# ESSAY

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## UKRAINIAN SOCIETY UNDER WAR: AN INSIDER'S SOCIOLOGICAL NOTES

When Marek Czyżewski suggested that I prepare a text on the sociological aspects of the Russo-Ukrainian war, I caught myself thinking about the need to comprehend the new social reality in which we have found ourselves since February 24, 2022. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine has already changed the European security order, but it has also become a major challenge to global peace and security. For the first time since the end of World War II and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the world is on the verge of a new global military confrontation with real risks of the state-aggressor using nuclear weapons.

Until recently, Ukrainian sociologists (like many of their foreign colleagues) were actively discussing the social aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. More broadly, they discussed the actualization of the problematics of post-modern societies of risk, new dilemmas of security versus freedoms, social aspects of biopolitics, and the social changes brought by the pandemic in terms of communication, education, business, and new basic rules for safe daily life.

By the end of 2021, the research group at the Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, where I work, had completed a large research

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project devoted to studying the social consequences of the pandemic in Ukraine. We tried to examine the COVID pandemic as a newly emerged factor in the context of a complex socio-political and societal transformation in Ukraine. One of the methodological premises of this study was Walter Scheidel's idea about the cumulative effect of violence in human history as a "great leveler", particularly regarding social inequality [Scheidel 2017]. Scheidel names four factors (the "horsemen of violence") that cause the social leveler effect: mass-mobilization warfare, transformative revolutions, state collapse, and catastrophic plagues (epidemics).

In 2021, Ukraine was already an intriguing case. In the previous decade, together with the global COVID-19 pandemic, there was the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity, while the war, first localised in Donbas, began in 2014. Although our study did not confirm Scheidel's hypothesis on erasing social inequalities in Ukraine under the simultaneous influence of various social turmoils, we concluded that Ukrainian society, which adapted itself to the challenges, has a rather high resilience threshold. After all, if one considers only the social and humanitarian consequences of the Donbas war at the beginning of 2021, there were about one and a half million internally displaced persons from Russian-occupied Crimea and parts of the territories of Donbas.

The large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has significantly reinforced the "cumulative effect" of violence, and this completely changed the perspective in the perception of social reality in its already usual "normality" of crisis, even for a society at a high threshold of resilience. The emotional shock, anger, and sorrow, combined with the powerful psychological stress of the first period of the war, have displaced in the Ukrainian mass consciousness the previous anxieties associated with fear of unemployment, prices for goods and utility tariffs, financial and economic problems, the local war in Donbas, and the COVID danger. This is not only about individual emotional switching to a stronger source of anxiety (from the COVID pandemic to the war) but, perhaps, also about the powerful physiologically protective mobilization of a human body against weaker mutations of the COVID-virus itself and with the already accumulative effect of mass vaccination.

With the war, the topic of the pandemic and news about morbidity statistics simply disappeared from Ukraine's information field. From that point on, it was filled by the dominant informative chronicle of the war and regular air raid sirens. A bitter joke in Ukraine in early March 2022, that "Putin has cancelled COVID", reflected changes in the public's daily practices. At least in half-empty Kyiv, since the beginning of March, the few shops and services that were working at that time no longer required their visitors to wear masks. The people who crowded

in bomb shelters and underground subway stations, hiding from rocket attacks, also almost all ignored their protective masks. This was a vivid indicator of the changes in mass social behaviour in the perception of a new social reality, different from the pandemic, with its own meanings, risks, and communication framework.

The war has already tragically and permanently changed the lives and destinies of millions of people in Ukraine. Many thousands of civilians were killed and tortured by Russian shelling and violence, hundreds of thousands of families lost their homes, and millions of Ukrainians have become internally displaced persons or refugees who left the country.[1] The war is a new tragic experience, with deep social trauma and a harsh everyday reality for Ukrainian society. The issues of the Russo-Ukrainian war, and its social, economic, and humanitarian consequences for Ukraine, Europe, and the world, will undoubtedly be one of the priorities for much social, in particular, sociological research. With a raising of awareness of the long-term nature of this war, and when the first emotional reactions to its horrors and tragedies have slowly given way to sober analysis, more and more solid social studies on the war will emerge.

