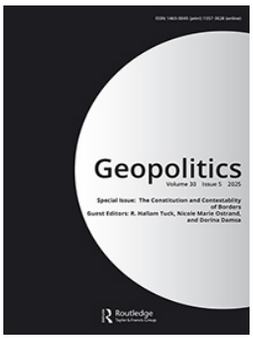

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Sheltering the Nation: The Politicisation of Ukraine's Civilian Shelters Amidst Russia's Aggression

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ABSTRACT

Since the quotidian underground spaces that serve as civilian shelters in modern wars have not been given much consideration within academic scholarship, this paper examines their sociopolitical significance in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war. In investigating Ukrainians' uses of subterranean sites like basements and metros in the first six months following Russia's 2022 invasion of their country, the paper illustrates how civilian shelters can function as more than spaces of protection during times of conflict. In the initial months of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, many sheltered spaces were also reinterpreted as sites of solidarity and non-violent resistance for Ukrainians through their artistic expressions, particularly of music and visual art. This discussion accordingly pushes forward scholarly analyses of contemporary wartime sheltering, especially within civilian shelters, and contributes to the growing theorising around the spatial politics of the Russia–Ukraine war and conflict and peace more generally. By uncovering more 'buried' experiences of the war, the paper additionally demonstrates how sheltered spaces in Ukraine have, in many instances, showcased the hope and resilience of Ukrainians in their fight against Russia's aggression.

Introduction

The noun 'shelter' is typically understood as a building designed to provide 'protection from bad weather, danger, or attack' (Cambridge Dictionary 2024). These spaces, which are often synonymously called 'bunkers', are usually bulky, underground structures intentionally built for the safety of civilians and military personnel in dangerous and hostile environments.[1] Still, many of

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the subterranean sites we engage with in our everyday lives, including those located in the private sphere, also serve as spaces of shelter when significant danger threatens (Klinke 2018). The cellars and basements in our homes and office buildings, for instance, as well as underground metro stations, parking lots, and walkways can, and do, quickly become places and even symbols of safety and security when danger materialises at and above ground level, including both natural and manmade threats. Although these spaces are not always instrumentally or exclusively designed for the protection of civilians in urban planning, nor even necessarily contemplated or perceived as shelters by ordinary residents until they are used during natural disasters or conflicts, they critically provide protection for those who occupy them.

But despite their significance for populations in insecure environments, civilian shelters within contemporary wars remain greatly under-theorised. Whilst recognising that shelters are 'symbolic space[s] where different spatial meanings are embedded' (Yun 2022, 1211; also Beck 2011), investigations into shelters and sheltering throughout the last two decades have largely been backward-looking. The existing literature predominantly draws on Virilio's (1994) work on visible war histories and bunker archaeology to highlight the use, symbolism, and role of bunkers intentionally built for safeguarding civilians and military and political personnel. While a number of other works explore citizens' experiences and anticipation of sheltering during wartimes (for example, Evans 2011; Field 2002; Gang 2017; Masco 2009; Yun 2022; Ziauddin 2017), research on civilian shelters has mostly focused on historical wars, especially World War II and the Cold War. As such, shelters of all kinds, and especially those constructed for military purposes, have essentially been reduced in academic scholarship to a latent nostalgic or sublime novelty and rendered 'obsolete relics' of a bygone past (Garrett and Klinke 2019).

Yet, neither the need for sheltering nor bunker-building have disappeared in the modern day. The ongoing importance of sheltered spaces can vividly be seen in Ukraine since the beginning of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2014, and specifically following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion. Since 24 February 2022, quotidian subterranean sites like basements and metro stations have regularly safeguarded citizens across Ukraine during Russia's violent attacks using air-borne weapons like drones, rockets, and missiles. At the same time as securing the Ukrainian population amidst Russia's war on their country, many of these underground spaces have also functioned as dynamic sites of solidarity and non-violent resistance for citizens through their artistic expressions – this was particularly seen in the months immediately following Russia's 2022 invasion when the majority of them first transitioned into acute sites of safety. Rather than representing the mere end of politics or the fragility of security, as 'below' ground spaces are often framed (for more, see Bachelard 1994; Graham 2016; Virilio 1994), civilian shelters across Ukraine have hence, in many instances,

showcased the hope and resilience of Ukrainians in their fight against Russia's aggression. Ukrainians' uses of quotidian subterranean sites since Russia's 2022 invasion also illustrate the 'persistence and morphism' (Garrett and Klinke 2019, 1077) of sheltered spaces in, and the expanding spatialities of, contemporary warfare.

Whereas the political blind spots and conceptual weaknesses exposed by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine underscore that more 'can and should be done to unpack the spatial politics of this war' (Klinke 2023, 813), little academic research has explored the conflict's spatial dynamics within urban spaces. This paper appropriately aims to fill the empirical and theoretical gaps around the spatialities of the war, and contemporary wartime sheltering more generally, by analysing how Ukrainians used quotidian underground spaces as civilian shelters in the first six months following Russia's 2022 invasion. To do so, the paper asks: what was the sociopolitical significance of quotidian underground spaces in urban spaces across Ukraine immediately following Russia's 2022 invasion? (How) can subterranean spaces serve as sites of solidarity and non-violent resistance within the context of war? And finally, what do the civilian shelters used by Ukrainians tell us about the evolving spatialities of war and peace?

To answer these questions, the study draws on 50 photos and videos publicly shared on online news and social media sites in the first six months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (see Appendix A for source type and citation). Digital materials were used to overcome the immense challenges of studying civilian shelters during an active war – methodologically, spatially, temporally, materially, and also ethically.[2] To ensure the transparent representation of diverse views and experiences of sheltering, the data used in this discussion were drawn from a range of media platforms and outlets (see Appendix A). We purposively sampled Google, Twitter (now X), and YouTube between 15 July and 1 October 2022 using the following English language keywords and their most common Ukrainian equivalents: 'Ukraine', 'Ukrainian', 'shelter', 'bunker', and 'bomb shelter'.[3] These searches generated many news articles, reports, blogs, photos, and videos about both military bunkers and civilian shelters in Ukraine. We then narrowed the sample to only photos and videos showing ordinary citizens' sheltering experiences between February and September 2022 and randomly selected 50 sources. While applying a more systematic sampling method to these outlets or the visual materials might enable greater comparisons of, or generalisations about, Ukraine's civilian shelters, this paper investigates their communicative and sociopolitical dimensions, to the extent this is possible remotely. The randomly selected materials therefore showcase the varied ways that these spaces were used by Ukrainians in the first six months following Russia's full-scale invasion. As public

representations of war may face control and censorship by state governments (Pinkerton, Young, and Dodds 2011; Rennie 2008; Smith and Higgins 2012) or be intentionally curated for specific purposes or audiences (Balabanova and Parry 2014; Banks 2001; Pink 2001), each item was approached critically to maintain distance and avoid merely replicating the public commentary around it. This was done by assessing the relevant socio-structural, political, and cultural contexts of the sites they were produced within, portrayed, and presented to and seen by various audiences (for more, see Bandtel and Tenscher 2014; Mason 2005; Rose 2012).

In using publicly available materials produced in the six months following Russia's 2022 invasion, the paper captures vignettes of how Ukrainians used shelters at a very particular moment in time; namely, the initial crisis period when their use was new to most citizens and there was heightened uncertainty around the war. We recognise that the importance, uses, and meanings of civilian shelters have remained, grown, and also qualitatively changed since February 2022 as the conflict continues. We are therefore not attempting to provide a generalisable account of every civilian shelter used in Ukraine since the beginning of the Russia–Ukraine war or following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion, nor suggesting that citizens' experiences within shelters, like any spaces, are homogeneous or hold the same meanings, including for people who sheltered together. We also recognise that the sources used here do not comprehensively depict the trauma of sheltering or Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine, nor do they represent all Ukrainians' lived realities since 24 February 2022. Crucially, the other layers of shelter-dwelling not presented in this paper are not unimportant and will need to be studied in due course, particularly sheltering in more rural and isolated settings and the private ways of sheltering that are much harder to access and have not been publicly shared as often, or at all, but which will reveal Ukrainians' experiences of sheltering in greater depth. Nevertheless, in examining the sociopolitical significance of many civilian shelters across Ukraine immediately following Russia's full-scale invasion, this paper exhibits some of the more 'buried' experiences of the war, which thus far have been overlooked.

