zipper pulls? Oushakine writes that "precise genealogy" and "exact symbolism" "was not really important for the organizers." The ribbons were to be worn with pride, but they did not necessarily brand one an "anti-fascist." They were awkward in other ways, too: Oushakine observes that the name "St. George" was unfamiliar to most Russians, and the "religious undertone did not go seamlessly with the Soviet war." Additionally, the ease with which St. George ribbons were acquired "clashed" with the "prominent Russian and Soviet awards" they presumably cited (287). Their casual use on lapels, car antennae, and ponytails was explicitly different from their deployment in military honors. Ultimately, the St. George ribbons *suggested* the past, but they animated feelings, rather than fighters.



**Figure 23: Part of the monument to Soviet soldiers at Treptower Park.** Berlin, Germany (spring, 2017). Note the St. George ribbons tied to the anchor.

Thus, the token-type relationship of the St. George ribbons was uncertain before the Maidan Revolution. *Kolorad*, we shall see, would exploit this.[140] But, in the context of the Maidan Revolution, perhaps an even bigger problem for the St. George ribbon as brand was ontological. Some Ukrainians were not at all convinced that they needed Victory Day celebrations, or at least not those that advanced an unproblematized narrative of the Great Patriotic War. Others were happy to recognize the defeat of the Axis Powers, but did not see the applicability of World War II to their present conflict. It did not really matter how successfully the St. George ribbon indexed the medals worn by the Soviet Guards, because, I suspect, the vast majority of pro-Maidan protestors did not see the relevance of World War II in demonstrations against a president so comfortable with his own banditry that he had a pirate ship.

For Nakassis, "brand ontology" is "the understanding of what a brand is, how it works or should work, its criterial features, its stereotypical qualities, and its prototypical exemplars" (628). He tracks how his interlocutors in Tamil Nadu, who consciously wore fake brands, "cit[ed] brand ontology through tokens that fail to index any brand type," thereby "supplant[ing] and decenter[ing]" or "disavow[ing]" brand ontology. I have observed a similar phenomenon in Ukraine, but refer to this strand of Nakassis' work here for a different reason: there is value in thinking about "brand ontology" in relation to chronotopes as I have described them in this chapter. Both brands and chronotopes embed commitments regarding how certain types of signs work, and the social types who use them. Distorted, however, they lose their ability to link up people, qualities, and

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[140] This gap was not necessarily a problem in Russia: the ribbon's emotive power, on the other hand may have even been enhanced by its vagueness. Oushakine, in a 2015 interview, observes that Russians "are good at keeping quiet" about their personal traumas, and that "we all cry for our own on Victory Day." Interview with Irina Kosterina, www.4freerussia.org/we-are-good-at-keeping-quiet-about-many-things/

space-times as before. Inspired by Nakassis, I propose we consider (some) pro-Maidan efforts to create red and black tokens that muddled the colors' relationship to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army not as "appropriation" or "recontextualization," but as a tinkering with, even unraveling of, World War II-related chronotopes.

For example, in chronotopes of the Great Patriotic War, "Jews" and "Banderites" are natural enemies, and the latter fly red and black flags. But in Odessa, and other Jewish cultural centers in Ukraine, such as Dnipropetrovsk, Jews tended to support the revolution, and were sometimes rather explicit about marking themselves as ethnically Jewish but civically Ukrainian. Some brought Israeli flags to the Maidan (in Ukraine, this flag seems to be taken to index Jewishness as much as the state of Israel); others wore (or at least purchased as souvenirs) yarmulkes embroidered with the Ukrainian trident.

Presenting oneself as overtly Jewish was a means of disrupting claims that Maidan was ethnonationalist or hostile to minorities. Recall Ihor Kolomojskyj's declaration of himself as a "Yid-Banderite": in the spring of 2014, a heavily circulated photograph showed him wearing a black t-shirt with red lettering that declared him a *zhidobandera,* and merged the Ukrainian trident with a Jewish menorah. The photo turned out to be a fake, but it was not condemned by Kolomojskyj, or by other Jewish Ukrainians I knew. While most of the Odessan Jews I spoke to expressed discomfort with the right-wing's celebration of Bandera and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, they felt strongly about upsetting anti-Maidan narratives that cast *all* supporters of the revolution as anti-Semitic. Expressions like *zhidobandera,* a leader at Odessa's Migdal center argued, were not about Jews assimilating and taking up ethnic Ukrainian's historic cause, but rather about pointing out the absurdity of assuming that, in 2014, Jewish life and

Ukrainian state sovereignty would be necessarily incompatible. Not unlike Nakassis's interlocutors' "non-brands," *zhidobandera* upset extant ideas about what certain signs, and the people who use them, signify or do.

Unsettling ontology is but one of three ways Nakassis identifies that a brand's "citationality" may be threatened. A second is troubling tokens, such as counterfeits that cite "brand essence" to different degrees (some fakes, Nakassis notes, winkingly reveal themselves to be so). The third is "expropriating brand types" by "remixing" materials. Drawing on Luvaas' work with Indonesian fashion designers (2010), Nakassis observes that a local logo, "EAT", superimposed over a global one, a Nike swoosh, provides a "humorous play" on brand, as well as a clever "reauthoring": "EAT" effectively ate Nike (632). "Remixing," thus, is not merely about putting brands in new contexts, but creating an environment in which one sign can commandeer another, either by subsuming its token, or by subverting it, causing the token to index a completely different type.
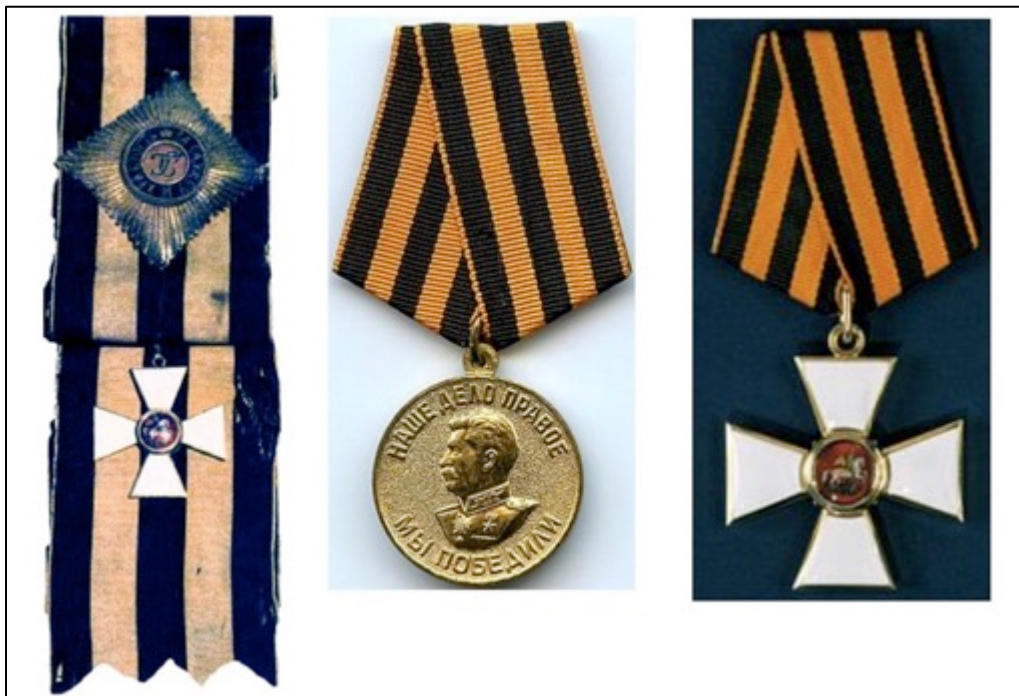


**Figure 24: Imperial, Soviet, & post-Soviet military honors.** Open source images from Wikimedia and eBay.

*Kolorad* memes did precisely the latter by reassigning the orange and black stripes of St. George ribbon to the Colorado potato beetle, a notorious pest that had been the subject of Soviet-era, anti-American propaganda campaigns. Interestingly, however, this was not the first time stripes had been seized: the medals of valor that the St. George ribbon referenced were remixes themselves (see figure 24). The imperial military decoration of the Order of St. George had gold and black stripes and a cross. The 1945 Soviet Guard medals indexed this genealogy while also overwhelming it: the stripes of the ribbon were darkened from gold to orange, and the cross of St. George was replaced with a pendant of Stalin and the words, "our work is just; we have prevailed" (Rus. *nashe delo pravoe; my pobedily*). In 1999 the Russian Federation's first president, Boris Yeltsin, revived the imperial Order of St. George as the nation's highest military honor. In clear citations of both of the previous medals, the post-Soviet design restored the imperial-era cross, but retained the orange and black ribbon associated with medals awarded to veterans of World War II. It was this latest iteration that gave the orange and black ribbons used on Victory Day, and later in anti-Maidan, their name. *Georgievskie lentochki*, "St. George ribbons," (or given the diminutive marker, "little St. George ribbons") diagrammed both the military honors they cited, as well as their physical detachment from them.

This detachment furthered the ribbon's tokenization, and also its vulnerability to expropriation. Following Derrida, the gaps between type and token, identity and difference, were precisely what enabled recontextualization. But following Nakassis, coherent brands require alignment between token, type *and* ontology. Their success isn't happenstance, but rather the achievement of reflexive citational management that is

always socially situated. *Kolorad* yanked the orange and black stripes away from military medals, but perhaps even more importantly, it undermined the authority of the Great Patriotic War. Some of the best evidence for this may come from how some anti-Maidan meme-makers responded to *kolorad*: by posting pictures of tigers. A far less dubious totem, and an interdiscursively shrewd reply, no doubt. However, this recasting did little mend the St. George ribbon's citational gaps. If anything, it seemed to underline the brand's ontological struggles: tigers, while majestic, have nothing to do with World War II. They are, however, a well-known favorite of Vladimir Putin.

**Seaside Rwanda**

How Colorado potato beetles arrived in Europe in such numbers in the post-war years remains unclear. One scenario is that, during World War II, the movement of armies spread the beetles from parts of Europe where they were already present. Another scenario is that American food aid came laced with eggs—whether these were stowaways, or intentionally introduced as an anti-communist bioweapon, has been the subject of controversy. [141] Some Eastern Bloc governments went even further, claiming that the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift was cover for the aerial distribution of pests. East German propaganda depicted the adult beetles as *Amikäfer,* "yank beetles", with red and white striped wing-covers, and blue, star-spangled heads.[142] A Czech children's book showed the beetle dining gluttonously (with knife and fork) on a plate of potatoes.[143] Prague school kids were instructed to sketch the pests parachuting from the sky, holding

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[141] The legacy of Soviet-era bioweapons programs, including the possibility of pest introduction, is most apparent in seasons 4 and 5 of the spy series "The Americans."
[142] Image available via the website of the German Historical Museum, id.: R 93/853
[143] See the 1950 book by Czech children's author and illustrator Ondřej Sekora, *O zlém brouku Bramborouku* (About the Mean Potato Beetle).

tiny American flags.[144] Children across the affected areas were organized into brigades to capture the larvae.

The beetles were marked as American in Ukraine as well. In my first summer in Sonjachne, Olena Marchenko was shocked to learn that I was not familiar with them. *Ale vony vashy!,* "but they're yours!", she exclaimed. Olena was quick to reassure me that she didn't believe the "propaganda" about the beetles as bioweapon. Her reasoning was simple: beetles don't know which way is east; the pests had been as destructive outside of the Soviet bloc as within it. Invasive species, she affirmed, were a consequence of global trade—like the North American jellyfish (*meduzy*) that had recently swarmed the Black Sea. I felt guilty nonetheless, and, as penance, diligently plucked hundreds of disgusting little salmon-colored grubs off of Sonjachne plants, drowning them in jars of alcohol.

The lifecycle of *Leptinotarsa decemlineata* makes it difficult to control. The adults, which bear ten light orange and black stripes on their wing covers, overwinter below ground. Come spring, they quickly mate, and then the females lay eggs, about two dozen at a time, on the underside of leaves. Once the larvae hatch—salmon-colored, with a few sooty speckles—they feed on the host plant, defoliating it, hindering photosynthesis and thwarting the development of tubers and fruit. In hot weather, the larvae mature in under two weeks; upon reaching adulthood, they too mate and lay eggs. A single growing season in southern Ukraine sees two, even three or four generations of beetles. To keep the pests in check, a good gardener attacks all three stages of the life cycle, and urges her neighbors to do the same. Yellow eggs are scratched off leaves; if necessary, an affected leaf can be removed. Larvae are collected by hand, drowned in alcohol or hot soapy

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[144] I thank Andrew Lass for sharing this childhood memory with me.

water, or doused with pesticides. Adults are crushed, drowned, or, as I learned after May 2nd, set on fire.

According to some accounts of the clashes at Kulykove Field, pro-Maidan belligerents not only let the Trade Unions building go up in flames, but shouted "burn the *kolorady*," as it did so. Others dispute this, pointing to photos of pro-Maidan men using the remants of the anti-Maidan soundstage (where the "We're for" and "We're against" banners had hung) as a ladder to rescue people from the burning building. What is certain is that in the hours following the violence in Odessa, Ukrainian social media erupted in tasteless comments about *kolorady*. One that astounded me came from a Kyiv-based political commentator who was, ironically, well-known for his criticism of the far-right.[145] His public status update—which garnered many, many "likes,"—read, "When I was small, my grandfather taught me to gather Colorado potato beetles from the garden in a jar, and then burn them." He later removed that status, and posted another apologizing for accidentally offending his readers, but also claiming that he was merely sharing a childhood memory. Not all were so crass. Mustafa Nayyem, the journalist often credited with initiating the Maidan protests, condemned "ignominious and inappropriate gloating," writing, "it is important to reach victory with a human face."

In the previous two sections, I described *kolorad* as 1) akin to "provocateur" and 2) a response to Soviet discourses about Ukrainian fascism. I have focused heavily on the semiotics of the St. George ribbon, succumbing perhaps to my interlocutors' claim that

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[145] Given the vagaries of citing Facebook status updates, particularly ones that were subsequently deleted, I have decided to withhold this individual's name. I also feel that, overall, this status update was not particularly representative of his values or political stance. If anything, his thoughtless commentary served as an alarm bell for moderates and progressives in Ukraine: if this man could succumb to such hateful rhetoric, anyone could.

*kolorad* was motivated by overlapping color schemes. But there is no denying that *kolorad* was always about insects—you cannot remove the stripes from the beetle.

In this last section, I consider some of the reactions Odessans had to the violence on May 2<sup>nd</sup>—both the physical clashes themselves, as well some Maidan supporters' cruel characterizations of the victims. I submit that while chronotopes of the Great Patriotic War were instrumental in marshaling the anti-Maidan movement in its initial months, following May 2<sup>nd</sup>, another discursive formation, which I call "Rwanda," guided how some Ukrainians interpreted what was happening to their country. (Comparison of Ukraine to Rwanda clearly also informed non-Ukrainians' perceptions of the conflict, but I focus here only on the people I know in Ukraine, and particularly in Odessa.) I identify three consequences to this: first, a causal explanation (however difficult to prove) emerged to explain why May 2<sup>nd</sup> turned so violent. Second, the Colorado potato beetle was stripped of its particularity—neither its history nor its stripes were relevant in "Rwanda." Finally, for some, "Rwanda" replicated, then intensified, the Banderites of the Great Patriotic War. The notion that Maidan activists were "fascist" was reinforced, but the conflict was recast as an interethnic one, in which Russians were the targets of genocide. This last point helps explain why the shock of what happened in Odessa did not result in a decline of violence in Ukraine, but rather hastened the mobilization of militia on all sides.

