

Hello, my name is Iryna Kuksa and this is the 29th of May 2023. And this is an online interview with Yaroslava for the oral history project called "Ukrainian Refugees in the English Higher Education Sector". Could you please reiterate that you gave consent for this interview?

Yes, I have given consent for this interview.

Thank you very much. So the first question is.. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

So, my name is Yaroslava. I am from Kyiv. I was born in this city. This is the city where I got my, where I went to school, the city where I got my higher education. So, my bachelor's was in political science. Afterwards, I had some working experience in an online education startup. Afterwards, I switched to media and basically journalism, communications, some media projects under the guidance of international organizations in Ukraine. So some of my projects were connected to, for instance, the promotion of equality and diversity, namely in eastern Ukraine. So the last one I finished with was with Donetsk-Luhansk regions and Kherson, but like it was before the Russian, the full-scale Russian invasion. So afterwards, we're actually at the same time, I was getting my master's degree, so my first master's degree is in journalism. Currently I'm studying social anthropology in Oxford. And I'm aimed at doing a field research that would be connected to the work of journalists in Ukraine during the first year of the full-scale Russian invasion. So this is basically it, I guess.

Can you just tell me what your life was like before the war?

Oh, okay. So before the war, I was working as... Well, in investigative media, [www.slidstvo.info](http://www.slidstvo.info), it is part of the organized crime and corruption reporting project. So this is a really cool media from Ukraine who were involved in investigations like Pandora and Panama Papers, and whose journalists are considered to be trustworthy professionals. I was doing their communications in social media, but sometimes it was something like journalism related, I'd say because yeah, so it's like social media in media, which is not always just social media, I'd say. And I remember like just... Yes, so I started this job. So I was finishing my master's degree planning to write my master's thesis. The topic that I was interested in back then was the shaping of an image of a modern woman and actually family, modern family, modern like modern relationships and I was really interested in how it is depicted in media. So I was also planning to do my documentary movie on that because in my university, I'm coming from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, we had this option of doing documentary on that. But on the 24th of February, my documentary on basically gender roles and the perception of relations in modern times was interrupted and it switched into just filming what was happening during the first days of the full scale invasion. So yeah, so I was working, I had like very different plans for my life I guess before the 24th of February, but unfortunately this all was kind of interrupted.

So have you planned to leave abroad before the war?

Not really. So before the war, like the full-scale war, so this is, I guess it's important because this is something that I've been thinking a lot about recently that my perception of events that were happening in Ukraine since 2014 was not like... Rationally I realized that Ukraine was in war, so I had friends who went to fight, I had friends who were volunteering. I was helping as well sometimes like donating money or like in 2014 we were collecting some stuff for the army. So, I mean, we were involved in that, but I can't say that it constituted such a big part of our lives. And now I say that like it's a... It's the thing that I'm thinking a lot about, like connected to a lot of perhaps guilt to an extent. Like just thinking about what I could have done to prevent this

situation. So yeah, this is, this is like this part. Sorry, can you repeat the question? I think I just lost it.

I just asked whether you planned to live abroad before the war.

Yeah, so before the war, I was planning to study abroad. So this was part of my plan to apply for Chevening and actually to go to the UK. Like actually, yeah, I applied a couple of times for Fulbright, but I was not accepted there. So I was planning to apply for Chevening to go study to the UK. I was not sure about what I was going to study, to be honest. Most likely it was something like media or journalism, like media studies or journalism. So I was supposed to be applying for it in autumn 2022. It was supposed to be happening on a very different time scale, let's say, of my life. But it just all changed. And it sort of happened like a year earlier, kind of unexpectedly. And yeah, so I'm here in Oxford. I am one of 26 scholars that were accepted to Oxford this year. So it was a scholarship that was launched by Oxford University as a response to the full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. And yeah, it was basically launched at the end of May. So it was not something that I was hoping to get, I guess. So I just applied because there was this opportunity in social anthropology, seeing something that I wanted to do in relation to media. Yeah, just gave it a try. To be honest, again, I was not really hoping much for getting the scholarship because I also at the same time was working in Brussels as a journalist. Okay, so all these are bits of my biography. So at the end of March I left Ukraine and I went to Brussels. And there I was supposed to stay for a couple of weeks, I guess, still working online in Ukraine. But I just bumped into this opportunity to do journalism in Brussels, just to see how things work outside of Ukraine, let's say. And also I had this idea of making some sort of... impact in my work as a Ukrainian journalist working in Brussels. So I was pretty much determined to look for jobs there. I was trying to figure out how this whole thing works, and it was kind of fun because I got my Oxford offer on the day before I found one vacancy I was very determined to apply for as a journalist. And it was kind of fun because I got this email and it was from some very weird electronic address that looked like, you know, like something that they do rejections through. So it's basically some no-picture, like some very general email, like Oxford or something like that. So I actually opened this email and they're like, oh yeah, we're delighted to say that you are accepted. And I was like, "No. Okay, is this a spam?" Yeah, so that was all kind of very, very unexpected. And I, I sort of feel that to an extent, I don't know, either it's connected to the Oxford system itself, because like master's degrees are – I'm doing MSc and it's kind of intense here – or it is connected to generally just me switching the third country within like half a year or it is connected to the fact that I came here basically at the end of September. So it's like a completely new environment and you just like immediately jump into it but I feel like my perception of time has all been very rushed. So I was planning to do this like this year. Like supposedly I was starting next year and so on. And basically this all was just like happening within a couple of months, which was very, like it just feels like it's very, very fast, I guess.

