Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy

Vol 18, No 2 (2025)

Trauma, Exile, and Cultural Displacement

Reconstructing Ukrainian Identity

Elina Kushch

doi: 10.12681/dia.43458

Reconstructing Ukrainian Identity: The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War Trauma

Elina Kushch,
Associate Professor,
National University 'Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic', Ukraine
elina2803@zp.edu.ua

Abstract

The paper explores the reconstruction of the Ukrainian national identity in the context of the traumatic events of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The war traumatic experience is viewed as a source of suffering and existential challenges for Ukrainians and a catalyst for constructing their renewed collective "we". This involves rethinking the history of the Ukrainian nation, its social, political, and cultural heritage. The paper also focuses on the development and the role of the Ukrainian language, the emergence and spread of various verbal and nonverbal initiatives and practices that contribute to overcoming the collective war trauma and revitalizing the image of Ukrainians as a nation in the world.

Keywords: *catalyst, national identity, image, redefining, the Russian-Ukrainian war, trauma, Ukrainian language*

Introduction

Wars fundamentally transforms the social, political, cultural, and psychological life of nations and personalities. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war has provoked the formation of a new Ukrainian national identity. Today, Ukrainian identity is increasingly defined by shared values: an unbreakable will to defend the country's sovereignty, mutual support, and large-scale volunteer activity. At the same time, the war has contributed to the revitalization of cultural life, the return of historical memory, and the strengthening of the significance of Ukrainian national symbols. Despite profound suffering, the trauma of war has become the basis for rethinking Ukrainian national identity and forming a new awareness of 'us' – as a community that defines its place in the world through resilience, unity, and dignity.

Trauma: Concept and Dimensions

Trauma derives from the Greek word τραῦμα, meaning "wound" or "injury". Initially, it referred to a physical injury resulting from violence or an accident.[1] Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, trauma has come to denote psychological and emotional wounds that leave no visible marks yet deeply affect the human psyche and consciousness.

The Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, studied the psychological dimensions of trauma and was among the first in scientific psychology to consider the role of traumatic experiences in human life. He described trauma as an event that exceeds the psyche's ability to integrate lived

* My heartleft thanks to Professor Piotr Blumczynski, Professor Gerard McCann, Doctor Kathleen Kaess (Queen's University, Belfast, UK), Professor Tammi Dice, Professor Anne Perrotte (Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, USA), Professor Edward Brantmeier, Lena Caffall, Kaia Goodiel, Ally Mueller (James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA) who support NU 'Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic' and other Ukrainian educational institutions during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.

[1] American Psychological Association (n.d.), "Trauma", in: *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Retrieved October 10, 2025, from https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma

experience, resulting in its repression into the unconscious.[2] According to Freud, repressed memories do not disappear but continue to influence human behavior through neuroses, dreams, or repetitive behaviors – a phenomenon he called repetition compulsion.[3] Freud's work led to the understanding of trauma not just as a psychological injury, but as a consequence of traumatic experiences shaping memory mechanisms and human behavior as well.

Leading twentieth-century psychoanalysts, including Melanie Klein[4] and Donald Winnicott[5], regarded trauma as the disruption of a person's fundamental sense of security and trust in the world. According to Donald Winnicott, an individual exposed to traumatic experiences loses the fundamental sense of stability essential for mental well-being, along with the ability to trust others and build healthy interpersonal relationships.[6] Modern psychologists have expanded upon the ideas of European scientists, defining psychological trauma as an emotional response to an extremely stressful event that threatens a person's life or physical and mental integrity.[7]

The philosophical dimension reveals trauma as an ontological rupture in human existence – a moment when the established structure of subjectivity collapses. Jean-François Lyotard interpreted trauma as "an event beyond representation that cannot be fully expressed or comprehended'.[8] In his "*Memory, History, Forgetting*" *(2000),* Paul Ricoeur approached memory and for-

[2] Freud S., *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, W. W. Norton, 1961, p. 13.

[3] Freud S., *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* W. W. Norton, 1961, p. 18.

[4] Klein M., *The Psycho-Analysis of Children,* Hogarth Press, 1932, pp. 198-205.

[5] Winnicott D. W., *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development,* Hogarth Press, 1965, pp. 37-44.

[6] Winnicott D. W., *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development.* Hogarth Press, 1965, pp. 103-110.

[7] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma and violence – What is trauma and its effects?* Retrieved October 22, 2025, from https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/trauma-violence

[8] Lyotard J.-F., *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 56.

giveness as ethical ways of overcoming traumatic experiences.[9] Jacques Derrida characterized trauma through the concept of the *trace* that never disappears but shapes our identity.[10] In "*The Origins of Totalitarianism*" *(1951),* German and American political philosopher Hannah Arendt emphasized the political dimension of trauma associated with exile, loss of home, and rupture from the world.[11]

The social dimension of trauma refers to the impact of collective upheavals on society, its structure, norms, and values. In his theory of cultural trauma, American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander stressed that trauma becomes a social phenomenon once the community acknowledges an event as threatening to its collective identity.[12]

Another American sociologist, Kai Erikson, shared a similar perspective. He interpreted trauma as the breakdown of social bonds and interpersonal trust. To him, trauma was not only a personal suffering but primarily the loss of social integrity. According to Erikson, collective trauma can help to restore social cohesion, reshape mutual support, and redefine a system of social values.[13]

Wars, genocides, acts of repression, and exiles are major social crises connected with the political dimension of trauma. They ruin people's lives, as well as social institutions, historical memory, and the sense of belonging. To Hannah Arendt, the trauma of exile and loss of homeland is both a personal and a political experience that alters the human way of being in the world and causes a crisis of human identity.[14]

---

[9] Ricoeur P., *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, 2024, pp. 507-523.

