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Museologica Brunensia. 2021, vol. 10, iss. 2, pp. 12-26

ISSN 1805-4722 (print); ISSN 2464-5362 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2021-2-2>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/144832>

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Access Date: 23. 02. 2024

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ARTICLES/STUDIE

DECOLONIZATION OF MUSEUM NARRATIVES OF DONBAS

POLINA VERBYTSKA – ROMAN KUZMYN – VASYL BANAKH

<https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2021-2-2>

ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:

This article describes the analysis results for the Donbas museums in Ukraine regarding the region's cultural peculiarities. The analytical assessment allowed us to identify a set of chief regional characteristics such as cultural hegemony, Soviet and colonial narrative domination with implicit onward compliance, and sporadic inner resistance in the form of tolerating local identity or counter-narratives. The study shows that such phenomena induced by the loss of priority status upon the collapse of the USSR currently penetrate the Donbas cultural landscape. It also explains the nature of this phenomenon through the processes of the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, followed by the region's deindustrialization, switching from cultural priorities to national ones. It led to disorientation and apathy of the local population and thus to a comeback of old pre-Soviet colonial narratives of the Russian Empire times. Concurrently, the museums' narratives keep specific ingrained Soviet-time imprints.

Dekolonizace muzejních narativů o Donbasu

Článek prezentuje výsledky muzejního výzkumu kulturních specifik v ukrajinském regionu Donbas. Na základě provedené analýzy byl identifikován soubor hlavních regionálních charakteristik, jakými jsou kulturní hegemonie, přetrvávající

nadvláda implicitně dodržovaných sovětských a koloniálních narativů a občasný projev vnitřního vzdoru formou tolerování lokální identity či protinarativů. Studie ukazuje, že tyto jevy, které byly vyvolány ztrátou dominantního postavení po rozpadu Sovětského svazu v současnosti, pronikají do kulturní krajiny Donbasu. Vysvětluje také podstatu tohoto fenoménu prostřednictvím procesu vyhlášení nezávislosti Ukrajiny následovaného deindustrializací regionu, kdy se na první místo dostaly místo kulturních národnostní zájmy. To vedlo k dezorientaci a apatii místního obyvatelstva a tím i k návratu starých předsovětských koloniálních narativů z dob ruského impéria. Muzejní narativy však zároveň uchovávají i specifické hluboce zakořeněné stopy sovětské éry.

KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

regional identity – decolonization of museums – Donbas – museum narratives
regionální identita – dekolonizace muzeí – Donbas – muzejní narativy

Introduction

The beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas in 2014¹ attracted the world's attention to the Russia-bordering industrial

¹ The Russian-Ukrainian war began on February 20, 2014, with the capture and annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation and further active Russia's provision of finance, weapons, and regular military units to separatist movements in the East and South of Ukraine to form a pro-Russian quasi-state "Novorossia".

region in eastern Ukraine, which has always been a frontier between forest-steppe and steppe, agricultural and nomadic civilizations, Christianity, and Islam. Modernization processes on the Ukrainian-Russian cultural borderline have created specific local manifestations of identity.²

One of the fundamental points is the current controversy over whether the territory of modern Ukraine was a colonial possession of the Russian Empire, and later a de facto dependent territory of the Soviet Union, directly controlled from the imperial center (St. Petersburg or Moscow), despite the quasi-state government of the state party leadership of the USSR, whose absolute authority resembled the Governor-General of the Russian Empire.

The purpose of the publication is to identify and clarify the state of colonial and Soviet historical narratives in the museums of Donbas, which will help identify components of the regional museum landscape. Aspects shared by the narratives of different museums enable identifying the components of regional identity, which are markers to interpret most historical periods of Eastern Ukraine's past. The territorial framework of the study covers museums of the Donbas sub-region, controlled by Ukrainian state authorities.

² KUZIO, Taras. *Putin's war against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime*. Toronto: Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, 2017.

It can be argued that the museum exhibitions in the uncontrolled part of Donbas are similar, as they are part of a single Soviet discourse that prevails in the region.

The study is based on the authors' field expedition to the Donbas and the materials provided by colleagues in 2018–2020. The research findings were obtained on the basis of the analysis of permanent exhibitions at the Bakhmut Museum of Local History, Museum of Artemivsk Champagne Wines Factory, Sloviansk Museum of Local Lore, Museum of the History of Kramatorsk, Museum of the History of Novokramatorsk Machine-Building Plant, Lysychansk City Museum of Local Lore, People's Museum of Severodonetsk Azot Association History, Mariupol Museum of Local Lore and Stanychno-Luhansk Museum of Local Lore.

The authors' focus in research technique implementation was on local museums in the border areas, but not on the museums in the capital city or the main regional centers of the country. The research is interdisciplinary given the complex employment of methods specific for museology, history, and memory studies.

When defining “cultural memory”, “amnesia”, and “forgetting”, the authors relied on the conceptual architecture developed by J. Asman, A. Asman, L. Shortt and A. Erll.³ Also, in April 2016 the Netherlands hosted a discussion on another concept about the exhibits at the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen) in Amsterdam, which resulted in a conference

³ ASSMANN, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; ASSMANN, Aleida and Linda SHORTT. *Memory and Political Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; ERLI, Astrid. *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2017.

on the need to “**decolonize the museum**”. Moderators defined “decolonization” as identifying dominant colonial ideas and practices that determined the structure and connotations of museum narrative representations (primarily in ethnographic museums). They also proposed alternative ideas for the formation of exhibitions. Insults and violence detected in the museum narratives of the imperial heritage of the Netherlands⁴ were at the center of criticism. The next subject of reflection on the “decolonization of the museum” was the Dutch Tropenmuseum expositions. Studies prove that museum narratives have a “positive” interpretation of the colonial past of metropolises. The interpretation of the past “greatness of the empire” is an integral part of the modern cultural heritage of the Netherlands contributes to the ideas of “return” to past great epochs.⁵ Similar processes can be observed in the museology and museum studies in France, Holland, and Belgium.⁶

Decolonizing the museums means understanding the situation wherein the museums currently are and identifying the key points that indicate a different type of practice to affect and confront the colonial legacy.⁷ Decolonising means

⁴ *Conference: Decolonize the Museum* [online]. Amsterdam: Frammer Framed [accessed 2021-08-29]. Available from www: <<https://frammerframed.nl/en/blog/conferentie-decolonize-the-museum-conference/>>.

⁵ HUIS, Iris van. Contesting Cultural Heritage: Decolonizing the Tropenmuseum as an Intervention in the Dutch/European Memory Complex. In LÄHDESMÄKI, Tuuli, Luisa PASSERINI and Sigrid KAASIK-KROGERUS (eds.). *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 215–248.

⁶ L'Internationale Online (ed.). *Decolonising Museums*, 2015, p. 5 [online]. [accessed 2021-08-29]. Available from www: <<https://d2tv32fppo1xal.cloudfront.net/files/02-decolonisingmuseums-1.pdf>>; WINTLE, Claire. *Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes. Museum & Society*, 2013, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 185–201.

⁷ L'Internationale Online (ed.). *Decolonising Museums*, 2015, p. 5 [online]. [accessed 2021-08-29]. Available from www: <<https://d2tv32fppo1xal.cloudfront.net/files/02-decolonisingmuseums-1.pdf>>.

