

I agree but want to add that to properly understand their potential to 'grip' subjects (and thus gain broad political support) they must be understood as fantasies in the psychoanalytic sense. Put in the words of Slovene psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Žižek's they provide the 'coordinates of our desire' and are central for processes of identification. Only thus we can understand why they are so powerful, and how they both have the potential to justify violent acts. Against this background, we need to explore further not merely the violence conducted by our most obvious political opponents, but also closer to home."

EL ŹBIETA KOROLCZUK:

"The global anti-gender movement is entangled with global politics and while its representatives usually employ non-violent methods to fight against women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, sex education and gender studies, its discursive strategies and campaigns should be further analyzed as possible conveyor belt to engagement in violence. Thus, we need to explore the links between anti-gender ideology and authoritarian militarism, having in mind the ultimate outcomes of such discourses.

We should also explore further the links between the anti-gender worldview and fascism. Fascist legacy is clearly visible in the ways in which the anti-gender actors seek to re-establish a binary hierarchical gender order as the basis of a healthy nation. It is much more obvious in countries such as Russia where gay people are prosecuted or in Poland where local municipalities established 'LGBT-free zones', but the obsession with the dangers of sexual decadence and moral purity can be discern also in other contexts. Secondly, as shown by Agnieszka Graff, there are also clear elements of anti-Semitism in anti-gender discourses. It can be argued that especially for fundamentalist groups within the Catholic Church gender functions as a stand-in for Jews: a malevolent force sexualizing the innocents, corrupting the nation from inside. While open anti-Semitism is no longer acceptable within the Catholic Church and the broader society, 'gender' has become its equivalent." ❌

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN TIMES OF WAR AND REPRESSION

THE ROUNDTABLE "Universities at War", held in Vienna on September 27, 2023, provided a panorama of case studies analyzing how universities have been implicated and affected by wars and conflicts. The speakers reflected on the

way academic communities have been affected and the role of European academic institutions as sites, agents, collaborators, resisters, and victims of military conflicts from the Second World War to Russia's war against Ukraine.

Introduction

PHILIPP CHRISTOPH SCHMÄDEKE is Political Scientist at the Federal Agency for Civic Education, Berlin, director of the Science at Risk Emergency Office.



"Hello everyone, really happy to have you here. Very shortly regarding myself, I'm also director of the Science at Risk Emergency Office. We are helping scholars at risk from Ukraine, but also Belarus and Russia. The full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine also affects scientists there. We can help 100 Ukrainian scholars and students at risk. But the situation is, in many ways, really, really horrible. Students and academics are at war. Many are fighting at the front, and some are even dying in the war. We see a brain drain of women academics from Ukraine. They are moving all over the place, but mostly Europe. We do not know if they're coming back and when it would be possible. The present situation in Ukraine for academia is alarming. It's quite impossible to have normal teaching, researching, and learning. The efforts to hold online courses are admirable but when there is no electricity it isn't really possible.

And at the same time we are experi-

encing repression, on a scale we haven't seen since the Soviet Union. The repression is not only in Russia, but also in Belarus where the number of political prisoners is 189 per one million habitants. We are facing an extreme situation that we need to deal with and understand how best to tackle together.

The good thing is that there is a big wave of solidarity aiming to help scholars at risk. We are thus doing what we can together with other European academics who are helping with their own means, with few resources. But the official structures are helping less than 1% of scholars at risk from the region, less than 1%. And we are facing the problem that there's not enough help for 99% of scholars at risk

"BUT THE SITUATION IS, IN MANY WAYS, REALLY, REALLY HORRIBLE. STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS ARE AT WAR."

in this war and under the current repression. And there are no long-lasting structures for the few we do manage to help. There are no big universities in exile, there's nothing. And this is why we are here today having this conference. And this is the topic we are talking about this evening, how we can tackle this situation jointly. This is the reason why there are so many great people are sitting here. Let me now present them all:

KIRSTINE ARENTOFT will begin by telling you about the project University of New Europe and the mentoring program.

Then we will have Svitlana Telukha, she's online now. She will tell us about the projects in Ukraine, and we are having great cooperation with Svitlana on a great project. Andrea Petö will then give us another perspective about wars at the European or global level about gender studies, this will also be very interesting. Then we have Alexander Etkind here, he will talk about the situation for universities in Russia, or rather the failure of today's universities in Russia. Last but not least, Dina Gusejnova will go back into history more and tell us something about universities in exile in a historical context. We will have these five inputs and then we will open the discussion. We are looking forward to having a good discussion, all together." ❌



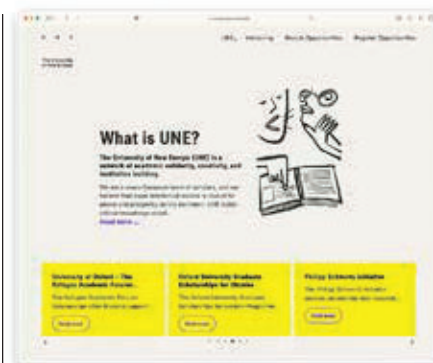
KIRSTINE ARENTOFT is currently a master's student in Comparative Literature at the University of Vienna, working with the University New Europe's mentoring program.