So can you tell me more about your experience of actually moving to the UK?

Okay, so well, as I said, I moved to the UK from Brussels. And for me, it was, I guess it was sort of a different experience than for people from Ukraine, who moved here from Ukraine, because, well, in Brussels, I had sort of like a cultural shock, I guess, because it's a completely different environment. And I don't speak French or Dutch. So for me, it was also like... I worked in the EU bubble. So EU bubble is a very specific formation within Brussels that combines people from different countries within the EU. And well, English is sort of like the main language. So it was not that bad to an extent. But otherwise it was like a completely different language environment,

culture, communication with people, like people from very different backgrounds. And it was like... In Ukraine, the first days of war, we spent basically with my family under occupation, I guess. Because my parents had a house, well they have a house, they live not far from Bucha, and that area was occupied at some point. So I can't say it was occupied in a sense that we didn't have like... Russians going around our houses, but it was just because our village was like around one kilometer further from the highway. So it's just down the Zhytomyrska Highway and, if you know, there is a village Berezivka. So basically it's just... So it's Berezivka, like a row of trees and our village. But the thing is that the houses from the sides were under construction. So it didn't look like anyone was living there, although there were a lot of people actually there. So they just didn't realize there was someone and they didn't know that they could loot anything. So basically it's like all the fights, all the like shootings happening all around the area. So sometimes it's like, I remember one night quite clearly when I just went outside at night because when the shootings were kind of heavy, we went to the basement. I mean, it probably wouldn't have saved us because it's like not a basement for bomb shelter. It's just a basement for keeping, I don't know, cans, like some gardening stuff, whatever. And it's like everything around was just burning. So it's, yeah, it was kind of tough. So we managed to leave that area on the 6th of March. So it was also kind of tough because you're like passing shot civilian cars and you just actually see this all. And at some point there is a Russian tank that just turns around and aims at your car. And actually like for some seconds, you don't understand if you managed to leave alive or not, or, and it was kind of like when you're packing your stuff. And for my parents, it was very painful because their house and their land were something that they had dreamed of for a long time and they had to leave everything behind. So we couldn't use our car, so we used our neighbor's car. So he left us the keys and he said, "If you need it, just take it". We were looking after his dogs and just left everything, not even knowing if we would manage to come back. So yeah, and straight from that we went to my grandparents' village and my grandparents' place in Vinnytsia. It's Vinnytsia Oblast. So, it was a very different thing, I'd say. But also like the same evening as we came there, I couldn't sleep. And I think that nobody slept that night, to be honest, after that trip. And we also, so we had a family of neighbors from the same village as us. And my mom just like called them to check if they managed to leave, because there was a long column of cars leaving. And they said, "Yeah, sure." But my mom is like, "Okay, so where are you going now?" And they say, "Well, we don't know. We don't have anyone to go to. We just left because there was no electricity in that area at that point." And they had two small children and they were all the time sitting in the basement and it was like quite, quite cold and children started coughing. So it was like, it was kind of tough and they just wanted to take children out of there. So my mom said, "Okay, let's go with us." And we went all together, so basically it's four of us and six of them because it was like his parents, his family and two children. So instead of four, my grandma got a huge group of people coming on the same evening. And again, that night we heard rockets just flying over the house. So at the same time, I just kept working online. Yeah, but at some point it's like the internet connection was poor and so on. And my parents were insisting on me going to my aunt in Brussels because my aunt has a husband there. He now works in the new commission. Yeah. And so I just moved to my aunt, just, you know, like for... Again, it was not a plan to leave the country. It was not a plan to just abandon everything. It was just for some time. So I didn't actually know if I'm coming back or if I'm not coming back. So that was all quite, let's say random. So yeah, when I came to Brussels, it was quite intense. Again, after all these things that you've gone through, you come to Brussels, which is... children playing on the playgrounds and people making a lot of loud sounds. This is actually the thing that's also always like, it's quite often that people don't really understand it, they play loud music or do some loud fireworks or whatever, people are just living their lives. And you come

