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Beyond Semiotic Representation: A Study of Emotion in Ukrainian Children's Paintings

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Abstract

As part of the Ukrainian children support project, the platform Mom, I See War presents, on its official website and social media, more than 4,000 drawings by children from war-affected areas (mainly Ukraine). Based on the artworks on this platform, this article delves deeper than mere symbolic interpretations and explores the various categories of emotional expression in these children's drawings. Through a close reading of different elements (symbols, colours, structures) within the drawings, the study is carried out within the theoretical framework of emotion and political and cultural study. While each painting contains a complex combination of various personal emotions, the article makes a general outline of all the paintings as a whole and analyses the various possibilities of emotional expression among the group. In response to war conditions, four categories of emotional expression are presented: fear, pain, anger, and hope.

Keywords

anger; child psychology; emotion; fear; hope; pain; war painting

1. Introduction

Since February 24, 2022, the world has witnessed the severe consequences brought about by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This ongoing battle has created significant economic, cultural, physical, and mental challenges for the people living in Ukraine. Among those dwelling within the war-affected zones, children, as one of the most vulnerable groups, suffer both physically and psychologically. Yet, instead of being regarded simply as victims, they are also actively making meanings with responses towards their surroundings. These responses can be seen in various creative activities, such as story-telling, visual-presenting, music-making,

etc., among which painting is the most common method used for self-expression. As part of the Ukrainian children support project, the platform Mom, I See War (https://www.misw.org) presents, on its official website and social media, more than 4,000 drawings by children from war-affected areas (mainly Ukraine). Grouped on the symbolic resemblance within the drawings, the website has given a clear message that children living out the war are using specific communal symbols or colours in their artworks, including umbrellas (protection), pigeons (peace), and the noticeable colours of the Ukrainian national flag (blue and yellow). Based on children's artworks on this platform, the study delves deeper than mere symbolic interpretations and discusses the different groups of emotional expression as presented within these drawings.

2. Theoretical Basis

Emotion, in its early stage, is seen as a complete outburst of one's interiority and is linked specifically to individual morality. People who reveal their emotions are presumed as immoral individuals who cannot properly control themselves. In his work, *De Ira* (*On Anger*), Seneca proposes a negative interpretation of anger. Connecting it with a "temporary madness" (Seneca, 1928, pp. 106–107), he considers anger as addictive and as a "baneful thing" that "is not to be counted as a helpful agent" (p. 131). For him, anger, as well as other similar emotions, is based on personal self-expression and is related to individual morality. Drawing on this early philosophy on emotion, later scholars have developed an appraisal theory that argues that fundamentally, cognition precedes emotion. In 1960, Canadian psychologist Magda Arnold introduced the concept of an appraisal interpretation of emotion, as a "direct, immediate evaluation" of individual experience (Arnold, 1960, p. 175). For appraisal theorists, personal emotions are responses premised upon assessments of the "stimuli and events for their significance for the individual" (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003, p. 576). The formation of this emotion is, therefore, a linear process that starts with the evaluation of events and is a subjective reaction towards the exteriority.

Another line of thought, however, challenges appraisal theory by emphasising the importance of certain non-conscious factors, suggesting that emotions can also be triggered entirely by external elements without having a prior evaluation. In *The History of Emotions* (2017), Rob Boddice stresses how personal emotions are pre-determined by the construction of the spaces they enter, and that "the *atmosphere* of a space is determined by the logic of its own construction" (Boddice, 2017, p. 178). The exterior factors, for example, the damp air, the highly-saturated painted walls, the intricate decorations, and the extremely bright lighting in a room may lead to anxiety for whoever is in that place even though they were in a pleasant mood before entering. Explaining this relationship between human emotion, architecture, and physical surroundings, Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, similarly, in one of his interviews, asserts that buildings are never neutral and possess emotion because each one "tells a story" (Out of Sync - Art in Focus, 2016). This narrative power of a spatial entity penetrates individuals and evokes certain emotions through its decorations, its specific fabrics of construction, and even the smell that lingers in the air.