"Good evening, everyone. I am very grateful for this opportunity to share insights into how mentoring networks can serve as a relevant case study in the context of universities facing the challenges of war. Before introducing the program, let me introduce the University of New Europe, in short, UNE. UNE is an academic solidarity project run by a team of scholars, and a support team of assistants and volunteers of which I am also a part. The mentoring program was founded by Dorine Schellens and Ellen Rutten in collaboration with Akademisches Netzwerk Osteuropas (AKNO), an organization that, like UNE, emerged in response to political suppressions in Belarus (as well as Russia) in 2021.

The idea of the University New Europe mentoring program is to connect students, scholars, and cultural workers at risk with resourceful mentors in their respective fields. Mentoring consists of various support forms, including practical assistance such as finding relevant positions, networking, proofreading applications, and very importantly, providing emotional support. One important resource that we offer is the UNE-database, which gathers information on relevant positions, fellowships and other types of support in one place. This database was developed by Dorine Schellens, who regularly updates it. Unique for this database

Roundtable speakers

"The idea of the University New Europe's mentoring program is to connect students, scholars, and cultural workers at risk with resourceful mentors in their respective field"



The University of New Europe is a solidarity program run by a team of scholars, and a support team of assistants and volunteers.

is its focus on options in humanities and social sciences, as well as its inclusivity for various at-risk groups across Central and Eastern Europe.

TO DATE, the program has matched around 800 people, half of them mentors, half of them mentees. Several mentees have acquired PhD-positions, fellowships, and even permanent positions thanks in part to their mentors. Most of our mentees are Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians. These are disparate groups, experiencing very different situations of fleeing from war and political repression. Reaching out to these different groups is not easy. It requires awareness that Ukrainian peers deserve especially acute attention, and that this is not the time for reconciliatory attempts. One of the strengths of the personal contact that is established through mentorships, however, is that every ques-

"IT REQUIRES AWARENESS THAT UKRAINIAN PEERS DESERVE ESPECIALLY ACUTE ATTENTION, AND THAT THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR RECONCILIATORY ATTEMPTS."

tion is solved on an interpersonal basis between mentors and mentees. This approach enables us to navigate the difficult problem of offering support to Ukrainians and Russians alike.

From internal surveys we learned that the success rate of the mentorships varies a lot, from short contacts to intense help with one acute question to very fruitful, longer relationships. This variation is of course due to many things, but we have found that the precision of matches is an important factor in the success rate of mentorships. In the first days of war, when physical safety was the biggest concern for most mentees, we primarily focused on providing mentees with mentors quickly. Having a supportive mentor who could provide guidance from a place of safety was very valuable to many mentees.

HOWEVER, WITH the sad reality of war becoming an integral part of everyday life for many mentees, the character of support also needed changes. Now we have more time to reach out to mentors with a profile that best matches the person at risk and follow up on relations as well. We are still discovering the best ways to do this and wish to learn more about how mental health issues impact the mentees as displaced academics as well as how mentoring can help mentors cope with feelings of powerlessness and isolation.

One structural problem that UNE as a university-in-the-making identifies is that the amount of people who need support to think freely is too big to fit into existing organizations. In a way this is exactly the work that our mentoring program offers: finding mentors, who can help their mentees, to find suitable existing institutions for them to continue their work.

Mentoring as a form of academic first aid has been and continues to be instrumental in assisting in the relocation and remote support for academics and cultural workers at risk in meaningful ways. But it also caters into the broader context of UNE's ambition to create new networks across Europe, and we wish to see how mentorship relations can grow into sustainable networks.

We have already seen signs of this transformation. More mentees have be-

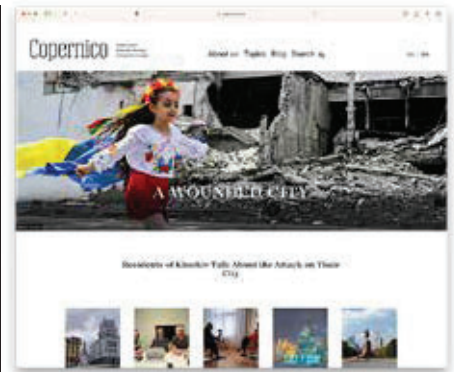
come mentors after having participated in the program and having succeeded in finding a way to continue their work. They are important bridge figures that help imagine what support can look like. Other productive mentoring outcomes are initiatives in which the resources of mentees are made visible to broader communities. One relocated mentee currently teaches a Ukrainian language program at the University of Amsterdam. Others educate broader audiences about the region in public seminar series. The mentorship program works best when it amplifies the voices of mentees.

