



# **The Concept of the State in Ukraine After EuroMaidan Through Consumer Practices And Beyond**

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*Abstract:* Over the past few years, the Russian annexation of Crimea and war conflict in Eastern regions threatened Ukrainian sovereignty and mobilized citizens in various ways. Boycotting of Russian goods and subsequent re-orientation for Ukrainian producers showcases how the domain of consumption became a sphere where ideas about the state and citizenship are both actively constructed, discussed, and transformed. In this paper I analyse how ideas about the state are envisioned and conceptualized in present-day Ukraine. For this, I look at the political consumerism actions — such as boycott of Russian goods and consumers' support of the national producers — that are centered on the ideas of the state- and nation-building. I investigate how consumers imagine their impact on the political developments and communicate direct interrelations between their micro-economic activities and macro-political changes that potentially affect the sustainability of the state system. Analyzing consumer experiences and their social media representations, I argue that communication and discussion of consumer movements contribute to the production of the alternative optimistic image of the state. This tendency is particularly significant in the context of post-socialism, where the state is perceived predominately as an alienated entity.

*Keywords:* Patriotic Consumption, Consumer Citizenship, Consumer Boycott, The State, Ukraine

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Every housewife can be a revolutionary,' says Roman, an activist from Odessa. He claims that this idea is essential for a consumer movement in Ukraine. Over the past four years, the Russian annexation of Crimea and involvement in the war conflict in Eastern Ukraine has threatened Ukrainian sovereignty and mobilized citizens in various ways. Politicization of consumption has become a popular civil response to these processes. The boycotting of Russian goods and subsequent re-orientation for Ukrainian producers demonstrates how larger

political processes are reflected and reproduced on the level of everyday practices. The domain of consumption, thus, became a sphere where ideas about the state and citizenship are both actively constructed, discussed, and transformed.

The focus of this paper is how the concept of the state is envisioned and conceptualized in present-day Ukraine. For this, I look at the political consumerism actions — such as boycott of Russian goods and consumers' support of the national producers — that are centered on the ideas of the state- and nation-building. I investigate how consumers imagine their impact on the political developments and communicate direct interrelations between their micro-economic activities and macro-political changes that potentially affect the sustainability of the state system. Building on scholarly critique of the state as an idea and deconstruction of the state as a supposedly coherent and all-encompassing entity, I investigate two problematic areas in detail.

First, I explore how the idea of the state, a popular and colloquial understanding of this concept, changed through the larger context of revolutionary developments in post-Soviet Ukraine. Thus, I start with a contextualization of the events in Ukraine to provide a comprehensive description of how the notion of the state has been renegotiated in public discourse over the past two years. In a similar vein, I look at the citizens' strategies of empowerment that were also strengthened after the annexation of Crimea and development of an armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, to argue that they played a crucial role in the understanding of the relationship between citizens-consumers and the state.

Second, I describe how media representations of consumer practices create a grassroots positive image of the state parallel to, and coexistent with, critical attitudes that dominate public discourse. Analyzing consumer experiences, social media discourses, everyday economic compromises and sacrifices in shopping practices, I argue that communication and discussion of consumer movements contribute to the production of the alternative optimistic image of the state. This tendency is particularly significant in the context of post-socialism, where the state is perceived by citizens predominately as an alienated and corrupted entity. In this sense, political consumerism can be seen as a domain of civil liberties, where consumers claim their agency and elaborate the state as an idea (as well as ideals) in contrast to the state-regulated narratives and ideologies.

My interest is stimulated by the fact that consumer activities present an area where private and public interests of citizens intersect. Consumerism in this sense can be seen as a domain where often-separated identities of citizens (community-oriented practices) and consumers (self-oriented practices) overlap and expose the permeability of political and economical spheres. Moreover, politicized consumer practices are actively manifested and explained by consumers, particularly through social media. Even though a consumer act itself can be a non-conspicuous action, its rationalization is public-oriented and contributes to the production of the discourse about the state. These processes mark consumption as a locus for civic engagement and social production of the state.

I employ several theoretical frameworks that deconstruct the notion of the state and that elucidate its different aspects as a conceptual, discursive formation. I use the notion of 'fantasy for the state,' introduced by Yael Navaro-Yashin, which explains the state as an imagined yet powerful concept that survives deconstruction by everyday cynicism. Building from the idea of the 'mundane cynicism' that underlines how dissatisfaction about the state is ac-

cepted – ‘the idea that things are as they are and do not try to change them’ (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 147) – I argue that in contrast to this, and through everyday practices of consumption, Ukrainians express their aspirations to change political order and participate in statecraft. Thus, they contribute to the development of the concept of the state, where citizens’ participation through consumer decisions and choices become a strategy to subvert everyday cynicism and be actively involved in state transformations. In this scenario, consumers also oppose a capitalist logic of commodity value and proactively inscribe symbolic and political meanings into goods. Marxist and post-Marxist approaches critique capitalist system for attributing values to objects and commodity fetishism (Marx 2004 [1986]) and creating ‘conceptual value-added’ branded commodities for generating profit (Klein 2000). In political consumption consumers ascribe additional political values to goods, rendering commodities as tokens of hostility (boycott) or loyalty (support of national producers).

Further, I argue that communication of consumer practices via media platforms is an important outcome of consumer actions, as their economic effects might not be tangible. As these practices correlate to the concept of the imaginary state, I draw from the theorizations of Philip Abrams (1988), who separates the state-idea from the state-system and highlights the conceptual mode of the state existence. As Abrams posits, the state is the ‘mask’ that acquires symbolic identity and shields political reality. Accordingly, the state exists as a socially constructed idea. However, as Abrams emphasizes the state as an illusion, he seems to overlook the role of this illusion in structuring social processes. The way consumers transform their everyday lives, driven by the imaginary state, illustrates that the state-idea has repercussions and reifications in social life.

