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CONTENTS

Section 1

YOUNG AMERICAN SCHOLARS

James K. Daly

INTRODUCTORY WORD

6

Sage E. Blodgett

THE LONGEVITY OF DEMOCRACY: ANALYZING THE CONDITIONS FOR
DEMOCRATIC SURVIVAL

9

Shane N. Holden

IDEAS AND INEQUALITY: REASSESSING FREEDOM AND POWER IN THE
UNITES STATES

17

Hasini Muddapu

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PRESENTING DEMOCRACY

22

Julia Kaluzna

FREEDOM AT 250: UKRAINIAN AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE

25

Avery J. Kachmarsky

WAR, INFORMATION, AND DEMOCRACY: UKRAINE’S APPROACH TO
DECENTRALIZED TRANSPARENCY

31

Neve V. Walker

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A WEAPON OF WAR: RUSSIAN PERPETRATION
AGAINST UKRAININAS SICE 2022

37

Emma Escobar-Rivera

THE COMPLEXITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AT THE
INTERSECTION OF SPAIN, FRANCE, AND AN INCIPIENT UNITED STATES

42

Luc Escobar-Rivera

INNOCENCE, FANTASY, AND DANGER: THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF
THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR THROUGH THE LENS OF CHILDHOOD
CURIOSITY 47

Dean Sati

POWER, DISCOURSE, AND THE ERASURE OF REVOLUTION: A
POSTCOLONIAL READING OF SYRIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM 53

Section 2

YOUNG UKRAINIAN SCHOLARS

Olha Tarasenko

INTRODUCTORY WORD 59

Olha Saraieva, Mariia Saraieva

SOCIOCULTURAL SELF-ORGANIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS
OF THE ZEMSTVO INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE DONETSK REGION (1860s –
1917) 67

Veronica Shtonda

WOMEN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN GALICIA: MOSCOPHILES
AND NARODOVTSI 77

Marko Miliutin

MYKOLA LYSENKO: RECONSTRUCTING PHYSICAL HEALTH THROUGH
NARRATIVE SOURCES 90

Mykhailo Mishyn

"UNDER THE MUSICAL AND ACADEMIC INFLUENCE OF VIACHESLAV
PETR": THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF KLYMENT KVITKA'S
SCHOLARLY WORLDVIEW 96

Stepan Vasylyshyn

THE TEACHER IN INTERWAR SOCIETY: PROFESSIONAL MISSION AND
SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN THE TERNOPIL VOIVODESHIP (BASED ON THE
MATERIALS OF *ECHO NAUCZYCIELSKIE*) 105

Myroslav Sakal

THE SOVIET ELECTIONS IN TRANSCARPATHIA ACCORDING TO PRESS
MATERIALS: PUBLIC MOOD AND THE POSITION OF THE UKRAINIAN
INSURGENTS 111

Roman Podat

INDUSTRIAL MODERNIZATION OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR AT THE MICRO
LEVEL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DARNYTSIA CHEMICAL –
PHARMACEUTICAL PLANT IN THE 1950s – 1960s 119

Olena Kazimirenko

FORTY YEARS SINCE THE CHORNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT
ACCIDENT THROUGH THE POSTERS OF STUDENT DESIGNERS 127

Artem Pavliuk

MARCUS LUTTRELL'S INTERPRETATION OF THE EVENTS OF
OPERATION "RED WINGS": A HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS 136

Daryna Osetianova

MY GENERATION'S STOLEN YOUTH 140

Hanna Hedo

DONETSK 148

Dariya Romanenko

FROM EUROPEAN PEARL TO MILITARIZED ENCLAVE: A TWELVE-YEAR
RETROSPECTIVE ON THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA 155

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

157

Section 1

YOUNG AMERICAN SCHOLARS

James K. Daly,
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INTRODUCTORY WORD

February 24, 2022. Everything changed.

A nation at peace was brutally invaded by a powerful and historic enemy. Since that time the nation of Ukraine has fought valiantly to preserve its independence and democratic way of life. The people of Ukraine have provided a model of courage, determination, and resilience. While their lives have changed dramatically in ways they could not have envisioned prior to the invasion, they continue to live their lives as best they can. Their young go to school, study and hope for a peace where they can use their knowledge and skills to rebuild their nation.

The war has not stopped the work between the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University and Seton Hall University. This electronic journal is part of that work. Once again students from both institutions have shared their views and opinions in the articles that appear in this edition.

In this 7th issue, the writers from Seton Hall have provided a focus on the concept of democracy. The United States recently commemorated over 250 years since declaring independence. While that milestone is worth celebrating, there are sources for concern. The compromises that led to the Constitution emerged in the framework of popular sovereignty, of democracy. The fragility of the competing views and beliefs were evident in Benjamin Franklin's warning that maintaining the republic would be difficult. That difficulty is evident now.

In recent years, there have been considerable public warnings about threats to democracy. From both the political left and the political right public dialogue, official and private, has become divisive. Distrust, of institutions and individuals, seems widespread. Discussion, engagement and consideration of alternative perspectives are not widely evident in the public sphere, nor often in communities, neighborhoods, even families. Democratic institutions and societies are difficult to maintain.

The concept of democracy swept across time and continents and challenged old order power relationships. The idea that people should have a say in how they are governed saw nations reject monarchies and autocratic systems. Inspired by themes of equality under the law, of liberty, and of justice for all, millions across the globe protested, fought and died for the opportunities

democracy promised. However, democratic impulses are facing significant challenges across the world.

The writers from Seton Hall University provide a range of diverse views and topics that examine the past, the present, and the future of the democratic impulse. Their articles provide thoughtful explorations of threats to democracy.

Sage E. Blodgett examines three countries and analyses the level of threat to their democratic systems. Ghana, The United States and Hungary provide intriguing insights into the stresses each are experiencing. Sage provides a review of the Weimar Republic for some historic context.

Shane N. Holden analyses the conflict between democratic ideals and reality in the U.S. The selective application of liberty and equality are examined from personal experiences with structural inequality.

Hasini Muddapu cites young people as a powerful force for the defense of democracy. Democracy is described as a living and evolving concept, and this piece highlights the ways in which young Ukrainians harness technology and confront misinformation.

Julia Kaluzna reflects on the ‘American dream’ that hard work and determination will bring about success. Continual engagement is required, and freedom is an on-going process facing significant tensions.

Decentralized digital citizen-led transparency in Ukraine is the focus of the essay by **Avery J. Kachmarsky**. Civil society has pushed for reforms and accountability, demonstrating the resilience of democratic governance during a time of conflict and disinformation.

Neve V. Walker shares the brutal reality of Russian sexual violence as a systematic and strategically deployed weapon in Ukraine. These crimes against humanity, with men and women as victims, are analyzed as having consistent patterns aimed at degrading and psychologically destroying victims.

Luc Escobar-Rivera reviews the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War with a focus on trauma, repression and moral responsibility. Examining three films, this essay challenges the culture of forgetting, and the necessity of resistance and remembrance.

Dean Sati presents the struggle for freedom in Syria, providing an Arab American perspective on the use of power and language. Assumptions and the Western interpretations of events are reported to have helped erase democratic aspirations in Syria, complicit in the brutal repression of the Assad regime.

Emma Escobar-Rivera provides an examination of African American identity and recognition with attention to Spain, France and the United States. Historical memory requires an examination of Atlantic histories, colonial alliances, slavery and the politics of memory.

How can threats to democracy be addressed? Examining the past, interrogating assumptions in the present, and thoughtfully proposing ideas and actions for the future are all

essential. Respectfully listening to different perspectives and clearly communicating with others are all critical skills. As many of the pieces in this journal demonstrate and propose, careful use of digital tools can counter disinformation and provide for consideration of alternative thoughts and actions. Action is the key, and action includes actively listening, seeking to confirm information and a willingness to seek new information. Action can be private and personal, as well as social and public.

The essays from Seton Hall University appear to meet the challenge. Historic, and current, they provide what this journal was originally designed to do – to provide a voice for young scholars.

UDC 321.7(091)"19"

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THE LONGEVITY OF DEMOCRACY: ANALYZING THE CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC SURVIVAL

Abstract: Three prevalent themes throughout the twenty-first century are weakening democratic institutions, attacks on democracy, and democratic backsliding. There are four key conditions that significantly contribute to why democracies can fail and to maintaining long-term democracy: civic competence and democratic education, media independence and government accountability, management of populist discontent, and participation in international organizations. Using data from Freedom House to compare different regions, the United Nations definition of democracy, and other academic journals, I have researched three states, one representing a democracy under stress, a second representing a democracy currently backsliding, and a third representing a strong, growing democracy. I have also included a case study of complete democratic collapse in the Weimar Republic. My findings indicate the importance of the four conditions in maintaining a long-term democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Survival, Democratic backsliding, Civic education, Independent media, Populism, International organization, Weimar Republic.

Background

According to the United Nations, democracy is a set of values and principles that promote greater participation, equality, security, and the development of human rights. It establishes an environment that respects fundamental freedoms; the will of the people is freely expressed, and citizens can hold decision-makers accountable. In democratic systems, all individuals have equal rights and are free from discrimination (United Nations).

Democratic backsliding refers to declines in political rights and civil liberties, as well as the overall weakening of democratic institutions. Since 2005, at least 54 countries have experienced this dynamic (Kurlantzick, 2026). This decline in democracy is not limited to a single region but rather a global pattern of democratic deterioration.

An overview from Freedom House highlights this trend regionally. Freedom has declined across Africa, Eurasia, and the Asia-Pacific; it has been increasingly threatened in the Americas, and continues to be unstable in the Middle East. The only region with relative stability is Europe (Freedom House, 2026). These trends stem from persistent challenges, including noncompetitive elections, restrictions on civil liberties, government corruption, and increased control over the media and academic institutions.

In response to democratic backsliding, this paper argues that the long-term survival of democracy depends on maintaining four key conditions: civic education, independent media, the management of populist discontent, and participation in international organizations. When these conditions are met, they enforce accountability, protect rights, and enable meaningful political

participation. When these conditions weaken, democratic systems become increasingly vulnerable to backsliding and potential collapse.

KEY CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC SUCCESS

Democratic Education and Civic Competence

Democracies must educate their citizens to ensure they are capable of participating in debates, discussions, and decisions that promote the population's well-being and protect their individual rights (Garrison, 2003: 1).

The relationship between education and democracy is cyclical; education is necessary for democracy, and democracy is necessary for education. Views on education in liberal versus illiberal societies are fundamentally different: democratic states view education as the construction of meaning, whereas authoritarian states understand education as a transfer of knowledge rather than an engagement (Garrison, 2003: 2).

Promoting education is not necessarily about teaching democratic practices, but rather about ensuring that citizens can learn through freedom and participation. Therefore, citizens must be educated to suit their constitution and develop their democracy. Education fosters the necessary qualities needed for democratic citizenship, such as critical thinking, curiosity, and independence (Parker, 2012: 4).

Media Independence and Democratic Accountability

Media independence plays a critical role in keeping democratic institutions accountable. Independent media examines government actions, exposes corruption, and keeps citizens informed about issues so they can participate in democratic decision-making (Damissah, Isiaka, Adejare, & Ogunlana, 2025: 2).

Independent media promotes objectivity, accuracy, and fairness by operating independently from government control. It can criticize people in power and hold them accountable, rather than just defending them (Schieck, 2003: 9).

By maintaining an independent media, citizens can stay informed on recent events, both domestic and foreign and choose their own opinion about it, rather than having their views shaped or controlled by the government. Independent media reinforces the freedom that democratic citizens have to hold their own beliefs and opinions about ongoing events.

Managing Populist Discontent

Populism emerges within a democracy through public support and fair elections. However, when in power, populist leaders may undermine the democratic system and initiate autocratic processes. Despite initially coming to power through democratic means, populist leaders can establish discriminatory electoral rules, skew political competition, censor and attack the media, and aid the partisan takeover of the judiciary, among other independent institutions (Kaltwasser and Taggart, 2025: 3).

The global rise of populism is not necessarily just a cause of democratic decline, but also a symptom. When people feel betrayed by their government or upset with its policies, they may begin to target different communities, using them as scapegoats. (Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2025: 3).

The populist movement has spread throughout Europe and the Americas, reflecting citizens' dissatisfaction with current democratic practices. Populist leaders commonly promote practices that counter the foundational doctrines of the liberal, rule-based democracy in which they are citizens.

International Organizations

International organizations are institutions created by governments with structured rules, regular meetings, and permanent administrations that promote cooperation and governance among the states (Mansfield & Pevehouse, 2006: 138).

International organizations support democracy by limiting special interest groups, protecting individual rights, introducing more information and perspectives that enhance public debate and decision-making, and increasing the government's capacity to solve issues (Keohane, Macedo, Moravcsik, 2009: 2).

International organizations help spread democracy by supporting leaders in democratizing states, implementing reforms, and reducing the likelihood of the rise of authoritarianism. They also allow for democratic states to create policy on cross-border issues that cannot be addressed domestically, aid in bargaining, provide international accountability, and promote global democratic policies (Mansfield & Pevehouse, 2006: 138).

CASE STUDIES: UNITED STATES: EARLY-STAGE STRESS

The United States is a democracy under stress. As the United States moves towards populism, backs out of international organizations, and allows increased censorship in media and education, the strength of the United States democracy is being tested. This strain reflects key democratic conditions, such as weakened media independence, civic education, and resistance to populist mobilization, all of which are essential for maintaining democratic stability. According to the Freedom House, media freedom and independence have eroded due to government pressures, economic constraints, and partisan bias. Throughout 2025, media outlets have faced pressure from federal governments regarding coverage and practices (Freedom House, 2026).

The weakening of media independence limits the people's ability to hold political leaders accountable and restricts citizens' access to reliable information, thereby harming informed participation in democratic processes. Freedom House also brings to light the increasing political indoctrination within the United States educational system due to the government interference in education on topics related to race, sex, gender, and identity (Freedom House, 2026).

Constraints on educational content undermine the development of the civic competence necessary for citizens to engage effectively in democratic decision-making and discussion. Donald J. Trump's taking office was a product of the rise of populism within the United States. Trump has been criticized for filling positions in government institutions with more loyal figures (Crothers, 2025: 17).

This prioritizing of personal loyalty over qualifications and institutional integrity weakens the independence of democratic institutions. The rise in populism is evident in the anti-immigrant, racist, and ethno-nationalist beliefs paired with culture wars over abortion rights and LGBTQI+ equality that is the current policy focus (Crothers, 2025: 18).

Targeting different groups, blaming them for economic and political hardship, has deepened political polarization and delegitimized opposition, which further erodes democratic norms. The Trump administration has also been criticized for leaving over sixty-six international organizations for promoting progressive ideologies around DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), gender equity, and climate change policy. The claim of the Trump administration is that these organizations are “Wasteful, Ineffective, or Harmful” and that these groups “actively seek to constrain American Sovereignty” (United States Department of State, 2026).

Withdrawal from international organizations reduces external democratic accountability and limits cooperation on global issues, which weakens global support systems that reinforce democratic governance.

HUNGARY: ACTIVE BACKSLIDING

Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a representative of the Fidesz party, took power in 2010. Since then, the government has consolidated control over independent institutions necessary to keep it accountable and to keep citizens informed, such as universities, nongovernmental organizations, and journalists (Freedom House, 2025).

This consolidation of power contributed to the weakening of democratic accountability produced through independent media and journalism, as well as nongovernmental institutions. The government has repeatedly targeted independent journalists and media outlets, accusing them of serving foreign interests. The government has also reportedly been surveilling independent journalists and preventing independent media outlets and journalists from attending government press conferences (Freedom House, 2025).

Such actions limit transparency and prevent citizens from making informed political decisions due to a lack of information. The Fidesz-led government has also maintained close oversight of schools and universities, imposing excessive government influence on school curricula (Freedom House, 2025).

The control that the Hungarian government has over education weakens the development of civic competence essential for sustaining democratic participation. Populism within Hungary was a response to economic hardship and distrust in democratic institutions. The populists in Hungary capitalize on nationalism and the protection of Hungarian identity, framing democracy as “the people” versus corrupt elites (Becker, 2010: 32).

Far-right populist parties gained support by mobilizing social frustration and blaming minorities and elites for their struggles. Hungarian populists have deepened social divisions by channeling public dissatisfaction toward specific groups. The rise of populism within Hungary has weakened democratic norms and trust within the state (Becker, 2010: 30).

Although Hungary is currently a member in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Orban’s government has pushed the narrative of portraying the EU as a hostile actor that threatens Hungarian interests, believing that Hungary must be protected from migrants, western liberals, and democratic influence (Biro-Nagy, 2023).

This reflects resistance to international democratic accountability mechanisms and demonstrates that participation in international organizations alone is insufficient without adherence to their accountability mechanisms. As of April 12, 2026, Peter Magyar following Hungary’s parliamentary elections took Viktor Orban out of power. Magyar’s success proves that right-wing populism is not irreversible (Fix & Harris, 2026).

GHANA: RELATIVE SUCCESS

From 1982 until 1993, Ghana was under Jerry Rawlings, a populist who did not believe democracy would benefit Ghana. However, his system lacked structure and legitimacy, leading Ghana to consolidate a democracy (Haynes, 2023).

Although populism initially challenged democratic development, its failure reinforced the importance of democratic practices. Since 1992, Ghana has maintained democratic processes, political rights, and civil liberties, and continues to strengthen democratic coordination.

This continued stability shows the successful maintenance of key democratic conditions. Ghana has both state-owned and privately owned media. Although historically government agencies have tried to control the media, there has been a trend of increasing media independence in Ghana (Freedom House, 2024).

The growth of independent media reflects government accountability and ensures that citizens are informed and can properly participate in democratic processes. Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and generally protected from extensive political indoctrination (Freedom House, 2024).

The protection of educational autonomy supports the development of critical thinking and civic engagement, which enable proper democratic participation. Ghana has overseen a continuation of peaceful transfers of power since 1992, indicating institutional legitimacy and public trust in democratic processes. For Ghana, democratization was the result of failed populism (Haynes, 2023).

Ghana is a member of the United Nations and the African Union, among many others. Its membership in the United Nations has supported its security, human rights, education, and aid efforts, as well as Ghana's efforts to maintain democracy (Legon, 2018: 3).

Ghana's active participation in international organizations provides external support, resources, and accountability mechanisms that strengthen its democracy. Ghana also uses its seat on the African Union to promote democracy among other members (Sansusi 2018: 3). The outward promotion of democratic norms reflects Ghana's strong democratic system.

WEIMAR REPUBLIC: DEMOCRATIC FAILURE

The collapse of the Weimar Republic was not the result of a single weakness, but rather multiple weaknesses within German society and government. The Weimar Republic lacked a strong, independent media, had limited democratic education, and struggled to engage with international organizations. These conditions contributed to the republic's instability and inability to counter the rise of populist extremists. These weaknesses together impacted public trust and participation, making the democratic system vulnerable to collapse.

In terms of international organizations, after World War I, the German economy was severely weakened and the country was internationally disgraced. The Weimar Republic's attempt to integrate into the global community was interrupted by the rise of nationalism arising from harsh economic and political conditions (Li, He, & Li, 2025: 15).

The League of Nations was founded after World War I to ensure a world war would never happen again (Benes, 1932: 66). The League of Nations was only a voluntary cooperation between states and had no independent authority. The expectation that members would prioritize collective goals over national interests proved unrealistic in practice (Benes, 1932: 80). Because the League was unable to achieve collective goals and enforce cooperation, it had limited capacity to support democratic stability in the Weimar Republic.

In the realm of education, reformers pushed to ensure equal access to education and to more modern teaching practices that promoted equality and equal opportunity (Lamberti, 2004: 3). Education became part of cultural politics, pushed to the forefront of the ideological struggle over the Germans' future, liberal vs illiberal (Lamberti, 2004: 1).

Many conservative and Nazi figures within the Weimar Republic in the early 1930s claimed that there was a "crisis of education." Conservative opponents claimed that progressive schools were damaging society. Regarding media, the Weimar Republic's media were unable to

support democratic accountability and resist manipulation. As the media expanded through newspapers and radio, politics became controlled, performative, and strategic rather than rational and open. This fueled misinformation, manipulation, and propaganda throughout the republic (Habermas, 1989: 206).

The Weimar Republic's democratic government was unable to address economic, international, and political issues. The result was that its citizens voted for a political faction that pledged to destroy democracy (Chou, 2012: 33).

The rise of populism in the Weimar Republic exploited democratic freedoms such as elections and free speech. These failures were not isolated, but rather interconnected. The weaknesses in media culture and education, and a lack of international support, created conditions that populist movements exploited, ultimately undermining the republic from within.

CONCLUSION

Even when functioning at its best, democracy needs continuous maintenance (Chou, 2012: 28). For long-term democratic survival, there must be accountability, public trust, and nongovernmental institutions capable of monitoring the system. A democracy must uphold an independent media, promote civic education, manage rising populism, and engage with international organizations. These conditions together foster accountability, equality, human rights, and political participation, all of which are essential to a democracy. A democracy also must be able to address the concerns of its citizens. Once one of the conditions begins to weaken, the others tend to follow, which can ultimately result in democratic backsliding or collapse. Recent developments in Hungary support the view that democratic backsliding is not irreversible. The collapse of the Weimar Republic serves as a cautionary tale, showing how quickly democratic institutions can crumble when the key conditions weaken. The failure demonstrates that democracy is not self-sustaining but rather requires constant reinforcement through education, accountability, international cooperation, and public trust. The preservation of democracy is essential not only for protecting individual rights but also for sustaining long-term political stability and democratic resilience.

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IDEAS AND INEQUALITY: REASSESSING FREEDOM AND POWER IN THE UNITED STATES

Abstract: This paper examines the contradictions between the foundational ideals of the United States and the realities of its historical and contemporary practices. While the nation was established on principles of liberty, equality, and individual rights, these values have been selectively applied. This paper further explores how U.S. foreign policy and globalization have extended these inequalities far beyond domestic borders. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the country's definition of freedom has been continuously shaped to preserve political and economic dominance, raising critical questions about the alignment between American ideals and lived realities.

Foundations and Contradiction of American Freedom

The United States of America became an official sovereign state 250 years ago on July 4, 1776 after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Shortly after in 1789, the Constitution was ratified, outlining the values, laws, and eventual guaranteed rights of its peoples. It is important to attribute the history of the United States' beginnings to its domestic and foreign policies over the past 250 years, as these important dates shaped how the United States will operate. The country prides itself on its diversity and willingness to provide freedom to others, setting itself apart from the rest of the world as a model of freedom, described by Thomas Jefferson as an "empire of liberty" (Craig). However, does the country's history actually align with its values?

At its source, the republic was founded on principles of liberty and individual rights, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, but economically resting in large measure on slavery. Among these principles is the idea that all people are created equal, whether European, Native American, or African American, and that these people have fundamental rights, such as liberty, free speech, freedom of religion, due process, and freedom of assembly ("Founded on a Set of Beliefs" 19). Accompanied by these values, the first Naturalization Act of 1790 contradicted them, establishing an early exclusive American identity of free white men. Freedom came to be defined more by the boundaries of race, and slavery shaped the language and idea of freedom (Craig: 2007). American values staggered heavily, especially during the American Civil War (1861), as well as times of international conflict, where rhetoric of liberty and diversity continued to be challenged at an extreme level. These contradictions highlight that the nation is founding ideals were not universally applied, but rather selectively extended in ways that preserved the existing systems of power.

Institutions, Expansion, and the Limits of Democracy

Systemic institutions such as the Electoral College, Senate, and the Supreme Court are designed to check and constrain majority rule. This function gives significant power to the leading representative parties (Republican and Democrat), as the system places significant power in the hands of elected officials, rather than the immediate will of the people.

This overarching distribution of power is combined with long periods of restricted voting rights and racial, patriarchal, and property-based exclusivity. Although checks and balances exist within the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, these processes take considerable time to enforce restrictions on the executive, which allow opportunities for exploitation. As a result, democratic participation has historically been limited in practice, reinforcing a system where political power is filtered. This structure reflects the preservation of established hierarchies and deliberate models to maintain stability.

Additionally, as the United States expanded its influence, the pursuit of global hegemony outweighed concerns for marginalized populations. What sets the United States apart is its inherently powerful geographical position, which allowed it to prosper as an isolationist power focused on internal development. However, this growth was deeply tied to imperialism and territorial expansion. The transition from a settler colony to extending its power over others—taking land, extracting resources, exploiting labor, and ensuring unequal relationships that benefit its interests has allowed the United States to grow exponentially with limited opposition (Paik 2023: 1). These policies place racism as central to the:

U.S. settler colonial project that seeks to exclude and remove anyone who does not fit the ideal settler community—one based not only in a white racial identity, but also property ownership, patriarchal gender norms, and health and ability, among multiple factors. Unfit for citizenship, such others cannot access the rights consecrated by the United States. Instead, citizenship is defined against them, its contours sharpened with every exclusion (Paik 2023: 2).

These peoples are left subjected to U.S. state power, as the state's significant hegemonic power constrains nearby country's freedoms and accessibility to resources significantly. These countries can be classified as domestic dependent nations, which allowed the United States to continue expanding further West, entrenching itself as a global superpower. It is apparent that the United States is quick to abandon its solidified values, as long as it can be justified to improve the country's aggregate power. Over time, this accumulation of predominantly white power and imperial actions has led to unstable fluctuations of domestic and foreign stability. This demonstrates how the United States limited the application of its founding principles to preserve power.

Despite its willingness to encroach on other states' sovereignty, the United States was once an isolationist power, unlikely to engage in foreign conflicts. It was not until the twentieth century that the country reluctantly participated in both World War I and II. As its global role expanded, so did a significant conservative focus, as the country thrived as an exploitative power for generations. This ideology would persist, focused on increasing economic power and a more active role in Latin America. However, domestic transitions and public opinion shifted towards a self-perception as a defender of rights and freedoms, though not for all people. Legacies of racism and imperialism continue to limit who counts as the proper subject of rights (Paik 2023: 5).

During the Cold War, the United States wielded civil rights as an instrument of soft power to advance its geopolitical interests. Domestically, openly racist segregation and immigration laws

tarnished the United States' international image during this time. Segregation and discriminatory immigration policies exposed the limits of its commitment to equality, prompting reforms that sought to polish its image as a defender of freedom.

Through systems of exclusion, constrained democracy, and imperial expansion, the United States has consistently shaped the meaning of freedom to serve its political and economic interest.

While these contradictions are often analyzed at the institutional level, they are not confined to seemingly faraway systems alone. The identity of the United States shapes everyday realities of those living within them, but also those affected by the influence of the country.

As a citizen raised in a low-income household with divorced parents, I have experienced firsthand how the promises of equality and opportunity are not equally accessible. The ideals of freedom that define the American lifestyle face structural limitations that affect economic stability, education, healthcare, and opportunity. My experience reflects the broader pattern of selective inclusion that has defined the United States since its founding, especially since I am a white male still confined by these systems.

Lived Experience and Structural Inequality

I lived in a large household growing up with six older siblings until my house foreclosed and my parents divorced. What resulted was a significant decrease in opportunities based solely on my household's low income. My housing situation was precarious, which directly limited my access to education and other resources. This gap between the idealized "American Dream" and the realities of the common American people highlights the lack of equal opportunity as freedom is conditional, not universal.

My experience growing up in a low-income household reflects the broad structural pattern of economic inequality described by Carles Boix. He argues that individuals without sufficient resources are often "constrained to invest in low-return technologies and to remain in low-income brackets" (Boix 2010: 4). Meaning that economic inequality persists not simply because of differences in effort or ability, but that those individuals are more likely to make decisions that prioritize immediate survival over long-term advancement. As a result, inequality becomes self-enforcing, as those with fewer resources are unable to accumulate the capital necessary to improve their economic position. Models of inequality show "intergenerational transmission of wealth" shapes outcomes over time, demonstrating that these conditions are inherited, not just based on income. In my case, I inherited poverty through my family's social and economic instability. These forceful restrictions on upward mobility contribute to the institutional injustices that further separate class by income which do not discriminate by race.

Capitalism, Globalization, and the Reproduction of Inequality

While these inequalities are historically ingrained, they are actively reproduced through the economic capitalism of the United States. Capitalism plays a large role as the privatization of goods creates further disparity between class and extends this influence over the world. Economic systems are not neutral; they are structured in ways that reproduce existing hierarchies, particularly through the intergenerational transfer of assets and opportunities. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the capitalistic society of the United States burst into its unipolar moment. The American economy, built on Hobbesian and Lockean possessive individualism to provide a commodious living to its citizens at the cost of nature and other human beings, has been the coping stone for other countries to shape their political and economic life. In that way, its multinational corporations and

transnational corporations became accessories to the American grand strategy. This era of globalization ushered “squeezing the entire globe into its [United States’] cocoon of concern for affluence and wealth production” (Gaan 2009: 126).

The American world order—and seemingly its domestic system—is the coercion of others to dedicate themselves to the extravagant lifestyle of American people.

Moreover, this objective required the proliferation of various institutions and structural arrangements which controlled and adapted the political systems of other countries into the liberal market economy. Not only did the global order change, the way in which countries operated shifted towards a Westernized view, and in many cases, directly puppeteered by the United States. Gann (2009: 127) describes globalization and the New World Order as “a camouflage for the American world order, has not yet facilitated democratization of world economic and trading systems in terms of equity in participation and access to resources.” Japan is one of the many countries the United States holds significant leverage over in its grand strategy, and its historical congregations clearly display proof of U.S. self-interest. The withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol highlights these interests through the unwillingness to compromise on the American way of living. Therein lies a divide of opinion however, as the rise of non-governmental organizations and greater participation of civil society directly oppose American supremacy and the conservative side. Through globalization, these inequalities are not only reproduced domestically but extended internationally, which reflects the class structure and American identity.

The two-party system was built on the direct opposition of views within the United States, creating further disparities between gender, economic status, and especially race. These structural inequalities are most visible at the local level, where economic vulnerability directly impacts the stability of individuals' lives. Through his work in *Evicted*, Desmond (2012: 91) reiterates the struggles of families at high risk and the persistence of poverty showing,

Findings from ethnographic fieldwork reveal how structural constraints, having to do with work, welfare, and housing costs, interactional patterns, and gendered reactions to receiving an eviction notice, place women from poor black communities at especially high risk of eviction.

Eviction rates are legitimate sources to draw from to properly show structural constraints through ethnographic data and neighborhood demographics. His work demonstrates how these constraints render low-income individuals and families incapable of breaking out of these barriers. This framework can outline the institutional disincentives these families face while explaining how welfare programs, income, housing costs, and ability drive the downward mobility of these families and the persistence of inequality within the United States. Desmond contends that eviction is not simply a consequence of poverty, but a mechanism that multiplies it, as housing instability disrupts employment, education, and access to resources.

Reconciling Ideals with Reality

Although, the United States does not fail to uphold its ideals accidentally, it does so through its complicated structure and deliberate extension of its sphere of influence. From its founding contradictions rooted in slavery and exclusion, to the development of institutions that filter democratic participation, the nation has consistently defined liberty in ways that preserve existing hierarchies of power. These patterns exist beyond domestic policy, as imperial expansion and global influence have reinforced inequality both within and outside of the United States.

At the same time, capitalism serves as a central piece in which these inequalities are produced, as the accumulation and transmission of wealth across generations limit mobility and

concentrate opportunity to those with access to capital. As demonstrated through theoretical frameworks and lived experience: economic instability, housing insecurity, and limited access to resources are not isolated issues, but deeply connected outcomes of a system that prioritizes accumulation over equity. Only by recognizing how these structures operate can the United States begin to reconcile its foundational principles with the realities it produces.

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THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PRESENTING DEMOCRACY

Democracy is often considered a destination or a finished product characterized by rules, institutions, or constitutional guarantees. As long as we recognize democracy and its ideals, the world will be fine. Yet, history teaches us a different story. Democracy is a living system. Similar to any other evolving organism, it constantly requires adaptation, nourishment, and defense when it is taken for granted. The current global climate of the world shows how this system is under immense stress. The challenges range from aggressive authoritarianism to eroding public trust in international institutions.

At the center of this tension lies the most assertive and influential force in global politics: the youth. For years, youth have been seen as simply a demographic that needs to be mobilized during elections. However, around the world, young people are progressively proving to be activists of political change. Rather than simply inheriting the previous systems of society, they are actively involved in reshaping global governance. Of course, this is not a simple journey.

For many young people, democracy is not a political concept; it is integrated into their daily lives and drives them to advocate for leadership, justice, and reconstruction. The Atlantic Council reports how many young Ukrainians have worked to integrate technology into their daily lives during wartime so that they can document war crimes and fight for international accountability.

Moreover, many young, inspiring individuals in Ukraine are working towards building an authentic human connection by being involved in youth movements. These specific movements encourage discussions about geopolitics, mental health, and other topics. Through these opportunities, students are able to make a difference and be heard.

For Ukraine specifically, it allows them to connect with youth programs in Europe and talk about their stories. Inspiring and hopeful young individuals view themselves as the primary force for recovery in Ukraine. Every day, they are committed to advocating for a better Ukrainian democracy. They fight for things like transparency and take measures against corruption. In the era of international media, storytelling and human connection are far more effective than the formal approaches of the past. They acknowledge that the country's future depends on accountability, reliable government, and sustainable partnerships.

Democratic legitimacy

Modern democracy is defined by ideals like accountability, freedom of expression, and the importance of laws and regulations. Around the world, we can see the practical application of these ideals is being tested. Misinformation and the fast-paced evolution of technologies have become a huge obstacle for democracy. In addition, from Eastern Europe to Tehran, the authoritarian powers have undermined the power of the media, corrupted the judiciary systems, and manipulated the integrity of electoral systems. In this context, international organizations like the United States

have struggled with proving their legitimacy. Youth around the world have been facing the effects of this decline, such as corruption, political instability, and climate instability.

Reforms

In the last decade, we have seen a global surge of political mobilization led by the youth. Rather than waiting for institutions to address the instabilities and issues in their societies, the youth are creating their own forms of accountability.

For example, the Atlantic Council highlights the role of “Generation UA.” This is a group that came together by a shared commitment to democracy and sovereignty. During Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, young Ukrainians have been actively involved in resistance. Through technology, they have created and utilized ways to spread global awareness and call for humanitarian support. Their actions illustrate how the youth are the first to acknowledge when their foundational principles are facing challenges.

This is not simply limited to places of conflict. In countries where there are heavy restrictions placed on the media, the youth tend to rely on each other to create networks for awareness.

The Representation Gap

Why is the participation of youth so low? Many countries adopt the system of gerontocracy. In India, for example, the youth represent a massive portion of the electorate, yet their function in the parliament is fairly low. In addition, East Asian nations such as South Korea and Japan have very low youth representation in the parliaments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union reports how the representation and involvement of youth in parliament has flat lined for the first time in many years. This lack of representation leads the younger generation to feel less connected and represented by their governments. One of the main reasons for this crisis is that foreign policy or government leaders only require experience. However, advocacy groups like the YIP have argued that this ideology is detrimental.

Foreign policy is about building and networking to influence and connect with people across borders. Excluding the youth prevents nations from listening to the voices that are the most adept at understanding current realities. With each generation, there is a greater capacity for connecting with peers from around the world and learning about different cultures. Governments should also understand the importance of climate policy, global health, and cybersecurity, which require new ideologies from the youth in order to succeed. For example, Armenia saw an increase in youth participation after political changes. Global public opinion is immensely influenced by digital ecosystems; young advocates are far more equipped with developing connections and strategies in a fast-paced world.

In order for the youth to be actually involved, nations should fund youth-led political campaigns, there should be more opportunities for youth to be representatives in international negotiations, and there should also be opportunities for the youth to share their expertise on foreign policy with their elders. This will allow them to practice civic entrepreneurship and not simply view this as a task for the future.

The Intersection of Economic Agency

A key value of democracy is the integration of politics with economic reality. Nations around the world face various issues like wealth inequality and housing costs. Youth should prioritize being educated on fiscal and economic policies and legislation that will address the root causes of economic issues. Democratic inclusivity means actually encouraging young individuals

to learn about things like tax codes and trade agreements. Youth involvement in economic governance can bring nations to feel a sense of shared prosperity.

The Sustainability of Activism and Mental Health

Finally, we must address the issue of how we can make activism sustainable? Many people see activism as a temporary phase of their life. However, the world is not simple. It requires strong individuals who are supported so they can be the primary force for recovery. Conflicts around the world take away many people's lives. Young activists often tend to feel burnout because they feel that the world is ignoring them and their society's problems. They start to feel hopeless and exhausted and nations end up losing their strongest champions. Mental health and activism are one of the strong roots of democracy. Normalizing mental health and providing support systems for individuals allow civic engagement to be sustainable and flourish. By prioritizing mental health and activism, we preserve advocacy and encourage people to defend democratic values.

Conclusion

The ideas of the youth should not be hidden. We should not treat democracy like an antique vase that is being passed down generations. Many young individuals around the world are architects, advocates, artists, engineers, mathematicians etc, with so many ideas and passions who are ready to rewrite their nations' stories and democracy. In order to preserve democracy, we should not continuously depend on the status quo; instead, we should willingly encourage the next generation to share their ideas and build something that reflects their values and perspectives in the changing times. This is why when the youth around the world empower each other, they become the most impactful protectors of democratic ideas and ensure that institutions and governments are relevant and resilient in a fast paced geopolitical world. It is truly inspiring to see young individuals come together from different backgrounds and different cultures.

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FREEDOM AT 250: UKRAINIAN AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE

The concept of freedom has been an important part of the United States for a long time. For generations, freedom has been portrayed as both a political principle and a promise that anyone could pursue, achieve, and live out. This promise is often captured in the idea of the “American Dream”, which suggests that through hard work and determination, individuals can build better lives for themselves, regardless of their background. For many immigrants, this vision has served as a source of hope, drawing people from around the world to a country that defines itself as a provider of opportunity and freedom. In this sense, the United States has not only come to symbolize freedom, but has also represented the possibility of advancement and the ability to shape and improve one’s own future.

While this depiction is compelling, it has failed to accurately reflect the reality of the U.S. From its earliest history, it is apparent that the United States has struggled to live up to its own idealized concepts of freedom. For example, the same nation that declared that “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence was also founded on systems of slavery and exclusion (National Archives, 1776). Though the history of the United States is one of an independent nation, freedom expanded over time through movements like abolition and civil rights, and even remains a challenge today. For example, although the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s led to major legal changes, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this did not mean that equal rights were entirely attained. In the present day, these tensions continue within debates over discrimination, accessibility, and representation, and resonate in situations such as restricted voting rights, prison labor, and lack of basic necessities like housing, to name a few (Brennan Center, 2025; ACLU, 2022; Eviction Lab, 2018). These examples suggest that freedom in the United States is not a completed achievement, but an ongoing process- one that requires constant effort to maintain and is vulnerable to setbacks when that effort weakens.

As this history reflects a tension between ideals and realities, is it not solely unique to the United States. There too is a different, if less widely known, story to tell about Ukraine, which offers another perspective on freedom. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union as a result of its dissolution in 1991, Ukraine began building a democratic system, though it came with political instability and public disapproval of the corrupt government. A significant social moment that reflected this disapproval was the Euromaidan, which began in late 2013 as a response to the Ukrainian government’s abandonment of plans to integrate more closely with the European Union.

Initially, the protests began small but quickly became a nationwide movement that demanded political change, accountability, and transparency from the government.

The continuous protests and growing tensions eventually led to the removal of the president, which serves as a mark in Ukrainian politics. (BBC News, 2014). These events, rather than highlighting a stable or firmly established democracy, have instead shown how freedom in Ukraine, much like in the United States, depends on the active involvement and awareness of citizens, especially in times when a political institution fails to represent them.

This contradiction between ideal and reality can be traced back to the founding of the United States. This tension did not end with the Declaration of Independence but rather became embedded in the legal and political structures that followed.

