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Special Section

# Teaching IR in Wartime

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# Teaching the Russian War Against Ukraine: Ukraine as a Microcosm of the Paradigm Shift from International Relations to Planetary Politics<sup>1</sup>

Ian Manners

***Abstract:** The impact of the Russian war against Ukraine should have far-reaching repercussions on the teaching of International Relations (IR) and European Union (EU) studies. In this article, it is argued that Ukrainian resistance to the invasion must be part of an important shift in thinking about IR and the EU within holistic planetary politics. First, the terminologies and technologies of teaching IR and EU studies, Ukraine and Russia, EU enlargement and the “post-Soviet space” after the end of the Cold War are introduced. Second, the conventional teaching of IR and EU studies in Western Europe, 1991–2022 is analyzed by looking at what was included and excluded in the study of these disciplines. Third, the transformation of teaching IR and EU studies after the invasion and counter-offensive of 2022–2024 is examined by focusing on the rapid process of re-education and rethinking of teaching on Ukraine and Russia in IR and EU studies courses. Finally, it is concluded that a paradigm shift to teaching planetary politics is necessitated by the Russian war against Ukraine and other 21<sup>st</sup> century crises.*

The 30-year period of Ukrainian independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union had not featured much, if at all, in the teaching of International Relations (IR) in western European universities.

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Kateryna Zarembo, Michèle Knodt, Maksym Yakovlyev, Thomas Fetzer, Mridula Ghosh, Olena Khylyko, Galyna Solovei, Nina Krickel-Choi, Simon Stattin, Ted Svensson, and Anders Uhlin for their thoughtful reflections and critical comments.

The 2013–2014 Maidan Revolution and 2014 Russian Annexation of Crimea and the Donbas featured as interesting events in IR, while the 2016 EU–Ukraine Free Trade Area and 2017 Association Agreement were also interesting to European Union (EU) studies. But neither Ukraine nor these events were widely taught in western European IR or EU studies prior to the Russian invasion on the 24 February 2022. This article analyzes the impact of the Russian war against Ukraine on the teaching of IR and EU studies in Europe. It argues that Ukrainian resistance to the invasion is part of an important shift in thinking about IR and the EU in empirical and theoretical terms, as well as accelerating a changed pedagogic paradigm to teaching IR and EU studies within holistic planetary politics.

The article does this in five steps by drawing on personal experiences of teaching, research publications, and textbooks from the period 1991–2024. First, the article introduces the terminologies and technologies of teaching IR and EU studies, Ukraine and Russia, EU enlargement and the “post-Soviet space” after the end of the Cold War. Second, the article analyzes the conventional teaching of IR and EU studies in Western Europe, 1991–2022, by looking at what was included and excluded in the study of these disciplines. Third, the article examines the transformation of teaching IR and EU studies after the invasion and counter-offensive of 2022–2024 focusing on the rapid process of re-education and rethinking of teaching on Ukraine and Russia in IR and EU studies courses. Fourth, the article concludes by thinking ahead to the necessary paradigm shift to teaching planetary politics that the Russian war against Ukraine and other 21<sup>st</sup> century crises demand. This paradigm shift centers the planet as a whole and decenters western and Eurocentric IR and EU studies, ensuring that peripheralized, marginalized, or colonized subjects such as postcolonial Africa, Asia, or post-Soviet Eastern Europe, as well as ecology, stateless peoples, and planetary justice, are properly part of constituting 21<sup>st</sup> century planetary politics. Thus, the article argues the need to understand Ukraine as a microcosm of symbiotic planetary politics, an example of the wider planetary organic crisis of



five symbiotic dimensions of economy, society, ecology, conflict, and polity.

The personal experiences of teaching, research publication, and textbooks come from teaching IR and EU studies at the University of Bristol, Swansea University, University of Kent, Brussels School of International Studies, Malmö University, Roskilde University, University of Copenhagen, and Lund University from 1991 to 2024. During this period, I have taught IR and EU studies at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels almost every year for three decades and have seen trends and fashions come and go. But during this period these two disciplines have become more confident about teaching disciplinary history and theory as the core, much to the expense of peripheral, marginal, or colonized subjects such as Ukraine. This article addresses this problem by asking questions about the new teaching challenges driven by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## 1. Introduction: Teaching the Russian War Against Ukraine

Americans and Europeans were guided through the new century by a tale about “the end of history,” by what I will call the *politics of inevitability*, a sense that the future is just more of the present, that the laws of progress are known, that there are not alternatives, and therefore nothing really to be done.... Americans and Europeans kept telling themselves their tales of inevitability for a quarter of a century after the end of communism, and so raised a millennial generation without history.... The fates of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus after 1991 showed well enough that the fall of one system did not create a blank slate on which nature generated markets and markets generated rights (Snyder 2018: 7).

The terminologies and technologies of teaching IR and EU studies in western European universities evolved rapidly with the end of the Cold War and the birth of the “New Europe” following Timothy Snyder’s “politics of inevitability.” Narrating the interim period 1991–2022 in terms of teaching IR is impossible; every teaching experience was and is so different, Europe west and Europe east, global north and global south. But there are two features which

Timothy Snyder, one of the leading scholars of international relations in and between Russia, Europe, and America, uses to describe this period: the *politics of inevitability* and the *politics of eternity*. The *politics of inevitability* since the 1980s is the assumption that There-Is-No-Alternative to neoliberalism, defined as the privatization of public life, including the deregulation and privatization of nationalized industries, financial services, welfare state, and government (Manners 2018: 1225). While these neoliberal assumptions survived the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007–2008 and the Eurozone Sovereign Debt crisis of 2009–2012, the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of the *politics of eternity* challenge hyper-globalization. In contrast, the *politics of eternity* “places one nation at the center of a cyclical story of victimhood” where “eternity politicians manufacture crisis and manipulate the resultant emotion” (Snyder 2018: 8). The past 18 years of democratic decline since 2005 have seen the rise of the *politics of eternity* and eternity politicians across the world (Freedom House 2024).

