

“My War” as a Means of Preserving the Individual and Collective Memories of Ukrainians During the Russian Invasion of 2022

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Tragic events marked European society in the 20th century. Revolutions took place throughout almost all of Europe, along with the First and Second World Wars. After the Second World War, which claimed millions of lives and left much of Europe in ruins, Europeans vowed to make every effort to ensure that war would never happen again. But at the beginning of the 21st century, new armed conflicts in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq shook humanity. In 2014, the Russian Federation annexed Crimea, and an armed confrontation between Russia and Ukraine began, localised in the eastern part of Ukraine, bordering Russia. On 2 March 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution “Aggression against Ukraine”, which condemned the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine and demanded that the Russian Federation immediately withdraw its troops from Ukraine, hoping to resolve the conflict politically. However, unfortunately, it was not possible to avoid a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the largest country in Europe, by Russian troops. The horrors of the 20th century arrived in the 21st century with a new force: the Russo–Ukrainian War.

This war has been going on for centuries,¹ but it escalated on 24 February 2022. For all Ukrainians, that morning began with the roar of Russian planes and explosions in their hometowns. At that moment, the reality of Ukrainian society split into a ‘before’ and an ‘after’. Beyond the basic preservation of life in the face of military aggression, this war raises several other issues important to humanity: a global food shortage, which is leading to famine in several countries; irreversible environmental damage; the moral degradation of humanity; and mass terrorism, among other things. As Ronald Eyerman, Alexander Jeffrey, and Elizabeth Butler Bresse noted, “[i]nevitably, mass individual suffering will produce a process of collective trauma, much less a mitigating social narrative to restore social fragmentation”.²

1 Andrii Bulvinskyi, *Ukrainsko-rosiiska viina 1658–1659 (The Ukrainian–Russian War of 1658–1659)*, dissertation abstract, Kyiv: Taras Shevchenko Kyiv University, 1998, 19.

2 Ronald Eyerman, Alexander Jeffrey, and Elizabeth Butler Bresse, *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering*, 2011, 20.

However, this war is terrible not only for Ukraine and for Ukrainians but also for Europe. Today, Ukraine is a shield that protects all European countries.³ If this shield falls, the security of Europe will collapse as well. The Ukrainian people are paying too high a price not only for their freedom, independence, and their democratic vector of development, but also for defending the democratic values of Europe and the whole world.

In 2014, the Russo–Ukrainian War became hybrid. Battles were fought not only in the physical spaces of the country, but primarily in the information space. Accordingly, the tactics for confronting a modern hybrid war must be different than those for ‘traditional’ warfare. Digital technologies make it possible to document and share the truth about events directly from the ground. History is no longer written only by scholars in academic institutions. It is also written by ordinary people, direct participants in tragic events.

People worldwide have been learning about the Russian Army’s war crimes and the experience of Russian aggression on the territory of Ukraine through the media – without being in the combat zone or in the range of Russian missiles. For the world to hear the truth about the Russo–Ukrainian War, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy created the platform My War.⁴ This project is designed to provide “an opportunity for every Ukrainian who witnessed the brutal war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, against democracy, against freedom, and against humanity, to describe their history”.⁵

These personal stories are modern literature. Natalia Dovganych notes that literature is “a factor in the formation and transfer of memory about the past, both personal and collective”.⁶ Since 2013, new literary studies have appeared on the collective trauma of Ukrainians. Particularly important have been the works of Tamara Hundorova, Olena Suchy, Vadym Vasylenko, Hrystyna Rutar, Marta Somyk, and Vi-

3 For more, see: Raisa Ivanchenko, *Ukraina – shchidnyi shchyt Yevropy: Uroky istorii i suchasnist (Ukraine – The Eastern Shield of Europe: Lessons of History and Modernity)*, Kyiv: Dnipro, 2022.

4 My War, <https://mywar.mkp.gov.ua/>, [accessed: 30.01.2023]. Currently, only the mobile version of the platform works.

5 Ibid.

6 Nataliia Dovganych, “Pamiat, trauma, i literatura: Sproby representatsii ta interpretatsii” (“Memory, Trauma, and Literature: Attempts at Representation and Interpretation”), *Ukrainske literaturoznavstvo (Ukrainian Literature Studies)*, 2020, 51–59, here 51 [author’s trans.].

taliy Ohienko.⁷ Looking at this scholarship can help to better understand the current collective trauma of Ukrainians caused by Russian aggression in 2022.

