Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine

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After snipers opened fire on protesters in the middle of the night on February 20, 2014, and killed over one hundred people, shrines were immediately erected to the slain as part of the emotional work of grieving. Sacrifice, loss, and redemption are reflected in these commemorative shrines, as well as in the monuments, exhibits, museums, and other sites of memory-making that are in various stages of development across Ukraine to commemorate what was the Maidan and its aftermath. As a historic event, the Maidan changed the aesthetics of public space and expanded the sites of everyday religiosity and the devotional practices they inspire. Public expressions of shared grief over the loss of life on the Maidan were quickly overtaken by shock, more grief, and rage over the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the outbreak of armed conflict on the Ukrainian-Russian border, which ushered in over 13,000 more deaths.

Public commemorations of these deaths in shrines, monuments, murals, and other affective urban forms amount to a political, aesthetic project of sacral framing of sacrifice. By crafting public spaces where death can be mourned and victims can become venerated martyrs, these extraordinary events enter ordinary, everyday life and remain present. They illustrate the appeal and efficacy, both political and popular, of using religiosity to link people in new ways. Commemoration in public space contributes to remaking understandings of relatedness, including their moral obligations of reciprocity, among “brotherly nations” and between “mother” and “daughter” churches.

This chapter analyzes how the deaths of those who died during the Maidan protests and as defenders in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in Eastern...
Ukraine, are curated into well-known, kin-like patriots. The aesthetics of the initial memorial shrines (*sviatynia* in Ukrainian) were replicated in subsequent contexts, media, and cities. These commemorative practices connect sacrifice and death with the quest for dignity and threats to Ukrainian sovereignty via acts of everyday religiosity that reaffirm belonging and express new understandings of relatedness. To the extent that religious institutions can persuade people to accept certain interpretations of the past, they influence understandings of who is a victim, who sacrificed for whom, and why. This is among the reasons why religious institutions are so invested in promoting particular visions of a shared past. As the presence and practice of religiosity go increasingly public, and religious institutions become ever more engaged in managing death and fostering spiritualized practices of recall and mourning, a religious idiom in the aesthetics of public space expresses relatedness and obligation that alters the emotionalized tenor of the atmosphere of public space.

**Mourning and Immortality**

On February 21, 2014, throngs of mourners carried scores of red roses and, when they sold out, red carnations tied with black ribbons to the Maidan and to St. Michael’s Monastery, which had served as a first aid station. Red symbolizes blood and black evokes the black Ukrainian soil (*chornozem* in Ukrainian). Mourners steadily moved down city streets in the days following the shootings to pay their respects to the dead. They laid flowers, forming huge piles, before grave-like shrines that were spontaneously built to mark the exact site of a protester’s death. The elements included in shrines became part of a personalized, religiously laden, commemorative aesthetic of patriotic sacrifice.

These flower-strewn shrines were embellished with icons, rosaries, candles, and other religious objects, as illustrated in figure 4.1. They created a focal point for the sincere outpouring of grief over the crushing of radical hope and the loss of life. The dead protesters were mourned as victims, heroes, and martyrs in quick succession because of the broad social recognition of the *podvyh*, or heroic feat, they had performed. As objects were added and debris was cleared, the shrines evolved. Along with a nearby chapel, the shrines were initially built without authorization. Once they became highly frequented sites of ritualized mourning and remembrance, it was obvious that it would be impossible to remove them.

By April 2014, the dead became known as the “Heavenly Hundred” (*Nebesna Sotnya*). The term *sotnya* refers to late-medieval Cossack military divisions, which numbered one hundred. The protesters had organized themselves into
sotnya: the Self-Defense Sotnya (Samooborona Maidana in Ukrainian), Art Sotnya, Women’s Sotnya, and so on. Over time, the state coopted the shrines, embraced them as emblematic of the heroism of the Maidan, and institutionalized them as official commemorative markers. The shrines became standardized and were professionally produced. The handwritten notes, poems, photographs, and mementos were systematized into memorial material that could be easily reproduced in other contexts. However, the initial personalization of the victims in the form of close-up facial portraits became a signature element in the aesthetic style of commemorating the slew of deaths that were to follow. As days turned to months and years, the faces and biographies of protesters were emplaced in a plethora of ceremonies, commemorative art, and public spaces across Ukraine, as seen in figure 4.2. After a while, the dead became not just recognizable but even familiar.