With the above, I aimed to offer some concrete suggestions on how our mentoring work with UNE – and mentoring in general – can act as tools in tackling academic war challenges. Thanks for your attention.” ❌

“We collect these stories through the prism of Kharkiv residents’ favorite places”

SVITLANA TELUKHA, PhD in History, is a lecturer at the National Technical University Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute and fellow of the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO). She is also editor of *A Wounded City Residents of Kharkiv Talk About the Attack on Their City*.

“My name is Svitlana, thank you for the invitation. I would like to say a few words about our project ‘Kharkiv is my favorite city’, which is a part of my life and work. The team creating and implementing this project consists of myself, a historian, as well as another historian, a designer and a developer. I want to start describing why we started doing it: it was when the full-scale invasion of Russia against Ukraine began. We could not just sit and do nothing, just stay in the bomb shelter or in the hall. We felt that we had to do something,



The project “A Wounded City – Residents of Kharkiv talk about the attack on their city” has a website with an interactive map where places are complemented with interviews.

whatever we could. When you are in this whole situation, when you see that people are dying every day, buildings are being destroyed, monuments are being destroyed, everything is being destroyed and so on, you need to do something. So, we started recording. The stories from Kharkiv’s citizenship were unique.

We started this project ‘Kharkiv is my favorite city’. We collected stories about Kharkiv residents, their lives told through stories about their favorite places in Kharkiv, and could preserve memory in this format. These stories were about what happened, about the everyday life during the war in the constantly bombarded Kharkiv, and about their favorite places surrounding the biographical narrative of our storytellers. The main idea of the project is to create a website, put an interactive map on it and complement all these places with these oral history interviews. And we add some information about these favorite



“SO, WE STARTED RECORDING. THE STORIES FROM KHARKIV’S CITIZENSHIP WERE UNIQUE.”



The campus of the V. N. Karazin National University in Kharkiv consists of eight dormitories housing more than 5,000 students and postgraduates. It is Oleksandrs K's favorite place.



The V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University is one of the most important universities in Ukraine. It is Kateryna I's favorite place.



The Burevisnyk Sports Complex was badly damaged during the major offensive by Russian troops. A heavy air raid on March 5, 2022 caused the roof to collapse. It is Valerij S's favorite place.

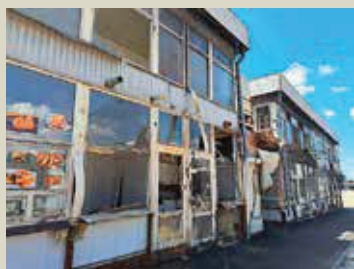


Velyka Danylivka is a suburb in the north-east of Kharkiv. Most of the houses here are detached, and there is a forest, a lake and several schools. It is Anton D's favorite place.

A wounded city

All images come from the project *A wounded City. Residents of Kharkiv Talk About the Attack on Their City*. Since the beginning of the war, the NGO Young Kharkiv has been conducting interviews with residents of the city, which has been subjected to ongoing and massive shelling attacks from day one. The aim of this project is to build up an archive of interviews with contemporary witnesses in order to record their personal experiences of the war, as well as stories about places of remembrance in this heavily destroyed metropolis.

The Barabashovo Market is located in the Saltivka district, the part of the city that has been most devastated by the war. Iryna Skyrda writes about the metropolis at war.



On March 25, 2022, the dachas of Pawlowe Pole and the nearby Ukrainian Orthodox church of the Kharkiv Diocese were severely damaged. It is Oleksandra I's favorite place.



places of Kharkiv's residents to present their stories as a complete picture. We collect these stories through the prism of Kharkiv residents' favorite places.

OUR COLLECTION included both sites, like well-known sites in Kharkiv, or little known places of memory for the citizens of Kharkiv. And in our collection we have different buildings, different monuments, different cafes, or parks or some other things. And there are also some mental peculiarities of the city, not about actual places, but about people related to these places. And we actually recorded all these stories. Our project becomes possible, thanks to the support of the Vienna teams and the Institute of Human Science, who are connecting it to their larger project "Documenting Ukraine". And actually, our focus is related to this big project. And it's an honor for us to be a part of it. And as a result, over the past year and a half, we have recorded more than 100 unique digital records of Kharkiv residents living there from February 24, 2022, up to today. Our audience is those who see their mission to share their experience through our project. Our narrators are students, educators, volunteers, soldiers, and doctors.

When we collected these stories, we actually ended up with something more than we wanted: several themes reproduce and continue because field research is always spontaneous and always deeper than we can imagine. One such emerging theme is that the perceived future, for many young people, is strongly connected to the university. Actually, we are talking about young people who became students in the pre-war years or earlier. And I will quote Kateryna Ilchenko, she is a student of the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics at one of the most famous universities in Kharkiv (Kharkiv National University by Vasyl Karazin):

In fact, I'm a Kharkiv resident who doesn't know her city very well, but after I got to Karazin, I started to stay more in the center and in principle, because I got to know different people, I studied the city more. But if to allocate

"THIS IS LIKE A BIG REQUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES OF ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORY OF UKRAINE."

one place, it's banal, but it's our university, because there I spent, well, every day, and, like, different parts, yes, and inside the classroom and, like, the place in front of the main building, there. Because of the fact that I spent a lot of time there, it's significant for me.

