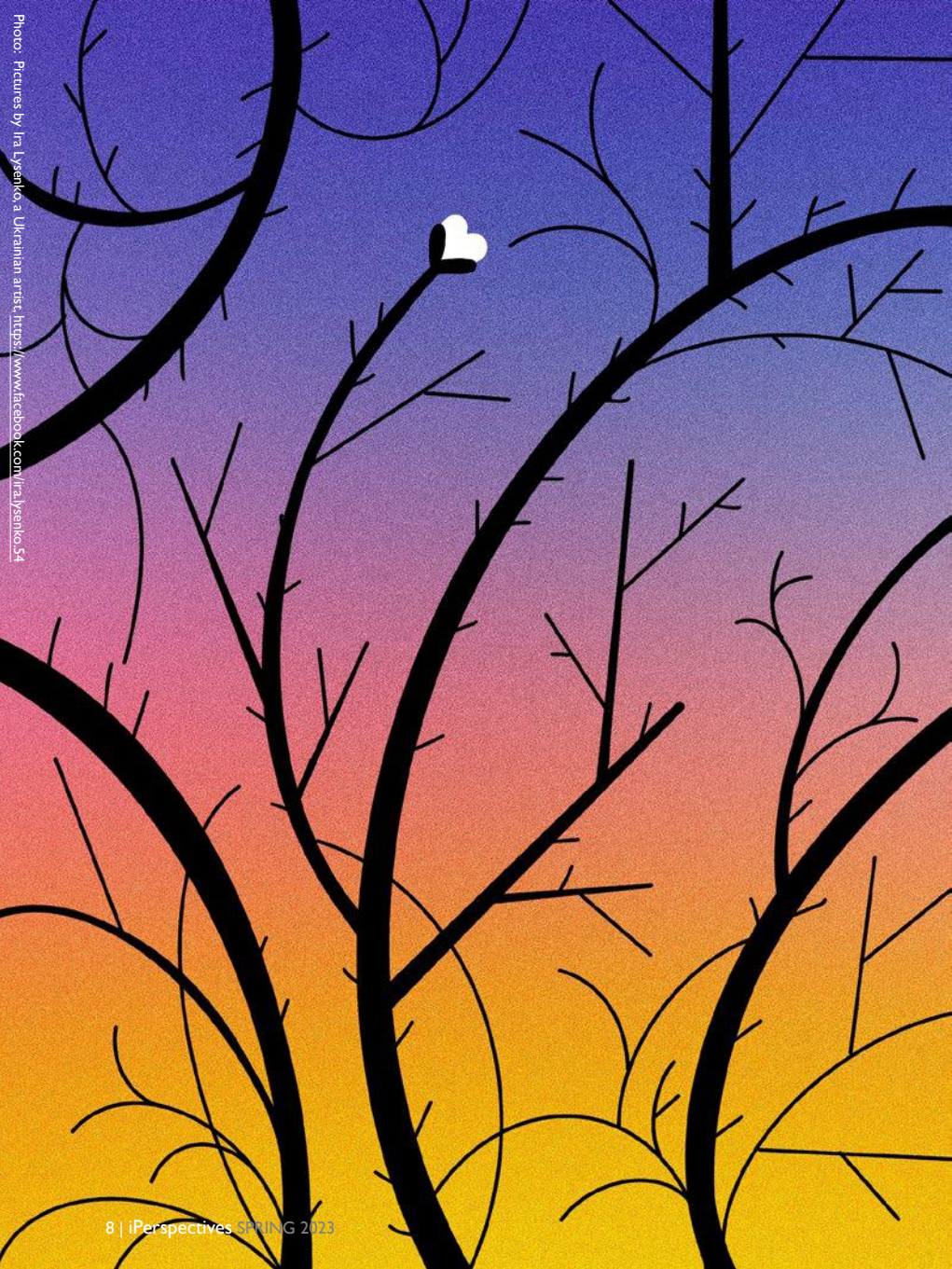




Ukrainian Grit

By **Nadiia Pavlyk**

Planning, dreaming, making blueprints, setting goals, imagining events, drawing the future: these are natural parts of human life. The future is a part of life: it's where we can find some emotional resources and inspirations for today's actions and efforts; where we can be happy despite all past and present troubles; where we can summarize the results of our past and certainties. The future is at once the logical continuation of the present and a reward for the past.