Exploring the state-idea, I investigate how politicized consumer movements embody ontological qualities of the state. The imaginary state is objectified and animated through consumer goods and commodities. Moreover, in contrast to the understanding of the state as a set of institutions and policies, this understanding of the state produces emotional reactions. I build on the ideas of Michael Taussig (1992) about state fetishism to illustrate this type of articulation of the state in consumer movements.

In the discussion about citizen-generated ideas about the state, I explore how the state is defined and understood in social media representations of consumer practices. Not only social media offer a prolific field of investigation, consumer movements in contemporary Ukraine largely sparked from the activities in Facebook, Twitter, and Vkontakte networks. These media are highly responsive to the socio-political developments and offer a variety of tools to disseminate and circulate instructive information about consumer movements. At the same time, explanations and rationalizations of politicized consumer activities turned social networks into essential communication platforms for discussing, producing and reproducing ideas about the state.

To grasp the image of the state, I analyze social media activities, slogans, elements of media discourse, and ethnographic interviews to obtain a generalized understanding of how people rationalize their participation in consumer movements, picture the state, and see their roles in state development. In terms of media coverage, I focused on the major Facebook group, titled ‘Boycott of the Party of Regions’ (<https://www.facebook.com/BoycotteInUkraine/>, 29.03.2017), which has almost 98,000 followers at the time of this writing (March 2017). It can be considered the largest online community for consumer resistance in

Ukraine. The group was launched in late 2013 during EuroMaydan and at first targeted businesses of the ruling political party, which explains the name of the community. Later, the agenda of the group expanded to the Russian goods as well. In addition to this, I also monitored EuroMaydan Facebook group (300,000 members), as it frequently communicated and dissimilated information about consumer activism. Though Vkontakte is the most popular social media platform in Ukraine, according to the data by Factum Group Ukraine (Karpenko 2016), this media does not host similar large communities about politicized consumption in Ukraine. Partially, it can be explained by the fact that Vkontakte is a Russian network and it was boycotted in Ukraine as well. For a comprehensive analysis, I also examined media coverage focused on consumer movements by monitoring key national media through the Google Alerts tool. In addition, in the course of research, I interviewed Ukrainian small entrepreneurs, consumer and social activists who organize and educate consumers about the larger implications of their everyday purchasing choices, and marketing professionals, who specialize in working with Ukrainian brands. The 17 in-depth interviews were focused on informants' expert opinion about the consumer patterns that developed in Ukraine in the aftermath of EuroMaydan. The majority of interviews were collected during the summers of 2014-2015. The interviews were conducted in Kyiv, Odessa, and Lviv.

### **State as a flexible entity**

To analyze the discourse of the state in contemporary Ukraine, it is crucial to acknowledge the impact of two significant historical events: the Orange Revolution and EuroMaidan. These precedents of massive public protests shaped public understanding of the state, civil power, and citizens' involvement in the state matters. Both historical events were triggered by public outrage regarding state injustice or state incompetence, and both can be considered as successful in changing political orders. Though revolts represented only part of Ukrainian population, their proponents deem them as successful in challenging the corrupted regimes and triggering socio-political transformations (Yekelchuk 2015).

In 2004, for the first time since its independence, Ukraine faced an outbreak of large-scale public demonstrations against the falsification of the presidential elections in favor of a pro-Government candidate, Viktor Yanukovych. Known as the Orange Revolution, this series of nationwide marches remained peaceful and nonviolent political demonstrations. After almost a month of continuing rallies, which were mostly concentrated at the Kyiv central square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), the Supreme Court of Ukraine annulled the results of the run-off elections. Consequently, a second election revote was scheduled. The Orange Revolution has been praised as a revolution without casualties, when an important political shift and a change of political elite was leveraged by peaceful pressure from citizens. A nonaggressive and so-called 'civilized' aspect of the Orange Revolution was especially emphasized in the context of similar events in the region. Violent clashes in Kazakhstan as well as repressive responses in Belarus, illuminated the Ukrainian case as a democratic process.

Nine years later, in November 2013, the EuroMaidan protests started, localized again at the Kyiv central square. As soon as the Ukrainian Government announced that it had suspended the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union, a group of activists gathered at Maidan Nezalezhnosti to protest against this turn in the state's geopoliti-

cal strategy. A peaceful demonstration lasted for a few weeks and then turned violent after police attacked protesters. This move of repressive state force triggered a large-scale response that gathered more than a million people. ‘The March of a Million’ – the largest public demonstration on the streets of Kyiv – signified a shift in the protesters’ agenda that, since late November 2013, turned to be an anti-presidential and anti-governmental protest. Strong emphasis was also on the corruption of the state and its inability to respond to citizens’ demands. After several months and following unprecedented violence for Ukraine, the president fled the country and the Ukrainian Parliament voted for a series of political decisions, including the dissolution of the Government. This usually marks the end of the active stage of the EuroMaidan revolution.

In public narratives, proponents of the two revolutions glorify them as ‘victories over regimes.’ As long as the principal demands of protesters were met<sup>1</sup> — in the first case the revote was scheduled and in the second case, the president and government were removed — these two series of protests are deemed as effective by their participants. They demonstrated citizens’ ability to exercise democratic rights and freedoms as well as to protect their rights. Importantly, the success of the two events reinforced the popular understanding of the state as a flexible entity that can respond to civil protests and demands. Thus, from the perspective of the proponents of revolutions, the understanding of the gap between the state and civil society as a part of modern political order (Mitchell 1991: 34) was dismissed or at least significantly shrank. Explaining the ‘state effect’ Timothy Mitchell points out the distinction between the state as a conglomerate of institutions and civil society that opposes it. However, Mitchell questions this separation, revealing the ‘elusiveness of the state-society boundary’ (Mitchell 1991: 78). In the context of the aforementioned historical events in Ukraine, both the state and civil society were deemed to be mutually constitutive. As one of the EuroMaidan participants extenuated her participation in protests ‘I was there to build a new state, to build the state that I want to live in’ (Olia<sup>2</sup>, 32 y.o.). Olia, like many other protesters, viewed the state as an entity that *can be* and *should be* transformed through the direct action and individuals’ engagement. At the same time, citizens’ ability to force changes in the state system is seen as an important democratic achievement.

