

# War frames: Insights from Eastern Europe and East Asia

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## Abstract

In spite of a boom in war studies in a range of disciplines, war remains marginal to sociology. Moreover, the dominant tone in war studies is a Western-centred criticism of militarization that tends to neglect weaponized colonialism and imperial irredentism in other parts of the world. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and hybrid war with other European countries is such a case; another is China's growing military hybrid warfare against neighbouring countries in East Asia. To correct this lacuna, this monograph gathers scholars working on Eastern Europe and East Asia. By placing these two regions – often treated as peripheral to the core of interest of Western sociology – into a single analytical frame, this collective volume contributes to develop a comparative sociology of the war–society nexus attentive to imperial formations, contested sovereignties and everyday experiences of insecurity. This introduction assesses how war matters to sociology and provides an overview of this monograph's contribution.

## Keywords

Cold War, Korean War, militarization, Russia–Ukraine war, sociology of war, Taiwan, war studies, weaponization

As Malešević (2026) reminds us in his foreword to this monograph, about a decade ago he published in this journal his views on the state of the art in the sociology of war (Malešević, 2014). We agree with his recent statement that war should not remain a peripheral issue to sociology (Malešević, 2025b). Moreover, we have taken seriously his argument that war has been central to the development of human societies, including

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nation-states and democracy. However, these claims are contestable and require careful specification. And if not primarily by sociologists, then by whom? As Michael Mann (2023b) shows, wartime has not dominated world history and societies are not condemned to war. But with Mann himself and several leading sociologists of war and organized violence, including Malešević, we acknowledge that wars are fundamentally sociological phenomena, and sociologists have much to offer on this subject. Actually, as demonstrated by Malešević (2010, ch. 1), the pacifist turn of post-World War II sociology led to the canonization of Marx, Weber and Durkheim as the ‘holy trinity’, at the expense of other ‘founding fathers’ of the discipline, such as Vilfredo Pareto and Ludwig Gumplowicz, who developed what Malešević (2010) described as a ‘bellicose tradition’ – a perspective he deems valuable to the study of war.

Beyond the currently limited field of sociologists interested in war, this volume should speak to a large range of sociologists interested in new perspectives. First, because our approach to war includes a great diversity of sociological traditions and ethical concerns, as well as openness to other disciplines and ‘writing differently’ (Kilby & Gilloch, 2022). Through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the contributors of this volume engage in dialogue with history, international relations and political science. On war and society, there are many things to learn from these disciplines, just as there are also many things to challenge. As Blain and Kearns-Blain (2018) aptly argue, war is too important an issue to be left only to international relations and military experts; sociologists have their take on it, and non-Western sociologists have a particular approach, which has been thus far insufficiently acknowledged.

Second, our juxtaposition of Eastern Europe and East Asia in the same volume echoes ongoing efforts to decolonize sociology from Western-centrism. These two regions, which remain peripheral to the core interests of Western sociology, have been struggling in their own way to decolonize, both in epistemic and (geo)politic terms. This preoccupation was stressed in a recent issue of this journal on the war in Gaza, which included a strong article by Michael Burawoy written shortly before his sudden death (Burawoy, 2025; Paton, 2025; Ziadah, 2025; see also Hanafi, 2025, with a preface by Burawoy). When we began to conceptualize this monograph, the war in Gaza hadn’t yet started. But the tanks and missiles of Vladimir Putin had already caused massive destruction all over Ukraine for one year. In spite of the geographic distance, the Russian attack on Ukraine had shocked East Asian societies – Taiwan, Japan and South Korea in particular – almost as if this war had direct implications for their own sovereignties. Although the contexts of the war in Gaza and Ukraine are very different, they at the least share a resistance against weaponized colonialism. In this sense, our monograph aims to contribute to a decolonial sociology of war. Moreover, departing from the dominant preference in the sociological literature to criticize the military, we emphasize the sociological problem of the legitimate right to resistance against imperial and neo-colonial aggression, while also engaging critically with processes of militarization. Rather than treating militarization as the sole or primary lens, we ask when, how and for whom militarization becomes normalized, and how it interacts with asymmetries of power, security imperatives and democratic accountability. In other words, the critique of militarization needs to be balanced with concerns over the sovereignty of a polity. What follows in this introduction to the

monograph develops these arguments and presents our theoretical choices, as well as related subtopics such as the question of nationalism and democracy.

## War and sociology

In a recent review of the literature, Malešević (2025b) argues that in spite of a mini renaissance, war remains a marginal topic to sociology. He argues that the study of war was untouched by the most influential sociological theorists in the discipline, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, Ulrich Beck and Niklas Luhmann. Consequently, when it comes to public debate on war, in spite of the potential of sociology for analysing individual and collective behaviours, and in spite of efforts to expand public sociology as advocated by Michael Burawoy, sociologists still lag behind scholars of political science and international relations.

