

(De-)Gendering Ukraine: Understanding social change in a post-Soviet society

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Gender equality as both a normative concept and a policy guideline is regarded as a central aspect of the change in values that is taking place, among other things, in the processes of Europeanization and democratization. The increase of debates on gender equality, changing role attributions, legal and social respect, and equality for LGBT people usually corresponds to a broader decrease in so-called ›traditional‹ (patriarchal) understandings of gender roles and identities, but also of ›traditional‹ hierarchies, power structures, and political exclusion. Therefore, more egalitarian gender perceptions and gender debates can be seen as an indicator for social and political transformation processes towards more consultative structures of society and increasing political inclusivity. Consequently, conflicts and disputes on the subject of gender equality and inclusivity are always a sign of increasing processes of negotiation and modernization in societies. In Ukraine, such processes have been observed for many years in parallel with democratization and social participation.

Against this background, it is more than surprising that the situation with gender equality and non-discrimination in Ukraine and the corresponding research on it is not really noticed in Germany and Western Europe. There is neither enough institutional cooperation nor are there any known major links to studies on Europeanization, democratization, or postcolonialism. In fact, gender discourses and policies in Ukraine relate very obviously to all three of the above-mentioned research strands, which is why dealing with gender issues in Ukraine can also help to reveal progress as well as obstacles in all three corresponding social processes.

However, understanding Ukraine and the fierce resistance of the Ukrainian society against the russian¹ war can be based on analytically deploying the gender perspective. Ukraine's self-defense increasingly goes hand in hand with more progressive legislation and societal understandings of gender arrangements as an expression of the integration of European-humanist value systems into Ukrainian self-image. In principle, it can be assumed that democracy and gender equality form a mutually reinforcing relationship and that higher levels of gender equality and public support for it correlate with

1 All expressions related to the root of the word *russia* are intentionally lowercase.

the quality of democracy and political as well as social inclusivity. Therefore, in this article, I will outline the significance of gender issues in studying Eastern European and, in particular, Ukrainian affairs by presenting the current state of research on gender in three realms that are crucially related to Ukraine's European integration, independence, and democratization. I will refer to gender issues in the recent Ukrainian legislation, in the sensitive field of military and armed forces, and finally, in relation to human rights and LGBT issues. All three realms have their own relevance for democracy and Europeanization. Still, combined with the question of gender arrangements and gender equality, they provide a deeper insight into social and political transformation dynamics in Ukrainian society – even in times of a full-scale war.

Gender equality in the legal system of Ukraine

Gender equality and nondiscrimination is among the priority issues in establishing true democracy. European Union proclaims equal treatment legislation and gender mainstreaming as important achievements (European Commission 2020). When it comes to EU integration, a popular opinion is that it will take many years for Ukraine to fulfill the legal requirements. At the same time, the process of equal rights and opportunities implementation in Ukraine for the last decades shows that these arrangements can be made very quickly if political actors realize the relevance of it for transformation.

Since independence, Ukraine has achieved visible progress in establishing gender equality in the different spheres of Ukrainian society (Channell-Justice et al. 2021; Martsenyuk 2016a). At the national level, gender equality is guaranteed, first of all, by the Constitution of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 1996) and the Law of Ukraine »On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men« (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2005).

At the international level, Ukraine ratified major international documents on providing equal rights and opportunities for men and women: the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (UNSC 2000). Ukraine also adopted the second National Action Plan (NAP) to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 for 2021 to 2025. In 2020, Ukraine formally became a full member of the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality (President of Ukraine, 2020), a global coalition championed by

the French government to achieve the full empowerment of girls and women around the world. Having signed multiple international agreements, Ukraine has recognized the importance of gender equality.

Moreover, on June 23, 2022, the European Council granted Ukraine the status of a candidate for accession to the European Union. Gender equality and respect for diversity are among the European Union's founding values. Therefore, it is important for Ukrainian society to continue promoting them through legislation, monitoring, policy guidance, awareness-raising activities, and support for grass-root projects and NGOs.

In Ukraine, despite the ongoing war, gender equality policies are being implemented, especially when it comes to important international documents. A recent big success was the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) after the full-scale invasion in July 2022 (Council of Europe, 2022). Now, the local (Ukrainian) legislation concerning gender and diversity (among them LGBTQI issues) are in the process of the improvement.

