

So, and then I will introduce our guest Emily Channel-Justice. Thank you very much that you came today. Emily Channel-Justice is the director of the Temerty Contemporary Ukraine Program at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University. She's a social, cultural anthropologist, who has been doing research in Ukraine since 2012. This research has focused on social movements and especially on the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests. Her current research focuses on the EuroMaidan protests in Donetsk through the lens of participants, who were forcibly displaced after the revolutionary events 2014. Her book, which we have left today on the table is called "Without the state. Self-organization and political activism", 2022. It was published at University of Toronto Press, won the American Association of Ukrainian Studies book prize. She's also the editor of "Decolonizing queer experience : LGBTQ+ narratives from Eastern Europe and Eurasia", 2020, Lexington books. She was visiting Assistant professor at the Alexanteri Institute, University of Helsinki in spring 2024 and she was a scholar in a residence at the Institute for documentation and exchange, Lviv, Ukraine in October 2025. She received her PhD from the Graduate Center of City University of New York in September 2016. So, we are very blessed to have you today. We are very excited to hear you and I give you a word. After the lecture we'll have QA session. I will moderate the questions from the room and then Vanja will moderate questions from Zoom. So, thank you very much and enjoy.

Thank you, Tanya, so much. Tanja, thank you so much for the invitation to speak here. Thank you so much everybody for coming. I think for some of you this will be fairly familiar experience, evidence. So, hopefully I can shed a little bit of light specifically on how I tend to present this research in the US in particular. I usually speak with American audiences as a kind of combination of academic and advocate for Ukraine. So, I'm really interested to talk to you all and hear a little bit more about what type of

questions you might have, but also from your own perspective, how you're engaging with what's going on in Ukraine right now.

I started doing research in Ukraine in 2012. I first visited it in 2004, when I was still in high school. I did a high school exchange program. And I happened to meet people at that time in Kyiv, who ended up being really essential in my long-term research. So, I spent a lot of time kind of exploring, what's happening in Ukraine from a political perspective due to kind of how I started approaching Ukraine. So, when I was doing my PhD, I started in 2009. I'm originally from the US state of West Virginia, which is famous for its coal mining economy, lots of far-right politics, but also really interesting trends in environmentalism and labor movements, labor history. For those of you who don't know, US PhDs take much longer than European ones. And so there's a little bit of room for maneuvering. And for a number of reasons... so, I originally wanted to do research in West Virginia about coal mining and environmental activism. But kind of in the middle of my PhD time, I went back to Ukraine for the first time after 2004, found my way back to the people, who I had met in 2004, and it turned out that they had become really interesting, student activists. And so, I decided to sort of shift my research to that area.

So, that's how I got connected with the organization Priama Dija, a student direct action, which is a leftist independent student union that existed in Ukraine throughout the 2000s and was very active in the 2010s, when I was beginning this research. So, they've been active in mostly higher education kind of campaigns, to change the laws around higher education in the 2000s and 2010s. There were a lot of successes, some not so successful campaigns that different groups of activists were involved in. This was a group that was active around Ukraine. But by the time I ended up in Ukraine in 2013 for my long-term research, it was mostly most of the activists were concentrated in Kyiv. So, that's where I spent the majority of my time.

So, originally I was interested in understanding the kind of broader landscape of student activism and higher education activism in Ukraine. And I did a lot of preliminary research about that. And originally, so, I started my research, like I said, seriously in the summer of 2012. I studied Ukrainian then, and then I attended a student organizing camp in Crimea. And that was a really interesting experience, because about half the participants were from Ukraine and about half were from Russia. And at that time, 2012, this is Yanukovich has been president in Ukraine for a couple of years. Student activists found a lot of commonality with colleagues in Russia, who were also working on fighting against authoritarian... kind of encroaching authoritarianism in the sphere of higher education. And so the kind of collaboration and solidarity was largely Ukraine and Russia. Although the activists that I worked with had also spent a lot of time coming to Western Europe to advocate for Ukrainian leftist political positions there, also in the early 2010 time period.

