

Beyond Epistemic Violence: Un-Silencing Diverse Ukrainian Voices

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PL ISSN 0071-1861; e-ISSN: 2719-6534

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23858/EP67.2023.3634>

<https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/publication/276863>

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Buyskykh, J. (2023). Beyond Epistemic Violence: Un-Silencing Diverse Ukrainian Voices. *Etnografia Polska*, 67(1–2). <https://doi.org/10.23858/EP67.2023.3634>

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BEYOND EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE:
UN-SILENCING DIVERSE UKRAINIAN VOICES

*Air-raid sirens across the country
It feels like everyone is brought out
For execution
But only one person gets targeted
Usually the one at the edge
This time not you; all clear.*

Victoria Amelina
(1986 – 2023)

On the first day of the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, I lost any sense of my professional work. I explicitly remember the first cold, loud night under shelling in the improvised bomb shelter in an underground car park where my mother and I went, taking only our cat with us. We still could not believe that Kyiv was under Russian siege, and that the war that had begun in 2014 was entering a new phase. After that night, I began to lose any sense of academic work; being an academic held little meaning for me in the darker days that came, whether I was in Kyiv, in the dark corridor of our apartment during the curfew, hearing explosions outside, or in Western Ukraine, baking bread for Eastern and Southern Ukrainian internally displaced people (IDPs). Even later, living abroad and volunteering as a translator for Ukrainian refugees in a Warsaw shelter, what was important had changed for me; I thought that research no longer mattered. All the good intellectual products academia had proffered, that reflected upon the catastrophes of so many twentieth-century wars, did not stop the current war in Ukraine from breaking out.

Unfortunately, we, humanity, have learned nothing from two horrible world wars and countless other conflagrations across our fragile world. Moreover, in our inhumanity, we continue killing nature, animals, and our kin. Why, to invoke John F. Kennedy (Kennedy 1940), has the Western world slept and overlooked the neo-imperial totalitarianism in Russia that is waging war in Ukraine? Where is the place for good intellectual thinking, now, for research, for ethics in our world? Why has

something gone so desperately wrong with our civilisation? These thoughts are neither new nor productive, but they held me, stuck, betwixt and between for months, trying to find new ground and a new sense of relevance for academic work.

Perhaps many, like me, thought back to the first months of the full-scale invasion, when I was petrified by its scale and the bitter losses it brought. Many Ukrainians have since joined the Ukrainian army, determined to defend our country. I have lost eleven friends, so far, in the last twenty-two months at the time of writing. Five of these friends were former colleagues of mine who perished at the frontline of this war since March 2022: an archaeologist, two historians, an ethnographer, and a philosopher. Young, talented men who are no longer alive, their words and new research papers are gone with their lives.

Other professionals, such as the Ukrainian writer and poet Victoria Amelina cited in the epigram, gathered evidence of Russian war crimes in de-occupied territories. She became a war-crimes researcher for the Ukrainian NGO *Truth Hounds*¹ collecting stories of those who had survived war violence. We met at a charity concert organised by the Irish Red Cross in Dublin, where Ukrainian women were presenting their writings, making vocal their stories of war, displacement, and hope.² Victoria Amelina was in attendance to talk about the importance of amplifying Ukrainian voices, especially those whom Russian aggression had made silent forever. Unfortunately, Victoria herself would soon become a victim of Russian aggression. She and I were supposed to meet in Kyiv in July 2023, but while in Kramators'k, Eastern Ukraine with a humanitarian mission, she was severely injured during a Russian missile strike on June 27th and died in hospital in Dnipro only four days later. Just before her unexpected death, she had saved the diary of Volodymyr Vakulenko, a poet and children's author who had been tortured and murdered by Russian soldiers near Izium in spring 2022. His diary, which Volodymyr had buried in his garden knowing that he might not survive the Russian occupation, recounted his experience of the war. With Victoria's help, the diary was published under the title "I Am Transforming: A Diary of Occupation. Selected Poems" (Vakulenko 2023). Two more souls sacrificed to the aggression, on and on, the chain of violence keeps adding links of friends and patriots.

