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EDITORIAL

Ukraine at War: Internal Dynamics, Global Positioning, and Modern Context

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Abstract

This editorial introduction presents the special issue of *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies*, 'Ukraine's Crossroads: Domestic Shifts and International Strategies in Times of War', which brings together five interdisciplinary contributions examining the profound transformations Ukraine has undergone since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Migration and forced displacement are foregrounded as defining structural conditions of the conflict, shaping educational adaptation, cultural resilience, digital governance, and strategic public diplomacy in ways that are only beginning to be understood by scholars. Drawing on a broad and growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship, spanning forced migration studies, diaspora politics, national identity, wartime resilience, and democratic consolidation, the introduction situates the five contributions within a rich theoretical and empirical context. Collectively, the articles demonstrate how the experience of war has simultaneously disrupted and galvanised Ukrainian society, forging new forms of identity, solidarity, and institutional capacity under conditions of extreme adversity. This introduction contextualises the contributions within that literature and outlines the conceptual threads that unite them.

Keywords

Ukraine; War; Displacement; Diaspora; Resilience

Introduction: War as a Crossroads

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, transforming what had been a simmering conflict since 2014 into one of the most destructive wars in Europe since the Second World War. The scale and intensity of the assault, involving aerial bombardment of cities, mass civilian displacement, the deliberate destruction of critical infrastructure, and the occupation of significant swathes of Ukrainian territory, precipitated a humanitarian crisis of enormous proportions. Yet alongside destruction, the war has also acted as a catalyst for transformation: reshaping Ukrainian society, identity, demographic situation and institutions in ways that are likely to endure long after the fighting ends.

Ukraine's resilience in the face of invasion surprised many observers who, prior to February 2022, had been sceptical about the country's capacity to withstand a full-scale Russian assault ([Bogachenko & Oleinikova 2023](#)). That surprise, as a growing body of scholarship has argued, reflected a failure to appreciate the depth of the identity and civic transformations that Ukraine had undergone since at least the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Euromaidan of 2013/2014. [Wilson \(2024\)](#) argues that these successive revolutionary moments had progressively consolidated Ukrainian civic identity, producing what he describes as a 'post-post-Soviet' nation whose sense of itself had been forged not by ethnicity but by shared political values, a commitment to sovereignty, freedom, and European integration that Russian aggression only deepened. Survey data support this strongly: the pride in Ukrainian citizenship went up from 59% in 2020 to 82% in July 2022 ([Wilson 2024](#), p.23). Far from exposing fractures, the war revealed the extent to which Ukraine had become a consolidated political nation ([Oleinikova 2022](#)).

This special issue takes the war and its consequences as its organising problematic, but it resists the temptation to reduce Ukraine to a site of victimhood or passive suffering. Instead, the contributions gathered here foreground Ukrainian agency: the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, and the state to respond creatively, strategically, and resiliently to conditions of extreme adversity. The articles span a range of disciplines, including education studies, media and communication, cultural heritage studies, political science, and together they illuminate the multiple dimensions of Ukraine's ongoing transformation. To contextualise these contributions, it is necessary first to engage seriously with the phenomena that is simultaneously their shared backdrop and one of their central objects of analysis: mass migration and forced displacement.

This introduction proceeds in three movements. It begins by situating migration, understood in both its pre-war economic form and its post-2022 forced-displacement form, as the key conditioning factor running through all five contributions, and it draws out the theoretical and research-ethical implications of this framing, including the relationship between displacement and the formation of national identity. It then provides an overview of each article and traces the three conceptual threads that unite them: resilience as a socially produced and multiply-scaled process; the contested dynamics of identity and belonging under conditions of existential threat; and the adaptive capacities of the wartime state. Finally, the introduction returns to migration as a cross-cutting lens, demonstrating its centrality not merely as a humanitarian backdrop but also as a constitutive dimension of Ukraine's wartime transformation, and of the wider scholarly literature with which this issue enters into dialogue.

