

War and the State in the Value Orientations and Everyday Professional Practices of Russian Teachers

Sergei Chernyshov

Ruhr University Bochum, Germany.
opensibir@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3885-7125>
<https://ror.org/04tsk2644>

Abstract. This study analyses the impact of the war in Ukraine and related state initiatives aimed at the militarization and unification of Russian education on the daily lives and value systems of teachers. The empirical basis of the research consists of 43 semi-structured interviews with educators from 11 regions of Russia and the so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic”. The responses of these participants do not support the traditional view of the school as a ‘victim’ or the dominance of ‘silent’ or ‘resisting’ teachers. Based on the data, the study concludes that state initiatives of any kind have a highly indirect effect on the everyday professional practices of Russian schoolteachers. Anti-war and humanistic values are not decisive for their daily work, and the war in Ukraine primarily provokes personal and practical concerns rather than political or emotional protest.

Keywords: Russian school, teachers, war in Ukraine, special military operation, teacher surveys.

Karas ir valstybė Rusijos mokytojų vertybinių orientacijų ir kasdienės profesinės praktikos kontekste

Santrauka. Tyrimu analizuojamas Ukrainos karo ir su juo susijusių valstybės iniciatyvų, kurių tikslas – militarizuoti ir unifikuoti Rusijos švietimą, poveikis mokytojų kasdieniam gyvenimui ir vertybių sistemai. Empirinis tyrimo pagrindas – 43 pusiau struktūruoti interviu su pedagogais iš 11 Rusijos regionų ir „Luhansko Liaudies Respublikos“. Šių dalyvių atsakymai nepalaiko tradicinio požiūrio į mokyklą kaip „auką“ ar „tylių“ arba „besipriešinančių“ mokytojų dominavimą. Remiantis duomenimis tyrime daroma išvada, kad bet kokios valstybės iniciatyvos turi labai netiesioginį poveikį Rusijos mokytojų kasdinei profesinei praktikai. Antikarinės ir humanistinės vertybės nėra lemiamos jų kasdieniame darbe, o karas Ukrainoje pirmiausia kelia asmeninius ir praktinius rūpesčius, o ne politinį ar emocinį protestą.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Rusijos mokykla, mokytojai, karas Ukrainoje, speciali karinė operacija, mokytojų apklausa.

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Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian war, which began in 2022, has stimulated a large-scale academic discussion about the relationship between the school and the state, the role of education in society, and the value orientations of educators during wartime.

Unfortunately, many of these studies, conducted on both sides of the front, tend to offer equally simplistic assessments of the school's role in a country at war. Schools are unambiguously and uncritically placed on the side of what is subjectively understood as 'good' and are assigned the role of a loyal ally to their own state, which, naturally, is also assumed to represent the 'good'.

As a result, in Russian studies, educators in the Russian Federation are said to rely in their professional activities on the "deep moral convictions of the Russian people" (Vasilyeva et al., 2022, p. 13). The so-called 'special military operation' (the term used in Russia for the war in Ukraine), along with its accompanying ideological and militaristic initiatives in schools, is portrayed as being unequivocally supported not only by most teachers (Mission of the School, 2023) but also by most students (Afanasyeva et al., 2023).

In contrast, Ukrainian studies depict Ukrainian educators as "daily delivering lessons of resistance and victory to the world" (Tsiuniak et al., 2024). They also are said to unconditionally support the policies of the Ukrainian state, which has developed "an optimal model for organizing the educational process in wartime" (Topuzov et al., 2024).

Historian Marina Sorokina explains the dominance of this interpretive framework by referring to a "regime of corporate insularity" (Sorokina, 2012, p. 153). Researchers writing on the interaction between the education system and the state are usually themselves representatives of the education system. As such, they face an inherent conflict of interest and have a strong internal motivation to project the image of educators and their institutions as either 'victims' or 'heroes', thereby removing any sense of responsibility from the educational system. This approach significantly limits our understanding of the role of education in critical social processes, of which, war is undoubtedly one.

School as a Victim, School as a Hero

Viewing education as a passive appendage of the state and denying it any agency of its own is a long-standing intellectual tradition, dating back at least to the works of the 'father of pedagogy', John Amos Comenius, who saw the primary function of education in reproducing society (Comenius, 1982). This idea reaches a more developed form in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, where the school is treated as one of the disciplinary institutions of society, alongside prisons, hospitals, and barracks (Foucault, 1975). A similar perspective is found in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where the school is viewed both as a tool of state repression against students and as a target of repression by the state itself (Freire, 1996).