Actually, Malešević (2010, ch. 1) has shown that the current impression that sociology has little to do with war comes from its development after World War II: the trauma left by Nazi war crimes and the carnage of World War II led post-war sociologists to refocus research interests away from the topics that dominated the discipline during its foundation in the nineteenth century. Against debates over nationalism and warfare and cultural difference, sociologists shifted attention towards social stratification, welfare, rationalization, secularization, urbanization, normative systems and gender inequality. This ‘pacifist turn’ of sociology resulted in the establishment of Marx, Durkheim and Weber as the ‘holy trinity’ of post-war sociology and the marginalization of other ‘founding fathers’ of the discipline such as Auguste Comte, Gabriel Tarde, Ferdinand Tönnies and Werner Sombart. While the post-war pacifist turn of sociology ignored even the attention that Marx, Weber and Durkheim paid to war and organized violence, the ‘bellicose’ figures of classical social theory such as Ludwig Gumplowicz and Gaetano Mosca were almost completely rejected, thus depriving sociology of valuable conceptual resources for thinking about war sociologically.

Among those bellicose thinkers, the case of Carl Schmitt is problematic. We agree with Malešević that Schmitt’s theory of the political and his friend–foe principle made him a core author of the belligerent statist tradition. However, in spite of his documented adherence to the Nazi regime, Schmitt has attracted renewed interest among a large variety of authors in social science who are influential in contemporary sociology, from the critiques of liberalism like Negri and Hardt (2004) to the thinkers of the Anthropocene such as Latour (2017), G. Mann and Wainwright (2018). Still, this interest in Schmitt has not resulted in a renewed interest for the study of war.

In their study on *War in Social Thought* from Hobbes to the present, Joas and Knöbl (2012) also underlined the pacifist turn of sociology after WWII, even considering it ‘a spectacular case of the suppression of war’ (Joas & Knöbl, 2012, p. 184). During the inter-war period and the 1940s, among the talented scholars who escaped the Nazis was Hans Speier; a disciple of Karl Mannheim, Speier (1939, 1941) was the first social scientist in the US to hold lectures and produce seminal articles on the sociology of war along with the more often-quoted ‘The garrison state’ by Lasswell (1941). Like Talcott Parsons, Speier also contributed to disseminating Weber’s ideas, but rather than Parsons’ grand theory of action, Speier emphasized the analysis of power, which constitutes a

fundamental dimension in the social study of war – as later demonstrated by M. Mann (1986, 1993, 2012) through three volumes. But apart from a subdiscipline studying armed institutions, sociological and theoretical explorations of war became marginalized after WWII. A notable exception was Raymond Aron, who provided one of the first studies of the Cold War (Aron, 1951/1954) before his monumental work on war in the age of nuclear weapons (Aron, 1962/2003).

As Joas and Knöbl (2012, ch. 6) further explain, a revival of interest in war emerged in the 1970s in Anglo-American historical sociology. In the US, Tilly (1975) paved the way through a masterwork on nation-states formation and revolution in Europe, highlighting the role of taxes and food crises as major drivers of war. Tilly's pathbreaking research was prolonged by Skocpol (1979) in her comparison of revolutions in France, Russia and China; in addition to Tilly, Skocpol also found support to her analysis in the work of Otto Hintze, the German theorist of belligerent state formation (Joas & Knöbl, 2012, pp. 199–200, cf. Gilbert, 1975). Departing from nation-state formation, Collins (1975/2019) shifted the theoretical focus to conflict and violence (see also Collins, 2008), the study of which was further developed by British sociologists. In addition to the above-mentioned Michael Mann – whom Collins recently called the 'Max Weber of our times' (in his blurb to Mann, 2023b; see also Collins, 2013) – Shaw (1988, 1991) explored the connection between war and other forms of macro-violence; looking in particular at the cases of the US and Britain, he introduced a distinction between militarism and the desire to wage war, which are not necessarily concomitant. Giddens (1985) placed the study of military power and war at the very heart of his analysis of modernity, an area he argued was largely neglected by other dominant social theories, including Marxism. Yet, contrary to M. Mann (1993, 2012, 2023a, 2023b) and Shaw (2003, 2005, 2025), Giddens did not further explore the bellicose features of modernity.

These developments were worth a caveat to the lament of war as being marginal to sociology. In a review of the literature, Wimmer (2014) highlighted the contributions made by political, cultural and historical sociologists to the study of war. Compared to political scientists and international relations scholars who tend to focus on short-term decision-making and changing alliances, sociologists have emphasized the *longue durée* of history, as well as the role of political power and domination. While they also pay more attention to the structural dimensions of wars, there are more sociological studies devoted to the consequences of war (such as the feminization of labour and the development of welfare state) rather than its causes (like ethno-nationalism). Finally, sociologists have examined how ideology and culture lead to and are shaped by war, an approach we prolong in this volume.

