

Keynote #2: Vitaly Chernetsky, Recognizing and Addressing Epistemic Injustice: Russia's War against Ukraine and a Paradigm Shift in Slavic and East European Studies

If there is a common thread in the world's reaction to Ukraine's spirited resistance to Russia's escalated invasion since February 24, 2022, it is surprise. Ukraine defied expectations, providing numerous examples of dignity under pressure, social initiative and organization, support of the war effort, as well as aid for the displaced and the wounded. The broader international expert community, especially in the West, had to admit that it knew and understood little about Ukraine, had a habit of recycling uncritically absorbed stereotypes and ideological talking points, many of them of Russian imperialist origin, and in its soul-searching had to admit to a history of marginalizing Ukrainian studies and ignoring or dismissing Ukrainian voices. In other words, there was an entrenched pattern of epistemic injustice towards Ukraine. At the same time, the Russian military assault against Ukraine was prepared and accompanied by a campaign of epistemic violence against Ukraine, attacking its integrity and legitimacy and denying its agency. The horrors of this war, in addition to the atrocities perpetrated by the Russian army, revealed deep ethical and intellectual challenges affecting the very essence of academic inquiry in Slavic and East European Studies. This talk reflects on those challenges and the ways in which our field has been addressing them, sketches out a roadmap for the project of confronting and undoing epistemic injustice towards Ukraine, and considers the broader implications of this much-needed process through which our field needs to go.