This approach is especially evident in modern research when it comes to education in Eastern or Southern Europe. In these regions, many researchers explicitly deny

education any form of independent agency. For example, in a contemporary Russian anthology on post-socialist education, all the examples of grassroots democratic school initiatives come from Sweden and Germany, while the analysis of Russian education is limited to pedagogical doctrines and state repression (Islands of Utopia, 2015). As a further example, we can mention that the authors of a recent collection of articles published in Prague use the concept *Universiteter i kamp* (“Universities in Struggle”) when discussing Scandinavian universities and Charles University in Prague but describe the University of Tartu in Estonia as being “under the German occupation” (Šimůnek, 2021).

The belief that educational institutions function only as an extension of the state (Rostovskaya & Vasilyeva, 2023), and that schools and universities are incapable of independently generating new ideas and strategies (Puzanova & Larina, 2021), leads to two roles that modern researchers typically assign to the school.

The first role is that of the victim. In this approach, schools and universities are depicted as being constantly subjected to unjust repression (Musienko & Vatlin, 2014; Ewing, 2009; Kucherenko, 2018), state-induced disruption (Freire, 2021), or manifestations of state injustice (Sorokin & Frumin, 2022). Thus, the history of Russian schools is portrayed as an evolution from the ‘time of freedom’ in the 1990s (Eidelman, 2007) to the ‘victory of totalitarianism’ in the 2020s (Shtein, 2023).

Freedom is taken away from the education system by an abstractly defined ‘state’ (Mierau, 2024), which offers financial and organizational privileges in exchange for political loyalty (Forrat, 2016). As a result, analysis of the current state of education focuses primarily on case studies of repression (Moser, 2023) and resistance (Kuksa & Fedosova, 2025).

Notably, schools are similarly described when analysing other regions and their socio-political upheavals: the war in Yemen (Muthanna et al., 2022), Nazi occupation and socialist dictatorship in Slovenia (Kodelja et al., 2021) and Albania (Lita & Keta, 2021), the civil war in Sudan (Bredlid, 2013), the Israeli military operation in Gaza (Jebril, 2024), or vocational education in the German Democratic Republic (Hoggan-Kloubert et al., 2025).

The second role is that of the hero. This perspective – most commonly applied to schools operating under conditions of occupation – interprets the position of schools as unequivocally patriotic and aligned with the stance of their own state, which is seen as the victim of aggression. Through metaphors of “loyalty to the pedagogical duty” and “commitment to fighting the aggressor”, the functioning of schools has been described this way in both Soviet (Pospelov, 1942) and modern Ukrainian sources (Tsiuniak et al., 2024).

Consequently, schools operating on the opposite side of a conflict are categorically labelled as supporting “colonialism and military occupation” (Wind, 2024) and as engaging in “collaborationism” (Tsanava, 1949; Ermolov, 2010, p. 79).

The School's Capabilities and Abilities for its own Subjectivity

The proponents of the two approaches described above – when discussing the role of schools in society – ultimately base their arguments on their own evaluation of two key indicators of education's agency: its capabilities (e.g., the level of repression, the availability of socio-political tools for asserting agency), and its capacities (value orientations and social, emotional, and behavioural skills, further abbreviated as *SEB*) (Mironenko, 2024). In other words, we can pose a couple of questions: *Can schools express their own agency under specific socio-political conditions? And: Do they possess internal needs and capacities to do so?*

Two assumptions are taken for granted: that schools have no opportunity to express their own agency under conditions of war and political repression, and yet, at the same time, they do possess a strong internal need and explicit value orientation (anti-war, humanistic). It is precisely from these not-so-obvious premises that the roles of 'victim' and 'hero' are derived. Let us analyse each of these assumptions in more detail.

The *first assumption* is that *schools lack the opportunity to express agency under conditions of war and repression*. From the standpoint of contemporary historical and political theory, totalitarian and authoritarian states have long ceased to be viewed as ideological or institutional monoliths (Riesman, 1965). Scholars now describe them as internally complex structures in which institutions possess at least some level of agency (Gudkov, 2018, p. 257; Du & Mickiewicz, 2016; Hassan et al., 2022). The notion of a clear division between 'guilty elites' and 'victimized masses' is now widely regarded as an oversimplification (Gieseke, 2007). On the contrary, it is widely accepted that, even under totalitarian regimes, individuals are not merely in opposition to the state, but are, instead, entangled in "ubiquitous interweaving and mutual penetration" (Yurchak, 2006).

