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How War Can Catalyse Positive Change for LGBT Rights: The Discursive Construction of LGBT Equality as a National Identity Issue in Ukraine (2022-2024)

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ABSTRACT

War is usually seen as a setback for human rights, reinforcing traditional gender roles and excluding minorities. However, in Ukraine, Russia's full-scale invasion has produced an unexpected effect: Ukrainians demonstrate higher levels of acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people, challenging conventional assumptions about nationalism and war.

This thesis examines how wartime nationalism, rather than marginalising, has opened discursive space for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Drawing on critical discourse analysis of 210 media articles and publications of civil society organisations (2022–2023), it identifies three key dynamics: the visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers challenging stereotypes and fostering public support; the rejection of Russian state homophobia, which casts inclusivity as a marker of Ukrainian difference; and the alignment of LGBTIQ+ equality with the postwar recovery of Ukraine as a democratic European state committed to human rights. In this way, the war has acted as a catalyst for reimagining national identity more inclusively.

By studying Ukraine's case, the study challenges dominant theories linking war, nationalism, and exclusion. It demonstrates how war can generate discursive opportunities for progressive change, offering insights relevant for Ukraine's postwar future and for understanding resistance to Russian imperialism in Ukraine.

Keywords: homonationalism, human rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, national identity, nationalism, Russia's war against Ukraine, Ukraine.

ABSTRAKT

Wojna jest zwykle postrzegana jako krok wstecz w zakresie praw człowieka, wzmacniająca tradycyjne role płciowe i wykluczająca mniejszości. Jednak w Ukrainie pełnoskalowa inwazja Rosji przyniosła efekt nieoczekiwany: Ukraińcy wykazują wyższy poziom akceptacji dla osób LGBTIQ+, co podważa konwencjonalne założenia dotyczące nacjonalizmu i wojny.

Niniejsza praca bada, w jaki sposób nacjonalizm wojenny, zamiast marginalizować, stworzył przestrzeń dyskursywną sprzyjającą włączeniu osób LGBTIQ+. Na podstawie krytycznej analizy dyskursu 210 artykułów medialnych oraz raportów organizacji pozarządowych z lat 2022–2023 wyróżniono trzy kluczowe mechanizmy: widoczność żołnierzy LGBTIQ+, która kwestionuje stereotypy i buduje poparcie społeczne; odrzucenie rosyjskiej państwowej homofobii, które przedstawia inkluzywność jako element odrębności ukraińskiej; oraz powiązanie równości LGBTIQ+ z powojenną odbudową Ukrainy jako demokratycznego państwa europejskiego, zobowiązanego do przestrzegania praw człowieka. W ten sposób wojna stała się katalizatorem redefinicji tożsamości narodowej w bardziej inkluzywnych ramach.

Analiza przypadku Ukrainy pozwala zakwestionować dominujące teorie łączące wojnę, nacjonalizm i wykluczenie. Pokazuje, że wojna może stwarzać dyskursywne możliwości dla postępowych zmian, dostarczając wglądu zarówno w kontekście powojennej odbudowy Ukrainy, jak i zrozumienia mechanizmów oporu wobec rosyjskiego imperializmu.

Słowa kluczowe: homonacjonalizm, nacjonalizm, prawa człowieka, prawa osób LGBTIQ+, tożsamość narodowa, Ukraina, wojna Rosji przeciw Ukrainie.

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INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion on 24 February 2022 divided life in Ukraine into “before” and “after”. The full-scale war affected all spheres of life — political, economic and cultural. The introduction of martial law, general mobilisation to the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), mass displacement of the population seeking refuge from the war, civilian and military casualties, humanitarian crisis and destruction of civilian infrastructure, atrocities under Russian occupation and war crimes of the invading Russian army are among the few processes affecting the everyday life of the citizens of Ukraine. Embracing the need for survival and resistance, society mobilised for defence and adapted to the wartime conditions, demonstrating a tremendous capacity for resilience.

Being psychologically and politically on a war footing, Ukrainian society demonstrates predicted and unexpected tendencies rooted in a unique socio-cultural context of Ukraine. One of the tendencies that occurs contrary to expectations is the change in societal attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ rights. Several nationwide surveys conducted in Ukraine in 2022-2023 confirm the increase in the level of acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people, contrary to the theoretical assumptions that rising nationalism and militarism are incompatible with LGBTIQ+ equality.

Scholars suggest that wars and military conflicts frequently reinforce traditional gender norms and stereotypes. The militarisation and radicalisation that accompany these conflicts often strengthen gender hierarchies and exacerbate existing inequalities, promote heterosexism, and uphold hegemonic, militarised masculinities. As a result, these dynamics contribute to further discrimination, marginalisation and increasing acts of violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that some theoretical provisions can be re-examined and reinterpreted.

The results of the surveys on public attitudes in Ukraine toward LGBTIQ+ people, conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology for non-governmental organisations National Democratic Institute, Nash Svit LGBT Centre, Donbas-Sos Project Centre for LGBT Research, illustrate a significant shift in public opinion regarding LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukraine from 2021 to 2022. Total agreement with the statement: “LGBT+ people should have the same rights as others” (strongly and somewhat agree) rose from 29% in December 2021 to 54% in August 2022 (National Democratic Institute [NDI], 2023, p. 21). In 2024, the number of respondents rose to 70.4%. When

asked how they felt about LGBTIQ+ soldiers defending Ukraine, 68.3% responded positively. However, only 28.7% of respondents support the legalisation of civil partnerships for same-gender couples in the 2024 survey (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology [KIIS], 2024). While society has generally become more accepting of LGBTIQ+ people, this shift has not necessarily translated into greater support for their rights, as acknowledging discrimination or advocating for same-gender marriage may require a deeper level of commitment and conviction (Shestakovskiy, Kasianczuk, & Trofymenko, 2021, p. 142).

A combination of different factors, accompanied by the change of generations, contributes to the growing acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people in Ukraine. Among them are Europeanisation, conditionality and norm diffusion related to the EU accession process of Ukraine, the activity of LGBTIQ+ organisations and their advocacy campaigns for LGBTIQ+ equality, and the growing visibility of LGBTIQ+ issues. While acknowledging the complex interplay of these factors, this research focuses on the discursive construction of LGBTIQ+ equality within the system of national values and national identity in Ukraine (Shevtsova, 2020). This study emphasises the need to consider the complexities of local perspectives and experiences with regard to the geopolitical, cultural, social, and historical context to adapt existing theories to the local context and uncover new insights (Shevtsova, 2024, pp. 10-12).

Against this background, this thesis investigates how LGBTIQ+ equality has been discursively incorporated into Ukrainian national identity during the full-scale war. It is guided by the following research questions: (1) How did the discursive construction of LGBTIQ+ equality as a national identity issue contribute to the growing support for LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukrainian society during the war? (2) Why has Ukrainian society demonstrated increasing acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people after Russia's invasion in 2022, contrary to theoretical expectations? (3) How has Ukrainian society opposed Russian discourses of state-sanctioned homo- and transphobia? (4) How and why has LGBTIQ+ equality been negotiated into Ukrainian national identity in public discourse? To address these questions, the study applies critical discourse analysis (CDA), supported by qualitative content analysis, to a dataset of 210 media articles, NGO publications, and political statements published between February 2022 and June 2023. This approach allows for examining the textual, discursive, and social dimensions of how LGBTIQ+ rights are framed within wartime narratives of national identity.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter I outlines the theoretical framework, focusing on nationalism, militarisation, and LGBTIQ+ rights; Chapter II reviews relevant literature on LGBTIQ+ rights and identity politics in Ukraine from independence to the full-scale invasion; Chapter III explains the methodological design of the study; Chapter IV presents the analysis of discourse on LGBTIQ+ rights in wartime Ukraine, organised around themes of public support, opposition to Russian homophobia, and incorporation of LGBTIQ+ equality into national values.

CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for analysing the complex relation between nationalism, militarisation, and LGBTIQ+ rights. It first examines the conceptualisation of nationalism as a socially constructed phenomenon, tracing its roots in anti-imperial and anti-colonial struggles, and explaining how national identity is shaped through processes of inclusion, exclusion, and Othering. Special attention is given to how these processes interact with questions of gender, sexuality, and LGBTIQ+ rights, exploring both exclusionary patterns such as political homophobia and heteronationalism, and more inclusive models framing LGBTIQ+ equality as a marker of democracy and respect for human rights. The second subchapter then discusses the role of armed conflict and militarisation in reinforcing gender norms and national narratives. Drawing on gender theory and queer feminist research, this section analyses how armed conflicts can heighten risks for LGBTIQ+ communities, while also potentially creating discursive openings to challenge hegemonic masculinities and heteronormativity. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide the framework for understanding how Russian aggression reshapes the boundaries of the “imagined community” in Ukraine and the place of LGBTIQ+ people within it.

1.1. Nationalism and LGBTIQ+ Rights

This research is grounded on the assumption that nations are socially constructed. For the purposes of this research, national identity is broadly conceptualised as a sense of belonging to the nation and identification with the nation. Such understanding is congruent with Benedict Anderson’s theory of imagined communities. He defined the nation as an “imagined political community” perceived as a “deep, horizontal comradeship”, and this imagining and sense of unity motivate members to act in the nation’s interests, often placing them above their own interests, sometimes even sacrificing their lives (Anderson, 1983/2006, pp. 6-7). This is relevant to the Ukrainian context, where there is a prevailing understanding that individual and collective well-being, as well as the protection of fundamental human rights, is threatened by the Russian invasion and depends on the survival of the Ukrainian nation-state (Stepanenko, 2022). Experiences of war unite military and civilian parts of the population and create or strengthen a sense of collective self-image vis-à-vis a common enemy so that the origin of nationalism can be traced in the anticolonial and anti-

imperial struggle for sovereignty, self-rule and political independence, which forms mass national consciousness as a self-differentiation in opposition to a rival Other (Hutchinson, 2017, pp. 58-59).

Nationalism actively shapes and strengthens national identity, providing the framework for defining who belongs to the nation, who outsiders are and what characteristics people must share to be included in the collective body of the nation (Kulyk, 2024, p. 297). Given that identity assigns values and vision and sets expectations to act in a particular way, governments utilise the performativity of identity to channel people's behaviour and actions in a specific direction, preserving control and order in a state (Shmatko & Rachok, 2024, pp. 69-71).

Following the assumption that nations are socially constructed, national identities are understood to be shaped and reshaped through discourse and "internalised through socialisation" (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 4). National identity is understood as flexible and context-dependent, shaped differently across various social settings, collective experiences and ideas, and influenced by both elite and everyday discourse (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 4).

Building on Anderson's idea of "imagined communities", Stuart Hall argues that nations are "symbolic communities", "systems of cultural representation", meaning that people relate to their nation not just as legal citizens but through the meanings and symbols embedded in its national culture, which functions as a discourse and shapes how individuals understand themselves and the world around them by creating narratives and images that define what the nation is (Hall, 1996, pp. 612-613).

In this context, national identity consists of commonly held beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural tendencies that are internalised through socialisation processes such as education, politics, media, sports, and everyday interactions. (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 28). This identity becomes visible in people's actions and discursive practices, with discourse being a way to express national identity and construct and maintain it (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 29).

This research applies the framework of the Self/Other relationship in identity construction to explain how views of LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukraine contrast with Russian LGBTIQ+ politics. Self/Other framework suggests that the ever-evolving process of identity formation takes place in contrast to the main adversary — the prominent Other — and acquires meaning in relation to other

identities sharing some common characteristics (Slootmaeckers, 2019a). National identity often emphasises unity within a nation, overlooks internal diversity and highlights contrasts with other groups, especially those perceived as similar, because “identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference” (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 2). Besides strengthening differences, identity helps to find similarities with other nations and identify with a broader circle of states, as Ukrainian identity has gained a pronounced European dimension (Kulyk, 2024, p. 298). The technology of Othering is studied as a commonly used tool in nationalist ideologies to define the nation’s boundaries.

National identity is typically given little attention in everyday life, but during times of crisis, particularly interstate wars, national identity becomes especially significant, as people not only feel a stronger sense of belonging but also reevaluate what their national identity means (Smith, 1981). Foreign aggression reinforces a sense of national identity and the shared understanding of its meaning, reducing internal disagreement about its significance and content (Kulyk, 2024, p. 296).

Scholars studying nationalism and national identity raise the issue of competing and parallel identities. Florian Bieber defined nationalism as a “malleable and narrow ideology, which values membership in a nation greater than other groups (i.e. based on gender, parties, or socio-economic group), seeks distinction from other nations, and strives to preserve the nation and give preference to political representation by the nation for the nation” (Bieber, 2018, p. 520). Such a view of nationalism supposes that it tends to reject alternative or competing identities (Swimelar, 2019, p. 609). However, some case studies confirm that complex relations of different types of identities – cultural, religious, gender, political, ethnic, regional, national or supranational – are contextual and, depending on the circumstances, have the potential for parallel coexistence (Shmatko & Rachok, 2024).

Nationalism and homophobia are not intrinsically connected (Swimelar, 2019, p. 609). However, scholars argue that because a nation’s existence is ensured by the physical reproduction of people, nationalism tends to develop into a heteronormative and homophobic project, reinforcing a specific understanding of masculinity that serves national interests, promoting a sense of brotherhood and comradeship while excluding LGBTIQ+ people as an obstacle to the project (Mosse, 1983; Shmatko & Rachok, 2024).

Researchers examining the impact of nationalism on societal views of homosexuality argue that nations are not formed in a gender-neutral manner but are instead shaped by gendered narratives. (Swimelar, 2019, p. 609). Exploring the deep-rooted historical and contemporary links between masculinity, nationalism, patriotism and militarism, Joane Nagel (1998) explains how nationalist ideologies symbolically construct patriotic masculinity and idealised motherhood, and national politics assign men and women distinct gender roles in national politics, where women are primarily positioned as mothers and caregivers, while men assume the roles of protectors, providers and decision-makers (Nagel, 1998). The patriarchal family structure, which reinforces heteronormative and patriarchal ideals of masculinity and femininity, ensures the continuity of a nation's ethnic identity and distinction from the Other (Nagel, 2000).

George Mosse, one of the first scholars to study the link between nationalism and sexuality, argued that modern nationalism constructed an idealised national identity that was heteronormative and rooted in rigid gender roles, while homosexuality was framed as a social deviation from the patriarchal order and a threat to the nation, justifying legal discrimination and social exclusion of LGBTIQ+ people. (Mosse, 1985, as cited in Hutchinson, 2021, p. 885).

The complex relationship between nationalism and LGBTIQ+ rights may vary depending on the socio-cultural context and political situation in a particular country. Mole (2016, p.104) argues that since many countries in Central and Eastern Europe historically defined their national identity through ethnic and cultural homogeneity, emphasising shared ancestry, religion, and traditions, their ethnic-based nationalism is one of the reasons for prevalent anti-LGBTIQ+ attitudes, contrasting with the civic nationalism of Western Europe, which is more inclusive of diversity.

Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe stem from the historical anti-imperial and later anti-communist and anti-Soviet struggle of the nations in the region for international recognition and political independence. The collapse of communism and the Soviet Union and the course of nation-building processes in the region highlight the historical importance and the positive functions of nationalism, which served as a core organising idea, played a modernising role and promoted further democratisation (Sajo, 1993). Russian military aggression brings back the relevance of anti-imperial nationalism in the region.