[10] Derrida J., *Writing and Difference*, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 226. Cf. Kakoliris Gerasimos, "Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction of Western Metaphysics: The Early Years", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 4, 2017, pp. 43-62.

[11] Arendt H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1951, pp. 267-302.

[12] Alexander J., "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", in: Alexander J. C., Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2004, pp. 10-11.

[13] Erikson K., Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood, Simon and Schuster, 1976, pp. 154-155.

[14]Arendt H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1951, pp. 267-302.

Trauma arising from political catastrophes may serve as a source of mobilization and resistance, enabling new forms of solidarity and a rethinking of national identity. It transforms collective pain into a catalyst for strengthening national unity and constructing a shared "we", reflecting the people's striving for freedom and the preservation of their cultural and political distinctiveness.

National Identity and the Reasons for Its Reconstruction

National identity is a person's awareness of belonging to a particular nation community, united by a common language, culture, historical memory, traditions, values, and symbols. It is both an emotional and a cognitive construct that forms the sense of collective belonging and an understanding of a shared past and future. National identity defines the way people perceive themselves within their nation and relate to members of other cultures or states.

The term "*national identity*" became common in twentieth-century academic works, although the concepts of national consciousness and people's self-determination are historically older. The American political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson is a key contributor in the field. In "*Imagined Communities*" *(1983),* he described the nation as a social construct existing in the minds of its members through the imagination of a shared past, symbols, and rituals. According to Anderson, national identity is based not only on actual social bonds but also on collective beliefs. These beliefs enable the sense of belonging to a community even among those who have never met.[15]

In his "*Nations and Nationalism*" *(1983),* the British philosopher and anthropologist Ernest Gellner examined national identity through socioeconomic and cultural factors. He stated that it is not inherent but is socially constructed, arising from historical, economic, and cultural changes. To him, nations are socially constructed entities that align cultural and political domains. According to Gellner, national identity is a result of shared social experi-

[15] Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983, pp. 4-5.

ences and common value systems supported by state institutions and cultural practices.[16]

The British sociologist and nationalism theorist, Anthony D. Smith, is renowned for his work on national identity, ethnicity, and the origins of nations. Within the framework of ethno-symbolism, he adds the role of historical myths, symbols, religious traditions, and heroic narratives to the understanding of national identity. In "*Nationalism and Ethnic Identity*" (1991), Smith emphasizes that national identity is based on lasting cultural traditions and collective beliefs about shared ancestry, history, and culture. He shows that the nation is more than a political concept; it is a cultural and historical phenomenon that provides a sense of stability and continuity to the community over time. According to Smith, national identity merges the rational (civic) and the emotional (ethnic), creating a moral community united by a shared history and culture.[17]

The British culturologist and postcolonial theorist Stuart Hall considered national identity to be a process of ongoing construction dependent upon historical conditions, discourses of authority, and cultural representations.[18] He stressed that national identity is a cultural construct constantly created through narratives, symbols, history, and notions of us and them. To him, a nation is not a fixed entity but *an imagined community* that always rewrites its history.[19]

Modern scholars point to the dynamic nature of national identity, which is constantly being reconstructed, especially under the influence of political crises, social transformations, and cultural changes.[20] [21] National identity provides a sense of belonging to a

[16] Gellner E., *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 23.

[17] Smith A. D., *National Identity*, University of Nevada Press, 1991, pp. 12-45.

[18] Hall S., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 10-15.

[19] Hall S., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 6-7.

[20] Mitchell J., "Transnational Identity and the Gulf Crisis: Changing Narratives of Belonging in Qatar", *International Affairs*, 97: 4, 2021, pp. 929-947.

community. It also shapes the collective "we", enabling individuals to navigate the social and political space, defend the rights and values of the community, and adapt to change. Periods of social instability, especially wars, intensify these processes because that's when the sense of community, cultural continuity, and moral unity become crucial for a nation's survival.

National Identity in The Context of War and Trauma

War stands as one of the most radical socio-political experiences a nation can face, forcing it to question its very existence, values, and right to self-determination. It creates circumstances that disrupt collective consciousness and turn traumatic experience into a force, making people rethink old narratives and shape new ones. During war, national identity gains real weight and becomes a matter of survival, dignity, and integrity of the community.

Collective war trauma prompts society to revise its own history, national memory, and symbols. Thus, the nation realizes the threat posed to its existence and identity. Such times foster a new collective narrative uniting people in shared pain, loss, and heroism. War brings destruction and, at the same time, sparks resurgence. It is a moment for a nation to rethink its past and plan based on responsibility and solidarity.

