

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Francisco Claramunt

28.03.2022

With Ukrainian sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko "This war was not inevitable"

It's not enough to simply give a "leftist" tone to your ruling class's war narrative and go out and repeat trivialities about "Russian imperialism."



A researcher on protest movements in his country, Ishchenko spoke to Brecha about debates about Ukraine on the global left, the growth of extremism and the future of Ukrainian identity.



Interior of a bombed house in Osokorky district, Kiev, March 15, 2022 Afp, Genya Savilov

Volodymyr Ishchenko holds a PhD in Sociology from the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kiev and is a research associate at the Institute of Eastern European Studies at the Free University of Berlin. His work has focused on the study of civil society, protests and social movements in Ukraine and the region. He is the author of several academic articles on contemporary Ukrainian politics, the Euromaidan uprising and the war in Donbas. He has published in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *New Left Review*, among other specialized magazines, and has collaborated with *The Guardian* *Al Jazeera* and *Jacobin*, among other international media. He is currently working on the collective work *The Maidan Uprising: Mobilization, Radicalization and Revolution in Ukraine, 2013-2014*.



Volodymyr Ishchenko

Outside of Ukraine and Russia, there is a debate on the left and its intellectuals about what the position should be in the face of this war. Some voices, such as that of Noam Chomsky (see in this issue "[Opening the Exit Door](#)"), favour a negotiated exit to the invasion and defend this search for a diplomatic compromise as the only sensible approach from a progressive point of view. Others, such as Étienne Balibar (see in this issue "[On the European War](#)"), demand that the international left give its full support to the Ukrainian resistance and, at least for the time being, leave other considerations aside or in a secondary place. How do you see this debate?

"My opinion is that the priority above all things should be to save Ukrainian lives, Ukrainian cities, the Ukrainian economy. The sooner you get a peace deal, the more lives you save, the fewer cities will be destroyed, and the less damaged the economy will be. If the war tends to drag on, if it is no longer a question of stopping the Russian invasion, but of, for example, bringing about Putin's downfall at all costs – which may not be an accessible goal – it will mean transforming Ukraine into Afghanistan. A place where an eternal war goes on for years without pause, with a failed state, with the economy returning to a pre-modern state, with industry completely destroyed and millions of refugees who cannot return home for years [see "[Moscow News](#)"]. And this scenario, honestly, would be only the second worst for Ukraine if this war were to degenerate into a nuclear conflict. Clearly, I do not wish this for my country.

Going to Ukraine, and leaving aside Russian propaganda about a non-existent "Nazi Ukraine," there are certainly far-right elements in Ukraine. Groups that today are insignificant from the electoral point of view, but that, during the war in donbas, have strengthened their penetration into the armed forces. Do you think it is inevitable that a protracted war situation across the country will lead to an increase and empowerment of these ultra-nationalist forces that grew during the Maidan revolution and then acceded to positions of power in the defense and security apparatus?

"Yes, definitely. In the event of a protracted war, there would be a progressive destruction of the Ukrainian state and military institutions, which would give more opportunities for radical groups to take the reins. The more dead and wounded among the population caused by the Russian invasion, the more destruction, the greater the hatred. And movements that focus their rhetoric on hate and capitalize on hate more easily, of course, will grow in that scenario. Those who talk about making Ukraine a new Afghanistan for Russian troops [in reference to the Soviet defeat of 1989 and the American defeat of 2021], those who say that we must prepare to resist in a long-term war are opening the window through which far-right forces will enter to take control.

It will happen exactly as it has happened in the Middle East: it was the collapse of state institutions caused by the foreign invasion in Iraq, the institutional collapse in Libya, in Syria, that created the space for extremist groups to seize power in large areas of those countries, with dire consequences. I do not understand how there are people who can expect a different scenario in the event of a protracted war in Ukraine.

In a recent article for *Al Jazeera*, you lament the end of the multicultural Ukraine in which you grew up. Is this due to the expected growth of these far-right groups, of this ultra-nationalist ideology? Do you see the end of this idea of a multicultural, multi-ethnic Ukraine as inevitable?