Studying LGBTIQ+ activism in Eastern Europe, Conor O'Dwyer (2018) discusses how LGBTIQ+ activism in post-communist societies has navigated nationalist discourses. He explains that, in

some cases, activists have framed LGBTIQ+ rights as compatible with national identity and democratic progress. Factors such as political leadership, civil society, and EU influence affect countries' paths regarding LGBTIQ+ rights. Although O'Dwyer's book does not focus specifically on war, its broader arguments suggest that moments of political crisis and transformation, such as EU integration, regime change, or national identity struggles, can create opportunities for marginalised groups, including LGBTIQ+ activists, to push for greater recognition (O'Dwyer, 2018).

Examining how the European integration process has influenced LGBTIQ+ rights in Central and Eastern Europe, Koen Sloopmaeckers, Heleen Touquet, and Peter Vermeersch (2016) argue that even though in some cases nationalism has been used to resist LGBTIQ+ rights, framing them as a part of Western influence, in other cases, nationalism has been redefined in more inclusive terms, framing LGBTIQ+ equality as a human rights issue and linking LGBTIQ+ rights to democratic values and resistance against authoritarianism.

Alternatively, scholars note that the state can co-opt LGBTIQ+ movements to promote its image or policies. The connection between sexual rights and the elements of nationalism is captured by the concept of homonationalism, placing "gay-friendliness" within national self-definition. Homonationalism, a concept developed by Jasbir Puar (2007), attempts to explain how a nation-state embraces and recognises LGBTIQ+ equality and uses it to reinforce nationalist, racist and imperialist agendas. The advancement of LGBTIQ+ rights is achieved at the cost of the exclusion of "racialised others" (Puar, 2013). Puar applies this concept to the United States and Israel, where its support for LGBTIQ+ equality is portrayed as a marker of progress and modernity to contrast with the perceived "backwardness" of the Islamic world or other regions with a lack of LGBTIQ+ equality (Puar, 2013). Despite the overextension of the concept, it is primarily used as a critique of the nationalisation of LGBTIQ+ movements, evident in homonormativity (e.g. advocacy for equal marriage rights is viewed as conformity with heteronormative practices of the nation-state) and complicity of LGBTIQ+ movements with far-right agendas featuring Islamophobic anti-immigration sentiments (Masri, 2022).

Scholars note the limitations of the concept in its application across various geopolitical contexts (Masri, 2022). Swimelar (2019), Leksikov and Rachok (2020) argue that homonationalism overlooks the developments in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as the region's unique post-

communist context makes it difficult to fit within the concept's framework in its current interpretation, which overlooks how local LGBTIQ+ activists often embrace European identity discourse to advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights instead of viewing it as a form of imperialism.

Despite the concept itself having emerged as a rather critical one to draw the attention of the academic discussion to prejudice and discrimination, Western exceptionalism and instrumentalisation of LGBTIQ+ rights, the scholars looking into homonationalism through the lens of the East-West dichotomy fail to notice Russia as an imperial force. Thus, they neglect the postimperial context of Eastern Europe, where LGBTIQ+ communities resist Russia's influence campaigns promoting "traditional values" both domestically and as a foreign policy tool (Strand & Svensson, 2021). The existing conceptualisation of homonationalism also neglects the unique historical role of nationalism in this region, which creates the pathways for its cooptation by local LGBTIQ+ communities. Ukraine's growing acceptance of LGBTIQ+ rights cannot be seen through the lens of homonationalism as formulated by Puar, and the following chapters attempt to extend the application of homonationalism by reversing Puar's argument.

Another concept explaining the nexus between nationalism and homophobia is heteronationalism. Heteronationalism, on the other hand, enforces rigid gender roles, heterosexism and patriarchy in state policies to sustain population growth and to define national identity and boundaries (Gosine, 2009, p. 98). Sloomackers (2019b) challenges the duality of homonationalism and heteronationalism, noting that both phenomena use homophobia as a technology of Othering: either to contrast the LGBTIQ+-inclusive and tolerant Self with the homophobic Other, or to differentiate the Self from the non-masculine, weak or effeminate Other – the LGBTIQ+ community or LGBTIQ+-friendly states.

Heteronationalism is closely related to political homophobia. Political homophobia refers to the use of exclusionary and discriminatory policies and rhetoric to target the LGBTIQ+ community, often as a means for those in power to strengthen their authority (Bosia & Weiss, 2012, p. 2). It describes the instrumentalisation of homophobia in statecraft or political struggle to frame the LGBTIQ+ community as a threat to the collective body of the nation (Swimelar, 2019, p. 610). When used as a political tool, homophobia is more than personal prejudice and hostility; it becomes a technology of Othering, reinforcing hierarchical social structures through masculinity norms (Sloomackers, 2019, p. 242). Research on political homophobia aims to understand how

homophobia becomes an institutionalised political strategy on a transnational scale when heteronormativity and masculinity are not inherently homophobic and have the potential to support the inclusion and acceptance (Bosia & Weiss, 2012, p. 14).

The analysis of nationalism in this chapter establishes it as a flexible, socially constructed framework for defining belonging and difference, capable of excluding or including LGBTIQ+ identities depending on political, historical, and cultural conditions. Nationalist ideologies are often linked to heteronormative and patriarchal structures, and concepts such as homonationalism, heteronationalism, and political homophobia highlight different ways sexuality is instrumentalised in nationalist projects. However, when these theoretical assumptions are applied to different socio-political contexts, they may reveal conditions in which LGBTIQ+ rights are integrated into national identity narratives. In the Ukrainian case, nationalism's anti-imperial roots, anchored in resistance to Russian aggression and established European orientation, offer an unexpected tendency, suggesting that LGBTIQ+ inclusion can be framed as consistent with national resilience and democratic values.

The next subsection introduces a theoretical framework for understanding how armed conflict and militarisation shape gender relations and national identity. It connects the dynamics of nationalism and Othering discussed here with the gendered hierarchies and hegemonic masculinities reinforced during armed conflicts. It also examines how militarised contexts can both deepen the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ people or, alternatively, open discursive space for reimagining their place within the national community.

1.2. Armed Conflict, Militarisation and LGBTIQ+ Identities

The gender analysis of the military structures and war, and of the social construction of a nation, is central to understanding the impact of an armed conflict on societal attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ identities, which has been a focus of numerous works. From the perspective of queer feminist research, gender plays a crucial role in all military conflicts (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024, p. 1).

Sustaining war efforts requires militarisation, which in its neutral meaning can be defined as “the quantity and proportion of resources a society devotes to military affairs” (Carlton-Ford, 2010, p. 885). Militarisation is also described as a process whereby society normalises reliance on and the

necessity of the military and internalises militaristic ideals (Enloe, 2000, as cited in Smet & Hwang, 2021, p. 326).

Militarisation tends to prioritise military values in everyday life, glorifying traits such as physical strength, bravery, discipline, and readiness for sacrifice, qualities traditionally linked to normative masculinity. Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (2005) discusses how war reinforces hegemonic masculinity by institutionalising a militarised form of manhood and marginalising alternative masculinities and LGBTIQ+ identities, which is evident in military structures, where homosexuality has historically been framed as a threat to unit cohesion and discipline. Connell (2005, pp. 244-265) explains how war often leads to a reassertion of traditional gender norms and divisions and argues that in the military and wartime settings, LGBTIQ+ people face exclusion, discrimination, and violence. Re-traditionalisation and polarisation of gender norms occurring during the war may result in a post-war rejection of progressive views on masculinity, gender and sexuality (Swimelar, 2019, p. 610). According to Connell (2005), the concept of hegemonic masculinity captures how patriarchy imposes internal hierarchies among men, where hegemonic masculinity subordinates or marginalises other masculinities.

Militarised masculinities in their plurality beyond military structures are conceptualised not only as a product of militarisation but also as a social construct and a process of socialisation manifested in popular culture, media discourse, governmental policies, etc. (Eichler, 2014). Scholars note how authoritarian regimes perform militarised masculinity as a mode of social control, retaining both discipline and unrestrained violence, as evident in Russia (Tapscott, 2020).

Nationalism, militarisation and heteronormativity can reinforce each other in shaping identities, values, and social roles. Nationalism often amplifies the gender hierarchies and gendered narratives that both shape and are shaped by militarism and armed conflict (Olivius & Hedström, 2019). Militarisation is viewed as a key process through which nationalist movements influence the perception of masculinities, as they present the military service as a primary way to fulfil the ideals of normative masculinity (Smet & Hwang, 2021, p. 326). Essentially, when nationalism and militarisation impose a narrow understanding of masculinity, they create a cultural and political environment where non-heterosexual identities are muted, being framed as incompatible with the patriotic, militarised masculine ideal. LGBTIQ+ identities, whether perceived as overly feminine

or excessively masculine, are seen as disrupting the pre-established gender binary that links men to masculinity and women to femininity (Smet & Hwang, 2021, pp. 328-329).

The armed conflicts affect the LGBTIQ+ community in many negative ways. Rigid gender hierarchies and heteronormative ideals reinforced by militarisation may translate into scapegoating and targeting of LGBTIQ+ people, who are affected disproportionately due to their disadvantaged position in society, evident in barriers to access humanitarian assistance and basic services, weak access to justice and discriminatory legal system, distinctive challenges during forced displacement and integration into host communities, weak family bonds and stigmatisation (Godoy, Cortez, Willenbrink, Liu, & Koehler, 2020, pp. 2-3; Myrtilinen, Khattab, & Naujoks, 2014).

In highly militarised environments, governments may delay or reverse progress on human rights, including LGBTIQ+ rights, as they focus on military priorities, and issues like same-gender marriage, anti-discrimination laws, or legal gender recognition may be ignored or deprioritised (Felice, 1998). The situation may be exacerbated by the shrinking civil space due to martial law, e.g. restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, making it harder for LGBTIQ+ organisations to operate, receive funding, or advocate for rights when public discourse is dominated by military and nationalist rhetoric.

Human rights reports inform that LGBTIQ+ people in conflict zones face heightened risk of violence, including from soldiers, militias, or extremist groups (Margalit, 2018, p. 238). Empirical data and human rights reports demonstrate that LGBTIQ+ people run higher risks of experiencing war crimes (Moore & Barner, 2017).

While there are many case studies on how rising nationalism and militarism mutually reinforce each other and exacerbate existing gendered hierarchies, human rights deterioration and homophobic violence, this research aims to focus on the agency of the LGBTIQ+ community and explore how, given a favourable social and political context, LGBTIQ+ movements can navigate nationalism and militarisation to pursue their aims. Despite the generalised theoretical assumptions about the incompatibility of LGBTIQ+ acceptance with militarism and nationalism, this research builds on the necessity for context-specific analysis of how LGBTIQ+ movements relate to and use the potential of nationalism and militarisation, circumventing their limitations.

This chapter has introduced the theoretical framework necessary to analyse how nationalism and militarisation interact with LGBTIQ+ rights in the Ukrainian context against the backdrop of Russian aggression. By understanding nationalism as a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon, the discussion moves beyond deterministic associations between national identity, war, and exclusionary politics.

Contrary to the assumption that nationalism and militarisation naturally exclude or marginalise LGBTIQ+ people by promoting hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, this research explores how war can be used as a discursive opportunity for local actors to redraw the boundaries of the “imagined community” and promote greater inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people, framing LGBTIQ+ rights as part of a broader national story of resistance, modernity, and shared values. This shift is studied within a broader discursive framework in which the Ukrainian Self is constructed in explicit opposition to a homophobic and authoritarian Russian Other, which allows for aligning LGBTIQ+ inclusion with national resilience, sovereignty, and European democratic values.

This study presumes that nationalism is not inherently exclusionary of LGBTIQ+ identities, but that its content and direction depend upon the socio-political context, in which national identity as a socially constructed phenomenon is being shaped. The Ukrainian experience challenges theories that link war and nationalism to the marginalisation of the LGBTIQ+ community, offering a more nuanced view of how national identity can evolve in times of crisis. In the Ukrainian context, the redefinition of national identity opens discursive space for greater inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people.

CHAPTER II. OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL CASE

This chapter reviews the existing scholarship on LGBTIQ+ rights and societal attitudes in Ukraine, situating them within the country's broader socio-political and geopolitical developments since independence in 1991. The literature demonstrates that changes in LGBTIQ+ acceptance cannot be understood in isolation from key historical events, including Ukraine's post-Soviet transition, the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014), and the ongoing full-scale Russian invasion (2022–). Researchers identify two central drivers of change: the influence of Europeanisation, including EU conditionality and the diffusion of liberal norms, and the efforts of local LGBTIQ+ organisations and activists. The situation with LGBTIQ+ equality is shaped by domestic social movements, national identity formation, and Ukraine's geopolitical positioning.

The chapter proceeds chronologically, examining three distinct periods: the first two decades of independence, the post-Euromaidan era, and the first two years of the full-scale invasion. Across these stages, it analyses how legal reforms, activism strategies, political instrumentalisation of LGBTIQ+ issues, and wartime nation-building have affected LGBTIQ+ visibility and acceptance. This review highlights both the opportunities created by moments of political transformation and the persistent challenges posed by homophobic rhetoric and the politicisation of LGBTIQ+ rights in the context of value-based geopolitical confrontation.

2.1. First Two Decades of Independence

Scholarship on LGBTIQ+ issues in Ukraine connects societal attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ equality with a socio-political situation and a broader geopolitical context. Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine, as a transitioning democracy, has undergone multiple large-scale socio-political events, such as the Orange Revolution in 2004, the Revolution of Dignity 2013-2014, the beginning of the occupation of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions by the Russian Federation in 2014, and the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. Maksym Kasianczuk, who studies longitudinal data on public opinion concerning LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukraine, notes that mass protests did not have a negative impact on the level of LGBTIQ+ acceptance, and the full-scale Russian invasion did not reverse the rising support for LGBTIQ+ rights (Kasianczuk, 2023). Researchers mainly focus on two factors explaining these dynamics: (1) Europeanisation with its

conditionality politics and norm diffusion and the role of Western institutions in promoting LGBTIQ+ equality, and (2) the activity of LGBTIQ+ organisations and the role of local LGBTIQ+ activists and movements in liberalising the social and political environment. These factors are interrelated, as local organisations rely on Western institutions for support while providing them with local expertise and networks for cooperation (Buyantueva & Shevtsova, 2020, p. 6).

Scholars researching the attitudes to and progress of LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukraine note the impact of the communist legacy. Legal and social discrimination, both criminalisation and unofficial persecution, contributed to the country's lower tolerance toward LGBTIQ+ individuals, while decades of government control over public life fostered distrust in political engagement and discouraged activism, including LGBTIQ+ activism (O'Dwyer, 2013, pp. 103-108).