“resisting the reproduction of colonial taxonomies, while simultaneously vindicating radical multiplicity”.⁸ D. Thomas identified four strategies which the colonial history is confronted with: (a) the desire to rethink the ownership of museum expositions taking into account the acquisition procedures; (b) reacting to changes of museum program from aesthetic to political; (c) privileging the experiential; (d) reducing the gap between “us” and “them” in order to acknowledge that the museum audience is also postcolonial.⁹

The problems of Russian/Soviet colonialism remained outside the scope of postcolonial research. In the last decades, this issue gradually became a key research point of many papers.¹⁰ “Soviet (colonial) experience cannot be isolated as something ideologically neutral or unique”.¹¹ D. C. Moore stated that the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the postcolonial theory was one of its main drawbacks. The author among others identified the “post-Soviet coloniality” zone, which included the Baltic states, Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.¹²

The manuscript authors' standpoint was to articulate the vision of the colonized, not the colonizers in the

d2tv32fppo1xal.cloudfront.net/files/02-decolonisingmuseums-1.pdf>.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁹ THOMAS, Dominic. Museums in postcolonial Europe: an introduction, African and Black Diaspora. *An International Journal*, 2009, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 125–135.

¹⁰ MOORE, David C. Is the post-in postcolonial the post-in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 2001, Vol. 116, No. 1, pp. 111–128; KALNACS, Benedikts. *20th century baltic drama: postcolonial narratives, decolonial options*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2016.

¹¹ KALNACS, Benedikts. *20th century baltic drama: postcolonial narratives, decolonial options*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2016, p. 16.

¹² MOORE, David C. Is the post-in postcolonial the post-in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 2001, Vol. 116, No. 1, p. 112.

museum narratives of Donbas, as a frontier with its inherent regional features.

In this context, a valuable epistemological remark was made by the Czech museologist J. Dolák: in a museum collection, “a thing turns into a museum object and exhibit, and the collection itself is a certain logically constructed structure”.¹³ The museum collection is a product of human activity and captures the history of our ideas. Moreover, in the museum, “the world is reborn through things, not the other way around. Therefore, the meaning of an object is manifested in the interaction between the observer and the object.”¹⁴ The museum does not collect things, no matter how valuable they are, but forms a collection as a system and structure.

The above European experience of decolonization of the imperial cultural heritage is based on the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the management and creation of museum exhibitions.¹⁵ From this perspective, a prominent role is played by the achievements of researchers in “new museology”, which transforms the traditional attitude of the museum to the issues of value, significance, control, interpretation, authority, and other issues.¹⁶

The collections of imperial museums or their local branches in the former

¹³ DOLÁK, Jan. Thing in museum. Museum collection as structure. *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, 2018, Vol. 2, p. 25.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 29.

¹⁵ BRULON, Soares and Anna LESHCHENKO. Museology in Colonial Contexts: A Call for Decolonisation of Museum Theory. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 2018, Vol. 46, p. 64.

¹⁶ FRAZON, Zsófia. New museology. In *Curatorial Dictionary* [online]. [accessed 2021-08-28]. Available from www: <<http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/new-museology>>; MCCALL, Vikki and Clive GRAY. Museums and the ‘new museology’: theory, practice and organizational change. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 2014, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 19–35.

colonies have been formed in the view of the metropolis civilizational mission. Such ideas align with the concept of **orientalism** proposed by E. Said, who also noted that museums were precisely the places where the ideas of interpreting the “East” as opposed to the civilized “West” were actively used. He argued that the key focus was not so much on the actual understanding of the people of the East (“image of the Other”) but rather on reflecting the ideas and fears of Europeans about themselves.¹⁷ It was essential to illustrate the superiority of imperial civilization as opposed to the primordial world of the “aborigines.” It was accompanied by the development of discourses on colonial institutions and bureaucracy, the creation of associated dictionaries, the formation of figurative semantic series, emerging from doctrines developed by imperial elites of the colonial past, and their circulation in the collective memory of modern society.

Problems of imperial domination, formats of violence of colonial administrations, the orientation of subjugated ethnic groups, and related issues of the “new imperial history” revived at the turn of the 20th–21st centuries.¹⁸ M. Tlostanova and W. Mignolo designed an efficient **colonial matrix** that incorporates control of the empire over the colony authorities (creation of government, political organizations, financial and military authorities), control over the public sphere (regulation of economic practices, naturalization of gender roles, and sexuality), knowledge control (formation of the imperial education system and

¹⁷ SAID, Edward. *Orientalism: Zapadnye koncepcija vostoka [Orientalism: Western conception of the East]*. Moscow: Ruskij Mir, 2006, pp. 8–13.

¹⁸ MCCLINTOCK, Anne. *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New-York-London: Routledge, 1995, p. 449; BURBANK, Jane and David L. RANSEL (eds.). *Imperial Russia. New Histories for the Empire*. Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 359.

adaptation of existing knowledge to the needs of the metropolis).¹⁹

Historical background

In the Ukrainian school of thought, despite the apparent recognition of the negative influence of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union on the development of Ukrainian lands and its peoples, there is a significant lack of conceptual research that would highlight the essence of colonial status in Ukraine’s historical past, outline the relationship of subordination between metropolis and colonial administration, demonstrate the degree of loyalty-confrontation of the local population, as well as identify strategies for the indigenous population integration into imperial social processes. The works by Z. Kohut, O. Yefimenko, and V. Sokyrka give an idea about certain historical periods of such relations between the imperial/Soviet center and the Ukrainian province/republic.²⁰

Meanwhile, modernization processes on the Ukrainian-Russian cultural border have created special local manifestations of identity. In our opinion, this situation also corresponds to another border region – Donbas, which has been actively exposed to modern influences that radically change the region’s landscape since the late 18th century. According to

¹⁹ TLOSTANOVA, Madina and Walter MIGNULO. Global Coloniality and the Decolonial Option. *Kult*, 2009, Vol. 6 (Special Issue), pp. 134–135.

²⁰ KOGHUT, Zenon. *Rosijskij zentralizm i ukrainska avtonomia: likvidacija Hetmanschyny, 1760–1830 [Russian centralism and Ukrainian autonomy: the elimination of the Hetmanate, 1760–1830]*. Kyiv: Osnovy, 1996, p. 317; EFIMENKO, Henadij. *Status USRR ta yivi vzayemovidnosyny z RSFR: dovyhij 1920 rik [The status of the USSR and its relationship with the RSFSR: a long 1920]*. Kyiv: Institute of the history of Ukraine, 2012, p. 367; SOKYRSKA, Vladylena. *Vidnosyny mizh SSSR and USSR (1919–1929): polityko-ekonomichnyj ta administratyvno-teritorialnyj dyskurs [Relations between USSR and SSSR (1919–1929): political-economic and administrative-territorial discourse]*, PhD Dissertation, Uman: Uman State Pedagogical University, 2018, p. 648.

Y. Vermenych, “Borders as unique spaces are created by the proximity of real or conditional borders; such location makes them less tied to a particular center”.²¹ With Donbas undoubtedly being one of them, such regions feature special socio-cultural phenomena with their own local identity.

Today, the issue of Ukraine’s colonial status as part of the Russian Empire and later the de-facto-dependent territory of the Soviet Union is debatable. Ukrainian historian S. Plokhii argues that the “lack of freedom” was a characteristic of both Alexander I’s empire and Joseph Stalin’s state.²² Therefore, his research focuses on the processes of the emergence of the Ukrainian national movement in the era of Romanticism. It became an important factor in the Russian Empire destruction in 1917.

