

Towards accounting for Russian imperialism and building meaningful transnational feminist solidarity with Ukraine

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I wish to offer my solidarity to Ukrainian feminists as someone who grew up in Prague under a Soviet military occupation. My solidarity comes from a place of knowing that my voice would not be in this feminist debate, if it was not for Czechoslovak protest and resistance against a totalitarian regime and Russian-led imperialism. In my gratitude, I am especially indebted to the Velvet Revolution led by students who persevered despite of the violence they were subjected to by the riot police, and to the decades of small and bigger acts of civil resistance that have eventually ended an oppressive state-organised socialist regime and succeeded to push Soviet occupiers out of the land. Without this liberation process, I - and many of my peers and younger generations - would have not been able to be outspoken without persecution or to learn feminist theory from Czech and Slovak feminists.¹ In my case, chances are that I would have not been able to study at all. My aunt was arrested shortly before the revolution for a small anti-regime student gathering and if her case went to court and did not end well, the whole family could have been punished and I would have never been able to enrol at university. To this day, I remember the sense of fear and anxiety when my aunt was in custody and the feeling of entrapment whenever I had to face Soviet occupying soldiers who were stationed near my grandparents' house in North Bohemia (previously and during a German Nazi occupation also known as 'Sudetenland'). I so vividly remember the euphoria and tears of relief shed by the whole family when the revolution came. I recall the immense hope and the following non-ideal transformation into

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¹ The Czech and Slovak academic feminists, whose work most influenced me during my studies, include Hana Havelková, Věra Sokolová, Kateřina Kolářová, Blanka Knotková-Čapková, Lubica Kobová, Petra Ezzeddine and Zuzana Uhde.

capitalism and the troubling and ongoing reality of unequal Europes (Boatcă, 2020). Still, without the liberation, my and many fellow feminist voices would not exist in the public realm today, we would have likely been lost to the world. And had it not been for the revolution, I would certainly not have been able to live the transnational scholarly life that has made it possible for me to enter this very solidarity forum. My voice would not be here.

As my existence as a feminist scholar is indebted to the Czechoslovak liberation movement, my feminist solidarity comes from a place of worry for the voices and lives that are being harmed, silenced and annihilated under the ongoing genocidal Russian invasion of Ukraine. It further comes from knowing that those who will manage to survive, will have to battle more intergenerational trauma and hardened living conditions. This also makes me concerned about the feminist voices Ukraine and the world might lose as a consequence of Russian violence as well as contemplate on how to best support Ukrainian feminists currently in progress. Reading about the atrocities perpetrated on occupied Ukrainian territory, including the Russian imperial re-education programs, magnifies these concerns (Dixon, 2022; Pankieiev, 2022; RFE/RL, 2022).

Meanwhile, on an international level, Ukrainian voices and agency are persistently being marginalised and erased. As absurd as it is, we are still being confronted with a seemingly endless stream of debates about Ukraine without Ukrainians,² yet with plenty of Western ‘experts’ who do not shy away from speaking about Ukraine without building on and centering Ukrainian perspectives and scholarship (Sonevytsky, forthcoming). It has been this dire erasure that brought historian and writer Olesya Khromeychuk (2022a, n.p.) to invite us to ask ourselves: “where is Ukraine on a mental map of Europe?” And “why, until Ukraine was attacked, had we not thought of securing mandatory in-house expertise on the largest country in Europe? Why had we thought of a nation of over 40 million as small and insignificant?” While we ponder on these questions, the reality prevails that even the vocal Ukrainian voices are still being overlooked. While many

² One such event was organised by the British Academy – the “UK’s national academy for the humanities and social sciences,” which aims to: “mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future.” The academy organised a conference on the Russian invasion of Ukraine (called by the British Academy the ‘Russo-Ukrainian war’), with a programme full of Russian propaganda talking points and without any Ukrainian scholars: they were only added ad hoc after weeks of public outcry and vocal criticism on social media. See: https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/events/british-academy-conferences/the-russo-ukrainian-war/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social_paid&utm_campaign=conferences_hybrid_&utm_term=3&utm_content=awareness.

Ukrainian thinkers have said and written much in English, they haven't been read and listened to in debates on their own country (Khromeychuk, 2022a; Sonevytsky, forthcoming). As a consequence, the systematic and intentional character of Russian aggression towards Ukraine is neither widely understood nor accounted for, that is, beyond societies occupied and colonised by Russia.

The lack of engagement with Ukrainian knowledges and perspectives is also pervasive in feminist debates, including those that are presented as solidarity (Pigul et al., 2022; Tsymbalyuk & Zamurieva, 2022; Zlobina, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming). Yet, how can one do meaningful solidarity if one does not centre the voices and agency of those that one ought to be in solidarity with? How can one not perpetuate harm if one does not listen to and learn from those who are being oppressed? This seems impossible. Below, I take a closer look at some troubling examples of international feminist responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine – in particular, feminist 'anti-war' manifestos and reflections on occupied Ukraine by Judith Butler and Jasbir Puar - to explore their implications and the path towards genuine, meaningful and just transnational feminist solidarity with Ukraine.

The epistemic imperialism of feminist 'anti-war' manifestos

Since the escalation of the eight years long Russian invasion of Ukraine, international feminists from predominantly Western societies have produced several feminist 'anti-war' manifestos.³ While most of these manifestos have been framed as acts of solidarity with Ukraine, they have not been centred around Ukrainian voices, agency and demands. Many of the manifestos also failed to attribute clear and full responsibility for the invasion of Ukraine to the invading perpetrator: Russia. As such, these manifestos have come short of providing meaningful solidarity with Ukraine against its brutal oppressor.

On the contrary, many of these feminist manifestos perpetuated a great deal of epistemic injustice and imperialism (Fricker, 2007; Burluk, 2022; Sonevytsky,

³ As part of a conscious practise of an anticolonial feminist politics of refusal (Hendl, 2021), I will not be sharing the links to these manifestos, but to their Ukrainian critiques (Zlobina, 2022; Tsymbalyuk & Zamurieva, 2022; Pigul et al., 2022). Many of these critiques have been published in non-academic formats. In this article, I reference a mix of academic and non-academic sources written by Ukrainian feminist scholars, as my primary intention is to centre and amplify Ukrainian feminist voices and critiques responding to the escalation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some of these critiques have not yet been published in academic form or are forthcoming (Sonevytsky, forthcoming), given the short period of time since Feb 24, 2022.