So I think, you know, I think we probably just... based on the fact that I know several of you here, I, you know, I don't really need to tell most of you that there is a left in Ukraine. But I think this is a really big myth that there's not leftist activism in Ukraine. And it's something that I had to kind of advocate against even when I started this research. When I first started presenting this research in like 2012-2013, you know, people would literally say to me like, "But they're not leftists in Ukraine. These are academics, who have lots of experience in Ukrainian politics. And so, I I think not only is that this question of "What does the left look like in Ukraine". But I also have always gotten the push back from academic circles that if you study the far left, you also have to study the far right, as if there's some sort of equivalence in the academic approach to this. And for which I was going to say always "That's not true". For a minute, I thought about it and then I decided I didn't want to, because I don't want to learn more about the far right. They have too much airtime anyway. So, let's not talk about them anymore.

But I also, you know, just ethically speaking, I found it really problematic to treat the far right with the same legitimacy as people on the far left. I thought, it would be potentially really dangerous to work with people on the far right if I was also working with activists on the far left. So, there were a number of reasons that I decided not to work on the far right at all. I also suspect that I probably would not be able to get access to people on the far right, because, you know, I'm connected with those on the far left, but that's perhaps another question.

But I think the key thing to say here is obviously that there is a left in Ukraine. It has quite a large definition and always had, you know, like many other political movements, there isn't one singular leftist position in Ukraine. There hasn't been since its independence. What I have focused on is very broadly defined non-party-based leftist activism. And I'm mostly in this time tonight going to talk about this: 2013-2014, EuroMaidan protest period, and what comes after that. But the reason I was able to study this type of activism was because it was already robust throughout the 2000s and coming into it. Throughout the research, I talked to people who identified specifically as anarchists or specifically as social democrats, but also people who said, "Well, I'm just left. I just consider myself part of the left." And specifically use that language. There were also groups involved in this type of activism that were described to me by other leftists as Stalinist groups. I didn't end up working with any of these. It's not because I didn't want to. I thought that could be interesting, but it sort of... the research process ended up being a little chaotic, so it's maybe not as systematic as it could have been.

But I think what's key here is that there were a lot of kinds of leftist activism. All of it had, you know, a lot of it kind of came together in different moments and different components. I'm happy to talk more about the research process if that's interesting to people. I don't know, you know, I don't know if that's something you're all interested in, so I'll leave that for Q&A if you want to hear more.

But like I said, I'm going to focus tonight on kind of 2013-2014. That's when I did 10 months of field work. That was the foundation of my dissertation and the foundation of the research that makes up that book. I started out with interviewing Priama Dijia activists, members that I already knew in Kyiv.

In September and October of 2013, before the Maidan protest started, I also had some meetings with official student unions and a couple of different universities and student groups around Kiev to try to get a little bit of a picture of what higher education activism looked like. Not just in that kind of leftist component. But I ended up spending most of my time with leftist groups and by extension also feminist groups, and some LGBTQ activists as well.

So, as we remember, this picture is from September 22nd 2013. So, this is one of the first days of the protest that ended up the big picture of things called Maidan. Or EuroMaidan. I usually just say Maidan, because I don't want to make it sound too much about Europe. We can talk more about that, too. So, this was a really interesting moment. So, I was already working with leftists and student activists, like I said, at the end of November of 2013. And it was a really interesting moment, because I had intended to kind of study the, you know, inner kind of workings and coordination of of this type of activism. But these mass protests started and the people that I spent most of the time with in this moment kind of understood that something big was happening. I went to Maidan with a couple of these activists on this day and we were listening to these speeches. And there was a lot of like national movement, nationalist kind of undertones, and the activists I was with were like "I don't know, you know, maybe this is not really something we want to be involved in". But I I kind of understood that people felt like there was something bigger happening that wasn't just about this kind of claim for Ukraine's participation in the European Union.

You know, initially the protest started because President Yanukovich at the time decides at the last minute not to sign the association agreement with the EU. There's

also, it's funny, one of my favorite moments, you know, we tell that story, right, that Ukraine is supposed to join the EU, and at the last moment Yanukovich decides we're not going to join the EU. I went back to my field notes for...when I was writing this book, and the notes actually say "Yanukovich decided not to let Juliya Timoshenko go get medical treatment in Europe". That was the actual sticking point. Not that it was specifically about the association agreement, but basically that the demand from EU states had been "This political opposition leader must be allowed to travel abroad to receive medical treatment. Yanukovich says no. Then the association agreement is off the table". And I think it's symbolic of the kind of political repression that we're talking about at the time. You know, which in the midst of it maybe didn't necessarily seem like the most important thing, but in retrospect was actually quite significant.