The Rwanda references began to circulate almost immediately after May 2<sup>nd</sup>, surfacing on social media platforms; in publications domestic and international; in comment sections; and in conversations between people trying to interpret what had happened, and what might happen next. Often, they were combined with descriptions of

May 2$^{nd}$ as a "massacre," and they always mentioned *kolorad.* Rumors swirled in those first days about the source of the fire in the Trade Unions building, and why the death toll had been so high. Some websites claimed that Right Sector members had infiltrated the building, setting the fire and also stabbing the anti-Maidan activists barricaded inside. Others speculated that the deaths were part of an elaborate Russian plan to annex Odessa, and that the building had been stocked with formaldehyde and then intentionally ignited, ensuring a high death toll, and giving Putin pretext to invade. Investigations would later establish that the fire started on the third floor of the building, either when someone inside prepared a Molotov cocktail that exploded before launching, or when someone outside the building launched a Molotov cocktail into the interior. In the interim, Odessans pondered the root cause of the deaths: the extraordinary antagonism that had swept their city and its surrounds.

On May 8$^{th}$, 2014, journalist Oleg Konstantinov published an editorial on the website *dumskaya.net,* a local news and politics site. He penned the piece "Ordinary Atrocity: How the 2$^{nd}$ of May Became Possible" from his hospital bed, where he was being treated for the gunshot wounds to his arm, leg, and back that he had sustained covering the clashes six days prior. One of the problems, he wrote, was that in the preceding months, Ukrainians of all political persuasions had become accustomed to the idea of using "brute force (Rus. *grubuju silu*) against people with other views." They had witnessed the carnage on Maidan, and they were "psychologically ready to accept new victims in an undeclared civil war." Konstantinov notably did not suggest that the conflict was interethnic; rather, he found its origins linguistic, suggesting that "dehumanizing" language was also to blame. He mentioned *kolorady* and *vatniky;* also *majdauny,*

*pravoseki* ("Right Sector" with a suffix implying homosexuality) and *khokhlopyteky* (very approximately, a non-Ukrainian who "drinks the Kool-Aid"). And he mentioned Rwanda: "in 1994, the Hutu mass media called Tutsis "cockroaches." As is well known, from 500,000 to a million people were subsequently killed." "To kill another human being isn't psychologically easy," Konstantinov wrote, "but if you deny a person the right to be called human, and declare him some sort of *kolorad,* the moral barrier is removed."

Konstantinov's efficient alignment of 1994 Rwanda and 2014 Ukraine was not unusual. Unlike the "Great Patriotic War," Ukrainian chronotopes of "Rwanda" were spare, marked less by storyline or social types than by a general gruesomeness and foreignness, and one damning detail: the comparison of humans to insects.[146] For most people I knew, the power of "Rwanda" lay not in its immediate applicability; Ukrainian media published strings of interviews with and opinion pieces by lawyers and academics explaining why Ukraine 2014 had little in common with Rwanda 1994, or Yugoslavia 1992 for that matter.[147] By the autumn of 2014, my interlocutors who invoked Rwanda would begin by stating, "they're hardly the same, *but—*." Rather, the potency of "Rwanda" lay in the tension it created between the unbelievable and the undeniable—the desire to presume that violence like that which occurred elsewhere was improbable in Ukraine, and the realization that May 2nd had happened, and it was not entirely anomalous. Several publications were quick to point out that Odessa, despite its "myth" of tolerance, did have a history of pogroms. But among my interlocutors, history seemed less important than the possibility that quieter acts of viciousness, including calling one's neighbors "stupid" or "parasitic," might have added up.

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[146] Golstein, Vladimir. "Will History Rhyme? Ukraine as Rwanda." *Russia Insider.* October 14, 2014.
[147] See, for example: Popovna, Tetjana. "*Uroky 'Radio Ruandy' dlja Ukrajini i rosijs'kykh ZMI.*" Lessons from 'Radio Rwanda' for Ukraine and Russian Mass Media. *Ukrajinska Pravda.* July 15, 2014.

That dehumanizing language may contribute to discrimination, oppression and violence is a topic well-explored in the social sciences and humanities (Bourdieu 1991, Das 1998, Raffles 2010, and Worthham 2006 are but a few selections). Likewise, the role of language as violence is a prominent theme in work on genocide (see, for example, Bhabha 2010 on Rwanda; see also Humphrey 2012 on rumor and pogroms in Odessa). Establishing a direct link between specific speech events and actual instances of violence has presented more of a puzzle, however. Legal scholars have struggled to prove "incitement" by persons accused of instigating grave crimes (Benesch 2004, 2008). Richard Wilson (2015), writing about Rwanda, employs Austin's division of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary force (what was actually said, what was meant by what was said, and what effects were produced) in a critique of international courts' fetishization of causality in prosecutions of war criminals—even though the law does not directly require it. That is, Wilson argues, attending to illocutionary force is legally sufficient for charging someone with an inchoate crime. Influential Hutu radio broadcasters who called for the destruction of Tutsi "cockroaches," were, for Wilson, aware of and responsible for the violence they were precipitating, even if they themselves did not carry out actual massacres.

But what if the violence had not occurred? Would the broadcasters still have been prosecuted? And would "Rwanda" still have embedded lessons about the horrifying consequences of calling humans insects? As Derrida (1988) pointed out, intention matters less than iterability: we recognize certain strings of signs as performative because we have observed their power in the past, or at least heard about it secondhand. And as Hill (2008: 40) reminds us, "performative ideology," or the assumption that "words have an

active force, that they can soothe or wound," rests upon culturally embedded notions about what effects language can or cannot produce. Hill is in no way suggesting that hateful speech isn't powerful, hurtful, or able to incite violence. However, she cautions us that the linguistic practices in which discrimination is most persistent and pernicious are far more everyday: "language ideologies…make some kinds of talk and text visible as racist, and others invisible" (39). In invoking "Rwanda", Konstantinov turned the mirror back on Maidan activists who had called themselves defenders of human dignity. Yet, even in new alignments, chronotopes delimit the interdiscursive linkages than can be made. The calibration of "Rwanda 1994" with "Ukraine 2014" ultimately spotlights only a few conflict-inspired neologisms, and particularly *kolorad*.

Judith Irvine (2005) observes that where there are knots in the interdiscursive fabric, there are also tears. One thing I found striking about *kolorad* from the start was how a pest once heavily associated with United States and the Cold War came to be connected with people not from the West, but the east. What of the "yank beetle" and rumors of bio-warfare? What of the fields of food that were simply ruined? As a cousin of the provocateur, *kolorad* perhaps retained a bit of its invasive and destructive quality, but its American origin was erased. When viewed with reference to Rwanda, *kolorad* lost even its stripes. The differences between cockroaches and beetles, both cultural and morphological, vanished. What mattered was that humans had been compared to insects and burnt alive.

In the aftermath of May 2nd, when talk of Rwanda and ethnic cleansing were most prevalent, the use of *kolorad* appeared to fall off among Maidan supporters.[148] To what extent *kolorad*'s decline was due to concerns about the relationship between language

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[148] I base this on my own social media observations, searches of Twitter, and my interlocutors' own reports.

and violence is unclear; my impression was that *vatnik* moved swiftly in to replace it.

Additionally, it was in the late spring of 2014 that tiger memes began to appear, with

knowing captions such as "kolorad, you say?" (ie. are you calling me a kolorad?). Like so

many neologisms, *kolorad* may simply have expired.

The violence in Odessa, however, did not subside. What happened at Kulykove

Field did encourage some political adversaries to engage in mediated discussions; in

Odessa, the May 2nd group organized an independent investigation of what had happened,

and concluded that both sides, as well as local emergency services, were to blame. But

for others, May 2nd was a call to arms. Dozens of bombings targeting pro-Kyiv political

offices, banks (usually PrivatBank, owned by "Yid-Banderite" Dmitro Kolomojskij),

military recruitment sites, infrastructure (train tracks) and progressive centers (including

a gay night club) rocked Odessa. The bombings peaked in the winter of 2014–2015, when

there were 16 in three months; the continued regularly through 2015, and still occur

occasionally at time of writing (the most recent was May 6, 2017). While the attacks

were minor, and seemed to be devised to frighten rather than kill, but they were a

constant reminder of the threat of separatism, and that elegant, eccentric Odessa was not a

beacon of tolerance, and never had been.[149, 150]

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[149] During this time Odessa city and region was under the authority of Mikheil Saakashvili, the former president of the Republic of Georgia. It was thought at the time that having an outsider with a record for combatting corruption would be most effective in multinational Odessa, but Saakashvili later developed a combative relationship with the Poroshenko government.
[150] The eastern city of Kharkiv also suffered regular bombings, including one of a pro-unity march in February, 2015 that killed four civilians, including a minor.

**Figure 25: Sticker "Ukraine must be Ukrainian."** Found on a fountain in Odessa, April 2014. The sticker suggests that "Ukrainian" means not Nazi, Soviet, nor Russian (the black, yellow and white flag was an imperial one, and used by monarchists).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has probed the multiple semiotic, historical, and ideological underpinnings of *kolorad*. More broadly, it has traced the interdiscursive processes that allow speech such as *kolorad* to circulate, as well as later be re-evaluated, circumscribed, and to some extent, reclaimed. Following Silverstein (2005), I showed that the interdiscursive processes that made, mobilized, and condemned *kolorad* turned upon "evals," the pairing of time-spaces that were known to be distinct, but felt to be in some way similar. I demonstrated how familiar chronotopic formations including "repression" and the "Great Patriotic War" were foundational to *kolorad*'s formation and circulation. However, I also identified another chronotope, "Rwanda," that informed criticism of *kolorad* in Ukraine, as well as characterizations of the country's slide into sustained conflict.

What I call "chronotopes of Africa" would figure prominently in subsequent

representations of the war in Donbas.[151] While "Rwanda" evoked questions about the

nature of the conflict, and whether it was interethnic, descriptions of the separatist

regions of Luhansk (Rus. Lugansk) and Donetsk as "Luganda" and "Donbabwe" played

on stereotypes about "Africa" as remote, uncivilized, and disorderly. In characterizing

separatist eastern Ukraine as irrefutably "Other," mainland Ukrainians went beyond even

from what Portnov (2014) has called "Galician reductionism": the notion that places

beyond historical western Ukraine were so hopelessly Russified and Sovietized, they

were best gotten rid of. In labeling the east "African," mainland Ukrainians (those who

used such language, that is) reinforced their notion of themselves as "European." In the

European Union, however, there were growing doubts about Ukraine's western

orientation. Comparisons of Ukraine to Rwanda, and also the Balkans, circulated

westward. News reports about ruthless, right-wing militia beyond Kyiv's control raised

questions about Ukraine's commitment to liberal democracy, or even its ability to

manage its own citizenry. The war in Donbas had quickly become the largest, most

violent political crisis in Europe in the new century, and it lay right at the European

Union's doorstep.

It wasn't supposed to be this way, of course. Twenty years prior, as the judge

reminded me that day in the strawberry field, Ukraine had signed the Budapest

Memorandum on Security Assurances, destroying most of its nuclear warheads, and

sending the few remaining to Russia. Two years after that, when disarmament was

complete, then U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry, along with his Ukrainian and

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[151] Palmié 2013 also writes about "Africa" as a chronotope meaningful to Caribbean populations as a
source of "authenticity." Again, chronotopes are neither singular nor immutable.

Russian counterparts, had planted sunflower seeds on the grounds of a former missile silo, symbolically returning the soil to agriculture. Nineteen-sixties flower power met post-Soviet democratization rhetoric, with Perry stating, "Ukraine today has shown the world how the seeds of democracy, tended with care and commitment, can grow and flourish and nourish a nation." The sunflowers recapitulated Ukraine's anticipated rebirth in more ways than one: in addition to being a promising crop for Ukraine on global markets, sunflowers were then being used to leach heavy metals from the soil spoilt by Chornobyl.

Sunflowers were supposed to sow seeds of peace. Instead, they became tragically associated with the war in Donbas.

CHAPTER 5

**Sunflowers**


A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence.
—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1977.


On July 17, 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17), en route from Amsterdam to

Kuala Lumpur, was shot out of the sky over war-torn Donbas. The plane, downed with a

Russian-manufactured Buk missile, was almost certainly deployed by anti-Kyiv

separatists who mistook the commerical aircraft for Ukrainian military aviation.[152] All

298 passengers and crewmembers were killed, and debris, human and mechanical, rained

down over 34 kilometers of towns, villages and agricultural lands. It was the cockpit and

nose of the plane that landed in the sunflower fields near the village of Rozsypne. The

fuselage flattened waves of wheat, and bodies, stripped naked by the force of the blast

and stiffened by the freezing atmosphere, fell everywhere, including through the rooftops

of stunned villagers. But news coverage, both in Ukraine and especially abroad, often

featured images of recovery workers combing sunflower fields, or scraps of the plane and

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[152] I yield to the reports of the Dutch Safety Board, which can be found here: https: //www.onderzoeksraad.nl/en/onderzoek/2049/investigation-crash-mh17-17-july-2014. It is also notable that Donbas separatists had shot down two Ukrainian cargo planes in the previous month, suggesting that they mistook MH17 for a third. The separatist leader Strelkov posted to V Kontakte (social media) suggesting as much right after the missile was launched, but removed the post after it became clear that the plane was not Ukrainian military, but commercial. However, Kyiv must also accept blame for not having closed the airspace over the conflict zone despite these prior attacks.

personal belongings watched over mournfully by human-sized blossoms with golden

manes and giant eyes. Mourners responded in kind, flooding the gates of Amsterdam's

Schiphol Airport with sunflower bouquets, and planning memorials integrating the

blooms. One could be forgiven for thinking the whole plane had crashed into a sea of

sunflowers; indeed some news accounts described the incident as such.[153] It's

understandable; it's far more comforting to think of the victims as laid to rest in a field of

sunflowers rather than blown to pieces by a missile launched by mistake.[154]

[153] A news search for "MH17 field of sunflowers" will yield countless English language that suggest that the plane went down in a field of sunflowers, or that most of the bodies were found there. This includes coverage of the tragedy at the time it happened, as well as upon annual commemorations, including the third anniversary, when a monument integrating sunflowers opened near the Amsterdam airport.
[154] The shooting down of civilian planes is mercifully rare and incidents in which neither the aviation company nor its passengers had any relation to the conflicted land into which they plunged, are even rarer. However, Ukrainian (2001), U.S. (1988) and Soviet (1982) armed forces had made such errors in the past.