forthcoming), which has undermined instead of supported the Ukrainian liberation struggle. According to US-based Ukrainian anthropologist Maria Sonevytsky (forthcoming), epistemic imperialism governs knowledge production between centres (commonly parts of former or present empires) and peripheries (formerly colonised spaces, such as Ukraine). Sonevytsky (forthcoming, n.p.), 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.”⁴ The feminist anti-war manifestos are epistemically imperialist as they have not been authored with Ukrainian feminists, grounded in their demands and needs, or the knowledge of the socio-historical context and the gendered abuse of power and harm within Russian colonial violence against Ukraine. As Ukrainian feminist philosopher Tamara Zlobina (2022, n.p.) noted about several of the texts: “None of the ‘sisters’ thought to consult with Ukrainian feminists when writing these calls (and where Ukrainians accidentally read them before publication and criticised them, their voices were simply ignored).” This speaks to a strikingly unequal power dynamic within transnational feminism. Dynamic, which involves predominantly Western but also plenty of Global South feminists using their agency to propose demands in response to a Russian war of aggression, while ignoring and erasing the voices and agency of women and societies in Europe’s East, whose lives have been directly affected by Russian colonial and imperial violence. As such, the manifestos offer a striking display of how power is exercised in ways that reinforce long prevalent East-West inequalities in feminist debates and solidarity movements. Symptomatically, none of the non-Ukrainian feminist manifestos expressed support for Ukrainian self-defence against the Russian invasion, despite of repeating Ukrainian demands for military aid and the ongoing history of Russia’s colonial violence against Ukraine. That, even though the media have already widely reported on attacks on civilian infrastructure and other war crimes perpetrated by the Russian army against Ukrainians since the escalation of the latest Russian invasion, including the use of rape as a weapon of war (BBC, 2022a; CNN News, 2022; Harding, 2022; Kaonga, 2022; Miranda, 2022; UN Security Council, 2022).

Despite all this evidence, the authors of the perhaps most visible of the manifestos, the Feminist Resistance Against War published in the *Spectre Journal*,⁵

⁴ One of the major types of epistemic imperialism in debates on Ukraine is Westplaining/Westsplaining. See Sonevytsky (forthcoming), Smolenski & Dutkiewicz (2022), Brom (2022) and Kazharsky (2022).

⁵ For Ukrainian feminist critiques of the manifesto, see Pigul et al. (2022) and Tymbaliuk & Zamurieva (2022).

have argued against the provision of weapons to Ukrainians in order to not contribute to ‘militarisation.’ As such, their manifesto effectively undermined feminist support for Ukrainian defence against a military invasion of a sovereign society and land.⁶ The manifesto was signed by a large number of international feminists, including established theorists of gender, racial and social justice, such as Nancy Fraser, Tithi Bhattacharya, Silvia Federici, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Zillah Eisenstein, Jules Falquet, Verónica Gago, Luci Cavallero or Piedad Córdoba. The text was published two weeks after a prominent Ukrainian feminist writer Oksana Zabuzhko (2022) gave an International Women’s Day address at the European Parliament, in which she described how Ukrainian women were standing up and resisting the Russian invasion and that Ukraine needed international support to prevent more atrocities that were coming. She warned that for years, Putin has been intentionally imitating Hitler in his speeches and politics and that the world needed to take this seriously and act to stop Russia’s violence against the Ukrainian people.

A few weeks later, Ukrainian feminist scholars Darya Tsymbalyuk and Iryna Zamurieva (2022, n.p.) responded to international feminist ‘anti-war’ manifestos, clarifying that while they were critical of militarisation: “Russia’s war crimes have left us no option but to campaign for more military aid to be able to defend ourselves and survive.” They also explained (*ibid.*) that Russia’s war on Ukraine was not only

⁶ The Feminist Resistance Against War manifesto proclaimed to ‘collect the call’ by Russian feminists from the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (2022a), who first published a manifesto against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Yet, the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (*ibid.*) is a manifesto accounting for the fact that Russia has declared war of aggression and attacked a neighboring country, violating Ukraine’s right to self-determination and peace. The manifesto also warns that Russia’s military aggression is particularly dangerous from a feminist perspective as Russia aims to promote and export ‘traditional values’ by force as a violent missionary. The manifesto comes short of supporting Ukrainian self-defence and its authors later clarified that they were trying to avoid ‘treason’ charges under Russian law (Feminist Anti-War Resistance, 2022b). Yet following misappropriation by the authors of the international Feminist Resistance Against War manifesto, Russian feminists behind the Feminist Anti-War Resistance manifesto distanced themselves from oppressive ‘pacifism’ and explicitly supported Ukrainian right to self-defence. In a Facebook post, Feminist Anti-War Resistance wrote (2022b, n.p.): “most of us support our Ukrainian comrades and sisters in their call to arm Ukraine! [...] We understand the consequences of militarization, but we also know the Russian state from the inside [...] we have been humiliated, beaten, raped, tortured, and imprisoned by this monster [...] We admire Ukrainian brave and strong resistance, and most of us want them to have weapons to protect themselves from the monster of the Russian state.”

“an attack on the country’s land and sovereignty” but a war of colonial conquest, with a long genocidal history: “Russia has been leading a colonial war of slow violence against Ukraine for centuries, erasing us as a people, society and culture.” It is this ongoing legacy of colonial violent abuse of power that was missed and unaccounted for in the vast majority of the feminist ‘anti-war’ manifestos (Pigul et al., 2022; Tsybalyuk & Zamurieva, 2022; Zlobina, 2022).

Yet, can a feminist manifesto on Ukraine be even considered feminist when it dismisses the voices, agency and demands of the women whose lives are concerned? How feminist is a manifesto which poses foreign demands regarding a war of aggression, which represent the very opposite of what many feminists from the affected and oppressed society have asked for? Can a manifesto be feminist when its demands undermine the safety and survival of the women and fellow people directly impacted by the violence the manifesto claims to be alarmed about? If one interrogated such manifesto from an anticolonial feminist perspective, what kind of power dynamic would one identify within it? Have the authors and signatories of the ‘anti-war’ manifestos conducted such analysis?

The double standard is striking: the idea, in particular, that a woman has the right to (self)defence against gendered violence and rape is one of the cornerstones of feminism. So is the insistence that a woman should not surrender to an abuser and accept a life in subjugation and torment by him. And yet, this is exactly what ‘feminist anti-war’ manifestos more and less implicitly propose to Ukrainian women on a social level, under a military occupation. In these manifestos, feminists typically located safely far away from the impact of Russian imperial and colonial violence perpetuate the fiction that ‘peaceful’ life under a military occupation is better for Other Women than their armed liberation. Is it that foreign feminists did not realise that should Ukrainians stop fighting, they will be further occupied and genocided by Russia? Is it because they haven’t familiarised themselves with Ukrainian perspectives and empirical evidence on the ground? Or is it because they imagined that life under Russia cannot be ‘that bad,’ i.e. they have disregarded Ukrainian scholarship and the scholarship and testimonies of fellow (post)occupied and (post)colonised societies on the destruction and gendered oppression that Russian imperial and colonial violence have entailed (Tlostanova, 2010; 2021; Andriewsky, 2015; Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives, 2017; Kassymbekova, 2017; 2022; Khromeychuk, 2018; International Criminal Court, 2018; Yurchenko 2018; Gorbunova & Klymchuk, 2020; Mayerchuk & Plakhotnik, 2021; Kassenova, 2022)? Or perhaps because some of the feminists do not perceive Ukrainian women as deserving of the same standards of living, self-determination and freedom from oppression that they have demanded for themselves and their peers? Hard to tell, but the living conditions implied for Ukrainian women by

‘feminist anti-war’ manifestos are far below what many feminists who signed them have argued for in their work. In this regard, their manifestos are strikingly colonial in that they reinforce global asymmetries of power and domination.

