

Oleksandr Pankieiev (ed.)

Narratives of the Russo-Ukrainian War

A Look Within and Without



With a foreword by
Natalia Khanenko-Friesen

Ukrainian Voices, vol. 65

ibidem

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Oleksandr Pankieiev (ed.)

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Verlag

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN (Print): 978-3-8382-1964-6

ISBN (E-Book [PDF]): 978-3-8382-7964-0

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Foreword

The war that will change the world: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and why we need to care

In your hands you have an unusual collection of essays. No doubt you have been following expert discussions about the Russian war in Ukraine, which resumed with new force in 2022 after some eight years of continued fighting in parts of Eastern Ukraine that were occupied by Russian troops in 2014. Depending on your positionality, background, academic, and general interests, you most likely have selected commentators and analysts whose take on this escalated invasion you value and whose line of thought speaks to you the most. Perhaps this book aligns with the opinions of your preferred experts. Perhaps you may find here new rationale and arguments that invite you to reconsider your currently held understandings of what has been happening in Ukraine, Europe, and the world since the pivotal year of 2022.

I wish this book would never had to have been put together. I wish the world was not witnessing this war, which many are rightly worried about, concerned about the directions it has taken thus far and where events could go next. I most certainly wish that Ukraine was not invaded by its neighbour, neither in 2022 nor in 2014. It has long been clear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is more than a regional conflict—so many other domino pieces of fragile global peace and security began to fall at the very moment when Russian tanks advanced deep into Ukrainian territory with the goal of capturing Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, on 24 February 2022.

I belong to the category of people who were raised on the liberal values and ideas of the late 20th and early 21st centuries that advanced a powerful and convincing line of reasoning: *democracy, liberty, and respect for international order will prevail*. So much work was done toward these aspirational goals. After the horrors and genocides of the Second World War, so many nations and states invested themselves into rebuilding Europe and the world as a shared political space where peace would rule, never imagining there would be a return to large-scale military actions and brutality. So much good work was done by various nations around the world toward meaningful memorialization of WW II, commemoration of its largest

tragedies, the genocides, nuclear bombing, mass murders, and other losses that the war brought upon peoples and nations. In particular, the work that was done in what today is the EU toward reconciliation, redress, and atonement—directed at rebuilding relationships between and within states that once had fought on different sides of the front lines—appeared to be very successful. Similarly, so did the work that the world did jointly to establish an international network of organizations called upon to oversee and govern global affairs in the post-WW II context and later in the post-Cold War times. All this created a sense for so many of us that global peace is indeed a possibility, that humanity learned its lesson from the wars, and that the world is at the point of realizing that large-scale worldwide conflicts are in our past.

In contrast, there have been other powerful voices—the one of Margaret MacMillan, for example—who have been warning us not to fall for this illusory vision of the future. In her book *The Rhyme of History: Lessons of the Great War*, published in 2013 just prior to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, MacMillan revisits two historical periods, comparing the global state of affairs at the onset of WW I and the global context in which the world has found itself on the eve of the Great War's 100th anniversary (MacMillan 2013). There are too many parallels and similar developments, she insists—in global politics, economy, technology, and means of communication—to be ignored by us, the contemporaries. Lulled by our own imagined inconceivability of returning to the most brutal pages of human history, we continued to believe that such mass violence is no longer possible, given that humanity has “progressed” so much after what it had seen and lived through in the two world wars.

MacMillan cautioned us that the hundredth anniversary since the onset of WW I should make us think more critically about the future, because there are so many parallels between the way global affairs and global politics unfolded just on the eve of 1914 and now. Like these days, just prior to WW I the world witnessed accelerated growth and development, with breathtaking technological innovations that upended long-established statuses quo in the economic, political, cultural, and social contexts of the day. Electricity was taking over, railroads were being built, manufacturing and new global corporations were constantly growing, mass migrations were occurring, new and radical cultural ideas (for example, psychoanalysis) and political ideologies were emerging, human rights movements

were expanding, and “the predatory ideologies of fascism and Soviet communism” were taking root (2013: 6).

Fast forward to the early 21st century. The recent global disruptions of the 1990s—i.e., the collapse of Communism in Europe, the Balkan wars, the genocides in Srebrenica and Rwanda—were in the past, however recent. Meanwhile, although the start of the new century was unquestionably affected by the terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, its first decade is now recognized as being a relatively peaceful period, during which only several regional interstate military conflicts stood out on the basis of losses, depth, and extension of the conflict: Eritrea-Ethiopia, India-Pakistan war, and Iraq versus the United States and its allies (Harbom and Wallensteen 2010, 61).

