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THE ROLE OF DECOMMUNIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF MYKOLAIV

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research paper is to explore the role of decommunization and decolonization processes in the formation of national identity under conditions of generational change (based on the materials of the city of Mykolaiv).

Scientific novelty. The paper represents an original attempt to examine the processes of decommunization and decolonization through the prism of generational change, drawing on J. Ortega y Gasset's 'spiritual and historical theory of generations', using the case of Mykolaiv. In preparing the article, the authors analyzed the activities of various compositions of the Mykolaiv toponymic commission, used data on the renaming of urban toponyms, and developed an original periodization of events.

Conclusions. The authors interpret the processes of decommunization and decolonization as a struggle between Ukrainian and Soviet (Russian) identities. At the same time, these processes unfold within the context of intergenerational transformation in Ukraine. The older generation retains certain traits of Soviet identity, such as the expectation that problems will be resolved by the authorities or external forces. By contrast, the younger generation embodies a new identity characterized by pragmatism, freedom of belief and behavior, and a critical, even nihilistic, attitude toward the Soviet legacy. More broadly, Ukraine is currently experiencing a crisis of national identity, partly shaped by the influence of regional specificities.

The presence of a significant number of carriers of Soviet identity within Ukrainian society has hindered the full implementation of decommunization. Nevertheless, the process has contributed to dismantling stereotypes and prejudices that previously fueled separatist sentiments and impeded national consolidation.

The processes of decommunization and decolonization in Mykolaiv were somewhat different from similar events in Ukraine, and accordingly, have their own periodization: Stage 1 (1989-1990s) – decommunization and reversion to imperial narratives. Stage 2 (2014-2016) – decommunization. Stage 3 (2022 – up to the present) – decolonization.

It will require time, and perhaps even a complete generational turnover, for the processes of decommunization and decolonization to transform Soviet identity into a Ukrainian one within the symbolic realm. The authors express the hope that these processes will become the foundation for the formation of a national identity grounded in Ukrainian markers of historical memory.

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Keywords: decommunization, decolonization, generation, national identity, historical memory, Mykolaiv, toponymic commission, Heinrich Boell Foundation

РОЛЬ ДЕКОМУНІЗАЦІЇ ТА ДЕКОЛОНІЗАЦІЇ У ФОРМУВАННІ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ: МИКОЛАЇВСЬКИЙ АСПЕКТ

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Мета статті полягає у висвітленні ролі процесів декомунізації та деколонізації у формуванні національної ідентичності в контексті зміни поколінь (на матеріалах міста Миколаєва).

Наукова новизна. У роботі вперше зроблено спробу дослідити процеси декомунізації та деколонізації в контексті зміни поколінь («духовно-історична теорія поколінь» Х. Ортеги-і-Гассета), використовуючи матеріали міста Миколаєва. У процесі підготовки статті проаналізована діяльність різних складів топонімичної комісії в Миколаєві, використані відомості про перейменування міських об'єктів, створено авторську періодизацію подій.

Висновки. Процеси декомунізації та деколонізації розглядаються нами як боротьба української та радянської (російської) ідентичностей. При цьому вони відбуваються у контексті трансформації різних поколінь в Україні. Старше є носієм деяких рис радянської ідентичності, що проявляються у надії на вирішення всіх проблем новою владою або ззовні. Молодше покоління є носієм нової ідентичності, де головне місце займає прагматизм, свобода вибору переконань і поведінки, нігілістичне ставлення до спадщини радянського періоду. Загалом, для України характерна ситуація кризової ідентичності, що пов'язана з певним впливом регіональних особливостей.

Наявність в українському суспільстві значної частини носіїв радянської ідентичності не дало змогу провести повністю процес декомунізації. Хоча її реалізація сприяла подоланню стереотипів та упереджень, які першочергово стали однією з причин сплеску сепаратизму та перешкоджають національній консолідації.

Процеси декомунізації та деколонізації у Миколаєві мали деяку відмінність від аналогічних подій на території України та, відповідно, мають власну періодизацію: 1-й етап (1989-1990-ті рр.) – декомунізація та повернення до імперськості; 2-й етап (2014-2016 рр.) – декомунізація; 3-й етап (2022 р. – до сьогодні) – деколонізація.

Для того, щоб процес декомунізації та деколонізації перетворив у символічному полі радянську ідентичність в українську потрібен час і, можливо, навіть повна зміна поколінь. Сподіваємося, що саме декомунізаційні та деколонізаційні процеси стануть основою формування національної ідентичності, заснованої на українських маркерах історичної пам'яті.

Фінансування. Стаття підготовлена в рамках міжнародного проекту Erasmus+ за напрямком Jean Monnet «Implementation of European values as a basis of democracy in Ukraine» (EVADEM – 101085843 – ERASMUS-JMO-2022-MODULE).

Ключові слова: декомунізація, деколонізація, покоління, національна ідентичність, історична пам'ять, Миколаїв, топонімична комісія, Фонд ім. Гайнріха Бюлля

INTRODUCTION

Identity is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses multiple interpretations. It constitutes a central component of any culture, with national identity serving as its foundational and core structural element. This phenomenon manifests in various forms – such as individual, collective, social, national, cultural, religious, and gender identities – each possessing distinctive characteristics and identification markers.

National identity is associated with an individual's or a group's self-awareness within the global context and the articulation of a sense of belonging. It remains a relevant object of scholarly inquiry, as it enables the identification of individuals or groups with a particular ethnic or national community on the basis of shared distinguishing traits¹. The formation of national identity rests upon common cultural values, traditions, rituals, symbols, artistic expressions, and other components of the national cultural code.

Since the beginning of Independence of Ukraine's in 1991, the national symbols of Ukraine have stood in active opposition to Soviet symbolism. In fact, we are witnessing not only a war of symbols, but also a war of identities: between Ukrainian national identity and Soviet (Russian) identity. In the Soviet period, symbols played an important role in shaping the ideology aimed at erasing national authenticity. Monuments, street names, and urban objects were steeped in communist ideology, which attempted to replace Ukrainian traditions with universal Soviet images. This process resulted in deep cultural alienation and a partial loss of historical memory.

The processes of decommunization and decolonization contribute to the restoration of historical memory in the context of national identity formation. These processes should have begun immediately after Ukraine's independence, but due to the political influence of revanchist (pro-Russian) forces, they continue to this day. The relevance of this problem in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war (2014-2025) is significant. This issue is particularly acute in complex regions such as southern Ukraine and, more specifically, the city of Mykolaiv, which Kremlin propaganda portrays as 'eternally Russian'.

