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Darya Tsymbalyuk, *Ecocide in Ukraine: The Environmental Cost of Russia's War* (Polity, 2025), 208 pp.

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Darya Tsymbalyuk's book *Ecocide in Ukraine: The Environmental Cost of Russia's War* (Polity, 2025) documents the multi-dimensional ways in which Ukraine's environment has been affected by Russia's full-scale invasion. *Ecocide in Ukraine* is a scholarly book that reads like an elegy, blending personal stories, research, folklore, and photography in an accessible yet rigorous text. *Ecocide in Ukraine* joins other contemporary environmental histories of recent wars and imperialism—Togzan Kassenova's *Atomic Steppe* (2022); Munira Khayyat's *A Landscape of War* (2022), and J.R. McNeill and Corinna Unger (eds.) *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (2010)—in its commitment to a holistic documentation of human-nonhuman wartime interactions. The book covers all the aspects of the ecosphere (i.e.: water, zemlia/earth, air, plants, bodies, energy), comprehensively exploring the war's effect and its future limitations on the possibility of human life. However, unlike these other scholarly texts, *Ecocide in Ukraine* results from documenting Russia's very recent full-scale invasion, which lends a tremendous urgency to the text. Tsymbalyuk's place-bound writing is charged with all the energy and love and survivor guilt triggered by having built a life elsewhere, in a place not ravaged by war (she is currently Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago), and yet trying to stay intimately connected with her homeland. On trips back to Ukraine, she rushes to note as much as she can about the people and environments threatened by war. Away from the war, she experiences it through "images, text messages, and calls" (111). She thus becomes an archivist of the war experience, an archive that she carries in her body, "like old splinters" (112).

Ecocide in Ukraine thus offers an archive of sources that document the invasion, from newspapers articles to YouTube videos, from photographs to academic studies, films, and literary works. The researcher's methods (participant observation, oral history, critically reading the works of Ukrainian biologists who documented Ukraine's flora a century ago) cross disciplines to create a textured, multilayered environmental history of the contemporary war in Ukraine. Tsymbalyuk caringly cites the work Ukrainian writers, journalists, scholars, and filmmakers do on the ground, often putting their lives at risk. The book also creates an archive of practices

that people under invasion adopt as they deal with daily death and irreversible loss. Soldiers directly fighting the invaders question war slogans about the immortality of heroes: "Heroes die," is a popular song. Civilians dealing with the murderous Russian occupation suffer tremendous losses as well: after a man was burned alive in his garage in Bucha during the Russian occupation, and nothing remained of his body except a limb, the man's seventeen-year-old son wished to bury that limb, to honor the dismembered, loved body. At the beginning of the book, and perhaps mirroring this story, a group of environmentalists try to store the body of a dead dolphin, one of the endangered cetacean species of the Black Sea, in the hope of performing an autopsy later on that they could use to document Russia's ecocide in Ukraine. Yet the body of the dolphin begins to disintegrate in the heat since the power supply has collapsed due to the invasion, and in the end the environmentalists decide to take the dolphin's dead body to the Black Sea, not far from the place on the beach where a man's dead body had been found weeks earlier. Another practice Ukrainians engage in—in this case to connect with the recent, prewar past—is swimming in the Black Sea, despite the fact that the beaches are lodged with mines and the water, where mines have already exploded, is laden with heavy metals.

War's toll is measured in body counts, but for Tsymbalyuk, who insists on human-animal connection, body counts include all sorts of animals. Tsymbalyuk tells the stories of villagers evacuating or staying behind with their cows, of rescue teams struggling to save horses, of donkeys hurt or killed or sometimes healed by humans. The Russian landmines lodged into the Ukrainian soil can kill children, elderly people, but also grazing cows. Even animals that are protected, such as those kept at the zoo in larger cities, or pets, suffer from PTSD, alongside, of course, humans.

Tsymbalyuk also documents the struggle to continue life in the face of Russia's vicious attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. The stories she tells, while intensely personal, open up a window to daily life under war: a city (Mykolaiv, the author's hometown) losing access to its main water supply, trying to survive the summer by providing water stations, although sanitation quickly becomes an issue. Faced with the threat of an epidemic, the water authority decides to use saltwater from the marshes nearby, which provide temporary relief, but quickly erode the city's old pipes, which now demand continuous repairs. Tsymbalyuk documents the lives of sanitation workers who make these repairs in the heat, underground, and under continuous threat of shelling.

War brings with it a particular ecology, as sometimes the dramatic changes in human activity engendered by destruction allow nature to recover. As the Ukrainian economy comes to a halt, species of fish return to rivers once too polluted for life. Traveling by train at night, Tsymbalyuk notices a sky full of bright stars—where had they been before? She wonders. Only later does she realize that because of the invasion, her country huddles in darkness at night, and in cities and villages—possible targets for infrastructure attacks—blackouts have become a feature of daily life. Tsymbalyuk stops to notice the stars' arresting beauty, then wonders: at what price?

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Both emotional and rigorous, highly personal and carefully researched, *Ecocide in Ukraine* is a book that can be taught in a variety of courses in environmental humanities. It is accessible enough for undergraduates even in introductory courses, yet rigorous enough for graduate students. The chapters, while connected in a coherent whole, can be read (or assigned) independently. The author's voice, her personal investment in Ukraine's environment, and the blend of scholarship and anecdote make this book highly recommendable for scholars working on war, Eastern Europe, and recent environmental history as well as for the general public.

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