### Ukrainian exceptionalism and the concept of the state

Even though the agenda of both protests represented the interests of a part of the population, it fostered the idea of a new Ukrainian exceptionalism – a self-view of Ukrainians as an extraordinary nation that succeeded in civil protests against the state. This is especially relevant in the region where protesting civil initiatives and public criticism of the state can result in re-

<sup>1</sup> The demographics of the two protests largely overlapped. As Serhy Yekelchuk mentions, since the independence of Ukraine, an urban middle class has developed as a social force and it was actively involved in both revolutions (Yekelchuk 2015). At the same time, protestors represented only a certain fraction of the population of Ukraine. It should also be acknowledged that there was a significant number of Ukrainians who did not support revolutions, stayed neutral, or condemned them.

<sup>2</sup> Since the political situation at that time was uncertain, several respondents preferred not to disclose their names. For the consistency of writing and because there were no specific requests to state real names, I use pseudonyms for all of the informants.

pressive actions, like in Russia or Belarus. Therefore, revolutions solidified the popular impression that Ukrainian people are in control of their state through protests mechanisms.<sup>3</sup>

The narrative of exceptionalism was reinforced from a different angle with an unfolding war in Eastern Ukraine. Reworking Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty, Giorgio Agamben demonstrates that emergencies, such as war or natural disaster, allows the state to claim the 'state of exception' and to extend its power up to suspend the law (Agamben 2005). While Agamben focuses on the state actions, it is equally important to emphasize the citizens' contribution. In critical conditions, they see the state as legitimate even if it does not provide them with rights and guarantees that it usually is supposed to ensure. The military conflict not only granted the Ukrainian government increased political power under the conditions of emergency, but also ensured a public credit of trust to the state system, as the former operates under crisis conditions. In public discourse this tendency is reflected by the fact that the critique of the government can be perceived as a betrayal of state interests and condemned as a deteriorating position. While the 'state of exception' enables government to withdraw certain rights and freedoms from its citizens, it also allows citizens to rethink the concept of the state and be more patronizing in relation to it.

Describing this tendency, scholars of political science Matthew Rojansky and Mykhailo Minakov accentuate the growing intolerance toward public criticism of the Ukrainian state: 'Russian-backed aggression, relentless propaganda and meddling in Ukraine's domestic politics have pushed many Ukrainians to adopt a deeply polarized worldview, in which constructive criticism, dissenting views, and even observable facts are rejected out of hand if they are seen as harmful to Ukraine' (Minakov and Rojansky 2015). These shifts in the dominant public attitude are important to recognize within the discussion of a positive image of the state. In some way, an external, outside challenge to state integrity neutralized the challenges from within. The elimination of the critique of the state along with the history of revolutionary success set a background for prolific discussions and challenges/re negotiations of a historically-informed post-Soviet paradigm of the state as a failing and corrupted system.

### **Imagined state – fantasies about the European Ukraine**

Revolutions like EuroMaidan are driven not only by dissatisfaction about the current state of affairs, but also by contesting alternative visions of how the state should be. In other words, it can be seen as an attempt to implement drastic shifts from the past state to the new imagined state. For instance, the reappearing reference to the 'new European Ukraine' during EuroMaidan, which was contrasted to the reverberations of the Soviet Ukraine, can illustrate this

<sup>3</sup> Through the accomplishments of revolutionary agendas, the idea of public empowerment was strengthened and acquired an almost mythological level of generalization. It is reflected, for instance, in the changing connotation of the word *maidan*. The toponym that originates from the Turk language, has a literal meaning of 'a square, a market square.' It was appropriated in Ukraine in the 17th centuries to signify public gatherings at the main square for discussing significant issues - a public form of referendum. Therefore, it was used as a proper noun *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, signifying the centrality of the place in downtown Kyiv. After two revolutions, the central square in Kyiv became one of the major scenes for public protests development. Since then the word acquired an additional meaning of public pressure and radical reaction to dissatisfaction with state governing. Thus, any pitfalls in the state apparatus performance are often met with a threat like 'We will start a new *maidan*!' In this context *maidan* is seen as a localized Ukrainian way to exercise democracy and as a skill of Ukrainians to achieve political changes.

tendency. The crucial difference is that the past state has tangible references – encounters with corrupted officials, reports about frauds that circulate in media, or other inconveniences that make the presence of the state palpable while the image of the desirable state is not discredited.

Abrams' theoretical suggestion to separate the state as a set of institutions and administrative processes from an abstract idea that masks political practices provides a matching framework to explain the idealization of the democratic and Westernized state-idea in Ukraine during and in the first years after EuroMaidan. The distinction between the state-apparatus and state-idea can be seen in the narratives of volunteer movement activists – an important civil outcome of EuroMaidan. In fact, the revolution in general can be described as a citizens' reaction to the growing gap between the idealistic idea of the state and the real practices of the state apparatus compromised by corruption and social injustice.

Akhil Gupta describes the discourse of corruption as a key arena to construe the state in public culture. Drawing from the study of India, he states, 'The discourse of corruption is central to our understanding of the relationship between the state and social groups precisely because it plays this dual role of enabling people to construct the state symbolically and to define themselves as citizens' (Gupta 1995: 389). In other words, corruption becomes a target, objectification of the state, at which citizens can channel their dissatisfaction. At the same time, Navaro-Yashin, exploring the case of Turkey, discusses that corruption and dissatisfaction about the state survives even when it is visible and known to its citizens. As she states, "state" can remain intact, in spite of public consciousness against it, because a material and tangible world has been organized around it' (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 171). According to Navaro-Yashin, this attitude contributes to the production of a 'cynical' image of the state, when citizens are aware about the defects of the system, but continue to participate in its reproduction. In contrast, in Ukraine, the impetus of the revolution was to confront this abstract 'enemy' – the corrupted state – and to fight it for the sake of the future-oriented fantasy for the state. Along with other practices that contributed to the struggle for the fantasy of the state – such as increased public control over the state agencies, development of civic media (Hromadske.tv, 29.03.2017) and other grassroots initiatives – citizens re-organize their consumer practices. The irony is that the state as a system is still reproduced and rebuilt, but under a different, positive connotation, fueled by the expectations for changes and partly justified by the 'state of exception.'