Migration as a Defining Feature of Modern Ukraine

The displacement crisis unleashed by the 2022 invasion cannot be understood without situating it within Ukraine's longer history of emigration and mobility ([Gorokhova et al. 2025](#)). Ukraine has been one of the most significant source countries for international migration in the post-Soviet space since at least the early 1990s ([Oleinikova 2020](#)), and the dynamics of this mobility have evolved substantially across successive political and economic conjunctions ([Bogachenko & Oleinikova 2023](#)). Before 2022, Ukrainian labour

migration to Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany and Italy represented the backbone of what was then the largest emigration flow in Europe, with remittances reaching USD 14 billion in 2021 alone, equivalent to approximately seven% of Ukraine's GDP ([Koinova 2024](#)). This pre-existing diaspora infrastructure, the networks, organisations, and cross-border ties that had been built up over decades, proved decisive in shaping the response to the 2022 displacement crisis and distinguishes the Ukrainian case from many previous refugee emergencies ([Malynovska 2023](#)).

What is theoretically distinctive about the Ukrainian case, however, is the relationship between migration and the formation of national identity itself. [Benedict Anderson \(2020; 1992\)](#) famously linked migration to nationalism in two related but different ways. In his foundational account, the spatial mobility of creole administrators across Latin America in the eighteenth century produced a sense of national distinctiveness from the imperial metropole, and his later concept of 'long-distance nationalism' described how migrants, physically removed from their homeland, often develop more intensely nationalist identifications than those who remain. The Ukrainian trajectory is at once analogous and distinct. Post-1991 economic migration to Poland, Germany, Italy and elsewhere generated what might be termed a 'nationalism of aspiration': exposure to European civic cultures, returns of economically and politically confident migrants, and the transnational circulation of remittances and ideas all reinforced the orientation toward European integration and sovereignty that found expression in the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan ([Oleinikova 2020](#); [Bogachenko & Oleinikova 2023](#), [Oleinikova 2017](#)). Unlike Anderson's long-distance nationalists, who risked substituting diasporic fantasy for the complex realities of the homeland, Ukrainian labour migrants remained embedded in dense transnational networks that tied them to Ukraine rather than displacing their identification elsewhere. Migration, in this account, did not weaken national identity; it helped to produce it. The post-2022 forced displacement of predominantly women and children under martial law has intensified this dynamic in ways that are historically unprecedented. Separated from territory by violence rather than by economic calculation, these refugees carry Ukrainian culture, language, and political identity into host societies under conditions that make return both longed-for and uncertain. If nationalism is conventionally understood as the ideological fusion of people and territory, then the forced separation of people from their territory, at massive scale and under conditions of existential threat, generates its own powerful nationalising logic. The resulting diaspora does not supersede Ukrainian national identity; it consolidates and, in important respects, makes it.

This theoretical claim is supported by empirical evidence that is striking in its clarity. Pride in Ukrainian citizenship rose from 59% in 2020 to 82% in July 2022 ([Wilson 2024](#)), with [Kulyk's \(2024\)](#) analysis of five nationwide surveys confirming an accelerating shift away from regional and ethnolinguistic identities toward a consolidated civic Ukrainian identity. The three interconnected themes this special issue traces; resilience, the dynamics of identity and belonging, and the adaptive capacities of the wartime state; are all, we argue, conditioned by these migration dynamics. It is to those dynamics that we now turn.

The scale of displacement since February 2022 is without precedent in post-war European history. [Schrooten \(2025\)](#) has characterised the Ukrainian displacement event as exceptional not only in scale and speed but in the institutional response it elicited: for the first time, the European Union activated its Temporary Protection Directive, granting Ukrainian refugees immediate access to housing, employment, education, and social security across member states; a stark departure from the treatment of Syrian and Afghan refugees in preceding years. In 2026, 5.6 million Ukrainian refugees remain abroad ([Ippolitova et al., 2026](#)), with a further estimated 3.5 to 8 million internally displaced within Ukraine itself ([UNHCR 2025](#); [Schrooten 2025](#)). As a refugee crisis, it exceeded the scale of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the Syrian crisis of the mid-2010s combined, at least in terms of European reception.

The demographic composition of this refugee population is both distinctive and consequential. The overwhelming majority of those who have crossed international borders are women and children, owing to the legal prohibition under martial law on men aged 18–60 leaving Ukraine ([Breda & Potot 2024](#)). [Andrews](#)

[et al. \(2023\)](#) have described this as a process of ‘feminised forced migration’. This is a sign of departure from the male-dominated patterns that have historically characterised war-induced refugee flows. Their research across Poland and Germany documents how this gendered character shapes not only the immediate challenges of reception and integration, but also longer-term questions of labour market participation, childcare provision, and household decision-making. Women, often travelling with children and without partners, have had to assume simultaneously the roles of caregiver, breadwinner, and navigator of unfamiliar bureaucratic systems, frequently without adequate institutional support and often with considerable psychological cost ([Yemets 2025](#); [Bouchard et al. 2023](#); [Długosz 2023](#)).

