Chapter 2
Contemporary Ukraine: Borderland—Bloodland—Neverland?

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The events that erupted across Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 drastically changed the geopolitical architectonic of the world, removing the black-and-white image of two opposing "camps," symbolically (and physically) divided by the Berlin Wall. These profound, near overnight "collapses" overthrew established theoretical approaches on the world order, consequently making way for others. First, the events gave rise to a number of "*end of something*" and "*post-X*" claims, thus strengthening both liberal supporters and postmodernist theorists. One of the most influential and debated theses, Francis Fukuyama's "end of history," trumpeted the "end of ideology" (Fukuyama, 1989, 1992) and celebrated the newly born, supposedly homogeneous world following the victory of "Western liberal democracy," proposing that the world "… may be witnessing … the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 4). Thirty years earlier, Daniel Bell had similarly claimed that ideas had exhausted their mobilizing potential, and that people ceased to dream of better futures, enjoying an infinite prosperous present instead (Bell, 1962, pp. 370–372), and implying that there are no viable alternatives to the political *and* economic liberalism.

Yet, the general post-1989 scenario was not this simple, and a more complex reality supplanted the illusion of simplicity. Geopolitical opposition emerged, which transcended Europe, thus replacing one single Iron Curtain with multiple "clashes of civilizations" (Huntington, 1996). Europe's eastern border (marking European Union member states) moved further to the east, having expanded from a single line to a significant "buffer zone," and eventually labeled "Borderlands." The inertia of substantive descriptors for the region, most often called "post-Soviet" or "post-Communist," is telling in itself: the Soviet Union remains the key reference point; such regional descriptors offer no new specific features except overcoming the Soviet past and the Soviet legacy, which is still deemed to characterize the region.

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Thus, complementing the post-1991 cultural shifts in reclaiming national and ethnic identities is a parallel cultural shift: emerging language to describe and explain the new order. That language and the ideas behind it carry a certain power to suggest a vision of alternative future for the region and for Europe at large. This future is imagined neither as the continuation of an "end-of-history" present nor as a recycling of the nationalist past (as with the recent rise of populism). The hard question here is, however: What could be the center of gravity for this new future? What social, political, and cultural practices might it entail? The 2013–2014 Maidan protests operated like a mirror in which the Ukrainian society tried to see and recognize its problems and prospects. But maybe the "Ukraine crisis" is also a mirror in which Europe might see its current vulnerabilities as well as a germ of an imaginable future.

This chapter aims to reinterpret contemporary Ukraine in terms of its geopolitical place and prospects, using a topological approach: i.e., illuminating (or prescribing) the social and political implications of spatial phenomena. I bring two existing notions into play here, both of which represent the "*land*" (not "state" or "nation"). The first is the well-established notion of "*Borderlands*" (see also Holc, this volume), which emphasizes Ukraine's interim geopolitical position between two civilizations, and two sets of values and worldviews, which supposedly determine its peripheral status and hybrid orientations. The second is the term "*Bloodlands*," coined by historian Timothy Snyder to describe part of Eastern Europe as the location of the most killing sites for both Nazi and Soviet regimes in 1933–1945: "The bloodlands were *no political territory*, real or imagined; they are simply where Europe's most murderous regimes did their most murderous work"[1] (Snyder, 2010, p. 36). Both notions imply a denial of political autonomy, agency, and subjectivity to these lands, communicating a sense of victimhood.

This research I present here is an attempt to comprehend Ukraine's 2013–2014 Maidan (or Euromaidan) movement and its aftermath and to build a theoretical framework to interpret this recent—and ongoing—story. By taking a topological approach, I suggest a theoretical alternative to the rhetoric of "identities" and "post-Soviet," which restricts discussions to Soviet policies and legacies and binds those discussions to "Russia versus the rest of the world." Moreover, the phrase "Ukraine crisis" is often an empty signifier, filled with arbitrary senses. It can serve as a starting point to discuss the hegemony of the United States or global capital, as well as the viability of the European Union project or the opportunity for Russia to "rise up from its knees."[2] Notwithstanding the urgency of these narratives, they generally miss the crucial point: the internal events in Ukraine itself and the significant shifts that have occurred there.

This chapter begins with a reconsideration of the aforementioned characterizations of Ukraine since 1991, which entails going beyond common understandings

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[1]From here forward, italics are mine.

[2]This expression is widely disseminated in the public discourse in contemporary Russia. It appeals to the resentment concerning the supposed humiliation after the lost Cold War and implies a revanchist comeback of a newly strong-again Russia. Moreover, this trope travelled across the Russian border (also popular in Poland these days); structurally, it is similar to the "make America great again" claim.

by attaching new senses to established terms. Such wordplay is inspired by the work of Tetiana Zhurzhenko (2014b), who argued that with the recent developments, Eastern Ukraine had turned from "borderlands" (which implied a peaceful coexistence of people with hybrid identities and multiple loyalties) into "Bloodlands" (where otherness converted into a military conflict). I suggest applying those notions to Ukraine as a whole, while considering them as markers for different visions for the country's future. Toward that end, I will supplement this dichotomy with a third concept presenting an alternative path that arguably emerged within the Maidan movement. Applying the device of consonance, I chose the word "*Neverland*" from the Peter Pan story, in order to underscore the heterotopian nature of Maidan, which attempted to build a parallel—better—society while simultaneously keeping some utopian aspirations for Ukraine as a whole.