3. Literature Review

Previous studies have discussed the relations between emotion and various artistic expressions, including literary works, film production, paintings, etc. In *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion*, Patrick Colm Hogan analyses the presence of various types of emotion (love, grief, guilt, shames, etc.) in several famous literary works (Colm Hogan, 2011). His focus involves both "interpreting the text itself" and "determining

individual readers' responses to the text" (p. 3). The emotion of a literary work, in his study corpus, is, therefore, approached both from within the work and from its exterior effects on readers' psychology. This discussion of emotion within an artistic creation is also prominent in cinematic production. By combining film study and psycho-neuro cognition, Greg M. Smith presents the evoking mechanism of films on audiences' emotions (Smith, 2003). Researchers have also discussed the inter-relations between paintings and emotion. One of the key focuses is viewers' emotional responses towards traditional paintings. Pamela Fletcher, in "'To Wipe a Manly Tear': The Aesthetics of Emotion in Victorian Narrative Painting" (Fletcher, 2009), evaluates Victorian paintings in terms of their emotional impacts and aesthetic success. The emotion discussed here is a reaction towards accomplished works, a following procedure after the artistic creation. Another line of research, however, emphasises the exact *process* of art-making. When examining the results art-making has "on the anxiety level of children undergoing cancer treatment in hospital," Altay et al. (2017, p. 5) have strengthened the therapeutic effects of "drawing and writing and mutual storytelling."

Besides emotions led by medical illness, scholars have also explored the physical and mental condition of children in war-affected zones. In *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, editor James Marten compiles several articles addressing various aspects of children on battlefields, including their memory and imagination of past and present war conditions, the portrayal of their experiences in literature, and the psychology of child victims (Marten, 2002). This area of study is then extended to the exploration of children's artistic expressions (mainly paintings) in war-affected areas. Analysed within the context of World War I, Pignot and Pickering (2019) give a detailed analysis of children's paintings in France, Russia, and Germany. Focusing on the specific representation of "enemy" and "combat" within the drawings, they use a historical perspective, seeing children's paintings as "one of the best places to observe childhood experience in World War I" (Pignot & Pickering, 2019, p. 172). Similarly, in "Understanding War, Visualising Peace: Children Draw What They Know" (Walker et al., 2003), 56 child participants were advised to draw their understanding of peace and war respectively. Unlike other studies that are based on the analysis of the already-finished paintings, this study is more specifically performed and presents the contrasts between children's presentations of peace and war by quantitatively calculating the "colours," "figures," "objects," and "space" (Walker et al., 2003, p. 197) used within the two groups of drawings.

4. Methodological Basis

Initiated in 2022, the platform Mom, I See War has presented more than 4,000 drawings by children in Ukraine and other war-affected areas on its official website and social media accounts. By inviting "all parents in Ukraine and worldwide to take a picture of their child's drawing" and sending it to the official website, the project intends to create "the world's most significant and most valuable collage of children's drawings about the war in Ukraine, which will remain forever on the Internet using NFT technology." Besides preserving the paintings, the project is also raising money for "the humanitarian aid fund for children affected by the war." The website offers young artists (anyone below the age of 18) the freedom to submit their work, whether they are from Ukraine or other countries, and to decide what to include in their paintings. This results in a more complex but universal database that encompasses a wide variety of drawings. Even though certain information (author's name, age, city) is collected with the submission, it is generally impossible to determine the exact status of the authors: the context of the drawing (individual or in school context), their living conditions (directly or indirectly affected by the war), and their drawing purposes (whether intended for the project or not). Lacking precise information on particular drawings, the

current study deviates from the author's biographical study of the relationship between artworks and their creators; instead, it takes the whole database as a collection of children's reactions towards the current war and approaches these visual data as texts which exist under the current cultural and political context.

The study of paintings can be performed with two different approaches: the content-focused approach and the projective approach. While the former "focuses on content and not on interpretation," the latter "treats drawings as data which must be interpreted by the researcher" (Merriman & Guerin, 2006, p. 49). A content analysis of paintings treats individual elements (symbols, colours, characters) as specific data and approaches them with quantitative digitisation. The projective approach, however, pays little attention to specific numbers and focuses more on the interpretation of individual paintings within the relevant theoretical contexts. Combining both approaches, this study organises and summarises different elements within the paintings into groups of emotional expression. Yet, instead of giving an exact digitisation of their number or percentage, it delves more deeply into the interpretation of such elements under the context of children in war-affected areas.

Treating the whole database of children's drawings as a collection of texts, the main method utilised is a combination of close reading of the paintings with cultural and political theory. Having its contemporary origin in New Criticism, close reading was initially a strict method of analysing texts, mainly poetry. Derived from I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*, close reading treats text as an independent entity, free from the influence of the author's biographical or socio-political circumstances (Richards, 1929). Instead of focusing on the exterior intention, it advised attention to formal aspects within the texts, including the vocabulary, symbols, ironies, etc. In contemporary settings of literary criticism, however, this method is extended and not restricted to the mere analysis of interior elements. It is, instead, a mode of approaching texts that emphasises, but is not limited to, textual details. While stressing the importance of interior elements as starting points of arguments, it also invites certain social and cultural contexts into the discussion. This method is not limited to literary study but can apply to the discussion of other artistic expressions, including paintings. When treating the children's paintings as the carrier of information (explicit or implicit), specific elements are approached. The first group of elements under examination are symbols and scripts which have a rather explicit connotation with certain emotions. Attention will also be paid to the colours used in the drawings, where tonal effects are analysed as implicit ways of emotional expression. Thirdly, there will be a focus on the structure of the drawing, specifically on the various combinations and organisation of certain symbols and colours. Through a close reading of these different elements inside the drawings, the study is performed within the theoretical framework of emotion study and political and cultural theories.