Debates around decommunization in Ukraine, which marked the beginning of the legal process of dismantling monuments to Soviet-era leaders (V. Lenin, F. Artem, D. Manuisky, etc.) along with the large-scale renaming of cities and streets, once again exposed the dilemma: “Was Ukraine a Soviet Union’s colony?”. The researchers M. Ryabchuk and T. Kuzio are inclined to believe that the Soviet version of communism and its institutional manifestation as the USSR was de facto colonial in its nature.²³ T. Kuzio compares the

Ukrainian case with the colonial situation in Ireland, Africa, or Asia. The postcolonial situation in Ukraine is similar, leading to attempts to eliminate all or part of the colonial heritage (colonial legacies) with the emphasis on revival of national historiography as an integral part of national identity. He points to the empire’s characteristic relationship of the metropolis (Moscow) with the periphery (the non-Russian republics), in which the ruling elites were concentrated in the “center” and controlled the bureaucracy of the regions. The relations between other “peripheries” were carried out exclusively through the imperial center.²⁴ The imperial core coordinated, controlled, and protected the periphery, while the latter had to show loyalty.

O. Motyl contributed to the theoretical substantiation of the **empire’s** features. In his work “The Results of Empires: Decline, Disintegration, and Revival”, he concluded that the Soviet Union had clear signs of empire as an isomorphic political system rooted in the empire and totalitarian state at the same time.²⁵ In particular, he defines the term “**empire**” as “a hierarchically organized political system with a sleeve-like structure ... where central elites and power dominate over peripheral elites and communities, acting as intermediaries in their important interactions and directing resources from the periphery to the center, and back to the periphery”.²⁶ He

also suggests dividing empires into “intermittent”, which have overseas colonies, and “continuous”, including the Soviet Union. Although Western historians argue that the USSR was an “unusual empire”, they recognize its imperial essence. In general, it is quite symptomatic that in the new “Oxford World History of Empires” published in 2021, the Soviet Union, along with the United States, is listed in several empires along with the Roman Empire or European colonial empires of the 16th–20th centuries.²⁷

Was Donbas a colony of the empire?

The toponym “Donbas” appears due to the geological and economic “development” of the region. It originates from “Donetsk ridge” and “Donetsk basin” concepts, introduced by the Donetsk geologist E. Kovalevsky²⁸, who outlined the region’s geological features and mineral deposits.

According to A. Kappeler, the most critical element of the Russian Empire’s modernization was industrialization, which gained considerable momentum in the last third of the 19th century.²⁹ A new industrial area appeared in the southeast of the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire. It was in the Donbas in 1860–1880, during the so-called “coal fever”. At that time, a railway network was constructed to connect the Donbas coal mines with the metallurgical plants of Luhansk and Katerynoslav.³⁰ The

21 VERMENYCH, Yaroslav. Pohranychchya yak sociokulturnyj fenomen: prostorovyj vymir [Borders as a socio-cultural phenomenon: spatial dimension]. *Regional history of Ukraine*, 2012, No. 6, p. 67.

22 PLOKHII, Serghiy. *Kosatskij mif. Istorija ta nacietvorenja v epochy imperii [Cossack mythus. History and nation-building in the era of empires]*. Kyiv: Laurus, 2013, p. 16.

23 RYABCHUK, Mykola. Dekomunizaciya chy dekolonizaciya? Scho pokazaly politychni dyskusiyi z pryvodu “dekomunizacijnyh” zakoniv [Decommunization or decolonization? What have shown the political discussions about “decommunization” laws]. *Scientific notes of the Institute of Political and Ethnonational Studies*

named by I.F. Kuras of NAS of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine, 2016, Vol. 2, issue 82, pp. 104–117; KUZIO, Taras. History, Memory and National Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space. *Nationalities Papers*, 2002, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 241–264.

24 KUZIO, Taras. History, Memory and National Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space. *Nationalities Papers*, 2002, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 241–264.

25 MOTYL, Oleksandr. *Pidsumky imperij: zanepad, rozpad i vidrodzhennya [The Results of Empires: Decline, Disintegration, and Revival]*. Kyiv: Krytyka, 2009, pp. 24–25.

26 Ibidem, p. 19.

27 HOSKING, Geoffrey. The Soviet Union. In BANG, Peter, Christopher BAYLY and Walter SCHEIDEL (eds.). *The Oxford World History of Empire. The History of Empires*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 1187–1216.

28 KOVALEVSKY, Evgraf. Geognosticheskoe obozrenie Doneckogo gornogo kryazha. [Geognostic survey of the Donetsk mountain range]. *Mining Journal*, 1829, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1–47.

29 KAPPELAR, Andreas. *Mala istorija Ukrainy [A small history of Ukraine]*. Kyiv: K.I.S., 2007.

30 DONIK, Oleksandr. *Indystryalne Osvojenja Donbasy y XIX-na pochatyky XX st.* [Industrial

emergence of rail and steam water transport and the growth of ferrous metallurgy enterprises required coal as a fuel, which boosted the rapid development of mines and quarries.³¹ Thus, in 1880, Donbas accounted for 43 % of all coal mining in the Russian Empire, and in 1900 this figure rose to 68 %.³²

An interesting regional feature of Donbas that survived the Soviet period and lived to the present day is the toponyms of the region's cities, often named after great industrialists of the Russian Empire. In many cases, the cities originated from workers' settlements near the mines or metallurgic plants like Horlivka, Yenakieve, Ilovaïsk, or Alchevsk. Paradoxically, large industrial cities named after the "pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie" successfully retained their names even in the Soviet Union time.³³

The transport network development accelerated the integration of the new industrial region into the general imperial economy. The intensive development of the Donbas industry was facilitated by a significant inflow of foreign capital from France, Belgium, Great Britain, and Germany.³⁴ Thus, in the late 19th–early 20th centuries, Donbas became the mining center with the highest density of railways in the

entire Russian Empire. Together with the metallurgical plants of southern Ukraine, it formed the most important industrial region of the Romanov Empire.³⁵ At the same time, the "development" of Donbas was mainly delivered by a huge influx of foreign assets, primarily from the central provinces of Russia, rather than by local Ukrainian human resources.³⁶

The development of agricultural commodity production was carried out mainly by Russian nobles. Russian and foreign manufacturers controlled the coal production and served to satisfy the general imperial needs, ignoring the features and needs of Ukrainian lands. For the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian lands were primarily a raw materials supplier and a market for finished industrial products from the central provinces.³⁷ In general, Ukrainians of Donbas and southern Ukraine did not experience the wave of modernization and urbanization.

Soviet measures of forced industrialization, industry nationalization, collectivization, dekulakization, accompanied by repressive measures, radically changed the Donbas landscape.³⁸ The region was strongly associated

with the "labor valor of the Soviet people" and the hallmark of the success of the Soviet planned economy. However, the actual price of such "success" and the dehumanization of the region's society, which became only a human resources pool, was concealed. At the same time, the privileged status of the region's inhabitants in the internal hierarchy of Soviet society created a unique "Donbas mentality", which manifested itself after the proclamation of Ukraine's independence in 1991.

S. Pakhomenko noted that "most often, the public articulation of disagreement with the Ukraine-centric version of history manifests itself in the political and social discourse" of Donbas. Moreover, this region is associated with a mighty "bastion" of post-Soviet identity in eastern Ukraine. Back in the early 1990s, President L. Kravchuk indicated a difference between Western and Eastern Ukraine in the perception of private property, which for the eastern regions "[...] is of abstract nature. They have not heard of it since post-revolutionary times. The mentality is diametrically opposed to the Western one."³⁹

According to the observations of the T. Yermolenko, the post-Soviet space is characterized by relations based on paternalism in social relations. The author defines "paternalism" as the phenomenon of culture, manifested in the archetypes of public consciousness, ideology, and social practices from the standpoint of "parental care" in relation to strata and groups that are less protected socially and economically. Author emphasizes that the

development of Donbas in XIX–beginning of XX century]. *Regional history of Ukraine*, 2015, No. 9, p. 201.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 206.

