THE IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE EAST OF UKRAINE ON RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SCHOLARS OF UKRAINE ACROSS EUROPE

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This paper aims to explore the ways in which the Euromaidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the armed conflict in the Donbas region have affected relationships among scholars based in Western Europe and Ukraine who focus on Ukraine in their work. This study draws upon the idea that knowledge production is never an individual endeavour, hence the effect of political crises on scholarly communities may be particularly traumatising, leading to a polarisation within the intellectual field. Drawing upon a series of interviews with social scientists and humanities scholars specialising on Ukraine, I discuss the ways in which negative changes expressed themselves, the connections that were perceived as particularly affected, ideas of positive changes, reconciliation, and the development of new ties and collaborations.

On the one hand, the conflict has had a strong impact on relationships within the field of Ukrainian Studies and beyond, in terms of disrupting both local and transnational connections in the real and virtual spaces of universities, conferences, and social media discussions. Increasingly militant language has been used to describe the shifts in academic relationships that have happened over the recent few years. Typically, relationships with Russian scholars are mentioned as being particularly affected. While opinions on perspectives of traveling to Russia vary, not crossing its borders often becomes a political decision. The language used by the researchers to describe changes includes emotionally and politically charged descriptions of academics, mostly centred on the ideas of "taking sides".

On the other hand, the destructive effect has been far from universal. The ideas of reconciliation and reformatting of problematic relationships

amongst researchers seem to be discussed by an increasing number of scholars. These discussions focus on the new transnational ways of conducting research, struggles to maintain the connections, establishing new contacts, drawing upon political solidarity, rather than differences, and thinking about the need to (re-)establish a dialogue on a larger scale in the future.

Framing the case

My first thoughts on the topic of challenges faced by researchers studying large-scale social protests and armed conflicts arose during the Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the first months of the armed conflict in Donbas. Some articles have already been published where researchers specifically discuss the problematic issues of defining the boundary between "involvement and objective expertise", and the dynamics of ethical approaches to the politics of writing and expression in the changing political circumstances (Likhachev, 2014); or explore the challenges posed by researcher positionality while conducting fieldwork during the protests (Malyutina, 2016).

However, thus far, reflections on the impact of the conflict on relationships among academics that have been published, or otherwise articulated by researchers and other commentators have been sparse and not very detailed. For instance, Hrytsak (2014, p. 227) criticises the views on Ukraine dominant in Russian academic discourse that draws upon a "widespread belief that Ukraine as a "failed/nationalized state" has no future and no modern subjectivity". Zhuk (2014) traces and questions his positionality as framed within (and as opposed to) the Russian-focused historiographical scholarly community in the US. Portnov (2015, p. 723) observes, from within German academia, the challenges and limitations of local Ukrainian studies that persist in the field and reveal "the strength of historical stereotypes and conventional categories of explanation". Elsewhere, he argues: "The attitude to these events [the Maidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and war on part of the territories of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts] and the language employed to describe these, have turned into an identification mark of political affiliation, even beyond the boundaries of Eastern Europe. Emotional and ideological tension is also evident in academic publications. In these, facts are often selected to fit pre-determined conclusions; information sources are often not verified; certain statements in social media are neither contextualised nor called into question; descriptions of a dynamic socio-political situation are frequently static and subject to essentialised categories of "identity"; and serious transnational and transregional comparisons remain rare" (Portnov, 2016, p. 103). Turkova (2016) reviews the impact of the war on professional connections between Russian and Ukrainian linguists, arguing that "scholars find

it impossible to rise above the fray and engage in pure, disinterested analysis", which has led to mutual isolation of research communities, and has limited the opportunities for research on linguistic processes during the armed conflict.