The resulting threefold topological framework opens practical as well as theoretical alternatives for Ukraine: confronting a boundary as within or nearby (with its negative and positive connotations); descending into aggressive, bloody chaos; or making a breakthrough and emerging as a prosperous country, grounded in European values and principles.

Ukraine as a Borderland, or How Comfortable Is It to Live on a Bridge?

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, observers have routinely treated Ukraine as a Borderland, disseminating a theoretical framework that stresses the country's interim position as one of "mixed and overlapping identities and multiple loyalties" (Zhurzhenko, 2014b). Such a perception characterizes present-day Ukraine as one where "borders are on the move," or global geopolitical space is being remapped. This notion obscures a number of sensitive issues. To name a few, these are: the challenge of drawing clear-cut borders with Russia, sitting between the edge of Europe and the "Russian world," and Ukraine's geopolitical status and identity, through the lens of Immanuel Wallerstein's dichotomy of countries positioned at the "center" or on the "periphery" of the center (Wallerstein, 2004).

What does it mean for Ukraine to be (perceived as) a Borderland? First, it conjures the notion of the modern nation-state and, using Michael Billig's term, of "boundary-consciousness" (1995). As Mann notes, in medieval Europe, there were few clear-cut territorial boundaries, but rather crosscutting networks. People who lived in a territory were usually subordinated to the local lord, and a king had to engage his supposed lieges through the entire chain of hierarchy and subordination (Billig, 1995; Mann, 1988). The French anthropologist Louis Dumont contrasts modern European culture with the rest of the world by identifying it as "homo aequalis," the only culture that has been consistently egalitarian (Dumont, 1976). According to Dumont, modernization demolished traditional hierarchy and decreased the symbolic distance between governor and the people. This fits perfectly the shift from multiple

concentric areas with overlapping peripheries, inherent in medieval Europe, to the bordered system of nation-states in modernity.

This new arrangement sacrifices multiple local centers in favor of bounded communities with supposedly homogeneous living spaces. Billig states that "[n]ationhood, spreading from Europe to the Americas and elsewhere, was established as the universal form of sovereignty. The world's entire land surface, with the exception of Antarctica, is 'now divided between nations and states'" (Billig, 1995, p. 22). The issue of delineating borders varies in urgency depending on location, landscape, and population density. However, the tragic experiences of the twentieth century illustrated that any boundary should be recognized; otherwise, it would cost lives. This became an axiom in international relations following the Potsdam Conference in 1945. Yet, the events of 1989–1991 challenged this principle, and it surfaced once again after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian-backed warfare in Donbas.

As Kristof notices, in the pre-modern state, the "frontier was quite literary 'the front': the front of the imperium mundi which expands to the only limits it can acknowledge, namely, the limits of the world" (Kristof, 1959, p. 270). And the term boundary "indicates certain established limits (the bounds) of a given political unit, and all that which is within the boundary is bound together, … fastened by an internal bound" (Kristof, 1959, p. 270). Yet, what would be the parallel in the contemporary world? Unlike pre-modern eras, the seizure of territory does not carry much privilege, because the symbolic landscape and an entity's geopolitical influence are now the important symbols of power-holding. Today, in an era called "late modernity," in contrast to "classic" modernity, globalization (economic and otherwise) has eviscerated and perforated boundaries. In this context, how should nation-building advance, and how should theorists characterize it?

Late modernity seems to have returned to the premodern arrangement of areas and flows, with clear hierarchies replaced by networks. Linguistically, in fact, the term "countries" has succumbed to the word "areas," with the latter emitting a civilizational flavor. As Karl Schlögel puts it, "[t]he new map is more reminiscent of early modernity, of the trade and pilgrimage routes, of the links between holy cities and routes of world communication" (Schlögel, 2008, n.p.). This re-gained "zone consciousness" (to rephrase Michael Billig) marks an important geopolitical shift, from aggressive territorial expansion to financial and symbolic influence. And here again, the map delineates "regions," "zones of influence," and overlapping areas that might be inscribed into a larger zone, or the so-called "civilization." This plurality of civilization, unknown to the medieval world, gave rise to Huntington's idea of marking culturally homogeneous zones instead of nation-states, with a special emphasis on the fractures, or the so-called "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1996). Yet, Huntington's theory conveys a certain equality between civilizations, whereas many European theorists still dichotomize "the West versus the rest." For example, Vakhtang Kebuladze, a contemporary Ukrainian philosopher, portrays Russia as an "anti-civilization," or, evoking Jungian language, a "*civilizational shadow*," aimed at destroying Western civilization without suggesting a replacement (Kebuladze, 2016). In a similar vein, Viatcheslav Morozov, a Tartu-based political theorist of Russian

descent, labels Russia as a "subaltern empire" that attempts to combat the West while staying Eurocentric both in its tools and in its aspirations (Morozov, 2015).