This chapter is about Ukrainian sunflowers, their fruits and their representations, and the semiotic processes that have allowed both to circulate far beyond the battlefields of Donbas.[155] It explores what sunflowers meant to my rural informants in Southern Ukraine, who considered the oil-seed varieties their most important, most profitable crop—the one that, even more so than grain, would make the country an agricultural powerhouse. It contrasts this niche understanding of sunflowers as global commodity with more widespread and often urban-based understandings of sunflowers as bucolic landscape, as cheery, decorative signs of devotion, or, increasingly in Ukraine, as part of an imagined folk culture. Finally, it probes how, in the two years following the MH17 disaster, sunflowers circulated not only in news photography as poignant backdrop for gruesome event, but as a planted symbol honoring the victims of the tragedy. I give special attention to the project of two Australian journalists, reporter Paul McGeough and photographer Kate Geraghty, to distribute sunflower seeds they collected from the crash site to the families and friends of the victims around the world (*Sydney Morning Herald,* December 27, 2014 and July 22, 2015).[156] Far more than a tale of gifts and commodities, or a cynical look at the problems—blistered hands, molding seeds, rigid quarantine regimes—urbanites encounter in the countryside, the journalists' effort to provide what they called a "keepsake" for the grieving offers an unusual point of entry into the interdiscursive meshwork that make sunflowers, which my Ukrainian farmer

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[155] I use Ukrainian here instead of "Eastern Ukrainian" or "Donbas" in recognition of how the sunflowers at the MH17 site were regarded by my Ukrainian interlocutors, and also by those circulating and planting sunflower seeds in this commemorative project.

[156] McGeough and Geraghty were experienced conflict reporters, and had worked together since at least 2010, when they were aboard the Gaza Freedom Flotilla that aimed to break Israel and Egypt's blockade of the Gaza strip, and came under attack by Israeli Defense Forces.

interlocutors called a "technical crop," seem "natural," and a natural choice not only for commemorating the lost, but binding the living.

But which living? For the families and friends of the 298 MH17 passengers, who were with just one exception unable to access the crash site, and whose loved ones, in some cases, could be retrieved only in parts (if at all), planting sunflowers offered a means to mourn. Seeds, tokens of a troubled place the recipient need not visit, could blossom into human-height plants to be cherished and nurtured. Eventually, those plants could produce their own seeds, which could in turn be sown. The people whom the sunflowers honored could never be brought back, but in other ways, life could go on. Yet for whom are sunflowers poignant, and what makes them so? It wasn't that Ukrainians weren't fond of their summertime splendor. For many of my interlocutors, the golden fields were vibrant national landscape and a cherished part of an emerging pan-Ukrainian civic identity. But sunflower memorials, I suspect, could not have had a similar effect in oilseed producing areas like my fieldsite of Sonjachne.

Two years after MH17, farmers in Odessa region were monocropping ever more land with sunflowers despite environmental and financial risk. Meanwhile, ever more young, rural men were being sent to fight the separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Much attention has been given to the volunteer militias fighting in Donbas, particularly those organized by far-right groups and implicated in atrocities.[157] However, the vast majority

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[157] These militias were officially integrated into the Ukrainian National Guard in the fall of 2014, but in some cases, their respect for Kyiv leadership has remained questionable. It is important to note that people joined independent militias for a variety of reasons, not all of which were ideological. American journalist Christopher Miller, who has embedded with and written extensively on independent battalions, has observed that these militia were often attractive to older fighters, foreign fighters, and people who wished to avoid the corruption and hierarchical structure of the Ukrainian Army. Moreover, because these militias were for some time funded by donors, including North American diaspora groups and oligarchs, they often had better equipment than the Army. That said, Miller also noted that there were people with neo-Nazi leanings among the battalions with far-right wing leadership. (Personal communication, July 2015.)

of those fighting were ordinary foot soldiers in the Ukrainian Army who had been

drafted, and either went willingly, or lacked the connections and funds to avoid

conscription. The luckier recruits from the area around Sonjachne were posted near the

border with Transdnistria, less than an hour to the west, where things were calm, and

from where they could easily come home for visits. But many more were sent east, to

what the Ukrainian government called the "ATO" (the "anti-terrorist operation"—a name

used to legitimize warfare skirting the norms of national and international law). There,

they slept, ate, and fought from trenches sliced through fields, from schools emptied of

their children, and from houses people not unlike themselves had been forced to abandon.

The interchangeability of place has been much troped upon in the former Soviet

Union, not least of all by the Soviets themselves—for example, works like Venedikt

Yerofejev's *Moscow to End of Line* (1973) and Eldar Rjazanov's *The Irony of Fate*

(1976) found humor in the uniformity of apartment blocks and transport stops. (See also

Yurchak 2003 and 2006 on the "hegemony of form.") Ukrainian villages also often have

strikingly similar layouts and color palettes. As I pored over news coverage of the war in

Eastern Ukraine, and in particular, in the coverage of MH17, I experienced pang after

pang of recognition. In photos of Hrabove, Rozsypne, and Petropavlivka, the villages

where much of the "debris" fell, I did not see the purply-blue houses (*synky*) often found

in Sonjachne and its surrounds. But the shape of the brick or whitewashed houses, the

way the windows were often trimmed in light blue and the gates painted green, the

pitched rooftops covered in corrugated medal—these were the same. There were orchards

in the front of the homes and expansive kitchen gardens in the back. There were

kerchiefed old women in housedresses and foam plastic sandals, the dirt under their

finger and toenails now visible to the whole world on the pages of international media. What did those women do after the bodies fell from the sky that afternoon?, I wondered. As dusk fell, did they hoe their potato plants as usual? Did they milk the cows?

Initially, I was ashamed to have thought the villages near the crash site looked like the ones I had spent time in, presuming I was denying the particularity of both those villages, as well as the ones I worked in. The narrow range of available construction materials and paint colors, I knew, always belied the complexity of lives lived. "Every person makes *borshch* in her own way," Olena, my host in Sonjachne had often reminded me. But in September of 2014, as we debriefed the events of the preceding months, Olena pointed out it wasn't important how alike or unalike the villages were. What I felt, Olena thought, was something she and Pasha felt, too: a feeling of narrow aversion. The feeling that, if things in Odessa had turned out differently, *the war could have been here.*

For MH17's 298 passengers and crew, who were overwhelmingly Dutch (193 victims), Malaysian (43), and Australian (27), Donbas was, quite literally, flyover country.[158] While Olena and I studied photos of Donbas' charred villages and fields as if they were windows into an alternate reality, this was likely not the case for most other people viewing those same images. Where Olena saw sunflower fields that looked just like those Pasha farmed, the Australian journalists saw a golden "blanket" that "obscured" the "abomination" of the wreckage. Olena's experience of the uncanny was moored by 50 years of working similar soil. Soil was actually the first gift McGeough and Geraghty pondered bringing victims' families. However, they decided upon

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[158] Victims by country of origins, based on the flight manifest, which counts countries based on the passport the used by the passenger at check-in time (ie. dual citizenships are not represented here): The Netherlands—193; Malaysia—43 (including 15 crew); Australia—27; Indonesia—12; United Kingdom—10; Germany—4; Belgium—4; The Phillipines—3; Canada—1; New Zealand—1.

sunflower seeds, which seemed to them more soothing, and which harvested, replanted, and harvested again, could be propagated for years on end.

I do not know whether the journalists were aware of Ukrainian devotion to chernozem, the black earth soil discussed in chapter 2. Perhaps they also thought of soil—sheer *topos*—as the sort of thing that émigrés took with them when they left home. But Ukraine most certainly was not home for the victims, and the point was to honor the people, not the place. It strikes me that a teaspoon of soil carried in a locket would always seem to point back toward Donbas, while sunflowers, with their human-sized height and bright eyes, might gently evoke those lost. Planted in a private garden or a public square, the sunflowers' heads might nod toward Ukraine, but with each harvesting and replanting of the seeds in local soil, what was foreign about them would be less and less.

Anthropologists often talk about making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. Frequently, we do so as a means of methodology, as an exercise in shifting perceptions, or finding patterning in the seemingly nonsensical. We claim reflexivity in employing such strategies, making comparisons, citing literature, "unpacking" the taken-for-granted. But people in shock, mourning, and uncertainty engage in similar analysis, quietly negotiating the tension between familiar and strange as a matter of coping, or even finding empathy.[159] Some dwell on the uncanny, counting their blessings, taking solace in what could have transpired, but did not. Others locate the known, the comforting, and hold fast to it. Perhaps you scratch seeds out of an industrial sunflower, hoping they"ll bloom later. Perhaps you do go home and milk the cow.

This chapter zooms out by necessity: the MH17 disaster commanded international attention in a way that the conflict in Ukraine had not previously, and has not since.

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[159] On coping as discursive practice, see especially Capps & Ochs 1995 and Ochs & Capps 2001.

However, it builds on the themes of the chapters prior: how iconicity naturalizes connections across contexts; how landscape is produced semiotically; how language participates in political economy, linking—and upsetting—global and local; how interdiscursive processes work to shape perceptions of people, places, and events. As in the previous chapter, I consider how a specific living non-human—there a beetle; in this case the sunflower—was not merely represented, but taken as representative *of* something significant about social life. But my focus in this chapter is less how places and people become marked than how others escape particularity.

In tracing the afterlife of a specific set of sunflowers, and a specific lineage of sunflower *seeds,* I show that the blossoms indexed not so much the expansive crash site itself, but rather a small number of images of the wreckage and recovery operation that circulated heavily in international media. Moreover, I suggest that these photos in which sunflowers were so prominent, as well as the subsequent commemorations of the tragedy, presupposed a broad "public" that recognized sunflowers first as charming, cheerful, or poignant, rather than as a global commodity (Warner 2002). The interdiscursive threads that allowed sunflower seeds to circulate in aftermath of MH17 were both token and type-sourced (Silverstein 2005); they pointed to a specific time-space, but their selection for memorials hinged upon extant genres of commemoration involving the planting of trees and flowers, and extant views of sunflowers as—as McGeough put it—"happy chaps."[160] Ultimately, I outline how the MH17 sunflower seeds' transformation—from

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[160] This was not the first time Eastern European sunflowers had taken a prominent role in in the Western imagination. See, for example, the 1970 film "I Girasoli," or "Sunflowers," an Italian-Soviet co-production directed by Vittorio De Sica about an Italian woman who travels to Russia to search for her husband, who never returned from World War II. See also the 2005 film "Everything is Illuminated," based on the book by Jonathan Safran-Foer of the same name, about a young man who goes to Ukraine in search of the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. When he finds her home, it is at the center of a majestic field of sunflowers. Such a fanciful merging of domestic and industrial is, alas, decidedly unrealistic.

commodity to gift to means of mourning—and ability to transform themselves—from

seed to blossom to seed-producer—both enabled a connection to a particular place that

could not be reached, as well as steadily erased that very site.

In writing this chapter, I do not aim to force my readers to look beneath the

sunflowers that shielded the unthinkable from the public eye. I certainly do not ask them

to discount the senseless deaths of 298 passengers, the heartbreak of their survivors, or

the comfort the latter might have taken from sunflower memorials. But I do ask my

readers to take a moment to make the familiar strange, to look closely at Ukrainian

sunflowers, and see them not as cheery blooms or comforting countryside scenery, but as

a global commodity engaged in a long and strange dance with capital, state-building, and

war. I realize that doing so in the context of a catastrophe like MH17 will be jarring.

I organize the remainder of this chapter around three questions: first, why were

sunflowers planted in Donbas, and across much of the steppe, in the first place? Second,

how were sunflowers meaningful to different people in Ukraine? Finally, how did the

MH17 sunflower project both deliberately point back to Ukraine, as well as leave room

for mourners to create their own meaning? To answer these questions, I first explore how,

via long-distance exchanges of seeds and dietary preferences, sunflower oil became

Ukrainian farmers' most prized export. The sunflower's weedy, primordial appearance

and folksy reputation, I argue, belie its very modern making, and the very modern

making of what is now imagined quintessential Ukrainian landscape. I then compare and

contrast how sunflowers have been engaged by different parties in Ukraine, including

urbanites on road trips, farmers anticipating harvest, protestors on the Maidan, soldiers

navigating conflict zones, photographers and filmmakers representing warfare, and

scientists trying to heal land contaminated by Chornobyl. Sunflowers, I demonstrate, long stood outside conventional flower culture, but were unusually present in depictions of national landscape under attack. In the third section, I return to the scene of MH17, detailing how sunflower seeds were collected from the site, reproduced and distributed, and embraced by mourners and media around the world—although not precisely in the ways that the Australian journalists had expected. I conclude with some reflections on Ukraine's quest for European integration, and how "Europe" has been transformed in the three years since Maidan and MH17.

**Fat and Friction**

In her "ethnography of global connection," *Friction,* Anna Tsing, drawing on Clifford, "stress[es] the importance of cross-cultural and long distance encounters in forming everything we know as culture" (Tsing 2005: 4; Clifford 1997). For Tsing, global connections are not fluid, but rather propelled by "zones of awkward engagement" that, like the contact between tire and road, create friction that forces movement. Uncomfortable, "unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of *interconnection across differences* [emphasis mine]" are the stuff from which cultural forms emerge, morph, reproduce, and wither (Tsing 2005: xi-4).

A key exercise of this dissertation has been to explore how difference, erased, naturalizes connections across contexts. In this section, I show how friction yields similar smoothing over, rendering sunflowers as much bucolic landscape as commercial crop, and sunflower oil both the foundation of the Ukrainian home kitchen, as well as lab-perfected additive to industrial foods. To be clear, MH17 was but sunflowers' latest "awkward engagement" in a centuries-long history of transoceanic movement,

resignification, hybridizing, and muddling of origins. Thus, understanding how the

sunflower, a North American native, came to be embraced by Australian journalists in

Eastern Ukraine as a poignant gift for predominantly Dutch families mourning the loss of

loved ones who perished under incomprehensible circumstances, requires understanding

how sunflowers came to the steppe in the first place. It also requires understanding fat,

and the role vegetable oils have played in global diets, both historically, as well as in

recent decades.

Sunflowers, as we know them today, are the product of intense, intercontinental

crossbreeding to produce a broad spectrum of plants, from the giant-eyed varieties used

to produce oil and snack seeds[161], to the small "confectionary" blossoms for decorative

gardens and gift-giving. A North American native,[162] the sunflower was first brought to

Europe by the Spaniards, who dubbed it *girasol* or *mirasol*, the flower that turns toward

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[161] I regret not having opportunity in this chapter to discuss edible sunflower seeds, which have their own semiotic history. During my time in Russia (2004–2005) and Ukraine (2008–2014), elderly woman selling roasted sunflower seeds on the street were often taken both by my fellow foreigners, as well as my hosts, as faces of sweeping post-Soviet inequality. This was despite the fact that old women had been peddling sunflower seeds for generations prior; one finds descriptions of such women that feel entirely familiar in the works of Chekov and Babel. However, in newly independent Ukraine, among weary locals and startled foreigners alike the proliferation of kerchiefed grandmother selling *semechki* was taken as evidence of the painfulness of economic reforms and the failure of the state to protect its most vulnerable. At the same time, the babushka selling sunflower seeds was also taken as a sign of women's resilience, or even their enterprising nature. Seed-selling grandmothers I encountered were often a frail but mighty sort who acquired seeds, in bulk, at the farm gate, or from their own or friends' kitchen gardens, and fried and spiced them in home kitchens according to generations-old recipes.