This interview-based study of scholars of Ukraine, and the challenges that they have been facing in their work since the Maidan, suggests that the conflict has, indeed, had a strong impact on relationships within the field of Ukrainian Studies and beyond. Both local and transnational connections have been affected. Politics has seeped into research communities, universities, and conferences. Increasingly militant language has been used to describe the impact of the conflict on academic relationships. Typically, relationships with Russian scholars are mentioned as being particularly affected. On the other hand, the destructive effect has been far from universal. Concerns about disruption of relationships are often accompanied by reflections on adaptation strategies; and ideas of reconciliation and reformatting of problematic relationships amongst researchers seem to be discussed by an increasing number of scholars, even if it has been happening in informal conversations rather than in analytical papers. How exactly the conflict has influenced relationships amongst fellow researchers and what are the implications of its impact for their work, are the questions that need a detailed exploration if we are to understand how to produce academic knowledge on, during, and in the midst of an armed conflict.

Methods

This study is empirically based upon 20 semi-structured expert interviews with researchers that were conducted via Skype and in person between November 2016 and November 2017. Skype was chosen because the interviewees were geographically dispersed across six different countries. The easiest way to access them was via this increasingly popular medium for qualitative research that combines a "face-to-face experience with the flexibility and "private space" elements offered via telephone interviews" (Hanna, 2012, p. 241). Respondents were recruited from personal acquaintances and colleagues with elements of snowballing technique. This strategy seems most appropriate for this study which represents the first stage of a planned larger-scale research. The interviews were conducted in Russian and English and lasted between forty minutes and one and a half hour each. Later they were transcribed verbatim and analysed using MAXQDA software. The analysis included development of a system of codes and bringing them together in more general categories, which helped identify a number of key themes.

In selecting and approaching my respondents, I intended to keep the sample diverse in terms of disciplinary backgrounds, research interests, and origins of the subjects. The early nature of this research phase, time constraints and concerns about generalisability, required the imposition of some limitations. For example, the representation of

Russian and US scholars was low; the majority of the respondents are based in Western European countries and Ukraine.

At the time of the interviews three of my subjects were based in Austria, one in Israel, three in the UK, seven in Ukraine, two in France, one in Estonia, two in Romania and one in the US, working in universities, research centres and think tanks; one was a Master student. Not all of them were involved exclusively in academic activity. More than half of them don't live in their countries of origin, which include Ukraine, Russia, the UK, Germany, Moldova and Belarus. Two of the Ukrainian respondents are from Crimea and Donbas, having had to either abandon the idea of going to the annexed territory again, or leave their home city when the war started. There were 11 women and nine men in the sample. Their disciplinary fields of expertise include sociology, political science, history, literature and culture, philosophy, development studies and policy analysis. Among their research interests are topics as diverse as the far right, memory politics, gender, social movements, migration, ideologies, and cultural memory (to name just the major ones). For the purposes of this paper, the respondents are anonymised.

Finally, I would like to clarify my position as a researcher in this study. I am a scholar who has been working on Ukraine-related themes since the beginning of the Euromaidan (namely, on the topics of Ukrainian migrants' protest activism in London and the challenges faced by Russian migrant journalists living in Ukraine), and have been actively involved in some common academic activities (conferences, academic publications). Furthermore, I have been engaged in the Ukrainian communities in London, and have lived in Ukraine for a few months. I believe that this experience has provided me ample grounds for developing rapport with most of my respondents (many of whom I had already known personally). However, this does not preclude some issues potentially arising in the future, for example, when interviewing figures who are less known to me personally, or significantly more senior scholars. Nevertheless, my experience of interviewing researchers as a researcher has proved to be a largely smooth and engaging process.

Research community

The Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing armed conflict in the East of Ukraine have had a strong impact on the relationships among the scholars and public intellectuals focusing on Ukraine-related topics. "People have quarrelled", a respondent briefly stated at the beginning of his reflections on this issue. However, this statement has to be disentangled. In the following sections of this paper I will concentrate on the descriptions of changes in relationships experienced by my informants. These include the ways in which these negative changes expressed themselves, connections that were perceived as particularly affected, and ideas of positive change, reconciliation, or development of new ties and collaborations.

