"Emerging Ukrainian Spatiality on the Background of the War"

written by Oleksandr Butsenko

In 2001, the Polish-British philosopher, Zygmunt Baumann, published in the *European Journal of Social Theory* an article "Wars of the Globalization Era" where he stated, among other things, that "In making the wars conducted with the help of weapons of unprecedented murdering power immune to ethical evaluation, the adiaphorization of violent actions has attained altogether new heights"[1]. Such heights one can see in today Ukraine, after more than two years of Russian aggression and wide-scale war. If not speak on hundreds of thousands of killed and millions of displaced persons, the culture sphere "has sustained the major losses in all history of independent Ukraine"[2]. As Andriy Kostin, the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, stressed, "the enormity and the purposefulness of these crimes is another evidence of Kremlin's intentions to commit a genocide against Ukrainian people". We can say that it matches with genocide definition coined 80 years ago by Raphael Lemkin in his book "Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation - Analysis of Government - Proposals for Redress", particularly in cultural, social and political fields.

According to the data of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, in the period between 24 February 2022 and March 25, 2024, Russia destroyed or damaged 1046 monuments of cultural heritage, including 128 of national significance, 848 of local significance and 70 recently discovered. In general, cultural heritage monuments were destroyed completely or damaged in 17 oblasts (regions) of Ukraine out of 24; the largest number accounts for the Kharkiv oblast, 294. The losses include not only historical architecture, monumental art, urban planning, park design, etc. but also underwater heritage (after explosion of Kakhovka dam, occupation of Black and Azov Sea waters) and archaeological heritage. Only in Crimea, the Russian occupants ruined about 150 archaeological objects, according to Crimean Institute for Strategic Research.

Besides cultural heritage, the culture infrastructure was also destroyed, damaged or robbed: In total, as of April 2024, these losses have constituted 1987 objects, including 958 houses of culture or clubs, 708 libraries, art educational establishments, 114 museums and art galleries, 36 theatres, cinemas and philharmonic societies, 15 parks, zoos and reserves, 3 circuses[3]. Most losses are in

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[1] Bauman, Zygmunt. Wars of the Globalization Era. European Journal of Social Theory. 4 (2001): 11-28.

[2] https://kse.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/UKR_Feb23_FINAL_Damages-Report-1.pdf (as on 15.05.2024).

[3] https://mcip.gov.ua/news/u-2024-roczi-215-symvoliv-totalitarnogo-rezhymu-ta-rosijskoyi-imperskoyi-polityky-vtratyly-status-pamyatky-kulturnoyi-spadshhyny/ (as on 15.05.2024).

Donetsk oblast (83%), Kharkiv oblast (55.4%), Sumy oblast (54,9%), Chernihiv oblast (47,4%), Luhansk oblast (46,2%), and Kherson oblast (43%). As the Institute of Religious Freedom informed, from the beginning of the war, Russian occupants destroyed or robbed also 630 temples of various confessions, more losses are in Donetsk oblast (146), Luhansk (83) and Kherson (78) oblasts.

All above mentioned figures (which are only a part of the general picture, since the situation changes every day and there are not comprehensive and verified data from occupied territories) visually show the transformation of cultural and social space in Ukraine. This transformation started after 2014 (in both directions, Ukrainian, and sovietised Russian in occupied Crimea and partially in two eastern regions). In one part of the occupied territory, it has led to the destruction and devastation of physical space, break of social and cultural ties, elimination of all dissents, critics or other-minded people, erasing of historical and cultural memory, burning of Ukrainian books, return of the past through erecting mnemonic images, like monuments to Lenin or soviet chieftains and party leaders. In another part, Ukrainian, the transformation of geographical space went out of the cities, provoking the monument-fall even in small villages and leading to change of toponyms and urbanonyms. Such, mainly bottom-up processes, gave an impetus for the approving the Law of Ukraine "On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting the Propagation of their Symbols" (2015). During 2015-2016, more than 51 thousand of urbanonyms (streets, avenues, squares, parks) and 991 towns were renamed, about 2.5 thousand monuments were dismantled.

