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What sociology can do in wartime. The resilience and dynamism of Ukrainian sociologists

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Abstract

What can sociology do in times of war? Is it still useful to conduct sociological research when immediate solidarity is needed? Drawing on wartime Ukraine and informed by insights from Palestine and the Philippines, this article reviews some crucial roles played by sociology in wartime: making sense of rapid social transformations, bearing witness to violence, and sustaining democratic horizons. Since 2022, Ukrainian sociologists have continued to document fast changes in everyday life and society, civic engagement, values, resilience, and war crimes. Insightful epistemological discussions have arisen on the conditions, limits, and responsibilities of knowledge production in wartime, addressing the tensions between scientific rigour and civic commitment and the ethical demands of research. By foregrounding the experience of sociology in a society under existential threat, the article invites international dialogue and mutual learning on the public, ethical, and democratic responsibilities of sociology in wartime.

Keywords

Public sociology, resilience, sociology, Ukraine, war

Introduction

From 24 February 2022 to the end of 2025, at least 14,999 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, and over 38,000 wounded (OHCHR/UN, 2026). On the front lines, devastating losses have claimed between 73,000 and 140,000 Ukrainian military lives (The Economist, 2025) – most of whom were regular civilians just days or months before. More than 3.7 million people have been uprooted and registered as internally displaced,

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and over 6.8 million have been forced to flee Ukraine, seeking safety throughout Europe and beyond (UNHCR, 2025: 21).

The war's devastation compels every citizen to act. As Ukrainian sociologists note, '*The war asks this question to everybody: how can you be useful in this or that way to your community?*' (Costas et al., 2024). Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, Ukrainian citizens have actively contributed to the country's resilience through multiple forms of engagement: by supporting those in need, sustaining essential services, and keeping public institutions and society functioning amid destruction and bombings. *But what can we do as sociologists? What does sociology offer in times of war and violence?*

There is no general and universal reply to these questions, as it heavily depends on the national context and the nature of violence. Drawing on two cases from the Philippines, Palestine, and a review of contributions from Ukraine, the article argues that sociology helps explain rapid social changes, preserve real experiences, and imagine possible futures during war.

The article is structured in three sections. The first draws on experiences from the Philippines and Palestine to reflect on how sociologists respond to war, repression, and mass violence, highlighting shared dilemmas rather than offering direct comparisons. The second focuses on wartime Ukraine and examines how Ukrainian sociologists have continued to produce rigorous and publicly engaged research since 2022, documenting social transformations, civic resilience, democratic values, and war crimes under conditions of extreme disruption. The third section turns to the epistemological and ethical challenges of conducting sociology in wartime, addressing questions of positionality, the tensions between scientific rigour and civic commitment, and the emotional and moral demands of researching violence and trauma.

Methods, positionality, and aims

The article stems from an invitation to deliver an opening address as ISA President (Pleyers, 2025a) and a keynote lecture (based on an earlier version of this article) at the Fifth Congress of the Sociological Association of Ukraine, held in a hybrid format at the University of Kharkiv and online on 20 and 21 November 2025. Writing from the position of a Western European sociologist who is not a specialist in Ukraine entails limitations, notably restricted access to publications not available in English and a necessarily partial grasp of the specific historical trajectories shaping contemporary Ukrainian society. However, this article does not seek to summarise the vast, rich, and rapidly expanding body of work produced by Ukrainian sociologists since 2022. Its purpose is more modest: to outline some crucial roles played by sociology in wartime Ukraine and foreground epistemological questions raised by the war, drawing on insights provided by Ukrainian scholars. Neither does this article aim at providing a comprehensive analysis of wartime social transformations, tasks addressed in depth by recent publications (e.g. Grushetsky and Paniotto, 2025). Rather than substituting the analyses of national scholars or country specialists, the contribution of global sociology lies in building a dialogue with them and fostering mutual learning among researchers from different countries and world regions (Pleyers, 2024).

By presenting recent research by Ukrainian sociologists, the article invites international scholars to engage more closely with Ukrainian colleagues. The outcomes of their research, their methodological creativity, and the theoretical and epistemological questions they raise carry relevance far beyond their national borders. Conversely, Ukrainian sociologists may find useful insights in work conducted in other contexts of war or mass violence. Since 2022, Ukrainian sociology has deepened its international collaborations, but mainly in Europe, the United States and Taiwan. This article invites wider dialogue, considering contributions by sociologists in the Global South that enrich these discussions, opening new avenues for methodological innovation and mutual learning. This article is therefore an invitation to dialogue across borders and experiences, pointing to shared challenges, while respecting Ukraine's unique context and situation.

