Lecture Timothy Snyder (Yale University, Fall 2022)

The Making of Modern Ukraine

23 - The Colonial - the Post-Colonial - the Global

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLfFmYWjHtc

00:00 All right, everyone. Greetings.

This is the last lecture of this class.

You have an exam in a couple days.

You have a thematic assignment due a week after that.

The thematic assignment's meant to be very straightforward.

I don't want you to do extra research.

I want you to pull out some little theme that is in the reading that maybe I've referred to or haven't referred to at all and write something simple and straightforward about it.

Don't overthink it. Don't overdo it.

Don't make us work too hard.

It's 1500 words.

Pick a theme, it's not gonna be hard.

Can anybody sing? Do you think, can you sing? Do you know how... what's it called? Do you know how the "Carol of the Bells" goes? - [Student] No.

- Okay.

01:06 (students vocalizes) That's it.

(students laughing) That's the one. That's the one.

That's the one. Very good.

(students chuckling) And you didn't raise your hand when I asked.

- [Male Student] I know.

The second question usually is not great after the first.

(Timothy and students laughing) - All right.

- So we had eight tones of Christmas music there to start us out with, which I'm gonna get back to, if I manage.

What we're talking about today is empire in Europe.

And like the last lecture, this lecture is meant to bring some threads together to help you think about the essays and help you think about the class as a whole.

We're obviously talking about this in the context of an imperial war that is going on right now, the Russian War against Ukraine, which began in 2014, and which was accelerated this February with a full scale invasion.

02:04 I think this is a fairly straightforward imperial war in its rhetoric and in its goals.

I'll talk more about that as we go.

What I want to talk about, though, in this lecture, is what this imperial war tells us about Europe and the European imperial past and what we can say about the European and American reaction to this war on the basis of the history of empire.

So a larger theme of this class, as you've all gathered, is what is history good for? What is it and what is it good for? One of the things that history is good for is reflection upon

the other stories about the past that you are being told.

So there's an obvious criticism, of course, in this class of the imperialist narrative that Ukraine doesn't exist, but perhaps more subtly, there's also a criticism of a European narrative, which says that European integration was born out of the higher European wisdom that war is bad and that peace is good.

03:18 So if any of you are from European Union member states, you'll be familiar with this, because you've been bombarded with it since childhood.

The notion that the Europeans are different and better than the Americans, because they experienced a Second World war and they saw that it was bad, and therefore, they have now had economic cooperation and since then, things have been good.

There are a couple of problems with this.

One of them is that what happened is not that Europeans learned from the Second World War that war is bad.

That never happened.

They kept fighting wars after the Second World War.

They kept fighting wars until they lost them.

04:00 That's a critical part of the story, which goes missing.

The Dutch and Indonesia, the French in Algeria and Southeast Asia.

The Portuguese and the Spanish can't hold out in Africa.

It's basically the same story everywhere.

They keep fighting until they lose and the wars they lose are imperial wars.

The story of European integration, as it's told, allows that imperial history to be pushed aside, to be occluded, to be not seen at all and because that history is not seen at all, this leads to misanalysis and misunderstandings of contemporary political situations.

The other tricky thing about that story is that it suggests that once you've learned this lesson that war is bad, all you have to do is trade with people and everything will be good.

To emphasize, the problem with that is that the European integration story with all the trade, which certainly happens, Treaty of Rome and all of that, it all happens after the defeat in the imperial war.

05:03 And so trade may be very well, be a good thing.

But in the actual European history, this trade project follows upon defeat in imperial war.

And when you take the defeat in imperial war out of the story, you're removing something which is going to disable your analysis of the rest of contemporary events.

So just very briefly now, I'm gonna remind you of some of the high points of the history of European Empire.

We've already had a couple of lectures on this already.

It's in the background of the reading in Road to Unfreedom, Black Earth to some extent, but I wanna try to make sense of where we are now on the basis of this trajectory of empire.

So from the point of view of European Empire, 1776, the great proud American independent story, that's when the Northern Hemisphere basically falls out.

I mean, there will be six... the Spanish will be around for a while, the Portuguese, too, but 1776 is, basically, you can call a turning point where the Western hemisphere, where the Americas fall out, begin to fall out of the calculation, empire is going to mean, essentially, Asia and Africa.

06:14 The 19th century is then a competition for the territory that's still left.

Most famously or notoriously, the race for Africa at the end of the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th century or at the beginning of the 20th, we have a First World War, which is a world war, even before the Americans arrive, because of empire.

It's a world war because it's fought with colonial soldiers from all over the world.

It's not a war of Europeans against Europeans.

It's Europeans and their colonial subjects against other Europeans and their colonial subjects, which is fought in Europe.

In the end of the First World War, what we have is a curious situation where the land empires all managed to lose and the sea empires, the maritime empires managed to win.