She told us in her story about some special places that play an important role, a very important role, and show university and student life in Kharkiv today. And she went to the university, which was a new world for her, as you can see in this quote, and she got to know the city, the code; she made new social contact. Indeed, many young people in their stories talked about how they are rethinking and changing their attitude towards education in general. After the coronavirus, the situation changed; they had this opportunity to go to the university physically, have a personal conversation, attend lectures and feel the spirit of the university. And the importance of this often came up in a lot of the stories that we've recorded to this date.

I added these photos to demonstrate how our universities look today. For example, this is the main one's university building. Here you can see a very important laboratory with very huge equipment, but today it is not working because it has no water, no light, and they actually have no windows as you can see. Here is a fresh photo from another building of the university located in the center of Kharkiv.

AND IN FACT, in this report, I want to emphasize that many students told us about the value of knowing as much as possible about Ukraine, and many stories highlight

exactly this as if highlighted with a red line. This is like a big request for knowledge and values of actual knowledge of the history of Ukraine. And I believe that this is a positive trend.

And at the end of my speech, I add this quote from that Kateryna that I mentioned earlier, and I think it's an optimistic and very positive quote from a speech that talks about the future of Ukraine and Ukraine's entry into the European Union, along with a little joke:

A happy future, I hope. No, actually, well, of course, the first thing is that we will win, the second thing is that we will have to rebuild, so, well, as if we will return, stabilize our economy, resources. Of course, this will take time, here. Then we will develop, blossom. Perhaps we will be accepted into the European Union, I don't know, into NATO..., rather we will take NATO, as they joke now. But, as it is, I think that everything is the best.

Do you have any plans for the future?

Well, as if, first of all, I want to get higher education, it seems to me from this point it will be easier for me to decide..., well, first of all, to look at the world and understand my possibilities, I may already have some, well, financial cushion. And, like, while I have, well, the goal is so, maybe so, not particularly interesting. But I'm trying to follow this path and enjoy life at the same time.

We try to add this as a positive point." ❌

“Now we are living in the third phase of the gender wars”

ANDREA PETŐ is a Professor at the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University in Vienna, a Doctor of Science of Hungarian Academy of Sciences.



“Thank you very much for organizing this conference, this is really an important event. And the roundtable is about universities of war, right? And we already heard a talk about how to handle and how to react to that historical moment when history knocks on the door. Then we heard a fantastic presentation about an event and how to react to that on the spot. And what I would like to talk about, I’m a professor at the Central European University, and this is the university, which, as you know, had to move into exile in Austria. Thanks again to the Austrians that they accepted us and offered us a new home. But it already shows that these wars with universities are happening inside what we call the European Union. What I will be talking about is a little bit about the global context, namely the gender wars.

In 2017, when the two-year master’s program in gender studies had been deleted from the accredited study list in Hungary, that was a litmus test. And then gender studies professionals were already saying that watch out, these bad things are coming in higher education. But the main point is that when academic gender studies had been attacked, more attacks on academic freedom were coming.

RECENTLY, THE ARD, the German Public Broadcasting Channel introduced a new episode of *Call Police 110* titled: *Little Boxes*. But what is worth mentioning here is that this recent episode explores the murderer of a postdoctoral fellow in the post-colonial studies department at a German university. I would like to draw attention to a specific aspect of this story, how state public television portrays post-colonial and gender studies as scholarly disci-

plines in German universities in prime-time public German media. The episode, much like the illiberal forces in Germany, presented these academic fields in an extremely distorted manner. The storyline

takes an interesting turn when this professor is accused of murder, but they have an alibi, an evening lecture about Judith Butler delivered at the same time of the murder.

This episode of a popular crime fiction series conceals and ridicules the real battles and real problems occurring in European and global higher education today and presents them as a caricature or a page from the DeSantis, Erdogan or Putin playbook.

I TITLED MY TALK Gender Wars because this conflict has its roots in the late 19th century when militarized language was very much legitimate. It started when women with privilege, and the girls educated as boys, fought for access to higher education. As far as the second part of the title is concerned with gender, it is crucial to consider how we define gender as a biological sex, or simply replace the women and men binary or connect it to stereotypes or social structures, or simply make it an identity. These four definitions of gender have evolved during history, and they are not teleological, but entangled layers. This first gender war was waged by these women, mostly from privileged backgrounds, who were admitted to universities, but faced numerous obstacles, starting with the lack of female toilets and other serious obstacles. And these women or girls educated as boys tried to fit in and often failed. And this war is still continuing.

