

# The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development

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Volume 8  
Issue 1 *The Journal of International Relations,  
Peace Studies, and Development*

Article 6

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Camilla Gironi

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### Recommended Citation

Camilla Gironi () "Decolonizing Kyiv's politics of memory: current and potential implications of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine on Ukrainian monuments and toponyms.," *The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development*. Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/agsjournal/vol8/iss1/6>

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**Decolonizing Kyiv's politics of memory: current and potential implications of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine on Ukrainian monuments and toponyms.**

Camilla Gironi\*

**Abstract.** History is the basis of our identity, but it sometimes represents a trap. As well explained by Keith Lowe, monuments are representative of our values, and every society deludes itself that its values will be everlasting. However, in a world changing at an unprecedented pace while we move on, urban furnishment such as monuments or streets' names remain frozen in time. Statues and toponyms that were erected and chosen a long time ago may no longer be representative of the values we now treasure. While Russia's aggression is still raging, a lot has been written on the potential implications of the war in Ukraine in several fields such as global economy, energy and food security. Still, at a time in which the relationship between memory and politics is coming to the fore in the field of IR, an in-depth study of the consequences of the war on Ukraine's politics of memory appears to be virtually essential. To close this gap, this paper aims at providing an overview of how the war has influenced Ukraine's politics of memory, especially by focusing on urban spaces such as monuments and topography. Drawing from the theoretical background on collective memory, first, the concepts of "memory" and "place" will be investigated by specifically looking at memory sites and building on Langenbacher and Yossi's idea of "infrastructure of memory". Second, we analyze the changing environment triggered by Russia's aggression and actions such as the removal of Catherine the Great's monument in Odesa or the renaming of the former Victory Square in Kyiv. Russia's war on Ukraine has in fact accelerated a process of decolonization of memory which had begun with the post-Communist transition. Ukraine is now determined to revive its national identity which has long been subjugated. Third, we draw conclusions by reflecting on which turn Ukraine's memory politics may take by analyzing hints provided by high-profile officials such as Zelensky or Klitschko. For instance, a reinterpretation of periods such as the Cossack Hetmanate, Kievan Rus' and Ukraine People's Republic or episodes linked to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army may be implemented with the emergence of new monuments or street names.

## Memory wars in the making

After Russia's withdrawal from Kherson and Kharkiv, the core of the fights has been centered on the eastern front, especially around the city of Bakhmut. Still, a wider war is being waged since February 24, 2022. This time the war is not being fought in trenches but shows some similarities with what is happening in Bakhmut: urban warfare indeed can take many forms.

"We are defending our country also on the cultural frontlines", has declared Andriy Moskalenko, deputy mayor of Lviv.<sup>1</sup> In parallel with the military confrontation, the conflict has indeed extended to the cultural sphere. What is happening all around Ukraine with the re-memorization of urban furnishment is a kind of urban warfare against a burdensome past. The Soviet and Russian heritage is being erased not only in rhetorical terms.

French historian Antoine Arjakovsky has indeed defined Russia's war on Ukraine as a "war of civilizations" between two divergent perceptions of the world. On one side Russia aims at perpetuating itself as a 21<sup>st</sup> century empire and on the other side Ukraine strives for rising from the ashes of the current conflict as a full nation state.<sup>2</sup> Even though the de-Sovietization of Ukraine started immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union and was strengthened after 2014, the current conflict has acted as a catalyst for Ukraine's determination to change its memory path.

Indeed, history often represents the basis of our identity, but it sometimes can turn into a trap. As well explained by Keith Lowe, monuments are representative of our values, and every society deludes itself that its values will be everlasting. However, in a world changing at an unprecedented pace while we move on, urban furnishment such as monuments or streets' names remain frozen in time. Statues and toponyms that were erected and chosen a long time ago may no longer be representative of the values we now treasure.<sup>3</sup>

Ukraine's politics of memory with a reference to urban spaces has already been investigated by several scholars such as Kovalov<sup>4</sup>, Kuczabski and Boychuk<sup>5</sup>, Gnatiuk<sup>6</sup>,

Kudriavtseva<sup>7</sup>, and Plokyh<sup>8</sup>. The present study aims at enriching the existing literature in two ways. First, it restricts the research to a specific time frame (i.e., after the beginning of Russia's invasion in Ukraine on February 24, 2022) bringing fresh material on memory politics in Ukraine specifically by referring to monuments and toponyms, since the above-mentioned works concern other periods of time. Second, this piece of research focuses not

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<sup>1</sup> Erika Solomon, "Goodbye, Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy: Ukrainians look to 'decolonize' their streets", *New York Times*, June 7, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/07/world/europe/ukraine-russia-rename-streets.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Norval, "Russian invasion of Ukraine is a "war of civilization", historian says", *France 24*, May 24, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/perspective/20220524-war-in-ukraine-is-a-war-of-civilisation-historian-says>.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Lowe, *Prisoners of history: what monuments to the Second World War tell us about our history and ourselves*. (HarperCollins UK, 2020), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Maksym Kovalov, "When Lenin becomes Lennon: Decommunisation and the politics of memory in Ukraine", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74, no.5 (2022): 709-733.

<sup>5</sup> Aleksander Kuczabski, Aina Boychuk, "Decommunization of urban toponymy in Ukraine: causes and consequences", *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 10, no.4 (2020): 8-16.

<sup>6</sup> Oleksiy Gnatiuk, "The renaming of streets in post-revolutionary Ukraine: regional strategies to construct a new national identity", *AUC Geographica*, 53, no. 2, (2018): 119-136.

<sup>7</sup> Natalia Kudriavtseva, "Reconfiguring identities within the cityscape: ideologies of decommunization renaming in Ukraine", *Ideology and Politics Journal*, 15, no. 1 (2020): 63-82.

<sup>8</sup> Serhii Plokyh, "Goodbye Lenin: A Memory Shift in Revolutionary Ukraine", *Digital Atlas of Ukraine* (2017): 1-27.

only on present policies, but also on potential implications of the political uses of memory by the governing political elite, that is, by those who speak on behalf of the state or who have sufficient resources to influence the official symbolic policy.