Objects that illustrated their engagement in combat, such as makeshift helmets, paving stones, tires, and found objects cobbled together to make defense barricades, formed the outer perimeter of the shrines when they were initially built and left no doubt as to how these fellow citizens died. Why they died was expressed through the multitude of Ukrainian flags, the coat of arms tryzub national symbol, the red and black flag of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and

**FIGURE 4.1.** Photos, flowers, icons with rosaries, and candles mark where protesters died. Photo by Tania Mychajlyshyn-D’Avignon.
Cossack imagery. The addition of professionally produced gold-engraved black granite plaques made the memorial markers seem grave-like. The challenge became commemorating death and burial without killing and burying the will to resist injustice as well. The solution was to make the Maidan, as the site of mortality where the protesters were shot, symbolically the reverse, namely the site of immortality. The vernacular religious practices that occur at these shrines as part of everyday religiosity include mourning, recall, and prayer. They provide a means to overcome physical death by assuring the protesters a social afterlife.

**Commemorative Spirits**

The initial response of most to these shrines was grief. Although grief is an emotion and mourning is a social practice, grief and mourning mutually constitute one another. Mourning results from grief and produces more grief, which often perpetuates mourning. This is why death is so disruptive to communal stability.
Grief, and the emotion it impels, can be intensified by an atmosphere laden with words grounded in theologies, songs with liturgical overtones, and religious objects integrated into memorial shrines. The portraits, candles, icons, and prayer beads that adorn the shrines invoke the veneration of saints. These, and other objects with clear religious meaning, were placed around the portraits and tributes to the slain. Crosses and crucifixes unite the sacrificial death of Christ with the sacrifice and death of protesters (see figure 4.3). The mimetic sympathy that is created from the objects and the eventual designation Heavenly Hundred conjure up sensations of the dead as martyrs. Ritualized behaviors set these sites apart and tautologically reaffirm the sacred qualities of mundane objects that were placed around the shrines, such as gas masks, lumber, tires, and other things relating to the righteous violent fight.

The etymological root of sacrifice makes clear its origins in religious experience, “sacer” and “facere,” or “making holy.” Although comparatively few people might make sacrificial offerings to God or gods these days, sacrifices in everyday life abound. Sacrifice has acquired new heterodox meanings through devotional practices and sacrificial forms of exchange that extend into everyday life for the purposes of acquiring certain benefits. The constitution of community and social life itself depend on the sacrifices members are willing to make. If no one is willing, then the community ceases to exist. Benedict Anderson’s (2006) landmark study decades ago drew our attention to the emblematic nature of Tombs of the Unknown Soldier, not only for imagining a national community into existence, but one that was grounded in sacrifice and veneration of that sacrifice. Today visiting dignitaries are now frequently brought to these shrines to pay homage to the protesters, much as other countries would escort visitors to a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, as seen in figure 4.4. When a sacrifice inspires awe, it garners the potential of enhancing communal allegiance or fidelity to certain moral and political principles that define it. In its most extreme form, self-sacrifice motivates suicide bombing, self-immolation, and other means of ending one’s life in exchange for the life of the group or its principles.

These shrines make the Maidan a politicized site of place-making and self-making. They contain both an absence and a presence. The protesters are dead and obviously absent. However, as heroic compatriots who sacrificed themselves for the pursuit of the common good of the nation, they are very much present. In other words, people might have died, and the protests might have ceased but the momentum and values that fueled the protests can live on when the sacrifice, undying glory, and immortality of participants is extolled in these shrines, in other sacred spaces, and in the transcendent practices they engender.