Grounded on these theoretical and methodological bases, this article takes children's drawings presented in the Mom, I See War platform as the study corpus, and discusses the different emotions expressed within them. While each painting contains a complex combination of various emotions, the article does not intend to categorise individual drawings into specific emotional groups. Instead, it discusses elements of the paintings and makes a general outlining of these elements as a whole, thereby analysing the various possibilities of emotional expression among the group. In other words, rather than treating each drawing as an individual case, this study uses the paintings as representations to illustrate how elements within them can be interpreted as different categories of emotions for children in war-affected areas. In response to war conditions, four categories of emotional expression are presented: fear, pain, anger, and hope.

5. Four Emotions in Children's Paintings in War-Affected Areas

5.1. Fear

The first group of emotion expressed in children's paintings is that of fear. Traditionally, when discussing the psychological status within or instantly after a catastrophic historical incident, the most immediate reaction is mere passivity. In his book *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988), Primo Levi introduces life in the Nazi concentration camp from the perspective of an intellectual and discusses the unique experience which he refers to as being impossible to remain humane (Levi, 1988, p. 57). In this abandoned world where traditional norms and meanings no longer exist, individuals are treated as animals that are deprived of their social values and can be disposed of as wished without moral judgment. For Levi, under such circumstances, most people tend to not feel anything because they are not able to think. This lack of thinking is due to, on the one hand, the tedious work and violence that restrict them to that exact moment, and on the other hand, an inability to understand what is happening. The instant change of surroundings both on a physical and metaphysical level is always too much for individuals to grasp, and much more so for those who have yet to develop a mature psychology. In the period after their first experience of war, children are overwhelmed by the tragedy and are shocked by the events that are instantly happening around them. When confronted with the deaths and suffering of close friends or family members, children in war-affected zones may struggle to comprehend their situation. Instead, they tend to passively endure the overwhelming pressures placed upon them.

This overwhelming pressure results in the first category, the emotional status of fear, which includes a combination of "affecting" and "feeling." When discussing the different vocabularies in emotion study, the exact meanings of these terminologies, such as feeling, affect, and emotion, are different. While emotion in general, defined in this essay, is a combination of all procedures taking place during an emotional process, the other two have more specific definitions. "Affecting" is the bodily reaction towards certain triggers; "feeling," on the other hand, is the individual interpretation of that reaction either through words or other medium. For example, most people would tremble and sweat at the sight of a wild bear, and this is the "affecting" they experience. Yet, it is only through summarising it as fear that "feeling" comes into being. The fear of the bear, as indicated through the bodily reaction of trembling, will take place uncontrollably as fierce animals like bears are sources of collective fear. When discussing collective behaviours and thinking patterns, Carl Jung introduces the term "collective unconscious," which he describes as a "system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature that is identical in all individuals" (Jung, 1968, p. 43). This collective unconsciousness of fear is inherited and revealed as the instant reactions of trembling or yelling in the face of danger, be it fierce animals or violence and death. In the case of children in war-affected areas, they must experience, on the one hand, the sudden sounds of gunfire and bomb explosions, and on the other hand, the bloody and violent scenes all around their neighbourhoods. The presence of weapons and death as collective sources of fear will have immediate effects on children's bodies, manifesting as either physical wounds or as crying and trembling, both on the battlefields and during the later process of war migration.