This article presents how Ukraine has engaged in a process of both decommunization and total derussification through the study of Kyiv's changing politics of memory referring to toponyms and monuments. First, a theoretical framework will be presented to frame the relevance of monuments and toponyms in memory studies. Second, the major changes in memory politics in Ukraine after the beginning of the 2022 Russian aggression will be analyzed in depth by inspecting monuments and toponyms. The analysis is not conducted by discussing every single monument or new street name, not only because of reasons of space, but also because it wouldn't have been functional to the purpose of this research, which instead aims at understanding the general trends of of Ukraine's new wave of politics of memory. Third, the analysis will then proceed through a selection of official speeches or declarations issued by influential political figures such as Volodymyr Zelensky or Volodymyr Kitshko and local authorities to understand which may be the potential implications of the current conflict in Ukraine in the near future.

### **IR theory, the politics of memory and urban spaces**

According to Israeli cultural historian Alon Confino, the expression “politics of memory” can be used to refer to “a subjective experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power” and revolves around the questions “who wants whom to remember what, and why”.<sup>9</sup> Reese and Fivush argue that memory is not a static body of knowledge and is something intersubjectively constructed, which means that it can be manipulated and even erased by different actors or over time.<sup>10</sup> It is crucial to remember that collective memory is a site of active contestation and negotiation. This process usually takes place between local groups and the elites who try to control the official version of the past.<sup>11</sup> Reese and Fivush wrote that the sites of contestation of collective remembering can include family discussions,<sup>12</sup> but other scholars have also added monuments, museums, history textbooks and national holidays.

As Alison Landsberg argues, memory is not a transhistorical phenomenon which remains intact over time.<sup>13</sup> It must be rather understood as a dynamic entity which is subject to contestation, reinterpretation, and supplantation by other kinds of memories. The crafting and recrafting of memories are mainly linked to the political, social, and cultural imperatives of the present.<sup>14</sup>

Memory politics in post-Soviet Ukraine is an object of growing academic interest, not least due to recent heated public battles over the interpretation of the Soviet past, the memory wars in Eastern Europe and the war that has been fought on Ukrainian soil. According to what can be defined the instrumentalist approach to memory politics, agents like

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<sup>9</sup> Alon Confino, “Collective memory and cultural history: Problems of method”, *The American historical review*, 102, no. 5 (1997): 1393.

<sup>10</sup> Elaine Reese, Robyn Fivush, “The development of collective remembering”, *Memory*, 16, no. 3 (2008): 208.

<sup>11</sup> James V. Wertsch, Henry L. Roediger III, “Collective memory: Conceptual foundations and theoretical approaches”, *Memory*, 16, no. 3 (2008): 319.

<sup>12</sup> Elaine Reese, Robyn Fivush, “The development of collective remembering”, *Memory*, 16, no. 3 (2008): 208.

<sup>13</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Maurantonio, “The politics of memory”, *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (2014): 1.

governments or elites can create a useful narrative about the past events, whereby they are able to legitimize their actions in the present. Instrumentalism has been shaped on Niccolò Machiavelli's works and the study of politics and the very word "instrumentalism" refers to the need to look for a "usable past".<sup>15</sup> One of the advocates of this "school of thought" is Barry Schwartz, who in 1982 wrote that "to remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present".<sup>16</sup>

Decommunization in Central and Eastern European countries has been layered into several dimensions from existential, economic, political to formal ones.<sup>17</sup> Toponymic and monumental decommunization is indeed yet another layer. However, as underlined by Maksim Kovalov, "symbolic forms of truth and justice is an understudied area of research" and little scholarly attention has been paid to such forms as history commissions or the renaming of streets.<sup>18</sup>

Eric Langenbacher and Shair Yossi have recently introduced the effective expression "infrastructure of commemoration", which refers to the tangible and immaterial facilities in which humans store their collective memory.<sup>19</sup> This infrastructure can be composed of different shapes like movies, museums, memorials, school curricula, documentation, and civil society organizations. All these elements have the enormous scope of keeping memory alive, but also of institutionalizing it to avoid events to be forgotten or to be understood in a different way from the official interpretation. In this regard, the construction of memory sites appears to be crucial, as specific locations become meaningful because memory is anchored to them. According to Pierre Nora, "memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events".<sup>20</sup> These sites could be material such as monuments, functional such as institutions, or symbolic such as flags.

According to Brian Ladd, "monuments are nothing if not selective aids to memory: they encourage us to remember some things and to forget others. The process of creating monuments, especially where it is openly contested, as in Berlin, shapes public memory and collective identity".<sup>21</sup> Brian S. Osborne points instead to the fact that national history is usually displayed through a narrative embedded in myth and tied to particular places, which are often located in the central squares or intersections of cities. These places help the materialization of history by linking together selective memory, familiar landscapes, and times in an entangled unicum.<sup>22</sup> Concrete examples are the memorial in Wanping Village where the Marco Polo Bridge Incident took place in 1937 or the Tribute World Trade Center that commemorates the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas U. Berger, *War, guilt, and world politics after World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Barry Schwartz, "The social context of commemoration: A study in collective memory", *Social forces*, 61, no. 2 (1982): 374.

<sup>17</sup> Aleksander Kuczabski, Aina Boychuk, "Decommunization of urban toponymy in Ukraine: causes and consequences", *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 10, no. 4 (2020): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Maksym Kovalov, "When Lenin becomes Lennon: Decommunisation and the politics of memory in Ukraine", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74, no. 5 (2022): 714.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Langenbacher, Shair Yossi. *Power and the Past. Collective Memory and International Relations* (Georgetown University Press, 2010), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 11.

<sup>22</sup> Brian S. Osborne, "Constructing landscapes of power: the George Etienne Cartier monument, Montreal", *Journal of historical geography*, 24, no. 4 (1998): 432.