Using personal reflections on teaching based on syllabi and textbooks provides one route to the experiences of teaching IR and EU studies prior to and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Having taught courses in IR and EU studies in seven different departments across at least three different countries brings some comparative experience and overview of teaching. These personal reflections will be strengthened by using and developing Felix Berenskötter’s (2018) review of “How textbooks cover theories” to assess to what extent and how transatlantic IR textbooks cover theories and issues in contemporary IR. A second route to understanding the changes of teaching IR in wartime is to examine the intellectual context in which teaching takes place through a series of longitudinal research publication trends generated using Clarivate Web of Science Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). While SSCI generates a number of analytical problems, it does help provide an overview of the incidence of certain research terms in IR during 1990–2023.<sup>2</sup> In the next section 2 the research terms include

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2 The SSCI produces path-dependent citation patterns emphasizing US-institutional bias.

“Ukraine,” “Crimea,” “Donbas(s)” and “environmental,” “climate change,” and “green”. In section 3 the research terms include “geopolitics,” “multipolar,” and “neoimperial/neocolonial.” In the concluding section 4 the research terms include “ecology,” “climate crisis/emergency,” and “planetary politics.” These analyses show how the core of IR and EU studies focuses on certain subjects, such as geopolitics, in contrast to the peripheralized margins of Ukraine and the climate crisis. Where possible these terms will also be used to examine the textbooks.

The article then provides both a personal experience of an international university professor during the Russian war against Ukraine, but also tries to narrate the terminologies and technologies of teaching IR and EU studies. The analysis of syllabi and textbooks illustrates the changing technologies of teaching IR and EU studies. The analysis of both (pre-)wartime terms and planetary political terms illustrates the changing terminologies of teaching IR and EU studies. The combination of these analyses leads to the argument that Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion is part of an important shift in thinking about IR and the EU in empirical and theoretical terms accelerating the need for a change in pedagogic paradigm to teaching IR and EU studies.

## 2. International Relations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*The General Assembly,*

*Reaffirming* the paramount importance of the Charter of the United Nations in

the promotion of the rule of law among nations,

1. *Affirms* its commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity

and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders;

2. *Calls upon* all States to desist and refrain from actions aimed at the

partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine,

including any attempts to modify Ukraine’s borders through the threat or use of

force or other unlawful means;

(UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 2014)

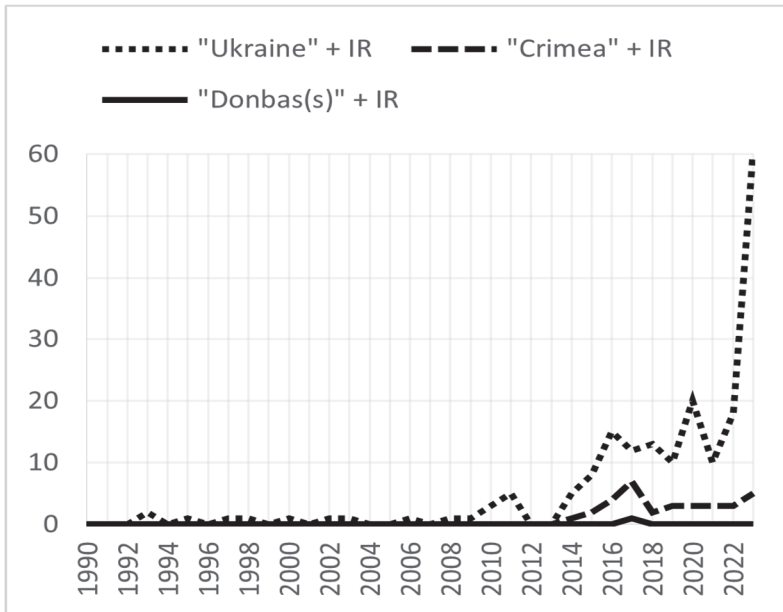
In general, the teaching of IR over the past 100 years has focused on the conservative state-centric concerns of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, placing the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN) at the center of study. The February to March 2014 Russian occupation and annexation of Ukrainian Crimea and Donbas led to the 7 March 2014 UN GA resolution 68/262 on the “Territorial integrity of Ukraine” (above). One hundred members voted to defend the principles of the UN charter and international peace. Ninety-three members declined to defend the UN and international peace. While the failure of so many members to defend UN principles was not unique, this vote and subsequent UN GA votes in 2022 marked the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century IR.

Early post-Cold War courses and textbooks were marked by a simultaneous loosening of the intellectual straitjacket and the desire to repack the period into existing intellectual frames. The earliest IR textbooks to capture the post-Cold War shift in thinking included Burchill and Linklater (1996), Brown (1997), and Baylis and Smith (1997), while the earliest EU textbooks included Nugent (1994), Wallace and Wallace (1996), McCormick (1999), and Bretherton and Vogler (1999). None of these textbooks considered Ukraine to any extent, except as a brief historical footnote in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Instead, IR and EU courses mixed together the “classical” story of IR state-centrism with the “new” story of IR borderless-liberalism. The neo-liberal aspects of IR such as globalization and corporatization focused on the “globalization of world politics” (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2022) and “supraterritoriality” (Scholte 2000) which left Ukraine and its sovereignty, democracy, and politics to the markets of the *politics of inevitability*. The neo-statist aspects of IR such as nationalism and egoism focused on “how states think” (Mearsheimer and Rosato 2023) and “rationality in foreign policy” (Stein 2016) which left Ukraine and its sovereignty, security, and politics to the power games of the *politics of eternity*.

During 2000–2004 I taught a master’s course on “European Union Enlargement” which included topics on Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and on Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Manners 1999, 2010). But in general during this period there were a number of aspects of Ukraine that we did not teach, such as the 1000-year

old origins of European Kyivan Rus or Ukraine as a founding member of the UN in 1945, and there were a number that we mistaught, such as the acquiescence of Ukraine in the Soviet Union and the idea of post-Cold War Eastern Europe as a “post-Soviet space.” As Charts 1 and 2 (below) demonstrate, IR research on Ukraine, Crimea, and Donbas broadly reflected this absence of teaching and textbook consideration during the period 1990–2014, but also the belated inclusion of these topics since the Russian occupation and invasion of Ukraine.

