"Ukraine Must Be Free!": Review Article

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Dispossession: Anthropological Perspectives on Russia's War Against Ukraine edited by Catherine Wanner. Routledge. 2024

Feminist Perspective on Russia's War in Ukraine: Hear Our Voices edited by Maryna Shevtsova. Lexington Books. 2024

Night Train to Odesa: Covering the Human Cost of Russia's War by Jen Stout. Polygon. 2024

Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States by Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel. Polity. 2024

How can we understand the brutal war that Russia has waged against Ukraine for more than a decade? Almost as soon as the conflict began in eastern Ukraine in 2014, there was a scramble to produce books that offered answers to that question, and the intensity of that effort only increased after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. In this special issue, we decided to present reviews of books that align with its overarching approach: research written by women on Ukrainian society's experience of Russia's war against it. Three of the four books reviewed here focus on the everyday realities of war, exploring its social, cultural, linguistic, and anthropological dimensions. Two of these books are anthologies that bring together articles by Ukrainian scholars or researchers with long-standing expertise on Ukraine. These works offer valuable, nuanced perspectives on how individuals and communities navigate the challenges of war and resilience. They complement the articles in this issue, which are written by Ukrainian female researchers

* Quotation from Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel, *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States* (Polity, 2024), 238.

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and provide grounded, context-specific insights into the war and its impact on Ukrainian women and men and society in general.

What factors determine the direction that an imperial power and its former empire take after that empire collapses? This is one of the driving questions at the heart of *Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States.* The book's authors, Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel, argue that in the case of Russia and Ukraine, the answer is to be found in the processes of postimperial nation-building and the search for identity and purpose. They explain the Russo-Ukrainian War as the result of development of domestic politics in both countries, tracing the origins of the conflict to a series of choices made by Ukrainian and Russian political elites and societies about how they would interpret their pasts and navigate their futures. Popova and Shevel are well-established scholars of the region, with research and teaching positions at major North American universities. Their command of the material and their ability to provide a clear, compelling, and consistent narrative are real strengths of the book and make it particularly suitable for non-specialists. Readers without any prior knowledge of the history or politics of the region will have no trouble following the argument, as the authors take care to provide important context-setting background and to explain important but potentially confusing political twists and turns that punctuate the courses that Ukraine and Russia have taken since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the same time, the reader who is already familiar with some or even many aspects of this story will find a great deal to ponder in the wide-ranging and strongly evidenced analysis. Throughout the book, Popova and Shevel directly address and refute claims made by Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials to justify their use of military force against Ukraine—for example, that Russia and Ukraine have always been one people, or that the war is the result of legitimate Russian security fears over the expansion of NATO eastwards. The book is particularly strong on its identification of key turning points (including explanations of why these moments are so important), but the authors do not fall victim to the assumption that the decisions taken at those points were inevitable. Instead, the book displays a refreshing willingness to explore counterfactuals, taking the reader down the intriguing pathways of considering "what if" this or that had happened differently: Would it have prevented the outbreak of war?

After an introductory chapter setting out the authors' main argument—that Russia's war against Ukraine is simply the latest in a

long-running series of efforts by Moscow to reimpose control over Kyiv following the breakup of the Soviet Union—attention turns to the role of the more distant past in shaping the development of Ukrainian and Russian societies. Beginning in the ninth century with Kyivan Rus' as the common source of Ukrainian and Russian statehoods, the authors survey nearly a thousand years of history, highlighting key moments in the development of Ukrainian culture and political consciousness. The pace then slows considerably to dwell on important milestones in the twentieth century, which was characterized by a brief period when Ukrainian culture, language, and society were able to flourish, followed by brutal repression and attempts by Soviet political leaders to erase evidence of the existence of Ukrainian identity. As this first substantive chapter arrives at the 1990s and early 2000s, the authors begin to build their argument about the importance of the choices made by both political elites and societies between the different possible models of nation-building under consideration. For Russia, the choice was between building a civic political community within the borders of the newly independent Russian Federation or seeking a broader basis for defining the Russian nation, whether that involved shared language, ethnicity, or perhaps the common experience of Soviet empire. Ukrainians similarly stood at the crossroads between embracing Ukraine's distinctiveness as a nation or seeking unity with Russia based on their shared identity as Slavic peoples. If Russia had chosen to build its nation within its post-1991 borders as Ukraine has, then Russia and Ukraine would have been freed from each other, as the authors put it. Alternatively, if Ukraine had chosen to prioritize the importance of unity with Russia, then the two would have developed closer economic, political, and cultural ties.