Ukraine decriminalised homosexuality in 1991, becoming the first post-Soviet country to do so (Shevtsova, 2020). However, despite formal decriminalisation, liberalising social and political space and achieving LGBTIQ+ equality and societal acceptance became a decades-long process, which involved breaking the silence around LGBTIQ+ issues and fighting stereotypes. LGBTIQ+ people continued to face discrimination and social exclusion. During the 1990s and 2000s, hate speech against LGBTIQ+ people was widespread, as politicians and religious leaders framed homosexuality as a threat to national values and morality, and the Ukrainian media reinforced stereotypes and spread misinformation through negative portrayals (Martsenyuk, 2012, pp. 395-399). To advocate for their legal rights and ensure protection, especially within state institutions, LGBTIQ+ people coordinated their forces through LGBTIQ+ organisations. Scholars note that Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ organisations had an insufficient influence on society and remained relatively unknown, resulting in a limited role in promoting LGBTIQ+ acceptance (Shestakovskiy, Kasianczuk, & Trofymenko, 2021, p. 131). The EU's promotion of LGBTIQ+ rights through conditionality mechanisms has proven to be a practical manifestation of normative power, especially with regard to legislative changes (Shevtsova, 2020). However, it is a top-down process that alone has a limited impact on driving changes in societal attitudes and making the general population internalise tolerance and acceptance. Additionally, similarly to other Central-Eastern European countries, it has often been politicised by anti-Western politicians in Ukraine as a reason to oppose "decadent West" and resist the imposition of "alien ideas from the West" (Mole, 2016, p. 114).

Between 2011 and 2013, when the Ukrainian government debated approximation with Europe or Russia, the pro-Russian political and media groups framed the EU conditionality on LGBTIQ+ rights as a threat of “coercive homosexualisation of population” and an argument against association with the EU (Shevtsova, 2020, p. 500). In that period, the Ukrainian parliament registered six draft laws against “propaganda of sexuality”, mimicking Russian anti-LGBTIQ+ laws (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024, p. 5). The politicisation of LGBTIQ+ rights made it harder for the LGBTIQ+ movement in Ukraine to use European arguments in their activism and led to more negative attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ people in Ukraine between 2012 and 2015 (Shevtsova, 2020).

2.2. Ukraine After Euromaidan

The Revolution of Dignity started as large-scale protests across Ukraine against the government’s decision to halt the preparations for signing the association agreement with the EU and the government’s intentions to seek a closer alliance with Russia. According to a public survey, one-third of the Ukrainian population was involved in the protests throughout the country, with 20% directly participating in the protests and 9% helping them (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation [IKDIF], 2014). Their reasons for participating in the demonstrations included human rights violations, widespread corruption, injustice, and political and institutional failures (Zelinska, 2015). The Euromaidan was called the Revolution of Dignity because it resulted in profound political and social transformations in the country, impacting nation-building, leading to a shift in values, and accelerating decolonisation from the Soviet past — both de-sovietisation and de-rusification (Sviatnenko & Vinogradov, 2014).

LGBTIQ+ activists chose not to advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights during the protests, opting to postpone the issue for a more favourable time, which can be viewed as a sign of unity, where activists with different political views as well as of different ethnic or religious identities, joined forces for a shared vision of a democratic and European future for Ukraine (Shestakovskiy, Kasianczuk, & Trofymenko, 2021, p. 130). It also demonstrates how different identities – national and queer – can coexist in parallel, balance or take precedence depending on the situation. The national identity of queer activists was the dominant force in moments of political change, while their queer identity remained a significant but less publicly emphasised aspect of their participation

(Shmatko & Rachok, 2024, p. 76). The strategy of invisibility they deliberately chose also helped to avoid provoking opponents and being targeted by the Russian propaganda (Martsenyuk, 2015).

The Revolution of Dignity signified people's aspirations to pursue Euro-Atlantic integration. The pro-European turn of domestic and foreign policy after signing the Ukraine-EU association agreement in 2014 helped activists to place LGBTIQ+ rights on the agenda and make LGBTIQ+ issues more visible, from organising equality marches to lobbying for legal changes. LGBTIQ+ activists used this window of opportunity to promote LGBTIQ+ rights as an inalienable part of human rights protected under EU law. In a new discursive shift, „not only did gay rights no longer appear to be a threat to national security, they were portrayed instead as a means to achieve this security via approximation with the European Union against Russian military aggression, by embracing ‘European’ values” (Shevtsova, 2020, p. 508).

After the Euromaidan, the LGBTIQ+ community gained visibility, and in 2015-2019, Pride marches were held annually in big cities of Ukraine, shaping the public perception of LGBTIQ+ communities and advocating for their rights. The EU association prompted the Ukrainian parliament to liberalise LGBTIQ+-related legislation in the Labour Code for the first time since 1991. However, similarly to pre-revolution development, opponents of the EU integration tried to manipulate public opinion by exploiting homophobic rhetoric and fuelling homonegative views (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024). Notably, such tactics of political instrumentalisation of homophobia are characteristic of wider Russian hybrid influence in the region and efforts to destabilise countries with EU aspirations, such as Georgia and Moldova (Strand & Svensson, 2021). That time, political homophobia was instrumentalised not only by pro-Russian groups but also by right-wing nationalists, who, instead of opposing pro-Russian groups, joined them in homophobic rhetoric and questioned the suitability of liberal values for Ukraine (Bonacker & Zimmer, 2020). Surprisingly, Ukrainian hetero-activist movements adopted rhetoric like that of the Kremlin while simultaneously distancing themselves from Russia through nationalist discourse. Shevtsova notes that hetero-activism in Ukraine evolved alongside certain progressions in LGBTIQ+ rights and gender equality, unlike in Western contexts, where it was often a reaction to rapid advancements in gender and sexual equality (Shevtsova, 2023, p. 1040).

2.3. First Two Years After the Full-Scale Invasion

When analysing societal attitudes and public discourse in Ukraine after 2022, it is necessary to look into it under the framework of the social organisation of war, which involves the interaction of governmental and non-governmental sectors, the army, businesses and media (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023, p. 341).

The urgent need to defend the country's independence in the face of Russian aggression in 2022 generated a unique form of collective effort and solidarity. This kind of unity is not just emotional or symbolic; it is a practical necessity for citizens to be able to protect their rights and freedoms and defend their home and people (Leksikov & Rachok, 2020). The war has reinforced the idea of the state as a shared responsibility and a collective asset, with many citizens viewing it as a value that must be safeguarded for future generations (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023, pp. 363-364).

The social, political and psychological experiences of full-scale war intensified bottom-up nation-building efforts (Korniychuk, 2024, p. 34). The concept of nationalism has multiple meanings, and in the war context in Ukraine, nationalism has taken on such interpretations as identification with the nation-state, patriotism, civic engagement, civil responsibility or simply "Ukraineness," i.e. Ukrainian identity rooted in language and traditions (Plakhotnik, 2022). Voldodymyr Kulyk notes that Ukrainians tend to perceive nationalism as "love for one's people and desire to see one's country free" or "the just struggle for national liberation" (Kulyk, 2016, p. 604).

Marnie Howlett, who studied everyday nationalism in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion, analysing its grassroots expressions and practices, highlights "its significance in the current conflict as a motivating and unifying force in Ukrainians' everyday lives" (Howlett, 2023, p. 63). Eleanor Knott argues that the nature of Ukraine's resistance is best captured by the concept of existential nationalism as "Ukraine is fighting for the right to exist and maintain its right to determine what that existence should look like (democratic, multicultural, tolerant and multiethnic)" (Knott, 2023).

According to Volodymyr Kulyk, "Russian aggression further contributed to the rise of inclusivity of Ukrainian nationalism" (Kulyk, 2014, p. 121). This inclusivity of national identity is evident in its emphasis on liberal democratic principles, such as freedom, respect for diversity, tolerance, and the protection of individual rights.

Using a postcolonial approach, scholars note the anticolonial nature of nationalism in Ukraine, highlighting the agency of the people who fight against the imposition of neocolonial domination and construct their national identity “to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between coloniser and colonised” (Loomba, 2005, as cited in Shevtsova, 2022, p. 136).

It can be argued that even though Ukrainian societies experience militarisation and the rise of nationalism, unique socio-cultural and geopolitical circumstances, defined by the alliance with the EU and the nature of Russian aggression, create societal demand for “reasonable”, “democratic” and human-centric militarisation because the purpose of defending the state is to guarantee social security and citizens’ well-being (Razumkov Centre, 2024). The remilitarisation in Ukraine, which before 2014 had undergone demilitarisation, is a reaction to Russian aggression, and this forced militarisation is characterised by a bottom-up approach, with volunteer movements and civil society playing a crucial role in military mobilisation (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023, pp. 362-363). According to the survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in 2024, the vast majority of Ukrainians support militarisation, including increasing defence spending and patriotic education, but they also expect the government to take a balanced approach, aligning with democratic values and ensuring accountability and transparency under civilian control (Razumkov Centre, 2024). Fighting the rigid, hierarchical Russian army, which relies on propaganda, repression, and top-down mobilisation, the Ukrainian military is conducting reforms to transition toward NATO operational structures, emphasising decentralised command and democratic engagement (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023, pp. 360-361).

Although martial law in Ukraine upholds fundamental rights such as equality before the law and the right to life and dignity, it also poses significant challenges to democracy. The ongoing war has led to increased militarisation of the public sphere, with governance shifting to military administrations and restrictions imposed on freedoms, including speech and peaceful assembly (Stepanenko, 2022, pp. 20-21). Some experts argue that if this securitisation continues, it could weaken key democratic structures such as decentralisation, civil society, and economic resilience. (Korniychuk, 2024, p. 43).

An increasing number of experts and policymakers view a militarised democracy as essential for Ukraine to protect its sovereignty in the coming years (Korniychuk, 2024). They expect Ukraine’s

recovery and post-war development to emphasise national and human security and focus on the defence and security sectors.

Since Ukrainian society relies on the army for state survival and protection against Russian aggression, attitudes of civilians are characterised by positive perceptions of the military personnel, heroisation, and gratitude (Klymanska, Malachivska-Danchak, Klimanska, & Haletska, 2024). Since the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian society has demonstrated the highest level of trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine among other state institutions, with 58% of respondents fully trusting the army (NDI, 2023, p. 26).

The general mobilisation to the Armed Forces of Ukraine introduced by presidential decree 69/2022 on 24 February 2022 applies to men aged 18 to 60. In the first days after the Russian invasion, thousands of people registered in the army as volunteers or voluntarily joined the territorial defence units. General mobilisation has also affected civilians whose friends or relatives serve on the frontline. The war affects the population of Ukraine in all spheres of life, which motivates people to establish and take part in fundraising campaigns and grassroots initiatives aimed at supporting Ukraine's defence effort, army provision and humanitarian relief. These efforts are based not only on civil society organisations (CSOs) and volunteer networks but also on individual initiatives of citizens, reflecting a deep sense of national identity and shared responsibility for the country's future (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023).

Ukrainian resistance in the ongoing full-scale war is primarily enabled by the resilience of its society. Andriy Korniychuk argues that “this resilience necessitates a high level of inclusivity — all members of the society understanding their role, whilst feeling valued, taken care of and included in decision-making” (Korniychuk, 2024, p. 40). The broad mobilisation of Ukrainian society, when every individual is actively engaged and empowered and contributes to the collective effort, enabled successful resistance against Russia, which outnumbers Ukraine in terms of economic and human resources. The active engagement and recognition of all societal groups are vital to Ukraine's defence efforts and its broader after-war rebuilding.

As the number of military personnel grows, the issue of meeting the needs of military personnel and ensuring their highest possible physical safety and psychological well-being remains a priority. Besides fundraising, civic activists make efforts to introduce reforms and institutional changes in the army, addressing the needs of the soldiers. For example, in February 2023, the AFU introduced

vegan ration packs. It was made possible because the civic activists raised the issue of the lack of dietary variety in the military ration packs. The petition to the president gained 25 thousand signatures (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine [MDU], 2024). Another example of civilians addressing military needs is the introduction of modernised women's military uniforms in February 2024, which was made possible due to civic activism (Ukrainska Pravda, 2024). Scholars note that emancipatory tendencies intensified in the military context, evident in discourses of public leaders emphasising women's active role and agency in defence and resistance (Petrova, Rebrii, & Zubrytskyi, 2023).

In June 2022, four months after the invasion, the Ukrainian parliament ratified the Istanbul Convention after 11 years of delay following the signing of the document in 2011 (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2022, p. 358). Amid the war, the necessity to ratify the convention became a pressing issue, which, if done earlier, could have provided the legal framework for assistance to numerous victims of conflict-related sexual violence (Shyrokykh, Busol, & Koval, 2025, p. 168). And yet in 2022, conservative MPs and the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches continued opposing the ratification because of the use of the terms "gender", "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" (Elsner, 2022). Thus, as a sign of compromise, the ratification was accompanied by a unilateral declaration that the convention's implementation shall not contradict the Constitution of Ukraine and the Family Code (Hromliuk, 2022). Analysis of Ukrainian reforms amidst the war concludes that EU conditionality, the pressure of civil society and the war factor made gender equality reforms bound to happen (Shyrokykh, Busol, & Koval, 2025, pp. 164-167).

Besides sociological data on the rising acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people in Ukraine, support for equal rights is evident in practical acts. In 2022, activists gathered enough signatures for a petition to President Zelenskyi to legalise same-gender unions, and as a result, a bill to establish same-gender civil partnerships was registered in the parliament (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024, p. 9). In Ukraine's current political debate, liberalising legislation is motivated not only by the need to secure Western support but also by shifting attitudes among political elites and society.

The effects of Russian military aggression on the nation-building process and LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukraine can be traced in several ways. Firstly, a new kind of public discourse frames LGBTIQ+ people as a part of the Ukrainian political nation.

Reports documenting the Russian army using physical violence against LGBTIQ+ people in the occupied territories confirm that LGBTIQ+ identity, along with support for Ukrainian statehood or the use of the Ukrainian language, increases the likelihood of being targeted by the occupation authorities (Feder, 2024). When people see LGBTIQ+ people defending the country in the Armed Forces of Ukraine or suffering under Russian occupation because of their identity, it prompts them to reconsider their attitude. It becomes a part of the narrative of shared suffering and sacrifice, which places them inside the Nation-Self. While earlier politicians attempted to frame LGBTIQ+ as a threat, now these arguments have lost credibility as the imagined threat is replaced by a real danger – the Russian war. In the Ukrainian case, the LGBTIQ+ community is “incorporated into the national struggle against the invasion” (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024, p. 2). Even though nationalism is an inherently exclusive project, Shmatko and Rachok note that “the Ukrainian national project excludes those who were trying to actively destroy it at a time (i.e. Russians and their supporters)” (Shmatko & Rachok, 2024, p. 79).

The growing visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers in the Ukrainian army helps to change public opinion about them, breaking stereotypes, challenging patriarchal constructs often associated with military services and placing LGBTIQ+ identity within the narratives of patriotism and heroism. War resistance is utilised for the advancement of LGBTIQ+ equality because it includes resistance to the imposition of an illiberal gender order (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2022, p. 351).

Bonacker and Zimmer (2015) note that in Ukraine, LGBTIQ+ people are often stereotyped as unproductive and detached from national development, mainly due to their perceived lack of contribution to the economy and defence. To challenge this, LGBTIQ+ activists highlight their roles as workers, taxpayers and soldiers, using their military participation to counter narratives that portray them as a threat and to affirm their commitment to Ukraine’s security and stability (Bonacker & Zimmer, 2020, p. 175).