**Chart 1. SSCI references to “International Relations,” “Ukraine”, “Crimea”, and “Donbas(s),” 1990-2023, expressed absolutely.**



**Chart 2. SSCI references to “International Relations,” “Ukraine,” “Crimea,” and “Donbas(s),” 1990–2023, expressed in percentages.**

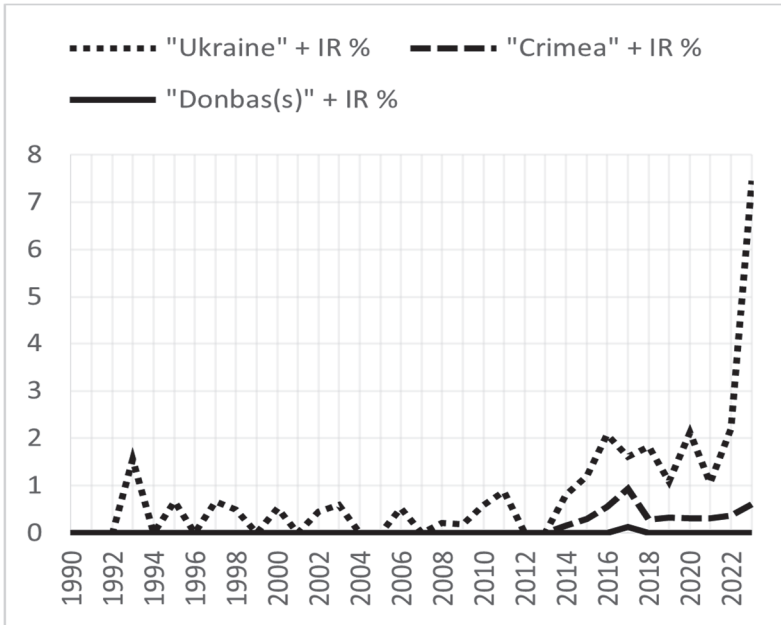
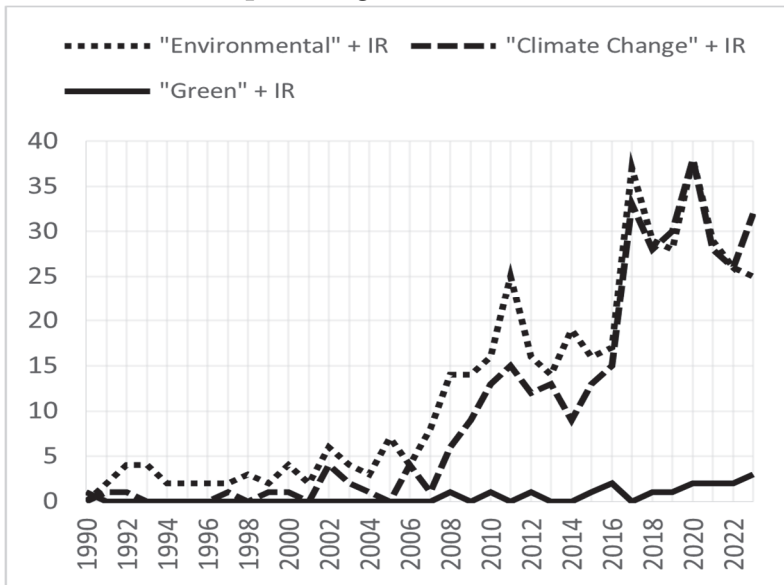


Chart 1 shows the comparative incidence of the phrases “International Relations” plus “Ukraine,” “Crimea,” and “Donbas(s)” from 1990 to 2023 in the SSCI. A few references to Ukraine occurred during the 1990s and have increased steadily since the 2014 Russian occupation of Crimea and Donbas. Articles referring to Crimea increased after 2014, but Donbas references are effectively zero. Chart 2 shows the comparative incidence of the phrases “International Relations” plus “Ukraine,” “Crimea,” and “Donbas(s)” as a percentage of the incidence of the phrase “International Relations,” 1990 to 2023, in the SSCI. This chart makes it possible to see whether references to Ukraine, Crimea, and Donbas are more or less common as a proportion of published articles over time. The chart shows that there was an interest in research articles between 1991 Ukrainian independence, 2004–2005 Orange Revolution, and 2013–2014 Maidan Revolution under 1% of overall IR articles. The 2014 Russian occupation and the 2022 Russian invasion led to a

growth to over 7% of IR articles in 2023. Articles referring to “Crimea” peaked in 2017 (1% of IR articles) and “Donbas(s)” peaked in 2020 following the Russian occupation of these Ukrainian regions.

Overall, the IR research community had very little interest in Ukraine, Crimea, and Donbas in the 25 years from 1990 to 2014. But Ukraine is hardly unique in this respect. To think more holistically about blind spots in IR teaching and research, the article will compare Ukraine with the broad issue of environmental climate change. Russia’s status as both a “petrostate” and one of the world’s worst fossil fuel polluters enables it to invade Ukraine and use “ecocide” as a weapon, hence the comparison facilitates the discussion of planetary politics. Similar to charts 1 and 2, charts 3 and 4 (below) compare the absolute and relative references to environmental, climate change, and green in IR research.

**Charts 3 and 4. SSCI references to “International Relations,” “Green,”<sup>3</sup> “Environmental,” and “Climate Change,” 1990-2023, expressed absolutely and in percentages.**



3 “Green” = (“greening” OR “green economy” OR “green theory” OR “green growth” OR “green politics” OR “green world”).

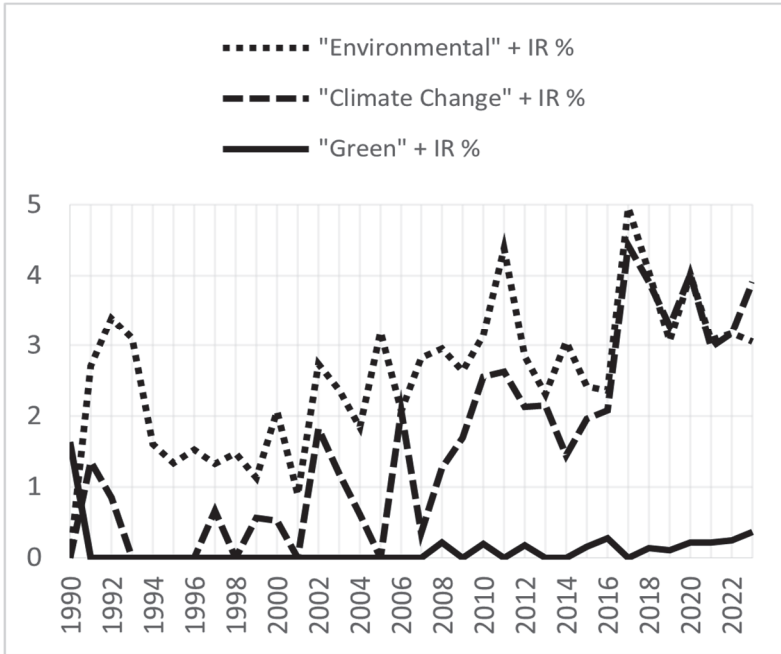


Chart 3 (top) shows the relative occurrence of the phrases “International Relations” plus “Environmental,” “Climate Change,” and “Green” in SSCI articles from 1990 to 2023. Articles on “environmental” IR increased steadily from 1991 to 2011, surged in 2017 and 2020, before declining in 2023. Articles on “Climate Change” and IR grew slowly between 2007 and 2017 articles, surged in 2020, before declining in 2022. Articles on “Green” IR emerge slowly over the past decade but are not significant. The average of 25–40 environmental and climate change articles per year during 2017–2023 is about half the 60 articles on Ukraine and IR in 2023.