Popova and Shevel then devote the rest of the book to themes and pivotal moments that mark the fundamental divergence between the two countries. Chapter Two explores the more explicitly political events and trends in this process, with the 2004 Orange Revolution presented as a major turning point for both Ukraine and Russia. The parallel paths that the two countries traveled in the second half of the 1990s—both with strong presidents, weak and divided parliaments, and oligarchs wielding political power—emphasize the potential for Ukraine to develop along the lines of Russia. The crucial difference between the two was in the strength of democratic opposition and especially civil society, which in Ukraine repeatedly resisted attempts by political leaders to consolidate power. Even though the Orange

Revolution ultimately failed to wash Ukrainian politics clean of patronage and corruption, Ukrainian society's rejection of the fraudulent election of Viktor Yanukovych in 2004 led to important structural changes including the development of an active independent media. It also shocked Vladimir Putin, who interpreted the rejection of the Kremlin's chosen presidential candidate as the result of a Western plot and a threat to his own control over Russia and tightened the state's control over the media and civil society in Russia.

Many readers will be particularly interested in the detailed discussion in Chapter Four, which addresses the issue of the West and its role in the divergent pathways taken by Ukraine and Russia. The authors raise the question of whether NATO enlargement, and especially the prospect of Ukraine joining the alliance, posed a security threat to Russia that Moscow could not ignore, creating a provocation for war. In a book that places a central focus on agency and choice, it is not surprising that the authors point out that the narrative of Western responsibility denies a fundamental reality: Central and East European states sought NATO's collective security protections against the threat of future Russian aggression. As the authors argue in the book's conclusion,

> The remote possibility that rattled Russia was not Western aggression against Russia from NATO coming closer to Russia's borders, but the closing of a window of opportunity to reincorporate Ukraine, which Russia's increasingly re-imperializing identity conceived as 'theirs' by right and by history. (218)

Indeed, NATO expansion proves to be a sideshow to the main event of Moscow seeking to reestablish its control over Ukraine. Popova and Shevel catalogue the various forms of pressure that Russia applied to Ukrainian political leaders and society over the years, including the useful reminder that this process did not start with Vladimir Putin. In the aftermath of the August 1991 coup attempt, Boris Yeltsin sent a delegation to Kyiv to warn that Russia might seek to reexamine the two countries' shared borders—especially in eastern Ukraine and Crimea—if Ukraine sought full independence. And in response to those who urge Kyiv to end the war by giving in to Russian demands, the authors cite examples from the presidency of the pro-Russian Yanukovych to argue that Moscow is never satisfied with Ukrainian concessions but instead uses them as the springboard to make ever-more extensive claims on Ukraine's sovereignty and independence.

In a book that is so rich in detail and takes such care to address a wide range of the claims made by Russia and its sympathizers, there is

one issue that gets relatively little attention: the continuing admiration in Ukraine for Second World War–era leaders and movements of Ukrainian nationalism whose politics included active support for the far right and Nazism. Russia's ugly and baseless claims that the post-Maidan governments in Ukraine are modern-day Nazis are enabled by the contradiction that groups and individuals who actively participated in the Holocaust can be regarded in a favorable light by members of a society with such a strong commitment to democracy. The authors do make the point, although briefly, that admiration for these wartime figures as symbols of Ukrainian resistance to Soviet domination are separated in the minds of many Ukrainians from their own political views. This explanation is borne out in successive elections, where far right parties receive negligible support. This is clearly a sensitive topic and one that needs care and nuance in the handling. Popova and Shevel do provide such nuance in their treatment, but a fuller discussion would have been welcome.

Popova and Shevel's book takes a big picture approach and addresses themes and issues that most would recognize as explicitly "political"—elections, the formation of political parties, foreign policy, and so on. By contrast, *Feminist Perspective on Russia's War in Ukraine: Hear Our Voices* addresses a very different kind of politics at work in wartime Ukraine. Edited by Maryna Shevtsova, who co-authored an article for this special issue, the book is diverse in terms of the disciplines that its authors work within, the methods and the types of data that are used in the chapters as well as the writing style of the contributors. Some articles are academic pieces of writing, while others adopt a much less formal style and include many personal reflections by the authors on their own experiences and circumstances. As Shevtsova's introduction explains, the book exists, first and foremost, to give voice to feminist scholars from the region—primarily Ukrainians but also scholars from central and eastern Europe more broadly—to explore issues of gender and changing cultural expectations of gender roles as they shape and are shaped by Ukraine's responses to Russian aggression. Shevtsova points out that the Russo-Ukrainian war has prompted an outpouring of expert analysis in the form of news media interviews, conference presentations, and academic publications, but Ukrainian voices have often been marginalized. This was particularly the case in the first year or so after the start of Russia's mass invasion, and it was this experience that prompted the writing of this book. The decision to center feminist perspectives and gender analysis was also driven by the need to fill an

