

Education as resistance

WARTIME UNIVERSITY PRACTICES AND DECOLONIZATION IN UKRAINE

Figure 1. O. M. Beketov National University of Urban Economy in Kharkiv ruined by Russian rocket (authors' own photo, February 2023).

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abstract

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has generated unprecedented threats to the nation's educational system, compelling universities to develop innovative survival strategies against imperial aggression. Using Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University as a case study, this article examines how higher education functions as a decolonizing force during armed conflict. Drawing on document analysis, visual documentation, and thematic analysis, the study explores how wartime adaptations, such as transforming deep bomb shelters into classrooms and student housing, preserve the right to education and reinforce Ukraine's intellectual sovereignty. Student choice data reveal an empowered learning community navigating blended and distance learning according to safety needs. Ultimately, these subterranean and digital adaptations transcend pragmatic necessity; they constitute acts of epistemic resistance that safeguard cultural identity, institutional autonomy, and the nation's right to produce its own knowledge. The "underground university" thus emerges as a practical manifestation of education's decolonizing power during war.

KEYWORDS: Higher education, education during war, in-person instruction, online education.

Scarcely had the global community recovered from the coronavirus pandemic, with its attendant restrictions and necessary adaptations across nearly every facet of human activity, when Ukraine was subjected to a bloody, brutal, and arguably historically devastating war, unleashed by an aggressive neighbor driven by imperialist ambitions. This act of aggression, rooted in a long history of colonial subjugation, has not only inflicted physical devastation on Ukraine but also threatens to undermine its cultural and intellectual sovereignty, necessitating a critical examination of the decolonization of education in the face of conflict.

Russia's prolonged and brutal war against Ukraine has created a cascade of socio-legal emergencies, requiring a deep investigation into the nation's ability to endure. The deliberate targeting of civilian spaces has shattered the core of Ukrainian social life. Even as millions of Ukrainians departed, millions more have demonstrated resilience by continuing to reside in the country amidst ongoing rocket attacks. Ukrainian universities also continue to function under these unsafe circumstances.[1] Critically, education (a legally protected human right) has been drastically undermined, particularly in war-adjacent regions. The resulting

collapse of educational systems jeopardizes the development of Ukraine's youth, making urgent intervention crucial. The city of Kharkiv, bordering Russia, has been subjected to relentless, devastating attacks, showcasing the depth of damage to educational infrastructure (Figure 2). This sustained assault has compelled Kharkiv, which was a student capital of Ukraine, to pioneer inventive educational solutions to maintain learning continuity.

THE SACROSANCT NATURE of the right to education, a cornerstone of Ukrainian constitutional law, is an indisputable tenet deeply embedded within the nation's socio-legal fabric. This constitutional mandate, reflective of a societal commitment to cultivating an informed citizenry, has been profoundly challenged by the imposition of martial law, a direct consequence of the Russian Federation's protracted military aggression. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict can be interpreted as an attempt to reassert colonial influence, impacting not only the physical infrastructure of the educational system but also the very content and orientation of knowledge dissemination. Therefore, the preservation of Ukrainian educational sovereignty and the promotion of a decolonized curriculum become paramount in this context.

Educational institutions within conflict zones, historically recognized as epicenters of intellectual development, have been transformed into frequent targets of hostilities, resulting in extensive infrastructural dilapidation and the effective nullification of conventional pedagogical methodologies. The systematic destruction of educational facilities, coupled with the forced displacement of both students and academic personnel, has precipitated a critical educational crisis. Moreover, the pervasive atmosphere of insecurity and psychological trauma, a direct result of relentless bombardment and the ever-present threat of violence, has exerted a deleterious impact on all stakeholders, including educators, students, and their respective familial units. The psychological sequelae of this conflict have engendered significant impediments to effective learning, necessitating a comprehensive, holistic approach to educational provision that addresses both academic and psycho-emotional exigencies.

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The ongoing conflict has necessitated a fundamental transformation in the delivery of educational services, forcing the implementation of novel pedagogical approaches that accommodate the stringent limitations imposed by wartime conditions while simultaneously preserving the constitutional right to educational access. The conventional model of physical classroom instruction has been rendered largely unsustainable in areas of active conflict, mandating the exploration and adoption of diverse alternative learning strategies. In this context, the primary focus has shifted to ensuring the safety of educational participants, placing their physical and psychological welfare at the forefront of all considerations. This imperative to protect students and educators has spurred the development of inventive solutions, including the establishment of subterranean learning spaces and the integration of blended learning frameworks. This adaptation, however, must also be viewed through the lens of decolonization, ensuring that the educational content remains free from external influence and promotes a Ukrainian-centric perspective. Consequently, the adaptive restructuring of the educational system to these unprecedented and demanding circumstances is indispensable for its continued functionality, thereby highlighting the relevance and immediacy of this investigation. The tenacity demonstrated by the educational system in Kharkiv stands as a poignant illustration of the unwavering dedication of the Ukrainian populace to the pursuit of knowledge, despite facing immense adversity, and to resisting the colonial ambitions of the country's aggressive neighbor.