Chart 4 (bottom) shows the relative occurrence of the phrases “International Relations” plus “Environmental,” “Climate Change,” and “Green” as a percentage of the incidence of the phrase “International Relations” in the SSCI 1990 to 2023. Articles on “environmental” IR were erratically higher in 1992, 2011, and 2017. In contrast, articles on “climate change” increased above 3% after the 2015 Paris Agreement. In general, there was almost zero percentage interest in “green” IR during the period. Whereas IR



interest in Ukraine rose to nearly 8% of SSCI articles published in 2023, IR interest in environmental and climate change remain at about 3–4% of published IR articles. In other words, insignificant.

In contrast to the lack of IR interest in Ukraine, textbooks and courses since the late 1990s have generally had one chapter or one lecture on environmental politics. For example, Matthew Paterson’s chapters on “green politics” in Burchill and Linklater (1996) and Devatak and True (2022), Robyn Eckersley’s (latterly with Olaf Corry) chapter on “green theory” in Dunne, Kurki, Kušić, and Smith (2024), John Vogler’s chapter on “environmental issues” in Baylis, Smith, and Owens (2022), or Cynthia Weber’s (2021) chapter on “Environmentalism.” Uniquely amongst IR textbooks, Simon Dalby’s chapter on “nature” and Carl Death’s chapter on the “planet” represent two chapters in Edkins and Zehfuss (2018). However, in my experience no widely-used textbook or widely-taught course has ever taken the ecological and climate emergencies seriously by starting a textbook with a framing chapter on the centrality of the environment or ecology as part of a holistic analysis of planetary politics. In this way, the lack of concern for teaching Ukrainian and planetary politics in IR are interwoven—Ukraine can be considered a microcosm in the paradigmatic shift from IR to planetary politics. Just as the peripheralized, marginalized, and colonized subject of Ukraine has not been adequately taught in the IR and EU studies of western European universities, neither has ecological unsustainability. Clearly other subjects such as the postcolonial world or the non-human world could, and should, be part of genuinely planetary politics.

### 3. Geopolitics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The sides underline that Russia and China, as world powers and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, intend to firmly adhere to moral principles and accept their responsibility, strongly advocate the international system with the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international affairs, defend the world order based on international law, including the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, advance multipolarity and promote the democratization of international relations, together create an even more prospering,

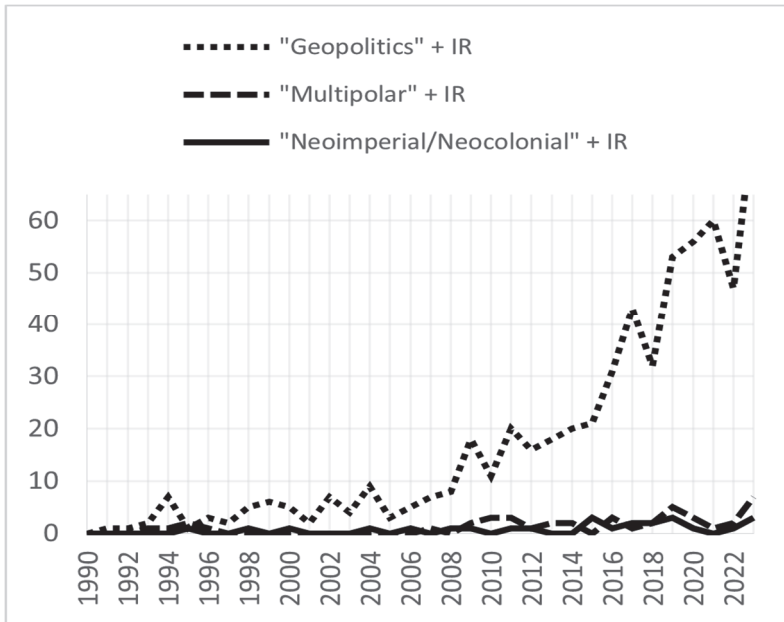
stable, and just world, jointly build international relations of a new type (Putin and Xi 2022).

The transformation of teaching, including the elevation of “geopolitics,” during the Russian invasion and Ukrainian counter-offensive, 2022–2024, has focused on the rapid process of re-education and rethinking of teaching on Ukraine and Russia in IR and EU studies courses. The joint Russia–China Joint Statement on International Relations of 4 February 2022 claimed that the two countries intended to firmly adhere to the moral principles, central coordinating role, and international law of the UN. However, the illegal Russian annexation and human rights abuses in Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine since 2014, and Chinese human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang since 2014, demonstrate the failure to adhere to the moral principles and international law of the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Just 20 days later the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the support of China ridiculed Putin and Xi’s joint declaration. During 5 votes in the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022, 24 March 2022, 7 April 2022, 12 October 2022, and 23 February 2023 Russia consistently disregarded and broke the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN, supported by 4 other autocracies (Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, and Syria). China led a group of 30+ other, largely autocratic countries, to abstain from supporting the UN and Ukraine during these votes. In contrast, the purposes and principles of the UN and Ukraine were upheld by the support of 140+ largely democratic countries during these votes. Thus, while the failure of so many members to defend the principles of the UN and the territorial integrity of Ukraine marked the end of 20<sup>th</sup> Century IR in 2014, the events of 2022 indicated that many countries were intent on returning to the geopolitics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prior to the establishment of the UN.