In parallel, management theory has for decades explored how organizations behave under political pressure (Dobrev et al., 2024; Neuberger et al., 2023), along with broader dynamics of business and NGO relations with authoritarian regimes (Neuberger et al., 2023). Thus, even in the most repressive regimes or during wartime, there are still opportunities for institutions to express their agency.

This theoretical possibility is supported by empirical research – and especially by studies that prioritize data-driven inquiry over ideological posturing. For instance, researchers have documented successful cases of private schools operating during military conflicts in Africa and the Middle East (Tooley & Longfield, 2017); scholars also note how education systems have played a constructive role in resolving long-term civil conflicts (Davies, 2005).

Comparable empirical data now exists for the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. Even those researchers who are keen to highlight state repression against schools in Russia count only about 200 affected teachers, the vast majority of whom faced administrative fines (Mierau, 2024). The number of criminal prosecutions is even smaller – these are only a few dozen cases (Criminal Repression, n.d.). Meanwhile, in Ukraine, reports come from universities evacuated from the occupied territories that the colleagues who remained behind

had the freedom to choose whether to continue working or not (Russia, 2023). The same applies to students (Trubavina et al., 2021). An analysis of university leadership on Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories shows that these institutions are not headed by outsiders from Russia, but rather by a ‘second tier’ of administrators who had previously worked in these universities under Ukrainian governance (Chernyshov, 2024b).

Meanwhile, the *second assumption* is that *schools, in times of conflict and social crisis, possess a clear need to express humanistic and anti-war value orientations*. This is precisely why Russian teachers are often described by foreign researchers as either ‘resisting’ (Rumyantsev, 2025, p. 293), or ‘forcibly silenced’ (Kuksa & Fedosova, 2025).

Currently, empirical studies on the value orientations and related everyday practices of Russian and Ukrainian teachers are virtually non-existent. However, the potential for such studies is enormous, as schools are key institutions for transmitting values in society (Oeschger et al., 2024). Moreover, teachers’ values influence not only the qualitative components of the educational process but also, for example, the success of education reforms (Korpics & Bajnok, 2024).

Furthermore, empirical research on teachers’ values often challenges the dominant theoretical assumptions, for instance, the notion that Muslim teachers in the UK are predominantly aligned with Islamic values (Dilek, 2024), the claim that Russian teachers were technologically unprepared during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chernyshov, 2024a), or the belief in the stability of teachers’ values over time through education and professional experience (Yanitskiy et al., 2014).

In fact, Russian teachers today represent, in Antonio Gramsci’s terms, *subalterns* – those “denied the ability to speak” (Guha, 1982). The aim of this study is to give them a voice.

Method

This study is based on a critical re-examination of the two dominant claims about Russian schools discussed above:

- Russian schools and those in occupied Ukrainian territories operate under conditions that exclude any expression of agency.
- Despite this, they possess an internal need and the corresponding value orientations to express such agency.

The first claim, as I shall argue, is already convincingly refuted by existing empirical data on the scope of political repression in Russia and other relevant sources. The second claim, however, requires verification.

In value theory, a common distinction is made between:

- *External values*, which shape the organizational culture of a given institution (Cameron & Quinn, 2006) or the national education system (Fend, 2008);
- and *Internal values* – the personal orientations (Auer et al., 2023) and goals (Oeschger et al., 2022) of the individual teacher.

Naturally, external and internal values constantly interact and influence one another (Hofstede, 2001). However, emphasizing this distinction has a direct impact on the research design: it implies the need to analyse both the organizational culture of the country and its specific schools, as well as the individual value systems of teachers themselves.

Participants

The empirical foundation for this study consists of 43 semi-structured interviews conducted between October and December 2024 with representatives of the educational system from various regions of Russia. I aimed for maximum diversity in the respondents' perspectives (Presser & Sveinung, 2016), while making a special effort to give voice not to the 'resisters' but, instead, to the traditionally 'passive majority'. In order to achieve this, the interview request was formatted as an official letter and sent to municipal education authorities and interregional education associations across Russia, as well as through the administrations of non-governmental educational projects (their names are not disclosed here so that to ensure the anonymity of the participants residing within Russia). These requests were subsequently forwarded to educational institutions, which independently selected the respondents for the interviews.