Today, the first published works of art, which highlight the tragic events of the full-scale Russian invasion, are beginning to appear. The individual poems of Eastern Ukrainian poet-volunteers, such as Serhiy Zhadan, Lyuba Yakymchuk, Natalka Marynychak, and others, can be found on social media networks.⁸ This literature is only now being written, and it will take time for the world to see it. However, the platform My War is already recording and publishing the stories of direct eyewitnesses of the war. As I see it, these stories are nonfiction literature. This is important for understanding these tragic events.

Stories preserving the war's memory are my research object. This article aims to analyse these personal stories of eyewitnesses of the Russo-Ukrainian War and to identify signs of collective trauma caused by the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. This research is significant because the experience of a collective trauma of a society in the 20th century showed that it is necessary not only for doctors or psychologists to respond to these problems, but also for scientists, journalists, politicians, and civil society in general. After all, I know from my

7 For specific works by these authors, see: Tamara Hundorova, *Tranzytna Kultura: Symptomy poskolonialnoi travmy, Statti ta esei* (*Transit Culture: Symptoms of Postcolonial Trauma, Articles and Essays*), Kyiv: Grani-T, 2013; Olena Suchy, "Problema kolektyvnoi travmy v ukrainskomu sotsiumi ta poshuk stratehii ii opanuvania" ("The Problem of Collective Trauma in Ukrainian Society and the Search for Strategies to Overcome It"), *Naukovi zapysky* (*Scientific Notes*) 74/6, 2014, 18–32; Vadym Vasylenko, "Zbyraiuchy ulamky dosvidu: Teoretyschna (re)kontseprualizatsiia travmy" ("Gathering Fragments of Experience: A Theoretical (Re)conceptualisation of Trauma"), *Slovo i chas* (*Word and Time*) 11, 2018, 109–122; Hrystyna Rutar, "Travmovana chy mifologichna pamiat? (na materialy romanu 'Tango smerti' Yuriia Vynnychuka)" ("Traumatized or Mythologised Memory? (Based on the Novel *Tango of Death* by Yuri Vynnychuk)", *Modern problems of linguistics and literary studies* 23, 2018, 294–298; Marta Somyk, "Bumerang pamiati: pro stydki i strashni spohady v ukrainskii literature" ("Boomerang of Memory: About Styles and Terrible Memories in Ukrainian Literature"), *Ukraino-polska mediaplatforma* (U.P.M.P) (*Ukrainian-Polish Media Platform*), 06 February 2018, <https://upmp.news/ua-in-ukraine/bumerang-pam-yati-pro-stidki-i-strashni-spagadi-v-ukrayinskij-literatur/> [accessed: 31.07.2024]; and Vitaliy Ohienko, "Posttravmatychnyi stresovyi syndrom i kolektyvna travma v osobystyh naratyvakh svidkiv Holodomoru" ("Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and Collective Trauma in Personal Narratives of Holodomor Witnesses), *Ukraina Moderna* (*Modern Ukraine*), 06 April 2018, <https://uamoderna.com/md/ogienko-holodomor-trauma> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

8 Works by these authors can be found on their respective Facebook pages or profiles: Serhiy Zhadan, official Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/serhiy.zhadan> [accessed: 20.01.2023]; Liubov Yakymchuk, Facebook profile, <https://www.facebook.com/iakymchuk> [accessed: 31.07.2024]; and Natalka Marynychak, Facebook profile, <https://www.facebook.com/vetra.smi> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

own experience that understanding and acknowledging the presence of psychological trauma, both individual and collective, is an important step towards overcoming it.

My research methodology uses a cultural-historical method, through which I analyse personal stories as documents testifying to the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. I apply a hermeneutic method when individual stories are ambiguous. On the one hand, these materials are documentations and reflect the circumstances and facts of reality. On the other hand, these stories are also literary works. Lastly, I use a phenomenological approach to reveal the existential significance of individuals' concerns, assessments, and attitudes.

I analysed the stories of 100 people posted on the My War platform. Overall, as of 31 December 2022, there are 3,691 stories on this platform. The stories are mainly written in Ukrainian and Russian, and sometimes, though rarely, in English. The platform has an automatic translation function, converting the texts into one of 75 languages. Therefore, people from all parts of the world can read the stories of ordinary Ukrainians. In this way, everyone who wants to know the truth about this war, can.