Whether still lingering or recuperating from these and other conflicts, the world moved on and began to embrace new technological advancements reaching into every corner of human life and (almost) every corner of the planet. The 21st century has brought about novel and dramatic shifts in the organization of our increasingly globalized lives, forcing millions to leave their homelands in search of better prospects for their families elsewhere. New technologies offered novel opportunities for operating our economies, making and saving our monies, making and raising our children, and communicating with each other across the globe. The rise of corporations, infused with ever-changing and adapting AI technologies, offered unprecedented opportunities for use but also for abuse of informational flows, directly feeding into the spread of disinformation, hybrid warfares, and leading to brazen violations of international law and world order.

In the political domain, another important development has taken place: a gradual change in the very nature and distribution of global power. The rise of Communist China to the position of a new and powerful global leader, and its growing influence on world affairs, has added another layer of complexity in today’s historical context. Alexander Motyl, whose article is included in this collection, offers further insights into how distant historical context can illuminate today’s circumstances. One important thing that we learned from the Cold War, Motyl asserts, is that bi-polar systems are less conducive to wars than multi-polar systems (ch. 18). With China reaching new heights and Russia trying to retain its sense of relevance, now with the help of the war in Ukraine, the global

system is once again being redrawn—just like in the early 20th century, becoming multi-polar and more fraught with tension.

In the 2010s, democracy made big strides toward peace building in the world; so it was felt, yet we the citizens of the world started witnessing many unsettling developments, including rising global tensions and the arrival of various powerful far-right ideologies and political movements that put down roots around the world, and alarmingly so, within its democratic fold. As counter-actions, we have seen the impressive mobilization of various grassroots resistance movements that became political movements over a short period of time. We have been witnessing the phenomenal growth of media and communication technologies that accelerate the spread of radical ideologies and conspiracy theories. To our chagrin, the same technologies gave birth to very expedient means of undermining truth telling and trustworthy information sharing, and thus we have been watching, with much worry, the impact that novel and powerful disinformation wars have on our national and international political institutions, our communities, and our allies.

Within the same decade, in 2014 an act of inter-state military aggression took place on the territory of Ukraine, and as time went by, the impact of this violation of an international order was felt deeper and deeper, and on global scale. In the early spring of 2014, exploiting the political upheaval in Ukraine—when the entire nation was caught up in active protests against the rule of President Viktor Yanukovich’s repressive, anti-European government—and having just wrapped up hosting the Olympic games in Sochi, President Vladimir Putin swiftly and cunningly moved Russian troops into Crimea. Within mere days, the peninsula was occupied by uniformed “green men” without any identifiable insignia, and within two weeks Ukraine’s Crimean Autonomous Republic was illegally annexed to the Russian Federation in a staged referendum that was criticized by the international community as fake. Not until 2022 would most of the world begin to comprehend and see the full repercussions of the illegal annexation of Crimea, finally understanding that *de facto* it was the beginning of a new, protracted, and on many counts highly dangerous “non-regional” war that in 2024 marked its tenth year.

In comparison to various “regional” wars and military conflicts that have affected other parts of the globe, Russia’s occupation

of Ukraine in 2014 and its recent effort to accelerate the military takeover of Ukraine have a profound potential to change the course of global history. Russia's attack on Ukraine has undermined and challenged global peace, security, and international law. Motyl, as mentioned earlier, sees this war as an imminent boost to the establishment of a much-preferred bi-polar system within the framework of global relations, where the main competitors remain China and the US with its allies. Whatever time it might take, and whatever outcome the current war will have, the scholar expects the resistance so many nations around the globe have displayed towards Russia in response to its open aggressive military invasion of Ukraine to cause Russia to lose its position of global leader. Emerging new juxtapositions will change the balance of global powers.

Realization by observers of the war's neocolonial nature also has been growing, along with an understanding of its global implications. There is a comprehension now that the war is directly informed by Russia's neocolonial appetite, which aims to annihilate Ukraine as a state and reabsorb the Ukrainian territory as its own. In the present volume, this argument is revisited in various ways by Oleksii Polegkyi (7, 11), Dmytro Bushuyev (11), Cynthia Nielsen (8), Peter Vermeersch (21), Bo Petersson (1, 32), and other contributors.

Serhii Plokhyy (13) sees the eruption of this war as the death throes of Russia's imperial legacy – as the final phase, however slow and painful it might be, of disintegration of the lingering (neo)totalitarianism that had continued to define Russia as an autocratic state after the collapse of the USSR and led to the establishment of the repressed and state-controlled social, political, and cultural landscape in Russian society.