Public opinion on gender equality in the armed forces of Ukraine

Even though the political will to implement gender equality on the institutional level is crucial, the attitude of society towards diversity and dignity is also noteworthy. Public opinion regarding the implementation of gender equality (especially in traditionally ›male‹ spheres such as the armed forces and military) and rights for LGBT people could serve as a ›litmus test‹ of democratic values. By contrast, russian conceptions of ›russkii mir‹ include discourses against gender equality and LGBT rights. This war is also framed, experienced, and fought as a ›civilizational choice‹ between ›Western‹ values of democracy, equal rights, and freedom of speech and the idea of so-called ›traditional values‹ that the russian government has been promoting, grounded in ›patriotism, spirituality, rootedness in history, respect for authority, and adherence to heteronormative and patriarchal ideals of family and gender‹ (Edenborg 2022).

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion and Ukraine's considerable need to defend its integrity, the question of gender equality in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and public opinion about it has become even more important. The support of women's integration in the military could mean that

society (especially after nine years of war in Ukraine) got used to the fact that Ukrainian women who want to defend their country have the right and possibility to do it.

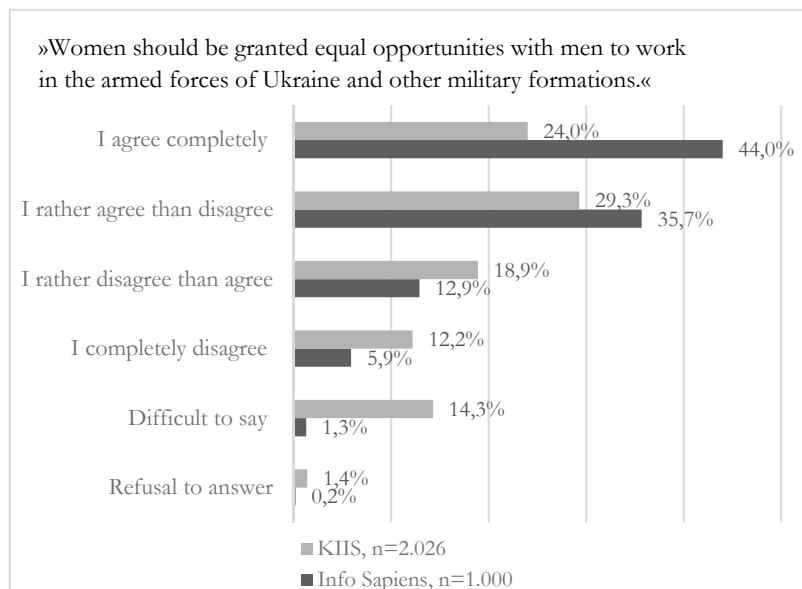
The topic of women's access to the armed forces has gained prominence on the current political agenda since the 2014 war in Donbas. The sociological research titled »Invisible Battalion: Women's participation in ATO military operations« was conducted during the summer and autumn of 2015. The research found that the Armed Forces of Ukraine, like the general job market, exhibit vertical and horizontal gender segregation. Two subsequent studies focused on the status of female veterans (2018–2019), and the issue of sexual harassment in the military (2021). Thus, the *Invisible Battalion* has evolved into a comprehensive advocacy campaign that investigates and documents women's participation in the war.

The first survey was conducted by *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology* (KIIS) from September 8 to 23, 2018, for our research project titled »Invisible Battalion 2.0: women veterans returning to peaceful life«. The survey was conducted in 109 localities across all oblasts of Ukraine, excluding the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, as well as the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. A total of 2,026 questionnaires were collected during the field stage, including 915 from men and 1,111 from women.

The second poll was conducted by the research agency *Info Sapiens* from April 10 to 14, 2022. The data was collected through telephone interviews (CATI). The sample consisted of 1,000 respondents, including 454 men and 546 women.

In general, the results of the representative public opinion surveys conducted in 2018 and 2022 indicate that Ukrainian society supports the idea of equal rights and opportunities in the armed forces of Ukraine. After Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukrainians show even greater support for gender equality in the military sphere compared to a few years ago (see figure 1). In particular, younger people, students, mainly Ukrainian-speaking people, and respondents from Central and Western Ukraine showed strong support for equal opportunities in the 2022 poll.