LITERATURE REVIEW

After the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014), Ukrainian historical scholarship intensified its focus on the processes of decommunization and decolonization as key components of the state's humanitarian transformation. Scholarly attention has centred on the rethinking of the Soviet legacy, memory politics, the cleansing of public space from totalitarian symbols, and the restoration of historical justice. Contemporary Ukrainian historiography seeks to comprehend these processes in the context of the struggle for national identity, independence, and cultural sovereignty.

The monograph by cultural scholar O. Hrytsenko examines the current stage of the decommunization process in Ukraine, launched by the 'decommunization laws' of April 9, 2015. The author briefly presents Ukraine's earlier experiences of decommunization – both through the spontaneous 'Leninopad' (or 'Lenin-fall') of the winter of 2013-2014 and in the form of state-initiated demolition of monuments to

¹ Костючок П. Культурні маркери національної ідентичності. *Вісник Прикарпатського університету. Історія*. 2012. Вип. 22. С. 106.

Soviet leaders involved in the Holodomor, carried out under President V. Yushchenko's decrees in 2007-2009. The new phase of this process, which began in spring 2015, is analysed from two methodologically distinct perspectives: first, as an instrument of state policy, and second, as a socio-cultural phenomenon².

Journalist T. Khitrova conducted an analysis of how the concept of 'decommunization' functions in the Ukrainian media space and highlighted that the media discourse surrounding decommunization is polyphonic: on the one hand, supporters of reform appeal to European experience and the need to purge public space of Soviet symbols; on the other, critics point to the dangers of censorship, the ideologisation of history, and restrictions on freedom of speech. The article also examines how decommunization influences the formation of national memory and identity³.

In his article, journalist M. Riabchuk analyses the public and political response to the legislative package adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in April 2015 concerning memory policy. The author critically reviews the arguments of various parties, emphasising that these debates reflect deeper issues within Ukraine's politics of memory and national identity. He argues that full-fledged decolonization requires not only symbolic change, but also a rethinking of historical consciousness and the overcoming of colonial mindsets that still influence Ukrainian society⁴.

Historian Yu. Kotlyar has authored numerous scholarly works that cover a wide range of issues related to decommunization, decolonization, historical memory, and the formation of national identity. He examines the impact of generational shifts on the process of decommunization in Ukraine, emphasising that the younger generation, being less burdened by the Soviet past, is more actively engaged in reinterpreting history and is more interested in issues of national identity⁵. Yu. Kotlyar also explores the interplay between historical scholarship and memory politics, analysing how Russia's war against Ukraine has accelerated decolonization and contributed to the emergence of new national identity narratives⁶.

In her work, historian A. Kyrydon analyses the nature, stages, and consequences of decommunization in Ukrainian society, particularly through the prism of the transformation of symbolic space. She conceptualises decommunization not only as a legal process, but as a comprehensive socio-cultural phenomenon encompassing all levels of public life – from memory politics to everyday environments⁷.

² Гриценко О.А. Декомунізація в Україні як державна політика і як соціокультурне явище. Київ: Інститут політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І.Ф. Кураса НАН України; Інститут культурології НАН України, 2019. 320 с.

³ Хітрова Т. «Декомунізація» як риторичний дискурс та джерело формування амбівалентних смислів у сучасному інформаційному просторі України. *Образ*. 2015. Вип. 3. С. 60-67.

⁴ Рябчук М. Декомунізація чи деколонізація? Що показали політичні дискусії з приводу «декомунізаційних» законів? *Наукові записки Інституту політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І.Ф. Кураса НАН України*. 2016. Вип. 2. С. 104-117.

⁵ Kotlyar Yu. Decommunization of Ukraine in the context of generation change. *Danubius*. 2017. Vol. XXXV. P. 99-108.

⁶ Kotlyar Yu. Historical memory and historical science: European and Ukrainian discourses. *European Historical Studies: Scientific Journal*. 2021. № 18. С. 78-88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17721/2524-048X.2021.18.07>

⁷ Киридон А. Декомунізація в Україні: перерозподіл символічного ресурсу. *Зовнішні справи*. 2020. № 7-8. С. 35-40.

Of particular relevance to our study is the article by historian M. Takhtaulova, who explores the transformation of toponymy in a specific urban context. She analyses the historical phases of renaming in Kharkiv, especially during the 1894 and 1936 campaigns, when changes were driven by administrative and ideological motives. Special attention is paid to the process of decommunization, which highlights divergent approaches taken by local authorities and the public. City authorities frequently chose neutral names or retained existing ones, while civic activists advocated for the restoration of historical names or the commemoration of Ukrainian historical figures⁸.

In her article, cultural scholar P. Herchanivska analyses the decolonization process in Ukraine as a multifaceted socio-cultural phenomenon. She focuses on the formation of national identity in the postcolonial context, demonstrating how centuries of Russian imperial expansion, Soviet ideology, and assimilationist policies undermined Ukrainian cultural distinctiveness. P. Herchanivska argues that dismantling the imperial legacy, banning totalitarian symbols, renaming toponyms, and safeguarding cultural heritage are not merely legal or administrative steps, but profound cultural transformations aimed at restoring and strengthening Ukrainian national consciousness⁹.

Contemporary Ukrainian historiography encompasses a broad spectrum of topics – from legal analysis of decommunization and decolonization legislation, to studies of public reaction, the development of new toponymic narratives, and the formation of a new humanitarian paradigm aimed at overcoming the totalitarian legacy and establishing an independent national identity.

At the same time, the study of decommunization and decolonization processes at the level of specific regions or cities remains underrepresented in Ukrainian historiography. This underscores the relevance of the present research and determines *the purpose of the research paper* – to highlight the role of decommunization and decolonization in the formation of national identity in the context of generational change (based on the case of the city of Mykolaiv).

DECOMMUNIZATION & DECOLONIZATION IN UKRAINE

The matter of self-awareness (national identity) is highly relevant for a significant number of Ukrainians. It manifests through various processes, including decommunization, de-russification, and decolonization. These processes represent key stages in the construction of a Ukraine-centric model of historical memory. In the context of the theory of nations and nationalism, historical memory is interpreted as a fundamental factor in the formation of modern nation-states, as it provides the foundation for identity and endows national communities with a sense of cultural uniqueness and a shared historical destiny¹⁰.