“IN THE 1960S AND 1970S, THE SECOND GENDER WAR EMERGED AS A PART OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE WESTERN PART OF EUROPE.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, the second gender war emerged as a part of the civil rights movement in the western part of Europe. In the Soviet Bloc, the official “statist feminist” policy expected to bring gender equality to academic structures together with knowledge production. Neither of them happened. This phase aimed to widen access to higher educational institutions for a wider social stratum to democratize society and knowledge production. But the newcomers also reshaped these institutions, redefined science, and knowledge, and challenged academic authority. New universities were established, and norm entrepreneurs introduced gender and cultural studies. They offered courses in their own departments and then inside universities using the existing structures to create certificate programs and then departments in new fields in social sciences and humanities. However, this phase brought very mixed results, especially in Germany, where the number of female professors remains low today. The lower the prestige of higher education in a certain country, the lower the pay for the professors, and the more women are employed by these professors as professors, like in South and Eastern Europe.

NOW WE ARE living in the third phase of the gender wars. But let me stress that the first gender war never disappeared. The actors, the institutions and the issues may have already existed, but were less visible. Until the poly crisis, liberal governments are actively intervening in higher education, taking away academic autonomy, controlling curricula and funding, and attacking critical knowledge production. This third war is cruel; it happens on social media and takes different forms depending on the country. It can be life-threatening, like in Russia or in Turkey, where academics are fired or imprisoned, also like in Mexico or in the US. As a matter of fact, one of my colleague’s office windows was replaced by the administration with a bulletproof window, to avoid legal liability and not react quickly to the challenges. The recent incident in Sweden involving a far-right social influencer who alone destroyed the critical race studies program of a university high-



An episode of the German state public television crime fiction series *Call police 110* called "Little boxes" portrays post-colonial and gender studies at a university in an extremely distorted manner, said Andrea Pető.

“LITTLE BOXES IS DANGEROUS, AS IT NORMALIZES AND CARICATURES A VIEW OF POST-COLONIAL STUDIES, GENDER STUDIES, AND CRITICAL RACE STUDIES.”

lights how gender wars are transforming academics beyond securitization and militarization. This influencer enrolled in a course on critical race studies in one of the Swedish universities and started to report on his experience in this course, and then sued this public university to release emails by the professor who was teaching this course on critical race studies. The emails were all released as the university professor was handled as a normal public servant so they are all subject of a freedom of information act. This ongoing story revealed tension between academia together with the legal and academic vulnerability of public institutions in the face of populist challenges. The reactions to these challenges are different in different contexts, and it is necessary to stick together for those who have the same enemies.

I WILL EXPLAIN how these gender battles are shaping higher education in five ways. And then I will conclude. First, it is changing the relationship between public and private higher education. I have been

reported twice to the rector, the current rector of the CEU, which is a private university, by relatives of those whom I actually write about, saying their grandfather was not a Nazi. In both cases, the previous rector and the president of CEU responded saying that this is something only the profession can judge, that is, the quality of the work; it cannot be done by someone outside academia. I'm not sure if I had been appointed to a public university that I would have been given the same answer. Secondly, challenging the academic authorization system, questioning who is being appointed as a professor, and how and who the appointed experts are, is another battle. The populist challenge poses a major obstacle. Third, questioning the role of higher education as a public good in society is becoming an issue, as certain groups are excluded from higher education. If I go back to this ARD movie, it's obvious that those students with migration backgrounds have no other space in German education besides area studies. Fourth, rethinking the relationship between the national and transnational is

vital. The German crime story episode sounds like a national story, but this is actually a chapter from the transnational know-how about how to undermine the authority of higher education. Now it has been employed in this context and also in the Swedish context because this is the strategy that the far right is using to undermine higher educational institutions in this war. The fifth battle is to recognize that we are in a New Cold War. The new Cold War is not waged between different blocks of states but rather among different members of the national constituency about the monopoly of producing knowledge. The field where this Cold War is waged is gender studies. And we all know that Putin's Russia started to promote the so-called traditional values as a site for preparing for this war. And that's why I decided to address this topic in this roundtable.

THE GERMAN CRIME film *Little Boxes* is dangerous, as it normalizes and caricatures a view of post-colonial studies, gender studies, and critical race studies, undermining its social importance and the ability to create a vision for a better future, and what actually attracts students. However, it gives a portrayal that what is happening in higher education is a question of life and death. It is a war. The liberal forces aim to return to hierarchical knowledge production, which is very clearly illustrated by the example from Sweden, and they see academia as a strategic field to control hearts and minds, setting the stage for more gender wars in the years to come." ❌

“In 2010, not a single Russian university made it into the top 200 of the world’s best schools”

ALEXANDER ETKIND is a Professor of History and since 2022 at the Department of International Relations at Central European University in Vienna.



