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Old or New? Russia's War against Ukraine and Post-Soviet identity politics

Introduction

In an interview in the initial stages of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Mary Kaldor has argued that «this war is much more like a classic old war. It is a deep-rooted contest between two sides, and it is showing us the difficulty of using military force for (...) making people do what you want them to do. (...) We need to think about how to prevent this conflict from becoming (...) a New war». To make sense of this statement, one has to better understand what New wars are and identify to which extent its features are present in the current conflict. This paper scrutinises whether the current war in Ukraine exhibits characteristics of New wars and suggests possible revisions to the theoretical concept in light of recent developments. In view of the present conflict, it also considers whether the distinction between New and old wars is meaningful at all.

The New war hypothesis was put forward by Mary Kaldor in the late 1990s. Her central argument is that «during the 1980s and 1990s, a new type of organized violence has developed, especially in Africa and Eastern Europe», which is tightly connected to the phenomenon of globalization (Kaldor, 1999: p. 1). This type of conflict distinguishes itself by earlier forms of warfare by its *goals*, its *methods*, and its *funding*. Its qualities are embedded in a globalized world that works according to a market logic. Among the goals of the New wars, identity politics feature most prominently. Identity politics is a claim to power based on identity, which contrast to the geo-political or ideological goals of the past (Kaldor, 1999: p. 6). In terms of methods, New wars tend to employ insurgency and counterinsurgency tactics practiced by non-state combatants and aimed at controlling populations rather than territories. The New wars approach was criticised from the outset and further developed by authors such as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) or Herfried Münkler (2018). Critics have questioned «the novelty of means, methods, strategies, tactics and the level of brutality of the new wars» (Malešević, 2010: p. 314). The main criticism of the New wars paradigm is that its key characteristics are not actually new but were already present in previous conflicts. However, in the

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context of globalisation and the collapse of Soviet control in Central and Eastern Europe, the new conflicts that arose seemed different to those previously theorised. The outcome of the new global setup was that armies became involved in protracted civil wars and were better prepared for counterinsurgency and intervention than for prolonged land warfare and conquest. It is precisely this latter type of warfare that Russia appears to have unleashed in Ukraine in 2022, heralding the return of an old war. However, according to Kaldor, this conflict could evolve into a New war again.

The war against Ukraine

The Russian full-scale attack on Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, but the military conflict begun already in 2014, with the illegal take-over of Crimea by Russia and the military invasion of the Donbas region. Still, the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022 took politicians and academics alike by surprise, as they downplayed the hardening of the Russian regime's stance towards the West and its increasingly assertive posture in the post-Soviet space. Since the change at the helm of the country in 1999, and despite ups and downs in Russia's relationship Western countries, the Kremlin increasingly moved towards autocracy, tended to escalate the rhetoric against the West and repeatedly engaged in military threats and actual military operations against its neighbours. Yeltsin's successor started his tenure resuming the military campaign against Chechnya, heavily destroying its capital Grozny in a bombing campaign. This conflict lasted several years until the situation stabilized, also due to co-optation of Chechen elites. Stabilization and co-optation resulted in a highly repressive system of local governance. In Georgia, Russian «peacekeepers» became a tool of Russian control over South Ossetia, and in 2008, after several breaches of the ceasefire and a Georgian attack on Tskhinvali, Russia attacked and briefly occupied Georgian cities. Today South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain outside Georgian rule and are effectively under Russian control. In 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea and started a persistent conflict in the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, using the Revolution of Dignity and the ouster of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich as a pretext. As will be shown below, these military operations were often justified by pointing to an alleged threat to ill-defined members of a Russian community, «compatriots», or arguing in a more territorial vein, speaking to an equally ill-defined *Russkij Mir*. Additionally, Russian officials and the Russian media have depicted NATO, the United States and the EU as institutions and countries that were overstepping the bounds of international law by advancing into a putative Russian sphere of influence and seeking to further weaken Russia. Their use of the term *Collective West* glossed over differences and denies individual countries' subjectivities, creating an allegedly united bogeyman (Chimiris, 2022; Meduza, 2024). These justifications where increasingly grounded in a geopolitical worldview, in which large power blocks are invariably pit against each other, while less powerful countries and nations are denied any agency of their own, thus mirroring largely assumptions of the realist school of international relations. Despite this Russian history of violence and autocratic development, as well as its anti-Western rhetoric, in 2022, Western observers were

surprised by the scale of the consequences that Russian elites were willing to accept for Ukraine, Russia itself and Europe as a whole, in terms of human suffering, economic costs, international relations, and the rules-based order.

This paper will focus exclusively on the period after 2022 and disregards the previous stages of the conflict. It is not aimed at providing an explanation of the full-scale war and rather focuses on its modus operandi. Neither does it aim to prove or disprove the accuracy of the New war hypothesis; rather, it will use it as a starting point for analysing the conduct of the war. As a theoretical paper, it seeks to question and potentially refine the New wars hypothesis by complementing it with alternative viewpoints to enhance our understanding of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Theoretical Framework: The New wars paradigm

The New wars hypothesis rests on three pillars: Identity politics, methods of war and funding. Mary Kaldor has focused on questions of *identity* and described them as a defining element of the New wars. In the course of New wars, claims to power are made on the basis of specific identities, for example, national, clan, religious or linguistic identities. Kaldor argued that the New wars contain an element of irrationality and subjectivity, as these identities are merely *labels*. Kaldor conceded that all wars entailed an identity dimension, but that «earlier identities were either linked to a notion of state interest or to some forward-looking project (...) The new identity politics is about the claim to power on the basis of labels», which «tend to relate to an idealized nostalgic representation of the past» and that are «inherently exclusive» in character (Kaldor, 1999: pp. 6–7). She claimed that it is the absence of forward-looking inclusionary projects that led to the emergence of identity politics and criticized the spread of such a type of identities via new forms of communication. Siniša Malešević, in contrast, questioned the strict distinction between ideology, including nationalism, and identity politics, as drawn by Kaldor: for him and others, identity is always embedded in ideology (Malešević, 2010: p. 325; cf. also Maynard, 2015). Succinctly put, «there is no identity without ideology, and no ideology can successfully mobilize mass support without constructing meaningful group labels» (Malešević, 2010: pp. 325–326). While this paper also rejects the distinction between identitarian and ideological conflicts (Maynard, 2015: p. 26), one point missed by both Kaldor and Malešević is the question of post-colonial identities. Frantz Fanon contended that violence was a *cleansing force* that contributes to freeing colonized people from an inferiority complex imposed on them by the colonizers (Fanon, 1963: p. 94). Violence is also a source of identity and national unity, it «binds [the colonized people] together as a whole, (...) a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning» (Fanon, 1963: p. 93). While in the past, post-Soviet studies and post-colonial studies have been widely ignoring each other (Chioni Moore, 2011), the post-colonial dimension of the conflicts taking place in the post-Soviet space has been increasingly considered (Mälksoo, 2023). In principle, both fields of research agreed on one thing: that Russian colonialism was unique, and that Russia remained both the subject and object of colonialism and Orientalisation (Dikovitskaya, 2002). Still, this position does not deny Russia's colonial role in its

neighbourhood. From a postcolonial perspective, it is important to consider the physical role Russia plays in all post-Soviet conflicts, as well as the discursive role it fulfils in shaping national identities in the region. Postcolonialism and the resulting identities affect both the formerly colonised and the former colonisers.

