

2024 ISSUE

Harriman

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Beyond the Battlefield

ART IN TIME OF WAR
DECENTERING EAST EUROPEAN
AND EURASIAN STUDIES



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A Russian strike in March 2022 destroyed most of the drama theater in Mariupol, Ukraine. When Mariupol came under siege from Russia, the theater was used as a civilian bomb shelter. An Associated Press investigation a few weeks later estimated nearly 600 people died as a result of the theater strike. AP Photo/Alexei Alexandrov

Dear Reader

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has "upended many extant assumptions about how the world works," Alexander Motyl writes in a provocative essay for this issue of *Harriman Magazine*. One of those assumptions is academia's traditional focus on Russia as the geographic and political center of Eurasia and East European studies. The war, says Motyl, has hastened a long overdue move to "decenter" how academics study the region, recognizing that Ukraine and other neighboring states are not mere offshoots or tangents of Russia.



Key to decentering is recognition of the region's distinct languages and rich cultures—differences long embraced at Harriman in its academic offerings, which cover everything from Ukraine to Central Asia and the Balkans. In March 2023, we examined culture's vital role in our event *Art in Time of War*, an evening-long celebration that featured the work of the institute's four 2022–23 Ukrainian Harriman residents in Paris. More of their work can be found in this issue, along with an essay written for the Harriman event by Ostap Slyvnysky, vice president of PEN Ukraine.

Victoria Amelina, who was due to take up a 2023–24 Harriman residency, was killed last summer after a Russian missile struck the restaurant where she was dining in Kramatorsk, Ukraine. "On that date, Ukrainian literature was made poorer," writes Andriy Kurkov, Harriman's 2023 Writer in Residence, in a tribute to Amelina. Other wartime reflections in this issue come from Elise Giuliano, director of the Harriman's MA program, whose groundbreaking research on public opinion in Ukraine was interrupted by Russia's invasion; and from Emma Mateo, a Harriman postdoctoral scholar who went to Ukraine last summer to research grassroots resistance to the full-scale invasion.

Our other report from the field profiles work done by Tetiana Khodakivska, a New York-based filmmaker who also participated in Harriman's *Art in Time of War* event. Khodakivska spent last summer in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions of Ukraine reporting on Russia's notorious deportations of Ukrainian children. Her work is part of a growing body of research that could eventually be used for war crimes prosecutions.

This is the first issue of the magazine since fall 2022. I joined the staff in the summer of 2023 to work with longtime editor Masha Udensiva-Brenner on a revamped magazine. We have a new design, an editorial advisory board, and a mandate to keep the very broad Harriman community connected and informed about the institute and the region it has studied for 77 years.

While most of this issue focuses on Ukraine and the war, we also go back in history for a story about the role of Soviet journalists in giving the world some of the earliest eyewitness accounts of Holocaust atrocities. Then we come forward to today, to hear why the Associated Press now discourages use of the term "former Soviet republics" (think decentering). There are also alumni notes and a new feature, *Harriman Talks*, that follows up with a few speakers from the hundreds of interdisciplinary events held at the institute each year.

Please subscribe to the magazine, share with friends and colleagues—and, of course, share your feedback with us.

Ann Cooper
Editor-in-Chief

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Harriman Magazine is published by the Harriman Institute.

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Cover image

Traces of Russian shelling surround an artwork painted in Irpin, Ukraine, outside Kyiv, by Italian street artist TvBoy. The dove, in Ukraine's national colors, adorns a wall of the city's house of culture, which was heavily damaged during Russia's attack on Irpin. AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky




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Art in Time of War

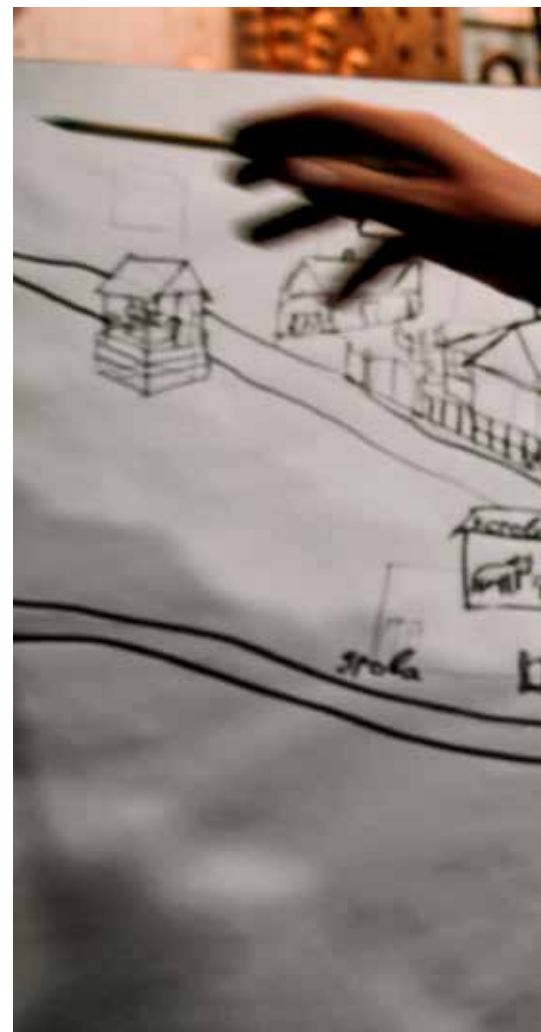
Perhaps culture's most important mission is to be a helping hand in times of misfortune. An essay by Ostap Slyvynsky.



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To See Beauty Again

"Now, in Warsaw, her traumatized consciousness transformed the regular metropolitan soundscape into the sounds of explosions, gunshots, and air raid sirens." A novel excerpt by Ukrainian musicologist Anna Stavychenko.

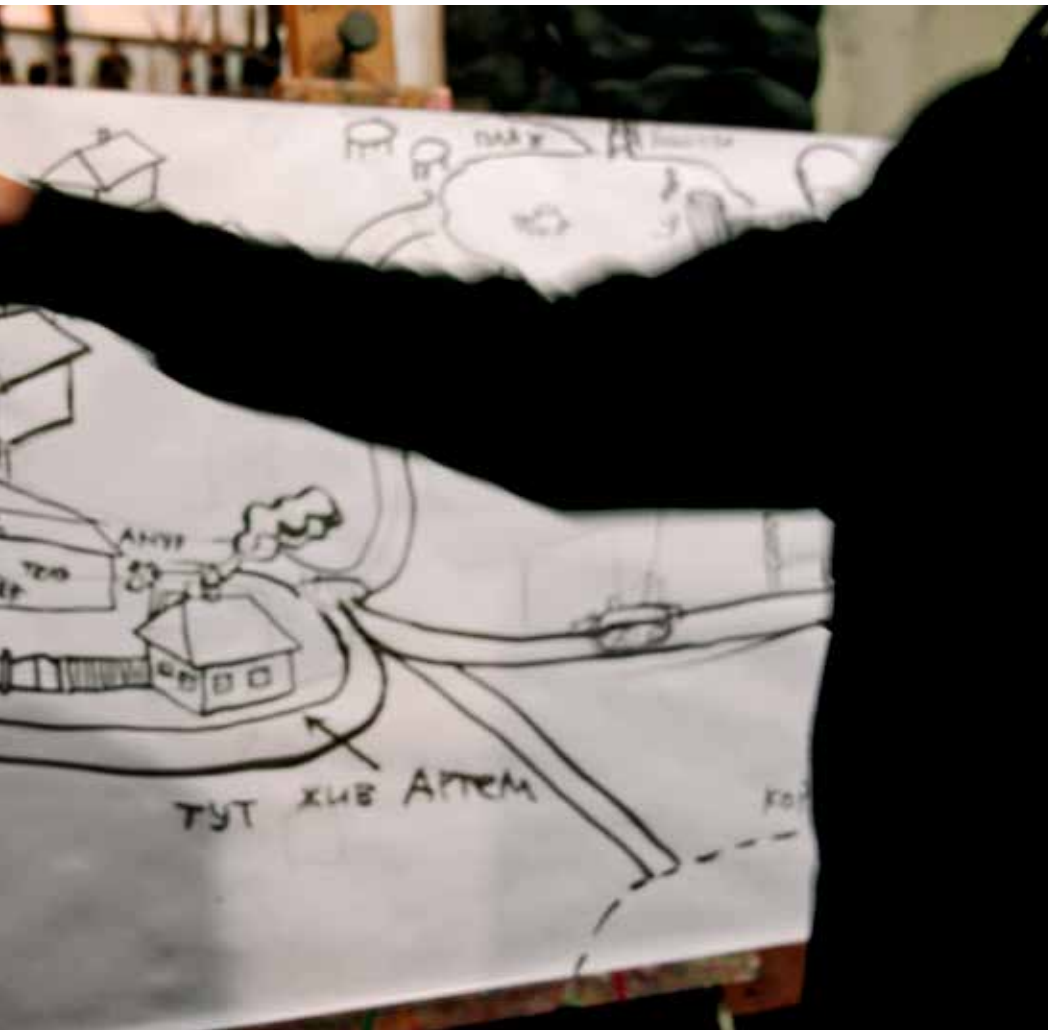


These people are not helpless victims of Russia's war, as media portrayals may indicate. Many of them, such as the volunteers at Bakhmut Ukrainian, are part of Ukraine's resistance."

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Bakhmut's Continuing Resistance: Beyond the Ruins

Harriman postdoctoral fellow Emma Mateo reflects on her field research about grassroots volunteers in war-torn Ukraine.



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Decentering Eurasian and East European Studies

Alexander Motyl on the long overdue shift in how we view and analyze the region.

Each academic year we host hundreds of interdisciplinary events with regional experts and members of the Harriman community on a range of issues concerning Eurasia and Eastern Europe. In a new web and print feature, Harriman Talks, *Harriman Magazine* follows up with some of those speakers about ideas or experiences discussed at the institute.

Harriman Talks

Winning the International Booker: “*Their Excitement was the Most Exciting Thing*”

“People in Bulgaria are rarely united by joy — it happens much more often with negative feelings — but this time, at least for a week, we shared in each other’s joy.”

Georgi Gospodinov, 2023 Man Booker International Prize winner

When Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva congratulated Georgi Gospodinov, Harriman’s 2022 writer in residence, on being the first Bulgarian author honored with the Man Booker International Prize, he shared with her the “incredible” response in his homeland (also Izmirlieva’s homeland). Gospodinov’s novel *Time Shelter*, translated into English by Angela Rodel, was the first Bulgarian book ever to receive a Booker nomination, and when it won, it became an instant sensation. Izmirlieva emailed Gospodinov last August to ask about the award; their e-mail exchange follows:

VALENTINA IZMIRLIEVA: Congratulations, Georgi! Your triumphant journey to the Booker was a source of much suspense and jubilation for your friends at the Harriman Institute. What surprised you most following the announcement of the award?

GEORGI GOSPODINOV: I was struck by how many people stayed up to watch the Booker ceremony live. It happened a little before midnight Bulgarian time, on the eve of Bulgaria’s most beautiful holiday—the Day of Slavic Letters, May 24. So many people, both at home and abroad, getting excited about a book award, about literature—isn’t that incredible? Three days later I had a signing at a book fair in Sofia. The line was four hours long. People kept coming to tell me stories, to weep and laugh together. *Their excitement was the most exciting thing for me during the truly strange days following the award.*

IZMIRLIEVA: The Man Booker International Prize was established in 2005 with an inaugural award to the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, and two more writers from “the Harriman part of Europe” have gotten the distinction before you: [Hungarian novelist] László Krasznahorkai (another Harriman Writer in Residence) in 2015, and [Polish writer] Olga Tokarczuk in 2018. Can we talk about a reorganization of the international literary space, with the former “other Europe”

becoming increasingly more visible and influential worldwide?

GOSPODINOV: I think so. European literary critics have finally begun to take literature coming from Central and Eastern Europe seriously. It had been undervalued for quite a while, played down as merely local, peripheral, or exotic. What I have always aspired to do with my own work is prove that so-called small or peripheral languages and literatures can also speak about big things, about the world’s sorrows and crises. And in recent years, when we feel the center of Europe is the place where things hurt the most—in the East—East-European literature can give us even more. ♦



Georgi Gospodinov. Photograph by Kostadin Krustev

Returning to Kyiv from Harriman: “The War Is Just a Given”

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER



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Shortly before Lili Bivings (MARS-REERS '23) moved back to Kyiv from New York last August, a friend asked whether she was feeling nervous. Bivings was returning to become business editor of the *Kyiv Independent*, the top English-language news outlet in Ukraine.

Yes, she was nervous, Bivings told her friend. “What if I’m not the right person for the task?”

Her friend was puzzled. The question wasn’t about the job; it was about the war, about Russia’s full-scale invasion that continued to rain down missiles on Ukraine, including Kyiv. Wasn’t Bivings nervous about the war?

That’s when it dawned on Bivings how much her paradigm had shifted in the year-and-a-half since the Russian invasion. The threat of destruction had grown so constant, she said, that she rarely discussed it with friends and colleagues: “At this point the war is just a given.”

Bivings, who was born and raised in the Washington, D.C. area, has no roots in Ukraine. She first went there as a Peace Corps volunteer in 2017. She fell in love with the country and, before moving back to the United States to start the MARS-REERS program at Harriman in the fall of 2021, vowed to return to Ukraine permanently as soon as she graduated.

While she was still at Columbia, the Harriman Institute hosted a conversation with Bivings and two of her *Kyiv Independent* colleagues: editor-in-chief Olga Rudenko and CEO Daryna Shevchenko. They described their disappointment with the language U.S. media often used in writing about the war. For example, when Ukrainian forces retook territory from Russia, it was often framed through a Russian lens: that Russia had “lost” the territory, not that Ukraine had “liberated” it. How could Russia lose something

that never belonged to it in the first place, the *Kyiv Independent* editors asked, arguing that such language reflected an imperialist, Russia-centric mentality.

After her return to Kyiv in the summer, Bivings told *Harriman Magazine* that journalists there seemed less agitated about such language issues. “Now, when we see it, we just give it an eye roll,” she said. According to Bivings, the most heated conversations in the newsroom these days revolve around something else: the culture wars inside Ukraine itself. For instance, much of the *Kyiv Independent’s* staff has decided to stop speaking Russian in public. But some staffers have refused to give up the language: “They say, ‘The Russian language doesn’t belong to Russia,’” said Bivings.

Bivings herself said she has chosen to stop speaking Russian — the first language she learned and spoke while living in Ukraine. But she is sympathetic to both sides on this issue. “For some people, it’s genuinely difficult to switch. Not everyone is good at languages,” she said.

Another issue upsetting Ukrainians in the second year of war, said Bivings, is Western media portrayals of Ukrainians living normally — “out at bars and restaurants, sitting on terraces.” That, she said, has led some in the West to conclude Ukraine no longer needs Western financial support.

“Just because people are going out and trying to live their lives does not mean they aren’t suffering,” Bivings said. “You can be sitting in a cafe having a craft cocktail and, within hours, huddling by your door because of really loud explosions.” The semblance of normal life is necessary, said Bivings, and not just for Ukrainians’ mental health. “It’s important to go out and buy things, to spend money. That’s how the economy sustains itself.” ◆

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The Last Word in Court: Russia's Only Remaining Outlet for Free Speech

As soon as it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government cracked down on antiwar activity—from opposition activists, journalists, artists, teachers, and anyone else who dared challenge the Kremlin's brutality. At an April 2023 Harriman Institute event, Russian journalist, filmmaker, and playwright Anna Narinskaya described how the courtrooms where these critics are tried have become the last bastion of free speech in today's Russia. Defendants use their

“last word” in court to make powerful statements about the war, President Putin, and the Russian justice system.

Narinskaya later helped *Harriman Magazine* editor-in-chief Ann Cooper choose excerpts from several courtroom “last words” that circulated widely on social media and independent news sites. Narinskaya's comments on the significance of each of the speeches follow the excerpts.

Vladimir Kara-Murza

A democratic activist and longtime Putin critic, Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years in prison after speaking out against the war. At the closing session of his trial in April 2023, he said the proceedings had exceeded even the sham trials of Soviet dissidents in the 1960s and 1970s, sending the country “all the way back to the 1930s.”



SOPA Images Limited/Alamy Live News

“

In their last statements to the court, defendants usually ask for an acquittal... But I do not ask this court for anything. I know the verdict. I knew it a year ago when I saw people in black uniforms and black masks running after my car in the rearview mirror. Such is the price for speaking up in Russia today ...

But I also know that the day will come when the darkness over our country will dissipate. When black will be called black and white will be called white; when at the official level it will be recognized that two times two is still four; when a war will be called a war, and a usurper a usurper; and when those who kindled and unleashed this war, rather than those who tried to stop it, will be recognized as criminals.

This day will come as inevitably as spring follows even the coldest winter. And then our society will open its eyes and be horrified by what terrible crimes were committed on its behalf. From this realization, from this reflection, the long, difficult but vital path toward the recovery and restoration of Russia, its return to the community of civilized countries, will begin.”