CONSIDERING THE extraordinary and unparalleled obstacles encountered in the pursuit of ensuring educational entitlements during periods of armed conflict, this scholarly inquiry confronts a central and exigent question: How can the core necessities of participant security, psycho-emotional welfare, and the provision of high-quality instructional services be effectively synthesized and perpetuated within a setting characterized by continuous warfare? The exploration of this question transcends the realm of theoretical contemplation, representing an essential undertaking geared toward the safeguarding of the nation's intellectual resources. To illuminate this intricate and multilayered problem, this study embarks upon a meticulous and detailed examination of the experiences of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, with particular attention directed toward their innovative adaptation of teaching and learning methodologies within the confines of bomb shelters. These case studies provide a critical perspective through which to analyze the pragmatic implementation of educational entitlements in a context marked by elevated risk, yielding significant insights into the strategies deployed to sustain educational continuity. In particular, this research will meticulously scrutinize the operational structures, pedagogical approaches, and, crucially, the demonstrable influence on the educational experiences and academic achievements of both students and faculty directly impacted by the ongoing hostilities. The analysis will explore the logistical frameworks, pedagogical methodologies, and psycho-emotional dimensions inherent within these adaptive initiatives, thereby offering a holistic and nuanced comprehension of their operational effectiveness and substantive impact. Eventually, by analyzing these diverse and pioneering adaptive strategies, this study seeks to advance a



Figure 2. H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University after Russian attack (authors' own photo, July 2022).

more profound and nuanced comprehension of the mechanisms by which the fundamental right to education can be upheld and actualized within the exigencies imposed by armed conflict, and to elucidate the diverse modalities through which educational institutions are responding to these unparalleled and formidable operational contexts. This investigation endeavors to meticulously chronicle and critically analyze the adaptive capacity and inherent resilience of the Ukrainian educational system, thereby yielding a compendium of instructive insights that may serve as a valuable resource for other nations contending with analogous exigencies.

Literature review

The context of the war in Ukraine, driven by imperialist ambitions, has brought into sharp focus the critical need to examine and adapt educational practices. That is why our literature review explores scholarly perspectives on decolonization in education, with a particular emphasis on the challenges and adaptations necessitated by armed conflict, drawing parallels with global decolonization efforts and responses to educational disruptions. The review also establishes the conceptual and historical foundations necessary to analyze Ukraine not only as a site of military aggression, but also as a space where education actively negotiates and resists long-standing colonial pressures.

It is crucial to start the research of the issue from the historical context of decolonization and its relationship to education, particularly in conflict zones. This is explored by Burton.[2] His investigation of African students seeking higher education during periods of colonial rule demonstrates how conflict and the denial of educational opportunities can lead to innovative, albeit challenging, pathways to knowledge. This historical lens provides a valuable framework for analyzing the resilience of Ukrainian education under wartime conditions. Similarly, Jackson[3] examines how representations of imperialism and decolonization have evolved in US textbooks, highlighting the shifting narratives and the marginalization of colonial actors. This analysis underscores the importance of critically examining how history and knowledge are constructed and disseminated, especially in times of conflict and transition. In applying these insights to Ukraine, it becomes necessary to recognize Russian imperial policy as a form of coloniality that has historically targeted Ukrainian culture, language, and educational institutions.

WITHIN THE PROPOSED framework, several scholars highlight the systemic issues that impede equitable education. For example, Uleanya, Rugbeer, and Olaniran,[4] in their research on a South African university, identified factors such as the language of teaching, students' prior educational experiences, and institutional policies as all contributing to poor learning outcomes. They advocate for the decolonization and restructuring of educational systems to better serve students and align with sustainable development goals. The stated call for decolonization in post-colonial educational settings finds resonance in the Ukrainian context, where the war can be seen as exacerbating existing post-colonial



Figure 3a. Bomb shelter for students (authors' own photo).