The activists, the leftist activists I was working with weren't really sure about how to participate at this time. Most of them expressed to me that they thought something important was happening, they wanted their voices to be in these protests. Especially at the beginning there was a real possibility to impact things. And so, what I documented was mostly people who were presenting some kind of criticism of the EU as an institution, as a kind of arm of global capitalism. How a criticism of the EU can also be a criticism of authoritarianism in Ukraine, can be a larger criticism about capitalism in general. And so, you know, people decided not to position themselves against the protest, because they were with the EU, but rather let's think critically about the EU, while we're also asking for this as a future. You know, what's the future that prioritizes Ukraine in this scenario.

And I do want to add also, academically I came to this research with this idea, because it was popular in US academia in 2012 and 2013, that we're talking about post-socialism, this is, you know, major state of being in this part of the world. And the leftist activists that I worked with were like, "Emily, this is not how we talk about ourselves. We have to talk about colonialism and imperialism here". This is already in 2012 that people

were bringing this up. And so, I think, it's important for me especially, but when we see this idea of decolonizing, and imperialism, and anti-imperialism be a key component of this war that's happening now, that's not new. That's something that has been an undertone of conversations among the left in particular for a really long time.

And so that's part of why this is so essential that leftists in November of 2013 decided to participate: because they wanted to talk about a Ukraine they want to live in, but they also want to talk about a Europe that they want to live in. So, in my book, I kind of identify this topology of Maidan. That's a little bit of a timeline. In the beginning is this very short first week at the end of November of 2013, which is a very reactionary stage. At this point we see a lot of violence against explicitly leftist, explicitly feminist, explicitly pro-LGBTQ positions. That came in the form of far-right activists who would beat up leftist activists or would, you know, try to destroy their signs and their messaging. There is a large presence of far-right folks on Maidan at this time. This is the moment though, that's really essential for leftist activists to decide, how they want to approach being part of these protests. Do we want to talk about, you know, specifically leftist things with leftist branding and images that people associate with leftist movements? Or do we want to try to kind of renegotiate our position, so that our message comes through maybe not explicitly as a leftist message, but might come through a little bit better. Which, I argue, is what happened.

So, the night of November 30th-December 1st, 2013 is when the riot police beat up students, who have decided to sleep on the square that night. And that's really when we start to see a shift, when violence really starts to happen. More people, who weren't necessarily that enthusiastic about the EU, realize that a line has been crossed, and so, they start to get more involved. That's where I start to see kind of leftist groups figure out a way to intervene with their kind of way of thinking about protests. That isn't, like I said, specifically leftist, but is a criticism of state violence. And then our third stage after January 16th, which is when the so-called dictatorship laws came into being, these anti-

protest laws. Up until the end of February of 2014, was a kind of stage of possibility, where lots of different political possibilities existed for a lot of people, but not necessarily explicitly for leftists.

The first stage of the protest, especially in that very first week, was very reactionary. There was some presence of political parties at this time. I mean, there were certain more politicized and party oriented parts of the protest and then certain kind of more general parts of the protest. But I use this image from the end of November of 2013 to show, you know, activists were already bringing kind of rhetoric about feminism, homophobia, European values into the protest. And as you can see, this one particular image was not welcome at all. Somebody tried to rip this sign and destroy it. They didn't succeed.

But this was a really interesting moment, because what ends up happening is this negotiation specifically around the role of political parties. Are the political parties that are officially in the opposition to Yanukovich regime, do they count really? Are they really the kind of opposition that's going to run these protests? And really what ends up happening is no, they don't end up gaining that space. They try to have that space, but they really don't do the kind of advocacy for people, that people expect. And of course, they still represent the opposition in official political institutions, but actually on the street level of protest they don't really become dominant. Which I always thought was a really interesting thing. And that happened in a lot of places, that also had their equivalent Maidan protests as well.

Then in our next stage we see this shift, like I said, November 30th-December 1st, when violence is used against student protesters, this crosses a line. And we start to see people kind of move away from asking for European accession and moving on to ask for sort of bigger demands. Like the blue sign, the resignation of Yanukovich. And then the other side is a left Maidan, hashtag left Maidan, which was a sort of attempt to make a kind of left platform on social media. At the time that, I don't know, didn't

necessarily really take off, but that doesn't mean it wasn't successful. But this is the moment, where we really, I think, start to understand that political parties aren't a sufficient kind of opposition, they're not giving the kind of criticism that people actually have of what has happened, which is institutionalized political violence.