Research conducted across multiple destination countries has documented the particular challenges of this feminised displacement in depth. Studies of Ukrainian women in Poland have foregrounded their agency and resilience alongside their vulnerability, challenging the tendency in policy and popular discourse to represent refugee women primarily as passive victims ([Kitsa 2025](#)). Research on Ukrainian refugees in Austria has drawn on social phenomenology to theorise the ‘sociology of loss’ that characterises the experience of forced migration, the loss of ontological security, established social relationships, and accumulated social status that cannot be captured by accounts that focus solely on housing or employment outcomes ([Riederer et al. 2025](#), [Ulrich 2025](#)). Mental health research has found that more than 75% of Ukrainian refugees in Poland exhibit symptoms consistent with anxiety disorders, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder, with the prevalence particularly pronounced among women and younger refugees ([Długosz 2023](#)). The psychological dimension of displacement is not a marginal concern but a central feature of the wartime experience that researchers must attend to with care.

It is important, however, to resist any homogenising account of Ukrainian refugees as a single undifferentiated category of victims. [Oleinikova’s \(2020\)](#) framework for understanding migrants from crisis regimes, organised around the analytical distinction between the ‘achiever’, who frames mobility as an opportunity for self-realisation, and the ‘survivor’, whose primary orientation is stability and coping, offers a valuable corrective to this tendency. Even within crisis-driven displacement, individuals bring different resources, aspirations, and adaptive strategies to their situations. Some refugees have rapidly integrated into host labour markets, accessed academic opportunities, and begun building durable lives abroad; others remain in precarious situations of temporary shelter and partial employment, hoping to return as soon as conditions allow; still others engage in frequent back-and-forth mobility between Ukraine and their host countries, maintaining ties on both sides of the border. [Oleinikova \(2023\)](#) further underscores the genuinely global character of the Ukrainian diaspora, a corrective to the exclusively European-centred focus that dominates much of the existing literature.

The relationship between displacement and democratic politics is a further dimension of the migration question that has attracted significant scholarly attention ([Kovalchuk & Korzh 2019](#)). [Koinova \(2018; 2024\)](#), writing on diaspora engagement in Ukraine’s reconstruction and recovery, has highlighted the multiple roles that displaced Ukrainians and the pre-existing diaspora can play in shaping the political trajectory of the homeland: as financial contributors and remittance senders, as informal advocates and lobbyists in Western capitals, as civil society actors countering Russian disinformation, and as potential participants in post-war democratic rebuilding. [Oleinikova and Bayeah \(2019\)](#) have provided essential theoretical grounding for this dimension of analysis, examining how diaspora communities both contribute to and are shaped by the democratic politics of home and host societies. This framing is especially important in the modern Ukrainian context, where the stakes of diaspora political engagement, for the outcome of the war, for the durability of democratic governance, and for the prospects of post-conflict reconstruction, could hardly be higher.

The mobilisation of the Ukrainian diaspora following February 2022 has been remarkable in scale and creativity ([Kozachenko 2025](#)). Diaspora organisations in Poland and France have established Ukrainian community associations, supplemented by newly formed networks of refugees, and have rapidly pivoted to

provide humanitarian assistance, legal guidance, cultural support, and political advocacy ([Fihel et al. 2025](#)). The concept of a ‘critical juncture’, a historical event that accelerates and intensifies civic engagement ([Fihel et al. 2025](#)), aptly captures the transformative effect of the invasion on diaspora political behaviour. Diaspora members across Europe and beyond have fundraised for Ukraine’s defence, lobbied governments, organised public demonstrations, and used social media platforms to counter Russian narratives. [Oleinikova & Oleinikova \(2025\)](#) showed how a comparatively small but highly educated Ukrainian-Australian diaspora has engaged in similar modes of transnational activism, illustrating the global reach of this phenomenon.

Taken together, what the scholarly literature makes clear is that migration is not merely a humanitarian by-product of the war in Ukraine, it is one of the central organising features of the conflict, implicated in virtually every dimension of Ukrainian social, cultural, political, and institutional life. The contributions to this special issue, to which we now turn, document that implication across a diverse range of domains.

