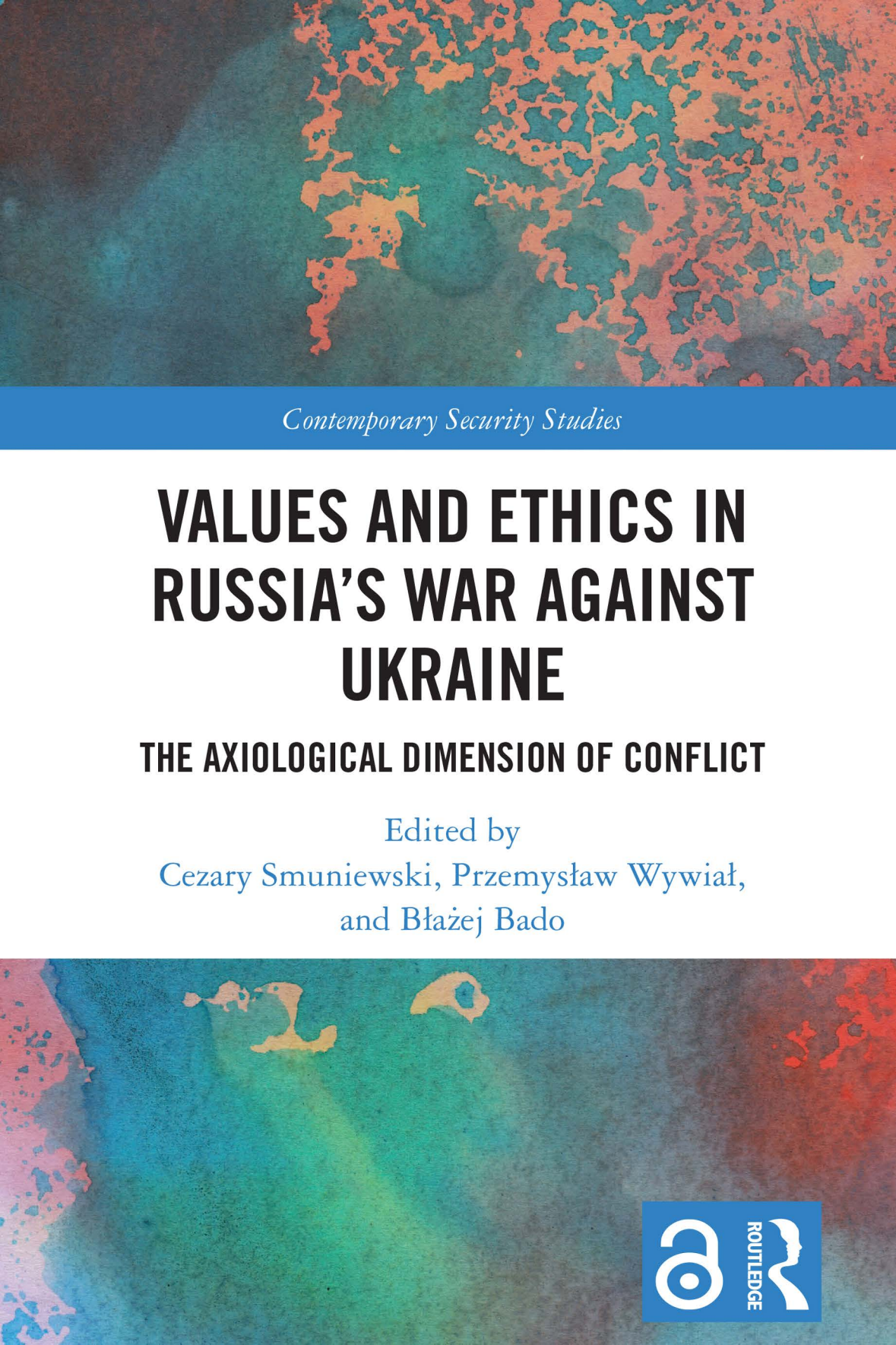




Contemporary Security Studies

VALUES AND ETHICS IN RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

THE AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF CONFLICT

Edited by

Cezary Smuniewski, Przemysław Wywiół,
and Błażej Bado



Values and Ethics in Russia's War Against Ukraine

This volume focuses on the role of ideas in Russia's war against Ukraine and contains interdisciplinary analyses of the values that have shaped and sustained Ukrainian resistance.

The book offers an interdisciplinary analysis of Russia's war against Ukraine from the perspective of values and ethics and shows how axiological aspects related to national identity, society's ability to organise itself, disinformation, gender roles, and geopolitical changes manifest themselves in the context of Ukrainian resistance and to what extent and in what direction this resistance is shaped. Integrating perspectives from political science, sociology, philosophy, and security studies, the chapters focus on various aspects of the conflict, including the role of grassroots social movements in shaping Ukrainian identity, the impact of war on the organisation of civil society, the axiological dimensions of European Union (EU)–Ukraine relations, and the evolution of societal attitudes towards the conflict. Through an in-depth analysis of war in the context of values, the book provides valuable insights into the ideological and cultural dimensions of contemporary conflicts and their implications for international relations.

This book will be of much interest to students of the Ukraine war, ethics, sociology, and international relations.

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Values and Ethics in Russia's War Against Ukraine

The Axiological Dimension of Conflict

**Edited by Cezary Smuniewski,
Przemysław Wywiał, and Błażej Bado**



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Introduction

An Axiological Perspective on the Study of Russia's War Against Ukraine

*Cezary Smuniewski, Przemysław Wywiół,
and Błażej Bado*

Research on wars and armed conflicts from an axiological perspective brings together reflections drawn from security studies, philosophy, sociology, international law, and geopolitics. Geopolitical concepts – such as Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory – have had a significant influence on the development of such reflection. The core assumptions of this theory were later directly translated into the Cold War strategic doctrine of the United States, shaping key values within the realm of collective security and the balance of power.¹ An important contribution to the discussion on the axiological perspective can be found in the work of Thomas X. Hammes, who reflects on the values and moral dilemmas accompanying new forms of conflict. He examines, among other issues, the moral dimensions of emerging types of warfare, the role and responsibilities of the soldier, the function of values in military operations, and the dilemmas arising in the context of asymmetric and hybrid conflicts.² In research on war from an axiological perspective, political philosophy and the ethics of war occupy an equally important position, alongside considerations of the morality of political and military decisions. An eclectic approach – drawing on analytical tools developed within sociology and international relations – enables more in-depth axiological analyses grounded in works such as *Just and Unjust Wars* by Michael Walzer, as well as reflections on the law of armed conflict within the common law tradition.³ Research on wars and their associated axiologies is firmly rooted in an interdisciplinary tradition and invites further critical analysis of the values, norms, and historical conditions underpinning armed conflicts. Such research implies not only the necessity of understanding the origins and evolution of values related to warfare but also the essential need to examine contemporary security and peace policies through an axiological lens. Research into the axiological dimensions of Russia's war against Ukraine draws particular attention to questions of its ethical character. Central to these analyses are the moral justification for Ukraine's use of force in self-defence, as well as the ethical dilemmas posed by the provision of weapons by Western states – often framed within the concept of 'force-short-of-war,' which highlights the persistent risk of escalation and the morally imperfect nature of a 'morally truncated victory' in this conflict.⁴ At the same time, scholars are analysing serious violations of international law and the ethics of war, such as war crimes committed

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by Russian forces. These transgressions further strengthen the moral justification for Western support of Ukraine, yet they also complicate the prospects for achieving a lasting peace.⁵ Particular attention is also given to the use of modern military technologies – especially drones – which, in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, pose new axiological challenges concerning both the principle of proportionality and the protection of civilian populations.⁶ These studies, situated within the broader context of just war theory and the norms of international law, emphasise that, despite the moral legitimacy of Ukraine's self-defence, the conflict generates numerous ethical tensions related to the contested aims, means, and long-term consequences of the war. Moreover, the religious dimensions of Russia's war against Ukraine are far from insignificant, as they strongly inform axiological inquiries into this armed conflict.⁷

In the social sciences, the axiological perspective assigns a central role to value-oriented reflection – values that shape human actions, domestic institutions, norms, and social relations. Viewing war through this lens reveals the conflict as a struggle over the dominance of particular values and meanings manifested in political, social, and cultural spheres. War is not merely a contest over territory, infrastructure, natural resources, or technological superiority, but it is, above all, a struggle for the human being and their collective modes of existence – for national identity, dignity, collective memory, democracy, and control over symbols in public discourse, all of which fundamentally shape the future normative and social order. It must be emphasised, however, that although the axiological perspective primarily addresses abstract notions – such as identity, dignity, or freedom – its consequences have tangible effects on specific aspects of social life. This means that the axiological perspective in question places the human individual at the centre of its focus, understood both as a recipient and as a creator of values considered fundamental within a given community. After all, the world of ideas does not operate in isolation from the human world, just as social reality cannot be fully understood without reference to the values embedded within it. The inseparability of the world of ideas and human reality is aptly captured by Archie J. Bahm's assertion: 'Values have existed as long as human beings.'⁸ If we accept that values accompany human beings in every form of their existence – both individual and collective – it becomes legitimate to ask which values are revealed in an extreme situation such as war. The impetus for posing this question has been the ongoing war waged by Russia against Ukraine, arguably the most devastating armed conflict in Europe, in terms of human and material losses, since the Second World War. This book, *Values and Ethics in Russia's War Against Ukraine: The Axiological Dimension of Conflict*, responds to the need for a deeper understanding of this conflict through the lens of values, recognising Ukrainian society as a central actor within the wartime reality.

The aim of this publication is to explore how axiological aspects related to national identity, the capacity for societal self-organisation, disinformation, gender roles, and geopolitical change are manifested in the context of Ukrainian resistance to Russian aggression. The contributors to this volume seek to systematically examine how values shape Ukraine's resistance, how they are communicated,

reinterpreted, and institutionalised, and how they influence international relations in the context of Ukraine's foreign policy. The texts included in this monograph emerge from the intersections of political science, sociology, philosophy, and security studies. Each chapter addresses a different axiological dimension of the war. The chapter 'Ukraine's Path Towards Building State and Societal Resilience to Threats' examines and analyses the values embedded in the process of shaping Ukraine's state resilience. The chapter 'The Axiological Dimension of Political Leadership of Volodymyr Zelenskyy' reflects on Zelenskyy's leadership, tracing its transformation from the perspective of moral and civic axiology. In the following chapter, titled 'Values in the Crossfire: Analysis of Fake News Narratives About the War in Ukraine,' the authors present the findings of their research, showing how manipulation of language, history, and symbols becomes a component of axiological warfare. These three chapters form the analytical foundation of the volume, presenting war not only as a military phenomenon but, above all, also as a 'systemic' one – assaulting social, political, and cultural values. Within this framework, values are not only an interpretive category but also a tool in the struggle for subjectivity, identity, and survival. We have titled this part of the book 'War and the Crisis of Values.'

The next three chapters of this book shift the focus from the 'systemic' level to the 'socio-individual' dimension. They explore how values are realised in practice – through everyday resistance, community life, rituals, and interpersonal relations. The chapter 'Ukrainian Identity in Wartime Conditions: the Example of the Women's Resistance Movement 'Angry Mavka' ('Zla Mavka') in the Occupied Territories' examines how a women-led resistance movement in the occupied territories of Ukraine draws on folklore and emancipation as tools for constructing national identity. The following chapter, 'Women During Russia's War Against Ukraine: The Perspective of Christian Clergy,' analyses the narratives of Christian clergy to reveal the changing role of Ukrainian women during the war, showing how an axiological perspective helps uncover the ways in which specific values are being redefined under conditions of armed conflict. In the chapter 'Funeral Ceremonies of Ukrainian Soldiers in 2022–2024: A Theological and Political Study of Funeral Speeches,' the authors analyse the funerals of Ukrainian soldiers as sacred-political spaces in which communal and identity-related values are shaped. Together, these three chapters demonstrate that values are not merely verbal declarations – they are embodied in the practices of Ukrainian society. We have titled this part of the book 'War and the Axiological Space of Social Practices.'

The final four chapters of the book draw the reader's attention not only to the 'socio-individual' dimension but also to the 'politico-transnational' level, extending beyond the territorial boundaries of Ukraine. In the chapter 'Will a Values-Driven Approach Prevail? EU–Ukraine Relations in Times of War,' the author examines the democratic values shaping the European Union's policy towards Ukraine. The subsequent chapter, 'The Evolution of Poles' Attitudes Towards the War in Ukraine and its Social Determinants,' explores the shifting social attitudes in Poland regarding the war in Ukraine. The chapter 'The Paradox of Remembering and Forgetting:

The Memory of Russia's War Against Ukraine Through the Eyes of the Polish Minority' analyses how historical values, local identities, and national narratives compete for space within Ukraine's collective memory. The final chapter, 'Activities of Polish NGOs for Ukrainian Refugees Since 2022,' presents the work of Polish non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in support of Ukrainian refugees, focusing in particular on how values are materialised through concrete actions undertaken by Polish civil society. Together, these four chapters demonstrate that when analysed through an axiological lens, war extends beyond the confines of statehood and territory. It assumes the form of a fluid, multidimensional reality whose impact reaches into surrounding regions – shaping their normative orders, social attitudes, and value systems. We have titled this part of the book 'War and Transnational Axiological Horizons.'

The axiological perspective, thus, forms the methodological core of this book, drawing upon both philosophical and sociological understandings of values as key determinants of individual and collective attitudes. Axiology is not merely an adjunct to politics – it in fact constitutes it, defining within a given community what is regarded as the common good, what is worth defending, and what is perceived as a threat. These are fundamental issues, often preceding questions of a strictly military nature. Consequently, the identification of these values, the analysis of the mechanisms associated with them, and the exploration of the possibilities of their reproduction become essential tasks not only for scholars of security but also for political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists – particularly social psychologists. In this book, the axiological perspective allows, first, for an understanding of why Ukrainian society – despite enormous losses – remains mobilised, determined, and capable of heroic resistance; second, for insight into why certain values are attacked, defended, and reconstructed; and third, for an analysis of how values, in the context of war, reshape understandings of patriotism, gender roles, attitudes towards the state, and the meaning of collective memory. In light of ongoing and newly emerging flashpoints of armed conflict around the world, reflection on what lies beyond the immediate objects of warfare – what remains hidden behind its visible front lines – appears not only justified but also urgently necessary. This book seeks to offer such a reflection.

At the heart of this book's conception lies our deep-seated need to draw the attention of the academic community – particularly researchers concerned with war, armed conflict, and broadly understood security – to the significance of the axiological perspective in scholarly reflection. Our aim was to demonstrate that the analysis of war-related phenomena cannot be confined to strategic, military, or geopolitical dimensions alone; rather, it requires a deeper engagement with the values that inspire action, justify choices, shape collective identities, and define what communities perceive as worthy of defence or sacrifice. Security studies that focus solely on the aforementioned strategic, military, or geopolitical aspects, while neglecting the underlying axiological reflection, remain incomplete – deprived of the contextual understanding that often not only supports these dimensions but also actively drives them. This book, thus, represents a deliberate attempt to foster broader reflection on the axiological dimension of war, as well as an invitation

to further research focused on identifying the fundamental values upheld by the parties involved in conflict; determining the sources of these values – be they cultural, religious, or political; formulating their justifications within specific social and historical contexts; and analysing the relationships between values, including the tensions that arise between them, such as those between freedom and security, truth and loyalty, and dignity and survival. We were also concerned with encouraging the academic community to reflect on how axiology shapes the interpretation of wartime reality – how it gives meaning to events, frames the language of description, and informs the understanding of conflict. With this book, we also seek to inspire inquiries into the practical consequences of value hierarchies identified within armed conflicts – namely, the actions, policies, narratives, and attitudes they generate, and the resulting social and political effects. We are convinced that future research on the axiologies of war must remain mindful of the limitations and controversies surrounding different value systems and must be willing to engage in critical reflection and openness to alternative approaches. We believe that only such in-depth, multidimensional, and self-aware approaches can offer a better understanding of contemporary wars and the social, political, and cultural transformations they entail.

We present this book to its readers with the hope that it will serve as a source of knowledge, inspiration, and new ways of interpreting contemporary phenomena of war – a contribution that may enrich not only academic debate but also civic and moral discourse.

Notes

- 1 Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (London: Routledge, 2017); Saul B. Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012); David Wilkinson, 'Spykman and Geopolitics,' in *On Geopolitics: Classical and Nuclear*, ed. Cira E. Zappa and Charles Zargbibe (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 77–129, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-6230-9_4; Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944); Nicholas J. Spykman, 'Geography and Foreign Policy, I,' *The American Political Science Review* 32, issue 1 (1938): 28–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1949029>.
- 2 Thomas X. Hammes, *Forgotten Warriors: The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, the Corps Ethos, and the Korean War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010); Thomas X. Hammes, 'War Evolves into the Fourth Generation,' *Contemporary Security Policy* 26, issue 2 (2005): 189–221, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260500190500>; Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004).
- 3 Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Brian Orend, *The Morality of War* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013); Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 4 Christian N. Braun, 'Weapons for Ukraine as Force-Short-of-War,' *International Affairs* 101, issue 1 (2025): 291–308, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae285>.

- 5 Neil Renic, 'The Cost of Atrocity: Strategic Implications of Russian Battlefield Misconduct in Ukraine,' *Ethics & International Affairs* 38, issue 1 (2024): 6–16, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679424000054>.
- 6 Christian Enemark, 'Returning the War to Russia: Drones and Discrimination in the Defense of Ukraine,' *Ethics & International Affairs* 38, issue 1 (2024): 54–63, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S089267942400008X>.
- 7 Marcin Składanowski, Andrzej Szabaciuk, Agnieszka Łukasik-Turecka, 'Church of War: Propaganda and Disinformation in Patriarch Kirill's Discourse on Russia's Aggression,' *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, issue 1 (2025): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2515329>; Marcin Składanowski, 'Religion in the Russian National Security System: An Ontological Security Perspective and the Problem of the (De)Secularisation of Putin's Russia,' *Religions* 16, issue 6 (2025): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060762>; Nataliya Hado, 'Rosyjska propaganda religijna podczas wojny w Ukrainie: historia powstania i mechanizmy oddziaływania,' *Media i Społeczeństwo* 17, issue 2 (2022): 44–50, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0016.3045>; Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 8 Archie J. Bahm, *Axiology: The Science of Values* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 1993), 3.

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Part I

War and the Crisis of Values



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1 Ukraine's Path Towards Building State and Societal Resilience to Threats

Przemysław Wywiał

Introduction

The state and society's resilience to threats plays an important role in the sphere of security, impacting the ability to react in a crisis situation. Building resilience has become an important element of both international and national security policy, especially after 2014 and Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In particular, this concept found its place at successive summits of the leaders of the North Atlantic Alliance, not only in the documents issued after such summits but also in the security strategies of individual allied states.

Following the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of hostilities in the eastern part of Ukraine, Kyiv also took measures to build the state's resilience to threats, both military and non-military in nature, including hybrid threats.¹ The foundation for these efforts was provided by modern strategic concepts and legal solutions presented primarily in the new Security Strategy of Ukraine and the Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance. It proved possible – largely due to cooperation with NATO – to reform and modernise the Ukrainian armed forces, which had completely different potential and capabilities in 2022 than in the tragic year of 2014. However, perhaps most importantly, changes have occurred in the attitude of the previously strongly divided Ukrainian society, which has become very involved in building resilience and then actively participated in defending the independence of the homeland.

This study is a presentation and analysis of the steps taken by the Ukrainian state and society to build resilience. The author focused primarily on the military aspect of this issue. He showed the foundations of the concept of resilience contained in strategic documents and legal acts, as well as the changes made in the defence system of Ukraine. The originality of the work lies in the analysis of the unique experiences of the Ukrainian state: a state seeking to build resilience during hostilities already taking place on parts of its territory, and also the only state, thus far, where such resilience has been tested in the conditions of a full-scale war.

The main research problem is set out in the following question: what were Ukraine's actions aimed at building state and societal resilience to threats after 2014? The main research problem, formulated in this way, is supplemented by additional detailed problems, also expressed in the form of questions: how is

resilience understood, and what place does it have in the security policy of the North Atlantic Alliance? What are the strategic and legal foundations of resilience in Ukraine? What changes have been introduced in the armed forces of Ukraine in order to make them an element of resilience? What is the role of the Ukrainian society in building resilience?

Several methods were used to achieve the research goal, primarily the methods of analysis and synthesis. In particular, methods of analysis and critical review of sources, as well as the critical review of literature on the subject, were used here. The content analysis method was primarily used to examine strategic documents, legal acts, reports, and other sources. The timeliness of the events and processes described is associated with the necessity of using, among other things, Internet sources, which are very often selective and only show a portion of reality. Therefore, out of this multitude of facts, reports, and opinions, it was necessary to build an internally coherent whole, providing answers to the fundamental questions that the author posed at the outset of the research effort. For this purpose, the method of synthesis was used. It relies primarily on official documents and sources that have been successfully verified. The author has endeavoured to maintain objectivity in the presentation of research results and conclusions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Context

At the outset, the author focused primarily on explaining the basic concept of resilience and the various approaches towards it. The present considerations should begin with an explanation of the very concept of resilience. The term 'resilience' comes from the Latin word *resilire* – 'to rebound' and 'to return to the previous shape.' It refers to the ability to resist and to cope with change, as well as to rebuild and to further develop. In the current polycrisis environment, resilience includes the capacity not only to recover and restore the initial state but also to enter a new, higher level, characterised by stronger resistance to new crises or changes than before. Depending on the context, resilience may be defined and understood in slightly different ways. In reference to the economy, it is the ability of an ecosystem to adapt to changes and disturbances without going into another state, the ability of an ecosystem to be expanded upon and renewed. In reference to society, it is its ability to cope with change and to develop further without compromising welfare or freedom of choice and flexibility in future periods. This relates to crisis situations caused by all types of threats: natural disasters; political unrest; economic, climate, environmental, and technological crises; or wars. Ecological and social systems are interconnected. In relation to organisations, resilience is the ability of an enterprise or organisation to survive through crises and difficulties. If the organisation can draw conclusions from such events and create innovations, then it will improve its efficiency and thus increase its level of resilience. In the military–political context, building resilience is considered to be one of the basic conditions for security, both at the national level, the European Union (EU) level, and at the level of the alliance.²

As stated by the authors of the report of the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) in Washington, the combination of resilience in the face of crises and the ability to show resistance in the event of occupation are important signals to both potential adversaries and allies.³ Such a situation makes it possible for the society to present its resilience and for the state authorities to show their readiness to take real actions in order to deter the enemy and defend the state, which is of great importance in the context of the provisions of Articles 3 and 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which constitute the foundation of NATO Allies' responsibility and solidarity.⁴

Meanwhile, Jamie Shea, from NATO Headquarters, sees the state as a form of social organisation and considers resilience a key element of security. In his opinion, this concept includes the following components: the readiness of society and the state; infrastructure preparation; internal solidarity and coherence of objectives; common situational awareness; coordination of measures and ways of responding; and cooperation with partner states. This NATO Headquarters official assesses that resilience is and will be an essential element of defence that enables a country to effectively counter hybrid threats and to survive in the event of war or occupation.⁵

The author analysed basic strategic and legal documents with regard to the issue of building resilience. These included, in particular, the Treaty on the North Atlantic Alliance, the National Security Strategy of Ukraine, the Defence Strategy of Ukraine, and the Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance. The latter three documents constitute the strategic and legal basis for the development of Ukraine's resilience.

The White Paper on Ukraine's Defence Policy for 2021 (official title: 'White Book 2021 Defence Policy of Ukraine'), published in 2022, is also an important source. In this publication, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine presents the comprehensive assumptions of the country's defence policy and its implementation. The document discusses, among other things, the assumptions of Ukraine's defence policy, including defence planning, the reforms introduced in the armed forces, the sources and methods of financing of defence expenditures, and issues related to training. A lot of space was devoted to the development of personal resources of the defence system, the methods of acquiring personnel, the promotion of military service, or the terms of service of reserve soldiers. Issues related to the technical modernisation of the Ukrainian army and its logistical support were also presented. The publication also discussed international cooperation for the development of Ukrainian national defence, primarily with NATO member states.

During the research, the author conducted an analysis of the extensive literature on the subject. Due to the topicality of the issue and the ongoing war in Ukraine, the literature on the topic is not very rich. The topic of Ukrainian resilience has been addressed in publications by, for example, Olga Reznikova,⁶ Jakob Hedenskog,⁷ Yuliia Kurnyshova,⁸ Derek Jones and J. Bryant Love,⁹ and Anastasiia Kudlenko.¹⁰ Studies and reports by think-tanks¹¹ and international organisations¹² have also been produced. However, these publications do not provide a holistic view of the problem, and these authors focus primarily on legal and social issues, while little space is devoted to the military sphere.

Building Resilience in the Security Policy of the North Atlantic Alliance

Resilience is, in a way, the Alliance's 'first line of defence.' Under Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, all allies are required to establish and maintain the capability to resist armed attacks. During the 'Cold War,' NATO and all allied countries had extensive civilian structures that were supposed to build resilience and readiness to repel any possible attack. After the fall of the 'Iron Curtain,' this issue lost its significance. It was only in 2014, following Russia's actions in Ukraine, that the Alliance began to adapt to new security threats and to develop mechanisms aimed at responding to these threats. At NATO summits in Newport in 2014 and in Warsaw in 2016, leaders of member states decided not only to strengthen deterrence and collective defence mechanisms but also to support member states' commitment to increasing resilience. The Allies committed to implementing agreed-upon requirements for enhancing national resilience across seven critical sectors (Seven Baseline Resilience Requirements), which define and describe the critical civilian functions underpinning the Alliance's ability to defend itself. The entities involved in the implementation of tasks related to building resilience include not only the government, various civilian ministries, and the armed forces but also the private sector and NGOs. These entities, in accordance with the assumptions adopted in the Alliance, have a very big role to play in building national resilience.¹³

One of the conclusions of the NATO summit held in Warsaw on 8–9 July 2016 was the decision by the heads of state and heads of government of member states to make a joint commitment to strengthen resilience and to constantly develop – in accordance with Article 3 of the Washington Treaty – individual and collective capacity to repel a possible attack on NATO states. In the Alliance's understanding, resilience is a very important element of the deterrence policy, which is supposed to force a possible opponent to abandon any attack by convincing any such entity that an attack will not enable it to achieve the intended goals or will prove to be too costly.¹⁴

The task of strengthening resilience is to be carried out in accordance with the guidelines included in the form of seven basic requirements. According to the assumptions, they help NATO member states in establishing a common understanding of the principles guiding the strengthening of resilience, including, above all, the effective support for the armed forces in the European theatre of operations, contributing to deterrence but at the same time to the efficient functioning of the state in crises and the protection of the population. This concept of resilience provides for the cooperation of the military and non-military systems, starting from the planning phase.

The aforementioned seven guidelines refer to:

- continuity of public administration and ensuring key state processes;
- energy supplies;
- the ability to respond to mass uncontrolled migration;
- water and food supplies;

- the ability to react to events with a large number of victims;
- ensuring communication;
- civilian transport.¹⁵

Three domains were taken into account in the scope of work on building resilience: the public sector, public–private partnership, and society.¹⁶

In light of the complicated situation in the vicinity of the North Atlantic Alliance's territory, preparations in both the military and civilian spheres are of particular importance in the event of any further deterioration in this respect. The alliance is also taking steps to strengthen its resilience to threats, currently focusing primarily on hybrid threats. Resilience has become one of the conditions for credible deterrence and defence, as well as for the effective fulfilment of NATO's basic tasks. According to the Alliance itself, the current resilience guidelines only represent the minimum necessary to ensure the ability of the armed forces to perform their tasks, especially in light of the need to join the collective defence effort. Creating resilience in many areas is necessary to be able to fulfil the obligations under Article 3 of the Washington Treaty in the national dimension.¹⁷

Therefore, the main objectives of civilian planning within the North Atlantic Alliance include the following:

- maintaining continuity of governance during possible war or hybrid operations, including so-called subthreshold activities, that is, ones conducted below the threshold of war;
- increasing the efficiency of utilisation of national civilian resources and infrastructure for both civilian and military needs;
- protection of the population and assistance to the population;
- preventing and counteracting crisis situations;
- actions aimed at strengthening resilience according to criteria relating to effectively secured continuity of operations of public administration and provision of key services; energy, water, and food supplies; and ensuring the functioning of communication and transport systems, as well as the ability to cope with uncontrolled population movements and numerous fatalities.¹⁸

At that time, the concept of resilience also appeared in the security strategies of individual member states. For example, in 2021, the United Kingdom adopted a document titled 'National Resilience Strategy: A call for evidence.'¹⁹ In turn, in the 'National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland,' it was stated that one of the fundamental national interests, defined as guarding independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and security of the state and its citizens, is to be implemented, among other things, by 'increasing the state's resilience to threats by creating a system of common civic defence, based on the efforts of the entire nation, and building an understanding for the development of the Republic of Poland's resilience and defence capabilities.'²⁰

Strategic and Legal Foundations of Ukrainian Resilience

The efforts to build a system of resilience to threats in Ukraine grew out of the humiliating experiences of 2014, when there was practically no opposition to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the establishment of separatist, self-proclaimed Donbass and Luhansk republics. It turned out that Kyiv was not capable of undertaking active efforts against aggression, on both the military and the political plane.²¹

For example, at that time, 41,000 soldiers served in the ground forces of the Ukrainian army, of which only 6,000 were ready to actively participate in combat operations. Meanwhile, the authorities had previously declared that the number of combat-ready soldiers was 20,000. The events in Crimea itself also proved catastrophic: more than 75% of the personnel of the Ukrainian Navy defected to the Navy of the Russian Federation (RF). Due to the paralysis of regular forces in the face of Russian aggression in the Donbas region, it was necessary to primarily rely on hastily organised volunteer battalions.²²

Russia's aggressive actions took place at a time of political upheaval in Kyiv. A new Ukrainian government led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk was formed at the end of February, just a few hours before the Russian special forces seized the parliament building in Simferopol and two airports in Crimea. Following the defection of President Viktor Yanukovych, the parliament appointed Oleksandr Turchynov, the chairman of the Ukrainian parliament, to serve as acting president until the new elections scheduled for May. It should be kept in mind that the new government had very little support and legitimacy in the south-eastern parts of the country, especially in Crimea and the Donbas.²³

Over the next few years, Ukraine made a significant effort to build the state's and society's resilience to threats. These efforts were taking place against the backdrop of the anti-terrorist operation (ATO) against separatists and Russian forces supporting them,²⁴ which was transformed into a military operation in 2018.²⁵

On 14 September 2020, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a new 'National Security Strategy of Ukraine.' It is conceptually based on three principles:

- containment – understood as the development of defence and security capabilities aimed at preventing armed aggression against Ukraine;
- resilience – understood as maintaining the adaptability of society and the state apparatus in a situation of changes in the security environment;
- cooperation – providing for the development of strategic relations with key foreign partners, primarily the EU, NATO, and the United States, as well as other states and international organisations.

The priority activities aimed at improving state security included the modernisation of the armed forces of Ukraine, the development of territorial defence, the withdrawal of combat equipment whose design assumptions were created in the USSR, and the strengthening – with the participation of other institutions – of the state's resilience (including, among other things, in the sphere of cybersecurity) – all with

the objective of making it more difficult for the enemy to conduct aggressive activities and to increase the cost of such activities.²⁶

A few months later, on 25 March 2021, President Zelenskyy signed the new 'Defence Strategy of Ukraine.' It replaced an earlier war doctrine developed in 2015. The previous document assumed that Ukraine should strive to gain the ability to independently defend itself against Russian aggression and to achieve full interoperability with NATO forces by 2020. Both goals proved to be overly ambitious and were not achieved.²⁷

According to the 2021 Strategy, the main goal of Ukraine was to prevent Russia from further escalating the war by increasing the cost of a potential offensive and occupation to an unacceptable level. Deterrence was to be implemented using diplomatic means and through the implementation of the concept of comprehensive security, which includes both military and non-military activities, such as propaganda or cyberwarfare. This approach was supposed to maximise the utilisation of Ukraine's potential without the excessive militarisation of the country. The strategy envisaged the development of territorial defence potential and the replacement of military conscription with compulsory training in the reserve forces, which would prepare the society for the establishment of a resistance movement for the duration of a possible occupation. The strategy outlined a scenario of defence of the state divided into four stages. In the first stage, regular armed forces and territorial defence are to be used. Their goal is to stop the offensive with the use of asymmetric actions, including in the enemy's territory. The second stage involves the support of the reserve forces and the use of the resistance movement in the occupied areas. These actions will enable the country to gain the time needed to implement the third stage, that is, carrying out general mobilisation and obtaining foreign military support. The fourth stage includes post-conflict stabilisation with the use of the armed forces.²⁸

Another important legislative act on the path to building resilience was the 'Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance,' signed by the president on 28 July 2021 and implemented since January 2022. By adopting a law defining the concept of 'national resistance' as an element of efforts to strengthen the state security system, the Ukrainian authorities opted for the implementation of the concept of total defence. Its basic elements include territorial defence, resistance movement, and the preparation of society for the possibility of war. The entity leading the 'national resistance' effort is the command of the Special Operations Forces, also responsible for conducting informational warfare and psychological operations.²⁹

Changes in the Armed Forces of Ukraine

After 2014, Ukraine implemented a number of reforms aimed at strengthening its defence capabilities. Defence expenditures were increased from less than 1.5% of GDP in 2014 to 3.2% in 2021. Volunteer battalions, which played a key role in the early phase of the ATO in the Donbas region, were integrated into the newly formed National Guard, subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.³⁰

The size of the armed forces of Ukraine increased from 130,000 soldiers at the time of the annexation of Crimea to 250,000, of which at least a third were combat veterans who had previously been fighting in the Donbas region.³¹

In 2016, Special Operations Forces was created as an independent branch of the military. These forces were built according to NATO standards. The Special Operations Forces consisted of the general command, five special (combat) units, four information and psychological warfare units, a training centre in Berdychiv, and special protection units.³² The Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine, which until 2022 carried out its tasks at the Combat Training Centre in Yavoriv, played an invaluable role in the process of training and reorganising the Ukrainian special forces towards the standards of NATO special forces. A leading role in this regard was played by instructors from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada.³³

In 2018, the previously carried out ATO led by the Security Service of Ukraine was replaced by the Joint Force Operation (JFO), supervised by the general staff of the armed forces of Ukraine. This change was associated with the official recognition of the fact that the actual opponent is the Russian army and not the separatists. The president then appointed a new Supreme Commander of the armed forces, to whom the entire Ukrainian army was subordinated. This contributed to better coordination of military operations under a single command, as well as better cooperation with the civil–military administration established in 2015 in the areas covered by the ATO.

At the time of the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of hostilities in eastern Ukraine, the armed forces of Ukraine had been relying exclusively on professional soldiers for two years (compulsory conscription to the army had been suspended in 2012). Conscription was reinstated in response to the Russian aggression in 2014. According to Ukrainian legislation, in Ukraine, military service is mandatory and applies to men aged 18–27. The compulsory military service lasts 18 months, but graduates of university studies only serve 12 months. In the following years, thousands of young men were conscripted annually to compulsory military service in the armed forces of Ukraine (e.g. 17,500 in 2017, 18,000 in 2018 and 2019, and 16,500 in 2020), which accounted for over 60% of the total number of conscripts. The remaining conscripts went to the formations subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs: the National Guard and the State Border Guards. In 2021, a total of 13,000 conscripts were recruited into the army during two conscription campaigns (Q2 and Q4).³⁴

The basic element supplementing the Ukrainian army's recruitment system was voluntary enlistment for contract military service. This was largely due to financial factors, including a significant increase in the remuneration of contract soldiers (starting from 2016). In the context of the broader economic collapse in Ukraine, the armed forces became one of the most attractive employers (especially for the inhabitants of the countryside). The White Paper on Ukraine's Defence Policy for 2021 states that in 2021, more than 30,500 soldiers began their contract service. Contract soldiers were used to fill combat positions, while conscripted soldiers are

primarily sent to serve in positions associated with the protection of the daily functioning of units, supply bases, warehouses, etc. They were not sent to participate in direct combat operations in eastern Ukraine.³⁵

It is estimated that at the time of the Russian aggression, Ukraine had 900,000 reservists trained in recent years (including about 300,000 combat veterans of the hostilities in the country's eastern regions). According to the 'White Paper on Ukraine's Defence Policy for 2021,' as many as 234,000 reserve soldiers had mobilisation assignments as part of the operational reserves of the armed forces of Ukraine. This was supposed to enable a quick supplementing of military units' personnel in the event of war.³⁶

Ukraine's Territorial Defence Force was established in accordance with the 'Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance' adopted in late 2021. This force constitutes a separate branch of Ukraine's armed forces and consists of volunteer brigades and units whose objective is to organise the local resistance movement. Territorial defence, along with the resistance movement, and the preparation of Ukrainian citizens for national resistance, all form a part of the National Resistance in Ukraine. The law only entered into force on 1 January 2022, and the first units were still being formed and trained when the Russian invasion began. In May 2022, the Ukrainian parliament amended the law, increasing both the size of the armed forces (from 25 to 32 brigades) and their powers.³⁷

The main tasks in the scope of territorial defence include, among others:

- defending and protecting the population in the designated areas of responsibility;
- participation in strengthening and protecting the state borders;
- protection of people, the natural environment, and property in crises and elimination of the effects of combat operations;
- preparing Ukrainian citizens for the organisation of national resistance;
- participation in ensuring the conditions for the safe functioning of public authorities, local government units, and elements of military command;
- protecting and defending important facilities, including critical infrastructure;
- ensuring public security and public order measures;
- implementation of the measures of a martial law legal system in the event of its introduction in the entire territory of Ukraine or in its individual sections;
- participation in the fight against diversionary and reconnaissance forces;
- participation in information warfare.³⁸

The Territorial Defence Forces recruited Ukrainian citizens between the ages of 18 and 60. People who had not previously served in the armed forces of Ukraine or other services were required to first undergo special introductory training and to take the military oath.³⁹

Already in the first days after the Russian invasion, more than 100,000 Ukrainians applied to join the territorial defence. On the second day of fighting, more than 18,000 weapons were handed over to them in Kyiv alone.⁴⁰

Cooperation with NATO and Decentralisation of the Decision-Making Process

After 2014, cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance was intensified, and Ukraine benefited from special funds created at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014. As a result, Kyiv was able to, among other things, build a secure communication system, which it lacked back in 2014.⁴¹ One important element of building resilience and deepening cooperation was the joint exercises of the Ukrainian army and NATO.

Thanks to its cooperation with NATO and the availability of good models, Ukraine was also able to reform the military command structure. Before these changes, the army encountered two main problems: the lack of good mid-level leaders/commanders in the officer corps and the organisation of command at the highest level. This was due to the fact that the Ukrainian army was still based on old Soviet models, where initiative and responsibility were not well perceived, which created an attitude of waiting for direct orders from superiors. This partly explained the paralysis of Ukrainian forces in Crimea. Right before the full-scale Russian aggression in February 2022, Ukraine decided to build a professional sergeant corps in the armed forces. The goals of this reform included improvements in the areas of training and skills, social benefits, and interoperability with NATO.⁴²

In the first phase of the war, the decentralisation of decision-making in the Ukrainian armed forces, carried out in the years 2014–2022, gave Ukrainians an advantage over the Russian army, which had (still has?) a highly centralised, hierarchical structure. By 2022, Ukraine also had a much higher percentage of junior officers, whose entire career was already associated with independent Ukraine and who had not previously served in the Soviet army, which was often the case among senior personnel.⁴³

Involvement of the Society in Building Resilience

In recent decades, Ukrainian society has proved numerous times that it is able to mobilise and engage in activities aimed at positive changes in the state. In 2004, Ukrainians protested for many days against the seizure of power by Viktor Yanukovich. Already at that point, they had exhibited the self-organisation and solidarity which they were also to demonstrate in the following decades. For example, Kyiv residents supported the demonstrators by providing them with accommodation in their apartments and premises, as well as with food. Donation drives were used to finance the construction and heating of the ‘tent city’ in the centre of the capital.⁴⁴

This was seen on an even larger scale in 2014 during the so-called Revolution of Dignity. After President Yanukovich (who assumed office in 2010) decided to withdraw from the agreement on association with the EU and to return to close cooperation with Russia, Ukrainians once again took to the streets of Kyiv and other cities. In response to the authorities’ brutal actions and attempts to forcefully disperse the crowds, the demonstrators started taking over government administration

buildings throughout the country. After the crowds stormed the presidential palace, Yanukovych fled to Russia.⁴⁵

However, until 2014, there was still a clearly visible regional divide between the largely pro-Western, central, and western regions of Ukraine, on the one hand, and the pro-Russian eastern and southern regions, on the other hand.

In 2014, authorities banned the broadcasting of Russian TV channels in Ukraine and blocked Russian media and social networks, while a new education law further restricted the use of the Russian language in radio and in print media. These changes were introduced alongside a decommunisation campaign, which banned not only Communist symbols but also Nazi symbols and led to the demolition of Communist monuments, such as Lenin's monuments, and the elimination of Communist symbols from public buildings.⁴⁶

The full-scale invasion of 2022 was a turning point for the strengthening of Ukrainian identity, which was associated with a growing use of the Ukrainian language at the expense of the Russian language throughout Ukraine. By 2022, as much as 95% of the population identified as Ukrainian (compared to 88% in 2017). In 2022, the share of the population using only or mainly Ukrainian as the everyday language of communication was 58%, compared to 49% in 2017. In 2022, the number of people who were only speaking Russian (6%) or mainly speaking Russian (9%) fell to single-digit values from 12% and 14% in 2017, respectively. Even in the east and south of the country, the number of people who speak only Ukrainian exceeds the number who speak only Russian.⁴⁷ As a result, there were virtually no differences in terms of identity between the various regions of Ukraine.

Because of these changes in attitudes, in 2022, there was a visible gap in terms of morale and motivation to fight between Russian and Ukrainian soldiers. Ukrainian soldiers were aware that they were fighting to defend their country against an aggressor and that they had the support of their compatriots. In turn, Russian soldiers were often mobilised against their will and sent to fight in a foreign country, often without even knowing why. There are many indications that they expected to be greeted as liberators but found themselves in the position of occupiers in a hostile environment. The readiness to defend Ukraine increased in the course of preparations for the Russian invasion. According to a public opinion survey of 1 March 2022, as many as 59% of respondents said that they were ready to take up arms in defence of Ukraine. This readiness to actively defend Ukraine also includes the occupied territories in the south of the country, where an underground guerrilla movement continues to resist the Russian occupation. Although it is not strong enough to end the occupation itself, it makes it difficult for Russia to govern these regions and undermines the Russian narrative that the Russian occupiers were welcomed by the local Ukrainian population.⁴⁸

The citizens were also very actively involved in national defence activities after 24 February 2022. Volunteers played a very important role in building resilience after the outbreak of the full-scale conflict by organising and engaging in various efforts, including fundraisers for the armed forces and the purchases of weapons, uniforms, food, equipment, or bulletproof vests for soldiers fighting on the front lines. One particularly noteworthy phenomenon is the exceptional creativity in

combining civilian IT knowledge with military measures. For example, Ukrainian volunteers developed a simple mobile phone app enabling civilians to report sightings of incoming Russian drones and missiles, which increased the likelihood of them being shot down before reaching their target.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The research conducted indicates that Ukraine successfully used the eight years between the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of hostilities in the eastern regions (2014) and the start of a full-scale war with Russia (2022) in order to build the state and society's resilience to threats. Back in 2014, Kyiv was unable to resist aggressive steps by the RF. There was a shortage of political will, which resulted in decision paralysis and a lack of clear orders regarding the involvement of the armed forces. Moreover, the potential of the latter was also insufficient to effectively counteract Russia's military activities.

The foundations for the development of a system of resilience were laid by the basic strategic documents issued at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century. The 'National Security Strategy of Ukraine' (2020) set out strategic principles for the formation and functioning of the security system, based on the principles of containment, resilience, and cooperation. The proposal to involve various institutions in the development of the state's resilience was also presented there. In turn, the 'Defence Strategy of Ukraine' (2021) drew attention to the issue of deterrence based on, among other things, the potential of territorial defence forces and the organisation of a resistance movement in the occupied territories. The strategic concepts were presented in greater detail and implemented under the 'Law on the Fundamentals of National Resistance and activities aimed at building total national defence based on territorial defence forces, the resistance movement, and public preparation in the event of war.'

The armed forces of Ukraine have also undergone thorough reforms and modernisation in order to be able to counter the military threat posed by Moscow. Financial expenditures on defence-related tasks have increased. The command system of the armed forces was reformed in cooperation with the armies of NATO countries, with a focus towards its decentralisation. The personnel potential of the regular armed forces and reserves was increased, which was facilitated by an increase in the limits for admission of volunteers to contractual service and the re-establishment of compulsory military service as part of universal conscription. Special Operations Forces were established and were built on the model of similar formations of NATO countries – in contrast to the previous 'Spetsnaz' special units. Territorial Defence Forces were also established and were based in large part on volunteers who could successfully combine their service in the territorial defence with their existing civilian life. Territorial defence was supposed to become one of the most important elements of national resistance. These actions proved to be exceptionally effective and prepared the Ukrainian defence system for the task of stopping Russian aggression in 2022. The armed forces were well commanded, and the morale of the soldiers was high. There was – and still is – a resistance

movement in the occupied territories, based primarily on the soldiers of the Special Operations Forces and the Territorial Defence Forces.

However, it seems that the biggest success occurred with regard to the changes in the national consciousness of Ukrainian citizens. The previous divisions between the pro-Western West and the pro-Russian East virtually ceased to exist. More and more citizens are mainly using Ukrainian in everyday communication. The pro-state and pro-defence attitudes of Ukrainians became apparent, especially in the last months before the Russian aggression in 2022, which was manifested in numerous grass-roots initiatives aimed at strengthening the country's defence potential and in widespread interest in defence training organised for volunteers. The Ukrainian society passed its own test after the outbreak of the war. Only in the first days of the conflict, tens of thousands of volunteers joined operational forces, territorial defence, and the spontaneously established self-defence formations. Society supported the military effort by raising funds for the needs of the army, becoming involved in logistical and medical assistance, and conducting reconnaissance for the armed forces. Civilians became engaged in passive and active resistance against the occupiers in the occupied territories. Russians' predictions that they would be welcomed in Ukraine as liberators and friends did not come true: Ukrainian society clearly identified them as invaders. Its attitude had a positive effect on the morale of the soldiers involved in combat.