The paper begins by introducing the theoretical underpinnings of the evolving spatialities of war and peace. After outlining the limited theorising on civilian shelters in modern wars, we examine how quotidian underground sites were used as shelters for Ukrainians in the six months following Russia's 2022 invasion, focusing specifically on how many of them served as spaces of solidarity and non-violent resistance through citizens' productions of music and visual art while sheltering underground. The paper concludes by detailing how Ukrainians' uses of civilian shelters in the Russia–Ukraine war pushes

forward our understanding of contemporary wartime sheltering and contributes to the growing theorising around the spatialities of modern warfare.

The Evolving Spatialities of War and Peace

Following the 'spatial turn' across the social sciences and humanities at the end of the twentieth century (for more, see Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005; Soja 1989), there has been mounting interest in peace and conflict studies 'to investigate the interconnectedness between space, peace, and conflict' (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016, 1). The need to examine the multiple interlinked agents and actors, spaces and scales, types and forms of agency, and processes of peacebuilding and conflict-making has become increasingly apparent with the evolving spatialities and temporalities of modern war and conflict (for more, see Flint and Dempsey 2023; Koopman et al. 2021; Macaspac and Moore 2023; Megoran and Dalby 2018). Whereas the 'battlefields' of prior wars were typically quite distinct and definable geographical areas on which warfare was predominantly conducted horizontally along 'frontlines', the spatialities of combat have greatly expanded beyond 'battlefields' into larger 'battlespaces' (Elden 2013; Virilio 1989), including areas previously excluded from war like those occupied by civilians. As cities have become greater targets and sites of violence and intra- and inter-state wars since World War II (for more, see Coaffee 2003; Farish 2003; Fregonese 2009, 2020; Hristova 2018), growing attention amongst political geographers has consequently been paid to the subfield of 'urban geopolitics' (Graham 2004a, 2010; Kaldor 2012; Mamadouh 2023).

Scholars of critical geopolitics and conflict and peace studies have also emphasised the increasing volumes, heights, and depths of violence by pointing to the presence of new military technologies across land, air, and water in times of both war and peace (for example, Campbell 2019; Elden 2013; Graham 2004b, 2016; Jackman and Squire 2021; Koopman et al. 2021; Megoran and Dalby 2018). Prior research has identified how the growing surveillance and attack capabilities of new war technologies, especially those airborne, have altered the conduct, potential for, and direction of violence. The rising use of air power as the pre-eminent method of warfare, such as drones (Gregory 2011; Jensen 2020; Kaplan 2020; Klauser 2021; Klauser and Pedrozo 2015), UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) (Birtchnell and Gibson 2015; Jackman 2023; Williams 2011, 2013), and military parachutes (Veal 2020), underscores the vertical expansion of modern warfare – particularly the inclusion of new heights within airspaces and the 'downward' gazes of now-conventional weapons. These technological developments have also extended warfare and security into new spaces, including areas located significant geographical distances away from military operations, due to the remote operation of weapons like drones (Mamadouh 2023). Increased digitalisation

in warfare has equally pushed war and peace into new online 'territories', such as social media platforms, making them 'emergent "arenas" of securitization' (Pinkerton, Young, and Dodds 2011, 117; also Douzet and Gery 2021; Smith and Higgins 2012).

At the same time, research into the geopolitics of subterranean spaces has expanded in recent years. Several scholars stress that politics also invisibly exists beneath major urban landscapes as complex social, cultural, political, and geographical struggles (see, for example, Graham 2004a, 2004b, 2016; Squire and Dodds 2020). Key examples include underground tunnels (Graham 2016; Slesinger 2022; Zhang and Crang 2016), militarised waters (Squire 2016), and bomb shelters built by political figures, private individuals, and companies in anticipation of specific events or to 'secure' the volume (Elden 2013). Adolf Hitler's use of the Führerbunker in Berlin in World War II is one historical demonstration of a bunker-dwelling political elite (see Bennett 2011), while Vladimir Putin's rumoured underground lair underneath Gelendzhik Palace is a more contemporary example (see Carrier 2023). Underground spaces have also increasingly been built by civilians in response to growing anxieties around global sociopolitical and environmental instability and collapse, such as the bunkers built by doomsday preppers (Garrett 2021), and the subterranean renovations in private homes to create 'mega-basements', armouries, long-term food storage facilities, and panic rooms (Graham 2016).

Given the evolving spatialities and temporalities of war and peace, a growing body of literature in critical geopolitics now consequently stresses that security and securitised spaces cannot be conceptualised on solely horizontal, vertical, volumetric, or spherical dimensions, but as 'a relational, emergent configuration of different elements which is always-already in-the-making' (Campbell 2019, 18; also Graham 2004b, 2016; Jackman and Squire 2021; Squire 2016). Unpacking the complex geopolitics of modern conflict and peace thus requires 'cut[ting] through', rather than merely across, political landscapes (Elden 2013, 37). To realise how politics and geographies are dynamically intertwined (Flint and Dempsey 2023; Koopman et al. 2021; Macaspac and Moore 2023; Megoran and Dalby 2018), the remainder of this paper accordingly focuses its attention on underground civilian shelters.

Civilian Shelters in War

Despite the growing attention paid to the evolving spatialities of war, especially the increasing extension of conflict into urban areas and the subsequent rising necessity of underground spaces, civilian shelters in contemporary conflicts remain largely under-theorised. While research in bunker studies continues to expand, the ongoing debates about civilian shelters are predominantly retrospective and centred on those built in the twentieth century to safeguard against the threat of hostilities in urban centres around the world, such as

the designated fallout shelters in buildings across the United States during the Cold War and the sprawling shelters constructed by the German and Finnish Civil Defence after World War II. Although Garrett and Klinke have sought to push forward the constrained modern discussions around the 'function, materiality and temporality' of bunkers (2019, 1063), arguing for a reimagination of these spaces as more than static concrete structures (also Bennett 2019), the existing literature primarily focuses on historical conflicts. As such, sheltering has largely been rendered a nostalgic novelty and bunkers 'outdated architectural forms' of wars gone by (Garrett and Klinke 2019).

Yet, there is a sustained and growing need for sheltering and bunker-building as new wars emerge and war technology increasingly bolsters threats to urban populations (Klinke 2018). Whereas the 'persistence and morphism' (Garrett and Klinke 2019, 1077) of bunkers warrants detailed attention, the quotidian underground spaces occupied by civilians in modern wars particularly deserve analysis. As subterranean spaces are fundamental for the urban condition where the water table is low enough (Armitage 2009), sites like basements and cellars in private houses and apartment blocks or parking lots and metro stations can (and often do) become sites of safety for populations when danger materialises at and above ground level. Although they are not often intentionally built as shelters, these concealed everyday spaces serve the same function as purpose-built bunkers in providing temporary asylum for those sheltering. Particularly stark illustrations include the London Tube stations (Field 2002) and cellars in Berlin (Evans 2011) used by civilians during World War II, as well as the nuclear bomb shelters built in Swiss family homes (Ziauddin 2017) and Swedish apartment buildings (Andersson 2021, 2024) since the 1950s. Whilst not necessarily underground nor in a traditional 'war' setting, Alvarez-Cueva (2022) similarly describes civilians' houses, apartments and dorm rooms as 'shelters' during the COVID-19 pandemic, which shielded against the life-threatening virus circulating in society. The importance of quotidian underground spaces for ensuring citizens' safety is indeed temporally limited to times of crisis, as they often quickly resume their intended functions when danger dissipates, yet the protection they provide can be critical for individuals' survival.

