



White Privilege in Times of War: Media Narratives of the Conflict in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to shed light on the media coverage of the initial stages of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Western media's reporting on the conflict was marked by biased and discriminatory comments. The Ukrainian refugees who fled to neighboring countries were compared harmfully to refugees from other war-torn countries, based on superficial and irrelevant criteria such as skin color, religion, race, and qualifications, rather than on the basis of their human suffering. The European media coverage normalized conflicts in other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East, portraying them as expected and commonplace. Conversely, conflicts occurring in Europe are deemed shameful for humanity, and white individuals are seen as unsuitable for becoming refugees. Additionally, the article examines the broader war scenario, suggesting that the current conflict may lead the world towards a third world war, due to the escalating tension between Russia and Western powers. The conflict may be geographically centered in Ukraine, but it is essentially a battle between Russia and Ukraine, with backing from the United States and Europe. This conflict has also had ripple effects on other nations, as tensions have risen between China and Taiwan, North Korea and Japan, and Kosovo and Serbia.

Keywords: Western Media, World War III, Russia, Ukraine, The Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The conflicts between Russia and Ukraine started directly in 2014. Russia invaded and annexed the Peninsula of Crimea in 2014. This invasion encouraged pro-Russian separatists in Donbas to declare Donetsk and Luhansk regions as two independent Republics from Ukraine. The separatists received direct support from Russia. Ukraine tried to reclaim the territories controlled by Russian-pro-held armed groups; however, all the attempts went in vain because of the Russian unlimited support for its allies. The expansion of NATO annoys Russia. Russia enhances its military presence near the borders of Ukraine. Russia denied the right for Ukraine to join a “military alliance” with NATO. In its efforts to cut the road for any chance for Kyiv to join NATO, Moscow recognized the two tiny republics of Luhansk and Donetsk. This step was not enough to stop the dream of Kyiv to join the military establishment of NATO and to be a member of NATO. So, On 24 February 2022, Moscow announced a military campaign to occupy Kyiv. Moscow's military motto is the denazification of Kyiv. In response to the airstrikes and missiles raining on Ukraine, Kyiv announced, by its leader Zelensky, a general mobilization and martial law, and the males aged 18 to 60 were barred from departing outside Ukraine. Moscow could capture Luhansk, Mariupol, and parts of Donetsk and Kherson. However, Russian troops face difficulties on land and were forced to retreat by the Ukrainian resistance. This war has impacted the world from all walks of life.

The security and affordability of food in the world are a major concern now because of the Russian-Ukraine war, especially in developing countries. European countries, China, the USA, and India are self-sufficient but countries like Yemen, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Iran, Oman, Jordan, and Tunisia depend on Ukraine for wheat (Welsh, 2022). Ukraine and Russia are one of the largest producers of wheat, sunflower oil, and fertilizers; they are the breadbasket of the world. Ukraine is one of the most fertile soils on earth. The color of the Ukraine soil is black and it is called chernozem (Bonne, 2022). Even the blue-yellow flag of Ukraine symbolizes the vast yellow color of yellow wheat grass. One of the most affected countries of the war between Russia and Ukraine is Egypt which is considered “the world’s largest importer of wheat” (Welsh, 2022). The second country is Yemen “where half of Yemen’s population, is [already] food insecure” (Welsh, 2022, p.2). Those two countries are just an example of the global suffering of the war. India which is the second largest producer of wheat banned the export of wheat, but excluded countries like Yemen and Egypt from the ban of export

(Enterprise, 2022). The blockage of the route of the Black Sea is used as a weapon. The routes of the exports are blocked. The crisis is now global. The price of fuel, sunflower oil, and grains has increased globally. Russia is accused of weaponizing food “Russia, by weaponising food in its war against Ukraine, is solely responsible for the global food security crisis it has provoked” (European Council, n.d.). The war also makes the world fearful of a potential third world war.

