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Family frames of the Russo-Ukrainian war in contemporary Ukrainian literature

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Abstract
The article aims to investigate the aspects of family relationships in contemporary prose about the Russo-Ukrainian war (with a focus on the 2014-2021 period of the ongoing war). The novels Daughter (2019) by Tamara Horikha Zernia, The Orphanage (2017) by Serhiy Zhadan and Amadoka (2020) by Sofia Andrukhovych are interpreted through the methodological lens of memory, trauma and resilience studies. Using Tamara Hundorova's concept of the post-Chornobyl library, the author tries to approach the theorisation of (post-)traumatic writing about the war. The analysis of the novels highlights the intersections between family frames and memory of political violence. These texts suggest that family can foster both discontinuity and resilience. Finally, working through a difficult past and bearing witness to the challenging present presupposes memory of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the future.

Keywords: family frames, resilience, Russo-Ukrainian war, trauma, Ukrainian literature

Introduction

This article aims to investigate family relationships in contemporary Russo-Ukrainian war prose. The analysis of selected literary texts – *Daughter* (2019) by Tamara Horikha Zernia, *The Orphanage* (2017) by Serhiy Zhadan, and *Amadoka* (2020) by Sofia Andrukhovych[1] – will concentrate on "family frames" (e.g., Hirsch, 2002; Erll, 2011) and the role of family in constructing cultural memory about present and past atrocities. Using the methodology of memory, trauma, and resilience studies, we can think about the connections between current and past political violence, and about the need to transmit these memories to the next generations. What is happening at the moment influences the processes of individual and collective meaning- and identity-making.

The war in the Donbas and the large-scale Russian invasion should be considered in the broader context of Ukrainian history. Using Timothy Snyder's metaphor of "bloodlands" (2010), we can speak about the continuity of historical violence in Ukraine that includes collectivisation, Holodomor, Nazi occupation, the Holocaust, deportations, gulags, and the repression of intellectuals. On the one hand, Ukrainian history can be perceived as a Caruthian "history of trauma" (Caruth, 1996), because it reveals a constant repetition of traumatic events. On the other hand, this is also a history of fighting for independence. Hence, there is a need to develop complex visions that take into account a range of perspectives, including stories of victimisation, stories

[1] In this article, I use my own translations. An English translation of *The Orphanage* is available, and a translation of *Daughter i*s forthcoming.

of protest against injustice (e.g., "memory of activism" in Rigney, 2018), stories of implication (Rothberg, 2019), and stories of perpetratorhood (e.g., Knittel & Goldberg, 2020).

Moreover, under Russian oppression, Ukrainian culture proved to be a culture of resilience. The concept of *resilience*, which refers to the ability to bounce back after experiencing trauma, has been developed in the past decades, above all in the field of psychology (e.g., Boris Cyrulnik, Insa Fooken, Catherine Panter-Brick). Furthermore, resilience became an emergent topic in the humanities (e.g., Michelle Balaev, Michael Basseler, Susie O'Brien). As Michael Basseler (2019) mentions, resilience in literary and cultural studies is characterised by two main features: the representation of the resources of resilience in a literary text, and the writing process itself as a coping strategy. In transcultural contexts, one can perceive literature, creativity, humour, cultural memory, and feelings of continuity and belonging as universal sources of resilience (e.g., Fraile-Marcos, 2020). Thus, in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war prose, it is also important to analyse mechanisms that help people to survive adversity.

