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CONVERSATIONS

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Lviv BookForum 2023
Conversations



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Contents

War as the Collapse of Civilization: Can There Be Happiness after War?	10
<i>Participants: Anne Applebaum (digital), Slavenka Drakulich (digital), Vakhtang Kebuladze, Maksym Yakovliev and Tetiana Oharkova (chair)</i>	
Marshall Plan for Ukraine: What Future Awaits the World after the Ukrainian Victory	37
<i>Participants: Timothy Garton Ash, Emma Graham-Harrison, Oleksandra Matviichuk (digital), Sevgil Musaeva, Oleksandr Sushko and Kristina Berdinskikh (chair)</i>	
Existential Resilience: How Global Historical Changes Affect Who We Are	61
<i>Participants: Elif Batuman, Kateryna Kalytko, Taras Prokhasko, David Toscana (digital), Iryna Tsilyk and Sasha Dovzhuk (chair)</i>	
The Art of Decolonisation	80
<i>Participants: Pankaj Mishra (digital), Volodymyr Yermolenko, and Sevgil Musaieva (chair)</i>	
The Power of Words	97
<i>Participants: Rachel Clarke, Halyna Kruk, Ben Okri (digital) and Olesia Khromeichuk (chair)</i>	

Freedom of Thoughts vs Indoctrination 121

Participants: Jaroslava Barbieri, Janine di Giovanni, Ian Garner (digital), Sofi Oksanen (digital) and Peter Pomerantsev (chair)

Colonial Discourse in Russian Literature:
How We (Mis)understood the 'Russian Soul' 139

Participants: Elif Batuman, Ewa Thompson (digital), Oksana Zabuzhko and Charlotte Higgins (chair)

Oleksandr Mykhed and Art Spiegelman
in conversation 173

Digital event



War as the Collapse of Civilization: Can There Be Happiness after War?

Participants: Anne Applebaum (digital), Slavenka Drakulich (digital), Vakhtang Kebuladze, Maksym Yakovliev and Tetiana Oharkova (chair)

Tetiana Oharkova: Good afternoon, we're happy to see everybody again. We're continuing our Book Forum work with this panel, called 'War as the Collapse of Civilisation: Can There Be Happiness after War?'

I'd like to introduce our participants: Vakhtang Kebuladze, a Ukrainian philosopher, translator, writer, and friend; Maksym Yakovliev, my close colleague, head of the Department for International Affairs at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and author of a book about conspiracy theories. If you haven't read it, I would advise you to do so. And online we have Anne Applebaum, a historian, writer and journalist. Also on Zoom, we have Slavenka Drakulich, who many of us know: a Croatian writer who's had many books translated into Ukrainian.

We're speaking about a very important topic: war as a collapse of civilisation. That's a big question mark: is war just a challenge for civilisation or an absolute collapse of it? The answer is far from clear. I'll start with a story I heard several days ago that really struck me.

At the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre, we were watching a documentary about our current war of Russia against Ukraine. Present with us were the heroes of that documentary, the characters depicted in it. The film hasn't had its public release yet, but I'll tell you briefly: it's about an actor from one of the Kyiv theatres who volunteered to go to war. He was defending Ukraine in the Kyiv region, then later went to Bakhmut and the south of Ukraine. At one point in the documentary, his battalion commander was given the opportunity to speak. What he said really struck me. He said, 'On the Ukrainian side, we have an army of people who were civilians two years ago, or months ago. And what you can't understand completely, because you're still a civilian, is that the way a person passes from the civilian state to being military is by becoming capable of killing the enemy, of

killing people. The path that person has to go on in order to get back to the normal state again is much, much longer.'

That made me think that we're in the position of having no choice but to sacrifice our humanity. A large number of Ukrainians need to learn to kill in order, perhaps, for our civilisation to continue to exist. That price is a very high one to pay. This is the metaphor we need: we're forced to lose our humanity in order to be victorious

My first question is to the philosopher Vakhtang Kebuladze, about the idea of the collapse of civilisation and war as a collapse of civilisation, or as a challenge to it, in the context of our war. I know you have many thoughts on this, and have been speaking for many years about Russia as a 'shadow civilisation'. There have been many wars in the centuries of human history. What are your thoughts about war and civilisation?

Vakhtang Kebuladze: Thank you very much. Thank you to the Forum for the invitation to participate in this discussion and the following ones. I'll start by reflecting on and reacting to what you've just said, because it resonated in my heart. The experience of war and of murdering is indeed a truly awful one. I have two thoughts about it.

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, I was thinking about what the difference was between us and our enemies. The vast majority, the sociological majority (at least I feel this to be the case, but we can discuss it), most Ukrainian men and women, do not want war. Despite that, they're ready to participate in it, actively or passively, as military, as volunteers, because they see it as being about the protection of our way of being and our existence. The majority of Russians, on the other hand, do want the war, but they don't want to participate in it. They want to kill us using somebody else's hands.

That's one opinion. The second is about this experience of inhumanity. I think this is much more complicated. I have a quotation here from Yuri Andrukhovych, from a text that's not about the war, but about Maidan, but which I believe suits the situation of this war very well. It was one of the first texts about Maidan, and maybe one of the best that has been published in English. In the United States it was called Love and Hatred in Kiev. In Ukrainian it was called Kyiv sl'ozyhinly, or Kyiv, the Tear-Causing, in reference to the fact that special security forces used tear gas on us. But we were crying not only because of the tear gas, but also because of the losses we had to suffer at Maidan. And now that continues on a much bigger scale.

A key phrase of Yuri's is when he writes, 'It is not immoral to hate murderers', referring to the people who shot at the peaceful protesters. We can continue this thought and ask, is it immoral to kill murderers? Is it immoral to kill enemies of humanity? I don't have an answer to that question, but I don't believe that our heroes, who are defending Ukraine and the whole of civilised humanity against Russian evil, are having an inhuman, immoral experience. They're having some other completely different kind of experience. I'm afraid of that experience, but at the same time I understand it to be one of the most important experiences a human being can go through in his life.

Coming back to our topic of war and civilisation, because we agreed we'd speak about happiness and luck afterwards, and first about war. To consider the two key words: war and civilisation. As a translator and a philosopher, I like to work in the 'Begriffsgeschichte', which means the history of terms. So I'd like to give a kind of introduction here to these two words. They're very understandable for us, but are not actually that simple.

I'll start with civilisation. We often compare civilisation with barbarism: civilisation is something developed, high, cultural; while barbarism is something destructive, underdeveloped, bad and so on. Using the term 'civilisation' in this broad sense, talking about human civilisation in general, we're changing the primary sense of this word. And I'd love to refer to an idea you might already have heard about from me: the idea that there's only one civilisation in the entire world. You can call it European, transatlantic, western, whatever you like. And I have no doubt that we, the Ukrainian political nation, belong to this civilisation.

One consequence of the 'poly-civilisational' approach, which appeared at the beginning of the 20th century in the works of Toynbee and Spengler, has been a mistake in understanding, in the sense of a belief that there's not only one European civilisation, but many different civilisations. It didn't start with Toynbee and Spengler; it started with Columbus, with Marco Polo, when Europeans started finding out about other forms of human existence. Spengler and Toynbee, in a critique of Eurocentrism, started calling these forms of human existence civilisations too. And that's a mistake, because the word 'civilisation' comes from the word 'civitas', meaning city. The centre of a civilisation has to be a free city. First it was the medieval cities, Italian and German cities, and the German, or 'Magdeburgian' rights system that existed for them. And the 'far historian' [I've put this in inverted commas as the meaning is not clear in English, and the interpreter is clearly unsure of the intended meaning while translating it literally] symbol of that city was a Greek polis. It is something similar to the Chinese or Aztec empires, but it isn't the same. That doesn't mean it's worse, just that it's something different.

What has been the benefit of the European civilisation up until now? I'll make a strong assertion, which might be criticised later. I believe that in human history, there's never been another form of civilian organisation that could be scaled up for the whole of humanity. Our European project is global. We Europeans propose something everybody can live in. The Arabian 'Ummah' doesn't acknowledge the existence of the non-Muslim world. The Chinese heavenly empire is only for the Chinese or for the people who were under them. Only the European civilisation offers a universal mode of human existence. And I would love humanity to exist in that form.

Does Russia belong to that civilisation? My answer is no. It was never part of it and, I'm afraid, will never become part of it. This is a very difficult topic, especially when we're talking to our western colleagues, who see Russians as equal, as the same as us, who think they've just made a mistake or something. But I believe that Russians organically do not belong to our civilisation, because they've never had anything like these free cities, there is no grounding for fundamental values like dignity and freedom. Remember that we called our revolution the Revolution of Dignity, and our main slogan was 'freedom is our religion'. These fundamental values that arise from common life in a free city are unknown for the Russians. For them they are foreign and threatening. In their strong hierarchical structure, with only one vertical line of power, freedom is destruction. I don't think that when Russians use the term freedom, they understand the same things we do. That's why Russia is not part of our civilisation. But it's not a different civilisation or an anti-civilisation; it's a shadow of civilisation, because it copies the forms of our civilisation in a shadowy, black, dark way.

We can reconsider the concept of civilisational collapse and ask, will this war lead to the collapse of our civilisation? In doing that, we need to understand and to communicate to others that we're not speaking about Ukraine. Yes, Ukraine is suffering – our nearest and dearest are dying in this war, our cities are being destroyed by the Russian invasion. But what we're speaking about is the survival of our civilisation, maybe human civilisation or, let's say, European or western civilisation. If we lose, how can we continue to live in this civilisation? It's not a question of whether one country or the other wins. It's not about territory. It's not about where the Russian or Ukrainian armies stand. It's about whether our European, western way of being is strong enough to continue to exist. I think, in this sense, that this war does threaten our civilisation. If we have time, I could talk more about this war. If not, I'll stop here in response to what you've said.





Tetiana Oharkova: We'll have time to return to you and give you the chance to speak in more detail about the war. I'd like to turn to Anne Applebaum, because I have the feeling you've said something important about the current risks and the war happening in our geographical part of the world. It seems that not only to Vakhtang, but to many Ukrainians, not only inside Ukraine – this is also a thought we're trying to spread beyond our country – that this war Russia has started against Ukraine is not just a war for more territory, to annexe several more regions, even though that's also taking place. It's a war that threatens European civilisation as it currently stands. Anne, you're a historian, you know a lot about the horrific histories of all the continents. Does it seem to you, in the west, either in Europe or in the United States, that there is any feeling, now we're entering the 19th or 20th month of the war, that this war poses an existential threat to the whole of western civilisation?

Anne Applebaum: Thank you so much. I'm sorry not to be there in person, but I'm happy to be joining you from Warsaw, not too far away. We have a big election here soon, so I'm unable to come to Ukraine this week. Let me begin by saying that you're right. I do very much believe that this war is a war about fundamental values. I believe that Putin began the war, partly for the imperial reasons he's described, his desire to conquer more territory, and partly as a kind of revenge for the loss of the Soviet Union. That was the greatest tragedy of his lifetime. He's written about how, as a KGB officer in East Germany, he watched the collapse of the Berlin Wall and experienced it as a tragedy. Most of the rest of the world was celebrating, but he saw it as a disaster, for himself and for his friends in the Stasi. But he also launched the war precisely in order to undermine a set of ideas: ideas of the rule of law, the ideas reflected in the UN Convention on genocide, the ideas of human rights, the idea that borders, especially in Europe after the Second World War, cannot be changed by force, that we've all agreed that this kind of war over territory leads to nothing. He saw all of those rules, that whole body of thought, human rights law, international law, international organisations, the United Nations, as a threat to the kind of power he holds in Russia. He's an absolute ruler who runs a kleptocracy that lives off the state, not a country of rule of law, but so-called rule 'by law.' That means the law is what the person in charge says it is. There's no such thing as a neutral constitution, there are no neutral laws, there are no neutral courts, there are no neutral institutions. There's only power, pure power and nothing else. And all of these other things, these ideas about institutions, rules, laws, international relations, these are a threat to his kind of power. I think that the moment he first really understood this was in 2014, at the time of the Maidan, when he saw Ukrainians carrying European flags, using slogans about corruption and rule of law, and saw that this language motivated people to come and to stay on the Maidan for many weeks, and that eventually these ideas were strong enough to push and frighten Yanukovich,



*Top: Vakhtang Kebuladze
Bottom (from left to right): On screen: Anne Applebaum.
On stage: Tetiana Oharkova, Maksym Yakovliev and Vakhtang Kebuladze.*

who was a figure very similar to Putin, a kind of acolyte or pupil of Putin, out of the country. Putin understood then that that was the kind of demonstration and the kind of argument he was afraid of. In other words, a democratic, European Ukraine threatens him personally.

So this is a war against Ukraine as a nation, it's a war for empire, but it's also a war against that body of rules and ideas. And I think actually the people who understand this best are not necessarily people in Western Europe and the United States, about which more in a moment. The people who understand it best are Venezuelans, Iranians, Zimbabweans. I've had conversations with people over the last several months where they say, 'We see the Ukrainians are fighting for us.' Iranian dissidents have said to me, 'We think it's very important that Ukraine wins this war because it will be a lesson that these ideas, and the unity of the democracies that support them, are stronger than the ideas of autocracy.' The Iranian regime is far away and has a different ideology and so on. But it would be challenged by a Ukrainian victory because that would show that the ideas of law, democracy and freedom have the potential to be more powerful, even militarily, than the ideas of autocracy and dictatorship. Iranian dissidents understand this, the Venezuelan opposition understands this. I was with Venezuelan opposition members in Washington just a few weeks after the war began and they all said, 'This is our war.' Again, Venezuela is far away, it's not a traditional ally of Ukraine in any way, but the Venezuelan opposition leaders want Ukraine to win because, again, they understand that it would be a victory for the values they're fighting for at home as well.

So I think that is a correct characterisation of the war, and I also think it's very important to speak about the war in this way, to explain to people around the world that this is what it's about. President Zelensky does this very well but, of course, there are counter voices. Having said that, here's my warning. Before joining you, I looked up a quotation from the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, who won the Nobel Prize many years ago. He once wrote about the difference in understanding that he encountered after the Second World War between Poles and foreigners, westerners, Americans in particular. He was in the US very soon after the war, in fact. And he noted the difference between how people in Central Europe had experienced the war under occupation, the violence and so on, and how Americans saw it. He wrote, 'In normal times, if a man had stumbled upon a corpse in the street, he would've called the police. A crowd would've gathered and much talk and comment would have ensued.' I'm quoting Milosz. 'Now he knows he must avoid the dark body lying in the gutter and he must refrain from asking unnecessary questions.' What he meant was that murder became ordinary during wartime, and was even regarded as legitimate if it was carried out on behalf of the resistance. In the name of patriotism, young boys from law-abiding, middle-class

families became what would have been considered criminals before the war, people for whom the killing of a man represents no moral problem. Theft became ordinary, falsehood and fabrication became ordinary. All kinds of behaviours that you would not engage in during normal times became legitimate because they were part of fighting the war.

So, again, this is from Milosz, people learn to sleep through sounds that would once have roused the whole neighbourhood. You know this in Ukraine, you know the sound of gunfire, the sound of bombs. Normally this would be an alarm, but you learn to accept it and live with it. And for all of these reasons, Milosz wrote, this is a quote from him again: 'The man of the east cannot take Americans seriously.' Because they haven't gone through these experiences, they don't seem to understand what they mean. And this is the moment where I want to warn you. We began this conversation with talk about what people have to do during wartime in order to return to the civilisation they want to have. And there's now going to be a gap between what Ukrainians have experienced over the last year and a half and what Americans and Germans, and even Poles, frankly, and Slovaks, and Romanians have experienced. You're living through a moment now in which people are fighting a war. They're killing people. They're doing things that would not normally be done in peacetime. They've had to get used to things that would not be accepted in peacetime. And you will now have to explain that to Americans and other foreigners: what the difference is, how you live through that change. Of course you also have to think, after the war is over, how to return to the peacetime norms in which murder is abnormal and you would never do it. And so, on the one hand, yes, I agree it's a war for and about a universal set of ideas, and ideas that are common to all of democratic civilisation, and also common to opposition movements and dissent movements, even in autocracies. On the other hand, your experience is now going to be so particular and specific that explaining that and transmitting this idea to western audiences is going to become more difficult.

I don't want to give you advice. I'm not a font of all knowledge but, keeping these two things in your mind at the same time, that you need to speak to a common audience, in the name of a common civilisation, and at the same time explain what you've lived through to people who won't understand it, is going to be very difficult.



Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you very much, Ms. Applebaum, for those remarks, for your observations about what's happening here, what the risks are of the experience of the war that we're all having, but especially the people who are on the front lines, who are perhaps even this minute going into a battle, while we're sitting here safely discussing. The question to you, Maksym, is our central question of civilisation and war, collapse or challenge. And also the question: is the opposition we have strong enough to provide not just an abstract response, but a forceful response to the aggressor who doesn't understand ideas and cannot be convinced, but needs only a strong, powerful response? If the world is strong enough to give that response, could that lead not to a collapse but to a strengthening of civilisation?

Maksym Yakovliev: Thank you to the Forum for the invitation. I'd like to reflect on what Vakhtang said. I'd also like to talk about the concept of categories and 'Begriffsgeschichte', and I've been thinking about the Cambridge School of Total History, which could help us to speak about the context, how this is happening. I'll start with the German word 'begreifen', that's at the centre of the term 'Begriff', which means 'term'. In several Slavic languages, 'understanding' has a meaning that's like 'covering'. But as we are in media res, within what's happening to us in this war, we're not able to understand everything or cover everything. But there are several things we can say about democracy and about civilisational terms. It's really not fair to say that all civilisations are equal. They're different alternatives. We, as political scientists, discuss whether BRICS offers an alternative to the transatlantic, western world. And when we speak about alternatives, we get mixed up. We forget about the important aspect that what we call civilisation is based on the understanding we have, and we see the rest as alternatives that offer a very limited world, where there is no place for the majority, despite the fact that they are part of the same civilisation we're part of. I have two comments on this.

I'll start with democracy. I write about this in my book about it – thank you for mentioning it. In popular culture, I've always disliked the popular Hollywood movie theme in which there's a school, someone's bullying other students, and somebody else, like a nerd wearing glasses, starts fighting back. And everybody says, 'How could you?' The two students are standing in the head teacher's office and everybody's saying, 'How could you have done it? You shouldn't have done it. You should have found another way.' We're being told something like that now, for example with the Vatican story about the Ukrainian woman who had to carry a cross with a Russian woman. We're being told we need to sit down with Russians in the same forum and talk about how Putin is bad and not everything is simple, blah, blah, blah. But we need to understand that the part of the world that has lived for a long time without wars, that has felt safe, has created this culture in

which a confrontational response is not understandable, or understandable only in the sense of starting a dialogue. Like the people in Germany who are against delivering weapons to Ukraine, who say, provide them with chairs so the Ukrainians and Russians can sit in a circle and talk, help them in a different way.

So we need to think about democracy in a different way. This is something I've discussed with my colleagues, how we use the word 'democratic'. I remember an advertisement in late 90s and early 2000s in Ukrainian restaurants and cafes, that said, 'We have democratic prices'. It was referring to affordability and cheapness. And, as a political scientist and specialist in international affairs, I understand that democracy is complicated and expensive, that it needs clarification, in the form of education, and support for institutions to make sure they work. That's why I would agree with this idea of collapse, because sometimes during wartime it's easy just to close things up, to make them simpler. And that's the threat, the pressure: let's make it simpler. Let's just find a shorter way. And that provokes resistance. Which leads us to the question you've asked about. How can democracies understand that they need to have their own teeth, they need to bite back, they need to be able to fight. That when you're bullied, and not only bullied, but when they try to kill you, you need to fight back and not propose a peaceful solution.

To close my remarks about how we understand civilisation, it's not just this collapse in the sense of this temptation to make it simpler: I'd also include a different meaning of civilisation. When you speak polysemantically, and when you come to my favourite topic, the architecture of international organisations, if not a collapse, then what we're seeing is a crisis. The majority of organisations that were created to support the order after the Second World War do not serve current needs. Maybe even by the end of the Cold War, they should've been reformed, or something else should've been done. And we understand that some of the institutions that exist now, if they haven't collapsed, are just sitting and watching. So we're in a crisis that needs a solution. Democracies need to rethink their role. We definitely shouldn't include inequality among the alternatives we choose from. There's a deeper need to reconsider what's needed to maintain democracy, which is complicated, but also how to protect democracy. That's a stimulus that's coming from Ukraine, from what we're doing and how we're fighting. Different ways of thinking about it.





Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you, Maksym. I'd like to bring in another speaker who's with us online: Slavenka Drakulich. We're very pleased to see you, Ms Drakulich. We're familiar with your books, which have been published in Ukrainian. We know a little about your geography in the context of countries that are well aware of what war is, not in an abstract way, and of how war can dramatically change society. Not long ago, I had the opportunity to talk to some Croats. I was struck by their memory of the war, which for many people present here in Lviv is distant, because we're talking about the 90s; we have a lot of young people around us here who may not even remember those events. I'm interested to hear your response to our question, and here perhaps we can also move to the second part of our discussion, about the possibility of returning to some sort of normal. I'm not going to talk to this audience about reconciliation, because we're absolutely not at the moment for that in our society: we're still in a hot phase of a war that's not even close to finishing, and nobody knows how it will end. We often refer to 'victory', or to 'Ukraine's victory', but that's still quite a long way away, and possibly quite a lot more blood will have to be spilled before it happens. But I was struck by how alive the war in Croatia was in the memory of those people, even though it was a long time ago. Can we talk about any sort of normal, any sort of happiness after war?

Slavenka Drakulich: Thank you very much for your question and thank you for inviting me to be part of this conference. I have to say I'd rather speak about the second part, about establishing normality, than the first part. I'm very grateful to the previous speakers, who spoke at a high level and using, I'd say, dangerous phrases like 'the end of civilisation', and 'learning to kill'. To me, as a writer, it frightens me when people use phrases like that. 'The end of civilisation', or 'learning to kill' are not such abstract concepts.

What nobody mentioned, and which I think is important to mention when we're speaking about killing, is that killing is the first taboo in every culture. People have to learn how to kill. That's what propaganda, before and during the war, is intended to do; to persuade you that you have an enemy, and that this is who it is. Propaganda is also needed when you experience aggression and occupation, as we did in Croatia; Croatia was also attacked. In that respect, we're pretty much in the same position, and I understand you very well. On the other hand, I'd like to emphasise that I'm speaking from a different position; that of a small, unimportant country that experienced war. I hear that, for Ukrainians, Ukraine is a big country and the war that is going on now is a big war. Our country is small and our war was always considered to be some fire on the periphery of Europe – nobody paid much attention to it; it was considered no danger and wasn't considered to threaten civilisation or values. So it was a different kind of war, but it was still a war, in which hundreds of thousands people perished and were killed.



*Top: Maksym Yakovliev
Bottom: Slavenka Drakulich (on screen)*

To speak about the future, I think I'd say that we've already seen a bit of what will be amongst the first things to appear in what we might call a normal situation. First of all, you have the material reconstruction of the country: the buildings, the infrastructure. You also have to reconstruct government, that is, the type of government that you want to have, that you want to preserve. In this case, it's democracy, as was also the case in Croatia.

After that, you have to mend society, which will have many wounds. It's almost as if it's been torn apart, piece by piece, and now it's as if you're making a quilt – you have to put all the small pieces together. Something else you mentioned is the memory of the people. At the psychological level, that also somehow has to be understood and mended. The human being, with all of its wounds and memories, has to mend. The difference between memory and history at this point is something that has to be established, and there may be a gap. These possible gaps have already been mentioned. One gap is between those who are now fighting the war in Ukraine, in this case, and those in the rest of the Europe. There may be some in Europe who still remember the Second World War. While the generation that experienced the war is still alive, that war is remembered. There are still some older people who remember the Second World War, but in general, younger people who didn't experience the war won't understand you in the way you'd like them to. People who participated in war directly, like my father in the Second World War, or my daughter's friends who participated in our last war, don't talk about the war. They don't speak to people who weren't in the same position, because they can't talk about it. That's one thing.

The other gap is evident in what you said; that there's a gap between the people who are on the front line right now and us, sitting here comfortably, talking about the war. That will be the first division in society after the war.

You have to mend death. And death is very difficult to mend. There will be the people who've been through the war: veterans, victims of war, raped women, refugees. These people will experience the war in a very personal and possibly tragic way. Then there are the people who were sitting at home. There's absolutely nobody who's untouched by this: even if you sat at home in Lviv and were never on the front line and never had a son fighting there, you'll still be marked for life by the war.

So, in terms of the peace which will come, hopefully sooner rather than later, I'm not thinking about values and civilisation. As a writer, I'm much more interested in society, psychology, and in particular memory. The gap between memory and history. Those areas are my, I wouldn't say expertise, but my interest, because I've been observing them for years. You're absolutely right in saying that, after many years, there's still a very vivid remembrance of war. A whole generation

of people has grown up, they already have children, and they still have such a vivid memory. My generation has a very strong memory of that war. Which is not necessarily the official memory, that is, the history, of that war. There's still a big gap there.

You also mentioned reconciliation. It's useful to mention reconciliation, and it's also useful that you remind us that talking about reconciliation is not an issue right now because it's not the moment for it yet. But it will be an issue, and one of the most immediate problems afterwards. You'll have to continue to live with a Russian minority who will still be there, as we continue to live with a Serbian minority who didn't leave. Many Serbs left, many were refugees, but there were, and still are, people living here who we have to live alongside. We have to live with what, perhaps not them personally, but what we could call their people, have done to us. This is another one of the gaps. So, reconciliation, yes, but that is for a later date. There will be the question of an international tribunal. How much does that contribute to reconciliation? What do you actually do with your own war criminals? Do you put them on trial? There are many, many questions that come after a war. That's the only thing I can speak about. I can't engage in political, semi-political, or geopolitical analysis or, much less, philosophical analysis of this war. But I can say that I'm frightened when you use phrases like 'the end of civilisation'. That means this war is so big, Ukraine is so big, that if you lose, civilisation is lost. I find that idea frightening.



Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you very much, Ms Drakulich, for your ideas. I feel a strong resonance with what you said about the gap, between history and memory. Just yesterday I spoke with a French man called Edouard Mayo. He's – what should I call him? – an activist and businessman, I suppose, who's very involved with helping Ukraine. He started the initiative Stand with Ukraine, in which the mayor's offices in various French cities help Ukraine with specific problems, on and off the contact line. I asked him yesterday whether there was any correlation between particular regions in his country and a quicker or slower response to the needs, be they for generators, humanitarian aid, or whatever. Not military needs. He said, 'You're not going to believe it, but yes.' He told me the eastern regions of his country, those that were more affected by war, even by the First World War, that remembered the trenches, and the furrowed brow of the earth more than a hundred years ago, still retained the memory of what war is. They had a sensitivity to the problems of others, even though it's not a matter of those people remembering anything personally; this is family memory. But they responded much faster than people from other regions. This specific example was very interesting for me.

You and I don't know what history will be like, what will be written later about this war, and we know very well that history is written by the victors. So far, no one has won this war. We can dream and hope and do our best to achieve victory for the civilised world against this sort of unprovoked, unjust aggression. But, again, we are in the middle of this history, it's history in the making, literally being made right now. We can't know what that sort of history will be like. At the same time, memory is something we already have, in this hot phase since the start of the full-scale invasion. We're now in the 19th month of the war, but this war has actually been going on for 10 years, perhaps much longer.

Vakhtang, I'll turn back to you now. First of all, you wanted to add something about the war. Secondly, this possibility of how to continue being after the unthinkable, after this trauma, this loss that can't be made good. For many of our compatriots, things have happened that can't be set right: you can't undo the loss of a loved one, you can't regain your health once you've lost it. We know the losses we've already faced. From your perspective as a philosopher, how can we be with this unthinkable, tragic collapse, this abyss of experience that is war?

Vakhtang Kebuladze: Firstly, I'd like to respond briefly to what I've heard, and that will partly bring me on to my next thought. We've heard these words from our colleagues that I really value, that support us greatly. But the first thing that made me pause was this: it wasn't Putin who started this war. I think that's a dangerous idea. Putin didn't start this war. Russians started this war. That's something we have to be clear about. If Putin goes, that's not going to solve the problem. It's a Russian war. Putin, as I've repeated this many times, is not some kind of demon thrown in from the cosmos. He's a product of the Russian way of life, a response to the demands of the deep state or the deep people. Russia doesn't have a deep state, but it does have a deep people, and Putin is a response to a particular demand.

Secondly, we have to understand something that we don't understand at the moment: that, for Russians, not only for Putin, but for Russians, this is an organic mode of existence, because violence is a key aspect of their social being. For us it's trauma, horror. We ask them, 'How can you live after war?' As Adorno said, 'How is poetry possible after Auschwitz?' Because, to us, war is a disaster and a nightmare. For most Russians, and for Putin, who is a response to a demand, this is the high point of their lives. I'm certain that Putin is enjoying the extent to which he's regained influence in the world. Everybody's talking about him; even I am. I don't want to talk about Putin, I don't even want to think about Putin, but I have to.

So this is a war of the Russians against us and against all the people who are part of civilised humanity. That's why, unfortunately, we have to be clear about

what our victory will mean. If Russia remains in the form in which it now exists, and we're talking about, let's say, a Russia next to us, and a Russian minority in Ukraine, that's not our victory. That's a temporary suspension of a particular phase of a war that will continue in future generations, because the aim of the Russians is to physically destroy us. If they can't destroy us physically, then to turn us into people like them, in a kind of master-slave relationship. Our victory is not the destruction of Russians, it's the transformation of the Russians, making them different, making it so that their way of life no longer pertains in this world. We're not facing the question of what we do with the Russian minority in Ukraine. If there are people with a Russian identity in Ukraine after the war, that means we haven't won. It means the war is ongoing in some other format. That's something our colleagues often don't understand, even those who are on our side.

So, the question arises: what does after the war mean? I don't know. I have no answer. What does our victory mean? Simply that the Ukrainian army has reached the 1991 borders? Do you think that if our army reaches the 1991 borders the Russians will stop killing us? They're throwing missiles at us, we're getting bombed here in Lviv, thousands of kilometres away from Moscow or from the border. Unfortunately, that would not be a final victory. An ultimate victory would be the destruction of the Russian empire, but the destruction of the Russian empire is the destruction of Russian identity. Because – I will risk this somewhat paradoxical statement – Russia, in the modern sense of the world, as a political nation, does not exist. There is no political nation of Russians. They created an empire, but they didn't create a political nation. If we take away the empire, it's not clear what will remain. That's not really our problem, but it will become our problem: the fact that the Russians can no longer be imperial will be a problem for us.

Look at the chief elements of Russian discourse, even amongst Russian liberals. They're primarily concerned with how people will treat them after the war, not with the fact that they're killing us. So I don't feel a sense of guilt towards Russians. Yes, they're suffering, too, because their motherland is being humiliated, looks awful. But they're just as awful, they're complicit in this awfulness, because rather than wanting to atone, all they think about is the future, about a happy life in the future after they've killed millions of Ukrainians. Thank God, it's not actually millions yet, but, if this carries on, it could be. So, is happiness possible afterwards? It's not a question of happiness, it's a question of afterwards. A question of post-war. What does it mean to be post-war? I think it was Anne Applebaum who said we'll all be living with this, we have to make peace with the fact that psychologically and mentally we'll all carry the trauma of the war, all the citizens of Ukraine, regardless of whether we participated in combat, or volunteered, or lost someone. Everyone's lost someone at this point. I don't know a single person who hasn't lost a friend, someone near and dear, in this war. This

trauma is something we have to live with. And it's a terrible trauma. But what does it mean to be after that? What does it mean to be done with that? And what does happiness mean?

To move on to an approach to the idea of happiness: what's the difference between happiness and pleasure? What is eudaimonism as opposed to hedonism? I can satisfy myself all alone. I can take care of all of my physical, even my intellectual needs, without appealing to other people. Civilisation gives me the tools to do that. But I cannot be happy on my own, only in conjunction with other free and dignified and happy people, unless I'm some sort of pervert sadist who enjoys the suffering of others, but that can hardly be called happiness.

Now the big problem arises for us. How do we, in that future world, co-exist with the kinds of other people who call themselves Russian? How can we be happy with them together in one world? To me, that's a problem that can't be solved, because being together with miserable people (because they are people, they're enemies but they're people; unlike them, we're not dehumanising the enemy), how can we be happy alongside this massive number of people controlled by a group of criminals, which is the constant form of existence of the Russian State? It's a question without an answer for me. The only thing I really don't want, which is something that many of us do want, is to go back to normality, to business as usual. A friend wrote to me from Germany, 'I so want to go back to Ukraine'. He has a young daughter. And I said, 'Do you understand that you don't just want to come back to a space? You want to come back to a time, you want to come back to a situation before all of this. But that's not possible. And it's dangerous.' I don't want to go back to 2013. Who, here, wants to go back to 2013, when next to us we had this Russian evil that at any moment might blow and might encroach? I don't want to go back to the normality that led to this abnormality of war.

We might've been happy in that normality because we were naive, because we closed our eyes to the real danger of Russia. A return would not be a return to happiness, but a return to misery, which is why we can't bring back the normal that once existed. We have to create the conditions for a new normal, in which there will be no room for Russian imperial identity. Russians have to transform and become something else. Having destroyed their empire, they have to turn into different kinds of people, so that they're no longer a threat to themselves or to others.



Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you, Vakhtang. That brings me to a question I want to address to Anne Applebaum. Vakhtang has given us this vision of the future. I'm still interested in how this situation is seen by our partners in the west. To what extent is there this understanding of the fact that we can't go back – not only Ukrainians, but also the rest of the world – to some kind of imaginary point where everything was good, the democratic world was stable. Because history is back. This very difficult, very dramatic kind of history is back. It requires an effort from each of us, and the changes will come, and they will not always be pleasant. To what extent is this mindset already there amongst you, the people who are trying to conceive, not only of the present but also of the future?

Anne Applebaum: It's a good question. I can't give you a clear answer, because the answer would vary from country to country, and even from person to person. I think the understanding that, as long as this kind of Russia exists, and I want to return to that in a second, that Europe is now perpetually threatened, is something some people have understood and some people have not understood. In Germany, it's almost as if there's a huge aircraft carrier and it's slowly moving; you can hear the German debate shifting as people begin to understand that the world they lived in before this war is over. That was a world in which Germany was a country surrounded by peaceful neighbours on all sides, didn't have any kind of military or security threat that was real, was able to do business with Russia, with China, all over the world without it having any political significance. There are people who understand that world is over, others who are still nostalgic for it. And some people really resent the idea that that there will have to be a change, that defence budgets will have to look different, that a certain kind of German business is no longer possible.

I'm picking on Germany for no particular reason. I could say the same thing about France, or even about Poland or the United States. For Europeans and for Americans to say to themselves, 'Right, we now have a permanent problem, as long as this regime exists, and it requires a change in the nature of our security and it means we need to bring our economies on to a war footing and produce far more ammunition than we ever did, far many more weapons than we did. We need to shift part of our budgets to the production of weapons in order to defend Ukraine and defend ourselves...' We're coming close to that realisation, but it has a very high price. Instead of welfare payments, instead of health care, instead of culture, instead of things that people would rather spend money on, we'll have to spend money on defence and self-defence. Some people have come to that realisation and some have not.

On the subject of Russia, I want to say something nuanced, and I'll try to say it carefully. I do think Russia can change and can be different. You can write a history of Russia, going back to the Decemberists and moving through to the present, in which you find a long story of people who've wanted Russia to be different. You can talk about the 1960s, when you had the Russian dissident movement, which essentially invented the modern human rights movement. You can talk about other movements right up to the present. I don't believe that all Russian liberals are Russian imperialists. I think you've heard a change in the conversation among Russian liberals, even in the last year and a half, but I think even before that you could find Russian liberals who understood that the empire was damaging. And it's my hope that eventually one of the things that happens in Russia is that there will begin to be political change. I don't care who's the leader of Russia or what the nature of the political system is, but I hope that eventually Russia comes to understand that this war was a mistake and that it's destroying their own country, and that in order to rebuild a better and more prosperous Russia, they need to remove their troops from Ukraine. That's the moment when the war's really over. It's not over when there's a ceasefire, or the day we stop fighting. It's over when there's this kind of change in Russia. It's the kind of change you had in France in 1962, when the French decided that Algeria was no longer part of France, they were not going to be a colonial power there anymore, and they went home. At that time, it was an enormous political crisis, there was a murder attempt on Charles de Gaulle, there was a kind of constitutional crisis in France connected to this change, but there was a change. And we have to work towards achieving that kind of change in Russia too. Change is possible; countries do become different. I think Ukraine is a very different country from the one it was 20 years ago. That happened because people in Ukraine wanted the country to change. And there are some people who want Russia to change too. It's a very small number; many of them are not in Russia right now, but working to support them and to support their arguments is something I think the Ukrainians could usefully do. I'll finish there.



Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you, Anne. Maybe there really will be changes. I have some fears, and I believe many have these fears, that the changes will happen, but that we won't live to see them. You remember how it happened after the Second World War? We don't remember it, but we read it in books. How much time has been needed in order to understand the mistakes, to ask for forgiveness, to change. This took place, but it didn't happen in an instant. It needed a lot of time: not a month, not a year, but much longer. Just yesterday, there was a story about the Maidan cases, saying that the investigation has been completed. Ten years have passed and only now it is coming to an end. Ten years is a short time

in one sense, but it's also incredibly long. I fear there will be changes, mental or geographical changes, with today's enemy. Maybe there's an alternative, maybe they will become different, but I fear that we won't see it. Maybe our children will, or maybe our grandchildren, or maybe it will never happen. Thank you, Anne.

Maksym, about the possibility of existence after war, the idea that it's not about happiness, but about whether this after war will take place. We're speaking in a very hypothetical way; nobody can be sure what will happen tomorrow, how it will end and when it will end. But still, your vision of the future: is there a chance we'll see the return of normality? It's the wrong word, maybe. Something that would be just? An understanding of justice, the end of this chaos, of this unjustified war?

Maksym Yakovliev: I will start with a game of words. I have some experience of translating books from English, Swedish and German. I always pay attention to the fact that phrases in one language don't mean the same in the other language. The English 'are you happy?' means something like satisfaction, maybe. Are we satisfied by freeing some territories? There are more questions. How do we work with those who collaborated? I'm sure that satisfaction will come, after a lot of effort that needs to be put in after the war.

Thank you, Vakhtang, for speaking about the future of Russia. I want to say two things here. I have an experiment I like to do abroad, especially when meeting somebody from western Europe, or an American professor of Russian studies. I look into their eyes and just start naming the nations that have been enslaved by the Russians. You can start with Buryatians, Yakutians, and so on. Because of the idea that what happens in Russia is limited to what's portrayed by Dostoyevsky and all the rest. I've tried to observe these national minorities in Russia, but they're in their homes, they're on their territory. There's a very black joke – you know that jokes and humour are things that allow us to keep fighting and believe in our victory and believe that we'll be happy one day. I had a course in qualitative methodology and I suggested that my students collect memes and jokes about how we're fighting. And the joke is that the first five republics that leave Russia and declare independence will receive a five percent discount on paying reparations to Ukraine. One of my students suggested that, in 20 or 30 years time, Sakha-Yakutia might send an ambassador to Kiyv asking for forgiveness as an independent state. Maybe we could think about that.

That looks more realistic to me than talking to the deeply sick people who are imperialists, who are not a political nation, who have invented this Uvarovian triad about self-governance, which doesn't exist in the form of any political theory. For us to be satisfied with the result of the war, much more would have to happen than our army's reach, our borders. We'd need to convince the entire world of what Russia actually is, its treatment of other people. My father always says the

hardest thing is proving that you're not a rhinoceros, because Russia is saying blah, blah, blah, whatever it is they're saying.