The article draws on a qualitative and interpretative review of sociological research that has examined both the evolution of the discipline and major social transformations in Ukraine since the Russian full-scale invasion of 2022. The literature review is selective rather than exhaustive and focuses primarily on peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and research reports produced by Ukrainian sociologists. More specialised strands of literature – such as studies on higher education, civic activism, and volunteering – were incorporated as they emerged as particularly salient in the analysis. The corpus was assembled through academic databases, disciplinary networks, and sustained exchanges with Ukrainian colleagues and selected for its relevance to a central question: what can sociology do in times of war? The analysis adopts a thematic approach, organised around a set of roles and challenges for sociology in Ukraine. References to the Philippines and Palestine are mobilised analytically rather than systematically, not to draw direct comparisons, but to learn from shared challenges and provide situated responses by sociologists working in contexts of war or mass violence.

Insights from sociologists in situations of war and mass violence

What can sociology offer in times of war and violence? Responses to these questions can only be partial and depend on the specific national context and the nature of war or mass violence.

The two cases from the Philippines and Gaza illuminate distinct yet complementary roles played by sociology in situations of harsh repression by a dictatorship, mass violence, or war: documenting repression and countering invisibility through risky empirical work (the Philippines), and creating research settings that are useful for the participants and combine care, agency, and counter-narrative production (Gaza). While none of these contexts is directly comparable to Ukraine, these cases show ways sociologists have responded to practical, methodological, and epistemological questions specific to these extreme situations and foreground challenges that strongly resonate with the Ukrainian situation since 2022, as will be discussed in the Sociology in wartime Ukraine section.

Barefoot sociology in the Philippines

More than 30,000 Filipinos were killed in the final 3 years of the Duterte presidency (2016–2022). His 'war on drugs' served as a cover for military and paramilitary abuses,

including widespread extrajudicial killings, particularly in poor areas, among urban youth, peasant communities, and Muslim populations. The massacres affecting farmers in Cebu Island remain largely unreported in both national and international media. This invisibility denied victims' existence, facilitated land grabbing, and contributed to suppressing resistance: local activists and political opponents were quickly labelled 'communist insurgents' and subsequently murdered (Arugay and Baquisal, 2023).

In this extreme context, Phoebe Sanchez, a professor of sociology in Cebu, undertook research to document the massacres of peasants. She considered that one of sociology's essential missions is to

> gather data at close range with the affected publics. Sociologists may employ sociography, ethnography, participant observation and other field-based methods . . . It connotes danger to academic existence, but it is crucial to engage and involve academics in barefoot research, as in the case of understanding the 'drugs trade' and 'human rights abuses' amid a regime's public policy on murder or 'necropolitics'. (Sanchez, 2021: 164).

Once made public, this 'barefoot sociology' produced data that 'serve as proofs, persuasion tools, and cognitive and relational tools' (Sanchez, 2021: 164) to address human rights violations and structural violence. This approach aims to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the lived experiences of marginalised communities. However, this work entailed serious risks for researchers. Following repeated death threats, the lead researcher was forced to leave the country, an exit made possible through support from the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium).

Youth narratives from Gaza: Collective healing, agency and storytelling

The Palestinian case offers particularly salient insights for sociology in contexts where destruction, displacement and epistemic erasure unfold simultaneously. Is it possible to conduct sociological research in Gaza, amid prolonged occupation and, since October 2023, a genocidal war (Tondo, 2025) marked by mass civilian deaths, regular bombing, lack of water and food, systematic displacement, and the destruction of social and academic infrastructure?

Despite this context, academic publications on Gaza have multiplied. They provide testimonies and analysis of life and society, confronted with daily attacks and genocidal violence. In such conditions, the production of knowledge becomes inseparable from struggles for visibility, and research a form of resistance against erasure, silencing, and dehumanisation.

Abeer Musleh, a professor of sociology and social work at the University of Bethlehem in the West Bank, has continued to develop empirical research on the experiences of young people displaced by the war. This research necessitates innovative, collective, and adaptive methodologies. The process entails a significant emotional burden on the researcher, whose work is conducted in close proximity to trauma, loss, and ongoing violence.

Abeer Musleh has been working with projects developed by the Tamer Institute for Community Education, a Palestinian NGO dedicated to community education, youth

empowerment, and cultural resilience through reading, storytelling, and participatory learning practices (Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2019). In Gaza, the Institute brought together young people displaced from their homes and living in tents, offering collective spaces in which participants could share stories, emotions, and everyday experiences, as well as memories of neighbourhoods destroyed by Israeli bombing (Jawad et al., 2025; Musleh, 2025).

Drawing on interviews with displaced young people aged 19–23 years and with youth workers involved in these initiatives, Musleh shows how some participants started to interview others in their surroundings, extending collective dynamics that functioned simultaneously as healing, empowering, and knowledge-producing processes (Musleh, 2025). In doing so, the research blurs conventional distinctions between research subjects and co-researchers (Oinas et al., 2018).