Another outcome of the war is Europe's growing sense of solidarity with Ukraine as a part of the European cultural and political space – described here in chapters by Dovilė Budrytė (4), Elżbieta Kwiecińska (17), Donnacha Ó Beacháin (26), and Andrii Zharikov (34). Despite differences in how various European states expressed and offered their support to Ukraine, we have also seen significant mobilization around NATO, making the alliance stronger and more relevant than it has been for a long time. Repercussions of the Russo-Ukrainian war expand beyond the European level, as under its pressure nations around the world – and in particular, those far away from Europe – are drawn into alliances based either on pre-existing political and economic ties with Russia or a lack of

understanding of history and what led to the genocidal Russian invasion of Ukraine.

An important for Ukraine and globally felt impact of the war concerns re-imagination of the place of Ukraine and Ukrainians within global history. The long-overdue realization is growing that Ukrainians are a different people from the Russians—a topic addressed in extended ways in contributions to this volume by Hiroaki Kuromiya (5, 10, 30), Nataliya Shpylova-Saeed (6), Agnieszka Legucka (24), and others. Another large and looming topic of discussion—calls for reassessment of Western systems of reference and framing when it comes to understanding Ukraine, Russia, and their long-term unequal relationship over many centuries—is informed by arguments put forward here by Aliaksei Kazharski (9), Jade McGlynn (33), Vitaly Chernetsky (39), and others.

From the vantage point of today, as I write these words in late spring 2024, much has changed in how political and cultural analysts have been discussing the war over the last two years. The presented collection of essays and interviews offers readers an opportunity: (a) to revisit and re-examine the pivotal moments and aspects of the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine since its escalation in 2022 and the beginning of the full-scale invasion; and (b) to explore key takeaways and analytical interpretations, developed and employed in real time, by scholars, policymakers, and political analysts from both within and without Ukraine. The book, therefore, is an invitation to engage with experts and follow the evolving international discourse on the events and outcomes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which reached its tenth year in 2024.

To highlight the evolution of the analytical discourse since February 2022, the articles here are placed in the chronological order in which they appeared. The table of contents will give you a sense of how the topics evolved and shifted over time and what was of concern to the analysts and to Ukraine at any given moment in the war. The contributors represent a broad spectrum of scholars with diverse academic training and different cultural backgrounds, research interests, citizenship, and national belonging. The submissions were originally published in *Forum for Ukrainian Studies* (ukrainian-studies.ca)—the prime analytical platform that the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (cius.ca) has been publishing since 2016. As the online newsmagazine of our Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program, *Forum* has justifiably earned a strong

international reputation, and as the CIUS director I am proud to state that this stellar collection of thought-provoking analyses, delivered by globally recognized experts, is a direct outcome of our work at the institute, focused on providing international audiences with academically sound and analytically valid interpretations of global affairs that have Ukraine at their core.

Debates on how to properly name Russia's ten years of military aggression against Ukraine are still ongoing. In English, it has come to be referred to as the *Russo-Ukrainian war*. Some continue to operate with the term "Russian war *against* Ukraine," aiming to maintain emphasis on the fact that this war was started by the Russian Federation and that calling it the "war in Ukraine" or the "Ukraine/Ukrainian war" is unacceptable. Most recently, the Ukrainians favour an apt phrase, *velyka viina* (great war), reminding outsiders of the very existential threat that this war poses to Ukraine. It is, after all, a war in which a large neighbour nation, once the core of a former empire, then a totalitarian regime, and now an autocratic state—in support of the ambition of its autocratic leader to regain his country's neocolonial dominance in the world and restore a centuries-long repressive hold over its neighbour—invaded its neighbour state, intending to fully reabsorb it. To accomplish this, Russia is now actively and openly perpetuating a large-scale genocidal war against Ukraine, illegally appropriating its lands, destroying its resources, torturing those who resist, abducting and indoctrinating children, and aiming to eradicate the very essence of its people, their culture, history, identity, memory, and language.

Of all the points raised and addressed in this collection, one persistent note continues to resonate in me. It is a kind of question that many commentators have been grappling with when tasked with providing empirically grounded and analytically sound commentary on Russia's ongoing efforts to decimate Ukraine as a nation, a people, and a state. *How do we in the 21st century respond to the new, large-scale neocolonial war at the heart of Europe as analysts, commentators, and human beings?* How could such an unthinkable idea—to cancel an entire nation by means of extermination and distraction—even be conceivable after the crimes and genocides of WW II? What vocabulary can help us to deliver on our professional obligation and enable us to effectively tackle this task of explaining what is happening in Ukraine, without undermining our expert credibility but also without suspending our own subjectivities?