Migration, Research Ethics, and the Wartime Society

The literature on conflict-induced displacement has long established that mass population movement fundamentally alters the societies from which people flee, as well as the societies that receive them ([Zolberg et al. 1989](#); [Castles 2003](#)). In the Ukrainian case, this has been accompanied by a remarkable proliferation of scholarship seeking to document, explain, and respond to the crisis in real time, a body of literature that, as [Schrooten \(2025\)](#) notes, is still rapidly evolving and in which significant empirical and theoretical gaps remain. Among the most important of these gaps is the consistent under-representation of internally displaced persons, LGBTQ+ refugees ([Shevtsova 2024](#)), Ukrainian youth university students ([Denisova-Schmidt & Marmilova 2026](#)), and people with disabilities in the existing research, as well as the relative neglect of Ukrainian-language scholarship produced in the countries most directly affected, such as Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

The proliferation of research on Ukrainian refugees has also generated urgent questions about research ethics and methodology ([Dominelli 2025](#)). When researchers seek to study displaced populations, particularly those who have experienced violence, loss, and profound trauma, they encounter obligations that go beyond conventional ethical frameworks. The risk of re-traumatisation, the power asymmetries inherent in researcher-participant relationships, and the vulnerability of people who have been uprooted from their lives by violence all demand particular methodological care. Several of the contributions to this special issue engage, directly or indirectly, with these concerns; Gorokhova’s article addresses them as its primary focus. Her work is situated within a growing methodological literature on trauma-informed research practice that has gained urgency in the context of Ukraine.

Furthermore, displacement is not only a physical and economic condition but a cultural and psychological one. The preservation and transmission of cultural heritage take on heightened significance when communities are geographically scattered and national identity is under existential threat from an aggressor that denies the very legitimacy of Ukrainian cultural distinctiveness. Similarly, the educational continuity of displaced children, and the professional communities of teachers working under conditions of bombardment and displacement, speak to the ways in which even the most fundamental social institutions must adapt, innovate, and persist. It is to these intersecting dimensions of Ukraine’s wartime transformation that the contributions of this special issue are directed.

The Contributions: An Overview

The five articles in this special issue examine Ukraine’s wartime transformation across interconnected institutional and human domains: education, public diplomacy, cultural heritage, digital governance, and trauma-informed research. Although each contribution focuses on a distinct field, together they illuminate

how resilience under conditions of armed aggression is produced through collective networks, digital infrastructures, transnational engagement, and ethically reflexive scholarship.

Across these domains, the war has not simply disrupted institutions, it has accelerated reform, reshaped state-society relations, and redefined the conditions under which knowledge is produced. The contributions demonstrate that resilience in contemporary Ukraine is not singular or static; it is relational, communicative, technological, and deeply embodied.

EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE AND PROFESSIONAL SOLIDARITY

In 'Strengthening resilience through teacher communities of practice in Ukraine', Anastasiia Syzenko and Olha Pavlenko analyse how Ukrainian educators sustain professional continuity amid destruction, displacement, and persistent insecurity. Schools have been damaged, students dispersed, and teaching repeatedly shifted online in response to air raids and infrastructural instability. In this context, resilience has become a structural necessity rather than a desirable attribute.

The authors conceptualise Teacher Communities of Practice (CoPs) as critical infrastructures of adaptation. These collaborative networks provide spaces for resource-sharing, reflective dialogue, and emotional support. By fostering collective problem-solving, CoPs mitigate professional isolation and enable teachers to navigate rapidly changing educational demands. Resilience, in this account, is not an individual psychological trait but a socially embedded process.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that such communities generate agency. Teachers collectively develop innovative pedagogical strategies, assert professional voice, and reassert control over their work despite external instability. CoPs thus function as both support systems and sites of empowerment. By recognising these networks as strategic components of professional development, policymakers can strengthen the adaptive capacity of Ukraine's education system in the face of a protracted crisis.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AS STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

In 'Image at gunpoint: Public diplomacy of Ukraine in terms of war', Sergii Geraskov and Sophia Bannikova interrogate the role of image and narrative in contemporary warfare. Grounded in the framework of participative warfare, the article argues that public diplomacy has become integral to Ukraine's national defence strategy.