The psychological and social "norm" is to be able to describe yourself within these three dimensions of past, present and future. A 1967 study by Cottle shows that a typical reaction from military men is lack of connection between past, present and future, when future acquires a huge, detached form from the present moment. I hypothesise that repeating this study with Ukrainians during the wartime could give similar results: while

the future looks great and meaningful in terms of victory and security, it is separate from the present and the past in that it is impossible to be influenced directly by my present.

Indeed, crisis events can change our ability to think about past, present and future. For example, children in orphanages can't describe their past as they don't have recorded or documented memories, such as photographs, family memories, or the presence of a person

**- How old are you?
- I am three years old.
Nearly five. Ten is soon.**

A quote from my dialogue with a three-year-old boy

who has seen the child continuously from birth to the present. This lack of memory alters many of the social and psychological processes of these orphans: self-identification, adaptation, self-concept and the conception of others (Prikhodzhan & Tolstykh, 1990).

Just as orphanhood affects the perception of the past, so too can war influence a person's idea of the future and perception of the present. My personal crisis started with a feeling that there is no longer any future, that all life is concentrated only in the present moment. This feeling was accompanied by a reflection on the insignificance of our dreams in comparison with the power of the weapon and politics. I have felt so clearly only one task: to save the people nearest to me. During the first week after 24th of February, I felt just the paralyzing fear about the moment that replaced all other feelings or needs. There was no feeling of hunger, no need to take care of the body, no desire to socialize, and nothing else that makes up the normal content of daily life. The only acceptable option was to monitor constantly the news to fill the present moment and understand what was happening right now.

I remember the state when all body sensations were reduced to absolute hearing as a condition of survival. In order to preserve the present moment and survive, it seemed that it was necessary to understand what was happening right now and therefore hearing and listening became the main need. I had the feeling that I had turned into these huge ears, like the ears of an elephant, trying to catch and understand

every sound from the outside. Later, my ideas about the future narrowed down to understanding basic needs: I had to plan what my family would eat and drink, where we would get money and gasoline, and in which direction we would run in case of danger.

The past: memories that matter

"That people's memories are maybe the fuel they burn to stay alive. Whether those memories have any actual importance or not, it doesn't matter as far as the maintenance of life is concerned. They're all just fuel. Advertising fillers in the newspaper, philosophy books, dirty pictures in a magazine, a bundle of ten-thousand-yen bills: when you feed 'em to the fire, they're all just paper. The fire isn't thinking, 'Oh, this is Kant,' or 'Oh, this is the Yomiuri evening edition,' or 'Nice tits,' while it burns. To the fire, they're nothing but scraps of paper. It's the exact same thing. Important memories, not-so-important memories, totally useless memories: there's no distinction - they're all just fuel."

Haruki Murakami, After dark.

I reflect on the past in several directions and forms: as an experience that became significant in the conditions of war; as memories and their physical confirmation in the form of things, photos, diaries; and as history, which is the only one of these forms capable of answering the question of why this war happened to us.

I realized the role of experience during communication with other Ukrainians: among

Ukrainian grit is hard work in the present for a better future, in memory of the past.

us there were people from the Luhansk and Donetsk regions who already had the experience of moving and building a "new" life in 2014. In my environment, these people turned out to be the most resourceful and supportive. I thank my loved ones Olena and Svitlana, who found the strength to support the shocked, gave effective advice and found surprisingly wise words. I remember when I received the invitation to be a part of AIAS and was tormented with the decision and guilt (wouldn't it be a betrayal to leave my country at such a difficult time?). In addition, how decisive was Olena's phrase about the fact that guilt is not natural; every time you feel it, you should ask who benefits from it. That being said, I hope our experiences have made us stronger and wiser.

