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Canadian Engaged Scholarship and the Russian War against Ukraine

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Exchanges

In Exchanges, we present conversations with scholars and practitioners of community engagement, responses to previously published material, and other reflections on various aspects of community-engaged scholarship meant to provoke further dialogue and discussion. In this section, we invite our readers to offer their thoughts and ideas on the meanings and understandings of engaged scholarship, as practiced in local or faraway communities, diverse cultural settings, and in various disciplinary contexts. We especially welcome community-based scholars' views and opinions on their collaborations with university-based partners in particular and engaged scholarship in general.

In this issue, *ESJ's* managing editor Penelope Sanz converses with Dr. Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, the founding editor of ESJ and now the director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CUIS) at the University of Alberta, about engaged scholarship in the context of the Ukraine-Russia war. When this exchange took place in Spring 2023, the Israel-Palestine conflict the world is witnessing now was farthest from their minds. ESJ keeps in mind the peer reviewers and authors from these two countries, who submitted and/or evaluated articles on community-university engagements to the journal.

Canadian Engaged Scholarship and the Russian War against Ukraine

Penny – I come from the island of Mindanao in Southern Philippines. It has a long history of armed conflicts due to inter-ethnic differences and rebellions that are secessionist, ideological, or terroristic in nature. Since Mindanao, an island slightly bigger than Singapore, is far from the national geo-body, the rest of the Philippines is concerned when they hear about deaths and armed conflicts that erupt among warring parties: usually between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and government's Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) or between the communist New Peoples' Army and the AFP. Personally, even when I'm here in Canada, whenever I hear a helicopter flying above, I still associate it with *gyera*, or war in English, happening somewhere in the island. Here I go again. Remember before didn't we notice that whenever we discuss ESJ concerns or ideas, we tend to insert Ukrainian or Filipino words and phrases in our sentences? We think that it's because both of us are non-native English speakers and we speak with an accent that something in our brain switches.

I reached out to you because just a few months ago in February, we marked the first year of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with tanks rolling in and bombing following. From my experience back home, over the long haul, the general public—especially those who are located in Northern and Central Philippines—get desensitized to war and it becomes business as usual. On the ground, there's massive displacement of

people, lives being disrupted or snuffed out, and livelihoods wiped out and yet nobody seems to care. Do you perceive any public fatigue towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine in Canada right now?

Natalia – I appreciate your awareness and your positionality when it comes to reflecting on Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022. By now, (in the fall of 2023, it has grown into a global conflict, but we should not forget that we are speaking of the war launched even earlier, in 2014, when Russian troops rolled into Crimea and soon after it was illegally annexed to the Russian Federation. And we remember that the war in the Donbas area also started in 2014, with Russian direct military intervention and logistical support to local insurgents. I appreciate your saying that by now, one year after the full-scale invasion began, many in Canada may have already gotten used to and perhaps even forgotten about this war, and moved on to other global affairs and challenges. Certainly, it's a signal of fatigue to which you referred. Of course, in my line of work, as the Director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta, I am quite embedded in war-related research and knowledge production, through discussions in academic venues as well as in the community, so in my immediate milieu I don't see much evidence that the world has forgotten about this war. But intellectually I am quite aware of this of course. There are times when I am asked by my Canadian friends whether the war is still going, whether I know personally anyone who has been killed (I have already lost many friends and colleagues to this war), and so on.

Penny – Why should the West care about the conflict in Ukraine?

Natalia – First, it is important to realize that describing this war as a "conflict in Ukraine" is inappropriate. It is the war initiated by an aggressor state against its neighbour, the Russian Federation, a successor of the USSR, wanting to regain and control a neighbouring independent state that was once a member of the Soviet Union. In other words, we are dealing here with the neo-imperial and neo-colonial ambition of the direct successor of the USSR and its aggressive efforts to expand its control over a neighbouring state and its territory to restore the previous status quo. The Soviet Union consisted of 15 federal republics combined into one union, a political federation under a communist rule that de facto was controlled from the Soviet capital of Moscow, also a capital of the Russian Federation back then and now. So, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dissolved, 15 independent states emerged. One of them was Russia, others were Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia etc. During these three decades, all 15 states have long been recognized as legitimate independent countries. But for various reasons, in Russia under the authoritarian rule of Putin who came to power twenty-two years ago, anti-democratic and harmful ideas on how a country can maintain its dominance on the global scene evolved.

The Russian president, a former officer of the Soviet Security Services, the infamous KGB agency, has long adopted old Soviet practices of dictatorial ruling trying to restore the former 'glory' of his country. Chasing his neo-imperial and neo-colonial dreams of powerful and dominant Russia, Putin and his regime have been long meddling in the affairs of neighbouring states to establish there political regimes loyal to Russia. In several cases, this meant a military invasion on some nearby states, for example, as was the case with the Russian occupation of parts of Georgia in 2008.