National identity serves as a psychological and cultural *shield*, allowing individuals to process and outline resentment and trauma, turning a turbulent experience into a meaningful narrative where pain and hope coexist.[22] Language, memory, and cultural practices help a nation to reclaim its sense of agency and thus reshape the connection between past and present (Kryvda

[21] Moon D., "Reconstructions of Serbian National Identity in the Post-Yugoslav Era: A Thematic Survey", *Ethnologia Actualis,* 23:2, 2023, pp. 67-84.

[22] Beukian S., and Graff-McRae R., "Trauma Stories as Resilience: Armenian and Irish National Identity in a Century of Remembering. Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies", *Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, 8(8), 2018, pp.157-188; Theodosiadis M., "Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch)", *Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London.* 2021, p.284.

2019).[23] Narratives of shared values and historical memories (expressed through artifacts and collective customs), common experiences of struggle, and the public expressions that commemorate them, help to preserve and sustain national identity.[24] In wartime, such narratives grow in strength, helping to bring society together, mark out the enemy, and define what it truly means to be a nation.[25]

War drives the transformation of national identity in different ways. Firstly, there is a reconsideration of historical memory – past events seen as neutral gain new symbolic meaning. Heroic deeds, the fight for independence, and cultural legacy are now inseparable from the ongoing national resistance. Secondly, linguistic and cultural self-identification becomes increasingly important. Language, literature, folklore, and art go beyond mere means of expression; they evolve into forms of resistance, strengthening the cultural autonomy of a nation. Thirdly, national identity acquires moral significance and forces every citizen to choose whether to contribute to the community actively or to stand aside.

The concept of collective memory is central in identity reconstruction.[26] It provides a space for people to rethink what national identity means. Traumatic events of war, such as destroyed cities, deaths, and exile, are woven into the collective memory through language and symbols. So, it does more than simply preserve shared experience – it builds an emotional pillar that fortifies national solidarity. Working through trauma leads to collective healing for those seeking to restore the meaning of their existence in a shattered world.

---

[23] Kryvda, N., Y., "КОЛЕКТИВНА ПАМ'ЯТЬ ЯК ЧИННИК ФОРМУВАННЯ ГРУПОВОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ [Collective Memory as a Factor of Group Identity Formation]". *Філософські обрії*, 41, 2019, pp.60-76.

[24] Theodosiadis M., "Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch)", *Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London.* 2021, p.288.

[25] Drozdzewski, D., Waterton, E., and Sumartojo, S., "Cultural memory and identity in the context of war: Experiential, place-based and political concerns", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 101:910, 2019, pp.251-272.

[26] Theodosiadis M., "Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch)", *Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London.* 2021, pp.65-77.

Simultaneously, reconstructing national identity is a complicated process. It involves internal contradictions, interpretive conflicts, and struggles over which narratives prevail. Trauma has the power to divide and bring people together, forming new solidarity that transcends conventional boundaries of language, ethnicity, or territory. From this perspective, war is more than just a battlefield. It allows for cultural and symbolic transformation, shaping a new identity where the memory of loss is inseparable from the hope for a brighter future.

The Ukrainian National Identity and the Ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War

For Ukrainians, national identity means not just acknowledging their distinct cultural, historical, and linguistic heritage but also uniting around shared values in the pursuit of sovereignty. It stands as a vital force in the nation-building process. Its formation was hindered by many factors, including centuries without statehood, periods of imperial and colonial domination, forced Russification, social and political upheavals, and constant struggle for freedom and independence. Each historical event has catalyzed rethinking Ukrainian identity and building community spirit among Ukrainians.

The Ukrainian ethnic group emerged from East Slavic tribes inhabiting the territory of modern Ukraine in the sixth and seventh centuries AD. These tribes included the Polans, Drevlians, Severians, Ulichs, Tivertsi, and White Croats. They formed the core of Kyivan Rus' (9th–13th centuries) – a state that was the first political and cultural center of the common features of East Slavic civilization. Kyivan Rus' became the ethnic and state-building cradle of Ukrainian identity, as it gradually gave rise to a common language, the Orthodox religious tradition, models of governance and social order, and core Ukrainian values.

The mass adoption of Christianity in 988 established shared moral and religious norms that later became an integral part of Ukrainian identity. This period marked the formation of the state's structure and first Ukrainian values – faith in God, respect for land and labor, mutual respect within communities, and prin-

ciples of governance through princely and local councils. Writing and literary activity were central to forming a cultural fabric – through the development of church schools, the compilation of early chronicles, and the translation of sacred texts – that endured despite foreign invasions and political crises. The formation of Ukrainian identity was also influenced by territorial expansion and contact with other peoples, including the Slavs, Turkic tribes, and Byzantines. These contacts fostered the emergence of early statehood institutions, legal norms, and economic ties that later shaped the political and cultural autonomy of Ukrainian lands. Developed crafts and trade contributed to social mobility and the formation of self-aware communities actively involved in the political, religious, and economic life of Kyivan Rus'.