³² KAPPELAR, Andreas. *Mala istorija Ukrainy [A small history of Ukraine]*. Kyiv: K.I.S., 2007, p. 111.

³³ DONIK, Oleksandr. *Indystryalne Osvojenja Donbasy y XIX–na pochatky XX st. [Industrial development of Donbas in XIX–beginning of XX century]*. *Regional history of Ukraine*, 2015, No. 9, p. 207–210.

³⁴ KULIKOV, Volodymyr. Inosemni pidpryjemzi, jak importery kapitalu, innovacij ta menedzhmentu v ukrainskych hubernijach Rosijskoji imperiji naprykinci XIX–na pochatku XX ct [Foreign entrepreneurs as importers of capital, innovation and management in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire in the late XIX–early XX centuries]. *Ukrainian historical journal*, 2014, No. 3, p. 159.

³⁵ KAPPELAR, Andreas. *Mala istorija Ukrainy [A small history of Ukraine]*. Kyiv: K.I.S., 2007, p. 135.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 136.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 135.

³⁸ It was believed in the Soviet Union that the workers as a social class were the mainstay of Soviet power. Therefore, the Soviet authorities supported blatant discrimination and physical destruction of potential adversaries ("class enemies") among the peasants, industrialists, intellectuals, and political opponents. The ideal vision of the economy was considered to be that of entirely state-owned industry, operated not according to market conditions, but manually according to the strategic planning of the ruling party leadership (five-year plans for economic development). Planned achievement implementation required maximum concentration of human and financial resources, which resulted in severe neglect of human lives, working conditions, and the interests of other industries (light industry, agriculture).

³⁹ PAKHOMENKO, Sergiy. *Vyprobuвання Donbasom. Regionalnyj kontekst polityky istoryčnoj pamjati [Challenged by a Donbas: regional context of the policy of history memory]*. *Historians* [online], 2013, para. 2 [accessed 2021-08-29]. Available from www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/doslidzhennya/649-serhii-/.

peculiarity of paternalism as an archetype of the Russian cultural tradition is the mobilization model of Russia's historical development, which activates and hypertrophies the cultural elements that are expected to unite society.⁴⁰ Donbas is also characterized by mobilization impulses for industrialization and mass resettlement of a large multi-ethnic population, which was easily assimilated by the Russian/Soviet regional administrative leadership, including measures of imposing a paternalistic model of social relations.

Colonial narrative: the relationship of “dominance” – “dependence” in Donbas

Peculiarities of frontal, post-industrial, and post-Soviet reality have left their mark on the exhibitions of Donbas museums. From several narratives presented in local museums, **the colonial narrative** is one of the most essential. It glorifies the achievements of the Russian Empire in the industrial and economic development of its outskirts/colonies, demonstrates the “refinement” of the representatives of the Russian culture as cultural leaders in the region. Russian imperial historical narrative in its hybrid form endured the “red canon” period and continued in the exhibits of Ukrainian and particularly Donbas museums now, 30 years since Ukraine's establishment as an independent state.⁴¹ This type of narrative is characterized by the glorification of the gains of the Russian Empire, the House of Romanov, imperial

achievements in the industrial and economic development of the empire's outskirts/colonies, and the strong presence of Russian culture as a cultural agent in the region. The monuments of the tsars, preservation of battlefields, names of streets and squares “reminded of the provinciality of the territory in contrast to the imperial center were a common occurrence and a necessary action for the colonizer to take”.⁴² In Ukrainian realities, the colonial narrative combines the Russian imperial narrative and the elements of Soviet interpretations. M. Ryabchuk notes that the ideas of “Orthodox brotherhood”, “Slavic unity”, “Eurasian integration”, and “Russian world” are close to the Russian colonial narrative.⁴³

This kind of historical narrative is well-articulated in the museums of Donbas. The colonial industrial assimilation of the Donbas mineral resources by the Russian Empire was detected in the exhibitions of the Bakhmut, Mariupol, and Lysychansk museums of regional studies. In particular, in Bakhmut, Hall One called “Native Region Nature” informs that the Donbas natural resources were discovered due to “the enthusiasm of pioneers and ore experts and the Peter I's policy, encouraging researchers and industrialists”. To support this idea, a map of geological expeditions initiated by the Russian imperial government is exhibited. At the same time, not a word is mentioned

about the local Cossack population⁴⁴, who had discovered the properties of “combustible stone” (coal), and used it for their own needs long before the imperial expeditioners arrived. For instance, Bakhmut salt miners actively used coal as a fuel for salt digestion in the 17th century.⁴⁵ The first known expedition was led by Semen Chykrov, the Bakhmut fortress commandant and captain of Izumskiy of Sloboda regiment, and landrat Mykyta Vepreiskiy, the manager of local saltworks plants, born to the Ukrainian and Polish noble families, respectively. In 1721, they discovered coal deposits in the tract Skelevatami and near the river Bilenka. In 1723 they started the industrial development of coal deposits for the needs of salt works.⁴⁶ So, it is evident that these deposits were not “newly discovered” but had long been used by the local population and were only localized by imperial scientists to be significantly expanded later.

The Russian Empire's personalization of the colonial development of Donbas resources is associated with the geologist L. Lutugin (1864–1915). In 1890–1900 he was delegated by the Geological Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture and State Estates of the Russian Empire to explore regional mineral deposits. The research resulted in the publication called “Donetsk Basin”⁴⁷ in 1897, co-written by F. Chernyshov, followed by a number of his individual

40 YERMOLENKO, Tatiana. *Paternalism v Rosiji: Kulturologicheskij analiz [Paternalism in Russia: a cultural analysis]*, PhD Dissertation, Rostov on Don National University, 2000, p. 38.

41 SERMUKSNYTE, Ruta. *Naratyvų labirintuose: Lietuvos ir Ukrainos muziejų patirtys [In the Labyrinths of Narrative: Experiences of Lithuanian and Ukrainian Museums]*. Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2019, p. 118.

42 KOWALEVSKA, Olga. Zvilnennya prostoru. Dekomunizaciya yak dekolonizaciya vizualnoho prostoru ukrajinskykh mist [Freeing up the space. Decommunization as the decolonization of the visual space of Ukrainian cities]. In *Tyzhden* [online], November 2015, para. 6 [accessed 2021-08-28]. Available from www: <<https://tyzhden.ua/Society/152408>>.

43 RYABCHUK, Mykola. Dekomunizaciya chy dekolonizaciya? Scho pokazaly politychni diskusiyi z pryvodu “dekomunizacijnykh” zakoniv [Decommunization or decolonization? What have shown the political discussions about “decommunization” laws]. *Scientific notes of the Institute of Political and Ethnonational Studies named by I.F. Kuras of NAS of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 82, p. 112.

44 It should be noted that contemporary museum narratives reveal the Cossacks of Zaporizhzhia and Slobozhansk to be the national heroes. Such Cossack narrative is nationally recognized and is proved to consolidate all regions of Ukraine.

45 DONIK, Oleksandr. *Indystryalne Osvojenja Donbasy y XIX–na pochatyky XX st.* [Industrial development of Donbas in XIX–beginning of XX century]. *Regional history of Ukraine*, 2015, No. 9, p. 202.

46 Ibidem.

47 LUTUHIN, Leonid and Feodosiy CHERNYSHEV. *Donetsky basejn [Donetsk pool]. Proceedings of the Society of Mining Engineers*, 1897, No. 12, pp. 20–42.

research works on coal deposits in Donbas.⁴⁸ L. Lutugin won a large gold medal at the 1911 International Exhibition in Turin for successful geological mapping of Donbas. The Mariupol Museum of Regional Studies features a sitting sculpture of L. Lutugin and describes him as “an outstanding researcher of Donbas, the founder of engineering geology”.

