DOI: 10.15201/hungeobull.72.3.3 Hungarian Geographical Bulletin **72** 2023 (3) 239–256.

From geopolitical fault-line to frontline city: changing attitudes to memory politics in Kharkiv under the Russo-Ukrainian war

Oleksiy GNATIUK[1] and Mykola HOMANYUK[2]

Abstract

The article investigates changing attitudes to memory politics in Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. In February 2022, with the outbreak of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, this geopolitical fault-line city became a frontline city with significant potential outcomes for urban identity and local geopolitical preferences, including attitudes to the national memory politics. The research is based on the comparative analysis of the two surveys among residents of Kharkiv, conducted in spring-summer 2018 and in autumn 2022 – before and after the full-scale war. The results of the surveys are analysed by means of descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression. Additionally, two focus groups were held in order to receive additional justification when interpreting the results of the survey. The research shows that the attitudes to Ukrainian nation-centric memory narrative, including both decommunisation and decolonisation, have significantly improved. Nevertheless, public attitudes to the memory politics in the frontline city are highly reflexive in nature and deeply embedded in the context of the ongoing war. The geopolitical divide, which existed before the war, has largely transformed into a cultural one, namely heterogeneity of attitudes to the Russian cultural heritage in the city. This softened albeit still existing divide has, to some extent, materialised in physical space and runs between the ardent supporters of decommunisation and decolonisation that massively fled from the atrocities of the war and their opponents who at most choose (or were obliged) to stay in the front-line city. The study reveals that military conflicts may either activate hidden geopolitical divides in geopolitical fault-line cities or contribute to their transformation or even disappearance.

Keywords: memory politics, geopolitical fault-line city, decommunisation, decolonisation, Russo-Ukrainian war, Kharkiv

Received February 2023, accepted June 2023.

Introduction

For decades after Ukraine's declared independence in 1991, and especially after the Orange Revolution in 2004, the largest cities of south-eastern Ukraine were divided in terms of conflicting geopolitical orientations and identities: pro-western/pro-European and pro-Russian/pro-Soviet. Such cities are typical geopolitical fault-line cities (Gentile, M. 2019; Zorko, M. and Novak, N. 2019): their inhabitants, living in the same neighbourhoods and walking the same streets, espouse controversial and conflicting geopolitical attitudes and narratives, correlating with ethnic or language identities only partially (Kulyk, V. 2011, 2019; Portnov, A. 2015; Kuzio, T. 2019). Even after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian hybrid warfare in 2014, these cities still hosted significant non-pro-Western contingents, if not outright pro-Russian, holding views incompatible with European vision for Ukraine (Gentile, M. 2020a,b). The sharpened tensions be-

[1] Department of Economic and Social Geography, Faculty of Geography, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. 64/13 Volodymyrska Street, 01601, Kyiv, Ukraine. oleksii.gnatiuk@knu.ua

[2] Department of Geography and Ecology, Faculty of Biology, Geography and Ecology, Kherson State University. 27 Universytetska Street, 73003, Kherson, Ukraine. E-mail: mgomanyuk@ksu.ks.ua

tween contradictory geopolitical narratives, imposed by both the Ukrainian government and by the Kremlin propaganda, and then interpreted through the lens of local urban identity, were reflected, *inter alia*, in ambiguous, incoherent, and chaotic local policies of identity and commemoration. In particular, strong pro-Soviet sentiments and alienation from the newly-created Ukrainian national narrative in geopolitically divided cities of the country manifested in predominantly negative attitudes to the national policy of decommunisation (Musiyezdov, O. 2022), and in specific implementation of this policy, namely pursuing highest possible depoliticisation and deideologisation of the urban symbolic landscape (Gnatiuk, O. 2018; Kudriavtseva, N. 2020; Kutsenko, D. 2020).

The outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022 opened a fundamentally new page in the life of Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line cities within the government-controlled territory – a page of urbicide, which is commonly understood as violent politics towards buildings and other elements of urban material environments (Coward, M. 2009). Some of these cities, like Mariupol, were significantly damaged by the Russian military forces, while others, like Kharkiv, turned into front-line cities suffering from constant shelling and, thus, also experiencing tangible destruction. Also, there are rear cities such as Dnipro, nevertheless regularly wounded by missile attacks. Notably, missiles, air bombs, shells, hardships and innocent deaths made no difference for supporters of the European choice and those nostalgic for the Soviet era, and even those pro-Russian adherents who secretly or openly called "Putin, come!" just before the invasion, and equally targeted symbolically significant urban places regardless of geopolitical narrative(s) inscribed to them by the residents.

In this way, military atrocities could lead to just another rethinking of geopolitical attitudes by the inhabitants of Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line cities; it is known that hybrid Russo-Ukrainian conflict unleashed in 2014 has induced transformation of urban identity in Mariupol (Gnatiuk, O. *et al.* 2022). In particular, one could expect for tangible pro-Western or, at least, anti-Russian breakthrough in their hearts and minds. The attitudes to memory politics, including continuing decommunisation and a new trend of decolonisation (generally equated to de-Russification and emerging exactly as an answer to the Russian aggression) can be considered as a vivid marker of such a hypothesised shift. If confirmed, such a shift may be interpreted as a start of disappearance of a geopolitical divide in such cities as one of the possible ways of their post-war evolution. Noteworthy, sociopolitical trajectories of Ukrainian geopolitically divided cities are of pivotal importance not only for the future of Ukrainian national-state building and opposing Russian geopolitical projects (Minakov, M. 2017; Kuzio, T. 2019; Kravchenko, V. and Musiyezdov, O. 2020), but also for the entire European and the global geopolitical order (Gentile, M. 2017).

Kharkiv (population ca. 1.4 million) is the second largest Ukrainian city, located in the eastern part of the country, in the direct proximity to the Russian border (app. 30 km). The city belongs to the Ukraine's largest, most significant and diversified industrial, scientific, and cultural centres, hosting highly skilled elite of engineers and specialists. Kharkiv's borderland status appeared to be one of the city's most stable components, emerging in public life in times of geopolitical cataclysms and becoming less visible in times of internal stability (Kravchenko, V. 2020). Geographical location of Kharkiv, together with its human and economic potentials, make it an important player in the process of national re-identification and geopolitical reconfiguration of the purely defined Ukrainian-Russian borderland (Zhurzhenko, T. 2016; Kravchenko, V. and Musiyezdov, O. 2020), which, in turn, might make the eastern border of Europe more visible (Schmidtke, O. and Yekelchyk, S. 2008). In this paper, focusing on a city of Kharkiv, we explore changing attitudes to memory politics in Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line city under the hot phase of the war.

Comparing the results of two surveys among city residents in spring-summer 2018 and in autumn 2022, we seek to reveal the change of public attitudes among Kharkivites to decommunisation and decolonisation as principal elements of the contemporary Ukrainian nation-centric memory politics. Employing binary logistic regression, we search for predictors of the individual's support for decommunisation/decolonisation.

The rest of the paper is structured in following way. We start with explanation of national context of decommunisation and decolonisation policies in Ukraine with specific focus on their implementation and perception in geopolitical fault-line cities. The following section contains a detailed contextual characteristic of Kharkiv as a geopolitical fault-line city and local context of memory politics. After that, the data and methods are outlined. In the next section we are presenting and discussing empirical results of the study. The paper ends with concluding remarks summarizing the main findings.

Memory politics in Ukraine and geopolitical fault-line cities

The memory politics in post-Soviet Ukraine until the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 was deeply contradictory and oscillating between competing ideologically charged narratives of the past (Shevel, O. 2011; Fedinec, C. and Csernicsko, I. 2017). As Portnov, A. (2013) puts it, "The search for a strategy that would legitimise the new independent Ukraine and its post-Soviet elite without provoking national, linguistic and/or religious conflict, while all time with an eye to Russia, was all about improvisation". The vector of memory politics swings along with presidential cycles from a significant pluralism of memory politics strategies (1994–2005) to a newly born Ukraine-centric narrative (2005–2009) and to a one more turn to rather ambivalent politics with combining ethnic symbolism with nostalgia for Soviet legacy (2010–2014) (Ivanenko, V. and Kryvoshein, V. 2022). This situational pluralism of memory "functioned not so much as a space for dialogue, but rather as a collision of different, closed, and quite aggressive narratives that exist because they cannot destroy their competitors" (Portnov, A. 2013), and competing interest groups in Ukrainian politics have long manipulated with these divisive historical narratives with the purpose of electoral mobilisation (Zhurzhenko, T. 2022).