Figure 3b. Classroom in the bomb shelter (authors' own photo).

challenges. This parallel also supports the argument that decolonization is not limited to contexts of historical overseas colonization but extends to diverse geopolitical forms of domination, including the post-Soviet imperial legacy.

It is important to understand that decolonization itself is a complex and multifaceted concept, as outlined by Stein et al.[5] The researchers discuss the various undertones of decolonization, as well as the complexities and paradoxes associated with its implementation within education. Stein and Andreotti[6] further elaborate on this problem, framing decolonization not as a singular event but as an ongoing process that requires denaturalizing modern/colonial perspectives. Such perspective is crucial for understanding the difficult situation in Ukraine, where educational adaptations must address both the immediate crisis and the long-term project of decolonization. Specifically, Ukrainian institutions must simultaneously respond to physical threats and to epistemic threats (attempts to erase or subordinate Ukrainian knowledge traditions), making their adaptations an important empirical site for studying "decolonization under conditions of active warfare."

It is only natural that, recently, a large number of studies devoted to the Ukrainian problem have appeared. For instance, the role of higher education in peacebuilding and decolonization is examined by Svyrydenko et al.[7] The scholars propose a multidimensional approach that integrates philosophy, policy, cultural studies, history, law, and political science. They also suggest that experiences from other conflict-affected regions, such as Israel and the Palestinian territories, may offer valuable insights for Ukraine. This perspective aligns with the need to consider the long-term implications of educational practices in Ukraine, not only for immediate survival but also for post-conflict reconstruction and decolonization. Such studies also reveal that higher education institutions become critical agents in restoring cultural sovereignty and rebuilding intellectual autonomy after violent conflict.

THE PRACTICAL CHALLENGES of maintaining education during wartime in Ukraine are detailed by Marchenko,[8] Fiialka and Kornieva,[9] and Zhyhora et al.[10] Specifically, Marchenko[11] describes the initial disruption of education and the subsequent adaptation to online learning, emphasizing the need to preserve the structure of the university and preserve academic potential. Fiialka and Kornieva,[12] focusing on journalism education, highlight the need for safety training, ethical considerations, and psychological resilience among students. Zhyhora et al.[13] examine the innovative solutions implemented by Ukrainian educational institutions to ensure continuity of learning, such as video conferencing, mobile applications, and learning management systems. These investigations highlight the immediate adaptations made by Ukrainian educators and students. However, they do not address how these adaptations intersect with the broader project of reclaiming cultural, linguistic, and epistemic sovereignty, i.e. the key markers of decolonial educational practice.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed reveals that the challenges faced by Ukrainian educators and students during the war

are multifaceted, encompassing not only the need to maintain educational continuity but also the imperative to address long-standing issues of decolonization. However, existing research has yet to specifically address the unique challenges and adaptations of teaching and learning within bomb shelters, underlining a significant gap in the literature that this chapter aims to fill. This focus represents the novelty of our article. The experiences of those in Ukraine, while unique in their specific context, resonate with broader global themes of decolonization and educational adaptation in the face of conflict and systemic inequities. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing subterranean learning spaces as sites of decolonial agency, and by analyzing how wartime adaptations strengthen educational sovereignty against imperial aggression.

Thus, the purpose of the work is to examine how Ukrainian higher education institutions, specifically Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, are adapting to the challenges posed by the ongoing war, with a particular focus on the ways in which these adaptations reflect and enact a process of decolonization. This analytical lens enables us to bridge the theoretical discussions from global research with the empirical realities of Ukrainian higher education under siege.

Methodology

To achieve the stated purpose, our investigation employed a combination of research methodologies, namely:

- document analysis (university documents, reports, and official statements related to the organization of educational activities during the war). This was necessary for gathering the primary data for our study and included examining policies and procedures related to the use of bomb shelters, the implementation of online and blended learning, and the provision of support services to students and faculty;
- visual documentation (photographic evidence of the adaptations made by the university, specifically the conversion of bomb shelters into classrooms and student housing). These visuals, provided by the authors, offer a tangible representation of the university's efforts to create safe and functional learning environments;
- thematical analysis of these data sources was used to identify key patterns and trends in the university's adaptation strategies. This analysis focused on how these strategies reflect a decolonizing approach, emphasizing resilience, self-determination, and the prioritization of local needs and the preservation of cultural identity in the face of external pressures.

IT IS IMPORTANT to acknowledge the limitations of this methodology. The study is primarily focused on a single institution, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other universities in Ukraine. Additionally, the reliance on document analysis and visual documentation may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives of students and faculty. Future research could benefit from incorporating interviews or surveys to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the war on higher education in Ukraine.