Zlobina (2022, n.p.) also points out that given the fact that Western feminists come from colonising not colonised countries, a major issue is that their conceptual frameworks tend to imagine wars in reductive scenarios as men’s games involving “two villains fighting over resources.” This then leads them to demand that ‘both sides’ disarm and include women at the negotiating table as agents of peacemaking, because through their gender roles, they will bring in concerns about the future of children. Yet, as Zlobina explains, such stereotypical framework erases and delegitimises wars of liberation, where the defending side is justified in its quest to win and the war is not just men’s business – just like no wars involve zero women. Indeed, every fourth person currently serving in the Ukrainian defence forces is a woman (Hendrix & Korolchuk, 2022).

In response to the foreign ‘anti-war’ manifestos, a collective of Ukrainian feminists has written their own manifesto: *The Right to Resist* (Pigul et al., 2022). In the text (ibid., n.p.), they critique the gender stereotypical war narratives that portray women* as victims, erasing the key role of women* in resistance movements, “both at the frontline and on the home front: from Algeria to Vietnam, from Syria to Palestine, from Kurdistan to Ukraine.” They particularly respond to the Feminist Resistance Against War manifesto and argue that its authors deny Ukrainian women* the right to resistance, “which constitutes a basic act of self-defense of the oppressed.” They further elaborate (ibid., n.p.): “Abstract pacifism which condemns all sides taking part in the war leads to irresponsible solutions in practice. We insist on the essential difference between violence as a means of oppression and as a legitimate means of self-defense.” If feminists want to claim that their politics sides with the oppressed, then observing and acting on such distinction ought to be common practice.

The problem with epistemically unjust pacifism

In some cases, Western feminist pacifism seems to come from well-meant hopes for peace in Ukraine. Such were, for example, remarks made by Judith Butler (2022) on the occasion of them receiving the Catalonia 2021 International Award. Butler (2022, n.p.) spoke about ‘Putin’s war’ and said that it has been “especially horrific because of the number of people he has killed and the number of refugees he has produced.” They (ibid.) shared that they think that it is difficult to hold Putin accountable because he presumably does not care about rules and or whether “his war is legitimate” and this lack of legitimacy is “his pleasure.” At which point, the interviewer proclaimed: “War depends on who has power

and how they use it. It is difficult to fight these authoritarian leaders.” Instead of responding to a statement about power and the proclaimed difficulty of fighting authoritarianism with an analysis of the power dimension of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine - building on the reality faced by Ukrainians under the Russian military invasion and exploring actions urgently needed to stop Russian war crimes and an ongoing military occupation of a sovereign land and its people - Butler responded with hope that there could be a democracy and anti-war movement in Russia. They then extended the discourse of hope further to say about the Russian army (Butler, 2022, n.p.):

“I would hope that the military falls apart or that the military refuses to fight or that it lays down its weapons in a velvet revolution. Wouldn’t it be beautiful? But you know, people say to me that I’m very naive, that I’m very unrealistic. I say yes, but it would be nice if this idea, this unrealistic idea became popular, right. Sometimes we get so realistic and strategic and hard headed that we forget that there are ideals, right? We should wish for the unrealistic, we should hold onto the unrealistic in my mind.”

Such idealism paints an optimistic picture. It is, however, a fantasy scenario strikingly disconnected from Ukrainian lived experiences, testimonies, agency and repeatedly voiced requests. And while Butler recognised their scenario as unrealistic, they insisted on holding onto the unreal. Would it not be beautiful if the Russian army stopped killing and raping? It absolutely would. Yet, the problem is that the actions of the Russian army during the last nine months and the years that preceded them have been nothing like those of a force progressing towards collective pacifism. Instead, they have been the actions of an army systemically perpetrating brutal and lethal violence on a mass scale. At the time when the interview with Butler was published, the violence has already been recognised as escalated by Russia onto a genocidal level by Eugene Finkel, an expert in genocide studies (Dudko, 2022; Finkel, 2022).⁷

Thus, towards Ukrainians under occupation and fellow people who have been subjected to Russian imperial and colonial violence, Butler’s words travel as unsubstantiated and utopistic visions of a scholar who has had the immense privilege of not living under the direct impact of Russian imperialism. Such words

⁷ For example, a scholar of genocide and the Holocaust Eugene Finkel (2022, n.p.) wrote in early April 2022: “The combination of official statements denying Ukraine and Ukrainians the right to exist, and mounting evidence of deliberate, large-scale targeting of Ukrainian civilians, leaves little room for doubt. The threshold from war crimes to genocide has been crossed.”

also do epistemic injustice and erasure towards the reality that Ukrainians live and die under and this is harmful. Even more so, as Ukrainians already have faced a genocide through a Soviet-manufactured famine, the Holodomor, that killed several millions of Ukrainians (Andriewsky, 2015; Gorbunova & Klymchuk, 2020).⁸

Butler's words also land in a broader socio-historical context, in which people from Europe's East have been systemically dismissed, silenced and gaslighted when speaking about the dangers and threats that the Kremlin, its supporters and their empire have posed to them (Mayerchuk & Plakhotnik, 2021; Boichak, 2022; Brom, 2022; Khromeychuk, 2022ab; Dostlieva, 2022; Smolenski & Dutkiewicz, 2022; Shevtsova, 2022; Wintour, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming). For decades, the (post)occupied people from Europe's East have been painted as irrational, emotional, paranoid, biased and Russophobic, while Western experts have positioned themselves as noble, rational, impartial, qualified and civilised, also because they have promoted 'peace,' never mind violent colonial Western history (Dostlieva, 2022; Feklyunina, 2012; Tlostanova, 2010; 2015; Dostlieva & Dostliev, 2022; Khromeychuk, 2022ab; Pigul et al., 2022; Smolenski & Dutkiewicz, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming).⁹ Are Ukrainians doing ideals wrong when they are asking for arms to defend themselves? Are they not imaginative enough when they are not hoping for the 'velvet revolution' of the Russian army? Such implicit re-presentations should worry us for their Western supremacist, devaluing and colonial dimensions.