The activities aimed at building the resilience of the state and society in Ukraine may become a great source of experience and conclusions for building resilience in other countries, especially in the context of Russia's aggressive rhetoric. They should certainly be analysed in the countries of Central and Central-Eastern Europe, which are directly threatened by Russia's actions. This is particularly important because the initiatives undertaken by Kyiv after 2014 turned out to be effective and brought tangible results, which were visible after the outbreak of full-scale war with Russia.

Notes

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2 The Axiological Dimension of the Political Leadership of Volodymyr Zelenskyy

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Introduction

The various qualities of political leadership are shaped as a result of experiences and also personality dispositions to a certain behaviour. In other words, it is the political situation that, to some extent, determines what kind of leader one can become. A particular situation is war, which inevitably affects the evolution of political leadership. Volodymyr Zelenskyy won the presidential election (2019) as a leader who promised change, fighting corruption, streamlining the administration, and surrounding himself with specialists in various fields. His lack of previous political experience resulted in him having to surround himself with people who had such experience. This resulted in a peculiar political system beginning to take shape after he assumed the presidency – that is, power began to concentrate in the hands of the head of state and the Office of the President, while at the same time, the actual importance of the Verkhovna Rada – that is, the legislative body – diminished.¹ Quite quickly, it became apparent that the war situation forced an accelerated lesson in Zelenskyy's new leadership. Since February 2022, we have been watching Zelenskyy as a wartime leader facing new challenges. These relate to the military sphere and international relations, including the search for not only allies (financial and military support) but also internal politics focused on society, national identity, patriotism, and symbolic politics.

The aim of the chapter is to present Zelenskyy through the lens of the axiological dimension of leadership. Thus, the analysis focuses on those aspects of leadership that allow for the presentation of a catalogue of qualities and actions based on values relevant to Ukrainian society. The analysis presented does not cover the entire phenomenon but rather key moments in the transformation of the Ukrainian president's leadership towards values.

To achieve this goal, the following research questions were formulated: what are the characteristics of the axiological dimension of leadership? How was Volodymyr Zelenskyy's leadership formed before the start of the full-scale war? How was the axiological dimension of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's leadership formed after the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine? The following research methods were used for the analysis: historical method, analysis of found data, and content analysis.

The Axiological Dimension of Political Leadership

The starting point for defining the axiological leadership dimension is the interactional theory of leader emergence. In general, it assumes the processual nature of leadership and the interaction between the politician and his or her followers. This theory indicates, therefore, that there is an interaction between the leader and the characteristics of the leader. In other words, a politician becomes a leader as a result of social perceptions about him or her or, in other words, as a result of social perception. People may attribute various qualities to the leader; they believe in his effectiveness and also in his courage and strength.² It can be concluded that the war shaped Zelenskyy as a political leader, but it should also be emphasised that this was possible due to the specifics of political action and personality characteristics. The axiological dimension of leadership should be considered as a type of leadership in which values play a key role; hence, it is assumed that this dimension of leadership is based on values. In general, we are dealing with moral values. The situation of war in particular places such values at the top of the hierarchy. These include, for example, courage, responsibility for the national community, and patriotism. Axiological leadership is defined in the literature as moral and ethical, which is why we decided to introduce an axiological dimension to leadership.

One concept of transformational leadership is that of James MacGregor Burns. It shows that the role of a leader is not only to inspire people to achieve goals but also to transform their values, aspirations, and needs, leading to moral and social development. Referring to the aforementioned concept, transformational leadership, it is worth pointing out, following James MacGregor Burns, values including security (community, family, and personal), and then, with the development of industry and the democratic system, human rights initially expressed in the U.S. Constitution, 'We are the People of the United States (1787)' became important, in which the 'Blessing of Liberty' was indicated as the highest value. The subsequent French Declaration of the Rights of Man introduced 'liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.' The most important document in the field of human rights is the Declaration of Human Rights.³ The above legal acts, in addition to the heritage of Greco-Roman antiquity, Christianity, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, became the foundation of Western values that inspired both Ukrainian revolutions (2004 and 2013–2014) and are the basis for the renewed (reunion) East–West conflict. Axiological leadership, on the one hand, gives credibility to the leader and, on the other hand, strengthens the relationship between the leader and his followers. Values largely help both to transform society towards positive goals and are an important factor in mobilising followers and polarising society.⁴

The concept of servant leadership, having high efficiency indicators in terms of group management, is an inspiration to achieve goals and, at the same time, can be effective in the analysis of a crisis situation such as war.⁵ One of the creators of this concept is Robert K. Greenleaf, who proposed a model of the leader as a servant who primarily serves others – supporting their development, well-being, and community needs. In its original version, the concept refers to organisations, teams, or institutions. The central idea of servant leadership is that one first serves and then

is a leader. Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership is defined by ten key principles: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. These principles emphasise a leadership approach focused on serving the needs of others and fostering growth within individuals and the wider community.⁶

The identified key values constructing servant leadership, such as caring, development of people (in a situation of war, e.g. a necessary career change), community, and shared responsibility, are values that place moral responsibility and acting in the interest of the whole, rather than one's own, at the forefront.

In the following part of the article, not only Zelenskyy's actions will be indicated, but also some statements containing his attitude to the war, to society, and also to his own role in this wartime period will be indicated. It should be noted that more than three years of war and various difficulties in Ukraine have resulted in varying assessments of Zelenskyy's popularity and expressed public support. Literature on Volodymyr Zelenskyy covers two stages of his leadership, before and after the start of the full-scale war in 2022. The first part is typically addressed in texts on artistic and communication skills,⁷ while the second part concerns his activities as president of Ukraine, including his value-based leadership.⁸ The issue of axiological leadership has been addressed relatively rarely and piecemeal, so an attempt to systematise this topic seems interesting.

Historical and Normative Background of the Formation of Axiological Leadership

The specificity of Ukraine and society is largely due to the short history of statehood; its emergence in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s was described as a 'geopolitical surprise.' This was due to the peculiarities of its geographical location. Ukraine lies both in an area of influence of various cultures, including Roman, Byzantine, Tatar, Turkish, and Russian, and at the crossroads of East and West, Latin, and Orthodox civilisations.⁹ This is confirmed by Ukraine's two identities: a Western one with European aspirations, using the Ukrainian language, and an Eastern one based on cooperation with Russia, using the Russian language. The influence of Russia and the Soviet Union has had a major impact on shaping the consciousness of Ukrainian citizens. The period of the Second World War, Stalinist totalitarianism, and the 1960s–1980s fostered widespread human rights violations, resulting in changes in people's behaviour, manifested in the emergence of phobias, social apathy, and passivity towards defending one's rights. Ukrainian society, despite its post-totalitarian characteristics, has a very strong attachment to tradition due to its history, the importance of patriarchy, and the influence of the Church (Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Moscow Orthodox Church).¹⁰

Since the creation of the Ukrainian state in 1991, the political elite has failed to define the strategic direction of foreign and security policy. The individual revolutions (2004, 2013)¹¹ were a result of 'self-organisation'¹² of Ukrainian society, a moment of uprising of the youth against the corrupt authorities cooperating with Russia. From the beginning of 2014, the conflict can be analysed in the sphere of

values: human rights, democratic system versus Russkiy Mir. Since the beginning of his presidency, President Zelenskyy has written in support of the democratic system and Ukraine's membership in the EU. It is worth noting that Zelenskyy, due to his Jewish origin and place of birth, is originally a Russian-speaking citizen and was an artist active in the Russian media market. It could be wrongly/seemingly expected that Zelenskyy would turn out to be a politician seeking compromise with Russia, preferring Russian culture and language.

Taking the above considerations into account, it should be noted that the formation of Ukrainian society's identity is not only a cultural and social process but also – in a certain sense – a normative one. Against this backdrop, the leadership of Volodymyr Zelenskyy was also shaped, encompassing multiple dimensions, including a significant axiological one.

This refers to its various dimensions, including the one shaped on the foundation of values. It seems that the war in Ukraine is a special situation when the President's actions strengthening the defence capabilities, fighting spirit, and awareness of Ukraine's territorial unity refer not only to the Constitution but also to other legal acts. The most important here is Article 65 of the Constitution of Ukraine: 'Defending the Fatherland, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, showing respect for its state symbols are the duty of Ukrainian citizens. Citizens are subject to military service in the manner prescribed by law.'¹³ The reference to the Constitution should be seen as a social (citizens) and political (leader) obligation to defend the highest values. Two laws have also become important for the formation of patriotic attitudes – from 2015, according to which the ban on communist propaganda and Soviet symbols was introduced and the renaming of streets and objects was initiated, which, among other things, is supposed to foster the construction of an identity free of imperial patterns, and the Law of March 2023, referring to the prohibition of Russian propaganda and the continuation of the decolonisation of state toponomastics, which in turn is expected to foster the construction of an autonomous historical and symbolic narrative of Ukraine.¹⁴

During Zelenskyy's presidency, the adoption of the 'Concept of the State Social Programme for Strengthening Ukrainian National and Civic Identity until 2028' (approved by the Government of Ukraine on 16 February 2024, No. 141-r) is a strategic framework act that sets the direction of state policy on patriotism and building a common identity for Ukrainian citizens. Its aim is to create systemic conditions for the development of Ukrainian national and civic identity, the strengthening of the unity of society, defence against colonial influence and Russian propaganda, patriotic education, and civic education. The expected results relate to the dissemination of the Ukrainian language among Ukrainian citizens and the sense of national identity. They are expressed as percentages, 80% and 75%, respectively. An increase in the readiness to defend the state and an increase in the number of patriotic and educational projects are further results of the adopted social programme. In addition, it draws attention to the participation of civil society and young people in public life.¹⁵ Finally, as an example of value-based measures, the Law on the Foundations of State Policy on Strengthening National and Civic Identity (enacted on 13

December 2022 and entered into force on 1 January 2023) identifies the following two objectives: firstly, it seeks to unite society by reducing socio-cultural tensions; secondly, it envisages basing all identity policy on Euro-Atlantic values and respect for citizens' rights. In pursuit of these objectives, the law provides for a number of tasks. First of all, it emphasises the formation of active civic and patriotic attitudes in Ukrainian citizens. At the same time, strengthening defence awareness and respect for state symbols such as the flag, anthem, and emblem is an important element of this policy. The law provides for measures to promote national identity both among Ukrainian residents and in the diaspora – that is, among Ukrainians living outside the country – and promote historical memory, including the honouring of war veterans and historical figures who contributed to the building of Ukrainian statehood. All these activities are crowned by the postulate of developing citizens' readiness to defend the country.¹⁶

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Leadership Before the Outbreak of Full-Scale Conflict in 2022

Volodymyr Zelenskyy was known to the wider public as an actor, comedian, and television producer in the Russian-language media market until 2014 as an entity before becoming president of Ukraine. His artistic career was built on an entertainment format popular in the Soviet Union. His first major artistic successes were on stage in Moscow and in Russian-language productions. It was not until the TV series *Servant of the Nation*, of which he was the main character, that he was able to launch his political career.¹⁷ Zelenskyy did not engage in political activity in either the Orange Revolution or the Revolution of Dignity and tried to remain neutral. This was most likely due to his professional commitments at the time. One of the landmark moments in his career, showing both political activism and a move away from an artistic career and expressing certain values that will at least determine Volodymyr Zelenskyy's attitude in the future, was his appearance on TSN's news service in Ukraine on 1 March 2014. As one of the most recognisable artists, Zelenskyy entered the studio, sat next to a journalist, and addressed President Yanukovich in Russian:

You are no longer the president of Ukraine. This is what the citizens of our country have decided, . . . there is no more President Yanukovich, step down first of all, don't fuel separatism, stop holding press conferences, . . . just leave.¹⁸

He then addressed the leaders of the Revolution of Dignity:

detach yourselves from those in the east in Crimea who want to speak Russian, give them peace, give them the legal right to use Russian, the language will never divide our homeland, Jewish blood flows in me. I am a citizen of Ukraine. I love this country and I do not want to become part of another country.¹⁹

It is worth mentioning that during the annexation of Crimea, Putin used the issue of language and ethnicity as a pretext to use military force. In the next part of the speech, he asked Vladimir Putin to stop military action:

Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich do not allow yourself even the suggestion of a military conflict Russia and Ukraine are brotherly nations we have the same skin colour, we have the same blood, we understand each other, even if not on even if we differ in language, if necessary I will beg you on my knees for it, but please do not bring our nation to its knees.²⁰

The attempt at media conciliation did not elicit much response from the Russian authorities. But it did show that Volodymyr Zelenskyy believes in his negotiating potential gained through popularity and media visibility and in the effectiveness of the negotiations. Therefore, until the last moment before a full-scale conflict erupts, he will cling to the hope that a conflict will not break out.

As a candidate in the 2019 presidential election, Volodymyr Zelenskyy has broken the previous geographical distribution of voter preferences. In previous presidential elections, the polarisation has typically been as follows: since the departure of the communists from power, Ukraine has been divided into two eastern and western parts, with the eastern part voting for Russian-speaking candidates and supporting cooperation with Russia (Viktor Yanukovych), while the western, Ukrainian-speaking part sought cooperation with the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (Viktor Yushchenko, Yulia Tymoshenko, and Petro Poroshenko). In the first round of the election (as shown on the map below), V. Zelenskyy received the most support in the central part of Ukraine, stretching north and south to the east. In the second round, he won in every oblast except Lviv (where he received support at 34.2%). He received significant support in the Dnipropetrovsk region (with 45.3% of the vote in the first round), the Odessa region (41.3%), and the Mykolaiv region (40.7%).²¹

In 2019–2022, Volodymyr Zelenskyy faced various social problems. At the beginning of the term, numerous laws were passed at the president's initiative. The first ones concerned the removal of parliamentary immunity, presidential impeachment, and combating corruption. On 17 October 2019, the Verkhovna Rada adopted amendments to the anti-corruption law, thus fulfilling Zelenskyy's presidential campaign promise to pay a reward of 10% of the value of funds recovered by the state to individuals who provide information about corrupt officials. Subsequent bills concerned electoral reform. Parliamentary and local elections will be held under a proportional system, replacing the mixed system, which elects half of the deputies in single-member districts. In recent years, this has led to political dysfunction and corruption.²² A new Electoral Code was introduced in 2019 and revised in 2022, establishing 40% gender parity at all levels of elections, from national to local. This means that the electoral committee authorities should ensure the presence of at least two candidates of different sexes in each of the five consecutive candidates (seats one through five and six through ten). This mechanism does not apply to elections at the village, settlement, and city council levels with up to 10,000 voters, in which case a parity of 30% remains.²³ Subsequent laws concerned

streamlining the operations of the General Prosecutor's Office; deregulatory nature, including the invalidation of many regulations in force since Soviet times; increasing the transparency of public finances (e.g. the launch of the 'E-Kontrakt' platform enabling ongoing monitoring of budget expenditures); concessions facilitating the lease of state-owned facilities by foreign companies; another law lifting the moratorium on arable land trade; and the so-called banking law, which hindered the recovery of banks nationalised in 2014–2016 by their previous owners.²⁴

Hence, the aforementioned laws, which referred to the need to shape Ukrainian identity, popularise the Ukrainian language and launch educational programmes shaping a sense of citizenship. One of the first laws that came into force at the beginning of V. Zelenskyy's term was the law 'On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language,' which ensured the priority of the Ukrainian language in many areas of public life, including public administration, media, education, culture, advertising, and services. Article 1 of the law defined the state status of the Ukrainian language as an inseparable element of the constitutional order of Ukraine as a unitary state (Article 1, paragraph 3). The law stated that the Ukrainian language is a factor of the unity and national security of Ukraine (Article 1, paragraph 8). The law was positively received by some members of society. Sociological research conducted by the Razumkov Centre in cooperation with the Democratic Initiatives Foundation indicated that the Ukrainian state language is the most important attribute of an independent Ukrainian state, even more so than the flag, anthem, and coat of arms of Ukraine. Thirty-six per cent of citizens are proud of their national language, and another 55% have a positive attitude towards it, for a total of 91% (an overwhelming majority).²⁵

February 2022 proved to be a test for Zelenskyy. A test of his courage and responsibility to defend the state.

The Axiological Dimension of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Leadership After the Outbreak of the Full-Scale Conflict in 2022

The axiological dimension of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's leadership was evident from the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. His actions and communications point to several key values that constitute one dimension of his leadership, as shown in Table 2.1.²⁶

A detailed analysis of the values presented in the table is now to be proceeded with. Values of courage and responsibility: Zelenskyy chose to remain in Kyiv despite the threat to his life. When he was offered an evacuation, he replied, 'I need ammunition, not a lift.' On the very first day after the outbreak of war, we could see Zelenskyy walk out onto Bank Street, stand in front of a building that every resident of Ukraine recognises, and say to the camera,

Every other day information comes out that I have escaped somewhere from the Ukrainian Kyiv from my office, but as you can see I am still in my place. Andri Borisovich is here no one has escaped anywhere, here we are working.³²

Table 2.1 Table of statements corresponding to values in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches after the outbreak of full-scale conflict in 2022

Values		Volodymyr Zelenskyy's statements after the outbreak of full-scale conflict in 2022
1.	1. Courage and responsibility	'I need ammunition, not a lift.' 'What makes us Ukrainians? Courage. If everyone had at least 10% of the courage that Ukrainians have, there would be no threat to international law.' ²⁷
2.	2. Democracy and freedom	'If everyone had at least 10% of the courage that Ukrainians have,. . . There would be no threat to freedom. We fight every day so that everyone on the planet finally understands that we are not a colony . . . but . . . an independent state.' ²⁸
3.	3. Empathy and closeness to citizens	'I am staying not running away.' 'I will be here with my people, in a place where war is being fought.' ²⁹
4.	4. Service and sacrifice	'I am not an icon. Ukraine is an icon' (to a CNN journalist at the start of the war). ³⁰
5.	5. Unity and solidarity	'All stages of the history of Ukraine's statehood, its defence and struggle for it can be described in one sentence: we were, we are and we will be.' ³¹

Source: Marek Strączek, *Potęga ulotnych słów. Komunikacyjny fenomen Zeleńskiego* (Warsaw: Edison Team.pl, 2022).

This attitude made him a symbol of courage and steadfastness – not only for Ukrainians but also for the international community.

The value of democracy and freedom: Zelenskyy constantly emphasises the importance of freedom, sovereignty, and democracy, placing these values above personal or political interest. His speeches often refer to universal principles of freedom and human rights. The value of empathy and closeness to citizens: as a former actor and comedian, Zelenskyy has a unique ability to communicate with people in an authentic and emotionally engaging way. He regularly addresses citizens, often in simple, direct language, building a relationship of trust and community. The value of service and sacrifice: Zelenskyy shows that leadership is service, not power for power's sake. In difficult moments, he does not run away from responsibility but stands at the head of the nation, showing a willingness to make sacrifices. The value of unity and solidarity: instead of dividing, Zelenskyy unites people around a common cause – the defence of the homeland. He calls for solidarity both at home and abroad, being able to mobilise massive international support. An example is Zelenskyy's speech in the EU Parliament on 1 March 2022.

Zelenskyy repeatedly stressed that, with his knowledge of the identities of both peoples, he has been able to create a thread of understanding and conduct effective peace negotiations. He was confident that, thanks to his popularity and recognition in the Russian-speaking media, he would be able to reconcile the warring nations. On 3 March 2022, in the midst of a full-scale war at one of his first press

conferences in Kyiv, he said, 'I understand well the mentality of these nations I know what unites us, what divides us, where are the points of contact that can help us avoid war and live in peace.'³³

After the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine, observers and experts expected President Zelenskyy to flee the country and wage war from the area of another state. It turned out that he surprised the world public opinion with his courage, sense of duty, and mission. After refusing to go abroad, he handed over the conduct of the war effort to General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, while he himself began an organised campaign to obtain weapons from around the world.³⁴ Overnight, Zelenskyy became a symbol of resistance and the fight against the invaders. His highly developed communicative competence helped him transform his image as a leader so quickly. One could use the statement 'getting into character,' as in the case of a specific film role. An additional strength of President Zelenskyy was his ease in connecting with a wider audience using generally available equipment, in this case, a mobile phone and social media. Initially, X, Telegram, and Facebook became his main weapons, in addition to diplomatic channels (permanent phone calls with state leaders). The actions of President Zelenskyy and Ukraine were supported by Western public opinion, whose leaders united in the face of the Russian threat. Realistically, Ukraine as a state that was attacked did not have much capacity and defence potential to defend its territory.

The greatest resource was specialised human capital,³⁵ allowing them to survive and organise effective resistance to the aggressors. The sense of threat from the encroaching Russian army helped unite the Ukrainian people – previously divided into two parts/identities, Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking – to speak one national language, Ukrainian, and made pro-Russian Ukrainians anti-Russian.³⁶ There is no longer a division into 'two Ukrainians.' Anti-Russianism is a component of the modern national identity of Ukrainians.

In the context of the values present in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's public speeches, it is worth quoting some of his statements made both in Ukraine and on the international stage. In a speech by Volodymyr Zelenskyy on 1 March 2022, at the European Parliament, he said,

Today we are giving our lives for our values and for our rights. I would like to hear from you that Ukraine's choice of Europe is something you can confirm to us. I may have some time, because we are not being fired on at the moment. This morning was a tragic morning for us 2 cruise missiles hit Kharkiv. We are fighting for our land and our freedom. No one will fight for the freedom of our country except us, but I believe every street after today will be called freedom square in every city of our country. No one will break us, we are strong, we are Ukrainians.³⁷

The speech reaffirms the defence of fundamental democratic values such as freedom, property ownership, independence, and sovereignty in political decision-making. These are fundamental values that confirm Ukraine's affiliation with Western Europe.

In turn, in a speech in the Polish Parliament on 11 March 2022, Zelenskyy emphasised: 'Already on the first day of the war it was clear that there are no borders between our nations. I am grateful to Poland for this.' He went on to add,

You have welcomed our people into your families with brotherly kindness and you don't want anything for it, you do it out of a good heart. This is the historic mission of Poland and Ukraine – to be together, to be leaders to stop the transformation of Europe into a victim, to pull Europe out of the abyss and danger.³⁸

Zelenskyy used specific content, references, and metaphors when addressing a specific audience. Speaking to the House of Commons on 8 March 2022, he invoked the Shakespearean question, 'Be or not to be?' saying, 'Well, we asked it to ourselves 13 days ago. Today, we are already certain that we are choosing "to be."' In a March 16 speech to the U.S. Congress, Zelenskyy recalled the events surrounding the terrorist attack and the demolition of the World Trade Centre towers in 2001. He said that every day, Ukraine experiences the same thing that America experienced with the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941 or during the 11 September 2001 attacks.³⁹

This rhetoric has played and continues to play a huge role in the ongoing war. It is clear that appeals to values and basic human rights are intended to sensitise the international community to the ongoing war, to encourage foreign governments to help, and to mobilise Ukrainian society to support the fighting soldiers. The above speeches were selected due to several factors: the date of delivery (it was the beginning of the actions after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine), the use of rhetorical devices (comparisons, rhetorical questions, and repetitions), and the building of a specific narrative about the war in Ukraine (freedom, democracy, and independence).⁴⁰

In this context, it is worth noting Zelenskyy's New Year's speech to the Ukrainian people, which should be interpreted as the essence of axiological communication.⁴¹ New Year's speeches have special significance. They serve not only as a kind of summary of the old year but also as a welcome to the new. In times of war, people need kind, positive words. The crux of the speech was values, first of all, patriotism and national identity. Analysing this speech, one can point out that value-based leadership or servant leadership has entered another phase, as if it is more mature. Unfortunately, the accelerator of this new phase is war. At the time of writing this chapter, there is no indication that the end of the war or at least a suspension of operations is imminent. Quite the opposite. The daily bombardment of Ukrainian cities and villages offers no hope for peace.

In the speech cited earlier, Zelenskyy highlights several key issues that demonstrate the characteristics of his leadership:

1. The image of Ukraine as a state of pride and steadfastness. In his first words, Zelenskyy states: 'Behind me is the "Motherland." Ukraine that stands firmly on

its feet. It does not bow its head.⁴² This is a strong metaphor for the motherland as a female figure – a mother who stands proudly, does not bend, and does not run away. This image embodies a proud national identity – Ukraine is independent and strong.

2. Patriotism as a personal and collective experience. Zelenskyy emphasises that Ukrainianness is not an abstraction but an everyday presence: in those who fight, teach, heal, defend, work, and build. ‘People for whom being a citizen of Ukraine is a matter of pride.’⁴³ National identity is defined not by a passport but by deed and attitude – whoever ‘держит независимость на своих плечах’ [‘holds independence on its shoulders’]⁴⁴ is a patriot. Patriotism is also a communal emotion, the president says, with everyone crying together in joy and pain. It is a community of feeling and action.
3. Children as the future of the nation. ‘This is what we are fighting for. This is who our heroes protect above all.’⁴⁵ Strong emphasis on children and the younger generation – learning in the subway and creating technical solutions for the army. This is not only the future of national identity but also living proof that Ukrainian identity is resilient, innovative, and enduring.
4. Ukraine as a community of free people. ‘You are not family here, you are temporary.’⁴⁶ (words to the occupiers). This is one of the most powerful sentences. It points to an internal, indestructible national identity: one can be occupied physically but not mentally. Ukrainianness is a spirit of freedom that does not surrender to any violence.
5. Ukrainian dignity as a source of strength and pride. Zelenskyy talks about scientists, engineers, and athletes who represent the character of the nation with their work and talent: ‘It’s about our character. It’s about who we are and what we can do.’⁴⁷ National identity is expressed by qualities such as courage, pride, and persistence. Ukrainians are strong because they have dignity – and the whole world can see it.
6. Message to occupied territories and emigrants. ‘And where Ukraine will one day return to be together.’ ‘Those who are now abroad, but have kept Ukraine within themselves.’⁴⁸ This is a very important message: national identity does not end at the border; it cannot be uprooted or replaced. Being Ukrainian is a state of mind, loyalty, and a bond with the community.
7. Symbolism of language, names, and cultural codes. Zelenskyy stresses that Ukraine is not only reclaiming territories and people but also creating its own meanings and symbols: ‘Palyanytsya,’ ‘Peklo,’ ‘Ruta,’ ‘Neptune,’ and ‘Sapsan’ – these are no longer just words but the language of identity and resistance, building a cultural wall against the enemy.
8. International patriotism: Ukraine as a moral leader. ‘This is what respect for Ukraine sounds like. This is what independence is.’⁴⁹ National identity is elevated in the eyes of the world. Ukraine is a moral symbol, an inspiration to other nations: Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus. Zelenskyy emphasises that freedom is a global value, but it is Ukrainians who are its main guardians today.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The analysis presented here considers one of the dimensions of political leadership – the axiological dimension. The basis for the analysis undertaken is the relational conception of politics⁵¹ and the interactional conception of leadership. Such a theoretical background implies a focus on Zelenskyy's personality and behaviour. This ignores the institutional dimension of politics and leadership. It should be emphasised here that the focus on the leader–citizen relationship, in which both personality traits and dispositions to specific behaviours are exposed, made it possible to achieve the goal of the research and present Zelenskyy as an axiological leader. In addition, it was indicated that his leadership can be described in terms of servant leadership. Thus, it should be pointed out that it is servant leadership, despite its non-political aetiology, that has the potential to be implied in the political leadership sciences.

Based on the collected sources, we conclude that Zelenskyy's leadership is based on values, including courage, patriotism, and inclusive communication with society. Research on Zelenskyy's axiological leadership indicates that after winning the presidential election, a significant issue was the emerging national identity and the need to address social problems. After the outbreak of war, Zelenskyy shaped his leadership based on values, primarily courage. Personal predispositions and communication style provide the foundation for the development of servant leadership. Therefore, in relation to the research questions formulated, it should be stated that both stages of leadership are qualitatively different but complementary.

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3 Values in the Crossfire

An Analysis of Fake News Narratives About the War in Ukraine¹

Dorota Domalewska and Paweł Zawadzki

Introduction

The information space has become a central arena of geopolitical competition, in which disinformation plays a key role in shaping public opinion and influencing political processes. The armed conflict in Ukraine, ongoing since 2014, stands as one of the most prominent examples. Russian disinformation campaigns not only distort facts and fabricate events but also deliberately invoke specific values in order to construct an alternative informational reality and influence political decision-making. Over the past decade, the Kremlin has been systematically producing fake news and manipulated narratives by developing innovative propaganda techniques and pursuing a strategy of information weaponisation. State-controlled media have systematically disseminated disinformation to cultivate an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility. A key element of this strategy is the construction of narratives that seek to justify Russian aggression, mainly by framing Ukraine as a ‘neo-Nazi’ state.²

In the context of the ongoing information war, it is essential to understand the axiological mechanisms embedded in disinformation and their effects on audiences. Disinformation often relies on manipulation and emotional appeal to shape societal values. There is a pressing need for further research into values and discourse in the context of disinformation to better understand the mechanisms through which it exerts influence. Most studies on Russian disinformation in Ukraine focus on strategic objectives, methods of dissemination, impact on public perception, and countermeasures to combat its spread. An axiological perspective, however, has not been comprehensively examined. The methodological gap lies in the underutilisation of critical discourse analysis and linguistic–axiological analysis (LAA) in investigating the ethical and value-based dimensions of disinformation. Given the limitations of the approaches in prior research, the study offers an original contribution to the field of social sciences by applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) and LAA. Its aim is to identify and analyse the values embedded in fake news narratives concerning the war in Ukraine and to examine how these values are used to manipulate audiences. The research focuses on the axiological dimension of disinformation. It explores the ways in which values are framed and instrumentalised in the context of the war. Based on a sample of 25 fake news articles published in

2024–2025 and retrieved from pro-Kremlin media sources, the research employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. By systematically analysing the ideological and strategic functions of values in disinformation, the study provides a deeper understanding of how manipulated narratives shape public perceptions and influence political discourse. As part of this volume's broader analysis of Ukrainian society under conditions of war, the chapter focuses on how disinformation weaponises values to undermine democratic institutions, distort public discourse, and influence international opinion. It offers a discourse-based lens on the information strategies used against Ukraine, complementing the volume's perspective on the axiological dimensions of war.

Disinformation and the Manipulation of Values: A Contextual Overview

Russian Disinformation in Ukraine

Extensive research has been conducted on Russian disinformation in Ukraine, focusing on strategic objectives, methods of dissemination, impact on public perception, and countermeasures implemented to combat its spread. Disinformation campaigns function as an element of hybrid warfare where manipulated narratives aim to influence or disrupt policy decisions³ and their execution without clear attribution or the risk of retribution, thereby avoiding the associated negative political and economic costs.⁴ Furthermore, these campaigns intend to achieve geopolitical objectives: to gain support for their own policies, shape the public policies of adversaries,⁵ and influence international discourse.⁶

The dissemination of false narratives occurs through various channels, including social media,⁷ traditional media,⁸ and direct state-sponsored propaganda.⁹ Russian state-controlled media, especially Channel One, systematically crafts and disseminates fabricated stories that align with the Kremlin's broader political agenda. These narratives are not random instances of misinformation but carefully structured propaganda designed to evoke emotional reactions, reinforce national identity, and justify Russian policies domestically and internationally.¹⁰ Russian disinformation in Ukraine aims to restore Russia's influence in the region, reinforce the myth of President Putin as the unifier of 'historical Russian territories,' and create divisions in the EU.¹¹ These narratives are highly effective because when the media continuously repeat certain themes, such as Ukraine's alleged 'Nazi threat,' they become socially accepted realities for many audiences. In Russia's war against Ukraine, fake news narratives serve as a strategic discursive tool to justify military actions and construct polarised ideological narratives. In authoritarian regimes, where freedom of the press is systematically restricted, fake news functions as an instrument of state-sanctioned truth that replaces independent journalism with government-approved propaganda.¹² As a result, fake news has become a mechanism of ideological reinforcement and political control in which historical, political, and ethical values are manipulated to serve ideological ends.

According to Aaron Erlich and Calvin Garner, pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns in Ukraine are guided by three key strategic objectives: promoting Russia's image, undermining Ukraine, and discrediting the West across four key topics: economy, politics, history, and the military.¹³ The main goal is to present Russia as a strong, stable, and benevolent global actor. Disinformation narratives highlight Russia's economic resilience, military strength, and moral superiority over the West. At the same time, Russian disinformation actively seeks to weaken Ukraine by portraying it as a failed state. Common narratives emphasise corruption, economic mismanagement, and political instability, all designed to erode trust in Ukrainian institutions and leadership. Ukrainians are repeatedly exposed to claims that their country is on the verge of economic collapse, that its government is controlled by Western interests, and that Ukrainian military forces commit war crimes. Such narratives foster scepticism and disillusionment in order to destabilise the country from within. Finally, pro-Kremlin disinformation aims to discredit Ukraine's Western allies, including NATO, the EU, and the United States. These narratives accuse the West of imperialistic ambitions, exploitation, and hypocrisy, often suggesting that Western institutions are corrupt and that Ukraine is merely a pawn in broader geopolitical struggles. Western democracy is presented as weak or in decline in order to discourage Ukrainians from Euro-Atlantic integration and sow doubt about the reliability of Western support.¹⁴

The Role of Media in Ideological Struggles and Value Negotiation

The media play a crucial role in constructing, maintaining, and reshaping societal values. Through framing, selective emphasis, and omission of perspectives, the media influence how the public interprets events and constructs values. Certain aspects of reality may be easily emphasised, while others are downplayed, shaping public discourse and societal priorities. Media have various instruments at their disposal to do this, including the prioritisation of elite voices, reinforcement of dominant perspectives, negativity, sensationalism, and eyewitness accounts. Thereby, they preserve existing narratives and societal hierarchies.

Media serve not only an informational function but also an axiological one. Media do not merely report facts; they also construct and reinforce values by framing issues in a particular way. According to Monika Bednarek,¹⁵ eliteness serves to legitimise specific views by frequently attributing authority to political leaders, experts, and official sources – a practice used to maintain existing power structures. The over-reliance on elite sources means that alternative or grassroots perspectives do not appear in the mainstream media. They preserve existing narratives and societal hierarchies by reinforcing dominant perspectives. This is especially evident in political reporting, where journalists often frame debates using binary oppositions (e.g. 'progressive' vs. 'conservative,' 'democratic' vs. 'authoritarian'), which limits nuanced discussions and reinforces entrenched ideological positions. Media reinforce divisions by constructing 'us-versus-them' narratives, often positioning groups such as the nation against elites or conservatives against liberals. Through

selective representation and framing, media endorse or challenge specific value systems, thereby contributing to social polarisation.

Media images, narratives, and spectacles, thus, help shape world-views and values: what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols and myths through which a common culture is shaped. They demonstrate who holds power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who must remain subordinate.¹⁶ Public discourse becomes a site of struggle, where competing forces attempt to establish dominant definitions of values. Media frequently repeat slogans, use emotionally charged language, and create strategic framing to reinforce specific value systems. Language is not a neutral tool; it plays a crucial axiological role in shaping how values are constructed, interpreted, and contested. It defines and assigns meaning to concepts such as democracy, tradition, and normalcy.¹⁷ This aligns with Norman Fairclough's¹⁸ concept of the dialectical relationship between texts and society, where media coverage both mirrors and shapes cultural and social norms. In the dialectical relationship, texts are shaped by social structures (e.g. power, institutions, and ideology); however, they also have the capacity to reshape society by constructing, legitimising, or challenging dominant values and world-views. For example, a news article on war is not only a description of events but also a discursive act that legitimises or delegitimises certain actions, actors, and policies. Through framing and deliberate use of language, media shape public perception of war as just, unjust, necessary, or avoidable. Victims and aggressors may be selectively constructed; therefore, the media influence public sentiment and foster sympathy for certain groups while demonising others. Such moral framing of conflicts not only justifies military actions but also shapes long-term narratives about national identity, justice, and global power dynamics.

Certain values gain prominence in public discourse due to media emphasis. Media discourse in Poland oscillates between promoting Western values and reinforcing traditional national ideals, influencing public attitudes towards modernity, globalisation, and European integration.¹⁹ Carlos Henrique Bem Gonçalves and Argus Romero Abreu De Morais²⁰ analysed political media discourse in Brazil to show how values are instrumentalised, polarised, and redefined by both the far right and opposition groups. Their research shows how the far right strategically manipulates values and creates a sharp binary between 'good' and 'evil.' The far right narrative is framed as a moral crusade carried out by 'patriots' who stand for 'traditional family values' against the supposed 'decadence' of the left. Religious values, in particular, are weaponised as tools for social mobilisation and political identity building. A similar process can be observed in Western media coverage of the Ukraine conflict, where mainstream media played a crucial role in shaping public perception. Oliver Boyd-Barrett²¹ argues that Western media coverage of the Ukraine crisis was not only a neutral transmission of facts but also a deeply ideological process. Through selective framing, strategic emphasis on certain narratives, and the omission of alternative perspectives, media outlets helped construct a moral framework that justified Western geopolitical interests while delegitimising opposing viewpoints.

Moral and ideological values can be easily framed through language and used as tools to polarise society. Political discourse often manipulates values to serve specific agendas, reinforce divisions, and exclude opponents.²² Anna Duszak²³ highlights how language functions as a mechanism of persuasion and ideological influence, where slogans and simplistic labels such as ‘traditional values,’ ‘normalcy,’ or ‘Europeanisation’ replace substantive debate. This process trivialises public discourse and reduces complex issues to populist simplifications that evoke emotional responses rather than critical engagement. In many cases, values are not only distorted and oversimplified but also replaced by personalised political narratives, where ideological struggles become centred around individual leaders rather than broader societal debates. Additionally, such narratives foster distrust in institutions by portraying them as manipulative and by cultivating a sense of threat and a common enemy.²⁴

Fake News and Disinformation as Tools for Constructing Values

Fake news and disinformation do more than simply spread false information; they actively shape the interpretation of reality and influence what is perceived as true and valuable. They function as discursive practices that construct alternative realities and shape public perception and political discourse.²⁵ They are frequently created to legitimise or delegitimise specific ideologies. Through selective framing, they portray certain political actors, movements, or ideas as either virtuous or corrupt, amplifying public distrust towards opponents and reinforcing populist narratives. By fabricating scandals and exaggerating threats, fake news delegitimises political institutions and mainstream discourse. It reinforces certain values but simultaneously erodes trust in traditional sources of knowledge (e.g. anti-vaccine claims undermine the values of science and public health, while narratives suggesting that elections were rigged erode trust in democracy and social cohesion). Manipulation contributes to a change in political attitudes as well as influencing individuals’ support for particular ideologies, parties, and political figures.

Unlike standard news articles, fake news does not adhere to journalistic standards of accuracy or reliability. Instead, it creates engaging and persuasive narratives with strategies such as negativity (highlighting threats, crises, and conspiracies to create fear and urgency), exaggeration (used to amplify the significance of events, making claims appear more dramatic than they actually are), and sensationalist and shocking content. Fake news manipulates these values to enhance its allure, influence public perception, and reinforce ideological biases.²⁶ It uses powerful rhetorical strategies to augment its appeal. It frequently refers to pathos (emotional appeal), ethos (appeal to authority), and logos (logical reasoning) to make its claims appear compelling and credible. However, these rhetorical strategies are often used selectively to distort reality, construct polarising narratives that pit in-groups against out-groups, reinforce stereotypes, and evoke moral outrage.²⁷ By using emotionally charged language, oversimplified contrasts, and conspiracy-laden arguments, fake news fosters distrust towards institutions and fuels anti-political sentiments, making individuals more susceptible to misinformation and ideological manipulation.

Fake news not only misleads audiences but also shapes perceptions of reality. Through long-term exposure to manipulated narratives, value systems are actively reinforced, weakened, or redefined depending on the context and intended goal. This process leads to axiological polarisation, where different value systems become irreconcilable. In a highly polarised society, compromise becomes increasingly harder to achieve.²⁸ Designed to target specific groups, fake news strengthens ideological divides, creating echo chambers that reinforce beliefs and prevent meaningful dialogue. Therefore, the spread of fake news exacerbates societal divisions and influences cultural and ethical norms. As a result, fake news distorts public discourse, making it increasingly difficult to establish a shared reality.²⁹

Methodology

The study aims to identify and analyse the values embedded in fake news narratives concerning the war in Ukraine and examine how these values are used to manipulate audiences. Two research questions guided the study: (1) what values are used in fake news narratives about the war in Ukraine? And (2) what roles do these values play in constructing disinformation narratives? To answer the research questions, a sample of 25 fake news articles was selected on the basis of the following criteria: the sources were Ukrainian news portals, and the articles had to explicitly concern the war in Ukraine and contain elements of disinformation. The collection process followed a multistep procedure. First, we reviewed fact-checking reports published by monitoring organisations specialising in disinformation, such as EUvsDisinfo, StopFake, NASK, DFRLab, and VoxUkraine. We then traced these stories back to their original sources, which was a difficult task. Access to the original posts is frequently restricted as Ukrainian authorities quickly block disinformation content. The fake news articles were retrieved from a range of pro-Kremlin or state-aligned media outlets known for disseminating disinformation. The main sources included Фонд стратегической культуры, ВЗГЛЯД, ГОЛОС РЕГИОНОВ, Известия, RIA Novosti, Sputnik, Readovka, WarGonzo, fondsk.ru, regionvoice.ru, politnavigator.news, tsargrad.tv, vz.ru, sport-express.net, regnum.ru, iz.ru, topwar.ru, lenta.ru, interfax.ru, topcor.ru, 24tv.ua, euronews.com, peterburg.one, and ru.krymr.com. The sample was limited to articles published in 2024 and 2025 in order to include the most recent examples of fake news. The topics range from political corruption and loss of sovereignty to military failures, human rights abuses, social inequality, cultural tensions, and economic exploitation. Russia has continuously advanced its tactics in the information war, so the sample reflects the evolving sophistication of disinformation strategies.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Quantitative analysis involved content coding, categorising, and counting instances of specific value references in the dataset. Qualitative analysis included CDA and LAA. CDA was used to explore how language and rhetorical strategies, such as metaphors, imagery, and emotional appeals, are used to construct ideological meaning and legitimise certain power structures. LAA was applied to identify both explicit and implicit values embedded in fake

news content. Next, we analysed how specific values are framed and manipulated in the texts to influence public perception and justify political objectives. QDA Miner was used for coding and to assist with the analysis. The process of value coding involved identifying words and phrases with evaluative meanings across the analysed texts. A deductive approach to coding was applied, using predefined categories of cultural values to systematically classify and analyse disinformation narratives. This was followed by an examination of narrative strategies, identifying recurring patterns in fake news and analysing the overarching goals of disinformation narratives. QDA Miner facilitated this stage of analysis by providing visualisation tools and frequency analysis to allow the researchers to examine the distribution of values and recurring narrative structures. Hence, the study offers insights into how values are strategically mobilised to shape public perception and influence discourse surrounding the war in Ukraine.

The typology of values used in the coding and analysis of disinformation narratives was developed based on a literature review on disinformation themes and typologies of values described in scholarly literature. In particular, the framework integrates the conceptualisations of Milton Rokeach,³⁰ Shalom Schwartz,³¹ Ronald Inglehart,³² and Samuel Huntington,³³ whose works provide theoretical foundations for understanding how values influence political behaviour, social identity, and conflict narratives. A detailed discussion of each framework is beyond the scope of this study. These theoretical perspectives were synthesised to develop a practical framework for analysing how disinformation strategically manipulates values to shape perceptions, justify actions, and foster polarisation. Each category contains specific values that are frequently distorted or weaponised in fake news narratives to serve ideological, political, or strategic purposes:

1. Ideological and political values shape national identity, political legitimacy, and governance. Disinformation often exaggerates patriotism, sovereignty, and democracy-related concerns to create an 'us-versus-them' mentality and delegitimise opposing governments.
2. Security and threat-based values are visible in fake news stories which exploit fear or uncertainty and emphasise existential threats, instability, and external dangers.
3. Moral and ethical values play a key role in disinformation, portraying one side as heroic and the other as corrupt or oppressive. Fake news uses victimhood, injustice, and moral superiority to justify aggressive actions and condemn opponents.
4. Cultural and religious values can be seen in fake news stories that use cultural divisions and religious sentiments to position conflicts as part of a broader civilisational struggle. This is often framed as a battle between traditional and modern values, or Eastern and Western ideologies.
5. Economic and material values are used in fake news stories that manipulate perceptions of economic stability, prosperity, and resource control. Such news frames conflicts in terms of financial survival, emphasising sanctions, foreign economic influence, and exploitation.

Together, these categories represent the broader set of fundamental values that shape perceptions, influence attitudes, and motivate behaviours. Disinformation narratives manipulate public discourse by the strategic use of these values, thereby reinforcing ideological divisions and legitimising political actions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the 25 analysed fake news articles reveals that ideological and political values were the most prominent category (34.5% of all occurrences). Security and threat-based values represented 29.9% of the data; economic and material values – 18.9%; moral and ethical values – 14.2%; and cultural and religious values (in this case, the West vs. East dichotomy) – 2.5%. Figure 3.1 presents the distribution of the five primary value categories and their corresponding subcategories.