Anna Narinskaya: For people in Russia, the most important thing in the last word of Kara-Murza, who was sent to prison for a completely Stalinist term on fabricated charges, is hope. Kara-Murza has no doubt that “Russia will be free” (today, this slogan itself could be the cause of repression), and he conveys this hope to his audience.

Zhenya Berkovich

In May 2023, authorities accused theater director Zhenya Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriychuk of “justifying terrorism.” After two months of pretrial detention, a court heard Berkovich’s plea to be released into house arrest; the court denied her request.



AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko

Generally speaking, I’ve always assumed that an investigator’s job is to investigate. I don’t understand what is being investigated, I don’t understand what the crime is, and I don’t understand the secrets and mysteries of this crime either. That’s all I have to say about our case, and now I’ll speak quickly so that I don’t cry ...

We have been in prison for two months. I have two children on the outside, one is a minor, the other is an adult with fairly serious mental health problems ... I keep saying that I want to be released completely because that is the just and merciful and safe thing to do. Now I’m a mother, not a director. I have to be at home—I will stay at home!”

Narinskaya: This completely dispels the notion that patriarchal Russia somehow values motherhood. A mother of two children with special needs was not even released under house arrest so that she could spend time with them. It is this evidence of the total anti-humanity of the regime that made a terrible impression, even on those who remained more or less loyal to it.

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I wanted to somehow wash away the fratricidal shame that stains our country, so I helped Ukrainian refugees and on social networks expressed my sincere hope for a Ukrainian victory in every way ...

I am accused of permitting myself to publicly dream about Putin’s hanging. Yes, I do dream of living to see that day of celebration.

I am sure that our dictator deserves the same kind of execution as other war criminals who were hanged, for example by the verdict of the Nuremberg Tribunal. He is the same kind of lying tyrant who has arrogated to himself unfettered power, and like those before him he is up to his elbows in blood.”

Narinskaya: This is striking in its level of courage and despair. It is here that we see confirmation that the last word of the accused is the last refuge of freedom of speech in Russia. It is impossible to publish anything like this in any media outlet today.

Mikhail Krieger

The same month that Berkovich and Petriychuk were arrested, a court issued a seven-year sentence to anti-war activist Mikhail Krieger for “justifying terrorism” and “inciting hatred.”



Mikhail Krieger. Photograph by Daria Kornilova

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You may go down in history as the person who imprisoned me. You may go down in history as the person who acquitted me. You may go down in history as the person who made a neutral decision and handed me a suspended sentence or fined me. It is up to you. But remember, everyone knows you are not judging a terrorist or extremist. You are not even judging a political activist. You are judging a musician, an artist, and a pacifist ...

Yes, I am a pacifist. I believe that life is sacred. If we give up the veil of this world such as cars, apartments, wealth, power, success, social connections, social networks—the only real thing left is life. Oh yes, life. It is incredible. It is amazing. It is unique. It is tenacious. It is powerful.”

Narinskaya: Sasha’s words “Yes, life!” have become popular as graffiti (in Russia, authorities have ordered its removal). They are printed on T-shirts and badges, which have become a secret signal. Sasha Skochilenko, unbroken despite the incredible violence with which Putin’s authorities are oppressing her, is a symbol of the Russian resistance—almost strangled, but still undefeated. ◆



AP Photo/Dmitri Lovetsky

Sasha Skochilenko

In November 2023, artist Sasha Skochilenko was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison for spreading “false information” when she put anti-war messages on price tags at a St. Petersburg supermarket in March 2022. Skochilenko has celiac disease and other severe health issues, but during more than a year of pre-trial detention, the court refused her requests to be moved to house arrest.

Ukrainian Literature During War Time

Andriy Kurkov, Harriman’s 2023 Writer in Residence, spoke at the institute in November about life for writers in Ukraine throughout the Soviet period, during the 1990s, and now in wartime. Editor-in-Chief Ann Cooper followed up with him about the war’s impact on literature.

COOPER: How has Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine changed the atmosphere and the work for Ukrainian writers?

ANDRIY KURKOV: Russian aggression has created many problems both for the publishing world and for the literary process. At the very beginning of the war, the largest printing plants, which also contained large supplies of paper for future books, were bombed by Russian artillery and missiles in Kharkiv and the Kharkiv

region. Many books prepared for publication before the full-scale invasion were never released.

Most Ukrainian writers practically stopped writing fiction, switching to essays and journalism. Many have still been unable to work on novels. All publishing houses, without exception, began to publish mainly documentary prose about the war.

The priorities of Ukrainian readers also changed. Before the war, readers gravitated toward Ukrainian translations of Western bestsellers. Now the books in demand are Ukrainian classical literature: prose and poetry by previously little-known Ukrainian writers of the 1920s–30s executed by the Stalinist regime, modern patriotic and war poetry, and books on the history of Ukraine. ◆

“

Most Ukrainian writers practically stopped writing fiction, switching to essays and journalism.”



Photo courtesy of Andriy Kurkov



Joshua Yaffa: Photograph by Max Avdeev

In Liberated Izyum, “The Wounds Are Definitely Raw”

In March 2023, Joshua Yaffa (CJS '07/SIPA '08), a contributing writer for the *New Yorker*, appeared at the Harriman Institute for a conversation with Keith Gessen (Columbia Journalism School) about his reporting in Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion. Masha Udensiva-Brenner reached out to him in September to follow up on later developments.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: When you spoke at the Harriman Institute, you discussed your [*New Yorker*] article about Russian collaborators in Izyum [in eastern Ukraine]. What updates can you give us on Izyum and the story of Russian collaboration in Ukraine?

JOSHUA YAFFA: It's now been a year since Izyum was liberated. I stopped by the city very briefly during another reporting trip at the beginning of the summer. A lot of basic services have long returned: the electricity is back on, water and heating, and some of the buildings damaged by shelling have been patched up. A lot of those who scattered during and immediately after the Russian occupation have come back, but of course many settled semi-permanently elsewhere in Ukraine and across Europe; I even know of a family from Izyum in the U.S.

From what I can tell, for those in Izyum, it's hard to move on from the memories and aftermath of occupation, especially as the larger war continues. This summer, there was a renewed Russian push to take Kupyansk, not so far away. Men from Izyum are drafted into the Ukrainian Army and sent to the front. And prosecutions of those accused of collaboration a year ago are still working their way through the Ukrainian courts, meaning debates among neighbors and colleagues remain open and unsettled. All that's to say, the wounds are definitely raw.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: You have reported extensively on both Ukraine and Russia, but you built your career as a Russia specialist and spent more than a decade living in Moscow. How has your relationship with Russia impacted your reporting in Ukraine? Is it an obstacle with some Ukrainians and some stories in Ukraine?

YAFFA: My experience in Russia doesn't come up

so often in Ukraine, though I do mention it as a reason why I speak Russian (and alas, not-so-great Ukrainian). That tends to interest people, but very rarely does it make anyone upset or suspicious. I can only speak for myself, but I've been surprised how little the language issue—or even my time in Russia—is a topic of much concern or even attention in Ukraine. More important, I think, is that I'm there: on the ground, in people's homes, asking questions and ready to listen. It may sound like a cliché, but that really does seem to be more relevant for setting the tone in my interactions with Ukrainians.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: Not long after you spoke at the institute your friend, the U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich, was detained in Russia on false charges of espionage; also, we learned that Russian journalist-in-exile (and former Harriman Paul Klebnikov Fellow) Elena Kostyuchenko was poisoned in Munich last October. How have these events impacted your own reporting and safety considerations?

YAFFA: Besides my feelings for Evan and his predicament—we're in semi-regular touch through letters in and out of jail—I naturally am aware that all of us are more at risk than we might have otherwise thought. There used to be an unwritten rule that foreign journalists were largely left alone; clearly that's not the case anymore. You could say something similar about Elena, who appears to have been poisoned in Germany. She wrote a moving essay for *Meduza* about her ordeal—she thought she was safe in Europe, but apparently wasn't, at least not fully. That's another assumption or unwritten rule we might have to question. We know this intellectually, but maybe it's still hard to absorb fully how much we are dealing with a different Russia than the one we knew from a year and a half ago. ♦

“There used to be an unwritten rule that foreign journalists were largely left alone; clearly that's not the case anymore.”

DECENTERING EURASIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

Text by Alexander J. Motyl • Illustrations by Nicholas Ogonosky

HOW RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE IS RESHAPING THE FIELD, BRINGING A LONG OVERDUE SHIFT IN HOW WE VIEW AND ANALYZE THE REGION.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine—and its subsequent pursuit of a genocidal war—may not have changed everything, but it's definitely upended many extant assumptions about how the world works. Academic institutions focused on Eurasian and East European studies have also had to reconsider the all-too-conventional wisdom that Russia is the region's geographic and political center and its neighbors are mere offshoots, tangents, or peripheries.

Unfortunately, although scholars are generally comfortable speaking about the “decentering” practiced by liberation movements outside the groves of academe, they often chafe when it comes to discussing the need for decentering in their own study of Russia's relations with its neighbors. This possibly is because decentering may imply decolonization, which in turn may imply the painful redefinition of Russia as an imperialist state with a colonial agenda. Traditional views of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation continue to give pride of place to Russian agency, voice, and logic and to downplay their counterparts among Russia's neighbors. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, and the Harriman Institute happens to be one, having effectively pursued a decentering, and implicitly a decolonizing, agenda since at least the 1980s.





WARS OF THIS MAGNITUDE weren't supposed to happen in a rapidly globalizing world. And they certainly weren't supposed to take place in the middle of the European continent, a region purportedly blessed in recent decades with perpetual peace, environmental sensitivity, human rights, liberal tolerance, and unending prosperity.

Neither was Russia—even Vladimir Putin's Russia—supposed to have engaged in the kind of barbaric behavior more easily ascribed to the Russia of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and a host of other blood-thirsty tsars and commissars. Nor were modern-day Russians supposed to be supportive of imperial projects, susceptible to believing the bizarre notions peddled by official propaganda, and willing to die for bits of foreign territory that had no strategic value for their country.

Finally, Ukraine wasn't supposed to matter to the West in general and the United States in particular. True, its existence was recognized, but its stubborn inability to become Switzerland in a few years—and its equally stubborn unwillingness to accept Russian hegemony, as some analysts recommended—grated on Western nerves and produced that periodically recurring affliction known as “Ukraine fatigue.”

But then, on February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin—deciding to reinvigorate the war he had initiated in 2014 with the seizure of Crimea—sent his troops across the Ukrainian borders and launched Europe's largest military confrontation since World War II. He thought his grand campaign would end gloriously in a few days. His strategic calculations were completely wrong; his expectations of unabashed Ukrainian joy at the sight of Russian liberators were absurdly unrealistic. Like Adolf Hitler, who believed that Operation Barbarossa would result in a quick victory over the Soviet Union, Putin made a strategic error of incalculable proportions, one that could eventually result in the Russian Federation's demise.

Students of the post-Communist states were as shocked by the war and its consequences as policymakers, analysts, and journalists. They confronted a new intellectual reality, in which old assumptions and conceptualizations had to be questioned and perhaps even discarded. In particular, they had to ask why the war shocked them as much as it did and why it seemed unthinkable even as the evidence of Russian aggressive intent appeared undeniable. Perhaps Russia's non-Russian neighbors had a point when they insisted that their fear of Russian malevolence wasn't just a peculiar psychological hang-up.

THIS WASN'T THE FIRST TIME that students of Eastern Europe and central Eurasia had to undergo a painful self-analysis followed by adjustments to their worldviews. Stalin's adoption of mass terror in the 1930s and subsequent decision to become a Nazi collaborator shattered the politics, ideologies, and loyalties of many “fellow travelers.” The publication in 1973 of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* led the “New Philosophers” André Glucksmann and Henri Bernard Levy to rethink their views of socialism. Nikita Khrushchev's dismantling of Stalinism spawned Revisionist Sovietology in the 1960s.

The Soviet Union's collapse had similarly portentous consequences, especially as the conventional wisdom among Sovietologists was that, while the USSR was desperately in need of radical reform, collapse was out of the question. I still recall the derision that greeted Héléne Carrère d'Encausse's book, *Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt* (originally published in France in 1978). After all, superpowers didn't just fall apart, especially in the absence of an enervating war, and Carrère d'Encausse's suggestion that the non-Russians had cause to rebel fell on mostly deaf ears within the Sovietological community.

A crucial intellectual consequence of the USSR's collapse was conceptual: An entire political system had disappeared, and it behooved scholars to ask just what kind of system it had been. This was a question downplayed if not ignored by the revisionist focus on bits and pieces of life in the Soviet Union. Discomfiting as it was, there was no getting around the fact that two of the Cold War concepts deemed disreputable in the revisionist 1960s and 1970:—totalitarianism and empire—might be of relevance to understanding the USSR and its end. Many Soviets recognized that the main obstacle to reform was not individual caprice but the logic of the system, and they began employing both terms in the late 1980s; the fear of being labeled an “inveterate anti-Communist Cold Warrior” dissipated. It became possible, if not yet fully respectable, for Western scholars to suggest the Soviet Union might in fact have been a totalitarian empire, and perhaps, as President Ronald Reagan suggested, an evil one at that.

“Empire” became an especially attractive conceptual tool, as it enabled scholars to compare the Soviet Union to a host of similar multinational entities with distinct cores and peripheries, track their rise and fall, and generate explanatory frameworks. Empire served another salutary purpose: it enabled students of the “Soviet nationality question”—who until then had been marginalized within the field—to be integrated into post-Sovietology and to bring their long-ignored insights into the fray.



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THE W. AVERELL HARRIMAN INSTITUTE for the Advanced Study of the Soviet Union, and Columbia University more generally, were well positioned to play a leading role in these exciting developments. Building on Edward Allworth's Program on Soviet Nationality Problems and Center for the Study of Central Asia, the Institute's intellectual leadership (Marshall Shulman, Robert Legvold, and Seweryn Bialer) established the Nationality and Siberian Studies Program in 1988. The timing couldn't have been better because, just as the USSR unraveled, the program and its faculty could offer policymakers and the media expertise about the rebellious republics facilitating the unraveling.

The program also encouraged scholars and students to expand their focus to the understudied republics soon to become independent states. One of its most important accomplishments was the publication of the volume, *Thinking Theoretically about Soviet Nationalities: History and Comparison in the Study of the USSR* (Columbia University Press, 1992). This included essays by specialists of ethnicity and nationalism (such as Paul Brass, David Laitin, Anthony Smith, and Ernest Gellner) who had hitherto not focused on the USSR in their work.

The Institute's decision in 1992–93 to embrace the entire post-Communist space within its programmatic purview, and not revert to Russian studies, marked a logical, and perhaps even inevitable, turning point in its development. After the W. Averell Harriman Institute was rechristened the Harriman Institute, there would be no going back to the days of the Russian Institute and the priority of Russocentric studies. In the years that followed, the Harriman—especially under the directorships of Richard Ericson, Mark von Hagen, and Cathy Nepomnyashchy—expanded its course offerings on every state and region outside of Moscow and the Russian Federation: from East Central Europe and the Balkans, to the Caucasus and Central Asia, to Ukraine and Belarus.¹

Especially indicative of the Institute's commitment to embracing all of Eastern Europe and Eurasia are its East Central European Center, Ukrainian Studies Program, Balkan Studies Program, and Master of Arts in Regional Studies—Russia, Eurasia and Eastern Europe. Equally important, and a portent of things to come, was the decision made in the early 1990s to change the language requirement for the Harriman Certificate (which testifies to a student's multidisciplinary expertise in the region) from Russian to “one relevant language from the Russian, Eurasian, or East European region.”

These developments over the last 30 years have arguably made the Harriman ideally qualified to take on the intellectual challenges posed by Russia's war in Ukraine. The Russian regime's aggressiveness and brutality, the Russian people's acquiescence in war crimes and genocide, and Russia's peculiar animus toward Ukraine and Ukrainians need explanation. Merely repeating the popular bromide that NATO enlargement magically compelled the Kremlin to embark on a barbaric war and genocide doesn't tell the story in all its complexity.

COMING TO GRIPS WITH the war requires examining Russia, of course, but it also requires understanding Ukraine, as well as Russia's relations with it, both today and in the past. The focus has to broaden from a Russocentric view of post-Soviet relations to a balanced perspective, one that sees Russia and her neighbors (in this case, Ukraine) as equally important to any explanatory project. If the Russians have agency, voice, and logic, then so, too, do the non-Russians: the Ukrainians, the Kazakhs, the Georgians, and others.