from that place and you're like, "Hey, come on, this is just happening right next door. This is horrible. How can you live like that?" And then I actually realized that, this is sort of the way Ukraine was living before the full-scale invasion, Ukraine that was not under occupation, Ukraine that was not in the active war zone. Because rationally, you can understand that, yes, this is war, this is horrible, but unless you actually do hear these explosions, it's very hard to... I feel like it's really very hard to understand what it actually is when you just are helpless and you can't do anything against that. And so when I moved to the UK, for me, again, this is sort of personal experience in this sense, because I didn't have that much of cultural shock. And to be honest, I was pretty happy because I don't feel that Brussels is fully my kind of city. So it has its peculiarities like with rubbish collection. So they don't have rubbish bins, they just take rubbish outside and it is supposed to be collected. But the thing is that sometimes, well, you're supposed to take it outside at night and then in the morning, before everyone wakes up, it is collected. But the thing is, some people don't follow the rules. And for me, in my head, it was just kind of dirty. I didn't really enjoy it. And like, again, EU bubble, it's a very specific place where people like you are very ambitious people who are super sure they're doing amazingly important role even if they're just replying to emails or whatever. But they're just convinced about that and you're just like, "Guys." So moving from Brussels to the UK personally for me was a kind of liberating and I felt it was so amazing when at the railway station, I... Okay, it was kind of fun when I just, I didn't know where to go. So I almost came to the guy and asked him this. It was amazing because I actually felt like a normal human being who was able to communicate with people. So, yeah, that was it. I can't say that the UK is very similar to Ukraine. It also has like a lot of its cultural things and its peculiarities but for me it's way easier than Belgium and it kind of feels like well... Again, Oxford is a very peculiar place within this system still, but it really feels like it feels okay. Yes, I miss my home. I miss my parents. Sometimes these feelings are quite intense, but yeah, I really feel quite comfortable in this environment, I guess. Well, again, this is a very personal experience, I guess, so it perhaps will not be representative of the rest of the Ukrainians, even those who are in the same scholarship but who come from Ukraine.

Did you have any expectations of the higher education sector in England, as compared to the higher education sector in Ukraine?

Well, something that I heard about the UK education system and something that I was sort of lacking in Ukraine was focus. Because my master's programme on journalism, it was basically a huge range of different things, starting from digital marketing and ending with... like documentary filmmaking and like, I don't know, work of journalists in a dangerous environment. So, and this was kind of fun because even my group was like a mix of people doing documentaries who are now actually working in this sector and like TikTok bloggers or whatever. So it's kind of... like a huge range and people like me who are doing most of anthropology or anthropology of media or basically media studies. So, it's something in between I guess. And it was kind of like crazy mixture and I feel like our program was also like a crazy mixture because some of those things were more useful for me but some of those things were just taught for the sake of being taught I guess. I mean my master's program was really very good and I really consider my Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism to be among the best if not the best journalistic places where they prepare journalists in Ukraine, so I can't say that I regret anything, but I feel like I really lacked focus in the curriculum and I lacked consistency in whatever we were studying. So this is something that I was expecting and why I wanted to apply for the UK. So basically here I am more focused. So it's like I know already what I want to do. I just need supervision and people who'd guide me in this understanding. So I actually I applied for Oxford with a very specific research project that actually I