Despite these limitations, this methodology provides a valuable framework for understanding how one Ukrainian university is navigating the challenges of war and enacting a process of decolonization through its adaptation of educational practices and infrastructure.

Results

Decolonization, conceptualized as a perspective that foregrounds community, indigenous lifeways, and knowledge systems,[14] provides a salient analytical framework for examining Ukraine's educational challenges amidst the current armed conflict. This conflict transcends a mere territorial dispute, encompassing a more expansive struggle against imperialist designs, as Ukraine endeavors to assert its sovereignty and safeguard its cultural and institutional autonomy. In the Ukrainian context, decolonization is understood not only as the dismantling of inherited Soviet/Russian epistemic dominance but also as the active restoration of cultural, linguistic, and educational sovereignty. This foregrounds education as a domain where colonial pressures are both experienced and resisted. Russian military aggression functions simultaneously as physical violence and as an attempt to reassert epistemic and cultural dominance, making the educational sphere a critical arena of resistance.

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Within this study, we operationalize "education as a decolonizing force" through three interrelated dimensions: 1) epistemic resistance, i.e. the continued production and dissemination of Ukrainian-centered knowledge in defiance of efforts to erase or replace it; 2) infrastructural resilience, i.e. the material reorganization of educational space (including the transformation of underground shelters into classrooms), which ensures the uninterrupted exercise of the constitutional right to education; and 3) pedagogical agency, understood as the capacity of students and instructors to choose learning modalities, sustain academic community, and enact self-determined educational practices despite wartime disruption. Each of these dimensions becomes empirically traceable in institutional responses, spatial adaptations, and teaching and learning interactions documented in the case of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University.

Within this operationalization, decolonization is understood not metaphorically but as a set of educational practices that actively contest the coloniality of power shaping the region. The "underground university" thus functions as both a material and

symbolic form of epistemic sovereignty: It maintains continuity of Ukrainian civic, legal, and cultural narratives; reorganizes academic space in ways that defy intended paralysis through violence; and cultivates pedagogical autonomy by enabling students to participate in education on their own terms, whether online or physically underground. These practices demonstrate that decolonization in wartime is enacted through educational persistence and collective agency, rather than through policy declarations alone.

FOR A PERIOD exceeding three years, the Ukrainian educational community has been engaged in a complex and multifaceted process to identify and implement optimal pedagogical approaches. Within this context of national crisis and resistance, it is important to note that substantial disparities exist across the nation in the application of these approaches. Specifically, the modalities of educational provision within higher education institutions exhibit significant variation, contingent upon the geographical proximity of these institutions to zones of active military conflict. Ukraine encompasses a vast territory spanning 603,628 square kilometers, a factor that contributes to its status as the second-largest country on the European continent. A considerable portion of approximately 20%, situated in the eastern and southern regions, is currently under temporary occupation, and these areas are subject to ongoing military confrontations. The challenges posed by this occupation and the ongoing hostilities have necessitated innovative and adaptive responses from educational institutions, which are viewed by many as a key part of the decolonization process. These spatial inequalities also highlight an important dimension of decolonization: Institutions closest to the front lines must defend not only the physical space of learning but also the cultural and epistemic continuity that colonial violence seeks to disrupt.

In the context of armed conflict, the imperative to safeguard educational institutions as sanctuaries assumes a position of heightened criticality. Contemporary Ukraine exemplifies this exigency, where the aggressor nation has demonstrated a disturbing proclivity for targeting educational facilities as sites of military engagement. The scale of this issue is particularly pronounced in Kharkiv and its surrounding region, where nearly half of all educational institutions have sustained damage or been rendered completely inoperable due to bombardment and artillery shelling, as illustrated in Figure 1. These attacks not only represent a violation of international humanitarian law but also constitute an assault on the cultural and intellectual heritage of Ukraine, a heritage that decolonization seeks to reclaim and protect. The systematic destruction of universities aligns with colonial strategies of suppressing cultural autonomy by dismantling institutions of knowledge production. Therefore, every act of educational continuity in such conditions becomes an act of epistemic resistance.