The discursive disposition between the citizens' future-oriented fantasy of the state (imagined European Ukraine) and the realistic manifestation of the state (corrupted state apparatus) were at the core of the EuroMaidan protests. In fact, the negative and unsympathetic perception of the state is often one of the causes for the national communities to strive and fight to protect their own idea of the state. 'The imagined national state, which is supposed to provide for its citizens, seems remote and careless, not fulfilling its obligations and generating the discourse of state deficit, an insufficient state which has abandoned its citizens' (Aretxaga 2003: 396). Therefore, 'longing for a good paternalistic state,' as Begoña Aretxaga names it (2003, 396), is a subject of dispute for forces that compete for state power. In case of Ukraine, it also coincided with the growing civil responsibility for the state within the national community, reified in volunteer movements to support/protect state sovereignty.

The dissatisfaction about the state in the protests in Kyiv was fused with the self-responsibility for the future of the state, highlighted in widely circulated messages ‘Who if not me?’ and ‘I am making the future.’ The turn to violence during the protests also created a network of spontaneous grassroots initiatives that reacted to the emergencies of the conflict. Among them were medical care and legal assistance initiatives, such as EuroMaidanSOS (<https://euromaidansos.org>, 29.03.2017), Maidan Ambulance (<https://www.facebook.com/medhelpmaidan>, 29.03.2017), and AutoMaidan (<http://www.automaidan.org.ua>, 29.03.2017). A massive rise of the volunteer movement is often perceived as a new social phenomenon in Ukraine and as a positive sign of a civil society emergence.<sup>4</sup> One of the reappearing narratives in my interviews with activists was the idea of the prosperous European state and that they all contribute to it: ‘[During EuroMaidan] we showed that we are not just a mass of people. We proved that we can organize and be responsible for our own country and for our future. We are capable to build a European country that next generations will live in. This idea drives me to continue [my activities as a volunteer]. It is my everyday fight for the future Ukraine’ (Roman, 29 y.o.). ‘They [state authorities and decision makers – T.B.] realized that they need now to give some space for us [volunteers]. We do not want to live in the Soviet past and be dependent on Russia. Our future is in Europe and we are strong enough to prove this’ (Masha 30 y.o.).

Thus, volunteers and activists, who gained strong public support and became opinion leaders, produced and reproduced a futuristic fantasy about Ukraine – a non-corrupted, prosperous European country. In contrast to the growing Euroskepticism within the EU itself, this fantasy reflected and preserved the core ideals about the EU. Moreover, activists envisioned their mission to function along with the state institutions and maintain pressure on the state agencies in order to achieve this fantasy.

It is important to capture this larger picture of the socio-political processes in Ukraine, in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the discursive production of the state. First of all, the euphoria about the success of the Ukrainian revolutions explained the deemed flexibility of the state. Perception of the state as something that can be changed through public pressure reaffirmed citizens’ empowerment and their ability to be active participants of state-crafting processes. In other words, it makes citizens believe that they can be involved in the field of politics not only through elections, but also through various forms of direct involvement. Accordingly, this attitude cultivates self-responsibility for the state and actualizes obligation to be involved in political processes, especially in the context of war and crisis. On the other hand, the narratives of recent revolution in Ukraine articulated a romanticized fantasy for the state. The European Ukraine is seen as a strong reference for further political decisions and actions, as well as everyday practices. These three features – *flexible* state that is *imagined* as a product of mutual cooperation between the state apparatus and *self-responsible* members of civil society – are important to acknowledge in the transformation of the ideas about the state among Ukrainians. Consumer practices such as the boycott of Russian

<sup>4</sup> Volunteer movements of the EuroMaidan transformed with the annexation of Crimea and unfolding of the war conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Majority of the initiatives reoriented their effort from the immediate reaction to the protests’ emergencies to the provision of different forms of assistance to the internally displaced people and the Ukrainian army. This active involvement into the areas that are usually perceived as an exclusive domain of the state, highlighted the inability of the transitional government to effectively address the emergencies and simultaneously contributed to the growing importance and effectiveness of the civil initiatives. Volunteers, who complemented and substituted state functions, thus became commonly referred as a ‘state within a state.’



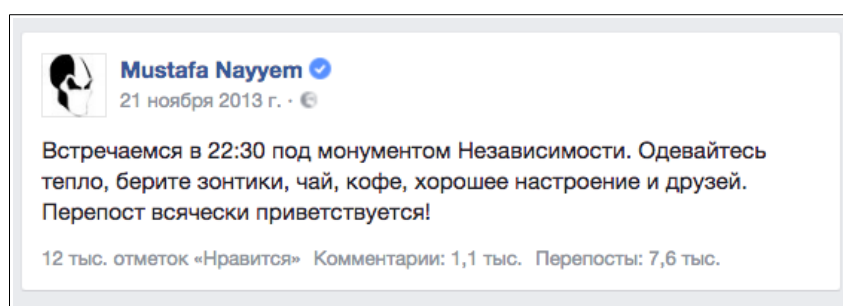
goods and consumer patriotism are inseparable from these larger processes. They are framed as a form of civic activism to support state sustainability and are rendered as a form of micro-economic action that lead to substantial macro-economic changes, namely the growth of domestic economy and a decline of Russian economic potential. These consumer practices would be inefficient for the construction of the ideas about the state, if they were not articulated and dissimilated through social media. In this sense, the role of social networks for envisioning and circulating ideas about collective consumer actions can hardly be underestimated.