Public visibility in social movements, including LGBTIQ+ activism, helps to raise awareness of social injustices, challenge stereotypes and fight discrimination (Buyantueva & Shevtsova, 2020, pp. 21-22). LGBTIQ+ organisations in their media highlight LGBTIQ+ soldiers’ contribution to the defence efforts and convey the message that people need to protect their rights as they protect their lives.

Analysing developments in Ukraine, critics of LGBTIQ+ politics of complicity with the regimes of power, which includes efforts of incorporating LGBTIQ+ equality into the nation's symbolic identity and aligning LGBTIQ+ activism with nation-building efforts, warn against making LGBTIQ+ rights conditional on conformity to state-defined norms, national loyalty, military service, instead of fighting for their recognition as universal human rights independent of nationalist agendas (Plakhotnik, 2022).

Secondly, drawing on the theory of Othering in identity construction, it can be argued that „Ukrainian and Russian discourses on gender, sexuality and war are mutually constitutive” (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2022, p. 348).

Studying national homophobic discourse in Russia, Kropp and Swityk (2022) conclude that “homophobia is an ingrained component of the Russian national identity” (Kropp & Swityk, 2022, p. 83). Scholarship confirms that Russia instrumentalises state-sanctioned homophobia as a reason for aggression against Ukraine. Russian state officials and the Russian Orthodox Church claim that they fight for “traditional family values” and aim to “liberate” Ukraine from “Western-sponsored” “propaganda of homosexuality and transgenderism” (Luciani & Shevtsova, 2024, pp. 1-2; Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2022, pp. 351-352). The so-called protection of “traditional values” is one of the pillars of the Russian ideology of “Ruskii Mir”, in which Russia is presented as a bulwark of traditional values against “Gayropa” (Riabov & Riabova, 2014, p. 195). The West, with its liberal order, is defined as the Other, an external enemy against which Russia forms its radically different identity and mobilises anti-gender movements in other countries to confront “gender ideology” and resist the global advancement of sexual and gender equality (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2022, p. 361). Russia positions itself as a protector of traditional family values and Orthodox Christian heritage, contrasting with Ukraine's increasing alignment with the European Union and its liberal, LGBTIQ+-inclusive policies (Shevtsova, 2023). Such geopolitical dynamics make LGBTIQ+ issues a part of value confrontation – “the war of values” (Shevtsova, 2024, p. 5).

This overview has shown that the development of LGBTIQ+ rights and societal acceptance in Ukraine has been connected with the country's geopolitical path, civil society, and nation-building processes.

In the first two decades after independence, the legacy of Soviet criminalisation and social conservatism limited LGBTIQ+ visibility and acceptance, even after decriminalisation in 1991.

EU conditionality encouraged legal changes but had a limited impact on public attitudes, and pro-Russian political actors used homophobic rhetoric to resist European integration.

Following the Euromaidan revolution, Ukraine's turn toward the EU provided a political opportunity for LGBTIQ+ activism, reframing LGBTIQ+ equality as part of a broader human rights agenda and even as a marker of opposition to Russian aggression. This period saw increased visibility through Pride marches and limited legislative gains, although political homophobia persisted among both pro-Russian actors and right-wing Ukrainian nationalists.

After the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, wartime mobilisation and collective resistance have fostered a more inclusive civic nationalism in which LGBTIQ+ people are accepted and increasingly recognised as part of the national struggle. The visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers and activists has helped fight stereotypes, reframing them as patriots and contributors to Ukraine's defence. Russian state homophobia has further positioned LGBTIQ+ equality as a marker of Ukraine's alignment with European democratic values.

The literature confirms that LGBTIQ+ acceptance in Ukraine has generally increased over time, particularly during moments of political transformation and crisis. Yet it also reveals a key gap: there is limited analysis of how wartime nationalism is redrawing the boundaries of national belonging and whether it leaves space for incorporating LGBTIQ+ equality into the Ukrainian value system. The following chapters aim to fill that gap by examining the connection between nationalism and support for LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukrainian public discourse.

CHAPTER III. RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to examine how LGBTIQ+ equality has been discursively incorporated into narratives of Ukrainian national identity during the war. It explains the analytical approaches that underpin the research, the selection and justification of methods, and the procedures for data collection, coding, and analysis. By combining critical discourse analysis with qualitative content analysis, the study identifies and interprets recurrent themes, narrative strategies, and ideological framings within national media, NGO publications, and political statements produced between February 2022 and June 2023. The chapter also clarifies the scope of the dataset and the measures taken to ensure reliability and reflexivity in the research process.

To study the construction of LGBTIQ+ equality in the national identity discourse in wartime Ukraine, this research applies qualitative methods, namely critical discourse analysis (CDA), supported by qualitative content analysis. CDA views written and spoken discourse as social practices shaped by and shaping their social, institutional, and situational contexts, meaning that discursive acts can preserve the status quo or disrupt and transform it (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009, p. 8). As a method focusing on the relationship between language, ideology and power, CDA allows for the analysis of how discourses of national identity incorporate or exclude LGBTIQ+ rights and how language constructs power relations between the nation-state and LGBTIQ+ people (Fairclough, 2013, pp. 59-60). To organise and categorise the large dataset (political statements, media articles, NGO publications), CDA is supported by qualitative content analysis to identify recurrent themes and patterns, which are then interpreted through CDA, focusing on the construction of meaning and the underlying ideologies and power structures (Schreier, 2012).

Following Wodak's (2009) discourse-historical approach to CDA, the analysis was conducted at three interrelated levels: the textual level (vocabulary, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies), the discursive level (narrative framing, argumentation), and the social level (ideological implications and positioning within broader socio-political debates).

The research addresses the following questions:

How did the discursive construction of LGBTIQ+ equality as a national identity issue contribute to the growing support for LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukrainian society during the war, despite the expectations of the gender and nationalism theories?

1. Why does Ukrainian society demonstrate growing support for LGBTIQ+ rights after Russia's invasion in 2022?
2. How has Ukrainian society opposed Russian discourses of state-sanctioned homo- and transphobia?
3. How and why has LGBTIQ+ equality been negotiated into Ukrainian national identity in the public discourse?

The primary data for this study consists of statements and publications by civil society actors, national media coverage reflecting on LGBTIQ+ people in Ukraine and formal statements and commentaries by government officials and politicians.

This study focuses on written texts such as media articles, NGO publications, and formal statements by politicians and public officials. Audiovisual materials such as podcasts, YouTube videos, and television broadcasts were excluded, as were social media posts and user-generated comments. These formats, while potentially rich in discursive content, fall outside the scope of this research due to their differing communicative context, multimodal nature, and challenges in consistent sampling and transcription. The aim was to maintain a coherent and manageable dataset of formal, publicly accessible written discourse that reflects institutional, media, and civil society narratives.

The time frame from February 2022 to June 2023 covers a surge in public and political discussions around unity, identity and values, following Russia's full-scale invasion, increasing media visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers in the AFU and calls for legal recognition of LGBTIQ+ rights. The milestone events that were covered in the news in this period include the petition on civil partnership, registration of the draft law on civil partnership in the Ukrainian parliament in March 2023, campaigns of LGBTIQ+ activists and human rights organisations advocating for adoption of civil partnership law and the Pride month in June 2023 when Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ activists took an active part in Pride marches in cities across Europe. Chronological data coding was used to

track the evolution of national discourse over time, revealing responses to events and continuity or shifts in framing.

To identify relevant publications that reflect discourses of national identity and LGBTIQ+ rights during wartime, the sources were collected via a month-by-month Google search of publications featuring “LGBT rights”, “LGBT soldiers”, and “Russia-Ukraine war”. Sources were selected for their visibility, relevance, and reach, focusing on national media outlets, NGO reports, and political statements. Only publicly accessible articles with explicit references to both LGBTIQ+ topics and the war context were included. Since the use of Google search, the most commonly used search engine among Ukrainian users, prioritises media with higher visibility, this approach may exclude grassroots or marginal voices published outside mainstream platforms.

The collected dataset of 210 publications was stored, managed and analysed in MAXQDA software, where data files were categorised by date, source, and theme. The coding was conducted using a hybrid approach: a preliminary codebook was created deductively based on the theoretical framework and research questions, then refined inductively during coding. Codes were organised into thematic categories such as “Public Support for LGBT Rights in the War Context”, “Opposition to Russian Discourses of Homophobia”, and “LGBT Inclusion as Part of National Identity”. Reflexive memos and ongoing refinement of the codebook were maintained throughout the coding process to track emergent themes, ensure consistency of coding decisions and remain transparent about potential bias.

As the analysis advanced, key arguments and discursive patterns began to repeat consistently across articles, suggesting that the major themes had been identified. This saturation increases the credibility of the findings, as it indicates that the dataset was sufficient to capture the relevant discursive constructions related to LGBTIQ+ rights and national identity.

To enhance the reliability of the coding process, intercoder checks were conducted. A subset of the data was coded independently by another Ukrainian-speaking researcher using the same codebook. The results were compared and discrepancies discussed. This process led to refinements in code definitions to improve clarity and consistency.

Most publications analysed in the period from February 2022 to June 2023 were neutral or supportive of LGBTIQ+ rights and bore an informative purpose. Such assessment is congruent

with the results of the media monitoring conducted by Olga Bilouseko (2023) for Gender in Detail. The monitoring showed that most Ukrainian media covered topics related to the lives of the LGBTIQ+ community in a neutral way, using neutral language when referring to members of the LGBTIQ+ community and taking on an educational and informative role when telling the stories of LGBTIQ+ people, including LGBTIQ+ soldiers, drawing more attention to the topic of LGBTIQ+ rights. Bilousenko (2023) suggests that Ukrainian media and society have become more tolerant and open to change, acceptance of people's differences, and so on, and these are interdependent processes, meaning that not only do societal changes influence media discourse about LGBTIQ+ people, but also the situation in society and the level of acceptance of the LGBTIQ+ community are changing, in part thanks to the media.

There were articles from conservative and religious media sources which explicitly argued against the civil partnership law and denied the LGBTIQ+ identities of the AFU soldiers. Since the aim of the analysis is to examine the narratives and strategies through which human rights activists discursively frame LGBTIQ+ rights as part of Ukrainian values and identity, explaining the growing public support for LGBTIQ+ rights, publications featuring anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiments were not included in the final dataset, as they fall outside the scope of the research. The purpose of this study is not to map all positions in the debate, but to trace how pro-LGBTIQ+ actors incorporate equality into the discourse on Ukrainian values and national identity. Including oppositional texts would have shifted focus from the emergent supportive framing that this study aims to analyse.

As a Ukrainian researcher with a personal and academic interest in gender and human rights, I approached this study with a perspective shaped by experience working on gender equality and LGBTIQ+ inclusion projects. While I do not identify with the LGBTIQ+ community, I recognise the importance of centring marginalised voices and aim to approach the data with cultural sensitivity and reflexivity. My positionality as someone who supports LGBTIQ+ equality and studies Eastern European identity politics informs how I interpret the discourses examined in this research. My current position as a Ukrainian researcher studying abroad provides both proximity and distance from the national discourses analysed, allowing me to engage with them both critically and empathetically. This perspective helps to enrich the analysis but also requires constant reflexivity to balance personal identification with academic impartiality. Throughout the

analysis, I maintained a reflexive journal to critically engage with my assumptions and ensure that the voices in the data, and not my preconceptions, guided the identification of themes.

To summarise the methodological framework, this study applies a CDA approach to analyse the textual, discursive, and social dimensions of how pro-LGBTIQ+ narratives are framed within Ukrainian national identity during wartime. Data was drawn from 210 online media articles, NGO reports and statements of officials released from February 2022 to June 2023. Coding was conducted in MAXQDA using a hybrid deductive–inductive approach. The methodology ensures that the subsequent analysis is grounded in systematic, transparent, and contextually informed procedures, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how LGBTIQ+ equality has been discursively positioned as part of Ukrainian values and identity during the war.

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents the analysis, structured around the main themes identified in the publications on LGBTIQ+ rights during the war: public support for LGBTIQ+ rights and the war context, opposition to Russian homophobia, and LGBTIQ+ equality as part of national identity and values.

4.1. Public Support for LGBTIQ+ Rights and the War Context

This section explores how the war context shaped public support for LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukraine. Drawing on online media articles and civil society statements, it examines discourses of visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers, the contribution of LGBTIQ+ organisations and activists to defence efforts, a sense of shared sacrifice, national unity and solidarity in the face of foreign invasion.

4.1.1. Visibility of LGBTIQ+ Soldiers

Military mobilisation produces a range of political, cultural, and social consequences for societies, some reinforcing existing norms, others challenging them (Hayoz & Stepanenko, 2023). Luciani and Shevtsova (2024, pp. 4-5) note that Russia's full-scale invasion changed the perception of nation, security, and threats in Ukraine, suggesting that major security crises can affect LGBTIQ+ politics in unpredictable ways: before the war, LGBTIQ+ people were often portrayed as a threat to national identity and framed as outsiders, whereas now the primary threat is Russia and its military aggression. Notably, media visibility of LGBTIQ+ service members in the AFU has contributed to LGBTIQ+ people being included in the collective image of the nation, which is regarded as the primary focus of security.

Analysed publications frequently highlight stories of LGBTIQ+ soldiers serving in the AFU. By sharing their interviews where they speak about motivation to give up their civilian life and volunteer to fight for the country, and military experience, the media have helped to normalise LGBTIQ+ identities within the context of patriotism and heroism. This is how Aaron Jones, an LGBTIQ+ soldier in the AFU, was introduced in an interview to an online media outlet, RBK-Ukraina: "Former human rights activist serves in the AFU from the first days of the full-scale

invasion of Russia and does not regret it in any way. Aaron is convinced that he would never meet such loyal comrades anywhere else but in the trenches. And by the way, his battalion is aware that he is openly gay” (Haiuk, 2023).

Shared risk, especially in life-or-death conditions of mutual dependence, helps soldiers to build strong bonds, and coming out to fellow soldiers challenges prejudice and may reduce homophobia even in traditionally conservative environments. The image of an LGBTIQ+ soldier directly challenges heteronormative and patriarchal constructs often associated with military service. Traditionally, military service is tied to heteronormative masculinity and national heroism. When LGBTIQ+ soldiers come out, they challenge stereotypes that link queerness with weakness or disloyalty. Instead, they reclaim national belonging and show that queerness and patriotism are not incompatible, dismantling harmful stereotypes, as combat medic Borus Khmelevskiy notes in an interview with RFI: “There were many misconceptions about LGBT people that they are not brave and strong enough, and they cannot fight. But as we can all see, the behaviour in a critical situation depends not on sexual orientation, but on character and personal convictions” (Viter, 2022). Even when people don’t know LGBTIQ+ people personally, repeated exposure through media can have a similar positive effect, especially if the media highlight their positive contribution to the state’s defence.

On an individual level, visibility can be a form of self-affirmation, and in Ukrainian contexts, it helps to create support networks and reduce isolation. In an interview with Hromadske, Nastia Konfederat, an AFU service member, shares: “I came out not only to raise LGBT visibility in general, but specifically to highlight LGBT presence in the military. Because there was a stereotype that LGBT people don’t fight. (...) The full-scale war has changed things—while there were only a few dozen of us in the beginning, now there are hundreds. Not all of us are open; not everyone feels comfortable or safe coming out. That’s why, as someone who has come out, I support those who have not. (...) The more of us show our faces, the safer it becomes for those who are still afraid” (Yermolayeva, 2022).

