



The book as a symbol

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Abstract

This paper presents a chronological account of one academic and her family's experiences of the war, and the importance of finding solace in books to create a sense of normality. The author also reflects on 'push and pull' factors in relation to migration and living outside of Ukraine during the ongoing conflict.

Keywords

symbolism, war, displacement, books, reading for resilience

The beginning of the full-scale war

The beginning of the full-scale war was overflowing with symbols for me. I regret that I didn't have the strength or opportunity to write anything down back then; my memory isn't as fresh now. But I remember how it seemed that everything was screaming about symbolism.

For example, my Facebook feed was ablaze with sunflowers, which are supposed to grow if the Russians put seeds in their pockets before stepping on our land. And I kept thinking that this was an allusion to a new life, in contrast to those Ilovaisk sunflowers, "not harvested from the summer" (© Serhiy Zhadan), which became a sad symbol of the early autumn of 2014.

Or similar parallels with the IL-76 aircraft. Everyone remembers how eight years ago, in June, the Russians shot down our plane with paratroopers from the 25th brigade near Luhansk. And today, in the first days of the full-scale war, our defenders, as if in response, shoot down the same IL-76 with Russian paratroopers who were trying to land in Vasylkiv.

Symbols, symbols all around.

But what about books?

It seemed to me that books were being discussed everywhere. So, when Andriy Lyubka, a well-known Ukrainian writer who has now fully switched to volunteering, said at a cultural

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event in Berlin that books are not relevant today, it caused me internal resistance. No, I fully support the thesis that the main thing now is to help the front, and everything should be directed towards the fight against the Russian army. But, despite this, I have a deep conviction that books are important in various contexts, precisely in this war, precisely today.

We must be aware that if we, Ukrainians, were more educated in general, if we learned our own history, many more of us would have been ready for a full-scale war. And if we had managed to gradually leave the post-Soviet, Russian, and Russian-language cultural and media discourse over the past 30 years, to sever this rotten umbilical cord, the war probably wouldn't have happened at all. A large component of this war is a cultural war. It is not for nothing that the Russians burn Ukrainian books in the occupied territories, bring their textbooks to schools, and demonstratively change signs with the names of settlements to Russian-language ones.

From our side, the book plays an equally important role. Soldiers read books. In history books, they seek answers to the question of why we are where we are now. In military books, which are quickly translated in real-time by volunteers from different languages, they seek practical advice. Ukrainian storyteller Sashko Lirnyk wrote that the soldiers even listen to his fairy tales – probably for relaxation or recharging. And it's no secret that there are many non-military people on the front lines now, and even more who were far from the army just eight years ago. So, it turns out that many people who work with books in civilian life are now fighting. They continue to read books now. And they also pay attention to books. That's why we have various photos and evidence about books: a bookshelf of a bombed-out house covered with earth from an explosion; a torn copy of the Ukrainian translation of Hannah Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem" in an apartment near Kyiv, liberated from the occupiers; the book "Traces on the Road" – a bestseller about the first years of the war by Valeriy Ananyev, which someone put on the burnt corpse of a Russian. In each photo, the book is a separate symbol.

I will also share my personal experience. Like many, I didn't want to believe in a full-scale invasion, even though the documents were collected and the car's tank was full. Anton, the father of my daughter Marta, and I agreed that on the first day of a possible bombing of Kyiv, I would take the little one to him in the Carpathians, where he had been living for the past few years. We packed our things for a few weeks, as we always did when we went to him for vacation. We took enough books with us: both children's and adults'. Besides, there, in the Carpathians, a few more were waiting for me – a gift from Anton. It quickly became clear that we would not be returning to Kyiv soon; there was a feeling that our hometown could be captured and destroyed. And, of course, first of all, it was scary for people: for family, for friends and acquaintances who remained in Kyiv. But, for some reason, in these thoughts about fear, loss, the possible need to start everything from scratch, I also thought about books. About those books that stood on beautiful white shelves in the big room, and about those that stood on the shelf in the kitchen; about those that were bought and those that were given; and most importantly – about those that have not yet been read. Many of us have a weakness – we buy more and more books without having time to read the previous ones. Because the Ukrainian book of the last decades is love, it is something we can truly be proud of, so we wanted to buy and read these books. But it turned out to buy more than to read. And I couldn't stop thinking about the fact that I didn't have time to read or finish reading dozens of books that I planned. And these worlds seemed forever lost to me, forever closed. I really didn't think

about the fact that I could die and life would end there, but about the fact that I could die and not find out how a very strong book by Iris Hanika ends in the translation of Yuri Prokhasko, or never read Itzhak Singer not in Russian, but in Ukrainian, in a wonderful translation by Yaroslava Strikha. And so many other books: fiction and non-fiction, written by our authors and translated.

