

Invisible Revolutionaries: Women's Participation in Ukraine's Euromaidan

Olena Nikolayenko

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Olena Nikolayenko's *Invisible Revolutionaries* asks three questions that animate contentious politics scholarship: why individuals join a contemporary revolution, how they participate, and what outcomes follow (p.9)¹. Taking Ukraine's 2013–2014 Euromaidan Revolution as its empirical focus, the book reframes all three through the lens of gender and advances three interconnected arguments: that women's engagement in civil resistance is systematically rendered invisible (p. 8); that the lived experiences of women participants, recovered through oral history, reveal mechanisms and meanings that survey data alone cannot access (p. 5); and that women's presence at protest events significantly shapes the trajectory of violence, functioning as a deterrent to the escalation of state repression (p. 13). In doing so, it makes a timely contribution to the study of gender and civil resistance, drawing on an unusually rich corpus of oral testimonies, illuminating the motivations and roles of women in revolutionary movements more broadly, and situating Euromaidan within a longer history of Ukrainian women's activism.

The book is organized around an original typology of women's participation in revolutions built on three dimensions: motivations, roles during mobilization, and post-revolutionary gender outcomes (p. 6). Nikolayenko distinguishes three models — patriarchal, emancipatory, and hybrid — arguing that the hybrid best captures Euromaidan. Chapter 2 traces Ukrainian women's activism back to the early twentieth century, a perspective rare in contentious politics literature that effectively count-

ers the assumption that women's civil engagement in Ukraine is either imported or situational (p. 37). Chapters 3 and 4 examine motivations including motherhood, civic duty, professional networks, and feminist consciousness, as well as the diverse roles women assumed. Chapter 5 covers post-revolutionary political representation, economic indicators, and women's integration into the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

What distinguishes the book methodologically is Nikolayenko's decision to work with randomized samples drawn from the available oral history corpora, complemented by large-N surveys conducted during and after the protests (p. 34). The extensive space devoted to women's first-person testimonies is a methodological and ethical choice consistent with the feminist standpoint theory underpinning the book (p. 5), and one that has acquired additional archival weight since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

The theoretical framework, however, invites scrutiny. The typology's first two categories, patriarchal and emancipatory carry clear conceptual weight. The third is named simply "hybrid," a label that describes its structural position between the other two rather than articulating its own logic, risking a catch-all category defined less by its own criteria than by what it is not. More fundamentally, the hybrid model's central claim that women's motivations and roles can be intersectional rather than reducible to a single driver is closer to a point of departure than a theoretical contribution.

The framework also raises questions about how its categories travel across contexts. Nikolayenko borrows the association of motherhood with patriarchal motivation and feminism with emancipatory motivation

¹ This review was prepared with the assistance of AI tools for language editing and sentence restructuring.

from existing literature but applies them without asking whether these associations hold in the Ukrainian case. Her own historical chapter suggests they may not: if women in Ukrainian revolutionary traditions were not perceived as occupying stereotypically masculine roles when they assumed them, then the framework's foundational distinction between "stereotypically" feminine and masculine roles requires more cultural grounding than it receives. The framework treats the content of a role and its political meaning as equivalent, leaving unexamined how the same role can carry radically different significance depending on context. In the Introduction, Nikolayenko cites Naples's concept of "activist mothering" (p. 10) — the politicization of care beyond biological ties — yet her empirical analysis narrows motherhood to its literal, biological form: mothers protecting their own children (p. 84). This is precisely where the analysis stops shortest: rather than asking how Ukrainian women reinterpreted the meaning of the roles they performed², the hybrid model settles for noting that different motivations and roles coexist.

A similar tension marks the book's final chapter. The framing of post-revolutionary developments as "gender outcomes" implies causality that the available data and methodology cannot fully substantiate. While Nikolayenko acknowledges within Chapter 5 that the analysis "catalogs cross-time patterns" rather than establishing causal relationships (p. 130), this caveat sits uneasily with the consistent framing throughout the book, where "outcomes of mass mobilization" recurs from the introduction onward.

These are limitations worth naming, but they do not diminish the book's considerable contributions. *Invisible Revolutionaries* offers an indispensable account of a formative moment in Ukrainian history. These arguments have only gained in urgency: as women continue to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, lead civil society organizations, and shape the country's wartime governance, the question of how revolutionary participation translates into lasting political agency remains urgent. For a European audience, the book speaks directly to debates about democratic resilience and the gendered dimensions of civil society mobilization. It will be essential reading for scholars of contentious politics, gender studies, and post-Soviet politics alike.

References

- Prymachenko, Yana (2025), Cultural Memory and Decolonization: The Case of the Motherland Monument in Kyiv, in: *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, 10 (2). https://elibrary.utb.de/doi/10.24216/JSPPS-2024-2-9783838276946_004.

² In the Ukrainian context, maternal and caregiving roles have carried deeply subversive connotations — as Prymachenko (2025) shows through the analysis of the Motherland Monument and „On the Shield“ initiative, where a female volunteer's renaming of fallen soldiers from Soviet „Cargo 200“ enacted a symbolic rupture with Soviet military tradition that the patriarchal/emancipatory binary cannot capture.