Thinking about Victoria, Volodymyr and my colleagues, killed because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I have come to see my ethical duty and my responsibility as a scholar and as a Ukrainian as being to amplify the voices of physically endangered Ukrainian scholars. This is something that makes me feel that life in the context of war may still be meaningful, still capable of light and goodness. Yet the voices of Ukrainian authors are also endangered symbolically, through effective Russian propaganda unleashed on Western societies, and hierarchically, through their relegation in their legitimacy as articulate advocates of their own individual and collective destinies. This hierarchical imposition of knowledge leagues is dismaying,

¹ <https://truth-hounds.org/en/homepage/> (accessed 20.10.2023).

² <https://www.innerlight.ie/> (accessed 20.10.2023).

even as Ukrainians face colonial advances through their country, and on its history, cultural heritage and its citizenry. I am astounded by the extent and reach of Russian propaganda's influence in Western academia and the dearth of empathy prevalent in my professional life. All this makes the current issue even more important.

Reflecting on what I see as a curious failure in the intellectual apparatus of the West, then, I share Maria Sonevtsky's powerful assertion that the Russian full-scale invasion on Ukraine became a catalyst for putting a spotlight on "the epistemic imperialism that governs knowledge production between centres (often correlating to the hubs of former or present empires) and peripheries (formerly colonized spaces such as Ukraine)" (Sonevtsky 2022, p. 22). She defines "epistemic imperialism" as "the hubris of believing that what one knows or studies from a privileged perspective, as within the Anglophone academy, can be exported wholesale to contexts about which one knows little or nothing" (ibid.). Equally, I argue there is a certain *epistemic violence* influencing the reception of scholarly Ukrainian narratives, a violence that refuses to see them as anything other than "local" and "emotional", even illegitimate; I see this special issue as a response to this violence. As I have argued previously, Ukraine has been held in the maw of two colonial discourses, one of lingering Western Cold War supremacy and the other of resurgent Russian imperial colonialism (Buyskykh 2023, p. 65). This censoriousness regarding Ukraine is revealed in how Ukraine has been perceived by the collective West even after 2014, that is, exclusively through the prism of the Russian empire, the Soviet Union, and Russia. This is, of course, a quite limited perspective regarding Ukraine's diverse history, entwined as it is with Polish, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Romanian, and Russian political entities, and extant heterogeneous cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

As Prince (2023) has recently stated, most of Western academia, with a strong focus on Russia, has "overlooked" the trauma inflicted on Ukraine – as well as the Caucasus and central Asian states – by Russian imperialism and colonialism. But why did the full-scale war have to happen to make Ukraine finally visible? It should have been recognised at least in 2014 after the Crimean annexation and the start of the war in Donbas. Even the fact that the collective Western world only believed Ukraine could withstand Russia's aggression for three days before it was supposed to surrender, suggests, I argue, that Ukraine has not been seen as a viable, modern nation-state (Buyskykh 2023, p. 65).

Only those professionals who had been researching Ukraine for decades understood its ability, its will, and its existential need to fight for its freedom. In the mid-1990s, Mark von Hagen, in his influential essay "*Does Ukraine have a history?*", emphasises that, "If we leave Ukraine and look to the political geography of history teaching, we find virtually no recognition that Ukraine has a history" (Hagen 1995, p. 658). He goes on to say that, "Ukraine's history must be seen as part of a greater dilemma of eastern and central Europe" (1995, p. 659), noting that Ukraine was still seen and taught as part of Russia's legacy and influence. It is sad that little had changed by 2014, that even by the outbreak of the full-scale invasion in 2022, such a view was still globally entrenched. Timothy Snyder calls attention to the historical

background of this problem when he talks about the multi-layered magnitude of the ongoing war's tragedy. He appeals to academia to call things as they are and name the anticipated eradication of Ukrainian people that Putin is inspiring. For his part, Putin "has long fantasized about a world without Ukrainians" – a fantasy that he is now attempting to realise through the Russian army (Snyder 2022). Snyder goes on to state that one of the means to withstand Russian propaganda's influence in Western academia is to popularise the history of Ukraine, which he eloquently does, embedding it in a world-historical context, in possibly the only third-level history course taught exclusively on Ukraine in the United States.³

Despite the large exodus of Ukrainian scholars escaping abroad as war refugees – many with their children – and the ongoing attrition of Ukrainian academia through frontline casualties and this refugee migration, local scholarly voices still articulate the emic perspective of a nation fighting for recognition and freedom. For instance, since the spring of 2023, the Ukrainian Institute in Kyiv has launched a multilingual depository of articles devoted to the large theme of the decolonisation of knowledge regarding Ukraine.⁴ The archive currently contains information, principally in Ukrainian, English, Polish, French, German, as well as other languages, such as academic articles, essays, blog posts and fresh emotional reflections that have been issued as responses to the events of the ongoing war.