In the children's paintings collected in the database, two types of fear can be seen in this first reaction against the war. One type of fear is related to "affecting," presented more in its primitive appearance as the reflection of the instant traces of war on children's bodies. Paintings of this type, normally abstract and impressionistic in nature, are not linked directly to the war, or any of the cultural and political background. Instead, they are more

connected with the primitive individual self-expression at that exact moment. In this painting by 12-year-old Kseniia (Figure 1), this primitive horror is portrayed both with symbols and the use of colours. The black canvas in the background, with a yellow circle (representing the moon) in the top-left corner, explicitly indicates a deep night. For children, nights are related to danger, where ghosts might appear suddenly from nowhere. In the context of war, this harsh yellow circle can implicitly be interpreted as military headlights from above, signifying the unavoidable exposure under enemy searchlights. This feeling of being exposed is validated by the portrayal of eyes that are scattered on the canvas. These dozens of eyes are similar in shape but with the iris (painted as black points) looking in all directions. For Kseniia, the horror is everywhere, as if millions of evil eyes, along with the beaming searchlights, are looking at her all the time. These symbols of eyes and headlight, despite being the sources of her fear, are figurative and not specific in terms of the exact origin of that fearful emotion. This illustration captures the instance of human suffering and horror, focusing on an inner outbreak of fearful emotion without making connotations to specific external causes, thereby presenting the most direct traces of war on children's bodies.

The other type of fear, portrayed as the later interpretation of the previous primitive fear, appears when children draw connection between that fear with specific sources in war. After the initial shock, when children are unable to process events happening around them, they begin to interpret that emotion, identifying the specific causes that have led to their suffering. This process of trying to understand the "affecting" and defining it into a certain "feeling" is not limited to naming or explaining using words, but can also be demonstrated through artistic expressions. In the children's drawings, this naming activity is

Figure 1. Eyes scattering over a black canvas (Kseniia).

performed by outlining the specific sources of their fear, including missiles, bombs, fire, blood, etc. One obvious example of this fear can be found in 14-year-old Zlata's drawing (Figure 2). In the foreground of the work, she presents a child crying and trying to cover his/her ears, capturing the exact moment when a bomb is exploding. Painted with a curling position, the child takes up only around 1/8 the space of the entire canvas, signifying their passivity and vulnerability. This is presented in huge contrast with the overwhelmingly large silhouette in the background, which has presumably brought about all the suffering. This huge figure in the shape of a man with a weapon does not have any specific facial characteristics. Yet, within this figure, the artist portrays a fighter jet passing by, with overwhelming dust and fire blowing, as if this man is bringing these fearful artefacts to and all around the child. With the portrayal of a background that explains the fearful condition of the foreground, the painter is indicating the direct causes (background) for the child's fear (foreground), being itself an artistic interpretation of the "affecting" as "feeling." By including these elements in their paintings, the children in war-affected areas experience this second type of fear when they realise the direct sources of their suffering.

Figure 2. A child horrified by bombs (Zlata).

5.2. Individual Pain—Collective Grief

The second category of emotion expressed is that of individual pain which is then added up to collective grief. While the initial shock and fear still exist, children will then start to feel the consequences of the war and begin to struggle to get used to this new society where gunshots and death are frequently taking place. This emotion of individual pain can be traced in almost all paintings in the database, through the portrayal of tears, blood, ruins, etc. While individual pain accumulates, a collective grief emerges within the community and among age groups who have experienced similar tragedies, whether within their own families or through the suffering

of others around them. In her book *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (2006), historian Barbara H. Rosenwein proposes the "emotional community" as "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions" (Rosenwein, 2006, p. 2).

Even though individuals differ in how they express their emotions, there is a tendency for certain collective emotions to arise due to political and cultural similarities. This is especially true for children living in war-affected areas, where individual differences are marginalised under the extreme circumstances of the ongoing collective suffering. While this collective emotion of grief is a build-up of individual pain, it is also based on a certain level of emotional transmission within the community. Challenging the "emotional contagion" theory, which regards emotion as a property that someone owns, Sara Ahmed, in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, proposes that the formation of emotion relies on interactions and contacts with the exterior surroundings (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). The pain in these children's paintings, similarly, is not an existing property that is unchanged and can be simply passed on to one another, but one that is constantly being formed through interactions among them. Through either hearing or witnessing other's painful stories or situations and sometimes mixing that pain within themselves, these children are also presenting a collective grief of the whole nation.

Among the children's drawings in the database, individual pain is presented through either physical wounds on children's bodies or figurative sadness. In the database, many paintings include elements of blood, wounds, scars, etc., marking the cruelty of war which leaves unbearable physical pain on individuals. In this drawing by 13-year-old Vladyslava (Figure 3a), for example, the protagonist has dozens of fresh wounds on their face and neck, with the left eye covered by a blood-soaked bandage, symbolising the ongoing physical pain inflicted by war on individuals' bodies. The series of red numbers ("24. 02.2024") carved below the right eye represents the specific date that marks the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In paintings like this, the children use their eyes like cameras which capture the continuity of physical pain from their own perspectives. Besides the portrayal of bodily suffering, this pain is also largely expressed through tears.