During 2021 to 2023 I taught and convened the required first-semester undergraduate/bachelor’s course in “International Politics” for approximately 150 Swedish students at Lund University. The course uses the 20<sup>th</sup> century conventions of introducing theories and issues, and is taught with a combination of a simple Swedish textbook (Gustavson and Tallberg 2021) and a more advanced English textbook (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2022). After

the February 2022 invasion we were able to adapt the course by adding a new secondary book, Mark Galeotti (2022) *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine* to the book review section of the course, as well as introducing the war into the parts of the course on international conflict and international cooperation. These adaptations are clearly similar to so many IR courses and textbooks across western Europe—existing paradigms and purveyors of IR knowledge remain hegemonic despite the radical transformations of 21<sup>st</sup> century IR.

**Charts 5 and 6. SSCI references to “International Relations”, “Geopolitics,”<sup>4</sup> “Multipolar,”<sup>5</sup> and “Neoimperial/Neocolonial,”<sup>6</sup> 1990-2023, expressed absolutely and in percentages.**



4 “Geopolitics” = (“geopolitics” OR “geopolitical”).

5 “Multipolar” = (“multipolar” OR “multi-polar”).

6 “Neo-imperial” = (“neo-imperial” OR “neoimperial” OR “neo-imperialism” OR “neoimperialism”).

“Neo-colonial” = (“neo-colonial” OR “neocolonial” OR “neo-colonialism” OR “neocolonialism”).

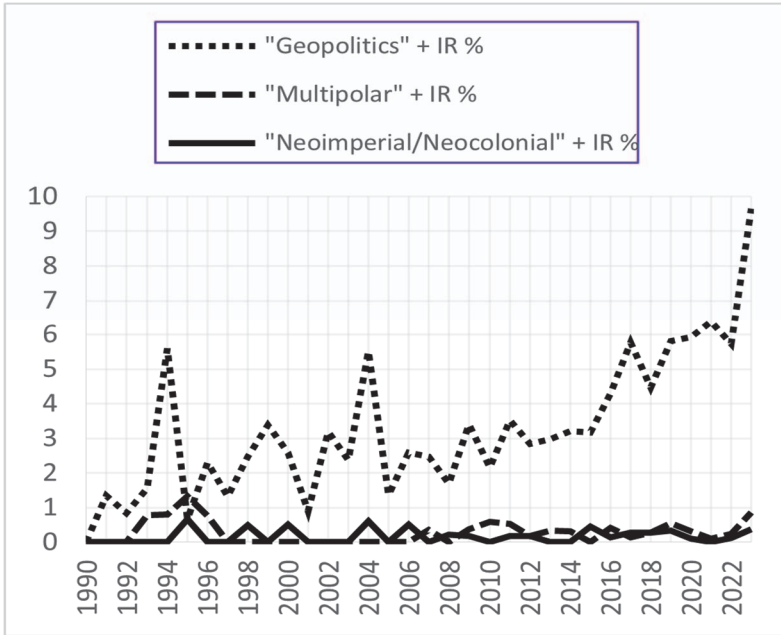


Chart 5 (top) shows the increasing amount of research referring to “International Relations” plus “Geopolitics”, during 1990 to 2023, with a more subtle increase in research referring to “Multipolar,” and “Neoimperial/Neocolonial.” Research referring to “geopolitics” has increased from zero articles in 1990 until 80 articles in 2023. The USA’s war on terror, Chinese foreign policy, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine appear to be driving this development. These developments are also reflected in the gradual but more subtle increases in articles referring to “multipolar” and “neoimperial/neocolonial” to describe the rise of the BRICS since the 2007 GFC. Comparing chart 5 with chart 1 suggests that while there was a gradual increase in references to geopolitics from 2008 to 2015, the rapid increase in articles referring to geopolitics corresponds to the Russian occupation and invasion of Ukraine from 2014 to 2023. Chart 6 (bottom) shows the relative use of the phrases “International Relations” plus “Geopolitics,” “Multipolar,” and “Neoimperial/Neocolonial” as a percentage of the incidence of the phrase “International Relations,” 1990 to 2023. The chart shows

how references to geopolitics, and to a lesser extent multipolar, were relatively higher after the end of the Cold War (until 2004), then rising again after 2015. The relative patterns for geopolitics, post-2014, is obviously similar to those for Ukraine in charts 1 and 2.

These SSCI results and the survey of recently updated IR textbooks indicate two worrying trends in response to the Russian invasion. Firstly, recently updated IR textbooks, such as Viotti and Kauppi (2023: 229) and Dunne, Kurki, Kušić, and Smith (2024), treat the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a case study in “realism” (Williams 2024: 68). While Baylis, Smith, and Owens (2022) provides a fairer analysis of the invasion in terms of globalization, new world dis-order, rising powers, global security, European integration, global trade and finance, the overall trend is that the Russian invasion can be understood and analyzed in terms of existing IR frameworks. Secondly, as the increasing amount of IR research referring to geopolitics demonstrates, the invasion is widely seen in conventional IR as part of a geopolitical struggle between global powers USA and EU vs. Russia and China.

In contrast to these 19<sup>th</sup> century views of geopolitics, the Russian invasion of Ukraine suggests five lessons for teaching a more 21<sup>st</sup> century IR that overcomes the “persistence of Cold War binaries” (Pishchikova 2023). First, the Russian invasion must be understood as an act of neoimperialism and neocolonialism, rather than being “westsplained” as realist geopolitics (Kurylo 2023; Hendl Burlyuk, O’Sullivan, and Arystanbek 2024). Russian neoimperialism to reimpose the imperial Russian empire of 1721–1917 or the Soviet empire of 1917–1991 is the driving force under Vladimir Putin, including the military interventions in Moldova 1990–1992, Chechnya 1994–1996 and 1999–2009, Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014 and 2022 (Kuzio 2009; Snyder 2018; Oksamytna 2023). Neocolonialism involves self-identifying ethnic Russians in these countries acting as the colonial rulers of occupied territories such as Transnistria, Chechnya, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, and Donbas, which in 2022 led to the “postcolonial moment in Russia’s war against Ukraine” (Mälksoo 2023 in Burlyuk and Musliu 2023: 609; also Berglund and Bolkvadze 2024).