My study's timeframe covers stories written during the first six months of the war, running until the end of August 2022. People of different ages wrote these stories, ranging from 15 to 65 years old. A trauma experienced in the not-so-distant past hurts people and needs to be 'told' in the present tense. Hundorova emphasises that a traumatic past cannot be distanced from the present: "People who do not get rid of the trauma of the past will not be able to fully exist in the present, and accordingly in the future. Therefore, it is very important to 'work out' the memory".⁹ The leading researcher in trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, also stresses the need to understand the essence of trauma. "Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche", she writes, "it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available".¹⁰ Investigating the trauma of Ukrainians, Hundorova states that "trauma is a constant and unconscious fear, caused by explicit or implicit factors when the mechanisms of psychological protection simply do not work".¹¹ Accordingly, a traumatic experience often remains in a person's memories.

9 Hundorova, *Tranzytna Kultura*, 16 [author's trans.].

10 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, 4. For more classic studies on the theory of memory and trauma, see: Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998; and Joshua Pederson, "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory", *Narrative* 22/3, 2014, 333–353.

11 Hundorova, *Tranzytna Kultura*, 14–15.

In her work *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann, a scholar of English and literary studies, writes that "memories arise only when the experience to which they relate is completed and has gone into the past".¹² On the My War platform, people jot down their memories of the terrible events that they have experienced. Often, contributors explain why they write their stories on this platform: it is to not forget the events of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, to remember the treachery and cruelty of the enemy, and to pass this memory on to future generations. Sometimes, contributors write their stories a few days after the experience. But more often, they do so after several weeks.

On the platform, ordinary people share their stories, personal experiences, and fears of the Russian aggression against Ukraine; they describe their powerlessness and, sometimes, feelings of madness stemming from hopelessness. In most cases, these are reflections on past events. But these reflections demonstrate how they affect the present. These individual, narrativised experiences become direct evidence of the crimes of Russian military aggression. The My War platform is a means of preserving individual and collective memories. As evidence, the texts surpass being purely literary material. This falls in line with theories by Ukrainian literary critic Vasylenko, who writes that

testimony texts are rarely included in traditional narrative forms and canons – this is not always and not only literature, but the territory of writing aimed not so much at the reconstruction of "physiological tissue" as at "restoring the presence of a trace", repressed by language, i.e., witnessing the ethical, psychological, and physiological consequences of the traumatic experience of the body and memory.¹³

Many of the stories begin in a similar way: on the morning of 24 February 2022, people peacefully slept when they heard the first explosions in their hometowns. Dasha Yurchenko (I give the names of the contributors as they appear on the My War platform) from Bucha (in the Kyiv Oblast) writes: "February 24. Bucha, I wake up at 6 in the morning without an alarm clock, I go to the shower and in a half-asleep state I hear two very loud explosions in a row".¹⁴ Similarly, Inessa Pustovalova, from Kharkiv, writes "05.12 in the morning. Explosions", and Anastasia Zapeka, from Chernihiv, begins, "[i]n one moment, all my terrible dreams became reality

12 Aleida Assmann, *Prostory spohadu. Formy ta transformatsii kulturnoi transformatsii* (*Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*), trans. K. Dmytrenko, L. Doronicheva, and O. Yudin. Kyiv: Nika Centre, 2012, 20 [author's trans.].

13 Vasylenko, "Zbyraiuchy ulamky dosvidu", 110 [author's trans.].

14 Dasha Yurchenko, *My War*, <https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/madness.dy> [accessed: 11.01.2023].

when I woke up on Thursday morning at 6:40 to the blood-curdling wail of sirens and two powerful rockets".¹⁵

Stories of people not yet personally experiencing Russian aggression but learning about it through messages or calls from friends and relatives are the second most frequently recurring narrative. "On February 24 at 5:25 an unexpected call from Odesa from my brother Andriy 'The war has begun! Cities are being bombed!'" writes Yeliena Trutnieva from Hostomel.¹⁶ "Around five in the morning, my sleep was interrupted by a phone call from the father of my children. 'World, wake up, the war has begun', and a few minutes later I heard explosions!" posts Svetlana from Kharkiv.¹⁷ Mariia Murashko, from Kyiv, contributes that "The morning started suddenly! Around five-thirty in the morning, my mother called and said that Boryspil was being bombed!"¹⁸

In all the stories, the date of 24 February 2022 is a key moment. For most, it is a point of bifurcation, when the usual reality, the established picture of the world, is divided into a 'before' and an 'after'. Such a division of reality became an acute stress for all of Ukrainian society. These traumatic memories left an imprint on the psyche of both adults and children.