The purpose of this text is only an early attempt to systematise disparate notes of the sociological aspects of the war, focusing on observable societal changes in Ukrainian society, its social experience, behavioural modes, and public moods, particularly in constructing social meanings of the war. I will use some data from Ukrainian sociological polls (mostly telephone surveys) while understanding that there are inevitable methodological limitations of such surveys under the war (in particular, the problems of incompleteness and filling the sample due to mass migrations, people's movements, and the issues of access to some territories because of their occupation). The overview of the semantic field of the war from the perspective of my own personal experience and observations while staying in Kyiv from February 24, 2022, until now will also be the valuable basis for these notes.

## Society's consolidation, national resistance, and solidarity

If one briefly defines the main characteristics of Ukrainian society with the beginning of the Russian invasion, three key words come to mind: courage, resilience, and solidarity.

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[1]     According to UN estimates, at least 12 million people have fled their homes since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including about 7 million still thought to be displaced inside Ukraine itself. As of June 21, 2022, more than 5.2 million refugees from Ukraine have been recorded across Europe, including about 1.2 million Ukrainian refugees who applied for temporary residence in Poland. [UNHRC 2022].

Ukraine has already buried Putin's imperial delirium on the "blitzkrieg" by "taking Kyiv in 3 days". However, in the first week after February 24, few in the world believed in the ability of Ukrainians to fight and defend their country against the military invasion of a state with a nuclear arsenal. The Ukrainian army, territorial defense units, volunteers, and ordinary citizens are bravely and successfully resisting the Russian military machine, debunking the myth about it as "second among the strongest armies of the world." In the first three months of the war in Ukraine, the Russian army had already had twice as many casualties as the Soviet Union in all the years of the war in Afghanistan. In a powerless rage without the desired great victories on the battlefield, the aggressor conducts missile and artillery shelling of civilians and civilian infrastructure, using weapons prohibited by international conventions. The Russian military is committing numerous war crimes by looting, killing, and torturing civilians in the occupied territories.

War is a difficult trial for citizens and the state. At the same time, the war has greatly strengthened the civil and patriotic consolidation of Ukrainian society. Of course, external military aggression is a natural factor in the consolidation of any society.

But in the case of Ukraine, this is of particular importance since the ideological precondition for a Russian invasion was the false perception about what would be the fundamental deepness of Ukraine's regional and sociocultural divisions, particularly between the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking West, North and Center of the country, including the capital, Kyiv, and its predominantly Russian-speaking South and East. There was a strategic miscalculation of Putin's regime, who hoped that the predominantly Russian-speaking residents of the East and South of the country would not resist the invasion and would be happy to meet the so-called "liberators" with flowers. And the residents of these regions were the first to meet the most powerful blows of the Russian invasion. They had first-hand personal experience of all the horrors of rocket attacks, killings, and destruction of the so-called "Russian world". The reverse effect of Russian "liberation" was that many residents of these regions, particularly in the large cities of Kharkiv and Odesa, strengthened their Ukrainian self-identification, and some of them have switched their daily language of communication from Russian to Ukrainian.

A survey[2] conducted in June 2022 in Odesa captured some of these shifts taking place in the city and its region. It found that about 63% of Odesa

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[2]    The survey was conducted by the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) method in Odesa and its region with the representative sample of 1024 respondents by the sociological group Socis in the period from 9 to 14 June, 2022. [SOCIS 2022].

residents were ready to undertake an arms resistance against Russian troops, and 78% expressed pride in their Ukrainian identity. At the same time, 88% noted a huge deterioration in their assessment of Russia's leaders, and 80% cited a sharp decline in feelings toward Russians in general. As a Ukrainian MP born in Odesa, Olexiy Goncharenko fairly noted: "Odesa's dramatic turn away from Russia over the past four months has been mirrored throughout Ukraine's most traditionally pro-Kremlin regions" [Goncharenko 2022].