Several scholars have demonstrated the significance of shelters by investigating civilians' experiences and anticipation of sheltering in prior conflicts. Beyond the architectural avoidance of danger, Beck frames shelters as profoundly emotive and psychological spaces in diametrically representing a refuge from, and a reminder of, the dangers often located only a few metres above; making them, in many ways, a locus equally between a crisis of life and death, or 'both womb- and tomb-like' (2011, 82). As shelters – including both those purpose- and non-purpose built – are symbols and artefacts of conflict (Bennett 2011, 2019), they can invoke traumatic pasts and/or insecurities for populations (Yun 2022). Much research illustrates this in highlighting the

emotions imbued in and symbolised by sheltered spaces; Andersson (2021), for example, details how Swedish citizens felt that air raid shelters 'made [them] feel safe and secure' during the Cold War (2021, 57). Other authors describe the more painful feelings associated with shelters, such as Ziauddin, who explains that those in Swiss homes not only left 'spatial scars', but had significant effects on peoples' bodies and minds because of how they invaded 'the innermost sphere of intimacy and privacy' (Ziauddin 2017, 675). Evans (2011) likewise details the disorder and chaos within Berlin's subterranean landscape towards the end of World War II, underscoring that the environmental and social conditions of shelters left them damp, cold, and in continuous threat of collapse; Field (2002) also divulges this when describing how coughs, colds, and other illnesses like lice and scabies spread freely in overcrowded shelters in wartime London. The reality that the instability of war is embedded in sheltered spaces was additionally seen during the conflict on the Korean peninsula, as these sites failed to universally instil a sense of security and safety for the South Korean population as some citizens struggled to accept their new functions in the context of the war because many were used 'for different purposes during peaceful times' (Yun 2022, 1213). In addition to symbolising the pain, suffering, and trauma associated with conflict, sheltered spaces thus often represent the fragility of security (see Virilio 1994). This is only further reinforced by the fact that negative sociocultural meanings like passivity, powerlessness, death, and vulnerability are regularly attributed to subordinate spatial and metaphorical positions and statuses as vertical scales are commonly used as allegories for hierarchies of power and prestige (for more, see Bachelard 1994; Graham 2016).

Still, civilians' 'sheltering' experiences during historical wars reveal that other meanings can also be attributed to these subterranean spaces. For example, Gang describes bomb shelters as places of 'important social interaction' for the residents of wartime Chongqing, pointing to the 'shelter friendships' and love affairs that formed in bomb shelters as people grew close because of their shared fates and the time they spent together chatting, reading, and studying (Ziauddin 2017, 390). Field (2002) equally emphasises the subjective meanings attributed to London's Tube stations during the Blitz through peoples' interactions within them, specifically referencing the grassroots efforts aimed at raising citizens' morale and combatting their boredom, such as the introduction of activities like dart matches, discussion groups, amateur singing nights, sewing circles, and dancing. Similar to the shelters used in London and Chongqing, Alvarez-Cueva (2022) additionally notes that social activities like sharing music and gaming, although often based online, prompted a sense of unity between people globally as a way to cope with their fears and boost morale while they 'sheltered' during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Hence, even though sheltered spaces exist 'in many forms and shapes' (Garrett and Klinke 2019, 1066), and vary considerably in their meanings and

the idiosyncratic nuances of the crises prompting their use, they are evidently not uniformly apolitical, passive, nor devoid of agency.

In fact, when analysing the meanings imbued in wartime shelters, some scholars have argued that they can serve as hubs or even 'theatrical' spaces (Virilio 1994) for sociopolitical activities. When describing the symbolic and cultural significance of Cold War era shelters in the United States, Masco (2009), for example, contends that these spaces enabled citizens to express a sense of 'Americanness' as life within them was portrayed as 'quintessentially American' and 'a new frontier experience where the resilient citizen could outwit a dangerous world' (2009, 20). In also looking at the national symbolism associated with shelters in Cold War America, Armitage (2009) likewise argues that a dimension of the 'homefront' was instilled in these spaces. Gang (2017) identifies the same phenomena in a very different context, detailing that Chinese citizens' experiences of Japanese air attacks from their shelters in Chongqing left many feeling like 'true' citizens. Contrasting the notion that below ground spaces can limit expressions of citizenship (Benton-Short 2007), many shelters used by civilians in Chongqing, like in Cold War US, became home to strong nationalist movements and places where people felt safe to critique the Japanese military (Gang 2017).[4] Field (2002) similarly discloses that London's underground stations became focal points for debates over civil defence and government failure during World War II. These historical examples accordingly demonstrate that multifarious sociopolitical meanings are variably 'negotiated' in the subterranean spaces that serve as civilian shelters.

Whilst revealing the importance of civilian shelters during wartimes, the aforementioned literature nevertheless remains mainly backward-looking and ignores the ongoing relevance of these underground spaces. There are therefore considerable theoretical and empirical gaps around civilian shelters and sheltering within contemporary wars. To address these lacunas, the remainder of this paper analyses quotidian underground spaces that were used as civilian shelters across Ukraine in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, focusing specifically on their sociopolitical significance in the six months following Russia's 2022 invasion.

Civilian Shelters in Ukraine Following Russia's 2022 Invasion

Everyday Realities of Insecurity

Even before 24 February 2022, subterranean spaces in cityscapes across Ukraine symbolised the 'everyday' realities of insecurity. In the months and even days preceding Russia's full-scale invasion, quotidian underground spaces were realised as potential refuges for the general population when Ukrainian authorities made it known that the country's few purpose-built shelters would only be made available to military personnel and a small set of

essential workers in the case of an invasion (Lonsdorf, Estrin, and Harbage 2022). In some localities, civil preparedness measures officially designated certain underground spaces as shelters, including storage facilities, metro stations, pedestrian tunnels, basements, cellars, and parking lots.[5] The Kyiv City Council (2022), for instance, produced an online map stating that the owners and organisations occupying the buildings identified as having functional underground spaces would provide free access for the public to shelter, if necessary. In a similar map identifying below ground areas that could serve as shelters in Lviv, local media detailed the official protocols to be followed in an emergency, urging residents 'to check access to their basement and talk about it with neighbours' (Koval 2022). Although the threat of NATO attacks was taken into consideration when some of these underground sites were built, such as the reinforcement of many metro stations with concrete and steel to withstand potential nuclear warfare during the Soviet Union, as was also true in other communist states (for example, Lasserre, Enkeleda, and Bennett 2022), they were predominantly functional spaces used in Ukrainians' everyday lives prior to February 2022 and before 2014 for those living in Ukraine's eastern *oblasti* (regions). The intricate architecture and decorative furnishings of some of these underground sites equally distract from their conceivable alternative function as a bomb shelter, such as the ornamental chandeliers, colourful mosaics, and marble archways in underground shopping malls in Lviv and metro stations across Kyiv. Even in less opulent subterranean spaces, the interior fixtures, shelving, and cabinetry – and the lack thereof – also underscore the banality of these sites and the fact that their intended instrumental purposes are not as shelters.

