

SECTION 14.

PHILOLOGY AND JOURNALISM

Ella Mintsys 

Senior Lecturer at the English Philology Department
Vasyl Stefanyk Ptercarpathian National University, Ukraine

Liudmyla Kryshropa 

Associate Professor at the Department of Philology and Translation
National Technical University of Oil and Gas, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine

WAYS OF REFLECTING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY MEMOIR DISCOURSE

The concept of identity has been central to numerous researches. Trying to define the meaning of the concept, scholars distinguish various types of identity which are closely related to each other. Special interest is evoked by cultural identity. For example, R. Heersmink [3] maintains that cultural identity is essentially the sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, whether that's a nation, religion, political affiliation, generation, or even a family. These groups have shared histories and stories that shape their identity and help them endure over time, and keep memories alive. It should be emphasized that language plays no minor role in this process. However, cultural identity isn't fixed. It evolves as we go through life. Moving to a new place, or shifting religious or political beliefs can all influence the cultural groups we feel connected to. Since we usually identify with multiple cultural groups at once, our overall cultural identity is a blend of these different affiliations, constantly shaped by our experiences and choices.

According to J. W. Berry [2], cultural identity can be understood on two levels. On a larger scale, it includes both a person's connection to their nation, and their sense of belonging to a particular country (i.e. national identity). On a more personal level, cultural identity is complex and deeply rooted in our thoughts, emotions, and attitudes toward the groups we identify with. Therefore, cultural identity takes shape within an individual's mind. It's the way our sense of self is built within a social environment, reflecting how we see ourselves and how we fit into the environment. Simultaneously, it exists both within society as a whole and on a personal level. Moreover, Q. Liu & D. Turner [5] state that cultural identity, as a reflection of our social nature, plays a crucial role in shaping both personal and collective identities.

It serves as a bridge that influences how individuals see themselves, and how they connect with their nation as a whole.

Cultural identity, representing the meaningful ways in which a person defines themselves or is defined in relation to their culture, is formed via cultural experience. That experience refers to events that are unique to a group of people who share common beliefs, values, traditions, customs, practices, and language. These experiences take place in diverse social and cultural settings and play a significant role in shaping one's sense of identity [3]. One's cultural identity depends on personal identity's clarity, higher self-esteem, and improved subjective well-being across various cultural groups. Besides, autobiographical memory, artifacts, one's "own country's historical and cultural traditions, moral values, ideals, beliefs, national sovereignty" [4], are crucial for clearly perceiving cultural identity.

According to M. Pier's contention, language is one of numerous expressions of cultural identity [7]. However, the latter cannot be defined without personal memories which are best reflected in memoir discourse. Thus, **the objective of the current research** is foregrounding the interaction between the concepts of culture, language and identity, and finding out how cultural identity operates in a memoir. The procedure of the research is based on Critical Discourse Analysis aimed at looking into the descriptions of cultural phenomena aimed at shaping national and cultural identity.

The present study is based on the book "The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir" [1] written by Victoria Belim during the full-scale war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine. Victoria Belim was born in Kyiv, and spent her childhood in her grandmother's house in Bereh, a small town in Poltava region. At the age of 15, she left for the USA only to return to Ukraine during the current war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine. In the memoir, against historical, social, and cultural background, she vividly describes her journey of self-discovery, redefining her national and cultural identity. This experience, recorded in the form of a literary work, "becomes part of the cultural memory of the Ukrainian people and helps to reveal the peculiarities of Ukrainian identity"[6].

It turns out that her return to Ukraine, to the place where she spent her young years, was an eye-opener to her. Victoria Belim describes how she began to pay greater attention to a lot of things which she either used to overlook or which were blurred in her memory. For example, she mentions such cultural artifacts as *ryshnyk* and *vyshyvanka* which have been symbols of Ukrainian culture for centuries, and which have acquired an absolutely new meaning for her. She recalls that her great-grandmother and grandmother would embroider *rushnyky*, which they used as

ordinary towels. So previously, they were just a part of their household. But after visiting Saint Nicolas' church and meeting a woman who had a whole collection of rushnyky, she came to perceive them as significant artifacts of Ukrainian culture which accompanied Ukrainians throughout their lives, from birth to death.

