

ФІЛОСОФІЯ ОСВІТИ ХХІ СТОЛІТТЯ: ПОШУК ПРІОРИТЕТІВ

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DECOLONIZATION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: CONTENT, PRACTICES, CHALLENGES

The article analyzes the processes of decolonizing historical memory within Ukraine's higher education system in the context of contemporary socio-political transformations. It outlines the theoretical foundations of memory politics as a socio-cultural phenomenon and defines the specificity of the postcolonial approach to interpreting the past. Particular attention is paid to changes in the content of academic courses aimed at overcoming imperial and Soviet historiographical narratives, as well as to the expansion of the thematic scope of historical research. The transformation of educational practices is highlighted, including the implementation of critical thinking, the development of public history, the digitalization of the educational process, and interdisciplinary approaches. The key challenges of decolonization are analyzed, including institutional inertia, the impact of information warfare, insufficient integration into the global academic space, and the traumatic context of the present. It is argued that the decolonization of historical memory serves as an important factor in shaping a new historical consciousness and national identity.

Key words: decolonization, historical memory, higher education, memory politics, history education, public history, critical thinking, Russian-Ukrainian war, identity.

ДЕКОЛОНІЗАЦІЯ ІСТОРИЧНОЇ ПАМ'ЯТІ У ВИЩІЙ ОСВІТІ УКРАЇНИ: ЗМІСТ, ПРАКТИКИ, ВИКЛИКИ

У статті проаналізовано процеси деколонізації історичної пам'яті у системі вищої освіти України в умовах сучасних суспільно-політичних трансформацій. Розкрито теоретичні засади політики пам'яті як соціокультурного феномену та окреслено специфіку постколоніального підходу до інтерпретації минулого. Особливу увагу приділено змінам у змісті навчальних курсів, спрямованих на подолання імперських і радянських історіографічних наративів, а також розширенню тематичного поля історичних досліджень. Висвітлено трансформацію освітніх практик, зокрема впровадження критичного мислення, розвитку публічної історії, цифровізацію навчального процесу та міждисциплінарні підходи. Проаналізовано ключові виклики деколонізації, серед яких інституційна інерція, вплив інформаційної війни, недостатня інтеграція у світовий академічний простір та травматичний контекст сучасності. Обґрунтовано, що деколонізація історичної пам'яті виступає важливим чинником формування нової історичної свідомості та національної ідентичності.

Ключові слова: деколонізація, історична пам'ять, вища освіта, політика пам'яті, історична освіта, публічна історія, критичне мислення, російсько-українська війна, ідентичність.

Relevance of the Topic. The full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has become not only a military challenge but also a profound ideological one, exposing the long-standing dependence of the Ukrainian humanitarian sphere on imperial narratives. The war has underscored the need not merely to defend territorial integrity but also to radically rethink the historical past, cleanse collective memory of colonial layers, and restore Ukraine's own interpretive agency. In this context, the decolonization of historical memory emerges not as an academic trend but as an urgent societal necessity and an element of cultural resistance. A special role in these processes is played by the higher education system, which functions not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as an active agent in shaping meanings, identities, and value orientations. Universities thus become spaces where the struggle over the interpretation of the past takes place: between imperial legacies and nationally oriented visions of history, between the reproduction of outdated frameworks and the cultivation of critical, decolonized thinking. In contemporary conditions, history teaching cannot remain

neutral or detached from memory politics; it is inevitably embedded in broader processes of social transformation. Decolonizing historical memory in Ukrainian higher education entails not only revising curricula and course content but also a deeper transformation of academic culture. This involves abandoning hierarchical models of knowledge that imperial centers of influence reproduced for a long time, critically rethinking canons, historical figures, and events, and integrating experiences of trauma, war, and resistance into the educational process. At the same time, this process is contradictory and uneven, encountering institutional inertia, resource constraints, and the complexity of reconciling academic objectivity with ethical responsibility in conditions of war.