Literature should be viewed as an important medium of traumatic experiences that are usually difficult to verbalise and communicate. In my current dissertation project, I analyse combat and non-combat prose as a means of coping with trauma. Since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war in Donbas, dozens of prose and poetical texts have been published in Ukraine. Many were written by professional authors. A significant part of this body of literature, however, was created by soldiers, veterans, journalists or volunteers who had never produced literary texts before (e.g., Riabchenko, 2019; Herasymenko, 2019; Polishchuk, 2018). Combat prose is mostly autobiographical and aimed at bearing witness. Often, soldiers tell their own visions of the war, focussing on experiences that do not circulate in mass media, such as individual stories of friendship and love, loss and fear, the rethinking of given values and self-reflection. Moreover, combat prose is characterised by a criticism of, or irony towards, the post-Soviet military system. For example, we can encounter this kind of approach in diaries and memoirs such as *Military Diary* (2014 –2015) (2016) by Oleksandr Mamalui, *This is ATO* (2016) by Dmytro Yakornov, *Checkpoint* (2016) by Borys Humeniuk, *Life P.S.* (2016) by Valeria Burlakova, *Ilovaisk Diary* (2017) by Roman Zinenko, *Footsteps on the Road* (2018) by Valery Ananiev, and *Diary of an Illegal Soldier* (2020) by Olena Bilozerska.[2] Non-combat prose exhibits a higher degree of fictionalisation and intends to reflect upon the Russo-Ukrainian war in a broader context. This kind of literature represents the visions of civilians and people who are not involved in battles but are still affected by the war, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), local civilians, volunteers, activists, and family members of soldiers. We can read about these experiences in *The Orphanage* (2017) by Serhiy Zhadan*, Daughter* (2019) by Tamara Horikha Zernia, *Length of the Days* (2017) and Mondegreen (2019) by Volodymyr Rafeyenko*, Grey Bees* (2018) by Andrey Kurkov, *Lucky Breaks* (2018) by Yevgenia Belorusets, and *Amadoka* (2020) by Sofia Andrukhovych.[3] Furthermore, writers and artists immediately reacted to the large-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022 by creating texts and illustrations. For example, poets of different generations, such as Ivan Andrusiak, Kateryna Kalytko, Myroslav Layuk, Haska Shyyan, Pavlo Matiusha, Liubov Yakymchuk, Borys Khersonsky, Daryna Hladun, Ihor Mitrov, Ella Yevtushenko and many others have provided a diverse poetic reflection on the ongoing atrocities (Feshchuk, 2022).

2 Most combat diaries and memoirs have not been translated to English.
3 Most non-combat texts have been translated to English and German.

Because the creation and publication of prose takes longer than is the case for poetry, we can anticipate a large number of prose texts about the new phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the next few years. Even despite a certain amount of fictionalisation, eyewitnessing should be foregrounded as one of the main functions of contemporary Ukrainian war literature. This means both craving for justice in the form of telling the world about what has happened, and preventing silencing (as was the case in the 20th century) in order to warn future generations.

In this article, I would like to focus on "family frames" of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Memory scholars like Marianne Hirsch (2002) and Astrid Erll (2011) emphasise a special place of family within cultural memory and the intersections – or sometimes conflicts – between private and public history. Ultimately, relatives influence the ways in which people think and evaluate facts: "Family members are the people who usually constitute the first, and often most important, social frameworks for a child. And family life is arguably one of the main sites where sociocultural schemata are acquired" (Erll, 2011, p. 305). At the same time, every family member is an individual that belongs to different social groups: "Family memory is not a monolithic, stable entity, but an ongoing process shaped by the multidimensional cadres sociaux of family members" (2011, p. 306). Therefore, family as a mnemonic community is especially affected by political violence:

In the postmodern moment, the family occupies a powerful and powerfully threatened place: structurally a last vestige of protection against war, racism, exile, and cultural displacement, it becomes particularly vulnerable to these violent ruptures, and so a measure of their devastation. But [...] these external perils do not disguise the violence and deconstruction that occur within the family itself (Hirsch, 2002, p. 13).

Ukrainian authors such as Tamara Horikha Zernia, Serhiy Zhadan, and Sofia Andrukhovych raise the question of the continuity of cultural memory – and political injustice – in Ukraine, using the examples of fictionalised family stories. In my analysis of these texts, I aim to show that family relationships can bring about an uncomfortable feeling of discontinuity and act as a source of resilience at the same time.

From the post-Chornobyl library to the war library

When approaching the changes in Ukrainian literature influenced by the war in the Donbas, it is worth comparing the current tendencies with those brought about by another humanitarian and ecological catastrophe – namely, by the nuclear disaster of Chornobyl. In her book *The Post-Chornobyl Library: Ukrainian Postmodernism of the 1990s* (2019 [2005]),[4] Tamara Hundorova conceptualised important aspects of literary tendencies that emerged after the explosion. As a result of this crisis, Hundorova contends, Ukrainian postmodern literature is characterised by a crisis of language and a search for new forms and meanings. Tamara Hundorova's observations can help us theoretically approach writing about the current war in Ukraine.

To begin with, liminal experiences of individual and collective trauma make the authors doubt the available narratives and language itself. As Hundorova observes,

[4] Ukrainian original was published in 2005, English translation in 2019.