developed into my DPhil offer. So I've had slight change of plans because I got an offer from the university for doing a DPhil here, but I didn't get funding. So I decided to do it a different way, switch to MPhil for two years program and then switch to DPhil, but then there is an option to do a two-year program for DPhil. So basically instead of like one plus three years, I will be doing like two plus two, hopefully, if everything goes right. So yeah, that was the expectation: that I'll get the supervision, the environment to do these things and actually access to resources. Because, well, I don't know if I should be telling this because it's like, I feel like it's unspoken, how to say it, there's a phrase for this, an unspoken agreement. So everybody knows that this is happening, but nobody actually talks about that, basically about the access to academic sources. So if you have articles that were published quite recently, and articles that were published in Western research magazines, institutions in Ukraine mainly, they simply don't have financial resources to buy access to those things. And things like Taylor and Francis Group were simply unavailable due to the financial opportunities of the university, I guess. So the thing is, like, again, I had some lecturers from my university who did their degrees in some Western university, like the US, I had a teacher who got his education in Oxford as well. So, I mean, again, this is one more factor that sort of builds up your expectations because you see the way these people think as compared to people from other backgrounds. So if I had a lecturer who was accredited from St. Petersburg University and a lecturer who was accredited from the Sorbonne University and you could see the difference in the way these people were thinking. Both of them were amazing lecturers to be honest, and I really loved both of them, but the thing is that it's just their approaches were very different. And I think that the Western approach gives more perspective. And again, if these lecturers came from the Western environments, they could bring some sources that they were sharing with their students. So actually, I don't even know if this is legal, but it doesn't violate any rules because as far as I know, you're not supposed to share these things, but this was sort of like the only way for us to get access to these tools. And again, this is something that I really wanted because SciHub was the common thing that was used, because it just allows you to open these articles without paying for them. Because again, even on a personal level, to pay 50 pounds per article, just to see that it doesn't have anything useful for your work. It's not something that you'd want to do in Ukraine, in Ukrainian realities, with the level of income, it's not something you'd be doing. So this difference in resources available is very well sensed. So again, I had amazing lecturers, I had amazing programs that actually allowed me access to these resources. But I'm pretty much aware that not all higher education institutions in Ukraine have it. So this is something that I really expected from the UK. And also like, well, okay, Oxford. So this is like all the bunch of stereotypes about like what Oxford is. So like posh people from rich families, from rich backgrounds, like some sons of lords and whatever, always dressed up in suits. This is something that I saw in pictures. This is something that I saw. So I've been to the UK before, a couple of years ago in 2019. So, I've been to Oxford before. So the fun thing is that you don't really see much as a tourist because you just see the central part, but you don't get behind these actual walls or you get here for a lot of money. So you just can imagine what it is. And then you see some people that are fancily dressed and you're like, "Oh my God, this is how Oxford students look." Now I understand that these mostly are not Oxford students. So these are either tourists or Oxford students who are here for the first week, when they actually do dress up. But then afterwards, it's like a very different environment. And when you come here, just see that in fact, there are people from very different environments. I'm doing graduate courses, so it's also a bit different set of people, I'd say, because you have way more different ethnic backgrounds coming together. A lot of these people are in some scholarships, and actually to get scholarships like Clarendon, which is super highly competitive, you need to be really professional in your field, which means that these people are

coming from environments where they actually did have to study and prove that they're here and not just like their parents' money. So I'm part of St. John's, which is considered to be the richest college of Oxford, but I can't say that any of my stereotypes or at least to an extent that they actually... work through. So this is a very different environment that you see. And it's actually funny, I was thinking about it the other day, so about scholarships and funding, and it's kind of fun because like when you see tuition fees at the website, and if you see like living expenses costs and like whatever, it just looks so wow. So it's like it must be very rich people who are here. But in fact, when you get the scholarship that covers all these costs, it's also kind of fun because on the one hand, it's like a huge amount of money. On the other hand, you never get access to this money. So it's just a tiny bit of it that goes to you as your personal scholarship, which is, I think is below even the lower, the salary in the UK. And this is sort of the reality you live in. And... What is more, if you want to do some postdoc or whatever, you actually again have to look for funding. It's like a never-ending process. So this is not like something that you imagine from like movies with this like fancy Oxford professors who look like they earned a lot of money and can afford just to live their lives the way they want to live. So this is just all very different, I guess, as you become part of this system.

So can you tell me about any challenges and opportunities you have been presented with while navigating this new higher education landscape in the UK?

Okay, so I would say that like the first weeks here were kind of fun because the first week is basically a socializing week. So you get to know the college, the university, the system and so on. You get to meet your lecturers, your like course mates. Basically, first week is like, "Hi, hello, how are you? Where are you studying here? Where are you from?" Oh, like this is like a never ending chat or something like that. It could be quite intense sometimes because you might have like three, four socializing events per day. And to be honest, I have a feeling that even back then, like my studies have already started. I don't know if it's because my social sciences background or whatever, but you actually learn from different experiences and backgrounds that people have. You do see these differences. Okay, so I'm doing social anthropology and I've just finished essays on concepts of exchange, personhood and ethnicity. Just all the time thinking like, okay, I'm using ethnographies, but, as a sort of background noise in your head, it is like constant thinking about all these people here as coming from different backgrounds, even things that are like... Well, I'm used to be very tactile. So with my friends, I can touch them or I can like hold their hand or I can... I don't know, like sometimes it's just giving a kiss on a cheek. So it depends, but again, I'm used to something or actually like the biggest thing is that at least in my university or among my friends, and I mean not only close friends, but quite a wide amount of people, hugging is perceived to be something very normal. And here, it's like sometimes I just feel like I need to stand a bit farther from people because it's a personal space. It's not because I want to invade their personal space. It's just that because the perception of tactility and closure is very different between different people. So I kind of felt sad because nobody hugged. I just remember my freshers week in my university in Ukraine. And like the first day after the end of like this acquaintance and introduction, we all were hugging. So as you just leave, you just hug everyone, like 20 people there you go in and so you do that. But this is like, it was perceived to be a very normal thing. And here it's like, you still keep the distance, personal, physical, any sort of distance. And it takes quite a while to get into that. This is first thing. The second thing was the following type of conversation: "Hi! How are you? Where are you from? From Ukraine? Oh, I'm so sorry." This is sort of the dialect that I had sometimes. Sometimes it was like... Okay, so there was a person in my college. I had a situation with this person when like, well, I feel like war leaves some traces on you and the way you think.