Then it got worse. When the difficult decision was made to go abroad with my daughter, we, of course, left most of our things and books behind. We only took a few children's and a few adults' books with us. The children's books were untouched, but I gradually left my books with friends along the way, never finishing them. It was hard for me to carry all the things myself, because everything simply didn't fit into one bag and the children's and adults' backpacks with which we set off. I am glad that I left the books with Ania and Ivanka, whom we stayed with in Poland, because I know that they will read and appreciate them. But leaving an unread paper book in each next city on our way was sad and brought to a lump to my throat.

It was equally heartbreaking to see Ukrainian books on the shelves of German bookstores just a few months later. Marta and I bought the first few new children's books in Frankfurt on the Oder. And for the entire hour-long train ride to Berlin, my seven-year-old child didn't look up from the book – she read and read. Tears also involuntarily welled up when I saw Ukrainian books in Berlin bookstores and libraries the next few times, until I got used to the fact that the books are there, they are available, you can reach them, physically hold them in your hands, buy them, read them.

And how and why did the books become available? I think there was a demand for them. Otherwise, it's difficult to explain why various organisations in Ukraine and abroad began to actively engage with books. I assume that after satisfying the most basic needs for food, housing, and simple personal belongings, Ukrainians who found themselves in various European countries began to look for books. It would be interesting to research this. It would also be interesting to look at the statistics on listening to and downloading e-books and audiobooks that various platforms and publishers made free. Children's content deserves special attention. With the idea that children should listen to fairy tales, not bombings, a separate Telegram channel "Yava and Pavlusha" was created, where everyone could upload an audiobook they had read and recorded. In four months of full-scale war, the channel has more than 100,000 subscribers and hundreds of audio recordings from professional actors, as well as ordinary moms and dads, grandparents, and the children themselves. The best platform specialising in audiobooks, "Abuk", opened most children's books for free listening back in March, and they are still available for free. My Marta listens to audio fairy tales in every free minute, and all these opportunities really help us enrich her life.

Moreover, the book allowed my Marta to find new formats of communication with her relatives, who ended up very far away due to the war. Marta misses her dad terribly and often cries when she remembers that he is not around. Every evening, we invariably call Anton and often he reads to Marta before bed. My parents – Marta's grandparents – also sometimes read to her via video call. But she and her dad have a special reading tradition. Anton chooses books that he himself loved in childhood and opens the world of these adventures to his daughter. It's bitter that they need a phone and the Internet for this now, but it's good that they found such a format; it's inspiring.

Returning to my own experience, I must state that in the first surreal days, like everyone else, I only read the news, there was no talk of books. Olena Huseynova, a book expert, talks about such a loss of the reading habit by all of us in her new podcast “Bookstore” on *Suspilne Radio*. But as soon as the first shock passed and we learned to live with constant monitoring of the news, I started reading and listening to books in any free minute. It seems, more than before, because I wanted to catch up with what was taken away by the war, to return the opportunity to read those books left at home or on the road. This war highlights our priorities. And now I see in practice that the book is one of mine.

14.07.2022

Autumn Berlin

I love these few days of the year the most, when autumn has already arrived, but the sun is still pleasantly warm. I immediately remember carefree school or student years, when it was best to walk in Kyiv parks at such a time. Berlin is wonderful at this time. Green in summer, it is now full of an unimaginable number of shades of red, yellow and green. In Kyiv, such “Indian summer” days usually last a week. And then the warmth is abruptly replaced by frost. The leaves on the trees freeze and turn into gloomy brown rags. I don’t know how it usually happens in Berlin, but this year the “Indian summer” has been going on for almost two months. And it’s fantastically beautiful. The wild grapes that twine around the five-story brick buildings are simply mind-blowing with their colours. The red giant hawthorn berries stand out brightly against the background of green crowns. When the wind blows, yellow leaves fall on you from everywhere. And whole streams of leaves form under your feet. This time, in this city, is simply created to be happy and carefree, walking with coffee and a cigarette along the beautiful streets of quiet neighbourhoods. I like this city, it suits me, I feel it, and I could definitely be happy here. In any other year, but not today, not now.