> (…) the Chornobyl postmodernist text not only testifies to the destruction of boundaries and demarcations between the real and the virtual but also ruins the symbolic order and language itself. It becomes impossible to use old words to describe the totally different reality that is unfolding after the atomic apocalypse (2019, p. 44).

Moreover, Ukrainian postmodernism had a strong anti-totalitarian and anti-Soviet impulse, which resulted in the "decentralisation of literature" (2019, p. 45). Today, war writing is also characterised by the critical re-evaluation of state narratives and by the reconsideration of values. After Ilovaisk, Debaltseve, Bucha and Mariupol it is impossible to use the old language. However, while post-Chornobyl literature tended towards protest and carnivalisation, contemporary Ukrainian war literature tends to combine the postmodern playfulness with a *new sincerity*; that is, it reveals a higher level of honesty and self-reflection.

Apart from the crisis of representation, the concept of the post-Chornobyl library also illustrates the flourishing of creativity in (post-)catastrophic times. Paradoxically, in response to the liminal experience of death and annihilation, new experiments, and literary impulses emerged. Furthermore, humour became an important element in literature, because it could help undermine the official narratives and make trauma bearable. Thus, literature and creative writing can be perceived as possible resources of individual and cultural resilience.

Nevertheless, catastrophic events and their artistic perception are inevitably connected with the danger of banalisation. As Tamara Hundorova notes, '[i]n the postmodern era of simulacra, catastrophes are easily appropriated and retold in an entertaining fashion: they become cartoons and horror movies' (2019, p. 47). "Chornobyl kitsch" is thus comparable with the "trivialisation" (e.g., Assmann 1999, p. 260) or "commercialisation" (e.g., Bond & Craps 2010, p. 3) of trauma. It means that mass culture – including mass literature – often produces superficial images and interpretations. Taking into account general tendencies in trauma and memory studies, it is possible to assume that the atrocities in Ukraine are not an exception and that examples of war kitsch may appear.

In contrast, family stories might provide another level of narration and create an opposition to kitsch and superficiality. Using the example of the testimony by a man who lost his daughter, recorded in Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future* (1997), Hundorova underlines the meaning of personal stories as antidote to official and mass-culture discourses:

> His testimony is directed against Chornobyl kitsch – the sale of memories or souvenirs of the tragedy and replications of the apocalypse found in popular culture and the media […] Apocalyptic personalization and the birth of a new language are, therefore, among the effects of the Chornobyl narrative. (2019, p. 47)

Thus, in (post-)traumatic writing, it is difficult to make great claims, because grand narratives have proved to be inefficient. As we will see in the following analytical sections, war literature has also become a medium of "counter-memory" (Foucault, p. 1977), and family stories are effective in voicing visions and attitudes that are underrepresented within the official discourse.

At the same time, the analysis will show that the reconsideration of family relationships reveals intergenerational gaps and discontinuities that appeared due to the atrocities of the Soviet period and due to the politics of silencing. Along with the trauma of the current war, the repressed memories of past violence keep haunting Ukrainian culture today.[5] If these memories remain unprocessed, they may cause conflicts in the future. Because reflections on these topics are more common for non-combat prose, I have selected the examples of the novels *Daughter* (2019) by Tamara Horiha Zernia, *The Orphanage* (2017) by Serhiy Zhadan, and *Amadoka* (2020) by Sofia Andrukhovych.

The controversiality of family relations in *Daughter* by Tamara Horikha Zernia

The novel *Daughter* (2019) is a reflection on the metamorphoses of civilian life during the war in the Donbas. This is the first book by Tamara Horikha Zernia (her real name is Tamara Duda), who was a volunteer in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In the novel, we read the story of a young woman from Donetsk with the nickname Elf who actively takes part in the local pro-Ukrainian initiatives and becomes a saboteur.

Daughter provides a profound (self-)reflection on the reality of the war. The narrator mentions how illogical this reality seems to be:

> We are falling down the rabbit hole. Everything we knew, that used to hold us, is fading away in front of us. Here, reality has nothing to do with sanity, so I close my eyes and pretend that I am not here. (2019, p. 52)

Moreover, the woman is aware of the defensive reactions of her psyche, as she mentions the following: "They say, when the concentration of stress is too high, you suddenly realise that everything is a vanity of vanities, and in the face of the Universe neither your life nor your last thoughts do seem important" (2019, p. 151). The constant threat to her life alters both her perception and her individual values. Nevertheless, the protagonist's ability to analyse the state of things in stressful situations is rather rare. Such a high level of self-reflection, even in these extreme circumstances, thus reveals elements of metafiction in *Daughter*.