Although the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion shattered the socio-political system of Kyivan Rus', its people preserved their ethnocultural identity. From the late thirteenth century, the territories of modern Ukraine gradually came under the rule of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (ca. 1320–1569). Following the Union of Lublin in 1569, they became part of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795), where the Orthodox population experienced pressure from Catholic and Protestant traditions. During this period, the Orthodox Church became a central force in maintaining literacy, language, and traditions through education, printing houses, brotherhood schools, and monasteries.

The Cossacks, arising in Ukraine as a social and military structure at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, came to embody the Ukrainian spirit of freedom and struggle for autonomy. Following the 1648 national liberation war led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the Hetmanate (1648–1764) emerged in part of Ukrainian lands – an autonomous Cossack state with its own political, military, and administrative institutions. The Hetmanate united Cossack regiments and the local population under the leadership of the Hetman. He was the highest military and civil authority of the state as well as a symbol of national identity. This period was marked by patriotism, military valor, and Ukraine's cultural development, with the Cossack administration

supporting education, literature, religious and cultural institutions, thereby reinforcing Ukrainian national identity.[27]

Following the 1654 Pereyaslav Treaty, the Hetmanate became politically dependent on the Tsardom of Moscow, while retaining a degree of internal self-governance. The autonomous Cossack state came to an end in 1764, when the Russian Empire deposed the last Hetman, Kyrylo Rozumovsky, and abolished all of its self-governing institutions. The Hetmanate's heritage contributed greatly to Ukrainian political awareness and national identity.

In the nineteenth century, Ukrainians experienced a revival, with literature, art, and scientific studies playing a pivotal role in forming national self-consciousness. A leading Ukrainian poet and thinker, Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), explores Ukrainian national identity from a philosophical perspective. His literary works depict the fight for freedom, dignity, and justice as a shared moral responsibility of Ukrainians, their sufferings as a source of inner strength, and the solidarity of the nation. The literary legacy of Ivan Franko (1856-1916) and Lesya Ukrainka (1871-1913) shapes Ukrainian patriotism and civic responsibility, stressing the value of moral strength, freedom, and dignity, and the role of language and culture in sustaining national identity through turbulent historical moments.

The nineteenth-century sociocultural aspect of Ukrainian identity was evident in the activities of scientific and cultural groups, theaters, musical bands, publishing houses, and educational institutions that actively promoted the Ukrainian language, history, and culture among various social groups. These institutions not only preserved cultural heritage but also cultivated a sense of community and moral solidarity among Ukrainians, laying the groundwork for nation-building. During this period, national identity ceased to be merely a symbol of ethnic origin and became a part of the values system, norms, and moral and aesthetic principles guiding the way Ukrainians think, live, and act in the world.[28]

[27] Pasichnyk V., "Cossack Self-Government in Zaporozhya Sich as a Component of the State Tradition of Ukraine", *DG. Journal of History & Statehood*, 1:29, 2022, pp. 26-41.

[28] Yekelchyk S., *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 45-78.

Ukrainians first had the chance to establish their own state during the revolutionary years of 1917-1921. For a short period, the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917-1921) and the West Ukrainian People's Republic (1918-1919) laid the basis for the development of constitutional norms, diplomacy, and national symbols. Nevertheless, political instability, foreign aggression, and internal conflicts prevented the full establishment of Ukrainian statehood.[29].

Nation-building occurred under constant challenges during the early Soviet period, characterized by the policy of Ukrainization, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, with systematic repression, collectivization, and the Holodomor of 1932-1933. These catastrophes had a profound sociocultural and psychological impact on the Ukrainian people. Losses, violence, and forced Russification resulted in a collective trauma that simultaneously reinforced the sense of national community and moral resilience among Ukrainians. Under these circumstances, Ukrainian identity came to be perceived less as an ethnic or linguistic category and more as a value-philosophical concept that brings the nation together around shared principles, cultural heritage, and moral norms.[30]

When Ukraine declared its independence on August 24, 1991, it brought to an end century of nation-building efforts, yet cultural and linguistic differences within the country persisted. In 2004, the Orange Revolution demonstrated society's maturity and civic engagement. The 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity, in turn, marked a decisive moment of sociocultural and ethical reflection on national identity. It confirmed Ukraine's commitment to democracy, freedom, and European values.[31] All of these showed that the Ukrainian people can come together in difficult times, recognizing their national identity through shared experience, collective memory, and moral and civic solidarity.

[29] Stepyko H., *Formation of Ukrainian Statehood: Historical Perspectives and Challenges*, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2022, p. 67.

[30] Marukhovska-Kartunova O., Turenko V., Zarutska O., Spivak L., & Vynnychuk R., "Analysis of Modern Socio-Cultural Processes in Ukraine and their Impact on the National Identity and Resilience Growth of Ukrainians in the Conditions of War", *Kurdish Studies*, 12:2, 2024, pp. 2780-2790.

[31] Kulyk V., "National identity in Ukraine: Impact of Historical Legacies, Language, and Political Mobilization", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68:5, 2016, pp. 800-826.

Ukraine's society faced an extraordinary challenge when Russia invaded it in February 2022. It led to the consolidation and transformation of the meaning of national identity. Extensive hostilities, a high-intensity information war, mobilization of society, and significant losses among civilians and military personnel have spurred a thorough reevaluation of the importance of the nation, the state, and culture in the lives of citizens. War trauma deeply influences the collective psyche, shaping renewed understanding of morality, culture, and politics. It makes Ukrainians reconsider the value of freedom, human dignity, moral responsibility, and the historical mission of their nation.