Yesterday, Russia bombed my country, my native Kyiv, all day long. In the photos from the early missile strikes, against the backdrop of burnt cars and the bodies of the dead, I saw the edge of the house I grew up in, my favourite childhood playground, Shevchenko Park, with which, as the director of the Ukrainian PEN, Tanya Teren wrote on her Facebook page today, every Kyiv resident has their own memories. The [Russians] are hitting my places of power, the dearest quarters of the dearest city.

That’s why it’s so hard for me to be far away now, to be in Berlin. I can’t be happy in this wonderful European city, because more than anything I want to walk the streets of Kyiv, with all its shortcomings and eclecticism, gas pollution and buildings. On days like yesterday, for some reason, I want to be at home the most. To be with those you love, and with what you love. To be in a city that is dearer than any European capital. And this cannot be explained logically, because a person should be guided by instincts, they should strive for safety. And I strive to be with my people, to experience the same thing as other Ukrainians, to have this common experience – the experience of my people.

Yes, I made the decision to spend a year in Berlin. For the sake of my daughter’s safety and peace, for the sake of being able to support my family and help the military. I realise that my situation is much easier than that of many who were forced to leave Ukraine because of the full-scale war. Thanks to the huge number of opportunities that have opened up to scientists and students since the end of February, I received a research

scholarship in Germany. This funding allows me to live here, continue my scientific and teaching work, and help the army.

But how good it is that the scholarship is only for a year. I have a defined period that I need to endure, I have a goal, I understand why I am here, and when I can return. And this, in fact, is very important. I sincerely sympathise with women who left Ukraine and want to return home, but do not know when they will be able to do so. Such a suspended state, such uncertainty, is the most tormenting. And the time frame that I have gives me the luxury of planning a year ahead, while the plans of my relatives, friends, and acquaintances are shrinking to a few days. These time frames and a certain definition of the future are a great advantage that I realise.

My scholarship ends in April, and I know that I will be home in May. I see myself walking the green streets of my beloved city, breathing in the scent of chestnuts and lilacs, enjoying the sun's rays and the islands of tulips in the city parks. I smell the lilacs and hear the buzzing of the beetles. I am very, very much looking forward to my May in my City.

11.10.2022

Push and pull factors

Today, on the *Commons* website, I saw an article by sociologist and colleague from the Department of Sociology at NaUKMA, Nastia Ryabchuk (2023), about the trajectories of Ukrainian refugees. Nastia professionally summarises the available statistical data, reflects on the push and pull factors that influence Ukrainians' motivations to flee the war and return home. Of course, I wanted to "try on" the results of the research on myself.

Housing, work, and provision were considered in the article as important factors of both push and pull. If housing was destroyed and jobs were lost in Ukraine, this pushed people to seek a new life abroad. Conversely, if migrants managed to find housing and work, or other sources of livelihood, in one of the countries that provided temporary shelter to Ukrainians, they were most likely not in a hurry to go home. In Germany, I had housing, a job, and a completely sufficient salary. But, as for me, all these things did not become pull factors. Rather, I considered them as a necessary tool for a temporary stay away from home. Would I have left Ukraine without a scholarship? Yes, because that was a joint family decision regarding my daughter Marta – the family decided that Marta should be further away from the war. Do I want to stay here longer than the scholarship year? No, I want to go back. Maybe without a scholarship I would have returned earlier, that's true. But in the long run, a few months don't matter too much. Therefore, in my situation, it is probably necessary to look for other reasons and motives.

Nastia writes a lot about mothers with children, for whom the key pull factor in forced migration is the safety of children, as well as the child's ability to attend school offline, go to clubs, and various events, and everything related to our idea of a "normal childhood". And an important push factor is the lack of support from a partner and relatives in general. It's true, it's hard to disagree with that. Although I would put completely different accents.