Figure 1: Opinions on gender equality in the Armed Forces of Ukraine



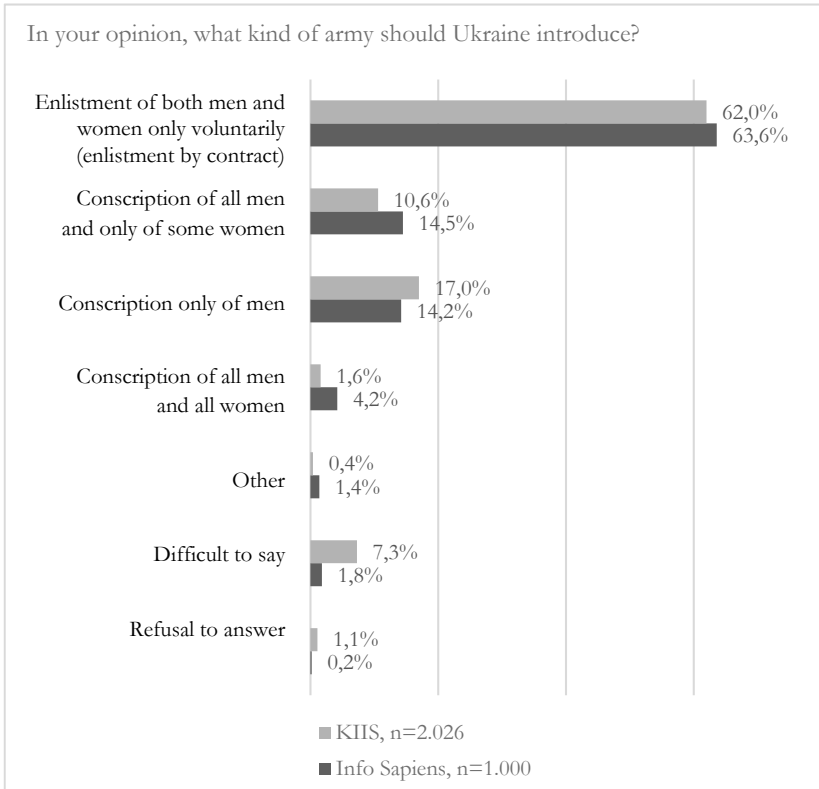
Source: *Invisible Battalion 5.0* (2023).

The questions on equal opportunities can be seen as reflecting a society that becomes more aware of the relevance of its values and independence in a situation of increasing threat. The Euromaidan protests in 2013 and 2014 and the war in Donbas in 2014 inspired women in Ukraine to actively fight for their rights, particularly in the military sphere (Martsenyuk, Troian 2018). Women became more visible in the armed forces of Ukraine and in the frontline of Russia's war against Ukraine (Martsenyuk, Grytsenko, Kvit 2016). The percentage of women in the armed forces of Ukraine has increased to 22% in 2022. Some women managed to obtain the military status of general (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023).

Furthermore, according to the 9th CEDAW periodic report submitted by Ukraine in 2021, Ukraine's security and defense sector has undergone significant systemic changes in terms of gender equality in the armed forces. Inter alia, granting women access to military occupations (including combat positions), recognition of female veterans, promotion of gender equality in military legislation, enhanced protection of women from gender-based violence, increased opportunities for girls and women to receive military education at all levels are recent political results that correspond to the public opinion.

In another question of both polls, the preferred structure of the armed forces does also reflect the relevance the Ukrainian society attributes to equal opportunities. The question pertains to the type of army that Ukraine should adopt and shows a strong support for voluntary enlistment of both men and women (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Structure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine



Source: *Invisible Battalion 5.0* (2023).

Currently in Ukraine, according to Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine »On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men«, compulsory military service for men is not considered sex-based discrimination (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2005). Simultaneously, in 2018, the law on equal rights for women and men while serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine

and other military formations was enacted, granting equal opportunities for women and men to contract for military service.

From polls like these, we may conclude that Ukrainian society has not only become accustomed to the presence and positive image of military women. Furthermore, russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the need to mobilize more individuals for armed resistance have encouraged society to perceive women as (potential) soldiers. As Ukrainian women have always been active participants in the fight for Ukrainian independence and recognition this tradition of resistance continues even today. According to an all-Ukrainian nationally representative poll conducted by *Info Sapiens* in February 2023, 61% of women expressed their readiness to personally participate in the armed resistance to end the russian occupation of Ukraine (Volosevych 2023: 8).