The article aims to analyze the processes of decolonizing historical memory within the Ukrainian higher education system, specifically by identifying the main changes in the content of academic courses and educational practices. It approaches teaching history and outlines the key challenges and prospects for transforming the university environment in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Presentation of the Main Material.

Memory politics in contemporary humanities emerges as a complex and multidimensional socio-cultural phenomenon that shapes how the past is interpreted in the context of pressing societal demands. It involves not only the preservation or reproduction of historical facts but also the processes of their comprehension, reinterpretation, and integration into contemporary identity practices. As Pierre Nora notes, modern societies increasingly live in a mode of “memory” rather than “history,” which signifies the predominance of symbolic and cultural forms of representing the past over purely scholarly knowledge [6, p. 7–9]. In this context, memory politics is formed at the intersection of several key spheres: state policy, academic discourse, and the public domain. The state, through legislation, educational programs, commemorative dates, and memorial practices, influences the construction of an “official” narrative of the past. The academic community, in turn, produces scholarly interpretations that can either support or critically reassess these narratives. Public discourse through media, culture, and social networks facilitates their dissemination, transformation, and, at times, radicalization. In this regard, the mechanisms for preserving and transmitting historical experience in society acquire particular significance. As Aleida Assmann emphasizes, cultural memory results from institutionalized forms of transmitting experience, which determine what a society considers meaningful to preserve [1, p. 40]. These processes gain particular relevance in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has sharply intensified debates over historical memory and its political use. The war has not only highlighted the necessity of rethinking the past but has also transformed memory into a crucial resource for societal mobilization and resistance.

For postcolonial societies, memory politics acquires particular significance, as it is directly connected to the question of authority over historical narratives. Ukraine spent a long period within imperial formations, which led to the dominance

of external interpretations of its history. Under such conditions, the historical narrative was often shaped not as an expression of internal development, but as an element of broader imperial frameworks. As Eva Thompson notes, Russian imperial culture systematically appropriated and marginalized the histories of subordinated peoples, creating asymmetrical models of memory [11, p. 12]. In this context, the decolonization of historical memory emerges as a necessary stage in the formation of autonomous historical thinking. It entails rejecting the dominance of imperial interpretations that represented the Ukrainian past as peripheral or dependent and asserting an independent perspective on historical processes. This process involves reinterpreting key events, reintroducing previously marginalized topics and narratives into scholarly circulation, and including groups that have long remained on the margins, such as women, national minorities, and local communities, into the historical narrative. An important aspect of decolonization is also the affirmation of multiple interpretations, countering the monological character of imperial discourse. As Paul Ricoeur emphasizes, memory is always interpretive and therefore open to diverse readings and reconsiderations [9, p. 21–25]. In this sense, decolonization does not mean replacing one “correct” narrative with another, but rather creating conditions for the pluralism of historical knowledge. Thus, memory politics in contemporary Ukraine is not only a field of academic analysis but also a site of societal struggle over meaning, identity, and the future. The decolonization of historical memory is a key mechanism in this process, enabling society to overcome the imperial legacy and develop new approaches to understanding the past. In this context, the education system plays a crucial role, capable not only of transmitting knowledge but also of fostering a critical and responsible attitude toward history.

One of the key directions in the decolonization of historical memory is a thorough revision of the content of courses