This depiction resembles that of Timothy Snyder (2015), who stresses that contemporary Russia does not provide any alternative project of development; it is not a different vision of modernity or "futurity" (Eshel, 2013) but an ideology of destruction. The theorist Lev Gudkov once labeled this peculiarity of Russian culture "negative identity," as always based on denial and a fight against certain "enemies" (Gudkov, 2004). It is noteworthy that in a recent publication, Snyder (2015) implies that the end of Europe can be overcome at its edge—Ukraine—and here the boundary turns into a frontier, a periphery becomes a front by acquiring the status of the greatest importance ever.

Throughout its history, Ukraine has been perceived as a land *on the crossroads*—not only between "Europe" and "Asia" as symbolic entities, but on the trade route "from the Varangians (Vikings) to the Greeks" that connected the "North" (Scandinavia) and the "South" (the Byzantine Empire). This particular geographical location not only enhanced cultural and genetic diffusion within the region but promoted the land's function as a buffer zone between sedentary populations and aggressive vagrant tribes. Therefore, its role as an *outpost on the edge of some area* has a long history.[3]

What is important today, however, is that by marking Ukraine as a borderland, one *excludes it from successful integration projects*—having failed to be a part of some collective entity, it just borders it instead. A borderland connotes a chaotic space over the fence, delineating the area of a particular social and political order. Here, the concept of a "border of prosperity" (Zhurzhenko, 2014a, p. 27) is key, as it is not subject to changing political declarations. This enhances the idea that *integrity precedes integration*[4]: The symbolic act of unification implies a required degree of homogeneity, at least economically, in "EU-speak."

Ukraine as a Bloodland: Stalin, Hitler, and Donbas

I now turn to the concept of "Bloodland." Timothy Snyder explains "Bloodland" as a geographically and historically specific place: "I define the bloodlands as territories subject to *both* German and Soviet police power and associated mass killing policies

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[3]Quite telling is the fact that Serhii Plokhy titled his recent book on Ukraine *The Gates of Europe* (Plokhy, 2017).

[4]The interplay of economy and politics within the European integration project is the key here. Whereas candidate states tend to perceive EU accession as a magic tool for drastic economic improvement, statistical data show quite a different picture. Maps that visualize the level of average salary or GDP per capita in different member states disclose the East–West cleavage in a salient way: Even if the political borders were demolished, the economic gap is still there. Interestingly, it produces resentments on both sides of the "border of prosperity" (the fatigue of being a donor vs. the fatigue of lagging behind). Therefore, an alternative approach is that the EU accession is not a magic tool: a candidate state must prosper *not due to* the accession but *before* it in order to get into the club.

at some point between 1933 and 1945" (Snyder, 2010, p. 1094). For Snyder, the Bloodland "extends from central Poland to western Russia, through Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States" (Snyder, 2010, p. 9). The historian skillfully depicts the scale of suffering, in contrast to the other countries' losses: "During the years that Stalin and Hitler were in power, more people were killed in Ukraine *than anywhere else* in the bloodlands, or in Europe, or in the world" (Snyder, 2010, p. 88). Snyder estimates that there were fourteen million civilian victims in the Bloodlands as an outcome of mass killing, but *not warfare*. This number "exceeds by more than ten million the number of people who died in all of the Soviet and German concentration camps" (Snyder, 2010, p. 1110), and even more counterintuitively, it surpasses "by more than thirteen million the number of American and British casualties, taken together, of The Second World War" (Snyder, 2010, p. 1102).

Snyder not only uncovers the mechanism used to destroy the Ukrainian nation and erase Ukrainian identity via specifically designed official Soviet policies (which is a valuable point on its own, as a strong argument against the widespread presumption of "no Ukraine before 1991"). But Snyder further claims that the Bloodlands' history contains *the key events of European history in general*, and no coherent genealogy of contemporary Europe is possible without this recognition. This argument totally undermines the established approach to the region as peripheral and, alas, of low importance internationally, or even for European history. Moreover, Snyder's survey reveals the Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933 to be one of the most underestimated historical events of the twentieth century. The author never states this explicitly; nevertheless, his analysis leads to such a conclusion.