I liked Anne's image of the aircraft carrier moving very slowly. I believe that for this enlightenment, you can't just read Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky; you have to understand that Russia is a vast territory, a kind of nation that has a lot of imperialist thinking, and a lot of enslaved nations belonging to it. Another student of mine showed me a joke by a stand-up comedian, who's not ethnically a Russian, maybe he's Tajikian or something. He said something like, 'I was walking through St. Petersburg and somebody said to me, "You're Russian, you have to go and fight." It's the first time in 20 years that I've heard that, all of a sudden, I'm Russian and not some kind of black man.' If we're ever going to have a feeling of justice, to feel safe with the neighbour we're going to have, we have a very long way to go to fight back our territories and then to convince everybody of it.



Tetiana Oharkova: A few minutes to Slavenka. Maybe you want to comment on some of the ideas you've heard? We'll give you a few moments and then we'll move on to questions.

Slavenka Drakulich: I have three very brief comments. What stuck with me was the statement that if there's a Russian minority after the war, living with us, that's not a victory. I think what you explained later on and what you meant is that these Russians living among you have to change, to become Russians who are longer an imperial force. But in terms of those people who are living in Ukraine and who are ethnically Russians, if you really mean that you can't live with them, because that wouldn't be a victory, if you literally mean that, which I don't think you do, that's a big problem for me. I don't think you can make such a statement, even if it's meant as symbolism of some kind.

The second comment is about what Anne Applebaum said about Russia, that there's also a different Russia, different people. There are very few of them, but the fact that she's the only one who mentioned that there are different Russians, that there could be different Russians, that they're not all the same....that, to me, means a lot. I know how difficult it is to say such a thing in this situation, but it's very important to keep in mind that there are such people, and we shouldn't demonise them. Perhaps only she could say it. I had the same experience in our war, that only foreigners could say some things that the wider public in my country didn't want to hear.

My last comment is in response to what you said about it being very difficult to speak about the future, and that we can't venture into that because this is not the time for it. We already are speaking about the future, in the sense that next year there will be elections in America and there's the possibility that Trump could win or, at least, that the Republicans could win. That will influence the outcome of the war in Ukraine immensely. And it will influence the European situation immensely. And what we're experiencing in Europe now, I hope you've all noticed, or maybe you haven't, is that there's a change in attitude towards the war in Ukraine; there's been change before and now divisions are getting even bigger, between east and west, between eastern Europe and western Europe. You've seen the elections last week in Slovakia. You know what Fico has said. You know what Orbán is saying and doing. There's not only that, there are also many signs that right-wing parties are getting stronger in the European Union. That might influence the future too. It's not only right-wing parties, ordinary people are also changing their minds and their attitudes. That's all I have to say. Thank you.



Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you very much, Slavenka, for your remarks. We have five minutes left for questions. I'll ask our speakers to respond as briefly as possible.

Yana Brenza: Thank you very much. My name is Yana Brenza, I'm a journalist. I'd would like to ask a question to Slavenka. I like your books very much. Reading one of them, I experienced something like a cold shower when you said that a Ukrainian mother who'd lost a son in the war and a Russian mother were having the same experience. For me, the Ukrainian mother who lost her son in the war didn't have a choice. Her son did something he couldn't have done in a different way, because he didn't have a choice. The Russian mother and son had choice: they could have changed it, they could have not started the war. Yes, the end effect is the same, the mother lost the son, but the Russians could've not come. Do they have a similar experience? If we say that it's common experience, don't we destroy the border between good and evil? Thank you.

Slavenka Drakulich: Thank you very much for your question. I think perhaps you misunderstood what I wrote a little. I didn't try to make the experience equal. It's not equal from the point of view of how they lost their sons, but the fact that they've both lost their sons. That's the key in that particular story. Also, I don't agree with you that the mother of a young Russian man who was accused of a war crime could influence his attitude, his deeds or his decision to go to the army. I wouldn't put blame on the mother. In that story, the accent is on mother losing son. That's what, in that sense, might put them in the same position.

Questioner: Could you please name the dissidents you think we need to support? I used to live abroad, I had Russian friends. None of them even asked me if I was alive when this war started. I tried listening to their liberals. Their first comments and lectures were not about how to raise a political nation, how to fight this, or avoid this, or try to change something. Their first comments were about the need to accept that there's no guilt for the whole nation. Their second comments were about how to prepare for repressions: not about how to fight, but about how to prepare to give up. So, personally, I've never really supposed there were true Russian dissidents. To both of our foreign commentators, I'd like to say that I think you don't really understand that there's such thing as a Russian ethnicity. Many Ukrainians in Ukraine can claim Russian ethnicity – we have Russian grandfathers, great-grandfathers, mothers, fathers, etcetera – but a person who claims they're Russian these days, I think is a bit sick in their mind, because they're specifically associating themselves with Russia as a country as it is currently now, not with Russian ethnicity.

A last comment about Ms Applebaum saying that Russians can change. True, anybody can change, but we forget that after the Second World War, Germany was changed, not because it wanted to change, but because it was forced to change. We do not plan to occupy Russia. We do not plan to force them to change. So, yes, change is possible but, for now, and I think many people will support me here, I see no move towards them trying to change anything in their minds. All the dissidents that you mentioned, you forgot to mention that a huge percentage of them are not of Russian ethnicity. They're Ukrainian, Kazakh, they're from other nationalities in the Soviet empire who wanted to break free.

Anne Applebaum: First of all, I've spent more than a decade explaining to western audiences that Russian-speaking Ukrainians are Ukrainians. So, don't lecture me about that. I fully understand that Russian can be your first language, you can have grandparents who were born in Russia and you can choose to be Ukrainian and you're born in Ukraine and you are a citizen of Ukraine. And I believe strongly that Ukraine is a nation built on ideas rather than on ethnicity. I've been writing that and saying that for a long time.

Secondly, presumably your Russian friends are different from my Russian friends, and we're not going to have a battle about whose friends did what. Some of mine are working on behalf of Ukraine and are interested in ending the war as soon as possible and in ending Russian imperialism as well. In terms of naming dissidents, I'd prefer to mention the ones who don't have names, and those are the ones who've organised this underground railroad inside Russia to help Ukrainians escape. So for the Ukrainians who've been expelled from Mariupol or from other occupied territories, who've ended up sometimes in distant parts of Russia,

there's a secret organisation that helps them escape the country and get back to Ukraine. I do know who some of them are, but I can't tell you their names, because what they're doing is so dangerous that if they're caught, they'll be arrested and I don't want them to be arrested, because I want them to continue to help this process. So, I prefer that we stick to the realm of ideas. There can be an idea of a different Russia, which is a nation based on the kinds of values you've come to accept in Ukraine. I refuse to accept that anybody inherits evil with their mother's milk, or some formula like that. And I think it's really important for Ukrainians to remember that; that you can be from Russia and you can still have different ideas about what your country should be.



Tetiana Oharkova: Thank you very much, Anne, for your response. Thanks to everybody for the discussion. Thank you to our speakers, both those present here on stage and those who were with us through Zoom conference. We wish you all a pleasant continuation of your discussions in the events to come. Have a nice day and take care.







Marshall Plan for Ukraine: What Future Awaits the World after the Ukrainian Victory

Participants: Timothy Garton Ash, Emma Graham-Harrison, Oleksandra Matviichuk (digital), Sevgil Musaeva, Oleksandr Sushko and Kristina Berdinskikh (chair)

Kristina Berdinskikh: A word of welcome to the audience. My name is Kristina Berdinskikh, and I'll be moderating the event today, in which we'll be discussing a potential Marshall Plan for Ukraine. We'll be talking about the future. But before I introduce our speakers, I think it's important that we mark what happened just an hour ago in Hroza, in the Kharkiv Oblast, in the Kharkiv region. There was a Russian strike. There are only 300 people in this village, 50 of whom died today. So every sixth resident of the village. It's a massive tragedy, both for this small village and for all of Ukraine. I think this is very telling of the reality in which Ukraine now lives. We're in Lviv discussing our plans for the future. At the same time, people are dying. This is a daily reality, and I think it should be the backdrop to our discussion. How do we reconcile these realities? And how do we continue thinking about Ukraine's future?

I'm proud to introduce our speakers. We have with us: Oleksandr Sushko, executive director of the International Renaissance Foundation; Timothy Garton Ash, a British historian, journalist and writer. I'm also happy to welcome Sevgil Musaeva, Editor-in-chief of the online newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda*; Emma Graham-Harrison, a British journalist who writes for *The Guardian*, and Oleksandra Matviichuk, who'll join us online, an advocate, human rights activist and head of the Centre for Civil Liberties.

I'd like to start today's discussion with a first question to Timothy Garton Ash. If we're talking about a Marshall Plan, I'd like to recall the original Marshall Plan that was put in place after the Second World War, long after the war was over. We're talking about a Marshall Plan for Ukraine now, even as the war is ongoing. The war is not over. We don't know when it will end, how it will end, in what conditions it will end. Does it matter that we talk about this now, and if so, why?

Timothy Garton Ash: It's great to be here in Lviv again. I want to start by recalling when I was last here, in December of last year. I had an unforgettable conversation with a guy called Yevhen Hulevych, a cultural critic and editor, whose name many of you will know. He volunteered to serve, was wounded in 2022, went back to the front, and when I talked to him, in early December, he was just about to go back to the front again. I've never forgotten our conversation. At one point, he said, 'I really hope I'll live to see what our country's like after this war.' And, as many of you know, he didn't. He was killed near Bakhmut on the last day of last year, and actually yesterday I went to lay flowers on his grave at the Field of Mars at the Military Cemetery, and I was quite shocked to see how many new graves there were since last year. So that's what's at stake. The question is, can we re-construct a country and a Europe that's worthy of that sacrifice?

Our panel optimistically had a rubric that said 'after victory'. But first we've got to get to that victory; we're still a long way from it, and obviously there are problems on the ground. But one of the biggest problems is the country that gave us the Marshall Plan, the United States. The speaker of the US Congress has just been ejected, partly because he wanted to get some funding through for Ukraine. The other day, I was sitting in a hotel in Washington, watching Fox News, which is a good idea from time to time, painful though it is. They were talking about AI, and a so-called 'comedian' said, 'So Joe Biden asks Chat GPT, the AI platform, "How do I screw the American middle class?" and the answer comes back, "send \$75 billion to Ukraine."' That's what you're up against. You're up against a real groundswell of feeling in the US, which is saying, 'Why are we sending all this money to this faraway country of which we know little?' Which is why I actually don't think we should talk about a Marshall Plan.

First of all, as a historian, I have to tell you that the history of the last 50 years is littered with the graves of Marshall Plans that never happened. 'Let's have a Marshall Plan for Eastern Europe after 1989.' Didn't happen. 'Let's have a Marshall Plan for the former Yugoslavia after 1995.' Didn't happen. 'Let's have a Marshall Plan for the Middle East after the Iraq War.' Didn't happen. 'Let's have a Marshall Plan for Africa.' Didn't happen. So even just calling it a Marshall Plan is not a good omen. Secondly, Marshall was an American. That kind of suggests this is going to demand a lot of money from the US. And the US is not in the mood to give a lot more money. What you need from the US is military support.

To go back to your question, one of the ideas of the Marshall Plan was essentially to catalyse cooperation between European countries. It was one of the first steps towards the European Union, if you like. Now we have a European Union. And it's very rich. It's an economy of comparable size. So, in my view, what we need is not a Marshall Plan led by the US, but a Euro plan, led by the EU. That would also

signal to the US, to the people who watch Fox News, that Ukraine is in Europe. Europe is going to take the lion's share of the burden of supporting Ukraine. But we need you to win this war.

A last point, before we go into the conversation: this plan would be very different from the Marshall Plan. What we need is something that starts right now, even during the war, with reconstruction, even while the destruction is still going on, and that puts that together with reform of the Ukrainian state, which probably isn't going fast enough and is inextricably intertwined with reconstruction. And – I'm going to make this a third 'R', so it's three 'R's – reaching your proper place in the European Union. So the accession process, domestic reform and reconstruction have to go together. And Europe has to take the lead, not the United States. It's going to be the Europe plan. Then maybe we'll end up with the Ukraine and Europe plan, which would be worthy of the memory of very brave people like Yevgen Hulevich.

Kristina Berdinskikh: In that case, I have a follow-up question to do with Europe specifically. We've seen the results, for instance, of the election in Slovakia, where there's a party that says, 'We shouldn't support Ukraine, we shouldn't fund Ukraine, we should give neither military nor financial support.' And we're already hearing voices in Europe saying that Ukraine is a very costly affair. Before we get any sort of plan, European or American, these voices may grow. How do we explain? How do we maintain? How do we balance? How do we explain to Europe and the world that support of Ukraine is in their interests? Can we keep that support until a plan is put in place?

Timothy Garton Ash: I really think the US is a much more serious problem at the moment than Europe. Most of the major European countries, including my own, the UK, but also Germany – and this wasn't so evident a year ago – really are signed up to this. In Slovakia, yes, the result was shocking. Robert Fico is not just pro-Russian, but pro-Putin. He said a few months ago that in 2014, Ukrainian Nazis and fascists had been attacking Russians in Donbas. That's revolting stuff, and he'll now have a seat at the EU's decision-making table, next to Viktor Orbán. So it is a problem, but it's a relatively small problem. In terms of European leaders and the EU leadership, Josep Borrell just brought all the EU foreign ministers to Kyiv, for example. That means something.

But, of course, there's also the scale of the funding needed. To give you an example, the EU is now asking for another billion euros, specifically for support for Ukraine, and that's controversial, because it's a big ask. What we need is for major EU leaders – not just Ursula von der Leyen and Josep Borrell and Charles Michel, but also Olaf Scholz and Emmanuel Macron and Giorgia Meloni and Pedro Sánchez and others – going out there, making the big speeches to their own public

opinion, explaining why this is so important, and putting it in a historical frame. And that historical frame is: if we succeed in this – and by the way, it's not just Ukraine, it's also Moldova, Georgia, the western Balkans – we'll take another big step forward towards the 'Euro-Poland Free', and we'll have, for the first time ever, a post-imperial Europe. That is to say, a Europe which has empires neither overseas, which we had since the 15th century, nor on-land, because the Russian Empire is the last major European empire. That's a speech I'd like to see Olaf Scholz making to the German public and Macron making to the French public, and unfortunately they're not making those speeches at the moment.



Kristina Berdinskikh: I'd just like to turn to the audience here and say that none of us on the panel are economists. We're talking about a Marshall Plan, but I think there are very important conditions governing how these Marshall Plans might be implemented. Sevgil, your publication recently published a letter that American officials had sent to the Ukrainian authorities, enumerating a list of recommended reforms – what the Ukrainian authorities are supposed to do to ensure further support, including further financial aid from the United States. In your opinion, Sevgil, to what extent will all of our future economic plans depend on this? How much will this be demanded from us by our partners, and to what extent will our authorities listen? Because as a journalist, I know that when we ask for weapons, we expect the whole world to help us, but when the world asks us to implement reforms, we say, 'We're an independent state, whatever reforms we want to implement, we'll do that ourselves.' That's how it often works. In your opinion, to what extent will the Ukrainian authorities listen? How de rigueur will these requirements be, or will they be more like recommendations? And what will be the most significant actions we have to take to maintain this level of support from the world?

Sevgil Musaeva: Thank you, Kristina. That's a big list of questions. I'd like to start by saying that, first of all, we do need reform. We're the ones who need it, primarily, because our country has lost over 20 years in which we had the possibility for change. I'm starting that calculation from the Ukraine with Kuchma and the Ukraine without Kuchma in the early 2000s. Then we moved into the Orange Revolution, then the Revolution of Dignity. And now, as the political commentator at *Ukrainska Pravda* said, this war is our third and most important Maidan. None of the things in that letter are a surprise to the Ukrainian side. All of them have been voiced before. They're there in the demands of the international monetary funds; they've been voiced by civil society. The Ukrainian authorities have already committed to them. However, we've been very slow to do our homework. And I think the contribution of Ukrainian journalists in this context was to tell



the truth. The truth about the crimes of the Russians and also sometimes the very unpleasant truth of our own problems, of corruption. Unfortunately, this phenomenon exists, even in the midst of this existential battle for survival. Is that truth-telling easy to do? No. It's very hard to do. It's very unpleasant. Nobody in our team enjoys it or derives any moral satisfaction from it, but we understand that without these investigations, we'll never get positive change.

In terms of whether our authorities will listen, I think they'll have to listen. They're under pressure not only from our western partners, but also from Ukrainian civil society. The demand for justice is there, it's sky high, and it needs to be satisfied. We're seeing this almost every day. There's growing controversy in our society. The unity that was previously our tool of victory is now turning into displeasure and discontent. We're seeing rallies in big towns whenever the municipal authorities fail to send money for arms and the front. So society sees itself as having a role in this process. Again, I'm not an economist, but I think the contribution of journalists to this story and to a potential Marshall Plan will be to do what we can to overcome corruption. So we'll continue that struggle. But I think that unless we attend to all of the requirements being made, it won't be possible.

What's the point of a Marshall Plan, if we're quite honest? It's not just about bridges. Certainly it is about infrastructure and bridges and concrete. Unless we rebuild the infrastructure here, in war conditions, we simply won't be able to return our women and children to the country, because we're out of schools and hospitals, and that matters. It's important that we rebuild now, which is why it's important to show evidence of reform here and now, so as not to lose the support of our partners. But a Marshall Plan is also about building a set of rules; perhaps even civilisational rules, rules of the game, legality, the rule of law. Because in the end, what is this war about, and what is victory about? It's about making a contribution to other countries with other very aggressive neighbours. If we put Russia in its place, that's about the law and legality.

So Ukraine has to become the kind of country that demonstrates this democratic transformation and this legality from the inside. The Ukrainians who've left for Europe can and could just stay there, where there are civilisational rules in place. Then there wouldn't be enough people here to rebuild the country. So of course I'm in favour of rebuilding bridges and buildings, but also of building bridges with Europe and cutting ties with Russia. These connections continue the process of de-communisation. For a section of our society that's still an open question, a misunderstanding.

We talk a lot about the authorities, but society also has to change. You can't have a gap with society when part of it has sacrificed its life for the possibility of chan-

ge. When someone can pay \$5,000 to the Odessa draft officer who then buys a villa and leaves the country, while someone else is serving in Bakhmut without rotation. They're fighting for 18 months while another part of society is hanging out at clubs under curfew, violating public peace. So there are a lot of questions for society.

It's about political leadership. I really think that if we have the political will in place, we'll see these changes soon. Unfortunately, the window of opportunity is not that wide. We're entering several election cycles, and questions about Ukraine will be heard louder and louder. If we're to move forward, to address all these questions, and to pull the rug out from under the feet of this Russia that will definitely be fomenting this questioning in other countries, we have to do our level best to change here and now. And a plan, whether it's for 3 months, 6 months or 12 months, is something we need. It's something Ukraine needs and our society needs.



Kristina Berdinskikh: I have another question. It turns out I have two questions for everyone. This isn't about an international aspect of the matter, but an internal aspect. I recently read a publication on social media by a Ukrainian serviceman who said, 'It's time to stop spending more money on these constant reconstruction conferences. We're in the trenches. All is not well. We haven't won the war yet. And it's very likely that I or my brothers and sisters in arms will not live to see victory.' Do you think it's timely to talk about reconstruction?

Sevgil Musaeva: I think actually even the letter you refer to was misread. It was also an early, early version from the sources. As someone said, it's also about military aid, but military aid can't be equalled to reform, because we're talking about a country's survival and the possibility of continuing its life. The partners are entirely with us. They support us and they will support us, because again, this is about survival. As for the reconstruction conferences, I think this dialogue is necessary. Again, because to me it matters that Ukrainians return to their country after the victory. Many people will not return. What's going to happen with internal demand? If there's no internal demand, what's going to happen to the economy? In terms of exports, we need to think about what Ukrainian exports are going to be. We really need a significant chunk of Ukrainians to return. And for them to return, we need to think about infrastructure. When one in 10 schools in the country have been destroyed, that's going to be a serious problem for women with children who've got accustomed to the conditions in Europe. There simply won't be any reason for them to return. The same thing with hospitals. So I think those processes have to carry on in parallel. In military terms, we've now started

thinking more strategically, thinking that the war will not end tomorrow. We're thinking about producing our own weapons, bringing in investment for weapons production in the country. But we also have to think about rebuilding schools and putting proper bomb shelters in those schools. Many initiatives of this sort are already underway now. But again, it all depends on transparency and fair play, on observing the rules of the game, which also need to be implemented here and now.



Kristina Berdinskikh: Oleksandr, you're the only person on this non-economic panel who I'll ask about the economy. On September 14th, President Biden appointed a US special representative for Ukraine's economic recovery, Penny Pritzker. So we even have a US official now, working on helping us to recover. I read Ms. Pritzker's interview in European Pravda. She mentions the sectors of the economy that she believes are most promising, in which foreign investors could start investing now. She mentioned green energy, as well as agriculture. In your opinion, which sectors of the economy will become our points of growth once the situation is more stabilised? And what would this depend on?

Oleksandr Sushko: I'm answering also not as an economist, but I can certainly see the logic of democratic political systems and leaders appointing and creating specific institutions to manage future or current reconstruction aid to Ukraine. Not just the United States, but also France, Germany and a number of other countries have either already appointed or are considering candidates. It's not just about appointing a person either. It's essentially about creating a separate institution that will formulate policy on this question. Policy is a matter of criteria and of frameworks that set the tone for performing activities. You mentioned that Ms. Pritzker, who has just started her work in this role, is already talking not only about how America will allocate money, but also about opportunities for private investors. An effective political role for a Marshall Plan would not to simply be to pour money into particular areas or projects, but to create the conditions for a powerful push for our economy. And not just the economy as such, but productive forces that could enable Ukraine to get back on its feet after this great war.

So I do think there will be investors, who'll be doing their own evaluations about the particular market prospects of a given sector. Much ink has been spilled about both the Ukrainian IT sector and the Ukrainian agricultural sector: though completely different in nature, both seem very promising for Ukraine. We're talking about capital construction too, and all of this is united by the factor of human capital. Sevgil referred in part to this.

I'll just add that I think any mature aid to Ukrainian renovation and reconstruction will be oriented towards social capital, towards recreating or creating capacities for Ukrainian society to progress using its own momentum. This is about who's moving it and what direction they're moving it in, and also about who this is for. Rebuilding a school, for example, if we're not sure there will be teachers and pupils in that village, would just be a waste, but we're not just taking into account how many people are there now. We have to think about the kinds of policies that would help rebuild the social resources of the territories that have been affected by the war both directly and indirectly.

How can we overcome the problem of depopulation that is perhaps the number one consequence of this war? There are different evaluations of how many people Ukraine will lose in the best and worst case scenarios, but in any case it's a lot of people. In addition to losses in terms of people moving abroad, there will be significant losses regionally when the proportions of various employable resources – labour resources, human resources – really changes. This will significantly affect the economic and social map of Ukraine. We'll really see a different Ukraine from the point of view of distribution of people and thus of their creative, social energies. Obviously the major objective and task here is to try to ensure we have powerful, qualified, competent experts who can provide some kind of prognostic value, so we can try to see now where we would stand should everything continue as it is continuing. We're already seeing some trends and we have to systematise them.

That's still not enough on its own, though. We also need to take the next step, which is to produce policies aimed at forestalling the worst possible predicted outcomes that are already fairly visible, and that can be affected if we mobilise the appropriate resources. This is exactly where international aid can really be of direct help. We're talking about qualified knowledge, about working with people. Instead of the individual projects that have already started all over the country, a holistic, systemic policy of reconstruction. We're not seeing holistic criteria for selecting the projects that are prioritised and on what basis they are prioritised.

So I'd like both the American special representative and our other international partners to focus on this, not just to dictate a list of benchmarks or reform conditions to be met. But that's not enough. I agree that our candidacy for the EU gives us a clear picture of how the country is expected to change. There's not a lot of room for fantasy here, frankly. Obviously rule of law and two sectoral policies in various areas. That's the path that's based on known criteria. But what's unknown is the consequences of the war. Nobody in the world has enough expertise in the question of what do you do in these situations in order to minimise adverse consequences for the country and society. That's where I see the über-task, for

the intellectual community to get together and really help Ukraine to see the light at the end of the tunnel and plan the use of the limited resources that we will have at our disposal.

Kristina Berdinskikh: Thank you. One more question, a basic one. The security factor will probably be one of the most important influences on our economic development. Even while the war continues, we can see life returning to regions – the Lviv region, for example – where there was destruction. It's restructuring, recovering, but I spoke to an entrepreneur in Ternopil who'd had a small furniture production business in the Kharkiv region. He'd resettled. The province where he used to work has already been liberated, and he told me he was ready to return home, but he said, 'I'll return to my business only when Ukraine has become part of NATO. I've survived once, but no security guarantees are enough for me to feel sure my business will survive in the future.' So we have several possible scenarios. One is that the war will continue at the same pace for the next few years and then end. How can we develop our security according to the different possible scenarios of how the war will develop?

Oleksandr Sushko: There's a full spectrum of varying forecasts, but they're only forecasts, visions. If we begin any discussion by saying we don't know how this war will end, it just prevents any possibility of getting a strong picture of the situation. Several things are very concrete. One is the understanding that without NATO membership, any talk of a positive future for Ukraine is in vain. I believe more and more stakeholders and players are beginning to understand that: Ukraine nowadays is united on this aspect; all the political and intellectual elites understand it. In that sense we've had a breakthrough. We've been seeing over the last few weeks and months that Ukraine has a strong perspective. But it's not that simple: everybody understands that NATO membership can only happen after the end of the war, that Russia doesn't want it, and that Russia can endlessly prolong this war if they understand that it's a tool to stop Ukraine from joining NATO. That's one dilemma. A second dilemma is the question we're often asked: will Ukraine be trading NATO membership in the context of possible diplomatic negotiations? Our NATO partners need to understand that this decision can't become part of political trade, and that our possible membership can't be traded either. So it's not so simple. On the one hand, everyone understands that it's much cheaper for Ukraine and for the world to provide security for Ukraine, not just by investing billions year after year in weapons, but also by guaranteeing the fifth article. On the other hand, I just came back from the Warsaw Security Forum, where this topic was discussed in a very professional way, but I didn't feel there was full understanding of how hard it will be. Maybe I'll participate in the Washington Summit too, but in general I don't get a sense of security. Some fear that Putin will escalate to nuclear war, others are afraid that Ukraine will trade

its status for something in the talks with Russia in order to stop the war. There are others who perhaps don't believe NATO is an important strategic perspective. They have different feelings about transatlantic unity, and not everybody is so optimistic on this question. So we face certain hurdles, but we have made progress. We can see that membership of NATO will solve the biggest problems, but we still need to put in a lot of effort to persuade our western partners that there's no alternative to this path.



Kristina Berdinskikh: I'll now pass the mic to Oleksandra Matvichuk, who'll be connecting with us online. Oleksandra, since your centre received the Nobel Peace Prize, you've become one of our main voices abroad, explaining to the world what's happening in Ukraine. Despite being a lawyer, concerned with protecting the law, you've asked the world to give Ukraine weapons. I'm going to ask you about the economic aspect, though. Something I'm witnessing at the moment – which is not being expressed in public, but there are private rumours about it – is that some people think it might be better to freeze the conflict, to help Ukraine to develop parts of its territories while other parts remain occupied; that maybe it's time to start negotiations with Russia. This view is mostly backed by economic arguments that such a course would be better for Ukraine. How do you explain to the world that peace on Russian conditions is not something that will contribute to the development of Ukraine or the world?

Oleksandra Matviichuk: What I keep saying is that what Ukrainians want most of all is peace, but there will be no peace if a country that's been invading just stops fighting. That's not peace, it's occupation, and occupation is just a different phase of war. As a person who's been documenting war crimes for years, I can tell you that means torture, it means rape. Occupation is the forced deportation of Ukrainian people, it's destroying their identity, it's filtration camps and mass graves. When we talk about peace, we're talking about the possibility for people of living without the fear of violence, and with future prospects. That's the peace we're fighting for. That's why the calls to Ukraine to satisfy the imperial ambitions of Russia are not just a mistake, they're immoral. We have no right to leave people in the occupied territories, because those people are under threat of death or torture.

Another point is that we talk about recovery during the war, and we don't know if we're in the middle of it, close to the end of it, or just at the beginning. I believe we need to explain to our international partners that we need recovery now. We need to plan development strategies and implement these strategies at the local level right now. We need support with investment right now. We need to look

for opportunities to stop being dependent on international aid, and to be stable. Russia is preparing for a long-lasting war. Look at the Russian budgets being developed now, to be implemented next year. We need to increase our economic stability. Our slogan should be 'recovery now'. Not after the war ends and Ukraine has won, but now. We need support and financing for that.

Finally, I'd like to say that there are possibilities for us not to be dependent on western taxpayers' money: 1.5 trillion roubles of Russian state assets are frozen in western accounts. That could be used for the recovery of Ukraine right away. Having said that, I need to state that this recovery, this building, should not just be recovering and renewing things that were destroyed, but should also be used as an opportunity for modernisation. It might be better not to renew or recover some of the things to the state they were in before the war. So we need not just recovery, but recovery and modernisation.

Kristina Berdinskikh: During the 18 months you've been speaking in the international arena, do you get the feeling there's a weariness with the war in Ukraine? When I go abroad, I often hear people saying Ukrainians are too emotional, they're traumatised by the war, and all they do is make demands. I sometimes get the feeling that Ukrainian arguments are not being listened to very attentively. What's your understanding of that?

Oleksandra Matviichuk: I believe we need to understand very clearly what we're dealing with: if it is weariness, there would be certain steps we could take. What's needed is an understanding that Ukraine needs a rapid victory. We're still sometimes at the level of 'let's help Ukraine not to lose', but there's a big difference between that and 'let's help Ukraine to win'. We can measure this difference practically in the types of weapons, the speed of decisions, the level of sanctions. If the international community is tired with this situation, it needs to switch to the level of 'let's help Ukraine to have a rapid, fast victory and put an end to this.' But there's something else we have to deal with, namely fear. Fear of taking forceful measures, because if Ukraine is to win, that means Russia has to lose. What happens when Russia loses? What happens when a country of 140 million people that has nuclear weapons loses? That's stopping international politicians from taking certain measures. I don't believe we're dealing with weariness, but with a lack of political leadership and historical responsibility.

Kristina Berdinskikh: Thank you, Oleksandra, for joining us in this discussion. Emma is a journalist who's written about many wars and visited several countries after the wars there ended. I'd like to ask you, Emma, what you see as the biggest risks for Ukraine at the stage we're at now, and what awaits us in the future.

Emma Graham-Harrison: I'm honoured to be on this panel with people who obviously understand Ukraine so much better than me. Just an outside perspective: we were talking about this before the panel and Kristina asked me to read a bit of a poem – we are at a literary festival, after all – by the Polish Nobel Laureate, Wislawa Szymborska, called 'The End and the Beginning'. It sums up the most obvious but also the most difficult thing about trying to do reconstruction work, rebuilding – whether that's now, while the war's still going on in parts of Ukraine, or afterwards – and that's that it's slow and it's boring. And people aren't that interested in it, generally. There's a dark fascination with war that keeps people looking, though maybe less now than they were at the beginning of this war. Wislawa Szymborska knew the conflicts that Timothy writes about historically. I won't read the whole poem – I recommend it to everybody – but she says, 'After every war, someone has to clean up. Things won't straighten themselves out. Someone has to push the rubble to the side of the road so the corpse-filled wagons can pass. Someone has to get mired in scum and ashes, sofa springs, splintered glass and bloody rags. Someone has to drag in a girder to prop up a wall. Someone has to glaze a window, rehang a door. Photogenic it's not, and it takes years. All the cameras have left for another war.' I think that's going to be one of Ukraine's problems. You were talking about weariness. We've seen that in the press coverage internationally, although I think it's still very strong. My own paper is still very committed. But it is, overall, less than it was at the start of the full-scale invasion. And hopefully when victory comes, it will drop off further.

So I think the reconstruction of Ukraine, and the reform that you were talking about as part of that, is key to keeping the rest of the world engaged. I've had questions from people about the recent firings over corruption. They've said, 'Does that mean things are falling apart?' My personal view is that actually that's pressure from reformers who are fighting a war not just against Russia, but also for the Ukraine they want. So I think that's one thing Ukraine needs, and Ukrainians need to think about going forward.



From right to left: Oleksandra Matviichuk (on screen), Kristina Berdinskikh, Oleksandr Sushko Sevgil Musaeva, Timothy Garton Ash and Emma Graham-Harrison.

The other thing I want to mention is that we talk a lot about physical reconstruction and physical rebuilding, but maybe something that people are more aware of now than they were in the 1940s is the mental reconstruction of a country that's already deeply traumatised, and is going to be even more traumatised before this war ends. The last time I was in Kyiv, I met a young Ukrainian poet who was reading the book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, about the impact of the First World War. And he said, 'I'm reading it because I look at the number of friends I've lost, just the number of brilliant people that have been lost to Ukrainian society...' (coming back to the points people were making earlier) '...and I'm trying to understand how another society dealt with that trauma and recovered from it.' I've heard similar things from a lot of Ukrainians. So I think when people are talking and thinking about reconstruction, they should also be thinking about how you support people through their trauma. It's something Ukraine actually knows a bit about after 2014; the trauma of the veterans and residents of the Donbas who were affected by the war in those years. I think trauma should be part of any discussion.

Finally, something I think often gets forgotten. Again, it's a relatively modern understanding. That's environmental reconstruction. I think there's a whole panel about this for people who are interested in it. But the environmental impacts of this war are devastating, on a country that was already dealing with a lot of pollution – obviously with the aftermath of Chernobyl, but with other types of industrial pollution too. I think that part of reconstruction is going to be really important for Ukraine as well.



Kristina Berdinskikh: Thank you very much. I have another question to all the speakers. Oleksandra mentioned an important topic, that the world is helping us to not lose the war but isn't rushing to help us win the war. One of the most important factors keeping our partners back is fear of what could happen with Russia after losing this war. We all expected that after the west introduced strict sanctions against Russia, when everything was restricted, that it would have some economic influence on Russia. But we can see that the Russian so-called 'defence budget' for next year has increased by 70%. Instead of having less money for war, they have more money to spend on war. My question is, what are your realistic expectations? Oleksandra has said we can't put ourselves in the frame because we can never know when or how the war will end. But can you give your personal realistic prognoses of what will happen to Russia and the Russian economy?

Sevgil Musaeva: The only thing I'd like to add here is on the question of sanctions. The sanctions are not enough. Russia has learned how to get around sanctions. I've just opened a report I've been sent by my foreign friends that proves that dozens of companies, including American companies, are continuing to deliver western components to the Russian military complex. In 2023, which is not over yet, in these figures for trade, which are just what journalists have found, the amount was 250 million dollars. So we know sanctions are not enough. Russia is circumventing these sanctions through Georgia and the grey import of components. This report mentions components used in helicopters, drones, parts that can be used in rockets and missiles. Everything that's going to fly into Ukraine tomorrow. We have a dilemma here, in that the west is not strengthening the sanctions, we're not getting the fifth sanction package. At the same time, we're spending lots of money on our military complex. It is understandable, but both need to be done in parallel, because in order to shut down one drone, a Shahed drone, which costs 36,000 dollars, we need a rocket or a missile that costs one million dollars. So that's the price our western partners are paying too.

So in terms of the short-term perspective, we need to do everything possible to sanction these companies. We have groups working on this, talking to the governments of other countries. Russia has got used to this situation and has managed to rebuild its economy. They've learned from their experience with drones. All the militaries say that Ukraine had the technological lead at the beginning of the war, but we're now losing this advance. We have a more complicated task: we're fighting for the ability to import components for drones, while Russia is accessing them from every market in the world. So the west must strengthen the sanctions, and Ukraine must do everything possible to produce and develop its own weapons. We can win with only our own weapons. They won't give us ATACMS missiles, but they gave us Storm Shadow. That helped us to attack the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. But we're also using Ukrainian Neptune rockets, which are quite effective. The more Ukrainian weapons we have, the better Ukraine will be prepared for a long-lasting war.

Kristina Berdinskikh: Timothy, you wanted to add something.

Timothy Garton Ash: Yes, to pick up on what you said about Russia being able to access all the markets in the world, this is one of the biggest problems we've had, even though the west imposed some of the toughest sanctions ever. And let's be clear about that, they were quite extraordinary. The problem is that when we stopped buying oil from Russia, India bought the oil we weren't buying, and China is supplying many of the things we're not supplying. South Africa is quite happy to do naval manoeuvres with China and Russia, as is Brazil under President Lula, and so on.

The global paradox of this war is that, on the one hand, it's restored the unity of the west quite amazingly. Suddenly, Europe and the United States are absolutely united in support and readiness. We have a common enemy in Vladimir Putin, which was an idea that was disappearing. On the other hand, it's a revelation for us to face the fact that we're now in a post-western world: a world in which the west can't set the agenda of world politics. We slam our biggest sanctions ever on Russia, and it doesn't work, because there's China and India and Turkey and Brazil and South Africa. I think that's an important dimension to bear in mind. The unity of the west, but a post-western world.

The answer, of course, is that we just have to try harder. We just have to impose tougher and tougher sanctions. I do want to say that the proper conclusion from everything we've been saying is that we just have to stay the course and give more support to Ukraine, both militarily and economically. Wladimir Klischko, who knows a thing or two about boxing, said it's like a heavyweight boxing match. If you haven't got a knockout blow in round two, and unfortunately we haven't got a knockout blow in round two, you have to be ready to stick with it through the following rounds. That's what we've got to be ready to do.

Oleksandr Sushko: We can also note here that Russia has been much stronger at counteracting sanctions than we thought it would be at the beginning. We have to take that into account. It shouldn't be a shock to us. The numbers that have been announced showing an increase in the Russian military budget don't mean there will be an expansion of the Russian economy. They're just re-allocating their budget, giving a larger proportion to the military. On the other hand – the figures are not hidden – we can see that they're spending a lot of their golden reserves, which they call the National Wellbeing Fund. I believe they've already spent 40% of it. And it's hard to imagine what they'd do without it. They're stable, but not for long. The other thing is that we have quite a disproportion here. We can't compare our economic potential with theirs. That's why we're dependent on the assistance from western partners.

The Russians understand their own weaknesses. They really know how to learn. They're not idiots in the sense of expertise in administration or managing financial resources. But the most important resource they have is not material or financial – it's in the matrix of their national behaviour. They can withstand economic losses without losing their pride. This is not something new; it was described in books 100 years ago. We just need to understand it, to remember it, and to make it part of our readiness for playing the long game.

Emma Graham-Harrison: Very briefly, slightly picking up on Timothy's point. When people talk about Russia's support from the non-western world, in the

west there's a failure to understand that. We're often very quick to criticise it without understanding where it comes from ideologically, which is that this is an anti-imperialist war. While we criticise those who oppose it, we're sometimes unwilling to look at our own imperialist past. The fact is that those historic ties to Russia come from a time when many of those countries were fighting their own anti-imperial war against European countries or US influence, and found help from the Soviet Union, for all its obvious many terrible crimes. Those were organisations like the ANC in South Africa or leftists in Latin America when the US was pursuing very brutal policies there. I think we need to keep in mind the historical roots of those links. If we leap to condemn them, people can point at the record of the UK and the US in Iraq, for instance – that unjustified, ungrounded invasion which led to so many civilian deaths – and the state of Iraq today. The legacy of that war is so damaging. I think it's important to understand. You don't have to endorse it, but to understand where that support for Russia is coming from and recognise it. If we don't do more in terms of looking at our own imperial legacy, it's easy for our support for an anti-imperial war to look like hypocrisy. So that would be my perspective as a Brit, something I think is left out of discussions about Russia's allies.