07:00 The British and the French managed to win, the Ottomans, the Germans, the Russians, in a complicated way, by way of revolution, the Hapsburgs, all manage to lose.

And as we've seen, in this war, Ukraine is a major prize.

Ukraine is the territory that the Germans think they can use to win the war on the Western front.

They turn out to be wrong, but that is what they think.

At the end of this war, we have the rise of the doctrine of self-determination, which means, in effect, that the maritime empires, I'm now counting the US among them, have the idea that some of the former territories in the land empires in Europe should become independent states.

So national self-determination does not apply to all the world.

That's a truism.

It was not about American colonies or British colonies or French colonies, far from it.

It was about the former terrains of defeated land empires, but not all of them.

08:01 Not not Ukraine. Not Ukraine.

Ukraine instead passes through this incredibly complicated period that we have studied of, in which you have white Russians, that is, Russian restorationists of empire who are fighting for Ukraine.

We have Poles who, in some way, are fighting for Ukraine.

We have the Leninist idea of self-determination, which basically means we say that you can have self-determination, but so long as it doesn't contradict the interests of the center of the revolution.

So a kind of declarative self-determination.

And while this is all going on, this is why I asked if anybody could sing.

While this is all going on, musicians from Ukraine are on tour across Europe and North America, playing, for example, in Carnegie Hall.

The song which drew the most attention is the melody which was just sung, which was composed by a Ukrainian composer called Mykola Leontovych, which really caught the attention of the Americans, so much so that it was adapted with new English words to become what's now the Carol of the Bells, which is the most striking, I think, American Christmas carol and I'm gonna return at the end to why that is.

09:14 Leontovych, himself, is murdered in 1921 by the Bolshevik secret police.

So then what is the Second World War? Again, from the perspective of Ukraine or from our perspective, the Second World War is another imperial war.

But this time the German aspiration for Ukraine is the absolute center.

It's at the absolute center of Hitler's plans.

It's at the absolute center of the war itself.

And the theory behind this war, and you've read all of this in Black Earth, but the theory behind this war is that the stronger nation should be colonizing and starving the weaker nation, that's what always happens.

Or the stronger people, the stronger race should be dominating, colonizing, starving out the weaker.

10:03 Why does this not always happen? According to Hitler, it doesn't always happen, because of the Jews.

That is Hitler's version of antisemitism.

The Jews have ideas like Christianity, capitalism, communism, rule of law, contracts, you name it.

And these ideas get into people's minds and prevent them from becoming the ruthless racial warriors that nature meant them to be.

So in Hitler's view, the Jews are both softening the minds of Germans, and this is important, they're ruling Ukrainians, because the Soviet Union, according to Hitler, is a Jewish state.

So the Ukrainians, in his analysis, are colonial people.

They're being ruled by one colonist, the Jews and if you kill the Jews or get them out of the way somehow, the Ukrainians will be happy to be ruled by another colonial master.

That's the theory.

In the planning for the war, the Germans intends to starve tens of millions of Soviet citizens, in order to colonize the Western Soviet Union and especially, Ukraine.

11:08 Tens of millions of Soviet citizens.

The reasons why they think this is possible is because, at the time, everyone knew that there was this thing, which only recently, people have started to call Holodomor, which is the famine in 1932-1933.

The German analysis is that the collective farms in the Soviet Union can be used to divert food in any direction.

So if they can be used to divert food to feed the Russians, they can also be used to divert food to feed the Ukrainians.

We can use them as instruments of starvation.

In fact, they're never able to starve tens of millions of people.

Most of the starvation takes place in prisoner of war camps, where about 3 million Soviet prisoners of war are starved.

Ukraine, as you know from the reading, is also a major site, oh, and by the way, Ukrainian soldiers who are starving in the German prisoner of war camps in 1941 refer to their experience of hunger in the Soviet Union in 1933.

12:07 There're even songs which refer to both of these events.

Ukrainian, as you know from the reading, is also a major site of the Holocaust.

Two of the major shooting sites, Kamianets-Podilskyi and Babi Yar just outside Kyiv are, of course, in Ukraine.

And the war is largely fought in and for Ukraine.

And so it's very important for present politics and for present conversations about imperialism that we know that this war was an imperial war.

This is not just some point that I'm trying to make on the margin.

It's very important to keep in mind that there was an imperial motive, an imperial geography to this war and that they were peoples who were subject to an imperial policy.

At the end of the Second World War, once again, the maritime empires managed to win.

The British and the French managed to win, again, with the help of the Americans.

Germany, which is aspiring to be a much larger land empire, loses and loses very decisively.

13:07 And in losing decisively their imperial war for Ukraine, the Germans begin the trend of other European empires losing imperial wars.

That thing which I've just said is the thing which is silenced.

It's silenced that Germany's war was an imperial war and it's silenced that Europeans then began to lose a series of imperial wars.

And how is that silence achieved? It's achieved by the otherwise very attractive story of European integration.