Noninstitutional forms of public religiosity do a great deal of cultural work. They communicate specific meanings through the sensations and forms of ex-
experience they generate. Rituals, such as the post-Maidan mass funeral rite held in public space, are episodic and constitute an experience in the sense of an extraordinary event. Mourning, by contrast, often occurs outside a formal ritual context and is connected with the experience of ongoing, emotional work of grieving. Both become part of the lifeworld of people who circulate in these
FIGURE 4.4. The shrines to the Heavenly Hundred have become the equivalent of a Tomb of an Unknown Soldier. Visiting dignitaries frequently lay flowers at this site. The key difference is that here the person who died for the country becomes well known through a personalized commemorative aesthetic. Photo by the author.

spaces. Just as religion is inescapably social, the process of remaking moral impulses correlated with relatedness happens collectively within communal ritual experiences.²

Mourning, veneration, and contemplation are not a response to the sacred, rather they are what make a site sacred. These practices propel forward the official state-directed commemorations of the Maidan as the Revolution of Dig-
nity. Mourning builds solidarity by collectively assuring the protesters the dignity in death that eluded them in life. This is part of the affect these commemorative shrines convey in the form of politicized, morally laden grief. When experiences of mourning are understood in transcendent terms, they link practitioners not only to the dead but also to previous generations, yielding deep vertical solidarity, much as the reenactment of Cossack Sichs did during the Maidan.

Whereas the moral significance of what is being commemorated is forged through the sensations generated at a particular place, the meaning of that space is also articulated by the ritual and ritualized behaviors that are conducted there (Smith 1987, 18, 104). The capacity of these shrines to repeatedly generate emotional sensations that lead to ritualized behaviors can be used politically to link a person to a specific place and, by extension, to the people living there. These attachments, plus the recall of common experiences and the sensations of sorrow and rage they prompt, are politically useful, and therein lies the significance of the forms of religiosity that are practiced at these memorial shrines. They generate an affective atmosphere of grief, mourning, and loss that now characterizes part of the city and serves as a lasting commentary to the legacy of the Maidan and all it stood for. This is why, although they were initially spontaneously created, the state coopted them for its own purposes.

Affective markers in the built environment, such as these shrines, are surfaces where solidarity and belonging can be inscribed. They articulate a relational sense of self to nation and self to compatriots to form a template for understanding history. Actively sacralizing public space and stimulating emotions of grief during ritualized behaviors of mourning heightens a sense of the past in the present and is a key means of sacralizing history. The fixation on the past and the vast scholarly and popular interest in memory studies can in part be explained by a tacit acknowledgment that the dead can be made present.

Oft repeated spiritualized practices of recall strengthen the attachments between the living and the dead. Vernacular religious practices to the dead constitute a form of offering that perpetuates communal relationships and the reciprocal obligations embedded in them. The dead are remembered and honored in gratitude for past acts and with the hope that their spirits will offer protection in the future. Everyday religiosity finds a place in commemorative sites in the public sphere of a pluralist society with a secular state. Vernacular practices that draw on generalized, nonconfessional Eastern Christian sentiments, signs, and theologies maintain horizontal relationships of solidarity among the living and as well as vertical relationships of connection that link the living with past and future generations.
State Encouragement of Vernacular Practices

Commemorative space is a product rather than a blank slate that is simply filled in. It is consciously produced to have a certain atmosphere that will prompt feelings, practices, and messages. Because these shrines have evolved into permanent fixtures of the urban landscape thanks to state intervention, they have lost some of their luster and magnetism. The standardization of a commemorative aesthetic, however, creates a reference point in terms of form, content, and tone that has been replicated in subsequent commemorations of the death, linking death on the Maidan to death in war.

All societies engage in acts of collective remembrance aimed at providing comfort to the living. Although it might seem surprising that memorial shrines in the form of graves to political protesters sprang up in the heart of the capital, perhaps it should not. Most cities began as ceremonial complexes, as sites of ritual display, and certainly Kyiv did. Until the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, cemeteries were located in the heart of the city, next to the main cathedral. Spatially separating the deceased from everyday life in cemeteries served to underline that the dead are no longer part of the community. The use of coffins coincided with the relocation of cemeteries to the outskirts of the city. Michel Foucault makes the interesting argument that as doubt arose as to whether a person really has a soul and if a body resurrects after death, care for the bodies of the dead increased and continues to be a veritable industry (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 25).

Forcing a separation between the living and the dead was specifically rejected in these memorial shrines. The shrines were consciously erected as near as possible to the sites of death. Emplacement is key to sacrality. The shrines are squarely located in lived public space, near the city’s single largest metro station. Streams of city residents pass by them every day. Incorporating commemorative space into highly trafficked areas is a growing trend in memorial commemoration. One need only think of the 9/11 Memorial in New York in the center of the financial district or the enormous Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, which is situated along busy thoroughfares. Both memorials were specifically built to erase separation from daily life. They trade the set apart qualities that make space sacred for immediate and unavoidable encounters within everyday life. These memorials are considered successful because they retain emotive qualities that create an atmosphere that provokes recall of past events and sets in motion the affective flow of sensations, thoughts, and actions.