Militant language

As suggested by Yurchuk and Marchenko (2018, p. 142), against the background of an armed conflict, predictably, "the questions of betrayal, loyalty, patriotism and treason came to the forefront of [Ukrainian] intellectuals' discourse". Scholars are not an exception.

The language that the respondents use to talk about the changes in their relationships with fellow researchers is far from neutral. One of the respondents argues that the protests, the revolution and the conflict have led to a noticeable fragmentation within the field, where previous contacts and groupings have disappeared. But new coalitions based upon research interests as well as political views have emerged at the same time: "this is not just one frontline", she stresses. Conflicts and disagreements with those who were previously considered as colleagues are mentioned by the majority of my respondents. Strikingly, often these are described using a particularly militant language that employs metaphors like "frontline".

The expressions used by the interviewed researchers while talking about the impact of the conflict on the relationships with fellow scholars that they have engaged with and observed, include emotionally and politically charged descriptions of academics as subjects occupying particular spaces and engaging in certain practices that emerge as peculiar to the current situation. Thus, the "enemy" metaphor is commonly used by a number of other respondents speaking about the transformation of relationships among researchers. Scholars also describe particular colleagues or generalised academics as being "pro" or "anti" (e.g. Ukraine), *regime apologists*, *traitors* or *dissidents*, being *partisan* or *unflinching* (in the face of possible political persecution). For example, a political scientist speaks about the disappearance of a research community where "colleagues stop being colleagues":

[...] because they are either on one side of the frontline, or on the other. [...] When colleagues become either companions in arms, or the enemy's associates, it is the end of a research community.

The spatial metaphors include *information battlefields*, *barricades*, *watersheds*, *camps*, *dividing lines*, but also *in-between* (the opposing *camps* or *sides*). *Taking sides* and *positions* are frequently brought up. Another political scientist says:

Many people have quarrelled. When the Yanukovych regime really started to suppress the protesters, it was a watershed moment. I thought that after that people who focus on Ukraine in their research and have lived in Ukraine cannot stay neutral. It does not matter if they were researchers or observers. This is a moment when you need to state clearly, if you are for or against something. There's a need to establish a kind of barricade and to understand who is on which side.

Scholars in these circumstances are described as engaging in a variety of practices. In terms of practices going beyond the academic space, such as public political statements and media appearances,

these may be characterised as *protecting/defending* (e.g. Ukraine), *participation in/contribution to information war*, e*ngaging in propaganda*, *whitewashing* (a regime) and *engaging in disreputable ties*. While speaking about activities that are more related to particular relationships within the communities of researchers, respondents mention *attacks*, *clashes*, *stigmatisation*, *manhunt* or *reprisals*.

There are also a few metaphors of a less negative nature, or signifying some positive dynamics, such as talking about *not crossing the line* or *not having direct clashes* with colleagues, or describing some members of their academic community *sobering up*.

Even those who do not speak about actually severing ties with other scholars describe the polarisation within the academic space, where ideological divisions become increasingly prominent, and discourse turns more radical. Ukrainian Studies as a field is criticised by many of my respondents for the increase of such polarised discourse and intensification of 'patriotic' tone: it has "become pro-Ukrainian", argues a scholar who identifies herself as a relative newcomer to the field. Another person speaks about reluctance to participate in some discussions:

Sometimes I just don't want to participate in discussions, because it's impossible, everything is so heated. [...] There's this dichotomous perception, "zrada-peremoha" ['betrayal-victory', a Ukrainian meme reflecting the polarisation of public discourse]. *If you're not promoting peremoha, you must be part of zrada. My research has never succumbed to this dichotomy.*

The increased politicisation of topics like memory politics, the far right, or the Russian language in Ukraine has occasionally limited some of the scholars' participation in discussions on the topics. A number of scholars propose that those who do not belong to the Ukrainian institutionalised academic community and/or are not Ukrainian citizens "might feel more freedom [...] no one can expect patriotism from us", or "explicit opposition to the other side". "You can't really talk about [Ukrainian] patriotism of foreign researchers, but there is a trend of a normative support of Ukraine", says a non-Ukrainian researcher.