So I remember I just came to the hall where we were all having dinner and I was talking about that. I think Lloyd's as a bank refused to open a bank account for a Russian student. And I was, I don't know, at mid sort of a joke about that like "Haha like this is but for me it is like I mean, it's not that I'm happy about not opening bank account, but I'm happy about this position being expressed by this institution. In a sense, it's kind of complicated to talk about relations to Russians, I guess, because on the one hand, like, I mean, I'm not gonna go and just attack any random Russian person I see in my environment. And I know a couple of people who are Russians here and we... If this is a respectful communication, we have quite decent conversations. Deeply on a personal level, I have some... Sometimes I just don't understand this resistance thing, because I'm coming from an environment where when I was 16 we had Revolution of Dignity. When I was six, we had Orange Revolution. And so like I'm used to a bit different way of society functioning. So, and again, when their country is doing that, these are like very complicated set of narratives, I guess, that were expressed in that moment when I made a joke about that. And people were like, well, maybe even if they didn't understand this, they were like, "Okay, well, whatever." And then in a while, like in a couple of weeks, the person, this person from my college who was there in a college bar, we're just like talking. And this person after like two beers just puts the beer aside and goes like, "You were so disgusting when you were saying that". I'm like, "What?" And it's like happening in front of other people. So I'm like, "What do you mean?" And that person is like, "Well it was so dehumanizing, so you're so dehumanized towards Russians, how can you be saying that? This is so disgusting, you were disgusting". So he repeatedly said this. And well, first of all, it was kind of like, "Well, do you understand what background I'm coming from? So do you have any idea?" Like, it's not that I just randomly, like, first, like, again, I didn't attack anyone. Second, I said it in a private conversation between, as I felt like, my friends and friends who actually understand my background and friends who understand why I am saying these things. So if you see representatives of this country standing next to your house and like almost killing you, you have sort of different sentiments and way of seeing things, I guess. And yeah, I had to have these conversations. And again, since it was happening in front of other people, I had to go into this conversation and actually explain why I said that and why this was happening, although I think I shouldn't have. Or I had another situation here when we went to a nightclub with my friend who is Portuguese actually. So we were just dancing and we bumped into another friend of ours who was like, "Oh yeah, I have this friend of mine. He's from Brazil, but he's lived in Russia for a couple of years." And I'm like, "Okay, so hi, how are you?" And the guy goes like, "Oh, you're from Ukraine." "Yes", and then he switches to Russian. He doesn't ask me if I speak Russian. He doesn't ask me if I want to speak Russian. He switches to speaking Russian. Again, the situation is happening at like around 1 a.m. It's a nightclub, so it's a place where we all came just to have rest and sort of let some anxiety and tension go in a sense. So it's happening in this social situation. It's a person who sees me for the first time in his life. It's a person I go into, "Okay, I speak Russian but I don't want to speak Russian. I don't want to use this language now and could we please speak English? It is more comfortable for me given the circumstances that I have now." The person goes on speaking Russian saying, "You understand what I'm saying?" And I'm like, "Man, I'm not gonna speak with you. I don't want to engage in this conversation." And then he goes, "Yes, but the great Russian culture is actually..." And he keeps speaking Russian. And I'm like, "Okay." At this point, I just turned around and I left because it was just so bad on so many levels. And we just kept dancing in different corners till the end of the night. So again, as I came there with my friend, it was kind of weird. But then at the end of the evening, as we were leaving, we ran into that group of people again. We come together and that guy again tries to say something to me, and I was really grateful to my friend because at some point he just stands in between us and says to him, "Just don't touch

