



ANTHROPOLOGY OF NOW

DISPOSSESSION

Anthropological Perspectives
on Russia's War Against Ukraine



Edited by Catherine Wanner



DISPOSSESSION

This volume examines Russia's war on Ukraine. Scholars who have lived through the Russian invasion or who have conducted ethnographic research in the region for decades provide timely analysis of a war that will leave a lasting mark on the twenty-first century.

Using the concept of dispossession, this volume showcases some of the novel ways violence operates in the Russian–Ukrainian war and the multiple means by which civilians, within the conflict zone and beyond, have become active participants in the war effort. Anthropological perspectives on war provide on-the-ground insight, historically informed analysis, and theoretical engagement to depict the experiences of dispossession by war and the motivations that drive the responses of the dispossessed. Such perspectives humanize the victims even as they depict the very inhumanity of war.

Dispossession is geared toward upper-level undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, and the general reader who seeks to have a deeper understanding of the Russian–Ukrainian war as it continues to impact geopolitics more broadly.

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Catherine Wanner

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*This book is dedicated to all who have lost their lives or
experienced dispossession as a result of this war.*



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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

We have followed the standard system for transliterating Cyrillic, modified Library of Congress. Speech was translated and transliterated from the language in which it was spoken or written. Some names used in this book are pseudonyms. In those instances, we have used names transliterated from the language the person generally uses. When an individual is a public figure or a published author, we have used their actual name. Place names are rendered in Ukrainian if the place is in Ukraine (Kyiv, not Kiev; Donbas, not Donbass; Odesa, not Odessa). All translations have been done by the authors unless otherwise noted.



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INTRODUCTION

War and dispossession

Catherine Wanner

War is an act of dispossession. One side tries to take things from the other, be it land, wealth, resources, culture, dignity, or anything else that will make domination, manipulation, and exploitation easier. And the other side (or sides) respond in kind. Although war is inextricably linked to dispossession, surprisingly little attention has been given to analyzing this connection. Rather, especially since the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, a great deal has been written about dispossession in terms of economic displacement. The focus of these works has generally been on how the dynamics propelling economic development produce economic growth at the expense of driving people from their land, turning them into wage laborers, and fostering dispossession leading to migration, which ultimately serves to magnify inequalities globally. More recently, attention has shifted to climate change and how environmental factors can render land unlivable, which can also force relocation.¹ Far less attention has been paid to the role of war in yielding dispossession and the interlocking consequences it produces, namely, displacement and disenfranchisement. The chapters in this book focus on the dispossession triggered by the hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine that began in 2014 and vastly accelerated after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The ethnographic data presented here address material forms of dispossession and their reverberations that result in immaterial loss and cultural dispossession. These chapters offer analyses of recent, transformative attempts to re-possess political and cultural autonomy as a response to the destructive dispossession produced by war.

There are many motivations to go to war. The historical encounter between Ukrainians and Russians has left an imperial legacy in its wake. This shared imperial legacy as of late has been divergently interpreted among Russians and

Ukrainians, leading to vastly different—and contradictory—political visions and aspirations for each country’s future political development. This legacy has also kept alive an imperial impulse that has been used to license acts of dispossession on two levels. An imperial impulse finds expression in actions designed to dominate other peoples and in a logic that renders those acts appropriate and even necessary (An-Na’im 2011, 50). Among the factors that keep this imperial impulse alive for some and position it as normative in a Russian–Ukrainian context are a sacralized politics of history and a melding of patriotism with piety that infuse historical and political narratives with justifications for taking or retaining possession of certain lands, peoples, and attributes of social and political life. As such, dispossession both enables and constrains the ability to narrate events that have contributed to the dispossessive disenfranchisement in the first place (McGranahan 2010, 769).

The beginning of Russian-backed armed separatism in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 was evidence of this enduring imperial impulse. Ostensibly the goal of armed intervention in Ukraine was to protect the rights of Russian speakers. It also served to rebuke Russia’s own perceived dispossession of its rightful imperial heritage and global standing as a feared superpower. However, the hybrid forms of warfare that ensued after 2014 unleashed new consequences. Ukrainians became increasingly committed to disrupting the normative expectations of historic patterns of imperial subjugation through violence, established cultural and ethnic hierarchies, and entrenched patterns of authoritarian governance. As violence accelerated over the years, culminating in the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, dispossession and the cascading series of consequences that inevitably followed sharply intensified. The chain of interlocking events, set in motion initially by the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the occupation of two regions in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, inevitably led to the displacement and impoverishment of indigenous and local populations. The import of these developments was compounded by the growing resolve and mass mobilization of civilian populations in Ukraine to reverse this dispossession in all its guises.

The brutality of war among “fraternal peoples,” as Soviet and Putinist rhetoric characterizes the relationship between Ukrainians and Russians, provides a springboard to offer a theoretical and conceptual framework to analyze the violence of war in terms of dispossession and the range of transformative responses to it. The essence of dispossession, I suggest, is that it compromises a person’s or a group’s autonomy by creating interdependencies that make them vulnerable to subjugation. Although there are multiple means by which to dispossess a person or group, there are essentially three types of dispossession: cultural, economic, and eliminatory. The residents of Ukraine have been subject to all three types. The peoples of the Russian Empire and former Soviet Union, including Ukrainians, have experienced cultural dispossession thanks to prolonged state-sponsored Russification, Sovietization, and other assimilatory pressures

that have erased cultural and local specificities. Certainly, for some, the creation of the Soviet command administrative economic system involved massive economic dispossession. Land and other forms of private property were confiscated by the state and nationalized. Especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when massive economic and fiscal reforms to unmake Soviet socialism were quickly or haphazardly implemented, the majority of the population experienced extreme economic dispossession as possibilities for reliable employment constricted and state services collapsed. The result was precarious impoverishment throughout the region. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, has unleashed eliminatory forms of dispossession, the focus here, which compounds previously ongoing cultural and economic dispossession.

Processes of dispossession have unfolded in two tempos, episodically in vastly hastened, usually violent modes, and gradually over the *longue durée*. Dispossession occurs via the episodic taking of land and other forms of property, leading to disempowerment, impoverishment, and displacement. It also occurs through processes of gradual, ongoing assimilatory pressures that can occur in waves over time and form layers. Successive waves of incremental dispossession dislodge pillars of autonomy and stability until they finally culminate in full dispossession. Russification, Sovietization, and neoliberal reforms after 1991 are all examples of waves of cultural and economic dispossession that occurred before the full-scale invasion, each leaving traces on the layers of traces.

A dual temporal perspective, episodic and gradual, allows us to conceive of dispossession not as a state that is the product of other acts but as a part of a process that involves a chain of interlocking events that can even depart from already being dispossessed. Even when a person or group has rights, thanks to a certain form of citizenship, actually possessing those rights remains dependent on a legal regime and forms of governance that respect and protect those rights. If that is not the case, those citizens are already dispossessed. As Judith Butler writes, “We are interdependent beings whose pleasure and suffering depend from the start on a sustained social world, a sustaining environment” (Butler and Athanasiou 2021, 4). Without a sustained social world and its recognizable traits, the prospects for dispossession find fertile ground. War, of course, shatters recognizable traits of a sustaining environment and creates a profound rupture to predictable patterns of everyday life. Repeated aggression does this repeatedly, facilitating ever greater degrees of dispossession over time.

So far I have noted three types of dispossession, cultural, economic, and eliminatory, and the dual tempos, episodic and gradual, in which they have unfolded. Mostly, however, dispossession has been analyzed in economic or monetary terms as the loss, forfeiture, or deprivation of land, through a variety of means, but often through market mechanisms. The loss of land becomes dispossessive when it leads to additional losses of property, livelihood, and belonging. A consequence of such dispossession is often forced migration, exile, and the

loss of citizenship and rights, which destroys, or at least vastly complicates, the lives of individuals and the communities to which they belong and derive meaning in their lives. Above all, the combined effect of these losses is disempowerment and the inability to refute the legitimacy of dispossession and forced displacement in the first place. Most anthropological studies of dispossession, especially those set in post-Soviet societies of the 1990s, have focused on the loss of property and land through market transfers (Gotfredsen 2016; Humphrey 2002; Khalvashi 2018; Nazpary 2001). In doing so, these studies have considered property a commodity within a neoliberal capitalist order and therefore have analytically connected dispossession to inequality. There is surely much merit to such approaches.

However, I propose a somewhat different framing that is reflected in the following chapters. Some forms of material property have value beyond the economic and monetary. It is specifically these immaterial forms of loss that accompany dispossession that we explore in this book. For example, property establishes boundaries in which interpersonal and community engagement occur and in which membership and rights are granted or denied; a home places a person in relation to others and creates status and feelings of rootedness and belonging in particular places; and property in the form of wedding rings, family heirlooms, and mundane objects, such as keys, form the symbolic bedrock of lifeworlds, memories, and identities.

In short, the loss of land, a home, and material objects has destructive reverberations for a person's sense of self, the sustainability of communities, and national solidarities with consequences on two temporal levels, episodic (loss) and gradually over time (loss of meaning). The sentimental attachments embedded in property give it important political, social, and cultural values that allow people to orient themselves and relate to others meaningfully. When dispossession occurs through involuntary property loss, and especially through the destruction of war, the multiple layers of meaning embedded in property become particularly apparent and the extent of losses is magnified. Here, we seek to explore the full ramifications of what has been lost through processes of dispossession brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Take as an example the experiences of the writer Volodymyr Rafeyenko. He had lived in Donetsk for 45 years when Russian-backed armed separatism started. After several months of living under attack, as a Russian-language writer and a specialist in Russian literature, he was forced to leave Donetsk for Kyiv, before he was displaced yet again. After years of war, much has changed for him. He no longer writes and publishes in Russian, and he even refuses to speak Russian to anyone, including his wife. When I asked him what he missed most about life in Donetsk, he said, "I miss myself. Donetsk is the place of my childhood, my youth, where my alma mater is, where I began to write. That is all gone. I miss myself."²

He noted that anyone with a conscience is not alone. There is always something to mull over, to think about, and to discuss. But what if that former conversation partner no longer exists or has been transformed into someone else by events that have overtaken the direction of life? This is what war can take away from a person. Additionally, he mentioned that, although Kyiv is a beautiful city with hills and rolling landscapes, he misses the steppe. On the steppe, it was possible to see the sunrise and the sunset. The vista was unbroken. How to restore the possibility of being able to converse with oneself and see the sunrise? These are some of the forms of dispossession that have beset the approximately 7 million Ukrainians who have been internally displaced and the additional 8.2 million who had left for Europe by May 2023.³

Displacement involves not just people moving across borders. During war, borders move across people, incorporating them into new political entities and groups where they are often (unwanted) minorities. This is another index of dispossession. Experiences of being regarded as suspicious outsiders by the new majority group, alien to its version of history and to the body politic it has forged to protect the same, reaffirm that the dispossessed belong elsewhere, not here (Tambar 2016).

Beyond the loss of land and property and the ways these material forms orient social relations and patterns of everyday life, Russia's war against Ukraine illustrates additional dimensions of eliminatory forms of dispossession. Athena Athanasiou suggests that "the politically induced condition in which certain people and groups of people become differentially exposed to injury, violence, poverty, indebtedness, and death" creates forms of vulnerability that can lead to situating the dispossessed in a state of "non-being" (Butler and Athanasiou 2021, 19). Based on research in post-apartheid South Africa, she uses the term "dignity taking" to refer to dispossession that is designed to produce not only impoverishment and displacement but also dehumanization by thrusting the dispossessed into "non-being." In other words, once a people is subject to cultural and economic dispossession—that is to say, no longer fully possesses their own histories, languages, belief systems, traditions, and the land and communities that sustain them—the final phase, eliminatory dispossession, takes away dignity and sometimes life itself. With that, a new state of "non-being" of a former people is born through eliminatory dispossession.

Within the context of war, the means by which individuals or groups can be subject to "dignity taking" and "non-being" are abundant. War recasts dispossession as a processual politicized chain of events that allows economic, cultural, and eliminatory forms of dispossession to coalesce, not just to reduce the autonomy of the other but to crush it. A framework that recalibrates the weight of the political against the economic and monetary reveals the consequences of politically motivated dispossession, in which economic dynamics that are insidious, deleterious, and long-lasting take structural form. When we consider the

multidirectional and multiplex aspects of dispossession that result from war, we gain a perspective that allows us to sketch out the degree of difficulty we will encounter in making restitution for dispossession in terms of restorative justice and eventual reconciliation in the long aftermath of this war.

To illustrate the logic and motivations for implementing eliminatory forms of dispossession operative in this war, consider a speech that Vladimir Putin gave on the eve of the Russian invasion. He articulates an envisioned state of “non-being” via “dignity taking” and the eliminatory means he plans to use to achieve it. In a televised address, he said:

It is a historical fact. As I have already said, Soviet Ukraine is the result of Bolshevik policy, and even today it can be rightfully called “Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s Ukraine.” He is its author and architect. This is fully corroborated by archival documents ... And now his “grateful descendants” have demolished monuments to Lenin in Ukraine. This is what they call decommunization.⁴ You want decommunization? Well, that suits us just fine. But why stop halfway? We are ready to show you what real decommunization means for Ukraine.⁵

Putin makes clear in this speech his view that if Ukrainians want to remove Soviet-era symbols, tropes, and concepts from public space and thereby distinguish Ukrainians from Russians and Ukraine from Russia, then “non-being” awaits them. He will obliterate Ukrainian state sovereignty and a sense of Ukrainian nationhood by returning Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians to their common historical–spiritual space.

The entanglements of the Ukrainian–Russian historical experience previously included efforts to govern using state-led initiatives to culturally dispossess people of their heritage and distinct cultural attributes. They also now include a political relationship that dispossesses people of their land and rights to peace, protection, and dignity, with the intention of delivering a state that no longer includes autonomy or the right to self-determination. (Dunn and Bobick 2014) These are the dynamics that have long made Ukrainian state sovereignty vulnerable to Russian state leaders’ desire to re-possess imperial power. The full-scale invasion that began on 24 February 2022 is simply a forceful iteration of this stark position.

To connect the processes of dispossession to war, Peter Wolfe’s (1999) landmark study, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, is helpful to further understand eliminatory forms of dispossession. Given the long-standing anthropological interest in indigenous societies and the colonial encounter, this study has been highly influential. Wolfe argues that settler colonial societies represent a qualitatively different form of colonialism that helps us see how dispossession could be achieved over time. As an Australian, Wolfe

is particularly sensitive to the treatment of Aboriginal peoples at the hands of white European settlers. Anthropologists and other scholars who have studied the history and current challenges of indigenous communities in the Americas have also found a settler colonialist analytical perspective insightful. Moreover, settler colonialism reaffirmed the work of earlier scholars, such as Edward Said (1994), who made similar arguments that linked the dispossession of Palestinians under occupation to alternative, colonial-like tactics of domination used by the Israeli state.

According to Wolfe, settler colonialism distinguishes itself from other forms of colonialism, such as extractive and franchise colonialism, in that it becomes an ongoing colonizing structure, not simply an event or a series of events in the past. It is centered on a winner-take-all battle over land, a denial of the Other's sovereignty, and the granting of authorship to the settler population to narrate their own normative supremacy and entitlements to the very land the settlers occupy.⁶ This narrative sustains a settler colonial structure and begins to distinguish the differences between a settler colonial society, where the colonizers remain, from a postcolonial one, where the ongoing effects of colonial rule endure even without imperial state structures. Wolfe succinctly writes, "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2006, 388).

Settler colonialism suggests how dispossession can operate on two levels in tandem: it centers on land, not on labor, and on forging narratives that naturalize the possession of land for some and normativize the eviction of others. Therefore, the "logic of elimination" is access to land. Precisely because the forms of settler colonialism include both eliminatory dispossession through land and cultural dispossession through narrative, Wolfe is careful to distinguish the logic of elimination of settler colonialism from genocide. "Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal," he writes (Wolfe 2006, 387). The two often converge but they are not synonymous. The difference is that settler colonialism aims to *replace* indigenous communities with settler societies using a variety of means that could, but doesn't necessarily have to, include genocide.

Russian President Vladimir Putin explains his own logic of elimination by asserting that Ukrainians as a separate people do not exist. By looking at centuries of settler colonialism and cultural dispossession that delivered Russians and Russian culture to Ukraine, he argues that Ukrainians have no history, religion, or language independent of Russia.⁷ Ukrainian state sovereignty amounts to nothing more than a Leninist creation of a sub-state structure that gains its relevance through interdependence on Russian state power.

The Native American response in the United States to settler colonialism challenges the logic of settler colonial domination. "We are still here" is their retort to sustained settler colonial efforts to eliminate indigenous peoples through dispossession, forced displacement and relocation, assimilation, disease, and murder. Indigenous resistance to colonial power to "still be here" has proven

more resilient than the structures and processes of elimination that tried to dispossess them into a state of “non-being” (O’Brien 2017, 254; Speed 2017).⁸

The same could be said of the Ukrainian response to repel war-inspired dispossession in all its forms: cultural, economic, and eliminatory. The use of a full-scale invasion to forcefully incorporate Ukraine into a Russian realm by dispossessing Ukrainians of their state sovereignty as a final push into a non-autonomous state of interdependency has triggered broad reactions of resistance and defiance. Outmanned and outgunned, Ukrainians have responded by all means possible, including the weaponization of language, religion, and social media and the activation of transnational networks in which they are all embedded. The range of responses to this war to reassert that “We are still here” is in proportion to the intensity and duration of dispossessive episodic and gradual efforts to which Ukrainians have been subject over time through cultural, economic, and eliminatory means.

Transformative responses to dispossession

When dispossession is viewed as embedded in a chain of events and as part of a process—and not a static state of being dispossessed—its transformative potential is more readily visible. Much like Victor Turner’s (1970) discussion of a liminal phase in ritual performance, dispossession has a “betwixt and between” phase too. This phase is critically important in that the void this phase offers is what allows for sweeping and rapid change to take hold. In other words, during the process of becoming dispossessed, within the chain of dispossessive events, much like in a ritual process, this liminal, transitional phase is characterized by no longer possessing what was lost or taken (land, property, dignity, for example). It is also characterized by not yet possessing what is desired. The goal is not always re-possessing what was lost or taken, because that is often impossible and sometimes not even desirable. With cultural norms and structural impediments to change destroyed by war, in essence, a multitude of possibilities for invention and innovation open up during this transitional phase and this is what makes dispossession so profoundly transformative. The key difference between processes of ritual and dispossession is that, in a ritual context, the outcome is clearly envisioned and usually even scripted. The point of using ritual to bring about a desired transformation is precisely to capitalize on the structured, scripted nature of ritual to break down a previous status and secure the transition to a new, specific status. In contrast, in the case of dispossession, while there is a sense as to what has been lost, what could or should emerge in its place after this liminal phase is often not entirely clear and sometimes not even imaginable. This gives this transitory phase of dispossessive processes an open-ended nature that is pregnant with possibilities and begins to explain the intense creativity and resourcefulness that characterized the early stages of the invasion.

Within the context of wartime violence and destruction, a radical openness to re-formulating a sustaining lifeworld in response to dispossession is the spark to conceive of new possibilities as to what one *could* possess or re-possess in the future. As these possibilities are innumerable, this means that dispossession, as unenviable an experience as it is, nonetheless has the potential via its very liminality to lead to significant and swift transformation when radical openness allows for imaginative resilience, regeneration, and reinvention. Property, communities, habits, and many other aspects of daily life might have been lost, as the first set of chapters illustrate, but so too have the many barriers to all forms of change.

What is distinctive about this war is the range of transformative reactions that have been unleashed by broad sectors of the Ukrainian population as a response to renewed efforts to render them dispossessed of their autonomy and to enhance their interdependency on the Russian state. At its core, the extent of radical openness to change is a direct outgrowth of and proportional to perceived threats of dispossession. Reactions to dispossession are driven by a conviction that the imperial impulse emerging as a policy in the Putin regime that fed the conditions leading to war in the first place must be tamed once and for all to allow Ukrainians to chart their own political future unencumbered. This chain of events—an imperial impulse, acts of dispossession, and transformative responses informed by radical openness during a transition phase—has culminated in an almost total civilian mobilization in response to the Russian invasion. This unprecedented situation has already yielded extensive transformation in the form of institutional innovation and revised cultural norms in Ukrainian society, which are analyzed in the second set of chapters.

Radical openness can lead to a concordant radical intentionality to reverse dispossession by reclaiming aspects of history, forms of expression, and modes of belonging. The sheer determination to resist dispossession and an even greater reduction in autonomy and capacity for self-determination have transformed the everyday lives of Ukrainians under conditions of war. Therefore, I consider dispossession not just as part of a chain of occurrences that includes loss in a material sense (land, citizenship, livelihood) but also in an ontological sense (rootedness, belonging, communal ties). These immaterial forms of loss are connected to efforts to resist dispossession by transforming what is already possessed. This begins, for example, to explain the vast uptick in the use of the Ukrainian language in public spaces across the country; the motivation to create and claim to support a Ukrainian, independent, self-governing Orthodox Church; and the variety of other forms of institutional innovation and revised norms of behavior that now include humor, new citizenship regimes, and women in active combat positions in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Confronted by dispossession since armed aggression began in 2014 that increasingly has eliminatory dimensions that rest on layers of previous cultural and economic

dispossession, the radical openness to find solutions to reverse these dispossessive losses and other attempts to compromise Ukrainian autonomy have prompted sweeping and transformative institutional and cultural changes. This makes the Russian invasion of Ukraine a watershed event for Ukrainian society and for NATO, the European Union, and geopolitics more broadly.

Dispossession since the 1990s

The connections proposed here between war, dispossession, and responses to dispossession leading to transformation in the post-Soviet space are new. Earlier forms of dispossession experienced in the region were largely driven by Soviet “high modernist” projects of socialist economic development, such as sprawling collective farms and hyper rationalist, monoindustrial urban planning (Brown 1995; Scott 1999). Authoritarian forms of governance largely silenced collective responses to reverse that dispossession. At the same time, cultural dispossession was an ongoing source of discontent throughout the region among the educated elite, and especially among members of the creative class, who had long chafed under Sovietization campaigns and the unique form of Soviet colonial relations that Adeeb Khalid characterizes as “the activist, interventionist, mobilizational state that seeks to sculpt its citizenry in an ideal image” (Khalid 2006, 232).

After the fall of the Soviet regime in 1991, and before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, most studies of dispossession in the region moved beyond cultural forms of dispossession to focus on economic ones. Having disenfranchised citizens from post-Soviet political domains, neoliberalism was posited by most scholars as the main factor driving dispossession in the region. Along with the well-developed ethnographic record of documented dispossession of indigenous peoples (Bloch 2003; Grant 1995; Gray 2005), many anthropological studies conducted in the turbulent decade of the 1990s focused on economic dispossession (Gotfredsen 2016; Humphrey 2002; Khalvashi 2018; Nazpary 2001; Wanner 2005). These studies illustrate the expansion of mechanisms capable of dispossessing ever broader sectors of populations through regressive taxation, crony capitalism, and other forms of neoliberal, capitalist-driven disempowerment and disenfranchisement.

Across the region, “market Bolsheviks,” enabled by state manipulation, promoted individual enrichment for themselves and “trickle-down economics” for others. Resentment grew quickly as state policies became engines for social suffering, downward mobility, and dispossession for some. In contrast, for a new elite, mounting wealth, status, and privilege crystallized into an oligarchic class with favorable relations to state authorities that secured sustained structural privilege. Many anthropologists studying post-Soviet forms of dispossession took inspiration from David Harvey (2005) to explain why some people were able to amass fantastic wealth after 1991, whereas the overwhelming majority

of citizens fell into deep poverty. Solving this puzzle fueled many earlier studies that engaged the concept of dispossession. Harvey recasts Marx's primitive accumulation, or the proletarianization of labor via wage labor, into "accumulation by dispossession" to explain the general rise of sharp inequality globally. Accumulation by dispossession refers to the dynamics inherent in capitalism to propel over-accumulation in the form of immobile capital (land, factories, and commercial hubs), which depends for its growth on dispossessing others of their access to the same. This propels uneven development and inequalities, which are particularly manifest in societies that transitioned from a planned economy to a market-driven economy. According to Harvey, the main goals of "accumulation by dispossession" are the restoration and consolidation of class power in postcolonial countries via the privatization of state assets, the redistribution of state assets disproportionately to upper-class elites, the financialization of the economy, and the management and manipulation of the social tensions that inevitably result (Harvey 2005, 159–165).⁹

Caroline Humphrey, drawing on long-term fieldwork in Siberia, detailed the processes by which accumulation and lavish consumption came at the expense of dispossessing others by making them "unemployment positive," either through forced displacement or by a lack of access to employment (Humphrey 2002). She notes the double sense of dispossession that was emerging in the 1990s and writes:

The dispossessed are people who have been deprived of property, work and entitlements, but in a second sense we can understand them as people who are themselves no longer possessed. That is, they are no longer inside the quasi-feudal corporations, the collective "domains," which confer a social status on their members and which in practice are until today the key units disposing of property and people in Russia.

(Humphrey 1996/1997, 70)

When state services collapsed in the 1990s, unemployment led to extreme dispossession in the form of impoverishment and political disenfranchisement throughout the region. Joma Nazpary (2001), building on Humphrey's earlier work, suggests that the loss of a paternalistic state led to the deprivation of rights, the loss of social stability, and a flourishing of often contradictory microstrategies among the dispossessed to make ends meet in 1990s Kazakhstan.¹⁰ The ultimate consequence of these haphazard responses to economic and cultural disorientation, Nazpary argues, was "chaos." Precisely because it is not possible for societies to exist in a prolonged state of chaotic transition, subsequent studies of dispossession include attempts to explain these reversals of fortune and the incomprehensibility that came to characterize everyday life. Gotfredsen (2016) argues that Georgians, who were dispossessed of 20 percent of their

territory in a war with Russia in 2008, appeal to conspiracy theories to make sense of economic dispossession and to explain who has power over wealth. These conspiracy theories, like the mythological cosmologies of Medea and their multiple manifestations in Georgian society that Tamta Khalvashi (2018) analyzes, are “good to think” because they offer flexible explanations for economic dispossession, postsocialist transformation, and political unrest. However, because these affective narratives are fueled by imagination, they often introduce ambiguity and provide a means to accommodate unwanted political transformations and economic dispossession without providing a response that could effectively begin to reverse or transform the sources of that dispossession (Khalvashi 2018, 821).

Some have criticized studies of economic dispossession for placing an overemphasis on the power of capital flows to mobilize labor in service of a global capitalist economy as a generator of dispossession, which has contributed to discounting the agency of the dispossessed, which we see so vividly in the response to this war. Glassman (2006) makes the important intervention that in an era of neoliberal transnationalism, accumulation by dispossession increasingly yields the formation of new solidarities among similarly affected groups. These groups join together to rectify the emerging forms of inequality and dispossession they are forced to confront by embedding activism on a vastly expanded global scale, allowing local movements to be operative on a global stage. Indeed, as many of the chapters in this book illustrate, local experiences of dispossession can now be projected into cyberspace and calls for activist reaction and even retribution for dispossession can reach far beyond national borders. These new forms of solidarity that emerge are often based on a relational interdependency that has strategic and instrumental value. Historical context is essential to gauge the depth and extent of dispossession and the ability to analyze the will—versus the absolute need—to confront dispossession. This is key to understanding the agency of the dispossessed and the type of dispossession we see operative in this war.

Ethnographic states of emergency

Allen Feldman (1995) coined the term “ethnographic states of emergency” to connote the experience of conducting ethnographic research in sites subject to political violence. Such research carries the burden of communicating the perils of living through the terror of being subject to random violence. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) argue quite persuasively that the very definition of a traumatized person is someone who cannot articulate what they have experienced. They came to this conclusion after working with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. They understood Holocaust survivors to be “impossible witnesses” of what they had endured. This has long-term ramifications for how war is recalled, understood, and narrated (Roccu and Salem 2019).

The chapters in this book depict the experience of war, both for individuals and for specific groups of people, and the variety of adaptive responses they avail themselves of to respond to the atrocities that have been inflicted upon them and changed the very tenor of their everyday lives. This reveals the dynamics that shape the relationship between politics, displacement, and dispossession, which scholars such as Giorgio Agamben (1998) suggest are embodied in refugees, asylum seekers, and illegal migrants, who increasingly reflect our “universal condition” as *homo sacer* or individuals with no rights of citizenship. Agamben suggests that the plight of the refugee is increasingly emblematic of political conflict, and the ethnographic data presented here reaffirm this. The state and the “state of exception,” in this case brought on by invasion and war, have spurred this transformation. As states of exception multiply, they trap people in zones where unpredictability, uncertainty, and vulnerability are the norm.

One of the benefits of ethnographic research is that it offers granular portraits of the visceral experience of war. These essays begin to explain why some people leave violent situations and why others choose to stay, if that is indeed an option. This decision is a pivotal moment that influences who will be dispossessed of their former life and who will not. Sometimes remaining in place guards against dispossession, and sometimes the only option to refute dispossession is precisely the reverse, to leave. The micro-level perspectives that ethnographic research delivers often reveal the motivations and reasoning of people trapped in violent situations not of their own making and details how they assess their options and make choices. Ethnographic research places into question the extent to which migration is actually voluntary when dispossession occurs because of war (Chatty 2010; Fagertun 2017; Glick Schiller 2021; Weston 2022). These kinds of ethnographic insights inspired Anthony Richmond (1993) to question the very concepts of “voluntary” and “involuntary” forms of migration. He suggests a reconceptualization of displacement in terms of “proactive migration” and “reactive migration” to restore a sense of agency, will, and choice to those threatened with dispossession and displacement.

Some of the responses to dispossession addressed in this book include the weaponization of information and communication through social media, the use of language and religious allegiance to reinforce state sovereignty, and the manipulation of civic transnational networks and historical understandings. They illustrate not just new tactics and strategies of waging war but also new means to reverse dispossession. These responses, which I suggest here are driven by radical openness, include new mechanisms for demanding accountability for crimes of aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The engagement of civilian populations in this war suggests how future armed confrontations might be altered because of the tactics deployed in this first-ever internet war where every civilian with a cell phone is also a documenter of the ravages of wartime dispossession and destruction.

All contributors to this volume are women, which in part reflects the anthropological profession, but it also speaks to the circumstances of war. Men under the age of 60 are mobilized in Ukraine and are not allowed to leave the country. Moreover, limited electricity and heat, frequent air raids, and the ever-present threat of violence are not conducive to scholarly inquiry. Many contributors have been displaced at least once and often to cities outside Ukraine from where they periodically return home. Reflecting on how morally freighted the decision to remain or relocate is, some insist on referring to themselves as “refugee scholars,” whereas others who have moved in and out of the country steadfastly refuse to see themselves as displaced. Such labels could well have divisive meaning in a postwar context when it comes to establishing who has a right to participate in decisions involving rebuilding cities, institutions, and communities.

This also means that when discussing the dispossession that has resulted from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the inherited practice of maintaining a neutral analytical tone, so-called “scientific objectivity,” can be challenging. Anthropologists are trained to be sensitive to positionality, for this is precisely what can create blind spots in understanding the beliefs, practices, and motivations of people from other cultures and places. One more easily sees repugnant values in others as often ideologically induced, whereas one’s own presumptions and assumptions remain unexamined and therefore hold the illusion of being “neutral.” This is particularly true concerning analyses of gender. Political engagement and ideological convictions are often attributed to others, whereas our own politicized views are naturalized and therefore are less examined, although they too fundamentally inform the arguments and interpretations we make.

Anthropologists in the past have not shied away from tackling controversial topics. They have taken provocative positions that challenged the cultural hegemonies of their time. Many anthropologists were proponents of evolutionary theory; others were critical of imperial ambitions and the colonial regimes propped up by the armed forces of their home countries; and, more recently, anthropologists have spoken out on a variety of issues concerning racial discrimination and other hierarchies of inequality. Often they were motivated to do so because, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) has argued, political convictions motivate—and in fact should motivate—scholarship.

The authors whose work is included in this collection are either from Ukraine or have engaged in topics concerning Ukraine or Ukrainians for decades. In other words, our positionality is quite clear. We seek to cojoin our scholarship to the urgent political issues of the day by illustrating how this war has affected people on the ground. The approach here is inherently interdisciplinary although the methods of are primarily ethnographic.

We seek to document what has been lost already in one very long year of ongoing destruction of human life and infrastructure. War traumatizes individuals, breaks up communities, and shatters the patterns of everyday life, but it also

triggers responses to these unwanted developments that are likely to have lasting consequences. These chapters are snapshots of how the processes of dispossession have informed those developments and their consequences.

About this book

The first two chapters examine how personhood has been remade by this war. Perceptions of time and space are fundamental informants of culture and experience. The first chapter by Natalia Otrishchenko offers a penetrating analysis of how war, the ever-present threat of violence, and the precarity and instability that come to characterize everyday life destroy a linear and progressive experience of time. War not only ruptures linear time and creates a “before” and “after” yardstick to measure time but also transforms the experience of time itself. It becomes difficult to make sense of one’s daily experiences because notions of time and the sequence of events become difficult to grasp and delineate. How can one, therefore, recount what has happened to decide what to do next? Understandings of time will undoubtedly affect political change going forward in that they inform which memories will haunt, which ones will be mobilized to agitate for particular forms of change, and which recollections will be used to question what we think we know from what we are told.

Picking up on the difficulties of articulating traumatic experiences, in a work of autoethnography, social psychologist Valentyna Pavlenko analyzes how the emotions experienced in the early stages of the war affected behavior. She details her own experiences as a resident of Kharkiv, a city in eastern Ukraine only 40 kilometers from the Russian border that was subject to repeated shelling. Surrounded by urban ruin and decimated neighborhoods, her own observations of emotional intensity and behavioral responses are complemented by the findings of research she conducted in spring 2022 on the psychological effects of experiencing pervasive vulnerability. Her timely explorations allow her to capture how emotionalized reactions to war inform perceptions of the options people have and what motivates the choices they make. Her moving recollections of this pivotal period shed light on how individuals in a state of high stress grapple with moral quandaries and make wrenching decisions.

Communal membership becomes a casualty of war as forced displacement scatters people around the world and destroys a sense of belonging and home. The experience of displacement is particularly poignant for Crimean Tatars, who were driven from their land and sent into exile in Central Asia during World War II by Soviet authorities. Greta Uehling’s Chapter 3 on the forced displacement of Crimean Tatars after the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, analyzes the clash of temporalities that ensues for this indigenous community as they reexperience historical traumas and the displacement that characterizes it. Refusing to migrate meant becoming a citizen of another country. Refusing

to be dispossessed of citizenship meant forcible relocation and becoming dispossessed of one's home and historic homeland. Such are the choices between forms of dispossession that Crimean Tatars must choose. This experience is not limited to Crimean Tatars. Others who decided their primary allegiance was to Ukraine had similar experiences, suggesting that the phenomenon can be analyzed more broadly.

Although living in an annexed territory imposes certain forms of dispossession, living in occupied territories involves others. In both instances, we see mobile borders with varying degrees of permeability recasting the meaning of citizenship. In Chapter 4, Oleksandra Tarkhanova analyzes a form of back-and-forth displacement that has characterized migratory patterns during this conflict. She analyzes how displaced residents of the two oblasts under occupation since 2014, the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, have experienced dispossession. She argues that, in addition to being dispossessed of their land and homes, the residents of the occupied territories have been dispossessed of their state even as they navigate between multiple state and sub-state political authorities. Current and former residents of the occupied regions experience not only the loss of certain citizenship-based rights and entitlements but also the stability and predictability of everyday life that a state can potentially deliver.

A different kind of fragmentation and multiplicity sets in for the Jewish residents of Odesa. Known as a hub of Jewish culture and humor, the Jewish residents of this fabled city, most of whom are Russian-speaking, have to contend with the threat of being "denazified" by invading Russian forces. The paradoxical, even absurd, nature of having to disentangle an old threat in a new guise throws into relief that, after 30 years of living in independent Ukraine, many Russian-speaking Jews from Odesa now recognize themselves as Ukrainian Jews. Marina Sapritsky-Nahum argues in Chapter 5 that Jewish residents of Odesa reflect the afterlife of the empire. They have fragmented identities and cross-cutting allegiances, which animate different histories in the present moment. An imperial afterlife colors attachments to family, community, city, and nation and informs how Ukrainian Jews in Ukraine and abroad braid these diverse historical threads into new lifeworlds amidst war.

The multinational and imperial dimensions of Soviet rule are revealed in Tatiana Vagramenko's insightful Chapter 6 on a variety of Protestant groups who, up until the 24 February 2022 invasion, often maintained close contact with co-believers in Russia. Most of these Protestant communities formed during the twentieth century and their unions, networks of cooperation, and common endeavors reflect the Soviet, Russia-centered context in which they were created. Moreover, prior to the 2022 full-scale invasion, most of these communities advocated pacifism and eschewed all forms of violence. Both their unions and doctrinal beliefs have been tested by the invasion. The moral quandaries the war

has forged have given way to a radical openness in making adaptive changes that include abandoning previous pacifist convictions and practices of withdrawal from a fallen world. In their place, they advocate novel forms of peacebuilding and activism, such as writing their own communal histories and severing alliances with co-religionists in Russia.

Even as some groups fracture and splinter as a result of war and dispossessive loss, new solidarities form and collective action in a new direction is made possible. The intensity of dispossession and feelings of betrayal have, counterintuitively, found expression in humor that has been weaponized to strike a blow. The chapters by Laada Bilaniuk and Bridget Goodman reveal the extent to which language and images circulate on the internet as defiant micro-actions that mock the prospects for Russian conquest. Finding receptive audiences, these memes have been immortalized by their viral, global circulation. In doing so, memes also generate solidarity among Ukrainians, as Bilaniuk shows in Chapter 7, and among Ukrainians and others, as Goodman illustrates in Chapter 8. Bilaniuk frames the memes as responses to the war that function much like “antibodies” in that they, too, counter “invading ideas and destructive cultural logics.” She analyzes the ramifications of these memes and the power of language to generate wartime resilience and resistance among Ukrainians. Goodman, in contrast, considers the circulation of images that have become globally emblematic of pivotal events in the war. She analyzes how these events are narrated on social media and explains why they have exerted such magnetism around the world.

The final set of chapters focuses on the radical openness that characterizes responses to dispossession driven by the war. The breakdown of norms of behavior, social institutions, and the everyday routines that maintained them have delivered a big sky vista of new options. Like so much else, the constraints and barriers that limited possibilities for certain forms of cultural, social, political, and legal change have also been destroyed. This allows for the emergence of agile, individual-initiated solutions to social suffering and fundamental institutional change that will surely affect postwar society for some time to come.

Emily Channell-Justice considers the myriad forms of self-organization that have emerged to counteract dispossession on multiple fronts. She analyzes the efforts of small volunteer groups to respond to the needs of the displaced residents of Eastern Ukraine, who have been dispossessed of land, livelihood, and homes. As needs magnified, so did the number and impact of these groups. Based on ethnographic research among internally displaced people, Channell-Justice illustrates in Chapter 9 how, in the span of a few short years, these initiatives have transformed civil society in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine and serve as evidence of the transformative potential of dispossession.

One of the sharpest and most likely durable examples of lasting institutional change as a result of this war is the integration of women into the Ukrainian Armed Forces, including into combat positions. These developments, along with

efforts to address sexual harassment in the military and the status of female veterans more broadly, are analyzed by Tamara Martsenyuk in Chapter 10. She situates these issues in terms of what this means for the evolution of gender ideologies more broadly and for the deepening militarization of Ukrainian society going forward.

Finally, the last chapter by Tetiana Kalenychenko illustrates efforts already underway to tackle conflicts and reduce social tensions within Ukrainian society by developing robust mechanisms for dialogue. Engaging in peacebuilding efforts during the war amounts to an effort to transform divisive forces and dynamics within Ukrainian society. Kalenychenko analyzes in Chapter 11 the initiatives to strengthen local communities by identifying moral leaders, fostering places in public space where people can congregate, and developing a political culture of dialogue to ensure that, when this war ends, there will be mechanisms already in place to begin to pursue restorative justice and solve the myriad problems that will confront Ukrainians as they rebuild their lifeworlds, cities, and selves.

By having addressed the weaponization of information, humor, and social media as well as the securitization of language, religious, and civic transnational networks, these chapters sketch not just new tactics and strategies for waging war and combatting dispossession but also new mechanisms for demanding accountability for crimes of aggression. When dispossession is placed within a context of a sequence of actions, in this case, sparked by an imperial impulse that led to an invasion and a radical openness that informs the means to re-possess a path to autonomy and a desired future, we see how the geopolitical imagination of alliances, new forms of governance, aspirations for justice and retribution, and the available means to realize them might emerge. Indeed, these are among the seismic changes Russia's war against Ukraine has already delivered.

Notes

- 1 There is enormous literature on economic forms of dispossession written by anthropologists. Several notable ethnographic studies include Dudley 2000; McGranahan 2010; Roccu 2013; Chatty 2010; Atuahene 2016; Tambar 2016; Fagertun 2017; and Weston 2022. See also a 2016 special issue of *Focaal* (74) entitled "After Dispossession."
- 2 Rafeyenko came to the United States to promote two translations of his books *The Length of Days: An Urban Ballad* and *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love*. We had this conversation at Penn State following a book presentation on 17 November 2022.
- 3 There were 22 million border crossings from Ukraine into Europe. Most were women, and some traveled with children—usually, but not always, their own. These numbers prompted the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights to claim that the levels of displacement are undoubtedly higher than official estimates. Nonetheless, with a total population of 44 million, this means that nearly one-third of Ukraine's population has been displaced as a result of war. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> and <https://www.statista.com/topics/8922/russia-ukraine-conflict-2021-2022/#topicOverview>

- 4 Decommunization is a policy introduced in 2015 under Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, following the Maidan protests of 2013–2014, that mandated the removal from public space of Soviet-era symbols, propaganda, and monuments, excluding those dedicated to World War II. Decommunization laws were popularly referred to as “memory laws.”
- 5 Speech of Vladimir Putin, 21 February 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5-ZdTGLmZo>
- 6 The sweeping attempts to “decolonize” the field of Slavic Studies would do well to consider the multiple means by which imperial domination can hide in plain sight and mask forms of colonial subjugation that reduce autonomy for some without generating critical inquiry. I suggest that settler colonialism is a more powerful dynamic shaping the histories of the territories of the former Russian Empire than many of the other colonizing techniques used by overseas European empires.
- 7 Alexander Etkind (2011) argues that Russia has been internally colonized by its own state and elites as well as simultaneously subject to external colonization. A key means of internal colonization was to settle “empty” lands but in the process to dispossess the indigenous inhabitants of those lands. This argument, while novel, remains controversial. See Wanner (2022) for a discussion of how religion and language have been vehicles of settler colonialism in Ukraine in the past and how they are being “weaponized” once again in an attempt to reassert Russian cultural influence and political domination in Ukraine since 2014.
- 8 Taking a broader and more critical perspective, Mamdani (2015, 596) suggests that while settler colonialism might have been quite effective in the Americas as an eliminatory and exploitative force, it was unable to take root in Africa to the same extent (see also Speed 2017 for a critique of this analytical framework).
- 9 Harvey argues that crises are no longer centered on class conflict in the classically Marxist sense of tensions resulting from balancing the demands of capital against those of labor in the factory as a result of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2006). Kalb (2015, 15–16) takes it a step further and argues that class itself should increasingly be seen as a compendium of unstable, contradictory, and “antagonistic relational interdependences.”
- 10 Very similar dynamics were operative in Ukraine and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. I have argued elsewhere (Wanner 2005) that the main way to avoid dispossession and poverty in the 1990s was to monetize skills and hobbies when employees often did not receive wages and salaries for months at a time.

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PART I

Experiencing loss through dispossession and displacement



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1

THE TIME THAT WAS TAKEN FROM US

Temporal experiences after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine

Natalia Otrishchenko

Despite the attempts of archaeologists, especially Heinrich Schliemann, to locate Troy in a specific space and time, the legendary city exists far beyond the hill of Hisarlic. The Trojan War, which might have happened in the twelfth century BC, also endures beyond time. According to Homer's *Iliad*, it lasted for ten years. Still, Homer himself, as Arnaldo Momigliano puts it, was "indifferent to exact chronology and in general to temporal sequence" (Momigliano 1966, 9). This ancient war exists in different cultures not as a fixed historical event but as a myth outside the linear representation of time.

The Trojan War illustrates two lines of tension concerning the assessment of time during an armed conflict. The first one lies between what we might call the "time of extreme" and the "time of routine." The decade-long siege of Troy not only constituted armed confrontations, battles, and military tricks but also remade the everyday lives of thousands of people.

The war in Ukraine has already lasted for nine years, and it heavily intensified after the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. From 2014 to 2023, Russia occupied Crimea; flight *MH17* was shot down; fighting broke out in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions; Chernihiv and Kharkiv were heavily bombed; mass atrocities were perpetrated in Bucha and Iziium; Mariupol was destroyed; the Ukrainian army launched a counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region and liberated the city of Kherson; and Russian missiles destroyed housing and energy infrastructure. Thousands lost their lives, millions had to leave their homes, and the entire Ukrainian population had to mobilize to counter this aggression.

During these nine years, presidential elections were held twice; professionals established new institutions; local administrations carried out decentralization reforms; doctors fought the pandemic; people fell in love; children were born;

teenagers entered universities; and men and women went to their jobs, lost their businesses, and started new ones. During a war, overlapping temporal orders evolve between a time of extremes, characterized by the destruction of existing temporal structures, and a time of routines, defined by repetitive daily activities to sustain human lives. Experiencing war often causes a rupture in everydayness and a loss of control over a sense of personal and collective pasts, presents, and futures. These experiences also produce radical openness and revelations.

A second tension concerning the assessment of time during armed conflict is between historical time, which forms a linear sequence of events, and the time of myth or religion, which operates in cycles. This tension exists on the level of connections—between the past and the future through the present or between the present and the reference points within a particular symbolic system. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, people in public discourse and personal narratives count days to mark how the invasion ruptured time. They describe Ukrainian resistance as a struggle of light against darkness, a battle with the last empire, and a war that began not in 2022 or 2014 but several centuries earlier. Therefore, the conflict unfolds in different temporal and symbolic registers.

This chapter illustrates various responses to these two tensions. It unpacks the reactions to a “frozen February 24th” and “Groundhogdayization” as a combination of the time of extremes and the time of routines without a vision of the future. It shows how war makes for a violently expanding present that consumes both the past and the future. It also argues that, despite the war and individuals having been dispossessed of their personal and collective time, people in Ukraine are developing strategies to cope. They (a) sustain an “extreme routine” that aims for survival and victory and (b) create a new system of connections that goes beyond personal chronology and links Ukrainian resistance to a universal fight for good against evil.

These arguments and observations draw on the narratives of people who shared their testimonies after the full-scale Russian invasion in the spring and early summer of 2022 as part of the “24/02/22, 5 am: Testimonies from the War” international documentation initiative.¹ The project team interviewed over 150 people who moved to Lviv, Uzhhorod, Ivano-Frankivsk, Mukachevo, Chernivtsi, and other locations from areas affected by intense destruction. People from Kyiv, Irpin, Bucha, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kramatorsk, Hirske, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and numerous other places shared their stories of everyday life in a war zone, making the decision to migrate and build a life in a new place. The team tried to minimize the risks of engaging vulnerable participants or those severely emotionally distressed. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and via personal networks of interviewers. This project became possible, as Mary Marshall Clark has written, because of the “sense of urgency that can fuel an amazing level of activity and build a sense of community among interviewers,

transcribers, narrators, and funders ... it developed our capacity to convey genuine emotional presence to our narrators, which they needed” (Clark 2014, 258).

Following the works of Mary Marshall Clark, Denise Phillips, Nerina Weiss, and many other scholars who study violence-affected areas, the project team resisted paternalistic approaches that disempower project participants by ignoring their agency. To put it simply, “rather than assuming what the narrator is capable or incapable of, we can ask what he or she is comfortable with” (Phillips 2014, 50). The comfort and decisive voices of participants were crucial factors at all stages of the project—from their agreement to participate in the documentation of the war to the structure of the interview, the time and place of the recording, and the ways the story will be preserved and accessed (Otrishchenko 2022; Wylegała 2022b). Within this initiative, we shared the assumption that telling one’s story is an act of empowerment—both directly at the moment of speaking and later when the story becomes part of the archive. The idea of “shared authority” (Frisch 1990) is one of the guiding principles at every stage of the project, from the design of the methodology to discussions on the future of this collection.

The narratives of internally displaced people (IDPs) and people whose everyday lives were reoriented toward volunteering their time to help affected civilians and members of the Ukrainian military are the starting point for my reflection on the temporality of war. This reflection is not universal. These stories were collected mainly in the western regions of Ukraine far from the frontline and recorded during the first six months after the full-scale invasion and before the Russian attacks on energy infrastructure, which strongly affected everyday life. The perceptions of time by people who have remained under occupation, who survived torture and rape, and who joined the Ukrainian army to resist Russian aggression will be different from the ones described here. As I write, the war is ongoing. Therefore, I will not provide personal details of our narrators beyond their gender, age, the location from where they were evacuated, and where and when the interview was conducted.

This chapter centers on three topics. First, it addresses the different constellations of relations between extreme and routine time during the war. One reaction is “Groundhogdayization,” or “routinized extremes,” when people are stuck in a time loop because the future is blocked. The other is “extreme routines,” when people accept the reality of war and reorient their actions accordingly. Second, this chapter shows how the war ruins the integrity of a timeline by colonizing both the past and the future and by violently expanding the present. Through the destruction of meaningful connections with the past and “defuturization,” Russian aggression commits the theft of time on individual and social levels. Finally, this chapter outlines narrative strategies as responses to the ruined chronology that create new connections beyond personal time.

Extreme and routine

The 24th of February 2022 started with a shock. The sounds of explosions, phone calls, and messages pulled people out of their everydayness and forced them to react. People describe a feeling of confusion and denial that a full-scale war was possible in the twenty-first century. The direct threat to one's own life and the lives of loved ones resulted in a shifted perception of time. Some could recall that morning in detail. For others, the first hours or even days drowned in a fog of panic or numbness. Another reaction was the mechanical repetition of routines—such as preparing breakfast—with which people tried to preserve the integrity of a world that was falling apart before their eyes. The full-scale Russian aggression has put many in near-death situations: they witness explosions and killings on the streets of their cities and through social media. People are immersed in a constant flow of news and updates and—when access to the Internet and electricity is available—observe situations in their area and other regions through screens. This synchronizes time among different locations.

Depending on available resources (savings, personal car with a full tank of gas, contacts in other regions of the country and abroad), personal life circumstances (health issues, having sick or elderly relatives, specifics of work), and assessments of the threat and situation in general, people made decisions of whether they could leave or should stay. They all had limited time to make a decision. A 40-year-old woman from Sumy (interviewed on 30 March 2023)² admitted that there was no time for thinking or being afraid. It was time to act. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen uses the term “tyranny of the moment” (Eriksen 2001); during the war, this metaphor becomes a terrifying reality. People had minimal time to pack and escape war-torn locations, and every minute of hesitation could be costly.

The shock of the first days of full-scale war was closely intertwined with denial and expectations of a quick end to hostilities. This was soon replaced by the need to reorient daily life to new circumstances. In areas close to the frontline, shelling defined people's daily lives. A 60-year-old woman from Kharkiv (interviewed on 19 March 2022) said that shelling in her city lasted for 20 hours daily. A 41-year-old man who left Kharkiv for Western Ukraine with his family in early March (interviewed on 17 March 2022) mentioned that there was a gap of a few hours between shellings when it was possible to cross the city: “The curfew ends at 6 a.m., and you can move more or less until 9 a.m. From 10 a.m., very active shelling begins and it becomes already really dangerous.” People made observations and searched for regularities that could help in decision-making. Numerous narratives included how people learned to differentiate the sounds that different types of weapons produced: missile strikes from Russia and the sounds of their explosions (*pryl'oty*), Ukrainian air defense sounds (*vidl'oty*), and the sounds of firearms or street fights. They had to learn what the different sounds meant because this was what told them how to react.

People in the rest of the country adjusted to unexpected air alarms, fixed curfews, and missile threats. According to the Air Alert Map initiative, there were 14,870 air alarms in Ukraine in 2022.³ These alarms lasted for more than 55 days in the Kharkiv region, more than 27 days in Kyiv, and more than 11 days in the Lviv region in total. A 37-year-old woman from Kyiv (interviewed on 29 March 2022) said that even basic activities, such as buying food, sometimes became impossible because the shops in the city were closed during air alarms. Professional activities, including teaching at schools and universities, receiving and treating patients in clinics, and industrial production, are also interrupted or postponed because of the risk of missile attacks.

Curfews definitively limit actions in extreme routines. People either cannot be outside at night or need special permits. Our interlocutors recalled having to plan their evacuation to avoid spending hours in queues at checkpoints. A route that would usually take several hours could last more than a day. A 31-year-old man from Kharkiv (interviewed on 30 March 2022) said that he taught himself to get everything done before the curfew. One 33-year-old male volunteer in Lviv who works in a kitchen and collects money for civilians in need (interviewed on 3 May 2022) described his experience thus:

as if there is not enough time, that is the feeling. Especially when this curfew was long [in Lviv, it was introduced on 25 February 2022 and lasted from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., while from 26 April 2022, it was from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. - N.O.]. This feeling is awful. You could still do something more, but you don't have the opportunity.

Volunteers often mentioned the lack of time, their desire to do more, and the need to react faster.

One of the most common reactions to the temporality the war imposed was disorientation and the loss of familiar time markers, such as days of the week or calendar dates. A 38-year-old woman who left Kyiv in early spring (interviewed on 16 March 2022) mentioned that she constantly needed her phone to check the date and count the days of the war to make sense of her temporal location. A 21-year-old man who left Kharkiv two weeks after the war escalated (interviewed on 17 March 2022) said that during these 14 days, he felt like every day was a “never-ending February 24th.” Time stopped for a 38-year-old woman from Vyshhorod in the Kyiv region (interviewed on 18 March 2022). A 24-year-old woman from Kharkiv (interviewed on 21 April 2022) shared her feelings about time:

I still seem to be waking up in the morning from the explosions. I'm still living in the 24th [of February]—[five-second pause]—just a frozen moment. I'm waiting for it all to end somehow. Then time will start again.

A 38-year-old man from Zaporizhzhia (interviewed on 13 May 2022 in Chernivtsi) said that the weekdays were lost entirely. IDPs whose stories we recorded outside Lviv expressed the same attitudes until almost mid-June 2022. Thereafter, time started to move on differently depending on how people found themselves. As a resource, the flow of time is scattered unevenly.