[162] Most likely domesticated what is now the east-central United States 3000–4000 years ago, the sunflower was used among indigenous peoples as a source of food, dye, and medicine (Heiser 1951; 1998). There is some debate as to whether the sunflower underwent a separate or earlier pre-Columbian domestication in Mexico. Lentz et al (2008) have demonstrated that several indigenous languages of Mexico have names for the flower that appear to lack Spanish influence, eg. Nahuatl *chimalacatl* "shield reed" and *chimalxochitl* "shield flower" (the authors argue this is a reference to a type or pre-Columbia armament), and Otomi *dä nukhä* "big flower that looks at the sun god" (translations theirs), thus suggesting that the sunflower underwent a second domestication further south than was thought. However, Brown (2008) finds no presence of a lexical item for "sunflower" in regional proto-languages, and notes that such descriptive names such as those mentioned by Lentz are often innovated when a social group encounters a new species for the first time. Moreover, the use of *chimalacatl* in the work of 16th century Spanish chroniclers of the flora and rituals of "New Spain" may or may not refer to the same species it refers to today. Finally, the archaeological evidence for a Mexican domestication is thin: Lentz's ancient Mexican sunflower seeds may actually be those of a bottle gourd, a finding that effectively (s)quashes his theory (Heiser 2007).

or watches the sun. It was young flowers' daily winding and unwinding, along with their radiant ray-like petals, that seems to have inspired common names for the plant, as well as its association with loyalty and perpetuity (see, for example, Potter 2013 and select floriography books discussed by Goody (1990; 1993) and Seaton (1995)). The latter likely stems from Ovid's tale of the nymph Clytie, who obsessively watched the sun god (Helios in some versions, Apollo in others) race his chariot across the sky. The sun god paid her no mind, and she was turned into a flower, heliotrope, that, as its name suggests, follows the sun from dawn to dusk. As it happens, sunflower heads are not in fact heliotropic; their heads only *seem* to rotate due to alternating growth on either side of the stem.[163] Once the flower matures, the stem stiffens, usually leaving the flower facing east. However, William Blake would not have been aware of this when he penned his illustrated poem "Ah! Sun-flower" (1794). Neither would C.S. Peirce, who, writing about the possibility of sunflowers being a Representamen of the sun, wondered whether there might be "signs without minds" (Collier 2014).[164]

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[163] What looks like heliotropic behavior—growing plants appear to face east in the morning, and west at night—is in fact the result of differential rates of cell expansion on each side of the stem. The head of the unopened blossom gradually turns as the stem lengthens on one side (when the growth is to the west, it tilts to the east), then balances itself by lengthening on the other side. While the leaves of the sunflower, like the leaves of many plants, demonstrate some level of solar tracking, the movement of the head itself is always dependent upon the stem, which is in turn governed by a complex circadian system that, while it may be synchronized with, is not dependent upon the sun. Young sunflowers face west at dusk, but uncoil, spring-like, to face east at dawn. They cannot be "tracking" the sun at this time.

[164] Peirce struggled with sunflowers. Writing in New England at a time when sunflowers were just being re-introduced to the North America as a seed-oil crop, he was likely familiar with the Helianthus annuus via the decorative arts and secondary literature rather than via practical experience. Yet Peirce, too, was captivated by the sunflower's storied dance, and wondered what it might mean for his semiotics. "A sign," he wrote, "is a Representamen with a mental Interpretant." For a sign to be a sign, it must be recognized as such. But "possibly," Peirce pondered, "there may be Representamens that are not Signs. Thus, if a sunflower, in turning towards the sun, becomes by that act fully capable, without further condition, of reproducing a sunflower which turns in precisely corresponding ways toward the sun, and of doing so with the same reproductive power, the sunflower would become a Representamen of the sun." Can the sunflower be a sign of the sun for other sunflowers? Peirce didn't know what we know now about the mechanics of sunflower rotation, but he determined that the sunflower couldn't be a Representamen of the sun for other sunflowers for another reason: there was no mental Interpretant to interpret it as such. "But

Stories about ritual uses of the sunflower by the Aztecs are uncertain at best. Tales of the Incas worshipping the sunflower as a representation of their sun god, certainly apocryphal, can be attributed to sunflower's introduction to Europe, when their origin was often cited as simply "Peru." As plant archaeologist Heiser pointed out (1951), this could have, at that time, meant most anywhere in New Spain, and should not be taken literally. Sunflowers shed some of their foreignness both with widespread cultivation of their oil seeds, as well as during the second half of the 19th century, when they gained mass appeal in Britain and North America as a decorative motif. Aesthete Oscar Wilde, particularly well-known for wearing a sunflower on his lapel, touted the blossoms' "gaudy leonine beauty" (1882, lecture "The English Renaissance of Art"), sparking a Victorian fashion craze, and, it has been suggested, an early emblem of homosexuality. (In contrast, Van Gogh's moody studies of sunflowers, although also quite leonine, were obscure during the artist's lifetime.) In becoming ordinary and everywhere—not unlike the beetles in the chapter prior—sunflowers were relieved of some of their foreignness, but retained a certain decadence. Nevertheless, the association of the sunflower with the most famous of pre-Columbian New World civilizations has been handily perpetuated in the English-speaking world by seed catalogs advertising confectionary varieties with names like "Inca Gold" and "Mayan Sun." Meanwhile, breeds of sunflowers planted for seed-oil production often have a different geographical association: Russia, as in the "Mammoth Russian" (sometimes the "Russian Mammoth"), which arrived, a radically transformed return émigré, to North America in the late 1800s.

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thought is the chief, if not the only, mode of representation" (Peirce 2.274, 1897). The sunflower could be no more a sign of the sun than a weather vane, absent an Interpretant, could be a sign of the wind.

Through what means the sunflower first came to the Russian Empire is not certain. One popular explanation is that late 17th, early 18th century tsar and reformer Peter the Great brought seeds back from one of his trips to Holland. However, it is the Russian Orthodox Church, however inadvertently, that is often credited with turning the scrappy sunflower into king of the seed oils. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Lent, the 40 days prior to Easter, is known as the "great fast" (Rus. *velikij post;* Ukr. *velikyj pist*). The observant gradually eliminate meat, fish, dairy products, alcohol, and oil from their diets—most oil, that is. Sunflower oil, because of its late introduction to Eastern Europe, had no history as a ritually forbidden food; olive oil, in contrast, did. While strict adherents to the fast now eliminate sunflower and rapeseed oil from their diets as well, the integration of sunflower oil into the Eastern European diet is generally traced to its use as a Lenten substitute for other fats.

As the Russian Empire expanded southward in the 18th and 19th centuries, snapping up the steppes from the Black Sea to the Altai Mountains, it acquired more and more land suitable for sunflower cultivation. The imperial expansion coincided with great advances in agricultural science (see also chapter 2 on Vasily Dokuchaev's mapping of soil types) that facilitated the breeding of towering plants with plump, oil-rich seed kernels—including those "Mammoth Russians' that sprouted up in the Burpee seed catalog in the 1880s.[165] The development of the hydraulic press furthered the efficiency of seed oil processing, and by the Soviet era, sunflower oil was a common household item. "Interconnection across difference," as described by Tsing, had naturalized the presence of the North American sunflower on the Eurasian steppe. Friction greased the

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[165] The introduction of enormous sunflowers to North America is usually credited to German Mennonite farmers who emigrated from the Russian Empire to the Great Plains of the U.S and southern Canada.

pans of Soviet kitchens, feeding the workers who fueled its economy. The break-up of the USSR brought innumerable changes, but the standard cooking oil remained a constant.

During my fieldwork, a bottle of cheap, golden sunflower oil still stood next to the stove in every home I visited. Even in rural areas, where meat and vegetables were often cooked in lard, eggs fried with thick pats of fresh butter, and salads doused in homemade sour cream or mayonnaise, clean-scented, cold-pressed sunflower oil was often preferred as a healthier, or at least lighter-tasting alternative. It was also common in salad dressings, especially in spring and summer, when cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers were abundant. In winter, it dressed the root cellar classic *vinegret* (cooked and chopped beets, potatoes, and carrots; a little bit of onion; a little bit of pickle; and a dressing of sunflower oil and a splash of vinegar). It also moistened "vitamin" salads of finely shredded cabbage, carrots, beets, and sometimes apple, which provided crunchy, fresh-tasting relief from the parade of all-things pickled and boiled. Olive oil was a luxury good, tucked away in a cabinet for special occasions, if used at all. Rapeseed bloomed bright in spring, but its oil rarely seemed to make its way into the kitchens I knew. The walls of village stores and urban supermarkets alike were overwhelmingly stocked with only one type of vegetable fat: sunflower oil.

Despite its nickname as the breadbasket of Europe, Ukraine leads the world in the cultivation not of wheat and grain, but of sunflowers.[166] In the former collective farming

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[166] The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the country, after early post-Soviet stumbles, reclaim its crown as the top sunflower seed producer and exporter in the world. Moreover, at a time when agricultural acreage in Ukraine was decreasing, and production of other crops—sugar beets, for example—was falling markedly, sunflower production was surging. According to USAID project AgroInvest, in 2013, Ukraine produced 10.5 million tons, or 27% of the world's sunflowers, and exported 3.3 million tons of pressed sunflower oil annually. For comparison, it ranked eighth worldwide in the export of wheat (7.8 million tons annually), 10th overall in the production of wheat (22.3 million tons, or just 2.5% of the world market). Ukraine is also a leading producer of corn, for which it is not particularly known, and rapeseed, which is used to make canola oil.

communities in which I did my fieldwork, sunflowers (Ukr. *sonjashniky*, Rus. *podsolnechniki* or less often, *podsolnukhi*), particularly the oil seed varieties, were known as a "technical crop," like wheat, rapeseed, or sugar beets, that was planted over dozens of hectares, and processed by men with machinery. (Thus, the production process was quite the opposite of that of potatoes, which, as discussed in the chapter prior, were grown almost exclusively on household plots.) Even more so than grain, sunflower oil was subject to the rhythms and whims of the global market. The tempos that govern the growing of sunflowers had less to do with the rising and setting of the sun—again, sunflowers are not heliotropic—than with the duration of leases, the viability of loans, spikes and crashes in the commodities market, and the latest dietary demands of industrialized states.

During time of research, the planting of every crop *other than* seed-oil sunflowers was contracting in Ukraine. Sunflower oil, particularly mid and high-oleic (high monounsaturated fat) varieties developed to have a "heart-healthy" lipids profile comparable to olive oil, was skyrocketing in price.[167] As such, there was increasing demand for oil seeds. Ukrainian farmers were abandoning other crops, particularly sugar beets, in order to take advantage of the oil boom.[168] Of the farmers I interviewed who grew sunflowers, every single one of them named sunflowers as their most important, most profitable crop. This was in part due to increased demand for sunflower oil, but it

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[167] Traditional linoleic sunflower oil, while lower in saturated fat than butter fat, palm oil, and even olive oil, was mostly comprised of polyunsaturated fat. Meanwhile, olive and canola oil (a marketing term derived from "Canadian oil," a name only slightly less appetizing than "rapeseed oil") were being touted for being high in monounsaturated fat. Linoleic sunflower oil contains only about 20% monounsaturated fat, compared to olive oil's approximately 70% and canola's roughly 60%. By the second decade of the the 21st century, high-oleic seeds with over 80% monounsaturated fat, and under 10% saturated fat had been developed.

[168] Moroz 2013 notes a 600% rise in sugar beet production at the household level in the post-Soviet period. However, this still amounts to less than 10% of overall sugar beet production in Ukraine.

was also due to the fact that sunflowers, harvested in the dry heat of late summer, were usually the last crop sold in the annual rotation. The sale price of sunflower oil could determine whether a farmer would be able to purchase a new tractor for the coming year, lease more land, or put in an irrigation system. Finding the right moment to sell one's harvest was imperative—too early, and the prices might be low; too late, and the crop risked infestation or mold—and could make the difference between windfall and debt. For rural residents sensitive to the whims of commodities traders, sunflower fields in the peak of summer were less national landscape than gamble on the global markets.

Farmers had several strategies for riding the wave of "liquid gold." One option was to shorten their rotation time from the traditional seven-years (ie. planting sunflowers in a given field only once in seven years) to four or five years, thereby increasing the average percentage of their land where sunflowers could be grown annually. (It is notable that since the farmers I worked with typically rented land in five year increments—see chapter 3—with no guarantee the lease would be renewed, the price of sunflower oil was likely not the only pressure driving down rotation times.) Longer rotation times allow the land to recover from nitrogen depletion and decrease the risk of weeds and fungal infections. In Ukraine, broomrape, a parasitic plant, and Sclerotinia, a fungus causing the head of the sunflower to rot, were common concerns, even among those farmers who were more conservative in their rotation practices. As such, many farmers were interested in purchasing seeds bred for maximum hardiness, and/or packaged with chemicals that would eliminate pests without hurting the sunflower itself.

Pasha Marchenko, who cultivated sunflowers, kept a collection of glossy seed catalogs in his truck. He would scrutinize the seed offerings between errands, marveling

at their professed advances over the previous year, and debating their merits with whomever happened to be beside him. Anything described as a "hybrid" struck his fancy, as "hybrid" (though it can mean a simple crossbreed, like Mendel's peas) in this context usually meant special features like drought, weed, or pest resistance. He decided which seeds to try based on what he thought might work well in the increasingly arid and sunbaked valley, and also based on what buyers seemed to prefer. The choice of seed, as will become clear, was not entirely the farmers'.

While the Soviets had been leaders in the development of sunflower hybrids, in the immediate post-Soviet years, western ones gained traction. Empires are *planted*, asserts Aistara (2014), working in post-Soviet, new European Union member state Latvia. Following Foucault, and drawing on a dispute over the right to sell Soviet heirloom tomato seeds—tomato seeds not in the official EU catalog of seeds—Aistara casts categorization, registration, and regulation of seeds and their dispersal as "technique of discipline through which power circulates" (13). Having not entered the European Union, Ukrainian farmers have not yet encountered regulatory disputes like the ones Aistara describes. However, at time of research, they were regularly navigating the regulations and preferences of their trading partners. The increasing prevalence of vertically integrated agribusinesses, which controlled every step of the sunflower oil process, including hybrid seed production and distribution, planting, harvesting, pressing, processing, bottling, and export, meant that global markets were reconfiguring the Ukrainian landscape, just as the Soviet, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian imperial regimes did before them.[169]

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[169] At time of research, notable vertically-integrated companies included multinationals like Cargill, as well as Ukrainian companies such as Kernel. The latter exports three times as much sunflower oil as its closest

Two major trends in western dietary habits have affected the cultivation of

sunflowers in the 21ˢᵗ century. First, sunflower producers, particularly those serving the

European markets, benefitted from consumer health concerns about genetic modification.

Unlike rapeseed, corn, and soy, commercial sunflowers have not, at time of writing, been

genetically modified. They have been certainly been engineered using the latest advances

in selective breeding and mutagenesis (in which plants are exposed to mutation-inducing

substances, such as radiation, prompting the development of new features), but, as there

is no interspecies splicing of genes, they are generally considered "hybrids" and safe for

markets like the European Union's, where genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have

been banned. (GMOs were similarly highly restricted in Ukraine, but it was difficult to

know to what extent these restrictions were enforced.)

Second, the push to ban trans-fats (also known as partially hydrogenated

vegetable oils) in fried and packaged food products was an unimaginable boon to the

sunflower oil industry, which had spent much of the 1980s and 1990s developing higher-

oleic sunflower seeds that would yield oil high in monounsaturated fat ("good fat") and

low in saturated fat ("bad fat").[170] In the U.S., the National Sunflower Association and

the U.S. Department of Agriculture joined forces to develop an "oil that had a pleasing

taste, stability without needing partial hydrogenation and low saturated fat levels"

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competitors, controlling approximately 1/5 of the global export market and 1/3 of the Ukrainian domestic
market. It also owns three of Ukraine's largest seed-crushing plants, two of its chief grain ports, over
200,000 hectares of farmland, and two of the top sunflower oil brands in Ukraine, Shchedryj Dar and
Chumak.