A common message shared by the LGBTIQ+ soldiers is that this is the first war in modern history in which there are so many openly queer soldiers fighting. Such framing is not only related to the visibility but also reflects upon the unique circumstances in which this is possible, the historical significance of their military service, and how it can help challenge stereotypes globally. In an

interview with Hromadske, Boria, a combat medic serving in the AFU, shares his thoughts on the historical meaning of LGBTIQ+ soldiers' visibility: "Right now, we cannot fully grasp the scale of what is happening in the context of LGBT soldiers' rights. But we must recognise that this is the first war in the world in which such a large number of openly LGBT soldiers are participating. And this will have an impact not only on the situation of LGBT rights in Ukraine, but also globally. Because it breaks down many stereotypes about LGBT people—stereotypes that still persist everywhere, including in Western societies" (Sarnatska, 2023).

LGBTIQ+ activists often emphasise the ratio of LGBTIQ+ soldiers serving in the army. It became particularly relevant after the Minister of Defence did not support the adoption of the civil partnership law, claiming that the draft law on registered partnerships contradicts the Constitution of Ukraine, which states that marriage is based on the free consent of a man and a woman, and the ministry has no statistical evidence on the number of LGBTIQ+ soldiers (Osadcha, 2023). In an interview with *Ukrainska Pravda*, representatives of the LGBT military organisation used it as a news break to remind people of their service: "Representatives of the LGBT Military believe that the number of LGBT individuals serving in the military is significantly higher—between 50,000 and 100,000. In response to a question from *Ukrainska Pravda* about where this figure came from, the organisation explained that, according to surveys, 5–10% of the Ukrainian population identifies as LGBT. The structure of the Armed Forces is no exception, as it reflects Ukrainian society. Currently, about one million people are serving in the Armed Forces and the National Guard. This means that approximately 50,000 to 100,000 people defending our land are LGBT+, and they too need protection" (Osadcha, 2023).

The LGBT Military organisation and other human rights activists acknowledge that the strategy of visibility is an effective advocacy tool to shift public opinion and gain support for civil partnership legislation. Oleksandr Zhuhan, an AFU service member, shared in an interview with an online media outlet *Zaborona*: "Now, there's a unicorn patch within the LGBT community that we wear with pride—so that no one can later say we weren't here" (Vernyhor, 2023).

Unlike during the Euromaidan and anti-terrorist operation of 2014-2021, when they were less vocal about their presence and role in those processes, now they choose to share their stories and be present in the media space, as Oleksandr Zhuhan notes: "Right now, many LGBT soldiers are giving interviews and constantly doing something—some are medics, some are mortar operators,

some are artillerymen. This shows that we cannot be ignored, and the more visible we are, the less aggression and rejection there will be, including from the far right” (Vernyhor, 2023).

Nowadays in Ukraine, the army enjoys high trust and moral legitimacy. In a society mobilised around war, being part of the military provides a unique moral authority. By coming out in the armed forces, LGBTIQ+ people gain symbolic capital by being seen as defenders of the nation. This visibility allows them to advocate for equal rights from a position of shared sacrifice rather than perceived difference and “otherness.” Coming out becomes not only a personal story, but a political act that forces the public and state to reconsider legal discrimination and, in the war context, makes it harder to ignore. Visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers puts LGBTIQ+ rights on the public agenda and provides real-world examples that advocacy groups and policymakers can reference.

Human rights activists and organisations report that the full-scale war made the issue of marriage inequality based on sexual orientation more pressing than ever. This concerns both military personnel risking their lives daily on the frontline and civilians who are also in danger of Russian strikes. If relationship of a LGBTIQ+ couple is not legally recognised, the partner may not have the right to visit them in the hospital or intensive care unit in the event of injury, make decisions related to life support, or, in the case of death, decide on burial arrangements, receive social aid from the state, claim first-line inheritance, or custody over children, as it is legally granted to married couple. Andrii Kravchuk, an advocacy specialist from the Human Rights LGBT Centre “Our World”, explains the situation in an interview with Hrechka, a regional information portal: “These problems exist whether there is war or not. But now, when people are fighting and can lose their lives at any moment—and their closest, most beloved person in the world is left with nothing because they are officially considered nobody—it is felt much more acutely” (Daliurman, 2022).

This problem of a lack of rights is a central argument raised in the petition to the President of Ukraine supporting the draft law 1903 on registered partnerships. Such framing is also used by lawyers, human rights defenders and LGBTIQ+ activists advocating for the registered partnership law. An article on Hromadske covering a photo exhibition about LGBTIQ+ soldiers highlights: “The issue of equal rights becomes especially urgent during wartime. A person who defends Ukraine with a weapon in hand deserves to have confidence that their rights are protected equally like everyone else’s” (Yermolayeva, 2022).

LGBTIQ+ soldiers have also voiced frustration at the unequal treatment, noting that while heterosexual couples received the possibility to register their marriages online, same-gender couples remain unrecognised by the state, and their concerns are ignored. Activists view the war as an opportunity to realign national values with human rights principles and to recognise all those who contribute to Ukraine's survival, regardless of sexual orientation. Maria Klius, lawyer and co-author of the draft law on registered partnerships, explains: "Last spring, there was a big wave of engagements among heterosexual couples. And LGBT soldiers said it was disheartening: while their fellow soldiers were getting married almost via Zoom calls, they couldn't do the same—their loved ones are officially no one to them. No one knows what will happen tomorrow; they are risking their lives for the state, yet the state does not even recognise them" (Vasina, 2023). The absence of marriage or partnership recognition deprives people of legal protection. In the context of war, where LGBTIQ+ people equally participate in national defence, this discrimination becomes even more noticeable.

An important part of the discourse is the idea that LGBTIQ+ people are actively participating in Ukraine's collective resistance, across both military and civil society sectors. The analysed publications often mentioned how LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations use their networks and resources for the defence efforts of Ukraine, explaining how, regardless of gender or sexual identity, people find different ways to contribute to Ukraine's resistance, whether it be military service, volunteering, fundraising campaigns or humanitarian relief. Signalling state recognition of the LGBTIQ+ community's contribution to the nation, Luidmyla Denisova, Ombudsman of Ukraine argues: "Members of the LGBT community, on equal footing with all other citizens of Ukraine, stand in defense of our state: fighting for Ukraine's independence on the battlefield, engaging in volunteer work, providing humanitarian aid, and documenting the war crimes of the aggressor state" (Ombudsman of Ukraine, 2022). This recognition by a state official marks a discursive shift from tolerance to active integration of LGBTIQ+ identities into the civic and patriotic life of Ukraine.

The analysed publications highlight how Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ organisations have been cooperating with foreign media and news agencies to spread information about their activities and have been informing the public through their social media accounts. For example, an article from an online platform, Gender in Detail, explains why KyivPride focuses on informational work: "In

Europe, there are many stereotypical and even horrifying perceptions about the state of the LGBT+ community in Ukraine, as it has never been adequately covered. The war and the dissemination of information helped reduce stereotypes and facilitated support for the community” (Hruzina, 2022).

In 2022, KyivPride organisation wrote a manifesto titled Stand with Ukraine, which emphasised that Ukrainians are an equal people in the family of European nations and called on the world to remember Ukraine’s internationally recognised state borders and to support the Ukrainian people and AFU, thereby helping the Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ community (Kozlova, 2022).

During the Pride months in 2022 and 2023, Ukrainian media wrote about LGBTIQ+ people from Ukraine participating in Pride marches across different cities in Europe. They emphasised how Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ networks, particularly KyivPride and KharkivPride, being unable to host Pride demonstrations in their home country for safety reasons, collaborated with LGBTIQ+ organisations abroad to draw attention to Ukraine’s struggle and ask for support. For example, in an article from Zmina, Marlen Scandal commented on the significance of Pride events for spreading the word about Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ community in the wartime: “Today, during Pride Month, KyivPride is drawing the world’s attention to the events in Ukraine and to the role of the LGBT community in our people’s struggle against the invaders. We must not forget that there is a war going on. LGBT people are also in the ranks of the Armed Forces and Territorial Defence, and they volunteer and work on the information front. Although Pride Month is traditionally a time of celebration and entertainment, this year, the colour of the month for us is pixel” (Radchenko, 2022a). Such reframing of Pride month integrates LGBTIQ+ identities in the narrative of shared resistance and patriotism, strengthening public empathy and solidarity.

Among the slogans of the Ukrainian columns on Pride marches were: “And the Russian world broke against the free Ukrainian queer!”, “Awaken your humanity — support Ukraine!”, „War is not over yet”, „Arm Ukraine now so that we can host a Pride in Mariupol too” (Kozlova, 2022; Slabinska, 2023). In addition, the Ukrainian activists called on participants to carry posters in support of the defenders of Azovstal held in Russian captivity. When LGBTIQ+ soldiers participated in the informational campaign called Arm Ukraine Now, which aimed to urge Western partners to supply Ukraine with heavy weaponry, they released photographs of LGBTIQ+ soldiers under the hashtag #ArmUkraineNow, and their portraits were carried during Pride marches in European cities. This is how Viktor Pylypenko, leader of the LGBT Military organisation, explains

the idea behind their participation in the project in an article from Radio Svoboda: “In this way, people were calling on the world to support Ukraine and to reject Russian propaganda claiming we have neo-Nazism. Because the very presence of openly gay and lesbian soldiers in the ranks of the Armed Forces is the strongest argument against that myth” (Aredova, 2022).

In this way, LGBTIQ+ visibility becomes a strategic discursive tool used by Ukrainian activists both domestically to challenge stereotypes and internationally to counter Russian propaganda and to gain support. LGBTIQ+ activists communicate to the world why it is important to support Ukraine militarily to help it protect its democratic development and why, in the war context, patriotism is an inalienable part of the identity of Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ people. For example, when Ukraine Pride had joint projects with the Azov regiment, they united around the defence of democratic values and national sovereignty despite holding ideologically divergent views. In an interview with Hromadske Radio, Sofiia Lapina, a human right activist and leader of Ukraine Pride, shared how their support for the Ukrainian army is often misunderstood within a liberal Western context: “It takes several hours to explain that Ukrainian nationalism has nothing to do with chauvinism, Nazism, or anything of the sort, that it is not imperialistic, and is cultivated for the purpose of defending Ukraine and national identity” (Tsarehradska, 2022).

4.1.2. War as a Moral Accelerator

Another theme identified is that war has catalysed changes in public attitudes, constructing the war as a moment of moral, cultural, and ideological redefinition. According to the analysed publications, the LGBTIQ+ community sees this war, which requires solidarity, unity, empathy and compassion, as an opportunity for people to become more considerate and accepting of others, especially those seeking help and support. One of the publications by the law firm Asters concludes: “We want to believe that the full-scale war, which has now lasted over seven months in our country, has made Ukrainians more humane and tolerant, has taught them to respect the feelings of others, to empathise, and to help those around them. Our new reality has shown that the most important thing for every person is the life and safety of their loved ones, and the greatest value is family, regardless of the gender of its members” (Kravtsova & Korniyenko, 2022).

Sociological studies on psycho-emotional changes and adaptation to war of Ukrainians confirm that people developed a stronger sense of community and belonging, which may be related to rising tolerance and anti-discrimination stance. One of the analysed publications references the findings of the comprehensive comparative study *How the War Changed Me and the Country: A Year in Review*, demonstrating how Ukrainians' views, perceptions, and lives have changed across various spheres during the year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine: "Over the past year, the sense of self-love has decreased, while love for others has grown—an affiliation trend has emerged (a desire to be with others), where the individual yields to the collective" (Rating Group, 2022).

LGBTIQ+ activists also shared their hopes that war may produce new forms of collective identity, where human rights, tolerance, and anti-discrimination are seen as essential to what it means to be Ukrainian. In an interview with *Ukrainska Pravda*, Kostiantyn Andriiv, human rights defender and member of the Zaporizhzhia-based Gender Zed foundation, notes: "The war has become a crisis, and we must use this crisis to make our society better and more democratic after victory. The whole world will be watching how we rebuild Ukraine. This includes both physical reconstruction and reconstruction of minds" (*Ukrainska Pravda*, 2022).

Nationwide experience of shared crisis makes people act fast, adapt to changes and mobilise resources. This holds true across different fields and includes military reforms, adaptation of businesses and civil society, and changes in governance, and the LGBTIQ+ community uses this window of opportunity. In an interview with *Jadu*, an online media source of Goethe Institute, Timur Levchuk and Tetiana Kasian from the all-Ukrainian civil society organisation *Tochka Opory UA*, note: "Activists have been working on these issues for many years, and now a random, spontaneous petition has such tremendous success" (Lohse, 2022).

Active service of LGBTIQ+ people in the army, as well as civic participation of LGBTIQ+ organisations in Ukraine's resistance, present a strong argument for the demand for civil partnerships, making this issue immune to populist attacks and presenting it as a pragmatic and urgent need in the wartime reality where death can come at any moment. A public petition to the president of Ukraine also uses that line of argument: "At this time, every day could be the last. Let same-gender couples have the opportunity to create families and receive official documents confirming it. They need the same rights as traditional couples" (Bilousenko & Korinieva, 2022).

Linking military service and national sacrifice to the legitimacy of LGBTIQ+ rights helps to explain to the public that it is morally unacceptable to deny equality to those who risk their lives for the country. People's Deputy of Ukraine Inna Sovsun explains: "These people are fighting for us, so it's difficult to publicly argue that they shouldn't have the same set of rights as others." (Bondar, 2023).

The analysed publications frame LGBTIQ+ advocacy as an integral part of a collective national project defined by unity, shared suffering, and democratic values. In an interview with the BBC, Ivan Tereshchuk, AFU servicemember, who is also the head of the Odesa branch of the LGBT League, explains: "People have realised that we share common values, like safety, and also the value of freedom, which the war has especially emphasised" (Hromliuk, 2023).

The repeated emphasis on common values, such as security, freedom, and mutual responsibility, bridges the divide between LGBTIQ+ and non-LGBTIQ+ Ukrainians, constructing a unifying narrative in which all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, contribute to the defence and future of the nation. In an interview with online news platform Geneva Solution, Ivan Honzyk, service member of the territorial defence, notes: "In this difficult time, everyone stands together: the LGBTIQ+ community and heterosexual people volunteer together, they've joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine—this should unite us and put an end to all misunderstandings" (Bakyeva, 2022).

The emerging discourse rejects the binary of "us" versus "them" and asserts an inclusive civic identity based on solidarity in the face of existential threat. Participation of LGBTIQ+ people in the Armed Forces and volunteer networks illustrates this inclusion in practice, making it unreasonable to deny LGBTIQ+ people the rights guaranteed to others. In an interview with online media outlet Babel, Anna Redko, a journalist and activist, highlights how common cause and common danger bring people together: "We are all facing the challenges of war. LGBT people have the same obligations. Just like other men and women, they serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. There is an organisation, LGBT Military, and many soldiers in it have been defending Ukraine since 2014. There is no 'them' and 'us.' We are all Ukrainians now" (Skibitska & Kobernyk, 2022).