Russia, in contrast, develops an absolutely different perception of gender relations. As Jennifer G. Mathers, a scholar of russian politics and gender issues, notices:

»Putin's idea of a strong state requires an alpha male leader because the state itself is highly gendered. The most important, most powerful and most generously funded institutions of the state are those that are most closely associated with masculinity and the same sort of tough and ruthless behavior that Putin celebrates – most notably the armed forces and the other security services.« (Mathers 2023)

Consequently, Ukraine's desire to finally get out of the »russian world's« reach does correspond to a very different image of armed forces that includes a strong aspect of gender equality.

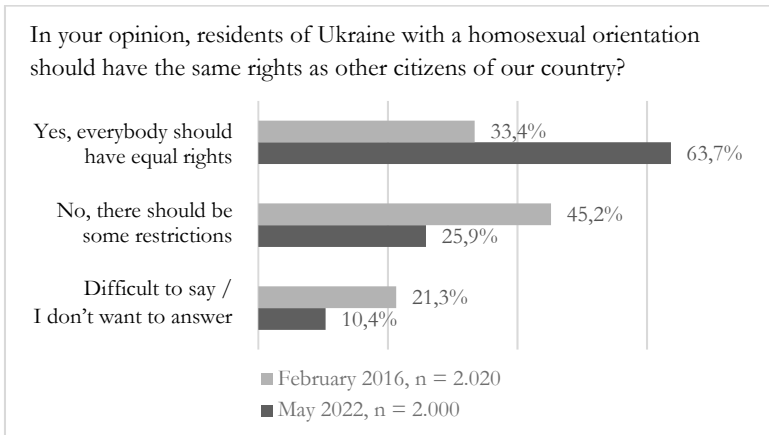
Public opinion on human rights for LGBT people in Ukraine

Respect of diversity, particularly based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), is considered a core value of the European community. Even though Ukraine was the first Post-Soviet country to decriminalize homosexuality in December 1991, homophobia remained a challenge for Ukrainian society (Martsenyuk 2016b). LGBT individuals actively participated in the Euromaidan protests of 2013 and 2014 and the Donbas war since 2014. In 2018, the Union of LGBT Military, Veterans and Volunteers was established by Viktor Pylypenko, an openly gay veteran of the Donbas Volunteer Battalion. The organization's statement asserts that they are »currently gaining strength, taking an active part not only in defending Ukraine from the

russian invasion on the frontline, but also defending democracy and equality for all citizens of Ukraine.«² Since the 1990s, LGBT organizations in Ukraine have advocated for their rights and visibility. Therefore, it is useful to examine the public opinion of Ukrainian society on this particular topic.

For many years, the LGBT Center *Nash Svit* (Our World), in cooperation with sociological agencies, has been monitoring public opinion in Ukrainian society regarding LGBT people. As a comparison of polls from 2016 and 2022 show (see figure 3), »Ukrainians have demonstrated a global trend toward increasing acceptance of their LGBT fellow citizens.« (Nash Svit 2022)

Figure 3: Right situation for LGBT



Source: *Nash Svit* (2022).

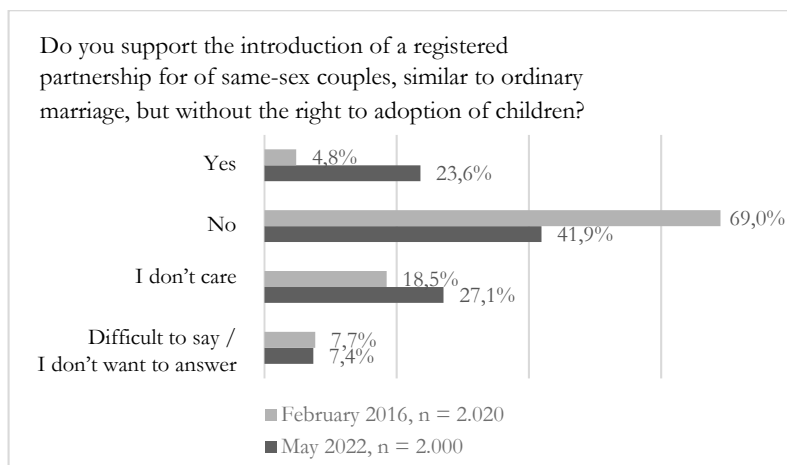
While in 2016 nearly half of Ukrainians (45%) believed that certain restrictions should be placed on the rights of individuals with homosexual orientation and only 33% of Ukrainians were in favour of equal rights the 2022 results demonstrated a visible shift towards a more gay-friendly attitude. The percentage of respondents supporting the idea that residents of Ukraine with a homosexual orientation should have the same rights as other citizens of our country increased to 64% compared to 6 years ago. Regarding the participation of LGBT people in the defense of Ukraine from russian aggression, 66% of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards it.