One of the most crucial contributions in memory studies concerning war memorials was offered by Reinhart Koselleck. His work revolves around the idea that memorials that commemorate violent death are per se means of identification for the living. The ones killed are usually recognized as heroes, victims, martyrs, possessors of glory, protectors of the fatherland and so on. This is mainly the result of the Christian tradition of martyrdom. They provide an example for the survivors, as it is summarized in the maximum *mortui viventes obligant*<sup>23, 24</sup>.

As Koselleck highlighted in his work, monuments are made by survivors and often convey a meaning that the deceased may have not found in their death. Usually, the dead are supposed to have died for a greater purpose, which feeds the nationalistic sentiments of a certain country.<sup>25</sup> For instance, such memorials as the tomb of the unknown soldier, which by nature are deindividualized, specifically show how collective memory and identity are closely interlinked, as each individual can identify himself with a particular political-cultural-territorial community. Still, the meaning attached to monuments is in continuous evolution.

The fact that a historical event is commemorated using several historical markers such as museums, monuments or sites shows a deeper degree of historical consciousness of that specific date or period.<sup>26</sup> According to the French art historian Germain Bazin, museums can be conceived as critical institutions of the modern state. Besides, it is crucial to highlight that their emergence in Europe roughly coincided with nationalistic ascent.<sup>27</sup>

Toponyms, instead, are not just mere abstract names which constitute the spatial structure of cities, but they are social constructs which are intentionally representative of the social and power relations which represent the basis of the identity of a specific city and country.<sup>28</sup> Indeed in history there has always been a tradition of changing street names according to the societal and political evolution of a given city or country.

Street names are not sheer depositories of the past. They are, indeed, extremely informative of how a country remembers its past and become involved in the politics of heritage since new governments and local authorities erase old iconographic landscapes to create new ones which appear to be in concert with their own values. However, memory shaping is not just about remembering or forgetting, but also about how meaning is built and conveyed. Ukrainian citizens and potential future tourists are not only passive recipients, but engage in a process, whereby their knowledge is enriched, and they can construct new meanings not only for historical events, since the infrastructure of memory in Ukraine is much more influenced by the future perspectives of this country.

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<sup>23</sup> “the living is obliged by the dead”

<sup>24</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “War memorials: identity formations of the survivors”, *The practice of conceptual history: timing history, spacing concepts* (2002): 287.

<sup>25</sup> Siobhan Kattago, “War memorials and the politics of memory: The Soviet war memorial in Tallinn”, *Constellations*, 16, no. 1 (2009): 151.

<sup>26</sup> Zheng Wang, *Memory politics, identity, and conflict: Historical memory as a variable* (Springer, 2017), 63.

<sup>27</sup> Anatoly M. Khazanov, “Selecting the past: the politics of memory in Moscow’s history museums”, *City & Society*, 12, no. 2, (2000): 36.

<sup>28</sup> Oleksiy Gnatiuk, “The renaming of streets in post-revolutionary Ukraine: regional strategies to construct a new national identity”, *AUC Geographica*, 53, no. 2, (2018): 119.

## Pushkinopad

On December 8, 2013, a column of protesters headed to Shevchenko Boulevard, where a monument to Lenin had been erected in 1946. It was the beginning of one of the first popular reactions which accompanied the Revolution of Dignity by the end of 2013 was the mass demolition of monuments that had been erected in honor of Lenin. This mass reaction was termed “*Leninopad*” (i.e., *Ленінопад* in Ukrainian, “Leninfall” in English) and brought about the demolition of 320 statues to Vladimir Lenin only during the month of February 2014.<sup>29</sup> This popular reaction was soon to be included within the so-called “Decommunization laws” of 2015.

Since February 24, 2022, monument after monument has been removed across the country. Two tendencies can be spotted in Ukraine’s politics of memory regarding monuments. First, we are witnessing the continuation of a political direction that had been inaugurated with the Decommunization laws. Indeed, several monuments to Soviet heroes have been dismantled in the last months. The spatiality of this process encompasses more and less the whole territory of Ukraine (except for the territories which are under Russian occupation).

To mention some examples, in the city of Hadiach in Poltava Oblast a panel in honor of the Bolshevik coup d’état orchestrated by Lenin has been removed.<sup>30</sup> In the city of Kyiv a Soviet-era monument called “the People’s Friendship Arch” representing two men holding up a medal representing the Soviet Union’s Order of Friendship of Peoples has been dismantled in April 2022.<sup>31</sup> The monument to Soviet General Nikolai Vatutin in Mariinskyi Park in Kyiv has been eradicated.<sup>32</sup> In Kharkiv the bust of Soviet Marshal Georgy Zhukov has been demolished<sup>33</sup>, while in Vinnytsia a sculpture dedicated to Soviet fighters has been removed from the European Square.<sup>34</sup>

Second, a process of deep derussification can be clearly spotted in post-2022 Ukraine, which has taken on some features which cannot be simply understood as part of the same phenomenon which has hit Central and Eastern European countries in the post-Soviet era. Indeed, this new tendency marks an abrupt departure from *Leninopad*. Even though decommunization has in recent years in Ukraine been a process linked to the idea of constructing a separate identity from Russia. Still, this new phenomenon of an actual derussification encompasses not only Soviet times, but different periods of history starting from Kyivan Rus’ up to the Russian Empire.

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<sup>29</sup> Serhii Plokyh, “Goodbye Lenin: A Memory Shift in Revolutionary Ukraine”, *Digital Atlas of Ukraine* (2017): 5.

<sup>30</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: позбавлення російської спадщини на Полтавщині та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, December 23, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-pozbavlennya-rosiyskoyi-spadshchyny-na-poltavshchyni-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv/>.

<sup>31</sup> “Арка Дружби народів: що це було і що буде?”, *Ukrinform*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3468987-finis-arki-druzbi-narodiv-nu-or-ki-teper-vam-tocno-skoro-kinec.html>.