As a result, the interviewees included 36 women and 7 men from 11 regions of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Moscow Region, Novosibirsk Region, Stavropol Krai, Perm Krai, Tomsk Region, Sverdlovsk Region, Tula Region, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Irkutsk Region, Altai Krai), and from the so-called "Luhansk People's Republic".

At the time of the interviews:

- 36% of the respondents lived in cities with a population over 1 million;
- 31% lived in settlements with populations under 100,000.
- 84% worked in municipal schools; the other 16% were employed in colleges or extracurricular education centres.
- 68% held degrees from pedagogical universities.
- 36.3% were under 35 years old, 52.3% were aged between 35 and 55, and 11.4% were over 55 years old.

The teaching experience of the respondents and their tenure at their current institution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents by teaching experience and tenure at their current position (% of total)

	Teaching experience	At current workplace
Less than 1 year	0	13.6
1–5 years	25	40.9
5–10 years	11.4	11.4
10–20 years	27.3	20.5
Over 20 years	36.4	13.6

Overall, the resulting sample aligns closely with the gender, age, and professional characteristics of Russian schoolteachers on average across the Russian Federation (Kosaretsky & Frumin, 2019).

Instruments

Since the survey was conducted within Russia, I was compelled to phrase most questions as open-ended, while avoiding direct references to the ‘Special Military Operation’ and the accompanying ideological measures within the education system – so that not only to mitigate potential risks for the research participants, but also to prevent respondent alienation.

Most questions focused on interactions with the state (e.g., “Do you feel pressure from above?”, “Who designs the curricula?”) and value orientations (e.g., “What usually causes conflicts within your team?”, “What could lead to your dismissal?”). However, there were also direct questions about current events, such as: “Has anything changed in your work since the beginning of the Special Military Operation?” and similar ones.

I assumed that teachers might not have clearly articulated beliefs on certain issues, or that they might lack ready-made formulations to express them (Kagan, 1992). These limitations were addressed through techniques such as stimulated recall, discussion of real-life situations, and inviting reflection on their colleagues, students and their parents, as well as school leadership (Pajares, 1992; Leavy et al., 2007).

The responses were analysed by using a method based on inductive theoretical inquiry (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), with categorization and pattern identification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in line with the study’s original objectives.

Results and Discussion

State and School

The respondents generally rated the autonomy of their day-to-day professional activities quite highly, both in relation to their school administration and to education authorities. 68% of teachers stated that they independently decide how to conduct their lessons. Another 18% noted that the dominant role belongs to the state, whereas 14% referred to the administration of the educational institution. In response to the specific question “How regularly does the school administration monitor your teaching activities?”, only 45% chose the option ‘fairly regularly’, while a further 45% answered ‘not monitored’ or ‘very rarely monitored (usually once a year)’.

When discussing the influence of school administration and education authorities on their daily teaching practices, teachers generally noted that they do not feel such influence. No more than ten respondents mentioned any such influence, and only on a mundane level: “they don’t want to communicate or cooperate”, “bureaucracy”, “they are indifferent to workplace problems”, “a huge number of reports and surveys”, and similar comments were received. Only one respondent noted that:

“Sometimes, the region sends down orders to organize certain events, but we treat it normally. We’re used to ‘Conversations About Important Things’, etc.”

The responses to the question about the unification of educational programs – specifically, the introduction of federal educational standards, a single upbringing program, and so on – showed a similar distribution. Most teachers either did not feel the impact of these reforms, or else they felt them only at a formal level: “I can’t change the sequence of lessons”, “had to redo the lesson plans again”, etc. Some respondents view the standardization positively: “Honestly, it’s not bad”, “for both students and teachers, the biggest advantage is that a unified educational space is being created in the country”.

Similar responses were given to questions about the recent initiatives of the Russian Ministry of Education, such as removing the term ‘service’ from the Federal Law on Education, or the proposed legislation on protecting the honour and dignity of teachers. The respondents stated that these initiatives had no impact on their daily lives and called them ‘pointless’.

Only when the discussion moved from general questions to specific evaluative judgments did some emotionally charged responses appear, revealing the respondents’ interest in the topic. However, the tone of these answers sharply contrasts with the common notion of the school as a ‘victim’.

