Geopolitical Fault-Line Cities

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MICHAEL GENTILE, APR 9 2017

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On 22 June 2016, people across most of the former Soviet Union were united in their remembrance of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War (GPW)[1]. This temporary appearance of unity comes against a background of political and ideological divisions largely centred on the question of how to interpret the Soviet past and its problematic legacies. Having experienced decades of suppression of historical facts, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact's secret protocol,[2] the Ukrainian population, like that of the entire Soviet Union, was confronted with a wide range of uncomfortable or unexpected new truths about the violent and coercive nature of Soviet power. In the western regions of contemporary Ukraine, which had been invaded by the USSR in 1939, these truths were largely known already. Elsewhere in the country, where the original invader was Nazi Germany, they were harder to believe and accept (Zhurzhenko 2007, Portnov 2011, Osipian 2015), and consensus on the country's post-totalitarian politics of memory did not emerge because independent Ukraine started off as a society divided into three very different political factions (Shevel 2011, 148-149). In the absence of a concerted, sustained, consequent and decisive effort on behalf of the central authority in Kyiv to de-Sovietise the country's historical memory (as was done in most of Central Europe and in the Baltic states, see Czepczyński and Sooväli-Sepping 2016), this context enabled the preservation and development of powerful alternative narratives manufactured during the years of the Soviet monopoly on historical truth, and inventively revised in Russia under Vladimir Putin. The most powerful of them all surrounds the GPW, which, as Zhurzhenko (2007, 4) notes, is the 'founding myth of the new Russia'.

Geopolitical fault-line cities are places where such contested remote-controlled narratives come together in space, trumping local issues of greater day-to-day relevance, and polarising the population on issues that differ substantially from the matters that typically split the residents of classic divided cities such as Belfast or Johannesburg. Inspired by the author's extensive experience of fieldwork in the Donbas until late 2013, and by observations made during subsequent shorter visits to Kharkiv and Odessa, this chapter aims at opening up a theoretical discussion on the conditions and challenges present in such cities. It proceeds with a general discussion of the idea of the fault-line within geopolitical discourse, followed by a more focused section on fault-line cities, which discusses three separate, but related, issues: (1) the overlapping of contradictory information spaces, (2) the meaning of border and frontline location, and (3) memory, identity politics and political confrontation.

Fault-line and Borderland Narratives

The idea of the fault-line evokes powerful imageries and associations, and is well established in geopolitical discourse. Nevertheless, a quick Google Ngram viewer search indicates that the term's usage outside of the field of plate tectonics is relatively recent. In combination with 'geopolitical', the concept appeared around 1970, but it did not take off until the early 1990s, paradoxically at a time when the end of the Cold War should have made it sound somewhat obsolete. It peaked in the late 1990s, and then stabilised at a somewhat lower level since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, the less frequently used but more recently introduced 'civilisational fault-line' surged twice: first,

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following the publication of Samuel Huntington's (1993) notorious Clash of Civilizations thesis, and then again after 9/11, when many observers interpreted the attacks as evidence in support of it.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Huntington's (1993, 1996) outline of the future of planetary international relations – one in which seven or eight civilizations will be confronting each other and in which the primary division will be between the West and the Rest – has been widely revisited, revalued and re-critiqued. The argument, as it goes, is that the death of the ideological battleground of the Cold War, elsewhere known as 'the end of history' (Fukuyama 1989), re-activates humanity's traditional conflict tendencies, most notably those stemming from the cultural incompatibilities between civilisations. Some countries, including Russia and Ukraine, must face the difficult task of hosting and managing one or more boundaries between different civilizations, and are therefore seen as 'torn' countries. On this basis, Huntington suggested that Ukraine could split along civilizational lines at some point in the future (see Bassin 2007, 361). While this may sound superficially prophetic given the recent Russian annexation of Crimea and the establishment of two Soviet-nostalgic 'People's Republics', these developments clearly lack the ethnic, religious or cultural underpinnings that would characterize a civilisational fault-line conflict.