Through document and content analysis, the authors assess Ukraine's mobilisation of cultural, scientific, sports, culinary, and digital diplomacy following the full-scale invasion. In an era where global perception shapes material support, reputation functions as strategic capital. Ukraine's communicative practices have aimed to consolidate international alliances, counter disinformation, and reinforce its democratic identity.

Public diplomacy operates across multiple levels. State actors, cultural institutions, civic organisations, and diaspora communities contribute to the co-production of national narratives. Digital platforms amplify reach and facilitate rapid engagement with global audiences. Rather than suspending diplomatic activity during wartime, Ukraine has intensified it, embedding communicative strategies within broader frameworks of resilience and resistance.

The article thus reframes wartime diplomacy not as symbolic performance but as operational infrastructure, one that sustains political legitimacy, mobilises solidarity, and strengthens Ukraine's international positioning.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AS DIGITAL AND TRANSNATIONAL RESILIENCE

Daryna Zhyvohliadova's 'Innovative tools for the preservation of cultural heritage: EU, Australia, and Ukraine' examines how cultural sectors adapt to contemporary threats through digital innovation and

international collaboration. In conditions where physical heritage sites are vulnerable or inaccessible, preservation extends beyond material safeguarding to include digitisation, virtual exhibitions, and knowledge exchange networks.

By situating Ukraine within comparative initiatives across the European Union and Australia, the article highlights the transnational dimension of cultural resilience. Digital technologies enable dispersed communities, including refugees and diasporic populations, to maintain connection to national heritage. Cultural preservation thus becomes both symbolic defence and inclusive engagement.

Innovation is presented not merely as technological adoption but as institutional transformation. Partnerships among governments, universities, and cultural organisations create adaptive ecosystems capable of responding to crises. Cultural heritage, in this account, is both a repository of memory and dynamic resource for social cohesion and sustainable recovery.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL TRANSFORMATION

In 'Digital transformation in local authorities in Ukraine: Challenges and opportunities', Iryna Fyshchuk explores how municipal governance evolves under wartime conditions. Drawing on interviews conducted between May 2023 and May 2024 and analysis of reports from national and international institutions, the study offers an empirical assessment of local-level digital reform.

Despite the ongoing war, Ukraine has advanced significantly in global digital governance rankings, reflecting sustained institutional commitment. However, progress occurs alongside formidable challenges: uneven implementation across municipalities, financial constraints, cybersecurity threats, digital skills gaps, infrastructural damage, and the prioritisation of immediate wartime needs.

Central to this transformation is the state-developed 'Diia' platform, which integrates access to administrative services and official documents in digital form. By simplifying service provision, digital governance reshapes the relationship between citizens and the state, enhancing accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness, particularly for displaced populations.

Fyshchuk further identifies forward-looking strategies, including training programs for digital transformation officers, inter-municipal and international cooperation, veteran engagement initiatives, and incentives to attract digital specialists. Digitalisation thus emerges not merely as administrative reform but as democratic infrastructure, sustaining state functionality and citizen trust during instability.

TRAUMA-INFORMED RESEARCH AND MEANING-MAKING

The final article, by Tetiana Gorokhova, "It's a sensitive topic for me, but I want to tell you": Ethical and trauma-informed issues of conducting interviews with young Ukrainian refugees', shifts attention to the ethics of knowledge production itself. Based on two waves of qualitative research with 20 young Ukrainian refugees in Germany and Australia, the study examines the methodological and emotional complexities of interviewing forcibly displaced youth during ongoing conflict.

Using an adapted version of Park's integrated meaning-making model and combining standardized trauma assessments with narrative interviews, the research reveals meaning-making as cyclical and non-linear. Participants, many of whom experienced bombing or occupation, simultaneously navigated grief, survival, growth, and identity transformation.

The study demonstrates that the research encounter itself can become a site of narrative reconstruction. While moments of distress required careful intervention, many participants described the interviews as opportunities for reflection, integration, and reclaiming narrative agency. At the same time, Gorokhova documents the emotional labour of conducting such research, including secondary trauma and the complexities of insider positionality as a Ukrainian scholar.

The article calls for ethical frameworks that extend protection beyond participants to researchers, advocating institutional support mechanisms such as supervision, debriefing, and structured self-care. By centring relational and justice-oriented ethics, it reframes fieldwork as a space of both vulnerability and resilience.