The New wars concept also assumes that there was an important shift in the *methods* adopted in warfare. New wars are not about armies clashing in battles, capturing and holding territory, but about armed groups adopting guerrilla tactics to control populations or deploying drones to remotely survey or attack enemies (Kaldor, 1999: p. 7). Here, there is an unexpected analogy to Foucauldian thinking about politics and war: as demonstrated elsewhere (Casula, 2017), until 2022, a shift in Russian foreign policy could be observed, from sovereignty and war on the one hand, to biopolitics and security on the other. This shift holds for the post-Soviet space, where Russia made political claims based on putative identities, such as the Russian «compatriots». Other analysts have even argued that a general turn to biopolitics can be observed in all areas of Russian politics, including the management of «health, hygiene, nutrition, birth, sexuality» (Makarychev, Medvedev, 2015: pp. 45–46).

Sovereignty is the power register which is about conquering territories or holding onto them. Its final goal is to preserve itself, with no utopian goals implied. Within its territorial boundaries sovereign power operates with repression and a rule *by* law. Biopolitics, in turn, deals with the population as political and biological problem (Foucault, 2007: pp. 92–93; 245). Biopolitics uses an economic rationality of laissez-faire, controls and regulates the «natural» circulation of people and merchandise. Security measures and «humanitarian» interventions replace war. In New wars, in an apparent turn away from geopolitics, populations become more important than territory. In contrast to Foucault and Yves Winter (2008), whose hypotheses seem more apt to describe shifts in Western (foreign) policies, Kaldor focused on Eastern Europe and interpreted insurgency and counterinsurgency as defining features of the New wars. She highlighted the horizontally organized units that «operate through a mixture of confrontation and co-operation even when on opposing sides [and that] make use of advanced technology» (Kaldor, 1999: p. 8). Terror and guerrilla actions instead of conventional battlefields; different military strategies, population control rather than territory capture; different combatants, private armies, criminal gangs, and warlords instead of professional soldiers or conscripts. All this leads to highly decentralized conflicts. The erosion of the state monopoly on violence clearly came to the fore with the emergence of new combatants. In civil wars, it is the collapse of the state, which leads to the emergence of warlords and paramilitary groups, while in wars waged by neoliberal countries it is the conscious retreat of the state and the inscription of organized violence into an economic logic that prompts the state to delegate violence to other entrepreneurs of violence (Bauman, 2001). New wars blur traditional divisions such as «legal vs. illegal, private vs. public, civilian vs. military, internal vs. external and local vs. global» (Malešević, 2010: p. 312). However, Malešević also criticized that «the deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of terrorist and guerrilla tactics» are nothing new and that they were and remain an «essential tactic of all civil wars» (Malešević, 2010: p. 313). Traditional states might also employ tactics specifically designed to terrorize the opponent's or the own population.

The contrast between centralised and decentralised modi operandi also defines the economies of war. According to Kaldor, old wars were firmly rooted in the nation state, whose economy was organised centrally for the purposes of war. War economies are «totalizing and autarchic» (Kaldor, 1999: p. 9). Industrial production adapts to the needs of war and serves the military in order to achieve victory. The entire population is also mobilized for military or war-related activities. On the other hand, New wars are financed in a decentralised manner. Participation in war is low, and unemployment is high. While domestic production declines, there is a growing need for external resources or for resources produced by the warring parties themselves through «illegal trade in arms, drugs or valuable commodities (...). All of these sources can only be sustained through continued violence» (Kaldor, 1999: p. 9). However, considerations on the economic aspect go beyond that. Zygmunt Bauman distinguishes two types of New wars in the globalization era: «globalizing wars» and «globalization-induced wars». Globalizing wars are high-tech wars waged by an «international community» against low-tech opponents, in the name of human rights and often against states or groups which refuse neoliberal integration: «Their objectives do not include the conquest and the acquisition and takeover of a territory (...) The intention behind is to throw the heretofore closed territory wide open to the global circulation of capital» (Bauman, 2001: p. 16). In contrast, globalization-induced wars are much more reminiscent of Kaldor's model. They are low-tech wars fought between low-tech opponents. Bauman warns to treat them as «a reaction to globalization, resistance to the advancing globalizing forces, or a manifestation of the anti-globalization tendency» (Bauman, 2001: p. 19), instead they are the flip-side of globalization. Both Kaldor and Bauman concur that there is a link between both types of war: «One type of war sets the stage for the other», argues Bauman (ibid., p. 25) and Kaldor concurs: «humanitarian intervention has not only failed to prevent the wars but may have actually helped to sustain them in various ways, for example, through (...) the effort to find political compromises based on exclusivist assumptions» (Kaldor, 1999: p. 10). The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kaldor's main example, seems to confirm this vicious circle of civil war, international intervention and frozen conflict. All three phases are characterized by an internationalization of war and an internationalization of funding. What neither Bauman nor Kaldor predicted, however, is that the world could enter a phase of deglobalization. In such a phase, wars can be the expression of changes to the world order, a collapse of a rules-based system, the severing of ties in the commercial and political field, leading to a return of the state, and power being more wielded in terms of sovereignty than in terms of biopolitics. To summarize, Table 1 illustrates the opposing pairs of concepts that are crucial for the following analysis.

Table 1

Main distinguishing factors between New and old wars

Categories	New wars	Old wars
Type of power	Biopolitics, control of the population	Sovereignty, control of territory
Aims	Definition of population and its control identity politics	Conquer and hold territory; ideological (utopian) aims

Categories	New wars	Old wars
Methods	Guerrilla tactics, outsourcing of violence, decentralized finance	Clash of regular armies, centralized economic effort
Economies of war	Globalized wars (state collapse, civil war); Globalizing wars (state retreat, interventionism); internationalization of funding	Deglobalizing wars; return of the state and setting-up of war economies

Materials and methods, research questions

This paper is theoretical in nature. It examines key assumptions of the New war paradigm and compares them with insights from other theoretical approaches. The empirical starting point is Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The paper is guided by the following primary research questions: What new insights or criticisms of the concept of New wars can be discerned in light of Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2022? In order to pursue this theoretical aim, the following secondary questions will be addressed: 1) Which multi-directional logics of identity politics emerge in the Ukrainian and Russian cases, and what role do post-colonial identities play specifically? The rise of non-state combatants is said to be a defining feature of New wars. What have been the Ukrainian and Russian experiences since 2022? 3) While the concept of New wars puts globalisation at the centre of its assumptions, how does deglobalisation determine the conflict in Ukraine?