her and don't talk to her, just don't." And well, since he's Portuguese and that guy's from Brazil, they just switched to Portuguese. And my friend just went into... I don't even know what he said, but he spent like 10 minutes just talking to that guy in quite a surly way. And as we left... He was like... So he says that he has also some friends who are Ukrainians and he's been involved in this discourse for quite a while and he's just like, "Why is this happening?" So this is not even like a Russian person. This is just some random person you see for the first time in your life, which just comes in, goes into like persuading you that you actually should not be hating Russians. You actually should embrace everything and so on. Or sometimes it's kind of the situation when... Okay, I don't mind switching into Russian if this is private communication. And the person actually asks me if I don't mind. So it's like, it's a matter of respect, I guess, and boundaries and understanding of the context. So sometimes you have people, like Russians in Oxfordshire, who just come and start speaking Russian to you when you actually refuse to speak Russian to them, they just keep on going. So the only thing you can do is just turn around and just walk away, I guess, because I haven't come up with a better solution for these things. So these are all things that are happening. And I mean, they're not necessarily related to starting process, but they're very much related to social context. Also adding to that is like all the studying challenges, of course. So I talk about it less because I feel like my system of priorities, due to my experience, perhaps, has sort of changed because my parents, my friends, my everyone is in Ukraine. And sometimes I don't sleep half of the night because there is another drone attack happening in Ukraine. Again, we understand that we can't stop them. We can't do anything except for like... My parents are volunteering and collecting money for the army. I'm trying, I'm the head of Ukrainian society here. So we're trying to do some events and show Ukraine from different sides to the local audience. But sometimes it's just really hard to break through these walls. And there's this thing that first people start asking. So they're like, If you want to talk anytime, just feel free. Um, I mean, yes, the majority of them say it out of politeness because what else do you say in these cases? Um, but then it's just when every single morning you come to breakfast, you talk to people and they're like, "How are you?" I mean, I'm still in this kind of situation that has happened overnight and I'm not okay. But then they go, "Why aren't you? Okay, so what happened?" And I have like two choices, either just say it in a very general way, just like situation at home, or actually go and talk about that. So I feel like at the beginning I was talking about that, but after some time people just perceived me as like, "Oh yeah, this is like as always". This is like some... At the beginning people were impressed and they reacted in an emotional way, but afterwards it just slightly became like a sort of routine, I guess. And there's another aspect like if, you know, going out with friends again to some pub, which is a big part of socializing culture here. So you can't actually avoid this element. And at some point people just start talking about their home countries. Well, I'm sorry, but I do have to bring up the things that are happening in mind. And I know that maybe it's the wrong social situation to do that. But again, I feel like I'm sort of avoiding some topics, just not to bring up some upsetting sad stories that are quite uncomfortable for people, because again, with the perception of the Russian culture and so on, that has been very strong in public discourse here or in European countries. It also means they have to challenge their prejudices and the picture of the world they have. And altogether, it just becomes very uncomfortable, either due to these or because these are not the most pleasant stories. So I sort of feel like I have some sort of resistance already built. But for people, it's just something from a different world. As for the sad things that you talk about, at some point you just stop talking about that to an extent again, like you talk sometimes only to the closest. Sometimes it just like breaks down. It also happens, to be honest. So my way of coping with it is just closing in my room for a bit just to wait for things to calm down or talking to some really close people that I have here, mainly also other Ukrainians. So these are



among the biggest challenges that I have here. But also, well, again, this is about priorities, I guess. Yeah, studying base and studying requirements are really really tough here, like compared even to what I had in my university. And it's sort of interesting because I remember that I also had a lot of writing stuff to do. My thesis was like 100 pages, not like the amount that we write about here and my thesis was really well written. So it was kind of also a lot hard work and I mean I could have 500 pages of literature, like philosophy and some political science, to read per week along with the same amount of academic articles from the same Taylor and Francis group that I have here and that I used to have during my undergrads. But here it just feels so much more pressure and I don't know why, maybe it's because you're like on the top. So actually you have to fight for your place under the sun or whatever. And you also have all these people here, it's like a lot of peer pressure, I guess, as well. But this all just feels so much more stressful here, I don't know why. I've just finished my exam, which was a take-home exam for two essays, 2,500 words each, per week. And I have to say that I've done this type of work before. To be honest, I've written this amount of words and this like works within like procrastinating. It just could take me like one day to write this thing. And I can't say that it was like that poor quality. I could write pretty like decent works within like one day or even one evening. Again, using the same set of sources, using the same analytical tools. But now here, you're double checking everything. You're double checking every single letter, sources that you use. And in total, it just makes it so much more stressful. I don't feel like this word describes a lot, but this is the word that I hear so often here, like stressful and anxious and anxiety. So these are the words that are like all the time around you on different levels except for DPhils, I guess, because they're working on their projects and their pace is like, "Oh, I can chill. I can work today, I can work tomorrow." Majority of them. I'm not saying that they're not working hard, but it's just like way more relaxed, I guess. So yeah, I guess, that's it.