Connecting Threads: Resilience, Identity, and the Wartime State

Read together, the five contributions to this special issue illuminate three interconnected themes that run through Ukraine's wartime experience: resilience at multiple scales, the contested dynamics of identity and belonging, and the adaptive capacities of the wartime state. Migration, as this introduction has argued, is not a background condition for these processes but one of their central organising features.

The concept of resilience emerges from these articles not as a passive capacity for absorbing shocks but as an active, socially constructed process of adaptation, resistance, and renewal. This understanding is consistent with recent scholarship on Ukrainian societal resilience, which has emphasised the role of civil society institutions, informal solidarity networks, and individual initiative in sustaining social cohesion under conditions of existential threat ([Reis 2025](#); [Kudlenko 2023](#); [Kutsenko 2025](#); [Reznikova & Korniiivskiyi 2024](#); [Zaremba & Martin 2024](#)). Whether in the form of teachers sustaining professional communities across the fractures of displacement, cultural institutions forging new knowledge-exchange networks to preserve threatened heritage, or municipalities finding digital solutions to maintain service delivery under bombardment, resilience here is something that is made, not merely possessed. It is produced through deliberate effort, social solidarity, and the creative repurposing of existing resources and relationships, a dynamic that [Oleinikova's \(2020\)](#) framework of life strategies in crisis contexts captures at the level of individual migrants, and that the contributions to this issue trace across multiple institutional domains.

Identity is a second connecting thread. Russia's war has been partly a war over identity, a war over whether Ukraine exists as a distinct nation, culture, and political community, or whether it represents, as Russian nationalist discourse insists, an artificial construct inseparable from Russia. Ukraine's response has been a remarkable process of national self-assertion. Survey data collected throughout the war have consistently shown overwhelming majorities supporting Ukrainian independence, European integration, and NATO membership, with identification as Ukrainian and with European values strengthening markedly since 2022 ([Wilson 2024](#); [Kulyk 2024](#)). [Kulyk's \(2024\)](#) analysis of national identity change across five nationwide surveys confirms this trajectory: the war has accelerated a pre-existing shift away from regional and ethnolinguistic identities towards a consolidated civic Ukrainian identity. The contributions to this special issue document aspects of this process across multiple registers, from the mobilisation of cultural heritage as evidence of civilisational distinctiveness, to the construction and projection of a particular Ukrainian image for international audiences, to the efforts of educators to sustain cultural and linguistic transmission across the dislocations of war.

Migration is inseparable from all of these identity dynamics. The millions of Ukrainians displaced by the war carry Ukrainian culture, language, and memory into new contexts, becoming, often without choosing it, agents of cultural transmission and national representation. Ukrainian migrants in Australia demonstrate the relationship between migration and national identity is complex and contextually shaped by the particular conditions of the host country ([Oleinikova 2023](#)), the timing of migration, and the political events unfolding in the homeland. For those displaced by the 2022 war, this relationship has taken on an unprecedented urgency.

Scholarly Context: Migration as a Cross-Cutting Lens

A recurring feature of the existing literature on Ukrainian wartime resilience, across political science, sociology, and cultural studies, is that migration and displacement tend to be treated as background context or humanitarian by-products rather than as analytically central. Studies of civil society mobilisation, democratic resilience, or institutional adaptation often acknowledge the displacement crisis in passing without examining how it conditions the phenomena they analyse. This special issue makes a corrective argument: migration is not residual to the dynamics of resilience, identity, and state adaptation it examines, but constitutive of them. The contributions collectively demonstrate that displacement permeates virtually every dimension of Ukraine's wartime transformation, and that the field of Ukraine studies will be better equipped to explain that transformation once migration is moved from the margins to the centre of analysis. The scholarship on Ukraine has expanded dramatically since February 2022, and the articles collected here enter into dialogue with a rapidly growing body of literature across multiple disciplines. In political science, scholars have examined Ukraine's wartime state capacity, democratic resilience, and civil society mobilisation ([Kutsenko 2025](#); [Reis 2025](#); [Stepanenko & Stewart 2026](#); [Reznikova & Korniiievskiy 2024](#); [Zarembo & Martin 2024](#); [Kudlenko 2023](#)). In sociology and migration studies, researchers have documented the unprecedented scale and character of the displacement crisis ([Schrooten 2025](#); [Andrews et al. 2023](#), [Gorokhova et al. 2025](#); [Oleinikova & Oleinikova 2025](#); [Elinder et al. 2023](#)) and the distinctive challenges it has posed for integration in host countries across Europe, Australia and beyond ([Burke & Bogachenko 2025](#)). In cultural and memory studies, the war's implications for Ukrainian national identity and cultural heritage have attracted considerable attention ([Wilson 2024](#); [Kulyk 2024](#)). And in diaspora studies, a growing body of work (for example, [Oleinikova 2020](#); [Koinova 2024](#); [Fihel et al. 2025](#)), has illuminated the political and civic dimensions of Ukrainian transnationalism before and after the invasion.