And this is what I find and found kind of created this space for the idea of self-organization to take hold in a kind of broader way in these protests. And these are all my photos, by the way. So, obviously self-organization is the key, like framework of the of the book that I'm talking about. And in that book I define it in this way: "If something needs to be done and a person has the ability to do it, then that person should simply do it, rather than waiting for anybody. Including people, who are supposed to do the thing, to do it for them". Right? We don't wait for, you know, somebody to come save us. We save ourselves. And this is one of the kind of processes that disconnects political participation from those existing political structures.

So, this trend towards self-organization is one of the reasons that political parties were not able to sustain a real opposition. It's because they didn't have the kind of legitimacy as oppositional political forces. Especially when self-organized groups, who are kind of defining how to solve the problems themselves, they are clearly so much more effective. And what I found is that self-organization opens that space for this type of political participation: to criticize the consolidation of power in the hands of the state. So, in the case of Maidan, these sort of different kinds of self-organized groups have a very explicitly political focus, right? we are organizing, we're in the streets and we're demanding xyz and here's how we're going to get it, and here's how we're going to organize ourselves to achieve all of these different things. And that is specifically as a criticism of the president at the time, or in the case of student organizing, you know, occupation of the ministry of education in order to demand a new minister of education, who is not beholden to the president that doesn't represent us.

So, we have this very direct line between self-organizing and political action. Things are achieved with this type of self-organization. There's success in making these demands and coming through with them. And this type of self-organization obviously, I'm specifically interested in higher education. My colleague Sophia Wilson has done some research specifically in the legal sphere. So, self-organized kind of pro-bono legal work to defend people, who had been arrested on Maidan, advocacy for those people. And this what she calls it "cause lawyering", which is kind of... this use of the law to be a kind of a political component, but this is also a self-organized process.

So, one of the key and, I think, really fascinating things in the scale of the Maidan protest, is that we see people kind of identifying different spheres that need to be addressed through this political activism, and then self-organizing within each of those spheres. "I have the legal background. I'm going to do this advocacy work". You know, "I have a higher education background. Here's how I'm going to be able to organize this or that thing". Or "I have no background. I will just serve food on Maidan, and make sure that everybody gets some". Also useful. And I do want to add, you know, when I talked to leftist activists later about this type of framework, they were specifically referencing kind of leftist political frameworks. Like "from each according to his ability to each according to his need" as a kind of explanation for why self-organization was a leftist idea. It becomes really interesting in the way that it ends up multiplying in ways that are very far from leftist. I think there's a criticism to be had here, where a lot of people... I mean even far-right groups were talking about their activist work as self-organized, as a reference to kind of legitimizing "this is how we work", "this is how this is the kind of good activism, now we're all self-organized". And so, it becomes..the actual terminology is very far removed from a leftist position, but it can be very far removed from really explicit political activism as well. Which is something that I have looked at in the post-Maidan period.

But I think, it's also a really interesting moment where these are protests, that were not leftist protests. They were not leftist from the beginning, they were not welcoming to ideas traditionally associated with leftist positions. But because of the use of language of police violence and because of the organizing around self-organization, leftist activists found ways to enter into the protest and actually turn them into something that they could feel was worth their time being involved in. And I think, that, you know, that makes a really interesting moment, where the protest actually to me, despite the criticisms that we have afterward, which we do, there is this moment of real political plurality. Where lots of people have kind of some semblance of a voice, and some part of the re-organization of the political kind of society afterward.

So, I always tell this story or I like to tell this this story about this banner, because I think, it really illustrates kind of how leftist language becomes..infiltrates the protests themselves. And the reason, I think, this story is so good is because I went to a presentation from somebody else, another anthropologist who'd been working in Ukraine in 2012-2013. She came to Maidan in 2014. She was not working with activists. She just knew people who went. She came with them. And she was giving this presentation and she showed a picture of this banner and she was like, "This is the best thing I saw". Like "Man, we're just against the police state. Like, this is this is exactly the ethos of the protest." And in the Q&A, I was like, "Do you know where that banner came from?" She had no idea. The banner was made by leftist activists, who hung it somewhere. I don't I think I have a picture floating around somewhere of where they originally hung it, but it was, you know, it was like hung from a lamppost. It was then taken down. It was moved into the occupied city hall in Kyiv, which had been taken over by activists in December and was occupied throughout the winter. And then, as you can see, this photo is from end of March of 2014. It hung outside of the front of the occupied city hall for months. This is literally a banner made by leftist activists, that became symbolic for people who were very much not leftist activists. And I think, this is just a

perfect illustration, because activists specifically decided not to mark their banners at this point as leftist or with the word left or with language.