Results and Discussion

Identity politics and the post-soviet National: Russia's neo-colonialism vs. Ukraine's post-colonial identity

For both Ukraine and Russia, questions of national identity play a crucial role in the conflict. In Russia, there emerged competing discourses about the Russian national, i.e. imperial identity, Russians abroad, the so-called Russian world, Russia and Europe, and about Ukraine. The conflict is cast in Russian political discourse as to be about a Russian identity as great power that must have zones of influence, and about the Ukrainians as either «nazis» or «brotherly people» or even as «one people» with the Russians. According to the shifting definitions, Ukrainians had to be «killed, killed, killed» (Dugin), deported or «de-Nazified», or brought back into the fold of the Empire. Russian discourses divide Ukrainian society into multiple layers and factions, both geographical and political. By segmenting Ukrainian society in this way, Russian propaganda attempts to divide it and erode opposition to the invasion. However, this segmentation also has consequences for Russian identity, which is potentially divided into different layers that either encompass, absorb or deny Ukrainian identity. These discourses are all united by the belief that Ukraine should not have its own political identity or subjectivity.

A first discourse is about some *Ukrainians as «Russians»* or as *bratskij narod*. This discourse seems to have been more prominent at the beginning of the war, when Ukrainian resistance was expected to be limited. There often was also a conflation within Russian propaganda between other peoples and «compatriots» (*sootečestvenniki*).

Zevelev distinguishes two approaches to the questions of «Russians» living outside the Russian state-borders: «The concept of compatriots began emerging in 1994 as a specific policy expressed primarily in laws, state programs, and foreign policy action. The concept of the Russian world, though its roots go back further, only became a part of active public discourse in 2007 (...)» (Zevelev, 2011: pp. 553–554). Federal Law no. 99-FZ on State Policy Toward Compatriots Living Abroad, adopted in May 1999 and amended in July 2010 is marked by ambiguity that Oxana Shevel criticized: it defined compatriots vaguely «by a virtually infinite combination of ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and even professional characteristics. For example, the compatriots' definition in the law can accommodate an interpretation that all former Soviet citizens are Russia's compatriots» (Shevel, 2011: p. 89). This ambiguity reflects the failure of post-Soviet Russia to develop and define a national idea independent from imperial and Soviet experiences. The ambiguity was then used in South Ossetia 2008 as in Crimea 2014. Regarding South Ossetia Dmitri Medvedev claimed that Russian citizens were dying and that he had a duty to protect them (Medvedev, 2008). In this context, the mass bestowal of Russian citizenship (so-called *passportization*) has been a tool of Russian foreign policy in South Ossetia and in many other contested regions. Coerced passportization also takes place now in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, where citizenship often becomes a requisite to receiving social services (Khoshnood, Raymond, Howarth, 2023).

Nuray Aridici noted a shift in official discourse away from «Russian citizens» (South Ossetia 2008) to «ethnic Russians» (Crimea 2014), who increasingly became the focus of Russia's politics abroad and who were used to justify military intervention (Aridici, 2014). The Kremlin's propaganda argued that «those [Ukrainians] who opposed the coup were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives» (Kremlin.ru, 2014). It should be added, however, that Crimea was for the Kremlin's propaganda both a population *and* a territory, as the Kremlin later included a territorial justification for annexation: Crimea as «a sacred place, (...) a holy land» (Kremlin.ru, 2021a).

In 2021, the Kremlin propaganda argued that a «forced change of identity» was taking place that amounted to using weapons of mass destruction against ethnic Russians: «The most despicable thing is that the Russians in Ukraine are being forced not only to deny their roots (...) but also to believe that Russia is their enemy. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us» (Kremlin.ru, 2021b). Interestingly, while it is now Russia that tries to engage in forced assimilation of Ukrainians, the Kremlin falsely attacked Ukraine on the same grounds. And on the second day of the Russian attack, the Kremlin argued as follows: «We had to stop that atrocity, that genocide of the millions of people who live there (...) The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime» (Kremlin.ru, 2022). In all cases, the Russian state never shared evidence or made more formal charges for such claims (Hinton, 2022). In all these cases, ill-defined populations were used to justify military

action. These arguments were used especially for the Ukrainians in the Donbas region. As for Ukrainians elsewhere, the argument was slightly modified in the first year of the war, depicting Ukrainians as hostages of the Ukrainian government: «The current events have nothing to do with a desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. They are connected with the defending Russia from those who have taken Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and our people», stressing a common Soviet legacy shared by Ukrainians and Russians: «Your fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazi occupiers and did not defend our common Motherland to allow today's neo-Nazis to seize power in Ukraine» (Kremlin.ru, 2022). A year before the invasion, the Kremlin had made clear that it sees a unity between Ukrainians and Russians: «I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole. (...) It is what I have said on numerous occasions and what I firmly believe» (Kremlin.ru, 2021b). This is a peculiar imperial perspective that denies a separate Ukrainian identity and «swallows» it into a Russian national identity. Identity politics as justification of war highlight an attempt to get a population under control, requiring a definition of the population as a first step. Russian neo-imperialism tries to distinguish between good and bad Ukrainians. Good Ukrainians are those who identify as Russian and thus have to forsake their Ukrainian identity. Those who insist on a separate identity are deemed to be Nazis and are considered bad Ukrainians. They must be eliminated. The line between good and bad Ukrainians seems completely arbitrary. One such attempt consisted of analysing tattoos as symbols of political affiliation to identify alleged Ukrainian Nazis. In this case, the identity of the Ukrainians was literally inscribed on their bodies, used to make claims about their political affiliation, and used to justify harming them (PBS, 2022). There are numerous accounts of such checking for tattoos at checkpoints or in so-called Filtration camps (cf. also Finkel, 2024: pp. 225ff.): Russian soldiers «were told that Ukrainian nationalists have Nazi swastikas tattooed on their heels. (...) It was winter and the weather was cold, but they made them walk barefoot and without clothes» (quoted in Logvynenko, 2025: p. 262). Vakulenko recalled being controlled for tattoos at checkpoints in his hometown Izyum: «Finally, I had to show them my tattoos, even if only the ones on my arm. I honestly have no idea what tattoos those of Azov have, and if they have any individual ones at all» (Vakulenko, 2025: p. 35). For those who are deemed Nazis, human rights organisations have recorded abuse and torture in a network of prisons and detention centres, as the murder of Ukrainian Viktorija Roščyna shows, who herself died while researching the Russian detention system in the temporarily occupied territories (Gorbunova, 2025). The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded that «Russian authorities committed the crime against humanity of enforced disappearances and the crime against humanity of torture. These crimes have been carried out as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population. (...) Torture of detainees was particularly brutal during interrogations. (...) Russian authorities have systematically used sexual violence as a form of torture [and] The Commission further examined incidents involving the killing or wounding, by Russian armed forces, of captured or surrendering Ukrainian soldiers» (Human Rights Council, 2025).

