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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

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Abstract

The formation of the Ukrainian political nation is taking place in a challenging environment. The country is forced to wage a war against Russia for its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. In such times, national self-identification is an essential factor in consolidating efforts in all areas of confrontation. The war accelerated the decolonization of the socio-cultural space of Ukraine. Ukrainians are distancing themselves from Russians and Russian culture, replacing the Russian symbolic space with a national and European one. Consolidation of the Ukrainian identity is taking place, and the level of its civic component, the feeling of national pride and patriotism is increasing, which increases the level of resilience as the ability to survive and recover.

Keywords: socio-cultural processes, national identity, nation, resilience, Russian-Ukrainian war.

Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian war initiated a massive transformation of Ukrainian national identity. Ukrainians began to perceive themselves as a nation capable of stopping the aggressor and defending their sovereignty. Against the backdrop of the war, the majority of contradictions that divided society disappeared. The war facilitates a reevaluation of our "we" in the context of forming a collective identity and accelerates the processes of forming a political nation.

The modern Russian-Ukrainian war is the result of Russia's aggressive imperial policy, which perceives Ukraine as a zone of its own interests, denying Ukrainians their national identity. "Russians and Ukrainians are one people," repeats Russian propaganda following their leader. Accordingly, with their heroic resistance, Ukrainians prove that they are an independent nation defending the independence of their state.

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The cultural factor plays a vital role in this struggle because Ukrainians have long been under the influence of the Russian information-cultural space, which is part of the Kremlin's hybrid wars. The modern war has radically changed the attitude of Ukrainians towards Russia and Russians, as well as towards Russian culture and language, which are instruments for promoting the Kremlin's imperial narratives. The war has accelerated the process of decommunization, which began with its inception in 2014 and has initiated the derussification of Ukraine's symbolic and mental space. All this defines the specificity of changes in contemporary socio-cultural processes in Ukraine, strengthening Ukrainians' national resilience and enhancing their national self-identification.

In this context, this study aims to analyze the sociocultural processes and trends in Ukraine caused by the war and to determine their impact on the growth of Ukrainian national identity and resilience.

Literature Review

The problem of the formation and development of national identity has been the research subject of many theorists since the beginning of time. This issue is considered within the context of understanding the concept of "nation." Primordialism starts from a biological understanding of the nation and considers it as the result of a certain evolution of ethnicity based on cultural and/or religious kinship. Constructivism regards the nation as a cultural and socio-political construct (Anderson, 1991).

According to E. Gellner, a nation results from the combination of human beliefs and solidarity, people's recognition of belonging to a community united by a common culture (Gellner, 2006). I. Kresina understands the nation as a community of people, regardless of their ethnic origin, united by political interests, awareness of their community in a certain territory with a particular state organization (sovereignty), common citizenship, legal rights and obligations, culture, and traditions (Kresina, 2002).

Analyzing national identity, A. Smith (Smith, 2002) defines it as a rather abstract and multidimensional construct, prone to constant transformations. The critical elements of this structure include historical territory, myths and historical memory, shared culture, unified legal rights and obligations for all members, and a shared economy. According to S. Schulman, national identity consists of ten components:

- 1) ethnic - race and origin;
- 2) cultural - traditions, religion, and language;
- 3) civic identity - common citizenship, territory, acceptance of a certain ideology, legitimacy of power, and the citizen's desire to be part of the nation (Schulman, 2002).

Thus, despite different approaches to defining national identity, the socio-cultural factor's unique role in its formation and further transformation is determined. According to J. Larrain (Larrain, 2003), national culture is a special space where various cultural aspects interact based on the support of national values, language, symbols, political institutions, etc.

Therefore, national identity is not a fixed substance but a set of trends and values that change over time. Consequently, it requires periodic redefinition in light of historically inherited characteristics, current needs, and future aspirations (Parekh, 1995).