### Crafting the state online

The importance of social media for the modern political movements and revolutions has been widely praised since the Arab Spring (Gerbaudo 2012, Nahed and Wiest 2011). With mobile, portable technologies, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter provide valuable organizational and informational resources. However, what often remains overshadowed is that social media becomes a site where the ideas about the state are expressed and discussed, which elucidate the role of social media as a platform for statecraft. The analysis of the consumer movements and how they contribute to the conceptualizations of the state are closely intertwined with digital social media.

EuroMaidan is often described as a revolution that sparked from a single Facebook post, when a Ukrainian journalist, Mustafa Nayem, asked if people would join him for a protest at the Independence Square (Nayyem 2014).

#### Image 1. Facebook post by Mustafa Nayyem



Source: Mustafa Nayyem Facebook page, <http://bit.ly/2fTPo2R>, 21. November 2013 (17.04.2017)

Since the first night, Facebook, Twitter and V Kontakte consolidated participants and offered them a platform for communication. In this way, social media functioned as a uniting mobilization platform and as an alternative media in condition of limited options. Along with the news and updates, social media became a forum for citizens to express their opinions not only about the ongoing developments, but also about the state system in general. Similar to Benedict Anderson's explanations of the connective functions of print media, digital social media offered a shared discourse and experiences for the production of an imagined commu-

nity and imagined state as well (Anderson 1983, see also Khondker 2011). However, unlike the print press that has a strong hierarchy of subordination, social media presented a democratic platform. This was especially relevant to the context of Ukraine, since political forces controlled the major media outlets. In contrast, social media became an alternative channel, free from political censorship and open for visions of the state.

In relation to consumer movements, social media also had a double role. First of all, they provided educational and informational resources, convenient for circulation of the information about boycott and patriotic consumption. At the same time, they made consumer movements visible and offered an outlet where certain consumer actions could be demonstrated and explained as political action. In this way, social media presented 'discursive resources' where people communicate their 'thinking and self-positioning' through encounters with the state (Jakimow 2014: 915). Its significant advantage is that digital media are not restricted and not directly regulated by the state, therefore essential for the collectively generated and maintained fantasy of the state from below.

### **Consumer practices. "Russian Kills!" - Boycott of Russian goods in Ukraine**

When I arrived in Ukraine the summer after EuroMaidan, the steps of my local supermarket were covered with blood. Or, at least that was what I thought at first. Apparently, it was red paint that were left after the activists performed a flash-mob called 'Russian kills!' to strongly discourage Ukrainian shoppers from buying Russian goods. After the annexation of Crimea and the development of an armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, boycotting Russian commodities became one of the tools of civil engagement in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. In this confrontation, citizens align with the state to support it in the state of emergency. Unlike Ukraine, in Russia, the boycott of Western goods as a response to the EU imposed economic sanctions was very much state-driven (Gurova 2017). However, popular support of consumer engagement multiplied the efforts from above and rendered consumerism as an arena of political confrontation.

The performance in the supermarket was targeting not only local residents, but a larger internet audience. Happenings like this are usually filmed by activists and are uploaded to Youtube as video clips. For instance, boycott flash-mobs performed by the Vidsich Civil Movement are highlighted at their Youtube channel (Hromadskiy Rukh Vidsich 2014). Further, they reach potential consumers as well as traditional media Tyzhden.ua ('The People of Kyiv ...' 2014) and Den' ('In Kyiv Supermarkets...' 2014). While the outreach of the on-site activities is limited, it can be argued that they generate content for social media and news. A variety of flash-mobs and performative actions spread through major Ukrainian cities. The activities in social media developed into an intense informational campaign with a message that by purchasing Russian goods, consumers helped to finance Russia and the Russian army in particular. As one of my informants mentioned, 'It is not that I was buying Russian goods. Or, maybe, I just did not pay any attention to what I was buying. But now I look at the labels and try to avoid anything that is produced in Russia. I do not want to support war' (Vika, 30 y.o.).

The boycott of Russian goods was a reincarnation of the earlier wave of consumer resistance that targeted Ukrainian politicians. The initial boycott movement started in the end of

2013, after the first occurrences of police violence in Kyiv. Its strategy was to economically weaken politicians of the ruling at the time pro-government Party of Regions, whose members were seen as directly responsible for police brutality - either through their inactions, silent endorsement, or public support. The logic of the consumer protest was captured in the following slogans 'Not even a coin to the Party of Regions!' or 'Boycott to those, who finance bloody slaughter!' This stage of the boycott mostly exposed the hostility toward and distrust of the state apparatus that is embodied in the image of greedy politicians, correlated with the narrative of state corruption.

The boycott employed different tactics, but almost all of them took advantage of the mobile technologies and capacities of social media networks. Like many EuroMaidan initiatives, the boycott was launched through a Facebook group, 'Boycott of the Party of Regions' (<https://www.facebook.com/BoycotteInUkraine>, 17.04.2017). This grassroots resource collected information about the range of boycotted brands and provided constant updates on what businesses were affiliated with politicians. A special mobile application was also released to provide an expansive list of rejected products, equipped with a barcode scanner for their identification. Its description stated, 'Yanukovych and the Party of Regions have no morals, for long they have been replaced with a thirst for power and money. Now they harm innocent people and revoke our European future. Hit the most vital [thing] for them – their money' (accessed on 5.12.2013). The ideology of the boycott movement was captured in its slogans 'You are earning, he [Member of the Party of Regions – T.B.] is stealing,' 'Not even a coin to the Party of Regions!,' 'Boycott to those who finance bloody slaughter!'. Through these narratives participants of the boycott implied that politicians were indirect sponsors of violence, while citizens were indirect 'sponsors' of politicians.

The agenda of this boycott movement changed in February-March 2014, when Russian and pro-Russian militaries took control of Crimea, and when a war conflict started to unfold in Eastern Ukraine. One of the public reactions to the threat to Ukrainian sovereignty was to boycott products that were produced in Russia or belonged to Russian trademarks. 'Russian kills!' and 'Stop Russia! Stop buying Russian goods'- slogans and flashmobs imposed strong moral obligations on consumers. As an updated description of the 'Boycott of the Party of Regions' Facebook group states now, 'The smallest thing one can do for the victory (of Ukraine) is to boycott Russian goods' (accessed on 25.12.2016). These messages strengthened ethical considerations of shopping activities and altered an agenda of citizenship duties, adding consumption to the areas of citizens' responsibilities. For generations of social media users, reminders about their purchasing choices became a part of everyday updates.