In some stories, a sense of temporal acceleration replaces time slowing down. A 31-year-old man from Kharkiv (interviewed on 30 March 2022) connected experiences of time to a very eventful first few days and sleep deprivation. He observed that, later, the days flew by quickly, “Some tasks appear, you complete them, and the day is already over. And the impression from last week is that the days just disappear.” These “disappeared days” are the ones that fall out of a personal timeline, because the routinization of extreme circumstances yields a constant feeling of exhaustion. The acceleration of time was also a frequent impression voiced by people who joined the volunteering activities intended to help displaced people and the Ukrainian army.

Some basic everyday activities that we take for granted, like having our usual breakfast, morning showers, and casual conversations with people on the streets, became impossible or consumed much more time. The same 31-year-old man from Kharkiv said that the simple things that were a necessary part of his daily life before the war and used to take up the first 30 minutes of each day now stretch out over time or do not happen at all. He also mentioned that accomplishing regular professional activities now takes more time and effort. He cited the simple act of writing a text for his work: “Probably half a day would be enough for me in peacetime, [but] I wrote it over three days.” Therefore, Russian aggression steals his time as he gets through everyday routinized extremes and does what he must do in order to keep up with his professional responsibilities.

Other participants in the “24/02/22, 5 am” project referred to the metaphor of “Groundhog Day” to describe a sense of everydayness in which each day is the same as the previous one, and they cannot wake up from this nightmare. For instance, a 28-year-old man from Mariupol (interviewed on 27 June 2022 in Vinnytsia) spoke about his experience of life under the siege:

You get lost all the time; there is no electricity ... you just sit and think about something. Time passes very slowly. Veery slowly. Like eternity. Every day. And you know how it is in that movie, *Groundhog Day*. It’s the same thing every day, the same thing every day.

Later, he returned to this reflection when describing life as a displaced person in Vinnytsia,

I don’t keep track of time. In general. Groundhog Day. Again—Groundhog Day. The only thing that has changed from Mariupol is that here there are all

the benefits of civilization. You can call your relatives and not worry that you won't be able to find water somewhere.

A 30-year-old man (interviewed on 18 April 2022) made a similar assessment; he described his time in occupied Berdiansk as constantly waiting. A 35-year-old woman from Chernihiv (interviewed on 22 March 2022) recalled the experience of staying in a bomb shelter:

The day was so long, and we woke up at five in the morning, and we were constantly wondering what time it was. It seemed as if it should be lunch or evening, but only 30 minutes had passed. I really, well, I wanted time to go by faster so that everything would end sooner. And now that we're here [in the Lviv region], well, it's as if ... you've calmed down a little.

Cathrine Brun follows Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between an abstract future and everyday time when she observes: "For many refugees and IDPs, both the routinized everyday time and the abstract future time may lack content" (Brun 2015, 23).

The experience of "frozen time" and "groundhogdayization" of everydayness shows that war blocks people's futures from developing and destroys their agency. The extreme devours routine and makes a constant loop without a way out. Therefore, one dimension of resistance lies in reclaiming everydayness or the normality and predictability of daily life, which is reflected in the ability to turn "routinized extremes" into "extreme routines." This is when people start to act consciously by adapting their usual daily practices to unusual circumstances. As a coping mechanism, embracing extreme routines helps link their actions to survival and a desired Ukrainian victory.

The establishment of a structure (either by counting days or by introducing regularized activities that occur, for instance, each Monday) gives a sense of moving beyond "frozen time" by creating variation within the sameness of the days. This helps to overcome "groundhogdayization." Many IDPs also joined diverse volunteering initiatives—it was a way out from the repetitiveness and emptiness of the days in their new places, where they had been torn apart from their usual activities and their networks of connections. The possibility of being engaged in work, volunteering, and social interactions, as well as returning to at least some of the non-extreme activities, becomes a way out of the time loop. A 24-year-old woman from Kyiv (interviewed on 25 March 2022) observes her daily monotony and uses any work or activity as an opportunity to remember what day and date it is.

The need to do something and be active was a common reaction among people who found themselves in a situation where their previous life was destroyed due to a forced relocation or a radical change in profession. A 36-year-old man

from Slavutych (interviewed on 26 March 2022) admitted that he had no time to check the news, as he was spending his days volunteering and using his professional skills. He emphasized that he wants to be more productive and, as he is not serving in the army, he can help other people with his job. A 37-year-old woman (interviewed on 1 April 2022) left Kyiv on the sixth day after the invasion and moved with her family to one of the small towns in the western part of Ukraine. She spoke about this experience: “We wanted to do something good, just for the neighbors who sheltered us. Well, we couldn’t just sit down and remain inactive like that.” She recalls that on the second or third day after relocation, people gathered to make dumplings for the army:

We were so enthusiastic, we just sat in that kitchen, and the children cooked, and we cooked, and we were so happy that after all, we were connected to this chain and were able to give some kind of help, and we somehow, well, personally, I was so happy to help our guys.

This routinized action, the mundane and familiar act of making dumplings, took on a strong political connotation similar to the experiences of women who participated during the Euromaidan protests (Channell-Justice 2017; Martsenyuk 2014; Nikolayenko and DeCasper 2018; Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014). Performing these routine acts helps people regain a frame of reference and again feel connected to a larger community by collectively pursuing a common goal.

The experience of “extreme routines” is well-defined in the narratives of volunteers. A 29-year-old Lviv female volunteer who helps with army supplies (interviewed on 26 March 2022) said that their initiative just got into a rhythm to “put itself on the rails” but it took them some time to organize the process of collecting funds, purchasing necessary items, and delivering them, and still they have to navigate through a lot of confusion. She also acknowledged that she has no time for procrastination: “We just work in the direction we need to go. Because there is no one but us.” The feeling of personal responsibility becomes a powerful driving force and is further explored in this volume, especially by Emily Channell-Justice in Chapter 9 and Oleksandra Tarkhanova in Chapter 4.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman uses the metaphor of Pointillism when speaking about contemporary times (Bauman 2020, 106). Instead of a cyclical approach to time, which is common in agricultural societies, or a linear perspective of time as moving toward progress, which evolved during the Enlightenment, we now experience a sequence of time as moment-dots that create a pixilated picture of our lives. What is omitted in this metaphor of time as a fractured mosaic-like whole is some kind of distancing and framing needed to bring this painting together. War destroys the ability to step back and gain perspective. By connecting daily activities with something beyond direct immediate existence in the present, people started to regain the feeling of their lives as a whole in which

a desired future could be made manifest by collectively helping the community here and now.

Bauman compares fragmented time with a Pointillist painting to emphasize that some of the dots are more important than others, such as the Big Bang: “At one moment, at one ‘point’ on the time axis of physical history, the entire universe appeared” (Bauman 2020, 106). The full-scale invasion became such a defining moment for many people. But for millions of other Ukrainians, the turning point happened in 2014. The terrible collective experience that affected all Ukrainians after 24 February 2022 forces people to reconsider their view of the past—their own individual past and the collective historical experience of Ukrainian society in general. It also blocks their ability to work within the framework of a personal or collective future. Among the things war destroys is the human agency to engage in deliberate, future-oriented decision-making. The present is “frozen,” but it also expands violently and moves the future out of sight and, therefore, out of reach.

Violently expanding present

Timeline integrity is not usually questioned, due to the modern idea of linear progress and the lived observation of how the human body ages. However, the borders between the present, past, and future are not fixed (Bevernage and Lorenz 2013). Historian François Hartog describes how people experience time in the present moment through memory (the presence of the past in the present), attention (the presence of the present moment), and expectations (the presence of the future in the present). He coined the term “presentism” to talk about the current regime of historicity:

The twentieth century is ... the century that, especially over the final thirty years, attributed the largest definition to the category of the present: a massive, overwhelming, omnipresent present, that has no horizon other than itself, daily creating the past and the future that, day after day, it needs.

(Hartog 2005, 14)

I use this to illustrate a sense of “war presentism,” which leaves no space for the past or the future as it consumes all time. The present, which in this context is structured by the extreme conditions set by war, becomes the reference point to evaluate all previous and expected experiences. It becomes a violently expanding present.

“We had everything” was one of the most common reactions articulated in the testimonies we recorded in different regions. The more the war dragged on, the more painful the rupture between “before” and “after” became. The expectation that active fighting would end soon evaporated. The return to previous

lifestyles, environments, and relationships became impossible for many who left areas under occupation or close to the frontline of active combat. The past is constantly reevaluated through new experiences, and as the studies of the historiography of the recent past show, the more temporal distance between the event and its placement within the narrative, the more stable the narrative of this event becomes (Graf 2021). As the war is still unfolding, it blocks the opportunity to evaluate the personal and collective past beyond the frame of loss, and these losses multiply daily. Only when the present stops violently expanding through the destruction of the lives of humans will a sense of having a past and perhaps envisioning a future begin.

Furthermore, a “violently expanding present,” by consuming the past and the future, also pushes people back in time. Time is not only frozen but also regressing. A 25-year-old man from Kyiv who moved to Lviv before the full-scale invasion (interviewed on 13 April 2022) recalled his experience of the year 2020. For him, during the COVID-19 pandemic, time had not simply been taken away, but he moved backward in time: “I have unlearned so much that I had previously learned . . . now I have a strong desire not to allow this in my situation, not to allow this story [to happen again].” A 28-year-old man from Mariupol (interviewed on 27 June 2022 in Vinnytsia) expressed his anger that not only his time—the most precious resource—had been taken from him, but also he was moved 16 years backward to a period “when I had no home, no work, nothing.” The dispossession of material resources, professional qualifications, and social connections also means the loss of the time invested in acquiring them.

This violently expanding present heavily challenged the perception of the future. It became “closed,” absorbed by an “ever-broadening present of simultaneities,” as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2019) puts it. One could even speak about “defuturization, i.e., decreasing the openness of our present futures” (Jedlowski and Pellegrino 2021, 148, after Luhmann 1976). The pandemic and the full-scale invasion have shown how fragile plans can be and how much planning itself is a privilege. Losing the ability to plan (which also means losing control over the future) was one of the most common responses to war.

People from different age groups, genders, and regions expressed similar attitudes about the shrinking horizon of planning during all the months when we collected testimonies. A 38-year-old woman from Vyshhorod in the Kyiv region (interviewed on 18 March 2022) spoke about planning in the past tense as either lost or suspended. A 24-year-old woman, who evacuated from Kyiv (interviewed on 25 March 2022), observed that many people stopped planning. A 36-year-old man, originally from Kharkiv, who moved to Chernivtsi (interviewed on 3 April 2022) reflected on the changing sense of time and how it was affecting his capacity for planning and mobility. These changes in his life had already taken place during the pandemic, but now he was unable to plan for more than a day in advance. Others, such as a 71-year-old man from Mariupol (interviewed on 25 June

2022 in Vinnytsia), could plan only for short periods. Planning as an active orientation toward the future is substituted by a passive waiting for what is yet to come.

Somewhere between the present and the future is the concept of temporary as a duration of time with an open but still definite ending. “Temporarily occupied territories” was the formula used to describe Kherson before liberation; it is still the way to speak about Tokmak, Melitopol, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea in official discourse and personal narratives. The accent on the temporal dimension shows the current situation as a deviation from normality and opens a possibility for hope and change. The geography of war is flexible, but its flexibility is due to human actions, and as the fighting continues, the line between spaces and places that are “liberated” and “occupied” constantly moves.

Temporary housing was another result of the massive destruction and internal forced migration the war imposed. It manifested itself in transforming cultural, educational, or sports institutions into shelters. However, as a 24-year-old woman from Kharkiv mentioned (interviewed on 21 April 2022), their activity related to creating housing for displaced people needed to shift from temporary to long-term solutions. The realization that the war’s end would not be in the near future marked the transition to a different type of planning work. The story shared by a 47-year-old female volunteer (interviewed on 21 July 2022 in Chervivsi), who has been working with IDPs since 2014, covers the issue of temporality from a longer perspective (for more about the issues of self-organization and housing for IDPs after 2014, see Channell-Justice, this volume). During the interview, she spoke about different levels of acceptance of a new reality and how they are reflected in practices:

For all people, especially those who agreed to live in villages, we said: “Plant gardens ... Make canned food.” [They responded] “What are you saying? We’ll be returning home soon.” Well, in general, no one who came went back, really ... When you live temporarily, you think: “Well, this will end soon.” And when you understand that you have to stay, I call it “being rooted” [in a new place].

Referring to something as “temporary” postponed the need to adopt or set new definitions. Felix Ringel argues that anthropologists often use this concept as an attribute of objects, and “the problem is the establishment of the specificity of this property of being temporal, i.e., to establish how exactly these objects exist in time, and what trajectory they have towards the future” (Ringel 2016, 396). To mark something as temporary is to acknowledge change but at the same time to maintain a connection with what was before that change. For instance, a 45-year-old woman from Irpin (interviewed on 19 March 2022) reflected on the possibility of moving abroad. She did not want to become a refugee and was more open to accepting temporary protection status in Europe, as it also meant

preserving Ukrainian citizenship. Radical and protracted uncertainty (Horst and Grabska 2015) seems preferable to her over a clearly defined refugee status. This type of waiting is quite pragmatic: “There is a calculated cost that is connected to how long people are prepared to wait. As long as waiting is meaningful, people willingly wait” (Brun 2015, 32). When speaking about internal displacement in Georgia, Cathrine Brun (2015) links waiting with hope through the idea of “agency-in-waiting”—an active and open anticipation of the future.

Applying a frame of “temporary” to current life, and the war situation in general, works as a coping strategy because it connects people to an imagined “normality.” They have already been dispossessed of their former lives and are not in possession of routines that are no longer extreme. However, remaining in such a state—existential limbo between already lost and not yet acquired—could easily become a burden. “I feel very uncomfortable. Well, in terms of the fact that the life we have and the relationships we have are still temporary, unreal, they are emergency, not long-term,” said a 31-year-old man from Kharkiv (interviewed on 30 March 2022). A 37-year-old woman from Kyiv (interviewed on 1 April 2022) spoke about her intention to return home: “People simply can’t get by with these temporary things: temporary housing, temporary clothes, temporary food.” The objects in one’s life also become temporary, and, therefore, people do not invest in creating meaningful relations with them. A 36-year-old man from Slavutych (interviewed on 26 March 2022) connected this temporary state with a feeling of fakeness from which he cannot escape. This temporary state of having been dispossessed but not yet (re)possessing is the only possible life mode during the war. Similar to the loops of “groundhogdayization,” people at some point have to accept this new reality, as undesirable as it is, to move forward.

The war became a lens through which our interlocutors approached personal and social timelines. As it destroys all meaningful connections between the past and the future, people try to establish new ones that can give some meaning to their violent present. Therefore, they refer to other symbolic systems like national history, mythology, or broadly defined cultural productions—books, movies, video games, etc.

History and beyond

Before the full-scale Russian invasion, the Ukrainian population had already experienced a strong interest in and connection to the past. According to a survey for the international project “Historical Cultures in Transition,” which took place in January–February 2018 (for a detailed description of methodology and findings, see Konieczna-Salamatin et al. 2018), around 80 percent of respondents said that they were interested in the past of their village, city, or country. Furthermore, 58 percent of those surveyed indicated that the events in the history of Ukraine influenced them personally or their loved ones. Almost 60 percent of

those whose lives were affected by a historical event clarified that the event was the Second World War. Further, they named the Holodomor and the events that took place after Ukrainian independence: the Orange Revolution and the Euro-maidan, the occupation of Crimea, the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), and the war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. People perceived recently experienced events as historic and therefore more meaningful and important.

Scholars and cultural critics frame Ukrainian resistance within the discourse of decolonization (Badiou 2022; Hrytsenko 2022; Iakovlenko 2022; Snyder 2022) to provide a contextual explanation and to see the full-scale invasion from a *longue durée* perspective. During interviews, people started to see the long shadow of dependence on and conflicts with Russia and to include it in their reflections on the current situation. For instance, a 39-year-old man from Kyiv (interviewed on 2 April 2022) spoke at the very beginning of the conversation about the revelation during his school years when he read Vasyl Barka's *Yellow Prince* (a novel about the Holodomor in Ukraine, written in 1963, published in 1991): "That is, it was such a shock, an absolute shock. Before that, there was Ukrainian literature, yes, serfdom, but it was a long time ago, who knows and remembers it?" This experience triggered conversations with grandparents:

I found out, for example, that in my family, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they had a huge farm of some kind, with automation and hired workers. Well, of course, they were dispossessed [*rozkulachyly*]. And in fact, I know the grandmothers and great-grandmothers, but I don't know the grandfathers. That is, only the female line.

This interview shows how interconnected communicative and cultural memory are (Assmann 2008) and how the war, by destroying the temporal integrity of personal daily life, leads people to search for connections in historical time.

The prevalence of the memories of the Second World War, both in communicative strategies (as survey results show) and in cultural politics (as part of public debate about history) partially explains why, in 2022, people used the Second World War as a constant comparative frame and repertoire from which to draw explanations. For instance, sociologist Anna Wylegała analyzes testimonies of Ukrainian refugees and shows how deportation to Siberia after the Second World War and escape from Mariupol after the Russian invasion in 2022 are assembled into one story (Wylegała 2022a). As Ukrainians now face renewed challenges of destruction and violence, the stories from the Second World War told in families and circulated in various media as part of cultural production have provided people with words to speak about their current experiences. Massive Russian aggression in 2022 pushed them to reconsider war chronology to include the occupation of Crimea and what was earlier described as an ATO in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions into a single timeline of accelerating war.

Not only has the historical past been reevaluated and connected to the present, but living in the present is almost immediately considered historic and, therefore, significant for the future. Online publication about the vocabulary that artists and cultural managers use in working with the recent past proposes the term “calendarism.” Artist Tereza Iakovyna defines this as the social practice of assigning special status to selected dates (i.e., 24 February as the beginning of the full-scale invasion, 11 November as the day Kherson was liberated). She believes that it helps to maintain a mythological awareness of these dates and link them to reclaiming the right to a Ukrainian historical memory (Iakovyna 2023). The events of the Euromaidan were also labeled “historic” almost immediately. By joining this mass action, the protests became, as anthropologist Catherine Wanner puts it, “pregnant with possibilities, that would determine their individual and collective fate for quite some time to come” (Wanner 2022, 84). Orientation toward the future and radical openness are some of the defining features of an event whose significance transcends everydayness.

The interviews recorded in late March and early April 2022 are structured around the days since the beginning of the open invasion. A 41-year-old man (interviewed on 17 March 2022) recalled that while he was in Kharkiv, “from that third day until the ninth, everything was monotonous: Shootings, shootings, shootings every hour, you get used to it, and nothing breaks up your days in any way.” Later he emphasizes that the day he is sharing his testimony is the 22nd day of the war, and this is the only calendar that now matters. This practice illustrates at least two tendencies: first, a radical break in chronological order, with a new marker of a beginning; and second, the need for an organizing principle. Counting days provides a feeling of sequence and continuity while living in a shattered reality. As more and more days passed since 24 February 2022, the mounting number of days since the beginning of the invasion increasingly stood in stark opposition to the claim that Kyiv would fall in three days.

One of the common motivations behind agreeing to be interviewed was to preserve experiences and make them part of future history-writing. “I consider this opportunity to communicate with you as a contribution to the history of our country,” said a 35-year-old woman from Hostomel in the Kyiv region (interviewed on 4 April 2022). She continued:

That it was not for nothing that we just sat there under these shellings—we talk about it, so that my children learn information about it not in textbooks from some incomprehensible sources, but from real people. So that our experiences are not overturned, this story is not spoiled, it is not rewritten, so that there are real testimonies of real people who went through it.

Historians consider it a benefit—to know the outcomes of the stories they want to tell: “Knowing the end of the story allows us to decide what has to be included”

(Graf 2021, 86). However, in Ukraine, the events of the present are framed as history before their representation in a structured historical narrative. The intensity of experiencing these events is enough to justify them as historic (on the connection between representation, event, and structure, see Koselleck 2004).

This process can be traced back to the events of the Euromaidan or the Revolution of Dignity, “a three-month-long happening that could not be absorbed into existing categories and structures” (Wanner 2022, 82). Despite the attempts to maintain a nonviolent protest, the winter of 2013–2014 ended with blood. The situation was exceptional; people lacked frames to describe their feelings and thus relied on comparisons drawn from general systems of reference, like religion, literature, or art. For instance, people whose narratives were recorded for oral history projects in 2015 recalled the events in central Kyiv and referred to paintings by Brueghel or Bosch (Kovtunovych and Pryvalko 2016, 75) or Tolkien’s writings (*ibid.*, 112). The situation in late February 2014 was also compared to the movie *From Dusk till Dawn* (Finberg and Holovach 2016, 30). Historian David Marples was reminded of the last scenes of the musical *Les Misérables* when thinking about this period (Marples 2015, 13). These experiences of being torn out of a linear timeline and, therefore, forced to rely on an external reference system resonate with observations made by Greta Uehling concerning the spatial and temporal displacement from Crimea after 2014 (see Chapter 3 in this volume). People with whom she spoke from 2015 to 2017 also referenced sci-fi literature and movies as a means to discuss the reality of the occupation they were experiencing.

Such comparisons became even more widespread during the full-scale invasion. Orcs and Mordor were used in public discourse and private narratives to describe the Russian army and state. War experiences often fell beyond or failed to link to previous experiences. This made people rely on images from books, movies, and TV shows to explain what they lived through. A 37-year-old woman (interviewed on 1 April 2022) described her evacuation from Kyiv:

In general, at that moment it seemed to me that a tank had just pulled up to the train and I had a picture in my head, that the muzzle of the tank was simply aimed at our car. That’s the only picture I had in my head. Well, I understood what I had seen before in movies, that kind of fantasy, but then I understood that it can happen in real life.

Cultural productions and memes (see Bilaniuk’s and Goodman’s chapters in this volume) serve as an important repertoire of images and metaphors that help set the meaning and build an understanding between people who have had different experiences.

Mentioning history or culture is a narrative response to the horrors of war that illustrates a tendency to shift from personal to collective timelines. When

people cannot reconnect their personal past, present, and future, they fight back with references to timelines beyond individual experiences. They move beyond everydayness and search for a frame that transcends their private lives and explains the experiences they wish had never happened. This narrative strategy helps people feel a connection with generations who came before, who come next, and who will come after. This is a return to the subjectivity that the war tries to take away.

Conclusion

My recent article about expectations of the future in Ukrainian society (Otrishchenko 2020) ends with a quote from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. A few years ago, I read that book as a story of multilayered temporality and also as a story of hope—as everything was, is, and will be. I returned to it in April 2022—on the 32nd day of the full-scale war, to be precise. The narrative begins with Billy Pilgrim falling out of time and ends with the bird's question, "Poo-tee-weet?" as no human language can grasp the horrors of the war. Like my interlocutors, I also need a story that will help me make sense of my experiences and connect them to reality beyond my separate embodied existence. Like Billy, I jump between moments, walk in circles, and fall in and out because our time ceases to be linear. And like Vonnegut, I often lack the language to speak about this experience. This chapter is my attempt to embrace Ukrainian society's multi-level grief and incredible resilience in the face of destruction wrought by war.

The "Unissued Diplomas" exhibition honors the memory of 36 Ukrainian students who will never graduate because their lives were taken by the Russian invasion.⁴ The lives of those who were killed in their homes, in their cars, on the streets, and on the battlefields are the most valuable of what has been stolen. It means unwritten books, unmade inventions, unspoken words of love, unborn children, unasked questions, and unfound answers. As a community, Ukrainians lost something that cannot be returned by any reparation or resolved by any post-war acts of justice. A 29-year-old female volunteer (interviewed on 26 March 2022) said bitterly that

when a person dies—he cannot be returned. No matter how much it hurts, there is no longer a person—that's all! You won't turn back time; you won't wake up to have a happy ending. And with that, you should continue to live and work, including for this person who did not return. And somehow, we live with this in the background.

Poet and soldier Ihor Mitrov, who documents the war at the frontline, speaks about this experience clearly and sharply: "But for me, the war is what takes away my life, my best years, plans, ideas. ... Therefore, for me, war is wasted

time and wasted life” (Rasulova and Skibitska 2023). The war experiences can be transformed and incorporated into personal chronology, but it would be much better not to have them at all.

In addition to the crime of aggression that the Russian Federation committed against Ukraine and all the destruction and losses caused by the war, the testimonies of people uncover another violation: *the theft of time*. Wartime dispossession is not only about direct losses—lives lost due to killings—but also about the time people could have and should have devoted to work, creativity, and communication with loved ones. Instead, they lose what they spent decades acquiring and are obliged to spend extra effort to maintain a bare existence. The dispossession of an individual’s time cannot be compensated—it is finite and irreversible. People can only rethink and fulfill the remaining time with meaningful actions and interactions. Literature scholar Iryna Starovoit describes it with an explicit relation to time: “After 10, 100, or 1000 hours, the war opens up great freedom and sincerity. We did incredible things on adrenaline. Because there is no point in wasting precious hours on unnecessary or unimportant things” (Starovoit 2022). Such experiences can not only bring revelations but also push people deep into oblivion. The only silver lining I can see amid the dark war clouds is a belief that, paradoxically, all our irreplaceable individual losses can push us forward collectively to a more empathic, open, and humane society that values every life and the time that every human has. We are forced to revise, reinvent, and reimagine a better possible world.

The end of the Trojan War became the beginning of another story—*Aeneid*. And this story at the end of the eighteenth century inspired Ivan Kotliarevsky to create his masterpiece, *Eneida*—the mock-heroic poem and the first major literary piece wholly written in the modern Ukrainian language. Every war ends. People can regain their future. I take this as a point of “radical hope” (Wanner 2022, 85) that has stayed with me since 2014.

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Notes

- 1 At the end of February 2022, the Center for Urban History, a privately funded academic NGO that has operated in Lviv since 2006, turned their premises into a shelter for IDPs. In early March 2022, together with colleagues from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Polish Oral History Association, the University of Saint Andrews, and the Center of Contemporary and Digital History at the University of Luxembourg, the Center for Urban History's team started online discussions about the possibility of ethically grounded and methodologically reasonable emergency collecting and archiving of oral testimonies of Ukrainian refugees, IDPs, and volunteers. These discussions resulted in the "24/02/22, 5 am" documentation project. For more about the architecture of this initiative, see <https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researches/oral-testimonies-from-the-war-2/> (accessed 15 January 2023).
- 2 Conversations took place in Lviv unless otherwise specified.
- 3 The data for the period from 24 February to 15 March 2022 are approximate; in the Luhansk region, air alarms have not stopped since the beginning of the full-scale war. See <https://alerts.in.ua/> (accessed 15 January 2023).
- 4 See <https://www.unissuediplomas.org/> (accessed 15 January 2023).

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2

THE EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES AFTER THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE FOR THE CIVILIAN POPULATION OF UKRAINE

Valentyna Pavlenko

Introduction

I have written a lot in my life—everything from books to articles, textbooks, theses, and so on—in which I have provided objective information. I am used to analyzing facts and research findings with the help of mathematical and statistical methods, always using low-intensity emotional scientific language with its specific terminology, designed primarily for my fellow social psychologists. I turn mainly to reason, logic, and rationality to explain the circumstances in which people live and the emotional and behavioral reactions they have to those circumstances.

But the subject of this book in general, and this chapter in particular, touches the heart of every Ukrainian. Therefore, I'd like to share my own perceptions of the Russian–Ukrainian war, my experiences related to it, and the way this war has changed my life and my worldview. I think they are quite typical and will enable readers to better understand and empathize with Ukrainians during this difficult period of our history. This is a work of autoethnography, a genre of academic writing that uses reflexivity and autobiographical ethnography to illustrate the lived experiences of the researcher to illustrate broader cultural changes. My goal is to present experiences that are usually shrouded in silence to allow readers to empathize with the challenges of living through war. Other examples of autoethnographic writing during this war can be found in Kostuchenko and Martseniuk (Forthcoming), especially the chapters by Kateryna Zarembo, Mariia Shuvalova, and Inna Volosevych.

In addition to my own experiences, this chapter includes my observations of other Ukrainians' behavior since the beginning of the full-scale invasion on 24

February 2022, as well as numerous conversations I have had with friends, colleagues, and neighbors about how the war has changed their worldviews, emotional states, and behaviors. In addition to contextualizing the loss and changes due to the war for the civilian population of Ukraine, I include the results of a socio-psychological study dedicated to the same topic. This study was conducted online in May 2022 by a Ukrainian–Israeli team of psychologists and included 750 students and employees of various higher educational institutions in Ukraine (Kurapov et al. 2022; Pavlenko et al. 2022).

The beginning

My life before 24 February 2022 was probably not very different from the everyday life of most Ukrainians. It was ordinary. Like everyone else, I delighted in the successes of my children and grandchildren, enjoyed spending time with my family and friends, gave lectures, and conducted research. Sometimes I treated myself to travel. Like most people, I didn't appreciate what I had. We only learn its true value when we lose what we used to take for granted.

Before 24 February 2022, information about the possibility of a full-scale Russian invasion had been discussed in the media and on social media as well as in my circle of friends. However, it was all very ambiguous. Western sources insisted that an invasion would happen. But in Ukraine, many government officials denied such a possibility and considered it unrealistic. So, like many others, I subconsciously chose the more positive option and did not prepare for such possible challenges and troubles.

My rose-colored glasses came off on the eve of the attack. On the evening of 23 February, I accidentally came across Putin giving a speech on television in which he explained that Ukraine should not exist and that ordinary Ukrainians were suffering at the hands of Banderite Nazis, who had illegitimately seized power. Therefore, he said, the ruling junta should be destroyed by Russian “liberators,” who would come to Ukraine and bring ordinary Ukrainians “Russian peace,” prosperity, and a better quality of life.

At that time, I wasn't very interested in politics. But this speech depressed me. For the first time, I clearly realized that there would be war and it would begin soon. Putin's assertions sounded as if they came from some parallel world that had nothing to do with our reality. I tried to understand his logic and find my place in the bipolar Ukrainian world that Putin described. Who was I in this scenario? A Banderite Nazi or a Ukrainian enslaved by them? Obviously, I did not fit into either of these categories. On the one hand, I never imposed my views, let alone my lifestyle, on anyone. On the other hand, I did not feel that anyone had taken away my freedom of choice.

All my knowledge and understanding of Ukrainian history and culture contradicted the ideas Putin proposed and the conclusions he made. But what struck me

the most was Putin's confidence in his rightness, the fanatical glint in his eyes, the unquestioning nature of his judgments, and the undisguised hatred and aggression that tinged his every word. That evening I felt impending war. However, I was still protecting myself from these conclusions, convincing myself that war would be limited, as he had initially announced, confined only to the Donbas—although, as a professional psychologist, I understood that this line of reasoning was again just a mechanism of self-deception to insulate myself from the truth.

On 24 February, when I woke up at home in Kharkiv to sounds I'd never heard before, I knew this was the beginning of the war. My mind was ready, but only my mind. It was very hard to believe. My senses failed. The explosions seemed to be coming closer. And it was terrifying. It is hard to imagine for those who have never experienced such a moment: The phone immediately started ringing. Friends and relatives were calling to discuss Putin's announcement of the so-called special operation. Those who were not yet affected by the shelling tried to find out what was happening in the East, expressing their sympathy and support. After we learned about the first battles and victims, it became even worse. Everyone was in a state of complete shock. But we had to decide what to do. We had to act.

For a while, my family hesitated. We didn't know what to do. But after more rounds of shelling, my son and his family decided to go to our relatives' house in a small town near Poltava, and my children persuaded me to join them. It took us 30 minutes to pack. We tossed documents, money, and whatever came to mind into our suitcases and set off. The drive turned out to be twice as long as usual because of terrible traffic jams and congestion. Fear was driving many out of Kharkiv. We left with the idea that we would be back in a week, two at the most. But fate decided otherwise.

I remember how I tried to understand what had happened as we were driving. I could not perceive the aggressor's logic. Kharkiv is only 40 km (about 25 miles) from the Russian border. The city's residents have always had close economic ties with Russians. Their relatives and friends lived in Russia. There were many ethnic Russians in Kharkiv, and the majority of Kharkivites spoke Russian. According to all sociological studies, the Kharkiv region has always been one of the most loyal to Russia. Therefore, shelling and bombing this region from the very first day of the war seemed completely absurd to me. Not to mention that the shelling of Kharkiv had nothing to do with the liberation of the Donbas, which was allegedly the main goal of Putin's "special operation."

Reacting to war

The 24th of February divided the lives of all Ukrainians into "before" and "after." That day everything changed. The most important and immediate difference, and this is the one everyone immediately felt, is that the war brought us

together. Everyone realized that the only way to resist an enemy who is prepared and better armed is by uniting and helping our own soldiers and each other. The manifestations of this new solidarity were impressive from the very beginning of the war.

From day one, organizations, adults, and children alike transferred money from their bank accounts to help the Armed Forces of Ukraine. A volunteer movement was launched and gained swift momentum. Volunteers working selflessly closed the gaps that the state could not fill. They searched for, purchased, and delivered to the front needed supplies, everything from food and medicine to body protection and the most modern weapons. Complete strangers came together and tried to help in whatever way they could and began preparing food for the soldiers, weaving camouflage nets, cleaning up the debris after shelling, and delivering needed supplies to civilians hit by missile strikes.

Tears came to my eyes when I saw old ladies coming to the volunteer center with bags of homemade preserves, vegetables from their cellars, and freshly baked pies. Everyone was trying to help reverse the attempts of Russian forces to dispossess us of our land and our dignity. In response, we shared everything, including blood. Medical organizations called for blood donations for the wounded, and queues formed immediately of those willing to donate blood. Children broke their piggy banks and tried to raise money for the Armed Forces by singing patriotic songs or selling homemade goods. They looked for other ways to earn money that they could donate. The story of ten-year-old Valeria touched nearly everyone. She was a gifted checkers player and invited passers-by on the street to play with her. If they lost, they were asked to contribute to the Armed Forces. She donated the money to the well-known Prytula Charitable Foundation that raised millions of dollars to buy drones, various weapons, unmanned combat aerial vehicles, Armored Personnel Carriers, and even a satellite to help the Ukrainian army. Another teenage girl sold what she always cherished and was most proud of—her long, thick hair. The proceeds were also transferred to the army. Many people opened their homes to internally displaced people free of charge or accepted payment only for utilities. People donated clothing and food, especially in the early phases of the war, when missile attacks led to massive internal migration.

The way of life for all fundamentally changed, especially in those regions under shelling or occupation that had to contend with numerous atrocities, such as torture, rape, robbery, and murder. People began to master the previously unknown science of survival. Suddenly, everyone knew where the nearest bomb shelters were. We learned the “rule of two walls,” meaning we needed to be between two load-bearing walls in the building in case there was no time or possibility to get to a more reliable shelter. We also realized that the safest place in the apartment during shelling is the bathtub. Children were often put to sleep there. If there were no children in the household, that is where the adults tried to

sleep. To survive, people learned the meaning of different alarms and the different types of danger they signaled, and mastered other methods of self-defense.

From the very beginning, I was shocked by the reaction of the Russian people to the attack on Ukraine. The vast majority of Russians supported this “special military operation,” and this continues to haunt me. It was the first time in my life that I saw with my own eyes what a well-oiled propaganda machine can do to supposedly well-educated, cultured people—and even in the twenty-first century, with the internet and all the access to diverse sources of information it offers.

Again and again, I was faced with the same questions: How can people be so brainwashed as to believe all those lies fed to them by the Russian media? Where is their conscience or at least some trace of critical thinking? Why, in the twenty-first century, do they try to reestablish the imperial thinking that makes possible the atrocities that accompany their invasion of Ukraine? How can they call themselves believers and at the same time violate all the biblical commandments, starting with the most important one: “Thou shalt not kill”? What did those peaceful Ukrainians—who the Russians abuse so much in the occupied territories, who they rob, torture, and rape so mercilessly, making the whole civilized world shudder with horror—do to the Russians? How can their conscience allow them to kill people just because they are Ukrainian and because they speak another language, sing their own songs, or love their land? I have no answers to these questions even now.

Of course, not all Russian people supported this “special operation.” For some of my Russian friends, this situation became a personal tragedy. They felt ashamed of their country, and in their letters, they asked for forgiveness for everything their army was doing in Ukraine and for the orders of their commander-in-chief. But even these few, with very rare exceptions, did not dare to openly oppose the war. Even if they were against the war, they were silent.

Dispossession and loss

This war took and continues to take many lives, the lives of our military and civilians, and even the lives of our children. Every day we hear terrible statistics of the wounded and dead. Therefore, every morning at 9:00 a.m., a minute of silence is observed in Ukraine, when everyone stops what they are doing and falls silent, honoring the memory of the dead. Funerals of those killed at the front are especially moving in small towns and villages, where the entire population turns out. The central square is freed from traffic, and locals kneel along the central street as the coffin solemnly passes by. They pay their last respects to their compatriots who died for the liberation of Ukraine. You can hear shouts of “Glory to Ukraine!” and the refrain “Glory to the Heroes!” everywhere. This is how many

people began to greet each other on the street in their everyday lives. The first part of the greeting replaces “hello,” and there is only one correct response to it.

From the first days of the war, every Ukrainian began and ended the day with news from the front and from their hometown. Moreover, many people woke up several times during the night to monitor what was happening in the country so as not to miss any important updates. For many, this has become a new habit, a way to somehow control an uncontrollable war.

Kharkivites have always been proud of their hometown. I remember how surprised I was when we were conducting a survey about identification decades ago. When asked about identity, Kharkiv residents indicated that their city was the most meaningful object that informed their identity and sense of self, not their civic, national, religious, or ethnic identity. “We are Kharkiv residents,” they said proudly (ГНАТЕНКО 1999; ПАВЛЕНКО 2002). Much as Marina Sapritsky-Nahum documents for Odesa in Chapter 5 of this volume, many respondents to this survey expressed strong feelings of attachment to their city. Therefore, the destruction of a really beautiful and beloved city, especially its signature monuments and buildings, caused pain in the hearts of both those who stayed and those who left.

The war took away homes, cars, and other property from many Ukrainians. A previously little-known, huge residential neighborhood in Kharkiv called “Northern Saltivka,” where several hundred thousand Kharkivites lived, became known throughout Ukraine as the area that suffered the greatest destruction. It became a symbol of the most severe damage inflicted by Russian forces. There is not a single undamaged building left. This means that the sense of familiarity, of living in a neighborhood, as other towns demonstrate when a resident returns for burial, is now gone in Northern Saltivka. The neighborhood has been transformed. Only a few people remain in the buildings that are still stable enough to be inhabitable.

I remember the day when my colleague texted in our team chat: “Well, it hit us as well. ... My apartment no longer exists.” What does it mean for a person to lose housing, all acquired property, and possessions and be left with nothing?! Absolutely nothing! Just imagine that, if only for a moment. The residents of Northern Saltivka have nothing to return to. Everything that rooted them in this place has vanished.

In Kharkiv, various civilian buildings and institutions suffered horrifying destruction. Hundreds of businesses, hospitals, schools, and shops were demolished. The photo of the smashed Kharkiv regional administration building on Freedom Square, the central city square and one of the largest squares in Europe, went viral around the world. Under its rubble lay many dead workers, who died the instant the building was hit. For the Russians, it was yet another attempt to destroy one of the most important symbols of the city and part of their larger program to wipe out the culture and history of Ukraine.

Kharkiv is famous for its institutions of higher education, and many of them were affected. My dear university, one of the best in Ukraine, was damaged

badly. It is impossible to hold back tears when looking at its completely destroyed buildings. Our Faculty of Economics, where my son used to study, and the Faculty of Physics and Technology, where my friends worked, have both been destroyed. The auditorium and sports complex of the Kharkiv Polytechnic University, where my eldest granddaughter is still studying, have been ruined. All this devastation touched the hearts of every Kharkivite. The questions of our students hang in the air, “How are we going to study now? What will happen to us? What about our dreams of becoming someone?”

According to Ukrainian statistics, 40 percent of all employees lost their jobs as a result of the war. The destruction of civilian facilities and the city infrastructure means the painful loss of workplaces for many residents. The COVID pandemic prepared us to some extent for remote forms of work. For some, such as teachers, it was relatively easy to work online. However, many other jobs had workflows that did not allow for remote adaptation and that meant that those people had no income. Only the financial assistance of the state and international charitable organizations somewhat remedied their situation. Thus, from the first days of the war, the state began (and continues) to pay a monthly allowance of 2,000 hryvnias (about \$50) to all internally displaced people. There was also a one-time payment of 4,500 hryvnias (about \$110) to all who are self-employed and lost their jobs. Of course, this is not enough to live a normal life. The state, private charitable foundations, and international organizations also try to help people by providing them with clothing, hygiene products, and food, usually canned food and other long-term storage products. But all people had to buy meat, fish, dairy products, fresh vegetables, and fruits themselves. At first, many people still had some savings. Over time, as the situation worsened, it became especially difficult for the most vulnerable, especially families with children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled.

The destruction of the Ukrainian energy infrastructure has been difficult, especially for children. Children can go for hours, and sometimes days, without light in winter, when it is already dark at 3:00 or 4:00 p.m. Just like in the old days, people utilize candles, burning bowls, and flashlights. Obviously, the internet disappears and cell phone connections deteriorate sharply, which means that those who work online cannot do their jobs, and it can become difficult to confirm that family members are still alive. Many Ukrainian households rely on electricity for all utilities. For them, no power means that the electric stove does not function and they cannot cook food and eat or drink anything warm; the heating does not work, and it soon gets cold in houses and apartments, when the outside temperature drops far below zero; because the electric water pumps stop working, the water supply stops and you cannot drink, take a shower, or even use the toilet properly. In multi-storied buildings, the elevators shut down, which means that elderly people or parents with strollers cannot go outside at all. Is this nightmare the “improved quality of life” that the Russian president promised?

Changes in attitudes

No matter how strange it sounds, this war has brought not only negative consequences but also some positive changes for the citizens of Ukraine. I would highlight first the strengthening of Ukrainian national identity. This was expressed in the rise in support for pro-Ukrainian positions and sentiments and in the active distancing of oneself from everything Russian. A striking example is the widespread renaming of cities, villages, and streets. For example, the longest avenue in Kharkiv, more than 18 km long, was previously called “Moskovskii” Avenue. Since May 2022, it is known as the “Avenue of Heroes of Kharkiv.” Another typical example is the dismantling of well-known monuments to Russian figures, such as the monument to Marshal G. Zhukov in Kharkiv and Tsarina Catherine the Great in Odesa.

I know many people from Kharkiv who used to speak Russian but deliberately stopped and started speaking Ukrainian exclusively. Their motives are obvious: Putin claims to be protecting Russian speakers. One way for average citizens to be soldiers in this war is to switch to Ukrainian and deny Putin the existence of Russian speakers in Ukraine.

The blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag became another means to demonstrate a pro-Ukrainian position and solidarity with Ukraine. These colors in clothes, jewelry, and hair ornaments make a fashion and political statement. Thousands of people, including President Zelenskyy, wore T-shirts and sweaters that proudly stated, “I’m Ukrainian.” In public spaces, yellow and blue ribbons are attached to fences, trees, and cars. Various patriotic catchphrases, such as “Good evening! We are from Ukraine!” or “Russian warship, go f*ck yourself!” appeared on billboards, clothes, cars, and accessories. People used every means possible to announce their attachment and allegiance to Ukraine and to distance themselves from Russia.

Even though, as previously mentioned, identification with one’s city of residence was primary in identity formation before the invasion, after one year of the war, the share of Ukrainian men and women who identified first and foremost as citizens of Ukraine ranged from 72 percent to 85 percent, depending on the methodology and the specific time period the survey was administered (Шевчук 2023). Nothing like this has ever been observed before; it’s a historical high. No less demonstrative of radical change is the fact that, while in 2021 only 55 percent of respondents believed that Ukrainians and Russians were different peoples, by March 2022 the number was 77 percent, and one month later in April 2022, the number had risen to 91 percent (Судин 2022). In other words, during the war, national identity began to crystallize rapidly and become more clearly defined and juxtaposed to a rejection of all things Russian.

I was surprised to learn that my daughter and son-in-law (who previously had little interest in politics) stopped shopping in the nearest supermarket because it

is owned by Russians. They, like many others, now refuse to buy any Russian merchandise. This deliberate distancing from language and commercial products extends to literature, movies, music, and even communication with former friends and relatives from Russia. One of my friends never had a clear pro-Ukrainian position before. She identified herself as a Kharkivite and didn't care about much else. With the war, her position has changed dramatically. "No one contributed to my Ukrainianization more than Putin!" she says, "Only now have I become a true patriot of Ukraine!"

The war has also changed the attitude of Ukrainians to state authorities. Before, criticism of the president, parliament, or other power structures could frequently be heard in everyday conversations. National consolidation means that the political positions of ordinary Ukrainians and the elite have converged. They all recognize that the president stayed in the country while it was being bombed, he assumed the leadership of the resistance to Russian aggression, and he gave daily appeals and reports to the people of Ukraine. He effectively petitioned numerous governments and people of different countries and was able to create an anti-Putin coalition. All these developments contributed to a broad and growing trust in the government and fostered a more positive attitude toward state authority. People saw how selflessly government officials, the armed forces, and even city employees tried to serve, defend, and fix all that had been destroyed or damaged and gave them credit for it. The sacrifice and fortitude of the military, other defenders of Ukraine, and state employees meant that previously held cynicism and suspicion were quickly replaced by a sharp rise in trust in a variety of public institutions and social groups (Грушецький 2023).

The war has increased not only trust in various government institutions but also the respect Ukrainians have for themselves. The fact that Ukrainians unexpectedly stood up to defend their country and continued to wage a desperate fight against the "second army of the world" made people look at themselves differently. When Ukrainians heard people around the world say, "We used to think the Russian Army was the second best in the world. Now we think it is the second best in Ukraine," they realized that they were actually capable of something. According to the results of sociological surveys, before the war, only 24 percent of the population believed that individuals could decide something themselves or change something, both in their lives and in the life of the country. After a year of the war, the number increased to 57 percent (Головаха 2023). Changes in self-esteem were facilitated by changes in international attitudes. When Ukrainians saw how the vast majority of countries (141 countries in total) supported the Ukrainian resolution at the UN, how parliamentarians from different countries gave President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a standing ovation, how the most influential leaders of the world, including US President Joe Biden, came to Kyiv to show their support, it made them change their attitude toward themselves and begin to be proud of their country and of being Ukrainian.

Obviously, the war has not only positive but also—for the most part—negative consequences. Now there is constant fear, fear of losing one's own life and the lives of relatives and friends. This is closely followed by the fear that, even if one survives, the war will destroy one's own wellbeing or, again, the wellbeing of loved ones. People are afraid of everything, including hunger. At the beginning of the war, survival meant not only ensuring physical safety but also providing necessities, such as food for oneself and one's family. In the first days after the invasion, store shelves were swept clean. Everything was bought up, especially products that could be stored for the long term. The same was true of medication. But the shelves were replenished again and again, so people gradually calmed down, realizing that the assortment of goods might be somewhat narrowed, but there was no need to panic and stock up. To a certain extent, humanitarian aid helped solve this problem. Thanks to various funds and international organizations, staples were regularly distributed to the needy in all cities and towns.

As other war-related challenges and shortages appeared, the urgent need to stock up on essentials arose again and again. When fuel shortages began, people hoarded gasoline. The threat of a nuclear strike caused hype around potassium iodide. Attacks on the energy infrastructure threatened to leave people without power, heat, or gas in the winter. Even my daughter, who was never prone to panic, immediately bought a rechargeable lamp, a power bank, a gas burner, and other things to endure these anticipated shortages. Those who lived in their own houses went even further. They bought firewood and electric generators and looked for alternative methods of heating and lighting.

The initial fears about if and how salaries and pensions would be paid and whether it would be possible to pay for purchases with bank cards gradually faded. All forms of payment were restored and continued to function, which made people feel safer. However, the high rate of inflation and the crazy increase of prices for all goods and services led to vastly reduced consumption as people tried to limit spending to essentials.

The fear of a nuclear strike was only faintly expressed at the beginning of the war. But it increased greatly after President Putin expressly stated in September 2022 that he was willing to use nuclear weapons. The danger associated with the possibility of energy infrastructure destruction didn't cause concern until that time; that is when power stations became one of the biggest targets of Russian aggression. For people who still vividly remember the fallout of the Chornobyl nuclear accident in 1986, the fears of radiation and long-term contamination of the soil and water are palpable.

Most anxieties are directly correlated with the feeling of losing control over one's life and the feeling of helplessness that accompanies it. People increasingly felt that they were no longer the authors of their own lives but subject to the whims of a cruel leader enabled by a passive population that seemed oblivious or indifferent to the suffering their political leaders were deliberately causing in Ukraine.

These fears were compounded by disappointment, mostly disappointment in the Russian people. Ukrainians, and especially Kharkivites, never expected the Russian leadership to become obsessively bent on destruction and inhumane cruelty. Such feelings of disappointment are manifest in complaints about depression, fatigue, feelings of helplessness, and, on the other hand, resentment, anger, and hatred toward those who brought so much grief to our land (Shevlin 2022).

The war dispossessed many of their plans and dreams (see Wanner, this volume). My youngest granddaughter has dreamed of becoming a flight attendant since she was a child. Now what? Bombed airfields mean that there is not a single working airport in the country. The entire aviation infrastructure has been completely destroyed. How can that dream be fulfilled? Only by living abroad! Because Ukrainians saw their dreams and plans evaporate, they also stopped making new ones. As Natalia Otrishchenko argues in Chapter 1 in this volume, the very nature and experience of time changed drastically as a result of this war, and this makes planning and even dreaming of the future impossible. No one can predict whether there will be shelling today and what the consequences will be, let alone what might be possible in the future. It makes absolutely no sense to plan for tomorrow when you have no control over your life today. Everyone began to literally live for the moment.

People who live in very harsh and unpredictable climatic conditions, subject to storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters, stop planning altogether and live in an ever-present now. This war creates similar conditions. Constant air alerts make a sense of powerlessness even more intense. When the siren sounds, all establishments must stop working and people are expected to proceed to the nearest shelter and stay there until the end of the alert—for however long that takes. Therefore, it is never clear how long it will take to go to the store or to the bank or to do other simple errands. You could get stuck for five minutes or five hours. You never know how long it will take to get what you need and get back home.

Surprisingly, despite all of this, Ukrainians have become much more optimistic about the future. According to the results of sociological studies, before the war, only 19 percent believed that the situation in Ukraine would improve in the coming years, while now more than 70 percent think it will become better (Головаха 2023). What was important before the war, such as acquiring property and job advancement, has taken a back seat. Compared to the potential loss of life, the loss of a car or other property is no longer considered important. After 24 February 2022, people no longer thought even about health, including COVID, and as a result, they no longer cared about wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Compared to the war, the pandemic seemed like a minor trifle, a negligible threat that was not worth paying attention to.

However, the value of Russian life ceased to be an absolute value too. The attackers violated all human and divine norms of behavior and basic standards

of morality among the military and civilian populations alike. The response was indignation, anger, and a desire to take revenge. Many Ukrainians stopped perceiving Russians as people at all. They are commonly referred to as “orcs,” the meanest and ugliest mythical creatures that deserve only contempt, hatred, and death. This attitude is reinforced by the new practices of tracking the statistics of dead Russians, rejoicing as the numbers grow, and watching, sharing, and enjoying the videos of how they die. I think these might be some of the feelings that prompt people to rejoice at the death of Russian invaders. Sometimes I wonder what will happen to these habits once the war ends. Habits tend to have an afterlife.

One of the most painful consequences of this war is the loss of social relationships. During one of my return trips to Kharkiv in summer 2022, I suddenly became acutely aware of this emptiness. Certain things that were previously mundane now prompt a swarm of memories and emotions. My keys were previously just an instrument to open the door. Now when I see them in my purse, they symbolize the impossibility of returning home, of returning to a longed for, dreamed of, peaceful life. All my family and friends, with whom I was in close contact before the war, have left the city. They have all been displaced elsewhere. I felt that my neighborhood and hometown of 1.5 million people, where I was born and lived all my life, had become empty for me. There was no one to meet, no one to chat with in a cafe over a cup of coffee, and no one to share good or bad news with. Almost all communication has become virtual, and the circle of communication continues to narrow. Now only the closest friends and family are included in conversation because no one has enough emotional energy to communicate virtually with acquaintances, neighbors, and colleagues, even though these people were vital parts of one’s previous life. Rather, efforts go into becoming acquainted and building relationships with people in new places of residence. Few people manage to fill the void of broken ties, which leaves many feeling lonely and depressed and begins to explain the significant increase in the use of antidepressants and sedatives (Половина 2023).

Changes in behavior

The most common reaction to the war was to flee from the constant life-threatening shelling. Obviously, this was impossible for men of military age (from 18 to 60 years old). For the remaining others, migration was the choice of almost 70 percent of eligible Ukrainians. The forced departure of wives, children, and other relatives, who sought asylum in other countries, became a tragedy for many families as they parted ways. Many women, including my daughter and daughter-in-law, preferred to stay close to their husbands despite the difficulties of life in Ukraine and continued to work and help the Armed Forces in any way possible.

Those who decided to leave often used special evacuation trains organized by state authorities. Some left by their own means or were helped by friends or

neighbors. Some had at least a rough idea of where they could go and had relatives or friends waiting for them in other regions of Ukraine or abroad. However, many were leaving without any organized evacuation plans. They just wanted to get away from places where they could die. Evacuees traveling in their own cars were often quite well equipped. They left with documents, money, clothes, and even some devices or equipment. But others, like one of my students whose house was destroyed while she was in a bomb shelter, left home with nothing at all. All she had with her was a smartphone. Luckily, her mother had some money and documents with her, which allowed them to get to their relatives in another part of the country.

Those who lived near the metro stations preferred to hide from the shelling there, while those who lived in their own houses typically hid in the cellar. Residents of multistory buildings sought refuge in the basements or underground parking areas or tried to find the safest place in their apartments. Not all shelters were well prepared for actual human habitation. They were often dirty, cold, damp, and cramped. People brought blankets, chairs, lamps, heaters, thermoses, and sandwiches, as well as some toys or games for children to make staying in shelters for an unknown period of time more bearable. Most recognized that they shared a common fate and tried to help each other survive these challenges.

For those who decided to stay, the motivations were diverse. Part of Ukraine had been occupied since 2014, so people had heard about or already had personal experience of what it means to live in a temporarily occupied territory. From these stories, we know that life under occupation means complete defenselessness. Occupiers can come to your home at any time, demand whatever they want, take everything they are interested in, abuse you, take you to a torture chamber, or even kill you with complete impunity. People talk about the deaths of their loved ones, either on the battlefield or as a result of occupation. I have friends who, when they learned of a loved one's death, felt a thirst for revenge. They appealed to the military enlistment office to send them to the front as soon as possible. Women, suddenly left without husbands and fathers for their children, felt forced to move in with parents to somehow raise their children. We have students at the faculty whose parents' death at the front brought them to the university because the government, in addition to many other types of assistance, provides them with resources to study.