According to UNHCR (2025), by the beginning of 2025, approximately 6.9 million Ukrainians had left the country, seeking refuge in Poland, Germany, Romania, the Czech Republic, and other countries across Europe and the world, while 3.7 million became internally displaced within Ukraine.[32] These mass displacements have resulted not only in humanitarian challenges but also in the creation of a transnational Ukrainian community sustaining cultural, educational, and linguistic connections with its homeland. Ukrainian communities across the globe continue to promote their language and culture, strengthening national consciousness. By opening educational and cultural centers, language schools and clubs, launching media platforms, and other creative initiatives, they help to redefine what it means to be Ukrainian in today's world.

The collective memory of Ukrainians has been deeply influenced by both civilian and military casualties, thousands of wounded, and the vast destruction of housing and infrastructure. Beyond the shared experience of suffering, these tragedies have become a strong driver of the nation's moral, cultural, and historical unity. Every city left in ruins, every school or hospital destroyed, and every story of a family that lost loved ones is evolving into a powerful symbol – not only of pain but also of strength, resilience, and self-sacrifice.

The traumatic experience of war has become a factor that brought together diverse social, ethnic, and regional groups across the country in a common striving for survival and victory.

[32] UNHCR. *Ukraine Emergency – Ukraine Emergency: Operational Data Portal.* 2025, February. Retrieved October 10, 2025, from https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/ukraine-emergency

The experience of danger, the loss of home, family, and familiar surroundings has deeply reshaped national awareness: Ukrainians are coming to recognize that their freedom, culture, and language are not givens, but values that must be actively defended. Psychologists emphasize that collective trauma can be destructive as well as generative.[33] In Ukraine's case, it has become a basis for moral renewal and the revival of civic responsibility.

The memory of the fallen has become a significant component in shaping the historical self-awareness of the Ukrainian nation. It is expressed through a variety of forms, such as memorials, documentary films, songs, and artistic projects. These initiatives honor the war heroes, gaining deep symbolic meaning. Other rituals of remembrance include moments of silence (every day at 9 am), walls of mourning, folk poems, and artworks conveying both the nation's pain and dignity. These practices have shaped a new kind of cultural memory, turning trauma into moral strength that unites society.

Veterans play a particularly important role in this process. Thousands of people with combat experience have become moral voices of the nation. They participate in public life, volunteer movements, and political initiatives, creating a model of a citizen who embodies courage, dignity, and responsibility. The state gradually provides veterans with social and psychological support and professional reintegration as a way to memorialize their sacrifice and heroism. The veterans stand as a symbol of the nation's moral resilience, with their traumatic experience becoming part of the new collective identity.

The so-called *frontline initiatives,* where veterans and civilians come together to create moral and cultural *islands of resilience,* are an essential aspect of the new national identity. In December 2022, the volunteer center *Art of Resilience* was opened in Kyiv, offering humanitarian aid, lectures on Ukrainian history, and workshops in traditional folk art. Similar centers in Lviv and Kharkiv document events and consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war and offer support to Ukrainians. Each story of

[33] Herman, J. L., & van der Kolk, B. A., *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Basic Books, 1997, p. 32.

loss, volunteering, or rescue becomes part of a shared narrative that strengthens cultural solidarity.

The war has also intensified the philosophical reflection on the existence of Ukrainians in the world. Through their books, treatises, articles, and artworks, writers, philosophers, journalists, and artists explore the phenomenon of national trauma as an integral part of Ukraine's new modern identity. Authors of fiction and documentary works portray the frontline reality, volunteer heroes, people who lost their homes, and those seeking meaning in suffering, forming a spiritual space where pain becomes the path to self-discovery and collective reflection.

Through this process, trauma evolves into a narrative – a story Ukrainians can share with the whole world. The war uncovered a new moral depth in the Ukrainian people, anchored in dignity and sacrifice. All of these constitute the heart of modern Ukrainian identity, born of suffering and war but oriented towards a happy life and peace.

The war has changed the meaning of everyday acts. They gain a profound existential significance, whether it is helping a stranger, rescuing an animal, volunteering, or writing a nice comment on social media. From a philosophical perspective, it reflects the idea of the ethics of co-existence, where one's sense of self forms through being responsible for others. Through the shared war trauma, Ukrainians are becoming a community where empathy underpins moral and national cohesion.

The war also alters a country's symbols. Ukrainian national symbols – the flag, the coat of arms, the embroidered shirt (vyshyvanka), and the song – have gained new ideological meaning, becoming means of collective therapy. Today, the blue and yellow flag appears in the most surprising contexts – on soldiers' helmets, on the walls of destroyed homes, in social media profiles, and in contemporary artworks. The Ukrainian trident, a statehood symbol for centuries, now serves as a sign of resistance and hope for the nation.

The war's symbolic language extends beyond official emblems to a visual culture of resistance expressed through graffiti, murals, posters, music, and memes. In Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, and Kharkiv, artistic projects of restoring walls and creating murals have transformed spaces of pain into spaces of memory and hope.