In the spirit of postmodern efforts to decenter language and, indeed, reality, post-Soviet studies have to be “decentered.” Obviously, Russia cannot and should not be ignored: how can a country of eleven time zones escape our attention? But it should be treated as no more than part of the regional equation. More important, the non-Russians must be viewed through the lens of their own phenomenology. A good place to start would be to junk the term *non-Russian*, which defines Russia's neighbors in terms of who they are not rather than who they are.²

Scholars with a decentering agenda are doing nothing intrinsically radical or, for that matter, new. They need not reinvent the wheel, as the agenda has been practiced for many years by, among others, the Global South, feminists, and African Americans, all of whom have long insisted that they have voices, agencies, and logics of their own. All we need do is follow in their footsteps and acknowledge that Russia's neighbors do, too. Significantly, as noted above, the logic of following in their footsteps may eventually lead to a “decolonizing” agenda, according to which the Russian Empire, the USSR, and the Russian Federation are all viewed as distinctly imperial centers that routinely practiced, or in the last case still continues to practice, imperialism and colonialism vis-à-vis their peripheral neighbors.

Whether the goal is decentering or decolonizing, decades of Russocentric scholarship, training, and institutional activity have left their mark and may require decades to undo. Unsurprisingly, many Russianists refuse to acknowledge what Ewa Thompson has persuasively demonstrated in *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (2000): that Russian culture is suffused with imperial motifs that reflect and sustain imperial agendas. René Nyberg puts it well: “It is embarrassing to realize that the prevalent rendering of Russian history in the West is still the canonized simplification of a straight path from ancient Kyiv to Muscovy and St. Petersburg and again to Moscow.”³

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine has made decentering—and, perhaps, decolonizing—all the more imperative because according credibility to the Kremlin's narrative of events amounts to an embarrassing apology for dictatorship, genocide, and war. That's because truth isn't just a quaint practice from the time before postmodernism. While absolute truth may be impossible to achieve, stabs at truth-telling are preferable to the outright mendacity practiced by Hitler and Putin, and their sidekicks, Joseph Goebbels and Vladimir Solovyov. Ideally, critically inclined scholars will do more than contemplate a cornucopia of “narratives” and leave it at that.

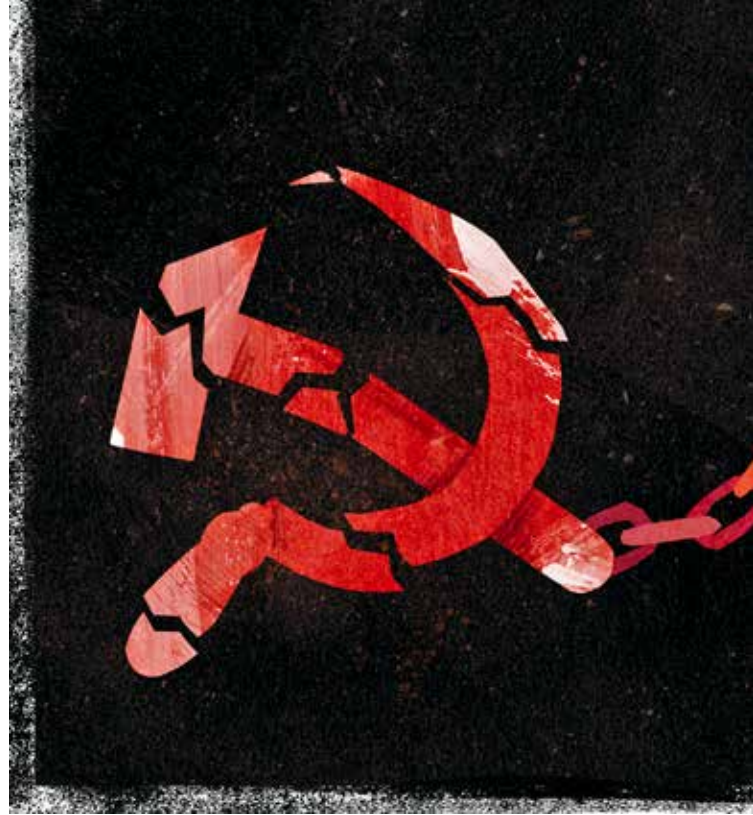




ONCE AGAIN, THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE is ideally positioned to continue the process of decentering that it embarked upon in the 1980s. How many academic institutions can say that they have, in the course of their existence, devoted more or less equal time to the Russians *and* their neighbors before that became fashionable and de rigueur? How many academic institutions have the institutional framework for pursuing a decentering agenda? How many have the political will and the intellectual capacity to succeed at such a project?

In this sense, Russia's war in Ukraine, while an enormous tragedy for everyone concerned, does have one silver lining. It is challenging the conventional wisdom and compelling scholars to rethink their paradigms and ask uncomfortable questions. In addition, because decentering is, as nationalists, feminists, and civil rights activists recognize, ultimately about justice, which is ultimately about morality, the war has confronted scholars with questions of right and wrong, good and evil: issues that we generally prefer to eschew.

If Hitler was wrong and evil, and if the behavior of ordinary Germans in the Nazi years promoted that evil, are we then not obliged to ask similar questions about the complicity of the Russian populace in the current war? Dare we say that Putin and his supporters — who, according to the Levada Center's



public opinion polling, have constituted about 85 percent of the population since the war began — are wrong and evil? If we're serious about decentering, the answer has to be yes or, at a minimum, maybe.

The point is not to wag fingers and excoriate people for failing to challenge the formidable coercive capacities of the Russian state, but to investigate the reasons for their inaction. Just as we don't hesitate to argue that something must have gone terribly wrong with Germany and its people for them to have supported Hitler's madness, we should not hesitate to do the same about Russia.

Postwar Ukraine will play an important role in addressing these matters and, more generally, in decentering. Already, the war appears to have spawned more books and articles on Ukraine in two years than we've seen in the last decade. That interest will continue, both because Russo-Ukrainian relations won't be "normal" anytime soon and because Ukraine likely will play a far more important role in geopolitics (and, hence, in the media) no matter how the war ends and who is perceived as the victor. At the same time, Ukraine's centrality will serve as a reminder that the voices, agencies, and logics of other formerly Sovietized nations also matter.

The logical culmination of decentering would be the disappearance of the imperial Russian center and its replacement by several centers. Thanks to the strategic idiocy of Putin's war, the Russian Federation's disintegration has become both possible and, if the leader and his regime continue to weaken, likely. One of Putin's favorite notions, multipolarity, would thereby come home to roost with a vengeance.

This would be the ultimate irony: Putin's hopes of reviving the center could end up decentering it. ♦

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1. For more on Soviet nationality studies and the Harriman's role therein, see "The Non-Russians Are Coming! The Non-Russians Are Coming! Field Notes from the Front Lines of Soviet Nationality Studies," *Harriman*, fall 2018.

2. I grappled with this issue several decades ago in "Negating the Negation: Russia, Not-Russia, and the West," *Nationalities Papers*, spring 1994.

3. René Nyberg, "Russia, Ukraine, and Poland: The End of a Tragic Triangle," *Carnegie Polltika*, July 28, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/90289>.



MOVING ON FROM “POST-SOVIET” STATES

Why the Associated Press decided to avoid the shorthand “former Soviet republics”

BY JOHN DANISZEWSKI
AP VICE PRESIDENT AND EDITOR AT LARGE FOR STANDARDS

By 1808, 32 years after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the identity of the United States was firmly established as a nation growing robustly and presenting the world with a new model of democratically elected government. Long gone was its identity as the “13 former British colonies.”

So why, 32 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, are the 14 countries that emerged independent of Moscow in 1991 still commonly referred to as “former Soviet republics,” which is often the prime, or only, descriptor given them in news accounts? The description is highly reductive when one considers that they all possess separate languages, histories, and cultures that transcend the relatively brief historical period when they were part of the Soviet empire: seventy years or so for most, and even less for the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Each of these countries has been on its own separate path for the past three decades. Some have retained elements of Soviet governance and style or remained aligned with Russia through organizations like the Collective Treaty Security Organization. Others have firmly distanced themselves from Moscow, aspiring instead for European Union membership. Indeed, the Baltic countries have been part of both the EU and NATO for nearly two decades already, having embraced capitalism and democracy to an impressive degree.

That’s why The Associated Press decided in June 2023 to stop referring to these countries as “former Soviet republics.” The decision was taken on the advice of our journalists working in the region, and it has been generally well-received.

Here is the style guidance we issued, which is now part of the AP Stylebook, a widely-used guide to practice and language in American journalism.

Former Soviet republic(s) Avoid this shorthand for any of the group of 14 countries besides Russia that existed within the former Soviet Union, unless clearly relevant to the story. For example: Belarus’ security apparatus retains elements of its past as a Soviet republic, or, Kazakhstan seeks greater distance from Russia, despite the ex-Soviet republic’s former union with Moscow.

The style guidance continues:

The Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, and the countries that emerged have identities, histories and governing systems that transcend their 68 years (or less) within the Russia-dominated USSR. This applies to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Of course, there are many instances when it is appropriate to call attention to a country’s Soviet past, such as explaining the roots of events now unfolding in the Caucasus, where ethnic Armenians fled from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 after an Azerbaijani military conquest. The territorial dispute and the ethnic tensions in the enclave emerged in the final years of the Soviet Union, which earlier had kept nationalist rivalries in check or at least below the surface.

But in other cases, such as referring to Ukraine as a former Soviet republic, the characterization diminishes its importance and sovereign identity just as this country of 40 million—among the ten largest in Europe—fights for its existence from a Russian invasion.

With many people unable to identify, much less locate on a map some of the region’s smaller countries—such as Moldova, Tajikistan, or Turkmenistan—we believe it is important to tell our readers more about them than that they are “former Soviet republics.” Given that they are now in their fourth decade of independence, anything less is disrespectful to these distinctive countries of Europe and Asia. Informing AP’s audience about their separate locations, languages, religions, economies, political systems, alliances, and cultures might be a good way to start. ♦

DESPITE CENSORSHIP AND CONTROLS, SOVIET JOURNALISTS BROUGHT THE WORLD EARLY, CONCRETE EVIDENCE OF NAZI EFFORTS TO EXTERMINATE EUROPE'S JEWS.

The liberation of Buchenwald, Dachau, and other Nazi concentration camps in Germany during the spring of 1945 is often regarded as the beginning of the unveiling of the Holocaust, as the moment when journalists could finally report irrefutable, visual evidence of the Nazi extermination machine. Yet that moment came many months after the earliest stories and photographs were published from Nazi killing fields and death camps in Ukraine and Poland. This book excerpt recounts how journalists for Soviet media, along with a few foreign correspondents, published eyewitness accounts from Babi Yar, Majdanek, Auschwitz, and other sites, starting in early 1942.

Excerpted from Newshawks in Berlin: The Associated Press and Nazi Germany by Larry Heinzerling and Randy Herschaft, with Ann Cooper. 2024 Columbia University Press. Used by arrangement with the publisher. All rights reserved.

(Author Heinzerling, who died in 2021, was the husband of Harriman Magazine editor Ann Cooper.)

▶ Left: "The Hell of Treblinka," Vasily Grossman, *Znamya*, November 1944: Image courtesy of the New York Public Library / Other images from Soviet media: Provided courtesy of East View Information Services, Inc.

▶ Right: In the summer of 1944, Soviet forces were the first Allied troops to enter a Nazi death camp, at Majdanek in Poland. This photo of the ovens in Majdanek's crematorium and the skeletal remains of victims was distributed by the Soviet photo agency to AP and others. Sovfoto via AP

"The reporting was graphic, often presenting stories from firsthand accounts by the Soviet journalists who reported on the ground, perhaps foremost among them the Jewish writer Vasily Grossman."

first eyewitness reports and photographs of Nazi gas chambers and crematoriums used for mass murder of Jews. AP and other agencies, crediting Soviet media, wrote about the findings. A few weeks later an AP reporter produced a vivid firsthand account of Majdanek's horrors after the Soviets arranged a trip there for foreign correspondents.

The reporting on Majdanek was published in America nine months before the Allied liberations of the concentration camps at Buchenwald, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen in 1945, (Teenage diarist Anne Frank had died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen just weeks before its liberation.) And yet for many Americans, the freeing of those camps is often remembered as the moment the world first viewed the full horror of the Holocaust.

How did names such as Buchenwald and Dachau come to symbolize the unveiling of the Holocaust, and not Kerch, site of the first photo of a Nazi mass execution published in U.S. media in early 1942, or Majdanek, the first death camp to be liberated and described in media in 1944?

One explanation lies in the source of the Kerch and Majdanek revelations: the





► Mark Redkin, a Jewish Soviet photographer accompanying Soviet paratroopers as they recaptured territory from the Nazis, took this early 1942 photo of several victims of Nazi executions carried out in the Crimean city of Kerch. The photo was published first in the Soviet Union, then sold to AP and other agencies for distribution to foreign media. AP Photo

"Redkin had just made a so-called liberation photograph, which, when published a few weeks later, would give the world some of the first visual evidence of the atrocities of the Holocaust."

Soviet Union, whose communist system was widely detested and denounced in America. Though an ally in fighting Germany, the Soviet Union also was a notorious purveyor of propaganda and misinformation.¹ Soviet media were tightly controlled, and foreign correspondents based in Moscow faced severe restrictions, often reduced to little more than rewriting accounts that had appeared in the Soviet press. None of that built U.S. audience trust in information from Soviet sources, and it may have even created some doubt regarding the veracity of foreign correspondents whose reporting was based on visiting sites under Soviet escort.

In the cases of Nazi atrocities, the reporting was graphic, often presenting stories from firsthand accounts by the Soviet journalists who reported on the ground, perhaps foremost among them the Jewish writer Vasily Grossman, who covered the war for the Soviet army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star). At war's end, the prosecutors at Nürnberg used Grossman's searing, deeply descriptive article, *The Hell of Treblinka*, as evidence in making their case for Nazi war crimes.

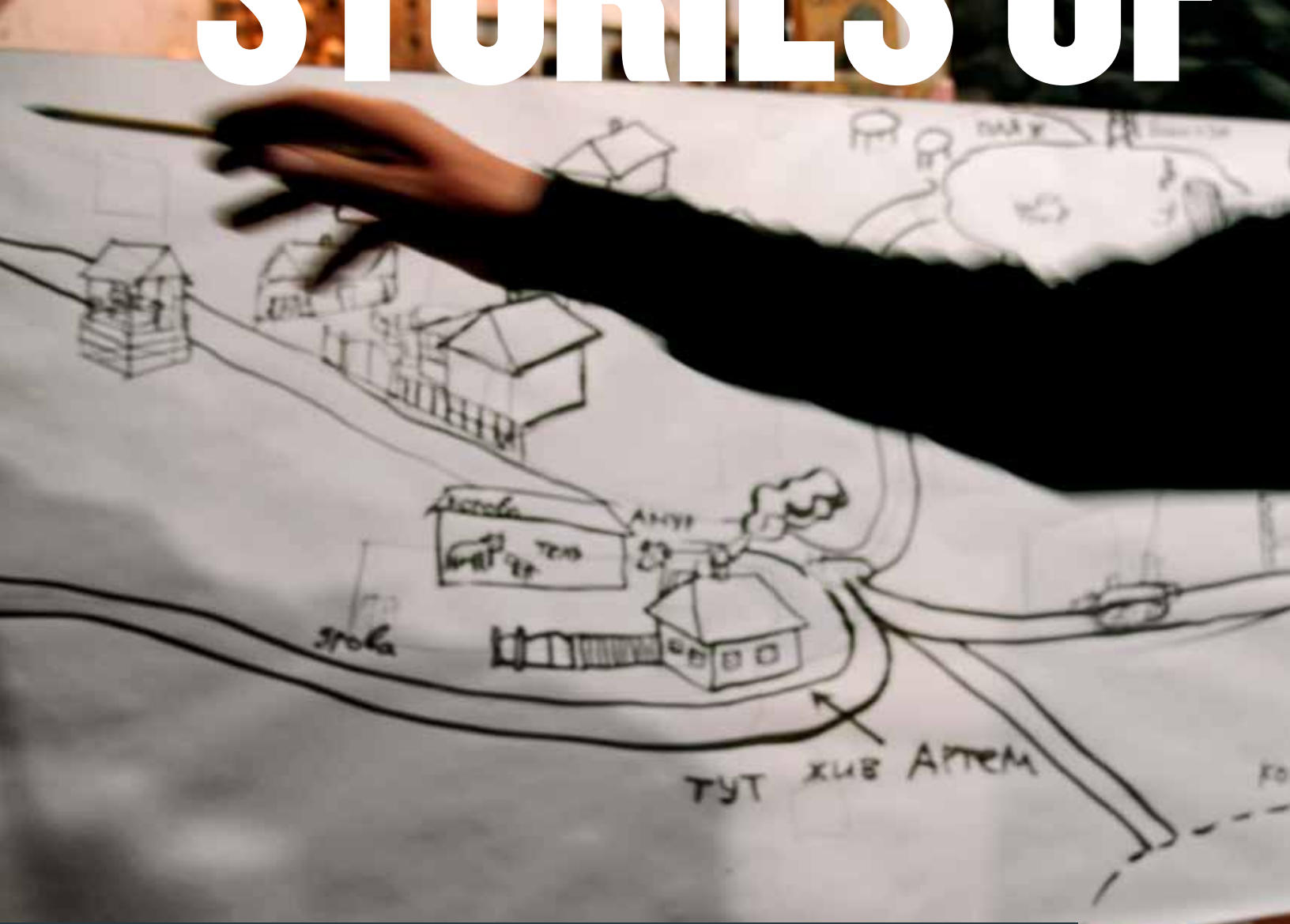
But while Grossman wrote about Treblinka as mainly "a slaughterhouse for Jews," Soviet media were inconsistent in identifying the Holocaust's victims. Some stories indicated the Nazis had targeted Jews for execution, but in other accounts Jews were listed as one of several categories of victims, all given more or less equal weight. And in some cases, likely reflecting both official anti-Semitism and official prioritizing of a unified "Soviet" identity, victims were described as "civilians," "Soviet citizens," or "the noncombatant population."