But it is also worth recognizing that in Ukraine, after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas since 2014, the Russian information attack (as part of a hybrid war) against Ukraine has become even more intense, and the ideology of the "Russian world" has also been quite actively spread through all possible political and information channels. For example, in Ukraine, even after 2014, there were pro-Russian TV channels that functioned legally. They focused on rapprochement with Russia, interpreted the war in Donbas as an internal Ukrainian civil conflict, and criticised the country's officially proclaimed Euro-Atlantic political course that was constitutionally provided in 2019, during the period of Petro Poroshenko's presidency. Paradoxically, the pro-Russian political and media networks acting in Ukraine, which had generous funding from Russia, heavily contributed to the translation of false and biased information about the state of affairs in Ukrainian society. In this way, they also significantly contributed to creating an imaginable parallel reality that the Kremlin itself so gladly wanted to see. And Putin's regime, in making the decision to begin the war in Ukraine, also became the object of the impact of its own illusory picture of the world and of the parallel reality about Ukraine that Kremlin propaganda created and is still trying to carry out.

Meanwhile, many professional sociological surveys in Ukraine have shown that one of the important results of the 30-year development of state independence since 1991 was the assertion of Ukrainian civic identity in the value orientations of the country's population. For example, according to the results of a 2021 nationwide survey[3] by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, two-thirds (63%) of respondents responding to the question "Whom do you consider yourself first?" chose the answer "a citizen of Ukraine". It should be noted that in a similar survey in 2000, the indicator of civic national

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[3]     Annual representative surveys by the Institute of Sociology of National Academy of sciences of Ukraine have been conducted annually since 1992 using "face to face" interviews. A nationwide sample of 1,800 respondents representing the adult (from 18 years old) population of the country. From 2014, the sample did not include the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

self-identification in Ukraine was only 41%; up to 40% of respondents consi-dered local or regional self-identification their priory, while 12% still considered themselves to be citizens of the former Soviet Union.

Thus, in 30 years of Ukraine's state independence, a somewhat consolidated Ukrainian civil nation has developed. It comprises citizens of different ethnic ori-gins, including ethnic Russians and people with different faiths and languages of everyday communication. In addition, during this period, a whole generation of young people was born. They were socialised and entered adulthood in an independent Ukraine, never knowing the Soviet communist past. The public's dominant attitude toward Ukrainian civic identity has become an important ba-sis for the consolidation and national resistance of Ukrainian society to Russian military aggression.

Moreover, with the war, Ukrainians, who in many polls often revealed a high level of criticism of the authorities and mostly distrusted official institutions, have significantly changed their attitude to the state, already practically perceiving it as a value. As Ukrainian sociologist Eugene Golovakha pointed out, "Ukrainians have finally accepted their state." For them, despite all the troubles and even under the current hardship, it deserves respect and high praise, especially when compared to the neighboring regime in the east, which brings war, death, and destruction to Ukraine [Golovakha 2022]. This practical test of patriotism and the shift in the Ukrainian mass consciousness towards the state is confirmed not only by observations, but also by sociological surveys. According to a telephone survey[4] conducted in Ukraine in early March 2022, the majority (67%) of respondents, including 78% of men and 59% of women, were ready to undertake personal armed resistance against the Russian aggression [Berger 2022]. In fact, the main motives of people who have not left the country since the war were their unwillingness to leave their home and their readiness to fight and defend the country when needed.

Ukrainian society has transformed into a powerful social organism of adaptation and resistance to Russian military aggression. This highly mobilised society, particularly in the first three months of the war, again resembled the phenomenon of the people's mass assembly (the Maidan) with its daily practices of self-organization, solidarity, mutual assistance, donations to the army and volunteering from both NGOs and ordinary citizens and businesses. In 2014, after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity, civil society, having accumulated its social energy on the Euromaidan, had partly transformed itself into self-organised

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[4]   The survey was conducted using the CATI method in a nationwide representative sample of 1024 respondents by the Info-Sapiens sociological group between 3 and 4 March, 2022.

military units to protect Ukraine's Donbas against Russian-backed separatists, as well as a powerful volunteer movement. A similar effect of the Maidan-style active mobilization of Ukrainian society, but on a much more powerful scale, took place in the movement of national resistance and defense of the country from the end of February 2022. In addition to the regular army, many civic activists and patriots actively joined the ranks of territorial self-defense (volunteer military structures for protecting the country from the local grassroots level), which became the basis of the network of national resistance.