Another discourse is the one that makes claims to *de-Ukrainize Ukraine*, implying that Russian and Ukrainian identities are incompatible, and there cannot be a

Ukrainian identity. One of the most obvious instances of such an identity politics has been the op-ed «What Russia Should Do with Ukraine» by Timofei Sergeitsev (2022). Sergeitsev is «an obscure columnist, political consultant and spin doctor, [who] has never before attracted such media interest» (Sorokina, 2022), however, publishing his piece with the state news agency RIA Novosti gives his opinion a quasi-official status. The most striking element in this treatise is the equation between Ukrainians and «Nazis». This leads Sergeitsev to construct a total opposition between Ukraine and Russia: «Denazification will inevitably also be a de-Ukrainization – a rejection of the large-scale artificial inflation of the ethnic component of self-identification of the population», and even more explicitly: «Ukraine, as history has shown, is impossible as a nation-state, and attempts to build one naturally lead to Nazism. Ukrainism is an artificial anti-Russian construction that does not have its own civilizational content, a subordinate element of an alien and alien civilization» (Sergeitsev, 2022). There is no place for a Ukrainian self-identification as Ukrainian, raising questions as on which Soviet assimilative vision contemporary Russia is drawing: any *Slijanie,* merging, or *Sbliženie,* rapprochement (Bassin, 2016: p. 158) seem impossible, as Russia portrays its war as a righteous continuation of the Great Patriotic war against Nazism. A similar position to Sergeitsev was previously expressed by the theoretician of Sovereign democracy, Vladislav Surkov in 2020: «There is no Ukraine. There is Ukrainianism. (...) there is no nation». Using derogatory vocabulary and supremacist language, he even predicted the possibility of genocidal practices: «What kind of Ukraine there will be, in what borders (...), how many Ukrainians there will be – these are open questions. And Russia will have to participate in the solution of these questions one way or another (...) Forcing brotherly relations is the only method that has historically proved effective in the Ukrainian direction» (Surkov, 2020). Ukraine was increasingly portrayed as an *anti-Russia*, its national identity devaluated as not carrier of a civilization of its own. In line with Art. 68 of the Russian constitution only Russians are a *gosudarstvo-obrazujuščij narod or* a *state-forming people*, giving it a special place in the multinational setup of the Russian Federation and in the whole post-Soviet region. Such a premise can provide the grounds to denying other peoples the right to an own political identity and justifies a neo-colonial Russian position. Already long before 2020, the Kremlin has cultivated this idea of Russians as driving «our nation's development, both culturally and demographically» (Kremlin.ru, 2013a; 2013b). As this demographic drive, however stopped, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is also about solving Russia's demographic crisis, replenishing it population with new «Slavic bodies»: hence, on the one hand, the so-called resettlements, the abduction of Ukrainian children (Talaver, 2023), or the forced «evacuations» of Ukrainians to Russia, while, on the other hand, «surplus bodies» of Russian criminals and convicts are sent to die on the battlefield.

Eugene Finkel aptly summarizes the shift in official Russian discourse that has taken hold with the full-scale invasion in 2022: «An invasion that began as an attempt to subjugate the state of Ukraine quickly morphed into a deliberate campaign to physically destroy Ukrainians as a group and Ukrainian statehood and identity as an idea. Invasion became genocide» (Finkel, 2024: p. 212).

In contrast to Russia's dictatorial, top-down organisation of society, which lacks a civic understanding of the nation or even lacks nationalism altogether (Rowley, 2000), Ukraine has managed to develop a rather pluralist and democratising society that is much more organised according to bottom-up principles (Hayoz, Stepanenko, 2024: p. 352). Ukraine also developed a patriotic nationalism or a civic understanding of Ukrainianness. The role of the Ukrainian language, and the alleged discrimination against the Russian language, are issues that have been distorted by Russian propaganda. The 2019 Law on Supporting the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language strengthened the use of Ukrainian as official language but did not prevent anyone from speaking Russian (Polityuk, 2019). The language issue became thornier after 2022, as «the predominance of the Ukrainian language significantly increased in both 2014 and 2022, with the latter change being much bigger than the former», and «many [Ukrainians] proudly stated that they had fully switched to Ukrainian or had come to speak it much more than before» (Kulyk, 2023: pp. 305–306). The language issue, the *Leninopad* of 2013/14, the decommunization laws of 2015 and 2022 led to an intensification of *derussification* as a form of *decolonization*, with intellectuals and politicians questioning the role of historical figures such as empress Catherine II, or Kiyv-born Mikhail Bulgakov (Kurkov, 2022; see also Betlii, 2023; Ahejeva, 2025: pp. 147–177). Olesya Khromeychuk argues that there was a national idea long before the war based on the experiences of «imperialist repression», «Soviet subjugation» and «opposed to imperialism» (Khromeychuk, 2022). Khromeychuk depicts the Ukrainian political nation as a melting pot, whose members speak «Crimean Tatar, Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and many other languages in addition to Ukrainian [and] fluent Russian» (Khromeychuk, 2022). The Russian attack on Ukraine heightened the sense of a post-colonial national identity, fighting a war of liberation (Snyder, 2022): Russian and Soviet empires equally oppressed Ukrainians, irrespective of their language or religion. This post-colonial narrative is result of a specific memory-politics that highlights Ukraine as Russia's victim, including the man-made famine Holodomor as central memory element.

Overall, the Russian state is authoritarian, its society is at war, and much of what was discussed previously regarding national identity, particularly since 2014, has been implemented since 2022. This includes the reverence for the Great Patriotic War and the associated heroism, the disparagement of other post-Soviet societies, neo-colonialism, imperial and Soviet nostalgia, and anti-Westernism. The state promotes a national ideology that looks to the past, «in contrast to the Soviet Union, [the Kremlin] does not have a progressive utopia. If it offers anything, it is a caricature of a past century with traditional values, beautiful women and no gender freedoms (...) The Russian world that [the Kremlin] is bayoneting is not a positive alternative for Ukrainians» (Menʹšikova, 2023: p. 91). It is precisely the nostalgic view of the Soviet past for which few feel nostalgia outside Russia, particularly not in Ukraine, while much depends on post-1991 development and previous status of the republic in question and age of the respondents (Nikolayenko, 2008; Russia Matters, 2021). One version of the Russian world proposed by Moscow is the Eurasian Union, which draws on the Gumilevian inspiration of Eurasianism (Bassin, 2016: p. 3). Since 2012, the Eurasian Union became an important foreign policy goal of Russia, which «needed

new explanatory rationales, for the purposes of which Gumilev's now well-known work and his legendary persona continued to offer a unique value and appeal» (Bassin, 2016: p. 239). The Eurasian Union must hence be seen as a corollary of Russian identity politics (Heller, 2015), as must the project of Novorossiya that equally draws on authors with Eurasianist-leanings, such as Dugin and Prokhanov (Laruelle, 2016).