Adopting a quantitative approach, Wimmer's (2002, 2013) own contribution to the sociology of war covered different world regions and relatively long periods of history, often in collaboration with political scientists (Wimmer et al., 2009; Wimmer & Min, 2006). Preferring qualitative research, Mann and Malešević have also have embraced long periods of history, far beyond the Western context, along with John Hall (e.g. Amasyalı & Hall, 2022; Hall & Malešević, 2013), Centeno and Enriquez (2016) and Blain and Kearns-Blain (2018). All of this scholarship has served to highlight how war shapes society. In the field of international relations, some scholars, such as Zarakol (2011), have been influenced by the historical sociology of war. Meanwhile, Shaw (1991,

2005) and Kaldor (1999, 2013) have underlined the specificities of post-Cold War conflicts in which state sovereignty has been eroded by the destructive forces of economic deregulation. But their idea of ‘new wars’ failed to convince in regard to *longue durée* analyses (Joas & Knöbl, 2012, pp. 237–240; Malešević, 2025b).

To summarize the above, we can identify three waves of development in the sociology of war. The first wave runs from the ‘founding fathers’ of the discipline in the nineteenth century, including the bellicose tradition dominated by Austro-German authors, up to the end of WWII. The second wave in the 1970–1990s was almost entirely Anglo-American with authors like Tilly, Skocpol, Collins, Shaw, Mann and Giddens. The third wave, emerging around the turn of the twenty-first century and associated with Malešević, Joas and Wimmer, was still shaped almost exclusively by Western scholarship. We therefore hope to contribute to a sociology of war that is more genuinely global in its authorship and perspectives, incorporating scholars and debates beyond the Western mainstream.

As we have seen above, sociological studies on war have nurtured special bonds with history, political science and international relations. As for the latter field, Michael Mann (2023b) recently challenged the Realist model’s presumption that states are rational entities acting within an international anarchy. Mann is not denying the contribution of international relations to the study of war, quite the contrary, but he stresses that simplified models can do little to help us understand the *meaning* of war and the role of social forces. Indeed, the dominant discourses on war focus quasi-exclusively on geopolitics-as-usual and the big masters of the game, that is to say, heads of state and political leaders (cf. Malešević, 2024, p. 99).

In this volume, we respond instead to the invitation made a decade ago by West and Matthewman (2016) to develop a ‘strong program’ in the sociology of war that would break with the focus on military and political forces and help us to understand how the legacy of past wars and the threat of potential armed conflicts have shaped contemporary social relations. We have seen that historical sociology provides the best repertoire with regard to past wars. For the social impact of future war, however, sociology clearly lags behind political science and international relations. Consequently, in this volume, for the political sociology of military tensions between Taiwan and China, we cannot but refer heavily to related studies in political science (see Lin & Chen, 2026; Wenger et al., 2026). Interestingly, the ‘social turn’ of security studies scholars has borrowed heavily from sociology (e.g. Balzacq, 2010; Bigo & Walker, 2007); it is thus fair that sociologists borrow back from this scholarship to support their arguments (see Janušauskienė & Mamaiev, 2026; Jobin et al., 2026).

Moreover, given the dominant role of Anglo-American sociologists in the study of war in recent decades, the numerous wars conducted by the United States and its military-industrial complex have been instrumental in the revival of sociological interest in war, and, more generally speaking, in social sciences studies of war: from the legacy of the Vietnam War (e.g. Espiritu, 2014; Hong, 2016; Nguyen, 2012; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991) to the most recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (e.g. Shaw, 2005) and throughout the ‘war on terror’ (Blain & Kearns-Blain, 2018; Butler, 2009). During the Cold War, the Soviet–Afghan War and the US–USSR struggle for global predominance also burdened the African continent with numerous proxy conflicts, the effects of which reverberate to this day. In Asia, the Cold War meant hot wars such as the Korean

and Vietnam Wars. Kim and Jin (2026) analyse the legacy of the Korean War in this monograph. Beyond the Cold War, there have been multiple wars in the Middle East, both between countries and within them. The ‘common sense’ that wars were disappearing was thus Western-centric. Not coincidentally, Europeans have historically exceeded other civilizations in the number of interstate wars (M. Mann, 2023b).

In their study of wars across a long period of history and across the continents, Malešević (2010) and M. Mann (2023b) have both pointed out the persistent influence of wars on society. Moreover, stressing that warfare is constituent of modernity, Malešević identifies two historically cumulative processes that have facilitated collective violence: the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion and centrifugal ideologization; of distinct importance to the latter is the ubiquity of nationalism. The interplay of these two processes forms what he later calls the ‘war-state-society nexus’ (Malešević, 2014), maintaining that ‘neither organized coercion nor societies can be properly explained without the careful study of their interaction’ (Malešević, 2010, p. 335).