So have you like received any support from the university or your classmates throughout your journey so far?

You mean academic or...? Okay. I have an amazing academic supervisor here. She's very supportive, providing both personal and academic support, because we've had a couple of talks about my personal situation and my working load and so on. So she's really been extremely helpful. And I know that if I have any questions, I can text her. She gave me feedback from my DPhil application. So the thing is that here you just need to know what you want to do and go around and talk to people, including lecturers. And I've seen my peers here who, for instance, were struggling to write their thesis. So they said, "OK, my supervisor doesn't know the topic. I don't know what to do. I've never done it before." So my way of thinking about it is sort of different because, I mean, I feel like if even my supervisor doesn't know this, I go to my department, I look through people who work with similar topics or courses, and I try to establish ties with people who actually do work with these topics. So I mean, if you are not scared of just talking, doing networking, which for me is quite okay, it's like, okay. It's kind of challenging to write all those emails because it's a very different writing style that you have here. And I have to say that sometimes chat GPT comes as a real help in this respect, not in a content, but actually framing this all in a British way, let's say. I mean, emails, not like academic work. So yeah, this can be a really helpful environment, but you have to put efforts into getting that. In terms of emotional support, well, mental health is a thing that is under discussion here, I guess. So I've heard a lot of dissatisfaction from many students about the way the university handles it. At the same time, the university is offering some counseling and it's just like, I mean, they're trying to do their best and students are trying to do their best, but there are still a lot of nuances in this thing. Yeah, so, I mean, you can get help in this sense, but sometimes it's not that easy. And a lot of people opt for

their local specialist rather than actually university ones, as far as I know. Regarding peers, I feel like it's, okay, I wish, I could say that it's like we're all coming from different backgrounds, but we're happy to help each other and so on. But I don't know, I can't say that this is necessarily the case because the people here are quite individualized. And sometimes the way it is shown is that they're just all in their researches and whenever you need any help, even like help connected to going somewhere and getting medicines for you, when you're sick or whatever, it's not necessarily that people would offer their help. So they're like, "Okay this is my project, I'm working on my project, I don't have time for you. So, oh, you're writing your take-home one week exam?" So you're just writing, you don't... you can't... no I mean I'm not gonna ask you for help. I mean... I'm like, yes, I am writing it, but I can make a 15 minutes break to help you to do this, like go outside or talk to you and come to actually get food. I'm not going to spend like a whole week in my room just writing. And it's fine for me. So again, I don't know, it's like a cultural thing or just a local thing or whatever, but it's kind of hard. There are some people who are really, really helpful. So for instance, with my essays, there's this person from my college who also did anthropology, like MSc last year, now she's doing DPhil. And she just offered help. She's a native speaker, so she offered help to proofread, just like grammar, and just like have a look at it, like give some feedback. And it was really helpful, or they were like... I got the same thing from other students for my DPhil proposal. Again, it's just as a matter of goodwill. But it's not always the case. I'm trying to be helpful to the extent that I can. So if people need some advice from me, like in the field that I'm actually aware of or I feel like I could give advice on, I'm gonna try to do my best. And then the same thing is about personal situations, I guess. Because I feel like the sense of community and it's like all together living in the same family. I mean, we have to look after one another. I don't know. Again, maybe it's just a cultural thing because it's a very normal thing for Ukrainians. So again, I had a situation when I got sick. So I just had a high temperature and fever. I was in my room. And I told about that to a bunch of my friends. So Ukrainian friends were like... I got like five messages at the same time: "How are you? Do you need anything? Do you need any medicine? So I have something at home and I'm going to bring it." So like five people, different people, different genders, different levels of acquaintance. And maybe one message from one person from here was like, "Oh, actually do you need anything?" And this is the thing that I was like also talking with other people. Like the other day I was talking to my friend, she's from Sweden, but her mom is from, I don't remember which country, but from Balkans. She was saying that she got into the hospital and she asked somebody for help here and their reply was, "So do you really need my help?" So it's kind of like not always necessarily the case that people would be helpful in this sense. Again, maybe it's just a cultural thing. So I'm not sure which is the reason and how to identify the reason.

So I think that brings us to the last sort of question. So what are your professional plans for the future? Are you envisaging yourself staying in the UK and carrying on hopefully on your DPhil? Or would you like to stay in academia in general? Do you want to come back and contribute to Ukrainian academia? So what's the plan?