While it is appreciated that Butler attributes responsibility for opposing the war to the Russian army and steers away from suggesting that Ukraine should stop fighting and surrender to its invaders for 'peace,' like so many Western thinkers have done (Bilous, 2022; Smolenski & Dutkiewicz, 2022; Pigul et al., 2022; Tsybalyuk and Zamurieva, 2022; Gorodnichenko et al., 2022; Zlobina, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming), and has crafted a space for solidarity with Ukraine – which given the uncritical approach to Russia and its legacy manifested by many Western 'anti-imperialist' scholars and activists is particularly valued – the emphasis on holding onto the unrealistic where a colonial land grab and genocidal violence are being waged is still dangerous.

Any time wasted on not providing the means necessary to stop Russian genocidal violence is paid with Ukrainian lives. "Nowhere in Ukraine is safe at

⁸ A similar famine was perpetrated by the USSR against the Qazaq people (Kassenova, 2022; Kassymbekova, 2017; Arystanbek, 2022).

⁹ Western feminists would especially benefit from using a translator on Dostlieva's (2022) text on coloniality, gender and trauma and reflecting on its grounds.

the moment. Russian soldiers have been committing war crime after war crime. They will continue to do so if we do nothing to stop them,” write Tsymbalyuk and Zamurieva (2022, n.p.). Considering that Ukraine urgently needs military aid to protect its people from the invading armies,¹⁰ any insistence on hope for mass pacifism within the deployed Russian military¹¹ is irresponsible towards Ukrainians as well as painful to watch for those from (post)colonised and (post)occupied societies, who have been intersectionally impacted, triggered, retraumatised, threatened and endangered. Some of us might be next.

Thus, the feminist solidarity we need is one which will engage with the bleak reality of Russian imperial and colonial violence, as conveyed by Ukrainians and those who have shared aspects of their socio-historical experience. In other words, when speaking on Ukraine, we need the global feminist community to respond to Ukrainian accounts of the imminent danger that Russia poses to their lives and actually contribute towards the stopping of Russia’s genocidal military invasion.

Still, many of us from societies who have for generations been harmed by Russian imperial and colonial violence and continuous threats of re-invasions do hope for utopia. We long for a world without an imperial Russia and what this will enable (Hendl, 2022; Latypova, 2022b; Kassymbekova & Marat, 2022; Lyubchenko, 2022; Pigul et al., 2022; Zlobina, 2022). But for that to happen and be enjoyed by us, we first need to survive, live free from imperial aggression and be safe. First and foremost, Ukrainians need to be able and supported to fight for their lives to outlive the occupation and to have the conditions to continue grappling with the various problems their society has had and/or reinforced, and to

¹⁰ At the time of the writing of this text, Chechnya, Belarus and Iran have joined Russia in attacking Ukraine.

¹¹ Many have also voiced their concerns regarding the recent migration of Russian draft evaders into countries that have been subjected to Russian imperial and colonial violence (CBSNews, 2022; Doolotkeldieva, 2022; Matusevich, 2022). Concerns have been raised from within Georgia, 20% of which is currently under Russian occupation - the third occupation within the almost 200 years of Russia’s occupying of Georgia (CBSNews, 2022). Kyrgyzstan-based journalist and anthropologist Yan Matusevich (2022) has reported on the flight of Russians from conscription into Central Asia and the concerns of local and Indigenous populations. These concerns are particularly pressing, given the repeating history of Russian imperial violence being ‘justified’ through Kremlin-proclaimed need to ‘protect’ Russian minorities in sovereign countries, highlighting issues of security and wellbeing of the receiving and already Russia-(post)occupied and (post)colonised societies (Dudko, 2022; Boichak, 2022; CBSNews, 2022; Doolotkeldieva, 2022; Matusevich, 2022; Shevtsova, 2022).

be able to build a better and more just future for themselves (Khromeychuk, 2018; Yurchenko, 2018; 2022; Meyerchuk & Plakhotnik, 2021; Lyubchenko, 2022; Pigul et al., 2022). This need to fight sadly comes down to the fact that Russians have – yet again – not used their agency and civil responsibility to profoundly and collectively undermine and overthrow their criminal regime and stop the genocidal invasion of Ukraine perpetrated by their country and in their name. Under the current circumstances and the ongoing imperial legacy of Russia, the binary between war and peace is a false one. For a lasting peace requires the invaded to win the colonial war of conquest, decolonise from the invading empire and get justice and reparations, on the terms of the invaded society (Pigul et al., 2022; Tsybalyuk & Zamurieva, 2022; Zlobina, 2022).

It is perhaps understandable that many of those who have had the privilege of not living the horrific reality of genocidal colonialism, may not wish to engage with the brutality of the kind of violence that goes into eradicating, raping and torturing a nation. Presumably one of the heaviest things is to grasp the confronting and hard-to-bear intentionality of such violence. In particular, when these violent acts are also perpetrated by soldiers who have been drafted after living the lives of ordinary civilians. This can be difficult to accept. It is no coincidence that such violence is commonly framed as ‘inhumane’ to underscore its criminality and distance ourselves from it. And yet, to get to the light at the end of the tunnel, we need to account for the darkness and terror that ought to be defeated. The weight of comprehending such violence should not lead us to lose out of sight the responsibility we as feminists dealing with concerns of justice have towards those who are subjected to terror. This, however, requires more than imagination and wishful thinking.

First and foremost, Ukrainians under attack are owed a proper hearing and an acknowledgement of the everyday material horrors they are subjected to. Instead of de-contextualised pacifist imaginaries, a decolonial lens is warranted to account for the ongoing imperialism of Russia, its structures and much of its population. The Russian ‘Federation’ is a country that has never formally acknowledged or accounted for its colonial character, past invasions, war crimes and genocides or paid any apologies and reparations. Instead, it has escalated to wage yet another colonial war. As diasporic scholars from Central Asia Botakoz Kassymbekova and Erica Marat (2022) have emphasised, it is high time to interrogate the false illusion of Russian imperial innocence. As they argue (2022, n.p.), the imperial view that “Russian rule over non-Russian populations is not colonialism but a gift of modernity” ought to be retired and the crimes against humanity perpetrated by Tsarist, Soviet and current Russia accounted for.