The story about how Europeans are very wise, and they understand that war is bad,

because they're smarter than the Americans who keep fighting wars, et cetera, et cetera.

And so in this story, it's the empire that goes missing and it's most crucially, the story of the German empire which goes missing.

So Ukraine goes missing just as Indonesia and Algeria and Morocco and Mozambique and all the rest go missing from this story.

14:04 But as I say, this is most important for the Germans.

This lecture is about empire and you think I'm only gonna be talking about Russia, but I'm gonna be spending a lot of time talking about Germany.

Russian imperialism is, right now, very open.

It's not very complicated, we'll talk more about it, but crucial to where we are in the 21st century is the misanalysis, the misapprehension and forgetfulness about German colonialism and German empire.

And as I say, one of the things history is good for, maybe the major thing, is to create reflection about the things that one got wrong or the things that one missed.

So in Germany, from 1945 and 1989, the main story is the division of the country.

Germany loses its Eastern territories.

What remains of Germany is divided into a West Germany and to an East Germany.

One Democratic, one communist.

From the point of view of West Germany, the major story is of one's own victimhood, one's own victimhood.

15:07 We were bombed at the end of the war.

So many of our men died.

We lost all of this territory.

Our country was divided.

So the major story in the 50s, 60s, into the 70s is one's own victimhood.

So this business of Germany taking responsibility for the Second World War is a relatively recent development and quite partial.

The discussion of German responsibility for the war begins as a discussion of the Holocaust, which is very important.

It allows other discussions and it's tremendously important in and of itself.

The problem with the discussion of the Holocaust, which takes place in Germany in the 70s and 80s, is that it's missing a lot of important things.

It's missing any discussion of East European territories.

It's missing any discussion of territory at all.

16:00 And it's missing, perhaps most critically, the German imperialism, which got Germany out into Eastern Europe in the first place, which is a crucial part of the history of the Holocaust, because that is where the Jews lived.

So without the German imperial ambition to get to Ukraine, there couldn't have been a Holocaust, because those territories are where the Jews or most of the Jews actually lived.

So in this discussion of the Holocaust, one of the things which is missing is the German imperial ambition.

So you get self-criticism about the Holocaust, but it's limited, it doesn't have territory.

And the Jews who are most important in this discussion are the German Jews.

And of course, that is a very important history.

But German Jews are only about 3% of the victims of the Holocaust, only about 3%.

And so that story can't be a representative one and it can't be one which is going to get Germans to think about the broader geographical scope of the war.

And then, indeed, it tends to be one...

Whereas, the history of the Holocaust tends to move you to a place where you can talk about other crimes.

17:01 So for example, Jews in Eastern Europe are some of our witnesses to the starvation of Soviet prisoners of war.

In Jewish testimonial material, there is evidence of the starvation of Soviet prisoners of war.

If you focus on Germany, all you have are the Germans and the Jews, which is a very different sort of story and you're not being forced to think about the other crimes, let alone the other peoples further east.

In the 1970s, West German social democratic governments begin a process of reconciliation with the Soviet Union.

And this is a Soviet Union, which you know from the reading from the class, this is the Soviet Union of Brezhnev.

And so what we have underneath this reconciliation is the meeting of two stories about what actually happened in the Second World War.

And by this time, by the 1970s, there's a Soviet story and the Soviet story is a cult of the war in which we were the victims as well as the victors, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and Soviet Alliance with Nazi Germany, completely taboo.

18:10 The documents are hidden away.

No one's remembering that.

It's a Russified cult of the war.

This meets a German story in which Germans are increasingly willing to take responsibility for the Second World War and the way that Germans move in this direction is to direct the apologetic energy towards the Moscow Center.

And so in Germany as in the Soviet Union, the idea that the Second World War was about tens of millions of dead Russians becomes normal.

Now, the Second World War did involve millions of dead Russians, but the scale of suffering was actually greater in Ukraine and in Belarus than it was in Russia.

And the story in which Russia monopolizes both the victory and the victimhood also starts to become natural in Germany.

19:07 And so then, in this weird way, what is actually meeting is a Russian quiet imperialism, the administrative Russification of the 1970s with a German or with the remnants of a German imperialism, or German implicit imperialism, or at the very least, the total absence of a reckoning with German imperialism, which means that it's totally natural that in this situation, no one talks about Ukraine, at all.

No one talks about Ukraine, at all.

The Germans have no reason to talk about Ukraine, because there's been no historical reckoning.

And so Russia's silences about Ukraine or control about Ukraine seems completely natural.

After 1989, we reach a moment where we have, as you've seen already in this class, After 1989, we're in a moment of tremendous change of rapid geopolitical realignment, where, from the German point of view, and we're now under Christian democratic governments headed by Helmut Kohl, from the German point of view, what we have is historical justice.

20:15 We have a unification.

East Germany and West Germany are brought together.