Rather than treating these initiatives merely as empirical 'cases', this research invites reflection on how sociology can be practiced – and remain meaningful – under conditions of extreme violence. Abeer Musleh and other Palestinian scholars (e.g. Jawad et al., 2025) foreground participatory, community-based forms of sociological work that blur the boundaries between research, care, and collective survival. This approach resonates with sociological research conducted in other wartime contexts, including Ukraine, where scholars are compelled to rethink the conditions, purposes, and ethical requirements of knowledge production. The following section develops three insights emerging from Abeer Musleh's research that speak beyond the Palestinian case.

In a war context, research must be helpful to participants and their community

Conducting qualitative research in a context of daily bombing and the targeted killing of civilians requires adaptation of methods. A key methodological requirement is to design research settings that support participants as they navigate repeated trauma. In contexts of daily bombings and mass killings, qualitative research may seem futile. Yet, the project developed by the Tamer Institute and Abeer Musleh was valued by the participants and actively opposed some dimensions of the genocide. Sharing live stories became a tool for resistance and empowerment. Writing and gathering stories helped restore a sense of purpose to days otherwise dominated by the urgent search for food and the fear of the next bombing. As one participant put it, 'I can write the stories of everyone instead of waiting for humanitarian aid in the tent' (Musleh, 2025: 626). Through storytelling, research became not only a means of producing knowledge but also a fragile yet vital space for agency, dignity, and collective survival.

Youth initiatives as spaces for healing, agency, and meaning

The research setting became a collective space of healing, where young people shared their wartime experiences, emotions, memories, trauma, and hopes. It also provided opportunities to act rather than merely endure, and to reclaim meaning in their lives. As A. Musleh explains: "Through sharing collaboratively, they form a collective process of building a

connection between their emotions and thoughts linked to the traumatic experiences they have lived and continue to live through" (Musleh, 2025: 623); " Engaging in youth initiatives is a tool for providing meaning and empowerment to one's life amid a genocide (Musleh, 2025: 622).

The youth collectives 'enabled participants to nurture one another, share stories, and collectively survive' (Musleh, 2025: 621). They belong to a range of small-scale and broader initiatives that allow Palestinian people to enact and build 'new ways of livability, warmth and love'. (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2024) in the most extreme conditions. 'Living through the genocide in Gaza, they assert their humanity by reassembling shattered social and physical body parts, connecting them to loved ones and land'. (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2024).

Amid destruction and constant risk, young participants found spaces in which to become subjects of their own lives and actors within their society: 'we try to face and challenge the genocidal war in our way, in ways we can be innovative and master the situation' (Musleh, 2025: 623), one young interviewee explained. These collective practices enabled young people to 'feel a sense of self-efficacy, empowerment and agency' (Musleh, 2025: 624) and to move 'from situations of passivity and trauma to forms of actively working on and processing the unspeakable by ascribing collective meaning'. (Musleh, 2025: 625). In doing so, they cultivated 'a sense of responsibility to write history in the way [they] live it' (Musleh, 2025: 630), thereby resisting dehumanisation and refusing to succumb to helplessness.

From individual traumas to a collective counter-narrative

Initiatives such as those developed by the Tamer Institute bring together groups of young people and are not merely therapeutic; they also provide a space for shifting from individualised experiences of displacement, injury, and grief to shared and collectively articulated narratives. They 'transform their meaning into shared and mutually understood experiences'. (Musleh, 2025: 623). By sharing their stories and gathering other people's life and wartime testimonies, young people assemble a community counter-narrative.

They contribute to writing a history of Gaza from below, making visible voices that would otherwise remain silenced. They show Gaza not only as a space of destruction, as it is often portrayed in political and media narratives, but also as a space full of life, where young people grew up with hopes and dreams. These settings, together with Musleh's research, render Palestinian life visible at a time when global media spoke almost exclusively of Palestinian death (Fassin, 2025), reducing existence to casualty counts.

The erasure of a people's history and culture is a recognised tactic of warfare and, in the case of Gaza, of genocide. This includes 'historicide': 'the deliberate destruction of the past and of historiographical enquiry itself . . . the weaponisation of the past for a particular ethnonationalist project. It is an epistemological land grab, an attempt to control what it means to do history' (Ward, 2025: 6). By enabling young people to tell and write their collective history, participatory research makes them not only narrators but actors of their own historical trajectory – a crucial dimension for a people denied the permission to narrate its story (Said, 1984). The research conducted by Musleh and her

young colleagues provides an alternative perspective on Gaza that effectively disrupts dominant frames.

Sociology in Wartime Ukraine

A resilient sociology. Before the war, sociology was already a well-established academic field in Ukraine, supported by an active national association, a strong presence within the National Academy of Sciences, a solid base in universities and survey institutes, and a presence in public debates. The volume edited by Vil Bakirov and Yevhen Golovakha (2018), *Ukrainian Sociology in the 21st Century: Theory, Methods, Research Results*, portrays a dynamic discipline. More recently, Olga Kutsenko and Svitlana Babenko (2024) provided a comprehensive overview of the field, synthesising institutional developments, major research themes, empirical findings, and an early analysis of the transformations induced by the war that began in 2014 and escalated with the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022. They also recount how sociologists have played key roles at several turning points in the country's recent history – after independence during the formation of national identity, in 2004 when electoral fraud was exposed through a landmark survey, and in the analysis of major social movements. Regular surveys and sociological analyses have supported Ukrainian society's capacity to understand itself and its ongoing transformations after independence, notably through the analysis of its two main social uprisings, the Orange Revolution (2004–2005) and the Euromaidan in 2013 and 2014 (Emeran, 2017; Oleinik, 2018).