Convicts not conscripts, against volunteers: Integration of non-state combatants vs. fostering internal competition

At first glance, the war against Ukraine appears to be a departure from the New war paradigm, as it is nation states fighting each other with regular armies over Ukrainian territory. However, this would be a short-sighted reading of the situation, as it would downplay other elements. These can be discussed at the two levels described above. The first level concerns the counterinsurgency elements of the war; the second, the biopolitical aspects. The two levels are interconnected. With regard to the first level, the deployment of military personnel not belonging to the regular armed forces is an obvious factor. However, the directions have been opposed: While the Ukrainian army has increasingly incorporated voluntary battalions since 2016 (Hayoz, Stepanenko, 2024: p. 360), Russia has relied more and more on non-regular troops initially, and later on foreign soldiers and mercenaries. The following comparison focuses solely on the status of these combatants as non-members of the regular armed forces. It disregards other features, such as the social, economic, and political backgrounds of the troops; their motivations; and their different status as either defenders in the Ukrainian case or as aggressors in the Russian case.

On the Ukrainian side, there has been a remarkable development of integrating non-state fighters into the Ukrainian armed forces and placing them under a single command (Kudelia, 2018: p. 269). From a sociological perspective, however, these non-state battalions are interesting because of their structure. Aliyev argues that in the beginning, Ukrainian armed formations had features of *state-parallel militia*, which are «fiercely independent and (...) growing increasingly critical of and disillusioned with the government» (Aliyev, 2016: p. 499). Weakened states are a precondition for the existence of state-parallel militias, and this definition could broadly be applied to the Ukrainian state in 2014. During the early phase of military confrontation of in Donbas after 2014, Kyiv started an Anti-terrorist operation (ATO), and «the deployment of Ukraine's conscript-based regular army in the east was disastrous» (Aliyev, 2016: p. 506). This weakness of the regular troops created the void necessary for other militias to step in. The characteristics of state-parallel militias comprise: 1) strong military capabilities, 2) political representation (and lack of accountability vis-a-vis the state), 3) popular support, and better equipment, stronger morale, and higher pay than the regular armed forces (Aliyev, 2016: pp. 503–504; 508). All this resulted in a tense relationship with the Ukrainian state, as these units pressured the government to be tougher on the Donbas situation. The Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 brought movement into this tense balance. The Ukrainian state and Ukrainian state institutions not only gained legitimacy, but also became recipients of funding and Western military equipment, which allowed them to improve the capacities of the regular army as a whole. While the battalions were often financed by Ukrainian oligarchs, the Ukrainian

army was now sponsored by Western partners with whom it had previously cooperated in various international operations, such as in Iraq. The war made the army more efficient, covered the rifts within the Ukrainian elites and society and possibly led to an apparent consolidation of the state and society. Thus, external aggression from Russia and external (financial) support contributed to the consolidation of the military. In the future, however, private military companies could experience a comeback and «offer veterans a way to continue serving after demobilization» (Denisova, 2025).

There was a similar process on the Russian side. The war caused rifts within the elites that had to be solved. However, consolidation was achieved by authoritarian, violent means: the remaining liberals were brought into line, imprisoned or left the country, rifts within the military leadership, whose commanders were frequently replaced, were kept in check, among other by often replacing commanders. Russia's also fielded various paramilitary groups such as the Chechen Achmat or the Wagner Group. Wagner's rise and fall tell a lot about Russia's way of waging the Ukraine war. Wagner was founded presumably by former GRU-operative and neo-nazi Dmitrij Utkin in 2014, however its most visible leader became Evgenij Prigožin, who denied his connection with Wagner for a long time and formerly controlled Russia's *troll factory* (Aljazeera, 2022; Meduza, 2022). The links of Wagner to the Russian state appeared important from its inception (Kozera et al., 2020: p. 87) and despite appearing private, Wagner filled many gaps the Russian military left around the globe. In Aliyev's typology, Wagner resembles a *state-manipulated militia*, fielded along regular forces, paid by the state and deployed to do the «dirty jobs», similar to pro-Russian Chechen paramilitaries (Aliyev, 2016: p. 501). Reynolds (2019: pp. 1–5) claims that Wagner fails to be qualified as a private military company (PMC), because «it is not a true commercial entity operating in a global marketplace; (...) Wagner's place outside the market (...) stems from its origins as a covert creation of the Russian military». However, Wagner in Ukraine is different from Wagner in Syria or in African countries. While Wagner's history is connected with the conflict in Ukraine and especially with the Annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in the Donbas region in 2014, the Russian state also relied on it during the Syria intervention. The company later expanded to Africa and deployed to Libya, Sudan and the Central African Republic (Matusevich, 2019; Kozera et al., 2020: pp. 87ff.; Margolin, 2024b: pp. 80–160), where it engaged in diamond and gold business. In Sudan and the Central African Republic, Wagner is less a fighting force as in Syria or Ukraine but more a «security provider, helping regimes with training, site defence, and the protection of high-level officials» (Reynolds, 2019: p. 8), putting it more squarely «into the market». The full-scale war in Ukraine from 2022 on, gave Wagner and unexpected boost. Wagner drew several thousand convicts to its ranks, underscoring that Wagner provides mostly «expendable» troops, especially in battle for Bakhmut. In 2023, Wagner had recruited 50'000 prisoners, of which only 10'000 have remained with Wagner, while the rest have either «been killed, wounded, gone MIA, deserted, or surrendered». However, 5'000 have been freed after returning from their tour in Ukraine (Meduza, 2023a). Wagner has been a tool for shielding wider society from the war, to uphold the notion of a «special operation». Wagner troops have been more flexible and decentralized than regular troops, copying the approach of the more modern Ukrainian forces (Meduza, 2023b). The Wagner group's

uprising in June 2023 highlighted both its quest for influence and real power as well as its dependence on the state and its lack of support by the Russian elites. While the group was able to march to Moscow almost unhindered, there seemed to be no plan for what to do once it had reached the gates of Moscow. Despite Prigožin's death, Wagner's legacy continues leading one military expert to conclude that a «Wagnerization» of Russian armed forces has taken place (Margolin, 2024a). The fall of Wagner came along with a normalization of war as a key part of state ideology (Hayoz, Stepanenko, 2024: p. 343).

The comparison between Ukrainian voluntary battalions and Wagner – despite all the obvious differences – confirms a basic principle of the New wars approach, namely that there are actually more fighters on the ground than just official soldiers, which is hardly surprising. What is unexpected, however, are the fluctuating and changing degrees of connection and competition with state structures. While the Ukrainian units appear to have been successfully integrated into the state forces, Wagner had gained such an autonomy that the Russian state attempted to tame it by forcing it to enter into a contractual relationship with the state, culminating in the mutiny of June 2023 against the MoD. At this point, Wagner posed such a threat to the Russian military leadership and the state itself that a de facto reorganization and subjugation of Wagner was the only viable option. Table 2 highlights the differences between Ukrainian and Russian non-state combatants.

