

RECONFIGURING IDENTITIES WITHIN THE CITYSCAPE: IDEOLOGIES OF DECOMMUNIZATION RENAMING IN UKRAINE¹

Natalia Kudriavtseva

Kherson National Technical University
ORCID 0000-0001-7641-9543

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Abstract: *This empirical case study focuses on the ideologies of decommunization renaming embraced by naming commission members, whose naming motives and toponymic choices are examined within a socio-onomastic approach. I employ the sociolinguistic concept of language ideology transformed from a belief about language into a belief about a linguistic form, the toponym, in this case. I suggest that the processes structuring language ideologies—iconization, fractal recursivity and erasure—also construct toponymic ideologies, or ideologies of place names. Drawing upon the list of the commission members' renaming suggestions, the data obtained from a questionnaire and in-depth interviews, I reveal perceptions of certain place names, and the renaming in general, in the local setting of the south-eastern Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih. I discuss the members' attitudes towards toponyms popular with the local political elites and those promoted by the officials, as well as towards their own suggestions, in terms of the toponymic ideologies' framework. I conclude that, while renaming arises as a reconstruction of national identity, the major naming motives include individualization and prevention of future renaming, which is reflected in the predominance of topographic place names and toponymic iconization of the periods related to the city's history, as well as in the decrease of political and military names.*

Key words: *place names, urban toponymy, renaming, ideology, identity, decommunization, Ukraine*

Introduction

Recent research into the symbolic transformation of urban spaces in post-communist countries have analyzed the political significance of place names as vehicles of commemoration (Azaryahu 1997; Light 2004; Gil 2005; Palonen 2008; David 2013). This focus, partially intersecting with the linguistic landscape perspective (see e.g. Berezkina

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2016; Pipitone 2019), allows us to go beyond the descriptive approaches to place-naming traditionally taken in sociolinguistics, and to adopt a critical standpoint on place names as means of re-constructing history. In landscape approaches, this view has been known as “place-making”—understood as “a way of constructing the past [...] and, in the process, personal and social identities” where place names are by all means involved in this “place” production (Basso 1996, cited in Pipitone 2019: 16–17; see also Azaryahu 2011: 32). In the field of cultural geography (see e.g. Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009), where the influence of linguistic theory has been recognized (Bucher et al. 2013: 25), place names, in their commemorative capacity, are considered to make up a “city-text” which reproduces a particular version of history and contributes to shaping a local and national sense of belonging (Azaryahu 2009).

Studies of urban toponymy, as a reflection of social memory and of renaming as a promotion of the ruling elite’s ideology in the context of Central and Eastern Europe (Stipersky et al. 2011; Bucher et al. 2013), point out an iconic link between street names and official versions of history, which works as a structural component of the group identity authorities try to design. These studies draw on Duncan Light’s notion of “iconographic landscapes”, as suggested in his research of renaming in post-socialist Bucharest (Light 2004). Light argues that iconographic landscapes arising as a consequence of renaming in post-socialist states are necessarily in accord with the ideals of new regimes, and that the examination of these toponymic changes can offer important insights into the ways in which these states are redefining their national identities and national pasts (Light 2004: 154). Light also notes that in this post-socialist identity-building, there are two processes that complement each other: that of commemorating certain historical facts and that of forgetting others (Light 2004: 156). Therefore, the city-text which results is doomed to highlight certain things and erase others as “the gesture of street naming constitutes an attempt to constitute and represent imagined communities” (Palonen 2008: 220). In this respect, the differentiation between city-related, regional, national, and international “identity levels” (Stipersky et al. 2011: 186) seems to be an effective methodological tool, as it allows us to check the intensity of each of these levels in a particular cityscape, as well as to examine whether the processes of commemorating and forgetting the past unfold similarly at different identity levels.

In Ukraine, as in other countries of Eastern Europe, the rejection of communist past has been accompanied by the search for a new consolidating element that all Ukrainians might possibly share. Decommunization—which intensified after the Euromaidan Revolution, including two laws on the censure of the communist and Nazi regimes and on the commemoration of strugglers for Ukraine’s independence (Law 2015a; Law 2015b)—triggered a large-scale toponymic renaming targeting primarily the south-east of Ukraine. In these regions, unlike in Western Ukraine, where a massive renaming already occurred as early as 1991, the bulk of toponymy² was still of the Soviet origin; thus, the decommunization process has been most evident there. Though the renaming strategy pursued by authorities in this part of the country was to maximally avoid commemoration, as explained by the need to deideologize and depoliticize urban place names, it is

² In this paper, I use the terms “place name” and “toponym” interchangeably with no difference in meaning.

possible to identify three memorialized historical strata in the officially sanctioned toponymy seen by the local authorities as readily accepted by all. These are the Kievan Rus and Cossack epochs, the 20th century national liberation movements, and certain military events and figures of the Soviet period (Gnatiuk 2018: 128; see also Gomaniuk 2017; Pavlenko 2018). Among the commemorative names, which were not directly related to either the military sphere or politics, the most drew on pre-Soviet era heritage, specifically the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires (Gnatiuk 2018: 129). Overall these trends in the toponymic renaming, as brought about by the 2015 decommunization, coincide with those exhibited by other post-socialist countries, specifically in their appeal to the pre-socialist era as an object of commemoration, a decrease of political and military place names, and an increase in local toponymy (Gnatiuk 2018: 134).