Another interesting example of the imaginary personification of the colonial narrative is the linocut by V. Shendel “Yes, we are Scythians” (2005–2006) in the museum exposition in Bakhmut.⁴⁹ It depicts the symbolic origins of the “people of Donbas”: at the bottom, there are “ancestors” (Scythians, Sarmatians, Polovtsians), including Prince Volodymyr the Great and a Cossack Ataman; the top features the group image of the conquered peoples of the Russian Empire – the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus and Central Asia. The central figure in the upper ranks of the “peoples of the empire” is the Russian boyar/prince with the symbolic “Monomakh Cap”.⁵⁰ The background depicts a mountainous area, in the middle of which stands an Orthodox church. The original shield holders in the upper part are simargls – Slavic mythical creatures. There is also an isosceles cross in the St. George’s Order’s shape and framed by stripes in the solar-sign shape.

48 LUTUHIN, Leonid. *Donetskij kamenouholnyj bazejn kak istochnik mineralnoho topliva [Donetsk mining pool as a source of mineral fuel]*. Charkiv: steam typography and lithography “Zilberberh”, 1900, p. 28; LUTUHIN, Leonid. *Izbrannye trudy po heolohyy Doneckoho bassejna [Selected works on the geology of Donetsk mining pool]*. Kyiv: Publishing House of the Academy of Science of USSR, 1956, p. 219.

49 SHENDEL, Volodymyr. *Exhibition „Yes, we are Scythians” in the Bakhmut museum of regional studies, 2005–2006*.

50 A symbol of the autocratic power of the tsars and emperors of the Russian Empire, which appeals to the models of Caesaropapism (a combination of secular and religious power) of the Byzantine Empire (“the idea of Russia viewed as the third Rome”).

The Donbas museums interpret the capture and colonial appropriation of the Azov Sea coast by the Russian Empire as the arrival of “civilization” too. In the Mariupol Museum of Regional Studies exhibition titled “On the history of the Azov Sea Studies”, the achievements in mapping, studies, and development of the Azov region are attributed to Russian Empire scientists and soldiers or seen as direct merit of Russian monarchs. Thus, the exposition contains a reduced copy of the map of “Southern Russia” (1699), authored by J. Bruce, the “Field Marshal of Peter I”, the comment to which says: “Under Emperor Peter I, the sea receives its modern name”. Therefore, the two-thousand-year history of the Sea of Azov, from the Scythians to the Crimean Khanate, which preceded the conquest of the northern sea coast by the Russian Empire, is largely ignored. Later stages of the Azov Sea studies are also presented as the achievements of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg University, and other imperial institutions.

In the Bakhmut Museum of Regional Studies, the genesis of the Bakhmut fortress and the development of salt springs by saltworker Cossacks derives from the leading role of the Russian Empire creator Peter I, who in 1702, granted his permission to build a wooden fortress in Bakhmut. Thus, the exposition ensemble dedicated to the region’s development, carried out mainly by the Ukrainian Sloboda Cossacks, focuses on the Russian emperor. Also, this hall exhibits the portraits of emperors Peter I and Nicholas II. In particular, a large portrait of Emperor Peter I, an honor to the families of Bakhmut burghers and nobles in the late 19th century, occupies the upper dominant part of the exhibition, next to much smaller images of Cossack officers as subjects of the empire.

The colonial narrative in museums is represented not only by artifacts and illustrations of imperial origin but also by binary logical connections – “low” autochthonous culture versus “high” imperial aristocratic culture. In the Slavic narrative, they appear in the sequence of halls: after the exposition of the merchant’s living room interior of the late 19th–early 20th centuries and demonstrating the “high” culture of the local nobility, visitors find themselves in the interior of a Ukrainian house of the same period. It represents a “low folk” culture, which evokes dissonance and makes visitors acknowledge the achievements of the Russian Empire. This opposition of the colonizers and the colonized illustrates the Russian Empire’s civilizational mission in the Ukrainian lands.⁵¹

In the industrial museum of the Artemivsk Sparkling Wine Factory, local winemakers trace the tradition of making sparkling wine back to Prince M. Vorontsov, who conquered Crimea for the Russian Empire, and the “patriarch of Russian champagne” Prince L. Golitsyn. He used his Crimean estate to establish the tradition of manufacturing sparkling wines in the Russian Empire. Thus, Donetsk winemakers see the roots of their manufacturing tradition in the Crimean estates of the Russian nobility, despite the winemaking traditions in the Northern Black Sea region dating back to ancient times, in particular the Greek cities-states, located in the Azov Sea region.

Cultural hegemony as an expression of the colonial narrative in the Donbas museums is manifested in the form of a monopoly of Russian

51 VERBYTSKA, Polina and Roman KUZMYN. Between amnesia and the “war of memories”: politics of memory in the museum narratives of Ukraine. *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 23–34.

culture's cultural agents (writers, poets, theater- and film figures) or figures of non-Russian cultures loyal to it. An example of such hegemony is the museum in Stanytsia Luhanska (Luhansk region). One of the exposition's highlights is the sculpture (by M. Mozhayev) of the Don Cossack G. Melekhov, a fictional character from the novel "And Quiet Flows the Don" by the Russian writer M. Sholokhov. The sculpture refers to the local identity of the Russian Don Cossacks, who lived in the territory of the Great Don Army (South of the Russian Empire), the territory of which partially covered the Donbas. In the novel, G. Melekhov demonstrates the negative attitude of the Don Cossacks towards Ukrainian peasants. The novel has some illustrative fragments that depict the conflict between the Don Cossacks and Ukrainian peasants at the Paramonovsky mill and the hostile attitude towards the "khokhly" during the uprising of Ukrainian peasants in the Voronezh province in the early 1920s – the Don Cossacks expected it to be brutally suppressed by Bolshevik authorities.⁵²

On Ukrainian soil, the colonial narrative often appears as a hybrid of the Russian Empire's imperial history elements, which genetically drive the Soviet models of interpretation of pre-revolutionary (until 1917) periods of the past.

Soviet narrative as an imaginary matrix of Donbas

What about Soviet narratives in museums, given that they are not on the list of institutions to be decommunized? How do the themes of the Holodomor, "Stalin's repressions", and Chernobyl

coexist with canonical examples of heroization of the episodes of the "Great Patriotic War"⁵³ or industrial achievements with the peculiarities of the Donbas region?

The main drivers of such a narrative are the glorification of key Soviet ideologues: the class struggle, the 1917 Bolshevik October Revolution, the cult of Lenin, the concept of the Great Patriotic War, socialist construction, the use of typical Soviet historical terminology, and others.⁵⁴ In addition, Soviet ideology went side by side with russification, and thus "Russian was perceived as Soviet". From that perspective, the researcher M. Ryabchuk believes that real decommunization is impossible without de-russification.⁵⁵

The Soviet narrative dominates the museums of Donbas. O. Kowalevska brings to the spotlight the totalitarian orientation of the Soviet museum, "by creating a new type of 'revolutionary museum', and designing methods for building an exhibition and tour not on the basis of artifacts, but on the basis of their ideological interpretation, through numerous street signs... the government imposed its vision of

⁵³ The 'Great Patriotic War' is the ideological concept of the Soviet Union regarding the period of 1941–1945 of the Second World War, according to which Soviet troops waged only a 'liberation' war, and the population provided general support for military operations. Prisoners of war, the citizens, and the employees of state authorities or public organizations of the occupied territories were considered potential 'enemies of the people', therefore, after the de-occupation, they were under control and surveillance of the Soviet state security agencies.