Due to different historical backgrounds of the different parts of the country, the divide between controversial and hardly irreconcilable Ukraine-centric and pro-Soviet/pro-Russian narratives had its regional dimension, expressed in well-known formula "two Ukraines" (a nationally-conscious (western) Ukraine and a pro-Russian "creole" eastern Ukraine), exploited and artificially enhanced by both pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine and Russian propaganda (Portnov, A. 2013; Fedinec, C. and Csernicsko, I. 2017; Kuzio, T. 2019). This divide can be clearly traced in regional variation of attitudes to the Soviet symbolic legacy. In particular, in western Ukraine, almost all street names related to the communist regime were erased already in early 1990s, in central Ukraine the renaming was limited and related only to the central parts of cities, and in southern and eastern Ukraine, with some exceptions, the renaming of streets practically did not occur, and the communist toponymy was preserved almost entirely (Gnatiuk, O. 2018). Local political elites in geopolitical fault-line cities of the south-eastern Ukraine cultivated Soviet version of Ukrainian history with clear pro-Russian/pro-Soviet sentiments. In line with this narrative, particularly negative emotional response accompanied three names: Hetman Ivan Mazepa, who switched from the Russians to the Swedes in 1708 in the Great Northern War, Symon Petliura, one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Revolution in 1917–1921, and Stepan Bandera, a leader of the radical wing of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists – the archetypical antiheroes of imperial and Soviet version of the Ukrainian past (Portnov, A. 2013).

The Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014 and the subsequent Russian hybrid aggression contributed to the de-legitimation of the Soviet-nostalgic narrative (Zhurzhenko, T. 2022). Moreover, the issue of Soviet and Russian legacy began to be considered important as an element of national security (Fedinec, C. and Csernicsko, I. 2017). On 9 April 2015, Ukrainian Parliament passed the Law "On Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols", giving decommunisation the status of a state politics. The Law regulated the obligatory change of names referring to the post-communist legacy, including geographical names, monuments, and other communist memorabilia. The government's intentions to finally get rid of the traces of the communist past were based on severe sanctions for non-compliance or breaking the law in this regard. Principal responsibility for the implementation of the Law was assigned to the local governments (Kuczabski, A. and Boychuk, A. 2020).

This obligatory decommunisation has been at large brought to life and dramatically changed symbolic landscape of Ukraine. Nevertheless, decommunisation in Ukraine was not received by society in an unambiguously positive way for both ideological and legal reasons interfering with issues of culture and ethnicity (Fedinec, C. and Csernicsko, I. 2017; Kuczabski, A. and Boychuk, A. 2020; Zhurzhenko, T. 2022). The geopolitically divided cities of the south-eastern Ukraine were among the most dissatisfied communities, as they were obliged to redefine their local identity and memory, which were not always compatible with a national narrative for commemoration (cf. Różycki, B. (2017) for decommunisation in Poland). Sociological polls conducted in 2016–2020 showed notable regional differences in attitude to decommunisation with support in the western regions almost twice higher than in the eastern regions (Marples, D. 2018; Musiyezdov, O. 2022). Some of the local governments, which were responsible for implementation of decommunisation laws and, thus, could influence the specific outcome at the local level, have tried unsuccessfully to boycott, avoid or implement decommunisation only formally and without enthusiasm (Kuczabski, A. and Boychuk, A. 2020). As Kovalov, M. (2022) points out, the interactions of subnational veto players involved in the renaming process and the work of local toponymic commissions help to understand compliance and opposition to decommunisation. The authorities and regional political elites often manipulated the provisions on decommunisation to address their tactical challenges (Kutsenko, D. 2020). In particular, local political elites generally chose a strategy of maintaining political neutrality when choosing new names, including avoiding commemorating "builders of Ukrainian independence" (see Marples, D. 2018), and giving preference to Kievan Rus and Cossack legacy as the most equally well acceptable by all Ukrainians regardless of ideology and electoral preferences, or even appealing to the legacy of the Russian imperial era or the same Soviet period (Gnatiuk, O. 2018). Similarly, the decrease of political and military place names in favour of toponymy exhibiting local topographical features, as well as peculiarities of local industry and culture, can be interpreted as a desire among renaming commission members to lower the degree of ideologisation and avoid any future renaming situations (Kudriavtseva, N. 2020). However, it should be noted that restoration of pre-socialist commonly used names and introduction of non-commemorative neutral names as dominant renaming strategies sometimes occur in relatively small post-socialist cities that hardly can be defined as geopolitically divided, e.g., Banská Bystrica (Bitušíková, A. 2022).

The full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022 has called into being a new rethinking of memory politics coming under the flag of decolonisation, generally understood as de-Russification – elimination of Russian cultural symbols from the symbolic space of the country, correcting in this way existing

imbalances between Ukrainian and Russian cultural markers (see, e.g., Gnatiuk, O. and Melnychuk, A. (2020)) and making room for commemoration of national Ukrainian heroes, including builders and defenders of the Ukrainian state. Notably, there are attempts to conceptualise ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war as a war of decolonisation (Barkawi, T. 2022). From the very beginning decolonisation was largely bottom-up and spontaneously emerging process, which can be considered as a measure of post-colonial transitional justice and simultaneously symbolic rebound to Russia in response of military invasion. In April 2022, more than 65 percent of Ukrainians supported changing street names associated with Russia or the USSR, and 71 percent supported dismantling monuments associated with Russia (Rating Sociological Group, 2022). Although de-Russification covered almost all government-controlled territories of Ukraine, there is a still remarkable contrast between quickly advancing west and the centre of the country and lagging south-east (Gnatiuk, O. and Melnychuk, A. 2023).

Kharkiv as a geopolitical fault-line city and local context of memory politics

Since the middle of the 17th century, Kharkiv became the most influential component of the historical Ukrainian-Russian borderland with its porous boundaries and elusive or hybrid identities, which has been a subject of symbolic and political reconfiguration and reinterpretation (Kravchenko, V. 2020). During its steady progressive development, Kharkiv became a modern, multi-ethnic, and culturally diverse city. The city was a capital of a historical region Sloboda Ukraine and an important administrative centre under the Russian Empire in the 19th century. Later, it served as a capital of the short-lived Soviet Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic (1917–1918), and functioned as a capital of Soviet Ukraine (1919–1934), after which it was replaced by Kyiv (Kravchenko, V. and Musiyezdov, O. 2020). In Soviet times, Kharkiv developed into a major industrial, educational, and scientific centre, where Russian functioned as the main language of communication, culture, and science (Musiyezdov, O. 2009; Pletnyova, G. 2020).

In independent Ukraine, Kharkiv largely remained international and cosmopolitan city without the strong predominance of any national culture – both Ukrainian and Russian, as well as acute tensions between them (Musiyezdov, O. 2009; Filippova, O. and Giuliano, E. 2017). In 2001, according to the last all-Ukrainian population census, the major ethnic groups in Kharkiv were Ukrainians (62.8%) and Russians (33.2%), followed by a tiny minority of Jews (0.7%). In the same year, 65.9 percent and 31.8 percent of Kharkivites indicated Russian and Ukrainian as their native languages, respectively. However, in Ukraine, identification in terms of a native language does not strongly correlate with everyday linguistic practices. According to 2018 survey (own data), 98.5 percent of respondents chose to be asked in Russian and only 1.5 percent percent in Ukrainian; as a language spoken at home, 88.6 percent indicated Russian, 5.4 percent Surzhyk (mix of Russian and Ukrainian), 3.3 percent both Russian and Ukrainian, and only 1.8 percent – only Ukrainian. In 2013, five years before, the figures were merely the same: 87.5, 5.6, 4.9, and 1.1 percent, respectively. At the same time, in 2018, 88.5 percent of respondents felt Ukrainian and 27.6 percent felt Russian. According to 2022 survey (own data), before the full-scale Russian invasion, 66.8 percent of Kharkivites spoke Russian, 29.9 percent – both Ukrainian and Russian, and 3.3 percent – only Ukrainian, while in November 2022 these figures, where 34.8, 47.7, and 17.4 percent, respectively.