The most interesting anti-imperial move that's made at this time was made, as we've seen again in the lectures and the reading, was made by the Poles, actually.

When the Poles recognize the Ukrainian border before Ukraine is even independent, they're making an anti-imperial move vis-a-vis themselves, which makes it much easier

for the Germans to make the same move vis-a-vis Poland.

Because all the way up until 1990, Germany had not recognized its border with Poland.

The fact that the Poles put any national quarrels with Ukrainians out of the question made it somewhat more likely that the same outcome would prevail on the German-Polish border.

21:00 And the lack of national conflict or border conflict is one of the reasons why the European Union can enlarge as it will to embrace many of the former communist states in 2004, 2007, 2013.

During this time, Germany is the most important democracy in Europe, unified Germany.

It's the biggest economy.

It's a very functional democracy.

It may already be the most important democracy in the world, but you can't tell the Germans that.

And as we enter the 21st century, the Germans have a reputation for having dealt with the past, which is only partially justified.

One has to be very careful here, because the Germans are, of course, pioneers in identifying a particular historical evil, which is the Holocaust, and beginning a story of addressing it.

And that has been good for their democracy.

And I suggest, in general, that those kinds of things are good for democracy.

The problem with this reflection is that it was thought to have been completed.

22:05 The idea was that by the time we got to the end of the Cold War, we, the Germans, have already gone through this process and now, we're in a position to be a model for other people.

Whereas in fact, the end of the Cold War created, I would've said, an opportunity to think about eastern Europe more broadly and about the German war in the East more broadly, which is the thing that doesn't happen.

So the form the criticism very often takes is that other people in Eastern Europe, in Poland, for example, or in Ukraine, don't understand how important peace is.

So peace is the crucial category.

What the Germans will say again and again, and here I say the Germans with some confidence, because this is a consensus which goes, which spans most of the political spectrum, is that peace is the important thing.

But peace is not what happened to Germany.

23:00 Defeat is what happened to Germany.

But you won't find Germans arguing that imperial powers have to be defeated.

What you find them arguing is that peace is a good thing.

So there's no reflection on empire.

There's no imperial analysis in this framework.

There is room for criticism of decline of democracy in a minor key, but here, the Germans, and again, this is a broad consensus, generally miss the most important and obvious case, the decline of democracy, which is Russia in 1999 to 2000, or maybe Russia, 1993 to 2000.

But in any event, the rise of Putin in 1999 to 2000 is a hugely important turning point, because it's here that Russia fails to have competitive elections where one Russian president, Yeltsin, anoints the next one, Putin, Putin stages a war.

And so you avoid that thing, which is so crucial for the success of a democratic system, in which somebody coming from somewhere else unexpectedly is a candidate and wins, and wins.

24:08 Here you have instead the person at the center of the system picking the next person who's the center of the system.

This is the moment where Russian democracy fails.

Likewise, there was very little recognition in Germany, I think it's fair to say, of the significance of the reverse happening in 2004, 2005 in Ukraine.

In 2004, there was similarly attempt in Ukraine for a president to anoint his successor and then elections were faked to see that that successor would win and this was held off by civil society protest.

And in this way, Ukrainians were able to arrange for an actual democratic succession where the person that the incumbent wanted to come into power to succeed him did not actually come to power and someone else did.

So 2004, at this time....

There's something I have to go on the record now.

It's at this time when Gerhard Schroeder, who's the social democratic, now, prime minister of Germany, it's at this time, November 2004, that Schroeder says Putin is a flawless Democrat.

25:12 And that kind of rhetoric from Schroeder is going to continue, essentially, almost to the present day.

In the 21st century, under Schroeder and then under his successor, Angela Merkel, the key that the Germans tend to apply in their foreign policy towards Russia is economics.

And I wanna stress this point again, although I'm sure it's clear, this arises from a certain misanalysis of how the European Union and how European integration arose.

The theory of European integration was war is bad, trade is good.

I mean, one doesn't wanna dispute those two premises, but the missing part in the story is, we, the Germans, decisively lost a war and admit that we lost it. (chuckles) We gave up on imperial solutions, because we had to 'cause we were defeated and then we moved on to something else and that that was true of most of the other Europeans as well.

26:14 And so the economics becomes a magic where the notion is, then, if we cooperate economically with Russia, for example, if we buy Russian natural gas, that must have a positive effect on Russia, because that's the theory.

So Gerhard Schroeder, who's the leading figure in all of this, negotiates a gas pipeline with the Russians a few weeks after he leaves office in 2005.

In what not only the Germans might find to be unseemly haste, he then joins the board of the gas company in question and is employed, in one way or another, by the Russian hydrocarbon industry with accumulating titles and salaries for the next many years.

This policy, though, in fairness, one has to say, is a consensus policy, which is then continued by the Christian Democrats.

27:04 And when I say the Germans over and over again, I'm basically meaning the two Volkspartei and the two big parties.