⁸ Тахтаулова М. Харківська топоніміка: етапи декомунізації. *Місто: історія, культура, суспільство*. 2017. № 2. С. 142-151. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15407/mics2017.02.142>

⁹ Герчанівська П.Е. Деколонізація суспільства: український поворот. *Вісник Національної академії керівних кадрів культури і мистецтв*. 2024. № 1. С. 32-41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32461/2226-3209.1.2024.301962>

¹⁰ Гурик М.І. Декомунізація як шлях побудови україноцентристської моделі історичної пам'яті. *Актуальні проблеми філософії та соціології: Науково-практичний журнал*. 2016. Вип. 11. С. 26.

The tragedies suffered by the Ukrainian people in the 20th century under Soviet rule led to the emergence of negative factors in the structure of historical memory: historical trauma, historical amnesia, quasi-memory, phobias, historical mythologemes, and a sense of historical injustice and deadlock – all of which are manifested in the existence of conflicting models of historical memory. According to philosopher and legal scholar Yu. Rymarenko, the falsification of memory is perhaps the greatest crime of a totalitarian regime¹¹. The impact of historical trauma has had a devastating effect on the historical consciousness of Ukrainians, resulting in the ambivalence of memory and the emergence of several identity models.

Philosopher V. Artiukh identifies three types of historical memory in modern Ukraine: Ukrainian, Russian, and Soviet. Crucially, these models lack mutual coherence. Most often, they exist in a state of conflict – although it can be argued that there is a tendency toward alignment between the communist and Russian models in their opposition to the Ukrainian one. These competing memory models exist not only at the societal level but also on the individual level¹². Decommunization, de-russification, and decolonization are not only a struggle against Soviet and Russian historical narratives but also against manifestations of divergent identities.

TERMINOLOGY AND PERIODISATION

It is necessary to begin by analysing the terminology used in the study. Firstly, ‘decommunization’ refers to measures aimed at decolonising Ukrainian society in relation to the Soviet period of its history. According to cultural scholar O. Hrytsenko, “in a broader sense, decommunization should be understood as a much more long-lasting and complex political and socio-cultural process of undermining and even removing from public space and collective consciousness the political, ideological, and, to some extent, cultural legacy of the communist (Soviet) period in our history”¹³. Theoretically and practically, decommunization is aimed at eliminating the influence and consequences of communist ideology across all spheres of public and national life. Thus, it is part of the broader process of Ukraine’s decolonization¹⁴.

Secondly, ‘decolonization’ is the process by which a formerly colonised country becomes politically independent. In the Ukrainian context, this term refers to Ukraine’s detachment from Russian imperial policy and the dominant Russo-imperial narrative of a ‘shared’ history, which originated with the agreement on the military and political protectorate of Muscovy (Moscovia) over the Cossack Hetmanate on March 27, 1654, in Pereiaslav. The Treaty of Pereiaslav marked the beginning of Muscovy’s targeted political, economic, and cultural expansion into Ukrainian lands. The Muscovite factor affected not only political and economic development, but also shaped the transformation of Ukraine’s cultural code. Through Russification – whose paradigmatic basis was the imposition of the Russian language and culture on Ukrainian society – Ukrainian cultural identity was gradually altered.

¹¹ Римаренко Ю.І. Національний розвій України: проблеми і перспективи. Київ: Юрінком, 1995. С. 105.

¹² Артюх В. Дещо про політику історичної пам’яті. *Православна Сумщина*. 2007. 2 лютого. URL: http://www.pravoslavyya.sumy.ua/readarticle.php?article_id=11

¹³ Гриценко О.А. Декомунізація в Україні як державна політика і як соціокультурне явище... С. 8.

¹⁴ Герчанівська П.Е. Деколонізація суспільства: український поворот... С. 34.

The foundation of Ukrainian identity was most deeply undermined during the Soviet era, when the central ideological premise was the formation of a homogenised 'Soviet people'. As a result, Ukrainian society – especially in urban areas – adapted to Russian culture. Attempts by the Ukrainian elite ('intelligentsia') to resist Russian cultural expansion and the Soviet lifestyle led to tragic consequences. The accumulation of assimilationist efforts targeting the Ukrainian nation intensified the conflict among Russian, Soviet, and Ukrainian identities¹⁵.

Cultural scholar P. Herchanivska identifies three stages of decommunization, decolonization, and de-russification in the period of Ukraine's independence:

Stage 1 (1991-2014) – the search for an optimal strategy for decolonization.

Stage 2 (2014-2022) – the development of key strategies and tactics in the field of decolonization; the adoption of a legislative package on Ukraine's decommunization policy.

Stage 3 (2022 – up to the present) – the revision of decommunization laws due to the martial law in the country and their practical implementation¹⁶.

THREE STAGES OF THE DECOMMUNIZATION PROCESS

The first stage was based on decrees issued by the Presidents of Ukraine – L. Kravchuk (1992), L. Kuchma (2001), and V. Yushchenko (2007) – which called for the removal of totalitarian monuments but did not provide mechanisms for their enforcement. In practice, these provisions were largely ignored¹⁷.

The second stage was implemented in accordance with the Law of Ukraine 'On the Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and the Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols'¹⁸, adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on April 9, 2015. This law, together with three other laws passed the same day ('On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century'¹⁹, 'On Perpetuating the Victory over Nazism in World War II (1939-1945)²⁰, and 'On Access to the Archives of the Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917-1991'²¹) had a strategic aim: to overcome the communist legacy in all spheres of public life, to establish a clear historical break between the present and the socialist past, and to draw a distinct boundary in public consciousness between the Ukrainian nation and the Soviet regime, which sought to destroy or distort national ideals and values. On May 15, 2015, the laws were signed by President P. Poroshenko, and entered into

¹⁵ Ibid. С. 33.

¹⁶ Ibid. С. 35.

¹⁷ Kotlyar Yu. Decommunization of Ukraine in the context of generation change... P. 101.