Reviewing officially endorsed renamings, however, it is possible to detect only officially expressed or imposed identities articulated by political elites. Those are not necessarily similar to the identities embraced by actual communities who inhabit cities and towns (Stipersky et al. 2011: 184). Maoz Azaryahu has stressed the necessity to refine our understanding of renaming by examining “the operation of naming commissions as municipal agencies that ‘author’ the landscape-as-text,” and thus explore the relation between the “input” (i.e. names offered for commemoration) and the “output” (i.e. the actual names approved by the officials) (Azaryahu 2011: 29–30). It is only in the case of looking into these suggestions on renaming (i.e. in the case of input) that place names can be seen as “mirrors” of those identities that people tend to manifest. So far, such cases have rarely been subject to academic scrutiny, and even when studied, those surveyed were namely capital cities (see e.g. Azaryahu 1997). Similarly rewarding appears to be an exploration of renaming suggestions in provincial cities and towns, both in terms of additional empirical data (Azaryahu 2011: 29), and the specifics of the input that is analysed.

It is such a study of toponymic suggestions that I describe in this paper. The case is Ukraine’s south-eastern provincial city of Kryvyi Rih. I set out to establish whether the suggested place names are in any way different from those authorized by the local officials. Do the authors of the suggestions and the authorities work on a similar range of objects which should be renamed under the law? Do the suggested toponyms relate to the same historical periods as those identified as common for the south-east of the country? How do any historical strata, expressed in the suggested toponymy, come to be realized at different identity levels? And which of these levels—local, regional, or national—is preferred?

I will not only review the full list of toponyms offered by a naming commission, but also survey the attitudes of its members towards the decommunization renaming as such. From a methodological point of view, I will thus follow a socio-onomastic approach, which allows for a discussion of the members’ naming motives behind their choices, as well as their perceptions of the various roles that toponyms play. My main objective is to reveal what can be called the commission members’ ideologies of place names, or their *toponymic ideologies*, as expressed in their associations, evaluations, and practices, connected to place names. In line with the abovementioned critical toponymy studies,

where the focus moves from a mere description of toponymy to the processes involved in naming places and creating names, I aim to show the kind of processes that structure these toponymic ideologies and motivate the concrete choices that the commission members make.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, I will not refer to “ideologies” in the sense often used in studies of socialist and post-socialist renaming, where it means an official state ideology legitimized in the symbols of urban space (e.g. Light, Nicolae & Suditu 2002; Gnatiuk 2018). Here, I draw on the sociolinguistic concept of *language ideologies*, broadly defined as “beliefs and feelings about language” (Field & Kroskrity 2009: 4). The notion of an ideology as a belief about something might readily lend itself to critical linguistic research on toponymy, as it can be extrapolated to denote people’s attitudes to place names and their beliefs of the influence that place names have. Research on attitudes towards toponyms, including the issue of renaming, has been conducted in the field of cultural geography (see Kostanski 2009) as well as in the field of sociolinguistics (see Berezkina 2016). The concept of language ideologies was first used within the context of attitudes towards American indigenous place names (see Pipitone 2019). As I will show here, this framework can also be usefully extended to the discussions of decommunization renaming in Ukraine.

Defined as “the cultural (or subcultural) systems of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989: 255), *language ideologies* are otherwise described as accustomed cultural stereotypes about language in general, particular languages, linguistic structure, or language use. On a large scale, these ideologies always concern more than just language, since they “envision and enact links of language to group and personal identity” (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994: 56).

The associations between languages and identities are formed through the three semiotic processes, identified by Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal (2000) as iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure. *Iconization* means that certain linguistic features are perceived as iconic representations of particular groups of people—as if “a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence” (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37). The notion of *fractal recursivity*, reminiscent of geometric fractals, suggests that intergroup oppositions between linguistic varieties or groups are projected onto intragroup relations, or vice versa: “[...] the myriad oppositions that can create identity may be reproduced repeatedly, either within each side of a dichotomy or outside of it” (p. 38). The process of *erasure* renders certain phenomena invisible, since language ideology is “a totalizing vision, elements that do not fit its interpretive structure [...] must be either ignored or transformed” (p. 38). For example, Aneta Pavlenko (2011: 49) uses this scheme to illustrate associations between languages and identities in Latvian and Ukrainian postcolonial narratives:

In the process of *fractal recursivity*, a political opposition between Russia and the new nation-states is projected inward, onto the relationship between Russian speakers and the titulars and between Russian and the titular language. In the process of *iconization*, Latvian and Ukrainian are symbolically linked to morally superior ethnic and national identities and a European or Western identity, and Russian to an inferior 'colonizer' identity. Its linguistic features, such as swearwords, become an iconic representation of the moral inferiority of its speakers. And because linguistic ideology is a totalizing vision, elements that do not fit its interpretive structure, such as variation within both groups, are rendered invisible through the process of *erasure*.

Since a toponym is, in the first place, a linguistic form (and therefore a sign), the three processes that construct language ideologies can also be seen as structuring the ideologies of place names. These processes can be employed in the analysis of associations between identities and place names. Under this framework, the use of a certain place name can be considered as symbolizing and indexing a particular identity, as this place name refers to a specific historical vision iconically represented by certain figures and events. Applied to the previous research on post-socialist renaming, this scheme explains the link that brings about "iconographic landscapes," where commemorating and forgetting are grounded by the processes of iconization and erasure.