Now, the irony of all of this, especially given that Schroeder is from the Social Democrats, which, historically, is an antifascist party, the irony of all of this is that this is a time when an astute observer, at least, might have noticed that certain important parts of the Russian elite, including the president of the Russian Federation, are beginning to talk in openly fascist terms.

And that the president of the Russian Federation is quoting Russian fascists in his most important political addresses.

There is no notice of this in Germany.

No notice at all.

I think the logic of insulating Germany from all of this is something like we are the antifascists and therefore, if we're negotiating with them, they can't be fascists.

28:02 And this logic prevails deep into the 2020s and probably until the beginning of the war.

So the Maidan of 2013-2014 can be seen in this light as well.

Actually, the Maidan of 2013-2014, which you've read about, which you've heard about in a separate lecture, confirms this post-imperial analysis of the EU, because that's how

everybody sees it.

Everybody who matters anyway.

The Ukrainians wanna join the European Union, because they understand that the European Union is there to rescue slightly problematic post-imperial states, such as their own.

The Russians wanna stop Ukraine from joining the European Union, because they recognize the same thing.

They understand that should Ukraine join the European Union, it is much more likely that Ukraine will become a successful rule-of-law state and prosper and become a model for Russians, which, from the point of view of the Putin regime, would be a very bad thing.

29:02 Everyone outside the European Union sees the logic that I'm trying to share.

It's only inside the European Union that it becomes unclear.

When Russia invades Ukraine in 2014, we see the implicit imperialism of Russian-German cooperation become explicit in the language which the Russians use and which the Germans, then, pick up.

The Russian invasion of Ukrainian in 2014 is muddled and made unclear and a great success for Russian foreign policy.

And the muddling and the un-clarity is a result of certain kinds of tropes about Ukrainians, which are imperial tropes.

That Ukraine was never really a real state, that Ukrainians aren't really a people, and if they are a people, they are corrupt and their state is gonna fail because they're corrupt.

And by the way, they're all Nazis.

Oh, and they're gay, that fit in there, too.

And they were you know...

30:00 (students laughing) No, you know how this works.

It's social media targeted audiences, that's how it works.

If you don't like gay people, they tell you the Ukrainians are all gay.

If you don't like Nazis, they tell you they're all Nazis.

If you do like Nazis, they tell you that they're all Jews.

That also happened.

(students chuckling) Social media, it's your life, you understand this.

But this imperial rhetoric, and here's the point, is largely accepted, at least in 2013-2014, in the German media.

At least as the central points of discussion, are they all Nazis? Which is just a way of asking are they all barbarians? Are they all Nazis? Is it a failed state? Did the Ukrainians somehow bring this upon themselves? All of this language, which speaks to the German imperial tradition about Ukraine.

And of course, the Russians are consciously manipulating this.

They're consciously playing on what they understand to be German sensibilities.

31:03 Now, I said this was a consensus and it is, when after Russia invades Ukraine, the Christian Democratic government under Angela Merkel then brings into existence Nord Stream 2, which is interpreted at the time by a broad swath of Europeans, not just Ukrainians and Poles, but many of Germany's West European allies, as nothing more than a reward for Russia invading Ukraine.

Because what Nord Stream 2 does is it allows the Russians to very easily bring their gas to Europe without having it to pass through Ukrainian territory.

So there is a consensus of implicit imperialism here, which has to do with, on the Russian side, an aggressive retelling of history, which I'm gonna say more about now.

But on the German side, a lack of historical reflection combined with a certainty that the historical reflection has already taken place, which is not only a German problem, you can find that elsewhere, too.

32:03 So when we get to the war of 2022, this is an imperial war, I think, fairly obviously.

It's an imperial war in that it's based on a story of history in which some people exist and some people don't.

Putin's account of the history of Russian Ukraine, which he gives in July of 2021, tells you that what happens today is predetermined by things that happened a thousand years ago.

That things that happened a thousand years ago give him the right to say who's actually a people and who's actually not a people.

It's imperial in the classic sense of denying that the people you encounter are a people, instead they're a tribe or a clan or they're corrupt or whatever.

And it's imperial in the classic sense of denying that the state you encounter is a state, they're not subject to law, law doesn't really apply, what is law anyway? The more interesting thing which is happening, continuing the Russia-German theme here, is that the Russian invasion of Ukraine very, very closely follows the model of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, which the Russians themselves tip off at the very beginning.

33:02 They tip this off at the very beginning by saying that this is all a war about de-Nazification and all you have to do is remove the de.

Just takes a little bit of Freudian analysis here.

Just a tiny, tiny bit of Freud to get what they're really after.

What they're really after is they're fighting a war on the German model, on the German model.

And with the de-Nazification, they're doing their typical thing of rolling something in front of the western media, especially the German media and saying, "Hey, why don't you talk about this.