Kristina Berdinskikh: Before we move to questions, I'd like to just wrap up our discussion with a brief summary. I'll repeat that I'm very happy we've had these panellists, who've been able to provide a realistic, almost dispassionate perspective on the future. They understand that we could face many different kinds of scenarios and challenges. I'd still like to put on rose-tinted spectacles now for a moment though, and extend what Sevgil said, about our future as we would like to see it, what we're fighting for today, including on the front lines. I was pleasantly struck by the story of an event that took place about a month, maybe six weeks ago. I was upset to find out that Ukrainian deputies during the war were trying to avoid declaring their incomes, in spite of all this pressure. And Oleksandr Yabchanka, a serviceman, three times wounded at Bakhmut, registered a direct democracy petition, which got the most votes in the shortest time and was supported by a great number of people, so the authorities were required to respond. Had they not responded, it would have looked very bad. Just for my part, I'd like to add that this sense of justice, of responsibility, the understanding of the price that's being paid and has been paid for our future should remain and should not be lost. Now it's your turn. I see a lot of hands.

Oleh Hrynychuk: Good evening. My name is Oleh Hrynychuk. I'm the editor of Universal Journal. It seems to me that the subject you touched on, the Marshall Plan for Ukraine, belongs to metaphysics. We really do need reform. We know

from history that during a war is a great time to implement reform. But who's supposed to implement those reforms? I don't envy the team who'll be charged with that. We'll have a hundred people coming to watch it, international observers. The people implementing this reform could be people who are involved in bribery. We need to change the system. It's been three decades, but the system is still there, that old post-Soviet system, with some superficial, cosmetic changes, perhaps. This is not bringing us any closer to victory. We often talk about about a reload or a reset of the state. I think we are confusing ourselves with IT people. Resetting a computer or restarting a computer is turning it off and on. The system is still there. The state has to be reconstituted. The question is, how can we reconstitute the state?



Questioner: I want to make a slightly more optimistic point on the economy. We should remember, first of all, that the Russian economy is only about the same size as Spain's. It is not an economic superpower. Its economy is the size of a single medium-sized European country. The second thing is that the oil price cap only came into full force in February this year. Sanctions take time to work, and actually, since that time, oil revenues going to Russia have fallen dramatically. While India is buying some oil, it does so at a large discount and because of that, is having to resort to using aged tankers which they self-insure, so the costs of transportation have gone up as well. The hydrocarbon exports and also all the gas exports to the EU have collapsed completely. So the hydrocarbon export income going to Russia has collapsed dramatically since the new war began. Added to that, Russia is now obviously spending a lot more money on its own army and weapons. So at some point, the rest of the budget will get squeezed and that will feed into reduced public sector salaries, benefits, pensions, etc. We know from past experience that what really hits Russians, what gets them out on to the streets to protest, is not foreign policy, it's not suppression of human or democratic rights, it's their pocketbooks. The biggest demonstrations in recent years have been about pensions and road taxes. At some point, Putin will either have enormous inflation, which hits people in a different way, or he'll have to cut spending. That's going to have an effect on Russia's internal politics. It may not topple him, but it will force him, one hopes, to moderate. I'd be interested in people's responses to that, but my main question to all the panellists is, what influence do they think China will have? Is China pressuring Moscow a real hope?

Timothy Garton Ash: That's something I've followed quite closely. And don't kid yourselves that China's going to be some benign intermediary at any point between the west and Russia. Xi Jinping's father was the Chinese Communist Party member responsible for relations with Russia. Xi Jinping grew up with great

admiration for the Soviet Union. He constantly cites Russian literature. I remember a senior Chinese advisor telling me seven years ago that Xi Jinping really admired Putin. The last time Xi Jinping and Putin met, an open mic picked them up speaking as they were parting. Xi Jinping said, 'Changes are happening not seen in a hundred years.' That's a phrase he uses often in China. He added, 'And we're making these changes; you and me'. Putin and Xi Jinping. In addition to which, to have the west and Russia beating the hell out of each other is fine for China. So don't have any illusions that you're going to get significant intermediation from China. The one piece of good news, I think, is they really don't want Russia to go nuclear, because they do actually want to keep the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons. And they don't want the war to destroy the world economy. But beyond that, China is not going to be helpful to Ukraine in getting to victory.

Emma Graham-Harrison: I'll just jump in very quickly. I worked as a journalist in China for 10 years, and I'm a Mandarin speaker, so I've also been following very closely. It's more than just current politics. Xi's world view is actually quite similar to Putin's. He specifically described the collapse of the Soviet Union as happening because there was nobody man enough to stop it. A critique of Gorbachev that's very reminiscent of the 'macho' world view. Very recently, he described the partnership with Russia as 'no limits'. If you look at the geopolitics of a world in which China wants to challenge the US, it doesn't have other allies who are significant players on the world stage. It has accommodations. But India, one possibility, is too close, there are too many problems between them. A country like Pakistan, also a close ally, is not a major player – it's in too much of a mess, politically and economically. Xi's first state visit after Covid, after his years of isolation, was to Moscow. China is happy to see a battered Russia, but it doesn't want it to be defeated. The thing you didn't mention is that China also has a democratic neighbour that it considers part of its own country, and it's watching this war very closely to see how the west responds. It's already apparently been studying the impact of Russian sanctions and making changes to its own system in response to those. Xi has said that the Chinese authorities consider Taiwan a rightful part of China. In that regard too, China has more skin in this game than just what happens here. It's about its own imperial and territorial ambitions as well.

Questioner: We've been talking about reconstruction reforms, and often they're seen as somehow outside or in contrast to military victory and victory generally. To my mind, reforms are part of victory. Reconstruction is part of victory. I wanted to ask the panel which reforms and reconstructions they think are most essential for Ukraine's victory. Or which ones do they think the government thinks are the most essential? The most obvious ones might be reform of the Ministry of Defence, maybe reform of the electricity grid to make it less centralised. I'd love to see that connection in Ukraine, and, for the historians among you: historically,

when do reforms and victory come together? On the question of the prioritisation of reconstruction, I actually think the Ukrainian government is doing very interesting things. The dream.gov.ua site has developed a really interesting prioritisation methodology that everybody can look at. I think there are huge advances in that, but I'd love to hear from you what you think.

Kristina Berdinskikh: Sevgil, why don't you start with you, as a Ukrainian journalist?

Sevgil Musaeva: I think it's anti-corruption reform and court reform. Especially the courts.

Oleksandr Sushko: Yes, continuing the anti-corruption reform. Even the narratives we have in our society have evolved from simple juxtapositions. We have this very popular narrative of how not to lose the peace. Not just how to win the war, but how not to lose the peace. People talk about that a lot. There is a risk. These processes are interconnected, and we're fighting for a difference in quality, a state of a different quality. The war has prompted a whole number of transformational processes, and we hope that in all of its tragedies, the war will help us create more significant ways of stopping degradation, backsliding, populism, corruption, cronyism and vested interests. All of the things that make life here unattractive for Ukraine's citizens. This is exactly where I see an optimistic synergy of the power that emanates from our defence, from our struggle against the aggressor, and the power that pulls us towards better institutions, towards a better state and a better quality of interaction amongst citizens and between citizens and the state. I noticed this progress particularly in the fact that during the war the citizens have started perceiving this state as their own. 'This is ours.' That's something I used to dream about, and it's partially coming true. At unprecedented levels today, compared to during any previous periods, the citizens really perceive this state as their own. That's a great change. I think that that will lead to other more stable, more far-reaching changes in terms of the quality of the state that we're forming.



Christina Lamb: I have a short question. Christina Lamb, from The Sunday Times. You're talking a lot about reform and all the things that need to be done. But surely there's a rather urgent question in that President Zelensky's term is due to end next spring. Does the panel think there should be new elections, or what should happen?

Kristina Berdinskikh: I'll just answer as a Ukrainian journalist. I believe that holding elections now in these conditions would be practically impossible. I come from Kherson Oblast. There are tons of families in Kherson who are afraid to leave their houses, to go into the street. I can't imagine a situation in which people might reach a polling station. And taking away the right to vote from a city the size of Kherson, that's not a free and fair election. I think it would be impossible to hold a free and fair election that guarantees the competition of the participants in the election process and at the same time guarantee the security of the voters. I think that's not possible in these conditions.

Sevgil Musaeva: Three reasons why elections are not possible. We can't ensure security. This will definitely split society, because for instance the military will be forced to leave. How do you ensure the voting of the military during an election? Security is an issue, because the Russians could simply launch some MiGs and fly around Ukraine bombing. We've seen Russia do that before. The third factor, I think, is very important, and few people discuss it, and that's what sort of signal we're sending to the residents of the recently occupied territories which have already been written down in the constitution of Russia. We're telling them, 'I'm sorry, we're not going to liberate you. We're basically back to normal now. Our political life is continuing as normal. We don't really care what's happening with you.' That's inadmissible, it's a crime. So how do we proceed? Because we see that the signals are there. Western partners are sending us letters and society is saying the president is responsible for corruption. So we need to do something, respond somehow. I guess this is a question for the cabinet of ministers; it's about the agenda they put in place. Perhaps it is about a reloading of the government.



Kristina Berdinskikh: We're very sorry but we don't have any more time. This event took place as part of the Lviv International Book Forum, in digital partnership with the Hay Festival and with the support of USAID and the Open Society Foundation. Thank you very much for your attention. And thank you to the panellists for their profound and interesting insights.





Existential Resilience: How Global Historical Changes Affect Who We Are

Participants: Elif Batuman, Kateryna Kalytko, Taras Prokhasko, David Toscana (digital), Iryna Tsilyk and Sasha Dovzhuk (chair)

Sasha Dovzhuk: Good afternoon. I'm Sasha Dovzhuk. I'm the Curator of Special Projects at the Ukrainian Institute in London, and I'm very happy to be here today. This event is part of the Book Forum, with the partnership of Hay Festival and the support of USAID and the Open Society Foundation, which we're very grateful for.

The topic of today's meeting is existential stability, how global historical changes influence us. I'll give a short introduction. Thinking about the title of this event, what is existential stability? Very often, when we communicate about the situation Ukraine is currently in, especially to our western partners, we use terms like 'existential war'. What does this mean? It is definitely the fight by Ukraine against this genocidal attack by Russia. I believe that the fact we're here today, that we have the possibility to speak about books, to think about books, literature, culture, and that all that can happen during a genocidal attack by Russia on Ukraine, is one of the paradoxes of life today. We woke up today and read about the attack by Russia on Kharkiv, in which people were wounded and two people were killed; we read the news about yesterday's attack on the village Hrozha in the Kharkiv region, in which people were killed. Russia is destroying the Ukrainian environment, Ukrainian schools, hospitals and libraries. It's trying to destroy us. At the same time, what we see when we talk about existential stability or existential war, is that we're fighting not only against Russia's attacks on Ukraine, but against Russia's attacks on society. It's history, in which a comparatively small country is fighting against a fascist dictatorship armed with the red button for nuclear weapons.

When we look at this existential resistance by Ukraine, our existential stability and our fight, it's something that sets up a division, not only between us Ukrainians, but also between the values of the democratic world, like pluralism and freedom, and this dark cave. From what I've said, we already have some cultural frames within which we can conceptualise this war. It's the story of an outsider fighting against a monster, the story of David and Goliath. We've been compared with that story multiple times already. With today's panel participants, I'd like to

talk about that, about these frames that are being imposed on us, how helpful they are for us, how they might help us explain our resistance to outsiders, what traps might be included in those narratives, built into the terms we use to describe the situation.

I'd like to introduce those I've been honoured to talk with today. We have Iryna Tsilyk, a Ukrainian film director, writer of eight books, director of the film *The Earth is Blue as an Orange*, that received the Sundance award in 2020, and of the film *Me and Felix*, based on the novel by her husband, Artem Chekh. Since the start of the full-scale war, Iryna has been one of the authors who's communicated a lot via international platforms and media.

Kateryna Kalytko is a Ukrainian poet, translator, writer and member of Ukrainian PEN. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, she's been active as a volunteer. She was the winner of the 2023 Shevchenko Award for her book *The Order of the Silent*. That's a book that helped me this year.

Elif Batuman is a journalist, essayist, novelist, and writer, who's written three books and writes for *The New Yorker*. We know Elif as the author of a very important essay about re-reading Russian classical literature during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Taras Prokhasko is a Ukrainian writer, essayist and radio presenter, the author of multiple books, including one of my favourite Ukrainian novels, *Neprosti*. I apologise for adding my personal comments here, but it's a book that really touched me.

I believe David Toscana is able to join us too, via Zoom. He's a Mexican essay writer. His novels have been translated into 15 languages and he's received several awards. His latest book, *The Weight of Living on Earth*, received the prestigious award of best novel published in Spanish in the last two years. He lives between Mexico, Spain and Poland. It's an experience that's known to many of us these days, and we're glad to have David with us.

I will repeat my question. It concerned how the cultural patterns and narratives that are spread through mass culture might help us to communicate our experiences during these times. I would like to address it to Iryna first.

Iryna Tsilyk: Good afternoon. First of all, I must apologise: I feel quite strange, so if I faint or something, it will only mean my physical body hasn't made it through the meeting! But you asked about these patterns. I was thinking about different analogies and I stopped myself, because I was feeling a kind of resistance. I don't want to look at parallels, even though I find it understandable that we're doing so.

Because in doing this we're reminding ourselves that this has happened already and will happen again, that it's not unique, neither the war nor our resistance. I believe that looking for these parallels is a sort of attempt to calm ourselves down or to mask things, and now is a time when we should call things by their real names. Because we don't have David and Goliath here, or Trojans, or Achilles, or Hector. We have a progressive and constant genocide of Ukrainian people by Russia. We have daily torture and war crimes, executions, shots that take the lives of people who've gone to a funeral, and so on. And I believe it's time to speak openly and directly about that, and to call things by their real names every day.

Maybe I'm even objecting to myself here, because during the first years of the war I did the opposite. I did experience the need to look for those parallels. I wanted to lean on something, to find some confirmation that we weren't alone, that the experience of others could help us somehow, or explain some things. I tried to look with completely new eyes through the books I'd read about other wars: Syria, Chechnya, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan. And I remember that when I was reading military poetry, 100 or more years old, I tried to find rhymes, plots that felt close. I translated Auden, who I like very much, and I found motifs that resonated with me. During this tragic war, but before the full scale invasion, I was working on the translation of a poem called 'O What Is That Sound'. Maybe you know it. The whole poem is a dialogue between a man and a woman, like a refrain; she hears first, then sees, the enemy army soldiers approaching and she's asking her husband all the time what the sound is, why they're approaching, and he's trying to calm her down, saying it's not a big deal, they're just soldiers, and so on. And at the climax of the poem, he leaves and she remains in the house alone, and the last part is very scary: the lock is broken, the door is forced open. 'Their boots are heavy on the floor and their eyes are burning.' That's how the poem ends, but we know what happened to her, we know it exactly. And this is happening to us today: again and again our doors are being kicked open by the heavy boots of the Russians.

We knew it, we read about it, we tried to lean on the experiences of the world, the huge resources of the arts – literature, cinema, visual arts – but, I don't know about you, but for me art doesn't help any more. I see the parallels, but they don't calm me down. Maybe the only thing it gives me is the knowledge that every war ends; even the Hundred Years War ended, but we also know, thanks to famous plots and our favourite books, that criminals don't always get punished. That thought never leaves me.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you Iryna. Indeed, I wanted to hear more about the narrative traps that we can fall into through our attempts to explain our experience in the way that it is understandable to the rest of the world, while all the time what we're feeling is this presence of horror around us. I want to readdress this question to Kateryna, to hear what you think is helpful, and what is dangerous.

Kateryna Kalytko: Good afternoon dear colleagues. I would like to support and add to what Iryna said. The attempt to look for analogies in world literature, in the experiences of other countries, is a kind of childish attempt to grab on to somebody else's experience, somebody who survived through this, to show you that you can live with it and make something from it. For me the territory I was trying to explore was Balkan literature, Bosnian literature. Yesterday we had a pre-recorded communication with Ozren Kebo, a Bosnian writer, and he mentioned one very important thing. I don't fully understand it, but I trust this person because he survived the siege of Sarajevo from day one to the last day, through all the darkest experiences of bombardment, siege, having no water or food or basic hygiene, of snipers shooting at civilians, coming for a weekend safari to shoot at people. I translated his book, *Sarajevo, a Beginner's Guide*. You can buy it downstairs and a donation will go to the Ukrainian army. I'm not saying that to promote myself: it's a message I wanted to transmit through the Forum. It's a scary, self-parodying, wonderful book. It tells us that after a horrific war you can still remain a human. It's what Iryna said, that every war ends one day and the restoration of our inner humanity is possible. What I asked Ozren was whether, in the 30-plus years since the war ended, there has been justice for the victims and judgement of the perpetrators, those who tortured them, and he said no, there is no justice in our idealistic understanding of it. The Hague Tribunal did some work, but that didn't change the horrific past, and nobody feels better because of it. But he also said that he believes in the justice of literature and the arts, and in the large number of very simple, powerful Bosnian books appearing in the decade after the end of the war, and being made into films. For example, Angelina Jolie has been making a film about the Bosnian war, and there have been other Hollywood projects. It's not anything like satisfaction, but when the world finally starts seeing you and listening to you, even if you had to sacrifice thousands of your own people for it, maybe that's something, a moment in which you can set down this experience for somebody who can use it in the future. The real world is scary. The military, the experience of war, is something that somebody will need. I wrote in the introduction to *Sarajevo, a Beginner's Guide* that the book works like an oxygen mask. It offers rules to survive in a scary reality – when you can't breathe, you can take some of the rules and use them.

That's an example of cultural parallels with a history that's close to us, but I do believe it's a trap, because when you try to explain things through some famous

analogy, you put your history into a frame and you make it convenient for somebody who wants it to be convenient, and the scary truth is much more than that; it goes way beyond the frames of the stories of David and Goliath, or Frodo, who's carrying the ring to Mordor to destroy it. It's much scarier than all of that.

When we were talking about symbols, or something like containers from world mythology that we might use to explain Ukrainian history, I was thinking about a Roman goddess, Dea Tacita. She was raped by Mercury and gave birth to two gods who were protectors of the home and well-being. From a history of violence, there's a history of living. The days when the goddess used to be celebrated were in February, when the major Ukrainian war started. And this story about a numb, silent goddess, who gets raped but gives birth not to a monster but something warmer and brighter, could be one form you could use to describe what's happening to Ukraine now. In the middle of Europe there's a big, strong country – smaller than Russia, who attacked us, but still a vast country in terms of its size and population, bigger than many other European countries, a country with its own history of statehood – that was occupied for years by the Soviet Union, but it didn't appear after the collapse of Soviet Union, it wasn't created by any of the Soviet leaders. It's a country with a century-long literary and cultural tradition. I'm trying to say that the country is not an outsider, a small entity fighting a big entity; it's the goddess who was made to keep quiet.

We can leave aside the parallels with world culture and propose our own explanations using examples that are widely known in European culture, to show that Ukraine has it all. It's been taken away and we've been told to keep quiet about that, but we have artists, thinkers, great warriors, writers. They're here but we were not allowed to speak about them because of the colonial, chauvinistic, imperial politics we suffered from. What is most important is the strong, energetic territory of the Ukrainian language, which has held the idea of Ukraine and Ukrainian identity through the periods where we didn't have our own state.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you Kateryna. That's something to talk about and to think about, there are a lot of metaphors and symbols that might guide us in this conversation in the future. I'd like to turn to Elif. We're trying to understand, from the inside, how to communicate this experience. Coming from the outside, is it helpful for you to rely on cultural narratives, cultural patterns? Is there something symbolic in this story of resistance for you?

Elif Batuman: Thank you very much, I'm so happy and honoured to be here. My thinking has already been expanded by the answers of the previous two speakers. My thoughts about narratives and storytelling as an outsider are that of course they're useful and necessary: it's how the human brain works when you see something you're unfamiliar with. You make a comparison, you say, 'This is the this of this,' but I agree that it's quite childish and there's something a little bit insulting in it, that you can't see what's actually happening, you have to compare it to something that's more famous. I definitely hear what you both said about the solidarity and comfort that comes, as someone who's undergoing a trauma, from reading accounts of previous victims and knowing that it happened before and that it ends, but I guess that one thing I've been thinking about a lot in terms of my own work is how I wish I could be more free from narratives that frame how I see reality. Because often narratives are written not by the victims but by the perpetrators; that's how history tends to work, and narratives are never free of ideology. One of the traps that's been alluded to is that narratives can end up being depoliticising in a way, because you have a story and it's complete and you think, 'OK, it's gonna go like this, I don't have to do anything,' or, 'This is how things happen, this is the way of the world.' We do need those kind of heuristics as people, to think. But we also want the future to be different from the past, so if we rely too much on stories and pre-existing narratives we foreclose the possibilities of the future. I now think it's too idealistic to think we can ever be completely free of narratives, but I'm very interested in thinking and learning more about different interventions we can make to expand narratives and create new possibilities. I'm excited to learn about that here too, so thank you.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you. Taras Prokhasko, are cultural parallels important for you? Are they something to lean on? Is it something that maybe levels out our experience today?

Taras Prokhasko: Yes, for me it is important to have the cultural parallels, and I believe we can find parts of this declarative stability in them, because culture is something that foresees the understanding, development, evolution of everything. My cultural parallels lean more towards archaic times. I think it's

important to understand the fact that this war is not a modern war, despite the existence of nuclear weapons and rockets and missiles. The most important thing we need to explain to people from the modern conditional west, or the modern conditional world, is that it's a very archaic war in its motivation, in the way it's led, in the rules that are being used for it.

Before the war I was very impressed by this bastard Surkov. He wrote an essay that people made fun of, because it was a kind of mixture of physics and philosophy and geopolitics, but he said a very important thing about the existential necessity of Russia, or the Russian world. He explained that Russia cannot exist without throwing out chaos to the rest of the world, because its existential mechanisms work only through the creation of chaos, through destroying and through expanding chaos further and further. It's possible that that's why Russia is so big, because it needed to export this ruination to other territories. We remember how the lands that were conquered by the Russians fell into decay and ruination. I've been wondering what our fatal existential need is. Our existentialism is about not becoming Russians. The only thing that's expected from us is to refuse from within ourselves; and this 'ourselves' is maybe our greatest stability, and has been for decades, maybe even centuries. It consists in the fact of making our Ukrainian choice, not refusing it, not forgetting about it.

If you look for parallels, then yes, we're suffering from a genocide now, they are killing Ukrainians just because they're Ukrainians, but it's not like the situation with the Jews when they were detecting Jews anthropologically – it wasn't about what you thought but whether you anthropologically fit their description of Jew. This is something different, something that could be compared to the religious world wars in pre-modern Europe, when it wasn't about nation, language or history, but identity. If I feel I'm a Catholic, or a Huguenot, or a Protestant, or something else, and then there's this massacre against the other people, the branding of each other as unfit that allowed you, archaically, just to destroy each other, because the others were not people; it's not that they're dangerous enemies, they're just not needed, they're human trash and it's better to send them straight to the final judgment. And in the Russian narrative about Ukraine, these elements are very very obvious, very easy to see. Many ethnic Ukrainians, or people with Ukrainian history, can avoid the genocide by just saying, 'I'm not Ukrainian, I'm for Russia.' That's why it seems to me that our main stability has to be in this retention of our own choice, our own will. What results from that is martyrdom, hard work, suffering. The main thing is to keep to our own ideas.





Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you. That's triggered two thoughts for me: firstly, the idea of identity as a choice that we need to protect; and secondly, the imperialism that you described. David, I'd like to address you now, thank you for joining us. I'd like to ask you the same question: while you're outside now, not inside of this experience, do you lean for some cultural frames in understanding this war? I understand that you're not a complete outsider to this war, but, what helps you understand it? What helps you share your knowledge about it with the world?

David Toscana: Well, first of all...

Sasha Dovzhuk: It's a pity, but the connection is very bad. If we can improve it, I'll be informed and we'll return to David. So, I have a question that's maybe a little banal, but it's rare that I have such fantastic people on stage with me. I'd love to hear more about your work. Despite this horrific war, you're still in your professions, engaging in creativity. Iryna looks very sceptical to me, but she's a person who's producing films, writing, communicating, and getting acknowledgement around the world, which is very important for us as a society, and for which we're grateful to you. I'd love to hear how this experience influences the way you're telling your stories, your own creations, your creativity.

Iryna Tsilyk: Maybe I'm in a negative mood today, but I think I understood recently that there are three reactions to stress – beat it, stop and run. I'm the kind of person who just stalls, in all senses of the word. I've had opportunities to be convinced of that at maybe the most traumatic periods in my life: the Revolution of Dignity, the day when people were shot in the streets, and the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine. I started to be numb, to observe without understanding when I saw my colleagues running or fighting back. They really did take up weapons or cameras, they shot unique shots, they wrote extremely powerful poems, they expressed the here and now, a situation which is very hard to express, while I turned into a rock I didn't know what to do. That's why I was smirking sceptically. Because, first of all, I'm a film director, and a screenwriter, and my profession needs long-term planning. I need to build strategies years ahead, to sell those strategies. It's a kind of schizophrenia when you participate in pitching and you need to sell the skin of a bear that's still living, a bear that at least you need to know how to hunt. You need to find a suitable bear. I wasn't thinking about the same bear that you were.

I'm now working on a screenplay that's going to be a new experience for me: it's an animated documentary. It's very tricky territory to make this sort of film – you need about four to five years, so it's a long distance run, so to speak. Yet we don't know what will happen to us in four years, who we'll be, and how to put the accents on those reflections. I prepared the first draft of the screenplay, then I had a very

particular experience in the life of my family. I forgot to mention that the film has a very intimate scenario. It's about my family, my friends, our bubble, which was affected on so many levels. And I wanted to speak about these invisible changes, so I wrote this first version of the screenplay, then May happened, which was a time when my husband lived through a very specific existential experience. He almost died, but he survived and it changed him a lot, and it changed me a lot. I had no connection with him for five days and during that time I accepted a thought I shouldn't have accepted. After that I needed to rewrite the screenplay. So I don't know how to put periods into statements of this kind, how to put the right accents on something we're in the process of. We're inside it, and our horizon of planning is maybe three or four steps ahead and then it's all fog.

I may even be contradicting myself, because I said I don't want to draw parallels, but in fact I was re-reading my favourite Apollinaire text quite recently, and I was struck by how he was describing the future. I felt it very strongly, because people like us are the people who should be using our tools to somehow recognise what's happening to us, and we should be offering the concept of the future, not just talking about the past, but also offering something, a direction we could move in. So I thought about Apollinaire and how he writes about the future. In one of his poems he writes about a vision. He sees two planes over Paris, one red, the other black. One of them is the future, and it's attacking the other plane, his youth. It's a very understandable image for me, a future that attacks the past. In other verses of his, he writes about himself and his peers being suspended in a space without time, writing letters and drinking champagne and not knowing who's going to come back from the fighting. I should note that Apollinaire himself was so badly wounded that he didn't actually recover completely from that injury, and he died at the age of 38. But in the poem he wrote about his experience on the front line, he writes that we look at a bee and we can't see the future. That's what I'm feeling right now. I can see a bee in front of me, but I can't see any further than that. Even poetry, which could give me some tools, isn't coming to me very often.

There's another tool I discovered for myself, which is writing essays. That's at least something at this stage. And now I'd like to pass the microphone to Kateryna because I think she's the person who actually uses this tool to its fullest right now. I'm fascinated by the poetry you're writing right now, in which you describe everything that's happening to us at the moment.

Kateryna Kalytko: Thank you, I really appreciate these words coming from you, because you're one of the people who construct my world, and whose presence in my life I value a lot. I have a very weird story to tell: it's also about the absence of the future, but also at the same time about the very evil concreteness of this future. I remember March, just after the beginning of the full-scale invasion,



when, like most of us, I was frozen and I thought it would last forever. I thought what can literature do, why would people need poetry in a horrific world like this, and that I could definitely not think of it as my job or my duty; there would be other duties at such a time. Sometimes I even thought that might be a relief, to just be a working ant, just like everybody else, with very specific things to do. On the other hand, poetry has always been my tool for recognising and understanding the world, one of my senses, you could say. And a very strange thing happened to me. I've talked about it in a number of interviews, so I'm sorry if you've already heard it somewhere else, but I find it important to mention it. I wasn't forcing it, I wasn't doing anything, but verses and poems started coming to me. I've always resisted the common idea that somebody is dictating something to the poet, that it's like a ray of light from heaven, instructing the poet to sit down and write something. No, this is actually a person with their lived experience and their desires and things like that – that's what makes each poet's voice recognisable. But at some point these texts started happening to me, so to speak. I was there but not there at the same time. I'm an agnostic, so I don't say that there are no higher powers, nothing like serendipity, but I was trying to explain what was happening to me and I thought of it as the power of the element of language. Language is bigger than us, and there are these historical turning points when it's not us speaking the language, but language using us to express meanings.

The first poems I wrote after the full-scale invasion were rhyming verses; they had the rhythm and logic of rhyming, though you'd think that military and war-time poetry would be very different. I thought this could also be connected with something primitive, archaic, something like shamanism or witchcraft. On the other hand, there's the marching rhythm that's a military thing, where you have to straighten your back and move together with the crowd, in the direction where you're being carried by the stream.

I find it difficult to work with longer forms – I'm not sure I'd be able to write a novel at the moment, especially one related to today's reality. In September, I went on a residency and worked on a collection of essays, but that's an intermediate form; those are smaller texts. They're poetic to a certain degree, but they also have a degree of fact. This is what Iryna also mentioned, about our generation breaking down, about the people who constitute my world, the generation of people aged from 30 to 50, those who are most active at this moment and most involved in this war. I'm not being ageist, I'm just using the sociological facts. Of course there are younger and older people doing a lot. I'm just talking about my personal bubble in in this case.

So these are the only experiences we'll be able to talk about persuasively in the next few decades. I remember the first moment of relief, if I can call it that. In

the first weeks, we were all lost, and we started doing things: some of us went into the army, some started volunteering, some started helping the internally displaced people. It was like an ant house where you don't know what's going to happen to you next, you don't have any tomorrow. By the end of March, I'd started to feel better. I told myself, 'This is your biography, this is your future, you will live through this war and its consequences. And the same will happen to the people close to you. This is the context in which you have to live. All you can do is to live day by day. Be honest with yourself and make ethical choices that you won't be ashamed of later.

I'd like to finish with what is a kind of mystery to me: what supports us, what is this idea of Ukraine that we can't really formulate? Poetry has the benefit of using private, intimate things to reach an international audience and achieve an immediate reaction to what's happening in Ukraine. It can actually trigger certain personal emotions in people in far away lands. But can we actually formulate this idea of what keeps us all in Ukraine and makes us all sacrifice our lives to protect this border of ours? What is it? Maybe this will sound too grand, but it's like the first Christians going into the arena to face the lions. It's the feeling of freedom that accompanies you, that prevents you from becoming bowed and breaking down. I don't have a specific answer to how we can explain this to non-Ukrainian people, but maybe it's part of my job to find the right words to express it.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you. I'd like to comment on what you both mentioned, and I think that will actually foreground this question of what experiences our generation has to share. That is the dissolution of the empire: two revolutions, the creation of independence and the war. To come back to the idea of communication to the outside world, where life is more predictable, you can also put a kind of a tick – I can talk about this experience and know that nothing radical will happen to me tomorrow. Also, about this idea of language which leads us, actually helps us to build the bridge. Elif, I've been talking about language and how much it helps us to understand and articulate this experience, and how much it is a definitive part of what we're experiencing. Through your lens as a student of Russian culture, how has this narrative been helpful or ruinous in your experience? When did the change happened or not happen for you?

Elif Batuman: I was very lucky to come to Ukraine for the first time in 2019. That trip, and the conversations I had about Russian literature then, did a lot to expand and destabilise the way I thought about those books. But I think actually the biggest jar to my world view came after the full-scale invasion. I started reading speeches by Putin and I recognised something in them. I'm American, I

was born in New York, but my parents are from Turkey, they're both scientists, doctors. They came to the United States after medical school. This is hard for me to talk about, it feels blasphemous to me to be on a stage saying this, but what I recognised in Putin's speeches was a lot of the same rhetoric as Turkish nationalism, and its justification for the treatment of the Kurdish and Armenian and Greek populations in Turkey. That feels like a very painful thing to say, because the story in Turkey is that if it hadn't been for Ataturk and the Kemalist revolution, there would be no modern Turkey. The Ottoman Empire was destroyed after World War I, when England and France won. There was going to be nothing and Ataturk created the country. But the rhetoric that I recognised was something I'd heard from my parents; I think it also justified their decision to move to the United States. At the time, they didn't think they were leaving Turkey for good, but they did, and they had this idea that it was time to be universal, to stop being provincial and thinking in these small nationalistic terms, time to embrace the cosmopolitan, western, scientific, positivistic truth. I think my parents felt that they'd become scientists and sort of transcended the realm of the particular, that they could come to America and be scientists there and nothing would be lost by that.

And when I think back to how I got interested in Russian literature, from an early age I wanted to be a writer, and of course my favourite class in school was the literature class, which in the US was English and American literature. I didn't feel a strong connection to American literature, or to the way it was taught, which was in the way that all national literatures are taught: 'This is our past and this is our history and this is who we are.' My father's a Marxist and a leftist and I felt a certain amount of distance from the American empire. Russian literature seemed very interesting, and I also thought, 'I'm not going to be so provincial as to study only American literature because I happen to be in America. I'm going to look at the whole world and choose what I'm interested in, and what I'm interested in is Russian literature.' I thought of that as being a kind of free and unconstrained choice. I thought that what I was doing was choosing the universal over the particular in some way.

And it was really a combination of the trip to Ukraine and many changes in the way I'd been thinking. I'd gone through a sort of a feminist and political revolution in my own thought. I hadn't thought of myself as a conservative person, but I'm very much a product of the 1990s in the US, which was a kind of a conservative time, even though we don't like to think of it that way. It was a time when the left was conservative, when we thought it was the end of history, democracy had won, it was time to just sit back and watch freedom take over the world. And that turned out to be so totally wrong. So I was just embracing a political consciousness for the first time, a feminist consciousness, a queer consciousness, political lesbianism, in my late 30s. I'd been going through all these big changes and it

was making me look at my favourite novels, which were a lot of the Russian novels, like Anna Karenina, and I was looking at those books and seeing scripts for oppression and domination, and justifications for the world order being the way that it is.

I was just thinking about what you said about Ukraine not becoming Russia, and it was making me think about how Turkey defending itself against this imperial incursion, also prolonged, led to it expanding its own imperial sphere. I started to think of the world as being divided between places that invade and impose and places that are invaded and imposed upon, and the master narratives of universalism being written by the invading places. I started reading more post-colonial theory and seeing how deep this actually goes – it's the bedrock of western thought, of what I think of as being truly universal, Descartes, 'I think therefore I am.' There's been so much research now showing that Descartes was able to think, to say, 'I'm my mind, I'm not my body, I'm in this...', because he was living in Amsterdam at a time when the Netherlands was controlling so much of the trade with the new world, which they'd inherited from Spain, and so much of the slave trade, and they were invested in being a place that was outside of history, but of course the colonies were places that were inside history, and inside the particular. So, just even saying the universal and the particular was always so fraught, and that sent me on a journey of revisiting my own choices and my identity and my values. It's a process that's still going on now. It's been really big, so thank you.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Taras, coming back to the question of how we've changed the way we talk about our experience during the full-scale invasion, how has it impacted your way of telling stories?

Taras Prokhasko: Well, I was convinced that I had to speak. This idea of retreat, even a little, from the necessity of everyday contact, or everyday practice... I never believed that I, or any one of my colleagues, could be the one and only person doing something that could transform everything, or stop time, or something else. But I also understand that without this daily work, we lose our sense of being among humans. Literature and art are technologically convenient tools, because you don't need to actually go to specific people and take them by the hand to tell them the things they need to hear, or just to talk to them. Books, texts, literature, films, these are a part of our daily bread, and they have to be there no matter what. A friend of mine once said that there are four important words in the French language which will suffice to get you anything you need in life. I don't remember exactly which words they were – buffet, baiser, bidet and some-

thing else. But there was also 'liberty', so you do need to talk. So I think the most important mission of literature, culture, and art in general is a kind of support service to make your path to death, well... decent. The removal of humiliation on that path is a basic need. So we shouldn't see our mission as anything grand, but also we shouldn't stop.

When the war broke out, it was a working day for me, a day when I had to send an article to the news site Zbruch. I'd been postponing writing this article until the day I actually had to submit it, then in the morning the war broke out. I was thinking, 'How am I going to write something? I'm not the leader of the nation; I can't write something like, 'let us all stand together and not give up and not be afraid,' and, more generally, what's going to happen?' We didn't know what was happening. Something was happening not far from Kyiv. Would we have a connection? Would we have any electronic media? Would we need books? Would we still have Ukraine? But then I thought – I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say this on screen, but I thought – well, fuck it. To keep living, I need to keep doing what I'm doing. There are things like this daily bread that you have to keep doing until you can't any more, and then you see what happens, whether you have a connection or not, but you have to do your job. One of the problems we've always had has been disruption in this kind of growth. Some people stop talking, for different reasons, but you have to keep communicating and speaking to your audience. And I'm happy I did that, I'm happy we have Zbruch, and all the other electronic media, and I'm happy that people are carrying on reading and writing. I remind myself that these are people who can speak.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you very much for your voices and your messages. I don't want to usurp my place as a moderator, so I'd like to offer the audience the opportunity to ask questions. Please raise your hands, we have time for one or two questions.

Anna Prykhodko: Hello I'm Anna Prykhodko, an expert from the Association for the Reintegration of Crimea. I have one question: how should Ukrainian written culture fight the aggressor's narratives about the occupied territories, including the territory of Crimea?

Kateryna Kalytko: This is a question about fighting disinformation and the aggressor's narratives. I would probably look at it from a different perspective. The aggressor's narratives have been in our discourses for a long time, and we've not been very successful at fighting them because we don't have a single doctrine with which to do it. What's important in terms of Crimea is to keep talking about

it, including publicly. We have to keep saying that it's part of Ukraine, part of our current Ukrainian history, and if we have any strategy for the future, considering the very short horizon of planning we have, we need to include it in this future of ours.

I've been working as a jury member for one of the competitions that demonstrates the close connections between Ukrainian literature and the literature of the Crimean Tatars. As a result of this competition, the Old Lions Publishing House published an anthology that including by texts of people still living in Crimea and supporting Ukraine, including political prisoners, from among the Crimean Tatars. These texts are written in the Crimean Tartar language and the Ukrainian language. There's a project of the Ukrainian Institute called the Crimean Platform, which also keeps Crimea in focus and keeps reminding the international community about it. So this is also part of the Ukrainian narrative about Crimea, and we're finally starting to see the literature and history of the Crimean Tatars as a part of the history of Ukraine. It's clear that Crimea is not only about the Crimean Tatars, there are many other ethnicities living there, but this is definitely the territory of the Crimean Tatars, and we still have to discuss their status there. When we talk about Crimea, we shouldn't say that it's an occupied territory and it's somewhere else and we'll think about it later. We should keep talking about it as a part of our joint experience.



Questioner: Thank you for an interesting discussion. I have a question for Elif Batuman. I use it as a reference in so many discussions and it kind of fills the gaps that I have. My question is, often when I talk to Americans, it feels as if by supporting Ukraine they're kind of losing their ties to Russian culture, which they've been using for years as an intellectual shield. They were kind of expressing their intellectuality through this reference to Russia. And there's an oppression involved in supporting Ukraine because they're kind of losing this identity of weird intellectual. How do we talk to them without making them feel that there's a loss, an intellectual gap, if they support Ukraine?

Elif Batuman: Thank you so much. That's a wonderful question. I know just what you mean. I know the people in the US who carry around a Dostoevsky tote bag because it gets them a lot of intellectual 'cred'. That was partly why I wanted to write an article in a mainstream publication like The New Yorker. I guess I have two things to say to that. One is that I think there has been an expanded interest and a realisation of the gaps in translation and publishing in the US, and I think we're going to see the benefits of that – not immediately, there's going to be a certain lag – but after I published that article, I started to get translated Ukrai-

nian novels. They tended to be from 10 years ago, but they're going to catch up, translation will catch up, and that's going to be something.