So first of all, I'm doing anthropology and I really love this field. And I feel like compared to even media studies, anthropology could bring up way more insights into work of journalists. Especially if you combine these two together. So you take content analysis from media studies, you take fieldwork from anthropology, you put them together and it really can bring up a lot more insights than each of these fields separately. The thing is that Ukraine doesn't have any anthropological department in any of the universities. So basically, if I want to do a PhD in Ukrainian university on the same topic, maybe I'd have to go to some media studies or communications or maybe cultural

studies. This is how it's usually happening. So you can do anthropology, but it will not be called anthropology. And it will not be the proper anthropology school, especially like the school with such a history as Oxford School of Anthropology. So I really am very passionate about my research. And I feel like since I want to research the first year of the full scale invasion and like in perspective, in general, the work of journalists during the war coverage, I need to start now and I need to start with the data that is available now, because later it will be harder to collect it. And so in general, for the next couple of years, I see myself either here or in any other academic environment that will allow me to do this. So this is not necessarily connected to whether I want to leave Ukraine, but the... opportunities that are just available for conducting this type of research. Second thing is, well again, even if in future I want to open this anthropology department in Ukraine, I need this experience from here. So this is like another argument in favor of this thing. Regarding Ukraine or UK or any other country, I feel like my aim is to be at the place where I'd be the most useful. I guess so in what I've sensed in Brussels and in the UK actually was that. So yeah, you have like these discourses, like Russian discourses, that have been on for like years and years and years. And you actually need to introduce changes, like changes from inside sometimes. But if you're just like someone from Ukraine writing an article for the New York Times, let's say, it's going to be one article published and written by New York Times, but it's not going to be a change of system. And if you want to change the system and play, let's say, a long term game, it's about being inside of the system. It's about changing you from the inside. So it's maybe a very unpopular opinion because like there's this concern of brain drain from Ukraine and so on. Mmm. But if the systems are to be changed, they will need to be changed from inside. And I feel like more and more Ukrainians and Ukrainian representation is actually needed in different institutions, on different levels, involvement of Ukrainians is needed on different levels, especially those working with Ukraine as a country or as a topic, whatever, in academia. For instance, Oxford University has Russian and Eastern European studies. So it doesn't have Ukrainians. It's called Russian and Eastern European. So basically, Ukraine, I feel like sometimes Ukraine is, actually Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, like Baltic countries to an extent, they're all viewed as Russia. And I even heard that from some of the people here, like from Belarus. I just don't want to reveal a lot of personal information about that but like I've heard that they have been treated by some lecturers that were supposed to actually know the difference between Belarus and Russia and like the situation they were treated as Russians or they were called Russians just because nobody actually cares. So even in this respect, in academia, Ukraine needs to be researched more. So for instance, I was just trying to find some anthropological literature on Crimean Tatars. I think I found just a couple of works, but in fact it's a very interesting group that just keeps... So there's a lot of things written about the Jewish identity, but it's not that much, for instance, with Crimean Tatars, although it's also like they managed surviving genocide and like deportation in 1944 and then actually preserving themselves. And things that are happening in this community now... This is also fascinating because they're trying to preserve themselves in this, I could say, landscape of Russia having occupied Crimea, while Crimea is a very big part of their identity. So it's a very complicated topic, but it's just one example. There's not really that much literature on that. I was trying to find some literature in Ukrainian media. So mainly it's about contouring Russian propaganda, but not really about how journalists work here. Not really, like Ukrainian journalists have been covering war like since 2013, 2014 actually. So we have a lot of literature written for instance about journalistic work during Arab Spring or during Balkan wars or during like any other military conflict. But there is not much written on Ukraine and it has not been like the focus of research for many. So in this respect it's like... A lot of changes need to be introduced here and these changes can be happening, pragmatically speaking. But you need people who talk here on behalf of Ukraine. So

mainly it's going to be Ukrainians rather than any other nationalities. And although there is really a lot of support from people from this department of Eastern European and Russian studies. They're like... It's actually interesting because they're called Russian and Eastern European, not Eastern European and Russian, which is again a concerning thing. If I'm not mistaken. I'm not sure about this fact, but I just thought about it. So again, there are people from there who actually work with Ukraine. So they work with some aspects of Ukraine. For instance, they work with Greeks from Ukraine or whatever. But it really needs a lot of complex and long-term work. So I could see myself doing this work here since being part of this system. Again, for me this is not about the question of coming back to Ukraine or staying here or whatever, but a question of being useful while doing what I'm doing. So at the moment, I need experience and skills, I need resources to do this research here. In the future, well... Yes, I might come back to Ukraine. Actually, I might help to develop this anthropological department, or I might stay here and just keep on promoting Ukrainian agenda here. So I think that it will depend. I can't see how it's going to be in the future. For the moment, it's more than in a couple of years.

OK, thank you so much. That was really good speaking to you. I'll switch this off.