Table 2

Comparison between Ukrainian and Russian non-state combatants

Ukrainian non-state troops	Russian irregular troops
Personnel: voluntary	Personnel: better pay, convicts freed from prison
Before the war: partly against the state, now incorporated	Supporting the state, supported by the state, finally against the state (MoD)
Ukraine-only, patriots: conviction driven	Global reach, criminals: mercenaries, pecuniary goals
Guerilla-tactics supported by the population	Guerrilla-tactics against the population
Well-trained and equipped	Poorly trained, poorly equipped
Before 2022: Mainly privately funded	Before 2022: mainly state-funded, self-funded

A key conceptual challenge, however, is how to deal with the tension between territory and population. While Ukraine officially pursues the goal of restoring a clearly defined territorial integrity of the internationally recognized 1991 borders, Russia appears to be much opaquer in its territorial claims, which range from the temporarily occupied territories to «all of Ukraine» (Connor, 2025). Tat'jana Stanovaja aptly noted that «all of [the Kremlin]'s ideas about a limitless Russia, about Russia not a territory but people, traditions, history appealed very much to the conservatives, hawks, and to the ultra-patriots who thought this to be a drive to expansion. But now this starts to be annoying, as an expansion without new demarcations is senseless» (Stanovaja, 2022) and deprives military action of a clear territorial aim. However, the temporary capture of Kherson shows that it is not only about territorial claims. During the occupation, the city was filled with examples of Russian propaganda aimed at

convincing the residents that they were now, or had always been, Russian, depicting «photos of blonde mothers and children in Ukrainian national dress», promoting social benefits (Higgins, 2023), and that Kherson was to be Russian «forever». This propaganda was not «the work of someone who is very interesting. And that itself is interesting. The propaganda has been poor. They do not really know their audience anymore», argued Timothy Snyder (quoted in Higgins, 2023). The effort to convince Ukrainians to be Russians consisted in reductionist visions of Ukrainian culture, reduced to folklore like in Soviet times, and stripped of any political consequence like autonomy, independence, or statehood. As Mario Loyola put it, by «annexing» territories such as Crimea, the Donbas region or Kherson, Russia has tacitly chosen territory over political control (Loyola, 2023). It is not a paradox that in the Russian war against Ukraine, sovereignty and biopolitics are both visible on the multi-layered battlefield (Weizman, 2017) of Ukraine: Russia is trying to conquer territory attacking the Ukrainian military, to demoralize and subdue the population in un-occupied territories, attacking civilian infrastructure and residential areas, terrorizing and controlling Ukrainians in the temporary occupied territories of Ukraine, by manipulating identities, withholding basic services or through violence and torture.

In contrast, the Ukrainian state fights the war much more according and exclusively to a sovereign logic, holding on to or freeing its territories, attacking Russian military assets both in Ukraine itself and in the Russian Federation, it has much less the necessity to fight according to biopolitical methods to define and control a (conquered) population. The Kursk incursion was never meant to be permanent. In Ukrainian perspective, both territory and population are well defined: the borders are those of 1991 and the population those within these borders. Following Loyola's reasoning, however, Kyiv might face analogous questions about territory and population, as the reintegration of freed territories must be accompanied by the reintegration of those people who stayed on, which might be including «lustration mechanisms» (UATV, 2023). Hence, also in Ukrainian political discourse there is an awareness that the war is not only about territory but also about people: Defence minister Rustem Umerov stressed that the «priority remains protecting people, protecting the nation, liberating people from nearly 10 years of temporary occupation» (quoted in VOA, 2024); or the Ombudsman of Ukraine, Dmitro Lubinec', stressing that «we are fighting not only for territory, but also for the dignity of every human being» (Ombudsman, 2025). Also the Minister of Agrarian Policy acknowledged that «we are fighting not only for land, but also for people» (quoted in Government Portal, 2023). Table 3 below roughly recaps the logics the Russian imperialist and the national Ukrainian logics regarding territory and population.

Table 3

Comparison of national Ukrainian and Russian imperialist logics on territory and population

Items	National Ukrainian	Russian imperialist
Territory	One determined national territory	Continuous need to expand, unclear borders
Population	One political community	Assimilation under imperial culture

(De)globalization and the financing of the war

Regarding finances, two aspects will be discussed in this section: first, the role of the state and the mobilization of its resources for war; second, how the Ukraine war can be gauged as globalizing or globalization-induced war. Globalizing wars are wars that aim «at the abolition of state sovereignty or neutralizing its resistance potential», they «shun territorial conquest and administrative responsibilities» (Bauman, 2001: p. 1). Here, Bauman's point of reference are Western «humanitarian interventions», conducted in the name of the «international community», however, this community is, for Bauman, a bluff: «There is hardly another way of bringing the international community closer to reality than flexing muscles in its name» (Bauman, 2001: p. 16). The key point however is, that these globalizing wars have an effect to bring or keep the attacked state within the system of a globalized economy and «to adopt the neoliberal model demanded by the globalization» (Ramonet, quoted in Baumann, 2001: p. 16), not to conquer and to occupy territory but to «throw the heretofore closed territory wide open to the global circulation of capital, money and commodities» (Baumann, 2001: p. 16). From this perspective, the Russian attack on Ukraine will be analysed here as a *deglobalizing* war: in 2014, Russia first removed Crimea and then the Donbas region from the global circulation of capital through annexation, and in 2022, in removed itself from globalization. It is important to note, however, that as Russia and Western countries increasingly diverged, and Russia distanced itself from Western globalization, it concurrently made efforts to remain participant in other global flows and networks. Therefore, while Russian politics and rhetoric may be anti-Western, they do not necessarily espouse anti-capitalism and perhaps not even anti-globalization stances. Instead, Russia appears to be seeking new partners for an alternative form of globalization. «Since the start of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russia has intensified cooperation with China in an apparent 'pivot' to Asia. However, while this is presented in both Russia and Western countries as a sudden one, the broader context shows that this is more a gradual recalibration that has been taking place over several years. (...) The 'pivot' was declared by [the Kremlin] in 2012 in the same year that Russia hosted the APEC summit» (Kuhrt, 2018: p. 254). 2022 brought an enormous acceleration into this decoupling from western countries and rapprochement with Asia, especially with China. This pivot is especially visible regarding Russia's prime contribution to the global market: crude oil. While shipments to Northern Europe came completely to a halt by December 2022, in April 2023 out of Russia's 3.39 billion barrels daily, 2.75 went to Asia. According to the International Energy Agency, in April 2023, «Russian oil exports in March soared» (IEA, 2023). «While Russia's oil revenues rebounded by $1 billion to $12.7 billion, they were still down 43% compared to a year ago» (Moscow Times, 2023). This deglobalizing war, however, is not a «hit and run affair» that Bauman had in mind (Bauman, 2001: p. 17). For both Ukraine and Russia, the war consumes high resources usually to be allocated to other ends. For the aggressor-state, Russia, this is widely an old war, in which the state had diverted and mobilized resources for military purposes long before 2022 and even before 2014, morphing into *military statism* or into a *militarization of society* (Hayoz, Stepanenko, 2024: pp. 350–354). Additionally, Mark Galeotti and Anna Arutunyan have shown how organized crime played a key role in the war economies in Donbas and in Crimea

since 2014 (Galeotti, Arutunyan, 2022), triggering the form of economy that Kaldor deems to be typical for New wars, especially in the temporary occupied Donbas. Overall, «the scale may vary but the Russian economy is on a war footing. Maintaining that bellicose posture is Russia's top economic priority, according to the country's minister of finance» (Kasparov, 2025).