From the onset of the war, Ukrainian sociologists have shown remarkable resilience. Even after the full-scale invasion in 2022, sociologists continued to teach and conduct research despite bombardments, displacement, and occupation. Under these adverse conditions, they have produced a substantial body of empirically grounded and theoretically robust research.

Quantitative methods and survey research have traditionally been among the strengths of Ukrainian sociology (Grushetsky and Paniotto, 2025). Thanks to sustained individual and collective efforts, survey institutes overcame the organisational, technical, and financial challenges of the first year of the invasion (Klein et al., 2025). The Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences continued its annual surveys on societal change, compiled in the volume *Ukrainian Society in Wartime* (available in Ukrainian, Golovakha and Dembitskyi, 2024). The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) also maintained its surveys, later synthesised in the book *War and the Transformation of (2022–23)* (available in English, Grushetsky and Paniotto, 2025). Maintaining methodologically solid and uninterrupted survey series documenting social dynamics during a full-scale war is an achievement with few precedents in the history of sociology.

Life, society, and values in a country at war. Documenting and analysing life in a society at war has become a central purpose of Ukrainian social sciences. The challenge is immense: full-scale war reshapes all spheres of personal and social life, from national and civic identity (Golovakha et al., 2023; Kutsenko, 2025c) to everyday family relations (Kostenko et al., 2024) and intimate religiosity (Karakai and Moskotina, 2025).

In their panorama of Ukrainian sociology, Olga Kutsenko and Svitlana Babenko (2024: 454) identify 'violence and war crimes, mental health, militarisation,

de-occupation, forced migration, [and] soldiers returning home' as major research themes that have surged with the war. Studies of displacement, community transformation, memory, trauma and civic resistance document the lived experience of a society undergoing profound change.

Ukrainian sociologists rely extensively on values surveys to analyse how war reshapes social and political orientations (Grushetsky and Paniotto, 2025). Unsurprisingly, they show that the war has produced a high degree of national unity: national sentiments and identity have strengthened considerably while long-standing social and political divisions that shaped public debate since independence have diminished, particularly in attitudes towards Russia, NATO, and the European Union. A strong pro-Western consensus has become a defining feature of contemporary Ukrainian identity (KIIS – Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2024, reported in Kutsenko, 2025a; 2025b).

Special attention has been paid to the evolution of democratic values under conditions of fear, militarization, and pervasive violence. Surveys suggest that the war and widespread violence do not seem to lead to a collapse of democratic ideals (Bakke et al., 2025). On the contrary, the war appears to have 'galvanised' Ukrainians' commitment to democratic principles (Kutsenko, 2025a). Drawing on KISS surveys conducted for the National Democratic Institute, Olga Kutsenko (2025a: 21) reports that 'in 2023, 93% of Ukrainians aspired for Ukraine to become a fully functioning democracy (. . .) and 70% believed that the authorities should be criticised for possible wrong decisions' (. . .). The proportion of Ukrainian citizens who perceived the democratic political system as 'rather good' or 'very good' rose from 76% in 2021 to 95% in 2022 and 93% in 2023.

While a strong support for democracy and democratic values is solidly established by successive surveys, overly optimistic interpretations of Ukraine's 'extraordinary democratic resilience' and its long-term sustainability require qualification, notably for three reasons. First, the wartime context amplifies the 'social-desirability bias', especially on politically sensitive questions. Some of the respondents tend to answer in a way they perceive as expected rather than expressing their opinion. Besides, recent laws criminalising the denial of Russian aggression make respondents very cautious when expressing opinions divergent from perceived patriotic norms. Second, in Ukraine, support for democracy is intertwined with the broader choice between the Western and the Russian political and societal models. Respondents may express a political orientation towards Europe and against Russia, rather than a substantive commitment to democratic values. Third, more in-depth analyses of surveys concerning democratic values show variation within the population. For example, drawing on surveys from October 2022 and July 2024, Bakke et al. (2025: 2) find that individuals who were physically injured or lost a close relative or friend are less supportive of safeguarding minority rights and, to a lesser extent, freedom of speech.

Documenting resilience and citizens' initiatives. Resilience has become a significant focus of social science research in wartime Ukraine. While psychologists consider resilience as the ability of an individual to successfully adapt to adverse changes, sociologists emphasise its relational, collective, and institutional dimensions, identifying organisational and societal settings that sustain resilience at the individual, collective, and national levels (Nechitailo and Alieva, 2025).