[170] Ironically, given the importance of sunflowers in the Soviet Union, as well as the high level of
biotechnical competence among its scientists, the mid and high-oleic (high monounsaturated fat, like olive
oil) hybrid seeds that now dominate the sunflower oil market were developed in the United States in the
1980s (first patent 1985, according to Orthoefer and List, 2015). Even more ironically, higher-oleic
sunflowers were first developed in the Soviet Union in the 1970s. However, at this time, there was little
incentive for producers to distinguish between types of fat present in seed oils. This changed markedly in
the decades to come, as scientific and public knowledge about "good" and "bad" cholesterol increased.

(National Sunflower Association/USDA, 1995.). The result was NuSun®, a hybrid that, in terms of lipid profiles, could compete with other vegetable oils, including Canola® and olive. NuSun was good for frying potatoes, baking snack cookies, and spraying breakfast cereals, and it was reasonably priced. It debuted in 1998, just as public discussions about the dangers of transfats were heating up, and major food producers were under pressure to find replacement ingredients.[171] NuSun and other, even higher oleic sunflower seeds quickly became popular among Ukrainian farmers, partially because of the prevalence of buyers on the newly opened markets, and partially through manufacturer-led programs that provided farmers with the seeds and training. While my Ukrainian sunflower farmer interlocutors listed high productivity and low maintenance requirements as their chief reasons for investing in new seeds, they also noted that purchasing (or in some cases, being given) advanced hybrids systems produced by biotech companies like Swiss Syngenta (a variety marked in Eastern Europe as "Jazzy" was well-known), U.S. DuPont Pioneer (USAID AgroInvest, discussed in chapter 3, partnered with DuPont to promote its "ExpressSun" line), and German BASF (the "Clearfield" system had a good reputation for, well, keeping fields clear of pests), was essential for another reason: sunflower seeds must be sold to seed crushing plants, which desire seeds that will yield a certain quality and amount of oil. It is not worth cultivating crop no one wants to buy.[172]

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[171] The National Sunflower Association's investment paid off: major snack food producers such as PepsiCo - Frito Lay embraced sunflower oil. By 2006, famous brands like Lays and Ruffles potato chips were being fried in NuSun sunflower oil, and by 2007 the National Sunflower Association estimated that over 70% of planted oilseed acres (presumably in the U.S.) were NuSun.

[172] The second decade of the 21st century has seen the physical entrenchment of Western biotech firms on Ukrainian soil in the form of seed factories. In 2013, DuPont Pioneer opened a seed production facility in Poltava region, and, in 2015, partnered with USAID's AgroInvest project (see chapter 3) to provide free trainings for small and medium sized farmers in three regions (to learn to use their ExpressSun herbicide-resistant hybrid sunflower seeds. As with other AgroInvest programs supporting the development or small

Thus, in the first decades of the 21$^{st}$ century, the Ukrainian agrarian landscape was planted with the tastes and nutritional desires not only of locals, who enjoyed sunflower oil on their salads, but Euro-America, which required oils of specific genetic profiles and lipid compositions for its french fries and Fritos®. Pasha, my sunflower farming host in Sonjachne, did not mind this. As he sat in his truck with his seed catalogs spread out in front of him, he told me that it was exciting for Ukrainians like him to be able to participate in the world economy. "Can you imagine," he said, "a drop of oil from my sunflowers here in Ukraine could end up in your french fries in America!"

**Fields Ablaze**

Sunflower oil, while found in many prepared foods, is largely invisible to those who do not cook with it. Even those who do so are typically detached from its production process. Unlike rose or lavender, whose prized scents perfume their fields of origin and end products alike, sunflower's connection to the food industry is not always readily apparent. The heads develop seeds, of course, but only the easy to crack, pinstriped varieties are suitable for human snacking. Oil seeds are dense, and black as night. In the peak of summer, the untrained eye sees only the blossom, not the fruit. In this section, I compare and contrast how different parties in Ukraine approached the yellow heads of

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and medium-sized farms, the farmers also received training in financial literacy, including how to access credit. Credit has long been been difficult to access in Ukraine, and is one of the most important impediments to the development of small and medium-sized businesses in many sectors, but especially agriculture. However, the situation grew even more dire as the currency plunged in 2014 and 2015, following the outbreak of war in Donbas. Interest rates soared to 30%. Recognizing this, DuPont Pioneer decided to initiate what it calls "barter programs," in which it provides farmers with seeds and facilitates contracts with buyers. Farmers are left responsible for leases, chemicals, equipment, and labor, and must pay DuPont Pioneer back later. Technically, these payments are either in cash or crop, but they might be best understood as a percentage of the revenue farmers earn from selling their crop.

sunflowers in peak bloom: as livelihood, as décor, as national landscape, as a promise of peace, as a backdrop for war.

From a moving vehicle, darkening seeds fade into a blur of yellow. In Ukraine, passengers going elsewhere leaned out car, bus, and train windows to snap photos of the golden haze as it whirred by. Sometimes, the cars stopped, and the travelers climb out to take more pictures. Parents captured their children lost among the lanky plants. Adults crouched slightly so that the chest-high blossoms framed their heads. Someone would take a playful photo in which they seemed to engage in conversation with a big-eyed sunflower. When the weather was clear, the patriotic, or even not so patriotic, tilted their cameras so that the yellow sunflowers filled up the bottom half of the frame, and the blue sky the top, reproducing the colors and design of the Ukrainian flag.

By late summer or early autumn, the plants' golden blossoms would wither and brown. The heads would appear downcast, drooping with the weight of their fruit. Travelers would no longer stop by the side of the road to take photos, and Pasha would turn his prized German combine away from the wheat fields and toward the sunflowers. Then he would wait. The dry heat of summer was ideal for dehydrating sunflower heads, thereby loosening the seeds, and also reducing risk of mold. Ten percent humidity was considered optimum for harvest. However, a sudden thunderstorm could dampen the drying process, or make the fields more difficult for machinery to navigate. All summer long, Pasha and his crew would move their harvesting equipment near whatever field needed to be "cleared" (*ubrannyj*, local dialect) in the event of rain. But sometimes it would rain in one part of the valley and not another. Because Pasha rented land shares across two different former collectives, the gas expenditures were staggering.

If one had only a few dozen sunflowers—this was more common with snack seeds grown in gardens—a common technique for harvesting the seeds was to hang a paper (never plastic) bag over the head of the flower, and simply catch the seeds as they fell. An added benefit to this method was that it discouraged peckish birds from flying off with the crop. Another option was to lop off the heads and set them to dry indoors. Then, one could brush out the seeds with a special tool. On a larger farm, or a smaller one with access to a combine, specialized equipment could accomplish these tasks more swiftly. Yet working with combines came with risks as well: sunflower dust is highly flammable, and fires are not uncommon. In waiting for the seeds to dry, farmers risked setting their fields ablaze.

For Pasha and Olena, sunflowers were first and foremost a crop to be harvested and sold. The proceeds were used to pay salaries and debts, repair equipment, or perhaps purchase extra inventory for Olena's store, which, open year round, kept cash flowing through winter. Come spring, money from Olena's "super minimarket" provided necessary funds for another season's planting. Olena's store, which sold bread, dry goods, a small assortment of clothing and cosmetics, cigarettes, alcohol, chocolates, sausages, and bananas, was called *Orchidea,* the orchid. A rival shop was called "lily," and another, "acacia." The only time I saw businesses called 'sunflower" was in the city, and these were places like hostels, travel agents, and pharmacies—and maybe the occasional corner store. In the villages, sunflowers failed to suggest either quality or romance. I once told one of Pasha's fieldhands about the popularity of sunflower bouquets in the United States, and asked whether such gifts were common in Ukraine. He wrinkled his nose. "Would you give someone a bouquet of corn?"

For most of my time in Ukraine, sunflowers stood outside of conventional flower culture. As in other parts of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine had a well-defined practice of gifting flowers on special occasions, after public arts performances, and at funerals, shrines, and cemeteries. While women were the primary recipients of bouquets, at the conclusion of an opera, ballet, or symphony, flowers were often given to women and men alike. Flowers were an extensive part of mourning rituals for both genders. Although fresh flowers and candles were laid at the impromptu shrines that covered central Kyiv after the death of some 100 protestors on Maidan in February 2014, actual gravesites were just as likely to be covered with synthetic blossoms that would never wither.[173] During the Soviet era, red carnations were used to honor fallen soldiers. Stalin, for his part, was greeted with red roses (see Ohnuki-Tierney 2015's fascinating *Flowers That Kill* for a discussion of how cherry blossoms and red roses were used to aestheticize death and subjugation in Japan, Germany and the Soviet Union in the World War II era). Flowers gifted in intimate settings could be highly personalized, but the assembly of a proper bouquet required following specific guidelines: give only in odd numbers, unless the flowers are for a funeral; avoid yellow flowers, which are associated with deceit, separation, and sorrow. Red roses remained appropriate gifts for women; red carnations did not.[174] I came across a website for English-speaking men seeking brides from the former Soviet Union that gave this advice: when in doubt, choose daisy-like chamomile.

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[173] Ukrainian graves, particularly those near villages, tend to have sizeable headstones, sometimes even with an image of the deceased etched into them. The area in front of the grave would be ideally be sown with flowers or other botanicals. Synthetic flowers were not uncommon, and, at where I observed them, were not left to tatter, but rather well kept, as if the mourner simply wished the grave to look cared for no matter the season. For a further discussion of the use of fresh and synthetic flowers in European gravesites, see Goody & Poppi 1994.

[174] There are some exceptions: large numbers of flowers (generally a dozen or higher, though 13 roses would actually be better than 12) can be even, and daffodils, despite their yellowness, are a cheerful means of welcoming spring. Flowers grown in one's garden, even if cut and put into a vase, do not seem to require

Goody (1993) traces the explosion in 19th century Euro-American flower culture to urbanization and increases in trade that brought non-elites closer to, and more able to afford, small luxuries like bouquets. Demonstrating botanical knowledge, whether by cultivating, selecting, or displaying flowers, particularly "exotic" ones, might also be understood as a practice of distinction (Bourdieu 1979, Goody 1993, Seaton 1995). But in the Soviet Union, ordinary citizens were also encouraged to give gifts of flowers, chocolates, and sparkling wine on special occasions. As Fehérváry (2009) details, state socialist command economies actively created consumers. While flowers may have lacked the branding of *Sovetskoe Shampanskoe* (Soviet Champagne) or *Krasnyj Oktjabr* (Red October) chocolates, florists specialized in eye-popping blossoms that could be seen at a distance. Critic Anya Von Bremzen, in an ode to the re-use potential of mayonnaise jars, recalled how, "When spring came and the first flowers perfumed Moscow air with romance, gangly students carried mayonnaise jars filled with lilies of the valley to their sweethearts. (Being short and delicate, lilies of the valley—and violets, too—were unjustly ignored by the Soviet flower vase industry, which favored tall, pompous blooms like gladioli.)" (Von Bremzen 2013: 184). By the time of my fieldwork, mayonnaise, though still made with sunflower oil, had migrated to squeeze packs. But Von Bremzen's observation held firm: gentle wildflowers were something you picked in the meadow; flowers from florists were long stemmed, big blossomed, and expertly wrapped. Then why not sunflowers? My suspicion is that sunflower's lack of uptake in bouquets had less to do with their yellow color or culinary purposes than with the relative absence of dwarf

adherence to the even/odd rules, presumably because they are not interpreted as a message delivered via a bouquet. Similarly, flowers used in the decorative arts, for example, in the head wreaths and embroidered shirts discussed above, or floral patterns on anything from scarves to spoonrests, are not held to these restrictions.

varieties. A full-sized sunflower is heavy; it reminds you it's a crop solely with its weight. It looks gawky on its own, but majestic in a group.

Soviet state-approved artwork featured sunflowers, usually in fields or large clusters, and less frequently than one might expect. Why this was the case is not clear. It could have been that sunflowers in vases were simply not available or practical, or were too associated with the bourgeois still lives and decorative arts of the West. Another possibility is that was that sunflowers, which were grown on the southern steppe, were not particularly practical for use in agitation propaganda in areas that did not grow them. (Recall that while sunflowers were grown in one of my fieldsites, "Sonjachne", the second, "Zelene Pole" specialized in beets.) In the late 1910s and early 1920s, when five agit-trains crisscrossed the steppe to tout the glorious socialist agricultural future, only one, the Red Cossack, was painted with sunflowers (not surprisingly, it went to Ukraine and southern Russia), and it made but a single trip, while other trains made several to a dozen (Bibibova & Tolstoj, eds. 2002).

Similarly, in my browsing of socialist realist depictions of collective farming, I have found that sunflowers appear surprisingly rarely. Arkady Plastov, a great depicter of rural Soviet life, produced only two well-known paintings of the crop. The first, in 1941, showed villagers among sunflowers, but the scene was hardly relaxing. Rather, the painting shows men pointing toward the horizon, where smoke is rising, and a woman guiding children out of the frame. The painting has two titles: "Sunflowers," but also "the Germans are coming." This tension between the pastoral landscape and the violence of warfare was absent in a later work, "Sunshine," which Plastov completed in 1965, just a few years before his death. This one depicted a woman resting on her back alongside a

field of sunflowers, nursing a baby. On the one hand, this work, too, was in line with socialist realist practices: the Soviets had suffered staggering population losses during the World War, and had adopted a pro-natalist policy. On the other hand, times were changing, and genres deemed to lack "socialist content" in the past were being actively promoted. The 1960s saw a profusion of interest among Soviet art critics in "naïve art" produced by untrained and often rural populations. (Rus. *naivnoje iskusstvo* approximates "outsider art" in the U.S.) Among the most celebrated of the "naïve" artists was Marija Pryjmachenko, a Ukrainian villager who painted fanciful animals, birds, and plants in bright colors and a rustic, two-dimensional style. In Pryjmachenko's work, there was nary a field or tractor in sight; when this artist depicted sunflowers, they were loose and lollipop-like. Endlessly imitated, Pryjmachenko's style, not associated with any particular region or tradition, influenced contemporary conceptions of Ukrainian "folk art."[175]

Once plucked and shrunk, sunflowers made their way from the greater Soviet landscape into the iconography of independent Ukraine. At time of writing, they remained uncommon in bouquets, but adorned much else.[176] For example, since 1992, the blossoms have appeared on no fewer than three different Ukrainian stamps. Sunflower designs were also woven into embroidered shirts (*vyshyvanky*), embellishing or replacing older, highly local patterns, and becoming a sort of a pan-Ukrainian decoration people of any ethnicity might wear.

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[175] By contrast, certain embroidery patterns and painting practices have very strong regional associations. For example, Petrikivsky floral design, which has experienced a resurgence of interest in Ukraine, even garnering UNESCO recognition, is associated with the east of the country.
[176] This conclusion is based on my questioning of Ukrainian friends, squinting at recent photos of urban flower vendors, scanning of floral design blogs, and tracking of "virtual" flowers gifted on social media (for example, on a contact's birthday).