For example, most teachers agreed with the statement that “the school today is an important part of the state in promoting the traditional values of Russian society”, and stated that, now, they are “following ministry directives and are required to conduct ‘Conversations About Important Things’”, “constantly hold educational discussions”, and “promote traditional values among children”. Only two respondents criticized these trends, by stating that:

*“I don’t consider myself a follower of such ideas, but I’m required to promote them”, and
“I turn on critical thinking and skip the parts I’m not ready to discuss with the children.”*

At the same time, most respondents not only showed neutrality toward the school’s transformation into an ideological tool of the state but also supported these initiatives:

“Nowadays, the younger generation is more loyal to such information, they’re changing and becoming better”;

“The most important thing is that a large percentage of students respond positively to it”;

“That’s why I work at a school – I feel useful to society.”

Value Orientations of Teachers

Through the second block of questions, I attempted to assess the role of value orientations (including pacifist and humanistic values) in teachers’ everyday professional activities. Initially, we discussed with them the possible causes of the workplace conflict

and the influence of external factors on such conflicts if attitudes toward the war and the militarization of education might significantly impact collective communication within schools.

In response to the open-ended question about the sources of conflict at school, most respondents again focused on every day, practical issues – such as workload distribution, managing electronic gradebooks, the requirement to use domestic communication platforms (such as *Sferum*), gossiping, “excessive demands from the administration”, paperwork and reporting burdens, and the way how performance bonuses were allocated. Only one respondent mentioned as a potential source of conflict “certain political innovations aimed at fostering a sense of patriotism” (City of Tomsk).

What concerns the topic of relations with the state, only a specific follow-up question referencing “the situation in Russia and the world” led respondents to focus on political issues. About ten respondents acknowledged that “different views on the situation in the world can also be a source of conflict among teachers”, but their assessments of this ‘situation’ were generally framed in personal or humanitarian terms rather than in a political context:

“Events in the country increase people’s anxiety; everyone is more on edge”;

“If people are unhappy with leadership directives, it leads to grumbling, not open conflict”;

“With the political situation becoming more complicated, people have become gentler with each other”;

“The principal doesn’t always justifiably take the side of parents, citing the situation in Russia” (this referred to a parent who is a “veteran of the Special Military Operation”).

Moreover, politics and the ‘global situation’ disappeared entirely from the respondents’ answers when discussing possible dismissals, in response to such questions as: “What were the reasons behind any dismissals at your school in the past 2–3 years?”, or “What would have to happen for you to leave your job at school?”.

Teachers mostly referred to conflicts with administration, low salaries, heavy workloads, retirement, conflicts with parents, a desire to ‘lead a normal life’, ‘extreme bureaucracy’, the completion of their own children’s education at the school, and health-related reasons.

Only three respondents mentioned potential repression or censorship as possible reasons for leaving:

“I’ll leave education if teaching history and social studies can no longer be honest”;

“Total censorship”; and

“If I’m no longer allowed to say what I think or forced to say what I disagree with”.

These three respondents work in Moscow City and Perm Krai.

War and School

Finally, in several questions, I directly asked teachers whether anything had changed in the relationship between schools and the state since the beginning of the “Special Military Operation” in Ukraine, and whether their everyday professional activities had changed as a result.

As in previous sections, responses to general questions (e.g., “Has anything changed in the relationship between schools and the state over the past three years?”) were mostly negative (“nothing has changed”) or focused on mundane issues: “more requirements and control”, “more accountability-related activities”, “increased state oversight”, “more unnecessary work”, “textbooks have become terrible”, and similar comments.

Even in response to the specific question about the impact of the “Special Military Operation” on their day-to-day work, teachers’ answers generally referred either to practical concerns or personal anxiety and rarely contained any critical assessment of the current events.

Examples of personal and everyday manifestations of the war in daily practices include the following statements:

“At the very beginning, the children were scared, then families started appearing where the father had gone to serve. It affects their learning”;

“I don’t feel it personally, but as a mother I understand that my child doesn’t receive the benefits that children of SVO participants get. But my children still have me, while some have lost a parent”;

“I just worry about my nephew, who went missing during the SMO”;

“Children have become more anxious – those whose fathers are at the frontline are stressed. It’s harder to work with them”.

A significant number of the respondents even gave positive evaluations of the current developments:

“It’s great that the patriotic component of the school has been strengthened”;

“It matters to me to stand and listen to the anthem; I’m deeply moved by its lyrics. I truly believe it should be heard – there’s power and strength in both the music and the words”;

“Some people have flipped and now strongly support the M. But actually... most people at school think it’s a necessary cause. And the victory will be ours!”