Russia has also fuelled other wars on Soviet territories, which were resolved differently for different political reasons. The two Chechen wars in the 1990s and 2000s are another example of how the Russian state suppressed a pro-independent republic within the Russian Federation. Then in 2014, when in neighbouring state of Ukraine the majority of citizens resisted the authoritarian pro-Russian government and participated in a national resistance movement that later became known as the Revolution of Dignity, it was Ukraine's turn. During these protests, as soon as Putin wrapped up the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russian troops swiftly occupied Crimea. Even though that the international community did not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, some folk around the world bought the Russian Federation's interpretation of events, that the takeover of Crimea was an outcome of some internal to Ukraine 'conflict'. It was not. The takeover was Russia's direct, forceful and illegal occupation of Crimea.

Penny – Yes, Crimea was taken over and the former Ukrainian president fled to Russia when there was a massive protest after he decided not to sign an agreement that would bring Ukraine closer to Europe.

Natalia – Ukraine has been facing an external threat since 2014 when Crimea was illegally occupied, without much bloodshed. The Russian troops went into the peninsula cleverly without insignia on their uniforms that would easily be spotted on journalist video and photo footage as Russian troops' insignia. Thus, we have a case of one state engaging in a military takeover of another sovereign nation-state. Within a couple of weeks, a fake referendum was staged, and 97 percent of the residents of that peninsula purportedly voted in favour of Crimean independence from Ukraine. Two days later Crimea was formally annexed to Russia. That is, the independence, for which all presumably voted, was over. Tell me, in what parts of the world have we seen cases where a couple of weeks after a takeover, 83 percent of the population would come to the polling stations and 97 percent of those would vote in favour of cession and immediately for a "reunification" with another foreign state? These statistics claimed by the Russian state are widely doubted in the democratic world. This was a crafted referendum that made it appear that Russia did something legitimate here, which they did not.

In February 2022, on the other hand, we saw a more conventional war, with troops and tanks rolling into Ukraine and attempting to seize the capital in the first three days. This phase of the war is spoken about in terms of being a full-scale invasion. Ukraine has been resisting it as much as it can since then.

Penny – The history of Ukrainian/Russian relations goes further than that, right? So, is it only about Ukraine's territorial integrity? What is at stake?

Natalia - The history of Ukrainian/Russian relations spans many centuries. Russia for example seeks its historic roots in the state of Kyivan Rus, a very powerful political entity founded in 862 with Kyiv as its capital. There is obvious territorial, religious and cultural continuity between this state and contemporary Ukraine. Moscow-the-city was founded much later, in 1147, followed by the emergence of the future state of Moscovy that eventually grew into a large Russian empire as we know it from the textbooks. And then in 1654, in the context of an ongoing war involving a number of warring sides an agreement was signed between the Russian tsar and Ukrainian Cossacks, as representatives of the Ukrainian Cossack state. That agreement was understood differently by both sides. In some ways, it reminds me of the treaties that were signed between the expansionist and colonial British Crown and the First Nations of Canada. On the British side, the treaties were interpreted as an invitation to full takeover, while the other side felt betrayed and colonized. In the case of the tsarist-Cossack agreement, the Russian Empire followed with steady repressive and administrative measures designed to subjugate Ukraine and make it an inseparable and integral part of the Russian Empire.

As we remember the current war began in 2014, with Ukraine's effort to align itself with Europe and to apply for membership in the European Union. This was perceived by Russia as a threat to its position of power and influence that the Russian state attempted to maintain in the region of its immediate neighbours. Thus, the war is not only about the territorial integrity of Ukrainians, and the Ukrainian effort to defend itself. It is about a young, pro-western democracy trying to enter a larger network of democratic states and live in accordance with the principles and values of democracy, human rights, the rights to territorial integrity, and rights to international law. All of these have been violated.

Penny – So what's Russia's real agenda?