Methodology

Toponymic Classification

In this study, I have adhered to the methodology used in previous works on urbanonymy, seen as reflecting identity in some central and regional European cities (Stipersky et al. 2011; Bucher et al. 2013) and thirty-six of the largest cities in Ukraine (Gnatiuk 2018). This included the quantification and classification of toponyms according to *themes* and *scales*, or identity levels. In order to enable comparisons of the "input" names with the "output" names approved by the officials, I used the following thematic classification, based on (Stipersky et al. 2011 and Gnatiuk 2018). First, I distinguished between (I) restored historic toponyms, and (II) non-historic, or newly given, place names. Then, I classified the non-historic names into (1) commemorative, (2) topographic, (3) poetic, (4) denoting crafts and trades, and (5) others. Of these five groups, only topographic and commemorative names were further subdivided into classes. Topographic names were classified into geographic (various geographic designations, such as rivers, towns, mountains, etc.), localities (vicinity to some significant locality, such as a hospital, railway station, etc.), and appearance (physical nature of a street, such as wide, narrow, etc.). Commemorative names, including personal and collective names, were grouped into names referring to political and military spheres, and into other names.

The political and military group of the commemorative names was additionally categorized according to historical periods, such as those identified by Oleksiy Gnatiuk (2018: 124): Kievan Rus; Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; the Cossack State between the middle of the 17th and 18th centuries; Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires; the

Ukrainian Struggle for Independence 1917–1921; the Soviet Union; the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and related liberation movements; Independent Ukraine (including the Euromaidan Revolution and the Donbass military conflict). The group of other names includes commemorative names related to spheres other than war and politics, such as science, culture, religion, industry or business. These names were also specifically arranged into historical categories of pre-Soviet, “Soviet-persecuted” and “Soviet-favored” (i.e. people having no obvious problems with the Soviet regime), ex-Soviet, and post-Soviet people.

In terms of scales, which is another criterion used in the classification, all commemorative names were related to the kind of historical context that a certain figure is perceived to represent — local, regional, national — which, in its turn, symbolizes a particular dimension (or level) of identity. Thus, names of persons commemorated for their contribution or relation to the city’s history are thought to be local-specific. Names of persons having somehow influenced a wider region where the city is located belong to the regional level. Names of persons who have historical significance for the whole of Ukraine are seen as embodying the national identity dimension.

Socio-onomastic attitudinal survey

To allow a deeper insight into the ideologies embraced by the authors of the toponymic suggestions that I examine, I have surveyed their attitudes towards renaming, as well as place names themselves, to find out more about the reasons for toponymic preferences and the associations related to them. I used both a questionnaire and in-depth interviews for this study, as outlined in previous research (Kostanski 2009; Berezkina 2016).

Besides traditional questions of age, gender, and nationality, the questionnaire was comprised of three parts, including thirteen different questions. Two of these parts included multiple-choice questions, and the other part contained two open-ended questions. The three questions in the first part identified beliefs about the nature and significant characteristics of the toponym, as well as the kinds of toponyms to which the respondents paid most of their attention. The second part listed eight different place names in the city which had to be renamed under the decommunization legislation, and asked the respondent to choose the most suitable variant for the renaming. The final part with the open-ended questions asked about the respondents’ opinion on the officially approved list of renamed toponyms in Kryvyi Rih, and also about their ideas of why / whether this renaming is altogether important.

As for the interviews, I followed a conversational-style interview — also known as the “open” semi-structured interview question routine (Kostanski 2009: 113). It is a method of open-ended questions, which allows the interviewer to build upon new information gleaned in the process of an interview, as it arises. While the list of questions asked was therefore not identical for each participant, basic themes were eventually covered by all of them. These themes concerned the interviewees’ associations with the city, their reflections on the work of the naming commission, as well as their perceptions of the functions of place names and of the impact of the decommunization renaming as a whole. As such, my methodological approach has been fundamentally qualitative in

nature, with occasional uses of quantitative methods, the latter applied in the toponymic classification part.

Data and Analysis

The city of Kryvyi Rih lies on the junction of the Inhulets and Saksahan rivers in the southwestern part of the Dnipropetrovsk region, a central-eastern region of Ukraine. The region borders the Donetsk region in the east and the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions to the south. Kryvyi Rih is its second largest city, itself being located close to the central Kyrovohrad region and to the southern regions of Kherson and Mykolaiv. Founded in 1775 by Zaporizhzhia Cossacks as a post station, Kryvyi Rih first evolved into a town and then a city, largely due to the extraction of rich iron ore deposits. The discovery of Ukraine's largest iron ore field was made by Ukrainian-German archaeologist and landowner Oleksandr Pol in 1866. This kicked off the first mine and a railway connection in Kryvyi Rih, bringing the city into the industrial conglomerate of Prydniprov'ia and Donbas.

In 1918, this industrial cohesion was even seen as sufficient grounds for creating a separate Soviet quasi-state—the Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Soviet Republic, which existed for hardly a month before it was joined with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, where it became completely dissolved as an independent territory by 1919. The city's iron ore potential was most exploited during the Soviet period, which brought its push for heavy industry. This included the construction of Ukraine's biggest mining and smelting complex "Kryvorizhstal" (1931). During World War II, Kryvyi Rih was occupied by German troops for almost three years (1941–1944), and the city's industrial equipment was either evacuated to Russia or blown up. The post-war period, however, saw even greater industrial expansion, as well as housing and infrastructure growth. Today Kryvyi Rih is one of the country's largest industrial centers—home to more than 600,000 people.