important gap in writing about the war and to draw attention to the work done by women and LGBTQ people to support Ukraine throughout the war, whether by joining the armed forces, through voluntary work, or through activism to campaign for improvements to government policy and practice to build a better society for Ukrainians today and for future generations. As Shevtsova puts it,

> Embracing a feminist approach to analyzing and living through the war and to peacebuilding means prioritizing gender equality, social justice, and the active participation of all groups. It is through these transformative efforts that we can lay the foundation for a more just and equitable society where every individual's rights and aspirations are respected and upheld. (13)

The book consists of eleven chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion written by the editor, and is divided into three parts. The first part groups chapters under the heading "Revisiting 'Good' (Wo)Manhood" and explores issues of masculinity, femininity, and how gender is experienced and performed in wartime Ukraine. A key theme of this part of the book is the complex effects of the war on ideas and expectations about gender in society. Women's roles and opportunities are shaped by a combination of factors: the agency of individual women and their willingness to act in a variety of capacities to support Ukraine's war effort; changes in legislation, and policy that lay the structural foundation for greater gender equality; as well as the representation and self-representation of Ukrainian women that drive idealized models of femininity. Attention is paid in particular to the tensions experienced by many women who join the armed forces, who seek to distance themselves from a focus on their gender while at the same time struggling with the very real hardships and challenges that they face in everyday situations because they are women doing jobs that continue to be widely-perceived as only suitable for men. Masculinity and its wartime construction and contradictions are also examined in this part of the book, especially the various ways that Ukrainian men experience pressure to demonstrate appropriate masculinity. Over the past decade, Ukrainian men have faced various tests of their masculinity, involving their willingness to use force in support of their ideals, family, and homeland, from resisting violent attack by Ukrainian security forces on Maidan Square during the protests of 2013–2014 to serving in the armed forces and fighting back against the Russian invaders. These traditional standards of masculinity involving physical strength, courage, and the employment of violence have been used to justify the

shaming of male protesters who did not participate in the running battles on the Maidan, as well as men who have sought to leave—or succeeded in leaving—Ukraine to avoid military service or just to avoid the dangers of war. At the same time, however, there are growing signs that understandings of masculinities are changing and becoming more varied. One of the chapters includes a discussion of "emotional" masculinity, exhibited, for example, when male soldiers rescue animals put in danger by the war and post photographs of themselves and the rescued animals on social media. War injuries resulting in permanent disability—for example, the loss of a limb—are also helping to transform common understandings of masculinity by undermining the equation of masculinity with physical strength defined by being able-bodied.

Part Two of Shevtsova's edited volume, "The Right to Emotions: Challenging the Norms," introduces some themes and scenarios that are perhaps unexpected for many readers. One chapter describes the experiences of several young women from Ukraine who were fleeing the war themselves while also helping other, more recent arrivals at Warsaw's central railway station. Written in an informal and reflective style and intentionally drawing heavily on the authors' positionality and their everyday, often overlooked and taken for granted experiences, the chapter seeks to problematize accounts that view the experience of such volunteers through rose-colored glasses, emphasizing their selflessness and solidarity. Instead, the authors recount their encounters with sexism, racism and homophobia, and their use of humor as a means of resistance and self-preservation. Another chapter in this part of the book picks up on the theme of responses to the stresses and frustrations of wartime in its examination of women's uses of obscenities. Interviews with Ukrainian women form the basis of this analysis, which reveals that swearing is one way that these women demonstrate their refusal to accept socially imposed behavior. The role of women activists from Belarus in supporting Ukraine is also explored in the book's second part. Many women in Belarus who opposed Lukashenko's regime and his illegal hold on power have expressed solidarity with Ukrainians, especially since the start of Russia's mass invasion and Lukashenko's consent for Russia to use Belarusian territory as a launching pad for its troops and weapons to attack Ukraine.