Ideological and political values were the most numerous category, with a total count of 97. This proves that Russian disinformation strives to emphasise governance problems and corruption (35 counts), undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty (24), and question political legitimacy (15) (see Table 3.1). Fake news narratives in this category aim to discredit the Ukrainian leadership by presenting it as inefficient, corrupt, and incompetent in managing the war effort and national governance. They try to erode public trust (both domestic and international) in Ukrainian institutions and foster perceptions of instability and political dysfunction. Fake news stories emphasise Ukraine’s dependency on Western powers, particularly the United States and NATO. They suggest that Ukraine is not an independent actor but rather a pawn manipulated by external forces. This framing delegitimises

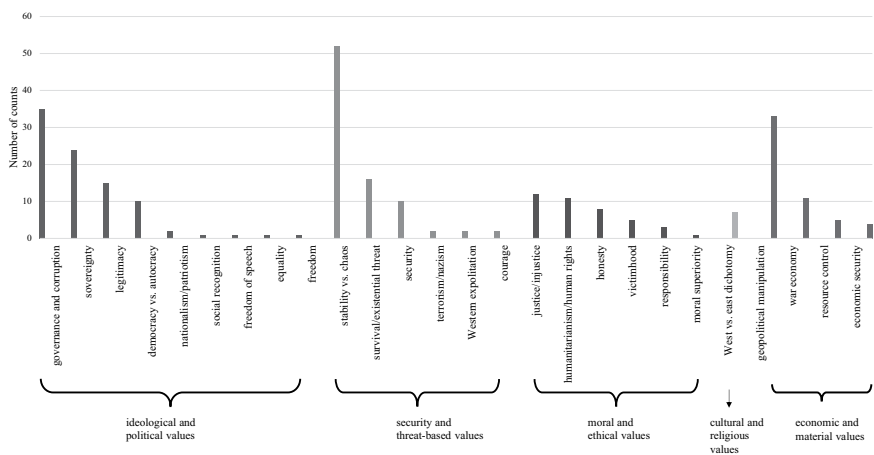


Figure 3.1 Distribution of value categories and subcategories identified in fake news narratives about the war in Ukraine.

Source: Own study

Table 3.1 Examples of ideological and political values in fake news narratives

<i>Code</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Disinformation objective</i>
governance and corruption	Zelenskyy acquired the mansion, Highgrove House, previously owned by King Charles III, for £20 million.	Presenting Ukraine's president as corrupt and self-serving, suggesting that Zelenskyy misuses financial resources for personal luxury.	Eroding trust in Ukrainian governance and discouraging further financial support from international allies (implications of corruption).
sovereignty	If the Kremlin demands Zelenskyy's departure as a prerequisite for a future Ukraine deal, Trump may see it as a perfectly acceptable and relatively low-cost concession.	Challenging Ukraine's sovereignty by implying that the decisions taken by authorities are subject to external control and portraying Ukraine as lacking true autonomy.	Undermining the image of Ukraine as an independent state and reinforcing the perception that foreign powers dictate its political decisions.
legitimacy/illegitimacy	Once again, Ukrainian soldiers criticise the command of the armed forces for repeating the same mistakes.	Undermining the legitimacy and competence of Ukraine's military leadership, suggesting systematic failures and mismanagement.	Delegitimising Ukraine's defence efforts and undermining internal morale by framing the leadership as incapable of safeguarding national interests.
democracy vs. autocracy	The lustration law was used to purge the state apparatus of 'outsiders' to make room for loyal appointees.	Attacking the democratic integrity of Ukraine by suggesting that post-Maidan reforms were authoritarian in nature, as they replaced legitimate officials with loyalists.	Depicting Ukraine as a pseudo-democracy where political decisions serve elite interests rather than genuine democratic processes.
power	One day, they may become Russians, or they may not become Russians. But, with all the money we've spent, I said that I want it back.	Ukraine's fate is subject to external influence and bargaining; Ukraine is a pawn in U.S. politics, and it is powerless in deciding its future.	Western aid as transactional as the West, especially the United States, is entitled to influence Ukraine's political destiny in return for financial support; the future of Ukraine is controlled by more powerful global actors.

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

<i>Code</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Disinformation objective</i>
nationalism/ patriotism	Medvedev compared the attack to a rabid animal biting its owner.	Using a metaphor that dehumanises Ukraine, portraying it as a reckless and irrational actor and betraying its own interests or alliances. The narrative appeals to patriotic sentiment by positioning Russia as a victim of Ukraine's aggression, thus justifying retaliatory actions as defensive.	The actions of Ukraine are irrational and aggressive; Russia needs to protect itself from unpredictable and hostile actions by Ukraine.
social recognition	Highgrove House has been used by Prince (now King) Charles since 1980 as a country residence, where he, along with Princess Diana, raised their children – Prince William and Harry.	Zelenskyy is seeking social status and recognition, and he aspires to associate with Western privilege.	Amplifying criticism of perceived elitism and disconnect from ordinary citizens.
freedom of speech	Despite Ukraine's long-standing ban on such broadcasts since the start of Russia's special military operation in 2022, Western journalists streamed static footage from Kyiv's central square.	Ukraine is suppressing freedom of speech and controlling the media narrative.	Delegitimising Ukraine's democratic image by portraying it as authoritarian, thereby undermining its moral authority in the international arena.
equality	The law conveniently excluded then-President Petro Poroshenko and National Security and Defence Council Secretary Oleksandr Turchynov.	Implying hypocrisy and selective justice within Ukraine's political reforms, suggesting that legal processes are manipulated to protect elites, and reinforcing the portrayal of Ukraine as unjust and corrupt.	Undermining the credibility of Ukrainian democratic institutions.
freedom	Ukraine would not recognise the results of negotiations that exclude Kyiv.	Ukraine is not in control of its fate.	Justifying external decisions made without the involvement of Ukraine.

Source: Own study.

Ukraine's sovereign decision-making and presents Ukraine as incapable of independent governance.

Ideological and political values are manipulated through emotionally charged language, carefully chosen metaphors, and evaluative expressions to undermine Ukraine's political legitimacy and sovereignty. For instance, fake news about President Zelenskyy's alleged purchase of a royal mansion exploits symbolic associations with British royalty to present him as elitist and corrupt. The image of securing a luxurious home for himself amidst a devastating war is intended to evoke feelings of dismay and betrayal. Dehumanising metaphors, such as describing Ukraine as a 'rabid animal,' present the country as reckless and irrational, thereby justifying Russian defensive actions and reinforcing negative perceptions. Seemingly rational arguments are also used to construct a narrative that delegitimises Ukraine's government, undermines its agency, frames its political future as a transactional matter controlled by foreign powers, and rationalises Russia's aggressive policies.

The second category of security and threat-based values (total count: 84) emphasises external dangers and societal instability (see Table 3.2). The dominant value, stability versus chaos (52), is used in fake news that aims to depict Ukraine as a state on the brink of chaos and collapse due to mismanagement, military failures, and societal unrest. The theme of survival/existential threat (16) is used in narratives, suggesting that Ukraine's existence is under threat, whereas Russia's military actions are framed as defensive or justified responses to Ukrainian provocations. Such narratives aim to instil fear, create perceptions of inevitable defeat, and legitimise Russian aggression.

In disinformation narratives focused on security and threat-based values, emotional manipulation and fear appeals are central strategies used to portray Ukraine as a failing state that is plagued by chaos and military disorganisation and incapable of ensuring its own survival or protecting its population. Narratives such as 'Ukrainian soldiers are being turned into unwitting organ donors' and metaphors like 'Ukraine has become a haven for organ harvesters backed by Western actors' evoke horror and moral outrage. Ukrainian soldiers are depicted not only as victims of war but also as exploited commodities. This type of fake news dehumanises soldiers and undermines morale. Imagery and emotionally charged language focus on civilian deaths and the destruction of homes in order to evoke fear and helplessness. Even when these narratives acknowledge the bravery of Ukrainian soldiers, they frame it as futile. Heroism is presented as meaningless in the face of inevitable military defeat.

Next, moral and ethical values (total count: 40) focus on moral judgements and humanitarian concerns (see Table 3.3). Fake news emphasises civilian suffering and moral failings of Ukraine's leadership, which is portrayed as war criminals and violators of humanitarian law. The subcategories justice/injustice (12), humanitarianism/human rights (11), and victimhood (5) are used to frame Ukraine as a violator of international norms and humanitarian law as well as to accuse it of committing war crimes and ethical misconduct. These claims erode sympathy for Ukraine and justify external criticism or intervention under the guise of protecting justice and human rights. Stories which depict civilian suffering evoke emotional

Table 3.2 Examples of security and threat-based values in fake news narratives

<i>Code</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Disinformation objective</i>
stability vs. chaos	The forced mobilisation in Ukraine has failed.	Ukraine is descending into chaos and is unable to maintain internal order. By suggesting that mobilisation efforts have failed, the disinformation seeks to highlight a breakdown in Ukraine's military capacity and governance, reinforcing perceptions of instability and disorganisation.	Weakening public confidence in Ukraine's ability to sustain its defence efforts and justifying external intervention as necessary for restoring stability.
survival/ existential threat	Ukrainian soldiers are being turned into unwitting organ donors.	The war threatens the survival of Ukrainian soldiers, as they are victims of exploitation and brutality.	Evoking horror and fear; eroding trust in Ukraine's government and military.
security	In Myropillia, Sumy Oblast, three people were killed after three aerial bombs were dropped on a two-story residential building.	Ukraine is unable to protect its civilians from external threats, as it is constantly at war, which takes away civilian lives.	Evoking fear and helplessness by presenting Ukraine as incapable of ensuring basic safety for its population.
terrorism/ Nazism	Security measures have been intensified at military facilities due to an increased threat of sabotage and explosions.	There are numerous acts of terrorism and extremist activities.	Justifying Russian military operations as necessary counterterrorism efforts.
Western exploitation	Ukraine has become a haven for organ harvesters with the backing of Western partners.	Ukraine is a victim of Western exploitation; international actors profit from the suffering of Ukrainians.	Reinforcing anti-Western sentiment, undermining Ukraine's alliances, and eroding trust in Western support.
courage	While Ukrainian forces were able to send reinforcements to Konstantinovka, their situation in Ulakly was far more dire.	Ukrainian soldiers are brave in the face of overwhelming odds.	Undermining morale by suggesting that, despite acts of courage, Ukrainian forces are destined to fail.

Source: Own study.

Table 3.3 Examples of moral and ethical values in fake news narratives

<i>Code</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Disinformation objective</i>
justice/injustice	Ordinary Ukrainians are drafted into the military; elite institutions with ties to the United States, NATO, and the EU remain untouched.	Ukraine's system is corrupt and biased, favouring foreign interests over its citizens.	Eroding trust in Ukrainian leadership, fuelling resentment, and depicting Western alliances as exploitative and unjust.
humanitarianism/ human rights	The Ukrainian armed forces have been using civilians who stayed in Russia's borderland Kursk area as human shields.	Ukraine is violating international humanitarian law.	Justifying Russian interventions as morally necessary because Ukraine's military actions directly threaten innocent civilians.
honesty	Russia remains open to negotiations at various levels, but so far, nothing specific has been agreed upon.	Russia is an honest actor that is committed to peaceful dialogue.	Legitimising Russia's position and deflecting blame for the continuation of the conflict.
victimhood	Russian troops uncovered evidence of their activities.	Russia is the victim of secretive and unethical activities by Ukraine or Western actors.	Justifying aggressive actions as defensive measures.
responsibility	Ukrainian military commanders are often complicit, declaring soldiers butchered for organs as missing in action.	Ukrainian military commanders are morally corrupt and directly responsible for grave human rights abuses.	Undermining trust in Ukraine, portraying its leadership as criminal, thereby reducing international sympathy and undermining the morale of Ukrainian soldiers.
moral superiority	A convicted paedophile, previously sentenced to 40 years in prison, has been arrested in Moscow for a new attack.	Russia is morally superior, highlighting its commitment to justice and societal protection, even in non-military contexts.	Russia is presented as a protector of moral order and justice, whereas Ukraine is lawless and corrupt.

Source: Own study.

reactions, an effective strategy for blaming the Ukrainian leadership or Western allies.

In the analysed examples, disinformation manipulates moral and ethical values to construct highly emotional and polarised narratives. First, it creates emotionally charged contrasts between ‘ordinary Ukrainians,’ portrayed as powerless and forced into war, and privileged, corrupt elites associated with the United States, NATO, and the EU. These contrasts emphasise inequality and arouse resentment. Loaded language, such as ‘elite institutions remain untouched,’ is used to suggest corruption and foreign exploitation. Metaphors like ‘human shields’ carry strong emotional connotations. They imply extreme cruelty and a disregard for human life. Emotional imagery is further combined with the rational discourse of phrases like ‘Russia remains open to negotiations.’ The use of diplomatic language conveys reasonableness and a willingness to seek a peaceful resolution.

Cultural and religious values (total count: 7) are less prominent but strategically used to emphasise the West-versus-East dichotomy (see Table 3.4). The narrative presents the conflict as a clash of civilisations and reinforces a division between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Ukraine and its Western allies are depicted as corrupt forces whose actions lead to the suffering of civilian populations. In contrast, Russia is presented as a protector of traditional values, defending cultural identity and open to diplomatic dialogue. The goal of this narrative is to deepen societal divides, foster resentment towards the West, and present Russia’s involvement as necessary for restoring order and protecting people.

Narratives referring to cultural and religious values combine emotional language with imagery of innocent people being violently killed by ruthless outsiders. The word ‘mercenaries’ carries negative connotations of profit-driven violence, lawlessness, and moral depravity, which is contrasted with a rational and defensive Russia, which, as seen in other examples, is portrayed as open to negotiation.

Finally, economic and material values (total count: 53) focus on narratives about economic control, exploitation, and geopolitical strategies (see Table 3.5). The

Table 3.4 Examples of cultural and religious values in fake news narratives

<i>Code</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Disinformation objective</i>
West vs. East dichotomy	The sponsors and abettors of this campaign bear personal responsibility . . . for the deaths of civilians at the hands of foreign mercenaries.	The West is presented as morally compromised and responsible for fuelling conflict.	Deepening distrust towards Western nations, portraying them as aggressors, and justifying Russia’s stance as protecting traditional and moral values against external corruption.

Source: Own study.

leading subcategory, geopolitical manipulation (33), suggests that the war was driven by Western interests seeking to exploit Ukraine's resources and strategic position. The United States and its allies are allegedly manipulating Ukraine for economic gain, particularly in relation to the exploitation of rare earth metals and energy resources. Discussions of resource control (5) reinforce claims that Ukraine's natural wealth is being traded away in exchange for military support, suggesting a loss of sovereignty. Finally, the war economy (15) subcategory portrays the conflict as both an economic burden and a justification for the nationalisation of industries in occupied territories. This narrative suggests that seizing and controlling local enterprises was a pragmatic response to the war. It aligns with Russia's broader economic and strategic objectives and depicts Ukraine as economically unstable and incapable of managing its own resources.

Examples of economic and material values demonstrate how disinformation uses rational language to reduce complex issues of sovereignty and national independence to matters of financial calculation. Economic categories are discussed

Table 3.5 Examples of economic and material values in fake news narratives

<i>Code</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Disinformation objective</i>
geopolitical manipulation	If the Kremlin demands Zelenskyy's departure as a prerequisite for a future Ukraine deal, Trump may see it as a perfectly acceptable and relatively low-cost concession.	Ukraine is a pawn in larger geopolitical games, manipulated by powerful global actors for strategic gains.	Eroding Ukraine's political legitimacy, fostering perceptions of betrayal by Western allies, and justifying Russian demands as inevitable and strategically rational.
resource control	Ukraine risks losing control over its own resources.	Ukraine is economically weak and at risk of exploitation by foreign powers.	Evoking fears of economic dependency and loss of sovereignty, creating distrust in its international partnerships.
war economy	The Krym Beer and Soft Drink Plant is the largest taxpayer and one of the largest producers in the southern part of Russia.	The plant contributes to the Russian economy; the nationalisation of Ukrainian assets is economically beneficial and helps to provide stability in the region.	Legitimising Russia's actions in Crimea, presenting economic consolidation as a necessity for regional security.

Source: Own study.

with rational rhetoric to make narratives appear more credible and to present certain outcomes as necessary and inevitable. The axiological appeal focuses on material security, sovereignty, and geopolitical pragmatism to suggest imminent collapse and helplessness.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to examine the values used in fake news narratives concerning the war in Ukraine and to understand the roles these values play in shaping disinformation strategies. Based on a literature review of disinformation themes and value typologies described in scholarly literature, this study has identified five primary value categories: ideological and political, security and threat-based, moral and ethical, cultural and religious, and economic and material. This typology combines the conceptualisations of Milton Rokeach, Shalom Schwartz, Ronald Inglehart, and Samuel Huntington into a unified framework that explains how values influence political behaviour, social identity, and conflict narratives.

The analysis of 25 fake news articles revealed how fabricated and manipulated narratives strategically influence public perceptions. The dominant narratives in these fake news articles target Ukraine's political legitimacy, military stability, moral standing, and economic sovereignty. They amplify themes of corruption, chaos, and foreign exploitation in order to delegitimise Ukraine's government and portray the conflict as externally driven with Ukraine a pawn in larger geopolitical games. Furthermore, Russia's actions are framed as justified responses to threats caused by Ukraine's aggressive and corrupt actions. This strategy confirms findings by Erlich and Garner,³⁴ who show how Russian disinformation seeks to destabilise Ukraine internally, undermine its global image, and discourage it from Euro-Atlantic integration.

In disinformation narratives about the war in Ukraine, values play a critical role in shaping perceptions and influencing emotional responses to achieve specific propaganda goals. Fake news often portrays Ukraine as politically unstable, corrupt, and externally controlled. It emphasises its vulnerability and existential threats to create an image of the country as incapable of ensuring security or stability, thereby justifying Russian aggressive actions. It evokes emotions such as distrust, fear, outrage, and disillusionment. As previous studies have shown,³⁵ such narratives serve to justify Russian aggression by presenting it as a necessary response to Ukraine's political dysfunction, instability, and corrupt authorities that commit atrocities against the civilian population.

The moral framing was designed to provoke emotional reactions such as outrage and sympathy fatigue in order to diminish international support for Ukraine. This also reflects broader patterns identified by Ivan Ablazov and Mariia Karmazina,³⁶ who argue that disinformation campaigns use moral narratives to present the West as morally corrupt, aiming to shift blame and promote emotional fatigue among international audiences. Economic narratives reinforce this emotional response,

presenting Ukraine as exploited and manipulated by foreign powers. This aligns with studies by Erlich and Garner,³⁷ Irina Khaldarova and Mervi Pantti,³⁸ and Ablazov and Karmazina,³⁹ who reinforce how fake news creates perceptions of Western exploitation to build anti-Western sentiment and emphasise economic collapse.

Overall, the study sheds light on the strategic use of values in contemporary information warfare. Values are carefully selected to align with the target audience's beliefs and fears. Audiences' emotional reactions, such as fear, anger, resentment, and distrust, intensify the persuasive impact of the narratives. Through this approach, disinformation campaigns aim to weaken Ukraine's international standing, erode domestic and global support, and shape a reality conducive to the aggressor's strategic objectives. In the long term, the cumulative effect of such narratives may contribute to a deterioration of social cohesion and declining trust in Ukrainian state institutions. This may pose serious challenges to national stability and democratic governance. On a societal level, Russian disinformation fosters polarisation and internal divisions, which may erode solidarity and hinder collective responses to national crises. At the international level, the deliberate construction of alternative narratives by Russia may influence how the conflict is perceived in the Global South and beyond, potentially weakening the coherence of the Western response. Strengthening information resilience and promoting media literacy are essential to counter these adverse effects. Civil society could play a vital role in enhancing information resilience by promoting critical engagement and defending the integrity of the information space. Finally, Western states need to adapt their strategic communication frameworks and develop more robust counter-disinformation mechanisms to sustain international support for Ukraine and defend democratic values against malign influence.

The generalisability of these results is limited by the small sample size of 25 fake news articles. Tracking disinformation in Ukraine is also challenging, as identified fake content is often promptly removed or blocked by Ukrainian authorities to prevent access even by allied states in order to limit its international spread. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of Russian disinformation in shaping public attitudes and behaviours, particularly its long-term psychological and social consequences. Further work is needed to determine how repeated exposure to manipulated narratives affects public trust, polarises society, and undermines democratic processes and internal stability. At the same time, future research should assess the effectiveness of Ukrainian and Western strategies to counter disinformation, focusing on their capacity to build societal resilience and protect the information environment.

Notes

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Part II

War and the Axiological Space of Social Practices



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4 Ukrainian Identity in Wartime Conditions

The Example of the Women's Resistance Movement 'Angry Mavka' ('Zla Mavka') in the Occupied Territories

Zoya Baran and Olga Wasiuta

Introduction

The problem of identity has accompanied humanity throughout its existence. The literature has devoted a great deal of work to the issue of national identity, which is increasingly becoming the subject of heated academic debate. For Ukraine, whose national identity has not been recognised for a long time, this problem is extremely relevant, especially since the Russian aggression of 2014, followed by the full-scale war of 2022, was aimed at dividing Ukraine along linguistic, ethnic, and religious lines. Nevertheless, Ukrainians have united to repel the enemy and defend their country and basic human values.

This chapter presents a factually structured, scientifically reliable account of the manifestations of Ukrainian identity in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, using the example of the women's non-violent resistance movement 'Angry Mavka' in the occupied Ukrainian territories. The authors have taken a certain research risk in analysing and attempting to fully understand the phenomena and processes related to the complex contemporary specific historical reality, often unknown, sometimes incomprehensible facts and trends. The originality of the work lies in the comprehensive analysis of the emergence of resistance groups in the occupied territories, including women's groups, and their methods of struggle against the occupying authorities. The authors tried to answer a number of important questions about the activities of such groups. What is the meaning of Ukrainian national identity in times of war? What is the role of women in war? What are the manifestations of Ukrainian identity in the occupied territories? What are the main aims of the resistance movement of the 'Angry Mavka' group?

Several methods were used to achieve the research objective. General scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, and systematisation predominate in the study of the main approaches to understanding identity. Content analysis, in particular systematic analysis, was chosen to analyse the content of the selected materials. Qualitative analysis was used for in-depth analysis of specific materials related to the activities of the women's movement 'Angry Mavka.' We also used certain techniques of mythocriticism and archetypal analysis.

Given the large number, dispersion, and diversity of sources, a thorough selection and evaluation of them was carried out. Materials published on social media, including the website of the women's movement 'Angry Mavka,' interviews with the movement's organisers, and materials from news agencies, were systematised and analysed. Throughout the Russian–Ukrainian war, the electronic media have played a key role in reporting events, shaping public opinion, and countering Russian aggression. Media content, in one way or another, shapes different values and conveys behavioural models that are adopted by individual information users. Social networks have become an integral part of the modern information space, the main source of news for citizens, a platform for consolidating the efforts of different segments of society, a tool for attracting international support, mobilising volunteer help, and playing an important role in maintaining the morale of the population and mobilising society to support the army and the state. This was manifested in the publication of stories about the heroism and sacrifice of Ukraine's defenders, coverage of volunteer initiatives and charity events, and the spread of calls for unity and resilience of the nation in the face of the aggressor. At the same time, social media also carry certain risks associated with destructive content, which requires responsibility and competence on the part of both media and their users. The authors therefore drew on British scholar Martin Conboy's theory of media bias in selecting material and also acknowledged the role of framing, as elaborated by American scholar Robert Entman, in selectively emphasising certain narratives over others.¹

Literature Review and Theoretical Context

A large amount of scientific material was systematised and analysed. The approach adopted in the work involved citing a wide range of literature on the subject, including opposing positions. In order to understand the nature of the concept of 'identity' and its multidimensionality, we referred to the work of representatives of various schools and trends (Zygmunt Bauman, Rogers Brubaker, Samuel Huntington, Montserrat Guibernau, Anthony Smith, etc.). The British researcher Anthony Smith believes that national identity includes both political and cultural elements. He identified the main features of national identity: historical territory and common features: myths, historical memory, culture, rights and responsibilities, and economy.² He also stresses that the *raison d'être* of any nation is to cultivate its unique cultural values: ethnic identity remains the *sine qua non* of a nation, 'and that means shared myths about ancestors, shared historical memories, unique cultural characteristics and a sense of difference.'³ The link between historical memory and national identity is emphasised by the British-Canadian political scientist Taras Kuzio,⁴ who sees 'historical memory as a central component of national identity.'⁵ As a collective phenomenon, it can result from the presence of 'common points' in people's everyday lives: national symbols, language, national history, national consciousness, and cultural artefacts – as emphasised by the American psychologist Herbert Kelman.⁶

Contemporary Polish researcher Ola Hnatiuk, focusing on the political component, suggests that national identity should be understood as 'a set of shared beliefs, attitudes and convictions developed in the process of forming the identity of a community, combined with the acceptance of the political aspirations of a particular political group or state.'⁷

Analysing the causes of the crisis of American identity, Samuel Huntington noted that the consolidation of the nation is based on a common interest in supporting their country and its image when identification with the American nation is more important than social, racial, ethnic, and other differences.⁸ This means that the sense of national identity can grow and weaken under the influence of an external threat.

According to the Spanish researcher Montserrat Guibernau, the following elements create a strong emotional bond, a sense of community solidarity and belonging to a particular nation: values, attitudes, customs, traditions, rituals, languages, and practices.⁹ The psychological dimension of identity is related to the fact that individuals feel emotionally attached to the nation, sharing a certain sense of community that provokes hatred of its enemies. In support of this, Guibernau highlights the examples of 'individuals who are ready to make sacrifices and ultimately die for their nations, and this proves, at least for them, that national identity is real and worth fighting for.'¹⁰ Based on Guibernau's concept, the present authors have tried to define national identity in women's non-violent resistance through five dimensions: territorial, political, cultural, historical, and psychological.

According to some scholars, Ukrainian national identity is still an 'unfinished project' and is going through a stage that the developed European nation-states went through in modern times. Andrew Wilson, a British expert on the history of Eastern Europe and Ukraine in particular, in his first study called the Ukrainians 'the unexpected nation' because the uprising of the independent Ukrainian state in 1991 came as a great surprise to the West.¹¹ He emphasised that the Ukrainian nation is still not fully 'constructed' in the sense of having formed clear identities: 'Ukrainian identity still needs to be "re-constructed," separating it from other national histories with which Ukrainians have been associated for centuries – Russian, Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, etc.' Finally, the Ukrainian nation was negatively affected by the Soviet government's policy of erasing all national differences and, according to Rogers Brubaker, creating a supranational entity – 'supra-national Soviet identity.'¹²

The works of Ukrainian researchers (Hrytsak, Dziuba, etc.) focus on various aspects of identity and have helped to clarify its peculiarities in the Ukrainian context. Yaroslav Hrytsak believes that Ukraine as a state has come into being, the Ukrainian nation has been created, and he considers identity and national security to be the two basic values for Ukraine, which largely overlap and complement each other.¹³ Ivan Dziuba, a public figure, literary critic, and member of the 'Sixtiers' movement, believed that the Ukrainian nation could only exist as a consolidated community, thanks to the idea of the state. The author's concept of the nation-state implies the superiority of the potential of civic identity over

ethnic identity in the nation-building process and does not diminish the role of the authentic Ukrainian principle.¹⁴

Problem Analysis

The RF launched a war against Ukraine in 2014 primarily because its ruling class and society were convinced that Ukrainians were incapable of uniting and repulsing an attack, and most of them, at least in the east and south of the country, were waiting for their 'big brothers' bring them back to the reality of 'Russkiy Mir' (the Russian World). The willingness and ability of Ukraine and Ukrainians to defend themselves and win this war against a powerful aggressor were hardly believed by Western countries. There were many reasons for this. One of them was the misconception that Ukrainian society was fragmented and disintegrated and therefore that the Ukrainian nation was unformed or incompletely formed. This is evidenced by the public stance of the Croatian-Austrian-German philosopher and cultural scientist Boris Buden, who said in one of his interviews in April 2022: 'Look at Ukraine before the war, the process of formation of the Ukrainian nation was far from complete. And it is the Russian intervention that completes this process, unites the nation, raises it above divergence.'¹⁵ A similar position is not uncommon in the West and in Ukraine itself. In this way, statements are made about the decisive role of Russian aggression and its initiator in the Ukrainian nation-building process. The inadequacy of such statements has been demonstrated by Ukraine's phenomenal, and for many, unexpected ability to confront one of the largest and most powerful states in the world. On 24 February 2022, when the RF launched a full-scale war against Ukraine, the Ukrainian people, already formed by then, rose up to defend their country and themselves. An example of this desire is the activation of the return of Ukrainians from abroad. According to the State Border Service of Ukraine, during the first 12 days of the enemy's offensive, 167,000 people (about 80% men) returned to Ukraine. Many of them began to defend the homeland.¹⁶

The war led to strong resistance from the Ukrainian armed forces and the general public, and the process of crystallising national and civic identity in Ukraine intensified. Therefore, in defining the main objectives of the RF's massive invasion of Ukraine, Putin emphasised the 'denazification' of Ukrainians and the erosion of their identity. In this sense, the renowned American historian Timothy Snyder stressed that this war is based on the Russian concept that Ukrainian nationality does not exist.¹⁷ Russia sees an independent Ukrainian state as having undermined its imperial interests.

The full-scale aggression of the RF against Ukraine has led to a profound change in the mass consciousness of Ukrainians. They are beginning to see themselves not only as a people capable of resisting an external invasion but also as a community reinventing itself and its collective identity.

When conquering new territories, Russia aims to erase the national identity of the local population and, above all, their mother tongue. Language is inextricably linked to the culture and genetic memory of that nation that created, supports, and develops it, hence the axiomatic understanding that a language is the cultural and

genetic code of its people. When a nation loses its own language, it cuts off the roots of its culture and genetic memory.¹⁸ Language is an important part of the ideology of subjugation, so Moscow sees the rejection of Russian as an official language as a desire to break the former colony's ties with the centre. Downgrading the languages of independent states is one of the main ways of interfering in the affairs of a de facto independent state. This is exactly what happened in Ukraine when the Kremlin began to defend Russian-speaking citizens.¹⁹ One can deny and prove that Russia could have come up with any other reason to annex Crimea and start a war, or start a war for no reason at all, but it used the very reason of protecting 'Russian-speaking' citizens. This was the Kremlin's most convenient and effective motive.

There are still people living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine who do not want to accept the 'Ruskiy Mir' and want to help the Ukrainian defence forces to liberate these territories as soon as possible. Under the conditions of a widespread offensive by Russian troops in Ukraine, a volunteer movement has become active, with conscious citizens joining the territorial defence forces to defend the territorial integrity of the country and preserve its statehood and independence. During this difficult time, other forms of civic activity also emerged, especially in areas that were in the war zone or under shelling. In particular, it is about interacting and helping each other. Mutual support and a sense of solidarity became the key to strengthening national civic identity and thus empowering national identity. A particular transformation in the civic consciousness of Ukrainians became the resistance movement in the temporarily occupied territories.²⁰

The Meaning of the Ukrainian National Identity in the Conditions of the War

Despite all the tragedy of the current situation, the Russian–Ukrainian war has played a key role in shaping Ukrainian identity, which in turn has been reflected in changes in the hierarchy of values in Ukrainian society. Difficult psychological and emotional states and the pain caused by the enemy's unjustified aggression have created a need for unity and solidarity not only among ordinary members of society but also even among former political opponents, forcing them to rethink and question their previous values.²¹

National identity in Ukraine is a complex and changing phenomenon, shaped by a number of factors. In particular, the events surrounding the Maidan ('Revolution of Dignity') in 2014 and the subsequent Russian aggression have had a significant impact on the identity of Ukrainians, causing citizens to unite in defence of their country. The full-scale Russian invasion is marked by a noticeable increase in patriotism and national consciousness among the Ukrainian population. The majority of the country's citizens are aware of the need to protect their country from external aggression and are ready for resistance.

The unity and solidarity of Ukrainians are evident not only in their response to external threats but also in their concern for their compatriots. It is expressed in active participation in volunteer campaigns and in support for internally displaced

persons and for the families of soldiers. Such support and national unity are the true foundation of the indomitable Ukrainian spirit.²²

The war has given Ukrainian society a powerful impetus for change that is visible to the naked eye. Some of them are clearly positive and undoubtedly of historical significance. The internal content of identity is changing and becoming more effective. National identity poses the question to everyone: if I do not help the Armed Forces of Ukraine, do I have the right to consider myself part of Ukraine?²³ The war with Russia has highlighted the importance of national symbols such as the flag, anthem, language, traditional songs, and costumes, which have become an expression of resistance to the aggressor. The Ukrainian language has gained particular importance as a means of distinguishing itself from the Russian aggressor. In the occupied territories and beyond, more and more people are choosing Ukrainian as their main language of communication, which is becoming an act of symbolic opposition to Russification. The war has also strengthened the sense of unity in Ukrainian society, regardless of linguistic or regional differences. The common struggle for independence promotes a redefinition of national identity as inclusive and based on democratic values.²⁴

It is important to note that the international community's support for Ukraine has increased the global visibility of Ukrainian culture and history. Many countries stand in solidarity with Ukraine, recognising its struggle as a defence of the universal values of freedom and democracy.

On 26 June 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted by 103 votes the resolution 'Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace,' drafted by Ukrainian MP Yevheniia Kravchuk.²⁵ The document contains unprecedented provisions on the promotion of culture and the preservation of Ukrainian identity. In particular, the resolution condemns the systematic erasure of cultural identity in Ukraine due to aggressive Russification policies by the RF. The document clearly states that the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage and the erasure of cultural identity in Ukraine constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and evidence of a specific genocidal intent to destroy Ukrainian national identity.

The Rise of the Women's Resistance Movement 'Angry Mavka'

In twenty-first-century conflicts, women play a variety of roles, from activists and journalists documenting violence to soldiers and humanitarian leaders. Women often lead local resistance movements, especially in occupied areas, where they organise humanitarian aid, sabotage enemy operations, and support local communities. Wars change women's social roles, often accelerating their emancipation, but they also have psychological consequences, such as trauma or stigmatisation. In the aftermath of conflicts, women often face the challenge of returning to a 'normal' life that does not always recognise their merits.

Since the first days of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian army has faced not only fierce resistance from the regular armed forces but also a huge guerrilla movement in the occupied territories. Every day, thousands of Ukrainians

under occupation remind the Russians that there is no place for them on Ukrainian soil. Guerrilla movements play a very important role in the war, and when women take up the cause, the damage done to the occupying forces is particularly ingenious. Despite the constant danger and the possibility of being interrogated and searched, they find ways to tell their own stories and keep in touch with the whole of Ukraine.

The role of Ukrainian women in this movement illustrates their determination and commitment to the struggle for independence. Women play a key role in intelligence, propaganda, and psychological support of the population in the occupied territories. The best example of this is the women's underground resistance movement 'Angry Mavka.' It was founded by three Ukrainian friends in occupied Melitopol in early 2023. The co-founders wanted to do something for the women who remained under occupation; they wanted to fight against the Russian occupiers. The main reason and impetus for the creation of the movement were the very presence of the occupiers and Russian tricolour flags in the women's hometown, and they decided to show the Russians what Ukrainian women's opposition could be. The women chose the path of non-violent resistance to inflict damage on the Russian occupiers and to remind them that they were not welcome in Melitopol. When planning their activities, the Mavki had no idea that the movement would gain momentum and develop into a large women's movement. What started as a simple kitchen discussion turned into a women's resistance movement that is still active in the south of the temporarily occupied Ukraine.

The women who now call themselves 'Angry Mavka' were defending pro-Ukrainian interests even before the movement of the same name 'officially' emerged – they went to rallies against the occupying 'authorities' until the Russians started actively breaking them up. When it became extremely dangerous to organise protests, Ukrainian women helped in every way they could to resist the partisan movements already in place.

It is no coincidence that the movement was given the evocative name 'Angry Mavka.' 'Mavka,' a creature from Ukrainian folklore and mythology, is the guardian of the forest, a virtuous nymph who protects nature from evil influences. This magical creature is difficult to see and impossible to catch, but she can be very cruel to those who destroy her home. That's why the 'Angry Mavka.' For the organisation itself, the Mavka symbolises disobedience and the ability to fight against those who have come to her land. So, the Mavka symbolises the anger and resistance of Ukrainian women against Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war crimes committed daily by the occupiers. And the very reference to images of Ukrainian culture contrasts with the dominance of Russian influence in the occupied territories.²⁶ The women decided to use the 'Mavkas' also to contrast with the 'orcs' (many Ukrainians have adopted this term for the humanoid creatures best known for their service as foot soldiers and slaves in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* to refer to the Russian military).²⁷

The movement's logo is an image of three women, symbolising the three founders. In the centre is an angry Mavka in traditional Ukrainian dress. She is flanked by two friends, one holding a dough roller and the other wearing more contemporary

feminine clothing. Such images are not accidental: they transform stereotypical images of women into symbols of female power. Posters with images of Ukrainian women appeared in the city and were taken down by the occupiers within an hour, but this is one of the ideas of the movement:

We want them (the occupiers – Auth.) to run around a bit. We want them to get tired of tearing down our posters, of painting over the signs saying that say we are waiting for the Ukrainian army. So that every woman is seen as a threat to them. Because the Russians treated women differently to men. If you're a woman, they're probably not going to check your papers on the street. A guerrilla to the Russians is a young boy in a hoodie, maybe with a gun, doing his job at night. That is probably how they imagined it. Because, according to them, a woman cannot do the same thing. And a woman's voice cannot be an expression of resistance,

– notes one of the Mavkas.²⁸ This perception of women gave the Mavkas a significant advantage and the opportunity to become a real 'secret weapon' in the occupied territories.²⁹

The 'Angry Mavka' movement has become a community of women who never meet in person, act anonymously, spread real news (rather than Russian lies), and try to do everything to make the occupiers feel uncomfortable.³⁰ The exact number of participants in the movement is not known, but the 'Angry Mavka' is growing every day and accepting new supporters into its ranks. The requirements are age, motivation, inspiration, and belief in victory. For people to continue their resistance, they need to know that they have a reason to do so. Each girl is given a safety briefing. It explains in detail how to avoid being seen by street cameras, how to remain unnoticed, etc. Security is a fundamental element of any guerrilla movement that cannot be ignored.³¹

The movement has hundreds of active participants from different temporarily occupied cities, with hundreds more women and girls joining irregularly. The reach of their resistance has extended to all the temporarily occupied territories. However, most of them are in Crimea, where they have been living under occupation for more than ten years and have more experience of surviving under such conditions. The co-founder of the women's resistance movement hopes that more people will join their community as Ukrainian troops advance. The underground women's resistance movement aims to tear down and destroy Russian symbols, Russian tricolour flags, pasted leaflets, and newspapers, and to support Ukrainian residents of temporarily occupied towns. One of the manifestations of disobedience is also the extremely low level of cooperation with the occupiers, as well as the mass refusal of Russian passports.³²

The Mavkas operate through a Telegram channel with a chatbot that allows activists to open 'offices' where they can communicate with the group's leaders and entrust them with resistance activities.³³ Anyone can also receive digital postcards to print out and distribute in their city. The identification details of both parties remain anonymous at all times, which is crucial for operations in occupied

territories where there is a constant risk of arrest.³⁴ Women from occupied cities and towns in Ukraine have started writing to the chatbot in Telegram for various reasons: someone just wants to talk and tell their story, someone is looking for help, and someone is ready to carry out certain guerrilla tasks, such as putting up posters, tearing down Russian flags, or burning them directly on buildings.³⁵ They also often talk about checkpoints where Russians carry out checks and searches, buildings where Russian military personnel are stationed under the cover of the local population, or hospitals that operate exclusively for the occupying forces.³⁶

The Russian occupiers are doing everything they can to convince their society and the world that the occupied Ukrainian territories have always been waiting for them and that everyone who remains there supports their rule. Instead, the Mavkas are constantly proving that this is not true.³⁷

At first they try to pretend that we don't exist. Then, when too much happens and they still have to lie, they start raids, searches – very often it's just for show. But yes – they are looking for us. There are patrols, a lot of cameras that have appeared for a reason, to detect guerrillas and resistance movements. Sometimes they just organise patrols and house searches, checking people on the streets.

– says one of the Mavkas, adding that security is always the first priority, so women engage in guerrilla activity purely out of willingness, readiness, and their own capacity.³⁸

Some pro-Russian channels in Melitopol draw attention to the 'Mavkas,' describing their actions as an attempt to 'intimidate' local residents, noting that 'small subversive groups' are operating in the city. Their chats are full of threats, humiliation, and vulgarity. For the Mavkas, this is a sign that the occupiers see everything and don't like it. For a long time, the movement was not taken seriously. But later, as the movement grew, they stopped saying this because they realised that there were many protesters and that they were resisting. At one point, the Russians created fake accounts of people involved in the movement and even a fake chatbot called the 'Angry Mavka' to trick the girls and get their personal information while writing to local residents on their behalf. But the attempt failed. As 'Mavka' says, the occupiers no longer feel completely safe in the occupied Ukrainian territories.³⁹ Therefore, the partisan movement will continue to operate, destroying the trust of the Russians from within.

Participants in the movement distribute patriotic leaflets, draw graffiti with Ukrainian symbols, and leave inscriptions: 'We are waiting for the Armed Forces of Ukraine.' As the Mavkas admit, it is the latter that annoys the occupiers the most.⁴⁰ The actions of the 'Angry Mavka' once again refute Russian fake news about the 100% support of the Ukrainian people for the occupation. The movement's coordinators point out that many Ukrainians are still living under occupation under coercive conditions. But that does not mean they support the invaders.⁴¹

The safety of the Mavkas depends on the city in which they operate, as the approaches of the occupiers vary. Everything can depend on the mood of the

occupier they encounter. Penalties used by Russia can range from an apology video to arrest on terrorism charges, deportation, and disappearance into Russian torture chambers.⁴²

In general, the 'Angry Mavka' morally upholds the attributes of Ukrainian national identity, although it is very difficult to maintain traditions under occupation. The Mavkas claim that they only do things as a family and never advertise. Yes, at Easter, they painted Easter eggs, and in winter, they celebrated Santa Claus Day and Christmas.⁴³ Celebrating Ukrainian holidays is a form of resistance to attempts to impose Russian culture. Under conditions of war, these traditions take on an additional dimension as a way of preserving identity in the face of danger.

The Russian occupiers generally resent even the mention of differences in Ukrainian identity. The Mavki perceive that the Russians have come to impose their own customs, eliminating or displacing local traditions and rites. This applies not only to Ukrainian history and identity in general but also to the Ukrainian letters 'i' and 'e,' which frighten and repel the invaders. The 'Angry Mavka' reminds the Russians that they are only here temporarily and will not succeed in completely subduing Ukraine.⁴⁴

In their resistance, the Mavkas noted not only the advantages of the Ukrainians but also their distinct difference from the Russians. The Mavkas insist that Ukrainians do not need other people's things; they only defend what is their own. Irrespective of profession or expertise, each representative of the movement has their own internal culture. Besides, submission is not typical for Ukrainian women: they will not 'bow down' to the occupiers. Russians are the opposite.

Never forget what distinguishes us from Russians – it is our dignity. Especially that of women. That is what we understood here, during the occupation. Dignity is a concept that refers to many things. One of them is respect for each other. Staying together. Let us help each other. And never forget who you are

– says the 'Angry Mavka' to the Ukrainian women.⁴⁵ Ukrainians are characterised by a sense of internal culture and freedom that is intrinsic to them. Russians, on the other hand, have no inner culture, no taste, no critical thinking, no inner freedom, no self, no dignity, no will, and much more.

Ways of Expressing Ukrainian Identity

Historically, Ukrainian resistance has always been imaginative and colourful, artistic, symbolic, satirical, and daring. Resistance, whether organised or individual, has many methods and tools: public demonstration of Ukrainian identity and culture, refusal to participate in illegal political processes (such as pseudo-elections), misleading Russian soldiers, sabotage, social boycotts, and much more. The women of the 'Angry Mavka' movement have shown themselves to be surprisingly active and inventive, offering sometimes unexpected methods of resistance. This resistance is disrupting the lives and work of Russians, contributing to the formation of

a strong new Ukrainian identity, and inspiring support for non-violent resistance both in Ukraine and around the world. Let's highlight the methods which Ukrainian women guerrillas use in their fight against the Russians.

The 'Angry Mavka' movement began with so-called 'business cards.' Graphic design, due to its relative speed, ease of execution, and low production costs compared to other genres, can be carried out with the greatest efficiency and effect. In addition, the very specificity of graphic design, which is focused on working with a large number of viewers, makes it favoured in the creative resistance movement.⁴⁶ One of the co-founders of the movement, who could draw well, created the first poster of three women with the caption: 'We fed up the occupiers. Don't anger Ukrainian women.'⁴⁷ Representatives of the movement put up these posters in the occupied cities.⁴⁸ The visual style of the poster is close to a comic, with captions in the language of the occupiers, using their symbols.

One of the first large-scale campaigns in 2023 was dedicated to 8 March, the International Day for the Advancement of Women's Rights. On this day, men usually give flowers to women. The Mavkas expected the occupiers to give flowers to women in the streets and near shops. So they made posters showing Mavkas hitting a Russian occupier with a bouquet, rejecting his advances, and turning flowers into a kind of weapon and symbol of Ukrainian defiance.⁴⁹ The posters read: 'I don't want flowers, I want my Ukraine!' The Mavkas wanted to show the Russian occupiers that Ukrainian women could not be bought with flowers and to demonstrate their only wish: the return of Ukraine. When the holiday was over, the girls continued to print postcards with this inscription and distribute them in the cities.⁵⁰

The next step was to create a communication channel on Telegram to spread information about what was happening in the occupied territories. Most of the posts are in Russian. The co-founder of the movement explains that the messages are also read by Russians, who should be able to understand from the posts how they are being treated. At the same time, the Mavka noted that Russians leave quite aggressive messages, usually with threats.⁵¹ However, women and girls from other occupied cities began to write to the movement's founders, asking them to send them leaflets so that they could distribute them.