Coping strategies

Taking into account the shock and stress experienced by Ukrainians since the beginning of the war, compensatory mechanisms are used consciously or subconsciously to alleviate stress, anxiety, and other psycho-emotional states. These coping strategies can be divided into two types: individual and collective. For individuals, common means of coping with stress include tobacco, painkillers,

sedatives, and, most of all, alcohol. To prevent it from becoming too widespread and leading to irreparable consequences, the state has restricted the sale of alcoholic beverages to certain times. In most regions, alcohol is sold only from noon to 6:00 p.m. Another compensatory mechanism, especially for young girls and women, involves food. In conversations and in the research conducted in May 2022, Ukrainians often note that they began consuming more foods with high salt content (chips, pickles, sausages, and the like) and high-sugar foods (sweets and chocolates). Stress eating consciously or subconsciously becomes a remedy to counteract the social tensions surrounding them.

In this whirlwind of events, constant change, and pervasive fear, people began to appreciate, as never before, moments that gave them a sensation of stability. For example, I found myself trying to maintain my habitual, pre-war daily routine, cooking the same food for breakfast and engaging in the same activities. I even associate my participation in research on the psycho-emotional consequences of this war, which began in May 2022, not only with the importance of the research on this topic but also with an attempt to do something familiar. It gives an illusory, but reassuring, feeling of continuity, a feeling that life goes on in spite of everything.

A form of collective compensation for the stresses of the war is war-related memes, jokes, videos, and songs. They were so needed that they often went viral (see Bilaniuk, Chapter 7 and Goodman, Chapter 8, this volume). From the very first days of the war, old and new songs flooded the internet in different genres and by different artists, all of them aimed at supporting a mood that would help Ukrainians defend their country, inspire victory, and give hope. One of the most popular was an old song written over a century ago, “Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow,” which was once sung by snipers and soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army during World War II. In the early days of the full-scale Russian invasion, the song was resurrected. Andrii Khlyvniuk, a founding member of the Ukrainian band BoomBox, performed a cappella on 27 February 2022 on Sofia Square in Kyiv. Because of his soulful rendition, the old song generated a tsunami of popularity. Red viburnum is an ancient symbol of Ukraine. In the song, Ukraine and the viburnum are compared. Just as the viburnum, which has fallen in the meadow and must be raised, so Ukraine, which has become so sad, must be cheered. The video version of the song became a hit. It was sung in many places as a symbol of support for Ukraine. The videos of this song performed by famous Ukrainian singers, including Andrii Khlyvniuk, received over 17 million views on YouTube. That is evidence of how necessary, how important, and how dear this song is in the heart of every Ukrainian.

Besides songs, there are poems, sayings, and simple slogans on billboards. At the entrance to Kharkiv, a billboard shouts, “I am proud! I am unbreakable! I will surprise the world! Your Kharkiv.” These slogans have played an integral role in bolstering the indomitable Ukrainian spirit by reflecting it back to the residents

of Kharkiv. Humor is also one of the most efficient socio-psychological defense mechanisms. Humorous songs, memes, and jokes have flooded the internet since the first days of the war. Their role in morally and emotionally supporting Ukrainians cannot be underestimated. Some of the more memorable are:

“The only thing that can bring Ukrainians to their knees is ... POTATOES” (manually harvesting potatoes is a common summer activity in Ukraine);

An advertisement of a supposed travel agency attracting Russian tourists to Ukraine: “Hot tour: See Ukraine and die! Cocktails included” (this refers to “Molotov cocktails,” or handmade explosives);

During the rapid Ukrainian counterattack in the East, we joked: “The Armed Forces of Ukraine must listen to the language spoken by the locals. If it’s Chinese, then they can stop.”

When the many Russian threats of imminent occupation, nuclear strikes, and complete blackouts of electricity are presented in humorous anecdotes, they lose their menacing tone. These threats are perceived by the population in a calmer, more balanced manner, and this protects them from additional stress, distracts them from negative thoughts, and gives them hope.

The media highlights our defenders’ exploits and reports on real heroes who, sometimes at the cost of their lives, fight for victory in a particular region. Individual cases sometimes create a generalized image of heroism, which has a therapeutic effect on the whole population. For example, the so-called ghost of Kyiv, who was thought to be a legendary ace pilot who won many battles by hitting countless targets in the air, actually turned out to be the 40th Tactical Aviation Brigade of Pilots. The exploits of this brigade were personalized, and people debated who the real “ghost of Kyiv” could be until it became clear that this was the work of an entire brigade.

Symbols of bravery and dedication can also be animals who are celebrated for their heroism. Everyone in Ukraine knows of the exploits of Patron, a bomb-sniffing dog, who has helped Ukrainian defenders find and defuse hundreds of explosives. He gained world fame and recognition when he became the official symbol of the International Coordination Center for Humanitarian Demining, established under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. Later, UNICEF signed a memorandum of cooperation with a dog for the first time ever. Thus, our dog Patron became the first in history to receive the title of Goodwill Dog. For his exceptional service, President Zelenskyy awarded Patron a medal “for selfless service” during a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Patron’s photo with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak appeared on the front pages of Ukrainian and international publications. Patron has his own Instagram and Twitter accounts, and his videos have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times. Today he is not only

the most famous dog in Ukraine but also a symbolic national hero and the embodiment of Ukrainian patriotism and opposition to Russia.

The Ukrainian cat Stepan, who has more than 1.5 million followers on Twitter and Instagram as well as a TikTok account, competes for popularity with Patron. For Kharkivites, this cat is especially dear because he is from Kharkiv. In May, Stepan received one of the most prominent awards at Cannes, an Oscar for bloggers. During the ceremony, Stepan inspired significant donations for Ukrainian children affected by the war. The images of Patron and Stepan, as traditional pets who are celebrated as heroes, help to ease the burden of the war. Pets have always been very important for Ukrainians, which is why there have been an unprecedented number of refugees who left home with their pets. International organizations report that they have never seen so many refugees flee with their pets in tow.

Conclusion

Russia's unjustified aggression violated Ukraine's state sovereignty. This became a challenge not only for Ukraine but also for global security. The democratic world was shocked by the ideological justification the Russian leadership gave for the invasion; the discrepancy between the originally declared goals (to help the Russian-speaking population of the Donbas) and the methods used, which went far beyond the borders of that region; the blatant attempts by Russian media to destroy or distort everything Ukrainian, including language, culture, history, and state symbols; and the inhumane cruelty Russian forces showed to the Ukrainian military and the civilian population of Ukraine. The very existence of Ukraine as a country is at stake. As US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said at a meeting of the UN Security Council on 22 September 2022, "If Russia stops fighting, the war ends; if Ukraine stops fighting, Ukraine ends."¹

The majority of Western countries stood by Ukraine on diplomatic, political, economic, and military fronts, for which we are infinitely grateful. Perhaps, for the first time since World War II, the world has once again found itself on the edge of an abyss, and, given the quantity and quality of weapons on both sides and the careless, and sometimes deliberately antagonistic, statements of the Russian leadership that include nuclear threats, this abyss looks much deeper and more dangerous than all previous ones. A growing awareness that global security system mechanisms do not always work properly and that the organizations that hold them responsible are not always effective makes the situation seem even more dire.

This chapter has analyzed how the war and the dispossession it has created has altered the thinking, emotional palettes, and behaviors of Ukrainians, which is manifest in the strengthening of Ukrainian national identity, active distancing from anything related to Russia, growing trust in state authorities, transitions to

short-term planning, changes in the system of values, the weakening and even collapse of social networks, and the predominance of virtual forms of communication.

A common reaction to the hostilities was to flee from constant life-threatening shelling and move to another place of residence, either within Ukraine or abroad. Those who still live under shelling have mastered the “science” of survival under such conditions. They have experienced a rise in social cohesion, increased mutual assistance, and a strong outpouring of support for the Armed Forces. Those who live under occupation try to distance themselves from the invaders as much as possible, leaving their homes only in case of emergency.

In addition to individual coping strategies, which include increased use of alcohol and drugs and a rise in eating disorders, other mechanisms that help alleviate stress are the real and legendary images of Ukrainian heroes, empathic images of animals as symbols of traits and qualities that can contribute to victory, and the creation of patriotic songs, jokes, and other content that fortifies a sense of national solidarity and community. These examples are only a small part of the enormous psycho-emotional and behavioral changes Ukrainians have experienced as a result of this war. Therefore, there is an urgent need for broader and deeper research on this topic, which needs to inform the development of therapeutic programs to address the psychological consequences that have already and will continue to impact the mental health of Ukrainians.

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Note

- 1 C-SPAN, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5tZDeouuNo>.

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3

POPULATION DISPLACEMENT AND THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

“Never again” becomes “again and again”

Greta Uehling

They said, “Take the Russian passport.” I said, “What for? I am a citizen of Ukraine.” They replied, “There is no such state.” Can you imagine? That is their level of consciousness. And what is most frightening is that children now hear all this and start to believe it. ... There are no centuries there [in occupied Crimea]. Maybe it’s the nineteenth, or maybe the twentieth century. Honestly. Old Soviet music is pounding at the bus stops that wasn’t heard before.

(No. 131, internally displaced Crimean Tatar male, age 40)

This statement about conditions in Russian-occupied Crimea was made by a Crimean Tatar man who fled Crimea shortly after it was occupied by Russian forces in 2014. He articulates a widespread sentiment that Crimea was effectively “returned” to its Soviet past by the imposition of Russian-backed rule in 2014. The observation about the lack of demarcations suggests that, from an experiential perspective, foreign occupation disrupted Crimea’s place in time if not space. This chapter analyzes subjective perceptions of being both temporally displaced and geographically dispossessed following the 2014 occupation of Crimea. This dispossession follows others: Empress Catherine II of Russia annexed Crimea in 1783, beginning a period in which Crimean Tatars were dispossessed of their lands, Russified, and systematically repressed. At the end of World War II, the entire group was deported from Crimea to Soviet Central Asia. An estimated 40 percent perished in the process, and that attempt at the destruction of these people is recognized as genocide by the government of Ukraine.

Methodology

This chapter is not one I ever expected to write. As I was awaiting a decision on a proposal I had submitted to the Fulbright Foundation for support to continue my research in Crimea, the entire Crimean Peninsula was occupied by Russia. It was February 2014, and it appeared there was no chance of receiving funding given the military occupation. To my surprise, fieldwork was funded with the stipulation that I would not travel to Crimea. In short, the proposed project *on* Crimea could not take place *in* Crimea. Having done extensive research on forced migration in other contexts, and given the reality that so many people were being displaced from both Crimea and zones of military activity in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine, I shifted my topic to the forced displacement that was occurring as a result of Russian territorial claims.

In three trips lasting approximately two months each, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork across non-Crimean parts of Ukraine, concentrating primarily on people displaced by Russian aggression. The individuals who fled Crimea as a result of the attempted annexation were dispersed across Ukraine, and I, therefore, distributed my interviewing across the areas where they had settled, including Kyiv, Lviv, Kherson, Kramatorsk, Sloviansk, and a number of villages and towns like Drohobych. With people who were displaced, I carried out interviews using a set of questions that were held relatively constant across the three-year period (2015–2017) and included people who identified as Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian, and Russian. I also carried out open-ended interviews with people who were best engaged using an individualized approach because of their expertise or unique experience. The people I spoke with were given a choice of Russian, Ukrainian, or English languages. Having recently fled predominantly Russian-speaking regions, the majority chose Russian. Ten interviews were undertaken with Crimean Tatars who lived in Crimea at the time, the interview itself being carried out while these individuals were visiting Ukrainian government-controlled territory.

During these interviews, previous ethnographic fieldwork in Crimea provided a foundation for establishing rapport. Having spent years in Crimea during trips since the late 1990s, and having visited friends there in 2013 just months before Russian occupation, the places my interviewees were from often provided a good way to begin a conversation. Chances were high that we could remember a common geographic landmark or event in Crimea. The conversations that started with Crimean geography, however, soon shifted to temporal subject matter as people described the “here” and “there” in terms of “now” and “then” following the sudden Russian occupation. My interest in the specifically temporal dimensions of forced displacement grew from listening to answers to the only seemingly simple question that proved to be so generative: how has Crimea changed as a result of Russian occupation?

The occupation of Crimea

One of the most significant geopolitical events for peace and security in the twenty-first century to date was Russia's swift and unimpeded occupation of Crimea in early 2014. The occupation and associated militarization of Crimea led to the forced displacement of tens of thousands of people: anyone who opposed or was even perceived to oppose Russian annexation was subject to arrest, fines, and imprisonment, or even worse. The forcibly displaced people I worked with, many of whom traveled between occupied and non-occupied territories, experienced the initial occupation as being sent "back" in time and in conversations consistently compared occupation to a bad dream, a state of insanity, and science fiction. Their stories open an important window into the subjective experience of foreign military occupation.

Two Incommensurable historiographies

Russia occupied Crimea in 2014 with the ostensible objective of protecting its Russian speakers and returning Crimea to its supposedly Russian roots. After the military takeover of the peninsula, authorities began a process of returning Soviet iconography, typefaces, music, and monuments to the landscape. This impulse was embraced by the pro-Russian members of the population, who began sporting the St. George ribbons associated with the commemoration of World War II and placing images of Stalin in their offices and on their cars. Creating strong associations with the Soviet past was thus integral to the symbolism of occupation. Russian authorities gained control politically by infiltrating local governance with their proxies, carrying out a referendum that was widely criticized as illegitimate, requiring citizens to take Russian passports or risk job loss and lose access to medical care, and punishing independent journalism. The political process of shifting Crimea into the Russian sphere of control was thus carried out in tandem with a social and cultural transformation, even though Crimea continues to be internationally recognized as part of Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has long lamented the disintegration of the Soviet Union in speeches and written statements. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine is linked, among other things, to his desire to return Russia to what he views as the glory days of the Soviet Union (Malinova 2017). Russian state media (RIA Novosti) published a "final solution" manifesto that outlines the complete destruction of Ukraine as a sovereign nation using rhetoric adapted from World War II (Stewart 2022). The opening statement my interviewee made above is consonant with this rhetoric. His choice of words was far from an exaggeration or confabulation because delegitimization of Ukraine's existence has long been clear in President Putin's speeches and written work (Drozdova and Robinson 2019; Khislavski 2022). The rise of a memory culture centered on World War

II in Russia has activated what scholars describe as a temporality in which elements of past and present are fused together in a collapse of linear historical time (Fedor et al. 2017, 5). The current Russian invasion of Ukraine has been replotted as a continuation of World War II, with Russia recast as morally righteous in its “heroic-patriotic master narrative” (Markwick 2012, 693).

The Crimean Tatars contest this historiographical interpretation of the peninsula. They developed as a group beginning in the eleventh century and have no other homeland. Considered indigenous to the peninsula, their settlement in Crimea is actually more longstanding than the Russian settlement. For every pin in the Russian leadership’s timeline, there is a Crimean Tatar counterpoint, from the moment of the first annexation in 1783 to the present. For example, far from a mere “vassal” of the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Tatars’ khanate was a major power in Eastern Europe between 1441 and 1783, with territory that extended far beyond Crimea’s current borders, from the Caucasus Mountains in the east to Moldova in the west. Statements that “Crimea is historically Russian” are difficult for Crimean Tatars to stomach, considering a Russian-ruled Crimea existed between the 1850s and the 1950s (Wilson 2021, 842). Crimea was legally transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1954. Incommensurable historiographies produce different ways of thinking about Crimea and inform a multilayered political, historical, and information war. The subjective experiences of displacement at the center of this chapter are not epiphenomenal, then, but integrally connected to war in and on Ukraine.

Multiple displacements

The precise number of people displaced by Russia’s unlawful occupation of Crimea is difficult to determine because not all of the displaced choose to register as internally displaced persons (IDPs). Ukrainian Parliamentarian Mustafa Djemilev has stated that in the first two years of Russian occupation, between 35,000 and 40,000 individuals left Crimea, and about 17,000 to 20,000 of them were Crimean Tatars.¹ The reasons for departure include human rights violations, a contraction of civil liberties, and drastic changes to political, economic, and social structures. The main targets of state repression were journalists, academics, opposition political leaders, and members of groups like the Ukrainian Orthodox clergy and the Crimean Tatars.

Individuals of Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar identities who fled make a critical incision in the logic of occupation, showing us the zone of contact between the Russian authorities’ consciously curated retrospective temporality centered on World War II and Ukrainian narratives about future incorporation in the European Union. This critical incision entails both condemning the temporally aberrant elements of Russian-occupied Crimea and, when necessary, fleeing Russian occupation. Describing the contrast between the two sovereign

territories in specifically temporal terms provided my interlocutors with a powerful vocabulary for constructing a new moral hierarchy in which Ukraine is a more highly developed and civilized country than Russia.

While displaced people of *all* ethnicities spoke of the occupation in terms of travel backward in time, there were also ways in which the Crimean Tatar experience differed. One is the historic depth of prior experience. Crimean Tatars have extensive familiarity with Russian leadership as a result of the Russian empire's annexation of the territory in 1783, which led to the massive dispossession of ancestral lands. From then on, they also experienced dispossession in the form of suppression of their religious and cultural freedoms. During the Soviet era, the repression escalated, culminating in the 1944 deportation on trumped-up accusations of treason (Uehling 2004). They encountered new accusations of treason as part of the 2014 occupation, when loyalty to Ukraine was conflated with World War II-era loyalty to Germany. Thus, even though the trope of treason was applied indiscriminately to people who resisted conforming with the Russian regime, talk of treason and political repressions affected Tatars disproportionately because of their history of being repeatedly dispossessed by authorities.

Another difference is the scope of dispossession. Although the Crimean Tatars represented 80 percent of the population of Crimea in the nineteenth century (Kul'chyts'kyi and Yakubova 2019, 60) they were only 12 percent of the population at the time of the 2014 occupation. The Crimean Tatars are a Sunni Muslim group, and Russian law has been modified to prohibit aspects of Crimean Tatars' religious activity. The group's political leaders have been expelled and are living in exile in other parts of Ukraine. Crimean Tatars are also targets of security services repression: according to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center (2022), there have been 190 imprisonments, 51 cases of police brutality resulting in death, and 18 disappearances of Crimean Tatars. According to the Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the occupational authorities concentrated the military mobilization against Ukraine on Crimean Tatars, in spite of the fact that this is a war crime.² Hundreds of thousands have fled Russia and Crimea to escape mobilization, and Telegram channels on how to flee Crimea are packed with price quotes for transport (Hyde 2022).

Migration in time and space

The narratives of people who traveled between Ukrainian and Russian government-controlled territories for the first three years after the 2014 occupation show how they encountered two very different sets of practices, memories, and historical narratives defining these time spaces. Crimea is therefore separated from the rest of Ukraine not only by a territorial demarcation but also by a temporal one. Put simply, we are used to thinking of migration as movement across nationally demarcated spaces, but what if it is also movement across temporalities?

Integrating the significance of temporality into studies of forced displacement is challenging because the categories that migration scholars think with are grounded in geography (internal, external) and political designations (forced, voluntary) that tend to fix migrants' identities in legal statuses.

Although there is a rich literature on temporality in anthropology (Edensor 2006; Fabian 2014 [1983]; Hodges 2008; Munn 1992; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Ringel 2014) and the anthropology of socialist, Soviet, and post-Soviet spaces engages deeply with historical time and temporalities (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017; Verdery 1999; Yurchak 2005), anthropological understandings of temporality are only beginning to inform migration studies specifically (Barber and Lem 2018; Brun 2016; Çağlar 2018; Collins 2018; Glick Schiller 2012; Villegas et al., 2020).

The reflections of people who were displaced by Russian occupation provide grounds for a tighter integration: they have unique insights into occupation precisely because they experience both Ukrainian- and Russian-controlled territories. The question is how to think about the “heterogeneous simultaneity” of temporalities in conjoined Russian- and Ukrainian-controlled territories, when the movement back and forth is not experienced as linear or cyclical. Pedersen and Nielsen suggest that a “hinge” provides a good metaphor for describing how multiple temporalities may intersect and be actualized in transversal, crosscutting ways (Pedersen and Nielsen 2013, 124). Hinges, as configurations of socio-cultural life, bring phenomena otherwise distributed across disparate periods in time together (Pedersen and Nielsen 2013, 123–124).

Like a hinge between a door and a frame, a transtemporal hinge is said to connect and articulate disparate temporalities. Hinges, however, suggest a simple and straightforward well-oiled functionality. My ethnographic material from Ukraine suggested something more akin to *disarticulation*, like a door that is *off* its hinges. The term *dislocation*, borrowed from the field of medicine to refer to the disarticulation or subluxation of a joint, is more apt here, because dislocations and subluxations are painful, offering a valuable metaphor for relations in Crimea where people and the temporalities through which they interact come into contact but fail to sync or function well. This creates profound discomfort, especially for those who do not believe that Russia's takeover will mean progress or development in Crimea. In leaving, people were dispossessed of the future they planned for and could no longer find a remotely acceptable version of either the past or the present in their historic homeland of Crimea.

Using a temporal lens is illuminating for the anthropology of Eastern Europe because across my Ukrainian, Russian, and Crimean Tatar interviewees (the three major groups living in Crimea), reactions were fairly consistent. In other words, variation among people from Crimea was based more on *political* opinion than *ethnic* background. The effort to integrate theorizing on temporality and migration also contributes to efforts to overcome the implicit methodological

nationalisms in migration studies. Migration studies, as Ayşe Çağlar (2018) and Nina Glick Schiller (2102) have argued, gains from avoiding “ethnicizing” and “culturalizing” logics that miss the multiple and interconnected subjectivities and sociabilities in migrants’ experiences.

Findings: spatial displacements and temporal dislocations

Back to the USSR

As mentioned, traveling from Ukrainian-controlled territory to Russian-controlled Crimea was often described as going backward in time. The first temporal dislocation, then, was between contemporary and Soviet times. In Crimea, it was as if past and present were no longer on a continuum, but superimposed. Although they could return to visit physically, the contemporary Crimea they knew and longed for no longer existed. People I spoke with between 2015 and 2017 were clear and consistent about the layering of time periods and the feelings of eeriness associated with going “back” to the USSR. As Otrishchenko points out (this volume), a “violently expanding present” has a way of pushing people back in time. Similarly, a woman I interviewed reflected on a visit to see her elderly parents in Crimea, by stating

I was sharing a taxi [from Ukrainian-controlled territory to Russian-controlled Crimea], and as we arrived, one man [in the taxi] said, God, it’s like the USSR! The real USSR! And we laughed because it really did look like the USSR. It’s a very strange feeling. Like, I was born before the USSR collapsed [and] I had that feeling that I was back in that time.

(No. 70, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

The eeriness can be further elaborated by looking at some of the contrasting ways people were oriented to this time and place. The differences between locals and visitors contributed to the temporal disconnect. Those who fled Crimea described the lived experience of time for those who stayed as stagnant:

It’s a kind of nostalgia, really. They can’t accept change. They can’t live in the future. They have to live in the past. They are still thinking about Stalin and cheap vodka. They are poor people: they are poor economically; they are poor mentally. They are poor in their hearts, and in their souls, in everything.

(No. 8, Ukrainian male, IDP)

The references to Stalin and cheap vodka clearly mark how what was for some people a moment of pleasurable recollection was repulsive for those who felt dislocated in time. Frequently citing their parents’ descriptions of the Soviet Union

or their school history lessons, they suggested something was terribly amiss: Crimea, in their eyes, was stuck in time. People who objected to Russian rule in Crimea felt they were in the right place but at the “wrong” time. The “poverty” of this world brings a normative framing: it is not just different, it is worse.

The perceived hierarchy of Ukrainian-controlled areas relative to Russian-controlled ones comes into even sharper focus with people’s descriptions of how the culture of contemporary Crimea resembles the Soviet era. People explicitly compared current Russian state media to Soviet-era programs like “Panorama,” which purported to give Soviet citizens a glimpse of life in other countries, but mostly focused on problems elsewhere while candy-coating life at home.

Every Sunday a program called Panorama came out. There were video clips with headlines such as, “in Spain there are demonstrations, in America there is unemployment, in England there are drownings. But here in the USSR all is well.” I was little, but I remember well. Today? Do not say anything unnecessary. Do not write anything unnecessary in social networks. You feel continuous control, continuous oversight.

(No. 2, Crimean Tatar male, IDP, age 38)

This man imagines the surveillance he felt in Crimea as akin to the surveillance his parents experienced in the Soviet era: he would have been a child watching Panorama, a sort of Soviet equivalent of National Geographic.

My interviewees are not the only ones to observe a Soviet quality of Russia’s contemporary reality. Many authors have explored nostalgia for the Soviet past, pointing to the *lakirovka deistvitel’nosti* (“a varnishing of reality”) that occurred in the Stalin era (Piccolo 2015). Shaburova argues that the Soviet past is being simulated for the sake of people who long for what they had under the Soviet Union (Shaburova 2009, 12). Her thinking is that evoking the Soviet past casts a sheen that “glamorizes” (*glamurizatsiia*) contemporary consumer goods. Glamorization works by delinking ideology from material culture, enabling product developers to free up the associations. In the case of Crimea, we are talking about not only products (whether cultural or consumer) but also lived experiences.

The evocation of a Soviet reality is evident in consuming (as one does in Crimea) Soviet medicines (marked with dates from the Soviet time period), using a (recently erected) monument to Stalin as a meeting point, or driving through the streets of the capital city Simferopol behind cars with bumper stickers of Stalin’s portrait. The abundant references to the Soviet past helped remake the Crimean present in the Soviet image, but that image had continually to be reinforced.

The added distinction is just how threatening this temporality is to Crimean Tatars who survived genocide during the Soviet period. As such, the *lakirovka deistvitel’nosti* is far from benign. *Lakirovka deistvitel’nosti* is a source of terror and ultimate trauma for those previously victimized by the Soviet regime.

Those who did not flee the Russian occupation, however, did not experience the same sense of temporal dislocation. They spoke instead of getting accustomed to life under the new authorities. As a Russian businessman who lives in Crimea told me:

The majority are glad that they became part of Russia, especially those over fifty who remember what it was like before Ukraine. They say the prices are high and not everything is going smoothly, but everything is and will be fine.

(No. 110, Russian male, non-IDP)

Russian-backed authorities may not have brought all that was promised, in other words, but people remained hopeful that Russia was taking measures to actively deliver Crimea to the prosperous future that Ukraine had failed to provide. From this perspective, far from a slide into the Soviet past, Crimea was moving toward a bright economic future. They point to the new Tavrida highway, the Kerch bridge facilitating travel and trade with Russia (closed as a result of the war at this time), and improvements to the peninsula's supply of energy. A Ukrainian I interviewed who stayed in Crimea and earned his income by driving people from one territory to another stated:

For more than two decades, Ukraine ignored us, and the crumbling roads, peeling paint, and rampant crime testify to that. It's no secret that under Russia since 2014 we've at least entered the twenty-first century. Better late than never.

(No. 129, Ukrainian male, non-IDP)

Neither backward-looking nostalgia nor future-oriented economics figured as prominently in Crimean Tatars' narratives, however. In contrast to others, they construed living in Crimea as a political act that helped prevent the further dispossession and indeed genocide of the group. As a Crimean Tatar woman described it to me:

Our friends write to us on Facebook from Crimea and say "move back!" ... They also say things may be difficult in occupied Crimea, but we are one people and at least we will be in it together.

(No. 11, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

As an aspiring Crimean Tatar language teacher, she had sought safety outside the peninsula and strived to advance their cause in international fora and Ukrainian halls of governance. Her friends thought preserving unity and their numbers on the Crimean Peninsula was the best strategy. As parliamentarian and former leader of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Mustafa Djemilev, told me repeatedly in

conversations that took place between 2015 and 2017, both are valid based on safety and other considerations. There isn't a single correct path because each person or family must decide for themselves. Crimean Tatars residing in Crimea recently told me that the current visibility of Crimean Tatars in Ukrainian state discourse is still "too little, too late," because from independence to occupation, Ukraine largely ignored indigenous rights while they continued to profit from the plunder of Crimean Tatars' property inherited during the Soviet era (No. 111, Crimean Tatar male, mid-50s, non-IDP).

Dreams and nightmares

The terror associated with returning to the Soviet era was expressed through metaphors and various idioms of speech. Notably, people I spoke with used a vocabulary of dreams and nightmares to describe experiences that were otherwise difficult to parse. Emanating from the unconscious, and oftentimes only available to the waking mind in fragments, dreams evoke in a deeply personal way how forced migration was accompanied by temporal dislocation. Both the initial occupation and visits years later were described phenomenologically in terms of being asleep. Referring to the initial occupation in 2014, a displaced Crimean Tatar woman, age 39 at the time we spoke, described how she had become unsure about reality. Looking back on the occupation one year later, she said:

I was unsure if it was a dream or real life. My friend said, "you need to wake up and listen to me." When I finally understood, I started to cry. But I still have the sensation that it is not real.

(No 35, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

In dreams, experiences from the past and present come together and sequences of events often skip around unpredictably, lacking the temporal scaffolding of narratives organized by chronological time. What does this choice of vocabulary, describing a real state in terms of a dream state, tell us ethnographically?

The language of dreams provides evidence of trauma and trauma's ability to disrupt the socially constructed experience of time. An important feature of psychological trauma is the disintegration or disruption of habitual and taken-for-granted temporal flow. A traumatized person, Stolorow explains, lives in a world that feels very clearly incommensurable with the world of others. Incommensurability has both psychological and social effects, contributing "to the sense of alienation and estrangement from other human beings that typically haunts the traumatized person. Torn from the communal fabric of being-in-time, trauma remains insulated from human dialogue" (Stolorow 2007, 20). In a place that was simultaneously familiar and strange, this temporal dispossession not only disrupted trust in others but also trust in one's own sanity. Thus, people did not

have to go anywhere to feel displaced. Many expressed concern about whether this was a state they could wake up from again. A 31-year-old woman who had both Russian and Ukrainian heritage and identified as Ukrainian stated:

I think that, were I to return, I would be in such a state of stress. It would be like being in a utopia that you are dreaming because it is the same houses, the same streets and people, but then you understand, you know, that it is now made of different material. You can't touch it and have it feel the same.

(No. 01, Ukrainian female, IDP)

Here as well, using the vocabulary of dreaming points to emotional stress. In this IDP's experience, it was not just the authorities that had changed but the metaphysics. As in a dream in which one is weightless and can fly, her home might look the same but was now a spectral entity. This woman had worked as a journalist before fleeing Crimea, leaving her fiancée and career behind. She was not alone in this experience of uncanny weirdness. As a 24-year-old Crimean Tatar also put it:

The streets are the same. The people are the same. It's like it's all the same, but you feel strange. It's very uncomfortable to be there. You don't feel safe.

(No. 34, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

The lack of safety she articulates is based on the pervasive, if difficult to pinpoint, feeling of strangeness.³

In dreams, one often experiences nonsensical images, situations, or incidents as if they make perfect sense. Talking about being in Russian-occupied Crimea as a "dream" was a way to bracket or defer the full realization of the profoundly troubling events. The dream vocabulary also works to point toward unfulfilled wishes. Those who had been internally displaced wished occupation was only a dream, so they could resume their previous lives.

This dream didn't end, however, making it more like a nightmare, as a Crimean Tatar man in his mid-twenties suggested:

And at first, yeah, everybody thought that it was a misunderstanding, it would last maximum half a year. Well, Russia will balk a bit and leave. But it's like a nightmare, I mean, you wake up and can't believe it, it's impossible.

(No. 91, Crimean Tatar male, IDP)

The nightmare metaphor suggests that it was the diurnal cycle itself that was turned upside down: daytime had become a waking nightmare. Along these lines, fleeing to government-controlled Ukraine was compared to waking up from a bad dream. As a 51-year-old woman who identified as Russian and had fled to Kherson with her family described in 2015:

It's like that entire year [in Crimea] was a bad dream. Like we woke up one day and continued with our normal lives. I wouldn't say that we feel like locals yet [in "mainland" Kherson, Ukraine]. But it's like we have a normal life here.

(No. 32, Russian female, IDP)

Interviewed in 2015, this woman, who identified as Russian, found herself wondering where she belonged, where she could live among *svoi* (her own), and concluded that it was not in Russian-occupied Crimea. The discomfort associated with transitioning between these environments highlights the disconnect between the two temporalities, one based on the Soviet past and the other organized around fast forwarding to a European future. While people in occupied Crimea talked about the economic dimensions of occupation they valued, people who rebuilt their lives in government-controlled Ukraine valorized the freedom of expression they were able to enjoy. Ukrainian authorities used expressions like "freedom is our religion" and other rhetorical devices to mark how Ukrainians are on a path to even greater freedom, democratic governance, and prosperity.

An excursion to an asylum

Comparisons of occupied Crimea to an insane asylum were common. Perhaps this is because asylums are a place where one is cut off from the ordinary flow of social time and even social communication. We may recall the disruption to cell phone service as a result of the Russian occupation was very serious, as was the blockage of customary social media sites for maintaining connections. The idea that living under Russian occupation was like life in an asylum tells us people felt removed and even barricaded from established daily habits and communication routines. This relates to the other temporal dislocations discussed in this chapter because it shows a slightly different way that temporality is shattered: temporal dispossession felt like the isolation associated with illness.

The only way to reverse the temporal dispossession and regain a sense of safety, according to a Russian man in his mid-thirties, was to flee. Added to the sense of time travel back to the USSR and the comparison to dreams and nightmares, this is a third way in which the lived experience of time between Russian-occupied Crimea and government-controlled Ukraine was disarticulated. The people living in Russian-occupied Crimea were seen as living not only in a separate time but also in a terrifying one:

It was strange. You don't feel yourself. It was hard to understand at all how such a thing could happen. When you leave and think back on it, it's like you have returned from an excursion to an insane asylum.

(No. 33, Russian male, IDP)

Escaping the entrapments of the past and restoring the desired present meant flight. He spoke at length about relations with coworkers who accepted ersatz passports, complied with restrictions on free speech, and bought the idea that incorporation into the Russian Federation was a good idea. From his vantage point, these individuals inhabited a different and internally inconsistent “insane” temporal reality. His time in this Russian-controlled setting now seems like a time in an asylum compared to the sanity of Ukrainian government-controlled territory. His comments underscore the extent to which these temporal experiences had more to do with political preferences than ethnic identity. The role of ethnicity was less salient than attitudes and beliefs toward the occupation. Ukrainians, Russians, and Crimean Tatars I spoke with who objected to Russian occupation all used themes of going “back” to the USSR, dreaming, and insanity to refer to the radical disjuncture between Russian and Ukrainian-controlled territory.

Like in a science fiction film

Without a way to incorporate the occupation into waking reality or explain it to themselves as a sane and reasonable turn of historical events, people sometimes described their experience of occupation in terms of science fiction. This is widespread among survivors of trauma (Pillen 2016). Here, too, however, there is an explicitly temporal dimension, because science fiction offers its readers utopian and dystopian escapes into imagined futures, in which the limits of contemporary technology and science are lifted. A Crimean Tatar woman, devoutly Muslim, used “science fiction” to connote the lack of safety she had felt in what was for her a dystopian past:

It’s a bit similar to American blockbusters or science fiction in which humans live in another world, in another dimension, fighting with robots or other humans to survive. People in Crimea live in those same conditions today.

(No. 106, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

The “fiction” part of science fiction is crucial to this construal of events. Sudden political events that stretched the imagination could be parsed as pure fabrication and imaginative reconstruction:

When the fictive referendum took place and it became clear that it is not a joke—well, it was simply hard to believe that it was all happening in reality, because it was so absurd that they simply came, hung a flag, and that was it, that was how it would be.

(No. 10, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

The struggle over “reality” and emotional survival in occupied territory is writ large in the struggle between competing views of the history of Crimea. While some envisioned a bright future as part of the Russian Federation, others viewed the promised economic development, improved standards of living, and military protection with deep skepticism. After all, the imperial ambitions of the Russian state came with a loss of civil liberties, enhanced surveillance of civilians, and the transformation of the peninsula into what many likened to a giant military base. In any event, the residents of Crimea were never given the opportunity to articulate their vision. The referendums, which were illegal under Ukrainian law and deemed illegitimate by international human rights organizations, were held at gun point, with many of the voters being bussed in from other regions according to eyewitnesses I know.

A telling sign of temporal disorder and *social* dispossession can be found in accusations of treason. After occupation, people who were loyal to Ukraine, the state with legitimate sovereignty in Crimea, were erroneously called “traitors” for failing to support Russia. In these statements, World War II–era “traitors” and what it means to be a traitor in the *contemporary* era were brought into a painful disarticulation:

Now those who actually are traitors to Ukraine mistakenly think that the traitors are the Crimean Tatars again. But the Crimean Tatars support Ukraine, right? I’m worried about how distorted their understanding of something is, you know. People don’t understand things like they are in reality.

(No. 70, Crimean Tatar female, IDP)

Highly charged notions of treason from the Nazi past appearing in the Russian-controlled present showed Crimean Tatars could be falsely accused, again.

Still, we should not be too quick to assume that this had only to do with the accused traitors of World War II or the Crimean Tatar problematic. As I have documented, Russians and Ukrainians who lived in occupied Crimea but who did not accept the Russian occupation were *also* referred to as “traitors” (Uehling 2022). Treason works more like a trope in this setting, where it became an ideological tool for drawing new internal boundaries between loyal and disloyal subjects in Russian-controlled Crimea, regardless of ethnicity. Accusations of treason and the general social discord they generated provided added impetus to seek refuge in government-controlled parts of Ukraine. In this way, the narratives of the forcibly displaced reveal a clash of temporalities and historicities rather than civilizations or ethnicities.

While all ethnic groups were affected, there are still several ways in which these tropes, again, affected Crimean Tatars disproportionately. Without centuries or certainty that events in the past are indeed past, behaviors were enacted in ways that repeated rather than rectified past harms. An especially frightening

reenactment of the accusations of treason in the past, according to Crimean Tatars I spoke with, was when neighbors gathered and stood in front of their homes and audibly discussed who among them would claim the house after President Putin ordered a twenty-first-century deportation of the Crimean Tatars for disloyalty to Russia. With the failure of the “never again” pledge, the Crimean Tatars were faced with the possibility of human rights being egregiously abridged “again and again.” The treatment that the leadership of the Crimean Tatars’ representative body, the Mejlis, is indicative. In April 2016, the Mejlis was named an “extremist” organization and its top leadership was banned from Crimea. Some members were tried and imprisoned. Other leaders were tried and convicted in absentia. In addition to being unable to lead their community, their personal pasts and futures were in effect “stolen” (Khosravi 2018) by the regime.

If, as I mentioned above, living in Crimea while Crimean Tatar was a political act, what that meant as a practical matter was working to strengthen Crimean Tatar cultural identity rather than overtly challenging Russian authority. The flowering of creativity included visual arts, children’s stories, educational conferences, talent programs, and television comedy spots. Shynkarenko argues that these modalities are also a form of resistance because this type of activity deftly avoids confirming Russian stereotypes about Tatars as an unruly or criminal element (Shynkarenko 2022) and effectively demonstrates the opposite. There has also been resistance to Russia’s repression of Crimean Tatars, in the form of organizations that support the families of the unjustly imprisoned, many of whom have small children.

Staying also constituted its own form of temporality in a stretched-out and emptied present. As a man who lives in occupied Crimea stated:

We are in a constant state of waiting, as a countermeasure. To be as ready as possible. One has to step over one’s fear to prevent being destroyed. Why do Russians behave as they do? Because they are afraid. It’s a psychological thing. We are afraid, and simultaneously we know that if we don’t resist, we will be destroyed.

(No. 41, Crimean Tatar male, non-IDP)

The very different reactions of IDPs and continuously resident locals demonstrate two experiences of space and time co-occurring. The sense of suspended time articulated here bears some resemblance to the way other enclosed territories like Cyprus have been described. What the people displaced from Crimea teach us, however, is the reaction inherited in people more than material objects or physical surroundings.⁴

Precisely what gave some people comfort terrified others. A Ukrainian woman who had been forcibly displaced told me of her shock when, just before leaving Crimea for Ukrainian-controlled territory, she overheard a conversation among

other residents of Crimea, praising the extensive police presence on the streets. Apparently, they thought it was “cool” because they could feel safe walking in the dark. She pointed out that security forces, like the Federal Security Service (FSB), targeted people for arrest and imprisonment on charges of religious “extremism.” There was also the very real possibility of forced conscription into the occupying army—a violation of humanitarian law and terrifying for Crimean Tatars whose ancestors had been deported or made disappeared by the security services in the Soviet period.

Inverting moral hierarchies

The language of time travel, nightmares, and science fiction is important to understanding the occupation of Crimea for several reasons. First, this vocabulary demonstrates the trauma by speaking around it. If trauma disrupts the ability to tell events in a linear way, these figures of speech evoke the subjective experience of occupation without needing to tell the story of occupation from beginning to end. Another reason this vocabulary is significant is that while temporality and history traditionally uphold the narratives of progress and betterment, these figures of speech (travel backward, insanity, nightmares, and science fiction) reverse the moral trajectory promoted by Russian leaders that Crimea has been improved by the unlawful Russian occupation. On the contrary, as the individuals who fled argued, Crimea experienced devolution and the dispossession of rightful residents. Finally, because these figures of speech were shared across ethnic groups, they illuminate the political as opposed to the solely ethnic nature of being dispossessed in space and time as a result of the occupation of Crimea. Those who remained but objected to occupation were dispossessed phenomenologically speaking in a different way when they felt themselves to be living in the “right” place (their homeland of Crimea) at the “wrong” time.

Conclusion

While we are accustomed to analyzing the Russian advances into sovereign Ukraine in terms of territory, there is a great deal to be gained by also analyzing the changes phenomenologically, in terms of temporality. Whether one stayed in Russian-occupied Crimea or fled to Ukrainian government-controlled areas, contemporary Crimea is being shaped through memory, history, and temporality in addition to military might. Phenomenologically speaking, time ceased moving forward in a chronological way. The present was being organized to resemble the Soviet past with its continual threats, ongoing traumas, and persistent need to seek safety. Dispossession is happening again.

This chapter has therefore explored the subjective experience of foreign occupation. People who were displaced by Russian occupation provide a valuable

window into Crimea because they travel between Russian- and Ukrainian-controlled territories. They compare life in occupied Crimea to having a bad dream, visiting a mental asylum, or experiencing a science fiction. All these expressions point to the psycho-emotional trauma of occupation, illuminating how political change is experienced by the mind and body and expanding the literature on forced migration's temporal dimensions.

Analyzing narratives through lenses of both temporality and forced migration enables us to understand their experiences both with and against the grain of ethnicity. After all, members of all the ethnic groups who left used the same idioms. Scholars of temporality suggest that the main question is how multiple temporalities interact. My analysis shows how, far from being effectively hinged, the lived temporalities in Ukraine and Russian-controlled Crimea were misaligned, functionally *unhinged*. Those who fled Crimea resisted the temporality cultivated by Russian-backed authorities, seeking to awaken from what felt like a nightmare and flee what seemed like an insane asylum to restore sanity and safety. Those who stayed in Crimea, by contrast, lived in what they characterized as suspended animation: something had been left hanging, and this might be the case for a very long time.

Notes

- 1 <https://daily.rbc.ua/rus/show/dzhemilev-voprosu-deokkupatsii-kryma-udelyaetsya-1455039385.html>
- 2 <https://mediacenter.org.ua/people-of-crimea-don-t-want-to-go-to-war-crimean-residents-leaving-peninsula-to-avoid-conscription-into-russian-army-tamila-tasheva/>
- 3 As Laub and Felman (1992) have argued, a defining feature of the traumatized person is that they cannot, or at least not quite, articulate what they have experienced.
- 4 In alignment with a post-humanist and materialist approach, Navaro-Yashin (2012, 18) contends that there is something in space, in material objects, or in the environment that produces the subjective experience of time. The people who traveled into and back out of Russian-controlled territory teach us that the same objects and buildings produced different affects for different subjects.

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4

NO LONGER A CITIZEN

Dispossession in Eastern Ukraine

Oleksandra Tarkhanova

I lived my whole life in that apartment [in Luhansk]. Then, I lost everything. Yes, I could have stayed there. Then again, the situation was difficult. Now I do not want to go back there, no matter what. I do not want to abandon the apartment because it is my property. I do not want to give up what is mine. It concerns the apartment, and the country, and everything. I do not need someone else's, but I do not want to give up what is mine. I can give to those who are in need. But not to those who are taking something from me, no.

(Iryna, 67, living in the government-controlled area of the Luhansk region)

Iryna was displaced in 2014, relocating to a then-peaceful town under government control in Eastern Ukraine. She relied only on her pension and state welfare assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the Ukrainian government to provide for herself and her sick and dying mother, whom she had been caring for since displacement. Her story is one of loss and resilience. She lost her apartment, which signifies more than a place to live; it means the result of a life's worth of labor. She lost normalcy and predictability in her life. Later, she lost her mother. Through these experiences of loss, a story of resilience comes through. She does not want to give up what was taken unjustly from her. I explore how IDPs from Eastern Ukraine, such as Iryna, viscerally experience their citizenship being undermined and conditioned in state-citizen encounters with the Ukrainian state that are governed by the established policy regime of displacement. Displaced persons devise strategies to reinstate their position vis-à-vis the state (Tarkhanova 2023).

Iryna resists the marginalization that comes with IDP status by trying to build broader solidarities with her neighbors based on her social rights, as she understands them, while still making claims to the state.

How is occupation experienced? What does it mean for people's everyday lives, self-perceptions, and imaginations of the future? How can one deal with and survive occupation? In this chapter, I focus on stories of dispossession that stem from living under occupation and having one's citizenship-based connection to the state forcibly disrupted rather than from having to leave one's home, property, and life behind due to military aggression and the establishment of an occupation regime, although this too has triggered massive dispossession. The (geo)political aspect of occupation draws our attention to the quasi-state formations in the region and a lack of legitimacy and authority, both in relation to the population and in relation to the "patron" state of Russia (Lennon and Adams 2019). People who have been living under occupation since 2014 reflect on their citizenship—as a status, as a means of accessing rights and entitlements, and as a sense of belonging—as being simultaneously suspended and yet present in an uncertain, ephemeral way. They *feel* like Ukrainian citizens and have formal status, but their practical ability to exercise their citizenship is suspended in the occupied territory. As a result, they must enter a complex array of relationships with the occupying regime. In this chapter, I explore how people experience and narrate such disruptions and in response recompose their relations with the state of their primary citizenship identification—Ukraine—and with the emergent quasi-state formations in the occupied parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

Before the full-scale invasion, my interview partners regularly traveled across the so-called contact line whether they resided under occupation or were displaced to the government-controlled areas (GCAs) of Ukraine. This mobility was essential, especially for people who continued to live under occupation, to maintain citizenship relations with the Ukrainian state and to secure access to essential social services, documentation, financial resources, medical care, and consumer goods. In 2020, this critical movement across the contact line was significantly restricted due to COVID-19, and, in 2022, with the full-scale Russian invasion, it became nearly impossible. Despite living in protracted conflict behind the demarcation line for seven years at the time of the interviews, my interlocutors insisted on their citizenship rights, rejected the legitimacy of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (D/LPR) and its *de facto* borders, and expressed persistent impatience to resolve the conflict that had caused this destructive separation. The goal of this chapter is to analyze these narratives and start a conversation about citizens of Ukraine¹ being dispossessed of their state and their citizenship under occupation during Russia's war against Ukraine.

Research methodology and context

I rely on interviews and ethnographic observations conducted in 2020 and 2021. The timing is significant. Due to COVID-19-related restrictions put in place in the spring of 2020, all interviews had to be conducted at a distance, with the help of a team of interviewers in Ukraine. This *ad hoc* adjustment to the original research plan created unforeseen opportunities, one of which was the possibility of establishing contact with people residing under occupation. We interviewed 25 people who had IDP status but continued to move regularly across the contact line in Eastern Ukraine while either resettling in the GCA or remaining in the occupied territories. Before the COVID-19-related restrictions, which affected the contact line as if it was an ordinary border, people were very mobile, with 1–1.3 million crossings per month. The sample was restricted to people whose place of residence was in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions—both on the government-controlled and occupied sides. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone or online. The interviews focused on people’s experiences of state–citizen interactions at state welfare institutions, entry–exit crossing points (EECPs), and road checkpoints.

Insights from the interviews were brought into conversation with ethnographic observations in summer 2021 at state welfare institutions and EECPs along the contact line, once some mobility across had been restored. Finally, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian state welfare employees at offices of social assistance and administrative service provisions in the two regions of Eastern Ukraine. These interviews with street-level bureaucrats and ethnographic observations provide a broader context on experiences of citizenship dispossession.

All interview participants maintained active relations with the Ukrainian state through their IDP status, which was necessary to access social and citizenship rights.² This means that people who have been displaced to other regions of Ukraine need to preserve a permanent address in the occupied territory or directly on the “contact line” and a temporary address in a new place of residence. The first address establishes their (former) residency in the region, supports their property rights, and renders their claims for state assistance legitimate. The second address in the GCA establishes citizens’ displacement, affords access to social assistance and services, and signals the unlivability of the occupied regions. Residents of the occupied territories were also obliged to maintain an IDP registration, which is achievable only by regularly crossing the contact line. However, the mere existence of citizens who continued to reside under occupation and maintain relations with the Ukrainian state challenges the perception of the territory without legitimate state sovereignty as unlivable and brings to the forefront the fact that the emergent quasi-state formations in the region, however illegitimate or incomplete, provide complementary provisions for people under

occupation. Interviews with a group of 12 Ukrainian citizens residing most of the time in the occupied areas comprise the core of the empirical material analyzed in this chapter.³

With such rules and regulations in place, mobility across the contact line has been crucial. Elsewhere, I show that the COVID-related restrictions, which suspended most crossings of the “contact line” in 2020, eventually surpassed their initial purpose to protect vulnerable populations from the virus and became a tool for the local *de facto* authorities to manage the population under occupation and for Russia to further integrate the occupied territories (Tarkhanova 2023b). The war in Eastern Ukraine and the displacement that it caused had been in a protracted stage for seven years at the time of the interviews. This means there was a certain degree of normalization around displacement and occupation, while the situation was still characterized as liminal in people’s narratives. The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictions on movement became a crisis within a crisis. Hence, interviews conducted during this period provide a snapshot of perturbation when interlocutors were aware of the ongoing changes, for example, in the facilitation of the passportization policy by Russia.

My team and I conducted an equal number of interviews with men and women. However, women were consistently more open and articulate when it came to their relations with the state. This might be explained by the fact that they have more experience dealing with the welfare state. The topics raised in the interviews were sensitive, so this might also be a sign of men and women assessing the risks associated with voicing their opinions on the state(s) differently. Men might have been more reluctant to give extensive answers because they thought they could face harsher prosecution for voicing critical opinions on the occupation regime by the *de facto* authorities.

Displacement, dispossession, citizenship

Critical and postcolonial citizenship studies provide theorization and empirical ground to regard citizenship not as a permanent status and a sign of inclusion and belonging, marking access to various rights and the public good, but instead as an internally differentiated and always insecure position within power structures (Cohen 2009; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Isin and Nyers 2014; Isin and Wood 1999; Lister 1997; Petryna and Follis 2015). Citizenship constitutes historically and politically contingent relations and practices that tie people to nation-states (Brubaker 1992; Isin and Nyers 2014; Sabbagh-Khoury 2022). These processes cannot be fully understood when focusing solely on the top-down ascription of status, membership, and access. However, relations with a sovereign state, which is bound by a territory, are fundamental to citizenship. Hence, citizenship is always “dialectically negotiated” between the state “classificatory apparatus” and individual or collective agentic processes (Bloemraad

et al. 2008; Sabbagh-Khoury 2022, 152). This has implications not only for outsiders, migrants, or “stateless” people but also for citizens. The case of occupation best illustrates that citizenship is always vulnerable and depends on the existence of a sovereign state and its authority over the territory where one resides (Franke 2011).

The precariousness of citizenship can be shown not only by zooming in on individual cases of transgression that result in the state stripping citizenship status away (e.g., Lenard 2018) but also by looking at the collective dispossession of citizenship (Kannabiran 2020; Rudabeh and Turner 2022; Sabbagh-Khoury 2022). The imperial war of occupation launched by Russia against Ukraine, along with other colonial wars, provides an example of such a process. The preceding period of hybrid warfare with localized occupation under quasi-state formations in Eastern Ukraine showcases the complexity of the interplay between sovereignty, occupation, and citizenship, which I explore here.

The case of occupied Eastern Ukraine becomes a case of collective dispossession of citizenship yet of a different kind than the one we find in literature on ethnic, religious, or other kinds of collective discrimination (Kannabiran 2020; Rudabeh and Turner 2022). Instead, this case best illustrates the intrinsic connections between citizenship, sovereignty, and territory by zeroing in on the case of its decoupling, when, as Kannabiran writes, “dispossession signals a disappearance of legitimate territory from [people’s] lifeworlds” (Kannabiran 2020, 343). Through the loss of state control over certain regions in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the military conflict with Russian-backed forces, and the consequent occupation of these regions through quasi-state formations, residents of these territories have been displaced and dispossessed of their citizenship.

Occupation presents a particular kind of dispossession that does not necessarily or immediately mean dispossession of property, land, or the right to own. However, this often follows gradually when, under the new sovereignty, laws are adopted that make dispossession legal (Kedar 2016; Sabbagh-Khoury 2022). I find Butler and Athanasiou’s (2013, 6–7) thinking through the broad understanding of dispossession useful, particularly their definition of its opposite—possession—in non-material terms as “the right to reside, to be left in peace, and the right to life with dignity, at the bare minimum” (Kannabiran 2020, 346). In the statement with which I started this chapter, Iryna voices the pain of being dispossessed of property. Many displaced interlocutors went through the humiliating, expensive, and difficult procedure of crossing the contact line from the government-controlled to the occupied regions to ensure that their property was intact and could not be easily taken away from them based on the claim of abandonment. Hence, I do not want to dismiss what I consider to be the strength of this concept—its connection to property and land. Yet, I want to draw attention to the dispossession of rights—which also means freedom to move, safety, bodily integrity, and life—due to its connection to citizenship and state sovereignty.

The result of dispossession through occupation is not non-citizens, citizens of another state, or migrants. The result is a complex creative space where citizenship is undone and redone against the will of citizens. Residents under occupation are not unwanted citizens. As citizens on the margins, they are central to the construction of state legitimation (Carroll 2019; Rimpiläinen 2020). Most residents of occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine have Ukrainian passports, and a large share remained in an active relationship with the Ukrainian state until the full-scale Russian invasion, but now a more complex “citizenship constellation” (Bauböck 2010) has emerged. The Ukrainian state introduced conditions under which people could continue to make actual use of their citizenship, and frequently leaving the occupied territory was the main one. The quasi-state formations—the D/LPR—in the occupied regions provided certain rights and assistance and issued their own passports in an attempt to gain legitimacy, which was not a replacement for Ukrainian citizenship but rather offered complementing provisions. Russian citizenship is another component of this constellation. It becomes a tool to occupy, dispossess, and erase the indigenous subject.