Ukraine, the aggressed state, did not prepare for war with its neighbour. On the contrary, «from the middle of the 1990s until 2014 Ukraine had conducted a consistent policy of disarmament [and] sharply reduced its army personnel» (Hayoz, Stepanenko, 2024: p. 358). Nowadays, it must not only cover the costs of wartime military spending and ramp up its military industry but also address civilian losses and infrastructure destruction. Consequently, in economic terms, Ukraine is effectively fighting an old war, necessitating the mobilisation of all available state resources. Unlike Russia, however, Ukraine can rely more on foreign assistance. Its armed forces and overall budget have received substantial subsidies from Western states, including for the payment of government salaries, pensions, and medical infrastructure (Liu, 2022). This discussion gains additional importance as with Donald Trump and its *America First* policy, the United States seemingly emerged as a deglobalizing power. The U.S. took a much more sceptical stance towards its allies both in economic and military terms, de facto, leaving much of the support to Ukraine to European countries. The Kiel Institute for the World Economy, which monitors support for Ukraine, has highlighted that European contributions have exceeded those of the US since March 2025. However, there is still a discrepancy between the aid that has been pledged and the aid that has been disbursed: «Europe could fully compensate for the halt in U.S. aid, if each of the European countries and the EU institutions (...), would mobilize 0.21% of their GDP to Ukraine» (Irto et al., 2025: p. 8). The study also shows, that Denmark and Estonia were already above target, committing roughly 0.7% of their 2023 GDP to Ukraine, followed by Lithuania and Latvia (0.5%), and Sweden and Finland (0.3%) (Irto et al., 2025: pp. 8–9). From the Ukrainian perspective, this war could also be read as a globalising war, as it is about bringing and keeping the country closer to Western (European) centres of economy and politics.

To summarize, in economic terms, the war in Ukraine has elements of an old war for both Russia and Ukraine, as both countries have to devote a high proportion of their resources to financing the war and both are approaching the establishment of a war economy. Unlike Ukraine, it seems that the Russian economy and general population are less involved and engaged in direct military operations. However, there are certainly huge regional differences. A substantial proportion of the workforce is now directly or indirectly economically linked to the war economy. Furthermore, Russia has suffered almost no infrastructure losses, as the war is only being waged in Ukraine. Ukraine, on the other hand, has to use all its human and material resources to defend itself. Ukraine received overt external support, whereas Russia's support was initially covert and transactional. Russia received support in the form of arms supplies from Iran and North Korea, as well as personnel from various Central Asian countries, North Korea and Cuba (Hartog, 2025). As the United States under Trump adopted a more ambiguous stance, Russia's international support became more overt. Both China and India have maintained good relations with Moscow: the former has become

Russia's main trading partner, while the latter is a major buyer of Russian oil. According to the Bruegel think tank, both Asian countries, which did not impose sanctions on Russia, are among the top providers of goods subject to export bans (Bruegel, 2025). For Ukraine, it is not only a de-colonial war but also a war to stay within a Western or at least European global order, to gain access to the European Union, while for Russia it is a deglobalizing war that decouples itself and the temporarily occupied territories from Western-style globalization while accelerating and deepening Russia's pivot to the East.

Conclusions

In light of the way the war in Ukraine is waged, does the distinction between old and New wars still make sense? Empirically, there probably never were pure cases of New wars, as critics such as Malešević have already outlined. Rather, New wars are much more an Ideal type in the Weberian sense. The 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia further confirms this assessment. As an analytical tool, though, the New wars hypothesis remains useful, as this paper has shown. It focuses analytical attention on specific aspects of the conflict, such as identity politics, the type of combatants involved and the global economics of war. Nevertheless, this paper has also demonstrated that the New wars hypothesis can be further refined in the context of the war in Ukraine. Postcolonialism and deglobalisation have been proposed here as two key notions to be added to Kaldor's original continuum between old and New wars.

Regarding the first dimension and the multi-directional logics of identity politics, Russian identity discourses under the current leadership have increasingly focused on the primacy of Russia within the post-Soviet space, and the forced assimilation and subjugation of other peoples within a renewed empire. Such an imperial and dictatorial Russian identity leaves no room for a separate Ukrainian national subjectivity, unless it is subaltern and reduced to cultural clichés. For Russia itself, the post-colonial era never seems to have been fully achieved, in the sense of a conscious recognition of Russia's past and present imperialism in the Eurasian space, including in Ukraine. The entire «Ukrainians and Russians are one people» propagandistic discourse, or the assumption of a Ukraine and Russia as «brotherly people» are a denial of Russia's colonial past and of other peoples' identities. Instead of recognizing its negative effects on other societies, Russia rather reverted to a neocolonial stance vis-a-vis its neighbourhood. «Russian colonialism and Russian colonial identity are not reformable (...). Nearly three years have passed since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and we still have not seen any roadmap from Russian intellectuals on how to rethink Russian colonialism» (Kassymbekova, 2024).

The Ukrainian discourse instead stresses Ukrainian multinationality, but also underscores distance from the Soviet legacy. In contrast to the aggressor state's case, the war is not about restoring an imperial past, but to restore and to confirm the Ukrainian nation, decolonizing it from Russian influence. In contrast to the Russian neo-imperial discourse, it not only displays a negative assessment of the Soviet and Russian imperial legacy but also provides a vision for the future of Ukraine, possibly

continuing an Ukrainian Europeanization process. While the Russian neo-imperial discourse is backward looking, the Ukrainian one is forward-looking. The 2022 full-scale invasion has only accelerated this process.