But is wartime the rule or the exception? Acknowledging the importance of war is not an endorsement of the cliché of war as inherent to ‘human nature’, a view that propagates an unjustified fatalism. Instead, historical comparative sociology has underlined that war is *not* the main characteristic of most societies. Yet, as Malešević (2010) and M. Mann (2023b) demonstrate, modern political formations of the nation-state have tended to exacerbate the mass destruction resulting from organized violence. In so-called ‘geopolitical hotspots’, the influence of war can even be banal. In his analysis of the causes of war over world history, M. Mann (2023b) finds that decisions to go to war hardly take public opinion into consideration and the more that power is concentrated, the bigger the risk of irrational decisions.

On the one hand, the legacies of war and violence are important in understanding a society in peacetime; on the other hand, when a war is taking place, we find it important to walk away from the frontline and look to the social forces backing resistance. As Kutsenko and Kostiuhenko (2026) show in this monograph, Ukraine has witnessed an explosion of civic activism and an entrenchment of democratic values, all the while facing internal tensions and identity politics. War can be productive of social transformation, the influence of which can be profound and expected to last long after the war is over, not only as a result of the destruction and catastrophe it brings, but also thanks to the agency of the people that resist it.

## The war in Ukraine. . .

The end of the Cold War was marked by the devastating Yugoslav wars of succession (1991–1995) and the 1999 Kosovo war (Malešević, 2002, 2025a). Vladimir Putin then started a long series of armed conflicts, starting with the brutal subjugation of Chechnya (1999–2009), followed by Russia’s 2008 war with Georgia and the subsequent *de facto* annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (August 2008) and later Crimea (February–March 2014). The war against Ukraine, therefore, did not begin in February 2022: it has unfolded since 2014, first as a hybrid and deniable intervention (‘little green men’, proxy forces, disinformation and cyber operations, and the militarization of ambiguity), before engaging in an open, large-scale interstate invasion (Haller, 2025; Kutsenko, 2025).

When on 24 February 2022, Putin launched his so-called ‘special military operation’ into Ukrainian territories, the attack came as another shock to international society, and to European countries in particular. Many argued that this was the first interstate war in Europe since the end of World War II, but this view neglected the wars that followed the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the full-scale invasion of February 2022 has sparked intense debates among policymakers, analysts, scholars and intellectuals, for it indeed encompasses a major threat to Europe. It has also forced a redefinition of what ‘war in Europe’ means in the twenty-first century: that is, sustained conventional combat combined with nuclear coercion, informational warfare and a systematic campaign of strikes on civilian life-supporting infrastructures. As these debates encompass topics ranging from the nature of war and geopolitical dynamics to strategic actions and ethical implications, sociologists from different corners of the discipline have been contributing to both the public and academic debates.

For instance, the American Sociological Association’s quarterly magazine *Footnotes* featured the Russia–Ukraine war in its Winter 2023 issue. In this collection of seven well-informed short papers, Kennedy (2023) argued: ‘Both sociologists and activists interested in democracy and truthfulness should centre Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in both their theory and practice.’ Solari (2023) focused on the gender of that war: although she acknowledges the ‘women-as-victim’ trope that the war creates for placing a disproportionate burden on women and girls, she argues more ambitiously that Russia’s war on Ukraine reflects a ‘manliness project’ that is appealing to many. In this volume, the contribution of Kim and Jin (2026) presents a paradoxical aspect of the ‘women-as-victim’ trope with the case of a half-million war widows who were stigmatized for having survived their husbands.

The *European Journal of Social Theory* also dedicated an issue to the war in Ukraine, which British sociologist Delanty (2023, p. 431) described in his introduction as ‘a new European war’ and a significant moment in post-1945 European history. In this issue, comprising 18 papers, a position paper by German-American philosopher Kögler (2023) advocated for an absolute moral call to defend Ukraine’s democracy almost ‘at any cost’ against Putin’s imperialist dictatorship. The author debunked Alexander Dugin’s ideological justification for that war as well as the calls for ‘peace at any cost’ from intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and Jeffrey Sachs (e.g. Chomsky & Fletcher, 2022). Similarly, Malešević (2023) rejected the ‘peace at any cost’ discourse, but departed from Kögler’s moral absolutism of ‘Ukraine winning at any cost’. Instead, he invoked the lessons of historical sociology to propose a more realistic ‘contextual morality’ as the best possible option in the fog of war, calling for ‘prioritising the agents and objectives that cause less physical and ethical harm’ (Malešević, 2023, p. 492).

In his response to Kögler, M. Mann (2023a) draws, like Malešević, on the lessons of historical sociology to rebuke moral absolutism. To Kögler’s depiction of the demand for a ceasefire in the name of saving human lives as ‘a destruction of human dignity’, M. Mann (2023a) was straightforward: ‘Nonsense! [. . .] A diplomatic solution to this war would be better – and nothing is worse than war’ (p. 555). Such a solution would of course require that the two sides be ready to reach a compromise, which as of January 2026 seems not to be of interest to Vladimir Putin, nearly four years after he decided on full-scale escalation in 2022, and 12 years after initiating the war.