Unlike literature on citizenship acts and practices, which focuses on instances of active political resistance to processes of subjugation (Isin 2009; Isin and Nielsen 2008), literature on collective dispossession provides a more diverse view of resistance, which is important to consider (Sabbagh-Khoury 2022). I believe that such an “unsettled/disturbed zone” as Eastern Ukraine, which is devastated by the war, might offer “new idioms and practices of citizenship,” which Roy calls “insurgent citizenship” (Roy 2014, 55).

My material shows how people insist on Ukrainian citizenship as a practice-based, actionable, and reciprocal instrument to maintain relations with the state and ensure access to basic social rights. Under the conditions of occupation and dispossession, people have restricted options to establish a connection with a legitimate political actor that can meet the extensive expectations that citizenship entails; one option is the citizenship of the occupying state. To deal with this “protracted uncertainty” (Brun 2015), people try to secure “passports” to assemble the citizenship constellation to meet their needs. Instead of framing this as banal pragmatism or a lack of national consciousness, I propose looking at it as a resource for resistance and activation. In the face of propaganda and a militarized oppressive regime, the pragmatic strategic rearrangement and utilization of passports, including the passport of the occupying state, could be reasonably considered a strategy of resistance.

Displacement

“Internally displaced” is not an easy-to-define category. There are IDPs in Ukraine without official governmental status, and there are people with the status who are not displaced. Half of the 12 people who reside under occupation

that I talked to have experienced displacement, but they returned home due to various reasons ranging from unemployment to sick family members needing care. All of them have the status of IDP, yet only a few identify as displaced persons (*pereselentsi/VPO*). In this part of the chapter, I rely on experiences of crossing the contact line to explore a particular aspect of dispossession through displacement, namely, restriction of movement. The contact line is an active tool in establishing citizenship and occupation regimes and changing the two.

Internal displacement might be reduced to a status on paper, minimized and normalized in people's narratives, or it can be avoided as a cumbersome bureaucratic procedure by people with means because it brings only minor social assistance in exchange for state surveillance. While experiences of displacement—physical and/or on paper—differ significantly due to individual circumstances, crossing the contact line is a common experience that all interlocutors and all people with a formal status of displacement share. During my fieldwork at the EECs, I observed how this securitized border crossing always carried a risk of not being able to return home. The border infrastructure that emerged along the contact line brought a certain sense of security and predictability to the border crossing. However, the pandemic became yet another disruption. The corresponding regulations put in place by the *de facto* authorities in the occupied regions ensured that people without registration in those regions or without having a legitimate (in their eyes) reason to come in could not cross the contact line. Some people were cut off from their homes and families on both sides of the border without being allowed to cross because the crossing was made impossible for the first two and a half months of the pandemic.

As a contested *de facto* border and a frontline in an ongoing conflict, the contact line is not only a militarized and securitized barrier, but it also constitutes a “border of belonging,” with people I interviewed stuck in between (Jones 2018, 35). IDPs are always attached to the region they come from—under occupation—and to the region where they currently reside, without being able to (re)settle and belong fully in either of them. That is why crossing the contact line is usually experienced emotionally as a humiliating and unjust process. Igor, a middle-aged man displaced from Donetsk, who continued to travel back home regularly for personal and professional reasons, recounted his experiences of crossing the contact line as upsetting because of being subjected to excessive regulations by authorities on both sides. He felt acutely humiliated when going through extensive document checks, searches, and often interrogations at the EECs. This *de facto* border was perceived by interlocutors like Igor as a tool of dispossession—a physical manifestation of the forced territorial separation that led to their displacement and a border that regulates or restricts their access to home. Routine and seemingly trivial instances of such regulations were recounted by Igor as unlawful and painful. For example, he was stopped on the way to the occupied regions by the D/LPR authorities and forced to get rid of several cans of coffee

that he was carrying with him. Both the Ukrainian state and the authorities in the occupied regions introduced strict regulations on the quantity and kinds of goods allowed to be transported across the contact line. This would be typical for any border crossing, yet most of my interlocutors perceived this border as illegitimate. Hence, any restrictions of this kind were considered a limitation of their rights.

Crossing the contact line always carries a risk of administrative or physical violence, and even when someone has not experienced this violence themselves, it is anticipated based on the stories of friends and acquaintances. The kind of violence people talked about ranged from the threat of being barred from crossing by being put on a “black” list to having one’s phone destroyed because the person forgot to turn it off and received a call at the checkpoint, to being beaten by the border guards. Although I have a limited number of accounts to draw larger conclusions from, the threat of administrative violence seemed to be more prevalent in interactions with the Ukrainian border guards and of physical violence in interactions with the D/LPR representatives on the border.

People have employed different practical strategies to counteract state violence along the contact line, from persistent presence, which means staying at an EECP for weeks at a time waiting for an opportunity to cross, to active rejection of hyperdocumentation demands (which means direct confrontations with border guards), to strategic concealment of one’s identification documents by IDPs to “pass” for an “ordinary” citizen (Tarkhanova 2023). A particular discursive strategy pertinent to disrupting this “border of belonging” and delegitimizing the exclusionary occupation regime came to my attention during fieldwork in a room at an EECP full of people with documentation problems that prevented them from crossing the contact line to the occupied territories. A dozen people were waiting for legal aid, and I chatted with some of them, when all of a sudden, one woman mentioned that she was a miner in the occupied region: “I was born there [in the occupied Luhansk region], I gained a miner’s long-service bonus (*stazh*) there, my home is there. But I do not have registration (*propiska*) there! And they do not let me through.” When she tried to cross the contact line, the border control of LPR threw her documents on the ground, told her to go back to Ukraine, and even shoved her: “I was born there and worked there, and now he is pushing me out (*vytalkivaet*).” At this point, it became clear that at least three people in the room worked in mines before, because they started discussing recent accidents and floods in mines in the occupied territory.

This was one of the most emotional episodes in my fieldwork. While the woman I spoke with could barely hold back her tears, I felt that other people in the room were deeply sympathetic toward her story. Having worked in the mine for 15 years, this woman, like other former miners, felt she belonged in the region, which has a strong industrial and mining identity, through her personal *and* professional connections. Hence, to insist on her right to travel home without restrictions, she makes her claim as a miner, relying on the identity of the region as such.

Dispossession of citizenship

During the active military hostilities in 2014–2015, most state functions were suspended or seriously disrupted in the occupied territories. All Ukrainian state institutions, as well as basic civil infrastructure, such as banks, the post, and transportation networks, were gradually withdrawn from the region. This initial period is remembered as a “rule of men with pitchforks” (*muzhiki s vilami*) by my interlocutors. By this, they mean that there was a lack of clear authority when the rule of law was replaced with armed men.

The quasi-state formations in the occupied territories emerged on the basis of Ukrainian institutional remnants, with the financial support of Russia, and often employing the same people as before (Tarkhanova forthcoming). This process was accompanied by the development of a legal and procedural institution of displacement by the Ukrainian state, which was supposed to ensure that people from the occupied regions had access to their citizenship rights. The *de facto* authorities in the occupied areas attempted to build their legitimacy not only by ideological means but also, and probably primarily, through social provisions for the residents of the regions under their control (Lennon and Adams 2019). The provision of pensions and other kinds of social assistance became detrimental to maintaining their political regimes (*ibid.*). The Ukrainian state also felt pressure to deliver social rights to its citizens according to the law and to maintain citizenship relations with people under occupation. The subject of the displaced supported the state’s claim and aspiration to reclaim the territory and ensure some possibility for people to return home (Rimpiläinen 2020). Residents of the occupied territories were integrated into the IDP category as long as they could move across the contact line and maintain administrative relations with the state.

Focusing on the people who lived under occupation, what comes to the forefront is not the discriminatory function of having IDP status but the role that occupation itself plays in people’s sense of dispossession when it comes to citizenship. Alina, a 52-year-old woman, was displaced during the first years of the war but soon had to return to Luhansk with her family to care for her sick mother. She continued to travel to the GCA regularly to visit relatives and later to resolve the question of her mother’s pension after she died. Because her mother was sick for several years and could not travel across the contact line herself (which, according to Ukrainian law, is mandatory to receive a pension if you live in the occupied territories), Alina decided, upon her mother’s death, to take the state to court to receive the pension that her mother was owed. Among the people I talked to, she was most explicit in expressing how her citizenship and the social rights it provided were suspended due to occupation.

When you go to that territory [GCA], you feel like a citizen, and you can enjoy all, so to speak, rights as a citizen of Ukraine. When you get back [to the occupied territories], then you are immediately under suspicion *because* you are coming back from Ukraine. Whatever kind of status you have here—the

territory where you are—you need to recognize the rules of the game in this territory (*pravila igry etoi territorii*). It's just that this territory [the occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions] does not have any formal and accepted status. That's why, on the one hand, you sort of feel like a citizen of Ukraine. Sometimes, when there are certain problems, even in everyday life, in a bus [across the contact line] or something, I say: "Excuse me, I have a passport of a citizen of Ukraine." I am a citizen of Ukraine with registration (*propiska*) in Luhansk—no one has yet removed Luhansk from Ukraine. The fact that there is conflict, that the territory is divided, that there are some negotiations, even if slow-moving—it is war, after all!—this does not mean that we have stopped using Ukrainian citizenship rights. It is another thing that we can't use them *here*.

(Alina, 52, living in Luhansk)

Alina *feels* like a citizen of Ukraine, and she *acts* as one in interactions with border control. However, her residence in the occupied territory means that her rights as a Ukrainian citizen are suspended. The emerging sovereignty under occupation exercises authority over her once she is in the territory it controls. For Alina, and other interlocutors in my sample, this process of citizenship re-configuration is not only accompanied by the violence and helplessness of war, but it is also in itself a process that is forced onto them and hence experienced as dispossession. She goes on to clarify: "We all turned out to be rights-less [*bespravnyimi*] in deciding on issues of our territory. Nothing was done according to the law."

Another interview partner, Sarah, was more settled in Luhansk at the time of the interview, although she was also previously briefly displaced to the GCA. Throughout the interview, she insists on her citizenship and points out that the state is failing to assist people in complicated situations, for example, pensioners, but also recognizes that she is in a citizen relationship with the new quasi-state authorities of LPR:

I think we count as citizens of Ukraine, but we are actually here, in the occupied territory, the so-called Luhansk uncontrolled territory. So, it seems like the state of Ukraine does not consider us to be its citizens. So, solve your own problems! Yes, there are mechanisms, but if you need anything—you go get it. We will not care for you anymore. ... A large share of citizens feel as if they are abandoned (*broshennyie*). Of course, we have some [rights] officially, on paper, but in practice, in reality—nothing.

(Sarah, 34, living in Luhansk)

The Ukrainian state remains the primary addressee of people's grievances. Alina might be more appreciative of the protection and rights that being a Ukrainian citizen provides when one is out of the occupied territory; however, she also has

extensive expectations of the Ukrainian state. Sarah draws attention to the fact that, while the state sets out a roadmap on how to access social and citizenship rights, it does not actually guarantee this access. There are mechanisms for ensuring that everyone under occupation with a Ukrainian passport has access to proper documentation such as birth and death certificates, pension and childcare payments, and administrative services, but these mechanisms are demanding and practically not accessible for everyone, namely for those who are immobilized. Her expectations of the *de facto* authorities in Luhansk are considerably lower:

If our territory took up the responsibility, organized its own state, with a constitution, with the same rights and responsibilities, it tries to meet social demands, such as social benefits, free education, free medical care, and so on. Again, it is understandable that there is not sufficient funding, no possibilities to deliver what was promised to people.

She goes on to frame social assistance provided by the LPR, namely, the pension equivalent, as deficient and, at best, complementary to Ukrainian provisions. It serves to show how different the meanings and expectations attached to state–citizen relations are. Unlike citizenship of the D/LPR or even of Russia, which is usually represented in narratives as merely a passport, Ukrainian citizenship is engendered with a wide range of comprehensive, legal, practical, and affective relations.

Certain vulnerable groups experience this “abandonment” by the state and the dispossession of citizenship under occupation most acutely. State welfare employees, who are used to dealing with vulnerable populations, were well aware when talking to me that the displacement regime put in place by the Ukrainian state, although it devised mechanisms for people to access pensions and other state provisions, excludes those who cannot move across the contact line. Primarily, these are people who are immobilized due to old age, sickness, and low income. But there are also other situations produced primarily by state regulations. For example, for a child to move across the contact line with only one parent or another relative, they need permission from the other parent or both of them, notarized by a Ukrainian notary in the GCA. This means the parent(s) must acquire this legal document in the GCA earlier, during another trip, which leads to considerable financial expenses. Besides that, a large share of the population under occupation has been made inadmissible to the government-controlled part of Ukraine because of their work in state institutions under occupation, such as welfare offices, schools, and hospitals under the authority of the D/LPR. As such, they are often rendered immobile and effectively trapped in the occupied part of Eastern Ukraine. This means their children might also be trapped due to the regulation above.

So far, in this section, I have discussed how Ukrainian citizens residing in the occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts had their citizenship suspended under occupation. This led to the development of the displacement regime in Ukraine that determines the differential conditions of citizenship for the population in the occupied areas. This process was also accompanied by the simultaneous development of a quasi-state apparatus under occupation, which established certain relations with residents that they perceived as citizenship relations. The contact line and the (im)mobility regime across it created by the Ukrainian state and the D/LPR have been indispensable for maintaining this citizenship reconfiguration. The contact line acts as a physical manifestation of finite state sovereignty and the “dividing line” between “safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). The occupied territory represents a black hole without any legitimate authority, functioning institutions, or knowable facts of life. For example, Ukrainian welfare workers pointed out that they could not consider people’s working history to qualify for a pension if a document to prove it had a stamp of D/LPR, indicating their employment under occupation. The sentiment of the “other side” being something of a black hole was also expressed by Maria, a 41-year-old resident of Luhansk oblast, who said

To be honest, I still do not understand the situation. How can the place where we lived, that we could reach in an hour from where we are now, turn into such an inaccessible place? I do not understand why all of this happened. There is an understanding, though, that we will never go back. Our property will stay there, people will live there. Whoever wanted to, left already. And this lost place (*poterennoe mesto*) is like some kind of emptiness (*kak pustota takaia*).
(*Maria, 41, living in Luhansk oblast, GCA*)

At the time of the interviews, the region had endured seven years of separation. Even then, the contact line was still perceived as an unnecessary and disturbing border. This border is a derivative of the combat line that is instrumental in the establishment of the occupation regime. It institutes the sovereignty of the new state formations but also displaces and dispossesses (Kannabiran 2020, 347). It is porous when it needs to be, for example, when pensions, social assistance, and goods flowing with the people into the occupied territories are instrumental for some semblance of socio-economic survival. It turns impenetrable when a new opportunity to demarcate safe from the unsafe, such as viral threats, opens up. In the narratives of my interlocutors, the contact line is present as a physical obstacle, a tool of discrimination and humiliation, but also as a symbolic representation of the unnatural and unnecessary division between two parts of the same state. Such rejection of the separation might be a plea for a return to normalcy or a way to deal with protracted uncertainty.

Citizenship under occupation?

Dispossession does not mean absence. Through violence, new forms of sovereignty and citizenship constellations appear. Under occupation in Ukraine, it means coexistence between citizenship projections from above by the Ukrainian state and the occupation regime and citizenship attachments, as well as expectations from below. In light of the full-scale invasion, further integration of these territories into the Russian state, and occupation of other parts of Ukraine, new empirical research needs to be conducted, once it is feasible and ethically justifiable, to understand the extent to which my reflections on the occupation since 2014 are indicative of ongoing processes in the newly occupied territories.

The people I interviewed who live under occupation attach two broadly defined meanings to citizenship. The first one concerns the social rights and welfare entitlements that citizenship affords, which could be understood as social citizenship. The second one concerns democratic processes and the active possibility of influencing the political development of the polity where one resides, which could be understood as political citizenship. So far, I have shown that both kinds of relations vis-à-vis the Ukrainian state are suspended or conditioned in the occupied territory beyond the state's control.

The social aspect is crucial for a sense of citizenship among my interlocutors, who want to feel like the state *cares about them*. At the same time, social responsibility is one of the central instruments for a state to claim legitimacy, especially in the context of not having international recognition, which is the case for the occupied territories. For Sarah quoted above, the fact that local *de facto* authorities try “to meet social demands” of the population is what makes their claim to statehood legitimate. In my research on state political discourses during the post-Soviet transformations in Ukraine, I argued that the intention of being a social state functioned as *raison d'état*, when in practice, was recognized as impossible. In other words, the state was unable to fulfill its citizens' expectations, but by stating that it intended to, it gained a measure of legitimacy (Tarkhanova 2021). In a similar way, Sarah recognizes that the local “republic” cannot fulfill the expectations, yet its discursive intention is taken as sufficient. Nevertheless, the lack of international recognition of the occupied territories as separate, independent state entities is always pointed out as a limit to their statehood. Alina responds when asked if she has a local passport

A: God, no! Why would I need it?

I: Why not?

A: I do not believe in fake republics and their passports, to be honest. But if it really comes down to it (*esli uzhe konechno prizhmet okonchatel'no*), if I will [otherwise] not be able to receive a pension, then, of course, I will have to [apply for one]. But generally, why would I need it? (Alina, 52, living in Luhansk)

Here, she references the rumors that started, when the contact line was closed due to COVID-19-related restrictions, that local “passports” would be required to access social services and payments from the D/LPR and to hold certain jobs, namely, at state-funded institutions. On the one hand, such limited social relations with local quasi-state formations are never enough to “compete” with Ukrainian citizenship. On the other hand, when Ukrainian citizenship entitlements are accessible only when and if one can leave the occupied territory *and* movement across the contact line is severely restricted, these relations with the “republics” are existential. Hence, citizenship under occupation is limited and intertwined with the possibility to still benefit from citizenship provisions from the Ukrainian state. Most importantly, Ukrainian citizenship provides administrative services that give people a documented and internationally recognized status that is needed for international travel and migration.

Life under occupation is characterized by “protracted uncertainty” (Brun 2015). An occupation regime creates ever-changing conditions of uncertainty and obliges its residents to adapt to them. What started as COVID-19-related restrictions turned into immobility due to the full-scale invasion. At the time they were interviewed, half of those residing under occupation applied for local “passports” in hopes of receiving Russian passports. The full-scale invasion, which brought devastating destruction to the region and made movement within and outside the occupied areas even more difficult and dangerous, exacerbated the circumstances.

The sense of “shifting sands of citizenship” under occupation (Kannabiran 2020) brings me to the second aspect of state–citizen relations for my interlocutors: its political and active component. The “disappearance of legitimate territory from [people’s] lifeworlds” (Kannabiran 2020, 343) made people feel disempowered to influence political processes that have insurmountable effects on their lives. Alina felt she had no right “to participate in the decision-making processes on the future of our territory.” This lack of political participation, and dissatisfaction with it, leads to other unwanted political processes. New forms of dispossession continuously emerge under occupation, and my interview partners feel powerless to resist them. Most prominently, people refer to possible loss of property rights, permission to work, education, and social provisions unless local or Russian passports are acquired. More recently, the threat of military mobilization, irrespective of one’s citizenship, is the most concerning type of mounting mass state violence in the occupied territories.

When asked about their political rights as citizens of Ukraine, my interlocutors referred to the possibility of expressing one’s political opinion vis-à-vis the Ukrainian state as an important part of *feeling* like a citizen:

In these seven years, I have realized that I still feel that I am a citizen of Ukraine. As a citizen, I can express my opinion: what I like, what I don’t like, how it is, how it should be, how it should have been from the beginning.

(Alina)

Alina does not vote in Ukrainian elections, because it entails a considerable effort of traveling out of the occupied territory, but she feels free to express her political opinions in personal communications or in conversation with me. The ability to express opinions on a variety of issues, including political opinions, is one of several kinds of citizenship acts, mundane and extraordinary, that are vital for resisting the Russian (neo)imperial project.

Discussion: possibility of resistance

Citizenship is not simply a status, membership, or means of access that is granted from above. It is also actively engaged with, reframed, exercised, and negotiated from below through practices and acts (Isin and Nyers 2014). Under conditions of occupation, the threat of violence, and the power of the regime, narrow possibilities for resistance and, more importantly, what it means to resist, survive, and collaborate, are continuously disputed and renegotiated. In the narratives of my interlocutors, their lifeworlds of dispossession, displacement, occupation, and powerlessness are also ridden with strategies devised to resist, adopt, and make a living space for themselves.

The Russian (neo)imperial project is trying to erase traces of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainians as a people who reside on a territory that has now been occupied. Ukrainian national identity has a distinctly civic underpinning rather than an ethnic basis, which is something that many scholars suggest will be even more prominent post-full-scale invasion (Barrington 2021; Onuch 2023). As other contributions in this volume show, the war of aggression aims to erase Ukrainians as a nationality *and* to “remind” Ukrainians that they are actually Russians. Ukrainians under occupation are at risk of losing their identity as Ukrainians by virtue of losing their citizenship and all that it bequeaths. We do not know yet how the full-scale invasion has influenced people’s attitudes and practices in occupied areas of Eastern Ukraine, but my material suggests that Ukrainian passports and citizenship remain significant for people who have lived in the occupied areas for years.

When occupation in Ukraine is understood as the dispossession of not only land and property (in national and individual terms) but also of state and citizenship, a tool in a war of national and physical annihilation, then the repertoire of possible resistance (as well as survival) radically expands. Areej Sabbagh-Khoury writes about the occupation of Palestine:

The mere existence of the Palestinians in Israel, alongside their continued political praxis, signifies both the incomplete nature of the settler colonial project’s attempts of erasure and the agentic labor of Palestinian citizens who, because they are partially incorporated into the polity, challenge erasure.

(Sabbagh-Khoury 2022, 171)

There are diverse strategies, practices, and discourses that constitute acts of resistance under the conditions of occupation and war in the face of imperial power, including acquiring the citizenship of the occupying state and maintaining or practicing the citizenship of the “home” state.

I consider maintaining Ukrainian citizenship and employing it to make claims to the Ukrainian state—as well as to the Russian state when it comes to being able to leave Russia—to be a sign of the “incomplete nature” (Sabbagh-Khoury 2022) of the Russian colonial project and a kind of practice of resistance by the people on the ground. That is exactly what is going on in the occupied regions when Ukrainian passports are preserved and used to move in and out of the occupied region and then in and out of Russia, against an occupation regime that tries to lock the population in place or use its citizenship (Russian) as a means of imperial expansion by mobilizing men from occupied territories to fight with Russian forces against Ukraine.

Being a citizen of the occupying state does not compensate for dispossession. Instead, it “obfuscates the state’s emergence from appropriation” (Sabbagh-Khoury 2022, 170). Passports issued by the Russian state to residents of the occupied regions are tools to claim Ukrainians as Russians but also to differentiate them from Russian citizens based on their local registration as residents of occupied territories. These passports are not internationally recognized and do not allow for the right to resettle in Russia without certain restrictions. However, Russian citizenship might enable people’s survival and their “existence in the homeland” as Ukrainians under occupation (*ibid.*, 168). Acquiring the citizenship of the occupying state might be accompanied by “contradicting and often incohesive desires” (*ibid.*, 172) on the part of people in such a position. This chapter shows that people might simultaneously hold comprehensive expectations of the Ukrainian state and yet pragmatically use local “passports” to secure access to the minimal provisions of the D/LPR. Ukrainian citizenship might continue to represent a more affective connection to the state and Ukrainian passports might be used as a tool of resistance to escape the occupied area and cross international borders. Existing and surviving under occupation certainly demands a variety of responses from people, and their interpretation remains a political matter, an ongoing process. Considering a wider range of citizenship practices under occupation as practices of resistance against Russia’s imperial war might help us to recognize occupation not as a geopolitical act of aggression against a nation-state but as a complex condition of protracted uncertainty and human suffering driven in large part by the dispossession of citizenship.

Notes

- 1 Citizen is not only a person with formal full-citizenship status but anyone whose rights, responsibilities, and status are to an extent regulated by the given state. Hence, residents, migrants, and “stateless” people residing on the Ukrainian territory are usually also in citizenship relations with the Ukrainian state.

- 2 For more on surveillance, control, and discrimination attached to IDP status, see Bulakh 2020 and Kuznetsova and Mikheieva 2020.
- 3 The research design was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of St. Gallen in 2020.

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5

FRAGMENTED LIVES AND FRAGMENTED HISTORIES IN ODESA

Marina Sapritsky-Nahum

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we have consistently heard the names of devastated Ukrainian cities: Bucha, Holstomel, Irpin, Mariupol, Kherson, Severodonetsk, and Bakhmut. When the war began, the port city of Odesa appeared as a likely target for attack and possible occupation. It has significant tactical, symbolic, and economic importance for Ukraine and is a highly prized cultural relic of the old Russian Empire, one that has long had the aura of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, despite its multiethnic history and composition, Putin has frequently described Odesa as a “Russian city” in speeches that paint Ukrainians and Russians as one people.¹

There has been frequent shelling and air raids; Russian missiles have targeted the city’s airport and the nearby Zatoka Bridge that allows for supplies from Romania; residential buildings and shopping centers have been hit; and civilians have been killed. In July 2023, Odesa was heavily bombed following the Russian withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, an attack that increased damage to the city center, which was recently made a UNESCO World Heritage site. Nonetheless, Odesa is still standing and for the most part remains intact.

The fragmentation and dispossession that the war has brought to Odesa, I claim, come less from the blunt force of munitions than from the cultural and political fissures that have opened in the everyday life of the city and its residents. The fracturing of identities and kinship, upheavals and reversals of historical understanding, and redrawing of political affiliations and religious communities are the less visible but deeply felt elements of dispossession and all can be seen at urban, communal, and personal levels.

As a space of research, what is understood as Odesa is not simply a geographic location and thus it too has been fragmented through the evacuation and

dispersion of so many residents. Nationwide, an estimated 12 million Ukrainians left the country (Plokhii 2023), among them the Jewish families I knew from Odesa. Others from the city relocated within Ukraine even as their family members may have gone to neighboring European states. Families with men of military age (a few exceptions notwithstanding) were separated from their children, from their elderly parents, and siblings from one another.

In anthropology, we understand that identities are fluid and multiple in any one person. These identities, as with collective histories, are always undergoing some form of fragmentation and reintegration in the process of adapting to evolving circumstances, all the more so in a time of severe trauma and war. Throughout history, we have seen how trauma can alter the configuration of traits and feelings within a person and generate what psychologists broadly call a *fragmented self*. We also understand that all social structures are permeable, never static and whole. In the case of Ukraine, the name of which literally means *borderland*, its unusually complex ethnolinguistic and religious composition means that there were already multiple historical divides at play.² Within that broader history of the country sits Odesa: predominantly Russian-speaking and traditionally cosmopolitan, populated by a rich amalgam of people and cut through with the afterlives of empires.

My attempt to understand the impact of the 2022 war on those from Odesa is informed by my ethnographic research from 2005 to 2007 in the wake of the Orange Revolution of 2004; subsequent field work in 2014 just after the annexation of Crimea; another stint of research in 2019; current field work with Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Germany; and ongoing communication with many colleagues and friends from Ukraine. Throughout this almost two-decade period, I have explored the lived experiences and orientations of the city's Jewish residents and their various efforts to construct, negotiate, and question a meaningful sense of togetherness and community, as well as the trajectories of individual Jewish Odesans redefining their sense of being Jewish in an evolving environment of independent Ukraine (Sapritsky-Nahum 2024).

The 2022 war meant following Odesa's Jews and communities, as many were resettled as refugees across Europe, Israel, the United States, Canada, and other destinations. In the first week of the war, I received a phone call with news that a bus of 150 Jews from Odesa was headed to Berlin. On board were children from a Chabad-run Jewish orphanage, Jewish boys' and girls' schools, and a number of families who evacuated with the Chabad community, some of whom I had known for years. They all needed help settling in Berlin. Though I initially traveled to Berlin as a volunteer, my extended engagement with this group and other long-term interlocutors seeking refuge let me see how Ukrainian refugee communities were making sense of their experiences during the war and adapting to life in Germany. At the same time, my friends who stayed in Ukraine were making short visits abroad to see family, and our encounters and continuous

communication gave me further insights into how the Russo-Ukrainian war was fragmenting and reassembling identities and orientations, dispossessing many Jews of familial and communal structures, bonds, and patterns of life, while simultaneously creating new sentiments of Ukrainian Jewish belonging and solidarity with the wider Ukrainian nation. As one of my interlocutors put it: “The war has simultaneously brought people together and divided them.”

Throughout the chapter, the term “dispossession” has two valences. One addresses the physical dispersal of family units, communities, and social and professional networks. The other addresses the fragmentation and reassembly of historical memory surrounding the propagandistic use of the idea of “denazification.” While it might seem that these two senses of fragmentation are rather distinct, both are forms of dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 3).

I begin with a discussion of my own positionality and concerns about conducting research and trying to make sense of life in an unfolding war. It feels important to broach those ethical dilemmas of advancing a research agenda while working to help long-term interlocutors and friends. It is also important to highlight the complexities of trying to apprehend a constantly changing and deeply traumatic reality by means of “patchwork ethnography”—short-term field visits and fragmentary yet rigorous data collection across various places (both physical and online) (Günel et al. 2020). The core of the chapter presents the multiple processes of dispossession that have stripped Jewish Odesans of their livelihood, their sense of belonging, heritage, and historical memory in Ukraine, as well as the pathways of reconstitution and new patterns of life, practices, identities, and solidarities within and beyond the realm of those Jewish communities.

Within this field of change brought by war, some political stances harden and others are abandoned. Some who said they would never leave their home do leave, and others who left nonetheless return. In addition, as we have learned from ethnographies of violence, occupation, and war, some people adapt to living in these conditions, and some aspects and processes of their new reality become normalized, ordinary, and mundane—albeit not without great cost (Kelly 2008). In other words, people are capable of remarkable creativity in rebuilding their worlds and recreating culture (see Wanner, this volume and Nordstrom 1997, 4). Without romanticizing any result of the ongoing war, my aim is to address the inspiring responses of Odesa’s Jewry as they rebuild themselves and their families and communities and reclaim their sense of agency amid waves of ruptures, fragmentation, and loss while living in “everyday war” (Uehling, 2023).

The chapter analyzes dispossession and reconstruction on two different planes. The first is found in ethnographic vignettes of Jewish Odesans reflecting on how the war has unsettled their prior senses of self, family, community, and identification with the city. The second emerges in an exploration of the fragmented memories of the nation through an analysis of Russia’s propagandistic

use of “denazification” as a war aim. Here I focus on the different reactions of Ukrainian Jewry—some of whom pledge their loyalty to the Ukrainian nation while others are more ambivalent in their support of a national project that has crowned Nazi collaborators (like the infamous Stefan Bandera and others) as heroes.³ But, for the most part, Jews in Ukraine distinguish Ukraine-then and Ukraine-now, and in the context of the current war, they see Putin’s Russia rather than Zelenskyy’s Ukraine as a threat to Jewish lives and the future of Jewish communities in their country.

Fault lines within Odesa

As indicated above, Odesa has long been an important cultural anchor in the public imagination of Russians, Ukrainians, and Jews—all seeing it as *their* city. Founded by Catherine the Great in 1794 as part of an expanding Russian Empire, it was built on former Ottoman territory, which was renamed Novorossiia (New Russia), and quickly developed from a tiny village into a commercial metropolis, described as an El Dorado for the poor Ukrainians, Russians and Jews (Herlihy 1986, 240; Tanny, 2011). By the second half of the nineteenth century, it was home to a diverse population that adhered to a wide variety of religious beliefs and spoke an array of languages. According to the 1897 census, only half the residents spoke Russian, a third spoke Yiddish, and 6 percent spoke Ukrainian; other languages included Polish, German, Greek, Tatar, Armenian, French, and Belorussian (Herlihy 1986, 242). Because of the city’s ethnic composition, its geographical location far from the metropole, and the tendencies of locals to privilege their city affiliation over any national identity, it has been described as a state within a state (Weinberg 1993; Richardson 2008). Odesa’s uniqueness has also been discussed as illustrating something that is typical for Ukraine as a whole (Richardson, 2008, 6).

In the wake of the Soviet Union, there was significant Jewish emigration from Odesa, and the Jewish population fell from 65,000 Jews in a city of one million to 30,000 in a little over a decade. Nonetheless, Odesa maintained its reputation as a cosmopolitan and decidedly Jewish city, as grassroot initiatives developed and international organizations arrived seeking to “revive” Jewish life there.⁴ My initial fieldwork explored the transformations and tensions surrounding new understandings of Jewish belonging in the midst of this international project of Jewish “revival.”

Many elderly Jews were as skeptical of Ukrainian nationalism as they were of religious revival and saw themselves as Russian-speaking Jews of Odesa and part of the larger world of ex-Soviet Jewry. Younger generations were more closely connected to Ukraine but still highly influenced by the rhetoric of their family circles. The Jewish population and the city as a whole was predominantly Russian speaking. Although many of the younger generation also knew

Ukrainian from school, it was rarely heard on the streets at that time. Following the Soviet system of classifying Jews as a separate nationality, like Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, etc., recorded in one's passport, many did not regard themselves as Ukrainian but rather as Jews living in Ukraine.

The period from the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014 to the ongoing war radically weakened those bonds to the Russian and Soviet world.⁵ In May 2014, during clashes between pro- and anti-Maidan supporters, a fire at Odesa's Palace of All Trade Unions killed 48 anti-Maidan protesters. Despite the wishful thinking by some that such divisions were the expressions of outsiders and political agitators, Odesa residents were undoubtedly part of both camps involved (Khavin 2014; Richardson 2014). When I arrived in Odesa that spring, just after the Russian annexation of Crimea, many of the younger Jewish Odesans I knew were focused on Ukrainian politics and had become active in the Euromaidan protests, with some volunteering for city-defense leagues. David, who was quiet and religiously observant when we first met in the mid-2000s, had enrolled in such an organization and was heavily involved in local operations. His transformation from a reflective, passive, and religious man shocked me. "I am not a Ukrainian patriot," he told me, wearing a bulletproof vest, and showing me his pistol, "But if some filth wants to enter my city, I will fight till the end." Russian aggression had done what previous Ukrainian presidents failed to do—catalyze the creation of a political nation (Zhurzhenko 2014, 249–267). In that context, many of my Jewish friends came to stand shoulder to shoulder with members of the ultra-nationalist political party Pravyi Sektor (the Right Sector) against the pro-Russian President Yanukovych and his move to compromise Ukraine's sovereignty and its connections with Europe.

As my earlier work had found, however, there were significant generational and institutional differences in the identity formations taking shape during the time of Euromaidan. Middle-aged members of the Jewish community may have also supported the protests, but they tended to stay neutral regarding all things Russian, while elderly members of the community were still extremely wary of Ukrainian nationalism and continued to see themselves as part of the larger Russian world. Leaders of Jewish organizations in Odesa that I spoke to in 2014 declined to discuss politics with their members. "We are a Jewish organization, not a political one," the secretary of the Chabad congregation in Odesa explained. However, an alliance between the leadership of the Right Sector and Jewish organizations had formed because of the common threat of Russian invasion. Many Jews in 2014 recalled the incident when a high official from the Right Sector traveled to Odesa to help the Chabad Rabbi restore the defaced Holocaust monument and to paint over the swastikas, a Nazi Wolfsangel sign, and the words "Death to the Jews." This story and the picture of the two men painting over the vandalism marked a sea change that created solidarity between Jews and Ukrainian nationalists.

While the political situation was creating new connections, it was eroding or rupturing older ones, particularly on Facebook and other social media platforms. As one interlocutor told me: “Some of my journalist friends on Facebook have started to write only in Ukrainian and others, although fluent in Ukrainian, choose demonstratively to write in Russian.” As a Russian native speaker, I was worried that these tensions could, potentially, create a chasm in my friendships, but presumably because I shared their political views, the conflict never divided us. We continued to speak to one another in Russian, which was still the language on the streets and in the homes I visited, even as the content of conversations changed and political topics started to arise more and more. In my correspondence with members of the Odesan intelligentsia, my friends were starting to see their city more and more as part of Ukraine and themselves as essentially Ukrainian, even as they primarily spoke, wrote, and read in Russian, and separated Russian politics from the Russian people. Some supported personal and professional ties with family, friends, and colleagues across the Russian border who shared their views on the escalating conflict, and most hoped for peace. There was a clear distinction between the perspective of activists and volunteers who were firsthand witnesses to the impact of the Russian invasion through their work with Ukrainian soldiers and internally displaced Ukrainians from the Donbas region, and others like Serhii, 43, who told me, “In Odesa we didn’t *feel* the war, it seemed far from us at the time.”

The 2022 Russian invasion and war changed that sense of distance. It bolstered the solidarity of Ukrainian people and deepened a sense of Ukrainian identity among the remaining population of the city leading to a greater separation from identification with Russia. Most families I knew with relatives and friends in Russia ceased all communication and cut all ties. Forty-two-year-old Olena described this as a painful break where she “buried” those people and “erased” them from her life. In this way, the war shattered any sense among ex-Soviet Jewish people of a “shared social world” between Russia and Ukraine. Many of my interlocutors saw themselves primarily as Ukrainian in the context of war and reported feeling “foreign” to family and friends in Russia they had considered close their whole lives—“betrayed, abandoned and discarded,” as forty-six-year-old Lana put it.

Dispossessed of their place in familial and friendship circles, many felt they had lost their very existence and voice (see Pavlenko, this volume). While speaking “the same language,” they were no longer *svoi* (Sapritsky-Nahum forthcoming). Indeed, literary scholar Uilleam Blacker has argued that Russia’s refusal, over the centuries, to perceive or hear Ukraine, to accept Ukraine’s existence on its own terms, lies at the foundation of Putin’s aggression (Blacker 2022). But it is neither kinship, nor friendship, nor the Ukrainian language that binds Ukrainians in the midst of war. Rather, it is the understanding that Ukraine is a sovereign state, it is their home, and their home is under attack.

Reflections of a fragmented anthropologist

Writing about the war in Sarajevo, social anthropologist Ivana Macek pointed out the difficulty of telling the story of a war-torn society where destruction cuts through the “social fabric, cultural habits, political ideas, moral beliefs and even language” (2009, xi). In the immediate aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, I, too, felt the destruction of language and was awash in unprocessed emotion. I could not find the words to describe what I observed, or the ability to cohere a narrative from the shattered lives, fragmented families, and collapsing communities I saw. I felt swamped by what scholars call “information abundance,” which is like trying to measure “an avalanche-in-motion” (Dzenovska and Reeves 2022). Engrossed by the media coverage of the war, I was nonetheless too closely connected to what was unfolding and overtaken by feelings of grief. Even a year and a half later, I felt a part of me was never fully grasping the war and instead always straining to conjure what my friends in Odesa and other parts of Ukraine were experiencing. Although I knew I was witnessing a historical event, I could barely keep up with the developments on the ground, let alone make any sense of them as a social scientist. In truth, I could barely make sense of them as a human.

Like other researchers working with people living through trauma, my anthropological training did not prepare me for this level of social change and upheaval. Indeed, during a webinar entitled “The Ethnography of the War? Articulating Research Needs in Times of Unfolding Trauma,” Ukrainian anthropologists, oral historians, and folklorists warned their audience against the very idea of doing research during the war. They argued that researchers are not trained to deal with people who are living through, rather than working through, traumatic experiences.⁶ Implicit in their suggestion is also a moral question: what right do we have to ask how they feel for the sake of a broader story? What right do we have to force them to voice their emotions and then dig deeper into a wound? These questions and many more like them continue to play out in my head.

This was just one way that the war forced me to think critically about my own positionality. I was born in Soviet Russia. Along with my Belarusian and Latvian roots, Ukraine was the ancestral home of my grandparents and a place that my research and ethnographic fieldwork have made so dear to my heart. Speaking Russian and growing up in the Soviet Union (until the age of nine) once defined my partial insider status as a researcher. Now those features of my identity potentially define me as an outsider, perhaps even an enemy aggressor to some. I moved to the US as a child and then to the UK as a young adult over 20 years ago, where my life is today. My family, like families of so many Jews from the ex-Soviet states, spans the world. In my circles of friends, family, colleagues, and interlocutors from Ukraine, with whom I had longstanding, sincere, and trusting relationships, there was no question about my position on the war and my unwavering support for Ukraine, but with the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion, I still felt an

overwhelming need to explain my mixed family heritage alongside my views to clarify any suspicion in new circles of Ukrainians.

I had always conducted research in Russian because it was the language I shared with my interlocutors and the language most often spoken in Odesa. The majority of Odesa's Jewry continue to speak Russian among themselves, but they are increasingly using Ukrainian in public to mark their Ukrainian identity and at times to dissolve any suspicion of being Russian (Sapritsky-Nahum forthcoming). Today, I am taking part in this reevaluation of all things Russian, language included. I have started studying Ukrainian and expanding my knowledge of Ukrainian history and culture from another linguistic perspective. Whereas before I saw myself as a specialist of post-Soviet Jewish Odesa, I now think of myself as a scholar of Ukraine as I write a new chapter of the city's Jewish history, which is part of the larger story of Ukrainian Jewry engaged in the process of redefining their senses of belonging, rebuilding their community life, and revising their historical discourse.

It is from this position of change and evolution that I have worked to gather testimonies of Ukrainian Jewry and build an archive of Jewish experiences during war, evacuation, resettlement, and occupation. I know that it is important that the stories entrusted to me become part of what we will remember about this war. Projects like "24.02.22, 5 am Testimonies from the War" (see Ostrichenko this volume), Exodus 2022, Documenting Ukraine, and others highlight the importance of "creating a record of the Russo-Ukrainian war,"⁷ "capturing the human experience,"⁸ and "making it accessible and comprehensible to the wider world."⁹ I believe that they afford us a multiplicity of perspectives likely oversimplified by the media and dismissed in the macro-analysis of geopolitical conflicts and wars. At the same time, I am aware that I am creating a source that can further feed into processes of collective memory and history-making as it is read, circulated, and cited, thereby potentially reinforcing certain narrative strains.

Fragmented lives

I spoke to my friend Lika the day before the 2022 invasion started. "Do you think he'll do it?" I asked her, as I sat at my table reading over the multiple scenarios laid out in the press. "I really don't," she said. Despite all the evidence in front of us, neither Lika nor I could have believed in our minds and hearts that the world would live to see another war of this scale between two nations that once fought together as one force against Nazi Germany and its allies. We made plans to see one another at the end of May.

I woke up in horror the next morning to the news that the invasion had started and Odesa was being bombed. I dialed Lika in a panic and begged her and her family to leave. She wondered if they had enough gas to get to the border, what

would happen to her cat, where would they go, and if she could actually flee her home. After a sleepless night, she and her husband decided to stay with their two daughters (their son was studying in Israel). They were resolute but still felt immense pressure from family and friends (myself included). “I just can’t do it!” she shouted into the phone on the second day of the war, as everyone we knew raced in panic and many were trying to make it out of the country. “The day I get on that bus I am not me,” she cried. “I can’t leave my city, I can’t leave my home, I can’t leave my people. I need to be here. I can’t watch war in my country from abroad like a spectator.”

After a month, Lika agreed to take her children to her mother in Slovakia, but she returned to Odesa where she and her husband worked to support both civilians and the military in the city. Lika had been working with displaced refugees from Donetsk and Luhansk since 2014, and she knew her role mattered (see Chapter 9 in this volume for an analysis of self-organization). That sense of purpose got her through many difficult days. It also kept her bound to Odesa. She knew what life as a refugee entailed, and she did not want to end up like so many of the people she had seen in her work: they got on a bus to leave their home and at that moment ceased to be themselves. While refuge for the millions of those who fled Ukraine meant safety, to her it also meant dispossession of self. In Odesa, in Ukraine, she was at home, and only at home was she herself. Hearing stories of friends who had attained refugee status in Europe and others who fled to Israel, she would often tell me that those who left lost their autonomy and were physically and temporally displaced. Like the displaced Crimean Tatars who traveled between occupied and non-occupied territories of Ukraine (see Uehling, this volume), many longed to return home. For Lika, staying in Odesa meant retaining her sense of self, her dignity. “I don’t want to receive free tea in a café with a Ukrainian flag in the window,” she said; “I am not comfortable with this.” Although many Ukrainians before the war envisioned life in the West as a move up from Ukraine, the realities of refugee life and the circumstance under which they had to flee Ukraine brought on numerous disappointments and hardships and reconfirmed to most their pride and sense of belonging in Ukraine.

Lika’s husband, Andrei, who worked in media and organized events, had lost his job and all sources of income. Initially, he volunteered at the Humanitarian Volunteer group set up in the center of the city, through which those of military age but not serving and women who remained could support civilians and soldiers by delivering medicine, food, and other essential goods. Following a recommendation, he was recruited as a “fixer,” initially for a French news station and then for the BBC and other international news channels and newspapers. Andrei was one of the few who, having lost his livelihood, was able to take advantage of the stream of journalists who arrived in Odesa from around the world to cover the war, and, as a result, had a highly lucrative job during a crippled economy, one that allowed him to practice his English. While they both told me

they missed their three children, they also said that, in a way, they were relieved that they had only each other to worry about and were able to fully dedicate themselves to their professional and volunteer efforts to help Ukraine. Because Lika was one of the only women in her close social circle, she cooked on Shabbat for those who remained in Odesa, forming kinship around their shared experiences of celebrating the weekly rituals of the Jewish day of rest in the absence of other family and friends.

Since the full-scale invasion began, over half of the Jewish population of Odesa has left the city. Jewish Odesa was previously defined by two Orthodox congregations: a Reform community and a newer Conservative movement. It now has just one functioning Orthodox synagogue where—for the first time since the early 1990s—Jews are united under one roof. And new congregants have become regulars at the synagogue (see Vagramenko, this volume for a similar observation on Ukrainian Protestantism). As the Chabad Rebbetzin explained, “Some were in need of religious support, others needed practical aid in the form of food packages, medicine and even clothes.” All religious communities except for Chabad left Odesa. The city’s Litvak congregation closed the doors of its synagogue and relocated the majority of its community to Romania where they remain to this day. Julia Gris, the reform Rabbi, and a number of her congregants are now in Germany. Many international Jewish organizations, like the Israeli Cultural Center, shut their operation and evacuated their staff. The leaders of grassroots Jewish organizations, like Migdal Jewish Community Center, stayed to work on evacuation efforts (see Figure 5.1) and support the families who remained—in particular keeping the children in the city occupied, aiding the elderly, and helping the immense flood of internally displaced refugees.

Beyond the instability caused by the physical dispersion of families and ethno-religious kin groups, the war has also dislodged any sense of security or predictability, which is manifest in the open-ended nature of separation. This separation of family units and communities yields an emotional and sometimes even a moral sense of distance between those who remain at home and those who have crossed the border in search of safety. Among Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Europe, many of those I interviewed expressed feelings of guilt for leaving. The moral stakes were even higher for men of military age whose absence from Ukraine raised suspicion among refugee communities and those who remained in the country.

Emil, 39, is one of the military-aged men who was allowed to leave the country because he has three children (most of his friends do not have that luxury). And though his catering business lost all its clients overnight, he turned it into a soup kitchen—delivering meals to civilians, soldiers, refugees, and hospitals—while also distributing scraps of fruits and vegetables to the local zoo.

I initially stayed for my people, for my city, and did all that I could for the soldiers and all those who stayed too. My grandmother is in her nineties and I could



FIGURE 5.1 Crowds of Odesa residents waiting to board evacuation buses.

not leave her either. I sent my wife and our two children to Israel where my oldest daughter lives, and I stayed knowing it was the right thing to do, but now I feel like I need to go help my family. My daughter is having a mental breakdown, she cries every night, my wife calls me with the children hysterically crying and just gives them the phone. I just listen to her. I stayed for my people but now I need to help my family.

Emil has since emigrated to Israel, taking his grandmother (and his dog) with him. Struggling to make a living, he is working odd jobs.

For some, the constant reminder of their absent kin fills the silences. “I feel the effects of war morning, night, and day,” says Nadia, who is 81. “Even when the city is calm, I feel the emptiness of my children and grandchildren.” Many interlocutors have told me that silence is scarier than sirens because it raises suspicion of a potential attack and builds up anxiety.

Lika’s daughters, 12 and 6, have been living with their grandmother in Slovakia since the first month of the war. When I got the chance to speak with the older one, she explained the challenges of tending to her little sister:

We live in a tiny apartment and there is no place to hide from my sister. Every time she sees I am offline from my classes, she drags me to play with her. She plays this game called “darling.” I am the mother, and she is

the father, and she calls me “darling” as she asks me to hold the baby and make food for her doll.

Many children have had to take responsibility for their kin beyond any normal expectation, as parents find themselves unable to offer adequate support or can’t physically or mentally be present.

I ask her if she misses her parents, and she says she does, and that they have promised to take her home soon. She constantly sings the Stepania song by the Ukrainian group Kalush Orchestra, which won the Eurovision Song Contest, and tries to teach its lyrics to her sister. Any victory is a victory for Ukraine at the moment, and the pride Ukrainians have in all things Ukrainian is touching to observe. The children instantly pick up blue and yellow colors in any context and get excited by any sighting of Ukrainian flags or symbols (Figure 5.2).

“How does one cope?” I asked Lika when we met in Vienna in May of 2022, as she was on her way to see her children. She told me she used to have a psychoanalyst who helped her for years. But since this woman had fled to Poland, Lika felt she could no longer relate to her. Lika instead takes one painkiller after



FIGURE 5.2 Ukrainian flag in place of a statue of Catherine the Great removed in 2022 from the center of Odesa.

another, seeking relief from migraines that never seemed to end. At night she changed her medication to muscle relaxants to help her close her eyes with ease. “Everyone at work takes them now, that is how we survive,” she said, with her eyes still glued to updates about bombings of Odesa that were lighting up her screen. But the turbulence of emotional stress came in waves, as Lika put it. One moment you are fine, she said, and then the horror of it all submerges you. As Emil told me in the spring of 2022, before he left,

It’s a surreal experience—you’re driving in Odesa and the trees are blooming, the sky is blue, you feel the sun’s rays on your back. The city has never been so beautiful! And then in seconds, that reality is shattered by the sirens booming across empty streets. It’s a reminder that there is war and war is here.

The unpredictability of everyday life affects the body. While Lika suffers from migraines, others are stricken with anxiety and other conditions.

Midway through my conversation with Lika, we’re caught off guard by a loud crash from a nearby construction site. I merely flinch, but Lika’s body visibly shakes. “I never thought one could react to noise the way I do now,” she professes. “My whole body reverberates.”

At the same time, many note that ordinary life events gain new meanings, and they have grown in their appreciation for the basic elements of their existence, all of which feed their love for their city and pride in being Ukrainian. Thirty-seven-year-old Oksana, for example, regularly sent me pictures of blooming flowers in springtime Odesa, explaining that she never noticed their existence until the war. The beaches may be mined and monitored by the police, but locals have found ways to visit the sea. School resumed online for some. Alexander, a 43-year-old historian who used to work at the Jewish Museum and has enlisted in the territorial defense league in Odesa, told me that he even managed to watch his six-year-old daughter’s graduation on Zoom.

Fragmented histories

Ukrainian Jews have found themselves at the center of Putin’s propaganda induced war narrative. As Russian speakers and as Jews, they have been cast—in the rhetoric of Russia’s war aim of *denazification*—as those who need to be “saved” from Ukrainian nationalists labeled by Putin as Neo-Nazis. Such rhetoric seeks to accomplish two things: first, it dispossesses Jews of any legitimacy as Ukrainians while positing Russia as their liberators; second, it reminds everyone of the infamous Azov Battalion, the Nazi iconography of some Ukrainian nationalists, and the actual Nazi collaborators of the Second World War. Such rhetoric is thus the “language of political mobilization against the external enemy,” which Russia needed “in order to marginalize the in-country opposition”

(Koposov 2018; cited in Sokol 2019, 131). While Ukraine, like most European countries, does have a far-right movement, the Jews there understand full well that in the 2019 elections, the party of that movement received only 2 percent of the vote (far less than the far-right parties in other European democratic states, such as France and Germany). Moreover, Ukraine is currently governed by a native-Russian-speaking, Jewish president who is a former comedian no less, and whose vision of the nation is clearly inclusive of the country's minorities. Many Jews I spoke with point to current state legislation that punishes acts of anti-Semitism as an official position of the Ukrainian state, which publicly supports and protects Jewish activity in Ukraine.

Some of the Ukrainian Jews I have spoken with readily concede the historical facts of Ukrainian collaboration with Nazis in the Second World War and see the ironies of history but acknowledge that Ukraine's Jewish history is multifaceted and not one dimensional. While Ukraine is a site of tragic atrocities against the Jews, it is also a place of flourishing Jewish life and culture (Myers 2022). Jews in Ukraine today refuse to be frozen in time, to see their history as their present or their destiny or accept the past traumas as the only available narrative of Ukrainian-Jewish relations. Focusing on Jewish life before Russia's destruction, Anna explained, "People need to see how we live fully flourishing Jewish lives and not just look at textbooks." Vova, a middle-aged Odesan historian, said:

It is understood that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) at times helped massacre both Poles and Jews, and no one is trying to forget this history, but right now we are witnessing such atrocities and an attempt to erase Ukraine and destroy the Ukrainian people and culture as a whole, Jews included, that it's not the time to look back. We need to focus on the now.

Some Jews in the diaspora, it should be noted, have heard a resonance of their own experiences in the history of Jewish-Ukrainian relations. The poet and essayist Jake Marmer, a Ukrainian Jew who emigrated to the United States as a teenager, describes his ambivalent feelings as "the bitter aftertaste of the motherland that systematically persecuted us, and the deep, heart-breaking concern for our numerous relatives, friends, and neighbors who stayed" (Marmer 2022). Likewise, Lika's grandparents, who emigrated from Odesa to San Francisco shortly after the break-up of the USSR, do not understand her support of Ukraine and call her "Banderovka" (a follower of Stefan Bandera, a famous Ukrainian nationalist regarded as a hero by some and as a Nazi collaborator by others). She told me,

They always thought Ukraine was more anti-Semitic than Russia and never felt an affinity to being Ukrainian. My grandmother taught history of the USSR. She lived and breathed that project. My grandfather was an engineer.

He too was a Soviet man. He loved to read war novels, and to him Russia was a great nation that educated great people. He can't move on from that. They don't recognize today's Ukraine as a real nation. Their old fears and visions of the world are supported by Russian propaganda on TV, which they watch regularly, and they can't see Russia for what it is today. It would be a complete collapse of everything they are, everything they know and love and understand.