And in the meantime, I think it's the same question as with all of cancel culture, and the answer is that we've accepted a false dichotomy: that if you're pro-Ukrainian and anti-Putin, it means you're going to forget everything you ever thought about Russian literature. To me, it's important to think that no one has to necessarily stop reading anything. You just have to keep reading more and thinking more, understanding more context. If you look at post-colonial critiques of a lot of classical novels, the reason those critiques are possible in the first place is that even the canonical writers, even Tolstoy or Jane Austen or whichever canonical writers profited from exploitation and imperialism, wrote about it, were sensitive to it, felt conflicted about it themselves, and those conflicts are in the text. We actually weren't reading them carefully enough before, to notice that those things were there. We weren't reading them looking for the right things. When I went back and did all of this reading, I saw so much of the critique was already there, and I'd just missed it. So I think it's important to clarify that what we're calling for is not for people to stop consuming certain kinds of literature, but to consume more broadly and to correct a kind of narrowness that we had before.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Yes, the gentleman near the pillar.

Questioner: I'm a weird American intellectual who used to be a Russophile. And I'm sorry, I don't mean to answer a question for you, but it doesn't strike me that there's a lot of critique in Tolstoy, or particularly not in Dostoevsky. He was a rabid anti-Semite. He was a canonical imperialist Russian, right?

Elif Batuman: If you look at Dostoevsky's publicistic writing, I think that's true. But if you look at his novels, or if you look at the story about his image of Russia, it was based on this traumatic memory he had from childhood, that he reproduced in *Crime and Punishment*, which is this image of a man who jumps into a coach and immediately starts pounding the driver on the back of the neck and the driver starts beating the horse as fast as he can and the whole thing just takes off. And he's like, 'That's Russia. That's the image on the seal of Russia.' I think what you see in that is a kind of trauma perpetuating itself. I sense that as a critique of Russia.

Same Questioner: I think we call it a dark empath. You know, somebody who's a narcissist, but is able to understand human emotions. Guilty is charged, but at the same time, I think the best advice we can give to those people is to learn Ukrainian, to learn other languages from the region.

Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you. Speaking of narrative traps, it's interesting to see how quickly we've started discussing Russian literature and Dostoyevsky. I encourage everyone to read Taras Shevchenko and Lesya Ukrainka, who also have a lot of critique of imperialism.

Elif Batuman: Great idea, great advice. Thank you.

Sasha Dovzhuk: And modern Ukrainian writers and poets, for whose voices today and for whose messages and work I'm incredibly grateful. Thank you for your voices, thank you for your words, thank you for continuing to speak and for your existential resistance and resilience, which helps us all to move forward. Thank you all



The Art of Decolonisation

Participants: Pankaj Mishra (digital), Volodymyr Yermolenko and Sevgil Musaieva (chair)

Sevgil Musaieva: Good evening, dear friends. Welcome to our discussion, which is about how Russian aggression against Ukraine has changed our understanding of colonialism and decolonisation. This is a joint event by the Lviv Book Forum and Ukrainska Pravda. Why did we choose this topic? Because it's important to understand what's happening in terms of the decolonisation discourse inside our country. For many Ukrainians, the moment of understanding of this discourse was the day of the full-scale invasion, and we need to understand what to do with the knowledge we're gathering. Secondly, for all of us, this full-scale invasion is an existential war, a war for the possibility of continued existence for Ukraine, but different countries have a different view of that, particularly countries in the global south. They see this war as a fight between the west and Russia. We'll have the possibility today to hear a different point of view, and perhaps the opportunity to appeal to it. We need to understand how the experience we're building here and now can be useful to other countries. Is it at least theoretically possible that a decolonisation of the Russian population could take place?

It's a pleasure to greet our guests. First, I want to introduce Volodymyr Yermolenko, a well-known philosopher, president of the Ukrainian PEN Club, someone who I think is known to everyone in this room. He was born in Kyiv, to a family of Ukrainian philosophers. He graduated from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. He studied for his PhD abroad. I'm mentioning this because joining us online is Mr. Pankaj Mishra, who was born in India. He's a columnist, essayist and thinker, a reviewer for Bloomberg and the author of several books. These include *Age of Anger*, *The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* and *How to Be Modern in India, Pakistan, Tibet and Beyond*.

Unfortunately Bektur Iskander wasn't able to be present with us today. He's a journalist from Kyrgyzstan, one of the founders of the famous Kloop Media. We would've liked to ask him about the experience of Kyrgyzstan, how they survived the full-scale invasion and how the war in Ukraine has changed their decolonisation objects.

I'll start with Volodymyr. What do Ukrainians understand about decolonisation? I was born in Uzbekistan. When I was two and a half years old, my family moved to Crimea. This was before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Two years later, my parents voted for the independence of Ukraine. For a long time, I grew up in

and was formed by Russian culture and influenced by Russian media. During my school years, the teachers told us, 'There's no difference between Ukrainian and Russian; you don't need to learn Ukrainian.' The turning point for me was when I became aware of the denial of the identity of the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainians through a book by Ivan Bahrianyy, called *The Garden of Gethsemane*, which I read when I was 15. I realised I was living in a different society, a different cultural sphere, which was constantly attempting to deny my identity. It would be interesting for me to hear about your experience, because you lived and studied in Kyiv. What decolonisation objects did you have?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: Thank you, Sevgil. I'm very happy to be here at the Lviv Book Forum. I'll also start with Crimea. My now wife, Tetyana Ogarkova, and I travelled widely in Crimea. We walked in the beautiful mountains and we loved to go for dinner with the Crimean Tatars. We somehow felt instinctively, intuitively, that in the establishments run by Crimean Tatars, somebody cared about their own land. We didn't feel the same thing in the parts of Crimea that other people were running, be they Russians or Ukrainians with Soviet attitudes.

I think this topic of imperialism is very important, especially Russian imperialism, maybe other imperialisms too. In Russian imperialism, there's no difference between what is one's own and what is somebody else's. All the land Russia has is a result of occupation, and it should belong to somebody else. It's important to speak about what Russian communism is, in this sense: it's a continuation of Russian imperialism. Communism, or socialism, has the idea of things being common, of everything belonging to us as a community, but the so-called 'homo Sovieticus' had the feeling that nothing belonged to him. We're seeing a continuation of this here and now, in the modern world, because we don't often have this understanding of a common space. What is Ukrainian corruption, for example? It's when you believe that something common belongs to you and you privatise it. That corruption is private interest over the common good.

You mentioned Bahrianyy. I remember two episodes from that novel. The first is the arresting moment when he finds himself in a single cell and there are 20 plus people in there and they're all naked. What does it mean? That the system leaves you with no private space. Even in a single holding cell, you don't have personal space. You're brushing up against other people. You remember how he describes that they were sleeping like fir trees, one pressed close to the other, and when someone died in the cell, the body stayed with them for a whole day and night. Another episode is before he arrives in the prison, when he's put in the freight carrier and delivered to Kharkiv, and the workers enter the train and understand that they're transporting a prisoner, but they just look away. You have no private space, you don't have time for or the right to your own space or

your own name. It's important to remember those effects of imperialism on our everyday experiences.

Life in Kyiv, in my childhood, was mainly Russian speaking. I learned at a Pushkin school, a Russian language school, and the reinventing and rediscovery of the Ukrainian in me was very interesting. You feel and hear all the time that Ukrainian literature is second-rate literature, that it's better to understand Ukrainian literature through Poltava, by Pushkin, or through Gogol, than through The Garden of Gethsemane. We can speak later about the fundamental imperialism that's present in the literature of Gogol and Pushkin.

When we started re-establishing and renewing our Ukrainian identity, the Rubicon for me was the birth of my first daughter. We realised that you can't speak only Russian with your children. The realisations came gradually, and it's important to understand that that's how it's happened for many people in Ukraine. One way I like to formulate it is that the Ukrainian language for many people is a native language, but a learned one. People say, 'My native language is Ukrainian, but I still use Russian.' This step-by-step development has peaks at times of revolution, but we need to have some understanding that it's a path.

Our parents' generation came from Ukrainian-speaking societies, and the big gap for them was going to university, because just after the Second World War, when they were born, if you went to university in a big city, there was no education in Ukrainian. We're all Ukrainian-speaking, the whole family and extended family, but it was transmitted through the children to the parents and grandparents, and it's about returning to our names, our language, our motifs.

Sevgil Musaieva: It's a very interesting process. I believe that the moment of truth was in 2022, the full-scale invasion, when Ukrainians discovered for themselves, even those Ukrainians who didn't understand, what it meant to be in Russian informational space. That understanding can be quite painful. I know many people who didn't understand. For example, one of my friends says to me now, 'Now I understand your pain from the occupation of Crimea, after not being able to go to Kyiv when I had a five year old daughter there.' This person switched completely to Ukrainian, even in daily life. But the experience is different for different people, and there's a need to unify the experience. How much time will Ukrainian society need to process this trauma of colonisation, and to become decolonised?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: It's hard to say. I believe we should treat this as a time of discovery, of all the interesting things we have before us: rediscovering our own language, our own literature, our own culture. I believe this feeling is present in

Ukrainians today. That's very often an effect of war: it makes us ask us whether we have a future, whether we have a tomorrow.

When we look at how imperialism and imperial discourse works, it's not just about space, it's also about time. It's common to hear, as in Poltava, by Pushkin, something to the effect of, 'You Ukrainians maybe had some kind of past, but you have no future.' It is like an amputation of the future. Or, 'Your past can be described, it involved some bloody, cruel Cossacks, but your future is imperial, it will be different.' This work with time is very important, and I believe that Ukrainians have this sense, from the Soviet Union, that you can have past roots, but the future doesn't belong to you, or to your culture; it belongs to the empire. I believe that's changed completely: we now have the feeling that the future belongs to us. Russia also presents itself as the power of the future, so maybe we should be talking about these different concepts of the future. Our understanding and the understanding in India, in China, in the US, are completely different, and that's maybe the main question, what the future will look like. But whatever Russia says about itself as a future force, for us Ukrainians, it's obvious that it's a past force, trying to return to the past of the Second World War and so on. And I believe that for Ukrainians, this feeling that the future belongs to us, that we're creating our future, is a decolonising experience.

Sevgil Musaieva: It's not a coincidence, then, that this year's Book Forum is called 'Writing the Future'. Before I put a question to Pankaj, I want to ask you one last thing. We see it as a problem that in some countries of the world, this war is not seen as a war of decolonisation, but as a fight between the west and Russia. My explanation for this is that perhaps western European colonialism and Russian colonialism are different. What is the difference, and what is the peculiarity of this Ukrainian experience of decolonisation?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: We can't simply say there's a difference. It's important to understand that Russia is an empire, not a nation state. This is an understanding we rarely see in western or other countries. And if the 20th century was the great century of de-imperialisation, of the fall of European empires, then to some extent Russia is the last European empire. There are differences, but the differences are not to do with whether it's a western or a non-western empire, but to do with who's being colonised. Is it people who are geographically and ethnically and religiously distant from you, or are you colonising people who are close to you? Russia has experience of both close and distant colonisation. Our Ukrainian and Russian history is about colonisation of people who were close. I don't know if our colleague will agree with this, maybe it is a little bit of a provocation, but I believe that British colonialism in India was an idea of colonising somebody far away, and because of that, the structure of the government was

different. You say to the colonised, 'You're different, you will never be like me,' and there's a hierarchical difference, 'You will always be beneath me'. I believe that Russian colonialism against the Crimean Tatars is very close to this. We can see it happening with this crazy manipulation of the Islamic topic and so on. But when we talk about the Ukrainian-Russian experience, it's completely different. In this case, the Russians said to the Ukrainians, 'You will never be different from me.' The model of colonisation, the model of power, is not the difference, but the equivalence, being the same. That kind of colonialism aims for assimilation. It's like the internal reprogramming of a person. That's why we have this fight against language, against tradition, against people's culture, because of the need to change these Ukrainians internally into Russians. We're seeing many different aspects of this.

When we analyse imperialism from the point of view of Marxists, as being a result of capitalism – the Soviet Union actively promotes this reading, and it's true to many extents – the exploitation moves from the internal to the external. You stop exploiting your own workers, but you exploit other nations. The question is whether Russian imperialism towards Ukraine was because Russians really wanted to exploit Ukrainian resources. That's a very important question for us, because it's a question about the Holodomor, the famine. Did Stalin want to confiscate Ukrainian grain for economic reasons, or it was a fight against Ukrainian identity?

Sevgil Musaieva: Did you find an answer to that yourself?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: Yes. For me, it was a fight against Ukrainian identity. The economic question was secondary. And it's interesting how Soviet or Stalinist Marxism has become a full mirroring of the real Marxism, and the material questions are not important any more.

Why are Russians so concerned with Ukrainian identity? Because they understand that they don't exist without Ukrainian identity. That's the particular relationship between Russia and Ukraine. Russia is an empire that believes its centre is here in Kyiv, or in Lviv. On medieval maps, Galicia [the historical and geographic region in western Ukraine and southern Poland] was called Ruthenia, or Rus. So we have a situation in which the questions of imperialism and colonialism that were raised in the 20th century are even more complicated. Russia as an empire cannot be complete without Ukraine.



Sevgil Musaieva: At this point I'll put a question to Pankaj Mishra. Before our discussion, I read your recent columns for Bloomberg with attention. Many of them were about the Ukrainian war, including one that was published on 30 January 2023. That one has been quoted a lot in Russian media, including propaganda media. I'd like to read a small extract from it for the understanding of the audience. 'There is no evidence that the people and nations of the global south who suffer the most from this war are against Putin, or that the majority of the population of the world believe that there is a difference between the US invasion of Iraq and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Recent research has shown that more respondents blame NATO and the USA for the war in Russia and Ukraine than Russia.' It seems to me that you support this idea that the war between Russia and Ukraine is a war between Russia and the west, or the west and the BRICS countries. Why is it, in your opinion, that the war in Ukraine is not seen, in particular by the countries of the global south, as a war of decolonisation? Or perhaps you've changed your mind on this and can give us an idea of what would be needed for the global south to change their opinion of this war?

Pankaj Mishra: Let me clarify straight away that I don't share the opinion of people who think this is primarily a war between the west and Russia. Russia, as both of you have just pointed out, is an expansionist, imperialist power. It has been for a very long time. You could argue that the communist regime in many ways advanced the imperialist project; swallowing up countries, entire regions. That history tells us a great deal about the aggressiveness of Russian imperialism. So there's absolutely no question that Russian imperialism is at work in the invasion of Ukraine. The real question is, why do most people in the global south, in most opinion polls and surveys in the year and a half since the invasion of Ukraine, not quite see it that way? Why don't they see Russia as an imperialist power? Why is it that the Russian president poses as an anti-imperialist? That's something I've written about in my columns. And I'm sure the Russian media didn't quote me on those subjects. When addressing the global south, Putin presents himself as a fellow victim of Western imperialism.

I think in order to understand that, we have to go back a bit and think about the years of decolonisation, when large parts of Asia and Africa were liberating themselves from European empires and found themselves struggling against the combined might of Western powers, including the United States. If you were a South African, for instance, fighting the apartheid regime, you discovered that even the apartheid regime had very strong allies in Western Europe and the United States. The only country that would assist them at that time was the Soviet Union. That was also the case with a country like India, which was constantly fighting wars with its neighbour Pakistan and was also, actually, in a sense always embattled against Western powers, especially the United States, which

was helping Pakistan. The only major ally a country like India had during those years was the Soviet Union.

In a country like South Africa, there's very little awareness of Russia's imperialist past. All that's remembered there of that history is the fact that the Soviet Union was a great supporter of theirs when they were fighting imperialist and neo-imperialist nations. This explains at least partly why so many countries in the global South have failed to see the Ukrainian point of view of this assault by Vladimir Putin.

Sevgil Musaieva: So you could say that countries in the global South are hostages to their own understanding and beliefs that were formed 30 or 40 years ago. Do I understand you correctly?

Pankaj Mishra: Yes. And they would have to undertake a new process of education, an education in the facts of the imperialism Russia has practised historically, swallowing up entire countries after World War II: the Baltic states, Uzbekistan, the whole set of Central Asian republics. For most people in the global south, this is not a history that they encounter, either in history textbooks or in the newspapers. It's something very remote, very foreign to them. So it's difficult for them to understand or to see the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an imperialist project.

Sevgil Musaieva: But it seems to me that pro-Russian propaganda is having a big influence. In India, for example, the possibility of watching the BBC has been lost, but in the meantime, Russia Today is a popular channel.

Pankaj Mishra: I wouldn't exaggerate the impact of Russia propaganda on a country like India too much. Definitely in large parts of Africa, yes, it's been very effective. I would argue that in India, its effect has been relatively limited. I would say that there is a large reservoir of goodwill towards Russia, because India depends on and has depended on first the Soviet Union and now Russia for its military hardware, and now increasingly for oil. And Russia obviously plays on that, and that has been very effective. Just yesterday, the Russian president hailed the Indian prime minister as a great and wise man, and that kind of thing really goes down well. But that's the extent to which the disinformation and propaganda work. It's far more effective in large parts of Africa.

Sevgil Musaieva: In such a situation, how can we in Ukraine tell people about our history, about the influence of Russia on our Ukrainian history, literature, culture, the story of how the Ukrainian nation has been destroyed, which is happening today and has been happening for centuries?

Pankaj Mishra: That's a really difficult task. And to undertake it while Ukraine is under attack from its big imperialist neighbour is an even more difficult task. It would be a difficult task under any circumstances. I would say what has been extremely unhelpful in the process of educating the rest of the world is the fact that the European countries that have been helping Ukraine fight the Russian threat are countries that have not actually acknowledged the crimes of empire their ancestors committed in various countries in Asia and Africa. That's another reason why people are unwilling to support Ukraine, because they see Ukraine as being supported by countries like Britain, where, for example, the previous prime minister, Boris Johnson, who's a great supporter of Ukraine, went around saying, 'I'm very proud of the British Empire.' When people who suffered under the British Empire hear that, they're inclined to see whatever is happening in Ukraine as something Europeans are just doing amongst themselves, not any of their business. They can't see that virtue or righteousness is on the side of Ukraine while people like Boris Johnson are supporting Ukraine. There's a real problem there. If European countries don't acknowledge their own imperialist past, how can we persuade other countries to see this as an imperialist move?



Sevgil Musaieva: Volodymyr, do you see a problem there?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: Yes, definitely. I believe that what Pankaj is describing is a very serious problem and something we should be thinking about. To go back first of all to a very basic thing, I believe that 'the global south' is a very imperialistic term. We're lumping a large part of the world together: China, India, South Africa, Ghana, Brazil. These are absolutely different countries, and we need to learn to differentiate them and to learn from their experiences.

Secondly, I believe that when we enter into a dialogue with other countries who've felt the hand of imperialism and colonisation directly, we should avoid the question of what was a good empire and what was a bad empire, of which imperialism is better or worse. In southern Africa, western imperialism is perceived as being much worse than that of the Soviet Union, and for us it's the other way round. We need to look each other in the eyes and think about what similarities we have horizontally, ways in which our societies are close because we went through these things. There will be many interesting questions, for example, the treatment of modernisation. There's the western narrative that modernisation is always good, and there's the Soviet narrative that modernisation is not only good, but has to be achieved through violence, through holodomors, industrialisation and so on. Ukrainians have a suspicious approach to modernisation. We try to preserve some of our past and traditions for our future – things like our

national dress – and that's good. I believe that can be a plus for the modern world, which is torn between the past and the future. We can find many such examples in other societies, in Latin America or Africa or Asia, and I think that could be an interesting topic.

A second topic is that, while I understand what Pankaj is saying about the non-recognition of western imperialistic crimes, with Russia we have a much worse situation. In western universities, people are talking about post-colonialism and post-imperialism, and very often the biggest problem is that there is academic discourse and theory, but no action. Edward Said [It's not at all clear this is the name he's saying, but I'm taking a guess from the context that it must be] is one of the most popular thinkers in the Western world, but which Russian professor in a Russian university would be as popular in Russia as Edward Said is in the west? Has Russia ever asked those questions about its own crimes? No, never. In fact, what we're seeing now, and it seems to me that this is very important, is that Russia not only hasn't asked the question about its own past, but it is also re-imperialising itself, and re-colonising lands. When they come back to Crimea and continue implementing the same politics they did in 1944, but with different methods, they're changing the demographics of Crimea. Colonisation is not just a question of influence and so on, but also a very material question of land, territory. You can remove a nation from its land.

What we're seeing in the occupied territories now is not Russia introducing their own laws to replace Ukrainian laws, but introducing lawlessness. They're depriving people of any kind of justice, of legal mechanisms. A person in the occupied territory can be stripped of property, abducted or killed, and nobody will know what's happened to that person. That lawlessness is one of the worst results when a power comes bringing not its own laws or rules, but a complete absence of rules. We're seeing a very cruel continuation of these practices. I agree that it's bad that there's still a monument to Leopold II, who was responsible for the loss of millions of lives in Congo, in the centre of Brussels, or when we see memorials of the British Empire in the centre of London. But I want to say that the Russian Empire is several steps, at least ten steps, worse than the Western empires.



Sevgil Musaieva: Pankaj, I'd like to ask you to comment on what Volodymyr has just said about colonialism, and also to ask a question about common experience. Could this be a tool that Ukraine could use to explain the character of this war to people in India, or should we use different tools, because experiences cannot be compared, and every country has different experiences, and is particular? Sometimes we sense this non-understanding, because you can't compare trauma and the experiences of India and Ukraine in the colonial past. What would you advise?

Pankaj Mishra: You were speaking earlier, at the beginning of this session, about the awakening of a Ukrainian consciousness, a Ukrainian nationality, and how that process has been accelerated by an experience as traumatic as an invasion, an occupation, and then even more insidiously, a process of indoctrination, a fake process of assimilation. These are all experiences that are widely known in large parts of Asia and Africa. These were precisely the experiences that the first generation of leaders, famous names like Gandhi and Nehru, and many others, went through: the experience of recognising, becoming slowly aware, of their language, their culture, their traditions, recognising that they'd been internally colonised. I feel something like that experience is a much better bridge to the experiences of the vast majority of the world's populations, which have undergone this kind of displacement, this kind of trauma. And in this ongoing process of adjusting to the modern world, to internal displacement and exile, there's much to be said about bringing together, reconciling the particular experience that Ukraine is going through right now. On the one hand, a military assault, and on the other hand, a kind of existential and spiritual awakening. I feel that this is the most compelling message Ukrainians can bring to the rest of the world, and particularly to the part of the world's population that's failing to recognise the immense tragedy of what's happening in Ukraine today.



Sevgil Musaieva: Thank you. It's a pity we don't have the other colleague who was going to be here, but I'd like to ask you, Volodymyr, how the Ukrainian experience can be useful to other countries? The history in the case of Kyrgyzstan is different. They also had two revolutions, and yet the government of Kyrgyzstan is not taking any steps to support Ukraine, and the Russian influence there is broadening. Similar things are happening in many other countries in the post-Soviet world. Will this full-scale invasion of Ukraine change this view or not?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: I believe that the optics used by Ukrainians to see this war as an attempt by the last empire in Europe, or that wanted to be part of Europe, to get revenge, is an important narrative to be understood around the world. If we look to history, we know what fascism and Nazism are: they're the constant

play of 'I was an empire and now I'm colonised, and that's why I want to be an empire again.' Truly awful ideologies have arisen from this. Mussolini called Italy a proletarian nation, and said they were fighting against colonialism too. But this past imperial greatness, and the attempt to reach it again, and the aggressive nostalgia also present in many western countries, leads to many totalitarian things. We can see it in Russia now.

It also seems to me that it's important when we're speaking with India – and these talks are very important – or with Brazil, or Mexico, that we think about what we mean by 'the west'? They see it as a kind of unity. I recently wrote an essay called 'The Internal Decolonisation of Europe'. In Europe there are many communities, nations and societies that have never been empires. We can see that in central Europe, which is looking towards itself and is in a strange vacuum, because it hasn't been part of the narrative coming from Gail and Kundera, and doesn't understand it. And the experience of Ukraine, or Ireland, maybe the experience of Scotland...there are many experiences that can be re-read from the point of view that inside the west, inside Europe, we also see these problems.

The other thing is when we're watched by India, and they say it's a war of the west against Russia, where is the subjectivity of the smaller countries? When we talk about the west against Russia, or the west against the non-west, we're using the logic of the big powers, in which the little ones, or the lesser players, have no subjectivity. More and more people, states and countries have their own subjectivity.

The Ukrainian case is very interesting: it's not that the west asked Ukraine to be part of it and Russia didn't want that. No. The west didn't want Ukraine. The west didn't take that view for a long time. It was only the efforts of Ukrainians, only our Maidans, only our victims that gave the so-called 'west' the feeling of 'Yes, we need to fight for Ukraine'. If it wasn't for that, the understanding of the west would be that Ukraine was fighting not against the Russian narrative, but against the western narrative that Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are parts of the Russian world. We've broken that narrative, but we've broken it with our own subjectivity. I believe this is a message to many societies: you can be a smaller state, surrounded by empires, you can go against the will of the big players and you can win.



Sevgil Musaieva: I think that's a very important message: that support for Ukraine is actually support for smaller countries who also have aggressive neighbours who might attack them. It's actually a contribution to the rule of law.

But I wanted to ask you about Russia. Many Russian researchers believe that Russian society has also been colonised, by their authorities, and something needs to be done about that. A part of Russian society believes that the course of the war in Ukraine will somehow define the future of the decolonisation of Russian society. Do we need to do anything about that? Or should we just leave it to Russian society to decide what to do about their own decolonisation?

Volodymyr Yermolenko: I think this idea of internal decolonisation is right. It's a big problem for Russia, because it's not as if there's a group of people who are the masters, who've colonised the others, who are the slaves. The problem is that this internal colonisation is Russia itself. They don't have the figure of the citizen there, only the figure of the slave. The problem is that they feel all right with that. If we look at whether Russia is a national state, it's not. In a civil society, a national society, society would challenge the sovereign if there was a problem. That's what happened in Ukraine, but it's not something that could be happening in Russia right now. That's a question to the so-called Russian liberals. I keep asking the same question. Are they ready to accept that their future depends on how badly Russia loses this war? Another question is, can they imagine a different Russia, a non-imperial Russia? And that raises many other questions, such as what should the territory of Russia be? If we believe many classics of political philosophy, you can't have such a big territory if you're building a republic rather than an empire. Are they ready to decrease their territory? Are they ready to conceive of Russia in a different way? And very few Russian liberals are ready to do that.

What about the rest of the world? I think we also need to send the message that it's not just Putin's war. There's the deep problem of Russian political identity, which conceived of itself as an empire from the very beginning. An empire which has a centre but no borders, so it's expansionist in its nature. It's afraid that if it doesn't expand, it will shrink. That's a great fear that all Russians have. Another imperial discourse is that there's no society without the tsar. That's a key topic of Russian political mythology, in which you have a real tsar and a fake one. That's a big problem for them. In Ukraine, we have a certain political culture. I'm not saying it's perfect, but we do have it. We also have political philosophy, based on important figures like Drahomanov and Lypynsky, who are very different. Drahomanov is the leftist and Lypynsky is the rightist, but they share some fundamental assumptions. What can Russia build on, in the intellectual sense and in the sense of political culture? They have to realise that they have to reimagine their identity from scratch. Are they ready to do that? That's a question for them.



Sevgil Musaieva: My question is whether the world is ready for that. But I'd like to engage our audience in the discussion as well, because I see that we have only 10 minutes left. So if you have any questions to Pankaj or to Volodymyr, please raise your hands.

Bohdan Hrychshyn: My name is Bohdan Hrychshyn and I'm from the Drohobych in Lviv Oblast. I've heard some new things from Pankaj. It actually explains the position of the countries of the 'global south', as it's sometimes called. The way our media presents it, we wonder how it's possible not to understand that Russia is an aggressor attacking a sovereign state. But we can see that there are deeper reasons for that: the colonial policies of the west and anti-Americanism, if I can put it that way. So I'm grateful to Pankaj Mishra for this explanation, because this is something new, something we don't usually hear from our media. We have a very simplified perception. We were surprised and unhappy by what the present Pope Francis said about this war. But he's from Latin America, where they have very strong anti-American feelings. He once even said that he expressed the ideas he was taught when he was young. I don't have a question, but I'd just like to comment on the topic of good empires. When I was a teenager, I asked my grandma, who was born in 1890 in Lviv Oblast, 'When was the life best: during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, during the rule of Poles or during the Soviets?' She thought about it, and she said it was best in the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. That's just funny comment on good and bad empires.

Volodymyr Yermolenko: I'd like to respond to that very briefly, if you don't mind. First of all, I think we can see very often that the discourse in the Ukrainian media is really simplified. We're a bit blind – well, maybe not a bit, maybe we're seriously blind – to that. When we're told that it's the civilised world against the uncivilised world, that is true, because Russia is about barbarism. But the problem is that we've been describing the situation here today just like that. There are many consequences to that, like the question of the sanctions. Many countries are helping Russia to avoid the sanctions. Then there's the matter of weaker positions from the west than we had 10 or 20 years ago. We have to be realistic about that. We can't live in a utopian world, an illusion. We have to analyse the situation and understand that it is as it is. Regarding the empires, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire being the best, we have to remember *The World of Yesterday* by Stefan Zweig, which describes how that empire lived the same kind of illusion. They just didn't notice the disaster coming with the First World War, and then again with the Second World War.

Sevgil Musaieva: Pankaj, would you like to comment on anything that's been said?

Pankaj Mishra: I think everyone so far has made some really fascinating points. You talked about the subjectivity of small nations. I'd add some experience of

mine, which is that when Tibet, as a small nation, found its cultural and territorial integrity under attack from its big neighbour, China, it made alliances almost entirely with western countries, western leaders. Today, nobody wants to receive the Dalai Lama because China is too powerful. I think one of the lessons I took from that was that Tibetans could have reached out to other, smaller countries, in Asia and Africa. They could have made different kinds of solidarities and different kinds of alliances. Putting all their eggs in one basket, that of western countries, was a mistake. Because once western countries decided to do business with China, the Tibetan cause was over.

I feel that in many ways, and this is one of the problems today, countries talk to each other mostly through their leaders. We should be talking to each other as intellectuals, writers, activists. We should be having more platforms, more occasions of the sort we're having right now, where we can talk to each other across boundaries, share experiences, talk about ways to move forward. If we leave it all to the politicians, they're not going to do everything. They only have time for a few things. We can't reasonably expect Zelensky to reach out to all the global south countries. That's something other Ukrainians have to do. Obviously, people in the global south or other countries then have to respond. What I'm trying to say is that there are different ways in which we can conceive of solidarity against imperialism. And I think aligning oneself too closely with western countries, which have their own very compromised and quite recent past, which brings them into discredit in large parts of the world, makes it seem more and more as if this is a war between the west and Russia, with Ukraine really only a bit player. To challenge this distorted view, I think we have to create solidarity on a different basis altogether.



Sevgil Musaieva: We have time for one more question.

Anna Prykhodko: Good evening. I'm Anna Prykhodko from Sumy. You talked about your Crimean experience. I wanted to ask you, should we distinguish Russian colonialism in Crimea from the newly introduced Ruscism? Are there any specifics of colonisation?

Sevgil Musaieva: I can't say. I can see the same tools being used by Russia for decades, even centuries. The destruction of culture. It's what happened in Ukrainian history and what happened in the history of the Ukrainian Tatars. If we talk about the Crimean experience in general, I see the same methods that were used in 1789 when the peace agreement was signed and the annexation of Crimea started. And when the repressions against the Crimean Tatars started, there were

just different methods. They deprived people of land. There were three waves of migration amongst the Crimean Tatars. So it's no different from what Russia's doing in Ukraine right now. But maybe Volodymyr could add something to that.

Volodymyr Yermolenko: Yes, I agree. Let's look at what we were told about the Crimean Tatars plundering Ukrainian villages and so on. That was a narrative from the epoch of romanticism, which somehow entered into the creative work of people like Drahomanov, for example. Then there was a break, with people like Ahatanhel Krymsky, who started integrating the identity of Crimean Tatars into the Ukrainian identity. Then we had Omeljan Pritsak, who showed how closely related the Caucasian identity and the Crimean Tatar identity are. I think that in the future we'll have many interesting discussions about that. We've had totally different relations with the Crimean Tatars. After the first annexation of Crimea, in the time of Catherine II, three nations actually lost their agency: there was the first annexation of Crimea, the first division of Poland, and the destruction of Zaporizhzhia. All of these things were interconnected. Now we're seeing the next episode of this.

What about fascism? It's a powerful emotional notion, but for the sake of precision, we should remember that fascism as an ideology was a certain reaction to modernisation. Roughly speaking, Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain and Hitler in Germany were reacting to the fact that, in their opinion, societies were becoming too democratic. They saw conspiracies, the conspiracy of the Jews and so on. Are we seeing that in Russia? Fascism and Nazism proceeded from the idea of conservative revolution. Did Putin come to power as the result of a revolution? No, it was all very gradual. It wasn't an attempt to break ties with this identity. We have to understand that Russia is much older than fascism.



Sevgil Musaieva: Thank you. Unfortunately, we don't have any more time. We've heard many important opinions. We have a lot to think about. I think we'll come back to this topic next year in Lviv, or maybe even in Bakhchysarai. Thank you.





The Power of Words

Participants: Rachel Clarke, Halyna Kruk, Ben Okri (digital) and Olesia Khromeichuk (chair)

Olesia Khromeichuk: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you so much for coming to this discussion on 'the power of words', especially late for Ukrainian audiences, and good morning, good afternoon, good evening, depending on where you are around the world. This event is held by Lviv International Book Forum in digital partnership with Hay Festival, and is supported by the US Agency for International Development and the Open Society Foundation. This particular discussion is supported by Book Aid International, who are donating books to Ukraine as well as to many other places around the world. My name is Olesia Khromeichuk, I'll be moderating this discussion, and I'm delighted to introduce this absolutely exceptional panel of speakers. We've got Sir Ben Okri joining us remotely. He's a Nigerian-born British poet, writer, and a man of many talents. I'll come back to that. To my left, we have Halyna Kruk, a Ukrainian writer, translator, educator, and also a woman of many talents. In fact, that's going to be a thread throughout this discussion, the many hats that our speakers have. We're also joined by Rachel Clarke, a British palliative care doctor, but also a writer and former current affairs journalist. Welcome to all of you. The four of us will have a chat to start with, but we'll leave plenty of time for discussion from the floor. So there'll be an opportunity for you to ask questions of the panel.

I've been thinking about the title of our discussion, 'The power of words', and I had some ideas and some questions I wanted to ask you, but then the news yesterday and this morning really made me question whether words do have any power. I'm referring to the attack on a funeral wake that killed several dozen people in Kharkiv Oblast, and another attack on Kharkiv city centre this morning. It makes you wonder what power words really have, and yet when we feel so powerless in these moments, I think it's also important to explore that power, because perhaps it really is the only weapon some people have at the moment. Not just individuals, but nations too: nations that have been stateless for a long time, that don't have a long tradition of statehood, are often the ones for which writers and poets and people of culture become the spokespeople, those who imagine that nation and will it into being, rather than royals or figures of state. So when I try to explain Ukraine to international audiences, I talk about Lesya Ukrainka, about Taras Shevchenko, about the creators who explain Ukraine to the world, to us. But if you're a stateless nation, or a nation with a brief history of

statehood, you lack that recognised authority of voice, right? You're not entirely trusted with your experience. And it's tricky to get your cultural canon out there.

We're all going to talk about literature today. Because that canon is so often overshadowed by the dominant culture. The dominant culture tends to be imperial or formerly imperial cultures. These dominant cultures can afford to be above politics. They say, 'We don't need to address questions such as war, we're above that.' Whereas if you're the culture that's been repressed for a long time, denied the very right to have a voice, perhaps you feel that necessity, that urgency, to use your words, to describe your own experience and that of your nation.

I wanted to ask you all to reflect on those observations, but also to think about how this power of the powerless can actually be effective. How can we make sure that the so-called minor canons and literatures make it to our bookshelves and to the bedside tables of the critics? How can we make sure the subaltern doesn't just speak, but is actually heard? And that it makes a difference?

Ben, I'm going to turn to you to begin this discussion. I introduced you just now as you're often introduced, as a Nigerian-born British poet, writer and so on. Not just as a bloody good writer. That introduction puts a lot of weight on your shoulders to explain a certain culture, to confront us perhaps with our misconceptions about a nation, the history of a certain country, your culture. How does it feel to have to carry that burden? Is it a burden?

Ben Okri: Well, I'm going to answer the second part of your question very briefly, and deal with your major point more extensively. First of all, the weight of responsibility you talk about in terms of explaining Nigeria or Africa to the world tends to be a lazy preoccupation of European critics and European curators of literary experiences. I call it laziness because they always assume that writers from certain parts of the world only have very few things they can talk about with great authority, which is to say: their nations, post-colonialism, colonialism, poverty and things like that. I understand where it comes from, but I think it's lazy and also a little bit stupid and disrespectful of what it means to be a writer. A writer, from my point of view, is someone who's interested in the whole world, whose interests are vast and not limited to either their nations or even their field of speciality.

Now, I want to address your main question about powerlessness and power and minor and major canons, all those important questions you raised. I agree with you that the dominant nations have more money and power to get their works across. But there's another kind of power, and that's the power of the gifted writer, who's committed in the depth of their humanity to telling the greatest truth they

can tell through their art. When they write, when they speak, they transcend the smallness or the bigness of their nations. I don't want to look at writing and literature in terms of nations, because sometimes big dominant nations produce rather minor writers through big periods of their history. All you have to do is look at the history of theatre in Britain between Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw. They didn't produce any really major playwrights for two or three hundred years. Good ones, but no great ones. Certainly not on the scale of Shakespeare. Meanwhile, other cultures, maybe not so big, were producing great and important writers. I'm thinking of writers like Ibsen, from Norway. So for me it comes down to the power of the writer within whatever culture they find themselves, their power to ask and address very deep questions about humanity from their patch of earth. When they write with such power, they create a canon of their own. They transcend dominant and minor. Nobody would talk of Ibsen in a minor mode.

So I'd rather look at what the individual writer can do, by taking their hands and thrusting them deep into the spirit of their nations and carving for us big and great narratives. So the whole dialogue between power and powerlessness in terms of literature comes down to what individual writers do on behalf of their people. When they create big works, in a sense they carry their nations with them. We give too much credit to the dominance of nations. I'd rather give more credit to the creative power of individual writers, who invest the strength of their lives to create great works for us that last through time.

The other point I'd like to address is the power of words in times of great crisis, oppression and war. I think it was Auden who said a poem cannot stop a bullet. But that's not what poems are designed to do. We have to get the scale of things right. Poems and literature are designed to speak to humanity, to speak to all of us in the deepest possible way, through time. The power of words is not in terms of the immediate moment in which we read them or write them or experience them. The power of words is the way in which they work through a culture, through the world, through time. The power of words is always still living, whether it's the words of Wole Soyinka, who's in his 90s, or Shakespeare, who lived 300 years ago, or Homer, who lived two or three thousand years ago. The power of words to address the deep issues of our times transcends time, and yet goes on speaking to time.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Those are really important introductory remarks. And one of the things I heard is an individual writer speaking on behalf of a nation. I want to pick up on that, because I think that over the last 19 months or so a lot of Ukrainians, especially writers, regardless of their actual occupation, have become sort of full time Ukrainians, trying to explain Ukraine to the rest of the world. Halyna, I'll turn to you now. You've spoken powerfully about your experiences of being confronted. On one particular occasion, a 30-something year-old Russianist came to you and moralised about the fact that poetry should be above politics and war. And you end one of your texts with a heartbreaking phrase. I'll say it both in Ukrainian and in my very poor translation. You say, 'Meni shkoda shcho poeziane vbyvae.' 'It's a shame that poetry doesn't kill.' Can you tell us a bit about what you meant by that?