Because geopolitical preferences and allegiances may be more susceptible to manipulation than ethnic, national and religious identities, they are arguably easier to mobilise too (O'Loughlin *et al.* 2006, Gentile 2015, Wilson 2016), particularly when societies reach critical junctures or transitional moments, during which the competition for hegemony between opposing geopolitical narratives intensifies (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006, 358). However, a power that intends to rely on geopolitically rooted identities will have to come to terms with the fact that the pendulum may swing back rapidly, which was nicely illustrated by the rapid rise and fall of the geopolitical conception of Novorossiya (Laruelle 2015, O'Loughlin *et al.* 2016). Hence, stable identity-building work may require crafting or grafting stickier forms of identification – national, religious, cultural, or whatever – onto the geopolitical identity framework. This is where the early 1990s' separatist movement in Crimea failed (Dawson 1997).

With an appropriate treatment by political technology, and corroborated by the onset of armed conflict, geopolitical identities can rapidly morph into more resistant, if artificial, national or regional identities. The Donbas offers a case in point: long lacking any clear sense of national identity, the least blurred aspect uniting its population was its fervent opposition to the imagined Atlantic geopolitical Other, epitomised globally by NATO (Kubicek 2000, Barkanov 2015, Gentile 2015) and locally by the 'Fascist-Banderite' myth projected upon western Ukraine (Osipian 2015). Yet, such opposition is not sufficient to explain the current hostilities. For the outbreak of war to materialise, vapid geopolitical differences demanded heavy exaggeration and to some extent re-framing as civilisational differences (see Laruelle 2015, Jekaterynczuk 2016), and direct military involvement from Moscow was indispensable. In Huntington's words, this would have implied a transition from a fluid and predominantly 'which side are you on?' based identity towards an identity centred on the more inelastic 'what are you?' (see Huntington 1993, 27). Finally, without the support of the local elites – the klepto-kakistocrats (incompetent thieves) of the Party of Regions and their oligarch associates – this shift would have been far less likely (Zhurzhenko 2014, Kuzio 2015, Osipian 2015, Portnov 2015, Wilson 2016).

By contrast, beyond the occupied territories of the Donbas and Crimea, the Russian aggression has strongly contributed to the formation and consolidation of Ukrainian national identity in those regions where it was traditionally considered weak, i.e. across the south and east of the country (Härtel 2016, Kulyk 2016). However, this does not appear to have altered the Ukrainian population's positive view of the Russian ethnic Other significantly (Barrington 2002, Armandon 2013, Onuch 2015), nor has ethnicity or language status been politicised in mainstream politics (the incendiary rhetoric of the far right parties Svoboda and Pravyi Sektor enjoy scant popular support). This is not the kind of context that would favour the development of inter-ethnic hostilities, let alone the outbreak of war: for this to happen, foreign (Russian) intervention would appear to be indispensable. Yet, such an intervention would have to exploit actually existing divisions, and because cultural, ethno-national or linguistic divisions have little to offer in this sense, geopolitical orientations are the only viable alternative.

Fault-line Cities

Fault-line cities are cities located where two or more ethno-cultural ('civilisational'), ethno-national, economic or geopolitical realms intersect or overlap, and where this condition may, under certain circumstances, express itself

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through heightened conflict, violence or outright warfare. Some fault-line cities are therefore characterised as contested, polarised and/or divided – often literally so, by walls, fences, gates, and exclusionary turfs, as in Nicosia or Jerusalem – but far from all fault-line cities are contested and not all contested cities are on fault-lines.

For the emergence of conflict, the politicisation of local differences is essential (Dawson 1997, Anderson 2008, Silver 2010). However, the recent Russian land grab of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and of Sevastopol, as well as the conflict in the Donbas, come against a local background of moderate and shrinking tensions *within* these regions, despite the heightened tensions stemming from Russia's mounting geopolitical assertiveness on the international arena (Dawson 1997, Armandon 2013). This has prompted an increase in research on seemingly peaceful, or at least pacified, fault-line regions, including northern Kazakhstan (Diener 2015) and Estonia (Trimbach and O'Lear 2015), where inter-ethnic divisions are increasingly subordinate to geopolitics.

Like much of contemporary urban theory, the literature on contested or divided cities is skewed towards a limited set of paradigmatic cities, towards a handful of iconic sites characterised by deeply rooted ethno-national, religious and political conflict (Allegra *et al.* 2012). These cities – places such as Beirut or Sarajevo – are indeed typically located on the geographical margins of Huntington's civilisations, yet they exist amidst scores of peaceful civilisational fault-line cities (Anderson 2008, 20). Interestingly, while noting that divided cities are usually found at the edge of (former) empires, and that conflict is particularly likely to emerge when the empire reaches its endgame, Anderson nevertheless understands divisions in the light of assumed ethno-national(ist) causes, even when these overlap with regional or global geopolitical interests. Following this – largely implicit – logic, conflict in civilisational or ethno-national fault-line cities may be instrumentalised by distant geopolitical agents, but it remains primarily embedded in the local ethno-national rift. Thus, this line of thought suggests that ethno-national divisions are the key issue, and that, given the right circumstances, these may be used by remote powers to forward their own interests. Indeed, this was the case in Estonia during the 1990s (Merritt 2000).