When outlining the different types of tears, Juan Murube proposes a "psycho-emotional tear" which "is used to express the need for help or offer of help/support" (Murube, 2009, p. 63). Caused by physical and emotional pain, tears become a form of communication, expressing sadness on a collective level. This element can be traced in most of the children's paintings. In Figure 3b, 12-year-old Nadiia presents a similar emotional pain through the running tears. With her eyes closed, the painter is projecting her emotional pain through a simple portrayal of tears running down the girl's face. By depicting tears in their paintings, these children are, on the one hand, using crying as a form of cathartic release, and on the other, expressing a plea for help to everyone who views their work.

Besides the portrayal of personal pain, a large portion of the paintings also bears a memory of the cultural level of grief. After witnessing the events around them, their initial, personal pain gradually transforms into mourning for the entire nation. This type of collective grief for communal suffering is achieved in the drawings through two different artistic techniques. One method of expression is using unique painting structures to present external surroundings. While the previously mentioned paintings focus more on individual emotional outbursts, or the pain within one person, this group of drawings describes the exterior ruins caused by the war. One subgroup uses the shape of an eye as their canvas, portraying themselves as the witnesses of all terrible events taking place.

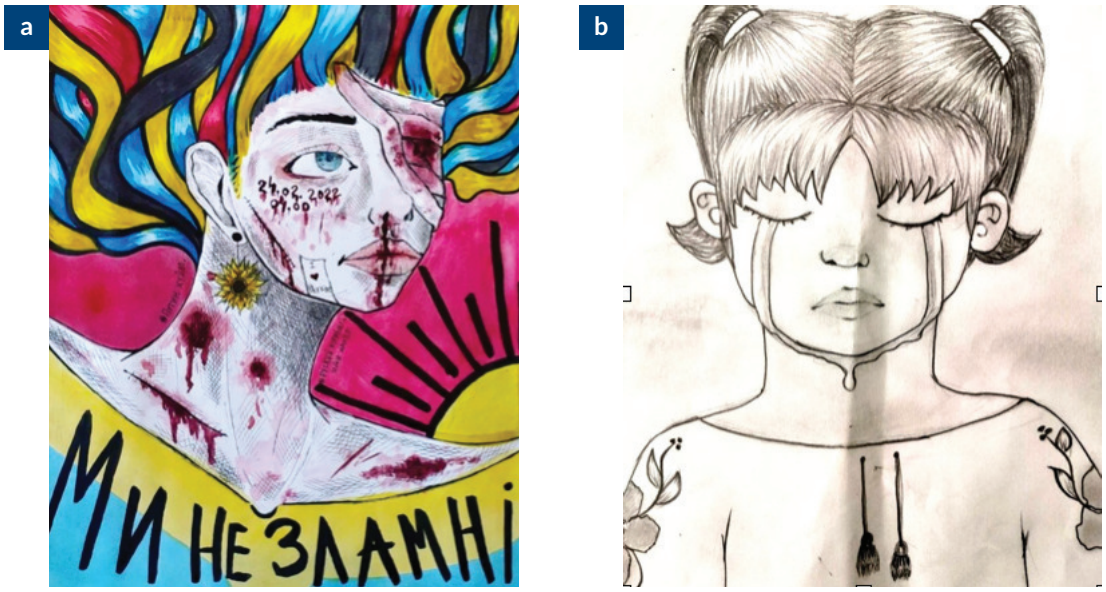

Figure 3. Vladyslava's *Scars and pain caused by war* (a) and Nadiia's *War as presented in children's tears* (b).

In Roman (13) and Veronika's (14) drawing (Figure 4a), the weeping eye captures the horrifying scenario where a house is being attacked by a tank, bombs, and a warplane from underground. While capturing this horrible scene in the eye, the children are both memorising and weeping for the collective pain unfolding around them. Another subgroup divides the canvas into two parts, portraying the sharp contrasts before and after the invasion. In this drawing by 6-year-old Anna (Figure 4b), the left side illustrates a lively scene of warm colours where birds are flying gently over a house, with greenery covering the lower background. The right side, however, challenges this serenity with everything burning in flashes caused by the aeroplane flying by. Either through eye-witnessing or contrast of "before" and "after," the first method of expression captures the exterior and portrays grief for the collective misery.