The majority of Kharkivites opposed the imposition of Ukrainian national ideology being dissatisfied with its interpretation of Kharkiv as "the one of the Russified cities of Eastern Ukraine", inclining instead to the idea of the "uniqueness" and "self-sufficiency" of Kharkiv (Musiyezdov, O. 2009). The city maintained close economic links

with Russia, while at the same time boasting a booming Western-oriented information technology industry. Kharkivites, in their majority, traditionally voted for pro-Russian political parties and has been largely indifferent to the Ukrainian pro-Western movements (Pletnyova, G. 2020). The concept of Kharkiv as a "First [Ukrainian] Capital", as well as the centre of industry and science, which shaped largely during the Soviet era, remains of crucial importance for contemporary urban identity (Musiyezdov, O. 2020). Not surprisingly, Kharkiv's urban toponymic space has not changed much in 1991–2014 because local authorities, as well as local citizens, did not consider the Soviet monuments and toponyms as a strange marker of occupation or coloniser (Kutsenko, D. 2020). Simultaneously, over time, the Soviet monuments and the Soviet names of urban objects lost their "semantic sense" and became almost invisible for locals (Gaidai, O. *et al.* 2018).

In 2014, Kharkiv was a site of strong protests against the Euromaidan and subsequent Revolution of Dignity that unfolded in Kyiv. The protests in the city were dangerous for the Ukrainian state because of a serious Russian-led attempt at creating a "Kharkiv People's Republic". However, unlike the neighbouring Donetsk and Luhansk regions, this attempt was unsuccessful due to the more active pro-Ukrainian community, decisive action of the Ukrainian Special Forces, as well as the actions of the local political and economic elites (Stebelsky, I. 2018; Buckholz, Q. 2019; Nitsova, S. 2021). During the Russo-Ukrainian hybrid warfare, Kharkiv became important logistical, medicine and military centre that accepted large numbers of internally displaced persons from the war-affected Luhansk and Donetsk regions, as well as military hospitals for wounded soldiers (Musiyezdov, O. 2022).

However, the same as after the Orange Revolution in 2004 (Zhurzhenko, T. 2011), Kharkiv once again became an arena of multiple colliding and contested geopolitical and ethno-national narratives, contributing to the activation of the semi-hidden fault-line between the pro-European and pro-Russian fractions (Zhurzhenko, T. 2015; Filippova, O. and Giuliano, E. 2017; Stebelsky, I. 2018; Malykhina, S. 2020). According to the 2017 survey's results, in view of their strong attachment to locality and region, Kharkivites tended to be particularly critical of the post-Euromaidan policies and remain ambivalent in their attitudes toward the Ukrainian state and nation (Kulyk, V. 2016). At the same time, it was demonstrated empirically that opposition to the Western geopolitical vector in Kharkiv did not necessarily entail support for Russia, and that large number of Kharkivites did not closely link the loyalty to Ukraine as an independent state to neither Europe nor Russia; instead, growing numbers of citizens did not want to make a choice between Russia and the EU (Filippova, O. and Giuliano, E. 2017).

The conflict of geopolitical narratives in Kharkiv was evidenced not only by the protests and rallies, but also by the ambiguous and contradictory implementation of the national decommunisation policy, including the most vivid and demonstrative example of dismantling of Marshal Zhukov's monument and renaming Marshal Zhukov Avenue (Kutsenko, D. 2020; Malykhina, S. 2020; Zhurzhenko, T. 2015). The public attitudes to decommunisation in Kharkiv (almost 270 streets, 7 districts and 6 metro stations were renamed in 2015–2016) were mostly negative and, notably, much more negative than in Dnipro, the other large Ukrainian geopolitically divided city in the centre-eastern Ukraine (Musiyezdov, O. 2022). At the same time, minority of community activists declared an active war on the communist legacy in Kharkiv. For instance, in April 2015, a group of activists single-handedly demolished the monument to Bolshevik leader Nikolai Rudnev and renamed the square around to *Maidan Nebesnoji Sotni* [Heavenly Hundred Square]. Also, in 2019, public activists dismantled the monument to Marshal Zhukov without any authorisation from the city administration. The (re)naming of toponymy under decommunisation in Kharkiv

revealed polycentricity and, to certain extent, chaotic functioning of local policies of commemoration and politicisation, resulting in heterogeneity of the newly emerged toponymic landscape both in terms of renaming techniques and in terms of memory/amnesia policies (Golikov, A. 2020).

Nevertheless, Kharkiv could not escape the wave of public demands for the decolonisation of the symbolic space, which swept the country with the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion. In March 2022, an open letter was published by local journalists to the Mayor with a request to change urban toponyms related to the Russian and Soviet geographical and cultural context. The author of the letter argued for the need to decolonise the symbolic space of the city by the fact that "... war is everywhere, including on the information front. Kharkiv is burning, and this fire turns to ashes everything somehow connecting the city with Russification and Sovietism. For sure, Kharkiv will never, even in someone's sick imagination, be either a 'Russian' or a 'Soviet' city" (Suspilne Novyny, 2022a). In April 2022, responding to this open letter, the Mayor said that "… in a situation of a war unleashed against us, toponyms related to the Russian Federation should disappear from the map of Kharkiv ... ... I am sure that the defenders of Kharkiv and Ukraine should be immortalised on the map of our city … … I am sure that the new street names will always remind us and our children of what Ukraine has done and what contribution Kharkiv made to the struggle for our honour and dignity, for the independence of the country, for the right of the Ukrainian people to exist" (Suspilne Novyny, 2022b). Later, the city administration began collecting proposals for renaming streets associated with Russia. On 11 May 2021, three streets and a district with names associated with Russia were renamed by the city council: *Moskovskyi Prospekt* [Moscow Avenue] became *Prospekt Heroiiv Harkova* [Heroes of Kharkiv Avenue], *Bilhorodske shose* [Belgorod Highway] became *Kharkivske shose* [Kharkiv Highway], *Bilhorodskyi uzviz* [Belgorod Descent] became *vulytsia Heroiv Riatuvalnykiv* [Heroic Rescuers Street], and *Moskovskyi Raion* [Moscow District] became *Saltivskyi Raion* [Saltivka District, after the largest mass housing estate in Kharkiv] (Suspilne Novyny, 2022c). In July 2022, the Kharkiv toponymic group, which included representatives of the public, published proposals for the de-Russification of Kharkiv toponymy, emphasizing the need to return a number of historical names, some of which are unique to Kharkiv and are not present in other cities of Ukraine (Suspilne Novyny, 2022d). However, no other decisions regarding decommunisation were adopted during 2022, making the decolonisation in Kharkiv quite sluggish compared not only to the cities of the western and central parts of the Ukraine, but to some other geopolitically divided cities such as Kryvyi Rih and Dnipro, where 183 and 77 toponyms respectively have been renamed in 2022. In this way, Kharkiv remains the city with the largest number of street names somehow related to Russia – more than 500, according to the expert estimations (Kharkiv Today, 2022). At the time of preparing the paper, it became known that about 20 more streets are expected to be renamed by the city council.