In many stories, there are memories of a time before the full-scale Russian invasion, yet this is still a time when there were already many warnings in information spaces about the possibility of it. People remember that they did not believe these warnings. For instance, Yulia from Kharkiv writes:

We discussed a possible attack with family and friends and thought with a smile: "No, he (fascist Putin) has enough sense not to attack a peaceful country", "What kind of attack can we talk about in the 21st century", "This old [Putin] will not commit yes, because then his country will go to the bottom" [...] We thought so on February 23, on the eve of the start of the war...¹⁹

Similarly, Serhii Huzenko from Kherson remembers thinking: "It's just ridiculous, it can't happen! Who in the 21st century could be so insane as to unleash a full-scale

15 Inessa Pustovalova, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/inessa_pustovalova [accessed: 10.01.2023]; and Anastasia Zapeka, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/anastasiya_zapeka [accessed: 10.01.2023].

16 Yeliena Trutnieva, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/elena_trutneva [accessed: 10.01.2023].

17 Svetlana, *My War*, <https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/Svetlyachok> [accessed: 10.01.2023].

18 Mariia Murashko, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/mariya_sokolovskaya [accessed: 10.01.2023].

19 Yulia, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/yuliya_shypko [accessed: 10.01.2023].

war in the center of Europe?"²⁰ The rejection of even the thought of this kind of threat to people's lives meant that when this reality arrived, many people refused to accept it.

The whole world saw the shocking footage of Bucha. The people who stayed in this city during the Russian occupation, and who return to these events through their memories, also do not accept that this reality took place. To distance themselves from deep trauma, they try to displace the memory of the events, assuring themselves that it was, for instance, a dream. Dasha Yurchenko recalls living under occupation in Bucha as follows:

And then begins a dream, long as eternity, which will never leave the memory again [...] The words 'fear' and 'panic' will not describe what we feel when the whole house shakes from the first tank shot on Vokzalna, a street 5 minutes from your house. The explosions become more frequent and louder, and you run to the basement in a panic, not thinking about anything else. In the cold and darkness, your body stops obeying you, and the explosions are so loud that, out of ignorance, you are already 100% sure that there are no houses above.²¹

Analysing the stories from the first month of the war, it is possible to distinguish categories in their authors' memories. Anger, a hatred of the enemy, and fear feature most prominently. Olena from Ovruch writes, "[a]nd every day you live in fear... Tension, despair, and tears are already the norm".²² Inna Tokarieva from Mykolaiv, a city that was not shelled for only about 20 days in the first six months of the war, admits: "I have never hated before in my life. I was angry – yes, I was offended – yes. And now I HATE it. Openly and unequivocally". Further on, she adds, "THE TITANIUM SHIELD OF HATE. People. People are simply enchanting. It seems that the entire city has been covered with a single impenetrable shield of titanic Hate".²³ Andrii Lisovyi from Kyiv similarly expresses that "[t]his is unforgivable. I hate everyone who dares to set foot on our land and I despise everyone who, having the opportunity to learn the truth, chooses the path of a slave without going out into the streets".²⁴

Frequently, it is not customary to talk openly about hatred in society; this is a taboo. But here, on the platform, people capitalise the word and use it as an association. As a result of trauma, people break the taboo by exposing their emotions.

20 Serhii Huzenko, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/sergei_guzenko [accessed: 10.01.2023].

21 Yurchenko, *My War*.

22 Olena, *My War*, <https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/Olena> [accessed: 10.01.2023].

23 Inna Tokarieva, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/inna_tokarjeva [accessed: 10.01.2023].

24 Andrii Lisovyi, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/andrii_lisovyi [accessed: 10.01.2023].

This emotion is directed against the enemy, the 'Other'. In this way, the contributors try to distance themselves from their emotions or redirect them towards the enemy. At the same time, they do not openly mention the horrors of war. Often the contributors use words such as "fear", "horror", "death", "basement", "broken", and "burned", among others.²⁵ Rather than depicting the horrors of the war in detail, they describe their emotions. This demonstrates their self-isolation and the presence of their trauma, which are painful to write about. Therefore, here we can see the contributors' attempts to bypass traumatic memories or redirect their anger and rage at the enemy. Assmann points out that silencing trauma is a "purposeful strategy", through which people think they protect themselves from traumatic experiences.²⁶