Natalia – The Russian war in Ukraine, some call it the "Russo-Ukrainian war," has roots in this colonial memory and nostalgia I just touched upon. Half a year before it began Putin

Note: In August 2023, Natalia joined the expedition of the Museum of Revolution of Dignity (Kyiv, Ukraine), which was focused on documenting the damage to cultural properties and religious temples of Ukraine caused by Russian bombing and shelling. With them, Natalia did the fieldwork in deoccupied territories of Kyiv oblast, Ukraine. The photos shown in this article were all taken in Village Peremoha in Ukraine.

wrote an essay on Ukraine explaining to the Russian citizens that Ukraine has no history and Ukrainians are just Russians. This was a strategic manifesto designed to prepare his country to accept what would come soon and to justify the war on Ukraine. Russian troops have come to Ukraine not simply wanting to take territory, but they were killing Ukrainian patriotic civilians, destroying Ukrainian heritage sites, museums, archives, and burning Ukrainian books. Ukraine of course has its own language, long history, strong cultural legacy and heritage. Since it gained independence in 1991, it has built schools, developed its own history curricula based on Ukrainian culture and history and raised at least two generations of Ukrainian citizens. But now, Russian teachers are being brought into the occupied territories of Ukraine to teach Ukrainian kids the history of the Russian empire, glorifying its past in accordance with the Russian view of the world history, in which Russia occupies the leading role and in which there is no Ukraine.

Documenting damage caused by the Russian shelling (Local Orthodox Church, the village of Peremoha). Photo by Natalia Khanenko-Friesen.

The Russian official view on Ukraine insists that Ukraine ought to belong to the Russian state; that it has always been part of Russia; that what was an overwhelming vote for Ukrainian independence in the 1991 referendum was a historical mistake. We're talking about a genocidal war, about the killing and horrendous torture of civilians, raping of women and removing children from Ukraine or re-educating them in the occupied territories. It is an agenda that systematically denies Ukrainians their own identity, their own history, their own language, and their own right to existence. It's as big as that. The world has witnessed earlier similar efforts at exterminating people and their cultures. We all remember the Holocaust and the place in history that the Nazi Germany assigned to the Jewish people and the Roma people, back in times of the World War II. We remember Rwanda and the massacre in Srebrenica in Bosnia and Hercegovina. We know too well in Canada, at least I hope we know well, what the removal of Indigenous children did to the Indigenous communities in Canada. This current Russian war in Ukraine is genocidal and is happening right on the doorsteps of the European Union. There are so many reasons why this is not a small war and why Canadians need to care.[1]

1 The authors also note that the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict also has historical roots and far reaching implications not only on the civilians in Gaza, but also the geo-political dynamics in the area. The war has led to a dire humanitarian crisis that continues to imperil civilian lives. It also threatens the regional stability, and nuclear security in the Middle East that

Penny – What do you think about these talks that Ukraine should just give up, considering the costs of war, its toll on people and economy, and that everyone will be at peace if the war stops?

Natalia – Giving up this fight for its territorial integrity and for the very right to exist as a sovereign state, is seen by many as a recipe for disaster. Giving up Ukrainian territory means to Ukrainians giving up a part of themselves, their nationality, identity, history, independence, and the right to sovereignty and political agency. Ukrainians are well aware of what might come next because, since 2014, the frozen war has been affecting people, their livelihood, sense of security, and the economy. It is of course a stretch to compare this situation with an abusive household in which an abusive family member keeps all others in fear. But I oftentimes return to thinking about the power disbalances and sense of hopelessness that becomes a living environment in which abused family members live under the same roof with the abuser. This is the situation for many Ukrainians now living in the Russia-occupied territories. Freezing this war will not introduce lasting peace. If you partition Ukraine by giving some of its parts up, it's going to be just another major geopolitical risk that could erupt again and rather soon.

Local librarian shares the story about murdered and tortured local youth (pic with the phone). Photo by Natalia Khanenko-Friesen.

Penny – I remember that when you were still *ESJ*'s editor and teaching at St. Thomas More College, you run the Study Abroad program where you took students to Ukraine during the Spring Term. I also know that you continue to engage with several communities in Ukraine through research and in various capacities. So, what was it like for you when you learned that Russia was invading Ukraine last year? What was the first thing that came to mind?

Natalia – The first thing was to pick up the phone. My first month or two or three, Penny, was spent on the phone. I had all my gadgets on 24/7; talking to my colleagues in Ukraine, who were fleeing with their children from eastern cities where shelling and bombing were happening. One of my colleagues is a mother to then a five-year-old child. I remember very painfully trying to convince her to leave her Eastern Ukrainian city which was severely shelled. She was traumatized and disoriented. She took cover in a bathtub with her small child while the bombing was going on, trying to survive and figure out what to do. To leave or not? I was trying to encourage her to consider leaving, though I knew how risky it would be. Do you remember seeing pictures of Kharkiv, where she lived? Kharkiv, a beautiful city in eastern Ukraine, an important cultural centre, already laid in

ruins within first few weeks of the invasion, like it once did in times of World War Two. I remember seeing images of the train station where people with children were trying to squeeze into the trains.

Penny – Yes, I remember seeing those photos. It was heart-wrenching. I felt like I was looking at LIFE magazine's photos of World War II that my father used to collect when he could. He was quite a reader of war history.