Victoria Belim's return to her homeland made her understand how cultural identity incorporated her family's memories, customs and traditions. For example, we read how she, under her grandmother's supervision, was preparing for Easter celebration: how meticulously she followed the recipe making dough for *paska* ("The dough turned elastic in my hands, and the more I pushed it, twisting it into the series of folds <...>, the more it fought back" [1]; how she decided to buy pork to roast for their Easter Sunday meal; how her grandma Valentina was making natural dye for Easter eggs boiling onion peels. She also mentions the traditions of getting Easter eggs and Easter bread blessed at church; during Easter breakfast knocking eggs together "to see who would get better luck in the coming year", and leaving the breads at the local cemetery, "in a gesture of remembrance" [1].

Every now and then, Victoria refers to Ukrainian folk sayings which are crucial means for shaping and preserving cultural identity. For example, applying a combination of literal and equivalent translation, she presents her great-grandfather's favourite saying: "A spoken word can't be taken back; a written word can't be erased" [1]. Staying true to the original and resorting to the translation strategies of semantic equivalence and idiomatic adaptation, the author acquaints English-speaking readers with the proverb "Never forswear a prison or a begging bowl", which her great-grandmother often quoted "as a warning that life was unpredictable and you never knew what fate had in store" [1]. Strangely, that memory popped up exactly during her visit to the Poltava city penitentiary where she was trying to find some records of her relative missing since the 1930s.

While staying in Bereh and communicating with local people, Victoria Belim "savoured every detail" in their habits, ways and everyday life, which her childhood memories brought back to her. For instance, when she met with her cousin Dmytro, they "kissed three times on the cheek, the Ukrainian way". She noticed a serious and protective air about Ukrainian men, and found it "sweet and exasperating in equal measure"; paid attention to "the warm familiarity that strangers expressed toward each other by using words like 'mother' or 'grandmother', or diminutives like 'little girl' "; and recalled "the Ukrainian propensity to speak in parables" [1].

Victoria Belim's love for Ukraine, her supporting the country in times of the ongoing war, became an indispensable part of her cultural identity, which finds reflection in her multiple references to the past, present and future of Ukraine. She

inherited her sense of patriotism from her great-grandfather who admired the free spirit of the Ukrainian Cossacks and said that they went into battle with the words which Victoria presents in a transliterated form (for the sake of authenticity) and later provides their English equivalent (for English-speaking readers to understand): “Abo slavu zdobudem, abo doma ne budem.” – “Either we find glory, or we won’t return home” [1]. More than once, Victoria Belim writes about her family’s cherry orchard, highlighting its versatile symbolism. First, when she quotes Taras Shevchenko’s famous poem “A cherry orchard near the house”, painting an idyllic scene of family harmony it has a positive and nostalgic meaning for her, when she writes about her stay in the USA and missing Ukraine. Later, addressing it with the line “But thy eternal summer shall not fade” from Shakespeare’s 18th sonnet, she perceives it as a symbol of resilience, unbending spirit and fight for preserving Ukrainian identity. Hereby, expressing hope for Ukraine’s victory.

The issue of cultural identity in contemporary memoir literature is highlighted from a deeply personal perspective, however, it is also viewed as universally meaningful. In “The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir”, Victoria Belim, shows that cultural identity is not fixed; that her childhood memories, Ukrainian traditions and personal experience are combined in order to shape it. Writing about Ukrainian cultural symbols and artifacts (e.g. rushnyk, vyshyvanka, cherry orchard), mentioning Ukrainian national traditions, customs and habits, resorting to the intertextuality of her storytelling, she vividly reflects the process of redefining cultural identity which is crucial for keeping cultural memory alive.

References:

1. Belim V. (2024). *The Rooster House: A Ukrainian Family Memoir*. L.: Virago Press.
2. Berry, J. W. (1999). Aboriginal Cultural Identity. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. 19(1). 1–36. <https://doi.org/info:doi/>
3. Berry, T.R., & Candis, M.R. (2013). Cultural Identity and Education: A Critical Race Perspective. *Educational Foundations*. 43-64. Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=afam_pub
4. Heersmink, R. (2021). Materialised Identities: Cultural Identity, Collective Memory, and Artifacts. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-021-00570-5>
5. He, J. R., & Yan, J. R. (2008). Discussions from Ethnic Identity to National Identity. *Journal of the Central University for Nationalities: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition*. 3. 5–12.
6. Liu, Q. & Turner, D. (2018). Identity and national identity. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 50(12). 1080-1088. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1434076>
7. Mintsyts, E., & Yatskiv, N. (2024). Searching for Identity in the Domain of Memory. *Folium*. 5. 84-90. <https://doi.org/10.32782/folium/2024.5.12>
8. Pier, M. (2024). What Is Cultural Identity? Meaning is Revealed in Personal Stories. *People Are Culture*. Retrieved from: <https://www.peopleareculture.com/cultural-identity>.