In its long, tortuous march to Berlin, the Soviet Union became the first of the wartime allies to expose the true savagery of Nazi occupation. And despite the limits on reporting from the Soviet side, correspondents in Moscow—including those from AP—filed some of the earliest accounts of Holocaust crimes for American newspaper readers. Along with photos the Soviets made available to AP and other agencies, these stories marked the beginning of the unveiling of the Holocaust, including revelations of mass executions by bullets and by gas.

Months later, when American and British soldiers liberated Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and other camps in Germany, the corpses and living skeletons they found "seemed to convey the worst crimes of Hitler," wrote historian Timothy Snyder in *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. But, wrote Snyder: "As the Jews and Poles of Warsaw knew, and as Vasily Grossman and the Red Army soldiers knew, this was far from the truth. The worst was in the ruins of Warsaw, or the fields of Treblinka, or the marshes of Belarus, or the pits of Babi Yar." ♦

¹ Perhaps the boldest lie told by the Soviet Union during the war involved the Katyn massacre, in which some 22,000 Polish military officers, police, lawyers and other members of the country's intelligentsia were killed and buried in mass graves, including in the Katyn Forest outside the Russian city of Smolensk. Germany announced the discovery of the graves in April 1943 and charged that the Red Army had killed the victims after it marched into eastern Poland in 1939. For decades the Soviet Union denied the charge, blaming the Nazis instead. Nearly half a century later, in 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, acknowledged Soviet forces had carried out the killings.

USING ART TO TELL STORIES OF



WAR CRIMES

A FILMMAKER'S PROJECT MAY ONE DAY HELP PROSECUTORS HOLD RUSSIAN OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE FOR DEPORTING UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

BY ANN COOPER

Ukrainian filmmaker Tetiana Khodakivska was in New York City when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of her homeland in February 2022. On the phone constantly with her mother in Kyiv, and with friends around the world, she watched videos on Zoom of rocket attacks, raised money for medical supplies, and helped Ukrainians find evacuation routes for their children. At night she offered long-distance editing help to friends who were filming on the ground as Russian missiles slammed into their cities.

As an expatriate, dividing her time for several years between New York and Kyiv, Khodakivska felt tormented by Ukraine's suddenly precarious future. She was part of Babylon 13, a collective of journalists, filmmakers, and others who united to use their skills documenting Ukraine's political revolution in 2013 and then the conflict that began the following year, when Russian-backed separatists occu-

pied parts of eastern Ukraine. Now, that conflict had escalated dramatically, and as a filmmaker, Khodakivska wondered whether art could still serve a purpose amidst all the horror unfolding in Ukraine. "If all the art couldn't prevent what is happening now, why do we even need it?" she recalled thinking at the time.

There were existential questions, too. "We didn't know if the art would survive, if the artists would survive, if our parents would survive," she recalled during a 2023 event at the Harriman Institute, Art in Time of War: Celebrating Resilience in Ukrainian Culture.

In March 2022, just one month into the war, Khodakivska read that Russia was deporting Ukrainian children from recently occupied territory in Luhansk and Donetsk regions and sending them to institutions in other occupied areas or in Russia itself. More stories followed, some in Ukrainian media, some in

Children who managed to return to Ukraine after deportation to Russia or Russian-held territories worked with filmmaker Tetiana Khodakivska and Ukrainian artists in 2023 to depict their experiences. Still images from *The Blue Sweater with a Yellow Hole*, a film-in-progress, courtesy of Tetiana Khodakivska, cinematography by Denys Melnyk.

western outlets. Khodakivska learned that the deportations were not new—children had been removed from occupied areas before the full-scale invasion—and increasingly, it was clear to her that these were not just a few isolated cases. Soldiers were taking children from orphanages, from schools, and from their homes, where they showed up threatening or bribing families to persuade them to send their children to “recreational camps” in Russia and Russian-occupied Crimea.

Russia’s heavily censored media presented the deportation of Ukrainian children as securing their well-being by moving them away from conflict zones to safety in Russia. Reading that Russian propaganda struck a chord with Khodakivska. “This is when I began to see it as a strategy,” she said. Eventually, multiple researchers and media reports seemed to confirm what she was thinking: that the Russian government had orchestrated the relocation of Ukrainian children not for their personal safety, but to “reeducate” them in Russian schools and institutions, to erase their Ukrainian identities, in some cases by having them adopted into Russian families.

As she read more, Khodakivska began making bullet-point lists of events. There was plenty to keep track of. In April 2022, Russian authorities said more than 2,000 children had arrived in Russia. The next month, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree clearing the way for more Russian families to adopt Ukrainian children.

Then the numbers—cited by officials at the United Nations, the U.S. State Department, and some Russian officials—began to escalate. By some estimates, 130,000 or more children had been deported by late 2022. But as Khodakivska began talking about starting her own research project—a documentary film about the deportations—she found that outside of Ukraine, many people were skeptical when she suggested something systematic and sinister was happening; the numbers were just too high, the confirming evidence too scant, some said.

That changed in February 2023. “I saw the Yale report,” said Khodakivska, “and that kind of proved what I was thinking.”

That report, from the Yale School of Public Health’s Humanitarian Research Lab, was bluntly titled: “Russia’s Systematic Program for the Re-Education & Adoption of Ukraine’s Children.” The Yale lab said it had documented the

movement of at least 6,000 Ukrainian children (the actual number was “likely significantly higher,” the report said) to 43 camps and other facilities in Russian-occupied Crimea and mainland Russia. The research lab’s work was based on open-source data—for example, social media posts by Ukrainian children who managed to keep their smartphones; posts by staff at the “summer camps” where the children were taken; and the online tracking of the vehicles that took them there. At most camp facilities, Yale’s report found evidence that activities for the Ukrainian children “included an identified component of Russia-aligned re-education, which at times included military training.”

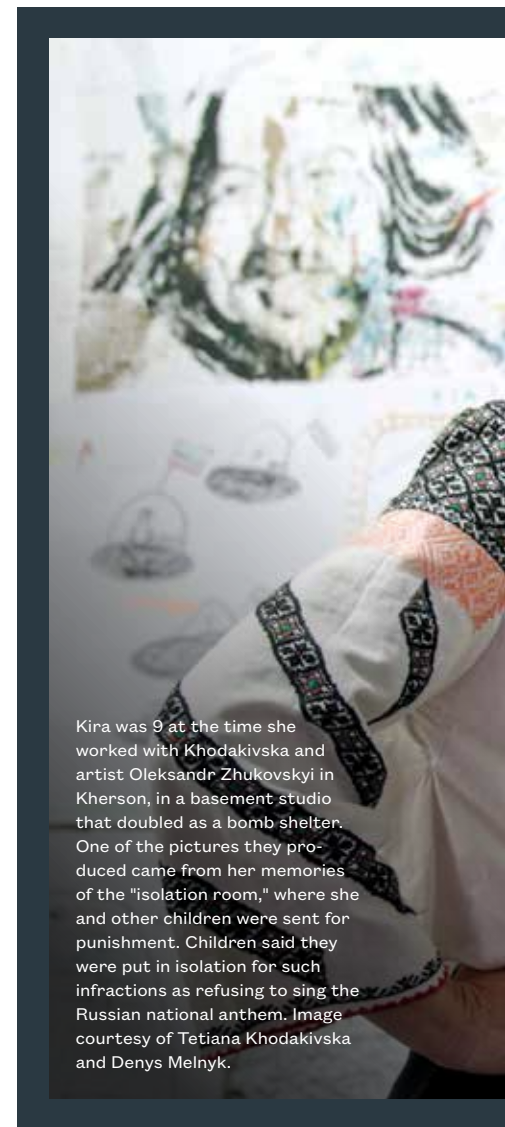
By design, the Yale researchers looked for forensic evidence and did not speak with parents or any of the Ukrainian children who had been able to return home. The stories of some of those children have been told in media reports, but more information was needed to document the scope of Russia’s effort and its long-term implications, including for possible future war crimes prosecutions, said Khodakivska. “Whatever I do, how can I show that it’s credible?” she asked herself as she planned her own research in Ukraine. She decided that to help verify what happened, she needed to gather a multitude of stories for a documentary film, and for a database that academics and others could use for further research. “That’s how we can say what really happened in these places,” she said.

As she continued thinking about a project about the deported children, Khodakivska helped curate a New York exhibition of Ukrainian art. Among the 40 artists whose work was displayed was Alevtina Kakhidze, who had been using her art to tell the story of war in Ukraine since Russian-backed separatists first occupied Kakhidze’s hometown of Zhdanivka in Donetsk Oblast in 2014. The exhibit featured a series of drawings, accompanied by diary-like bursts of narration, where Kakhidze told the story of her mother’s life in occupied Donetsk (her mother died suddenly in 2019 while waiting to cross into Ukraine at a Donetsk checkpoint). The images were “very childlike,” said Khodakivska, but their very simplicity had a powerful impact on those who saw

them in New York. Khodakivska, who had wanted to find a way to connect storytelling and contemporary art in her project, decided to reach out to Kakhidze about working with her film crew in Ukraine.

“My first idea is that we will talk with children, and [Kakhidze] will draw images” of what they describe, to be used in an animated film, said Khodakivska. Kakhidze agreed to meet when Khodakivska got to Kyiv. But no specific plan was finalized; Khodakivska just knew that art needed to be a part of telling the story of deportation.

Before heading to Kyiv, Khodakivska created a partnership with Save Ukraine, a local NGO that organizes rescue missions to return deported Ukrainian children (as of late 2023, Save Ukraine



Kira was 9 at the time she worked with Khodakivska and artist Oleksandr Zhukovskiy in Kherson, in a basement studio that doubled as a bomb shelter. One of the pictures they produced came from her memories of the “isolation room,” where she and other children were sent for punishment. Children said they were put in isolation for such infractions as refusing to sing the Russian national anthem. Image courtesy of Tetiana Khodakivska and Denys Melnyk.



said it had made 13 expeditions and brought home 223 children). The group helped the filmmaker develop a travel plan and connect with families and returned children. The Kherson and Kharkiv regions were target destinations: both had experienced frequent child deportations under Russian occupation, and both were areas where Ukraine had subsequently liberated territories, making it possible for Khodakivska and her crew to visit and interview families there. Other partners in planning for the research trip were Terre Des Hommes Germany, an international children's rights organization, and a local group, Ukrainian NGO Girls; these groups helped with trauma awareness training for the film crew and psychological support to the children and families Khodakivska would interview.

A mother cries while remembering the six months when she did not see her son. Image courtesy of Tetiana Khodakivska and Denys Melnyk.

“SOMETIMES THEY WOULD CRY AND OUR SOUND RECORDER WOULD START CRYING,” SHE SAID, NOTING THAT THE TEAM’S DISPLAY OF GRIEF HELPED PARENTS UNDERSTAND CRYING WAS OKAY.

Still unanswered, though, was the question of how drawing would be incorporated into the project. Shortly after Khodakivska’s arrival, she met the local film crew she would work with at a Kyiv coffee shop. The occasional air raid siren wailed as she spelled out her idea of having the artist sit in on the filming of interviews, making drawings of what the children described — a variation on the courtroom sketch work that Kakhidze sometimes did in Ukraine. But when the cinematographer suggested that having Kakhidze in the room drawing pictures could be distracting for the children, that idea was dropped.

It wasn’t until the film crew and a 15-year-old girl — who had been deported and eventually returned to her family — arrived at Kakhidze’s studio just outside Kyiv that a plan finally took shape. It was the first of the art sessions, and Kakhidze began it by unrolling a long sheet of flimsy tracing paper, attaching it (with Khodakivska’s help) to a wall, and asking: “Will this work?” Then, pens in hand,

the artist, the girl, and Khodakivska began talking and drawing.

Khodakivska hadn’t planned to be part of the drawing process. “I don’t know how to draw,” she said, but quickly she saw that her collaboration was comforting for the girl, and later for the other children she interviewed. “They like it. They want to share ... It creates an intimate atmosphere,” she said.

With that, the project was underway. Each child was interviewed first by the film crew, then asked if they would like to participate in an art session as well. Nearly a third of the 40 children Khodakivska interviewed returned on a later day to draw, and the filmmaker plans to return to Ukraine to conduct more interviews and art sessions with others. When the team moved on from Kyiv to small villages in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions, areas where fighting was never very far away, they found buildings with secure basements so the art sessions could go on, often for several hours, without being interrupted

for a dash to a bomb shelter. And with Kakhidze’s help, they found local artists to collaborate with: artists who had lived through the Russian occupation, which helped them bond with the children.

Creating such emotional connections was key in talking with both children and their parents, said Khodakivska. “Sometimes they would cry and our sound recorder would start crying,” she said, noting that the team’s display of grief helped parents understand crying was okay.

In some interviews, a child would switch gears abruptly from dark memories. “They would say something absolutely emotional like, ‘I lost a house,’” said Khodakivska, and then immediately redirect the conversation — taking out a phone, for example, to show a photo of the family dog.

In such cases, the drawing sessions that followed the interviews often made it easier for a child to recount what happened to them, in part because of the freedom they had to move about the room and draw instead of sitting in front of a camera. They worked on paper, mounted on an easel or stretched across a table or floor, while Khodakivska and the artist stayed close, starting each session with the same set of questions (what did your home look like before the war, for instance) and talking them through their stories as they drew.

“Most often, all three of us had markers or pens,” said Khodakivska. The

process might begin with the artist drawing what the child described, but usually the children joined in with their own drawing, coloring, or writing—much like the drawing-diary format Kakhidze had used to tell her mother's story. The drawings have bold, black strokes that outline people, buildings, and rooms. Details such as facial features are spare, and so are colors. But the stories are clear.

One girl's mostly black-and-white drawing has a stark spot of color near the top: a single tree, its green canopy standing in contrast to the image just to the right of it, where a stick figure heads down a steep staircase into a cob-webbed basement with a bedstead that has no mattress or covers. The lone window is covered with what appears to be barbed wire. This was the "isolation room," a form of punishment described by several children Khodakivska interviewed; children could be sent there for infractions such as saying "Slava Ukraini" or refusing to sing the Russian anthem. Variations of isolation rooms are seen in other drawings; the collective credibility of the testimonies about this form of punishment is reinforced with each additional description, said Khodakivska.

Among the most disturbing images from the art sessions is a six-headed green dragon bearing the letter Z to signal its support of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The dragon appears in a long artistic narrative created collaboratively by a local artist, Iryna Potapenko, Khodakivska, and Artem, a 14-year-old boy from Kherson. After occupying Artem's town, the new Russian authorities ordered children to attend schools under Russian control. Some, like Artem, stayed home, studying online with Ukrainian schools when they could get an Internet connection. Eventually soldiers came to Artem's home; the metaphorical dragon represents his memory of their visit. Each of its six long necks are topped by a soldier's helmeted head spitting fire at the tiny figure of a child below. All around them are Russian phrases, written by Artem, of the dragon heads shouting:

"We came to save you from Ukrainian Nazis!"

"Why aren't you in Russian school?"

"We will take parental rights from your mother."

The presentation of these phrases, in red, capital letters, seems to emphasize the menace lingering in Artem's memory.

"There are many, many cases when [Russian] Army people would come to

these parents or to grandparents with guns, saying, 'If you do not give your child to Russian school, we will take him or her out of here, and you will lose your parental rights,'" said Khodakivska.

In other cases, Russian soldiers "would literally come to a school and just take all the children, put them in a car, and just drive them away, without the parents knowing," she said. Children were also taken from orphanages or separated from their families in "filtration camps," set up to interrogate Ukrainians; once in Russia or Russian-controlled territory, some have been put up for adoption or foster care. Russian soldiers have also played on familial guilt, telling parents in occupied areas that it's dangerous for their children to remain there "because Ukrainians are coming and there would be street fighting. So let us take your kids for two weeks of camp. They will be safe," said Khodakivska.

When Khodakivska returned to her Manhattan home in late summer 2023, she had 20 drawings from the art sessions and more than 60 filmed interviews: 40 with children, the rest with family members. In addition to the documentary, she plans to put all these interviews—and more she hopes to conduct in 2024—into a database that researchers and legal experts can search by subject ("physical abuse," for example, or "punishment cell").

In recording these stories Khodakivska and the partners in her project have joined a determined cadre of academics, human rights activists, and journalists whose work may one day help prosecutors hold Russian officials accountable for war crimes.