In the life story of the young woman with the nickname Elf, family plays an important role. The protagonist grew up in the Rivne region; her mother passed away early, and her father was addicted to alcohol. Once, the father decided to become a work migrant in Poland, so he sent his daughter to Donetsk. There, the Ukrainian-speaking girl lived with her grandmother. For a while, she felt like an alien in Donetsk, but the tragedy at the Zasadko mine made her develop empathy for her neighbours. Consequently, she decided to stay in Donetsk when the unrest of spring 2014 began.

Furthermore, the protagonist always felt different because of her unconventional attitude towards traditional family structures. The society put pressure on a young woman: she was supposed to marry and have a child. Instead, Elf followed her passion and created art objects from glass. However, when the war began, the woman discovered her potential to become a saboteur: "I had neither a husband nor children. What seemed to be a tragedy now became a privilege. If you do not have any family, you do not have any weakness, you cannot be blackmailed" (2019, p. 71). On the one

[5] For further elaboration on Alexander Etkind's (2013) concepts of "magical historicism" and "post-Soviet hauntology" in Ukrainian war prose, see Tarku (forthcoming).

hand, family can thus be perceived as an Achilles' heel in times of war, because it reveals people's vulnerability.

On the other hand, family can also be a source of developing individual resilience. In the liminal situation of war, the protagonist realises the strength of her family tree: "God save you from living in challenging times. But let everyone know how it is, to find support in the hour of greatest despair [...] Because the truth is on your side. Because your roots, your deceased and your yet-to-be-born relatives are here, on your side" (2019, p. 79). In a certain way, the feelings of continuity and belonging, even without knowing all family members, help Elf to survive the atrocities of the war.

Furthermore, the protagonist's main source of individual resilience is creativity. From her grandmother, Elf discovers that her mother was an embroidery artist who used the rare technique of whitework (*bilym po bilomu*). Thus, even without knowing her background, the girl discovered her artistic talent, and the moments of creation used to bring her the biggest joy: "I remember the feeling of coherence (...) I was overwhelmed by the endless beauty of everything around me (...) The perfect clarity of light, the precision of the form – there was some kind of magic in it" (2019, p. 29). Creativity can thus be perceived as a means of transcending difficulties.

Furthermore, there is a place for real magic in the novel. For example, the ghosts of dead soldiers appear and save the protagonist's life.[6] Elf herself refers to some pre-Christian rituals (*zamovliannia*) when she tries to help a wounded friend (2019, p. 262). Moreover, the combination of pagan and Biblical motifs (e.g., Psalm 90) does not cause any internal conflict. Hence, in the novel, creativity is interrelated with faith, magic, and shamanism, a secret knowledge that merges zamovliannia with prayers, folk songs, and poems. Furthermore, the references to poet and dissident Vasyl Stus, the Insurgent Army (for example, the song "Lenta za lentoyu"), folklore, and the Bible actually reveal the rebirth and the remediation of the memory of writers and activists, as well as of national and religious traditions, that were repressed during the Soviet period.

Her faith, intuition and supernatural abilities help Elf to survive the atrocities in Donetsk. After losing everyone, the protagonist decides to adopt the daughter of her deceased friend. Having passed through the initiation by the war, the woman becomes a responsible mother and concludes that she will live together with this child, despite all the horrors they have been going through.

Intergenerational (dis-)continuity in *The Orphanage* by Serhiy Zhadan

The reconsideration of family relationships is also present in Serhiy Zhadan's novel *The Orphanage* (2017). Born in Starobilsk, Luhansk region, Zhadan has become one of the strongest voices of the Donbas as both author and activist (Ilchuk, 2017). Even before the war, he used to write about people living in this region – for example, his novel *Voroshylovgrad* (2010) received the Book of the Decade award by BBC Ukraine. In *The Orphanage*, Zhadan also depicts the life of an ordinary civilian family from the Donbas. However, the absence of the city name highlights the fictionality and conditionality of the literary text. While writing the novel, the author searched for a different language that could grasp the new reality of the war – for example, he shifted the focus from the official heroic narratives to the perspectives of civilians like the main

[6] On magical realism in Holocaust literature, see Adams, 2011.

character Pasha, who usually do not have an opportunity to share their experiences in public (e.g., Kuryshko, 2017). Moreover, according to Tanya Zaharchenko (2019) and Yuliya Ilchuk (2021), *The Orphanage* highlights crucial questions of remembering and forgetting, traumatisation and healing in the situation of the ongoing war.