Let's change the subject to how many Nazis there might be in Ukraine, as opposed to we're invading the country right now." But the de-Nazification thing, I think, is actually deeply a clue to what's happening.

'Cause the similarities are actually really striking.

The notion that Ukraine only exists because of conspiracies.

The idea that Russia is not the aggressor, but it is the victim of conspiracies and therefore, it must attack Ukraine.

34:01 The ideological assumption that the state you're attacking doesn't really exist.

It's just propped up by said conspiracies.

So the moment you hit it, it will fall apart, which is literally what Hitler said about the Soviet Union.

Putin says the same thing about Ukraine.

There is also, it's obviously not nearly as important, but there's also an antisemitic element in which the thing which is artificial is the presidency of Volodymyr Zelenskyy himself, because he's Jewish.

And that element has grown larger with time as the Russian media now presents Zelenskyy routinely as the devil or as the anti-Christ.

Also, the idea which is practically plagiarized that the Ukrainians are a colonial people, they have one master now, but they would be happier with a different master.

Now they have the Americans, the Jews, the gay international conspiracy, whatever, they have some master, but we would be a better master.

But the Ukrainians are colonial people and they'll be happy when we replace the previous master.

All of these ideas are not just uncomfortably close, they're practically copies of the German motivations or the German's stated ideologies in the invasion in 1941.

35:11 There's even the haunting fact that the Russians were planning one kind of genocide, which was the extermination of the Ukrainian elite, and they have since moved on to other forms of genocide when that one didn't work out.

Which again, in a minor key, is very similar to what happened to the Germans who were planning a mass starvation campaign, which they were not able to carry out, but then moved on to other forms of genocide when the war actually continued.

So the actual policies of Russian Ukraine include things like the deportation of a 10th of the Ukrainian population, including children, the execution of elites, rape as politics, the bombing of evacuation routes and so on.

And currently, the deprivation of water and energy.

And this moment we're in now, as we move into the winter of 2022, is, if you're a German, at least, should be uncomfortably close to the winter of 1941, where the idea is you're killing people by depriving them of access to things.

36:05 The Soviet prisoners of war died in the millions, not because they were shot, although many of them were shot, especially the Jewish ones, but they died in the preponderance, because they were denied access to other things, which is of course what Russia is now trying to carry out on the scale of Ukraine itself.

This is not a reference which Germans themselves make.

And I would say that's because the Germans generally don't think of the Second World War in terms of the things which happened in the east.

So of course, the war in 2022, to be fair, does change people's views.

The general consensus, which is not just a German idea, it's also an American idea, that Ukraine is a weak state, is challenged by the events of February, March, April, and the rest of 2022.

The idea that Ukraine was gonna fall apart within three days was not just, and this is important, it wasn't just a Russian idea, that was also basically believed in Washington and in Berlin and I would suggest that the reasons why we all believe that have to do with our own imperial past.

37:04 It's not just Russian propaganda, it's our vulnerability to certain kinds of arguments about how other people are corrupt and they haven't ever really had a state and maybe they're all radicals and can they really have elected a president? Things have changed, things are changing.

The German parliament just voted a few days ago to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide, which is interesting and of itself, but it's a short step from there, I would like to think, for Germans to think about how their own hunger plan in 1941-1942 was related to the Holodomor, not just in the experience of people, but also in its planning.

The Ukrainians who survived both certainly linked both.

So it's an interesting moment to see what's going to happen in the winter of 2022.

But when we speak about empire, it's important to recall that empire is about the denial of the subjectivity of others.

38:05 It's about monopolizing agency.

We exist and they don't really exist.

And so the story of Russian imperialism in Ukraine is also the story, or more importantly, the story of the Ukrainian reaction.

So Ukrainian subjectivity and all this matters and not just as an answer or as the answer to a negation of, it matters on its own.

And here we can also see a way that history can help us.

The historical references that Ukrainians make on the battlefield at this point in the class should be clear to all of you.

When they refer not just to Cossacks but to Vikings, that will no longer seem like a curiosity, that will seem like something which is not very surprising.

When they claim the Second World War as their own war against the Russians, this is also, probably, now understandable.

But the most interesting things in the history, frankly, may have to do with the history of the last 30 years.

A lot of what the Ukrainians are doing in their communications has to do with a particular understanding of both Russia and the West and the United States, which I think is specific to a certain generation or two of Ukrainians.

39:06 And the generational part itself is very important.

The elites who govern Russia are the same elites as 20 years ago.

Which, in Ukraine, is not the case.

The people who are running Ukraine now tend to be younger than me.

I'm not as old as you think, I mean.

They're closer to my age than your age, let's put it that way, but they're young still.

(students laughing) They're still young, they're still young.

They're still learning, they're still growing.

The people who are running Ukraine now are in their late 30's and early 40's, just to be clear.

And so there's been a generational turnover, which is, itself, very important.