To illustrate my argument, the historical record indicates that deliberate mass killing preceding and connected to World War II started with the Ukrainian famine. At that time, Hitler's regime was far less murderous; thus, one might conclude that Stalin served as a model for the German Führer due to the scale of the massacre and his strategies: Stalin weaponized food distribution, which is a very efficient and cheap extermination method. A widely accepted argument against the recognition of the Ukrainian famine as genocide is that Ukrainians were not the only nationality who died in the USSR during those years. Snyder suggests an obvious argument here: notwithstanding other victims of the Nazi regime who died in concentration camps and death facilities, we still recognize the Holocaust as a crime against Jewish people. By the same token, it seems plausible that Stalin's deliberate intentions to destroy Ukrainian peasantry as an obstacle to the modernized Soviet state with working-class hegemony was central to the general starvation of Soviet citizens.[5]

Another successful invention of the Soviet leader was to split societies and to turn social groups, such as different generations, against one another. Russian literary critic Sergey Averintsev recalls that in his home village, young Komsomols climbed on top of local churches on Easter and urinated on the Easter procession in which their parents participated. Averintsev concludes that the main difference between the Soviet and Nazi regimes is that the former lasted longer, and there were several generations of people born within it who accepted Soviet values and policies as

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[5]Ann Applebaum's recent book dwells on the similar argument (Applebaum, 2017).

"natural" and not to be disputed (Averintsev, 2003, p. 9). Philosopher Hanna Arendt viewed *the origins of the modern atomized* society in the Ukrainian famine, because people were forced to care only about their personal fates, descending into egoism and indifference (Arendt, 1951, pp. 320–322). Therefore, Ukraine was forced into accelerated modernization and exemplifies these atomized outcomes.

Why apply the notion of Bloodlands to contemporary Ukraine, extending and transcending Snyder's analysis? First, it is tempting to see historical parallels between today's situation and the world wars in the twentieth century, although we must be wary of speculation and disregard for important peculiarities. Second, the very notion carries powerful connotations due to the reputation and the resonance of Snyder's research. Thus, by labeling contemporary Ukraine as a "Bloodland," we mark its victimhood and Putin as an aggressor, a deliberate heir to Stalin. Third, and most importantly, this label might serve as *a warning sign*, awakening people in order to prevent further catastrophe.

The latter seems somehow consonant with Snyder's personal position as an intellectual. Having given special attention to the global community's abandonment of the Ukrainian peasantry during the famine, despite the appeal of many starving Ukrainians to Polish (and other) diplomats to deliver the message to the world, Snyder attempts to make a difference in the present day. In the spring of 2014, he encouraged well-known Western intellectuals to come to Kyiv (despite presumed security risks) and to express symbolic support through a forum entitled "Ukraine: Thinking Together." This forum addressed the important dichotomy of "*money versus solidarity*," a central theme across Ukraine's modern history: *against* solidarity, in 1933, when "the laws of the international market ensured that the grain taken from Soviet Ukraine would feed others" (Snyder, 2010, p. 185); and *in favor of* solidarity, in 2013–2014, when Ukrainian protesters chose solidarity over personal safety and welfare while engaging in the Maidan uprising.

So, what is the conceptual core of the term "Bloodlands" if removed from the historical context? First and foremost, it designs the territory of Ukraine as *an important battlefield of a global importance*: external actors regard it as a significant resource strengthening their geopolitical weight, enabling them "to remake the continent in their own image" (Snyder, 2010, p. 87) while wiping out Ukrainian people as abundant supply to the territory. Thus, Hitler's plan involved starvation or enslavement of Ukrainian peasants with simultaneous migration of German farmers to the fertile Ukrainian lands. Stalin dreamed of access to the "Ukrainian breadbasket" as well, to extract the property and the grain for the sake of a modern industrial state. In addition to Ukraine's fertile soil, the country is a large territory in the center of Europe that must be "either a weak ally or a defeated foe in the coming wars" (Snyder, 2010, p. 75). The unchangeable variable here is the objectification and victimhood of Ukraine as a "land," "territory," or "resource" with no right to its own plans and interests. Yet, it remains an important target, as the seizure of Ukraine supposedly gives players a privilege on the global scale.

Secondly, to succeed into turning Ukraine into a Bloodland, one must implement the Roman "*divide et impera*" principle: exploiting fear, acquisitiveness, and a "no choice" illusion, and one must engage local people and turn them against one another.

Key examples were the local "polizei" (police) during German occupation and local Communist Party activists taking away grain and food during the famine. Thus, some local inhabitants become collaborators and maintain a silent pact, feeling shame and guilt.

Thirdly, one needs to masquerade one's policies with a thick layer of lies, a sophisticated propaganda that twists the facts, using conspiracy theories. Thus, the Ukrainian famine was widely perceived as sabotage, a plot of Ukrainian nationalists supported from abroad.

And, finally, from Ukraine's vantage point, this is a story of *vanished opportunities for sovereignty*, agency, and statehood. From time to time, some windows of opportunities have opened, when Ukrainians felt like something important was just on the horizon, yet all their dreams of sovereignty and a better life had only been enticements, which eventually led to deterioration and helplessness. For example, Ukrainian peasants were hopeful that they had won their long-term struggle for their lands with landlords, due to the Bolshevik Revolution (Snyder, 2010, p. 108). And later, many Western Ukrainians had hoped to rid themselves of Soviet rule, which pushed them into vague alliances with the Nazis.