Just weeks after the February 2023 Yale report was released, the International Criminal Court in the Hague sent an early prosecutorial warning, issuing arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and for Maria Lvova-Belova, who serves as Russia's children's rights commissioner. The ICC said Putin and Lvova-Belova were "allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deporting of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation." Though estimates vary widely and remain unconfirmed, researchers at the Yale lab and else-

where believe at least 130,000 Ukrainian children may have been unlawfully transferred to Russia or Russian-held Ukrainian territory. Legal analyses by the Yale lab and others say the deportations could violate several international protocols, including the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The social media and other online sources researched by the Yale lab provide forensic evidence, while interviews on the ground—conducted by Khodakivska and various journalists, including those from Ukrainian media—provide vital witness testimony. Both can be valuable for future prosecutions, said Nathaniel Raymond, executive director of Yale's Humanitarian Research Lab.

"Very rarely do you try a case with the bullet and not the body, right? You always want both," said Raymond. In legal terms, he said, the testimony of children targeted by Russia "is prima facie probative. [Khodakivska] has images of purported children, and that right there is gold."

The interviews will also be part of Khodakivska's documentary, *The Blue Sweater with a Yellow Hole*, set for release in 2025. The film is titled after a painful story told in a drawing made with 14-year-old Taisia, who was sent to a Russian "summer camp" in Crimea from her home near Kherson. Upon her arrival, camp officials confronted Taisia for wearing a sweater with a yellow and blue design because it represented the colors of the Ukrainian flag. They ordered her to cut the design out with scissors. She refused and the officials cut it out themselves. The drawing narrates this incident step by step, showing a giant pair of scissors in the official's hand and Taisia crying blue tears after the sweater is cut, the square with the Ukrainian colors lying at her feet on the floor.

Khodakivska hopes that drawings like Taisia's can help bring the deportation story to larger audiences. And that this can serve as an early warning for other countries facing similar challenges.

"It's not just about me being Ukrainian and attempting to shed light on what is happening to these children," she said. Misinformation, propaganda, and manipulation of information "are all a universal concern," especially in the new age of artificial intelligence, she said. "We all need to work together to understand how to resist it to prevent other wars and war crimes." ♦

Ukrainian Culture

The works that follow in this section are from Harriman's four 2023 Ukrainian residents in Paris, who participated in Art in Time of War and then continued their artistic residencies at Reid Hall, Columbia Global Centers in Paris.



Nikita Grigorov is a Ukrainian writer, journalist, and editor who was the Harriman Institute's 2022 Paul Klebnikov Fellow.



Natalka Bilotserkivets is an award-winning Ukrainian poet.



Anna Stavychenko is a Ukrainian musicologist, former executive director of the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra, and mission head of the Philharmonie de Paris project that helps Ukrainian musicians exiled in France.



Zoya Laktionova is a Ukrainian documentary filmmaker.



To learn more about our residents in Paris you can listen to interviews with some of them on our podcast, *Voices of Ukraine*.



You can also learn more about our Ukrainian Studies program by visiting our website.

Art in Time of War

Perhaps culture's most important mission is to be a helping hand in times of misfortune.

BY OSTAP SLYVYNSKY

In 2022, a Harriman initiative gave safe haven to four Ukrainian artists and writers to pursue their work at the Columbia Global Center in Paris. This "Harriman in Paris" program creatively leveraged Columbia's global resources to support Ukrainian culture, which is as much the target of the Kremlin's war as is Ukrainian sovereignty. In March 2023, Harriman brought the fellows to New York for a week-long festival, Art in Time of War: Celebrating the Resilience of Ukrainian Culture. Some of their work is presented here, along with an essay written for the event by Ostap Slyvynsky, vice president of PEN Ukraine.

During the last year, we Ukrainian artists have often asked ourselves: what can culture do in bad times? Culture cannot stop war, cannot dissuade an enemy who has come to kill us.

Culture cannot rebuild our houses, demine our fields. As for the dead, it can only mourn and commemorate them. It cannot even collect their bodies, which may lie untouched under shelling for weeks.

So, what can it do?

When the full-scale Russian invasion began, I immediately started volunteering at the train station in Lviv where tens of thousands of forcibly displaced people from the frontline regions were arriving. My job was to provide them with hot drinks, food,



Left to right: Nikita Yermak, Ihor Barynin, Lavinia Pavlish, Valeriya Sholokhova performing Ukrainian music for a string quartet curated by Anna Stavychenko for Art in Time of War. Photograph by Eileen Barroso

and information, and to listen to those who wanted to talk. Later I accompanied them to refugee shelters. Every day I went there with a backpack full of my personal documents and everything I needed to survive, because I didn't know if I would be able to return home.

The greatest wonder in those days was that in the evenings when I was coming home, my home still existed, with its walls, with its books, with the cat needing petting and begging for food. On the third or fourth evening, I began to read. It was a strange and counter-intuitive action because reading seemed dangerous to me. I felt like I would lose control of reality if I entered another person's world even for a moment. Nevertheless, I read. I read the autobiographical stories of Ida Fink, a Jewish woman who was born in Ukraine and escaped the Holocaust with her sister. She went through the worst: looters, forced labor, the Gestapo, concentration camps. You may wonder: haven't I had enough horrors in reality?

But this book seemed to lead me by the hand. The heroine, who goes through the horrible misfortunes of war, finally leaves one simple but important message: if I could do it, so can you. It is unlikely that something more terrible will happen to you.

Perhaps this is the most important mission of culture, often not visible from the perspective of so-called "peaceful" times: to be a helping hand in misfortune. Stretched across time and miles,



Ukrainian culture now, as perhaps never before, works as one organism. From memes and graffiti to classical music, everything channels the same energy."

this hand finds the one who needs it. The outstretched hand offers not an admonition, not an instruction, not a demand, not a call, and not a rebuke, but simply a touch that expresses what is said, without speaking, in Ida Fink's text: "I could do it, therefore, you can too." These connected hands create a chain that stretches through time, and the best thing you can do if you want to say thank you is to try not to break the chain.

An outstretched hand will not hang by itself in the air, because—let's not deceive ourselves—there have never been and, most likely, there will not be any "good" times. "Peace" is a moment of calm while someone reloads their weapon. "Peace" is the time when the war recedes from our windows, when we are busy looking at other things, so that one day it will definitely remember us.

After recovering from the first shock of invasion, we Ukrainian artists started to create. We watched, listened, memorized, and then wrote, drew, or performed. We continue today, though it is still not easy, because neither our language nor our imagination was ready for such a reality. But no one will do it for us, no one will do it later.

Ukrainian culture now, as perhaps never before, works as one organism. From memes and graffiti to classical music, everything channels the same energy. This is not the "synthesis" we used to talk about in peacetime, but something else: it is a kind of mobilization needed for a joint rush toward the same goal. This is the circulation of values.

Everything we create now will not just be a testimony of bad times. I hope, like Ida Fink's stories, it will also become a helping hand for someone. For someone who will need it one day. ♦

The Second Beginning



BY NIKITA GRIGOROV
TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

Photo: ©Yaroslav Danylchenko/Stocksy United

Nikita Grigorov is a Ukrainian writer, journalist, and editor who was the Harriman Institute's 2022 Paul Klebnikov Fellow and resident in Paris. The following is an excerpt from his memoir-in-progress, which he worked on during his Harriman residency. It spans the period from 2014, when he fled Donetsk with his family as a 19-year-old university student after the start of Russia's first invasion, and the period following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, when Grigorov fled his parents' apartment in Irpin, a suburb of Kyiv that was briefly occupied by Russians and decimated at the start of the war. This never-before-translated excerpt describes Grigorov's experiences during the first days of Russia's 2022 invasion, when he volunteered as a copywriter and security guard for the Pirogov First Volunteer Mobile Hospital (PFVMH). PFVMH was founded in 2014 to provide medical aid to the Joint Forces Operation Zone—formerly Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone—within the occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and reinvigorated during the full-scale invasion.

“

It was impossible to imagine anyone could survive that huge, faraway cloud of smoke, the pulse of the crimson flame in its belly, the rain of those muscular killers pelting from the sky.”

As I gathered from the conversation fragments around me, there was a military unit in Hostomel. I've never been interested in military units, airports, trench systems or fortified areas. And the view from my kitchen window—Russian helicopters piercing through thick clouds of gray-black smoke somewhere far up ahead—was big news to me. Three months later, Masha would write: *many times, I rode in the same train car as a guy from the Hostomel garrison. He suggested we exchange numbers. Today he connected via messenger: Alive. I'm happy.*

But back then, on the first day of our new lives, it was impossible to

imagine anyone could survive that huge, faraway cloud of smoke, the pulse of the crimson flame in its belly, the rain of those muscular killers pelting from the sky. My imagination, polluted by American thrillers, easily overcame the few miles between myself and the battlefield, filling in the gaps missing from my personal life experience. Images of bodies dancing under machine gun fire, blood black as pine resin, the brilliant whites of the eyes—dead or alive—emerging through the pixels. Meanwhile, behind me, in the depths of the apartment, my mother's frightened voice addressed the back of my head, reading from her Facebook feed the first obituaries of Ukrainian soldiers killed defending Kyiv oblast from the invaders.

Everything around me had changed in an instant. Archaic structures, imprinted for decades into the dust of peaceful life, had resurrected from it, imprisoning all of us in their one-way tunnels. As a man, your only option was to move upward on the scale of your abilities to defend yourself and your family—nothing else mattered back then. If you didn't move, you instantly lost relevance, which, in the conditions of this improbable intensification of military life, was extremely dangerous. Every one of us elected the strategy best suited for his internal makeup. Within the first hours of the invasion the best, bravest, dynamic young guys and the stocky, house-proud, real men, dug out all the portable firearms from the Irpin warehouse, curiosity and rousing humor intact. Others dodged, cheated and conjectured. They had to leave. But where to? Which way? No one understood what was really happening on the newly-formed frontlines, and one of the most common misperceptions was—get away from Kyiv, away from the big cities. It was assumed that the small towns and suburbs wouldn't be interesting to the Russians, and you could wait out the war there. Kyiv, this huge, dirty anthill, crisscrossed by endless lines of lifeless traffic—people were trying to get out at all costs, and the thick, dense forests of Kyiv Oblast pulled them under their

canopies, toward the Russian tanks and infantry columns.

Women followed a very different behavioral model. If men moved upward on their abilities scale, toward action and battle, women, in contrast—and unlike in peaceful times—had to attract as little attention as possible; make themselves *unattractive*. Intuitively, nearly everyone understood what this was about, and mothers and grandmothers would catch their men glancing at them with relief. Young women were nervous. Inviting a young, single female friend into your family in order to wait out the first shock of the war together was a kind of heroic act. This heroism had a distinctly pathetic and vile aftertaste (weighing the probabilities, calculating the consequences), but from then on, this aftertaste and the daily smattering of minor existential choices would be our pestilence companions, our eternal wounds. Yet, in February 2022, far from everyone understood the real scale of the danger and tragedy that awaited us. Those who did understand were in the minority. I understood it quite clearly; I'd already faced Russian soldiers in 2014 Donetsk. I was actively involved in literary and social activism and there was talk in our circles of special kill lists compiled by Russians so that they could “purge” the new territories of socially active citizens. I believed these rumors instantly.

Many Ukrainians had treated the “problem of Donbas” as some sort of toll, a sacrifice to the dark gods that allowed them to go on with their small and peaceful lives. And now, sitting in these huge, multi-mile traffic jams, looking frightfully through their apartment windows, the ballistic rocket explosions and the distant firefights pulling them toward the glass, people were still in some sort of dreamlike, half-comprehensive state. And they could easily be excused—the fate

of Donbas, complicated, contradictory, and poorly integrated into the governmental body of the region, was of little concern, and the probability of a grand and cruel war in a world of McDonaldses, iPhones, and greatly decreased testosterone levels, seemed fantastical.

But here it was—a real war of pure evil falling on us from the old Soviet films and the protruding eyes of Russian historiographers. And it was difficult to find a person better equipped to deliver this simple idea to the masses than the Lawyer, a tall, black-haired man in black jeans and wheat-colored sweater with quick, nervous movements and anxious, glistening eyes. This is why he joined the Pirogov First Volunteer Mobile Hospital (PFVMH)—he simply couldn't endure the rush of events and pain in isolation. Each morning meeting, when the volunteers decided who would join the combat crews that day and which route they would take, the Lawyer started with the most general matters: I downloaded a video from the internet today, he would say, that demonstrates the effect of glass shards on a human face. There was a photograph of a woman—before the explosion, and another one of her, after. This is utter horror, impossible to watch! And the Lawyer would wrap his hands around his black-haired head. Gena,¹ what should we do? We will go crazy here. Gena would always respond with irony and restraint.

The Lawyer was of course, by profession, a lawyer. He and Gena became friends based on common professional interests. He joined [what was left of] the hospital team immediately, in the first days of the full-scale invasion. During the pandemic the hospital had fallen into a soporific state, practically ended its existence, and at the end of 2021 Gena finally decided to dissolve it. The project of redesigning the Ukrainian constitution, which Gena had worked on during the two COVID years, had completely consumed him. So, in February, on a semi-secret base in Khmelnytsky, which they had spontaneously created on the second day of the invasion, they only had three cars and six crew members. On February 23, Gena called each of his friends and warned them that the invasion would start that night. On the 24th, before sunrise, alongside the first explosions of Russian bombs in and around Kyiv, he made toward Khmelnytsky in order to lay the bricks of the new iteration of the First Volunteer Medical Hospital named after Mykola Pirogov. On the first or second of March, three ambulances, filled to the brim with medicines, entered Kyiv against the grain of the departing masses.

The spring 2022 blueprint for PFVMH was relatively simple. Resources were scarce—particularly if you accounted for the scale of the military operations around Kyiv—and there were two primary objectives: firstly, evacuating the injured from the battlefield. And secondly, the accumulation of medicine and gasoline “for a rainy day.” It was assumed that Kyiv could meet the same fate as Mariupol—with rumors circulating among soldiers and volunteers about the state of affairs in the latter. None of us knew the details, but there weren't any doubts about the fact that something terrifying and unprecedented was happening there. The Lawyer was particularly fond of this parallel. He fulfilled the role of ambulance driver

“

But here it was—a real war of pure evil falling on us from the old Soviet films and the protruding eyes of Russian historiographers.”

and in parallel developed a plan for the possibility of a retreat from the city. “We must not allow ourselves to be surrounded, the way it happened in Marik,” he liked to repeat. Looking at the women on the hospital team—Irina the young nurse, Svitlana the experienced doctor and manager, Victoria the paramedic—the Lawyer would address Gena in a loud whisper: “We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of working with women here. You know what happened in Hostomel? Eh, Gena? The women have to leave immediately. This is *our* work. They have to leave right now.” No one knew exactly what had happened in Hostomel. But the women refused point-blank to leave. And who am I kidding? Everyone knew. It hung in the air.

The Pilgrim dissolved silently into the darkness every night, and every morning he entered Gena's office, grim and cold. They spoke alone for a long time, sometimes inviting Tkach to join them. The Pilgrim—a spy, an officer of the Special Operations Forces (SSOs). In the spring of 2022 he was working in Kyiv Oblast, deep in the tail of the Russian army. Tanks were burning. Soldiers choking on their own blood during sleep. Artillery stockpiles blown into the air. And the rumors were taking form.

This story emerged as if by itself, out of thin air. Everyone was retelling it to each other. For a moment, you even felt lighter for it. Our guys, the SSOs, had found and punished everyone. Played soccer with their severed heads. This was, after all, the year of Europe's soccer championship, right? And all of us had missed it. A twinge of satisfaction.

But the truth of it is, that heads don't make very good balls. And playing soccer with them won't work.

The PFVMH cars drove every day to the exploded bridge that connected Irpin to Kyiv, picking up civilians, picking up animals, picking up everyone and everything they could reach. Soldiers carried their wounded brothers-in-arms to the medics and again disappeared into the dead ruins, the white smoke. A bit farther, straight after Irpin, directly on the frontline, was Hostomel, and in it, next to the airport, was a military unit. The unit was seized on the first day of the invasion. Among others, it included women. They wore military uniforms. ♦

¹ Gennadiy Druzenko, a constitutional lawyer who cofounded PFVMH with his wife, medical doctor Svitlana Druzenko.

Kateryna

Translated from the Ukrainian by Ali Kinsella (MARS-REERS '14) and Ukrainian-American poet and translator Dzvina Orłowsky.

BY NATALKA BILOTSEKIVETS

Natalka Bilotserkivets is an award-winning Ukrainian poet. The following is the first-ever English language translation of her poem “Kateryna.” Orłowsky and Kinsella cotranslated Bilotserkivets’s collection, Eccentric Days of Hope and Sorrow (Lost Horse Press, 2021), which was a finalist for the 2022 Griffin International Poetry Prize, the Derek Walcott Poetry Prize, and the American Literary Translators’ Association National Translation Book Award in Poetry. It was 2022 winner of the American Association for Ukrainian Studies Translation Prize. Bilotserkivets and the translators held a joint reading of the work during Bilotserkivets’s visit to Columbia last winter as part of her Harriman residency in Paris.