There are several key research directions on national identity in Ukrainian scientific discourse. L. Nahorna considers it in the context of the relationship with the national idea, which answers

key questions: what does the nation live for, and what value orientations does it prefer? (Nahorna, 2003). After analyzing the relationship between national ideas and national culture, O. Rudakevych emphasizes that national values as part of national culture become the basis for forming national identity (Rudakevych, 2010). When studying the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the transformation of Ukrainian identity, O. Reznik notes the formation of a new collective identity against the backdrop of increasing its civic component (Reznik, 2022). According to P. Horinov and R. Drapushko, national identity is a significant component of state security. The war allowed overcoming existing differences in Ukrainian society and uniting based on national identity (Horinov et al., 2022).

The concept of "national resilience" also remains quite controversial due to the complexity of its conceptualization. According to C. Folke, resilience is the ability of a society to adapt to change and withstand threats (Folke, 2016). According to the results of an Israeli-Canadian study, "national resilience" is considered in the context of countering threats to national security based on such elements of national identity as patriotism, social cohesion and historical experience, and cultural differences (Canetti et al., 2013).

Therefore, despite the significant number of studies, the issue of the impact of sociocultural transformations in Ukrainian society on the evolution of Ukrainian identity and the strengthening of national resilience during the war requires a comprehensive study.

The purpose of the study is to single out the key trends of socio-cultural changes in Ukraine caused by the war, determining their impact on the growth of national identity and stability of Ukrainians.

Methods

Constructivism is the main methodological approach of our study. It allows us to consider national identity as a construct that is formed under the influence of many factors. Accordingly, the socio-cultural changes taking place in society contribute to the transformation of national identity.

While writing this article, we employed document analysis and secondary analysis of sociological data. These methods allowed us to determine the essential components of the studied concepts and the main trends in the transformation of Ukrainian identity under the influence of war. The research was based on sociological surveys conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, and the Rating Group. We also applied the case study method, analysis and synthesis, deduction, generalization, and comparison.

Results

National identity is one of the critical factors of societal consolidation during times of crisis. According to F. Fukuyama, national identity cannot only enhance physical security but also contribute to the formation of an effective governance system and economic development, as well as make liberal democracy possible (Fukuyama, 2018).

However, the processes of self-identification among Ukrainians have significantly prolonged over time due to objective factors. The formation of the nation in Ukraine took place in conditions of centuries-old statelessness, complicated by territorial fragmentation (Nahorna, 2003). Accordingly, nation-building was based not on territorial unity but on their language and culture. However, the inclusion of Ukrainian culture in two geo-cultural communities (Russian and European) creates a

cultural dichotomy and a conflict along the Russia or Europe line, which continues into the 21st century. The Ukrainian identity within the Russian Empire was built under the dominance of the Russian language. Ukrainian culture was perceived as part of the Russian culture. Consequently, the Ukrainian national identity is substituted by "Little Russian" with its complex inferiority. Quite strong stereotypes of a significant part of Ukrainian society regarding kinship with Russians and Russia did not allow to distinguish and clearly articulate a collective identity (Reznik, 2022).

Such a dichotomy is reflected in almost all manifestations of self-identification:

- The discussion of mono- or bilingualism.
- Conflict between Orthodox churches.
- Values conflict – one part of Ukrainians demonstrates Eastern mentality (authoritarianism and community), while another upholds Western European values (individualism, freedom, and democracy) (Rudakevych, 2010).

The Russian-Ukrainian war, which began in 2014, accelerates the processes of Ukrainian self-identification. However, actual changes started after the full-scale Russian invasion, when Ukrainians began to distance themselves from Russia en masse. Y. Stavrakakis notes that the main feature of national identity lies in the principle of being different from others. The difference becomes an antagonism: the antagonistic force threatens or is conceived as threatening one's identity. At the same time, it becomes a factor whose exclusion supports the unity of one's identity (Stavrakakis, 2007). Continuing his thoughts, A. Triandafyllidou believes that national identity is best actualized through contrast with "others." In other words, it is actualized through differentiation from other nations and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the author believes that not all "others" influence the formation of national identity. The scholar singles out a category called "important others," whose influence determines the formation and transformation of national identity (Triandafyllidou, 1998; Kubitskyi et al., 2022).