Yet, underground sites like metros and basements have regularly provided safety and protection for people across Ukraine since 24 February 2022. Like in other contemporary wars (see Gregory 2011; Slesinger 2022; Veal 2020; Williams 2011), Russia's attacks have frequently followed a 'downward' vector through the use of air power – namely, drones, UAVs, rockets, and missiles – making underground spaces the safest in Ukraine's urbanscapes. Much social and news media has accordingly profiled Ukrainians' sheltering experiences, especially in the first six months following Russia's 2022 invasion, often showing crowds of people, couples, and families in underground metros and basements waiting for Russian attacks to cease (for example, Chin, 2022; Ochagavia and Lamborn, 2022; Sengupta, 2022; Yaffa, 2022). In doing so, they exhibited how civilian shelters provide(d) safety for people across religious, ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural divides; examples from the first few weeks include the Lebanese student community that sheltered in Kyiv (Chehayeb, 2022) and religious sites that opened their basements as public shelters like the Synagogue of the Breslover Hasidim in Uman (Wright and Konovalova, 2022) and the Cathedral of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ternopil (Chin, 2022). Uniformed military personnel were also

shown sheltering in these subterranean spaces alongside ordinary civilians (see, for example, Mathieson, 2022), thus illuminating the fragility of security (Virilio 1994) and serving as harsh reminders of the violence only a few metres above (Beck 2011).

The immense trauma, pain, and suffering in and represented by shelters (see Evans 2011; Ziauddin 2017) were likewise reflected in images and videos shared immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion. This includes many harrowing depictions of overcrowded concrete rooms, corridors, and train platforms where Ukrainians waited during air attacks, often for long periods of time (for example, Belton 2022; Cookman 2022; Yaffa, 2022). A basement in Yahidne that housed more than one hundred people for twenty-five days is just one of many vivid illustrations (Aljazeera, 2022; Limaye, 2022). Like Evans (2011) described in Berlin in World War II, many of the underground spaces occupied by Ukrainians had poor environmental conditions, including cold temperatures, dampness, darkness, and traces of mould and mildew (Khurshudyan, 2022), and some were in deteriorating conditions and risking collapse (Oppenheim, 2022), especially those in cities that experienced significant shelling like Mariupol (for example, Beskrovna, 2022; DW 2022). The psychological, physiological, and emotional toil of sheltering (Ziauddin 2017), and of living through war, was also exposed in much media coverage in the spring and summer of 2022. This includes stories about the shortages of humanitarian aid and basic goods like food, water, medicine, and baby food (Beskrovna, 2022; Boffey, 2022a) and the prevalence of illness, infection, hunger, and also death (Aljazeera, 2022; Limaye, 2022) in some shelters, as well as the plight of ill, elderly, and disabled individuals forced to live in below ground spaces, often on concrete floors, for long periods of time (Khurshudyan, 2022; Reuters, 2022). The perilous situations in many of Ukraine's shelters were also made visible through reports of medical treatments and hospital wards forced to move underground, such as maternity wards full of pregnant women and newborn babies (McClure and Bryant 2022; Sengupta 2022) and paediatric hospitals like the Okhmatdyt National Specialized Children's Hospital in Kyiv (Jennings, 2022). While shelter-dwelling in public spaces in urban centres featured, and continues to feature, much more frequently on news and social media platforms than sheltering in private homes, it must be noted that the emotions associated with underground sheltering are likely even more acute, and compounded by feelings of isolation and desolation, when people have sheltered alone.

But while providing critical protection for Ukrainians amidst Russia's bombardments, civilian shelters also served other functions in the first six months following Russia's full-scale invasion. In particular, many quotidian underground spaces across Ukraine were used as dynamic sites for sociocultural and political activities, as can be seen through citizens' artistic expressions while sheltering underground. While representing Ukrainians' immense pain and suffering, civilian shelters thus also facilitated their solidarity and non-

violent civil resistance against Russia's aggression. The remainder of this paper demonstrates this by analysing Ukrainians' productions of music and visual art within civilian shelters in the first six months following Russia's 2022 invasion.

Solidarity and Resistance Through Artistic Expression

Music

Just as in other historical war contexts, like war-torn London and Chongqing, and globally throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of music in Ukraine's underground shelters following Russia's full-scale invasion showcased how these spaces enabled Ukrainians' solidarity and resistance. This was exemplified by numerous videos and photos shared online of ordinary citizens playing music and/or singing together in their shelters while waiting for Russia's attacks to end, especially women and children (Fisher, 2022) and university students (NowThis Impact, 2022). For example, a widely shared video in the first days featured 7-year-old Amelia Anisovych singing Frozen's 'Let It Go' in Ukrainian in a Kyiv shelter (Jain, 2022). These performances notably resembled those that also (and sometimes even simultaneously) occurred at ground level across the country, often in high-traffic places as people fled to safer places, such as in the Kyiv Central Station where the Akko Quartet performed on 30 March 2022 (Mook 2022). Ukrainians' singing and playing of music amidst Russia's attacks on their cities also closely emulated the 'resilience of ordinary people' documented in other conflicts throughout history (Field 2002, 16; see also Armitage 2009; Gang 2017; Masco 2009).

Moreover, and perhaps unsurprisingly, performances of songs significant for the Ukrainian nation were regularly performed in underground shelters during the initial crisis period: the first among them, the Ukrainian national anthem. Noteworthy performances of the anthem include a singing and piano-playing family in a makeshift shelter in a Kyiv daycare (Uchilochka, 2022), a chorus of women sheltering in a basement in Cherkasy (Fisher, 2022), and a group of diverse individuals singing together in Kharkiv (Dzheppar, 2022). The trumpeter filmed and shared on Twitter (now X) by freelance journalist Kristina Berdynskykh on 28 February 2022 in a metro station-turned-shelter – one of the many musicians who performed solo in their shelters – is an additional example (Berdynskykh, 2022; also Yaffa, 2022). Musical ensembles also played the anthem for audiences while sheltering underground, as was shown in Yaroslava Antipina (2022)'s video on Twitter (now X) of a performance in a Kharkiv metro station on 26 March 2022. As national anthems bring people together and prompt feelings of national pride and patriotism by connecting them with their wider nation (Waterman 2019), or national 'family' (Lauenstein et al. 2015), Ukrainians' playing, singing, and listening to their anthem below ground with individuals who were wholly unknown to them but temporarily located in the same shelter symbolically

reflects their solidarity, resistance, and hope for Ukraine's future (see also Howlett 2022a). This is further underscored by the Ukrainian anthem's lyrics, such as the opening exaltation that 'Ukraine has not yet perished', which is also its title, and proclamations that Ukrainians will again rule 'in a free land of [their] own' as their 'enemies will vanish, like dew in the sun'. Whilst innately a symbol of the nation, the Ukrainian anthem is politicised within the context of the Russia–Ukraine war because of how starkly its linguistic projection of nationalism and reminders of the existence and strength of independent Ukraine juxtapose Russia's repeated violations of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. Indeed, the many performances of the anthem in separate and unconnected shelters filled with diverse peoples across the country do not reveal the extent to which Russia's full-scale invasion consolidated a Ukrainian national identity that supersedes other identities, especially those tied to ethnicity and language. Nevertheless, the widespread prevalence of the anthem suggests it held important meanings for many Ukrainians – whether in its own right or as a symbol of opposition to Russia – regardless of where they sheltered. Although not explored further here, it may also point to a growing sense of attachment to the Ukrainian nation and state, or like in other warring contexts (see Gang 2017; Masco 2009), that experiencing the war from underground shelters made some citizens feel that they are 'true' Ukrainians.