Yet, there exist cities that are located on the interfaces of different global-scaled geopolitical spheres of interest, cities where ethno-national divisions are either absent or subordinate to the power of clashing geopolitical imaginaries, and in which potent but irreconcilable historical and geopolitical narratives and discourses overlap, dividing the population into opposing factions. Essentially, these are geopolitical fault-line cities, cities whose inhabitants may use the same language, but not the same vocabulary, in their approach to contentious issues such as historical memory, foreign policy preferences and geopolitical alignment. In a geopolitical fault-line city, membership in NATO is more likely to lead to hard feelings than the decision to divert funds from schools towards the construction of an underfunded ring road. Moreover, whereas residential segregation (by religion, ethnicity, wealth, etc.) is one of the most salient features in most divided/contested cities (Allegra *et al.* 2012), this is not the case in geopolitical fault-line cities: there are no NATO-supporter ghettos, other than where NATO support correlates with other population characteristics.

Geopolitical fault-line cities are also cities where the production and consumption of geopolitical meaning are exceptionally multi-sited (cf. Fregonese 2009), cities in which multiple, opposing, sometimes abruptly emerging, and frequently ephemeral geopolitical narratives of both local and non-local origin come into conversation with different parts of local society and with the built environment. When the salience of the overlapping geopolitical narratives suddenly increases, e.g. as a result of significant external impulses or during critical junctures (as was the case during and after the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine), the probability of violent conflict increases. Yet, the roots of such conflict, as well as its prospective solutions, are rather to be sought outside of the city than within it. In this sense, the geopolitical fault-line city is an empty canvas upon which struggles on matters that are of little concern to the daily running of city life are projected, meaning that there is ultimately little to fight about. And because there is little to fight about, the dynamics of conflict in geopolitical fault-line cities are far more volatile than in ethno-nationally divided cities, where conflict tends to evolve more predictably and in relation to universal concerns such as ethno-politics, security, policing and discrimination (Calame and Charlesworth 2009, 7).

Information Fault-lines in the City

A crucial aspect characterising geopolitical fault-line cities is their exposure to overlapping, but contradictory, spaces

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of information which, in today's globalised media landscape, does not necessarily command a border(land) physical location. Moreover, while global geopolitical imaginaries may well be coloured by religious or ethno-national differences, they orbit around a core of vague concepts such as polarity (uni-, bi-, multi-) and global status, democracy (or not), military power, and political ideology. Cultural differences may become part of the equation too, but unlike the case along Huntington's civilisational fault-lines, rather than being 'not only real [but] basic' (Huntington 1993, 25), they may be very artificial. The recent Kremlin-supported talk of a civilisational rift between a value-conservative Russia and the allegedly decadent West is a case in point (see Hutchings and Szostek 2015).

The collapse of the Iron Curtain and the rise of the internet took place almost simultaneously. If the previous global order was one of insulated regional spaces of information, only at times broken by e.g. *samizdat* publications or Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcasts within the Soviet sphere, the circulation of information since 1991 has been almost boundless, despite some authoritarian governments' unrelenting efforts to contain it. People's ability to assimilate this information, however, has changed far less, depending on foreign language skills and on the heavily socialising legacy of the informational past. One may thus expect the population of geopolitical fault-line cities to be divided on prominent issues by age, education, socio-economic status and language skills; indeed, my own research in Luhansk, which was conducted during the months preceding the Euromaidan, suggested that this was the case in relation to both NATO and, especially, EU support (Gentile 2015), squaring in with findings from earlier research conducted in Ukraine on this and on other related topics (Katchanovski 2006, Munro 2007, Armandon 2013).[3] Moreover, Charnysh (2013, 7) noted that Ukrainians and Russians increasingly consume different media, causing a polarisation of opinions on political matters, and similar observations have been made by Koort (2014) in relation to Estonia and its Russian minority, and by Birka (2016) for Latvia. The major difference between Ukraine and Estonia, in this respect, is the fact that almost the entire population of Ukraine is a potential consumer of Russian-language media products, whereas this certainly is not the case in Estonia. Following the Russian news broadcasts in Narva is less of a matter of choice than in Kyiv, where Russian nevertheless remains widely spoken among its residents, Ukrainian and Russian alike.