¹⁸ Закон України. Про засудження комуністичного та націонал-соціалістичного (нацистського) тоталітарних режимів в Україні та заборону пропаганди їхньої символіки. *Відомості Верховної Ради*. 2015. № 26. Ст. 219. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19#Text>

¹⁹ Закон України. Про правовий статус та вшанування пам'яті борців за незалежність України у ХХ столітті. *Відомості Верховної Ради*. 2015. № 25. Ст. 190. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/314-19#Text>

²⁰ Закон України. Про увічнення перемоги над нацизмом у Другій світовій війні 1939-1945 років. *Відомості Верховної Ради*. 2015. № 25. Ст. 191. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/315-19#Text>

²¹ Закон України. Про доступ до архівів репресивних органів комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917-1991 років. *Відомості Верховної Ради*. 2015. № 26. Ст. 218. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/316-19#Text>

force on May 21. However, decommunization did not affect a vast layer of toponyms that were not formally covered by the law but were clearly linked to the Soviet and imperial legacy.

The third stage began after February 24, 2022 and was associated with the rejection of names referring not only to the communist past but also to Russia as a whole. As of April 21, 2023, President V. Zelenskyi signed draft law № 7253 'On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine 'On Geographical Names' regarding the decolonization of toponymy and streamlining the use of geographical names in settlements of Ukraine'²². According to this law, it is now prohibited to assign names to geographical objects that symbolise or glorify Russia. Moreover, toponyms associated with Russian historical landmarks, dates, and events are also banned. The adopted law is a systemic measure aimed at removing the markers of the so-called 'Russian World' ('Russkiy Mir'). According to the law, Russian imperial policy is officially recognised as criminal and condemned; its promotion and associated symbolism are prohibited²³.

One of Ukraine's major challenges lies in the failure to enforce laws and the delays in adopting them. Legislation concerning the renaming of the imperial-Soviet legacy should have been enacted as early as 1992, as the names of streets, towns, and villages are deeply intertwined with ideology, historical and cultural upbringing, and national identity. Unfortunately, neither the Ukrainian state, nor the political forces in power at the time, nor the public itself paid adequate attention to these issues. Meanwhile, Ukraine's north-eastern neighbour actively promoted its ideological agenda through various means – including attempts to obstruct processes such as the renaming of streets and the dismantling of monuments of the communist-totalitarian era.

DECOMMUNIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GENERATIONAL CHANGE

In conceptualising the notion of 'generation', this article draws on the 'spiritual and historical theory of generations' formulated by the Spanish philosopher and sociologist José Ortega y Gasset, who defined a generation as a 'historical agent' shaped by and loyal to the political ideas of its time. J. Ortega y Gasset considered thirty years to be the typical span of a generation's active influence. He noted: "A generation that has grown up under the dominance of certain ideas already carries its own views, tendencies, and preferences, gradually saturating the social atmosphere with them. And if extreme views prevail, the new ones will tend towards the opposite – that is, towards restoration... Whoever genuinely wishes to create a new socio-political reality must first ensure that the miserable stereotypes of past historical experience no longer remain valid in the renewed world"²⁴.

Contemporary Ukrainian society largely consists of individuals whose identity is currently undergoing a profound and complex transformation. Just thirty-four years ago, nearly everyone in Ukraine identified as a Soviet person. Although the USSR as a

²² Проект Закону про внесення змін до Закону України «Про географічні назви» щодо деколонізації топонімії та впорядкування використання географічних назв у населених пунктах України. Верховна Рада України. URL: <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/39367>

²³ Котляр Ю.В. Декомунізація і деколонізація в контексті європейських цінностей. *Становлення сучасної Української держави: роль європейських цінностей у формуванні демократичного буття: тези*. Миколаїв: Вид-во ЧНУ ім. Петра Могили, 2023. С. 13-15.

²⁴ *Ортега-і-Гассет Х.* Бунт мас. *Бібліотека української літератури*. URL: <https://www.ukrlib.com.ua/world/printit.php?tid=3813>

state no longer exists, a residual sense of belonging to it continues to influence the older generation of Ukrainian citizens. For those who lived in the Ukrainian SSR, the so-called Soviet identity remained a powerful marker of collective self-perception. Researchers at the National Institute for Strategic Studies have identified the following features of this identity: 'personal passivity' (a lack of will to improve one's life through one's own efforts, accompanied by formal activity for appearance's sake); 'an inferiority complex' (a sense of personal inadequacy due to incompetence and lack of professionalism); 'unmotivated ambition and rudeness'; 'paternalism' (shifting the responsibility for solving one's problems onto the authorities); and 'helplessness' (a hope that problems will be resolved from the outside).

Former citizens of the Ukrainian SSR quickly became citizens of the new state of Ukraine, but the process of identity reconstruction never fully took place. Members of Ukrainian society initially did not perceive themselves as a coherent unity. Therefore, instead of consolidation, the phenomenon of regionalism came to play an important role – one that is characteristic of representatives of different generations. As a result, the features of Ukrainian identity are more clearly manifested not at the all-Ukrainian (national) level, but at the regional level (Western, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine)²⁵.

The current young generation in Ukraine is the first since 1991 to have been formed under post-socialist conditions. Studying its identity-specific traits is particularly relevant today, as this generation will soon shape public opinion in the country. The cohort of 25-35-year-olds, in its pursuit of individuality, does not always accept the traditional values and norms of the society in which it lives. A distinctive feature of this generation is its internal stratification. This is understandable, as its earlier part carries certain elements of Soviet identity, expressed in the well-known slogan 'Born in the USSR', while the later part identifies with Ukrainian identity: 'Born in Ukraine'. Thus, representatives of a single generation, under the influence of historical events – especially the proclamation of Ukraine's independence – actually belong to different identities: national (Ukrainian) and Soviet.

The peculiarities of identity formation in the new Ukrainian society are shaped by several key factors. First, this process is unfolding not only in the context of generational change, but also against the backdrop of political, economic, and social transformations. Particular importance is also attached to the borrowing of elements from Western subcultures. Moreover, a nihilistic attitude toward the legacy of the Soviet period leads to the devaluation of the spiritual values of previous generations and complicates their transmission to the next²⁶. In this context, Ukrainian researcher V. Tarasenko aptly observes that "the current Ukrainian society is a very young social entity, the formation of systemic characteristics of which is still at the stage of the possibility of their diverse variants"²⁷.

The modern Ukrainian generation was born and raised in a time of radical value disruption and in the absence of a functioning system of state institutions for

²⁵ Котляр Ю., Соловійова А. Українська ментальність в умовах суспільних трансформацій (1991-2014 рр.). *Rozdroża. Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia w refleksjach humanistów*. Częstochowa-Humań-Poznań, 2016. Т. III. С. 124.