<sup>32</sup> “Пам’ятник Миколі Ватутіну переносять із Маріїнського парку в центрі Києва до музейного простору”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, February 9, 2023, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/pamyatnyk-mykoli-vatutinu-perenosyat-iz-mariyinskogo-parku-v-centri-kyyeva-do-muzejnogo-prostoru>.

<sup>33</sup> “Жуков опинився на смітнику історії”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, April 18, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/zhukov-opynyvsya-na-smitnyku-istoriyi>.

<sup>34</sup> “У Вінниці демонтували скульптуру, присвячену борцям за владу радянської влади”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, May 5, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/u-vinnyci-demontuvaly-skulpturu-prysvyachenu-borcyam-za-vlast-sovyetov>.

On June 10, 2022, an advisory body called the “Council of experts” was created within the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information in order to deal with the most troublesome symbols of Russian cultural domination in Ukraine and to provide local authorities with recommendations on how to behave in order to “decolonize” Kyiv’s politics of memory.<sup>35</sup> According to the recommendations issued by this new consultative commission, monuments erected in Poltava during the times of the Russian Empire or linked to the Russian victory of the 1709 Battle of Poltava should be demolished. The reason behind this recommendation stems from the idea that they must be considered imperial Russian symbols which have been conceived to “emphasize Ukraine’s colonial status, glorify the Russian army and greatness and contribute to a Russian-oriented vision of Ukraine itself”.<sup>36</sup>

The Battle of Poltava represents a source of pride for Russian authorities. On the eve of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine during his speech on February 21, 2022, Vladimir Putin mentioned the fact that a monument to Russian general Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov had been demolished in Poltava by asking the following provocative question: “Are you renouncing your own past? The so-called colonial heritage of the Russian Empire?”.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, during this war in Ukraine Russian elites have much emphasized comparisons between the battle of Poltava and present times. Saint Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov, for instance, made a comparison between Peter I who made a toast after the victory at Poltava and the fact that Russia will likely behave in the same way in the near future.<sup>38</sup>

As the memory of Poltava serves Russia’s aim of reasserting its position in the world, erasing this memory from Ukraine’s urban spaces not only means regaining possession of a separate identity which has long been subjugated, but posing a real challenge to Russia’s own myths for Russia not to be able to exploit it. In other words, what Ukraine is doing is depriving Russia of a means of legitimizing itself and its aggressive foreign policy throughout the globe.

Other cases of derussification can be identified with the willingness to remove the monument which was erected in 1849 on the site in which Peter the Great used to relax or the removal of the monument in honor of Red Army Vasily Chapaev’s division that was active during the Russian Civil War.<sup>39</sup> Still, Ukraine’s willingness to derussify its urban spaces has also brought about major discussions about the kinds of statues that have been toppled. According to Ukrainian Minister of Culture Oleksandr Tkachenko during the eight months that followed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine 28 monuments to Pushkin, 9 to Gorky, 20 to the

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<sup>35</sup> “МКІП та УІНП підбили підсумки за рік щодо подолання наслідків русифікації й тоталітаризму”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, December 30, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/mkip-ta-uinp-pidbyly-pidsumky-za-rik-shchodo-podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-y-totalitaryzmu>.

<sup>36</sup> “Рекомендації Експертної ради щодо демонтажу російських імперських пам’ятників у Полтаві”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, 2023, <https://uinp.gov.ua/dekomunizaciya-ta-reabilitaciya-podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-ta-totalitaryzmu-v-ukrayini/rekomendaciyi-ekspertnoyi-rady-mkip-shchodo-demontazhu-rosiyskyh-imperskyh-pamyatnykiv-u-poltavi>.

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation”, *Website of the President of Russia*, February 21, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67828>.

<sup>38</sup> “Россия скажет Западу спасибо за санкции, уверен Беглов”, *RIA Novosti*, June 18, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220618/spasibo-1796423610.html>.

<sup>39</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: позбавлення російської спадщини на Полтавщині та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, December 23, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-pozbavlennya-rosiyskoyi-spadshchyny-na-poltavshchyni-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.



Soviet liberators, 4 to Ostrovsky and 4 to Suvorov had been removed from Ukraine's urban landscape.<sup>40</sup>

Even though Tkachenko's declared figures may not be accurate if we count the number of monuments to Pushkin that the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory is constantly monitoring, what first appears is a sort of "crusade" against monuments erected in honor to Russian poet Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin. According to Regional Representative of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory in Chernihiv Oblast Serhyi Butko, "the removal of the monument to Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin from public spaces must be carried out, because this figure belongs to the most important and famous toponyms and Russian imperial markers that magnify, perpetuate, promote and symbolize the occupying state and its culture".<sup>41</sup>

The most exceptional case of a dismantled monument during the war in Ukraine undoubtedly is the monument to Catherine the Great that decorated one of the major squares in the city of Odesa. Odesa perfectly embodies a city linked to Russian imperialism and expansionism having it been founded in 194 as a consequence of the Russian conquest of Southern Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> This is the reason why its inhabitants have come to the point of rejecting a statue to the founder of their city which had already been contested after the 2014 Euromaidan protests. Director of Odesa National Scientific Library Irina Birivkova has added that "we are a city with a multicultural past but covered with ideological markers linked to Russia. The French, the Germans, the Jews, the Greeks, the Italians, the Moldovans and dozens of other nationalities built Odesa. This memory is underrepresented. Russian imperial culture is overrepresented".<sup>43</sup>

Even though the majority of locations that were previously occupied by Soviet or Russia-linked monuments have now remained empty, a trend of building new monuments has already been displayed. For instance, in Kyiv a new monument to Pavlo Horiashchyk Horianskyi has been erected. Pavlo Horianskyi was the leader of the Ukrainian Regional Council of Crimea in 1919-1920 and Consul of the Ukrainian Popular Republic.<sup>44</sup> Among the historical periods which have been rediscovered is in fact the short-lived experiment of the Ukrainian Popular Republic which will further be addressed below.