Also, some researchers mention the intensified tension between scholars with different political leanings; in this context, the terms *left* and *right* are sometimes used to underline and explain the worsening of relationships. For example, a left-wing sociologist speaks about a number of other scholars, who, in his view, have been diminishing the role of the far right during the Maidan. Whilst describing the change to his increasingly negative attitude towards them he sums up: "They are right-wing, I am left-wing. [...] There is some political dishonesty, intellectual dishonesty on their part". A political scientist, on the other hand, speaks about not being able to preserve "normal relationships", among others, with scholars of "left-wing or radical left views who turned to denigrating the "fascist junta".

In this respect, splits in the academic relationships often coincided with some existing differences in political views which resulted in what,

as another academic describes, is a "visualisation of the ideological affiliations of this or that colleague: those who rather had [...] right-wing or far left orientations mainly tended to have a more pro-Russian position [...] the moderate left [...] were mainly on the other side". Although such generalisations may seem to present a binary and somewhat simplistic interpretation, they suggest that, often, break-ups of academic relationships and radicalisation of discourse related to reactions to the developments in Ukraine have interwoven with and intensified the existing differences in scholars' political views: "the existing dividing lines have become crystallised", a respondent notes. This is not to suggest that the splits have been completely pre-determined by the scholars' positioning at different ends of the political spectrum: if that were the case, none of these would have been seen as something surprising, unexpected, or disappointing. Rather, this points to the scholars establishing links and continuities between academics' views on the situation in Ukraine and their wider political views, as well as alliances or oppositions based on these, with an attempt to explain further polarisation of the intellectual field as something that has already been prone to divisions.

The idea of maintaining boundaries within scholarly communities reflects in a practice that has long been described as one of the key features of intellectuals. Bourdieu argues that "a central property of the intellectual field" is that it "is the site of struggles over who does and does not belong to it". (Wacquant, 1989, p. 4). Suny and Kennedy (1999, p. 404) suggest that intellectuals may attempt to delegitimise others by denying them the intellectual distinction. Similarly, some of my respondents, while commenting on their relationships with other scholars, discursively deprive others of 'proper' scholarly qualities. This includes accusations of "intellectual dishonesty", speaking about "colleagues who stop being colleagues", but also mentioning former colleagues in a context where, for them, the respondent "stopped being a scholar or a researcher, in their view, because they thought I was whitewashing the "Kyiv junta" during the Maidan".

One of the respondents very vividly criticizes a researcher who, in his opinion, "has received a completely inadequate amount of attention from a part of the liberal audience in Ukraine as a super-expert [...] uses very dubious methods of argument often drawing upon random coincidences [...] has gained notoriety among some scholars [...] draws upon some complicated conspiracy theory [...] is inclined towards categorical assertions, exaggerations, search for traitors". At the same time, later he accuses the same person and others of "not using their expertise when it's most needed [...] in order to promote a particular political position". Yet elsewhere he claims that the described subject has a "low academic productivity" and lacks publications in "serious academic journals" with high impact factors. Short of aiming to validate or counter these assumptions, it is rather interesting to look at the variety of arguments that might be employed (usually selectively, but sometimes, like in this case, simultaneously) in order to strip someone of the status of a 'se-

rious' scholar: there is critique of methods and ideas, presentation as opposed to or even ridiculed by 'proper academics', accusations of pursuing political rather than intellectual aims, and derogation of purportedly not fulfilling the necessary academic criteria (publications).