Just like Russia's colonial violence is far from incidental, senseless or isolated, the current aggression is also not simply a 'war' and certainly not just 'Putin's war.' Such terminology only conceals the power structures, imperial character and socio-historical legacy of Russia, its culture and much of its population (Tlostanova, 2010; Andriewsky, 2015; Yurchenko, 2018; Shevtsova, 2022; Kassymbekova, 2017; 2022; Sakha Pacifist Association, 2022; Engelhardt & Shestakova, 2022; Gaufman, 2022; Yusupova, 2021; 2022). Instead of using such euphemistic terms that have been contested by Ukrainians (see, for example the open letter to international press by Ukrainian media professionals and organisations by Ziyatdinova et al., 2022; and Burlyuk, 2022), epistemic justice is owed to Ukrainians and fellow societies harmed in the ongoing history of imperial Russia, and our liberation struggles (Tlostanova, 2010, Hendl, 2022; Khromeychuk, 2022ab; Sonevytsky, forthcoming). As a feminist scholar and activist enabled by one such liberation movement, I shall point out – although I wish I did not have to – that this also requires doing justice to the Velvet Revolution. Among many things, this was also a revolution against the Russian soldiers of the occupying Warsaw Pact Armies and a crucial prerequisite towards pushing these occupiers out of the land and carving a different future without them and their empire.

Postcolonial feminism without transnational decolonial justice

The accounting for Russia's imperial legacy has also been slow in global post-colonial scholarship. While most of these debates have interrogated Western imperialism, non-Western imperialisms have not been put through adequate scrutiny. Recently, Jasbir Puar, a US-based Gender Studies scholar who has advanced critiques of Western imperialism, gave a talk at the 11th European Feminist Research Conference. Puar (2022) used her concept of homonationalism to look at US media debates regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine to critique American imperialism. Regrettably, her talk did not engage with any Ukrainian feminist theory and perspectives on the Russian invasion that Ukrainians are subjected to. Beside an appreciated mention that the aggression amounted to a Russian invasion, Puar's talk involved no critique of Russian imperialism. Without an engagement with Ukrainian feminist thought, any robust critique of the colonial character of Russian military violence, or a mention of genocide, the reduction of a peoples' struggle for bare existence to a discursive analysis of American media coverage and Western imperialism came across as remarkably Western-centric and instrumentalising.

What was particularly difficult to experience was that while Puar's talk lacked a critique of the genocidal Russian invasion, it featured plenty of critique

of Zelenskyy. Puar criticised the Ukrainian president for his speech to the Israeli Knesset, in which he spoke about Ukraine's security concerns under the ongoing Russian occupation and said that the hopes that post-war Ukraine would be a liberal state have been shattered. He further elaborated that Ukraine will have to increase its security and cited Israel as an inspiration. He said the following (MME, 2022, n.p.): "We will become a 'big Israel' with its own face. We will not be surprised if we have representatives of the Armed Forces or the National Guard in cinemas, supermarkets, and people with weapons. I am confident that the question of security will be the issue number one for the next ten years. I am sure of it." He then stated (ibid.) that Ukraine would not become "an authoritarian state," which according to him was "impossible" in Ukraine: "An authoritarian state would lose to Russia. People know what they are fighting for." Puar critiqued Zelenskyy for his position and without a critique of Russian colonial violence or an expression of solidarity with the Ukrainian struggle, her talk left space for the implicit conclusion that we should not support Ukraine as it would mean supporting (another?) Israel.

Yet, while Zelenskyy's words warrant a critical analysis from a decolonial perspective, the same decolonial perspective simultaneously needs to be applied to analyse the Ukrainian context shaped through Russian colonial violence. This is the complex part: the situation involving a president of a colonised country idealising and normalising a colonial state in the quest to decolonise his country from a colonising empire does not present an easy clear-cut scenario (Said, 2003 [1978]; Pappé, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2021; Tsymbaliuk & Zamurieva, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming; UN, 2022abcd). Instead, the situation calls for a careful disentangling of two different – and in some ways interconnected – socio-historical contexts, the power dynamic and asymmetries dominant in them, the flow of power between these contexts and the broader inter-imperiality involved.¹²

Perhaps it is difficult scenarios like these, which test the intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Kóczé 2009; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hendl, 2021) of our feminist and anticolonial politics. To build and foster a genuine and anticolonial transnational feminist solidarity (Land 2015; Khader 2019; Pigul et al., 2022), we then must be able to find a way through such non-ideal 'messy' reality, which will defend decolonial justice across different contexts. As such, we must be able to recognise that Zelenskyy's relating to Israel's 'security' does not invalidate the struggle of over 40 million Ukrainians against Russian colonial war crimes and genocide. Simultaneously, we also ought to be critical of the binary logic that would present two decolonial struggles as an either-or scenario and instead, connect them in the quest for multidirectional solidarity. Decolonial justice calls on us to oppose

¹² Regarding the concept of inter-imperiality, see Parvulescu and Boatcă (2020).

the dehumanisation, oppression, and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the dehumanisation, oppression and ethnic cleansing of Ukrainians at the same time (Andriewsky, 2015; Said, 2003 [1978]; Pappé, 2006¹³ Human Rights Watch, 2021; Dudko, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming; Shevtsova, 2022; UN, 2022abcd).¹⁴

Decolonial justice in debates on Ukraine should further guide us to recognise that the Ukrainian struggle against genocide is also worthy of solidarity, despite of Western media tropes framing Ukrainians as ‘white, blond and blue-eyed’ and ‘European.’ Such tropes found their way into Puar’s talk via racist Western media discourse of selective solidarity and stayed unexamined, despite of Ukrainians’ socio-historical experiences with racialisation, discrimination and systematic exploitation within Europe, beside the ongoing history of genocide from Russia (Andriewsky, 2015; Yurchenko, 2018; Katona & Zacharenko, 2021; Uhde and Ezzeddine, 2020; Lewicki, forthcoming). While we certainly must critique and oppose the structural racism and white supremacy that have shaped and governed Europe and its asylum and immigration politics, when speaking on Ukraine, we also need to critique the subjugation of Ukrainians within European racial hierarchies (Lentin, 2008; Parvulescu, 2015; Safuta, 2018; Davies & Isakjee, 2019; Sojka, 2019; Bhambra, 2022; Kalmar, 2022; Lyubchenko, 2022; Lewicki, forthcoming).

In response to debates surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, political scientist Olena Lyubchenko has interrogated the gendered exploitation that Ukrainian women have been subjected to since the Shock Therapy of the 90s and while Ukraine continued to be “plundered by ‘European-oriented’ neoliberal reforms” (Lyubchenko, 2022, n.p.). As she puts it (ibid.): “Ukrainian mothers and grandmothers have been working as migrant domestic workers, leaving their families behind, cleaning the homes of rich Italians, Germans, Poles, Americans,

¹³ While Pappé (2006) has written on colonial violence and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, he has not applied a decolonial lens to Russia. Pappé (2022ab) recently published texts replicating Kremlin talking points, describing Ukraine as ‘Russophobic,’ while saying nothing about Ukraine being invaded and subjected to genocidal violence by Russia or raising issues with such systemic violence. He has previously (2022a, n.p.) framed the military occupation as “the Ukraine crisis.”