Lika's emphasis on the state of Ukraine *today* captures the spirit of Ukrainian Jews who are responding to Russian provocations by pivoting away from—or outright rejecting—older narratives of persecution.¹⁰ As Vova's comments point out, Jews in Ukraine have come to draw a clear distinction between historical ills of Ukraine and the country's contemporary achievements. Some who draw on the Holocaust do so to make the case that Russian aggression is a would-be genocide against the Ukrainian people. Indeed, on a few occasions, my questions about Ukrainian nationalists, Ukrainian Nazi collaborators, or the very idea of *denazification* were met with astonishment and anger. “Seventy-seven years after the Holocaust, who would ever have thought we would be hiding from the Russians in Germany?” said Liza, a 68-year-old Ukrainian Jewish woman from Dnipro whom I met in Berlin. “What denazification can we talk about if we, Jews, are running away from the Russian army to Germany of all places?”

“Denazification does not have any roots in the ideology and reality of Ukrainian government and people,” explained 70-year-old Natasha. “But this propaganda has been part of Kremlin discourse for years, convincing the masses that Ukraine is full of Nazis and Russian speakers needing to be rescued from their evil grip.” A middle-aged entrepreneur in Odesa told me: “Then [in WWII] they were killing us as Jews. Today they are killing us as Ukrainians.”

When I asked seventy-year-old Nadia about Putin's rhetoric in the war, she shouted: “Denazification is a fake word!” As she then explained:

The only way to use the term Nazi is to describe Russians today. Look at how they burn entire cities and populations. They are burning Ukrainian books the way Nazis burned literature. They are barbarians. You can't even call them human.

Likewise, a 65-year-old woman I met as a refugee in Berlin told me: “I am tired of having everyone throw our own history in our face. That was so many years ago. Look at what we are seeing now!”

Among Ukrainian Jews, questioning one's historical understanding is part of rebuilding a new vision of the past and possible imaginations of the future. Within a context of cultural dispossession, they interrogate the way remembrance was formed through Soviet-inflected education (see Introduction, this volume). Many young Ukrainian Jews ask: how much of what they know about

Ukrainian nationalists is a product of an older Soviet education system? For example, although Lika remembers Stefan Bandera and all that she learned about him, including the atrocities he and other Ukrainian nationalists committed against Poles, Jews, and others in the name of Ukraine's independence, she is now willing to question this history, to "forget" it if need be, and to leave room for new narratives to emerge. Thus, when I asked Lika about the Azov Battalion and what she thought about their reputation as a right-wing, nationalistic regiment often linked to Nazi ideology, she said without hesitation that in her eyes, at this moment, they are heroes. "They are giving up their lives for us. They are fighting for our freedom and defending our land." In other conversations, friends pointed out that the Azov Brigade includes Jewish and Israeli soldiers and then asked how they could possibly be regarded as Nazis. Their story of the Ukraine of today is developed by moving past the imprints of historical traumas and allowing for a new understanding of Ukrainian Jewish history—one that privileges the common history of Jewish and Ukrainian persecution from the outside, as when Zelenskyy addressed Israel in March 2022 and drew parallels and comparisons between Jews and Ukrainians, both victims, he said, of a "treacherous war aimed at destroying our people."¹¹

Seeing such fragmentation of one historical understanding and the concomitant constitution of new ones, I wondered how the elderly Jews I interviewed in Odesa in 2005, were they alive today, would see the war. They were raised in the Soviet Union and took great pride in being part of the Russian-speaking intelligentsia, feeling a great connection to Russian culture, literature, and history. They were cynical about Ukrainian nationalism at that time. To them, neither the Hassidic Jews nor the Ukrainian nationalists were symbols of true Odesa. In their eyes, both were foreign to a city that was apolitical, cosmopolitan, and home to multiple visions of national pride and anything but traditional or orthodox in its religious disposition.

The disconnect and misalignment we see today between people's roots and their views and beliefs reinforce the idea that our perspectives are shaped by the social world, the media in particular, but also by personal memories and affective responses that slogans like *denazification* activate. It is precisely because that term speaks to ex-Soviets and to the world about one of the greatest evils of history that it has received such attention and reaction in the media and personal testimonies of Ukrainians home and abroad. While the war propaganda is designed to dispossess Ukrainian Jews of historical authority, it generates new counter-narratives.

Public remembering and forgetting occur simultaneously, at times strategically and intentionally and at other times in reaction to pressures and desperation. In other words, young Ukrainians are *forgetting by remembering*. They are forgetting their historical distinctions and the Soviet imprint on Jewish identity, constructed by the Soviet government as a nationality (ethnicity) inscribed on

the fifth line of their passports (one that did not allow them to claim an identity that was Russian or Ukrainian or anything other than Jewish). They are forgetting the troubling history of Jewish-Ukrainian relations as they remember that they are now united in their fight against a common enemy. Indeed, as I have written elsewhere, Putin's war has in many ways created the strongest sentiment of sympathy for Ukrainian nationalism among Jews of Ukraine, giving rise to a modern and new category: Ukrainian Jewry (Sapritsky-Nahum 2022).

President Zelenskyy gives a face to this idea of a new Ukrainian Jewry. Strong, proud, brave, and resilient, he is being called the world's "Jewish hero" and a "symbol of the nation" (Beckerman 2022).¹² Someone recently shared this joke with me on the subject: "A Jewish man arrives in Israel and at the border they ask him if he is Jewish through his mother or his father and he answers, through my president!" Zelenskyy may be Jewish, but his Jewishness was not a significant factor for himself and his voters until the war. Young Jews in Ukraine respond with jokes and memes (see chapters 7 and 8 by Goodman and Bilaniuk in this volume for an in-depth analysis of memes). One joke making the rounds goes like this:

- Hey, you're a *banderovets* (Banderite)!
- I know. Our synagogue is full of them.

The self-proclamation of Banderite (a follower of Stephan Bandera) spotlights the absurdity of Russia's claim that all Ukrainians are far-right nationalists and that Jews are among the persecuted minority groups, while allowing Jews to pledge their loyalty to the Ukrainian nation and express solidarity with other Ukrainians.

Other posts on social media show Jews dressed in Ukrainian military clothing in prayer at the synagogue or at the war front. These images, like the one described before, emphasize that Jews think of Ukraine as a homeland for which they are willing to fight. Many religious Jews post pictures of themselves in prayer to show to the world that they are far from persecuted because they are openly practicing Judaism and doing so as they fight for Ukraine's independence. In one image that I saw, Andrei and three friends are conducting morning prayer wearing traditional religious garments such as a kippah, *tallit*, and *tefillin* (a set of small leather boxes with leather straps containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah). These garments are worn by adult Jewish men during morning prayer. The heading on the post reads, "an ordinary Monday for Ukrainian neo-Nazis in Odessa" (see Figure 5.3).

There we see in microcosm the fact that many Jews have come to identify themselves first and foremost as Ukrainian Jews who are residents of Odesa. They have thus expanded their sense of belonging from Odesa's unique urban space to Ukraine as a whole.

Обычный понедельник украинских неонацистов
в Одессе



FIGURE 5.3 Four men in prayer mocking Putin's rhetoric as they refer to themselves jokingly as Ukrainian neo-Nazis.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in the context of the current war in Ukraine, Jews from Odesa—whether remaining or refugees—have experienced fragmentation and dispossession on personal, familial, and communal levels, and these have at once greatly destabilized previous forms of life, security, and self-understanding and allowed for new, radically recast senses of identity. The war effectively shattered many of the longstanding personal and institutional ties that connected Jews across the Russian and Ukrainian border. It also dissolved the sense of a common history of Nazi persecution and gave impetus for and shape to new solidarities—first and foremost one that is primarily *Ukrainian*. Sewing together the ripped pieces of their social and historical fabric with blue and yellow thread, these Jews from Odesa seek to defy their connection with Soviet and Russian imperialism and resist the gravitational pull of the once-dominant “Russian world.”

This chapter has offered a snapshot of a particular moment in the longer trajectory of Russia's war against Ukraine. Each day that the war continues, the death toll rises, the destruction continues, and displacement, fragmentation, and

dispossession extend their reach. There is much yet to be understood about the geopolitical, social, and cultural effects of the war, and the process of identity reformation laid out here will continue. But at this point in time, it is evident that, while Jewish communities have been fragmented, they have not been broken. Perhaps inspired by their biblical story of overcoming wars, exodus, and dispersion to remain a free people, the Jews of Odesa now bind their historical struggle *as Jews* to their current struggle *as Ukrainians*.

Notes

- 1 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>
- 2 In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the territory of Ukraine was divided between Russia, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. In the nineteenth century, it was divided between Russia and Austria-Hungary. And in the twentieth century, except for short period of independence after the First World War, it became part of the Soviet Union. Ukraine has been on the edge of empires for centuries. See Friedman 2013.
- 3 I want to stress that *denazification* is not politically important in itself. In fact, in the first round of negotiations Russia was already willing to drop such a condition (see “Live News from March 29,” *Financial Times*, 29 March, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/326062fb-5581-4dfa-bcba-32316ac8bbac#post-3892c408-7c93-4aff-a4d4-696243de3643>). Moreover, Russian sociologists found that among their sample of Russian citizens, many found the word incomprehensible and even difficult to pronounce (see “Kreml’ sobiraetsia otkazat’sia ot ‘denatsifikatsii’, potomu chto rossiiane ne ponimaiut chto eto” (“The Kremlin is preparing to turn away from ‘denazification’ because Russians don’t understand what it is”, *Rubrika*, 4 May 2022. <https://rubryka.com/ru/2022/05/04/kreml-zbyrayetsya-vidmovytsysya-vid-denatsyifikatsiyi-bo-rosiyany-ne-rozumiyut-shho-tse-doslidnyky-proekt/amp>).
- 4 The discourse that defines Odesa as cosmopolitan and Jewish comes from history and geography (see Herlihy 1986, 241–243).
- 5 The same held for many religious groups and networks that previously thrived across ex-Soviet borders; see Vagramenko’s chapter in this volume for a comparison to Protestantism.
- 6 Kule Folklore Centre, University of Alberta. 2022. “The Ethnography of the War? Articulating Research Needs in the Time of Trauma,” 4 April. <https://www.ualberta.ca/kule-folklore-centre/news/2022/april/ethnography-of-war.html>
- 7 Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen “Documenting Ukraine” project. <https://www.iwm.at/documenting-ukraine>. Accessed 15 June 2023.
- 8 Center for Urban History, “24.02.22, 5 am: Testimonies from the War.” <https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researches/oral-testimonies-from-the-war-2/> (accessed 15 June 2023).
- 9 Exodus-2022: Testimonies of Jewish Refugees from the Russo-Ukrainian War. <https://exodus-2022.org> (accessed 15 June 2023).
- 10 Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman argue that one way to understand collective memory is as a “traumatic relationship with the past in which the group identifies itself as a victim through its recognition of a shared experience of violence” (2009, 15–16). Russia’s attempt to mobilize the dynamics of collective memory has meant casting Ukrainians—who fought with the Soviet army to liberate the world from Nazism and perished by the millions—as Nazis themselves, while calling on a shared experience of Nazi victimization.
- 11 For the full text of the speech see: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-ukraine-president-zelenskys-speech-to-israeli-lawmakers/>
- 12 For Zelensky’s family Holocaust history, see Brockell 2022.

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6

FAITH AND WAR

Grassroots Ukrainian Protestantism in the context of the Russian invasion

Tatiana Vagramenko

Introduction

The face of the church has changed. The war has emptied churches where many generations of believers entwined the thread of religious life. “Panic began in Odesa ... Our people started leaving. The [believing] youth are completely gone ... This is a catastrophe. We used to have great choirs, orchestras, a well-organized children’s ministry. All that is gone now.” Ivan, a Baptist pastor from Odesa, was telling me the story of how the war arrived in his hometown in the freezing days of early spring 2022 and how it affected the religious life of his community. He continued by saying that about 70 percent of pastors (from both Baptist and Pentecostal churches) in the region had left in the first days of the war, most of them emigrating abroad. Less than 50 percent of ordinary believers remained in the churches of his Baptist union in Odesa and even less in other churches. This story of Ivan mirrors many other wartime stories I heard from various parts of Ukraine, particularly those closer to the front line. Pavel Sitkovsky, a pastor from Merefa (a town in the Kharkiv region), reported at the 2023 Annual Conference of the International Council for Churches of the Evangelical Christian Baptists that took place in Sacramento in February 2023:

Our unions are empty [he pauses to hold back his tears]. In the beginning, it hurt a lot. We used to have five hundred members in our church. Now only a hundred and thirty are left. Out of six thousand members in the Kharkiv [Baptist] union, only three thousand are left. Half have left the country, mostly young people, with their families and children, our future. Few young people stayed. Those who stayed are mainly old people ... We don’t know why God allowed it.¹

The face of the church has changed indeed. But, initially, the war brought new people into prayer houses and churches. It was time for a great religious awakening in Ukraine, “greater than in the 1990s!” Sitkovsky noted. Back then, after the fall of the USSR, Ukraine opened up to a global religious marketplace and became an attractive place for international Protestant missionary initiatives (Wanner 2007). Similarly, since the escalation of the war in 2022, in the Kharkiv region alone, Pavel Sitkovsky reported about 30 evangelistic ministries per week, with approximately 6,000 people attending them. Just in the church in Merefá, he continued, some 550 new people regularly attended evangelistic ministries and 1,200 newcomers gathered for the first wartime Christmas. “The prayer house was full. People could not find any place not only to sit, but to stand! Some 300 people remained in the yard, as they could not fit.”

The war brought loss of human lives, land, homes, and livelihoods but also the loss of history as we knew it; it broke the social fabric of the once-thriving religious life in Ukraine. At the same time, it brought new forms of solidarity, new hopes and faith, and, as Ukrainian Evangelical Christians call it, religious awakening. This chapter examines how Ukrainian Christian minorities, such as Evangelical Christians,² negotiate their historical and social role in a war-torn society. Through the prism of personal and community wartime stories, this chapter discusses the dispossession of historical memory and religious identities in times of war. How did Ukrainian Protestants negotiate the loss and endangerment of their historical heritage as a result of Russia’s military aggression, the loss of their history as they knew it and taught it for many years, and the destruction of post-Soviet Protestant religious networks and alignments caused by the war?

The focus of this chapter is minority Protestant groups, whose congregational life and historical heritage became most vulnerable in the context of Russia’s military aggression. The war fractured their institutional structures and once-strong inter-community connections both within Ukraine and in the neighboring countries, particularly Russia. Most of the Protestant denominations in Ukraine formed institutionally during the Soviet period and were built upon post-Soviet alliances that often reflected the colonial pattern, with Russian unions continuing to dominate as a center of power on the post-Soviet religious landscape. These post-Soviet alliances and unions were broken with Russia’s first military aggression in 2014, and inter-congregational communication became impossible after the escalation of the war in 2022. All these communities underwent a process of redefinition of their identities and revision of their histories and social roles in the context of the war. As Ukrainian theologian Mykhailo Cherenkov argues, prior to the Maidan and before the war broke out in 2014, Protestants in Ukraine were considered “post-Soviet,” which is to say that they were no longer Soviet but also not yet Ukrainian, being apolitical or neutral (Cherenkov 2015a, 42). In the wake of the Maidan Revolution and the subsequent Russian invasion,

Protestants became “Ukrainian Protestants,” discovering that they are an inseparable part of the Ukrainian people, its history, its present, and its future (Panych 2014 and Chapter 5 this volume, for an analogous situation with “Ukrainian Jews” in Odesa). The process, of course, was not smooth, and it triggered splits and internal conflicts, because many post-Soviet (called now “Eurasian”) Protestant unions were built on Soviet-based connections and maintained strong ties with Russian communities.

While disrupting congregational life, the war at the same time provided a platform for new forms of interreligious dialogue and what Cherenkov calls “practical ecumenism” (Cherenkov 2015a, 42). These features became overwhelmingly visible when the war reached its peak in February 2022. Many Protestant groups were actively engaged in wartime activities, even though their involvement was, as a matter of principle, pacifist. Interreligious dialogue moved into the grassroots practical sphere: various religious groups ran joint charity campaigns, helped internally displaced people, and delivered food and medicine to the frontline areas. Most Evangelical churches I visited in summer 2022 in the Kyiv, Chernivtsi, and Lviv regions had been turned into shelters for internally displaced persons. Evangelical missionary and theologian Konstantin Teteriatnikov writes:

Theology has moved from lecture halls to the streets of Ukrainian towns and villages. Now it is different: it is practical and adequate. We respond to people’s real needs: dress the wounds, feed hungry people, shelter children who lost their parents due to the war.

(Teteriatnikov 2022)

Witnessing the disastrous outcomes of the war, mass killings, and loss, many Evangelical Christians nevertheless refused to hold guns in their hands, firmly standing on their pacifist principles.

“We must be a warlike nation ... If no one will shoot, then I will shoot,” said Ihor Plokhoy, a Baptist chaplain.³ It is noteworthy that many Protestants (particularly from the mainstream officially registered all-Ukrainian Baptist and Pentecostal Unions) were drafted into or volunteered for the army and defended their country with weapons in their hands. Chaplains have been officially part of Ukraine’s military since 2021 and include members of the all-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists and Christians of the Evangelical Faith-Pentecostals (Bilash and Karabin 2020; Wanner 2022). These communities have a unique view regarding military service and, therefore, are not the focus of this study. Instead, I look at those communities who developed historically grounded apolitical attitudes and defended their pacifist stances throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Many members of the unregistered Baptist movement, reformed Adventists, Pentecostals, and, of course,

Jehovah's Witnesses (who have the most uncompromising principles regarding military service and non-involvement in political life) were sentenced to prison terms for their refusal to be drafted into the army and to bear arms in the Soviet Union. Their principles remain little changed since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war. As I argue, although their refusal to fight in the war and their historically apolitical attitudes elicit social blame and can lead to the further marginalization of religious minorities, many Protestant groups attempt to develop alternative foundations for *bottom-up* peacebuilding and reconciliation in this war-torn society. While various European religious actors were involved in faith-based diplomacy that attempted to resolve the conflict by the use of religious instruments (O'Beara 2022), less is known about internal religious actors and grassroots movements in Ukraine who search for peace and reconciliation in the country. In this chapter, I try to give voice to religious actors in Ukraine who act as mobilizers of their faith communities in a time of war and, at the same time, promote peace and stand against the escalating militarization of society.

My focus is on understanding how faith-based pacifists make sense of the war. If pacifism is generally viewed in terms of avoiding going to war, what kinds of responses and actions are called for when war arrives on the doorsteps of pacifists and enters their homes and churches? As I will argue below, these groups' historical legacy of civil persecution and repression during the Soviet period helps to provide them with an interpretative framework to comprehend traumatic social changes and losses brought about by the war. Historical trauma has a profound impact on shaping their collective identities and memory formation; it shapes the groups' understanding of their past and the way they perceive present-day traumatic changes (Alexander 2004; Assmann 2015). The ongoing war brought about re-traumatizing experiences, when the resurgence of violence, loss of life, displacement, and destruction revived their collective memories of Soviet-era state surveillance and persecution, underground life, and clandestine activities. But, at the same time, as I will show, traumatic historical memory has turned into a mobilizing force for believers' agency and stimulated creative social responses during times of war (Sztompka 2000).

I follow the stories of several religious actors who chose to stay in Ukraine after February 2022 and who dedicated themselves to saving lives, churches, and religious heritage.⁴ First, I examine how they rebuilt their identities and reclaimed their histories in the context of disrupted congregational life and endangered historical heritage. Second, I address how Christian minorities with conservative and pacifist stances come to terms with a present in which violence, mass destruction, and atrocities leave no room for the Biblical maxims, "Do not resist the one who is evil" (Matthew 5:39) and "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). The study is based on my historical and ethnographic research on Ukrainian Protestantism, including summer 2022 field research with Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witness groups from the

regions of Kyiv, Chernivtsi, Odesa, and Lviv. I use a storytelling approach to capture locally situated first-person narrative accounts of minority faith communities to gain insight into their wartime experiences, and understand how believers make sense of their radically changed world. This approach also supports the process of building trust and a shared language in a situation where trust has been broken and communication between groups has become difficult. I believe, in the context of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and community rebuilding, storytelling can be used to create a space for dialogue and to encourage empathy and understanding (see Kalenychenko's Chapter 11, this volume).

Dispossession of history: the story of an Adventist archive

Artem⁵ was waiting for me on the porch of the Adventist University in Bucha. He waved when saw me and smiled openheartedly—a man in his mid-50s, in a tailored suit, polished shoes, and a bow tie. At that moment, I thought that the look did not correspond to the devastating destruction I had just seen all around. As a man in a bow tie amid war, he was waiting to show me his treasure, waiting for help. The brief thought quickly faded as I saw that a grass plot lay between us. All I could think of was the multiple “butterfly” mines the Russian army indiscriminately spread with drones all over the Kyiv region at the beginning of the 2022 invasion. By now, in August 2022, only four months since the Russian troops had withdrawn from the Kyiv region, forests and parks of Bucha, Hostomel, and Irpin were being slowly demined, checked meter by meter. Yet nothing was safe. The Ukrainian division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the university—a beautiful modern complex hidden among the tall pine trees of the Bucha woods—were captured by Russian soldiers in February–March 2022. While they were based there, they damaged furniture, broke windows and doors, stole money and valuables, and destroyed all digital devices. What did they leave behind when they retreated? Was that small grass plot between me and the man in the bow tie safe? I jumped.

The roadway from Kyiv to Bucha mushroomed with exploded cars, skeletons of burnt buildings, military block posts, anti-tank hedgehogs, and piles of sandbags. Every house wore wounds from shelling and gunfire. The smell of burning was still in the air. About 240 internally displaced persons, mostly women and children, were being sheltered at the Adventist complex in Bucha by the time I arrived there. Everything looked out of place and agitated. But as Artem opened the door into the archive building, a hidden, quiet, and untouched world of old and precious things suddenly opened to me: traces of memory of religious life in Ukraine, old scrolls, *samizdat* manuscripts, photographs, and other ephemera belonging to Seventh-day Adventist communities, mostly from Crimea. Some items were nicely displayed on the shelves of the Adventist Museum: maps, religious art, typewriters, and old manuscripts. However, most of the archival

documents were stored in banana boxes. Piled one on top of another, they were stacked floor to ceiling in several rooms that had been turned into storage spaces. This was the result of Artem's life-long activity. "Now do you understand why I never managed to have a family?" he laughs. His true passion was the archive.

"I have aged some ten years since the beginning of the war," he said. Artem could not conceal his emotions. He lived in a village some 60 kilometers away from here; unlike Bucha, it was not occupied by the Russian troops, although it was heavily shelled, and his house was damaged. Someone rang him in the grim days of early March saying that the soldiers had broken into the building and were staying on the premises of the archive. For many weeks he did not know what might have happened to the archive to which he had dedicated his entire life. When he finally was able to see it, the devastation was disheartening. All the windows and doors were broken, money was stolen, all of the computers and laptops were smashed with pieces scattered all over the floor, and not a single memory stick survived—the digitization work of eight years in vain, with no surviving backup copies. "But they did not appreciate the treasure of the archive!" He put on white gloves and carefully unrolled seventeenth-century-old Armenian prayer scrolls, proudly showing his treasure. "They could not even imagine the price of that!"

Artem was originally from Crimea. As soon as he converted to Adventism in 1992, he started to collect the ephemera of the religious life of his community, gradually sparking his interest in the history of other minority ethnic and religious communities residing on the peninsula. The Adventist movement has long been present in Crimea. The first Adventist community in the Russian Empire was registered in the Crimean village Berdybulat, where a group of German settlers were baptized. The community members were shot dead during the 1941 deportation. Artem interviewed some eyewitnesses of the tragic events, who showed an allegedly mass grave near the Adventist prayer house. However, the exhumation was not approved by the local authorities, nor were archival records found. "Crimea has always been Red. And you must belong there if you want them to support you. But you do not belong there. You are a 'sectarian'."

After World War II, the Adventist communities in Simferopol started to grow; they built new prayer houses, celebrated baptisms and weddings, and organized Bible study groups, prayer meetings, and outdoor activities. Photos, letters, *samizdat* materials, and other traces of this history were carefully preserved by Artem. His renown as the man who collected things from old times grew, and people started to bring him their personal archives and old items they no longer wanted to keep. They brought stories, too, which Artem carefully recorded and stored. Several decades on, Artem was the holder of many thousands of rare archival artifacts with possibly the largest collection of Adventist Soviet-era *samizdat* and community photographs. His interests in religious life during the Soviet period led him to the SBU (*Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy*, the Security

Service of Ukraine, the successor of the KGB in Ukraine) and Communist Party archives in Simferopol, where he searched for the stories that did not make it into either the oral history or the history books. He was met suspiciously by local archivists—a sectarian who digs into the archives!—and was not allowed to copy documents, not even to take notes while reading. Artem developed his own shorthand method and secretly took notes on small pieces of paper, which he then transcribed at home. He restored broken threads of old life stories and clandestine histories of repressed faith. This collection of handwritten notes is what he valued the most.

Then 2014 arrived, and Crimea was occupied by Russian forces. Although his Crimean roots went back many generations, Artem did not have a single thought to stay because he knew that the archive would not survive there.

We realized very quickly what kind of “Russian world” was arriving here. I understood that the archive would die here ... because the church is very dependent on the state in Russia. In the best-case scenario, it would be taken to the Euro-Asia Adventist Division in Zaokskii [130 kilometers from Moscow], without me of course. In the worst-case scenario, it would be confiscated as extremist materials.

Fearing that, Artem made a life-changing decision: to move the entire archive to Bucha in Ukraine, where the all-Ukrainian Adventist division was located. To smuggle the entire archive (although it was not officially registered in any way) across the newly established borders was not an easy task. The preparations were in total secret. Just two days before the planned smuggling operation, the council of the Crimean Adventist churches found out about the move.

And then they handed us over [*togda nas sdali*]. Someone rang the FSB [the Federal Security Service of Russia] saying that the Adventists were going to smuggle a museum. A museum, they said! Although we were not registered as a museum. And while the FSB was figuring out what kind of museum the Adventists held, they put us under surveillance.

Soon, he noticed a strange car was keeping watch over his home, and he decided to mask the move. Under the pretext that he was personally moving to Ukraine, in secret, he started buying banana boxes from a local fruit market and packing archival collections. Once everything was ready, he rented a truck and loaded all the boxes. To hide them, he threw his personal belongings on top: pillows, mattresses, multiple flowerpots, and his large collection of live birds to make it difficult to search the truck at the border. Even the driver was not told what he was hauling, so he would not reveal his fear. “We’d thought of everything.” Early in the morning, around 2:00 a.m. when it was still dark, a sleepy customs

officer had a quick look inside the truck. He was impressed by Artem's potted flower collection. "My wife likes flowers so much. How lovely!" After receiving a couple of flowerpots as a gift "for your wife," the customs officer was happy to let the truck go. Once Artem and his companions crossed the border, they heard sirens behind them. Something was going wrong on the Crimean side of the border, but they did not know what exactly, as they already had passed the occupied territory. Only after they safely arrived in Bucha did they find out that the Russian police had tried to intercept them at the border. They were in pursuit but missed the truck at the last moment. According to Artem, the plenipotentiary for religious affairs in Crimea rang the Adventist minister in Simferopol the following day and yelled at the top of his voice, swearing:

You, b**ch, did you forget how the boots smell in the prison zone?! I will burn you, motherf**ker! You will forget your children and your wife! You had permission to move the museum to Zaokskii but not to Ukraine! ... We chased you, but you, b**ches, managed to jump out earlier!

This is how the archive and its creator ended up in Bucha in 2014. The Ukrainian Adventist division provided space for it, registered the collection for the first time as the Adventist Museum-Archive, and appointed Artem as its curator. This tangible history of a minority religious community, once smuggled and rescued, was endangered again eight years later with the escalation of the war in February 2022.

"My two wars": historical memory revived and revised

Kyiv, 12 August 2022. I rang him in the evening but had little hope that he would agree to meet me. An old Baptist pastor of the unregistered Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists (CCEChB), Volodymyr was one of the most active members of the underground religious network in Soviet Ukraine; he and his wife spent several years in the GULAG (Soviet labor camps) in the 1980s for their religious activities. People like him would not open the door of their homes for a secular scholar and would be even less inclined to share their personal stories with a person who is not a member of their church.

I was wrong. Volodymyr invited me home the following morning. "You are lucky my wife is not at home. She would never allow you in, she is very suspicious and always complains that I am too open to strangers." We spent over five hours talking about the history of the Baptist movement and about the war, of course. Volodymyr's nine children all followed the path of their parents and were ardent believers and active members of CCEChB, often called simply the Baptist Brethren. During the first weeks of the war, he drove his wife and his daughters with their families to the Polish border, and they were now

safe. Only the men, he and his three young sons, all in their twenties, stayed in Kyiv in their spacious apartment, which now looked empty. “Can you cook borscht for us?” he laughed.

The origins of the unregistered Baptist movement go back to 1961, a time when Khrushchev tightened his policies regarding religious organizations, attempting to assert total control by state authorities over religious life. The state initiated a massive anti-religious campaign, which was to be based on a strong commitment to scientific atheist principles. The new wave of religious persecutions and arrests of religious activists began in the late 1950s; they were accompanied by numerous anti-religious, and particularly anti-sectarian, propaganda films, public lectures, articles and books, exhibitions, and public events specifically targeting the so-called “sectarians” (all Protestants in Ukraine fell under this definition), depicting them as fanatical, deceitful, and socially harmful people. As a reaction to the growing pressure, a new movement emerged in 1961, initially as a result of a split from the officially registered Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists. They became known as the Initiative Group (*initsiativnaia gruppy*) or the “separated Baptists” (also known as “unregistered,” “young” Baptists, or simply The Brethren). Back in the 1960s, they were mostly young, enthusiastic, and radically uncompromising believers who initiated the first public protest campaigns against religious persecution, church collaboration with state authorities, and the registration of religious communities by local authorities and the multiple restrictions of religious life in the Soviet Union. They publicly defended their right to be Christian believers. Hence, the movement became one of the first open protest movements against both the Soviet anti-religious policy and the political conformism of official church leaders. As a result, the “unregistered” Baptists took the brunt of the Soviet-era religious persecutions. Refusing any kind of relations with the state and rejecting official registration, the movement was illegal during the Soviet period, and its leaders were regarded as criminals. Dozens of activists were arrested and imprisoned, and some leaders spent over 20 years in prisons and labor camps.

“To me, 2022 became another 1961. Everything started over again. Back in 1961, a war began too, when believers realized that they had to give themselves up on the altar,” said Volodymyr. Back then, in the years of Soviet-era religious persecution, there was always a choice, a choice not to resist, not to go to prison, not to have problems.

If you played their game, if you collaborated with the authorities, obeyed their control, they did not touch you. Our brothers thought about it a lot but, in the end, they made their choice. Their war began for them at that time.

On 24 February 2022, Volodymyr made his choice: not to flee, but to stay and start his own war and “to give himself up on the altar.” His beliefs did not allow

him to take up arms. His war was for souls and human lives. He opened his own church and organized daily prayer meetings for everyone who needed it. Together with his sons, they helped displaced people and distributed food and medicine to the frontline zone. His fight was also against the escalating militarization of society and public space. Volodymyr initiated a campaign against aggressive military posters that flooded the public space of the city at the beginning of the war.

You remember, all these stories with the “Russian warship”.⁶ We went [to the authorities] and told them: “What are you doing!? This is so dangerous!” We prepared a petition against military posters in the city. And it worked. Look around, you see posters everywhere, they cry to God!

The following day Volodymyr and his son drove me to Irpin and Borodianka. We saw devastated ruins and destroyed buildings, met believers who survived the occupation, and prayed with them. As we were passing through the forest that surrounded Kyiv and extended further to Bucha, the forest that was so meaningful to Volodymyr, he recalled:

When I was young, I could cross this forest with my eyes closed. We knew every tree, every hillock there. We used to meet deep in the Kyiv Forest every Sunday. Therefore, our church was called the Forest Church; I was a member of the Second Forest Church in the 1980s. It was an Exodus of people to the forest. We gathered hundreds of people for our service. It was a living forest. ... We used to meet at the last tram stop and from there we headed to the forest. The place was ideal because nobody lived around there, so if we met a stranger, it was clear that he was a *chekist* [KGB agent]. We had our techniques to get away from such shadows, drew maps of the forest, searching for convenient locations. We knew the forest very well.

“Let’s go there right now and I will show you those places!” Volodymyr smiled, recalling the great days of the great awakening. “Dad, that forest is fully mined now,” his young son murmured. It was a place of heated battles just a few months earlier and was now a closed zone with military block posts all around it.

Volodymyr’s two wars entangled into one historical narrative. Back in the mid-1980s, when he returned from prison, he knew that it would be easy to get a second term. “You are under surveillance now.” The second term also would be much longer than three years.

I’ll tell you honestly, I did not want to go to the zone again, I really didn’t want to. So, I had a choice: to join the registered [Baptist] church or to go to the forest. If I go to the forest, I go to jail straight away.

He made his choice then, as he was making his choice now—to build the church in times of war: the war against faith in the 1980s and the war against life in 2022.

The Soviet period ended, but only on 24 February 2022, Volodymyr argued. He believed that, before this, even during the first 30 years of independence, the religious landscape and religious life in Ukraine were still influenced by Soviet patterns of the politics of religion. “Nothing much changed. There was no lustration and, therefore, it was the same people and the same methods,” he told me the following day in his church. Volodymyr opened it on the eve of the war in a bedroom community of the city. A ground-floor apartment in a high-rise building was turned into a cozy and tidy prayer house, with a kitchen, a library, and premises for gatherings and music rehearsal. Here, Volodymyr proudly showed me the most precious material he had: his personal archive and large posters he made during his many years of teaching the history of the Evangelical movement in CCEChB Biblical courses. He took his shoes off, and, barefoot, unrolled the largest panoramic poster on the floor—some 13 meters of a chronogram of the history of Baptism, which was too big to fit in the room. Meter by meter, we went from the history of the Evangelical movement in late-Imperial Russia, throughout the years of Soviet-era religious persecutions, to the post-Soviet period; the panorama ended with the year 2021, the second year of the COVID pandemic.

Each period marked significant historical events in the politics of religion in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the independent states. The historiography was centered on the creation of the Baptist Brethren, CCEChB, represented as an authentic heir of the Evangelical movement in “wider Russia.” It was the history of “Russian Baptism” as he had been teaching it for many years, the history according to Volodymyr, with Russian centers (both political and religious) as foundational in the making of the history of the movement. “This history finished in 2022,” he said.

There are several breaks in this panorama, when the historical line of the Baptist movement was severed, be it because of wars or religious repressions ... Now, there will be one more break in the panorama and we will have to start a new period on 24 February [2022]. A completely new history, and this time not of Russian Baptism, and not even of Ukrainian Baptism, but of *the Ukrainian Evangelical Christian movement*. Because God is not a sectarian, and we must enrich this panorama with all kinds of Evangelical movements in Ukraine.

I find this citation to be the best illumination of how Ukrainian Evangelical believers reclaimed their historical memory and religious identities on a novel foundation. With the final dissolution of the *post-Soviet* cultural, religious,

and political spaces caused by the 2014 and 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine, Evangelical movements in Ukraine gained new visions of their historical role and social place, grounded on decolonized national identities. “We became different. Many of us are no longer guided by Moscow. Russian Christianity cannot show a positive example of social influence,” writes Konstantin Teteriatnikov, former coordinator of the Evangelical educational project School Without Walls in Ukraine (Teteriatnikov 2022). The wartime rupture also provided a novel foundation for interreligious dialogue and, possibly, for the formation of a renovated Evangelical movement that would unite various groups and splits in Ukraine. This is even more important, as many Protestant groups say they are witnessing a religious awakening in times of war, which they interpret as a mark of a new period in the future of Ukrainian Evangelical Christianity.

“The history of wars is the history of awakening. Each war followed a great [religious] awakening. So now we know what will be after this war. The great religious awakening is going on,” Volodymyr believed. Waves of increased religious enthusiasm were recorded across the country, particularly in the regions most affected by the war. More and more people gathered in churches, received baptism, and sought refuge in faith. A Baptist minister in the Sumy region, for example, reported that over 1,000 new people had arrived for daily prayer services in his church in the town of Lebedyn since the beginning of the war: “Our [believing] families with children have left [Ukraine], but the House of Prayer filled with new saved people who listen to the Word of God, pray, cry, repent, and receive the Bread of Life.”⁷⁷ Many of my interlocutors saw it as the beginning of a new period in the history of Ukrainian Evangelical Christianity and, hence, a token of hope for peace and redemption. Volodymyr summarized it in the following way:

The great revival is happening now. We don't have enough space in our church. Many other churches are full of people who never went to church before. Some two hundred people now come to a church in Bucha. War is the time for spiritual awakening. This did not happen in 2014, therefore God repeated it again. The war happened again because people had not come to God.

Religious and institutional connections between Ukrainian and Russian Protestant churches and educational institutions were eventually severed with the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022. The Baptist Brethren CCEChB, which Volodymyr followed all his life, found itself in the most precarious situation, as it was one of the few, if not the only, post-Soviet religious organization that did not form independent republican associations and existed as a single Union that embraced churches from all across the former Soviet Union. The Union, highly centralized and structurally ordered, wrote its history and collected

its archives as a single, undivided movement. The trauma of war atrocities and violence left little room to continue this common history. Historical memory that posited unity and continuity over many generations of believers were broken; they became one of the losses of the war. This prompted Volodymyr, and many of his other Ukrainian co-believers, to write a new history of Ukrainian Baptism—a history that begins with this wartime religious awakening.

Faith-based pacifism in times of war

Andrii is a Baptist believer in his early 20s. He grew up in Kyiv, in a family of believers. Early on the morning of 24 February, when the first missiles struck the Kyiv region, his life changed. After they evacuated their elderly parents and other family members to a safe place, Andrii and his two other brothers made a life-changing decision to return to Kyiv. In March 2022, as the Russian army occupied the Kyiv region, rumors started to arrive about the atrocities in the occupied territories. Kyiv lived in great fear and uncertainty. Andrii and his brothers did not know what awaited them back in the city; perhaps they were going to meet their deaths, and perhaps they wouldn't see their parents again. All they knew was that they were joining the Ukrainian people in the war effort, albeit by other means:

We understand that our mission is to serve the people. No, we don't fight with machine guns in our hands, we don't do it ... We had a choice: to stay in a safe place or to go and to help people. This is what I was born for, this is what Christ commanded me to do ... I have my mission, my duty ... I want to tell all military men about Christ because they might die tomorrow. I am not going to fight; I am not going to shoot. I don't want tears to be shed somewhere in Russia. I don't want to kill, to kill Russians. I simply want to help people. If needed, I will give help to a Russian.

Andrii's co-believer, Oleksii, echoed this: "We can take part in the war in many other ways. We don't kill people, we save them!" In cooperation with other members of his church, Andrii organized evangelizing campaigns, preaching, praying, and singing in the metro and bomb shelters during air raids. He became actively involved in humanitarian assistance, distributing food, medicine, and other essential products to the most unsafe places in the Kyiv region and further to the front line. It is noteworthy that a humanitarian network was created by religious communities from different confessions. They all worked together: Pentecostals from one region arranged the production of packed ready-to-eat food; Baptists from another region distributed it to the front line; and Orthodox and Baptists organized evacuation transport from Irpin, Bucha, Hostomel, and Borodianka.

A young man driving his car, continuously receiving phone calls, always on the move: this is how I remember him. It was difficult to find even 20 minutes to make him stop, to have tea and talk to me. He arranged food supplies, looked for necessary medicines requested from the front line, organized a youth ministry in a village, met co-believers for rehearsal, and organized a trip to the East to bring humanitarian aid. Serious, almost never smiling. On one occasion, Andrii and his brother came under shelling by artillery systems; they saw how a car with a whole family in it got burned in a second, just a few meters away from them. They had been discussing an evacuation plan with them just a few minutes earlier. While missiles were falling from the sky, Andrii and his brother were lying on the ground and praying. He saw dead bodies lying on the streets of Bucha and burned-down homes in Irpin, and he heard heart-breaking stories from people who survived the occupation. He witnessed all the devastating destruction that the war brought to his land. Yet he knew that even if he would be drafted into the army he would refuse to fight: “In war, some prepare ammunition, some make Molotov cocktails, but we prepare our own weapon—the Word of God and prayer.”

The war made Protestant believers think and act beyond their confessional boundaries. At the same time, it led to the creation of a common boundary among *Ukrainian* Protestants. Andrii believes that the duty of every Ukrainian in this war is to contribute to peace and to serve the people. People stay to work at petrol stations to supply civilians during the war—this is their “ministry” in times of war, as Andrii puts it. People stay to work in hospitals; this is their “ministry” too.

Believe me, they all want to take their families and go somewhere far away. But they did not do it, they stayed. They have their duty ... We had a choice too: to stay safe with our family or to go [to the front line] to help people ... This is my ministry ... It hurt a lot to see my mother cry when she was saying goodbye to us.

Even against the background of Russian aggression, the majority of Ukrainian Protestants don't foster religious forms of nationalism or securitization of their faith (when a religious narrative is applied in the creation of an image of an external enemy). Many Protestant communities across the country keep Russian as a second (in some regions as the first) language in their religious services. Some of my respondents reflected on how they tried to modify their preaching to prevent politically motivated conflicts within their churches. Volodymyr, the Baptist minister from Kyiv, shared a story of a woman who recently joined his church. She and her husband used to go to a charismatic church, but they both left it because the husband allegedly was beaten there by his co-believers for his pro-Russian position. She found that she liked Volodymyr's church, saying: “We decided to go to your church. We like it because you take a neutral position.” This made Volodymyr think:

People come to me whose relatives were drafted into the army and now they are on the front line; people also come to me who were punched in the face in another church for their pro-Russian stance. Why do they think I have a neutral position? I think I am distinctively pro-Ukrainian. But this [story] made me think. Matthew also came to Christ, and he was a collaborationist and worked for the Roman Empire, and Simeon the Zealot also came to Christ. They were all so different, but they were all united in Christ. Only in Christ did they find reconciliation and peace.

Perhaps, the most rigorous “neutrality” position belongs to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, which in turn puts them in a more precarious position in a country at war. Their political non-involvement comes from their fundamental stance toward earthly governments as corrupted by Satan and soon to be destroyed by God in the pending Apocalypse. During the Soviet period, Witnesses refused to serve in the Red Army, participate in elections, join the Communist Party or state organizations like the Komsomol, or salute the national flag, let alone bear arms and fight in any war (Baran 2014; Vagramenko 2021). Many Witnesses were imprisoned for their refusal to be drafted into the army in the Soviet Union. These stances have changed little even now.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses were affected the most by the war in Ukraine also because of the 2017 ban on their organization in Russia.⁸ The ban sparked state-sponsored persecutions of Jehovah’s Witnesses on the occupied Ukrainian territories, where they were also formally rendered illegal. All Kingdom Halls (Witness prayer houses) were raided by the military and closed down on the occupied territories of the Donbas, Crimea, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, with property and religious literature confiscated and some faith activists arrested. Replicating the Soviet practice, occupation authorities accused Witnesses of being foreign spies and dangerous extremists and widely distributed “anti-sectarian” propaganda documentary films and newsreel reports (Vagramenko and Arqueros, forthcoming). Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses were forced to go underground again or to leave the temporarily occupied territories (Khalikov 2022).

Finding themselves between the threat of marginalization for their non-involvement principles and open repression in the occupied territories, Jehovah’s Witnesses nonetheless stood for their faith.

People don’t understand us now, they blame us, because not a single Jehovah’s Witness fights in this war, because our faith does not allow us to take up arms or to take a military oath. Even alternative service can be a problem for us, as it might demand an oath, which none of us accept,

Serhii, a Jehovah’s Witness in his late thirties, said these words as he drove me to the Ukrainian Bethel in Lviv (the Watchtower branch office in Ukraine). The

war seemed far away in this quiet place surrounded by woods, tidy buildings, a beautiful lake, curved pathways along trees and lawns, and pretty benches to read a book in peace and quiet. No sound of air-raid sirens. Serhii and Osyp, two Bethel staff members, welcomed me there on a sunny day in August 2022, showed me how the Bethel worked, and told me the story of how it was built. Originally, the Ukrainian JW headquarters was planned for Odesa, and a piece of land was even bought for this. But soon, it was decided to move the Bethel to Lviv. “It seemed strange to translate the Bible and other material into Ukrainian in Russian-speaking Odesa!” Osyp smiled.

Before the 2022 war broke out, a group of Russian Witnesses found their refuge here in Lviv; however, they were asked to leave after 24 February. All former pan-Soviet ties of the Jehovah’s Witnesses were broken. As some scholars observe, these changes compelled the Ukrainian Witnesses to develop a denomination that is open to Ukrainian society. Jehovah’s Witnesses seek to be involved in public life and to become more active as members of Ukrainian society, while offering their own model of Christian life (Fylypovych and Tytarenko 2022). Serhii believes that it is their non-involvement in political life and military activities that becomes an alternative foundation for peace and reconciliation:

We don’t fight with weapons, and people blame us for not protecting the country. I know for sure that there is not a single Jehovah’s Witness in Ukraine who will kill someone in this war. But I also know for sure that there is not a single Jehovah’s Witness in Russia who will take a gun in his hands, nobody in Ukraine will be killed by the hand of a Jehovah’s Witness.

Many Evangelical Christian communities in Ukraine have a long history of pacifism and political and social non-involvement, which is rooted in their religious beliefs and historical experiences. Jehovah’s Witnesses and unregistered Baptists were among those who took the brunt of Soviet state repression for their strong beliefs that the church should not engage in the social and political life of the country. This historical legacy was revised and re-interpreted in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. While standing on the grounds of faith-based pacifism, ordinary believers either develop alternative forms of social activism in times of war or pursue their own models for peace and dialogue, while refusing to engage in violence.

Conclusion

The disintegration of post-Soviet Protestantism began with the first shootings on the Maidan and Russia’s invasion of the Ukrainian Donbas in 2014. The last post-Soviet Protestant alliances were broken with the escalation of the war in 2022. This made believers and churches revise their histories and take on

identities as Ukrainian Protestants. A range of scholars argue that this sparked the development of new, nationally centered, and politically oriented forms of Ukrainian Protestantism; as Mykhailo Cherenkov puts it, “a symbol of the return of the Church into politics with a more balanced and deeper understanding of its own responsibility” (Cherenkov 2015b, 340). While mainstream Protestant organizations became visible in the political arena and more engaged in civil society, a number of Evangelical minorities rejected what Horkusha and Fylypovych (2014) call the model of a “civil church” and followed their historically and theologically grounded principles of political neutrality and non-involvement. The faith groups mentioned in this chapter—Seventh-day Adventists, unregistered Baptists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses—may be particularly vulnerable in the face of wartime destruction, violence, and occupation. Due to their minority status and sometimes lack of official registration with the government, these communities fight on their own to protect their historical legacies, their archives, their prayer houses, and sometimes their lives (as in the case of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in the occupied territories).

The historical experiences of these communities also play a significant role in shaping their pacifist and non-involvement beliefs. The Soviet-era religious persecutions and their marginalized underground experiences have led to a deep distrust of the government and a commitment to non-violent resistance against state control over religious life. This experience of living as a religious minority under state oppression strengthened their commitment to non-violence and non-involvement in politics. Paradoxically, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which is in many ways a struggle against the legacy of Soviet colonialism, could have unintended consequences and could revive the Soviet legacy of social exclusion and discrimination against religious minorities. In particular, these communities may find themselves vulnerable to social marginalization if they are perceived as unpatriotic and as a threat to the dominant political or cultural narrative for their pacifism and non-involvement. The believers I write about find themselves in a difficult position in times of war. On the one hand, they are committed to peace and non-violence and reject any involvement in the conflict. On the other hand, they are also deeply committed to the value of freedom and may feel compelled to take a stand against what they see as interference in their country. The tension between these two values can be challenging, and each community finds its own way of navigating between what they understand as neutrality, political involvement, and work that contributes to peace and reconciliation.

Notes

- 1 Pavel Sitkovskii, “Posledniaia informatsiia: Blagovestie v goriachikh tochках,” *Lichtimpuls*, 8 March 2023, YouTube video, 24:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6e882M9DRQ>.

- 2 Evangelical Christians include Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. In this study I also include Jehovah's Witnesses, although they are not considered Evangelical Christians, because their pacifist position is important in the context of this study.
- 3 "Igor Plokhoi: Pastor-boets na zashchite rubezhei Ukrainy," *Slavic Sacramento*, 21 October 2022, video, 29:08, <https://www.slavicsac.com/2022/10/21/chaplain-igor-plohoy-ukraine/>.
- 4 The gender disbalance (all my research participants are male) partly reflects the imbalance in wartime Ukraine, when over 94 percent of the more than 8 million people who have fled Ukraine were women and children.
- 5 This and the following names are pseudonyms.
- 6 He is referring to the famous wartime slogan "Russian warship, go f**k yourself" with its multiple visual versions.
- 7 *Nasledie vernykh*, Telegram channel, 21 August 2022, <https://t.me/baptisthistory>.
- 8 On 20 April 2017, the Russian Supreme Court declared the Jehovah's Witness organization—a pacifist religious organization whose members never take up arms—an "extremist" organization, and banned all its activities.

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PART II

Radical openness and responding to dispossession



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7

MEMES AS ANTIBODIES

Creativity and resilience in the face of Russia's war

Laada Bilaniuk

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, brought terror throughout the country. Every day brought more bombings and more news of Russian soldiers pillaging, torturing, raping, and killing. The assaults were part of Russia's plan to take control of Ukraine's government and to re-establish Russian cultural dominance. During its three decades of independence after the fall of the USSR, Ukraine had unevenly but surely moved away from Russia's orbit, extracting itself from the Russian imperialist ideology that viewed Ukrainians as "little brothers" and Ukrainian language and culture as quaint or funny, but no match for "Russian greatness." Ukrainian citizens were inexorably shrugging off their inferiority complex and uplifting the Ukrainian language and culture, both legally and in practice, even while many remained bilingual with Russian (Bilaniuk 2017, 2020, 2022). They were rejecting totalitarian control and increasingly embracing what they saw as "European" democratic values. Meanwhile, Russia was becoming increasingly autocratic, and its leaders were irked by their loss of global political and cultural standing. Russia's efforts to reclaim regional dominance included military invasions and land grabs, as in Georgia's South Ossetia in 2008 and Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) operatives were sent years in advance to cultivate "rebel" groups and then lead them to break away from Ukraine's control, as documented in the Donbas region (Batytskyi and Kalynska 2022). With long-term preparation and greater military might, Russia expected its takeover of Ukraine in February 2022 to be complete in a few days. In their arrogance, the Russian leaders could not imagine that Ukrainians would have the desire and resilience to fight them off.

But fight they did, both physically and psychologically. While many enlisted in the armed forces or volunteered to supply, evacuate, or help those in need, there was another front that burst across the internet: that of the cultural resistance. News and documentation of the horrors of the invasion were soon joined by texts, images, and videos that rebuffed Russia's intimidation and destruction. Some of these were directed at a global public, to garner support for Ukraine (see Goodman's chapter, this volume), while others were directed primarily at Ukrainians, to inform, share, and support one another. As a Ukrainian-American observer from afar, as I struggled to process what was happening, I felt compelled to document the explosion of memes and various other instantiations of creativity that I encountered on social media. I took heart in this expression of the courage of Ukrainians who were facing the invasion. This burst of cultural production also extended to professional artists. Art historian and critic Olha Balashova described as it "an explosion of art."¹ Balashova was the head of the board of MOCA NGO,² which established a digital "Wartime Art Archive" to collect wartime artworks in a wide range of media, most of which were shared on social media by the artists. Even more so than usual, the line between professional art and popular artistic production blurred, as meme themes were taken up by professional artists, and key artworks were in turn taken up and circulated as memes on social media.

Over a year after the full-scale invasion, as I tried to understand the phenomenon of the explosion of creativity in response to the invasion, a biological metaphor presented itself: cultural production as an immune response. While this metaphor has limitations, it allowed me to make sense of several major trends in Ukrainian social media, which I examine in this chapter. I use the term "meme" in a broad sense, based on evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins' (1976) coinage referring to units of cultural information that are transmitted from one person to another, analogous to genes carrying biological information. Rather than just packets of information, I view memes as antibodies or other forms of immune response, in that they play an active role in countering invading ideas and destructive cultural logics. Following this metaphor, we can ask: what cultural and ideological threats did Russia present along with its military invasion, and how did Ukrainian memes counteract them? Strictly speaking, this metaphor presumes that Ukraine (comprised of Ukrainian people and Ukrainian culture) is an entity, like an organism, mobilizing to defend against a threat. Rather than assume a pre-existing entity, I argue that the meme production contributes to the construction and reinforcement of that national entity. The Russian attack, instead of disrupting Ukrainian identity, prompted a consolidation and renewed vigor in Ukrainianness and a sense of national unity. As Benedict Anderson (1991) discerned the power of print media to construct imagined communities that are nations, so I aim to show that social media facilitates national construction at a rapid and intense pace. But unlike the geographically bounded

and rooted community that Anderson theorized, the digitally circulating memes help construct a community that is imagined as bound and yet pervasive and boundless, including its displaced and diasporic members. Memes forge community, one oriented to include all who want to be part of it.

For this study, my media sources included posts on Facebook,³ YouTube, and several Telegram channels, which often featured material reposted from other social media, including Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. I followed Facebook accounts by Ukrainian bloggers, performers, writers, artists, friends, and colleagues, who posted primarily in Ukrainian and sometimes in Russian. My own positioning as a Ukrainian-American scholar researching Ukrainian popular culture activism meant that most (but not all) of my contacts were supporters of Ukrainian language and culture and an independent, democratic Ukraine. The Telegram channels I followed also included popular military and activist channels, as well as the news channels Radio Svoboda (Ukrainian Radio Liberty), BBC Ukraine, and Babel, which also reported on cultural trends and occasionally posted compendia of popular memes that emerged in response to key events.⁴ Ukrainian news media (outside of social media) also reported on the popularity of memes (e.g., Rudenko 2022). The material that I present here is a selection of some of the most resonant and widespread memes that emerged as Ukrainians' responses to Russia's full-scale invasion. While some of these memes circulated into the global media space, my focus is on material directed mostly at a Ukrainian audience, often requiring knowledge of Ukrainian and/or Russian language and cultural contexts. Even while many were refugees and displaced from their homes, people were participating in building the imagined community of Ukraine through their social media postings.

The sayings, songs, and images examined here were posted on the internet, revoiced and reenacted in real life, and again recirculated through various channels online. The authorship of some of the posted images, texts, and videos is attributed, while in other cases the source is hard to trace through their recirculation and modifications, losing connections to original authorship, thus becoming part of what is known as "digital folklore" (de Seta 2020; Lialina and Espenshied 2009). One of the striking aspects of the war-response memes was that they circulated in many different contexts, from official to unofficial, from President Zelenskyy in his video reports to soldiers in the trenches, from official postage stamps to street graffiti in occupied territories. Indeed, one of the effects of this cultural explosion appeared to be the creation of unity across status, class, region, age, gender, and language in Ukraine.