The world is heading to a third world war and some experts say the third world war has already started. Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine, says himself “World War III may have already started with Russian invasion” (Madani, 2022). Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, states “humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation” (BBC, 2022). He further states “We have been extraordinarily lucky so far”. The world may not be lucky forever. We, human beings, might be very unlucky if a nuclear war breaks up. We are actually on the edge of a nuclear conflict. Nuclear war might be even inevitable now. Vladimir Putin warns countries involved in supporting Ukraine from trying to stop his plan of the full invasion of Ukraine. Putin says “Whoever tries to hinder us ... should know that Russia’s response will be immediate. And it will lead you to such consequences that you have never encountered in your history” (Reuter, 2022). Russia in a moment of anger may unleash a nuclear attack especially if Russia feels defeated, humiliated, or put in a corner. Russian military doctrine permits it to use nuclear arsenals in case of existential threats; however, during the war, nobody can assure maintaining doctrines. We have a lesson in history during World War II. In 1945, the United States of America dropped two atomic bombs on Japan killing hundreds of thousands with huge devastation. Dropping those two bombs was justified to compel Japan to surrender. The Russian-Ukraine war intensifies tension in other parts of the world. Japan which has imperial history increases its military budget due to the “face of regional security concerns and threats posed by China and North Korea” (Aljazeera, 2022). China does not recognize the sovereignty of Twain and considers it part of China. Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, a German politician and a member of the Bundestag, visits Twain and states “Russia’s war in Ukraine necessitated the visit to Taiwan as it was a huge wake-up call not only for Europe and Germany but also for the whole world.” She further states “Now we could see what happened in Ukraine... It affects the whole world ... that’s the reason why we come to your country” (Aljazeera, 2023). The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a direct impact on the tensions between Kosovo and Serbia. The unrest in the Balkans has been

exacerbated by the ongoing conflict, with both countries taking different sides in the conflict. As a result, the Russian-Ukraine war has directly influenced the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and has heightened tensions in the region. Serbia shares the dislike of NATO with Russia and Serbia is also backed up by Russia. (Nuqi, 2022).

Europe is Garden, Rest of the World is Jungle

The quote "Europe is a garden, rest of the world is a jungle" was made by Josep Borrell, the EU Foreign Policy chief. Borrell's statement implies that Europe is a civilized, prosperous, democratic, free, stable, and just region, in contrast to the rest of the world, which is portrayed as a lawless jungle, where individuals must fight for their survival. In other words, Borrell suggests that the European continent has achieved a higher level of development and organization than other regions, which are characterized by chaos, disorder, and instability. This statement is said within the context of the media war between Russian media and EU media. This statement represents the western mindset that sees others as inferior to them. They recognize the others as animals who live in jungles where there is no social contract and the only law is the law of the jungle. This implies the supremacy of the west and the inferiority of the other nations. It gives the west the authority to go to the east to dominate, reconstruct and civilize them. But in fact, the west goes to the east to dominate, robe, humiliate, despise, and exploit it. Borrell garden's speech confirms Eurocentrism and revives imperialism and colonialism ambitions.

Borrell further states that:

But the gardeners will not protect the garden by building walls. A small garden surrounded by high walls in order to prevent the jungle from coming in, it's not a solution. Because the jungle has a strong growth capacity and the wall will never be high enough in order to protect the garden. The gardeners have to go to the jungle. The Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. The rest of the world will invade us by different ways of means (EU Debates, 2022)

In a reply to that statement, Maria Zakharova, the spokeswoman of the Russian ministry of foreign affairs, says "Europe built that "garden" through plundering. World's most prosperous system, created in Europe, was nurtured by "roots" in colonies" (PRESS, 2022). The reason behind the prosperity of the "garden," referring to Europe, was and remains the colonization of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In other words, Europe's wealth and prosperity were built on