The naming commission—whose particular toponymic suggestions and ideologies I have examined—was independently organized in one of the city-based universities in Kryvyi Rih. It involved eight members, including the rector of the university (Korotaiev 2017: 136). This commission was not affiliated with an official municipal agency, but was rather a citizens' grassroots initiative (working group). However, it was their activity that triggered a massive public discussion and encouraged the city officials to attend to decommunization renaming foreseen by the law. The city council and mayor were supposed to facilitate and administer the process from the very beginning, but they did not end up making any decisions regarding the renaming of city places within the specified time of nine months. The working group, however, did prepare renaming suggestions and initiated their own discussion long before the decision was to be made on the subject by the regional self-government. Two representatives of the working group were then invited to work on a special naming commission created at this official level, where the final decision on the renaming process in the city of Kryvyi Rih was to be made and endorsed.

I have concentrated my research on seven of the nine members who made up the core of the group and also authored the list of toponyms submitted to the officials. Of the

seven researchers, there were two historians, two geographers, two Ukrainian language experts, and one researcher specializing in philosophy and logic. It is important to note that in the group's work on toponymic suggestions, it was on their own that they identified objects that had to be renamed under the decommunization legislation. As a result, they actually ended up with even more decommunized place names than was originally recommended by the Ukrainian Institute for National Memory (Viatrovykh et al. 2015). Out of the 239 streets, squares, parks, ponds, city districts, and metro stations that the working group saw as bearing communism-related labels, 231 objects were recommended new names, and 8 streets were suggested to reorganize. The group's most intensive work on the renaming suggestions took place in January 2016; of course, much historical and geographic research preceded these January discussions.

Toponymic classification

The list of toponymic suggestions, which I have classified according to the abovementioned themes and identity levels, was given to me by the university rector. Table 1 shows quantities in the designated categories of commemorative names, such as *vulytsia Kostia Hordiiienka* (Kost Hordiiienko Street), *park Mershavtseva* (Mershavtsev Park), and *vulytsia Ukrainskykh voiniv* (Ukrainian Warriors Street); topographic names, such as *vulytsia Umanska* (Uman Street), *vulytsia Hoverlivska* (Hoverla Street), and *vulytsia Staroinhuletska* (Old Inhulets Street); denominations of crafts and trades, such as *vulytsia Hirnykiv* (Miners Street) or *vulytsia Kobzarska* (Kobzar Street); poetic names, such as *vulytsia Chervneva* (June Street) and *maidan Svobody* (Freedom Square); restored historic names, such as *vulytsia Tserkovna* (Church Street) or *vulytsia Poshtova* (Post Street); and other names, which include at least one habitual name of popular origin—*maidan 95 kvartal* (95th Kvartal Square) and one name homonymous with the previous toponym *park Pravdy* (Truth Park), which was formerly known as the park named after the communist newspaper *Pravda* (Truth).

The table also indicates the numbers of commemorative names with reference to the identity scales (local, regional, and national), and with respect to particular historical periods. One of the main problems that arose during this classification was deciding which of the identified historical periods should this or that figure be assigned to. For example, Volodymyr Byzov and Pavlo Shevchenko, both former rectors of two of the city's universities, were suggested to be commemorated in the names of the streets where the universities are located. They served as rectors and contributed to the development of their respective universities during both the Soviet and post-Soviet times. Another instance is Eduard Fuks, a geologist and photographer known to have been the most qualified explorer of iron ore deposits in Kryvyi Rih during both the pre-Soviet and early Soviet period. He was later persecuted by the Soviets and died of a self-imposed hunger strike in 1938. Further, such collective names as "Ukrainian warriors" and "Heroes of Ukraine" might have associations with various historical periods.

Table 1. Classification of toponyms suggested for places in the city of Kryvyi Rih (quantities in dubious categories marked by means of ±)

Category	Group	Subgroup	
COMMEMORATIVE NAMES (83)	persons (77): <i>local (62) regional (4)</i> <i>national (11)</i>	<i>political and military (15):</i>	
		<i>local (9):</i> Cossack State (3) 1917-1921 (1) Russian Empire (1) Soviet Union (2) Independent Ukraine (2)	
		<i>regional (2):</i> Cossack State (2)	
		<i>national (4):</i> 1917-1921 (2) Soviet Union (persecuted) (2)	
		<i>other (62):</i>	
		<i>local (53):</i> pre-Soviet (17±1) Soviet-persecuted (6±1) Soviet (23±4) post-Soviet (2±4)	
		<i>regional (2):</i> pre-Soviet (2)	
		<i>national (7):</i> pre-Soviet (2) Soviet-persecuted (4) ex-Soviet (1)	
		collective names (6): <i>local (1) national (5)</i>	<i>political and military (5):</i>
			<i>local (1) Soviet</i>
	<i>national (4)</i> Independent Ukraine (1) all times (3)		
	<i>other (1):</i>		
	<i>national (1)</i> Independent Ukraine		
TOPOGRAPHIC NAMES (105)	geographic names (72)		
	localities (32)		
	appearance (1)		
CRAFTS & TRADES (14)			
POETIC (4)			
RESTORED HISTORIC (23)			
OTHER (2)			
TOTAL (231)			

Out of these 231 suggested place names, there were 122 toponyms accepted by the regional authorities, and which were approved by their order, issued in May 2016 (Order 2016). Ninety of the recommended names were used on the same objects, while thirty-two names were used to rename streets, squares, and parks, other than those suggested by the working group. Besides, seventeen of the accepted 122 toponyms were taken in a slightly different form. For example, *vulytsia Osvity* (Education Street) was

adapted as *vulytsia Osvitianska* (Educational Street), and *vulytsia Rybalok* (Fishermen Street) as *vulytsia Rybalska* (Fishing Street).