in higher education institutions. Primarily, this involves moving away from Soviet and Russian historiographical frameworks that for a long time defined the structure and logic of history teaching in Ukraine. These frameworks were based on an imperial vision of the past, in which Ukrainian history was treated as part of the “All-Russian” historical process, significantly limiting the possibilities for developing a nationally oriented historical narrative [4, p. 151]. In this context, an important task is the reassessment of key events in Ukrainian history from the perspective of national agency. This entails shifting the focus from Ukraine’s peripheral status toward recognizing it as an independent historical actor with its own developmental logic, internal contradictions, and unique state-building experience. Such an approach allows for overcoming colonial interpretations and contributes to the formation of a coherent understanding of historical processes. A crucial element in transforming the content of historical education is also the inclusion of topics that were previously marginalized or excluded from the academic discourse. These include the history of national minorities, regional studies, everyday life, and gender history. Incorporating these narratives pluralizes historical knowledge and fosters a more inclusive model of historical memory. Another important direction is integrating Ukrainian history into the broader European and global context. This entails moving away from isolationist or empire-centered approaches toward comparative and transnational studies, according to A. Portnov, incorporating the Ukrainian historical experience into broader European processes, helps overcome the provincialization of historical knowledge and contributes to its modernization [8, p. 247].

In contemporary conditions, reassessing periods such as the Russian Empire’s colonial policies, Soviet totalitarianism, and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war acquires particular significance. These historical stages are considered not only as objects of study but also as factors shaping a new historical consciousness grounded in

experiences of trauma, resistance, and the reinterpretation of the past. This involves a shift in the perspective of historical knowledge from externally imposed interpretations to internally reflected narratives that convey the Ukrainian experience of historical development. In this context, it is important not only to update factual knowledge but also to transform the interpretive frameworks through which historical events are understood. Specifically, the reassessment of imperial and Soviet legacies entails uncovering mechanisms of subjugation, asymmetries of power, and cultural domination that shaped Ukraine’s position over a prolonged period. An essential aspect of decolonization is also the deconstruction of entrenched historical myths and stereotypes that have long been reproduced in the educational process. This involves critically revisiting narratives such as “brotherly peoples,” “shared historical destiny,” and “liberating mission,” among others. As Edward Said emphasizes, such discourses function as instruments of cultural domination and require systematic deconstruction [10, p. 54–56]. In contemporary Ukraine, these processes also acquire an institutional dimension, manifested in policies of decommunization, derussification of the public space, and the revision of educational standards and curricula. Thus, the decolonization of memory extends beyond the academic discourse and becomes an integral part of state humanitarian policy.

Decolonization of historical memory in higher education is implemented not only through the revision of course content but also through profound transformations in educational practices. It involves changing the very logic of teaching history, shifting the focus from reproducing established narratives to critically analyzing and reinterpreting them. This approach entails moving away from a linear, normative view of historical processes toward multiple interpretations and openness to diverse research perspectives. In this context, distinguishing history from myth as forms of representing the past becomes particularly

significant. As Peter Munz notes, historical knowledge differs from myth primarily in its critical approach to sources and its aim to provide rational explanations of events. In contrast, myth functions as a symbolic organization of experience [5, p. 5–7]. Consequently, one of the key objectives of contemporary history education is to teach students to differentiate between scholarly interpretations and ideologically constructed narratives. A central aspect of this process is the introduction of critical thinking as the foundation for teaching history. This entails moving away from reproductive learning models focused on memorizing facts toward analytical, discussion-based, and research-oriented forms of study. Within this framework, students are viewed not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in the creation of understanding.

An important aspect of decolonizing educational practices is the active use of public history as a tool for interaction between the university and society. Public history expands the boundaries of the academic space by engaging students in the processes of researching and representing the past in the public sphere, thereby fostering a responsible approach to history as a socially significant resource. In this context, the digitalization of the educational process is particularly important, opening new opportunities for working with historical sources while simultaneously transforming how the past is represented. The use of digital platforms and online archives, as well as visual and multimedia formats, not only diversifies learning but also enables the critical rethinking of traditional historical narratives, making them more open to interpretation. In contemporary Ukrainian realities, these approaches are combined with broader processes of reexamining historical memory and identity, which manifest in the introduction of new educational courses, the development of research and public initiatives, and the documentation of events of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In this context, the university functions not merely as a space for transmitting knowledge but as an active participant in shaping public

history, where academic research, public dialogue, and memorial practices converge. Interdisciplinarity plays a crucial role in this process, allowing the integration of approaches from history, cultural studies, anthropology, and media studies, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which historical memory is formed and its social functions are realized.