Part Three of this volume, "Zooming Out: Gendering the External Dimension of the War in Ukraine," does just what it claims—shifting the focus from the micro, individual and community level experiences

of everyday life in wartime to a much bigger canvas. Ukraine is famously the only country at war to have adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security agenda. One of the chapters in this part of the book considers the factors that enabled this circumstance—especially the cooperation between civil society, the state, and international organizations—along with an account of the development and adoption of a new NAP during the period of full-scale invasion. Another chapter tackles the tensions that have arisen between some Western feminists and Ukrainian feminists over the war and how Ukrainian women "should" respond to it. Using "feminist foreign policy" as a focus, the author highlights the tensions and contradictions between a Western feminism that claims to pay attention to women's voices and their lived experiences while simultaneously ignoring Ukrainian women's voices and denying their agency when they call for support in acquiring the means to defend themselves from a war of aggression. The chapter further exposes a core problem of feminist foreign policy: it is perceived (and treated, by those states that have adopted it) as a desirable practice for prosperous states in peacetime, rendering it apparently irrelevant for the more difficult and challenging phases of foreign policy.

In her concluding chapter, Maryna Shevtsova reflects on wartime societal trends and considers how they might continue to affect Ukrainians after the war is finally over. She points out the unknown but undoubtedly serious and long-lasting effects of the mass displacement of so many Ukrainians by the war, especially the impacts on children who have been forcibly removed from Ukraine and resettled in Russia. The suggestion by then-Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov that military training should in future be a prerequisite for holding a wide range of public service appointments raises important questions about the creation of a new political elite based on (wartime) military service, and what that might mean for future opportunities for public service for those who supported the war exclusively through work as civilians. Meanwhile, the fact that many thousands of veterans and civilians alike have been left with lasting physical and emotional war injuries creates new intersections between disability, gender, and citizenship that will continue to affect Ukraine's society for many years to come. As Shevtsova argues,

> Living through the war and its aftermath, as Ukrainian society strives to define the "new normal," it will be crucial to remember that conventional ideas of normalcy often exclude those groups on the margins who bear the consequences of the conflict. Further work will be needed to find ways to challenge the very concept of "normal" and advocate for a more inclusive vision for postwar Ukraine. (277–278)

Night Train to Odesa: Covering the Human Cost of Russia's War is a book about the first year of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine written by Scottish freelance journalist Jen Stout and was published in 2024. Unlike the other three books reviewed here, this is a semi-autobiographical account by a freelance female journalist written in a popular, accessible style. Applying an academic lens, one might say it uses a phenomenological approach and a participatory observation method to explore the everyday lived experience of people in Ukraine during the war in 2022–2023. Yet it is precisely this approach that makes the book distinctive and compelling. Its focus on ordinary people, their lives, and thoughts, conveyed in approachable language, will, hopefully, make the stories of the human cost of Russia's war against Ukraine insightful for a wider audience beyond academia.

The book offers insights into lived experiences of Ukrainians during wartime through a patchwork of brief conversations with "ordinary people"—voices that are rarely captured in domestic or international media. The author further enriches these personal accounts by providing extensive historical and sociocultural context, deepening the reader's understanding of Ukraine and its people. Importantly, while there are certain geographical patterns in people's political, social, and cultural attitudes across Ukraine, the book mainly reflects the views of those living in eastern and southern Ukraine— territories closer to the contact line.

One of the peculiarities of this book is the author's remarkable ability to immerse the reader in the sensory reality of war. The smell of a decaying body clings to Jen's hair and seems to cling to the reader for several pages after she leaves the scene. The deafening roar of explosions and their vibrations are palpable on the page. In contrast, the author captures moments of tenderness: the warm lick and gentle gaze of a stray dog in a near-deserted frontline city, the fragile tremor of a stray kitten, and the silent refuge of a family sheltering underground in a ghost-like town. In between these experiences the reader is transported to the fresh green fields, the formal speeches at international conferences in Lviv, and Kyiv's rush hour where people hurry to work moments after a missile strike in the capital's heart.

The book also sheds light on women's versatile roles in this war and their contributions to resistance and keeping the society going. Traveling with Jen across Ukraine, the reader meets a Canadian female military medic, the Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina—later killed in a missile attack in the Donetsk region—female train attendants on evacuation trains, women fighting on the front line, women volunteering for both civilian and military duties, and many other female characters.