Civic activism and volunteering, now central features of Ukraine's wartime social landscape, have attracted sustained scholarly interest (Boichak and McKernan, 2024; Stepanenko and Stewart, 2025). Citizen and volunteering initiatives have responded to a wide range of needs: constructing shelters, rebuilding schools, supporting displaced persons, and assisting soldiers. Drawing on public opinion surveys on trust, Vil Bakirov (2025) points to a self-reinforcing dynamic, whereby participation in collective action strengthens national identification, which in turn encourages further engagement. These practices thus operate simultaneously as forms of practical support and as mechanisms of social cohesion. However, Olga Kutsenko (2025a and 2025b) warns that the unprecedented solidarity of 2022 may erode under the pressure of war fatigue, mistrust of institutions, perceived injustice, and emerging wartime divisions between those who fled and those who stayed, between military personnel and civilians, and across social classes.

The sociology of education has also become a vibrant field. Sociologists have analysed how Ukraine's education system re-established itself remarkably fast after the invasion and struggled to maintain teaching and students' attention under wartime conditions. Teaching resumed as early as mid-March 2022. In an insightful contribution, Iryna Nechitailo and Aigul Alieva (2025: 29) analyse the 'unique "Ukrainian recipe" for the resilience of the education system under wartime conditions'. They highlight the key role of schools and teachers, facilitated by the substantial autonomy granted by the government, and a functional balance between school organisational control and individual autonomy. Drawing on the neo-institutional approach and in-depth interviews, they propose an analytical and evaluation framework of resilience in the education system that better considers teachers' experience and school-level practices.

Higher education has received substantial attention from researchers, not least because academics themselves experience directly the disruptions and adaptations they analyse. Surveys and analyses (Lavrysh et al., 2025) document how universities, professors, and students strive to maintain educational quality despite the circumstances: expanding online learning, relocating universities to safe territories, and multiplying collaborations with international partners. Pedagogical innovations to sustain students' motivation and maintain academic standards testify to the commitment of teachers. An illustration is provided by the international and interactive online courses that bring together students based in different universities in Ukraine and abroad (Zayachuk, 2025).

Documenting war crimes. An essential role for sociology and social sciences in wartime is to document and analyse war crimes and human rights violations. Like Phoebe Sanchez in the Philippines, Ukrainian sociologists have systematically recorded war crimes and atrocities. Like Abeer Musleh in Palestine, they have collected firsthand narratives of traumatic experiences of violence, notably following the massacres of civilians in Bucha and Mariupol.

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, new modes of evidence gathering outside state-led investigations have proliferated in Ukraine. Social scientists participate in a wide range of research and civil society initiatives that collect and verify testimonies of war crimes. The proliferation of new forms of evidence and non-state modes of evidence gathering offers additional perspectives on war crimes. It gives more visibility to dimensions that are often neglected by state-led processes, notably for 'modes of

violence that simultaneously defy boundaries (e.g. rape, manslaughter, trafficking) and have highly localised effects (the destruction of particular homes and communities and the assault on particular bodies and lives)' (Klosterkamp and Jeffrey, 2024: 4).

The Lviv Centre for Urban History launched a project documenting everyday life during the war. Its members also started collecting testimonies among internally displaced citizens, as they noted that some refugees 'felt a strong need to talk about their ordeal' (Wylegala, 2025: 145). The project was expanded to five European countries to interview victims and witnesses of war crimes among Ukrainian refugees (Wylegala, 2025). Civil society organisations such as the Centre for Civil Liberties (Nekoliak, 2025) and the Reckoning Project (Reckoning Project, 2024) train and coordinate local journalists, researchers, and professionals to gather visual data and firsthand testimonies from witnesses and victims of war crimes. Both initiatives rely on methodologies aligned with international legal standards, enabling the use of collected material in judicial proceedings.

The primary purpose of these initiatives is to shed light on violence and war crimes, support accountability, and seek justice. Researchers and civil society organisations also emphasise two additional aims: public dissemination and victim support. Sharing testimonies contributes to 'counter disinformation', 'inform global audiences', and 'preserve the historical memory of the war' (Reckoning Project, 2024; Nekoliak, 2025). It also contributes to trauma healing, as many survivors feel a strong need to bear witness and seek justice for family members, friends, or neighbours who have been murdered. As Ana Wylegala (2025: 157) notes, research 'cannot be a substitute for meeting the basic needs of interviewees, but it can follow right behind. If implemented responsibly, it performs important functions both in relation to the group studied and more broadly to society'. At the same time, this work demands strong epistemological and ethical commitments: a trauma-informed and sensitive approach is essential to avoid retraumatization (Nekoliak, 2025).