After all, the main idea of the Maidan, whether in a revolutionary-protest frame, as it was in 2013–2014, or in the current armed resistance frame, is one goal and shared beliefs that unite society, at least a major part of it. Now this goal is the defense of the country, victory over the enemy, and the return of all Ukrainian territories, including Donbas and Crimea. The protection of the country, and its unity and integrity within internationally recognised borders, is a common good that cannot belong separately to anyone, but only to all. Ukrainians believe that the country's territorial integrity, according to international laws and the national constitution, cannot be subject to political bargaining or any compromises. As sociological polls demonstrate, the vast majority of Ukrainian society (82% of respondents)[5] does not want peace at any cost, in particular, due to territorial concessions or loss of parts of the country as a condition of a so-called "peaceful compromise". Even in the country's east, which suffers most from Russian aggression, most citizens support this position. At the same time, people fully understand that the desired victorious peace as a common good will not be quick or easy. And achieving this common good depends not only on the army's heroic actions on the battlefield, but also on the combination of many individual efforts, on the synergy of actions and deeds of many citizens, and on overcoming narrow group, corporate or individual selfish interests.

National mobilization and resistance during a war is a special kind of collective action and solidarity that takes place in extreme circumstances and with the existence of the independent state as a common good at high stake. Although the concept of collective action, in particular, in Mancur Olson's approach, is mostly suitable when studying the activities of economically oriented groups, it can also be applied to understand the collective action of the Ukrainian national resistance. The logic of this collective action is really not inherently economic;

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[5]   Readiness for territorial concessions to end the war as soon as possible: the results of a telephone survey (CATI method) conducted May 13-18, 2022 – [Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2022].

similarly, patriotic feelings or national sentiments are not entirely economic phenomena (even though patriotism could have an economic dimension). After all, there is always another individual choice – emigration from the country, that is, a physical way out of participating in collective action (of resistance) or, in Olson's terminology, the "free rider" scenario. However, the collective action of national resistance is also quite a rational activity because protecting the country is simultaneously protecting one's own family and home and the right to live on this land and work and earn in this country. This collective action is also far from personal-cult fanaticism. In this war, Ukrainians are not fighting for President Zelenskyi's authority, but for their country and the state, in which they have the right to freely elect any authority.

When a businessman hands over to the Ukrainian army for a strike the co-ordinates of his own house taken by the occupiers, next to which the Russian missile system is located, it is about his effort for collective action in achieving the common good of victory over the enemy. Residents of the village of Demydiv, who destroyed the dam and flooded their village to make it harder for Russian troops to advance in Kyiv, also thought primarily of the common public good of defending the country's capital rather than about their own homes and property. The owners of restaurants and cafes, who prepare free lunches for territorial defense members and older people during the war, are also making an important contribution to the national collective action for the common good of the country's defense and victory. And there are many such examples of collective actions, mutual assistance and solidarity of Ukrainians during this war.

It is also important to stress that Ukrainian people feel and appreciate the huge wave of solidarity, support, and help that is coming to Ukraine from many people and governments of Europe and across the globe. And this is also a sub-stantial part of collective efforts and actions for the common good of Ukraine's defense. Certainly, there are also cases of abuse, looting, and corruption by local officials, such as the distribution or sale of foreign humanitarian aid, the theft of trade supplies for the army, and cases of fraud by pseudo-volunteers, among others. However, solidarity, mutual support, and assistance are still the dominant model of behaviour of the majority of citizens during this war.

Sociological indicators of a good moral climate in everyday relations be-tween people in Ukrainian society under the hardship of war confirm this social cohesion. According to a recent survey, relationships with relatives for the vast majority of respondents (94%) remain peaceful. Additionally, most citizens (89%) still get on well with neighbors. Sixty-seven percent of people who were asked

also have peaceful relationships with strangers.[6] And even though almost a third of respondents avoid contact with strangers, there is no significant aggression in social interactions. Thus, even during war, Ukrainian society still manages to retain important basic principles of friendliness and the overwhelming trust of citizens in each other. As in peacetime, networks of mutual trust are preserved, reproduced, and even actualised through individual close circles of communication with relatives, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. This happens on the principle of: "I know this person myself or my friend knows him/her, so I can trust this person." But under the circumstances of war, the best way to verify people and spread the horizontal networks of trust is through mutual participation in joint action – in residents of apartment blocks' mutual help in settling everyday issues, in the delivery of medicines, water, or food to elderly neighbors, or in the mutual participation in volunteer initiatives.

