

Ukrainian Society Responds to a Decade of Russia's War

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This special issue presents an empirically driven analysis of Russia's war against Ukraine from the perspective of Ukrainian scholars. Curated in response to the limited presence of Ukrainian voices in international academic discourse on the conflict, this collection focuses on the social, gendered, and lived realities of war. The issue also addresses the underrepresentation of women's voices in war and conflict studies. Ukrainian women scholars are the authors or lead authors on all contributions to the issue, which explore critical themes including the impact of the war on gender roles, the rapid integration of women into the Ukrainian armed forces, gendered discourse surrounding war crimes, and the innovative role of civil society in defense. The issue also includes a review of recent books that offer insights on the war's impact on Ukrainian society from sociocultural, anthropological, historical, and journalistic perspectives. Ultimately, this special issue offers readers a nuanced understanding of how Ukrainian society is navigating and being profoundly transformed by the war, affirming the vital importance of insider perspectives in comprehending modern war.

Keywords: Ukraine; war; gender; civil society

How can we understand the various responses of Ukrainian society to a decade of Russia's war against their country, and how are Ukrainian scholars addressing this question? This was our starting point for curating this special issue of the *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*. We were very pleased to be asked to undertake this work by the journal's editors. Our vision was to produce an issue featuring research by Ukrainian scholars, with the aim of advancing understanding of

current societal developments in Ukraine and gaining broader insights to deepen our comprehension of modern war and its social and political impacts. Additionally, the issue seeks to critically challenge dominant conceptualizations of the war.

As co-editors of this special issue, our goal was to present research that offers empirically driven analysis, addressing topics that are relevant for the entire period of the war, from the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by Russia's military involvement in the eastern regions of Ukraine that also began in that year, through the acceleration of Russia's attacks on the country through its mass invasion beginning on February 24, 2022. We wanted to ensure that the everyday realities of war and society's experiences were central to the pieces published in this special issue and to provide Ukrainian perspectives on it. In our early discussions with the contributors to this issue, we agreed to shed light on areas of society that rarely feature in public discussions and representations of the war, allowing them to speak for themselves. Despite their varied focus and empirical material, the articles share a common underlying message: Russia's war against Ukraine constitutes a violation of international law and human rights; the human cost is immense and must be recognized; Ukraine's resistance and resilience are extraordinary; and the war has triggered a profound transformation of Ukrainian society.

A special issue featuring work by Ukrainian scholars is also a response to the prevalence of experts invited to provide commentary on the Russo-Ukrainian War in the media, at academic conferences, and in academic publications who are neither Ukrainian nor have a background researching war-related issues in a Ukrainian context. While scholars whose primary focus is on, for example, the study of war, strategy, or international relations can certainly bring valuable insights, there is the risk of Ukrainian perspectives and expertise being overlooked. The journal's editors were keen that this should not happen in this special issue.

The co-editors of this special issue are scholars from different countries and with different disciplinary backgrounds but with shared interests in Ukrainian society-military relations, especially regarding the gendered dimensions to that topic. Anna Kvit is a Ukrainian sociologist and expert on the United Nations' agenda for Women, Peace, and Security,¹ who has been conducting empirical research on the social and gendered impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian War since 2014. She is

1. The UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda was initiated by the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 and introduces a series of recommendations for increasing the participation of women in all processes of ending conflict

part of the “Invisible Battalion” research and advocacy project, launched in 2015, which focuses on the rights and experiences of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) and female veterans and advocates for the protection of women’s rights within the defense sector.² Anna has also cooperated with Ukraine’s authorities and international organizations on implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ukraine during the ongoing war. While Anna was completing her research fellowship at University College London, she met Jennifer G. Mathers (Jenny). Jenny is senior lecturer in the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University, on the west coast of Wales. An American who received her undergraduate degree in the United States, Jenny did her postgraduate work at Oxford University, first in area studies (an MPhil in Slavonic and East European Studies) and then in International Relations (DPhil). Her research has concentrated on Russian security policy and women in the Russian armed forces, with a focus on the relationship between foreign policy and domestic political and societal issues and a keen interest in gender. Over the past decade, Jenny has begun to research gender and security issues in Ukraine. We co-authored a short article on women in the AFU but this is our first experience of editing together.³