For Ukrainians, Russians served as "important others," whom they perceived as the closest among other peoples. In 2010, 85% of respondents identified the lowest level of social distance from Russians (Tolerance of Ukrainian people, 2010). Against the backdrop of the Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine, Ukrainians' attitudes towards Russians significantly deteriorated. In 2018, 47% of Ukrainians had a positive attitude toward Russians, and after the full-scale invasion, only 3% remained positive (Dynamics of the population's attitude to Russia and the emotional background due to the war, 2022). Instead, the number of people who perceive Russians negatively increases to 81%.

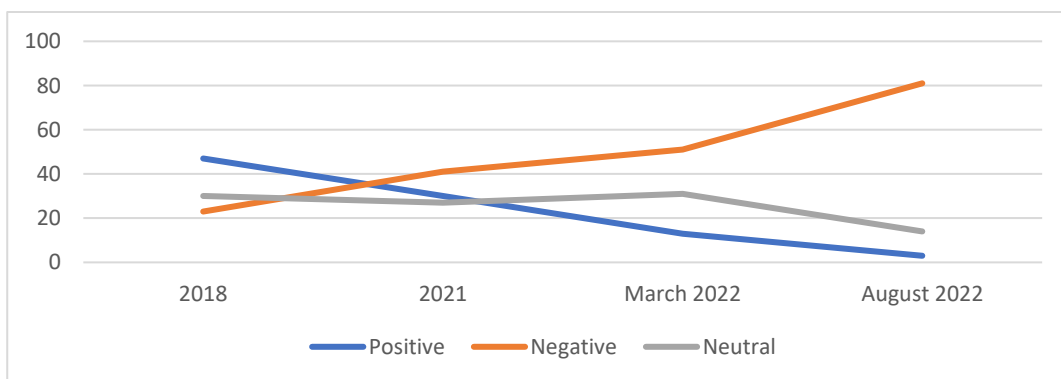


Figure 1: Dynamics of Ukrainians' Attitudes Towards Russians.

Source: (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022).

A full-scale Russian aggression undermines the myth of "brotherhood." If, in 2017, 27% of respondents supported the thesis that Ukrainians and Russians have always been and remain fraternal peoples, then in 2023, only 4% did (Inter-ethnic prejudices in Ukraine, 2023). The number of supporters of the idea that Ukrainians and Russians have never been fraternal peoples increased from 16% to 43% (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022). The growing social distance from Russians becomes the basis for further cultural differentiation and increasing the role and status of Ukrainian culture, which is an essential component of national identity.

According to T. Edensor, in the modern world, traditional cultural forms are complemented and increasingly replaced in their emotional power by meanings and images taken from popular culture, both national and international (Edensor, 2002). Modern Russian cultural products have influenced Ukraine for a long time. The Russian authorities disseminated their narratives through them using the "soft power" policy.

Since 2014, the Ukrainian authorities have restricted the use of Russian informational and cultural products. However, this does not find significant support among the population. However, already within six months of full-scale war, Ukrainians' attitude towards Russian culture changed dramatically:

- 46% of respondents stopped watching Russian TV series altogether.
- 15% started watching much less.
- 23% did not watch even before the war.
- 23% did not watch even before the war.

Similarly, 43% of Ukrainian respondents stopped listening to Russian music, while 26% continued. Accordingly, 84% of Ukrainians have given up Russian video materials and 71% - Russian audio products (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022).