At the same time, people's wariness towards strangers during the war is not only a natural psychological reaction to a possible enemy or saboteur, who, for example, in Kyiv or Odesa does not differ visually from many Russian-speaking inhabitants of the metropolis. It is also a rational strategy for citizens' safe and responsible behaviour. In the first month of the war, when there was fighting near the suburbs of Kyiv and enemy sabotage groups also penetrated the city, all indicators of street names and directions of movement around and within the city were removed by the decision of the military command and the city authorities as a means of additional security. Half-empty Kyiv turned into a city "only for our own", that is, for people who are habitually oriented in the city and without street signs, or at least if necessary, have such people in their inner circle of communication. At that time, talkable and friendly Kyivans reluctantly or with double caution would explain to strangers the directions of movement through the city, which was close to the battlefield. Some Ukrainian words[7], the pronunciation of which is difficult for Russians or people unfamiliar with the Ukrainian--speaking environment, were also used as codewords to identify a person on the "us-them" principle.

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6    The nation-wide "Psychological markers of the war" survey conducted using the CATI method on a representative sample of 1200 respondents by the "Rating" sociological group. April 6, 2022. [Rating sociological group 2022].

7    For example, the word "palianytsia" *(паляниця* – a white bread loaf in Ukrainian) was actively used as such a popular everyday codework, and it also became a popular war meme in the Ukrainian public discourse.

### The state and politics in wartime:
### in search of democratic unity

The war has significantly changed the political process in Ukraine. National politicians, including President Zelenskyi, declared an informal peace pact of political unity, and in the first period of the war, at least until the end of May, they mostly adhered to it. The basis of this pact is the mutual recognition of Russia's armed invasion as the main danger to the country and the unification of political efforts of all Ukrainian political parties to strengthen the army and protect the country.

The political landscape of domestic politics also transformed. On May 3, the Verkhovna Rada (the parliament), with its constitutional majority, adopted the law on the prohibition of the pro-Russian political parties' activities. It is hard to imagine, but in the eighth year of the war since 2014, such parties, as well as pro-Russian TV channels, operated legally in Ukraine, and one party even had parliamentary status. Now, according to the law, the ban includes those political forces that publicly deny Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, the annexation of Ukrainian territories, and who justify violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

War is a great challenge not only for society, but also for the normal functioning of the state apparatus and social institutions. On February 24, martial law was introduced in Ukraine, and it is still in force today. According to the national Constitution, under martial law, the military command may establish restrictions on certain rights and freedoms of citizens. For example, in Kyiv and other settlements of the country, a curfew was imposed during martial law. This allows citizens' movements on the streets at certain times of the day to be restricted.

Although martial law preserves citizens' basic rights, such as their equality before the law and the right to life and dignity, war is a serious challenge to the functioning of democracy, in particular, due to the constitutional possibilities of restricting freedom of speech and the citizens' right to peaceful rallies and demonstrations. Under these conditions, the government's responsibility grows so that it does not use the command and political capabilities of martial law for political struggle against the opposition or to increase authoritarian tendencies. Certain alarming trends in this respect have been observed, in particular, due to the authorities' monopolization of information policy and the exclusion from the media sphere of other democratic pro-Ukrainian information sources. This makes fair criticism impossible. It also allows the government to avoid frank answers about the mistakes and poor preparation of the country for this war, despite many alarms from intelligence sources about the failed or disrupted national defense

programs, particularly rocket-building, about the reasons for the rapid occupation of the country's south, and other uneasy questions and issues that are actively discussed in society.

After Russia's invasion, Ukraine's previously pluralistic TV has been replaced by uniform informative coverage, dubbed the "United News Telemarathon". The main TV channels have one daily slot each, which is then shown across all national channels. But this excludes the representation of three pro-Ukrainian TV channels oriented toward Petro Poroshenko, the former President and Zelenskyi's main political rival. Such a policy does not strengthen much-needed national and political unity. And, it must certainly be a democratic, not an authoritarian, unity for the country. The authorities' rhetoric that now is "not the time" for other issues, apart from the war, may seem quite convincing to many citizens. But the current strong public support for Zelenskyi's government is due not only to the war, but also, to a large extent, to the monopolised control over the main media, in particular, TV.