By 2014, previously uncommon dwarf varieties of sunflowers were being twisted into head wreaths (*vinky*). Historically, *vinky* had been made from small flowers, often those with domestic uses, such as apple blossoms, chamomile, cornflower, and poppy. Colorful ribbons with historical meaning were tied to the back, and the wreaths were worn by young women on ceremonial occasions, most notably weddings. Female protestors on Maidan turned the wreaths into crowns of resistance—perhaps some were influenced by Femen activists, who famously paired *vinky* with bare breasts in their own pro gender-equality demonstrations, undermining the wreaths' association with marriage and domesticity. Later in the protests, vendors hawked mass-produced, synthetic *vinky*. One of the most popular wreath designs paired sunflower and cornflower blossoms, mimicking the colors of the Ukrainian flag.



**Figure 27: Floral head wreaths in patriotic colors.** Dnipropetrovsk city day celebrations, autumn 2014.

Removed from the earth, sunflowers turned token-like, vaguely indexing the countryside for those who lived far from it. Navigating actual fields of sunflowers was rather more challenging, especially if done on foot, rather than by combine. Sava Savchenko, a volunteer in the (pro-Kyiv) Donbas Battalion and survivor of the ambush at Ilovajsk[177] in late August, 2014, gave a short laugh when I asked him about news reports that claimed that sunflower fields had provided refuge for retreating soldiers whose column Russian-backed forces attacked.[178] It was true, he said, that the ambush had taken place on a road that ran between corn and sunflower fields, and those who escaped it did so by trekking through the tall stalks to safety. It was also true that mature sunflowers fairly reliably face east, but, Sava pointed out, going west from Ilovajsk did not automatically lead one to territory controlled by Kyiv. Ilovajsk had been encircled; this was why Poroshenko and Putin had tried to negotiate a "green corridor" for Ukraine's retreat. When the green corridor collapsed, and the separatists started attacking, Sava was fortunate enough to be in a fast minibus, a small target that sprinted away from the scene, making it some distance before being crippled by artillery. He and his companions leapt from the vehicle and into the dense fields of corn.

But Sava attributed his own survival of the bloodbath to his smart phone, on which he had several cached maps of the region. Hiding in the fields is a romantic idea, he explained, but in reality quite unpleasant. Dried cornstalks crackled as he and his

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[177] The Ukrainian narrative of these events usually goes as follows: retreating Ukrainian volunteer batallions, supposedly guaranteed a "green corridor" by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin, were attacked by their pro-Russian opponents. The bloodbath that followed killed at least 366 people, or about 30% of the battalions. The soldiers who survived usually had hidden in sunflower and cornfields. The ambush at Ilovajsk is, to date, the single bloodiest day of the war in Donbas.
[178] "It was the fields of sunflowers that saved us." Quote originally attributed to a Evgeniy Sidorenko on Censor.net, September 9, 2014.

fellow soldiers tried to move through them undetected. The parched plants scratched their skin and taunted them with their inedible fruits: due to the war, the corn had not been harvested in time, and kernels were rock hard.[179] Those who found themselves in sunflower fields fared little better: oil seeds, sometimes found in bird feed, are difficult to crack, and not particularly meaty. "Now I hate sunflowers," declared one of Sava's fellow survivors, who walked 60 kilometers to safety.[180]

Sava and his companions were intercepted by separatist fighters, who stripped them of their weapons, valuables, and even shoes, before sending them back to united Ukraine with the Red Cross. Sava lost his smart phone, but unlike hundreds of his peers, escaped with his life. (Officially, 366 Ukrainian soldiers were killed during the August 29th ambush, but hundreds more were listed as missing or captured.) He declared the date of his release, September 1st, 2014, his "second birthday." On the first anniversary of the battle of Ilovaisk, he attended an exhibit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of works by Ukrainian photographers who documented their compatriots' struggle and eventual defeat. The images captured soldiers in trenches, an improvised operating room in an abandoned school, a calf prodding a burnt-out tank, and men covering their ears as they shelled their adversaries. Sava sent me a photo of a fiery shell exploding over a field of sunflowers at dusk. It was the only sunflower picture in the entire show.

The absence of photos of sunflowers in the exhibit speaks not only to the season—by late August, the sunflower's mane has thinned and faded, and the plant's energy is focused on seed production—or to the photographers' interest in portraying the grittiness of the battle. It may also reflect this: peaceful sunflowers juxtaposed with war,

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[179] It also occurs to me that the corn may have been field corn for animal feed, and therefore dried.
[180] Quote from Luhn, Alex. "Anatomy of a Bloodbath." *Foreign Policy*. September 6, 2014.

mourning, and machinery was already an established trope in Ukraine. (Recall Plastov's 1941 painting "the Germans are coming," mentioned a couple pages back.) The Agence France-Presse (AFP) image by Dominique Faget of a tank amidst a field of sunflowers that circulated heavily in 2014 echoed, intentionally or not, similar photos taken during the battle of Stalingrad in 1942.[181] A few years prior to that, Soviet Ukrainian film director Oleksandr Dovzhenko had opened his 1939 film *Shchors,* about the famous Red Army general, with a battle scene that exploded, literally, out of a field of sunflowers. Still earlier, in his 1930 masterpiece *Zemlja* ("Earth"), Dovzhenko showed sunflowers mourning fallen revolutionary Vasyl", who had led his fellow villagers in the drive for collectivization, and secured the community its first tractor. The blossoms bowed their heads, and even appeared to caress Vasyl's body as it was carried to his burial site. At the end of that film, an airplane, observed by the villagers, but not seen by the audience, harkens the arrival of Soviet technology that will supersede even Vasyl's new tractor.

Depictions of sunflowers also bookended the Soviet period, when the excesses of technology had become frightfully apparent. While the use of flowers more generally in anti-war, including anti-nuclear demonstrations, has a much longer history, the sunflower gained prominence as a specifically anti-nuclear symbol in the mid-1990s. As described in Chapter 4, the 1994 signing of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, in which Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan relinquished their Soviet-era nuclear warheads, was followed by a 1996 ceremony in which representatives from the U.S., Ukraine, and Russia planted sunflowers on the site of a former missile silo. The land, corrected of the excesses of modernity, was ritually returned to agriculture. The sunflower planting at the

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[181] This same photo also appears on the cover of Yekelchyk's 2015 book about the Maidan Revolution and subsequent conflict.

missile silo site coincided with early experiments in photoremediation in the Chornobyl exclusion zone. In 1994, the Phytotech Sunflower Project planted sunflowers there to study their effectiveness in extracting heavy metals from radiation-poisoned soil and water. Whether or not these experiments directly affected the choice of sunflowers for the anti-proliferation ceremony is unclear. The uptake of the sunflower in global anti-nuclear movements, most notably Plowshares, does seem to stem from this time period, however.

My Ukrainian interlocutors were often aware of the phytoremediation experiments; several of the younger ones mentioned having learned about them in school. For many of the people I worked with, sunflowers were glorious summertime landscape, healers of the earth, and nourishment for the economy. When I asked Pasha about phytoremediation, however, the conversation led first to rotation practices. Sunflowers, Pasha explained, were mighty but indiscriminate, sucking up the good as well as the bad. The shortening of rotations, which he admitted succumbing to as well, would hurt Ukraine in the long run. And then he spoke about his brother, a former police officer who was sent to Chornobyl just after the accident in 1986. Pasha's brother continued to suffer from a host of ailments related to radiation exposure. It was not only the exclusion zone that needed healing, Pasha sighed.

**Keepsakes**

When Christopher Miller arrived at the MH17 crash site, he saw "scars of black across yellow fields of wheat" where debris lay. The placement of bodies was marked with white flags, but "you were perpetually looking down because there were pieces of bodies everywhere…bodies that were twisted, broken, bent…limbless, headless, skinless…you had to look twice to make sure they were human." For Miller, it was the passengers'

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belongings that seemed to restore their humanity: "the guidebook to Indonesia; the Sudoku book that was never filled out; the newspaper from that morning."[182]

Miller was one of dozens of foreign journalists and aid workers who were grudgingly permitted to access the disaster zone the week of July 20th, 2014. Initially, separatist forces had blocked entry even to investigators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), who had been charged with retrieving the passengers' remains, which were quickly bloating and deteriorating in the July sun. While perimeter was ostensibly enforced so that a truce with Kyiv could be negotiated—the tragedy led to the first iteration of the (still regularly violated) Minsk Protocol—the Ukrainian government accused the rebels of hindering access to the site so that they could destroy evidence implicating them in the disaster. Miller's words above were included in short film made by our mutual acquaintance, David Ferris, a Berlin-based filmmaker who had done intermittent work in Ukraine since 2010. In 2013, Ferris won an award from the European Commission for a short film on African immigrants in Kyiv. The following summer, he purchased a bulletproof vest, and set off to Donbas to film the struggle for control of the once-sparkling Donetsk airport, which opened in 2012 when Ukraine hosted the European soccer cup. Ferris happened to be in Donetsk when MH17 went down, and took a taxi to the affected area to film. Ukrainian journalists, he noted, had difficulty accessing the conflict zone. In contrast, as a foreign stringer, one could stay in a hostel, enjoy wireless internet, and then, absurdly, "take a taxi to the war."

In the sections prior, I described Ukrainian views of sunflowers: as foodstuff, livelihood, and link to the global economy; as national landscape that mirrored the

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[182] "To Not Look Away: The Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 Crash." Film by David Ferris, posted August 3, 2014. https: //www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nmI592NyCc.

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Ukrainian flag; as a charming blossom with summertime splendor, but a less than ideal selection for a bouquet. In this section, I return to the MH17 disaster, and how sunflowers were taken as a calming presence, a blanket that shielded the unthinkable, and an index that nodded toward the site of the tragedy, without demanding specificity. I briefly discuss the role of photography in both exposing the nature of the crash, as well as concealing it. Thereafter, I detail the journey of Ukrainian sunflower seeds from the fields of Donbas to the United States, then Australia, and then the Netherlands and other places where the victims' families and friends live. In doing so, I consider the nature of the "keepsake," an indexical icon that, as Sontag writes about photographs, "is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence" (1977).

"Victims, grieving relatives, consumers of news all have their own nearness to or distance from war," writes Susan Sontag in *The Pain of Others* (2003: 61). "The frankest representations of war, and of disaster-injured bodies are of those who seem most foreign, therefore least likely to be known. With subjects closer to home, the photographer is expected to be more discreet." Western press agency photos of the MH17 disaster were both subtle and devastating. Images of the crumpled plane, luggage spilled over the blackened fields, and masses of flowers at the Amsterdam airport and the Dutch Embassy in Kyiv suggested the scale of the tragedy without depicting the victims. Photos of recovery efforts were similarly cautious, often depicting workers (always men) wading through fields of summertime crops. Occasionally, an image gestures more directly at the hell beneath, depicting the placement of a white flag, or even the lifting of a body bag.

One of the most widely circulated photos was an Associated Press (AP) image by Dmitry Lovetsky of five coal miners on the edge of a sunflower field, looking

downward.[183] On the right, a man is paused, slightly crouching, with large hands resting on his thighs, as if to examine—but not touch—whatever it is he has found. The man next to him wears a jumpsuit and balances himself with his arms as he steps over something on the ground. Behind them, the sunflowers shine gloriously. In such photos, "foreground and background easily trade places or slide into each other" (Spyer 2013: 102). The word "surreal" feels both sensible, and entirely trite.



**Figure 28: Miners searching the fields near the MH17 crash site.** AP photo by Dmitry Lovetsky; limited editorial rights provided through University of Michigan.

Prominent press agencies—AFP, AP, Getty, Reuters—circulated evocative but tasteful images carefully edited for mass audiences. However, their staff were far from the only ones taking photos. As Zeynup Gürsel (2012; 2016) observed during her fieldwork with AFP, digital photography undermined the role of the "image brokers" at

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[183] Lovetsky is a prolific Russian photographer and frequent contributor to the Associated Press. I have no idea what his motivations were in photographing sunflower fields, or whether he was influenced by previous depictions of sunflowers and war.

traditional wire services. Also at the MH17 crash site were villagers with cellphones, and stringers like Ferris and Miller, not all of whom were committed to preserving the privacy of the victims, or circulating images that delicately hinted at the gruesomeness of the catastrophe. Photos snapped on cell phones and posted to social media could quickly go viral. Among the most controversial were ones of dead children; a Ukrainian government official came under much criticism for re-posting an image of dead baby that had perished in the disaster, along with words blaming Putin for its loss. Miller and Ferris, who were both at the scene of the disaster, treaded carefully, but forcefully, in the film they made, "To Not Look Away." The short, which Ferris posted to YouTube about two weeks after MH17 was shot down, is respectful but graphic. The camera sweeps over the wreckage, zooming in on remains, but blurring faces and gendered body parts. Miller, as if in a therapy session, cycles through images etched in his mind: the woman with the red painted toenails; the boy who looked almost alive from the front, but whose body had been blown away in the back.

Toward the end, Miller says the line that gives the film its name, "It's important to not look away." This remained his philosophy when I spoke to him months later, after he had returned from time embedded with the Donbas Battalion (it was Miller who introduced me to Sava Savchenko). International news agencies, he observed, were the only ones interested in images of pastoral scenery juxtaposed with the blight of war. Everyone else was preoccupied with the actual conflict. I asked him what sorts of photos soldiers took for themselves; he replied that "injury selfies" were a prominent genre. On the one hand, photos of one's own wounds might be understood as an exercise in machismo, a means by which the photographer reaffirms his own vigor. But such photos

also point to a wrinkle in Sontag's observation: the frankest representations of war may be found in photographs of strangers (the dead baby, for example), but also in images one takes of those closest to them, or even of oneself. Perhaps the obligation to be discreet comes when the victims are neither familiars nor strangers, but rather *familiar strangers*, and the reporter an unwitting intermediary

Journalists McGeough and Geraghty were such reporters. Seasoned correspondents with Australian media giant Fairfax, they were less acquainted with Ukraine than Miller and Ferris were, but far more experienced in reporting on conflict. Covering MH17, however, they found themselves representatives of Australia, and intermediaries for families who had been warned not to attempt to enter the conflict zone. "More than 25 years as a correspondent have taught me to curb sentimentality as I observe the unreasonable randomness of pain, suffering, and uncertainty in the world," McGeough wrote for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in December of 2014. Nevertheless, he explained, the MH17 tragedy had touched him in ways other events had not. He described feeling a responsibility to provide a "keepsake" for the families and friends of the victims, who were, with a single exception, unable to reach Donbas.

I have thus far discussed the sunflowers surrounding the MH17 crash site as a sort of scrim or shield, at best protecting the dignity of the lost and the privacy of the mourners, and, at worst, permitting us "to look away." I have perhaps come across as rather cynical. Yet a vast field of sunflowers *is* something wondrous. Juxtaposed with the horror of MH17, it must have seemed comforting, even miraculous. I understand why McGeough, Geraghty, and others reporting from Eastern Ukraine were so taken with the blossoms, and I am in awe of their commitment to care for those most directly affected

by the disaster. The obligation to be discreet and the compulsion to connect would seem to be at odds, but in the sunflower fields around Donbas, they merged.