CONSEQUENTLY, HIGHER education institutions situated within the aforementioned regions were compelled to undertake relocations to safer areas in the west of the country. These relocations enabled the provision of instruction to students either within conventional university classroom settings or through a blended learning approach. To prioritize the well-being of both students and academic staff, those higher education institutions located in close proximity to zones of active hostilities have transitioned to delivering educational services exclusively via online modalities. This transition to online learning, while necessary for safety, has also presented challenges in maintaining the quality of education and the sense of community that is central to the decolonizing mission of education. Despite these challenges, digital and blended modalities also represent important decolonial strategies: They preserve access to Ukrainian-led education, prevent epistemic displacement of students, and sustain national academic ecosystems even under extreme threat.

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In August 2022, the State Service for Quality of Education in Ukraine administered an anonymous online survey targeting educators, education-researchers, and students within both higher educational and vocational institutions. The survey sought to evaluate the preparedness of educational process participants for various modalities of instructional delivery during the 2022/23 academic year. The findings were subsequently disseminated through official government channels. A total of 24,000 individuals participated in the survey, a figure that lends both representativeness and reliability to the results obtained and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the educational landscape.

Within the segment of respondents affiliated with the higher education system (69.4%), a substantial proportion indicated their willingness to resume in-person educational activities during the specified academic year. Approximately one in ten respondents stated that their respective institutions intended to commence the academic year with a traditional, classroom-based mode of instruction. Nevertheless, a considerable number of higher education institutions elected to implement a blended teaching and learning model, characterized by an alternating schedule of in-person and distance learning sessions.[15] This blended approach represents an attempt to balance the need for safety with the desire for a more traditional educational experience, and can be seen as a manifestation of the resilience and adaptability that are central to decolonization. It also underscores an important dimension of operationalizing decoloniza-

tion: preserving student agency in choosing a learning modality that aligns with their safety, psychological well-being, and capacity to remain engaged in Ukrainian education during wartime.

Notably, a significant majority, comprising 80% of all respondents (both students and academic staff), perceived the implementation of the distance educational format as an effective strategy during the wartime conditions prevailing in the nation.[16] This finding underscores the crucial role that technology has played in maintaining educational continuity, and its potential to contribute to more flexible and accessible forms of education in the postwar period, which could further support efforts at decolonization. The ability of Ukraine's higher education system to harness technology to maintain epistemic continuity directly resists the colonial strategy of severing populations from their cultural and intellectual institutions.



Figure 4. The space for sleeping in a bomb shelter (authors' own photo).

IT IS ALSO PERTINENT to emphasize that, notwithstanding Russia's widespread military aggression against Ukraine, domestic higher education institutions persist in conducting courses for international students and actively recruiting applicants from abroad, employing specific admission protocols for foreign enrollees. This practice further underscores the significance of the distance learning model, as a mutually acceptable solution for all parties involved, and highlights Ukraine's continued engagement with the global academic community, even in a time of crisis. This continued engagement is a further way that Ukrainian universities are resisting the isolation that can be a tool of colonization. Indeed, maintaining an international academic presence and visibility is an essential element of asserting Ukrainian epistemic sovereignty on the global stage.

It is, however, understandable that both students and faculty generally prefer in-person interaction. To guarantee the right to education, preserve stability within the educational sphere, and fulfil the objectives of education, the state is endeavoring to maximize its efforts within the constraints imposed by martial law. Significantly, contemporary Ukrainian legislation empowers educational institutions to autonomously determine educational formats and the organization of the educational process, encompassing flexible scheduling and thereby enabling the adaptation of educational activities to the exigencies of martial law. This legislative flexibility is essential for ensuring institutions are able to respond to the diverse and evolving challenges of wartime, and to assert their autonomy in the face of external pressure. Institutional autonomy, i.e. the ability to self-govern educational processes in defiance of external coercion, is itself a cornerstone of decolonial practice, positioning universities as agents of national sovereignty.

Consequently, both the Kharkiv authorities and university administrators are actively exploring diverse avenues to facilitate the resumption of on-site instructional activities. Moreover, a prevalent view holds that online education is generally perceived to be of lesser quality compared to traditional classroom-based instruction. Thus, during the summer of 2023, a number of higher education institutions in Kharkiv (located approximately 200 kilometers from zones of active military engagement), possessing deep and extensive subterranean facilities with the potential for conversion into bomb shelters equipped with classrooms conducive to teaching and learning, began preparing for the 2023/24 academic year in order to provide their student body with the option to pursue on-site instruction. This proactive approach demonstrates a commitment to both safety and educational quality, and exemplifies the agency that is a key part of the decolonizing process. By reclaiming underground spaces as classrooms, institutions symbolically and materially assert that Ukrainian education will continue to thrive even under the most hostile colonial conditions.