Unveiling false narratives. A further essential role of sociology is to expose and debunk propaganda, misinformation, and false narratives, which are extensively used in wartime. The invading power seeks to negate the history and culture of the people they attack. Empirical research counters such erasures by documenting social realities and historical depth. While the contexts differ profoundly, the notion of 'historicide' used to analyse Israel's attempt to erase Palestinian history resonates with Russia's attempt to undermine Ukrainian identity. Mishalova et al. (2024) show that the challenge and attempt to destroy Ukrainian cultural identity and historical heritage is a core dimension of Russia's invasion.

Other scholars analyse Russian propaganda and the dissemination of state-backed narratives (Bradshaw et al., 2024; Oleinik and Paniotto, 2024). Oleinik and Paniotto (2024: 225–226) highlight recurring attempts to depict Ukraine as lacking a legitimate history and possessing territories that constitute a 'historical error to be corrected by military means'. Research across the humanities and social sciences has refuted such claims, demonstrating that Ukrainian national identity is rooted in long-standing cultural and historical trajectories and civic values (Krymets et al., 2025). Large-scale surveys

further disprove portrayals of Ukraine as a 'failed' or 'divided' state and are increasingly mobilised as 'discursive tools of resistance' (Kutsenko, 2025b: §30).

The utopian role of sociology. Beyond documenting and analysing social change, sociology also carries a utopian function: clarifying challenges, imagining possible futures, and expanding public horizons. This role does not refer to naive idealism. Ernst Bloch's (1986) concept of '*concrete utopia*' refers to anticipations grounded in real tendencies and latent possibilities. Building on this insight, Ruth Levitas (2013) conceives utopia as a methodological resource that excavates latent lines of development in contemporary society by projecting alternative possible scenarios for the future.

By analysing value changes, identifying structural dynamics and potential trajectories, Ukrainian sociologists remind citizens of a society's capacity to transform itself and highlight that crises may open the horizon of possibilities. They act fully within their disciplinary mandate when they identify post-war risks and opportunities. They emphasise that the future of Ukrainian society will depend on collective choices rather than a return to the pre-war status quo that is neither inevitable nor desirable. As Yevhen Holovakha (2025) warns:

> If the phenomenon of elitist egoism . . . persists, if corruption schemes endure, and if the elite fail to demonstrate meaningful downward solidarity, it will be difficult in the post-war period to preserve and develop the substantive solidarities that emerged during the war.

Vil Bakirov (2025) similarly argues that 'a key post-war challenge will be overcoming the gap between the horizontal energy of society and the vertical weakness of the state'. He sees in the volunteering and civic initiatives possible seeds of a more cohesive post-war society:

> The extraordinary capacity for self-organisation, the high level of social capital, and the strong public trust in the army and volunteers must be transformed into a driving force for reforming and rebuilding state institutions capable of healing the wounds of war and ensuring sustainable development in peacetime.

This resonates with Phoebe Sanchez's (2021: 164) call in the Filipino context: 'Sociologists have to be emboldened as harbingers of the process of democratization . . . [The country] needs civil society formations that are self-organised, voluntary, self-generating, genuinely autonomous from the state, equipped with public-interest articulation'.

Methodological and epistemological challenges

Adapting methods. One of the enduring strengths of Ukrainian sociology has been its reflexive and self-critical ethos (Kutsenko, 2025c; Kutsenko and Babenko, 2024). This tradition has proven particularly valuable since the full-scale invasion generated an 'epistemological earthquake' (Kutsenko, 2025b), destabilising the objects, methods, and very epistemology of social analysis. The war obliges to rethink research practices and to revisit some core epistemological questions, starting with academic social

commitments and the limits of scientific responsibility when research is conducted in a context of war. How should research, methods, and epistemological stances adapt when societies confront existential threats, widespread violence, and severely disrupted research environments?

In Ukraine, the first challenges are practical. Some researchers have emigrated, and others have been conscripted. Some regions of the country are under occupation. Maintaining teaching and research activities requires coping with electricity cuts and the stress of regular bombardments. Every researcher is struggling to balance their time and energy between professional duties, the challenges of daily life in wartime, and voluntary solidarity actions.

Methodological issues are also substantial. Conducting sociological research during war, whether quantitative or qualitative, demands overcoming significant hurdles, such as recruiting participants, adapting methods, and accessing relevant actors considering displacements, insecurity, and disruptions. Quantitative researchers and survey institutes have adapted rapidly. Traditional face-to-face surveys have become increasingly difficult and were partly replaced by phone interviews, with their inherent challenges and limitations. To reach populations who have left the country or are serving in the military, Ukrainian research institutes increasingly rely on mixed-mode designs, for example, complementing phone surveys with online questionnaires. Ukrainian sociologists have also developed statistical methods to limit error margins and account for the country's new demographic and territorial realities (Paniotto, 2024).

Public sociology and care. As highlighted in research on Palestine, sociological work in times of war must strive to be meaningful and valuable for participants and their communities. Ukrainian sociologists have increasingly turned to applied research with social impact (Kutsenko, 2025b), notably through collaborations with civil society organisations and local authorities, where sociologists contribute to programmes of reintegration, recovery, and support for war-affected populations (ISAR Ednannia, 2023).