Second, the support for the Russian invasion and opposition to the purposes and principles of the UN charter must be understood within the context of a “multipolar” view of emergent international order with the “great powers” of USA, China, Russia, and India as dominant powers. The absurdity of such a limited view of multipolarity in IR is that these four powers currently make up approximately 42% of the world’s population and will diminish to approximately 26% of the world’s population by 2100 (Vollset *et al.* 2020). A more accurate reading of this changing world order is that in general democracies support, and autocracies oppose, the UN and international rule of law. The UN GA votes on occupation and invasion of Ukraine demonstrate this reading, with Russia supported by the closed autocracies of Belarus, Cuba, North Korea, and Syria (plus China, Laos, Mali, Nicaragua, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam on one-off votes). In contrast, the UN and Ukraine are supported by 140 states, that are over 75% democracies (V-Dem Institute 2024). In this context, the need for support for the UN and the international rule of law in the opposition to Russian imperialism was made clearly by Kenyan UN Ambassador Martin Kimani in a speech to the UN Security Council on 21 February 2022:

Rather than form nations that looked ever backward into history with a dangerous nostalgia, we chose to look forward to a greatness none of our many nations and peoples had ever known. We chose to follow the rules of the OAU and the United Nations Charter not because our borders satisfied us but because we wanted something greater forged in peace.... We further strongly condemn the trend—in the last few decades—of powerful states, including members of this Security Council, breaching International Law with little regard. Multilateralism lies on its deathbed tonight. It has been assaulted, as it has been by other powerful states in the recent past.... Let me conclude by reaffirming Kenya’s respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders (Kimani 2022; Yakovlyev 2022).

Third, the Russian invasion must be seen as part of a wider campaign of disinformation, grey zone and hybrid warfare involving the state-funded private military company Wagner Group, Patriot Media Group, Internet Research Agency, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, Russia Today/RT, Sputnik news agency, and a myriad of state-backed disinformation operations (Khylyko 2023;

Kormych and Malyarenko 2023; Krainikova and Prokopenko 2023; Solovei 2023). This disinformation and influence campaign began with Putin's appointment in 1999 and stretches across Europe to the USA, and from the Middle East to Africa. In Europe the campaign has been most successful in undermining democracy in the UK, with highly placed individuals within politics and widespread interference in the 2014 Scottish independence and 2016 EU membership referenda (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019; Mueller 2019; Intelligence and Security Committee 2020). In addition, the campaign has supported and shaped far-right parties across the EU with "trojan horse" parties such as UKIP, French National Front/Rally, Alternative for Germany, Italian Northern League, Netherlands Party for Freedom, and Sweden Democrats all serving the interests of Russia (Anton 2022; Oksanen 2015, 2022; Polyakova *et al.* 2016, 2017, 2018; Shekhovtsov 2023).

Fourth, tragically the Russian invasion of Ukraine involves four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. In March 2022 the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation into the Situation in Ukraine, including war crimes and crimes against humanity or genocide (ICC 2022). Crimes against humanity are the most widespread atrocity, defined as acts "committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population" (article 7, ICC 1998: 3–5). In October 2023 the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (UN IICI) on Ukraine documented evidence of "indiscriminate attacks by Russian armed forces, which have led to deaths and injuries of civilians and the destruction and damage of civilian objects" (UN IICI 2023: 2). Russian war crimes are equally prevalent, defined as "violations of international humanitarian law (treaty or customary law) that incur individual criminal responsibility under international law.... war crimes must always take place in the context of an armed conflict, either international or non-international" (Geneva Conventions 1949; article 8, ICC 1998: 5–10). The UN ICI (2023) collected evidence showing that "Russian authorities have committed the war crimes of willful killing, torture, rape and other sexual violence, and the deportation of children to the Russian Federation." In

March 2023 the ICC (2023) issued arrest warrants against Vladimir Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova over allegations of involvement in the war crime of child abductions during the invasion of Ukraine.

Fifth, in complete contrast to teaching and scholarship on the “post-Soviet space,” the Ukrainian response to the Russian invasion has demonstrated loudly and clearly across the world the determination and agency of Ukrainians to control their own destiny (Kudlenko 2023; Poberezhna, Burlyuk, and van Heelsum 2024). Following the Maidan Revolution the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, was agreed in 2014 leading to the 2019 amendment of the Constitution of Ukraine aiming to join the EU and NATO. After the Russian invasion, the process of Ukrainian EU membership was accelerated with an application to join in February 2022, leading to the European Council opening accession negotiations in December 2023 (Rabinovych and Pintsch 2024; Noutcheva and Zarembo 2024). Ukraine is not alone in seeking a more secure destiny within European organizations with Denmark joining the EU’s CSDP in 2022, Finland and Sweden joining NATO in 2023 and 2024, and at the same time Ukraine, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina have all sought greater security within NATO (Wiesner and Knodt 2024; Zarembo 2024).

These five lessons of Russian neoimperialism and neocolonialism, opposition to the purposes and principles of the UN charter, disinformation and manipulation, Russian mass atrocity crimes, and finally Ukrainian independence and agency all demonstrate the importance of shifting IR teaching away from 19<sup>th</sup> century geopolitics and four-power multipolarism, and towards 21<sup>st</sup> century planetary politics that escapes the binary paradigm of the past 75 years.

#### **4. Conclusion: Ukraine as a Microcosm of Planetary Politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Chernobyl perhaps marks the start of the wider public awareness of the fragility of the human environment. But even without a Chernobyl or a



greenhouse effect, the result of a great lessening of the fear of nuclear war was always likely to be that mankind, the well-off section of it, anyway, would start to concentrate its anxieties on the health of the planet (Woollacott “Planet Politics” 1989).

The necessary paradigm shift to teaching the Russian war against Ukraine and other crises demands new thinking about planetary politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Martin Woollacott presciently observed in 1989, the events in Ukrainian Chornobyl marked the start of a wider awareness of the fragility of the human environment, the greenhouse effect, and the health of the planet he called “planet politics.” It is only through understanding and coming to terms with the paradigm shift from international relations to planetary politics over the past 35 years that it is possible to contribute in a meaningful way to teaching the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a microcosm of planetary politics (Manners 2002: 10; 2008: 37). Fourteen years after Woollacott’s labeling of the era of planetary politics, Karen Litfin (2003: 481) argued that “planetary politics ... are characterized by truly planetary relations of causality that can only be understood and addressed holistically.” Planetary politics means that economic, social, ecological, conflictual and political relations and crises cannot be considered independently—they are symbiotic (Manners 2023, 2024a).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a microcosm of the wider planetary organic crisis of five symbiotic dimensions of economy, society, ecology, conflict, and polity (Manners 2020, 2024b). Stephen Gill and Solomon Benatar (2020: 171) argue that the planetary organic crisis involves “interacting and deepening structural crises of economy/development, society, ecology, politics, culture and ethics—in ways that are unsustainable.” The invasion of Ukraine represents a microcosm of these crises and politics because of the way in economic (in)equality, social (in)justice, ecological (un)sustainability, conflict (in)security, and political (ir)resilience are symbiotic in understand both the driving forces and the prospects for Ukraine.