Recall is not the bringing forth of an image stored in the mind or sensations stored in the body. Rather, recall triggers feelings, thoughts, and sensations that
newly emerge each time. This makes the Maidan, dotted as it with shrines, “pregnant with the past” (Ingold 2011, 153). The same can be said of other commemorative sites in Ukraine that recall sacrifice, immortality, and the afterlife of the dead. Material representations of the dead affect our thoughts and emotions via “regimes of invisibility” that have iconic power, recalling Bruno Latour’s assertion that some of the most powerful actors are invisible (2010). Their sources of agency are not merely social constructions, nor are they autonomous realities. Rather, their agency and presence are both made and made real. The materiality of commemorative sites, the objects within them, and the practices they inspire engage the bodies that circulate there. In doing so, they make an affective atmosphere pregnant with possibility.

When the sensational forms that trigger an affective reaction of feeling-thinking-acting are linked to an otherworldly realm and located in otherwise mundane public spaces, such as a city street or square, these experiences mediate the twin processes of producing the materiality of urban space and constructing the meanings of that space (Wanner 2016). Experiencing the sensations of grief generated by reading the signs of death and loss in a religious register makes for an atmosphere where an otherworldly realm can feel palpable, and those who inhabit it knowable. By drawing on the legitimating authority of a confessional tradition to ritualize grieving and mourning and forge shared meaning into these feelings, the transcendent can be kindled and experienced.

Roy Rappaport (1999, 387) noted that for a work of art or a shrine to be effective, “It need not stimulate the same emotional response in all who experience it. Indeed, if emotion is in its nature not fully describable, how can anyone know if another feels as he or she does? It is likely that everyone responds emotionally to a particular object or event rather differently, for each person brings a uniquely conditioned emotional and rational constitution to it. What is important is that the work elicit a response of some sort.” Commemorating the protesters killed on the Maidan so lavishly and sincerely recognizes the exceptional nature of their death. The multiplicity of the shrines’ symbolic forms produces a variety of reactions among those who were present, those who were virtually present, and those who imagine themselves to have been present (Kertzer 1988, 69–75). The past speaks directly through the contagion of the objects, and specifically the aesthetics and religious iconography. The important point is that public expressions of grief and indebtedness call for a reciprocal response, which often comes in the form of a commitment to a place and its people, which contributes to feelings of belonging.
Panakhya Funeral Service for the Dead

Religious institutions make pronouncements as to how one should properly relate to the dead, to their soul, and to burial. When death occurs, burial practices are ritualized into two phases: first, to transfer the living to the dead and second, to make the transition from the realm of the dead to the world of ancestors. Each transition is separated by a liminal phase. Cremation is not practiced in the Eastern Christian tradition. Although in 2016 the Vatican decided to allow cremation, but not the sprinkling of ashes, Ukrainian Greek Catholics rarely cremate the dead. The belief is that cremation would burn the soul along with the body and until the third day after death, the soul remains close by. Funerals and burials are a means to separate from the body, to mark the deceased as no longer among the living. At the grave, it is common to burn incense, light a candle, pour water or wine, and later bring food and other valued items for the deceased. The fortieth day after death is another important commemorative moment because the soul is believed to be nearby until that day. Thereafter, the soul finally leaves the world of the living. Sometimes the three-, six-, and nine-month anniversaries of the death are commemorated as well as the one-year and subsequent annual anniversaries.