### **A new politics for Ukrainian toponyms**

During the Russian aggression in Ukraine a lot of attention has been paid to the fall of monuments in Ukraine, as they represent the most evident form of the changing politics of memory. However, changes in terms of toponyms have been much more pervasive in terms of number and spatiality. Monuments are the reification of a certain top-down narrative and make more visible the idea of everyday belonging of a specific urban space to a certain

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<sup>40</sup> "МКІП та УІНП підбили підсумки за рік щодо подолання наслідків русифікації й тоталітаризму", *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, December 30, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/mkip-ta-uinp-pidbyly-pidsumky-za-rik-shchodo-podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-y-totalitaryzmu>.

<sup>41</sup> "Локальна пам'ять»: ліквідація російської спадщини та інші новини регіонів", *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, June 17, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-likvidaciya-rosiyskoyi-spadshchyny-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>42</sup> Olivia Durand, "Monument to Catherine II – Monument to the founders of Odesa", *Contested Histories* (2021): 2.

<sup>43</sup> David, Gomerzano, "War in Ukraine: 'Derussification' on the rise in Odesa", *France 24*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230222-war-in-ukraine-de-russification-on-the-rise-in-odesa>.

<sup>44</sup> "У Києві відкрили пам'ятник лідеру Крайової української ради в Криму й консулу УНР Павлу Горянському", *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, October 6, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/u-kyyevi-vidkryty-pamyatnyk-lideru-krayovoyi-ukrayinskoyi-rady-v-krymu-y-konsulu-unr-pavlu-goryanskomu>.

historical narrative. Removing Catherine the Great's face and body is much more visibly effective than changing a street name. Indeed, even though street names may not directly seem a means for memory construction and perpetuation, what is interesting is that "the apparent ordinariness of street names and the everyday contexts of their use support their capability to render the version of history they represent not only familiar on an everyday basis, but also seemingly self-evident".<sup>45</sup>

The first wave of decommunization in Ukraine can be dated back to the last years of the USSR, during which interest in changing urban toponyms first emerged with the renaming of Zhdanov to Mariupol and Voroshilovgrad to Luhansk in 1989 and 1990 respectively.<sup>46</sup> In the current new phase for Ukraine's memory politics toponyms have been subject to the same two directions that have been followed by monuments, i.e., further decommunization and deep derussification. As it happened with monuments to Pushkin, streets named after Russian writers or poets such as Alexander Blok or Nikolay Nekrasov (who was indeed born in Nemyriv which is located in Vinnytsia Oblast) have been renamed.<sup>47</sup> Derussification has even gone further up to the point in which a street has been named after the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Dzhokhar Musayevich Dudayev whose secession has never been recognized by the Russian Federation.<sup>48</sup>

On April 21, 2023, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has signed some amendments to the law 'On Geographical Names' concerning the decolonization of toponyms and streamlining the use of geographical names in the settlements of Ukraine. According to the law, geographic names that symbolize and glorify Russia or its memorable places, events, dates and people who carried out aggression against Ukraine must be removed from Ukrainian public spaces within six months from its entry into force.<sup>49</sup>

Street names and toponyms in general have been renamed following different paths. First, there has just been a random substitution of Soviet and Russian names with influential men and women who have marked Ukrainian history. Second, there has been a search for original Ukrainian names which had been stripped from towns or streets in favor of Russian and Soviet ones. That is the case with Victory Square in Kyiv which has now been renamed "Halytska Square", which was its original name back in 1869 as that square marked the beginning of the path which led from Kyiv to Galicia.<sup>50</sup> Third, what is interesting to notice is that toponyms have been changed with a look at Ukraine's present and future ambitions. Several streets have been named after European cities both in gratitude for their help in the current war in Ukraine (such as London)<sup>51</sup> and because of Ukraine's willingness to get closer and closer to Europe.

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<sup>45</sup> Maoz Azaryahu, "Renaming the past in post-Nazi Germany: Insights into the politics of street naming in Mannheim and Potsdam", *Cultural geographies*, 19, no. 3 (2012): 388.

<sup>46</sup> Aleksander Kuczabski, Aina Boychuk, "Decommunization of urban toponymy in Ukraine: causes and consequences", *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 10, no.4 (2020): 11.

<sup>47</sup> "Локальна пам'ять: ліквідація російської спадщини та інші новини регіонів", *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, June 17, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-likvidaciya-rosiyskoyi-spadshchyny-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv1>.

<sup>48</sup> "Локальна пам'ять: заходи до Дня захисників та захисниць України та інші новини регіонів", *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, October 28, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/5183>.

<sup>49</sup> "Про засудження та заборону пропаганди російської імперської політики в Україні і деколонізацію топонімів", *Verkhovna Rada*, March 21, 2023, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3005-20#Text>.

<sup>50</sup> "Проспекту Перемоги та низці київських вулиць повернули історичні назви", *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, February 10, 2023, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/prospektu-peremogy-ta-nyzci-kyivskiyh-vulyc-povernuly-istorychni-nazvy>.

<sup>51</sup> "Kyiv renames nearly 100 streets to shed Russian past", *Reuters*, August 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kyiv-renames-nearly-100-streets-shed-russian-past-2022-08-25/>.

Another interesting feature of the new course of memory politics in Ukraine is linked to the idea of present memory in the making. In September 2022, former Minister of Internal Affairs Denys Monastyrsky declared that “every day of the war, which has lasted for seven months, takes the lives of our heroes. At the same time, events develop so quickly that over time and the memory of what happened a day, week, or month ago is lost” and that the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and the Ministry of Internal Affairs had agreed upon a memorandum to preserve the memory of those who bravely died during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, several streets have already been renamed after Ukrainian war heroes. For instance, in Myrhorod in Poltava Oblast a street has been named after Oleksandr Oskanchenko, who was a Ukrainian fighter pilot who was killed by a Russian missile during the Battle of Kyiv in February 2022.<sup>53</sup> In Kremenchuk Nikolai Vatutin Street has become Ihor Pugach Street (named after a Major of the National Guard of Ukraine who died defending Kharkiv in June 2022), while another street has been named after the defenders of Azovstal, Gomelsky Street has now been turned into Gostomelsky Street honoring the fierce Battle of Hostomel and a new street glorifying the heroes of Mariupol has appeared.<sup>54</sup> In the same city in Poltava Oblast new street names have appeared honoring the “hero cities” of contemporary Ukraine such as Chernihiv, Irpin or Chornobaivka that have bravely resisted the current Russian invasion.<sup>55</sup>

What is interesting to notice is that there has been a selection of historical events which Ukrainian authorities have decided their identity must be rooted to. In particular, periods such as Kyivan Rus’, the Cossack Hetmanate, the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917-1921) and Ukrainian independentist movements during World War Two have been at the center of this new path in memory politics.