Digital culture is of great importance in the philosophical understanding of war. Ukrainian society is creating a new form of digital collective memory, where every post, photo, or frontline video becomes a fragment of history. Ukrainians are turning social media (such as TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram) into a living chronicle of war, documenting the moments of everyday dignity and struggle.

During war, memes help people cope with the harsh reality and stress they face. They transform trauma into text, into laughter, and into a collective "we" that overcomes fear. Humor and memes become a form of freedom that breaks the monopoly of fear. Iconic memes about "tractors pulling tanks," songs about the "Bayraktar," and humorous videos featuring Zelensky and the Armed Forces of Ukraine have become symbols of national resistance, reflecting the pain and heroism of the Ukrainian people. This phenomenon combines traditional folk humor culture (with its archaic protective functions) with modern digital creativity, forming a media-based expression of Ukrainian national optimism.

The Ukrainian Language and National Identity in the Ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War

The anthropocentric nature of any language manifests in its ability to name, conceptualize, and interpret the world from a human perspective. For this reason, language is defined as "*the house of Being*". [34] Language is believed to embody the soul of a nation, its inner life, and its cognitive patterns. Thus, it functions not merely as a tool for naming but as a mechanism for collective reflection – a way of understanding national being. Language reflects a nation's spiritual state, its core values, and moral com-

[34] Heidegger M., "On the Way to Language" (trans. by Albert Hofstadter), in: Heidegger M., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, 1971, p. 113. Cf. Filippopoulos, Y. G., "Understanding the Concept of Being in General: From Being and Time Back to Young Heidegger", *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 9:1, 2024, pp. 9-32, https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.32079. Cf. Sakizli, A., "The Neutrality of Dasein and the Shame in the Female Experience: A Feminist Philosophical Analysis", *Dia-noesis*, 17, June 2025, pp. 313-30, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.41716.

pass, functioning as a tool for understanding collective experience in hard times. Language preserves fragments of human existence connected with losses and victories, experiences and emotions. They help to comprehend all aspects of human experience, including the traumatic experience of war.

Similar experiences are not always conveyed solely through negatively valued or emotionally charged linguistic units, narratives of fear, pain, or despair. The Russian-Ukrainian war resulted in the emergence of neologisms in the Ukrainian language. New wartime realities required new designations. Since 2014, there has been a surge of neologisms and reinterpretation of existing lexical units. For example, «*green little men*», «*territorial defense forces*», «*de-occupation*», «*resocialization*», «*moral front*», and «*resistance*».

Since February 2022, due to the full-scale war in Ukraine and the need to name new realities, the number of neologisms in the Ukrainian language has significantly increased. Among them are the following units:

analogovnet (аналоговнєт) – an ironic term for Russian technologies that have no analogs except in the imagination of Russians;

bayraktaryty (байрактарити) – to destroy the enemy with Bayraktar drones;

bavovna (бавовна) – a euphemism for explosions in Russia or on temporarily occupied territories;

banderomobil (бандеромобіль) – a vehicle painted in national colors with patriotic symbols, used to collect aid, transport volunteers, or participate in protests;

blackout (блекаут) – complete power outage due to attacks on the energy grid;

debakhnulo (дебахнуло) – a person who can cause a lot of harm;

dyskoteka, discotheque (дискотека) – hostilities or shelling;

donate (донатити) – to give money to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine or volunteers;

ye-mogyla (є-могила) – an ironic name for the program of destroying occupiers;

culture front (культурний фронт) – activities aimed at preserving, promoting, and developing Ukrainian culture,

language, traditions, and values as a form of resistance against the aggressor;

orcs (орки) – a derogatory name for Russian soldiers;

moped (мопед) – Iranian kamikaze Shahed drones;

palyanitsetest (паляницетест) – a test to identify whether someone is 'one of us' (a friend) or 'one of them' (an enemy) based on their pronunciation of the word palyanitsa;

Parton the dog (пес Патрон) – a sapper dog, symbol of heroism and humor;

pixel (піксель) – military uniform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine;

pynkt nezlamnosti, point of invincibility (пункт незламності) – a place where people can get help during a power outage;

rashism (рашизм) – the criminal ideology of the 'Russian world';

rashists (рашисти) – Russian military, Putin supporters, etc.

Ukrainian wartime neologisms can be divided into several thematic groups:

military-patriotic (*bayraktar, PPOshnyk (ППОшник) – air defense officer, deokupatsiya (de-occupation, kontrnastup (counteroffensive*);

ironic-satirical (*katsapsky svit, rashism, svynosobaka (bastard), vatnyk*);

everyday/humanitarian *(volonteryty (volunteer, trymatu striy (keep rank), donatyty (donate);*

meme-internet *(dobrogo vetchora my z Ukrainy (good evening, we are from Ukraine), palanytsia effect).*

Within the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, new linguistic units have become not only tools of communication or emotional response but also important means of reconstructing and reinterpreting Ukrainian national identity. Wartime linguistic creativity reflects the nation's self-awareness, its values, collective memory, and perception of its own historical experience. By means of language, Ukrainians express their subjectivity, showing solidarity and moral superiority over the aggressor.

