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Book Review

***Greta Lynn Uehling. Everyday War: The Conflict over Donbas, Ukraine.*
Cornell University Press (2023)**

Reviewed by Patrick Clairzier*

Greta Lynn Uehling's book offers a fresh perspective on the ongoing conflict between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian government backed forces over the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. Begun in March 2014, the conflict was partly due to the events following the Maiden Movement or Revolution of Dignity, which ousted pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich. Given the escalation of the conflict with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Uehling's multiyear study of the war in the Donbas region represents a valuable addition to the broader discourse on the ongoing Ukraine-Russian war.

Turn on any of the twenty-four-hour news networks or do a google search regarding the war in Ukraine, and you will be provided with the latest battlefield developments, levels of military aid given to Ukraine by Western allies, the possible economic and political consequences for Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin, and various analyses regarding the broader geopolitical outcomes of the ongoing conflict. What is conspicuously absent, from these sources, are the 'micro' or 'everyday' accounts and analyses of the impacts on the people in this war-torn country. More precisely, as Uehling states, "the conscious and deliberate practices people" use "to participate in the conflict."¹ If we are to truly understand the significance of modern warfare which is increasingly "fought in residential areas", as she states, our definition of what constitutes war must change to include "the [actions of]noncombatants who live in areas where conflict and combat occur."²

Uehling's inclusion of personal stories and narratives makes the reader aware of the practices employed by noncombatants through everyday activities to manage their participation in the conflict. Uehling employs the term "Everyday war," which she developed to represent the "conscious and deliberate practices" utilized by populations in active war zones to maintain a semblance of everyday life but most of all to nurture their interpersonal relationships. Her complete immersion in the everyday life of those affected by the war in Donbas has provided rich ethnographic details revealing the nuances of how life in general and interpersonal relationships and economies of exchange have been reconfigured. Understanding these interpersonal reconfigurations is as important as the broader geopolitical analyses provided in the media. This is best demonstrated by one astonishing account depicted in the book. Oleg a pro-Ukrainian supporter living with his wife in the city of Makeyevka, one day, received an ill-fated visit. Pro-Russian forces violently took him from his home, interrogated and imprisoned him for about thirty-days. He was eventually reunited with his wife and transferred to safer territory. But Oleg surprisingly stayed in touch with his former captors. Maintaining that connection provided some advantage when the security of his home was threatened. He was able to get those responsible for removing him from his home to secure the property from being burglarized in his absence. Moreover, when a member of the separatist forces contacted him about his car that was left on the property, he offered the individual the car as a good will gesture, because he envisions returning home someday.

¹ Uehling, *Everyday War*, 14.

² *Ibid*, 2-3.

This story clearly demonstrates Uehling's central premise that military conflict along with broader socio-political factors encouraged "conscious and deliberate practices" from individuals in their efforts to acknowledge each other's humanity and maintain the relationships of civil society. Although an end to this conflict seems farther and farther away, it is clear from the Ukrainian people's ongoing resolve, there is cautious optimism that it will end. However, that eventual end will require Ukrainians of all political stripes to adapt to new realities whatever those may be. When those new realities manifest, there will be a plethora of economic and political proposals to repair the country. As important as these proposals will be to the physical reconstruction of the state, Uehling's work has demonstrated it takes more than repairing broken infrastructure or political institutions to restore peace. It will also require the mending of the deep "interpersonal ruins" across the broader population, which will "pose the greatest challenge for rebuilding society."³ This book is a timely addition to the ongoing discussion around the Ukraine-Russian war and a welcomed anthropological perspective that counterbalances traditional geopolitical analyses of conflicts.

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³ Ibid, 52.