¹⁴ At the time of the writing of this paper, the UN (2022e) held a vote on Israel’s occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territory, which the UN (2022abcd) has previously found to be in violation of Palestinians’ right to self-determination. The United Nations’ decolonisation committee adopted a draft Palestinian resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the matter (UN, 2002de). The majority of voting countries supported the motion and Ukraine was one of them (Shamir, 2022; Lazaroff & Harkov, 2022; UN, 2022d).

and Canadians and doing the social reproductive work previously borne by the Western ‘white women.’” She emphasises that none of these women have ever been greeted with any preferential treatment on any borders of the EU and as migrant labourers, they had no access to social benefits or services while being used as a supply of ‘cheap’ labour. This picture fits right within a growing pool of research on the racialisation and systematic devaluation of East European subjects and their labour, including the gendered exploitation and sexualisation of East European women (Andrisajevic, 2007; Safuta, 2018; Yurchenko, 2018; Sojka, 2019; Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020; Katona & Zacharenko, 2021; Lewicki, 2022; forthcoming). The situation of Ukrainians is even more difficult now as refugees, who are predominantly women, face an exacerbated structural vulnerability across Europe, to everything from exploitation at work, mistreatment in private housing schemes, homelessness and trafficking (Fallon & Cundy, 2022; Cincurova & Lüdke, 2022; Bryant & Townsend, 2022). These gendered structural issues should particularly concern feminists.

Debates on Ukraine, which frame Ukrainians as racially privileged white subjects, come short of grasping how racialisation has operated in Europe as well as of accounting for the socio-historical background of imperial violence that has impacted on Ukrainian lives. The relatively recent part of this history has been shaped by the inter-imperiality between Western Nazism, that has treated Slavs (after Jews, Roma and fellow racialised and othered population groups) as sub-humans for subjugation, extraction of forced labour and resources (Herbert, 2000), extermination and colonisation of their land - Ukraine, indeed, was meant to be swallowed as Nazi Germany’s ‘Lebensraum’ (territorial imperial expansion) and several millions of Ukrainians were murdered as part of the war of aggression (Lower, 2005; Beyrau & Keck-Szajbel, 2012; Petersen, 2022) - and Soviet and contemporary fascist Russia, with the repeating history of genocidal violence perpetrated against Ukrainians (Andriewsky, 2015; Dudko, 2022; Shevtsova, 2022). This socio-historical context needs to be taken into account in contemporary debates on Ukraine. Crucially, the structures of power and racialisation within this historical background are context-specific and cannot be grasped through the employment of US-centric racial frameworks, which currently dominate debates in critical race studies, but require the employment of more local frameworks and categories applicable onto European social structures, racial hierarchies and relations (Kóczé, 2009; Parvulescu, 2015; Lyubchenko, 2022; Schmidt & Jaworsky, 2022; Lewicki, 2022; forthcoming).

Western media tropes about ‘white, blond and blue-eyed’ Ukrainians, which are commonly insufficiently examined in scholarly debates, such as Puar’s talk (2022), not only conceal long history of imperial oppression as well as the racialised

socio-economic East-West divide that structures Europe and its labour market (Yurchenko, 2018; Katona & Zacharenko, 2021; Lewicki, 2022; forthcoming), but also erase the diversity of the Ukrainian society. Ukraine includes population groups, such as Indigenous Crimean Tatars (Latypova, 2022ab; Engelhardt & Shestakova, 2022), the Roma (Minority Rights Group, 2022; CoE, 2022), a large Jewish population, that includes survivors of European concentration camps, who are now being bombed and killed by Russia (Belam, 2022; BBC, 2022b),¹⁵ and people who had to flee from Soviet and Western imperialism in countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq (Latifi & Haris, 2022; Travers, 2022). Given that these population groups have faced exacerbated intersectional difficulties under the Russian invasion and while seeking refuge in various European countries (Ataai, 2022; Fremolva, 2022; Latifi & Haris, 2022; Latypova, 2022a; Ryšavý, 2022; Schmidt & Jaworsky, 2022),¹⁶ the struggle against Russia's war against Ukraine is also a struggle for racial and Indigenous justice.

Indeed, a recent *Letter from indigenous peoples of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)* (Sakha Pacifist Association, 2022, n.p.) strongly denounces Russia's genocidal invasion of Ukraine and recognises the violence as linked with and originated from the oppression of Indigenous nations: "These imperial methods evolved from Russia's centuries-long oppression of indigenous peoples – historically unrecognised and still ongoing colonisation allowed this logic to spill over into neighbouring countries." The authors elaborate (ibid.):

"Historically, Russia expanded its borders by subjugating territories that were the homelands to many indigenous people. Ethnic cleansing, forced relocation, assimilation, russification, cultural erasure, and resource exploitation all went hand in hand with conquering these regions. This dark side of Russian history has never been widely discussed or acknowledged, particularly within the country, where the forced hierarchy of cultures and ethnicities has long been normalised, portrayed as natural and reproduced through cultural products."

¹⁵ See media reports on how Holocaust survivor Vanda Semyonovna Obiedkova died sheltering in a freezing basement during the Mariupol siege (Belam 2022), and the death of Boris Romantschenko, who has survived detention in four European concentration camps between 1942-1945 and was killed in Russian shelling of Kharkiv (BBC, 2022b).

¹⁶ In her reporting on how Russia's mobilisation disproportionately affects racialised population groups, Latypova (2022a) notes that 80% of the draft papers for mobilisation in Russian-occupied Crimea were sent out to Indigenous Crimean Tatars.

The troubling fact that Russia's ongoing colonial legacy has not been widely acknowledged does not, however, mean that this topic has not been discussed by (post)colonised subjects. For example, Indigenous scholar from Central Asia Madina Tlostanova (2010; 2012; 2021) has been writing about Russian colonialism for years. Against popular views consistent with Soviet propaganda, which have presented the USSR as an egalitarian 'union' of 'brotherly nations' (Kassymbekova, 2017; Shevtsova, 2022; Sakha Pacifist Association, 2022),¹⁷ Tlostanova (2010, p. 193) has argued that: "The Soviet empire was racist, Eurocentric and patriarchal in spite of its rhetoric." The need to account for Russian colonial violence manifested through series of invasions, domination and genocides is thus one of the major debts in global debates on imperialism, colonialism and decolonial justice. The accounting for Russian colonialism also needs to support the decolonial demands of Indigenous nations currently colonised by the Russian 'Federation' (Chraibi, 2022; Latypova, 2022b; Sakha Pacifist Association, 2022).