In the spring of 2023, the movement began to grow rapidly as women from the occupied Crimea joined. Despite the repression, the Crimeans expressed their opposition to Russia's genocidal war, their pro-Ukrainian position, and their solidarity with their fellow citizens on the Ukrainian mainland. In July 2023, there was an explosion on the Kerch bridge, and in November and December, there was an explosion in Sevastopol. Frightened Russians began to flee the peninsula en masse. These events contributed to the production of new posters showing a double-headed eagle, one of the symbols of the RF, being strangled by a woman's hand. The poster was accompanied by an ironic inscription: 'I don't want to leave Crimea.' 'But you will have to!' It was based on a phrase from a viral video in which a Russian woman fleeing the peninsula tearfully complained that Crimea was 'so homely.'⁵²

Members of the women's guerrilla movement began distributing patriotic stickers on the streets of Crimean cities and even on Russian propaganda material, with inscriptions such as 'This is Ukraine' and 'Let's remove Russian rubbish.'⁵³

The women also distributed posters urging the occupiers to be careful about what they eat and drink. Later, it turned out that in Melitopol, one of the women had access to the kitchen where the occupiers were eating. So, it was a safe opportunity to add something to the buns or sausages in the dough. The laxative turned out to be the perfect option: eyewitnesses said the results were expected. After a while, a 'dry law' was declared in Melitopol. Faced with the occupiers' extreme thirst for alcohol, the Mavkas began adding laxatives to homemade alcohol (vodka). In addition, the occupiers often went door to door 'begging' for alcohol because they needed it so badly. Crates of the 'improved' drink were given to Russian soldiers. This operation was called the 'Mavkas Kitchen.' One of the movement's founders remarked, 'We added laxative, not poison, because we are not murderers like the Russians.'⁵⁴ The 'Mavkas Kitchen' does not work as often as the women would like, but it is surprisingly effective.⁵⁵ According to the movement's representative, after such 'treats,' the occupiers warned Russian soldiers not to take food and drink from local women.⁵⁶

The next action is the 'Mavkas money,' that is, the creation of its own version of Russian banknotes (rubles). The campaign was launched on 20 July 2023. At first glance, they look very similar to Russian banknotes printed on a laser printer. However, the design of the Russian banknotes included various images and captions in Russian so that the occupiers could understand them. The 50-ruble note shows a Mavka holding a Ukrainian 'Tryzub' and the inscription: 'This is not Russia. You are in Ukraine.' The 200-ruble note has a Ukrainian flag and the inscription 'Crimea is Ukraine.' These pseudo-rubles, which the Mavkas leave behind wherever possible, are meant to remind the occupiers that they are still in Ukraine and to remind the locals that it is inevitable that these territories will return to Ukrainian control. The women's guerrilla movement 'Angry Mavka' has distributed 3,000 banknotes depicting liberated Crimea and the Ukrainian armed forces in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. According to the activists, the banknotes fell into the hands of residents of cities such as Sevastopol, Simferopol, Kerch, Yalta, Melitopol, Berdiansk, Tokmak, Kakhovka, and Luhansk. According to the guerrillas, some people will keep these banknotes as a reminder of the forthcoming liberation, and for the occupiers, they will be a reminder of the end of their presence in Ukraine.⁵⁷

Another area of the Mavkas' work is the fight against Russian propaganda. Older people are particularly susceptible, as they do not have easy access to Ukrainian news and content. So the Mavkas decided to create their own newspaper – 'Weekly News from the "Angry Mavka." What the occupiers won't tell you' – with Ukrainian news. 'We distribute a newspaper with news from Ukraine and the world, because here, in the occupation, the Russians are trying to create a news vacuum' – the Mavka said in an interview.⁵⁸ They distribute the paper through letterboxes, leave it on doorsteps and in parks, and encourage people to read it and pass it on to their friends. The electronic version of the paper can also be downloaded from the Telegram bot. The Mavka recalls that there have been cases where people have downloaded the paper and passed it on via messengers.⁵⁹ Such actions help the movement.

Another mass action aimed to clear the streets of Russian billboards, symbols, and flags. Russian flags caused particular irritation. The Mavkas started by taking one of the flags, bringing it to an undisclosed location, and burning it on camera so that no one could tell where they did it. They then posted the video on social media. After that, people started sending videos of them burning Russian flags in other cities. The Mavka called this activity 'Operation Catharsis.' Catharsis comes from the ancient Greek word for 'purification' and is commonly used to refer to the purification of thoughts and emotions through expression. The desired result is an emotional state of renewal and restoration. The Mavka noted that they had not even anticipated how much pleasure they would derive from such events: 'You see it burning and it makes you feel better.'⁶⁰

At the same time, the Mavkas understand the risk of their activities, and, as one of the movement's members stressed, it is generally difficult to be a woman under occupation. You have to be quiet, a 'grey mouse'; you have to stay out of the street and leave the house only when absolutely necessary.⁶¹ Representatives of the movement are advised not to tell even their relatives about their activities in order not to endanger anyone. Safety is paramount, and women are only involved in guerrilla activities if they are willing, ready, and able. Especially since the occupiers are increasingly conducting raids and searches, patrols are walking the streets of cities, and many cameras have appeared to detect partisans.⁶²

An important stage in the work of the Mavka is the publication of diaries from the occupation. Keeping diaries is also a form of resistance. On the one hand, it is a way to tell their stories and to share their feelings, and on the other hand, to be heard outside the occupation so that the world knows the truth and continues to support the Ukrainian struggle. Diaries help to capture moment-to-moment realities. On 18 May 2024, the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Crimean Tatar Genocide, the exhibition 'Unseen Force' opened in Kyiv. The exhibition is dedicated to the non-violent resistance of Ukrainians in the temporarily occupied territories and its manifestations in various forms of art. One of the Ukrainian radio stations, 'Radio Kultura,' created the project 'Angry Mavka. Diaries of Nonviolent Resistance.' These are 14 radio stories based on the original diary entries of women of different ages and professions living under the occupation, recorded by actresses.⁶³

The Mavkas distribute pro-Ukrainian leaflets, draw graffiti, write diaries, destroy Russian symbols, and gather information about the Russian military. The three co-founders make all decisions about the 'Angry Mavkas' activities together, but only if each of them agrees. Other members who join take responsibility for their own safety and risk. The 'Angry Mavka' has no sponsors or funding, and there is no need to raise large budgets. Anyone who wants to join the movement and has a printer at home can print a poster, newspaper, sticker, or even a fake banknote for the next action. The Mavkas Telegram channel is full of humour and also serves as psychological support for the women under occupation. The longer the occupation lasts, the harder it is for people to fight and believe. The Mavka symbolises the anger and disobedience of Ukrainian women against Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war crimes committed daily by the occupiers.

Conclusion

While the Ukrainian defence forces are fighting the Russians on the battlefield, civilians in the occupied territories are helping them behind enemy lines, often putting themselves in danger. However, the desire to drive the occupiers out of their territory overrides the fear of torture and death, so Ukrainians surrender enemy positions and organise sabotage or resistance movements to support each other and intimidate the invaders.

The 'Angry Mavka' movement is significant for Ukrainian national identity in conditions of war, uniting people and reminding them of their national identity. Based on symbols drawn from Ukrainian folklore that symbolise freedom and opposition to injustice, the movement serves as a key weapon in building communities, strengthening national values, and resisting attempts at Russification. In the occupied territories, the 'Angry Mavka' actively fights against attempts to establish a Russian identity; the movement's actions represent a force of resistance and sacrifice that inspires the next generation of Ukrainians. Angry Mavka promotes the emancipation of women as a key element in the construction of a modern Ukraine. The actions in which they participate strengthen the role of women in public, political, and cultural life. The movement redefines the concept of patriotism to include elements of gender equality and social justice. In this way, Angry Mavka supports the building of an inclusive society based on shared values and solidarity, while respecting diversity.

No lie, propaganda, or manipulation can destroy national memory. In their attempt to eliminate national consciousness, the invaders first destroy its historical memory. For hundreds of years, invaders from the East have tried to suppress Ukrainian freedom, each time rewriting history. As the events of the past few years have shown, the strong resistance of patriotic Ukrainian civil society was a real surprise for Moscow and has played an important role in key aspects of the war. During these dramatic events, we have seen that the struggle for cultural values, identity, the interpretation of history, the preservation of cultural traditions, openness to other cultures of the world, and free and equal dialogue (in fact, the struggle for values) sometimes costs human lives.

Ukraine is the first country among the post-Soviet states that remains a powerful opponent of Russian imperialism, capable of stopping its attacks. However, Ukraine cannot fulfil this mission on its own because it has always pursued a policy of non-alignment – it has no alliances and no signed agreements. As a result, it has no chance in a regular war against a superpower and is waiting for various forms of help from the international community.

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5 Women During Russia's War Against Ukraine

The Perspective of Christian Clergy

Zofia Kulińczak

Introduction

War, as one of the most destructive phenomena, not only alters the balance of political power but also profoundly affects individuals and the social structures in which they exist. Armed conflicts are periods in which traditional social and parental roles are often disrupted, and new challenges are placed before both men and women. The contemporary war fought on the territory of Ukraine reveals the particular role of women, who, while often perceived as victims of war, perform highly significant functions. These are the consequences not only of their family roles but also of their engagement in social, spiritual, and political life. The Christian community – particularly in the context of the clergy – plays an important role in shaping the attitudes and values that influence how women are perceived in society during armed conflict. Clergy, as witnesses to the daily struggles of their parishioners, observe many new dimensions of womanhood in the face of wartime reality, including women's steadfast presence on both the physical and spiritual fronts. Women are no longer merely victims of war – their role is becoming increasingly complex, encompassing activities in aid provision to all those in need, crisis management, and the fulfilment of spiritual leadership functions within their communities. In the respondents' statements, thematic analysis identified the following categories: women and family, women and aid, women and suffering, and women and new social roles. These categories constitute the central axis of reflection in this text. In the narratives of Christian clergy, women are depicted as central figures not only in the context of family life but also in broader issues of solidarity and compassion. The clergy's perspective focuses primarily on themes related to women's suffering and resilience, portraying them as active participants in the processes of reconstruction and survival amidst the chaos of war. The aim of this chapter is not only to understand the changing role of women in a society engulfed by war but also to examine the ethical and religious values that shape their experience of the conflict.

Research Problem and Literature Review

Research on women during wartime constitutes an important and rapidly developing field of contemporary analysis. It encompasses various aspects of the roles

assumed by women in the context of armed conflicts and their impact on the functioning of society. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of studies devoted to this subject, which is crucial for understanding the role of women in shaping social and economic life under wartime conditions. Research findings indicate that women not only perform traditional caregiving roles within the family but also become active participants in both military operations and peace processes. An example of such an approach is a study on women in the conflict in Nigeria, which demonstrates how their activities can be perceived as an expression of agency, introducing new perspectives into the debate on war and mediation.¹ During conflicts, women often become agents of change, mobilising to ensure the safety of their families and local communities.² The emphasis on incorporating gender perspectives into war studies has given rise to new research directions that examine how gender norms influence relationships and psychological outcomes for both women and men in the context of conflict. Among these directions is also a consideration of how differences in gender roles can increase levels of conflict within families adhering to traditional role divisions. This is supported by studies indicating correlations between gender-related conflicts and difficulties in family relationships, although findings on this subject may vary depending on the cultural and social context.³

In the context of research on the role of women in conditions of armed conflict, it is essential to draw attention to the diverse dimensions of their activity in family life, professional life, and assistance-oriented initiatives. As primary caregivers within families, women often face challenges related to ensuring the safety and subsistence of their loved ones. Research findings indicate that in families affected by the consequences of war, women assume additional responsibilities, becoming not only caregivers but also heads of households in the face of crisis.⁴ In crisis situations, they often take up employment in difficult and high-risk conditions, which – on the one hand – serves as a source of their strength and resilience and, on the other hand, exposes them to discrimination and workplace violence.⁵ An important dimension of women's activity during wartime also lies in humanitarian efforts. Women frequently assume leadership roles in non-profit organisations and social movements aimed at providing support to victims of conflict.⁶

An analysis of existing research indicates that the role of women in conditions of armed conflict remains an area requiring further in-depth exploration, particularly in relation to the specificity of Russia's war against Ukraine. There is a need for the systematic integration of feminist theoretical frameworks that would enable a fuller grasp of the significance, complexity, and multidimensionality of women's experiences in the context of war. Existing findings demonstrate that women simultaneously operate in multiple roles – as family caregivers, participants in the labour market, and initiators of humanitarian activities – and that their engagement in these spheres constitutes a significant factor shaping social life, especially at the local level. Understanding the mechanisms behind this involvement, as well as women's suffering, is of key importance for developing support models and public policies conducive to building society in post-war realities.

Methodology

This chapter draws on the method of individual in-depth interviews (IDI), conducted between 29 December 2023 and 21 September 2024 in Ukraine. The interviews were held with clergy from Orthodox Churches (affiliated with both the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate), Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches, and the Armenian Apostolic Church, as well as various Protestant denominations (including Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists). The study was carried out at the Interdisciplinary Centre of the University of Warsaw 'Identity – Dialogue – Security' under the direction of Cezary Smuniewski. A total of 36 individuals were invited to participate in this anthropological study, including one woman serving as a minister in a Protestant church. The participants were asked various questions concerning the ongoing war, its causes, course, and possible consequences. None of the questions referred directly to the role of women in war. Nevertheless, in response to various questions, the interviewees spontaneously raised this issue, speaking explicitly about problems that can be classified within this particular area of the discipline as feminist war and peace studies.

The responses obtained during the IDI interviews form the subject of analysis in this study. The transcripts used in this chapter originate from the archives of the Interdisciplinary Centre of the University of Warsaw 'Identity – Dialogue – Security' and are not publicly available. This results from the research team's commitment to protecting the identities of the study participants in the context of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. All interviewees have been anonymised.

The collected interview material was first subjected to coding in order to identify those segments in which the respondents referred to women during the war (wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, grandmothers, employees, nuns, and widows). Second, it was categorised according to four identified themes: (1) women and new social roles, (2) women and family, (3) women and aid, and (4) women and suffering. Third, the material was subjected to content analysis and, following Steinar Kvale, meaning condensation, as well as conversational analysis and narrative analysis.⁷ When quoting the respondents' statements, the abbreviation 'IDI' is used together with the response number, for example (IDI_5), (IDI_9), and (IDI_10). The terms 'respondent,' 'participant in the study,' and 'research participant' are used interchangeably.

The statements of Christian clergy can serve as an important source of knowledge about the situation of women during the war in Ukraine. Their perspective merits attention for several reasons. First, clergy are often in direct contact with women experiencing crises – both emotional and existential – which enables them to observe experiences related to the loss of loved ones, anxiety about the future, and the necessity of taking on new social roles. They are frequently the first individuals to whom women turn in search of spiritual or psychological support, lending their accounts the character of authentic testimony. Second, clergy operate within local communities, including in smaller towns, meaning that their reflections can refer not only to individual experiences but also to the social changes taking place

in the parish and family environment. Third, the statements of clergy may also be enriched by spiritual and ethical dimensions, allowing for a deeper understanding of the experience of suffering, hope, and community. For these reasons, the perspective of Christian clergy constitutes a valuable complement to research on the fate of women during wartime.

Women and New Social Roles

During the war, women who had previously often remained in the shadow of male-dominated social structures began to take on new roles, previously uncommon for them. The armed conflict disrupted the existing order, compelling women to assume responsibilities traditionally held by men before the war – heads of households, community leaders, spiritual guides, and even rescuers and medics. From the accounts of Christian clergy emerges an image of women as remarkably adaptable and resilient individuals, capable of adjusting to new realities and bearing responsibility not only for their own lives but also for the well-being of others. The new social roles of women are not only a necessity arising from the absence of men but also evidence of their inner strength, competence, and ability to act under extreme circumstances. Women are not simply ‘replacing’ men; they are redefining their presence in public and religious life – becoming leaders, organisers of community life, spiritual guides, and active participants in efforts to protect and save lives. Their new roles inspire respect, admiration, and at times astonishment – especially among clergy, who often emphasise that the war has revealed an unexpected yet profound potential of women as social pillars.

The thematic analysis of the participants’ statements, including those relating to the category ‘women and new social roles,’ also emerges in later issues connected to family matters. One participant put it as follows:

When the husband goes to the front, the woman stays with the children, with the mother-in-law, she has to take care of everything. She often also works and organises help for others. As long as he is away, the wife has to manage on her own – for example, hammer a nail into the wall, take the child to the hospital. Yes, he is a hero, defending the country, but his family are also heroes because they carry the burden of life without a father who is fighting on the front line.

(IDI_14)

This statement from a clergyman highlights the profound transformation of a woman’s role within the family structure during wartime. In the absence of a man who has gone to the front, the woman becomes the head of the family – both in a symbolic sense and in a practical sense. The entire weight of daily life falls on her shoulders, encompassing caregiving, child-rearing, logistical, and emotional responsibilities. It is she who must take the child to the doctor, provide for the family, care for the older generation, and maintain the emotional balance of all family members. The clergyman perceives women as the quiet heroes of the home

front – those who remain outside the battlefield yet fight daily for normality in conditions of extreme crisis. Women, thus, become both the pillars of the family and highly versatile actors – managing the household, raising children, earning an income, engaging in humanitarian assistance, and at times participating in religious and community life. Their role is therefore repeatedly expanded. This excerpt from the respondent's account also exposes an important aspect of women's social invisibility during war – their sacrifice and hardship are rarely recognised as equally heroic as participation in armed combat. However, for clergy who have direct contact with the everyday reality of these families, there is no doubt that the woman on the home front fulfils a role just as vital and no less heroic. She ensures the continuity of family life, the upbringing of children, and the maintenance of the basic social structures that families represent – all of this often in conditions of profound uncertainty, fear, and emotional exhaustion.

The war has compelled women to take on the roles of spiritual guides and catechists. One research participant spoke of this as follows:

Today, a chaplain in the army is more of a psychologist than a clergyman. And very often, there are also volunteers who offer help. Once, a woman came and said: 'I am your chaplain, I will teach you, I will teach you about God,' and so on. She knew she could not hear confessions, because only a chaplain can do that, but such volunteers are also needed. There is this desire for spiritual help, because the demand for it is visible. I also know a widow of a soldier who now also teaches catechism in our parish. The children listen to her because they say she knows what suffering means.'

(IDI_7)

War presents people with enormous challenges – not only physical but also spiritual. In this context, a woman acting as a spiritual guide plays a key role in helping others cope with wartime suffering and trauma. The clergyman's statement shows how a woman, without holding the formal position of chaplain, can still carry out a spiritual mission by offering help, prayer, and support, especially in moments of crisis. What distinguishes women in this role is their capacity for empathy, compassion, and understanding of the suffering of others, particularly in the wartime context. A woman who has endured her own tragedy, such as the death of her husband during the war, becomes a natural source of support for others – especially for those who have also experienced loss. Her wartime experience becomes the foundation of her spiritual authority, enabling her to guide others in their process of spiritual healing. The woman's role in this area may take the form of teaching religion, leading prayer, or holding one-on-one conversations with those facing similar hardships. By providing spiritual support, she not only helps others to rediscover a sense of meaning in the face of suffering but also becomes a guardian of religious values in times when everything seems uncertain and destroyed. This assistance is particularly significant when the war separates people from traditional forms of support, such as military chaplains, who are restricted by formal regulations.

Another role of women highlighted by the respondents is their presence in emergency and medical services, a role with a long history. During Russia's war against Ukraine, too, women sought to engage in various emergency and medical service roles. One participant described the decision of a woman from his local community as follows:

One woman from our parish became a medic – she went to [name of city]. She volunteered herself. She had previously been a hairdresser. I also know many other female volunteers who are now helping in hospitals. They do some basic things, because they had nothing to do with this before, but they help. On their own initiative. They see the need, the shortages in hospitals.

(IDI_20)

This account illustrates the extraordinary transformation women undergo during wartime. In this case, a woman who, under normal circumstances, worked as a hairdresser decided to change course and volunteer for medical service at the front to help the wounded. Her decision reflects exceptional commitment and courage – qualities indispensable in wartime, when each day brings new challenges. The choice to work in emergency services despite lacking prior experience in the field is a powerful example of solidarity and willingness to offer assistance where it is most needed. War compels women to transcend their own limits and apply their skills in entirely new and demanding conditions. Women have become key actors in emergency services, which not only underscores their crucial role during war but also demonstrates their flexibility and capacity to adapt in the face of crisis. In wartime, when there is a shortage of qualified medical personnel, women also take on tasks related to medical and rescue assistance. They care for the wounded, help in hospitals, and provide first aid. Their presence in this role not only contributes to saving lives but also stands as a symbol of strength – a strength often underappreciated in the reality of war.

Another new role is women's involvement on the 'home front,' supporting soldiers. One research participant described it as follows:

They sew camouflage nets, bullet vests, prepare food, write letters. This is also the front, just a different one. They do it of their own accord. They know what soldiers need, what they lack, and they help as much as they can.

(IDI_16)

Women's assistance during war extends far beyond the traditionally understood role of domestic or spiritual support. This statement illustrates a new yet equally important role women play in ensuring the operational capacity of the armed forces. Their work, though invisible in the context of direct combat, forms a foundation for the army's effective functioning. Sewing camouflage nets, preparing food, and producing protective vests are tasks which, while not involving direct engagement in fighting, significantly support front line operations. Such work is as vital as that carried out by soldiers because it provides them not only with essential equipment

but also with morale. These activities demonstrate that war is fought not only on the battlefield but also through the constant efforts of the home front, which supplies the army with everything it needs to operate effectively. In this role, women not only perform basic logistical tasks but also become part of a larger mechanism enabling the military to function. Their contribution to producing food, clothing, and military equipment is indispensable, as they know – often through direct phone contact with their husbands and sons – what the soldiers lack most at the front. Their help is an expression of unwavering determination and a will to endure amidst the chaos of war, where even the smallest acts can have immense significance.

Women and Family

In their statements on the role of women, Christian clergy depict them as central to the structure of family life during the ongoing armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In their view, the woman is not portrayed solely as a victim of war – although her experiences undoubtedly carry a profound dimension of suffering – but is presented above all as an active and responsible individual, demonstrating psychological, moral, and spiritual strength. According to the respondents, the woman often becomes the pillar of a family's daily functioning amidst the chaos, separation, fear, and loss brought by war. The thematic categories, including 'women and family,' reveal the complexity of roles women assume during wartime. Women are compelled to act in conditions of constant uncertainty, performing roles traditionally assigned to both women and men, which makes them the symbolic and practical centre of family life during war. Their presence is considered multidimensional: first, as mothers who not only ensure the safety and development of their children but also strive to provide them with a sense of continuity and stability in a situation of extreme danger; second, as spiritual guides, taking on the role of initiating and sustaining religious life in the home, especially in the absence of men, who are often away at the front. In addition, the clergy's accounts portray women as bearing the weight of complex loss – emotional, social, and material – while simultaneously being compelled to continue their own lives. This perspective highlights the significant dimension of women's spiritual and social engagement as an element sustaining the cohesion of the family fabric.

The thematic analysis of the participants' statements, particularly those relating to the category 'women and family,' reveals themes concerning motherhood and childcare. One respondent observed:

Suffering has many different levels. First of all, there are personal tragedies in families where members are killed – daughters, sons, fathers, husbands, wives. There is suffering connected with the fact that there are many newly broken families as a result of such separation. Because it happens that the husband is at the front, fighting, while the wife is at home with the children. Well, this war has already been going on for almost two years, and this separation contributes to families breaking apart.

(IDI_2)

The clergyman's statement describes the complex situation of women, revealing not only their physical presence in the home but also their profound responsibility for maintaining the continuity of family life during the absence of men – fathers and husbands – who have been called to the front. This separation, as the clergyman notes, is a destabilising factor for families, sometimes leading to their dissolution. In such circumstances, the woman becomes the sole point of reference for her children, which generates intense emotional strain, particularly under the continuing uncertainty regarding the fate of her partner. Moreover, women often become the only source of emotional, psychological, and moral support for their children. Their role, however, extends beyond caregiving – it also encompasses organising education, maintaining social contacts, and ensuring the physical safety of children in conditions of bombings and evacuations. Clergy perceive women not only as caregivers but also as individuals possessing immense inner strength and determination, capable of taking action that requires psychological resilience and perseverance. Their situation is far from one-dimensional – it combines the everyday care of the household with the suffering born of uncertainty about the future and the necessity of making decisions alone. In wartime, the 'woman-mother' becomes a figure of stability and safety in a reality that offers no guarantee of either.

In the participants' statements, women are portrayed as the pillars of family life during wartime. One respondent described their role as follows:

The men went to the front, and the women stayed behind and do everything. They cook, teach the children, pray, help refugees. And alongside all this, they take care of their own families. Many times the message came that someone had been killed – a husband or a son. And there were several cases where there were no bodies at all. And for me the hardest thing is to convey that to the family, when a mother asks to bring back at least some parts so that a funeral can be held. And we also keep constant contact with many families. Some mothers call whose sons have returned and are drinking or falling into other addictions. Mothers call us for help, to come and speak with them about it.

(IDI_9)

The clergyman's statement reveals the multifaceted nature of women's roles during war – their presence in both the domestic and public spheres becomes pervasive and multilayered. Women not only manage the household, raise children, and lead prayer but also actively participate in aid efforts for refugees and others affected by the war. Their multitasking takes on an existential dimension – they serve as both the physical and spiritual support for families and local communities. The clergyman also points to the most emotionally difficult aspect for him – delivering news of the death of loved ones, particularly when a full burial is not possible. Mothers and wives long for at least a symbolic act of farewell to allow them to close the grieving process. At the same time, women remain constantly present for those returning from the war – often struggling with trauma, addiction, and depression.

They are the first to respond to the destructive effects of war on the mental and emotional lives of their loved ones. In this sense, the woman becomes not only the guarantor of the family's daily survival but also the manager of its internal crises. She absorbs the pain, transforms it into action, and – as clergy emphasise – never ceases to care for others, even when she herself is in a state of mourning and fear. Their role is not only functional but also deeply spiritual and social. The woman emerges as the 'silent centre' of wartime life – without her, neither physical survival nor the preservation of human dignity would be possible. This is a social role in the fullest sense, as it is families that form the foundation of society and the nation.

War ruthlessly separates families, taking from women their husbands, partners, and the fathers of their children. One respondent recalled such a situation:

We have widows who came to church after the funeral with small children. Their pain is indescribable, but they do not give up. One of them said: 'I must go on living, because the children must eat and go to school.'

(IDI_6)

War deprives women not only of their husbands and sons but also of their basic sense of security. The clergyman's account highlights the situation of women who – despite their loss – continue to fulfil the roles of mothers, caregivers, and organisers of daily life for their loved ones. Particularly moving is the image of a woman who, immediately after her husband's funeral, returns to the religious community with her young children. This is not only an act of presence but also a symbolic testimony of determination, strength, and the inevitability of action. Women in such circumstances have no space for prolonged mourning – the demands of daily life require them to assume their responsibilities immediately. The quoted words, 'I must go on living,' express not only an inner conviction about the need to endure but also a deep awareness of responsibility for their children. The mother's unmet emotional needs give way to the existential needs of the children – food, education, and a sense of security. Such cases reveal in women a form of quiet heroism – not ostentatious but rooted in everyday perseverance. Their presence and attitude carry hope while at the same time serving as a poignant testimony to how war redefines the notions of motherhood and womanhood, attributing to them a distinctly heroic dimension.

Women during wartime are also presented as the spiritual pillars of their families. In one of the interviews, a respondent described their role as follows:

Often, women lead prayer in families, especially where the father is at war or has not returned. They teach children how to trust God and not be afraid of the night. They are the ones who sustain spirituality in families. They often say: 'As a mother, I could give in to hysteria, fall into a nervous breakdown, but I have no choice – I must trust God, trust that my son will return home safe and sound. This is important.'

(IDI_11)

An analysis of the narratives of Christian clergy clearly reveals the image of the woman as the spiritual foundation of the family during war. Deprived of the support of a man, she assumes the role of religious leader. The quotation shows not only their role in prayer, which shapes the inner strength of the family, but also their function as teachers of faith, encouragers of children, and moral guides in a world that has lost its order. War fosters spiritual crises, fears, and existential questions – especially among children, who do not understand the mechanisms of war but feel its effects. Women therefore teach not only prayer but also spiritual courage and trust in the meaning of existence despite tragedy. Their stance rests on self-discipline – holding back emotional reactions (hysteria and breakdowns) in order to remain strong for others, especially their own children. The clergy portray women as combining the roles of mother and spiritual leader. They take on functions traditionally ascribed to fathers: leading prayer, upholding values, and setting the direction of hope. They pass on within the family what is intangible – faith, a sense of meaning, and hope. Their spiritual leadership carries an emotional and symbolic dimension. In the face of war, the woman becomes the ‘priestess of everyday life’ – the one who keeps the family alive not only physically but also spiritually.

Women and Aid

In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, women play a crucial role in the broad field of humanitarian assistance. The narratives of Christian clergy, in which women are portrayed as active participants in relief efforts, emphasise their significant contribution to the reconstruction and support of communities affected by the war. The assistance provided by women is multidimensional. It includes both material and spiritual support, as well as the organisation of aid activities within local and parish structures. Women are therefore seen not only as individuals responding to the urgent needs of their families and communities but also as initiators and organisers of local assistance. Their activities range from material help – such as preparing aid packages, sewing camouflage nets, or cooking meals – to more subtle forms of spiritual support, such as praying for soldiers and offering psychological encouragement to families. They are often leaders within parish-based aid structures, coordinating activities and managing resources directed towards those most in need. In this regard, women are not passive participants in humanitarian efforts but active agents whose involvement ensures the continuity of social and spiritual life in the face of war. Within the thematic category ‘women and aid,’ three specific forms of assistance provided by women during wartime have been identified and will be analysed below: their role as volunteers, as spiritual leaders, and as carers for refugees.

The thematic analysis of the participants' statements, particularly those relating to the category ‘women and aid,’ reveals content concerning female volunteers. One interview contains the following account:

In our parish, the women immediately began to help – they organised packages for the army, sewed camouflage nets, cooked dinners. They were

the first ones. Without their hands, there would have been no such assistance. . . . I also had the experience of supporting one woman who worked as a military medic. She was like a sister who pulled the wounded from the battlefield. The wounded, and often also the dead. She was directly at the very front of the fighting, at 'zero.' And after each such mission, she had to call me so that I could support her spiritually and encourage her. She went through it very deeply. Sometimes it was a torn-open stomach, sometimes half a head missing – still breathing – and she was pulling him. She told me many different stories. Such a small, young girl, twenty-four years old. A twenty-four-year-old girl was pulling bodies from the front. And now there are many more such girls. I will say this: I have always thought that war is not a place for a woman, but on the other hand, I understand that everyone has the right to defend their homeland.

(IDI_17)

The analysis of this statement shows that women, by engaging in front line activities, play a key role in wartime relief efforts. The quotation emphasises that, in situations of sudden danger, it was women who first mobilised to assist soldiers. Women's initiatives encompass a wide range of tasks – from organising packages for the army, through sewing camouflage nets, to cooking meals for all those in need. Their involvement not only is limited to logistical work but also includes interventions in challenging situations where first aid must be administered on the spot. The example of the young woman who personally assisted the wounded illustrates an exceptional level of determination, courage, and psychological resilience, even in the face of extreme wartime experiences. From the clergyman's account, it is clear that women form an essential link in the aid system, without which its effective operation would be significantly hindered. Their actions demonstrate an ability to adapt to conditions of extreme stress. By taking action in crisis situations, women show not only responsibility but also remarkable empathy and solidarity towards others. Such examples provide evidence that war redefines traditional gender roles, placing women in positions through which continuous humanitarian assistance to soldiers becomes possible. Each form of this aid portrays women as dynamic, strong, and responsible individuals whose actions are invaluable for maintaining social and spiritual order in the face of extreme wartime challenges.

During the war, women provide spiritual and psychological support to those in need: 'I know women who call soldiers' wives every day, ask if everything is all right, and pray with them over the phone. This is quiet help, but very important.' (IDI_15) – as one research participant observed. The quoted statement clearly highlights the role women play in offering spiritual and psychological support. Their daily activities – such as phone conversations with soldiers' wives – form an essential part of an informal support system that helps to alleviate the emotional consequences of war. This assistance, though seemingly quiet and unspectacular, carries great significance, as it offers reassurance that, in difficult moments, one is not alone and that prayer and dialogue can bring relief from pain and fear. Women engaged in this area often become mediators of emotions, helping to break the isolation faced

by the families of soldiers and by those affected by wartime trauma. Through regular phone contact and the initiation of prayer, women not only strengthen faith but also demonstrate care and empathy, qualities that are particularly important for providing psychological support during war. Such actions foster visible bonds within the community, expressed primarily through kindness and solidarity, which can contribute to a broader sense of security and unity. The clergyman's account underlines that spiritual support provided by women forms the foundation of their relief efforts. In situations where access to formal psychological care structures is limited or insufficient, quiet yet consistent prayerful support and telephone conversations can prove equally effective. This approach not only builds the inner strength of families but also reinforces social capital – a resource essential for survival in the extreme conditions of war. The statement indicates that spiritual support offered by women can contribute to easing emotional wounds and to fostering hope for overcoming the crisis.

According to the respondents, women serve as leaders of aid efforts within their local communities, as illustrated by the following excerpt from an interview:

All our relief activities are coordinated by the parish council, and it is mainly women there. They know who needs food, who needs their bills paid, and who needs medicine. For example, I know nuns who simply stayed at home – during the war, children do not come to kindergarten. Obviously, some have left with their parents, while others are at home under care. And the kindergarten is not in operation, but they started simply making dumplings, freezing them, packing them, and sending them to soldiers at the front.

(IDI_6)

In this statement, the respondent emphasises the role of women as leaders and coordinators of relief activities within parish structures. The quotation shows that the organisation of support in the religious community relies on the initiative and commitment of women, who have an excellent understanding of the needs of the local population. Coordination activities – preparing and distributing food, helping to pay bills, and purchasing medicines – reflect a deep awareness of the specific nature of local problems and the individual needs of beneficiaries. This is further illustrated by the following fragment:

In [name of city], for example, the Felician Sisters stayed at home because during the war children do not come to kindergarten – some have left with their parents, and others remain at home under care. And the kindergarten was not in operation, so they simply began making dumplings, freezing them, packing them, and sending them to soldiers at the front.

(IDI_7)

The example of the Felician Sisters, who transformed an inactive kindergarten into a place for producing and distributing meals for soldiers, demonstrates both their ability to respond quickly and their creative use of available resources. Whether

laywomen or religious sisters, women in parish leadership roles bring not only organisational structure to relief work but also an element of emotional and spiritual care. Their crisis management skills allow them to respond effectively to the rapidly changing wartime situation. As a result, local support structures become more resilient to difficulties and more effective in meeting community needs. The clergyman's statement indicates that these women demonstrate not only organisational competence but also deep empathy and dedication. Their involvement contributes to building a coherent support network in which each person receives help appropriate to their needs. In this way, women fulfil a crucial function in maintaining the connection between the community and institutional parish-based assistance.

During Russia's war against Ukraine, women have emerged as organisers of assistance for refugees. One research participant described it as follows:

Women with children came to us from [name of city]. The women from our parish took them into their homes, gave them clothes, food, warmth. And then they started helping them find work and kindergarten places. I also heard a story about an older woman who took refugees into her own home, cooked whatever they wanted, whatever they liked, and so on, and then overheard them speaking on the phone in Russian, criticising her. They insulted her. Such ingratitude. Disgusting – after all, she was helping them, bringing them into her own home, and she hears such words.

(IDI_7)

This narrative clearly underlines the role of women as initiators and implementers of aid directed towards war refugees, especially mothers and children forced to leave their homes due to the conflict. The quotation highlights the multifaceted nature of women's assistance – from providing shelter in private homes, through the supply of basic goods, to supporting social reintegration, such as helping to find employment or arranging education for children. This assistance has both a material and an emotional dimension – women not only provide the physical conditions for living but also seek to build an atmosphere of trust and safety, essential for overcoming the traumas of war. However, the help offered is not always met with gratitude – the critical comments and ingratitude mentioned by the clergyman point to tensions arising from difficult relations between refugees and the communities hosting them. The women's actions represent an example of altruism aimed at rebuilding social life in a context where war has stripped people of a sense of stability and security. As a result, women become a foundation of local resilience – not only through the provision of material goods but also as a source of emotional support that enables refugees to regain faith in a better future. The tension mentioned in the Ukrainian clergyman's account between hosts and refugees warrants separate analysis. Underlying it is a deep division within Ukrainian society, expressed, among other things, in the language used daily by its citizens. Those from the east very often speak Russian.⁸

Women and Suffering

War brings not only physical destruction but also an immense burden of psychological and spiritual suffering. In the accounts of Christian clergy, the theme of women's suffering emerges as one of the most poignant consequences of the ongoing armed conflict. Women, as wives, mothers, and daughters, often become both direct witnesses and victims of war, experiencing the loss of loved ones, displacement, violence, loneliness, and profound trauma. Their suffering is complex and layered, encompassing a range of experiences – from grief after the death of a husband, through constant fear for their children, to trauma resulting from sexual and physical violence. Clergy portray women as emotionally, psychologically, and existentially burdened individuals who, despite their harrowing experiences, often remain silent, concealing their pain deep within themselves. These descriptions not only reflect the scale of suffering but also reveal a profound need for spiritual and social support. The clergy's testimonies serve both as an expression of empathy and as an attempt to understand how women bear the often invisible yet extraordinarily heavy burden of war – a burden frequently overlooked by those outside Ukraine. This chapter presents the different faces of women's suffering as seen through the eyes of clergy across personal, social, spiritual, and physical dimensions. Each of these aspects represents a distinct form of grief, loneliness, and pain, yet all are bound together by the universal experience of wartime loss.

Thematic analysis of participants' statements within the category 'women and suffering' reveals, above all, experiences tied to grief and mourning after the loss of a husband. One participant shares the following account:

A young woman came to me with her child. Her husband was killed near [city name]. She only said: 'I don't know how to go on living.' And she cried for an hour. I just sat with her. . . . I have never spoken at such a funeral. What should one say? It is certainly difficult to speak when you see that this soldier had a good wife, children, and now those children are crying, and in fact no words will ever replace that father. This is unbelievable suffering. Pain that will remain.

(IDI_6)

In the clergy's narratives, the theme of women's grief after losing a husband resonates with particular intensity. The death of a partner on the front is often a dramatic life turning point, shattering a woman's world overnight and stripping it of a sense of security. The cited scene of a meeting between a pastor and a young widow – her silence and prolonged crying – reflects trauma and existential disintegration. The clergyman's response – choosing to accompany her in silence rather than with words – becomes, in itself, a profound testament to the fact that in the face of such deep suffering, there are no adequate statements. This experience fits into the broader social context of war, in which women deprived of their husbands become its victims not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. Particularly significant is the pastor's own admission of helplessness in the face of

grief. This is not only an emotional testimony but also an important interpretive point: clergy are not only observers but also participants in mourning, which cannot be fully addressed through standard liturgical forms. The symbolic dimension of the father figure is also worth noting – his loss not only is a personal tragedy but also deprives the children of a foundational pillar of family identity. The widow's suffering, thus, becomes the grief of a fractured family community, with her tears serving as a visible sign of the unspoken absence of a loved one. As the clergyman remarks, this pain 'will remain' – not as something that can be processed and closed but as part of the daily wartime reality that women must confront.

The suffering of women is closely linked to loneliness and the heavy burden of responsibility for the rest of the family, particularly children. One female clergyman describes a situation in the following way:

Recently, I was walking through the hospital and saw two women. I understood they were a mother and a wife. I simply sat down next to them without saying a word. I just embraced the mother. She cried it all out. I thanked her for her son. We sat together for a while, and I told them that if they ever needed me, I was nearby. On the grounds of the church, I have also spoken many times with such women. These women are lost; they don't know where to go. And if they are displaced persons from occupied territory, they usually have nothing – no home and no one. Widows often say they are alone with everything – with the bills, with the children, with the decisions. The man went to war or was killed, and they have to carry it all.

(IDI_11)

The cited account offers a quiet yet deeply poignant portrayal of women who, after losing a husband or son, are left solely responsible for the entirety of daily life. The clergyman sharing this experience understood the women's pain without needing words – her gesture, presence, and embrace were acts of profound empathy towards their suffering. The loneliness depicted here is both emotional and structural. Emotionally, it reflects the isolation and grief that accompany loss. Structurally, it points to the reality that these women become the sole caregivers of children, keepers of the household, managers of finances, and sole decision-makers in all matters of family life. This shift not only redefines their roles but also places upon them a continuous, unrelenting responsibility in the absence of male family members – a burden intensified by the instability and trauma of wartime conditions.

It is worth noting that the absence of a father in the early years of a child's life can significantly increase the likelihood of developing depressive symptoms. One of the most renowned studies in this field, conducted in the United Kingdom as part of the ALSPAC (Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children) project, examined the absence of a biological father during early childhood (0–5 years) and its relationship with depression in adolescence and early adulthood. The results showed a strong correlation between these two variables, indicating that the absence of a father in early childhood may constitute a significant risk factor for a child's mental health.⁹

War separates families and deprives their members of a sense of support and security. Women left to fend for themselves often feel lost, without direction or assistance. The loneliness of displaced women is particularly dramatic – they have lost not only loved ones but also their homes, communities, cultural identities, and everyday points of reference. This loneliness takes the form of a cry for help – often silent, laden with shame and resignation. The spiritual dimension of this loneliness makes spiritual support and the presence of the religious community sometimes the only source of relief, even if it does not bring immediate comfort. In this context, the role of the Church as a space of presence and community takes on special significance.

According to the interviewees, women's suffering also stems from the loss of their sons in the war. In this regard, one respondent made the following remarks:

The hardest conversations are with mothers who have lost their sons. They say their heart no longer beats, that everything is over. And some no longer want to live. We say that he is a hero, that he gave his life, and so on. Mothers do not want to accept the fact of death – that it is them, their sons.

(IDI_8)

This statement reveals the emotional intensity of the pain experienced by mothers who have lost their children. The loss of a son as a result of war is, for a mother, not only a personal tragedy but also an existential end to the meaning of life. The priest observes that arguments about heroism or sacrifice, though sincere and idealistic, cannot reach the heart of a woman whose child has died. Mothers in mourning often do not accept the fact of death – they live in a state of suspension between hope and despair. Such suffering goes beyond the limits of language – it is a feeling of absolute emptiness that cuts women off from reality. They are described as people who 'no longer want to live,' because with the death of their son, their inner world also dies. Maternal love, in its deepest form, knows no boundaries – thus, the death of a child becomes an unimaginable blow that exceeds both adaptive and spiritual capacities.

War is a profoundly traumatic time for women's psychological suffering. One of the interviews contains the following statement: 'Many women do not sleep. They say they wake up at night and wonder whether their son is still alive. Sometimes they cry in church, but quietly, so that no one sees' (IDI_27). This brief quotation reveals an exceptionally painful and elusive dimension of women's war-time suffering – psychological pain that has neither a clear beginning nor an end. Women whose loved ones are fighting on the front line live in constant uncertainty. Each night becomes a battlefield of thoughts, and every sleepless hour serves as a reminder of the ever-present danger that cannot be stopped. This is a pain that does not explode suddenly but instead seeps slowly and silently, burning a woman from within. Clergy observe this condition among their parishioners – women who come to church, cry discreetly, and hide their faces in their hands so that no one sees their tears. In a society that often demands strength, composure, and care for others from women, there is little space for weakness, fear, or exhaustion. Insomnia, thus,

becomes a symbol of emotional instability, loss of security, and life under constant threat. Women endure this condition for months, often without psychological support, therapeutic care, or even the possibility of rest. Their exhausted bodies and minds reflect a war being waged not only on the front lines but also within their own hearts.

A completely different form of women's suffering during war is that associated with the necessity of changing one's place of residence – being forced to flee from home and to adapt to life as a wartime displaced person. One of the study participants described women's experiences in this regard as follows:

It is hard to say what the common suffering is. If we talk about things that affect everyone, then, for example, the wife and children are abroad, and the husband is fighting. This is the tearing apart of families. It is a suffering that many ordinary people now share. Everything else – housing, money, food – can be resolved. But the fact that a father does not see his children for a very long time, or a wife her husband. . . . Women who have come from the front are often in shock. They are silent, staring at the wall. One woman said that she had left everything – her home, her mother's grave, her land. And now she has nothing.

(IDI_12)

The clergyman's statement touches on the dramatic aspect of war, that is, forced displacement. Women who are compelled to leave their homes lose not only a roof over their heads but also their past, sense of identity, and security. The loss of a place bound with memories, relationships, and emotions is a deeply traumatic experience. Particularly painful is the departure from the graves of loved ones, family land, places of worship, and everyday objects – everything that provided stability and meaning in daily life. The trauma of displacement undermines a woman's sense of rootedness while forcing sudden and difficult adaptation to a new environment. Many find themselves in a state of psychological suspension – on the one hand, they must function and care for their children; on the other hand, they cannot cope with the inner pain, which manifests in silence, withdrawal, and even depressive states. The clergyman's description of 'staring at the wall' is a symbolic image that aptly conveys the feeling of emptiness and helplessness. Priests, nuns, and laypeople engaged in humanitarian aid can serve as more than providers of material assistance – they can also be spiritual companions in a suffering that is hard to name and even harder to overcome.

There is yet another form of women's suffering during war – one that is often hidden and marked by silence. As one of the interviews reveals:

The suffering is in the villages where everyone was raped, starting from infants just a few months old, to mothers, and to elderly men aged 60 or 70. After meeting with them, they told me not to tell anyone about it. They raped everyone. Women who experienced violence do not want to talk about it, they do not want anyone to touch them. They say nothing. They just sit and

look. But in their eyes there is pain. A kind of pain that cannot be put into words.

(IDI_9)

This harrowing account exposes one of the most traumatic realities of war – sexual violence. Victims of such violence, including women, children, and the elderly, are often unable to speak about what happened to them. Silence becomes both a defence mechanism and a manifestation of profound pain – a pain that cannot be named, as any attempt to do so would be like reopening the wound. Women who have been raped live with a stigma they feel ashamed of, despite the fact that they are the victims. The clergyman draws attention to their demeanour – withdrawal, aversion to physical contact, and avoidance of conversation. In their eyes is imprinted an experience that surpasses the boundaries of human comprehension. Their suffering is not immediately visible, but it is present in every gesture and glance. Addressing it requires exceptional sensitivity, empathy, and respect from those offering help, as well as the creation of a safe space where a woman may feel secure – even if she never chooses to share her story. This suffering – hidden and silent – remains one of the darkest aspects of war and demands the deepest compassion.