Let's start with safety. Yes, there are no missiles flying here in Berlin, but it is here that my Marta is much closer to the conditional border with Russia than in her native Kyiv. There are a lot of Russians in Germany, both those who have lived here for a long time and

those who are coming now. There are two children from Russia in Marta's class who, together with their families, ended up here after the start of active mobilisation in the Russian Federation. And in general, there are noticeably more Russians in the school than Ukrainians. There are only a few Ukrainian children, and even those speak Russian.

For my daughter, this coexistence with a significant number of Russians in the same space is very contradictory. On the one hand, of course, it is easier for her to understand Russian than German, so she often plays with Russians, she is personally interested in this or that child. On the other hand, she understands everything that is happening, she hates Russians and Russia, and everything connected with them.

As for me, honestly, I'm just scared for my daughter. I'm afraid that she will be offended or hurt by the Russians, of whom there are really many around. In Berlin, you hear Russian all the time on the streets, it seems like you are surrounded by hated Russians everywhere. Most of them, in fact, are ours, just Russian-speaking. But it's not written on their foreheads, and I still get triggered by Russian, no matter who speaks it, somehow unconsciously. And "triggered" is not an artistic expression. I really feel unpleasant cold chills on my skin, I feel uncomfortable and unpleasant. And I just want to run away so I can hear less Russian. There is little logic in this, because we all know that there are enough people left in Ukraine who speak Russian. But this argument is beyond logic - it's about the physical sensations of coldness on the back that you want to get rid of. That's why I instinctively want to take Marta away from the Russians who seem to have flooded Berlin. Ironically, in this regard, "dangerous" Ukraine seems safe to me.

The second point is a "normal childhood". Here in Berlin, Marta and I do go to a lot of different events for children: museums, workshops, theatre, cinema, literary readings, planetarium, and zoos. It was here that Marta started learning to play the piano and attending a theatre group. This is all wonderful, I am glad that my little one is learning new things and developing. But I have a persistent inner feeling that all these numerous entertainments are painful attempts to maintain the normality that is falling apart.

Because, in fact, the phrase "normal childhood", if we recall our own growing up, is not associated with a high-quality school program or rich extracurricular activities. My happy childhood is going to visit my great-grandfather and great-grandmother with my parents every Saturday, or riding bicycles with my grandfather to the dacha, listening to my grandmother's stories about everything in the world, eating a "penyok" cake with my mother on the way home, and holding my dad's hand while falling asleep...

This year, Marta was far from her family, she was far from her dad, whom she loves very much. And I'm not at all sure that the best clubs or master classes in the world will compensate for this. But what hurts me the most is what I have become over this year. I had never yelled at Marta before or lost my temper in front of her. And here I was yelling and cursing, and I even tore up her German notebook.

Objectively, I understand that we are all traumatised, that we have the right to weaknesses. And nothing bad happened, we did not lose trust in each other, I still speak frankly with my daughter about everything, I have the strength to explain and not lie about anything. Nevertheless, at some point I clearly felt that our relationship had changed. As a mother, I stopped liking myself, I lost my self-respect.

Also, I didn't have the strength to organise Marta's birthday the way she wanted. I meanly complained to her that I didn't have the resources for all this organisation of the holiday

with German-speaking children, and I persuaded her, as an adult, to do without a birthday, even though I knew that this holiday is still too important for my daughter. And then I sighed with relief when she got sick in the weeks leading up to the holiday and couldn't bring invitations to the guests. At home, we would definitely have come up with something: we would have called by phone, postponed the holiday, we would have celebrated anyway. But here I used the virus as an excuse, and did not organise the most important day of the year for my daughter.

Therefore, the argument about a "normal childhood" seems even less justified to me than the argument about safety. And I doubt that the factor of "lack of support from a partner and relatives in general" can fully outline the complex difficulties described above.

In my dissertation, I wrote about the motives of people's participation in the protests on Maidan in 2013-14 and observed how the respondents, in the process of in-depth interviews together with the interviewers, dug into their own less obvious, partially hidden, but often key motives. And if the results of quantitative studies of participation in the Maidan events showed that the key motive was resistance to the authorities' brutal repressions against the protesters, the in-depth interviews revealed a whole range of external circumstances and internal emotions that actually prompted people to go to the Maidan. From the desire to be close to loved ones to the desire to feel an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness, from a sense of conscience to a sense of guilt.