And this is also the generation which experienced Maidan, participated in it or saw the consequences of it and that has a lot to do with the sheer subjectivity of the Ukrainian battlefield response, which is based, not just on a state, which turns out to be far more functional than people thought, but largely on the basis of what we call civil society, of people in horizontal organizations filling in the gaps and doing the things that the state can't do or in a way that the state can't do them.

40:11 It's also reflected in the pluralism of the army itself and the army's ability to take local decisions, but also the various kinds of formations, which appear in the Ukrainian armed forces.

Which include, by the way, as probably everybody knows, but it's roughly one in six female and includes gay soldiers who actually mark themselves very often as such.

Prominent cases, but not the only cases of the variety, which is possible in a pluralist army.

But the war itself is largely about this subjectivity.

The word that Ukrainians use, as I have found, others might correct me, most often to say what it's about is freedom.

Freedom in the positive sense, not just of being free of Russians, but freedom in the sense of what is going to come next.

41:01 And the resistance, and this is the point that I meant to get to last time and didn't get to, the resistance is also carried out by the people who would ordinarily be creating the culture.

It was two lectures ago that a historian, a colleague of mine, a guy called Vadym Stetsiuk, was killed in combat and this death in combat was reported in turn by a journalist, a very courageous, intelligent journalist called Vakhtang Kipiani, who's a Ukrainian of Georgian origin.

That name, which I very much hope I have on the sheet, that name, Kipiani, he wrote the book about Vasyl Stus, who was the poet I cited at length last time, the most important of the Ukrainian-Soviet era dissident poets and in that book, just follow me here, in that book, he devotes a chapter to a man called Viktor Medvedchuk, because this guy, Medvedchuk, was Stus' lawyer in 1980 when Stus was on trial.

42:03 And at that time, your lawyer was not somebody who represented you, he was someone who stood up and said, "Yeah, he's guilty, he actually did it and he probably should go to a camp." And Stus, then, did go to a camp and went on a hunger strike and died five years later.

This fellow, Medvedchuk, you're gonna see why I'm mentioning this, this fellow, Medvedchuk, is Putin's personal friend and he was one of the candidates in February to be the person that the Russians were gonna drop in to run Ukraine.

So there are continuities in this, not just a personal, literal example, that go back to the 70s.

And one way to think about the moment we're in now, not just in Russian-Ukraine, but for the whole world, is whether we can ever actually get out of the 1970s.

Whether we get out of the 1970s into something else.

Because the 1970s, and this is a bit of a pivot, but just work with me here.

The 1970s are also the origin of all of the literary theory, which is behind Russian propaganda.

43:03 And one way to understand this conflict in Ukraine is one version of the 70s against another version of the 70s where the other version of the 70s is the dissidents, the human rights idea.

The notion that you're bearing responsibility.

So there are many ways to criticize the Russian media about Ukraine.

You can talk about how it's genocidal and say genocide and all of that's true, whole long list of critiques.

But maybe the most interesting thing about it is the total shunning of responsibility.

The idea that the war itself is just a performance.

That we ourselves are not involved.

We're not really involved personally.

It's a performance, it's a spectacle in which Ukrainians should die because that...

it's like when our soccer team scores a goal or something.

They should die because that's the way that the world works.

That's the way we are entertained.

And in this, of course, the people who are urging all of this, I mean, to make the obvious point, but it's important, they're not themselves ever going to go to the front.

44:08 They're not themselves ever going to go to the front.

It's a spectacle. It's a spectacle.

Signifier is separated from signified.

What is actually true? Everything that really matters is the medium itself.

That version of the 1970s versus the other version of 1970s, which is the dissident version, which says you're always bearing some responsibility all the time, even when the situation is unfair.

Even when you're in a show trial or even when you're at war, you take some responsibility anyway, even when the conditions are against you.

And this is, by the way, one of the things that, when I did talk to Zelenskyy back in September, we spent a lot of time talking about.

So on the other side, of course, it's the case and I put some of the names on the list, because I can't mention all of them and even that list would be very incomplete.

But on the other side, Ukrainian cultural figure after Ukrainian cultural figure is killed in this war, some in bombing and shelling but many of them in combat.

45:08 Many of them in combat, from famous movie actors to multiple ballet dancers, to athletes, and of course, journalists, humanists, scientists.

Most recently, the conductor of the Kherson Orchestra was executed for refusing to conduct a concert for the Russians, which of course, recalls Leontovych, the Ukrainian composer I mentioned earlier, who was executed because he represented Ukrainian music.

I could mention a Russian cultural figure who was killed in Ukraine.

There is one person I can think of and no doubt there are more, but the one who I can think of, and people will no doubt help me in the sea of emails I'll get about this, but the one who I can think of is Oksana Baulina.

46:09 She was a Russian reporter who was killed by Russian shelling in the Podil district of Kyiv and the way she was killed is by what's called a double tap.