“I’m really happy that we could come and compare some Russian experiences with Ukrainian experiences and Hungarian-Austrian experiences. That’s really important because of all this Russian uniqueness, which is apparent nowadays more than ever, we need to compare and contrast. This is what scholars do.

Like in Ukraine during the democratic revolution, students, intellectuals and IT workers dominated the Russia protest movement. This was before the invasion of Crimea in 2011, 2012. It was a really important movement in Moscow and in some other Russian cities. It had political consequences. While the students, intellectuals and people of goodwill won in Ukraine, they lost in Russia. And this had enormous consequences.

IN RUSSIA, the protest manifested itself in a full distrust of the state which had cheated them, but they did not succeed in claiming their rights and overturning the rule of the state. Samuel A. Greene described this dynamic as retreat from the public space, but the private sphere was really able to give refuge to these people after their defeat in 2012. The hope was for the new generation that had to be educated in some kind of new way. In 2003, before those events, Russia joined the Bologna Process, which involved the restructuring of higher education programs according to European standards. Some reforms were made, and lots of money was invested and largely misused. The international rankings of Russian universities refused to improve. In 2010, not a single Russian university made it into the

top 200 of the world’s best schools, according to the Times Higher Education.

In 2012, the government launched the so-called project “5:100”. Five universities were selected, and they were to increase the global rankings of these five leading Russian universities by pumping money into them. And one of the inventions was making professor salaries variable and dependent on the citation index of these professors. So, the higher the citation index for a particular year, the higher your salary will be next year. And the difference was actually significant.

I heard this story, not sure it was true, from the Higher School of Economics, that they created a particular kind of office for converting the citation index into a salary. And there were like 18 officials, highly paid, I guess. And they operated an equation with 18 members of the mathematical department for a conversion of citation index into the salary numbers. Despite all this, the multi-year program was a failure.

IN 2021, the accounts chamber, the Chief Russian auditor, concluded that not a single Russian university had made it into the top 100. In the meantime, the auditors and then the newspapers reported the salaries of directors of certain universities, including those five, which were higher than those of the professors by an order of magnitude, or in some cases, this difference was just enormous; it was like 20 times higher, 30 times higher, a hundred times higher in some provincial cases. Now, like when you see these numbers, of course, which very few could actually verify, this was just outlandish. The situation with the established universities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the major

“WHILE THE STUDENTS, INTELLECTUALS AND PEOPLE OF GOODWILL WON IN UKRAINE, THEY LOST IN RUSSIA.”

state-owned schools with some tradition and reputation, was still fine, with some traditional instructors with very high salaries. These universities have exploited their prestige and imitated scholarships for decades. The most successful, however, were the newly established institutions; some of them were really big, and they said that they had become the biggest universities in Europe, for example, the Highest School of Economics, which was established in the post-Soviet period from scratch and became one of the biggest land owners in Moscow. Or the so-called Presidential Academy, which had 55 provincial branches and said it had the largest contingent of students in Europe.

HOWEVER, UNIVERSITIES were not the only homes of Russian science and scholarship. There was also the Academy of Sciences, a legacy institution left over from the Soviet Times, a gigantic non-profit organization, which included more than a thousand institutions in all fields, fields of knowledge, from nuclear physics to humanities. A typical institution had hundreds of social associates, most of them with doctorates, doctoral degrees, or super doctoral degrees. There are still two degrees in Russia. Regarding the administration of valuable real estate in major cities of Russia, these institutions are housed in some of the buildings, including in St. Petersburg or in Moscow, which they can actually rent out and use for profit. However, these academics institutions never had students, and education was not their function. They were involved in peer research, fundamental or applied. At the top of these institutions, there’s still a ruling body that consists of the privileged academicians, like full academics as opposed to non-full academics, who are professors.

In 2022, there were more than 300 such academicians with an average age of 76 years. The whole system depended on the state budget, which was relentlessly shrinking. Many of the academic institutions made money by letting parts of their properties to businesses. This archaic system was only bail subordinate to the authorities or auditors. The salaries of scientists in the academic institutions

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow, Leninsky Prospekt, 2008.

“THESE ACADEMICS INSTITUTIONS NEVER HAD STUDENTS, AND EDUCATION WAS NOT THEIR FUNCTION. THEY WERE INVOLVED IN PEER RESEARCH, FUNDAMENTAL OR APPLIED.”

were pathetic and actually significantly less than the professorial salaries at the universities. A particular issue in Russian academic life was plagiarism. And we’re not talking about plagiarism by students, but I’m talking about plagiarism by professors and research associates. Although it affects many countries, plagiarism was widespread in Russia. The new Russian elite considered an academic degree as an important addition to other perks and forms of status, like you have whatever billion in your bank account, you have maybe five yachts in the Mediterranean, and also you have a doctoral degree. Written by a ghostwriter, such a dissertation could be bought for cheap because there are ghostwriters, obviously, in academia, young professors or something like that, maybe graduate students. These dissertation writings were a form of corruption, of course, more sophisticated but less convertible than the appropriation of barrels. You appropriate thousands,

whatever, millions of barrels of oil, that’s convertible. You get a doctorate degree, that’s of course not convertible, but still it was important for these people.