The U.S. Constitution, often seen as the foundation of American democracy, both expanded and limited the meaning of freedom. While it established a system of representative government and protections for certain individual rights, such as freedom of speech, religion, and due process under the law, the Constitution also reflected inequalities of its time, as these rights were not extended to all members of society. For example, the Three Fifths Compromise counted enslaved individuals as three-fifths of a person for purposes of representation, which increased political power for slaveholding states without actually granting enslaved people any rights (Britannica). At the same time, voting remained largely restricted to white male property owners, excluding enslaved African Americans, women, and poor white men, while Native Americans were often treated as outside the political community altogether and denied citizenship rights, as they were not broadly recognized as U.S. citizens until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924 (National Archives). In practice, American society depended on slavery for its economy, with enslaved individuals legally defined as property rather than citizens. These contradictions of freedom were not abstract but were actually reinforced through law and practice, defining who could fully participate in American society. Laws such as the Naturalization Act of 1790, limiting citizenship to “free white persons,” and the Alien and Sedition Acts, allowing the federal government to limit speech and target immigrants (National Archives), reveal how even core liberties such as the freedom of speech and expression could be limited and restricted (National Archives; EBSCO; Immigration History, 1790).

Importantly, these early limitations did not disappear in later years but instead continued to shape American society in new forms as the nation expanded. This is evident in the decades following the Civil War. For instance, though the abolition of slavery was a major achievement of the U.S., there still existed internal biases and beliefs that prevented people from willingly integrating former slaves into society. Even though the addition of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments attempted to redefine citizenship and political rights, southern society found loopholes to keep African Americans oppressed (Gilder Lehrman Institute). As Reconstruction came to an end, southern states introduced Jim Crow Laws, which enforced racial segregation and restricted Black political participation, while groups forming in society, such as the Ku Klux Klan, used violence to maintain racial hierarchies (Gilder Lehrman Institute). Economic systems like sharecropping further limited freedom by trapping many formerly enslaved individuals in cycles of debt with the disguise of receiving a fair trade of crops in return for their labor, and in turn restricting their independence despite formal legal changes (Gilder Lehrman Institute). Together,

these developments suggest that rather than being removed, the challenges to freedom were simply reshaped.

Throughout these periods, a consistent pattern emerges, which is that the expansion of rights is often followed by new forms of restriction. This pattern reveals that freedom in the United States has developed through an ongoing process of struggle rather than steady progress or final resolution.

While the failures of Reconstruction demonstrated how easily progress could be reversed, they also set the stage for continued efforts to expand and redefine freedom in the United States. In the mid-twentieth century, the Civil Rights Movement marked one of the most significant attempts to challenge the inequalities that had persisted since the nation's founding. Through protests and organization, activists sought to end systems of segregation and secure equal rights under the law. These efforts led to major legislative achievements, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, both of which aimed to eliminate discrimination and expand access to political participation (National Archives; Gilder Lehrman Institute). For a moment, these changes suggested that the United States was moving closer to fulfilling its founding ideals. Yet, much like earlier periods, these gains did not mark a final resolution. Instead, the struggle for civil rights continued in new forms, reflecting the persistence of underlying inequalities.

In recent years, debates over voting rights have once again highlighted the fragility of democratic participation. Research from the Brennan Center for Justice found that dozens of restrictive voting laws were enacted across multiple states in 2025, including measures that limited early voting, imposed stricter identification requirements, and reduced access to mail-in ballots. These policies, while often justified as efforts to protect election integrity, have been criticized for disproportionately affecting marginalized communities and limiting access to the political process, though the percentage of fraud by voters is rare. (Brennan Center, 2026, Brennan Center, 2017). In this sense, the right to vote, often considered a fundamental element of democracy and freedom, remains challenged rather than secure.

At the same time, other areas of American society reveal similar tensions. The continued use of prison labor, for example, raises questions about the limits of freedom within the legal system. Although the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, it included an exception allowing involuntary labor as punishment for a crime (ACLU, 2022). As a result, many incarcerated individuals are required to work under conditions that lack basic labor protections. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, a significant portion of incarcerated people (approximately two-thirds) perform labor, often receiving minimal or no pay while facing consequences for refusing to work (ACLU, 2022). Likewise, issues such as housing insecurity and eviction further demonstrate how access to basic stability can influence an individual's ability to participate fully in society. Studies from Eviction Lab have shown that eviction can reduce voter turnout, suggesting that economic conditions play a direct role in shaping democratic participation (Eviction Lab, 2023).

These examples suggest that freedom is not only defined by legal rights, but also by the conditions that make those rights meaningful. This idea is reflected in the work of Paulo Freire, who argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that liberation requires both awareness and action. Freire

emphasizes that individuals must recognize systems of inequality and actively work to challenge them, rather than passively accepting existing conditions (Freire, 1970).

When applied to the United States, this perspective helps explain why moments of progress, such as the Civil Rights Movement, require continued engagement to be sustained. Without ongoing participation and accountability, earlier gains can weaken over time. In this way, the persistence of modern challenges, from voting access to economic inequality, reflects not a failure of freedom, but its ongoing and unfinished nature. In fact, when viewed from a broader perspective, it becomes clear that the challenges of maintaining freedom extend beyond any single nation, as seen in more recent efforts to establish and defend democratic systems in countries such as Ukraine.

While the United States demonstrates how struggles over freedom can unfold over centuries, Ukraine presents a more recent and immediate example of how liberty must be actively established and defended. Following the Dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine declared independence and began the complex process of building a democratic state. The demand for independence was strongly supported by the population, as the national referendum that was held in December 1991 revealed more than 90 percent of voters supported independence, signaling a widespread desire for a democratic state. (CSCE, 1991). However, much like earlier periods in American history, this initial expansion did not resolve deeper challenges. Instead, Ukraine in the following years faced political instability, corruption, and tensions over its national direction, demonstrating that independence alone does not guarantee a stable or fully developed democratic system.

These challenges became particularly visible during the Euromaidan, which began in November 2013 after the Ukrainian government decided to postpone an agreement that would have strengthened ties with the European Union. What initially began as student-led demonstrations in Kyiv's Maidan Square quickly expanded into mass protests involving hundreds of thousands of participants across the country.

As government responses became increasingly forceful, the protests escalated, resulting in violent clashes and the deaths of over 100 demonstrators (BBC News, 2014). By early 2014, the movement had led to the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich, marking a major shift in Ukraine's political trajectory (BBC News, 2014).

At the same time, these developments did not mark a final resolution of Ukraine's democratic struggles. Instead, they revealed the need for continued public engagement, reform, and national stability, which remained central to Ukraine's development in the years that followed. In this way, Ukraine's experience reflects a pattern similar to the one seen in the United States, where moments of expansion such as independence or political reform, are often followed by new challenges that test the strength of democratic establishments. Together, these examples suggest that freedom is not secured through a single event, but must be continually maintained through active participation and support.

When considered together, the experiences of the United States and Ukraine suggest that freedom is not a fixed or permanent condition, but an ongoing process shaped by both progress and resistance. In the United States, the expansion of rights, from the abolition of slavery to the

Civil Rights Movement, has often been followed by new forms of limitation, illustrating that liberty must be continuously protected rather than assumed.

Similarly, Ukraine's path since independence, from the 1991 referendum to the Euromaidan, reveals how democratic systems depend on active participation and become vulnerable to instability once that participation weakens or gets abandoned. In both cases, moments of progress have required effort to be preserved, while setbacks have exposed the fragility of political and social rights.

Ultimately, these histories challenge the idea that freedom can ever be fully achieved. Instead, they suggest that liberty depends on the continued presence of certain conditions, including civic awareness and engagement, courage, and access to the social and economic resources that make participation possible. Without these foundations, even established democracies can experience limitations on rights, while newer systems struggle to maintain stability. Viewed in this way, freedom is not something that a nation simply possesses, but something that must be continually enacted and redefined by its people. This perspective not only reframes the history of the United States and Ukraine, but also raises broader questions about how democratic societies can sustain liberty in the future.

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WAR, INFORMATION, AND DEMOCRACY: UKRAINE'S APPROACH TO DECENTRALIZED TRANSPARENCY

Abstract. This essay explores the development of decentralized, citizen-led digital transparency networks in Ukraine, from their origins in post-Soviet governance challenges to their expansion during the ongoing war with Russia. The analysis examines how open-source intelligence communities and anti-corruption platforms have strengthened democratic accountability by improving access to information, supporting independent verification, and increasing public participation. The essay also examines how these systems challenge authoritarian governance by limiting control over information and exposing misinformation. In addition, the essay considers the limitations of these networks, including issues of misinformation, ethical concerns, and long-term sustainability. This examination highlights how Ukraine's use of digital transparency contributes to broader state-building processes while demonstrating the resilience of democratic governance during conflict.

Introduction

Ukraine's development of decentralized, citizen-led digital transparency networks reflects broader efforts to address long-standing governance challenges while adapting to the pressures of ongoing conflict. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has faced persistent issues related to corruption, weak institutional trust, and uneven democratic consolidation. In response, both state institutions and civil society actors have increasingly turned toward transparency to improve accountability, particularly using digital tools and open data systems. These efforts have become significantly more visible during the war with Russia, where access to information and the ability to verify events in real time have taken on greater importance.

The expansion of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) networks and public transparency platforms has reshaped how information is produced, shared, and evaluated, allowing citizens to play a more active role in monitoring both government actions and wartime developments. At the same time, these systems have contributed to strengthening democratic accountability by increasing visibility and limiting the ability of actors to control information. However, while these networks offer clear advantages, they also introduce new challenges related to misinformation, ethical concerns, and sustainability.

Origins of digital transparency in Ukraine

Ukraine's system of digital transparency developed gradually in response to structural governance challenges that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly the concentration of political and economic power among elites and the resulting lack of public trust in state institutions. Throughout the post-Soviet period, corruption remained a persistent issue,

shaping both domestic politics and public perceptions of legitimacy, as Ukraine continued to face “a lack of political will, poor governance, corruption, military weakness, and dysfunctional law enforcement” (*Iryna Solonenko, 2015*).

These conditions contributed to growing dissatisfaction with formal institutions and created an opportunity for civil society organizations to push for reforms that emphasized openness, accountability, and citizen involvement, particularly during key political moments such as the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan protests. These movements highlighted the limitations of formal democratic structures and reinforced the idea that legitimacy depended not only on elections, but also on sustained public oversight. Over time, new forms of digital participation began to change how accountability could work in practice, as “the online community is filming, posting and resharing evidence of Russian war crimes... in the hope that someday, victims might hold the guilty to account” (*Jack Crawford and Andrea Ricci, 2024*).

One of the most significant outcomes of these reform efforts was the introduction of digital governance tools, especially open-data platforms designed to increase transparency. The establishment of ProZorro in 2016 marked a major institutional shift, operating on “the main principle of eProcurement system: ‘Everyone can see everything.’” (*Nadiia Konashchuk, 2016*).

This system enabled public access to procurement processes, allowing journalists, watchdog organizations, and citizens to monitor state spending, as the platform “publishes the structured data online... [and] these achievements represent an outstanding opening in the area of access to information... [and] progress in civic participation...” (*Open Government Partnership*).

Procurement reform made it easier for people to see how public money and other assets are being used and spot potential corruption. By embedding transparency into formal systems, Ukraine moved toward a model in which accountability is supported by both institutional structures and public engagement.

Early forms of OSINT began to emerge, especially following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. These networks relied on publicly available data, including satellite imagery and social media content, to track developments and verify events. OSINT is defined as “intelligence produced by collecting, evaluating and analyzing publicly available information with the purpose of answering a specific intelligence question,” often outside traditional state-controlled frameworks (*Ritu Gill, 2023*).

Through this, information gathering became more decentralized, allowing non-state actors to contribute directly to analysis and verification processes.

Expansion during wartime conditions

The full-scale, illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 accelerated the expansion of decentralized transparency networks, as the need for timely and reliable information increased under conditions of conflict. As state institutions faced operational pressure, citizen-led initiatives expanded rapidly, filling gaps in information collection and verification. OSINT communities became central to documenting the war, using techniques such as geolocation, satellite analysis, and cross-referencing digital evidence to track developments in real time. This transformation has been described as the emergence of a “transparent battlefield,” in which conflicts are increasingly visible through publicly accessible data (*Nicholas Romanow, 2025*).

The structure of these networks reflects a high degree of decentralization, with a wide range of actors contributing to information gathering and analysis. Rather than relying on a single

institutional framework, this system draws from multiple streams of publicly available data, as “these public sources can range from... unencrypted radio messages [to] public social media posts.” (*Vanessa Smith-Boyle, 2022*).

This variety of inputs allows different actors, including journalists, investigators, civil society organizations, and volunteers, to participate in collecting and interpreting information, strengthening the overall depth and reliability of available intelligence. As a result, these networks can respond quickly and flexibly to developments, with verification and analysis occurring across multiple channels rather than through a centralized authority. Citizen participation has played an important role in this expansion, as individuals contribute images, videos, and firsthand accounts that are then analyzed within larger networks. As a result, citizens have become active participants in documenting the conflict, rather than just passive observers.

Strengthening democratic accountability

Decentralized transparency networks have strengthened democratic accountability in Ukraine by increasing visibility into state actions and reducing the likelihood that misconduct can remain hidden. Unlike traditional oversight methods that rely primarily on centralized institutions, these systems distribute monitoring capabilities across a range of actors, making it more difficult to suppress information. This shift has contributed to a more open political environment, where information can be independently verified and widely shared. Independent verification represents one of the most significant functions of these networks, particularly in a conflict setting where competing narratives are common. OSINT investigators have used digital evidence to confirm events such as missile strikes and troop movements, ensuring that “the auditing and verification of all digital items... can be carried out by referring to the third-party record holders (*Starling Lab, 2023*).

This approach allows claims to be tested against independently preserved evidence rather than relying solely on official statements or single sources. By combining web archives, metadata, and field documentation, investigators create an evidence base that is more resistant to manipulation or distortion, since having multiple sources makes it much harder for false information to go unchecked. This ability to systematically verify information strengthens trust in reporting and reduces the influence of misinformation, particularly in fast-moving conflict environments where false narratives can spread quickly.

In addition to improving verification, these systems have expanded opportunities for civic participation by allowing individuals to contribute directly to monitoring and reporting processes. This reflects key democratic principles that emphasize the importance of public engagement in governance. Recently, this has taken the form of distributed investigative efforts and documentation of Russia’s ongoing strikes on Ukraine’s infrastructure, including civilian missile impacts, Iranian Shahed drone attacks on energy facilities, and damage to urban areas in cities such as Kharkiv and Odesa. Civilians and volunteer investigators frequently share videos and images of these incidents, which are then cross-referenced with satellite imagery and archived to confirm timing, location, and impact. Documentation of civilian killings in Bucha used satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies alongside open-source material to challenge Russian narratives about what happened and when. John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher with the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, stated that OSINT has been “an unprecedented amount of information, and

[it is] making the... operation of Russia's propagandists a lot harder," as there used to be no widely available way of contradicting with factual evidence false narratives (*Kazi Stastna, 2022*).

These examples demonstrate the necessity of civilian participation and collaboration with fellow civilians and larger groups to track down information and holding individuals or groups accountable. By fostering ongoing participation, rather than limiting involvement to periodic democratic processes, decentralized transparency networks strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state while reinforcing accountability.

Challenging authoritarian governance

The rise of decentralized transparency networks in Ukraine also challenges governance models that rely on tightly controlled information environments. In such systems, authority is often maintained by limiting access to information, shaping what can be publicly seen, and controlling how events are presented. Ukraine's wartime information environment makes this harder by allowing multiple, independent ways of collecting and sharing evidence that do not depend on official sources and continue to exist alongside state or military communications.

This has been seen in the documentation of forced deportations and filtration practices in occupied territories, where satellite imagery, transport logs, and leaked administrative records have been combined to reconstruct civilian movement patterns. In doing so, this documentation directly challenges authoritarian governance by limiting the ability of authorities to conceal or selectively present what is happening on the ground. For instance, open-source investigators tracked transit routes from Mariupol to filtration sites in Russia-occupied regions by aligning train schedules with Telegram posts and commercial satellite captures (*Dean Kirby, 2023*).

Similarly, analysts monitoring the early years of the expanded war have examined recovered battlefield components to understand evolving strike capabilities. The components have included "'universal planning and correction' modules... (UMPK)... can be attached to Russian FAB-250 or FAB-500 general purpose air-dropped munitions to increase their range and add an element of guidance... 'dumb' bombs..." (*Conflict Armament Research*).

These findings show that verification becomes distributed across many independently maintained datasets, reducing the ability of any one authority to fully define the narrative.

The resilience of these networks is also supported by their presence across multiple platforms. Information related to battlefield developments is frequently shared across messaging applications, mapping tools, and satellite databases, making it difficult for any single actor to fully remove or control it. Because information is not managed by one central source, this structure limits the ability to shape or restrict narratives in the same way as centralized systems. As a result, transparency develops through the accumulation of independently verified pieces of evidence, rather than through a single controlled channel.

Limitations and ongoing challenges

Despite their advantages, decentralized transparency systems still face several ongoing challenges. One major issue is that different investigative groups often use different methods to verify information, which can lead to inconsistent results. For example, during the July 2024 attack on a pediatric hospital in Kyiv, "which killed over 35 people..., injured another 190 "OSINT investigators" in Ukraine, and further afield were quick to identify the make and composition of the Kh-101 missile that hit the hospital, denying Russia the opportunity to mask the attack (*Crawford and Ricci, "Puzzling Pieces"*).

Another challenge is the growing use of disinformation within open data spaces. False or manipulated content, including AI-generated images and altered drone footage, has increasingly been used to confuse or mislead users. In some cases, fake material has circulated alongside real evidence, making it harder to distinguish what is accurate. As a result, investigators have had to rely on more advanced methods, such as checking metadata or analyzing visual details like shadows, to confirm authenticity.

Ethical concerns have also become more important as these practices expand. For instance, reconstructing attack timelines in heavily populated areas like Kherson can raise questions about whether sharing detailed, location-based information might unintentionally put civilians at risk. In response, some groups have started delaying the release of sensitive information or removing certain details to balance transparency with safety. Finally, maintaining these systems over time remains a challenge. The amount of data collected, from satellite imagery to drone footage and civilian uploads, is extremely large and continues to grow. This creates pressure on storage systems and makes it difficult to organize and analyze information efficiently. Some organizations are beginning to test new ways of storing and backing up data, but these solutions are not yet widely adopted, making long-term sustainability an ongoing concern. Overall, while decentralized digital transparency networks experience challenges, they have become a key part of how accountability, information sharing, and public participation function in Ukraine and aim to limit the role of propaganda from authoritarian regimes.

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A WEAPON OF WAR: RUSSIAN PERPETRATION AGAINST UKRAINIANS SINCE 2022

Introduction:

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the conflict has been marred by full-scale violence, displacement, and violations of humanitarian law. Among these grievances, include the use of sexual violence against Ukrainian detainees and civilians. The United Nations reports that the use of conflict-related sexual violence has been a recurring and deeply concerning feature of the war (A/HRC/58/67). Acts of this nature include rape, sexual torture, forced nudity, and other forms of abuse. Inflicted on both men and women, the conditions were often under detention or occupation (Noone 2025). While rape and sexual violence has long been considered an “unfortunate side-effect” of war, shift in focus since 2008, when rape as a method of warfare became a warcrime, has made the strategic use of sexual violence against Ukrainians not incidental (Thomas 1994) (Jayaraman 2008). It appears to be systematic and, in many cases, strategically deployed. This piece argues that acts of sexual violence that were perpetrated by Russian forces against Ukrainians function as a crime against humanity as it is systematically deployed to deliberately terrorize populations, extract information, and assert control. Through the analysis of documented cases, patterns of abuse, and the broader strategic context, this paper demonstrates that sexual violence in Ukraine is widespread as well as purposeful, while also addressing the challenges of documentation, accountability, and capacity building.

Defining Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Conflict related sexual violence refers to “refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict,” as defined in a report written by Secretary General Antonio Guterres (Guterres 2019). Depending on their scale and intent, these acts are recognized as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and in certain cases, even acts of genocide under International Law (Stachow 2019).

In Russia’s use of CRSV, the violence is not limited to just against women, men and children are also frequently victims, particularly in detention settings (Edwards 2025). Furthermore, CRSV has not been confined to a single pattern or location, but instead appears across multiple regions under Russian control. In these occupied territories, sexual violence has been reported to have occurred during house searching, at military checkpoints, and in improvised detention sites. These acts have occurred alongside beatings, lootings, and threats of execution (Straw 2025).

In detention centers, prisoner-of-war facilities, and more formalized settings, the violence takes on a more structured and repetitive role. Survivors have described environments in which

guards or interrogators would exercise total control over them, often over extended periods of time. Since this pattern has been replicated in multiple different regions, this underscores that CRSV is not incidental to a specific battlefield but embedded throughout various layers of strategy over occupation and captivity. In Russian practice, sexual violence often intersects with other forms of abuse, especially torture and coercive interrogation practices. Testimonies from survivors describe sexual violence occurring during questioning sessions, used to extract information or force confessions. Moreover, victims report being beaten, deprived of sleep, electrocuted, then subjected to sexual assault or humiliation (Deutsch 2023).

When sexual violence is used systematically in partnership with interrogation, is divorces from being opportunistic or driven by individual misconduct alone, instead, it reflects consistent patterns with institutional tolerance.

Furthermore, the recurrence of these methods across regions strengthens the assertion that sexual violence serves a functional role within the broader system of control. It is deployed with the purpose to assert dominance over civilian populations, communicate the futility of resistance, and break prisoners psychologically. The combination of abuses magnifies its broader social and political impact, for individuals, long-term trauma extends beyond immediate physical harm, including difficulty reintegrating into communities, isolation, and shame (John Hopkins 2015).

When this kind of violence becomes acknowledged within a community, whether through public rumors or direct testimony, it would create widespread fear, which discourages others from resisting or cooperating with Ukrainian authorities. In this way, the consequences of CRSV have a multiplied effect, contributing to the destabilization of social structures and weakening collective resilience. These patterns reinforce the conclusion that sexual violence in Ukraine is being used not only to harm specific individuals, but also to achieve the long-term goal of military and political oppression perpetrated by Russian forces. Through embedding sexual violence within already created systems of torture and control, perpetrators are maximizing the effectiveness of the tools of domination, making it a central threat rather than peripheral.

Scale and Scope of the Violence

Due to underreporting and the limited capacity of affected areas, quantifying the full extent of sexual violence in Ukraine is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, available data provides a clear indication of the scale of the problem. In the time period of the 24th of February 2022 to the 31st of August 2024, the Human Rights Monitoring Mission had documented 376 cases of CRSV against 262 men, 102 women, 10 girls, and 2 boys (Janowski 2024).

Some UN agencies have documented up to 433 incidents in the same time frame (UN Women 2025). Military personnel, law enforcement officers, and prison authorities perpetrate these cases of sexual violence. Additionally, global monitoring bodies as well as Ukrainian officials emphasize that these numbers likely represent only a fraction of the actual number of incidents due to underreporting caused by lack of forensic capacity, social shame, and distrust of enforcement mechanisms (Wamsley 2022).

In terms of documented cases though, a significant proportion of cases occurred in detention settings (Edwards 2025). In these cases, survivors have reported being subjected to repeated acts of sexual violence, usually in conjunction with physical torture and psychological abuse. These environments are purposely created to be isolated and with complete control in the captor's hands, creating conditions in which abuse can be systematically carried out with impunity. Testimonies

from these environments indicate that sexual violence is not rare or isolated but a common experience among detainees (Kottasova and Voitovych 2024).

While most cases occur in areas of detention, sexual violence in Ukraine has also been widely documented in civilian contexts, particularly in areas that were under Russian occupied during the early phases of the invasion. In civilian settings, violence is often perpetrated in highly personal and invasive spaces, such as in the safety and privacy of the victims own home (Fernandez-Powell 2023).

Accounts have been recorded of survivors describing being assaulted during house raids, interrogations, or searches. Armed soldiers who entered without warning and exercised complete control over the environment (McKernan 2022) often perpetrate these.

Many cases included assaults being carried out at gunpoint or under explicit threats of violence against family members, including threats against children or elderly relatives present in the home. This civilian setting further intensifies the psychological impact of the violence. Sexual violence is not transformed from an individual trauma to a collective experience of terror when attacks occur in front of family members or within shared living spaces. Now, witnesses such as spouses and children are often forced to observe helplessly, deepening both immediate fear and long-term psychological harm. Now, the home is a site of violation, stripping the victim from its sense of security and reinforcing the totality of control that can be exercised by Russian forces.

Beyond the immediate victims of these incidents, fear is further generated to create insecurity throughout entire communities. Furthermore, when word of such assaults spread throughout occupied areas, whether through direct testimony, visible signs of violence, or rumors, residents may alter their behavior, from avoiding public spaces to refraining from contact with authorities or resistance networks, creating mass disillusionment in the trust of Ukrainian enforcement mechanisms and solidifying Russian social control (Seelinger 2022).

In the case at hand, civilian-targeted sexual violence operates as a component of a broader strategy of occupation. It reinforces the notion that all forms of resistance or non-compliance would carry severe consequences, and most importantly, teaches civilians that no space is safe.

Patterns and Methods of Abuse

One of the most consistent patterns identified in reports is the use of sexual violence in detention facilities, including rape, forced nudity, and genital torture (Gorbunova 2025). These acts are often carried out during interrogations and are used as tools of coercion and punishment. The systemic nature of these abuses is particularly evident in the repetition and consistency of survivor testimonies (Novytska 2025).

Many victims report being subjected to repeated instances of sexual violence over extended periods, often by different perpetrators. In some cases, the abuse is done to attempt to extract information, with the perpetrators using or threatening sexual violence to force confessions or compel cooperation. This pattern strongly supports the conclusion that CRSV is being systematically deployed as a method of torture.

Furthermore, what is also significant about the use of CRSV is the number of male victims. While in most war contexts, sexual violence disproportionately affects women, evidence from Ukraine demonstrates that men are frequently targeted, especially in detention centers (United Nations Population Fund 2024).

These torture methods against men were specifically designed to humiliate and emasculate victims, such as electric shocks to the genitals or forced sexual acts. The targeting of men in these

cases underscores the broader purpose of sexual violence in this context as being driven not by sexual desire but to dominate, degrade, and psychologically destroy victims. This use of CRSV is done with the purpose of reinforcing power hierarchies and serves as a means of asserting control over individuals and groups.

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence provided demonstrates that the use of CRSV in Ukraine is not an incidental byproduct of war, but part of a broader strategy deployed by Russian forces since the invasion in 2022. The repetition of instances across detention facilities, civilian households, and occupied territories, especially alongside other forms of abuse, suggests a patterned method of control rather than isolated misconduct by individual perpetrators. Furthermore, when sexual violence is systematically integrated into detention centers and interrogation practices, it functions as a tool of domination designed to extract information and punish resistance.

Simultaneously, the documentation of civilian-targeted sexual violence highlights the method of control deployed by Russian forces against Ukrainian people. Through assaulting individuals in their home, at times in front of family members, these traumatic acts extend beyond the immediate victim and into the community. The home is seen as a space of safety and stability, when violated, it turns into a site of fear and vulnerability that is to be replicated in the environment. Sexual violence is now used as a mechanism of population control.

Ultimately, the patterns of violence documented in Ukraine strongly support the conclusion that the methods of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian forces constitute a crime against humanity. Through the recognition of this reality, we can ensure accountability and justice for survivors.

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THE COMPLEXITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AT THE INTERSECTION OF SPAIN, FRANCE, AND AN INCIPIENT UNITED STATES

Abstract. This article examines the construction and contestation of African American identity through the lens of historical memory, emphasizing the interconnected roles of Spain, France, and the early United States. Drawing on the concept of historical memory as a socially constructed narrative that shapes collective and national identity, the study argues that processes of remembering and erasure have profoundly influenced both the recognition of African American contributions and broader definitions of American belonging. It situates contemporary political efforts to narrow national identity through policies, legal decisions, and the suppression of Black history within a longer tradition of selective historical narration.

The author highlights the marginalization of Spain's role in the American Revolution and its intersection with the underrepresentation of African Americans. Through a detailed case study of Jane Henderson Bronner, a descendant of an enslaved woman freed through then Governor of Louisiana Bernardo de Gálvez' intervention, the paper illustrates how personal genealogies expose the transnational and multiracial foundations of the United States. This encounter reveals the entanglement of memory, identity, and recognition across time and space.

Ultimately, the article argues that African American identity cannot be fully understood within a purely national framework. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of Atlantic histories, shaped by colonial alliances, slavery, and the politics of memory. By recovering overlooked narratives, the study calls for a more inclusive understanding of American identity that acknowledges its global, multilingual, and multicultural origins.

Keywords: African American identity; historical memory; collective memory; national identity; Spain and the American Revolution; Bernardo de Gálvez; Jane Henderson Bronner; historical erasure; transnational history; race and citizenship; identity politics; memory and nationalism.

Historical memory is a concept that supposes making certain choices regarding what and how to remember as well as the recognition that what is remembered (and what is forgotten or erased) has an impact on national identity. Today, this process of selective remembrance is visible in the deliberate reshaping of public historical narratives: African Americans' contributions to the

United States and key elements of their history are currently being erased from federal sites such as national parks, military bases and museums.

In fact, as Angelo Villagomez, Mariam Rashid and Kendra Hughes argue “Through a multipronged strategy that includes purging diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, pushing for changes in school curricula, and censoring museum exhibits, the administration has implemented a series of orders to reduce access to public areas and censor and rewrite historical exhibits, particularly those targeting the history and impact of Black Americans on public lands” (Villagomez et al, 2026). Unfortunately, as the authors point out, this erasure, despite the aggressivity which characterizes many of the current iconoclastic administration’s moves, is not new. Those African Americans whose contributions have been recognized all had to fight long and hard for that recognition, making the current rollbacks that much more devastating.

It isn’t just African Americans who are being once again excluded from the category of true Americans. The question of American identity is becoming increasingly narrow and tinged with religious, ethnic and even linguistic litmus tests which generations had sought to remove from the definition of who belongs. On September 8, 2025, in the case *Noem v. Vasquez-Perdomo*, the Supreme Court’s “shadow docket” declared in a 6-3 decision that factors such as speaking Spanish, accented English or “apparent race or ethnicity” are legitimate reasons for suspicion that a person is illegally in the US and therefore may be detained and questioned by immigration officers. Additionally, a bill proposed on December 1, 2025 by Senator Bernie Moreno (Republican of Ohio, born in Colombia) entitled “Exclusive Citizenship Act of 2025” would prohibit dual citizenship for U.S. citizens who would therefore be forced to renounce their U.S. citizenship to keep one or more others.

But if national narratives always have an element of mythmaking, the efforts to shape how the nation is viewed inside and out don’t wait for some new radical regime to make sweeping changes in it, these narratives begin immediately, or even in media res. In the national discourse around autonomy (a necessary concomitant to narratives of liberation from the yoke of foreign powers) we see how the myths of sovereignty and national identity are constructed. For example, Charles de Gaulle in his famous speech upon the liberation of Paris on August 25, 1944 strategically omitted the key role of the Allies (“Paris! Paris outragé! Paris brisé! Paris martyrisé! Mais Paris libéré! Libéré par lui-même, libéré par son peuple avec le concours des armées de la France, avec l'appui et le concours de la France tout entière, de la France qui se bat, de la seule France, de la vraie France, de la France éternelle.” / “Paris martyred! But Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people, with the help of the armies of France, with the support and co-operation of the whole of France, the France that fights, the only France, the true France, the eternal France!”). Acknowledging France’s deep dependance on the United States and Great Britain in the time of its greatest vulnerability is not nearly as good a story as that of France liberating itself.

Similarly, the contribution of Spain to the birth of the United States, as well as that of African-Americans, has been strategically erased for fairly clear reasons related in part to the popularity of the figure of the French general, the Marquis de Lafayette who was very close to George Washington and much better known in the United States than Bernardo de Gálvez, the Spanish military leader and governor of Spanish Louisiana. The erasure of the latter’s role and emphasis on that of the former in the narrative of the United States’ fight for independence is also a consequence to the perceived prestige of being helped by France, home of the Enlightenment

rather than by Spain, a country whose reputation was still suffering from the effects of the “Black Legend”.

Some of the complexities around these issues came to the fore on September 19 and 20th, 2025 at a symposium entitled “Spain and the Birth of American Democracy” held at the stately Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Constitution Hall in Washington DC, just a few blocks from the White House. Co-organized by the DAR, the Fundación Ramón Areces and the Queen Sofía Spanish Institute, the symposium was designed to right a historical wrong: namely, the lack of recognition in the United States of Spain’s role in fending off British troops during the American Revolution. Throughout the two-day conference, scholars spoke about the contributions of Bernardo de Gálvez in the American struggle, analyzing both the geopolitical objectives of Spain as well as the reasons why this collaboration has been seldom celebrated in the US.



Jane Henderson Bronner explains that her ancestor benefitted from manumission by Bernardo de Gálvez to Queen Sofía of Spain at DAR Constitution Hall in Washington DC, Sep 19, 2025.

Yet, the most dramatic moment of the symposium stemmed not from one of the scholarly talks but from an impromptu and historic meeting between Queen Sofía of Spain and an African American woman with a fascinating story to tell. On the second and final day of the symposium, Dr. Richard Kagan, a distinguished emeritus History professor at Johns Hopkins University, directly addressed Queen Sofia (mother of King Felipe VI) in his talk on the “erasure” of Spain’s role in aiding the Americans during the Revolutionary War. It was at the end of this speech that Jane Henderson Bronner, accompanied by family members, approached the Queen in the audience and began to speak to her as a small crowd gathered to hear what she had to say.

Through tears, she explained that she is the descendant of Mathieu Devaux, a French merchant who served in the New Orleans militia during the Revolutionary War under Governor Bernardo de Gálvez. Gálvez is credited with contributing significantly to the war effort by forming a battalion that defeated the British in two key battles in Florida and Louisiana and by providing critical aid to American troops such as weapons, ammunition and cattle. Henderson Bronner went on to explain how her great-great grandmother, Agnes Mathieu, was an enslaved person and the

wife of Mathieu Devaux. After 30 years of research, her brother Michael (also present) discovered that Gálvez personally signed the manumission document by which her enslaved ancestor was freed. Mrs. Henderson Bronner expressed her gratitude to the Spanish state (as represented by Queen Sofía), since her enslaved ancestor never had the chance to do so. Following her emotional speech, which the Queen who speaks English fluently listened to attentively, the two embraced.

What is truly striking about this moment is how it encapsulates the complexities of identity in colonial America as well as today when loyalties, rights, and the struggle for historical memory preservation collide. Henderson Bronner is an African American descendant of an enslaved woman and a Frenchman who fought alongside Spaniards, American colonists and enslaved people for a Spaniard (who governed a huge territory ceded to Spain by France later to be incorporated into the United States). Her membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution serves, as it does for other African American members who fought to be accepted in this association, as validation of her deep connections to a key historical moment in US history.

And yet, it was Spain that freed her ancestor, not the United States. To what nation did Agnes owe greater allegiance? We do not know the nature of her relationship with the Frenchman whose children she bore, nor whether he had a sense of national belonging, but her life was clearly deeply marked by marginality as were the lives of her descendants.

Today, as larger battles play out over historical memory, something both Spain struggles with as regards the Franco regime, the meaning of including Spain's role in the American Revolution dovetails with Henderson Bronner's efforts at recognition of her own identity, linked as it is to three continents: Africa, Europe and North America. There are thousands more just like Henderson Bronner, who likely unbeknownst to them are ancestors of enslaved people with links to revolutionary fighters or who fought themselves and whose lives were touched by foreign intervention in favor of the United States.

In some ways, it was ironically fitting for the question of recognition to come up at the end of a conference whose entire purpose was to demonstrate how Spain's contribution to the birth of America has gone largely unnoticed (as Dr. Kagan particularly pointed out, for over a century few books were written on this topic and to this day it is little taught in American schools). This impromptu act of connection across the centuries – below the gilded Constitution Hall's stage – reflected the difficulty to make heard many voices which have been left out of the story of the birth of the United States. Not coincidentally, up until 1976, the DAR did not recognize any person of color's ancestral links to revolutionary soldiers, thus keeping them symbolically and literally outside. Henderson Bronner's final poignant statement, "I too am a daughter of the American Revolution," points to this past policy of erasure, giving a voice to the thousands before her who were denied one. Like that of Latinos whose ancestors can have ties to three different continents and as many nations, and despite decades of efforts to combat such marginalization, African Americans' sense of belonging remains contested, a fact underscored by the fragility and scarcity of their political representation in the United States Congress from which all four current Black Republican representatives have just announced their departure.

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INNOCENCE, FANTASY, AND DANGER: THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR THROUGH THE LENS OF CHILDHOOD CURIOSITY

Abstract: This article examines how Spanish cinema engages with the contested historical memory of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the subsequent dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975) through the lens of childhood, fantasy, and curiosity. Focusing on Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*), Del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo* (*The Devil's Backbone*), and *El laberinto del fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth*), the paper argues that child protagonists, detached from any political ideology, offer a powerful narrative framework for exploring trauma, repression, and moral resistance. Their encounters with supernatural or imagined worlds contrast sharply with the violent realities of war and dictatorship, highlighting both the persistence of innocence and its vulnerability.

The analysis situates these films within broader debates over Spain's historical memory, including the legacy of silence following Franco's regime and the delayed institutional recognition of its victims through Spain's 2007 law of Historical Memory (*Ley de Memoria Histórica*). It demonstrates how filmmakers employ fantasy, allegory, and symbolism to circumvent censorship (in the case of Erice) or to reach global audiences through visually rich storytelling (in the case of del Toro), while consistently humanizing victims of repression, particularly Republican resistance fighters.

Ultimately, the article contends that childhood curiosity operates as both a narrative device and a moral compass, allowing these films to reframe historical violence through empathy, wonder, and confrontation with danger. By juxtaposing innocence with brutality, these works challenge the culture of forgetting and assert the necessity of remembrance, suggesting that the imaginative resilience of children symbolizes an enduring resistance to authoritarian erasure and a commitment to preserving historical truth.

Keywords: Historical Memory; Collective Memory; National Identity; Spanish Civil War; Spain Under Franco Regime; Spanish Cinema; Political Art; Childhood; Magical Realism in Film; Guillermo Del Toro; *El Espinazo Del Diablo*; *El Laberinto Del Fauno*; Víctor Erice; *El Espíritu de la colmena*; *The Spirit of the Beehive*; *The Devil's Backbone*; *Pan's Labyrinth*; war; trauma; fascism in film

A country's historical memory reflects the values it is meant to defend, those ideas and principles that its citizens should aim to uphold, yet it is precisely for this reason that it is often subject to fierce debate. The government has a powerful role to play in the way that a country portrays its history and what narratives it prioritizes and politics is indissociable from the ways in which a nation defines itself.

Over the past decades, Spain has struggled with issues around its Historical Memory especially as concerns its Civil War (1936 – 1939) and the forty-year fascist regime that followed it. One of the arenas in which this battle over how to remember the nation's past is of course that of culture, and Spain's renowned filmmakers have frequently grappled with this question. Yet, there has always been tension in that country regarding two very different approaches to the trauma of civil war and the massive, decades-long retaliation campaign that Franco's government waged against its perceived enemies. This campaign was so pervasive that Spain is currently one of the countries that has the most mass graves with over 2000 of them and well over 100,000 victims of government terror. Many of the victims were buried in unmarked mass graves and the question of whether to dig up the bodies of the victims (known as "retaliados" or "victims of retaliation") is a central point of contention between those who wish to forget and those who feel it is crucial to remember. Many thousands, the vast majority of survivors (now elderly children or grandchildren of victims) still have not identified the bodies of their family members. Those who do not want the bodies disinterred seek to continue with a culture of silence around what happened.

