

**BOOK REVIEW “DIARY OF AN INVASION, BY ANDREY
KURKOV”**

***RESENHA DO LIVRO “DIARY OF AN INVASION, DE ANDREY
KURKOV”***

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**Diary of An Invasion (2022 - 295 pages), by Andrey Kurkov
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1. INTRODUCTION

Diary of An Invasion was written by Andrey Kurkov in 2022. Kurkov is a well-known Ukrainian author, from Kyiv. Among some of his earlier works, are the novels “Death and the Penguin” and “Grey Bees”. Different from his previous works which had elements of fable and fiction inside a political dimension, this time he writes about the hard reality of the Russian invasion to his country. Written mostly during the first semester of 2022, the book primarily functions as a chronological diary to recount Kurkov’s experience in Ukraine, during the initial months of the invasion.

This book review will comprise of six sections, that also come in chronological order: (2) brief history and pre-invasion, (3) February 2022, (4) March 2022, (5) April 2022, (6) May 2022 and (7) June-July 2022. Some concluding remarks will ensue.

2. BRIEF HISTORY AND PRE-INVASION

Kurkov starts his book at the 2021 year-end holidays, questioning if Russia would really invade Ukraine. He writes that some people still believed that would not happen but himself seemed to be thinking more on the contrary. Kurkov emphasizes Putin’s constant fixation on Ukraine. He brings a Putin’s manipulation of a history instance stating that the same Russian leader who once said that Ukraine was an invention of Germany (when the country was invaded by the latter in 1918), conveniently changed his mind stating that Ukraine was indeed a creation of Vladimir Lenin. Per Kurkov, this is a way for Putin to say that Russia has more claim on Ukraine than Europe does. Living approximately in the middle of the country, in Kyiv, Kurkov observes that peoples from eastern Ukraine, a “bastion of pro-Russian sentiment”, had been clearly preferring to work and live at Western Ukraine or Western Europe, as opposed to in the east or as guest workers in Russia. Additionally, Kurkov is very proud to state that Ukraine is a democratic (he later shows that the country has the incredible number of about four hundred political parties), liberal and diverse country. But that doesn’t absolve the case that Ukraine has been politically troubled ever since its independence in 1991. Numbering the six presidents of Ukraine, Kurkov comments that animosity between them, especially among “#4” (Viktor Yanukovich, who was pro-Russian and fled to Moscow in 2014),

“#5” (Petro Poroshenko, who lost the 2019 elections aiming at patriotic Orthodox Ukrainians through the slogan ‘army, language, faith’), culminating in current “#6” Volodymyr Zelensky (since 2019), was the norm in the country’s politics. Kurkov highlights the creation of the Law on the State Language by Poroshenko, which removed non-Ukrainian languages – such as Russian and Hungarian – as languages of instructions in schools and universities. This was a turning point to deteriorate relations of Ukraine with Russia and Hungary, and to improve Putin and Orbán relations, as Kurkov points out.

3. FEBRUARY 2022

Kurkov described early February as a period of anxiety but no tension. A first false alarm was the news that Russia was going to attack on February 16. It didn’t happen. He actually had train tickets to go to the east (Luhansk) for an ordinary trip in early March but ended up accepting he would not make the trip. Kurkov commented that the pre-invasion weather in Ukraine was a pleasant one, with spring-like temperatures after a short meteorological winter, what made people go more to the streets and try to live “normal” lives. Kurkov described the day before the potential invasion (February 23) as one which escalated to tension, but no panic yet. Tension came as Ukrainian politicians began speaking louder than usual, and more military movement was seen around Kyiv. And at Russia’s side, Ukraine was shaken (per Kurkov) when Putin used in a speech the words “republics” with its respective “constitutions” referring to the oblasts (provinces) of Donetsk and Luhansk. War began when Russia hit Ukraine with missiles at 5:00 am in February 24.

4. MARCH 2022

Per Kurkov, it takes some time for the (psychological) realization that war had actually begun. After hearing shellings in his Kyiv, a city that had been surrendered but not penetrated, and the news of deaths, Kurkov decided to leave Kyiv on March 2, with his wife to a house in a small village in the west of the country, 90 miles from the capital. March seemed to be a tough month, as the reality of the

war undoubtedly kicked in Ukraine. Refugees going West (of Ukraine or off to neighbouring countries) were a constant. Kurkov writes about the metro of Kyiv, depicted by him as one of the most beautiful and deepest underground systems in the world. The metro became, in his words, no longer a form of transport, but rather, a haven. The stations became filled with living spaces, the platforms were turned into cinemas where movies were shown for free, children's films in the morning and films for wider audiences later in the days. Constant supply of tea, free but weak Wi-Fi and toilets with long queues were marks of those days in the metro, per Kurkov. As the days went by, Kurkov reflected on the differences between Russia and Ukraine. Per Kurkov, "Ukrainians are individualists, egoists, anarchists who do not like government or authority; they think they know how to organize their lives, regardless of which party or force is a power in the country; if they do not like the actions of authorities, they go out to protest and create 'Maidans'", referring to public gatherings at Kyiv's independence square, the Euromaidan pro-UE demonstrations of 2013-14 being good examples of them. In contrast, Kurkov observes that "most Russians are loyal to authority, are afraid to protest and are willing to obey any rule the Kremlin creates"; also, as they are cut off from information (from social medias), they tend to believe in official communications. Kurkov says he has Russian origin, and his native language is Russian. But appalled by the aggression, he quietly began only to speak Ukraine and regrets that Putin was not only destroying Ukraine, but also the Russian language. Per Kurkov, many Ukrainians were giving up everything Russian, including the language, the culture, even their very thoughts about Russia.