⁵⁴ SERMUKSNYTE, Ruta. *Naratyvų labirintuose: Lietuvos ir Ukrainos muziejų patirtys [In the Labyrinths of Narrative: Experiences of Lithuanian and Ukrainian Museums]*. Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2019, p. 106.

⁵⁵ RYABCHUK, Mykola. Dekomunizacija chy dekolonizacija? Scho pokazaly politychni dyskusiyyi z pryvodu "dekomunizacijnykh" zakoniv [Decommunization or decolonization? What have shown the political discussions about "decommunization" laws]. *Scientific notes of the Institute of Political and Ethnonational Studies named by I.F. Kuras of NAS of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 82, pp. 112–113.

the community's past, present, and future under its leadership. In this way, it tried to visualize and engrave in each resident's mind the image of their history and prospects."⁵⁶

Nature and minerals are seen as primer resources for economic development. The expositions present samples of minerals; plants that strengthen the slopes of ravines; species of agricultural plants; samples of domestic animals, which is a manifestation of biocolonialism inherent in the modernizing Soviet-type economy, with its priority of changing natural landscapes for the economy of the Soviet Union. At the same time, examples of negative human impact on the natural landscape and environment are not displayed at all. The dominant idea is civilization, empire, socialism winning over nature: "Severodonetsk builds, marches over eternal sands, wins them bridgehead after bridgehead, and the Severodonetsk chemical plant helps in this" (Figure 1). Such interpretations formed the idea of a city raised by people in the "Wild Field".

Under the guise of **progress** and achievements of the USSR socialist system, the attention of museum visitors was focused on specific aspects of the Donbas industrial modernization. For example, in the Severodonetsk Museum of Regional Studies at "Azot", LLC, the central idea of the exhibition is "big chemistry", which opens new horizons for the Soviet economy and is one of the flagships of the region's industry. The idea is supplied with a quote by the Russian "proletarian" poet M. Gorky. "Chemistry is a realm of miracles; it holds the happiness of humanity..."

⁵⁶ KOWALEVSKA, Olga. Zvlnennyya prostoru. Dekomunizacija yak dekolonizacija vizualnoho prostoru ukrayinskykh mist [Freeing up the space. Decommunization as the decolonization of the visual space of Ukrainian cities]. In *Tyzhden* [online], November 2015, para. 6 [accessed 2021-08-28]. Available from www: <<https://tyzhden.ua/Society/152408>>.

⁵² SHOLOCHOV, Mikhail. *Tichij Don: roman y chetyrjoch knigach [Quiet Don: novel in four books]*. Moscow: Eksmo, 2005, pp. 129–133.

Thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the layers of Soviet discourse remain unchanged in Donbas museums expositions. For example, the friso of the upper tier, depicting the Bakhmut region history, the ideological Marxist construct – formational approach to interpreting the history of human civilization (primitive communal system – slavery – feudalism – capitalism – communism/socialism) is intact. The expositions of the Bakhmut museum are organized according to the same principle: the nature of the region – the Stone Age – feudalism – capitalism – revolution and transition to socialism – the achievements of the Communist Party.

Such obvious Soviet narratives markers as quotations from the classics of Marxist literature are still a part of the exhibitions. For instance, the Mariupol Museum of Regional Studies cites the works of the Marxist “patriarch” Friedrich Engels. In the exhibition “Department of the Regional History from ancient times to 1917”, one of the window panes shows a Friedrich Engels’ quote, “Labor is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labor created man himself.”⁵⁷

The Donbas museums preserve a pronounced **cult of Lenin and other Soviet leaders** in parallel with the decommunization process. Examples here are a commemorative album in honor of the “Dear Joseph Stalin’s” 70th birthday in the exhibition of the Museum of “Nitrogen” in Severodonetsk (Figure 2) and a picture of Grigory Ordzhonikidze’s arrival to the construction site of the “Azovstal” plant in Mariupol.

⁵⁷ ENGELS, Friedrich. *Rol truda v processe prevrashheniya obezyan v cheloveka [The role of labor in the process of transformation of an ape into a human]*. Moscow: State Publishing House of Political Literature, 1953, p. 132.



Fig. 1: A picture of a chemical plant “Azot” in the Azot museum of regional studies in Severodonetsk. Source: Created by the Author.

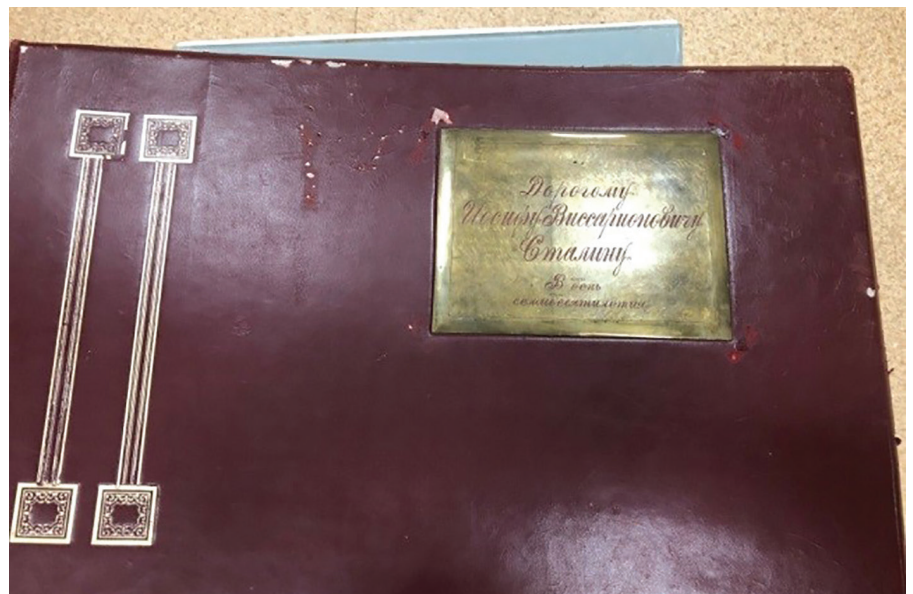


Fig. 2: Commemorative album “Dear Joseph Stalin” in the Azot museum in Severodonetsk. Source: Created by the Author.

In almost every museum in Donbas, there are “pantheons of Heroes of the Soviet Union”, which continue the tradition of glorifying Soviet party, state, and military officials, in contrast to which “little people” belonged to the space of the Unknown Soldier. “Ordinary people” were given the role of silent “heroes of the Soviet people.” They were to demonstrate the superhuman efforts made during the construction of industrial enterprises that turned Donbas into the proletariat’s industrial Mecca in the 1920s and 1930s. Such scenes demonstrate hard manual labor

and panoramic photos of workers’ settlements.

The distinguishing features of the Donbas museum expositions are the artifacts that demonstrate **binary logic** – one of the cornerstones of the colonial narrative.⁵⁸ In the context of Donbas, it manifests itself in the opposition of the traditionalist, “backward”, and agrarian Ukrainian society in the region as opposed to the

⁵⁸ ASHCROFT, Bill, Gareth GRIFFITHS and Helen TIFFIN (eds.). *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London-New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 25–28.

progressive, modern, and industrial project of Russian/Soviet urbanism. The “civilization mission” of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union and its representatives in the region is emphasized as the “vanguard” of the industrial “breakthrough” and development of Donbas. The Soviet policy of “forced industrialization” of the early five-year plans (1920–1930s) was interpreted as turning “backward natives” (Ukrainian peasants, Azov Greeks, German colonists) into the proletariat that propels “world progress”.