The novel tells the stories of Pasha, a teacher of Ukrainian language, and his family members. As the battles come closer to his hometown, Pasha decides to pick up his nephew Sasha from the orphanage. On his way, the man notices how hastily the new reality of war changes the places where he grew up and where he spent all his life. At first, the character is petrified by the war. He recollects his childhood, influenced by the fall of the Soviet Union, with a certain nostalgia. In general, the process of growing up is perceived as a tragedy by Pasha: "And this loss of his own cocoon, of his own space where everything is clear and understandable became the first catastrophe and trauma that would haunt him for a long period of time" (2017, p. 228). Back there, in his childhood, Pasha had an ephemeral feeling of safety. At the same time, the objects at a local school trigger some different, rather unpleasant memories: "Pasha feels like he returned to his childhood, and that is why, all of a sudden, he wants to hang himself" (2017, p. 190). The spectres of his past follow Pasha as long as they remain unrecognised and unreflected. Moreover, there appear some supernatural images in *The Orphanage*: for example, the personification of death itself that smells like a wet dog, haunts Pasha during his journey and finally meets him at the hospital.

The modest teacher Pasha reconsiders his relationships with the people around him. It seems that family conflicts resulted in alienation between the relatives. Furthermore, Pasha could not develop a relationship with Maryna: scared of intimacy, Pasha even slept in his sportswear like in a shell (2017, p. 128). Finally, their inability to talk and to listen to each other made the family place their youngest member in the orphanage. However, the intense three days of their journey together make the uncle and his nephew comprehend how vulnerable human life is and how much they actually care for each other.

The war blurs the lines between the private and the public realm. Individual stories create a new uncanny reality. When Pasha sees abandoned houses and the strangers who come inside, he concludes that "[w]atching someone's household is like turning the pages of someone's porn magazines – you never know what you shouldn't touch" (2017, p. 266). As a result, Pasha himself realises the value of his 'previous' simple life, "You were supposed to come here, into the middle of hell, to understand how much you had and how much you've lost" (2017, p. 308). However, a return to the old reality seems impossible. While thinking about Sasha, Pasha hopes that the boy can just forget everything, but he suddenly realises the unpleasant truth: "[N]obody will forget anything, and his nephew will carry these memories like heavy stones in his pockets; the images of wounded bodies and salty male tears will haunt him for the rest of his days" (2017, p. 308). Hence, the experience of war changes human life forever. Nevertheless, even though the future does not seem to be clear, Pasha and Sasha find empathy for each other and get a chance to change their relationship.

To conclude, in *The Orphanage*, family is also seen as a complex source of both vulnerability and resilience. As in *Daughter*, there is the idea that Ukrainians fight for their own home, for their friends and relatives, and that everyone wants to survive: "Military people are concentrated and calm. Nobody is screaming […] Everyone is preparing for the ongoing war. Everyone wants to survive and come back. Come back

home, because everyone likes it" (2017, p. 334). Eventually, Pasha and Sasha return to their town and find a homeless puppy, which is why there is hope for a better future in this scene, because this puppy will grow up and "will show them all" (2017, p. 335).

Voicing the silenced pasts: Connections between the Donbas war, the Holocaust and Stalin's terror in *Amadoka* by Sofia Andrukhovych

Amadoka (2020) by Sofia Andrukhovych is a novel that, on the one hand, mediates silenced pasts and underlines the continuity of political violence in Ukraine. On the other hand, it questions the reliability of memory in the age of post-truth. The main plot is based on the story of Romana, an archivist who aims to save the traumatised Donbas veteran Bohdan Kryvodyak. Finding the photo of an injured amnesiac man on the Internet, Romana recognises him by his lips and decides to give his memory back to him. Romana pretends to be Bohdan's wife and retells everything she heard from him during a short affair before his departure to the Donbas. Finally, the man realises that he is not Bohdan, but Victor, a separatist from Mariupol and a descendant of the NKVD official Krasovsky. Such an uncomfortable ending can be interpreted as a critique not only of the post-truth society (e.g., McIntyre, 2018; Szakolczai, 2021) but also of the capacities of memory and trauma theories as well (e.g., Hyvärinen, 2010; Bond & Craps, 2010).