I found a passage from Marci Shore's interview (29) with the editor of this volume, Oleksandr Pankiev, so powerful when she shares the story of her Yale professor Tony Judt contemplating the fate of Europe in the 20th century. Precisely these words of his struck me, as they struck Shore: "We are unwise to laugh too quickly at those who describe the world as a conflict between good and evil. If you can't use the word 'evil,' you have a real problem thinking about what happened in the world." This invitation — to follow our deeply felt and implicitly experienced inner truths when it comes to comprehending the scope and purpose of Russia's war in Ukraine — is redemptive, as the evil that is being committed by Russia on the territory of Ukraine these days is not even masked or covered up; on the contrary, it is quite bare, Shore states, and propagandized as the desirable, even holy, course of action.

The future is still ahead of us as we endeavour to imagine and predict the outcomes of this war and its broader impact on the world. One thing is clear, though: to successfully resolve the current immense tensions that have pervaded the globe in recent years, any state using war and human extermination as a geopolitical tool for self-advancement should be compelled to leave the political stage of world affairs as a key international player. I invite you to read the essays included in this volume to better understand the role and place of Ukraine in this existential struggle for the global good.

Natalia Khanenko-Friesen

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Assessing the Russo-Ukrainian war: Are we reading the signs correctly now?

Oleksandr Pankieiev

July 2024

Oleksandr Pankieiev is the editor-in-chief of *Forum for Ukrainian Studies*, the online analytical magazine of the Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta. With a Candidate of Sciences (PhD equiv.) degree in history from the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine's Hrushevsky Institute of Ukrainian Archaeography and Source Studies, his main research interests include the history of Steppe Ukraine (Southern Ukraine) and Russia-Ukraine relations. He also pursues research in the fields of ethnography, propaganda, digital humanities, and Ukrainian Canadian diaspora studies. Pankieiev is the author of historical sourcebooks, edited collections, and numerous articles on related topics.

The Russo-Ukrainian war, which started in 2014 and escalated on 24 February 2022, has massive implications for the world-order architecture that can be traced and observed in many aspects of everyday life on all continents. The most severe and sinister consequences of the war are borne by Ukraine. For one more time in its history, it has become the epicentre of war—the biggest conflict in Europe since WW II.

As the Kremlin's war on Ukraine progressed to the full-scale invasion, many initiatives throughout the world were set up or re-oriented their focus to examine more closely the rapidly changing situation. Nuanced analytical information about Russia's war against Ukraine was needed from a variety of angles: defence, humanitarian aid, history, identities, international relations, media landscape, firsthand testimony, etc.

Published since 2016 under the auspices of the Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program at CIUS (cius.ca), the online analytical and scholarly magazine *Forum for Ukrainian Studies* (ukrainian-studies.ca) has allowed experts, practitioners, and academics to discuss, explore, reflect upon, develop, and transform international understanding of contemporary Ukraine. More recently, *Forum* has also

launched new projects with the aim of better understanding and informing the world about the Russo-Ukrainian war from an analytical and scholarly approach. Being housed at CIUS, which has almost 50 years of experience and expertise in w holistic research of Ukraine, has helped the *Forum* team to navigate many complex questions. Significantly, the institute's own history is also a part of the global story of Ukraine's struggle for recognition. For a long time, émigré communities in the European, North and South American, and Australian diaspora were virtually the only place where the concept of Ukraine was preserved, nurtured, and continued to be researched.

In 1976, when CIUS was established at the University of Alberta, the Soviet Union was well into yet another campaign to curtail re-emerging tentative but also powerful signs of Ukrainian identity. In 1972 alone, several hundred dissidents, cultural figures, and scholars in the Ukrainian SSR were arrested or fired — under the pretext of combating “anti-Soviet activities” and “bourgeois nationalism” but in reality fearing the Ukrainian identity movement that had burgeoned in the 1960s, partially as a result of the Khrushchev Thaw. This wave of repressions also deliberately targeted many historians whose topics of research were deemed dangerous to the imposed, pervasive, and largely false Soviet/Russian interpretation of Ukrainian history. Only institutions abroad, like the Ukrainian Free University (Vienna, Prague, and Munich), the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, and CIUS (Edmonton and Toronto), as well as individual scholars at other universities, could conduct research on Ukraine in those years, and for this determined and increasingly compelling activity they were also targeted with discreditation efforts by the KGB (Kohut 2024). Gravely handicapped by centuries-long persecution, rapacious genocide, and statelessness, Ukraine remained invisible to the outside world, a terribly disadvantageous situation, perpetuated by the almost complete lack of awareness or demand for knowledge about it. The academic fields of Slavic, East European, Soviet, or Russian studies subsumed Ukraine's culture-history in their “grand narrative” frameworks, where Ukrainian existence was not acknowledged and did not have an authentic voice. In this colonial vacuum, “Does Ukraine have a history?” was actually posited as a legitimate question, which then demanded to be addressed unequivocally (Von Hagen 1995).