All of the authors (or lead authors) of articles in this special issue are highly respected Ukrainian scholars whose research relates to Ukrainian society, politics, and the military. And while we initially invited both men and women, the final collection of contributors—those who were excited by the project, had relevant research underway, and could commit to the demanding timeline—all happened to be women. Although unintended, this all-female issue is a welcome outcome. For if there is a danger that Ukrainian perspectives and expertise have sometimes been marginalized, that danger is even greater when it comes to the attention given to Ukrainian *women’s* perspectives. Research, writing, and commentary on war and militaries is a male-dominated activity,

and preventing future war. For more information, see <https://wps.unwomen.org/preventing/>

2. For more information, see the “Invisible Battalion” project website: <https://invisiblebattalion.org/en/home-2/>
3. See Jennifer Mathers and Anna Kvit, “Ukraine War: Attitudes to Women in the Military are Changing as Thousands Serve on Front Lines,” *The Conversation*, January 31, 2023. Available at <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-attitudes-to-women-in-the-military-are-changing-as-thousands-serve-on-front-lines-198195>.

and we are glad to contribute to redressing that imbalance in some small way.

The first article in this special issue is Olena Strelnyk's piece, "Men are Defenders, Women are Defended? How the War Affects the Public Attitudes Toward Gender Roles in Ukraine." Strelnyk addresses a question that deeply concerns feminist scholars of war and society: the relationship between war, militarization, and gender—more specifically, the construction of gendered attitudes towards the appropriate roles of women and men. Feminist research has explored the societal dimensions of militarization and demonstrated that shaping society's ways of thinking about war and the military is as important a component of militarization as reorienting the economy towards the production of weapons and munitions or conscripting large numbers of citizens into the armed forces. Drawing on feminist work that emphasizes the ways that wars and military service contribute to the construction of gendered expectations of men's and women's wartime roles and behavior, Strelnyk provides a rich empirical study of gendered attitudes in Ukrainian society, with a particular focus on the period since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022. Her findings suggest that the Ukrainian case complicates some tenets of established feminist thinking, both about the strengthening of stereotypical gendered wartime roles into the dichotomy of "defender" and "defended," but also about the way that we conceive of militarization as a phenomenon that is always and entirely destructive.

Tamara Martsenyuk's article, "Women's Access to Professional Military Education: Gender Equality Implementation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine" follows on nicely from Strelnyk's piece. If Strelnyk's analysis introduces the topic of the impact of war on Ukrainian society and on gendered wartime roles, Martsenyuk takes us more deeply into one of the most fascinating developments of Ukraine's response to Russian aggression over the past decade: the rapid and dramatic expansion of women serving in the AFU. One of the co-authors of the "Invisible Battalion," Martsenyuk draws on some of the material produced for a component of that project in her article. The article addresses an issue that is the subject of intense debate among scholars of women's participation in state militaries: what mechanisms can enable women to play full and equal roles as soldiers? This issue is one that is particularly challenging to resolve, considering the strength of gender stereotypes and expectations in both civilian society and military culture and women soldiers' experience of sexual harassment by their male colleagues and

commanders. Martsenyuk identifies professional military education (PME) as a key factor that can promote greater gender equality in the armed forces, although its significance is often overlooked, both by scholars who study the military and by those who research education. Ensuring that women have access to PME helps them to develop professionally and improves their chances of promotion, while studying side-by-side with women can help men in the military to accept women as colleagues and equals. At the same time, the content of PME needs to be informed by a gender-sensitive approach for professional military education to fulfil its potential in changing attitudes and culture. This article presents a wide range of material about women, gender, and PME in the Ukrainian case, including a detailed discussion of key legislation and policy initiatives as well as the results of public opinion surveys about support for women's military service and their access to PME. As Martsenyuk argues, making progress in this area will not only benefit individual women soldiers but strengthen the AFU and bring Ukraine closer to achieving the international standards that it aspires to reach.

One of the many shocking aspects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine is Russia's systematic kidnapping of Ukrainian children living in territories under Russian occupation: removing them from their families and communities, transporting them to Russia and, in some cases, offering them for adoption to Russian parents. This topic is addressed in the article by Maryna Shevtsova, Kateřina Krulišová, and Allyson Edwards: "Now I Know What It Means to be a Donbas Mother": Ukrainian, Western and Russian Media Representations of the ICC's Arrest Warrant Against Maria Lvova-Belova and Vladimir Putin." An important issue for feminist scholars is the way that the agency of women is often denied, especially when it comes to women who commit acts of political violence. Such acts tend to be gendered "masculine" and "unwomanly," especially in light of the typical construction of women as mothers or future mothers, which supposedly makes them inherently peaceful. Shevtsova, Krulišová, and Edwards contribute to this ongoing debate with their focus on the gendered logic of reporting on the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrant against Maria Lvova-Belova, who is Russia's Children's Rights Commissioner. Lvova-Belova is a particularly interesting case because she is a rare example of a woman accused of war crimes, and because her status as the adoptive mother of a Ukrainian child makes her motherhood an integral component of child deportation, which is the war