These are extraordinary women, each finding her way to live through the war and to contribute to her family, community, or country. There is a lot of often unspoken bravery, devotion, and dedication in their actions. Even the author herself could be an example—she reports from the war zone without the necessary training, equipment, and prior experience, but with commitment and determination.

The book could serve as a powerful illustration of the "dispossession" explored in *Dispossession: Anthropological Perspectives on Russia's War Against Ukraine*, edited by Catherine Wanner and reviewed here as well. As we follow the author's journey through war-torn Ukraine and neighboring territories, we encounter a profound loss—of material goods, homes, communities, relationships, peace, and lives. Yet, crucially, the book also conveys what remains intact. It offers thoughtful reflections on resilience, the preservation of hope and solidarity, and the ways in which Ukrainian identity is reconsidered and strengthened through the voices of those the author meets and in the author's own analysis. We also witness the persistent efforts to reclaim what has been lost—and at times, the sense that these efforts succeed.

It is also worth noting the author's personal context and experience as a part of the story she presents. The opening of the book acquaints the reader with the author—a Scottish journalist driven by a long—held passion for the Russian language and a desire to work in Russia, but also a sentiment for Eastern Europe. Initially, the author's position seem to reflect common Western perspectives prior to the 2022 full-scale invasion: curiosity about Russian society, admiration for Russian culture, hope for freedom of speech in Russia, along with a lack of awareness of its colonial presence in the region, of the fact that the current war against Ukraine began in 2014, and surprise at the full-scale invasion in February 2022. Shortly after the first experiences of living in Moscow and while traveling across war-torn Ukraine, engaging with local people, and witnessing the everyday reality of war and its cost, the author's attitudes and knowledge evolve.

The author's deep empathy for Ukraine and its people shines through her portrayal of their complex and deeply affecting wartime experiences, encompassing both heartbreak and hope. Yet the book offers a relatively "safe" perspective for the reader who can see the war through a lens of Jen's perception. Jen has authorized access to select areas adjacent to the frontline and conversations are limited to the languages she speaks and the stories others present to her. As a foreign journalist, she creates a slight but present buffer from the raw reality for the reader.

Dispossession: Anthropological Perspectives on Russia's War Against Ukraine, edited by Catherine Wanner, masterfully explores the concept of dispossession in the context of war-torn Ukraine. Unlike most anthropological studies, this volume focuses on the immaterial forms of dispossession, which often accompany visible losses of material property. It stands out for showing how dispossession reshapes identities, social ties, and everyday practices in Ukraine, offering a nuanced understanding of the lived realities of Ukrainians today. In the context of war, dispossession can be described as the process through which individuals or communities are deprived, often violently, of their land, homes, kinship networks, cultural practices, and political autonomy—resulting in enduring displacement, marginalisation, and loss of identity. In the editor's introduction, Catherine Wanner outlines the essence of dispossession and reflects on it in the reality Ukrainians are facing today. She claims that the core of dispossession "is that it compromises a person's or a group's autonomy by creating interdependencies that make them vulnerable to subjugation. Although there are multiple means by which to dispossess a person or group, there are essentially three types of dispossessions: cultural, economic, and eliminatory. The residents of Ukraine have been subject to all three types" (2).

The introduction to the book offers a valuable summary of recent historical context, highlighting that Ukraine has been subjected to dispossession caused by Russia and its policies throughout the past century, although in fact, this has been the case for even longer. It underscores the continuity of dispossession in Ukraine's history, which is crucial for understanding the ongoing war waged by Russia against Ukraine. The establishment of the Soviet Union was associated with cultural dispossession, when all new republics, including Ukraine, were violently stripped of their culture for the sake of building a new Soviet culture and identity. Studies of dispossession in post-Soviet societies of the 1990s usually focused on the loss of property and land through market transfers. By contrast, Wanner classifies the events in Ukraine since 2014, and especially after February 24, 2022, as eliminatory dispossession—a form that, by her definition, could be understood as genocide:

> In other words, once a people is subject to cultural and economic dispossession—that is to say, no longer fully possesses their own histories, languages, belief systems, traditions, and the land and communities that sustain them—the final phase, eliminatory dispossession, takes away dignity and sometimes life itself. With that, a new state of "non-being" of a former people is born through eliminatory dispossession. (5)

The volume is structured into two main parts: the first examines experiences of loss through dispossession and displacement, while the second one focuses on the diverse strategies of response to dispossession. The chapters in the book draw on case studies, interviews, ethnographic observations, content, and context analysis of songs and social media and memes in Ukraine. They are written by scholars from various disciplines, mainly anthropology and sociology, providing both depth and breadth in their examination of dispossession.