The use of shelters by popular Ukrainian musical artists amidst Russia's attacks equally illustrates how these spaces facilitated solidarity and resistance within the context of the war. The formal and informal underground concerts by Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, lead vocalist of the admired Ukrainian rock group *Okean Elzy*, in the initial weeks following the full-scale invasion are particularly noteworthy. Rather than preparing for his world tour previously planned for April 2022, the singer travelled and performed in public spaces across Ukraine, including many civilian shelters, in order 'to make people feel that [he is] with them' (Boffey, 2022b). *Okean Elzy*'s 'Everything Will be Alright' concert on Orthodox Easter Sunday in Kyiv's *Zoloti Vorota* (Golden Gate) metro station is one acute demonstration (Телеканал 1 + 1, 2022). Beyond the symbolism of the concert coinciding with a holiday of great significance for many Ukrainians, the venue itself is immensely emblematic as it had protected, and continues to protect, thousands of citizens during attacks on the capital (see also Howlett 2022a). Another remarkable performance was Vakarchuk's singing of the popular Ukrainian folk-pop tune, '*Chervona Ruta* (Red Rue)', in a metro station in Kharkiv with a group of civilians in March 2022 (Chkhikvadze, 2022). Like the anthem, *Chervona Ruta* is important for Ukrainians as it was written by the late Volodymyr Ivasiuk, who became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance to Soviet rule after his celebrity status in the USSR and Ukrainian cultural works drew the attention of Soviet authorities for presumedly arousing nationalist sentiments, which is thought to have contributed to his premature death (for more, see Wojnowski 2023).

The collective chorus of this particular song performed in an underground shelter amidst Russia's attacks on Ukraine accordingly demonstrates the significance of sheltered spaces for enabling Ukrainians' protest and resolve. As Kharkiv was largely a Russian-speaking city before February 2022, and the first capital of the Ukrainian SSR, the singing of *Chervona Ruta* in one of its metro stations following the the full-scale invasion moreover suggests that the shared experience of the war, and even the underground musical performances themselves, may have contributed to the consolidation of a more united Ukrainian identity amongst Ukraine's multi-lingual and multi-ethnic population (see also Howlett, 2022a).

The performances by Serhiy Zhadan – famous Ukrainian novelist, poet, and frontman of the band, Zhadan and the Dogs, and now a soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine – similarly illustrate how music and literature united citizens within underground spaces despite linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity. Like Vakarchuk, Zhadan also played several concerts and read poetry for sheltering audiences following Russia's 2022 invasion (Stenson, 2022; Coakley 2022); an example is his performance of a lyrical monologue in a shelter in Kharkiv in April 2022. He likewise detailed the experiences of Ukrainians, and specifically Kharkivians, sleeping in quotidian underground spaces like metro stations in his new song 'Metro' (Higgins 2023). Just as Zhadan's shows brought together different people within civilian shelters, much of his literary work, including many pieces read and performed for underground audiences, also celebrates and showcases the diversity of Ukraine in detailing how his native Donbas region is closely entwined with Russian culture and history, but is principally Ukrainian (Coakley 2022). Hence, Vakarchuk's and Zhadan's uses of subterranean spaces as auditoriums for their performances both overtly demonstrated their solidarity with sheltering Ukrainians and showcased their own attachments to the Ukrainian nation. Notably, their underground concerts also very much resembled those that took place in civilian shelters in other wars, such as in London during the Blitz (see Field 2002); an observation explicitly noted by Vakarchuk himself by comparing the experiences of Ukrainians in Kharkiv to those of Londoners (Boffey, 2022b).

Still, Vakarchuk and Zhadan are not the only musicians whose performances in shelters showed Ukrainians' solidarity and resolve. In fact, several music festivals and concerts, including the Kharkiv Music Festival, were quickly relocated underground following Russia's 2022 invasion, which permitted these events to continue and facilitated intimate interactions between artists and their audiences that may not have been possible had they taken place above ground (Suliman and Kornfield, 2022). Numerous other groups also performed underground for sheltering audiences throughout the country. For example, the Kyiv-based Brassers Brass Band played in several settings, including in their own city's underground metro stations-turned-shelters (UkraineWorld, 2022). In swapping their usual performance street clothes

and suits for Ukrainian army uniforms following February 2022, the group of seven brass-playing musicians visibly illustrated their commitment to their nation's fight against Russia's aggression through both their costumes and concert locations. Other widely observed examples include performances of classically trained musicians in underground shelters, such as a female violinist in Kyiv who played '*Nich Yaka Misiachna* (What a Moonlit Night)' (MFA of Ukraine, 2022). A further demonstration is Illia Bondarenko's rendition of popular Ukrainian folk song, '*Verbovaya Doschechka* (The Willow Board)', from his basement shelter in Kyiv (Roberts, 2022), which was also featured in a virtual international violin choir alongside ninety-four other violinists from twenty-nine countries and streamed at ITV's televised 'Concert for Ukraine' to show solidarity with Ukrainians (Roberts, 2022). Internationally renowned performers likewise exhibited their camaraderie with the Ukrainian population in the months after Russia's full-scale invasion by travelling to Ukraine and utilising concealed spaces for their own performances. U2's Bono and the Edge, for instance, used Kyiv's Khreshchatyk metro station as an auditorium for a surprise concert on 8 May 2022 (Garcia, 2022). While playing directly for an underground audience of approximately one hundred people, the artists symbolically displayed their support and allyship with Ukraine, as was also reinforced through Bono's rallying affirmations that they stand with Ukrainians, who are not only fighting for their freedom, but 'for all of us who love freedom' (Garcia, 2022).

A comparable illustration of Ukrainians' resistance and resilience within their underground shelters is Ukraine's 2022 Eurovision Song Contest commentating by Timur Miroshnychenko. Surrounded by an assemblage of cameras, wires, and lights in an undisclosed shelter with more than 161 million people watching globally, the host from one of the most popular Ukrainian morning television shows presented the national broadcast for Ukraine in May 2022, as he has done every year since 2007 with the exception of 2017 when he co-hosted the contest (see Quinn, 2022). Indeed, the act of moving the broadcast into a shelter communicated the harsh realities of the war to external audiences, as is also evidenced by statements that it not only protected the host and crew, but the broadcast itself should critical infrastructure be targeted by Russian attacks (BBC News, 2022). Still, Miroshnychenko's underground broadcast for the contest's 4-day duration transformed his shelter into a theatre that evocatively communicated Ukrainians' experiences and the complex, multidimensional dynamics of the war for external audiences – including people outside of his shelter, above ground, and beyond the territory of Ukraine. In addition to visually exhibiting Ukrainians' resilience, he verbally reminded audiences of it during an interview with the BBC after the competition when he described how difficult life in Ukraine had been

since 24 February 2022, specifically mentioning that TV towers, TV stations, and even his own office building were shelled by Russia (BBC News, 2022). This example, like those aforementioned, thus demonstrates that the subterranean spaces used as shelters following Russia's full-scale invasion provided critical protection for, at the same time as symbolically serving as an extension of, the Ukrainian nation, or even its 'homefront' (Armitage 2009) in the war against Russia.

Notably, these acts of musicianship in Ukraine's civilian shelters in the six months following Russia's full-scale invasion closely mirror historical examples of music prompting a sense of national solidarity and resilience for Ukrainians in difficult times (for example, Helbig 2006; Helbig and Miszczynski 2014; Sonevytsky 2019). They similarly reveal the significance of music in times of conflict and distress, as was also documented in other contexts like Paris during World War I (Moore 2018) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alvarez-Cueva 2022). Some of the musicians who played in underground spaces after Russia's 2022 invasion even shared that their performances were intended to build connections with other people while sheltering together. Vera Lytovchenko, for instance, explained that her underground violin recitals in Kharkiv were meant to showcase the Ukrainian nation and generate a sense of unity amongst the eleven others in her basement shelter, noting they had become more than an audience, but her 'brothers and sisters' (Santalucia, 2022). In Odesa, Moysey Bondarenko, a professional musician who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine after February 2022, analogously divulged that he played for his comrades in his shelter 'to help keep them distracted' during Russia's attacks as they 'hold on and support each other' (King, 2022). Many of the songs played by Ukrainians in their shelters, and beyond, also reflect artistic expressions of solidarity and resistance (Howlett, 2022a). In addition to *Chervona Ruta*, the lyrics of *Nich Yaka Misiachna*, for example, detail the beauty of a grove under the starry, moonlit sky that a man wishes to show his beloved, reassuring her to 'not be afraid' and that he will 'carry' her home and protect her. *Stefania*, the winning song of the 2022 Eurovision Song Contest by Ukrainian pop folk group, Kalush Orchestra, is also notable as a heartfelt tribute to lead rapper Oleh Psiuk's mother that has taken on new meaning for Ukrainians after Russia's 2022 invasion, particularly the line: 'I'll always find my way home, even if all roads are destroyed' (Cumming 2022; Quinn, 2022).[6] The song's popularisation and internationalisation through Eurovision and use as the soundtrack for many social media posts by people forced to flee from their homes likewise connected international audiences to Ukrainians' wartime experiences, thus reinforcing the expansion of war and peace through digitialisation (Douzet and Gery 2021; Pinkerton, Young, and Dodds 2011; Smith and Higgins 2012). Against the backdrop of the war, the prevalence of these and other

songs significant for the Ukrainian nation in Ukraine,as well as beyond, hence underscores the importance of music for Ukrainians' solidarity and resistance. As safe spaces wherein music could be performed and produced in the country, underground shelters accordingly supported Ukrainians' resilient fight against Russian aggression.