Natalia – In my case, I have family in Ukraine still. I was trying to figure out how my family was doing. Looking back, for the first half a year, I don't remember sleeping. Especially for the first couple of months, we were frantically trying to figure out how to support people who were fleeing, and where to house them while they were on the run. Many colleagues were so disoriented. They didn't have resources. They just looked for rides, looked for escape cars in areas being bombed. At the same time, other colleagues immediately signed up for the army and territorial defence units, we began losing some to the war almost immediately. I remember communicating with a devastated colleague whose wife died in her apartment because it was bombed. I remember an emerging scholar losing a child. I have close friends whose sons signed up for the Army and went to the front. Then I remember calling around Universities in Ukraine, and in the West, trying to find out who can go where, what University can take what colleagues and students.

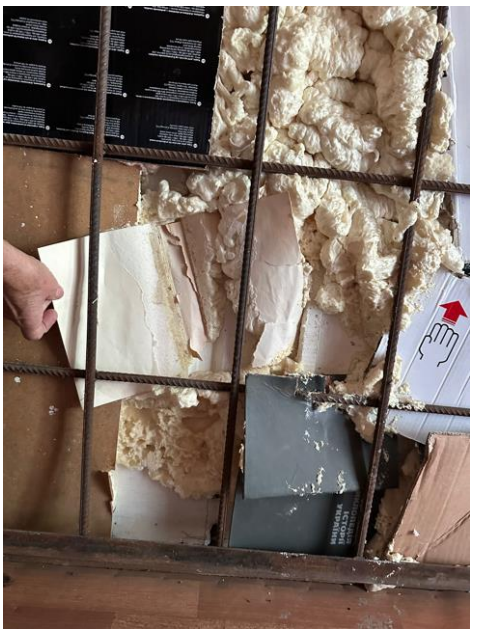
These were emotionally wrenching times. At the same time, we launched an initiative called U-ART, Ukraine Archives Rescue Team, called to help fleeing researchers to store their data for free on highly secure server. I was not allowed to speak about this project, to be honest, so not many people heard about this initiative yet. Once we were contacted by a researcher from the city of Mariupol that was bombed as severely by the Russians as the Chechen capital Grozny was bombed by the Russians in their war against Chechnia some twenty years ago. Others compare Mariupol to Aleppo, Syria, destroyed by Russia-Syria bombs. In any case, the gentleman, a researcher from the regional museum who was fleeing the war zone, contacted us, asking to arrange a data transfer from his research computer, but we have never heard back from him again. Having interviewed many people who had to flee from the occupied territories and from Mariupol, I now can only imagine what may have happened to him on his way out of the city. I pray that he is alive somewhere though.

Penny – When the war in Ukraine broke out, you were in your second year as director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS). What was it like for your institute? But first, can you tell us a little bit about your organization?

Natalia – CIUS is Canada's largest and most impactful research institute focusing on Ukrainian Studies. We pride ourselves on being global leaders in the field. The institute was founded in 1976, and its growth benefited directly from the support of the Ukrainian Canadian

community that continues to donate and support our research projects financially and in many other ways. We are a large organization. We have some 40 people employed and working in two countries, Canada and Ukraine on campuses of the University of Alberta, the University of Toronto, and Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. We are a 'commonwealth' of 11 research centers and programs all housed under the umbrella of the institute. There is the Ukrainian Language Education Center, Kule Ukrainian Canadian Studies Centre, Petro Jacyk Centre for Historical Research, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium and other programs. These are large and reputable institutions in their own right. Ukrainians in Canada have witnessed many upheavals and pivotal points in the history of Ukraine and the work of our institute has been to offer critical analytical perspective on those.

Local librarian shows where exactly Russian troops removed books and where they were taken to mould the wall. Photo by Natalia Khanenko-Friesen.



Russian troops used Ukrainian library books as construction material to plaster walls in the destroyed Village Culture Club (Village of Peremoha, Kyiv Oblast). Photo by Natalia Khanenko Friesen.

Penny – Before you answer my question about how your institute coped with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, can we digress for a bit and can you tell us what these historical events were?

Natalia – The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is one such pivotal historical event, because it led to the establishment of independent Ukraine. Before that, the Soviet regime in Ukraine resulted in a number of devastating developments. In 1932-1933 there was the Holodomor, when the Soviet political leadership and Stalin in particular deliberately starved the Ukrainian countryside for the Ukrainian peasants did not want to become workers of soviet farms that were being created on the basis of their personal land holdings and cattle. This mass famine has been recognized as genocide against the Ukrainians. Close to four million Ukrainian villagers perished, which accounted for about 13 percent of the entire population of Ukraine. And there was World War II, when the Soviet troops occupied Western Ukraine,

persecuted, exiled or executed its intelligentsia, clergy, and political leaders who resisted that foreign takeover. After the war, there was another mass famine in 1947. Later, Soviet regime continually repressed the Ukrainian intellectuals, through as late as the 1970s and 1980s. These events and the overall repressive Soviet regime are an important backdrop of the 2022 Ukraine-Russia War.