In 2022–2023, a lot of public initiatives and actions related to the symbolic space occurred in Kharkiv. They include, first of all, the arbitrary demolition of monuments and pressure on the city authorities with such proposals. For instance, a list of demolished monuments includes those to Soviet Marshal Zhukov (on 17 April 2022), Alexander Nevsky (on 19 May 2022), and Soviet writer Alexander Ostrovsky (5 January 2023). On 9 November 2022, the city authorities, following an appeal by Konstiantyn Nemichev, the commander of the Kraken Special Unit, dismantled monument to Alexander Pushkin. In the field of street renaming, the most active position was taken by the Kharkiv Toponymic Group headed by Maria Takhtaulova, an employee of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. The group proposed a complete de-Russification

and de-Sovietisation of the city's streets. The Department of Toponymy of the Kharkiv City Council received dozens of letters from public organizations, institutions and national cultural societies with proposals to commemorate prominent Kharkiv residents and fallen heroes via street naming. Artists also joined the process: the famous modern Ukrainian writer Serhii Zhadan took a selfie against the background of the Pushkin monument "without hinting at anything", while the artist Hamlet Zinkovskyi made a series of graffiti on Pushkin Street with the proposed new name – British Street.

Data and methods

The research is based on the two surveys among residents of Kharkiv, conducted with different purposes and methodology, but nevertheless allowing comparative analysis. The first survey (n = 1,258, aged 18+) was held in 2018, i.e. during the hybrid Russo-Ukrainian military conflict. The data were collected through personal interviews by the Kyiv-based Centre for Social Indicators (CSI). The sample relies on a household-based sampling frame (only one person was selected within each household). The second survey was conducted by Kharkiv-based New Image Marketing Group in November 2022 (n = 914, aged 18+) partly in face-to-face technology at the place of residence (76%), and partly remotely with those residents who are temporarily outside the city (24%) (ratio of people who moved and left was determined according to the data from the city administration). The face-to-face survey employed a combined route sample with a probability selection of starting addresses and with a quota selection based on the sex-age distribution of respondents in households. The remote survey used quota selection was based on an online panel.

To assess the attitudes of Kharkivites to the decolonisation in Kharkiv in 2022, we used a set of the 2022 survey questions with regard of: (1) general support to renaming streets in Kharkiv, (2) attitudes to changing specific categories of urban place names, as well as concrete urban place names, and (3) street names that should definitely disappear and should definitely emerge on the city map. To evaluate the shift in attitudes to decommunisation and decolonisation politics in Kharkiv, we compared the answers to the similar questions in the 2018 and 2022 surveys. The fact that questionnaires of 2018 and 2022 used different sets of questions constitutes the main methodological problem of this part of research and prompted to cautious conclusions.

Then, we employed binary logistic regression in order to determine the predictors of positive/negative individual attitudes to decommunisation/decolonisation in 2018 and in 2022. Regression models were built for the following dependent variables (DV):

For 2018 survey: DV1: Support for renaming streets with Soviet names in Kharkiv; DV2: Support for renaming *Dzerzhynskyi District* [after Felix Dzerzhinsky, creator of the Soviet secret police and one of the Red Terror architects] to *Shevchenkivskyi District* [after Taras Shevchenko, the greatest Ukrainian poet and painter]; DV3: Renaming of the *Radianska* [Soviet] metro station to *Maidan Konstytutsiji* [Constitution Square].

For 2022 survey: DV1: Support for further renaming streets in Kharkiv; DV2: Support for dismantling the monument to Marshal Zhukov [Marshal of the Soviet Union, Chief of the General Staff, Minister of Defence, member of the Presidium of the Communist Party]; DV3: Support for dismantling the monument to Alexander Pushkin [Russian poet, playwright, and novelist, considered by many to be the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature].

Our independent variables, the same for three regression models, were the following:

(1): Sex: male (ref. female) as a standard demographic control;

(2): Age: 30–59; 60+ (ref. 18–29) as a standard demographic control, although it was suspected, based on previous studies (see Marples, D. 2018; Musiyezdov, O. 2022) that older age cohorts will show more negative attitudes to decommunisation and decolonisation;

(3): Language of communication used before the full-scale war: only Ukrainian; only Russian (ref. both Ukrainian and Russian): – to test the hypothesis that assessment of decolonisation correlates with individual linguistic preferences;

(4): Support for EU and/or NATO ascension: yes (ref. no) – to test the hypothesis that assessment of decolonisation correlates with individual geopolitical preferences;

(5): Education: higher education (ref. other) – as it was know from the previous studies that better education is related to higher support for decommunisation (only for 2018 survey);

(6): Place of location: refugees abroad; internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine (ref. Kharkiv) – to test the hypothesis that assessment of decolonisation depends on individual's proximity to the war-affected city (only for 2022 survey).

Additionally, on 30 October 2022, two online focus groups were held with 18 Kharkiv residents (8 female, 10 male), average age 40, age range from 19 to 65 years, representing different social strata, as well as people who stay in Kharkiv or temporarily left the city. The results of focus groups were used as additional justification when interpreting the results of the survey.

Results

Changing attitudes to nation-centric memory politics in the frontline city

In 2018, only 12.8 percent of Kharkiv residents supported renaming streets with communist names. In autumn 2022, 60.1 percent of Kharkivites supported de-Russification and decolonisation of Ukraine, and 56.1 percent supported further renaming of streets in Kharkiv, which is comparable to the nationwide figures (Rating Sociological Group, 2022). Given the fact that general tolerance for the communist ideological symbols in Ukraine always was lower than that of the Russian cultural markers, these figures indicate that the attitude towards post-Soviet rethinking of the symbolic space of the city has changed radically. In particular, we may cautiously assert that before the full-scale Russian invasion decommunisation and decolonisation were supported by the minority of Kharkiv residents, while after the invasion the supporters constitute nearly a half of the city population.

The answers to the questions about the renaming of a specific toponyms point to similar trend. For instance, in 2018, only 25.8 percent of Kharkiv residents supported the decision to rename *Dzerzhynskyi District* to *Shevchenkivskyi District*. The renaming of the *Radianska* metro station to *Maidan Konstytutsiji* gained the support of only 16.3 percent of respondents. However, in 2022, 79.4 percent of surveyed Kharkiv residents expressed their support for renaming *Moskovskyi Prospekt* to *Prospekt Heroiiv Harkova*, 78.1 percent supported renaming of *Bilhorodske shose* to *Kharkivske shose*, and 77.2 percent supported renaming of *Bilhorodskyi uzviz* to *vulytsia Heroiv Riatuvalnykiv*. Considering the attitudes towards these specific place names, it can be seen that before the full-scale war decommunisation was supported by a clear minority of Kharkiv residents, while after the Russian invasion in 2022, decolonisation, which is a more radical step compared to decommunisation, is supported by the absolute majority of Kharkivites.

Shifting a focus from place names to monuments, we also observe tangible changes in the public attitudes to decommunisation and decolonisation. In 2018, only 8.2 percent of Kharkivites residents supported the removal of Lenin monuments, another 24.2 percent considered it appropriate to move them to another place, and 60.7 percent of respondents – the overwhelming majority – strongly condemned a practice of "Leninfall" (see Pshenychnykh, A. 2019; Gaidai, O. 2021). In 2022, 9.2 percent of Kharkiv residents supported the complete dismantling of the Pushkin monument, another 33.1 percent supported the idea of moving it to another place (a museum or a sculpture park), while

almost 55 percent would leave it standing in the usual place. At the same time, 57 percent of respondents supported dismantling the monument to Zhukov in April 2022. In this way, the attitude towards the Pushkin monument in 2022 practically coincides with their attitude towards the Lenin monument in 2018. Taking into account the fact that Pushkin as an artist is a much less odious person than Lenin, the communist leader, as well as the support for the dismantling of the monument to Zhukov, another symbol of the communist regime, being of crucial importance for pro-Russian audience in Kharkiv (Kutsenko, O. 2020) it can be assumed that the tolerance for monuments to the communist and Russian prominent figures in Kharkiv significantly and proportionally decreased.