This discourse in the museums of Bakhmut, Kramatorsk, Sloviansk, Lysychansk is represented by two conceptual and fundamental points. The first is the “backward” items of the Ukrainian rural life, which is opposed by the “progressive” bourgeois life of the Russian/Soviet workers. The second, the vision of industrialization and the associated collectivization policy of the first five years of 1928–1939, is interpreted as “a big leap” that demonstrates the transformation of Donbas into a powerful industrial region in a record-short time. This narrative exaggerates the real economic and socio-domestic achievements of industrialization. The transition from the “backward” agrarian society in the village is illustrated exclusively through the items of Ukrainian rural life: embroidered towels, spinning wheels, ceramic pots, old sewing machines, kerosene lamps, wooden spoons.

The metamorphosis of the urban agglomerations, the so-called “cities emerging in the steppe”, is associated with the concept of an ideal socialist garden city. For instance, a significant amount of documentary and photo materials of the Museum of the History of Kramatorsk contributes to an ideal image of the Soviet socialist city of the industrialization era (1920–1930s), with then developed social infrastructure. The case



Fig. 3: A combination of themes of collectivization, industrialization and the Holodomor in the exhibition of the Sloviansk museum of regional studies. Source: Created by the Author.

of Severodonetsk emphasizes the establishment of the village “Liskhimstroy” (in the 1930s), later transformed into the city of Severodonetsk. Photographs of the city’s infrastructure development capture the construction of the airport (1948), hospital, bus station, and residential neighborhoods, and the photograph of a “young Lyshimbudite is a road to the future.” Meanwhile, the expositions offer almost no content that would cover the urbanism problems of in the Donbas mono-cities, with the full range of complex social, environmental, and economic problems challenging “people overtaken by modernization”.⁵⁹

From that perspective, the attempt to decolonize and overcome the Soviet myth of the Museum of the History of Kramatorsk deems quite controversial and ambivalent. Materials about the Holodomor

59 PODDUBIKOV, Vladimir, Sergej VARZEMOVYCH and Dmitrij FUNK. Resursnoe proklatiya s antrazytovim otbleskom: korennye narody i dobyvajuscheje kompanii Kuzbasa v situazije konflikta [Resource curse with anthracite glare: indigenous people and Kuzbass mining companies in a conflict situation]. *Siberian historical studies*, 2018, No. 2, p. 97.

genocide,⁶⁰ as a consequence of Stalin’s forced collectivization and repression against Ukrainian peasants, look inept against the background of a general exhibition ensemble. The exhibition full of Soviet propaganda materials (posters, newspapers, government decrees) demonstrates only the official vision but does not present the “collective farmers” themselves and their daily lives and desires (Figure 3).

The Donbas museum expositions are contradictory regarding other topics as well. For example, the All-Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Ukrainian National Liberation Revolution of 1917–1921 are artificially combined. In the Museum of Regional Studies in Lysychansk, one of the museum windows glorifies the Bolshevik First Cavalry Army of Semyon Budyonny, who waged active hostilities against the

60 The Holodomor was an artificially inspired famine in 1932–1933 by the Soviet authorities in the territories inhabited by the Ukrainian people, with the aim of completing agrarian reform and ending resistance to collectivization, which killed about 5 million people.

Active Armies of the Ukrainian People's Republic. Immediately next to it, there is another one created during Ukraine's independence. It is dedicated to the UPR liberation fight for its statehood. The Soviet narrative is well saturated with local materials from Donbas, while the Ukrainian narrative looks somewhat "unnatural" and artificial, as it mainly demonstrates the struggle "in distant Kyiv".

At the same time, the Slavic Museum of Regional Studies case demonstrates a successful example of the exposition transformation. Separate windows of the museum introduce visitors to "Slovyansk citizens in the Ukrainian People's Republic army." Copies of photographs with biographies provide information about people from Slovyansk who served in the Ukrainian army and resisted the Bolshevik aggression in 1918–1920 and speak about the hard work done by the museum staff. However, the case of Slovyansk is an exception to the rule rather than a regularity. Moreover, other thematic blocks of the Slovyansk museum regarding the Holodomor or World War II do not show such flexibility. The exhibitions illustrating political parties of the 20th century in all Donbas museums create an impression that only the Bolshevik party of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was active in this area and was the only one to enjoy the "wide popularity" among the region's inhabitants.

One of the cornerstones of Stalin's ideologues, which continues to be firmly reproduced in the museums of Donbas, is the so-called "Stakhanov movement" ("workathon movement"), presented exclusively by voluntary workers' enthusiasm and "labor feat." The museum windows are filled with original letters of the Stalinist period and decorated

with Stalin's quotes about the significance of the socialist competition, which "embraced millions of workers". For example, in the Nitrogen Museum in Severodonetsk, a central place is occupied by the Stalinist resolution of the All-Soviet Communist (Bolshevik) Party on the importance of the Stakhanov movement "on the path to socialism", glorifying workers' enthusiasm and "outstanding" socio-economic achievements of the Stalin five-year plan. Emphasis is also placed on the "enthusiasm of the youth" – Komsomol members and future high-ranking members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the Donbas museums show no evidence of such phenomena as the exhausting 12–14-hour work of half-starved workers, acute shortage of labor and its fluidity, repression against engineers (so-called "damage actions"), and the Soviet authorities turning a blind eye to the terrible housing conditions.

The most crucial component of the Soviet narrative in the expositions of Donbas museums is the theme of the "Great Patriotic War". According to M. Ryabchuk, this narrative "split Ukrainians" for many decades. Replacing it with the grand narrative of World War II was supposed to level most of the controversial moments of historical memory.⁶¹ That is why Russian propaganda scrupulously supports the "Great Victory" myth to ideologically consolidate the part of the post-Soviet space the Russian Federation tries to control politically. Essential elements of the mythology of the Great

Patriotic War are the glorification of the exclusively Soviet guerrilla and underground movement, the cult of Georgy Zhukov, and the glorification of the Red Army, ignoring the Holocaust, appropriation of victory over Nazi Germany by the Soviet Union's. At the same time, May 9, 1945, is interpreted as a "holiday", a feat of the depersonalized Soviet soldier and the wisdom of the Soviet leadership and command, while concealing the vast number of war victims and the personal tragedy of each individual.

It is noteworthy that all the expositions of the Donbas museums begin with the "treacherous attack of Nazi Germany" on the "peaceful" Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. In Bakhmut Museum of Regional Studies, much attention is paid to the Soviet guerrilla movement and underground communist organizations in 1941–1943 during the Nazi occupation. An integral part of such a Soviet rule is materials on Soviet generals who liberated one or another settlement from the Nazis. Also, the windows display the findings of field excavations, namely "things of defeated enemies" (German helmets, bayonets, cutlery, suicide tokens, photos of the lined tank PzKpfIV and German grave crosses).

According to our observations, the Soviet narrative of the "Great Patriotic War", which dominates the Donbas museums' expositions, hardly ever mentions the early episodes of World War II of 1939–1941 (found only in the Mariupol Museum of Regional Studies). We detected a taboo on displaying various periods of local Nazi occupation (public life, work of enterprises, religious and cultural activity) and covering all branches of the anti-Nazi Resistance Movement. There is an urgent need to dismantle the pantheon of heroes

⁶¹ RYABCHUK, Mykola. Dekomunizaciya chy dekolonizaciya? Scho pokazaly politychni dyskusiyi z pryvodu "dekomunizacijnyh" zakoniv [Decommunization or decolonization? What have shown the political discussions about "decommunization" laws]. *Scientific notes of the Institute of Political and Ethnonational Studies named by I.F. Kuras of NAS of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 82, pp. 111–112.

of the Soviet Union, who were not consistently related to the local or national Ukrainian past.