In fact, after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, and the subsequent fall of his dictatorial regime, the Spanish government did not formally recognize victims of the Civil War or condemn the regime formally until 2007, when it passed the Historical Memory Law (Ley de Memoria Histórica) due to the Amnesty Pact by which it was agreed that the members of the Franco Government who were guilty of crimes wouldn't be prosecuted so as to avoid a new civil war.

However, long before the 2007 law was passed, the tragedy and despair that came with the Civil War (1936 – 1939) and the repressive Franco Regime (1939 – 1975) were already major themes reflected in Spanish cinema which subsequently has consistently produced movies reflecting on the Civil War or the Franco Regime, ranging from comedies such as *La Vaquilla* (Berlanga, 1985) or *¡Ay Carmela!* (Saura, 1990), *La reina de España* (2016) or last year's *La cena* (2025).

In contrast to the approach taken in these films, some Spanish films look back on the Civil War and the early years of the Franco regime through the lens of fantasy or magical realism, in which their child protagonists make contact with supernatural entities or enter into magical realms while the adults of the story deal with the country's political turmoil. This is the case in particular in *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*, 1973) directed by Victor Erice as well as *El espinazo del diablo* (*The Devil's Backbone*, 2001) and *El laberinto del fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth* 2006) both directed by Guillermo Del Toro – a Mexican director whose close family ties and personal interests connect him with Spain. It should be noted that Del Toro was operating in a very different economic, political and cultural atmosphere. His films come at a time when Spanish-language cinema had already triumphed both due to filmmakers such as Almodóvar and the

Mexican triumvirate of Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro, and Alejandro González Iñárritu who were making big films in the US and would all go on to win Oscars.

The three films which I am interested in here depict the violence and repression that the Franco regime imposed on political opponents, and sympathize with the Republicans (that is, those who defended the democratically elected Republican government) who are targeted by the new fascist government. Unlike the adults, the children in these movies are not politically motivated and function in a different sphere from the hopeless and politically charged environment their parents and the adults around them find themselves in. The children are mainly preoccupied by their curiosity about and fascination with supernatural forces. The very real depictions of adults in despair alongside the magical adventures of the children is meant to contrast with the bleak reality Spain was faced with. The children's access to fantastical worlds reflects their heightened wonder which goes beyond the logic of adults. This child-like sense of wonder and naïveté represents human nature untainted by ideology and wholly trusting of the world. Although broadly speaking these films share similar goals and thematic elements, the way in which each director portrays both fantastical and real historical elements differs.

Even during the Franco regime, amidst a repressive atmosphere of censorship and persecution, films such as *El espíritu de la colmena*, which attempt to tackle the nation's past and are critical of the Franco regime slipped by censors by veiling their messaging with symbolism and allegory. While Del Toro's more visionary approach makes heavy use of CGI, costumes and production design and is targeted at more wide reaching audiences, Erice's vision, due to economic and politically imposed constraints, was more tonally subdued and made use of symbols while eschewing conventional narrative structures. In short, Del Toro's audience is the world, while Erice was speaking mainly to Spaniards at a time when Spanish films were not widely distributed outside Spain (with the exception of film festivals).



The ghost of the dead boy in El espinazo del diablo (Del Toro, 2001).

Del Toro, a Mexican filmmaker with strong ties to Spain, humanizes the monsters in his films, often depicting them as misunderstood outsiders who are subject to the monstrous humans lead by fear or greed, very much like in his 2025 adaptation of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, in which Jacob Elordi gives a very sympathetic portrayal of the "monster," unlike in the novel and in

the 1931 version by James Whale, in which the monster drowns a little girl. This scene as depicted in the 1931 film appears both literally and metaphorically as the impetus for the protagonist Ana's fascination with spirits in Erice's film. The *maquis*, or Republican resistance fighter, who appears near the end of the film right after little Ana, played by 5 year-old Ana Torrent, is filmed looking up at the sky as if yearning for some kind of magic amidst the uneventful rural environment she lives in. Erice's neutral portrayal of the injured republican who is holed up, hiding in a cabin does not explicitly suggest support for the democratic regime though the little girl's curiosity and sympathy for him evokes that of the audience. This compassion contrasts with the brutality of the killing of the republican once he is discovered.

In both films, the children are guided by a curiosity which ignores signs that adult logic would perceive as dangerous and are driven by a vague instinct to do good. In Del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo*, set during the Spanish Civil War, the main character Carlos, played by 14 year-old Fernando Tielve, is sent to live in an orphanage after his father's death and ends up seeking justice for the killing of another little boy who appears to him as a ghost. Carlos' drive for justice leads him to investigate the presence of the ghost who was killed by a young man who had also been interned in the same orphanage and now works there. The presence of a bomb in the courtyard of the orphanage is an everpresent reminder of the random inhumanity of war, which is part of the cruel adult world. The bomb cannot be removed and since it is suggested that it could go off at any moment, it represents a continual threat.

The fact that the rusted bomb itself (which fell sometime before the story begins) has become a sort of artifact makes it something from the past which remains, just as the history of the country continues to shape political discourse and identity.

In *El espíritu de la colmena*, despite others' fear of such men, Ana, a little girl in a middle class family who live in an isolated area of the countryside, instinctually helps an injured republican whom she sees as a "spirit", giving him her father's clothing and wristwatch. Some time after Ana leaves the cabin he is hiding in, the republican is caught and ruthlessly gunned down by police who later call in her father and return his possessions. When Ana returns to the cabin which is now blood splattered, she is scared by her father who suddenly enters, and spontaneously flees. A police-led search is conducted for her which only finds her the next day. While she is alone in the woods, there is a sequence in which the line between reality and dream is blurred. Here, Ana imagines that she is herself the little girl she saw in the 1931 *Frankenstein* film. She is facing a lake, and is confronted by the monster, who approaches her ominously and before we see what happens, the scene ends.



Ana offers the Republican an apple in *El espíritu de la colmena* (Erice, 1973).

Cornelia Ruhe identifies the image of the monster with the repressed Maquis, which would make the scene a recontextualization of the original scene in the film in which the monster is vindicated, mirroring the director's attempts to present the humanity of the Maquis who were persecuted and negatively portrayed under Franco's rule: "la figura del monstruo de Frankenstein le sirve a Erice para representar a los republicanos españoles oprimidos bajo Franco, pero especialmente a los maquis, en su relación con la España oficial." ("The figure of Frankenstein's monster serves Erice as a way to represent the Spanish Republicans oppressed under Franco, but especially the maquis, in their relationship with official Spain." Ruhe, 43)

Ana is later found sleeping behind something, and when she is taken in and cared for by a doctor, the doctor consoles the mother by solemnly telling her that "Ana will forget." This forgetting is portrayed as the healthy desire of the Spanish people at the time to forget the horrors of the war (not the Franco regime), while the filmmaker suggests that Ana herself, who is symbolic of the nation's hopes for the future, will *not* forget. Historical memory here entails not only a remembrance of the atrocities committed during the civil war and the Franco regime, but also the recognition of the effort made by those who died or risked their lives opposing it.

Each film explores how innocence, fantasy and danger or death can intertwine for children living during moments of war or political uncertainty. Ultimately, that sense of wonder is never without risk be it psychological or physical. While both *El espinazo del diablo* and *El espíritu de la colmena*'s endings revisit Spain's history on symbolically hopeful notes, framed by the child protagonists looking outwards, *El laberinto del fauno* ends on a much more somber note, with the protagonist dying from the violence of the regime. In addition, it is implied that the world of Pan (el fauno) which seemed so real was all in her imagination, subverting the "happy ending" one expects from the kinds of fairy tales and fables from which the film borrows its fantastical imagery.

Despite the somewhat hopeful endings of *El Espinazo del diablo* and *El espíritu de la colmena*, the journey the protagonists embark on is a tumultuous and dangerous one, in which both either crossed paths with death or risked dying. It is their determination, whether it be due to a naive ignorance of life's dangers (in the case of Ana) or a selfless sense of justice, to look death or danger unflinchingly in the face (in *El espinazo del diablo* Carlos literally does this when bravely communicates with the ghost) which is the necessary step to survive while maintaining one's humanity against all odds.



Pan and Ofelia in El laberinto del fauno (Del Toro, 2006).

While the ending of *El laberinto del fauno* may be more tragic, each film's fantasy world is contested by a cold reminder of the brutality the Spanish faced from Franco's regime, and serves as a force of resistance to it. Youthful curiosity therefore functions as a symbol for the eternal battle of good versus evil, or more directly the persistence of the people who opposed the regime, who are venerated in each film for their bravery and their unwillingness to forget.

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POWER, DISCOURSE, AND THE ERASURE OF REVOLUTION: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF SYRIA’S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

Abstract: This paper examines how the democratic aspirations of the Syrian uprising were gradually erased through domestic and international discourse. It argues that narratives produced by the Assad regime and reinforced by global actors reframed the uprising from a movement for freedom and dignity into a conflict defined by terrorism, sectarianism, and instability. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, the paper shows how power operates through language and representation, shaping how conflicts are understood and responded to. Writing from an Arab American perspective, it also considers how orientalist assumptions continue to influence Western interpretations of Middle Eastern resistance movements. Ultimately, it argues that the erasure of democratic aspirations in Syria is not only the result of state violence, but also of the narratives that shape how the conflict is understood globally.

Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in Tunisia, shook the Arab world by setting himself on fire as a form of protest, triggering a ripple effect so powerful that revolutions surged beyond borders throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The fight for resistance and freedom quickly spread into Syria, more specifically, the southern city of Daraa, which would soon emerge as the cradle of the Syrian Revolution. The fight for Freedom and dignity began at the Al Banin all-boys school in the countryside of Daraa, where a group of schoolboys came together and carried out an act so defiant that it ignited a nationwide uprising. What seemed like an innocent dare by classmates, fifteen-year-old Naief Abazid was oblivious to the fact that his act of teenage defiance would bring an end to decades of suppression and fear inflicted by the Ba'athist dictatorship of the Assad regime. Armed with a spray paint can, he proceeded to unknowingly reshape the geopolitics of the region as he wrote on the wall of the school building, “It’s your turn, doctor,” referring to incumbent president Bashar Al-Assad, who, before succeeding his father, Hafez Al-Assad, in 2000, was a practicing doctor.

The Assad regime’s response was ruthless; in the matter of a few days, Syrian security forces charged into the school, detaining Naief Abazid and fourteen other children. The authorities held the boys in an undisclosed location for weeks, subjecting them to brutal beatings, torture, starvation, and the horrific act of tearing out their fingernails. The parents, pleading with the government to release their children, were left with a cruel and absurd response, with official security chief Atef Najib releasing a statement saying, “Forget your children. If you want children, make more of them. If you don’t know how, bring us your women, and we will make them for you.” This response by the Assad regime was a tactic used to instill fear against anyone who would dare challenge the regime. No matter the words or tactics used to terrorize the Syrian people,

their pursuit of self-determination ran deeper than fear. On March 18, 2011, the first-ever demonstration of the revolution took place, with the people of Daraa taking to the streets peacefully, demanding justice and accountability for the government's actions. The chants and outcry for "freedom, freedom, freedom" and "peace, peace, peace" were only met with bullets, tear gas, tanks, and mass disappearances. Among those unlawfully abducted by the regime during protests was 13-year-old Hamza al-Khateeb, whose whereabouts were unknown for a month; he was finally brought back to his family, but as a corpse. Pictures and videos made public "showed evidence of a blunt force injury to the face, injuries to his head and back, a severed penis, and possible entrance wounds." Hamza's mutilated body became the breaking point for every Syrian nationwide, unleashing defiance so resistant that the pursuit of freedom became inevitable. Daraa was no longer alone; peaceful protests were erupting nationwide, from the outskirts of the capital, Damascus, to the second-largest city, Aleppo. From the Syrian coastal cities of Lattakia and Tartus to the farmlands of Hama, Homs, and Deir El Zor, the people of Syria reiterated their opposition to the tyranny, shouting, "Come on, Bashar, your time is up," calling for an end to the forty-year rule of the Assad family and their enforced Ba'ath ideology. Declaring their demand for freedom and self-determination, the Syrian people shouted, "God, Syria, and freedom only."

Ignoring dialogue, the Assad regime countered the Syrian people's calls for freedom with what would unknowingly be a fourteen-year era of brutal repression and siege on the population. The voice of the people, harmless yet powerful, nonetheless terrified the Assad government as peaceful protesters were met with the spraying of bullets. Startled by the regime's response, the protesters who managed to escape the onslaught fled to their homes for safety. Following behind them were security forces, who went on a military crackdown, storming neighborhoods and forcibly breaking into the homes of petrified Syrians. These unwarranted break-ins ended with civilians forcibly dragged out of their homes, only to be forcefully disappeared or killed on the spot, before the very eyes of family members. The forcibly disappeared were almost always taken to undisclosed locations and subjected to torture, all in the name of fighting for freedom and dignity. The regime's military crackdown rapidly extended to regions of the country that had not yet experienced these raids. The pacifist voices of the Syrian people, given no other choice, chose to arm themselves in the name of self-defense. In pursuit of protecting their communities and the chase for freedom, both ordinary citizens and defected soldiers, who refused to harm protesters, came together to form the Free Syrian Army. The Free Syrian Army came about to become the army for the Syrian people, fighting the tyrannical Assad regime. "The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has evolved significantly since its emergence in the summer of 2011. At the time of its formation in late July 2011, its founding leader, Colonel Riyad al-Asad, described the establishment of a force with a dual purpose: to protect peaceful protesters demonstrating against President Bashar al-Assad's regime and to initiate resistance operations against his security forces." (Lister 2016, 1). The Free Syrian Army embodies the very Syrian people who first took to the streets of Syria in March 2011, the parents of children tortured and killed by the regime, and the kids whose parents were forcibly taken and disappeared. The actions of the regime created resistance.

The Free Syrian Army was never an outside force, proxy, or faction but a force rooted within the Syrian people who endured a painful siege under the Assad regime. Since the first uprising in Daraa, "the FSA remains the cornerstone of Syria's moderate opposition component. The FSA is also strategically important because of its extensive civilian popular base and its representation of the revolution's original vision and brand" (Lister 2016, 12). However, as time went on, the battle for freedom became far-fetched when global foreign powers intervened for the

sake of strategic interest, exploiting Syria and turning the country into a power vacuum. This paper helps uncover the truth behind the Free Syrian movement and its distortion and reconstruction by external foreign powers, with the theoretical principles of post-structuralism and post-colonialism helping expose the very power and colonial structures that undermined and ultimately defaced the Syrian people's legitimate fight for freedom, turning it into a terrorist-designated movement.

Post-structuralism, a theory that challenges many theories within international relations, rejects universally accepted “truth” and “knowledge” as fixed, instead positing that they are socially constructed, shaped, and molded by power and political agendas. Post-structuralism challenges the idea of an objective truth or concrete doctrine, as power elites constantly reshape it to fit their motives. The truths we are presented with do not have absolute validity. Prominent poststructuralist Foucault states, “We must not imagine the world turns towards us a legible face, which we would only have to decipher” (Foucault 1981, 67). It is imperative that one understands that these “truths” and doctrines are nothing more than constructed realities and ideologies, formed by elite powers, which are then imposed on society as a whole.

Following the 2011 uprisings, the Assad regime imposed extensive coercive control over the Syrian population. The Syrian people faced the scrutiny of undercover spies, who relentlessly pursued anyone daring to criticize the government. Government moles disguised as taxi drivers, bus passengers, teachers, journalists, or regular civilians would go after anyone who was found to have uttered the word “freedom” or insulted the regime. They had forcibly disappeared, tortured, and executed, with loved ones having no clue about their families’ whereabouts or whether they were still alive or dead. The Assad regime imposed discourse-based control on Syrians, forcibly eradicating any idea or concept of freedom and completely suppressing what was once the resistance. Foucault’s concept of “regime of truth” directly applies to the Syrian regime and its actions in constructing its truth and knowledge regarding the Free Syrian Army. This system’s tools consist of the elite actors, who were the Ba’athist ruling party; the dominant discourse; and the language used towards the FSA. The Assad regime successfully established a regime of truth by using state media to disseminate propaganda domestically and, in an international context, international diplomacy to persuade foreign actors to view the Free Syrian Army as an extremist group in its national affairs. The Free Syrian Army, a liberation group created by the Syrian people, was defaced in the international community by the Assad regime: “The al-Assad regime has repeatedly claimed that it is fighting ‘foreign-backed terrorists’ while refusing to cite any empirical evidence for its assertions” (Flood 2012, p. 137).

The prevailing dominant discourse transcended borders, with foreign states harnessing the Assad regime’s framing of the uprising as a warrant for intervening in Syrian affairs. One of the most prominent global powers of the world that intervened in the pursuit of consolidating the Assad regime’s narrative of taking down “the terrorists” was Russia, a country that had ties with the Ba’athist party ever since Syria was liberated from France. The involvement of Iran and Iran-backed proxies who sought to inflict their Shi’ite ideology on Syria, a country where the religious makeup consists of “The vast majority, 74% Sunni Muslim” (Heritage for Peace n.d.). Alawites, “a Muslim sect from which the Assad family originates.” Current estimates of the Alawite population place the group around 10 percent.” (Al-Omar 2018). The Assad family favored the involvement of Iran and its proxies in hopes of furthering sectarianism within the country, with hopes of removing the majority Sunni population. The political concept of security vs. liberty became one of the most powerful discursive tools used by the Assad regime. The regime established an ‘Us vs. Them’ narrative, where ‘Us’ referred to the Alawites, who constituted only

ten percent of the country's population, and 'Them' referred to the Sunnis, who made up the majority. In the process, the regime ignored the country's religious composition of "16% other Muslim (including Ismailis, Shiites, Alawites, and Druze) and 10% Christian." (Heritage for Peace n.d.).

David Campbell's post-structuralist insight into foreign policy and its role in constituting a state aligns with the actions of the Assad regime. David Campbell argues that states do not possess fixed identities; instead, they construct their own identities based on their own definitions and formulations of what constitutes a threat. Denying that foreign policy is solely a response to external threats, he argues that it is merely a practice that produces boundaries. The Syrian government, on its own, created an internal threat to its affairs, evident in its violent response to the Syrian people who peacefully chose to protest. Afterwards, the Syrian movement and the Free Syrian Army were labeled as an external, foreign-backed, extreme group. Forging such a fabricated threat granted the Assad regime, on an international level, the legitimate right to inflict brutality on the Syrian people.

A prominent scholar of post-structuralism, Richard K. Ashley, challenges the traditional international relations view of "heroic practice." This belief asserts that sovereignty is inherently rational, ordered, and coherent. The Assad regime contradicted this very idea. Rather than being rational, the Syrian government shot at its people. Instead of being ordered and coherent, the Syrian government relied on repression, alienating the population and upholding sectarianism within the country by privileging a religious minority, which ultimately led to widespread dissent and conflict among various groups within Syria. Ashley himself states, "a well-bounded sovereign presence that decides its bounds, an already legitimate power that defines for itself the social basis of its legitimacy and power." (Ashley 1988, 250). In this instance, the Syrian government decided its bounds for the sake of power as it declared the Free Syrian Army an external terrorist group meddling with Syrian affairs. This label was placed upon the FSA, a narrative that dismantled the Syrian people's legitimate struggle and fight for freedom.

While post-structuralism reveals the truth behind the Assad regime's constructed narrative and deceitfulness towards both the Syrian people and the international world, it is only superficial. Post-colonialism goes deeper, revealing the global order and power structure that enabled the international acceptance of the Assad regime's narrative. We must delve into the deep colonial presumptions about the Middle East that persist even now, obscuring the postcolonial realities and ultimately shaping the world's perception of the Syrian fight for freedom, despite the tactics employed by the Syrian government. Edward Said, a prominent Arab-american theorist, created the concept of Orientalism. A concept asserting that the world's perception of Arab culture, history, and muslims lies in the hands of the West. The West, through the education system, media, and film, and with the help of power elites, distorted the true lens of the Middle East as a whole, ultimately constructing the idea of the "Orient."

Said goes on to state, "The Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and remarkable experiences.'" (Said 1978, 1). The Middle East, a region seen by the West to be backwards and irrational, helps us had better understand why the Free Syrian Army was not deemed a legitimate uprising against authoritarianism but rather another non-state terrorist group. Orientalism and its misrepresentation of Syria became the reason why the international order abandoned the Syrian cause. For the next fourteen years, the Syrian people were left isolated from the world, fighting

solely by themselves. Bashar al-Assad's deceptions would not have prevailed without the complicity of the West's deep-rooted orientalist views.

Sanjay Seth, a theorist who challenged post-colonialism, argued that international relations selectively determine what is considered legitimate and illegitimate. He adds to this view, stating, "this overlooks that knowledge serves to constitute that which they purport to merely cognize or represent, and that IR theory serves to naturalize that which is historically produced" (Seth 2011, 168). Taking Seth's viewpoint on post-colonialism and applying it to the Syrian uprising and how the world reacted to the resistance, it becomes evident that the international system itself falsely understood the resistance as another turmoil spill in the Middle East.

Post-structuralism alone does not provide the full picture of the Syrian Revolution. Although it does help us get a better grasp of how the Assad Regime fearmongered the Syrian people, constructing language and state-bound narratives to suppress any form of uprising, it is still very superficial. Postcolonialism dives deeper, revealing how century-old orientalist propositions have shaped today's view of the international global order, which accepted Assad's lies and led to a lack of proper action against the Assad regime. Together, both theories help uncover the truth behind why the international order failed the Syrian people and their cause.

The Syrian Revolution ultimately exposed the flaws within the international order. Justice became debatable when it came to dominant discourse and deep-rooted colonial biases, as these biases often skew perceptions of fairness and accountability in international responses to the Syrian crisis. Recognizing oppression requires overlooking any form of dominant distortions or biases.

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Section 2

YOUNG UKRAINIAN SCHOLARS

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INTRODUCTORY WORD

This 7th issue of the Grinchenko-Seton International Journal of Young Scholars included articles from the 14th All-Ukrainian Scientific and Practical Conference of Young Scholars with International Participation “*Ukrainian Past: Wars for Identity and Independence*”. It took place online on the Google Meet platform in Kyiv and was prepared and held by the History of Ukraine Department, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University on April 23, 2026, together with Seton Hall University, which co-organized the conference.

Section “Young Ukrainian Scholars” included research by young Ukrainian scholars who, together with their American colleagues from Seton Hall University, spoke at the conference in the section 3 “*Freedom 250: The International Dimension of Democracy and Security*” with reports and presentations to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of the USA.

Olha Saraieva, Ph.D. in History. an Associate Professor in the Department of Ukrainian Philology and Intercultural Communication at Kharkiv National University of Urban Economy named after O.M. Beketov (Kharkiv) together with **Mariia Saraieva**, a first-year student in the specialty “Philology: English, German” at the same university, studied *sociocultural self-organization and corporate ethics of zemstvo intelligentsia in the Donetsk region in 1860s – 1917*.

Their article is devoted to the study of the activities of local self-government bodies of the Donetsk region, which acted as strategic agents of the region's comprehensive modernization. They paid special attention to the fact that the main instrument of these transformations was the zemstvo intelligentsia – the so-called “third element” (teachers, doctors, agronomists, statisticians), whose everyday activity directly depended not only on the level of professional training, but also on the degree of their social protection. They emphasized that the zemstvos' introduction of innovative mechanisms of social insurance, housing autonomy, and corporate solidarity at the time made it possible to form a stable regional elite capable of resisting the destructive influences of society's radicalization and marginalization. They noted that the experience of the zemstvos is useful in the conditions of the formation of today's civil society.

Veronica Shtonda, a second-year student, majoring in History and Archaeology, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University wrote the study “*Women’s socio-political movement in Galicia: Moscophiles and Narodovtsi*”. She notes that the women’s socio-political movement in Galicia in the 19th – 20th centuries was a distinctive phenomenon that combined the struggle for women’s rights with the aspiration to preserve the Ukrainian language, traditions, and culture under conditions of statelessness.

This important theme demonstrates how women became active participants in public life and helped safeguard national identity amid the pressures of Polonization and Russification. The study compares the two opposing currents within the women’s movement, the Moscophile and the Narodovtsi, and their impact on women's roles in society. Veronica used the historical-comparative method, integrating the analyses of scholarly works and of the activities of women’s organizations, education, and women’s economic participation. The sources include the magazines “Lada”, “Rusalka”, and “Pershyi vinok”, along with foundational studies by contemporary historians, in particular Marta Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Stepan Kost, and Liliia Sholohon.

A notable feature of the work is that the Narodovtsi movement integrated education, active female participation in public life, and national interests, while the Moscophiles adhered to a conservative model in which women remained mostly at home, engaging only in charity and church activities without a broader national dimension. The study shows that the Narodovtsi trend ultimately won out and shaped the image of an educated, active, and nationally conscious woman. This contributed to the formation of Ukrainian women’s organizations, the advancement of education and the economy, and the laying of the groundwork for future Ukrainian statehood. The women’s movement in Galicia became a vital component of nation-building and social transformation, preparing the ground for the creation of the “Soyuz Ukrainok” /"Union of Ukrainian Women" – the most powerful women’s organization in interwar Europe.

Marko Miliutin, a MA Graduate, Senior Researcher at the Museum of Prominent Figures of Ukrainian Culture; Leading Archaeographer at the Department of Source Studies of Modern Ukrainian History, M. S. Hrushevsky Institute of Ukrainian Archaeography and Source Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in study “*Mykola Lysenko: reconstructing physical health through narrative sources*” devoted his research to reconstructing physical health of the Ukrainian composer, pianist, conductor, teacher, collector of folk songs, public figure Mykola Lysenko based on narrative sources from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ego-documents – correspondence, memoirs, and recollections of the composer himself and entourage.

Health is considered not only a medical or biological category, but also a component of everyday experience, closely connected to professional activity, family circumstances, psychological stress, and the sociocultural context of the imperial era. The article analyzes Lysenko’s major illnesses as well as therapeutic practices typical of the period: sanatorium treatment, climate-related travel, and restrictions on physical activity.

Special attention is paid to the family dimension of health – the illnesses of children and close relatives, epidemics, the psychological impact of losing his wife, and the mechanisms for emotionally overcoming traumatic events through creative work. It is shown that the illnesses and deaths of members of the intellectual milieu were perceived as a collective experience of the community and were reflected in private discourse. Marko emphasizes the heuristic potential of ego-documents for studying the history of everyday life and the private dimension of the lives of figures in Ukrainian culture.

Mykhailo Mishyn, a second-year postgraduate student at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University wrote the study *“Under the musical and academic influence of Viacheslav Petr: the intellectual origins of Klyment Kvitka’s scholarly worldview”*. He explores the intellectual connections between the Ukrainian folklorist and musicologist Klyment Kvitka and director of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium and an outstanding Ukrainian-Czech educator, philologist and music theorist Viacheslav Petr. The study highlights V. Petr’s impact on K. Kvitka’s scientific worldview through the analysis of epistolary sources and bibliographic records. Central to the research is K. Kvitka’s letter to Olena Pchilka, where he explicitly acknowledges being “under the musical and academic influence” of V. Petr, while also noting the shared academic lineage of musicologist Mykola Hrinchenko. The paper further demonstrates how the mature K. Kvitka integrated V. Petr’s theories on ancient musical scales into his own studies. The findings illuminate V. Petr’s important role as an educator, proving that the gymnasium was a powerful intellectual environment where the academic worldview of the European elite was forged.

The study highlights Viacheslav Petr’s influence on Klyment Kvitka’s scientific worldview through the analysis of epistolary sources and bibliographic records. Central to the research is Klyment Kvitka’s letter to Olena Pchilka, in which he directly admits to being “under the musical and academic influence” of Viacheslav Petr, while also noting the shared academic lineage with musicologist Mykola Hrinchenko. The paper further demonstrates how the mature Klyment Kvitka integrated Viacheslav Petr’s theories on ancient musical scales into his own studies. The results of the study highlight the important role of Viacheslav Petr as an educator, demonstrating that the gymnasium was a powerful intellectual environment in which the academic worldview of the European elite was formed.

Stepan Vasylyshyn, Ph.D in History, the Head of the Humanitarian Department of the Kopychynets City Council, a history teacher at the Lyceum of Hadynkivtsi, Kopychynets City Council, Chortkiv District, Ternopil Region wrote the research *“The teacher in interwar society: professional mission and social challenges in the Ternopil Voivodeship (based on the materials of Echo Nauczycielskie)”*. He conducted a comprehensive analysis of teachers’ professional mission and the socio-economic challenges that shaped their activities in 1921 – 1939, based on periodical materials, archival sources, and regulatory legal acts in Polish.

Stepan established that the teaching profession in the Ternopil Voivodeship during the interwar period performed functions far broader than those envisaged by the official educational policy of the Second Polish Republic. The teacher acted not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a key agent of socio-economic stabilization in local communities, combining pedagogical, administrative, and as civic roles.

Stepan explores how chronic underfunding of the education sector, along with the transfer of responsibility for school maintenance to communes, has led to the emergence of an informal practice of teachers’ financial participation in supporting the educational process. This situation effectively transformed the social status of the teacher, turning him into a “community resource”, which undermined the material well-being of teachers’ families and contributed to professional burnout. Despite these difficult conditions, the teaching profession demonstrated a high level of self-organization and civic activism. The activities of the Society for the Support of Public School Construction indicate that teachers were the driving force behind the modernization of school infrastructure, ensuring the implementation of large-scale construction projects through community mobilization mechanisms. The organization of “Public School Weeks”, cultural and

educational events, and the mobilization of financial resources of the population indicate the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives in overcoming the structural limitations of state policy.

Myroslav Sakal, a third-year student, majoring in History and Archaeology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, wrote the study *“The Soviet elections in Transcarpathia according to press materials: public mood and the position of the Ukrainian insurgents”*. He explores the conduct of Soviet election campaigns in the territory of the Transcarpathian region within the Ukrainian SSR during 1946 – 1947. The study focuses on the region's mountainous settlements, using the Svaliava district as a representative administrative-territorial unit of that period.

Myroslav selected the local periodicals as the primary source, which allows for a more detailed micro-historical investigation. Through careful analysis of contemporary periodicals and archival materials, Myroslav identified events that were covered not only through an ideological prism, but also through the lens of local social conflicts, administrative decisions, and public reactions. This study allows us to trace whether the level of censorship in the local press was truly as extensive as often believed. Even Soviet publishing houses had editors and authors who could criticize local officials. However, this dynamic could work both ways. The article analyzes the methods of Soviet political integration, as well as the public reaction and the resistance efforts of the Ukrainian underground.

Roman Podat, studying for a master's degree at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, in his study *“Industrial modernization of the Ukrainian SSR at the micro level: the development of the Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant in the 1950s – 1960s”*, in his research examines industrial modernization in the Ukrainian SSR using the example of the Darnytsia Chemical and Pharmaceutical Plant in the 1950s – 1960s. Based on annual financial reports, construction materials, and union minutes from the company's archives, Roman reconstructs the plant's transformation from a postwar branch of a research institute into a large pharmaceutical enterprise. The study argues that micro-level modernization was contradictory: growth in production, mechanization, and product range coexisted with dependence on imported technology, chronic planning distortions, and difficult working conditions.

Olena Kazimirenko, Head of the Department of Fine Arts and Design at the Applied College “Universum” of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, wrote the article *“Forty years since the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident through the posters of student designers”*.

She noted that April 26, 1986, divided the life of the then Soviet Ukraine into the period before and after the accident at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. In 2026, students of the Applied College “Universum” of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, majoring in “Design”, investigated the public's views on the historical aspects of the events and on modern life in the radiation-contaminated zone. The article presents the students' posters as an illustration of their research.

Artem Pavliuk, a first-year undergraduate student at the Educational and Research Institute “Horlivka Institute of Foreign Languages of Donbas State Pedagogical University” (relocated to Bakhmut), wrote the study *“Marcus Luttrell's interpretation of the events of operation “Red Wings”: a historical and critical analysis”*. He examines the interpretation of the events of Operation “Red Wing” by U.S. Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell and compares his version of events

with alternative sources, including journalistic investigations, veteran testimonies, and historical analyses.

The study argues that many elements of Luttrell's memoir "Lone Survivor" were exaggerated or distorted, particularly regarding the number of Taliban fighters, the conduct of the battle, and the operational circumstances. The article also analyzes the planning failures and command decisions that contributed to the tragedy and further mythologizing of the operation. Particular attention is devoted to the impact of these distortions on historical memory, military ethics, and the perception of the dead service members.

Daryna Osetyanova, a second-year Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University student majoring in History and Archaeology at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, in her essay "*The Stolen Youth of My Generation*," notes that her generation learned too early what violence is. Daryna writes about how the Russian-Ukrainian war during 2014 – 2026 stole the childhood and youth of Ukrainian children, how quickly and terribly the reality and attitude towards the reality of yesterday's students changed, how quickly they grew up and stood up for the defense of the Motherland, about the perception of news from the front, about volunteer activities that Ukrainian society has established, about communication with children of displaced persons from Eastern Ukraine in a Kyiv school, and about the feeling that something is being prepared on the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion of a sovereign and independent Ukraine.

Daria recollects the first days of the beginning of a full-scale war, when the only shelter was a barracks that had turned into a bunker and the rule of two walls, about the sounds of artillery fire, the vibration from explosions on the northern outskirts of Kyiv, about how adult men and Kyiv were preparing for resistance, about the self-organization of people and the month of March when people tried to survive, about the smell of a burning city, the rustle of missiles overhead, the sounds of explosions that did not let us forget that we were in the center of the war, about the spring sun, nature waking up after winter, and the warmth that inspired hope, about the streets of Kyiv blocked by checkpoints and anti-tank hedgehogs.

Daryna thinks of April 2, 2022 – the day of her 16th birthday, when the de-occupation of Kyiv and Kyiv region was announced and the horrors of Bucha and Irpin were made public to the world, about distance learning in Kyiv at school since the fall of 2022, about getting used to the power outage schedules in Kyiv and throughout Ukraine, about the first three days without electricity, mobile communication and water, about the gradual adaptation of society to life and learning in the new realities of life, about the rapid growth of children during the war. She talks about her preparation for the National Multi-Subject Test during 2024 in conditions of frequent power outages and air strikes, about graduating from Kyiv school with honors and successfully passing the NMST without a break during the air raid, and about the rocket falling into the residential building opposite and the force of the blast wave.

Daryna remembers about the targeted rocket attack which occurred on July 8, 2024, on the largest children's hospital in Ukraine, "Okhmatdyt National Children's Specialized Hospital in Kyiv", where children from all over Ukraine with extremely serious diagnoses are treated, about the feeling of indescribable horror, and the understanding that Ukrainian schools, hospitals, kindergartens, and residential buildings are "NATO bases" and "military facilities" for the aggressor. She shares the realization that the enemy has no morality, conscience, or humanity. She

talks about entering the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Grinchenko University, majoring in History and Archaeology, the beginning of her student life during wartime, new friends, falling in love with history, hours spent in a university shelter during alarms, and donations to support the Ukrainian army. Daryna talks about how close and familiar civilians became soldiers, about weaving camouflage nets within the walls of the university, and about the first losses and injuries in a large family.

Daryna recalls the heavy shelling of Ukraine by the Russian aggressor since the beginning of 2026 during the cold winter without heating and hot water, in conditions of constant power outages, the Russian enemy's brutal shelling of energy facilities in Kyiv and Ukraine and the enemy's destruction of Kyiv's centralized heating system, taking exams in the winter session under these conditions, and the fact that each new shelling of Kyiv was worse than the previous one.

Daryna talks about the bombing of hospitals and museums in Kyiv, in particular the National Museum "Chernobyl" on May 24, 2026, and the loss of 40% of unique exhibits, as well as the massive rocket attack on Kyiv on June 15, 2026 and the damage to many historical monuments and cultural objects – the cultural spaces of the Ukrainian House, the Mystetsky Arsenal, the Dovzhenko Film Studio, where the largest and oldest collection of costumes in Ukraine (3 million pieces) was burned in a fire caused by the rocket strike.

Daryna describes the attack on the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra National Reserve, where she was doing the archaeological practice in the summer of 2025, the destruction of the architectural and religious monument of the Assumption Cathedral, which was built in the 11th century, when Russia did not even exist yet, and the fact that the aggressor is waging a war in Kyiv, as well as throughout Ukraine, against residential buildings, hospitals, universities and schools, kindergartens, maternity hospitals, bookstores, museums, temples, antique markets, even a McDonald's on Lukyanivka.

Daryna writes about the terrible shelling of Kyiv by ballistic missiles on June 2, 15, 25 and July 1-2, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 19, 24, 2026 and that since 2022, more than 425 people have died in Kyiv alone as a result of shelling, and as of July 6, 2026, 2,236 alarms have been registered in Kyiv since February 24, 2022. In total, they lasted 2,642 hours and 11 minutes, which is equivalent to 110 full days.

Hanna Hedo, a first-year student, majoring in History and Archaeology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, in her essay "*Donetsk*" recalls her childhood in Donetsk, adorned with flowerbeds of thousands of roses, her generation of children of steel and flowers, the sense of home security, and the beauty of her hometown. Hanna's reflections on the Soviet term "Donbas" as a geographical, geological, and industrial term, a tool for erasing the complex identity of the region, which did not take into account cultural and national identity. Reflections on the city of Yuzivka, built by the Welshman John Hughes in 1869, from which modern Donetsk grew. Reflections on the metallurgical experience of British engineers and managers, their architectural ideas, on the British philosophy of urban planning, on Donetsk as a Western-oriented project implemented on Ukrainian soil, a place of new ideas and different nationalities, with a rich history of entrepreneurship, trade and international relations. Reflections on Donetsk as a promising European city, which until 2014 hosted large-scale international events.

Hanna's understanding as a historian of what happened to Donetsk after May 26, 2014, during 12 years of Russian occupation. Hanna's reflections on "memocide" – as a planned,

systematic killing of the city's memory, a method of erasing Ukrainian culture, history, and people's sense of self-awareness, leaving behind an empty shell that can be filled with the ideology of the occupier. About the goal of memocide – to cause deep social amnesia, to force the occupied region to doubt its own Ukrainian past and its own life experience, its Ukrainian identity.

Hanna's memories of leaving Donetsk at the age of seven are like losing a part of her childhood, of becoming a "refugee" at the age of seven, and the words "occupation" and "war" are too small to contain the pain of what was lost. Hanna's reflections on finding her weapon in the profession of a historian, understanding her life mission, taking a serious attitude towards mastering the craft of a historian to prevent the enemy from writing the history of her native land, and protecting and restoring historical memory. Hanna's reflections on writing as a historian's weapon and healing the memory of Donetsk after the victory in the war and the liberation of her native land, on the spirit of Donetsk that lives inside and waits for us to bring home its true history.

Daria Romanenko, a first-year master's student in History at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, wrote the essay *"From a European pearl to a militarized enclave: a twelve-year retrospective of the occupation of Crimea"*. Daria reminds us that thanks to its temperate climate, extraordinary natural beauty, and strategic maritime location, Crimea has always been historically much more than just a peninsula. For many, it was the pinnacle of aesthetic and cultural wealth.

A native of Sevastopol who survived the initial stage of the Russian occupation, Daria examines the transition of the Crimean peninsula from European prosperity in 2013 to systemic decline in 2026, exploring how Ukrainian Crimea, from a European pearl and center of gravity for international tourism and European integration, after its occupation by the Russian aggressor on February 20, 2014, more than 12 years of rule by Russian invaders, has transformed into a militarized enclave.