Some respondents did note that “there are different positions in the staff”, and that “teams have become divided – as some are dominated by SMO supporters, whereas the liberals stay quiet; in others, liberals dominate”. However, even in these cases, they emphasized that “the district doesn’t put much pressure on our school, most things are on a voluntary basis”, and that teachers “are ready to go along with the new initiatives without getting emotionally involved”.

Discussion

Thus, the responses from these participants do not confirm the dominance of humanist and anti-war beliefs among Russian teachers, nor do they show that such beliefs significantly influence their everyday professional activities. However, the opposite is not confirmed, either, namely, that they are predominantly ‘militant’ or ‘collaborationist’. The war in Ukraine evokes mostly mundane and personal concerns among them, rather than political or emotional protest. Accordingly, in such conditions, the interpretation of the Russian school as either a ‘victim’ of the regime or its committed ‘hero’ and follower clearly does not hold. State initiatives of any kind have only an indirect impact on the daily professional practices of Russian teachers. They are neither ‘against’ nor ‘for’ the state – as they actually exist *outside* the state and its narratives.

Overall, these conclusions align well with all known representative empirical studies of the value orientations of Russian educators. Since the 1990s, such studies have noted a pronounced ‘anti-market stance’ among teachers (Slyusaryansky & Shaidarova, 1997, p. 31), as well as an absence of values related to personal happiness (Gryaznova & Magun, 2011). At the same time, there is a clear demand for a ‘strong state’ (Vishnevsky, 2001) and support for viewing the collapse of the USSR as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” (Osinsky, 2011).

Attitudes toward the war, in turn, correlate with findings from several recent regional field studies conducted by the “*Public Sociology Laboratory*” (e.g., Nado kak-to zhit’, 2024), which noted that people are willing to organize militaristic activities (from “Important Conversations” to weaving camouflage nets), but are entirely unwilling to subject these activities to critical reflection.

Recent sociological research also identifies anxiety as the dominant factor in how the “*Special Military Operation*” is perceived. For example, a large-scale survey of the youth in Central Russia and Crimea in 2023 showed that 47% of young women and 34% of young men experience subjectively felt stress, which the study’s authors link directly to the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, those who report that the war has had some impact on their lives are one and a half times less likely to make long-term future (Smirnov & Pogodina, 2023; Smirnov, 2024).

In other words, this survey confirms the trends previously identified by other scholars in analysing Russian society at large and significantly enhances existing empirical data by focusing specifically on the teaching community as its object of study.

Conclusion

It is difficult to state what constitutes a more negative characteristic of the contemporary Russian school: the lack of explicit condemnation of the war in Ukraine, or the inattentiveness to what is happening – the displacement of the current political events beyond the bounds of daily moral reflection.

One way or another, in this regard, the Russian school is far from unique. In postwar Germany, the complicity of schoolteachers and university professors in the rise of the

Nazi dictatorship also remained unspoken for a long time (Rauschenbach, 1992). Only a generational shift in German schools – with the steady dominance of a teaching staff who had participated in the student movements of 1968 – made radical rethinking of the relationship between National Socialism and the German school system possible (Borozniak, 2014, p. 315).

I am confident that this study contributes not only to the analysis of specific value orientations and the role of state initiatives in the everyday professional practices of Russian teachers but also expands the epistemological boundaries of the object of study itself – i.e., the contemporary Russian school. It transforms the school into a subject of action and restores its necessary internal complexity.

It is evident that this approach can also be applied to the analysis of teaching communities in other countries at war, countries experiencing socio-political catastrophes, and countries living under totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. First and foremost, it contributes to the analysis of the teaching community in Ukraine, which likewise is by no means a homogeneous institution united by a single dominant idea of resistance and heroism. It is quite likely that, as in Russia, teachers in Ukraine experience the war primarily from an everyday, domestic perspective, and are only indirectly involved in the numerous political initiatives of the Ukrainian government. Should such studies be carried out and reach such conclusions, they would clearly lead to a significant revision of the dominant narratives about the current Russian-Ukrainian war.

The well-known book by Alexei Yurchak about the last Soviet generation is titled *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Yurchak, 2006). In it, he illustrates the paradoxical situation at the end of the USSR – a coexistence of power and fragility, vitality and despair, belief in lofty ideals and cynicism. I believe that a similar absurd coexistence of humanism and opportunism, of declared high ideals and a focus on mundane problems, is also characteristic of the contemporary school. Just like the Soviet Union, the Russian school had a historical chance for a clearer self-definition and for actively asserting its agency. But, unfortunately, it failed to take advantage of that opportunity.

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