It seems to me that it can be the same with the push and pull factors of forced migrants. When I conditionally divide into two columns the factors that encourage me to stay in Germany and the factors that push me to return, I, of course, remember the safety of the child and the lack of support from relatives. But then I start thinking about things that should not be important, secondary, and definitely irrational, but it seems that they are the ones that tip the scales.

For example, I realised that it is very important for me to have this experience of war, a shared experience with my people. It sounds pompous, but it's true. I understand that the end of the war is still far away, and the post-war years will not be easier. But I see my future in Ukraine, by the way, I never wanted to live anywhere else for a long time. That's why I want to be there physically. Objectively, I could strive to be here as long as possible despite the difficulties, because here I can actively help the army, and with my Ukrainian salary at home, I will be able to do this in an order of magnitude smaller volumes. But subjectively, I still want to be with everyone, even if I am less useful there.

So it turns out that the more I think about different factors and motives, the more I tend to think that it's like in the series "Friends" when Ross compared Rachel with one of his girlfriends to choose the one to be with. He found a bunch of flaws in Rachel, and about her rival, he simply wrote "she's not Rachel." And it didn't matter how wonderful and beautiful that girl was, Ross just loved another. Maybe it's the same with me? It doesn't matter how good and safe it is here in Germany if I just don't want to notice these positive aspects, I don't want to adapt and gradually forget about the war and home. Because it's not "Rachel" here.

20.01-07.02. 2023

Participant Observation: Surveys show that the vast majority of those who left Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale war want to return home. If I were involved in quantitative sociological research methods, I would definitely write a methodological

article about how external circumstances during a survey influence the respondents' answers. For example, if a woman fleeing the war with one suitcase, a child, and a cat in a carrier is asked about her plans at the border, there is no doubt that the interview situation itself strongly influences her answers. Or, for example, the general increase in the level of patriotism. How can you say under such pressure, "I don't need to go back to Ukraine, I've always wanted to go to Europe"? Therefore, in my opinion, all these mantras "we want to go home" are often empty words. Most of those who really wanted to have already returned. And most of those who are still abroad, consciously or unconsciously, have other plans.

I'm just observing - I have observation mode on here in Berlin, and even that is very limited. I can't handle it for long. Taking my child to a Ukrainian group and then quickly running away - that's my strategy. If any events or workshops require my presence, if I start talking to other parents, or even if I observe for too long - it always ends badly. I start getting angry at these people, I'm irritated by their ease and normalcy in the new reality, their long-term plans related to staying in Germany, their adaptability and rootedness in the already new reality.

I fully understand that I'm biased. That's why I don't conduct any research. I simply don't have enough distance from the situation, which is necessary in Academia. I just write these texts for myself, to pour out all the emotions that accumulate in me, without any claims to representativeness or objectivity. You could even say that this is a purely subjective and selectively constructed reality by me. But that doesn't make it any less suffocating.

No generalisations, just specific cases. Back in the summer of 2022, at one of the children's programs, I met a girl from Lviv. She's here with her two daughters. Let's call her Olena because, to be honest, I don't remember her real name anymore, and it's not nice to mention real names without permission.

So, Olena stuck in my memory because she actively discussed the nuclear war, feared nuclear bombings of Berlin, and generally thought it would be better to move to Australia - it's safer there, far from the main stage of potential nuclear competition.

Nevertheless, for now, Olena is still in Germany. And I truly admire two things about her position. Firstly, she actively participates in various rallies organised by the Ukrainian diaspora in Berlin. I often see both her and her daughters in photos from social media. And secondly, she honestly says that this whole situation with the full-scale war is a chance for her. She recently got divorced, has a bad relationship with her ex-husband, the children call him once a month or even less often. Nothing is holding her back at home, she wants to stay here. She's not working yet, plans to attend German language courses paid for by the state, and plans to find herself. But for now, she's quite comfortable: new acquaintances, many opportunities for her children's development, a new reality. Besides the rallies, Olena goes to all the concerts of Ukrainian musicians in Berlin, to various parties. Well, she doesn't need to work several jobs, does she? But at least Olena sincerely says that she doesn't plan to return, she's building her life here, if it hasn't worked out with Australia yet.