Daria recalls the beginning of the occupation in February 2014, the rapid, coordinated Russian military maneuvers aimed at undermining local self-government, the transfer of Sevastopol under Russian control on February 23, the culmination of civil resistance on February 26, when thousands of supporters of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, together with pro-Ukrainian citizens, surrounded the regional parliament in Simferopol to block separatist legislation, the seizure of the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Council of Ministers of Crimea at night by Russian special forces units - soldiers without insignia, who are called "little green men", the occupation by the Russian aggressor of all key administrative buildings on the peninsula by March 7. Daria recalls the cutting off of vital transit routes to mainland Ukraine, the complete blockade of Ukrainian military garrisons, the change in the physical and cultural landscape of the peninsula, the fact that Sevastopol has turned a stagnant relic of the Soviet era, devoid of real urban development, the rapid changes carried out by the Russian invader in the education system as the main tool of Russification, the severing of cultural ties with mainland Ukraine in order to present the Ukrainian state as an enemy of the Crimean people, the psychological tension in society, the systemic repression of the Crimean Tatar community and the targeted destruction of its cultural heritage.

Daria notes that after the large-scale invasion of Russian troops on February 24, 2022, into the independent and sovereign state of Ukraine, Crimea became an important military bridgehead for attacks on the Southern Ukraine and the launch of missiles, strike Shaheds, and drones throughout Ukraine. This tragedy is deepened by the fact that the local Ukrainian population of the peninsula is now illegally mobilized into the ranks of the occupation army that controls their

home. Daria believes that only Ukraine's victory in the war, the restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty, and the de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula are the only ways to release political prisoners, preserve Crimea's cultural heritage, restore natural resources, and rebuild Crimea as a European pearl.

We are sincerely grateful to all the authors of the 7th issue of the “Young Scholars Grinchenko – Seton International Journal” for their articles.

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SOCIOCULTURAL SELF-ORGANIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS OF THE ZEMSTVO INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE DONETSK REGION (1860s – 1917)

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the activities of local self-government bodies of Donetsk region at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries, which acted as strategic agents of the region's comprehensive modernization. Particular attention is focused on the fact that the main instrument of these transformations was the zemstvo intelligentsia – the so-called "third element" (teachers, doctors, agronomists, statisticians), whose everyday activity directly depended not only on the level of professional training, but also on the degree of their social protection. It is emphasized that the introduction by the zemstvos of innovative mechanisms of social insurance, housing autonomy, and corporate solidarity for that time made it possible to form a stable regional elite capable of resisting the destructive influences of the radicalization and marginalization of society. It is noted that the experience of the zemstvos is useful in the conditions of the formation of today's civil society.

Keywords: zemstvos, local self-government bodies, city дума, professional ethics, "third element" of the zemstvos.

Presentation of the main material: At the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries, Donetsk region represented a unique and dynamic sociocultural landscape. The processes of rapid industrialization, the accelerated development of the mining and metallurgical complex, and a massive influx of a multiethnic labor force formed a specific environment in which traditional peasant institutions were rapidly leveled, while new forms of urban and corporate life were in the stage of emergence. In this transitive context, the county zemstvos (Bakhmut, Mariupol, and Slovianoserbsk) acted not merely as local self-government bodies, but as strategic agents of the region's comprehensive modernization.

The main instrument of these transformations was the zemstvo intelligentsia – the so-called "third element" (teachers, doctors, agronomists, statisticians), whose everyday activity directly depended not only on the level of professional training, but also on the degree of their social protection. Under the conditions of an industrial region characterized by a high cost of living,

environmental challenges, and social tension, the issue of material provision for a specialist acquired political significance.

The introduction by the zemstvos of innovative mechanisms of social insurance, housing autonomy, and corporate solidarity for that time made it possible to form a stable regional elite capable of resisting the destructive influences of the radicalization and marginalization of society.

The need to study the experience of the resilience of the zemstvos under the conditions of crisis regions adds particular significance to the topic. The study of how, through “family” solidarity, professional unions, and the attraction of private capital (in particular through charitable societies under the leadership of such figures as D. Kharadzhaiev), an environment for the development of education was created has practical significance for understanding the development of communities during periods of transformation.

The historiographical progress in the study of the activities of zemstvo self-government in the territory of Donetsk region is characterized by a shift in ideological paradigms – from the analysis of legal foundations to the study of the social anthropology of the “third element”.

The historiography of the imperial era was marked by active theoretical polemics regarding the nature of self-government (O. Vasylychuk, B. Veselovsky) (Veselovsky B., 1911: 301). Soviet historiography, despite its ideological engagement, significantly expanded the source base (N. Pirumova). The modern stage is marked by the “anthropologization” of history and an appeal to the regional dimension (A. Lokhmatova, O. Obmetko).

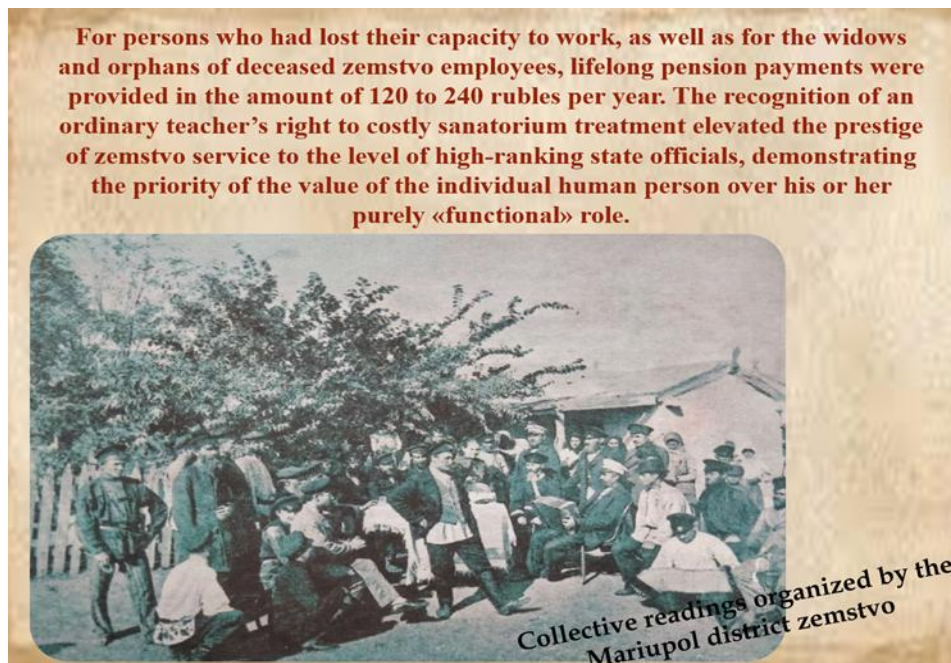
Foreign historiography (R. Manning, S. Seregny, R. Gneist) considers the zemstvos as “engines of professionalism” (Gneist R. 1896: 41).

The source base of the study consists of a representative complex of materials that makes it possible to reconstruct the main directions of social policy and the everyday domestic life of the zemstvo intelligentsia of Donetsk region. Important are the documents of public organizations and professional unions, among which the materials of the “Labor Union” of teachers of Bakhmut county (1906) and charitable institutions, in particular the Mariupol Society for Assistance to the Poor under the leadership of D. Kharadzhaiev, are of particular value, illustrating the mechanisms of interaction between the zemstvo and private capital in matters of social care. The informational potential of the study is expanded thanks to statistical and reference sources, such as the “Statistical Yearbooks of Katerynoslav Governorate”, materials of special surveys of the everyday life of the intelligentsia, as well as Memorial Books and Address Calendars, etc.

The zemstvo institutions of Donetsk region were among the first to state the fact that the effective implementation of the educational mission of the intelligentsia under the conditions of an intensively industrialized region required the creation of a stable economic foundation. The self-government bodies developed a strategic approach according to which the level of material provision of a specialist directly correlated with his qualification characteristics and the effectiveness of his activity.

An analysis of the structure of budgetary allocations confirms that the monetary maintenance of zemstvo employees in Donetsk region often exceeded the average indicators in other governorates. Such a financial policy in fact performed the function of a “territorial allowance” for work under specific conditions: the unfavorable environmental situation of the

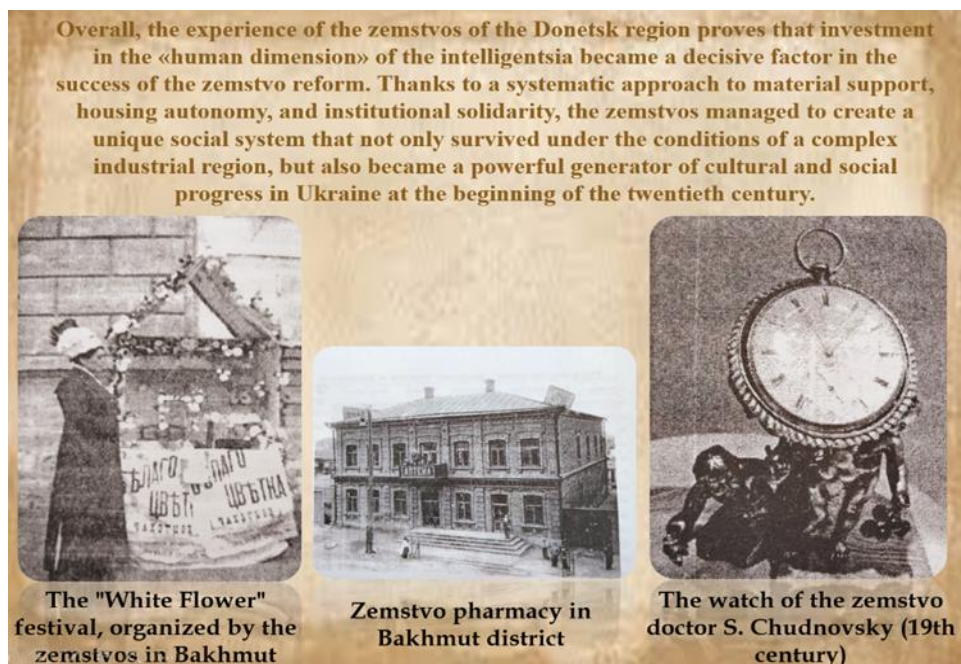
industrial region and the need for communication with the heterogeneous society of factory settlements.



While in the central governorates the annual income of a primary school teacher could amount to 240 – 300 rubles, the zemstvos of Donetsk region sought to ensure a level of remuneration within the range of 400 – 600 rubles, providing for additional allocations for housing rent or heating of premises. The high level of material incentives gave the zemstvos the opportunity to carry out careful personnel selection.

The bonus mechanisms introduced in Mariupol and Bakhmut counties did not bear the features of situational charity, but acted as an effective instrument of personnel management. In particular, in Mariupol County, the practice of substantial one-time payments was introduced. Thus, the director of the male gymnasium received an annual bonus in the amount of 1000 rubles, which in fact led to a doubling of his annual income. Assistant directors and class supervisors received payments in the amount of 300 rubles.

Despite the fact that zemstvo budgets often faced the problem of arrears (in particular in years of poor harvests), the financing of “cultural personnel” remained a priority and, in fact, protected item of expenditure. Even under conditions of administrative pressure, when the central authorities attempted to delegate to the zemstvos the costs of maintaining the police apparatus or penitentiary institutions, the zemstvo institutions of Donetsk region (in particular the Slovianoserbsk zemstvo) showed consistency in defending educational and medical budgets. According to the reports of the Mariupol Zemstvo Board, expenditures on the medical sector in the region demonstrated a rapid growth dynamic: from several thousand rubles at the initial stage of activity to hundreds of thousands of rubles at the beginning of the 20th century (*Report of the Slavyanoserbsk, 1894: 9*).



The stability of financial provision contributed to the formation among specialists of a sense of belonging to a specific “zemstvo corporation”. This in fact acted as a form of tacit contract of mutual loyalty: the zemstvo guaranteed the specialist a high standard of living, and in return received a qualified cultural educator capable of working effectively under conditions of social tension in Donetsk region.

In the second half of the 19th century, the material and everyday living conditions of the rural intelligentsia were characterized by a certain social marginality. The lack of specialized housing stock forced specialists to rent a “corner” or a room in peasant dwellings, which not only caused their direct everyday dependence on the moods of the community, but also leveled the conditions necessary for intellectual and professional activity. The zemstvo institutions of Donetsk region were among the first in the territory of the empire to articulate the thesis that without the provision of an autonomous living space, a specialist was incapable of fully performing the function of a bearer of modernization culture.

A foundational stage in the formation of a systemic housing policy was the decision of the Mariupol Zemstvo Board of October 8, 1876. In accordance with this directive, the zemstvo assumed the obligation to provide teachers of urban gymnasiums with free apartments or to pay the corresponding monetary compensation (the so-called “housing money”). Subsequently, this practice was extrapolated to the rural teaching staff and medical personnel. An analysis of the reports of the Bakhmut zemstvo shows that the project documentation for the construction of new educational institutions necessarily provided for the erection of a separate wing or an adjacent house for the teacher, which usually consisted of 2–3 rooms and a kitchen.

The indicated measures were aimed at the comprehensive “demarginalization” of the intelligentsia. The provision of free housing performed not only an economic function (the

preservation of the specialist's own funds), but also removed him from the direct everyday pressure of the peasant community. The transformation of the teacher's status from a "temporary tenant" into a representative of an official institution – the zemstvo – significantly strengthened his social positions within the county.

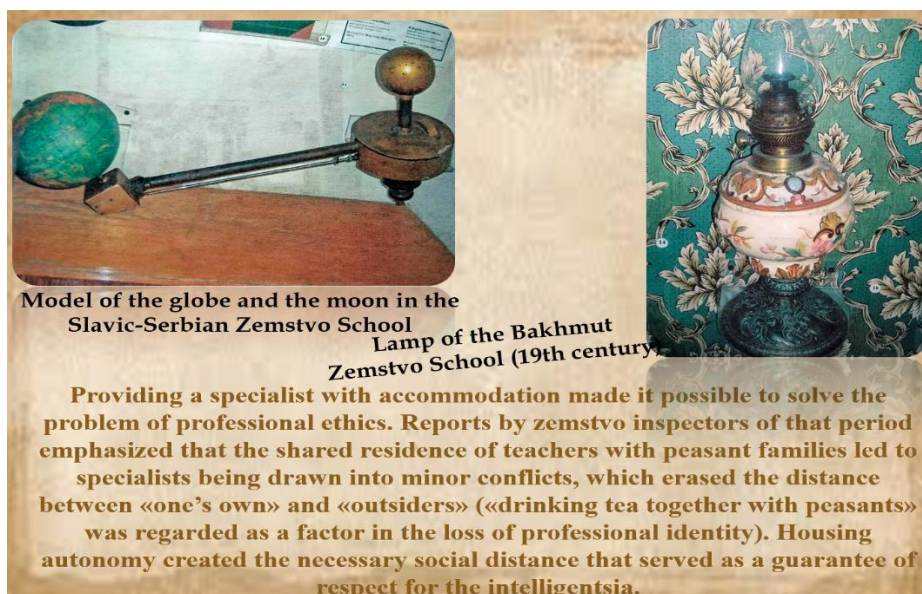
The zemstvo dwelling in Donetsk region was designed as a multifunctional space intended not only for rest, but also for intensive extracurricular and scholarly work. A typical architectural project of a zemstvo school in Bakhmut county provided for the presence of a separate entrance in the teacher's apartment. This made it possible to preserve the necessary level of privacy, while at the same time creating conditions for receiving visitors outside class hours. Similarly, special offices for consultations were allocated in the dwellings of zemstvo doctors, which in fact expanded the functional boundaries of the medical district.

Providing the specialist with a separate dwelling made it possible to solve the critical problem of professional ethics and the maintenance of social authority. In the reports of zemstvo inspectors of that period, attention was focused on the fact that the shared residence of teachers with peasant families led to the involvement of specialists in minor conflicts, which leveled the distance between "one's own" and "outsiders" ("shared tea drinking with peasants" was regarded as a factor in the loss of professional identity). Housing autonomy created the necessary social distance, which was a guarantee of respect for the intellectual.

The zemstvos of Donetsk region were aware of the long-term economic efficiency of investments in real estate compared with constant payments for rent. During the 1880s – 1890s, the Mariupol zemstvo made active capital investments in the construction of brick buildings for hospitals and schools. According to the estimates of that time, the construction of a permanent house for a doctor with the corresponding outbuildings cost the zemstvo from three to five thousand rubles. Such significant one-time expenditures were strategically justified, since they made it possible to remove the problem of personnel instability in individual districts for decades. It is worth noting that, for the implementation of these goals, the zemstvos actively attracted funds from special funds (for example, the school-construction fund named after Peter I), which emphasizes the state-building scale of resolving the housing issue.

The presence of a "state" (zemstvo) apartment was one of the most significant arguments in attracting young personnel. This created a foundation of stability and security, which was critically necessary for preserving the "cultural vanguard" in the specific conditions of the industrial region of Donetsk region. Thus, the housing policy of zemstvo self-government was part of an integral systemic approach to the recruitment and adaptation of new social elite, creating a space in which intellectual culture could not only exist, but also be actively reproduced (*Lokhmatova, A., 1999: 45*).

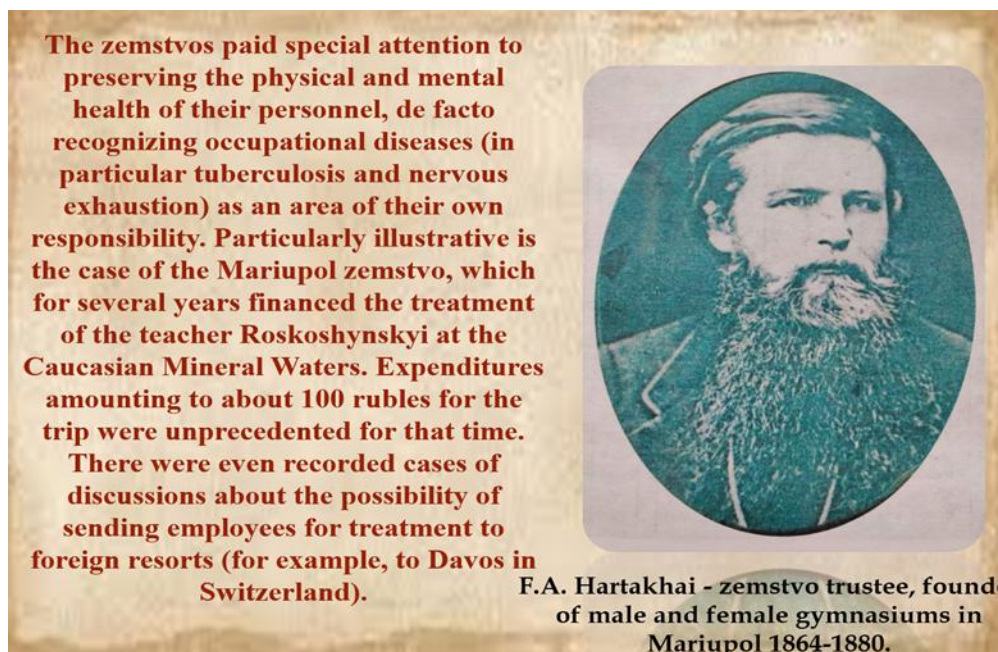
One of the priority areas of retaining specialists in the region was the provision of educational opportunities for their descendants. The system of named scholarships and educational preferences created the prerequisites for the formation of hereditary dynasties of the zemstvo intelligentsia. In Bakhmut County, the practice of awarding scholarships to the children of employees had a systemic character.



A representative example is that of the daughter of the teacher of the Nelypivka zemstvo school, O. Dotsenko, to whom the zemstvo steadily allocated 100 rubles per year for obtaining an education. Similarly, in Slovianoserbsk County, zemstvo institutions assumed the costs of educating the children of medical and pedagogical workers in secondary educational institutions, regarding this as a form of “deferred reward” for the parents’ many years of devoted service.

Zemstvo philanthropy acted not as a formal procedure, but as a flexible mechanism for supporting the individual in critical life circumstances. The scale of charitable activity was significant: according to statistical data, in 1877 alone, 610 persons received assistance in Mariupol County, for which more than 4600 rubles were allocated. A unique feature of the system was the procedure for verifying needs: members of the zemstvo board personally made visits to the most remote corners of the counties for an objective assessment of the condition of those in needs. An important budget item was also “travel allowances” (compensation of travel expenses) and “settling-in assistance” for young specialists, which contributed to their faster adaptation in the region.

The zemstvos paid particular attention to preserving the physical and mental health of their personnel, de facto recognizing occupational diseases (in particular consumption and nervous exhaustion) as a sphere of their own responsibility. Indicative is the case of the Mariupol zemstvo, which for several years financed the treatment of the teacher Roskoshynskyi at the Caucasian Mineral Waters. Expenditures of about 100 rubles for the trip were unprecedented for that time. Cases were even recorded of discussing the possibility of sending employees for treatment to foreign resorts (for example, to Davos in Switzerland). For persons who lost their ability to work, as well as for the widows and orphans of deceased zemstvo members, lifelong pension payments in the amount of 120 to 240 rubles per year were provided. The recognition of the right of an ordinary teacher to expensive sanatorium treatment raised the prestige of zemstvo service to the level of high-ranking state officials, demonstrating the priority of the value of the specific human person over his purely “functional” purpose.



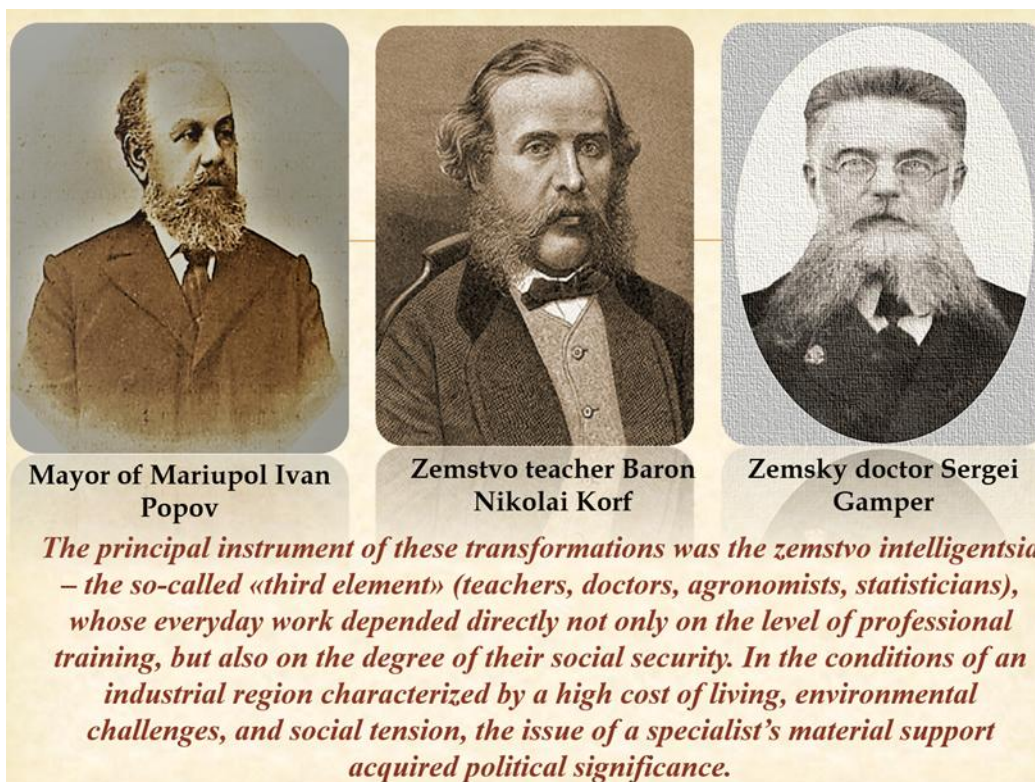
Effective social protection became the foundation for the formation of corporate ethics. The intelligentsia member in Donetsk region positioned himself not as a hired worker, but as a full-fledged member of the protected “zemstvo community”. This allowed the zemstvos to preserve personnel potential and the loyalty of specialists even during periods of revolutionary upheavals and economic destabilization. The model of “family” solidarity of the zemstvos of Donetsk region was a higher form of social management aimed at preserving "cultural capital" by protecting the people who were its creators and bearers.

The evolutionary dynamics of zemstvo activity in the territory of Donetsk region during the period under study testified to a fundamental transition from the model of one-sided paternalistic “care” on the part of county boards to the development of full-fledged institutions of professional and social self-organization of the intelligentsia.

The revolutionary events of 1905 – 1907 became a powerful catalyst for these processes, giving impetus to the legalization of professional associations. In Donetsk region, these structures had a clearly expressed cultural and educational vector. In particular, in 1906, in Bakhmut County, through the direct initiation, organizational support, and financing of the zemstvo, the “Labor Union” was created (*Saraieva, O., 2013: 54*).

Under the aegis of the “Labor Union”, literary readings, chamber music evenings, and traveling art exhibitions were organized on a systematic basis, which was extremely important for the cultural de-isolation of specialists. The Bakhmut zemstvo, for its part, provided the organization with the necessary premises and allocated targeted subsidies for the purchase of books to form the Union’s professional libraries. The emergence of such a structure marked the professional group’s entry onto the level of civil society. Zemstvo self-government consciously “shared power”, understanding that a cohesive, corporately solidary intelligentsia was a reliable

and competent partner in the implementation of complex regional reforms. Among other things, the Union's cultural events performed the critically important function of psychological relief and prevention of professional burnout for specialists who worked in the specific, and at times aggressive, conditions of factory settlements.



A true social innovation that was intensively introduced in Donetsk region was the organization of summer children's institutions. The zemstvos initiated the creation of nursery-shelters for children during the summer period – the time of peak agricultural work, when the rural population was maximally occupied. Despite initial skepticism and, in some places, open distrust on the part of the peasants (as evidenced by the reports of the boards), it was the zemstvo intelligentsia, represented by female teachers and female feldshers, that assumed the role of organizers and educators in these institutions. The Mariupol zemstvo, in its reports, emphasized the success of this experience in several volosts, where the functioning of the nurseries led to a noticeable improvement in the sanitary condition and a real reduction in child mortality rates. This project had a clearly expressed dual purpose: on the one hand – social care for children, and on the other – a space for the professional and social self-realization of women intellectuals. It was a form of active social service that removed alienation and significantly strengthened trust between the “zemstvo members” and the local peasant population.

Thus, on the eve of the events of 1917, the social policy of the zemstvos of Donetsk region turned into an integral, balanced system, in which directive “care” from above and grassroots “self-organization” formed a unique corporate spirit. The zemstvo intelligentsia in the industrial region

ceased to be a scattered group of “visiting specialists” (Belokonsky I., 1914). Thanks to professional unions, retirement mutual-aid funds, and active participation in charitable projects, it transformed into a powerful regional cultural elite. Such internal cohesion and institutional support allowed zemstvo members to effectively resist the administrative pressure of state power and to preserve loyalty to their humanistic and cultural-educational ideals even during periods of acute political instability.

The institutions of solidarity in Donetsk region became the highest form of manifestation of zemstvo activity. In practice, they proved that comprehensive support for the intelligentsia is not merely an item of expenditure, but a strategic investment in the creation of a self-regulating social system capable of reproducing culture, knowledge, and ethical standards under any extreme conditions. It was precisely thanks to this multivector solidarity that the “zemstvo project” in the region became one of the most successful examples of systemic social modernization in the history of Ukraine.

Conclusions

The conducted study makes it possible to formulate a number of generalizing conclusions regarding the specificity and effectiveness of the social policy of the county zemstvos of Donetsk region toward their intelligentsia at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries.

It has been established that the activities of the zemstvo institutions of Bakhmut, Mariupol, and Slovianoserbsk counties went beyond the limits of purely administrative governance, transforming into an integral “cultural project”. Under the conditions of the rapid and, at times, chaotic industrialization of Donetsk region, the zemstvos acted as the main subjects in the formation of the region’s intellectual capital, regarding the social protection of teachers and doctors as a fundamental condition for the successful modernization of the entire sociocultural landscape of the region.

The analysis of the financial policy of the zemstvos of Donetsk region testified to the predominance of a pragmatic approach to remuneration. The introduction of a system of “territorial allowances”, high salaries (400 – 600 rubles per year for teachers), and regular bonus payments (in particular the experience of the Mariupol zemstvo) was a justified response to the high cost of living in the industrial region. Such “pricing of culture” made it possible not only to minimize personnel turnover, but also to carry out strict selective recruitment of specialists, transforming zemstvo service into a prestigious and socially attractive position.

The social protection of zemstvo employees had distinct features of anthropocentrism and corporate solidarity. The system of scholarships for employees’ children, payment for expensive sanatorium treatment in the Caucasus or in Europe, and pension provision for widows and orphans testify to the fact that the zemstvos assumed responsibility for the full life cycle of their employee. Such many years of real care formed a loyal “zemstvo corporation”, whose members felt themselves not temporary hired workers, but part of a protected elite capable of preserving loyalty to professional duty even during periods of socio-political turbulence.

Evolution from care to civic agency. The study confirmed that on the eve of 1917, the social system of the zemstvos in Donetsk region evolved toward professional self-organization. The zemstvos’ support for such institutions as the “Labor Union” in Bakhmut or charitable societies

under the leadership of D. Kharadzhaiev in Mariupol contributed to the involvement of industrialists' private capital in solving humanitarian problems. The creation of summer nursery-shelters and a network of professional mutual-aid funds became the highest stage of this evolution, demonstrating the ability of the intelligentsia for self-regulation and active social service.

In general, the experience of the zemstvos of Donetsk region proves that investments in the “human dimension” of the intelligentsia became a decisive factor in the success of the zemstvo reform. Thanks to a systemic approach to material provision, housing autonomy, and institutional solidarity, the zemstvos managed to create a unique social system that not only survived under the conditions of a complex industrial region, but also became a powerful generator of cultural and social progress in Ukraine at the beginning of the 20th century.

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WOMEN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN GALICIA: MOSCOPHILES AND NARODOVTSI

Abstract. The women's socio-political movement in Galicia in the 19th – 20th centuries was a distinctive phenomenon that combined the struggle for women's rights with the aspiration to preserve the Ukrainian language, traditions, and culture under conditions of statelessness. This topic is important because it demonstrates how women became active participants in public life and helped safeguard national identity amid the pressures of Polonization and Russification. The study compares the two opposing currents of the women's movement, the Moscovophile and the Narodovtsi, and their impact on the role of women in society. To achieve this, the historical-comparative method was employed, integrating an analysis of scholarly works as well as the activities of women's organizations, education, and women's economic engagement. The sources include the magazines "Lada", "Rusalka", and "Persnyi vinok", along with foundational studies by contemporary historians, in particular Marta Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Stepan Kost, and Liliia Sholohon. A notable feature of the work is that the Narodovtsi movement integrated education, active female participation in civic life, and national interests, whereas the Moscovophiles adhered to a conservative model in which women remained primarily at home, engaging only in charity and church activities without a broader national dimension. The research shows that the Narodovtsi trend ultimately prevailed and shaped the image of an educated, active, and nationally conscious woman. This contributed to the formation of Ukrainian women's organizations, the advancement of education and the economy, and laid the groundwork for future Ukrainian statehood. The women's movement in Galicia became a vital component of nation-building and social transformation, preparing the soil for the establishment of the "Soyuz Ukrainok" – the most powerful women's organization in interwar Europe.

Keywords: Women's socio-political movement, Galicia, Moscovophiles, Narodovtsi, pragmatic feminism, national identity, Russification, "Society of Russian Ladies", "Society of Ruthenian Women", "Persnyi vinok".

The women's socio-political movement in Galicia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was a unique and very important phenomenon. This movement was not simply a copy of European feminism. In fact, it marked the beginning of women's return to an active role in social life, a role they had once held but lost. At that time, Ukraine did not have its own state, and therefore the issue of women's rights was closely intertwined with the broader struggle to preserve the nation. Women played a crucial role, as they were the ones who safeguarded the language, traditions, and national consciousness. Through raising children and everyday life, they helped maintain Ukrainian identity despite strong pressures of Polonization and Russification.

Thus, the women's movement was not only about women's rights but also about the survival of the entire nation.

An important feature of this process was that Ukrainian women viewed emancipation not as an individual right, but as a tool for serving society. This contributed to the formation of a specific concept of "self-help", in which women acted independently, without expecting support from the state. They created their own educational and social initiatives, including childcare institutions and training courses, which enabled them to combine civic engagement with national educational work.

Modern scholars emphasize that this period requires thorough reinterpretation through the lens of gender history. The movement was not spontaneous; it was grounded in a solid intellectual foundation shaped by women intellectuals. Today, historians interpret these developments not only as a form of social struggle but also as part of the broader process of modernization of Ukrainian society, within which women became active participants in political life. At the same time, it is important to consider that the feminist movement developed under the conditions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where patriarchal norms remained deeply entrenched.

During this period in Galicia, there was a division between two currents, Moscophiles and Narodovtsi, who had different views on the role of women in society. The Moscophiles adhered to more positions that are conservative and did not support women's active participation in public life. In contrast, the Narodovtsi advocated for women's education, their development, and involvement in social activities. This difference in views was part of a broader ideological conflict in Galician society, which had formed after the defeat of the 1848 revolution and the changes in the political system of Austria-Hungary in 1867.

The Moscophile trend in the women's movement of Galicia emerged in the second half of the 19th century and was connected with the orientation of part of society toward the Russian Empire. Its supporters believed that Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians were one "triune people", and therefore supported the idea of cultural and linguistic closeness with the Russian Empire. This position appeared as a reaction to intensified Polonization after 1848, when many Ukrainians in Galicia began to lose their rights and sought protection from other powers (Sholohon, 2026: 3502).

This trend was quite conservative. Its representatives supported preserving a traditional way of life in which women had a limited role. Their activities were mainly confined to managing the household, raising children, participating in church life, and engaging in charity. Women could help others, but they were not expected to take an active part in political or public life. In addition, this movement paid little attention to ideas of national development or women's equality (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

One of the first women's organizations in Galicia was the "Society of Russian Ladies" ("Obshchestvo russkikh dam"), founded by Klavdiia Aleksovykh in 1878, or according to some sources, in 1879 in Lviv. It mainly included women who supported Moscophile views. They had connections with Russian conservative circles and cooperated with Metropolitan Yosyf Sembratovych. The main activities of this society were quite limited. They organized balls and exhibitions, engaged in charity, and opened small sewing schools for girls. This helped women in everyday life, but did not go beyond local assistance and had little impact on the development of national consciousness or on broader participation of women in society (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

The main problem of the Moscovophile movement was its detachment from the real needs of Galician women, which was especially evident in the sphere of the press and literary activity. Publications by Severyn Shekhovych, such as the journals “Lada” (1853) and “Rusalka” (1868–1870), were issued in a specific mixture of Ukrainian and Russian known as “yazychiie” (Kost, 2007: 124). Because of this, Galician women often preferred Polish magazines, as “yazychiie” was perceived as something artificial and difficult to understand for ordinary peasant women, who made up the majority of the region’s population (Sholohon, 2026: 3502). The content of Moscovophile periodicals was often simplistic and did not correspond to the social needs of the time, promoting purely patriarchal norms without taking into account the social changes occurring in Austria-Hungary. A vivid example is the “Marriage Rule” published in “Rusalka” in 1868: “Girls younger than 20 should marry men older than themselves; girls up to 30 should marry their peers, and forty-year-old women should take whoever they can get...” (Kost, 2007: 124). Such advice only emphasized the patriarchal limitations of the Moscovophiles, ignoring the need for women’s education and self-realization in a modern society.

This conservatism was also reflected in the fact that even women from educated Russophile families were primarily oriented toward the role of a wife and received only basic education in vocational schools. The use of “yazychiie” and the lack of a clearly defined national program reduced the quality and appeal of their publications, which made them less competitive, compared to the Narodovtsi periodicals.

They promoted the image of a “sincere Russian patriot”, which in the context of Galicia was perceived as something alien, since it distanced women from local traditions and language, orienting them toward cultural assimilation with Russia (Sholohon, 2026: 3502). Ultimately, the Moscovophile movement failed due to its inability to offer women a path to genuine development, its neglect of the national identity of Ukrainians in the region, and its restriction to church-charitable activities, which did not meet the growing demands of the national revival.

The Narodovtsi women’s movement in Galicia emerged in the late 19th century as an active response to social problems. Unlike the Moscovophiles, the Narodovtsi saw women not only as homemakers but also as important participants in the creation of the Ukrainian nation. The movement was based on so-called “pragmatic feminism”: the primary focus was not only on women’s personal rights but also on benefit for the nation (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

Education was one of the most important ideas of the Narodovtsi movement. They believed that without knowledge and literacy it was impossible to develop either an individual or the nation as a whole. Although, according to the Austrian law of 1872, girls were supposed to study for only three years, the Narodovtsi aimed for much more. They tried to convince peasants that education wasn’t just something formal, but had practical value, as it helped to manage a household more effectively, raise children and shape conscious, and responsible women – future patriotic mothers (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021). At the same time, education was seen not only as a woman’s personal right but also as her duty to society. It was believed that an educated woman should work for the benefit of her people, support its development, and preserve its culture. That is why ideas of women’s equality were combined with national interests – women were to become active participants in public life, but above all for the sake of the common cause (Kost, 2007: 124).

An important event took place on December 8, 1884, when Nataliya Kobrynska founded the “Society of Ruthenian Women” (“Tovarystvo ruskykh zhinok”) in Stanislaviv. This was the first secular, that is, non-church, women’s organization, and it had broader goals. It aimed to develop women through education, reading, and literature, as well as to unite them regardless of

social background. Members of the society engaged in educational activities, organized cultural events, and spread knowledge among women (Kost, 2007: 124).

Natalia Kobrynska faced misunderstanding even among her like-minded associates. Some members of the society sought to turn it into a conventional charitable organization focused on providing material aid to the poor. However, Kobrynska remained consistent in her views. She regarded the organization as an intellectual center for the development of women's consciousness (Kost, 2007: 124). She believed that women's emancipation was not an end in itself, but a necessary condition for the overall socio-cultural development of the nation. Modern scholars characterize her approach as a manifestation of a modern type of self-awareness. In her view, women's reflection on reality had the potential to critically reassess patriarchal notions and contribute to the renewal of Ukrainian literature.

Nataliya Kobrynska was also one of the first to explain why women should have more rights and opportunities. She opposed the old patriarchal order, where a woman was limited to the family, and argued that her development was important for society as a whole. In her views, she drew on the ideas of European thinkers, particularly John Stuart Mill, as well as moderate socialist ideas (Sholohon, 2026: 3500).

An important step in the development of the Narodovtsi women's movement was the publication of the almanac "Persnyi vinok" ("The First Wreath") in 1887. Nataliya Kobrynska and Olena Pchilka (Sholohon, 2026: 3501) created it. This was a very significant event, as it was the first time women from different parts of Ukraine united for a common cause. The collection included contributions from 17 female authors from both Galicia and the Dnieper region, among them the very young Lesya Ukrainka and Hanna Barvinok. In the preface, Nataliya Kobrynska emphasized that this was the first instance of Ukrainian women coming together for a shared goal – national unity and addressing important women's issues (Kost, 2007: 125). The almanac was not just a collection of literary works. It also addressed important social topics, particularly issues of women's education, their rights, and their role in society. In other words, it served as a statement that women have the right to be active participants in public life. For this reason, it can be considered an example of so-called "pragmatic feminism", where the fight for women's rights was combined with the needs of the nation (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

In addition, the publication of "Persnyi Vinok" became a challenge to the traditional norms of the time, as it was produced entirely through the efforts of women. However, the public, including Galician women themselves, initially received it without particular enthusiasm, and it was only due to financial support from the Galician intelligentsia that the project could be realized.

This movement received strong support from Ivan Franko. He helped edit the almanac and actively supported women in their activities. In his publications, particularly in the newspaper "Dilo", Franko spoke positively about their work and urged society not to ridicule but to support the women's movement (Kost, 2007: 124).