A new danger of war 'zoomed out' the focus of the boycott from intra-Ukrainian political challenges to the confrontation between larger state entities. Importantly, the goods that were boycotted during the first wave of protests, were reincorporated into consumer practices and 'justified' in the face of a larger state threat. A magnified common enemy that threatened both the state and the national community enabled joint action or at least co-current and complementary actions to address the same challenge. Therefore, in the domain of everyday activities, the boycott can be seen as a practice of statecraft. As one of my informants, Roman, pointed out with regard to this ideological mission, 'The least thing that one can do for Ukraine is to stop buying Russian goods' (Roman, 29 y.o.). Even smaller contributions can be seen in raising the awareness about the boycott and disseminating information about the

brands that are affiliated with Russia. As social media activist Alina commented, ‘We ask people to at least share the list of Russian goods. Lots of them do not realize that by buying certain goods they give their money in Russia’ (Alina, 26 y.o.). Both activities – the boycott itself and its support through social media – established new dimensions of citizens’ responsibility and areas of citizen’s contribution to nation-state affairs.

The supporters of the boycott approached it as a tool for economic disempowerment of Russia. For this, the interpretation of larger economic processes was reduced and simplified so that any stage of commodity production was seen as directly affiliated with Russian expenditures on its army. On the other hand, commodities were perceived as a physical continuation of the state and embodied the enemy-state. Therefore, Russian commodities became taboo objects, in contrast to fetishized objects – a new connotation that Ukrainian commodities acquired.

Here we can see the parallels with the fetishism of the state, described by Michael Taussig. Drawing from the Durkheim exploration of the nature of sacred objects’ magic in Australia, Taussig explains the interchange between thoughts and objects. In his reading of Durkheim, he formulates the sacred object, which he defines as fetish, as those ‘where thought and object interpenetrate in the significance of collective sentiment’ (Taussig 1992: 233). He quotes Durkheim, ‘in general a collective sentiment can become conscious of itself only by being fixed upon some material object; but by virtue of this very fact, it participates in the nature of this object, and reciprocally, the object participates in its nature’ (Durkheim, 1965; 266). Thus, commodities can be seen as essential elements of the nation-state, as material projections of the ideas about the state. (An opposite example would be when we construct the ideas about the state, based on our experience with commodities that are associated with certain states.) The complex metaphor of the boycott slogan ‘Russian kills!’ exemplifies this danger and emotional connotation that goods inherit from the ideas about the Russian state.

**Image 2.** “Do not buy from occupants.” 46 – the first two numbers on the Russian barcode



*Source:* Facebook public group ‘Boycott to the Party of Regions’, <http://bit.ly/2na9yYY>, undated (14.04.2015)

**Image 3.** Poster for a supermarket that says ‘Say “Yes!” to marking Russian goods. People have right to know. By buying Russian goods, Ukrainian unconsciously finance war against our state’.



Source: Facebook public group ‘Boycott to the Party of Regions’, <http://bit.ly/2na9yYY>, undated (03.03.2015)

**Image 4.** “Boycott Russia. Save Ukraine”



Source: Facebook public group ‘Russia, hands off’, [www.facebook.com/russiahandsoff](http://www.facebook.com/russiahandsoff), undated (12.02.2015)

Emotional affect was multiplied by visual elements that accompanied informational messages. Being a popular communication element of social media, pictures and imageries that visualized the danger and offered an interplay of recognizable symbolic elements, were more likely to be shared by users.

The symbolic taboo on Russian products required consumer awareness about features that usually do not matter or are obscure for purchasers and calls for the rediscovery and reexamination of production stages. To some extent, it shifts what Marx describes as commodity

fetishism in the capitalist model of economic relationships, where the producer is alienated from the product (Marx 2004[1986]). The boycott stimulated the reintroduction of actors involved in production and reattached connections between them to detect the presence of Russia. Sometimes, it is complicated by the fact that Russian companies would have production facilities in Ukraine, or that international corporations use Russian raw materials and resources, but have production sites in Ukraine. Therefore, there are various degrees of involvement into the boycott by Ukrainian citizens – some exclude commodities that are well-known Russian brands, some refuse to buy goods when they are somehow affiliated with Russia in general.

In any case, meticulous investigations about the origins of commodities became a part of shopping practices for those who supported this form of consumer resistance. A substitution of Russian goods also required additional time and effort. As one of my informants shared, for her to refuse from buying chewing gum that is produced in Russia, would mean that once per month she would drive to a different part of the city, where she can stock up on a similar gum produced in Poland. Her reasoning was that ‘everybody should understand that by buying Russian goods we are weakening our own state’ (Lena, 38 y.o.). Thus, extra time and effort spent on shopping can be seen as citizens’ investment in the state. As another informant reiterated, being more attentive and selective while excluding Russian goods from a shopping cart and giving preferences to the Ukrainian producers is the easiest way of ‘being a patriot’ (Stas, 27 y.o.). In this sense, consumer behavior reflects growing political consciousness and overturns prior notions of apathy and a fractured civil society.

Additional allocation of time and effort for shopping were complimented by the sacrifice of personal comfort and pleasures, in cases when consumers cannot replace their favorite Russian products. Among the goods that were named in interviews, as those that cannot be substituted, were several types of candies, laundry detergent, and toothpaste. However, the sacrifice of comfort comes to the critical point when Ukrainians are looking for a substitution for medicine. Refusal to consume Russian drugs and generic substitution can be seen as a form of bodily practice for the sake of the state, rendering boycott into a corporal sacrifice.