Running away from home is accompanied by the impossibility of taking memorable things with you. Firstly, they seem unimportant, but later they turn into cornerstones, which keep our memory and worth. They are about home. Moreover, there are Ukrainians who have no home at all now. Nevertheless, they have



memories. The war caused Ukrainians to return to their history; to search for national identity and for a reinterpretation of experience. This will be the subject of an article based on the results of interviews with 18 Ukrainian women with children in Denmark.

The present and the people keep it

*“Suddenly felt
that I don’t want anything
and I don’t know where to go
that wasted time
that missed opportunities
that neither the universe,
nor my loved ones,
nor Ukraine have any benefit from me.
I know that I don’t even have a place at home
And there is no right to a home here.
And I don’t belong to myself.
I know it will pass.
I know that this is a morning without the sun.
I know that spring is coming soon.
But...”*

Public post on Facebook, originally in Ukrainian

My present is related to AIAS where 12 AUFF-Ukraine Research Fellows are restoring their ability to create ideas, plans, ambitions, dreams and goals; it was a significant process of restoring trust in the future. I am grateful to the people around me; their interest restores faith that I can be interesting (thanks to Birgitte, Bridget, Helen, Iwona, Magdalena, Shiru); their support allows me to finally breathe and relax (thanks to Vibeke, Søren, Lotte, Dorte, Kamilla, Helle and Lena); their trust inspires me to try new activities

(thanks to Nanna and Simon); their presence creates a sense of belonging (thanks to Alina, Elmira, Lyudmyla, Anastasiia, Oleg and Boris). I guess the only one way to keep humanity is through people; past, present and future depend on people: they are because of people, they exist for people and with people. This war underlines the values of people in my life.

AIAS became the place where I was first asked what I wanted and what I needed. I learn here every moments like a thirsty person drinks water: more and more. The present, for me, now derives from people and from learning. I worked here with Ukrainian refugees, and dialogues with them confirm that my experience is not unique; almost every woman I interviewed talked about the role of supporting people and the need to learn.

The future: bridges towards achievement

*“Everything will be difficult, if there’s no dream”
Hryhorii Skovoroda, The Garden of Divine Songs*

The war destroyed my ability to plan, to imagine or to see my future completely. I got tired quickly, I didn’t see any prospects, I didn’t understand what all this science was for when people were dying and I didn’t feel the desire to achieve anything: memory, imagination, attention did not work.

In the first months of the full-scale invasion, the general trend for Ukrainians was to utter the phrase “after the victory” when making any plans for the future. The impossibility

of planning anything due to dependence on air alarms, enemy actions, and external circumstances led to the construction of a corresponding reality. We can arrange a meeting, but it is not certain; it will definitely be after the war. We can plan the learning process, but the timing is not accurate; will definitely be in peacetime. We may live happily ever after, but it is not certain; it will definitely be after the victory.

We are praying for the best future of our children and elders. We are donating for the best future of our country. We are dreaming about an independent and strong Ukraine. The idea of the future has never seemed so big and significant:

- How old are you?

*- I am forty-four years old. Nearly fifty.
Centenary is soon.*

Conclusions

*«I am helped by thoughts that this is also life,
that no one promised anything, and that from
happiness to unhappiness is one moment, in
both directions».*

Comment to a public post on Facebook, originally in Ukrainian.

Grit is a phenomenon described in the literature as the perseverance of effort, a consistency of interest and a passion for long-term goals; it is an excellent predictor of success and performance (Credé, 2018). However, for me, grit is the bridge between the past and the future, placed over the present chasm formed by the war. Grit is the fundamental hope for Ukrainians who have lost

the past, save the present every day and do not imagine the future without victory. The grit of Ukrainians is their power and their resource: the war is powerless to take it away. Grit is a confidence that we can and we will. Ukrainian grit is hard work in the present for a better future, in memory of the past.

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