



Guest editorial for the Ukraine special issue: ‘Tempus fugit, Academia sempiterna’

Julie Hulme¹

For many academics around the world, war is unimaginable. It happens to others, a brutal but distant reality that appears on our television screens, but not outside of our windows. For others, including (but not only) those in Ukraine, the reality of war is immediate, here and now, and yet, somehow, academic life persists. This very special issue of our journal came out of conversations with academic colleagues in Ukraine, who visited the University of Glasgow in August 2023 through an international collaboration grant.

The special issue contains articles that describe what it is like to exist and persist through war, teaching students while hearing bombs, experiencing enforced separations (including the critical role of social media and Telegram, a popular messaging service in the Eastern bloc), and worrying about friends, family, and pets. Lessons learned from online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic came into their own from the beginning of the war, but with new problems. Vyshenska, for example, talks about the difficulties of teaching field courses online without mains power to both a laptop and an internet router. We encounter understandable fear, suspicion, and anger. We see how compassion is given a central place in every classroom and every interaction with a colleague or a student; as Kharchenko writes, “My main goal was to create a safe space for them, to help them survive emotionally. Only after that came the actual academic program”. We also read about remarkable hope and about the generosity of the international academic community, creating jobs and opportunities for Ukrainian migrants. And we hear how academic identity not only persists but brings insight and resilience through the experience of war.

Some of our Ukrainian contributors, like Bachynska, share very personal insights, and these provide context, so that, in our relative safety, we can begin to imagine the unimaginable reality of war. What happens when your child is expecting the Tooth Fairy while you’re hearing bombs explode outside? Volkova shares with us her grief over the loss of her beloved brother. These stories are not traditional academic articles, but they reveal much about the effects of war on human beings who also happen to be our academic colleagues. In their personal reflections, they sometimes express their feelings

¹ Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

Corresponding Author:

Julie Hulme, Professor of Psychology Education, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, NG18 5BH, UK
Email: Julie.Hulme@ntu.ac.uk

and thoughts in ways that those of us who live in relative safety might find challenging and uncomfortable. We recognise that war is itself challenging, and that it brings people into inevitable opposition. War creates enemies, and ordinary people feel and express the consequences of that enmity, as thoughtfully articulated by Veretelnyk: “political correctness takes a time out” and “every person had their own valid truth”. Similarly, levgen notes “I immediately wanted to write to all of my friends and strangers in Russia, and exclusively with swear words...”, but later: “I consciously do not want to live with the thought that all our enemies are inhuman creatures. This is a simplified picture of the world. And we cannot survive in a world where we simplify reality”. Our contributors have expressed their lived experience authentically, and we have chosen not to substantively alter this to create more palatable stories for those of us who do not fully understand war. The views our contributors express are their own complex and “valid truth” in response to war, and may not necessarily align with those of the oSoTL team, or, we realise, with all of our readership. We ask you to read with compassion, even if not understanding or agreement.

Some authors have provided articles that offer insights from both a personal and academic perspective. It seems when we are experiencing trauma and distress, our academic discipline remains a core part of who we are and how we view the world. For example, Prokhorova reflects on how her understandings of sociology and symbolism inform her thinking around forced migration, around motivations to flee the war or to remain or return ‘home’ in a war zone. Her reflections on women migrating for their children’s safety, what it means to offer a child a ‘normal life’ far from family, and on women escaping domestic violence because the war has enabled them to relocate are fascinating, interwoven with her own more personal insights. She notes that she “wants to show [students] by my own example that it is possible to stay in sociology, teach, and work on a bunch of interesting projects even in the midst of war”.

Similarly, Solovei researches and teaches her students about how to analyse and resolve international conflicts through diplomacy, sanctions or coercion, while reflecting on her decision to move to Spain with her family during the war. In the face of criticism from those who believe she should have remained in Ukraine, she says: “I am a teacher, I am a professional, I am a researcher”. Kiselova writes on how teaching philological studies through the war has become an act of resistance for both herself and her students, with renewed engagement and a new level of poetic creativity evident in her students’ work. She notes a remarkable determination, a “fierce stubbornness” to persist against the odds that unites the university community.

The centrality of education to a sense of positive action, of contributing to the wellbeing and future of a nation, is strong within all of these articles. Shuhai articulates this powerfully, saying that education “is a powerful tool for maintaining an image of stability, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing resilience in young minds...a teacher is embodying a source of strength, guidance and inspiration for students striving to learn amidst the chaos. And so, we kept going...reclaiming our lives, our dreams, and our future”. This idea of education building strength is echoed by Badior, who describes a remarkably innovative Creative Writing course, in which students were encouraged to write in English for a website called ‘Along Came the War’, which proved cathartic but also enabled the development of critical thinking and deep reflection. Creativity and writing are described as a means of human connection, and “a powerful tool for personal and

collective resilience”, and we see this demonstrated through both Tretinichenko’s poem in this issue, and Ievgen’s account of writing a fairy tale for children.

War and politics are of course highly gendered and differently gendered in different cultures; we see this in this issue; all but one of our contributors is female, and our sole male author (Ievgen) includes an account of serving in the Ukrainian military in his article. Reflecting on gender, Martsenyuk provides a fascinating account of the importance of teaching gender studies through a sociological lens within the context of education about the Russo-Ukrainian war. Girls and young women are particularly vulnerable during war, she argues, and will need specific types of help during the future recovery. However, they must be taught about their agency, not only about their roles as victims, she says. She also draws our attention to problematic narratives of masculinity, to a growing awareness of LGBTQI+ rights in Ukraine as a direct response to Russian politics, and to the importance of listening to local voices to inform thinking and interventions. Martenyuk ends with a call to action for non-Ukrainian scholars to consider seeking opportunities for collaboration with Ukrainian colleagues, and to be informed by research that comes from Ukraine.

These articles and stories evoke the reality of life – both personal and academic – in a war zone. When we read our Ukrainian colleagues’ stories we gain insight into their fears, their hopes, what teaching means to them, and the centrality of discipline and pedagogy to identity. We discover that even in the middle of an unimaginable war zone, there is a feeling that teaching is a part of normalcy. In the words of the motto of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, ‘Tempus fugit, Academia sempiterna’: Time passes, but the Academy is eternal. In every article included in this issue, there is a narrative of looking to the future, to a time beyond the war, and a time when universities will once again thrive. We at oSoTL hope that the determination of our contributors to see a positive future becomes a reality very soon.

Footnote regarding translation: The editorial team was keen to publish this special issue in both English and Ukrainian. However, we do not have funding for translation, and so this was only possible through use of artificial intelligence. We have translated Ukrainian writing into English and checked it by reverse translating into Ukrainian as a sense check. And we have translated English writing into Ukrainian and checked it by reverse translating into English as a sense check. Speakers of both languages have been involved in checking translation and localisation. However, we recognise that the translation is likely to be imperfect, and we apologise for any errors. We hope that this is better than no translation at all.