Together with responses from Ukrainian intellectuals towards the blindness of some Western Anglophone academic circles, particularly in relation to Russian (neo)imperialism and its crimes in Ukraine, emotional testimonies of war have become a matter of academic reflection. One such reflection, from Iuliia Lashchuk, asks the sharply rhetorical question as to what extent we, as scholars from and of Ukraine, have a *right* to be sincere and emotional, and to be free from being accused of lacking distance from our homeland and the ongoing war:

But what emotions are we, Ukrainian scholars abroad, expected to connect to in order to communicate our research [...]? The task is not simple. Apparently, it should be emotional, but not too much, not too sad, but not too happy either, persuasive, but not aggressive, evidence-based, but politically correct and inclusive (Lashchuk 2023).

In this regard, I want to underline the importance of acknowledging and recognising emotional testimonies as an essential part of research knowledge-production. I suggest that *respect for an emotional insider's testimony and emic perspective* should be perceived as a deeper, embodied form of knowing that contributes to more insightful and contextualised production of knowledge in academia (Ahmed 2014; Okely 2019). This kind of contribution, in turn, can lead to a deeper empathy when we as scholars step into the shoes of others, feel their emotions under our own skin, which can impel us to do something good for others as a profound act of solidarity.

³ <https://online.yale.edu/courses/making-modern-ukraine> (accessed 28.10.2023).

⁴ <https://ui.org.ua/en/sectors-en/decolonization-selected-articles-published-in-the-aftermath-of-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/> (accessed 28.10.2023).

Empathy, or what Liu and Shange call “thick solidarity” (2018), recognises the very rupture within another person’s suffering and proposes. I read empathy as a capacious form of witnessing, existentially grounded in our shared, if unequally-distributed, sense of justice in this world. Empathy can even be a socially-affirming emotional response to people and events. Equally it can engender an experience of solidarity, or be an imaginative “co-feeling as social cognition” (Throop & Zahavi 2020). I argue then that empathy can serve as an emotional register of reciprocity beyond the rupture of events, amenable to articulating a shared humanity.

I appeal to our readers to think beyond colonial epistemologies and listen to the voices of the scholars who are usually perceived as “local” and therefore “lacking distance” to the region, field, events, and people. Now is the right time to question the epistemic authority of knowledge production when it (un)consciously keeps an “appropriate”, unemotional distance from painful fluctuations in history-in-the-making. I encourage all of us to think in ways that shrink the periphery of knowledge practices, where Ukraine has been usually placed; on the contrary, Ukraine is at the very centre of this history-in-the-making.

The entire context for this special issue is deeply intertwined with the course of the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine. We issued our call for applications in mid-September 2022 with the deadline for abstract proposals by December 1, 2022, a period of active warfare in Ukraine, with constant Russian missile shelling, which has become massive since October 10, 2022. On November 15, 2022 alone, Russia shelled Ukraine with more than a hundred missiles. These attacks targeted energy infrastructure and were designed to cause a total blackout in Ukraine, inflict collateral damage to civil infrastructure and take civilian lives. From mid-October 2022 to early March 2023, Ukraine lived with recurring blackouts, and reduced access to electricity, heating, hot water, mobile and internet connection. More than a million households in Ukraine were left without electricity, while others only had limited access. March 1, 2023 was our deadline for manuscript submissions.

Eight of our authors and my co-editor stayed in Ukraine during this period of shelling and blackouts. Two authors had to flee Kyiv under Russian siege in early March 2022 to save their children from war, to take refuge in several EU countries. In doing so, they had to leave family members behind, and were left feeling anxious about their lives every single day, not knowing whether their homes would be preserved after every new missile or drone attack. I have this fear too, thinking of my mother staying in Kyiv. We all live our lives liminally, the entire time, expecting to return home the following day, when the war would be over. Unbelievably, it is still not over...