And Olena is far from being alone in this. A girl whom I occasionally run into because our children go to the same Ukrainian Saturday school, and before that they were in the same summer camp for Ukrainian kids - let's call her Mariana - once told me that she and her

son are "just the two of them." She's probably divorced too, or maybe Timur never had a father - I don't know, I didn't ask for details. One thing is clear: no one and nothing is holding them back in Kyiv. Mariana is thinking about how to get her economist diploma recognised here in Germany, considering an internship, even thinking about further studies. In short, she's making plans.

Oh, here's another example. A girl whom I even know a little from my previous life, because we studied at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy around the same time and have mutual friends. Let's call her Sofia. Sofia doesn't have children. She ended up in Berlin because her ex-boyfriend lives here, and Sofia would like to rekindle their relationship. Sofia is working, for now in part-time jobs, but in her field, and she's actively learning the language, which she's good at. Actually, I talked to Sofia a bit about all this. I asked about her relationship with her parents, tried to understand what it's like when there's nothing particularly holding you back. Sofia wants to stay in Berlin, wants to get back together with her boyfriend, wants to build a career here.

By the way, since I mentioned Sofia, who went to her boyfriend, it's worth mentioning the opposite experience - the experience of fleeing from men. I'm talking about women who experienced violence from their husbands and, if it weren't for the open borders, might never have dared to break off toxic relationships. Oksana Dutchak, a sociologist who studies, among other things, the role of women in the field of reproductive labour, spoke about this aspect in one of her public lectures. And I, in my own far from systematic observations, have also encountered such cases.

Most of these women, like Olena, Mariana, Sofia, and women similar to them, do not evoke aggression in me, perhaps only apathy, because I'm sad that they are okay with everything, they don't feel drawn to home, they don't feel much pain. But I'm grateful to them for their honesty, first and foremost with themselves. They openly say that they would like to stay abroad for various reasons. I truly wish them all the best. Especially if there really is nothing and no one left for them at home. I just don't particularly want to communicate with them because we are in completely different contexts.

At the same time, I can't help but get angry when I see in the Facebook groups for Ukrainians in Berlin the demand for manicures, eyelash extensions, all kinds of laminations. Today, Olena wrote under one of these posts that she wants a free eyelash lamination. No, I know the formula from the military, even from 2014: "We are there, on the front lines, so that you here, in the rear, can live your normal lives". I know, but for me all this is somehow not the time. Yes, it's not the time for civil society to criticise the government, which is always necessary, it's not the time for eyelash lamination. Because it's something so alien in times of war, something that stands out too much from the flow of news. Moreover, I support, let's say, a manicure in Kyiv, because in that context it is a manifestation of resilience, it is in defiance of war. But a manicure in Berlin is something completely different for me for some reason.

The topic of manicure is a separate personal story altogether. The manicure and pedicure master, Slava, whom I've been going to for the last few years, is now, as in 2014, on the front lines. So my shellac will wait for his return. I don't want it without him.

But I've digressed from the topic. And so far, I'm not very good at conveying my feelings. I'll try to describe a situation where I really had to restrain myself from making a scene.

At one of the recent events for Ukrainian children in Berlin, in addition to families with children, there was an acquaintance of the organiser at the workshop. A creative lady, seems to be an actress, maybe not only that. After exploring the islands of Oceania, ships, and various maps, the children and everyone else were supposed to draw their own map of places that are important to them. The idea is good, even therapeutic. The children drew something that remained in Ukraine - their home, their grandparents' house, school or kindergarten, playgrounds, etc., and something that they found here abroad - new places of strength. And the theatrical lady, let's call her Natalia, drew a theatre, a museum, a library, and coloured them with four colours symbolising four countries - Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, and Germany. Such a bright, cheerful picture - places where she feels good in each of these countries, wherever she is. The mothers applauded, thanked Natalia for sharing her inner world. And I could barely restrain myself from lashing out at that Natalia. How is it possible: it turns out she doesn't care where she lives, works, creates? Ukraine - good, Poland, Lithuania, Germany - also good. Theatre is theatre everywhere. "What's the difference?"...

To make a long story short, I asked my daughter to take a break and not go to events for Ukrainians for a while, because it's somehow traumatic for me.