On February 21, 2014, a publicly televised open-air funeral was held on the Maidan. Priests led the crowd, along with politicians, in an all-night memorial service for the dead. The Maidan became a liturgical space once again. A panakhya funeral rite took place with teeming crowds in attendance and more virtually watching. This transformed the Maidan from a place to assert the aspiration for dignity to a site of commemorating death with dignity. Mortuary rituals frame death as rebirth (Bloch and Parry 1982). By hauntingly commemorating the Heavenly Hundred, a form of life springs from these deaths, drawing on the Christian idea that the death of Christ is the source of eternal life. Revolutionary heroes in other situations, most notably the Soviet Union, were treated in a similar fashion. One need only think of the grandiose burial sites of Communist Party leaders and their elaborate funeral ceremonies.³

Music during the funeral rite played a pivotal role in creating an atmosphere of transcendence that conferred an otherworldly martyred status to the sacrificed protesters. Jeffers Engelhardt notes the prominence of music as a spiritual and ethical endeavor that links Orthodox liturgy and theology to Orthodox personhood (2015, 217). The highly emotive, hauntingly beautiful, mournful song Plyve Kacha po Tysyni (A Duck Floats on the Tysyn River) emerged as the signature “gesture of accompaniment” for the dead in funeral services (Ricoeur 2009, 17–20). The song was performed during the public funeral for “national heroes”
by Pikkardiis’ka Tertsia, a six-man acapella group whose harmonies draw on liturgical chants and Ukrainian folk music. The emotive power of the song’s grieving lament over sacrificing a son to war later prompted the families of soldiers who died in Eastern Ukraine to make it a custom to come to the Maidan and play this performance on loudspeakers for all to hear as part of their mourning on the fortieth day after death. This song, and the sensations it generates, captures the ability to attune listeners to each other by creating an atmosphere of “being and being together” (Slaby 2020, 275). Like so many other folk melodies and folk healing practices, the song evokes the protective powers of a mother. The refrain is a soldier speaking to his mother before he goes off to war:

Сам не знаю де погину
Гей, погину я в чужім краю
Хто ж ми буде прати яму?
Гей, виберут ми чужі люди
Ци не жаль ти, мамко, буде?
Гей, якби ж мені, синку, не жаль?
Ти ж на моїм серцю лежав
Гей, плине кача по Тисині
I don’t know where I will die
Oh, I’ll die in a foreign land
Who will bury me?
Well, you will be buried by strangers
Won’t you regret this, dear mother?
Oh, how could I not regret this, dear son
You have rested on my heart
Oh, a duck floats on the Tysyn

During the public funeral, a procession carried the corpses in coffins through the crowd in close proximity to the mourners in a deliberate effort to erase any separation between the living and the dead. Some of the coffins were open, and all were draped in flags. At one point, the crowd erupted in a repeated rhythmic chant, “Heroes do not die” [Heroi ne vmiraiut’ in Ukrainian]. Immortality, as an illusion or aspiration, contributes to feelings of transcendence. A body might die, but a spirit can live on when individual undying glory is extolled. The dead are counted among the immortal ancestors, and specifically those who, in their sacrifice, were willing to act morally for others. Thanks to personalized depictions of each sacrificed protestor in the shrines and the unearned intimacy of televised close-ups of family members and other mourners during this funeral, the dead were no longer strangers. Feelings of comfort arise from the recognition that what is performed for the dead today will be performed for those who die tomorrow. As the coffins were carried away through the crowds, the funeral service concluded with the crowd chanting in unified, almost trance-like repetition, “Glory to the Heroes!” This is meant to overcome individual transience
and reaffirm the righteousness of ongoing political struggle despite the real tragic deaths that occurred.

Anthropologists have long debated the significance of funeral rites, and specifically whether they enhance or quell the threat death poses to community stability. Robert Hertz (1960) placed great emphasis on mortuary practices as a means to resolve the disruptiveness of death. Mourners need to be purified because of their polluting contact with a corpse, he argued. Especially in instances of “bad death,” meaning murder, suicide, or accident, contact with the corpse is usually minimal. What is striking about this public funeral service is that it goes against the established pattern of avoiding contact with corpses, much like the shrines also refuse a separation from the dead. Moreover, Jean Baudrillard argues the purpose of funeral rites is to control the expression of grief so as to “beg and bribe the dead to stay away,” which is why, he argues, burial grounds became “the first ghettos,” segregating the dead from the living in restricted spaces (1976, 195ff.). A long-standing fear exists in this part of the world, often referred to as “the bloodlands” (Snyder 2010) that, given the theological view of bodily resurrection, the spirit of the “unquiet dead” could return in the afterlife to torment the living. Prolonged ritualized mourning serves to restore the social fabric by casting death as a manageable threat. It suggests that the disruptive loss due to death can be overcome and that the spirits of the dead can be appeased.