IN 2016, the Dissernet, an informal organization of scientists who hunted plagiarism, using all kinds of means, mostly electronic, found out that every ninth member of the Russian Parliament, the Duma, had an academic degree, either a bachelor’s or doctorate of science. And of course, all this was plagiarized, a ghost-written thesis. One of the leaders of the Dissernet said in an interview in 2016 that, “A Russian Donald Trump would suddenly have a dissertation, maybe two or three.” Indeed, Putin defended his dissertation wherein the Dissernet with some American help found plagiarism. It was also found in the dissertation written by the chairman of the Duma and thousands of other similar texts. Not one of these well-heeled officials that were involved

in the scandal resigned or repented or in any way responded to these accusations. But of course, with the start of the war, and when this new statute concerning foreign agents was instituted in Russia by the Russian government, the leaders of Dissernet left Russia, and some were declared to be foreign agents.

For similar reasons, attempts to create private institutions of higher learning have not really been successful. So, private institutions were created, but sometimes administrations stole the money, sometimes students were dissatisfied and wrote complaints, and sometimes the auditors found out that the diplomas were fake. However, there were several important independent universities that developed in the sensitive area of social sciences and humanities, the European University of St. Petersburg, the new economic school, the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, also known as Shaninka, and the Smolny, a semi-independent small college, which remained a part of the St. Petersburg State University. All these elite institutions were established in the 1990s with the financial help of George Soros. All of them developed into modern hubs of liberal arts and social sciences, having foreign grades, international professors, joint programs with foreign schools, and successful alumni who taught all over the world. The European University of St. Petersburg was closed twice, but still survives. The director of the New Economic School, Sergei Guriev, left Russia for Paris in 2013, and he’s now provost of SciencesPo in Paris. Some writers were arrested, some were released, while others were not.

I’M ABOUT TO conclude with very recent news from Canada concerning something that happened on September 23rd this year. The government of Canada declared sanctions against a number of Russian educational institutions. And I think that’s the first time that the sanctions have been declared against universities in Russia. Specifically, the sanctions were declared against the Highest School of Economics and the Moscow state of international relations. This is the first, but probably not the last, decision of this sort.” ❌

“In the Russian academic community, discussing this history has now been criminalized”

DINA GUSEJNOVA is an intellectual historian and Associate Professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science.



“We are speaking today about universities at war at a conference on post-socialist universities, or universities in post-socialist countries. I want to begin by saying how the two topics connect, because I think that at one level, we are facing here a real tragedy, a tragic culmination in the history of post-socialist universities. Incidentally, this might also raise the question to what extent they were actually post socialist in any significant way, whether they have actually ever been socialist.

The first thing that is really important to bear in mind is that we will talk about two post-socialist academic communities, the Russian and the Ukrainian. Currently, one of them, Russia, has effectively been turned into a perpetrator community. In other words, the scholars that find themselves in this situation are facing the choice of essentially having to position themselves either in direct confrontation with the regime, or in some sort of passive resistance, or in tacit agreement with the regime. And it’s particularly symbolic that institutions such as the Higher School of Economics which, until recently, has been hailed as the hallmark of post-socialist liberal democratic institutions, is now basically on the frontlines, carrying out the ideological functions of the Russian occupation in the occupied territories of Ukraine. It was this institution and others like it which have been pressuring some of the first academics now in exile to abandon their research agendas for years before the full-scale war against Ukraine. So, in Russia, we see the ongoing repression, but also, in some areas, the enforced complicity of Russian

academic communities with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

In Ukraine, I think, over 20 universities have been physically damaged in the course of the war, not to speak of the physical losses of academics directly involved in the war, destroyed archives, archives directly targeted for destruction by the Russian attacks, as well as collateral damage.

THE SECOND POINT that I want to make is that this entire situation inevitably revives the ghosts of the Second World War, topics such as the Soviet-German division of Poland, the attack on Polish cultural life, the cultural consequences of the German occupation of Soviet territories, and the war in the Baltic states. In the Russian academic community, discussing this history has now been criminalized; it takes place in the realm of illegality. Instead, the Russian government has authorized and centralized the production of alternative textbooks, alternative realities, parallel realities with redrawn maps. These materials are produced by leading experts, incidentally, of socialist global knowledge production, academicians like the 94-year-old historian Aleksandr Chubaryan. He was a star of Soviet comparative and world history and is now one among many who have been co-opted into effectively sanctioning the Kremlin narrative and its criminal foreign policy through textbooks.

“IN RUSSIA, WE SEE THE ONGOING REPRESSION, BUT ALSO, IN SOME AREAS, THE ENFORCED COMPLICITY OF RUSSIAN ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES WITH THE RUSSIAN WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE.”