From the 1890s, the Narodovtsi women's movement became more organized and widespread. In 1893, the "Club of Ruthenian Women" was established in Lviv under the leadership of Hermyna Shukhevych. Its members opened kindergartens, schools for girls, held lectures, and taught women useful skills. One of their major achievements was the creation of the Ukrainian Girls' School named after Shevchenko, where girls were educated in the national spirit (Kost, 2007: 125 – 126).

In the interwar period, women's press became a powerful instrument for shaping national consciousness. The magazine "Nova Khata" (1925–1939) popularized folk art, creating a fashion

for embroidered shirts among the intelligentsia, which strengthened patriotic sentiments (Kost, 2007: 129). At the same time, “Zhinocha Dolia” in Kolomyia, under the leadership of Olena Kysilevska, focused on rural women, explaining how to establish women’s circles and participate in civic work (Kost, 2007: 130). Of particular note is the biweekly “Zhinka”, which became a platform for Milena Rudnytska and the intellectual milieu, defending the rights of Ukrainian women before the Polish authorities (Kost, 2007: 134).

An interesting innovation in the press was the “American” section in the magazine “Zhinocha Dolia,” edited by Dr. V. Simenovych. It enabled Galician women to feel connected to the global women’s movement and to draw on the experience of the diaspora for developing their own initiatives (Kost, 2007: 125).

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new, even more active generation of women emerged. For example, the “Circle of Ukrainian Girls” (1901) encouraged women to be bolder and participate in public life. They even published their own magazine “Meta”, where they wrote about women’s rights and their role in society (Kost, 2007: 126).

In 1909, various women’s organizations united to form the “Women’s Community”. This made the movement stronger and more organized, as it now had many branches throughout Galicia. Women engaged not only in cultural activities but also fought for the right to study in gymnasiums and universities (Kost, 2007: 127).

At the end of 1912, when male political leaders did not invite women to a meeting on supporting Austria in the war, leaders of the women’s movement convened their own secret assembly. Olena Stepaniv, Kostyantyna Malyska, and other activists expressed their readiness to support the state only on the condition that Ukrainian national interests would be respected, and within a short time, they raised significant funds for organizing a Ukrainian army (Kost, 2007: 127). This demonstrated the political maturity of women, who proved to be better oriented in the historical situation than some male politicians were.

Economic activity was also important. Women created their own organizations and worked together to earn money. For example, they opened clothing workshops or participated in cooperatives, such as the “Maslosoyuz”. This helped them become more independent, support their families and at the same time strengthen Ukrainian society (Bohachevska-Khomiak, 2021).

Today, the ideas of the historical women’s movement are gaining new relevance through modern initiatives such as “Her Lecture Series” (Yiyi Lektorii) and the activities of the Museum of Women’s and Gender History. An important initiative is the proposal to establish December 8 as the Day of the Ukrainian Women’s Movement, as it was on this date in 1884 that the first general meeting of the “Society of Ruthenian Women” took place in Stanislaviv (Sholohon, 2026: 3503). This highlights that the struggle for gender equality and national identity remains relevant today.

It is worth noting that in 2025 an international conference titled “Natalia Kobrynska – The Path of Progress” was held, bringing together a significant number of scholars to explore new approaches to popularizing her legacy. In addition, recent collective monographs have been published, including “In the Name of Our National Unity”, dedicated to the authors of the almanac “Pershyi Vinok”. At the same time, according to the latest historiography (as of 2026), there is still a lack of a comprehensive study that would systematically analyze the historical preconditions and interconnections of the Ukrainian feminist movement within a global context (Sholohon, 2026: 3504).

Thus, the development of the women’s movement in Galicia showed that the victory of the Narodovtsi over the Moscovophiles was entirely logical. The Moscovophiles encouraged women to

remain within old boundaries: without an active role in society, oriented toward a foreign culture and language that were largely incomprehensible to the people. This did not correspond to the new conditions of life, as changes were taking place in Austria-Hungary, and the national consciousness of Ukrainians was gradually growing. In contrast, the Narodovtsi proposed a completely different approach. They envisioned women as educated, conscious, and active. Such a woman not only took care of her family but also participated in public life, engaged in educational work, worked in cooperatives, and even joined the struggle for the rights of the nation. In other words, she combined her personal life with contributions to society. It was during this period that an understanding of the rights and role of Ukrainians in society began to form. The women's movement managed to unite ideas of women's equality with the national idea. Thanks to this, Ukrainians were able to better preserve their culture and identity, even without having their own state. In the future, this development led to the creation of the "Union of Ukrainian Women", a large and influential women's organization. It united thousands of women and had a real impact on education, the economy, and even political life. Thus, the women's movement in Galicia was not merely a struggle for women's rights. It became an important part of the broader struggle of Ukrainians for their existence and development, laying the foundation for a future independent state.



Female activists of the Ukrainian movement along with male public and culture figures celebrating the 100th anniversary of Kotlyarevsky's Eneyida, 1898.



Klavdiia Aleksovykh (1830 – 1916).



Natliia Kobrybska (1851 – 1920).



The cover of the almanac of Pershyi Vinok (the First Garland), 1887.



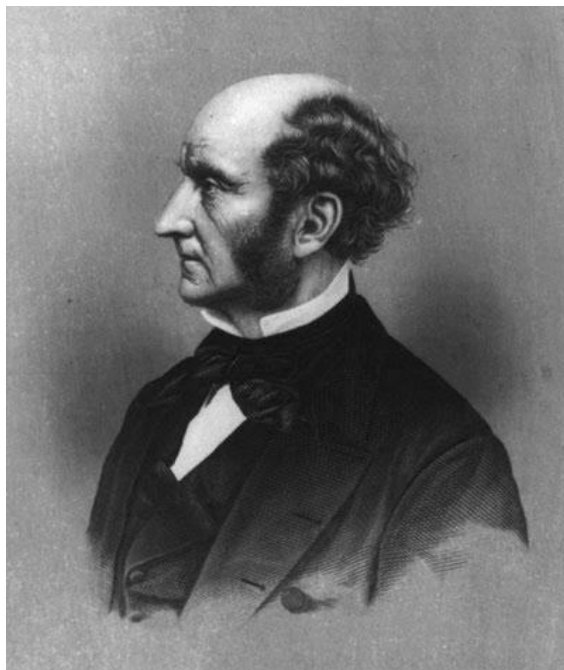
Olena Pchilka (Olha Kosach) (1848 – 1930).



Lesya Ukrainka (Larysa Kosach) (1871 – 1913).



Hanna Barvinok (Oleksandra Biloserska-Kulish) (1828 – 1911).



John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873).



Ivan Franko (1856 – 1916).



Hermina Shukhevyh (1852 – 1939).



Olena Stepaniv (1892 – 1963).



Konstiantyna Malytska (1872 – 1947).



*Members of the Stryi branch of the Soyuz of Ukrainok
(Union of Ukrainian women), 1937.*

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**MYKOLA LYSENKO:
RECONSTRUCTING PHYSICAL HEALTH THROUGH NARRATIVE SOURCES**

Abstract. The article is devoted to reconstructing Mykola Lysenko's physical health on the basis of narrative sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, above all ego-documents – correspondence, memoirs, and recollections of the composer himself and of those around him. Health is considered not only as a medical or biological category, but also as a component of everyday experience, closely connected with professional activity, family circumstances, psychological strain, and the sociocultural context of the imperial era. The article analyzes Lysenko's major illnesses as well as therapeutic practices typical of the period: spa treatment, climate-related travel, and restrictions on physical activity. Particular attention is given to the family dimension of health – the illnesses of children and close relatives, epidemics, the psychological impact of losing his wife, and the mechanisms of emotional coping with traumatic events through creative work. It is shown that the illnesses and deaths of members of the intellectual milieu were perceived as a collective experience of the community and were reflected in private discourse. The conclusion emphasizes the heuristic potential of ego-documents for studying the history of everyday life and the private dimension of the lives of figures in Ukrainian culture

Keywords: Mykola Lysenko, narrative sources, Kyiv, everyday life, health, illness.

In the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, ego-documents – correspondence, memoirs, and diaries – became one of the most important sources for reconstructing the private dimension of life that remained outside official narratives. The particular value of these materials lies in the possibility of tracing not only the course of events, but also the author's individual experience.

Despite the breadth of research on the everyday life of members of the Ukrainian community in Kyiv, Ukrainian scholarly discourse still lacks specialized studies that would reveal the interdependence of everyday experience and the nature of activity and achievements of individual figures, as well as the relationship in their narratives between matters of private life, including their own health and the health of their closest family circle.

Epistolary and memoir heritage makes it possible to consider health not only as a biological category, but also as an element of everyday experience under imperial conditions, high professional workload, and constant psychological stress. Medical topics in these sources are

closely connected with family circumstances, creative activity, social obligations, and personal tragedies.

The aim of this article is to analyze Mykola Lysenko's ego-documents and those of his circle as a source for studying personal health, with an emphasis on the interpretation of illness, treatment, and lived bodily experience in the private discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

References can remain as in the original, while I continue translating the main body paragraph by paragraph.

References to Mykola Vitaliiiovych Lysenko's personal health in his correspondence are fragmentary, but they allow certain aspects to be identified. In particular, rheumatism as the composer's chronic illness, the first recorded aggravated course of which, caused by accompanying pathologies, was documented in his correspondence with F. Krasyt'skyi in the spring of 1895: "I have been weak the whole time; first I was laid low by rheumatism in my leg; however, I lay for about five days and then began to recover quickly; this was before Carnival. And now, during Lent, I have fallen ill again with bronchitis, such a fierce and stubborn one that my chest has been tearing for about a week and a half. At first I had a fever, so I had to lie in bed for five days without getting up, and now I am already on my feet, though I do not go outside, and the cough does not stop, no matter what I do. Because of my weakness I have to miss many lessons, but I do not dare take risks" (Lysenko, 2004: 241).

In light of the above, Lysenko's intention to undertake therapeutic measures becomes evident. Evidence of this can be found in his letters to M. Komarov in May and July 1895 (Lysenko, 2004: 242). The main topic is the organization of the Lysenko family's rest at the Odesa estuaries.

The sources do not record whether Lysenko managed to carry out this health-related trip; by the end of 1895 the problem of rheumatism remained relevant for him (Lysenko, 2004: 248).

At the same time, special attention should be paid to the detailed description of the course of the illness, which may indicate a threat of chronicity. "I suffered from acute rheumatism this winter, though only for a very short time, and only in my leg; but although this weakness of mine is not in a severe state, it has nevertheless taken root: sometimes pain appears in the elbow bone, sometimes in the shoulder, sometimes in the collarbone..." (Lysenko, 2004: 242).

The theme of spa treatment reappears in the composer's letters shortly before his death – in 1912. In July and August, on the recommendation of Dr. T. Yanovskyi, he stayed in Nauheim for the treatment of heart disease. From there, in a letter to Petro Stebnytskyi, the composer expressed hope for the effectiveness of the treatment. "However beautiful it is here, and relatively warm in climate, pleasant, moderately hot and not dry, however orderly life is – to one's astonishment, looking at this high and, one would think, hardly attainable culture in everything from the most important to the smallest manifestations in the lives of the local inhabitants – still, the monotonous life is exhausting, and by the end of the bathing season one grows weary and is glad to fly away to one's unfortunate homeland," (Lysenko, 2004:473-474) Lysenko stated.

Lysenko linked the change in his condition to an insufficient number of balneological procedures. In the same letter one can also discern not direct criticism of the physician – Theophil Yanovskyi. He stopped the treatment course at 21 baths, although he had initially prescribed five weeks of baths and two additional weeks of rest, which Lysenko described with the Germanism *nachkuhr* – rehabilitation, post-spa treatment, sanatorium convalescence. "Perhaps because I took too few baths, the old pains are again making themselves felt. In general, I heard from many

patients there that one course of treatment in Nauheim is not enough to improve one's health..." (Lysenko, 2004:474.) the composer concluded.

After returning to his homeland, and with the obvious seasonal change – autumn was approaching – Mykola Lysenko noted a sharp deterioration in his well-being, in contrast to the relief he had experienced at the spa. "And here I felt worse than there. My legs are swelling again, though not very much, but still they are, and there I had got rid of this trouble, and while walking here, pain in the chest soon reappeared, so that one has to stop until the circulation improves," (Lysenko, 2004:478) he wrote in a letter to his daughter Kateryna.

That Mykola Lysenko suffered from heart disease is also confirmed in the memoirs of his son Ostop. Describing a trip to Kaniv, to the grave of Taras Shevchenko, he wrote: "Then we climbed for a long time up a steep hill. We walked in silence. Father stopped more than once, breathing heavily, leaning on his Hutsul hatchet-stick. It was clear that for him, a man suffering from heart disease, the ascent was not easy. But he never complained." (Lysenko, 1966:363).

Lysenko was deeply concerned about the illnesses of those close to him. In 1895 his daughter Kateryna had influenza, and at the same time his younger brother Andrii, who suffered from tuberculosis, came to Kyiv for treatment; the composer reported this in one of his letters to F. Krasyskyi (Lysenko, 2004:248).

The ailments of his relatives were a heavy psycho-emotional trial for Lysenko. "Put yourself in my position: besides hard work with the choir and other concerns, sorrow has also visited me: my eldest daughter suddenly fell ill with diphtheria. God only knows what happened to me. Thanks be to God, everything ended well: the child recovered. Now we are disinfecting the entire apartment, and rehearsals have been moved to another one, to acquaintances. Such a moral state simply broke me, 'weakened' me," (Lysenko, 2004:208) he wrote in a letter to I. Shrag.

An effective method of combating infectious diseases, besides those mentioned by the composer, was to leave the city, which had become a center of the epidemic. Thus, during the cholera outbreak in 1892, the family temporarily left for the village of Orlova Balka; from there the composer sent letters to Fotii Krasyskyi at the end of June ((Lysenko, 2004:202-203), expecting to return to the city by 15 August. Those hopes were not fulfilled, and only on 28 October, in a letter to another correspondent – Volodymyr Shukhevych – did he report having recently returned to Kyiv (Lysenko, 2004:204).

Lysenko devoted considerable attention in his correspondence to the health of his youngest son, Taras, which may be explained by several factors. First, Taras was the youngest child in the family. Second, he was also a late child – the composer was already 58 at the time. Third, his wife and the mother of the family, Olha Antonivna, died in childbirth. These circumstances probably intensified parental care and concern for the youngest son.

In a letter to Hanna Barvinok, Lysenko described in detail the tragic circumstances of the birth and sudden death of his wife Olha (Lysenko, 2004:300). In a letter to I. Franko, retelling the depth of his loss, he stressed the significant psychological trauma. He emphasized that this loss was not only family-related but also deeply personal, since his wife was for him "the sincerest friend and adviser in all my public undertakings and affairs, the helper of my best efforts" (Lysenko, 2004:301). The composer also noted her key role in raising the children in the Ukrainian spirit, admitting that "I owed everything to her... Now I have been left alone and unbalanced."

In June 1900, after less than three months had passed since his wife's death, while staying in Romanivka on the estate of the Rytskyi family, Lysenko gave instructions concerning the newborn son: "How is little dear Tarasik, does he wheeze or cough, is he pale, green? Did you call

Mykhailov? (This is absolutely, unconditionally necessary.) What did he say, what did he advise? God, how much he should go out for walks, but not in the little garden, in a garden such as the Botanical one, but with his head covered by a cap and umbrella, and his legs wrapped in a blanket, and not so that they are left uncovered. Of course, all this only when it is dry, not damp and a little warm. In addition, under your tireless care...” (Lysenko, 2004:304).

Lysenko showed lively interest in the health of his adult children as well. In a letter to his daughter Kateryna, when she was living in Krakow, he gave her specific advice on adaptation to the new environment and on mental well-being. “Are you all healthy there? What worries me most is how you, Katriusia, will get used to the climate and also to the food, and I hope that in the first days you will not fall ill, and your silence gives rise to sad thoughts: are you all healthy there? When you receive my letter, immediately write back about your health and your stay, whether you live in good harmony and peace, whether you do not quarrel sometimes. Harmony is spiritual peace, agreement of mind and heart; it is as necessary as health, and in a foreign land, among strangers, it sustains a person when he begins to miss home. So describe to us this state of mind, Katrya, and tell us in detail...” (Lysenko, 2004:329). In this same letter the composer also mentioned his two-year-old son Taras, who had not yet learned to speak, and asked his daughter to pray for his deceased mother on the eve of the second anniversary of her death.

After the profound personal loss that befell Lysenko, the composer found consolation in creativity: “Once, not long after my mother’s sudden death, returning from gymnasium, I found my father at the piano. There was no one in the whole house. The piano was at times pleading and weeping, at times whispering something tenderly and passionately... It seemed to me that at that moment, in the dearest language of sounds, he was continuing the unfinished conversation with our mother, his faithful and unforgettable friend,” (Lysenko, 1966:207) recalled his son Ostap. As we can see, the intensification of creative activity in response to life’s trials was for the composer an effective mechanism of psychological adaptation and grief work.

In Mykola Lysenko’s letters to his friend, a representative of the khlopoman movement, ethnographer, and public figure Borys Poznanskyi, who had been exiled by the imperial authorities beyond the borders of Ukraine, we find frequent and detailed information about the deaths and illnesses of members of the Old Hromada.

In December 1900, Lysenko informed his correspondent about Antonovych’s illness and the route and circumstances of his health-related trip to Italy: “Volodymyr Bonifatiiovych left on 1–2 November for Sicily, to the city of Catania, on the southern side of Sicily, at the foot of Etna. His state of health is very, very poor and required this departure. The university gave him 600 or 700 rubles for the trip. He has sclerosis of all vessels and nephritis, and every kind of ailment. Whether he will return to us at the end of April, as he said, only God knows. He was in Lviv for a few days. In Rome he suffered a stroke: one leg, one arm, and his tongue were paralyzed, and one eye twisted. But after 2 – 3 days he recovered and wrote about it himself to Dr. Cherniakhivskyi. He wrote that he was traveling via Naples to Catania. He is there already now” (Lysenko, 2004:310). In the same letter Lysenko mentions Tadei Rytskyi’s wintering in Crimea. This confirms a widespread practice among the intellectual elite of the time of choosing Crimea as a place for rest and recuperation in winter, which corresponded to contemporary views on treatment and leisure.

After Volodymyr Bonifatiiovych’s return from Italy, Lysenko, having seen him at one of the Hromada gatherings, positively assessed the results of the treatment: “Volodar, thank God, returned in the first days of June much fresher, healthier, and has felt well all summer and even

now, but as it gets colder, he feels worse”(Lysenko, 2004:322). He also reported plans for another winter stay in Crimea.

In the case of the death of Oleksandr Konyskyi, Mykola Lysenko paid attention to the cause of death – “he had been weak with pneumonia, but not severely; he died of paralysis of the heart” (Lysenko, 2004:310) – as well as to general remarks about the course of the funeral procession. The description of William Berenshtam’s death is marked by a high level of emotional intensity and detail. This difference is explained by the close friendship between the composer and the deceased. The tragic character of the narrative is intensified by the fact that Lysenko and Berenshtam had seen each other shortly before the latter’s death. “William left us so unexpectedly that it is hard to come to terms with it. I saw him in the Hromada just a few days before. He seemed to me extraordinarily pale, emaciated; he said that he had been feeling very unwell lately, complained of his heart, shortness of breath, and sclerosis. Still, he took part in the conversation, in the debates, and even, it seems, had a little supper with us (or perhaps not). And after that I never saw him alive again,” (Lysenko, 2004:393) Lysenko emphasized, drawing attention to Berenshtam’s complaints about his condition, noting his poor appearance and at the same time stressing his communicative activity.

The phenomenon of sensing the approach of the end of earthly life often stimulates a person to put life affairs in order and to complete unfinished projects, which is especially characteristic of people of artistic professions. Mykola Vitaliiiovych Lysenko was no exception in this regard. A detailed description of such a phenomenon is recorded in the memoirs of his son Ostap, which testify to the composer’s tendency toward reflection and the systematization of his activity in the period preceding his own end.

“We are not eternal, Ostap,” the composer said to his son, “so it is time for me, as our Taras said, to prepare the wagons for a long journey. I want you to help me with the work” (Lysenko, 1966:298). Thus, he helped his father organize his creative legacy, including checking the text of the opera Taras Bulba.

The composer’s trip to his small homeland, which had been a cherished dream for several decades, can be interpreted as psychological and emotional preparation for the end of life’s journey. In 1911, a year before his death, he visited his native village of Hrynky in Poltava region, as well as nearby Lypove, Zhovnyn, Svitylivka, Klishchyntsi, and others. A detailed description of the circumstances of this final trip is also reflected in his son’s memoirs, where its effect on his father’s health was assessed positively: “...and he returned to Kytayiv younger by several years, cheerful, in high spirits” (Lysenko, 1966:324).

In Ostap Lysenko’s memoirs there is no information about the immediate cause of death or a detailed description of his father’s funeral arrangements. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the reaction of the Ukrainian intellectual and cultural elite, particularly Lesia Ukrainka and Dnirova Chaika, to this tragic event.

A detailed description of the funeral is presented in an article by the Ukrainian art historian and ethnographer Vadym Shcherbakivskyi. Quoting Oleksandr Kosyts, the author gives us an idea of the first stage of the funeral and broadly presents the panorama in the deceased’s house: “The house was filled with the emptiness of death; the family wandered about with tearful eyes. It was felt that something extraordinary had happened, the full weight of which could not yet be grasped. Some student was reading the Ukrainian Psalter over the coffin. The coffin stood on the floor. Lysenko’s large portrait had been covered with a veil, and all the furniture had been removed from this room, which made the impression of coldness and emptiness even stronger. I, oppressed, gazed

at the face of the deceased... <...> The priests came. Students and female students sang the memorial service; I went home...” (Shcherbakivskyi, 2022).

Vadym Shcherbakivskyi, describing the memorial service in St. Volodymyr’s Cathedral and detailing the funeral procession – its route and the participation of numerous choral ensembles – emphasized the exceptional size of the event. Such events made it possible not only to express public protest against the existing order, but also to demonstrate solidarity and support for the communities to which the deceased belonged.

The analyzed narrative sources make it possible to reconstruct not only the spectrum of the composer’s illnesses, those of his family and circle, but also the ways in which lived bodily experience was understood in the private discourse of the Ukrainian elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when illness became part of everyday life and was closely connected with professional workload, family circumstances, emotional losses, and social obligations.

The correspondence materials show the gradual progression of Lysenko’s ailments into chronic conditions – rheumatism, respiratory, and cardiovascular diseases – and demonstrate therapeutic strategies typical of the era: spa treatment, climate-related travel, and restrictions on physical activity. At the same time, they record the composer’s critical attitude toward the effectiveness of treatment and his awareness of its temporary nature.

The family dimension of health acquires particular significance. Care for children, emotional responses to the illnesses of loved ones, preventive practices during epidemics, and detailed discussion of treatment measures testify to a high degree of medical sensitivity and responsibility on the part of the head of the family. The death of his wife Olha became a profound psychological trauma that affected both the composer’s physical condition and his inner world, while at the same time activating creative mechanisms of coping with loss.

The illnesses and deaths of close friends were perceived by Lysenko as a shared experience of the milieu rather than as purely private events. The detailing of symptoms, treatment routes, and circumstances of death served to record the collective vulnerability of the community and at the same time functioned as a form of emotional processing of loss.

Thus, the analysis of narrative sources makes it possible to view health in Mykola Lysenko’s life as a dynamic process in which lived bodily experience, emotional experiences, and the sociocultural practices of the epoch are combined. Ego-documents emerge as an important tool for studying the history of everyday life, making it possible to reconstruct the private dimension of a figure’s life that remains outside official biographical and medical narratives.

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UDC 930.1/.2:781.7:82-6]:929Квітка

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"UNDER THE MUSICAL AND ACADEMIC INFLUENCE OF VIACHESLAV PETR": THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF KLYMENT KVITKA'S SCHOLARLY WORLDVIEW

Abstract. This paper explores the intellectual connections between the Ukrainian folklorist and musicologist Klyment Kvitka and director of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium and an outstanding Ukrainian-Czech educator, philologist and music theorist Viacheslav Petr. The study highlights V. Petr's impact on K. Kvitka's scientific worldview through the analysis of epistolary sources and bibliographic records. Central to the research is K. Kvitka's letter to Olena Pchilka, where he explicitly acknowledges being "under the musical and academic influence" of V. Petr, while also noting the shared academic lineage of musicologist Mykola Hrinchenko. The paper further demonstrates how the mature K. Kvitka integrated V. Petr's theories on ancient musical scales into his own studies. The findings illuminate V. Petr's important role as an educator, proving that the gymnasium was a powerful intellectual environment where the academic worldview of the European elite was forged.

Keywords: Klyment Kvitka, Viacheslav Petr, ethnomusicology, intellectual formation, microhistory, historical anthropology, Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium, academic mentoring.

Main Body: Today, Klyment Kvitka is widely recognized as a foundational figure in Ukrainian ethnomusicology. His biography, extensive fieldwork, and fundamental contributions to musical folklore have rightfully been the subject of profound and comprehensive scholarly research. However, within this well-studied biographical landscape, the specific mechanisms of his early intellectual formation can be further illuminated through a micro-historical and anthropological lens. The specific interpersonal influences that forged his strict scientific paradigm – particularly the significant role of his director, Viacheslav Petr – warrant much deeper examination.

This exploratory study aims to reconstruct the academic ties between K. Kvitka and V. Petr, highlighting V. Petr's indirect influence on K. Kvitka's intellectual formation. The research traces this connection through a contextual analysis of correspondence, memoirs, and K. Kvitka's explicit references to V. Petr's findings, while also examining the director's pedagogical approaches and the vibrant educational atmosphere of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium. This paper serves as an initial framework that will be significantly expanded – incorporating a comprehensive analysis of primary archival sources – in the author's upcoming dissertation on V. Petr's broader scientific and educational legacy in Ukraine.

To achieve the goal, the study employs the micro-historical approach and biographistics, enabling a focused examination of his specific educational environment (the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium). Furthermore, utilizing a historical-anthropological perspective, the study conducts

a contextual analysis of epistolary documents, contemporary memoirs, and V. Petr's and K. Kvitka's scholarly works.

The historiographical framework of this study is grounded in foundational biographical research on K. Kvitka (A. Storozhuk, N. Demydenko, A. Ivanytskyi, H. Khvostenko, T. Tretiachenko, and B. Lukaniuk, alongside the participants of his research project). These works focus not only on documenting K. Kvitka's biography but also on republishing his original research papers and epistolary heritage. Furthermore, the everyday life of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium, along with the administrative, pedagogical, and musicological legacy of its director, V. Petr, are explored in the publications of V. Fedorchenko, O. Kostiukova, T. Diorova, M. Oleksiiko, I. Kalinin, O. Hysa, N. Savchuk, I. Sapozhnikov, T. Miaskova, M. Kalnytskyi, as well as O. and D. Muratov, among others. Notably, these themes have also been the subject of recent research conducted by the present author and his supervisor, V. Andreiev.

The source base includes an analysis of materials from contemporary periodicals, such as the journal *Avanhard*, which sheds light on secret youth circles, as well as specific research works by V. Petr. Notably, these include "On the Melodic Structure of the Aryan Song"¹ (published in the *Russian Musical Gazette* in 1897–1898) and "On the Tasks of the Secondary School", 1900. Furthermore, the research relies on his memoirs published in *Russian Excursionist* in 1916, data regarding the teaching staff extracted from official address-calendars, and records on musical studies found in the reports of the educational district trustee. Furthermore, the study relies on primary archival sources from CSDAVO of Ukraine: V. Petr's biographical records and K. Kvitka's personal file from the General Secretariat of Judicial Affairs.

The late XIXth and early XXth centuries marked a crucial period in the formation of the Ukrainian intellectual elite. To understand the genesis of K. Kvitka's unique methodological worldview, one must first examine the complex circumstances of his childhood and his path to Kyiv (see picture 1). Born in the village of Khmeliv in the Sumy region, K. Kvitka lost his father to tuberculosis at an early age. Unable to financially support her son, his widowed mother entrusted the five-year-old boy to the Karpovs – a childless family residing in Kyiv's affluent Lypky neighborhood. Under the care of his foster mother, Feoktista Karpova, the boy was provided with a highly cultured upbringing, including private music lessons from the age of seven.

At that time, a new educational institution had just been established in this exact district to meet the growing demands of the local community. Opened in 1885 – largely funded by the prominent philanthropist Mykola Tereshchenko the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium was the first boys' secondary school in the area.

The establishment of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium took place under the leadership of V. Petr, a Ukrainian-Czech educator, classical philologist, and musicologist. At the time of his appointment, he possessed administrative and pedagogical experience from educational institutions in Kyiv, Odesa, and Kamianets-Podilskyi. Furthermore, he held a position as a privat-docent at St. Volodymyr University (see picture 2).

V. Petr's personal memoirs suggest that his administrative and pedagogical philosophy extended beyond the rigid imperial curriculum. His educational vision was aimed at cultivating both the intellectual and physical development of his students (Petr, 1916 (part 1): 21-22). This

¹ The term "Aryan," as used by V. Petr, should be understood within the framework of late XIXth-century musicology, where it referred primarily to the reconstruction and classification of Indo-European melodic and modal systems, rather than to later racial interpretations.

effort culminated in the creation of a student orchestra that rapidly evolved to perform complex classical pieces by Haydn, Mozart, and Grieg at gymnasium concerts, literature evenings and balls (see pictures 3, 4). With the involvement of about 82% of students in singing classes in 1890, the percentage of participating students remained relatively stable during the rest of K. Kvitka's years of study, averaging approximately 33.7% (Otchety popechitel'ia, 1890-1897).

V. Petr's musical aspirations were supported by experienced teachers and professional musicians who served at the gymnasium. Notably, the cello class was taught by Jan Shebelyk, a prominent Czech musician and partner of Mykola Lysenko, and wind instruments were directed by Kostyantyn Vout, violinist and conductor, military kapellmeister of the 3rd Sapper Brigade. Such professional teaching staff transformed the school's musical activities into a rigorous professional environment (Pamyatnaya knizhka, 1896, 1901).

V. Petr's pedagogical worldview was rather conservative, defined by a staunch defense of classical education. He firmly believed that the ultimate goal of a school was to cultivate individuals who possessed both intellectual prowess and moral nobility. To achieve this harmonious ideal, V. Petr insisted on maintaining a strict balance between the sciences (real subjects) and the humanities. He "fought" against the marginalization of the humanities, particularly resisting the exclusion of ancient languages and classical antiquity from the gymnasium curriculum (Petr, 1900: 1-3).

V. Petr consistently shared his latest academic discoveries with his students during lectures. Furthermore, he was the visionary and lead organizer behind extensive student excursions. V. Petr's memoirs indicate that the gymnasium established a vibrant tradition of annual spring steamboat trips along the Dnipro River. These outings were filled with musical activities amidst nature. Most notably, V. Petr led the gymnasium's first graduating class on a grand expedition to Crimea (1892). Bringing his own publications to life, he guided the students through the ancient Greek ruins of Olbia and Chersonesus, and visited Cape Fiolent, the legendary site of the Temple of Artemis. (Petr, 1916 (part 1): 22-24).

Through these journeys, young students experienced a living synthesis of antiquity, history, and musical practice.

Parallel to his classical education, K. Kvitka pursued professional musical training at the Musical School of the Kyiv Branch of the Russian Musical Society, supported by a special society scholarship. While officially enrolled in the piano class of Professor G. Khodorovsky, K. Kvitka later acknowledged in his autobiography that his musical development was most profoundly shaped by the outstanding Kyiv pedagogue L. Zatel, who tutored him free of charge. A severe nervous illness subsequently forced K. Kvitka to withdraw from the formal higher course of the Musical School (Lukaniuk, 2017: 100).

While still a gymnasium student, K. Kvitka initiated his lifelong ethnographic mission: recording folk melodies using scientific parameters. In his retrospective memoirs, K. Kvitka explicitly dates his conscious entry into scientific work to the age of sixteen in 1896. At that time, he conducted his first authentic fieldwork in the Kyiv province (Lukaniuk, 2017: 101). Using M. Lysenko's collections as a baseline, the young gymnasium student consciously aimed to surpass them in accuracy, meticulously capturing musical, speech, and phonetic dialect variations.

According to the memoirs of Mykola Halahan and O. Morhun, the gymnasium on Pechersk was the central hub for one of the clandestine circles of the "Hromada of Secondary School Students". It was within this vibrant environment that K. Kvitka not only absorbed national ideas but actively applied his burgeoning ethnomusicological expertise. M. Halahan specifically

recounts a secret gathering held at the home of the Kosach family, initiated by Olena Pchilka. During this event, a bandurist performed traditional epic songs (dumas), and it was the young K. Kvitka who assumed the role of the expert: providing the historical context, interpretation, and critical evaluation of the repertoire (Lenyk, 1971: 378-379).

Whether V. Petr was explicitly aware of the clandestine “Hromada” operating within the walls of his institution remains an open historical question. Given his official capacity as the director of an Imperial gymnasium, he could hardly have openly endorsed such unauthorized national-political activities. However, what is worth noticing is that the director maintained personal relations with M. Lysenko. Both of them were active participants in the Kyiv Literary and Artistic Society, a unique intellectual platform where figures of the Ukrainian national revival regularly interacted (*Iliustrirovannyi sbornik*, 1900). M. Lysenko’s melodies were often performed by the gymnasium orchestra and mentioned in V. Petr’s musicology research papers (Petr, 1897 (part 1): 11-12).

The methodological foundation, formed during his gymnasium years, was further developed during K. Kvitka’s subsequent academic trajectory. The influence of the V. Petr on K. Kvitka’s methodology never meant a blind adherence to his director’s dogmas. The evidence of this intellectual dialogue between the mature ethnomusicologist and his former director is found in K. Kvitka’s 1926 study “Primitive Tone Rows”. Analyzing ancient pentatonic structures, K. Kvitka directly engages with V. V. Petr’s *On the Melodic Structure of the Aryan Song*. He credits V. Petr’s pioneering identification of pentatonic elements in Ukrainian (specifically Pokuttian) melodies, yet applies strict methodological critique, warning readers that V. Petr’s broad selection of examples must be used with caution as being not always accurately reproduced from the primary sources (Lukaniuk, 2010: 237).

Despite this source criticism, K. Kvitka actively utilizes V. Petr’s comparative scholarship. He directs his own readers to V. Petr’s treatise as an accessible, reliable reference for ancient musical texts originally published by A. Ambros, demonstrating a practical reliance on his former mentor’s historiography (Kvitka, 2010: 226). Furthermore, K. Kvitka leverages V. Petr’s cross-cultural data to analyze Ukrainian ritual folklore. By drawing on V. Petr’s citations of Latvian “Ligo” midsummer songs to contextualize local Kupala and Petrivka melodies, K. Kvitka effectively bridges rigorous ethnographic field data with V. Petr’s trans-European comparative perspective (Kvitka, 2010: 244).

In treatises such as “Anhemitonic Primitives and Sokalsky’s Theory”, K. Kvitka builds directly upon V. Petr’s pioneering structural observations. Where his former director identified rare, semitone-less archaic scales hidden within the massive, multi-volume ethnographic collections of O. Kolberg, he took these isolated acoustic artifacts and wove them into a comprehensive evolutionary theory of folk music. This reveals a profound methodological continuity (Kvitka, 2010: 382).

For instance, in his 1925 academic review of “Songs of Crimea”, K. Kvitka relies on V. Petr’s seminal treatise *On the Melodic Structure of the Aryan Song* as a trusted comparative database. To illustrate examples of the anhemitonic pentatonic scale, he specifically directs readers to the Kyrgyz and “Tashkent” melodies compiled in the appendix of V. Petr’s 1899 publication (Kvitka, 2010: 163).

The era of tectonic political shifts and the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921 fundamentally redefined the trajectories of both director and student, forcing them into the vortex of state-building. This period, which K. Kvitka would later cautiously excise from his Soviet-era

memoirs for reasons of personal safety, was characterized by his service to the Ukrainian People's Republic. Simultaneously, his former director, responded to the call of the national academic awakening. At the invitation of Ivan Ohienko, the visionary rector and Minister of Education, V. Petr moved to Kamianets-Podilskyi to join the faculty of the newly founded Ukrainian State University. There he mentored Mykola Hrinchenko – a future prominent figure of Ukrainian musicology who later became one of K. Kvitka's academic colleagues at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

This connection is explicitly confirmed by K. Kvitka himself in his correspondence with his mother-in-law, the writer Olena Pchilka 05 July 1923. Explaining M. Hrinchenko's background to her, K. Kvitka points out the direct parallels in their biographies and their shared educational foundations: "... His fate is somehow connected with mine, although I only met him last year. He was born in the Kyiv suburb 'Zvirynets', and I was born [brought up] on the border between Pechersk and Zvirynets, studied with the same music teacher Zatel, and when he served as secretary of Kamianets University, he was under the musical-scientific influence of the very same Viacheslav Petr, who was the director of the gymnasium where I studied, and later a professor in Kamianets ..." (Tretiachenko, 2017: 102-103).

While K. Kvitka's intellectual formation was undeniably fueled by his innate talent, his family, his fellows, and the profound influence of the Ukrainian national intelligentsia (such as V. Antonovych, M. Lysenko, O. Pchilka and M. Hrushevskiy), this study highlights that V. Petr's mentorship provided the rigorous classical and comparative foundation that helped transform K. Kvitka's passion for folklore into a systematized scientific discipline. Ultimately, it proves that the Ukrainian ethnomusicological school was deeply rooted in the trans-European academic tradition rather than emerging solely from amateur folklore collecting.



Klyment Kvitka with his sister. Photograph, late 1890s.

Source: <https://spadok.org.ua/lesya-ukrayinka/kokhannya-v-zhytti-lesi-ukrayinky>.

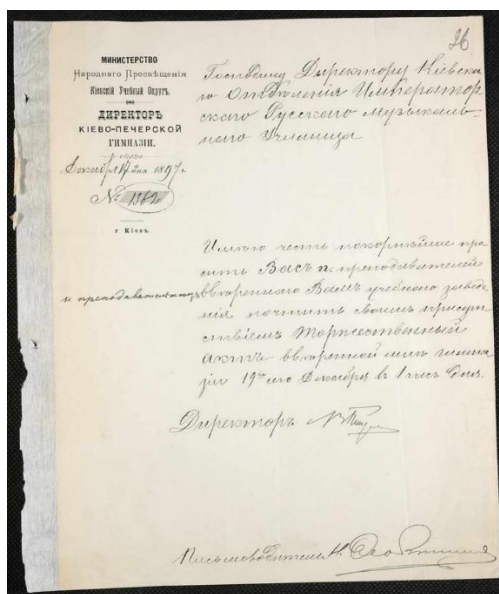


Viacheslav Petr. Photographic portrait, 1897.

Source: Russian Musical Gazette, 1897, No. 1, ed. M. Findeizen. Saint Petersburg, 1897, p. 114.



The gymnasium orchestra of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium in the assembly hall during a rehearsal. Photograph, late XIXth century. Source unknown



Invitation to the director and teachers of the Kyiv Branch of the Imperial Russian Musical School to the ceremonial act of the Kyiv-Pechersk Gymnasium on December 19, 1897. Source: TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 646, inv. 1, case 124, ark. 26.