Halyna Kruk: That phrase concluded my speech to the Berlin Poetry Festival. It was supposed to outline, for the European milieu I found myself in, how Ukrainians, particularly Ukrainian writers, are perceiving this new situation, and the opportunities they have to stall or stop the war. It was essentially a cry for help, a cry of powerlessness and helplessness, because I never have wanted to kill with poetry. Poetry works in a completely different key. Like all literature and art, it works in the long term, at long distance. It has its own preventive action because, apart from the fact that it doesn't owe anything to anyone as art, as creativity, it also attempts to work with the future. It's the territory that creates or perhaps defends certain values for the future, certain ideals or ideas that might work in the future. In order for something to happen in the future, you need to have planted its seed through poetry some time before. This realisation became very direct during the war, which is when we realised starkly that our neighbours ought to have been working on this moment long before the start of Russia's latest aggression. In fact, in that moment, someone dropped the ball. In these discussions with Russians, with the good Russians who are now in the west, this moment was for me the most dramatic. It's hard to explain to someone that there's work that was not done by Russian literature and Russian poetry, amongst other things, in their own territory, their home.

To go back to this key question of how literatures can present themselves if they're subaltern or dominated by their neighbours' literature, so have ended up with this colonial, and now post-colonial, status. One of the things I regret the most is the time that's been lost. Yes, we can now turn to the work of Lesya Ukrainka or Taras Shevchenko, but these are authors from the 19th century. Lesya Ukrainka touches the early 20th century, but still, quoting these authors in the west now looks like quoting something a bit out of date, out of touch with the context. All of these untranslated works of Ukrainian literature, authors that are unknown in the west, that have never been translated and introduced into the

current, have now unfortunately not been read in time, and referring to them will never work. They don't defend us and they never defended Ukrainian literature or represented Ukrainian literature to the extent that they could have if they'd been translated in time. And the fact that they weren't translated in time is the biggest effect of our dominated status. We find ourselves in the deep shadow of Russian imperial culture. Not because our culture is weaker, but because it had a lot less opportunity to present itself. That problem continues to this day, even though the war has to a certain extent thrown Ukrainian culture into relief, at least given it the opportunity to be noticed, to have some sort of voice, at least in the most recent translations. But at the same time, the huge gap, the emptiness we're trying to fill, is so vast, there are so many of these untranslated, unfilled, empty places, that I can't help but think we'll never make up for it over the course of our lives.

Of course you want to be a writer, not just someone on a mission of enlightenment, trying to make people discover Ukrainian literature. So it is a problem that individuals are attempting to work on, but it's only institutions, and long, consistent work that can really achieve it. Something we're starting now will only work if it's consistent and long term. To make a point on translation, it was heartbreaking to see that when a colleague, Victoria Amelina, died, her work was discovered through obituaries about her. We can't afford to have contemporary Ukrainian literature discovered because our writers are being killed. And you're absolutely right, the way to get those books to the bookshelves is by having them translated into many different languages around the world. I have to say that my observation in the UK is that the shelf on Ukraine, previously non-existent, now exists in most bookshops, and is becoming longer and longer. But it's often filled with books by western observers. They write brilliant books, offer brilliant analysis of Russia's war in Ukraine. But it's not filled with translations of Ukrainian authors who've been speaking for the past several decades, if not centuries, about our society, culture and history, and who continue to speak now. So translation is absolutely key, because that's how we access information about the country as it is.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Rachel, I'm going to turn to you. First of all, I'd like to ask you to tell us a bit about how you discovered Ukraine. But also, as we've been talking about the different types of power that words possess, I'd like to ask you about their power to heal, to soothe, to comfort, because that's something you know quite a lot about.

Rachel Clarke: Thank you. So I came to Ukraine almost exactly a year ago, for the Book Forum last year, and I also came in my capacity as a palliative care doctor. I went out and visited local palliative care and hospice teams here in

Ukraine; one in Sambir, outside Lviv, and one in Kyiv. What I saw in those visits was extraordinary.

Palliative medicine is a really tough form of medicine. It's about how we provide comfort, care, hope and healing to patients who are potentially right at the end of their lives. How on earth do you do that? One of the most powerful ways in which we can do that – counter-intuitively perhaps, because we think of a patient with terminal cancer as having terrible pain, terrible symptoms – is through our words. Rudyard Kipling, who everybody knows of as a writer, nearly became a doctor. He once said to a group of surgeons in London that the most powerful drugs known to mankind are words. I think that's completely true. When you're a doctor facing a patient at the end of their life, you're facing somebody who has two kinds of suffering. The suffering such as pain, we can fix. We can give drugs like morphine. The suffering that is unfixable is the existential anguish of knowing that you as a human being are having to relinquish your grip on everything and everyone, every human being that you love in this world. That's the price of being mortal. We all have to face that; one day we'll lose everyone we love and they will lose us. It's the necessary price of being human. No drug can help with that pain, but the words of a doctor can be everything. We can help a patient reframe their fractured narrative from one that they think will be only suffering: 'I am now someone who is dying. There is nothing good in my life any more.' A doctor can look that patient in the eye and say, 'No, you are not a person who is dying.' In one sense, we're all dying, we just don't know when. In another sense, every single person is living now; today, tomorrow, until the very last breath they take. You may have one week to live, or one day, or one hour, but you're living. Our job as doctors, in palliative medicine particularly, is to help those patients feel as though their life still has the capacity to offer them the experience of joy, the beauty of the world, the love of the people around them. You can be too weak to lift your head off a pillow on your hospital bed, but somebody can open the door so you feel the warmth of the sunshine on your cheek. You can hear the laughter of your grandchildren as they play on the floor in front of you. Your husband holds your hand, your child holds your hand, you feel the love. That's living. That's the stuff we want every day of our lives, and we still want that when we're dying.

Dying is a lived experience. If I speak those words to a patient, maybe I can help them reframe a future that they think is nothing but fear and suffering into one that's full of life. I experience that every day at work in the UK, but last year, when I came to Ukraine, I experienced it here. I went out with the wonderful Ukrainian palliative doctors and nurses and saw them in the hospice and with patients in their own homes, speaking the same words, trying to help those patients feel as though they were cared for and loved. Words, in a human individual sense, have the most staggering power. They help us build trust. They help us relinquish our



fears. They help a patient feel as though there's hope, there's something to live for, that their life still matters, still has meaning. Words are everything. And if they have that much power, that much might, even with a patient in the last days of their life, my goodness, how much power do they have on a national scale, on a global scale? That's the power words have.

Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you so much for speaking so passionately about it. Since that experience of visiting Ukraine, you've become a bit of an ambassador for Ukraine yourself, and for a specific project, Hospice Ukraine. Tell us a bit about that, please.

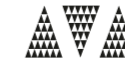
Rachel Clarke: Last year, like everybody, I'd read about Ukraine in the newspapers. I wanted to help. I thought I couldn't help, but when I came here, I discovered through words, through talking to the ordinary people I met, what it was like to be a Ukrainian citizen, in a country in the grip of total war. Everybody I met here in Lviv was in tears within five minutes of starting to talk to me. The trauma that people were experiencing a year ago, I'd had no idea. I realised from those conversations that this could be London, it could be Oxford, it could be me, fearful that my son was going off to die on the front line in Kharkiv. I wanted to help, so I decided to use my words as a journalist, writer and doctor to tell people in Britain how much patients who needed palliative care here in Ukraine needed our help.

Hospice Ukraine is a new charity with a very simple mission. We want to help fund local palliative care teams here in Ukraine to provide this vital work to patients at the end of life. There's never been more death and dying in Ukraine, perhaps in its whole history. Yet the conditions are as hard as they've ever been to support those patients who are dying. I came back wanting to shout and scream at the UK public, 'Give me your money, we have to help these people!' And you know the really beautiful thing: the response from the British public has been staggering. We've raised tens of thousands of pounds. Everybody has wanted to help. With this money, we're able to help local teams support patients who, sometimes literally, have no voice at all. They have no words. They're too sick to speak. But through our words, our power and our platform, we're able to help them.

Olesia Khromeichuk: What a wonderful gift to be able to do that. Thank you for doing it. I we ought to also mention the co-founder of the charity, a great friend of Ukraine, someone who's well-known here, both as a writer and a doctor. I saw all of his books in translation in the bookshop here at the Forum: Henry Marsh.



Rachel Clarke: Henry, who said to me last year, 'It's very safe, there'll be no problems.' We went to Kyiv, and our train arrived in the morning just as missiles started raining down on the city. So not so safe, but a very important thing to experience.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Absolutely. My next question is to all three of you. It's about the moment when words do fail us. When we try to describe something that's very difficult to describe, like wars and violence. I'm going to quote Iryna Shuvalova, a contemporary Ukrainian poet, in the original and in Iryna's own translation, just a very quick line from her recent poem. 'Pysaty pro vijnu ce jak kovtaty koliuchydrit, povilno, za santymetrom santymetr'. 'To write about war is to swallow barbed wire inch by inch, slowly.' Each one of you has written about violence in your own ways. Can you share that experience? How do you find the language to describe something that's impossible to describe? Halyna, why don't you start?

Halyna Kruk: It's a very broad, complex question. On the one hand, I've realised that when we're talking, those of us who've experienced this, who remain in Ukraine, who in one way or another have been touched by war, we talk about the war without using the word 'war'. Everything we describe, everything we say about how we've changed, how we see the world, tells of the experience that sometimes it's very hard to describe it in literature. For example, I have narratives that sometimes come out in poetry, but I can't always use them, these narratives from real life that talk of war without once mentioning war. In one poem, I wrote about a very quiet, silent bus that was on its way from Ukraine with about 20 mothers and 30 children in it. Over the course of the nine hours of the trip, there was silence on the bus. It's terrifying to imagine children of that age – four, five, six years old – who over the course of a nine hour trip are just sitting there quietly. They're not laughing, not screaming, not shouting, not being rowdy, not even arguing. That's something so unnatural. That metaphor of that silent bus is, to me, more striking than describing all the things that we're used to seeing on video. Really striking someone, really getting through to someone by depicting violence, or images of blood and gore, is a tough proposition. We're all products of a culture that uses violence for entertainment. There's hardly a thriller or action movie that does without the blood and gore and lumps of flesh. More striking are things that are much harder to describe, and harder to come up with in your imagination, like that bus full of silent kids.

I think the question was how can we talk about this difficult experience? I think it's up to us to be brutally honest, as honest as possible. I've noticed in many countries where I've read my poems about the war, poems that were maybe

not about the war directly, but had been written since the start of the full scale invasion, that people said that those poems struck them much more strongly than the news and the videos that describe all of this. They're a kind of emotional way to inhabit someone else's skin, to be in the kind of role that you've never been in, and hopefully you never will be.

This liminal experience, this difficult material that the war gives any artist who can dig deeply into such complex material, for people who are inside this war, is not really material. That's the biggest problem, and is why so often writers from abroad have an easier time working with the material, because for them it is material, whereas for us, it's very hard to separate ourselves from it. We're inside this thing and our optics are clouded. We see it through the prism of our emotions, and we're not always in any condition to speak. I tell myself that it's my job to speak for as long as I can speak, to explain for as long as I can explain, because I understand that as this experience amasses: sooner or later, you reach a point where you can no longer explain.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you. Ben, let me turn to you. I'd love to hear your reflections on how to describe something that's difficult to describe, and perhaps I could ask a follow-up question as well. I mentioned that you're a poet, a novelist, an essayist, a short story writer and a playwright. I've got a list here. And recently you've become an artist as well. Do words fail you? Do you look for different forms to express messages effectively, especially at times when you feel that it's difficult to find the right words and the right language?

Ben Okri: It's such an important question. And what people on the panel are saying is so deeply moving. I was very moved by the silent bus analogy. I'm a child of the Nigerian civil war. I was seven, eight, nine years old when the civil war broke out. It's something I went through as part of my lived experience, but I was a child. And I'd like to speak from that point of view. The thing about a lived experience, especially one like war, is exactly as was said earlier, that it's not material. It's part of your lived experience. It's also a silent trauma. It's a break. It's a smash to your consciousness. But it's one which takes place in an everyday life, an everyday situation. I remember bombs falling, bomb scares, hiding on the ground, all of that. That just seemed to me to be how people lived. And that's what I really want to say about talking and writing about the un-sayable. It took me a long time to find a language for that experience. It took me 17 years. The first sentence I ever wrote about the civil war, when I wrote that sentence, I didn't know I was writing that sentence. I thought I was just writing a short story, a work of the imagination. I'll give you the sentence: 'Those were long days as we were pressed

to the prickly grass, waiting for the bombs to fall.' After I wrote that sentence, I realised I was recalling a moment when I was at school. I was left there all by myself. Everybody had gone. I was in the school by myself when the war broke out. My mum had to come and get me. And again, it was that total silence that was talked about. I was there alone. Every now and again, there'd be a bomb raid alarm. And I, alone, would press my face to the grass. Later on, there were other experiences, but that's the sentence that came to me first, after 17 years of repressing that experience.

It's the most difficult thing to write about the unspeakable, to write about war. First of all, one has to process it as a human being. And maybe one doesn't process it, maybe one represses it. Maybe one presses it down as a way of surviving. Literature is a transfiguration of one's ordinary experience into a new form, a new kind of narrative. That's not something that can be rushed. I've noticed that with war, there are two kinds of responses. There are people who are able to write about the war immediately, it's on a par with memoir: you're writing about an experience that you've witnessed, or you've been there. For all wars, but I'm thinking about the Spanish Civil War. Turning that into art, into literature is a lot harder. It can't be willed or forced. The un-sayable can only be said through that, the un-sayable. It can only be said indirectly, in its own way. It's very hard to do it directly. In all the poems I've written about pain, violence, crisis, I've always been indirect. I've never set out to do them directly because I'm always overwhelmed by the size of the experience, by the bigness of it. Even though while I was living it, it was normal.

My answer is that we should find indirect ways. We should try to do it without knowing we're doing it. We should live our lives in these circumstances as fully and as deeply as possible. They are not material. But when the time for art comes, it will become art in ways that we don't know. Art is about the un-sayable. I want to stress that literature and art, poetry, the short story, the novel, making art, paintings, they're all about the un-sayable. They're about the un-sayable and the unspeakable because the deepest things are un-sayable. There's no point in art if we're just going to be talking about the un-sayable. The deepest part of art is the un-sayable, is people on the edge of death itself. This moment that we find ourselves in across the globe now, on the very edge of an existential climate crisis. We're all living in various kinds of un-sayable conditions for which we try to find words. So I'm going to say words. We work with the un-sayable and we work in a state of grace. We work sometimes in a state of good fortune, but always indirectly. If you set out to do it directly, you'll have problems. I think work without knowing you're working. Dream without knowing you're dreaming.

A lot of writers are simply saying they can't write, whether that's because they've been called upon for other duties that they need to tend to, or because they simply can't find the language to describe what they're experiencing. But others have tended towards different forms. So novelists have started to write poetry, poets have started to write non-fiction, and so on. We're looking for ways of expressing ourselves differently to how we did before.

Olesia Khromeichuk: Rachel, I'd like to give you an opportunity to comment on that question as well.

Rachel Clarke: I'm so struck by what you've just said, Ben, about these topics that are un-sayable. And yet, in the words of the great poet Maya Angelou, 'There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.' I think that's profoundly true. These stories, these experiences that are so painful, we perhaps initially repress them, try to bury them, but of course they continue to define our lives. They feel un-sayable, yet they dictate our lives. And I'm struck by this in my professional world as a doctor who uses words for therapeutic effect, as well as a writer. Because my 'taboo subject' is not the violence of war per se. It's almost something purer and more monumental and more terrifying than that. It's death. Every week, sometimes every day, I'll meet and talk to a patient who's dying, and perhaps dies, and I'll be there when they die. Perhaps death is the ultimate taboo, yet we have to find words to address that taboo. And I'd suggest that perhaps the only thing that's more daunting, more frightening, than these un-sayable taboo subjects is what our imaginations do to them in the absence of words. So if we don't confront them out loud, in conversation with other people, our imaginations can take on a life of their own and can be terrifying. They're unbridled. By way of example, when I meet a patient for the first time – they have a terminal diagnosis, perhaps they know they're dying – I'll always ask them, 'What is the thing you're most afraid of?' It's an incredibly powerful question, and very few doctors ask it. Almost always, a patient will say, 'It's not being dead, I'm okay about being dead, what I'm most frightened of is dying. What will it feel like? Will it be terrible?' Then that's a little opening, a chink, in which I can say, 'Would you like me to talk to you about what it is likely to be like, and the ways in which we can help you?' And suddenly through words; simple, honest, sincere words, you've erased all the fear that the imagination has provoked, and you've unlocked a way of actually supporting that patient so they feel it won't be as bad as that because they have a team around them caring for them. Boy, is that a power of words.

Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you for sharing that, Rachel. I'm going to keep asking you to share more experiences of being both a doctor and a writer. You write partly about your experience of being a junior doctor, but also about NHS, the British health system. The lived experience we talked about, and how difficult

it is to describe it, is something Ukrainian medics are going through just now in these really difficult times. We've been learning a bit more about their experiences now through documentary film making, interviews and so on, and some are beginning to write. Would you encourage doctors experiencing wars on the front line and treating civilians, as well as being targeted in Russian attacks, to put their experiences into words? And if so, how do they go about it if they haven't done it before? Is it something you have any advice on?

Rachel Clarke: I think the most important thing to say in response to that is that nobody, a doctor on the front lines in Ukraine or any other person, should ever attempt to write because they feel they have a duty to. Don't do it unless you want to, unless it comes from your heart, because it is difficult, it's traumatic, and it may be that the best and safest way for you to express your lived experience and the traumas of that experience, of trying to be a medic on the front lines, is through therapy, talking to someone in private who you trust. But, in the spirit of Maya Angelou, if you have an untold story, an experience that nobody knows about because they're not there running on to battlefields to try to save their comrades, knowing that the cost of that impulse might be losing their lives, never seeing their children again, never seeing their wife or husband again, nobody knows what that's like except you and someone else who's doing that. That's an exceptionally powerful experience to try and articulate. So is the difficulty of wanting with every fibre of your being as a trained doctor to help, to save lives, to heal, while simultaneously with every fibre of your being wanting to recoil, to run away from the battlefield because you don't want to die. It's such an interesting and unusual set of experiences, and I think for anybody to have the privilege as a reader to read that first hand, told sincerely and truthfully by a medic trying to do that job in Ukraine, would be captivating.

So try to do it, and my simple advice would be don't try to write good words, don't try to write clever or fancy words or words that some editor in an office thinks you should provide. Write what's there, what you felt and smelled and heard and suffered, and just tell it as honestly and truly as you can. I think the audience for that would be immense. We do like to hear from journalists trying to articulate that from observing, but to hear it from a participant, their lived experience, that's priceless and it can't be replicated.

Olesia Khromeichuk: Absolutely. I'm going to put you on the spot and ask you, are you going to write about your experience of discovering Ukraine and working in Ukraine and working with Ukrainian doctors?

Rachel Clarke: So I feel very strongly that it's not my place to. I want to hear from Ukrainian doctors, I want to hear from everyone in this room, I'm hungry

for Ukrainian experience. The only reason that could change is something very specific. I know how news editors work in the UK. If there's a British doctor in Ukraine and there are bombs and missiles in Kyiv, if I write about it, that will get into the UK papers. So last year I deliberately used this little platform as a tactic, a mission. My mission was I wanted to write about this to make people in Britain care about what everybody who's in those bomb shelters day after day after day feels. I wanted them to understand that you are the same as people in London, in Oxford, in Edinburgh. You are us, and I wanted to write that to try and make people in Britain care and see Ukrainians as people who are the same as us. If me coming from Britain gives me the platform to do that, I will try. But other than that, it's not my story, it's your story. I want to hear from you.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you for saying that. Journalists and editors in the room and online, amplify Ukrainian voices with lived experiences, please – it's very important. And on that note, I'm going to invite Halyna to read us one of her recent poems. It will be read in Ukrainian and our wonderful interpreter will do his best to translate it as it's being read. An incredible task to face – I'm sure he'll do an amazing job. And in the meantime, please think of your own questions, as we'll open the floor after we've listened to Halyna read her poem.

Halyna Kruk: 'Will I be able to walk two steps more? Will I step here, over bodies strewn around in unnatural poses? The rust of an incinerated car gaping with shell holes, too large to kill a particular person? Too uneconomical, the artistic devices. The world will not believe this. This lacks clear motive. Explain to me, you say. Why do they kill you? There must be a reason. This isn't how you build a narrative in a book. In literature, you can always pull back without getting too close. Where the eye sees too much. A broken fingernail on a neatly manicured woman's hand. A child's shoe mixed with the rest of the flat's contents. This is what they look like. Among other things, literature ought to not let what happened happen, pre-empt, avoid the worst, change the potential perpetrator of something irreparable. It's not the point of literature, after all, to argue post-factum that an abandoned child's shoe has nothing to do with a child's foot. That a broken fingernail is just a broken fingernail, it's not that big a deal. If you pull back in time, abstain from approaching or looking more closely, the saving distance of art, the barrier of convention, up to which all of this can still be a narrative fiction, a forbidden fruit of the imagination, packed with catastrophising. Literature is no longer a means of escape, only an extra track that will take you nowhere. You get on a train, pull out a book, and you realise this train is not trained at any destination, nor reaches a place in a person where a decision can be taken. To leave forever and never return. Or pull the emergency stop and go all in. One day

you will uncork this path, should a great need arise. You will remove the speed bumps. You will let yourself see, remove the blinders in a world where the point of literature is not to kill, not to find revenge, not to remember, not to bring you back to your senses, not to remember every iota, not to show reality in its most unattractive forms. Who the hell needs that kind of literature anyway? The shoe that flies off a child in the air as it's mixed with glass shards and concrete, the broken fingernail on a woman's hand, unblurred from whatever remains of the body. A child's book you focus on so as not to see all the rest, not to imagine all the rest. The space that was between the book and the hand, between the moment of a Saturday morning in a family and the next shot. You come too close and you run through with somebody's mortal yell from under the rubble, 'I don't want to die.' The point of literature is to clear the rubble in time. Literature is there to tell us how to go on living with this yell in our ears, with this hand and this shoe blown up on a screen, knowing what was behind them in the unblurred reality, unsoftened by artificial intelligence. That has always been the point of literature.'



Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you Halyna. Yes, gentleman in the second row.

Yehor Bilan: Good evening. My name is Yehor Bilan. I'm a historian, journalist and analyst and director of media. Thank you for a very interesting conversation. I have a question to Ben and to the other participants. The Nobel literature prizewinner, Chinua Achebe, wrote his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart* about the colonisation of Nigeria by Britain. Can we compare Nigeria with Ukraine? Things fell apart, for the global audience, after February 24th. For a long period of time, the world didn't consider that there was an on-going war, a genocidal war by Russia against Ukraine. How can the comparison of genocides, maybe of past and present, help the world to understand that it must be stopped immediately, and that stopping the Russian-Ukrainian war will help to build a really lasting peace?

Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you. I'll just summarise the question, if I understood it correctly. How can our knowledge of previous genocidal wars help us understand that this is also a genocidal war that Russia is waging against Ukraine and ensure that it is stopped, in other words, that Ukraine wins as soon as possible?

Ben Okri: The best answer I could've given is a poem I was going to read, but I'm not sure there'll be the chance to read it.

Olesia Khromeichuk: Please do read it. Yes, there's a lot of 'Yes, please' in the audience.



From left to right: Ben Okri (on screen), Olesia Khromeichuk, Halyna Kruk and Rachel Clarke.

Ben Okri: Thank you. It's a poem I published in The Guardian some time ago. A friend of mine had been in touch with a family in Ukraine who lived in a bomb shelter and he told me about a young girl called Katya who was in this bomb shelter. She was seven years old, and her story reminded me of when I was seven in the bomb shelter in Nigeria during the Nigerian civil war. So I wrote this poem called 'To Katya, aged seven, in a bomb shelter in Kyiv':

'All around you missiles are falling. Churches you once knew won't be there any more. The streets you walked will be changed by blood and shelling and bombs. It seems the world's gone mad. As the earth shakes, not because of the rage of the gods, but that one man wants to win back a lost empire, you will think that your world is being shattered for ever. It is. But out of the destruction, out of all this thunder, something new will come. Whatever happens to your land, whatever happens, your land will know the courage of its soul, its people; and history will be rewritten, not with the force of an autocrat, but by the steadfast hope and desire to be true to the beauty of your earth and all you have suffered. Katya, in your bomb shelter, we're with you. We're there in the shadows. We're there in the silence between explosions. Those who destroy your land destroy themselves. Always remember what your land fights for, the right to its future without any force from outside. Katya, we are done with people forcing us into their own dream. We are done with being told who we can or can't be. A time comes when you stand and say, 'My future's mine to dream, my land is mine to tell, my life is mine to imagine. You will not break my truth. You will not distort my dream. You will not destroy my future, whoever you are. You may pulverise our churches, our roads, theatres, our hospitals, with hundreds hiding in them, but you will never touch the fountain of our dreams. Or the deep world from which we create every day a radiant land. From this bomb shelter we'll dream anew.' Your shelling is our resurrection. Your missiles are missives of our regeneration. And all those things which must go so that we will forever be free to be what we truly are. For even if you win, the victory is ours. For you have tempered our souls and revealed to us our true selves, which we might never have found without your wish to crush us. Katya, in your bomb shelter, it's a fearful thing when people act from the great emptiness of a loss of empire. An empire is a vast ego, a gigantic delusion, and it makes people think that they own the soul of others, that they control the destiny of nations, and that they are somehow the masters of the earth. the loss of such a delusion can make people insane. Sometimes when a leader is unhinged by this loss, they are prepared to destroy the world so they can return to their lost dream of vast terrains in which once they were gods. It's not good for humans to entertain the delusion of being gods. So Katya, it's not your fault that someone wants back what they should not have taken. It's not our fault that we dream of freedom, we want to be ourselves, live our own mistakes, determine our own destiny. No one can rip that away from us. The age of empire is over. The age of freedom is here.

They may dominate us with their might and their nuclear bombs, but they will not determine who we shall be, or where the fire of our dreams will take us. I'm with you there in the bomb shelter. I am a bomb shelter child too. This will end. It will pass. So drink the sweet waters of the earth. Sing songs to one another in this time of darkness. The monster's worst roar is just before it falls. There are no real monsters in life. Just people who are deluded or mad or lost in ideas that stray too far from the wise road of the human. Fires are howling in the streets that centuries built. There are tenements, bomb-sliced in half, in which you can see the innards of apartments. Your roots are entangled with the souls of those who seek to murder you. I hear that their soldiers weep as they drop bombs on their distant relations. See, they're driving their knives into their own hearts. Such a great civilisation, home to such madnesses. They learn nothing from Lev Tolstoy, Katya. They learn nothing. Napoleon tried to do the same thing. He won too. But what a loss that was. They burned their famed city so that what he won was ashes. He sat there in the throne of ash, an eternal winter descended on his head. That was the commencement of his end. They learned nothing from War and Peace, nor from Hitler. A people determined to be free cannot be compelled to be unfree again. Even if you kill them. Do you know why, Katya? Well, it's because we're made of a stuff not of this earth. And when we find our truth, a new beauty and force is added to the universe. The missiles are falling. Children perish in bombed-out churches. An evil is being planted in our time and the whole world can see it. But missiles create lions from lambs, and bombs awaken tigers. They never learn, the deluded ones. They'll kill hundreds of thousands, but from those defeats an army of dragons will be born. They have changed the world, but not in the way they thought. Katya, you who live in the slip stream of empires, wake up fast. Grow deep, strong and brave. Join the great river of human destiny. You can't fight injustice and then be unjust to others. Every day you survive brings your liberation closer. Spirits of the dead will you on. The church will be rebuilt. The streets will be made new. There will be festivals in the square. You will taste grapes from Greece, apples from the Hesperides, and sweet oranges from Africa. And one day your laughter will defeat the vacuum missiles, and the bombs will fade into the depths of your freedom. A soft wind from the Bosphorus will weave your hair. And the sun-kissed snow will temper the grim memories of this bomb shelter where you grow.'

I'm sorry the poem was so long, but I really wanted to express that and share it with you all.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you. You can hear the applause, but also I wish you could've heard the silence we could hear while you were reading, the attentive silence. I often say that one of Ukraine's greatest weapons is solidarity, what we see inside the country and international solidarity, and your poem was a beautiful expression of that solidarity. So thank you so much for reading it and sharing it with us, and of course for writing it. Would either of you like to comment on the question about previous historical genocides and how they inform our understanding of today?

Halyna Kruk: I noticed an interesting thing when I had occasion to tell others about the crimes perpetrated by Russians in Ukraine today, the genocidal nature of this war. I had this curious observation: people who'd experienced something similar in their own biographies – for instance, an Afghan woman who was at Harvard, who'd just escaped from Afghanistan, or, in Denmark and Sweden, a Croatian woman, who, as a child, had escaped the wars in the Balkans – these people who had their own experience of something similar, something like genocide, said that they didn't like comparisons. But the experience resonates when you see something similar, so you can't really rid yourself of it. These allusions, these resonances, kind of come unbidden. But I don't know how clear they can be, how well-understood such comparisons can be, when we're talking about remote experiences. It's not always this collective trauma, this collective experience of genocide, it doesn't always remain so deep that it can be talked about in another time and be understood by the descendants. That's the question to which I have no answer. I don't know how long it lasts, and until which generation it's still understood.



Questioner: Thank you very much, a very powerful and moving conversation. I wanted to return to a point that was raised at the beginning, and particularly the role of writers as representatives of entire nations, and possibly also the power of culture in countries that historically, for different reasons, might have had a weak statehood, a statehood under attack, or a statehood entirely destroyed. The reason I wanted to go back to this point is that my grandmother is a Ukrainian writer, and I've seen her often conflicted between the desire to write about universal themes, philosophical themes, and values, but always drawn to the sense of responsibility that her writing speaks about her country, her culture, that was always under attack from a colonial neighbour. So my question to you is, do you think that writers, that is, people who are gifted with the power of saying things in a way that many can't express quite as powerfully, have a responsibility to be the messengers of their nations in different ways, and is it fair to put this burden on them?

Ben Okri: I come from a tradition in which we're conflicted in similar ways. The writer is meant to bear the responsibility of the nation, the responsibility for dealing with poverty and injustice, and often writers just want to write about very simple and intimate and personal things. I've tended to find that when writers try to be the voice of their nation and of their age, they tend to be much lesser writers than when they write what's deepest in their hearts. But more than that, I think that the best contribution a writer can make to their nation is not to try and be its representative, but to write the most beautiful, the truest, the deepest, the most magical, the most enduring thing that they can write. Because if they write something that lives and that touches people, here and now, and touches people over there, and touches people through time, they will actually have carried their nation with them much more fully than if they set out to do that.

I've always been torn as a writer between trying to be a representative and writing my truth, what I care about most, what I can touch most truthfully and craft most beautifully. And I've always tended to the latter, to go for my own truth, for the story I can tell, in the full understanding that if I tell a truly good story and the story touches the depth of what it is to be human, it will have in it all the things that we want, that we think about in terms of our nation, whatever that nation is. I think it's all in there in the truth of the stories that we try to tell, much more so than when we consciously try to tell stories for our nations. So for me, I believe a lot more in the truth of a line, of a narration, rather than trying to represent the nation. I know it's a difficult thing to say right now, but no one represents the nation more truthfully than people whose stories linger through time and ring through and touch people's hearts across time and across the globe. James Joyce didn't set out to write about the soul of Ireland as such. He just told a story about one man, a Jew in Dublin, during the course of one day. And in telling us that narrative, he told us everything about Ireland and about Nigeria and about Ukraine and everywhere else. So much can be impacted in one thing. I think we put too much of a burden on our writers, and we crush their fingers and we crush their souls, and they're unable to speak because we're asking them to speak in unnatural ways. We're forcing them to play an instrument that's not true to their souls. I think we need to just let writers live and give us the best they can give us, when they can give it to us, and not put a harness on them. I understand that this is difficult. I grew up with it. I struggled with it. But all the writing that people did trying to represent the time and the nation, most of it has just gone, is just not of much use any more. And the people who just tried to tell us about one flower or about a stone by the roadside and did it truthfully and beautifully, they still speak to us. That stone somehow speaks of the oppression that's not even mentioned in that poem. Art is a very strange thing, and we should be very careful about what we expect from it.

Rachel Clarke: I couldn't agree more strongly with that. I think, if we imagine for a second the antithesis of trying sincerely, as a writer, to represent your nation, your culture, it's the voice of, for example, a politician, an insincere politician who's using his or her words to curry favour, to garner power, to win votes. There's nothing, for me, more reprehensible than a politician who tries to speak on behalf of the nation. 'I represent Great Britain', or whatever the country might be. It's a form of insincerity. The flip-side of that is a writer who, in virtue of the fact that they try simply to narrate their own truth, their own experience, their own sincerely held beliefs, experiences, their individual way of navigating this world, through that very individual experience, touches something universal, the universality of human experience. We're all members of the human race, and all of our deeply individual experiences are simultaneously representative of ourselves as human beings. I just don't see that a nation-state or a particular culture necessarily has anything to do with that. Writing is about the truth of our personal individual experience.

Olesia Khromeichuk: Thank you. I feel like we've come organically full circle to the start of our conversation. I'd like to give you, Halyna, the final word.

Halyna Kruk: It's interesting, because the two views that we've had represent this very different optics of what culture is in a country or a state that's completely organised, with all of its institutions playing their role, and what it is in a country that is accustomed to saving itself with culture in situations in which all the institutions fail, or at least fail to do their proper job. My experience is my experience of Ukrainian literature. I'm talking even perhaps more as a literary scholar than a writer. That tells me that many Ukrainian writers took on this function of talking on behalf of their nation in situations when they saw that no one else was doing it. A clear example is Shevchenko, who was alone in his time, and replaced or performed a very important function for Ukraine of lasting through this stateless and precarious period.

But another important aspect, and an important danger, exists in a situation where we take on the role, we take it upon ourselves to speak on behalf of others. I think that situation is possible. Of course writers as individuals try to speak on their own behalf, even if it seems to them that they speak on behalf of some community, some amalgamation, some public. But it's difficult for us to understand each other because when you come from this this post-colonial experience, this stateless experience, and you really do take on too much, then in cultures that are well cared for and are not threatened, they understand you as someone taking on a political role. And that's an eternal discussion that will probably persist, this constant misunderstanding that I think will continue, between nations that have found themselves in post-colonial situations and those that have never had that

experience. As far as talking on behalf of someone goes, here's how I outline this question for myself: In a situation of war, of threat, where many people are neither able nor strong enough to talk on their own behalf about their difficult conditions, the writer, as much as she might not want to take on that role, sometimes has to speak for others, has to take on that responsibility to speak in the voice of those who cannot speak, especially if it's a difficult experience, a liminal experience, an existential experience, if it's the experience of those who've fallen or died, of those who've suffered. Otherwise you have a literature that turns away from that responsibility, a literature that limits itself to the pretty narrow sphere of adorning reality. I think that's really important.



Olesia Khromeichuk: Let's pause our conversation there. I say pause, because I'm sure we'll continue reflecting and discussing the things that were raised in this discussion. I'd like to thank you, Halyna Kruk, Rachel Clarke and Ben Okri for joining us tonight and sharing your insights, your thoughts, your work, your poetry, and thank you to all of you who stayed up so late here in Lviv, and to our audiences around the world. Thank you very much, and be safe.





Freedom of Thoughts vs Indoctrination

Participants: Jaroslava Barbieri, Janine di Giovanni, Ian Garner (digital), Sofi Oksanen (digital) and Peter Pomerantsev (chair)

Peter Pomerantsev: Thank you all for joining us, here and online. My name is Peter Pomerantsev. I work at Johns Hopkins University and with the Reckoning Project, which we'll be hearing about today, focussing on things to do with propaganda and ideology, and that's going to be the subject of our conversation today. We know that Ukrainian children are being kidnapped and abducted, and we know that they're then put through a Russian system that tries to change their identity by force. To describe this process we often use words like 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination', but what do these words actually mean? How do such processes actually work and what can we do to fight them? That's what we're going to discuss today.

My co-panellists are Janine di Giovanni, my colleague at the Reckoning Project and a remarkable writer and war reporter with 30 years of experience from different war zones, which she'll be sharing with us today; Jara Barbieri, an academic at the University of Birmingham who's just completed a groundbreaking study about indoctrination in the occupied territories, called Raising Citizen Soldiers in Donbas; Sophie Oksanen, a Finnish-Estonian, writer of amazing novels like *The Purge*, but also of non-fiction, most recently *Same River Twice - Putin's War Against Women*; and up in the early morning to be with us is Professor Ian Garner of the department of political studies at the University of Toronto and the author of *Z Generation*, a book about the Russian education system and – I'm going to use a word that the professor may dispute – how it's creating a fascist youth.

I'd like to start with you, Janine, because I want to open the horizon to our discussion before we get back to Russia and Ukraine. When we use words like 'indoctrination', how have you seen this practised in the various places you've reported from, and what's the difference between education and indoctrination? Can we say there's a set of practices that's unique? Tell me about your experience.

Janine di Giovanni: Good afternoon everyone and thank you everyone from the Lviv Book Forum for having us here and for all your hard work. It's lovely to be here. So, three words: abduction, coercion; manipulation. I'm going to try to place

this in a bigger context of what war is. What are the tactics of war? How do you destroy a society? It goes beyond the battlefield or military gains or territorial integrity. It goes to the heart of destroying the fabric of a society by breaking down the family. If you can do that, you can completely destabilise a country. It's usually at the bottom or the top of the agenda of how you can win a war and destroy a country, burn it. So let's look at a really classic example, which is Sierra Leone, which fought a brutal 14-year civil war. One of the hallmarks of the human rights abuse, among the many things, was the amputation of limbs, of civilians' arms, either at the wrist or at the elbow, by rebel soldiers.

All of the sides recruited child soldiers, but the RUF rebels were the most advanced at it. A child soldier, which to me is indoctrination at its core, would be taken from their village. When the rebels rode through, burned down the village, raped the women, killed everyone, they would take kids as young as six or seven, bring them to their headquarters and begin the indoctrination. The first step of this would be a kind of hazing process, which would mean the kids would have to go back to their villages and kill a member of their family. It could be a mother, it could be a father, it could be an aunt. The point was that they would then destroy their ties to the community, so they'd never be able to return. This is part of what we call the long game in indoctrination, which was also used by Islamic State, but I'm going to talk about that later.

Why young children? Many reasons. They can hold light firearms. Warfare has become much more directed towards lighter arms, so kids can now hold them, whereas 30 or 40 years ago they couldn't. Even more creepy is what I was told by a Jesuit priest who ran a kind of post-indoctrination centre in Freetown after the war ended, that before the age of nine children don't have a conscience: their determination of what's right and what's wrong, what's moral, what's immoral, what should be done, what ethically cannot be done, has not yet been established. They can be manipulated so easily, so they can be taught to kill without guilt at that stage. I sat opposite kids, teenagers, who'd been so brutalised by this indoctrination that they were able to be 'the amputator', to amputate civilians. There was one teenage girl they called Queen Cut Hands – because they all took creepy noms de guerre – and she was renowned for being the most brutal of all the choppers and killers. What we do about them afterwards is really important, and we'll talk about that later.