Ukraine regaining its state independence in 1991 allowed it to start researching and writing its own history. But Russia viewed this as a departure from its “zone of influence.” The 2004 democratic Orange Revolution, which rejected the rigged presidential election that had brought in Viktor Yanukovich, a candidate with a pro-Russian agenda, was interpreted in Russia as a direct threat to Vladimir Putin’s attempts to consolidate his power and influence over the former republics of the Soviet Union. The clear pro-democratic trajectory of Ukrainians and their desire for closer integration with the European Union did not sit well with Russia, either. In 2013, the Euromaidan erupted in protest against Yanukovich’s decision to abandon an Association Agreement with the EU and instead turn to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, contrary to the people’s will. The Revolution of Dignity started when Yanukovich tried to violently remove the protesters from the Kyiv city centre; by 20 February 2014 around a hundred were killed, and President Yanukovich abdicated and fled the country. Russia used this very moment to invade Ukraine, as on the same day covert Russian forces began the illegal seizure of Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Later that year, using hybrid warfare tactics Russia also occupied numerous districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

All this time, there was a demand for information about Ukraine as never before. Still, narratives about the war in Ukraine were dominated by Russian propaganda, which framed it as a “Ukrainian crisis.” It was a clear indication to us at CIUS, particularly in the Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program under the direction of historian Volodymyr Kravchenko, that new initiatives were acutely needed in order to combat misrepresentations of Ukraine in media and professional circles and to mobilize recent academic knowledge that had been developed in Ukraine, at institutions abroad, and by individual scholars.

Thus, in response to the escalated invasion *Forum* launched the Media Monitoring Service (MMS). This project produces weekly media reports that examine Ukraine’s portrayal in North American media and identifies misconceptions and disinformation about Ukraine that have been disseminated, consciously or not, by reputable outlets, often those with a large readership.

An unanticipated albeit uniquely valuable benefit from the MMS has been its replenishment of *Forum*’s pool of potential contributors by highlighting the op-eds of renowned experts on Ukraine,

the region, and the war; the *Forum* editorial team can then nimbly adjust its publication strategy as appropriate, inviting selected authors to address relevant theoretical and factual issues in more detail in the form of short essays and interviews. The diversity of professional backgrounds of the contributors in the present collected volume not only gives greater depth to our understanding of the events of the Russo-Ukrainian war from its start in 2014 to its current escalated invasion stage but also puts it in the broader context of the preceding events and theoretical concepts that dominated the political, economic, and cultural field and precipitated the war. The voices included in this collection are representatives of academia, analysts who work with different think tanks, diplomatic practitioners, former military officers, journalists, writers, and film directors. These authors come from Ukraine and other countries, which helps us to understand their positions from perspectives both within and without.

This volume presents a selected collection of essays and interviews from among those published by *Forum for Ukrainian Studies* during the first two years of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The materials not included in this collection are also of high value, and we encourage readers to visit the *Forum* website (ukrainian-studies.ca) and find them there. The first text in this collection was published on 7 March 2022, almost immediately after the escalated invasion began, and the last one was released on 15 February 2024. All the essays and interviews in the book are presented chronologically, putting them in the larger context of the events that unfolded within Ukraine and outside of its borders and contributing to the redefinition of many perceived ideas—most of all to a reconceptualization of the fundamental principles of global order. We trust that in this new format, these texts will continue to help readers to understand and analyze the overarching narratives and discourses that have been produced around or influenced by those events at particular moments.

Many of the essays and interviews speak to each other and tackle the same sets of questions. In some cases, we intentionally asked the same (or slightly rephrased) questions of different experts, seeking to comprehend how understandings of Ukraine as an actor have shifted in various discourses and scholarly fields throughout the full-scale invasion. Some questions may seem provocative, but we encourage you to persevere and read the whole book in order to maximize appreciation and benefit from its unique format.

At the start of Russia's escalated invasion, there was a moment when many presumed experts were puzzled and shocked by the fact that they hadn't seen it coming. Bo Petersson's essay title captures the prevailing mood of that time among Western experts who had studied Russia and Ukraine in their respective fields for decades: "The signs were there for all to see, but we did not read them right" (ch. 1). Olexiy Haran mentions in his interview (16) that in 2014 "very few experts [...] anticipated the annexation of Crimea because it was so irrational" and that in 2022 "it seemed irrational for Putin to start a full-scale invasion and try to conquer Kyiv" – but we all know that he did. A number of essays and interviews in this volume tackle the question of why the escalation happened and how those "rational" and "irrational" causes have been reinterpreted over the two years of the escalated invasion.