Such statements represent a form of not only political but also intellectual boundary-setting, establishing a distinction between scholars specifically. If, according to Bauman (1992, p. 81), "any attempt to accord or deny the status of an intellectual is an attempt at self-construction", they also become part of "self-production and self-reproduction" (Ibid., 1992, p. 81) of some scholars, where delegitimisation of others also becomes an attempt at self-legitimisation. Besides, such claims also help justify taking any further discussion with or about the subject of critique beyond scholarly polemics, resorting to mockery or particularly aggressive language use, and complete severing of the ties.

The delegitimisation of other scholars also refers to the discussions and arguments with some colleagues as having become devoid of 'academic' qualities and the resultant lamentable loss of academic confrontation. In such cases, interaction including confrontation is described as either completely disappearing, or turning into non-academic opposition. This is not limited to verbal accusations and complaints: sometimes, the consequences are more tangible.

Spaces of conflict

In terms of practical implications of splits in the research communities, people talk about *inability* to share common physical space with some (former) colleagues, such as attending the same events together. Respondents commonly describe such situations along the lines of: "we could stand next to each other and diligently try not to notice each other". One of the scholars talks about appearance of "non-handshakable colleagues": "these are the people who would not get invited to a research seminar, while everyone else would. [...] They have become marginalised". People talk about avoiding participation in conferences "because I know who organises them", and relying more on communication with more closely-minded colleagues (one respondent calls this "support networks of academics"). While most of the respondents admit there has been "nothing dramatic" in the changes of their relationships which were limited to avoiding particular people and situations, yet a number of scholars use harsher metaphors, pointing at emergent perceptions of others as enemies, and at inability to have "academic confrontation" at events that turn into "information battlefields" instead. A political scientist recalls his former PhD examiner:

[He] always used to be a somewhat apologetically minded commentator of the Putin regime, and decided to follow this path now. [...] We often see each other at conferences, and have known each other for many years, and I'm indebted to him in a way [...] I don't communicate with him anymore.

While conference discussions seem to have become increasingly tense and the space for calm, constructive discussions on politically sensitive topics has narrowed, according to the researchers, quarrels and arguments usually take place in the online social space rather than during personal encounters. Unfriending or banning someone on Facebook is a practice that most of the respondents recall having resorted to, or being affected by. "I knew [a researcher] virtually, but in winter 2014 he decided I was a traitor and unfriended me", one of the respondents recalls.

Participating in heated discussions in the social media is also something that most of the scholars talk about – most commonly, mentioning that they could have engaged in such discussions more at the beginning of the Maidan but trying to avoid it now. "I think in the heat of the Maidan, there were quite a few discussions on Facebook and social media that got pretty heated. [...] my personal policy is that I don't find those kinds of discussions too productive, so I don't partake in them", a respondent says. Another admits: "There was a period when I took part in [online discussions] more. [...] Then I saw it all primitive and get predictable [...] I thought there was no point [in continuing]".

Relationships with Russian scholars

Relationships of Ukraine- and Western Europe-based scholars with Russian researchers are worth particular noticing: when asked about the impact of the conflict on research relationships, respondents frequently start talking about Russian (ex-)colleagues without being specifically prompted. Stories about actual break-ups and impossibility of further collaboration feature most prominently in the narratives of those whose research concerns contemporary politics. A Ukraine-based political scientist says:

There was a certain bifurcation in relationships with Russian colleagues, those of them who are still finding justifications for the Putin regime, and "Krymnash" in particular, contributed to this bifurcation.

Some seem to question the very possibility of discussion between Ukrainians and Russians, arguing that the language for dialogue is yet to be elaborated. Concerns have been expressed about the potentially destructive impact of the war on links with Russian academia as such, and the consequent decline in the level of expertise on Russia.