"That's one of several reasons. Before the war, what have been called *ambiguous identities* were possible in Ukraine. Some Ukrainians understand their national identity as an opposition to Russia, but many others do not understand their Ukrainianness as well. Many people feel Ukrainian and Russian at the same time. For example, in many families the father is Russian and the mother is Ukrainian. Or the other way around. All this will be very difficult after this war. The Russian is now the enemy. Thousands of people are suffering because of this invasion. The position enjoyed today by the Russian language

within Ukraine will probably be lost. This war will be – is being – a great transformation in how Ukrainians think about themselves, about their identity and about the Russians and the Russians. Reconciliation is possible, of course. It was possible even after World War II. Even after the Holocaust. But it will take many years and require very serious political changes, both in Ukraine and in Russia.

In that column for *Al Jazeera*, you criticize the Ukrainian government's recent decision to suspend 11 opposition parties for their "pro-Russian" views held before the invasion. Among them, the second most voted party in the country. In that article he also reminds the reader that the left was already very weakened in the Ukrainian political landscape, and decisions like this, which reduce dissenting voices, only weaken it further. In this scenario, what are the prospects for Ukrainian social movements and progressive forces in the midst of the invasion of Russia? Is there a place for them in the resistance against the Russian attack and occupation?

What are the opportunities for trade unions and social movements today in Syria or Libya, for example? One of the horrors of war is that it closes any space for any progressive social movement as we know it. War requires completely different movements, such as a guerrilla, militarized, paramilitarized movements. And there is absolutely no opportunity to launch such a left-wing movement in today's Ukraine. Some members of social and left-wing movements in Ukraine are enlisting in the Defence Forces, but their political impact, in these circumstances, will be negligible. At present, there is no chance of changing anything in the dominant ideology or in the orientation of war.

The debate outside Ukraine about where the analysis should be focused to understand what is happening is further complicated by the fact that there is constant pressure from the political *mainstream*, which accuses the left of being suspected of pro-Russian bias and therefore complicit in the invasion. Do you see a division within the left of Central and Eastern Europe between a more anti-NATO camp and a more anti-Russian one? Do you think this is a good framework for a debate within the progressive camp?

This war has a global and not only regional impact on the way it provokes a right-wing McCarthyite reaction against the left. As you rightly point out, the entire left is going to be under attack and it will be harder now to say even basic left-wing things without being accused of being "pro-Russian". There are many who are now evoking the past years and months to say that the Russian invasion was inevitable, that it was clear from the

beginning that it would happen, and that the left failed to foresee it because of some kind of complicity or blindness to Russia. In the Ukrainian context, for example, it is even said that it is time to reconsider the role of far-right groups that were preparing for war against Russia for years, since the 90s to be exact, from the very moment of Ukrainian independence.



Mikhaïl Vrubel, Le Démon assis (The Seated Devil), Oil on canvas, 114 × 211 cm, 1890, Galerie Tretyakov, Moscow*

But is that really so? Does this invasion make the far right less extreme? Does it make it some kind of patriotic anti-colonial and visionary organization? And war was not inevitable. [We know that it was only in February that the CIA began to see signs of a final decision by war-prone Russia](#), when that concentration of troops had already been coming since October. During all those months, there were opportunities for a diplomatic solution to this conflict and much could have been done differently.

The left must have offensive positions and not just be all the time apologizing, "oh, we were talking too much about NATO and not enough about Russia, et cetera." We must stand by our positions, point to the complexity of the problem, defend the truth. Not embracing the opportunism of jumping from one extreme – talking only about NATO expansion as if Russia were not guilty of the war – to the other – a completely Russocentric look, in which discussion of NATO and Ukrainian nationalism is marginalized, even taboo. Discussing NATO and Ukrainian nationalism is not justifying the Russian invasion. It is necessary to see these factors as part of the overall scenario, and as part of the problem that has led us to this war. Otherwise, they will seek to present themselves as part of the solution.

We know that there are many factors that led to this war. Putin bears the first and foremost responsibility, no doubt. It was he who pressed the button, even though he had other options. War was his choice, and he is and will be guilty of it. But, at the same time, we cannot forget that there were other forces contributing to our getting here. It's not enough to simply give a "leftist" tone to your ruling class's war narrative and go out and repeat trivialities about "Russian imperialism." There is much to study and understand of Russian imperialism as a real phenomenon, and simply repeating superficial clichés will not improve our analysis or our ability to propose ways out of this war.

Francisco Claramunt, 24 March, 2022

Edited by María piedad Ossaba

Source: [Brecha Mundo](#), March 24, 2022

La Pluma. Net 27.03.2022