²⁶ Яремчук О.В. Культурно-історичний потенціал молоді в умовах трансформації суспільства. *Вісник Чернігівського державного педагогічного університету. Серія: Психологічні науки*. 2009. Вип. 74. Т. 2. С. 211-212.

²⁷ Тарасенко В. Криза соціального самовизначення в Україні. До питання про соціальну ідентифікацію українського суспільства. *Віче*. 2000. № 11. С. 59.

socialisation. Traditional values of the Soviet era – such as a sense of duty, the prioritisation of public over personal interests, patience, and enthusiasm – are giving way to new values that have emerged in the context of market-democratic transformations. Among these, material wealth, freedom of belief and behaviour, and pragmatism come to the fore²⁸.

The overall situation among different generations of Ukrainians resembles a state of identity crisis, one that “leads to the disintegration of social and political entities that were stable in the past and shaped people’s behaviour”. Its main features include fragmentation, inconsistency, lack of coherence and stability, and constant change. Such a type of identity typically emerges in situations of abrupt transition from totalitarianism to democracy, which are marked by the emergence of numerous alternative forms of social life²⁹.

Therefore, the presence of carriers of Soviet identity (‘Born in the USSR’), some of whom remain in power – particularly at the local level – has contributed to slowing down the pace of the decommunization process.

Nevertheless, spontaneous decommunization efforts – most notably in the form of the so-called ‘Leninopad’ – were actively taking place across Ukraine. The dismantling of Lenin monuments occurred in four stages: during the 1990s, more than 2,000 sculptures were removed in Galicia and Volyn (also, Volhynia); at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s, over 600 in the western and central regions; in 2005-2008, again over 600, primarily in the central regions; and in 2013-2014, a further 552 were taken down³⁰.

One of the first symbolic events of the Revolution of Dignity was the toppling of the central monument to Lenin on Bessarabska Square on December 8, 2013, two weeks after the uprising began. Responsibility for this act was claimed by the parliamentary All-Ukrainian Union ‘Svoboda’, one of the most radical parties during Euromaidan. Although other protesting politicians did not support this action, the spontaneous removal of communist-era memorials, initiated by the public, quickly gained popularity across Ukraine. This led to the gradual destruction of Lenin monuments.

In addition to monuments to Lenin, a significant number of markers of the past era remained across Ukraine. These included monuments to various Bolshevik leaders and ideologues, as well as mythologised literary figures (such as Pavlo Korchahin, the protagonist of M. Ostrovskyi’s novel ‘How the Steel Was Tempered’), along with street and square names. According to a study by the analytical centre ‘Texty’, published a day after the Lenin monument in Kyiv was toppled, the vast majority of central streets in Ukrainian cities, towns, and villages – especially those housing local authorities (district councils) – bore names associated with communist ideology. Most commonly, these were ‘Lenin Streets’, ‘Soviet Streets’, and ‘October Streets’. For example, Dnipropetrovsk was named after H. Petrovskyi, and Kirovohrad after

²⁸ Артимонова Т.П. Архітектоніка цінностей сучасної молоді та студентів. *Нова парадигма*. 2010. Вип. 98. С. 320-328.

²⁹ Хрипко С. Феномен «кризової ментальності» в духовному просторі України. Релігія в Україні. 2011. 28 вересня. URL: <http://www.religion.in.ua/main/12192-fenomen-krizovoyi-mentalnosti-v-duhovnomu-prostori-ukrayini.html>

³⁰ Подобед П. Від ленінізму до лєнінопаду. *Радіо Свобода*. 2014. 31 грудня. URL: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26770232.html>

S. Kirov – two regional administrative centres, along with many smaller towns and villages, were named after communist or Soviet historical figures. Until 2013, only a few central streets had names connected to Ukrainian independence or the national historical narrative. Most of the renamed avenues, squares, boulevards, lanes, and so forth were located in Western Ukraine³¹.

At the same time, such landmark historical events as the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) clearly indicate that the role of the new generation in Ukrainian society is becoming increasingly prominent. During the Orange Revolution, different generations of Ukrainians came to recognise themselves as subjects of political action, free from the phantoms of the repressive totalitarian system.

The Revolution of Dignity made it possible to preserve Ukraine's state sovereignty, overthrow the dictatorial regime of then-President V. Yanukovych, restore Ukraine's orientation toward democratic freedoms and European standards of living, raise the level of patriotism among the Ukrainian people, and complete the formation of Ukrainian political power and civil society in accordance with standards that uphold European values. It played a catalytic role in launching political, economic, and socio-cultural changes aimed at supporting Ukraine's European integration and strengthening its position on the path toward the community of Western democracies³². It also produced a significant shift at the level of identity, achieving not only a victory over authoritarianism (a remnant of Soviet identity) and the traditional Ukrainian stereotype of 'my house is on the edge' (*Engl.* 'not my business'), but also revealing new traits of the younger generation of Ukrainians: defiance, determination, tolerance, a desire for freedom and justice, and a willingness to make sacrifices.

The full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war (2022-2025) has finally shattered the illusion of the so-called post-Soviet space, which for a long time remained a symbol of imagined unity. Although the term formally encompassed all the former Soviet republics, it was most frequently associated with the three states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR: Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. The concept of 'the post-Soviet' preserved in public consciousness the Soviet ideological construct of a 'common origin' and the 'brotherhood of three peoples', thus reinforcing an imperial perception of unity. However, with the onset of large-scale aggression, these myths lost all legitimacy, and their colonial nature became evident. Russia is attempting not only metaphorically, but in very real terms, to strip Ukraine of its history, culture, and right to independent existence.

In this context, the concept of 'decolonization' has emerged as one of the key notions after February 24, 2022 and has, in fact, become an important political, cultural, and intellectual reference point for Ukraine. In May 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, together with the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, launched a series of discussions involving historians, cultural scholars, and philosophers under the title 'De-russification, Decommunization, and Decolonization in Public Space'. Notably, in this title, 'decolonization' appears last among the three

³¹ Федоренко К., Умланд А. Конфлікт тріадичного зв'язку? Політика націоналізації України, націоналізм Росії та динаміка ескалації у 2014-2019 рр. *Ідеологія і політика*. 2022. № 3 (22). С. 49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36169/2227-6068.2022.03.00003>

³² Котляр Ю., Мосін О. Революція Гідності: вибір європейського майбутнього. *Acta de Historia & Politica: Saeculum XXI*. 2024. Vol. VII. С. 54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26693/ahpsxxi2024.07.047>

terms, and the main focus of the discussions was predominantly on de-russification and decommunization, leaving the issue of decolonization somewhat at the margins of the conversation³³.