Due to its reliance on personal interaction and in-depth interviews, qualitative research requires meticulous adaptation and an explicit ethic of care for both participants and researchers. When working with individuals affected by loss or trauma, the research setting itself should be designed to support participants' subjective and reflexive processes, notably by carefully crafting safe spaces where traumatic experiences can be shared. In a situation of war or when collecting testimonies of victims and witnesses of war crimes, 'even when utmost care is taken, methodological and ethical assumptions necessarily undergo modifications. This makes it all the more important that such projects are carried out by experienced research teams with the necessary substantive and institutional support' (Wylegala, 2025: 156). Adaptive, reflexive methodologies and ethics become crucial. 'The well-being of the respondent takes precedence over the quest for "complete" information' (Kutsenko, 2025b; see also Nekoliak, 2025: 168; Wylegala, 2025: 148).

Sociologists, social scientists, and psychologists engaged in projects to document war crimes, conduct fieldwork in wartime, or collect traumatic narratives heightened risks of emotional exhaustion, moral distress, and secondary trauma. Although the emotional impact of qualitative research on violence was long neglected, recent studies have documented processes of 'vicarious trauma', defined as the emotional and psychological

stress resulting from exposure to another person's traumatic experiences (Coles et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2023). These studies also indicate that research projects incorporating professional psychological support or supervision, or at least structured peer debriefings and reflexive supervision, can help mitigate harm and sustain ethical practice (Williamson et al., 2020; Wylegala, 2025). Therefore, psychological support, whether through mental-health professionals, structured team debriefs among trained colleagues, or both, should be a clearly defined, adequately funded, and integral component of methodological design for research conducted in contexts of war or mass violence.

Tensions between research and commitment. Prior to the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian sociology was primarily rooted in a tradition of 'professional' and 'policy' sociology (Burawoy, 2021), emphasising objectivity and detachment. On many crucial issues today, maintaining a stance of detached neutrality is untenable for a country suffering invasion and daily bombardment. The public role of sociology has intensified. Survey results, expert commentaries, and reports now find significant attention in the public sphere. Many now argue that sociological knowledge should 'not only explain but also support collective subjectivity' (Kutsenko, 2025b: §39). The war has also transformed researchers' positionality. Ukrainian sociologists are not only observers but also citizens of a nation at war. They share the anxieties, uncertainties, and patriotic sentiments of their fellow citizens.

This shift raises pressing epistemological questions that received only limited attention before the war. 'Wartime – with the urgencies it imposes on everyday life, the emotions it summons, and the loyalty it demands of a collective – is opposed to central requirements of academic life' (Costas et al., 2024: 765). For those pursuing a sociology that is both rigorous and publicly engaged, certain biases and dilemmas are unavoidable: 'political considerations can hinder academics' ability to assume the 'responsibility' of 'speaking truth' (Costas et al., 2024: 766).

There are no universal answers to these dilemmas. Some of the most compelling responses emerge from reflections grounded in personal fieldwork experience, an acknowledgement of the researcher's positionality and stances, and a realistic assessment of possibilities for empirical research and dissemination. The case studies of sociologists in Palestine and the Philippines, referenced earlier, represent such situated answers. Likewise, Ukrainian sociologists have navigated fragile and evolving balances between scientific rigour, ethical responsibility, and civic engagement. They are forging individual and collective responses based on their experiences and the constraints of life and research in wartime.

In an insightful analysis, Costas et al. (2024) examine the stakes and limits of activist commitment in wartime and the epistemological conditions for rigorous research during an invasion. They note:

> The extreme context of war confronts academics in a fundamental way, as the state of emergency obliterates space and time for contemplation and critical reflection. While such powerful affective and existential immersion may yield unique insight . . . it can also make it difficult to sustain the distance on which academic practice simultaneously relies.

They point to frictions 'at the point where people's academic role runs contrary to their political, activist life and goals, situations in which, for strategic political considerations, academics hold back critique' (Costas et al., 2024: 768).

Across the world, war and political polarisation force a re-engagement with long-standing debates about sociology's relationship to politics, researchers' commitment, and critical stance. Should sociology be politically engaged? Has it become too political? Or should it defend axiological neutrality? These debates have been present since the foundation of the discipline. They gain new resonance in wartime. There is no correct universal answer to these. Different stances on the degree of academic social commitment or activism are legitimate, and the discipline benefits from this plurality. Nevertheless, the common ground must remain the uncompromising upholding of scientific rigour. Fact-checking, methodological transparency, and the rejection of disinformation remain the pillars of the social sciences and the collective ethos of sociology (Pleyers, 2025b).