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THE TEACHER IN INTERWAR SOCIETY: PROFESSIONAL MISSION AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN THE TERNOPIL VOIVODESHIP (BASED ON THE MATERIALS OF *ECHO NAUCZYCIELSKIE*)

Abstract. The aim of the study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the professional mission of teachers and the socio-economic challenges that shaped their activities in 1921–1939, based on periodical materials, archival sources, and regulatory legal acts. It has been established that the teaching profession in the Ternopil Voivodeship in the interwar period performed much broader functions than those envisaged by the official educational policy of the Second Polish Republic. The teacher acted as not only a transmitter of knowledge, but also as a key agent of socio-economic stabilization in local communities, combining pedagogical, administrative, and civic roles.

It is researched that chronic underfunding of the education sector, along with the transfer of responsibility for school maintenance to communes, led to the emergence of an informal practice of teachers' financial participation in supporting the educational process. This situation effectively transformed the social status of the teacher, turning him into a "community resource", which undermined the material well-being of teachers' families and contributed to professional burnout.

At the same time, despite these difficult conditions, the teaching profession demonstrated a high level of self-organization and civic activism. The activities of the Society for the Support of Public School Construction indicate that teachers were the driving force behind the modernization of school infrastructure, ensuring the implementation of large-scale construction projects through community mobilization mechanisms. The organization of "Public School Weeks", cultural and educational events, and the mobilization of financial resources of the population indicate the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives in overcoming the structural limitations of state policy.

Keywords: Ternopil Voivodeship, teacher, interwar period, schooling, Second Polish Republic.

The interwar period in the Ternopil Voivodeship was marked by complex transformations in the educational sphere, unfolding against the broader backdrop of state-building processes in the Second Polish Republic. During this time, the formation of the system of public education acquired not only administrative and organizational dimensions but also a pronounced socio-cultural significance. The primary school teacher emerged as a key agent of rural modernization,

a bearer of state ideology, and at the same time a mediator between the authorities and the local community. It was through the teacher that the state sought to integrate peripheral regions into the national space, shaping loyal citizens and disseminating educational standards.

At the same time, the official discourse that portrayed the teacher as a “builder of schooling” and a promoter of civilizational progress sharply contrasted with the actual conditions of their professional and everyday life. The economic instability of interwar Poland, exacerbated by the consequences of the Great Depression, led to chronic underfunding of the educational sector. The transfer of a significant share of financial responsibilities to local self-government bodies resulted in a persistent shortage of resources, which directly affected the functioning of schools in the rural areas of the Ternopil region.

Under these circumstances, teachers found themselves burdened with a wide range of responsibilities that extended far beyond their formal professional duties. They assumed the roles of administrators, caretakers, benefactors, and community activists. Insufficient funding compelled educators to compensate for the lack of material resources with their own financial means, effectively transforming them into “economic donors” of the school system. This practice was not incidental but rather a systemic feature of the region’s educational life, shaping a specific model of interaction between the teacher, the community, and the state.

Particular attention should be paid to the everyday practices of teachers, which included financing school repairs, ensuring heating, purchasing teaching materials, and supporting socially disadvantaged students. Within the framework of the social history of education, these phenomena reveal a profound discrepancy between the formally declared functions of the state and their actual implementation at the local level. At the same time, they demonstrate a high level of professional ethics and civic responsibility among teachers, who, despite material hardships, ensured the continuity of the educational process.

Equally significant was the participation of teachers in public initiatives, particularly in the activities of the Society for the Support of Public School Construction, which became a key instrument for the development of school infrastructure. The active engagement of educators in local self-government, cultural and educational fundraising, and community resource mobilization attests to their role as leaders of social change. Through the organization of public events, participation in gmina councils, and the initiation of new school construction projects, teachers effectively assumed functions that, in a modern state, would typically fall within the competence of public authorities.

Thus, the study of the teacher’s role in interwar society in the Ternopil region not only allows for the reconstruction of the professional status and social challenges of this group but also provides deeper insight into the mechanisms of the educational system functioning under conditions of limited resources. The aim of this article is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the professional mission of teachers and the socio-economic challenges that shaped their activities in 1921 – 1939, drawing on periodical materials, archival sources, and normative legal acts.

The reduction of state revenues during the interwar period, combined with the delegation of a significant share of financial responsibilities for maintaining the school network to local self-government bodies (gminas), resulted in a systemic shortage of resources in the field of public education. Consequently, a considerable number of educational institutions operated under conditions of insufficient or virtually absent funding. Under such circumstances, teachers were compelled to compensate for the institutional incapacity of local authorities by assuming the role of informal financial donors to the educational system. This phenomenon was обусловлено, in

particular, by the chronic failure of gminas to fulfill their budgetary obligations toward schools. A widespread practice involved delays in the payment of housing allowances to teachers, with these funds effectively redirected to cover current school expenses, including the purchase of fuel (Nieco o samowystarczalności szkoły, 1934. 10: 401-404). Thus, the maintenance of educational institutions was often carried out at the expense of teachers' personal resources. According to available sources, the scale of private expenditures by teachers on school needs ranged between 100 and 200 zlotys and, as a rule, was not reimbursed (Głosy z terenu kto – i kiedy załatwi tę sprawę?, 1934. 3: 90-91).

An analysis of the source base indicates the presence of significant dysfunctions in school management, manifested in the lack of adequate financial and material-technical support (Głosy z terenu budżet szkolny, 1938. 4–5–6: 67-68). In these conditions, teachers were forced to independently cover a wide range of household and operational expenses necessary for maintaining the functioning of educational institutions. In particular, they financed the repair of school premises, including the purchase of construction materials (such as glass and lime), the restoration of infrastructure (windows, fences), and the implementation of sanitary and hygienic measures. In cases where gminas failed to provide schools with fuel, teachers purchased firewood or coal at their own expense in order to prevent interruptions in the educational process during the winter period. In addition, they incurred costs related to the remuneration of auxiliary staff (notably caretakers) and ensured the provision of essential equipment and maintenance supplies for schools (Sprawy organizacyjne, 1936. 1–2: 25-26).

The absence of stable budgetary allocations for the administrative needs of educational institutions necessitated the financing of office-related expenses from teachers' personal funds. School administrators were required to independently procure paper, ink, writing materials, and postage for official correspondence. Even subscriptions to official publications, such as «Dziennik Urzędowy», were frequently paid for out of the teachers' own pockets (Na marginesie. Zbędni korektorzy, 1934. 6: 252-253).

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the financial involvement of teachers was not limited to meeting the institutional needs of schools but also extended to supporting pupils, especially those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In conditions of insufficient state funding, teachers produced teaching aids and visual materials on their own, investing personal resources in the process (Dlaczego tylko i jedynie nauczyciel jest narażony na różne bolączki z tytułu swojego zawodu?, 1934. 3: 92-93). At the same time, they provided children from low-income families with textbooks, notebooks, and other learning materials (Na marginesie to pono „Nieaktualne“, 1937. 5–6: 152-154.). In certain cases, such assistance assumed a broader social dimension, encompassing the provision of food and clothing, which indicates a transformation of the teacher's role from a purely educational function to a socio-custodial one (Przedruk z broszury Z. N. P.: „O właściwy stosunek do pracy nauczyciela“, 1937. 1–2: 1-4).

Thus, the financial and economic activities of teachers in the interwar period extended far beyond their formal professional duties, reflecting both deep structural deficiencies in the functioning of the educational system and a high level of social responsibility within the teaching profession.

In addition to direct expenditures related to maintaining the functioning of educational institutions, teachers bore a significant financial burden associated with their professional and civic engagement. In particular, compulsory forms of professional development—such as training courses, conferences, and other activities aimed at improving qualifications—were largely financed

by the teachers themselves (Głosy z terenu, 1934. 4: 149-150). The absence of compensation mechanisms for travel expenses and per diem allowances indicates the transfer of part of the state's institutional obligations onto employees within the educational sector.

An important component of this financial burden was also the participation of teachers in state and public initiatives. Within the Ternopil Voivodeship, educators actively contributed to fundraising efforts for the National Defence Fund, which entailed regular deductions from their salaries (Kronika, 1937. 3: 58-61).

The cumulative effect of these factors resulted in the systematic physical and moral exhaustion of teachers. Low wages, combined with the necessity to finance both educational and public needs, compelled educators to sacrifice the well-being of their own families. Sources indicate the emergence of a specific social perception of the teacher as a "public resource," whose private time and financial means were regarded as available for collective use (Na marginesie, 1937. 3: 65).

A key mechanism of the civic-driven modernization of educational infrastructure was the participation of teachers in the activities of the Society for the Support of Public School Construction. Teachers functioned as the principal organizational and ideological force of this institution, ensuring its operation largely on the basis of voluntary, unpaid labor. An important tool for resource mobilization consisted of annual campaigns, particularly the "Public School Week," during which fundraising activities were conducted, educational initiatives were promoted, and local populations were encouraged to join the organization (Komunikat Towarzystwa popierania budowy publicznych szkół powszechnych, 1937. 7: 163-165).

The effectiveness of these efforts is evidenced by tangible results: in 1937 alone, within the Ternopil school district, 13 new school buildings comprising 70 classrooms were constructed (Z terenu Podola, 1937. 7: 191-192). The implementation of such projects became possible through the combination of community engagement and the organizational capacity of the teaching profession.

A significant area of teachers' civic activity was the struggle to eliminate the widespread practice of operating schools in unsuitable rented premises, particularly in peasant houses with so-called "zakhata" (straw insulation). Within the Ternopil Voivodeship, more than a quarter of educational facilities were located in conditions that failed to meet basic sanitary and hygienic standards. High humidity, insufficient lighting, and low temperatures posed serious risks to the health of both pupils and teachers (Godło w zahacie, 1937. 3: 41-43).

Teachers actively integrated into local self-government structures, seeking to influence the formation of school budgets and decision-making processes. Securing mandates in gmina councils was perceived as an effective instrument for protecting the interests of the educational sector at the local level.

At the same time, cultural and educational fundraising initiatives played an important role. Teachers organized amateur theatrical performances, choir concerts, festivals, and other events, with the proceeds directed toward the development of educational and cultural infrastructure, including the construction of schools and "People's Houses." A representative example is the construction of a school building in the village of Yablunivka, achieved through the combined efforts of the local community and the initiative of teachers (Uroczystość poświęcenia budynku szkolnego w Jabłonówce WSI, 1934. 9: 383-384).

An additional mechanism for resource mobilization involved proposals to utilize state financial instruments, particularly government bonds of the "National Loan," directing these funds

toward the construction of new educational facilities (Głosy z terenu sprawa zużytkowania obligacyj pożyczki narodowej, subskrybowanej przez szkoły, 1934. 8: 329-330). Such initiatives demonstrate a high level of financial awareness and organizational capacity among teachers, who sought to effectively integrate available resources into the development of the educational sphere.

The conducted study provides grounds to assert that the teaching profession in the Ternopil Voivodeship during the interwar period performed significantly broader functions than those envisaged by the official educational policy of the Second Polish Republic. The teacher acted not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a key agent of socio-economic stabilization within local communities, combining pedagogical, administrative, and civic roles.

It has been established that chronic underfunding of the educational sector, along with the transfer of responsibility for maintaining schools to gminas, led to the emergence of an informal practice of teachers' financial participation in sustaining the educational process. Expenditures on building maintenance, heating, the procurement of teaching materials, and even the support of pupils from low-income families became an integral component of teachers' professional activities. This situation effectively transformed the social status of the teacher, turning them into a "community resource," which undermined the material well-being of teachers' families and contributed to professional exhaustion.

At the same time, despite these challenging conditions, the teaching profession demonstrated a high level of self-organization and civic engagement. The activities of the Society for the Support of Public School Construction indicate that teachers were the driving force behind the modernization of school infrastructure, ensuring the implementation of large-scale construction projects through mechanisms of community mobilization. The organization of "Public School Weeks," cultural and educational events, and the mobilization of financial resources from the population testify to the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives in overcoming the structural limitations of state policy.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the efforts of teachers to improve learning conditions, especially in combating the widespread practice of operating schools in unsuitable premises. Initiatives aimed at constructing proper school buildings with residential facilities for teachers reflect not only the desire to enhance the quality of education but also to affirm the social dignity of the teaching profession. The participation of educators in local self-government bodies further demonstrates their intention to institutionalize their influence on decision-making processes in the field of education.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the civic initiatives of teachers in the Ternopil region in 1921 – 1939 became a key factor in the functioning and development of the primary education network under conditions of limited resources. Teachers acted not merely as objects of state policy but as active agents of social change who compensated for the deficiencies of the institutional system. The experience of the interwar period demonstrates that the effectiveness of an educational system largely depends on the degree of involvement of the professional community in decision-making processes and its capacity for self-organization. This, in turn, opens перспективи for further research into the social history of the teaching profession as an important factor in modernization processes in Eastern Europe.

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THE SOVIET ELECTIONS IN TRANSCARPATHIA ACCORDING TO PRESS MATERIALS: PUBLIC MOOD AND THE POSITION OF THE UKRAINIAN INSURGENTS

Abstract. This paper explores the conduct of Soviet election campaigns in the territory of the Transcarpathian region within the Ukrainian SSR during 1946 – 1947. The study focuses on the mountainous settlements of the region, utilizing the Svaliava district as a representative administrative-territorial unit of that period. The main feature of this research is the selection of local periodicals as the primary source, as this type of source allows for a more detailed micro-historical investigation. Through proper analysis of contemporary periodicals combined with archival materials, it is possible to uncover events that were highlighted not only through an ideological lens but also through local social conflicts, administrative decisions, and public reactions.

Furthermore, this study allows us to trace whether the level of censorship in the local press was truly as extensive as often assumed. Even within Soviet publishing houses, there were editors and authors who could criticize local officials. However, this dynamic could work both ways. On one hand, some editors and authors condemned specific officials for their actions; on the other hand, there were those who condemned the residents of individual settlements for failing to fulfill assigned targets, which were set for ideological and propaganda purposes. The paper analyzes the methods of Soviet political integration alongside public reaction and the resistance efforts of the Ukrainian underground.

Keywords: Elections, press, Sovietization, agitation, propaganda, Transcarpathia, anti-Soviet protests.

During the first half of the 20th century, the local press was quite mosaic-like in terms of linguistic, ideological, and even ethnic criteria. With the establishment of Soviet power, the media space began to acquire a centralized character in both ideological and ethnic aspects. Clear tasks were set before what was effectively the only mass media outlet in Transcarpathia at the time-the press. The Soviet authorities utilized periodicals as an instrument to combat the newly constructed image of the enemy. This category included individuals who were in one way or another associated with the region's previous political regimes-the Czechoslovak and Hungarian administrations (Lenio, 2018: 130).

Additionally, representatives of the Carpathia-Ukraine government and their supporters were added to the category of "enemies of the people." Terms such as "*Voloshynivtsi*", "*Klochuraky*", and "*Brashchayky*" were applied to them (Lisovyi, 1958: 69). Furthermore, Russophiles were also classified as enemies of the people, being dubbed "*Fentsyktivtsi*" and

"*Brodiyivtsi*" (Lisovyi, 1958: 69). This confirms the thesis presented in an article by P. Lenio, which argues that the Soviet authorities attempted to impose an orientation on the population of Transcarpathia that was neither Ukrainophile, nor Rusynophile, nor even Russophile, but strictly Soviet (Lenio, 2018: 130).

It is important to understand that the concept of "Russophile" in the history of Transcarpathia shares much in common with "Rusynophile"; however, there are distinct differences between these notions. While proponents of the former oriented themselves toward Russia, the latter were more interested in the distinctiveness of their own sub-ethnos.

The Soviet authorities did not accept even the "Rusynophiles" who were loyal or occasionally sympathetic to Russia. This is illustrated in the periodicals, where editors could make the mistake of using the term "Rusyn" to refer to local residents. Such "errors" in turn provoked outrage among censorship officials and certain other editors, as noted in the dissertation of Larysa Kapitan (Kapitan, 2013: 59).

A distinct "Russophile" is evident in the Transcarpathian press, as indicated by numerous newspaper columns featuring articles on Russian culture and history alongside mentions of Soviet figures close to J. Stalin. Specifically, in the newspaper *Lenynskiy Shliakh*, in only four months of the second half of 1946, articles were published about M. Lermontov, A. Tsulukidze, L. Tolstoy, and N. Chernyshevsky (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1946: 77, 58, 67, 81, 71, 74). Notably, M. Lermontov was mentioned twice, marking the anniversaries of both his birth and death. Such frequent focus on Russian figures suggests an attempt by the Soviet authorities to impose a cult of the Russian people as a "big brother." This figure was perceived as significantly more educated than the Ukrainian people, given that only two Ukrainian figures—M. Kotsiubynsky and U. Karmaliuk—were mentioned in associated articles (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1946: 71, 74). Typically, these articles first appeared in regional periodicals before being reprinted in district newspapers (Lenio, 2018: 129).

The newspaper *Lenynskiy Shliakh* was established alongside other district publications in 1945 (Lenio, 2018: 129). It was published twice a week and served as a key ideological organ for the local administration (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1946: 6). Strict control over all periodic and non-periodic publications was enforced across all districts during this period. To ensure ideological purity, the leadership of the censorship apparatus periodically inspected every publishing house. These inspections sought to identify undesirable literature or specific problematic pages of text (Mishchanyn, 2012: 166-172).

Simultaneously, there were periodic problems with the delivery of newspapers to certain settlements in the Svaliava district. The edition from August 25, 1946, noted that delivering a newspaper from Moscow to Kyiv took less time than local postal workers spent sorting them (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1946: 61). Editors blamed the incompetence of district postal employees for these persistent delays, which were occasionally exacerbated by local government failures. For instance, a January 1947 article regarding the village of Olenyovo reported that although peasants had subscribed to one hundred copies, they could not receive them due to poor systematization (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1947: 104). Furthermore, the most frequently mentioned issue was the non-payment of subscriptions by the peasantry, which cost 1.20 rubles per month (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1946: 6). Party secretaries in villages like Keretsky were accused of failing to ensure the population fulfilled their subscription obligations (*Lenynskiy Shliakh*, 1946: 67).

From the moment the Transcarpathian region was created and throughout the period of intensive Sovietization, approximately three election campaigns were conducted. These included an all-Union election, one to the republican parliament, and one to local self-government bodies

(Ostapets, 2009: 114). The first of these, held on February 10, 1946, consisted of all-Union elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the highest state authority (Leninskyi Shliakh, 1946: 5). The press performed one of the primary functions of agitation for these elections. Significant coverage was devoted to this event, as the newspaper *Leninskyi Shliakh* published fourteen articles specifically dedicated to this theme between January 10 and February 10. The main candidate from Transcarpathia was Ivan Ivanovych Turianytsia, the Chairman of the People's Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine (Ostapets, 2009: 114).

Turianytsia actively conducted various agitation events across all districts, including his visits to the Svaliava region. On January 17, he visited the timber and chemical plants in the city of Svaliava to meet with his constituents (Leninskyi Shliakh, 1946: 5). Polling stations were established in the local settlements, though their work was often described in the newspaper as unsatisfactorily organized. Notably, in these newspaper articles, individuals were usually mentioned without their first names, using only the abbreviation for "comrade" before the surname. For example, a January 17 article regarding the agitation point in the village of Hankovytsia accused the precinct chairman, Legeza, of neglect. The editor, Selekman, critiqued him sharply, stating that he "did not treat the important work in a Bolshevik manner" (Leninskyi Shliakh, 1946: 5).

From the establishment of the Transcarpathia region and throughout the period of intensive Sovietization, approximately three election campaigns were held: one all-Union, one to the republican parliament, and one to local self-government bodies (Ostapets, 2009: 114). The first of these was held on February 10, 1946, and it was an all-Union election, i.e., to the highest state authority of the Soviet Union the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Leninskyi shliakh, 1946: 5).

The press performed one of the primary functions of agitation for these elections. Much attention was devoted to this event, as fourteen articles on the topic of these elections were published in the *Leninskyi shliakh* newspaper between January 10 and February 10. The main candidate from Transcarpathia was the head of the People's Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine, Ivan Ivanovych Turianytsia (Ostapets, 2009: 114), who actively conducted various campaigning events in all districts, including Svaliava. For instance, on January 17, he visited the sawmill and chemical plants in Svaliava and met with his voters (Leninskyi shliakh, 1946: 5).

Polling stations were established in the settlements, though their operation is sometimes described in the newspaper as poorly organized. It is worth noting that individuals in newspaper articles are usually mentioned without their first names, using only the abbreviation for the word "comrade" (c.) preceding their surname. Thus, on January 17, an article was published about an agitation center in the village of Hankovytsia, in which the editor, Selekman, blames the station head, Leheza, for the unsatisfactory state of the polling station: "The head of the polling station, c. Leheza, did not treat this important work in a Bolshevik manner. The polling station is not set up at all. There is no agitation center. This is a negligent attitude toward one's duties." (Leninskyi shliakh, 1946: 5).

Serhii Hordiichuk's academic work "Anti-Soviet Sentiments of the Transcarpathia Population During the 'Stalinshchyna' Era" features excerpts from archival documents highlighting manifestations of anti-communist agitation in neighboring districts. For example, in the village of Poroshkovo in the Perechyn district, voters demonstratively tore up their ballots (Hordiichuk, 2015: 94).

Had such a phenomenon occurred in the Svaliava district, it is unlikely the newspaper would have covered it, and there is no information regarding such events in the Svaliava district

among the published archival documents. However, a highly valuable document described in the article by Nelia Zhulkanych and Vasyl Mishchanyn states that: "Twenty soldiers of the 3rd Carpathian Mountain Rifle Corps were sent to each of the Volivets [Volivskiy], Nyzhni Vorota [Nyzhnyoverechanskyy], and Svaliava districts," specifically to the villages of Poliana and Bereznyky (Zhulkanych, 2016: 57).

The involvement of military structures in the conduct of the elections indicates that the Soviet authorities expected sabotage during the election campaign, including within the Svaliava district. This is quite logical, as among the residents, particularly in the village of Bereznyky, many were accused of having ties with OUN members (Hordiichuk, 2016: 44). Another reason for the local authorities' apprehension was the fact that OUN member Semen Hut, under the pseudonym "Tymish," operated with his detachment in the territory of the Svaliava district, primarily in the Mount Stiy area (Mishchanyn, 2008: 44).

The next elections were held on February 9, 1947, during which deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR were elected. Obviously, the local authorities had already gained experience in conducting them from the previous election campaign, and during the second election, they decided not to change their tactics. Campaign work was conducted in the same way, with the press remaining one of the most important tools in this regard. The main candidate for the position of deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR in the Svaliava district was the head of the Transcarpathia Regional Council of Trade Unions, Ivan Dmytrovych Petrushchak (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 99).

Between January 5 and February 9 (election day), 1947, 37 articles regarding the election campaign were published. This is significantly more than during the previous elections. Many of them were dedicated to violations at polling stations; notably, on January 26, an article by editor M. Holovnia pointed out that members of the election commissions did not know what duties they were to perform on election day, blaming the head of the district executive committee, Karabelesh, because he had not conducted a single instructional seminar with the commission members (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 105).

Comparing the elections of 1946 and the first elections of 1947, they did not differ significantly in the actual process of their conduct. Moreover, the population already guessed that nothing depended on them (Mishchanyn, 2015: 55).

Even before the voting began, they were presented with the established fact that Ivan Petrushchak would become the deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR, especially given that the number of mandates matched the number of candidates in the elections (Shershun, 1998: 71). It was also clear even before the elections themselves that the Communist Party would win them.

These elections also did not go without anti-Soviet protests. For instance, in the village of Pavlovo, nine ballots were found in a trash bin after the elections with the names of the candidates torn out (Shershun, 1998: 61), a fact not mentioned in the newspaper.

Overall, the voting dynamics in February 1946 and 1947 showed that the communists managed to increase the number of votes for the Communist Party by a full 7 percent over these two election campaigns (Shershun, 1998: 60).

The third election campaign since the creation of the Transcarpathia region was the first election to the local Soviets of Workers' Deputies. Between November 16 and December 21 (election day), forty-six articles dedicated to the election campaign were published. As can be observed, this is the largest increase in articles dedicated to the elections themselves compared to

the two previous campaigns. In the newspaper issue dated November 16, a full page is dedicated to stating that all peasants of the Svaliava district had chosen J. Stalin as their first candidate to the local councils of the regional council (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 200). The same phenomenon occurred during previous elections in the Rakhiv district, which V. Mishchanyn referred to in his article as "communist clowning" (Mishchanyn, 2015: 56).

There were significantly more candidates in these elections compared to the two previous election campaigns. Each enterprise nominated its own candidate; for example, workers of the Chynadiyevo Furniture Plant nominated Hanna Stepanivna Turianytsia, a worker in the parquet shop of the plant, as a candidate for deputy of the regional council (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 200).

Due to the population density characteristics of the Transcarpathia region, the minimum number of electoral districts was formed according to Article 121 of the 1937 Constitution of the Ukrainian SSR—70 districts, specifically for elections to the regional council (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 201). The first half of all articles published between November 16 and December 21 was dedicated to elections to the regional council, while starting from December 5, a list of candidates to the village Soviets of Workers' Deputies was published (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 209).

This list is quite important, as it indicates the candidates themselves, their electoral district, their current position or professional activity, and their gender. Based on the data obtained, statistical information was generated regarding the composition of the population and its characteristics: out of all the settlements in the Svaliava district, of which there were 31, 358 individuals submitted applications to be candidates for deputies of local councils. The highest numbers of applications were submitted from settlements such as Svaliava, Chynadiyevo, and Keretsky. They reached the maximum number of candidates in a single settlement, twenty-five individuals. The village of Tybava had the lowest number, with nine candidates. A massive portion of all candidates were men—about 70% of all candidates, or 268 individuals. Furthermore, broken down by profession, female candidates were primarily engaged in agriculture, or worked as teachers, library managers, or medical workers, while men typically held managerial positions in enterprises (Leninskyi shliakh, 1947: 200).

The dominant group by employment type were people engaged in agriculture, i.e., peasants. They accounted for 51% of all candidates—183 out of 358. Interestingly, most peasant candidates typically applied in small populations, except for the village of Keretsky, which is one of the largest in the district, yet the number of applications among peasants accounted for nineteen out of twenty-five candidates. In second place after the peasantry in terms of application numbers were individuals working in enterprises. These were mostly forestry workers, who made up a sizable portion of the candidates in settlements such as Chynadiyevo, Svaliava, and Nelypyno. During these elections, another method was also used, which was quite unique for this micro-region—a newsreel that filmed how this election campaign took place in the village of Keretsky (Central State Audiovisual and Electronic Archive, 1947: 2256).

For all three election campaigns, one specific function was defined: stating the fact that the Communist Party was supported by the absolute majority of the Transcarpathia population. However, it became clear to residents after the first elections that nothing truly depended on them, but everyone feared the consequences of what would happen if they did not vote, and even more so if they voted in a way that was undesirable for the communist system.

Approximately half of all newspaper materials published during the election campaigns were dedicated specifically to the systematic work of agitators. These publications often appeared in the form of practical guides for organizing voter lists or provided laudatory reviews of well-

executed propaganda efforts within the district (Leninskyi Shliakh, 1947: 203). It is significant that the activity of agitators was not confined solely to the formal periods of election campaigns, as they remained highly active on the eves of all major Soviet holidays. For instance, in connection with the anniversary of the Stalin Constitution, a specialized article was published detailing the rights of a Soviet citizen to serve as a manual for these ideological workers (Leninskyi Shliakh, 1947: 204). This continuous involvement ensured that the state's ideological message remained omnipresent in the daily lives of the Transcarpathian population throughout the entire year. Such a method of communication allowed the authorities to maintain a high level of political mobilization and reinforce Soviet values among the local residents of the Svaliava district.

Between the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1946 and the republican elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR, a difference can be seen in the number of articles during the campaign period, amounting to an increase of 23 publications: from 14 in February 1946 to 37 in February 1947. This increase is 164%. Moreover, if we compare the two election campaigns of 1947, between the elections in February and December, the increase was already 24%, or 9 publications. As a result of this statistical comparison, it can be concluded that with each subsequent election campaign, the importance of the press steadily grew. In addition, based on the analyzed texts, the following statistical data can be generated:

Popularity of candidate applications by professional sector in 1947:

Industry	Number of Candidates	Description
Agriculture	183	The largest group. Mostly listed as "peasant" (male or female).
Workers and Industry	63	Employees of timber industry enterprises, loggers, workers at chemical and spirit plants.
Local Government and Party	47	Chairmen and secretaries of village Soviets, district committee employees.
Education and Culture	37	Teachers, school directors, club, and library managers.
Employees and Trade	23	Trade, post office, consumer union, and bank employees.
Medicine	4	Feldsher-obstetricians and midwives.
Others	3	Post/communication managers and railway personnel.

**Data taken from the publication: "Workers of the Svaliava region nominate their candidates". Leninskyi Shliakh. 1947. 104(200). November 16. P. 2.*

Conclusions. Having analyzed the propaganda methods used by the Soviet authorities before the election campaigns, it was possible to determine the purpose of conducting them. Furthermore, based on distinct published data regarding candidates for higher positions, it was possible to characterize the composition of candidates in the Svaliava district at that time, which helped to better understand the level of professionalism of the individuals entrusted with power. The main task of the election campaigns was to consolidate Soviet power in Transcarpathia and to confirm the fact that it had the highest level of trust among the population through the quantitative percentage of votes for the Soviet party during the election campaigns, which, in reality, was driven by fear of the consequences of choosing an alternative to the Soviet regime.

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INDUSTRIAL MODERNIZATION OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR AT THE MICRO LEVEL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DARNYTSIA CHEMICAL–PHARMACEUTICAL PLANT IN THE 1950s – 1960s

Abstract: This paper examines industrial modernisation in the Ukrainian SSR through the case of the Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant in the 1950s – 1960s. Based on annual financial reports, construction materials, and trade-union protocols from enterprise archives, it reconstructs the plant's transformation from a postwar branch of a research institute into a large pharmaceutical enterprise. The study argues that modernisation at the micro level was contradictory: growth in output, mechanisation, and product range coexisted with dependence on imported technology, chronic planning distortions, and difficult working conditions.

Keywords: Ukrainian SSR, industrial modernisation, pharmaceutical industry, Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant, Soviet economy.

The history of the Soviet pharmaceutical industry is usually written at the macro level, through state policy, aggregate output, or the achievements and failures of the Soviet health-care system. Such a perspective is important, but it does not fully explain how modernisation functioned inside a specific enterprise. A microhistorical approach makes it possible to see the practical mechanisms of industrial growth, the limits of planning, and the social cost of production. The Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant is especially suitable for such an analysis. Its trajectory combined postwar reconstruction, rapid growth in output, repeated changes in administrative subordination, and persistent everyday problems in the workshops. The main source base for this topic is Fund R-1125 of the State Archive of Kyiv, which contains annual financial reports, capital construction materials, technical documentation, correspondence, and trade-union protocols. These materials make it possible to compare the official language of success with evidence about shortages, bottlenecks, and labour tensions. They also make it possible to examine modernisation not as an abstract slogan, but as a process that unfolded in specific buildings, with specific equipment, and under the pressure of concrete production tasks (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125).

The postwar growth of the Darnytsia enterprise was closely connected with the broader attempt to restore the medical infrastructure of the USSR and expand the production of basic medicines in the Ukrainian republic. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the plant emerged from the network of the Ukrainian Institute of Experimental Endocrinology and gradually acquired the features of an independent factory. This process reflected the general priorities of Soviet medicine. The Soviet medical system combined ambitious social goals with severe organisational constraints, and its material base often lagged behind its declared tasks (Field, 2000: 51-65). In pharmaceuticals, this meant an emphasis on quantity, accessibility, and rapid recovery after the

war. Darnytsia's early specialisation in organotherapeutic, galenical, and other relatively simple medicines corresponded to this logic. The plant was expected to supply the republic with products that were socially necessary and technologically attainable within the limits of the postwar economy. In that sense, its development was not exceptional. Rather, it was a local embodiment of a broader Soviet strategy that aimed to expand medical provision quickly, even when technological capabilities remained restricted (Bohatyrova et al., 1999: 611-634).

At the same time, the institutional setting of this development was unstable. The pharmaceutical sector in the USSR passed through repeated reorganisations between the late Stalin period and the Khrushchev years. The boundaries between the Ministry of Health, the structures of the medical industry, and later the regional economic councils were repeatedly redrawn. Research, regulation, and production were often subordinated to different bureaucratic centres, which created delays and contradictions in decision-making. Recent scholarship on Soviet pharmaceutical regulation shows that the branch remained highly centralised in crucial matters, yet its administrative design changed often enough to undermine consistency and long-term planning (Vasilyev, Petrenko, Tayukina, 2021: E1894). The Darnytsia case demonstrates how this worked in practice. The enterprise did not develop in a stable institutional framework. It was shaped by a sequence of reforms that changed reporting lines, investment procedures, and the practical distribution of authority between central and republican structures. Such volatility did not stop growth altogether, but it made modernisation more uneven. The plant could receive new tasks and new investment, yet it still had to adapt to shifting rules of management, which complicated both technical renewal and the everyday organisation of production.

During the 1950s, the enterprise made a difficult transition from a vulnerable postwar production base to a more regular industrial operation. Annual reports show that workshops expanded, the assortment of medicines broadened, and the factory learned to fulfil plans more consistently than in the immediate postwar years (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, file: 101). Yet this did not mean that Darnytsia had already become a fully modern pharmaceutical plant. A large part of the production process still rested on manual labour, cramped premises, and an unstable supply of materials. In this respect, the plant followed a broader Soviet pattern. Conroy has shown that postwar pharmaceutical production in the USSR was marked by extensive growth, emergency methods, and chronic weaknesses in logistics and technical support (Conroy, 2004: 963-978). At Darnytsia, these weaknesses appeared in the gap between growing expectations and the real state of workshops. Production rose, but the technological base remained narrow. The enterprise expanded not because structural problems had been solved once and for all, but because managers and workers were compelled to squeeze more output from a limited material environment (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, file: 53). This was modernisation in a very specific Soviet sense: real movement forward, but without a clean break from earlier scarcity.

The structure of the assortment is especially revealing for understanding the level of modernisation reached in the 1950s. Darnytsia's output was still based to a large extent on organotherapeutic, galenical, and other relatively labour-intensive medicines that could be produced with limited technological sophistication (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 3, file: 11). This did not make them unimportant. On the contrary, such preparations remained essential for Soviet public health, especially in conditions of chronic scarcity and uneven regional supply. Yet their predominance also showed the technological ceiling under which the enterprise operated. The production of more complex chemical and synthetic medicines required a different equipment base, more stable supplies of intermediates, and stricter control over technological regimes. In this

respect, Darnytsia occupied an intermediate position between a postwar recovery workshop and a modern pharmaceutical factory. It was already more than a small auxiliary producer, but it had not yet fully escaped the material and technological constraints characteristic of the early Soviet pharmaceutical sector (Conroy, 2004: 970-978).

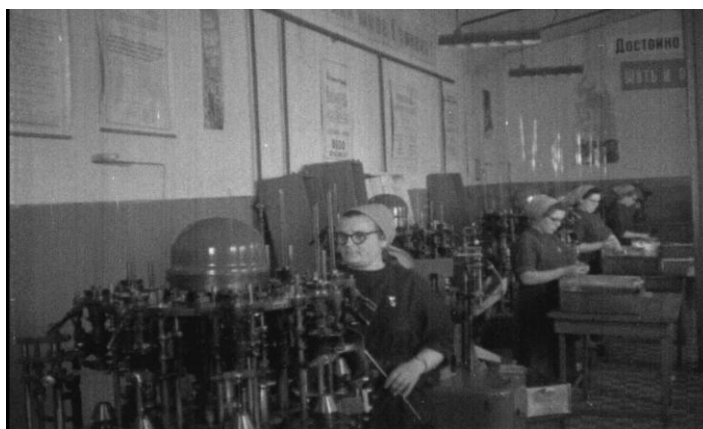
	1949	1952	1955	1958	1961	1964	1967
Production (million rubles)	0,4	1,3	1,9	2,6	5,1	9,6	11,1
Employees	95	250	287	295	371	465	1029
Productivity per one employee (thousands of rubles)	4,4	5,3	6,6	8,8	13,8	20,7	10,9
Average monthly salary per employee (rubles)	58,5	55,9	54,7	57,9	67,2	79,5	88

Table 1: Statistical indicators of the Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant in the 1950s-60s (taking into account the monetary reform of 1961)

The logic of planned production also produced a specific kind of success. Factory management reported the fulfilment and overfulfillment of quantitative indicators, and in formal terms, these results could be presented as evidence of progress. However, archival materials suggest that the real situation was more uneven. The rhythm of work depended on deliveries from other enterprises, the availability of raw materials, and the condition of outdated workshops (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, file: 101). Managers were under pressure to achieve gross output, whereas questions of assortment, product quality, and the long-term replacement of obsolete equipment often remained secondary. In other words, the plant could look successful in official summaries even when its internal functioning remained unstable. This contradiction between the fulfilment of the plan and the fragility of actual production was characteristic of the Soviet economy more broadly. It was especially visible in pharmaceuticals, where interruptions in packaging, bottlenecks in auxiliary materials, or delays in external supplies could undermine the practical value of reported achievements (Conroy, 2004: 978-985). The Darnytsia materials, therefore, show that modernisation should not be measured only by the growth of output. It also has to be judged by the regularity, reliability, and technological quality of production, and in these respects, the enterprise still faced serious limits in the 1950s and even later (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, file: 128).

These contradictions become even clearer when questions of quality, assortment, and packaging are considered. In a planned industry, the formal fulfilment of gross output could coexist with shortages in specific medicines, delays in shipment, and complaints from consumers or partner organisations. Pharmaceutical production was especially vulnerable because the value of the final product depended not only on quantity but also on sterility, dosage accuracy, shelf life, and proper packaging. Archival materials from Darnytsia show that packaging shortages, transport problems, and irregular deliveries could undermine the final result even after the medicine itself had been produced (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, file: 151). In other words, modernisation was not only a matter of building new workshops. It also required a much more reliable chain of supply, quality control, and distribution. The plant's experience demonstrates how the Soviet industrial system could generate output growth without fully resolving the infrastructural weaknesses that stood between production and effective delivery to consumers.

A more dynamic stage began in the early 1960s. Khrushchev's reforms and the growing official emphasis on living standards gave pharmaceutical production a more important place in Soviet economic policy. In the Ukrainian SSR, this led to new investments in the medical industry and to attempts to expand the output of medicines needed by a rapidly urbanising population (Bohatyrova et al., 1999: 634; Vasilyev, Petrenko, Tayukina, 2021: E1894). At Darnytsia, these changes translated into new workshops, reconstruction projects, and a more active introduction of packaging and ampoule equipment. By the mid-1960s, production had increased several times compared with the earlier period, and the assortment had widened substantially. According to the plant's reports, by 1965 the factory had launched 18 new medicines, while total output reached 11.2 million rubles, which was about 2.5 times the level of five years earlier (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, File 247). Such data indicate that modernization at the enterprise was not imaginary. The factory did become larger, more productive, and more diversified. Yet the very scale of this expansion also sharpened old contradictions.



*Figure 1: Packing tablets and making ampoules at Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant, 1961
(CSAEAU, Archival number: 3461)*

The expansion of the 1960s, however, did not eliminate the structural dependence of the enterprise. Soviet pharmaceutical modernization remained closely tied to imported equipment and to selective borrowing from outside the USSR. The Soviet chemical and pharmaceutical engineering base could not fully satisfy the needs of the industry, especially in those segments that required precision machinery, reliable packaging technology, and more advanced production lines (Office of Technology Assessment, 1979: 208, 227). The Darnytsia plant followed the same pattern. Archival materials indicate the regular purchase and installation of imported or externally supplied machinery, including equipment produced in the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, and other technologically advanced countries (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, File 230). This borrowing was productive. It allowed the enterprise to raise productivity, improve some production stages, and support export-oriented stability in certain lines. At the same time, it exposed the limits of Soviet self-sufficiency. The plant did not modernise through an autonomous technological breakthrough generated inside the Soviet system alone. Rather, it modernised through a combination of administrative mobilisation and carefully selected external technologies. This makes Darnytsia a revealing example of how Soviet industrial growth could be both genuine and dependent at the same time.