Let's go back to the conditional categories. Besides those who consciously stay abroad, there are those who don't directly say that they want to stay here, or even don't fully understand themselves that they are staying. But it's clear that they are staying, at least to me - it's obvious. Some people moved here with their whole families: wife, husband, three children, they even brought their grandmother. I know from one such family that they feel absolutely comfortable with the social assistance they receive from the state, especially the child support. And if there's also an opportunity for at least one of the adults to work, even part-time, they feel quite confident. Is there a high probability that a family that has already moved to another country, left everything behind, and more or less integrated into a new place, will want to go back after some time and experience all the difficulties of changing their social environment again? In my opinion, not at all.

I can't avoid the issue of men leaving the country. Again, I don't have any statistics, I just observe. In my daughter's theatre group, 5 out of 9 children were here with their fathers. Yes, I know that at least two families have many children, and one of the fathers even served until the birth of his third child and only then came to Berlin to join his family. Some families who lived in Ukraine before February 24th did not have Ukrainian citizenship and therefore came to Berlin with their husbands. Also, some of the men worked here before the full-scale invasion, and their families simply joined them. I understand all of this. But I also see that there are simply a lot of men, and there are more and more of them. After the New Year, the theatre group was renewed, and, who would have thought, in the first week I saw two new fathers. And it's like that everywhere: at the Saturday school, at the planetarium... A noticeable portion of the parents who pick up the children are fathers. And yes, I get angry when I see fathers with children, because my Marta misses her dad terribly. The vacation at home helped a little, but before that there was a period when my daughter cried every day - every day she cried for her dad. So when I see other people's fathers - I get angry, even though I fully understand that most of them might have had the right to cross the border. But the probability that some of them didn't remains.

And there are also people who say they want to return to Ukraine, but under certain conditions. For example, after the victory, or when it's safe at home, or when there's work at home... This, by the way, is from a Facebook discussion about the hypothetical extension of the document that allows Ukrainians to live, work, and receive assistance from the state in Germany. In the spring and summer of 2022, it was issued for two years. So now people are worried whether they will be able to stay in Germany longer than until the spring-summer of 2024! I read the comments, and I have a lot of questions for the Facebook community, of course, rhetorical ones. Because personally, I don't see any realistic scenarios for these "after the victory" and "when it will be safe" to be waiting for us in the near future. And here, rather, it's necessary to have the strength and inspiration to return and work at home not because the conditions are already there, but in spite of the fact that they are not. To be honest, there are almost no people around me in Berlin who are ready for this, or even think in these terms.

But perhaps the most telling for me are people's reactions to my confident desire to return home in April after completing my year-long scholarship. Or rather, not so much that, but the interesting moment is when people realise that my desire to return is real and it precedes the action - the actual return. Because most people say that they miss home, that they want to return, that they will return as soon as it's possible. But when they hear that I am truly consciously staying here for a year, and then just as consciously returning - they are surprised. They start asking if I'm not afraid, and if I'm really sure that it will be safe in April. Here, by the way, we are moving out of the observation mode. This is more reminiscent of Garfinkel's experiments, in which he disrupted people's background expectations in simple everyday situations and observed their reactions. It's like in that joke about how an acquaintance will react when you actually start telling them how you are doing in response to their formal question "how are you?". People say they want to return because it's accepted, because it's right, because that's what others say. But in reality, when it comes to an actual return, it shocks them, and often scares them.

19-23.01.2023.

From the spring of 2022 to the spring of 2023, my child and I were abroad. And it was the most difficult year of my life. I can say this with certainty, because more than a year has passed since we returned home. Yes, at home now there is a completely new reality. What was May 2023 worth, when the shelling of Kyiv happened almost every night? Or June 2024 with its endless power outages. But I'm ready to adapt to anything, just to be at home.

Because being away from home during a major war is a constant, oppressive, unbearable worry for family and friends who are under fire, without light and heat, for friends and acquaintances who are fighting or delivering aid to the front lines.

Abroad, I reacted to every air raid alert - I monitored all information resources, wrote to my family. I slept for a few hours, woke up and checked the news feeds through my sleep, listened to experts, watched analytics, tried to understand.

And at home, everything is rushing and spinning: various jobs where you try to be useful, primarily to the army and the country, your child, everyday life... Here you learn to work despite air raid alerts and between power outages - quickly and efficiently. There's no time to read the news or think about the future. You live in the present.