ACCORDINGLY, AT Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, which possesses extensive multi-level subterranean facilities, these spaces have been adapted into both classrooms and bomb shelters, equipped with essential amenities such as proper ventilation systems, sanitary facilities, potable water reservoirs, electrical generators, public address systems, fire alarms, and multiple emergency egress points, as depicted in Figures 3a and 3b. The adaptation of these spaces is a concrete example of how institutions are working to maintain a sense of normalcy and provide a safe and effective learning environment, even in the midst of war. Here, educational continuity becomes an operational marker of decolonization: It demonstrates that the university refuses to allow colonial violence to interrupt the production of Ukrainian knowledge.

Moreover, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University equipped student hostels with bomb shelters (Figure 4). This comprehen-

sive approach to student safety and well-being underscores the university's commitment to its community and its determination to continue functioning as a center of learning and culture. Ensuring students' ability to remain in Ukraine while studying prevents the displacement of future Ukrainian intellectual capital, which is another key element of resisting colonial erosion.

WITHIN THIS CONTEXT, in the 2023/24 academic year, students at the university were given the opportunity to acquire their higher education in the educational format that is the most psychologically comfortable and acceptable for them individually, in order to achieve better academic results. Thus, nearly half of the first-year student cohort (49%) elected to engage in a blended learning modality, comprising remote (online) lectures and on-site practical and seminar sessions. The remaining portion of the first-year students (51%) opted for fully remote instruction,[17] as did 53% of first-year students in the 2024/25 academic year. Such data demonstrates that more than half of the student body either have concerns about their safety or have left the country, a factor that presents ongoing challenges for the university. For academic staff, this arrangement afforded instructors the opportunity to juxtapose various facets of distance and on-site modes of educational delivery, providing valuable insights into the efficacy of different pedagogical approaches in crisis situations. The flexibility of these arrangements also represents an operational indicator of decolonization: Student autonomy, localized decision-making, and the preservation of Ukrainian educational agency all counteract the coercive force of colonial aggression.

Initially, the intended utilization of subterranean classrooms was limited to periods coinciding with aerial bombardment warnings. However, the extremely short flight duration of missiles targeted at Kharkiv from the Belgorod region within the Russian Federation – approximately 40 seconds – means that detonations frequently precede the activation of air raid sirens. Consequently, the concentration of numerous individuals in a single location poses a significant hazard. Moreover, practical experience has revealed that the frequency of such alerts in Kharkiv necessitates that student cohorts, accompanied by their instructors, relocate to basement classrooms with considerable regularity, often every double period. This practice has proven to be suboptimal due to several factors. Firstly, valuable instructional time is lost during the transition. Secondly, students experience a diminished capacity for concentration following relocation, necessitating the reiteration of previously covered material. Thirdly, disciplinary challenges have been observed in certain groups. As a result, the prevailing decision of the university's administration has been to conduct conventional educational activities exclusively within subterranean classroom facilities. This decision, while driven by safety concerns, also reflects a commitment to maintaining the integrity of the educational process in the face of significant disruption. It reinforces the principle that education in Ukraine will persist autonomously, irrespective of colonial violence or attempts to dismantle academic life.

Consequently, contemporary university instruction in Kharkiv is delivered across a spectrum of modalities, encompassing both on-site classroom instruction within university-operated bomb shelters and synchronous distance learning facilitated by platforms such as Zoom, with pedagogical approaches tailored to prioritize the psychological well-being of students. Within the classroom setting, instructors employ both long-established pedagogical techniques (including the utilization of printed texts, blackboard instruction, and audio-visual resources) and innovative methodologies such as gamified learning,[18] interactive whiteboards,[19] and mobile technologies.[20] The integration of these diverse pedagogical approaches highlights the adaptability and resilience of Ukrainian educators in the face of adversity. More importantly, these pedagogical strategies operationalize decolonization by reinforcing Ukrainian-led curricula, pedagogy, and intellectual culture, thereby preventing the erasure or replacement of local knowledge systems despite conditions of war.