In terms of the designated categories, the most frequently used category was that of topographic names, followed by commemorative toponymy. These two types of toponymy also prevailed through the officially endorsed process of renaming, except that the biggest group was instead commemorative names (see Gnatiuk 2018: 125).³ The most pronounced historical context “named” in the subgroup of political and military commemorative toponymy was the Cossack period (17th–18th centuries), in both the input and output. Such historical periods as Kievan Rus and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were altogether absent from the renaming recommendations, though they figured in the list of place names officially approved. Among other commemorative toponyms (e.g. science, culture, religion, industry, and business) preference among the recommendations was given to the so called “Soviet-favored” personalities, this category closely followed in preference by names of other representatives of the pre-Soviet time. In the approved list, however, the order was just the opposite: pre-Soviet commemorative names ranked first, while Soviet names came in second.

As for the identity dimensions, there were no discrepancies between the input, suggested by the working group, and the output toponymy, produced by the officials. Local history is expressed most vividly in both the renaming suggestions of the commission and in the list of officially authorized place names. When juxtaposed with the identified historical contexts, the identity levels in these toponymic suggestions exhibit an interesting pattern: while the most frequent appeared to be Soviet-related toponymy, including names of non-persecuted political and military figures from the Soviet Union, and “Soviet-favored” personalities, representing other spheres of life, these were only found in the local identity dimension, which means that the commemorated people have significance exclusively at the local level in the city of Kryvyi Rih. At the regional and national levels of identity, there are either names of Soviet-persecuted persons, or names of those who do not have any relation to the Soviet Union as such.

In the political and military group under the national identity dimension, there are such figures as Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, a leader of the 1917–1921 Ukrainian struggle for independence and an outstanding scholar; Ivan Ohienko, a political and public figure of the same historical period; Oleksa Hirnyk, a Ukrainian dissident and Soviet political prisoner known for his self-immolation to protest against the Soviet russification of Ukraine; and Viacheslav Chornovil, a Soviet political prisoner and initiator of Ukraine’s independence in 1991. At the regional identity level, there are two Cossacks—Sydir Bilyi and Kost Hordiienko—who are both commemorated as eighteenth-century atamans of the Zaporizhzhia Sich. Among those personalities representing spheres of life other than war and politics, there are four authors suggested to be commemorated for their national significance: Mykola Hvyliovyi, Vasyl Symonenko, Vasyl Stus, and Oleksandr Oles—their prose and poetry having been either forbidden or neglected during Soviet times. The Georgian-born film director Serhii Paradzhanov is also remembered as a national figure

³ Since there are no exact quantities for each category given in Gnatiuk’s study of official renamings, I do not provide any numerical comparisons between input and output toponyms.

who was persecuted by the Soviets and exiled from Ukraine. Two additional personalities from the pre-Soviet period, who are memorialized in the national identity dimension, are the author of Ukraine's anthem lyrics, Pavlo Chubynskyi, and the Ukrainian culture and education leader Mykola Arkas. Both of them contributed to the Ukrainian history and culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the regional identity level, there is also a natural science scholar and local flora researcher, Yosyp Pachoskyi, and the theatre playwright and director, Pavlo Saksahanskyi. They both worked in the pre-Soviet and early Soviet times.

The pattern in the toponymic suggestions—whereby there is no commemoration of “Soviet-favoured” personalities in the national identity dimension, but instead an abundance of them at the local level—can be explained with data from the questionnaire and in-depth interviews, and their analyses below.

Toponymic ideologies

The socio-onomastic survey, I will focus on in this part of the paper, was carried out in the autumn of 2019. The questionnaire, preceding the in-depth interviews with the naming commission members, was an anonymous online questionnaire to which I received answers from the seven members of the group. A month later I recorded interviews with six of the seven experts on the commission, one of the geographers being unavailable at the time. I will analyze these data using Irvine and Gal's (2000) language ideology theoretical framework, as outlined earlier in section two.

Iconization. As much as certain linguistic features, or even whole languages, can represent individuals, groups, or cultures, certain place names can become indexes of personal and group identities, defining identity through reference, or rather adherence, to a particular historical interpretation. The view of toponym as a reference to history (as opposed to, for example, a spatial reference, or a description of the designated object) is itself an ideological vision characteristic of many post-socialist societies, but absent from some other cultures of the world: for example, see (Pipitone 2019) for ideologies and processes of indigenous place naming in North America. This approach to toponymy, where it functions primarily as a means of commemorating things by applying their proper names to physical objects (rather than producing a name by describing the nature of the object itself), ensures that certain names will become iconic representations of certain historical periods, and the choice of these names in the process of toponymic renaming will be perceived with positive appreciation along with related historical events and figures, thus augmenting desires to identify with them.

This is the attitude towards place names that prevailed among the members of the naming commission that I worked with. In the questionnaire, six of the seven respondents chose to characterize the toponym as an “element of history,” and five agreed that the best kind of toponym is the one that has some “historical association.” Five of the seven experts answered that during their work on the renaming suggestions, they paid most of their attention to commemorative names, while the other two focused on the restoration of historic names. “We can take off strata of history by exploring how renaming occurred

at this or that period of time,” one of the historians said.⁴ Describing the process of renaming and discussions among the group, another commission member said, “[first], we considered a historic name, then we looked at which historical part of the city a street was located in, and then [looked] at a possible commemorative name for it.”