Investment of time and resources into investigations of the commodities’ production chains as well as their alternatives were rewarded by the opportunity to share this knowledge, particularly through social media. Investigations of the origins of products and the list of places where one can find replacements became a shared knowledge distributed through social media, which unified the community of consumer-protestors. In this way, Facebook and VKontakte offered media platforms for reifications of Benedict Andersen’s ideas about imagined communities, making it possible to connect the members of this community in a virtual reality of social media. However, if Anderson talked about imagined community that was formed through the passive consumption of media, in this case we witness an active media community that is formed through the interaction and joint participation online and offline. An example of this tendency is ‘In search of Made in Ukraine’ Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/407230962725790/>, accessed on 29.03.2017). The members of this community actively share their knowledge about Ukrainian products and request information about consumer experiences.

According to the TNS research, in April 2014, 52% of Ukrainians expressed their support for the boycott and almost 39% stated that they actively participated in the boycott, reducing

the consumption of Russian goods ('Ukrainians Boycott Russian...' 2014). There are reports that for the first year since the boycott started, the trade volumes between Russia and Ukraine have decreased by 20% ('Because Of The Boycott...' 2014). However, it is still hard to estimate to what extent this data is representative of the boycott's efficiency. The instability of Ukrainian currency, hryvnia, as well as economic crisis in the country caused an overall decline in purchasing capabilities of consumers. At the same time, the boycott obtained a highly symbolic value among Ukrainian citizens. It is perceived as a statecraft practice, as an area of interaction between citizens-consumers and the state-idea, generated in and mediated through social networks. In the longing for the fantasy of the state, citizens undertook a patronizing role themselves, seeking to support Ukraine in times of crisis, practicing and preaching responsible consumerism.

### **'Made in Ukraine!' – Consumer Support of the Ukrainian Producers**

If boycotts aimed to weaken certain actors economically, patriotic consumption attempted to empower the state through market practices. It started as a parallel consumer movement that called for the support of Ukrainian business and used the same communication platform of social media (*buycott*). It especially targeted small business initiatives that started after EuroMaidan and were interpreted as one of the positive outcomes of the revolution.

For many Ukrainians, the label 'Made in Ukraine' created an additional value of the product and became a strong argument for consumer decisions. As one of the activists of the movement 'Made in Ukraine!', Yilia Savostina, admitted, recent revolution and consequent war created the most favorable business environment for the Ukrainian producers, where they are granted with credibility and support based on the sole affiliation with Ukraine (Savostina 2015). Thus, ideological component of the consumption became one of the dominant elements of the practice, labeling consumerism as a form of state-building practice.

Re-orientation to Ukrainian producers presumed a financial investment in Ukraine as the state through tax deductions and the establishment of new workplaces. Some consumer activists explained this in detail to educate consumers as to how their preferences are connected to national security, 'We just want to remind you that by buying Ukrainian goods you create new workplaces, stabilize currency, increase salaries and pay taxes to the Ukrainian budget, which consequently allocates money and finances new military equipment for the Ukrainian army' (from a public Facebook group 'Boycott to the Party of Regions'). Another example is evident in the advertising of the online store of Ukrainian goods – '[Our store] is not only an internet-store of made-in-Ukraine goods. It is a tool by which every Ukrainian family can make a contribution in the economic development of our country' (from <http://nyatko.com.ua>, 29.03.2017). As well as in the boycott, the emphasis is on the consumers' responsibilities and duties as citizens of Ukraine. The argument of state support imposes moral and ethical repercussions of one's consumer activities and endows consumers with agency to sustain the state. While similar tendencies can be seen in other countries, particularly as manifestations of anti-globalization movements (see Klein 2000, Klein et al. 2004, Micheletti et al. 2004), the context of war and an ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine urge Ukrainian consumers to be more proactive. Some respondents confirmed that they were familiar with boycotts as a form for resistance before, but joined the movement only in response to the conflict with Russia. As

Olena puts this, ‘I just cannot tolerate Russian goods anymore. I know that some people avoid Starbucks in the United States because of their ethical preferences, but here it is an issue of war and I do not want to support the country of aggression in any possible way’ (Olena, 31 y.o.).

The strategy of patriotic consumption can be essentialized through the concept of *sviy/nash* (ours, one of us/ours) that originates from earlier historical discourses. Catherine Wanner’s interpretation of *sviy* states that it represents a collective Soviet identity produced by the ‘shared experience with an oppressive state apparatus,’ in which ‘[we] bond together against “them,” the enemy, the state and its institutions’ (Wanner 1998, 9; see also Yurchak 2006, 102-108). Pro-Ukrainian consumers also appeal to this shared identity. However, in the dichotomy of ‘us/our’ (*sviy*) vs ‘they’ (*vony*) the state is now united with citizens. Joint alliance constitutes a collective identity, which confronts the common threat of external enemy (e.g. Russia). Therefore, the actualization of the consumer slogan, ‘*Sviy do svogo po svoye*’ (Ours (one of us) comes to us to get ours), highlights the idea of a self-sufficient community with mutual support between producers and consumers, as well as between the citizens and their state. From this perspective, the consumption of once boycotted goods (for instance those affiliated with the Party of Regions’ politicians) is justified in the face of a larger national danger and for the sake of state welfare. Thus, the nation bonds together in the face of an external threat that can be further externalized through consuming only domestic products.

**Image 5.** “Buy *svoe* (yours), Ukrainian.”



*Source:* Facebook group “This Is Ukraine”, <https://www.facebook.com/etoukraina/>, undated (24.07.2015)

The interrelationship between the state and citizens can be traced in commodification of Ukrainian national symbols. The blue and yellow colours of the national flag, a trident, folklore and embroidery motives, figures of national heroes – these elements have been continuously replicated in various commodities. T-shirt, sweaters, dresses, and ties with national motifs appeared not only in the specialized for national producers, but also on the street



stands that usually sell inexpensive souvenirs and miscellaneous everyday commodities. This tendency took so-called patriotic goods from specialized spaces into a public space.