Parallel to this plotline, the story of Bohdan's real family unfolds. As Bohdan's grandmother Ulyana faces her death, she recollects her youth and the Holocaust in Western Ukraine. Ulyana fell in love twice in her life: with the Jewish friend Pinkhas and with the member of the Insurgent Army Kryvodyak. However, love stories turned out to be horror stories under the influence of terror and repression. Consequently, both Pinkhas and Kryvodyak died. In this part of the novel, old photos play an important role, because they represent the distorted and fragmentary nature of family memory. Moreover, Ulyana and her sisters doubt the credibility of their own stories: "Even grandmother herself was not sure if the scenes in her imagination were real memories or just some very realistic dreams" (2020, p. 230). At the end of the day, such stories are difficult to believe.

Another plotline represents a fictionalised biography of writer Victor Petrov-Domontovych, who witnessed the repression of his friends and colleagues – Ukrainian intellectuals, representatives of the "Executed Renaissance".[7] Nevertheless, the life story of Petrov-Domontovych seems to transcend trauma, because this man had an extraordinary personality: as a secret agent, a friend, a lover, and an intellectual. Such personal stories make us think about the connection between the past and the present political violence as well as about cultural memory (or silencing and fragmentation) of the Holocaust and Stalin's terror within the official discourses of the Soviet Union and Ukraine.

In the novel, Bohdan's individual amnesia might be perceived as a metaphor for cultural amnesia. However, Bohdan's family seems to facilitate this problem by keeping secrets from each other and by hindering the transmission of memories. Therefore, all relatives see the scars on Ulyana's hands but never dare to ask

[7] The term "Executed Renaissance" was suggested by Jerzy Giedroyc to Yuriy Lavrinenko (1959) during the work on the anthology of texts by Ukrainian intellectuals, active in the 1920s and 1930s, who witnessed Stalin's repressions. Thousands of representatives of the intelligentsia of all ethnicities were imprisoned and executed during the Great Purge.

something, until grandmother herself reveals that she killed Pinkhas. Moreover, the lack of trust and understanding between closest relatives made Bohdan run away to the battlefield and resulted in another circle of traumatisation. This story brings about the ethical question of how to speak about experiences of present and past atrocities within family and society because both storytelling and listening or reading are integral for the healing process.

However, *Amadoka* does not provide any clear answers. Sometimes, the narrator suggests that the issues of heredity and identity can be troubling: "Home, memory, history, ground – are they the answer, the core of human belonging, or are they a limitation, a prison, an atavism, an obstacle on the way to true individual freedom?" (2020, p. 548). Although the real Bohdan and his father start to understand each other by the end of the novel, the mysterious Victor from Eastern Ukraine identifies himself as a separatist, a killer, and a descendant of an NKVD official, so there is no end to the conflict and no catharsis in the sense of finding coherence and inner peace for all parties. The fragmentary nature of individual, family and cultural memory seems to be impossible to overcome, as the narrator mentions in the following quotation: "Our imagined completeness means death, oblivion, not-being" (2020, p. 711). Family memory (or family amnesia) might therefore cause feelings of discomfort and unbelonging. Nevertheless, the ability to realise this discontinuity might be the first step on the way to working through trauma.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Russo-Ukrainian war brings about reconsideration of values in everyday life and stimulates processes of meaning- and identity-making. Consequently, Ukrainian literature becomes one of the sites of these changes. Today, as in the aftermath of the Chornobyl catastrophe and the fall of the Soviet Union, authors search for new forms of expression and a new language that could come to terms with trauma. Remarkably, family stories reveal a specific mode of perception that can alter from and complement individual and collective visions of the war. Such authors as Serhiy Zhadan, Tamara Horikha Zernia, and Sofia Andrukhovych provide a complex reflection on family relations in Ukraine and on the (dis)continuity of memory of political violence in public and private spheres. The awareness of this (dis-)continuity and the need to share stories of victim-, perpetratorhood, activism, and implication are crucial because the current generation will shape the way their descendants comprehend and interpret the Russo-Ukrainian war. On the one hand, family can cause internal and external conflicts due to a lack of communication and understanding. On the other hand, support, empathy, and feelings of belonging and continuity can help people to survive the atrocities. All forms of political violence – including wars, terror and forced migration – endanger the transmission of family memories and foster discontinuity and disintegration. However, relatives might foster each other's resilience by holding up together in the face of adversity. These aspects are important for understanding the cultural dimensions of the current war in Ukraine, and they could stimulate further research in cultural and literary studies.

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