Visual Art

The visual art produced in civilian shelters across Ukraine following Russia's invasion likewise demonstrates how these spaces served as sites of solidarity and non-violent civil resistance. In addition to Ukrainians' armed defence and peaceful acts of defiance at the ground level, such as putting their bodies in front of Russian tanks and changing town and street names (for more, see Koopman 2023), the artworks produced in their shelters depicted their rejection of Russia's invasion and aggression. Particularly striking illustrations include the images added to the walls of shelters themselves, such as the many murals documented and shared on a Twitter (now X) thread by Roman Kyryliuk (2022) on 29 May 2022. In addition to exhibiting the artists' attachments to Ukraine, as is evidenced by their use of the country's landscapes and maps of its territory, these murals visibly portrayed the resistance of Ukrainians. For instance, one of the paintings depicted a Ukrainian soldier's opposition to an air and sea attack on Ukraine's *Zmiinyi* (Snake) Island in February 2022 while reportedly uttering, 'Russian warship, go fuck yourself' – a scene that became internationally famous and is now regularly reproduced, along with the rallying cry, in murals, signs, and stamps as a symbol of the nation's resolve (for example, Michael 2022). A similar 'critique' (Kelly and Dixon 2011) of Russia's violence against Ukraine was revealed in other murals, too, such as one that portrayed the territorial form of Ukraine established in 1991 with definitive borders and symbols unique to each *oblast*, implicitly suggesting that they are all small parts of Ukraine's, not Russia's, territory, and therefore, all worth fighting for. The presence of bright colours and symbols significant for the Ukrainian nation – like wheat, the colours blue and yellow, and the *tryzub* (trident) – in all murals included in Kyryliuk's thread, and in much other artwork produced in shelters across the country following Russia's 2022 invasion, further accentuated Ukraine's distinctiveness and the hope of Ukrainians to restore its sovereignty. As these and many other comparable images and words were added to the walls of Ukraine's shelters whilst citizens were sheltering during Russian attacks, they visibly show their strong condemnation of and opposition to Russia. These artistic expressions also mirror the obstructive and constructive non-violent resistance tactics used in Ukraine and other warring contexts, as described by Koopman (2023) – obstructive as they aimed at deterring the invasion and constructive as they conceivably sought to construct solidarity and peace in Ukraine.

Other visual art pieces produced underground in the first six months following Russia's invasion similarly reveal Ukrainians' resilience, defensiveness, and also suffering. One exemplification is a secret art society in the then-occupied city of Kherson called the 'Residency in Occupation' - a group of six artists who secretly met in a basement studio to create artworks like paintings, drawings, diary entries, and videos despite the threat of Russian interrogation and imprisonment. The Residency's decision to meet and continue their work despite Russia's occupation of their city symbolically showed both their condemnation and critique of Russia's invasion (see also Koopman 2023) and their rejection of their neighbour's intervention in Ukraine's social, political, and cultural life. The Residency's curator, Yulia Manukian, likewise stressed that Ukrainians' production of art amidst Russia's aggression can be seen as 'a powerful act of resistance' not necessarily any less powerful than, and very much mirroring, the armed defensive directly above, arguing that art is 'where a free future is being elaborated' (Bryant, 2022). This non-violent civil resistance and the embeddedness of the 'everyday' realities of the war within sheltered spaces were also vividly displayed in the artworks produced by the Residency while underground. One example is the painting entitled 'Impossible to Stay/Leave 04/18/2022' by an artist under the name of Marka Royal in an occupied village near Kherson that shows a difficult goodbye between loved ones at a train station. In reproducing below ground the same feelings of trauma, loss, and anxiety experienced by citizens above ground, this piece portrays that the suffering caused by the war has been felt both within (see Evans 2011; Ziauddin 2017) and beyond sheltered spaces. It furthermore demonstrates the critical role of art during wartimes for recording and documenting events (Green, Brown, and Cattapan 2015; Hutchison and Robertson 2015), as well as representing and communicating their consequences (Smith and Higgins 2012) and certain, often political, messages (Chaffee 1988; Jacquemond and Lang 2019; Kidd and Jackson 2010).

Whereas similar motifs were incorporated into the different types of art produced in shelters across Ukraine, their prominence in the works by children are particularly noteworthy. This is again evidenced by the many murals drawn by schoolchildren in underground shelters (see Kyryliuk, 2022), as well as by other artworks shared on social media since February 2022. Specific examples include the painting of *pysanky* (Ukrainian Easter eggs) in Lviv in April 2022 (Crux Now, 2022) and the chalk drawings by children in Chernihiv (Dukhovych, 2022). Further illustrations include the works produced by children working with artist Mykola Kolomiets, who spent forty days between March and May 2022 running art classes for approximately fifteen children in the underground Historical Museum metro station in Kharkiv (Higgins 2023). While a source of entertainment for the sheltering children, the art also revealed Ukrainian national sentiments, as demonstrated by the prevalence of national symbols, especially the colours blue and yellow, and images related

to the conflict; one example is a mural of a male soldier with flowers bursting out of his rifle (Higgins 2023). Comparable drawings and paintings both related and unrelated to the war were also produced by children in more isolated places, such as those drawn in May 2022 by the last child left in Kutuzivka, a small village near Kharkiv, who sheltered in an underground basement with his mother, aunt, and grandmother after other residents had fled to safer places (Boffey, 2022a). While the prevalence of national symbolism in the children's artwork likely reflects the particular social and geographic imagination of the Ukrainian state and nation taught through Ukraine's education system, it nonetheless suggests that, like their older counterparts, they, too, recognised themselves as part of the Ukrainian 'family' (Howlett 2022a; see also Lauenstein et al. 2015; Waterman 2019).[7] As children are the future of any nation, their production of art within and also, *on the walls of*, Ukraine's shelters furthermore served as a reminder of what and who Ukrainians were fighting for: the next generation. Hence, regardless of how, where, or in what form these national sentiments appeared, their presence in artworks produced by Ukraine's youngest citizens in civilian shelters in the first six months following Russia's 2022 invasion displays how these spaces facilitated Ukrainians' non-violent civil resistance and resilience.