In his essay, Prague-based Aliaksei Kazharski (9) asks whether Western experts have been well-informed or had enough expertise to comment on Ukraine. He deals with the "Westsplaining" and "Westsplainer" phenomena. In late February 2022, the vast majority of scholars and experts who were providing explanations of the historical and geopolitical causes that precipitated Russia's escalated invasion of Ukraine had no background in Ukrainian studies. Kazharski and some other authors point out that the problem with those commentators is their Russo-centric interpretation of both past and contemporary events. In her interview (41), Ewa Thompson argues that the root of the problem is that Slavic studies in North American academia have been dominated by scholars trained in Russian studies, who mostly came directly from Russia and occupied key academic positions at leading universities in the US. She mentions, moreover, the generations of students who have been trained in the traditions of Russian historiography. Teaching courses about Ukraine's history, culture, and literature can change the situation. Vitaly Chernetsky (39) asserts that decolonization of the curriculum is crucial to changing the overall academic field. Chernetsky and Thompson describe the theoretical complexity of decolonization in the context of the specific historical and cultural relations between Russia and Ukraine. Chernetsky deconstructs the notions of postcolonialism and postmodernism, explaining their place in the cultural spaces of both countries that were constructed after the fall of the Soviet Union. He also examines the cancellation of Russia's participation and demotion of its cultural

status in the West, which have become points of action and discussion, and how Russians respond by framing themselves as the victims.

In one of three essays contributing to this volume, Hiroaki Kuromiya examines “distinct Russian culture” and argues that it is a tool of cultural appropriation and colonial expansion (5). The language of literature doesn’t define its belonging, and the Russian language of writing doesn’t justify equating it with Russian culture outside the Russian Federation. He explains that “Ukraine has Ukrainian culture, not a ‘distinctive Russian culture,’ even when it is written and expressed in the Russian language.” Kuromiya concludes his essay by explaining how Rus’ and Russia are different. Nataliya Shpylova-Saeed’s essay (6) examines Russian mnemonic constructs which foster the idea that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people” and Ukraine’s “(r)evolutionary” departure from the shared memorial space that Russia has forced on Ukraine. That is why, according to Shpylova-Saeed, the war against Ukraine is another forceful attempt to Russify Ukraine. In his essay about the fall of Lysychansk (10), Kuromiya says that Putin has mercy neither for Ukrainians nor for his own people or soldiers. In his desire to achieve the goal of subjugating Ukraine, the Russian president doesn’t care about casualties on either side.

Oleksii Polegkyi’s essay (7) examines one of the cornerstones of Russia’s memory politics, which it has used to project its power within its borders, on its neighbours, and far abroad. Russia’s public and political spheres are defined and shaped by its mythicized interpretations of World War II and the cult of victory that emerged from those interpretations. Russian propaganda has amplified and twisted those interpretations to such a degree that the Kremlin used them to justify its aggression against Ukraine. Cynthia Nielsen’s essay (8) posits that Putin’s and Stalin’s regimes are alike in their views and violent attitudes toward Ukraine. She also points out that Russia’s imperial discourses—in contrast to those that dominated in Europe, regarding the colonized as exotic others—did not construct the view of Ukraine and Ukrainians as the Other but instead promoted the view that Ukrainians and Russians are the same people.

Russia’s war against Ukraine is also about Putin’s “misreading of history,” as Serhii Plokhyy opines in his interview (13), but it is also the sign of another process. Plokhyy is convinced that what we

see indicates an extended decline of the empire, which started in WWI and is still happening today. The Russo-Ukrainian war is also symbolic of Putin's failure to recognize that Ukraine's democratic trajectory is not a plot against Russia orchestrated by the West but an authentic European cultural-historical tradition possessed by Ukraine long before modern institutions such as the European Union were created.

Davis Daycock's essay (2) deconstructs the justifications that President Putin employed to start the invasion. The problem of NATO's "expansion," alleged "genocide" and oppression of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, and the denial of Ukraine's statehood and labelling of Ukrainians as "fascists" were the main narratives that Russia used to justify its aggression. All of them, Daycock shows, are false and manipulative.