When we start accounting for Russia's socio-historical legacy, it then also becomes problematic to use foreign concepts, such as homonationalism, without a decolonial analysis. In particular, of the starkly different socio-historical contexts of the US and Ukraine, which also require a careful distinguishing between imperial wars of aggression and defence against them (Pigul et al., 2022). Especially, against the backdrop of many Western and Russian dominated debates, which have muddled Ukrainian efforts to distance Ukraine from Russia's so-called 'sphere of influence' with nationalism (Shevtsova, 2022).¹⁸ As Tsymbalyuk and Zamurieva (2022, n.p.)

¹⁷ In particular, a recent article by gender studies scholar Aizada Arystanbek (2022) "Why romanticising the Soviet Union obscures its colonial past," is a particularly relevant read. In it, Arystanbek critiques the whitewashing of Soviet colonial crimes by Western leftists, from a Qazaq perspective. The *Letter from indigenous peoples of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)* (Sakha Pacifist Association, 2022, n.p.) also critiques Soviet propaganda and its construction of the USSR as one 'happy family': "The idea of "people's friendship," proclaimed by the Soviet Union, still influences many people's opinions. It helped to spread the illusion of homogeneity. Images depict the titular nation, "Russians," as the center of the narrative, surrounded by minorities. Such means of symbolism were an ongoing conceptual warfare that the empire has been utilizing for decades."

¹⁸ See also the public letter by renowned scholars of genocide, the Holocaust, Nazism and World War II (Finkel et al, 2022, n.p.), who have strongly criticised the Russian state for spreading propaganda about Ukrainians allegedly perpetuating genocide against Russian-speaking Ukrainians to justify a military invasion (and subsequently a genocide) against them: "We strongly reject the Russian

write: “For centuries, Russia has been coercing Ukraine into its political, economic and cultural space. The country has constructed Ukrainians as inferior, as ‘little Russians’, as a colonial Other.” To justify the escalation of the military invasion, Putin and Russian propagandists have repeatedly insisted that Ukraine as a state and nation does not exist and employed this rhetoric in the justification of the military invasion – including via framing Ukrainians as Nazis en masse (Shevtsova, 2022)¹⁹ – and perpetuating a genocide against Ukraine. Hence, to use the concept of homonationalism in a talk about Western discourse on Ukraine, without asking whether from a Ukrainian perspective, some ways of asserting the nation might play a different role – that of the basic necessary survival strategy against Russian colonial violence, through the affirmation of one’s contested existence as a people, in resistance against erasure and genocidal annihilation – is troubling to say the least. And it is even more troubling with regard to Ukrainian LGBTQ+ concerns and safety amidst the ongoing Russian invasion.

While the concept of homonationalism has been useful in analysing predominantly Western wars of aggression and propaganda (Puar, 2007), its unambiguous and un-examined application in a talk indirectly looking at Ukraine through a Western lens has concerning implications. In her talk, Puar quoted two Ukrainian LGBTQ+ NGOs which supported Ukrainian defence, to then focus on critiquing how the US discourse appropriated the case of LGBTQ+ defenders for a justification of Western military involvement. Yet, isn’t it first important to robustly explore the reasons why Ukrainian LGBTQ+ people are particularly concerned

government’s cynical abuse of the term genocide, the memory of World War II and the Holocaust, and the equation of the Ukrainian state with the Nazi regime to justify its unprovoked aggression. This rhetoric is factually wrong, morally repugnant and deeply offensive to the memory of millions of victims of Nazism and those who courageously fought against it, including Russian and Ukrainian soldiers of the Red Army.” One of the authors of the letter, Holocaust studies expert Eugene Finkel (2022), has additionally written on how the Russian invasion of Ukraine constitutes a genocide.

¹⁹ To the (post)occupied, Russia’s framing of sovereign nations in attempts to ‘justify’ their military occupation comes across as a familiarly tired repetitive pattern. The exact same thing was done to Czechoslovaks via Kremlin’s fabrication of a right-wing counter-revolution and a fictious Western/NATO intervention in Czechoslovakia, in an attempt to justify the 1968 military invasion of the country. Just like the Ukrainian society, Czechoslovaks too were in the process of increasingly distancing themselves from Russian influence and domination during the Prague Spring, which is when the Warsaw Pact Armies invaded (Kavan 2008; Černá, 2015; Tůma, 2021). They however, were not able to break many people’s will for liberation, which Czechoslovaks achieved two decades later.

about a Russian occupation (including their potential motives for joining the defence and whether these are justified), to then let such investigation inform an analysis of an international military involvement?

What motivates Ukrainian LGBTQ+ people to support the Ukrainian defence? Asiya Ahmed (2022) has interviewed members of Ukrainian LGBTQ+ communities on why they have been rallying to resist the ongoing Russian invasion. Many expressed their worries and fears regarding a military invasion by a country with a terrible record of oppressing, persecuting and eradicating LGBTQ+ people. In 2013, Russia passed a queerphobic ‘gay propaganda law,’ banning LGBTQ+ expression, institutionalising persecution and criminalisation of LGBTQ+ people and fuelling anti-LGBTQ+ hate crime (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Russia has also enabled homophobic crimes in Chechnya – a region devastated and occupied through Russian imperialism - where gay purges have been perpetrated, raising concerns of gay genocide (Kondakov, 2019; BBC, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2019).²⁰ This homophobic violence has been committed under the leadership of Putin’s ally Ramzan Kadyrov, who has described gay people as “subhuman” and “devils,” and who has more recently called for the “wiping out” of whole Ukrainian cities and has been actively deployed to oversee the Chechen army in the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Hasan, 2022; Moscow Times, 2022). Interviewed by Ahmed (2022, n.p.), Ukrainian LGBTQ+ activist Zhenya shared how Russian anti- LGBTQ+ violence in neighbouring countries made them afraid of what was coming for occupied Ukraine: “People were taken away, tortured and kept as prisoners. I’m afraid this could happen to Ukraine, after so many years of fighting for change.” Does the Ukrainian LGBTQ+ struggle against the Russian war of aggression not differ from ‘homonationalism’? Is it not important to clarify this and let the investigation inform the analysis of US media debates on Ukraine? Does the Ukrainian LGBTQ+ struggle amid the Russian military invasion not deserve international solidarity, support and military aid, to help to defend, save and liberate Ukrainian lives?