While analysing the place of disenchantment (understood as disillusionment related to a feeling of betrayal) in statements and arguments of four prominent Ukrainian public intellectuals (two of whom are also scholars), Yurchuk and Marchenko (2018, p. 157) observe: "although Russia is often mentioned in the intellectuals' narratives it is not an object of disenchantment since there were no traces of enchantment in the first place". Clearly, there are differences between what scholars say in public statements and in face-to-face interviews, or when individual scholars exchange their views. However, the changes in attitudes

described by my interviewees suggest a more intricate situation. While there has been no sign of enchantment with Russia as a state, a number of scholars speak with regret about losing the opportunity to engage with Russia both professionally and emotionally.

For instance, a researcher based in Britain, admitting that he used to be "a big fan of the Russians", talks about finding it "really hard to be enthusiastic about just Russia more generally", and feeling "a little bit disappointed with Russian culture, or cultural responses to what's happening". Disappointment also stretches to colleagues studying Russia but "not quite appreciating how shocking it is that this has happened, and how this is not acceptable".

People recall developing reluctance, or reconsidering their attitude to exploring Russia-related topics. "I did some research in Russia before 2014 [...] Now I don't understand how I could possibly write about Russia", a Ukrainian scholar who lives and works in Western Europe says, pointing at the emotional impact of the developments of the last years. Another respondent, while also mentioning the emotional difficulties connected with research in Russia, speaks critically about the distance created by reluctance to study the country that impedes the "understanding of [the Russian] society".

Notably, while Russia (as a research topic and as a location of research institutions and colleagues) is mentioned frequently when the respondents discuss the impact of the conflict on scholarly communities; this does not in all cases mean that the relationships with Russia-based scholars have been affected more or less than those with others. A number of people do not even have established contacts with Russian researchers. Rather, it prompts that for at least half of my respondents, the topic of tensions and divisions in academia that are associated with the Maidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the war, immediately invokes reflections on relationships with Russian colleagues.

However, some of my interviewees recall situations where they witnessed Russian scholars holding views and saying things that are interpreted as one-sided and uncritically pro-Ukrainian. For instance, one of the researchers describes witnessing a dialogue between scholars from Russia and Western Ukraine, where the latter "almost had to defend this Donetsk-Luhansk formation" while his opponent, as observed by the respondent, put all the blame on Russia while ignoring "the more complex social, economic, and regional mechanisms". A Ukrainian historian based in Western Europe talks about how some Russian colleagues are "inclined to idealise some of what is happening in Ukraine, and I feel sad to dissuade them, because these are all sweet illusions".

Beyond the level of personal connections, academic relationships with Russia also seem to be affected in other ways. Some of the respondents mention criticism by Ukrainian colleagues for the (potential) decisions to publish in Russia, or of going to academic events there. Generally, concerns about going to Russia on fieldwork or to participate in conferences are widespread. Among my respondents, these quandaries

have often resulted in making decisions not to go to Russia, sometimes even when this had been initially considered necessary for their ongoing research. The reasons for not going to Russia can be summarised as physical threats, psychological discomfort and instrumental issues.

Physical safety concerns as such are not necessarily the main issue in this sense, while these are often mentioned, for example, by the researchers of the far right (who also describe these as traditional in their research field), political scientists, and/or those who have a certain amount of publicity, combined with a highly critical stance towards Russia. For instance, one political scientist notes that he felt "not only a psychological but a very real physical threat that if I went to the territory of the Russian Federation [...] there is non-zero threat to my own safety".

Not all of my respondents are active and recognised public intellectuals, though. More commonly, the motives of not going to Russia are described in terms of feelings of uncertainty, lack of predictability, and personal discomfort. One of the researchers has cancelled an already planned research trip to an archive in Russia after the Ukrainian Foreign Minister warned Ukrainians against travelling to Russia in relation to the latter's detainment and accusations of espionage of the Ukrainian journalisst Roman Sushchenko (Ukrinform.ua, 2016). "If the Foreign Minister issues this statement, maybe this should be taken seriously. I thought so. I felt really uncomfortable about going [to Russia]. I didn't want to check out myself whether it was safe or not", says the scholar, who also went through an uneasy email conversation with the archive. Furthermore, the general concerns about going to the country waging war against Ukraine and facing the increasingly authoritarian regime are mentioned by a number of researchers. A scholar that last went to Russia for fieldwork in 2014 recalls: "It was so hard, and unexpectedly hard, because I had done research in Russia before and it was fine. [...] It was hard to hear things that I heard, I mean the propaganda effect... I realised that I was not ready and I had to leave".