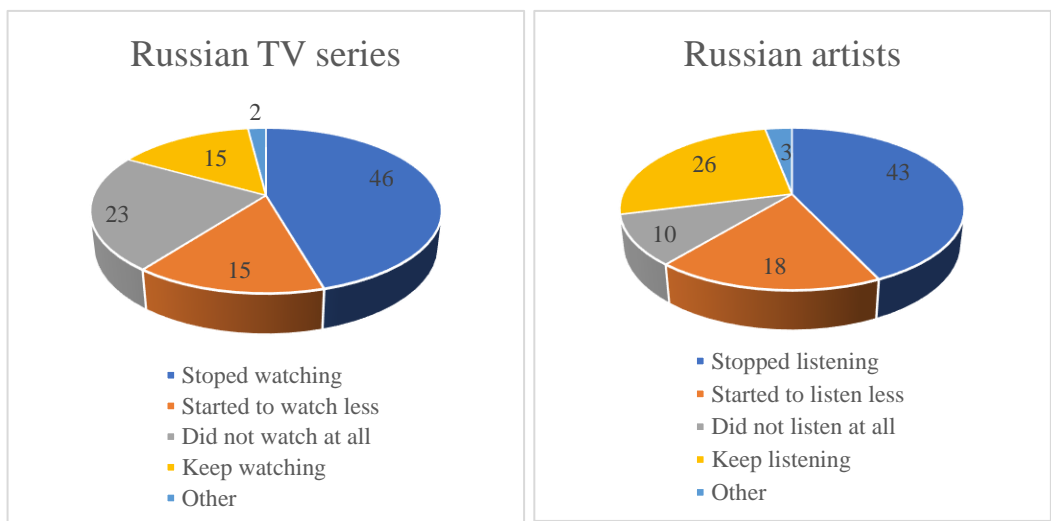


Figure 2: Ukrainians' Attitudes Towards Russian TV Series and Music.

Source: (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022).

Throughout the war, the cultural self-identification of Ukrainians has been changing. If, in 2006, only 56.3% identified themselves with Ukrainian culture, in 2023, this number increased to almost 81%. At the same time, the number of those who identify themselves with the Soviet

cultural tradition decreases from 16.4% in 2006 to 3.6% in 2023. Meanwhile, people who associate themselves with the Russian cultural tradition almost disappear, and their number drops from 11.3% to 0.5% (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022). Ukrainians increasingly feel themselves to be part of Europe, and their identification with Europeans almost doubled from 3.6 to 6.4 points. In contrast, the percentage of respondents who identify themselves with the Soviet Union decreases from 2.9 to 1.1 points (Sudyn, 2022).

Separation from the Russian-Soviet cultural paradigm is an essential prerequisite for the mental decolonization of the Ukrainian cultural and symbolic space, as well as for the consolidation of Ukrainian identity. The latter is crucial in the context of ensuring the country's national resilience in times of war.

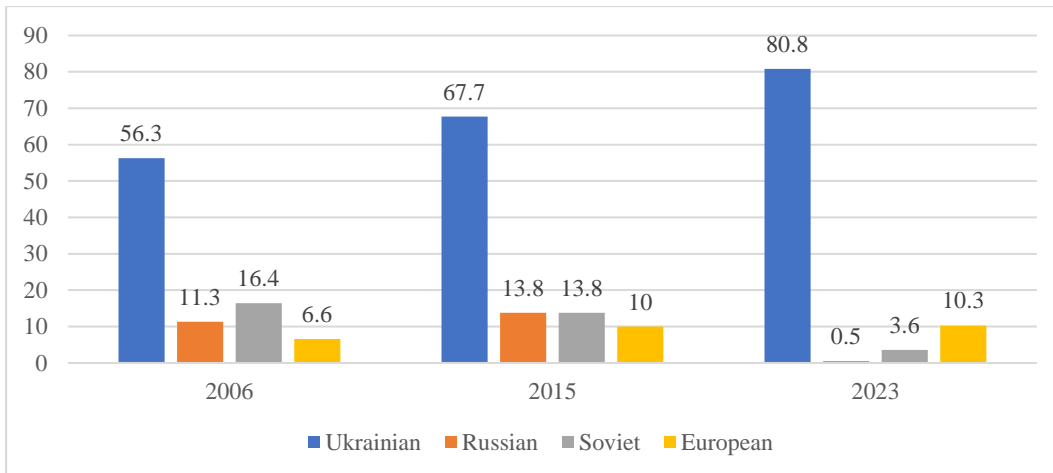


Figure 3: Dynamics of Ukrainians' Cultural Self-Identification.

Source: (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022).

Language plays a vital role in shaping national identity. It not only shapes perceptions of the world surrounding individuals but also influences the formation of the community. Language serves as a means of communication and constructing texts of national identity, the basis for forming the ideology of national unity (Joseph, 2006).