The Darnytsia case also had a clear spatial dimension. The plant developed on the left bank of Kyiv, in a district whose industrial role expanded significantly in the postwar decades. The transformation of the Darnytsia area was part of the broader reconfiguration of Kyiv's urban and industrial geography, in which new production zones, transport links, and residential districts emerged outside the historical core of the city (Stebletska, 2014: 71-73). In this sense, the growth of the pharmaceutical plant should be understood not only as a branch of history, but also as a fragment of postwar urban modernisation. The factory became one of the enterprises that tied industrial policy to the physical expansion of the capital. At the same time, the old site increasingly became a bottleneck. The need to reconstruct workshops, improve utility networks, and expand storage and auxiliary facilities indicates that the inherited spatial framework no longer matches the scale of production. This observation is important because it shows that modernisation at the micro level was inseparable from the built environment. The history of Darnytsia was shaped not only by ministries and plans, but also by the capacities and limits of the physical plant itself. In the broader context of Kyiv's medical industry, this made the enterprise part of a larger shift in the city's economic landscape (Illiashenko, 2016: 591-595).

By the late 1960s, this contradiction became even sharper. The modernisation of Darnytsia increased total capacity, but the inherited site and the accumulated logic of production still constrained further development. As the plant expanded, older buildings and communications increasingly acted as a bottleneck. This encouraged a shift toward forms of output that were cheaper, more labour-intensive, and easier to maintain within the limits of the available space and equipment. Such a tendency should not be read simply as a failure of modernisation. Rather, it shows that Soviet industrial development often proceeded through compromise. Enterprises adopted new machinery and increased production, but they also adapted their assortment to the material conditions that remained unresolved. The Darnytsia case, therefore, reveals modernisation not as a clean transition from "old" to "new," but as a layered process in which innovation and inherited constraints coexisted for a long time within the same factory space (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 1, File 247).

The social side of this process was no less important than the technological one. Trade-union records show that output growth did not remove the ordinary problems of life in the

workshops. Workers complained about poor ventilation, periodic failures in the water supply, sanitary shortcomings, and unsafe handling of chemicals. In hazardous production these were not minor inconveniences but direct threats to health. The plant relied heavily on female labor, which corresponded to a broader pattern in Soviet industry, where women formed a substantial part of the industrial labor force while remaining concentrated in relatively low-paid and demanding work (Engel, 2004). At Darnytsia, the predominance of women in many segments of production was combined with modest wages and significant staff turnover. Archival evidence from the mid-1960s shows that labor mobility remained high and that many workers left of their own accord, which suggests dissatisfaction with everyday conditions and the limited attractiveness of factory work despite the social importance of the branch (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 3, File 67). This is a crucial point for understanding modernization. Growth in output did not automatically mean a better working life. On the contrary, the expansion of industrial tasks often outpaced investment in labor protection, sanitation, and everyday welfare.

The trade-union materials are especially valuable because they complicate the triumphalist image projected by annual reports. They reveal that the factory administration and the workers often experienced the same process in different ways. For management, modernisation could be measured through new workshops, new machinery, and plan fulfilment. For workers, it was also measured through air quality, access to water, safety in handling substances, and the possibility of remaining at the enterprise without constant physical exhaustion. In this respect, the Darnytsia materials confirm a broader point made in the literature on Soviet pharmaceuticals: industrial growth often coexisted with weak attention to labour safety and with the expectation that workers would compensate for structural deficiencies through personal effort and discipline (Conroy, 2004: 978). The enterprise, therefore, modernised unevenly. Some production lines improved, and certain technical processes became more mechanised, but the everyday environment of labour changed much more slowly. The factory's modernisation was social as well as technological, and its social side remained incomplete. Looking at trade-union complaints alongside formal production data makes it possible to recover this tension and to show that the costs of industrial success were distributed downward, onto the people whose labour sustained the plant (State Archive of Kyiv, R-1125, Des. 3, File 67).

The case of the Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant, therefore, clarifies the character of industrial modernisation in the Ukrainian SSR more broadly. Soviet modernisation at the republican level should not be reduced either to propaganda about uninterrupted progress or to a narrative of total failure. At the factory level, the state did create new production capacities, broaden the range of medicines, and support a transition from semi-handicraft methods to more mechanised production. At the same time, these gains were constrained by institutional volatility, planning distortions, technological dependence, and the social costs imposed on workers. The Darnytsia materials show that modernisation in the Ukrainian SSR was often cumulative rather than transformative. New capacities were added, old bottlenecks were partially overcome, and the enterprise became more productive, but the underlying weaknesses of the Soviet model did not disappear. Instead, they were carried into a new stage of growth. This is why the micro level matters so much. A single plant allows us to see how administrative ambition, technical borrowing, and labour pressure were woven together within one industrial trajectory.



Figure 2. Modern infusion production workshop of the pharmaceutical company " Darnytsia" (Hatsenko, 2018)

Thus, the history of the Darnytsia Chemical-Pharmaceutical Plant in the 1950s-1960s demonstrates that industrial modernisation in the Ukrainian SSR was contradictory at its core. On the micro level, the plant moved from a fragile postwar enterprise to a major pharmaceutical producer. It expanded output, widened its assortment, and introduced more mechanised forms of production. At the same time, this success rested on an unstable institutional framework, uneven planning, dependence on imported machinery, and difficult labour conditions. The case of Darnytsia, therefore, makes it possible to see Soviet modernisation not as a linear story of progress, but as a mixed process in which expansion, dependence, and social tension developed simultaneously. For the history of the Ukrainian SSR, such a perspective is useful because it restores the complexity of industrial change and shows how republican modernisation was made and constrained at the level of a concrete enterprise.

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FORTY YEARS SINCE THE CHORNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT ACCIDENT THROUGH THE POSTERS OF STUDENT DESIGNERS

Abstract. April 26, 1986, divided the life of the then-Soviet Ukraine into before and after the accident at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. In 2026, students of the Applied College "Universum" of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, majoring in "Design", investigated the public's views on the historical aspects of the events and on modern life in the radiation-contaminated zone. The article presents the students' posters as an illustration of their research.

Keywords: graphic design, student project, poster, Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, exclusion zone.

Topicality. April 26, 1986, divided the life of the then-Soviet Ukraine into before and after the accident at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. In 2026, students of the Applied College "Universum" of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, majoring in "Design", investigated the public's views on the historical aspects of the events and on modern life in the radiation-contaminated zone. The article presents the students' posters as an illustration of their research.

The projects of design students cover various spheres of human life, addressing the urgent cultural and environmental issues of our time. Through their own posters, graphic designers can communicate more than mere facts; they can translate collective emotion, pain, and profound anxiety for our shared future into a visual language.

This project commemorates 40 years since the Chornobyl disaster, an event long shrouded in Soviet secrecy. Since Ukraine gained independence, the 'secret' classification has been lifted from the archives, revealing a stark disconnect between the Soviet leadership's internal knowledge and the sanitized version of events presented to the public and the international community. Thanks to the researchers and journalists who bring these facts to the public, the world continues to learn the lessons of this global tragedy.

Using open-source facts, student designers created posters titled "Chornobyl Then and Now." They conducted their own research into what those 40 years were like, how the Chornobyl zone is perceived today, and the lingering threats and scientific insights it offers.

In the posters "Victims of 1986," Yaroslava Syrota began a story about the horrific facts of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

On April 26, 1986, time seemed to stop in a pause of terror and uncertainty. The disaster was worsened by a government that prioritized secrecy over safety, delaying the containment of

the fire and hiding the facts from the public. This negligence claimed the lives of the first responders -firefighters and medical personnel - as well as the station's workers and the innocent residents nearby.



Posters by Yaroslava Syrota "Victims of 1986".

The posters say: "Nurses and medical staff who treated the dying firefighters and plant workers absorbed lethal doses of radiation alongside their patients. Many were later documented to have fallen seriously ill or died."

"At 1:23 a.m., a powerful explosion occurred at the fourth power unit, destroying the reactor. Everything in the vicinity - kindergartens, homes, and streets - was exposed to radiation, which resulted in numerous casualties."

Evacuations were carried out using ordinary city buses. Upon arrival, many residents were forced to abandon their belongings after radiation checks revealed that their clothes, shoes, and personal items had become contaminated. Displaced and dispossessed, thousands fled their homes in search of safety as a 30-kilometer Exclusion Zone was established around the ruined reactor.



Exhibition by Oleksandr Moskalenko, a teacher at the Applied College "Universum", "Models of vehicles during the accident liquidation period".

Access to the zone was restricted to personnel and security guards, and certain areas were closed to the public due to high radiation levels.

One of the first reports from the KGB Office for the city of Kyiv and the region, sent to the KGB of the USSR on April 26, stated: "In order to prevent the leakage of information, the spread of false and panic rumors, control of outgoing correspondence has been organized, and subscribers' access to international communication lines has been limited." [5]

At the same time, the USSR authorities tried to hide the true consequences of the accident and its impact on the population and the environment. On May 1, 1986, residents of Kyiv, together with their children, took part in a festive parade, although the radiation background exceeded the permissible norm by dozens of times.

As historian Andriy Kohut points out, the government's own records later admitted that the clothes of children after attending the May Day demonstration were highly radioactive. [6]



Posters by Karolina Repetilo “#Chornobyl_deception”.

Poster text: #Chornobyl_Deception. IT'S NOT THAT BAD. WE DIDN'T FORCE YOU!!! THERE ARE MORE VICTIMS! RADIATION KILLS SLOWLY.

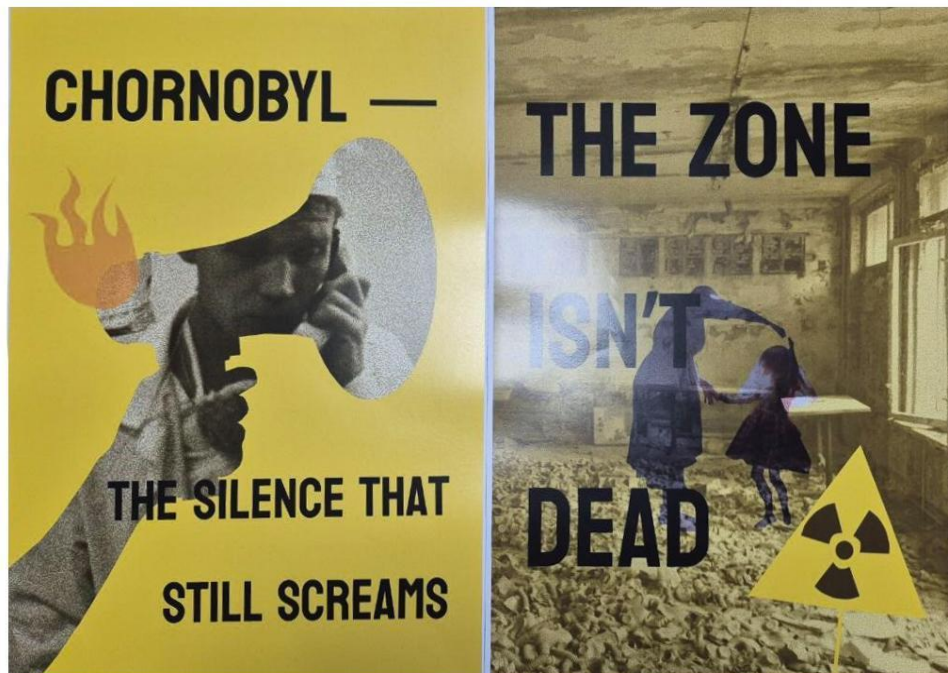
Concealed statistics. Officially – 31 victims. In reality, thousands. The KGB covered up the truth. The effects of radiation exposure appeared years later. Outpatient medical record. Diagnosis: Vegetative-vascular dystonia.

In her posters “# Chornobyl_deception,” Karolina Repetilo presented the works titled “It’s Not That Bad,” “We Didn’t Force You,” “Concealed Statistics,” and “Diagnosis...”, which reveal various aspects of the government’s concealment of real facts from its own population and the international community.

A report from the 6th Department of the Ukrainian SSR’s KGB in Kyiv dated May 13, 1986, states that patients showing signs of radiation sickness were diagnosed with "vegetative-vascular dystonia" in their medical records.

On May 5, the G7 leaders, during a meeting in Tokyo, prepared a joint statement on the Chernobyl accident: “We call on the Government of the Soviet Union to urgently provide all the information requested by our and other countries.”

The USSR authorities turned the territory of the Chernobyl disaster into a "zone of silence," which existed in this format until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Historians and politicians now largely agree that the disaster was a pivotal factor in the eventual collapse of the Union.



Posters by Pavel Shchipsky “The zone isn’t dead”.

During the years of independence, Ukraine opened the Chernobyl territory to international organizations, transforming it into a site of shared global responsibility. In 2000, the last remaining reactor, Unit 3, was permanently shut down. By 2016, construction of a new protective sarcophagus over Unit 4 was completed, marking one of the largest and most ambitious engineering projects in the world. Supported financially by the G7 countries and the European Union, the area surrounding the plant has since been turned into a strictly controlled zone and an important hub for scientific research.

Over time, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone has also become a powerful cultural symbol. It attracts tourists, inspires filmmakers, and serves as a setting for numerous video games. Titles such as *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and *Chernobylite* use the zone as their primary backdrop, while *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* features a memorable mission set in Prypiat.

The site has also been recreated in simulators and virtual tours. Its influence extends into cinema as well - for instance, in *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, where characters travel to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in search of hidden extraterrestrial technology.



Sofia Zabiyaка's posters “#Chornobyl_Myths”.

Poster text: THE EXCLUSION ZONE IS NOT A DEAD WASTELAND. EVERYONE HAS MUTATED. LETHAL DANGER. EVERYONE IS A MONSTER.

Over time, Chornobyl has become surrounded by numerous myths and misconceptions. Sofia Zabiyaка sought to explore and challenge some of these ideas through her poster series.

One of the most widespread beliefs is that the 30-kilometer exclusion zone is completely deserted and uninhabitable. In reality, a small number of residents have returned to their homes despite the risks. In addition, the area is regularly inhabited by workers, security personnel, firefighters, and scientists who maintain the site and monitor environmental conditions.

Another persistent myth involves so-called “mutants”: multi-headed creatures, giant man-eating catfish, or entirely new species of flora and fauna. While such stories are popular in mass culture, they have no scientific basis. For example, large catfish - sometimes reaching up to two meters in length - do inhabit the cooling channels near the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. However, their size is natural, influenced by a lack of predators and regular feeding by workers, and they pose no threat to humans.

The claim that “anyone who visits Chornobyl will develop cancer” is also misleading. Although the disaster had serious long-term health consequences, radiation levels vary significantly across the zone. Certain locations remain highly dangerous - such as the basement of the hospital in Prypiat, where contaminated clothing from first responders is still stored. However, much of the territory now has relatively low radiation levels.

This uneven distribution has made it possible to organize controlled visits, turning the exclusion zone into one of Ukraine’s most unusual tourist destinations. Guided tours follow carefully planned routes designed to minimize exposure, allowing visitors to safely explore selected areas under expert supervision.

Up until 2022, the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone maintained a complex existence shaped by scientific research, cultural fascination, and enduring myths.



Posters by Yaroslava Syrota "Chornobyl 2022-2024".

Poster text: 14.02.2022 At the start of the full-scale invasion, Russian forces occupied the plant and the Exclusion Zone.

14.02.2024 Major wildfires, triggered by weather conditions and military operations, pose a significant environmental threat.

In 2022, the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone became one of the corridors used by Russian forces advancing toward Kyiv. Columns of military equipment moving through the area were captured on camera by the organization Chornobyl Tour.

During the occupation, staff at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant were held hostage for 36 days. They worked under extreme pressure, with minimal rest and limited access to food and medical care. As the occupation ended, many were taken into captivity. At the same time, Russian soldiers dug trenches in the Red Forest - one of the most contaminated areas following the disaster, known for its dangerously high radiation levels. Reports that emerged later suggested that none of those in these trenches survived.

The Red Forest itself is a stark symbol of the disaster. Its name comes from the reddish-brown color pine trees turned after absorbing high doses of radiation. The dead vegetation created a lasting hazard as it could become a source of secondary contamination, particularly in the event of fires. In 1987, contaminated trees and topsoil were buried in trenches and covered with about a meter of clean soil; in total, more than 4,000 cubic meters of radioactive material were contained in this way.

After Ukrainian forces regained control of the zone, widespread destruction and looting became evident. Archives, laboratories, and storage facilities were heavily damaged or stripped. The full extent of what may have been removed and potentially transported to territories such as

Belarus or Russia remains unclear, raising concerns about the uncontrolled spread of contaminated materials.

In February 2025, a drone strike damaged part of the protective structure over Reactor 4 at the Chernobyl site. According to an assessment by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the main supporting structures and monitoring systems were not critically affected. Repairs to the damaged sections are planned for 2026, though ongoing threats from missile and drone attacks continue to pose risks to the facility's safety.



Posters by Daria Ruban "Arrow. The Power of Nature".

Poster text: #ChernobylKnocking. Knocking... knocking. Abandoned old homes. The graphite ash is not forgotten. We are not forgotten; we will remain as an eternal lesson. They cling to the past. We are not forgotten!

They cling to the past. We are not forgotten. Soulless products of "progress" and "reliability." It is hard for the ghosts of the past to be forgotten. But nature will come with new life. Knocking... knocking...

Nature will recover from human errors. It will cloak everything in a dense forest. ...and so, knock after knock, as if a woodpecker is speaking. Knocking... knocking...

Fauna is restoring. It tames the metal in a way that will cover over human mistakes. Knocking... knocking...

The Duga radar, constructed in the 1980s, was designed for the early detection of intercontinental ballistic missile launches. As part of the USSR's nuclear defense system, it once played a key role in the country's "nuclear shield," but became obsolete with the rise of satellite technologies and after the Chernobyl disaster. Its immense antennas - reaching up to 150 meters in height and stretching roughly 500 meters in length - emitted a distinctive repetitive signal that earned it the nickname "Russian Woodpecker."

Daria Ruban reinterprets this structure as a symbol linking past and present. In her work, the radar embodies how once-grand technological achievements fade into abandonment, leaving behind traces that echo into the future. Over time, nature reclaims these remnants, restoring life in rhythm with the imagined "knocking" of the woodpecker.

Because of its restricted access, the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone has also evolved into an unintended wildlife reserve. Rare plant species have re-emerged, and animals such as Przewalski's horse roam freely. Camera traps regularly capture wolves, foxes, bears, black storks, and many other species that have grown largely unafraid of humans, often approaching surprisingly close to the zone's inhabitants.



Posters by Olena Kotenko “Life is more important than mistakes”.

Poster text: *Life is more important than mistakes. Live and adapt.*

Radiation has no color, smell, or taste. Once inside the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone, a person may notice nothing unusual - at most, mild discomfort such as a headache. The only visible reminders of its presence are warning signs placed in the most contaminated areas, marking the otherwise invisible danger.

What began as a catastrophic accident - caused by human error and worsened by a failure to acknowledge it - has since evolved into a vast open-air laboratory. Through the combined efforts of international and public organizations, the zone is now a site for studying the long-term environmental effects of radiation and the processes of ecological recovery following the Chernobyl disaster.

At the same time, students of the Applied College “Universum” of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University engage with this legacy through creative and research projects. Their work draws public attention not only to the disaster itself, but also to the broader consequences of radiation exposure and the importance of a responsible, thoughtful approach to human technological advancement.

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MARCUS LUTTRELL'S INTERPRETATION OF THE EVENTS OF OPERATION "RED WINGS": A HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Abstract: This article examines the interpretation of the events of Operation "Red Wing" by U.S. Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell and compares his version of events with alternative sources, including journalistic investigations, veteran testimonies, and historical analyses. The study argues that many elements of Luttrell's memoir *Lone Survivor* were exaggerated or distorted, particularly regarding the number of Taliban fighters, the conduct of the battle, and the operational circumstances. The article also analyzes the planning failures and command decisions that contributed to the tragedy and subsequent mythologization of the operation. Special attention is devoted to the impact of these distortions on historical memory, military ethics, and the perception of the fallen servicemen.

Keywords: GWOT, Operation "Red Wings", Marcus Luttrell, Lone Survivor, Navy SEALs.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies as part of the Global War on Terror, the Taliban was removed from power, and hostilities transformed into a guerrilla war, a development greatly facilitated by the country's terrain. In addition to conventional operations conducted by the United States and coalition partners, there were also targeted missions, typically carried out by special operations forces. The operation described herein, known as "Red Wings," constitutes an example of such a targeted elimination mission; its objective was the neutralization of the field commander Ahmad Shah, who had been involved in the kidnapping and killing of a Turkish citizen at the end of 2004. By the time of the operation, he had carried out a series of attacks in Kunar Province, primarily against U.S. Marines stationed there. One of the participants in this operation-and ultimately the sole survivor-was Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell. He was born in Texas, began preparing for a military career at an early age, and in 1999 commenced service in the United States Navy (Jenkins, 2014).

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that, during wartime, information is often distorted either deliberately or due to the absence of accessible sources. In the case of Marcus Luttrell, we are dealing with deliberate distortion and falsehoods, which is unacceptable and gives rise to entirely misleading narratives about the engagement.

Sources presenting a version different from that described by Marcus include analyses of the operation published by Politico and Newsweek (Schneiderman, Darack, 2026; Schneiderman, 2016); an examination of the operation by Ed Darack, a journalist who wrote for the Marine Corps (Darack, 2009); testimonies of veterans who personally knew Marcus and the fallen servicemen and had encountered them during various assignments; as well as comments by individuals

connected to the operation on specialized forums and in professional communities (Sniper's Hide Forum, 2025; Jenkins, 2014).

At the very initial stage of the operation's description, discrepancies emerge between the actual situation and Luttrell's account in his memoir. Marcus wrote: "Suffice it to say, he was a major leader of Taliban forces, a grim mountain warrior, known for organizing attacks on towns and for bearing direct responsibility for several lethal attacks on U.S. Marines using explosives. He was about forty years old and was a rather grim figure. He commanded 140–150 armed fighters, but he was an educated man who understood military tactics and could also speak five languages. Sharmak was known as one of Osama bin Laden's closest associates" (Luttrell, Robinson, 2007: 255). This does not fully correspond to reality. Ahmad commanded a group of 12–15 militants in that area, was not a principal actor, and certainly was not a close associate of bin Laden, as Marcus asserted. Initially, the operation was to be conducted by U.S. Marines and with significantly larger forces than were ultimately employed (Schneiderman, Darack, 2026).

The operation commenced on 27 June 2005 with the insertion of four U.S. Navy special operations personnel from Team 10 into the area of operations. The team consisted of Marcus Luttrell, Danny Dietz, Matthew Axelson, and team leader Michael Murphy. On the morning of 28 June, they were detected by local shepherds. In his memoir, Marcus wrote that, due to the decision to release the civilians, they reported to the Taliban in a nearby village, after which the team was tracked down. In reality, Ahmad Shah's militants had heard the insertion of the special operations team by helicopter and were preparing an ambush, while the claim that local shepherds passed information to the Taliban has not been substantiated (Schneiderman, 2016).

Approximately one hour after the encounter with the shepherds, the group fell into an ambush organized by the Taliban. Ahmad Shah's force involved in the engagement consisted of 8–10 individuals, as can be seen in a video released by the Taliban. They occupied elevated positions surrounding the low ground through which the SEALs were moving, and used RPGs (rocket propelled grenade), PKM machine guns, and assault rifles to fire upon the special operations personnel. In his memoirs, Marcus writes about a battle with Taliban forces numbering between 80 and 200 individuals, which did not occur (Downrange Film, 2019).

The entire subsequent description of the battle in the memoirs raises serious doubts, since, if one refers to the same video, it can be heard that the team commander, Michael Murphy, is shouting at Marcus to return, as he had left his comrades and begun running down the slope. This battle clearly ended in tragedy: all three of Marcus's comrades were killed in action, and their radios were not functioning. Because of this, Michael Murphy had to move into an open clearing and use a phone to call for support and report the engagement, whereupon he was killed by the Taliban. For his bravery, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor (Schneiderman, Darack, 2026).

Even the official citation text for the award indicates a militant force of 30 to 40 individuals, which still does not correspond even remotely to Marcus's descriptions. When command headquarters received the report of the engagement, a quick reaction force was deployed, consisting of two helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (MH-47), a UH-60, and two AH-64 Apache helicopters from Army aviation. This entire group flew to the area of contact between the SEALs and the militants (Darack, 2009).

The Chinook, carrying both personnel from the regiment and SEALs, was shot down by an RPG. Following this, the quick reaction force returned to base. All 16 operators aboard the downed

Chinook were killed, including the commander of SEAL Team 10, Erik Kristensen. This represents the largest single-day loss for the special operations forces (Eric C., 2014).

At the same time, Marcus slid down the slope, already being approximately one kilometer away from the site of the battle. The following morning, he was found there by a local resident, Gulab, who, according to the Pashtun code, took him to his village and assisted in treating his wounds, which were not fatal, although Marcus claimed otherwise in his recollections. Taliban fighters arrived in the village, but the locals were well armed and refused to surrender the American, after which Marcus soon activated a radio beacon and the Rangers evacuated him together with Gulab to a U.S. base (Schneiderman, 2016).

Subsequent events developed rapidly, but several key points should be emphasized. Due to the fact that Marcus had escaped and did not participate in the battle, he was unable to assist the Green Berets in locating the bodies of his comrades; his statements were vague and inconsistent (it should also be noted that even prior to the operation Marcus was disliked by adjacent units, as he behaved arrogantly, placing himself above others, as recalled by the Green Berets (Sniper's Hide Forum, 2025; Jenkins, 2014)). Consequently, he provided no useful assistance in the recovery of the fallen personnel. For his assistance, Gulab's home was destroyed by the Taliban, all his property was destroyed, and his brother was killed. Gulab went into hiding across the country and only later made his way to the United States (Schneiderman, 2016).

The Taliban also captured, as trophies, the SEALs' weapons and the laptop containing classified information that Murphy had with him. Upon returning to the United States, Marcus was awarded the Navy Cross for his account of the events, and subsequently, in co-authorship with Patrick Robinson, he began to be used for recruitment and advertising for the SEALs. Patrick Robinson was merely a writer who was to co-author with Marcus a "correct" version of events under the supervision of legal advisors from the Department of Defense, and in practice military lawyers produced a revised version of the events of the operation, which was successfully promoted. Subsequently, a film was produced that moved even further away from reality and distorted the portrayal of Marcus's fallen comrades (Jenkins, 2014).

It is also necessary to add several details that contributed to the failure of the operation and the subsequent mythologization of the events by the military establishment. First and foremost, it was an inherently flawed decision to deploy only four special operations personnel for such a mission. Initially, this task was intended to be carried out by the Marine Corps. They possessed superior familiarity with the area and the operational environment. Moreover, the insertion of the special operations team by helicopter approximately two kilometers from the village where the Taliban and Ahmad Shah were located effectively alerted all insurgent forces to their presence. Another mistake was that the SEALs did not carry reliable radio equipment that would have ensured stable communication with the base (Darack, 2009).

Thus, a chain of errors led to a catastrophic outcome and the loss of life. As a result, an alternative version of events had to be presented, since the operation was fundamentally flawed from the earliest stages of planning, and the heroization of Marcus—who reportedly did not even return fire (he was later found with full magazines of ammunition)—should be regarded as a disregard for the fallen operators. Among them were Michael Murphy, who sacrificed his life to establish communication with the base; Matthew Axelson, who lost his vision as a result of his injuries yet continued to return fire; and Danny Dietz, who was wounded multiple times at the very beginning of the engagement but continued to fight. Also included were operators from the 160th

Aviation Regiment, the “Night Stalkers,” as well as SEALs from Team 10, together with the commander who flew in to assist them and was also killed.

Thus, Marcus Luttrell’s interpretation of the events of Operation “Red Wings” served a specific purpose of distortion and disinformation, aimed at justifying incorrect and failed command decisions during the planning phase, as well as operational mistakes made by personnel during the mission itself. Such actions are destructive to the armed forces, the families of the fallen, and historical record.

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MY GENERATION'S STOLEN YOUTH

My generation learned what violence was far too early.

I grew up as a happy child in Kyiv. I was seven years old when I entered the first grade of school in September 2013, and the Revolution of Dignity began in November of the same year. Of course, at that time I did not yet know the word "revolution", but I already felt its consequences. My parents' quiet conversations turned into anxious whispers, while the footage from opposition television channels, broadcasting live from Independence Square around the clock, grew ever more horrifying before my eyes.

One morning, my mother and I were going to school, and a column of thick black smoke could be seen over the city center, although we live far from the city center and Independence Square (10 kilometers, no less). It was protesters burning tires. In the middle of the lessons, the teacher messaged all the parents that it was better to take the children home as soon as possible, because in one of the districts of Kyiv anti-Maidan activists and the Berkut (a special police unit used to stop mass riots) had begun to seize schools and turn them into their bases. The next morning, my mother said that no one was going to school today. Every child in my place would feel the joy of an unplanned day off, but even then I realized that something was wrong, the tension of the adults around me was palpable.

February 2014 changed my perception of what is scary. I used to be afraid of the dark, because who knows what might be hiding in it, but as it turned out, what you can see in front of you is often much scarier. In the news, they talked about increasingly brutal attacks on protesters, which turned into the first deaths. A boy from our family came from the Kirovohrad region to the Maidan just from the school desk, he was an 11th grade student at the time. After some time, he was detained by the police with other protesters, so his mother had to go to Kyiv to take him back home. He studied at school, received his good certificate, passed exams and had the opportunity to enroll at several prestigious universities. But after the annexation of Crimea, he chose to join the army. He changed his name, made up a story that he was of legal age (which was not true), a Crimean who lost his documents. There were many such young men who lost their own home, but not themselves, so no extra questions were asked. He fought in the hottest points of the anti-terrorist operation, was repeatedly wounded, lost a leg, entered a military university, got married, had a daughter, who was so symbolically named Vira (in english Faith), but in February 2022 he put on a military uniform again and continues to defend the country to this day. Max has been at war for 12 of his 30 years of life.

Daily news from the front continued, reports of the dead became more and more frequent. My parents helped volunteers financially and physically. They bought walkie-talkies, ammunition, delivered food to the hospitals and anything else needed. At school, we, children, drew pictures

and wrote letters to people in the military (many soldiers then and now carry children's drawings with them as charms). As a class, we collected gifts for children in the temporarily occupied territories, and added short postcards to the gifts. School charity fairs were held (and still are held regularly) to help those who protect us. One of these fairs was particularly memorable, because we collected money for volunteers my parents are still friends with (one of them joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 2022, as a military paramedic, although in peaceful life he was an architect), they bought first-aid kits for the front, because then the military did not have body armor, tourniquets, or helmets – many things that are now standard and are issued by the army, were then bought by volunteers with money from the concerned citizens. The army of Ukraine, which had been purposefully destroyed by the pro-Russian government of Yanukovich, was just forming and getting back on its feet.

The war was territorially far away, but there was always an understanding in my head that it was going on. New children began to appear at the school – relocated families of those who fled from Donbas because they did not want to live under Russian occupation. During this period, I had an idea that did not leave my mind for a long time – it was clear that sooner or later Russia would launch a full-scale invasion, go to Kyiv through Belarus and the war would come to my home. Almost a decade later, it will happen.

The period of the Corona virus has become calm before the storm. The focus shifted to the killer virus. My focus has also shifted to distance education, forced online socializing, the health of my family and myself. The complete restriction of freedom of movement and forced self-isolation distracted from the fear of war, which was still raging in the country. Gradually, we all learned to live in a new world, but soon we had to adapt to completely different problems and threats.

The year 2022 began with palpable tension. The broadcast of the Winter Olympic Games was accompanied by news about "military exercises" of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine. In social networks, videos about emergency kits became more and more common. The parent council of my school tried to find out from the administration the condition of the basement, which could theoretically serve as a shelter. The school administration ignored the question, because officially there was no war and there was not supposed to be an attack either. Each class organized its "emergency suitcase" in case of an emergency during classes: a few warm blankets (because it was winter), a first aid kit, water, sweets with a long shelf life, radio, flashlights, power banks. Literally a week before the full-scale invasion, I witnessed a telling scene near the school: a grandmother was meeting her grandson from classes, and the boy shouted to her from the threshold instead of "hello": "What's in the news? They won't attack us, will they? There won't be a war, right?". Everyone knew something was coming.

The night before February 24, 2022, remains etched in my memory with remarkable clarity. I was suffering from insomnia at the time, which was nothing unusual for me. My cat was spinning at my feet, and I was thinking about a biology project on genetics that I had to present at school that day. In this project about the inheritance of eye color, relatives living in Russia were still considered family members at that time. A few days later, after their messages like "Be patient, we will save you, it will all be over soon. It's just a preventive measure, we will capture you so that NATO does not attack us", these people will cease to be considered members of our family. I was not the only one who did not sleep that night. My younger brother and my mother worked late into the night doing a "swan on the lake" crafts project for an art lesson. Everyone went to bed late.

In the morning, my brother and I woke up to the sounds of explosions and airplanes above Kyiv, the fact that our parents quickly packed the most necessary things, documents, warm clothes, some food, water and a first aid kit into backpacks. Many people with suitcases got into cars and left already at 5 in the morning. The yard became unusually empty and quiet, only the janitors and the garbage truck did their work as usual. "It has begun" immediately flashed through my mind, my childhood fears about the war at my home came true. On the same morning, it was announced that the school was moving to a remote format (the experience of such education during a pandemic had already been worked out). The English lesson took place the same morning, the teacher distracted everyone with grammar, for us it became an island of normality in a completely abnormal situation. Almost all lessons were held according to the schedule, teachers tried to hold lessons from phones on the bus, from train stations, even just on the street, where they were lucky to catch a connection and relative silence.

Throughout the day, my eyes were glued to the phone, the TV did not turn off for the first time in many years, and the news kept getting worse. We live on the northern edge of Kyiv, so we understood that our side would be the first to meet the enemy. The parents immediately began to tape the windows (it somewhat protects against windows broken by explosions), moved furniture throughout the apartment, removed all mirrors, because during an explosion any of them could become deadly. Thick curtains were hung over the windows, and stacks of books were placed, which could theoretically slow down the debris. The apartment quickly turned into a bunker. Life awaited us in a narrow corridor, because the walls of the apartment were the thickest there.

We learned that the nearest shelter at my school was not ready for use on the second day of the full-scale invasion, during an air raid alert. By then, heavy military vehicles were already moving through our neighborhood, and in the distance we could hear the sounds of tank battles and artillery fire drawing closer. The terrible condition of the shelter became one of the reasons why we spent the biggest attacks at home, instead of going to the nearest shelter, as was recommended. Inside the basement, everything was covered with a thick layer of red dust, because no one had used those rooms for decades. On top of all that, the coronavirus was still going on. People huddled closely together, sat on the dirty floor, but in disposable masks, with cats, dogs, pets and children in their arms. Both people and animals were nervous, there was not enough space for everyone. We left our cat and pet mouse at home for the time being, so we looked outside every five minutes to check if our house was still intact, because there was no communication in the basement, but we could hear the distant vibration of the explosions. Some people settled into the shelter and did not come up to the surface for several days. Whenever new arrivals came in, they would ask what things were like above ground and just how bad the situation had become.

Having survived the shelling that day, we returned to home, and for the next few days we all coughed up that red dust and remembered the basement filled with horror. That same day we bought a carrier for the cat, because if suddenly we would have to run away from home, no one was ready to leave her alone in such a situation. From then on, we actually lived in a narrow corridor – it was the safest place in our apartment – on a narrow mattress lying on the floor. Day after day we shuddered from explosions that shook not only us, but also the walls. There were several artillery shells that landed in our area, literally a few blocks from us. Many people left, but public transport did not run, and the train stations were incredibly crowded in Kyiv. My disability did not allow me to endure such an evacuation. Our neighbors had a bedridden sick grandmother, so they also stayed home. Through the windows that were lit up in the evening, it was clear that there were 10-15 families left (out of 144 apartments) for each large 9-story building.

It was good that the traumatic historical experience of our ancestors somehow accumulated. We had canned food, flour and some grain at home for the first time. But the food was running out quickly, so my father went out to buy groceries and stood in long lines under explosions at the shops that were still open, in between digging frozen sand by hand on the river to set up checkpoints and digging trenches. There was a catastrophic shortage of equipment, people tried to help the soldiers in any way they could. People who were complete strangers to each other united: some were digging, some were transporting people, some were bringing food and something hot to drink, some had a supply of gloves at home, some had shovels or buckets. Every time we were afraid that my father would not return. The news showed photos of the dead, who were killed by rocket fragments in lines for drinking water (we had public water pumps, so at least there were no problems with water). Checkpoints were set up right on the streets. Kyiv was preparing for resistance. Those who remained received weapons and were ready to fight for every house, every yard, every street.

In the house chat, we exchanged information about which store had delivered some food, alerted everyone when someone with a vegetable truck arrived at a stop nearby (some sellers gave away their food for free, some took some purely symbolic money), who should take bread for older neighbours, who had painkillers or cough pills. We started exchanging food with our neighbors: a chocolate bar for a beet, a grapefruit for a carrot, whatever each person had. The exchange rate was very strange, but in this way we just wanted to do something nice for each other. It felt as though we had gone back to the time when people in primitive communities also exchanged food with each other, a natural exchange of everything for everything. The menu consisted of whatever food could be found today. Those who left their flats left the keys and products to those who stayed, so there was always something to do: feed someone's pet, water the flowers, go check if the windows were intact after another attack. The browser queries were about: evacuation teams, which clinics are open, first aid, how to overcome a panic attack, what to do when you haven't slept at all for several days.

At the end of March 2022, we went outside for the first time just for a walk, not on business. The smell of the city burning, the rustling of missiles overhead, the sounds of explosions did not let us forget that we were in the center of war, but the spring sun, nature waking up after winter, and warmth gave us hope. All the streets of Kyiv were blocked by checkpoints, anti-tank hedgehogs. Seeing someone in military uniform, our eyes immediately looked for signs that we were dealing with a Ukrainian soldier, not a Russian who would not hesitate to shoot us.

The enemy was shamefully retreating from the Kyiv region, but continued to destroy everything. Public transportation and shops in the area were gradually returning to work. However, a direct hit from a Russian missile near the railway station, where evacuation trains were parked, soon occurred. Short-term hope for evacuation was cast aside, because without a car, our family could not even get to the station, which in an instant turned from a place of salvation into one of the most dangerous places in Kyiv.

On April 2, 2022, the de-occupation of Kyiv and the Kyiv region was announced. The horrors of Bucha and Irpin, which shook everyone, were then revealed to the world. It was my birthday. Usually on this day we had a picnic on the riverbank, which was now dug up and mined, and there was no way to buy fresh food for the barbeque. But mom baked brownies, because she was lucky to buy fresh eggs. We ate them to the sound of explosions, watching movies on a laptop, while sitting in the hallway. That's how I spent my 16th birthday.

In June of the same year, I finished the 9th grade. According to tradition, we were supposed to have a loud and bright graduation party. We wanted to celebrate the completion of an important stage of life, receive certificates of basic education, say goodbye to classmates, because many were going to college or were going to leave Ukraine. However, thoughts were not focused on celebration at all, but on survival. None of us were able to truly experience the day that comes once in a lifetime. Sleepless, tired from nightly air raids, callous to any positive emotions, we simply came and collected our documents. Loud explosions in the background made me think about everything but the future happy adult life, in which I should have uncompromisingly believed.