Increasing difficulties of a more technical nature are also described by scholars, in addition to concerns about threats and risks. These include being unsure whether to use Ukrainian passport if crossing the border and arranging research interviews, to communicating with research institutions and local scholars, community gatekeepers and potential research subjects. A researcher doing a project on WWII veterans talks about difficulties of finding access to respondents in Russia, and struggling with gatekeepers who "did not want to put me in touch with the veterans". "It's not only safer but also easier [to work on Russian or Soviet history] in Kyiv than in Moscow now", she concludes.

In general, at the time of the interviews, nine out of 20 respondents said they would rather not go to Russia in the present circumstances, for reasons that have been outlined above. One was uncertain. For five people, the question did not seem relevant, either because their work did not require going to Russia, or they had few Russian colleagues (or

met them outside Russia), or they were Russian citizens themselves. However, for five scholars, travelling to Russia did not seem to be a significant problem. It would be fair to say that the impact of the conflict on transnational academic relationships has made scholars reconsider their connections and ideas of joint academic practices, and made them more sensitive towards their and others' words, rather than only talk about the disruptive effect.

New connections and concerns of reconciliation

The impact of ideological divisions amongst academics can be quite distressing and hampers the processes of collaborative knowledge production and maintenance of cross-border academic connections. However, while respondents speak more about tensions than cooperation, the situation is not described only in negative terms.

While recollections of break-ups and politicised arguments have been frequent, at the same time many of the respondents speak about not having lost significant connections with colleagues. These reflections are usually focused on small-scale networks and connections between individual scholars. This is explained by initially belonging to particular groups and networks that have presumably been less likely to split up for ideological reasons, sharing opinions on political developments, where the differences "remained within the normal range", or at least where the "opportunity to have a constructive dialogue" has not been lost. Some new connections have also emerged, according to the scholars who speak about *gains* rather than *losses*.

There are also frequent mentions of being *lucky* or *in a fortunate situation* not to lose some of the contacts, or, more specifically, of being pleasantly surprised at Russian colleagues "who have not supported *Krymnash* ['Crimea is ours', Russian meme]". For example, a Ukraine-based political scientist talks about Russian researchers who turned out to be "even more unflinching than I expected and do not accept *Krymnash* and this whole Putin's political course. [...] My respect for these people has even increased". A few respondents also stress how they managed to maintain their relationships with Russian colleagues, at the same time noting that this might be partly because the latter live and work in the West: "I can't quite position them as Russians anymore". At the same time, *Russian-ness* of colleagues and fellow researchers is not necessarily objectified as a precondition for arguments and disagreements. Most of the scholars mention that it's a person's political views that matter rather than citizenship; some of them also point at hybridity of one's own identity and connections with Russia beyond academia.

Sometimes, respondents mention connections that seem to have been maintained and keep functioning across borders. In these cases, impossibility or hesitation about travelling and meeting personally/conducting research in the same physical space, nevertheless, does

not rule out research plans and ideas about collaboration as such, but rather tweaks them. For example, the scholar who decided to cancel her trip to an archive in Russia notes: "I really wanted to cooperate with them, and they wanted me to give a talk... I think I still will cooperate with them, it's just I won't go there". A Ukrainian researcher based in Western Europe speaks about having previously researched Ukraine-Russian borderlands, and while admitting that going to Russia might be problematic for her now, thinks about the possible ways of conducting field research in collaboration with a Russian colleague. Another Europe-based scholar who used to find it hard to think about going to Russia after a difficult experience in 2014, talks about the need to look for cooperation with Russian colleagues, "because I feel I'm more ready now, and I have to do [research in Russia], and I don't want to do it alone".