Due to the Russian-Ukrainian war, the linguistic dichotomy that has long hindered the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation and has been the subject of political confrontation is almost disappearing. Ukrainians are beginning to actively use the Ukrainian language in all spheres of life: at work, at home, when communicating with friends, etc. Dissatisfaction that was caused by the mandatory introduction of the Ukrainian language in the service sector is de facto disappearing against the backdrop of Russian aggression. Language becomes an important marker that distinguishes Ukrainians from enemies. Within six months after the full-scale Russian invasion, 19% of Ukrainians completely switched to the Ukrainian language, and 41% of bilingual and Russian-speaking Russians began to use the Ukrainian language more often. Accordingly, the number of supporters of the official status of the Russian language has dropped from 27% in 2014 to 3% in 2022 (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022). Therefore, as of the summer of 2023, almost 60% of respondents communicate exclusively in Ukrainian, 30% in two languages, and only 9% continue to use Russian (Sociological research for Independence Day: perception of patriotism and the future of Ukraine, 2023).

Significant changes have occurred in the religious sphere, which are also related to distancing from the Moscow Patriarchate. In 2019, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) received autocephaly. This decision was supported by over 54% of Ukrainians, 31.2% were neutral, and almost 11% were negative (Confessional structure of Ukrainian people and the creation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 2019). In just two years, the number of Ukrainians identifying with the OCU has increased from 48 to 58% (Religious self-identification and attitudes toward the main churches of Ukraine, 2021). At the same time, the church's transition to the new Julian calendar, which is followed by the majority of Orthodox churches, did not receive support from the population. In 2016, only 15% supported such an idea. However, when the OCU decides to make the transition in 2023, this decision is supported by already 63% (only 18% were against it). At the same time, it takes time for changes in cultural practices to become firmly entrenched in people's minds. Therefore, the vast majority of Orthodox Ukrainians (55%) continue to celebrate Christmas according to old traditions on January 7. Meanwhile, the number of supporters celebrating Christmas on December 25 is growing (from 4% to 11% over the year), and for celebrating both Christmases, it is increasing from 18% to 25% (The twenty-fourth nationwide survey "Ukraine in times of war." Public sentiment and economic situation of the population, 2023).

One of the complex issues remains the situation with the memorial space of the country, where a significant part of Soviet-Russian toponymy and monuments are preserved. With the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014 and the launch of decommunization processes in Ukraine, the process of changing the names of settlements related to the Soviet heritage began. Since 2022, in addition to Soviet markers, Russian ones have been added to the symbolic space. The process of renaming and dismantling iconic monuments has begun, even in those cities where the Russian component of regional identity was dominant before the war (Odesa and Kharkiv).

Kyiv leads in the number of changes during 2014-2023, where the renaming affected 561 objects (324 during 2022-23). These include street names, squares, parks, and even metro stations. Rapid de-Sovietization and de-Russification of toponyms are taking place in Vinnytsia, Kryvyi Rih, and Sumy (Kyiv leads among Ukrainian cities in the number of renamed streets and squares, 2023). The process was much more complicated in Odesa and Kharkiv. However, mass Russian shelling changed the attitude of residents and local authorities toward Russian symbols. In December 2022, the monument to the Russian Empress Catherine II and her favorites ("Monument to the Founders of Odesa") was dismantled in Odesa. Since 2022, the process of de-Russification has begun in Kharkiv, which had certain difficulties. However, in January 2024, after the mass Russian shelling of the city center, one of the central streets of the city - Pushkinska Street, changed its name. It is now named after the prominent Ukrainian philosopher H. Skovoroda.

Under the influence of full-scale Russian aggression, attitudes toward Ukrainian historical figures such as Ivan Mazepa, Symon Petliura, and Stepan Bandera have changed. Their activities previously caused a division of opinions. However, the most significant transformation occurs in attitudes toward UPA soldiers (Ukrainian Insurgent Army). In spring 2022, 80% of respondents recognized them as fighters for Ukraine's independence. Earlier (during 2015-2021), this indicator fluctuated between 41% and 47% (Sudin, 2022).

Since identity is a complex construct, we will focus on its civic component, which is also being transformed by the war and socio-cultural changes. At first, national pride in Ukraine snowballed from 34% in 2021 to 75% in August 2022 (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity.