“The most important thing is to rename [places] in such a way as not to offend the memory of the people,” remarked one of the Ukrainian language experts. “Today the function of the toponym is to preserve history and culture,” the other philologist said. “To me it was important to bring back all the historic names,” explained the philosopher. This confirms the shared view of toponymy as symbolizing history where even some of the suggested geographic names were viewed through a historical prism. For instance, the street name *vulytsia Karachunivska* signals that the street is located in the neighborhood called *Karachuny*, and derives its name from this historical toponym. There is presumed to have been a village there which dated back to the end of the 18th century, and was named *Karachunivka* after the family name of its founder—Captain Karachunov (Melnyk 2015: 27).

The name of another street, *vulytsia Dekonska*, also refers to the location in the area of the former estate called *Dekonka*, which derives its name from the family name *Dekonska*. Kateryna Dekonska was the lady who once owned the land. This suggested street name, *vulytsia Dekonska*, repeatedly described in my interviews with the naming commission members, arises as an icon of the pre-Soviet period in the city’s history. Before the 1917 revolution, the major part of today’s Kryvyi Rih and some neighboring villages existed as a number of estates owned by landed gentry, and this memory is still alive among many of the city inhabitants. “I want to say Dekonka instead of Artem Square,” said one of the Ukrainian philologists in the interview.⁵ “Dekonka is the old name ousted by the Soviet renaming,” the philosophy expert said.

Another iconic name representing this pre-Soviet period is Oleksandr Pol—the pioneer of the Kryvyi Rih iron ore mining, who initiated the industrial extraction of the deposits beginning in 1881. The group suggested to commemorate him at four different places in the city: an avenue, a park, a square, and one of the city’s districts. His name was the most frequent personal name on the commission’s list. The square, which had been known as *maidan Artema* was renamed after Oleksandr Pol by the authorities in 2016. However, two years later, in October 2018, the name was changed again to *ploshcha Volodymyra Velykoho* (Volodymyr the Great Square) to commemorate the iconic figure of Kievan Rus, whose monument was erected there in the same year. “[...] Oleksandr Pol Square. It was there that the industrial extraction of the iron ore began in 1881. Now that it’s Volodymyr the Great Square, this is not quite logical,” remarked one of the historians of the commission, emphasizing that their renaming suggestions were not random. He went on to add that, “[my] attitude to Kievan Rus commemorative names is positive, since

⁴ The interviews were originally conducted in Ukrainian and Russian, transcribed and translated into English by myself. The interviewees were then familiarized with the translation, and their approval to publish them was received.

⁵ *Maidan Artema* “Artem Square” used to be the name borne by one of the city’s squares which memorialized “comrade Artem” – the head of the Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Soviet Republic. Artem was a Soviet political and party figure, and used to be widely commemorated on various objects throughout the city of Kryvyi Rih.

it means that we link our [local] history to Kievan Rus too.”⁶ However, “the main question about commemorative names is ‘what do these people have to do with Kryvyi Rih?’” said another.

This idea of needing to have a direct relation to the city was most recurrent in the interviews. It was accurately summarized by a geography expert:

“Renaming is shaping a personalistic image of the native land. When we picked up local place names, we exposed what is *individual* about it [this land].”

This belief of individualizing a toponymic landscape was also expressed by the other experts, as they contrasted it with the previous practice of universalizing place naming and its pervasive Lenin and Karl Marx Streets. This belief also explains the abundance of Soviet period commemorative names at the local identity level. However, these local figures are not perceived as “Soviet-favored” and not at all associated with the Soviet era, but are commemorated for what they did for their native city, for their contribution into its industrial development and social life. An iconic figure of the Soviet time in this local dimension is Hryhorii Hutovskyi, who was the head of the Kryvyi Rih city council between 1979 and 1992. Hutovskyi had been commemorated in the names of several places in Kryvyi Rih, but came within the purview of the decommunization laws in 2016. “Our idea was not to rename Hytovskyi Street because he contributed a lot into the development of the city,” said one of the historians. “A lot was built in the city during Hutovskyi’s time,” further argued one of the Ukrainian language experts.

The Soviet communist past is linked to a range of quite different personalities, the icons here being Lenin and Marx. Once a necessary attribute of any Soviet city, these toponyms have been the first to be wiped out. “We also wanted to remove place names commemorating [Soviet] poets and writers. But those are outside the scope of the decommunization laws,” said one of the historians. “Mayakovsky Street and Gorky Square should have been removed in the first place. Gorky is a [Soviet] emblem, an idol. These should have been removed,” explained the geography expert. He added that “they [the authorities] should have renamed much more places because those names are foreign to this country, they are foreign to this city. We consulted with the Ukrainian Institute for National Memory, but the answer was—‘leave them.’” This opposition of “our own versus foreign” ran through all the interviews. “This practice [of naming places] has to label the space, make it more comprehensible, make it one’s own,” the historian went on. Renaming is “stating the city’s identity. For this city to be *our city*,” said one of the Ukrainian language experts.

When asked about associations they have with Kryvyi Rih, a question aimed at revealing the imagined nature of “the city’s identity”, the commission members named various historical periods ranging from the times of nomads and Cossacks, to the industrialization of the Soviet times. The mention of nomadic tribes, such as Scythians and Sarmatians, was quite frequent in the interviews. This was a reflection of the multi-ethnic identity of Kryvyi Rih. One of the historians said about his associations: “As for me,

⁶ The territory of Kryvyi Rih was never a part of the Kievan Rus medieval state. This area was known as *Dyke pole* ‘Wild Field’ where various nomadic tribes travelled at the time.