People talk about new and ongoing collaborative research. Where ideological divisions have not emerged amongst scholars, but instead solidarity, this has provided ground for working together. For example, there are the narratives from the scholars with feminist or left-wing views who present these as a basis for transnational anti-war and anti-oppression solidarity. One of the respondents stresses that collaboration may continue not only because of the commonality of research topics, but also because "the fact of continuing this collaborative work and generating some common viewpoint [against the war] – this is equally politically important for us".

Finally, there is some reflection on the future of academic collaboration, along the lines of having to develop an (academic) dialogue at some point after the end of the war. One of the respondents says:

I think it will get worse [...] the space for [...] neutral dialogue is constantly narrowing down, every conversation starts with "identification questions" like, "Who does Crimea belong to?" And then there's arguments, "enemies", and so on. But I also think it's a necessary stage, and it will pass.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have briefly explored the impact of the Maidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine, on relationships among scholars who focus on Ukraine in their research. According to my interviewees, polarisation of the academic discourse and research communities has been the key challenge. Their reflections point not only at its impact on the scholars, but also at the ways in which scholars themselves may engage in polarising practices.

The language used by the researchers to describe changes in relationships is telling. It includes emotionally and politically charged descriptions of academics as subjects occupying particular spaces and engaging in certain practices pertaining to the current political situation. These are mostly centred on the idea of taking sides, aggressively

defending political views, engaging in confrontations and presenting these as opposed to what is seen as 'proper' academic activities. The latter implies a discursive delegitimisation of opponents by means of denying them the qualities of 'proper' scholars and thus setting boundaries in the processes of intellectual distinction and self-legitimisation, which is exacerbated by the political and military developments.

The spaces of conflict include public events such as conferences, but mostly are described as taking place in social media, where the intensity of heated discussions and willingness of respondents to participate in them is said to be declining.

It is predominantly relationships with Russian scholars and Russian academic institutions which are mentioned first when the scholars are asked about particular cases of break-ups. More broadly, Russia-related parts of researchers' lives that are presented as being significantly affected include damaged personal connections with Russian scholars, a reluctance to focus on Russia-related research topics or go to Russia for fieldwork or academic gatherings. The reasons for not going to Russia can be summarised as physical threats, psychological discomfort, and instrumental issues such as technical difficulties of conducting research.

At first glance, the conclusions might seem quite predictable – indeed, the most obvious hypothesis would be that during armed conflict, scholars' relationships become increasingly based upon ideological differences, and that the connections between Ukrainian and Russian scholars suffer the most. A more detailed look at the (still limited) interview data suggests: firstly, while describing changes in academic networks and communities in emotional and politicised ways, respondents also occasionally use expressions related to the idea of reconciliation. They also point out that tensions have not been completely new and sometimes coincided with (and were reinforced by) existing differences in scholars' political views. Secondly, new relationships have also developed, and not all existing ties have been severed. Moreover, Ukrainian-Russian relationships (at least on the level of individual scholars) have not necessarily always suffered, whether they were present before the conflict or in the cases where no meaningful relationships had existed (and therefore there was nothing to break up).

While the idea of academic quarrels and break-ups is very much in the air as something that is talked about, observed, and often experienced, when it comes to individual stories, the situation is more complicated. When analysing the ways in which large-scale protests and armed conflicts might influence the relationships of the scholarly communities and individual researchers whose work is related to the affected country, it makes sense to focus not only on break-ups, but also on the new transnational ways of conducting research, struggles to maintain the connections, establishing new contacts, drawing upon political solidarity, rather than differences, and thinking about the need to (re-)establish a dialogue on a larger scale in the future.

Acknowledgements

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