In the material I analysed on the platform, it was possible to single out a stage when the contributors began to understand their new reality. Here, I distinguished two opposing strategies: an acceptance of the thought of imminent death and/or the desire to die so as not to see everything; and a surge of energy and a desire to do something. Those adopting the first strategy, as seen in the stories on My War, delay evacuating to safer places and fantasise of a quick death, without suffering. Alyona Mazurenko, from Kyiv, writes:

Tonight I already came to terms with death when my house was shaking when planes flew so low one after another [...] Somehow it got cold. Siren. Explosion, cry, death. Now the day can be described as follows. I look at the photo, and I hear about death... sorrow has come. But now there are no tears because the horror has passed, emptiness and wild coldness remain in the soul. I am afraid that I can no longer cry. I am afraid that the news of death is not shocking...²⁷

When people accept reality as one in which death cannot be avoided, they are often in a state of anxiety that has not yet left them. On the My War platform, anxiety is often expressed in descriptions of heart palpitations, sudden waking in the night, dreams of the horrors of war, the inability to sleep, the anticipation of coming under fire, the phantom sounds of roaring aeroplanes, and air raid sirens.

In the second strategy, people try to leave dangerous places or, despite fear or panic attacks, actively help the military and those who need it. "We started actively volunteering", writes Maria Murashko. "Dad went to dig trenches, mom baked bread for our defenders, and they donated canned goods, some clothes, blankets, and mattresses to receive refugees", she continues.²⁸ Inessa Pustovalova states that "[p]eople

25 My War, <https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/>.

26 Assmann, *Prostory spohadu*, 296.

27 Alyona Mazurenko, My War, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/mo_sparkle [accessed: 10.01.2023].

28 Murashko, My War.

are very inspiring: I coordinate financial assistance, we collect things for the army, civilians [...] seven nervous breakdowns and panic attacks are behind me. There are no more tears. And now I don't feel anything at all. I loaded myself with matters related to helping the country".²⁹ Svetlana expresses that "Something must be done! And it began. I registered on the official website as a volunteer. To accept a child with a family [...] The assistance of the State Emergency Service, in sorting out debris. Searching for people somewhere in the social network. This is how my battle began".³⁰ Or, similarly, Iryna Zlatieva from Dnipro recalls that

In two hours, they collected four cars of food, drinks, things [...] A large amount of money was then used to buy medicine and things. And it went on...day after day... Purchasing, searching drugstores, volunteer centers, checkpoints, pest control, hospitals... At school, everyone was actively weaving camouflage nets...³¹

Most of the people who describe such stories chose a path of struggle. The reasons for choosing this seem obvious. There is a desire to be not just an observer, to not hope that someone else will help or protect you, but to change something yourself. Broadly, this collective awareness of the need to act, to rise in response to an external threat, accelerated the formation of the Ukrainian nation and accumulated nation-building processes. The war influenced many people's views of themselves as belonging to the Ukrainian nation. Sociological surveys, politicians, historians, and journalists also indicate this.³²

29 Pustovalova, *My War*.

30 Svetlana, *My War*.

31 Iryna Zlatieva, *My War*, https://mywar.mkip.gov.ua/user/zlata_zlateva [accessed: 31.07.2024].

32 See: National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS), "Iak viina zminyla suspilny svidomist ukrainsiv: sotsiologichni doslidzhennia" ("How the War Changed the Public Consciousness of Ukrainians: Sociological Studies"), 09 November 2022, <https://niss.gov.ua/news/komentari-ekspertiv/yak-viina-zminyla-suspilnu-svidomist-ukrayintsiv-sotsiologichni> [accessed: 28.01.2023]; Dmytro Syniak, "'Tsia viina prizvela do formuvannia ukrainskoi natsii i zrobyla nas sylnishimi...' Prozpovidaiut holovy hromad" ("This War Led to the Formation of the Ukrainian Nation and Made Us Stronger...' Community Leaders Say"), *Detseentralizatsiia (Decentralisation)*, 07 March 2022, <https://decentralization.gov.ua/news/14620> [accessed: 31.07.2024]; Vitaliy Mykhailovskii, "Narodzheni viinoiu. Iak uprodovzh stolit zbroini konfliity formuvali ukrainsku natsiiu" ("Born of War: How Armed Conflicts Shaped the Ukrainian Nation over Centuries"), *Ukrainsyi Tyzhden (Ukrainian Weekly)*, 09 January 2023, <https://tyzhden.ua/narodzheni-vijnoiu-iak-uprodovzh-stolit-zbrojni-konfliity-formuvali-ukrainsku-natsiiu/> [accessed: 28.01.2023]; and Oleksandr Reznik, "Kolektyvna identychnist za umov viiny: vid kompleksu menshovartosti do natsii peremozhtsiv" ("Collective Identity under Conditions of War: From an Inferiority Complex to a Nation of Winners"), Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 24

