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Diana Dumitru & A. Dirk Moses

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## INTRODUCTION: THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

Diana Dumitru<sup>a</sup> and A. Dirk Moses<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of History, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA; <sup>b</sup>Department of Political Science, City College of New York, New York, NY, USA

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the reverberations of this conflict have consumed ordinary individuals, scholars, and practitioners with unyielding intensity. In view of conflict's magnitude and accompanying accusations of genocide on both sides, the editors of the *Journal of Genocide Research* decided to address its various dimensions in a dedicated special issue of the journal. There are inherent challenges in researching an ongoing conflict, like access to reliable data and quality information. Nevertheless, we embarked on a scholarly endeavour to explore various dimensions arising from the Russian invasion. Needless to say, we sought out Ukrainian and other Eastern European scholars. The essays contained here appeared on the journal's webpage between May 2022 and December 2023, and are now gathered together as numbers 3 and 4 of volume 25.

This special issue meticulously examines the multifaceted aspects of the conflict. Each contribution, authored by experts in their respective fields, provides nuanced and carefully argued perspectives on a range of topics. They offer insightful case studies, ranging from the portrayal of events in Bucha on Russian social media and the lessons learned from the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Poland during the initial weeks of the war to the legal implications surrounding conflict-related sexual violence and the potential pursuit of justice at the International Court of Justice. Moreover, the authors contextualize the war within relevant historical frameworks by exploring wartime collaboration, filtration camps, and the analytical concepts that inform current war strategies.

A salient conclusion emerges from the collective discourse presented in this special issue: a recognition of the complexity and inadequacy of existing international law in addressing crimes committed in Ukraine by Russian leaders. Yulia Ioffe posits that the forced transfer of children from the occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation constitutes an act of genocide. Kateryna Busol demonstrates the extent of conflict-related sexual violence against Ukrainian women and men under occupation, which likewise cries out for legal prosecution. Yet the likelihood of holding individuals like Putin accountable in court for aggression and genocide in Ukraine appears slim. Were an opportunity to present itself, Kevin Jon Heller's proposed strategies for prosecuting Russian aggression against Ukraine underscore the imperative for a(ny) trial. As he advises, this could be manifested through the establishment of a Special Tribunal, mutually agreed upon by Ukraine

and the United Nations with the General Assembly's endorsement or, alternatively, a hybrid tribunal situated in Ukraine and backed by the Council of Europe.

Another point revolves around the ongoing and inconclusive debates over the applicability of the genocide paradigm in the Ukraine war. Alexander Etkind's essay contextualizes Raphael Lemkin's conceptualization of the genocide concept in his apparent awareness of the Holodomor and applies his broad definition of genocide to the current invasion. A potential conclusion might be that if one sees Russia's war in Ukraine as genocidal, it would prompt scholars and practitioners to broaden their analytical lenses when applied to other cases. This transformation, as suggested by Martin Shaw, could lead to viewing genocide as "more or less endemic" during any war.

As this special issue suggests, the moral power of victims of genocide, both in the eyes of internal and external audiences, did not escape the Russian sight as well. As shown by Noah Krasman, in building its parallel claims to victimhood and suffering, the Russian side turned to a safe and deep well of suffering: World War Two. In the midst of the war in Ukraine, in October 2022, a St. Petersburg court decided that the Siege of Leningrad from 1941 to 1944 was an act of genocide committed by the German troops and their accomplices – the armed troops of Belgium, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland, among others. The intended contemporary parallel with NATO forces could not escape any astute audience. But Putin's contemporary parallels may turn deadly, Shpend Kursani warns, if those were to be mimicking or mirroring the Balkans in the 1990s. As he reminds us, World War Two trauma has been invoked as a prelude to the Srebrenica genocide during the Balkan wars of the 1990s – which did lead to genocide. Several of our authors seem to agree that Putin's own invasion was woven on narratives to prevent and stop genocide against Russian-speakers in Ukraine, justifying in his mind a genocidal attack on Ukraine in the name of humanitarian intervention. Alexander Etkind and Iryna Marchuk, and Aloka Wanigasuriya demonstrate the delusional nature of this claim, which the International Court of Justice rejected.

Jared McBride delves into the intricacies of collaboration during the Russo-Ukrainian War, contemplating historical patterns that resurface in times of crisis. He emphasizes the highly contingent and hotly debated nature of collaboration, even within the same country. Importantly, he cautions against demonizing "collaborators" by highlighting the difficult choices faced by Ukrainians under Russian occupation. McBride underscores the historical inconsistency that complicates the Ukrainian government's task of explaining why, for instance, a teacher conducting classes during the Russian occupation might face punitive measures while the street bearing her school's name commemorates someone who fought alongside the country's last occupiers.

It is often said that Russia's war on Ukraine is colonial or imperial. Maria Mälksoo explores the postcolonial aspects of Russia's campaign by conceiving of Eastern Europe as a colonized and occupied space. She critiques prevailing Western-centric perspectives on Eastern Europe in the field of International Relations, challenging an established notion that the region's autonomy is shaped more by great powers whose preferences should prevail. According to Mälksoo, the prominent moral and practical stance of Central and Eastern European nations in supporting Ukraine signifies a pivotal departure and signals a transformative shift in European politics. In her view, one consequential outcome is the heightened influence of Central and Eastern European member states within the European Union, carrying substantial political implications for the emerging

European polity in the aftermath of this conflict. The final essay by A. Dirk Moses and Jessie Barton Hronešová offers a brief survey of international administrations of territory for diplomats and policy makers to consider as a possible interim peace option. It reminds them that international administrations of contested territory have been resorted to with regularity for hundreds of years.

While not claiming to offer a complete and comprehensive view of the war in Ukraine, we hope that the contributions gathered here provide an informed and balanced understanding of several crucial facets of the Russian invasion. This compilation aims to serve as a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and the broader community involved in the study of genocide and conflict.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### **Notes on Contributors**

**Diana Dumitru** is Ion Ratiu Professor in Romanian Studies at Georgetown University. Her research interests include the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, nationality policies and antisemitism in the USSR, and late Stalinism and postwar trials in the Soviet Union. Her second book is entitled *The State, Antisemitism and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (2016). She is an editor of the *Journal of Genocide Research*.

**A. Dirk Moses** is Anne and Bernard Spitzer Professor of International Relations at the City College of New York, CUNY. He is the author of *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (2021) and is the senior editor of the *Journal of Genocide Research*.