I think had it written up in the book..We had a whole meeting of like: What do we say, so that people will not immediately say: "Well these are leftists, there's no legitimacy to this position"? So that people would not..you know, not using leftist imagery, you know, no anarchy symbols, no some symbols associated with the student activist movement. To make sure that people would not immediately turn away from these or try to commit violence against it. And we can see that that infiltrated. We are against a police state. I mean, it is, right? That's an obviously, you know, it shouldn't be a political thing to say necessarily. But I think, the circulation of this banner really indicates that this did actually work to some extent. To actually have thought about it, and said, "Okay, here's how we're going to approach it." And therefore, you know, try to kind of criticize, not criticize the protest, but kind of, you know, use the protest to give a criticism of the state that's a little bit bigger, than any kind of political opposition in the first place. So, I think that example is the best one.

So, like I said, there are obviously quite a lot of criticisms that we can say about the Maidan protest in the aftermath. I think, it's really important that, and I also write about this a lot. I did a lot of interviews with activists in the years after Maidan. And some of them said things as explicitly as: "We would have been better off, if these protests had never happened." Because they really felt that things had gotten a lot worse in terms of the potential for a political plurality in Ukraine. And I think, that that's really important that the activists, who were deeply involved, really felt like these protests hadn't gained anything.

But I think, there's a really important distinction between that criticism and this perception, that Maidan was a coup. Which people as far as the US have said to me straight up to my face, like, "Well, the CIA funded that and it was a coup, right?" And that just really bothers me, because, you know...And one of the reasons I think that that's

really important to push away from, you know...In a way, so, these photos are from March and April of 2014. So, we know, right after the protests officially sort of succeed, right? Yanukovich leaves office, interim government is put into place. And almost immediately Crimea is invaded and then annexed in early March of 2014. At the same time, one thing I think, you know, whenever academics especially write about Maidan, they write that the end is what, like February 23rd or something, but the square in Kyiv continues to be occupied throughout the spring of 2014 all the way until the end of June of 2014. The day I left Kyiv, was the day that the square was cleared out from activists. And there were active protests within this occupy protest space throughout the spring, some of which was against Russian intervention into Ukraine. And some of which was criticisms of the interim government, which was not actually doing anything to protect certain categories of people, who had been participants on Maidan and who therefore had made some claims, you know, about their political status.

So, I think it was a moment of possibility through the spring, I think, where the government that is in formation before the election of Poroshenko in May of 2014, really anything could have happened, I suppose. But the possibilities also become closed off, because Russian intervention already has started in March and April of 2014. And so, while there's a lot of ways to criticize, how the kind of interim government took over and what they did in that wake. There's also a lot of kind of chaos and people don't know exactly, you know, how to react to this invasion and intervention. And so, that sort of.. I think, turns a lot of the opinion against Ukraine in 2014, after the protests have happened.

Although, I also want to say I don't really know, you know, political scientists like to play the game of "what would have happened, if..." And I don't really know that something else could have happened, right? I mean, there's no ideal state, right? That's just not how states really work. And so, while maybe there could have been, you know, different kinds of representation of activists in power after these protests had happened,

it's not like everybody would have been super satisfied and said: "Super, we have a wonderful, perfect democracy now". That never would have happened. So, I think it's also a little unfair to kind of criticize really harshly, what happened in the wake of mass protest. Because anything could have happened. But I think, what's really key to push against is that the protests, whether or not there was external funding, you know, it doesn't... there were people, who were there on the protest square, because they felt like this was an important moment of political engagement, that something could happen, and that it was worth being there, and that that was part of building a Ukrainian democracy. And so, I think, that it's really important to recognize that people were genuinely involved and genuinely trying to kind of build up something independent.