In general, the focus group participants expressed positive attitudes to the decommunisation as erasure of the Soviet symbols. It is more difficult to find a consensus on names that are somehow connected with Russia. Plans to rename the streets invoke conflicting reactions – from enthusiastic support to bewilderment why this should be done at all. Most of the opinions of focus group participants are somewhere in between: if street names should be changed, then it is better to postpone and implement somehow selectively, weighing the pros and cons. Reasons why street renaming doesn't seem like a good idea are the following: (1) It's very expensive, and in times of war there are higher priorities; it should be postponed until after the war; (2) Respect should be shown to the older generation, for whom the former street names mean a lot and evoke nostalgic feelings; (3) Some commemorated figures, despite their Soviet or Russian origin, have globally recognised scientific or cultural merits that cannot be cancelled by renaming; (4) Renaming may be just another reason for a split in the public mind, it can provoke conflicts and disputes; (5) Ukrainian names will not necessarily raise patriotic moods, while Kharkiv residents still are wary of some pages of Ukrainian history, so before renaming, public sentiments should be studied. As for the monuments, there were few supporters of radical measures among the focus group participants. Opinions were more often voiced that the issue of monuments is now generally irrelevant, it can be thought about after the war. Also, some participants said that it is not necessary to demolish monuments at all, except for the most odious ones. The proposal to create a park of the history of monuments in Kharkov, where to bring all the monuments that disappear from the streets, looks like a possible compromise. If the monuments are nevertheless dismantled, their place may be taken by equivalent, but already Ukrainian monuments. Alternatively, a fountain or flower bed may appear at the place, or the place can remain empty.

Rehabilitation of "Banderites", "soft" decolonisation, and Kharkiv-centrism

Table 1 shows that in 2022 the support for renaming streets named after Russian and Soviet military and political figures, as well as streets with names related to the geography of Russia, is generally twice as high as support for renaming streets after Russian and Soviet writers and poets, cultural figures and, especially, scientists. The level of support for both general categories of toponyms and specific street names confirms this thesis. It means that tolerance for individual Soviet and Russian cultural markers may differ significantly and depends on the relationship of a particular marker (e.g., a prominent person) to the realms of politics, state building, and warfare. It is interesting that the figure of Gagarin, given low demand for renaming Gagarin Avenue, is obviously perceived primarily as an outstanding person – the first cosmonaut – whose triumph was contributed by including Kharkiv residents as residents of Soviet Ukraine, and not as a figure used by the Soviet regime for the promotion of communist ideology.

In general, the majority of Kharkivites share "soft" approach to decolonisation (Gnatiuk, O. and Melnychuk, A. 2023) – they are ready to get rid of the markers of Russian

Table 1. Support for change of street names related to the Russian geography and culture, 2022

Do you think that the following street names in Kharkiv should be changed?		Confidently agree, %	Rather agree, %	Rather disagree, %	Confidently disagree, %
Related to the geography of Russia		43.0	16.6	11.6	28.8
Related to the Soviet Union and Soviet ideology		41.0	14.1	14.3	30.5
Commemorating	military leaders of the Russia Empire	42.1	12.8	10.6	34.5
	Soviet military leaders	41.8	14.4	10.9	32.8
	Soviet poets and writers	25.4	12.9	16.3	45.4
	Russian writers	24.1	11.1	15.8	49.1
	Russian cultural figures	26.6	14.8	14.8	43.9
	Russian scientists	21.4	10.7	18.1	49.8
	Soviet scientists	20.0	11.6	19.1	49.2
Gagarin Avenue		12.1	8.8	18.7	60.4
Marshal Zhukov Avenue		41.7	12.1	9.2	36.4
Pushkin Street		20.4	10.4	12.3	57.0

geography, state building, and warfare, but still keep positive or neutral attitudes to the Russian figures of culture and science. These interpretations have been proved by the focus groups. According to the focus groups, the presence of Russian culture in Kharkiv evokes different feelings: from tolerant (*"Pushkin or Dostoevsky are not politicians, not military men, and not the Soviet legacy"*) to extremely intolerant, complete disgust for everything Russian, because *"every person who experienced this* [war atrocities] *in Kharkiv does not want any reminders of them* [Russian figures, places, etc.]*"*. Furthermore, some participants admitted that they *"lost the desire to buy goods with names that contain a reminder of Russia, they don't want to listen to the music of Russian performers, songs in Russian, etc."*

Table 2 shows high support of Kharkiv residents for commemoration of the heroes of the ongoing war with Russia (≈ 60–70%), including tangible values for confident support (≈ 40%). At the focus groups, people expressed opinions that the names of Ukrainian heroes and glorified combat units of the Russo-Ukrainian war definitely should be present in the toponymy of the city, but *"there is no need to hurry with this"*. Firstly, *"the reminder of the war will be very painful for a long time to come; this war needs to become a bit of history"*. Secondly, *"in the haste of renaming, one can admit injustice, and forget the names of those heroes who, no less than others, deserve the right to be commemorated"*. Extremely high support for naming streets after the new hero cities (Hero City of Ukraine is a Ukrainian honorary title awarded "for outstanding heroism" to ten cities in March 2022) may be interpreted in the following way: Kharkivites consider their city as one of the hero cities and want to express the solidarity with the other cities that suffered from the Russian aggression.

Notably, support for commemoration of Mazepa, Petliura, and Bandera (≈ 20–30%, including ≈ 40–50% of confident support) is significantly lower but nevertheless seems to be extremely high for traditionally Soviet-era oriented city as Kharkiv was until 2022. The explanation could be that under war with Russia, these archetypically anti-Russian figures (Portnov, A. 2013) became symbols of Ukrainian resistance to the invasion, "joining" the ranks of the defenders of Ukraine, and, thus, have been "rehabilitated" in the eyes of many Kharkivites – in fact, Bandera in Ukraine under the war became a mass culture protagonist and has little to do with the real historical figure. However, a little less than half of the respondents still categorically deny the expediency of commemorating

Table 2. Attitudes to naming streets in Kharkiv, 2022

Who (or what) should be commemorated via naming streets in Kharkiv?	Confidently agree, %	Rather agree, %	Rather disagree, %	Confidently disagree, %
Servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces who died in the war	43.3	25.8	11.5	19.4
Military units (brigade) of the Ukrainian Armed Forces	38.0	24.1	14.0	24.0
Azov Regiment (defenders of Mariupol)	43.7	16.6	11.4	28.3
New hero cities of Ukraine (Mariupol, Volnovakha, Mykolaiv, Bucha, etc.)	46.3	22.1	9.4	22.2
Famous volunteers	25.2	22.2	18.5	34.1
Ivan Mazepa	33.4	19.3	14.2	33.2
Symon Petliura	22.9	16.0	18.2	43.0
Stepan Bandera	27.8	15.9	13.2	43.1
Foreign leaders who support Ukraine (Boris Johnson, Joseph Biden)	18.4	17.0	16.8	47.8

these "builders of Ukrainian nation". A cautious conclusion can be drawn that Kharkiv hosts a large contingent that is not clearly pro-Russian and, moreover, at large supports the novel Ukrainian national-centric narrative written during the current war, but is not ready to accept the traditional figures of such a narrative demonised for decades by first Soviet and then Russian propaganda, including as "Banderites" (Laruelle, M. 2015). Notably, the focus groups showed that naming streets after such figures remains a controversial idea among the older Kharkivites, although young people often welcome such renaming. The attitude to commemoration of the foreign leaders who support Ukraine in the war – so called gratefulness naming (Gnatiuk, O. and Basik, S. 2023) is mostly negative. According to the focus-group discussion, this happens because Kharkivites consider rather unacceptable naming streets after the people who are still alive.