Against the backdrop of war, a common interest in defending the country prevails above all differences and creates a foundation for mutual support. LGBTIQ+ activists note that even

institutions traditionally opposed to LGBTIQ+ rights, like the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches, have ceased their openly homophobic rhetoric, recognising the importance of unity (Vovk, 2022).

This moral logic of shared sacrifice supports calls for equal legal recognition, framing LGBTIQ+ rights as a condition for equality for all citizens. In this way, LGBTIQ+ equality becomes part of the broader effort to defend, define, and rebuild Ukraine as a post-war democracy committed to human rights and equality. In an interview with Zaborona, Ivan Lahoyda, AFU servicemember, emphasises how diverse Ukrainians are united by a shared goal: “I want everyone to know that our Ukraine, our sovereignty, and our territorial integrity are being defended by diverse people. On the front line today are people of different nationalities, religions, orientations, and ages. People must understand that we stand for their peace, their sleep at night, and their mornings without missiles. It doesn’t matter who you are, because right now your primary task is to stop the enemy and not let them advance further” (Vernyhor, 2022).

The references to survey data in national media normalised LGBTIQ+ acceptance and provided advocates and journalists with empirical evidence to challenge homophobic narratives and frame equality as part of an emerging national consensus. For example, in an article explaining what same-gender partnerships mean, regional internet magazine The Village Ukraine cites the survey report: “A survey by the Centre for Social Expertise at the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine shows that support for same-gender marriage has nearly doubled over the past 10 years. 53% of respondents support this right, whereas in 2013, only 33% were in favour” (Panchenko, 2022). As a result, survey results did not just reveal public opinion but supported discourse in which LGBTIQ+ inclusion is viewed as compatible with “Ukraineness.”

4.1.3. Civil Society Advocacy During War

Despite martial law and wartime conditions limiting typical means of LGBTIQ+ advocacy and activism, LGBTIQ+ organisations adapted their strategies to raise awareness and push for legal reforms. Themes of war and patriotism allowed for a discussion of shared citizenship, a democratic vector of development and evolving social norms. The backdrop of war gives additional urgency to the human rights advocacy, as Tetiana Kasian shares in an interview with Jadu: “In essence, war

embodies a violation of human rights. But that doesn't mean we will stop fighting for them!" (Lohse, 2022).

When a petition for registered partnerships for the first time in the history of Ukraine gained enough signatures to be eligible for the president's consideration, it was an unprecedented success for the LGBTIQ+ community, signalling that society's attitudes are shifting and the time is right for advocacy, despite the wartime restrictions. LGBTIQ+ activists focused their strategies on media presence, awareness raising and information campaigns. In this context, public messaging and media storytelling have been used not only to maintain visibility but also to reshape public understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues and portray LGBTIQ+ citizens as partners in the country's defence. Commenting on the role of civil society, Pavlo Mysiiko, a political activist and AFU service member, told CSO Feminist Workshop: "Under martial law, mass events and protests can be exploited by the Russian Federation to destabilise Ukrainian society. Therefore, the current moment calls on civil society to focus on educational and informational activities. Public discourse is also an important front" (Feminist Workshop, 2023).

LGBT Military and other organisations and individual activists used creative forms to raise awareness of LGBTIQ+ people's active presence in the defence efforts, such as art exhibitions and film festivals, which served as news breaks and were widely covered in online media, making LGBTIQ+ people more visible and drawing attention to discrimination against them. For safety reasons, mass events and demonstrations are not allowed during martial law in Ukraine. Not being able to hold annual Pride marches in the streets of major Ukrainian cities, in September 2022, the LGBTIQ+ community held a Pride March in the Kharkiv metro under the slogan "Rights Are Always Timely" (Ukrainian Sociological Portal [USP], 2022). Another example is when the media wrote about a lesbian couple who celebrated their wedding without being able to get married officially, to once again remind society about the discrimination (Shaparenko, 2023). Similarly, an event which was covered by the media and drew attention to marriage inequality was the wedding of a woman from Kyiv with her gay friend, who served in the army and did not have any close relatives, so that she could be an intermediary between him and his boyfriend in case anything happens (Shevchenko S., 2022).

Grassroots activism for the LGBTIQ+ community during the war reflects the well-established trend of civil society in Ukraine—to step up where the state fails to meet the needs of citizens,

making the LGBTIQ+ community an integral part of the social infrastructure, resistance effort and post-war democratic recovery. Anastasiia Vinslavska, combat medic and feminist activist, tells Feminist Workshop: “Activism in this sector is essential—awareness-raising, legal, psychological, and material support. The state cannot meet all needs, so civil society organisations are now crucial. Ukrainians are strong because, in times of crisis and catastrophe, they come together” (Feminist Workshop, 2023). Rather than being ignored during the war, LGBTIQ+ people have shown that they are part of the country’s fight and future and connected their struggle for equality with the bigger fight for Ukraine’s freedom and democracy.

The content analysis shows how journalists emphasised the legal aspects of LGBTIQ+ discrimination, consulting with lawyers and interviewing human rights defenders to provide the audience with fact-based information, legal context, and expert assessment of the situation. Media coverage explaining the legal aspects of the draft law on registered partnerships aims to increase public understanding and the legitimacy of LGBTIQ+ demands. For example, an article by The Village Ukraine notes: “The legal recognition of same-gender unions is not about romance, but about pragmatism. In wartime, situations arise where relationships require formal state recognition. Civil partnerships are now about injuries, captivity, or the death of one partner” (Panchenko, 2022).

This also reflects a strategic move by journalists to frame LGBTIQ+ advocacy as evidence-based, pragmatic, and aligned with democratic values. By focusing discussions on legal analysis, journalists contribute to normalising LGBTIQ+ equality as a matter of institutional justice, explaining how it benefits a democratic society as a whole. For example, an article by Explainer, an online media outlet, emphasises: “Legal and social recognition of same-gender relationships helps countries to overcome discrimination, makes same-gender families more secure, and serves as a guarantee of stability and equal rights” (Radchenko, 2022a).

One of the milestone developments in the anti-discrimination measures widely covered in the media during the analysed period was the ratification of the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe on combating violence against women in June 2022, after a decade’s delay. Subsequently, the Law on Media in December 2023 was passed by the Parliament, prohibiting the public dissemination of statements that incite discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Besides explaining the legal aspects of the newly adopted changes, the analysed

publication emphasised the progress in the anti-discrimination measures accelerated by war. Zmina cited Sviatoslav Sheremet, policy and legislation coordinator of the National LGBTI Consortium #LGBTI_PRO: “Protecting civil equality for LGBTI people and preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a trend in state policy” (Zmina, 2022b).

The analysis reveals that wartime restrictions have not silenced LGBTIQ+ advocacy in Ukraine. Instead, LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations adapted by being actively present in the informational space, using storytelling, media engagement, symbolic activities, and legal argumentation to claim both visibility and legitimacy. LGBTIQ+ rights are increasingly framed as a necessary step toward a more just and inclusive Ukrainian society. Media coverage reinforced this image framing LGBTIQ+ demands as legally grounded, pragmatically justified, and morally consistent with Ukraine’s European aspirations. In this discursive shift, LGBTIQ+ people position themselves as active contributors to the national cause, soldiers, volunteers, and active citizens, whose rights must be acknowledged if the country is just and democratic.

4.2. Opposition to Russian Homophobia

After the Russian invasion, the reconstruction of the Ukrainian “Self” evolves in contrasting opposition to the Russian “Other”, specifying what Ukrainians are not. Due to this differentiation and distancing between the interdependent “Self” and “Other”, the construction of Self is contextual and relational (Slootmaeckers, 2019a). Russia’s denial of Ukraine’s identity creates an identity crisis – “a war of identity” – where Ukraine responds by reinforcing the Othering process and embracing key characteristics distinguishing them (Mishalova, Hordiichuk, & Sokolovskyi, 2024). This section examines how “Self” versus “Other” identity construction is instrumentalised in Ukrainian discourse on LGBTIQ+ equality.

In the war context, confrontation with Russia takes place not only in military terms, but also spills over to other spheres – ideology, values, political and social norms. Deaths and destruction inflicted upon the Ukrainian population by Russia’s unprovoked invasion naturally caused social animosity toward Russia, as national surveys demonstrate that 93% of respondents have a negative attitude toward Russia (Hrushetsky, 2024). Active opposition and resentment to Russia and all it stands for are also reflected in the discourse on LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukraine, linking support for

LGBTIQ+ rights with the de-russification of thinking and distancing from Russian influence. People's Deputy of Ukraine Inna Sovsun notes: "Russian homophobia, which is practically the foundation of their national ideology, actually works in favour of the Ukrainian LGBT community. Ukrainians are so determined to distance themselves from Russia that they are abandoning conservative views" (Opanasenko, 2023).

According to the analysed sources, experts and activists notice how people recognise homophobia as a part of Russian ideology and reject it to be different from the enemy. In an interview with Media Sapiens, Alina Sarnatska, psychologist and combat medic, explains: "Many already understand that homophobia is part of the Russian spiritual pillars, which are not characteristic of our society and should be left behind along with other elements of the 'Russian world'" (Bilousenko & Korinieva, 2022).

In this way, the journey of becoming a society which accepts and respects LGBTIQ+ equality is framed as a part of victory, decolonisation and post-war reconstruction. Ukrainian Sociological Portal cites the activists of Metro Pride: "Homophobia is part of the aggressor state's ideology. So, we reject stereotypes and inequality and move toward victory—victory over rashism, discrimination, and oppression" (USP, 2022).

According to researches Kratochvíl and O'Sullivan (2022, pp. 349-350), gender is not just an underlying factor in the Russo-Ukrainian war—it is one of the main issues being directly contested, as Russia justifies its aggression as a necessity to defend "traditional values", including ideas about gender, sexuality, masculinity and femininity, from "sexually degenerate Europe". Thus, public discourse on LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukraine during the war should be analysed in connection with the reassertion of imperial masculinity in Russia. Andrii Kravchuk, an advocacy specialist from the Human Rights LGBT Centre, explains to ElitExpert: "While Western society developed under conditions of open information access, free discussion, and competition of ideas, homophobia and transphobia in Ukrainian society were first imposed by the Soviet regime and then perpetuated by the Church. We must go through our own process to finally break free from the suffocating grip of the past—of Russia and the USSR. We are now fighting it not only physically, but intellectually" (Kravchuk, 2023).

As Russian political and religious leaders proclaim the defence of traditional family values as a state mission, Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ activists and human rights defenders frame attitudes to

LGBTIQ+ people as a marker of differentiation between Ukrainian democratic, human-centric, European development and the Russian human-hating, oppressive, totalitarian system. The Kyiv Pride Manifesto of 2022 states: “The aggressor state, Russia, is our enemy on all fronts—including in matters of human rights. It is a terrorist state that destroys all expressions of individuality, suppresses all freedoms. The destruction of human rights, including the persecution of the LGBT+ community, is Russian state policy. Propaganda channels broadcast hatred of queer people, there is a law banning so-called ‘gay propaganda’, and LGBT+ activists are persecuted and even killed. Does Ukrainian society want to follow Russia’s path? The answer is clearly no” (KyivPride, 2022).

The analysed publications often referenced Russia as an embodiment of homophobia and the exporter of anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiments, spreading its influence through disinformation campaigns targeting LGBTIQ+ communities and inciting far-right groups. “The narrative about homophobia in the Ukrainian army was ‘imported’ from the aggressor country and fuelled by pro-Russian organisations and the Russian church. (...) Russian disinformation is the main enemy of the LGBT human rights organisation” (Bilousenko & Korinieva, 2022). Here, Russia is viewed as the primary exporter of homophobia, and homophobia is associated with broader structures of violence, propaganda, and authoritarianism.

Journalists note how Russian propaganda takes advantage of homophobic attitudes and uses LGBTIQ+-disinformation to discredit NATO, the EU and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. According to Anastasiia Bondarenko, lawyer for the Paralegal Network project, who was interviewed by Media Sapiens, “For the Russian propaganda machine, societal homophobia is useful: such disinformation humiliates LGBT+ people, devalues their role in society, and reduces them to their sexual orientation. Such individuals are portrayed as weak and inferior. According to typical propaganda narratives, a gay person is considered unprofessional and incapable, neither able to lead nor to fight. As a result, in attempts to discredit someone, be it an official or a soldier, propagandists often label them as gay. In their logic, if the Ukrainian army includes gays and lesbians, it is considered weak and incapable of resisting the Russian military” (Bilousenko & Korinieva, 2022).

Discussing the ‘Russian trace’ in anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda helps activists frame homophobia as an instrument of Russian influence and ideological confrontation. In an interview with the

Economist, Soffia Lapina notes: “Ukrainians have begun to see more clearly that hatred in any form—racism, homophobia—is essentially Russian propaganda” (Economist, 2023).

Journalists note how politicians refer to the Russian state-sanctioned discrimination of LGBTIQ+ people as an argument for why Ukraine must respect LGBTIQ+ rights as part of Ukraine’s decolonisation and ideological resistance to Russia. The 2023 report of the CSO Insight states: “Among the political rhetoric, it was stated that the LGBTIQ+ movement should be supported precisely as a movement going in the opposite direction from the ‘Russian spiritual pillars’” (Iryskina, 2023).

Inna Sovsun, a people’s deputy who registered the draft law on civil partnerships, explains that one of the arguments in favour of it, besides the urgency of guaranteeing the rights of same-gender couples, is the necessity to demonstrate that Ukraine is not Russia: “I know for sure that the majority of Ukrainians—though not 70%, but 56–58%—believe that homosexual people should have the same rights and that same-gender partnerships should be legalised. We’ve already crossed the psychological threshold and broken away from Putin’s homophobic Russia” (Opanasenko, 2023).

Even conservative politicians are willing to compromise in favour of the draft law to demonstrate their difference from Russian politicians and Russian policies. Mariia Klius, lawyer, human rights defender and assistant to People’s Deputy Inna Sovsun, shares her memories of discussions around the draft law on same-gender partnership in the parliament committee: “During a parliamentary session, Mr. Kozhemyakin, following remarks by Inna Sovsun, spoke briefly about his background—how he supports Christian values and married young. And yet he added, “But we are at war. We clearly know who our enemy is and who our ally is. And if we can do something to move away from the Russian spiritual pillars, I support this decision and this bill” (Vasina, 2023).

Politicians and activists advocate for the adoption of civil partnership law not just for the protection of human rights, but as a symbolic act of detaching from Russia in a legal space. According to lawyer Yurii Babenko, “The introduction of registered partnerships will deepen the legal divide between Ukraine and Russia. The adoption of draft law No. 9103 would once again underline the contrast between us and the aggressor state. While Ukraine is creating a new legal mechanism to better ensure human rights, Russia continues to deliberately ignore those rights” (Babenko, 2025).

In this way, the Ukrainian public discourse constructs a moral binary when Russia equals repression, and Ukraine aspires to freedom and dignity for all. This rhetorical move allows even conservative politicians to support LGBTIQ+ rights even when it is not congruent with their party's ideology. Support for LGBTIQ+ rights is framed as a national imperative to differentiate Ukraine and prove its break with the colonial past. In this way, LGBTIQ+ advocacy becomes a part of a broader narrative of national redefinition and democratic reconstruction.

