

Oleksandr Hrytsenko, Nadiya Honcharenko, Inna Kuznetsova, et al.

**Memory Culture in Contemporary Ukrainian Society:
Transformation, Decommunization, Europeanization.**

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Discussions and conflicts related to different, sometimes diametrically opposed visions of Ukraine's historical events by residents of different regions, various social groups or political forces are often at the center of public life in modern Ukraine. Some see the reason for such discussions in significant differences in the ethnocultural composition of the population of Ukrainian regions. Others place it in their different historical past, ancient and recent. Still others—in the deliberate exploitation of these linguistic and cultural peculiarities by political elites, and in recent years—in hybrid aggression (military, information, cultural) against Ukraine by the Russian Federation. In an effort to explain the polarity and the conflicts related to it, scholars employ different methodologies and tools. Likewise, they offer a variety of concepts for analyzing this complex and changing field of humanities knowledge.

The study conducted by the researchers of the Institute for Cultural Research of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine (Oleksandr Hrytsenko, Nadiya Honcharenko, Inna Kuznetsova, Maryna Mishchenko, Olena Beregova, Violeta Demeshchenko, Valentyn Ryabenkyi)—published in the collection **Memory Culture in Contemporary Ukrainian Society: Transformation, Decommunization, Europeanization**—proposes to identify the main components of cultural transformation which took place in Ukraine over the past 30 years. In particular, the study examines the various factors of social change, the actors at play, and the main directions of transformational change.

The study is structured around a set of tasks set by the authors. First, they seek to comprehend and describe the modern transformation of ideas about Ukraine's past and its historical and cultural heritage. Second, they identify the main trends and patterns of transformational changes occurring in the Ukraine's memory culture after independence (in the symbolic space and presence of national cultural heritage in the public

consciousness, in the state memory policy, also in society historical memory and public commemoration practices.) They proceed to analyze the legislative and academic aspects of cultural policy and memory policy, in particular the adoption and implementation of decommunization laws. Finally, the authors consider the reception of the artistic heritage of the Soviet era.

The theoretical framework for the study is rooted in the methodology of memory culture (*Erinnerungskultur*) developed by Jan Assmann, Reinhard Koselleck, and Paul Connerton. The study also draws from a variety of interdisciplinary concepts as the post-communist socio-cultural transformation, published in the works of Kazimierz Krzysztofek, Vieran Katunarić, Nada Šwob-Dokić, Taras Kuzio, as well as cultural studies approaches proposed by British scholars Raymond Williams, Stuart Holl and policy analysis methodology developed by Leslie Paul and James Anderson.

The first chapter *Post-communist transformation of Ukrainian culture and the interaction of Ukrainian and Polish historical discourses* analyses the transformation of Ukrainian culture in the context of post-communist social changes in Central and Eastern Europe. It describes three powerful challenges related to the functioning and transformation of cultural and historical memory, which should be overcome by the Ukrainian society. The first challenge is a change in the social order that has provided open access to the full range of facts and knowledge about the past and an open public discussion of key moments in Ukrainian history in order to reach a democratic national consensus on these issues. The second challenge is a chance for Ukrainian culture to become self-regulating in a creative and economic sense, as well as to enable Ukrainian scholars to publish interesting research and demythologize Russian imperial or local falsifiers of history. The third challenge is the formation of identities and their interactions in the modern Ukrainian society after the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of an independent democratic Ukrainian state, which significantly undermined the group identity of numerous local Russian-cultural “Soviet people.” Some of them willingly identified themselves with Ukraine, while others (albeit without enthusiasm) mastered the state language and gained new political loyalty. There are also many who cultivate nostalgia for the USSR and expect “unity with the fraternal people.”

The first chapter also scrutinizes the controversial problems of the shared history of Ukraine and Poland, which have aggravated the two countries’ relations in recent

years. The authors examine the historical, political, and mythological bases of these problems and their reception in an attempt to reach an understanding between both countries' academic and public circles. At the same time, the chapter signals that even historical works aimed at understanding the Polish and Ukrainian visions of the past demonstrate their authors' affiliations to national memory cultures, which complicates the positive perception of their texts by the audience of the neighboring country.

The second chapter, titled *Decommunization of culture as a key factor in transformation: public policy and society reception*, analyses the gradual changes in the memory culture surrounding World War II in Ukraine. In particular, it inspects decommunization of public policy discourse and commemoration practices (as a set of ideas, assessments of historical events and figures, concepts, images, symbols, and rituals used in the state memory policy), as well as describes several main motives that emerged in the decommunized official discourse of World War II: de-Sovietization, European integration, Ukrainization, and actualization.

In addition, the chapter highlights some legislation and ideological conflicts related to the implementation of decommunization laws, and the protection and preservation of cultural heritage and monument. The authors consider the public reception of decommunization in Ukraine and describe the basic identities and narratives in cultural communication formed during the implementation of decommunization laws.

The third chapter, *Reception of the cultural heritage of the XIX–XX centuries in the public consciousness of modern Ukraine*, analyses the celebrations of the anniversaries of Ivan Franko as a reflection of the transformations in contemporary Ukraine's memory culture. The authors also cover the reception of the cultural heritage of the XX century through the prism of the work of Les Kurbas; they describe the phenomenon of the 'sixties' in Ukrainian classical music and its lasting legacy in contemporary society. In addition, the authors address the specifics of presenting biographies of Soviet cultural figures in Ukrainian history textbooks.

The fourth chapter, *Europeanization of the memory culture in Ukraine through the understanding of humanitarian catastrophes*, deals with the problems of traumatic historical memory as it pertains to the tragic events of the past. The authors analyze the various ways in which the historical and cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars is represented in the cultural space of modern Ukraine. They describe the dramatic events

of Crimea's past and analyze how the historical events affect contemporary political tendencies and academic interpretations. A particular emphasis is placed on the humanitarian and civic responsibility of modern Ukrainian intellectuals in the processes of understanding the tragic events of the XX century, such as the genocides committed by the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes: the Holodomor, the Holocaust, and the Deportations.

The results of the study highlight the main trends and patterns of post-communist transformation that has been taking place in Ukraine for over three decades, as well as changes in the country's memory culture—in the symbolic space, cultural heritage, historical memory, commemorative practices—after gaining independence. One of the most interesting and fruitful results of the study is the conceptual model of national memory culture and its post-communist transformation developed by the initiator and leader of this research, Oleksandr Hrytsenko. This model takes into account the broader political and cultural context of similar processes taking place in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The conclusions at which the authors arrive encourage further interdisciplinary studies at the intersection of culturology, policy analysis, and history.

The authors of the book **Memory Culture in Contemporary Ukrainian Society: Transformation, Decommunization, Europeanization** came to the conclusion that the identities and historical experiences of different generations residing in contemporary Ukraine inevitably generate contradictions and conflicts in the perception of the past. Therefore, scholars need to analyze the processes of social transformation, as well as public policy, which plays a significant, but not a dominant role in the formation of historical memory.

This study can serve as a basis for further interdisciplinary studies of the aspects of social development (culturology, history, political science, public administration.) Likewise, the rich findings presented by Hrytsenko, Honcharenko, Kuznetsova, et al. can be used in the educational process—to train culturologists, historians, policy analysts, and specialists in the field of public cultural policy.