Conclusion

War is a time of immense loss, trauma, and shifting social roles. Yet, as the analysis demonstrates, women play a crucial role not only in maintaining family bonds but also in rebuilding societies from the ground up. The suffering they endure – whether through the loss of loved ones, experiences of violence, or separation from family – often becomes the foundation of their spiritual strength and the transformation of their social roles. Through the lens of this analysis, a portrait emerges of women who, in response to the brutality of war, assume new responsibilities. A woman is not only a mother or wife; she is also an organiser of aid, a community leader, a spiritual guide, a medic, or a member of rescue services. Often unconsciously yet with determination, they shape a new social reality, earning the title of heroines who bear the weight of daily life while also supporting others – including soldiers – in their fight for life and survival. It is important to emphasise that women's significance lies not only in their traditional roles, such as caring for family, but also in their active engagement in public life, which encompasses a wide range of activities – from organising material assistance to serving as spiritual leaders. Women in Ukraine, despite the hardships of war, demonstrate that their role in society extends far beyond motherhood or marriage. In wartime, they become a cornerstone for communities in need of both physical and spiritual support. From the perspective of Christian clergy, women are symbols of not only suffering but also hope. Their role in the face of war exemplifies resilience, strength, and solidarity – the essential foundation for family survival under extreme conditions. The transformation of traditional women's roles during war is not only a reaction to crisis but also a reinforcement of their societal position, potentially leading to a

more resilient and united community in the post-war period. The role of women in wartime – encompassing both their suffering and their adaptation to new social roles – reveals the extraordinary value of their contribution to the reconstruction of not only families but also entire societies. They emerge as symbols of steadfastness and indispensable strength, whose presence on the wartime front is as vital as the fight itself. The analysis of empirical material shows that the experience of war in Ukraine, as perceived by Christian clergy, allows us to recognise the transformation of women's social roles, as well as the ways in which religious and ethical values shape their daily lives and coping strategies in times of crisis. Women are depicted not only as participants in aid efforts but also as agents of spiritual mobilisation within local communities. Clergy testimonies highlight the complexity of these roles, revealing elements of adaptation to wartime realities alongside active involvement in community and spiritual initiatives. This, in turn, underscores the need for further in-depth research that takes into account the religious and axiological dimensions of women's wartime experiences as an essential component of reflection in the context of a protracted armed conflict.

Notes

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6 Funeral Ceremonies of Ukrainian Soldiers in 2022–2024

A Theological and Political Study of Funeral Speeches

Cezary Smuniewski and Paweł Marek Mrowiński

Introduction

Funeral ceremonies play a special role in all religions and cultures. They represent a theological transition – from the temporal to the extraterrestrial eternal life. Whether we consider funerals as a religious or secular phenomenon, a special role in them is played by the rites of passage (*les rites de passage*), which ethnographer Arnold van Gennep defined as ‘all the ceremonial pattern which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another.’¹ According to van Gennep, these rituals ‘involve all areas of human life in which change occurs.’² Rituals, by virtue of their well-known structure and predictability, accompanying any change in a community (events that disrupt order and order that arouse anxiety), guard the order and offset the undesirable circumstances of this change. They thus have a homeostatic dimension in different communities. The ethnographer’s thought was further developed by Victor Turner. For him, rites of passage had a liminal function – enabling the individual/group to move from one phase to another. Thus, *rites de passages* represent a reinforcement of the values constituting the social basis and act as a stabiliser of social life. The stabilising role of rituals can be seen, for example, in the theory of social dramas.³

Within rites of passage, a special role rests with the officiating ‘master of ceremonies,’ who is usually a religious clergyman. It is he or she who performatively presides over the ceremonies and verbally (through funeral speeches) frames them – not only giving them form but also filling them with appropriate content.

The function of the funeral ceremony outlined earlier becomes particularly important during crises faced by the community. The ceremony becomes not only a space for theological reflection and consolation but also a place for community building and for the dissemination of values and ideas. Undoubtedly, a characteristic type of crisis is war. Then, the funerals of the fallen (both civilians and military) turn into a performative national and patriotic space (especially in the case of victims on the side attacked by the aggressor).

This kind of community funerary phenomenon is currently being experienced in Ukraine. From 2014, when the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine began, funeral ceremonies for the fallen began to play the role of a national community builder. In contrast, since February 2022 (the beginning of the full-scale

war), this phenomenon has intensified – not only because of the dramatically higher number of casualties but also because of the different socio-political context compared to previous years. The following chapter analyses the funeral ceremonies of fallen Ukrainian soldiers in terms of the narratives and motifs evoked in the funeral eulogies of the ministering clergy. The source basis for the analysis was interviews conducted between December 2023 and September 2024 with clergy officiating at the ceremonies.

In order to place our analysis in the strand of broader research on the political dimension of death, we would first like to look at the socio-political role of funeral ceremonies, especially during wartime conflicts, and their significance for the community (both local and national).

The Socio-Political Role and Significance of Funerals

Historian Avner Ben-Amos, analysing funerary ceremonies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, emphasised the importance of this type of ceremony as part of the modernisation of French society. According to this researcher, the funerals of soldiers killed during armed conflicts took on particular significance.

The ritualistic utilization of public, urban space was most evident in state funerals. These major civic festivals, which were celebrated throughout the regime, honoured the new republican heroes – the great men. The relation between the Republic and the national past was especially highlighted by the funerary processions which followed, time and again, the main routes that had already acquired historical connotations.⁴

Similar phenomena are also observed in other modernising and emerging or transforming European societies (above all in the second half of the nineteenth century).

As Leonardo Zambenardi noted, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, there was a significant change in the approach to the bodies of fallen soldiers. Military funerals began to be carried out according to an ambiguous combination of civilian and military rituals, the former derived from the funeral practices of society as a whole and the latter derived from a kind of patriotic pride based on nationalist ideology. This is mainly due to the different approaches of societies and authorities to death and the new location and structure of burials.⁵

During armed conflicts, rulers seek to use the funerals of fallen soldiers 'to frame the loss as a necessary sacrifice for a greater purpose.'⁶ Studies within the literature on the subject point to two main implications of such ceremonies for the authorities. On the one hand, researchers – focusing primarily on the American and British experiences – point to a weakening of support for those in power and their war efforts as a result of funerals for fallen soldiers.⁷ On the other hand, the results of other studies indicate the opposite trend – funeral ceremonies for the fallen become factors supporting those in power, causing an increase in nationalism and pro-war attitudes.⁸ The genesis of the dualism outlined earlier can be

traced to a number of factors. Nevertheless, a combination of the following must be considered the most important:

1. the location of the armed conflict – in the case of conflicts outside the country (especially in remote parts of the world), a reduction in pro-war attitudes is much more likely to be seen;
2. the nature of war – societies' perceptions of war (offensive/defensive) and the rationale for the warfare carried out influence anti-/pro-war attitudes;
3. the length of the conflict – depending on the length of the conflict, funerals of its victims give rise to different attitudes (in the case of long-lasting wars, anti-war attitudes may increase as a result of the increase in the number of fallen soldiers).

Equally important – as the above factors – becomes the framework of the death narrative. Namely, the socio-political context, combined with media coverage of the armed conflict and the victims themselves, significantly influences public perceptions. Secondly, the framework and content of the narrative are significantly influenced by the speakers at the mourning ceremony. It is on them that the role of building patriotic sentiments, maintaining pro-war attitudes or, on the contrary, lowering the temperature of public emotions, and calling for the cessation of hostilities rests.

Turning to the analysis of the funerals of soldiers killed during the 2022–2024 war in Ukraine, it is worth noting that socio-political significance is not only evident during state and central ceremonies (characterised by elaborate proceedings, scenery, and large numbers of mourners). Also in these more modest, more private ceremonies, aspects of relevance for society/nation as a whole can be found. Huge state funerals are rare, especially during armed conflicts. Of course, they have an important social overtone and reach; nevertheless, it is usually of a singular nature. In the face of war and tens of thousands of casualties, on the other hand, these smaller and more private ceremonies – due to their scale and universality – not only become a kind of daily occurrence in local communities but also have a much stronger impact on these communities through, for example, the proximity of the deceased soldier to the mourners or the position of the officiating clergyman, who is often one of the main authorities in smaller communities.

Methodology

This chapter is based on the IDI method conducted from 29 December 2023 to 21 September 2024 in Ukraine. Interviews were conducted with clergy of the Orthodox Churches (subordinate to the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate), Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Armenian Apostolic Church, and various Protestant denominations (Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists). The study was an anthropological study. Thirty-six people took part, including one female clergyman in a Protestant church. The participants of the study were asked the question, 'What

should clergymen talk about at the funerals of Ukrainian soldiers who died in the war?' The answers obtained during the IDI interviews to this question became the subject of the analysis of this study. The interviewees were not asked about theological differences between different Christian denominations. Such would probably have emerged if questions had been asked about, for example, purgatory or man's predestination to salvation. By omitting such questions from the survey, a high degree of homogeneity emerged in the group of respondents. The authors of the study also consciously refrained from publishing the full transcripts of the interviews in open online repositories, driven by the need to protect the identity of the research participants in the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. Participants were informed of this decision before the interviews began. From the outset of the study, we placed particular emphasis on ensuring the highest standards of data anonymisation, which was an integral part of the research strategy. This approach should be considered a significant advantage of this study. One discernible effect of the solutions adopted was to increase the interviewees' freedom of expression by limiting the phenomenon of self-presentation, thereby reducing the risk of distorting the image of the reality under study.

The collected material from the interviews was subjected firstly to codification (identification of theological and political ideas and themes), secondly to categorisation (grouping of codified data of theological and political content), thirdly to analysis and interpretation, and fourthly to synthesis, bringing out the most important tendencies in the statements. In classifying the content of the IDI interviews into a given category (theological content and political content), we used operational definitions based on the presence of direct references in the clergy statements to elements specific to a particular category. Thus, we considered as theological statements those that had references to Christian doctrine, liturgy, spirituality, or the Christian understanding of the meaning of life and death. On the other hand, we considered as political statements those that contained references to issues related to the state, citizenship, the relationship of the individual to authority, or criticism of public institutions. Due to the context of the war, we were open to their association with securitological content when categorising the content of clerical statements. As such, we considered those that referred to national and social security, psychological support and trauma prevention, mobilisation and strengthening of collective resilience (community resilience), and identifying gaps in the aid system. In the 36 statements surveyed, we identified theological content in 33 conversations and political content in 35 conversations.

Following Steinar Kvale, the following methods were used to work with the research material: condensation of meaning, conversational analysis, and narrative analysis.⁹ When quoting interviewees' statements, we use the abbreviation 'IDI' for 'individual in-depth interview' and the number of the response, for example (IDI_1), (IDI_9), and (IDI_32). We use the terms 'interviewee' and 'research participant' interchangeably.

Theological Analysis

By thematically analysing the theological content in the statements of the participants of the study, we identified four main issues. Firstly, out of 36 interviewees, as

many as 21 said that at the funerals of Ukrainian soldiers killed during the war, content related to Christological–eschatological issues should be emphasised: death, resurrection, and eternal life. Secondly, 17 participants in the study spoke about the Christian theology of Christ’s sacrifice, which allows us to interpret the death of soldiers as a sacrifice of their lives for the good of others – those who can live on in a free homeland. Thirdly, we identified the theme of God’s mercy and forgiveness of sinful man, which we identified in the statements of 11 interviewees. Fourthly, we identified the issues of pastoral practice as the last theme, the clergyman’s actions related to the celebration and conduct of the funeral. These were referred to by as many as 24 participants in the study. Let us now look at these four themes.

The first theme is directly related to eschatological issues, which in Christian theology include theological reflection on death, resurrection, and eternal life. In the statements of the Ukrainian clergy, a clear eschatological orientation is present, in which the death of the soldier does not represent the end but a transition to a new reality – eternal life in union with God. Interviewees repeatedly stress that the key message of the funeral is the hope of resurrection, rooted in the Christian understanding of death. As one interviewee states:

I personally when I attend a funeral I talk about the fact that this soldier is now with God. The death of this soldier is not the end of him. At the funeral you have to talk about eternal life.

(IDI_4)

Another interviewee, when asked what to talk about in a sermon at a soldier’s funeral, responds strongly:

About eternal life. About eternal life. It is true that there is death, and that is a fact. That is human life. There is the fact of death. But also there is the fact of resurrection. The Lord Jesus died, he lay in the tomb for three days, but he rose again. The funeral is the moment when we can help people to experience the death of the man, this soldier, with faith, with hope, with God.

(IDI_8)

One clergyman explicitly says that the funeral sermon of a soldier should speak about death as Christ’s Passover, that is, his transition from death to life:

The priest should base his sermon on this. To speak not of death but of the transition to the Heavenly Father. The Fallen One died defending us by giving us life and is therefore still alive, only that in the other world. One must give the mother, the wife, the children a ray of hope. You cannot bury him and that is the end of it. It should be emphasised that we are alive thanks to him, and that he lives in us and our Homeland.

(IDI_16)

This understanding of the soldier’s death – as a hopeful transition rather than a tragic end – is in line with a Christian eschatology centred Christocentrally on the

resurrection of Jesus. This is why one interviewee emphasised with great commitment, as if with homiletical fervour, in the interview that in a soldier's funeral sermon, one should speak

only about the resurrection, only that Christ loves him, that Christ is alive, has passed through death. So this soldier similarly, he did not cease to exist, but even though he died he is alive, he has passed to eternal life.

(IDI_23)

Consequently, the emerging image of the soldier's death portrays it as a theologically meaningful event that simultaneously gives spiritual support to the family of the deceased and reminds the living of the need to prepare for eternity.

The second theme is the theology of sacrifice. The statements of Ukrainian clergymen included in the IDI survey reveal a clear rooting of their interpretation of the death of a soldier in a Christian theology of sacrifice. Not only do the interviewees refer directly to the words of Jesus in the Gospels, but it should also be emphasised that they interpret them in a war context: 'when there is a funeral for soldiers there are very many priests present. In the sermon, it is said above all that his death is a sacrifice, that this sacrifice is not in vain, and that this sacrifice bears its fruit. It is about fruit above all in the spiritual dimension. For the Lord Jesus says that "There is no greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). In sermons, it is often emphasised that this sacrifice also spurs others to sacrifice. In a way, such sacrifices can also encourage others to "be more courageous"' (IDI_2);

This is an exceptional death by which a man showed love for God and love for his homeland, for his loved ones. This is something to be proud of. The Lord God says that there is no greater love than to give one's soul for one's loved ones, for one's friends.

(IDI_26)

A similar thought was expressed by another interviewee:

I am convinced that we priests should say at funerals that their sacrifice is the greatest. After all, the one who gives his soul for his fellow human beings has the greatest love according to scripture and has made the greatest sacrifice. We cannot let this sacrifice go in vain.

(IDI_25)

In this perspective, the death of a soldier is not understood solely as a tragic event but as an act of spiritual heroism that has a religious meaning. Just as Christ's death has a redemptive and salvific dimension and is therefore a work of liberation in the temporal and eternal order, the present death of soldiers happening during war is similarly leaning towards the future: 'Just as Christ sacrificed his own life, so in times of war people, by dying, sacrifice their lives for the future' (IDI_10). Clergy

statements also point to the role of sacrifice in shaping community attitudes in subsequent generations:

Military funerals are similar. The difference depends on whether he had children or whether he had a family. You have to pay special attention to the children, to remind them that their father did not cease to exist. And the fact that he died he did it for them: he just made a sacrifice for their future and their lives, and they have no right to waste it. This applies not only to the children of these dead soldiers, but it applies to everyone present. We don't have the right to waste this sacrifice, we have to find the strength to work and continue what this man fought for.

(IDI_35)

The appeal to a theological understanding of sacrifice becomes, in this case, the pursuit of an interpretation of death that empowers one to talk about the meaning of death. In turn, in the face of the destruction of war, it is this sense that can become a formative and identity force in future generations. The death of soldiers, by comparing it to the redemptive death of Christ, acquires a particular theological dimension. It is a death that is a revelation of love and at the same time empowers love – patriotism. Soldiers who have fallen in war not only deserve to be remembered, but their death also becomes an imperative to continue their sacrifice in subsequent generations. This obligation arising from the death of soldiers is realisable because death for the homeland is understood as man's participation in the death of Christ.

The third theme is related to the theology of mercy and forgiveness. The tension between the emotional desire for revenge and the Christian message of mercy and forgiveness, which should shape theological reflection at soldiers' funerals, resounds clearly in the statements of Ukrainian clergy. Interviewees point out that, although societal expectations are sometimes characterised by anger, the priest must not succumb to these moods:

There is a strong desire for revenge in society – 'death to enemies' – and yet this is not Christian. At a soldier's funeral it is therefore necessary to talk about forgiveness, even though it is very difficult to talk about it today. Therefore, first – before talking about forgiveness – one must start by talking about love: to show the Lord God as love. And then you can talk about man, about the homeland about honour. But always first about God's love. Even though it is very difficult.

(IDI_7)

The priest should talk about God's mercy in his words to the funeral attendees:

It is necessary at the funeral to ask God to have mercy on him, not because of his actions, but out of mercy, because surely there was something good in him, even if we did not see it. It is important to speak the truth at the funeral.

One cannot heroise and canonise. There is a rule that what life is such a death and what death is such an eternity. But there are exceptions. There is the wicked man who entered paradise first, there is the adulteress, the tax collectors who will be first in the Kingdom of God. Of course, it is not necessary to rejoice if you are a highwayman, but it is important to be honest. One should then ask that God have mercy on him and forgive him for the things he did wrong. If he was a hero, that he would be counted.

(IDI_18)

Another participant indicated that when presiding over funeral ceremonies, like the interviewees cited earlier, he emphasises the theme of mercy: 'I speak of gratitude, of faith and hope, that God will be merciful to all those who are motivated to defend their compatriots' (IDI_10). Another clergyman reveals in his statement the motives for justifying a person, which, according to him, should also be mentioned at the funeral of a soldier: 'One should talk about what is most important from a spiritual perspective – how to preserve, not to damage, not to lose the soul. Because, after all, it is the damaged soul that breeds wars and conflicts' (IDI_20). In these words, one should recognise a reference to the Christian teaching on original sin, which is the root of all individual and collective human immorality in the history of mankind and the history of the individual human being. An analysis of the clerics' statements reveals that for them, the funerals of soldiers are not only a moment of commemoration of a particular person but also a space for witnessing to the mercy of God, who – regardless of the circumstances – remains open to forgiveness, transcending human calculations of justice. A similar thought also resounds in the statement of the clergyman, who speaks of his funeral sermons and the associated attitude as follows:

They say that long ago I would have gone mad from the injustices of this earthly world if I had not known one thing, that the last word belongs to God. We try to find some words, but instead of words it will be more precious to hug your mother, hug your wife, cry with them and it will be much, much stronger. But most importantly, pray with them. One must express at the funeral the thought that this soldier is already with God, that is, in paradise. Why in paradise? Because he has already seen hell on earth. Every burial is a wound, a pain and it is not a statistic, it is a tragedy. A tragedy in the family.

(IDI_28)

This framing makes it possible, in reflecting on directly theological issues – the theology of sacrifice, eschatological issues, and God's mercy and forgiveness – to move on to issues specific to pastoral theology. Let us therefore look at the role of the clergy as pastoral caregivers.

The last of the four theological themes identified concerns the funeral of a soldier as a site of specific pastoral ministry. In the reflections of the Ukrainian clergy, the funeral appears as a special space for the implementation of pastoral ministry, requiring a deep pastoral sense and theological prudence. The interviewees

emphasise that the presence of the pastor is not just about saying words but, above all, about being with people and for people:

We start not by speaking, but by being present. The mission and task of the chaplain is to be alongside. You have to be there when the need is greatest. And a soldier's funeral is just such a place. One has to be next to the man, feeling his mood, the warmth of his hand what he is experiencing now. Then even words can be superfluous, because I am together with the family of the fallen. Sometimes we can embrace a family member, stand together, cry. I can listen, ask the question: 'What can I do, how can I be of service?' I can suggest: 'Maybe we can go together, have tea, coffee. If you are hungry then treat yourself to my sandwich.'

(IDI_14)

In this context, the funeral is a moment not of spectacular rhetoric but of delicate and responsible service, in which the task of the pastor is to 'speak little, slowly, gently, weigh every word, show respect' (IDI_14). Priests emphasise that their presence gives the families of the deceased not only spiritual support, which should be extended also after the funeral:

when the emotions have subsided, life still goes on. The priest should also come after the funeral, in a few days' time, ask what they need, have coffee or tea with the family of the slain soldier, talk to them. I think that for them this is a sign that someone is with them, someone is helping them.

(IDI_6)

The pastoral service of the clergy, according to the participants of the study, should go beyond the time and liturgical signs provided for in the funeral ritual. The interviewees emphasise that the basis of pastoral care related to soldiers' funerals is the relationality of the priest, his ability to be with the mourners. This being 'with' a person suffering after the loss of a loved one resonates particularly strongly in the following statement by a clergyman:

I just sat next to him and didn't say anything. I just embraced my mother. She cried her eyes out. I thanked her for her son. We sat together, I told them that if they needed me, I was here for them. On the temple grounds, I have also spoken to such women many times. Such women are lost, they don't know where to go. And if they are displaced people from the occupied territory, most often they have nothing or no home or no one.

(IDI_11)

The pastoral service revealed in the context of soldiers' funerals thus goes beyond the limits of pastoral care limited to the sacraments, participation in the liturgy or teaching (preaching), and devotional practices. It presupposes knowledge of the mechanisms of trauma, sensitivity to the family context, and readiness for

long-term accompaniment. Consequently, the analysis of the interviewees' statements reveals the soldier's funeral not only as a religious rite but also as a special form of pastoral presence at the moment of suffering, where the priest's service is realised through tenderness, accompaniment, and concern for the community.

The above analyses referring to theological content authorise the formulation of conclusions of a political nature and, due to the context of war, also those concerning security. Firstly, the death of a soldier, by embedding it in a theological eschatological narrative and by portraying it in relation to eternal life, gives it a new meaning. Well, from a political science perspective, this kind of sacralisation of death in the service of the homeland constitutes a legitimising element of warfare, re-evaluating the hierarchy of values in the life of the political community, and strengthening collective resilience. Secondly, the theology of sacrifice present in the clerics' statements transforms the individual act of death into a heroic gesture of a collective nature, analogous to the salvific sacrifice of Christ. As a result, the death of a soldier acquires the dimension of a moral-political imperative, mobilising society to continue fighting and sacrificing for the nation. Thirdly, the accent on God's mercy and forgiveness inscribes the funeral liturgy in the tension between the pursuit of justice and the need for spiritual reconstruction of the community amidst the trauma of war. In this context, clergy celebrating funerals can be seen as directors of the norms of a communal culture, counteracting the radicalisation of social sentiment through mitigating and integrating narratives. Fourthly, the funeral as a space of pastoral closeness between clergy and mourners becomes a tool for building social capital of empathy and solidarity. Ukrainian clergy, according to the analysed statements, by combining liturgy with practices of emotional and psychosocial care, become known in society as carriers of opposition to violent attitudes and violent narratives. These attitudes and narratives can manifest themselves in the glorification of war and the justified privileging of revenge and violence. Fifthly, the religious funeral ceremonies of soldiers should be recognised for their function of stabilising the functioning of society. The idea is that funerals can act as a mechanism to alleviate social tensions and traumas resulting from prolonged armed conflict. Through theological narratives and the pastoral presence of the clergy, the community is provided with symbolic tools to integrate and work through the experience of loss, which counteracts social disintegration and promotes the psychological resilience of society. By constructing a positive and meaningful image of the death of a soldier, the clergy counteract the demoralisation and pessimism that are great forces weakening a defending nation. Thus, the churches become an informal but important security actor by constructing narratives that support the defence effort of the state in not only a cultural-symbolic dimension but also directly in the dimension of national security.

Political Analysis

Thematically analysing the political content in the statements of the survey participants, we identified four main issues. Of the 36 interviewees, as many as 27 spoke of patriotism (first theme); 19 interviewees pointed to the funeral as a space

for national and local community building (second theme); 17 presented the clergy celebrating funerals as carriers of national identity (third theme); and 16 referred to the sacrifice of soldiers' lives as a source of legitimising the state and civic values (fourth theme). Let us now look at these four themes.

Issue one – an analysis of the statements of Ukrainian clergymen shows that patriotism plays a central role in their reflections on the funerals of soldiers, acting as not only a moral value but also a spiritual and civic one. In funeral sermons, patriotism is not conceived merely as an attitude towards the homeland but as an act of neighbourly love and sacrifice, deeply embedded in the Christian imaginarium. One interviewee emphasises that at a funeral, one should say in the sermon: 'About the example of this particular soldier: that he loved the homeland and proved it with his life. He showed that being a soldier was more than a job for him' (IDI_1). In this way, the interviewee points to the boundless dedication to the homeland and the depth of motivation of the fallen. In this way, the death of a soldier is interpreted as proof of supreme devotion – not only to the homeland but also above all to loved ones and the community:

It is necessary to talk about patriotism. After all, in war, soldiers give their lives: that which is most precious, that which has the greatest value. This life is not given for just anything and just anyone but is given for the freedom of the state.

(IDI_6)

A similar thought appears in the reflection of another clergyman, who directly points out the need to use the funeral as a formative moment:

Every soldier who gave his life for us is a hero. We should be grateful to him, his family, his parents for raising such a patriot. And, of course, at the funeral it should be pointed out that others should follow the example of our soldiers, and that they should love their homeland, their nation, their family.

(IDI_30)

In the context of war, patriotism also becomes a counterpoint to apathy and emigration, gaining a clear counterfactual feature: 'Of course it is worth talking about patriotism at the funeral, because if it wasn't for patriotism, that soldier wouldn't have died, he would have lived in a "Russian mirage" or abroad, or still somewhere' (IDI_25). The clergymen's statements about patriotism testify to the fact that it is patriotism that functions as a cultural tool for interpreting war, acting as a bridge between what is political and what is religious in an individual's life. The narrative of patriotism is both identitarian and moral because it is both a way of making sense of death, of strengthening community, and of reinforcing beliefs in the rightness of armed resistance.

Of the 36 clergymen surveyed, when asked whether patriotism should be spoken at a soldier's funeral, only three responses differed to some extent from the others. One survey participant emphatically stated: 'No, 100% no, God forbid about

patriotism. Only about the resurrection, only about the fact that Christ loves him, that he is alive, not dead, that he has passed to eternal life' (IDI_23), justifying this with social trauma and negative associations with patriotism, which in the community where this clergyman is ministering is an 'ambiguous' concept, and precisely for this reason should not be associated with Christian thought by funeral participants. Two other interviewees took the view that the context of the funeral required a particular sensitivity towards the emotions of the family and the community and that emphasising patriotism could be perceived as inadequate or instrumental to the personal suffering of loved ones. One respondent claimed that a funeral: 'is not the place to talk about patriotism' (IDI_19), although he acknowledged that supporting the state has its importance, and this should be talked about. Another interviewee stressed that, due to disillusionment with the political elite, patriotism should not be highlighted at funeral ceremonies:

I personally don't speak to them about patriotism, because they get very upset by such speech. . . . I speak at funerals about the fact that we should be people one to another, we are supposed to help one another, we are supposed to be together, we are supposed to support each other.

(IDI_24)

The positions indicated reflect the deep tensions between the dimension of individual suffering and national discourse under conditions of war. The three clergymen whose statements differ from the others in terms of speaking about patriotism at soldiers' funerals do not so much show themselves to be opponents of patriotic thought but rather fear that the word 'patriotism' might be understood in a way that they would not like. This undesirable understanding of patriotism could be to regard it as a religious concept or to confuse it with respect for the state and authority within the state. Those clergymen who take the position that a funeral is not an appropriate place for patriotic arguments believe that this ceremony should be a primarily religious or only religious event.

Issue two concerns the funeral as a space for national and local community building. Statements by Ukrainian clergymen show the funerals of soldiers as an important dimension of collective life, in which religious, political, and social themes meet, making the funeral rite a space for the formation and manifestation of community – both national and local. The funeral, although celebrated in liturgy and church tradition, is presented by many interviewees as a moment of particular mobilisation of political and religious communities. One clergyman describes it as follows when talking about the various people attending the soldier's funeral:

Representatives of the Church, the authorities, MPs, the mayor of the city. We all pay due tribute, give the family monetary support or support regarding housing – our mayor is wonderful. He keeps his word, invites the soldier's family to visit him the day after the funeral to discuss the problems and challenges that our city can face to help the family. And in the parish we include

the family of the fallen in a special community giving spiritual support, psychological support. This community is headed by the mother of the fallen soldier.

(IDI_14)

In these words of the interviewee, one can recognise the description of the moral and social mobilisation of the inhabitants of the village. The participation together in funerals of representatives of the church hierarchy and the state (local) authorities makes it possible to perceive the political community as an inclusive subject – not limited to political institutions but including religious communities (churches and parishes) as equal actors in public life, co-creators of the culture of common life, and formers of national collective memory. At the funeral, therefore, the special role of the local community is revealed, whose duty, as the interviewees point out, is to stand by the family of the fallen. One priest states: ‘I always say at funerals that the neighbours and relatives are the ones who should take care of the wives and children of the fallen’ (IDI_15), while another adds:

We need to support the families of soldiers who have lost someone in the war. So that they are not isolated, so that they are in contact with the environment. I encourage this environment to reach out to them regularly. Such a family needs to be assured that the community, friends will come to them and be interested in what is happening in that family.

(IDI_24)

The funeral, in this sense, becomes an impetus to activate social bonds and strengthen social capital within the local community. This multidimensional involvement of different actors – clergy, families, local authorities, and lay communities – allows us to understand the funeral not only as a moment of mourning but also as a ritual with a constitutive function for social continuity and national identity. In the reflections of Ukrainian clergy, the funeral of a soldier reveals itself as a special space in which what is religious and what is political intermingle, giving rise to a community built on memory, solidarity, and gratitude. It is therefore not only a liturgical act but also an act of identity – giving structure to the collective experience of war and forming lasting bonds within the national and local community. These bonds should be seen as the strength of civil society, which Ukrainians are learning by healing from the remnants of *Homo Sovieticus*.

The third issue is related to the perception of the clergy as carriers of national identity. In the reflections of the participants of the study, national identity appears as a value deeply embedded in historical, spiritual, and communal experience and at the same time as a process sustained and shaped by the ministry of the clergy. They are the ones who act as guardians of national memory and interpreters of the sacrifice that soldiers make of their lives – in this sense, their role not only is limited to the sacred function but also includes the transmission of national and formative content. Soldiers’ funerals become community events in which national

identity is not only recalled but also embedded in the concrete sacrifice, in the real name and biography of a particular fallen person. As one interviewee states:

The death of a soldier is a death that is always special, because in it a person has shown love for his homeland, for his loved ones. And sometimes also love for God. If this is how death happened then we should take pride in this death out of love.

(IDI_26)

In this view, love for the homeland is not abstract – it is embedded in relationships, in a concrete family and in a local and national community. The national identity built by the clergy is not nationalistic but communal and sacrificial. Priests point out that the death of a soldier is not just a personal loss but part of a wider narrative of belonging, responsibility, and gratitude. One of them states:

We do not have the right to waste the death of a soldier, we must find the strength to work and continue what this man fought for. If the Lord God allowed Ukraine and Ukrainians to exist, that means he gave them some kind of mission.

(IDI_35)

The national identity they form is therefore not just a matter of ethnic or civic belonging – this identity is based on a common understanding of the common good and a shared history of suffering and sacrifice. The identity of the political community built by the clergy at funerals is based on the memory of sacrifice, a community of solidarity, and rootedness in Christian values. The clergy not only interpret the reality of war but also, through liturgy, presence, and word, constitute the identity of the national community under conditions of its deepest trial.

The fourth issue concerns the fact that there is a clear motif of legitimisation of the state and national values in the statements of the Ukrainian clergy. Well, the state and its sustainability are understood by them not as abstract political entities but as a community built on the concrete sacrifice of life, which, as the interviewees point out, gives meaning to the common existence. This narrative is based on a strong link between sacrifice and political community, in which citizenship is identified with a willingness to serve, sacrifice, and take responsibility. One clergyman formulates such a thought in a very direct way: 'We should understand that the best representatives of the Ukrainian people are being killed, those who reacted the fastest to the Russian onslaught, and went first' (IDI_10). In this perspective, the state gains moral legitimacy precisely because of those who give their lives for it – not in the name of ideology but in the name of community values. The death of a soldier also becomes an impulse to reflect on the quality of civic life in the state of those who remained:

We should remember that if life has been given to us, we should live in such a way that we are not ashamed of that life. The enemy has come to take this life

away from us, but since we have saved ourselves, we should live as best we can. If our husband or son or daughter died, we should understand that this sacrifice was for the sake of something. We should not destroy the life given to us, if only through alcoholism or other addictions. After all, someone died so that we could live with dignity.

(IDI_10)

As we see in this statement, citizenship becomes rooted in a moral obligation towards the fallen, an obligation to live with dignity. In this view, the legitimacy of the state does not come from institutions, for it is bottom-up – it comes from citizens wanting to live with dignity, citizens identifying with the community created with those who have already passed away because they were killed for the sake of the freedom of future generations. This legitimisation of the state through the sacrifice of the soldier is also pedagogical – aimed at those who remain. The clerics call on them to continue their work, to live according to the values for which others died. It is therefore about affirming the state not as a political entity but as a moral community, sanctified by witness and suffering. As one interviewee put it:

You can't bury it and that's the end of it. It has to be emphasised that we live thanks to him, and that he lives in us and our homeland. There is still a lot of work to do here.

(IDI_16)

The statements of the clergy indicate a strong tendency to interpret the sacrifice of the soldier as an act that legitimises the existence of the state and the civic community. The clergy not only accompany the mourning but also give it social and political meaning and shape the imagination of the national community as a space of remembrance and moral responsibility.

The above analyses authorise the formulation of conclusions of a political nature and, due to the context of war, also conclusions concerning security. Firstly, patriotism in clerical narratives acquires the status of a formative and axiological category, performing an interpretative function in the face of the death of a soldier and armed conflict. It is presented as an act of supreme devotion, the content of which is simultaneously rooted in the Christian ethos of love of neighbour and duty to the political community. The message of patriotism becomes an integral element of funeral preaching and, at the same time, a tool for the moral mobilisation of society. Secondly, the funerals of Ukrainian soldiers appear as a space for revealing and strengthening community bonds – at both the national and local levels. The simultaneous presence of representatives of the church, local government, and the families of the fallen testifies to the synergy between the religious and political spheres. In this context, funeral rites become integrating rituals that activate local solidarity mechanisms and are part of the process of remodelling the inherited Soviet ways of society in favour of a civic culture based on the community's capacity for self-organisation. Thirdly, the clergy act as active co-constructors of national identity. In their funerary activities, this

identity is not only an ethnic or political category but also a spiritual–moral one. Grounded in Christian values and in narratives of suffering, sacrifice, and love for the homeland, national identity takes on a relational and communal character. In this way, the clergy co-shapes the national imaginarium, inscribing the death of the soldier in the continuum of the nation's historical testimony. Fourthly, the statements of the clergy clearly indicate a perception of the soldiers' sacrifice as the foundation of the legitimacy of the state. The state, in this view, is not a value in itself or an institutional structure, but a moral community, called to live with dignity through the testimony of the fallen. In this sense, statehood becomes imbued with ethical and emotional content, and political legitimacy acquires a bottom-up character – based on collective memory, loyalty, and a commitment to live in accordance with the values for which others gave their lives. Fifthly, funeral ceremonies for soldiers perform the function of strengthening social resilience (resilience) under conditions of war, counteracting social disintegration and crisis of trust in the face of personal loss and existential threats. Under conditions of war, the funeral thus becomes one of the key tools for the performative regeneration of the nation and thus a space where the 'sacred' and the 'polis' ('profane') meet in an act of public witness oriented towards the 'futurum.' In this way, too, the nation reveals itself as an emotional–political community, so that it does not exist merely as a political structure but as an imagined and lived community, as described by Benedict Anderson. This community needs rituals and narratives to reproduce itself.¹⁰

Conclusion

On the basis of the IDI conducted with clergy from Ukraine, it was possible to reconstruct the theological and political dimensions of thinking about the role of funerals of soldiers killed in Russia's war against Ukraine. From a theoretical perspective, the study was set in relation to van Gennep's concept of rites of passage and Turner's theory of social dramas, according to which funerary ceremonies in border situations – such as war – have an ordering, integrating, and axiologically stabilising function. Clergy statements, analysed in the context of these theoretical frameworks, reveal themselves as a source for reconstructing the symbolic meanings of death, community, and statehood.

From an axiological perspective, the clergymen's narratives demonstrate that funeral eulogies do not merely perform a consolatory function but are spaces for the propagation of values fundamental to the continuance of the community: generosity, remembrance, love, forgiveness, and responsibility. Thus, the clergy – through word, presence, and pastoral care – play the role of guardians of the axiological order of a nation in a state of existential threat. In their utterances, the death of a soldier is neither a mere loss nor a mere heroisation but a theological, social, and political event that still demands a responsible interpretation and a communal experience.

From a political science perspective, the interviews indicate that funeral speeches are an important tool for legitimising not only the soldier's sacrifice but also the

political community itself. The clergymen formulate a message in which the state is not just an institutional structure but a community built on suffering and love, and citizenship is expressed through a willingness to sacrifice. Patriotism – presented as an attitude rooted in the Christian ethic of love of neighbour – serves both to narratively ground the meaning of death and to form a lasting national identity built on intergenerational solidarity. The clergy's statements allow us to understand funerals as part of a system of collective resilience – resilience – activated under conditions of war. The ministry of the clergy, as well as the content present in their funeral eulogies, appears to protect the community from emotional and axiological disintegration through its psychological and spiritual support. Particularly relevant here are the themes of forgiveness, mercy, and eschatological hope, which serve to alleviate anger and despair and thus counteract the social mechanisms of escalating violence and nihilism.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasising that although the subject of the analysis was only the statements of the clergy regarding the funerals of soldiers, the significance of these ceremonies goes far beyond the local context and has a fundamental impact on the entire Ukrainian nation. This is because funerals, present every day in the public space (funeral processions, kneeling crowds when a soldier's body is transported down the street, and Ukrainian flags on soldiers' graves), shape the collective perception of war – as not only a military but also a moral struggle, in which a soldier's sacrifice becomes a symbol of national determination, unity, and the sense of further resistance. These rituals, through their repetition and strong axiological charge, strengthen the conviction of justice and the necessity of defending the homeland, and at the same time – thanks to the motifs of mercy and forgiveness present in the clerics' narratives – prevent the radicalisation of social emotions by creating a counterbalance to the destructive tendencies of war. However, it cannot be overlooked that the 'Great Absentee' in this analysis remains the funerals of civilians – victims of the same war, whose deaths often carry a different social and symbolic message. The reflection on the funerals of civilians opens up another, extremely important area of research that deserves a separate, in-depth study, showing the fuller spectrum of the experience of war from a community and national perspective.

The results of the study confirm that mourning speeches – as part of the performative role of the clergy – are one of the important mechanisms for the reproduction of the national community under conditions of war and that the clergy appear as an important cultural and political actor, contributing to the resilience of the state not only through prayer but also through active participation in the formation of collective imagination, hope, and meaning.

Notes

- 1 Within the division of *les rites de passage*, the researcher concluded that 'rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies.' Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 10–11.
- 2 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, 'Przemiany,' in *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii*, ed. Arnold van Gennep (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2006), 7.

- 3 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).
- 4 Avner Ben-Amos, 'The Sacred Center of Power: Paris and Republican State Funerals,' *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, issue 1 (1991): 28. To some extent, a similar path – the transformation and modernisation of public burials and their different socio-political significance over the centuries – has been followed by Harry Garlick. See Harry Garlick, *The Final Curtain. State Funerals and the Theatre of Power* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).
- 5 Leonardo Zambernardi, 'Western Attitudes towards Soldiers' Death: From the Early Modern Period to the Present,' *Mortality* 27, issue 3 (2022): 286, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2020.1864723>; Leonardo Zambernardi, 'Excavating Soldier Deaths: A Study of Changing Burial Practices,' *International Political Sociology* 11, issue 3 (2017): 292–307, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olx012>.
- 6 Maria Rashid, *Dying to Serve: Militarism, Affect, and the Politics of Sacrifice in the Pakistan Army. South Asia in Motion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).
- 7 Rachel Gribble, et al., 'British Public Opinion After a Decade of War: Attitudes to Iraq and Afghanistan,' *Politics* 35, issue 2 (2015): 128–150, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12073>; Douglas L. Kriner, Francis X. Shen, 'How Citizens Respond to Combat Casualties: The Differential Impact of Local Casualties on Support for the War in Afghanistan,' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, issue 4 (2012): 761–770; Scott Sigmund Gartner, Garry M. Segura, 'Race, Casualties, and Opinion in the Vietnam War,' *Journal of Politics* 62, issue 1 (2000): 115–146.
- 8 Dino Hadzic, David Carlson, Margit Tavits, 'How Exposure to Violence Affects Ethnic Voting,' *British Journal of Political Science* 50, issue 1 (2020): 345–362, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000448>; Daphna Canetti, et al., 'Exposure to Violence, Ethos of Conflict, and Support for Compromise: Surveys in Israel, East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, issue 1 (2017): 84–113; Anna Getmansky, Thomas Zeitzoff, 'Terrorism and Voting: The Effect of Rocket Threat on Voting in Israeli Elections,' *American Political Science Review* 108, issue 3 (2014): 588–604, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000288>.
- 9 Steiner Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (London: SAGE Publications, 2017), 101–119.
- 10 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2003).

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Part III

War and Transnational Axiological Horizons



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7 Will a Values-Driven Approach Prevail? EU–Ukraine Relations in Times of War

Vadym Zheltovskyy

Introduction

This chapter aims to explore the transformation of the EU’s institutional leadership towards the unprecedented support for Ukraine and its aspirations to join the EU in the years 2022–2024. It was, in fact, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine that led to a transformational shift in the EU foreign policy agenda, leading to the dominance of a values-based approach to the reconsideration of the status quo. That resulted in the announced plans to strengthen the values-driven transformational potential of the EU in the international arena and the adoption of the ambitious 2030 enlargement agenda. As a result, the EU institutions and member states managed to achieve ‘commonality of purpose’¹ on the need to transform the EU actorness and build a new foreign policy agenda driven by moral imperative.

In this regard, the main research objective of this chapter is to explain the impact of axiological factors on EU–Ukraine relations and its implications for EU strategic capacity as an international actor. The chapter puts forward the assumption that the efficiency of the values-driven rhetorical strategy developed by EU institutional leaders has been dependent on their capacity to employ political discourse as a persuasion tool promoting Ukraine’s accession as a pragmatic necessity dictated by the new geopolitical context. Such a focus argues for a methodological approach that employs qualitative discourse analysis coupled with content analysis as the main methods for studying the promotion of political strategies delivered by EU officials and their reflection in adopted documentation aimed at facilitating continuous intergovernmental support for Ukraine’s EU membership in the years 2022–2024.

The rationale behind choosing these chronological limitations is twofold. First, the starting point of 2022 allows the author to explain the transformational change of the EU shift to values-based foreign policy in response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine that was launched on 24 February 2022. Second, the final point of the analysis, which is the end of 2024, makes it possible to follow the evolution of the EU inter-institutional cooperation on maintaining the political support for the announced reform of the EU foreign policy-making under a new geopolitical context. The time span of two years, that is 2022–2024, is necessary to evaluate

the sustainability potential of the transformational consensus on the enlargement between two election cycles of the EU institutions (i.e. the term of office of the European Parliament and its president and the term of office of the European Commission and European Council presidents).

Empirically, two sets of data are taken into consideration – political speeches delivered by EU institutions' presidents, that is, presidents of the European Council, European Parliament, and European Commission, on the matter of EU–Ukraine relations in the context of the EU support for Ukraine's struggle against Russian invasion and for the democratisation reforms in times of ongoing war. Another set comprises the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament, conclusions of the European Council and verbatim reports of European Parliament plenary discussions on the broad topic of EU foreign policy reform. The texts of the above primary sources are conveniently available at the official websites of the European Union institutions. By doing so, the chapter attempts to explain the leverage of the undertaken axiological perspective on the inter-institutional alliance on building intergovernmental support for the transformation of EU enlargement policy in line with the Solidarity with Ukraine initiative. That, in turn, will make it possible to evaluate the sustainability potential of the EU's values-based approach towards democracy support in Ukraine and its EU accession despite the ongoing war.

The structure of the chapter consists of the following parts. First, the chapter provides an overview of the literature on the transformation of EU foreign policy in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The main part, presenting the findings, concentrates on the impact of values-driven rhetoric on the proposed changes to the EU foreign policy agenda-setting in response to Russia's war on Ukraine. The proposed analytical framework is based on an analysis of axiological factors that define the essence of EU–Ukraine relations between 2022 and 2024 within the institutional settings regulating EU relations with non-member states. The emphasis is put on the impact of the political discourse delivered by key institutional actors in the EU on the dynamics of EU foreign policy-making, that is, enlargement reform. Furthermore, there is an attempt made to evaluate the efficiency of political narration as a persuasion tool by studying its reflection in the official documentation (i.e. resolutions of the European Parliament and conclusions of the European Council) on the matter of bilateral relations between the EU and Ukraine in a wider context of the EU strategic agenda.

The Transformational Shift in the EU Foreign Policy-Making in Times of War – Contexts of Scientific Analysis

Russian military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 has served as a catalyst for the reconsideration of the EU foreign policy priorities and EU actor-ness internationally. It is, in fact, Ukraine's decision to apply for membership in the EU² four days after the launch of the Russian full-scale invasion that reinvigorated the issue of enlargement. The unprecedented support for such an initiative from the side of the EU institutional leaders³ was illustrated by a qualitative

change in political narration on the enlargement as an instrument of EU foreign policy. This new dynamic and signs of unity in the face of existential threat for European order⁴ were particularly topical in the context of the recent trends of de-Europeanisation observed in the rhetoric and action of certain member states⁵ before 2022.

