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THE CHORNOBYL DISASTER IN THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

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ЧОРНОБИЛЬСЬКА КАТАСТРОФА У КУЛЬТУРНО-ІСТОРИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

The Chernobyl disaster is a tragic event that impressed everyone with its scale, caused international resonance and was reflected in various forms of cultural reproduction which prompted a new understanding of the world as well as became a «generator» of historical experience and «living memory» of the Ukrainian nation. The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone can be considered a place of the technological, socio-cultural and political crisis. The zone arose rather as a result of that crisis - it is a symbol of the dead political system and utopian Soviet ideals.

In Western literature the expression «cultural Chernobyl» which distinguishes the constituent basis of «spiritual extinction» is often used in relation to the mental and spiritual crisis of the post-Soviet society. In fact, after the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine, rising on the ruins of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, was held hostage to the disaster and it became a mnemonic place of rethinking of the post-Soviet life in general by gradually becoming a transit meeting place for West and East. Such a situation encouraged citizens to live in the parameters of constant responsibility and memory of the past. Consequently, the reflexive cultural representation of the Chernobyl accident also determined the general state of Ukraine's spiritual crisis [1, p. 96].

The uniqueness of historical and cultural experience gained by the Ukrainians during the liquidation period as well as ethnosophical features of the regional thinking, gave the possibility of the fruitful, intensive development of cultural and artistic reflections on the events and consequences of the 1986 accident: in extreme conditions, people fought with two invisible forces - radiation and information about it.

With the acquisition of political independence, since the beginning of the 90s of the twentieth century, Ukraine has begun to experience a process of «renaissance» of understanding and interpreting of many events in its history, by forming a «national history». Thus, with the gradual declassification of a large layer of material from the archives of the totalitarian USSR - new historical facts have appeared, the interpretation of well-known events has changed, a new understanding of the past has appeared which was not publicly mentioned before. The Chernobyl disaster belongs to such «historical revelation».

The total study of the potential of post-Soviet transformations is promoted with the help of the modern culturological thought. The Chernobyl tourism, with the typical classical infrastructure of such towns as Chernobyl and Pripyat, falls into the category of such searches, as the very communist symbols and industrial «Soviet» urban planning are a priority

for foreigners as well as the general status of Ukraine as a post-Soviet country is of great interest to tourists. Chernobyl presents the reality as a surreal attraction to tourists and on the other hand - it presents illusory as something real. Destroyed landscapes are presented as a symbol of technical and political errors, a consequence of human abuse of nature and a warning of a possible apocalypse for the civilization. The Chernobyl disaster is the disaster of time. This is the event that will last longer than the lives of entire generations. Disasters used to be always local in nature, they were always associated with some object and place - whether it was a natural or technological disaster. Instead Chernobyl is global in terms of both space and time.

According to the French historian Pierre Nora, the author of the concept «places of memory», after the collapse of the Soviet Union the period of radicalization of the national and ethnic memory began in the Ukrainian history when the Ukrainians needed a collective rethinking of their history and experienced, firstly, the process of «memory recovery», secondly, the modification of the ethnic self-identification in the processes of inculturation. In the post-Soviet period, there was the replacement of the «ideological» history for the «living memory» regarding Chernobyl which, at the subconscious level of the people, was merged with morality and national semantics, forming a symbolic background for the process of distinguishing of «places of memory». One of the brightest examples of such cultural and historical changes can be considered the transformation of the «living memory» of the Chernobyl liquidators into the national, state inheritance. Thus, the issue of the «exclusion zone» is now in the same plane with such events in the «Soviet» history as the OUN-UPA, the Holodomor of the 1930s in Ukraine, the repression of the scientific and cultural intelligentsia of the 1930s and 1950s, etc. and this, in turn, confirms the relevance of the sacralization of their cultural memory by the Ukrainian people [2, p. 63].

