CONTESTED NAMES IN THE TOPONYMIC LANDSCAPES
OF POST-SOVIET SPACE
Introduction

Natalia Kudriavtseva

Kherson National Technical University
ORCid: 0000-0001-7641-9543

Mykola Homanyuk

Kherson State University
ORCid: 0000-0002-9625-1968

Ever since the ancient discussion on the "correctness of names" and up until Pierre Bourdieu's explication of the symbolic power exercised by the state through "legitimate naming" (Bourdieu 1991), language, in the social sciences and the humanities, was not viewed as in some manner entangled with power relations. Traditionally, research in linguistics, geography and neighboring fields did not go beyond the politically innocent systematization. It drew either upon etymology or descriptive taxonomies of various kinds. A critical approach to toponymy, marking the "cultural turn" in respective disciplines, aims to show that "to take language seriously" is important with respect to the power of language over place and in terms of the "always-already power-laden character" of (re-)naming places (Vuolteenaho & Berg 2009: 1).

Place name studies, usually scattered around a number of different fields, came in the light of critical theories which emphasized political power in the relations of the state, space and language. The process of post-socialist toponymic renaming, in its turn, has provided a rich empirical base for research studies. While the case of Ukraine, due to its transitional nature and the on-going process of "decommunization", has yielded particularly interesting data. This case is even more rewarding because of the relative accessibility of material available, such as enacted laws, renaming lists, toponymic commissions meeting records, media clippings and social media debates, petitions, city guides, etc.

A great number of studies on renaming in Ukraine that appeared right after the start of the decommunization, tended to give a rather emotional, sometimes even biased, appreciation of events, reflecting an uncritical view of the changes often presented as ideologically neutral. The present issue of the *Ideology and Politics Journal* is the first interdisciplinary, multilingual collection of case studies that give a critical appraisal of these renaming events, as suggested earlier by the volumes (Vuolteenaho & Berg 2009; Rose-Redwood, Alderman & Azaryahu 2017), but which also draw upon the empirical

material of the post-Soviet states. The contributions in this issue illustrate the toponymic processes occurring in Ukraine and in Georgia. This enables a comparison of the place name politics within Ukraine (the articles in the issue survey the renaming processes in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kryvyi Rih and in the south of Ukraine) as well as their juxtaposition with similar processes that took place in Tbilisi.

Conceptually, the present issue on the contestation of geographical (re-)naming is also diverse. Instrumental to the reshaping of historical narrative, collective memory and national identity, (re-)naming is analyzed here in the critical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's post-structuralist interpretation of "symbolic and political capital", Louis Althusser's "theory of ideological state apparatuses", Benedict Anderson's "constructivism", Pierre Nora's conception of "*lieu de mémoire*" and Judith Irvine and Susan Gal's "language ideologies", Bruno Latour's "actor-network theory" and Henri Lefebvre's "theory of space as a social product". Methodological approaches include traditional classificatory descriptions involving detailed renaming quantifications, as well as qualitative methods employed within the critical framework, such as discourse analysis, oral history, Geertz's "thick description", in-depth interview, etc. The focus, therefore, is on national and local toponymic strategies, motivations and patterns of (re-)naming, politicization of the toponymic landscape, actors and objects of symbolic transformations, hegemonic and alternative discourses of (re-)naming.

The results of the studies point to the simultaneous existence of two phenomena: on the one hand, the toponymic landscapes of post-Soviet space are still "run by the state" which sometimes is rather brutally administering respective affairs. On the other hand, more and more structures (e.g. media, NGOs, civil society institutes, educational establishments, even non-human participants), and particular individuals are getting involved in the renaming, thus evidencing a certain democratization of the process. The authors also reveal the historical backgrounds of the current toponymic modifications as they analyze the genetic relation of the ongoing modification with the historical events of the nineteenth (and even) eighteenth centuries. The authors expose the pre-Soviet, imperial origin of a number of post-Soviet renamings, which suggests a decolonization of place names as such, as well as a decolonization of toponymy as a field of study. An important takeaway message put up for discussion by the authors of this issue is the ideologically quasi-neutral and power-laden character of place names. This is often ignored not only by the actors of toponymic changes, but also by those who attempt at their scientific, though uncritical, review.