This discourse shows that the processes of Ukraine's departure from Russian sphere of influence accelerated by war take place in different aspects, including the attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ people which is connected to "a decline in conservative values, a move away from the Soviet worldview, and a growing acceptance of European values", as sociologist Volodymyr Paniotto notes in his interview with DW Ukraine (Shepeleva, 2022).

The analysed publications frequently mention Russia's anti-LGBTIQ+ laws and repressions, such as a law that completely banned gender transition procedures in July 2023 and the Supreme Court declaring the "international LGBT movement" an extremist organisation in November 2023. (Iryskina, 2023) Emphasising the systemic discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people in Russia, Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ activists frame LGBTIQ+ persecution as one of the defining features of Russian state ideology. In an interview with Babel, Anna Redko, a journalist and activist, notes: "The country that attacked us is the most brutal, homophobic, transphobic, sexist, racist, and xenophobic. For example, domestic violence is not even criminalised there" (Skibitska & Kobernyk, 2022).

The analysed articles explain how LGBTIQ+ discrimination in Russia affects the occupied territories of Ukraine, where Russia seeks to impose its laws. LGBTIQ+ Ukrainians become specific targets because their very existence contradicts the foundational myths of the "Russian World", which rests on patriarchal, heteronormative, and militarised ideals. According to Andrii Kravchuk, "In the so-called 'Russian world', the existence of LGBT+ people or Ukrainians is simply impossible" (Kravchuk, 2022).

Reports of abductions, disappearances, and violent persecution of LGBTIQ+ people in occupied areas illustrate how homophobia functions as a tool of state terror, designed to silence or even destroy identities incompatible with the Russian regime's worldview. According to Maryna Usmanova, a leader of Insha, a feminist and LGBTIQ+-inclusive organisation, "Kherson was

under Russian occupation for 256 days, and during that time, LGBT people who remained in the city faced constant persecution. Homophobia and transphobia are part of the propaganda that explains to Russian soldiers why they are fighting in Ukraine” (Zmina, 2022a).

The targeting of LGBTIQ+ people in Russian-occupied territories affects the growing acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people in Ukraine in several ways. Firstly, the suffering of LGBTIQ+ people in war zones contributes to greater empathy and solidarity among the broader public, building on a narrative of shared victimhood. Secondly, LGBTIQ+ rights are framed as anti-occupation and pro-Ukrainian, strengthening the argument that LGBTIQ+ rights are part of what distinguishes Ukraine from Russia. Furthermore, documentation of human rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people in occupied territories has also strengthened calls for legal protection and equality in Ukraine.

In their 2022 manifesto, the KyivPride clearly uses the technology of othering, defining themselves not only by who they are, but by who they are not. In this way, identity is constructed relationally, through contrast and exclusion. In the manifesto, LGBTIQ+ rights discourse is used as a tool of national differentiation, wherein Russia is called out as the homophobic, oppressive “Other”, and Ukraine is defined as the democratic, rights-respecting “Self”: “The aggressor state, Russia, is our enemy on all fronts—including on human rights. It is a terrorist state that destroys all forms of self-expression and suppresses all freedoms. The destruction of human rights, including the oppression of the LGBT+ community, is official Russian policy. State propaganda channels spread hatred toward queer people, “gay propaganda” is banned by law, and LGBT+ activists are persecuted and even killed. Does Ukrainian society want to follow Russia’s path? The answer is clearly no. (...) The space of the aggressor state—a place of total destruction of human rights—is not Ukrainian space. Choosing to suppress the rights and freedoms of LGBT+ people means choosing the policies of Russia, Putin, and the zombified, brutal, xenophobic Russian people” (KyivPride, 2022).

This binary of “we” versus “they”, where “they” (Russia) are repressive and homophobic, and “we” (Ukraine) are modern, pluralistic, and free, allows for a powerful form of identity consolidation. Thus, national identity is reaffirmed through cultural and ideological alignment with liberal democratic norms.

4.3. LGBTIQ+ Equality as Part of National Identity and Values

This section explores the rethinking of national identity and values during the war, allowing for LGBTIQ+ inclusion to be framed as an essential element of Ukraine's democratic, free and European future. As Hall (1996) notes, national identity is often redefined in times of crisis around shared values. In wartime Ukraine, values such as freedom, dignity, and equality become organising principles of belonging. Such an understanding is shared by LGBTIQ+ activists and human rights defenders, as well as the president and elected officials. Speaking of the war, they often define it as “a fight for values, for freedom, for equality” (Bilousenko & Korinieva, 2022). This discursive framework makes it possible to speak about LGBTIQ+ rights as an inalienable part of human rights, important for the democratic development of Ukraine, and make a connection to the European path of Ukraine. For example, in his response to the petition for civil partnerships, President Zelenskyi stated: “Overcoming difficult trials, the Ukrainian state has consciously chosen the path toward European standards, which are based on the three fundamental values of the Council of Europe—democracy, the rule of law, and human rights” (Electronic Petitions, 2023).

Public discussions on war are often related to the purpose of resistance, what must be safeguarded, and what matters to people who are fighting. One of the articles by Detector Media about LGBTIQ+ activists' resistance to Russian aggression concludes: “Ukrainians are now defending not only territorial integrity, but also freedom and self-expression” (Bulavin, 2022).

In their interview, LGBTIQ+ soldiers often take an opportunity to share their vision of Ukraine that they are fighting for. For example, telling the story of Viktor Pylypenko an article from Piatyi highlights: “By defending Ukraine and Ukrainians from the so-called ‘Russian world’, Viktor is also defending himself and his future. Because Ukraine's future lies with Europe—a tolerant Europe, Europe with equal rights for all” (Lesnoi, 2022).

The analysed publications signal that the LGBTIQ+ community not only partakes in Ukraine's defence but also assumes an active role in rebuilding post-war Ukraine, where LGBTIQ+ inclusion is a part of the national project, where respect for human rights is a marker differentiating Ukraine from Russia and aligning it with Europe. Lawyer and human rights defender Andrii Kravchuk summarises such a vision of future Ukraine in his interview with Suspilne: “LGBT community

members demand and want to live like in a normal, modern, civilised state. We want to live in Kyiv the way people live in London, Paris, Madrid, Berlin—in the entire civilised world. We don't want any special phrases; we don't want any privileges. We want to live with equal rights. If people in developed Western countries live happily and don't experience any problems because of it, then why shouldn't we? Do we want to live like in Moscow or Tehran?" (Slavinska, 2022).

The LGBTIQ+ community highlights their national belonging through participation in national projects, such as military service, civil engagement, and legal advocacy. These socially visible and civically necessary engagements allow LGBTIQ+ Ukrainians to assert themselves as full members of the political nation, claiming equal treatment. In their letter to the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, leaders and activists of LGBTIQ+ organisations appeal for understanding as members of one nation: "We are all part of the Ukrainian nation—not enemies, but compatriots, who in this difficult time are defending, together, the very existence and free European future of our country" (Zmina, 2022c).

As a human rights issue, LGBTIQ+ equality gains exceptional urgency and legitimacy during the war, because human rights and dignity become the moral foundation of Ukraine's resistance and national identity. War reframes human rights as a national priority, which creates a discursive opportunity for LGBTIQ+ advocacy. For example, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union notes that war does not suspend human rights because they are central to what Ukraine fights for: "The importance of showing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and discrimination—including against members of the LGBT+ community—remains an unwavering priority for Ukraine. The period of armed conflict is no exception when it comes to upholding the fundamental norms of international human rights law" (Ukrainian Helsinki Group [UHG], 2022).

Ukraine's commitment to human rights and dignity is framed as a symbolic opposite of Russian oppression. In an interview with Radio NV, Oleksandr Zhyhan, an actor who serves at the AFU emphasises: "The topic of human rights is always important, but now it has become especially urgent because, in his words, we can see the difference between Russia and Ukraine—Ukraine is doing much better in upholding human rights" (Hirzheva & Koshliak, 2022). Respect for human

rights becomes a discursive marker of Ukrainian identity: to respect LGBTIQ+ rights is to uphold what Ukraine stands for; to deny them is to resemble the aggressor.

In the wartime context, guaranteeing LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukraine is seen as a patriotic step to encourage the return of citizens who fled abroad. As the government is concerned about post-war reconstruction and repatriation, registered partnerships and LGBTIQ+ equality are thus viewed as strategic tools to retain and reintegrate people. In an interview with DW, Sviatoslav Sheremet, lawyer and advisor to the National LGBT-Consortium, argues: “For many gay men and lesbians, the primary reason for leaving Ukraine over the past one and a half to two decades has been the legal vacuum and the lack of legal prospects in the fields of family and marriage. If we do not want to lose our young generation, we need to make the legal system flexible and friendly toward different people with different needs” (Shepeleva, 2022). Similarly, an article by Explainer on the importance of legalising same-gender partnerships draws attention to the problem of emigration: “In addition to protecting medical, social, property-related, and burial rights, registered civil partnership or marriage will help prevent the emigration of working-age LGBT youth, who leave Ukraine precisely because these rights are absent” (Radchenko, 2022b). In this sense, granting LGBTIQ+ rights becomes a patriotic act, which fosters belonging and signals respect from the state. LGBTIQ+ equality, therefore, is seen as an investment in the democratic and demographic future of Ukraine.

The media reports on metro pride and other activities highlight that the LGBTIQ+ community increasingly demonstrates their attachment to the country and people, integrating national symbols such as flags, Ukrainian embroidery, folklore and patriotic songs into Pride events. An article by regional media outlet Khmarochos mentions typical Ukrainian visual symbols present at the demonstration: “Yesterday, members of the LGBT+ community and their allies, dressed in traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirts, rode through the Kharkiv metro,” which is followed by a quote from the KharkivPride Facebook post: “We—LGBT+ Ukrainians—are actively participating in the fight for Ukraine. We are a part of Ukrainian society” (Krutko, 2022).

4.3.1. LGBTIQ+ Rights and Ukraine's European Aspirations

The analysis of the publications reveals that in Ukraine, the discussions about the institution of civil partnerships and LGBTIQ+ rights are often connected with Ukraine's European aspirations. During the war, this connection gains particular weight as an argument in favour of LGBTIQ+ equality since Russia's full-scale invasion prompted a historically high level of support for European integration, with over 90% of respondents claiming that they are in favour of Ukraine's membership in the EU (NDI, 2023). Previously, EU policy on LGBTIQ+ rights was referenced by pro-Russian and far-right political forces as an argument against EU integration, but now the target audience for such claims has significantly shrunk.

The deputies and lawyers note that even though civil partnerships are not an obligatory step for European integration, guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens and introducing liability for discrimination, including on the grounds of homophobia, is a necessary characteristic of a democratic European country (Opryshchenko, 2023).

In June 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled on Andriy Maymulakhin and Andriy Markiv, who turned to the Court in 2014 due to the impossibility of legalising their relationship in Ukraine. The Court ruled that the lack of legal regulation for same-gender relationships in Ukraine is a violation of Article 8 (right to private and family life) and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights (Koloda, 2023). It was widely discussed in the media and served as a reminder that Ukraine must take appropriate measures for the protection of LGBTIQ+ rights, including legalising same-gender marriage or civil partnerships, enacting anti-discrimination laws regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, and protecting against hate based on these grounds.

A publication of Nash Svit organisation on the ECtHR ruling concludes: "Without the adoption of a law on civil partnerships or same-gender marriage, Ukraine will remain in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, which will undoubtedly have a negative impact on Ukraine's European integration, not to mention the shameful treatment of its own citizens and defenders" (NashSvit, 2023).

Respect for human rights, including LGBTIQ+ rights, is framed as an essential marker of a European country. People's deputy Suvsun commented: "Failing to comply with the European

Court of Human Rights ruling carries ‘reputational risks’ for Ukraine before the Council of Europe and signals to European countries that our state is unable to protect human rights properly. Which could seriously hinder our EU integration” (RadioSvoboda, 2023). Besides, Sovsun argues in favour of adopting registered partnerships as a step to safeguard the reputation among international partners as a democratic country observing human rights, in contrast to Russia: “Ukraine is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights, so we must comply with the [European Court of Human Rights] ruling to avoid questions about whether we’re truly committed to our international obligations. Let me remind you that Russia withdrew from the convention. Ukraine must show that while Russia is abandoning international human rights institutions, we are committed to fulfilling their requirements” (Bondar, 2023).

The act of recognition of same-gender partnerships is presented as a contribution to the international branding of Ukraine as a liberal democracy with shared values. For example, an article by Explainer emphasises: “Legalising same-gender marriage or civil partnerships could significantly improve both the quality of life for LGBT people and Ukraine’s reputation among European states” (Radchenko, 2022b). In this discursive strategy, activists push for domestic change by appealing to supranational expectations. Olena Shevchenko (2023), a civil activist and leader of the Insight CSO, argues: “Ukraine still faces significant challenges in the field of human rights, and LGBT+ rights are a litmus test for our country’s readiness for European integration.

The analysis of public discourse reveals that discussions on LGBTIQ+ rights and civil partnership law often mention that many European countries and international allies of Ukraine worldwide recognise same-gender partnerships. For example, the 2023 report of the CSO Insight states: “Almost all EU countries already have some form of marriage equality or civil partnership or are on track to implement one soon. Ukraine’s path toward EU accession is another factor making the adoption of draft law No. 9103—or something similar—a more realistic prospect” (Iryskina, 2023).

This serves as a discursive strategy to normalise same-gender partnerships and set legal systems in other countries as examples for Ukraine to follow. In an interview with Zmina, Viktor Pylypenko explains: “Our international partners—the U.S., Germany, France, Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, and others providing us with critical military aid—are countries that protect LGBT+ rights at the highest level, including within their armed forces. Ukraine must show its

international partners that our country is a fully fledged democracy. Without supporting draft law 9103 and granting our defenders basic human rights, this will be hard to achieve” (Zmina, 2023).

As the Ukrainian government follows the declared path to European integration, enjoying the support of most of the population, the LGBTIQ+ community uses it as a discursive opportunity to create a connection between the democratic European development and respect for LGBTIQ+ rights, as it is clear in the 2022 manifesto of the KyivPride: “Supporting Ukraine’s EU integration means respecting and sharing in each person’s choices: about their personal life, gender expression, and the right to be themselves. Being openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex in Ukraine means choosing freedom. Supporting LGBT+ people in Ukraine means supporting Ukraine’s path to the European Union” (KyivPride, 2022).

As Ukraine seeks to assert its belonging to the European political and cultural space, support for LGBTIQ+ rights becomes a test of modernity, alignment with global democratic standards and a symbol of Ukraine’s pro-European geopolitical orientation. LGBTIQ+ activists explain rising support for LGBTIQ+ equality by creating a strong connection between pro-European choice and LGBTIQ+ friendliness. Lawyer Yurii Babenko notes: “It would be strange to call ourselves part of Europe while continuing to ignore the rights of same-gender couples. So, the law “On Registered Partnerships” will finally address this issue” (Babenko, 2025).