In viewing the rapid cultural production as a cultural immune response, I consider how it functioned as a defense against the cultural and ideological threats that Russia presented along with its military invasion. I focus on three key themes. First, the most significant threat was an existential one: the Russian leadership denied Ukraine's legitimacy as a country and its right to exist.

Russian leaders, including President Putin, had stated that Ukraine was not a legitimate state, and with the full-scale invasion, there were even calls to eliminate Ukraine as a sovereign country and to erase Ukrainian culture completely (Düben 2000; Sergeitsev 2022). In other words, this can be viewed as genocide (CSCE 2022; Hook 2022; Snyder 2022). Second, and corollary to the argument that a sovereign Ukraine should not exist, was the idea that Russia and Ukraine are one, that their language and culture are essentially the same. Third was the idea that the Ukrainian people and their culture were weak and no match for Russia's culture and military might. As voiced by Russian ideologues, the expectation was that Russia would "take Kyiv in three days" and that Ukrainians would either welcome their "big brother" and "great Russian culture" or, if not, that they would quickly fall to the might of the Russian forces (Skibitska and Lohvynenko 2022). The explosion of memes targeted these destructive ideologies with the assertion of Ukrainian existence, an emphasis on Ukrainian distinctness, and a celebration of courage and endurance in the face of assault. The field of wartime memes in Ukraine is so rich that this analysis encompasses only a segment, but an ideologically and culturally very potent one.

Countering the existential threat

Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny ("Good evening, we are from Ukraine"). This simple phrase became one of the main catch-phrases of the war. At first glance, it may seem banal. Why would saying hello and that one is from Ukraine be so significant, and why did it become a viral phrase? Like the opening line of the national anthem, which translates as "Ukraine has not died yet," it is an assertion of Ukraine's existence. Said in Ukrainian, it is also an assertion of the existence of the Ukrainian language. The need to make such basic assertions is a response to Russian denials of Ukraine's right to exist, which date back to the Russian Empire's efforts to subsume the territory and population of Ukraine under its rule. The imperial Valuev circular of 1863 illustrates this conundrum, in that it imposed restrictions on the use of Ukrainian while it declared that the Ukrainian "language never existed, does not exist, and shall not exist" (Miller 2003, 97–115). Direct and indirect efforts to erase the Ukrainian language and culture continued throughout Russian imperial rule and the ensuing Soviet era, but Ukrainian identity and language proved to be remarkably resilient. Alas, the need to assert Ukraine's existence remained even after the USSR disintegrated and its member countries became independent, as political, economic, and cultural pressures from Russia continued. In 2003, Ukraine's President Kuchma even felt compelled to publish a book titled *Ukraine Is Not Russia*, presumably ghost-written, published in both Ukrainian and Russian editions (Kuchma 2003). This tome apparently did not convince Russia's President Putin, who in 2021 published his opinion that Ukrainians are not a distinct people and not a

real nation, setting up the groundwork to justify the impending plans of invading and taking over Ukraine (President 2021). Once the invasion began, one of the first actions of occupying forces was to seize and destroy Ukrainian literature and history textbooks, replacing them with Russian versions and replacing road and city signs with Russian ones (Biriukov 2023; Radio Svoboda 2022).

The iconic use of *Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny* can be traced to Marko Halanevych of the ethno-chaos band Dakha Brakha, who opened their concerts with that phrase. Dakha Brakha is one of the most renowned Ukrainian bands worldwide (Sonevytsky 2019, 139–167). They are phenomenal musicians and cultural ambassadors who have used their global success to “make the world aware of the new country but ancient nation that is Ukraine.”⁵ As part of their concerts, the band members displayed the Ukrainian flag and political slogans such as “Stop Putin” in English, to get their message across to the global concert-going public. But the opening phrase *Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny*, spoken in Ukrainian, was just as much directed at Ukrainians as the rest of the world. As Halanevych explained:

It’s important to show the world Ukraine, and to show Ukrainians that we don’t need to have an inferiority complex. That we’re not backward hicks, but progressive artists. There are a lot of creative, wonderful people here, people who are now striving for freedom, for a more civilized way of life, and are ready to stand up for it.⁶

Halanevych’s phrase became the centerpiece of an electronic music composition titled “Good evening, (where are you from?)” by the duo Probass Hardi (Artem Tkachenko and Maksym Mokrenko), released in October 2021. The track incorporated Halanevych’s voice repeating “Good evening, we are from Ukraine” as the only lyrics, along with powerful bass beats and traditional folk instrumentation, including a Ukrainian flute (*sopilka*), fiddle, and mouth harp.⁷ The song was played widely on Ukrainian radio and then went viral on social media after the start of the full-scale invasion, used as a soundtrack for videos from the war front (Genderdesk 2022). The phrase came to be used by key government officials in opening their daily social media addresses to the public, most notably Vitalii Kim, the charismatic head of the Mykolaïv Regional Military Administration, and Oleksii Reznikov, the head of the Ministry of Defense. During the first months of the war, both Kim and Reznikov opened their reports with the Ukrainian phrase *Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny* (or *Dobroho ranku* [“good morning”], if filming earlier in the day), followed by their report in the Russian language. The greeting became an emblem, an assertion of Ukrainianness not contradicted by their own preference to continue their reports in Russian.⁸ Soon the phrase was appearing everywhere, printed on T-shirts and pins and handwritten by Ukrainian soldiers on missiles destined for Russian military targets.

In the latter case, as well as in videos of Ukrainian military activities where the Probass and Hardi composition plays as a soundtrack, the phrase became not just an assertion of existence, but a challenge: if you are invaders, we will greet you with resistance.

In a demonstration of solidarity between official institutions and the people, the phrase *Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny* became the theme for a Ukrainian postage stamp. This followed soon after the issue of a wildly popular stamp commemorating the Ukrainian soldiers on Snake Island who famously defied a Russian warship's order to surrender, discussed further below. For their second war-themed stamp, the Ukrainian Postal Service organized a public online vote to choose the stamp theme itself, with five proposed themes. More than 650,000 people cast votes, with 229,783 choosing the theme *Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny*.⁹ This was followed by a competition for the stamp design. Out of 1,500 submitted designs, five were selected and put forward for an online vote in which 834,000 people participated, with over 340,000 choosing the winning design. The winning image (see Figure 7.1) depicted a tractor with a Ukrainian flag pulling a tank with the Russian “Z” marking, with a bent gun barrel (Bespriatov 2022; Sadhzenytsia 2022). This stamp paid homage to the stories of bold villagers who took over abandoned Russian tanks, towing them away with farm vehicles and then turning them over to the Ukrainian Armed Forces or selling the parts for scrap.

The fact that so many people voted to choose the theme and then the design underscored the resonance of the phrase for Ukrainians and the renown of the tank-towing farmers, with the concomitant humor and irony that simple villagers could be mightier than a superpower's military. Beyond using the stamps for postage, people valued them as collector's items that chronicled historical events, sending them as gifts or using them for fundraising.

Akin to the phrase *Dobroho vechora, my z Ukraïny*, the English-language phrase “Welcome to Ukraine” also became popular in social media. It is also an assertion of Ukraine's existence on the global stage and also took on ironic meanings. It is the title and key phrase of a musical composition by JKLN (Jacqueline Farauti) released in May 2022, which went viral as a soundtrack for videos of the Ukrainian military carrying out their assignments. Like Probass and Hardi's “Good evening,” the song features a prominent rhythmic bass, making it effective in evoking the adrenaline-filled atmosphere of the war front.¹⁰ In addition, JKLN's soulful and mournful singing evoked the pain and suffering of war, with the English lyrics “Fire away, freedom calls, like a burning flame, tears and blood, we will not give up, welcome to Ukraine.” In the middle of the track, the singer switches from English to Ukrainian, chanting *volia, svoboda, slava, Ukraïna* (“liberty, freedom, glory, Ukraine”) like a mantra, asserting a place for the Ukrainian language in an otherwise cosmopolitan, English-dominated, electronic medium. In addition to asserting Ukraine's existence, there was a



FIGURE 7.1 “Good evening, we are from Ukraine!” postage stamp.

Source: Ukrainian Postal Service.

potentially ironic meaning when the “welcome” was addressed to invaders. This ironic meaning was clear when “Welcome to Ukraine” appeared on social media images of Ukrainian military defenses or on burnt Russian vehicles. The addition of *suka* (“bitch”) after the English phrase made the irony even more obvious. For example, in a popular YouTube video showing a burning Russian military truck, Ukrainian soldiers from their foxholes call out in a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian, “*Nu sho, iak vam hostiepriimnost’ shcherykh ukraïntsiy, bliad’*”? (“So, what do you think of the hospitality of true Ukrainians, damn it?”). Another voice calls out “[unclear] *Slava Ukraïni!*” (“Glory to Ukraine!”). A third voice responds, in a mixture of Ukrainian and English, “*Ne tak, ne tak, welcome to Ukraine, suka!*” (“Not like that, not like that, welcome to Ukraine, bitch!”).¹¹ The last part of that exchange itself became a meme and was sampled in another electronic music composition published on YouTube by Kozak Music.¹²

Another viral phrase that also asserts Ukraine's existence is *Vse bude Ukraïna*. In Ukrainian *vse* can mean "always" or "everything," so the phrase can be translated into English as "there will always be Ukraine" or "everything will be Ukraine." The latter version evokes the phrase *vse bude OK* ("everything will be OK"), in which "OK," pronounced in contemporary Ukrainian slang as one syllable ("ok" rhyming with "tock"), resembles the first syllable of the name of the country in Ukrainian (*uk*, from *Ukraïna*). Both interpretations, whether "Ukraine will always be" or the more expansive "everything will be Ukraine," served as an empowering assertion for Ukrainians, as their existence was threatened (see Goodman's chapter in this volume, which discusses a Facebook page by that name).

Celebrating difference: Shibboleths, resistance, and solidarity

Ukrainian and Russian are both in the Slavic language family, and as such they share some structural features with each other and with other Slavic languages. However, there are significant differences in phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. While language difference is difficult to measure, one indicator is the percentage of shared vocabulary. According to a study by Kostiantyn Tyshchenko, a comparison of Ukrainian and Russian shows that they have 44 percent morphemically identical and 18 percent morphemically similar terms, with 38 percent of the vocabulary completely different (Tyshchenko 2000, 266–267). This is comparable to the degree of difference between Spanish and Italian, or between French and Portuguese (Ohoiko 2020).

The difference between Ukrainian and Russian emerged as a shibboleth (a pronunciation test that reveals identity) in 2014, when Russian militants seized government buildings in eastern Ukraine. The militants pretended to be "local separatists," but inadvertently revealed their origins by using the term *porebrik* to refer to a curb, instead of the term *bordiur* used by local Russian speakers (Bilaniuk 2017; Shandra 2015). After 24 February 2022, the word *palianytsia* ("loaf of bread") became the new shibboleth, possibly returning to a shibboleth of the times of WWI and WWII (Mandziuk 2022). According to Russian phonology, /l/ and /ts/ in the given phonetic contexts are pronounced harder than the corresponding palatalized Ukrainian phonemes. Also, Russians would be inclined to pronounce /ny/ as [n'i] in this word. This would yield something like [paljan'itsa] in contrast to the Ukrainian [pal'anyts'a]. Other Ukrainian words with similar phonemes, such as *Ukrzaliznytsia* (the compound word for "Ukrainian railroad") and *polunytsia* ("strawberry"), also circulated in phrases meant to reveal undercover Russian operatives. *Palianytsia* was the most prominent of these shibboleths. Along with its phonology, the word carries with it the meaning of bread as the most basic nourishment in Ukraine, the product of its black earth soils. Young children played "checkpoint" by asking drivers of passing cars to



FIGURE 7.2 Artist Volodymyr Kazanevsky’s vision of how the word *palianytsia* (“loaf of bread”) can be a weapon, as it allows the detection of Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups.

Source: Mandziuk 2022.

stop and say *palianytsia* (as seen on social media videos), and it appeared on graffiti (pictures of which circulated on social media) and in various memes (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3).

The *palianytsia* memes are often tied into other memes, such as with the image of a postage stamp from 2013 featuring a Ukrainian *palianytsia* bread loaf, with the addition of the phrase *ne mozhem povtorit’* (“we can’t do it again”), which was posted on Facebook (see Figure 7.3). This is a play on the popular Russian phrase *mozhem povtorit’* (“we can do it again”), referring to the ability to defeat Nazi Germany, as the Soviets did in WWII, again if necessary.¹³ *Povtorit’* can mean either “do it again” or “say it again”; hence the inability of Russians to properly say *palianytsia* also works as an assertion of their inability to achieve military conquest. Another meme shows a graffiti mural of a smiling cartoon cat pointing a pistol, and under it the Ukrainians words *kazhy palianytsia* (“say ‘*palianytsia*’”). The antithetical combination of friendly cat and pistol refers to the popular term for Ukrainian soldiers, *kotyky* (“kittens”), who are cherished and lovingly welcomed, but fierce defenders against enemies at the



FIGURE 7.3 Ukrainian postage stamp from 2013 depicting a loaf of bread, with the addition of the phrase *ne mozhem povtorit'* (“we can’t do it again”). (Recreated by the author from an image reposted by Alexej Zaika on Facebook, 1 April 2022.)

same time. It was also common practice to superimpose emoji kitten faces over the faces of soldiers in photos on social media to preserve their anonymity.

One letter of the Ukrainian alphabet, *ï*, which is absent in Russian Cyrillic, also took on a special role on the cultural front. Even before the war it was celebrated as a symbol of Ukrainian uniqueness, honored by Ivan Malkovych (1997, 103) in his poem “*Svichechka bukvy ï*” (“The candle of the letter *ï*”). The letter appeared on T-shirts of the *Ne bud’ baiduzhym* (“Don’t be indifferent”) activist movement, and was erected as a 3.6-meter-tall sculpture next to the Shevchenko monument in the city Rivne on the occasion of Native Language Day (TSN 2013). After the 2022 invasion, the letter *ï* became a symbol of partisan resistance in occupied territories, appearing alongside yellow ribbons and posters declaring that cities were Ukrainian and that they awaited liberation by the Ukrainian armed forces. It was pasted and spray-painted on walls and chalked on the pavement in occupied cities of eastern Ukraine and Crimea (In Ukraine 2022; Rubryka 2022). The *Zhovta strichka* (“yellow ribbon”)



FIGURE 7.4 Ī against Z. Poster proclaiming “Ī always wins,” showing the letters falling like bombs over the Kremlin. The words Zlo (“Evil,” written with the Roman letter Z, emblem of the Russian forces) and *Smert’* (“Death”) appear lower right on the poster.

Source: <https://www.zhovtastrichka.org>.

anti-occupation resistance movement supported and collected documentation of such partisan activity on their eponymous Telegram channel and web page (see Figures 7.4 and 7.5).¹⁴

Lexemes that differ between Ukrainian and Russian in some cases took on an outside significance, and wordplay based on differences abounded in online memes. One of the most widespread examples was the Ukrainian word *bavovna* (“cotton”), used to refer to explosions in Russia or Russian-occupied territories starting in 2022. This usage was based on the fact that the Russian word for “cotton,” *khlópok*, has a near-homonym, *khlopók* (with the stress on the last syllable) which means “bang.” Russians narrating videos about explosions seen and heard in Russia or occupied territories used the term *khlopók* (“bang”), likely because calling the occurrence an explosion could risk sounding like they were criticizing the government for negligence and inability to protect (Shevchenko 2022). In response, Ukrainians started referring to explosions in Russia and Russian-held territories as *bavovna* (“cotton”). This generated visual memes as well, in which the billowing clouds of smoke from explosions



FIGURE 7.5 Letter *ï* flyer posted in the Russian-occupied city of Heniches’k (Rubryka 2022).

were replaced by cotton bolls, recreating visually the homonymy between the Russian words for “bang” and “cotton” (Vidomenko 2022). The *bavovna* meme required knowledge of Ukrainian as well as Russian, and as an inside joke, it created a sense of solidarity among Ukrainians. Referring to explosions on the Russian side as “cotton” made light of them, as they could hardly compare to the extensive destruction of Ukrainian cities, towns, and villages inflicted by Russian bombings.

The differences between Ukrainian and Russian languages were also highlighted in mistranslations in Russian media reports claiming to represent what was happening in Ukraine. For example, DonPres, a news outlet of the occupying government in the Donbas region, created a report supposedly showing that children in Ukrainian schools were being instructed to denounce their family members (Krechetova 2022a). The article showed a picture of a bulletin board in a schoolroom, in bright colors and decorated with autumn leaf shapes, with a notice instructing children to tell their teacher if they have family members in Russia, if their parents speak Russian at home or watch Russian television, or if they say bad things about Zelenskyy. However, the heading on the notice board read, *Rozpovi vchytel’ke*, where both words are ungrammatical. In Ukrainian, the correct phrase would be *Rozkazhy vchytel’tsi* (“Tell the teacher”).

The ungrammatical wording consisted of an incorrect imperative for the verb *rozpovisty* (“to tell”) and a wrong case ending on *vchytel’ka* (“teacher”), one modeled on the dative form of “teacher” in Russian (*uchitel’niste*). The inability of Russian propagandists to manage the most basic Ukrainian grammar in their pseudo-reports brought a gleeful viral response from Ukrainians. The Ukrainian National Guard posted pictures of schoolchildren with servicemen, using the ungrammatical formulation *rozpovi vchytel’ke* to instruct children that they should “tell the teacher that we will be victorious.” The Ukrainian Postal Service, various banks, telecommunication providers, and other businesses also used the phrase to promote their products and services, some even using the poster design with autumn leaves from the DonPres news article. The Press Secretary of the President of Ukraine joined the virtual flashmob as well (Krechetova 2022a). It is not clear where the erroneous translation originated, since even Google Translate would provide the correct translation from Russian to Ukrainian.

Another Russian tactic to undermine Ukraine’s efforts to survive the war was the #LightOnZelenskyyOff online flashmob. In response to the mass bombings of Ukrainian power stations in the fall and winter of 2022, the Ukrainian government requested that people economize electricity usage, especially at peak times, until the compromised power grids were repaired. The first Twitter post with the #LightOnZelenskyyOff hashtag appeared in late October 2022, from accounts that had almost no followers. The National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine determined that the spread of posts was mostly done by automated bots (Krechetova 2022b). The posts usually showed a hand turning on a light switch and expressed dissatisfaction with Ukraine’s politics, with statements like “my comfort is more valuable than the president’s ambitions.” Russian news media picked up the story to spread the idea of a Ukrainian populace that was not willing to make sacrifices to oppose Russia. However, the trend backfired, as Ukrainians saw through the Russian tactics and made fun of them. Some posted ironic messages featuring funny mistranslations of Russian words into Ukrainian, alluding to the work of bots, making the most of the nonsensical possibilities afforded by the difference between the two languages. A common phrase in this trend was the Ukrainian *nemaie sechi terpity tsi pekel’ni boroshna*, which literally translates to “there is no urine to suffer these hellish flours” (Krechetova 2022b). This is a willful mistranslation of the Russian phrase *net mochi terpet’ eti adskie muki* (“there is no strength to suffer these hellish torments”). The Russian words for “strength” (*moch*) and “urine” (*mocha*) are written identically in their genitive form (*mochi*), making possible the mistranslation to Ukrainian *sechi* (the genitive form of “urine”). The Russian word *muka*, which can mean both “flour” and “torment” (depending on stress, but written identically), was rendered as the uniquely Ukrainian word for flour, *boroshno*.

Defiance, courage, and resilience in the face of war

As Ukrainians asserted their existence and uniqueness, they also rejected Russian expectations that they were weak and would not defy Russia, as was evident in many of the memes already discussed. Perhaps the most famous meme of defiance originated on 24 February 2022, the first day of Russia's full-scale onslaught, when Ukrainians rejected a Russian warship's order to surrender with the phrase *ruskii voennyi korabl', idi nakhui* (see Goodman chapter in this volume for more on the global impact of this phrase). The Russian-language phrase, which literally translates to "Russian warship, go onto a dick" but glosses better as "Russian warship, go fuck yourself," was spoken by a Ukrainian serviceman at a small Black Sea military outpost on Snake Island in response to a radioed message from the Russian warship *Moskva*. The recorded exchange went as follows, translated from the original Russian (Abramovich 2022):

Russian warship: Snake Island, I, Russian warship, repeat the offer: put down your arms and surrender, or you will be bombed. Have you understood me? Do you copy?

Ukrainian 1: That's it, then. Or, do we need to fuck them back off?

Ukrainian 2: Might as well.

Ukrainian 1: Russian warship, go fuck yourself.

This exchange achieved legendary status, as it demonstrated the stalwart defiance of Ukrainians in the face of a much greater military force. The vulgar words, although inadmissible in normal polite conversation, were seen as a fitting response to the abominations of invasion, torture, death, and destruction being carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine. Just as in 2014 during the Revolution of Dignity, extreme conditions made profanity allowable in broader public use and even brought it into official state spheres (Bilaniuk 2017, 352–354; Dickinson 2022). The phrase *ruskii voennyi korabl', idi nakhui* spread like wildfire on social media, and appeared on billboards and store signs across Ukraine, on T-shirts and stickers, and in protest signs around the world. When the State Agency of Automobile Roads of Ukraine urged people to remove road signs that could help the invading enemy find their way, one group posted an image of a replacement "universal road sign" that indicated three directions for the invaders: *NA KHUI, ZNOV NA KHUI, DO ROSIĬ NA KHUI* (literally "onto a dick, again onto a dick, all the way to Russia onto a dick," which essentially translates to sending someone to fuck off no matter where they go) (Ukravtodor 2022). Such road signs were indeed erected in some regions, and later, once taken down, they were auctioned to raise funds for the Ukrainian Armed Forces (Hal 2022). The phrase appeared both in Russian orthography as *ruskii voennyi korabl', idi nakhui*,



FIGURE 7.6 Roadside billboard in the city of Ternopil stating, “Russian warship, go fuck yourself” (in Russian but using Ukrainian orthography), with the word *idi* (go) stylized to look like a warship head-on, and to evoke the Ukrainian state emblem. Photo by Mykola Vasylechko.

and in Ukrainian orthography rendering the Russian pronunciation phonetically, *ruskii vaiennyi karabl'*, *idi nakhui*, which served to make the Russian phrasing seem more comical. The phrase was even artistically morphed into the *tryzub* (“trident”), the state emblem of Ukraine, further emphasizing the defiance of Russia inherent in Ukrainian statehood (see Figure 7.6).

The vulgarity received further official recognition when the Ukrainian Postal Service announced a competition to design a stamp commemorating the Snake Island servicemen’s defiance. The winning design pictured a soldier standing on a shore with his middle finger raised to a warship in the background. After Ukrainian missiles sank the Russian warship *Moskva* on 14 March 2022, the Ukrainian Postal Service issued a revised set of stamps, with the added label “Done” in English on some stamps and with the warship no longer visible on others. While the stamps clearly featured the non-verbal vulgarity of the soldier raising his middle finger, the printed text elided vulgar words with ellipses



FIGURE 7.7 “Russian warship ... DONE!” postage stamp.

Source: Ukrainian Postal Service.

(Figure 7.7). In a similar vein, when President Zelenskyy invoked the phrase in some of his video addresses, he used euphemistic formulations, saying, “where the enemy warship is heading and will always head” or in the direction that “follows the Russian warship” (Zelenskyy 2022a, 2022b). Thus, authorities showed solidarity with the courage and defiance of the people, participating in the transgressive expression while simultaneously demonstrating some propriety and restraint.

In addition to the tank-stealing tractor drivers, many other memes also celebrated and honored the courage and resilience of ordinary people. On the first day of the full-scale invasion, a woman in Heniches’k in the Kherson region was filmed confronting invading Russian soldiers, excoriating them for invading her land, cursing them, and giving them sunflower seeds to put in their pockets so that “sunflowers grow here when you die” (Mufarech 2022). This video went

viral, showcasing the courage and defiance of an ordinary unarmed woman facing armed Russian soldiers. She spoke Russian as she defended her Ukrainian land (rejecting the idea that Russian speakers would want Russian rule), and invoked the power of sunflowers as a symbol of Ukraine, which resonated both in the country and globally. Her face was not visible from the filming vantage point, and her name was not publicized, adding to the sense that she represented any Ukrainian woman.

Some of the stories did identify their heroes, as with 83-year-old Vira Pylypivna who baked easter breads in a brick oven amidst the ruins of her summer kitchen in the village of Horen'ka in Kyiv oblast. Her daughter felt compelled to share photographs of her mother doing this, and they went viral. The image of a *babusia* (grandmother) continuing to use her brick oven when the rest of the house was in ruins exemplified the indomitable spirit of Ukrainians, unwilling to give up even in the harshest conditions. She did have to repair the partly destroyed oven first, but as there was no gas service yet in her heavily bombed village, it was the only option for homemade Easter bread. Not only that but also the brick oven is the heart of Ukrainian food traditions. Vira Pylypivna then shared the breads with neighbors and workers who were repairing the damaged utilities and spoke of how the hardships brought people together (Khotsianivs'ka 2022).

Not only ordinary Ukrainian people but also everyday objects took on symbolic power as exemplars of perseverance. As Sopova (2022) writes in her essay on the role of objects in resistance and mourning during the war, material objects are “part of us, they shape us, they carry our memories, they are affectively charged.” A prominent example is the kitchen cabinet in Borodianka, a suburb of Kyiv. Miraculously, after intense bombing, a cabinet remained intact, attached to an exposed wall of a ruined building several stories up, with its dishes still in place. On top of this cabinet was a ceramic pitcher shaped like a rooster, an example of the folk art of the region. Memes abounded celebrating the indomitability of the cabinet and the rooster, identifying with them and taking inspiration from them, with captions such as “all of us are a bit like this cabinet” or “this rooster is now my idol” (Suspil'ne 2022; see Figure 7.8). Another meme, showing a cartoon cat holding the rooster pitcher, proclaimed “Ukrainian culture is unshakeable!”¹⁵

Ukrainians on social media showed courage, composure, and even humor in facing the dangers that invaded their lives, such as the ordinance that became commonplace across Ukrainian spaces. One meme showed a dachshund urinating on an unexploded bomb sticking out of the sidewalk, captioned “an ordinary dog in a Ukrainian city.” A video that circulated on Telegram showed a man shaving his face in his bathroom while behind him loomed an enormous unexploded bomb, its point of entry visible in the ceiling above him. Other posts showed bomb casings converted into a barbecue grill or a bench for children. Ukrainian actor Maksym Burlaka took things a performative step further on International Yoga Day (21 June), posing in a headstand next to an unexploded



FIGURE 7.8 Folk art rooster pitcher perched atop a kitchen cabinet on a wall of a bombed building in Borodianka, Kyiv oblast. Photo by Yelyzaveta Servatynska, taken on 6 April 2022, after the city was de-occupied (Suspil'ne 2022).

bomb in Kharkiv. His goal was to draw the world's attention to the reality that Ukrainian civilians face, especially in eastern Ukraine, and also to remind Ukrainians that it is important to take care of their mental and physical condition at all times. (Burlaka 2022a; see Figure 7.9). Burlaka also created a video titled *Ioha za syhnalom tryvoha* (“Alarm yoga”), in which he instructs how to perform a series of yoga poses to channel the anxiety brought on by the war into positive benefits for one's body and spirit (2022b). He instructs that “it is very important to inhale deeply the scent of freedom, which the Russian government wants to take away from us.” He combines yoga instructions with explanations of their symbolism, which he associates with the war. These include a pose expressing gratitude for Ukraine's defenders, poses portraying how the Russian army thought Ukrainians would meet them, how Russians greet their president, how Russian oligarchs encounter sanctions, and a pose protecting from bombing danger. Then Burlaka presents a series of poses done by two people that he calls *ruskii korabl'* (Russian ship). In the end, this series of poses is shown to spell out the word *nakhui* (“onto a dick”), which Burlaka explains is where the Russian warship that told Ukrainian border guards on Snake Island to surrender should go. The soothing deadpan delivery combines comedy and seriousness, ending with the assertion that “everything will be well.”

Such photos and videos were acts of defiance, showing that even in conditions of extreme danger, Ukrainians would persist with conviction. While many people were dying from such bombs, these memes asserted that Ukrainians



FIGURE 7.9 Maksym Burlaka in a yoga pose in central Kharkiv. Photograph by Stanislav Ostrous.

Source: Burlaka 2022.

would not live in fear. The most extreme threat, that of Russia possibly using nuclear bombs, became acute in media discourses in September 2022. Once again, the Ukrainian social media response showed humor and defiance, with a plan to meet for an orgy on one of the hills of Kyiv, Shchekavytsia, if indeed a nuclear strike was imminent. This idea went viral, with similar plans emerging in other cities, generating countless memes, showing that even the threat of nuclear annihilation would not break Ukrainians.

Not all of the memes of defiance were humorous, as embodied poignantly in the case of a Ukrainian soldier, later identified as Oleksandr Matsievskiy, who was executed on 30 December 2022 after being taken captive. A video showed the unarmed, tired soldier holding a cigarette, saying *Slava Ukraini* (“Glory to Ukraine,” an assertion of resistance and sovereignty that dates back to the early twentieth century), and then being shot multiple times. The killing of an unarmed captive is a war crime, adding to the already long list of documented atrocities committed by the Russian army. What stood out in this case was that, even when surrounded by the enemy, the soldier was undaunted, and “*navit’ dyvlyachys’ v oblychchia smerti, prodemonstruvav us’omu svitu, shcho take ukrains’kyi kharakter i nezlamnist’*” (“even looking death in the face, he showed the whole world what is Ukrainian character and indomitability”) (Vasyl Maliuk, quoted in BBC 2023). An explosion of images and text memes honoring Matsievskiy

followed (RBK-Ukraina 2023). While the usual response to *Slava Ukraïni* is *Heroiam slava* (“Glory to the heroes”), in recognition of Matsievskyi’s deed the individualized answering call *Heroiu slava* (“Glory to the hero”) was used. The tragic event gave new meaning to the *Slava Ukraïni—Heroiam slava* call-and-response, reinforcing the idea that Ukrainians were being killed because of their commitment to their country’s sovereignty. They would be defiant to the end, and unwilling to accept a subjugated role in relation to Russia.

Imagined community in the age of the internet

The explosion of memes in response to the Russian full-scale invasion served to unify Ukrainians as a nation at a time when they were displaced, dispersed, and threatened. Meme production can be viewed as an immune response to an invading entity (Russia), and it is through this response that the entity that is “Ukraine” was (re)constructed and solidified. Like never before, social media proved to be a significant front in the war, allowing anyone, not just well-connected officials and celebrities, to participate in cultural expression and resistance, creating new dimensions of “popular culture.” In the memes reviewed in this chapter, solidarity was manifested between the government and the people, and between people of different regions of Ukraine, old and young, speaking different languages and dialects, civilian and military. As hierarchies were leveled, at least temporarily, the national imagined community was reinvigorated and sustained even beyond geographic national boundaries. The memes discussed here are the tip of the iceberg of Ukrainian online cultural creativity in response to war, a window onto everyday resistance, and what it means to be Ukrainian.

Notes

- 1 Olha Balashova, online lecture on “Ukraine’s Wartime Art Archive,” University of Washington, 15 March 2023.
- 2 MOCA NGO (Museum of Contemporary Art NGO) was established in 2020 to advocate for the museification of contemporary art in Ukraine. <https://moca.org.ua/en/about-us/> (accessed 16 June 2023).
- 3 Facebook was singled out as the most important social medium by two prominent Ukrainian cultural figures, including writer Serhii Zhadan (personal communication, 14 March 2023) and art curator Olha Balashova (online lecture, 15 March 2023).
- 4 Accounts that I followed included performers who supported the “Ne Bud’ Baiduzhym” activist group, members of the *boiovyj surzhnyk* movement that began in 2014 (including Tatusia Bo, Ruslan Gorovyi, Liudmyla Gorova, Olha Dubchak, and Yevhen Manzhenko), and internet personalities/channels Fashyk Donetskyi, Anatoli Shtefanovych Shtirlitz, Operatyvnyi ZSU, Khuyevyi Kharkov, Bozhe iake konchene, Persha pryvatna memarnia, and Derzhavne biuro memiv. I also follow Telegram channel Vatnoie Boloto, which is entirely in Russian and often clearly directed at Russians, featuring material critical of the invasion and Russian politics.
- 5 Dakha Brakha press materials, cited in Sonevsky 2019, 140.

- 6 Marko Halanevych, quoted in press materials cited in Sonevtsky 2019, 140–141. Dakha Brakha has voiced and displayed anti-war messages since 2014, and in 2022 the theme of war became more centrally incorporated into both aural and visual aspects of their performances.
- 7 Probass Hardi, “Good Evening (Where Are You From?),” YouTube video, uploaded 28 October 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvgNgTPTkSo>.
- 8 Starting in August 2022, I noted that both Kim and Reznikov delivered some of their video reports in Ukrainian or at least partly in Ukrainian. This was likely in response to criticism in social media regarding their continued Russian language usage.
- 9 In second place was “Pes Patron” (the famous bomb-sniffing dog) with 182,236 votes, and third was “Putin, Moskva palaie, Haaha chekaie” (Putin, Moscow burns, the Hague awaits) with 88,035 votes (Man’ko 2022). A stamp honoring the Dog Patron was issued in September 2022.
- 10 JKLN, “Welcome to Ukraine,” YouTube video, uploaded 12 May 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujdTl9eIgPk&t=0s>. The original video has over 11 million views, with other versions also garnering over 1 million views each. The artist JKLN is Jacqueline (Jackie) Faraoui, a Ukrainian singer-songwriter and producer who was born in Kyiv and grew up in Athens, Greece (<https://www.muzitee.com/featured-artists/jackie-faraoui>).
- 11 Telekanal ATR, “Welcome to Ukraine, suka,” YouTube video, uploaded 7 March 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mszKy7CeOa8&t=2s>. This video has over 1 million views.
- 12 Kozak Music, “KARMV—WELCOME TO UKRAINE SUKA!/KOZAK MUSIC,” YouTube, uploaded 14 May 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrCCG7p5YKU>. This video has over 245,000 views.
- 13 For an examination of the origins of the Russian meme-phrase “*mozhem povtorit*,” see Efimov (2022).
- 14 Yellow Ribbon webpage: <https://www.zhovtastrichka.org> (accessed 16 June 2023).
- 15 See Sopova (2022) for different angles of analysis of the kitchen cabinet meme.

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8

“RUSSIAN WARSHIP, GO F*CK YOURSELF”

Circulating social media discourses in the Russia–Ukraine War

Bridget Goodman

This year can be called a year of losses for Ukraine, for the whole of Europe, and the whole world. But it’s wrong. We shouldn’t say that . . . We haven’t lost anything. It was taken from us. Ukraine did not lose its sons and daughters—they were taken away by murderers. Ukrainians did not lose their homes—they were destroyed by terrorists. We did not lose our lands—they were occupied by invaders. The world did not lose peace—Russia destroyed it.

—*New Year greetings of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 31 December 2022*

The title and transcript of this speech were posted on the official website of the President of Ukraine in English, presumably translated from Ukrainian; I found the speech in this form on Twitter because it was shared by “Cap’n” (@Janet04745625) on 1 January 2023. The speech continues with a detailed portrayal of the forms and causes of dispossession in Ukraine that have occurred over the 311 days of the war in 2022 and outlines the strength of the Ukrainian response and the global outpouring of support.

Unfortunately, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is not unprecedented, but there is a sense of unprecedented awareness and support—emotionally and financially—for Ukraine in this phase of the war. This awareness and support are reflected in the volume of posts about the war from various perspectives on social media platforms. This chapter presents a sample of posts and reactions on social media to the events of the 2022 phase of the Ukraine–Russia war to shed light on the extent to which Ukrainians and the Ukrainian diaspora, rather than resigning themselves to being a part of Russia as the Russian government expected, have become ever more assertive in claiming a sense of being

Ukrainian. In this new era, being “Ukrainian” is symbolized by both Ukrainians and world observers as being heroic, brave, and resistant to the terrorist state of Russia and its President, Vladimir Putin. I will show through the presentation of these artifacts that, from national leaders and soldiers to individuals at home and abroad, the positive images of Ukraine and the Ukrainian government are persistent despite the ample evidence of loss, destruction, and dispossession this war has generated.

Methodology and positionality

Digital artifacts were collected from three social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram.¹ As a middle-aged Generation X American, I became an active member of Facebook in 2007 and joined Twitter in 2011. As a former English teacher in Kharkiv and Khmel’nyts’kyi (2001–2003) and an anthropology of language and education researcher in the city now known as Dnipro (2010–2011), I have friended multiple people on Facebook and followed accounts on Twitter related to Ukrainians in Ukraine, the Ukrainian diaspora in North America, and researchers and educators who have previously lived in Ukraine. These friends and accounts frequently share posts from Ukrainian social groups and news outlets. Telegram is a site I am less active on, but one that I have learned from my students in Kazakhstan is frequently used in Eurasian countries.

My analysis focuses on these platforms because they, plus Facebook Messenger, have been an especially important link connecting me to friends who remain in Ukraine, and, in one case, they helped me facilitate the departure and arrival of one acquaintance from Ukraine to Canada. In the early days of the war, I recall checking the Facebook Messenger status of a former student still in Kharkiv. If it showed she was active with a green light or that she had accessed the app in the past 12 hours, I could be sure she was still alive. She relocated with her family to L’viv in March 2022. Each time a bomb goes off in Dnipro or Khmel’nyts’kyi or L’viv, I write to friends in those cities on Messenger to make sure they and their loved ones are still okay.

Data were collected from individual and group posts that appear in English, Russian, Ukrainian, or a combination of these. Individual posters include current president Volodymyr Zelenskyy,² former President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, newspapers *Ukrainska Pravda* and *The New Voice of Ukraine*, Kyiv *Independent* newspaper reporter Illia Ponomarenko, influencer Xena (@xenasolo, 36,000 followers), American journalist Terrell Jermaine Starr (@terrelljstarr), American celebrities such as Bette Midler and Steven King, and personal Ukrainian contacts. Group posters include In Ukraine, Ukrainian Memes Forces, and regional organizations, such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Telegram data were collected from two news sites, UkraineNow and Ukraine24, with a focus on visuals.

Data were archived by saving screenshots or links between 1 March 2022 and 7 December 2022, with an emphasis on key strategic points in time or places in the war: (1) the defense of Snake Island; (2) the discovery of the massacre at Bucha; (3) the liberation of Kherson; and (4) the blackouts and limited gas supplies affecting heat in November 2022. In addition, secondary searches were conducted for additional materials on key words in posts and in comments on some original posts to enhance interpretation.

Artifacts could be textual only (i.e., tweets or Facebook posts), visuals (i.e., photos, illustrations, selfies, or memes with or without language), or moving visuals (gifs or videos) (Hand 2016). I broke down visuals into (1) still or moving visuals and (2) hybrids, which are visuals that may be still or moving and presented with commentary contextualizing the shared image. Following Altheide and Schneider (2013), I conducted analyses of both “manifest” and “latent” content, that is, the surface-level meaning and the apparent meaning in a particular time–space context (Banks 2018, 14). To check my interpretation of images, I relied on comments on the original posts in the original media, and consultations with other scholars in Ukraine and beyond, including a workshop with several scholars in this volume.

Discourses

I present four discursive themes on the Russia–Ukraine war found on social media in 2022. The first two themes focus on heroism at national and individual levels. The third theme considers regional and individual dispossession, while the fourth theme considers the hope of repossessing people and places.

Hero versus villain

Posts in the early days of the war focused on President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as embodying grit and heroism. One image of Zelenskyy portrays him as a superhero, “Captain Ukraine,” by depicting Captain America’s body with Zelenskyy’s head on it (Selada de Fruta 2022).³ The Captain Ukraine image was reposted on Facebook, along with the phrase “The fight is here. I need ammunition, not a ride,” by two of my Facebook friends who are originally from Ukraine and Georgia but were working in a university in Hong Kong when the war began. This phrase is attributed to Zelenskyy and represents his refusal to flee the country in favor of staying and fighting Russia with international support. Although Zelenskyy’s office has never confirmed he made this statement (Kessler 2022), it has been reported in the Associated Press, the *Times of Israel*, *CNN*, *The Daily Beast*, and multiple other US news sources. It became one of the top quotes of 2022. This flippant use of humor to respond to the US President’s offer to evacuate him to safety during a dire wartime crisis contributed from the beginning to

Things on Earth you can see from space:



The Great Pyramids of Giza



The Amazon River



The Grand Canyon



The balls of Volodymyr Zelenskyy

FIGURE 8.1 Meme: “Things You Can See from Space.” Screenshot by the author of Twitter feed.

the perception of Zelenskyy as a strong, fearless leader. Multiple memes and Twitter texts refer to Zelenskyy’s balls to illustrate his fortitude, with the assertion that his balls can now be seen from outer space. Figure 8.1 shows an example of this meme posted on Twitter by Bette Midler, an American entertainer whose career and fame span over 50 years and whose tweets over the years have shown her to be a staunch anti-Trump liberal Democrat.

This portrayal of Zelenskyy contrasts sharply with how Putin’s leadership style is presented on social media. Visual side-by-side comparisons make the choice of resistance to Russian aggression that much easier for all to make, as seen in a split-screen image of the two leaders with the headline “Ukrainian vs. Russian leadership” (Rudkevich 2022). On the left, Zelenskyy sits in fatigues flanked by soldiers on both sides as they drink from plastic cups at a table laid with sausage, apples, and cookies—an everyday Ukrainian meal rather than a presidential banquet. On the right, Putin sits at the head of a long table in a suit with three advisors sitting far more than the COVID-precautionary six feet away at the other end. The post was retweeted 33,000 times and liked 209,700 times. An additional 2,241 people quote tweeted (retweeted with commentary). Some quote tweets merely say, “the picture says it all,” implying that it goes without

saying that the Ukrainian leadership is the winning side. Zycr9 (2022) was one of the few posters to comment on the comparison, explaining the importance of trading suits for fatigues: “President Zelensky is working ‘with’ soldiers for the country & obviously they share a great rapport. So much they will literally put their lives at risk.”

Regarding the image of Putin, other commenters asked, jokingly, why Putin has such a long table—is he trying to avoid COVID? Is he paranoid about getting stabbed by one of his advisors? Polterghast (2022) wrote, in his quote tweet, “that table is so comedically oversized is he trying to look like a cartoon villain bro,” followed by a tears emoji implying that the author is laughing so hard they are crying at the contrast between the villain Putin and the hero Zelenskyy. In a less “comical” view, the *Kyiv Post* (2022) shared an editorial cartoon that rendered the image of Putin at the table as a drawing, but with the table in the shape of a coffin with a cross on it—images that can be interpreted to signify Putin as a murderer and head of a terrorist state (Digital Nomad 2022) or as presiding over his own funeral (Kozłowski 2022).

Other posts position both Russian leadership and its followers on the losing side of the war. A repeated trope was modifying images of road and street signs to indicate that Russian soldiers were on the path to death. On Facebook, for example, Maryna Melnyk for *Ukrains'ki Posiden'ky!* (Ukrainian Gatherings!) wrote in Ukrainian that there were “new road signs in Ukraine!” The post includes a photo that shows blue and white signs offering directions to *HROBY* (coffins), *KREMATORII* (crematoriums), and *MISHKY* (body bags) (see Figure 8.2).

A similar road sign appears in a “revised” form of the famous painting *Kateryna*. The maiden is holding up her middle fingers while the bomb-sniffing dog Patron looks on. The road sign offers three directions: *NA KHUI* (GO F*CK YOURSELF), *ZNOV NA KHUI* (AGAIN GO F*CK YOURSELF), or *DO ROSII NA KHUI* (GO TO RUSSIA AND F*CK YOURSELF).

The theme of Russian soldiers on a path to death continued nine months later when Russia mobilized additional troops. Ukrainian Memes Forces (2022b) posted on Facebook a meme of a dog with the Russian flag on its head being told on its 18th birthday in English, “You’ve been drafted and are going to Donbas. You are lucky to die for Putin’s legacy!” In March, Vera Partem, a Ukrainian-American friend on Facebook, reposted from Ukrainian blogger Sergey Naumovich a billboard from Odesa that says in Ukrainian, “Hot tour: see Ukraine and die! Cocktails included.” While it looks like something that could have been improvised, this billboard is one of hundreds of anti-war posters placed on highways in the Odesa region, according to the Official Site of the City of Odesa (2022). The sign is a trope of a travel ad for a vacation package that, in this case, includes Molotov cocktails (homemade bombs), which have been renamed in Ukraine “Bandera smoothies.”

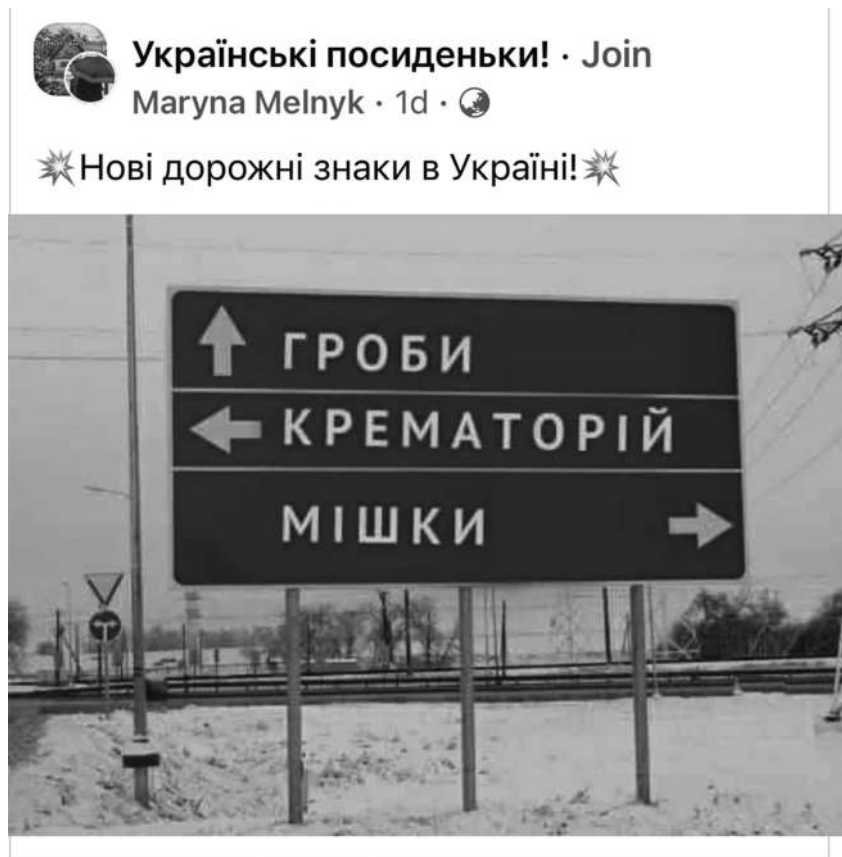


FIGURE 8.2 “New Road Signs in Ukraine!” Screenshot by the author of Facebook news feed.

Military and civilian heroism in Ukraine

I want to say to all of you: Ukrainians, you are incredible! See what we have done and what we are doing! How our soldiers have been smashing this “second army of the world” since the first days. How our people stopped their equipment and infantry columns. How an old man used his hands to stop a tank. How a woman knocked down a drone with a jar of tomatoes.

—*New Year greetings of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 31 December 2022*

On the first day of the war, a Russian naval ship approached Ukraine’s Snake Island, 30 miles off the southern coast of Ukraine, and ordered the soldiers on the island to surrender. In the transcript of the conversation that was later released to the public, the response from a Ukrainian soldier was *Russkii voennyi korabl’, idi nakhui* (“Russian Warship, Go Fuck Yourself”). Since all contact was lost after that message, it was initially reported in multiple local and international news outlets that all 13 soldiers on the island had been killed and that Zelenskyy would

name them as Heroes of Ukraine posthumously (e.g., Radio Free Europe 2022). Later it became clear they had been captured by the Russian ship and were eventually released in a prisoner exchange (Verkhovna Rada 2022). The phrase and the moment became a widespread symbol of the bravery of the Ukrainian military in standing up to Russia from the first attack. The moment circulated far beyond Ukraine, but only within Ukraine was it depicted on a Ukrainian stamp with a soldier holding up a middle finger to recall the phrase (see Figure 8.3).

As of January 2023, the official version on the Ukrainian Post website goes one step further, showing the same soldier holding the middle finger up but with alternating images of a warship in some stamps and an empty seascape in others.⁴ The byline is *Russkii voennyi korabl' ... Vs'o* (“Russian Warship ... Done!”). While the first three Russian words echo those of the Ukrainian soldier who addressed the Russian warship in Russian, the final word “Done!” alludes to the Ukrainian Army’s sinking of the Russian warship (Harding 2022). However, the word *vs'o* is neither Russian nor Ukrainian. It is a mixed sociolect of Russian and Ukrainian. Given this is an official government document, the mixed word choice is purposeful and definitely sarcastic.



FIGURE 8.3 Ukrainian Soldier and Russian Warship Stamp Image. Screenshot by the author of Facebook news feed.

Another Ukrainian military action against Russia celebrated on Facebook was the rapid liberation of multiple towns and villages and the destruction of two key logistical and symbolic bridges between Ukraine and Russia. The liberation was marked by one academic on Facebook as “the greatest counteroffensive since WWII” (Sheremeta 2022). A more humorous representation, shared on Facebook by a former student of mine from Kharkiv and now living in Canada, portrayed in Ukrainian a “Daily Military Schedule” signed by President Zelenskyy and Ukrainian Minister of Defense Reznikov with timelines for liberating multiple cities in between meals and celebratory concerts (see Figure 8.4).

As important as the literal and figurative representations on social media of the strength of the Ukrainian military are for maintaining Ukrainians’ morale, there are similar discourses and portrayals of civilians showing bravery in their response to the war. As Zelenskyy told his people in Ukrainian, “each of us is a warrior” (Office of the President of Ukraine 2022a). Around this same time, reports appear of civilians performing military actions including removing mines (The New Voice of Ukraine 2022), throwing a jar of tomatoes to bring down a Russian drone, and stealing a Russian tank with a tractor.⁵ This last feat is also now on Ukrainian stamps⁶ (see Bilaniuk in this volume).



FIGURE 8.4 “Daily Military Schedule.” Screenshot by the author of Facebook news feed.

Other forms of civilian bravery shared on social media are expressions of patriotism and continuing everyday activities that are presented as evidence of a strong Ukrainian spirit. Journalist Kristina Berdysnykh (2022) posted a photo and caption of someone with a trumpet playing the “Ukrainian national anthem in the metro station (bomb shelter)”; this post was retweeted one day later by journalist Olga Tokariuk (2022) with the headline, “these people are invincible” followed by emojis of the Ukrainian flag and a heart afire. In December, a Ukrainian friend in Canada reposted on Facebook a TikTok video by rehabdp (2022), which showed young girls doing ballet exercises during an air raid alert. The captions in Ukrainian read “Unbreakable. Explosions in Dnipro, Exercises in the bomb shelter,” as the Cranberries’ song “Zombie” plays over.

In fact, the terms *neperemozhni* (“invincible”) and *nezlamni* (“invincible” or “unbreakable,” depending on the translation into English on social media) appear in multiple posts across multiple social media platforms to refer to the status and actions of Ukrainians. In hybrid form, the Khmel’nyts’kyi Palace of Creative Arts of Children and Youth (2022) in Ukraine posted an image of the Ukrainian trident written in footprints in the snow with the headline in Ukrainian: “*My—natsiia! I my—NEPEREMOZHNI!*” (“We are the nation! And we are



FIGURE 8.5 Russia as a Nutcracker, Ukraine as an Unbroken Nut. Screenshot by the author of Facebook news feed.

INVINCIBLE!”). Visually, the Facebook user In Ukraine represented the concept of being unbreakable with a photo of a nutcracker (potentially a symbol of Russia, but a modern metal version rather than a wooden soldier) and a walnut labeled “Ukraine” in English. The nutcracker is shown broken while the nut remains intact (see Figure 8.5).

Dispossession

Hostomel. Bucha. Irpin. Borodianka. Kharkiv.

Mriya.

Kramatorsk Station. Toy.

Chernihiv.

Mariupol. Drama Theater. The word “Children” written.

Olenivka.

Odesa. Multi-story building. Girl. Three months old.

Vilniansk. Maternity hospital. Baby. Two days old.

Azovstal.

It’s impossible to forget. And it’s impossible to forgive. But it’s possible to win.

—*New Year greetings of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 31 December 2022*

While the artifacts from the previous two sections illustrate the national and individual sense of Ukrainian heroism, other posts acknowledge the victims of this war and the ways in which Ukraine is broken, albeit not defeated. Some of them refer to soldiers who have died in battle and their funeral arrangements (e.g., Crimean Banderian 2022), including artists and athletes who died as volunteer soldiers or civilians (e.g., Kyiv Post 2022, September 13). Many of these posts include hashtags or headlines with the individual mourning expression *vichna pam’iat’* (“eternal memory”) and/or patriotic mentions of “heroes.” The Ukrainian spirit during wartime is simultaneously celebrated in these posts in at least two ways. One is to celebrate Ukraine with two phrases that date back to World War II: *Slava Ukraini* (“Glory to Ukraine”), to which the reply is *Heroiam Slava* (“Glory to the heroes!”). Other posters decry and disparage Russia as the cause of these deaths, as Matviichuk (2022, 14 September) did in mourning soldiers lost as the result of “Russian occupiers.”

One pair of civilian images that has circulated repeatedly on Ukrainian Twitter and in Western media (e.g., John et al. 2022; Tahir 2022) is of one victim, Iryna Filkina, from the town of Bucha in the Kyiv region, where over 400 civilians were killed by Russian troops in March 2022. Their corpses were discovered in April 2022 (Pelley 2022). One photo shows her smiling in profile with her manicured and polished fingers resting on her chin, while the other photo

is of the same manicured hand lying lifeless in the street, covered in dirt and asphalt. When these images are shown side by side (Tahir 2022; Zabrisky 2022), they underscore the dispossession of life Ukrainians have suffered at the hands of Russian forces and demonstrate how social media can “prime us to react with outrage” (Goodman 2020, para. 4).