The issue's array of case studies begins with an illustration of the relation between vernacular (perceptual) regions and their respective names, and the ideological state apparatuses in action. Using the example of the *Tavria* region case, Mykola Homanyuk shows how the change in the political connotations of the respective toponymy accords with the changing ideologies of the states comprising *Tavria* at various historical periods. In the times of the Russian Empire, *Tavrida/Tavria*, was conceptualized as a part of the ancient world. This justifies, the author shows, an ideology that accounts for Russian expansion into the south. During the Soviet times, *Tavria* symbolized the victory in the Civil War, as well as the successful socialist transformation of the nature.

In independent Ukraine, the concept of *Tavria*, on the one hand, becomes profitably commodified under the influence of the market economy. On the other hand, it is effectively used in the decommunization process as an ideologically "neutral" place name. Accompanying each change is not only a rather logical modification of the area's image, but also a change in the perception of its boundaries and its imaginary center. The *Tavria* region expands perceptually (from the Crimean Peninsula in the ancient times to a large-scale region including almost all of Ukraine's south), while its territory absorbs official Tavrian place names. At the same time, *Tavria* is perceived as a steppe region, and the collocation "Tavrian steppe" becomes a set expression associated primarily with anthropogenic, not natural, landscapes. The *Tavria* toponymic case suggests the influence of the ideological state apparatus on the shaping of vernacular regions. This case also explicates the practice of attributing new senses to initially semantically neutral place names by means of their de- and etymologizing in the course of various political campaigns.

Alexander Golikov conducts a comparative analysis of renaming strategies and practices characteristic of the post-Soviet space as a whole, and in particular of Kharkiv, Ukraine. Here, in 2015, the toponymic changes were initiated by two different actors: on the one hand, there were regional authorities representing the state and, on the other, the local city council. The author employs discourse analysis to examine the "big" place names (names of administrative districts, metro stations and parks), and a qualitative approach to survey the collection of the city's street names. The author suggests that, after the 2015 decommunization, Kharkiv toponymy can be characterized as authentic, or provincial, in the sense that now more place names appeal to the city's local history than before. Another finding is that there are now fewer personal names in the city's toponymic landscape, though a significant number of toponyms still refer to Soviet and pre-Soviet times.

Exploring the patterns of renaming, Golikov identifies a type of logical allusion which, similarly to the notion of having a phonetic resemblance to the initial form (e.g., Kalyninske/Kalynivske), implies a similarity of signification (e.g., Chapaev Street/Cavalrymen Street). The juxtaposition of the renaming strategies adopted by the regional authorities and Kharkiv city council elicits major differences between them. While the regional administration has made a "broad" interpretation of the decommunization process and has promoted a more radical and, therefore, more conflict-bound transformation of the cityscape, aiming at a more extensive political unification, the city council has assumed a compromise position adhering to the letter of the law, as well as deferring to the values of the city inhabitants.

In her article on the decommunization renaming in the Ukrainian south-eastern city of Kryvyi Rih, Natalia Kudriavtseva explores attitudes towards the ongoing process expressed within an expert community of researchers from different fields. The working group, organized by the researchers with the aim of developing their own toponymic suggestions to be then publicly discussed, stands here as a separate actor of the symbolic changes. Employing the sociolinguistic concept of language ideology, the author transforms it from a belief about language into a belief about place name in order to

analyze the working group naming motives and toponymic choices. In a similar way to the ideology which links ethnic identity to language, the toponymic ideologies of the renaming group members are governed by the view that the toponym is an expression of national identity, where a specific historical interpretation functions as a structural piece. The processes structuring these ideologies—iconization, fractal recursivity and erasure—necessarily lead to a selective commemoration of events and historical figures, which are defined by their belonging to the place. As foreseen by the national agenda, "decommunizational" renaming in this local context is also perceived as a reconstruction of identity. However, the major motivation for the toponymic changes does not relate to a unification of the cityscape according to the top-down conceptual framework. Instead, the renaming recommendations are inspired by the group members' intention to produce an individual symbolic landscape in order to demonstrate their local identity, as well as to avoid any future toponymic changes.