I am convinced it is crucial to empathise with, to support, and to honour those people whose lives were ruptured by war. Those who still strive to maintain a scholarly identity, to work in unbearable circumstances – be it living under missile strikes in Ukraine during a blackout, or being torn apart from family and struggling for life elsewhere, alone with their children – these people speak for countless others. While some authors in Ukraine could work on their articles during in daylight hours, using

candles in the evenings without electricity, others struggled to send applications and submissions without even mobile internet. One author, having no electricity at home for two days, had to use the wi-fi connection at a local petrol station so as to submit their article. None of it should have been like this. I plead for these authors' considered, often emotional, efforts to remain scholarly in the eyes of our readers, to be acknowledged by us all as worthy. Life per se is fragile, but life under siege is dangerously and sharply fragile.

Other authors here, coming from Poland and Slovakia, revealed their deep and active empathy through helping Ukrainians fleeing the war to EU borders, translating for refugees, and volunteering in many different ways for Ukraine. Their contributions to this special issue not only exhibit their ethnographic research cases well but are also part of their conscious response to the war and its devastation. It is their empathic commitment to the region and language of their research, and to their study participants, friends, colleagues, even to complete strangers in Ukraine who have been affected by the Russian invasion.

Representing different regions and universities in Ukraine – from Kharkiv in the East and Kyiv in the north to Uzhhorod in the west and Odesa and Kryvyi Rih in the south – the authors bring to the issue their diverse backgrounds in history, archival studies, social anthropology, sociology, and religious studies. Their research cases reveal a historically-rooted range of Ukrainian identities, be it through contradictorily-entangled memories of the Second World War in local communities in Transcarpathia or Kryvyi Rih, or the culture and struggle for recognition of indigenous peoples of Ukraine, e.g. Crimean Tatars and Crimean Roma. Other authors offer insight into the role photography plays in the secular and sacred lives of various ethnic and religious groups in the Odesa region, into the roots pilgrimages of Hasidim to Uman, and into everyday economic and legal challenges. The contributors also illuminate the transcultural encounters people living at several borderlands face, the meanings of multiple linguistic belongings and the challenges that such meetings cause during fieldwork. We are thus bringing the local voices and experiences of Ukrainian scholars, as well as scholars in Ukrainian studies, to the surface, to allow them to speak about a multi-sited and diverse Ukraine from their grounded point of view. This rich and careful documentation of the heterogeneity of Ukraine and its citizens represents one symbolic form of resistance to ongoing efforts of colonial erasure that we all resist on a daily basis now.

We also strive to reflect on such issues as Ukrainian ethnography and history that have been silenced, that is, banned during the Soviet era, or that have yet to be voiced sufficiently to get the academic recognition and resonance they deserve. One such theme is the *Holodomor*, the Great Famine of Ukraine (1932–1933), the silencing of which through Soviet information warfare is the central point of **Tetiana Boriak's** article (pp. 26–47). The author writes soulfully that “the world kept silent about famine in Ukraine in 1932–1933” in part because of the active multi-faceted Soviet propaganda campaign that hid the worst ravages of the famine. Moreover, as the author underlines, “the world kept silent until the fiftieth anniversary of the famine, when the US

Commission on the Ukraine Famine (1984–1988) investigated the Holodomor”. In her paper, Boriak analyses instruments used by the Soviet state in the 1930s not only to hide information about the famine from the world but also to suppress memories about it. The article presents five different types of historical sources on the famine, more recently available and unsilenced testimonies of those whose experiences and tragic fates were erased. In doing so, she deconstructs historiographical myths invented by the Soviet regime around the Holodomor, paying attention, too, to the scholarly language that both expresses and constrains discussion of the most tragic episodes in Ukraine’s twentieth-century history through difficult terms such as “starvation”, “famine”, or “genocide”.

Language encounters and the ways we frame the contexts of our research are more important now than perhaps they have ever been before. How to even refer to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has at times shaped the experience of authors who contribute to this special issue. **Magdalena Zatorska**, for example, writes that her use of the word “war” to refer to Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine in a paper she wrote resulted in a surprising encounter with the respected peer-reviewed journal to which she had submitted the paper. Reflecting on the review process, she goes on to say that the editorial board actually took issue with her characterisation, proposing instead to replace her use of “war”, “in reference to the armed conflict in Donbas since 2014, for the term ‘conflict’”. Even though the author proposed to write “undeclared war” instead of “conflict” or “war”, her paper was ultimately rejected by the editorial board in March of 2022 (p. 66). To remind the reader, March 2022 was when the Russian war in Ukraine was effecting a full-scale invasion. The war that ought not to be named did not start on February 24, 2022; it began in March 2014 with the Russian Federation’s annexation of Crimea. By refusing to play language games with the descriptive term “war”, the author chose empathy, with her field and her interviewees in Ukraine, and with her Ukrainian colleagues and friends, who understand the invasion since 2014 to be a war and who have been suffering because of it. The author also chose academic dignity in her refusal to countenance trite ethical-linguistic substitutes such as “conflict” or “crisis”. I dare ask: what has the editorial board of that Western journal chosen?