Ukrainians' uses of art to communicate their opposition and defiance from within their shelters are further evidenced by the continuation of theatre and drama in, and also about, these subterranean spaces amidst Russia's destruction of Ukrainian cultural centres and institutions above ground.[8] This includes several theatres and performance halls, such as the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theater in Mariupol in March 2022, where civilians were sheltering and the word 'Children' was written on the pavement outside (DW 2022). Other theatres around the country similarly served as shelters for civilians, such as the Victor Afanasyev Kharkiv State Puppet Theatre and the Rivne Ukrainian Musical Drama Theatre (Veselovska 2022), whilst sheltered stages were also constructed so that performances could continue despite air raids. Particularly stark examples include the shows performed by the Mykolaiv Art Drama Theatre in an underground shelter converted into a small theatre (Bektas, 2022) and the Lviv Regional Puppet Theatre for displaced children (львівський театр ляльок, 2022), as well as smaller performances like Oleksandra Shlykova and Anton Andriushchenko's puppet show in a Kharkiv metro station (Stenson, 2022). Some theatre companies even used their shows to depict everyday life in Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion, such as the ProEnglish Theatre of Ukraine's 'The Book of Sirens' (ProEnglish Theatre of Ukraine, 2022). As a story about a bomb shelter both staged and performed in a space in Kyiv used as a shelter since the full-scale invasion, the play thus captured Ukrainians' wartime experiences and visibly reminded audiences about the conflict. Kostyantyn Vasyukov's 'Vona Viyna (She Is War)' portrayed less violent aspects of the war, including the

various ways that citizens actively resisted Russia's assault, by featuring the stories of more than thirty Ukrainian women who contributed to the war effort (Tsemyk, 2022; also Veselovska 2022). While bringing the war underground, Ukrainians' staging of these and other shows within subterranean shelters exhibits the importance of both formal and informal cultural productions for helping sheltering people make meaning of the conflict (Bennett 2019; Jacquemond and Lang 2019; Moore 2018), as was similarly seen in wartime Chongqing (Gang 2017) and London (Field 2002). These examples moreover illustrate how Ukrainians used theatre as a channel through which they could confront and challenge some of the moral, ethical, and political issues inherent in the war (Cooper and Holman 2008). This is only further reinforced by the fact that Vona Viyna's performance in Kharkiv on 30 August 2022 took place only a few hours after several people were killed by Russian shelling a few streets away (Tsemyk, 2022).

Following 24 February 2022, the subterranean spaces that served as civilian shelters in Ukraine were likewise used as motivation for many theatrical companies' performances for international audiences. The production of Vona Viyna across Ukraine, including in cities greatly affected by the war, like Odesa and Kharkiv, as well as in a theatre festival in Germany, is one example. The Hooligan Art Community's song, drama, and dance production, 'Bunker Cabaret,' was also intentionally produced to recreate the atmosphere of Ukraine's shelters for international audiences, particularly in the United Kingdom. Troupes like the Kharkiv National Opera Theatre moreover toured the Baltics and Central Europe after the full-scale invasion, and several Ukrainian plays were read in theatres and festivals in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Germany, and the UK (Veselovska 2022). These performances outside of Ukraine integrally served to transport international audiences into representations of the war by overcoming the temporal and geographical distances that normally separate them from it (Andries and Siviter 2021).[9] Benwell and Pinkerton (2020) likewise argue that artworks are geopolitical objects, or tools of soft power (Andries and Siviter 2021), with ongoing emotional effects/affects that can effectively transmit social knowledge, shape collective memories, and 'feedback' into both practical and everyday diplomatic and geopolitical relations and discourses (see also Pinkerton and Benwell 2014). Although the influence of Ukrainians' theatrical performances about the war as a form of soft power, like Miroshnychenko's 2022 Eurovision broadcast, requires much further research, theirartistic expressions nonetheless transmitted the 'everyday' realities of the conflict and communicated their experiences of the war for external audiences. Like this, the significant power of art for Ukrainians' resistance within, and also beyond, their shelters lies in its presentation, as well as its production, product, and practice (Chaffee 1988; Jacquemond and Lang 2019).

Crucially, not every activity or work of art produced in Ukraine's shelters in the first six months following Russia's invasion reflected national sentiments or directly responded to the war. Many artworks were produced during the significant stretches of time that people spent sheltering underground, often without electricity, cell service, or Internet. Others were individuals' attempts to continue their above ground activities; for instance, dance teachers like Yaroslava Vilkhova taught lessons (United24 Media, 2022) and performers such as Ukrainian stand-up comedian Anton Tymoshenko moved their acts into underground spaces (The Telegraph, 2022). Many shelters across Ukraine also offered activities for sheltering people, such as the underground rooms that were turned into schools for children (France 24 English) and the libraries that lent books for people to read while waiting for Russia's attacks to end (Chappell, 2022). Still, as music and art are creative therapies (Green 2011), artistic expressions likely served as a form of relaxation for many Ukrainians, a way to psychosomatically remove themselves from the immediacy of the conflict, and/or an outlet for them to express or validate their thoughts and emotions about the war (for more, see Andries and Siviter 2021; Baker 2006; Hutchison and Robertson 2015; Jacquemond and Lang 2019; Moore 2018). This was even disclosed by several artists in the months following Russia's invasion, such as Kolomiets, who explained that the repetitiveness of colouring while sheltering proved useful for 'switching off [his] brain' (Higgins 2023) and Zhadan, who detailed that creating and performing music for others was 'therapy' (Coakley 2022). The Lviv Puppet Theatre also shared that their subterranean performances aimed to 'distract from the traumas' of the conflict (львівський театр ляльок, 2022). While indeed helpful for some people, it must nonetheless be recognised that even those who produced music or art in the first six months following Russia's invasion were not excluded from suffering or the psychological impacts of sheltering and, likewise, that those who did not engage in these activities were not necessarily apolitical or apathetic.

Sensitivity must therefore be exercised when drawing conclusions about the underground spaces used by Ukrainians in the months immediately following 24 February 2022 so as not to suggest that all shelters served as active socio-political sites, nor at all times, as significant variation existed in how, when, and why these spaces were used, as well as by and for whom. Whilst shelters often enabled activities that contributed to the broader Ukrainian resistance effort, and the images of brave Ukrainians served as a powerful signal to Russia and the world that they were willing to keep fighting despite total war, the act of sheltering itself should also not be viewed as a form of resistance but necessary for the survival of the Ukrainian population. Since the views of Ukrainians are not directly included in this analysis and their experiences within sheltered spaces are unique to them, the sites themselves, the other people who sheltered with them, and the idiosyncratic nuances of the conflict

(Yun 2022), it is equally important 'not to overstate the level of communal activity' (Field 2002, 19) in Ukraine's civilian shelters and the temporary associations amongst sheltering individuals. At the same time, the significance of some artworks produced in the months following Russia's 2022 invasion, including both within and beyond civilian shelters, may not yet be realised. As art can play a critical role for historical memory and transitional justice (see, for example, Rush and Simić 2014; Simić 2020), some works produced within the context of the war might only become important for Ukrainians once the conflict ends.

But whereas all artistic expressions within Ukrainians' shelters may not have reflected or directly responded to the ground-level conflict, they were still innately shaped by its dynamics, if only because they were produced within quotidian subterranean spaces that served as shelters because of it. As art has historically been used by Ukrainians to mark their distinctiveness, including before and since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014 (see, for example, Hansen et al. 2019; Helbig and Miszczynski 2014; Nahachewsky 2011; Sonevytsky 2019), it is thus not particularly surprising that coexisting themes of hope and resilience appeared in their below-ground artistic works after February 2022 without coordination or explicit communication across shelters. Yet, their production of music and visual art in their shelters fundamentally highlights their solidarity and resistance in new spatial-temporal contexts – both in underground spaces in urban areas and within Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine more largely (Howlett 2022a). Even more crucially, Ukrainians' artistic expressions in sheltered spaces following Russia's 2022 invasion demonstrate their continued agency despite Russia's violent attempts to pacify them.

Conclusion

As few studies have investigated the quotidian underground spaces used as civilian shelters in contemporary wars, this paper makes important empirical and theoretical contributions in examining Ukrainians' uses of them at the beginning of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion. At the same time as providing fortification for the Ukrainian population during Russia's airborne attacks, many subterranean sites like basements and metro stations across Ukraine served as sites of solidarity and non-violent resistance, as can particularly be seen through citizens' artistic expressions. In doing so, shelters showcased Ukrainians' hope and resilience.