I continued my studies at an online school, which became especially difficult when in November of 2022 the Russians began carrying out targeted strikes on energy infrastructure throughout Ukraine. We gradually got used to the blackout schedules, but on November 23rd, the first total blackout happened that I will remember forever. For almost 3 days, we did not have not only electricity, but also mobile communication, or even water. The only salvation was an old mobile phone that was able to catch the radio, it then became our only news channel. On the second day of the blackout, all our gadgets and power banks were low, which is why we had to go to the nearest Nova Poshta (one of the postal services in Ukraine) to charge them, the electricity there was from a generator. The business adapted little by little and was working again. We already knew then that blackouts would be something we would have to get used to, because the electricity situation was only going to get worse. During December, our house had only 6 hours of electricity per day, and even that was becoming a luxury.

Throughout 2023, Kyiv tried little by little to return to at least the illusion of "usual life". The danger was still real, as were the frequent air alarms, but life did not stand still, new matters and problems arose. A person can really adapt to many things, the Ukrainians proved it. Adults went to work, children to schools and kindergartens, often going down to shelters. Life went on, and all the children, including my younger brother, grew up incredibly fast.

I spent the beginning of 2024 preparing for NMT (National Multi-Subject Test) in conditions of frequent blackouts and air raids. At that time, I had already decided that I would stay in Ukraine and enter the university in Kyiv. I graduated from school with honors, passed the exams quite successfully, and was very lucky that it was quiet at night, and there was no air alarm during the 4 hours of the exams. However, my cousin, who passed the NMT this year, was not so lucky. She wrote the exam after a sleepless night of explosions, and even during the exam she was forced to pause due to the air raid. But she managed to pass exams, like thousands of other Ukrainian children.

On June 30, 2024, a UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) landed in a residential building across the street from mine. It was incredibly fortunate that there were no casualties. However, people were left without their property and housing. The force of the blast wave shook our windows, the window in one of the rooms still stubbornly refuses to properly close.

On July 8, 2024, Russia launched a massive attack on Ukraine and, in particular, on Kyiv. The Russians purposefully hit the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital. The largest children's hospital in Ukraine, where children with the most severe diagnoses were brought from all over the country for treatment. Two adults died, 32 people were injured, among them were children. The feeling of indescribable horror was paralyzing, I couldn't imagine how they could aim the missile directly at the children's hospital. Schools, hospitals, kindergartens, and residential buildings are always transformed into "NATO bases" and "military facilities" in Russian reports. It was then that I

became convinced we were defending ourselves against people who possessed neither morality, nor conscience, nor humanity. In the years that followed, we were reminded of this truth again and again.

Having enrolled into the chosen university in August of 2024, I began a new phase of my life. Meeting new people, a different pace and schedule of the day, it was sometimes difficult to get used to a new environment after 4 years of distance education. However, I gradually found what I was looking for – my people, who became close friends, the conviction that I had chosen the right profession, because I fell in love with history anew. However, something remained unchanged – the war, which was still raging. Sleepless nights, drone debris scattered across our yard, strikes on buildings just nearby, hours spent in the university shelter during air raid alerts, and donations to support the army never let us forget. My parents did not stop in their financial support of volunteers since 2014, it only became more active (because more and more acquaintances, from completely civilian professions, became military and fought in hot spots), and now I have joined this help with my own funds, from my scholarship. The help was not limited to money, it was at the university that I learned to weave camouflage nets, and I began to do it as often as possible, in a sense it became a meditation for me: the monotonous work calmed my brain a little.

May 2025 brought what I had feared for a long time. After a series of massive bombardments, our cat died. This cat has been with me since I was six years old, and my younger brother has never known life without a four-legged friend by his side. She bravely survived the beginning of a full-scale invasion, often alerting us to danger, hearing things we hadn't yet noticed with her keen hearing, comforting us with her purr and warmth on cold days. Because of stress, she periodically became ill, but over time she was always feeling better. After three years of constant shelling, especially intense and frequent recently, she could not take it anymore. We still haven't come to terms with it and can't get another pet.

However, the losses in our family did not stop at the cat. At the end of the summer of 2025, my mother's cousin, who was a farmer but mobilized in 2024, was killed in the Sumy region during Russian shelling. Three daughters are left without a father, a woman without a husband, an old mother without a son, a sister without a brother, and a small granddaughter will grow up without a grandfather. His nephew, the same Max I wrote about above, was wounded at the same time. After the hospital (for him, far from the first), he returned to the front, although he could have been discharged long ago due to his health. But he repeated again and again: "Who will do it, if not me?".

The year 2026 has traditionally started with increasingly bad shelling. On January 5, the Russians hit a private medical facility in the Obolon district, a man, a patient after surgery, died. We have been proved right many times that the words of the Russians "we only hit military facilities" are a complete lie, because there was absolutely nothing military nearby, only a park and residential buildings.

A little later, in the winter of 2026, my other uncle, from my father's side, was seriously injured and is still being treated. He returned from a business trip abroad a few days before the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, to celebrate a friend's birthday. They still have not been able to celebrate it, because both of them have been on the front lines since the very first day of the full-scale invasion.

The winter of 2026 was unusually cold, on some days the temperature reached -22 celsius outside. The already cold situation was made worse by the fact that the Russians were repeatedly

destroying energy facilities throughout Ukraine. We again lived in conditions of blackouts, but this time they were accompanied by a terrible cold in our flat – the Russians were also destroying the centralized heating system throughout Kyiv. I especially remember the day when I had to take one of the exams remotely at home due to an emergency. Trying to keep warm, with a hat on my head and the warmest clothes on, I sat on the floor of our flat, connected to the Internet cable directly with my laptop, because at that time we had no electricity for almost a day, the WIFI at home did not work, and the mobile connection was getting worse every hour. Fortunately, I still managed to take the exam. Yet all I could think about was how profoundly abnormal the circumstances were in which I was taking it.

Having survived such a difficult winter, we witnessed how each shelling became a new "record" and worse than the previous one. The Russians continued to hit "military facilities", for them this category includes not only hospitals, but also museums, because on 24 May 2026, the Russians hit the newly renovated, with an updated exposition, the National Museum "Chornobyl" in Kyiv. As a result of a direct hit, 40% of absolutely unique exhibits were lost.

In the summer of 2026, the Russians set several new anti-records. One of them was the massive attack on Kyiv on June 15, 2026, which further reinforced my conviction that, for the Russians, our culture is one of their highest-priority targets. As a result of this attack, many cultural monuments and objects were damaged, among them were the cultural spaces of the Ukrainian House and Mystetskyi Arsenal, the Dovzhenko film studio, where the largest and oldest costume collection of Ukraine was destroyed. However, I was most shocked by the attack on the National Reserve "Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra", where in the summer of 2025 I had an archaeological internship. The Russians hit the Dormition Cathedral, a landmark of architecture and religion. This cathedral was built in the 11th century, when Russia did not even exist yet. As usual, the Russians immediately started an active disinformation campaign, reports began to appear on social networks that the videos and photos of the burning Dormition Cathedral were generated by artificial intelligence, or that paid photographers waited all night for the planned attack on the spiritual monument by the Ukrainian authorities in order to discredit Russia, Facebook began to remove Ukrainian posts about Russia's guilt. Russia once again tried to convince the world that it does not attack civilian objects. Yet I see the truth as clearly as I see the smoke rising from the building across the street with my own eyes – Russia is waging war against residential buildings, hospitals, universities and schools, kindergartens, maternity hospitals, bookstores, museums, temples, antique markets, even a McDonald's on Lukyanyvka.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, shelling has damaged the following in Kyiv alone (according to official figures as of January 2026; sadly, the numbers are even higher now):

- 2,960 residential buildings;
- 330 institutions of culture and science;
- 15 social institutions;
- 39 cultural institutions;
- 93 administrative buildings;
- 11 sports infrastructure facilities;
- several churches and temples.

Only one attack on the night of July 1-2, 2026, during which 74 missiles and 496 UAVs of various types were used, killed 30 people in Kyiv and injured 100 people. The rocket simply destroyed part of an apartment building, entire blocks are now without windows, hundreds of

people were left without their homes and belongings in one night. The ambulance station, the O. V. Palladin Institute of Biochemistry of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, a five-star hotel in the historical center of the city, a warehouse of an online store, and the logistics center of Nova Poshta were destroyed.

While this article was being translated, another massive shelling occurred on the night of July 5, 2026. At least 18 people were killed in Kyiv, and about 60 were injured. A nine-story building was damaged, apartments from the ninth to the fifth floor were completely destroyed, and structures from the second to the fifth floor were also destroyed in a 21-story building.

Since 2022, more than 425 people have died due to shelling in Kyiv alone. As of 6 July 2026, Kyiv had experienced 2,236 air raid alerts since 24 February 2022. Together, they lasted a total of 2,642 hours and 11 minutes – the equivalent of 110 full days.

*Air-raid sirens across the country
It feels like everyone is brought out
For execution*

*But only one person gets targeted
Usually the one at the edge
This time not you; all clear*

(«Sirens» by Victoria Amelina
01.02.1986 – 01.07.2023.

Translated by Anatoly Kudryavitsky)

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DONETSK

My childhood memories of Donetsk are not merely pictures archived in my head, nor are they simply scenes from a movie I once watched. They are tactile experiences – real feelings and smells that live in my memory. When I close my eyes and travel back to the age of seven, grand historical events or political maps do not define my world; my world was defined by the smell of warm asphalt. Donetsk had a specific summer rhythm. After the sun dipped below the horizon, painting the sky in shades of bruised purple and burnt orange, the concrete streets and wide avenues acted like giant storage batteries, keeping the intense heat of the day long into the twilight. That smell – mineral, dusty, and radiating an almost living warmth – was incredibly comforting. It was the smell of freedom, of the hours between dinner and bedtime when the city belonged to us children.

I remember the alleys of roses with an almost overwhelming clarity. In a city, famously known for its heavy industry, for the plumes of smoke rising from massive metallurgical plants, these flowers seemed like a beautiful defiance of logic. There were thousands of them. They lined the boulevards, climbed the trellises in public parks, and surrounded the grand, Soviet-era theaters. They made our industrial city look like a giant, meticulously maintained greenhouse. These roses were not wild accidents of nature; they were planted on purpose, tended by municipal workers whose silent labor showed that the people of Donetsk cared deeply about beauty, even in a city built on coal, iron, and sweat. The contrast was our identity: we were children of steel and flowers.

In those days, I operated under the blissful, universal illusion of childhood: I thought my life would never change. Home was not just a physical structure of brick and mortar; it was a safe place, an emotional fortress built on the pillars of family, the predictable changing of the seasons, and a deep, unshakeable feeling of belonging. My childhood in Donetsk was perfectly safe, wrapped in a cocoon of normalcy. I remember the yellow streetlights that hummed softly as evening settled over the neighborhoods. Their amber glow felt like a warm hug from the city itself, keeping the darkness at bay.

Walking with my mother in the city center was a peaceful daily routine that I took for granted. We would walk down Artema Street, the main artery of the city, bustling with life. I knew the exact sound of the trolleybus wheels grinding against the steel tracks — a high-pitched, rhythmic squeal punctuated by the sparking of the overhead cables. I knew the specific, earthy smell of the local park after the automatic sprinklers had done their work in the early morning. I loved the bright, almost gaudy colors of the city fountains at night – the "Glass Fountain" with its mosaic bowls catching the light, the water dancing to classical music. Life was calm, predictable, and beautifully ordinary. The city was alive, breathing in sync with its inhabitants, and I was an integral part of its

body. I had no concept of fragility. I did not know how easily that peace could be broken, how thin the ice of civilization actually was.

Everything changed suddenly, with a violence that shattered the mirror of my childhood. There was no gradual warning, no slow fade from peace to conflict. It started with a sound that had never been part of our city's symphony: the loud, aggressive roar of military airplanes flying alarmingly low. The sky, which had always been a canvas for stars and kites, suddenly became a domain of terror.

May 26, 2014, is the date that surgically cut my life into two separate hemispheres: "before" and "after." On that day, the sound of fighter jets screaming over the Sergei Prokofiev International Airport became the soundtrack of my loss. The airport was not just a building; it was the modern face of Donetsk, the place where we went to greet relatives, the place that connected our isolated industrial hub to the rest of the world. Hearing it becomes a military target was incomprehensible to my seven-year-old mind. I did not understand the complex web of politics, geopolitics, or hybrid warfare. Nevertheless, I understood something much more primal: the air itself felt different. It became heavy, oppressive, and scary, as if it were carrying the weight of impending doom.

The most terrifying change was not in the sky, but in the eyes of the adults around me. Adults are supposed to be the anchors of a child's reality; they are supposed to be invincible. But suddenly, my mom, my neighbors, and my teachers started talking quietly. Their voices lost their casual volume. Conversations happened behind closed doors, accompanied by the continuous, nervous clicking of TV remotes as they cycled through news channels. Their eyes, which used to look at me with warmth or mild irritation, were constantly darting upward, looking at the sky through the windows, scanning the horizon for threats. They tried desperately to act normal for my sake. They forced smiles and maintained our routines, but I was a child attuned to their micro-expressions. I could smell their fear, just as clearly as I had smelled the warm asphalt days before.

The city itself underwent a horrifying metamorphosis. Overnight, the place that felt vast and full of possibilities felt small, claustrophobic, and deeply dangerous. The wide, tree-lined streets I had walked so confidently with my mother now felt exposed and hostile. I began to study the faces of my neighbors, and I watched them change in real-time. A hard mask of fear, suspicion, and exhaustion rapidly replaced happy, open, relaxed looks. People no longer strolled; they walked with a specific purpose, faster, with their heads down, trying to make themselves invisible.

The joyful, chaotic sound of children playing in the playgrounds disappeared completely. It was replaced by a terrifying, suffocating silence. This silence was occasionally shattered by the harsh, mechanical roar of military trucks rolling through the streets, carrying armed men whose faces were hidden behind balaclavas. That was when I learned the harshest lesson of my life: safety is an illusion. I learned that a home, a deeply loved and established home, could be invaded and taken over by dark, faceless forces that you cannot control or reason with. The cocoon had been ripped open, and I was exposed to the cold wind of history.

To truly understand the tragedy of what happened to my city – and what continues to happen – we must violently tear down the Russian myth about the "Donbas." For decades, leading up to the invasion, Russian state media and propaganda machines carefully painted our home with a very specific, cynical brush. They depicted Donetsk as a grey, depressed, strictly utilitarian industrial zone. They pushed a narrative that the people there were simple, heavily Russified factory workers

who only wanted to live in a romanticized Soviet past, safely tucked under moscow's protective wing.

This was not just a misunderstanding; it was a calculated lie, and it functioned as a weapon of war long before the first tanks crossed the border. By reducing Donetsk to a monolithic "worker's city," russia attempted to systematically erase our art, our intelligence, our middle class, and our European spirit. This propaganda was designed to do one thing: to make it seem as though Donetsk was naturally, genetically russian, and that it had no interest in a democratic, independent Ukrainian future. If moscow could convince the world that Donetsk was not truly Ukrainian, then taking it would not look like an invasion; it would look like a "reunification."

The prominent Ukrainian historian Olena Stiazhkina, who herself is from Donetsk and lived through the occupation, perfectly dissects this in her work. She argues that the very word "Donbas"—an abbreviation for Donetsky Basin—is essentially a tool used to erase our complex identity. It is a geographic, geological, and industrial term, not a cultural or national one. By focusing exclusively on coal and iron, russia treated the millions of people living there as a faceless, interchangeable workforce—cogs in a machine that existed only to generate resources for an empire. We were dehumanized by terminology.

But the reality of Donetsk's foundation and development tells a completely different story. Donetsk has a rich history of entrepreneurship, commerce, and international connections. It was not founded by a russian tsar, but by a Welshman, John Hughes, in 1869. He brought not just metallurgical expertise, but British engineers, managers, and architectural ideas. The city, originally named Yuzovka in his honor, was built with a distinct British urban planning philosophy: wide, straight streets designed for ventilation, green spaces, parks, and solid brick houses. From its very first days, it was an international, Western-oriented project planted on Ukrainian soil. It was never just a bleak soviet city; it was a place of new ideas, a melting pot of different nationalities working together.

If you listened to russian propaganda, you would assume Donetsk was a cultural wasteland, a place where high art went to die. However, the reality leading up to 2014 was entirely different. Before the war, Donetsk was rapidly transforming into a modern, forward-looking European city. We witnessed a construction boom of new business centers, modern shopping districts, and cozy European-style cafes. We hosted massive international events, most notably the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship. The Donbass Arena, with its gleaming glass and steel, was not just a stadium; it was a physical manifestation of our city's ambition to be seen as part of the developed world. We had a thriving, underground art scene, independent theaters, and a growing middle class that valued European standards of living and governance.

To understand the true soul of Donetsk, you only need to look at my family, which was entirely representative of the city's silent majority. My grandfather spent his entire working life inside the belly of a massive metallurgical factory. He was the very image of the "Donbas worker" that russian propaganda loved to romanticize. Nevertheless, russian propaganda left out one crucial detail: what that worker thought about when he came home. At night, with grease washed from his hands, my grandfather did not read soviet newspapers or dream of the russian Empire. He read poetry. He revered the words of Taras Shevchenko and Vasyl Stus.

Speaking of Vasyl Stus – one of the greatest Ukrainian poets and a legendary dissident who died in a soviet labor camp – he actually studied at Donetsk University. This fact alone shatters the russian narrative. One of Ukraine's most fierce, intelligent, and anti-imperialist voices was forged in the libraries and lecture halls of Donetsk. The city was not a swamp of russian imperial thinking; it was a crucible of Ukrainian resistance.

Being Ukrainian in Donetsk in those days was not a loud, performative, or fake spectacle. We did not need to wear vyshyankas (traditional embroidered shirts) every day to prove our identity. It was a quiet, normal, unshakeable truth. People spoke Ukrainian freely in universities, in schools and in the offices of the new businesses. In addition, here is the most important nuance that outsiders often miss: even the people who spoke russian in their daily lives – people like my family – knew with absolute certainty that they were not russian.

We felt a deep, cultural and civic connection to a democratic, independent, and European Ukraine. When we traveled to Kyiv or Lviv, we did not feel like we were visiting a foreign country; we felt like we were moving through different rooms of our own home. The idea that Donetsk was "not Ukrainian" is an insult not just to geography, but also to the buildings, the institutions, and the real lives of millions of people who always felt infinitely closer to the democratic ideals of Kyiv and Europe than to the authoritarian grip of moscow.

Today, looking at the ruins of my hometown through the analytical lens of a historian, I do not just call what happened an occupation or a physical destruction. I call it "memocide." We must understand this term if we are to grasp the full scale of the tragedy. Memocide is not merely about bombing buildings into rubble or tearing down the Ukrainian flag to raise a donetsk people's republic one. Physical destruction is terrible, but it can theoretically be rebuilt. Memocide is far more sinister: it is the planned, systematic killing of a city's memory. It is a calculated method to erase people's culture, history, and sense of self, leaving behind only a hollow shell that can be filled with the occupier's ideology.

Olena Stiazhkina perfectly captures this process when she compares the occupied city of Donetsk to a raped woman whose voice has been stolen. The enemy did not just take our houses, our parks, or our factories; they took our history. They hijacked our past. The goal of memocide is to induce a profound societal amnesia. They wanted to make the entire region doubt its own past, to make people question their own lived experiences. They wanted the residents of Donetsk to believe that their Ukrainian identity was an anomaly, a recent lie invented by politicians in Kyiv, rather than the organic truth of their lives.

When an empire steals your voice, it forces you to speak its language, both literally and metaphorically. If you control the narrative of the past, you control the future. By erasing the memory of John Hughes, the memory of Vasyl Stus, the memory of Euro 2012, and the memory of those quiet evenings reading Shevchenko, the occupiers attempted to create a blank slate. They wanted to erase the evidence that Donetsk was ever anything other than a gray, obedient russian outpost. Memocide is the ultimate form of imperialism: it does not just conquer your land; it conquers your mind, making you a passive participant in the erasure of your own existence.

The way the occupiers executed this memocide was deeply evil, highly organized, and terrifyingly bureaucratic. It was not a chaotic byproduct of war; it was a deliberate policy. They understood that to conquer the city permanently, they had to starve the minds of its residents. The

first step was the systematic purification of our libraries. Armed men, accompanied by local collaborators, entered the quiet sanctuaries of our city. They combed through the shelves, pulling out Ukrainian history books, Ukrainian literature, and any texts that contradicted the Russian imperial narrative. These books were not merely hidden; in many cases, they were publicly burned or dumped like trash. The smell of burning paper in Donetsk was no longer the smell of autumn leaves; it was the smell of our intellectual heritage going up in smoke.

Then came the rewriting of the future, disguised as the rewriting of the past. They completely overhauled the school curriculum. The textbooks were changed. Children who had previously learned about the Holodomor, the Ukrainian liberation struggles, and the democratic history of Europe were suddenly forced to study from books that claimed Donetsk had always been an inseparable part of Russia, a loyal province that had tragically fallen under the influence of Western fascists. They were weaponizing education, aiming to raise a generation of Ukrainians who would not even know they were Ukrainian.

To enforce this new reality, they constructed an atmosphere of suffocating terror. It was a terror of the mundane. You did not need to carry a weapon to be a threat; you just needed to wear the wrong color. Just wearing a blue and yellow ribbon on your jacket, or humming a Ukrainian song under your breath in a public square, could result in being dragged away by the "ministry of state security." People disappeared into basements turned into torture chambers. They tried to surgically cut out our identity without any care for the psychological pain, the trauma, and the fractured families they left in their wake.

They wanted to turn Donetsk into a blank, gray space, a perfect canvas for Russian lies. But in their arrogance, they forgot one fundamental truth about human nature: you cannot easily destroy memory. They can burn the books, but they cannot burn the neurons in the brain where the words are stored. They can change the street names, but they cannot erase the mental maps of the people who walked them. Memory is portable. By forcing us out, they accidentally scattered the true memory of Donetsk across the rest of Ukraine and the world.

Leaving Donetsk was not a relocation; it was an amputation. It felt like losing a vital organ, a part of my childhood that I could not live without but could no longer reach. At the age of seven, I was handed a heavy, invisible label: "refugee". It is a cold, dehumanizing word that fails to capture the absolute shattering of a universe. In the new, safer parts of Ukraine, I lived in two worlds simultaneously, trapped in a state of severe cognitive dissonance.

I lived in the physical, real world – going to a new school, learning to navigate a new neighborhood, trying to make new friends. But in my heart and in my dreams, I was living in the past, endlessly mourning my lost home. For years, I suffered from a psychological phantom limb. I felt like the real Donetsk was still there, frozen in time, waiting for me just behind a thick, invisible mirror. I harbored an irrational, childlike belief: if I could just find the right angle, if I could just hit the glass hard enough, I could break the mirror, step through, and be back on my street. I could smell the warm asphalt, hear the trolleybus, and watch the fountains dance.

However, the truth was brutal, and it arrived slowly through news reports, conversations between adults, and photos sent by acquaintances who were still trapped there. The mirror was not intact. It had been shattered into millions of jagged, irreparable pieces. Each piece was a ruined building, a closed school, a park turned into a military position, or a lost friend whose family had

been forced to accept russian passports. The city I loved was being physically altered to match their lies, and I was powerless to stop it.

Starting a new life in another part of Ukraine was an incredibly lonely and painful process. I carried a trauma that I could not explain to anyone outside of my situation. Other kids my age in Kyiv or Lviv thought the war in the east was just something that happened on TV. For them, a distant news segment ended when they changed the channel. For me, it was the agonizing death of my entire world.

At first, I stayed completely silent about my past. How do you explain to a stranger, let alone a child, what it feels like to have your hometown stolen? How do you describe the specific flavor of grief that comes from knowing your house is still standing, but an enemy who hates everything your family stood for has occupied it? I realized that words like "occupation" and "war" were too small to hold my pain. Therefore, I wrapped my memories in silence, protecting them like a fragile flame; waiting for the day, I would finally know how to use them.

That long period of silence eventually broke, but it did not break from weakness; it broke because I found my weapon. Today, my work as a historian is not just a profession or an academic pursuit – it is my life's mission, my absolute duty. I do not study dictatorship, propaganda, and the mechanics of war as abstract ideas hidden safely within the pages of a library book. I study them because they physically destroyed my life. I am not an outside observer; I am evidence.

Because I lived through the opening chapters of the occupation, I know exactly how the "russian world" actually functions on the ground. I do not need to read theoretical papers about how authoritarianism suppresses a population; I watched it happen in real-time. I saw how the intoxicating mix of fear, propaganda, and economic desperation worked to turn my childhood streets into a dark, paranoid place. I watched intelligent, good people learn to look down at their shoes, to lower their voices, and to stay quiet just to survive, to put food on their tables, to keep their children safe from the basement torture chambers.

I study this dark machinery because I fiercely refuse to let the enemy write the history of my home. The russians understand that whoever controls the narrative of the past controls the future. If I remain silent, if my generation does not document our experiences, the occupiers will fill the vacuum. In fifty years, they will claim Donetsk was always russian, that the roses never existed, that we were always miserable until they "saved" us. Writing is my weapon. I want to save the truth that russia is trying so desperately to strangle. Every academic paper I write, every memory I record is a bullet fired back at the empire that tried to erase me.

Nevertheless, winning the physical war and liberating our land is only the very first step on a much longer, much harder road. We cannot simply take the city back with tanks and pretend the last twelve years of darkness did not happen. If we only rebuild the broken walls but leave the minds of the people under occupation, the victory will be hollow. We need a massive, generational process to heal the memory of Donetsk.

This will be incredibly difficult. We will have to face the reality that millions of people have been fed a strict diet of russian lies for a decade. We have to figure out how to help them detoxify, how to de-program their minds without alienating them. We must teach the next generation of children in Donetsk that being Ukrainian is their inherent human right, their cultural

heritage, not a political idea forced upon them by the government in Kyiv. We must meticulously reconnect the city to its true past, its European roots, and its Welsh founder.

I believe that protecting and restoring memory is a civic duty, exactly like protecting the environment. Just as we must clean a toxic river to make the water safe for life again, we must clean our collective minds with the truth. The ideology of the "russian world" is like a highly aggressive weed. It spreads quickly, it chokes the native flora, and it poisons the soil so that nothing else can grow. Pulling it out by the roots takes immense time, patience, and stubborn effort.

We have to become the gardeners of our collective memory. We have to get our hands dirty. We have to gently but firmly pull out the lies, root and branch, and plant the seeds of truth. We have to water them with our stories, our archives, and our unwavering belief in who we are. It is grueling work, but it is the only way to ensure the soil of Donetsk is fertile for freedom again.

We are getting ready to return. Not today, perhaps not tomorrow, but we are preparing our hearts and our minds for the day the occupation ends. Moreover, I want to make one thing perfectly clear: we are not returning for revenge. Revenge is a dark, destructive force that belongs to the "russian world," not to us. We are returning for the truth. We are returning to reclaim what is ours.

When the occupation will finally end, the heavy, terrifying silence that fell over my city in 2014 will break. It will be shattered by the voices of people who can finally speak freely, by the sound of children running in the playgrounds again, and by the rhythmic squeal of trolleybus wheels on the tracks. The physical scars of war will take decades to heal, the rubble will take years to clear, but I know, with absolute certainty, that the smell of roses will eventually cover the smell of gunpowder and burning books.

I know this because I remember the streets I walked. I carry the map of the real Donetsk in my DNA. We are the builders of the new Donetsk. We are the generation that was forced into exile, but we used that exile to educate ourselves, to understand our enemy, and to forge an unbreakable identity. We carry the truth in our hearts like a sacred fire. We kept the city's spirit alive during these long, dark years, ensuring that the city existed beyond its physical borders, living inside us.

We remember the trolleybuses, the fountains, the poetry of Stus, the hard work of our grandfathers, and the quiet, European dreams of our parents. We remember the warm asphalt and the thousands of roses. Because we remember, the city is not lost. It was never lost. It is just waiting, patient and enduring, for us to cross the threshold and bring its true history home.

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FROM EUROPEAN PEARL TO MILITARIZED ENCLAVE: A TWELVE-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE ON THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

Crimea has historically been far more than a mere peninsula. Defined by its temperate climate, extraordinary natural beauty, and strategic maritime position, it once stood as a perennial center of gravity for international tourism and European integration. For many, Crimea represented a pinnacle of aesthetic and cultural richness. However, this trajectory was violently interrupted on February 20, 2014 – the date officially recognized as the onset of the Russian occupation. This paper examines the retrospective trajectory of the occupied Ukrainian territories over more than a decade, tracing the peninsula's transition from the European prosperity of 2013 to the systemic decline witnessed in 2026. This evaluation of Crimea is grounded in both political analysis and direct, personal observation as a native of Sevastopol who lived through the initial phase of the occupation.

The beginning of the occupation in early 2014 was marked by rapid, coordinated Russian military maneuvers designed to subvert local governance. On February 20, 2014, armored columns from the Russian Black Sea Fleet's 810th Marine Brigade exited Kazachya Bay under the guise of "heightened security" due to Ukraine's political instability following the Euromaidan protests. By February 23, Sevastopol had effectively fallen under Russian control following the appointment of a Moscow-aligned "people's mayor" and the rapid formation of paramilitary "self-defense" units.

Civic resistance reached a critical climax on February 26, when thousands of supporters of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, alongside pro-Ukrainian citizens, gathered at the regional parliament in Simferopol to block separatist legislation. However, overnight, Russian Spetsnaz units – unmarked soldiers colloquially referred to as "little green men" – seized the Verkhovna Rada (the regional parliament) and the Council of Ministers. By March 7, all key administrative buildings across the peninsula were occupied, vital transit routes to mainland Ukraine were severed, and Ukrainian military garrisons were fully blockaded.

At the onset of the occupation, a profound shift occurred almost overnight. Following a pseudo-referendum that completely disregarded the actual will of the populace, the physical and cultural landscape changed. In Sevastopol, a sea of Russian tricolors replaced the cosmopolitan aesthetic of the embankments. While some segments of the local population celebrated without realizing the long-term consequences, the atmosphere for those who understood the implications was one of profound loss.

The educational system was quickly leveraged as a primary tool for Russification. The Ukrainian language was stripped from the curriculum, and promised electives in Ukrainian never materialized. By the fifth grade, school children were subjected to "documentary" screenings claiming Crimea was "historically Russian territory" that had been "illegally" held by Ukraine. This systemic indoctrination even extended to music lessons, where students were compelled to sing

the Russian national anthem. Every cultural tie to mainland Ukraine was systematically severed to frame the Ukrainian state as an enemy of the Crimean people.

While Crimea did not see active combat in 2014, psychological tension remained pervasive. Pro-Ukrainian citizens lived in silence, while the Crimean Tatar community faced targeted, systemic repressions. Activists and dissenters simply vanished – either surfacing later in Russian prisons or disappearing entirely.

Physical and societal changes observed during subsequent visits in 2018 and 2021 reveal a startling, compounding decline. Infrastructure projects have come at a devastating cost to the region's environment and heritage. For example, the construction of the "Tavrida" highway resulted in the mass deforestation of ancient orchards and the physical destruction of the 14th-century Kirk-Azizler burial ground – a staggering loss of cultural heritage. Furthermore, a deliberate demographic shift has taken place. By 2021, the behavior, speech, and appearance of the local population confirmed a massive influx of relocated Russian nationals, representing a clear case of state-sponsored demographic engineering.

Under occupation, Sevastopol has come to feel like a stagnant relic of the Soviet era, devoid of genuine urban development. Elsewhere on the peninsula, the situation is even bleaker, as evidenced by the amateurish "restoration" work at the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai, which caused irreversible structural damage to this vital Crimean Tatar cultural monument. Additionally, formerly open public areas and landmarks, such as those in Phoros and Partenit, have been closed off to the general populace, while it has become increasingly clear that the only sector receiving genuine, consistent investment is the Russian military machine.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched on February 24, 2022, the transformation of Crimea has been finalized: it has been turned into a critical military springboard for attacks on Southern Ukraine and a key launch site for missile and drone strikes. Compounding this tragedy, the local Ukrainian population on the peninsula is now being illegally conscripted into the very occupying army that controls their home.

In retrospect, these past twelve years illustrate a tragic regression. Crimea has been transformed from a culturally rich, European-oriented region into a militarized enclave echoing the stagnation of the Soviet period. Restoring Ukrainian sovereignty and achieving de-occupation remains a non-negotiable priority. It represents the only viable path toward liberating political prisoners, preserving endangered cultural heritage, and rehabilitating the natural resources that have been systematically depleted under occupation.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Sage Blodgett is a first-year Diplomacy and International Relations major with a minor in History at Seton Hall University, originally from Albany, New York.

She is passionate about refugee advocacy and international humanitarian issues, with a strong interest in global policy and human rights.

She hopes to pursue a career in refugee policy, focusing on international frameworks that support and protect displaced communities

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Shane Holden is an undergraduate student at Seton Hall University.

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He aspires to center his career on expanding access and ensure high quality education around the world.

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Hasini Muddapu is a student at Seton Hall University studying International Relations and Diplomacy.

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She loves to cook, dance, and play violin, travel, and spend time with friends and family.

Julia Kaluzna



Julia Kaluzna is a sophomore at Seton Hall University, majoring in Secondary Education and History, with a minor in Religion.

She is interested in education, language learning, and the role of faith in shaping individuals and communities.

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She also hopes to pursue opportunities to teach and travel abroad in the future.

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Avery Kachmarsky of Pasadena, California, is an undergraduate in the School of Diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University.

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Avery is a member of both the Honors and Buccino Leadership programs, and the upcoming President of Seton Hall's Slavic Club for Fall 2026.

Neve Walker



Neve Walker is an undergraduate student at Seton Hall University studying Diplomacy and International Relations and Philosophy, with a minor in Arabic and a focus on women in conflict zones and disarmament in the Middle East.

Actively involved in global initiatives, she has participated in international forums such as the ECOSOC Youth Forum, Commission on the Status of Women, and the World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar.

Through her work with organizations like the AFS Youth Assembly and the United Nations Association, she has developed strong skills in event coordination, advocacy, and youth engagement.

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Dean Sati



Dean Sati is a graduate student at Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International Relations and a member of the United Nations Association at Seton Hall University (UN-SHU).

He also serves as a research assistant within the department.

He is bilingual in English and Arabic and has a strong familiarity with the cultural and political dynamics of Syria and the broader Arab world.

His academic interests focus on U.S. – Middle East relations, international law, and human rights, with particular attention to the geopolitical dynamics of Syria and the broader Middle East.

His work examines how power and discourse shape international understandings of conflict and resistance in the region. Outside of his academic work, he is a student pilot who enjoys traveling and participating in local volunteer initiatives in the Middle East.

Olha Saraieva



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Since December 2012, she has been an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophical Sciences and History of Ukraine at the State Higher Educational Institution “Priazovsky State Technical University” (Mariupol). In 2022, the university was relocated to Dnipro.

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Olha’s scientific interests include the activities of local governments in Southern Ukraine, source studies, and prominent figures in education and culture in Southern Ukraine.

Olha researches the socio-economic and cultural history of southern Ukraine in the late 19th – early 20th centuries.

In 2022, she participated in the scientific project “Research Perspective of Ukraine” at the Humboldt Forum (Berlin).

In 2023, she was a participant in the DHI scientific scholarship program (Warsaw).

Olha is the author of 85 scientific articles and 3 monographs.

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Saraieva Mariia is a first-year student in the specialty “Philology: English, German” at Kharkiv National University of Municipal Economy named after O.M. Beketov (Kharkiv).

From 2014 to 2025, she was a student at the Mariupol Municipal Lyceum (relocated to Kyiv in 2022).

From 2022 to 2024, she was an Erasmus student at Gymnasium (Rostock, Germany).

In November 2025, she passed the FCE English language exam at the Cambridge School (Hamburg, Germany), level B2.

In September 2026, she passed the German language exam «TELC» level S1 (Rostock, Germany). Her academic interests include ethnolinguistics, stylistics, and analysis of artistic texts, creative writing, and narrative strategies.

Stepan Vasylyshyn



Stepan Vasylyshyn is a Candidate of Historical Sciences – a Ph.D in History.

He is the Head of the Humanitarian Department of the Kopychynets City Council and a history teacher at the Lyceum of Hadynkivtsi, Kopychynets City Council, Chortkiv District, Ternopil Region.

He is researching the theme “School Education in the Ternopil Voivodeship: Regulatory and Legal Principles and Organizational and Administrative Mechanisms (1918 – 1939)” to comprehensively reconstruct the education system in the Ternopil Voivodeship during that period. The educational sphere of this period was not just an institution but also an arena of struggle to preserve Ukrainian identity under the systemic pressure of Polonization.

Stepan is investigating the balance between state (Polish) and private (Ukrainian) schools based on archival materials from the funds of the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Lviv, the State Archive of Ternopil Region, the archives of the Republic of Poland, and contemporary periodicals.

He pays special attention to the study of regulatory and legal support, personnel issues, the activities of Ukrainian teachers, and the functioning of the network of educational institutions, scholarships, and societies with the aim of eliminating gaps in the history of Ukrainian education and complementing the decolonization narrative in modern historical science.

Olena Kazimirenko



Olena Kazimirenko is the Head of the Fine Arts and Design Department at the «Universum» Applied College at the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University.

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She is interested in Design as a communication tool for shaping cultural and social environments.

Marko Miliutin



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Mykhailo Mishyn



Mykhailo Mishyn is a second-year postgraduate student at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University.

His academic interests include local history, the history of pedagogy, and biographical studies of educational figures.

Mykhailo advocates for the inherently European nature of Ukrainian education and science.

He emphasizes that Ukraine has always been an integral part of the European intellectual and scientific tradition.

He enjoys researching archival records and genealogy, and actively promotes the historical legacy of the Ukrainian educators as a vital foundation for contemporary European reforms.

Mykhailo works at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, focusing on European integration of education, science, and innovation.

Roman Podat



Roman Podat is studying for a Master's degree at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, majoring in "History and Archaeology".

He graduated from Shevchenko Kyiv National University with a Bachelor's degree in the History of Ukraine.

Since childhood, he has been interested in history and economics, so he has a special interest in economic history and the history of technology.

Myroslav Sakal



Myroslav Sakal is a third-year student of the History and Archaeology program at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University.

He chose this profession, guided by a desire to develop Ukrainian history and serve the nation through the study of its past.

His research interests include historical periodicals, historical urban studies, historical cartography, and the history of Western Ukrainian lands.

Daryna Osetianova



Daryna Osetianova is a second-year Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University student majoring in History and Archaeology.

She chose this major because she has always loved the mysteries of history and the detective work involved in uncovering them. For her, every research project feels like an investigation.

Her research interests include the politics of memory, russian imperialism and colonialism, and travelogues of foreigners in Ukraine in the 19th century.

When she is not researching, she can usually be found reading books from different genres each time, solving all kinds of puzzles, or playing video games, particularly those set in post-apocalyptic worlds or centered on historical events.

Veronica Shtonda



Veronica Shtonda is a second-year student at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, majoring in History and Archaeology.

She chose this major because she wants to discover the hidden stories of our country.

She is very interested in the history of Western Ukraine, especially how people lived there in the 18th–19th centuries.

Her future goal is to become a researcher.

She wants to study additional historical sources and demonstrate the importance of Western Ukrainian history to our national identity.

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Pavliuk Artem is a first-year undergraduate student at the Educational and Research Institute “Horlivka Institute of Foreign Languages of Donbas State Pedagogical University” (was relocated to Bakhmut).

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Hanna Hedo



Hanna Hedo is a first-year Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University student majoring in History and Archaeology.

Her research interests include historical methodology, ethnography, and the study of travel notes. Hanna actively participates in scientific conferences, archival practices, and interdisciplinary educational projects.

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Although she holds a Bachelor's degree in Philology, a growing passion for historical research prompted her to switch to studying History.

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