From the translators: *Natalka Bilotserkivets’s “Kateryna” is based on the poem and painting of the same name by the father of Ukrainian literature, Taras Shevchenko. The subject of both is the tragic fate of a Ukrainian serf girl seduced and then abandoned by a Russian officer. In Shevchenko’s “Kateryna,” the protagonist has her baby, tries to find the father, leaves the child along the road, and runs into the forest where she drowns herself in a pond. The boy is saved by a forester and eventually becomes a guide for a Ukrainian bard musician (kobzar), who takes him back to Ukraine.*

Bilotserkivets suggested we tackle this never-before-translated poem from her 1989 collection November (Lystopad) because of the new resonance it has for the Ukrainian reading public since the onset of Russia’s full-scale war. We are delighted to introduce it to a wider readership through Harriman Magazine. ♦

Катерина

Ні, неправда, що ніч непробудна й незрима,
але також неправда — цей сяючий тернами шлях.
Просто в місячнім світлі
поволі пройшла Катерина
із дитятком в холодних руках.

І відразу сніги почорніли і проліски білі
розцвіли; і запахи водою долина і ліс.
Ополонка стара розімкнулась на білому тілі
і глибокі озера штовхнула в коліна беріз.

Наші бідні серця вибухають у місячнім світлі,
і здається мені крізь льоди на Дніпрі,
що й моє немовля

на шляху

у полатаній світлі
все кричить і чекає своїх кобзарів.

О, в цю ніч весняну на печальному марші
цих нещасних жінок, цих убогих сторіч,
ще ніким не описані, наші трагедії старші,
але їх імена не проказує ніч.

Підніми ж свої символи із тротуару міського,
із газетних рядків, де і віра, і страх, —
щоб здригнулися тіні мистецтва старого
із дітьми і гвинтівками в мертвих руках!

Kateryna

No, it’s not true that the night is unwakeable and invisible.
And it’s also false — this path shimmering with thorns.
Simply in moonlight,

Kateryna walked slowly
with a child in her cold arms.

Immediately the snows blackened and snowdrops
budded; and the valley and forest smelled of water.
A fishing ice hole opened up against the white body
and pushed the deep lakes into the birches’ knees.

Our poor hearts burst in moonlight,
and it seems to me through the ice on the Dnipro,
my baby too

in a patched coat

on the road
still crying, awaiting its kobzars.

O, on this spring night on the sad march
of these hapless women, these wretched centuries —
our older tragedies have yet to be written
but the night doesn’t utter their names.

Raise up your symbols from city sidewalks,
from newspaper columns with both faith and fear
so that shadows of the old art shudder
with children and rifles in our dead hands!



Natalka Bilotserkivets during the Harriman’s Art in Time of War event. Photograph by Eileen Barroso



TO SEE
beauty
AGAIN

BY ANNA STAVYCHENKO
TRANSLATED BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

Anna Stavychenko is a Ukrainian musicologist, former executive director of the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra, and mission head of the Philharmonie de Paris project that helps Ukrainian musicians exiled in France. The following is an excerpt from her novel-in-progress, which she worked on during her Harriman residency in Paris. It is inspired by true events.

INTRODUCTION

This book is born out of immense loneliness.

Since February 24, 2022, I have discovered many new forms of loneliness. When the first explosions of the full-scale war thundered through Kyiv, amidst the shock and numbness I also felt something that continues to surprise me to this day: a sense of injustice stemming from the fact that I would die alone. That there would be no one near me to witness my last seconds. No one I could ask to pass along a few tender words to my loved ones (if they themselves survived). It was as if this made my whole life unreal, something that never existed. And this created a very bitter feeling.

And it also generated a lot of anger.

Perhaps it was precisely this anger that triggered me to act. To save my family. To save myself. “You won’t get me, Russians. After you killed so many of my family members in the Holodomor, after breaking the lives of my ancestors in the Gulag, after labeling those dear to me ‘enemies of the people’ – no, you won’t get *me*” – these words were whirling in my head for every second of the three days of the evacuation. I promised that my life would have many more witnesses. That I would utter and receive many more tender words. I would live.

And I would write a book about it.

Warsaw

After the outbreak of the full-scale war, Valeria and her parents planned to stay in their country house not far from Kyiv, but being there turned out to be more dangerous than they expected. So, after traveling for a few exhausting days, they found themselves near Warsaw, having only their documents and a day's worth of spare clothing with them. They were sheltered by a Polish family, headed by a woman named Katarzhyna, which soon became a second family for all of them.

Valeria asked Katarzhyna to drop her off somewhere in the Old Town. After walking through a labyrinth of small streets, she quickly emerged close to the main campus of the University of Warsaw. The sun, still wintry, illuminated the ancient buildings that had once risen anew from terrible destruction, the gates of the university, the cobblestones. It was shining on a completely different—ordinary—life. People were sitting in cafes, laughing and rushing to their destinations. Everything looked exactly like her life had been just 10 days before.

She stopped in the middle of the street and started weeping for the first time since the start of the full-scale war. She hadn't wept when Russian missiles and bombs flew toward Kyiv. She hadn't wept while she closed the door to her perfect, warm apartment that held all her dreams and all her plans, not knowing when, if ever, she would return. She hadn't wept during that frightening night in Kyiv Oblast when she had been making plans in case of capture by those Russian bastards, and the only way of saving herself and her family from rape and torture would have involved killing her parents and then taking her own life. She hadn't wept when, just before reaching the Polish border, Russian tanks surrounded their evacuation train and held them at gunpoint for an hour and a half. Her animal instinct had held on to save her family and she had felt nothing but the burning desire to survive.

But now she dissolved into tears as she faced the tragic contrast between ordinary life and what was happening in Ukraine, just 186 miles from these streets—skies free of Russian missiles, cafes, people rushing along somewhere to complete their peaceful tasks ...

"Why us? How did we deserve this?" Valeria watched the Warsaw weekday around her as if she were watching a movie. Her personal reality was now completely different. Only the war was real.

Nights were restless. After arriving in Warsaw from the Polish village where her parents were still living, Valeria had to accustom herself again to the noises of a new place. Night after night she couldn't sleep, absorbing every sound, studying them, attaching a mental label to them so she could identify them as safe. "The hum of a motorcycle." "The knocking of a door in the neighboring lobby." "The upstairs neighbors' creaking floorboards." "Rolling thunder" ... her mind had to learn to recognize every sound so as to not be afraid of it.

Valeria had already survived something similar in 2014, after the executions of the protestors on Maidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the Russian occupation of Donbas—the year the war really started. In that awful moment her consciousness had failed to hold onto her sense of security. Mass killings were happening just next to her home and outside of her alma mater, the National Music Academy. And then the shock that the neighboring government could tear off a part of your territory and capture a huge region—she had experienced all of this as an attack on her own home. At night she had been scared to fall asleep, listening, wondering if someone was breaking into the door of her apartment. She had been frozen in fear when, standing in the shower, the sounds of water sounded like the footsteps of murderers coming to kill her ...

Now, in Warsaw, her traumatized consciousness transformed the regular metropolitan soundscape into the sounds of explosions, gunshots, and air raid sirens. Awakening to the horn of the passing ambulance, she reached for her telephone and checked the news, afraid to discover that the Russians had attacked Poland, too, and that the ambulance was transporting victims of the first missile strikes to the hospital. She imagined that this time she would be completely alone: her family thirty miles from Warsaw, with no way to reach them during another invasion. She wouldn't be able to save them. And now the Russians would kill them all. This terror was difficult to appease with rational logic, because it arose from the trauma of lost security, which had lived in her for years and now battered at her psyche with newfound strength.



The stress and the lack of sleep took her voice. She would soon have to meet with the director of the National Institute of Polish Culture and the director of the Polish National Orchestra. These discussions were supposed to determine whether or not she would be able to bring the Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra to Poland.

Valeria came to the restaurant meeting very early and drank tea with honey and lemon in short sips, hoping that her voice wouldn't betray her, at least for the next hour. Elzbieta, the director of the institute, appeared first. A young, beautiful brunette whose features projected not only strength but also extreme kindness, she had in her hands a large, multicolored bouquet of tulips.

"This is for you," she smiled and handed the flowers to Valeria. "I just wanted to do something nice for you. You must be having such a difficult time right now?"

Valeria got up, timidly took the flowers and thanked Elzbieta. She suddenly felt great warmth. She felt her voice coming back.

She and Elzbieta sat across from each other at the table.

"And so, how are you?" Elzbieta asked.

"I'm ok, thanks. The date of the orchestra's departure from Ukraine is already decided. I hope that today we can finalize the details of their arrival in Poland."

Elzbieta delicately interrupted Valeria with her gaze.

"No, I mean how are you? *You?*" She emphasized the last word with her melodic voice.

Valeria stared at Elzbieta. She felt that an entire lifetime had passed since someone had asked her how she was really doing. Not as a refugee, or as a Ukrainian, or as the director of the orchestra, or as a daughter. How she was. *Her*. As a human. With the right to grief, fear, anger. It felt good, but also a bit uncomfortable, to have someone look at her so openly and sympathetically, willing to accept whatever response came forth.

"I'm ... holding on. Thanks," she said shyly. Valeria didn't know what else to say with words, but her gaze conveyed all the pain she felt. And that was enough for both of them.

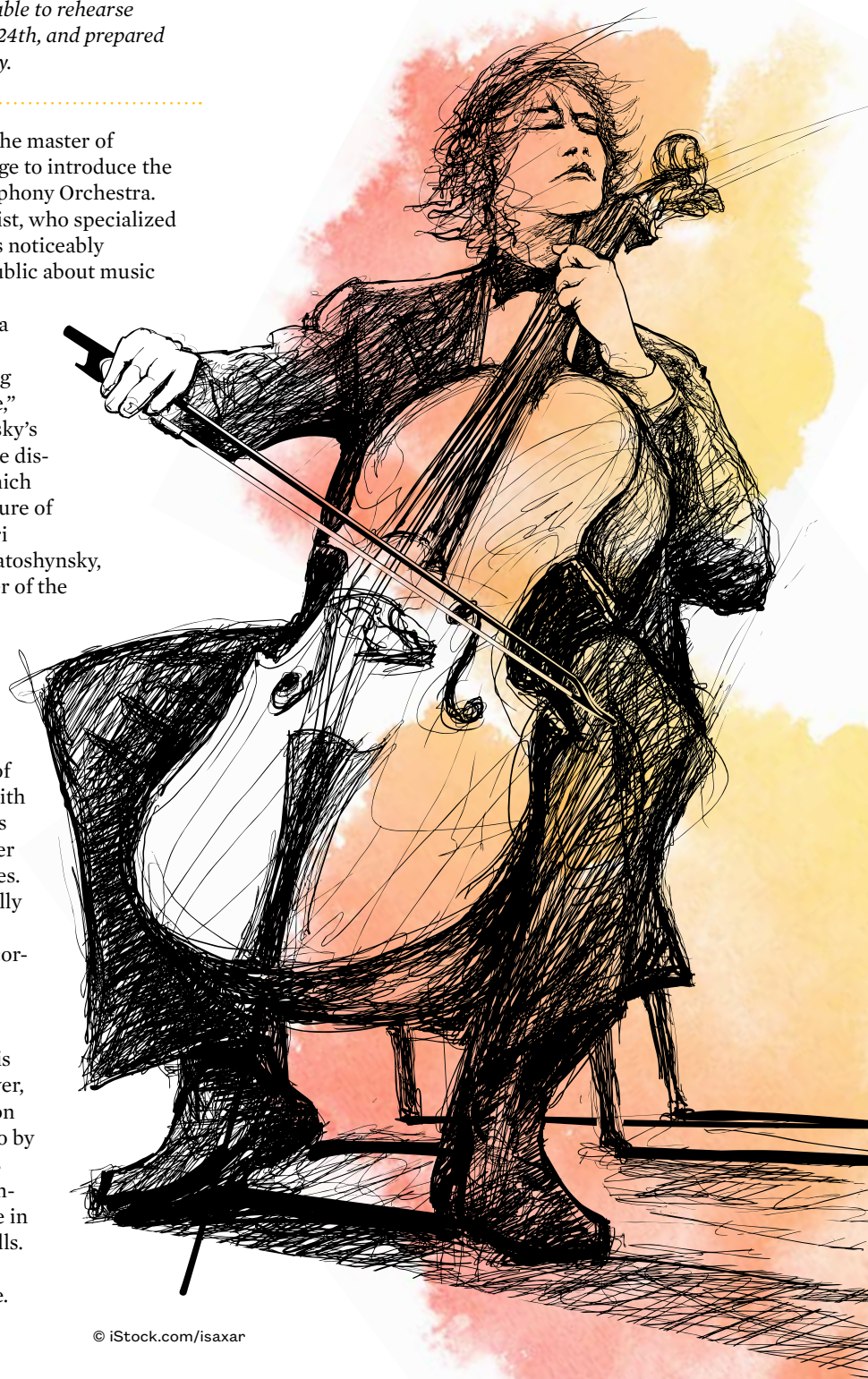


The Orchestra

A month and a half after the start of the full-scale war, Valeria, as a managing director, organized a residency for the Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra in Warsaw, during which the orchestra was able to rehearse for the first time since February 24th, and prepared for a subsequent tour in Germany.

Before the concert in Hanover the master of ceremonies walked onto the stage to introduce the program for the Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra. The famous German musicologist, who specialized in Eastern European music, was noticeably nervous, preparing to tell the public about music that, obviously, he knew very little about until recently. After a few introductory phrases about “the Ukrainian orchestra touring Germany during this tragic time,” he focused on Borys Lyatoshynsky’s Third Symphony. Specifically, he discussed its historical context, which he made primarily about the figure of Soviet-Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Talking about Lyatoshynsky, the greatest Ukrainian composer of the 20th century, he again and again redirected the public’s attention to the Soviet icon. “Just like Shostakovich he was forced to create in the conditions of a totalitarian regime,” and, “In the footsteps of Shostakovich, his music dealt with military themes.” Shostakovich’s name was repeated by the master of ceremonies three or four times. Lyatoshynsky’s name — practically never. And when he did finally name him, he pronounced it incorrectly. Of course, Lyatoshynsky is not the easiest name to pronounce for a Western audience. But, as a matter of fact, neither is Shostakovich. The latter, however, is pronounced without hesitation not just by professionals but also by every music lover. Because he is known. Because his music is constantly programmed, worldwide in the most prestigious concert halls.

Valeria observed what was unfolding from the parterre.



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Listening to Shostakovich mentioned over and over again at a concert of Ukrainian music, she pondered how even in the 21st century Russia continued to overshadow and destroy Ukrainian culture. She pondered how Russia was liberally pouring influence and money into European institutions and festivals. She pondered how its imperial propaganda had for centuries hung the label “Russian” upon everyone and everything that Russia cleverly snatched up by way of cultural appropriation, by robbing Ukrainian museums and private collections, by physically destroying Ukrainian artists and intellectuals. She thought of the Ukrainian composer Dmytro Bortniansky, one of the key figures in 18th century Ukrainian music, whom Russians refer to as a “Russian composer,” as they refer to his First Symphony as “the first Russian symphony.” She thought of Mykola Leontovych, the author of the iconic “Carol of the Bells,” killed in 1921 by the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage. She thought of the Executed Renaissance, a generation of Ukrainian intelligentsia—poets, writers, musicians, theater personalities—systematically eliminated by the Soviet authorities throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Every day of this German tour, Valeria received horrible news from home. The Russians were up to more of the same: destroying museums, theaters and cultural objects, robbing collections, killing Ukrainian musicians, writers, poets, intellectuals. Just two days before, during another concert of the Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra in Germany, the orchestra’s former marketing director was killed by a missile strike in Kyiv. Just as it had done 300 years ago, 100 years ago, Russia was targeting the very heart of Ukrainian identity: its culture.



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Paris

Valeria moved to Paris to manage a project at the Paris Conservatory helping Ukrainian artists in France. She met several Ukrainian intellectuals who ended up in Paris because of the war. One of her new friends is called Mykola: he is a researcher from Luhansk who received a scholarship from the American-French institute to write a book.

One evening as she and Mykola walked from the institute, she turned his attention to a bas-relief on one of the houses near the Luxembourg Gardens.

“Look how beautiful it is. You know, sometimes

I choose a beautiful object in Paris, usually a building, and force myself to recognize its beauty. Because otherwise I don’t see it anymore. I look, but I can’t see.

“Yes. Me too...”

They quietly examined the bas-relief. Paris in September was gentle and quiet in its anticipation of the buzzing evening streets. A magic hour was starting to adorn the building facades.

“Do you think we will ever overcome this? Be able to see beauty again, feel alive?” asked Valeria, her gaze fixed upon the bas-relief.