the exploitation of resources and labors from these regions, leading to the accumulation of wealth in Europe. The regions of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia were subjected to colonization by European powers for a prolonged period of time, during which their natural resources, including precious metals and even human capital, were exploited and looted by the colonizers. Even today, the ongoing suffering experienced in these "jungle" regions can be attributed to the lasting legacy of European imperialism, as these areas continue to be subjected to exploitation and resource extraction by powerful Western nations. The instability and conflict in the Middle East can also be traced back to the actions of Western powers, who have contributed to the political and social turmoil in the region. In essence, the continued plight of these regions can be attributed to the actions of European imperial powers, who have historically and continue to exploit these regions for their own benefit, perpetuating the inequalities between the "garden" and the "jungle." This speech also shows the supremacy of the white man calling himself civilized while the others are uncivilized. On the excuse and justification of civilization, nations in Asia, Africa, and Latina America were occupied, salved, killed, and robbed of their wealth for centuries by those who call themselves civilized. The USA occupied Iraq in the name of democracy and civilization. India was invaded by the Britishers for centuries in the name of civilization. Some of the rationalistic voices in Europe is Marc Botenga who is a member of the European parliament.

He condemns EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's "garden" speech. Botenga states:

what is the difference between a garden and a jungle? A garden is a nice place where civilized human beings walk around; a jungle is the heart of darkness where wild animals live. Now, many people in America, Asia, Latin America remember very well how in the name of civilization European colonialism treated them like wild animals, enslaving them, torturing them and even exhibiting them in human zoos. Therefore, when the highest diplomat of European Union compares Europe to a garden but especially the rest of the world to a jungle, the message these people hear is that Europe is still driven by neocolonialism. We cannot let that message pass (MiddleEastEye, 2022).

Europe now screams because of the Russian war on Ukraine. They want the whole world to stand in solidarity with them. However, they remain silent about the wars in the Middle East. They close their borders in front of the faces of immigrants and refugees of the war-ravaged countries of the Middle East. However, they now receive Ukraine refugees with open arms

because they are white. So, your skin is your passport. In a reply to a question of why not India take a strong position against Russia, Jaishankar, Indian foreign affairs minister, states “Somewhere Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe’s problems are the world’s problems but the world’s problems are not Europe’s problems. That if it is you, it’s yours, if it is me, it is ours” (DD INDIA, 2022). It is like a master-slave relationship.

Double Standards

There is a growing concern that Western policies and media exhibit a significant blind spot when it comes to the conflicts and suffering of people in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Many believe that European media, in particular, is largely indifferent to the problems of other nations. However, the shock and attention given by European media to the current conflict in Ukraine highlight a deep-seated bias that favors those who are perceived as being similar or more closely aligned with Europe's cultural and historical identity. The fact that the large-scale refugee crisis has arisen due to the conflict in Ukraine, which has resulted in white refugees, has prompted some to argue that this reveals a striking double standard in how Europe responds to global crises. This raises important questions about the ethical and moral obligations of Western powers in addressing global issues, and whether their policies are influenced by a bias based on race, culture, and historical identity. Western media shows sympathy and stand in solidarity with Ukrainian refugees. Media shows sympathy for Ukraine refugees and at the same time racism against refugees from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq to name a few. Racism is not only in media but also in receiving refugees. Ukraine refugees are the most welcomed in European countries. They are given homes, shelters, clothes, and also cash from European countries. For example, the government of the Netherlands gives an allowance of 355 Euro monthly for each Ukrainian refugee in the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). European countries facilitate procedures for Ukrainians who fled from war to enter any European country. Media coverage, attention, and language used to describe Ukrainian refugees and conflicts are all different from those used to describe unrest, conflicts, and refugees of the Middle East and Africa. Kyiv Charlie, CBS News Correspondent in Ukraine states that “This isn’t a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilised, relatively European – I have to choose those words carefully, too – city where you wouldn’t expect that, or hope that it’s going to happen.” (Arab News, 2022). Charlie shows the western media’s racism openly without any disguise. He means