Nevertheless, giving ideologically neutral names remains the most popular general principle with respect to street naming in Kharkiv remains neutral names – the only position supported by the majority of the respondents, while commemorative naming receives less support among the Kharkivites *(Table 3)*. Both focus groups discussed the idea that it would be better to abandon the practice of naming streets for famous people altogether – because of a great temptation to revise these names due to political expediency. This seeking for highest possible ideological neutrality corresponds to the studies of Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line cities before the full-scale Russian invasion (Gnatiuk, O. 2018; Kudriavtseva, N. 2020; Kutsenko, D. 2020). The second most acceptable principle is to commemorate famous Kharkivites (the idea was also mentioned during the focus groups), which once again emphasises the appeal to the local urban identity and "uniqueness" (Musiyezdov, O. 2009). The ideas of commemorating the heroes of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war and the paradigmatic "builders of Ukraine" receive merely equal support. Finally, low support for return of pre-Soviet names may be cautiously interpreted as a desire of Kharkivites to break up with the Russian imperial narrative.

Notably, the focus group participants emphasised that the renaming of a street is easier to accept if people are informed about the biography of a commemorated person, especially his/her links with a city. It is especially important for the residents of this specific street: *"I was very indignant when my Ordzhonikidze Avenue was renamed until I found out who the*

Table 3. General vision of principles for decolonization of street names in Kharkiv, 2022

What common ideas of street renaming should prevail in Kharkiv?	Agree,%	Disagree, %
Return of pre-Soviet names (those existed before 1917)	19.7	80.3
Commemoration of heroes, cities and military units in the current war with Russia	31.1	68.9
Ideologically neutral street names (e.g. Sunny Street, Chestnut Street, Calm Street)	52.0	48.0
Neutral number names (1st Street, 2nd Street – as in New York)	14.1	85.9
Commemorating figures related to the struggle for the Independence of Ukraine	32.4	77.6
Commemoration of famous Kharkivites	42.1	57.9

architect Alyoshin was. He was the architect who built the city of Kharkiv, and I told all my neighbours about it".

Geopolitical divide: From blurred line to spatial separation

According to the binary logistic regression models *(Table 4)*, reliable predictors of positive attitudes to decommunisation in 2018 were person's geopolitical preferences (support of EU/NATO accession), higher education, and, quite surprisingly, belonging to older age cohorts (however, analysis of the cross-tabs for dependent variables and the age covariate shows that this correlation may be considered as insignificant). The language seems to be less important predictor; nevertheless, correlation between speaking only Russian and negative attitude to decommunisation is stronger and more significant than correlation between speaking only Ukrainian and positive attitude to decommunisation. This proves that divide in Kharkiv is still manifested primarily in terms of geopolitical attitudes, while ethnic and language considerations play secondary rule (Gentile, M. 2017; Kulyk, V. 2019; Kuzio, T. 2019).

Reliable predictors of negative attitudes to decolonisation in 2022 *(Table 5)* were old age and speaking only Russian, while speaking Ukrainian is, once again, relatively weak predictor of positive attitudes. Strong and statistically significant predictors of the positive attitudes were geopolitical preferences and location outside of Kharkiv, both in Ukraine or abroad. This means that the most confident supporters of eradicating Russian symbolic legacy are Ukrainian speaking (and, giving the regression results for 2018, highly educated) people, supporting Ukraine's EU/NATO accession, who left the city fleeing from the war atrocities.

At first glance, it may be concluded that people who are far from the front-line city are able to pay more attention to ideological issues, while those who left in the city are concentrated on the personal survival and consider memory politics issues as untimely. However, we found a significant positive correlation between a person's current location outside the city and individual geopolitical preferences. At the same, predominantly negative attitude of those inhabitants who remained in Kharkiv to joining the EU/NATO cannot be explained by the argument that such actions are untimely or of low priority since they would obviously tilt the scales on the Ukrainian side and stop the horrors of the war. On the contrary, we expect that people living under the constant Russian shelling are more inclined to stop this nightmare via enforcing Ukraine's geopolitical position. This leads to the possibility of a scenario that people supporting the Western vector of Ukraine's geopolitics had greater opportunities and/or desire to leave Kharkiv when the warfare began. On the contrary, pro-Soviet/pro-Russian geopolitically oriented people in south-eastern Ukraine are, on average, older and low educated (Gentile, M. 2015), and had lower possibilities or desire to flee. Therefore,

Table 4. Binary logistic regression results: predictors of individual attitudes to decommunisation in 2018

Independent variables (covariates)	Odds coefficient = Exp (B)		
	Support for renaming		
	DV1: Streets with Soviet names	DV2: Dzerzhynskyi district	DV3: Radianska metro station
Male (ref. female)	1.209	1.210	1.159
Age 30–59 (ref. 18–29)	1.506	1.622*	1.914*
Age 60+ (ref. 18–29)	1.464	1.723*	3.119***
Spoken language: Ukrainian only (ref. both Ukrainian and Russian)	1.629	1.481	1.751
Spoken language: Russian only (ref. both Ukrainian and Russian)	0.609	0.365***	0.681
Support for EU and/or NATO ascension: yes (ref. no)	8.933***	6.511***	7.521***
Education: higher education (ref. other)	1.760**	1.376*	1.606**
Constant	0.038***	0.193***	0.040***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.774	0.775	0.703
Nagelkerke R Square	0.247	0.245	0.221

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 5. Binary logistic regression results: predictors of individual attitudes to decolonisation in 2022

Independent variables (covariates)	Odds coefficient = Exp (B)		
	DV1: Support for further renaming streets in Kharkiv	DV2: Support for dismantling the monument to Marshal Zhukov	DV3: Support for dismantling the monument to Alexander Pushkin
Male (ref. female)	0.888	0.929	0.808
Age 30–59 (ref. 18–29)	0.721	0.717	0.815
Age 60+ (ref. 18–29)	0.298***	0.478**	0.465**
Spoken language: Ukrainian only (ref. both Ukrainian and Russian)	2.605	2.147	1.391
Spoken language: Russian only (ref. both Ukrainian and Russian)	0.788	0.773	0.654*
Support for EU and/or NATO ascension: yes (ref. no)	9.730***	8.710***	8.947***
Place of stay: Ukraine except Kharkiv (ref. Kharkiv)	5.500***	3.415***	5.599***
Place of stay: abroad (ref. Kharkiv)	2.947***	4.191***	4.581***
Constant	0.265***	0.279***	0.276***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.742	0.378	0.206
Nagelkerke R Square	0.322	0.273	0.307

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

the lower level of support for nation-centric memory politics among those who remained in Kharkiv should be explained not by the direct impact of the warfare (shelling, destruction, economic situation in the city), but by the fact that most active supporters of decolonisation may mostly left the city. In this way, the geopolitical fault line, which was previously dissolved among the city inhabitants, now lies largely between those who left the city and those who remained. Indeed, this exposes a potential problem related to the "right to the city" – more specifically – the right to define the memory and identity politics in Kharkiv during and after the war. For instance, those who remain may claim themselves as "true city patriots" and deny the rights of "traitors" and "cowards" who fled, while the latter may argue that their ardent pro-Ukrainian position should be given a priority. Nevertheless, it will be important to involve into a dialogue on the post-war memory politics in Kharkiv all strata of inhabitants regardless of their current place of residence and geopolitical attitudes.

Conclusions

Positive shift in attitudes to decolonisation and growing support to the Ukrainian nation-centric memory politics in Kharkiv is directly related to the emerging image of Russia and Russians as the "negative other". The main factor for identification to common/similar identity for a group of people often is the question of driving force of insecurity (Cerutti, F. 2006). For Kharkivites, since February 2022, Russia became a constant threat endangering their lives and living environment. The "builders of Ukrainian independence" were partially rehabilitated among the pro-Soviet-in-the-past Kharkivites exactly for being anti-Russian icons. The backlash of "othering" a military adversary is not something new in the history – it was observed including in the other post-socialist military conflicts, first of all in former Yugoslavia (see, e.g., Mihaylov, V. 2020; Zorko, M. 2020). For instance, in Croatia, negative stereotyping of the Serbs and Serbia was fostered by the 1991–1995 war. Consequently, in the early 1990s, notions about Serbian culture and geography were erased from the Croatian streetscape, including the street names referring to prominent Serbs and Serbian cities (Šakaja, L. and Stanić, J. 2017).