“I don’t think so,” Mykola responded, not hesitating for even a second. ◆

The Smell of Mariupol

BY ZOYA LAKTIONOVA

Zoya Laktionova is an award-winning Ukrainian documentary filmmaker. She wrote this text in Barcelona, where she fled shortly after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and it was used in her short film, Remember the Smell of Mariupol, about the juxtaposition of living in safety while Russian troops decimated her hometown Mariupol.

During her Harriman residency Laktionova worked on a feature documentary, Ashes Settling in Layers on the Surface, about Mariupol families, including her own, and about the Azovstal plant, where many members of her family had worked. Laktionova, who continues work on it, says the film "centers on the value of freedom and human life itself over the nonsensical statements repeated by totalitarian regimes, as witnessed throughout the history of the Azovstal Plant." She took these photos while filming in Kharkiv in November 2022.

It was as if someone hugged me and said that everything was going to be okay. I lacked it. The ease in my muscles. The feeling of my body senses coming back. Southern sun and tender air of the seashore city. It was in every pebble and a tree leaf. In every slow, lazy motion of passers-by. I suddenly felt that there was a mask on my face. From forehead to jaws, my muscles were stones.

For days, I had an image before my eyes. The photo of a Mariupol woman in a puffer with her hands in her pockets, sitting next to the apartment building. I have never seen anything more dreadful than this death next to the apartment building made of Mariupol's limestone. Her hands are in her pockets. Her mouth is open. She sits there leaning on the wall. This image moved and something behind my numbed face muscles started coming back to life. Just as if the face of that dead woman opened wide and gave birth to me.

I didn't die with her.

There are sun-bleached station signs moving behind the windows of the train moving away from Barcelona. The color of stones and gravel along the railroad tracks is the one that can only occur in the Southern seaside cities. I feel the smell of Mariupol's asphalt and petroleum pitch boiled by the hot sun. But it is not from here. The wind is beating this Mariupol photo fixed by a thread to the last carriage of the train that brings me further away.

March 2022, Barcelona ◆

Photos: Kharkiv, November 2022. Behind the scenes of filming Laktionova's film-in-progress, *Ashes Settling in Layers on the Surface*.





Researching Public Opinion in Eastern Ukraine

BY ELISE GIULIANO

Unpacking the myth of "two Ukraines" in the aftermath of Euromaidan, Crimea, and the invasion of Donbas.



The author on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (2018).

In 2018 I sat on the rooftop deck of the Kharkiv Palace Hotel—built for the European soccer championship hosted by Ukraine several years earlier—conducting an interview with a local journalist. He explained that during the height of the war in Donbas he and his circle were worried that the conflict would come to Kharkiv, since the city is only about twenty miles from the border with Russia. The war had started in eastern Ukraine in 2014, and, as we sat in our comfortable, chic lounge chairs under the warm June sun, the idea that Kharkiv could be shelled seemed inconceivable, even ludicrous. I pushed aside the thought and focused instead on how generous and open my new colleagues and interlocutors in Kharkiv had been during my field research visits. Thinking back to that day, it still feels unfathomable that just a few years later, Kharkiv would become a major focal

point of Russia's ruthless full-scale invasion.

I had decided to conduct research in Kharkiv in order to understand the shape of public opinion in eastern Ukraine resulting from the momentous developments of 2013 and 2014: the Euromaidan Revolution that ousted pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich; Russia's annexation of Crimea; the formation of the self-styled, pro-Russian Donetsk and Luhansk "Peoples' Republics;" and the war in Donbas. The conventional wisdom explained these events as a product of "two Ukraines": a pro-European, Ukrainian-speaking west and a pro-Russian, Russian-speaking east. In this facile view, Ukraine's geographical and linguistic divide largely determined people's political opinions.

But if a person's home region can explain their geopolitical orientation and other attitudes, we might expect that a majority of residents of the eastern Donbas region would have supported separation from Ukraine in order to join Russia. Yet only about one-third of the population living in Donbas supported pro-Russian separatism there in 2014.¹ Why was that? And what were the motivations of those who wished to separate from Ukraine and unite with Russia? Was it nostalgia for the Soviet past? Russian ethnic or linguistic identity? Or was it mainly about material and pragmatic interests?

I analyzed public opinion polling and statements made by residents of Donetsk and Luhansk, and discovered that economics had been

1 2014. "The Views and Opinions of South-Eastern Regions Residents of Ukraine: April 8-21." *Kyiv Institute of Sociology*. <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=302&page=1&y=2014&m=4>.

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Palace Hotel Kharkiv where the author would stay during her research visits to the city (2018).

the primary driver of these sentiments.² Many people in Donbas believed their jobs and welfare would be at stake if Ukraine joined the European Union. Many also thought that Donbas, as the industrial heart of Ukraine, was subsidizing the rest of the country without receiving much in return. In addition, people who supported separatism felt Kyiv had abandoned the east in the wake of Euromaidan, and they feared violent unrest if the region remained in Ukraine. Strikingly, these kinds of con-

² “Who Supported Separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and Popular Opinion at the Start of the Ukraine Crisis.” (*Post-Soviet Affairs*, March 2018).

“
The war had started in eastern Ukraine in 2014, and, as we sat in our comfortable, chic lounge chairs under the warm June sun, the idea that Kharkiv could be shelled seemed inconceivable, even ludicrous.”

cerns were far more likely to be expressed than statements about Kyiv’s supposed discrimination against the Russian language or against ethnic Russians in Ukraine. My findings undermined not only Russian President Vladimir Putin’s propaganda about aggrieved Russophone Ukrainians, but also the common impression that Russophones and ethnic Russians form a natural constituency that supports Russia.

The second phase of my research examined popular opinion in Ukraine’s east and south, especially in its second largest city—Kharkiv. Kharkiv did not follow the same trajectory as the cities of

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Derzhprom (State Industry House), Kharkiv, 2018. Built in 1928, it is the oldest skyscraper complex in Europe.

Donetsk and Luhansk, which formed self-styled separatist republics. Like these cities, Kharkiv had witnessed dueling pro- and anti-Euromaidan demonstrations in February 2014. Russia had bussed in paid “activists” who, together with local street fighters, temporarily took over Kharkiv’s government administration building, just like in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Yet Kharkiv did not seek to separate from Ukraine. Why not? Political scientists who researched this question found that local elites were key. Kharkiv’s leaders and security services did not switch loyalties as their counterparts had in Donetsk and Luhansk. Instead, they arrested violent separatists and continued to support Kyiv. Yet, even with

this understanding, I continued to wonder how the diversity of attitudes displayed at the dueling demonstrations was playing out in post-Euromaidan eastern Ukraine more generally. My research asked: Did the 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine trigger polarized opinions? Or did it merely lay bare an underlying polarization that has characterized Ukrainian politics since independence in 1991?

Each summer from 2016 to 2018 I traveled to Kharkiv.³ In addition to conducting interviews with journalists, academics, and representatives from NGOs and business people, I co-organized focus groups of ordinary Ukrainians with Olga Phillipova, a sociology professor at Karazin National University in Kharkiv.

I had interviewed Phillipova during my first research trip to the city, and, after discovering we had a lot in common, we decided to begin joint research. The next two summers we held a series of general focus groups as well as specific focus groups composed of teachers; IT workers; university students; small entrepreneurs at Kharkiv’s outdoor Barabashova bazaar; and migrants forced from their homes in Donbas. In these sessions, we asked participants to discuss their thoughts about the economy, the war, language, and the government’s reforms and policies.

Kharkiv residents, we learned, were polarized on certain issues but united on others, including a desire to end the war in Donbas. They

were committed to reintegrating the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, though not if it meant that Russia would continue to control them by proxy. These views lined up with those of a majority of Ukrainian citizens at the time. Kharkiv residents were also disturbed by political parties and leaders who seemed more concerned with lining their own pockets than with Ukraine’s future. Our respondents expressed these complaints so intensely that the 2019 landslide victory of Volodymyr Zelensky, who had campaigned on a platform of fighting corruption and ending the war in Donbas, did not surprise me in the slightest.

Foreign policy and the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine are critical aspects



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³ My trips were funded by Harriman Institute’s Tymkiw Ukrainian Studies Faculty Research Grant.

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of public opinion there. After the events of 2014, residents in the east increasingly shifted away from supporting Russia and the Customs Union (Russia's answer to the EU) and toward Europe. A much smaller minority continued to support Russia, creating a certain degree of polarization on foreign policy after 2014. But in our focus groups, we heard people articulate two other, surprising alternative opinions: first, that Ukraine should engage with both Europe and Russia; and second, that Ukraine should engage with neither pole but remain independent *both* from Europe and from Russia. These opinions felt surprising because they had not been reflected by Ukrainian polls. We realized that this was because the polling agencies had framed questions about Ukraine's geopolitical orientation only in binary terms, obscuring alternative opinions and disproportionately accentuating the polarization in Ukraine. Our focus group research picked up not only the presence of additional attitudes, but also frustration with the dominant alternatives that existed at the time.

Russia's invasion in February 2022 has drastically changed the situation, and it has also temporarily suspended my research. But Ukraine's polling agencies returned to work after a brief respite following the invasion, offering a glimpse into current public opinion. They show that Ukrainians are now even more unified in their opposition to Russia: more and more people embrace Ukraine's turn toward Europe. The polls also show that a very small minority of Ukrainians in the east and south (includ-

ing in Kharkiv) continue to support Russia. However, as my research from before 2022 suggests, polling questions are likely obscuring the existence of other opinions among Ukrainians by asking questions—Would you vote for or against NATO? Should Ukraine enter the EU or the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan?—that offer only binary answers. It remains an open question whether variegated opinions toward Europe and Russia will reassert themselves after the war.

Russia's ongoing shelling of Ukraine—most of which takes place in the east and south—prevents me from returning to talk to Ukrainians to get a real sense of how they think about the cataclysmic changes since Russia's invasion. Also—and painfully—most of my

colleagues in Kharkiv have scattered. They now live in other cities of Ukraine or in Poland, the Czech Republic, and other European countries. Olga Fillipova, with whom I worked on the focus groups, spent the first weeks of the war in an underground shelter in her building complex, then braved the onslaught of Russia's Grad missiles in central Kharkiv to travel across Ukraine with her son, settling temporarily in Finland. She continues to work for Karazin National University, teaching and working remotely via Zoom, while continuing to help students and other Ukrainians displaced by the war.

Some of my other high profile interlocutors who worked as activists in Kharkiv before the war left the city to avoid arrest in the event of a Russian

occupation. Others have remained in Kharkiv and work to support the Ukrainian military and each other. Against this new reality, I look forward to a time, hopefully in the near future, when all of my friends and colleagues—and all Ukrainians—can return safely to their homes and resume their lives.

Elise Giuliano is Senior Lecturer in Political Science, Director of the MA Program at Harriman Institute, and Director of the Program on U.S.-Russian Relations. ♦



Kharkiv Oblast (Region) State Administration Building (2018). The building was destroyed by a Russian missile attack early on in the full-scale war.

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Left: The author's finished doll, made at Svitlana's workshop. Right: The author (right) and Svitlana, wearing vyshyvankas, traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirts.

Bakhmut's Continuing Resistance: Beyond the Ruins

BY EMMA MATEO

Researching grassroots resistance movements in wartime Ukraine.

I wasn't sure what to expect this past summer as I entered a windowless warehouse in the suburbs of Dnipro in southeastern Ukraine. Someone turned on the lights, illuminating dozens of cardboard boxes stacked on metal shelves and spread across the bare concrete floor. Some gaped open, revealing military clothing, water filters, tourniquets, and all manner of tactical medical supplies. Next to a box overflowing with trench candles stood a spent artillery casing. And on a table in the center of the room was a stack of children's drawings, addressed to soldiers.

Everything inside was destined for Ukrainian troops fighting Russia's invasion, but this was no military store-room. I was on the premises

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of a small volunteer organization; its name, emblazoned across a Ukrainian flag, provided the only color in this room of grey and brown: Bakhmut Ukrainian.

As the name implies, the grassroots organization is from the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, now on the frontlines of Russia's war in Ukraine. Today Bakhmut Ukrainian has relocated to Dnipro, considered more secure. But until February 2023, a few volunteers remained in their hometown, helping those living and fighting there, even as the Russian army destroyed the city around them.

Bakhmut Ukrainian gathers money and goods to support those fighting on the frontlines with key items,

such as life-saving medical supplies. But what the troops appreciate most, the organization's director told me, are the children's pictures—colorful drawings with flags and smiling soldiers, emblazoned with the words “thank you!” and “glory to Ukraine!”—which they use to brighten up their barracks and raise their spirits. As for the waist-high artillery casings in the corner, they're a “present” to the volunteers from one of the military units they support. For local Ukrainian groups—unlike international humanitarian organizations—there is little separation between military aid and humanitarian help: more support for the armed forces means a shorter war, and less civilian suffering.

The lines between civilians and the military blur in another way, too. These volunteers from Bakhmut were civilians in the crossfire; now they are vital support in the rear, providing troops with supplies to stay alive and do their jobs more effectively.

I'm a sociologist writing about the war in Ukraine. But I don't focus on military maneuvers or the destruction

wrought by the Russian military. I study the ways in which ordinary Ukrainians—particularly those whose lives have been most acutely impacted by this invasion—contribute to Ukraine's resistance.

Scholarship on civilians in wartime generally anticipates they will either flee or stay and fight. But in Ukraine, many have chosen a third option: to stay, but to participate in the war effort as noncombatants. It was this choice that I sought to examine in my summer 2023 fieldwork.

I was unable to travel to Bakhmut, which has been almost entirely destroyed. Bakhmut's pre-war civilian population of 73,000 has largely been displaced across Ukraine and beyond. But I did interview a number of people from the city, now living elsewhere in Ukraine, about their experiences of engaging in the war effort. Although my research did not focus exclusively on people from Bakhmut, the stories from this city in particular demonstrate that even the very worst of Russia's destruction is met with resistance and defiance by ordinary Ukrainians—

including in Ukraine's eastern regions, where Russia mistakenly expected to be welcomed with open arms.

Bakhmut, now known throughout the world for its annihilation by Russia, used to be referred to by its residents as the City of Roses. In February 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale invasion, Bakhmut did not feel like a critically dangerous place, according to many of my interviewees. My sources told me they didn't panic in early 2022 because they thought it would be like before: the Ukrainian Army would fight back, and there wouldn't be too much destruction. That is what happened in the spring of 2014, after pro-Russian rebels staked a claim there; by early July that year, Ukrainian forces had fully recovered control, without significant destruction.

In the years that followed, Bakhmut remained close to the frontlines of the war in eastern Ukraine, though the city itself was peaceful. Many of the people I interviewed emphasized that in 2022, most people stayed in Bakhmut not because they were waiting to



...the stories from this city in particular demonstrate that even the very worst of Russia's destruction is met with resistance and defiance by ordinary Ukrainians.”

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Many people I spoke to fled only when the shelling finally reached their neighborhoods. Several told me that when they did finally leave, they took only a couple of suitcases, thinking they would be back soon. Now their homes and all the possessions they left behind are gone.”

welcome the Russians. They stayed because they thought Bakhmut would endure and remain in Ukrainian hands.

Many people I spoke to fled only when the shelling finally reached their neighborhoods. Several told me that when they did finally leave, they took only a couple of suitcases, thinking they would be back soon. Now their homes and all the possessions they left behind are gone.

And yet—and this is my biggest concern with the way Bakhmut is perceived by the wider world—these people are not helpless victims of Russia’s war, as media portrayals may indicate. Many of them, such as the volunteers at Bakhmut Ukrainian, are part of Ukraine’s resistance.

Svitlana, one of these volunteers, showed me that this resistance can manifest in many different ways. She spends a lot of time at the Bakhmut Ukrainian warehouse, sorting and distributing donations. But she also supports her fellow displaced Ukrainians by other means—as a master of Ukrainian folk art who runs workshops

teaching dollmaking and other traditional Ukrainian crafts to internally displaced people. Svitlana, who obtained her master’s degree in psychology so she could help people traumatized by the onset of Russia’s war in 2014, explained to me that the years of watching Ukrainians make dolls have led her to notice a transformation that often takes place during the workshops. Participants achieve a state of calm, she said, and they begin “to be proud of themselves because they’ve made something beautiful. And not only that—they start to feel Ukrainian, and familiar with Ukrainian culture.”

Svitlana invited me to one of these workshops to see for myself. When we introduced ourselves at the start of the session, most of the attendees stated their hometowns as places we know from news stories about the war: Bakhmut, Pokrovsk, Severodonetsk. At the start, the mood in the room was subdued—some women struggled to identify just one good thing that had happened to them that week. But, by the end of the session, all

had smiles on their faces and traditional dolls in their hands. One woman shared that assisting a neighbor with her doll made her feel like she wasn’t powerless, because she could do something helpful for another. Maybe this is the reason why so many Ukrainians engage in the war effort.

Svitlana, and a number of others I interviewed from Bakhmut, volunteered in various ways long before 2022. Ukraine has a flourishing civil society stretching back to the 2013–14 Euromaidan protests, which ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, and beyond. Time and again, Ukrainians have risen up to challenge corrupt leaders, or threats to their freedom. This history of civic engagement, something I have been studying for almost a decade, has empowered many Ukrainians to engage in the war effort.