Coming back to your question about what we did as an institute after February 24, 2022, we had to reconfigure everything, now with the war going on. Our efforts were directed at figuring out how we could lead and provide a proper intellectual response to the war, support scholars at risk, mobilize new research, and seek funding that would support all new initiatives that we undertook. And for a period of time, we had to become a humanitarian aid centre. CIUS became a mobilization centre as we tried to figure out how we could support our colleagues in war-torn Ukraine.

Penny – Was it just anyone in Ukraine or were there also initiatives supporting scholars, researchers, writers—the Intelligentsia? I asked this because you mentioned that Ukrainian books and literature are being burned: to erase a culture is to also to target the intellectuals, the cultural workers. etc.

Natalia – Soon after the full-scale invasion started, we began focusing on Ukrainian students both here and in Ukraine. We set up the Disrupted Ukrainian Students and Scholars (DUSS) initiative. Together with other faculties and departments, we pulled more than $600,000 to support such individuals. We worked hard and around the clock identifying those in need, responding to numerous queries, matching scholars with programs and the other way around and so on. We've been looking around for ways to mobilize university resources and to bring disrupted and displaced scholars to places where they can work, meaning also but not necessarily to the University of Alberta. So that's why I insisted on settling on the term 'disrupted' rather than 'displaced', because some colleagues of ours were not allowed to leave. You may remember that the Ukrainian government had instituted the bylaw stipulating that males from the age of 18 to 60 are not allowed to leave, which covers the entire adult male working population. In an overwhelming number of cases, our male colleagues could not leave Ukraine.

Penny – are all your colleagues accounted for?

Natalia – We lost track of some. We couldn't find them or did not know what was going on because their territories were occupied. Some were able to flee and thankfully, we were able to reconnect. But we've lost many literally, as I mentioned earlier, some were killed in the line of duty. We had some very moving stories back from the early days. Colleagues were serving in the army and still lecturing their students online while on the frontline, imagine that. They were able to work with their students and serve in the Army oftentimes lecturing

between military action. And even if we've lived through all of this in a sort of second-hand way, vicariously participating in all these unfolding traumas if you wish, experiencing all this was and still is very painful.

Penny – Yes, I also know what it is like to lose colleagues and close friends who were also killed while doing their jobs as photojournalists… peace educators. So, there was immediately a shift in the Institute's focus?

Natalia - Yes, our efforts were part of what we called an academic rapid response to the war, to support colleagues and find funds for them to reengage with their work once they fled the war. At this point, we have brought over 48 scholars to the University of Alberta.

Penny – Scholars? Are these students only? Or also senior scholars? Back home in times of armed conflict, the youth are very resilient and provide the much-needed energy to organize and gather data. Have you tapped and mobilized young scholars?

Natalia – Both, scholars and students. Young or emerging scholars reaching Canada are now in the category of displaced persons. Now, they want to document their story. And I'm very lucky to have met a couple of scholars and have them engaged in the documentation project I initiated a year ago, "Making Home in Times of Peace and War: Oral History of Ukrainian Displaced Persons in Canada Post-2022". There were visiting fellows who we brought over, or who came with their families and were accepted to the university. Tuition fees were waived for a year for the Ukrainian displaced students at the University of Alberta, so this would be a great help to them.

This is our university's response to the war. It's a costly response amounting to about CA$ 1.5 million I heard that the university has allocated for displaced Ukrainian students during the first year.

Penny - What other academic activities has the Institute continued to engage in since the invasion?

Natalia – We introduced an international lecture series "Historians and the War: Rethinking the Future." These were initially biweekly seminars profiling internationally renowned experts in global history lecturing and explaining to our audiences what's going on with this war on Ukraine. We also created a short video interview series "Did You Know? CIUS Answers" that addressed questions of interest to the general public, for example, why would Ukrainians fight back in this war? Why this war is not an ethnic conflict? What's the difference between Russian and Ukrainian cultures, languages, history, and peoples? And so on. Then, there's also the Canadian side to this war aftermath.

Penny – When you say the Canadian side what do you mean?