In his recent book on the conflict in Ukraine, Haller (2025) rejects both moral maximalism and ‘peace at any cost’ as politically ineffective and ethically myopic. For Haller, the question is how to pursue peace *within* war without rewarding aggression: peace-making must be anchored in the protection of sovereignty and law, coupled with a realistic assessment of power and responsibility, rather than in abstract imperatives detached from the conditions that generated the violence. In this sense, Malešević’s call for ‘contextual morality’ and Mann’s insistence on diplomacy can be read as complementary, but only insofar as diplomacy is oriented towards a just and enforceable peace rather than a merely expedient cessation of fighting.

In 2023, the German journal *Soziale Systeme* also published a special issue on the war in Ukraine. In her introduction, Kuchler (2023) noted that political science and international relations studies offer clear theoretical toolkits – such as the realist, liberal and institutionalist schools – to analyse war and make policy recommendations. In comparison, sociology is more fragmented and ill-equipped for policy recommendation. For example, one can approach the war through a Weberian distinction between an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility. Another path is to follow Habermas to focus on the tension between content and procedure, or the defence of democracy and the prevention of a third world war (cf. Habermas, 2022). Or one can adopt Luhmann’s opposition between modern contingency and open-endedness on the one hand and the autocratic striving for determinacy and control on the other.

Yet sociology cannot be isolated from public debate, and an ongoing war constitutes a particularly powerful catalyst. As Kuchler (2023) aptly puts it: ‘War polarizes, and it also polarizes the perspectives of observers’ (p. 207). Consequently, compared to the ethically ambitious goal of Delanty et al. in their special issue for the *European Journal of Social Theory*, Kuchler (2023) presented their issue for *Soziale Systeme* more humbly as a ‘forum of sociological discussion’ where the authors express themselves ‘primarily as specialists, and not as public intellectuals’ (p. 207).

Our monograph sits somewhere in between these approaches. We hope to contribute to the sociology of war and society with methodologically solid and ethically ambitious observations that will offer meaningful insights for other contexts struck by full-scale warfare or rampant harassment in the grey zone between war and peace. But, as our positionality statements make clear, we cannot pretend to be neutral observers. For example, our colleagues Kutsenko and Kostiuhenko (2026) found themselves compelled to admit that ‘living and working through the war . . . with each day beginning and ending in messages asking whether our loved ones are still alive’ necessarily affects their Weberian neutrality.

As we are summing up this monograph (January 2026), the war in Ukraine is still ongoing and we are witnessing with anxiety and helplessness Donald Trump bullying the victim and favouring the aggressor. In early January 2026, U.S. military strikes in Venezuela, the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, quickly followed by further threats on a potential annexation of Greenland, underscored how quickly the boundaries between security and outright coercion can be redrawn.

Lacking the benefit of hindsight obviously impairs our capacity to analyse the war with cool sociological eyes; somehow like Fabrice at Waterloo – the hero of Stendhal’s novel – we cannot really pretend to fully understand an ongoing war. Wen Liu who concludes

our monograph (Liu, 2026), has elsewhere described what she calls the *mundanity of war*: rather than being spectacular, wars can become trivial matters (Liu, 2023). This approach partly responds to the invitation made a decade ago in this journal for an ‘embodied sociology of war’ (McSorley, 2014). It highlights the quotidian experience of war not to banalize violence, but to see war as a far-reaching process that pertains to nearly every aspect of social life. Once we reposition our perspective accordingly, we find that a whole field of sociological enquiries is opened up, giving sociology an abundance of epistemic and political potential that sheds new light on the analysis of the war–society nexus, namely, the intertwined relations between war and society, and balances the overemphasis on war–state interplay currently dominated by international relations.

Moreover, we understand the Russia–Ukraine war as an historical event catalysing what we aim to achieve in this monograph. In spite of reinforcing a Euro-centrist perspective, there are several reasons behind such an argument. First, a nuclear-armed state launching a conventional, territorial war in Central Europe represents not merely a historical anomaly, but a profound challenge to previous understandings of war in the late-modern era. Second, the war’s legacy is already visible in the re-militarization and strategic reorientation of European states, the redefinition of energy security and critical infrastructures as targets and objects of governance, and the institutionalization of transnational solidarity and displacement on an unprecedented scale. Third, the war has also made us reconsider state–society relations under conditions of existential threat. Finally, the Russia–Ukraine war has reopened foundational debates about democracy, identity and political order under extreme pressures. Unlike classical theories that predict authoritarian centralization during war, Ukraine exhibits a paradoxical combination of emergency powers and civic empowerment.