A double tap is when you fire an artillery shell and then you wait for the rescue workers to come and then you fire on them, that's a double tap.

It's a way that journalists often die, that's how she died.

And so she died in Podil.

She was a Russian, she did die in this war.

She is a known cultural figure, she died.

Of course, someone who opposed the war.

There are no Russian cultural figures who are in favor of the war, who are fighting this war in Ukraine.

None. There are no such people.

She dies in Podil and what is Podil? What is Kyiv, what is Podil? Podil was a port area of the city.

I'm asking you a way back now to the 8th century, 9th century, beginning of the class.

It was the port area of the Khazars before the Vikings even showed up.

The Vikings controlled in 900, which is a sign that they and not the Khazars are the ones who are in charge of Kyiv.

47:06 If you walk down to Podil from the center of Kyiv, there's a beautiful route downwards, there's a 14th century Lithuanian castle on the way, which marks the period of Lithuanian control of Kyiv and much of Ukraine.

In the 19th century, Podil was the site of markets, which were dominated by Jews and Poles.

Was it made Russian by shelling it? Was it made Russian by the death of a Russian journalist? So Podil was there before any of this.

Podil was there a long time ago and it's been a theme of this class that nations are real political entities in the 20th century, the 21st century, the 19th century.

They're formed by all kinds of contact along the way.

But there are some things which are actually, authentically old.

48:03 I ended the class last time by reading Julia Moskovski's poem about the problematic politically incorrect verses.

But, of course, the thing about that poem is that it's not actually the poem that's problematic.

It's we who are problematic.

And the poem is perfectly elegant.

It's the we, we who are problematic.

This thought that this is leading me to is the way the poem answers itself.

Because the premise of the poem is that this is all we have to offer, these awkward words, but that's not true at all.

The example of Ukrainians resisting this war offers much more than that and it offers much more than that even in poetry.

When Julia answered me on, I can't even tell you what platform, 'cause I don't know, but maybe it was Instagram, maybe it was Telegram, I don't know.

But what she said was, "I thank all of the Ukrainians who are continuing to create in times of war," which is an acknowledgement of an important point.

49:07 That it's not just that the war is going on, the culture is going on the entire time, which leads me to where I began and where I'm gonna end, I promise, very soon.

On Sunday, I was at a concert in Carnegie Hall, which is not something I do all the time.

You have to make me, but I have kids.

You can imagine, it was three hours long.

But I really wanted to be there, it was very interesting.

Among other things, the performers were the Ukrainian's Children's Choir, which is called Shchedryk.

And Shchedryk is named after a song called, "Shchedryk," but Shchedryk is an interesting word, because Shchedryk involves an adjective which can mean both generous and bountiful.

A person is generous, but a situation is bountiful.

And that it's generous that gives me a cue, which I need to use to thank all of the Ukrainian historians and also the Ukrainian listeners.

50:07 This class has turned out to have been listened to a lot of people in Ukraine.

So I'm very glad that you've done so and that you've indulged my interpretations.

But the blurriness between generosity and bountiful is interesting, because it points us back to a pre-Christian era where in a pagan world where the deities are present in the world, there isn't really a line between generous and bountiful.

The world is gonna be bountiful, because the deities are generous.

And that's why you perform certain rituals and that's why you celebrate the season.

So that song, the (vocalizes "Carol of the Bells") that song, which we have as an American Christmas Carol, is, of course, you know where I'm going with this.

It's a Ukrainian song and the reason why it's so different from all the American Christmas carols is because it arises from Ukrainian polyphonic singing.

From multi-part harmony, Ukrainian singing.

51:01 And the song itself, the song that Mykola Leontovych took almost 20 years to adapt is ancient.

It's ancient.

And it's not about winter actually, it's actually about spring.

Because if you're a pagan, I mean, if you're a sensible person actually living in the world, when does the year actually begin? It begins when things start growing out of the ground.

And it begins when the swallows come and sing.

It begins when the first lambs are born, which is February or March, which is what the song is actually about.

It's about those things.

So this song, which was adapted and played in Carnegie Hall a century ago and then played again on Sunday, is ancient.

It's pre-Christian, it goes back before 988.

It's actually about spring.

It's about fertility, it's about prosperity, it's about love, it's about how things are going to get better.

That part in the American version where they say at the end, "Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas," in that part of the song, in the Ukrainian version, it's actually about how your wife is beautiful.

52:01 (Timothy and students chuckling) Things are going really well for you.

You're gonna make lots of money this year.

The farm's going really well and by the way, your wife is beautiful.

(students chuckling) And what it literally says is that she's dark-browed, which is beautiful.

That's a beautiful woman in Ukraine.

It's a woman who has dark eyebrows.

It's a song about spring.

It's a song which we think of as about winter, which is about spring, which I close on,

because I just wanna suggest that sometimes that things that seem like an end can actually be a beginning.

Thanks.