LGBTIQ+ activists note that as Ukrainian public views of LGBTIQ+ rights are converging with broader European norms, it suggests that legal change is not only externally encouraged but also increasingly internalised, driven by the war. The 2023 report of the CSO Insight states: “The war is seen as a struggle for a civilizational choice in favour of the progressive, legal, democratic values of the so-called Western world, instead of the archaic, authoritarian values of the so-called Eastern world, personified above all by aggressive Russia” (Iryskina, 2023).

4.3.2. Ukrainian Identity and LGBTIQ+ Equality

Internalisation of LGBTIQ+ equality as part of Ukrainian values is demonstrated at different levels, from governmental institutions to civic activists. When the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine released statements in Pride month in 2022 to support LGBTIQ+ people, they emphasised that “equality is one of the key

foundations of freedom.” (Visit Ukraine, 2023). Thus, governmental officials reinforce connotations of freedom, openness, and human dignity when speaking about LGBTIQ+ rights and weave them into the narrative of modern Ukrainian democracy.

The LGBTIQ+ community emphasises LGBTIQ+ acceptance as an intrinsic quality of Ukrainian people, stemming from such positive qualities as love for freedom, self-expression, and openness. This framing transforms LGBTIQ+ inclusion into a national virtue, as the 2022 KyivPride Manifesto claims: “Ukraine is a state of a free democratic society. Our society is characterised by such concepts as freedom of self-expression, will, and human rights. The self-determination of the LGBT+ community to be themselves is mostly perceived neutrally by the majority of Ukrainian society. Isolated cases of homophobia and transphobia do occur in our country, as they do in all—even the most developed—democracies. The difference lies in how Ukrainian society responds to them: it mostly condemns them” (KyivPride, 2022).

LGBTIQ+ soldiers refer to their patriotism, love for their country and people and willingness to build their lives in Ukraine when they explain why it is important for them to have their relationship recognised by the state. Gay couple Ivan and Roman, who are both AFU service members, emphasise: “We need partnerships because it’s important for us to live in our country, to see our future here, and to defend it” (Gays Ukraine, 2023).

When sharing their stories, journalists emphasise their patriotism, evident in their choice to fight for their country, defend what they cherish and build a better future, as seen in an article by Priamyi: “The stories you are about to read are about people who love their country very much. Stories about LGBT people from Ukraine who, since February 24, 2022, instead of fleeing, went to defend Ukraine, as best they could. They believe in a country where they see their future. They believe in a tolerant, European Ukraine” (Lesnoi, 2022).

The analysed publications signal that many Ukrainians envision LGBTIQ+ equality as an inalienable part of the free democratic development of Ukraine after the victory against a neighbouring autocratic regime. Pavlo Mysiiko, a political activist and AFU service member, told CSO Feminist Workshop: “Undoubtedly, the priority is victory over the Russian occupiers—their physical destruction and expulsion from the territory of Ukraine within its 1991 borders. However, a part of this struggle must also be articulating what kind of Ukraine we envision and what

distinguishes us from the ‘Russian world’. So yes, human rights and gender equality—these issues are always timely” (Feminist Workshop, 2023).

Many comments share the common idea that a true victory over an aggressor state is to reject all it stands for. These narratives anticipate LGBTIQ+ equality that goes beyond legal reforms and foresee a value shift toward empathy, tolerance, and respect. Presenting the stories of LGBTIQ+ and women soldiers in the AFU, the Ukrainian Sociological Portal writes: “They are convinced that true victory will come when Ukrainians are free from stereotypes contradicting human rights and freedoms. (...) A young woman is proud to be Ukrainian and hopes that after the victory over the ‘rashists’, Ukrainians will also be able to overcome prejudice toward women and LGBT people. After all, a truly free country is one where a person can live without fear of being themselves” (USP, 2022).

LGBTIQ+ soldiers and activists envision an attitude change after the war, when people become more tolerant, empathetic and accepting after all the struggle they have lived through and fought together. In an interview with online media, Gluzd, Pavlo, an AFU service member, shares his hopes: “When we win, Ukrainians will be more aware. Many people have rethought their lives and started to value them more. We know what kind of neighbour we live next to, and we’ll treat them cautiously. After the war, I want to walk down the street with a piercing in my ear, nose, in a pink hat and skinny jeans—figuratively speaking—without anyone coming up and asking if I’m gay. I want it so that when people find out about my orientation, they don’t insult me. I want them to understand that they’ll have legal problems if they humiliate me because of this. I want LGBT people to be able to marry” (Varchuk, 2023).

4.4. Findings

The media discourse analysis demonstrates that the visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers since Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022 has become an effective advocacy strategy. Their inclusion in media narratives of patriotism and heroism has tied LGBTIQ+ identities to military sacrifice, challenging the traditional association of military service with heteronormative masculinity. The Russian invasion changed the perception of the existential threat, which became Russia as an aggressor state, not internal minorities. This opened space for LGBTIQ+ soldiers to be reimagined as part of

the national “we”. The analysis shows that the Ukrainian media have contributed to reshaping public opinion by sharing LGBTIQ+ soldiers’ service stories. By narrating their motivations and battlefield experiences, these stories normalise LGBTIQ+ identities in the patriotic sphere. Soldiers’ courage in life-or-death situations challenges prejudice within traditionally conservative military environments, showing that courage and loyalty are defined by character and not sexual identification. The discourse emphasises that LGBTIQ+ Ukrainians use their networks to engage in humanitarian work, fundraising, international advocacy, and war crimes documentation. Their military and civilian contributions reinforce their belonging to the national community.

The discussion around the number of LGBTIQ+ soldiers highlights visibility’s strategically political utility. Activists use population-based estimates (5–10% of Ukraine’s million-strong armed forces) to underline that tens of thousands of LGBTIQ+ people are defending the country. This is also framed historically: never before in modern warfare have so many openly queer soldiers participated, creating a precedent with domestic and global implications.

The war emphasises the urgency of legal reforms, particularly registered partnerships. Without recognition, LGBTIQ+ soldiers and their partners risk exclusion from critical rights, such as medical access, inheritance, and social benefits, if their loved ones are injured or killed. This injustice is more visible and morally pressing when soldiers are risking their lives defending the nation. Thus, activists frame marriage equality as a wartime necessity.

A recurring argumentative strategy is connecting LGBTIQ+ military service to claims for legal equality. Denying rights to those who risk their lives for the nation is framed as unacceptable. By framing equality to those who defend the nation as a moral obligation, activists make it harder for opponents to dismiss these claims without undermining the shared values of freedom, equality, and solidarity, which the war has elevated.

Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ organisations use international Pride events and media with several aims: to counter Russian propaganda (e.g., claims of Ukrainian neo-Nazism), to secure foreign political and military support and to present LGBTIQ+ Ukrainians as patriots and defenders of democratic values. Domestically, LGBTIQ+ visibility challenges stereotypes and pushes legal reform. Internationally, it is a public diplomacy tool countering hostile narratives and disinformation about Ukraine and appealing for concrete support.

The war has intensified a collective emphasis on solidarity, empathy, and unity, opening a window for LGBTIQ+ activists to push for structural change. In this regard, LGBTIQ+ rights are framed as part of a broader moral and democratic project. The reason why initiatives such as the petition for same-gender partnership gain support more easily in these difficult times might be that the war shifted the focus away from issues that previously have been polarising. Existential threats, such as wars, strip away secondary divisions and place survival, safety, and mutual care at the forefront. Traumatic experience can foster greater tolerance and increase people's willingness to prioritise the collective over individualism (Stepanenko, 2022, p. 10).

The results of a public opinion survey on LGBTIQ+ rights, showing growing societal support for same-gender partnerships, have been widely circulated in the analysed publications and appeared to have had a performative impact on the discourse. Ukrainian media frequently referenced the findings of the surveys in articles when covering the draft law on civil partnerships, interviews with LGBTIQ+ soldiers, commentaries of lawyers and human rights defenders, so that these statistics not only reflected public sentiment but could help to shape it. This phenomenon is explained by such concepts as reflexivity and the performativity of social knowledge, which suggest that when individuals become aware of how societal trends are changing, they may adjust their attitudes or behaviours to align with emerging norms (Glass & Rose-Redwood, 2014). In this case, when media emphasised rising support for LGBTIQ+ rights, they likely contributed to a normalisation of those views, creating a feedback loop where increased visibility and acceptance fostered further public change.

The war intensified a relational identity formation and "Self-Other" dynamic, when Ukraine's definition of itself emerges in contrast to Russia. In this sense, LGBTIQ+ rights are framed as a geopolitical marker of national differentiation. Support for LGBTIQ+ rights is presented as a symbolic rejection of Russian imperialism, connected to Ukraine's national struggle for sovereignty, which takes place both militarily and culturally. LGBTIQ+ equality is perceived as a test for Ukraine's commitment to human rights, democracy, and alignment with Europe. In their rhetoric on homophobia, activists, politicians, and journalists draw attention to Russia's oppressive, totalitarian system, making homophobia rhetorically externalised and associated with the aggressor state. Thus, LGBTIQ+ inclusion is framed as progressive, modern, and even patriotic and anti-colonial, but most importantly, antithetical to Russia. The "war of identity" described by

Mishalova et al. (2024) is not just territorial but symbolic, fought over norms, values, and definitions of societal order and political culture. By explaining LGBTIQ+ equality in the language of national identity, Ukrainians may internalise acceptance better than if reforms were perceived only as external pressure.

Russian aggression is a manifestation of a direct physical attack against the identity of Russia's Other, whether it be ethnic, national or sexual identity, confirming that "illiberal gender order can produce a real gendered war and genocidal violence and become a central point of contestation" (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2022, p. 351). This cannot be explained nor justified as a response to Western homonationalism, supposedly making Russia claim heteronationalism as an "anti-imperial" boundary-setting countermeasure to defend "moral sovereignty" from "Western decay", as some scholarship on homonationalism and heteronationalism suggests (Edenborg, 2023) (Rekhviashvili, 2022). Ukraine's progress in LGBTIQ+ equality is not just an attempt to conform to norms of Europeanisation, but also a result of the internalisation of shared values, placing LGBTIQ+ rights among universal human rights. And this is how Ukraine's fight is framed – as a fight "for values: life, democracy, freedom" (Dooley, 2022).

These findings contribute to the critique of the framework of homonationalism developed by Puar regarding its application to the Central and Eastern European countries (Puar, 2007). The existing theory of homonationalism oversimplifies the local context with a different historical and geopolitical reality. Leksikov and Rachok (2020) argue that Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ activism participates in the national identity formation, namely using the Othering process contrasting Russian, Soviet, anti-Western, conservative, authoritarian and homophobic Other with pro-European progressive, modern, liberal and tolerant Self. The formation of patriotic queer identity and the so-called militarisation of LGBTIQ+ activism in Ukraine, often criticised as homonationalist, emerges within a broader anti-colonial struggle against Russian influence and military defence against imperial Russian aggression. Given the ongoing war, LGBTIQ+ support for the military is a necessity for state survival rather than a means of gaining state recognition or reinforcing imperialist ambitions (Leksikov & Rachok, 2020). And only by ensuring the survival of a Ukrainian state can they build a legal system that guarantees their rights. Applying Puar's homonationalist critique to Ukraine risks misrepresenting the unique ways in which LGBTIQ+ activism uses nationalism and military resistance to ensure state survival in the Russian imperial

war of aggression. The Ukrainian case presents empirical evidence to expand the conceptualisation of homonationalism and extend its application to circumstances where LGBTIQ+ communities embrace patriotism or nationalism out of necessity to resist military aggression and imperialism, opposing heteronationalism. Therefore, the theoretical implications of the Ukrainian case for the conceptualisation of homonationalism should be examined in further studies.

Nevertheless, important limitations remain. Although surveys indicate rapidly increasing acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people, this has not yet translated into legal protections. Future research should focus on the durability of inclusivity in post-war Ukraine and whether discursive shifts translate into concrete legislative reforms.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has studied how LGBTIQ+ equality has been discursively constructed as part of Ukrainian national identity after the full-scale Russian invasion. It sought to explain why, despite theoretical expectations that nationalism and militarisation are incompatible with LGBTIQ+ inclusion, Ukrainian society has demonstrated rising support for LGBTIQ+ people during the war. The central research questions guiding this work were: How did the discursive construction of LGBTIQ+ equality as a national identity issue contribute to the growing support for LGBTIQ+ rights in Ukrainian society during the war? How has Ukrainian society opposed Russian discourses of state-sanctioned homo- and transphobia? And how and why has LGBTIQ+ equality been negotiated into Ukrainian national identity in the public discourse?

The study applied critical discourse analysis, supported by qualitative content analysis, of 210 written sources—media articles, NGO publications, and political statements—published between February 2022 and June 2023. These methods allowed the author to explore how discursive practices shape public understandings of national identity, belonging, and equality. The analysis identified recurrent themes and narrative strategies through which LGBTIQ+ rights were integrated into Ukrainian identity discourse. This approach also highlighted how media and civil society actors have contributed to shifting social norms, reinforcing inclusivity through visibility campaigns and framing equality in terms of national resilience and European belonging.

The findings of the analysis can be summarised along three interrelated themes.

First, the war has increased the visibility of LGBTIQ+ people, especially LGBTIQ+ soldiers serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Their participation in military defence and the media coverage of their personal stories have challenged common stereotypes and instead normalised LGBTIQ+ service members and activists within the narratives of patriotism, sacrifice and national heroism. This discursive shift has strengthened arguments for equal legal recognition, particularly the push for civil partnerships.

Second, Ukrainian discourses on LGBTIQ+ rights have been shaped in sharp opposition to Russia's state-sanctioned homophobia. Russian officials and media, portraying themselves as defenders of "traditional values," have explicitly targeted LGBTIQ+ people as symbols of the West's "moral decay". In contrast, Ukrainian government officials, NGOs, and the media have

increasingly framed LGBTIQ+ equality as a marker of Ukraine's democratic identity. This process of "Othering" has positioned LGBTIQ+ inclusion as integral to Ukraine's moral struggle against Russian aggression.

Third, these developments have facilitated the integration of LGBTIQ+ equality into broader narratives of Ukrainian national identity and values. Public discourse has increasingly associated equality with Europeanisation, resilience, and a civic conception of the nation. The discursive incorporation of LGBTIQ+ people into the "imagined community" demonstrates that Ukraine's existential nationalism recognises diversity as a strength in the struggle for sovereignty and independence against the aggressor state.

The Ukrainian case demonstrates that the compatibility of nationalism and LGBTIQ+ acceptance is socially constructed and context-dependent. In Ukraine, nationalism's anti-imperial roots and its orientation toward Europe have created discursive openings for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, challenging theories that link war and nationalism to exclusion and regression of human rights. This case thus extends debates on homonationalism and heteronationalism by showing how, in Ukraine, LGBTIQ+ rights can be integrated into the national identity discourse as part of democratic resilience to the "Russian world".

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that the full-scale war has paradoxically acted as a catalyst for positive change in public attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ equality in Ukraine. Through the visibility of LGBTIQ+ soldiers, opposition to Russian homophobia, and the framing of equality as a national value, LGBTIQ+ rights have been discursively incorporated into the broader struggle for sovereignty, resilience, and democratic identity. While the development of this trend remains uncertain, the Ukrainian case demonstrates that crises of survival and national defence can open opportunities for reimagining the boundaries of belonging, challenging theories of nationalism, militarisation, and LGBTIQ+ acceptance.

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