Tine Munk, *Memetic War: Online Resistance in Ukraine*, Oxon: Routledge Focus, 2024.

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Memetic War (Routledge Focus, 2024), authored by Tine Munk (Nottingham Trent University) is a careful and detailed analysis of the concept of memetic war, which is part of cyber warfare, during the conflict in Ukraine. The author not only provides a detailed discussion of the concept as well its components and aspects, but also its workings and affordances. Munk analyses memetic war from the perspective of a strategic military method, Resistance Operating Concept (hereafter ROC), Ukraine's Total Defence Strategy, and argues for its defensive as opposed to offensive character (which is the nature of Russia's actions).

The book is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 (Introduction) sets the stage for the analysis, briefly summarising the events leading to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in detail as well as introducing the theoretical and methodological background of the book and the main concepts. Chapter 2 (Tensions and False Justifications: Escalation of Events) explores the initial triggers and rationalizations that led to conflict in Ukraine and then its escalation. It starts with the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions, which were the beginnings the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the backdrop of the annexation of the Crimea in 2014. These events culminated in the Minsk agreements (2014-2015). Later, the author devotes her attention to a discussion of Ukraine's military doctrine and recent reforms, including in light of NATO enlargement. Chapter 3 (War and Warfare: The Online Environment as a Facilitator for War) lays the groundwork for comprehending the main aspects of war and how it is manifested online, especially in relation to the circulation of information. It is against this background that the author discusses making wars by means of memes. In the first part of the chapter, Munk explains the status of the conflict in Ukraine in international law, the status of cyber war and information warfare. In the latter part, Russia's propaganda and how it is addressed by Ukrainian legislation is discussed. It is at this point that the author applies the concept of *community resilience*. The concept constitutes a strategy of the logistics of building civic resistance during peacetime, which then proves to be of utmost

importance in times of crises. Finally, a definition of memetic warfare is provided, which in this particular context is a concrete manifestation of non-violent civic resistance. Chapter 4 and 5 are empirical, presenting two case studies. Chapter 4 (Memetic War: Resistance and Actors) delves into the role of memes and the various actors involved in using this tool for resistance. The author discusses both governmental and civic, as well as group and individual support during war, which testifies to the strong sense of togetherness and mobilisation against Russia's violence. This appears to go against the common misconception of Ukraine as a divided nation (in line with the "two Ukraines"/"divided nation" narratives, Zhurzhenko 2014: 249). These activities were possible thanks to the constitutional backing of civic resistance and were carried out by different actors and in different forms. Of particular importance here is image material, which both the officials and civil society have recognised as most effective in cyberwar, and which memes are an example of. Here the author provides ample instances of these, along with other forms, such as videos, hacktivism and fundraising. Chapter 5 (Memetic Warfare: Communication as a Weapon) also focuses on memes and their content. In this chapter, Munk emphasizes the key role of communication in wartime, both in building a sense of togetherness and in communicating information unreported in other channels. While discussing the contents of chosen memes, Munk refers to particular themes and symbols, e.g. symbolism of the trident, sunflower, watermelon, etc. Chapter 6 (Concluding Remarks – Strategic Considerations) offers a summary and strategic insights based on the preceding analysis.

In her analysis of the memetic war in Ukraine, Munk emphasizes a number of key points. Firstly, communication should be regarded as a weapon. The control of information flow, i.e. its selection and its form, is essential in wartime as it allows actors to inform their audiences about unreported events, but also develop desired narratives to support resilience and build a sense of unity. For instance, President Zelenskyy's nightly speeches appear to be a well-thought and planned strategy. Secondly, communication here encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication. The latter aspect has been recognised by the Ukrainian government as particularly effective, easy and straightforward. In this sense, memes, which at first sight may appear exclusively entertaining on the part of both the author and recipient, are also meant to spread enemy-ridiculing and/or downgrading messages to those who are uninformed or do not share a particular opinion (cf. Negrea-Busuioc et al. 2024). They are also instrumental in the building of the desired attitudes communicated, for instance in the form of particular narratives (cf. Hutchings and Szostek 2015). These functions have been discussed for example by Mozolevska (2024: 15), who, as well as highlighting political agendas, also

mentions aiding in trauma coping and the formation of collective identities during crises, contributing to the construction of self-identity and affecting the perception of others. What Munk also observes is the fact that all these meme-circulating practices do not require the audience to be on the frontline and may additionally help to generate more funds for the war. Thirdly, as has been already mentioned, this form of warfare is non-violent and defensive, and it yields itself to analysis from the perspective of the strategic military concept of ROC, Ukraine's Total Defence Strategy, which is intended to prepare the societies for wartime. Finally, Munk also points to a number of challenges that leaders and decision makers need to take into account when relying on memes. Among these, the author mentions the fact that since the use of memes is not regulated by any law and is dispersed in cyberspace, it is difficult to control, including how they are interpreted and what they communicate. Also, meme producers run the risk of their private data being collected without their knowledge and/or consent.

Bearing in mind the content matter, the book is richly illustrated, providing ample examples of memes. Moreover, the references to the cited sources appear at the end of each chapter instead of at the end of the book, which is also a useful option when searching for particular references for the ideas presented in individual chapters. Finally, the author provides two boxes in the last chapter, which contain strategic summaries regarding both memes and the actors involved in their circulation, in a brief and comprehensive way.

Memetic War is a must-read not only for scholars and researchers, but also anyone genuinely interested in the topic wanting to get a deeper insight into the dynamics of modern warfare in the digital age.

References

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