I cannot definitely prioritize something... in our suggestions, we defined those separate [ethnic] groups, communities who used to inhabit the Kryvyi Rih area, but were not represented [in its place names]. I mean the nomads: Polovtsians, Scythians, Sarmatians...". He went on to explain that their idea was to designate in the suggested place names those ethnic groups that used to live, and in some cases still do live, on this territory today. An iconic representation of this ethnic variety has become the Roma community, memorialized in the name of Romany Street (*vulytsia Romska*) (also officially endorsed). This is where most of the Roma live in Kryvyi Rih today. "I think it is the only street in Ukraine bearing the Roma name. [In Kryvyi Rih] the Roma people live in Romany Street", said the other historian, adding that, by suggesting this place name, they undertook a reconstruction of the local and national identity, as well as designated in place names all those people who historically inhabited the area notwithstanding their ethnic identity and native language. This belief of a multi-ethnic nature of Ukrainian identity realized in the practice of commemorating a rather marginal social group is again constrained by the "own versus foreign" dichotomy, which is evident in the emphasis on commemorating those groups who "historically inhabited this area". As such, they are considered to belong to the city and country—and consequently, are seen as "our own".

Fractal recursivity. Under this view, communist place names are iconically linked to foreignness and are thus opposed to those which explicate the local topography, and commemorate people who have a relation to the city, the region, and Ukraine as a whole. As seen in Table 1, there is no commemoration of "Soviet-favored" personalities at the regional and national identity levels, which testifies to the perceived foreignness of this period of time. Yet, this is not the only point of opposition in the "toponymy-as-identity" ideological framework. The dichotomizing process that was involved in the intergroup opposition (i.e. communist vs non-communist place names) is projected inward onto intragroup relations, thereby creating subcategories within the group of non-communist place names. The basis for further partitioning is a similar iconization of certain toponyms as foreign—which, in their turn, are contrasted with those seen as belonging to the place.

Among the identified historical strata expressed in the officially approved toponymy (Gnatiuk 2018: 124), there are two periods not articulated in the toponymic recommendations I examined. These are Kievan Rus and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Though absent from the list produced by the working group, these respective toponyms were included in my questionnaire as variants of renaming that the group members could choose from. For each of the eight decommunized place names, there were given eight different naming suggestions. Of these, the only case in which commemoration of Kievan Rus was chosen was the name *ploshcha Volodymyra Velykoho*, selected for the abovementioned Artem Square. There was not a single mention of variants relating to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, or the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.

Although positively appreciated by the history experts, Kievan Rus and its iconic figures were not mentioned in any answers to my question about historical associations that the working group members had with Kryvyi Rih. The various periods referred to were nomadic tribes, Cossacks, pre-Soviet industrial history, and Soviet-era

industrialization. Commemorating the historical period of Kievan Rus, a trend popular among the city's officials, was not accepted eagerly by the group experts, since respective toponymy was seen as "abstract," "trivial and banal," and not related to the city of Kryvyi Rih. "What does Volodymyr the Great have to do with Kryvyi Rih?" asked one of the Ukrainian philologists. "To use similar names in all [Ukrainian] cities, like those of Kievan Rus personalities, means they [those names] will be devoid of local specifics, and will soon become worn, as it's used to be with Karl Marx Street before. What does Karl Marx have to do with Kryvyi Rih?" explained the philosophy expert, emphasizing the individualization belief again.

The same attitude was expressed towards commemoration of Ukrainian Insurgent Army and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, iconized in such figures as Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych. It was neatly articulated by the geography expert in the following statement:

"We agreed upon one thing from the very start—no disputable issues... moreover, Stepan Bandera has nothing to do with the development of our region."

This attitude was reiterated in other interviews. "We didn't suggest Bandera Street, since we knew it might not be accepted," said one of the linguists. These arguments, given by the working group members, suggest that the intergroup opposition of "our own vs foreign" is reproduced within the category of non-communist place names, which are also divided into "foreign" and "our own."

Erasure. In case of toponymic ideology, erasure is the process in which some historical periods are rendered invisible. "Awkward" historical facts, and those inconsistent with a particular identity, will either be unobserved or erased from the toponymic landscape. This is a common goal of the process of renaming. By remembering certain events and figures, and simultaneously forgetting others, it is possible to concentrate on those features of identity formation that shape our particular definition of the self, as contrasted with some imagined "Other." As in the case of language ideologies, the Other is often imagined as homogeneous, essentialized, and simplified (Irvine & Gal 2000: 39).

The process of erasure can be identified in the following explanation of the purpose of the decommunization renaming. An explanation is offered by the expert in philosophy and logic:

"It is necessary to eradicate all the remains of the Soviet past from Ukraine. Otherwise, it will hang as dead weight. [...] Our young people should forget about this Lenin and never ask who he was. In such a case, Ukraine has good prospects. This [nostalgia] is what hampers our progress. It means that we are not oriented at Europe, but at some kind of obsolete social structure. This is particularly important for Ukraine, for these post-Soviet countries. We see that it [eradication of the Soviet past] has not occurred in Russia. Not only has it not occurred in Russia, but, on the contrary, it [the Soviet past] is being cherished, extended there. And we see that this is a dead end. [...] If we continued to strive for Europe with the old names and the old monuments, they would have dragged us back. While today's situation [after the renaming] is already taken as natural."