Another method combines representational cultural symbols with pain, outlining the collective grief of the whole nation. While the interaction between individuals and their surroundings produces and adds up to a collective emotion, it is through specific interpretations that the feeling of grief takes shape. When painting

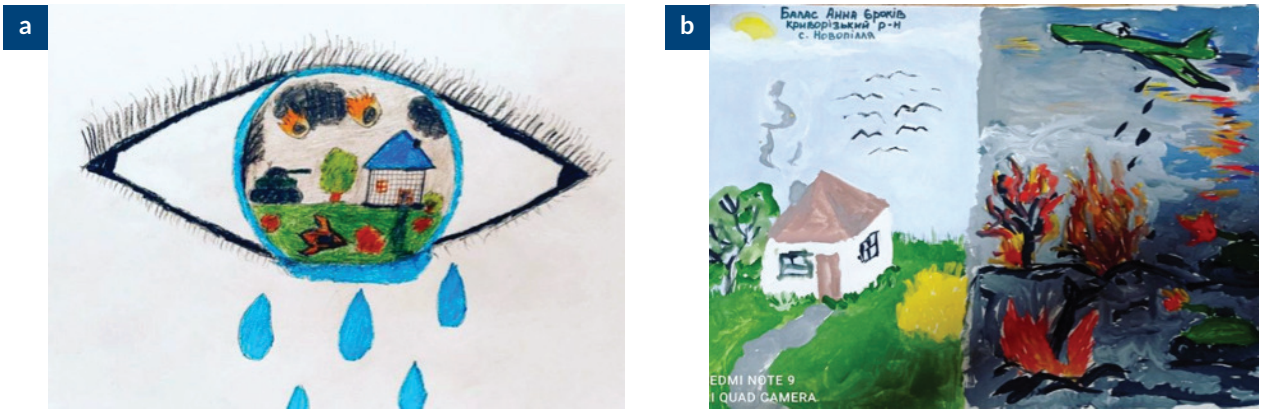

Figure 4. Roman and Veronika's *The eye that captures war scenarios* (a) and Anna's *Ukraine divided into "before" and "after"* (b).

certain elements of collective grief, the children are projecting their own feelings into a nation, "as if it were a mourning subject" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 13). By outlining a collective nation as having an emotion, this nation is presented as "the subject of feeling" (p. 13). This subjectivity is based upon individuals' own mourning "on behalf of the nation," upon the premise that the nation is "the object of 'our feeling'" (p. 13). In the drawing by 18-year-old Asia (Figure 5), a girl, with her face covered in the colour of the national flag of Ukraine, is weeping blood. While the tears indicate an individual expression of pain, this combination of tears and representational national elements marks a collective mourning: The whole nation, represented by this girl, is bleeding and weeping. By projecting their pain on a collective level, the children introduce characters as representatives of the whole nation. The individual pain is, therefore, added and metaphorically changed into a nation that is weeping.

Figure 5. Bleeding of a woman coloured in blue and yellow (Asia).

5.3. Anger

Among the children's paintings in the Mom I See War database, the third emotional category is that of anger. Although anger is traditionally believed to be a morally ambiguous emotion that is destructive in nature, contemporary scholars see it the other way around. In her article "The Uses of Anger" (1997), American writer and activist Audre Lorde discusses, for the first time, how anger can be viewed positively as a power of revolution against the dominant systematic power. According to Lorde, the anger of minorities, whether among Black individuals or females, is often feared and dismissed as mere hostility and typically met with silence (Lorde, 1997, p. 7), effectively ending a conversation. In redefining the positivity of anger, she openly advocates for others to not fear their anger as the fear of that anger teaches nothing. Instead, the power to "envision and reconstruct" is fuelled by anger, which will help "define and fashion a world" (p. 10). Anger, for her and many other activists influenced by her, is a response to injustice, an energetic tool of rebellion. While the emotions of fear and pain are directed inward toward individuals themselves, anger is more of a

subjective reaction to the external world. Similar to Lorde's positive view on anger, Sue J. Kim, in her monograph *On Anger: Race, Cognition, Narrative* (2013), introduces three aspects of the appraisal patterns of anger: as "a reaction to violations of norms and rules" (Kim, 2013, p. 18), as blame upon the real or imagined other who (might intend to) "act upon us" (p. 19), and as an implication of hope where one "is not reduced to mere passivity" (p. 20). For children in war-affected areas, the anger is toward the enemy who has or will act upon them. In comparison to adult activists, their anger is less destructive due to their age and the conditions of war. However, through their intentional expression, these paintings serve as a subjective reaction to the enemy, envisioning an affirmative future where peace might prevail.