So, this for me is actually the backdrop against which we discuss the historical and present crises of universities at war. And it poses a lot of moral questions for academic communities affected by it, whether they’re based in Russia, based in Ukraine, expatriates from either of societies, or international people with no connection to these countries. I myself arrived in Germany as an eight-year-old, as the daughter of two Soviet academics (my father had a Humboldt fellowship, and my mother a Hölderlin fellowship, both in Germany), and I benefited from the kind of opening up of the post-socialist world and the opportunities which presented themselves then. In this war I am realizing that I’m completely out of my depth. I mean, my experience and even that of my parents provides absolutely no resources available for me to understand the desperate experience and situation of young people from Ukraine now. I get applications from Ukrainian school leavers looking for a degree who get rejected from European universities because they don’t have a high school diploma; meanwhile, they tell me it has not been granted because their high school has been bombed, and things like that. I often feel helpless.

And I’m also dealing with it on a daily basis as an academic.

ONE OF THE QUESTIONS which preoccupies me now is how to mobilize the insights from the way academic communities responded to the rise of the Third Reich, the Second World War, and the Cold War, in today’s crises. And, I was thinking of what Kristine mentioned about the mentoring program and the mental health question. The first point is academic solidarity. There is a lot to learn from the historical solidarity networks that emerged in response to the aggression of the Third Reich, for example, the Council for the Assistance of Refugee Academics in Britain, and similar initiatives in France, the United States, and elsewhere. There were also particular groups that supported specific groups of refugees, Jewish refugees, Christian refugees from the Third Reich and so on.

At one level, one can learn a lot from these groups because they provided a

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University after Russian shelling on August 17, 2022.

“IN UKRAINE, I THINK, OVER 20 UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY DAMAGED IN THE COURSE OF THE WAR.”

lot of support, and also a lot of advice on relocation and how to find maybe possibilities or short-term contracts. But there are also a number of things that one can do differently and perhaps improve. One is the question of gender, because these support networks were usually focused on male star academics. They completely neglected not only independent female scholars, but also the wives, children, and family members of academics. One of the lists I’m working with as a historian was produced in the 1940s by the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, the organization which became the council for refugee academics and now works as CARA. Out of a list of about 600 academics supported by this organization, only two or three names are those of

women, even though by this point there were already a number of distinguished female scholars and students fleeing the Continent. What worked against them was that women actually had more possibilities to find employment in domestic work or tutoring, and therefore they did not require the support of this academic community, which later also hindered their visibility and academic networks after the war.

NOW, TODAY, we are hoping at least not to fall into the same trap, even though there’s a kind of self-censorship going on in a number of affected communities. The women among the Ukrainian scholars in exile and Russian scholars at risk often, for different reasons, have a tendency to promote their husbands’ work, rather than speak of their own work or achievements. It’s a kind of common pattern in these communities, and we try to work around this. I think I also want to mention that it’s really good to bear in mind the benefits of this kind of supporting work for the supporters. This is not just a humanitarian kind of extension of a helping hand by a rich and stable society to a suffering kind of disintegrating Eastern Europe. Academic refugees provide a great enrichment to the communities that host them – not least, continued expertise in the region. In the aftermath of the Second World War, a number of British social reformers working on innovations in social policy such as the National Health Service, the democratization of universities and other changes, were influenced in their thinking by academic refugees from continental Europe. There were many networks connecting refugees and hosts, which provided expertise to these organizations. Work in areas such as comparative law, development economics, all of these fields, were pioneered by refugee scholars who had brought some of the experimental social science from Germany to the United States, Britain, France, and so on.

The last point I want to make is that we should at the same time avoid turning universities into a kind of Truman show of cosmopolitanism when we are living in the context of wars and conflicts whose

end we cannot see, and which might last a decade or two. How do we maintain, on the one hand, a commitment to cosmopolitan solidarity, but on the other hand, remain sober about the difficulties faced by scholars on many levels? For example, many scholars from Ukraine cannot envision the possibility or the opportunity of working with scholars from Russia; this kind of dialogue is very difficult and problematic. How can international academics position themselves in this crisis, and what’s the place of international networks in facilitating this kind of conversation?” ✕

PHILIPP SCHMÄDEKE: We thank you very much for these five inputs. It is a really important discussion and let us continue it – not only here today but also at our home universities and in our national context. Thank you all a lot.”

Acknowledgement: Yuchen Li, a master’s student of Social Studies of Gender at Lund University, transcribed the recorded version of the roundtable.

Note: The public roundtable Universities at War at the University of Vienna took place on September 27, 2023. It was arranged in cooperation with The University of New Europe (UNE) and the research platform, Transformation and Eastern Europe as a starting event of the workshop “(Re)Thinking the University from, in, and beyond (Post-) Socialist” held on September 27–29 and organized by Elisa Satjukow, Leipzig University, and Friedrich Cain, University of Vienna.