Russia also justifies its war against Ukraine as part of preserving and protecting the *ruskii mir* "Russian World" as the space that goes beyond its borders. A review of the "Russian World" as an integral component of modern Russia's political and ideological concept is provided by Oleksii Polegkyi and Dmytro Bushuyev in their essay (11). They identify three elements of the "Russian World" that are at the foundation of its experience: the Russian Orthodox Church, common historical memory, and "heartless technocrat[s]" that execute any command without questioning—for instance, Russian soldiers who kill Ukrainians and frame it as them "just trying to do their job."

The escalated invasion has affected people in Ukraine many different ways. Ukrainian society has shown incredible resistance and adaptivity to wartime's new realities and hardships. The war has also ushered in a new era, where identities are constituted more sharply, and attitudes and worldviews are undergoing rapid transformation. Many texts in this collection address how the war impacts Ukrainian society and its extraordinary capacity for resilience.

On the one hand, Haran reminds us in his interview that Ukraine's internationally admired resilience did not appear overnight on 24 February 2022 and should not be surprising. He says that the "distinctive nation-building trends" in Ukrainian society date far back even before 1991. On the other hand, Mychailo Wynnyckyj admits in his interview (35) that Ukrainian society has indeed undergone massive changes since the full-scale invasion. First of all, the invasion has shattered the myth of the "cleft nation"; instead,

Wynnyckyj uses the metaphor of a *beehive* to describe how Ukrainian society functions. It is not often hierarchical in how it functions, and it has many instances of situational leadership—in contrast to how it is in Russia. (Haran also points out that Ukrainians have an inherent distrust of institutions.) Wynnyckyj also asserts that it is no longer relevant to analyze processes in Ukraine through the prism of oligarchy, as the war has undermined their financial positions and, therefore, their ability to exercise power.

The question of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and LGBTQ are discussed in the essay by Tamara Martsenyuk (12). She observes that women are now more visible in the armed forces, and also that acceptance and support for partnerships for same-sex couples have increased in Ukrainian society. The interview with Maryna Shevtsova (19) provides further details on the issues of women's and LGBTQ rights in Ukraine in the past decade and developments in this field since the beginning of the escalated invasion. Serhiy Kvit (25) discusses how the war has affected universities, their role in the resistance, future reconstruction, and rebuilding of Ukraine, as well as possible challenges that Ukraine might face due to the mass migration of refugees and displaced people from the country.

The interview with Iryna Tsilyk (36), a writer and filmmaker, examines how the war has affected the cultural scene in Ukraine. The fact that many Ukrainian artists have been directly affected by the war, some of them taking up arms to protect their country, is reflected in the cultural products that are now being produced in Ukraine. War poetry is what Tsilyk singles out as a powerful example that conveys the essence of the time and its experience. But the broader tragedy of this time is that the war has also taken the lives of many talents, and those who have fallen won't produce anything anymore. Tsilyk confesses that she thinks the war was not avoidable. The war accelerated metamorphoses in Ukrainian society that were happening in Ukraine in the first thirty years of independence.

In her interview, Yevhenia Podobna (38) describes in detail her observations of the transformations in Ukraine's media landscape. As a professional journalist, she speaks from first-hand experience. She challenges the "standard of pluralism" that Western media try to uphold in their reporting of Russia's war against Ukraine. In her opinion, it stimulates the spread of "terrorist ideas

and lies” in many cases. On the positive side, she acknowledges that many Western journalists are now reporting about Ukraine while being in the country and seeing the war with their own eyes. Podobna has also been actively involved in collecting war testimonies, which she defines as “anthropological journalism.” She shares her practical and methodological experiences of working with eyewitnesses to the war. The role of media is further discussed in other texts in this collection. In her interview Marta Dyczok (27) scrutinizes Russia’s weaponization of media and its use of propaganda in preparation for the full-scale invasion. The narratives that Russia produces find willing audiences around the globe. She draws attention to the fact that the effectiveness of the Kremlin’s propaganda is often associated with long-existing, assiduously cultivated, and overly mythologized beliefs about Russian culture in some regions of the world, especially the countries of the Global South. The fact that Ukraine is not presented as an sovereign nation with historical agency in university courses in the US and Canada is a crucial factor in Russia’s chauvinistic vision of Ukraine often being accepted without question. Dyczok also shares how the media has been functioning in Ukraine under wartime conditions, recognizing that Ukraine has improved its position in the RSF World Press Freedom Index.

The essay by Polina Sinovets, Khrystyna Holynska, and John Parachini (23) deals with cases of Russia’s fake propaganda about nuclear threats from Ukraine. In its propaganda messages, Russia often accuses Ukraine of working to regain its nuclear status, aiming to frame Ukraine as a real threat and justify its invasion. Agnieszka Legucka speaks about “*matryoshka*-style” Russian disinformation in her interview (24) and that Russia has broadened the geography of its disinformation campaigns. Legucka observes that the messages spread by the Kremlin now are not pro-Russian but rather anti-Ukrainian.