We publish **Zatorska’s** article in our special issue with a full measure of respect for the author, her courage, empathy and ethical position. We respect, too, the value she has placed on the profound ethnography she did on Hasidic pilgrimages in the Ukrainian town of Uman (pp. 49–70). Researching Hasidic pilgrimages established around the tomb of the Jewish righteous Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, Zatorska explores the idea of energy employed by Uman’s non-Hasidic and non-Jewish inhabitants to describe the pilgrimages as well as the pilgrimage’s impact on the town’s urban space and its community life. She shows the meaning of certain places animated by divine power and how energy is produced in local and supralocal contexts. In particular she draws on the uneasy pursuit of national identity and long-lasting efforts to elaborate a peaceful coexistence between Christian dwellers of Uman (predominantly Ukrainian ethnic, although some Russian too), the local Jewish community and the Hasidic pilgrims arriving every year.

An uneasy coexistence of contradictory historical memories is the central topic of two articles in this special issue. While **Denys Shatalov** explores the memory landscape in an urban industrial area of Kryvyi Rih in Southern Ukraine (pp. 71–93), **Pavlo Lenio** exhibits the multi-layered and diverse palette of entangled memories in rural and urban dwellings of Transcarpathia, underlining the differences in remembering certain historical events by various ethnic groups in the region (pp. 95–121). In his paper, **Shatalov** argues that the sociological features of the heavily industrialised and entirely Russian-speaking region, which is deeply influenced by Soviet nostalgia, are nevertheless generally oversimplified in both historiography and in Ukrainian media discourses. As an insider, he presents a rich emic perspective of how current commemorative practices in the city's public space have been formed and what the sources of these rituals are. His paper addresses the shaping of commemorative practices and the overlapping of memories of three distinct historical periods: the first wave of the Russian invasion since 2014 with the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in the Donbas; the Second World War (intertwined with the Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War 1941–45); and the late eighteenth-century Cossack roots of the town. Shatalov also raises the question of how the existing collective regional memories of the ATO and the Second World War are changing as a result of the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion and unbearable human losses Kryvyi Rih has borne. He raises two emotionally painful, yet crucially important questions: how will Ukrainian society commemorate the victims of the ongoing Russian invasion; and how will Ukrainians remember this unbearable trauma, the scale of which is yet to be comprehended?

Lenio, in his turn, presents the emic perspective of Transcarpathia, the westernmost edge of Ukraine, summarising and reflecting on more than fifteen years of doing anthropology at home among various ethnic communities of the region. His article addresses the complex question of how various ethnic groups in Transcarpathia, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans, and Roma among others, remember and commemorate the Second World War and its aftermath. This commemoration includes the painful border formation that divided villages, communities, families, and which has created sometimes drastically different views on the same turning points of this historical period. These differences may create ruptures in the relationships between the Ukrainian majority and, for instance, Hungarian and Slovak minorities, making visible uneasy layers of coexistence following the Second World War, through the Soviet era, and into independent Ukraine.

Slovak anthropologist, **Matej Butko** (pp. 123–139) argues for recognising the hybrid nature of Transcarpathian borders, especially the Ukrainian-Slovak border, which also serves as one of the external borders of the EU and the Schengen zone. Based on his fieldwork in a Transcarpathian village (2018–2019) and border observations during the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, when refugees from Ukraine were coming to Slovakia, the author examines local states and border administrations in terms of people's everyday economies, functions and purposes. The author presents local state institutions and border administration as socially negotiated

for decades by local inhabitants who have lived by the current Ukrainian-Slovak border (the former Soviet-Czechoslovakian border) for almost eighty years. Butko reflects on ongoing cross-border social relations and informal practices that are performed from within local state institutions. He discusses in depth the unwritten rules of people's economies in a particular Transcarpathian village community on the Ukrainian side of the border. One of the author's central arguments is that these economies are implicated in considerations of morality and solidarity in this time of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The invasion has caused extensive traffic to the external Schengen border and has made local inhabitants reflect on and rethink their networks, social strategies, informal economies, as well as their sense of solidarity and resilience to past traumas rooted in the history of the border. New traumas, stemming from the current war, are being added to that list daily.