Driven by the new security context,⁶ the debate on enlargement centred on the EU's capacity to achieve the sustainability effect of consensus regarding the transformation of its foreign policy. Supporting Ukraine was presented as a 'geopolitical necessity'⁷ that gave grounds for the expectation of an abandonment of the EU's transactional approach to its relations with Ukraine, which blocked any membership perspective,⁸ thereby causing the 'EU hope-performance gap'⁹ that existed since 2014. This inter-institutional consensus on enlargement was seen in both supranational and intergovernmental dimensions. The EU documents defined it as a geostrategic investment in 'peace, security, stability and prosperity',¹⁰ 'in peace, stability, security, and growth across Europe'¹¹ or even 'long-term peace, democracy, stability, security, climate protection and prosperity across the continent.'¹²

The scholars analysing the EU response to Russia's war on Ukraine point to different views on the dynamics of the EU's capacity to strengthen its international actorness. Referring to his concept of the capability–expectation gap from today's perspective, Christopher Hill underlines the significant narrowing of the gap in comparison to his observations 30 years ago.¹³ Meanwhile, some works illustrate the existing doubts regarding the prospect of the EU as a relevant international actor¹⁴ or point to the complexity of building its security element and stress the importance of the EU leveraging its normative strength.¹⁵ Solidarity with Ukraine was another significant issue of the debate: among the analysed contexts, one could find case studies of the narrative strategies employed by leaders of Central Europe with the purpose of promoting Ukraine's accession to the EU,¹⁶ narratives of EU institutional leaders on 'responsibility for Ukraine',¹⁷ or Ukraine's struggle in policy debates at the European Parliament.¹⁸

At the same time, there are observations regarding the pragmatic usage of solidarity expressions by some member states in their pursuit of their own political and economic benefits¹⁹ as well as examples of rejecting Russian aggression by member states' governments and putting part of the blame on Ukraine as a pragmatist approach.²⁰ To remember, before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the pragmatic concerns of member states, which related to potential enlargement, had resulted in contestation²¹ around this issue and its politicisation, leading to the diminishing role of the European Commission²² and to 'enlargement fatigue'²³ overall. That in turn took the enlargement discussion off the table.²⁴

As far as the EU–Ukraine relations are concerned, there is a considerable agreement in the literature that the EU response to Russia's war on Ukraine was unprecedented²⁵ in its nature in many dimensions. In fact, it illustrated the institutional shift to transformational leadership based on moral imperative²⁶ and showed the significant capacity to speak with one voice on diplomatic matters.²⁷ In reference to this, the accent is put on the importance of the EU's normative power in the current

geopolitical context,²⁸ the transformation of its public diplomacy, and the prospective significance of Ukraine for EU foreign policy.²⁹ At the same time, as some scholars put it, the initial EU response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine showed the dominance of a strengthened intergovernmental alliance rather than a growing supranational impact on decision-making.³⁰

The analysis above vividly demonstrates the wide academic interest in the EU foreign policy transformation in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. It also illustrates the dynamic nature of the foreign policy agenda and attempts of both supranational and intergovernmental actors to define the nature of the common European response to the unprecedented change of situational settings in its immediate neighbourhood. Therefore, the following parts of the chapter will centre on the case study of rhetorical strategies employed by leaders and representatives of key EU institutions (supranational and intergovernmental) in order to categorise the major narratives and their reflection in official documentation. By doing so, the author aims to explore the impact of the undertaken values-driven approach on the dynamics of Ukraine's accession to the EU.

Findings and Discussion

Inter-Institutional Leadership Consensus on 'EU's Responsibility for Ukraine'

Tackling the issue of the values-driven approach of the EU to its relations with Ukraine, the analytical framework of the empirical research below is based on the study of rhetorical strategies of the EU institutional leaders, that is, presidents of the European Parliament, European Commission, and European Council, as a part of their involvement in the policy framing of the EU–Ukraine relations, particularly the impact of their values-centred discourse that was used to promote Ukraine's accession to the EU and to reform the EU foreign policy overall. In order to define and evaluate the values-based narratives as political persuasion tools used by EU authorities in the years 2022–2024, the categorisation of given narratives takes into consideration the following elements:

- the institutional/political affiliation of the speaker;
- the situational settings of the declaration;
- the proposed action promoted by the narrative;
- justification of the proposed action; and
- the final goal of the proposed action.

As a matter of fact, the reference to the EU as a community based on values set the tone for the discussion on the transformation of its structural potential and the need to promote its vision internationally.³¹ Table 7.1 introduces the main categories of narratives used by leaders of three EU institutions actively engaged in promoting support for Ukraine, that is, the president of the European Council, the president of the European Parliament, and the president of the European Commission.

Table 7.1 Main categories of values-based narratives of the EU institutional leaders on Ukraine in the years 2022–2024

<i>Category of the narrative</i>	<i>The situational settings of the declaration</i>	<i>The proposed action promoted by the narrative</i>	<i>Justification of the proposed action</i>	<i>The final goal of the proposed action</i>
EU's Solidarity with Ukraine	The immediate aftermath of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.	The financial and military support for Ukraine's struggle in its fight against Russia.	Support for Ukraine as a moral responsibility of the EU in light of Ukraine's fight for democratic values; Russian aggression as an attack on European values.	The strengthening of democratic Ukraine and laying the grounds for its victory in the fight against Russia.
'Acting as Europeans' ³²	The immediate aftermath of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and onwards.	Joint procurement and support for the European technological base.	Significance of the unity within the EU and a shift in foreign policy priorities as a response to the threat to the EU values.	To strengthen the EU industrial base to be able to further support Ukraine.
Union of Defence as a security guaranty for the EU and Ukraine	The end of 2023 and onwards.	To continue providing Ukraine with strong military support.	'Rock solid' support for Ukraine as a moral obligation of the EU. ³³	Ukraine's victory in its fight against Russia.
'EU is Ukraine and Ukraine is EU' ³⁴	The immediate aftermath of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and onwards.	To provide facilitation for the accession talks with Ukraine.	Ukraine's fight as an illustration of devotion to the EU set of values; The EU enlargement as 'a moral, historical and political responsibility.' ³⁵	Ukraine's accession to the EU.

Source: Author's own analysis based on political addresses of EU institutional leaders delivered in 2022–2024.

As the table 7.1 summary demonstrates, there has been a stable inter-institutional leadership consensus on joint narration on the matter of EU–Ukraine relations since February 2022. The leaders of three institutions have employed the EU values as the central element of their rhetorical strategies aimed at persuading a wide range of audiences inside the EU to continue supporting Ukraine. In fact, since the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion, it has been possible to

define four major categories of narratives on EU–Ukraine relations that use moral imperative as their major persuasion component. Every category draws a line of connection between Ukraine and the EU, presenting a complex system of interdependencies between the two. It has been regularly stressed that Ukraine's fight is about the fight of democracy against autocracy.³⁶ Solidarity with Ukraine was presented as a very pragmatic and reasonable decision for all who prefer a democratic system of values.

In addition to that, there was a repeated argument that it is in the EU's vital interest to 'stop Putin in Ukraine' and that is why EU member states should unite around strengthening their security sector and, in a longer-term perspective, around establishing the Defence Union. In terms of this category frame, to act like a European means to develop one's own security and defence potential in order to be able to further support Ukraine and prepare the EU for a potential Russian attack. In other words, not only was democratisation and institutional building support for Ukraine presented as a moral obligation of the EU but also the strengthening of EU capacity to provide Ukraine with more weapons. That clearly employed an axiological perspective on foreign policy-making, which emphasised the moral constituent as a key difference between the EU and Russia in their policy towards Ukraine. Such black-and-white rhetoric under existing situational settings of Russian threat could have a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it was addressed at a domestic audience in order to provide EU citizens with arguments as to why it is in the EU's significant interest to continue support for Ukraine. On the other hand, it sent a message to Russia, showing the sustainable potential of the EU's resolve.

An equally important category of narratives referred to Ukraine's accession to the EU. There has been a clear message arguing that 'Ukraine is the EU and the EU is Ukraine.'³⁷ In no time, Ukraine's accession to the EU was transformed from a non-existent issue to the most prominent association with the announced enlargement of the EU. Despite the opposition from the Hungarian government and from the voices of some conservative and ultra-conservative parties across the EU, its relations with Ukraine have evolved from an association agreement, which did not mention the possible membership perspective,³⁸ to opening negotiations with Ukraine and to positive evaluations of Ukrainian progress in adopting the *acquis* in times of war.

Where Supranationalism Meets Intergovernmentalism: A Case Study of Axiological Perspective in Resolutions and Conclusions of EU Institutions

The analysis of European Parliament debates on enlargement policy presents an interesting case study to formulate a number of observations on the reflection of the EU institutional leadership stance on Ukraine in parliamentary proceedings on the enlargement reform. As a matter of fact, the analysed verbatim reports of parliamentary proceedings on the enlargement as a tool of the EU foreign policy. In fact, the MEPs' discussions of EU–Ukraine relations reveal the confrontation of values-driven proposals and pragmatic interests of political groups in the EP.

Importantly, EU–Ukraine relations were mainly discussed in the context of EU support for Ukraine’s struggle against Russian military aggression and in terms of the broader issue of EU enlargement reform.

As mentioned earlier, both enlargement and support for Ukraine were officially presented as issues vital for the EU’s democracy and security. Such a position resulted in active debates at the EP forum, leading to the adoption of 126 resolutions on matters related to the EU’s foreign policy in the years 2022–2024.³⁹ A major part of the adopted resolutions concentrated on the enlargement reform and excluded the fast track for candidate states’ accession to the EU, arguing for the necessity to maintain a tailor-made approach that would include a merit-based evaluation of each candidate country. As far as the axiological perspective of documents is concerned, the analysis of lexical units used by MEPs in the debates on EU–Ukraine relations makes it possible to group them into three main categories of notions, precisely:

1. Standing with Ukraine;
2. Russia as a Threat to European Values;
3. Enlargement as a Geostrategic Investment in Peace and Democracy.

As far as the Standing with Ukraine group is concerned, the repeated element in the European Parliament’s resolutions on EU–Ukraine relations was the statement on the necessity to facilitate the military support for Ukraine and include it in the Western systems of collective security and defence as a precondition for strengthening the security of Europe as a whole. The second group, that is Russia as a Threat to European Values, included the appeals to address the issue of building a Common Foreign and Security Policy through strategic partnership with ‘like-minded’ counterparts. In addition to that, one could find a consecutive emphasis on the European Defence Union as a strategic instrument that could reduce the military dependency of member states on non-EU NATO allies if necessary. Finally, the enlargement was referred to in a wider context of deepening the European integration and adapting the EU structures to new states’ accession. That, in turn, was presented as a tool to strengthen the EU’s actorness globally.⁴⁰

Meantime, from the political groups’ perspective, our study resorts to the discourse analysis method to define key values-driven narration elements employed by the representatives of political groups represented in the EP in the previous election cycle since the launch of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, it was the European People’s Party and Socialists and Democrats (EPP and S&D) political groups which voiced their support for Ukraine’s accession, justifying their appeals by their commitment to secure a joint EU future in light of external threats and challenges.⁴¹ At the same time, while defining the future enlargement as ‘the most important geopolitical project of the EU for this decade,’ the representatives of both groups (EPP and S&D) during the parliamentary debates on the future of enlargement addressed more specific appeals to the

European Commission to engender a tailor-made approach towards each candidate state and gauge the impact of their accession on key policies of the EU⁴² as well as the significance of the merit-based approach of the enlargement process.⁴³

Regarding political statements delivered by representatives of other political actors, the Renew political group used the debate on enlargement as an opportunity to put forward their appeal on the necessity to amend treaties in order to strengthen European institutions by granting them additional powers in matters of foreign policy, while pointing to the difficulty of separating Ukraine from Moldova in the accession process.⁴⁴ Different narrations were employed by the Left or ESN political groups. The Left pointed to the potential challenges of Ukraine's accession, such as the necessity to meet international social and labour standards, and emphasised the importance of peace as a prerequisite for enlargement.⁴⁵ ESN, in their turn, supported the idea of Europe of nations and criticised the stance of Ursula von der Leyen for the fact that her 'warlike stance is completely detached from the interests of the people in Ukraine and Europe.'⁴⁶

As the above analysis illustrates, the political groups used the discussion on foreign policy reform to put forward their appeals regarding the future shape of the decision-making or institutional competencies in the EU. It also vividly illustrated that Eurosceptical actors, that is, the Left or ESN, used the forum of the European Parliament debate to politicise the issue of enlargement and criticise the dominant narrative of the pragmatic significance of Ukraine's accession to the EU. What makes it different under the current situational context is that the coalition actors demonstrated the sustainability of an achieved consensus on EU–Ukraine relations and used plenary discussions as a platform for argument exchange on policy implementation procedure. That, it should be remembered, was not always the case, due to the high politicisation of enlargement prior to 2022.⁴⁷

Another significant observation refers to the conclusions of European Council summits that were adopted in the analysed period of 2022–2024. As a matter of fact, during the time frame of 24 February 2022 until 31 December 2024, there were 21 meetings of heads of the EU member states (including formal European Council summits, informal meetings of heads of states and governments of the EU, and special summits of the European Council). To be precise, there were eight meetings in 2022, five meetings in 2023, and eight meetings in 2024.⁴⁸ Significantly, the axiological element in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine has been a central one in the texts of all adopted conclusions. As in the case of the European Parliament resolutions' focus, the axiological dimension could be regularly observed in the following thematic groups of repeated statements:

- security and strategic capacity of the EU;
- EU–Ukraine relations;
- EU–Russia relations.⁴⁹

Table 7.2 shows the context of values-based statements in terms of the thematic groups of notions used in the texts of adopted documentation.

Table 7.2 Context of values-based statements in conclusions of the European Council in the years 2022–2024

Thematic group of notions	2022	2023	2024
Security and strategic capacity of the EU	• Improving the defence capabilities of the EU; • reducing EU energy dependency on Russia; • developing EU strategic actorness based on EU values; • introducing the idea of the European political community with partner countries across Europe; • launching the enlargement reform.	• EU as a promoter of Ukraine's peace formula on international forums; • EU as a facilitator of discussions on global food security initiatives; • strengthening the industrial potential of the EU built on four freedoms; • enlargement as a reform aimed to 'foster the values on which the Union is founded.'⁵⁰	• Further advocating peace in Ukraine based on principles of the UN Charter and international law; • EU as an international facilitator of providing Ukraine with military support; • integration of Ukraine's energy system with the EU's energy network as a strategic priority; • strengthening 'the resilience, preparedness, crisis prevention and response capacities in the context of the evolving threat landscape';⁵¹ • adopting the 2024–2029 Strategic Agenda of the EU.
EU–Ukraine relations	• Solidarity stance with the people of Ukraine in their fight against the Russian invasion; • EU recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty; • EU acknowledgement of 'the European aspirations and the European choice of Ukraine';⁵² • praise for the people of Ukraine's fight for 'our shared values of freedom and democracy';⁵³	• Readiness to continue 'strong financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes';⁵⁴ • readiness to work with Ukraine on the implementation of reforms necessary to meet the requirements of the accession process;	• Repeated declarations to support Ukraine in every dimension, not only 'as long as it takes' but also 'as intensely as needed';⁵⁵ • joint security commitments between the EU and Ukraine and between Ukraine and member states; • establishment of further financial instruments to support Ukraine, that is, the Ukraine Facility.

(Continued)

Table 7.2 (Continued)

<i>Thematic group of notions</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>
EU–Russia relations	• financial support for the reconstruction of democratic Ukraine.	• introduction of the European Peace Facility and the EU Military Assistance Mission as instruments to support Ukraine militarily.	
	• Introduction of restrictive measures (sanctions) against Russia; • Russia as a violator of ‘rules-based international order’;⁵⁶ • encouraging accountability of war crimes ‘in connection with Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.’⁵⁷	• Continuous efforts to introduce new packages of sanctions and improve mechanisms to control their implementation; • introducing initiatives on using frozen Russian assets for investment into Ukraine’s recovery; • supporting the initiatives aimed at the establishment of a tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine.	• Stopping Russia from prevailing in Ukraine as a foreign policy priority for the EU; • EU condemnation of ‘Russia’s continuous human rights violations in occupied territories of Ukraine’⁵⁸ and attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine; • continuous economic pressure and establishing legal grounds for using immobilised Russian assets towards further military support for Ukraine; • confirming the commitment to hold Russian leadership fully accountable for waging a war against Ukraine and Russian war crimes.

Source: Author’s summary of “Database of European Council Conclusions Adopted in Years 2022–2024,” European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/calendar/?DateFrom=2022%2F01%2F01&DateTo=2024%2F12%2F31&Entity=122132&category=meeting> (accessed April 25, 2025).

The above examples of values-based statements in the conclusions of the European Council bring us to the following observations. First, they illustrate the way the EU leaders employed an axiological perspective to argue for the necessity of announced reforms aimed at strengthening the EU’s strategic and security capacity.

Second, they demonstrate the sustainable nature of the achieved intergovernmental consensus on the direction of EU foreign policy transformation under the new geopolitical context. Significantly, the case study analysis of European Council conclusions gives ground to assert that the axiological dimension has become a key argument in promoting the swift shift from the transactional approach of EU foreign policy-making towards Russia to the transformational one. That, in turn, resulted in the consensus on long-term planning of the EU strategic capacity development based on a moral imperative.

The new priorities defined at the EU summits found reflection in strategic documents, that is, the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029, or in the new EU economic governance framework, both of which were adopted in 2024. While the former presents a set of recommendations for the European Commission, European Council, and European Parliament for the new institutional cycle, emphasising that ‘our values are our strength,’⁵⁹ the latter introduces a pragmatic focus on economic growth with the imperative of maintaining debt sustainability.⁶⁰ That brings us to the conclusion that the analysed narrative strategy of EU institutional actors used the axiological perspective of EU–Ukraine relations in times of war as a central element of a multifaceted pragmatic discussion on EU foreign policy reform.

Conclusion

This chapter concentrated on the axiological perspective of the EU approach towards Ukraine in times of war and its implications for the EU as an actor of international relations. The conducted analysis of case studies defining the narratives of institutional leaders and their reflection in official documentation argues for the efficiency of values-driven rhetorical strategy as a persuasion tool of the EU foreign policy-making process. Altogether, this study defines four categories of narratives in the political discourse of EU institutional leaders that serve as an argument for a growing sustainability of inter-institutional agreement on the necessity to considerably reform EU actorness on the international scene. The newly developed projects, that is, the 2030 enlargement agenda and the European Defence Union, have been presented as a moral responsibility of the EU to preserve and promote its fundamental values that form the essence of European integration.

Furthermore, the axiological narrative may be defined as a consolidating element of strategic documents adopted by the European Council or European Parliament, which based their policy proposals on EU values imperative. Similarity of positions and repetition of the same justification of proposed changes formulated by both institutions in terms of the EU foreign policy reform give ground to formulate the following observations. The analysis of the EU’s response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine showed its institutional capacity to reach a transformational inter-institutional consensus on new priorities of EU common foreign policy objectives. The most visible change that argues for the EU members’ political will to build a sustainable foundation for strengthening EU actorness

internationally is the adopted 2024–2029 strategic agenda and the support for the ongoing enlargement reform.

As a final concluding remark, it is significant to emphasise that the aforementioned changes were triggered by Ukraine's fight against Russia in defence of its democracy and sovereignty, which are basic EU values. Equally important is that these changes in the EU approach to Ukraine have had a direct impact on Ukraine's capacity to continue its resistance against ongoing Russian aggression and on EU–Ukraine relations as a whole. Overall, the analytical framework of the chapter showed the sustainable foundation for the newly achieved values-based status quo that is likely to dominate EU–Ukraine relations in the upcoming years. Therefore, the outcomes argue for the efficient usage of an axiological perspective by EU institutional actors in their attempts to present foreign policy change as a pragmatic necessity to the broad public, both inside and outside the EU. Such a state of events brings us to a positive response to the question posed in the title of this chapter.

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8 The Evolution of Poles' Attitudes Towards the War in Ukraine and Its Social Determinants

Ewa Maria Marciniak and Jonathan Scovil

Introduction

The changing geopolitical situation in the world (Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential election, the tariff war, China's economic aspirations, and the rise of populism in Europe) and the political situation in Poland (political polarisation and the resulting diverse, sometimes contradictory definitions of the political and economic landscape) affect the views and beliefs as well as social emotions of Poles towards various key issues, which undoubtedly include Russian aggression against Ukraine. From the outset, fear of the potential expansion of the conflict shaped Polish attitudes towards the war to a much greater extent than those of many other European nations more distant from the front line. On the one hand, this proximity to the threat often made Poles' reactions more pronounced, but, on the other hand – paradoxically – it made them more unstable, so that a sudden leap from one extreme to another was always possible. The same values praised with conviction at the beginning of the war could transform into anti-values in the blink of an eye, so that yesterday's pragmatism quickly became today's treachery, and today's fraternity became tomorrow's delusion.

In order to give some structure and chronology to this axiological chaos, we decided to conduct a cross-sectional, wide-ranging analysis of the data collected by the Centre for Public Opinion Research in Warsaw (CBOS) over the last decade, identifying the social attitudes prevailing in a given period. With such research goals, we set ourselves several tasks, which correspond to the following sections of this chapter:

1. theoretical description of the concept of 'social attitude';
2. identification of social attitudes of Poles towards the war and their periodisation;
3. indication of the extent of change in the attitudes of Polish society towards the war in Ukraine and their social determinants.

Research Methodology and Sources Used

We chose a method of synthesising quantitative and qualitative data and an analysis embedded in a hermeneutic approach. Thus, the chapter uses both quantitative

research, which allows us to diagnose attitudes towards war and the scale of their occurrence, and qualitative research, through which we explore the problem under study, discovering how people understand and what meanings they give to their own attitudes towards war.

The source material consists of data collected in successive surveys by the CBOS. The analysed results come from three main periods: firstly, it's the most recent data from 2024 to 2025, that is, the time of the presidential campaign, when anti-Ukrainian themes were already loudly resounding, and candidates often distanced themselves from the Ukrainians' struggle. Secondly, it's the period immediately following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when, for at least a year, the sentiment in Poland was clearly favourable to Ukrainians and their defence. Thirdly, and finally, it's the period of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, when the war didn't yet seem to threaten Poland that much – we recognised that the prevailing moods at that time provide a key context for understanding the subsequent evolution of Poles' attitudes, and the CBOS surveys, repeated regularly, provide unique insights into them.

All measurements from the time of the 2014 Crimea annexation are based on computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI), while surveys conducted after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 already use a mixed-mode procedure, combining the CAPI method with telephone (CATI) and Internet (CAWI) interviews. Both the older and newer surveys, however, were created on the basis of a representative sample of adult Polish residents drawn from the PESEL registry, with a size of around 1,000 respondents each time.

In addition, the chapter also refers to qualitative research by CBOS, conducted using the focus group interview method. The centre conducted two such surveys after 2022, one on the perception of Ukrainians by Poles¹ and the other on the perception of Poles by Ukrainians living in Poland: both labour migrants and war refugees.² Due to the subject matter of this chapter, we primarily use data collected in this first survey, conducted from 27 June to 5 July 2023 (the period when the turnaround in Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainians was beginning to take place), from four cities (Wrocław, Rzeszów, Warsaw, and Łowicz). In each city, one interview was conducted with a younger group of respondents (20–30 years old) and another one with an older group (50–65 years old).

What Are Attitudes, and How Should They Be Described Today?

Generally speaking, attitude will be understood as a relatively stable positioning towards some entities (e.g. people, phenomena, and ideas). Thus, it is an inclination towards a certain positive or negative valuation of a given object.³ It is values that direct social attitudes, as they influence the evaluation of various entities. Another approach to defining attitudes points to their three components: knowledge, emotions, and behaviour. This involves answering three important questions: what do we know about the entities? Do we like them? And how do we behave towards them? Such a concept is useful, especially when we study specific entities with which we do have real contact. An attitude can be favourable or unfavourable, positive or negative.⁴ Thus, attitude should rather be understood as the result of a

formative process of relating to these entities. Attitudes are relatively stable, but this relativity dictates that attitudes should also be thought of in terms of variability.

The study of attitudes is generally reduced to an analysis of the statements of the respondents. It is then sometimes the case that the three components mentioned merge into a single whole and become one-dimensional, and this dimension is precisely the dimension of valuing.⁵ Bogdan Wojciszke emphasises that an attitude, understood in this way, is a kind of lens that mediates between past and present experiences with specific entities.⁶ The presented outline of the concept of attitudes provides a theoretical context for the presented research, which reflects the attitudes of Poles towards the war in Ukraine, their essence, and variability. We diagnosed three types of attitudes on the basis of our research: distance and pragmatism (2014), compassion and solidarity (2022), and resentment and offended pride (2023).

Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainians have been the subject of academic research, reflecting the growing interest in this topic. It's important to note the diverse perspectives of these studies – migration studies, including acculturation, security studies, and war studies. Some scholarly texts integrate these approaches. For example, Maciejewska-Mieszkowska⁷ identifies factors that influenced Poles' attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine, including the perception of Poland's security threat as a result of the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine into a full-blown war and the positive perception of refugees from Ukraine as people in need of support and culturally close. In turn, Przemysław Sadura and Sławomir Sierakowski⁸ published a research report on Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainians, the title of which reflects the complexity of these attitudes. Poles are pro-Ukraine but anti-Ukrainians. Michał Bilewicz's research, on the other hand, indicates a stable positive attitude towards Ukrainians in the first months of the war. This attitude has changed, as shown by the research cited in this chapter.⁹

One of the newest scientific articles on this issue written by Piotr Długosz and Dominika Izdebska-Długosz points to a varied attitude towards Ukrainians. The authors write,

The results of the study indicate that one-third of the respondents hold negative attitudes towards the refugees. The respondents stated that the arrival of Ukrainian war refugees in Poland would have a negative impact on the housing market, increase in the prices of goods and services and the condition of healthcare services. Factors such as poor financial status, younger age, the conviction of a decrease in one's social status, a diminished sense of security, subjective experience of anomie, lack of trust and neuroticism significantly impact the attitudes of the surveyed Poles towards the war refugees from Ukraine.¹⁰

Distance and Pragmatism: Attitudes Towards the 2014 Annexation of Crimea and the Fights in Donbas

When the protests on Kyiv's Maidan were underway in late 2013 and early 2014, most Poles did not believe that the increasingly violent clashes between pro-Russian authorities and pro-European protesters could lead to military intervention by

Russia.¹¹ When Russian troops finally entered Ukrainian territory at the beginning of 2014, first occupying Crimea and then starting operations in the Donbas region, the vast majority of Poles closely followed media reports on the ongoing events in their eastern neighbour's territory¹² but maintained a relatively distanced attitude towards them – especially if we juxtapose their attitude with the extremely vivid reaction to the 2022 events. Although the seizure of Crimea was met with widespread condemnation in Polish society,¹³ at the same time, there was a dominant conviction that the international community – let alone Poland itself – should not provide military support to the defending Ukraine but only limit itself to financial support, diplomatic pressure on Russia, and the imposition of economic sanctions.¹⁴

It should be stated that, at least at the level of declarations, the attitude of Poles towards Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 was dominated by pragmatism. At the time, a clear majority of respondents (61%) advocated that Poland should primarily look after its own interests in its foreign policy, even if this meant deviating from just moral principles.¹⁵ Of course, the majority of Poles realised that opposition to the annexation of Crimea, the growth of Russian influence in Ukraine, or the country's move away from the orbit of the European Union didn't have to have an exclusively ethical basis but that it would also be in line with the Polish *raison d'état*. On the other hand, there was a dominant conviction that these interests could be pursued indirectly by supporting the activities of large international organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union that were favourable to them, rather than through Poland's own initiatives, which would potentially expose it to retaliatory action from Russia.¹⁶ In a forced choice scenario, Poles were also slightly more likely to favour maintaining good relations with Russia rather than close cooperation with other countries of the former Soviet Union, such as Ukraine or Georgia.¹⁷

It seems that the attitude of Poles towards the events in Ukraine at that time is largely explained by the fear of Russia and the underlying conviction that, just over two decades after the collapse of the USSR, it is still strong, threatening, and expansive. As past CBOS surveys have shown, even before the annexation of Crimea and even before the war in Georgia, most Poles assumed that Russia would seek to regain its influence in Central and Eastern Europe in the near future.¹⁸ Since the annexation of Crimea, the majority of Poles also considered the situation in Ukraine as directly threatening Poland's security, indicating a vivid fear of the escalation of the conflict and its potential expansion to other countries.¹⁹

The fear of Russia was accompanied by a relative lack of sympathy towards the Ukrainians. Even before the Maydan protests, only one in five Poles assessed Polish–Ukrainian relations positively,²⁰ and the general attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians was slightly outweighed by dislike.²¹ Equally importantly, there was a prevalent belief that Ukraine was weak in the face of Russia. The dominant view in Polish society at the time was that Russia would occupy yet other Ukrainian territories in the east and south of the country, and one in six respondents even expected Russia to subjugate all of Ukraine. A few months after the annexation, only 7% of respondents believed in the recovery of Crimea by the Ukrainians.²² All

this resulted in the majority of Poles (52%) declaring that they did not sympathise with either side in the Russian–Ukrainian conflict.²³

Sympathy and Solidarity: Attitudes Towards a Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine in 2022

Against the background of the distanced, cautious and pragmatic attitudes of Poles in 2014, the transformation that took place after February 2022, that is, after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, seems all the more striking. It is best illustrated by attitudes towards Ukrainian war refugees. Although prior to 2022 there had always been a preponderance of voices in favour of Poland accepting them (there were certainly more of them than in the case of refugees from Africa and the Middle East), the percentage of those opposing such an approach sometimes reached as high as 40% of respondents. Meanwhile, shortly after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the reception of Ukrainian refugees began to be supported by almost the entire Polish public (94% in March 2022).²⁴ Moreover, throughout the first year of the war, this support remained very high, usually oscillating around 80% (see Figure 8.1).

The widespread support for accepting refugees was also followed by a willingness to help – more than a month after the Russian invasion, almost two-thirds of the Polish public (63%) declared that they or members of their households had provided voluntary and unpaid assistance to refugees from Ukraine. Until the end of 2022, this percentage remained at no less than 50%.²⁵

Although the feeling that the war in Ukraine posed a direct threat to Poland's security was very high from the outset – there were fears both of the conflict spilling

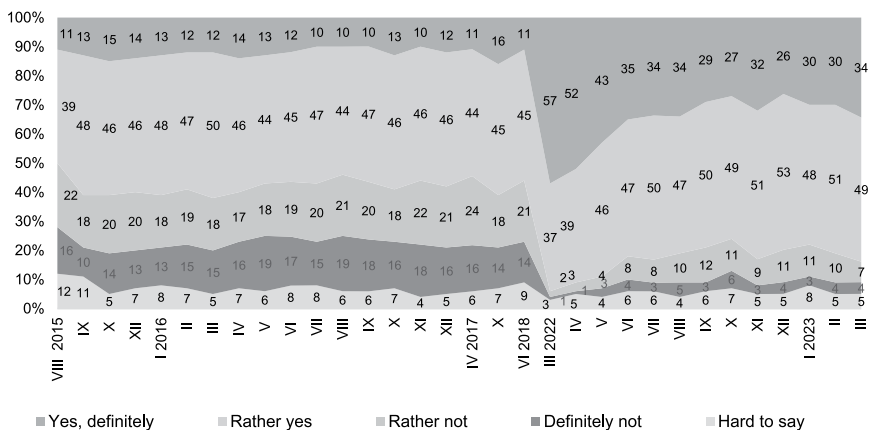


Figure 8.1 In your opinion, should Poland take in Ukrainian refugees from the conflict areas? (Data covering the first year after the outbreak of war).

Source: Scovil, Jonathan (ed.), *Polacy w obliczu wojny na Ukrainie: Opinie i Diagnozy* No. 52 (Warsaw: CBOS, 2023), 77

over into other countries and of Russia's use of nuclear weapons – faith in Russia's military strength was shaken in Polish society after the first months of the Ukrainians' effective defence. This is evidenced by Poles' predictions for the end of the conflict – as late as the end of 2022, more than half predicted a scenario favourable to Ukraine, with Russia withdrawing from the areas attacked in 2022 or as late as 2014. The decrease in fear towards Russia at that time is also well illustrated by the answers to the question asked in June 2022 about whether, if Poland found itself in a similar situation to Ukraine, Poles would defend themselves with as much success – the predominant belief was that they would, and one in five respondents thought that Poles would do even better.²⁶

The successful containment of the Russian onslaught also made the Ukrainians grow in the eyes of the Poles. Measurements of attitudes to other nations, conducted annually by CBOS, showed that after one year of war, sympathy for the Ukrainians increased significantly. It is worth noting that almost all the changes in Poles' attitudes towards various nations recorded at that time were clearly related to their position in the face of the war in Ukraine – all those who supported the Ukrainians gained in sympathy, while the ones who lost out were not only Russia or Belarus itself but also countries formally allied with Ukraine, which, however, according to Poles, did not support it sufficiently (Germans or Hungarians, e.g., fell into this category).²⁷ This shows the extent to which Poles at the time took a principled approach to supporting Ukraine, making clear value judgements and dividing nations into 'good' and 'bad.'

This was also very evident in the focus groups, in which Poles, when asked to reconstruct the events from the beginning of the war, repeatedly declared their pride and satisfaction in their nation's open, helpful attitude towards the Ukrainians, which they considered morally right (the metaphor of a 'well-passed exam' often recurred), while at the same time referring with pity to the richer nations of Europe, which were not as decisive in this respect. A sense of superiority towards the sluggish, less open Western Europe was clearly echoed in the respondents' statements:

- I mean, there was a way out; you could set up refugee camps very quickly, make schools for them there, fence them in with wire, and that would be it;
- we would never do that; that's how they do it in the West;
- we opened houses, as they say;
- schools too;
- yes, everything;
- in the European Parliament, they debated what it would look like if a country were attacked and how to help it, and Poland showed them how to do it. They debated for a good few years, and they didn't know how to.²⁸

In this first period following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Poles moved very far away from the distanced pragmatism of the pre-war period and often described ongoing events using the language of universal values. As one interviewee from Wrocław expressed it, 'We did not help the Ukrainians, we

helped people in need.²⁹ Solidarity with the Ukrainians was further facilitated by the commonality of historical experience and cultural proximity:

Some of us know some of the tragedies of the war from family stories, so it automatically opens the heart; Culturally they are very similar to us, so there was nothing separating . . . unless one goes back in history, Volhynia and so on, but without that, we are brothers.³⁰

Resentment and Offended Pride: Deteriorating Attitudes Towards Ukrainians from 2023 Onwards

The very positive attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians persisted for a long time, but it eventually broke down quite sharply. The first clear changes could already be observed in the first half of 2023, which coincided with media reports of the so-called grain crisis, caused by an increased influx of Ukrainian grain into Poland (as well as other EU neighbours of Ukraine), causing huge price drops on the domestic market and hitting Polish farmers.³¹ The change was well illustrated by the percentage of respondents supporting the admission of Ukrainian refugees, which suddenly dropped by as many as 10 percentage points in April 2023 (from 83% to 73%). Then, in August, it fell below the 70% threshold for the first time, and just two months later, it fell below 60%.³² In the most recent CBOS survey of March 2025, it had already reached 50%, while the percentage of opponents of accepting Ukrainian refugees had risen to an unprecedented 43%³³ (see Figure 8.2).

Almost from the beginning of the conflict, the acceptance of refugees from Ukraine was less frequently supported by young respondents (especially young

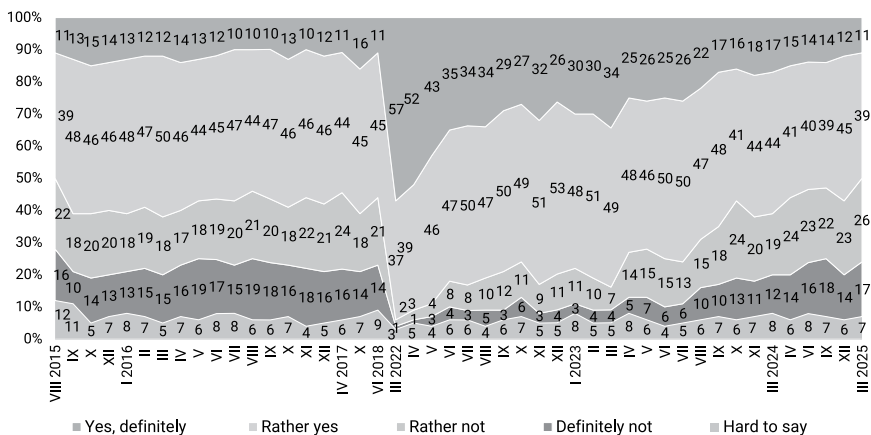


Figure 8.2 In your opinion, should Poland take in Ukrainian refugees from the conflict areas?

Source: Scovil, Jonathan, 'Polacy o potencjalnym zakończeniu wojny w Ukrainie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 22* (CBOS, 2025), 2

women), who were less interested in politics and assessed their material conditions as bad.³⁴ As Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees worsened overall, clear differences between electorates also became apparent – in the last measurement from March 2025, voters of the ruling Civic Coalition were the most supportive of accepting Ukrainians, while voters of the opposition Law and Justice party, which had pursued a strongly pro-Ukrainian policy throughout the first year of the war, were the least supportive.³⁵

The rate of change taking place in Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainians is best illustrated by their assessments of Polish–Ukrainian relations. When asked to give such an assessment in June 2023 – just before the 80th anniversary of the Volhynian massacre – the majority of Poles (64%) considered Polish–Ukrainian relations to be good, which was a record positive result. However, when the question was repeated in October, the results were already a record low (25% positive and 27% negative). In just four months, the percentage of positive evaluations of Polish–Ukrainian relations fell by almost 40 percentage points, while the percentage of negative evaluations increased almost sevenfold.³⁶

Observing the polling data itself, one could get the impression that the outbreak of the so-called grain crisis – and its subsequent consequences, such as Ukraine's complaint against Poland to the World Trade Organisation – could have been solely responsible for this sudden change in the mood. However, focus group interviews by CBOS in late June and early July 2023 (thus in the period of the shift in question) suggest a broader picture. The interviews show that many Poles began to feel quite early on that there were various problems associated with the presence of Ukrainian refugees in their country, such as competition in the labour market or in access to public services, or an increase in criminality associated with Ukrainians. Respondents also frequently pointed out that the Ukrainians who had arrived in Poland were not in line with their image of war refugees: the wealth or even affluence of a significant proportion of them was particularly pointed out. They also spoke of their ungratefulness for the help they received or even of dishonest attempts to take advantage of it, which was already clearly incompatible with the pride many Poles had in the help they had given at the beginning of the war, as described in the previous section.³⁷

Therefore, we suppose that the grain crisis did not so much cause this sharp deterioration of Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainians on its own but rather triggered mainstream Polish public debate to break the taboo and openly criticise Ukrainians for the first time since the outbreak of the war. This, in turn, released previously unexpressed feelings of resentment and fatigue about the presence of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, which had previously been suppressed.³⁸ Later, in this chapter, we will also look at broader phenomena explaining and accompanying the transformation in question, but it is worth stating here that it dovetailed with a change in Poles' attitudes towards the war in Ukraine itself. From 2023 onwards, the percentage of respondents believing that the Ukrainians should continue their struggle and not make any concessions to Russia gradually began to fall. Towards the end of 2024, the decline accelerated significantly – and this was undoubtedly also related to Donald Trump winning the U.S. presidential election, promising a swift end to

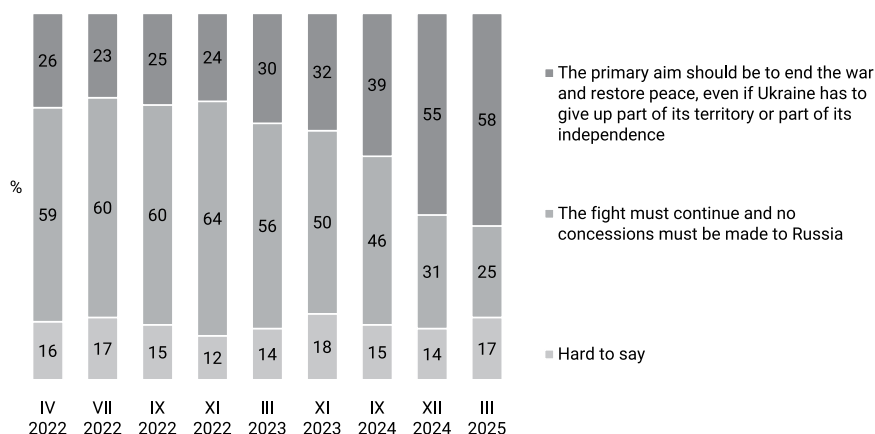


Figure 8.3 What is your opinion on Russia's war against Ukraine?

Source: Scovil, Jonathan, 'Polacy o potencjalnym zakończeniu wojny w Ukrainie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 22* (CBOS, 2025), 3

the war – and by the beginning of 2025, a clear majority of Poles already believed that peace should be pursued first and foremost, even if it entailed Ukraine having to give up some of its territory or independence³⁹ (see Figure 8.3).

It seems that after 2023, Poles have slowly started to return to the pragmatic and distanced attitude from before the full-scale Russian invasion, but it is now more tinged with a growing dislike of the Ukrainians and perhaps even some disappointment with the mutual relations. As before 2022, Poles no longer want to engage on the side of Ukraine in an explicit way. When asked whether, after a potential peace, the Polish armed forces should participate in a stabilisation mission within Ukraine – along with other European countries that already made such proposals, such as France and the United Kingdom – they overwhelmingly responded in the negative (68%).⁴⁰

Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Attitude Change

The change in attitudes outlined by the research is the result of several complex factors, some of an economic nature and some relating to media representations. Statistics show the large volume of aid provided by Poland to Ukraine. In November 2024, the Office of the President of Poland reported that Poland had allocated the equivalent of 4.91% of its GDP to assist Ukraine. Of this amount, 0.71% of GDP represented direct support to Ukraine, and 4.2% of GDP was allocated to the cost of assisting Ukrainian refugees.⁴¹ Almost one million Ukrainians fleeing the war have received a Polish PESEL, which entitles them to public services, including healthcare, social care, and free schools.⁴² At the same time, Ukrainians also set up businesses in Poland and participate in the creation of various services. According to the Polish Economic Institute, from the beginning of the Russian

invasion in 2022 to the end of 2024, Ukrainian citizens established almost 90,000 companies in Poland, including 77,700 sole proprietorships and 11,300 companies with Ukrainian capital.⁴³ Thus, Ukrainians have become a very important part of the Polish labour market, *ergo* – an important part of the society.

The consequences of this are clearly reflected in the research findings. On the one hand, Ukrainians are still recipients; that is, the Polish state and social organisations support them in various areas. On the other hand, they are active participants in economic life, competing with the Poles and also acting as employers. Their status is therefore differentiated, and many Poles feel that a significant proportion of them are in a better position than themselves, which generates conflicts. It is clear that since Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the attitude of Polish society has evolved from hospitality to distance and eventually rivalry. There is also an unmet expectation of gratitude on the part of the Ukrainians for the help they have received.

The indicated evolution of attitudes is to a large extent related to the so-called media diet of Polish society, which means the habitual use of specific media and specific content in these media. Respondents feed on content that upholds a certain image of the social world and is generally associated with arousing fear and threat and disavowal of ethnic and national minorities living in Poland, which fuels the deterioration of attitudes towards Ukrainians. The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights investigated the spread of hate speech against Ukrainians, presenting a detailed report on the subject.⁴⁴ The report shows that social media in particular – apart from being fodder for conspiracy theories, deliberate disinformation, and 'urban legends' – have become another field for Russian propaganda to achieve its political goals. The authors of the report attempted to estimate the scale of the use of anti-Ukrainian hate speech on the Polish Internet – they identified over 90,000 anti-Ukrainian posts on the X platform, containing terms referring to history, such as 'banderowiec'⁴⁵ and 'UPAina'⁴⁶ (54% of posts), distorting the word Ukrainians to 'Ukr' or 'Ukra' (41% of posts), or using the hashtag #StopUkrainisationOfPoland.⁴⁷ A huge role is played in this respect by non-authentic accounts, that is, so-called bots.

Negative content about Ukrainians is disseminated in the Polish public opinion by means of the choice of not only specific vocabulary but also specific rhetorical strategies. Among them, the authors of the report mention, *inter alia*, stereotyping: the citizens of Ukraine are presented as anti-Polish nationalists, as people with claims, expecting privileges. They also point to efforts to militarise migration – through the use of words such as 'invasion,' 'uncontrolled migration,' and 'resettlement action' – or to dehumanise it – through the use of impersonal slogans such as 'influx,' 'deluge,' and 'wave.' Finally, Ukrainians are portrayed as a threat to national homogeneity – 'substitution of the ethnic structure,' 'resettlement action,' and 'Ukrainisation' – and assistance to refugees is negatively valued and labelled 'handouts,' 'favouritism,' and 'betrayal.'⁴⁸ Summarising the research conducted, the authors of the report point to two main currents of narration in social media: a historical narrative, which exploits the complicated Polish–Ukrainian relations during the Second World War, and an economic narrative, which exploits

the fears of the Polish society about the reduction of the quality of life.⁴⁹ It should be noted that a narrative accentuating the threat of crime by people from Ukraine and the diseases they allegedly spread is also present in Poland.

Conclusion

The research results show that attitudes towards the war in Ukraine and war refugees have changed markedly over time. On the one hand, after a period of heightened social emotion in favour of helping Ukrainian refugees and assisting the Ukrainian state, there was a clear decline in social empathy. The Ukrainians coming to Poland have partly started to cope on their own, and their economic activity has turned their status as refugees who need to be helped into the status of co-residents, co-citizens with whom it is possible (or necessary) to compete, for example, on the labour market.