The Meaning of Border and/or Military Frontline Location

Geopolitical fault-line cities are frequently located in proximity of borders between states with differing geopolitical interests or ambitions, irrespective of the degree of confrontation between them. Most cities in eastern Ukraine belong to this group, including prominent metropolises such as Kharkiv, Donetsk and Dnipro.[4] The borderland location has several implications. First, close proximity to the border is likely to increase the quantity and quality of cross-border economic, social, cultural, and even kinship ties. Second, it entails an enhanced exposure to the informational spaces of the neighbouring country, especially in the absence of a significant language barrier. Consequentially, third, it implies relatively weak connections to the national centre of power, unless the borderland fault-line city *is* the centre of power. Instead, stronger cross-border connections may be expected, including enhanced migration flows, particularly in the presence of large real wage differentials. Fourth, residents of borderland fault-line cities are prone to identity hybridity or blurring, creating a sense of relative detachment from the core and strengthening the sense of a unique local or regional identity (cf. Trimbach and O'Lear 2015 for northeast Estonia, Zhurzhenko 2011 for Kharkiv, Pirie 1996 and Kubicek 2000 for the Donbas).

Today all cities in eastern Ukraine are geopolitical fault-line cities, and many are located near the country's external borders. Moreover, many are dangerously close to the military frontline, adding an additional layer of complications. The most evident complications stem from what it means to be located near a military frontline in the first place. First, this means that there is a real and constant threat of invasion, yet the perceptions of this threat are far from uniform, as are the feelings towards the potential invader. Second, this context may embolden the faultline-frontline cities' 'risk entrepreneurs', actors who may seek opportunities to cooperate with the potentially invading state's authorities for personal, economic or political gain. Third, being perceived as high-risk sites means that such cities inevitably deflect investment, contributing to increased economic hardship and dependency on external support. Finally, there are the flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees generated by the conflict. Such flows are usually initially directed towards safe areas within short distances from the areas of armed conflict, confronting the local authorities with an immediate requirement to provide shelter, while simultaneously increasing housing demand and the burden on public services such as healthcare and schooling.

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Because it is common for IDPs and refugees to experience social, economic and psychological distress, it is crucial for frontline-faultline cities to work for their correct and rapid integration. Moreover, in the Donbas there are cities that have experienced temporary Russian proxy occupation by the 'People's Republics', cities such as Slovyansk or Kostyantynivka, which are now net IDP/refugee-importers after having been net exporters during the four months of 'people's occupation'. Former IDPs who have had to spend time elsewhere in Ukraine have now returned to cities where they must re-encounter neighbours who had chosen to escape to Russia. Presumably, these two groups of returnees have been exposed to very different conditions and narratives, and this may have influenced their national/ethnic/civic self-identification in potentially conflictual ways. Geopolitical faultline-frontline cities must thus also contend with the task of mending the relations between groups with opposing experiences of the war, particularly among IDPs and returnees, but also among those who chose not to leave. Also, recent research on the twin faultline-frontline cities of Slovyansk and Kramatorsk suggests that opinions tend to be divided between those who have been directly victimised by the conflict and those who have not, with the former tending to exhibit a stronger pro-West position than the latter (Coupé and Obrizan 2016).

Memory, Identity Politics and Political Confrontation

Geopolitical fault-line cities are sites of heightened political confrontation, places where irreconcilable narratives tensely coexist, and where fundamental aspects of historical memory collide. With the partial and anachronistic exception of Belarus, Moscow's role as ideological *axis mundi* was rapidly disposed of throughout Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), prompting a return to narratives centred on the historical homeland and the search for a new role within the Western world, signifying a Return to Europe (Czepczyński and Soováli-Sepping 2016). Concordantly, identity politics in CEE heavily relies on the othering of the alien ideology of Communism (Light and Young 2010, 946), which, like a zombie, re-surfaces time and time again to scare off any attempt at challenging the main tenets of the new (neoliberal) order (Chelcea and Druţa 2016, see also Etkind 2009). During the 1990s, both Russia and Ukraine followed this path, albeit with hesitation, but neither country ever succeeded in making a clean break with its past (Burant 1995, Pipes 1997). In Moscow, the voices of the Soviet hardliners backed by the security services and by the military were never fully suppressed; Kyiv, for its part, struggled with regional differences in political support 'so acute that more polarisation would be difficult to imagine' (Kubicek 2000, 290).