Oleksiy Gnatiuk and Anatoliy Melnychuk continue the issue's analysis of streetscape, symbolic space and national identity. The city under study is Ukraine's capital Kyiv whose streets represent, according to the authors, "façade symbolic landscape" of the whole state. The map of contemporary Kyiv functions as a guide to an official version of Ukraine's history as it reflects the accents and the chronological priorities of the state's ideological program, and the national historical narrative developing from 1989 to 2018. The authors identify four stages in the decommunization of Kyiv's symbolic landscape, each of them defined by a background political change. The first stage is spurred on by the declaration of Ukraine's independence, the second one falls on the President Leonid Kuchma's first term in office, the third one—on the presidency of Viktor Yuschchenko, while the fourth stage, being most large-scale and ideologically permeated, begins after the Euromaidan's Revolution and continues into the present. The general trend in this toponymic process evidences a change in the naming patterns which transform from careful restoration of historic place names into an active implementation of ideological commemorative names. In identifying genetic and semantic structures of the new toponymy, together with its locational patterns, the authors argue for a distinctive model of toponymic policy conditioned by the status of Kyiv as the capital of Ukraine. This model is characterized by the predominance of place names which relate to the Cossacks, Ukraine's struggle for independence at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the contemporary period of independence. Accompanying this policy is the concentration of ideologically-colored names in the city center, which is also defined by the status of the object named.

The situation in Kyiv is also addressed by Lyudmyla Males and Artemiy Deineka who review today's toponymic clashes in a retrospective of cityscape formation since the second half of the nineteenth century. That was the time when personal names first began to appear in Kyiv's symbolic landscape and an active ideologization of its toponymy begins. Reaching its pitch in the Soviet times, this naming pattern leads to a considerable deprivation of the city's local semantic color and an alienation of its inhabitants from the cityscape. First careful attempts at decommunizing Kyiv's toponymy result in its "postmodern diversity" and produce an ideological mixture in the city's symbolic space. Analyzing public discourse around the latest stage of renaming, the

authors draw upon contemporaneous texts: media clippings, official legislation, public discussion records, and petitions, the latter being so far rarely used as a source. The authors suggest three discursive patterns structuring public discourse around renaming in the time of Ukraine's independence: local history (the restoration of pre-Soviet place names), nationalism (the selective commemoration of Ukrainian nationalist liberation events and heroes), and a decolonization which is based on the presumption of political commitment regarding any kind of toponymy, even a semantically (quasi-)neutral one. Drawing upon various data sources, the authors deduce a less regulated and, consequently, more democratic feature of the discursive practices accompanying the latest "shock" wave of renaming, comparing these to the Soviet ones and the ones associated with the first decommunization transformations in contemporary Ukraine.

Augusto Dala Costa narrates a massive renaming in Tbilisi, which took place from 1988 to 2007. The author emphasizes that the toponymic changes in Georgia's capital reflect the political transformations of the time and accord with the post-Soviet national discourse of Georgia. Drawing upon the data previously not translated from the Georgian language, Costa detects the points where the national discourse meets Tbilisi's local history and highlights a selective nature of commemoration of early independence. Replacing ninety percent of Soviet personal names with the same number of place names memorializing Georgian historical figures, the authorities performed a "Georgianisation" of the capital, incorporating not only cultural but also religious and ethnic elements into its cityscape. Deprived of local peculiar traits, the toponymic portrait of Tbilisi depicts the whole of Georgia as a homogeneous monoethnic nation whose unity is secured by the commemoration of the national historical events and figures, which its capital readily illustrates. This national discourse characterizes the Menshevik nature of the First Republic, the local minorities of the Armenians and Azeris, and even the shared Transcaucasian history erased from the post-Soviet Tbilisi cityscape. Reconfigured in such a way, the symbolic landscape of Georgia's capital reflects the politics of the then Georgian leaders—Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Mikheil Saakashvili—and brings about "the democratic expression of power from the Georgian nation", while also cultivating its self-perception as it shapes Georgian national identity defined by the political agenda of the time.