**Image 6.** UA\_Made festival of Ukrainian producers. The girl is wearing a t-shirt with the Ukrainian national symbol – trident.



*Source:* UaMade, <http://fest.uamade.com.ua/> (the page is no longer available)

**Image 7.** Street sale point. The t-shirt says “It so simple! The triggers of influence are in your wallet”



*Source:* Tetiana Bulakh

Many new Ukrainian brands appeared in light of these market developments. One of them, 'Patriboty' (<http://www.patriboots.com.ua>, literally – 'patriotic boots,' 29.03.2017), manufactures shoes with a trident print-mark. The brand offers a special discount for volunteers, who supply outfits for Ukrainian military servicemen and servicewomen.

The growing demand for 'patriotic' goods with national symbols and elements offered an opportunity for producers to monetize the raise of patriotism. For consumers, it created a way to publicly manifest and accentuate their belonging and conspicuously demonstrate their support for the state. At the same time, the elements of the state symbols play an interesting role in embodying the state in the material world and presenting the reification of its ontological qualities. The abstract existence of the state and the non-material affiliation between the citizens and Ukraine are articulated through the conspicuous consumption of its symbols. In consumer logic, the desire to own and exhibit state symbols can be seen as a desire for the state. Thus, commodities obtain fetish qualities and represent a mythical, magical power of the state as fetish (Taussig 1992). However, for Taussig the state is deeply connected with violence, it is 'intrinsically mysterious, mystifying, convoluting, plain scary, mythical, and arcane cultural properties and power of violence to the point where violence is very much an end to itself' (Taussig 1992: 223). In the case of patriotic consumption it represents a positive fantasy for the state – the state that citizens' strive to be associated with, the pride of being associated with the state. This desire for the state and new positive meanings of the state symbols construe a part of the alternative discourse of the state, where alienation and hostility to the state is complimented by the affection for the state.

Interestingly, the patriotic consumption initiative does not get substantial support on the governmental level. After 2008 there was a social campaign to promote local producers. 'Be a patriot, buy Ukrainian!' did not receive public support. Initiated from above and implemented through state agencies, the campaign was perceived with skepticism (Gorbanskiy 2009, Bilyk 2009). After EuroMaidan, consumer movements were organized by citizens themselves. Channeled from below, it obtained a different social value. We can interpret the consumer movement as a locus of polity, relatively independent from the direct influences of the state but directly involved in the production of the state. Here, Timothy Mitchell's words about the 'effect of a state' are relevant again:

politics itself is happening not so much by some agency called "state" or "government" imposing its will on some other preformed object — the social, the population, the people — but rather that it concerns a series of techniques that create what I have called the effect of a state: the very distinction between what appears as a sort of structure or apparatus of power, and the objects on which that power works (Mitchell 2013, see also 1992).

Thus, the structure of the state is not involved as an actor in consumer movements, but at the same time the effect of the state causes influence and shapes citizens' behavior.

## Conclusions

'I am a Ukrainian and I am proud of it' – says a t-shirt that one of my informants has in his collection of patriotic clothing. In our conversation, he made it clear that he would have never

considered wearing something like that just few years ago. After EuroMaidan years and in the light of the threat to Ukrainian sovereignty, the discourse about the state has significantly transformed in Ukraine at least during the proximate post-revolution years. In my essay, I aimed to elucidate and capture these shifting perspectives on the state and the role of citizen's participation in producing the desired discursive state.

Complex relationships between the citizens and the state in Ukraine are historically informed by the experience of the Soviet Union formation, post-Soviet crisis, and lasting instability. Overall, they can be characterized as distrust and alienation, which closely correlates with the notion of cynicism as a central structure, a mechanism of production of the political in public life (Navaro-Yashin 2002). The discussion of corruption dominated public critique of the state and was one of the central issues of Ukrainian revolutions – both in 2004 and in 2013-14. The discursive formation of a corrupted state has been challenged since the EuroMaidan. The deemed success of political changes through civil engagement altered the understanding of the state as a not-autonomous, but rather flexible entity that can respond to public pressure. The revolution also facilitated the development of a future-oriented fantasy for the state – an imagined European Ukraine – that was largely cultivated and articulated in social media and imposed self-responsibility among the citizens of Ukraine.

The alternative, positive, and even paternalistic attitudes toward the state can be traced through the analysis of representations of everyday consumer practices and specifically through the boycott of Russian goods and growing loyalty toward Ukrainian producers. The protectionism of the state along with the desire for the state shapes a new citizenship identity in Ukraine and offers alternative views of the state. Importantly, this fantasy for the state is produced by the citizens, articulated and represented in social media discourse, which is not regulated by the government. While the economic outcomes of the consumer movements can be questioned in terms of its scope and efficiency, the political and ideological effects are evident. Experiences that citizens actively discuss and share make social media an essential site for the producing the fantasy for the state. In return, this fantasy structures their consumer behavior and imposes new scenarios for exercising and expressing citizenship.

The critique of the state and power is something that can be seen as a strong tendency both in academic and in a public discourses. As Navaro-Yashin points out, 'What has been little studied, however, is the more significant, peculiar yet extremely commonplace, practice of active support for the state on the part of the people, or participation in nationalism' (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 129). In my exploration of consumer movements in Ukraine, I looked at these practices that presume different types of personal investments and involvement in the state and that make Ukrainians manifest what they are proud of.

There are two major questions that hang in the air and so far cannot be comprehensively addressed - whether the optimistic fantasy for the state will survive post-revolutionary disillusion and if consumer movements will transform into a lasting phenomenon? Since the conflict in Ukraine has shifted into a protracted phase and the post-revolution euphoria is fading away, these movements, most likely, will change as well. However, the importance of these experiences can hardly be overestimated. Boycotts and patriotic consumption showcased that practices of everyday consumption can become a battlefield for the desired state, a field for the production of ideas about the state, and an area of active civil engagement. Com-

municated and represented in social media, these practices united and empowered citizens in a new way, solidifying an imagined online community through common offline actions.

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