people of third world countries are uncivilized and since they are uncivilized, it is possible for them to be displaced and suffered. However, Ukrainians are civilized and since they are civilized white humans, they should not suffer or be displaced. They are more human than other human beings. Charlie dehumanizes all non-white and non-western humans. He shows white racial supremacy through his racist comments. David Sakvarelidze, a European politician, when he was hosted on BBC to comment on the Russian-Ukraine war, he states “It’s very emotional for me because I see European people with blonde hair and blue eyes being killed every day with Putin’s missiles and his helicopters and his rockets” (Arab News, 2022). This comment is more racist than the other one. The notion that "blonde hair and blue eyes" individuals are inherently more human by virtue of their whiteness is a highly awkward and discriminatory belief. Such thinking promotes the idea of white racial superiority and implies that those who do not possess these specific physical traits are somehow less worthy of basic human rights and protections. Furthermore, the statement that the displacement or killing of a white man is the severest crime spreads the belief in white privilege and reinforces the notion that those who belong to this racial group are entitled to special treatment and protection above others. Such thinking is antithetical to the principles of inclusivity, equality, and diversity, which should form the foundation of any just and equitable society. It is essential to reject any form of racial or ethnic bias or discrimination and to work towards a more equitable and harmonious world where all individuals are valued and respected regardless of their physical characteristics or racial identity. David Sakvarelidze implies that colored people can be displaced or killed. There is no problem with that! This disguise and mask of European media have fallen. The life of white matters, but the life of non-white does not matter. This is racism at its peak. Lucy Watson, a TV correspondent, states “ Now the unthinkable has happened to them. And this is not a developing Third World nation. This is Europe.” (Defence Inside, 2022) Watson was crying while giving the report. According to this sentiment, third-world nations can be displaced, killed, robbed, and raped with no wonder because they are less human than white humans. Lucy Watson's emotional report highlights the shock and horror of a crisis that was once unimaginable in a developed nation such as Europe. Her words suggest that the severity of the situation is compounded by the fact that it is happening in a place that is considered to be more civilized and advanced. However, the implication that non-European nations are somehow less deserving of basic human rights and dignity is completely false. No one deserves to be subjected to violence or oppression,

regardless of their geographic location or ethnic background. Such thinking only spreads harmful stereotypes and prejudices that have no place in an objective and reasonable world.

Peter Dobbie, Aljazeera English anchor, states:

some of the refugees trying to get on trains or trying to get out of Ukraine. And what is compelling is just looking at them, the way they're dressed, these are prosperous middle-class people. These are not obviously refugees trying to get away from areas in the Middle East that are still in a big state of war. These are not people trying to get away from areas in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to (WION, 2022).

Dobbie speaks against the middle east though he is hired by Aljazeera TV which is funded, located, and established by a country in the middle east. This is the superiority and racism syndrome of the west that has just come to the surface thanks to the Ukraine war. This is dehumanization and humiliation to refugees from middle east countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine.

Kelly Cobiella, NBC NEWS correspondence, goes further and makes religious implications about refugees "These are not refugees from Syria. These are refugees from neighboring Ukraine. I mean that quite frankly is part of it. These are Christians. They are white" (Arab News, 2022). The prejudice and racism of the west are naked here and there is nothing to cover it. This Russian-Ukraine conflict exposes the western mindset. Cobiella speaks without a mask. If you are white and Christian, you should not suffer. Suffering, killing, displacing, and starving are only for people who are not white and Christian. What is dangerous in all these racist comments is normalizing the conflicts in other parts of the world other than Europe and the USA. This racism makes the conflicts and wars in parts of the world other than Europe and the USA like something regular, normal, and expected.

In his article in the Telegraph entitled "Vladimir Putin's monstrous invasion is an attack on civilization itself" Daniel Hannan states "[t]hey seem so like us. That is what makes it so shocking. Ukraine is a European country. Its people watch Netflix and have Instagram accounts, vote in free elections and read uncensored newspapers. War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations". (Hannan, 2022) This poisonous racism segregates the world into poor nations that are used to conflict and bloodshed and first-world nation that are

white and prosperous and know only stability and peaceful life where there is no place for wars. Hannan superficial comparison is not based on humanity but on color and material life. A poor nation whose citizens do not watch Netflix and do not have Instagram accounts is worth suffering and conflicts.