This paradox is inseparable from the war’s changing form: from Russia’s hybrid warfare and deniable occupation (2014–2021) to full-scale invasion (since February 2022), and to a sustained strategy of violence directed at civilian populations through the deliberate destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure across the country. At the same time, the war has become a laboratory of rapid techno-tactical transformation – mass drone warfare, ubiquitous surveillance and satellite-enabled intelligence, electronic warfare, cyber operations and the accelerated integration of digital platforms into mobilization, logistics and public communication – reshaping how societies experience and organize war.

As Kutsenko and Kostiuchenko (2026) demonstrate in their contribution to this monograph, wartime mobilization has accelerated the consolidation of a civic national identity beyond linguistic, regional and cultural cleavages. This hybrid configuration – democratic resilience within a highly militarized environment – does not align neatly with existing sociological theories of war, democratization or state-building. Taken together, these developments suggest that the Ukraine war represents not simply a major geopolitical event but an inflection point in the sociological understanding of war itself. In this sense, the Russia–Ukraine war constitutes a watershed moment: it forces the discipline to rethink core assumptions about how modern societies organize for, experience and are transformed by war. This calls for a conceptual rethinking of the war–society nexus.

However, why focus on this war and its consequences for other countries? How about other places plagued by war such as Syria, Congo, Sudan and Gaza, to name just a few countries in the Global South? This question is not a call for hierarchy of suffering, but for analytical specification: what features of the Russia–Ukraine war make it sociologically distinctive for theorizing contemporary war? These include its long hybrid-to-conventional trajectory; nuclear-backed territorial revisionism on the European continent; the systematic targeting of critical civilian infrastructures; and the intense coupling of battlefield dynamics with transnational displacement, digital mediation and civic mobilization. These characteristics do not eclipse other wars; rather, they illuminate a particular configuration of late-modern warfare that can be compared – without moral competition – to conflicts elsewhere.

### **. . . and its consequence for Eastern Europe and East Asia**

As a conflict between the two largest states in Europe, this war has provoked enormous reactions across the continent. This was understandable given the magnitude of the attack in which Russia, the far more powerful state, launched a full-scale invasion of its Ukrainian neighbour. More surprising was the level of concern the war has generated in East Asia, in contrast with a relatively muted response from the Global South, which can be explained by the fact that conflicts in this part of the world are usually ignored by the Global North.

In Eastern Europe, national defence against the threat of another Russian offensive gathered a large social consensus. As examined in this volume by Janušauskienė and Mamaiev (2026) in the case of Lithuania, the most impressive and concrete response to this threat were nationwide mobilizations to assist war refugees from Ukraine. Krivonos (2025), highlighted that contemporary Ukrainian migration to Poland started around 2014 with Russian military harassment of Donbass. In addition, sociological studies on migration are right to stress the weaponization and stigmatization of migrants to fuel xenophobic political agendas (e.g. Greenhill, 2010; Lahav & Messina, 2024). In comparison, Janušauskienė and Mamaiev (2026) show a more positive aspect of interstate migration, highlighting how Ukrainian war refugees have indirectly contributed to strengthen the Lithuanian securitization of Russia without causing anti-immigrant backlash. Moreover, they underline that the solidarity of Lithuanian society towards war refugees was made possible by a network of civil defence organizations, which have been active on several fronts. In addition to traditional military training, Lithuanian civil society has worked with the state to address the grey zone of psychological warfare conducted by Russia, which started long before its war against Ukraine (cf. Bajarūnas & Keršanskas, 2018; Hoffman, 2007).

On the other side of the globe, particularly in Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, civil society has generally expressed support for Ukrainian resistance. The war in Ukraine and the ‘no limits’ friendship between Beijing and Moscow have further increased the fear that Beijing’s irredentism could escalate and follow Moscow’s example in the region. The most obvious reason is that in recent years, from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia, many countries have been facing increasingly assertive claims by China’s military.

In their contribution to this monograph, Lin and Chen (2026) conducted a very original quantitative approach to cope with the difficulties of conducting research in China

under its authoritarian regime. Their findings highlight the convergence, among certain segments of the population, between the Russian narratives justifying the invasion of Ukraine and the Chinese narrative to legitimate in advance the possibility of a military annexation of Taiwan.

In this context, as analysed in this volume by Wenger et al. (2026), for Taiwanese society, social trust in the military has become an existential matter. Jobin et al. (2026) show similar trends in Japan, with particular concern regarding the possible consequences of a ‘Taiwan contingency’. In South Korea, the primary concern remains the threat from North Korea, which has provided Russia with troops and weapons to support its war against Ukraine. This commitment stirred various political emotions in South Korea. As Kim and Jin (2026) show in their contribution, these emotions are entangled with the legacy of the Korean War that devastated the peninsula some eight decades ago.