crime that she is accused of. The authors of the article apply discourse analysis to coverage of the ICC arrest warrant in Ukrainian, Western (British and American), and Russian media outlets, and find a common fascination with framing the story of Lvova-Belova around notions of ideal or monstrous motherhood. Indeed, their research also reveals that Lvova-Belova herself deploys the motherhood framing to present herself as protective, caring, and innocent of any wrongdoing.

One of the many reasons that the Russo-Ukrainian War is being closely watched around the world is the innovative way that drones are being used in combat by both armies. Particular attention among military strategists around the world is being paid to the pioneering work by Ukrainians, who are using drones not only to defend against a larger and more heavily armed adversary but also to strike military targets behind the lines in Russia and occupied territories of Ukraine. Kateryna Zarembo and Raluca Csernatonî's article, "Civil Society as Arms Producer: Oxymoron or Reality? Ukraine's Drone Production in Response to the Russian Invasion," addresses an aspect of this topic that has received almost no scholarly attention: the role of civil society in arms production. Although the large-scale response of Ukrainian civil society to the war has been the focus of both media stories and academic research, the production of drones for military operations by civilians has so far been subjected to limited examination. In this piece, Zarembo and Csernatonî provide a social network analysis of open-source data collected about the civilian production of drones in Ukraine during the full-scale invasion stage of the Russo-Ukrainian War that reveals a complex web of interactions and relationships between civil society, private businesses, and the state (in the form of the armed forces). They demonstrate that civil society production of drones extends beyond fundraising and purchase and includes individuals and private nonprofit companies assembling components in informal settings. Zarembo and Csernatonî's research challenges dominant understandings of civil society and argues that the Ukrainian case supports an expansion of the possible roles of civil society to include security actor. During the production of this issue, Zarembo began working as a medic with The Hospitallers Medical Battalion, which she now does on a full-time basis, providing emergency medical care for those who are wounded in Russia's attacks on Ukraine.⁴ Zarembo's experience is a vivid demonstration of the essential message conveyed by this article:

4. The Hospitallers Medical Battalion website is available at <https://www.hospitallers.org.uk/>

that Ukraine's civil society is responding in many and varied ways to the demands of Russia's war.

We conclude this issue with a review essay that highlights some recent books about the Russo-Ukrainian War. Once we realized that the articles in the special issue would all be written by women, we explored the feasibility of reviewing books by women in this essay and identified four thought-provoking publications. Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel's *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States* explores the crucial role played by the construction of Ukrainian and Russian understandings of their own national identities in shaping the steps leading up to the war. *Feminist Perspective on Russia's War in Ukraine: Hear Our Voices*, edited by Maryna Shevtsova—one of the contributors to this special issue—is a collection of chapters that examine a variety of aspects of the war using feminist tools and policy frameworks (such as the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security agenda) as well as focusing on women and LGBTQ+ people. *Dispossession: Anthropological Perspectives on Russia's War Against Ukraine*, edited by Catherine Wanner, is another collection featuring the work of many scholars who engage with the notion of "dispossession" as immaterial forms of wartime loss. By contrast, Jen Stout's *Night Train to Odesa: Covering the Human Cost of Russia's War* is not the product of academic research but is instead the firsthand account of a journalist's experiences covering the war and the human experience of it during the first months after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This special issue presents the perspectives of female academics on Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. It offers empirical evidence-based, rather than theory-driven, insights into the realities of the war, focusing on areas, contexts, and meanings that are often underrepresented in public and academic discussions of war. The Ukrainian origin of the contributors or lead authors is aimed to ensure that insider voices—those with professional knowledge, nuanced understanding, and lived experience of the war's direct impact—are authentically represented and heard. The books reviewed in this issue complement this approach by offering anthropological, feminist, and at times semi-biographical and phenomenological insights into the ongoing reality of the war in Ukraine. As co-editors of this special issue, we believe that it offers its readers the opportunity to gain both broader and deeper understandings of the human dimensions of this war.