DECOLONIZATION PROCESSES IN MYKOLAIV

The processes of decommunization and decolonization in Mykolaiv had their own specific features. Their periodisation can be defined as follows:

Stage 1 (1989-1990s) – decommunization and a return to imperial legacy. Interestingly, the first street renaming in Mykolaiv, which can formally be regarded as a decommunization act, took place during the Soviet Union's perestroika era. In 1989, on the occasion of the 200th Anniversary of Mykolaiv, Plekhanivska Street was renamed Pot'omkinska Street (i.e., in honour of Grigory Potemkin). Later, several other old names were selectively restored. In 1996, Sverdlova Street was renamed Spaska Street, and Rosa Luxemburg Street became Nikolska Street.

It is important to note that some of the names restored at that time were later changed again during the decolonization of geographical names. Nevertheless, under the circumstances of the mid-1990s, these changes represented a certain achievement for Mykolaiv – especially considering that almost no further renaming occurred in the years that followed.

Stage 2 (2014-2016) – decommunization associated with the implementation of the 2015 legislative package. These laws reflected broader public sentiment and formalised a large-scale transformation of national identity.

The decommunization process in Mykolaiv can be considered to have begun on February 22, 2014, when local activists toppled the monument to Lenin. Later, at the initiative of local authorities, in order to prevent clashes between the supporters of the demolition and the few defenders of the monument, utility workers joined the activists. However, it was only on August 15, 2016 that the dismantling of the pedestal was completed. Given that the Order of the Mykolaiv Regional State Administration 'On the Renaming of Toponymic Objects and the Dismantling of Monuments and Memorial Signs'³⁴ is dated May 21, 2016, a certain symbolism can be seen: the decommunization process in Mykolaiv began with the events at the Lenin monument – and ended in the same place.

As for the renaming process, it proved to be quite complicated in Mykolaiv. Theoretically, the initiator and organiser of the decommunization process was to be the Toponymic Commission, chaired by Deputy Mayor Ye. Shevchenko and I. Bondarenko, Head of the Department of Culture and Cultural Heritage Protection of the Mykolaiv City Executive Committee, serving as secretary. However, the commission's work faced serious criticism from the broader public.

In response, Mykolaiv-based scholars, historians, and local researchers established a public organisation called 'Symvoly Mykolaieva' (*Engl.* 'Symbols of Mykolaiv'), headed by H. Savchenko. As a result of its work, a conceptual approach was

³³ Гундорова Т. Деколонізація і провінціалізація Європи: чи варто виходити поза «топографічну деколонізацію»? *Критика*. 2024. № 3-4. С. 32-35.

³⁴ Розпорядження Миколаївської обласної держадміністрації «Про перейменування об'єктів топоніміки та демонтаж пам'ятників та пам'ятних знаків» від 21 травня 2016 р. № 197-р. Миколаївська обласна державна адміністрація. URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20160816190000/http://www.mk.gov.ua/ua/oda/order/?doc_id=14304

developed whereby the names of streets, squares, parks, and other sites were to clearly reflect that Mykolaiv is a Ukrainian city with a centuries-old history. It would be difficult to say that this idea inspired much enthusiasm among officials. On the contrary, civic activists already at that stage had to overcome resistance from the bureaucratic apparatus.

The scope of work was considerable, as 170 city streets were subject to renaming, not counting other objects. Accordingly, a notional 'black book' and 'white book' of renamings was created. The 'black book' included names that had to be removed from the map of Mykolaiv in accordance with decommunization laws, while the 'white book' listed names associated with historical figures or events deemed worthy of commemoration. Local historians and civic activists insisted on a strict criterion: the event or person to be memorialised in a toponym had to be directly connected to the Mykolaiv region. Moreover, if the name referred to a historical figure, their role in history or contribution to the development of the city had to be significant.

However, the commission did not favour a systematic approach in which names linked to Ukrainian patriots or events in Ukrainian history were given to a prominent place. As a result of several commission meetings, most of the proposed names related to Ukrainian history and 20th century independence fighters were rejected. The leadership of the commission justified this position by citing a purported intention to avoid names associated with individuals. Formally, this was explained by the fact that, during the initial naming of Mykolaiv's streets in 1835, personal names were not used. Overall, there was a sense that some officials did not want Mykolaiv to be identifiable as a Ukrainian city through its street names³⁵.

Despite a number of obstacles, the process of decommunization in Mykolaiv took place: 129 parks, public gardens, streets, and squares received new names. According to historian O. Bobina, the discussion around Mykolaiv's toponymy – apart from the renaming of Lenin Square to Soborna Square – was quite active. In the course of this debate, several informal 'camps' or 'parties' emerged. The first was the party of returning to historical names. As a result, names such as 'Pohranichna' (formerly Chyhryna), 'Kuznetska' (formerly Skorokhodova), and 'Bezymenna' (formerly Shkapina) appeared. The second party – the so-called 'grape-and-apple' party – sought to avoid controversial historical references and instead opted for neutral names: 'Pryvitna' (*Engl.* 'Friendly') (formerly 7 Zizdu Rad), 'Rodynna' (*Engl.* 'Family') (formerly Kollontai), and 'Ozhynovyi' (*Engl.* 'Blackberry') Lane (formerly Komunariv Lane). The third party was pro-Ukrainian but somewhat radical. Thanks to their initiative, 'Heroiv Ukrainy Avenue' (*Engl.* 'Heroes of Ukraine Avenue') (formerly Heroiv Stalingradu Avenue) appeared, as well as streets such as '79 Bryhady' (formerly Skliara) and 'Hetmana Mazepy' (formerly Parkhomenka). The fourth party – aimed at preserving everything possible – tried to retain the existing names to the greatest extent³⁶.

³⁵ Мірошніченко А. Декомунізація у Миколаєві: блукаючи в «Бічних» і «Казематних». УКРІНФОРМ. 2015. 21 листопада. URL: <https://cutt.ly/bt1m8sRW>

³⁶ Бобіна О.В. Миколаївська топоніміка: основні етапи формування і спроба декомунізації. Миколаївщина і Північне Причорномор'я: історія і сучасність. До 80 річниці від дня народження українського археолога Б.М. Мозолєвського: матеріали Всеукраїнської науково-методичної конференції. Миколаїв: НУК, 2016. С. 7.