In these paintings of Ukrainian children, traces of this affirmative anger can be seen in not only the pictorial drawings but also the words that sometimes accompany the drawings. These scripts, either in English or in Ukrainian, together with the picture itself, work as a public parade where slogans are chanted. In an article dedicated to anger, Marilyn Frye regards anger itself as "somewhat a speech act" (Frye, 1983, p. 88). When expressing individual anger, the first party is both presenting information through emotion and also demanding responses from the second party. In the paintings, the symbols and scripts are speech acts per se, as they carry information about the collective. This act of speech serves its function the moment it is performed even though no immediate responses are given. By directing their anger through different mediums and forms of expression in their artworks, the children in Ukraine are directly reacting to the wartime conditions and are using their rage as an act of speech, a performative yet powerful tool against the inhumane activities performed by the other side. By expressing anger, whether consciously or unconsciously, in their drawings, a powerful reaction to the wartime conditions is articulated and a positive future, where these children have a safe and peaceful life, is envisioned.

Among all the paintings in the database, anger is less explicitly expressed than other emotions. Yet, it can be seen through the inclusion of particular symbols and also from scripts written on the drawings. One typical symbol of anger is the image of the blood-soaked handprint. The handprint, in its original appearance, is found in the earliest man-lived caves. The fact of having a handprint on a wall or canvas symbolises life and validity, as it is a unique biometric characteristic of all individuals who have ever lived, and therefore, a proof of existence. Throughout history, handprints have been used to represent humanity and rebellion against inhumane activities. While handprints are common to almost everyone living in different continents, the combination of which presents a unity of all human beings as a group, against any enemy that intends to interrupt this unity. In the drawing by 13-year-old Katia (Figure 6), dozens of red handprints are scattered on the canvas in a messy but unifying way, signifying the whole group of Ukrainian people binding together. This unity is strengthened by the colour of the handprints and the script in the background. With the hands covered in red, Katya is explicitly expressing her affirmative anger, signifying both suffering and rebellion. While being harmed by the invaders, the people of Ukraine, symbolised as blood-coloured handprints sticking together on the canvas, will unite and act collectively against the other side. The anger of the collective resulting from the blood is transformed into a communal fight against the same target. The background writing *Я хочу, щоб ти відчував, що відчуваю я* ("I want you to feel what I feel") validify this anger when the painter intentionally asks viewers to feel the anger that she feels. By demonstrating both explicitly with the blood-soaked handprints, and implicitly with the scripts, Katya is voicing her anger and at the same time affirmatively envisioning the unity of the whole country despite its suffering.

Figure 6. Blood-soaked fingerprints (Katia).

5.4. Hope

Besides the various emotional expressions of fear, pain, and anger, the last category observed in the children's paintings is the emotion of hope. Hope, in its original essence, is a positive emotion as opposed to its negative counterpart, depression. In his article "Hope: An Emotion and a Vital Coping Resource Against Despair" (1999), Richard S. Lazarus defines the act of hoping as "believe(ing) that something positive, which does not presently apply to one's life, could still materialise" (Lazarus, 1999, p. 653). The hope, for Lazarus, is premised upon an unsatisfactory condition of the current situation, which is then projected into a future positivity. While the emotion of hope, for Lazarus and many other scholars alike, is affirmative, a recent study has negated that premise by proposing a toxic positivity where the things individuals hope to achieve are manipulated by institutional power. Contemporary Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in his monograph *Psychpolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (2017), introduces a "smart power" as opposed to the "greater power." While the latter uses "violence and repression" (Han, 2017, p. 13) to control, the former "operates seductively" (p. 14) and "call(s) forth positive emotions and exploit(s) them" (p. 14). In Han's philosophy of positive emotion represented by hope, individual pursuit is controlled and exploited by the "smart power," utilised as a way for more efficient institutional control in contemporary society. Despite the complex possibilities of different interpretations of the emotion of hope, the children's paintings demonstrate an affirmative direction. The hope they hold is aiming towards the power that tries to dominate and is, to a large extent, beneficial to them. By demonstrating their hope, negative emotions of fear and pain will be gradually cured. This vision of a peaceful time, whether in the past or the future, offers a positive outlook for everyone in desperate conditions to regain their strength.

Among the paintings, the emotion of hope can be divided into two different categories of expression: the portrayal of peace and love as well as the various images of protectors. The first category, featuring various representative elements of peace and love, evokes an explicit envisioning of a scenario filled with beauty and tranquillity. Many children use the image of a giant umbrella in their paintings to protect people and the cities underneath. In 7-year-old Artem's drawing, for example, a significantly large umbrella, covered in the colours of the Ukrainian national flag (blue and yellow), crosses the canvas diagonally. Painted in faded colours, the warplanes and tank on the left side of the canvas stand in stark contrast to the right side, where buildings are depicted in various vibrant colours, bringing more life to that corner. This lively and colourful corner is