Currently, a similar situation exists in Donbas, if not in Ukraine in general. Indeed, the Kremlin has been attempting to turn Ukrainian territory into a wholesale Bloodland, using firearms rather than starvation. This is often labeled the "Ukraine crisis," as if it is a domestic civil war. This completely mirrors Stalin's strategy to do the job by using the work of others. And the situation is heavily supported by propaganda, justifying Russia's actions as its defense against a major Western plot. The general framework is completely "*Bloodlandian*," so to speak: there are two sides of a geopolitical (and ideological) conflict. Ukraine is potentially a valuable trophy that empowers the master, which is why Russians are poised to do battle with the United States, but on Ukrainian soil "until the last dead Ukrainian," as the joke goes today.

What is crucial here is not only the denial of Ukraine's sovereignty (articulated as "no-Ukraine" and "Russia's eternal zone of interests"), but also a dehumanization of Ukrainian victims in Russian public discussions, morally justifying loss of life, because "they deserve it" and "we must win at any cost." The state-supported Russian media discourse has always been centered around the figure of an imaginary evil opponent, be it Jews, Ukrainian nationalists, or, more recently, "Gayrope" (gay Europe) and "GosDep" (acronym for the US Department of State)—to complete the justification, to cover one's own aggressive strategy with a veil of martyrdom. As Snyder acutely remarks: "No major war or act of killing in the twentieth century began without the aggressors or perpetrators first claiming innocence and victimhood" (Snyder, 2010, p. 1068). And the general historical context might reveal the similarities: the loss in a (Cold) war; new borders, regarded as illegitimate ("Crimea is ours"); a huge desire for historical revenge ("Russia rises up from its knees"); and the global financial crisis in 2008, which weakened geopolitical opponents and turned enemies of your enemies into your friends.

In 1991, observers implicitly perceived Ukraine as a "*suspended Bloodland*," as it gained state independence peacefully without bloodshed, which contrasted noticeably both with its own history and with the contemporaneous situation in some other

former Soviet republics in the 1990s (such as Azerbaijan and Moldova). Therefore, the independence felt a bit "unreal," "undeserved," or artificial, because it did not represent a radical break with the Soviet past: many ruling elites, as well as social patterns, remained the same; the only observable changes were the erasure of Soviet markers and slogans. This visible continuity with the USSR, not fully disrupted by the brisk splash of nationalism in the early 1990s, underscored the suspicion that the actual struggle for independence was still ahead. This all bubbled to the surface in 2013 during the Maidan events, which were widely reckoned as an attempt to break with the Soviet legacy and to take an alternative, European, path.

In contrast to a "Borderland," the "Bloodland" model reveals the perception of Ukraine as a location of important historical events with potentially broader reverberations. Yet, there are limits to the use of "Bloodland" because it connotes *a scene for external actors*, and a country deprived of its own historical and geopolitical subjectivity. Further, the scale of human losses gives the "Bloodland" model less appeal than that of "Borderland."

Ukraine as a Neverland: Can a Child's Utopia Offer an Alternative?

After detailing the applications and limits of these two "land" analogies above, I propose a third possible model, inspired by the children's book writer J. M. Barrie. Barrie coined the word "Neverland" in the series of novels about Peter Pan, "the boy who wouldn't grow up" (Barrie, 1999). Neverland was designed as an imaginary island, a place to escape from the "Mainland," an unsatisfactory "real world" of grown-ups. The etymology of the word can be traced to British theorist Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516/1967); yet, there is a crucial difference between the plots of these two works. For More, Utopia was also an island, yet it served as an *example* of alternative social arrangements for an outside observer. In Barrie's stories, however, the island is an *asylum*, a place to go when you do not feel comfortable where you are, and moreover, the place where you are able to establish your own rules and follow your desires. Besides, Sir More's conception suggests a static description, and the wordplay of "utopia" (no-place) and "eutopia" (good place) is important here. The island that Thomas More depicts is always-already "a place of felicity" by default, whereas the world of Peter Pan is the world of *struggle for one's dreams and priorities.*

I would like to invoke Barrie's neologism as a metaphor for the Ukrainian Euromaidan, a mass uprising during 2013 and 2014, to interpret it from a new angle. The initial episode was a popular outpouring into the streets on November 21, 2013, to express disapproval of the government's announcement that they would suspend the signing of Ukraine's Association Agreement with the European Union. Protesters viewed this suspension as jeopardizing Ukraine's future development and prosperity. They perceived the problem as "development versus stagnation" rather than "the EU

versus the Customs Union." Whereas the pro-Russian rhetoric usually depicted the EU and the Russia-led Eurasian Customs Union (then consisting of the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, and Belarus) as comparable integration projects, each of which had its advantages and disadvantages for Ukraine, pro-Ukrainian discourse disclosed the Eurasian Customs Union as an incarnation of the Russian Empire with no room for Ukraine's subjectivity.