By shaping a new picture of the world, the Ukrainian language crystallizes core traits of Ukrainians:

Invincibility – the ability to endure, preserve dignity, and maintain inner freedom even under the most challenging circum-

stances (e.g., *points of invincibility, the steadfast, reinforced-concrete (people), the spirit of steel*);

courage and heroism manifested in the linguistic terms associated with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, volunteers, defense, and resistance (e.g. *ZSUshnyk, birdie – nickname for female combat medics, snipers, or drone operators; symbolizes lightness, courage, and vigilance, volunteer fighter – has gained new heroic connotations since 2014, becoming a national archetype of bravery and self-sacrifice, the Bird of Azov – nickname for Ukrainian medic Yuliia "Taira" Paievska and other Azovstal defenders*);

self-irony and humor serving as a form of psychological protection, reflected in numerous ironic and satirical neologisms (*e.g., bavovna, orcs, rashists*);

humanism and solidarity – embodied in lexemes related to volunteering (*donatyty (donate), volunteer, punkt nezlamnosti (point of invincibility);*

a sense of community and national pride expressed through popular memes (*dobrogo vetchora my z Ukrainy (good evening, we are from Ukraine), trymatu striy (keep rank).*

Wartime neologisms are linguistic markers of a new Ukrainian identity based on shared experience of struggle, mutual support, and spiritual unity.

Many neologisms have entered other languages, including English, not only due to its status as an international language but also because of the continuous reporting of the Russian-Ukrainian war in English-language media and social networks. Such linguistic units are the following:

Bayraktar – the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drone, a symbol of Ukrainian resistance at the beginning of the Russian–Ukrainian war;

palianytsia – a Ukrainian word for "bread," that is difficult to pronounce for Russian speakers (has become an identity marker and a way to detect strangers);

*Russian warship – a phrase originating from the legendary remark of a Ukrainian border guard on Snake Island: "Russian warship, go f**k yourself" (in the English-speaking world, it has become a meme and a slogan of resistance, used to signify defiance and heroism);*

Bakhmut spirit – a phrase denoting the resilience and heroism of Ukrainian defenders who defended the city of Bakhmut during one of the fiercest battles of the Russian–Ukrainian war;

Ukrainian resilience – a phrase used in English-language political speeches, analyses, and media to describe the Ukrainian people's ability to withstand aggression, adapt to the harsh conditions of war, and maintain national unity.

ZSU – Armed Forces of Ukraine;

missile terrorism – deliberate missile strikes on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure;

orcs – used by Ukrainian media and social networks as a diminutive derogatory term for Russian soldiers; this term has already appeared in English-language publications.

bavovna – Ukrainian slang for an explosion or strike on enemy territory, also discussed in English as a Ukrainianism;

rashism – a portmanteau of Russia + fascism, describing the ideology or actions of the aggressor country; sometimes also used in English.

It shows that the Ukrainian language is becoming a source of new elements in international political discourse, shaping the image of modern Ukraine as a country of courage and dignity. In the global linguistic discourse, Ukrainians are characterized through metaphorical expressions such as *phoenix nation, nation of indomitable people, the indomitable, and the nation of will.* The following lexical units have become new means of marking Ukrainian national identity in the global linguistic space:

nation of light – in contrast to the "darkness" of the aggressor; a symbol of good, truth, and civilizational choice;

Nation of heroes – highlights mass heroism both in combat and civilian life.

steel people, steel hearts – signifies resilience, perseverance, and unbreakable spirit;

people of light – represents Ukrainians' moral purity and humanitarian values;

people of gratitude – emphasizes the value of mutual support, mutual assistance, and the cult of gratitude;

country of volunteers – highlights the unique social phenomenon of self-organization;

people of courage – characterizes Ukrainians as a decisive and fearless nation;

warriors of light – an emotionally charged metaphor popular on social media, combining military valor and a spiritual mission;

nation of gratitude and memory – points to the ability to remember losses while transforming pain into strength.

The Ukrainian language is a tool for psychological recovery, helping people deal with the consequences of the war. Different texts, songs, and slogans support people's emotional state. Such national phrases as "Everything will be Ukraine!", "Glory to Ukraine!" and "Glory to the heroes!" give psychological strength and unite the Ukrainian people. Similar slogans influence international discourse and global support of Ukraine.

Another form of therapy is the annual all-Ukrainian Radio Dictation of National Unity. Since 2022, their titles have been *"Your Home is Ukraine," "On the Station Platform", "Letter to the Future", and "We must live"*. They convey Ukraine's wartime realities and the experiences of traumatic events. They are not primarily about literacy, but about unity, patriotism, and morale of the Ukrainian people.

President Volodymyr Zelensky plays an exceptional role in narrativizing the war and shaping a new image of Ukrainians amid existential challenges. He has become not only a political leader but also a moral-philosophical symbol of modern Ukraine. His public addresses – in world parliaments and before the international community – have turned into acts of national self-identification. In his speeches, President Zelensky uses simple, emotionally charged language that creates a sense of unity – he speaks from the people and for the people. His constant presence on social media, including video addresses from the streets of Kyiv, is therapeutic: it builds an emotional bridge between the government and society, reducing the traditional gap between them.