Just a few other classic examples. Pol Pot's murderous regime in Cambodia, during which a million people were murdered, a million died of exhaustion and starvation. He mastered the art, with this extreme Maoism, of taking kids – again, the separation from their parents – and teaching them to actually be stool pigeons on their parents, to report on their parents to get them imprisoned and

killed. At the heart of this brutal social experiment was the aim of destroying family life by turning children against their families. Vietnam liberated Cambodia in 1979, but there were still millions of these child informers, indoctrinated kids left. How do you undo that? I think I'll turn it over to the next person and we can go back to Islamic State and what they did later.



Peter Pomerantsev: That's a sort of promise of more horrors...listening to your story of Queen Cut Hands is not easy, but you mentioned this element that indoctrination is different from education, in that you're forcibly turning people against their families, getting them to report on their families. That immediately, to everyone in the room, makes us think of Soviet ideology. Soviet myths about Pavlik Morozov, who was celebrated in the Soviet Union for having reported on his parents. Sophie, I want to turn to you. You're coming at this from a Finnish-Estonian perspective. Your novels, and so much of your writing, deals with the legacy of the Soviet occupation in Estonia, but also in Finland in a much subtler way. What do you think about this question of indoctrination, given that history in particular, and again – I keep on going over this in my head – what is the difference between indoctrination and education? What's the difference between healthy education and something else?

Sophie Oksanen: Well, I feel I'm in a kind of special place in this sense, because in Finland we learned to keep quiet about things connected to Russia and the Soviet Union, and at the same time the Winter War is the most important national, unifying narrative in Finland; it united the nation in the sense that I don't think we have any other unifying experience like it, and it's still a living memory. But at the same time, it's very contradictory to me. My Finnish grandmother was a Winter War veteran, so it's definitely part of my family story. But so is deportation. Soviet deportations were part of my family history and that's the most important identity narrative for Estonians. Of course, Ukrainians know these interpretations as well, and now we can see it happening again.

In Finland this was something you weren't supposed to talk aloud. It wasn't a publicly-acknowledged matter, meaning that it kind of didn't exist to official Finland. The acceptable Estonians at the time were Soviet Estonians, and our major public stories and narration, and our politics and education, all went along with the Soviet narration. That meant that deportations didn't officially exist in Finland. Of course, as we know, Soviets did like to keep an eye on the former citizens of their empire, also abroad, so we were really walking on eggshells in terms of what we could actually say out loud, because we didn't want to jeopardise our visas.

Peter Pomerantsev: Can we talk a little bit about the Estonian experience as well? What was the indoctrination in Soviet Estonia; what do you see as the main ingredients of it?

Sophie Oksanen: It was one way of people forcing people not to think. Not to think about what you were actually learning at school, which was Soviet propaganda: it had absolutely nothing to do with reality, and it also erased Estonian identity and history and made everything that had been good and respectable bad, illegal and criminal. I think this change of paradigm, what was good and what was OK and what was bad, that was actually the worst thing of all.



seems to be part of the mix of indoctrination, and then access to information, erasing information. So already we're talking about some very fundamental rights that are part of indoctrination. Ian, I want to turn to you. You've written this incredibly powerful study of how the contemporary Russian system is trying to create a war-mongering generation of children. Tell us about the techniques being used now in Russia, and maybe how they're similar and different to Soviet ones.

Ian Garner: Good morning. Firstly, thank you for having me. What a big question – we could talk about this all day. I think the technique, generally speaking, in Russia today – as it has been in particular for the last 10 years, though you can really see the seeds of it even 20 years ago when Putin came to power – is to remove agency and to remove pluralism from education, and then, in particular, from the teaching of values to children. In the early Putin period you see that happening in schools with the introduction of new textbooks, a new emphasis on World War II and the rather bizarre death cult, as some people have called it, around World War II: a kind of ancestor cult, a cult of worship, of sacrifice, of messianism, of war itself as an aid or an aim in reforming society. But over the last 10 years, what's become increasingly obvious is the state's attempt to take a multi-dimensional, multi-platform approach to re-education. In the newspapers here, in the media, we see a real emphasis on what's happening in Russian schools, and more recently universities. We saw, for example, a month or six weeks ago, lots of stories about the new textbook, a history textbook that showed, let's say, a rather bizarre take on reality.

But the emphasis really lies beyond the classroom. Schools are actually a really bad place to indoctrinate children. The Soviets always had the problem of the kitchen conversation, the fact that doors could be closed and family influences. We know this is born out by dozens of different studies: family influences played a huge role in moving children's values away from Soviet values, in particular in the second half of the Soviet period. The same is true of Portugal in the 1960s and 70s, of Spain in the same period, even in the 1980s. Once those countries were reforming and moving away from totalitarian values, the family unit had a hugely negative role from the state's perspective.

But in Russia today, they have this phenomenally powerful tool – the smartphone. This is where the state really aims to reach children today, because the smartphone is always on. It's always there, in children's pockets. Going back to Janine's comments about not just taking children away from the family, but asking them to actually destroy part of the family unit, now the Russian state doesn't necessarily have to ask children to destroy their family because it can constantly be acting as a kind of a voice, a peer chattering away in the background. The state very

From left to right: Sofi Oksanen (on screen), Peter Pomerantsev, Janine di Giovanni and Jaroslava Barbieri

cleverly manipulates TikTok algorithms. TikTok is the big growth social network for Russian children. Although the Russian state doesn't control it, we also don't control it in the west, so the Russian state can use it pretty much as it sees fit.

Also [the Russian social network] VK. Children are encouraged to join groups, to find belonging in community groups where frankly disturbing nationalist and violent values are taught. Not every Russian child does that, but when one Russian child likes, shares, comments, and so on, and interacts with materials, their peers are seeing that that child is interacting in some way with the values of the state. And that creates the perception that other children around them are subscribing to those values. It actually inflates the importance of those values, inflates the sense, and potentially the real number, of children who really are subscribing to those values. And that begins a spiral in which children really do begin, or can or could begin – because this is still a project in its infancy – subscribing to those values.



Peter Pomerantsev: I find it one of the most bizarre things about what is, in many ways, a bizarre system. The people who create this, the disconnect between their cynicism and the kids they're trying to influence. It seems very strange to me. We'll move on to Jara with the same question. Jara, you've been looking at the indoctrination of children in the temporary occupied territories in Donbas. Again, the people creating this project inside Russia are often cynics, a generation of cynics, yet they seem to be trying to create what you call, I think, children warriors. Tell us about how they do that. And do the people who created it and the people who practice it and the children who've now been living under it for eight years actually believe it?

Jaroslava Barbieri: First of all, our thanks to the Lviv Book Forum for having us here. I'm going to answer your question at the end of my remarks because I want to first just give a little bit of background about how the so-called patriotic education programmes, directly supported by the Russian system, have been implemented in the temporary occupied territories in Donbas, and Crimea as well. Interestingly, my ambition was to show everything that Russian state and non-state actors did in the occupied areas in Donbas, and there were aspects, like passportisation and economic banking integration, that they did here and there, sooner or later. But the one thing that they did systematically was indoctrination programmes under this umbrella of patriotic education programmes. And when you look at the official documents around this policy, they have different strands of patriarchal education that I think capture well the overarching objectives behind the policies. The text of these documents is absolutely copied and pasted from the state programmes of the Russian Federation on patriotic education programmes. When you look at other breakaway regions, say Transnistria in Moldova, it's the same text.

So that shows a systematic pattern of these strategies across the post-Soviet region. For example, one strand of patriotic education is what they call historic patriotic education. That's outright indoctrination that's embedded in the local and Russian history textbooks that are exported to the occupied territories. They portray the Donbas people as a nation. You remember, for example, the ideological project that tried to promote 2014 as a springboard for future accession to the Russian Federation, that portrayed the events of 2014 not as an invasion but as a national liberation movement. They portrayed all the past historical experience of Donbas under the Ukrainian state as a force for Ukrainisation. I'm quoting literally the expressions used in these textbooks. So it's about portraying the history of the region as inextricably linked to the evolution of the Russian states and the Russian nation, and about portraying any past as part of Ukraine as an historical aberration that was wrong. Finally, you're liberated and facing your real historical destiny.

That indoctrination objective is overarching, and it's very dominant. The second objective is legitimising the occupation administration that's been installed by Moscow. It's about presenting them as paladins of peace against an aggressive Ukraine. And again, going back to the framing of the events in 2014 as the beginning of it all. So it's very important how they try to instil in the youngest strata of society the sense that they're part of a very noble project of reclaiming, of rebuilding a statehood that was stolen by Ukraine.

These are very subtle and systematic narratives that you see in the local educational systems. It's interesting how, for example, they draw parallels between the great patriotic war, which is the framing of World War II in Russia, and the events of 2014. They show the state symbols of the self-proclaimed republics and the Russian Federation. So it's strengthening the sense of a civic identity among the younger strata of the population.

The final objective is creating reliable training and recruitment mechanisms for the local security and military structures, the structures of the Russian Federation. You'll all have heard of the Young Army movement, for example, which, if you look on their website, is a paramilitary movement that trains young children aged 11-18 to ultimately join the national armed forces. They're actively present in the occupied territories. That militarisation of youth centres around a Soviet/Russian interpretation of history is used as a basis for strengthening a sense of civichood that's all about alienating the local population from the rest of Ukraine and promising a future that's politically and culturally purely oriented towards the Russian Federation. That's how indoctrination is linked to militarisation. It's very tangible.



Peter Pomerantsev: Let's just summarise where we are up to now, because I think we can already see a pattern among these different scenarios. Soviet Finland, Sierra Leone, the temporary occupied territory. It's breaking the links with family; sometimes physical deportation; the rewriting of history and the suppression of access to history; getting to children, especially, these days, through social media; and normalising violence and atrocities. You start early, before they're nine. If you get to them before they're nine, you can subvert any idea of morality. But I wanted to go back to this question and go a bit deeper. Does it work? That's what they want to do, that's the pattern, but does it work?

Janine di Giovanni: So now we're going to get into radicalisation. If the Kremlin are masters of propaganda, Islamic State learned a lot from them. Afterwards, when

ISIS rolled across the desert and took over Mosul, and then most of northern Iraq, we began to look at their propaganda machine, but more importantly, at their radicalisation machine, which was absolutely extraordinary. How did they manage to recruit young Muslims in France, in the UK, in Germany, in Scandinavia, to such an extent? Then, once they got them to Raqqa, how did they do it? Also, on another level, there were the very young children. So the Islamic State instigated what they called 'The Cubs of the Caliphate'. These were young kids, again, as young as six or seven. You ask what the technique is, well it's increased exposure to violence. You show them more and more violence. If you were living in Raqqa, you did see crucifixions, you did see people burned alive inside cages, you saw extreme brutality. ISIS had a goal, which they basically called their trans-generational long game, that long after Raqqa fell and ISIS no longer existed – although we believe it does still exist in many forms, just perhaps not at the Raqqa base where it was before – these child soldiers, or 'cubs', would live on, and the ideology would never be able to be put back into Pandora's box.

Another factor that was used in Sierra Leone, in Chechnya, and by Islamic State, is drugs. In Sierra Leone, they used a substance called 'brown brown'. It was basically a mixture of cocaine and amphetamines, and they'd cut the kids' arms and put it under their skin. So they'd get this immediate buzz of going into battle fearlessly. That's how they got these fearless kids. With ISIS, they used captagon, the drug that's manufactured widely in Syria, which is a kind of speeded-up amphetamine, a Ritalin-type derivative. So these kids could basically become suicide bombers, frontline soldiers, and they were backed by the increased violence they were seeing. Going back to the long game I was mentioning, ISIS is defeated. Where are the cubs? The Atlantic Council had a brilliant paper on it, which basically said that these kids were moulded; their trauma and vulnerability became obedience and rage. That's really terrifying. There are now more than a thousand cubs in the Kurdish regional government prisons. They're charged with terrorism and affiliation with ISIS and ISIS related groups. They were tried as children, but they were given blanket sentences and sent to prison. So the final thought is, what are prisons? Prisons are always the best breeding ground: terrorism university for radicalism and indoctrination. It's where all the leaders of Al-Qaeda met, in US prisons in Iraq.

The Reckoning Project is launching this year. It will be a year long, very deep dive into deported children and indoctrination. And these are some of the things that Peter and I, and our team, are going to grapple with: the level of radicalisation, the indoctrination, the patterns of how they were taken, the deportation, the legality of it. How do we take this terrible crime and this blow against Ukrainian society to the courts? How do we get it from here to there?

Peter Pomerantsev: This idea that the state, in this case ISIS and Islamic State, has fallen, but the indoctrination lives on into another generation, and it might be passed on further, of course has echoes in the Soviet experience. Sophie, how do you see the longevity, maybe even the trans-generational nature, of indoctrination?

Sophie Oksanen: I remember a reader I met years back, a young man, younger than me, a Finnish man brought up in Finland. He came to me and asked my advice, because he had problems understanding his girlfriend's thinking. I was thinking, I'm not sure if I'm the right person to help you with this. But then he said that the girl was from Estonia and he didn't care for her ideas about the Second World war.

I was thinking, OK, the guy is dating and in love with this Estonian girl who has, from a Finnish perspective, a different understanding of the Second World War, so she must be from a privileged Soviet family. Indeed, the girl was from Sama, which was a closed city during the Soviet years, and the people living there were very privileged people. So this girl, younger than me, still had a very rosy understanding of the Soviet Union. That was something the Finnish boyfriend didn't understand at all, because the girl was from occupied Estonia. I'm pretty sure that this girl will pass on her rosy memories of the Soviet Union to her children, and sometimes, you know, the memories can even grow stronger the further away you go. Also with geographical distance: if you move to another country, immigration is also a situation in which certain emotions can grow stronger. For example, if your grandfather was a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, then maybe your parents want to pass on the memories of that war if they're living in a country where the school education is not supporting that idea at all.

In Finland we also have Finnish Putinists, who don't have a multicultural background or anything like that, who've been brought up within the Finnish educational system and have access to all information of the world, yet they become Putinists. And they certainly might start to share the Soviet ideas of history. Personal history also usually follows the quite typical histories of radicalisation, and I think we should use the word radicalisation more often. In Finland, it's not used when we talk about Finnish Putinism. We might say 'Finnish Russia activists' to describe these pro Kremlin activists, but I think we're seeing exactly the same kinds of personal behavioural, patterns and personal histories as with the radicalisation related to Islam.



Peter Pomerantsev: Another word that I've heard used in this context is extremism. When I first heard the word extremism, I thought it meant the fringes, something on the edge. But then it was explained to me, over many discussions, by experts in extremism, that it has nothing to do with that. It's not spatial, it has nothing to do with the fringe or the edge. Extremism, as a political psychology, is a set of beliefs that dehumanise others, that take away the value of life that others might have. Extremism can be at the centre of a society. It was in Nazi Germany, and I wonder if it is in today's Russia. So it's nothing to do with the edges, it's about dehumanising others.

Ian, you talked a little bit – and I encourage everyone to read your book – about how the Russian state tries to indoctrinate youth, but what is the ultimate goal, and does it work? You started to mention it when you talked about social media and normalising atrocities and war crimes. Is that their aim? Is their aim to dehumanise others and Ukrainians, and in that sense, is it extremism?

Ian Garner: Yes, it is extremism. And I would argue pretty strongly, as I do in the book, that this is about fascism. That Russia is a fascist state, and I don't use that term lightly. It's not something I've pulled out of the ether. Fascism is about the regeneration of society through war. It is about the idea that the inherent goal of society is war, sustaining itself through continued conflict, external conflict and internal conflict, both politically and psychologically. And what the Russian state is trying to do in the education system is to create a very clear sense of an in-group and an out-group. An in-group in which, to be a member of the Russian community, a good Russian, you have to subscribe to a very clear and narrow set of values. You are Russian, of course, preferably ethnic Russian, and if you're not ethnic Russian, you need to start performing as an ethnic Russian, following the rituals, dressing in the army uniforms, letting Russians lead you. It also means very clearly being straight, because queerness is a value of the out-group, and I'll get on to that. It means being Russian Orthodox Christian, in the very distorted and warlike form of Christianity that is subscribed to by the Russian church. And it means being aggressive, because it means believing that Russia is surrounded by an out-group that is intent on destroying it.

Everything attached to the out-group in this, if you can call it a philosophy, is inherently dangerous, inherently deleterious, and it's inherently attempting to destroy this sense of Russian-ness as it has been throughout history, as Jaroslava was alluding to. Russia is surrounded by enemies: 1453, 1812, 1941; on and on it goes, this cycle of Russia being surrounded and having to fight.

Now everything in the out-group is inherently bad and inherently inhuman because it's western. Western means transgender, it means queer. That doesn't

just mean a sense of being feminine, somehow lacking masculinity; it means a deformation of the self. It also means that when we think about Jewish people, Jewish people aren't Russian people, and we can look back to Putin's comments a couple of months ago, which are hugely antisemitic. We can dehumanise Jews because they're not Russian. And yes, it means that Ukrainians too are not just dehumanised, they have to be dehumanised because they are seen as distorted forms of Russian-ness. And I apologise for bringing this up, because this is not pleasant to talk about, but this means that Ukrainians are spoken about as being cancerous, as being Russians that are somehow afflicted by tumours. What do you do to a tumour? You destroy it. You don't attempt to reform it, because it's on the out, it's not a part of us. That's the philosophy, again, if you can call it that, that lies at the very heart of the Russian youth re-education project. So there is extremism at the very heart of government.



Peter Pomerantsev: I think we're starting to see very strong patterns, from the Islamic states in Raqqa and this Russian model that Ian is describing. Jaroslava, your study is so important because it's really at the edges of this project in terms of closeness to conflict and closeness to war. How do you see these models working in practice? How effective are they? How are they changing since the start of the full-scale invasion?

Jaroslava Barbieri: I think that in terms of effectiveness, it might seem a self-evident point, but the effectiveness of these indoctrination programmes will vary greatly depending on whether they start targeting a six year-old kid who's lived under occupation since they were six years old, or perhaps someone in their late teens whose identity was formed under an independent Ukraine and has lived as a young adult under occupation. That's important to stress when we talk about rebuilding the fabric of society that Russia has destroyed after victory. It will essentially be a question around national security; how to rebuild that fabric that's been torn apart through those indoctrination programmes.

It's interesting to look at how they evolved, say, in the occupied territory since 2014 versus 2022. I think that a key element here is looking at the implementers. One of your initial questions was, how do you square the circle between having some Russian curators who ultimately are very cynical, in understanding what these indoctrination programmes are all about. The implementers in the occupied areas are very often warlords who are ideologically committed to those narratives that the Russian state largely exploits cynically. I just want to mention that a couple of days ago I saw a video of one of the first self-proclaimed leaders of the occupied areas around Donetsk. He was saying after 'our victory', as he put it,

'We won't be able to kill all the Ukrainians who hate us. We don't hate Ukrainians, and we won't be able to kill all of them; we'll have to re-educate them.' That sense of re-education as a tool to change people's sense of belonging is actually a reflection of a violent, militaristic desire to change entire nations. Which goes back to the initial point of how they paid attention to it from the very beginning, when their objectives around Donbas were not quite as clear-cut they are now.

So I think that point on extremism is very important, because the way they're promoting these extremist narratives is that they're framing them as instruments of liberalisation. If you're obedient, if you buy into these narratives, that's when you're free. If you question them, that's when you're mentally enslaved by an ideology that was imposed on you. So that's how dangerous they are in that respect.

Peter Pomerantsev: That's very interesting. In some of my journalistic work, I've looked at cults, and part of my interest in propaganda came from studying cults. That's exactly what a cult will do. They'll say, 'You're only free here. You have to tear yourself away from your family. This is the only place where you are truly yourself', when in actual fact you've given yourself completely to the cult leader. It's an inversion of freedom and slavery.



What can one do about this? We're talking about something that's not just for one generation; it can be trans-generational, as Sophie said, and sometimes the next generation is even worse. Somewhere where others have been dehumanised, which is normalised murder, which clearly has – and I think this is a motif in our conversation – death, murder and destruction as its goal. It's not just there for no reason. War and destruction and murder are part of it. And it acts like a cult can act. What experience internationally do we have of fighting this?

Janine di Giovanni: So we know that Russia is using these children, even if they were deported with false promises, like, 'We're bringing you to a better place, we're taking you away from the Nazis', as an insurance policy, basically, so that when the war ends, they're still there. They will have this ideology, and it will carry on. There are no good wars, and there is no way for wars to end without some kind of deep trauma in society. Getting back to your point about rebuilding the fabric of society, one way that it can end better is through transitional justice. So in Sierra Leone, even though there was this absolutely brutal war, it ended relatively well because they were able to establish court systems of justice and also to rehabilitate these kids. Rehabilitation of victims of indoctrination, as you know from your work with cults, is incredibly difficult, because you can't erase trauma. Trauma is never erased. What we know from all of our studies, from Judith Herman, and all of the great academics working on trauma, is that we can work with it.

So eventually, when these kids come back, they're going to have to be re-educated into Ukrainian life and Ukrainian society will need to rebuild. The basis of that is transitional justice. Courts. Without that, any kind of ending, any kind of peace treaty...

Peter Pomerantsev: That's so interesting, because I'd think about ideology, but you're saying justice is important. Why?

Janine di Giovanni: Absolutely. We've got to take this to the courts. That's what we do at The Reckoning Project anyway. We're going to take these heinous acts that are happening and we're going to bring justice. Otherwise, how do you live with this level of deportation? 16,000 kids now? We have to, in some way, give them something pragmatic, a way of rebuilding the society. I use the example of Sierra Leone because it is used as a case study of a country that was in a brutal war, and they did have some kind of peaceful transition. Bosnia did not end well. We look at Bosnia now, because the Dayton Peace accords were so divisive that it will return to conflict in, I don't know if it'll be a decade or two decades, but it will. That's why I think we have to ensure that a way of coping with this is to bring it to the legal level, which is what we're trying to do by documenting it. Knowing,

understanding what they're doing, but getting the testimonies of the kids for us is really crucial: we need to understand what exactly happened to them, what they were told. Only then will we be able to establish centres where we will rehabilitate them. I hate that word actually, rehabilitation.

Peter Pomerantsev: Of course a real reckoning with the past and justice is something that didn't play out after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And clearly that was a very important juncture that was missed in many dimensions.

We only have eight minutes left. I kind of want to ask more questions to my other panellists, but I'm aware that people might have questions from the floor.



Questioner: The question is chiefly to Janine, but also to anyone else who has data on this. How much do we know about what has actually happened to the children? Where are they? Are they still in groups? One hears about 'adoptions' by Russian families. What percentage of them also were from orphanages? And are they still in their institutions? Did the staff go with them and so on? I'd be interested to know how much we actually know. My second question is, do we think they're being held hostage in effect, in the Soviet tradition of the 30s, for the good behaviour of their families? Are they being used basically to pacify the newly occupied areas?

Janine di Giovanni: I'll give you the example of one of our cases. There were three children in Mariupol who were leaving with their father. They were taken at a checkpoint. The father was taken into a filtration system, and the kids were then taken away from him. They were first put on a bus and went to the occupied territories. From there, they went to Rostov. From Rostov, they were put on a plane. They were only on one plane. We know some children have been put on two or three planes, to go to the far east of Russia. These kids were put in an actual orphanage. They were told they were going to be adopted and they would not see their father for seven or eight years. Somehow the eldest kid got hold of a phone. He called his father's boss, who told him his dad was in Latvia. It ended up with the father driving to Moscow, getting the kids, and they're now in Latvia.

Yale has done extensive work at the Conflict Observatory, using satellite imagery to try to pinpoint where the kids are. Some of them are in institutions. We've got testimonies from kids that they're not being fed properly, they're not being washed, they're not allowed to call, they're not allowed to get cell phones to call their families. Some are, but most aren't. When we talk to our legal team, we believe the defence that Putin and the Russian state will use is that they will say they're not prisoners, that any parent can come and get them at any time. That will be

their defence. But the fact is there, that a lot of them can't communicate with their parents. The other thing is that many of the kids are under five years old. They don't know how to contact their parents. And we know that the Ukrainian institutional system not only took kids who were orphans, but kids who were disabled, or whose parents were alcoholics or drug addicts. They could leave their kids in these institutions. Some of them are unable to communicate even their names.

So the figure of 16,000, which is used by Yale – and Jara could probably back this up – we're unclear on it. I think there are probably more, because so many of the institutions were emptied. This year what we're going to do – the German and Swedish governments have kindly given us grants to do this – is to dive very deep to try to establish where they are, possibly using help from activists who can work with us. That's basically the task we have ahead of us. And to find out how we get them back. There are amazing Ukrainian NGOs working right now to actually bring the kids back. That, of course, is the ultimate goal – to get them back to Ukraine.



Peter Pomerantsev: I think we only have a minute left, but I wanted to ask our other guests – Ian, Jara, Sophie – very briefly, what is the direction for fighting this indoctrination? Janine has talked about justice, which hadn't really occurred to me as a step in undermining, and drawing a line between the past and the future, and normalising returning to values. Which directions would you think about? Is it about counter propaganda? Where do we even start given the depth of the problem?

Sophie Oksanen: This might not be the answer to your question, but I started to think about something we actually didn't talk about: the classic thing of victim blaming, blaming the children and saying they're free to leave even though it's clear that they can't leave just like that. If you think about children who then get back home, I think it's important for the world and the international media to understand that they're the victims, and the victims are never to blame. I have the feeling that the outside world might not understand the limitations of a person who's alone.

Peter Pomerantsev: So it's about justice, but also returning language to its proper meaning. It's both justice in terms of rights, but also, in a system that has subverted the idea of freedom, has said that slavery is freedom essentially, and called the victims the perpetrators, restoring language to meaning is a sort of justice as well. Ian, Jara, very briefly, what are the directions for us to head in?

Ian Garner: The bad news is we need to act now. Waiting five years or ten years for the war to end and Russia to go quiet is not going to be good enough, because we have the ticking time bomb of that nine year old or 12 year old. But the great news is that if Russia can so convincingly use social media to influence children, to give them opportunities to find a sense of belonging within this extremist identity, then we can do the same. We can be in their social media spaces, interrupting, disrupting, and most importantly of all, giving children alternative narratives about the self that pull them away from this very dangerous form of Russian identity and towards a pluralism that is much more accepted. It's not going to be easy, but it can be done.

Jaroslava Barbieri: I think we're at a turning point. Just like World War II was the trigger for formulating concepts such as genocide and crimes against humanity, we were discussing this morning how, shockingly, there's no legal framework for criminally prosecuting the crime of indoctrination. So I think it's the moment for acting on that intellectual boldness and understanding that we need to find mechanisms to formalise that. And that's also about linking a phenomenon that's hard to capture, such as indoctrination, with a very tangible phenomenon such as deportation, or militarisation, or physical abuse of children when they're interned in these camps. I think that's the next step, creating these mechanism to make sure that when these crimes happen in the future, it gets more and more difficult.



Peter Pomerantsev: Well, I think today we've taken a step towards that. It's very clear to anyone listening to this what the difference is between education and persuasion, which are legitimate things in in any democracy, and what we're calling indoctrination. Maybe it needs a new word, but the elements we've gone through – deportation, splitting from family, dehumanisation, murder – are clearly not normal education. It's something very different and we have to fight with every possible lever to stop it. Thank you very much.





Colonial Discourse in Russian Literature: How We (Mis)understood the 'Russian Soul'

Participants: Elif Batuman, Ewa Thompson (digital), Oksana Zabuzhko and Charlotte Higgins (chair)

Charlotte Higgins: Dobryy vechir. Hello everybody. My name is Charlotte Higgins and I'm the chief culture writer at The Guardian newspaper in London. It's my absolute honour and pleasure to be here with you. This is my third reporting trip to Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and I've been so honoured and enriched and inspired by reporting on Ukrainian culture, writing, art and resistance for the last few months. So thank you very much indeed for having me here with you.

To briefly introduce the topic of today's discussion: in the year 2000, the year of Putin's ascent to power, Ewa Thompson, Professor of Slavic studies, published her book, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, which demonstrated the role of Russian writers in building the myth of the Russian Empire. Why have literary critics failed to see Russia as a colonial power? How does Russian imperialist discourse differ from colonial discourse in western literary traditions? What role can Ukraine have in helping people re-read Russian literature through a post-colonial lens? That's our starting point, though I'm well aware of the paradox of discussing Russian literature at this wonderful Ukrainian festival in the middle of a full-scale invasion of the country.

I suppose my own personal confession should be that I fear it's many years since I've read Russian literature, although I have, in my youth. And, at the moment, my main concern is reading Ukrainian literature and trying to learn Ukrainian and read books about Ukrainian culture and history. And, without disrespect to my own profession, I've learned so much from that process, more perhaps than from reading journalism. So I think we should take it as read before embarking on the panel that one of our projects can and should be reading widely, reading beyond the Russian canon, reading Ukrainian literature. That being said, Russian literature does exist, and what are we to do with it?

It seems to me there are a few possible avenues for this discussion. We can think about what the effect of Russian imperialist discourse has been on the literatures of Russia and the Soviet Union's former colonial possessions. What effect has this imperial discourse, which is perhaps swathed in this amorphous romantic idea of the 'Russian soul', had on readers in the west? And how do readers develop Professor Ewa Thompson's ideas further, to adopt a mature, post-colonial, critical framework for Russian literature? Are there ways of reading Russian literature against the grain of its prevailing imperialist discourse? I suppose also a question for me is what is this mysterious Russian soul that people talk about? It seems to fall apart in my hands whenever I try to consider what it really means.

To briefly introduce our incredibly distinguished panel. Ewa Thompson, who joins us online, is Professor of Slavic Studies Emerita and former chairperson of the Department of German and Slavic Studies at Rice University. Her book *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, published in 2000, marked her out as the matriarch of post-colonial literary studies in Ukraine, and had a huge influence on readers, here and abroad. It's a delight to welcome you to Lviv Book Forum.

We have the great Oksana Zabuzhko here, in three dimensions. She's a Ukrainian writer, poet, essayist, and one of the most energetic and passionate voices communicating on behalf of Russian literature abroad. Her works have been translated into more than 20 languages. Her most recently translated works, I think, are *Your Ad Could Go Here: Stories*, and *Selected Poems*, published in 2020. It's wonderful to have you with us, Oksana.

We also have Elif Batuman. Elif's first novel, *The Idiot*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the Women's Prize. Her sequel, *Either/Or*, was published in 2022. She's been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 2010. Her essay 'Rereading Russian Classics in the Shadow of the Ukraine War', published in January of this year, was widely read, here in Ukraine and on both sides of the Atlantic, and caused a lively debate. It's also great to have you with us, Elif. The Georgian poet Paata Shamugia was also to have joined us but he won't be able to, as he's had technical problems.

I want to address the first question to Oksana. You wrote an amazing, provocative and strong essay in *The Times Literary Supplement* in the UK, shortly after the atrocities of Bucha were revealed. You wrote in that essay, 'It was Russian literature that wove the camouflage net for Russia's tanks.' Your contention in that essay, if I read it correctly, was that if only Russian literature had been read more attentively by westerners, and not only westerners, what has happened now could have been foreseen. You grew up in a Soviet education system, no doubt imbued and immersed and marinated in Russian classics. Can you give me

a sense of what attitudes you were encouraged to adopt to the Russian literary canon in your Soviet education? And how have you succeeded in disengaging yourself, perhaps, from those prevailing readings? I know you were also one of the first people to review Professor Ewa Thompson's book when it was published in Ukraine, so perhaps you could talk about that experience as well.

Oksana Zabuzhko: Thank you very much. I'll try to summarise as briefly as I can. I have to confess that, like all Ukrainians of my generation, I still know Russian literature better than Ukrainian literature. That's the doubtful privilege of what Derek Walcott in one of his poems dubbed a 'solid colonial education'. I've had a first-class solid colonial education. Yet, unlike most of my counterparts, I had the advantage of coming from a family of Ukrainian intellectuals who were specialists in Ukrainian literature. So, I got a home education in Ukrainian studies from the time of my school years. It was a kind of clandestine education. Unlike Derek Walcott, I knew I was not just this indigenous intellectual who's supposed to learn the superior culture of the white people to be able, one day, to become their equal. I knew that I did have a culture of my own, a rich literature, but that most of this precious heritage had been hidden from me and from all Ukrainians. It's kind of dangerous. Most of these books were banned, most of their authors executed at the time, and their names deleted from our textbooks. The portrayal of Ukrainian literature in Soviet education was very miserable. It was a typical case for post-colonial studies.

I'm very honoured and privileged to share the same panel with Ewa Thompson, who is venerated in post-colonial studies in Ukraine. She's had many successors among Ukrainian literary critics. This instrument, the post-colonial reading of Russian literature, was something I inherited from my upbringing. I was studying Russian culture all my life in the Soviet times, and also studying Ukrainian culture for myself. That was not an easy task – you had to find the books, to hide the books you found...It's still not an easy task. After years of independence, Ukrainians are still struggling to fully reappropriate their cultural and literary heritage. The series of Ukrainian classics is now becoming the most trendy in Ukrainian publishing. This year they'll hit the stage, all the publishers are saying.

So I had these kind of double spectacles, maybe even triple spectacles, because I also had Polish at home. I grew up with the belief that a true Ukrainian intellectual had to know Russian and Polish, because a considerable part of our history was happening in those languages and, as an intellectual, you had to have access to all that. So these double spectacles helped me to see what for an ordinary western reader, admiring Gogol or Bulgakov or Tolstoy or Chekhov (I love Chekhov myself, you know, I wrote a long essay about him) might not have been as transparent as they became after Ewa Thompson turned the light on.

For me, as a Ukrainian, this colonial attitude, or imperial contempt, towards indigenous people, local people, that's present somewhere in the landscape of nearly every Russian writer, has been visible. I'm sensitive to the kinds of things you might not notice. By way of illustration, I can mention Bulgakov's *The White Guard*. It's presented in the English translation more than once as a book about Kyiv. In fact it's a book about the Russian civil war in Kyiv. For me...[sound cuts out for a couple of sentences]...caricature of the Skoropadskyi Hetman, and of the entire indigenous population. In my favourite example, in chapter six, the protagonist goes to Saint Sophia Square, when the whole of Kyiv runs there to meet Petliura and see the parade of troops of the Ukrainian People's Republic. It's so gorgeous. To fully understand it, you really have to watch Russian propaganda films now. To be able to understand the all-permeating hatred and venom of this deeply hurt character who hates this whole city for refusing to be Russian. Because since his childhood, he's been taught to believe the city is his, that he's the king in the castle. And now, all of a sudden, God knows from where, all these crowds appear and are happily cheering Petliura. And the church service in Saint Sophia is in Ukrainian, well; that's something like an apocalypse for him. He hates Saint Sophia. All of these metaphors, like the small bells like dogs, and all of this envy for this city, which never was his but which he always wanted to own.

Bulgakov was not a Kyivean writer; he was born in Kyiv because he was the son of a tsarist, a Russian priest, and the Russian church was encouraging newcomers from greater Russia to come to Kyiv. They were getting extra payments, allowances for 'obrusieniekraia', the Russification of the region. So those were the official tsarist politics, and his father was working as a censor. It's like Kipling, who was born in Bombay. The difference is, and here we come to the difference between Russian imperialism and non-Russian imperialism, that Rudyard Kipling never claimed, as far as I know, that Bombay was an English city, or that India was part of England. He left Bombay, like Bulgakov left Kyiv, but without any bad feelings towards Bombay for being India.

Charlotte Higgins: That's a complicated question. Maybe let's not get into ideas that the British Empire was better, because I'm not sure that's a very good idea! Tell me, from your readers' perspective, what effect Ewa's book had when it was published in Ukraine. I know somebody who bought copies of that book to circulate among all his friends.

Oksana Zabuzhko: I know you have to interrupt me because the Bulgakov sentences are going to last into infinity, but just one moment to finish the previous point about Bulgakov. The same events were described in Ukrainian literature by Pavlo Tychyna in a long and beautiful poem, 'Golden Echoes', sometimes translated as 'The Golden Roar'. Tychyna's text was banned until independence. In the Soviet

times, it was not known. When you juxtapose these two texts, when you read 'The Golden Roar', or 'Golden Echoes', and you read chapter six of *The White Guard*, you really know where you are. You have a collision of two cultures, two worlds, two views, and you have these optics, for which otherwise you'd need the methods of postcolonial studies, which is where Ewa Thompson's book really became an eye-opener for many. For Ukrainian scholars, it was like, 'Wow, that's it!' So when it appeared, translated into Ukrainian, I immediately announced it on my blog. I had a blog on the most popular national resource of the time, *Ukrainska Pravda*. I think it helped the popularity of the book, and now it's considered a classic of literary criticism. Scholars who study Russian-Ukrainian relations now all pay homage to Ewa Thompson in their works, and rightly so.



Charlotte Higgins: Thank you. And with that great fanfare, Professor Thompson, Ewa, I would love to turn to you. I'm curious as to what led you down the road of starting this process of reading Russian literature through the lens of imperialism. I've seen that Edward Said was lurking in the background there. I'm also curious about the reception the book received, because I can't imagine it went down terribly well with certain professors of Russian literature, the guardians of the flame. Could you tell me a bit about that?

Ewa Thompson: First of all, I'd like to thank Oksana for her warm words and her ability to develop this picture that she did for us, of Ukrainian literature being basically sidelined by Russian invaders. How did I get to write about it? You're right, Charlotte, I was reading Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. And at some point, I realised that what Said says about British literature and French literature could well be applied to Russian literature. Why hadn't it been applied to Russian literature? I can give you five reasons why not.

First of all, the geographical remoteness of Russia. Today we have quick communication, electronic and otherwise, and we perhaps don't feel that Russia is so remote from Europe, but it is. In the days when the literature that I've written about was written, Russia was remote. People reading Russian literature in the west simply didn't have the opportunity to check, to go there and see for themselves how things were being done in Russia. So remoteness was one reason. It was simply something that we didn't know much about, we couldn't write about. That's why, at first, nobody would even think of thinking of Russian literature as a colonialist literature.

The second reason would be that Russian colonies were not overseas. They were contiguous to ethnic Russia. This was something that completely fooled a lot of scholars for many generations, because it seemed that Russia was just rectifying its borders by attaching these places to Russia. In the 19th century, the Russian empire was increasing its land possessions by 55 square miles per day. Do you realise how much land that means Russians attached to Russia? That was all colonies, it was not Russia. That was somebody else's land, somebody else's culture being suppressed, and Russian culture being introduced instead.

Here we come to the third reason for us in the west not being able to notice, at first, that Russian literature is colonialist. Russians renamed the territories they conquered. They renamed them Russia. And then, when Napoleon was invading the Russian Empire, we heard, and we still do, that he was invading Russia. False. He was not invading Russia. He was invading Russia's colonies. The entire belt of nations in the west of Russia was a Russian colony. And this particular colony, or colonies rather, were trying to get rid of Moscow's domination; they didn't want

to be part of Russia. Russians tried to Russify it, and Oksana rightly said there's a difference here between Western colonialism and Russian colonialism. Russian colonialism has tried to take away the nationality and identity from the peoples it has conquered, whereas in the west, the British let the inhabitants of India be Indians, remain what they were before. So we have this idea of conquering territory, Russifying it, taking away the identity of the territory, and then saying, 'Look, Russia is the biggest country in the world.' You can show the country as being totally unique in the history of the world.