After the beginning of Russian war against Ukraine, this process accelerated addressing not only to the soviet past but also against Russian historic direct and inner oppression. Such bottom-up energy with top-down confirmation drove structural, spatial, and value-oriented changes reflected in the laws of Ukraine "On Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda for Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and Decolonization of Toponymy", signed by the President of Ukraine on 21 March 2023, and "On Prohibition of Propaganda for Russian Nazi-like Totalitarian Regime, Armed Aggression of Russian Federation as a State-Terrorist against Ukraine, Symbols of War Invasion of Russian Nazi Totalitarian Regime in Ukraine". During 2022-2023, 42 city councils from 50 examined by the program *Transparent Cities*[4] renamed 3225 toponyms, including names of streets, squares, boulevards, avenues, parks, public gardens, city districts, metro stations, lakes, ships, schools, public transport stops. The leaders in this process are:

- Kyiv (237),
- Vinnytsia (232),

[4]https://transparentcities.in.ua/en (as on 15.05.2024).

- Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovska oblast) (183),
- Kamianske (Dnipropetrovska oblast) (182),
- Sumy (179),
- Kremenchuk (142),
- Cherkasy (105).

It's interesting to note that among the most popular names used until recently in Ukrainian urban space and countryside were after Lenin, Pushkin, Gagarin, Gorky, Tolstoy, Maiakovsky, Lermontov, Kutuzov. Now the mnemonic space markers changed radically, reflecting not only the attitude to the war and aggressors (e.g., the metro station in Kyiv, named after Leo Tolstoy, bears now the name of Ukrainian Heroes), but also the vision of future (e.g., Pravda Avenue in Kyiv, named after the newspaper "Pravda" ("Truth"), the organ of the central committee of the soviet communist party, now is called the Avenue of EU).

The spatial transformation has embraced not only geographical/physical space but also social, spiritual and narrative. The split between Orthodox churches in Ukraine became aggravated, as result of the Russian war. There are about 30 million Orthodox believers in Ukraine, divided among the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate [UOC-MP], the Orthodox Church of Ukraine [OCU]), and others. This led to a switch to a revised Julian calendar to become more aligned with the Gregorian calendar used in the secular world, as of September 1st, 2023. The OCU's head, Metropolitan Epifaniy said that it was "vitally necessary". And the Metropolitan of Bila Tserkva (Kyiv oblast), a spokesman of Kyiv Metropolitanate of the OCU, Levstratiy Zoria added that in the context of the cultural de-occupation one should remind on the de-occupation spiritual. The respective draft law on the ban of religious organizations related with Russia is waiting for the second reading and approval by the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine. According to the survey conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in April 2024, 60% of Ukrainians support the ban of the UOC-MP, other 20% propose to put it in surveillance[5]. Obviously, as the Institute executive director, Anton Hrushetsky noted, the UOC-MP could not convince Ukrainians that this Church is independent and takes pro-Ukrainian position. The most population considers it as a "fifth column".

The public organization CAT-UA (Communication Analysis Team–Ukraine) examined the actual narrative in Ukraine on February-March 2024[6]. They defined three main narratives existing now in Ukrainian society: "Fight for Ukrainian culture" (clash between two cultures), "Multiculturalism" (seek for co-existence of all cultures), and "Civil unity" (priority in citizenship position). All three narratives treat Russia as an enemy, and joining EU and NATO as a core goal. At the same time, as researchers

[5] https://kiis.com.ua/ (as on 15.05.2024)
[6] https://cat-ua.org/en/2024/04/22/national-narrative-three-visions-of-ukraine/ (as on 15.05.2024)

stated, the Russian narrative disappeared completely from the public discourse of Ukraine.

On summarizing, we can say that the Russian war has divided Ukraine in two parts: one, destroyed, devastated, occupied and oppressed, like the whole Russia, is what, as the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen said at the European Economic Congress in Katowice, Putin is seeking - the return of empires and authoritarianism. Other represents emerging Ukrainian spatiality turned towards democracy, freedom and a new European future. However, such division is very fragile and dangerous for Ukraine fighting against terrorist regime. It's time to take a decisive step for the united world and stand hand in hand with Ukraine. Because, as again Z. Baumann noted during in his lecture at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 2010[7], it is one of such hard situations "that you not only have not experienced but even wouldn't want to experience".

About the Author

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[7]Quoted on: Baumann, Zygmunt and Donskis, Leonidas. Moral Blindless: The Loss of Sensivity in Liquid Modernity. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013