This “before and after” approach to understanding the destructiveness of the Russian military action (see Pavlenko, this volume) has also been applied in social media to cities and soldiers. Videos of cities, such as Mariupol, show what life and infrastructure were like before February 2022, compared with what has been and is being destroyed (e.g., In Ukraine 2022a). The approach has also been used when reporting about prisoners of war who have been freed, as evidence that Ukrainian soldiers have been “beaten, starved, and tortured in all ways imaginable” in Russia (Xena 2022). The hashtags in the main posts or responses suggest these posts are pleas for help to #StopRussia from further destroying Ukraine. They also constitute a mounting body of evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Paradoxically, the dispossession of infrastructure has inspired further Ukrainian resistance. Russia has attacked energy bases, leading the government to impose rolling blackouts on much of the country. President Zelenskyy responded to this threat by saying, “without gas or without you? Without you. Without light or without you? Without you” (Gerashchenko 2022). In other words, as Zelenskyy elaborated in Ukrainian, “Cold, starvation, darkness, and thirst are not as frightening and as deadly to us as your ‘friendship and fraternity’” (Zelenskiy/Official 2022). This discourse was repeated by numerous government officials. The British ambassador to Kyiv posted “without you” in Ukrainian with a photo of a flower and a flashlight (Dame Melinda Simmons 2022). A former member of the Ukrainian Parliament (Sotnyk 2022) and the head of the Center for Civil Liberties in Ukraine (Matviichuk 2022, 26 November) both shared an embellished satellite image of Ukraine in full darkness with a red border line between it and Russia and the words “without you!” in English in red. This image was captioned with similar, but not identical, texts explaining that true light in Ukraine is not about electricity but about caring for one another. After Ukraine regained control of Kherson from Russia, a resident, Andrii, was recorded by a reporter for Agence France-Presse in English with the following comment:

I am extremely happy that we are finally liberated, that we are finally free, because now we have no electricity in the city, no water, no central supply heating, no mobile connection, no Internet connection, but we have NO RUSSIANS. And I am extremely happy of that. We can survive anything. But we are free.

(Soldin 2022)

In this statement, the paradox becomes clear—although Ukrainians momentarily possess even fewer material resources than before the war or as part of an occupied Russian nation, they are happier. These are marked shifts from pre-war attitudes of cynicism toward political leaders and high aspirations to have infrastructure that matched international standards (Goodman 2013).

This shift in thinking within Ukraine became policy, action, and discourse when President Zelenskyy linked the Ukrainian state response to the “terrorist attack on our energy system” to Ukrainian invincibility. In November 2022, Zelenskyy said in a speech posted on Facebook in Ukrainian, “*iakshcho zнову vidbudut'sia masovani rosiis'ki udary*” (“if there will be massive Russian strikes again”) the country will open *Punkty Nazlamnosti* (“Centers of Invincibility”) across the country where citizens can find heat, electricity, internet, mobile phone charging stations, water, and a pharmacy—all free and open 24 hours (Office of the President of Ukraine 2022b). Zelenskyy referred in this message to the website *nezlamnist.gov.ua*, which uses that same Ukrainian word for “invincible”; as of April 2023, the centers identified on the website blanket the map of the country, except for the occupied territories (Luhansk, Donetsk, Crimea) and parts of southern and eastern Ukraine (e.g., Kherson, Mariupol).⁷ These points of invincibility were expanded further by Kazakhs in Ukraine who have built “Yurts of Invincibility” (traditional Kazakh nomadic tents) to show their support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people (5 Kanal 2023). Discursively, one Facebook poster illustrated her “‘point’ of invincibility in the soul” (“*Punkty*” *nazlamnosti v dushi*) with a drawing of a power strip with three devices connected: (1) *Nadiia na maibutne* (“Hope in the future”); (2) *Liubov do Ukraïny* (“Love of Ukraine”); and (3) *vira v ZSU* (“faith in the Ukrainian Armed Forces”) (Avtorhova 2022).

Repossession

The face of Kherson is cut by fragments of shells, but the main thing is that we welcome the New Year free and together under blue and yellow flags. And therefore, we will restore everything, rebuild everything. Just like Chernihiv and Zaporizhzhia, and Kramatorsk, and Bakhmut.

—*New Year greetings of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 31 December 2022*

It is difficult to end the analysis on a sad note, given the joyous displays on social media of *repossession*—Ukrainian individuals and military units taking back spaces that were previously occupied by Russian soldiers. In the case of the city of Kherson, one common trope was the use of the word “home”—for example, “welcome home” (U.S.—Ukraine Foundation 2022) or *Kherson vdoma* (“Kherson is home”) (Telegraf UA 2022)—with the understanding that Kherson had returned to Ukraine, its rightful “home.” Ukrainian-American Vera Partem’s

Facebook post on this theme consists of a picture of a soldier surrounded by a crowd of civilian men, women, and children. Over the photo is written in Ukrainian, “today every Ukrainian cries from happiness. Kherson is home.” Similar live videos and still shots of a soldier surrounded by civilian crowds and flags, with tears of joy, have been posted on multiple news and media outlets, such as the Ukraine NOW Telegram channel (Ukraine NOW 2022).

In the photo posted by Vera are three other symbols of Kherson’s liberation by the Ukrainian army. Two Ukrainian flags are seen, and one man holds a cardboard sign that reads in Ukrainian, “Kherson was waiting for the Armed Forces of Ukraine.” The message in the sign is punctuated by the image of a watermelon, as Kherson is “Ukraine’s ‘watermelon capital’” (Euromaidan Press 2022).

Another symbol of repossession is the Ukrainian flag and its colors. Two posts from September 2022 show individuals replacing the colors of the Russian flag (white, blue, and red) with the colors of the Ukrainian flag (blue and yellow). The Facebook user In Ukraine (2022b) described the activity of three men and two young girls in the photo as “giving a bus stop its true colors back.” UATV English (2022) showed a photo of a woman at the bottom of a ladder holding her thumb up. The poster identifies the woman as an “activist repainting the street sign into the colors of Ukrainian flag.”

Ukrainians are not only repossessing land, but they are also imagining a repossessed future. This is best reflected in the phrase that has widely circulated on all three platforms in English and Ukrainian, “Everything will be Ukraine” (*Vse bude Ukraïna*). The phrase is even the name of a Facebook page created in March 2022 (everythingwillbeukraine.org). This page and website are more than meme generators; they offer video testimonials of people in and from Ukraine about their reactions to the war. They also offer links to organizations where one can donate funds to support various needs of the war.

A more violent notion of an imagined future that is Ukrainian, not Russian, was captured by Ukrainian Memes Forces (2022a), which posted on Twitter another split hybrid image. The top image is of a wheat field and sky and the phrase in English “Ukraine before the war.” Underneath this is an image of a field of sunflowers and a sky with the phrase “Ukraine after the war.” The wheatfield and sky are known as the image of Ukraine on which the yellow and blue Ukrainian flag is based; sunflowers are also a symbol of Ukraine. However, the visual and text responses to the post indicate the interpretation goes back to the view of who will win the war (Ukraine) and who will lose. One response to Ukraine Memes Forces was to post an image of a Ukrainian woman pointing at a Russian soldier with the caption “Put the sunflower seeds in your pocket please” (Jones 2022). This is an allusion to a Ukrainian woman who told a Russian soldier to put sunflower seeds in his pockets so at least sunflowers will grow when he dies (*The Guardian* 2022). Another response to the post (Wilmoth 2022) made the connection between the woman in the video and the meme verbally, by replying, “Well fertilized fields.”

Conclusion: social media as a space for performing Ukrainianness

This is the year when Ukraine changed the world. And the world discovered Ukraine. We were told to surrender. We chose a counterattack! We were told to make concessions and compromises. We are joining the European Union and NATO.

The world heard Ukraine. European Parliament, Bundestag, the UK Parliament, Knesset, the US Congress.

The world felt Ukraine. Ukraine in the media. In the hearts of people. At the top of Google search.

The world saw Ukraine. On the main squares in Toronto, New York, London, Warsaw, Florence, Sydney, and other cities.

Ukrainians surprise. Ukrainians are applauded. Ukrainians inspire.

Is there anything that can scare us? No. Is there anyone who can stop us? No.

Because we are all together.

It is what we are fighting for. One for each other.

—*New Year greetings of President of Ukraine
Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 31 December 2022*

Researchers in the first phase of the war (2014–2021) found that posters on social media performed their understanding of Ukraine in multiple ways, including by declaring a threatened city or region “is Ukraine” (Boichak and Jackson 2020), by commemorating and mourning heroes who have died fighting for Ukraine (Kozachenko 2021), and by making “indirect” references to the Russian–Ukraine conflict (Kisliuk 2021). Social media has been used by citizens within Ukraine and beyond to promote both online and offline forms of engagement and activism (Boichak and Kumar 2021; Kozachenko 2021).

The data in this chapter demonstrate that many of these patterns continue in social media in the 2022 phase of the war. Individual posts asserting that “Kherson is Ukraine,” mourning military and civilian loss of life or celebrating strength, and using images of fields as allusions to the war are all examples of trends previously identified (Boichak and Jackson 2020; Kisliuk 2021; Kozachenko 2021). In 2022, as the war intensified and the need to stand against Russia intensified, social media went further by portraying ordinary citizens of Ukraine as heroes and Ukraine’s leaders as superheroes.

Digital artifacts illustrate the array of symbols that can be weaponized to convey a sense of patriotism and social solidarity in a time of war—not only a flag or an anthem but also the colors of the flag, the trident, a stamp, a flower, or a watermelon. In social media, in particular, it is not only the symbols themselves but also the positioning of these symbols and the metacommentary that imbues them with meaning as visceral symbols of national strength that are capable of

generating certain forms of behavior because they echo individual experiences, attitudes, and acts. In other words, it is not the anthem alone that is meaningful, but the sight and sound of the anthem being played in spaces challenged by the war (i.e., a metro station–turned bomb shelter and a darkened capital city square) along with a comment that understands these images as evidence of Ukraine’s invincibility. Similarly, the Ukrainian and Russian flags, when layered on other known images in popular culture, convey the relative positions of the two countries in the conflict, with Ukraine invariably portrayed in the winner’s position.

Social media and the relationships between the state and the people

Previous research has shown social media has been used by Ukrainian government entities to engage with the public and maintain political power, while simultaneously having that power shifted to other social media users who promote their own understandings of political situations, historical narratives, and identities (Lychkovska-Nebot 2018; Sadof 2017; Zakirov and Zakirova 2020). The alignment between President Zelenskyy’s daily and yearly speeches on multiple platforms and the discourses they inspire on social media raises the question of whether Zelenskyy is highly strategic and therefore highly successful in using social media to communicate his messages, or whether his communication is shaped by images on social media, or a cyclical combination. In his speeches and multiple seasons of the show *Servant of the People*, in which he portrayed a history teacher–turned President of Ukraine—a role that inspired people to vote him into office, Zelenskyy demonstrates that he is a gifted communicator in multiple languages and a student of history who is draws on examples of past heroes to frame his oration and inspire a nation and the world to support him. Unlike radio speeches or scripts, the power and potential danger of social media is that it allows for quick and widespread second or thirdhand information, such as presidential quotes and reports of soldiers’ deaths, that may not be true. Unlike newspapers, there is no official correction posted. Discourses continue to circulate and impact viewers regardless of how true they are.

The posts on social media reflect dimensions of the relationship between individuals and the Ukrainian state, and among individuals. Social media affords people a chance to reconstruct their relationship with the Ukrainian state according to the challenges faced. At the same time, posts showing how people support each other, for example, by creating private “centers of invincibility” and non-profit fundraising, suggest ongoing self-organization (see Channell-Justice, this volume). Posters can position themselves as heroes of Ukraine by sharing images of soldiers standing up to Russia or by identifying as state “forces” that use private images (memes), rather than guns, to fight this war and support each other in metaphorical and literal dark times through humor.

Analyzing identity through the lens of social media lends some credence to the view espoused by some anthropologists that a nation-state is an ideological construct, an imaginary sense of community. Posters can connect and even develop attachments to the Ukrainian nation-state even if they are not living in the Ukrainian territory, or have no Ukrainian heritage. These posts allow viewers to identify politically and show solidarity with the people of Ukraine. While the creators and circulators of discourses in social media, including those who might identify as transnational migrants, are adamant about the need to maintain physical boundaries between Ukraine and Russia, they use social media and the internet, two forces that transcend all boundaries, to do so. Most importantly, the memes and artifacts analyzed here, many of which are now known to the world over through postings and repostings, testify to the commitment of Ukrainian citizens to their own state's sovereignty and their willingness to sacrifice and band together as a society to ensure its invincibility.

Notes

- 1 Had I included Tiktok (Kisliuk 2021) or Instagram (Sadof 2017) directly for analysis, it would have yielded greater representation of youth voices and perspectives. In addition, my social media network is specific to me and may not reflect even other people of the same ethnic and educational background.
- 2 In this chapter, I use the English transliteration provided by the official website of the President of Ukraine (<https://www.president.gov.ua/en>), except when the source of a social media post uses an alternate spelling.
- 3 Following citation style guidelines, posts with original and citable links are given preference; posts that could not be traced are shared in the findings as mobile or desktop screenshots.
- 4 These stamps can be viewed on the website of the Ukrainian Postal Service: https://postmark.ukrposhta.ua/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=275 (accessed 22 June 2023).
- 5 Facebook reports from Ukraine suggest that this tank was stolen by Roma (*tsyhani*), and therefore it is not Ukrainian heroism but stereotypical ethnic behavior.
- 6 This stamp can be viewed on the website of the Ukrainian Postal Service: https://postmark.ukrposhta.ua/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=527 (accessed 22 June 2023).
- 7 A friend in Ukraine reports that these centers are in “standby mode,” as winter is over.

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9

RESPONSES TO DISPOSSESSION

Self-organization and the state

Emily Channell-Justice

You know, 2014 was a special year. It was such a surge in community mobilization. For the first time in my life, and I'm pretty old, I've lived in Ukraine, so I know that it wasn't really common nature for Ukrainians to mobilize and do some volunteering.

Iryna told me, animatedly, through the computer screen. "I think that everything that we had back then and everything we have now, it's all rooted in Maidan." I interviewed Iryna over Zoom in September 2021, while I was in Kyiv and she was in Kramatorsk, working for UN Women. Originally from Dnipro, Iryna spearheaded an aid group that responded to the massive numbers of people who were displaced from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions after hostilities began in 2014. She told me she started volunteering in the spring of 2014, because she began to see cars with license plates from Crimea and then from Donetsk and Luhansk in Dnipro. Ukraine's leaders were largely unprepared for the scale of displacement, so there was no clear system for internally displaced people (IDPs) to access government services. They didn't know if and when they could return home or what their homes might look like. They didn't know if their children could go to school in new cities or if they could find jobs. They also didn't know how they would be received in their new communities.

Iryna told me that the regional government helped her find an unused dormitory in Dnipro that she and other local volunteers could use. Its electricity and water were disconnected, and it was damp and covered in mold. She told me that she mobilized the community via social media, and over 100 people from around the city came to help clean the dormitory so that IDPs could use it as a temporary shelter. People brought wallpaper and glue so the building would

look like a livable space, and Iryna used the dormitory as a coordination center. People would come directly from the bus station to the center, and volunteers would register them with a 30-question survey to establish people's needs. At the coordination center, volunteers helped distribute humanitarian aid in addition to helping accommodate IDPs with rooms in the dormitory. "We had hundreds of volunteers coming and helping us," Iryna told me.

Some people would come for a couple of hours, some would come for a couple of days, some would come for a couple of weeks or months, but they were all Maidan protesters or people who supported the Maidan protests, in some way, even if it was only in their heart.

As I have argued elsewhere, the foundation of Ukraine's 2013–2014 protests, known as Euromaidan or simply Maidan, was a demonstration of self-organization (Channell-Justice 2022). Self-organization is the idea that if someone has the capacity to do something and that thing needs to be done, then the person should simply do it. There is no need to wait for someone else—a political figure or party, or an international organization—to meet one's needs if one can do it oneself. This widespread belief in self-organization and its effectiveness at all levels prompted people to continue to participate in politics following the end of these protests. This expanded to include forming new political parties and civil society organizations—actions that are easily identifiable as "activism"—but it also included community engagement and a willingness to volunteer among people who never identified as activists, even during and after the Euromaidan protests.

The concept of self-organization is widely used to point to instances of civic and non-state organizing throughout Ukraine's history. Late Soviet-era and early post-independence protests, including ecological protests responding to the Chernobyl disaster in the 1980s, the 1990 Revolution on Granite, the 2000–2001 Ukraine Without Kuchma movement, and even the 2004 Orange Revolution, are a key part of the tradition of political self-organization.¹ Elsewhere, I have traced the use of the term "self-organization" to Soviet-era development projects (Channell-Justice 2022, especially Chapter 2); others link the self-organization of these protests and the war response to the heritage of the Zaporizhzhian Sich, the Cossack proto-state that existed on modern Ukraine's territory from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Marynovych 2022). I differentiate self-organization from "civil society" because of the latter's institutionalization. Self-organized initiatives disappear when they are no longer necessary, making them ephemeral, flexible, and often more immediate and effective ways to meet people's needs.

Self-organization, as I demonstrate in this chapter, is extremely effective as an immediate response to a crisis when state and international organizations are unable to intervene. Self-organization quickly became the most effective

response to the large numbers of people who were forcibly displaced from the Crimean Peninsula (see Uehling, this volume) and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions following Russia's invasion in 2014. However, self-organization cannot take the place of services and benefits distributed by government institutions. The self-organization that responds to a crisis of displacement fills a gap created by state absence and, in so doing, criticizes the state's inability to meet people's needs or correctly distribute entitlements to people with specific needs. The limits of self-organization illuminate the dispossession of Ukrainian citizens created by state failures to meet people's needs.

In this chapter, I describe how volunteer groups navigated unprecedented challenges to help IDPs, and, using interviews with IDPs from 2014 to 2016, I explore how IDPs themselves interacted with volunteers, with residents of their new cities, and with state actors. I show how self-organization was most effective in responding to immediate needs, but when displacement became entrenched in Ukraine, self-organization could not solve long-term problems, such as accessible housing. The years-long absence of state services created a dual sense of dispossession among IDPs. First, their displaced status was a reminder of their lost homes, property, and loved ones, and second, the absence of the state made them feel like they were not considered full citizens of Ukraine. However, how citizens assess their expectations of the state's obligations changes over time; in 2014, self-organization was a response that critiqued the state's absence, while, in 2022, self-organization was perceived as an active kind of participation in citizenship that contributed to a much larger-scale fight for Ukraine's existence. In the chapter's conclusion, I connect the experiences of 2014–2021 with the massive, self-organized Ukrainian response in the form of civilian mobilization to Russia's full-scale invasion that began on 24 February 2022.

Despite recurring experiences of dispossession, in the response to displacement, we see Ukrainians relying on their own "vibrant re-creations" to respond to crises at various scales. Carolyn Nordstrom has observed that "in the midst of a violent breakdown of order ... *most* people [do] *not* respond with disorder and discord, but with vibrant ways of re-creation" (Nordstrom 1997, 213). She argues that circumstances of extreme violence urge people to recreate a viable society, one in which they want to live, unmaking the "power and possibility of violence" to "set the stage for peace" (ibid., 220). Nordstrom's conclusion that people who experience violent upheavals "[do] not need political institutions to forge community structure and keep order" (ibid., 220) resonates with the actions of Ukrainians in response to forced displacement and illustrates how self-organization is often a criticism of the status quo of political institutions. Ukrainians' response to Russia's invasion in 2014 and their response to the full-scale invasion of 2022 are both examples of "re-creation" that should encourage an exploration of the similarities of these two time periods, even if the scale of the Russian use of force was radically augmented in 2022.

Self-organization: ordinary citizens, the state, and mass mobilization

What I refer to as self-organization has been explored through the framework of other related terms since 2014: self-help, civilian engagement, volunteerism, and civil society are all connected to the changes in Ukrainian political participation since the 2013–2014 Euromaidan protests, driven by self-organization. Ordinary people came to Kyiv’s main square in late November 2013 to protest then-president Viktor Yanukovich’s decision not to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. When Yanukovich’s police forces began using violence against peaceful protesters, the mobilizations grew exponentially, and protesters occupied Kyiv’s Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) for several months. When violence came to a head in February 2014, over 100 protesters were killed, Yanukovich fled the country, and a temporary government was put in place until elections in May 2014. Throughout these months, the protests were driven by regular people. Political parties were largely confined to actions within official governing structures, such as the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament). The key role that ordinary citizens played in these protests has shifted Ukrainian citizens’ relationship with the actors and institutions that make up the state—they know that their actions can hold the state accountable (see also Goujon and Shukan 2015).

How did this new citizen–state relationship change when the protests ended? Later in 2014, war began in the Donbas, an eastern region of Ukraine, and many who volunteered in the protests earlier that year fought against Russian-backed separatists and Russian troops in volunteer battalions. Because these battalions, as well as the Ukrainian military, were poorly equipped, non-combatants organized to gather funds and equipment to meet their needs (Keudel 2020; Stepaniuk 2022). I consider this type of volunteer work self-organized because it meets a specific need at a specific time and there is no other actor (in particular, no state actor) able to meet this need instead. Describing the volunteer activities of women caring for wounded soldiers in Kharkiv, Ioulia Shukan refers to the management of the “practical and direct problems that are raised by the medical treatment of the wounded” (Shukan 2018, 135; translation by the author), calling the results of these actions “immediate” and “concrete” but also “limited to the domestic sphere” and, therefore, distant from the political, not intending to identify or correct the origins of the problems that create the need for volunteers.

Yet these types of activities have ramifications beyond simply meeting a need. In other words, self-organized activities may not be conceived of as political and their participants may not intend to make political changes, but self-organization creates new kinds of political possibilities. For instance, several researchers working with self-organized volunteer groups have shown that these groups are

dominated by women. Because of their essential role in self-organized groups and the effectiveness of these groups' response to the beginning of the war in 2014, women have been able to renegotiate gendered expectations (Jarymowycz 2020; Shukan 2018; Stepaniuk 2022).² This shift is often noted in reporting and analysis about the 2022 war effort in Ukraine: more women than ever are joining the Ukrainian Army and the Territorial Defense Forces, and women are essential participants in a variety of humanitarian efforts across the country (see O'Grady and Khudov 2022 and Specia and Ducke 2022 for a small sample of this coverage).

While many volunteers may see themselves as outside of politics, the expansion of non-government organizations and actors that meet specific needs—sometimes assessed collectively as “civil society”—has meant that these actors and groups have more power vis-à-vis the state (Keudel 2020; Krasynska and Martin 2016). Tania Bulakh has explored the “sovereignty gap” left by the inability of state actors to establish a functioning order in the “grey zone,” the area between Ukrainian government-held and temporarily occupied territories (TOTs) in Donbas (Bulakh 2018), arguing that this gap allows for non-state humanitarian actors to become responsible for Ukraine's own citizens. Self-organization and volunteer work also fill this gap, creating the space for criticism of the state. In the case of serving IDPs, these criticisms were especially acute (Uehling 2023). In the next section, I delve into how volunteers and people who worked for the international organizations that were helping IDPs criticized the state's inability to meet people's needs, at the same time as they praised the work of ordinary citizens who were essential in helping displaced people because they took on the tasks that should have been addressed by the state.

“Sovereignty as responsibility” and the absence of the Ukrainian state

“There was no preparedness, nobody was ready, nobody knew what to do,” said Iryna.

It was crazy. In June, we had the Minister of Social Policy herself coming to this dormitory. [The Minister] came, she was so angry, she spoke to several IDPs and one woman started crying [because of] this rudeness. And that was it, that was the cooperation with the national authorities.

Many people recognized that the Ukrainian government was not at all prepared for the mass displacement of people from the Donetsk and Luhans'k regions when the war began. The IDPs, Iryna told me, were arriving in Dnipro, the nearest large city, following heavy shelling in eastern Ukraine.³ “They came really, really traumatized, they came with children, they basically came with nothing, just a bag or two, some of their personal belongings.” They lacked basic

necessities, such as bedlinens and towels. “When you run for your life,” said Iryna, “you don’t take a towel with you. You’re lucky if you get your passport.” Iryna had a full-time job, but she spent all her free time at the dormitory for the next six months, until an international organization came in to take over the work in October 2014.

Everyone I spoke with in the fall of 2021 noted that Ukraine’s state policy toward internal displacement was dysfunctional. Ukraine is a country that has historically produced refugees and was not prepared to administer the resettlement of displaced people within its own borders. According to definitions laid out in the UN’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), IDPs are defined as

persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

(Cohen 2004, 465–466)

Roberta Cohen grounds this definition in the concept of “sovereignty as responsibility” (ibid., 2004, 466), which, in this case, designates the primary responsibility for the welfare of IDPs as falling to their governments. Additionally, this framing requires international actors to provide humanitarian assistance for IDPs when state governments are unable to do so (ibid.). While the Guiding Principles are not legally binding, they are the internationally accepted framework for addressing the safety and welfare of IDPs.

By 2021, the Ministry of Social Policy was responsible for demographic information about IDPs. It counted approximately 1.5 million people who were officially registered as IDPs, meaning that they held a government-recognized status as an IDP. However, two key complications led many people I spoke with to point out that this number was flawed (see also Tarkhanova, this volume). First, many people did not register as IDPs. Registering as an IDP allowed a person to keep their home address as their official residence, which has implications for Ukraine’s *propiska* system of internal passports. To make future claims of residency in, for instance, Donetsk, or to claim restitution for damages on one’s residence, one had to remain registered as an IDP with their pre-displacement home address. But the status was limiting—it was only just before I arrived in Ukraine in 2021 that IDPs were allowed to vote in the local elections of their new places of residence. Previously, they were only able to vote in their place of registration, even if, in many cases, that place was unsafe or under the control of the occupying forces. In other words, for nearly eight years, being registered as an IDP excluded people from voting, a fundamental citizen right.

The second complication about IDP status was that many people registered as IDPs but subsequently moved back to their homes in the TOTs. Until the COVID-19 pandemic forced Ukraine to close its borders in 2020, the borders between the occupied territories and the government-controlled territories were extremely porous, with around 100,000 crossings each month according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁴ Many of those crossings into the Ukrainian government-controlled territory were by people who were registered as IDPs and who were attending to business in Ukraine, such as collecting their pension payments or withdrawing cash from Ukrainian banks.⁵ The legitimacy of these Ukrainian citizens as displaced—and, therefore, the Ukrainian state's obligation to them as IDPs—was contested and often led to negative perceptions of IDPs gaming the system (Rimpiläinen 2020; others view these perceptions through the lens of “ours” [Bulakh 2017] and belonging [Sereda 2020]).

Experts I interviewed pointed out a variety of flaws in the mechanisms of governance that Ukraine used to address displacement. Here, I assess two of them that led to the kind of dispossession experienced by IDPs in relation to the state: lack of state funding for IDP programs, particularly around housing; and lack of clear policy regarding reintegration. The combination of these and additional issues led to many IDPs feeling like the Ukrainian authorities had abandoned them, even as they chose to live in Ukraine outside the occupied territories (see Tarkhanova, this volume, for more on this kind of decision-making).⁶ As my data shows, however, despite dispossession by the state, many IDPs participated in vibrant kinds of re-creation when they volunteered for the same charities or international organizations that helped them during their displacement. These motivations and actions reappeared in February 2022 after the full-scale Russian invasion.

Lack of state funding for IDP housing

Alina worked for a major international organization in Mariupol, the second-largest city in Donetsk oblast' in 2021, which had a population of around 430,000 and had received nearly 100,000 IDPs by the time of our interview in September. As in many cities that saw their populations expand with the arrival of IDPs, Mariupol faced rising housing costs, a problem which made displacement more acute. Alina felt that housing was what most distinguished IDPs from Mariupol residents.

The local population had their own housing, and the displaced people did not have it. That is, we had many people who lived in Donetsk and were middle class, they had their own home, their own car, they vacationed abroad once or twice a year, and then they move to Mariupol, they have the kind of job that

allows them to live from paycheck to paycheck (*v nykh ie taka robota iaka dozvoliaie im zhyty vid zarplaty do zarplaty*), they lose economic security ... and now this is the situation with people, it has not improved—that is, when they did not get housing, there is no state program.

Artem—one of the only male volunteers I interviewed in 2021—worked for a small economic support program within a large international organization. He mentioned that problems with housing and employment had been partially solved in the first three or four years since the largest waves of displacement began but that housing for people in the most difficult circumstances had to be addressed by international organizations, not the Ukrainian state. Artem described the housing situation in Kramatorsk:

We have been trying to build housing for IDPs for five years and something is not working out very well. I know there was a hostel [in Kramatorsk], it was under renovation for three years, that's a very long time, people can't wait three years. If they don't find housing in a month, they move on, because they don't have money to live on. An apartment in Kramatorsk now costs three times a normal apartment, three times more than before the start of the war, maybe five times more. Moreover, in Kramatorsk, people like my colleagues who came to work in international relations or the regional state administration, which also has quite a lot of people working there, they occupied the last housing and were ready to pay 300, 400 dollars for it. And IDPs who could not find a good job, they cannot cope with it (*vony ne mozhut' z tsym vporatys'*).

In addition to struggling to find housing in their new cities, Artem described the problem of selling their existing housing in the occupied territories. Not only would it be nearly impossible to get money for that housing, he said, but the banks do not work in the occupied territories, so a person couldn't access any funds they might receive; furthermore, certificates of housing changing hands were issued by the self-proclaimed authorities in the occupied territories and were not recognized elsewhere.

Additional challenges for IDPs related to their specific status and government-issued residency documents, which were also linked to people's access to work, schools, and healthcare. Ol'ha, a woman from Luhans'k who worked for an international women's aid organization, described a particular state regulation that complicated IDP access to housing.

There are programs that allow you to buy apartments, but if even an internally displaced person wants to buy an apartment under the program, a mortgage or something like that, they can buy only in the territory of the

Luhans'k-Donets'k region [where they previously lived]. That is, they were restricted (*ikh obmezhyly*), they cannot buy in Kharkiv, nor in Kyiv, but only in the Luhans'k-Donets'k region. In order to enter the apartment register, a person must be registered in the city of residence, but [an IDP] cannot be registered because she has no home—that is, she is not tied to anything—and this IDP certificate does not give her anything (*tse dovidka pereselentsia ii nichoho ne daie*).

Additionally, Ol'ha said, if a displaced person does wish to buy housing in another region, she would automatically lose her IDP status and therefore her claims to other services that went with it.

The lack of state policy for IDP housing was exacerbated by the fact that people had been displaced for seven years when I spoke to most of these experts. While Iryna's story about helping IDPs in Dnipro included a self-organized project of cleaning up a disused dormitory, this type of solution was not tenable for the long term or on a larger scale. At the same time, international humanitarian organizations were still present in Ukraine and were meeting IDPs' needs, another indication that the Ukrainian government was not provisioning for people's needs. For some who worked in aid organizations, the continued presence of aid organizations signified the continued dispossession of IDPs and people living in the occupied territories.

Liza, who worked for a civilian aid organization, put it bluntly:

The Ukrainian government should be ashamed, ashamed of having international humanitarian assistance still on their land. Honestly, it shows the incapability of the government to [help] their own citizens. For the first years the country is in chaos, you cannot figure out what to do, but not in the seventh year of conflict, it's just unacceptable.

The government's inability to address IDPs' needs, in her view, made it more complicated after so many years to convince citizens that they should live in Ukraine. Liza felt that if the government could show IDPs, including those living in the TOTs, that life is better in Ukraine, it could go a long way in convincing them to support Ukraine.

Our government thought that they were losing those people and ... Obviously, the official narrative wasn't that they are separatists and let them survive however they want, but there were a couple of moves that cut them off from economic ties. There were a lot of conversations, "why should we pay for their retirement if they're on the [other side]." But you're still talking about citizens of your own government, they were entitled to certain services and social payments, the same as the other part of your citizens. And yes,

maybe it will be more expensive, but in the long run, you're paying for still having the minds and hearts of your other people on the other side. Unfortunately, there were a couple of really bad steps of cutting these additional ties and making these borders even more explicit, and they lost part of the population, who was then easily converted into Russian citizenship.⁷

Ol'ha, who worked for another women-focused organization, echoed Liza's sentiments.

I know for sure that people who live in the territory controlled by Ukraine, they feel more secure, free to move, legal guarantees, there is some stability, justice, guarantees. Yes, this is the main thing. Freedom of movement, freedom of expression, political actions, and so on.

In addition to people's concrete needs, such as pensions and other economic support, these less-tangible entitlements that Ol'ha described would make people feel like citizens. If both these concrete and abstract benefits could be communicated to people living in the occupied territories, then perhaps they could be convinced to support Ukraine or at least move to the government-controlled areas. However, because of the tight border controls that were implemented in 2020, the possibilities for effective communication decreased.

These remarks about the Ukrainian government's limited ability to fund programs for IDPs, as well as to effectively communicate what Ukraine would do for them, are connected to the second component of the dispossession of IDPs: lack of policy about reintegration. The next section addresses how my interlocutors described the process of integration of IDPs from 2014 and the challenges Ukraine would face in reintegrating people who remained in Donbas.

Integration and reintegration

When I asked Artem to describe the current situation with IDPs, he responded,

The critical time for IDPs has passed. In most cases, these people solved their life problems on their own, unfortunately, and not with the help of the state (*V bil'shosti, tsi liudy samostiino vyrishyly svoi zhyttievi problemy, na zhal', a ne z dopomohoiu derzhavy*).

He went on to describe the difference between the waves of displacement of the period 2014–2016, describing how many of the people who evacuated from the Donbas in those years had found work and housing, enabling their integration into new communities. Ol'ha agreed: “The people who arrived in 2014 have settled their lives in the territory of Ukraine, found new jobs, and actually already

have relations with other communities.” Iryna expressed the integration of IDPs in terms of official legal status, pointing out that

those who never registered, they are well-integrated. They don’t really need any support from the government, so they are very self-sustained, they depend just on themselves and their family members, they are the successful IDPs. They don’t call themselves IDPs.

Questions of integration and reintegration were often discussed in the same breath, but the terms denoted rather different aspects of the war and occupation. My interlocutors used the term “integration” to talk about how IDPs were living in host communities, how they had settled, and whether or not they intended to return home. As Iryna described above, the IDPs that my interlocutors assessed as “most integrated” were the ones who did not need to register as IDPs at all. Viktoria Sereda has assessed IDP integration in receiving communities based on the idea of a “hierarchy of belonging” and perceived social distance. She concludes that IDPs’ loyalty to Ukraine was often questioned by residents of host communities that had not experienced direct attacks but also that IDPs who left the occupied territories later, for instance, were also often assumed to have been collaborators because they stayed in Donbas for some time while the territories were occupied or under attack (Sereda 2020).

These perceptions about integration colored people’s understanding of “reintegration,” which was more focused on the TOTs of the Donets’k and Luhans’k regions. As Sereda also documented, my interlocutors often commented on the negative perceptions of IDPs’ compatriots who remained in the occupied territories. As Ol’ha put it, “These people who are internally displaced persons, they were very angry and offended (*zli i obrazheni*) by their people who stayed there and started working for the occupying power.” However, my interlocutors also perceived that these negative attitudes were connected to the Ukrainian government’s lack of policy about reintegration. Liza was especially concerned about how much time had passed under occupation:

It’s already been seven years now and we lost so much time. There is a new generation born after the conflict started, and the more the government, the authorities are not showing specific actions [toward them], the more we will be losing the people who are on the other side.

Of course, reintegration was not an issue that could be addressed until the occupied territories were no longer occupied—as Ol’ha put it,

the question of reintegration can be raised only when the armed forces of the Russian Federation are withdrawn from the occupied territories, there can be

no other condition (*Pytannia reintehratsii mozhe pidnimatysia til'ky v tomu vypadku, koly budut' vyvedeni zbroini syly Rosiis'koï Federatsii z okupovanoi teritorii, inshykh umov ne mozhe buty*).

However, the Ukrainian state had not created a reintegration policy as of 2021. Policies of integration and reintegration were connected to Liza's and Ol'ha's comments about Ukraine not communicating with populations behind the front lines. Alina criticized the lack of state policy about integration and reintegration, which she reiterated several times in our interview. However, she also connected people's lack of support for Ukraine to questions of economic stability. She mentioned the large number of people from Mariupol who sought work abroad because there were few jobs in the area, and she advocated for Ukraine to focus on economic development to encourage Ukrainians to stay in the country. "When we talk to people from the occupied territories who come to us, we hear that they don't care who will be in power, as long as Ukraine gives them a clear picture of their future." She elaborated:

If, for example, the Ukrainian administration (*administratsiia*) will come to the occupied territory and show them a clear picture of their world, for example, "People, we will give you a job, we will pay you a pension, we will screw in a light bulb for you, you will have light, you can do 1-2-3-4 and then you will be able to financially support yourself"—and that's it, they don't need anything else, they will be pro-Ukrainian.

However, Alina described interacting with many IDPs who were "offended by the lack of state policy regarding their provision (*vidsutnistiu polityky derzhavy shchodo ikh zabezpechennia*), regarding their life in general." She advocated for drawing from comparative examples of countries that had established policies toward displaced people, which could be more effectively implemented.

Such a development was in progress in 2021. I spoke with two representatives from the Danish Refugee Council, an organization that was working directly with the Ministry for the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories and the Ministry of Social Policy to create an effective policy for IDPs, specifically drawing from Serbian and Georgian experiences. These representatives advocated for "durable solutions" rather than the stop-gap measures that had been implemented by the Ukrainian state in the previous seven years of war, including creating a mechanism that would not incentivize people to remain IDPs based on status-related benefits. Rather, the Danish Refugee Council's proposals were focused on long-term perspectives on integration, using the Serbian and Georgian experiences to measure the level of integration of IDPs into host communities. Unfortunately, with the onset of the full-scale

invasion in February 2022, it has been impossible to measure the success or effectiveness of the Danish Refugee Council's research and recommendations to the Ukrainian Ministry of Reintegration. Additionally, such a policy would not address the fundamental problem of reintegration: the de-occupation of the occupied territories.

Without being able to measure the Danish Refugee Council's proposed "durable solutions," it is useful to turn to IDPs' own experiences of displacement and resettlement in host communities. Here, we can see how IDPs illustrate what I have been calling throughout this chapter "dispossession" or a feeling of being abandoned by the state and, relatedly, the "re-creations" of engagement and care that were the response of volunteers and other non-state actors.

Assessments, needs, and aid: IDP interactions with state and non-state actors

The experience of dispossession by the Ukrainian state was widespread, in particular in the ways IDPs felt like the state had abandoned them in their time of great need. In this section, I combine observations by NGO workers with those of IDPs themselves, who regularly spoke about their interactions with state actors.⁸ As Iryna described earlier, many IDPs left their homes with almost nothing but their documents. While many accepted help from volunteers in the immediate aftermath of their displacement, the longer people remained displaced, the more their needs changed. In every interview I did, people established IDPs' most profound needs as stable housing and employment. The absence of policies to help IDPs secure both of these was a regular target of complaints by NGO workers and IDPs alike. Iryna elaborated:

There have been so many assessments conducted on IDPs and their needs and their plans for the future. Do they want to integrate with us? Do they want to return? Often, they don't feel welcome. Small communities would be cheaper for IDPs to live in—because the main problem is still accommodation, it's expensive, it's difficult to get a good job, and it [the cycle of unmet needs] all starts again.

While many criticized the Ukrainian authorities for not being able to find a way to support IDPs financially, Lesya, a psychologist working with IDPs in L'viv, noticed that IDPs were grateful for the help that organizations could give them.

It seems to me that, after all, they view charitable foundations as better than state institutions (*derzhavnykh ustanov*), because firstly, there are long queues, and secondly, there is a very large amount of red tape with papers and documents, and our system is somehow simpler.

Rather than make state institutions more accessible, according to Lesya, state actors preferred to recommend that IDPs go straight to charitable organizations to access aid; state institutions sent IDPs to charitable organizations and NGOs and then, as Lesya said, “report that they provided help, check a box that they contributed to the adaptation of migrants.” On the one hand, this shows that the state budget could not address IDP needs and led to the feeling of dispossession among IDPs; on the other hand, IDPs were more likely to trust non-state organizations and take advantage of their aid programs.

Nina, a woman from Luhans’k, displaced in Dnipro, described how there was “no help from the state (Rus. *A tak net nikakoi pomoshchi ot gosudarstva*).” While registering as an IDP provided a small resettlement income, she pointed out that this benefit was not enough to pay for housing—likely because of the issues of inflation highlighted by Artem and my other interlocutors. But Nina said she had not expected much from the state: “I’m only counting on myself,” she said. Nina worked for an aid organization in Dnipro, helping other IDPs. She pointed out that the state was delayed in paying out pensions, so IDPs there had nothing to live on. “No one has help from the state, now, at the moment,” she stated. While Nina described the process of registering as an IDP with state officials as “nothing special,” the pension delay caused significant anger among IDPs who needed services. She was concerned about the increased distrust that IDPs would have in the Ukrainian state, even as she personally believed in a unified Ukraine and hoped that she could move forward following her displacement.

A 30-year-old man from Donets’k, Igor, stated plainly, “The state does not care about migrants at all (Rus. *O pereselentsakh voobshche ne zabotit’sia gosudarstvo*). I can tell you right away. No money, nothing. There is not even any housing until you find it yourself.” While IDP status did provide certain cash assistance, Igor described how he was refused when he tried to claim this benefit:

They didn’t give me anything. Never. I came, and they said, “You are not allowed.” I didn’t work for three months. I came, got registered in Dnepropetrovsk,⁹ they told me: “You haven’t worked for three months, you are not entitled to anything.” That’s it. And they didn’t make any payments.

Igor’s experience is a prime example of what many of my interlocutors mentioned: the Ukrainian government was expected to recognize displaced people as citizens by providing them with certain entitlements due to their IDP status, and the state was absent. IDPs criticized the state at the same time that they praised volunteers for meeting their needs or themselves for figuring out how to survive without help from the state.

Liza recognized that the Ukrainian state was not active in changing the perception that it was absent and that international organizations were more effective in distributing IDP benefits. As she put it,

The Ukrainian Government could show better access to certain services, pensions, or medical services. [If] people start seeing more care and more interest from the government, not just talk but action, then the perception of the Ukrainian authorities would change, the understanding that this government cares about you and the government really sees you as citizens.

If IDPs sensed that the Ukrainian government did not treat displaced people as Ukrainian citizens, they often had a radically different experience when they interacted with non-governmental organizations and charities. Many of the IDPs in my interviews worked for the organizations and charities that had once helped them, creating a kind of exchange in which no one's citizenship was under scrutiny. Such interactions led to the possibility of re-enfranchisement or re-creation of new kinds of sociality, as Nastia, a 28-year-old woman from Donetsk who was working for an internationally funded aid organization in Dnipro, described:

You saw how many people you really help, and saw these endless letters that they wrote to us. We had this box, we called it a mailbox for thanks (Rus. *pochtovyi iashchik, my ee nazyvali blagodarnosti*), and it was packed to the top with all the letters, thanks, reviews. People were so impressed. The situation is the same: people came without anything at all, they lived in the village. They had no money, nothing; they arrived there, rented some kind of house, and they wanted to grow vegetables. To sow something like dill and parsley. And when it came time to harvest, they brought us, I think, two boxes of peppers and tomatoes. We were just in shock, I said: "Why did you bring all this, you yourself need to eat!" They said: "No, we are so grateful to you," she said, "because you treated us like human beings, you are still there, you gave us hope, support. Because we were brought to some state social services (Rus. *sotsial'nye sluzhby gosudarstvennogo*) ... they treated us like dogs. They shouted at us endlessly, they said that we were separatists, it was our own fault. And here, you treated us with such understanding, with such, such kindness." Of course, the fact that we ourselves are all migrants also played a big role, and we were, as it were, in their skin, and we felt it all ourselves.

Nastia's final comment, that volunteers or employees of charitable organizations and NGOs who were IDPs themselves could understand what people who sought out assistance were going through, was an important distinction between aid organizations and state services. Through these testimonies, it remains unclear whether state services were truly incapable of serving the needs of IDPs and, therefore, if international funding was necessary. Additionally, these interviews present only a partial picture of state services: it was likely very difficult for state functionaries to meet the expectations and needs of IDPs, and state actors who, as Nastia's client described it, "treated us like dogs," might have

simply been in an impossible situation because of a lack of clear state policy and endemic distrust in state authorities. But the evidence presented here ultimately shows that many IDPs and my interlocutors who worked with IDPs recognized similar problems related to the dispossession of IDPs between 2014 and 2021 by state actors. A lack of state policy regarding IDPs' needs in the short and long term can inform the Ukrainian authorities moving ahead, as the questions of displacement, dispossession, integration, and reintegration continue to be present.

Self-organization in 2022: a multi-scalar response

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory began on 24 February 2022, the world has witnessed a remarkable response on behalf of Ukraine and Ukrainians at multiple scales. The Ukrainian army has withstood the onslaught of Russian forces beyond any analyst's expectations. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, elected in 2019, has become the most recognized world leader, representing Ukraine to the world and continuing to make demands for more international support. And Ukrainian citizens have mobilized on behalf of their shared citizenship however they can. Whether by hand-making camouflage nets and Molotov cocktails or by sourcing heat-vision binoculars and bulletproof vests for people serving at the front, Ukrainians are helping meet every need. Their previous experiences of self-organization, beginning in 2013 with the Euromaidan protests and continuing in the intervening years, as I have described in this chapter, prepared Ukrainians to expand the scale of their response in defense of their country's sovereignty.

However, the relationship between citizens and the state is now rather different than it was from 2014 to 2021, addressed in the first part of this chapter. Then, citizens were focused on criticizing the state's absence and, relatedly, the international community's presence. Now, Ukrainians have continued to advocate for more aid—both military and humanitarian—on the part of international organizations to continue to support the Ukrainian state. The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology's December 2022 survey showed that 87.5 percent of Ukrainians felt that the state acted effectively in addressing all or most of its responsibilities (nearly 45 percent felt that the state almost never effectively addressed its responsibilities in November 2021).¹⁰ Perhaps respondents are judging the state's effectiveness by different criteria in 2022; perhaps this is a special scenario in which criticism of the state can and must be set aside while Ukraine's sovereignty is at stake.

Many of the volunteers in countries that received millions of Ukrainian refugees also self-organized to meet people's needs: in Poland, for instance, where I volunteered in May and July of 2022, many of the non-state-based aid initiatives helping Ukrainians were entirely self-organized. Some were established by Ukrainians already living in Poland, but in all the places I volunteered, I

worked with other Ukrainian refugees who had fled their homes since 24 February (many of whom had also helped displaced people within Ukraine before they left the country). While the Polish government's policies alleviated some of the challenges facing refugees—for instance, allowing Ukrainian refugees special work and education permits, as well as cash benefits for them, their children, and their Polish hosts—self-organization was still an essential part of the response to support refugees.

This type of self-organization complements Polish state policies. For instance, I established earlier that housing was a particularly difficult problem to tackle with self-organization. Across Warsaw, people opened their homes to Ukrainian refugees, knowing they would get state-paid benefits for doing so. And the city and the national government made possible the creation of other short-term housing projects, such as dormitories or an exhibition center. Self-organized initiatives, such as a free shop for refugees, gave out groceries and clothes to displaced people and were run entirely on donations. And, like other self-organized initiatives, the free shop closed at the end of the summer of 2022 when refugees' needs had changed. Volunteers took the leftover goods to the Ukrainian border to be distributed in Ukraine by humanitarian groups, and others redirected their energy to helping refugees in the longer term with Polish classes and helping them find jobs in Warsaw.

Within Ukraine, the government has continued to rely on international organizations because of the massive scale not only of refugees but also of additional IDPs. The Ukrainian state budget cannot be expected to address the needs of all displaced people (and indeed, the Ukrainian state is not required to meet the needs of Ukrainian refugees because they have crossed an international border). But how Ukraine ultimately is able to balance the continued volunteer response with financial intervention from large international organizations is a significant question for the immediate and the long term. Anthropologists are making an important contribution to the criticisms of large aid organizations that are unable to serve the immediate needs of people who are in crisis (Riabchuk 2022), and we may be in a position to advocate for the reformulation of global aid in the future. The examples of the self-organized initiatives we have seen since February 2022 show that localized aid distribution can more effectively and more immediately meet people's needs (see Otrishchenko, this volume); large aid organizations take too much time to respond to crises and are often limited in what they can provide because of bureaucratic restrictions (see Rachok 2022).

In addition to these questions of funding and state capacity, the problems of integration and reintegration remain. Elizabeth Dunn advocates for seeing displacement as “forever” (Riabchuk 2022), not because people will physically be displaced forever, but because the effects of displacement and dispossession are not erased simply by returning home. Because the process of rebuilding

Ukraine will be long term, IDPs will continue to live around Ukraine, away from their homes, for the foreseeable future. If the war continues, refugees will likely continue to live abroad as well, especially if receiving states facilitate the process of obtaining legal residence and work permits. The problem of how to best reintegrate the TOTs around Ukraine is larger now than ever before, but the conditions of its resolution remain the same as when Ol'ha stated in 2021: “The question of reintegration can be raised only when the armed forces of the Russian Federation are withdrawn from the occupied territories, there can be no other condition.”

Notes

- 1 The Orange Revolution was organized around stolen elections and in support of a political figure, Viktor Yushchenko, so it is not entirely a non-state protest. However, because so many of the tactics of this protest influenced the 2013–2014 Euromaidan, it should still be considered as part of the tradition of self-organization.
- 2 Combat may generally be seen as a male-dominated aspect of wartime, but the representation of women in Ukraine's Armed Forces has also changed since 2014. This is in part thanks to the work of the Invisible Battalion project, which helped establish laws protecting women in combat roles and women veterans.
- 3 Here, Iryna is speaking specifically about people displaced from Eastern Ukraine. While she also noted the presence of people displaced from Crimea in our interview, the circumstances of their departure were not under shelling, so their needs were assessed differently from the IDPs from the east that Iryna is speaking about.
- 4 UNHCR, “Checkpoints: People's monthly crossings.” <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiZjNjZTYwY2QtYWFlZC00ODAyLTg1YjQtY2NjNWFlYW00ODNjIiwidCI6ImU1YzZM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBlLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9> (accessed 26 June 2023).
- 5 UNHCR, “Eastern Ukraine checkpoint monitoring 2019.” <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiNGM3NzRjMzgtYzYxZC00ZjAwLTlkMzgtYjRlODFhZmY5ZmEzIiwidCI6ImU1YzZM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBlLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9> (accessed 26 June 2023).
- 6 This sentiment is reflected in interviews with IDPs who interacted with Ukrainian state representatives in government-controlled territories. People who were registered as IDPs but returned to live in the TOTs may have had different sentiments, though a lack of research with populations living in the TOTs makes it impossible to know for sure how they perceived their relationship with the Ukrainian state.
- 7 As of summer 2021, researchers studying the Russian policy of passportization—distribution of Russian passports with partial citizenship benefits to people living in the occupied Donetsk and Luhans'k regions—counted that approximately 530,000 Russian passports had been distributed since 2019 (Burkhardt et al. 2022).
- 8 These interviews were completed between 2014 and 2016 by Anna Trofimova, who has given me permission to use this data in my research.
- 9 Igor's interview was in Russian, and his use of Dnepropetrovsk reflects this. The city's name was officially changed to Dnipro in 2016.
- 10 Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, survey on attitudes toward the state. https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/pr/20230115_g/Презентація%20моніторингу%2C%202022%20—%20фінал.pdf#page=22 (accessed 26 June 2023).

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10

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES

Tamara Martsenyuk

The full-scale war has shown that sustainability and further post-war reconstruction and development of Ukraine require equal involvement of both women and men in all spheres of life. Besides, equal rights and opportunities are one of the key values of the EU.

—Olha Stefanishyna, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine

Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, equality and human rights have become more important values in Ukrainian society. Gender equality improved during and after the Revolution of Dignity (a.k.a. the Euromaidan Protests) of 2013–2014. During this and other historical events, Ukrainian women played an important role in fighting for freedom, equality, and dignity. Grassroots activism has a long tradition in Ukraine, and women have actively participated in bringing forth “bottom-up” changes in the country, including new ideas about gender.

Mass civilian mobilization means that all human resources, regardless of gender, are needed and considered appropriate to stem further dispossession and loss of land. Among the consequences of the full-scale Russian invasion, we see growing support for gender equality. Such egalitarian ideas are manifest in a new openness to women serving in the armed forces and even in combat positions. General attitudes toward LGBT participation in the military are also evolving (Martsenyuk 2022). Given the civilizational choice between the so-called *russkii mir* (“Russian world”), which relies on promoting traditional gender roles and inciting homophobia, and Western values that favor equality and inclusivity, politically and popularly we see institutional changes in Ukraine that favor the latter. In this war, where different groups, including women and

LGBT people, are contributing to victory by participating in different forms of resistance, expectations are growing for more inclusivity and more possibilities to fight for gender-based rights. Implementing gender equality in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), which has resulted in massive growth in opportunities for women to serve in combat and other positions in a highly male-dominated domain, is one of the major consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Since 10 February 2022, shortly before the invasion began, female officers were allowed to serve in all military specialties and ranks (Ministry of Defense 2022). The radical openness that drove these swift and innovative developments in the military sector is likely to influence the continued formation of new gender-based norms, identities, and roles in a multitude of other spheres in Ukrainian society.

After Russia started the war in Donbas in 2014, and especially after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, women expressed their will to defend the country on par with men. Since the Russo-Ukrainian war began, the number of women in the AFU and military institutions of higher learning increased, giving women greater visibility in the security and defense sectors and among activists and veterans of the Russo-Ukrainian war. A democratic society should provide women and men with equal opportunities to participate in all spheres of life, including the military sector. The Ukrainian government has identified promoting gender equality as an important state policy priority (Levchenko 2020; Razumkov Center 2016).

In 2020, as part of the project "Strengthening Democratic Control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces," the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) sponsored the publication of *The Guidebook on Gender Integration in the Ukrainian Armed Forces* (OSCE 2020), intended for the top management of the Ministry of Defense, the Armed Forces, officers at all levels, and heads and officials of authorized units on gender issues. The manual presents the fundamentals of gender concepts; gender threats in armed conflict; legislative principles of gender policy; the basics of NATO's gender perspective; and the substance of the 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" agenda (UNSC 2000). UNSC Resolution 1325 underlines the importance of women in resolving conflicts, restoring peace, and fighting gender-based violence in conflict situations. Moreover, the resolution encourages UN member states to increase their representation of women in decision-making capacities in peace and security efforts as part of an overall effort at gender mainstreaming.

At the same time, the problem of discrimination against women in the military sphere remains, as does gender-based and sexual violence, all of which remain taboo subjects that are insufficiently studied. The results of two sociological studies, "Invisible Battalion': The Participation of Women in Military Operations in the ATO" (2015) and "Invisible Battalion 2.0': The Return of Female Veterans to a Peaceful Life" (2018–2019), document the hostility of

Ukraine's security sector to women. Despite reforms regarding gender equality and Ukraine signing of a number of treaties and accords—such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979), the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2030 (Verkhovna Rada 2019), and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSC 2000)—women in the military still face significant gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

In this chapter, I analyze the implementation of gender equality policies and how they have recently changed thanks to international accords and state policies designed to deliver equal rights and opportunities, before moving on to a discussion of the successes and ongoing challenges of women's integration into the AFU over the past ten years. I analyze statistics on women and men in the armed forces, gender equality, and what is being done to address sexual harassment based on official state statistics and public opinion surveys. This chapter posits that, in response to Russian efforts to compromise Ukrainian state sovereignty and autonomy since 2014, sweeping changes have been implemented in the AFU. These changes affect gender equality through women's integration into the military sphere. This is part of a greater response to the war that has also led to broad popular support for a professional contract army with equal conscription of men and women on a voluntary basis.