Unlike Svitlana, others are now volunteering for the first time. I met two childhood friends from Bakhmut, Nastya and Olya, who started a new NGO in early 2023. Both are internally displaced and work to help families and children in areas neglected by other organizations: they throw a party for children in a town and then provide the families who attend with much-needed school supplies and hygiene and food items. Nastya and Olya named their organization “We Are Bakhmut” because they wanted to show that Bakhmut still exists as a community of people contributing toward Ukraine’s victory.

I asked Nastya, as I did all my interviewees, if she had engaged in any volunteering or civic activities before the full-scale invasion. She said no, but, not long after, acknowledged that she used to

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host troops in her Bakhmut home, feeding soldiers and doing their laundry.

Similar stories emerged in other interviews. People would tell me that they weren't volunteers, then describe actions that, from a Western perspective, could very much be considered volunteering. Ihor, an older man from Bakhmut, initially told me that before leaving Bakhmut in the summer of 2022, he had been too busy working as a high school teacher to volunteer. But later, he recalled how he helped local military personnel find safe housing in the city—and how his students had made camouflage nets for the military.

Lyudmila also told me she didn't really volunteer since being displaced from Bakhmut to Dnipro; having lost everything, she depended on external support, and she also had to look after her grandchildren. I suggested that this was important, too, and she agreed: "Yes, they're our future. If not me then who will help them? Right now, schools aren't working, kindergarten isn't working, someone needs to be with them. That's also my 'front,'" she laughed. But it turned out Lyudmila contributes in other ways too: when she has some free time, she often helps at the warehouse of Bakhmut Ukrainian, sorting supplies donated to military units.

The reality is that many Ukrainians are playing an active role in the war effort. Surveys by my colleagues at MOBILISE (mobiliseproject.com)—an international research project that studies mass protest and migration—suggest that around 80 percent of those in Ukraine are engaging in the war effort in

some way. We might expect the Ukrainians most directly affected by the war—those who have lost homes, jobs, and loved ones—to be less likely to volunteer as they deal with trauma and financial or emotional hardships. But my research this summer shows something different: those who have suffered greatly may be highly motivated to support Ukraine's resistance. It is important to acknowledge that this may not be true for all displaced people; my interviews do not represent the whole population. Nevertheless, the people I spoke with from Bakhmut want to prevent

more Ukrainians from losing their homes. They also want to help others who have already suffered this trauma.

Of all the people I interviewed this summer, the most hopeful were volunteers from Bakhmut. Many are steadfastly convinced that Ukraine will win the war and their city will be rebuilt. Svitlana told me about her plans to create a museum and center for Ukrainian culture in liberated Bakhmut: "I am convinced that after our victory, my dream will come true." She said she even has a plot of land in mind to build on. As we walked together through Dnipro, I saw her col-

lect seeds and plant cuttings to sow in her garden when she finally returns. Svitlana is certain that Bakhmut will flourish once again, a city of roses.

Some names have been changed.

This research trip was possible thanks to a Harriman Institute PepsiCo Summer Travel Grant.

Emma Mateo is Petro Jacyk Postdoctoral Scholar in Ukrainian Studies at the Harriman Institute. She is a sociologist who studies protest, activism, and civil society in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. ♦



The warehouse of Bakhmut Ukrainian, featuring a flag bearing the organization's name, boxes of tourniquets and medical equipment, and children's drawings on the table.

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Remembering Victoria Amelina

BY ANDRIY KURKOV

Victoria Amelina was slated to be the Harriman Institute's 2023-24 resident in Paris.

During a war, time flies especially quickly. Almost all the news is from the front. Reports of missile and drone attacks on Kharkiv are replaced by reports of missile and drone attacks on Odesa—and so on, endlessly. In the whirl of this ever-changing, but constant destruction, I have the feeling that the tragic rocket attack on a pizzeria in Kramatorsk, in which the talented Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina sustained injuries that would kill her a few days later, happened a long time ago. In reality, June 27, 2023, was only a few months ago. On that date, Ukrainian literature was made poorer and lost one of its most talented and most active representatives.

Victoria Amelina was, first and foremost, a civil activist deeply concerned about her country and its future. In the short period between the COVID-19 pandemic and the escalation of Russian aggression, she managed to organize and hold a literary festival for children in New York—not the big American city but a small Donbas town founded by German Mennonites at the end of the nineteenth century. To the Mennonites, the name represented prosperity.

To save time on finding sponsors, Amelina spent her own money to create the event which, since 2021, has inspired and enlivened the residents of this little-known town. In its old cinema, writers, poets, and essayists performed and held discussions, and a new cultural community emerged before the eyes of amazed participants. The children of our Donbas New York started writing poetry and inventing fairy tales. They began to talk more often and more enthusiastically about the future, thanks to Amelina's efforts.

But then the full-scale war came.

Now that Victoria Amelina is no longer with us, and the old cinema, which had become a cultural hub for New York residents, lies in ruins after the hit of a Russian missile, Amelina's friends and colleagues are planning the future of this festival. It will be named after its founder, and Ukrainians have already collected enough money to stage it. The festival will take place, just as soon as the war ends, in the newly restored cinema; enough money has been raised to cover the renovation work as well.

As monuments to her short and bright life, Victoria Amelina left us with two novels, *Fall Syndrome* (2014) and *Dom's Dream Kingdom* (2017), a children's book, as well as some poetry and many articles and essays that demonstrate her great intelligence, self-irony, and courage—she was not deterred by the danger of combat zones, visiting them frequently, sometimes multiple times per month.

Her books are just beginning their journey to foreign readers. They are regularly reprinted in Ukraine, and I hope the same fate awaits them in other countries. If it were not for the Russian missile, the future would have us reading very different poetry and prose from Victoria Amelina. The business of documenting Russian war crimes, into which Amelina plunged headlong from the start of the aggression, greatly changed her attitude toward life and the world around her. This is evident from her last texts,

filled with pain for Ukraine, for Ukrainians, and for the victims of war crimes, whose evidence she collected for future trials.

When I look at photos of her, including those from the Cartagena festival in Colombia, where we both spoke on behalf of Ukraine in January 2023, I cannot believe that she is no longer with us. It seems to me that she is nearby. Probably because I, like many of my colleagues, can very well imagine her reaction to any given situation—military or non-military.

Amelina was a very open person. This openness disarmed her colleagues and at the same time facilitated complete trust in her. This trust, trust in Victoria Amelina's every spoken or written word, remains to this day.

Andriy Kurkov is a Ukrainian author and public intellectual. He is the Harriman Institute's 2023 Writer in Residence. ♦



AP Photo/Alex Zakletsky

Alumni Notes

If you would like to be included in a future issue, please submit a note (100–150 words) and a photograph (1MB +) to Masha Udensiva-Brenner at mu2159@columbia.edu.

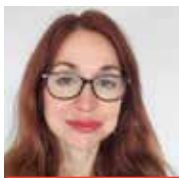


Edward Corcoran
RI Certificate, 1967; Ph.D.,
International Relations, 1977

I enrolled in Columbia's Russian Program in 1961, then took a two-year leave to begin my assignment for the U.S. Army, which sent me back to Columbia to complete my Russian Institute Certificate two years later. After graduation, I continued to work on research remotely with Professors Seweryn Bialer and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Professor Bialer's deep knowledge of the Soviet Union provided critical support while working on my dissertation. He led my dissertation committee and was extremely helpful in supporting my Ph.D. award in 1977.

At U.S. Army European headquarters, I was a U.S. Intelligence Officer and then the U.S. Army's liaison to the Soviet Commander in Germany. After my Army career, I worked on overall security throughout the U.S. Department of Energy's nuclear complex and ran an industrial company in Hungary until 2005. Since then, I published my book, *Threats and Challenges* (2021). Most recently I have been promoting an end to the war in Ukraine and the emergence of a more progressive Russian government.



Anita Demkiv
MARS-REERS, 2004

My time at the Harriman Institute was marked by an exciting intellectual atmosphere and notably different geopolitical landscape. At the time, Ukraine was on the brink of electing Viktor Yushchenko as president, but a likely stolen election ushered in the Orange Revolution. Drawing on my time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ukraine, work in the NGO community in Kyiv, and guidance from Professor Peter Juviler, I wrote my master's thesis: "Civil Society's Role in Ukraine's Orange Revolution." Other professors who influenced me included Catharine Nepomnyashchy, Alexander Motyl, and Mark von Hagen.

Although professionally I focus on renewable energy projects, my dedication to Ukraine continues. I proudly serve on the board of Sublimitas, a nonprofit dedicated to helping orphans in Ukraine pursue higher education. Founded by Alla Korzh, a Harriman Fellowship recipient and native of Chernihiv, Ukraine, Sublimitas has continued throughout the war to support and mentor vulnerable Ukrainian students.

My experience at the Harriman Institute—including a Harriman PepsiCo Travel Fellowship that enabled me to conduct interviews with NGO leaders in Kyiv and Lviv for my thesis—profoundly shaped my path and perspective. The institution is invaluable for fostering dialogue, thought leadership, and empowering scholars and practitioners to navigate the complex landscape in Ukraine and beyond.



Allan Grafman
M.I.A. 1977; RI Certificate

I was privileged to study with some of the all-time great scholars and educators in the sector, including Marshall Shulman, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and John Hazard. Another highlight of my time at Columbia was participating in the International Fellows program at the School of International Affairs.

Upon graduation I worked for the U.S.-USSR Trade and Economic Council, whose mission was to facilitate trade between the United States and USSR.

Prior to Columbia I was able to spend a semester at Leningrad State University and was fortunate to revisit after 40 years, just before Covid. So sad to see another dark period enveloping Russia and her people.

Delighted to see Columbia SIPA in the news and vanguard of educating our leaders.

Alumni Notes



Wesley (John) Jordan
M.I.A., 1998

I've just relocated to Kyiv, Ukraine to support economic recovery in the midst of the war, by financing small businesses and small-scale agriculture.

Ukrainian households have lost income and life savings due to displacement, loss of employment and the destruction of homes and businesses. Both returnees and those who remained in liberated areas are ready to rebuild and restart their businesses, however the market is still very disrupted by the war.

The adverse impact on the agriculture sector has been felt worldwide. Smallholder farmers and others within the ag sector used to employ more than half of the population and have not yet returned to pre-war production levels. Yet there are small glimmers of hope for enterprises to start rebuilding and restarting.

I'm working with VisionFund to provide access to credit to support small businesses and farmers rebuild their livelihoods and rebuild the local economy. I'm grateful for the time at Columbia and SIPA, to provide a framework in economics and finance, and the Harriman Institute for both the depth and breadth of understanding of the political economy of the region. I finished the program with a focus on international economic policy and still remember a paper I wrote about the introduction of the Ukrainian national currency, the *Hryvnia*, in 1996.



Jeffrey Lehrer
M.I.A., 1994; HI Certificate

A Foreign Service officer for the past 22 years with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), I arrived in Kyiv in August 2023. I currently serve as Acting Deputy Mission Director for USAID Ukraine. I provide strategic leadership and operations management for USAID's development assistance for energy, agriculture, private sector development, democratic governance, health, and other sectors, oversight and monitoring for direct budget support, and coordination of humanitarian aid. It is rewarding to contribute to helping Ukraine strengthen its capacity to resist Russia's aggression, restore infrastructure and services damaged by attacks, and advance reforms to fight corruption, modernize, and integrate with Europe and other international partners. I have wonderful memories from my graduate studies at the Harriman Institute in the 1990s, which sparked my passion for better understanding and contributing to the transformative changes in this region.



Sasha Mart
M.I.A., 2000;
HI East Central Europe Certificate

After 22 years I am back in New York City, serving as Minister Counselor with the Permanent Mission of Serbia to United Nations. Since my days at Columbia, I have been a professional diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. I've been posted to Serbian Embassies in Pretoria, South Africa, as deputy head of mission 2015–2020, and in Nairobi, Kenya, 2005–2009, as a chargé d'affaires and acting permanent representative to the United Nations Environment Program and UN Human Settlements Program. Between postings abroad I was working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade on a range of UN-related issues and most recently on the European Union Affairs and Regional Initiatives, where I was deputy national coordinator for the Central European initiative (Trieste, Italy) as well the Western Balkans Fund (Tirana, Albania) and in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region Priority Area 10 (institutional capacity and cooperation). I was also in charge of the Višegrad Group and the International Višegrad Fund and of the Chairmanship-in-Office of the Western Balkans Fund in 2022.



Angela Wheeler
GSAPP, 2016; HI Certificate

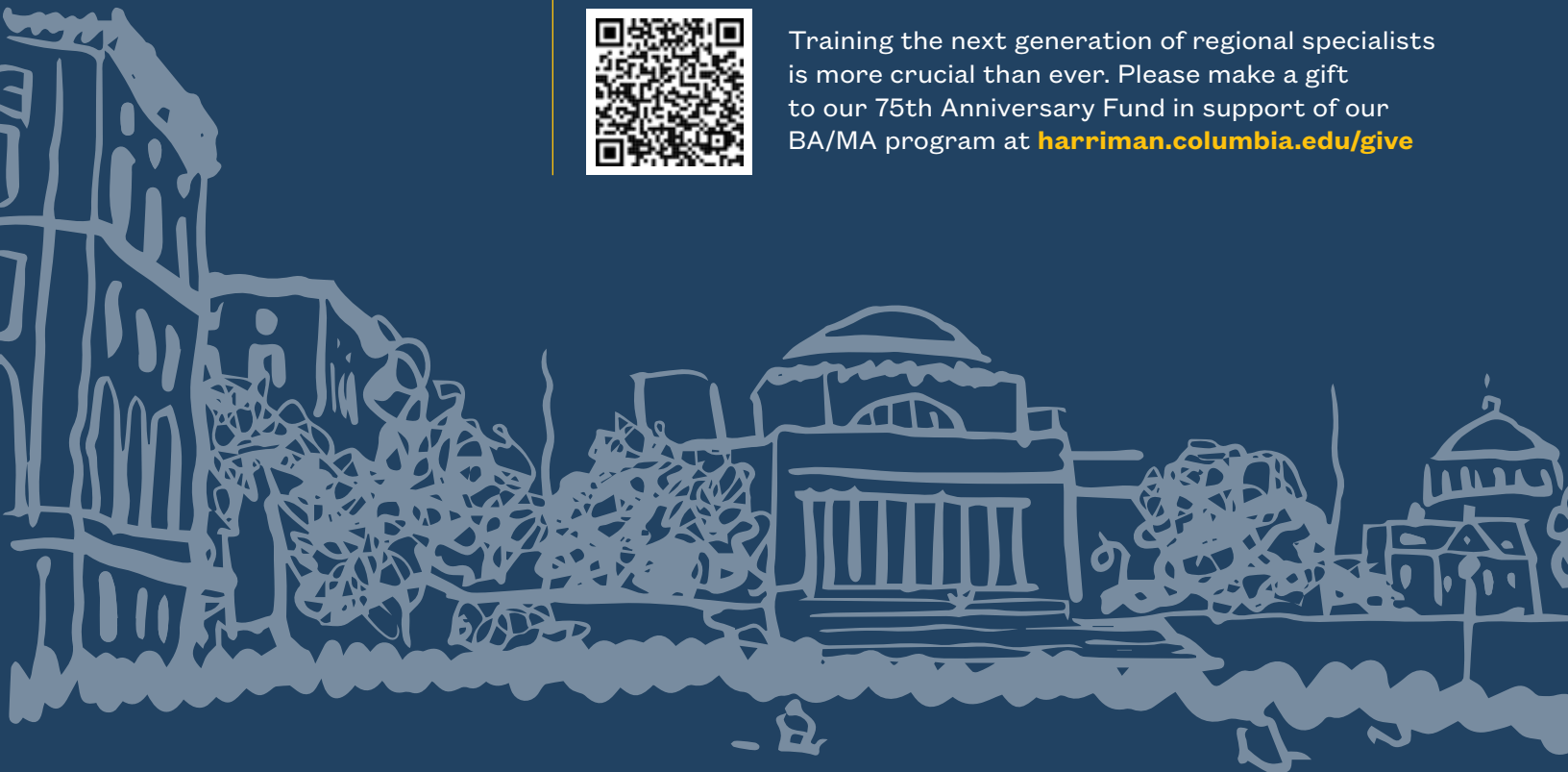
I graduated in 2016 with a master's degree in historic preservation and a Harriman Graduate Certificate. As a 2015 Harriman Civil Society Graduate Fellow, I worked with the Council of Europe on urban heritage initiatives in Georgia. Projects I undertook with Harriman's support have influenced my doctoral research (on Soviet urban planning approaches to historic cities) and my recent book, *Architectural Guide: Tbilisi* (DOM Publishers, 2023), the first comprehensive English-language guide to architecture and urban development in Georgia's capital city. I remain deeply grateful for the friendships, community, mentorship, and support at Harriman that sustained me through my graduate studies. Cheers from Amherst! ♦




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