While the ideology of Communism may have suffered a fatal blow around 1990, from which it was never to recover, it is still notable that 'the 'subjects' of post-socialist transformation will retain a memory of the past which, in its inevitably incomplete and remoulded shape, continues to influence evaluations of the present' (Hörschelmann 2002, 63). In other words, while Communism may well be dead, memories of the Communist past are not, but these memories are fragmented, open to manipulation and, above all, highly contested. In Ukraine, and to some extent in Russia and Kazakhstan, one such crucial element of historical memory refers to the Holodomor – the mass famine orchestrated by Joseph Stalin in 1932–1933 – which has come to epitomise the tensions existing between pro-Russia/pro-Soviet and pro-Ukrainian factions in Kharkiv. At the centre of this process is the status of the Holodomor as genocide aimed specifically at Ukrainians (as decreed by law under President Yushchenko), or as a tragedy victimising all, irrespective of ethnicity. In practice, the local elites handled the matter by looking for some kind of compromise, e.g. in relation to the location and characteristics of new monuments commemorating the victims of the Holodomor, yet this compromise only confirmed Kharkiv's hybrid borderland identity status, rather than promoting the city's new status as Ukrainian (Zhurzhenko 2011, 608). Therefore, Zhurzhenko (2011, 619) concludes, '[…] the new memory regime is contested, renegotiated, and modified at the local level, resulting in decentralisation and fragmentation of the official narrative of the Holodomor as genocide'.

Thus, in geopolitical fault-line cities, like in ethno-nationally divided cities, 'truth has to be negotiated' (Brand 2009, 49), and memory politics are rife. However, as Zhurzhenko (2007) explains, 'memory politics [in Ukraine] is less about the communist past than about the future political and economic hegemony on the European continent, […] it is always the *geopolitics of memory*' (original emphasis). Hence, the monument commemorating the 21 Luhansk natives that fell victim to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (OUN-UPA), which was uncovered in Luhansk as late as in 2010, is far more eye-catching than the stone raised two years earlier in remembrance of the thousands of local victims of the Holodomor.

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While the Holodomor is one of the major *enjeux* in the geopolitics of memory – both within Ukraine and beyond its borders – it is by far not the only one. Geopolitical fault-line cities such as Kharkiv or Luhansk persistently experience conflict over antagonistic symbols, and while Soviet and Soviet-inspired monuments and street-names dominate their cityscapes (or at least, they did until the implementation of the recent laws on de-communisation[5]), they offer resistance to the dominant anti-Soviet counter-narrative stemming from Kyiv. The political controversies and polarised opinions surrounding the ubiquitous Lenin statues in eastern Ukraine are ultimately about 'empty signifiers' (Zhurzhenko 2014 and 2015), symbols that have come to represent something that is separate from the person/thing they represent. Except for a small number of true Communist believers, Lenin has become more a symbol of resistance against nationalist Kyiv-Ukraine, rather than of the very ideology he championed (Zhurzhenko 2015). Thus, unlike in ethno-nationally divided cities, where tailored myths are artificially projected onto specific sites and into the overall aesthetics of the city (Bakshi 2014, 189), geopolitical fault-line cities experience a more thorough decoupling between place and meaning. In other words, there is more ambiguity in the air, there is a multitude of narratives and counter-narratives, but also plenty of symbolic capital up for grabs by local elites and political entrepreneurs (cf. Forest and Johnson 2002). In Kharkiv, the Party of Regions ultimately consigned interpretations of history that were alternative to those dominating in the city to discursive and visual marginality and insignificance, and the attention was shifted towards smaller monuments (Zhurzhenko 2015). However, as Bakshi (2014, 208) notes, conflict and disruption alter the bond between place and memory at its core. Accordingly, following the Euromaidan and the subsequent wave of successful and unsuccessful attempts at establishing 'people's republics' (notable failed attempts took place Kharkiv and Odessa) and Anti-Maidan movements throughout southeast Ukraine, tensions run higher than ever, and small explosions and bomb threats have ostensibly supplanted the battle of signs and symbols that had been characterising Kharkiv. Conflict has now reached the grassroots, with the population having become extremely polarised in regard to the city's largely unreformed landscape of signs and symbols – empty signifiers that have been activated as a result of the intensification of the discourses surrounding them (Zhurzhenko 2015).