Leading up to this moment, across the first decade of the 2000s, Ukrainian politics resembled a swing, alternating between one camp that strove to modernize and integrate with the West, and another that remained within a post-Soviet inertia. The former camp was primarily composed of the creative class, students, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs who worked globally or were eager to do so. The latter camp included beneficiaries of post-Soviet nepotism and an electorate vulnerable to media propaganda that preferred paternal guidance over democratic representation and civic activism. Throughout the post-Soviet period to date, Ukrainian politicians had attempted to please the public through various slogans and ideological masks, while actually pursuing personal enrichment and "career opportunities." This configuration of so-called "façade democracy" disabled any legal leverage; no viable "counter-democracy" (Rosanvallon, 2008) had yet existed.

The 2004 Orange Revolution, initially celebrated as victorious, lost its luster as its promised reforms evaporated. Following the revanchist comeback of Viktor Yanukovych in the 2010 presidential election, most of his non-supporters continued to hope that enough reformers remained within the government to fend off any drastic setbacks for Ukraine. By the end of 2013, however, those hopes had vanished, as the economic and political situation had worsened dramatically, exposing the system as a kleptocracy. Faced with a power vacuum in their country, many Ukrainians childishly relied upon Europe and their perception of the "civilized world" to confront Yanukovych's government out of support for the hopes and aspirations of the Ukrainian people. Therefore, when Prime Minister Mykola Azarov's government announced that it would not sign the Association Agreement, many people lost hope and resorted to more dire measures.

Beginning on November 21, the early protest gatherings in Maidan Square were sparse, composed primarily of university students, and party and civil society activists. Publicly, the authorities appeared to ignore the movement, but behind the scenes, they attempted to suppress it, by pressuring university presidents (rectors) through informal bureaucratic channels. One week later, President Yanukovych was in Vilnius, Lithuania, to sign the Agreement with the EU; he backed down, despite the protests at home, and the uprising intensified dramatically. By that time, an improvised camp of predominantly young protesters had established itself on the central square in Kyiv. Early in the morning, at 5:00 a.m., on November 30, riot police aggressively broke up the camp and brutally beat its denizens. For a peaceful Ukraine that had regained its sovereignty bloodlessly, these actions were surreal, as they were unprecedented, illegitimate, and intolerable. The following day, a massive outpouring of protestors across social status and cultural backgrounds, from the city and surrounding regions, took to the streets of Kyiv to resist this brutality, with estimates ranging from several hundred thousand to one million. These resisters named it

the Revolution of Dignity, a moniker that observers beyond Ukraine's borders rarely used. Suddenly, the cause was not limited to the retreat from the EU Agreement, but one that called for human rights and European values more broadly. Ukrainian people declared the prevalence of human dignity over safety and of common good over personal acquisitiveness. The Ukrainian modus of communitarianism appeared as a proto-ideology of the movement: a popular slogan "*I'm a drop in the ocean that will change the country*" framed subsequent network activities.

Less commonly known is that between the two Maidans—the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity—were a number of other "Maidans" in Ukraine, including the Vradiivka revolt against the impunity of police criminals, or the Tax Maidan against new tax policies. Yet, none of these scaled up to a nationwide claim, as they revolved around particular issues (like the Occupy Wall Street movement had). In contrast to these failed attempts, the 2014 Euromaidan movement was able to unite the majority of the country with the simple slogan "We're fed up! We can't stand it any longer!"[6] Against the backdrop of corrupt authorities, severe human rights violations, an invalid judicial system, a significantly declining quality of life, and future prospects, a "general strike" became an *ultimate measure of direct democracy*, the only constitutionally sanctioned possibility for Ukrainian people *to reimagine the existing social order*. By this time, Ukrainian governing authorities had lost legitimacy. When Yanukovych fled to Russia in February 2014, Russian media designated him "the legitimate President of Ukraine." This was a Freudian slip: he was a legally elected—not necessarily legitimate—president. His legitimacy was precisely what the Maidan movement questioned.

Yanukovych's flight, however, was preceded with a several-month confrontation between the authorities and the protesters. What came to be known as the "Maidan" was not only an action (uprising) but it was also a *topos*, a special emplacement on the geographical—and the symbolic—map of Ukraine. An improvised camp in the city center of Kyiv eventually turned into a fortress cordoned with barricades, but more importantly, it grew into a quasi-society, or a "*parallel polis*" (Benda, 1991). Various functional units emerged as parts of this "society": Self-Defence (Samooborona) for safety/internal affairs, Euromaidan SOS for fundraising/legal support, the Council of the Maidan for diplomacy, InfoResist for information policies, AutoMaidan for external actions/communication, and special units for medical care, provision/food supplies, and even for educational/cultural needs (libraries, the Open University of Maidan). Such a differentiated structure went far beyond the needs of a protesters' camp. Not all the quasi-institutions were physically located on the Maidan, but they were parts of the symbolic Maidan as a project of another Ukraine.