This thesis on forgetting the Soviet past was reiterated in responses to the questionnaire, especially when asked about the general importance of the renaming: “communism must be relegated to oblivion,” “the city has to acquire a new identity, so that the place names could be associated with this particular city,” “former names are either too abstract or do not accord with Ukrainian reality.” The idea also surfaced in the interviews. “The purpose of the renaming was to change the city’s identity. [...] We had to change this communist city, which, judging by its street names, dated back to 1934, into an ancient city that arose on the spot of a Cossack settlement in the 17th century... we wanted to connect with a great history, with a Ukrainian history, with Cossacks, with the history of Ukraine as a whole. [...] Renaming is a symbolic parting with our past for good,” said one of the historians. “Very often opponents of the renaming would put forward an argument: ‘This is history.’ But we used to have Hitler Street, Hitler Strasse. And it was renamed,” said another. “People have inhabited this place since very early times. It was not just Wild Field. There were some settlements here...” one of the linguists suggested, adding that the city’s history could be drawn even to pre-Cossack times.

An important point in this narrative is that this “great Ukrainian history” is not imagined to be overly political and military. Out of seventy-seven commemorative toponyms, only fifteen memorialize people who were somehow concerned with political and military activities at various periods of time. These include Cossacks, such as Petro Kalnyshevskiy, who initiated the construction of the post road passing via the territory of today’s Kryvyi Rih; political figures involved in the 1917–1921 Ukrainian struggle for independence, such as Mykhailo Hrushevskiy and Panas Fedenko; military men defending the city during occupation in World War II, such as Ivan Bedianko, the commander of a local partisan group; as well as those who died in the current Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, such as General Radiievskiy, whose former regiment is located in Kryvyi Rih. Notwithstanding the little attention paid to such aspects as war and politics, this constructed Ukrainian history is, nevertheless, explicitly masculine. In the group of commemorative toponymies, there are only two names belonging to women remembered for their significance at the city’s local scale. The names are of musician and author of the city’s anthem, Iryna Shevchenko, and local newspaper journalist and World War II veteran, Tetiana Voronova.

This gendered aspect was explained by the commission members in quantitative terms of commemorating people’s direct contributions to the city’s and country’s histories: “It was namely their contribution, rather than gender, that was accounted for”. The paucity of political place names is caused by the perceived instability of an official state ideology and memory politics. “By contrast to science and art, political values are changeable,” explained the philosophy expert, who also expressed hope that a small number of political toponyms would help to prevent the chance of future renaming. “There should be more local place names, and then the chance of a new renaming is smaller,” said the geography expert, who insisted on including more topographical names in the suggested list. “This must be the final renaming. These place names should be of such a kind as not to ever be changed,” emphasized one of the experts in history. He also accounted for the very little number of commemorative names referring to contemporary Ukrainian history. “As in the case with the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, let’s wait

for some years and then figure out exactly whose names we should commemorate,” he said. This perceived changeability of Ukraine’s present, and particularly its ideological doctrine, is the reason why political place names so rarely show up in the new toponymic landscape, and that political history is thus largely unobserved and unattended to in this way.

Conclusion

This study presents an original approach to capturing a “snapshot” of the decommunization process, embodied in the renaming of toponymic cityscape. While previous research concentrated on the officially approved lists of toponyms, this study examines a preceding stage in the process—the renaming recommendations authored by a local initiative group. Besides reviewing and comparing them with the officially endorsed place names, this research offers a deeply contextualized examination of the motives behind the group’s renaming suggestions. From a methodological point of view, the study combines results from a questionnaire and in-depth interviews, while also taking a socio-onomastic approach to the problem of revealing the general tendencies for naming motives, which allows us to gain an insight into how certain place names are perceived. The framework of toponymic ideologies applied in the interpretation of these motives makes it possible to go beyond defining main regional strategies of renaming urban toponymy, and give account of the reasons why these particular strategies are preferred at a local level.

Analyses of the data show that renaming arises as a reconsideration and reconstruction of national identity, where history functions as an integral structural part. This toponymic ideology brings about the iconization of certain historical periods, such as Cossack times, 1917–1921 Ukrainian struggle for independence, and pre-Soviet and Soviet industrial growth—all of which are represented as commemorative, through association with specific personal and collective names. The multi-ethnic character of Ukrainian identity is iconized in the toponymic designation of the Roma minority, while this iconization is constrained by the major renaming ideology of belonging to the place.

The leading principle being “communist vs non-communist” opposition, the naming process redefines contemporary Ukrainian identity on the “non-communist” side, which evolves out of a general projection of the “our own vs foreign” dichotomy. Nonetheless, this logic also leads to the neglect in the renaming process of such historical periods as those of Kievan Rus and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. These periods go unrecognized, and the communist period is erased altogether. Ukraine’s political and military history is also largely unobserved, due to the perceived changeability of political values and the current time as a whole. Women’s history is also unaccounted for, hardly represented at all at the city’s local level. The Soviet-related toponymy, which characterizes local identity, is not associated with communist ideology—and therefore, is perceived in Kryvyi Rih to be “our own.”

As shown by previous studies, Ukraine’s decommunization renaming shares some common trends with other post-socialist European countries. The city of Kryvyi Rih is not

an exception here. This study also suggests that appeals to the pre-Soviet era, as well as parts of the Soviet history of this particular city, arise as a result of an unclear nature of more recent historical events, and the general transience of any official state ideology. The decrease of political and military place names in favor of toponymy exhibiting local topographical features, as well as peculiarities of local industry and culture, can be seen as they are called forth by a desire among renaming commission members to avoid any future renaming situations. The overall dominance of the local toponymy testifies to a growing ideology of individualization (as opposed to previous universalization) in the current process of identity formation we see across Ukraine.

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