Perceptions of Ukrainians began to diversify, and the relatively homogeneous attitude from the beginning of the war (94% of those in favour of accepting Ukrainian refugees) was increasingly contested until it finally ceased to be clearly dominant, giving way to an attitude of aversion towards Ukrainians, reinforced by growing fears. Here, the media played a special role, saturating public opinion not only with untrue information but also with conspiratorial stereotypes. They are largely responsible for the change in attitudes. Their essential element, that is, knowledge about Ukrainians or the war, is being stereotyped. At the same time, the conspiracy stereotyping refers to the whole group, treating it as integrated, in solidarity with each other, generally egocentric or even hostile. Such judgements presented by Polish respondents are characteristic of conspiracy thinking, which is marked, for example, by distrust of foreign enterprise in Poland and of the intentions of our neighbour. Thus, this conspiracy stereotyping affects not only emotions (fears and aversions) but also reasoning, explanations, and scenarios for the development of the situation.⁵⁰ The research of Mirosław Kofta and Grzegorz Sędek concerned various national groups and was conducted at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century;⁵¹ nevertheless, their scientific findings and the discovered mechanisms of shaping the so-called group soul stereotype (the term 'conspiracy stereotype' is used nowadays) have not lost their relevance. Due to the fact that there are about one and a half million Ukrainians in Poland, discovering and examining attitudes towards Ukrainians in the context of a conspiracy stereotype is an important cognitive task.

Notes

- 1 Jonathan Scovil, 'Polacy o Ukraińcach,' in *Fokus Report No. 5* (CBOS, 2023).
- 2 Jonathan Scovil, 'Ukraińcy o swoim życiu w Polsce,' in *Fokus Report No. 2* (CBOS, 2024).
- 3 Bogdan Wojciszke, *Człowiek wśród ludzi. Zarys psychologii społecznej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2002).
- 4 Alice H. Eagly, Shelly Chaiken, *The Psychology of Attitudes* (Belmont: Cengage Learning, 1993).

- 5 Abraham Tesser, David R. Shaffer, 'Attitudes and Attitude Change,' *Annual Review of Psychology* 41 (1990): 479–523, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.41.020190.002403>.
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- 10 Piotr Długosz, Dominika Izdebska-Długosz, 'Polskie społeczeństwo wobec uchodźców wojennych z Ukrainy,' *Migration Studies* 2, issue 192 (2024): 15–32, <https://doi.org/10.4467/25444972SMPP.23.023.18935>.
- 11 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, 'Polacy o rozwoju sytuacji na Ukrainie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 22* (CBOS, 2014), 3.
- 12 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, Małgorzata Omyła-Rudzka, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed wyborami prezydenckimi,' in *Research Communiqué No. 78* (CBOS, 2014), 1.
- 13 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, Małgorzata Omyła-Rudzka, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed wyborami prezydenckimi,' in *Research Communiqué No. 78* (CBOS, 2014), 8.
- 14 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, 'Polacy o sytuacji na Ukrainie w czasie krymskiego kryzysu,' in *Research Communiqué No. 35* (CBOS, 2014), 5.
- 15 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed akcjami separatystów na Wschodzie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 54* (CBOS, 2014), 7.
- 16 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed akcjami separatystów na Wschodzie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 54* (CBOS, 2014), 4.
- 17 Barbara Badora, 'Polacy o stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich i polityce wschodniej Polski,' in *Research Communiqué No. 77* (CBOS, 2014), 11.
- 18 Krzysztof Pankowski, 'Stosunki polsko-rosyjskie i sytuacja na Kaukazie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 158* (CBOS, 2008), 10.
- 19 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed akcjami separatystów na Wschodzie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 54* (CBOS, 2014), 2.
- 20 Małgorzata Omyła-Rudzka, 'Stosunki polsko-ukraińskie w opiniach Polaków,' in *Research Communiqué No. 95* (CBOS, 2014), 4.
- 21 Beata Roguska, 'Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów,' in *Research Communiqué No. 12* (CBOS, 2013).
- 22 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, Małgorzata Omyła-Rudzka, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed wyborami prezydenckimi,' in *Research Communiqué No. 78* (CBOS, 2014), 4.
- 23 Katarzyna Kowalczyk, Małgorzata Omyła-Rudzka, 'O sytuacji na Ukrainie przed wyborami prezydenckimi,' in *Research Communiqué No. 78* (CBOS, 2014), 3.
- 24 Michał Feliksiak, Beata Roguska, 'Polacy wobec rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę,' in *Research Communiqué No. 38* (CBOS, 2022), 8.
- 25 Jonathan Scovil (ed.), *Polacy w obliczu wojny na Ukrainie: Opinie i Diagnozy No. 52* (Warsaw: CBOS, 2023), 77–79.
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- 29 Jonathan Scovil, 'Polacy o Ukraińcach,' in *Fokus Report No. 5* (CBOS, 2023), 4.
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- 31 Anna Jastrzębiec-Witowska, 'Food Solidarity Battles: The Case of Poland After the Russian Aggression on Ukraine,' *Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs* 27, issue 4 (2023): 153–171.
- 32 Jonathan Scovil (ed.), *Polacy w obliczu wojny na Ukrainie: Opinie i Diagnozy No. 52* (Warsaw: CBOS, 2023), 85.
- 33 Jonathan Scovil, 'Polacy o potencjalnym zakończeniu wojny w Ukrainie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 22* (CBOS, 2025), 1–2.
- 34 Jonathan Scovil (ed.), *Polacy w obliczu wojny na Ukrainie: Opinie i Diagnozy No. 52* (Warsaw: CBOS, 2023), 86.
- 35 Jonathan Scovil, 'Polacy o potencjalnym zakończeniu wojny w Ukrainie,' in *Research Communiqué No. 22* (CBOS, 2025), 2–3.
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- 43 Aleksandra Wejt-Knyżewska, 'Ukraińskie firmy w Polsce w latach 2022–2024,' in *Point Paper 1* (Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2025).
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- 45 The name refers to Stepan Bandera – the leader of Ukrainian nationalism and symbol of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, an organisation responsible for war crimes against Poles, especially during the Volhynian massacre.
- 46 The term 'UPAina' is offensive because it links the name 'Ukraina' (Ukraine) with the acronym Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), responsible, among other things, for the Volhynian massacre, that is, the mass murder of the Polish population in 1943–1945.
- 47 Ada Tymińska, Paweł Korpál, Michał Sęk, 'Przyjdą i zabiorą. Antyukraińska mowa nienawiści na polskim Twitterze,' in *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights Report* (2023), 28.
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- 49 Ada Tymińska, Paweł Korpál, Michał Sęk, 'Przyjdą i zabiorą. Antyukraińska mowa nienawiści na polskim Twitterze,' in *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights Report* (2023), 59.
- 50 Mirosław Kofta, Grzegorz Sędek, 'Stereotypy duszy grupowej a postawy wobec obcych,' in *Psychologia rozumienia zjawisk społecznych*, ed. Bogdan Wojciszke and Maria Jarymowicz (Warsaw: PWN, 1999), 173–207.
- 51 Mirosław Kofta, Grzegorz Sędek, 'Conspiracy Stereotypes of Jews during Systemic Transformation in Poland,' *International Journal of Sociology* 35, issue 1 (2005): 40–64.

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9 The Paradox of Remembering and Forgetting

The Memory of Russia's War Against Ukraine Through the Eyes of the Polish Minority

*Cezary Smuniewski, Błażej Bado,
and Łukasz Kaczmarek*

Introduction

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine is not only reshaping the geopolitical landscape but also profoundly influencing the collective memory and national identity of Ukrainians. It is to be expected that Ukrainians' self-understanding – and indeed their future – will depend largely on how society interprets and experiences the traumatic events of the war as it unfolds. The aim of our study was to identify prevailing tendencies in Ukrainian collective memory of the war. Specifically, we were interested in what Ukrainians will wish to remember, and what they will choose to forget, about Russia's war against their nation and state. However, our research did not focus on ethnic Ukrainians. Instead, we invited members of the Polish minority living in Ukraine to participate. We operated on the assumption that the perspectives of Poles may better reflect the local realities, as ethnic Ukrainians, when asked directly about the war – a subject of immense emotional weight – might be inclined to respond in schematic, formulaic ways that unconditionally support and reinforce their national narrative. We assumed, on the other hand, that in everyday conversations with Poles – their neighbours and fellow citizens – Ukrainians might express themselves more naturally. Furthermore, we do not believe that Polish respondents would have deliberately interfered with the narratives they encountered. On the one hand, their distinct historical, social, and cultural background continues to create a degree of distance from ethnic Ukrainians; on the other hand, they share a concern for the common good – Ukraine – which unites both communities. By approaching the study in this way, we aimed to mitigate the influence of individualised perspectives on the national situation and collective memory in Ukraine.

Referring to Pierre Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory),¹ this chapter identifies a tendency within Ukrainian society regarding what elements of wartime experience Ukrainians choose to preserve and transmit to future generations and what they prefer to forget. Through the use of qualitative research methods, including IDIs conducted with members of the Polish minority in three regions of Ukraine, this study provides insight into the processes through which collective memory is transferred and utilised to strengthen national unity during

times of war. The chapter also aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the interplay among war, memory, and nationalism, particularly within the complex socio-political landscape of contemporary Ukraine.

Inspiration and Research Methodology

Firstly, what inspired our research? National identity is to a large extent a construct shaped by the memory of shared history, symbols, traditions, and major national events such as wars or struggles for independence. Memory thus constitutes a foundation for collective identity. One of the key inspirations for conducting our research in Ukraine – focusing on wartime memory and transformations within Ukrainian nationalism – was Pierre Nora’s observation:

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn-but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.²

In reflecting on Russia’s war against Ukraine, we asked ourselves what, under the influence of this war – ‘at a particular historical moment’ – is currently ‘crystallising and secreting itself’ within Ukrainian national identity. This identity, in turn, is a space of internal transformation rooted in a complex historical background, which continues to influence Ukraine’s contemporary politics of memory.³ That politics, meanwhile, unfolds in a context of cultural and ethnic diversity that has intensified in recent years – exemplified, among other things, by the Orange Revolution.⁴

Previous research on Ukrainian national identity has reinforced our conviction that Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine exerts a significant influence on the development of Ukrainian nationalism.⁵ At this point, it is worth recalling the observations made by Andrew Wilson:

Forget about the old stereotype of a divided Ukraine. Ukraine is now an 80%–90% consensus society. Although change has accelerated since 2022, this has been a cumulative process since 1991, through the Orange Revolution, Maidan, first war, Zelenskyy’s presidency and second war. The baseline of support for a consolidated national identity has moved ever higher. At the same time, civic and ethnic elements in national identity increasingly coincide. There is a strong element of social construction and opposition to Russia.⁶

Equally compelling are the words of the Ukrainian scholar Volodymyr V. Kravchenko, who notes: ‘Ukraine remains a battlefield of competing mythologies

and identities as well as memories and histories.⁷ From the vantage point of this metaphorical 'battlefield,' the future of Ukraine can perhaps be discerned. What Ukrainians will tell their children and grandchildren after the war – what becomes part of their intergenerational transmission – will undoubtedly be a powerful force in shaping the country's future national identity. Following the insights of Jie-Hyun Lim, one may argue that this process is particularly important when seen from the perspective of those who have suffered aggression⁸ – as is clearly the case in the situation under analysis. In turn, drawing on the reflections of Jeffrey K. Olick, it can be assumed that the experience of traumatic pasts is not only remembered but can also play a key role in shaping social structures.⁹ Collective remembering and forgetting shape both the present and the future of societies. According to Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory, societies construct memory by selectively choosing which aspects of the past to preserve and which to suppress in order to maintain social cohesion and a shared national identity.¹⁰ A similar understanding of memory has been articulated by Aleida Assmann. According to her, forgetting certain events may be necessary to create a positive, shared narrative about the past that will help society in its reconstruction process. This process is particularly important after wars, when society, instead of focusing on trauma and mistakes, must rebuild its identity on the foundations of martyrdom and heroism.¹¹ In Ukraine's case, it is a matter of not only rebuilding but also constructing from the ground up the identity of a sovereign state. In this process, one can observe the dynamics of both nation-building and state-building – processes illuminated by classic works by Max Weber,¹² Immanuel Wallerstein,¹³ and Charles Tilly,¹⁴ as well as the monograph by Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, which specifically addresses Ukrainian issues.¹⁵ However, this theme extends beyond the scope of our present research framework.

In light of the above reflections on memory, national identity, and Ukraine – and following the thinking of Halbwachs and Assmann with regard to both remembering and forgetting – we decided to focus our research on two specific aspects of Ukrainian memory relating to the ongoing war with Russia. We limited our analysis to first, the declared themes of future wartime narratives (memories) – those elements that are likely to be passed on to future generations of Ukrainians, shaping them as a national community and sustaining their nationalism, and second, those aspects of the war that future generations will not learn about from wartime recollections because it is certain that Ukrainians will choose not to speak of certain facts to their children and grandchildren. These unspoken elements will therefore not become part of the repository of Ukrainian national memory that possesses the power to shape national identity and nationalism.

Secondly, what research methods did we employ? This study is based on the findings of qualitative research carried out using the method of IDIs.¹⁶ The interviews were conducted between 12 and 17 June 2024 in Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, and Lviv, with members of the Polish population residing in these cities and surrounding regions. The research took the form of an anthropological case study involving 15 participants who represented a range of groups, activities,

and forms of social engagement. These included scouting, tourism, journalism, religion, universities of the third age, school education, higher education, transport, humanitarian organisations/the third sector, psychological support, public administration, and community activism. The participants' responses did not differ significantly from one another. The observed homogeneity of the research group led to the decision not to disclose the gender of respondents in the interview excerpts cited below. Prior to conducting the study, it was also decided that full interview transcripts would not be deposited in online repositories due to security concerns related to the ongoing war in Ukraine. All interviewees were informed of this decision before the interviews began. From the outset, ensuring a high level of anonymisation has been a priority in this research. There is at least one reason why such an approach should be considered a strength in studies of this kind – and, by extension, in the present analysis. A noticeable effect of this methodological choice was an increase in the openness of respondents, which in turn reduced their tendency to present themselves in an artificially positive light. This helped to minimise the degree of distortion in how they described the reality around them.

The research was conducted among members of the Polish national minority residing in Ukraine and holding Ukrainian citizenship. Our aim was to examine the transformation of Ukrainian nationalism – shaped by Russia's war against Ukraine – from the perspective of individuals with a dual national identity, that is, individuals who are historically and ideologically connected to both Ukraine and Poland. The process of selecting participants was as follows. First, we identified the target research locations based on publicly available statistical data. According to the only nationwide census conducted in Ukraine – in 2001 – there were 144,100 Poles living in Ukraine at the time, representing 0.3% of the total population (48,457,100). However, it must be assumed that this number has significantly declined in recent years due to low birth rates, emigration, and the consequences of the ongoing war.¹⁷ According to the UN Population Fund, Ukraine's population in 2024 is estimated at 37,900,000.¹⁸ Many Poles, mainly women and children, who used to live mainly in western Ukraine, left for Poland after the outbreak of full-scale war. Since, according to data from the 2001 census, the largest concentrations of Poles are in the Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, and Lviv regions, the researchers contacted Poles living there. With a view to preserving the multifaceted diversity of the research sample, we selected 15 people and invited them to participate in the study. When selecting them, we made sure that the group included people of different genders, ages, places of residence (city and village), and places of work.

The collected interview material was subjected first to coding (the identification and labelling of key ideas, themes, and patterns present in the interview content), second to categorisation, third to analysis within two subcategories of memory (remembering/forgetting), and fourth to synthesis (summarising the key findings of the analysis and identifying the most significant issues, patterns, and tendencies in respondents' statements). Following the approach

proposed by Steinar Kvale, the following methods were used in working with the research material: meaning condensation, conversation analysis, and narrative analysis.¹⁹

The scenario for the IDI interviews was built around the theme of memory. According to the scenario, the term 'nationalism' itself was not introduced by us in the interviews. However, if the interviewees used it themselves in the interview, we freely maintained this concept throughout the rest of the interview.

What Will Ukrainians Tell Future Generations About the War?

In the interviews, we asked the question: 'What do you think Ukrainians will tell their children and grandchildren about this war?' Two main themes emerged from the responses. First, as many as 11 out of 15 respondents pointed to the brutality of the Russians. Second, eight out of 15 participants spoke of the pathologies within Ukrainian governance.

Let us examine these two topics. The first is the brutality of the Russians. Participants in our study claimed that Ukrainians in future transgenerational transmission will talk, among other things, about 'women who were raped' (R1), 'the brutality of the Russians' (R2), 'the death of many people, about funerals' (R3), 'the story of Bucha,²⁰ where innocent people were killed, murdered and raped' (R5), 'terrible things, invading our homeland, killing and murdering' (R12), and 'entering houses . . ., looking for girls . . ., taking everything from houses, locking residents in basements, occupying flats' (R13). Our interviewees' statements are full of reflections on what the Ukrainian people are experiencing at the hands of the brutal Russians, including pain ('They are waging a war without rules, and children are dying, elderly people are dying, young people are simply dying, and that is probably what hurts the most and will continue to hurt' – R15) and fear ('Only this fear, only these crimes committed by the Russians' – R6). Most of our interviewees were convinced that the post-war memory of Ukrainians would be anti-Russian. One of the participants in the study said,

They will talk about this war as a wound. Yes. It is a wound that will take a long time to heal. There will be a wound in Russian-Ukrainian relations, and this wound will be passed down from generation to generation.

(R15)

Some of our respondents, when speaking about what Ukrainians will tell future generations about the war, referred to specific events that are already being circulated within Ukrainian society. Stories are told of villages occupied by Russian forces, where Ukrainian men reportedly had their fingers cut off with pliers to prevent them from using weapons in the future – effectively excluding them from conventional armed combat (R1). Accounts also include stories of Ukrainians hiding from incoming drones in holes dug into the ground (R2) and of the consequences of missile strikes – such as children who died in their homes and in their beds, later

unearthed from beneath the rubble of destroyed buildings (R15). In our respondents' statements – rich in vivid imagery and explicitly associated with feelings and emotions – we can already discern the emergence of Ukrainian national narratives. These stories possess the potential to become part of the intergenerational memory of the nation. The power of such intergenerational transmission appears to lie in the simplicity of the memorable images, strengthened by the explicit naming of emotions, experiences, and affective states.

In this context, let us consider the following account shared by one of our respondents – a story, which, as he himself emphasised, is already being told among Ukrainians:

A family with three children from a village in the Zaporizhzhia region had a small farm, a pasture, and kept sheep. Russian soldiers were stationed near the village. At first, they would come to the house and take things – some food, something to drink, maybe some vodka or something like that. But over time, the Russians started acting like they owned the place. Later, they would simply come and say, 'Tomorrow you must bring me this and that.' Then they began taking over the houses in the village. And then they started saying things like, 'Tomorrow you must bring me a girl.' They had a 14-year-old daughter. That's when the parents realised they had to escape with their children [the respondent's voice breaks]. So that the sheep wouldn't fall into Russian hands, the husband and wife killed them all themselves and buried them in the pasture. Such a terrible story for me.

(R13)

It is not difficult to identify, in this account, elements that primarily reflect the brutality of the Russian forces, as well as references to the heroism of Ukrainians – motifs that are almost archetypal within collective memory. Let us consider several themes present in this story. First, the motif of violence and oppression is clearly pronounced. In the respondent's account, the central element is the escalation of violence on the part of the occupiers. Initially, the Russians 'would come to the house and take things – some food, something to drink, maybe some vodka or something like that,' which is presented as a form of looting and terror. However, over time, they began to 'act like they owned the place,' suggesting a shift in the nature of the occupation – from the chaos of war to systematic oppression, in which the Russians began to dominate the civilian population, treating them as subjects. This progression marks a key moment in the narrative – one that, within the framework of national memory, may be interpreted as a symbolic turning point in the perception of the occupier: from an invading force to one that exerts brutal control, violating not only physical boundaries but also human dignity. From the perspective of national memory theory, such events may function as *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) – to use the concept developed by historian of identity Pierre Nora.²¹ The decisive actions of the occupier, intruding into the intimacy of everyday life (e.g. by demanding, 'Tomorrow you must bring me a girl'), may become

a significant component of wartime memory. This memory not only informs future generations about physical destruction but also conveys the psychological and social trauma that accompanied the occupation.

The second motif in the story is the decision to flee. This decision is marked not only by fear but also by determination. This moment may, in Ukrainian national memory, become a symbol of the courage shown by individuals and families who, despite overwhelming adversity, chose to fight for survival, not only in the physical sense but also in the psychological sense. When analysed through the lens of collective identity theory, as articulated, for example, in the work of Anthony D. Smith,²² the story contains the potential to become part of a national narrative centred not only on the defence of territory but also on the defence of national dignity. Flight, in this context, is not simply an act of fear; it is a moral and ethical choice in which parents strive to protect their children and safeguard their future. It expresses not only the desire to preserve life but also a symbolic struggle for what is deeply valuable – the future of the nation.

The third motif is the killing of the sheep. The narrative of the family slaughtering and burying their sheep appears to be rich in meaning – not only through its allusions to Judeo-Christian biblical imagery. As livestock, the sheep represent an integral part of the family's life, and, in the cultural context, they can be seen as symbols of security, stability, and labour. The decision to kill them is not merely a desperate and, in a sense, paradoxical act of 'protection' against the Russians' violence. It is also a painful rupture with the family's former rural and pastoral way of life, which was destroyed by war and occupation. Perhaps the killing of the sheep – animals that typically evoke positive associations (calmness, gentleness, and innocence) – may come to be interpreted, in future wartime memories, as a form of surrogate sacrifice: a bloody act of defence against the total humiliation the occupiers sought to impose by demanding 'a girl.' Equally plausible is the interpretation of this act as an allegory for what was irretrievably destroyed by the enemy. Thus, the decision to kill and bury the sheep reflects the strength of the individual and the family and their determination to protect their identity, property, and bodily integrity.

The fourth motif is the emotional charge embedded in the story. The respondent, recounting this episode during the interview, concluded with the words: 'Such a terrible story for me.' In saying this, he expressed more than a general judgement about the horror of the events – he admitted that the story continues to haunt him. In the vivid language of his account, it is clear that although he is already familiar with the events he narrates, they still elicit powerful emotions. This may be interpreted as evidence of trauma associated with the experience of war and occupation. The respondent's breaking voice invites reflection on the challenges involved in processing such experiences – both on a personal level and on a national level. These experiences are likely to remain not only in the individual memory of the speaker but also in the collective memory of Ukraine. From the perspective of research focusing on war memory (such as that of Judith Butler²³ and Paul Conner-ton²⁴), individual trauma becomes part of collective memory, which is then passed

down through generations. The significance of the story lies not only in the act of telling it but also in the transmission of emotion – emotions that may become part of a shared national experience and contribute to shaping the future Ukrainian national identity.

We focus on this story as an example of a narrative with the potential to contribute to the emerging collective memory of Ukraine – a memory in which personal experiences play a key role, while simultaneously reflecting broader social processes such as resistance to occupation and the struggle to preserve identity. From this perspective, the memory of war is not merely a record of events. The role of individual traumas in the process of shaping Ukrainian national identity constitutes an important field of research. Scholarly inquiry into this issue helps to clarify likely scenarios for the development of patriotic and nationalist tendencies within societies – tendencies that draw significantly upon collective memory.

The second theme, which – according to our respondents – is likely to become one of the central elements in future Ukrainian narratives, concerns the pathology of governance, particularly the widespread corruption in Ukraine. This corruption permeates the functioning of the state and humanitarian aid channels and, as a result, severely undermines societal morale. First and foremost, it is important to note that corruption has intensified during the war. This is evident in the account of one respondent, who pointed to the functioning of administrative structures: ‘They will talk about the destruction and the corruption of the authorities in our city, who withhold humanitarian aid in order to profit from it personally, about massive fraud at border crossings’ (R1). Such actions not only result in tangible material losses but also erode citizens’ trust in Ukrainian state institutions and well-meaning aid organisations. Corruption also affects military assistance: ‘A very large amount of aid to the military was sent to us from other countries, but it just didn’t go to the military! Someone was taking over this support’ (R13). Under such conditions, aid not reaching the military and mismanagement of resources lead to feelings of frustration and mistrust. Another participant stated that in the future, Ukrainians would ‘talk about corruption in the Territorial Recruitment Centres’ (R1). These institutions, responsible for conscripting new soldiers into the Ukrainian armed forces, have become widely regarded as a prime example of systemic degeneration. Reports of brutality by recruitment officers – ‘hunting’ conscription-age men in the streets and forcibly enlisting them – are frequently accompanied by accounts of rampant nepotism and bribery within these centres. There is a strong belief in society that only the poor end up on the front lines, as they cannot afford to bribe their way out of military service. One commonly repeated sentiment among respondents was: ‘You won’t find the sons of the rich in the trenches.’ When discussing the situation of the Ukrainian people, the participants in our interviews provided us with specific amounts of bribes that officials demand from applicants (e.g. ‘they say at the office: you can pay this amount again, and it will be ready in two days. It’s just awful’ – R7) in order for their cases to be processed.

The memory of the war in Ukraine, as shaped by narratives concerning the pathologies of power, has a profound impact on how the war is perceived both domestically and internationally. It is highly likely that the suffering of the poor – and, by extension, their powerlessness in the face of a corrupt state apparatus – will become a central force in the stories that have the potential to shape future generations of Ukrainians. Should this happen, and in the absence of any meaningful process of justice or restitution for these crimes, this particular element of memory may exert a destructive influence on efforts to build post-war trust in the state and its institutions – particularly the armed forces.

What Will Ukrainians Not Tell Future Generations About the War?

In the interviews, we asked the question: ‘What do you think Ukrainians will want to forget about this war – what will they not want to tell their children and grandchildren?’ Two main themes emerged from the responses. First, ten out of 15 respondents referred to the pathologies within the Ukrainian government. Second, eight out of 15 participants pointed to the brutality of the Russians.

The first theme concerns the pathologies within the Ukrainian government. Below are selected responses from our study participants: ‘They won’t talk about the corruption’ (R3), ‘Corruption – probably the most important issue that will be silenced. And they’ll be ashamed if it ever comes to light. The most important thing! Corruption has been devouring this state since the very beginning of its existence’ (R4),

They might want to forget the corruption, which, unfortunately, is why we’re losing this war. They won’t want to talk about it. Because the war would look entirely different if there hadn’t been corruption – both at the highest levels and at the lower ones.

(R15)

A recurring theme alongside these accounts of corruption is the greed of those in power: ‘They want to stuff themselves on this war – to get rich off people’s misery and suffering’ (R13). Our respondents also included among the unspoken pathologies of governance the operational practices of the Territorial Recruitment Centres. Notably, their criticism extended beyond the widely known corruption within these institutions to include the brutality of military personnel forcibly conscripting men off the streets:

They’ll be ashamed. They won’t talk about it. They won’t admit that such things happened – that they threw people to the ground. What, they’re going to say that they stopped someone at a checkpoint and threw them to the ground? Come on! I saw it with my own eyes.

(R14)

Forgetting immoral acts such as corruption can be analysed in the context of collective memory formation processes, which involve not only remembering but also the selective forgetting of inconvenient aspects of the past. In Maurice Halbwachs' conception, as outlined in 'On Collective Memory,' social groups shape collective memory selectively – choosing which events are preserved and which are excluded in order to maintain internal cohesion and a positive moral self-image.²⁵ In the Ukrainian context, forgetting the pathologies of power – such as corruption – may reflect a need to sustain a coherent and heroic narrative of war and national resistance. Paul Ricoeur, in his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, points out that the process of forgetting is essential for creating coherent historical narratives that can be passed on to future generations.²⁶ Ricoeur's perspective finds a particularly resonant echo in the words of one respondent, who described how Ukrainians might recount their story in the future: 'They'll want to talk more about what the Russians did, and they'll talk less – or maybe not at all – about what they themselves did' (R15). It is highly likely that Ukrainians will construct their national identity by focusing on narratives of external aggression and collective suffering, rather than internal problems that could fracture the image of national unity. In this way, the process of forgetting becomes a tool for constructing a national identity aimed at preserving cohesion in times of adversity.

The second theme that, according to our respondents, is unlikely to be passed on to future Ukrainian generations is the brutality of Russian forces – including accounts of rape and the agonising deaths suffered by Ukrainians. Participants in the study suggested that, after the war, there would be a strong tendency among Ukrainians to remain silent about the details of such atrocities: 'They won't talk about the murders' (R6), 'About the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers . . . about what happened in Bucha near Kyiv, about the rapes, the looting' (R4), and 'About the terrible crimes, the killings, the rapes' (R13). One of the most harrowing manifestations of the aggressors' brutality is sexual violence,²⁷ which has primarily affected women. However, as one respondent noted, 'I heard that men were raped too. They'll definitely be ashamed to talk about it' (R8). Not only murders and sexual assaults but also the everyday experiences of violence during the war – such as death on the streets of Ukrainian cities – are likely to be silenced: 'Yes . . . there are things they probably won't want to talk about: what they saw . . . how people were killed . . . how people died, how they just lay there, dead in the street' (R10).

As the above analysis demonstrates, we identified two themes that, according to our respondents, are unlikely to become part of transgenerational transmission in Ukrainian society: the pathologies of Ukrainian governance and the brutality of the Russians. It is clear that Ukrainians are invested in preserving the memory of certain events in order to allow them to dominate collective memory – thus displacing other, more difficult, or painful recollections. They envisage a future in which there is no need to speak of certain aspects of the past – a future in which they can instead speak with pride about integrity (as a negation of corruption),

good governance (as a negation of political dysfunction), and life free from fear and violence (as a negation of brutality). This, in turn, represents a vision for a hopeful and prosperous future. The desire to forget internal problems and Russian brutality may, however, serve the purpose of reinforcing national unity – an essential condition for the struggle towards swift victory. According to our respondents, the future national narrative will focus on the necessity of permanent separation from Russia, which will enable Ukrainians to construct a unified national identity – one in which there is no place for the pathologies of governance. These, in their view, belong to Russia, just as brutality characterises Russia's conduct in international relations.

Conclusion

One of our respondents aptly captured a central theme of our study when reflecting on how war-related memories will be passed down in Ukrainian society:

Every story will be a personal one. It will be told through the prism of one's own experience, one's own history. And what a young person will know about the war from their father or mother will depend on that.

(R5)

However, what is particularly striking – indeed paradoxical, and thus worthy of deeper analysis – is that respondents, when asked what will be remembered and what should be forgotten ('What do you think Ukrainians will tell their children and grandchildren about this war?' and 'What do you think Ukrainians will want to forget about this war – what will they not want to tell their children and grandchildren?') – frequently identified the same themes in both categories. According to our data, 11 out of 15 respondents believed that Ukrainians would want to speak to future generations about the brutality of Russian forces, while, at the same time, eight out of 15 respondents believed they would wish to forget it. Similarly, ten out of 15 respondents said Ukrainians would want to forget about the internal pathologies of governance, while eight out of 15 respondents believed they would want to pass those stories on. This reveals a discernible tendency in Ukrainian society to both remember and forget the very same wartime events – undoubtedly allowing us to describe this condition as a paradox. The paradox is concisely illustrated in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Tendencies in collective memory in Ukrainian society

<i>Ukrainians want to remember</i>	<i>Ukrainians want to forget</i>
Brutality of the Russians	Pathologies of Ukrainian power
Pathologies of Ukrainian power	Brutality of the Russians

Source: Own study.

How should this paradox emerging from the research be interpreted? Several interpretations, at least, can be identified:

1. The paradoxical situation in which Ukrainians – according to representatives of the Polish national minority speaking about them – appear to want to remember what they simultaneously wish to forget stems from the fact that collective memory is not simply a ‘record’ of events but rather a selective process of narrative construction aimed at stabilising and preserving social cohesion.
2. Ukrainians select only certain individual elements from the broader categories of ‘Russian brutality’ and ‘pathologies of governance’ to be either remembered or forgotten. This capacity to choose from within the complexity of these issues appears to be crucial when considering the usefulness of selected narrative elements in the construction of national identity and nationalism. The very act of selecting specific content constitutes a practice through which Ukrainians are able to build and shape a form of nationalistic discourse that serves to integrate society in the face of a common enemy. Collective memory, therefore, does not function as a fixed matrix for reproducing the past in the present but rather as the capacity to reformulate what society deems important and useful across different contexts of national life. Forgetting, in this sense, does not imply literal oblivion but rather the exclusion of certain topics from the national narrative – topics that could undermine the sense of national identity and unity. Such mechanisms of forgetting are socially purposeful: they aim to preserve a positive and cohesive narrative whose principal function is to mobilise the nation in times of crisis.
3. Collective memory is not only a straightforward transmission of the past, but it is also a dynamic process marked by tensions between the individual and the collective, the monumental and the incidental, and the proud and the shameful. It is shaped, to a large extent, by diverse and often conflicting social and political factors. What is remembered and passed on to future generations is determined by how a nation acquires and interprets its history. It is precisely this question of acquisition that seems to be key to understanding the paradox we have uncovered. The drama of this acquisition lies not only in the fact that it unfolds during wartime but also in the ambiguity of the narratives being acquired – they are not fixed or unambiguous, but rather, as Pierre Nora described, they ‘crystallise and secrete’ themselves within collective memory. Collective memory, like a coin, appears to have both an obverse and a reverse. The value of what a nation acquires through its collective memory – and later incorporates into its identity – is both ‘crystallised’ and ‘secreted’ between these two sides. The two sides alone have no inherent value; that value lies in the space between them. This value may only be revealed in the future, as the nation draws strength from stories that demand ongoing interpretation – stories formed in the interplay of what has been ‘crystallised’ and what remains ‘secreted.’
4. The paradox revealed in the findings of this study offers insight into some of Ukraine’s wartime needs. One of the essential needs in times of war is the

capacity for national unity in the face of a shared threat. Undoubtedly, the memory of Russian brutality, as well as the memory of corruption and the pathologies of Ukrainian governance, serves to unite Ukrainians – they function as a kind of ‘cement’ that binds the political community together around a common enemy. Ukrainians face the brutal aggressor with the naked truth of their own nation – but it is precisely this nakedness that makes them aware of how much unites them, even immorality (in the form of corruption and political dysfunction). Ukrainians simultaneously wish to remember and to forget both Russian brutality and their own moral failings. Yet this paradox enables them to recognise that the most pressing challenge of the present moment is neither Russian violence nor domestic corruption and political pathology. What is truly needed is national unity – a reweaving of the social fabric. And in order to rebuild the state after the war, a moral renewal will also be essential.

5. The paradox observed in our study stems from the fact that collective memory is not a direct reflection of the past but rather a socially constructed and continuously evolving narrative. It is, therefore, not a closed memory. Nationalism does not seek to be history; rather, it aspires to be a present confidently projected into the future – firmly rooted in a concrete and clearly defined past. Selective remembering and forgetting allow nationalism to sustain itself across successive generations of the political community. Nationalism endures precisely because it draws upon both memory and forgetting as tools for forging its path through the nation’s unfolding history. These tools prove useful in a variety of ways – for instance, in justifying past mistakes or in adjusting the vision of the nation to the needs of the present and the challenges of the contemporary world.
6. The paradox observed in this study does not simply reflect a general ambivalence within society. Selective forgetting and remembering also function as mechanisms of psychological defence. War trauma – on the one hand rooted in the brutality of the aggressor and on the other hand rooted in a sense of internal helplessness (linked to corruption and dysfunctional governance) – is so profound that forgetting its most harrowing aspects may serve as a form of psychological protection. A society devastated both externally (by Russian aggression) and internally (by corruption and political pathologies) is not so much torn between remembering and forgetting, as it is revealed to be a living organism – actively sorting through and filtering the elements of its own historical experience. This process may aim to eliminate feelings of pain, shame, and guilt and to bring an end to the trauma.
7. The paradox revealed in our research invites us to consider national memories as interpretatively ambiguous images when viewed without an axiological context. A memory image is either transmitted to the next generation or rejected on the basis of certain values. It conveys something that once held value – or lacked it – something that speaks to a hierarchy of values or the absence thereof. Thus, the paradox of the ambiguity of memory and forgetting allows for a deeper understanding of specific elements of national memory as an axiological construct of images – one capable of shaping a political community that is grounded in a particular value hierarchy.

8. A final reflection on the paradox identified in our research prompts us to consider the possibility that Ukrainians – through the current war, their defence against Russia from the east, and their westward orientation towards Western states – are in the process of rewriting both their individual and collective biography. Ukraine, as a state, is relatively young and has limited historical experience. Yet the pain of war and the pain of paradox emerge as forces giving birth to its own international subjectivity. Wars have the power to eliminate or establish states on the map, to draw borders, to shape and define alliances and spheres of influence, and to channel or obstruct civilisational connections. Paradoxes, in turn, carry the force of emergence because, first, they compel critical reflection on accepted norms and values. In the context of national culture and history, they can reveal the complexity of human experience and the contradictions present within society – thus provoking deeper thought about the political and legal structure of a nation-state in the making. Second, paradoxes generate dynamics of social change. Especially during wartime, they can expose tensions between old orders and new ideas. Such contradictions often reflect the struggle between tradition and progress and may contribute to the redefinition of social and political norms. Third, paradoxes protect national tradition from ossification and from being confined to a cultural museum. Such confinement would require thinking of a nation in terms of a static object, unfit for active existence in the present. Paradoxes enable tradition to remain diverse, full of contradictions, and thus dynamic and authentic. The clarity of tradition often leads to its impoverishment and its inability to exert influence in contemporary life. Paradoxes, therefore, defend national tradition from stagnation – revealing its internal tension, its constant becoming, and its rebirth with each generation. Fourth, accepting one's own paradoxes helps nations to manage internal diversity and the contradictions that arise from it, preventing these from becoming destructive. Paradoxes serve as reminders that national histories are often constructed upon competing narratives. Fifth, paradoxes challenge national stagnation, entrenched conventions, and dominant norms. They encourage thinking beyond what has been taken for granted and invite nations to transcend the obvious – fostering creativity and innovation. Within national culture, then, paradoxes may give rise to new forms of self-expression on the international stage and to the continuous, creative assertion of identity in the world.

The tendency we identified within Ukrainian society bears the hallmarks of a paradox – one that is likely to have meaningful implications for the country's future. The paradox of remembering and forgetting reveals the complexity of the collective experience of Russia's war against Ukraine. This paradox emerges as a generative mechanism: it protects tradition from ossification, opens it up to reinterpretation of the past, of values, and of national identity, and, in doing so, enables it to exert real influence in the contemporary world. In this sense, the paradox is not a weakness but a strength – one that allows a nation to endure, to transform, and to grow.

Notes

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- 2 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,' *Representations* 26 (1989): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.
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- 8 Jie-Hyun Lim, *Victimhood Nationalism: History and Memory in a Global Age*, trans. Megan Sungyoon (New York: Columbia University Press, 2025); Jie-Hyun Lim, 'Victimhood Nationalism in the Memory of Mass Dictatorship,' in *Mass Dictatorship and Memory as Ever Present Past. Mass Dictatorship in the 20th Century*, ed. Jie-Hyun Lim, Barbara Walker and Peter Lambert (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 36–61, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137289834_3; Volodymyr V. Kravchenko, 'Ukraine Faces Its Soviet Past: History versus Policy versus Memory,' in *Mass Dictatorship and Memory as Ever Present Past. Mass Dictatorship in the 20th Century*, ed. Jie-Hyun Lim, Barbara Walker and Peter Lambert (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 87–119, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137289834_5.
- 9 Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013).
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- 11 Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016); Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
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- 18 'World Population Dashboard Ukraine,' <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/UA> (accessed May 28, 2024).
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10 Activities of Polish NGOs for Ukrainian Refugees Since 2022

Paulina Szczepaniak

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the most important activities undertaken by selected Polish NGOs on behalf of refugees from Ukraine since 2022. In times of global humanitarian crises, such as the war in Ukraine, the role of NGOs becomes extremely important. The chapter shows how civil society gets involved in helping those affected by armed conflict while also highlighting the importance of grass-roots initiatives in building social solidarity. In the context of this book as a whole, the topic is part of a broad analysis of the mechanisms of the integration of refugees, the challenges related to their adaptation in new environments, and the potential that is present in collaboration among civil society, the state structures, and businesses. The chapter also emphasises the fact that the activities of Polish NGOs constitute a unique example that deserves a deeper reflection in both a national perspective and a global perspective. The chapter presents selected activities of NGOs, highlighting their key initiatives in support of the refugees.

The key research problem of the chapter focuses on understanding the strategies and forms of support used by Polish NGOs since 2022 in response to the migration crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine. A number of research questions have been identified within this area:

1. What types of activities since 2022 have been undertaken by NGOs in Poland in order to support refugees from Ukraine?
2. How have the NGOs been supported by the civilian population and other actors (private and state-controlled)?
3. What barriers and difficulties have Polish NGOs been facing while implementing their activities?
4. How have the activities of NGOs evolved over time (from 2022 to 2025)?

A multidimensional research approach was used in the development of the chapter, which includes a variety of methods and sources. The main research methods included a content analysis of documents, reports, and publications, which made it possible to identify key themes, strategies, and trends in the activities of Polish NGOs in support of refugees from Ukraine. The content analysis also made

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it possible to assess the narratives and priorities presented by each organisation. Of crucial importance in this respect was the analysis of content (e.g. articles) produced by the NGOs themselves, which provided valuable numerical and descriptive data on their activities. These organisations include Caritas Poland, Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH), Polish Red Cross (PCK), and Polish Centre for International Aid (PCPM). Also used was a rich body of academic literature on the migration crisis related to the conflict in Ukraine and the role of civil society in mitigating it. Furthermore, in order to obtain a more complete picture, numerical data (including the number of refugees, the form and amount of assistance provided, and financial data) from state institutions and international organisations as well as NGOs (e.g. Eurostat, International Committee of the Red Cross, PCK, Warsaw Enterprise Institute, Border Guard, European Commission, and Kiel Institute for the World Economy) were taken into account. The criteria for selecting sources were primarily their availability, timeliness, and reliability. The period of analysis of NGO activities includes data since 2022. This allows for the presentation of the immediate response and evolution of the support strategy in the following months. The information obtained will allow for a broader understanding of the role of civil society and activities carried out by NGOs in mitigating the effects of the crisis and will supplement the empirical data with a scientific and systemic perspective.

The scientific achievements to date concerning the activities of Polish NGOs for refugees from Ukraine are relatively extensive. They include various types of analyses, case studies, and evaluations of specific aid projects. The current state of research not only allows for the identification of effective forms of providing assistance but also indicates gaps requiring further research, especially taking into account the provision of long-term integration and support.

Academic and Political Context

The activities of Polish NGOs in favour of refugees from Ukraine are a phenomenon that is worth embedding in the context of both academic analysis and current political determinants. NGOs are defined as independent, usually non-profit, organisations that operate outside government structures. They can be organised locally, nationally, or internationally and work voluntarily for the public good. Government organisations are often associated with meeting needs that are not met or are only partially met. Participation in the work of NGOs is based on voluntary participation.¹ NGOs are often seen as a key component of civil society, which acts quickly and flexibly in the face of humanitarian crises, such as the war in Ukraine, bridging the gaps left by the state structures (especially in the first months of the emergency). As an immediate neighbour of Ukraine, Poland finds itself at the centre of the European refugee crisis. The assistance provided by NGOs has become a key component in managing this crisis.

NGOs can be divided into different types depending on their mission and methods of operation. There are a number of categories – charitable (aiming to help those most in need), service (providing assistance in specific areas), participatory (organising self-help projects), and empowering (raising awareness on various

developments).² The division proposed by the World Bank, on the other hand, indicates that there are two types of NGOs – operational and advocacy. The first refers to focusing on implementing projects and programmes to address specific social or environmental problems. The second, on the other hand, is concerned with defending and promoting the law and influencing the policies and practices of international organisations.³ In the context of refugee assistance, it should be pointed out that humanitarian organisations, which provide food, shelter, medical assistance, and psychological support, are key in this respect. We should also not forget about educational and integration organisations that facilitate Polish language learning, organise activities for children, and support refugees in finding work. Both of the above examples belong to the operational type. The second category is advocacy organisations, which focus on protecting the rights of refugees. Through their activities, refugees can benefit from legal advice, administrative support, and protection against discrimination. The chapter uses examples of activities of organisations that fulfil the above functions, often combining different types of activities.

The analysis of NGOs' activities in favour of Ukrainian refugees is part of broader research on social mobilisation and (international) solidarity, as well as the processes of migration and integration. NGOs not only provide emergency assistance in such situations in the form of shelter or food but also support refugees in their adaptation to a new social and cultural environment. In practice, this means, among other things, providing opportunities for education, psychological care, legal counselling, or vocational training.

An important aspect is the role of NGOs in relations with the state and international institutions. Actions undertaken within this role can be considered as examples of collaboration between grass-roots initiatives and more formal political and administrative structures. In addition, collaboration with international organisations (and donors) is an example of cross-border engagement in addressing humanitarian issues. A significant role in this regard is also played by the involvement of companies, which provide financial, in-kind, or logistical support.

In compiling the chapter, data from a number of national and international studies on NGOs and their assistance to refugees in Ukraine after 2022 were relied upon. Studies by Andrzej Szeptycki ('Polish Assistance for the Ukrainian Refugees: Current State and Perspectives of Research'), Paweł Mikołajczak ('Polish activism: NGO activity in the refugee crisis related to the war in Ukraine'), Sarian Jarosz and Witold Klaus ('The Polish School of Assistance. Reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022'), Mikołaj Herbst and Michał Sitek ('Education in exile: Ukrainian refugee students in the schooling system in Poland following the Russian-Ukrainian war'), Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata Madej, and Judit Csoba ('Organising support for refugees from Ukraine The role of the state, local governments, and civil society'), among others, were used. In particular, data provided by the aforementioned NGOs, a think-tank (Warsaw Enterprise Institute), a research institute (Kiel Institute for World Economy), government data (government websites), and Eurostat played a key role. The Law of 12 March 2022 on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with armed conflict on the territory

of that country and information provided by the Border Guard was also included in the compilation.