And so, the other kind of I guess related myth about Ukraine in the wake of the Maidan, is that it's this antisocial state and there's a real strong propaganda here. In which we talk about, you know, the banning of the communist party as an anti-democratic move. So, I want to say specifically that there is a real strong marginalization of institutionalized real leftist positions. After Maidan there were a couple of leftist attempts to form political parties and to run for office and none of them have been successful. But that's very different from the communist party. I just picked a couple of images. That guy.. the communist party, I don't know if you can see, this is a communist party outfit hanging and then that's the Lenin statue that was taken down. People had a real field day, as we say, chopping it up and selling it online. Some guy just gave me a little piece of this Lenin, so I still have that. But I also heard in the wake of the protests, somebody say something to the effect of that Maidan was an anti-communist protest. And basically said that, I've repeated that in different settings and a lot of academics have disagreed with me very strongly about that, which I think is also very interesting. I don't think they're wrong, right? The idea that the communist party in Ukraine at this time is a representative of the holdover of Soviet legacies, of imperialism and unfreedom. I mean, I think that's true. The communist party in Ukraine and

"Independence" was not a leftist party, it was an institutionalized organ of the former Soviet system. There was an actual leftist movement. And the problem is when those two things get conflated, when leftist activism about, you know, higher education or feminist activism or anything kind of associated with a communist position gets associated with the Communist Party, then that becomes really problematic. And that did happen a lot.

But the banning of the Communist Party in Ukraine in 2015 is not an exclusion of political plurality. It's an exclusion of an organ of Russian propaganda that had functioned quite well because of its long institutionalization in Ukrainian politics. And so, I think this is one of those examples of something that becomes like pointed at as an example of Ukraine not being a democracy, because obviously, you know, people should be allowed to have different political parties. But in the con, you know, when we look at it from the angle of Ukraine's domestic politics, we can't fix that part. I mean, that party is never going to become an actual leftist political party. It's going to be the Communist Party of Ukraine. That kind of institutionalized organ. And so, the exclusion of that party does not therefore mean that Ukraine is not a democracy, right? But I I think that this story is a kind of key. It's often pointed to as an example, you know, for this...to delegitimize Ukraine.

I also want to say about political pluralism after 2014. And one additional comment that I wanted to make about why it became really difficult to have a sort of a unified leftist position after the Maidan happened. And that's connected to Russia's intervention and Russia's invasion. What ended up happening among the activists that I was specifically working with at that time, was that there was a real disagreement about whether or not the left in general should have an anti-war platform. And the reason that there was a huge discussion, was because several leftist activists mobilized already in 2014 and 2015 as volunteers to go to the what was then called anti-terrorist operation zone to do things especially in the medical sphere. For example, as combat medics or,

you know, ambulance drivers. There's stories about people who were drone operators, who were working as scouts and that sort of thing in this time period. And already in 2014, there's a really strong criticism of this voluntary mobilization as serving the state, right? If there's a war happening, it's the realm of the armed forces to fight against that war, right? They're the ones who are supposed to take this on.

That's not what happens in Ukraine. There's too much of a weakness in the institutions of the state at this time. Again, this is 2014, interim government. It's not even an actually elected government. The weaknesses are really obvious. And basically activists were calculating if I don't go, more people will die, and I have a skill, and it's necessary. I'm going to use my skill. So, they see it as a direct extension of the self-organization that they had just been pursuing in this very political way on Maidan. Obviously, among leftists not everybody agrees and that's been a long conversation in the whole last 10 years. You know, is it on the one hand, you know, self-organization is there to criticize state institutions, because we can do things better than state should. It shows what the gaps in the state are, right? So, that is a space for us to level criticism. But on the other hand, if I fill this gap, that means that nobody holds state actors accountable for things that are their responsibility. This is an unsolvable problem in my view.

So, my current research is mostly focused on internal displacement after 2014. And this is again something that we see, this exact language. Well, technically displaced people, who stay in the boundaries of their country are the responsibility of the state. If the state actors cannot support them, what are people going to do? Let them be homeless and starve? No. People mobilize, and what ends up happening, especially in the case of Ukraine, is that volunteer networks are so strong and so successful, that they become better than the state could possibly have been. And we specifically also see that in this context of displacement, when state institutions start to take over for what volunteers had been doing and it becomes worse, right? The law

makes it a lot more difficult for displaced people to get what they need. Whereas, when volunteers were in charge, people have empathy, people really faced a lot less discrimination, that sort of thing.

So, we see, I think, you know, a sort of shifting of what becomes political, and how people deal with these political calculations. My opinion of this is not that self-organization allows the state to get away with not doing its job. I would argue, instead, it actually creates different kinds of networks of sociality between people, who share a citizenship and who, you know, who are therefore building a different kind of political state in Ukraine. That isn't about state institutions and elections. It's about, you know, these networks of mutual aid for one another.