Patriotism. Values, 2022). Secondly, along with this pride, the civic identification of Ukrainians is also growing. If only half of the respondents positioned themselves as Ukrainian citizens at the beginning of the XXI century, by 2022, depending on the assessment methodology, the number of such respondents ranged from 72% to 85% (Sudyn, 2022). If, in 2021, the level of assessment of Ukrainian citizenship on a 10-point scale was 7.9 points, in the summer of 2022, it increased to 9.5 points (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022).

It is important to note that during wartime, the importance of positive traits (kindness, industriousness, patriotism, and hospitality) increases in the national consciousness. By stopping the enemy, Ukrainians begin to realize the strength of their own nation and the advantages of their positive qualities. All these should serve as the foundations for the future recovery and development of the country (Identity of Ukrainian Citizens: Trends of Change, 2023).

From the first days of the war, Ukrainians were almost unanimously confident in their victory (94%). The spread of self-perception as a victorious nation across all social age categories indicates a shift from the traditional perception of themselves as a defeated population (Reznik, 2022). Accordingly, the victory over Russia becomes another factor in consolidating Ukrainian identity: 88% of respondents believe in the victory, and 63% are entirely confident (The results of 2023: Public Opinion of Ukrainians, 2023).

Against the backdrop of such changes, it is crucial to project Ukraine's future, which the country's citizens describe as free, independent, democratic, prosperous, peaceful, and strong (Seventeenth National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values, 2022).

Thus, war causes profound socio-cultural changes in Ukraine, transforming key elements of national identity (language, religion, culture, and historical memory). All these contribute to the transition to a consolidated national identity and strengthen national resilience in the context of resisting Russian aggression.

Discussion

The concept of "identity," especially "national identity," remains one of the most complex due to the multidimensionality of its components - the concepts of "nation" and "identity." Understanding the nation and, accordingly, national identity as a complex construct allows us to analyze various elements of its structure: language, religion, culture, citizenship, ethnic archetypes, etc. All of them have significantly influenced the formation processes and especially the transformation of Ukraine's national identity during the most critical events in the country's history (Declaration of Independence, the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Revolution of Dignity 2013-14, etc.). However, the radical transformation of Ukrainian identity is associated with Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Due to the particular conditions of its formation, the Ukrainian identity had a dichotomous structure, where the Russian factor played a significant role. This led to constant internal conflicts along the lines of language, religion, values, and foreign policy choices, as well as hindered the processes of creating a consolidated identity. Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 activated processes of linguistic and cultural self-identification but did not sever mental ties with Russia. The full-scale Russian invasion changes the situation fundamentally, triggering processes of distancing from Russia and Russians. Accordingly, the main trend of socio-cultural changes after February 24, 2022, becomes the decolonization of the Ukrainian historical, linguistic, and cultural-symbolic spaces, freeing them from Russian-Soviet elements.

Ukrainians are massively switching to the Ukrainian language, which becomes a marker distinguishing "ours" from "foreign/enemy." Moreover, they are refraining from consuming Russian cultural products (TV series, books, music). The war accelerates the process of actively liberating the Ukrainian memorial space from Russian-Soviet symbolism. This process began in 2014 and further develops civic identity through Ukrainians' identification with their own state (citizenship institute) and the growing sense of pride in their country. All these factors contribute to the consolidation of national identity at various levels and enhance Ukrainians' resilience in the fight against the aggressor.

Conclusions

The Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war acts as a catalyst for sociocultural changes. It resulted in the strengthening of the national identity and resilience of Ukrainians. The war finally severs the physical and mental ties with Russia and Russians, towards whom, even after 2014, a large part of Ukrainians maintained a "warm" attitude. Accordingly, the self-identification of Ukrainians from the usual dichotomy, which combined elements of Russian and Ukrainian cultural spaces, finally transitions to a clear definition in the context of "us vs. them," where "them" is a mortal enemy.

The detachment from the "main" to the "other" for the Ukrainian nation opens the way for the final destruction of the "Little Russian" identity along with the inferiority complex. Consolidation replaces them across almost all mental directions, which previously sparked intense debates: language, religion, culture, history, and memory. Such sociocultural transformation contributes to the consolidation of the Ukrainian identity. It becomes a solid foundation for the Ukrainian political nation, strengthening the national resilience of Ukrainians in the war against Russia and paving the way for post-war political development.

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