In his article on the erasure of Jewish toponymy from the Ukrainian landscape, Yurii Kaparulin examines the place names of Jewish agrarian settlements founded in southern Ukraine from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward. Owing to them, the maps of Ukraine in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries were abound in names originating in Hebrew and Yiddish. While the policy of "nativization" (*korenizatsiia*) and collectivization of the 1920s created five Jewish national regions in Ukraine, which incorporated new and existing settlements with Jewish names, the Stalin purges of the 1930s and 1940s erased almost all Jewish toponymy from Ukraine's map. The Jewish place names were extremely vulnerable not only to the "general party line", but also to specific changes in Soviet ideology, for instance, as regards the ethnic problem and in particular the acculturation of the Jewish minority in the USSR. The decommunization renaming process in Ukraine, however, did not result in the restoration of Jewish historic place names (with the exception of two former Jewish settlements in

Crimea renamed *de jure* by the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine.) The author highlights that the lost toponymy of the Jewish rural places was also the lost symbolic space that would commemorate the victims of the pogroms, Holocaust, Stalinist repressions and the prosecution of the national movements in the Soviet times. The conclusion he draws is that, as before, multiculturalism has not been demonstrated in Ukrainian decommunization renaming, neither has it been a trend of the 2015–2016 campaign.

Iryna Pavlenko broadens the scope of investigation supplementing the traditional critical study of settlement and street names with a detailed examination of names borne by various city businesses. To a lesser degree governed by the officials, commercial names are no less responsive to social and economic issues of the day. Drawing on the case of Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia, the author demonstrates a heterogeneous development of the different layers of the toponymic landscape: while commercial names experience continuous alterations, conforming with the pragmatics of the current socio-economic change, street renaming is realized in stages, being conditioned upon the "correction of historical memory" initiated by the state. These layers do not, however, exist in isolation, which is exemplified in the street names fixing the names of enterprises as well as in the commercial names stemming from the names of streets. A unifying factor in the toponymic transformations of Ukraine's independence is produced by the two interrelated processes: "desovietization" and decommunization of the cityscape. The desovietization process is rather spontaneous, being called forth by the world cultural and economic challenge, and rarely expresses the on-going political change. The decommunization process conversely has a clearly defined ideological nature which gains peculiar traits in the local context of Zaporizhzhia. Constitutive to the "retrospective and perspective image" of the city is its regional character which reflects the economics, culture, science, as well as ideological orientations of the place.

Taken together, these contributions prepared by sociologists, historians, geographers, linguists, political science and culture experts once again stress the multifaceted character of toponymic landscape as an object of research. What is more important is that they construe toponymic renaming not only as a practice of nomination, but also as a practice of producing place, as a place-making practice. Notwithstanding the similarity of strategies, patterns and naming motives, the places made would possess very few common traits, or even may arise as having a unique nature. This view will hardly bring about a systematic description of renamings in a single country, not to say of the whole of the post-Soviet space. However, this view will not preclude a gleaning of the story behind the process as the papers presented here, like a mosaic of diverse pieces, highlight various issues discussed in the field.

Bibliography:

Berg, Lawrence D. and Vuolteenaho, Jani (eds.) (2009). *Critical toponymies: the contested politics of place naming*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Rose-Redwood, Reuben, Alderman, Derek and Azaryahu, Maoz (eds.) (2017). *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics and Place.* New York, NY: Routledge.