Conclusion: The global resonance of Ukrainian sociology

The resilience and vitality demonstrated by Ukrainian sociology represent a collective achievement, grounded in sustained personal and collective efforts. Many Ukrainian sociologists have endured displacement, loss, and severe disruption. Yet, despite immense difficulties and uncertainties, they have continued to produce empirically rich, theoretically robust, and socially relevant research, published in national and international academic journals and books. Their work documents the social consequences of war and displacement, but also the practices of solidarity, adaptation, and civic commitment that underpin the resilience of Ukrainian society.

Far from being paralysed, Ukrainian sociology is experiencing a period of dynamism, reconfiguration, and creativity. Sociologists have undertaken large-scale surveys and developed methodologically innovative qualitative research. Building upon established national traditions, they have also revitalised the field through innovative methods, fieldwork, and expanded international collaborations. Active engagement in international sociological associations and research networks and a growing presence in international publications have resulted in unprecedented global visibility for Ukrainian sociology.

To their international readers, Ukrainian sociologists provide far more than empirical data on a society under attack. They demonstrate that sociology can provide significant contributions to societies experiencing conflict. Sociological research provides citizens and institutions with tools for self-understanding during periods of rapid transformation. It also enhances societal resilience under existential threat and supports efforts to rebuild a democratic and more unified nation. As Nechitailo and Alieva (2025: 30) argue in their study of Ukraine's wartime education system, some 'Ukrainian recipes for resilience' constitute 'unique experiences that are relevant for all of Europe, contributing to the formation of universal basic principles . . . that can serve as a guide during global social crises, from which no society or country is immune'.

Wartime research in Ukraine addresses some of the core questions faced by contemporary sociology. How does a society remain resilient under extreme pressure? How does democracy resist, and how is it transformed and challenged? How do institutions

and moral economies transform when facing existential threats? How can researchers conduct rigorous studies while they remain committed to a collective struggle for survival? Through these challenges, Ukrainian sociologists have demonstrated methodological creativity, epistemological reflection, and theoretical insights with relevance far beyond their national context.

For the international sociological community, engaging with Ukrainian sociology is therefore not merely an act of solidarity, but a crucial opportunity for reciprocal learning and theoretical renewal. It nurtures a global dialogue and provides empirical, methodological, and normative resources for a concrete reply to those who challenge the relevance of sociology. Beyond our discipline, learning from the experience of a resilient democracy is urgent at a time when the world order is shaken, and democracy is threatened.

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Author biography

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Résumé

Que peut faire la sociologie en temps de guerre ? Mener des recherches sociologiques a-t-il encore une utilité lorsqu'une solidarité immédiate s'impose ? À partir de l'expérience de l'Ukraine en temps de guerre et des enseignements tirés en Palestine et aux Philippines, l'article passe en revue un certain nombre de rôles cruciaux joués par la sociologie en temps de guerre : donner un sens à des transformations sociales rapides, témoigner des violences perpétrées, et poursuivre des horizons démocratiques. Depuis 2022, les sociologues ukrainiens continuent de rendre compte des changements rapides intervenus dans la vie quotidienne et la société, de l'engagement civique, des valeurs, de la résilience et des crimes de guerre. Des débats épistémologiques fort intéressants sur les conditions, les limites et les responsabilités de la production de connaissances en temps de guerre ont vu le jour, dans lesquels sont abordées les tensions entre rigueur scientifique et engagement civique ainsi que les exigences éthiques de la recherche. En mettant en avant l'expérience de la sociologie dans une société menacée dans son existence même, l'article invite au dialogue international et à l'apprentissage mutuel sur les responsabilités publiques, éthiques et démocratiques de la sociologie en temps de guerre.

Mots-clés

guerre, résilience, sociologie, sociologie publique, Ukraine

Resumen

¿Qué puede hacer la sociología en tiempos de guerra? ¿Sigue siendo útil hacer investigación sociológica cuando se necesita solidaridad inmediata? A partir de la experiencia de Ucrania en tiempos de guerra y los aprendizajes obtenidos de los casos de Palestina y Filipinas, este artículo revisa algunas funciones cruciales que la sociología ha desempeñado en tiempos de guerra: comprender las rápidas transformaciones sociales, dar testimonio de la violencia y sustentar horizontes democráticos. Desde 2022, los sociólogos ucranianos continúan documentando los rápidos cambios en la vida cotidiana y la sociedad, el compromiso cívico, los valores, la resiliencia y los crímenes de guerra. Han surgido debates epistemológicos profundos sobre las condiciones, los límites y las responsabilidades de la producción de conocimiento en tiempos de guerra, los cuales abordan las tensiones entre el rigor científico y el compromiso cívico, así como las exigencias éticas de la investigación. Al destacar la experiencia de la sociología en una sociedad amenazada en su propia existencia, el artículo invita al diálogo internacional y al aprendizaje mutuo sobre las responsabilidades públicas, éticas y democráticas de la sociología en tiempos de guerra.

Palabras clave

guerra, resiliencia, sociología, sociología pública, Ucrania