Activities of NGOs on Behalf of Refugees from Ukraine

NGOs in Poland have become one of the most important pillars of support for Ukrainian refugees since the escalation of the conflict. The armed conflict in Ukraine that has been taking place since the Russian invasion on 22 February 2022 has led to a mass exodus of civilians seeking refuge outside their country. It is estimated that more than seven million people have left Ukraine so far, of whom nearly one million have found refuge in Poland. As an immediate neighbour of Ukraine, Poland has played a significant role in providing support to refugees, especially in the early days during the influx of huge numbers of people. In the first month alone following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more than two million refugees from Ukraine arrived in Poland.⁴ Poland became a key place of refuge for those fleeing the war, making it one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the world at that time.⁵ The majority of the refugees who crossed the Polish border were women, children, and elderly people.

Assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Poland was divided into two key stages. This division was distinguished by Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová and Filip Bambúch. During the first one, the focus was on providing basic humanitarian assistance, which mainly included the provision of temporary accommodation, meals, and transport support. The second phase was geared towards the long-term integration of refugees, enabling them to integrate into the labour market, the education system, and the administrative structure of social assistance.⁶

Importantly, reception points were set up in all provinces in Poland at the beginning of 2022, offering support to border crossers. Those places provided meals, a space to rest, basic medical assistance and information on available forms of support and the rules of stay in Poland, and the associated legal procedures. As of the beginning of 2025, there were 12 such points still in operation, and by the end of January, they had provided assistance to more than 1.57 million people.⁷

At this point, it is also worth mentioning the Law of 12 March 2022 on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of this state.⁸ The provisions of the aforementioned law have enabled NGOs in Poland to obtain tools to provide assistance more effectively. This law introduced special rules for completing all legal formalities regarding the residence permit for persons who came to Poland directly from Ukraine as a result of the hostilities. It also includes regulations on employment, education, healthcare, and financial support for the refugees. With this law, refugees from Ukraine gained access to a wide range of assistance, including obtaining residence permits, opportunities to take up employment, and access to the Polish education system, healthcare, and social benefits. The act also provided for the establishment of an Assistance Fund to finance the implementation of tasks undertaken to help the Ukrainian citizens, which significantly improves the provision of support from state institutions and facilitates the mission of NGOs.⁹

Interestingly, a number of surveys were also carried out on the most urgent needs identified by refugees. The UKREF Research Report – ‘Social Reception and Inclusion of Refugees from Ukraine’ – indicates that the most common answers to the question ‘What are your most important needs’ were finding a job; material assistance – clothes, shoes, and food; renting a flat; and language courses.¹⁰

This was also reflected in surveys conducted among NGOs in Poland. Data collected by means of a survey questionnaire, conducted between the beginning of August and the end of October 2022 by Paweł Mikołajczak on a sample of 80 NGOs (29 during the pilot study and 51 during the actual study), indicate that in the face of the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, NGOs undertook a wide range of activities to support refugees. The most frequently mentioned initiatives were organisation and co-ordination of Polish language courses (16%), provision of food (12.9%), and provision of accommodation (12.3%). Then, 10.4% of the organisations participating in the survey indicated integration activities, psychological support, and assistance in finding employment for refugees. NGOs also provided the refugees with essential products for everyday life, like clothes (7.4%), hygiene products (3.1%), and medicines and dressings (2.5%), especially in the first days after they crossed the border. Moreover, the organisations supported children and young people by providing care for them (6.7%), helped with administrative matters (4.3%), and co-ordinated logistics and transport (3.7%). Through a variety of initiatives, Polish NGOs played a key role in assisting refugees during this difficult time for them.¹¹

Another part of the research concerned the collaboration between NGOs and other entities. In the context of assisting refugees from Ukraine, NGOs collaborated first and foremost with local government entities (23.3%) and on a smaller scale with the central government (7.6%). The second most common type of collaboration was collaboration within the NGO sector, especially direct partnerships between NGOs themselves, which accounted for 22.9% of all cases. An important role was also played by educational institutions (11.6%) and, to a lesser extent, healthcare institutions (2%). Additionally, organisations established partnerships with the private sector, especially with entrepreneurs (14.5%), which allowed for more efficient management of available resources and streamlining of the aid activities. Furthermore, one in ten organisations established contacts with international actors (10%), and 8% of the organisations were linked to NGO networks, which allowed for a more effective exchange of both reserves and experiences. Additionally, mention should be made of the forms of support that were received from the institutions and organisations that collaborated with the NGOs. The most frequent form of support was financial, which was received by 69.6% of the organisations analysed. A significant part of the support was also in-kind donations and organisational support, including the provision of food, clothes, and space for aid activities; this type of assistance was reported by 11.6% of the organisations. The least common type of assistance received by the NGOs was technical support, for example, related to digital infrastructure or logistics, which was declared by only 7.2% of the survey subjects.¹²

Examples of NGOs and Their Activities on Behalf of Ukrainian Refugees

Aid to refugees from Ukraine has been carried out by many NGOs in Poland. The following section will focus on the analysis of activities carried out by selected NGOs. The selection of NGOs was dictated by the desire to capture the full range of interventions – from immediate response to long-term support. More importantly, each of the selected institutions represents a different but complementary model of helping refugees.

When referring to specific examples of NGOs and their activities, mention should be made of Caritas Poland, which has played a key role in helping refugees from Ukraine who were fleeing war, together with its diocesan branches. This organisation has created as many as 32 Migrant and Refugee Assistance Centres, which have become places of support for those in need.¹³ The purpose of the centres is to help people integrate, learn the Polish language, and find their way in the new reality. The centres also offer free psychological counselling, legal counselling, official translations, and support in finding a job. They also provide play areas for children. Over time, the activity of the organisation was dynamic and evolved in response to the changing needs of the refugees. Caritas Poland constantly adapted its activities to respond as effectively as possible to any new challenges, in terms of both the scale of the crisis and the specific requirements of those who found themselves in a difficult situation. With its flexibility and openness to the needs of the beneficiaries, it was possible to set up some mobile teams. The teams that operate as part of the assistance centres reach out to people who are in difficulties in economic, health, or communication situations and provide them with the necessary assistance. This ensures that the support reaches those most in need, regardless of their location or constraints.

Caritas was involved in distributing meals, particularly at the beginning of the humanitarian crisis. During the most difficult days at the border, the organisation distributed more than two million meals.¹⁴ Figures show that some 70,000 Ukrainians benefited from the psychological support offered by Caritas. Further to this, nearly 30,000 Ukrainian children received educational support, and 670 of them were given the opportunity to join scholarship programmes.¹⁵

In addition, Caritas (like other NGOs) received help and support from various companies, for example Biedronka and Lidl – food products; Maspex – financial aid and food; LOTOS Group – food, medical supplies, and first aid articles; CCC Group – more than 10,000 pairs of new shoes, clothes, blankets, and other everyday articles; and Azoty Group – financial aid, provision of accommodation and transport, organisation of blood donation campaigns, and collection of material gifts for Ukrainian refugees.¹⁶

Another organisation worth discussing is the PAH. In May 2022, PAH initiated a new organisational structure under the name Poland Country Office, which was created for the purpose of providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees. The main task of this entity was to co-ordinate activities aimed at supporting those affected

by the conflict. During the most intense phase of the crisis at the Polish–Ukrainian border, PAH organised aid points in the towns of Zosin, Hrebenne, and Dorohusk. The organisation provided tents that served not only as a protection from the wind but also as places to have a rest and a meal. At those points, refugees received the necessary support including the aforementioned food, warm drinks, water, blankets, and hygiene items (for both adults and children). In addition, the organisation (like Caritas) offered assistance in translation, finding accommodation, and organising transport to relocate the refugees to other parts of Poland as well as other countries in Europe and the world.¹⁷

The PAH has been involved in providing assistance to those in need since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine (i.e. since 2014). It has also been sending humanitarian aid shipments to Ukraine on a regular basis following the escalation of the conflict in 2022. This support is intended for both internally displaced people and those who are unable to leave their homes for various reasons. As part of these activities, parcels containing a month's supply of food, hygiene products, household chemicals, or items for children are delivered. In addition, PAH implements financial support programmes to help people in difficult life situations.

In addition to this, numerous organisations and companies supported the PAH by making donations to support its aid activities. The organisation was in particular supported by some domestic companies. In 2023, it received funds from companies such as ERBUD (PLN 200,000), Apart (PLN 100,000), Lilou (over PLN 549,026), and Brother Polska (PLN 50,000).¹⁸ Interestingly, it also carried out fundraising through the crowdfunding website siepomaga.pl. As of April 2025, the PAH has collected over PLN 34m.¹⁹

Another organisation that cannot be overlooked is the PCK. One of the key components of the support offered by the PCK was psychosocial assistance. The PCK launched a psychological helpline, which was available to refugees from Ukraine. Specialists provided psychological support, helping people cope with the trauma and stress of the war experience. Additionally, training courses were organised for volunteers and the PCK staff to improve their skills in providing psychological support to refugees. The organisation was also involved in efforts to reunite families that had been separated as a result of the conflict (Restoring Family Links programme). Through its collaboration with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the PCK assisted in finding relatives and restoring contact between family members.²⁰

The PCK (together with the German Red Cross) was also the initiator of the Health Counts campaign. It was a medical assistance programme for Ukrainian citizens staying in Poland after 24 February 2022. With financial support of PLN 3.64m, it was possible to provide care to thousands of people in need of medication. Special attention was given to seniors, children, and people with disabilities to make sure they had access to appropriate pharmacotherapy. The project was divided into two phases comprising the registration and issuing of codes enabling the purchase of medicines at 16 District Branches of the PCK. Under the programme, 10,791 codes were issued to Ukrainian citizens. Through the Health Counts initiative, the PCK effectively supported refugees from Ukraine, providing them with access to

treatment and increasing their sense of health security in Poland. Together with the Spanish Red Cross, the PCK supports and runs the Livelihoods programme, which aims to support Ukrainian refugees in finding work and adapting their skills to the needs of the Polish labour market by organising training courses to teach them how to use computers and office software, courses in accounting and human resource management, preparation for work as a carer of the elderly, and courses on fork-lift operation or driving licence category B. The PCK also organises holidays (summer and winter) for Ukrainian children and young people.²¹

Next, the PCPM should be mentioned. Since 24 February 2022, the organisation has been implementing various support programmes with a focus on regular financial aid, assistance for local authorities, and help in finding employment for Ukrainian citizens. In collaboration between the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Warsaw authorities of the PCPM, a transit centre located at the Warszawa Wschodnia railway station was set up and operated from the first days of the crisis. This facility, which operated around the clock, offered refugees hot meals, medical care, and assistance in obtaining key information regarding their further stay in Poland or the possibility to leave (relocate) to other countries. Volunteers also assisted Ukrainians in the process of obtaining Polish SIM cards. This place also provided care for the youngest and offered a special play area that was set up there. Assistance was also given to the animals accompanying the refugees, which were provided with the necessary food products, carriers, leashes, litter, and hay. At the beginning of the crisis, by 4 April 2022, the centre had served an average of 800 to 1,000 people per day and served around 2,500 meals, which were prepared in collaboration with NGOs and service providers.²²

Within the framework of the Together to Independence initiative, the PCPM (together with the PCK) supports people staying in collective accommodation centres, helping them to become independent by subsidising the cost of renting accommodation (up to six months), paying the deposit, or supporting them if they decide to move.²³

The PCPM is also involved in educational activities, supporting Ukrainian teachers in gaining qualifications necessary to work in Polish schools. The organisation assists with postgraduate studies, language courses, and career counselling to improve the refugees' chances in the labour market. With the support of the American CARE Foundation and the Indestructible Ukraine Foundation, it has supported the hiring of teaching assistants and teachers from Ukraine to work in schools in Poland.²⁴

Aid has also been provided by many other NGOs, for example the Ocalenie ['Deliverance'] Foundation, the Polish Migration Forum Foundation, the Society of Friends of Ukraine, the Ukrainian House in Warsaw, and the With Bread and Salt organisation. It is worth noting that because of the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, many NGOs faced a completely new challenge. For some of them, this was their first experience of this kind of activity, which required quick adaptation to the new reality in order to carry out effective actions in a crisis situation. The lack of experience in working with refugees made it necessary to partner with more

experienced actors, such as international humanitarian organisations, which also assisted in carrying out operations on a national scale.²⁵

It should not be forgotten that any assistance provided to refugees from Ukraine would not have been possible without the involvement of volunteers. They played a crucial role in the activities carried out by the NGOs. Their activity was the foundation of the effectiveness of many aid initiatives. People from all walks of life, often with no previous experience in humanitarian work, gave their time, energy, and resources to deliver aid to those in need. Volunteers helped at the reception points; co-organised transports; distributed food, hygiene products, and clothing; and supported refugees in the process of integration. Their work was not only practical but also emotional; many provided psychological support to the refugees, helping them to find their way in their new reality. In Warsaw alone, at the beginning of the crisis, more than 8,000 volunteers volunteered to help, operating at railway stations and temporary accommodation centres.²⁶ A major challenge faced by the NGOs was the language barrier. Therefore, there was a demand for people who were fluent in Ukrainian and Russian in order to facilitate effective communication with the refugees. The volunteers' selflessness and determination show the importance of social solidarity in the face of a crisis.

Among those who were involved in helping refugees and supporting the activities of the NGOs were also Ukrainians themselves, who had already settled in Poland, especially after the events of 2014 related to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Many of them had already had the experience of having to adapt to life in a new country, and thus, they engaged themselves in various aid activities.²⁷ In many cases, Ukrainians living in Poland became a bridge between the refugees and the Polish institutions, supporting them in establishing contacts and building relations with local communities. The actions they undertook were not only an expression of support for their compatriots but also proof of the importance of collaboration and mutual assistance in the face of difficult challenges.

Financing of the Activities of NGOs on Behalf of Refugees from Ukraine

According to a study conducted in February 2023 by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Poland's support for Ukraine, including assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, reached more than 2% of the Polish GDP, an amount in the order of PLN 56.6 billion. By that time, PLN 11.39 billion had been allocated for military aid alone. The largest donors were the United States, Germany, and, in third place, Poland. However, taking into account the percentage of the GDP, this was the highest amount of all the countries assisting Ukraine.²⁸ Data from the official site of the President of the Republic of Poland from March 2025 indicate that Poland allocated 4.91% of its GDP to assist Ukraine, of which 4.2% was allocated to support the refugees, and the remaining 0.71% of GDP was allocated to support Ukraine.²⁹ This is an important issue from the point of view of the government's transfer of funding to NGOs in Poland and the sharing of responsibilities related to refugee assistance.

Despite the above data, reference should be made to the challenges that the NGOs face in the course of their activities. It can be noted that the aforementioned issue of funding is an important one. Data from the study conducted by Paweł Mikołajczyk indicate that 35.6% of the organisations he surveyed obtained funding for their activities from private donors. Next, 26% of them used the help of public authorities, while 17.8% reported that they had used their own resources of the organisation to carry out their activities. Next, 15.1% answered in the survey that they relied on donations from the public, and only 5.5% indicated that they supported refugees with money from their paid business activities. Notwithstanding the sources indicated earlier, the NGOs indicated in 53.4% of cases that their financial situation was average. The second and third most frequently chosen options were 'very bad' (1.4%) or 'bad' (31.5%). On the other hand, 11% of the NGOs rated their financial situation as good and only 2.7% as very good.³⁰ Despite this abundance of funding, there are still more needs of refugees. The NGOs must therefore continue to strive to secure funding for their activities and programmes. This is made clear by the above data, which shows that funding for the activities of refugee NGOs in Ukraine, despite various forms of financial support, was largely insufficient. Their activities are largely dependent on external actors, which carry the risk of financial instability. Only 5.5% generated income from commercial activities.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the most important activities undertaken by selected Polish NGOs for Ukrainian refugees since 2022. The activities of Polish NGOs on behalf of refugees from Ukraine are part of a broader picture of social solidarity and political challenges in the face of humanitarian crises. They are not only an important component of research on migration and civil society but also a real response to the needs and challenges that emerged as a result of the armed conflict at the Polish border. In the chapter, it was only possible to present a fraction of the activities of the NGOs and show their key initiatives in support of the refugees. The activities of Polish NGOs in favour of refugees from Ukraine can provide extremely valuable lessons for the future, both for Poland and for other countries struggling with similar challenges.

NGOs in Poland have played a key role in providing assistance where state institutions faced constraints or were unable to respond quickly to the needs of those fleeing the conflict. Referring to the formulated research questions, it should be pointed out that these organisations demonstrated flexibility and the ability to mobilise local communities, offering not only material assistance but also psychological, educational, medical, social, and legal aid, which had a significant impact on the process of integrating the refugees into their new environment. NGO activities in Poland have evolved over time. Initially, activities focused on emergency aid, but over time, organisations began to focus on social integration, education, and professional support for refugees.

NGOs in Poland have also become an example of effective collaboration with international organisations, which has allowed them to expand the scope and scale

of their activities. NGOs have also been supported by the public through volunteering and financial and in-kind donations, as well as by companies and state institutions that have provided resources, funding, and space to operate.

Despite numerous successes, Polish NGOs also face numerous challenges, which include financial constraints, professional burn-out of the volunteers and difficulties in co-ordinating activities with other actors. A key issue has been the funding strategies of national and international donors for humanitarian action, which has had a direct positive impact on shaping the capacities of NGOs. At the same time, it is also recognised that there are limitations to stable funding, which makes it difficult to implement long-term integration projects. Furthermore, the literature emphasises that the effectiveness of NGOs also depends on their ability to adapt to the changing needs of the refugees and to collaborate with different social sectors.

The activity of NGOs highlights the potential of civil society in dealing with global challenges. It is necessary to continue investing in stable sources of funding, providing training, creating favourable legislation, and systematically examining the needs of refugees and testing the effectiveness of the initiatives taken. This is particularly important in the context of the continuing conflict in Ukraine. Organisations of this kind deserve increased support and recognition from the state. However, they also need to be geared towards attracting and deepening collaboration with international partners. In the face of the current and future global humanitarian crises, their role will become increasingly important, and the development of these organisations should be pursued.

Notes

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- 4 Data as of the end of February 2025 indicated that 995,000 refugees from Ukraine were residing in the territory of Poland. As indicated by Eurostat, there are 27 Ukrainian refugees per 1,000 inhabitants of Poland. Poland received the most refugees (taking into account the ratio of refugees to the number of inhabitants of the country). See 'Temporary Protection for Persons Fleeing Ukraine – Monthly Statistics,' Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Temporary_protection_for_persons_fleeing_Ukraine_-_monthly_statistics (accessed April 8, 2025).
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- 9 Lucyna Łowisz, 'Polska pomoc dla uchodźców z Ukrainy w związku z rosyjską agresją. Wybrane aspekty,' in *Wojna Rosji z Ukrainą i Zachodem*, ed. Tomasz Wójtowicz and Sergiusz Wasiuta (Kraków: Uniwersytet Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie, 2024), 490–496.
- 10 Jakub Isański, et al., 'Odbiór społeczny i integracja uchodźców z Ukrainy,' *Raport badawczy UKREF*, issue 1 (2022): 7.
- 11 Grzegorz Paluszak, 'Współpraca organizacji pozarządowych w warunkach kryzysu uchodźczego związanego z wybuchem wojny w Ukrainie,' in *Polski aktywizm. Działalność organizacji pozarządowych w kryzysie uchodźczym związanym z wojną w Ukrainie*, ed. Paweł Mikołajczak (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu, 2025), 136–138.
- 12 Grzegorz Paluszak, 'Współpraca organizacji pozarządowych w warunkach kryzysu uchodźczego związanego z wybuchem wojny w Ukrainie,' in *Polski aktywizm. Działalność organizacji pozarządowych w kryzysie uchodźczym związanym z wojną w Ukrainie*, ed. Paweł Mikołajczak (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu, 2025), 136–138.
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- 15 'Solidarni z Ukrainą,' ['Solidarity with Ukraine'], Caritas, <https://caritas.pl/ukraina/#polska> (accessed April 14, 2025).
- 16 *Kompendium polskiej pomocy dla Ukrainy* (Warszawa: Warsaw Enterprise Institute, 2023), 10, 17, 19, 29, 31.
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- 23 The project is designed for 6,000 people and is 90% (over PLN 84m) co-financed by the European Commission under the call Specific Action MS under pressure – Support for Ukraine. The project is scheduled to end on 31 March 2026. See ‘Poland: Government Launches Initiative Promoting the Independence of those Displaced from Ukraine,’ European Commission, July 23, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/poland-government-launches-initiative-promoting-independence-those-displaced-ukraine-2024-07-23_en (accessed April 15, 2025).
- 24 Mikołaj Herbst, Michał Sitek, ‘Education in Exile: Ukrainian Refugee Students in the Schooling System in Poland Following the Russian-Ukrainian War,’ *European Journal of Education* 58, issue 4 (2023): 581.
- 25 ‘Działania organizacji społecznych na rzecz uchodźczyń w polskich miastach,’ in *Polska Szkoła Pomagania. Przyjęcie osób uchodźczych z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2022 roku*, ed. Sarian Jarosz and Witold Klaus (Warszawa: Konsorcjum Migracyjne, 2023), 56, 57.
- 26 ‘Osiem tysięcy zgłoszeń na wolontariat miejski na rzecz uchodźców z Ukrainy!’ [‘Eight Thousand Applications for Municipal Volunteering for Refugees from Ukraine!’], Ochotnicy Warszawscy, March 8, 2022, <https://ochotnicy.waw.pl/aktualnosci/726-osiem-tysiecy-zgloszen-na-wolontariat-miejski-na-rzecz-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy> (accessed April 14, 2025).
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Conclusion

The Axiological Horizon of Russia's War Against Ukraine

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Introduction: Aim and Scope of the Conclusion

In this conclusion, we aim to synthesise and conceptually organise the research findings presented throughout the book. The purpose of our work has been to demonstrate that Russia's war against Ukraine has revealed not only geopolitical and military dimensions but also, above all, an axiological one – concerning the meanings, values, and moral foundations upon which communal life is built. From this perspective, we indicate that the values identified within the individual chapters of this volume do not constitute a mere backdrop to political and social processes but rather form their internal structure and integrating principle. The conclusions set out in this final section are formulated primarily on the basis of the analyses presented in the respective chapters, which we treat as mutually complementary aspects of a single phenomenon: war. From this perspective, the following functions of this conclusion should be distinguished. First, it reconstructs the overall meaning of the book by synthesising the findings of its three parts – 'War and the Crisis of Values,' 'War and the Axiological Space of Social Practices,' and 'War and Transnational Axiological Horizons.' Second, it organises the conceptual and methodological framework by indicating the relevance of the individual chapters' findings for security studies, political science, communication studies, and the study of religion and by demonstrating that the axiological perspective constitutes an integral dimension of these fields rather than a merely philosophical supplement. Third, it outlines directions for further research in the social sciences, proposing inquiries into values in the process of Ukraine's reconstruction and in the shaping of a European moral order, as well as into the dynamics of values in borderline and crisis situations.

In this conclusion, we do not repeat the content of the individual chapters but rather integrate them, with each thesis referring back to the arguments and materials developed throughout this volume. It should be emphasised that we understand the interdisciplinarity of this book – encompassing security studies, political science, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, and the study of religion – not as a collection of parallel approaches but as a coherent matrix in which values connect the institutional, communal, and international levels. In this sense, the conclusion not only brings together the individual studies presented in the volume but also

opens a new horizon of reflection – towards the practice of post-war reconstruction, towards a deeper consideration of the European community of values, and towards future research into how values structure human action in situations of threat.

Synthesis of Key Findings from the Three Parts

The following section offers a synthetic summary of the three parts of this work, in which the authors present the axiological dimension of war from three mutually complementary perspectives: the state, society, and the transnational sphere. The aim of this synthesis is not only to gather together the conclusions drawn from the individual analyses but also, above all, to reveal their shared horizon of meaning – namely, the ways in which values are disclosed, sustained, and transformed during wartime. The division of the book into three parts has proved effective, as it reflects the actual structure of the phenomenon of war when viewed from an axiological perspective. In the first part, the authors examine the functioning of values at the state level – in political leadership, security strategy, and the informational sphere. The second part shifts attention to social practices, in which values are realised in everyday activities, rituals, and community relationships. The third part expands the scope of analysis to the transnational dimension, demonstrating that Russia's war against Ukraine is simultaneously a test for the European community of values. This structure has enabled us to capture the complex interrelations between the different levels at which values operate within Ukrainian society. The analyses conducted across the three parts form a coherent perspective: from the defence of statehood and the meaning of political community, through the moral agency of society, to the shaping of the axiological foundations of international cooperation. In this sense, the organisation of the book is not only an editorial device but also a reflection of the very reality of war, in which the spheres of institutions, society, and the international community are inseparably linked by the language of values.

Part I: War and the Crisis of Values

The first part of this book focuses on the phenomenon of war, analysed in the context of a crisis of values – that is, a situation in which basic moral and social principles are put to the test by violence, chaos, and disinformation. The authors of the first three analytical chapters emphasise that security cannot be understood solely as a military, political, or institutional matter. In their approach, security has an axiological character, meaning that it concerns the world of values that condition a community's capacity to endure. In borderline situations such as war, it is the manner in which society defends and interprets its values that determines its cohesion. War, although destructive, reveals the underlying hierarchy of norms and moral convictions, showing which values are truly fundamental for a political community. The analyses conducted by the authors of the chapters that make up this part of the book indicate that they focus primarily on two key issues: first, the relationship between values and the resilience of the state, and second, the significance of truth and information as essential elements of axiological security.

On the basis of the analyses conducted by the authors of the studies included in the first part of this book, we identify two main conclusions. First, the relationship between values and state resilience determines the state's capacity to endure. Second, truth and information have become key elements of security today because they underpin the moral and cognitive coherence of society – that is, whether a community is able to maintain trust and meaning in a world saturated with false narratives. We treat these two conclusions as axes of reflection that bind together the entirety of the first part of the book. From them it follows, among other things, that the relationship between values and state resilience, understood as the ability to survive and recover under conditions of threat, is complex and dynamic. It is within the sphere of values that the capacity of the political community to act in an organised and purposeful manner is shaped. From this perspective, values perform a regulatory function – they set the boundaries of the moral permissibility of decisions, legitimise defensive efforts, and give meaning to collective actions undertaken in the face of danger.

The authors further indicate that war – as a borderline situation – compels a re-examination of the meaning and hierarchy of the values that underpin social and political order. From the analyses presented in the first part of this volume, it may be deduced that a resilient state is one that is able to maintain its capacity to act while at the same time preserving coherence between its value system and its political and social practice. On the basis of these findings, we argue that the example of Ukraine provides a particularly vivid demonstration that values can become a real source of resilience for both the state and society. Of particular significance in understanding this issue is the leadership of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, analysed by the authors of one of the chapters (Chapter 2). These authors show that Zelenskyy represents a model of values-based leadership, in which categories such as courage, service, and responsibility become not only ethical norms but also effective tools of crisis management. In our interpretation, this constitutes evidence that effective leadership in wartime does not consist solely in organisational capability but in the ability to endow collective actions with meaning and to provide moral direction to political decisions.

Part II: War and the Axiological Space of Social Practices

The second part of this book is devoted to analyses of the war in the context of the social practices accompanying it and their axiological dimension. The authors of the three chapters comprising this section examine how everyday activities, rituals, and communal relationships among Ukrainians become carriers of values under wartime conditions, transforming the experience of violence into an experience of meaning, community, and memory. In the authors' view, war is not only a moment of the destruction of social structures but also a situation in which the moral capacity of the political community to act is renewed. In the analyses presented, values do not appear as abstract ideas but as concrete practices – signs, testimonies, and rituals – that sustain social bonds and give meaning to human action in the context of crisis. On this basis, we observe that the chapters in the second part of the book focus on two key issues: first, values as the foundation for building community and

social resilience, and second, the religious-symbolic dimension of the experience of war, which enables suffering to be transformed into enduring meanings that sustain identity. Both themes lead to a deeper understanding not only of how values are expressed in practice during wartime but also of how a community – through everyday actions, testimonies, and rituals – renews its moral foundations. Let us now consider these two issues.

The findings of the studies included in the second part of this book show that social resilience is not solely a function of state institutions nor the result of formal systems of assistance but emerges within a dense network of small yet meaningful actions undertaken by citizens. The texts reveal that the source of this resilience lies in the citizens' identification with the values of solidarity, responsibility, dignity, and freedom, which, when expressed in practice, become the axis of spontaneous social mobilisation. Research on women's resistance in occupied territories demonstrates that values take the form of communicative and symbolic practices through which the community can maintain its agency even under occupation. The women's resistance described by the authors in Chapter 4 does not merely consist of gestures of defiance against the occupier but creates a network of actions that sustain a sense of agency, social bonds, and hope. Symbolic gestures of resistance link the moral and the practical dimensions, constructing a space of communal meaning where the reality of war has stripped it away. The role of women during the war is also the subject of another contribution in the second part of the book. Drawing on the perspective of clergy living in Ukraine (Chapter 5), the author shows that, in wartime, women serve as both moral and organisational pillars of the community. Women thus constitute the connective link binding the micro-institutions of everyday life – the family, the parish, and voluntary groups – filling the gaps in social roles created by war and sustaining the structure of communal life. The analyses presented show that women in Ukraine embody the values of compassion, care, and service in social life, thereby transforming suffering into action and loneliness into connection. It is important to emphasise, however, that these values are not only moral in nature but also practical. They form the foundation for organising assistance, communication, and spiritual support across Ukrainian communities. No less significant as a social practice imbued with a distinct axiological dimension are the funeral rituals of soldiers, which are the subject of the final chapter in the second part of this book. According to the authors of that study (Chapter 6), the funerals of soldiers become events of co-presence and communal commitment, serving as fundamental acts of moral integration. They bring together clergy, local authorities, families, and neighbours in a shared act of remembrance, in which individual suffering is incorporated into a broader order of communal meaning. The authors emphasise that, under wartime conditions, funeral rituals perform religious, social, and symbolic functions simultaneously: they affirm the values of dignity and sacrifice, restore the community's moral order, and remind it of its obligations towards those who have given their lives for their homeland. In this way, the funerals of soldiers become moments in which the community not only bids farewell to the dead but also renews its own axiological foundations – which, following the analysis, may be identified as fidelity, memory, solidarity, and hope.

From the editors' perspective, we interpret the research findings presented in the second part of this book as revealing three interconnected case studies in which values are externalised in action. What we observe is, first, a symbolic mobilisation present in the forms of women's resistance, which gives meaning to shared experience and enables society to preserve its identity under conditions of violence. Second, we see a relational ethos, evident in the caregiving and community practices of women described by clergy, which transforms suffering into agency and isolation into social connection. Third, we identify a ritual competence manifest in funeral rites, understood as the community's capacity to transform pain into meaning and to restore moral order through shared experience and memory. On this basis, we conclude that, according to the authors, the durability of community is determined not by the intensity of ideological declarations but by the continuity with which values are realised in specific forms of action. In this way, the axiological resilience of society is shaped as a dynamic process of assigning and renewing meaning through social and religious practices. From our perspective – as the originators and editors of this volume – we therefore infer that social resilience in wartime has an axiological and cultural character. It is formed by a network of actions in which values constitute both the content and the form of communal life. In the language of the social sciences, this means that axiological resilience should be understood as a dynamic configuration of practices – signs, testimonies, and rituals – which together create the framework for social cohesion, protecting the community against moral disintegration.

Part III: War and Transnational Axiological Horizons

The third part of this book is devoted to analyses of Russia's war against Ukraine in the context of the emergence of transnational axiological horizons – that is, those dimensions of political and social life in which values extend beyond the boundaries of states and nations. The authors of the four chapters in this section examine how the values they identify become elements of cooperation in a transnational perspective. In their approach, Russia's war against Ukraine is not merely a military conflict or a local security crisis but a civilisational event that puts the axiological foundations of the European order to the test. From their perspective, values do not function merely as elements of political rhetoric but as real principles of co-ordinating action, which define the moral and cognitive boundaries of political communities. On this basis, we conclude that the chapters constituting the third part of the book focus on the following issues: first, value-based solidarity as a tool for building and maintaining international security, and second, transnational memory and identity as the foundation of a new normative order. Let us now consider these two issues.

The findings of the studies included in the third part of this book show that solidarity between the nations and societies of the EU and between Poland and Ukraine cannot be understood as a spontaneous emotional reaction to the tragedy of war. In the analysis concerning the European Union's policy towards Ukraine (Chapter 7), it becomes evident that the values of democracy, freedom, and responsibility have,

during the war, become the actual language through which political decisions are legitimised. European institutions – the Council, the Commission, and the Parliament – not only invoke these values in their discourse but also employ them as instruments of action: they use them to determine the direction of foreign policy, support programmes, and the enlargement process. In the remaining texts included in the third part of this book, the authors focus on the social and grass-roots dimensions of solidarity, which complement the institutional dimension. They show that in Poland, solidarity with Ukraine has taken the form of a concrete social practice: the mass involvement of citizens in assisting refugees (Chapter 8), the openness of local communities, and the sustained work of volunteers and local governments. The authors argue that this spontaneous mobilisation had an axiological character, as it stemmed from a sense of moral responsibility and from the historical closeness of the two nations' experiences (memories of the First and Second World Wars remain vivid in Poland). Acts of assistance were not only humanitarian responses but also expressions of shared values – the dignity of the human person, compassion, responsibility, and solidarity – whose significance extends beyond the borders of any single state. In the same spirit, another chapter analyses the activities of Polish NGOs (Chapter 10), which since 2022 have formed a network of transnational cooperation linking institutional, social, and local levels. The author of this chapter shows that, through reference to axiological principles, the work of NGOs not only responds to the material needs of Ukrainian refugees but also strengthens the structure of civil society in both Poland and Ukraine, building durable international bonds grounded in mutual trust and empathy. In the third part of this book, an important focus of analysis is the processes through which the memory of war is transformed into a shared space of reflection and negotiation of meanings, rather than remaining merely a source of national divisions. The research concerning the Polish minority in Ukraine (Chapter 9) demonstrates that war memory takes on a selective character – combining heroic and martyrological elements with acts of forgetting intended to preserve the cohesion of the Ukrainian community. The authors emphasise that this selectivity of memory is not a sign of weakness but an expression of the community's capacity to protect its axiological core. By choosing those aspects of the past that allow it to preserve the dignity of victims while avoiding resentment, the Ukrainian community safeguards its moral integrity. From this perspective, memory performs the function of axiological security: it orders narratives, defines the moral boundaries of public debate, and enables the transformation of suffering into a source of collective identity. As the authors show, the memory of war in Ukraine – in a transnational dimension – takes on an integrative significance. Around it emerge new areas of moral consensus, in which selected values become the foundation of shared responsibility for the future – not only within the national community but also, above all, beyond state borders. The analyses demonstrate that collective commemoration of war victims, humanitarian assistance, and narratives of sacrifice and hope transcend national boundaries, creating a transnational language of values with the potential to strengthen the identity of Europe understood as a moral community.

From the editors' perspective, we interpret the findings of the chapters in the third part of this book in the spirit of the thesis that Russia's war against Ukraine has revealed the axiological nature of European security. Solidarity between nations, the capacity for shared emotional response, and a common memory of suffering have become new indicators of European resilience. This means that the security of Europe cannot be understood solely in military, economic, or institutional terms but must also include a moral and symbolic dimension. The analyses clearly show that values have ceased to function as abstract ideas and have become constitutive factors in the practice of security. We argue that the analyses gathered in this part of the book demonstrate that the future of peace in Europe depends, among other things, on the durability of axiological cohesion, which unites the institutional, social, and symbolic levels into a shared ethical horizon. It should be emphasised that European states capable of maintaining a common language of values possess the potential to retain their capacity for action even in the face of military and political threats.

Discussion and Future Research Perspectives

In the final part of this conclusion, we move from a synthetic summary of the findings to a broader reflection on their significance for contemporary thinking about values within the social sciences. Our aim is not only to gather conclusions but also to interpret them in the context of axiological, philosophical, and social debate, as well as to indicate directions for further research that may extend and deepen the considerations undertaken here. We seek to show that it is through the identification and analysis of values that we can better understand how war transforms the moral order of the contemporary world and what challenges this poses for the social sciences.

Russia's war against Ukraine has become a phenomenon that has revealed, in an unprecedented way, the role of values as a constitutive force for political communities. This conflict is not merely a military or geopolitical event – it is, above all, an experience through which Europe has been compelled to redefine its own ethos. Values, which previously functioned as political declarations, have acquired the status of moral commitments. In this sense, the war has come to serve as a kind of 'laboratory' in which it has become possible to observe how values move from the level of ideas to the level of action. From this perspective, it becomes evident that values constitute not only the foundation for legitimising actions but also a motivating resource that determines the capacity of societies to endure and to reconstruct order in extreme situations. This diagnosis, grounded in the research conducted by the authors of the individual chapters comprising this work, confirms the classical insight of Jürgen Habermas, who argued that no democratic community can sustain itself without a moral justification for its political order.¹ In the context of the war in Ukraine, this thesis has acquired a concrete dimension: the stability of the European community does not depend solely on the effectiveness of its institutions but on the conviction that they are rooted in recognised values. Political communities

can endure only when they are able to justify the meaning of their own existence to themselves – that is, when values cease to function as instruments of strategy and become measures of truth. Against this background, Paul Ricoeur's observation appears particularly significant: that memory and responsibility constitute the ethical identity of a community.² Here, too, the analyses contained in this volume appear to confirm the insight expressed by the French philosopher, for they show that in Ukraine, the memory of suffering and sacrifice is not limited to recalling the past but becomes a source of moral energy that shapes the present. Memory takes the form of practice: it becomes an act of solidarity, care, and action on behalf of others. In this sense, it functions as an instrument of social resilience – it enables the preservation of coherence and meaning in borderline situations. In the context of the reflections developed here, it is also worth recalling Charles Taylor's argument that, in analysing the genesis of modern identity, he wrote that the human being exists within a moral space of strong evaluations.³ In relation to this and to the content of the present book, we can observe that Ukrainian society embodies this principle in practice: moral identity becomes the foundation of the political community. Values are not abstractions but acts of daily choice made in the face of danger. In this context, Martha C. Nussbaum's theory is also instructive, according to which justice should be understood as a capacity to act, rather than as a system of prescriptions.⁴ In Ukraine, the idea of capabilities takes on concrete forms: the capacity to care, to assist, to empathise, and to share in the suffering of others. It is precisely within this experience that moral resilience is born – the ability to preserve meaning despite trauma and to transform pain into action and suffering into hope. As Michael Walzer reminds us, war is never morally neutral, for every act of fighting is simultaneously an ethical act.⁵ Indeed, in light of our analyses, it is difficult to disagree with this thesis, for it is evident that the conflict in Ukraine has become an arena in which the European value system is undergoing a profound test. Two key theoretical categories thus emerge from the reflections developed here: axiological security and moral resilience. We understand axiological security to be the capacity of communities to protect, reinterpret, and transmit values under conditions of crisis. Moral resilience, on the other hand, refers to the ability of individuals and groups to maintain a sense of meaning and the common good in extreme circumstances. Together, these concepts provide a framework in which security ceases to be understood solely as a matter of structures and strategies and becomes a question of the moral culture and ethos of the community.

Russia's war against Ukraine reminds us that the experience of conflict is not only political and military but also, above all, existential and moral. It brings to light fundamental questions about the nature of the human being, the meaning of community, and the boundaries of evil. For Ukraine – and, indirectly, for the whole of Europe – the war has become an axiological event: a moment in which values have become a condition of survival. What in times of peace may remain in the background of social life becomes, in wartime, its very core. Despite its destructive nature, war assumes a revealing function: it exposes the true hierarchies of values, their strength, and their vulnerability. As Hannah Arendt reminds us, the meaning of human existence is realised in action, which constitutes community and freedom

in the public sphere.⁶ From this perspective, war reveals not only the destruction of the human world but also the extraordinary capacity of people to act together – to create spaces of freedom in defiance of violence and chaos. Hannah Arendt showed that evil can take on a ‘banal’ form when moral thinking is suspended and replaced by the unreflective performance of roles – a conclusion she drew from her analysis of the Eichmann trial.⁷ The experience of Ukraine confirms this insight while also revealing its opposite: consciously chosen good, enacted against despair, becomes an act of moral resistance. In the heroism of soldiers, in the patience of women, in the service of volunteers, and in the courage of those who speak the truth, there appears an ordinary good – devoid of pathos, yet constitutive of the political community. It is this very good that shows that axiology is a reflection on how people sustain meaning under conditions that seek to destroy it.

From an axiological perspective, war not only tests systems of values but also generates new horizons of meaning. What once appeared immutable – for example sovereignty, freedom, or truth – is re-experienced and reshaped through suffering. From the standpoint of political philosophy, the war in Ukraine is a formative event: it redefines the concepts of community, nationhood, and solidarity in the spirit of European humanism. Community does not arise solely from law but from the experience of shared responsibility and shared suffering. Humanity is an ethical process – not something given once and for all but something that requires daily affirmation through actions, words, and memory. Values are at once static and dynamic – their universality is expressed in their capacity to adapt to changing social contexts. The challenge for scholarship, therefore, is to sustain a shared ethical language in a world of global tensions. Martha C. Nussbaum emphasises that humanism requires the cultivation of capabilities that make a life worthy of the human person,⁸ while Amartya Sen points out that justice is realised in practice – through the reduction of real suffering and the expansion of freedom.⁹ In this light, the war in Ukraine is not only a national experience but also a global one. It poses the question of the world’s capacity for shared emotional understanding and responsibility. Finally, Paul Ricoeur reminds us that the human being is ‘capable’: capable of doing good and evil, of remembering and forgetting, of forgiving, and of seeking vengeance.¹⁰ Values sustain us in the space between these possibilities, protecting us both from nihilism and from fanaticism. The ultimate meaning of war may therefore be not only the defence of territory or the state but also the defence of human meaning – that which enables us still to call the world a shared one. If war is a drama, then axiology is its language – the means by which meaning is drawn out of chaos and hope out of suffering.

With regard to future research in this field, firstly, the area of axiological security requires further development, understood as the study of the relationship among values, the perception of threats, and strategies of response. In recent years, research on resilience and moral psychology has increasingly indicated that the ability to preserve ethical integrity in extreme conditions is a key element of a community’s survival.¹¹ In light of the experience of the war in Ukraine, we should therefore continue to ask how values strengthen resilience against disinformation, symbolic violence, and moral ambivalence. These phenomena require research

that brings together the insights of moral psychology, practical philosophy, and studies in information security. In this way, a more comprehensive concept of axiological security may emerge – one that understands society as a system, which defends itself not only against military threats but also against the erosion of moral meaning.

Secondly, it is essential to develop methods for studying values in crisis situations. Although existing instruments such as the World Values Survey¹² and the European Values Study¹³ provide valuable comparative data, they do not capture the dynamic axiological transformations that take place during war, forced migration, or prolonged social stress. What is needed are longitudinal studies – that is, studies which follow the same individuals, groups, or phenomena over an extended period (weeks, months, years, or even decades), combining quantitative and qualitative methods.¹⁴ Only such research can make it possible to identify how values are redefined in the course of wartime and post-conflict experience. This approach may form the basis for the development of comparative axiology – the study of value systems across different societies in the context of shared global challenges: security, migration, climate change, and humanitarian crises.

Thirdly, research into the role of women, the clergy, and religious communities in processes of moral resilience and social reconstruction requires further development. The war in Ukraine has shown that it is often these groups that sustain the community's sense of meaning, reinterpreting suffering and sacrifice in ethical terms. Such research should be interdisciplinary in nature – combining practical theology, the sociology of religion, and gender studies – in order to grasp the spiritual dimension of post-conflict social reconstruction. A source of inspiration here may be Robert N. Bellah's¹⁵ classical concept of civil religion, as well as its contemporary reinterpretations by Hans Joas,¹⁶ who understands the sacred as a force that integrates society around experiences of goodness, compassion, and memory.

Fourthly, research on values in strategic communication and the informational sphere is needed. In the age of narrative warfare, disinformation not only distorts facts but also undermines the foundations of moral rationality and social trust. It is therefore necessary to develop an ethics of communication that is resistant to manipulation and grounded in theories of truth and epistemic justice.¹⁷ In this context, the concept of epistemic solidarity¹⁸ is of particular importance, understood as the capacity of communities to share truth as a common good and to support one another in resisting disinformation.

Finally, future axiological research should aim to develop a new theory of values in borderline situations. The classical concepts of Milton Rokeach,¹⁹ Shalom H. Schwartz,²⁰ and Michael Walzer²¹ have provided tools for analysing stable moral systems, yet contemporary crises – hybrid wars, climate catastrophes, mass migrations, and the erosion of democracy – show that values are dynamic, subject to negotiation and transformation. The axiology of the future should therefore combine empirical enquiry with reflective interpretation, examining not only which values people affirm but also how those values enable them to maintain meaning and the capacity for action under conditions of uncertainty and threat.

Final Reflection

In concluding this final section, we formulate the central thesis that emerges from this volume: war is a clash of value systems, not merely of interests. This means that, in analysing conflict, it is necessary to adopt a three-dimensional perspective:

- values as content – identifying which moral goods become the object of contestation (e.g. freedom, truth, security, and solidarity);
- values as process – describing how the hierarchy of values changes during crisis and which mechanisms give these values new dynamics;
- values as instrument – showing how values are used for mobilisation, communication, and the legitimisation of political and social action.

Such a three-dimensional perspective, which becomes an analytical framework within the research process, allows for a more integrated understanding of armed conflict, in which the military, political, and social dimensions intersect with the moral and cultural ones. In this model, values are not an addition to politics but its internal principle – they determine a community's capacity for survival, self-organisation, and renewal. Incorporating this perspective into theories of conflict and security makes it possible to grasp the phenomenon of axiological resilience – the capacity of a society to sustain moral meaning in the face of violence. In this sense, war, although it reveals extreme forms of destruction, also becomes a space in which what is most enduring in human beings and communities is revealed – the capacity to defend meaning through values. It is values that define the boundaries of humanity and constitute the only lasting foundation for peace.

Notes

- 1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
- 2 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
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- 4 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2013).
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- 6 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
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