The last thing I want to say in terms of, you know, misconceptions about Ukraine, which obviously, I'm sure, we've all heard, is this one about Nazis being in power in Ukraine. And, of course, I have some pictures of far-right people, who are stamping on the communist flag. Also the flag of the party of regions there. I don't know who these people are. They may just be regular guys, but they may be far-right guys too. I don't really know. But this is again one of these conversations that's been happening a lot more recently, but it has been part of the conversation since 2014. Of course, there are far-right neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine. They have them here, too. We have them in the US as well, right? This is a perpetual problem everywhere.

There's been a lot of disagreement especially in academic circles and how we study the power of the far-right in Ukraine in particular, but again, true everywhere. In the wake of the Maidan protest in 2014, far-right parties did not gain seats in the electoral system. The strongest showing of far-right parties in Ukraine was in 2012. And since then, Ukrainian far-right parties have never gotten that kind of representation. Now, on the other hand, I just told you that I don't think that state, you know, state-elected politics is the most important thing, and there are still obviously far-right groups that have a lot of power in more informal settings. And certainly that does matter. But

especially when the myth here, and especially this Russian narrative that we have to invade Ukraine, because there are Nazis in power there, to denazify the state, and it's very very clear to anyone, you know, who actually studies the electoral politics that there aren't in fact far-right groups who are representing Ukraine at all.

And I I also want to say, throughout the Poroshenko, when he got elected in 2014 and then in the ensuing years, he did have explicit connections with some far-right actors and far-right organizations. And so, in 2019 when the choice was between Poroshenko and Zelenskyi, a lot of people voted for Zelenskyi precisely because he did not have these connections with the far-right. And there were leftist activists explicitly saying, "Well, we think there could be more political plurality with Zelenskyi. we know there will be less with Poroshenko, so let's go with Zelenskyi". And so, I think, that this is a really, you know, precisely because Zelenskyi is targeted as this, I don't know, neo-Nazi in power, which is ridiculous. It's very interesting that that narrative succeeds, when for actual voters, the other guy was a much more problematic in terms of his connections with the far-right.

I think, I'm just highlighting the just general misunderstanding of Ukrainian politics, which is what it really reflects is the strength of Russian misinformation narratives, that get in people's heads and circulate really strongly. And you know, because Ukraine long had this association with nationalism. That was always a story in Ukraine beforehand. I mean, the flags obviously show that that is resonant. You know, it sticks for whatever reason. Let's just say.

You know, like I said, after 2014 self-organized networks were really key in responding to the first invasion. After 2022 they become really key again. People mobilize a lot of the same networks. Many of the leftists, who mobilized themselves, volunteered to mobilize in the front lines in 2014 and 2015, mobilized themselves again. A lot of other folks organized for the delivery of military and humanitarian aid. One of the things that has been most interesting, and actually I wrote an article about this last year,

about the new wave of student activism with Priama Dija, the independent student union. They have been absolutely fascinating. I don't know them anymore. They're all younger. But what has been so fascinating, if you follow their social media channels, is that they present these absolutely just vicious criticisms of the state that is behaving in a really poor way towards students, you know, cutting student stipends, while promoting the students as the future of Ukraine. And these student activists are giving these amazing criticisms. And at the same time, they're running fundraisers for their friends on the front lines. Or when a university is hit in a Russian missile strike, immediately they're mobilizing people. Let's go help clean up, and let's raise some money to fix this institution. And I think, what's really key about this, is that people really understand that we, you know, we don't get to fight for a democracy in Ukraine and plurality in Ukraine, if there's no Ukraine.

And I think people understand, that it's better to, you know, fight for something imperfect than allow imperialism to kind of take over and authoritarianism to become a success in the world. And so, I think that, you know, for me, just listening to the people who were involved in this research project and who are now mobilized, kind of understanding that they understand that they're fighting an imperialist war. I think it's obviously an obligation for anybody who doesn't support authoritarianism to support Ukrainians, who are the ones who are actually sacrificing themselves in order to protect the rest of us from from this kind of imperialism.

I don't want to say too much about the current situation, because we can ask, you know, we can chat more about that. But I do want to say thank you for listening. And if you're interested in exploring this idea of activism and solidarity more, I'll go ahead and promote the conference that I'm organizing in January. I have postcards over there. It's going to be in person, but also online. And everybody's welcome to attend. I'm really excited. And our keynote speaker is Maxim Butkevich, who, I think, is coming here in a couple of days. And, I think, it should be a really good discussion of what solidarity in

the context of the current global situation is for Ukraine. So thanks everyone and happy to have any questions.