Video addresses of the President have become an *"emotional bridge"* that helped Ukrainians endure the crisis and maintain their morale. As a result, English-language media have begun using the phrase *"Zelenskyy's address"* for both his daily video messages to Ukrainians and his speeches in parliaments all around the world. His speeches are a means of moral leadership, enabling the nation to engage with state and international institutions.

Conclusions

Thus, the reconstruction of modern Ukrainian national identity is caused by the events of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. The suffering and pain, losses and uncertainty have led Ukrainians to rethink themselves as a nation and revitalize their history, culture, language, traditions, and symbols. An unbreakable Ukrainian people capable of defending their country and its values, supporting their compatriots and national unity, adapting to changes and existential challenges, are the core of their present national identity. Language and communication practices play an important role in these processes, contributing to the renewal and representation of the Ukrainian "we" as a nation in the world.

References

Alexander J., "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", in: Alexander J. C., Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., Sztompka P., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004.

American Psychological Association (n.d.). "Trauma", in: *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma

Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London 1983: Verso.

Arendt H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York, 1951: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Beukian, S. & Graff-McRae, R. (2018). *Trauma Stories as Resilience: Armenian and Irish National Identity in a Century of Remembering.* Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies, 8(8), 157-188. DOI: 10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-23374

Derrida J., *Writing and Difference*. Chicago 1978: University of Chicago Press.

Drozdzewski, D., Waterton, E., & Sumartojo, S. (2019). *Cultural memory and identity in the context of war: Experiential, place-based and political concerns.* International Review of the Red Cross, 101(910), 251-272. DOI: 10.1017/S1816383119000110

Erikson, K., *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood.* New York, 1976: Simon and Schuster.

Filippopoulos, Y. G., "Understanding the Concept of Being in General: From Being and Time Back to Young Heidegger", *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 9:1, 2024, pp. 9-32, https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.32079.

Freud S., *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York, 1961: W. W. Norton.

Gellner E., *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, 1983: Cornell University Press.

Hall S., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London 1997: Sage Publications.

Heidegger M., "On the Way to Language" (transl by Albert Hofstadter), in: Heidegger M., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York 1971.

Herman J. L., & van der Kolk B. A., *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York, 1997: Basic Books.

Hirschberger G., "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2018, Article 1441, pp. 1-17.

Kakoliris G., "Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction of Western Metaphysics: The Early Years", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 4, 2017, pp. 43-62.

Klein M., *The Psycho-Analysis of Children.* London 1932: Hogarth Press.

Kulyk V., "National Identity in Ukraine: Impact of Historical Legacies, Language, and Political Mobilization", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68:5, 2016, pp. 800–826.

Kryvda, N. Y. (2019). *КОЛЕКТИВНА ПАМ'ЯТЬ ЯК ЧИННИК ФОРМУВАННЯ ГРУПОВОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ [Collective Memory as a Factor of Group Identity Formation].* Філософські обрії, (41), 60-76. DOI: 10.33989/2075-1443.2019.41.172940

Levinas E., *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh 1969: Duquesne University Press.

Lyotard J.-F., *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Minneapolis 1988: University of Minnesota Press.

Marukhovska-Kartunova O., Turenko V., Zarutska O., Spivak L., & Vynnychuk R., "Analysis of Modern Socio-Cultural Processes in Ukraine and their Impact on the National Identity and Resilience Growth of Ukrainians in the Conditions of War", *Kurdish Studies*, 12:2, 2024, pp. 2780-2790.

Mitchell J., "Transnational Identity and the Gulf Crisis: Changing Narratives of Belonging in Qatar", *International Affairs*, 97: 4, 2021, pp. 929-947.

Moon D., "Reconstructions of Serbian National Identity in the Post-Yugoslav Era: A Thematic Survey", *Ethnologia Actualis*, 23:2, 2023, pp. 67-84.

Pasichnyk V., "Cossack Self-Government in Zaporozhya Sich as a Component of the State Tradition of Ukraine", *DG. Journal of History & Statehood*, 1:29, 2022, pp. 26–41.

Ricoeur P., *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago 2004: University of Chicago Press.

Sakizli, A., "The Neutrality of Dasein and the Shame in the Female Experience: A Feminist Philosophical Analysis", *Dia-noesis*, 17, June 2025, pp. 313-30, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.41716.

Smith A. D. *National Identity*. Reno 1991: University of Nevada Press.

Stepyko H., *Formation of Ukrainian Statehood: Historical Perspectives and Challenges*. Kyiv 2022: National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Trauma and Violence – What is Trauma and Its Effects?* Retrieved October 8, 2025, from https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/trauma-violence

Theodosiadis M., Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch), *Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London.* 2021. DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.00030431

UNHCR. *Ukraine Emergency – Ukraine Emergency: Operational Data Portal.* 2025, February. Retrieved October 10, 2025, from https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/ukraine-emergency

Winnicott D. W., *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London 1965: Hogarth Press.

Yekelchyk S., *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*. New York 2007: Oxford University Press.