Figure 7. An umbrella that protects the city underneath (Artem).

surrounded by the umbrella and a rainbow that covers from above, outlining a place where all things related to battlefields are excluded, where only peace remains. While this portrayal can be interpreted as either a vision of the future or a memory of the past, the writing *Поверни наше щастя Дитинство!* ("Bring back our happy childhood!") in the top right corner reinforces its nostalgic quality. In handwritten form, the phrase describes Artem's calling to bring back their "happy childhood." This childhood, for the 7-year-old painter, is not a physical age span; instead, it is a peaceful past before the invasion. In *Retrotopia* (2017), Zygmunt Bauman argues for a contemporary "U-term" of directing public hopes from the "uncertain and ever-too-obviously un-trustworthy future" to "the vaguely remembered past, valued for its assumed stability and so trustworthiness" (Bauman, 2017, p. 6). While the future cannot be imagined in the miserable present, a nostalgia for tranquillity became the way out for Artem in directing his hope.

The second category that demonstrates hope among the paintings in the database focuses on depictions of various protectors: the adults and the children themselves. Images of adults include the portrayal of mothers, fathers, and sometimes soldiers in uniforms. In Yeva's (13) painting (Figure 8), two children are sleeping in bed while two adult characters, forming a bubble with their bodies, are constructing a clear sky around the children. Painted with the colours of the Ukrainian national flag, the bubble prevents missiles and fires from getting inside. The man on the left does not show any facial expression; instead, there is a focus on his identity as a soldier wearing a uniform. The woman on the other side, similarly, is painted with long hair and a dress, without showing any personal characteristics. Yet, it is this anonymity of the protectors that unites them as a collective. By projecting their hope onto adults, regardless of their identity, children envision a reliable and unified protection that allows them to feel safe. Besides adults, the group of protectors is also sometimes identified as the children themselves. While hoping for protectors to help them, the children also envisioned themselves as protectors for other people living in war-affected areas. In this painting (Figure 9) by Nadiia (no age specified), while the left panel represents the enemy in a cartoon-like skeleton hand, the right part is characterised by a boy sheltering the other kids, and even an adult, from danger. Portrayed as an angel, with a pair of wings and a halo, the child is given the power to face the enemy. By drawing this angel-like character that stands between danger and their people, the painter and other children like her are hoping that they will have the strength to protect others in the same situation.

Figure 8. Adults protecting children with their bodies (Yeva).

Figure 9. Children as protectors (Nadiia).

6. Conclusion

Among the paintings presented in the Mom, I See War database, four categories of emotional expression of children under war conditions are analysed. Firstly, the emotion of fear appears when the cruelty of war presses its traces directly upon children's bodies. Two types of fear exist among the paintings: The first type marks a primitive and instant bodily reaction and calls for an entire self-expression without drawing any external connection; the second, through naming and outlining the specific sources of that fear, goes further as an interpretation of the previous primitive fear. Secondly, when children begin to recognise the deaths of

their close friends or family members, the emotion of pain emerges. Individual pains, as analysed within the database, are presented as both physical wounds (blood, scars) and figurative sadness (tears). This individual pain, experienced both physically and mentally, contributes to a collective grief in which the entire nation mourns. In the children's paintings, this collective grief is expressed either through depictions of their miserable external surroundings, marking them as witnesses of unfolding events, or through the personification of the nation, signifying a shared sense of grief. The third emotion of anger, however, appears less frequently in the paintings. Seen positively as a vehicle for activism and an envisioning of a positive future, this anger is presented through the symbol of blood-soaked handprints binding and resisting together on the canvas. The scripts within the drawings also indicate a parade-like utterance for a peaceful world. Finally, a positive emotion of hope is expressed in two different ways. Elements of peace, together with the application of warm colours are used as powerful depictions of a positive future. Similarly, images of various protectors, including parents, soldiers and the children themselves, are presented as a wish for safety and the strength to protect others.

Summarising the different possibilities of children's emotional reactions in war conditions, the article does not intend to categorise paintings or their creators into these different categories. With the ongoing suffering caused by the invasion, Ukrainian children are experiencing a fluid and unstable emotional landscape that is too complex to fit into one particular category. In most cases, each painting contains a complex combination of various personal emotions, taking different proportions within one particular artwork. This study considers these paintings as a corpus rich in various elements of emotional expression and offers approaches for analysing children's war paintings with a focus on emotion. It is worthwhile for follow-up research to consider individual paintings as cases and conduct a more detailed, painter-related study on the drawings, relating the personal experience of the young painters to the artworks as well as discussing the relationship between paintings and their specific social and cultural contexts.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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