Olena Sobolieva in her paper (pp. 141–153) explores another dimension of inter-generational trauma, drawing on ethnographic data on Crimean Tatars in Crimea (2003–2011) and Crimean Tatar exiles in Kyiv after the Russian annexation of the peninsula in 2014. Sobolieva's article is devoted to the meaning of identity and belonging in the generations of Crimean Tatars who are in the process of defending land rights following their repatriation to Crimea in the 1990s. Being forcibly resettled by the Stalinist regime in 1944 and therefore separated from their ethnic homeland, the Crimean Tatars formed an identity that had a distinctive connection to the lost territory and ancestral land. Sobolieva shows that political resistance continued during the Soviet period, until a mass, spontaneous repatriation of Crimean Tatars took place under the slogan "*the restoration of justice*". This slogan articulated the Crimean Tatars' moral return to their ethnic homeland to regain their rights to ancestral (often parents') land. The author shows this uneasy process and how it had great political resonance in Crimea and Ukraine overall, leading to a significant reorganisation of the cultural landscape of the peninsula. Providing us with the richness of her ethnographic data and the field context, Sobolieva helps us feel the pain of being exiles experienced by the generations of many Crimean Tatars who lost their homeland twice, in 1944 and in 2014.

The other two indigenous people of Ukraine who experienced the trauma of deportation in 1944 are Servur'a and Krým'a (Crimean Roma), sub-ethnic groups of Ukrainian Roma. These two groups are studied in depth by **Mykola Homanyuk** and **Yanush Panchenko** (pp. 155–173). Based on their ethnographic and historical research (2016–2022), the authors argue that the Krým'a and the Servur'a meet the criteria for being recognised in Ukrainian law as "indigenous people of Ukraine" who merit the state's protection. The authors exhibit the history of Servur'a and Krým'a for the reader, showing the distinctive ethnographic features of both groups, including their languages, cultures, social customs, religious rituals, and cuisine. The authors advocate for classifying Servur'a and Krým'a as indigenous peoples of Ukraine, with all the recognition and state support they deserve. They explore the groups' traumatic historical experiences, including the near-extirmination of the Roma during the Nazi occupation and the 1944 Stalinist deportation that they share

with Crimean Tatars. The authors underline the general vulnerability of these two indigenous groups, and their uncertain legal status in Ukrainian society, which is strengthened by negative stereotypes about Roma. However, as the authors state, these negative stereotypes are changing slowly regarding the role representatives of Roma communities have been playing in helping the Ukrainian army during the full-scale Russian invasion and in their demonstrable allegiance to the Ukrainian state. They hope that with their research they may draw attention to the urgent problems of all Romani ethnic groups in Ukraine and give impetus to the formation of state policy towards the Roma.

The interethnic and interconfessional coexistence of various ethnic and religious groups in the Odesa region, Southern Ukraine through the lens of photography is explored in **Viktoriia Dmytriuk's** ethnographically rich paper (pp. 175–196). Being a professional photographer and ethnographer, she researches the historical and cultural dynamics of the development of photography in the region, from sophisticated art available for certain strata of urban society to everyday vernacular practice present both in urban and rural areas. The author shows the operation of photography in traditional practices related to birth and death, religious rituals, and feasts of various groups, highlighting the most aesthetically-expressive ethnographic examples among local Bulgarians and the adherents of the local Innochemist Christian sect. Dmytriuk pays attention to the role of a researcher who holds a camera in the field, to her interactions with the respondents who shared their family albums with her, and to how the space for mutual trust developed in the field can be frequently fragile. She stresses how essential the ethical principles of photographers' and ethnographer's work in the field are, particularly when they not only listen to oral stories but also touch on families' pasts through family photo archives – repositories that may have remained unseen and silent for decades under communism.