Only ten to twenty of the 129 renamed toponyms have a clearly articulated Ukrainian meaning – approximately 15-20% of the total. The most successful outcome was achieved by the Bulgarian community of Ternivka, which received eleven new toponyms. A large portion of the names were simply restored under the pretext of historicism. However, this rather reflects the narrow-mindedness, lack of creativity, and the desire of those promoting these names to bring the process to a swift conclusion³⁷.

The most high-profile renaming included ‘Tsentralnyi Avenue’ (*Engl.* ‘Central Avenue’) (formerly Lenina), ‘Soborna Street’ (formerly Radianska), and ‘Schneiersona Street’ (formerly Karl Liebknechta).

Despite the work carried out, it was evident that the process of shaping the toponymic landscape would sooner or later be resumed, as the core issue of de-russification and decolonization had not yet been resolved. A considerable number of place names in Mykolaiv remained associated with the history of the former Russian Empire.

Stage 3 (2022 to the present) – decolonization, linked to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and the implementation of the Law of Ukraine ‘On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonization of Toponyms’³⁸.

After the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, an active dismantling of monuments dedicated to Soviet or Russian figures and historical events associated with the Russian Federation began, along with the renaming of streets and other topographical objects. This process also unfolded in Mykolaiv. On the one hand, it was regulated; on the other, it occurred spontaneously.

On May 21, 2022, the monument to Alexander Pushkin was removed from its pedestal, and shortly thereafter, municipal services dismantled the memorial plaque to the Russian poet. On July 28, the Mykolaiv City Council renamed Moskovska Street (*Engl.* ‘Moscow Street’) to Mariupolska Street. The corresponding decision was adopted during an online session of the City Council. The bust of Alexander Suvorov was dismantled on December 28, 2022.

The spontaneous process, unfortunately, took the form of vandalism and posed a threat to the lives and health of the city’s civilian population. On October 19, 2022, unknown individuals in Mykolaiv blew up a monument to police officers who had died during World War II and the civil wars. In the evening of November 2, 2022, an explosion occurred in the park near the ‘Skorbotna matir’ (*Engl.* ‘Grieving Mother’) obelisk, destroying the monument. The blast wave shattered windows and doors in the buildings adjacent to the monuments³⁹.

Official efforts related to the decolonization process in Mykolaiv resumed in the spring of 2023, when the Mykolaiv City Council approved a new composition of the Toponymic Commission and adopted a revised regulation on renaming toponyms in

³⁷ Ibid. С. 8.

³⁸ Закон України. Про засудження та заборону пропаганди російської імперської політики в Україні і деколонізацію топонімії. *Відомості Верховної Ради*. 2023. № 65. Ст. 221. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3005-IX#Text>

³⁹ Котляр Ю. Декомунізація та деколонізація Миколаєва: проблеми і пошук рішення. [Video]. Платформа МУ ART, YouTube. 2023. 25 травня. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q8nd151TaI>

order to eliminate Russian names from the city. In addition, the City Council's Legal Affairs Committee approved an updated version of the regulation governing the activities of the Toponymic Commission responsible for street renaming.

The Chairman of the Toponymic Commission was Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, and Head of the Mykolaiv Regional Branch of the National Union of Local Historians of Ukraine, O. Trygub. The secretary of the commission was S. Skydan. However, in August it became known that the Toponymic Commission had not commenced its work. Due to the withdrawal of one of the candidates, the City Council was forced to revise the commission's composition. At the session held on September 7, 2023, the deputies of the Mykolaiv City Council approved a new composition of the Toponymic Commission. Major General D. Marchenko was included on the list, marked 'subject to consent'. However, the General himself opposed this proposal⁴⁰.

In early September 2023, the research study 'Decolonization: Rethinking the Imperial Past in the Public Space of Mykolaiv' was presented in Mykolaiv. It was conducted by the MY ART Platform in partnership with the Mykolaiv Development Agency and supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Their proposals were submitted to the Mykolaiv Toponymic Commission in the autumn of 2023.

Between September 2023 and January 2024, the Toponymic Commission proposed the renaming of 269 toponyms, 250 of which were street names. In addition to names containing imperial narratives or glorification of the aggressor state, the list also included toponyms requiring spelling revisions in line with modern Ukrainian orthography, as well as confirmed cases of name duplication within the city. The next stage of the renaming process in Mykolaiv involved public discussions, conducted in the form of consultations with the public, which lasted from April 24 to June 24, 2024.

The Toponymic Commission operated quite productively in an online format, although there were relatively few truly active members. At times, it was even difficult to secure a quorum. Some proposals sparked lively debates, particularly those concerning M. Falieiev, O. Vadaturskyi, and Dekabrystiv Street. In fact, the commission was divided into two camps, each with its own vision of the renaming process in Mykolaiv: a moderate group (comprised of historians, local historians, and cultural workers) and a more radical group (consisting of representatives of civil society organisations, former participants of the Anti-Terrorist Operation or ATO, and war veterans). Nevertheless, compromises were often reached. On several occasions, the commission's work was obstructed by city council deputy A. Yantar.

According to the Law of Ukraine 'On Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and Decolonization of Place Names', on January 27, 2024, the Mykolaiv City Council lost the authority to make decisions regarding the renaming of toponyms. On April 27, 2024, the Mayor of Mykolaiv was also stripped of this authority. This power was transferred to the head of the Mykolaiv Regional Military Administration. A total of 190 place names in the city were submitted to the head of the Mykolaiv Regional Military Administration for

⁴⁰ Бойченко Ю. Топонімічна комісія Миколаєва завершила свою роботу – тепер її пропозиції розглянуть депутати. *МукВісті*. 2024. 24 січня. URL: <https://nikvesti.com/news/public/283208>

review, of which 51 streets were proposed for renaming due to duplication or other reasons not covered by the aforementioned law. On July 26, 2024, by the order of the head of the Mykolaiv Regional Military Administration, new names were approved for 152 toponyms. On October 17, 2024, a separate order reversed the renaming of Andriieva Street. As a result, a total of 151 toponyms were renamed⁴¹.

Among the decolonization and de-russification renamings, the following groups should be highlighted:

- Toponyms named after Russian military figures, war heroes, politicians and events (18 renamed): Admiral Makarov Street → Pavlo Skoropadsky Street; Suvorov Street and Lane → Zebek Street and Lane; Potiomkinska Street → Mark Kropyvnytskyi Street.