Despite obvious progress, the process of decolonizing historical memory in Ukrainian higher education is accompanied by a range of systemic challenges, both institutional and socio-cultural. Overcoming these challenges is a necessary condition for the formation of a new model of historical education, free from imperial narratives. One of the key challenges is institutional inertia, which manifests in the preservation of outdated curricula, traditional teaching methods, and established academic approaches. A significant portion of educational practices still relies on frameworks developed during the Soviet period, complicating the implementation of modern methodologies. As noted by Georgiy Kasianov, the transformation of historical education is uneven, and resistance to change is often driven by both institutional and generational factors [4, p. 152]. An additional complicating factor is the wartime situation, which limits educational institutions' resources while simultaneously increasing societal demand for rapid updates to educational content, creating tension between academic rigor and the need for prompt reform. This problem is further exacerbated by a lack of resources and by educators' insufficient preparation to work with new approaches and sensitive topics. Another important challenge is the impact of the information war accompanying the current stage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Historical memory has become an object of deliberate manipulation, requiring educational institutions to take an active role in countering disinformation [7, p. 179]. The information space remains a battleground over the interpretation of the past, where propagandistic narratives aimed at reproducing imperial myths and discrediting

Ukrainian history actively operate. In this context, historical education faces pressure from both external and internal sources of information, complicating the development of students' critical thinking skills.

A significant problem also remains the insufficient integration of Ukrainian historiography into the global academic space. This limits access to the latest research, contemporary theoretical approaches, and international scholarly debates. As Andriy Portnov emphasizes, the isolation of Ukrainian historical scholarship in the past has led to a certain lag in the adoption of new methodologies, particularly postcolonial approaches and memory studies [8, p. 251]. Addressing this issue requires activating international cooperation, academic mobility, and participation in global research projects.

A distinct group of challenges is posed by the traumatic nature of contemporary historical events, primarily the Russian-Ukrainian war. The war not only alters the content of historical memory but also affects the emotional state of participants in the educational process, including both teachers and students. Working with topics such as war, violence, and genocide requires particular pedagogical sensitivity, as well as approaches that take into account the experience of trauma. In this context, the ideas of trauma studies scholars are especially relevant, notably Cathy Caruth, who emphasizes the complexity of representing traumatic experiences [2, p. 4–6], and Shoshana Felman, who highlights the importance of testimony as a form of understanding trauma [3, p. 78–80]. In the educational process, this necessitates combining academic reflexivity with an ethical approach to teaching difficult and painful subjects. In this sense, the decolonization of historical memory in higher education emerges not only as an

academic task but also as a strategic factor in fostering the resilience of Ukrainian society, its capacity to resist informational influences, and its ability to construct its own model of historical development.

Conclusions. As a result of the conducted research, it has been established that the decolonization of historical memory in Ukrainian higher education is a complex and multidimensional process encompassing content-related, methodological, and institutional levels. It involves rejecting imperial and Soviet historiographical models, affirming national agency in interpreting the past, and expanding the thematic field of historical research by including previously marginalized topics and groups. It has been demonstrated that a crucial component of this process is the transformation of educational practices, including the promotion of critical thinking, the development of public history, the digitalization of the educational process, and the adoption of interdisciplinary approaches. These tools ensure the formation of a new model of historical education oriented toward interpretation, analysis, and a responsible attitude toward the past. At the same time, decolonization extends beyond the purely educational process, encompassing the university space itself as an environment for the symbolic representation of memory. Moreover, it has been found that implementing these transformations is accompanied by several challenges, including institutional inertia, the impact of the information war, insufficient integration of Ukrainian historiography into the global academic space, and the traumatic nature of contemporary historical events. These factors complicate the decolonization process and require systemic solutions at the levels of educational policy, the academic community, and the state as a whole.

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