5. APRIL 2022

On April 13, Kurkov points out that almost half of the population of Ukraine were refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). Also, that many families were far from home, as hundreds of schools and universities had been destroyed by Russian artillery. Despite the chaos, Kurkov was a little happy with the fact that students continued to attend lectures online, just as it was during the pandemic. If on the one hand Kurkov was very sad to acknowledge that regions of Ukraine such as Kherson were taken over by Russia, with an insult to injury addition element by

the erection of a monument to Lenin in front of that city hall, Kurkov was hopeful to observe that Kyiv was turning itself into an awakened beehive, as around 30 to 40 thousand people were returning to the city every day at the end of that month. Still in late April, two months into the war, Kurkov ponders about problems that both Russia and Ukraine endure or would endure related to the conflict, in a longer-term perspective. Kurkov claims that Russia lacks population, just as the Russian army lacks soldiers, reasons to explain the difficulty to exert control of territories in Ukraine. And as a by-product of the invasion, Ukraine will encounter demographic problems as well, mostly related to the huge question mark of how many of the ones who left the country would return, especially those with smaller children who might not be willing to return so soon.

6. MAY 2022

On May 1, Kurkov claimed that a third of Ukraine was in ruins. Nevertheless, as an enthusiast for literature and culture, Kurkov is happy to mention that literary evenings are taking place and theatres are open once again in the cities of western Ukraine. He mentions that even in Kharkiv, a city with sits in the northeast very close to the Russian border, there had been presentations of new books and rock concerts, although some of those were underground. The month also made Kurkov respond to requests from many parts of the world on the real status of the war. Regarding the alleged “anti-Semitic and Russophobic” stance of Ukraine raised by Russia and by some international media contacts, Kurkov rebuts them firmly stating that this is very unthinkable given that Ukraine’s elected leader Zelensky himself is a Russian-speaking Jew. Kurkov resents on the behaviour of some European countries, namely Germany and France, by casting doubt on what kind of military assistance was coming from them, as opposed to the firm support that came from the U.S., the U.K., Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania and Estonia. Kurkov distinctly delineates two groups of countries, one who was completely on the side of Ukraine, represented by the Washington-Ottawa-London-Warsaw-Vilnius “coalition”, and another one who was mostly fighting to “save Putin’s face”, represented by Paris-Berlin-Rome-Budapest-Nicosia. At the end of May, Kurkov goes back to the tough writings of ruins and destruction, citing many cities, towns and villages that were destroyed in his

country, such as Mariupol, Bucha, Hostomel and Vorzel; also, he sadly ponders that it would take at least five to seven years to clear Ukraine of landmines and unexploded shells following the end of the war.

7. JUNE-JULY 2022

Kurkov characterized early June as a phase of protracted, slow-paced war. And added that Europe was becoming accustomed to it, as opposed to the U.S., which usually thinks that getting used to a war is extremely dangerous. The apparent war stillness was then brutally shaken on June 27, when a Russian rocket with a ton of explosions hit a large shopping mall and entertainment centre in Kremenchuk, a cosy Ukrainian little town, on the words of Kurkov. Around a thousand people were spending the afternoon there, and Kurkov doesn't precise the death toll in the book, but official information which came later mentions dozens of deaths plus dozens of seriously injured people. This tragedy caused an impetus to blood donation to Ukraine, an asset that was in dire need throughout the country, per Kurkov. Then comes July, a symbolic month for summer in Europe. Kurkov narrates that Ukrainians love going to the beach, but regrets that in the Odesa region, visiting beaches is officially prohibited, with all of them closed and some of them wrapped by barbed-wire fences. In contrast, the beaches of Kyiv were full of people, even though a constant pre-routine of sapping for mines is necessary. As one of the last "diary" remarks of the book, Kurkov writes that many Ukrainian families still wanted to relax at the seaside, despite the war.

As concluding remarks of his book, Kurkov proudly defends the Ukrainian resistance by claiming that "the more Putin tries to "de-Ukrainianize" Ukraine, the more intensely the integration of Ukraine into Eastern and Western Europe takes place". His book ends there, within an unconcluded scenario that we are all aware of in early 2023. As an epilogue, he hopes he can further write a continuation of his diary of Russia's aggression.

Referências

KURKOV, A. **Diary of An Invasion**. London e Sydney: Mountain Leopard Press, 2022.

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