For instance, in Merefa in Kharkiv Oblast a street has been renamed after Yaroslav the Wise<sup>56</sup>, while among the most common names linked to the Cossack tradition are Ivan Mazepa, Petro Kalnyshevsky, Cossack military leader Ivan Sirko and Hetman of right-bank Ukraine Petro Doroshenko.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, several streets as in Potoky have been renamed after Zaporozhian Cossack starshina, diplomat and Hetman in exile Pylyp Stepanovych Orlyk.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, in Hadiach in Poltava Oblast, Komsomolska street has been named after the

<sup>52</sup> “УІНП та МВС підписали меморандум про співпрацю задля збереження пам’яті про героїв війни”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, September 14, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/uinp-ta-mvs-pidpysaly-memorandum-pro-spiivpracyu-zadlya-zberezhennya-pamyati-pro-geroyiv-viyny>.

<sup>53</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: позбавлення російської спадщини на Полтавщині та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, December 23, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-pozbavlennya-rosiyskoyi-spadshchyny-na-poltavshchyni-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>54</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: перейменування вулиць у Кременчуці та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, August 19, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-pereymenuvannya-vulyc-u-kremenchuci-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>55</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: заходи до Дня Соборності, Дня Героїв Крут та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, March 2, 2023, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-zahody-do-dnya-sobornosti-dnya-geroyiv-krut-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>56</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: дерусифікація на Харківщині та Полтавщині й інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, September 16, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-derusyfikaciya-na-harkivshchyni-ta-poltavshchyni-y-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>57</sup> “Локальна пам’ять»: дерусифікація на Харківщині та Полтавщині й інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, September 16, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-derusyfikaciya-na-harkivshchyni-ta-poltavshchyni-y-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>58</sup> “Локальна пам’ять»: перейменування вулиць у Кременчуці та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, August 19, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-pereymenuvannya-vulyc-u-kremenchuci-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

heroes of the Battle of Kruty between the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Red Guards.<sup>59</sup> In Kremenchuk new streets have appeared honoring figures linked to the OUN such as Ekaterina Mironova Zarizkaya or Ukrainian activist Olena Teliha.<sup>60</sup>

Streets throughout Ukraine have also been devoted to Ukrainian dissidents in Soviet times such as Levko Hryhorovych Lukianenko who is the author of the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine and one of the fathers of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group and Viacheslav Maksymovych Chornovil who was a dissident in exile for his independentist aspirations and one of the leaders of Rukh (the first opposition party in post-Soviet Ukraine).<sup>61</sup> People from the fields of science and culture can be found too. Examples can be retrieved in streets renamed after Ukrainian writer Ostap Vyshnya, Ukrainian writer against Tsarist autocracy Lesya Ukrainka, songwriter and poet Volodymyr Ivasiuk and Ukrainian Cossack poet Hryhorii Skovoroda.<sup>62</sup> What is intriguing to highlight is that Hryhorii Skovoroda wrote his texts not only in Ukrainian and Church Slavic but also in Russian.

What is interesting to notice within this process of derussification is that the previously mentioned Council of Experts of the Ministry of Culture has recommended ten most used Russian names which must be substituted to reduce the influence of the Soviet-Russian narrative, do historical justice, and restore the original Ukrainian toponyms. Among those names are Yuri Gagarin, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Ivan Michurin, Valery Chkalov, Maksim Gorky, Alexander Suvorov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Oleksandr Matrosov (who was indeed born in Yekaterinoslav, which is present-day Dnipro) and Vladimir Komarov.<sup>63</sup>

### **Potential future trends in Ukraine's memorialization processes and memory politics**

As well explained by historian Keith Lowe, history is “a force that stultifies us, holding us hostage to centuries of outdated tradition. It leads us down to the same old paths, to make the same mistakes again and again. When left unchallenged, history can ensnare us: it becomes a trap”.<sup>64</sup> Official speeches delivered by influential political men and women such as Volodymyr Zelensky or Volodymyr Kitshko and local authorities provide us with several insights into the future implications of Russia's aggression on Ukraine's memory politics and its willingness to challenge its own past. Indeed, by analysing those speeches, declarations and sermons one may easily understand which kind of official narrative is and will be produced and developed in the near future. According to Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko, new street names “should perpetuate the memory of significant historical events of Ukraine as

<sup>59</sup> “Локальна пам'ять: перейменування вулиць у Кременчуці та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, August 19, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-pereymenuvannya-vulyc-u-kremenchuci-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>60</sup> “Локальна пам'ять: заходи до Дня захисників та захисниць України та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, October 28, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/5183>.

<sup>61</sup> “Локальна пам'ять: заходи до Дня захисників та захисниць України та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, October 28, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/5183>.

<sup>62</sup> “Локальна пам'ять: дерусифікація на Харківщині та Полтавщині й інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, September 16, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-derusyfikaciya-na-harkivshchyni-ta-poltavshchyni-y-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>63</sup> “Найбільш вживані «російські» урбаноніми, рекомендовані до перейменування Експертною радою”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, 2023, <https://uinp.gov.ua/dekomunizaciya-ta-reabilitaciya/podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-ta-totalitaryzmu-v-ukrayini/naybilsh-vzhivani-rosiyski-urbanonimy-rekomendovani-do-pereymenuvannya-ekspertnoyu-radoyu-mkip>.