The fourth reason, connected to the third reason, is a very subtle kind of thing. Russia and the Soviet Union paid a lot of money to western colonies to help them to be free of the colonial yoke of Great Britain, France, Holland and Germany. How did they do that? They sponsored the underground movements, the terrorist organisations, and they managed to help a lot of movements, in Africa in particular, to gain power in a given territory. A good example is South Africa. Did you know that when Russia invaded Ukraine, and there was a vote in the United Nations to condemn Russia for the invasion, the Republic of South Africa did not vote to condemn it. I think they said 'present', but they didn't vote. Why? Because the African National Congress, which presently holds power in South Africa, has been sponsored financially by Russia for many years. They have gratitude that they want to display towards the Russians, and they simply couldn't afford, in these circumstances, to vote against Russia, to declare Russia an invader. A lot of actions like that made Russian colonialism invisible. One more example here. In the 18th century, Voltaire, who was extremely popular and considered almost somebody who couldn't make mistakes in his thinking, wrote a number of pamphlets criticising Poland. He presented Poland as a backward and unenlightened country, where there was no freedom of religion, as opposed to Russia, where there was freedom and where Enlightenment rules were implemented. Guess what? Catherine the Great paid Voltaire handsome sums for writing those pamphlets. And those pamphlets were written when the partitions of Poland were taking place. You can guess the end of the story by yourselves, right? This was pure corruption. And when a Polish scholar named Henry Glebovsky, from Jagiellonian University, went to Moscow and tried to find documents and details, to write about it, he was told that it was still a state secret. After two and a half centuries, the corruption that Russia initiated is a state secret. Imagine how many other such things are hidden in Moscow archives, concerning Ukraine, concerning Lithuania, concerning all those colonies to the west of Russia.

So all of these factors have worked against Russia being seen as a colonial empire. One more reason. There are post-colonial scholars, those from Pakistan and India play a prominent role – We all know the names of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Leela Gandhi, and so forth – who are adamantly opposed to the idea

that white-on-white colonialism exists. They believe that colonialism is only when the white man goes to the men of colour and appropriates their country. Russia is a counter-example, because Russia's colonies, certainly to the west of ethnic Russia, were all white people, Caucasus. Very few colonies of Russia were inhabited by people who are not white. And this idea that colonialism can only happen in countries that are non-white has held many people back from noticing what Russia has been doing.

So Russia has basically got away with creating an enormous empire. It's enlarged itself to the west, the east, the south and the north. As I said, 55 square miles per day. Can you imagine what an enormous territory that is? And it's still called Russia by people in Moscow. So these are the reasons why we're so late coming to the understanding that Russia was a colonial empire.

You're right, Charlotte, that I received a lot of negative comments about my book. People simply couldn't believe I could approach writers like Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy with the accusation that they were colonialists. These are the very great Christian writers. If we have time, I could go through at least part of War and Peace to show how this colonialist gaze is embedded in the novel, which is still a great novel, by the way. I don't want to suggest that Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky or any number of other people are bad writers, not at all. I think these are the greatest novels ever written. That doesn't mean a great novel doesn't have in it the elements of colonial appropriation.

So, if you look at War and Peace, at the start you see a party being held in St. Petersburg. Who's at that party? The very top of Russian society, not just nobility, but the very highest aristocracy. That's very important, because we frequently think that the Rostov or Bolkonsky or Bezukhov families were typical of Russia. In fact, they're completely separate from real Russian society. This is not how Russian families act and behave. At this party, we meet the characters that we'll be seeing throughout the novel. We meet Pierre Bezukhov, a sympathetic guy by all measures. We meet the Bolkonskys, we meet the Rostovs, not necessarily in person, but being discussed. We meet the women of the novel. So we meet a group of people we like.

Then the next part of War and Peace describes those people going to war. Not the women, of course, but the men, Bezukhov, Bolkonsky and Rostov. It's a natural thing for us to sympathise with, to be on the side of those people. We're not on the side of Napoleon, because we've just met those people in the novel and we like them. So, obviously, they're in the right. There's a description of the Russian army and Russian people as we get into the war part that, again, reinforces the sympathy that we have for the Russian side. How does it do that? Consider the

descriptions of Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon. Tsar Alexander is presented by the narrator as a sort of knight on a white horse. He's adored, worshipped by his subjects. Nicholas Rostov, the narrator, tells us that he feels, looking at Alexander, that he'd do anything for him: if Alexander wanted him to walk through fire, he would; if Alexander wanted him to kill a thousand people, including women and children, he would. So, we get the idea that people worship Alexander, that he's truly the person that Russians adore. Then we have the description of Napoleon. Napoleon is presented as short, fat and stupid. We know that Napoleon was short and fat, but he was also a genius. That's a very important element of Napoleon: he was a military genius who actually won one of the most important and difficult battles in military history, the Battle of Austerlitz. In the book, Napoleon is presented as someone who didn't really plan that battle. But he did. I don't know that I have time to describe the battle itself, but it was quite amazingly performed because the Russian forces were on a hill, together with the Austrian forces, and Napoleon's army was in the valley. Obviously, the Russians had the power to go down on the enemy. And Napoleon had fewer people in his army than the Russians and Austrians combined. One piece of information that Tolstoy does not include in War and Peace is who the commander-in-chief of the Russian and Austrian army was. Because they had to have the same commander-in-chief. That was Kutuzov. In other words, the spectacular failure of Kutuzov is glossed over, and later on, Kutuzov is described as a great strategist who finally defeats Napoleon. Of course, what actually defeated Napoleon was the Russian climate in the winter.

Anyway, here we are in Austerlitz. Napoleon tells his people to charge up the hill, which was totally unexpected, by the Russians and by the Austrians, because who does such things? That's suicidal. Napoleon, as a leader, as commander of the army, apparently risked the loss. That's what being a genius strategist is. You do things that nobody else would do, and you win. So he charged up the hill. He introduced confusion in the joint Russian and Austrian army. He encircled them and lost fewer people in that battle than Russians and Austrians did. So here you have this idea of describing Russian leaders and the Russian Army as great, as winning, which was not quite true in reality. In reality, the Russian Army turned out to be a failure, the Russian command was faulty, and the battle was lost in a very spectacular way.

This is an introduction to us thinking that Russia is a truly great country and a great nation, because maybe they lost at Austerlitz, but then they won in Moscow. And by the way, Austerlitz is not an Austrian city. That's a classic case of appropriating somebody's land and renaming it. You know where Austerlitz is today? It's in the Czech Republic. It's called Slavkov. So, that's what colonialism does, in this case Russian colonialism and Austrian colonialism as well. It changes

names, it introduces a different culture on top of the native culture, it tries to bury the native culture, to remove it from sight. And, eventually, it tries to Russify the entire territory. As we move on in the novel, we see that this pattern of glorifying the Russian Army and the Russian people is very clearly imposed on us. As I already said, when Napoleon invaded, he did not invade Russia. He invaded Russia's colonies, which, by the way, were very much on the side of Napoleon.



Charlotte Higgins: Could I pause you there, Professor Thompson? Thank you for that wonderful close reading of the Battle of Austerlitz scene. I just want to bring in Elif at this point. Elif, one of the things that Ewa said in her statement just now was that these are the best novels in the world. We may agree or disagree with that, but is there a way of continuing to read these novels, but through a post-colonial framework, through the spectacles of imperialism, that actually might be an enriching process rather than a diminishing process? With that in mind, I wanted to ask you about your reading of these novels, which, as you described in that brilliant New Yorker essay, has, I think, changed quite radically over the past year or so. How has that been for you? Have you found a way of reading Russian literature? Have you detected countercurrents in the prevailing imperial discourse of Russian literature that allow you to see Tolstoy and Dostoevsky sometimes subtly working against prevailing imperial discourse?

Elif Batuman: Thank you for that question. I can't say how happy and honoured I am to be here on a panel with Oksana Zabuzhko and Ewa Thompson. I'm going to start with how I got interested in Russian literature, which was in the context of my upbringing. I was born in 1977 in the US. My parents came from Turkey as scientists. I was a student in the 90s, and the 90s in the US was a time when even the political left was extremely apolitical. It's something I didn't realise until later, but I internalised a lot of ideas that I now find very suspect. There was the idea of the end of history, that democracy had already won, the famous book by Francis Fukuyama that said all we have to do is sort of sit back and wait to reap the rewards of global freedom and the end of racism. I believed that, in a way, because it was the trajectory of my family. My parents saw themselves, I think, as being post-political and post-national, scientists who could go to the place in the world with the best science and study that, and it was not a political decision for them, it was about science. I didn't learn to think about the politics of which country has the best science until much later. I also believed in the idea of meritocracy, which sounds nice, that if you work hard, your quality is always eventually recognised in a fair society. That's something we really believed about the US, that it was somewhere where the best things rise to the top.

So I saw myself as someone very free from ideological constraints. I grew up in an atheistic household, the school I went to was proud of not imposing political views. There was an idea that literature, in particular, was free of politics, and that it was sort of small-minded and petty to have political readings of literature. I basically believed that when I encountered Russian literature. I fell in love with Anna Karenina when I was a teenager, for reasons that actually my therapist wants to unpack, but that's going to be several years, probably... later, over drinks, perhaps!

So that was my situation, and it started to change in 2016. There was an attempted coup in Turkey. It was the Brexit year. Donald Trump won the Republican nomination in the US, and then he became president, after he'd said those preposterous things about, you know, grabbing women by the pussy... And it was just a nightmare. It was like, 'What is reality?' Meanwhile, that year, I'd also fallen in love with a woman for the first time, after dating men my whole life. That was really a huge ideological change for me. As a writer, I was always very interested in these heteronormative kinds of stories, and I sort of assumed that something biological was happening. I didn't think about cultural determinants. Basically, I saw myself as someone who was completely free, and that I was lucky. The whole of the rest of the world, everyone in every other country was brainwashed, but here, in America, we were free to choose what we wanted, and I'd freely chosen Russian literature; I'd freely chosen this life where I was pursuing masochistic relationships with a man. And none of this was anything to do with ideology or patriarchy or cultural structures. And then, in 2016, I started reading queer theory and second-wave feminism for the first time, and understanding the extent to which there's overt indoctrination, which everyone in this room knows really well, in which you're directly fed propaganda. And there's a different kind of propaganda that works through depoliticisation, through making you think that liberation has already happened and now it's just time to appreciate art and kick back and read these great novels that have nothing to do with politics.

But books like those are actually vehicles of... Anna Karenina has to get run over by a train because she's in love with this guy. And I had thought of that book as... not feminist, but I'd thought it's so clear that Anna is smarter than Vronsky, so Tolstoy saw that. And so, it's critical of patriarchy, but it's still, you know, her love for this mediocre guy causes her to get run over by a train and that makes it a great work of literature. And I kind of perpetuated that in my life. I would see that the guy wasn't really worth it, but it was kind of, that doesn't matter, that's not the point of the story. The point of the story is doomed love.

So then, fast forward to 2019. I was on this whole journey of rereading Russian literature and thinking about the ways it had indoctrinated me in heteronorma-

tivity. And in 2019, I had the great opportunity to visit Ukraine for the first time. I was a guest of LvivBook Forum then, which was such an incredible experience. I was also a guest of Pen Ukraine, and I think it was Tetyana Teren, who I believe is here, I know she's moderating events, who told me there was one book I had to read, which was Oksana Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. And that book completely blew my mind. It was so amazing. All the different layers of all the different kinds of oppression. You could say, 'This is a book about imperialist oppression', or 'No, it's about gender.'

When I came to Ukraine, I was extremely ignorant. Nobody here knew who I was and I was presented as, 'This is Elif Batuman, she's an American writer, she wrote a novel called *The Idiot*. So people were like, 'Oh, interesting. You must really like Dostoevsky. And here's how we feel about Dostoevsky now. We don't really like his novels because we recognise the same rhetoric that's in the fake news that's justifying the seizure of Crimea.' And I was like, 'I never thought of that.' My first thought was, 'Of course, in this country people feel that way because they're not objective.' Then I thought, 'Wait, who's objective, me? What is this idea that anyone can be objective about literature and that there's any objective truth to literature?' I'd been on this whole journey of rethinking novels through a feminist lens and it was really *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* that made me think, 'Of course those novels are reinforcing heteronormativity and patriarchal norms, of course they're enforcing imperialistic norms, and it's just something I haven't thought about.'

So then I went home, and in my further course of belated reading of stuff that I should have read in the 90s, that I read instead in the 2010s, I read *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said for the first time. I'd read *Orientalism*, Said's book about the Orient, in college, but *Culture and Imperialism* completely rocked my world. It has these very famous arguments, and it was hard for me to reconstruct what it was that I didn't know, because once you see it, it seems so obvious. There's a very famous reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, a novel I'd read multiple times. The patriarch of *Mansfield Park*, the estate where all the important things in the book happen, is this kind of aspirational character, mentor to Fanny, who's the young ingénue who goes there. He owns a sugar plantation in Antigua, and he goes there to take care of some business and then he comes back. And through the dates, Said proves that the reason this character went to Antigua was to put down a slave revolt on the sugar plantation, and that this actually parallels a movement in the colonial order in Antigua. Said shows, using just a few points in the text, that the order in *Mansfield Park*, that's kind of aspirational, and that moves the plot of Jane Austen's novel, is directly dependent on the slave economy.

Then I thought, I've never heard this about Russian literature, and I immediately started going back in my head and thinking about Vronsky going to Serbia

at the end of *Anna Karenina*, and Tatiana's general... And then I thought, I didn't remember the Antigua plantation, so how much stuff must there be that I don't remember from the Russian novels? And that's when I found *Imperial Knowledge*, and I couldn't believe such a book existed. She goes into who Tatiana's general was and who Karenin was, the fact that Karenin was based on this guy, Valuev, who was instrumental in suppressing Ukrainian publications and the Ukrainian language... And just how intimately these themes are tied together.

This was before the full-scale invasion, and when the full-scale invasion happened, I just felt completely sickened and had the feeling that people knew this was going to happen, and they told me it was going to happen, and I knew it too. I remember that PEN Ukraine immediately proposed a boycott of Russian books, and there was a sort of an intra-PEN argument, where PEN Germany said we have to keep our priorities straight; we boycott financial institutions, we don't boycott literature, the enemy is Putin, not Pushkin. I saw that argument get a lot of traction in the US, and there were a lot of people who I consider smart, enlightened people, who were saying, 'This is such a tragedy, that literature is getting dragged into politics.' I saw this conversation happening and it felt like a constant gaslighting of Ukraine or the Ukrainian geopolitical position, to say that Putin has nothing to do with Pushkin. That's not to slight how much I loved Pushkin's work, but it's a clear connection. So that's what made me want to write the *New Yorker* piece.



Charlotte Higgins: That's a brilliant answer. You described so beautifully there the thing that happens when you start to see the invisible ideological frameworks that are operating on your world view, and what happens when you take a different lens and look at the thing that you've regarded as being as natural as grass. That sort of universalism that you talk about in the article. Can I bring you back in, Ewa? I've got a very specific question for you, which is about a thing that you identify in your book: you detect another process going on in Russian literature, which is about fear. There's not just an appropriation of surrounding peoples and an othering of them, and an appropriation of them as Russian at the same time; there's also a process of fear of being othered in Russian literature. To quote your book, 'Fear of being othered is always present in Russian literature. In Pushkin's time, it was not yet certain that Russia would succeed in overcoming the West's taxonomising gaze. Powerful voices were still ready to treat Russia in ways not dissimilar from those adopted by Pushkin in regard to the Caucasus.' So there's a process where Russian literature is afraid of being regarded as primitive or inadequate. And that's part of the process of adopting the ideological clothing that we're all discussing.



Ewa Thompson (on screen)

Ewa Thompson: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Charlotte Higgins: I just wondered if you could expand, briefly, on this idea of part of the process of what's happening, and part of the ideological process, being Russian writers being fearful of being regarded as inferior by, say, French writers, French intellectuals, British intellectuals. So there's not only an assertion of power, but also a kind of cringe and a fear of looking 'eastern', or primitive, or distant from the intellectual centres of western Europe.

Ewa Thompson: There is that, definitely. I'm thinking about Turheniev, who was a really westernised Russian, if you can put it that way, probably the most westernised of Russian writers. And yet, he was regarded by [unintelligible], as 'this strange man from God knows where.' In other words, many Russian writers were aware of the fact that they were looked upon by western writers, western societies, western intellectuals, as aliens, as something perhaps not quite up to the standards of Europe. Yes, they were afraid of that. And maybe the insistence on putting down those nations, tribes and territories that Russia conquered was prompted, partly, by this feeling of not being regarded as equal by western writers. If we put down those people, that will make us look equal. That's the way I read it.

So, yes, there are many elements here and there are many, sometimes contradictory, influences on Russian literature, on what writers have written. I would say that, if it were not for the October Revolution, Russia was evolving, and Russia was eventually going to join Europe, for better or worse. But the revolution made Russia again into some alien, lower, un-European country. You can see that in many writers who matured during the Soviet period. I can't speak about the present, because I'm not that familiar with the Russian scene any longer. But I would say that this oscillation between trying to impose one's vision on others, and the fear of being regarded a slower by western intellectuals, is very much part of the Russian psyche.

I would say that this is better understood by people like Ukrainians, who are close to the Russians geographically, than by, say, writers from France or the UK. Those from France or the UK may not notice it because they're looking for other things. But the Russians do still have this feeling of inadequacy, this feeling of, 'I must show up, I must build this palace so that it's at least as good as the French palace or some other palace'. There's very much this uncertainty: who am I really?



Charlotte Higgins: Thank you, Professor Thompson. I think, Oksana, that does speak to some of the things that I know you've thought about in relation to this kind of cringe. It's not just an aggression, it's a defence, perhaps. I would like you to tackle this question, because we're talking to the brilliant audience in the room, but we're also talking to a global audience, online, thanks to Hay Festival. And I still think it's tough for people 'za kordonom', abroad, to get this thing that Elif has been talking about, which is that there's something to do with Pushkin in what's going on now. There is still, as Elif said, the impulse to say, 'There's a thing called the Russian-Ukrainian war now, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. And that's something that Putin's doing. But please don't drag wonderful Russian literature into it. There's politics over here and there's Russian culture over here, and Russian culture is wonderful, leave it alone.' You must have tackled this over and over again. How do you respond to that desire to disengage culture and politics?

Oksana Zabuzhko: I'm grateful to Elif for explaining to us how this whole Fukuyama-like or Fukuyama-fostered mentality has been developing. I always get a kind of cultural shock whenever western interviewers, who've read my work in translation, make the very typical statement, 'Oh, you so interestingly combine the personal and the political.' For me, every time, it's like, 'What? I don't combine anything. The personal is political, the political is personal.' It's all in Aristotle and in Plato. It's in European tradition. Culture is the Greek agora, where we all communicate. A human being is a political zone, a political animal, and everything is political. Language is political, the body is political, the way it's used or misused or manipulated in different cultures. So this idea of dividing literature from politics, I mean, literature is written with words, it contains ideas; every word drags a whole history behind it, and the ideas permeate the thoughts and behaviour of the characters in a very subtle and occasionally perfidious way. I think this very dangerous misunderstanding opens the door for a new totalitarianism. Not Orwell, but a Brave New World type of totalitarianism where we don't know we're in the matrix. Where we all feed the matrix with ourselves, without our awareness.

Coming back to your discussion with Ewa, while you were talking, I thought of something else. The problem is not only about Russian literature, but about Russian culture, the Russian way of doing things. Writing texts is also one of the ways of doing things. You mentioned fear of being othered. I would describe it as fear of otherness in general: a characteristic of imperialism is it's absolutely allergic to otherness. Just a couple of days ago, I happened to read an excerpt from the memoirs of Christina Alchevska, a famous Ukrainian cultural activist and pedagogue of the 19th century, one of those nation-builders that every eastern European nation was boasting at the time. She met Dostoyevsky somewhere in

Europe, and they were conversing about how to liberate peasantry and about the differences between Ukrainian and Russian peasantry, and Alchevska said that Ukrainian peasantry is more advanced because they're more individualistic; they have individual farming, the grown-up son is separated from the family and a woman is treated like a human being, that is a member of the local community, who has her own voice. And Dostoyevsky said something like, 'What's good about that? When the whole family lives together as 'obshchina', then there's unity. Once a grown-up son is separated from them, animosity starts.' So separation, otherness immediately means animosity. And animosity ends up in war. So everyone should be the same. From Lisbon to Vladivostok, the world should look alike.

This fear of differences, this allergy to differences, excludes dialogue. That's something that western readers can't grasp in the Russian classics and, much more dangerously for the fate of humanity, western politics has been failing and keeps on failing to understand in the negotiations with Stalin or Putin or any of the Russian leaders. The total lack of the concept of a dialogue, and the idea that a vertical structure, with a patriarch up there, be it the father of the family or the tsar or Putin, is the only win-win structure. This vertical subjugation goes through the entire texture of society. When we recognise it, we can see it as, I would say, an incurable disease of Russian characters. They all lack action. They lack personality, in fact.

Charlotte Higgins: OK. So, I'm trained in reading imperialist literature; not Russian literature, but Roman literature. Roman literature is quite a handy place to read colonial, imperial literature, because it was written a very long time ago, and we're not currently subjugated, Britain is not currently under the Roman Empire. So there's no skin in the game. And yet it's a fascinating thing to do, to read Virgil's Aeneid, the national epic of Ancient Rome, that contains and lays out and almost codifies Roman imperialist ideology. Dido gets crushed. What I would say is that the reason that poem is interesting is that there are many countervailing currents to the overarching imperialist voice. That's what makes the poem interesting. You can detect the countercurrents. The way the poem undermines itself in terms of that prevailing imperialist voice. So can we get to a point in reading Russian literature where that's possible, to detect those voices, those subaltern voices, inner voices, maybe suppressed voices that are hidden within, say, Tolstoy? Or is that not a possible project? I don't know whether you want to take that, Elif?

Elif Batuman: What Edward Said says about this in *Culture and Imperialism* is that he addresses the question of should we not read *Mansfield Park* any more because of its relationship to the slave trade. And he says, no, the solution isn't to read less, it's to read more. We have to read contrapuntally. By which he meant you have to also read about stuff that's happening in Antigua. There's a tendency in western literary criticism to treat works of literature as being separate from

the political opinions of the writers and actually not to look at their political ideas. And he says we have to stop doing that. You have to look at what the writers actually said about all these things. I think Oksana gave a great example of reading contrapuntally when she said read chapter six of *The White Guard* and then read *The Golden Eagle*. It's about expanding.

You mentioned the Russian soul before. And to me, the thing that's sort of appealing about the idea of the Russian soul is that there's so much self-hatred in it that's so relatable. There's a consciousness of being awful. I've been thinking about that because of Oksana's piece in *The Times Literary Supplement*, about how Russian literature always takes the perspective of the perpetrator rather than the victim. And if I'm writing a book that's like peak Dostoevsky, like 'I'm a miserable man, I'm a horrible cretin, and look at all the horrible things I did.' You kind of want to give that person a pass.

Oksana Zabuzhko: Victimising the perpetrator, I would say.

Elif Batuman: Yes, exactly. I've been thinking about that mode of writing as a conservative force in literature, which goes beyond Russian literature.

Charlotte Higgins: It's interesting. I think Roman literature does voice critiques of imperialism as such. I don't know whether Russian literature does that or not, or whether that's something that we shouldn't look to Russian literature for. We can look to Ukrainka for that impulse.

Oksana Zabuzhko: The problem is there's a terrible lack of self-reflection in Russian culture. I vote strongly for Ukrainian literature, not only because I'm Ukrainian, but because I'm interested personally in the number of readers of Ukrainian literature growing. But it was not my observation that to really understand the hidden imperialism of Russian writers, you should read Ukrainian writers. That's been the discovery of my western colleagues. The first overtly anti-colonial poem in European culture was written in Ukrainian. It's 'The Caucasus' by Shevchenko. While Russian classics were still describing the romanticism of the Caucasian wars, Shevchenko addressed the tribes that were attacked and told them, 'boritesia - poborete (Борітеся - поборете)', 'fight and you will win'. That's still something that's appearing now on the posters about the current Russian-Ukrainian war. A century and a half later, these are still words in action. So you're welcome to read and to translate more than you have up until now.



Charlotte Higgins: We're out of time, but it makes me so happy that we've ended this discussion on Taras Shevchenko, who we should absolutely be reading. And I long to see more Ukrainian literature translated into English. So, please, hurry up everybody and translate everything. And I'd like to thank my incredible panel: Elif Batuman, Oksana Zabuzhko and the legendary Ewa Thompson.



Global Consequences of Russia's Ecocide in Ukraine

Participants: Anatolii Pavelko, Tamara Hundorova (digital), Philippe Sands (digital), Rebecca Solnit (digital) and Sasha Dovzhuk (chair)

Sasha Dovzhuk: I'm glad tonight to be joined by a fantastic panel of experts to help us untangle all these complexities and discuss these burning issues. It's my absolute delight to introduce our speakers tonight. Next to me is Anatolii Pavelko, who's a leading lawyer in the Ukrainian human rights organisation Environment People Law. He has more than 20 years of work experience in environmental projects, environmental protection and policy. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, Anatolii has served in the Ukrainian armed forces. Please join me in a round of applause and gratitude to Anatolii.

Also with us digitally tonight will be a fantastic cohort of international experts. I'll start with Tamara Hundorova. She's currently a research scholar and lecturer in the department of Slavic languages and literature at Princeton University. She's also a fantastically prolific and inspiring Ukrainian literary critic and cultural expert. I'll highlight just one book by Tamara Hundorova, which I think is crucial for our understanding of environmental thought and environmental culture in Ukraine, which is *Post-Chernobyl Library*. I recommend it to all of you.

Rebecca Solnit is a writer, historian, activist and the author of, I think, 25 books on feminism, the environment, climate, popular power and social change. I think the book that has the most immediate connection to our discussion tonight is the one she edited in 2023, *Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story from Despair to Possibility*. Another book which I would love to highlight is *A Paradise Built in Hell: the Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*. This is a book which stresses the power of the people and of grass-roots resilience, which often comes as a surprise to authoritarian regimes worldwide.

Finally, I'd like to introduce Philippe Sands, who's a professor at University College London, and also a visiting professor of law at Harvard. Phillip is a practising barrister. He appears at council before the International Court of Justice and other international courts and tribunals. His latest books include: *East West Street: on the Origins of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, which I'm sure

most people in this audience have read; *The Ratline: Love, Lies, and Justice on the Trail of a Nazi Fugitive*; and *The Last Colony: A Tale of Exile, Justice, and Britain's Colonial Legacy*. Thank you, and let's have a round of applause for our panel.

I'd like to begin this conversation by addressing Anatolii and asking him to help us understand the impact of Russia's war on Ukrainian nature. As someone who's been involved in environmental protection and policy for two decades, and as someone who's currently experiencing and observing the changes that Russia's aggression has brought to Ukrainian environment on the ground, could you please help us understand the devastation that the Ukrainian environment has suffered as a result of this aggression?

Anatolii Pavelko: Thank you, Sasha. When talking of the war in Ukraine, we should say that one of the main victims is our environment, our nature. Sometimes nature is described as 'nama' – victim. The one that suffers, but cannot confront anybody, cannot stand up for itself, cannot go to any international court and testify. Therefore, this burden lies on our shoulders. We have to relate the crimes of the war; the crimes that cause people to suffer and the crimes that cause nature and our environment to suffer. We can say that the war that was launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine is probably the most devastating war for the environment in Europe since the Second World War. Most likely, its devastating aftermath will be even bigger than that of World War II.



What is that related to? First of all, the weapons being used by the Russian Federation against Ukraine are very destructive in their nature. Moreover, unlike in the previous war, some objects are becoming targets, used by the aggressor state to cause more devastation to our homeland, to cause more harm to the environment and thus to weaken us. When we talk about crimes against the environment in the framework of this aggression, not all of them fall under the international definition of ecocide. There are a variety of crimes. For example, mined territories. When the territory is mined, who suffers? This is the natural habitat of many wild animals. No scientific institution, academic or scientist as of today can tell us how many animals have died because of the minefields. These are silent victims. Maybe after the war is over, we'll figure out, directly or indirectly, how many animals, how much wildlife ceased to exist because of this war.

We have to remember that in the territory where there are active hostilities and atrocities, prior to this war, there was a war of environmental tensions. Donbas has been a slowly-ticking environmental time bomb since the times of the Soviet Union. Ukraine, which inherited a lot of problems from the Soviet Union, has exerted much effort and invested many resources in trying to stop this bomb. But it has exploded because of the war. Chemical industrial facilities, metal facilities, machine-building facilities, all became targets of the enemy's attacks. Pesticides and agricultural chemical facilities were bombarded, which had a detrimental effect on the community. The victims were the population of animals and plants. Military vehicles enter the territory of the park or the object which is under conservation or is preserved, and they couldn't care less. They just make trenches, they consider it a place where they can deploy and can do their aggression. People remember what happened in the Chernobyl zone when it was basically looted and robbed. Contemporary knowledge and common sense should probably suggest to the aggressors that they should keep away from objects like Chernobyl. On the other hand, you have to preserve it, not only for Ukraine, but also because this is a slow-ticking bomb of global import. It was not just Ukraine that suffered from Chernobyl, but also Russia and Belarus. But the aggressor has a very short memory. For them, aggression, looting, and occupying territories is more important than environmental disaster. Therefore, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was looted, and the scientific research that was being done there was terminated or was put on hold. The system of monitoring was damaged. The monitoring is continuous there, in order to prevent any possible accidents that could emerge in the post-disaster period.

Probably the most striking act that suggests ecocide was the destruction of Kakhovka Dam and Kakhovka power plant. This had disastrous outcomes; it affected both people and nature, and it resulted in very long-term environmental effects for the entire region. It's related to water, it's related to the death of people

and also of the wildlife whose natural habitat was this territory. No one can offer any estimates or any analysis of what happened. Environmental experts are now trying to take samples in order to do research, but they're risking life and limb to do it, because on the other side of the Dnieper River there are Russian troops, and no one is protected from shelling, shooting, and bombing.

Sasha Dovzhuk: One question for you: you've mentioned the mining of Ukrainian territory. Do you have the statistical data as to how much of the territory of Ukraine is now covered in mines and explosive substances?

Anatolii Pavelko: There are no exact statistics. Ukraine has information about the mined territories which are located in the areas under the control of Ukrainian government. In those territories that are not under the control of the Ukrainian government, we cannot know for sure. What we do know for sure is that Ukraine has become the most mined territory in the world today. There are minefields and there are UXOs, unexploded ordnances. These are projectiles, mines that landed but did not explode, and they're potentially dangerous for people and for nature. In general, around 18 to 20 percent of the territory of our homeland is mined. That's the territory that's contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnances. The second thing we can talk about, as our armed forces are liberating territories, is that those minefields that are in the occupied territory cover dozens of kilometres. Our enemy sees this land not as an object that needs preservation, not as having any value for their Russian world fantasy. They see this territory as a battlefield, a territory for military activities, where they can do anything. That's the understanding of the leadership of the Russian Federation and the people of the Russian Federation – that Ukraine is the territory of the battlefield and the territory that has to be destroyed.



Sasha Dovzhuk: An unfolding current situation. I would like us to move to the history and the culture of environmental thought in Ukraine, and to the ways Ukrainians have been grappling with the impact of Russian imperialism on their land, their environmental resources and their nature for the past decades and centuries. There's no better person to help us understand this than Tamara Hundorova: Ukrainian environmental thought has been a persistent thread in her body of work, from the environmental aspects of the work of the Ukrainian canonical writer Lesya Ukrainka to the political engagement of Ukrainian cultural figures after the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. I'd like to ask Tamara about the history of Ukrainian environmental thinking and what it can perhaps teach us about recovery.

Tamara Hundorova: I would like to say to the world today that some of the characteristics of the current war in Ukraine are that it has many dimensions and that it has a strong imperialistic and colonial character. What is also very important is that the main target is civilians in Ukraine, as well as cultural history, and all of our cultural being, I would say. So we can speak not only of ecocide but also of 'culturecide', and of the many cultural objects that have become a target in the current war. There is a whole attack on Ukrainian history and culture and identity, and the destruction of everything that's connected with our national history and our national existence. Some experts say that 1,000, or 2,000 objects that are part of our Ukrainian cultural heritage have been damaged, partially or fully. It seems to me that the environmental problem is not only about the object but also about the cultural object. And it's also about the landscape, which has also become part of the cultural heritage in Ukraine.

What this war really demonstrates to me is its imperialistic character, starting from the statement by Putin that Ukraine has no history, no culture. The main aim of this war, it seems to me, is to erase our memory, and we can see the many consequences of this intention. For instance, the destruction of the museum of Skovoroda, a famous philosopher and author who became a cult figure for Ukrainian cultural philosophy. Or we can recall a name like Maria Prymachenko, whose museum in Ivankiv was destroyed, although hopefully her pictures were saved. In Oleshky, Polina Rayko created in her own house a kind of paradise that was also destroyed, especially after the destruction of Kakhovka Dam. That was a very significant and symbolic object, and it shows how the target of this war for Russia is the iconic objects of Ukrainian culture.

I would also like to say that it seems to me this war is also connected with the brutal rejection of any attempt at the decolonisation of Ukraine. This started from the proclamation of independence, but it seems to me that in the period since the Maidan this process of decolonisation has started to be more active and more visible. And it seems that a kind of elimination, of erasing of all of that struggle for independence, in all of its different aspects, has also become an aim of this war.

Also very important, I think, is that part of the contemporary discourse of Putin, and his political propaganda, has become a kind of nuclear eschatology. It's a part of an imperial idea of Russia, going back to the past. It means our war is not only local, but has a global character, because the target of destruction of this war is not only Ukrainian culture, but culture, or cultural archives, in general. This nuclear threat that Russia has used and manipulated is a danger for the whole of human culture. Chernobyl has become a symbolic place and one of objects that clearly demonstrates this threat. We all know that the Chernobyl zone was occupied for more than a month. That demonstrates that Russia has

no boundaries in terms of their invasion, their destruction; they will even use this global nuclear threat.

So I think it's important that the saving of cultural heritage in Ukraine becomes an international task. I recall that UNESCO has done important work in documenting all the damage done to cultural heritage in Ukraine. Or, for instance, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative has also tried to show international communities the importance of saving cultural heritage in Ukraine. But it's also not all about Ukraine, it's about the saving of all human archives.

Sasha Dovzhuk: Speaking about the 'culturecide' and the attack on the Ukrainian culture of resistance, amongst other things, leads us nicely to the next speaker, Rebecca Solnit. I'd like to ask Rebecca to expand on the ways that the attack on Ukraine by the Russian regime, which is of course a fossil fuel regime that relies to a great extent on the extraction of fossil fuels and the destruction of the climate, compares to attacks by other authoritarian regimes on nature and the environment, around the globe. And what is for you, Rebecca, as a climate activist on this global scale, perhaps surprising about the Ukrainian resistance to this attack?

Rebecca Solnit: I have to say that the Ukrainian resistance is not at all surprising. Authoritarians operate from a set of assumptions about human nature; that human beings are cowardly and selfish, that their morale and determination can be broken by bombing. We saw this in Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, with the allied bombings of Germany and Japan, and the Nazi bombing of the United Kingdom in the Second World War. We saw it with how the US fought its wars in Vietnam and Iraq. The idea that somehow you can terrorise civilians into collapsing in fear and no longer resisting, no longer having the will to resist. Of course, what we actually see in both disasters and war is that human beings are mostly courageous and resourceful and that war often strengthens their resistance. So I think that part is fascinating, because it's a dumb mistake that history has proven over and over to be a mistake. You don't break the will of the people that way. The great writer Jonathan Schell, whose career began as a journalist covering the US war in Vietnam, wrote an amazing book about that.

But climate change essentially is a human war against nature and against humanity as well. And I want to broaden the context to talk about that. There are so many aspects of it in the Ukrainian war. One thing I was thinking this morning, and that I thought when the invasion of Ukraine began last year, is that Russia's invasion of the US was done using its most successful powers; it was a sort of informational propaganda invasion. And I was delighted to see that the Russian military in its physical capacities was so much less competent. Of course, Russia invaded the United States on behalf of Donald Trump in 2016, clearly because the Republican Party in the United States in general, and Donald Trump in particular, was likely to continue supporting unregulated fossil fuel expansion and consumption, which is what the Putin regime rests on. It's a petrol regime. There's a strong link between fossil fuel and authoritarianism. And you can stand that on its head to say that there's a strong link between democracy and renewable energy, in part because nobody will ever have a monopoly on wind and sun: they're distributed widely throughout the world.

So the climate battle is partly a democracy battle. The surveys show that the great majority of human beings want climate action. They want to do what the climate requires of us, which is a swift transition away from fossil fuels to renewables and the ending of our war against the climate. It's a minority of people, who are directly involved in and profiting from fossil fuel, including specific regimes – Saudi Arabia, Russia, etc. – that are committed to it. There are also authoritarians around the world – Jair Bolsonaro, when he was in charge of Brazil, the chaos in Venezuela. I think is partly the resource purse at work, where incredible profit from one resource tends to warp that society and government.

In the US, there's an ongoing battle between Republicans and Democrats. And while the Democrats are far from perfect, the Republicans, who have been taking a stand against the US support for Ukraine in many cases, are heavily backed by the fossil fuel industry. There are climate deniers. They're refusing to do what science has demonstrated the climate requires of us. So we can see how all these things stitch together. And it's very much at work in Russia. It's been fascinating to see Putin seem to count, just as he counted on the weakness of the Ukrainian people, on the weakness of the European Union, because it was so dependent on Russian fossil fuel. And to see the European Union instead make a swift transition away, to speed up its climate transition, and to recognise that it had been culpable for all those years when it gave huge amounts of money to Russia in return for the fossil fuel, that it was essentially propping up an authoritarian and terrorist regime. That was also such an interesting dimension of this war. Those are many scattered pieces of many huge pictures, but they're what comes to mind in response to the questions. And thank you. It's an honour to be here. I hope we're here next year celebrating Ukraine's victory.



From left to right: Tamara Hundorova (on screen) Sasha Dovzhuk and Anatolii Pavelko



Sasha Dovzhuk: Following Rebecca's remarks, I'd like to move to Philippe Sands, and to the question of accountability and justice when it comes to ecocide. Philippe is involved in the Stop Ecocide experts' panel, which is honing the legal definition of ecocide, which hopefully one day will help us bring justice to Ukraine for the crimes committed against the environment here. So I'll pass the virtual microphone to Philippe and ask him to enlighten us on the legal aspects of Russia's unfolding war against the Ukrainian environment.

Philippe Sands: Thank you very much. Let me begin by congratulating the Forum and Hay festival for putting this together. As some of you know, I was supposed to be with you in person, but for reasons related to the joys of Russian decision-making, I'm not able to travel on this occasion. But I will be back in my beloved Lviv very soon, I promise you; later this year, I hope. I've listened with immense interest, and it has galvanised a lot of thoughts. As a very young academic back in the 80s, I watched from afar the slowly-emerging news of what appeared to have happened at Chernobyl. And sort of amazingly, given everything that's happened to me subsequently, it became the subject of the first book I ever wrote: Chernobyl, Law and Communication – a very minor, modest academic book. But it spawned an interest in me in the environment, and it became the basis for my wanting to explore how the law at the international level dealt with environmental issues. I think you can actually trace the emergence of modern international environmental law to the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Before at that time, there were no books, no treatises on the subject of international environmental law. They didn't exist. The first one was published in 1990. Mine followed a couple of years later. Of course there's been a proliferation ever since.

As I got increasingly involved in environmental issues in the late 1980s, as a consequence of the accident at Chernobyl, a friend in the US sent me an article from the Law Review that had been published in 1972, by a wonderful human being called Christopher Stone. It's called 'Should Trees Have Standing?' And it posited the idea, which was revolutionary then, and perhaps still revolutionary now, apropos of what Anatolii said, that only human beings had access to courts or corporations, not natural objects, not animals, not plants, not trees. Christopher Stone's article totally changed my life: it opened the door to reimagining how the law could function; not as an instrumentality of the human, but as an instrumentality of our natural world. And very slowly, over the years, that's beginning to be a reality. There's been a transformation. I think it'll be for the next generation, not mine, to really run with this. But it's now the case that since 1996, we have confirmation by the World Court in The Hague that the protection of the environment is part of the obligations of states. Indeed, the number of cases and treaties, and the level of attention now, is not enough. But compared to my days as a student, when

we weren't even taught environmental law, and international environmental law didn't exist, there's been a sea change and a total transformation.