Economically, the Ukrainian and Russian economies both experienced negative growth during the period 1989–1997, but

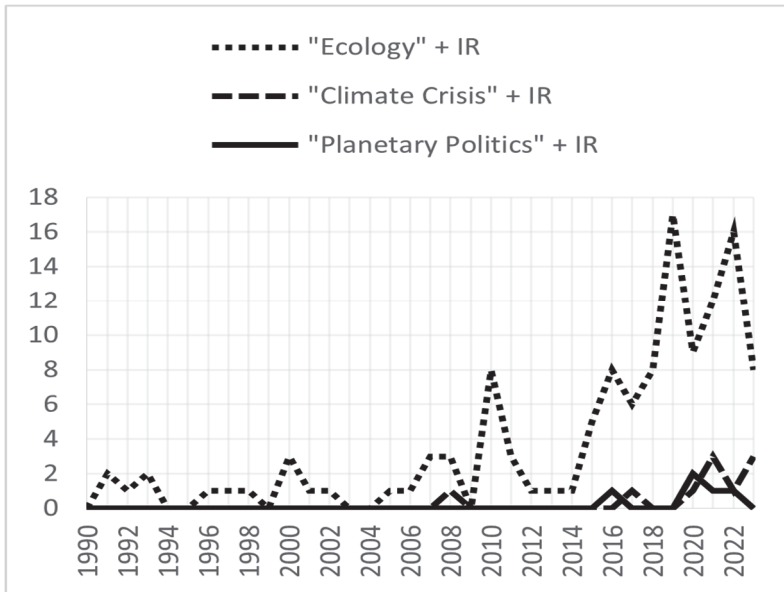
during 1998–2008 the Ukrainian economy outperformed the Russian economy. The GFC had a negative effect on both economies, but the Ukrainian economic downturn in 2014–2015 was particularly bad. The Russian invasion has a destructive effect on the Russian economy, but worse on the Ukrainian economy. However, in terms of economic (in)equality the economies are quite different with Ukraine having a 0.45 gini income inequality index, broadly comparable to that of the EU, while Russia has an index of 0.60—one of the worst in the global north (Alvaredo *et al.* 2022). The extent to which Russian wealth and inequality is being “sucked up” to wealthy oligarchs surrounding Putin is seen in the dominating role of Russia’s ultra wealthy 1% taking 25% of the national income share, while the Russian super wealthy 10% take 50% of the national income share. In comparison, Ukraine is broadly in line with EU averages, with the top 1% taking 10–12% of national income share and the top 10% taking 35% of national income share.

Socially, the Social Progress Index (SPI) ranks the EU an average of 44<sup>th</sup> position out of 170 countries with an index score of 84 on 3 dimensions of basic human needs, foundations of well-being, and opportunity (Social Progress Imperative 2024). Ukraine ranks 59<sup>th</sup> on the SPI with an index score of 70 (up from 66 in 2011), similar to other EU applicants Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia ranks 76<sup>th</sup> on the SPI with an index score of 67 (down from 68 in 2017), with a fall in opportunity, most significantly a collapse in rights and voice, since 2011. Changing demographics will be one of the greatest challenges to social justice this century, with the EU 27 population falling from approximately 448 million today to roughly 308 million by 2100, or to approximately 340 million if the EU enlarges to 36 by 2100 (Vollset *et al.* 2020). Both Russia and Ukraine have low fertility rates, lowered by the invasion and war, that will lead Russian population to drop from approx. 146 million today to approx. 106 million by 2100, and Ukrainian population to drop from approx. 41 million today to approx. 18 million by 2100.

Ecologically, the invasion of Ukraine has involved “ecocide” with nuclear power stations such as Chornobyl and Zaporizhzhia put at risk, while munitions and landmines contaminate and condemn fields and forests, dams such as Kakhovka are destroyed, and rivers such as the Desna poisoned (Yavorska *et al.* 2024; Shahini *et*

al. 2024). As the world’s major exporter of natural gas and second largest exporter of oil in 2022 Russia is both a “petrostate” (making up 30–50% of state budget) and one of the world’s worst fossil fuel polluters. Adriana Petryna (2023: 15) argues that the Russian invasion of Ukraine centers a range of planetary challenges, including the need for “de-occupation as planetary politics,” and shows how “genocide legitimizes both anti-human and anti-planetary violence.” As charts 7 and 8 illustrate below, the study of eco-centric “ecology,” rather than anthropocentric environment in IR only emerged since the 2010 Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 2015 Paris Agreement. In contrast, the realization of the “climate crisis” and “planetary politics” in IR are far more recent phenomena from 2020 onwards, possibly driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Charts 7 and 8. SSCI references to “International Relations,” “Ecology,”<sup>7</sup> “Climate Crisis,”<sup>8</sup> and “Planetary Politics,”<sup>9</sup> 1990–2023.**



7 “Ecology” = “Ecology” OR “Ecological.”

8 “Climate Crisis” = “Climate Crisis” OR “Climate Emergency.”

9 “Planetary Politics” = “Planet Politics” OR “Planetary Politics.”