THE PERSISTENCE of educational provision amidst such exigent circumstances, as exemplified by institutions like Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, embodies the decolonial tenet of repudiating subjugation. These institutions safeguard and perpetuate the intellectual and cultural distinctiveness of the nation, even in the face of aggression aimed at its suppression. Moreover, this adaptation signifies a dedication to local self-determination and the rejection of imperialist narratives that endeavor to erode Ukraine's autonomy and the capacity of its populace to flourish independently. In this sense, the university's practices constitute both symbolic and material acts of decolonization, which preserve not only the physical continuity of learning but also the epistemic independence of Ukrainian scholarship. The integration of decolonization into this discourse accentuates the pivotal role of education as an instrument for resisting neo-colonial pressures and cultivating a resilient society that steadfastly refuses to succumb to external domination, even during periods of profound hardship. The universities are sending a clear message that they will not be conquered. Thus, the Ukrainian wartime educational landscape provides a rare and significant empirical example of decolonization enacted in real time under active conditions of aggression, expanding theoretical understandings of what constitutes a "decolonizing force" in higher education.

"THE UNIVERSITIES ARE SENDING A CLEAR MESSAGE THAT THEY WILL NOT BE CONQUERED."

Discussion

Our study sought to scrutinize how Ukrainian higher education institutions, specifically Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, are adapting to the challenges posed by the ongoing war, with a particular focus on the ways in which these adaptations reflect and enact a process of decolonization. The investigation

results reveal a complex interplay of resilience, adaptation, and a steadfast commitment to maintaining educational continuity in the face of profound adversity. These adaptations, we argue, are not merely pragmatic responses to wartime exigencies but also represent a form of resistance against imperialist domination and a manifestation of decolonizing agency.

Particularly, the findings of our study resonate with and expand upon the observations of other scholars examining the impact of the war on Ukrainian higher education. For example, Galynska and Bilous[21] highlight the significant challenges that distance learning presents in wartime Ukraine, including issues of accessibility and effectiveness. While their research focuses on the National University of Food Technologies, the challenges they identify – such as the location of students and faculty, the ability of educators to develop and deliver online courses, and equitable access to resources – are clearly echoed in the experiences of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, as evidenced by the data on student preferences for blended or fully online distance learning.[22] The fact that a substantial portion of students at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University opted for fully online instruction, even when in-person options were available, suggests that these accessibility and safety concerns are widespread and deeply felt. The stated example can be interpreted through a decolonial lens, insofar as the disruption of the traditional educational paradigm by an external force (Russian armed aggression) necessitates an evaluation of educational approaches to ensure inclusivity and continued access to knowledge. The adaptations made by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, in embracing both online and blended formats, demonstrate an attempt to address these challenges while upholding the educational rights of all students, regardless of their location or circumstances.

IN PARALLEL, Sokol and Melko[23] broaden the scope of the discussion by analyzing the challenges facing higher tourism education in Ukraine, including digitalization, distance learning, and the outflow of students to foreign educational institutions. The abovementioned challenges, exacerbated by the war, are interconnected with the decolonization framework in several ways. The outflow of students, for instance, can be seen as a consequence of the disruption and instability caused by the imperialist aggression of the Russian Federation, potentially leading to a loss of Ukrainian intellectual capital. The adaptations made by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, in providing safe and accessible teaching and learning environments, can be interpreted as a countermeasure to this trend, seeking to retain and empower Ukrainian students within their own national context. Furthermore, the emphasis on digitalization and innovative teaching methods, as observed at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, aligns with Sokol and Melko's call for improved educational approaches in distance learning. Such digitalization measures, while driven by necessity, can also be viewed as a tool for decolonization, enabling the dissemination of knowledge beyond the physical constraints imposed by the armed conflict and potentially democratizing access to education.

Zayachuk[24] provides a comprehensive overview of efforts to ensure quality higher education in Ukraine during the war, highlighting the legal framework, the destruction of educational infrastructure, and the various initiatives undertaken by the state, universities, and international institutions. The scholar's study findings underscore the immense challenges faced by Ukrainian universities and shared by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The adaptation of the university's spaces into bomb shelters, as documented in our research, directly addresses the issue of safety and preservation of infrastructure, which Zayachuk identifies as a key concern. [25]Moreover, the blended learning approach adopted by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University reflects the broader trend of improved and wider implementation of online education systems, which Zayachuk[26] recognizes as a crucial response to the war. The emphasis on student safety and high-quality education, which Zayachuk's[27] survey data reveals as a top priority for Ukrainian universities, is clearly evident in the actions of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, whose efforts to provide both safe physical spaces and flexible learning modalities demonstrate a commitment to these principles. The adaptation of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University also reflects a form of resilience, showing the university's dedication to its educational mission. This resilience can be seen as a rejection of the colonizer's attempts to disrupt Ukrainian society.