Three years ago I was asked, sort of melding my interests in crimes against humanity and genocide – and the great city of Lviv is the font and the origin of these concepts – to chair an international working group to explore the addition of a fifth international crime to the statute of the International Criminal Court. That was the crime of ecocide; the wanton, unlawful destruction of the environment. We were a wonderful global, international working group, all cast of characters involved. We worked by consensus, and the product we came up with was a definition of the new crime of ecocide, which has begun to have legs and has taken off. Belgium has become the first country to adopt a domestic ecocide law based on our law, and is pushing for it to be adopted at the international level. More than a dozen countries now support that. I hope that Ukraine will support it at the international level.

Ukraine in fact does have a domestic ecocide law. It's a slightly different definition from the one we came up with, but it's there. And of course, Ukraine has a sort of special place in the pantheon of environmental developments because of its connection with the Chernobyl accident. So that's the context against which I've observed what's going on in this terrible, illegal war of aggression. As, you know, I'm very involved in working with Ukraine and other countries on trying to establish a special criminal tribunal to deal with the crime of aggression, and the perpetrators, right to the very top, right up to Mr. Putin himself, because they're the ones who are responsible for these crimes. Modern international law doesn't really deal, I'm afraid, with the environment in terms of war crimes and crimes against humanity. It's a big gap. So these terrible things that we've seen – the targeting of nuclear power plants, the destruction of the dam, the other actions we've been hearing about, their terrible consequences, frankly, are not really part of the legal discussion in relation to the environment as an interest in itself. It's only about the environment as a means of protecting the human. So I think that's the transformation that needs to take place. And I think this terrible war is going to contribute to that transformation, precisely because it has enhanced our understanding of what's going on right now.

To conclude, and we can raise more issues through questions, this is, for me, a generational issue par excellence. I've had the privilege of working on a large number of issues, which I think are important and interesting, over many years. But it was only when a newspaper reported this working group on the crime of ecocide that our three children, aged in their 20s, all reached out to me separately: each of them sent a WhatsApp. It was very simple. They hadn't coordinated. They said, 'Dad, finally, you're doing something that's useful and important!' And that,

I thought, sent a very clear signal that something is changing with that generation. And it will be for them to really run with this, to add the environment to the heart of every domestic legal order, to make it part of the international legal order, and to insist, as happened, for example, in 1990, after the use of the oil fields in the first Iraq war, that Russia doesn't get away with its environmental desecration. It mustn't get away with its desecration of humans, but it also mustn't get away with its environmental desecration, it must be held to account.

I'm not starry-eyed about how courts work. There are other mechanisms that are available. There needs to be a full accounting of what happened. There must be an assessment of how it can be repaired, and Russia must be held to account for that harm. That's not an easy task. But I think it's one that I get the sense everyone on this panel will be very strongly committed to supporting.



Questioner: My question is regarding the amendments to the Rome Statute on ecocide, but regarding today's situation. Is it possible today to start proceedings in the International Criminal Court regarding war crimes, using the seventh, eighth article, on de facto ecocide crimes? In a situation of a possible universal jurisdiction, a national jurisdiction of foreign states, where ecocide is criminalised, using the definition you proposed? Or maybe you know of other ways, current ways of reacting to ecocide crimes in Ukraine?

Philippe Sands: Thank you for that question. I'm really sorry to tell you, but the International Criminal Court Statute, which was drafted in 1998, and I was involved in drafting it, does not address the environment, except really in one situation, which is the use of the environment as an instrument of war. But the way that's drafted makes it very, very difficult to prove that there was an intention to do that. I think the destruction of the dam could arguably come within that definition. And I think we'd have to depend on a prosecutor who has an open mind on environmental issues. It's not immediately apparent to me that this prosecutor has that open mind, or a particular interest in environmental issues, but it may be that some of his staff will want to do it.

We face the following problem: our legal order does not reflect the change in values in relation to our environment. You can find ways before the International Criminal Court and before domestic courts to prosecute, to investigate, to litigate harm to the environment, but it's always in relation to the harm that occurs to human beings. It's essentially the human rights model of environmental protection. And I think the transformation that a lot of us are looking for is one that puts the natural environment, the ecological system, at the heart of the legal order and



makes that itself, where harm occurs to it, the subject of criminal sanctions, civil sanctions and the law. The short answer is, I think a creative prosecutor could find a way, but it's not immediately apparent how they would do that in relation to all the matters that Anatolii and Tamara have described to us in relation to the terrible damage that's being done.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you. One more very short question from the audience.

Questioner: I heard our panellists claiming that the aggressor has basically ruined everything, burned it all. I know that black soil is a very important resource for Ukraine, for the world. How in that situation can we talk about compensation or reparation? I heard that 18,000 rounds were shot per day by the aggressor. It's unfathomable. Is there any vision in terms of reparations? Do you know anything about the recovery time of black soil? Maybe there's some information about that from the environmental viewpoint.

Anatolii Pavelko: The first question we have when we're dealing with the harm to black soil is the fixation. It's very important to document everything. There are some explosive parts which end up in soil. In the organisation of ecology law, it's very important to have the causal connection: what happened? What is the aftermath? There are authorities trying to document the facts of contamination. There's a remote methodology that can be used for that, remote documenting from artillery strikes. On the ground, too, it's possible for us to take samples to analyse the contaminants that have appeared as a result of this aggression, as a result of shelling, when we have rounds in the soil. We already have that information documented, about contamination because of artillery missiles and mines and projectiles. This is also indirect pollution: many agricultural entities and others have been affected.

After documenting an assessment, we can continue with legal proceedings related to reparations. There are different approaches. One of them is to take into consideration the funds which are needed for recovery. We can think in terms of the volumes of agricultural produce loss, in terms of misuse or having no ability to use the land. In terms of methodology, we'll see what works best under the circumstances. But I absolutely agree with you. It's very important that the aggressor is held accountable for it all. If there is harm inflicted, it is very important that there is compensation for it. That is compensation to our state, to our people, and for our future generations. This is also a precaution to make sure that such aggressive actions are not repeated. It's very important for the

aggressor to remember that there is a price to be paid for any actions which disrupt ordinary life.



Sasha Dovzhuk: Thank you Anatolii. I just want to stress this one more time for our international audience. There is immense pressure just now on Ukrainian society, which is both fighting on the front lines and defending the country and the environment and the people of Ukraine, and analysing the damage and working towards ensuring Russia's accountability for the crime. We rely on your support. We owe this to the future, as has been said today. Thank you so much to this fantastic panel of experts and to our brilliant audience.

Oleksandr Mykhed and Art Spiegelman in conversation

Digital event

Oleksandr Mykhed: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is the 30th Lviv Book Forum literary festival, organised with the support of Hay Festival. My name is Oleksandr Mykhed, I'm a Ukrainian writer and I'll be the moderator today. It's a huge honour to introduce our guest, an American cartoonist and editor, creator of one of the most influential graphic novels ever, Maus. Art Spiegelman, thank you for joining us today.

Art Spiegelman: Thanks for having me, Oleksandr. It's a pleasure to be here in Ukraine, though virtually rather than in person. I've even gotten one set of instructions where in case this is interrupted by an air attack, we'll try to get back in touch later. Which is possible in New York, but it's not very likely. So it's hard for me to wrap my brain around what daily life actually is in Ukraine nowadays. I felt it was important to say yes to this event, while I've pushed away a lot of others, because I'm touched that books remain important enough for you to come out of your bunkers and go into a public space to discuss literature and ideas. The horror of what's happening in the Ukraine, and now as of yesterday also happening in Israel, and has been an ongoing problem in the Middle East and elsewhere in the globe, all comes down to the same kind of thing that my parents were living through when they lived through World War II in Poland, which is a virus that's been with us ever since we came out of our caves, which seems to be a kind of nationalism, the idea that there are really strict borders everywhere, and that Ukraine seems to have a lot of wheat, which makes it a very desirable place to demolish, annexe, and turn into grain gold, let's say. And it's a horror to me, because after World War II was when Jews decided to make Israel a homeland, and the slogan at the time was something like, 'A people without a land must go to a land with no people', and the problem there is there were people there, and that was a giant error that was made.

Ultimately, if we're going to survive as a people, the struggle for borders and for land is the opposite of the direction we have to go in. It's Israelis and Palestinians working together to live into another century. And Russians and Ukrainians. I have no idea how one arrives at that, it's part of the fantasy world of my youth



reading comic books. How do we make that kind of world even possible? After I started hearing about the creation of Israel after World War II as a solution, and having read how the Nazis had suggested somewhere in Africa, Zanzibar or Uganda or somewhere, to put all of the Jews in a place that was very inhospitable for living, just to put them somewhere and give them their own nation, I figured: if Jews were supposed to have a nation after World War II, it should be Germany, and the Germans should have had to go and deal with the Palestinians because they'd forfeited their right to a nation through their monstrous aggressions. So, I have no solutions, I'm not a politician, I'm just a human who has enough empathy to feel horrified at what you're living through, and therefore I felt I had to lend myself to this and just wish you good luck.

Oleksandr Mykhed: Thank you so much, Art, for this message and your support. I'd like to talk not about the specificity of *Maus*, because I think all our viewers and audience know what it's all about. I'm more curious about how it's done in terms of how your techniques, your ideas, might be used or applied by the younger generation who would like to write, for example, about the tragedy that's happening in Ukraine. I'd like to start with the more tricky question. It's been 32 years since the publication of *Maus*, and 45 years since you started this journey. Do you feel that you're still in the material, that you're still thinking about this? And do you still follow new editions, new graphic novels about the Holocaust? And how do you feel about still speaking about *Maus* through all these years?

Art Spiegelman: Well, I even drew a comic strip at one point, called *Mein Kampf*, about being chased by a 5,000 pound mouse years after, and I've recently been dragged back into the battle because of the book bannings and book prohibitions in the United States, in which *Maus* became a poster boy for this new set of challenges. I keep trying to move away from and past *Maus*. I was trying for some years to either compete with it or try to find a way to evade it, by just dealing with totally other subject matter, but ultimately, to answer your question, the issues that are in *Maus* were the issues that were in my life before *Maus*, and as time goes by I have to revisit my book from different angles, let's say. Recently it's been interesting for me to go back and see how my relationship with my father has improved a lot since his death. It's easier. I look at things with eyes where I'm not in instant fight-or-flight mode when I'm dealing with him, or with the memory of my mother. So that's required me to keep going back to it, not to make another work. I think *Maus* is about the best I could do at the time, and it took, as you were suggesting, years to make the two volumes. I was doing many other things at the same time, but this was the focus of my life for a very long time, and although I can look back and say, 'I really should redraw that panel,' or 'Maybe I should take this out and move it,' it's a little too late for that now. So I've been finding other places to hang my hat. What I was doing when I was making *Maus* was not trying to

give a message to the world. I wasn't trying to tell the world, 'You must be better,' because I think it's kind of a pathetic and hopeless task, frankly, and I wasn't trying to teach young people about the horrors of the world. I was just trying to teach myself. What is it that allowed me to be born after both my parents should have been murdered, long before I was hatched, for example. And to do that involved achieving a certain kind of granular clarity about what they went through, so it led me into years of researching the very specifics of what they went through. I was trying to give it a shape and a form that made it clarified without making it simplified, and that was the challenge, and it wasn't a challenge that most comics were interested in, trying to deal with something quite that complex. So when *Maus* first came out, everybody was expecting that this would be a monstrous, aberrant thing in bad taste, because I'd been doing many things in bad taste in my underground comic years before that, but the idea really was to make something that could clarify, and also to make something ambitious, because at the time that I was growing up, comics had their own weird ambitions to show superheroes which have now taken over the planet, but not in comic book form, and thereby find what else a comic could do, because comics were the lowest rung of the literary ladder.

I was grateful at one point to meet a tattoo artist, because I felt far out there, somebody with less stature than a comic book artist in the arts. So I was ambitious, I wanted to make something that would be a long comic book that needed a bookmark, not just a 32-page pamphlet that you could throw away, and that would ask, or demand even, to be reread. To make really good comics is harder than writing, harder than drawing, and maybe even harder than both of them put together can be, because it's a very complex thing to work with those two different streams, visuals and language. One of the reasons comics were treated so dismissively was it was perceived that those two media couldn't go together well. It goes back to this Renaissance and post-Renaissance idea that words have their domain, pictures have their domain, and they're not supposed to intermingle – it creates mongoloids, maybe.

Oleksandr Mykhed: That's really interesting about rereading *Maus*, because I was amazed at how my reflection or my perception of *Maus* has changed since the full-scale invasion. I read it I guess five or seven years ago, and then again now, preparing for our talk, and that was totally different, because it's getting much closer to us. It shows the same situations: the refugees leaving the house, trying to survive in the siege, and the whole context of this amazing world has changed.

My next question is, in *MetaMaus* there's a striking quote: 'I feel like I never earned a right to the material.' I'm really curious about both parts of this. Who gets the right to speak about something? For example, the Russo-Ukrainian war, the

Russian invasion. Could you elaborate on the material? Because this is something tangible, something about sculpture, something artistic.

Art Spiegelman: Well, it's the only medium I'm comfortable with; this bastard form. I can write a bit, I can draw a bit, but even the very first comics artist that I can think of in the history of the world, who was really making something very close to comics, was a guy named Rudolf Töpffer in the early middle of the 19th century, who invented this form with the text underneath, written, but in the same handwriting, line and pen that he used for the drawing, in one of the first versions of lithography. They were very witty. He also wrote separately, but in the introduction to the book, he says, 'The author apologises for his writing weaknesses, but if you don't like the writing, perhaps you could be amused by the drawings. If you don't like the drawings, maybe you should just read what's below.' So it was a way of trying to find a way in.

Who got the right to speak about certain tragedies? Everyone has the right to speak, including to speak stupidly. I think that that's the only way speaking can happen, and one of my issues when I was making the book was I was trying, weirdly – and maybe a psychoanalyst could explain more fully why I was trying so weirdly – to re-inhabit what my parents lived through. My daily life was very comfortable in the United States, and when I was a kid growing up, I never got a coherent version of what they went through from them. My mother would tell me little flash frames of an event, but with zero context, so it just seemed like some kind of mad horror story punchline, and then she'd move on to, 'We have to go and do the shopping.'

Oleksandr Mykhed: That's just a typical day in the full-scale invasion.

Art Spiegelman: Yeah, that's right. You have to move them out of the un-faceable and then deal with whatever is immediately in front of you. My father didn't want to talk about it when I was growing up. He'd say, 'Oh, people don't want to hear such stories. When first I came, I was trying to talk to your uncle, other people around me, and it was impossible. When I would talk about the privations we went through, Uncle Herman would say, "Yes, and we couldn't get any nylons or sugar".' The shortages in the United States, a different situation. So I just had to navigate to imagine myself in it and re-inhabit it through a lot of research, reading, and thinking. And that was, like I say, the real impulse for doing the book. Was there another part to the question? I think there was.

Oleksandr Mykhed: About the material. What is the material for you? Because there's this whole concept of how you could elaborate on the material, for example, the Holocaust or Auschwitz.

Art Spiegelman: Well, for me, it was just a matter of doing a lot of research and ultimately talking to my father when I was older, when finally, astonishingly, he sat down and we talked for days. When we finished, we'd do it again every time I was in his presence, because I found that when I was interviewing him, it was, if you'll forgive a clumsy metaphor, like holding a vampire at bay with a crucifix. When we were talking on this subject, it was not like the rest of our daily lives, which were filled with quarrel in almost every conversation: my father wanting me to be a dentist, to wear better clothes, and to cut my hair shorter, whatever. It led to explosions. But on this one topic, very peculiarly, it was as if Auschwitz was the zone where we could actually have room to talk, and where I would actually listen with great avidity and without argument. So when we finished, I'd start again, because we'd found a place to have a relationship, and that was important to me.

For somebody else wanting to tackle it, there's the advice I got at some point from my wife. She just said, 'Well, keep it honest, honey.' And honesty involves looking at things from many different angles, some of them uncomfortable. It's not the way one would want to present oneself. It's not even necessarily the way I would want to present my father, but the alternative in *Maus* would've been do something that I thought would be a violation of the work. Holocaust survivors tend to be considered as somehow saintly because they've gone through this great suffering. But to me, that's a very Christian idea. Suffering only causes pain. It doesn't cause ennoblement. To show him as anything other than the complex person that he was would've been a kind of lie.

So what do we do here if we want to make a work about what's going on? And it deals with presenting one's daily life, one's relationships, one's fury, as well as one's fears, as well as one's fantasies of what might be. I mean, one of the things I know about Ukraine is that's a thoroughly mixed culture, that has a lot of Russian culture in it, as well as Western European culture brought in, and trying to deal with those strands...

Oleksandr Mykhed: And the authentic Ukrainian culture.

Art Spiegelman: Of course. Every culture is an authentic culture in a sense, but it exists through a lot of different strands that run through it. And how do you find all those things and make them something that's not... It's one of the reasons I keep being baffled by this new tendency in America towards what's criticised as 'woke culture', as if there's something terrible about being awake. And more generally, maybe there is. But in terms of this idea of moral one-upmanship and moral rectitude, if I wanted to make something, and I do, about a black cartoonist I once met and spent some time with, who's an amazing individual... I was starting



to do it in 1995. I got lost because I just didn't know enough. His story was really complex. But the idea that I shouldn't do it has now entered into my head, because I would be, in big quotations, 'appropriating' somebody else's culture, which to me is actually a demented idea, because you're not appropriating a culture. Culture is appropriation. Culture is the streams that run through you. It's not as if only black people can play jazz. That would be crazy. It's just something that enters into the world and mixes. There's a strain that becomes identifiable as your cultural home. And then there's the rest of what made that home possible, which involves possibly wood from other countries, metals that were brought in to build this home. And that home is now, therefore, in some fundamental way, an international construct. I think it's useful to have that idea.

Oleksandr Mykhed: This is a really interesting issue. I hadn't planned to discuss it, but I have to, because when we speak about the appropriation of culture, I do think it's really inappropriate, for example, for a Russian artist to try to imagine what it's like to be under the full-scale invasion or to be in occupied Bucha or Mariupol or any other siege that was produced by the Russian occupants. This is the stuff that's at the centre of many cultural conflicts right now. When for example, you have an international competition for illustrators or artists and then all of a sudden you have a Russian artist who doesn't say, for example, that he or she is from Moscow. They say Berlin-based, or Basel-based, or something. And they put their pictures out there saying something about the Ukrainian war. That's this kind of appropriation that's inappropriate.

Art Spiegelman: Of course. I think culture is bigger than the cultural expressions about a specific moment in time that you're going through. But I also think that you have the right to be stupid. It's really important. And these people from whatever country you're talking about, Germany or wherever, who are comfortably outside of this and are in their easy chairs explaining the situation as if they understand it, that's fine. Somebody else has to counter it. The next cartoonist or writer has to say, 'I'm sorry, but this person is acting like an idiot. He doesn't understand a word of what's going on.' And having that as a foil might allow the person in Ukraine who's trying to make something to give a corrective based on their innermost experiences. This is the dialogue that has to happen. It becomes more and more difficult as we enter a planet of AIs that have no experience. All they have is a straw that's sucked up the Internet and can spit out every foolishness as well as every fact that comes through it. But it's one's job to just be as authentic as one can be.

For me, in *Maus*, I didn't fully understand what I was doing, in a sense. It was all through intuition. But I knew that this cat and mouse metaphor was very important to me. And one of the reasons, I now see because of the recent resistance

to *Maus* that has led to it being banned in schools and in libraries, was that *Maus* grew out of a short comic strip for a comic book called *Funny Animals* that had Robert Crumb doing the cover. It became an important project. But editing in those days consisted of, 'We're doing a comic about anthropomorphic characters. Would you like to do something?' 'Sure.' I had no good ideas, and I was really scared about it, because to be in a book that Robert Crumb did the cover of in 1971 was a great honour. I did a lot of stupid things while trying to find something worth doing. Like, 'Maybe I should make it like an old horror comic story where an anthropomorphic mouse is getting ready to go to work, but when he goes out the door, a giant mousetrap kills him.'

Considering the drawing and making a comic is the hardest thing I know how to do. It's not exactly something I would put in the pleasure column of my life. It's just the only way to make the things I want to do manifest. My good friend Ken Jacobs, a film maker and a teacher, showed in his classes the old, racist animated cartoons from the 1930s. Then he showed a Mickey Mouse cartoon, one of the first, or maybe the first Mickey Mouse cartoon with sound. He'd just shown the virulent racial stereotypes in the other cartoons before. And he's looking at Mickey and he says, 'What's the difference between Mickey Mouse and Al Jolson?' You know, a white singer in blackface with big white lips, the absolute caricature of black people. Mickey in the 1930s was kind of a jazzy character. He wasn't just the corporate logo he became in later decades. And he said, 'Well, what's the difference? It's just Al Jolson with big round ears on top of his head.' And I went, 'Eureka!' and I was going to do something about blacks in America with minstrel-lipped mice and with 'Ku Klux Cats' as their enemies. And for about 24 hours, I was happy with that, before I realised, not that it's impossible to do, but that I didn't feel comfortable trying to deal with black history in America without knowing a lot more than I did. So I thought, 'Now what'll I do?' And I realised there was a cat and mouse metaphor closer to home, in that Jews were considered vermin to be exterminated. A pesticide was what was used in the gas chambers. And a story by Kafka, called 'Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk', pointed me in the direction of the Jews as mice. It led me to a place closer to home, where it was clearer how to work through all this.

The reason I went through all of that is to explain that the metaphor I used was what made this book, I believe, so visible over the years, even more so over the past year or so, because it's a fable-like, metaphoric idea. I learned it from the Tom and Jerry animated cartoons when I was a kid, that cats chase mice. Then to put that together with the very granular real experiences of my family, as best I could understand them, made something that at this one time was really specific, but also could translate for other people from other cultural backgrounds. I even heard in the early 80s, when the first volume came out, that *Maus* was used as

a book to read in Inuit schools in Canada. My experiences and a native Inuit's in Canada are so disparate, and yet it has to do with the power dynamic between one set of people and the people with power who are dehumanising them, which is exactly what you're talking about when you talk about people from outside trying to deal with your issues in Ukraine.

Oleksandr Mykhed: This is a direct link to another question, about starting with stupid ideas and where they might develop. In *MetaMaus*, you mentioned that since *Maus*, the whole discourse around the Holocaust has produced some kitsch movies about the tragedy. There's a really fine line between the artwork and between kitsch about the tragedy. Can you elaborate on that? Because for sure at the centre is the truth that might make this artwork something really specific or interesting. But where is the line about that truth?

Art Spiegelman: It all came from me coining a word, which was 'holokitsch', as a way of understanding what this is. It has to do with sentimentalising, with the big-eyed waif in striped pyjamas who befriends a commandant's son through the barbed wire. That's one of the great examples of 'holokitsch' in recent years, the 'pyjamafication' of the Holocaust. It happens even in more earnest films. I think Steven Spielberg wasn't badly intended; he just wasn't up to the task with *Schindler's List*. That was a film I found repugnant. I'd actually been asked to have a conversation about it somewhere on the internet, with a number of people, including Ken Jacobs, Jim Hoberman – a film critic – and another critic named Annette Insdorf who specialises in Holocaust-related film. There were different angles on it, but for me it was a terrible way to go about making that kind of film. To see it through the lens of the virtuous Christian who manages to create a situation that saves some Jews; to have a movie that seems to go very directly from sensationalised sexuality to sensationalised violence between one cut and the other; to make violence very sexy as part of the real story. At the end of the film, they have some of the survivors actually coming into the film and talking. And Ken Jacobs said something that really amused me, which was, 'They should've had them on screen through the whole film: "No, it wasn't like that, it was like this....When you say it's like that, it wasn't. It couldn't be".' That would've made a much more interesting film. And with a smaller budget. I thought that maybe what they should do is a film about *Schindler* after the war, when he was totally friendless, without money, and a few people were sending him enough food and money to stay alive in a single room occupancy hotel in Germany. That might've been, in the then present, a more interesting way to approach what happened in World War II than to make something that's once more, for me, high-kitsch, or maybe low-kitsch. I don't even know, kitsch with a bigger budget.

Oleksandr Mykhed: As you mentioned, there should be somebody saying, 'This, wasn't like this, this was like this.' It's like the direct stuff that happened with your father's memories. When you did the research, and there was a huge disruption between the memory of the witness and the stuff that had been researched in the archive. What would be your advice for those who do interviews with survivors or witnesses, and what's the position of the researcher or the writer in this?

Art Spiegelman: I would say one's job is to clarify as much as one can, but no more. There are certain things that have to have a kind of ambiguity to them, because that's how it remains. Five people witnessing an accident each see something totally different. Maybe all five witnesses have to be presented in order and you have to sift through it and try to understand, if you can, what happened. But it's not a matter of pushing an agenda; it's a matter of trying to understand through the various lenses that are possible. Memory is so fallible that I've given up on having one. I can't remember anything any more. It's a story one tells, and as soon as the story is told, it becomes crystallised as a story. It's not memory any more. Then when one visits it again, other events that have happened re-colour what you think you remember. And that's not a criticism, say, of my father for having seen something or not seen something that other sources indicate. It's a matter of using him as a witness and then kind of quarrelling with him behind the lines.

There's a page in *Maus* where I'm talking with him, asking him about the orchestra that was in Auschwitz: it was pretty clearly documented. And he says, 'No, there was no orchestra. I never heard of such a thing. That's crazy.' So first I show the orchestra walking by while we're talking, the marching soldiers marching past the orchestra. Then I have them totally covered up, after my father says there wasn't one. But you can see the little piece of a cello and other instruments sticking up. So I'm arguing with him, saying, 'I'm pretty sure from the other testimonies that there was an orchestra.' And then for my own pleasure, the little bits of orchestra are set up like horizontal lines of wood in the building they're walking past. So it also looks like a musical stave with notes. It was a way of having it both ways, explaining what he thought and showing what I thought based on what I saw. In later years, I realised that he probably hadn't seen an orchestra. He was actually accurate to his own eyes in the sense that he wasn't brought in to Auschwitz by train. He was in a small group brought in by truck. The orchestras were usually there at the entrance to calm people who were being herded to their deaths, to say, 'No, no, there's still civilisation here. See, they're playing Mozart, Beethoven.' My father didn't hear that because he was in an inner camp, a very complex place with lots of barbed wire, lots of roads you had to take to go to work. So he probably didn't see that. There are other things that I couldn't catch, that were different from most other experiences. And all I can do is indicate that

all these things are kind of collaboratively dealt with, understood, and ingested. One has to keep trying to clarify.

Oleksandr Mykhed: That's an amazing example of what an artist, a writer might do with the medium of the graphic novel. That visualisation and disruption that is the nuance of the whole story.

Art Spiegelman: Even using cats and mice: I've made it clear by the time you've read the whole work, that these are not cats, these are not mice. They're kind of people with masks on. That had many advantages of allowing people in, of me not having to know what every physiognomy of every face was like, and letting you into the white paper and projecting the people from the information that's given.

I have a question: is there such a thing as comic-making in the Ukraine?

Oleksandr Mykhed: For sure. An old tradition, from the 90s. There were many adaptations, graphic novels. We had a huge flourishing of the market in the period between the Maidan of 2014 and the full scale invasion. Those were the first examples of 'building the industry' of graphic novels and comics in Ukraine. There are, I guess, five or six publishing houses with not only translations of Marvel or DC, but also Maus and Persepolis, and all the most famous examples of graphic novels.

Art Spiegelman: Are most of these non-fiction? Or are there also fantasy, humour, science fiction branches?

Oleksandr Mykhed: You can find everything, even researchers who write and speak about your legacy and about your work in the whole context of the history of the medium. We have researchers, publishers, creators, we have all of them.

Art Spiegelman: That's very interesting. I'm coming from a place where the only industry for comics really when I was growing up was the superhero comics, and maybe a few Donald Duck books, stuff like that. The idea of a 'comics industry', to me sounds like an oxymoron, even now, when I'm one of the main beneficiaries of that 'industry'. Most of the comic book artists I know have the understanding that they'd probably make more money driving an Uber. So it has more to do with comics as self-expression than comics as a business.

Oleksandr Mykhed: Yes. That brings me to to the next question. In Maus and MetaMaus there are two mentions of picture books produced by Ukrainian artists who were imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps, one in Maus, the other in MetaMaus. Both of them were in your mother's library. One is by Paladij Osynka,

Album of a Political Prisoner, published in 1946. The other is by Olena Vitek-Voitych, The Biggest Women's Concentration Camp in Germany, about Ravensbruck, published in 1947. Do you have any specific memories of these two books?

Art Spiegelman: I can't read Polish or Russian. I even have trouble with English. These were books that came out of a strange Pandora's box that was opened when I sneaked into the den where the forbidden books were. In the front row was Lady Chatterley's Lover and a book about Aleister Crowley, The Beast, and other things like that. And behind them, there was something called The Black Book of the Camps, and these small books, I never could read the text, but those pictures were really important for me. I'd discovered a few people, and right now, because of my lack of memory, I'm not even going to try to cite their names, but I can remember one of them, Alfred Kantor, who was a prisoner in Auschwitz and drew what he saw, then destroyed it because it would be death to have it found. Then after the war, in DP camp and after, he reconstructed those drawings, and that was published. That was very useful, because there were very few cameras in Auschwitz, and to even understand what I was trying to understand involved some kind of visual information that wasn't easily available.

There's also a very important Polish artist whose name I did know, because I was able to get hold of some books of his drawings. They were amazing. But I'd have to look in MetaMaus to find his name. Those books were important. Survivors' art, even when the artists themselves didn't survive, was urgent. It was a very important kind of witnessing. It was based on being able to translate what they saw in ways that really reported on the geography, the space, what was it like to be on an 'Appell', one of those line-ups in the morning to make sure everybody was present. I don't think they had them all huddled together like for a group high school portrait. So it was only those people who were on those lines who could make that picture.

So, when trying to get that kind of visual information, it's complicated because you can just say, 'They were on an Appell' and leave it at that if you're a writer. If you're a drawer, then the work really starts. You have to figure out how to distil that as meaningful information. Which is why I'm interested in hearing that there's such a thing as comic-making there. I don't know how one would even see such a thing here, because we're pretty closed off to many other cultures. Manga is of course very visible in America. Comics from the UK, from France, some from Italy and other Western European countries. But I've never seen comics from the Soviet Union or from the Ukraine or from Poland, if such things exist. Maybe there's a blockade, I don't know.



Oleksandr Mykhed: When I found out about these two, Olena Vitek-Voitovych and Paladij Osynka, I did a little research, looking for more information about them. I found a really interesting interview with Olena Vitek-Voitovych, and the information that she died in March 2013 in Madison, Wisconsin. Did you know about that?

Art Spiegelman: Not at all. I didn't know her name until this conversation.

Oleksandr Mykhed: Because it's interesting that she survived for 22 years after the publication of *Maus*. And it might be interesting, in an alternate universe, to get her reflection on that.

Art Spiegelman: I'd be interested. But you know, I did cauterise myself from this after I finished the book. When I was doing the research, I would read and then I would almost pass out from the pain of it and trying to understand what I was being told. And at a certain point, when I was doing it every day, I was like a surgeon who develops a kind of professional deformation. They can cut somebody open and not faint. But if they go away from it for a while and try to cut somebody open 10 years later, they faint again. I've internalised what I could, but it's not like I'm trying to do *Maus 3*, for example. The war ended. It's a specific event that lives with me, and my understanding of what I made changes over the decades. But I know that other people are now exploring this area and other areas of a kind of witnessing through comics. I don't know if Joe Sacco's work is published in Ukraine.

Oleksandr Mykhed: It was published in Russia and Palestine and several other places.

Art Spiegelman: Yes. A recent one, called *Paying the Land*, takes place in Canada and is about the situation of the indigenous Canadians and the difficulties that surround them. It's a very moving book. He keeps going from strength to strength. He was trained as a journalist and he's as focused as a journalist. He happens to also be a very great draughtsman, so he's able to do these things very convincingly. There are a lot of other projects that have come out. Some I've liked better, some worse. I only tend to glance through the ones on the specifics of the death camps in World War II, because it confuses me more than it enlightens me. I didn't know I was working in a genre when I did *Maus*. I was without a context. And now I see that that context has grown, very usefully for other people writing about absolutely disparate subjects. And it's great to see that happen. But I don't feel a responsibility to be the curator and the main critic of what's come since.

Oleksandr Mykhed: For sure. A question that might be interesting for young writers is about the specificity of the publication of *Maus*. You published Part One and it became a huge hit. How does success influence the work that's still going on, and how do you deal with it? Because it might be a huge support, but it might be a huge writing block.

Art Spiegelman: I went into a major depression after *Maus* came out. It only came out as Part One. I'd already begun what became the second part, then I got unhappy when I learned that there was an animated film coming out called *American Tale*, from Spielberg and an animator named Don Bluth. And *Maus* was coming out in chapters in this large-size avant-garde comics magazine that my wife, Françoise, and I made together, self-published. It was very visible at the school where I was teaching. The school gave it support. I was even publishing a few of the students whose work was not student-level in this magazine, and trying to show what comics could be. So I feel quite certain that the animator, who was a visiting artist, saw *Maus* in its development. And in my fantasy life I'm imagining his story conference pitch with Spielberg, saying, 'So we have these mice in a concentration camp, see?' And then Spielberg or somebody saying, 'Oh, that's a bummer. That's just too depressing. But you know, *Fiddler on the Roof* is good. Maybe we could set it in a nice Chagall-like fantasy world of pogroms and a mouse family that escapes to America.' So at that time, I didn't know much about it, but I panicked, because I didn't want, several years after this movie, to be seen as somebody doing a kind of weird take on *American Tale* rather than vice versa. A friend suggested to me that I should just publish Part One on its own. It seemed like the only thing to do at that time to stave off, you know, Spielberg. 'Spiegelman, he's even copying Spielberg's name. And then he does this thing...'

The publisher was not interested. They said, 'Look, nobody's going to buy this book anyway, so why don't you just finish it? We'll be glad to do it. It's not a problem.' And I said, 'It's going to take me years.' 'It's OK. Nobody's waiting for it.' And then an article came out in the *New York Times Book Review*, and it was an especially influential thing talking about how *Maus* was an important work of postmodernism and the first example this writer had seen of a non-cynical postmodernism. I barely understood that phrase. But it made such an impact that the publisher said, 'Let's do the first volume. Everybody's writing to us asking when it's going to come out. So we'll do it. And when you finish it, we'll put out a hard cover book. Now let's have a paperback.'

It was very successful. I was turned into a talking head for the next several months, something that happened again recently, and also left me with a kind of creative block sense of talking about the book-banning America. So it wasn't exactly helpful. I'd never made it with the expectation of it being a success. Even

when the publisher did take it on, it was after having been rejected. Since you looked at MetaMaus, you'll have seen all of the saved rejection letters I could find. It was rejected by everybody. So I assumed we would publish it ourselves, just like Raw Magazine. And that was fine. And I thought that maybe it would be found as a message in a bottle 50 years later, but this was something I just had to make. I was very conceited, thinking I was decades ahead of my time. I was probably minutes ahead of my time.

But when it came out, it was a shock. It landed well partially because what could be worse as an idea than a comic book about the Holocaust? And then people read it and said, 'It's not completely stupid. That's interesting. We have to reassess what comics might be.' So it did change things in a way I never expected. And it has actually been a weight for me. It didn't make me think, 'Now I'm going to do Maus 3, and then I'm going to go to Ukraine, and then after that, I'm going to...' It's not like that. Everything I've done is a separate project, quite anomalous from the ones that came before, built on different premises, often drawn in styles that would make it difficult to even recognise that it was my hand making it.

Oleksandr Mykhed: In the essay, 'The Sky Is Falling', and in your comics about the tragedy of the World Trade Center, 9/11, Shadow of no Towers, you say a really interesting thing: 'After all, disaster is my muse.' Does it still work for you like that? Is disaster a fuel?

Art Spiegelman: Well, it gives me the fuel to stay awake and get through the day. Now I've had to amend it. 'Disaster is my muse, but catastrophe, maybe not.' I have no idea what I could add to the conversation about global warming, except, you know, 'Instead of being involved in fucking border disputes, try to make a planet that you can breathe on in 100 years, huh?' It's getting closer and closer. By 2030, we'll be past the point of no return on fixing these things so that the ice caps don't all melt, so that coral reefs aren't gone. And every one of the nations with any power to intervene in this is much more interested in the next quarter's returns for their corporations than in trying to actually have a planet you can breathe on. I don't know how to begin to make an impact there, as an example of many catastrophes that face us. On the other hand, I don't make comics about, 'Oh, it's so nice to be with your girlfriend on a beautiful day in Central Park.' That just isn't my subject matter.

Usually, things are born in the way that an oyster makes a pearl around an irritation. It has to be either a small thing in my brain that's so troubling I have to make something, or I sit around wondering what I really should be doing because what I'm doing now, is it even worth bothering with?

Oleksandr Mykhed: In 'The Sky Is Falling' there's another great quote: 'I still believe the world is ending, but I can see that it seems to be ending more slowly than I once thought.' Do you still feel the same?

Art Spiegelman: No, that was in 2004. It's happening faster. At this point I'm horrified by the international rise of whatever you want to call it. You can be polite and say autocracy, you can be less polite and say fascism. We were just talking about how fungible memory is. People seem to have forgotten what happened. I think right after World War II there was a moment of pause, when we thought, 'Oh, maybe we should have the United Nations that could work together to make something.' It was as flawed a version of the United Nations as could have happened, a little bit like our democracy here in America. It's pretty flawed, but there was at least a pause, rather than, 'Let's gear up for the next one,' even though America did shortly after go into Korea, for example.

All I can really figure at this point is that memory is gone and there's a rise in, what do you want to call it, autocratic fascism? Fascism might be too specific, autocratic seems a little bit too abstract maybe, but the idea of a democracy seems to be rather damaged at this point by all of its failures. So I see a rise in the right wing in France; even in Germany, that seems to have known better for a while and tried to correct course; certainly in what's going on with Russia now; and certainly with the American elections. I feel terrified that this might be our last election.

Oleksandr Mykhed: Is there any hope for us, for everybody? What gives us hope?

Art Spiegelman: You've got to keep on trucking, you know. One can't focus on the disaster or all you can do is line up on a bridge and all jump off, one after the other, like lemmings. So one does what one can. I tend to be much more pessimistic than some people around me. There's a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale I read when I was a kid that had to do with a little boy who gets a glass splinter in his eye, and it makes him only see the horrible parts of the world, maybe it was 'The Snow Queen'. It stayed with me. I think the reason I'm wearing these strong lenses is because I have a glass splinter that I've had in my eye since childhood.

Oleksandr Mykhed: Do you have any message to Ukrainian writers or Ukrainian comic creators to finish?

Art Spiegelman: I would just say, as they say in France, 'bon chance'. It's a difficult task, it's a necessary task, and I wouldn't have been able to make Maus without certain books that came into my possession while I was making it. One of the most important, for example, was *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, by

Tadeusz Borowski. It was such a fine-grained picture of his daily life with a kind of veneer of cynicism, as if it was written by a hard-boiled Kapo. And it offered me a much clearer way of understanding than most other books did. The ones that seem to have too strong an agenda or to paint too rosy picture of what can happen and what did happen were less useful. Primo Levi's last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, was devastating and really urgent for me at the time.

So you have to make versions of *The Drowned and the Saved* and *This Way for the Gas* about what you're living through, because if you live through it and therefore we get to live through it, then that's urgent for trying to understand what happened. Despite our tendency to try to avoid looking at our disasters, our catastrophes, it's necessary if we're going to even begin to try to sidestep another one. And it's horrifying to me that instead we seem to be goose-stepping straight into this current one. So good luck and it's important.

Oleksandr Mykhed: Thank you so much, Art. Thank you so much, Book Forum. Thank you so much, Hay Festival. That was Art Spiegelman. And my name is Oleksandr Mykhed. See you soon and good luck to all of us.

Art Spiegelman: Thanks. It was a pleasure to talk with you.