Nevertheless, most of Kharkiv residents share "soft" and "inclusive" approach to decolonisation (Gnatiuk, O. and Melnychuk, A. 2023): sharing a nation-wide demand to eradicate Russian cultural markers, they express higher tolerance to the Russian cultural figures not directly related to the realms of politics, state building, and warfare. Also, priority is given to local urban context, and merits to the city of a (potentially) commemorated person could be seen as an indulgence of being Russian or the pro-Russian position.

In view of the findings, post-war memory politics and identity building in Kharkiv could be grounded on the Russo-Ukrainian war context, positioning Kharkiv as one of the centres of national resistance, inscribing in this way a city into Ukrainian national narrative – a task that remained extremely problematic for decades (Kravchenko, V. 2020; Musiyezdov, O. 2020). The dividing line from mostly (geo)political has transformed into a cultural one: heterogeneity in relation to the Russian cultural heritage. Approximately a half of Kharkiv residents consider Russian culture (but not a Russian state) as part of their own one, and the other half renounces it. At the same time, public attitudes to the memory politics in the frontline city are highly reflexive in nature and deeply embedded in the context of the ongoing war. Therefore, the current pattern of attitudes may change once again when the war comes to an end and emotional calved thrive.

Besides establishing that supporters of Ukraine-centric memory politics in Kharkiv are pro-Western, younger, and better educated, we found that softened albeit still existing geopolitical and cultural divide in war-affected Kharkiv has, to some extent, materialised in physical space and runs between the ardent supporters of decommunisation and decolo-

nisation that massively fled from the war and their opponents who at most choose to stay in the front-line city. This reformatted division inevitably raises the question about the "right to the city" – namely who have legal and moral grounds to define the future post-war reconstruction and transformation of the urban space, including its symbolic component.

Our final consideration refers to the future of Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line cities. Although geopolitical divide in Kharkiv already has only softened compared to the pre-war state, it is possible to speculate that the Russo-Ukrainian war has launched the gradual process of its disappearance, and, thus, we have a change to witness in real time the final stage of evolution of a geopolitical fault-line city. After all, the main dividing line between the more pro-western and more pro-Russian regions of Ukraine has gradually shifted eastwards since 1991 (Kulyk, V. 2016). Of course, future trajectories of geopolitically divided cities in Ukraine and beyond within the post-Soviet space largely depend on the outcome of the war, which is hardly predictable at the moment of writing this paper. Nevertheless, while military conflicts often produce ethnonationally divided cities, as it was in former Yugoslavia, they may either activate hidden geopolitical divides in geopolitical fault-line cities or contribute to their disappearance.

Acknowledgements: This article was funded by (1) Petro Jacyk Non-Resident Scholars Program (Munk School's Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, University of Toronto), project "The Politics of Memory in Ukraine: Current Situation and Post-War Prospects", and (2) Norwegian Research Council NORRUSS grant 287267 "Ukrainian Geopolitical Fault-line Cities: Urban Identity, Geopolitics and Urban Policy."

REFERENCES

Barkawi, T. 2022. War and decolonization in Ukraine. *New Perspectives* 30. (4): 317–322. Doi: 10.1177/2336825X221132935

Bitušíková, A. 2022. Transformations of place, memory and identity through urban place names in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 71. (4): 401–417. Doi: 10.15201/hungeobull.71.4.6

Buckholz, Q. 2019. The dogs that didn't bark. *Problems of Post-Communism* 66. (3): 151–160. Doi: 10.1080/10758216.2017.1367256

Cerutti, F. 2006. *Identitet i Politika* (Identity and Politics). Zagreb, Politička Kultura.

Coward, M. 2009. *Urbicide. The Politics of Urban Destruction*. Oxon, Routledge.

Fedinec, C. and Csernicsko, I. 2017. (Re)conceptualization of memory in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity. *Central European Papers* 1. 46–71.

Filippova, O. and Giuliano, E. 2017. *'Neither with Europe nor with Russia': tracking views in Kharkiv.* Visnyk of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Series "Sociological studies of contemporary society: methodology, theory, methods." 39. 269–274.

Gaidai, O., Sklokina, I. and Kasianov, G. (eds.) 2018. *Polityka i Pamiat. Dnipro–Zaporizhia–Odesa–Kharkiv. Vid 1990-h do Siohodni*. Lviv, FOP Shumylovych.

Gaidai, O. 2021. Leninfall in Ukraine: How did the Lenin statues disappear? *Harward Ukrainian Studies* 38. (1–2): 45–69.

Gentile, M. 2015. West oriented in the east-oriented Donbas: A political stratigraphy of geopolitical identity in Luhansk, Ukraine. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31. (3): 201–223. Doi: 10.1080/1060586X.2014.995410

Gentile, M. 2017. Geopolitical fault-line cities. In *Migration and the Ukraine Crisis: A Two-Country Perspective.* Eds.: Pikulicka-Wilczewska, A. and Uehling, G., Bristol, E-International Relations. Available at www.e-ir.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Migration-and-The-Ukraine-Crisis-E-IR.pdf

Gentile, M. 2019. Geopolitical fault-line cities in the world of divided cities. *Political Geography* 71. 126–138. Doi: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.03.002

Gentile, M. 2020a. Diabolical suggestions: Disinformation and the curious scale of nationalism in Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line cities. *Geopolitics.* Doi: 10.1080/14650045.2020.1830766

Gentile, M. 2020b. The 'elephant' in Mariupol: what geopolitical moods prevail in the city. *Vox Ukraine*. Available at https://voxukraine.org/en/the-elephant-in-mariupol/

Gnatiuk, O. 2018. The renaming of streets in post-revolutionary Ukraine: Regional strategies to construct a new national identity. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Geographica* 53. (2): 119–136. Doi: 10.14712/23361980.2018.13

Gnatiuk, O. and Melnychuk, A. 2020. Geopolitics of geographical urbanonyms: Evidence from Ukrainian cities. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Geographica* 55. (2): 255–268. Doi: 10.14712/23361980.2020.19

Gnatiuk, O., Mezentsev, K. and Pidgrushnyi, G. 2022. Rethinking of identity under war: Pryazovia renaissance and regional centre ambitions in Mariupol before 2022. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 71. (3): 271–286. Doi: 10.15201/hungeobull.71.3.4

Gnatiuk, O. and Basik, S. 2023. Performing geopolitics of toponymic solidarity: The case of Ukraine.

Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift/Norwegian Journal of Geography. E-publication on 6 February 2023. Doi: 10.1080/00291951.2023.2170827

Gnatiuk, O. and Melnychuk, A. 2023. De-Russification of urban namescapes in Ukraine: Rigged trial or justice restored? *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* (in print).

Golikov, A. 2020. (Re-)naming and decommunisation in Ukrainian: Macropolicies, historical memory and the risks of mediatisation (Kharkiv case). *Ideology and Politics Journal* 15. (1): 33–62. Doi: 10.36169/2227-6068.2020.01.00003

Ivanenko, V. and Kryvoshein, V. 2022. Derzhavna polityka pamiati v suchasnij Ukrajini v umovakh informatsijnoji vijny (2014–2021 rr.). *HRANI* 25. (2): 16–21. Doi: 10.15421/172218

Kharkiv Today 2022. *Mista bez Pushkina. Chomu u Kharkivskij oblasti povilno jde derusyfikatsija?* Available at https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/mista-bez-pushkina-chomu-u-kharkivskiy-oblasti-povilno-yde-derusyfikatsiya

Kovalov, M. 2022. When Lenin becomes Lennon: Decommunization and the politics of memory in Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies* 74. (5): 709–733. Doi: 10.1080/09668136.2022.2078478

Kravchenko, V. 2020. Borderland city: Kharkiv. *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 7. (1): 3–6. Doi: 10.21226/ewjus572

Kravchenko, V. and Musiyezdov, O. 2020. Kharkiv: The elusive city. *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 7. (1): 3–6. Doi: 10.21226/ewjus567