So, thank you, Emily, very much. I will start with the first questions to you, which I'm gonna ask and then we'll go with your questions.

And so, in 2023 I think I spoke to one fighter, one anarchist fighter, who took part in Maidan in Kharkiv and who fights since 2022 in army against Russia. And I asked him, what it was for you? I will read this, and I will be interested about your reflection about this. And what was it for you, because it's so much time passed after this time and how did this affect you? How did it influence your field of research, of activity. So, I will not say the name, but this soldier said [this] about the meaning of Maidan [to him]: "It gave birth [to] a civil society in Ukraine. For me personally and for me as activist, before that we existed in an activist paradigm, where we are super passionate guys. And there is a super passive, super inner society. And in the field of politics, there is also real politics or the politics of power with parties. And there is our grassroots activism as pure and not connected with the dirt or real politics. And in the end, just such vicious circle was formed. And the Maidan destroyed these circles. The civil society became a subject and not an object, and we came out of the pro-Russian agenda. If it were not Maidan, we would have been waiting for the building of such a slow, decaying dictatorship". So, for me it's the event, yeah, Maidan revolution, has really big impact on modern Ukrainian society, on modern Ukrainian history. What it was for you? How did affect you? And what do you think, how did it affect the society?

I mean, overall I agree with this person. I mean, for me, as, you know, as a person trying to do research, it created a lot of chaos, right? Because I didn't know how to do research on a political mobilization, that was huge and changing every single day, and nobody knew what was happening. I had diligently planned my research project, and I threw the entire thing away, because it was totally irrelevant. Just a lesson, if

anybody's doing research, just don't prepare too much, because you won't.. you can't predict. But it's also interesting.

I did my research in 2013-2014, and the book came out at the end of 2022. It took me a really long time to write it, and the reason is because my relationship with Maidan changed so much over time. In the first few years, when I went back to Ukraine and interviewed some of the people, who had been involved in the research, like I said, a lot of them said "it's worse", you know, "I wish this had never happened". Other people said "we're so burnt out, we decided to focus on this one thing, because we couldn't do all the things. We saw this huge thing and what it had done. And we just couldn't do it anymore."

But I think, it took a long time to be able to see how it changed society, because the other thing other people said and that still resonates with me...In 2014 people's consciousness actually changed, because they saw that they could achieve the thing that they mobilized to do. And that, I mean in the US at least, we don't protest, because we don't think it does anything. Because our society is really separate, we're far away from each other, you know. The seat of power is sort distant from all of us. And we don't see any impact in organizing, I say that in a very cynical way, but, you know, I kind of believe it's true. Whereas, the success of Maidan, I mean, the president fled the country, and all of his deputy.. like nobody from his party took their place. And while there are a lot of imperfections in the actual kind of political reorganization, I do genuinely think that people saw the way that they could help one another as a political act, as a foundation of the political existence of Ukraine. It's regular people, who can make change. And again, I mean, it's not perfect, but it shows people that it matters how they behave and what they do and how they see themselves as political actors. And it allows everybody to see themselves as a political actor, which I also think is really a key.

I wouldn't have said that in 2016 or in 2018 even. I probably wouldn't have said that until much later on. But by the time I was writing this book and trying to think about

how can I make this book not just be a kind of story of a thing that happened in 2014, but an actual resonant thing in society. And I think that's how. At all these different scales people's relationships with politics changed, but also with each other changed. And I think people understanding that you know, kind of helping one another and creating systems of mutual aid and mutual support is also a kind of politicized act. It makes you feel more invested in your own ability to, you know, be part of society. You're not just relying on "Okay, I don't like the guy, who got elected and so everything is terrible, right?" You know you make changes at all these different scales. And I think that's really a key.

I've had people ask me questions like "Is it really democratic, if mass protest is the best way to get rid of a political leader?" You know, I think that the role of mass protest in Ukraine is also very interesting. It has been effective in pushing back against undemocratic practices. And obviously we see that that's different in other authoritarian situations. Mass protest doesn't happen or it's not successful. So, I do think it shows us something really special that we don't really see in a lot of places elsewhere in the world. And I do think, I do agree with this person, that, you know, this kind of activism really did change Ukraine completely.