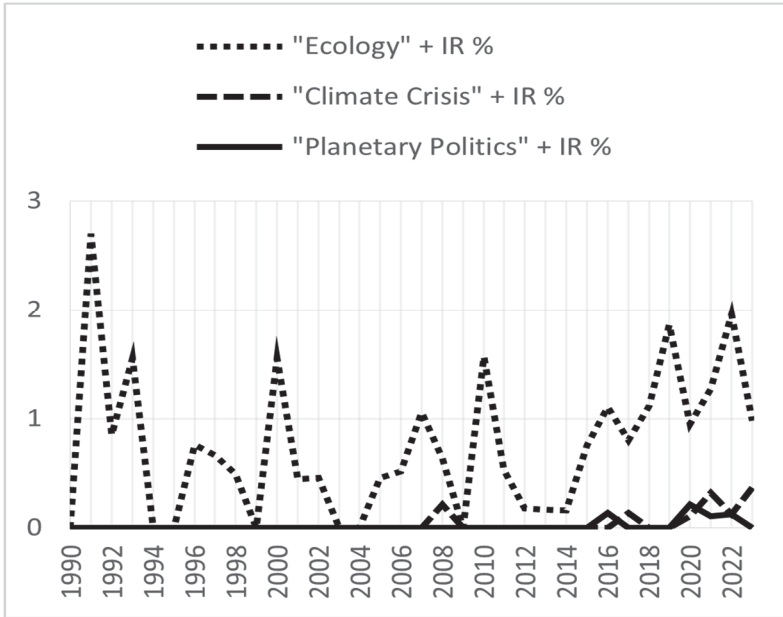


Chart 7 (top) shows the slowly increasing amount of research referring to “Ecology” in IR scholarship from 2009 until 2022. However, the amount of ecological IR research is tiny compared to the previous charts, perhaps reflecting psychological climate disavowal (Thierry, Horn, Von Hellermann, and Gardner 2023). In comparison, IR research on the climate crisis/emergency has only begun to emerge since the IPCC AR5 in 2014 and the Paris Agreement in 2015 demonstrated the failure to address the crisis/emergency. The anthropocentrism and egocentrism of contemporary IR scholarship remained hegemonic during the period, with planetary political attempts to escape the paradigm by Karen Litfin (2003), Paul Gilroy (2004), Gayatri Spivak (2003), and Achille Mbembe (2022) barely registering in IR. However, compared to the 400 plus references to environmental IR and 300 plus references to climate change since 2007, the 125 references to ecological IR lie 16 years behind in terms of research and publication.

Chart 8 (bottom) shows the relative use of the phrases “International Relations” plus “Ecology,” “Climate Crisis/Emergency,” and “Planetary Politics” as a percentage of the incidence of the

phrase “International Relations,” 1990 to 2023. The chart shows how references to ecology have been sporadic since the end of the Cold War. While this pattern is somewhat similar to climate change IR research, the relative levels of research references is about half for ecological research.

In terms of conflict, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a microcosm of the increasing impunity with which neoimperial great powers take actions in multipolar politics. Prior to 2010 inter-state conflicts had been slowly falling in number across the world (there was only an interstate conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti during 2004–2010). Since 2010 inter-state conflicts in the Middle East, South Asia, Caucasus, and Ukraine have thrown the world back into arms racing, with risks of regional conflict in the Sahel, Palestine, Yemen/Iran/Saudi Arabia, Kashmir, the Black Sea, the Baltic, and Taiwan. As Ukrainian scholars of the invasion have made clear, understanding the conflict needs far greater knowledge than westplaining the grabbing up of territories like a game of *Risk* (Burlyuk and Musliu 2023: 607; Tyushka 2023: 652). As the discussions of economy, society, and ecology suggest, in unequal, unjust, and unsustainable countries such as Russia the population and civil society are just too weak and fractured to form the foundation of a viable society and oppose the ruling kleptocracy. In this context, neoimperialism and neocolonialism with impunity are the foundation for the governing oligarchy, as Ukrainian scholars are only too familiar.

Finally, the general culmination of economic inequality, social injustice, ecological unsustainability, and conflict insecurity lead to the observation that both freedom and democracy are under threat across the world. The Russian invasion of Ukraine represents a microcosm of this wider pattern with Russian inequality, injustice, and unsustainability facilitating its aggression and impunity, as part of the Russian decline of freedom and democracy. According to Freedom House (2024) the world has now seen 18 years of decline in global freedom, with Russia being at its most free in 1991, remaining “partly free” from 1991–2003, and dropping to “not free” from 2004 to 2024. Similar evidence is presented by the V-Dem Institute (2024), with autocratization continuing to be

the dominant trend of the past 15 years. According to V-Dem, Russia was in the “autocratic grey zone” from 1992-1999, then became an “electoral autocracy” from 1999 onwards where it is currently ranked 159<sup>th</sup> on the liberal democracy index (out of 179 countries). Thus, the long-term decline in Russian freedom and democracy since 1991 has led to it becoming a “not free” “electoral autocracy” since Putin came to power in 1999.

In contrast, according to Freedom House, Ukraine was “partly free” from 1991-2003, became “free” after the 2005 Orange Revolution from 2005-2010, returned to “partly free” under Viktor Yanukovich in 2010 and has kept this status ever since. V-Dem Institute data demonstrates how Ukraine was a form of autocracy between 1991-1993, 1998-2005, 2010-2018, 2022-2023, and was a form of democracy between 1994-1997, 2006-2009, 2019-2021, and is currently ranked 109<sup>th</sup> on the liberal democracy index. What these two sources of data demonstrate is that Russia is an irresilient autocracy without the capacity to recover from elected dictatorship since 1999, while Ukraine is a more resilient polity with the ability to spring back from autocracy to democracy as it has done in 1994 (first parliamentary and presidential elections), 2006 (Orange Revolution and election of President Yushchenko), and 2019 (election of President Zelenskyy). Thus, the irresilience and decline of Russian democracy helps fuel its invasion of Ukraine, whilst the resilience of Ukrainian democracy helps it resist the Russian invasion.

These five dimensions of planetary politics illustrate how Ukraine is a microcosm of larger events but leave plenty of space for Ukrainian determination and agency. The teaching of the Russian invasion and war against Ukraine must help students and teachers alike to understand the symbiotic relationships between inequality, injustice, unsustainability, insecurity, and resilience in the planetary politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The article argued that the greatest challenge of teaching IR in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine is that western IR is stuck in a 20<sup>th</sup> century paradigm of thinking. The article then set out how incorporating the war into a first semester introductory course on international politics initially involved adapting the course to the empirical events,

such as lectures on conflict and cooperation. But the war has led to five lessons for rethinking the teaching of neoimperialism and neocolonialism, opposition to the purposes and principles of the UN charter, disinformation and manipulation, Russian mass atrocity crimes, and Ukrainian independence and agency. While the article did not discuss teaching methods and technology, it did demonstrate the need to shift paradigms of thinking about teaching and address the need for Ukrainian knowledge about the war. In this respect the article used the rich and wide range of Ukrainian scholarship and literature to discuss this knowledge, as the bibliography demonstrates. Finally, although the article did not address the emotional and psychological impact of the war on students and staff, it is clear from personal experience that the planetary organic crisis is having an increasingly negative effect on the mental health of all, including the effects of the rise of far-right autocrats and their neoimperialism, the invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza, and the ecological and climate catastrophe.

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