Natalia –There is a 'Canadian side' to these developments, as not only have academics started reaching our University, but many other Ukrainian displaced persons have begun to arrive in Canada. With the war in full swing, about 15 million Ukrainians were displaced at some point. Some eight million more were displaced outside of Ukraine. We're talking about one-third of the entire Ukrainian population being displaced most in the first half of 2022. The population of Ukraine before the war was about 43 million, and currently, Ukraine has an estimated population of 36 million people. That's the drop; right now. The demography institute in Kyiv is very hesitant to issue any official numbers, these are the estimates. There are 8 million Ukrainians who ended up being abroad, and this displacement has been very rapid. If you look back at the Syrian war, the number of displaced Syrians amounted to about 11 million. But this displacement shaped over the course of 10 years. I'm not saying one situation is better than the other. I'm simply pointing out the chronological dimensions of this displacement. Governments, NGOs, and countries where displaced Ukrainians are showing up must figure out how to handle this major humanitarian crisis, with the accelerated speed at which these transformations are happening, in a short period. Europe faced these challenges first, but Canada followed soon thereafter.

Penny – Canada opened its doors to Ukrainians almost immediately, right?

Natalia – Canada has been supportive of Ukrainians, like many other democratic countries within Europe and around the world. What many in Canada don't recognize though is that the Canadian government did not extend the framework of refugee protection to fleeing Ukrainians as it had to the Afghans or Syrians. I think there have been about 35,000 Syrians who have come to Canada, since 2014. Do you remember when you and I were editing some academic contributions on Syrian newcomers in Saskatoon?

Penny – Yes, I do remember. Your students in oral history class were interviewing them as well.

Natalia – Yes, Syrian displaced persons had just arrived from Syria, and still lived in the hotels when my students were conducting oral history interviews with them. We also have had about 45,000 Afghans who arrived in Canada. Both groups came here as refugees, and they've been channelled, accepted, and supported by a very important, elaborate, and well-financed refugee framework, which exists in Canada. But Ukrainians have not been afforded that very status.

Penny – Would you mind enlightening me why Ukrainians do not have that status? What does it mean then when it comes to supporting the newly arrived Ukrainians?

Natalia – Ukrainians fleeing the war are not considered refugees: they were not given refugee status but work visas to come to Canada for three years. This means that Ukrainians fleeing the war came to Canada without extended financial support, and without the help of

refugee-receiving agencies, which have the know-how, experience, and without government funding to accept them as refugees and help them settle. Canada's settlement and refugee agencies have been involved in the situation but on more of an ad hoc basis rather than in a concerted or systemic federally supported way. Canada granted emergency visas CUAET (Canada-Ukraine Authorisation for Emergency Travel) to displaced Ukrainians and started providing them with $3,000 per adult and $ 1,500 per child. Now (in mid-November 2023) we're talking about more than 198,000 Ukrainians who have arrived.

We technically cannot even call the arrival of displaced Ukrainians 'immigration'; instead, they are termed 'temporary asylum seekers'. These people are coming to Canada with some hopes of going back to Ukraine in the future and figuring out how to live their lives again. But that's a separate conversation. That's what researchers should be looking into.

Penny – How are newly arrived Ukrainians coping with this situation of not having enough support from the government?

Natalia - That's where our communities and volunteer organizations, be they Ukrainian or non-Ukrainian, have come forward and are actively working, be it in Saskatchewan and Alberta or elsewhere in Canada. It is phenomenally stressful, but also rewarding I might add, because this engagement gives volunteers a degree of satisfaction and pride to be able to help others in times of need. Of course, there is a much work and ongoing effort that goes into receiving and supporting newcomers. Alberta alone received 33,000 Ukrainians over the last six weeks, and on average 1,500 people arrive here weekly. We would have a clearer and more exact number of such arrivals if the Ukrainians were coming in as refugees via established channels: the federal and provincial governments would have known the demographics, the breakdown, and the overall situation.

Penny – How do Ukrainians arrive here by the way? Are they being flown here on a chartered flight?

Natalia - They are coming on their own. Initially in the spring of 2022, there have been some charter planes taking early displaced persons on to Canada but that practice did not last. This overwhelming flow of people brings much work to community volunteers who mobilized to help but usually without much expertise in how to do this effectively; volunteers also have been struggling to identify and find arriving Ukrainians. There has been a huge mismatch in the early months in terms of needs and assistance available. You have this influx of people, and then you have unprepared volunteer groups trying to help them. So, that was the nature of Canada's community support of DPs from Ukraine.

Penny – How can academics help resolve some of the challenges in addressing these issues and move forward?

Natalia – In response to both the scope of needs and the influx of people, I had to refocus the entire conference devoted to Ukrainian immigration to Canada which I have been planning for a year. My previous plan for the conference was to focus on post-independent immigration from Ukraine to Canada (1991-2021). But then, of course, this all got hijacked. We needed to create space to include conversations and reflections focusing on post-2022 arrivals. There have already been efforts in the academia and the community to give all this a valid and informed perspective, but many changes continue taking place on the ground every day. All in all itt was important to change the focus of our conference to incorporate early academic efforts to account for the CUAET arrivals and what it means to Canada. As a result, at the conference, we heard about projects taking place in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and elsewhere. New initiatives have been evolving as well. Thus, Dalhousie University initiated a project that focuses on youth arriving from Ukraine. I have also launched a project "Making Home" that I described earlier.