Jade McGlynn instead tackles the question of propaganda inside Russia (33). She argues that Russia’s external propaganda succeeds inside the country because it resonates with the pre-existing system of worldview beliefs that most ordinary Russians uphold. McGlynn points out that this is not the problem of one person, and Putin’s departure probably won’t be a solution to end the war. She also contemplates the role of Russia’s opposition groups and their varying stances on Ukrainian issues and the war.

Alexander Motyl discusses the “collective Putin” phenomenon (18), using the term to identify both ordinary Russians who have absorbed all the values fed to them by Putin during his reign and elite figures who have shown unvarying support for him for several years. But Motyl conjectures that now the “collective Putin” is much weaker, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg. He points out that the elites in Russia are fractured, and if there is an opportune moment, they will definitely use it to get rid of Putin and save themselves.

Mitchell Orenstein opines (42) that the sanctions on Russia are doing their work, slowly eroding the support that Putin has enjoyed so far, even if there are no visible signs of dissent now. Margarita Balmaceda (37) also has a similar view toward determining the effectiveness of sanctions. While it is indirect and they cannot stop the war now, in the long run they could recalibrate the decisions of the elite and wobble their loyalty to Putin.

Canadian journalist Michael Bociurkiw is concerned about Ukraine’s ability to get diplomatic messages to the outside world. He believes that the Ukrainian diaspora can be very instrumental, and that at the time of his interview (20) the interest of Western media in Ukraine was noticeably more visible. As a global affairs analyst, Bociurkiw gives his perspective on the slowness of Western partners in providing promised and needed ammunition to Ukraine, particularly the crucial air defence systems. But he also underscores the unique nature of this war, where “victory depends more on technology and tactics than on men on the front lines.”

Several interviews and essays in this volume focus on the full-scale invasion, specifically from the perspective of military studies. Mykola Bielieskov provides an overview of the first few months of the escalated military aggression from the tactical, operational, and strategic aspects (3). He explains why Russia underperformed and why Ukraine managed to succeed in defending Kyiv. However, he also warns that Russia learned the lessons and will review its tactics. Bielieskov admits that Ukrainian grassroots efforts to allocate resources to combat needs at the front are unprecedented and even, in some cases, bypass the state’s capabilities.

In his interview, Alexander Vindman argues that the US and the West could do more to help Ukraine (22). He declares that Russia needs to lose the war if we want to preserve the rules-based international system. This interview was conducted during a heavy battle in Bakhmut. He argues that Bakhmut has little strategic

significance and that staying there wouldn't play out in Ukraine's favour if Ukraine wanted to proceed with a counteroffensive. He also thinks that further Western support will be questioned if the fighting extends through 2024.

In his essay, Frank Ledwidge (28) also brings up the war continuing beyond 2024, stating that Ukraine needs to be armed and equipped for the long haul in order to face Russia's threats even after the war is over. He provides a detailed overview of what military equipment Ukraine would require to withstand the growing pressure on the battlefield.

Some essays and interviews focus on acts of solidarity, empathy, and help that Ukraine has received from different countries and communities around the globe. Dovilė Budrytė explains (4) why the Baltic states feel a deep connection to Ukraine and are among the most devoted supporters and helpers of Ukraine. The traumatic experience of shared memories of the Soviet Union provides a deep connection and understanding of the existential threat that Ukraine is facing now. The help that the Baltic states have provided ranges from advocacy on behalf of Ukraine on the world stage to the supply of lethal weapons from the first days of the war.

In her interview, Elżbieta Kwiecińska (17) reveals that at the start of the full-scale invasion, she had become actively involved in different volunteering initiatives to help Ukrainians who arrived in Poland fleeing the war. As an academic, she also observed how the universities in Poland responded to the growing interest in understanding the Russo-Ukrainian war as a phenomenon. Kwiecińska tackles the issues of decolonization and "Westsplainers" in addressing Ukraine.

The case of Ireland's support is examined in detail in the interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin (26). Despite the geographical distance and different historical circumstances, Ireland finds many similarities with Ukraine in its experience of colonialism, which has contributed to Ireland's reasoning behind helping Ukraine and Ukrainians. He considers whether a Good Friday Agreement scenario of ending the Russo-Ukrainian War is applicable. He also addresses other important questions about changes in the geopolitical environment of the EU.

The UK's response to Russia's escalated invasion is addressed in an interview with Andrii Zharikov (34). One of the strongest backers of Ukraine, the UK has similarities in past historical experience