In spite of the cultural and geographic distances, the resemblance of the situations has favoured identification with Ukrainians. This is particularly strong in Taiwan, where the slogan ‘Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow’ turned into a catchphrase to capture an existential anxiety of the Taiwanese people: is the Russian invasion of Ukraine going to encourage China to take military action against Taiwan? Facing Russian propaganda backed by Beijing and Taiwan-based pro-China advocates, Taiwan’s citizen groups, wanting to protect the island’s de facto independence, have promoted solidarity with Ukrainians for the sake of a common fight for democracy (Ho & Chen, 2025; Liu, 2026).

Another reason for the solidarity with Ukraine expressed in East Asia has to do with what Boltanski (1993/2009) coined ‘distant suffering’, or the moral dilemma of witnessing suffering through media like TV when direct action is impossible. As Butler (2009) demonstrated with eloquence, while selective grievability is a moral conundrum, the infinite reproduction of images of devastation on mass media (and now algorithmically buzz-driven ‘social media’) tends ineluctably to banalize the violence of armed conflicts and makes internet users *used to it*, ‘armoured against’ their traumatic effects. Artificial intelligence combined with the use of drones further complicates the matter (Malešević & David, 2025), possibly diminishing the power of images.

Like Moscow’s hybrid warfare, Beijing has found in TikTok a fantastic weapon of ‘mass seduction’ to influence the perception of China among youth across the globe. The first targets are Taiwanese youth: the more they use TikTok or its Chinese version Douyin, the less they perceive Beijing’s authoritarian regime as a problem and a threat to Taiwan’s democracy (Hsu, 2025). By blurring the distinctions between true and false, war and peace, these narratives erode confidence in democratic debates.

## Insights from the ‘Global Easts’

Since Saïd (1978) debunked the contemptuous portrayal of the Orient, from the Middle East to Asia, societies of the Eastern World have further developed their critical tools. However, East and West are always relational categories and what consists of ‘East’ for a certain region might be the ‘West’ for another. While Eastern Europe has always been part of the ‘West’ for East Asians, it remains an ‘East’ for Western Europeans. From a decolonial perspective, Eastern Europe can be understood as a remnant of post-World War II power relations that positioned these countries on the periphery, or what Boatacã

(2020, 2021) called ‘forgotten Europes’ resulting in ‘lesser European’ identities (see also Amelina et al., 2020).

The recent idea of ‘Global East’ further encourages us to bring together Eastern Europe and East Asia. This notion was first introduced by scholars of urban studies working on gentrification in East Asian societies such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, China and Vietnam (Shin et al., 2015). The idea to group these countries together under the label Global East was to deconstruct the dominant dualism of Global North and Global South (Waley, 2015, p. 620). Geographer Müller (2020) further conceptualized the notion to include Eastern Europe. As he explains: ‘The East is too rich to be a proper part of the South, but too poor to be a part of the North. It is too powerful to be periphery, but too weak to be the centre. . . . unlike in the South, people have not found in the East a cause for compassion, global activism or a source of alternatives to neoliberalism, environmental destruction, power politics and rampant nationalism’ (Müller, 2020, pp. 735–36, 740). Müller and Trubina (2020) later put East in the plural (‘Global Easts’) to underline a vast regional multiplicity, from the Asian East (North, East and Southeast Asia) to the Middle East and the European East, once known as the Eastern bloc: ‘The “Easts”, in the plural, takes up the elusive signifier of the “East” as a place that is always elsewhere’ (Müller & Trubina, 2020, p. 628).

Among this vast ensemble of Global Easts, the history and current situation of Eastern Europe and East Asia share specific commonalities. In a book titled *Global Easts*, South Korean historian Lim (2022) digs into the productive potential of thinking from the perspective of these two regions. Having witnessed post-Cold War democratization in both South Korea and Poland, Lim takes up Global Easts as a transnational space that, beyond contradictions, provides a stimulating way to look at a shared experience of dictatorship. Eastern Europe has experienced centuries of domination, invasion or colonization by various great powers, such as the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Austria, Prussia and Sweden. As Janušauskienė and Mamaiev (2026) highlight in their contribution, Lithuanians tend to see the current invasion of Ukraine as a resurgence of past domination by Russian Tsars and the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, in East Asia, the Korean peninsula and Japan paid tribute to Chinese emperors for centuries. Taiwan was a province of the Qing empire of China before being colonized by Japan at the end of the nineteenth century. Likewise, Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, and both Taiwan and Korea remained under Japanese colonial rule until the end of World War II. During the Cold War, Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries, as well as Taiwan and Korea, endured authoritarian regimes before liberalizing during what political scientists called ‘the third wave of democracy’.

Connecting the Easts also shows a way out of Cold War politics. Our approach echoes the analysis of Zhang et al. (2022); as they argue, the discourses about a ‘New Cold War’ between the US and China perpetuate the dichotomy of a democratic capitalist camp (the ‘West’) vs authoritarian Russia and China, or what they call ‘Cold Warism’. Symptomatic of this Cold Warism is a posture of ‘campism’ regarding anti-war principles which focuses solely on US imperialism while neglecting other forms of neo-colonialism and imperialism, including those perpetrated by Russia and China (La Botz, 2022).