Penny – Is it also an oral history project?

Natalia – Yes, it is. My team and I are interviewing displaced Ukrainians about their aspirations, hopes, and efforts to recreate a sense of normalcy amidst the ongoing trauma. This war caused much trauma and loss for so many citizens of Ukraine. It is important to go into the field and document the experience of displacement and how people address its challenges. At the same time, I am interested in the interviewees' reflections on what is next for them.

This brings me back to an important observation. Ukrainians coming to Canada themselves prefer not to be labelled as refugees. This is an identity-focused matter for them, it's challenging for them to apply the term to themselves. Therefore, we should be careful about doing so ourselves. On the other end, the ethnic Ukrainian community in Canada is itself being 'symbolically' displaced, if you wish. Let me explain. Ukrainian Canadians are accustomed to describing their history in terms of four or so immigration waves. These waves frame their understanding of their community and its historical developments. The largest immigration wave of Ukrainians was the first one, it amounted to some 170,000 individuals back in 1891-1914. The current arrivals already toppled this number, currently sitting at 198,000, and it took just one year for this large number of people to arrive in Canada. The representatives and descendants of the pre-existing immigration waves will soon begin to grapple with many identity questions of their own while welcoming current newcomers.

Penny – That's a gripping reflection/observation you have there about labels and identity, Natalia. It reminds me of how the Filipinos here in Saskatchewan and generally across Canada would refer to the first wave as nurses in the 1950s, in Saskatchewan's case seamstresses and nurses, caregivers in the 1990s, then nurses again in the first decade of the millennium. The Ukrainian community here in Saskatchewan and Alberta has a far longer history of immigrating to Canada over several waves of immigration. Certainly, the

Russian war in Ukraine is also disrupting the pre-existing chronological categories that scholars and the public have regarding Ukrainian migration. By the way, do you know how many visas have been given?

Natalia – And there are now more than a million visas that were approved and issued. Some of them may or may not come at all. With this number, it is a tsunami, not a wave. We are amid a major tsunami, which is going to redraw the map and the meanings of what the Ukrainian ethnic community in Canada is about. It will affect the overall layout of Canada's multi-cultural ethnic society in some dramatic ways as well.

Some people may have applied for CUAET visa for an opportunity to have the option of settling in Canada permanently. Others may come here for just a couple of months or years, to sit and wait to see what happens in the war. But if children go to school and families are settling down, if life improves for them in economic terms I suspect many newcomers will stay. Still, we should be very careful not to label these people as immigrants or refugees.

Penny – How about the term 'asylum seekers'? Is it appropriate?

Natalia – I think it is appropriate in a commonsensical way, though conversationally 'displaced persons' is probably the best designator that we can apply to this group. We just need to remember that for the Ukrainians coming under the CUAET visa to Canada *asylum seekers* or *displaced persons* are difficult labels to apply to themselves. There are also economic factors to this influx of people. Though we do not have studies conducted on the topic, one can speculate that those, who were able to reach Canada, with Canada providing very little support, are those who had some resources to come here. Those who were able to come here, have gotten enough funds to afford the plane tickets. Some of them most likely have networks outside of Ukraine to rely on. But not all of those who were granted visas will come here. Thus, we now have an intellectually dazzling, complex, and brand-new displacement pattern in the 21st century, to which different governments have been responding differently. The Canadian government's response to this displacement is unique. Issuing a work visa is not what others have done. It is a unique response to this massive inflow of Ukrainians to Canada.

Penny – As an engaged scholar, do you have stories you want to share that strike you?

Natalia – Recently, I hosted a very important round table involving five leaders from across Alberta, who have spoken of their experiences in helping and assisting Ukrainians fleeing the war. Their stories were heartbreaking and they are stories about goodness and kindness too. For example, we have an individual, not a Ukrainian, who opened his house to newly arrived Ukrainians. He has already hosted 100 families in his house and counting.

Displaced individuals and entire families would come in and live at his house for a couple weeks or longer, and then move on to own residences. Then he would welcome another family into his home. And he is not the only one who has been doing this of course.