By now it should be clear that mid-July was not a typical time to be gathering sunflower seeds. McGeough and Geraghty were understandably unaware of this when they decided to collect seeds from the site around MH17. Moreover, they were under substantial pressure to leave for safer grounds and other assignments. When they saw "giant harvesters in nearby fields," they feared they were headed for the sunflowers. (It is indeed possible farmers had decided to clear agricultural fields before they were prevented from accessing them.) The pair decided to gather the seeds themselves:

> We made a dawn arrival at Rassypnoe, which we had dubbed "the cockpit village" because it was where the cockpit section of MH17 had crashed to earth. We stood among head-high plants with a big empty suitcase—and in the absence of any cutting tool, we soon found that the only way to part the bread-plate sized flowers from the stringy stems was to wring their necks, as it were. We then drove north for five hours, to clear the conflict zone, and flew to Kyiv. In the capital, my [McGeough's] hotel room quickly took on the look and smell of a barnyard, as I shucked the seeds from the flower heads. By 2 o"clock the next morning my hands were blistered and blackened, but the volume of the bulky suitcase had shrunk to a more manageable bundle of tightly rolled hotel laundry bags, weighing just 1.5 kilograms (*Sydney Morning Herald*, July 2015).

Thereafter, McGeough and Geraghty parted ways, with McGeough returning to his base in Washington, DC.

McGeough stored the seeds for months, until December, 2014, when he announced his intention to offer them to Australian MH17 families. It was Christmas, he noted, a difficult time of year for those who had lost a loved one. Moreover, in the southern hemisphere, it was the time of year when people were planting things in their gardens. His announcement prompted requests for seeds from beyond Australia, and also frantic calls from the Australian Department of Agriculture, which informed him that the seeds could not be distributed as such, but would need to be held in quarantine and then germinated, reproduced, and tested for disease and parasites in a government laboratory.

Thus, it would be the seeds *descended* from those surrounding the MH17 that would be the ones to be distributed.

The quarantine turned out not to be the only challenge for the MH17 seeds: because they had been harvested so early, and not allowed to dry before McGeough shucked and packaged them, they were in poor condition. Dr. Mark Whattam, the plant pathologist on the project, explained over email: "The collected seed was quite old and shriveled, which significantly reduced germination. In addition, [it] was collected and transported in plastic bags, and there was a reasonable amount of secondary mould present on the surface of the seed" (personal communication, April 2016). Whattam's team soaked the seeds, and then applied hot water treatments and fungicides in order to remove the "exotic" (ie. quarantine non-compliant) mold. Next, they planted the seeds in individual plots containing a "pasteurized propagating mix." A dozen of so seedlings emerged, and the team raised them to maturity in warm, sealed greenhouses, using a small paintbrush to artificially pollinate each head. Without any parent plants to compare the first generation to, Whattam could not ascertain whether the flowers produced in quarantine were significantly different from those in the field in Donbas. Similarly, he could not determine whether the seeds came from plants produced by a particular manufacturer. It is entirely likely the MH17 sunflowers were a commercial sort, grown from patented hybrids produced in factory-laboratories.[184] Yet, as Whattam pointed out, it

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[184] While intellectual property law is notoriously lax in Ukraine, farmers have little incentive to save seeds grown from hybrid plants, as they are generally not capable of expressing the precisely same bundles of traits as their predecessors. Rather, they may express an array of traits from the grandparents —those that were crossed to form the hybrid —and not necessarily in desirable combinations. (While the genetics is undoubtedly more complex, recalling Mendel's classic pea plant experiments and rules of dominance and independent assortment can be helpful here: parasite resistance is not mapped on the same allele as high-seed production, so over generations, these traits may or may not co-occur.) Thus, it's not that hybrids result in sterile, single-use "terminator" seeds biotech companies like Monsanto are frequently accused of producing. The descendants of hybrid seeds are viable, but if a farmer requires uniformity in the fruit of

is the requirement of the importer to clarify the source of the seed. "Obviously, this was a unique situation," he noted. As of time of writing, no one has come forward to claim otherwise.

In an Australian laboratory, under rigorously controlled conditions, the MH17 sunflower seeds were scrubbed of environmental traces. They were sanitized, and reborn commemorative indices that gently pointed to the crash site, without being fully embedded in it. I do not mean to suggest that the original seeds, which were of questionable viability, should have been distributed. Rather, I find that what made these seeds work as *keepsakes* had as much to do with their ability to point back to the sunflower fields of Ukraine as it did with people's preexisting ideas about sunflowers as charming or cheerful, and, sometimes, their association of those qualities with the loved ones they lost.

A keepsake is, by its very definition, indexical. It is a memento, a souvenir, a *token* that facilitates a linkage a connection to a time, place, person, or event.[185] But keepsakes rely as well on iconicity. A keepsake's affective promise depends upon its ability to recapitulate some recognizable essence of that which it indexes. (Consider, for example, a child's delight at "hearing" the ocean through a conch shell.)

Thus, to engage with a keepsake—be it a photo, a piece of jewelry, or a sunflower seed—is to allow oneself to momentarily *feel* the presence of that which is absent. The keepsake, like an ancestral valuable, offers "present traces of a particular past" (Keane 1997: 222), yet it also affords re-imagining and indulges yearning. A keepsake points to

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their crop (which most do) or guaranteed protection against a particular pest (which many desire), investing in new seeds year to year is realistically their only option.

[185] Peirce briefly mentions keepsakes in a 1905 letter (although apparently never sent) to his frequent interlocutor, fellow semiotician Lady Welby, grouping them with "muniment, monument, memento, souvenir, cue." (Thellefsen & Sorensen, 2014).

existence, but not contemporaneousness. It is as much evidence as it is possibility. Put more simply, the sunflower seeds afforded both remembering and reverie. For McGeough and Geraghty, it was critical that the seeds be from the precise place where the plane went down. No other sunflower would do. But for some of the recipients, the plants were also powerful in how they could evoke the lost loved one's smile, vibrant personality, or mere fondness for sunflowers.

By the first anniversary of the MH17 disaster, McGeough and Geraghty had sent personalized parcels of seeds, each in a small tin with a handwritten note, to over 200 of the families, friends, and hometowns of the victims. These seeds were planted in gardens public and personal, for mourning collective and individual. In Hilversum, the Netherlands, a town that lost 15 people in the crash, five sunflower plants, one for each family directly affected, were given a permanent spot in the botanical garden. "The sunflowers bring us back to the crash site…they console us a bit, and they give us seeds for the future," Hilversum's mayor told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "There will always be seeds from Ukraine now in Holland," agreed Hilversum's chief gardener, who was responsible for harvesting the Hilversum sunflower seeds, and replanting them again the following spring. Sunflowers, I hasten to make clear, are not perennials, but annuals.

The families of the recipients, however, seemed to find less of Ukraine and more of their loved ones in the blossoms. "I told my mum that Mabel passed away in a field of sunflowers," said the brother of Mabel Anthonysamy Soosai, 45, who, along with her husband and nine-year-old son, perished in the accident. Mabel's smiling Malaysian passport photo, still intact, was found among the wreckage nine months after the catastrophe. "She adored sunflowers. And God took her away in a field of sunflowers."

(*Free Malaysia Today,* April 15, 2015.) Media coverage of the commemorations also noted recipients of the seeds and seedlings doted upon the plants "like children," including the children they had lost. "We treat [our sunflower]…well, we treat it like a baby, our baby Quinn," explained Thomas Schansman, whose 18 year old son, a Dutch-U.S. dual citizen, died in the crash (*Sydney Morning Herald,* July 2015, ellipses from published text). The mother of the only New Zealander killed in the crash, observed, "When the sunflowers are blooming, that will be like Rob smiling and saying, "Come on guys, life's sweet"" (*The Dominion Post,* July 27, 2015).

The daughter of Lilianne Derden, 50, described her mother's death in or near a field of sunflowers "probably the best outcome considering the circumstances." "I probably try not to think of [the sunflowers] too much as a reference of the accident and what happened, but more of Mum and them being her favourite flowers," she explained (ABC Australia, July 17, 2015).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has made the familiar strange by contrasting the sunflower's reputation for cheer with its role as a global commodity, frequent juxtaposition with (or embellishment of?) warfare, and, in Ukraine, position outside of conventional flower culture. However, it has also documented how some, faced with the unimaginable, used the sunflower to make the strange—the horrific—more familiar. In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested the MH17 sunflower seed project employed both token and type-sourced interdiscursivity, pointing back to a specific field of sunflowers (where the cockpit had crashed) while also drawing on extant genres of commemoration (the use of flowers for comforting the mourning). A few pages back, I also probed the idea of a "keepsake,"

suggesting things like photos, heirlooms, souvenirs, and even these tragic sunflower seeds were iconic indices whose potency came not only from their ability to provide a material link to the past, but their ability to evoke what was lost, or facilitate reminiscing. (The St. George ribbon, discussed in the chapter prior, operated somewhat similarly.)

Coping, perhaps, is an interdiscursive practice, a means of linking past and present, presence and absence, familiar and strange, by lining up things, people, and places that previously did not go together, but now, somehow, must. This chapter has largely focused on the experiences of either my immediate interlocutors in Ukraine, or, via secondary sources, those of the MH17 victims. I have not been able to integrate the voices of the witnesses: the people in the villages where luggage, refreshment carts, plane parts, bodies fell from the sky, marring their homes and fields in ways not easily erased. How does one make sense of such an event? How do other instabilities organize reactions? (Let us not forget that the region where MH17 was shot down had only been claimed for the Donetsk People's Republic three months prior.)

In the days following the accident, western news outlets shamed locals for answering cell phones of the dead, stealing valuables, even using a found credit card. It is unclear how widespread these incidents were. Initial news reports, even within Ukraine, focused very little on either the trauma of those on the ground, or on the contributions they made to the recovery effort. Four days after the tragedy, an Australian news agency found that they were the first western journalists to speak to a family whose home had been punctured by a falling body. It landed in the kitchen, spraying blood all over the pots and pans. The middle-aged woman who lived there was distraught that the body could not be removed until later the next day, but when it was, she was upset that it was

identified only as "Body 26." "She was only half a person but she was a woman, maybe in her 50s…I want to know about here, who she was, her name, these things," the witness said.[186] Other witnesses described their commitment to helping locate the perished so that they could be returned to their families and buried with respect. Subsequent articles about the villagers and the Orthodox memorials they held for the MH17 victims suggest a striking desire *not* to cover up what happened, but to connect, and mourn.

But one person's sense that their fate is intertwined with that of a stranger is not always shared by the other person. It is difficult to ask the families and friends of the MH17 victims to make room for Ukrainian villagers; a hole in one's home is not the same as a hole in one's heart. Moreover, many of the victim's families seemed to want to have nothing to do with Ukraine, or with Russia for that matter. They were furious with Kyiv for not having closed the airspace over the conflict zone, with the separatists for initially preventing access to the crash site, and with Russia for providing weaponry to the separatists. They were frustrated that it took weeks for their loved one's remains to be identified and returned, and when they were, they were accompanied by Ukrainian death certificates that were illegible to them, and had to be translated and notarized before useful.[187] It is perhaps little wonder that, while the sunflower was widely adopted as a commemorative symbol for the MH17 disaster, the victims' families often ascribed their

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[186] Miranda, Charles. "MH17: Inside Ukraine's "village of the dead" and the tragic tale of body Number 26." News Corp Australia website, July 21, 2014.

[187] See, for example. Harding, Luke. "Flight MH17, two years on: 'As far as I'm concerned, Putin killed my son.'" *The Guardian*, July 13, 2016. My understanding, based on reports of the Dutch commission on MH17, is that death certificates were issued by Ukraine, translated into Dutch and English, and provided with the necessary apostille. However, these were sometimes done in two rounds: one certificate before positive identification of remains (to help survivors cancel contracts in the deceased's name), and one certificate upon repatriation. It seems that some families had a more difficult time than others in making use of the death certificates, and that they had varying reactions to having the final official document bearing their loved one's name be from a foreign land, in an alphabet they couldn't read.

own meanings to the blossoms, connecting their radiance to that of the loved ones they had lost, rather than the fields that had inspired them.

Sunflowers live for but a season, and by late autumn they wither and fall. In 2016, two years after the crash, the Dutch town of Hilversum installed a permanent memorial to those it had lost: a circle of 15 sunflowers, cast in bronze. In 2017, an international monument to MH17 victims opened near Amsterdam: 293 trees in the shape of a looped ribbon—a reference to the black ribbons Dutch wore following the catastrophe, and the wearers' cry to "bring them home." Every spring, sunflowers will be planted around the edges so that they will reach peak bloom by mid-July. The planted seeds, as far as I know, will not be from Ukraine.

By the spring of 2016, 27 of the European Union's 28 member states had approved Ukraine's bid for political and economic association—that is, for the formalization of the agreement Viktor Yanukovych had stepped away from in late 2013, sparking the Maidan Revolution. The holdout was the Netherlands, which required its citizens to approve the measure via referendum. Turnout in the April referendum was low, but those who voted rejected association with Ukraine two to one. While the "no" vote was most likely driven by Euro-skepticism, xenophobia, and Ukraine's ongoing struggles, some of my Ukrainian interlocutors were left wondering how much MH17 had to do with negative outcome. The disaster certainly hadn't helped. The referendum was non-binding, however, and in early 2017, the Dutch government overrode it, finally approving the Ukraine's association agreement with the European Union. As of June 11, 2017, Ukrainians, like U.S. citizens, may travel the Schengen Zone visa-free for up to 90

days at a time; eventually, they will also have greater access to work and study visas. But what might my Ukrainian interlocutors find on the other side of the border?

In the introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that for Ukrainians, "Europe" was not so much a place or idea, but a *destination*. People spoke of "going to Europe," or "becoming European," or in some circles, "returning to Europe" and Europeanness. During Maidan, this rhetoric shifted somewhat, with activists in places like Odessa emphasizing that they already were Europe, and always had been European. Following the revolution, some of my Ukrainian interlocutors spoke of "deserving" to be part of the European Union. Ukrainians, they felt, had demonstrated that they understood the value of democracy and rule of law, and were dedicated to the European project. Perhaps incidents like May 2nd and MH17 threw these commitments into question. Perhaps the revolution, which some European leaders viewed as a coup, did as well.

But the Dutch referendum was a symptom of a greater issue: the European Union had changed. Economic woes, austerity measures, and the refugee crisis had fueled the rise of the populism and nativism. This did not happen overnight, of course; Euro-skepticism had undermined Brussels for years, and the Dutch referendum on Ukraine seems to have primarily been a convenient avenue for protest. Two months later, in June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, raising the boats of populist leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Since the Maidan Revolution, the EU's borders have opened, closed, stretched, and contracted, but not at all in the ways that my Ukrainian interlocutors had anticipated.

# CHAPTER 6

## Epilogue

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between
> the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.
> —Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 1967.

"I'm just here to rest," the woman says. We are in the train station in Odessa, in the
"VIP" waiting room, now a makeshift arrivals center for people displaced by the war in
the east. Weary travelers nod off in the faux leather chairs, shaking themselves awake to
check on their belongings. Children gather around a small boy with toy car, watching him
wind its wheels, and then release it so that it zips down the aisle, running into a
teenager's duffle bag. The teenager stares into his phone, his mind somewhere else.
Nearby, senior citizens cluster around a table, handwriting petitions to receive their
pensions in Odessa, rather than at home in Donbas.