The importance of an ethnographer's constant self-reflection in the field is the central theme of **Tomasz Kosiek's** paper, where he investigates language encounters during fieldwork among the Ukrainian minority groups in Poland and the Romanian borderland region of Maramures (pp. 197–212). Drawing his inspiration from Malinowski's iconic method of research, Kosiek follows his approach and stresses the deep need to know the language of the studied community. Comparing two minority Ukrainian communities in Poland and Romania, the author shows how knowledge of the Ukrainian language affected his self-identification with respect to respondents. Kosiek reflects upon the vulnerability of the field when language serves as an identifier of "self" and "other", engendering trust or mistrust, opening or closing certain doors and even the very hearts of the people. He stresses important moral and ethical issues to be constantly acknowledged during field research. He draws on examples of how, through a deep knowledge of the local language, the researcher's identity may be unintentionally misinterpreted by respondents, influencing their perceptions of the researcher, and he explores the ethical dilemmas such a situation may generate.

The authors here are moving from Ukrainian (also Slovak and Polish) into English, reaching across language boundaries to bring their research cases and emic

perspectives to a wider audience, seeking understanding, solidarity, and even refuge in English as an academic *lingua franca*. Some articles were translated into English, while other authors transformed their academic writing from their native languages into English themselves, to implement their need for their fieldsites to be seen and heard more widely. I, too, am writing in my fourth language, intending to inspire thoughtfulness in our audience to understand our main message of empathy, solidarity and hope. We all aspire here for the capaciousness of the host language to meet our basic need of recognition for our translated message, for it to be considered seriously. The alternative is for these texts to be rejected at the borders, without papers. That being said, if there are any rough edges in these texts to be found, they do not emerge from a lack of understanding of the host language, but from a resolute refusal to be readable completely in that language; part of each of us who writes here remains unable to leave the ongoing crisis. Each contributor for this special issue, in fact, has found him or herself living in a context of shifting and potentially annihilating meanings, seeking out edges and liminal spaces within which some record of their precarious lives can be communicated, however incompletely. Several authors speak through a longer fieldwork practice to address incessant atrocities that attempt a retranslation of hard-won Ukrainian independence back into a russified idiom of “liberation”. Rarely has the work of anthropologists been so important to move meanings to safety, and to preserve meanings in the face of such a comprehensive onslaught. As anthropologists, we understand here the power of reciprocity to return this generosity. We are grateful for what our authors have shared with us.

We live in a world where a colonial power seemingly from the awful past of the now-dominant West has risen to annihilate the very conditions of being in Ukraine, or even being from there. Many friends have come to our aid, and surprising new friends have been found in our time of need. But the war in Ukraine still goes on. We too often do not have enough trusted friends, enough words, enough weapons, enough food or other essential resources. All we have now is hope. Being Ukrainians, we hope, even though hope may just mean “another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed” (Solnit 2016, p. 4).

I ask myself repeatedly, can the existential search for hope be a common ground to experience active empathy, to practice being empathic? Following Michael Jackson, how we generate life comes from our ability to build relationships not only with ourselves but also with our various environments, and hope is the driving force in these processes: “Hope is predicated on the experience of being integral to the lives of the others, one’s own subjectivity coextensive with theirs” (Jackson 2011, p. 93). From such hope many Ukrainians and their friends make symbolic gestures, rallying our allies in efforts such as this special issue. We move forward as we may, across the world, into the penumbra of our now almost-forgotten peaceful lives, to remember with the force of a cannon, to resist, to overcome, to prevail. Each author here stands in empathy and solidarity with their friends and colleagues, with their fallen loved ones, and with the generations to come, to say to the physical and symbolic violence: you shall not pass. This cliché from World War One is deliberate; we

must resist this quintessentially anachronistic and banal evil now. We have to stop the violence, whether it is on the actual frontline or in the increasingly adversarial academic system.

Our country is much more than the enemy can imagine, and this special issue is but one stubborn reminder of the fractally beautiful, irrepressibly complex, and eternally resilient Ukrainian people. We write here to remind our colleagues abroad that solidarity is always an option, and to invite them to join us in celebrating our beautiful land, and the diverse cultures of Ukraine. Extend to us the empathy we require to feel that our plight has been recognised, that we need not do more to qualify for basic equality with the rest of humanity, to secure our right to live away from the shadow of evil oppression that has fallen over us all. Stand with us, stay with us, resist with us too. You are humans first: come, read, learn, join us, and respond, first with your humanity, only then with your intellectuality.

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