It is difficult now to predict further trajectories of relations between citizens and the authorities, especially from the post-war perspective in Ukraine. However, it is worth emphasizing that the social institutions Ukrainians mostly trust are the church (usually indicated in polls as a whole institute without denominational differentiation), the army, and volunteers. And while public trust in the authorities fluctuates and correlates with the socio-political and economic situation in the country (in particular, the ratings of trust in President Zelenskyi have significantly risen during the war), public trust in the church, the army, and volunteers has been consistently high since 2014. During the war period, public trust in these social institutions, especially the army and volunteers as active representatives of civil society, has increased more.

However, even during the war, the issues of reforms and the fight against corruption cannot be put aside. Moreover, the war has greatly increased the demand for qualitative and professionally effective state management that is free from corruption. This demand is not only one of the conditions for Ukraine's EU aspiration, but it might be the country's strategic advantage in the war against Putin's authoritarian and corrupt regime.

### Social meanings of the war

The global meaning of the Russo-Ukrainian war is revealed in the clash of two policies and cultures regarding the future of the global world order, namely, whether it will be built in accordance with civic rules and norms of international

law or based on the principle of force with the risks of plunging the world into the chaos of escalating rampant violence and destruction. It is also a global war for the values and principles of democracy against authoritarianism, and it is characteristic that in this battle, the leading democratic countries are on Ukraine's side. As Lucian Way fairly noted, "Two factors made Russia's invasion a watershed moment in Europe's battle for democracy: the stark moral clarity of Ukraine's cause and the existential security threat presented by a newly aggressive Russia" [Way 2022: 9]. Political solidarity and substantial military, economic, and humanitarian support by the global democratic community to Ukraine is an important factor in the struggle for its own sovereignty and for universal human and democratic values.

The Russo-Ukrainian battlefield is the struggle of worldviews, values, but also socially informative meanings that easily spread over state borders in the age of digital communications. After all, the real reason for Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not the alleged Ukrainian or NATO military threats to Russia or the fictitious oppression of the "Russian-speaking population" in Ukraine or other false arguments. The true reason is the fear of Putin's regime before the soft power of the example of a democratic transformation of the neighboring former Soviet republic, where, unlike Russia, competitive democratic elections regularly take place and fundamental human freedoms, in particular, freedoms of speech and public assembly, are realised.

However, it is also important to note that the current war actually began in 2014 with the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea by Russia and with the armed conflict in Donbas initiated by Russia and its proxy. And if one looks only at recent history, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has never stopped its economic, energy, information, and cultural-mental wars against independent Ukraine. But the peculiar severity of the current war is due to the fact that now it is being waged by Russia in the most brutal and violent way as total terror, which includes the destruction of civilian and economic infrastructure in Ukraine, killing civilians, women subjected to violence and rape, and the deportation and abduction of children. Russia's real goal also became evident: the complete erasing of the independent Ukrainian state based on denying Ukraine's separate nationhood, identity, language, history, and culture. "Russians and Ukrainians are one people," dictator Putin claims. Following this absurd logic would mean that Russians are killing themselves in this war.

Any war requires a certain meaningful justification on both sides. In other words, war as an extreme social conflict requires the construction of meanings:

"For what?" or "What are we fighting for?" At the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, Russian official policy and propaganda still tried to justify its so-called "special military operation" with constantly changing arguments such as "the protection of the Russian-speaking people in Donbas" and the "needed preventive war", which allegedly prevented Ukraine's attack on the Russian-occupied parts of Donbas and Crimea, as well as on Belarus. Other arguments included the "preparation by Ukraine of nuclear and biological weapons (for example, with the help of specially trained birds) to attack Russia", "the fight against the Nazis," and other manipulations. Anne Applebaum noted, "The modern Russian propaganda state turned out to be the ideal vehicle both for carrying out mass murder and for hiding it from the public" [Applebaum 2022]. Part of this technology of falsifying reality and dehumanizing the West and Ukrainians by Russian propaganda is the substitution of real meanings with fictional or opposite ones (in the Orwellian sense): It was not an invasion, it was a "special military operation"; it was not the mass murder of Ukrainians, it was "protecting" the inhabitants of the eastern-Ukrainian territories; it was not genocide, it was defense against "genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime" [Applebaum 2022]. However, a month after the invasion, Russian officials and propagandists already made no secret that the real goal of Ukraine's so-called "denazification" was to erase it as an independent democratic state.