At the same time, abroad, there is no such life "here and now". On the contrary, it's a constant feeling of a postponed life, a life put on pause. And you don't allow yourself

anything extra, you don't buy anything, you put everything off until later, you're in a state of uncertainty and temporality for weeks and months.

When I returned home and took a shower for the first time, I suddenly realised that for the entire previous year I hadn't washed my hair with conditioner. It's like being on a business trip where you can take shampoo with you, but not conditioner, because you can temporarily neglect it. Only my "temporarily" dragged on a bit.

Probably the hardest thing for me to get used to abroad was the contrasts that inevitably arose between the reality I was physically in and the reality I was in informationally and mentally. An alert sounds on my phone app (I didn't turn it off), notifying me that missiles are hitting my hometown. And on the streets of another European capital, I see smiling people just walking, eating ice cream, drinking beer. Or my entire social media bubble is writing about a mutual acquaintance who died. And the Berlin Facebook groups of Ukrainian migrants are filled with questions about where to get a manicure or a haircut for their dog. And I'm just overwhelmed by these contrasts. The New Year 2023 was a particular torture. At home, rockets were mercilessly pounding, drones were flying, it was very, very loud, and in Berlin, fireworks were exploding just as loudly all night long. It was absolute surrealism. You talk on the phone with family or friends, and it's not clear what's exploding louder - the drones in Kyiv or the fireworks in Berlin.

Last but not least: abroad, I somehow felt like a fugitive, a traitor, I was ashamed that I wasn't at home, not with my loved ones, not sharing these most difficult times with them. As a result, I didn't feel like I had the right to speak, my experience and the experience of people like me seemed completely insignificant compared to those who are fighting, constantly volunteering, were under occupation, didn't leave their hometowns... And although I myself teach students that all voices are important, and one of the tasks of qualitative sociology, in which I work, is to give voice to different communities, abroad these words were very easy to undermine and retreat from these ideas.

27.06.2024

Academia in war

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, almost from the first days, an extraordinary number of opportunities opened up for researchers, teachers, and students. At the same time, it's worth emphasising that despite these opportunities, dozens and hundreds of teachers, students, and scientists voluntarily joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from the first days of the full-scale invasion. And it's particularly difficult for me to look into the eyes of them - colleagues who dropped everything they had and went to fight for our country not because they had to, but because they couldn't do otherwise.

Returning to those researchers who haven't yet joined the ranks of the Armed Forces. Ukrainian scientists, who were previously quite isolated from the global scientific community, were invited to leave the country, offered collaborations, scholarships, and work contracts. Ukrainian researchers have never had such opportunities on such a scale. Finding themselves in all possible corners of the world because of the war, they got the opportunity not only to collaborate with colleagues in different countries and build networks, but also to advocate for Ukraine on various platforms.

According to my observations, scientists were also one of those categories of the population who, having found themselves in another country, had the opportunity to

continue working in their field. This contrasted with the majority of forced migrants who often had to start from scratch in a new place.

I would like us to take advantage of this unprecedented openness of the global Academy, and for Ukrainian researchers from various fields to become part of this international community. But even more, I would like that, having gained unique experience of involvement in the Western Academy, our colleagues would still return home and implement the best foreign practices here.

As for me, I am extremely grateful to my colleagues from Berlin and Frankfurt on the Oder for their support and cooperation, for the opportunity to continue my research and teaching activities. Throughout my year abroad, I continued to teach remotely at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, had the opportunity to work with students and support them. During the period of active blackouts in the fall-winter of 2022, it was convenient that I had stable internet and, as it seemed to me, I was able to provide some normality to our educational process. At the same time, one of the reasons for my return home is the desire to be here, in Kyiv, with my students. I want to show them by my own example that it is possible to stay in sociology, teach, and work on a bunch of interesting projects even in the midst of war, here and now.

That's why I take advantage of every opportunity to meet with students in person in the classrooms, rather than remotely, through screens. So that this Covid-war generation of students can experience real learning, a real community... And it's a special thrill and a rare gift to see the eyes of these interested, intelligent, active young people light up. This is my special resource that supports me in the most difficult times and motivates me to teach even when everything around me seems devalued except for being on the front lines.

27.06.2024

Reference

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