This analysis accordingly pushes forward understandings of the spatial politics of conflict within, but not limited to, the Russia–Ukraine war. Whereas prior literature largely suggests that 'below' ground spaces symbolise the fragility of insecurity and the end of politics (Virilio 1994) or are

dehumanised and passive sites representing death and defeat (see Bachelard 1994; Graham 2016), the civilian shelters used in Ukraine immediately after Russia's 2022 invasion contradict these dominant narratives and negative cultural references. Specifically, many underground spaces across Ukraine allowed for the continuation and even *extension* of social, cultural, and political life in Ukraine in the face of Russia's aggression. While closely reflecting what was observed in other wars throughout history, such as in London during the Blitz, this study empirically adds to knowledge through its investigation of the Russia–Ukraine war – a modern and, at the time of writing, also an ongoing conflict. As the materials used for this analysis were produced and shared online in real time or shortly following the events they depicted, the paper also shows how increased digital connectivity poses new opportunities and complexities for wartime communication and information sharing, particularly as war can now be 'observed' and studied from significant geographical distances (for more, see Balabanova and Parry 2014; Douzet and Gery 2021; Pinkerton, Young, and Dodds 2011; Smith and Higgins 2012). In illustrating the increasing expansion of conflict into both urbanscapes and new online spaces, the paper thus contributes to the ongoing debates about the role of civilian shelters, and the experience of sheltering more generally, within the evolving and enlarging spatialities of modern war and peace (for more, see Flint and Dempsey 2023; Graham 2004a, 2010, 2016; Kaldor 2012; Koopman et al. 2021; Macaspac and Moore 2023; Megoran and Dalby 2018). This is indeed essential for realising the spatialities of Russia's war on Ukraine and other warring contexts globally. It is equally important given the degree to which some European countries have adopted new civil protection measures since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine; for example, countries like Latvia (Mathers 2024), Germany (Reuters 2024), and Norway (Ummelas 2025) have begun reviving their bunker architecture and identifying and expanding the number of underground spaces that could be used as shelters in emergency situations. Whilst it is unclear whether these bunkers are becoming, or even could become, spaces of solidarity and resistance like those in Ukraine, these new civil defence efforts nevertheless illustrate the ongoing significance of sheltered spaces and reaffirms that they are not merely 'obsolete relics' of wars gone by (Garrett and Klinke 2019).

Beyond its contributions to scholarship on civilian shelters, this paper also highlights numerous avenues for further research. As the quotidian underground spaces used by Ukrainians for shelter resume their functions as storage spaces and metro stations when immediate danger dissipates, it remains uncertain whether (and how) the effects within and significance of them might have changed over time and whether they will be temporally and/or contextually limited to the Russia–Ukraine war; this is only further complicated by the fact that they are still regularly used as Russia's aggression continues. The need to consider the 'ever-evolving typologies' (Garrett and

Klinke 2019) of Ukraine's civilian shelters and those used in other conflicts, both modern and historical, thus becomes even more critical moving forward. Additional studies could consequently explore and even compare the variable meanings imbued in civilian shelters and purpose-built bunkers in times of conflict, as well as the dynamic and changing functionality and temporality of these subterranean spaces – whether in Ukraine or elsewhere. For a more capacious orientation towards the 'multiple spatialities and temporalities of peace and conflict' (Macaspac and Moore 2023, 45), future studies on shelters in Ukraine could also explicitly connect the local actors, processes, and spaces analysed here to wider geopolitical agendas and actors to tease out the interconnected micro- and macro- dynamics of war and peace (for more, see Flint and Dempsey 2023; Fregonese 2020; Megoran and Dalby 2018). While intentionally excluded from this paper, other inquiries may wish to examine the Russian population's use of sheltered spaces in the same war. Analysing Ukrainian president Zelensky's political uses of underground spaces since Russia's 2022 invasion could likewise reveal important insights about contemporary shelters, as would comparing his use to those of other wartime political leaders, such as the end of Adolf Hitler's (political) life in his bunker (for more, see Bennett 2011) or even the Russian president. Nevertheless, any future scholarly work on contemporary sheltering must acknowledge the immense psychological and emotive meanings attributed to shelters, and war itself, as the fear, grief, and suffering inherent to them may not quickly, if ever, dissipate for individuals who occupied them during active conflict. Further investigations must also take seriously the significant ethical sensitivities of producing knowledge in the context of ongoing wars (Howlett and Lazarenko 2023).

Overall, this paper greatly adds to our understanding of contemporary wartime sheltering and the expanding spatialities of modern war by acutely exposing Ukrainians' overlooked – or 'buried' – experiences in their underground shelters between February and September 2022. While much work is still needed to fully realise the (evolving) spatial politics of the Russia–Ukraine war (Klinke 2023), this investigation nonetheless adds to knowledge by showing how some quotidian underground spaces across Ukraine were used by Ukrainians to determinedly position themselves in opposition to Russia spatially (in a vertical sense), politically, and symbolically. As such, sheltered spaces have and continue to prove critical for Ukrainians' geopolitical struggle for survival and independence.

Notes

1. We use 'shelters' rather than 'bunkers' in this paper to refer to the underground spaces used by civilians in insecure settings in order to distinguish them from the largely purpose-built military 'bunkers' explored in much of the existing scholarship.

2. In addition to difficulties in ensuring the physical and psychological safety of all research stakeholders, access to underground shelters is limited due to minimal Internet, cell coverage, and electricity, and because they are not always marked or located in the public domain. The fleeting and unpredictable nature of war also poses challenges for research as many quotidian spaces only serve as shelters during times of heightened danger, meaning that people are located within them for an unpredictable amount of time and have little, if any, coordination and communication prior to occupying and once leaving them.
3. The following words were used in Ukrainian: 'україна', 'український/а', 'укриття', 'сховище', and 'бомбосховище'.
4. In examining securitisation plans for moving the visitor centres at Washington DC's national mall below ground, Benton-Short (2007) shows how underground spaces are thought to be dehumanising in making it difficult for, and even completely restricting public access to, both passive and active citizenship. Drawing on the idea that forcing individuals underground diminishes the meanings behind the American nation's treasured architecture, the author points to the lack of agency and sense of powerlessness assumed to exist within subterranean spaces.
5. Importantly, not all officially designated spaces could be used as shelters for civilians as many were blocked, inaccessible, or no longer existed.
6. As Eurovision is closely connected to themes of nationalism and identity (Hansen et al. 2019), the participation (and first-place win) of Kalush Orchestra in the 2022 competition likewise showcased Ukrainians' use of music to protest and unite their nation amidst the existential threat posed by Russia (for more, see Howlett 2022a).
7. For a larger discussion about how young Ukrainians absorbed and reproduced national narratives in other contexts, see Howlett (2022b).
8. The Ukrainian Defense Ministry estimated that by early August 2022, nearly 500 cultural institutions and sites of cultural heritage across Ukraine had already been destroyed by Russian shelling (UNESCO 2022).
9. Andries and Siviter (2021) specifically consider the spontaneous theatre initiatives of assumed 'powerless' individuals like prisoners of war, but a similar phenomenon has also been described in other conflict settings, including London's wartime bunkers (for example, Field 2002).

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Appendix A

Source type	Citation
Online news article and photos	Aljazeera. (2022). After 25 days trapped in basement villagers in Ukraine count dead. *Aljazeera*. 8 April. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/8/after-weeks-trapped-in-basement-ukrainian-villagers-count-dead (accessed on 20 September 2022).
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Online news article and video	BBC News (2022). Ukraine Eurovision win: Presenter hosting from bunker jumps for joy. *BBC News*. 16 May. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-61465120 (accessed on 6 August 2022).
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