The chapters in the book explore the destruction of time and space under the persistent existential threat caused by war. They analyze emotions and psychological effects of pervasive vulnerability. The book dives into history, identity, and experience of Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and of the Jewish community in Odesa, as well as into experiences of people living in the occupied territories, along with the experiences of internal displacement caused by the war ongoing in Ukraine. It also provides insights into the political, moral, and social aspects of the reality of religious communities in Ukraine during the war. It offers an engaging analysis of the war-time humor in Ukraine and the power of language and micro actions to generate wartime resilience and resistance. It analyzes volunteer action and power of self-organization and volunteer groups in Ukraine during the war and a significant institutional and norm change related to the integration of women into the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and also highlights the importance of internal dialogue within the country to reduce social tensions that may develop due to the war related challenges.

A strong focus of the book is responses to dispossession. Even though technically the second part of the book is devoted to this topic, responses to Russia's war against Ukraine and its aftermath is a cross-cutting theme for all the chapters. Responses take the form of intentional actions and unintentional everyday practices and attitudes.

> Outmanned and outgunned, Ukrainians have responded by all means possible, including the weaponization of language, religion, and social media and the activation of transnational networks in which they are all embedded. (8)

Referring to previous studies on other continents, the editor claims that the range of responses to the war in Ukraine is proportionate to the intensity and duration of dispossession "which Ukrainians have been subject to over time through cultural, economic, and eliminatory means." (8)

Another prominent theme the book highlights is the message "we are still here," reasserted by Ukrainians through various forms and practices in their everyday lives. "We are still here" is a response to eliminatory dispossession that is aimed at depriving local people of everything, including their identities. The articles in the book provide empirical analyses of how this message is manifested through language, humour, music, networking, speaking out, identity change, the development of new practices, and coping strategies. These acts represent defiance against the occupier's persistent efforts to eliminate life in Ukraine in all its dimensions.

The book provides valuable insights into the experiences of minority groups in Ukraine, offering an in-depth analysis of the challenges they face and the transformations they undergo as a result of the ongoing war. This focus fosters a more nuanced understanding of Ukraine's society. For instance, it explores the reality of the Jewish community in Odesa, capturing with biting humour the surreal situation in which Ukrainian Jews, like the rest of the population, are absurdly accused of being neo-Nazis by Russian media and authorities, and targeted for so-called "denazification." It also dives into the transformation of identity among Crimean Tatars, Jews, people living in occupied territories, and the Protestant community, who often remain beyond conventional politics. The book describes the transformation of old identities—or the absence of them—shaped under previous imperial regimes and highlights the development of new identities prompted by the ongoing struggle for existence, as well as by a reevaluation of the past and present events.

The main idea of the book, as its editor Catherine Wanner thoughtfully summarizes, is that:

> By having addressed the weaponization of information, humor, and social media as well as the securitization of language, religious, and civic transnational networks, these chapters sketch not just new tactics and strategies for waging war and combatting dispossession but also new mechanisms for demanding accountability for crimes of aggression. (18)

The Russo-Ukrainian War is a very male-dominated area of book publishing, with many of the authors focusing on the more explicitly "military" aspects of the war (strategy and tactics, weapons and technology), and a high proportion are neither Ukrainian nor have much of a background in studying the country before Russia's mass invasion

began in 2022. This review essay provides a reminder that it is important to seek out alternative perspectives, especially those that take a more human approach to war: exploring how society adapts to war, shaping actions and perceptions in response to everyday realities, and in turn creating new realities of lived experience. The books discussed here highlight the experiences of individuals and communities that rarely make news headlines—whether they are dispossessed Crimean Tatars or LGBTQ refugees struggling to find a safe and accepting space to rebuild their lives. They also dig down beneath the surface noise of high-level political posturing to examine turning points in the development of civil society that both enable and push politicians to make certain policy decisions. These four books offer vital perspectives from women's research into the war in Ukraine. Many of the contributions to the edited volumes are written by Ukrainian scholars or by those with long-standing research experience in Ukrainian society, providing invaluable first-hand insights. These insider accounts illuminate the complex societal dimensions of war and, at times include personal reflections that are as revealing and informative as conventional analysis. We would argue, therefore, that it is not only worthwhile but also necessary to seek out women's writing on war—in general, and on the Russo-Ukrainian War in particular.