On the platform, people began to measure reality through the categories of 'self' and 'other'. In their testimonies, the category 'self' or 'us' is defined by words and phrases such as "our", "dear", "relatives", and "our kitties".³³ The word 'own' is always associated with national and state attributes, such as the Ukrainian flag, the colours blue and yellow, the chevrons of the Ukrainian military, and other similar symbols. The contributors depict the category of 'stranger' with words such as "those", "inhumans", "enemies", "invaders", or "orcs", among others.³⁴ To denote the flag of the Russian Federation, Ukrainians choose derogatory expressions such as "tricolour", "aquafresh",³⁵ and "Russian rag".³⁶

The My War platform is nonfiction literature, which preserves the individual memory of Ukrainians during the Russo–Ukrainian War. Narrativised through media, the personal memories of Ukrainians acquire the characteristics of collective memory. This is facilitated by the wide spatial scope of the memories (i.e., all the regions of Ukraine are covered), and the fact that not only direct participants and witnesses share their experiences on the platform. Some contributors bring to life the experiences of others by sharing their stories, creating indirect expressions of collective memory.

The individual stories posted on the My War platform allow Ukrainians to understand their involvement in historical events. And most importantly, they help citizens understand that they are not alone with these traumatic experiences. This understanding helps strengthen the unity of the nation. One of the consequences of this war is a stronger sense of national identity than ever before.

The My War platform is a vital tool for documenting and preserving memories of the Russo-Ukrainian War, facilitating the sharing of personal narratives to address psychological trauma. This task is of paramount importance in contemporary society, as memory shapes the ideological constructs that define a nation's cultural and historical consciousness. The Russian Federation's continued military aggression against Ukraine has caused a fundamental shift in Ukrainian identity, emphasising the importance of preserving and comprehending these memories.

The platform My War catalogues these memories and contributes to a nuanced comprehension of the Russo-Ukrainian War. These shared memories not only aid individual healing but also facilitate a greater understanding of the conflict. Eyewitness accounts provide an impartial viewpoint of the events, revealing the motives

July 2022, <https://dif.org.ua/en/article/kolektivna-identichnist-za-umov-viyni-vid-kompleksu-menshovartosti-do-natsii-peremozhstv> [accessed: 31.07.2024].

33 My War, <https://mywar.mkp.gov.ua/>.

34 Ibid.

35 Aquafresh is the name of a toothpaste that has the same colours (red, blue, and white) as the flag of the Russian Federation.

36 My War, <https://mywar.mkp.gov.ua/>.

behind Russia's military incursion and anticipating possible consequences for European society and global security. The narratives showcased on My War serve as a counter to the partial accounts perpetuated by the Russian media, offering an alternative and more credible perspective.

After conducting a thorough examination of the stories showcased on the platform, it is clear that the Ukrainian experience has been affected by a communal trauma due to military aggression. The trauma presents itself through multiple signs, including shock, disbelief of reality, acute awareness of impending death, intense emotions of animosity, and the division of the world into 'self' and 'other'. These categories highlight the significant psychological influence of the conflict on both individuals and the collective psyche of the Ukrainian population.

Ultimately, the My War platform acts not only as a storehouse for personal accounts but also advances comprehension of the psychological costs incurred by the Russo-Ukrainian War. Documenting and analysing these memories provide valuable insights not only into individual experiences of trauma, but also into the wider societal and geopolitical implications of the conflict. This scholarly approach promotes a nuanced understanding of the war's consequences, facilitating the development of strategies to address and alleviate the collective trauma experienced by the Ukrainian population.

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