Long road to transnational feminist solidarity

Having explored various feminist responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a (post)occupied feminist wonders: how to process those experiences

²⁰ In 2017, three French gay rights groups filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court, accusing Chechnya of a systemic genocide against gay people (BBC, 2017). Nevertheless, the legal problem is that the Genocide Convention applies only to “national, ethnical, racial, or religious” groups, thereby excluding persecuted LGBTQ+ people, see UN (1948).

when the feminisms and feminists, who have advanced debates on Western imperialism and colonialism, do the opposite when Europe's East is concerned? How can genuinely intersectional, supportive and beneficent remote transnational feminist solidarity be done? The collective of Ukrainian feminists (Pigul et al., 2022, n.p.) behind *The Right to Resist* manifesto holds that first and foremost: "we view feminist solidarity as a political practice which must listen to the voices of those directly affected by imperialist aggression." As such, engaging with local voices, perspectives and knowledge whenever speaking on issues concerning a foreign cause appears fundamentally important. The Ukrainian manifesto (ibid.) further emphasises that "feminist solidarity must defend women's* right to determine their needs, political goals, and strategies for achieving them independently and on their own terms." From this emphasis on agency and self-determination, it should follow that in debates on Ukraine, it is crucial to centre Ukrainian concerns – not the Western ones or those related to critiques of Western-centric notions of imperialism and colonialism.²¹ And when contemplating on debating Ukraine indirectly, it remains to be examined whether and how this can be done in non-instrumentalising and anticolonial ways, which ought to build on Ukrainian standpoints on a Ukrainian liberation cause.

Thus, the process of stepping back and learning from local feminists, knowledges, struggles and debates then needs to constitute a necessary part of transnational feminist solidarity. Crucially, the learning process also needs to involve interrogating one's assumptions and conceptual frameworks through the knowledges and scholarship of the oppressed and their anticolonial perspectives. As Khromeychuk (2022a, n.p.) argues: "What we need is a permanent alteration – de-colonisation, de-imperialisation – of our knowledge." Only through this path, it will become possible to avoid that one's feminist work will end up committing epistemic imperialism and coloniality, including in not treating Europe's East as a site of knowledge production (Blagojević, 2009; Tlostanova, 2010; 2015; Meyerchuk & Plakhotnik, 2021; Hendl & Browne, 2022; Krivonos, Hendl, Uhde & Nachescu, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming).

Yet, this might still not be enough. As Khromeychuk (2022b) captured in a recent talk, the international treatment of Ukrainian scholars/hip has been shifting from epistemic distrust to epistemic exploitation. Where Ukrainian voices and perspectives used to be deemed biased and untrustworthy, suddenly in wartime they are being sought, to fill knowledge gaps and popular demand for the anticipated emotional performance. The path towards solidarity, which lies before

²¹ Syrian writer Leila Al-Shami (2018) has also critiqued this pattern of 'campism' in Western debates on Syria, another country which has been bombed by Russia.

non-Ukrainian feminists, then requires to commit to treat Ukrainian scholars and knowledge in ways that will not be marginalising, tokenising, extractive and burdening Ukrainians with emotional and educative labour. Especially, in all instances where non-Ukrainian scholars can do their own research and familiarise themselves with what their Ukrainian colleagues have already articulated. Furthermore, as Sonevytsky emphasises in a forthcoming paper, a much-warranted critical reflection on the issue of whose voices and assumptions have been treated as authoritative in debates on Ukraine shall lead into a robust examination of the Western-centric and Anglophone academy (with its racialised hierarchies of power and domination) and towards a politics of redistribution from within the prestige economies, including from diasporic to local.

The Transnational Solidarity of the (Post)occupied

Since the escalation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February this year, many of us from (post)occupied and (post)colonised societies have been coming together for conversations and mutual support. For some of us living as migrant academics in Western societies, the months have brought a heightened sense of alienation from our surroundings. The common inadequacy of Western responses to Russia's violence as well as the inter-imperiality of such perspectives - asserting a Western-dominating dynamic, too often mediated through a Russo-centric and 'understanding' lens²² and a lack of listening to experts from societies who have been directly impacted by Russian imperial violence and who are most qualified to assess this systemic violence - have further deepened our disillusion with the West and its coloniality towards Europe's East.

The disappointment we have felt with too many Western, but also some Global South scholars, whose work on gender, race, class, power, justice and decolonisation we have appreciated and learnt from, has made a profound impact. In many cases, it has pushed us away and had us re-examine the feminist 'canon,' including much of the canonised post- and decolonial scholarship, and motivated us to (re)connect with each other, our scholarly work, traditions of thought and social movements. A lot of us have since strengthened networks with thinkers and activists from Europe's East,²³ Ukrainians in particular, as well as created new

²² See, for example, the 'Putin-Versteher' (Putin understander and apologist) phenomena and the politics of Russia appeasement in Germany and the West more broadly (Brumme, 2022; Hucal, 2022).

²³ Some of these debates have developed within the Central and East European (CEE) Feminist Research Network founded by the author of this text. The network centres,

connections with our colleagues from Central and North Asia and Syria. From alienation, we have been building new dialogues and communities.

This community-building shall continue: at this difficult time with layers of mourning, outrage, trauma and loss, it is crucial to keep joining together and building stronger alliances, grounded in our shared historical, material and lived experiences, knowledges and lineages of resistance. The Ukrainian resistance and insistence on freedom have inspired and empowered many of us like only a few things have. The courage with which Ukrainians stood up to the giant and abusive aggressor that is imperial Russia as well as the broader and largely Western-dominated geopolitical 'order' that has treated Europe's East as - in the words of Ukrainian feminist scholars Maria Mayerchuk and Olga Plakhotnik (2021) - a 'buffer' periphery, has motivated many of us (post)occupied subjects to speak out about aspects of our herstories and lived experiences that we have not shared before, and certainly not with such urgency and insistence on being heard.

It has been immensely empowering to talk among ourselves and with each other rather than to a feminist 'canon' and 'communities' that have long othered, marginalised and disregarded us and our standpoints (Tlostanova, 2015; Kulawik, 2019; Hendl & Browne, 2022; Krivonos, Hendl, Uhde & Nachescu, 2022; Sonevytsky, forthcoming). For some of us, our shifting eastward has been the ultimate form of selfcare and a major source of strength and hope at an exceptionally difficult, re-traumatising and disappointing time. Personally, I feel immense gratitude for the feminists I have connected with through debates on our shared liberation movements. My hope is that we will keep our conversations and collaborations going and that we will continue supporting and amplifying each other. I trust that we will keep following the lead of Ukrainian feminists on what Ukraine needs in order to win the war of colonial conquest and liberate its land, so that Ukrainians can live freely and be safe under a lasting and just peace. May we also learn from Indigenous nations on what they need for their liberation from Russian colonialism and support them in achieving their aims. Hopefully, more international feminists will become allies to these liberation struggles, but that is their journey.

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amplifies and supports scholars and scholarship from CEE and stimulates anticolonial debates from CEE standpoints.

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