In June 2015, when I last visited Kharkiv, the city's walls were virtually free from any graffiti in favour of or against the Ukrainian state, the Security Service (SBU), Putin, NATO, the EU, or the 'Kharkov People's Republic'[6]. Likewise, unlike in Kyiv, where the colours of the Ukrainian flag are ubiquitous, the celebration of Ukrainian Kharkiv was at best timid. Almost complete semiotic silence enveloped the city's public spaces, yet, behind the facades, in the inner courtyards, and away from the bustling life of the city centre, the walls still revealed the fading voices of the most active period of conflict between separatists and supporters of Ukrainian unity. The local administration, it seems, had silenced the elephant in the living room.[7] Meanwhile, Lenin's right boot was all that was left on the pedestal located in the middle of Freedom Square. Swimming with the tide, Hennadyi Kernes, the city's scandalous mayor, has opportunistically announced that the entire area will be given a European appearance in the future (Radio Svoboda 2015). Ironically, this was not long after he declared that he would have defended the Lenin monument at any cost (Bershidsky 2014). In Kharkiv, like elsewhere in CEE, both Europe and Lenin may well be empty signifiers, but they remain each other's antonyms.

Conclusion

This chapter cautiously theorised the geopolitical fault-line city, attempting to extract it as a useful concept from the heterogeneous club of cities that are spoken of as divided, contested, polarised or dual. Any comprehensive analysis of geopolitical fault-line cities – or of any city for that matter – would necessitate deep engagement, possibly including ethnographic fieldwork, with the characteristics and sources of the conflicts taking place in them (cf. Allegra *et al.* 2012), revealing complex entanglements of local, national and transnational identities with a diverse set of geopolitical commitments. For this reason, as Véron (2016) sensibly suggests in relation to the closely related literature on divided cities, it is important to listen to the multiple voices present in the city, not just to the hegemonic storylines that tend to essentialise, and perhaps even contribute to, the sources of conflict (see also Nagle 2016). Yet, key dissonances between views on historical memory, foreign policy, geopolitical alignment and geopolitical identity are among the most important sources of conflict in geopolitical fault-line cities; locally, these dissonances translate into heated battles over 'empty signifiers' such as the many Lenins and Dzerzhinskiys scattered across south-eastern Ukraine that still stand vigilant against the imminent threat of a 'Fascist-Banderite invasion'. In this sense, conflict in geopolitical fault-line cities is truly 'glocal'. Ukraine's geopolitical fault-line cities are for the global

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geopolitical order what the voters of Ohio are for the United States presidential elections: their swinging status, and their future socio-political trajectories and alignment are of pivotal importance, not only to the regions and countries within which they are located, but also for the entire European integration project (and conversely, for the corresponding Eurasian project led by Vladimir Putin).

A crucial aspect distinguishing the geopolitical fault-line city from other divided cities relates to the potential for the spread of conflict. If conflict in classic fault-line cities tends to remain localised – because it mostly relates to localised concrete concerns held by opposing groups – conflict in geopolitical fault-line cities tends to be very abstract and, therefore, easier to manipulate and export. Therefore, the Donbas war and the furtive Russian annexation of Crimea have revamped the confrontational attitudes present between parts of the Russian-speaking community and the non-Russian majority elsewhere, especially in Latvia, projecting cities such as Riga and Daugavpils into the frontlines of the current geopolitical struggle over the minds and allegiances of their populations. Yet Riga and Daugavpils are fundamentally different: while Daugavpils is an almost entirely Russian-speaking borderland city, Riga is a multi-lingual geopolitical fault-line *capital* where a growing geopolitical identity schism (Birka 2016) overlaps with the unsettling characteristics of classic divided cities, particularly ethnic residential segregation. This may exacerbate the potential for conflict in this city.