With regard to the second dimension, this paper has demonstrated that the emergence of Wagner in Russia and of voluntary battalions in Ukraine should not mislead observers into conflating them into a broad category such as PMC. Also, the comparison should not lead to the conclusion that there has been an increase in the number of PMCs and militias in New wars. Instead, Wagner and the Ukrainian voluntary battalions demonstrate the numerous ways in which non-state combatants can be used in armed conflict and controlled by the state. While Wagner might function as a typical PMC in other theatres of war, albeit under state influence and control, in Ukraine it has developed a life of its own, with varying degrees of independence and influence according to the whims of battle and the Kremlin. Wagner was given a great deal of leeway, but when it overstepped the mark by rebelling against the Ministry of Defence and was brought back into line. The topic of foreign mercenaries in the Russian military has been mentioned only in passing. Similarly, Ukrainian volunteer battalions were largely independent before 2022, but have since then been successfully reintegrated into state structures, as the state and these units now share the same goals. This development in no way diminishes the accomplishments they achieved, for example in defending Mariupol and the Azovstal steelworks. While Russia fostered competition between various regular and irregular forces at the beginning of the war, Ukraine seemed to be more successful in integrating as many groups as possible. These two approaches also served a social purpose: as long as Wagner was prominently fighting in Ukraine, its presence and role on the battlefield lent credence to the propaganda of the *special military operation* narrative. However, its downfall symbolised the normalisation of war within Russian politics and society. The integration of Ukrainian voluntary battalions, on the other hand, indicated unity among different strands of Ukrainian politics and society in the face of Russian aggression. Under a different guise this process as well, symbolized a normalisation of warfare. As mentioned above, however, after the war, there might be a return of Ukrainian non-state military groups.

Finally, the question regarding financing of the war points at the much larger issue of deglobalization: The war in Ukraine is neither a globalization-induced, nor a globalizing war, but possibly the first major war of *deglobalization*, defined here as a decoupling between Western countries, including Ukraine, on the one hand, and Russia and possibly China on the other hand. This decoupling has been chosen by the Russian leadership in a move that Alexander Etkind calls a Russian «disruptive campaign against modernity» (Etkind, 2023: p. 8) and which would reflect Vadim Tsimbursky's idea that cutting ties from Europe was the only option for Russia, which is «too weak and fragmented within to succeed in a globalized world» (Krastev, Holmes, 2024). For Ukraine, however, this war could be indeed a globalizing one, with European resources available to bring and keep Ukraine into liberal globalisation, especially given the expected influx of investment after the war and the reforms undertaken by Ukraine to align with EU standards. The Russian decoupling does not mean an end to the capitalistic, globalized mode of production, in neither part of the world, but implies that capitalism might rein in separate systems that are hostile to

each other, and that each capitalism will be governed by its own rules. In particular, Russian identity politics is widely silent about globalization-induced market exchanges – while authors such as Dugin or Prokhanov tend to restore some sort of socialism (particularly the latter), the Russian state just seeks new partners to undertake such exchanges, largely based on resource extraction. Hence, official Russia is anti-Western, but not anti-market. Thus, Ukraine, together with Europe, might establish a separate space from Russia. The results of the analysis are summarised in the table below (table 4).

Table 4

Dimensions of the New war paradigm in regard to Ukraine and Russia

Items	Ukraine	Russia
Identity politics	Patriotic nationalism, civic understanding of Ukrainianness, preserving the nation, post-colonial, integrative internally, rejection of the Imperial and Soviet past, vision for a future	Neo-colonialism, neo-imperialism, chauvinism, revanchist affirmation of the Imperial and Soviet past, destroying Ukrainian identity, future based on imperial-Soviet continuity
Modes of warfare	Integration of non-state combatants	Mobilization of all forms of combatants, fostering internal competition
Financing	Mobilization of the entire state economy, external financing, integration with Western countries	Mobilization of the entire state economy, deglobalization, separation from Western countries

Future research could focus on understanding the dimensions and mechanisms of deglobalisation, and the formation of potential blocs for exchange and interaction. While the post-1945 rules-based order was never perfect, all major powers formally adhered to it. This order was also the basis for the post-1990 globalization, a *unipolar moment,* that allowed to justify Western military interventions into civil wars. This order has now been shattered, creating power-based spheres of influence and increasing multipolarity, with no rules- or value-based ordering principles in place. This makes the type of conflict seen in old wars more likely. However, as the Ukrainian case shows, the current conflict has characteristics of both old and New wars. Further research could also examine how postcoloniality shapes the conflict from the perspective of the aggressor state seeking to re-establish a colonial situation and from Ukraine's perspective as it fights to maintain its sovereignty, thereby contributing to Europe's independence.

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ФІЛІП КАЗУЛА

Старе чи нове? Війна Росії проти України та пострадянська політика ідентичності

Парадигма «Нових війн» стала важливим евристичним інструментом для розуміння організованого насильства, яке відбувалося на більшій частині Східної Європи після краху комунізму у 1989 році. Цей підхід був особливо корисним, щоб кинути світло на основні цілі війн, нових комбатантів, які беруть у них участь, і на те, як фінансуються конфлікти в глобалізованому світі. Хоча насильство, застосоване для анексії Криму та захоплення Луганська й Донецька у 2014 році та в подальшому, здавалося, значною мірою відповідало принципам парадигми «Нових війн», напад Росії на Україну в лютому 2022 року, схоже, відсилає нас до методів «старих війн». Ця стаття має на меті не пояснити причини війни, а проаналізувати меха-

ніку нинішнього конфлікту під кутом зору парадигми «Нових війн». Таким чином, стаття містить як аналіз війни, розв'язаної Росією проти України, так і роздуми про актуальність концепції «Нових війн». Стаття складається з двох частин. У першому розділі розглянуто ключові елементи парадигми «Нових війн» і запрооновано критичну перспективу з погляду біополітики та постколоніалізму. Другий розділ застосовує висновки першого розділу для теоретичного обговорення війни в Україні.

Ключові слова: *Україна, Росія, війна, «Нова війна», неоімперіалізм, біополітика, постколоніалізм, деглобалізація*

PHILIPP CASULA

Old or New? Russia's War against Ukraine and Post-Soviet identity politics

The New wars paradigm was an important heuristic tool for understanding the organised violence that occurred in most of Eastern Europe following the collapse of communism in 1989. This approach was particularly useful for shedding light on the underlying goals of wars, the new combatants involved and how conflict is funded in a globalised world. While the violence used to annex Crimea and seize Luhansk and Donetsk from Ukraine in 2014 and afterwards seemed largely in line with the tenets of the New wars paradigm, Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 appears to hark back to the methods of the 'old wars'. This article aims to analyse the mechanics of the current conflict from the perspective of the New wars paradigm, rather than to explain the reasons for the war. Thus, the article provides both an analysis of the war Russia has launched against Ukraine and a reflection on the relevance of the concept of New wars. The article is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the key elements of the New wars paradigm, offering a critical perspective from biopolitics and postcolonialism. The second section uses the findings from the first one to discuss the war in Ukraine in theoretical terms.

Keywords: *Ukraine, Russia, War, New war, neo-imperialism, biopolitics, postcolonialism, deglobalization*