Kuczabski, A. and Boychuk, A. 2020. Decommunization of urban toponymy in Ukraine: Causes and consequences. *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society* 10. (4): 8–16. Doi: 10.26881/jpgs.2020.4.02

Kudriavtseva, N. 2020. Reconfiguring identities within the cityscape: Ideologies of decommunization renaming in Ukraine. *Ideology and Politics Journal* 15. (1): 63–82. Doi: 10.36169/2227-6068.2020.01.00004

Kulyk, V. 2011. Language identity, linguistic diversity and political cleavages: Evidence from Ukraine. *Nations and Nationalism* 17. (3): 627–648. Doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00493.x

Kulyk, V. 2016. National identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the war. *Europe-Asia Studies* 68. (4): 588–608. Doi: 10.1080/09668136.2016.1174980

Kulyk, V. 2019. Identity in transformation: Russian-speakers in post-Soviet Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies* 71. (1): 156–178. Doi: 10.1080/09668136.2017.1379054

Kutsenko, D. 2020. Experience of implementing decommunization laws in Eastern Ukraine: A Kharkiv case. *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society* 10. (3): 55–64. Doi: 10.26881/jpgs.2020.3.06

Kuzio, T. 2019. Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians and why Novorossiya failed. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52. (4): 297–309. Doi: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.10.007

Laruelle, M. 2015. The three colours of Novorossiya, or the Russian nationalist mythmaking of the Ukrainian crisis. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32. (1): 55–74. Doi: 10.1080/1060586X.2015.1023004

Malykhina, S. 2020. Change and continuity in the urban semiosphere of post-Soviet Kharkiv. *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 7. (1): 58–104. Doi: 10.21226/ewjus569

Marples, D. 2018. Decommunization, memory laws, and "builders of Ukraine in the 20th century". *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 39. (1): 1–22. Doi: 10.14943/ASI.39.1

Mihaylov, V. 2020. Ethnoterritorial divisions and urban geopolitics in post-Yugoslav Mostar. In *Spatial Conflicts and Divisions in Post-socialist Cities.* The Urban Book Series. Ed.: Mihaylov, V., Cham, Springer, 91–110. Doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-61765-3_6

Minakov, M. 2017. Novorossiya and the transnationalism of unrecognized post-Soviet nations. In *Transnational Ukraine? Networks and Ties that Influence(d) Contemporary Ukraine.* Eds.: Beichelt, T. and Worschech, S., Stuttgart, ibidem Press, 65–88.

Musiyezdov, O. 2009. *Kharkivska Identychnist: Ujavlennia pro Misto ta Joho Istoriju jak Chynnyky Identyfikatsiji.* Essay-urban. The Online Publication Series of the Centre for Urban History of East Central Europe 5. Available at: http://dspace.univer.kharkov.ua/bitstream/123456789/8939/2/Musiyezdov_ukr_5.pdf

Musiyezdov, O. 2022. Do national and geopolitical identities explain attitudes to decommunisation? A comparison of Dnipro and Kharkiv. In *Ukraine's Outpost: Dnipropetrovsk and the Russian-Ukrainian War.* Eds.: Kuzio, T., Zhuk, S.I. and D'Anieri, P., Bristol, England, E-International Relations, 164–190. Available at https://www.e-ir.info/publication/ukraines-outpost-dnipropetrovsk-and-the-russian-ukrainian-war/

Nitsova, S. 2021. Why the difference? Donbas, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk after Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution. *Europe-Asia Studies* 73. (10): 1832–1856. Doi: 10.1080/09668136.2021.1912297

Pletnyova, G. 2020. Linguistic diversity in Kharkiv: Between "pride" and "profit," between the local and the global. *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 7. (1): 105–128. Doi: 10.21226/ewjus570

Portnov, A. 2013. Memory wars in post-Soviet Ukraine (1991–2010). In *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*. Eds.: Blacker, U., Etkind, A. and Fedor, J., New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 233–254. Doi: 10.1057/9781137322067_12

Portnov, A. 2015. Post-Maidan Europe and the new Ukrainian studies. *Slavic Review* 74. (4): 723–731. Doi: 10.5612/slavicreview.74.4.723

Pshenychnykh, A. 2019. Leninfall: The spectacle of forgetting. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23. (3): 392–414. Doi: 10.1177/1367549419871345

Rating Sociological Group 2022. *The Tenth National Survey: Ideological Markers of the War* (27 April 2022). Available at https://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/desyatyy_obschenacionalnyy_opros_ideologicheskie_markery_voyny_27_aprelya_2022.html

Różycki, B. 2017. Renaming urban toponymy as a mean of redefining local identity: The case of street decommunisation in Poland. *Open Political Science* 1. 20–31. Doi: 10.1515/openps-2017-0004

Šakaja, L. and Stanić, J. 2017. The spatial codification of values in Zagreb's city-text. In *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place.* Eds.: Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman, D. and Azaryahu, M., Abingdon, U.K., Routledge, 151–167.

Schmidtke, O. and Yekelchyk, S. (eds.) 2008. *Europe's Last Frontier? Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine between Russia and the European Union*. New Yok, Palgrave Macmillan.

Shevel, O. 2011. The politics of memory in a divided society: A comparison of post-Franco Spain and post-Soviet Ukraine. *Slavic Review* 70. (1): 137–164. Doi: 10.5612/slavicreview.70.1.0137

Stebelsky, I. 2018. A tale of two regions: Geopolitics, identities, narratives, and conflict in Kharkiv and the Donbas. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 59. (1): 28–50. Doi: 10.1080/15387216.2018.1428904

Suspilne Novyny 2022a. *Prybraty z vulyts "russkij mir": Kharkivjany zvernulys do Terekhova*. Available at https://suspilne.media/218427-pribrati-z-vulic-russkij-mir-harkivani-zvernulis-do-terehova/

Suspilne Novyny 2022b. *Kharkiv pozbudetsia toponimiv, povjazanykh z Rosijeju, i dast vulytsiam imena zakhysnykiv – Terekhov*. Available at https://suspilne.media/233285-harkiv-pozbudetsa-toponimiv-povazanih-z-rosieu-i-dast-vulicam-imena-zahisnikiv-terehov/

Suspilne Novyny 2022c. *U Kharkovi perejmenuvaly Moskovskyj rajon, prospect i dvi vulytsi povjazani z RF.* Available at https://suspilne.media/238147-harkivska-meria-pogodila-perejmenuvanna-cotiroh-toponimiv-u-misti-spisok/

Suspilne Novyny 2022d. *Kharkivska toponimichna hrupa proponuje povernuty v ramkakh derusyfikatsiji istorychni nazvy vulytsiam*. Available at https://suspilne.media/257857-harkivska-toponimicna-grupa-proponue-povernuti-v-ramkah-derusifikacii-istoricni-nazvi-vulicam/

Zhurzhenko, T. 2011. 'Capital of despair' – Holodomor memory and political conflicts in Kharkiv after the Orange Revolution. *East European Politics & Societies* 25. (3): 597–639. Doi: 10.1177/0888325410387646

Zhurzhenko, T. 2015. The fifth Kharkiv. *New Eastern Europe* 17. (3–4): 30–37.

Zhurzhenko, T. 2016. Borders and memory. In *The Routledge Research Companion to Border Studies*. Ed.: Wastl-Walter, D., London, Routledge, 85–106.

Zhurzhenko, T. 2022. Legislating historical memory in post-Soviet Ukraine. In *Memory Laws and Historical Justice*. Eds.: Barkan, E. and Lang, A., Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 97–130. Doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-94914-3_5

Zorko, M. and Novak, N. 2019. Classifying divided cities: The need for geopolitical perspective? *Sociology and Space* 57. (2): 159–171. Doi: 10.5673/sip.57.2.3

Zorko, M. 2020. Divided space or divided Society? The case of Vukovar. In *Spatial Conflicts and Divisions in Post-socialist Cities.* The Urban Book Series. Ed.. Mihaylov, V., Cham, Springer, 75–90. Doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-61765-3_5