This was in a way a Peter Pan-like safe haven, a runaway from the discrepancies of the "external" world full of injustice. But on the other hand, rather than trying to hide and isolate themselves, the Maidanians were driven with the desire to expand this new mode of social relations over the rest of the territory. To capture both sides of the process, I introduce here Michel Foucault's notion of "*heterotopia.*" As Foucault explains, in almost every culture, there are "places that are written into

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[6]More details of the revolutionary slogans can be found in Trach (2015).

the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of *counter-emplacements*, a sort of effectively realized utopias" (Foucault, 2008, p. 17), and though these places are not imaginary but real, they exist as if they are "outside all places" by virtue of being "simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault, 2008, p. 17). Foucault calls such special places "heterotopias," resembling *mirrors* that capture a society's essence and thus enable it to reconstitute itself grounded in the reflection.

Euromaidan carved out a space outside of the existing order: old rules and relations did not apply, and alternative ones appeared. It was an exemplary "*heterotopia*," or a social alternative to the existing order, yet it was a radical form of heterotopia, a substitution not only for the city design or a particular framework of social relations but for the social order more generally. While initially localized in one small spot, it stood as an inclusive project, open for everyone who shared its visions, values, and attitudes. In a sense, Maidan was even more "heterotopian" than other constructions, as it was not functionally inscribed into the existing order, and never became a part of the system, albeit it shared space and people with that system. Foucault suggests that heterotopias expose an external gaze at the society "in which they reside through the way in which they incorporate and stage the very *contradictions* that this society produces but is unable to resolve" (Foucault, 2008, p. 25). From this perspective, the Maidan was also aimed at revealing existing contradictions and proposing resolutions by rearranging the order itself. Activists were questioning the existing order from within *as if* from the outside.

Given that Foucault initially was addressing architects, the notion primarily stressed cultural phenomena and architectural artifacts, something functionally particular and socially specific (like airports, retirement houses, carnivals). However, Foucault's epigones applied the notion to the political domain to revise the established distinction between public and private spaces. Starting from the point that the *polis,* which is "the ideal of the city-state – tries to realize the good life via equilibrium between *oikos* (private sphere, household, and hence, economy) and *agora* (public sphere, the place of politics)" (2008, p. 4), Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter proceed with the claim that today's crisis of politics is caused by the economization of public life that erodes the autonomy of the political. And in this setting, called by the authors the "postcivil society," the heterotopia "resurfaces as a strategy to reclaim places of otherness on the inside of an economized 'public' life" (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008, p. 4). I believe this observation links (pre)civil society of the Maidan and the postcivil society of the West in crisis, and it reveals the value of the Maidan experience for contemporary democratic theory and practice.

The third—Neverland—model completes the three-tier framework for contemporary Ukraine. It is probably the most optimistic and underrepresented pattern, which is more like a guiding idea than a realistic plan. However, it potentially opens up futurity (future that is not given, not a replication of the preceding models) for Ukraine and—probably—for the European project at large. And it is a remaining challenge to transform a "heterotopia" (Foucault, 2008) into a "real utopia" (Wright, 2010), to turn a mirror reflection, and a demonstrative installation, into a viable society, based on the same grounds and principles.

Conclusion

There is always a gap between the experience of "presence" (Gumbrecht, 2004) and its representations; the scale of events would vary crucially for a participant and an external observer. This chapter aimed to link these perspectives, to stress the peculiarity and importance of Ukraine's contemporary position, and by the same token, to inscribe it into a broader historical and global picture. Research has shown that Ukrainians themselves tend to speak of their country separately from other geopolitical units (for instance, Osin, 2012), thus stressing its uniqueness (articulated by the popular moniker, "the center of Europe"). At the same time, outside observers (especially those from the farthest distance) usually view the country through a gaze that classifies Ukraine as "part of Russia," a former USSR republic, or even part of "Western Eurasia" (the latter of which the Ukrainian public totally rejects). This discrepancy between the external and internal characterizations is rooted in distinct intentions: whereas the Ukrainians construct Ukraine as a symbolic entity by articulating *desired* basic principles and orientations (mostly European, which they equate with "civilized"), Western observers cold-bloodedly base their gaze on the *current* state of events, placing Ukraine closer to the Eurasian orbit than do its own citizens.

This situation appears to be a case when both parties are right and mistaken at the same time. The country's patriots in the post-Maidanian era should focus more on the algorithm of real changes instead of popular slogans; here, essential economic and political shifts offer the best measure. At the same time, the international community should not neglect new tendencies and impulses from the region, not only regarding emanating from Russia, but from Ukraine as well. Maidan, initially a local event focused on long-awaited modernization and democratization, first turned into a regional issue that revived the rhetoric of "zone of interests," and eventually, through the chain of its aftereffects in the Crimea and Donbas, engaged the existing global order. Yet, this co-existence of dual, and dueling, perspectives might contain a way out of the crisis. Russia was using warfare in Eastern Ukraine as a vehicle to refute not only the Maidanian project but the set of values that it purported to embrace: human dignity, freedom, and accountability of authorities, inherent in Western civilization.