It is worth noting that creativity is becoming a tool for rethinking and preserving of the historical memory of the Chernobyl accident and its consequences, especially for the younger generations, as the exclusion zone has opened its door to art. Without a single touch to the walls of the buildings of the exclusion zone, the bright and large-scale art project «Artifact» is in action. Among other things, the artists' efforts resulted in the «Chornobyl Radiance», a lighting installation projected on the radar station «Arc». Another impressive idea of the artists is the projection of giant flags of the Chornobyl Fund donor states, which was covered at the confinement for the Independence Day of Ukraine in 2020 [3].

Thus, the process of cultural and historical reassessment of the fact of Chernobyl within the post-Chernobyl paradigm has led to the identification of the «exclusion zone» as a «place of memory» of the post-Soviet retrospective. Gradually overcoming most of the «information barriers» of the official history of the Soviet period, the Chernobyl accident has come into the collective memory of the young generation of the Ukrainians as a full-fledged historical fact that has its mnemonic reflection within the 30-kilometer «exclusion zone», becoming a center of the formation of «memorial culture» of modern Ukraine. Today, memories of the Chernobyl accident are certainly an element, characteristic of the national memory of the Ukrainians which affects the mental self-determination of the nation as a whole.

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THE HISTORY OF THE GHOST TOWNS: THE CHORNOBYL EXCLUSION ZONE

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ІСТОРІЯ МІСТ-ПРИМАР: ЧОРНОБИЛЬСЬКА ЗОНА ВІДЧУЖЕННЯ

At night on April 26, 1986 in the town of Pripjat, Ukraine, the greatest catastrophe in the history of nuclear energy occurred - the explosion of the fourth power reactor of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, the consequences of which were tragic. Immediately after the accident, almost 8.5 million people were irradiated and high-level radioactive contamination covered about 155,000 square kilometers of the territory, 52 thousand square kilometers of which was the agricultural land [1]. People were evacuated in a hurry, asked not to take many things and persuaded that the evacuation was temporary. Residents left their homes, leaving everything (furniture, appliances, personal belongings) because there was no time as staying in the town meant to die. None of the residents of Pripjat, Chornobyl, neighboring towns and villages could have imagined the scale of the catastrophe and did not suspect that they would have to leave their homes forever. More than 116,000 residents of the area were evacuated after the accident. At that time, no one could have guessed that those towns would turn into «ghosts».

The territory from which the population was evacuated has become the exclusion zone since that time. The area of the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone and the zone of unconditional (compulsory) resettlement is 2600 km². This is the area with strictly limited access and movement, governed by a set of special laws, particularly, the Law of Ukraine «On the legal regime of the territory affected by radioactive contamination as a result of the Chornobyl disaster» [2]. There are 76 settlements, including the towns of Chornobyl, Pripjat and Yaniv railway station. The functional purpose of the exclusion zone is to prevent the spread of radioactive substances and to monitor the condition of natural systems and man-made objects.

Natural resources as a set of historical, cultural, natural, climatic ones in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone, have undergone various changes for 35 years since the Chornobyl disaster. The Chornobyl zone is becoming one of the most popular destinations among tourists, including foreigners who visit Ukraine. The attractiveness of the Exclusion Zone as a tourist destination was also facilitated by the five-episode British-American miniseries «Chornobyl» created by Craig Mazin, the premier of which took place on May 06, 2019.

As the dosimetric control indicates that the level of radiation has fallen drastically since the accident, tourists are not in danger within the official routes. Exclusion zone guides and tour operators say that most visitors are interested in the abandoned nuclear town of Pripjat, which has been abandoned and contaminated with radiation for 35 years. Modern schools, hospitals, the house of culture, the cinema have turned into half-destroyed buildings and emptiness instead of people in parks and streets. While fleeing, people left everything at their homes, so you can still feel how the inhabitants of Pripjat used to live, despite the fact that most of the abandoned houses have long been looted.

The Chornobyl zone could have been visited for a long time only illegally. Back in 1995 at the very beginning, no one could have thought that tourists would have ever been interested in «radioactive wasteland». However, there were a few interested people with whom the first study visits to Chornobyl were organized accompanied by Oleksandr Syrota, a