² <https://lgbtmilitary.org.ua/eng>. Last accessed on August 25, 2023.

The question regarding support for the introduction of registered partnerships for same-sex couples is of great importance to the LGBT community of Ukraine. As shown in Figure 4, in 2016, only 5% of Ukrainians supported the introduction of registered partnerships for same-sex couples.

In May 2022, the situation with public opinion improved when the percentage of supporters for the introduction of registered partnerships for same-sex couples increased fivefold to around 24%.

Figure 4: Opinion towards same-sex marriage in Ukraine



Source: Nash Svit (2022).

Conclusion

In the recent ›civilizational battle‹ between ›russky mix‹ that promotes patriarchal gender norms and the criminalization of ›gay propaganda‹ and European values that support diversity and equal rights, the latter is prevailing. There is good reason to hope that the recent successes in implementing policies of equal rights and opportunities in Ukraine will continue and prove beneficial for the ongoing Eurointegration process. Indeed, the emphasis on democratic values and a ›European‹ present and future for Ukraine appears to have contributed to more favorable and accepting attitudes towards LGBT communities and increased respect for diversity in general.

»While Russia's emphasis on the masculine character of its armed forces and the marked absence of women soldiers are important demonstrations of Moscow's commitment to a traditional social order, the presence of growing numbers of women in Ukraine's military demonstrates Kyiv's commitment to a very different type of state and society.« (Mathers 2023)

Thus, it is important to change the perception of studying Ukrainian and Russian societies under the common post-Soviet umbrella. As the data the last few years demonstrate, these societies are taking different ways. Moreover, the empirical data collected in Ukraine in recent years, particularly on gender equality and diversity, provides an opportunity to rethink the Western concepts of gender and nation building as well as gender and war. For Ukrainian women and men, their national identity is important, as they have been fighting for their independence for centuries. At the same time, people with strong national identity are supporting ideas of gender equality and rights for LGBT people.

Women's emancipation, the emergence of the group of LGBT soldiers and veterans, and EU integration processes that happened in Ukraine for last years, created spaces and opportunities for alternative femininities and masculinities that should be studied and discussed in the Sociology of Gender.

In Western sociological theories on gender, nationalism and war, those issues are difficult to reconcile. However, the case of Ukraine in the last nine years of war could contribute to the European debates on democratisation and the implementation of gender equality, which does not always have to be incremental or step-by-step. Definitely, more time is needed to develop more theories that better explain the sociological data collected during times of war.

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Freischwebende Fiktionen und willkürliche Feinde in Putins Russland

Anhaltspunkte für eine politische Soziologie des modernen Totalitarismus

Evelyn Moser

Einleitung

Am 2. Mai 2023 verabschiedete die *Verkhovna Rada*, das ukrainische Parlament, die Resolution »Über die Verwendung der Ideologie des Raschismus durch das politische Regime der Russischen Föderation und die Verurteilung der Prinzipien und Praktiken des Raschismus als totalitär und menschenfeindlich«. Die russische Invasion, so heißt es in der Erklärung, habe

»der Welt das wahre Wesen des politischen Regimes von Wladimir Putin als eine neo-imperiale, totalitäre Diktatur vor Augen geführt, die die schlimmsten Praktiken der Vergangenheit nachahmt und die Ideen des Faschismus und des Nationalsozialismus in einer modernen Version des russischen Faschismus (Raschismus) verkörpert.«¹

An die Resolution knüpft sich die Aufforderung an die internationale Gemeinschaft, die russische Staats- und Militärführung für jene Verbrechen zur Rechenschaft zu ziehen, die im Namen des Raschismus gegen die Ukraine und ihre Bevölkerung begangen wurden.

Damit erhält der Neologismus *Raschismus*, dessen Verwendung seit Beginn des russischen Angriffs auf die Ukraine an Popularität gewonnen hat, einen quasi-formalen Status. Betont wird der völkerrechtliche Imperativ, der

¹ <https://www.svoboda.org/a/verhovnaya-rada-obyavila-rashizm-gosudarstvennoy-ideologye-rossii/32389491.html>. Letzter Aufruf am 15. Mai 2023, Übersetzung E.M.