<sup>64</sup> Keith Lowe, *Prisoners of history: what monuments to the Second World War tell us about our history and ourselves*. (HarperCollins UK, 2020), 18.

well as famous figures and heroes who glorified Ukraine and fought for the independence of our state”.<sup>65</sup>

Zelensky’s speech on Ukrainian Statehood Day in June 2022 is indeed representative of a new path in Ukraine’s memory politics. Indeed, the President of Ukraine provides a sense of continuity between past and present suffering of Ukrainian people, by declaring that losing this war in Ukraine will not only mean losing their own state, but also their own memory and that “our warriors defend Ukraine on the ground, in the water and in the air. Our ancestors defend it from the skies”.<sup>66</sup> By the term “ancestors” Zelensky is referring to precise influential characters in Ukrainian history such as Sviatoslav the Brave, King Danylo or Hetman Khmelnytsky.

These people fought bravely against foreign invasions as King of Ruthenia Danylo tried to resist and cohabit with Mongols, but most importantly they played an anti-Russian role or were more oriented towards Europe. The last Viking Sviatoslav the Brave, indeed, had its foreign policy oriented toward the Balkans and according to chroniclers of that time he wanted to move his capital to the Danube River.<sup>67</sup> Hetman Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny not only played a significant role against the Turks in the Battle of Khotyn, but he joined King of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth Władysław IV Vasa’s attempt to gain the tsar’s throne.

Moreover, Zelensky’s speech takes a hard stance on Ukraine being the legitimate heir of Kyivan Rus’. Ukraine intends to challenge the Russian view of direct lineage with the Kyivan Rus’. Indeed, in the future Ukraine may become more assertive in this field by pointing out as declared by Zelensky that it is “the state in which the history of Christianity in Eastern Europe began” and “the only legal heiress of Kyivan Rus’, the possessions and achievements of our rulers”.<sup>68</sup> This idea of Zelensky referring to “Askold and Dire, Vishchy Oleg, Prince Igor, Princess Olga, Sviatoslav the Brave, Volodymyr the Great, Yaroslav the Wise, Volodymyr Monomakh” is further confirmed by the already ongoing process of renaming streets after some of these figures.

Even on October 14, 2022, on the Day of Defenders of Ukraine, Zelensky delivered a speech by expressing gratitude to Olga, Svyatoslav, Volodymyr the Great, Svyatopolk, Monomakh, Andriy and Oleg “who gathered in Ukraine for the princely congress”.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, one might expect that with the aim of erasing any element of Russian heritage, Ukraine will highlight being the “legal” heir of Kyivan Rus’ in its own urban spaces.

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<sup>65</sup> “Kyiv renames nearly 100 streets to shed Russian past”, *Reuters*, August 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kyiv-renames-nearly-100-streets-shed-russian-past-2022-08-25/>.

<sup>66</sup> Volodymyr Oleksandrovyh Zelensky, “All stages of the history of Ukrainian statehood can be described in one sentence: we existed, exist and will exist - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the occasion of Ukrainian Statehood Day”, *Website of the President of Ukraine*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vsi-etapi-istoriyi-derzhavnosti-ukrayini-mozhna-opisati-odni-76705>.

<sup>67</sup> Serhii Plokhy, *The gates of Europe: a history of Ukraine* (Penguin Random House UK, 2015), 29.

<sup>68</sup> Volodymyr Oleksandrovyh Zelensky, “All stages of the history of Ukrainian statehood can be described in one sentence: we existed, exist and will exist - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the occasion of Ukrainian Statehood Day”, *Website of the President of Ukraine*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vsi-etapi-istoriyi-derzhavnosti-ukrayini-mozhna-opisati-odni-76705>.

<sup>69</sup> Volodymyr Oleksandrovyh Zelensky, “Address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the Day of Defenders of Ukraine”, *Website of the President of Ukraine*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-volodimira-zelenskogo-z-nagodi-dnya-za-78485>.

The Cossack heritage appears to be a functional element in the making of a new memory politics in Ukraine in two major ways. First, the Cossack Hetmanate represents one of the first organized entities on nowadays Ukrainian lands and allows the Ukrainian authorities to draw a line between the past and Ukraine's independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. Second, within the collective imagination the Cossacks have always represented self-made warriors that can perfectly be compared with present-day Ukrainian soldiers defending their homeland.

Indeed, on the anniversary of the defense of Okhtyrka, Zelensky gave a speech by declaring that “in the Sumy region, in our Okhtyrka, we honor the true Cossack courage and indomitability of our people, our heroes, all Ukrainian men and women”.<sup>70</sup> Zelensky has indeed highlighted the “Cossack sort” of Ukrainian people both in informal and formal addresses such as during his speech on the Day of Defenders of Ukraine.<sup>71</sup>

Another future trend which has already gained foothold in other countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom where imperial monuments have been dismantled is the idea of moving monuments from urban spaces to museums. Indeed, sometimes demolishing monuments means rejecting the idea that some periods of history deserve to be studied thus leading to a refusal to undertake a critical historical reconstruction of the past. Moreover, renouncing a critical historical reconstruction of the past means not merely to challenge the subjugating view of this past but to manipulate it up to the point of imposing new narratives.

In order to avoid this consequence, Ukrainian Minister of Culture Oleksandr Tkachenko has long insisted on the fact that Ukraine will not accept a new form of cancel culture, because “decolonization does not mean the destruction of monuments” and that those statues will be moved to museums.<sup>72</sup> The Director of Fine Arts Museum wished in fact “the monuments which have been created for propaganda purposes to be removed from public space and brought into the museums which will give them another life”.<sup>73</sup> It will thus be interesting to understand how these monuments will be contextualized within museums in the near future.