Implementing gender equality: international agreements and state reform

In the last handful of years alone, Ukraine has ratified major international accords on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women: the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2030 and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (UNSC 2000). Ukraine also adopted the second National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 for 2021–2025. Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men is an important area of activity for the Council of Europe (CoE), of which Ukraine is a member. Member states are expected to fulfill the six goals of the CoE's Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2023: (1) preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism; (2) preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; (3) ensuring the equal access of women to justice; (4) achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; (5) protecting the rights of migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women and girls; and (6) achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures (Council of Europe 2018, 7). In 2020, Ukraine formally became a full member of the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality (President of Ukraine 2020), a global coalition championed by the French government to achieve the full empowerment of girls and women around the world.

In the framework of the Partnership, Ukraine, as a full participant, undertakes commitments in five areas: (1) the development of a barrier-free public space friendly to families with children and low-mobility groups; (2) teaching children the principles of equality between women and men; (3) prevention of violence; (4) reducing the pay gap between women and men; and (5) creating greater opportunities for men to care for children. Moreover, in the summer of 2022, the 2011 Istanbul Convention, which is “the most comprehensive international instrument for combating violence against women and domestic violence in its many forms,” was finally ratified (Council of Europe 2022).

These initiatives were all a prelude to European Council granting Ukraine the status of candidate for accession to the European Union on 23 June 2002. This means that gender politics in Ukraine must continue to develop (Levchenko 2020; Martsenyuk 2016). In addition to these international agreements, some key legislative steps had already been taken. The Constitution of Ukraine (1996) and two laws of Ukraine—“On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men” (Verkhovna Rada 2005) and “On the Principles of Prevention and Counteraction of Discrimination in Ukraine” (Verkhovna Rada 2012)—had already established the principles of non-discrimination and equal rights and opportunities for men and women in various areas of public life. According to Article 24 of the Constitution of Ukraine, “There shall be no privileges or restrictions based on race, color of skin, political, religious and other beliefs, sex, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, linguistic or other characteristics” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 1996). The law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men” (Verkhovna Rada 2005) includes definitions of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, gender-based discrimination, positive action, and sexual harassment. The State Social Program on Providing Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men up to 2021 also included the creation of a Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. Finally, on 12 August 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men through 2030 and an operational plan for its implementation in 2022–2024 (Service of the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine 2022).

The international community monitors equal rights and opportunities through the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report. The report tracks the gender gap in four important areas of inequality: economic participation, health, educational level, and political representation. In 2022, Ukraine was ranked 81 out of 148 countries. The lowest score that Ukraine earned, 100 out of 148, was for women’s participation in the political decision-making process (World Economic Forum 2022). Addressing gender equity and gender mainstreaming in the political sphere is an important step toward women’s empowerment. Having signed multiple international agreements, Ukraine has recognized the importance of gender equality. Now comes the difficult task of implementing processes and

procedures to achieve it, especially in those particularly challenging domains, such as the male-dominated military, and especially during wartime.

Women's integration and gender equality in the military sector: successes and challenges

Gender policy in the AFU requires both gender mainstreaming and the introduction of specific measures to promote women's participation in the armed forces (Martsenyuk, Grytsenko, and Kvit 2015). Gender-based stereotypical attitudes, paternalist approaches, and even discrimination characterize women's participation in the military and the labor market in general. The introduction of outside experts to advise on policies to promote providing equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the military was an essential step. In the metaphorically titled "Invisible Battalion" study, I argued that the state ignores the interests and needs of women who have been mobilized or volunteered. The AFU, similar to the labor market, is characterized by a vertical "glass ceiling," meaning the higher the military rank, the fewer the women (which blocks women from assuming decision-making roles), as well as horizontal forms of gender segregation, meaning women are channeled into traditionally "female" non-combat positions and men into traditionally "male" combat military specialties. Although the number of women in the military is increasing, which aligns with general global trends, women mostly hold so-called "feminized" positions as medical, financial, logistics, and communications workers.

When the Anti-Terrorist Operation started in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the majority of combat positions were closed to women. There is a similar phenomenon in certain civilian spheres. For example, according to a decree of the Ministry of Health (Ministry of Health 1993b), women in Ukraine did not have the right to work in around 450 positions that involved "heavy manual labor" or to work in "harmful and dangerous conditions." In 2017, this decree was overturned, although some prohibitions against women working in mines remained (Ministry of Health 2017). According to labor protection rules, there are still limits prohibiting women from lifting and moving heavy objects that weigh seven to ten kilograms (depending on the frequency of lifting) (Ministry of Health 1993a).

The 2015 "Invisible Battalion" study revealed the non-fulfillment of the 2000 UNSC Resolution 1325, which emphasizes the importance of viewing women as equal and active participants in processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities. The current war has historical parallels with the Second World War concerning women's involvement and participation in combat positions. Women's war stories are not excluded entirely, but as in the current war, they take a subordinate place to the narratives of male soldiers (Khromeychuk 2018). The "Invisible Battalion" campaign provided an opportunity to recognize the

role of women in the war, resulting in the granting of more labor rights to women working in the AFU (Martsenyuk et al. 2019). As a result of joint efforts by the women veterans' movement, women's activist groups, and female parliamentary members of the Parliamentary Equal Opportunities Caucus, the law "On amendments to certain legislative acts of Ukraine on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military formations" was adopted (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2018).¹ This law enables women to serve equally with men through enlistment by contract on a voluntary basis or military draft, in active and reserve service, as long as military registration rules are followed.

In the summer of 2018, a founding meeting of the women veterans' movement was held near Kyiv. The participants explained the need for grassroots organizing that would include the creation of a female veteran "block." As women are in the minority in the army, at meetings of (mostly male) veterans, it is difficult for individual women to voice problems and achieve solutions (Martsenyuk et al. 2019). The Ukrainian Women Veterans Movement aims to increase the opportunities to advocate and protect the rights of women veterans and active women military personnel by promoting equal rights and opportunities through lawmaking and advocating for a professional and prestigious security sector. Since 2019, over 100 women veterans have joined the Ukrainian Women Veterans Movement (UN in Ukraine 2020a).

Women's access to military education is an important component of building equal rights and opportunities in the military sphere. Ukraine's implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security provides equal access to women and men in educational institutions of all levels of the security and defense sectors and inclusion of a gender component in the educational process (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2020). After girls were admitted to study in military lyceums in 2019, the visibility of women in the fields of security and defense increased significantly (Martsenyuk et al. 2023). In the period 2021–2022, the number of girls in the most prestigious military educational institution, the Ivan Bohun Kyiv Military Lyceum, doubled to 50 from two years earlier.

At the same time, the Ninth Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women report, submitted by Ukraine in 2021, noted that two women participated in negotiations within the Trilateral Contact Group on the peaceful settlement of the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in the period 2014–2019. The report outlined a number of significant systemic changes that had been adopted by 2021: access of women to military occupations (including combat positions); recognition of female veterans; gender equality in military legislation; improved protection of women from gender-based violence; access to military education at all levels for girls and women; gender-sensitivity training and education for staff; and sociological research on different aspects of gender equality implementation (Ukraine CEDAW 2021, 5–6).

Nonetheless, lingering problems remain. Some leaders of the security and defense sector do not see gender equality as a necessary part of reform; security institutions lack the necessary capacities and experience for advancing gender equality at strategic, operational, and tactical levels; women have little or no support in developing their capacities and leadership skills; and discrimination and sexual harassment against women are widespread in the security and defense sector. To meet these challenges, in 2020, UN Women in Ukraine launched the “Women Are Key to Peace” campaign to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (UN in Ukraine 2020b). After the full-scale invasion, the issues of women’s uniforms and hygiene products became more relevant. By March 2023, NGOs and private initiatives provided women with anatomically comfortable uniforms, even though the development of women’s uniforms was announced by the Ministry of Defense in 2022, with the goal of putting comfortable uniforms into circulation by the end of 2023.

Overcoming gender segregation

As the war ground on, by January 2023 the adviser on gender issues to the commander of the Ground Forces, Oksana Grygorieva, announced:

About 5,000 women are fighting on the front lines ... Currently, 60,000 Ukrainian women are serving, including 40,000 in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Prior to 24 February 2022, 16–17 percent of the Ukrainian Army was female. After the mobilization of mostly men and women volunteering, the percentage of women in the total army decreased. Currently, it is 8 percent with plans to recruit up to 20 percent women into the army to achieve gender equality.

(Slavins’ka 2023)

Vertical gender segregation in the military is gradually being overcome as more women hold higher military ranks (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023). As Table 10.1 shows, according to the data of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (MoD), since 2013 and the intensifying armed combat with Russia, the number of women in military service in the AFU almost doubled from 16,000 to 31,000. Moreover, the number of female officers has more than tripled from 1,633 in 2013 to 5,112 in 2022. The number of sergeants has almost tripled from 4,784 in 2013 to 13,747 in 2022.

On 24 August 2021, the President of Ukraine awarded the military rank of Brigadier General of the Medical Service to Colonel Tetiana Ostashchenko, the commander of the Medical Forces of the AFU (UkrInform 2021). This is the first time in the history of Ukraine that a female representative of the Armed

TABLE 10.1 The number of women in military service in the AFU by year

<i>Year</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Sergeants</i>	<i>Soldiers</i>	<i>Total</i>
2013	1,633	4,784	9,797	16,214
2014	1,633	4,784	9,797	16,214
2015	1,582	3,898	8,490	13,970
2016	2,204	3,946	10,405	16,555
2017	2,553	4,434	12,599	19,586
2018	3,068	5,316	15,703	24,087
2019	3,574	6,125	16,004	25,703
2020	4,244	6,973	17,438	28,655
2021	4,810	6,112	19,673	30,595
2022	5,112	13,747	12,402	31,261

Source: Data supplied by the MoD upon request, 16 January 2023.

Forces received the rank of general. The head of the Military Medical Department of the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU), Liudmyla Shugalei, became the first Ukrainian woman to receive the rank of major general of the medical service (Hrytsenko 2022). Yulia Laputina, Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, received the second general rank in the SSU (Zubkova 2020). Other women in top positions in the security and defense sector include Hanna Maliar, Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine; Yulia Laputina, Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine; and Iryna Vereshchuk, Deputy Minister and Minister for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine.

According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, as of 1 January 2023, about 455,000 people had registered as veterans of the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2014 (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023). Among them are more than 26,000 women (5.8 percent). Five years ago, there were almost 12,000 female veterans, revealing a sharp increase. Since the summer of 2018, the number of female veterans of combat operations has more than doubled (Martsenyuk et al. 2019). The largest share of female veteran combatants is in the National Police (15.8 percent), followed by the SSU (8.3 percent), the State Emergency Service (6.0 percent), and the Administration of the State Border Service (5.0 percent). The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine has the largest number of women veterans with 18,922 (6.0 percent). Among the volunteers, the share of female veterans is almost 10 percent. Regionally, the largest number of veterans were from Donetsk (4,253 or 17.6 percent of all veterans), followed by Luhansk (2,155 or 14.2 percent), Lviv (1,679 or 6.0 percent), Dnipropetrovsk (1,499 or 4.3 percent), Odesa (1,350 or 7.3 percent), Zhytomyr (1,312 or 5.7 percent), Kyiv (1,172 or 4.1 percent), and Kharkiv (1,165 or 5.3 percent) regions.

According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, as of 1 January 2023, the number of persons having the status of a person with a disability due to the war was 101,153, of whom 8,534 (8.4 percent) were women (Invisible

Battalion 5.0 2023). According to the most recent available open sources, such as the Book of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine, as of 1 December 2021, 23 women had died in the Russo-Ukrainian war.² A number of them received awards posthumously, including markswoman Alesia Baklanova, sanitary instructor Alla Vovk, senior nurse Sabina Halyts'ka, sniper Yaroslava Nikonenko, senior telephone operator Kateryna Noskova, senior combat medic Klavdia Sytnyk, sanitary instructor Natalia Horuzha, and sanitary instructor of the battalion medical post-Iryna Shevchenko, who was posthumously awarded the order “For Courage” III degree. Olena Kulish, a volunteer who was killed for providing support to Ukrainian soldiers, was posthumously given the “National Hero of Ukraine” award.

Public opinion on equal rights and opportunities for women in the military

Even though the political will is crucial for implementing gender equality at an institutional level, societal attitudes toward diversity and dignity are also important factors (Martsenyuk 2022).

As part of the sociological study “Invisible Battalion 2.0: The Return of Female Veterans to a Peaceful Life” (2019), a survey was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology during the period 8–23 September 2018 in 109 localities in all oblasts of Ukraine under Ukrainian control. In the field survey stage, 2,026 questionnaires were collected, 915 from men and 1,111 from women. The results of this survey demonstrate support for the idea of equal rights and opportunities in the Armed Forces (Martsenyuk et al. 2019, 144–149). Almost five years later in 2023, and almost one year after the invasion, to assess attitudes toward gender equality in the AFU, three questions were asked again (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023). The field stage in January 2023 was conducted by the research agency Info Sapiens on different samples of the population that were nevertheless representative of Ukraine (except for the non-controlled territories).

While in 2018 more than half agreed that women in Ukraine should be given equal opportunities to work in the AFU and other military branches, in 2023, this opinion was held more strongly (see Table 10.2). In fact, nearly a year after the full-scale invasion, half of the respondents still strongly agree with this statement. Full support for equal rights and opportunities for women and men to work in the Armed Forces and other military formations has doubled over the past four and a half years of the war that began in 2014. Table 10.2 shows that, in 2018, slightly more than one-third of Ukrainians disagreed with this statement, and 15 percent found it difficult to answer. By 2023, the situation has changed significantly. We have half as many respondents (6 percent versus 12 percent) who completely disagree with the fact that women should be given

TABLE 10.2 Women should be granted equal opportunities with men to work in the armed forces of Ukraine and other military formations. Please say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>KIIS, N = 2,026, September 2018 (%)</i>	<i>Info Sapiens, N = 1,000, January 2023 (%)</i>
I agree completely	24.0	50.1
I rather agree than disagree	29.3	33.8
I rather disagree than agree	18.9	8.4
I completely disagree	12.2	5.8
Difficult to say	14.3	1.6
Refusal to answer	1.4	0.4
Total	100	100

TABLE 10.3 Attitudes to the statement that the army should be a professional field where both women and men can fulfill their potential on a voluntary basis (of their own free will)

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>KIIS, N = 2,026, September 2018 (%)</i>	<i>Info Sapiens, N = 1,000, January 2023 (%)</i>
I agree completely	32.9	78.0
I rather agree than disagree	36.2	17.1
I rather disagree than agree	9.6	2.2
I completely disagree	6.8	1.6
Difficult to say	13.1	0.7
Refusal to answer	1.4	0.3
Total	100	100

equal opportunities with men to work in the AFU and other military branches. The share of those who rather disagree has more than halved in those years. By January 2023, only about 2 percent of Ukrainians were undecided on this issue, demonstrating new attitudes toward gender equality in the armed forces.

Similarly, support for the statement that the army should be a professional force where both women and men can serve on a voluntary basis has increased significantly (see Table 10.3). While in 2018 only 33 percent fully agreed with this statement, by 2023, two and a half times more did (78 percent). In fact, a year after the invasion, we have almost unanimous support for a professional army with both men and women serving.

Regardless of the survey year, the majority of people believe conscription of both men and women should be only on a voluntary, contract basis (see Table 10.4). More than 60 percent of Ukrainians chose this option in both 2018 and 2023. By 2023, the share of those polled who were inclined to support

TABLE 10.4 In your opinion, what kind of army should Ukraine introduce?

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>KIIS, N = 2,026, September 2018 (%)</i>	<i>Info Sapiens, N = 1,000, January 2023 (%)</i>
Enlistment of both men and women only voluntarily (enlistment by contract)	62.0	65.9
Conscription of all men and only of some women	10.6	12.8
Conscription only of men	17.0	12.0
Conscription of all men and all women	1.6	3.3
Other	0.4	4.0
Difficult to say	7.3	1.9
Refusal to answer	1.1	0.1
Total	100	100

the conscription of only men decreased to 12 percent from 17 percent. Few support the draft of all men and only some women. The least popular option in both periods is the total conscription of all men and all women. In 2018, only 1.6 percent of Ukrainians supported it. In 2023, it rose only to 3.3 percent. In other words, support remains robust for enlistment over conscription and for equal opportunity for women and men to enlist.

There are different factors to explain why Ukrainians, especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, support equal opportunities for women and men in the AFU. The presence and positive image of women soldiers have become common. Moreover, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the necessity to mobilize more people for armed resistance have encouraged people to see women as potential soldiers. Finally, Ukrainian women have long been an active part of a tradition of resistance in the fight for Ukrainian independence (Channell-Justice et al. 2021).

An additional survey to gauge the readiness of men and women to engage in armed resistance to Russian occupation was conducted by the research agency Info Sapiens in the period 11–23 January by the computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) method. It was based on a random sample of 1,000 mobile phone numbers, representative of the population of Ukraine aged 16+ by gender, age, region, and size of settlement. The survey excludes the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Luhansk Oblast, as well as some temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv Oblasts, where there is no telephone connection (see Table 10.5). The majority of Ukrainians, 70.2 percent, both men and women, are ready to do this, if we combine the responses “fully ready” and “rather ready.” Of course, men chose these options to a greater extent: 77.4 percent of men and 64.3 percent of

TABLE 10.5 Are you personally ready or not ready to put up armed resistance to stop the Russian occupation of Ukraine? (Info Sapiens, *N* = 1000, January 2023)

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>Men (%)</i>	<i>Women (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Completely ready	44.32	29.59	36.26
Rather ready	33.09	34.70	33.97
Rather not ready	8.55	16.58	12.95
Completely not ready	7.23	13.45	10.64
I am already resisting	5.00	0.12	2.33
I don't know/It's hard to say	1.82	5.54	3.86
Total	100	100	100

Source: Data provided to the author by Inna Volosevych, Info Sapiens.

women are ready to offer armed resistance, that is, the majority of Ukrainian men and women. We see that 2.3 percent of the population is already resisting, according to the results of this survey.

To summarize the results of public opinion polls, egalitarian tendencies toward equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the military have intensified after the invasion.

The problem of sexual harassment in the armed forces and the fight against it

The topic of combating sexual violence in Ukrainian society in general, and in the military sphere in particular, is relevant and requires careful attention. A systematic strategy and policy for preventing and countering sexual harassment in the security and defense sector has not yet been formed. Psychologists and others responsible for moral and psychological support lack appropriate qualifications and job instructions for interacting with survivors of sexual harassment and offenders. There is a lack of clear, established terminology, an effective mechanism for responding to sexual harassment, systematic information on the inadmissibility of behavior that can be considered sexual harassment, and accountability for violating these new norms of behavior. To understand the scale of the problem, one must consider the reluctance of survivors of sexual harassment to report such cases, the complexity of the process of reporting, and the taboo nature of the subject of sexual violence. Survivors often refuse to ask for help because they face victim-blaming from those around them.

Non-governmental organizations, such as the Ukrainian NGO Legal Hundred,³ the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association (JurFem),⁴ and La Strada–Ukraine,⁵ collect statistical information about cases of sexual harassment in the military. The Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association provides free legal aid for survivors of sexual violence and all forms of gender discrimination. As of 7 February 2023, the JurFem support hotline had received about 200 complaints.

Of these, ten were from women who served in the military, mostly regarding sexual violence and discrimination. Four cases were related to sexual violence committed against military women. According to data from La Strada–Ukraine, in 2022, the national hotline for the prevention of domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender discrimination received 38,472 calls. Regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence, 147 appeals for help were received, including 88 for rape consultations and 59 for sexual harassment. Among them, two were related to sexual violence in the military. One appeal concerned the rape of a female soldier during military service and the other related to sexual harassment by a commander during military service.

Military women are afraid to report acts of violence to their commander or make a statement to law enforcement agencies. They are wary of negative consequences that might arise from fellow male comrades in their unit. Internal investigations take place under the guise of “covering their own” in compliance with “male solidarity.” The true scale of the problem of sexual harassment in the military is difficult to assess, which makes it difficult to address. Conclusions from statistical data from a study conducted two years ago remain relevant in 2023. Considering the increase in the number of women in the defense and security sector of Ukraine who are more likely to be survivors of sexual harassment, there is an urgent need to establish effective mechanisms for monitoring cases of sexual harassment and combating sexual violence.

In 2021, an online course titled “Gender Equality and Combating Sexual Harassment in the Military” was introduced on the Prometheus platform.⁶ The course was developed by the NGO “Institute of Gender Programs” as part of the “Invisible Battalion 3.0” information campaign (Invisible Battalion 3.0 2021). It is intended for employees of the security and defense sector, veterans, military journalists, and employees of military educational institutions, as well as for all those interested in the topic of ensuring gender equality in the military. As of 11 January 2023, 23,365 students had taken the course and 21,105 (or 90 percent) received certificates. The average age of the listener was 34 years, and the vast majority, 83 percent, were men.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the hybrid war in 2014, the number of women working in the security and defense sector has grown significantly, and increasing women’s access to the Armed Forces has become part of the current political agenda. A combination of dynamics is driving these developments: a “top-down” approach regarding the regulation of gender equality via policies on the official level and a “bottom-up” approach driven by NGOs, grassroots activism, and women themselves. The Invisible Battalion advocacy campaign, which began in 2015, initiated positive changes within the security and defense sector and helped change

the public perception of women defenders. As the war dragged on, so did efforts to expand the possibilities for women in the military. Newfound openness to gender equality in the midst of war has led to sweeping changes. Combat positions were gradually opened to women; women were admitted to military lyceums and higher institutions of military education; there has been greater acknowledgment and condemnation of gender-based violence leading to gender training and education for staff; female veterans are now recognized; and the general principles of gender equality have been legally approved.

Although the issue of horizontal and vertical segregation of women in the Armed Forces remains problematic, the situation is gradually improving. Providing equal rights and opportunities for women in the military mandates preventing and combating sexual harassment. The number of appeals from military survivors of sexual harassment is increasing. This indicates a growing level of awareness of this problem. However, the topic of sexual violence still remains rather hushed and taboo, which allows perpetrators to go unpunished, especially during the active phase of war.

Given the very real military threat Ukraine faces, military and political leaders have had to use radical openness to find new ways to strengthen defensive capacities to gain a decisive edge. Support for egalitarian ideas regarding the involvement of women and LGBT people in the armed forces is growing as a solution. Not only are all resources needed, but also there is a broad tendency among Ukrainians to distance themselves from all things Russian (see Pavlenko, this volume). This includes the traditional gender roles and identities encapsulated in the civilizational choice of the “Russian world” versus more tolerant and inclusive European gender-based ideals. As women and LGBT people continue to contribute to victory by participating in different forms of resistance, including militarily, radical openness to new gender-based norms of equality might well continue to spread to other spheres of Ukrainian society even long after this war is over.

Notes

- 1 This legislation also affects service in the Border Guards of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the Civil Defense Forces of Ukraine, and other military formations, created in accordance with the laws of Ukraine, as well as relevant law enforcement agencies (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2000).
- 2 The Book of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine: <https://memorybook.org.ua> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 3 The Ukrainian NGO Legal Hundred: <https://legal100.org.ua/en/> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 4 The Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association “JurFem”: <https://jurfem.com.ua/en/homepage-2/> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 5 La Strada–Ukraine: <https://la-strada.org.ua/en/> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 6 “*Henderna rivnist’ ta protydiia seksual’nym domahanniam u viis’kovii sferi*,” course on the Prometheus platform: https://courses.prometheus.org.ua/courses/course-v1:Prometheus+GE101+2021_T2/about (accessed 28 June 2023).

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11

MEETING THE OTHER

Peacebuilding and religious actors in a time of war

Tetiana Kalenychenko

Can we, or even should we, talk about peacebuilding during war? During an ongoing process of dispossession when scores of civilians are dying and suffering and appeals for enhanced weaponry are growing more urgent as the front lines of assault broaden, is this the moment to call for dialogue and peacebuilding? Is it possible to find peace and focus on post-war recovery in the middle of a war?

The Dialogue in Action Initiative, which began in 2016, is dedicated to fostering restorative practices that include community building led by religious actors from a broad cross-section of denominations as a means to mediate conflicts and reverse dispossession. This initiative points to the challenges of fostering dialogue among representatives of completely different religious groups, non-believers, and secular NGOs, some of whom consider each other enemies and live in active combat zones and therefore contend with dispossession every day. I consider religious actors in Ukraine to be part of civil society, albeit ones that are not entirely separate from the state. Such actors are often the drivers of key political and social decisions designed to reverse the deleterious effects of dispossession. Because religious actors often enjoy moral authority, they are also the ones capable of marshaling the radical openness necessary to begin the arduous process of imagining what peace might look like, even as the war rages on.

The religious sphere in which such actors are embedded is defined by a variety of structures, institutions, and communities. Each has its own vision, and this influences the narratives and lenses through which members of faith communities look at the world. I consider the peacebuilding potential of religious actors as members of civil society in terms of their potential to advance restorative practices and mediate conflicts that exist on the national level and on the level of multi-layered conflicts within local communities across Ukraine.

The prism of conflict transformation

John Paul Lederach proposes a theory of conflict transformation that is based on theories of peacebuilding and extensive practical experience (Lederach 2003). It departs from the premise that conflict is a natural part of social life. His main argument is that the goal of peacebuilding is not to “solve” or “resolve” a conflict, but rather to change it, to transform a conflict by looking at it not from the perspective of five to ten years but in terms of generations. Lederach defines conflict transformation in terms of responding “to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (2003, 14). He advocates processes that enable self-organization and have the potential to lead to strengthening the resilience of social institutions that manage internal and external stressors and shocks (see Channell-Justice, this volume; de Coning 2018).

Regarding building peace in Ukraine, several principles have become widely accepted. First, peacebuilding is needed already in Ukraine, even during this active phase of the war, to prepare for the post-war period by acting now to minimize conflicts that could arise later. Second, peacebuilding is not an isolated process but must be considered within broader frameworks of global trends and development strategies. Finally, intra-Ukrainian processes, including those aimed at preserving and even increasing social trust, are the first order of peacebuilding, as noted by the professional community of Ukrainian mediators and dialogue facilitators (Kyselova 2017).¹ The potential restoration of contact with the Russian side is possible only within a framework of transitional justice that recognizes the violation of human rights and state sovereignty by a full-scale unprovoked invasion of a sovereign state and the atrocities this unleashed, including dispossession, destruction, suffering, and loss of human life.

Like Lederach, I, too, have combined research and the study of conflict with practical experience since 2014 as a project coordinator and dialogue facilitator in Ukraine. Especially since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, it has become essential to preserve the possibility of strategically envisioning and narrating ideas that can form new pillars of identity. Rather than only documenting current crises, we need to develop strategies to assess current trends as they are unfolding. It is impossible to ignore the rise of social polarization that is happening in Ukraine thanks to this war. We need to see its sources and understand how it contributes to new forms of identity that can foster a lasting and deeply rooted peace—and not just peace as a phase before another outbreak of armed combat, discrimination, radicalism, fundamentalism, and other disruptive forces. Our analyses of peacebuilding in Ukraine must not consider religion and faith as something that exists, or should exist, only in the private sphere of an individual’s life but should rather consider

the political and economic influences religion and faith wield and their potential to contribute to conflict mediation and to strengthening local communities. I use a conflict-sensitive approach to analyze the current experiences of war and interfaith dialogue as part of peacebuilding processes in Ukraine.

Transforming conflicts is a means to understand and respond to the rise and fall of social tensions driven by dispossession. This includes life-giving opportunities to develop the radical openness necessary to pioneer processes of change that reduce violence and increase justice in direct interactions and through social institutions charged with responding to tangible problems. At the heart of a transformational approach to conflict management are two fundamental principles: (1) understanding conflict in a positive sense, as a natural phenomenon in which the constructive potential for beneficial, transformational change is embedded; and (2) maximizing this potential.

In the context of war, reconciliation is the final goal of conflict transformation that must be preceded by transformations among individuals and social groups. This does not constitute a rejection of any aspiration toward reconciliation, but rather a repositioning of it as a mission. Most often, reconciliation is mistakenly set as a goal during an active phase of war when heated emotional states do not allow the process to advance. The importance of Lederach's work, in both an academic and an applied sense, is that he was the first to raise the issue of reconciliation as a matter of religious mission. He realized that religious actors share beliefs, and this can serve as a basis for reconciliation and the formation of strategic visions for coexistence, even when the word "peace" is still a trigger for victims of violence.

Reconciliation as a process is paradoxical. It begins not with an opponent, a perpetrator, but with work directed to oneself. Long-term therapeutic work can change how one sees the enemy and can lead to a re-personalization/re-humanization of the enemy by separating the individual from a group on which enmity is projected (a group of Russian religious people, for example). This is the first essential step to abandoning feelings of superiority over an enemy Other and to developing a positive sense of self and group identity that does not depend on critically judging the Other to elevate the standing of one's own group. The great challenge, and even tragedy, is that sometimes participants on one side do not want to reconcile. Then, the magic of mutual forgiveness and restoration of relations does not happen. However, even merely reckoning with what an individual or group has experienced, healing from those experiences of loss and dispossession, and using the potential that emerges from that process to move forward and envision a new future is fundamental and a step in the right direction. Religious actors can define, develop, and disseminate spiritually based ideas and meanings to initiate processes of reconciling one's own dispossessive losses, and the grief and anger they generate, even when others remain unprepared to embark on such processes. Below I consider examples where religious

actors have the potential to articulate new visions and positive identities and implement them at least on the level of their own local communities—that is, provided those same religious actors are ready to work on themselves and work toward a peaceful future.

Ukrainian religious actors in conditions of full-scale war

The recent past has brought a “great return” of religion to the public sphere, and especially to politics, which has been called the “re-politicization” of religion (Yelensky 2013). At the same time, the “securitization” of religion as a “spiritual front” is becoming a feature of current efforts to politicize and weaponize religion during the war. State actors instrumentalize the religious factor for a variety of purposes. As Tim Jensen notes, religion is an important part of the agenda not only for politicians, secret service agencies, and law enforcement but also for European Union politicians and those organizations responsible for the international security system (Jensen 2017, 47–48). Securitization has become a rationale to use various social institutions—political, educational, and religious—to protect the social order (Jensen 2017, 48–49).

The securitization of religion is advanced not only by politicians and government authorities but also by clergy. Clergy use the repressive apparatus of the state to fight competitors, incorporate religiosity into state institutions, and convert symbolic religious capital into political capital. There is growing popular support for policies that allow for the “securitization” of religion and identity policies that involve the “nationalization” of religion. Political elites and opposition leaders both turn to religion as a tool to achieve their goals. Identities become, in the words of Dominique Arel, “rather labels that are fought over by state agents and nonstate entrepreneurs,” more than anything that reflects lived experiences (Arel 2006, 3).

The Russian full-scale invasion has prompted severe challenges to several religious groups. Dramatic changes are taking place among believers and clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is experiencing the most serious crisis of its entire existence as it tries to clarify its relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) (Brylov and Kalenychenko 2022). Serious questions about the connection between religious conviction and political position have also arisen for Protestant denominations. Before the invasion, they were closely associated with their Russian co-religionists and advocated pacifism as part of their fundamental doctrine (see Vagramenko, this volume). Ukrainian Greek Catholics are also experiencing shifts in individual and collective self-perceptions as the Church attempts to articulate its political position in the face of broad popular criticism of the actions of the Holy See that include the Pope’s attempts to mediate religious conflicts in Ukraine.

This is not an exhaustive list given the highly diverse character of the Ukrainian religious landscape. A system of religious denominationalism has been

established in Ukraine thanks to religious pluralism, a high degree of competitiveness among religious organizations, and the Ukrainian state's refusal to formally acknowledge any of the larger churches as a single state church. All religions have equal rights under the law and compete with one another. Particularly among predominantly Orthodox societies, this situation stands out by its liberal nature and by the scale of religious pluralism. This open religious field in Ukraine recalls the American religious landscape (Wanner 2007, 132).²

Responses of religious actors to the challenges of war

One of the characteristics of the religious landscape in Ukraine that I have observed as a dialogue and peacebuilding practitioner is a reactionary model of behavior among religious leaders. Senior clergy often prefer to wait for occasions to *react* to socio-political events instead of proactively acting to generate their own strategies for shaping the outcomes of those events. This reticence to act is at least partially grounded in clerics' fear of being dispossessed of resources, both tangible (land, buildings, money) and intangible (political status, social connections, public support). This posture hinders the potential for religious communities to positively influence events and widens the gap between the expectations of religious actors to be moral leaders and the actual behavior of these actors.

This also exposes a much deeper problem in Ukrainian society. Religious actors themselves do not share a consensus as to whether they are part of civil society or not. Should they be silent about issues of faith and confine religion to a private domain, as some believe? Or, on the contrary, should they express their views publicly, as some consistently do? Should they speak out in response to political and social problems as religious figures and thereby influence the course of events? Or should they refrain from doing so because these are not spiritual problems strictly speaking? Such dilemmas, along with many others, support a reactionary response model. Some leaders of religious organizations prefer to look for ways to effectively politicize or securitize their own communities, with the belief that this will deliver additional resources. However, this usually only weakens their authority and the religious identities of believers and plays into the hands of politicians.

Instead, acute social and political crises, which are often accompanied by sudden economic downturns, such as this war, become external factors that oblige religious leaders to think and respond to critical questions within their own communities. Even those religious leaders who prefer to remain silent and "respond spiritually," that is to say, to remain "above" reality but not "in" it, are obliged to articulate certain positions and give very practical responses as to how they define their identity, denomination, and spiritual convictions in matters of life and death. Ukrainian society remains fractured by deep internal divisions,

having not yet formed a culture of communication and cooperation and struggling in the gray zone of identity formation that relies on a rejection of all things Russian (Pavlenko, this volume).

Disrupting the religious landscape as we knew it: Orthodox and Protestant communities

Here I focus on two key issues that are indicative of how identities and communal belonging are changing, the fractures that have developed within Ukrainian religious communities, and the severing of communal ties with Russian co-religionists. I focus primarily on Orthodoxy in Ukraine and specifically the challenges faced by the UOC and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Certainly, no less serious crises face Protestants, whose numbers in Ukraine are much larger and whose members are more influential than the results of quantitative surveys of membership and religious allegiance would suggest.

Tensions between the UOC and the OCU reach beyond Ukraine's borders and affect Orthodoxy globally. From the moment the OCU was created in 2018, instead of one unified Orthodox Church, there were two parallel Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, each with canonical status. The most difficult issues the OCU confronted were the problem of its recognition by the world Orthodox community and its own representation at the international level.³ Additional problems have arisen that require a solution at the pan-Orthodox level.⁴ With millions of Ukrainian refugees abroad, one issue is the question of their pastoral care, given that the OCU cannot open parishes abroad according to the conditions set by the *tomos* of autocephaly. While there have been agreements that allow OCU priests to serve abroad in Roman Catholic churches, for example, in Poznan, Poland, these are isolated cases.⁵ Some theologians consider this a violation of the canonical territory of the Polish Orthodox Church.

The earlier split in the relationship between Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Patriarch Kirill of the ROC, which has affected the entire global Orthodox world, has deepened since the invasion. The Ecumenical Patriarchate announced that the head of the ROC should renounce his status after the start of Russia's open war against Ukraine.⁶ Without question, the OCU began to embody its long-awaited status as an independent "Ukrainian" Orthodox church even as it faced new challenges. This political positioning was in stark contrast to the Russian institutional connections that the UOC has to the ROC. The symbolism of Metropolitan Epiphanius, the head of the OCU, conducting a service on 7 January 2023 in the Assumption Cathedral⁷ at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra was a historic event that shook the authority of the UOC, which previously had dominion over the monastery, and changed the position of the UOC in Ukrainian society. About 600 UOC parishes switched their affiliation to the OCU in 2019 after the OCU was created, and another 700 switched from the UOC to the OCU after the full-scale invasion began.

From the very beginning of the Maidan protests in 2013–2014, again when the armed combat began in 2014 in Eastern Ukraine, and most of all after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the UOC was obliged to respond to the vociferous demands of Ukrainians to react to these events. Usually, the UOC positioned itself as “above” political conflicts and tried to focus on serving the spiritual needs of its people. It often contrasted its fulfillment of a spiritual function with the worldly engagement of a “secular OCU” in public space. The UOC continues to include pro-Russian clergy and parishioners, as well as pro-Ukrainian elements who do not always take a specific position but adapt to external events.

Public accusations of pro-Russian positions among the UOC from both religious actors and secular leaders led to criminal investigations, the creation of a separate investigative commission on collaboration,⁸ and searches of the Kyiv monastery by the Security Services of Ukraine.⁹ As a result, the UOC's lease on buildings in the Upper Kyiv Pechersk Lava was terminated in early 2023.¹⁰ The citizenship of a number of clergy, including members of the clerical hierarchy, was suspended. This has placed the UOC in crisis mode, obliging it to either articulate its relationship to the ROC or face the logical consequences if it does not. If the UOC leadership is not ready to declare autocephaly and openly oppose its institutional connection to the ROC and Patriarch Kirill, a vociferous proponent of the war, it will confront the decisions that clergy and laity on the ground will make in response to this. Dissenting clergy could go underground, continue to serve in an unofficial status, or integrate into another church, including the Polish Orthodox Church, as one priest formerly of the UOC in the Lviv region has already done. Even if some clergy refrain from judging the UOC over its failure to clearly articulate its status during the war, if the UOC continues to avoid taking action it will not solve this essential dilemma. On the contrary, requests for a clear statement of the UOC's position toward the ROC, Patriarch Kirill, and the war more broadly are likely to grow louder, more frequent, and more categorical.

At the same time, one cannot ignore the diversity of views within the UOC and the hate speech that is directed at the church, which the Russian state uses to its advantage. For example, Russia and the ROC have appealed to the UN Security Council claiming violations of religious freedom in Ukraine, even though the UOC rejects such claims and denies the right of the ROC and Russian authorities to speak on its behalf. The UOC has expressed:

concerns over structures that have no relation to the UOC raising questions in our name. We call on the Russian authorities not to speak on behalf of our Church on international platforms and not to use the religious factor for their own political purposes.¹¹

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine not only led to a split and crises in Orthodoxy but also splits and crises among Protestants (see Chapter 6, this

volume). Before the full-scale invasion in 2022, although there are numerous Protestant communities in the Donbas, most Protestant leaders did not take public positions on the war and were at a loss to offer theological interpretations to explain Russian aggression and appropriate responses to it. However, after the full-scale invasion began, they reacted quite differently. The invasion and the public reaction to it confirmed only the differences in church–state relations among Protestant believers in Russia and Ukraine. Over time, leaders of Protestant communities in Ukraine could not ignore the unfolding political and social crises that were affecting their communities and were exacerbated by revelations of support among Russian co-religionists for the “Russian world” doctrine and armed aggression against Ukraine. This is a quandary with co-religionists that not only Protestants in Ukraine faced but also Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim communities. Some Protestant religious actors in Russia went underground. If they did not, they were subject to being banned, repressed, or monitored. Ukrainian Protestant actors were faced with the choice of whether to accept their compromised autonomy and lose the chance to rethink and develop in new directions. In public statements and personal conversations, Ukrainian Protestants were asked to “be silent and not call for violence,” “to resist the fall into the heresy of nationalism,” and to return to their Anabaptist roots and advocate pacifism as a response to the invasion and intensifying war.

By April 2022, religious organizations in Russia mostly supported state policies toward Ukraine and pledged their allegiance to the Russian imperial-national idea and the Russian state.¹² Although there were later calls to “pray for peace,” to return to biblical postulates, and reminders of the Church’s mission, there was never a condemnation of a political regime that called for war against a neighboring country. This is what Ukrainian co-believers expected.¹³ Russian Protestant leaders argued that this was a “fratricidal war independent of its causes” where “borders are not important, only human souls.”¹⁴ This narrative did not change even after the partial mobilization of the civilian population in Russia on 21 September 2022, seven months after the war began.

Russian Protestant leaders advised their believers to “listen to your own Christian conscience” and act accordingly without fear.¹⁵ This prompted the emergence of a cohort of so-called Christian peacemakers. They condemned Russia’s aggression from a biblical perspective. Their proposed solution to war was to withdraw into prayer for peace, provide humanitarian aid, and advocate for nonviolent resistance. However, humanitarian aid from Russian Protestants quickly took the form of opening their own religious communities in the occupied territories and working with Russian occupying authorities to do so.

This contrasts sharply with the narratives of Ukrainian Protestant unions that squarely condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine and stress the number of civilian casualties. As Tatiana Vagramenko argues in Chapter 6, the position of Ukrainian Protestants in the war represents such a significant departure from

the narrative of Russian Protestant leaders that the unions and networks, which formed in the Soviet era, were driven to the breaking point. Moreover, Ukrainian Protestant unions had begun preparing their local communities to respond to the war and even encouraged resistance by joining the Ukrainian Armed Forces or territorial defense units. Their connections to transnational religious organizations allowed them to secure public pronouncements condemning the war. For example, the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE) expressed its solidarity with Ukrainian Protestants by decreeing:

As a result of condemning the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine and Belarus' role in the war as fundamental violation of European values, principles and goals and of Christian ethics, the ECTE will not consider membership or engage in quality assurance procedures or other work with providers from the Russian Federation and Belarus unless it can be assured that such cooperation is based on shared values.¹⁶

Such shifts in alliances among co-believers globally and the solidarity expressed toward Ukrainians prompted some who still maintained pacifist views to rethink them. This has set off a chain reaction of rethinking through many other interlocking doctrinal issues—those that concern gender, for example—that will surely find their way into theological education and localized religious practices in the future. In doing so, the radical openness to new ideas and partnerships that have driven the reactions to the war have forged not only significant new divisions separating Ukrainian Protestant communities from their Russian counterparts but also new alliances that more closely tie Ukrainian communities into greater regional and global networks and alliances.

The transformative potential of religious actors

The staggering events of 2014, which included the violent end to the Maidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of a Russian-backed separatist hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine, led to two new related trends: theological reflection and interpretation of historic events in a religious register, and active involvement in social service provision. Religious actors developed these growing trends with the strong horizontal networks of cooperation that developed during the Maidan protests. “Maidan theology” was a key first step into a new era of public religion. It theologically affirmed an expanded engagement in social and political life among religious actors and related experts. Yuri Chornomorets, a religious studies scholar, was one of the most vocal proponents of Maidan theology as a theology of liberation that centered on repentance. Theologian Cyril Hovorun (2017) was also an active participant in these discussions. He offered theological interpretations of the momentous events of 2014 and strongly

advocated for proactively responding to crises without waiting for popular or political requests to intervene. Hovorun departs from José Casanova's (1996) concept of "public religion" by his advocacy of a theology that seeks to interpret current events in terms of theological principles found in key religious texts. He argues that the Maidan, for example, was a religious phenomenon that unfolded in a public space that became a sacred space, which resulted in new theological influences on institutional religion as well as on Ukrainian society.

Bucha is a small town outside Kyiv. It was the site of a massacre of more than 320 civilians, many of whom were brutally tortured or raped before being buried in shallow mass graves. Especially after August 2022 and the revelations of numerous other war crimes, we see the birth of "Theology after Bucha," a term coined by Protestant theologian Roman Soloviy as an attempt to try to reckon with evil. He poignantly wrote:

Hundreds and hundreds of unarmed civilians were shot dead with their hands tied. Burned bodies of raped women. Dead bodies cover the streets of cities, fill basements, and decompose in looted apartments ... A month and a half ago, I could have given a lecture on how to forgive enemies and support victims of violence. But today I can only cry. I used to be tormented by the question of why so many Holocaust survivors later committed suicide ... Today, I understand that the violence and evil they experienced deprived them of ways to return to everyday life, to form normal relationships, and to trust other people.¹⁷

People make choices and those choices make history, as Eli Wiesel (1960) asserted in his first book on his experiences in Auschwitz. But how could a benevolent God allow people to make choices that would lead to such atrocities and create such despicable levels of human suffering? Protestant leaders, such as Soloviy, reaffirm their intention to expand theological education to increasingly address issues of theodicy, to reckon with how to reconcile perceptions of the forgivable and the unforgivable, and to consider how popular attempts to grapple with these issues will impact theological education and the work of religious actors going forward.

Finally, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations offers another interpretation of the war. The Council was founded in 1996 to coordinate interconfessional dialogue in Ukraine and abroad, participate in church-state legislative issues, and contribute to charitable initiatives. The Council has taken a leading role in uniting religious organizations, unions, and groups of religious actors to create new narratives and interpretations of the war as guiding principles going forward. The Council declared on 6 April 2022 that the Russian assault on Ukraine constitutes a genocide that is being justified by the ideology of the "Russian world," which denies the possibility for a sovereign Ukrainian state and a separate Ukrainian nation to exist.

The writer Maksym Vikhrov echoes the need for individuals with credibility to address the vexing ethical and moral issues that arise during war:

First of all, there is now a strong demand for specifics. It is no longer possible to hide in the fog of streamlined phrases—and the point is not (only) that an angry nation requires everyone to clearly and loudly declare their position. It is also about the accuracy and objectivity of statements because the evil we have encountered manifests itself in forms that lend themselves well to definition. “Peace,” “war,” “violence,” “aggression,” “suffering”—these are all good, correct words, but without context and without a projection onto reality, they threaten to turn into deceptive euphemisms.¹⁸

This declaration and the many other theologies that have been developed in the course of this war begin to pave the way for establishing the criteria of what constitutes a Just War worth fighting, which has prompted some who previously held pacifist views to abandon them. These new theological interpretative frameworks for understanding contemporary events also proactively provide clergy and laity alike with the language and categories that could be used to discuss what might constitute a Just Peace and help bring an end to this war.

Beyond the theological innovation that is taking place in response to dispossessive loss, there is extensive ongoing institutional reconfiguration resulting from the war from disruptions to institutional allegiances. The promotion of a theologized interpretation of the dispossessive tragedy of war in a religious register has led to greater grassroots activism on the communal level. This activism takes many forms, most prominently as active involvement in social service provision in response to the suffering the war has delivered. This is certainly a form of vibrant self-organization (see Channell-Justice, this volume), yet within the ever more porous confines of religious institutions whose religious leadership and moral authority are increasingly subject to critique.

On the eve of Primate Epiphanius becoming enthroned as the leader of the OCU, the “Ten Theses for the OCU” was released. The Theses outline the key priorities for the new Church based on the “historical traditions of faith in Ukraine” that include the renewal of parish life and the restoration of the principle of the collegiality of the Church, meaning allocating a greater degree of autonomy and self-governance to local communities. This is an important initiative that, once again, has grassroots origins and transformative potential. It reflects a certain openness to new practices and perspectives and an assertiveness to see them fulfilled. Although the Theses were not officially accepted by the OCU hierarchy, they offered an ecumenical platform in which diverse confessions could articulate new visions and continue discussions as to how the strategic relationship between institutional religious life and the nature of its responsibility to Ukrainian society (no longer primarily the state) should continue to evolve.

An appeal with a similar title, “Ten Questions to the Episcopate and the Synod of the UOC from the Clergy and Laity,” followed on 12 January 2023, after the UOC’s lease to churches of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra was terminated and 13 clerics of the UOC had their Ukrainian citizenship revoked due to charges of collaboration with Russian authorities. In a public video, clergy and laity of the UOC demanded that the Holy Synod of the UOC finally clarify the Church’s institutional connection to the ROC, urging support for UOC autocephaly and a break with the ROC.¹⁹ Such a new direction courts the possibility of leading the UOC into a marginal position in the religious landscape, much as the UOC-KP, another breakaway Orthodox church, earlier occupied. An important difference, however, is that this appeal represents a bottom-up initiative that has garnered the signature of over 400 clergy who support such institutional changes. They have also offered an appeal to all Eastern Christian churches to pursue the prosecution of Patriarch Kirill for war crimes.²⁰ The growing number of such initiatives is evidence of an increasing willingness to unite to make public demands of church leadership that inevitably include a questioning of authority and an insistence on addressing the growing gap between the episcopate of the church and the clergy and laity.

Continuing the UOC strategy of refraining from providing comments on the war and maintaining a position of neutrality on the conflict “for spiritual reasons” means that the leadership is pushing its members to implement their own pragmatic solutions that might include not only transferring to OCU but also creating a breakaway church and quasi-church institutions. In short, responses to the war have inevitably set in motion a fundamental rethinking of the Church’s mission in society, its relationship to state and ecclesiastical structures, and its role in solving urgent social problems.

There are two more important examples of transformative changes in theological thinking that have led to tangible institutional innovation since the war began in 2014 that illustrate the transformative potential of dispossession to yield regeneration and reinvention (see Wanner, this volume). The first is the “Living Parish” initiative, which was part of a strategic five-year plan implemented in 2015–2020 by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Living Parish is a concept that emphasizes the importance of individual parishes and believers and encourages an engagement in social justice. A three-year project that began in 2017 focused on increasing the level of social responsibility of individual parishes through their participation in local communities by supporting educational programs to train parishioners and clergy to engage in social service provision. These programs embody new communal practices that shape the everyday lives of local religious communities by mitigating social tensions.

The second example is the “Dialogue in Action” initiative, which brings together religious actors and secular experts to develop a culture of communication and cooperation within and among local communities through sustainable

programs of facilitated dialogues, trainings, and consultations.²¹ Such programs aim to expand understanding, cooperation, and joint social service projects among representatives of NGOs, government, businesses, educational institutions, and local religious communities. A distinctive feature of the initiative is its openness to the participation of representatives from a wide variety of religious organizations—Christian, Muslim, and Jewish—as well as lay leaders who enjoy a high level of trust in local communities, which allows them to influence the direction and coordination of initiatives with multiple groups in local communities.

Initially, the goal of Dialogue in Action in 2016 was to reduce social tensions in local communities by addressing growing expressions of intolerance, prejudice, and frustration as a result of the war in Eastern Ukraine and the influx of displaced people. The dialogue facilitators aimed to improve cooperation between local authorities and residents to solve local problems of governance through community building. The goal was to improve mutual understanding, identify common goals and aspirations, and integrate diverse groups into communities across Ukraine. In 2017–2018, they implemented a youth project, “Peer to Peer: Developing a Culture of Dialogue and Cooperation in Society,” with similar goals. Twelve young volunteers from all over Ukraine underwent a 16-day training in dialogue practices and then conducted their own trainings for youth peers at various venues throughout Ukraine.

Since the full-scale invasion, their focus has shifted to developing individual leadership in local communities along with providing community support for dialogue. Local leaders are trained to recognize trauma, understand the mechanisms of the psyche, and teach coping mechanisms to address the consequences of war for themselves and for the people around them. Ukraine lacks specialists in mental health and trauma healing, areas that will continue to demand systematic work for years to come, and, in the short term, this initiative acts to fill the lacuna. As the Dialogue in Action initiative operates within the framework of the European Center for Strategic Analytics, an additional focus is to foster projects to create a platform for resolving inter-Orthodox conflicts, establishing ecumenical relations among Protestant communities, and adapting religious outreach practices to the needs of ministers and lay people alike.

Conclusion

Life in the midst of full-scale war brings new and unique dilemmas to religious organizations. Defining collaboration and appropriate forms of interaction between clergy and state authorities during occupation is particularly fraught. The challenges and complications exist on multiple levels: within a particular denomination; within a denomination’s communities; among multiple denominations; and among global partners of multiple denominations and faith-based

organizations. The beginning of a unifying partnership sometimes depends less on shared religious affiliation and more on common interests, motivation, or experience. The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers²² and Religions for Peace²³ are examples of cooperative organizations that operate globally across confessional lines; they have been models for Ukraine already during war and surely will continue to be so in the war's aftermath as well.

The strategic direction and operationalization of peacebuilding is to transform conflicts now by fostering a vision of reconciliation through dialogue within Ukraine among Ukrainians. The emphasis is not on reconciliation with Russia and the Russians. Rather, the goal of peacebuilding initiatives now is to develop internal processes to strengthen the social fabric of Ukrainian society by enhancing the ability to include representatives of other social, cultural, and religious groups in its understanding of national culture by broadening the legitimacy of inter-cultural dialogue and cooperation in a way that leads to practical improvements in people's lives. The priorities facing religious actors and broad sectors of Ukrainian society as they instigate positive change in the midst of war include encouraging an understanding of civic identity and responsibility, which can become the foundation for accepting cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity; forming new narratives that contribute to social cohesion and raise the level of trust among people and toward social institutions; fostering processes of interaction that allow people to cross lines of politicized division and develop a culture of dialogue and cooperation; and forming a strategic vision of a common future. Despite a strong rise in the level of cooperation and coordinated responses to war and the suffering it has wrought, Ukrainian society still faces significant internal challenges. Those challenges have not disappeared because of the war and can only remain unaddressed for so long. This is why initiatives to foster peacebuilding, internal and external, cannot wait until the war is over. Leaders, practices, and sites of dialogue must be established now.

The same priorities exist for the religious sphere. Religious actors have remade their own subjectivities to reassess their roles, activities, and agendas and the strategies for achieving them. Important theological questions, the responses to which cannot be formed independently of events, aspirations, and the problems faced by the social world, are social in their very essence. They provide guidance as to how to navigate and survive the punishing experiences Ukrainians are now enduring. The war, together with the destruction and tragedies it has brought, nonetheless is a chance to rethink and renew priorities, many of which might have been impossible to pursue under different circumstances. Against the background of dispossession, crisis, and immense grief due to loss, there is an opportunity to reach a new level of self-determination that draws on a common vision of a shared future that includes civic identities, dialogue, and cooperation. The alternative is to react to challenges without taking into consideration the needs of the whole society and to exacerbate existing tensions

and polarization. The process of transforming a conflict is akin to “going to the enemy with your heart in your hands” (Lederach 2014, 25). The main priority of these initiatives is to resist the temptation to create an enemy out of one’s neighbor or out of a religious Other. Rather, we must create a common space, where what has been silenced can be spoken in order to understand how it is possible to peacefully live together. Only then can there be the possibility of reconciling with external enemies. After all, sooner or later, this question stands before future generations.

Notes

- 1 “7 Points on the war and dialogue from Ukrainian mediators and dialogue facilitators.” Public Statement, Mediation and Dialogue Research Center, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, 10 May 2022. https://md.ukma.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Public_Statement_War_and_Dialogue_Ukraine_ENG.pdf.
- 2 See also “Pohliad Zboku: Relihiyna Systema Ukrayiny Nahaduye Amerykansku.” *BBC News Ukraïna*, 28 June 2013. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/science/2013/06/130626_jose_casanova_int_ko.
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