A distinctive contribution of this special issue lies in its integration of migration as a cross-cutting analytical lens rather than a discrete topic. Too often, refugee and displacement studies sit in isolated silos, disconnected from analyses of cultural policy, educational reform, or digital governance. The articles collected here demonstrate that this separation is analytically impoverishing: the experience of displacement permeates virtually every dimension of Ukrainian social, cultural, political, and institutional change that the issue examines. Whether one is studying teacher communities, digital transformation, public diplomacy, cultural heritage, or the impact of a research methodology, the fact of mass displacement, with its particular gendered character, its emotional and psychological weight, its political and diplomatic implications, and its consequences for cultural transmission and democratic participation, is inescapably present.

Finally, the special issue models the kind of ethical scholarly practice that research on war and displacement demands. Several contributions engage explicitly with questions of positionality, reflexivity, and the politics of knowledge production. Gorokhova's article on trauma-informed interviewing is the most sustained engagement with these issues, but they surface across the articles in the special issue. It is worth noting that this reflexive dimension is itself connected to the migration dynamics the issue foregrounds: several of the contributing authors are themselves displaced Ukrainians, or scholars whose research trajectories have been directly shaped by the experience of displacement. Their positionality as insider-researchers, carrying the personal stakes of the conflict into the research encounter, is not a methodological liability to be declared and bracketed, but a source of interpretive insight that the best work in this issue turns to productive analytical use. Gorokhova's reflection on the emotional labour and secondary trauma of conducting interviews as a Ukrainian researcher, and the broader call for institutional support structures adequate to that burden, speaks to this directly. This reflexive dimension we hope will be of value not only to scholars of Ukraine but to all researchers working with vulnerable communities in contexts where the stakes of representation are high.

Conclusion

Ukraine stands at a crossroads, though it has arguably stood at crossroads throughout much of its modern history. What distinguishes the present moment is both the existential scale of the external threat and the remarkable depth of the internal capacity for resistance, adaptation, and renewal that Ukrainian society has demonstrated. The articles collected in this special issue offer partial but illuminating glimpses of these dynamics, documenting the ways in which war has simultaneously destroyed and created, traumatised and galvanised, displaced and reoriented.

The broader theoretical implications of this collection deserve emphasis. The Ukrainian case challenges conventional frameworks for understanding the relationship between migration and national identity. Whether in [Anderson's \(2020\)](#) account of imagined community, or [Brubaker's \(1996\)](#) analysis of nationhood and nationalism, the prevailing tendency has been to treat migration as a complicating force, fragmenting solidarities, diluting attachments, producing hyphenated or hybrid identities. The Ukrainian evidence suggests something different: under conditions of forced displacement, at massive scale and under existential threat, migration can function as a powerful nationalising force. The diaspora consolidates rather than supersedes the nation. Separation from territory, far from dissolving national identity, intensifies it. If nationalism conventionally fuses people and territory, then the violent rupture of that fusion generates its own nationalist dynamic, one that the literature on diaspora politics, transnationalism, and forced migration has not yet fully theorised. This special issue, we hope, offers materials for that theorisation.

Migration and displacement are not background conditions for these processes; they are central to them. The questions that the contributions to this issue address: how societies sustain cultural inheritance when physical anchors are under threat; how states maintain legitimacy when populations are dispersed; how educators sustain professional communities across borders; how nations project themselves to the world under conditions of violent existential pressure; are not exclusively Ukrainian questions. They are questions about democratic societies under conditions of existential threat, and about the relationship between territorial rupture, collective identity, and institutional resilience that the Ukrainian case illuminates with unusual clarity. The analytical framework that this issue proposes: migration as a constitutive rather than residual dimension of wartime social transformation, has implications that extend beyond Ukraine, to any context in which forced displacement and national solidarity intersect.

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No AI tools were used in the development or presentation of this submission.

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