- Toponyms named after Soviet military figures, war heroes, politicians and events (38 renamed): General Bielov Street → Serhii Hussidi Street; Zoia Kosmodemianska Street → Povstanska Street (*Engl.* 'Rebellion Street'); Komkov Street → Danska Street. Halyna Petrova, Vitya Khomenko, Kober, and Levanevtsiv streets were not renamed.

- Toponyms named after Russian figures of culture, education and science (30 renamed): Tolstoy Street → Maria Zankovetska Street; Tchaikovsky Street → Mykola Sadovskyi Street; Chernyshevsky Street → Mykola Khvylovy Street.

- Toponyms named after Soviet figures of culture, education and science (9 renamed): Michurina Street → Oleksii Kvasha Street; Dunayevska Street → Myroslav Skoryk Street; Krylov Street → Yevhen Lohinov Street.

- Toponyms whose names promote Russian (communist) ideology or Soviet myths (19 renamed): Partyzanska Iskra Street (*Engl.* 'Partisan Spark Street') → Plastunska Street; 28 Armii Street (*Engl.* '28 Army Street') → Oleh Bondarenko Street; Pershotravneva Street (*Engl.* 'First May Street') → Yevhen Khrapko Street⁴².

Dozens of streets in Mykolaiv were renamed in memory of the soldiers who died in the ATO zone or while repelling the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation. The city's main streets were also renamed in honour of prominent Ukrainian officials and cultural figures:

Pushkin Square → Ivan Mazepa Square;

8 Bereznia Street (*Engl.* 'March 8 Street') → Hlib Babich Street;

Heneral (*Engl.* 'General') Karpenko Street → Heneral (*Engl.* 'General') Oleksy Almazov Street;

Heneral (*Engl.* 'General') Popel Street → Oleh Kravets Street;

Dekabrystiv Street → Zakhysnykiv Mykolaieva Street (*Engl.* 'Defenders of Mykolaiv Street');

Zhukovskyi Street → Roman Shukhevych Street;

Lohovenko Street → Oleksandr Klepikov Street;

Liahin Street → Heroiv Riatsuvalnykiv Street (*Engl.* 'Heroes of Rescuers Street');

Molodohvardiiska Street → Dmytro Kremen Street;

Nikolska Street → Vadym Blahovisnyi Street;

Pushkin Street → Arkasivska Street;

⁴¹ Проект «Деколонізація Миколаєва: аналіз нових топонімів у публічному просторі». Платформа МУ ART, Фонд ім. Гайнріха Бьоля, Бюро Київ-Україна. Миколаїв, 2024. URL: https://ua.boell.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/brochure_decouolonization_2024.pdf

⁴² Ibidem.

Chkalova Street → Ihor Bedzai Street.

Decolonization and de-russification in Mykolaiv also concerns the monuments of the World War II period. On May 7, 2025, the representatives of the Municipal Enterprise 'Mykolaivski Parky' (*Engl.* 'Mykolaiv Parks') handed over dismantled elements from the memorial complex in honour of the 68 Olshansky paratroopers – the reconstruction of which had recently begun – to the regional museum of local lore. Namely, the letters of the inscription and the hero's star. The reconstruction work involves the Ukrainianization of the inscription and the replacement of Soviet symbols. After the renovation, the memorial will bear the following inscription: 'Eternal glory to the heroes who died for the Motherland', and instead of the star, a decorative wreath with a spike and the years of World War II – 1939-1945 – will be installed.

Thus, the process of decolonization in Mykolaiv is ongoing, but there are still markers of both the communist and imperial past in the city, in particular in the form of monuments that need to be removed from the city's public space.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the 21st century, Ukraine is undergoing a critical stage of rethinking its past, breaking free from the Soviet legacy and colonial influence. The events of the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) marked the starting point for a new wave of decommunization and decolonization processes, which now define the current trajectory of Ukraine's national memory policy and identity formation. This study has made it possible to analyse how these transformations are unfolding at the levels of legislation, public space, collective memory, and public consciousness. Today, these processes not only reshape the cultural landscape, but also reinforce Ukraine's statehood in the face of Russian aggression. Thus, the subject of decommunization and decolonization remains highly relevant and calls for continued and in-depth scholarly exploration.

In this article, the processes of decommunization and decolonization are seen as a struggle between Ukrainian and Soviet (Russian) identities. At the same time, they unfold in the context of generational transformation in Ukraine. The older generation retains certain features of Soviet identity, which are manifested in the belief that all problems will be resolved either by a new government or through external intervention. The younger generation, by contrast, carries a new identity, with pragmatism, freedom of belief and behaviour, and a nihilistic attitude toward the Soviet legacy taking centre stage. In general, Ukraine faces a situation of identity crisis, which is shaped in part by regional specificities.

The process of decommunization in Ukraine, which began after the Revolution of Dignity, has become a key component of national revival, aimed at restoring historical justice and fostering a cohesive national identity. Decommunization has entailed not only the removal of Soviet symbols, but also a focus on the promotion of traditional Ukrainian symbols that reflect the multifaceted nature of Ukrainian culture and history.

The presence in Ukrainian society of a significant number of carriers of Soviet identity did not allow for a complete decommunization process. However, its implementation has helped to overcome stereotypes and prejudices that were one of the reasons for the surge in separatism and impeded national consolidation.

The processes of decommunization and decolonization in Mykolaiv were slightly different from similar events in Ukraine, and accordingly, have their own periodization:

Stage 1 (1989-1990s) – decommunization and return to the imperialism;

Stage 2 (2014-2016) – decommunization;

Stage 3 (2022 – up to the present) – decolonization.

A certain peculiarity of Mykolaiv was the beginning of some decommunization processes (return of old names), even during the Soviet era. Most of them were renamed during the third stage, when markers of imperialism were removed. But the beginning was laid back in 1989.

Decommunization and decolonization provoked a certain activity of the society, which saw these processes as an opportunity to implement national and patriotic discourse in the local Sovietised and imperialised landscape. This approach on the part of the public caused some confrontation with local authorities.

The process of decommunization and decolonization will take time and possibly even a complete generational change to transform the Soviet identity into a Ukrainian one. There is hope that the decommunization and decolonization processes will become the basis for the formation of a national identity based on Ukrainian markers of historical memory.

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