*Otdykhat'*, Rus. to rest or relax, has multiple senses. You could lie down to rest in
the afternoon. You could come to Odessa to relax at the beaches. When you vacation, you
are *na otdykhe*. This woman, standing on the edge of the arrivals center, pondering the
resources for the displaced posted on a bulletin board, did not appear to be on vacation. I
asked for clarification. "I just needed a break," she said. It was September, 2014, shortly
after the battle of Ilovajsk, roughly two months after the MH17 crash. Kyiv had regained
much of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, but a new front had opened along the Sea of

Azov, sending another wave of displaced people westward. The room was filled with frazzled families, some of whom had been twice uprooted: first from the Donetsk area, and then from the towns along the Azov they had fled to. The woman explained that she actually had come to Odessa temporarily, visiting the same seaside resort she did most years. But now there was fighting near her hometown, or at least on the road to it, and she was pondering her options.

Displacement sneaks up on you. My research assistant, Ljosha, and I learned this quickly. In the autumn of 2014, I returned to Ukraine for two month-long research trips to survey how the war was affecting the people I had been working with. However, I was also interested in speaking to displaced people, especially those either from or with close connections to former collective farming communities like the ones I had been studying. Rural scenery had featured so heavily in the media coverage of the war, but where were the people? Could they have stayed behind? It seemed many did, or at least had one family member do so. My interlocutors in Sonjachne and Zelene Pole were not surprised by this. It is one thing to leave one's apartment; it is another to leave an entire farm or homestead at harvest time.

Most of the people we spoke to described not fleeing until it was impossible to stay. This was not necessarily because they supported the separatists. Rather, many explained that they never anticipated the rebels would come to or stay in power, or that the conflict would turn as violent as it had. Moreover, evacuating was complicated. "Displacement" sounds passive—the people were displaced by war—but the people we encountered made clear that "displacing oneself" was a process most agentive. Many had arranged their own evacuation; doing so required contacts, money, and organization. It

also required relinquishing responsibilities to one's family, facing criticism from those that disagreed with the decision to leave, and coming to terms with the possibility of losing one's home. Then, there was the question of when and where to go. By what means should one depart? To where? How to determine from afar whether a place would be suitable for oneself and/or one's family? This last question was particularly difficult for visible minorities: while the majority of displaced people I observed appeared phenotypically Slavic, Donbas was also home to a substantial number of people with roots in East Asia and Africa. These families, too, could be found at the train station.

In September of 2014, resettlement efforts were almost entirely volunteer-run, and there was not yet an official government program to aid the displaced. We interviewed people at the train station, at hostels, at a converted Black Sea sanatorium, and at drug rehabilitation center above a tuberculosis dispensary, its dormitories stuffed with anxious single mothers and small children.[188] The sanatorium, whose lease had been negotiated by a charity that previously worked with veterans, was filled with orphans, the disabled, and their families or caretakers.[189] Among the people we interviewed there was a middle-aged woman caring for her sister, who had been paralyzed by a stroke. Like many of the people we met from Luhansk, "Natasha" had been living in a basement at the time of her evacuation, and had witnessed severe shelling. She hadn't seen the conflict coming, couldn't understand how things had gotten so bad. She had not voted in the April referendum for independence that the separatists had hastily organized because "they

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[188] See Jones 2014 for more extensive descriptions of displaced persons in Odessa at this time.

[189] Orphans and disabled persons from Eastern Ukraine were generally well-supported. Donors were eager to assist those they considered most vulnerable, and least likely to be able to help themselves. In contrast, men and childless women often found it more difficult secure assistance.

kept talking about "referendum, referendum, referendum"" but "there wasn't anyone or anything normal to vote for."

> *And then you see we were already DNR [Donetskaja Narodnaja Respublika—Donetsk People's Republic]. Well [I thought], DNR means DNR and there will be some sort of government, some kind, something will be. But they didn't do anything. Pensions, well they didn't have any money. Absolutely [none]. "Live as you like," they said. But how?*

Her son, Natasha explained, was let go from his job at the university, and then later told to come back, but there were no students or resources, so he was terminated a second time. Food had disappeared from the shelves; she and her sister were left to nibble on dry toast (*sukhariki*, a bit like croutons). Natasha described dashing to the corner store while the militants shot back and forth, clinging to building walls for cover. The simplest tasks became gambles with death:

> *And some days you didn't stick your head out at all. Shooting, shooting. I just left the house, I was carrying the trash. Ba-bakh! somewhere. Me with this trash.* [Short laugh.] *I didn't even take the trash to the container. I dropped it. I think, life is more valuable. I think, I will take it out next time. And, and I ran right back to the apartment entrance and into the basement. It [the mortar] ended, I came out, picked up the trash, and took it to the dumpster. I made it. To the dumpster it's maybe ten meters.* [Brief pause.] *And that's how we lived.*

When does displacement begin? Does the rupture happen once you decide to leave? Once you commit to not going back? Or was Natasha displaced even while she was still in Luhansk, unable to even take the trash out? Another family we interviewed ended up living in the rehabilitation center after their attempts to secure an apartment and work in Odessa fell through. By November, they had run out of money, and returned to the town near Donetsk they were from. The fighting had subsided, but they kept their heads low, trying not to draw attention to their opposition to the separatist government. When we Skyped, they described feeling displaced at home. Their son's school was half empty; several teachers had been dismissed because of the lack of pupils, or because their subject—Ukrainian language, for example—had been stripped from the curriculum.

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Businesses were shuttered; work was difficult to find; conversations with former friends were stilted. "We mostly stay home and watch movies," the parents explained. Eventually, they would go to Poland as migrant workers, leaving their son in the care of his grandparents. When I asked them where they hoped to settle, they paused for a moment, and then the husband said, chuckling, "I don't want to offend you [an American], but actually, Canada."

Displaced people live in what anthropologists call a state of liminality, a state in which not only their physical positions but their entire life worlds have been uprooted (Dunn 2014). They are, in Victor Turner's seminal words, "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (1969: 95). Yet they *live*, and not without any sense of who or where they are, or where they wish to go. Rather, it is often precisely when people find themselves at a threshold that they must declare themselves most loudly (Lemon 2000: 205). In my brief work with displaced persons in the autumn of 2014, none of the people I spoke to ever called themselves *bezhentsy*, refugees. This could have been because of negative, often racialized associations with the term, but it also could have been because, at that time, most everyone I spoke to either expected to eventually go home, or described their move as permanent.[190] Some called themselves, as the government did, *pereselentsy*, literally, re-settlers, or loosely, migrants, but many refused that term as well. "I'm opening a business with my best friend," one mother, a cosmetologist, told me as she wrote a petition to register her daughter for school. "I can work from anywhere, so why

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[190] As the family I Skyped with observed, the urge to return home could be configured both by desire as well as by financial and familial constraints. I detail their experience in Jones 2014, noting that they had arrived anticipating building a new life for themselves, but were quickly overwhelmed by their lack of a support network.

not the beach?" said a young content developer I met at a hostel. "I'm just here to rest," the woman at the train station said. *Otdykhat'*, which had sounded so absurd to me in the train station, was perhaps less naïve, and more agentive than it had seemed. "Rest," "relaxation," a "break"—such terms suggest choice, control, and the expectation that one could wake up from this nightmare and continue with life as it was supposed to be. Liminality is always a perspective; one may dwell quite well in spaces others consider marginal. But many of the displaced people I spoke to, like many of my interlocutors in Ukraine—the borderland, the land "on the edge"—saw themselves not adrift, but at crossroads, on the verge of making it to the other side. For them, liminality was tolerable only because they anticipated a means of exiting it.

This dissertation has been about people who imagined their lives would be different. It has been about how they made sense of their situations, as well as *why* their situations made sense to them as they did. How my interlocutors interpreted the past, or calculated possibilities for the future, I have shown, was a product of semiotic processes that naturalized some connections across contexts, while erasing others. People, places, things, and times could be strung together to justify certain readings of circumstances, and negate alternatives. Remembered ruptures, chronological and interpersonal, bore *afterlives* and *other lives*, both imagined and all too real.

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized two aspects of semiosis, iconicity and interdiscursivity, exploring how their how their interdependency propelled particular understandings of what was, what could have been, and what still might be. However, within the chapters, I focused on different aspects of the work that iconicity and

interdiscursivity do, and knit those into a narrative of how the Maidan Revolution, and

Ukraine's descent into war, was manifest:

In chapter 2, 'soil," my task was to explain how some Ukrainians came to think of

their country as not only post-Soviet, but postcolonial, and still susceptible to abuse. I

showed how, in the late imperial and early Soviet period, soil maps, and the development

of modern pedology more generally, furthered the reputation of Ukraine as wealthy in

chernozem, the "emperor of soils." I argued that in the 20th century, the *interscaling* of

deposits of black earth and anticipated agricultural outputs drove the exploitation of the

soil and the people who lived upon it. Moreover, I found that in the 21st century, such

interscaling not only persisted, reifying the breadbasket trope, but also amplified the

traumas of the past, bolstering perceptions of Ukraine as a postcolonial, even post-

genocide space, and fears that it could fall into foreign control again.

In chapter 3, "Fields," I explored the ramifications of those fears through a study

of agricultural land rights at a time of moratorium: buying and selling farmland, at time

of writing, remains illegal in Ukraine, but an open market constantly seems on the

horizon. The main focus of this chapter, however, was to interrogate the relationship

between private property and discourses of "rule of law" on the eve of the Maidan

Revolution. I centered my analysis on explaining how my interlocutors experienced land

deeds as, on the one hand, iconic representations of actually existing plots, and on the

other, malleable potential. Furthermore, I detailed how discourses of "rule of law" in or

about Ukraine were deeply concerned with linguistic transparency, the relationship

between signs and experience, and the ability of different speakers to wield the legal

word to different effect. For my interlocutors, observations of arbitrariness (or more

precisely, what they found to be unfair, unpredictable, inconsistent or unreliable), whether in their individual legal encounters, or at the highest levels of governance, underscored their impressions that Ukraine was unruly, and that a change in administration and political affiliation might catapult them into a different time-space.

Chapter 4, "Beetles," focused on a gruesome episode of political violence, and the language that was thought to have precipitated it. It delved into the concept of *chronotopes*, interrogating how their interdiscursive alignment can create the sense that history rhymes. But, I showed, not everyone was convinced that the present was just like the past. In unpacking *kolorad* I demonstrated not only how interdiscursive threads can be woven together, but also how they can be tugged apart. Interdiscursive connections, and the chronotopes they calibrate, may be contested, replaced, or reformed: *kolorad* disrupted the performativity of the St. George ribbon not only by tying its orange and black stripes to a beetle, rather than a military honor, but also by disputing the relevance of World War II to the present moment more generally. But *kolorad*'s cheeky punch was later undercut by its association with the devastating May 2nd clashes in Odessa, and comparisons of what was happening in Ukraine to what had happened in Rwanda. *Kolorad*, critics insinuated, had always been about iconicities beyond overlapping stripes.

Finally, chapter 5, 'sunflowers," revisited the themes of those prior: how icons—this time, photographs—can naturalize a certain type of landscape; how relationships between tokens and types can become muddied or refined; how arbitrarily—and devastatingly so—power can be wielded. However, its central undertaking was to make the *familiar strange*, and to show how that process, as well as its reverse, is an intentionally jarring interdiscursive exercise. Toward the end, I suggested that "coping" is

a constant negotiation of familiar/strange, an ongoing practice of knotting and tearing the interdiscursive fabric (Irvine 2005), such that it stretches and smoothens over time, but always remains a bit puckered.

There is supposed to be a means of leaving liminality. You launch yourself across the threshold, or someone grabs you from the other side. Ritual is supposed to seal the deal. But, as many have observed, political rituals rarely deliver precisely what they advertise. Elections, treaties, revolutions, and wars anticipate big breaks with the past, and ride on narratives of justice, reform, and overcoming. But the transformations they bring are not necessarily those anticipated or desired. For some Ukrainians, the Maidan Revolution was a glorious achievement that united ethnicities, ushered in better (if still imperfect) governance, and flung open the door to European integration. It was a large and decisive step aimed at catapulting the country out of "transition." But for most of my interlocutors, especially the displaced ones, the revolution only brought more uncertainty. Rupture plunged them into new liminal states, but this did not mean they had escaped those prior.

While there is a presumption of linearity in the notion of liminality, liminal states do not necessarily occur one after another; rather, they may embed, reflect, resemble, or reference each other. Liminality is more like *matrjoshki*, Russian nesting dolls, than it is like a game of dominoes. There is no springboard out of "transition." But where there are afterlives, there are always other lives, and new possibilities. Ruptures *open* as much as they break or tear.

When I think back on the hours Ljosha and I spent in the Odessa train station in September of 2014, I often think of the first woman we interviewed, "Nadja". She was

about 50, and had just arrived from Kharkiv that morning, where she and her five year old grandson, had been reunited with her daughter and the boy's mother, Oksana. That afternoon, they would head north to a small city, not too far from Sonjachne, where Oksana had arranged work and housing through a relief program. They would all be living together in a three-room *domik*, a little house, Nadja smiled. It was a far cry from her well-appointed apartment in Luhansk, she noted, but it would be peaceful and green. She was thrilled to be with her family, and for her grandson to be raised somewhere, she hoped, he might never again encounter war. Nadja and her grandson had been separated from Oksana when the city came under siege. They were unable to reconnect for weeks until Oksana, working through a Kharkiv network of volunteers, managed to secure her mother and son's evacuation. During that time, Nadja and Maxim were living with 200 other people in a basement bomb shelter left over from the Soviet period.

Shy at first, Nadja ultimately spoke for some 45 minutes. At times, it seemed like she was talking more to herself, recalling moments frightening and funny, her voice catching, in turn, with laughter and tears. Like many of the people we spoke to, she fixated on food. In the shelter, she explained, they were given bread and cheese, but mostly cheese.[191] *Syr kolbasnyj*, she said, referring a processed cheese in the shape of a sausage developed during the Soviet era. It has a strange, rubbery consistency and a fake smoky flavor; it keeps for weeks, perhaps months—it won't mold in a basement. When there was no bread, there was still cheese. "You would have a chunk of cheese, and you would go to get some bread, and they would just give you more cheese." Nadia subsisted primarily on "sausage cheese" for two weeks. "You can torture people with that

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[191] It was unclear who was bringing the food, but given her location in Luhansk and her use of the word *opolchentsy* (militias), pro-Russian fighters seems most likely.

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cheese!....I will never in my life eat (Rus. *zhrat'*) it again. *Perejila* (Ukr. 'I overate.')

*Uzhas* ('horror')."

When Nadja and Maxim were evacuated, she initially took some of the cheese with her out of fear of having nothing to eat. But when she reached her hosts Kharkiv oblast', the volunteers welcomed her with fresh fruit and vegetables. Never had "our" produce tasted so good to her, she said. Nadja's story might be read as a matching of the qualities of food with those of people—she was clearly unimpressed with both the separatists and their processed cheese, but spoke of her rescuers and their offerings with reverence. However, I think it was foremost a tale of simple astonishment, and gratitude: a commentary on the dull, greasy taste of warfare; of not being able to provide for one's dependents; of possibly spending one's last days in a dank basement barely surviving on a diet of murky water and chemical-laden cheese—and of emerging into the sunlight to enjoy fresh tomatoes at the peak of the season.

Nadja and her family departed for their new lives later that day. I know where they were headed, but I do not know where they settled, or if it suited them. Perhaps, like other displaced people from Donbas, they eventually returned home, or moved abroad. But I like to imagine Nadja in her little house in the north of Odessa oblast', in a valley rich with chernozem. I imagine her tending a garden, spending her retirement running her hands through the soil, planting food to feed her family—because she wants to, not because she needs to. I imagine her beginning again, and I imagine her home.

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