CIUS has been in close connection with local communities and settlement agencies. Our responsibilities are multi-fold. We are keen to document the unfolding trauma, the unfolding humanitarian crisis. We should be sharing the resources as academics we have on the ground with communities. We should be including community responses to this Ukrainian DP crisis on various platforms and podiums, like the series of conferences we organized, and therefore amplifying their voices and making them broadly available to other audiences. Within our academic strategies and methodologies reflecting on the war-driven displacement, we need to incorporate community-placed reflections and practices of UDP accommodation and settlement. Then we will be better positioned to offer comprehensive view on what the Russian war in Ukraine has done to Ukrainian civilians how settling in Canada.

Penny – Listening to you reminded me of my own fieldwork where I encountered the trauma of a whole town caught in a bloody siege where many of their neighbours were killed or were used as hostages or body shields by a secessionist group. A simple question of *kamusta*? (how are you?) would open an emotional floodgate for a community member and for me as well. It was then that I realized the importance of storytelling and healing, to listen closely and hear what they were saying and just being present. Most of the time, they caught me off guard. They always find me just sitting and, writing down on my notebook, or just spacing out under a tree or a waiting shed. Looking back, I realize that they also had this kind of disposition—a readiness—to tell their stories when they sought me out.

Natalia – I was just about to tell you that exactly. That would've been my point. If I can say, one of our jobs as oral historians, anthropologists, and social scientists is to let people tell their stories. I needed to recruit newly arrived researchers who wanted to document the war experiences. I have recognized quickly enough that projects would be set up immediately after the full-scale invasion, and teams would be getting organized to document testimonies about the ongoing war. But what has been lacking is a sustained and focused academic discussion on how to do this work in highly ethical ways, in times of war, in times of crisis. So, a month into the war, I reached out to various colleagues in Europe and mobilized a team of oral historians to host a Witnessing the War in Ukraine Summer Institute on interview-based research. Our summer institute met in June 2022 in Krakow, Poland, which is close to Ukraine, to talk about the methodological hurdles and challenges involved in doing this work during the war. We've invited speakers who reflected on experiences of war in the Balkans, Sudan, Somalia, and other countries that experienced the war. We've had speakers who personally survived the genocide, and we also spoke about the oral historical projects that were done in Bosnia. Alessandro Parelli, one of the founding fathers of oral history was amongst our keynotes. I'm so proud of what we have done, we've helped the entire field of

war oral history research in Ukraine to be reshaped and mobilized. I continue coordinating research in this field and supporting Ukrainian teams still. Recently, I was elected as the co-president of the Ukrainian Oral History Association, an association that revived its work in September 2023, based on the work and networks that our Krakow summer institute built and continues to support.

Penny – If someone, for instance a conventional academic who wants to step out of the proverbial "ivory tower," or anyone else, is moved by the plight of the Ukrainians and wants to help out, to support and/or volunteer for the first time, what would you advise them?

Natalia — It is a good question to address. And as it is with any other calamity or disaster, how do we find more room in our hearts to accept and process one more trauma, one more pain? If you are an academic, consider recruiting displaced Ukrainian talent for your projects. Or invite them to study under you. Ukraine is a highly educated country and many people who ended up in Canada are professionals to their core. Even if their language skills are lagging behind. See if you can welcome those who you meet into your homes and lives. People need emotional support, even if it may appear that addressing financial needs is their priority. Then there are opportunities to donate to various causes, to support the wounded, those who have lost houses, orphans, people with disabilities and other groups that have suffered the most.

Importantly, I strongly advise Canadians to read only trustworthy media sources and maintain vigilance when consuming unverified media reports covering the war, especially if these reports originate or seem to originate in the Russian Federation. Contemporary wars are hybrid wars and are fought as much in media spaces as on the battlefield. With the former Soviet KGB officer as the Russian president, the aggressor state continues to utilize the same rhetorics and means that the Soviet Union and its KGB security services did in the past to undermine Western democracies and destabilize societies. The same tactics are actively applied to undermine today's democratic societies that are currently supporting Ukraine. This is being done in Canada as we speak and in various sophisticated ways. Staying vigilant and not falling prey to Russian propaganda is important. A simple way to verify information that is being actively disseminated online is to track the source and then look for reports coming from other sources, and compare the messages. Daily on my FB account, I receive requests for FB friendships. If the requester's profile is bare, brand new or suspicious in other ways, I decline and I advise others to be careful as well in their social media activities.

Penny – One last question, did you get to convince your family to leave Ukraine?

Natalia – Oh, I was trying to bring them over. They didn't want to leave Ukraine, each for their reasons. Someone had a bedridden spouse. Someone had a boyfriend or husband who

could not leave. My home town has not been occupied but it is regularly shelled and I am of course worried about their wellbeing.

Penny – Thank you, Natalia, for this conversation and for spending an hour of your time with ESJ. I wish you and your family well.

Natalia Dear Penny, it is always a pleasure to return to ESJ and work with you and your team.

About the Authors

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