Soviet everyday-life items, too, incorporate an ideological component – they demonstrate the technical progress of the Soviet economy and the welfare growth of the “Soviet people”. One such example is a “red gramophone”, placed on Ukrainian embroidered towels. Red is a strong association with the Soviet government. Combined with the Ukrainian traditional towel, it is designed to demonstrate the harmonious development of social life in the Soviet Union.

After 1945, the Soviet narrative focuses on the positive aspects of the “era of advanced socialism”. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian dissidents fighting for human rights remains a marginal episode of depicting the “welfare of the Soviet citizen”. The museum ensembles of Bakhmut, Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, Lysychansk, and Mariupol are full of letters of commendation from the “leaders” of socialist competitions and “heroes of labor”, photographs of “happy” collective farmers, the achievements of the “Soviet people” in rocketry and space exploration, and others.

The expositions dedicated to the “war in Afghanistan” – the bloody 10-year war of the Soviet Union – and the liquidation of the Chernobyl disaster deserve special attention. These episodes of the 1980s were a demonstration of ideological propaganda and deception of the Soviet leadership, which ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The theme of the greatest man-made catastrophe in history – the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on April 26, 1986, is present in all museum expositions of Donbas. Amid numerous photos of liquidators of the man-made

Chernobyl accident, state diplomas, awards, and honors, the causes of the tragedy (haste in construction, violation of operating standards, imperfect equipment) that affected the lives of millions of USSR citizens have not been revealed. The events of 1986 are shown in the context of the propaganda construct of the heroic feat of depersonalized “Soviet citizens” in the fight against the consequences of radioactive contamination. Miscalculations in the design of the fourth power unit and the haste of construction resulted from the interference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with the production process. Then came the criminal and inhumane concealment of the tragedy by the USSR’s top state and party leadership.

The participation of a “limited contingent” of Soviet troops in the war in Afghanistan in 1979–1989 is the plot that integrates the colonial and Soviet narratives in Ukrainian museums. Several local conflicts from Latin America to Indochina were integral to the USSR and US geopolitical confrontation during the Cold War. The deployment of Soviet regular troops aimed to expand the dominance in the Middle East and was a manifestation of the neocolonial wars of the second half of the 20th century. In the Donbas museums expositions, this military conflict is interpreted in the categories of Soviet propaganda – “international assistance to friendly people” and “military duty of internationalist soldiers”. Artifacts demonstrating the military exploits of Soviet soldiers in the challenging conditions of the mountains and deserts, military awards, and photographs of those killed there are dominant.

However, the exposition has no reflections on the causes and consequences of the military conflict for the USSR and Donbas,

and there is absolutely no representation of the enemy with whom the Soviet soldiers fought – “Mujahideen” (“enemies” in the Soviet lexicon) in Afghan territory, which were mostly ordinary peasants and defended their homes, families, and traditional lifestyles.

Conclusions

Ukraine’s declaration of independence, region’s deindustrialization, change of cultural priorities (from Soviet to national) led to disorientation and apathy in the Donbas. It became the basis for turning to the old pre-Soviet colonial narratives of the Russian Empire (until 1917), and triggered openly anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russian separatist sentiments in Donbas in 2014. Ukrainian researchers (T. Kuzio, O. Motyl, M. Ryabchuk), employing modern methodologies of postcolonial studies, argue that the territory of modern Ukraine had all the hallmarks of colonial ownership when being a part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

Local museums in Ukrainian Donbas are particularly seen to be facing a deep crisis, manifested in a severe lack of financial resources and shortage of qualified personnel. The modernization of contemporary museums in Europe, oriented towards promoting openness to diverse communities of different national, ethnic, religious, and gender identities has hardly affected the local museums in the region. The old generation of museum professionals monopolizes the establishment of museum development frameworks and practically impedes innovations and employment of new professionals with creative ideas, concepts, and approaches.

An important factor in perpetuating Soviet museum narratives, which were not affected by the decommunization of 2014–2019,

is the political constituency of regional political authorities, deliberately preserving the Soviet content and hindering its revision and reshaping on political grounds. Moreover, local elites are building political forces, harbouring anti-nation-state ideas, and seeking support in regional identity. The changes that are taking place are paradoxical, as they crucially maintain distancing Donbas museums from the European standards by fostering and practising the return of bygone pre-revolutionary Russian ideological mythology manifestations and nostalgia for the Soviet Union. The museums of the region can largely serve as a litmus test to indicate the reasons for the emergence of centrifugal tendencies in local society, concurrent with the rise of ideas of *Russkiy Mir* (“Russian World”) and the invasion of Russian troops in the Ukrainian Donbas. Local museums are primarily regarded to be the ‘places of remembrance’ that hamper decolonization and retain the colonial (Russian/Soviet) narrative. Meanwhile, over the years of Ukrainian state independence, the central government of Ukraine has not targeted any efforts to undertake a thorough overhaul of local museum narratives. While discussions on the Soviet narrative revision in historiography have gradually contributed to bringing Ukrainian historical science closer to European values, attempts to initiate such discussions among the museum professionals in the early 1990s and after the Orange Revolution of 2004 were weak/sporadic, especially in Donbas and in the south of Ukraine. It was in Odesa and Simferopol that monuments to Russian Empress Catherine II were restored in the 2000s, and the number of monuments to Lenin and other Soviet figures in Donbas remained one of the largest in Ukraine up until the decommunization process.

Such conditions have led to minor superficial changes in the museum narratives of Donbas. Most of them concerned the integration of particular narrative plots important to the Ukrainian central government, such as the Holodomor of 1932–1933 or episodes of the Ukrainian National Revolution of 1917–1921, into the existing Soviet narrative. Such changes were the products of conjuncture and preserved Soviet myths, which eventually took on an anti-state coloring. Post-Soviet disorientation and the vacuum of values, as well as weakness of the state museum policy, resulted in the restoration of ‘old’ Russian plots in the museum narratives of Donbas (Romanov dynasty, achievements of the Russian Empire, monarchical forces of 1917–1920). Thus, the ineptitude of local museum professionals in finding new ways to develop the museums of Donbas, the centrifugal political efforts of local elites, and the weakness of the central government have led to the preservation of colonial narratives. In view of this, there is an urgent need for a thorough professional discussion among the museum professionals on the ways and approaches to local museum decolonization and reforms.

The analysis shows that the Donbas museums feature cultural hegemony amid absolute dominance of the colonial / Soviet narrative. It is characterized by outward compliance with sporadic inner resistance in the form of tolerance toward local identity or samples of counter-narratives. The Donbas museum expositions show a steady trend toward describing Donbas development not as a result of the work of the local citizens but as industrial achievements of the central government (St. Petersburg, Moscow). It is manifested through idealized images of “the land of minder” or “All-Union steamship”.

The museums’ colonial narrative glorifies the achievements of the Russian Empire and discriminates against the role of local Ukrainian, Jewish, Greek, and other communities, reducing them to the role of ordinary executors of the will of “Russian autocrats”. Meanwhile, the Soviet narrative is interpreted as the “golden age” of Donbas and is perceived by the regional elite as an inviolable reference point for the current socio-economic progress of Donbas and Ukraine as a whole. Amid the economic crisis in Ukraine, such ideas form a nostalgia for the return to the “Soviet Eldorado”. Thus, the Donbas’ cultural landscape is in a state of affect that appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union and is due to the loss of the region’s priority status in the country.

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