We know the current status quo of the conflict. We also know its background and history. However, we do not know what is going to happen in the next few months. What is the scenario of the conflict? Is the conflict going to develop into World War III? If so, what will be the consequences? No one can for sure answer these questions or imagine the consequences. This article tries to show some scenarios depicted in science fiction.

The Inevitability of the War

The following scenarios in science fiction expected global nuclear conflicts with varied scenarios. *The Last Flower* (1939) by James Thurber talks about sequences and cycles of war and how war is always inevitable. In the story, World War XII brought the collapse of civilization. All the cities, villages, and forests of the world perished. Survived humans degraded to animalism. They even have no libido because the love itself has disappeared. Art, music, and painting disappeared. Until one day a flower that was about to die was discovered by a girl. That flower was the last one on earth. The girl along with a young boy takes care of the flower. A bee and a hummingbird spread the nectar of the flower and from that flower, many flowers originated. The young boy discovered that touching the girl was enjoyable. Love comes again to earth. The offspring of the young man and the girl build civilization again. However, the global war breaks up again and nothing is left in the world except one young man one young woman, and a flower. This shows the inevitability of wars because man is the enemy of himself and wars are always a good trade.

Sadhguru, an Indian philosopher, states:

Almost every nation has invested an enormous amount of money in building and stockpiling arms, armaments, bombs, missiles, smart bombs. The question is not whether it'll be used or not; the question is just where and on whom. wars are almost inevitable because economies are built on war. Without war, a lot of people cannot survive. The largest industry on the planet is arms and armaments – how will you not use it? (Sadhguru, 2022).

War is always a good business. The top American and western military companies benefit from the war in Ukraine (CNN, 2022). Those companies are marketing their product and testing their effectiveness on the real battlefield. Weapon suppliers are very pleased with all the conflicts in the world not just in Ukraine. They are also funding and feeding those wars around the world.

There seems to be only a military solution for the Russian-Ukraine war. EU and USA continue to support Kyiv with advanced military devices. Russia is determined to control the whole of Ukraine. Ukraine is enthusiastic to control the lost territories. However, what if this conflict develops into World War III? No one can predict the outcome of a global conflict. So, this article tries to shed light on some examples of global conflicts in science fiction.

Alas, Babylon (1959) by Pat Frank tells the imaginary story of a nuclear war between the US and Russia. Most of the United States become polluted districts due to the nuclear war. The United States defeated Russia but with very heavy damage to its infrastructure. Russia and the United States lost their dominance over the world and new powers emerged. India, China, and Japan become the superpowers of the world after the war.

Tom Clancy's *Red Storm Rising* (1986) depicts a Third World War between NATO and Russia. The war depicted in the story is not fought with weapons of mass destruction but only with conventional weapons. No one won the war and it ended with a negotiation. The result of the negotiation was to maintain the status quo antebellum. This current Russian-Ukraine war might end with the same scenario.

In a nutshell, Kyiv is enthusiastic to liberate all the occupied areas. Ukrainian troops have already succeeded in liberating "almost half of the areas Russia occupied earlier in the year" (Mirovalev, 2023). Moscow may continue the fight because the war is not on its soil. However, the western powers pressure the Russian economy. There seems to be no compromise or negotiation between the two countries. This war may develop into a science fiction scenario and cause devastation to the whole civilization. Half of the nuclear power in the world is in the hand of Russia. (Peters, 2022). Although we are in the winter season of 2023, and although the winter is so severe in countries like Ukraine and Russia, battles have intensified. Moscow has claimed the capture of the city of Soledar with the help of its Wagner militias (Aljazeera, 2023). Winter is used as a weapon. Belarus may engage in the war with Ukraine by letting Russian troops

attack Kyiv from Belarus. We hope this war will come to an end very soon. Let us pray for peace, harmony, and coexistence for all human beings. The biggest crime is when a human, tortures or kills another human. The world population of up today is more than 8 billion and they all deserve to live in peace, coexistence, and harmony.

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