By looking at the list of the significant dates in 2023 provided by a resolution issued by Verkhovna Rada it is easy to find a confirmation of which path Ukraine's politics of memory is taking and will take. Indeed, among those dates are the 1040<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Yaroslav the Wise, the 970<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Volodymyr Monomakh, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election of hetman Mikhaylo Doroshenko, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Mykola Mikhnovsky (who was a Ukrainian independence activist and early

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<sup>70</sup> Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelensky, “President took part in the events on the occasion of the anniversary of the heroic defense of Okhtyrka”, *Website of the President of Ukraine*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-uzyv-uchast-u-zahodah-z-nagodi-richnyci-geroyichn-81877>.

<sup>71</sup> Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelensky, “Address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the Day of Defenders of Ukraine”, *Website of the President of Ukraine*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-volodimira-zelenskogo-z-nagodi-dnya-za-78485>.

<sup>72</sup> “МКП та УІНП підбили підсумки за рік щодо подолання наслідків русифікації й тоталітаризму”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, December 30, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/mkip-ta-uinp-pidbyly-pidsumky-za-rik-shchodo-podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-y-totalitaryzmu>.

<sup>73</sup> David Gomerzano, “War in Ukraine: ‘Derussification’ on the rise in Odesa”, *France 24*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230222-war-in-ukraine-de-russification-on-the-rise-in-odesa>.

leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement) and many more figures linked to specific periods of Ukrainian history.<sup>74</sup>

According to a declaration issued by Kyiv State Council, “the process of derussifying place names in Kyiv is of important historical and national significance. In particular, it will help reduce the cultural influence of the Russian Federation on the consciousness of Ukrainians and perpetuate the memory of significant historical events, famous figures and heroes of Ukraine”.<sup>75</sup> One might expect that in the near future Ukraine will complete this process of massive derussification, as confirmed by several local authorities such as Deputy of the Lubensk City Council Alina Savka who has declared that Lubensk has started the process of decolonization and an official working group has been established.<sup>76</sup>

Another interesting feature is the growing debate within local authorities on which policies should be implemented in the field of decolonization of memory politics, which has been confirmed also by Kremenchuk mayor Vitaly Maletskyi.<sup>77</sup> What will be important in this process is the involvement of local communities because “only through joint efforts we will be able to achieve the desired result and victory of Ukraine on all fronts” as expressed by Head of the Central Interregional Department of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory Bohdan Galaiko.<sup>78</sup> Several referenda by means of online voting have already taken place. For instance, in June 2022 more than 6.5 million Ukrainians voted online to rename 296 streets and squares in Kyiv.

## Conclusion

Building on different theories of memory studies, the core argument of this paper is that Ukraine has undertaken a memory shift from its willingness to decommunize the country to the idea of a total derussification to defend the right to have a separate and specific identity. Thanks to an in-depth analysis of primary sources mainly coming from the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory that is tracking changes in monuments and toponyms, we contend that there has been a clear shift from the times the Decommunization laws that entered into force in 2015.

Ukraine is now not only accomplishing final decommunization which is inconsistent with the past years but has gone further. The pulverization of every inch of the Ukrainian public opinion and sociopolitical opposition supportive of the Russian Federation has accelerated a process which so far had been translated only into the decommunization.

Since historical memory provides national communities with a feeling of cultural exclusivity and a shared historical fate, what Ukrainian authorities have attempted to do during the Russian aggression is to create a sense of continuity between the present and

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<sup>74</sup> “Про відзначення пам’ятних дат і ювілеїв у 2022-2023 роках”, *Verkhovna Rada*, December 17, 2021, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1982-20#Text>.

<sup>75</sup> Iryna Pavlenko, “Ukrainians vote to change names of Russian-themed streets, squares”, *Kyiv Post*, June 27, 2022, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/6978>.

<sup>76</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: дерусифікація Полтавщини та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, July 22, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-derusyfikaciya-poltavshchyny-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

<sup>77</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: ліквідація російської спадщини та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, June 17, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-likvidaciya-rosiyskoyi-spadshchyny-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv1>.

<sup>78</sup> “Локальна пам’ять: демонтаж одного з останніх пам’ятників Леніну та інші новини регіонів”, *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, January 7, 2022, <http://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/lokalna-pamyat-demontazh-odnogo-z-ostannih-pamyatnykiv-leninu-ta-inshi-novyny-regioniv>.

specific periods of Ukrainian history, namely Kyivan Rus', the Cossack Hetmanate, the Ukrainian War of Independence (1917-1921) and the struggle for Ukrainian independence during World War Two.

Moreover, Ukraine's actions have deeper consequences, as the cosmological changes of Ukrainian urban spaces deprive Russia of symbolical handholds which have always fueled Russian nationalism. Two crucial outcomes of Ukraine's turn in memory politics can be detected in the references to Europe which gives a clear indication of the authorities' will for its present and future and in the making of present memory. It is indeed intriguing to notice that usually memory politics and memorialization processes have been built on past events as they can be reinterpreted according to present needs. However, Ukrainian authorities have probably understood that the current war in the future will be regarded as a capital event in Ukrainian history.

As the war is still raging and it is not possible to forecast how the current conflict in Ukraine will end and which fate will Ukraine face, what can be taken for sure is that the process of erasure of the Russian heritage will be finalized as confirmed by local and governmental authorities. As for future potential implications in memory politics concerning monuments and toponyms, the current conflict will allow Kyiv to build a more stable nation state in the fields of memory and identity by perpetuating the memory of significant historical events of Ukraine such as the Cossack era, the Kyivan Rus' or World War II. Ukraine may not indulge in cancel culture, by preserving imperial monuments in museums as expressed by several influential people and authorities. Eventually, public discussion and the involvement of local communities in the making of memory politics may be yet another trend in Ukraine in the near future.



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**\*Biography:** Camilla Gironi is a post-graduate master student in Geopolitics and Global Security at La Sapienza University and executive master student in Leadership for International Relations and Made in Italy promoted by Fondazione Italia USA. Holds a joint MA degree in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe at University of Bologna, Vytautas Magnus University and Zagreb University. Holds a BA in Community Interpreting and Translation in English and Russian at Istituto d’Alti Studi SSML Carlo Bo. Her research interests focus on Russia and the post-Soviet space, particularly on politics of memory, official narratives and foreign policy.