For Ukraine and its people, this war has an existential dimension. After all, we are talking about the existence of not only the independent democratic state of Ukraine, but also Ukrainians as a people with their own identity, language, and culture. Therefore, the basic meaning of this war for the Ukrainian people is to defend their lives and homes on native land, their freedoms, and the right to exist in their own state within its internationally recognised borders. And when, in 2013–2014, Ukrainians successfully defended their rights and freedoms in the Revolution of Dignity, in 2022, they are again forced to fight for their dignity, waging this war. Ukrainians did not attack anyone; they are only defending their own land, homes, and their families because the occupiers invaded the country, and the war is being waged on Ukraine's territory with all attendant violations and disasters for the country.

The numerous Russian missile attacks on civilian facilities, such as residential buildings, railway stations, shopping centers, schools, and hospitals, the purposeful destruction of economic facilities, and the capture of important industrial facilities (e.g., the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant, among others), Russia's blockade of sea routes to prevent grain and steel trade for Ukraine, and putting

the world on the verge of global hunger – all these are deliberate military terror by Russia aimed at destroying the viability of Ukrainian society and undermining its will to resist. Russian politics in this war reproduces the most appalling, heinous and historical practices of the totalitarian Stalinist regime towards Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars – such as murder and violence, killing by hunger (Holodomor), forcible resettlement, the deportation of people, and the abduction of children. And if this is a war of meanings from both sides, the Russian meanings of the war refer to the awful historical past of violence and arbitrariness.

This war has already become intertwined in the construction of modern national history; it continues and is far from being completed. In the sociological sense, applying Jeffrey Alexander's approach to cultural sociology, for example, this war is also an ongoing experience of cultural and socio-psychological trauma for Ukrainian society, which already perceives and will develop a perception of the war as part of its national identity [Alexander 2003: 85]. In experiencing and making sense of the war and its trauma, society already records, remembers and determines the "painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences", not only in researchers' and experts' growing representations, but also at the level of mass consciousness and in everyday communication [Alexander 2003: 103]. There are various expert and mass activities to identify and document the war victims, collect thousands of their testimonies, as well as the oral histories of combatants, affected families, and people who have been forced to flee their homes because of the war. Ukrainian public discourse also actively discusses issues of responsibility for this war, for example, the collective responsibility of Russians as a "collective Putin" for the evils of the war, the problems of punishing Russia and its leadership for war crimes, issues of financial and material reparation, and the prospects of rebuilding Ukraine after the destruction.

For Ukrainians and many people of good will in the world, the meaning of this war, which is rightful on their part, and also the motivations for fighting are clear, true and oriented to the future. That is why new popular heroic songs, stories, and numerous memes are born so easily in Ukraine nowadays, and a new epos and a pantheon of national heroes of the resistance are also appearing. In the social construction of the meanings of this war in the mass consciousness, folk legends (for example, the Kyiv legend about a fearless Ukrainian pilot guarding the sky of the city, nicknamed the "Ghost of Kyiv") are combined with the memorialization of real facts and heroic deeds of the Ukrainian military (like the border guards of Snake Island in the Black Sea, and the defenders of Mariupol, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and

Odesa and other real heroes). Only transparent, true, and optimistic meanings can provide a powerful creative impetus for the abundant folk and professional graffiti, drawings, and posters dedicated to this all-Ukrainian struggle, both in Ukraine and around the world. However, the opposite is also true. Only the people themselves, whose existence is denied by the neighboring totalitarian regime, are able to create and represent these meanings, protect them, and, when necessary, sacrifice their lives for them.

Unlike the Russian delusions about the revival of the Soviet or tsarist empire, which turned into the past, Ukrainian meanings about this war also contain hope for the country's revival and its European destiny and the belief in the people who are fighting for their own and their children's chance for the future. In fact, for Ukraine, this war and the victory in it are the last real chance to finally throw off the burden of the communist past and, in the subsequent restoration and reform of the state, overcome such premodern institutional deformations as corruption, the deficiencies in the legal system, and the strong oligarchic influence on the socio-political process.

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