In the context of our study, Lugovyi et al.[28] discuss, on the one hand, the broader context of globalization, sustainable development, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have already influenced the development of higher education, and on the other hand, how Russian military aggression has added another layer of complexity. The researchers outline key areas of change, including infrastructure destruction, decreased institutional capability, and restrictions on international academic mobility. The situation at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University exemplifies these challenges. The adaptation of bomb shelters into classrooms is a direct response to the destruction of infrastructure and the need to maintain institutional capability. The blended learning approach, with its combination of online and on-site teaching, reflects the restrictions on traditional academic mobility and the need to find alternative ways of delivering education. The university's actions, in this context, can be seen as a form of resistance against the disruption and displacement caused by the aggressive invasion, and as an attempt to preserve its role as a vital educational institution within Ukrainian society.

MOREOVER, AN ANALYSIS of the impact of the war on Ukraine's higher education system was made by Antoniuk,[29] who focuses on the losses incurred and the forced transformation processes that are shaping the future of postwar education. The study highlights the problems of security and the preservation of infrastructure, human resources, and the student body, which are all directly relevant to the situation at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The university's adaptation of its facilities, and its efforts to maintain educational continuity, address these challenges head-on. Furthermore, Antoniuk emphasizes the importance of digital technologies, innovative approaches, and international

cooperation in preserving higher education. The blended learning model and the use of technology at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University exemplify the adoption of digital technologies and innovative approaches. The university's actions demonstrate a proactive response to the threats posed by the war.

Finally, Sibruk et al.[30] discuss the crucial role of educators in fostering educational competencies and enhancing student competitiveness in the job market during wartime. The authors emphasize the need for students to develop such qualities as adaptability, critical thinking, and resilience. These soft skills are not only essential for navigating the challenges of war but also central to the decolonization process, which requires individuals to be empowered, self-reliant, and capable of challenging dominant narratives. The adaptations made by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, in ensuring the continuity of education and providing a safe and supportive learning environment, contribute to the development of the abovementioned qualities in its students. The university's commitment to in-person teaching and learning, where possible, also acknowledges the importance of communication and social interaction, which Sibruk et al.[31] highlight as crucial during times of armed conflict.

IN CONCLUSION, the adaptations of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, while driven by the immediate need to maintain educational continuity and ensure safety, also represent a profound act of decolonization. By refusing to succumb to the disruptive forces of war, the university is actively resisting imperialist domination and asserting its commitment to Ukrainian self-determination. The blended learning model, the transformation of bomb shelters into classrooms, and the prioritization of both online and on-site instruction all demonstrate a multifaceted approach to education that is both resilient and empowering. The university is not only preserving its function as an educational institution but also playing a vital role in safeguarding Ukrainian cultural and intellectual identity during a time of profound crisis. The findings of our study, when considered in conjunction with the work of other scholars, underscore the critical role of education in resisting oppression, fostering resilience, and shaping a more just and equitable future for Ukraine.

Conclusions

Having examined how Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University has adapted to the challenges of the ongoing war in Ukraine, with a specific focus on how these adaptations reflect and enact a process of decolonization, we have revealed that the university has implemented a range of strategies to maintain educational continuity and ensure the safety of its students and faculty. These strategies include the transformation of the university's basements into functional teaching and learning spaces (as well as into bomb shelters for those students who live in the university student hostels), the implementation of blended and online learning modalities, and the provision of ongoing support services.

Such adaptations are not merely pragmatic responses to wartime conditions. Rather, they represent a proactive effort to assert the university's autonomy, preserve Ukrainian cultural and intellectual identity, and resist the disruptive forces of external military aggression. Within the framework of decolonization, the adaptation of higher education to wartime exigencies, exemplified by the transformation of basements into instructional spaces, embodies a decolonial response. This response underscores resilience, self-determination, and the prioritization of localized necessities over external impositions.

THE FINDINGS of the study highlight the following key points: 1) Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation and resilience in the face of significant challenges; 2) the university's adaptation strategies reflect a commitment to both the safety and the educational needs of its students and academic staff; 3) the application of technology and the creation of safe teaching and learning environments have been crucial in maintaining educational continuity; 4) the university's actions can be interpreted as a form of resistance against imperialist domination and an assertion of Ukrainian self-determination; and 5) education, in this context, plays a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of national identity.

In conclusion, the case of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University provides a compelling example of how higher education institutions can adapt to the challenges of war while simultaneously enacting a process of decolonization. The university's efforts to maintain its educational mission in the face of adversity serve as a testament to the resilience of the Ukrainian people and the enduring power of education to shape a nation's future.

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