Summing up, contested memories and conflicting identities come together in geopolitical fault-line cities, diverting the population's attention from issues concerning the more mundane aspects of urban life. Geopolitical imaginaries and controversies over empty signifiers hijack and polarise the political debate and population alike. Because the disputed issues are only partially rooted in the local conditions, the situation in geopolitical fault-line cities is potentially more volatile, and the unfolding of conflict less predictable. Until two or three years ago, Odessa, Dnipro, Kharkiv and Donetsk were generally assumed to be similar in terms of the political orientations and geopolitical preferences of their residents. Previously underestimated differences between these cities and, above all, physical distance from the Russian Federation, have rapidly tilted the balance in favour of the one or of the other side. However, in the meantime, the widening gap between the truths portrayed within the Russian and non-Russian informational spaces activates the fault-line between opposing factions in these cities. New earthquakes cannot be excluded.

Notes

[1] The Great Patriotic War (GPW) is the Soviet and later Russian name for the Second World War. However, unlike the Second World War, the GPW only started when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Soviet propaganda machine effectively silenced or misrepresented most of what happened before this date, including the Soviet occupation of parts of Poland and of the Baltics, as well as the war on Finland (see Portnov 2011 for an insightful discussion on the official memory of the GPW in Ukraine and Belarus since 1991).

[2] The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was a non-aggression pact signed by Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939. It included a secret protocol that agreed upon and specified the areas and extent of the countries' respective spheres of influence.

[3] It should be noted that the diversity in popular opinions on geopolitical matters is not a characteristic that is limited to geopolitical fault-line cities. During the early 2000s, when the Russian media landscape was not quite as unidirectional as it is today, popular views and imaginations of Russia's role in the international arena were far more diverse than they are today (O'Loughlin *et al.* 2005). However, more recently, and especially since about 2012, popular views on foreign policy have converged; e.g. the annexation ('re-unification') of Crimea and the country's policy towards Ukraine (however contradictory) enjoy widespread support (Morozov, this collection).

[4] Other borderland geopolitical fault-line cities include Daugavpils (Latvia), Narva (Estonia) and Chişinău (Moldova). While it may be tempting to interpret these cities as ethno-nationally divided and straddling a 'civilisational fault-line' – for example a 'Slavic/Finno-Ugrian fault-line' (Anderson 2008, 9) running across Estonia – inter-ethnic tensions are in fact negligible in these cities, despite the recent rise of a more distinct form of Russian-speaker identity in the region (Cheskin 2015, 16, see also Birka 2016). Like in Ukraine, tensions run stronger in relation to

foreign policy preferences and geopolitical alignment. Until relatively recently, formal citizenship was also a major grievance among Russian speakers in these cities, but the problem has been greatly reduced over recent years, not least because 'non-citizen' status has its perks in the form of visa-free travel from Lisbon all the way to Vladivostok (Selga 2016). At the same time, however, the relative attractiveness of non-citizenship may exacerbate some of the geopolitical fault-line characteristics of the cities where non-citizens are most numerous.

[5] The decommunisation laws entered into force in May 2015. They require the effacement of all communist symbols, monuments and toponyms present on Ukrainian soil, with the exception of those commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War. A recent high profile city renaming is that of former Dnipropetrovsk, now Dnipro. Initially thought to be controversial, evidence suggests that the laws have not been met with much resistance on ideological grounds (Shevel 2016). Importantly, the renaming of cities has not left the occupied territories untouched: for example, the city of Stakhanov in Luhansk *oblast'* was recently returned its old name Kadiivka, but this is not reflected in the city's current official website (Stahanov.info, accessed 27 July 2016), as the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic does not intend to implement the Ukrainian decommunisation laws.

[6] The Kharkov People's Republic was an early attempt at establishing separatist rule in the city in March-April 2014. Unlike similar efforts in the Donbas, it did not succeed. 'Kharkov' is the Russian-language version of Kharkiv.

[7] Interestingly, the authorities in Odessa appear to have adopted a lightly more *laissez faire* strategy. Unlike in Kharkiv, as of October 2015, Odessa's walls offered a visual archive of the tense atmosphere that prevailed in the city following the Euromaidan and, especially, after the 2 May 2014 Trade Unions Building fire.

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About the author:

Michael Gentile is Professor of human geography at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo. He has conducted research in different countries of the former Soviet Union and has published extensively on various aspects of these countries' urban social geographies. His recent work has touched upon residential segregation, gentrification, geopolitical identities, labour migration, and socialist-era housing allocation practice, with his latest publications figuring in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Post-Soviet Affairs, Urban Geography* and in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Until very recently, his research field base was in the Ukrainian city of Luhansk, which is one of the epicentres of the ongoing Donbas conflict.