Departing from such Cold Warism, our juxtaposition of East Asia and Eastern Europe aims to emphasize the agency of subaltern nations marked by the experience of war and colonialism. Our two Easts are not simply the victims of global capitalism and Western imperialism: sometimes they are the oppressed, and sometimes they assume the role of the oppressor. In any case, they deserve an analysis of their own. East Asia includes both a former colonial state like Japan and potential neo-colonial powers like China and former colonized countries such as Taiwan and South Korea. Yet, as Taiwan, and perhaps also Japan and South Korea, face threats of war from China and North Korea, as well as Russia, their societies deserve to be seen through this complexity.

Moreover, we do not take ‘East Asia’ and ‘Eastern Europe’ for granted, but as categories to be challenged. For instance, our Eastern Europe does not encompass all the former Soviet nations. As Janušauskienė and Mamaiev (2026) argue in their article, the very notion of ‘Eastern Europe’ – in connection with ‘Pan-Slavism’ and the ‘Russian World’ – must be seen as a frame that has contributed to encouraging Putin’s assault on Ukraine. By researching these diverse societies in the ‘Easts’ side by side, we do not aim to provide a clear-cut definition of what constitutes the Eastern experience. Instead, we intend these articles to be a constellation that might spark unexpected coincidences, productive comparisons and alliances across their differences – and provide a map to wartime survival and resistance.

## War as events and frames

Several sociological works have already studied the role of collective memory, nationalism, cultural frames and norms in the causes and consequences of war (e.g. Hall & Malešević, 2013; Luard, 1986; Malešević, 2010; Mannheim, 1940/ 2007, 1943/2021; Shaw, 1991; Wagner-Pacifi, 2005; Wimmer, 2013; Wimmer & Min, 2006). In his contribution to this monograph, Wang (2026) draws on Butler (2009), Goffman (1974) and Sewell (2005) to reconceptualize the war-society nexus in terms of events and frames. Most articles in the monograph refer to it to identify the variety of war frames and to examine their social consequences.

The concept of ‘frame’ has enjoyed a widespread use in the study of social movements, mass media and discourse analysis, prompting van Dijk (2023) to question its analytical precision. Wang nevertheless demonstrates that it remains a useful concept for examining a wide range of social phenomena, including war, when it is carefully conceptualized and theoretically grounded. Drawing on Sewell’s work, Wang defines war as a structure-transforming event that is both the framer and the framed. He distinguishes between two levels of war frames: primary and secondary. The former refers to the frames created by war itself, which can conjure up new subjects and enable subjects to speak, while the latter helps to analyse how war is conducted, experienced, understood and interpreted by various actors. Events and frames thus form a recursive relationship, in which war frames continuously shape and reshape societies. Drawing on historical experiences in East Asia, as well as the Russia–Ukraine war, Wang shows how war generates frames that, in turn, shape how war is narrated, contested and morally evaluated by different social actors through diverging interpretations. Conceptualizing war as both

events and frames therefore allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how war transforms the world and how its legacies continue to reshape societies in profound ways that are not yet fully recognized.

In this monograph, we examine different frames that illuminate each society's relation to different experiences of war. We not only aim to analyse existing war frames, but also to reframe current ways of viewing war, starting with this question: what does the war in Ukraine look like when we look from the 'Easts'? The main features in the cases presented here are as follows: an ongoing war, in the case of Ukraine; societies concerned by the threat of war, in the cases of Lithuania, Taiwan and Japan; an authoritarian world power whose military bullies its neighbours and threatens to start a full-scale war (China); and a society, in South Korea, that has lived in a state of chronic tension with its northern neighbour since the end of the civil war seven decades ago. Actually, in this latter case, as Kim and Jin (2026) remind us in their article, the two countries have yet to conclude a peace treaty – an unlikely eventuality as long as North Korea remains a totalitarian regime.

Ultimately, the articles in this volume remind us that war is never only a geopolitical contest but a profound social transformation. Societies confronted with violence do far more than endure. They theorize, reinterpret meanings, reorganize institutions, and resist. By placing Eastern Europe and East Asia in conversation, and by shifting the lens from great-power scripts to lived realities, this monograph challenges epistemic imperialism and expands what sociology can know about violence, sovereignty and resistance. In doing so, it shows how ordinary people and institutions become authors of their own security rather than objects of geopolitical narratives. This volume invites us to imagine a discipline capable not only of analysing war but of recognizing the knowledge born from it. It is a sociology attentive to frames shaped by history and the everyday struggles for dignity through which societies insist on their right to exist. We believe this is where a truly global sociology begins.

### Author's Note


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