Contemporary Europe is being torn from within with multiple crises: from the South, as asylum seekers escape civil war; from attempts to build internal walls and demolish the Schengen area; between "old" and "new" Europe as defined by relations with the United States (Krastev & McPherson, 2007); between successful and unprofitable economies due to attitudes toward IMF policies, exemplified by Greece; among other internal strains. Against this backdrop, compassion fatigue over Ukraine seems natural and justifiable, but the price could be too high. The "Russia – Ukraine case" is not just a matter of the boundary of Europe sliding back and forth but the issue of Europe's integrity—and what binds it together. And Ukraine must establish itself as a new Europe *and* a better Russia, thus investing its borderland position in the best possible way, turning its hybridity into an advantage. By the same token, it might move the boundary further to the East and change the country's status

into a regional leader or at least an equal counterpart. And there are some objectives and precedents for such bold prospects. Yet, by doing so, Ukraine has to overcome its Eurasian habits and practices, brought in during its long history as a part of the Russian and Soviet empires. And this challenge is not for Ukraine only: new borders, entities, and geopolitical configurations are at stake.

Within the Soviet project, Ukraine was designed as a *periphery* barely distinguished from Russia, a sort of "underdeveloped Russia." Unlike the Central Asian, Caucasian, or Baltic republics, Ukraine and Belarus were perceived as parts of the Soviet core, being juxtaposed to Great Russia as Little Russia (Malorossiya) and White Russia (Byelorussia), respectively. This implied the absence of an authentic high culture: ethnic specificity was accepted only at the level of rural traditional culture (traditional clothes, ethnic songs, and the like), whereas the high/modern/urban culture could be only Russian (all alternative attempts had been extinguished harshly by the Soviet authorities). This presupposed a shared political identity with the polity centered in Moscow. Geopolitically, all the contacts, even with the neighboring countries, were to be mediated by Moscow.

After 1991, when Ukraine gained independence, the challenge of inventing the polity and the nation anew became urgent and arduous. What came as an alternative, albeit imposed from the outside, was the *Borderland* framework that stressed the hybridity of Ukraine's culture and the ambiguity of its geopolitical position. This classifies Ukraine as a double periphery, a limitrophe of both Europe and Russia. From that perspective, the country fits poorly into one particular cultural and political order (which hampers its successful integration), yet it is functional as a bridge or a buffer zone, depending on the geopolitical setting. This niche is often presented as natural and unavoidable for Ukraine, due to its geographical location. However, symbolic geography is inflective. For instance, Poland—for centuries perceived as a Borderland between Germany/West and Russia/East—managed to escape this position by becoming a poster child of the EU Enlargement.[7] The Borderland framework is nothing new for Ukraine. Already in the nineteenth century, Panteleimon Kulish, one of the prominent Ukrainian writers, insightfully mentioned that Ukrainians "lie with their head to Europe and their feet to Asia, being quite able to rise from the primordial darkness to various sophistications of the Enlightenment" (Kulish, 1930). This means that the Borderland model is neither desirable nor sustainable in a long run: sooner or later the country swings to one of the poles.

Still, the Borderland model implies some balance, when different patterns and identities contribute to the general homeostasis. However, when the order is questioned, whether by external or internal actors, a Borderland might turn into a Bloodland, or a no-order land. When existing institutions are suspended, and there is no monopoly on power, a Bloodland territory is swirled into a bloody chaos causing human losses. The Borderland and the Bloodland models are two sides of the same coin, while the latter presents a much more negative (and impetuous) scenario. Yet both deny the existence of a polity and its subjectivity, and they thrust the land to some center of gravity, pushing it to recognize itself as a subordinate periphery.

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[7] Since 2015, Poland has shifted again, yet it does not change the essence of my argument here.

However, there is another way out of the Borderland–Bloodland limbo, which is to make a breakthrough into a Neverland, a realized utopia where differences become an advantage, a source of growth and development. This challenge of moving into an unknown yet desirable future that is neither the continuation of the present nor the recurrence of the past is on the agenda everywhere. Hence, the realization of this model in Ukraine is potentially inspiring for the region at large. As for now, this path is barely realistic and even less so recently. Yet, in a certain sense, there is no other way to go. Unlike Central European states, Ukraine lacks an appealing past to which it could gravitate. Unlike other post-Soviet countries, it has a strong civil society not willing to accept the paternalist culture of the Russian type. Finally, the Bloodlandian model, exposed on the Donbas, still stands as a real danger for the whole country. It looks like there is no feasible way back to normalcy as we knew it (which was Borderland-like and fragile). The only choice is between a dystopia and a utopia. So perhaps Peter Pan must grow up and make the only possible selection, which is to attend to his own future.

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