By contrast, O’Rourke (2007) argues that mourners need to be purged of grief, for it is grief, and specifically the public expression of grief, that poses a far greater threat to social stability than death. Although the deliberate, repeated conjuring up of grief has the potential to remake relationships based on compassion and solidarity, in other instances grief inflames rage and recasts relationships in terms of antipathy. Death can be instrumentalized for political ends when a curatorial emphasis on sacrifice, martyrdom, and veneration of slain patriots draws on grief to amplify primordial visions of the nation and revive national glories in the name of defense against the aggressor. Therefore, provoking grief through ritualized mourning at commemorative sites and public funerals can generate compassion and solidarity with those who sacrificed as easily as it can generate rage toward the other who created the unrelenting grief in the first place. The unspoken solution to grief is the elimination of its source.

**From Grief to Rage**

Not only did the material form of makeshift shrines change over time as the state became involved, the larger political context in which they were experienced also changed to include war and the loss of territory. Many young people with whom I
have spoken resent what they see as a glorification of victimhood achieved through the commemoration of tragedy. Although an incessant confrontation with a painful past is meant to yield allegiance to the dead and produce solidarity, for Mykola, who studies architecture at Kyiv Mohyla Academy, it has the opposite effect. He asked me in an exasperated, rhetorical tone, “Don’t you think it’s terrible that these memorials are all sad? They focus only on the past and what is bad about the Maidan.” He really wanted me to condemn the grave-like shrines, but I said that I thought it fit a country whose national anthem is titled, “Ukraine has not yet died.” Death has always played a central role in Ukrainian self-presentation, and especially death due to violent, tragic infractions on the innocent. “But that’s the problem,” Mykola shot back, “who wants to be part of a nation that is constantly getting beaten down?” He has a point. The galvanizing power of imagining a shared future, which propelled solidarity on the Maidan, is giving way to established tendencies, often led by religious institutions, to emphasize the shared burden of a tragic past. Although the need to redeem the suffering and sacrifice of others does not motivate Mykola as intended, others react to perceptions of unfair onslaught by banding together for the purposes of protection or revenge.

Matvei Veisberg, a celebrated Kyiv artist who actively participated in the Maidan protests, called the Maidan “one of the most beautiful things I have seen in my life.” He was inspired to paint a series of twenty-eight paintings, all hung in four rows of seven across, which he called “Stena,” or Wall. He made the paintings over forty days, ending on March 8. When I asked why he depicted the Maidan in almost monochromatic black tones punctuated by a piercing red and billowing grays, he said, “It was because of the ever present fire and smoke. I’m not a religious person, or a believer, or even a mystical person. But the wind always took the smoke to them.” He meant the Berkut Special Forces charged with controlling, disbanding, and finally shooting the protesters. He saw the smoke drifting into their eyes as evidence that even the elements were on the protesters’ side. He sought to illustrate the majesty of “ash, burnt tires, and smoke” as almost a celebration of the weapons the powerless have against the powerful.

As meaningful as the Maidan is to him, he does not like the way it has been commemorated. Before explaining why, this articulate man begins by saying “I don’t know” several times in fits of starts and stops as he searches for words. “That kind of atmosphere corresponds to the new mood. It is even helpful to some because it validates those who think, “What have you done! It has only gotten worse!” He continues on, “When they say, you didn’t accomplish anything, that’s ridiculous. It seemed as if each of us couldn’t influence anything, but then we succeeded in not letting them turn our home into a prison.”

Commemorative space that began with graves as shrines now serves as a reminder of war and a cautionary tale that could discourage further protests. The
possibility of more mass discontent lingers because grief, like the shrines themselves, can morph into something else. The use of an affective atmosphere to generate grief, sometimes inadvertently and other times directly, can also demonize other places and peoples and lead to rage. By channeling grief into rage or rage into grief, these sites of mourning can spark moral obligations of an entirely different kind, often involving revenge, retribution, and the glory of honor killings.

Renato Rosaldo wrote an article that has since become a classic after his wife tragically died while conducting research among the Ilongot, a headhunting people in the Philippines (1984). She slipped on a mountain path and fell sixty-five feet to her death. One minute here, the next gone. In the depths of Rosaldo’s grieving and what he called the “heaving sobs with no tears,” he had insight as to why the Ilongot headhunt. Long before, he had asked them why they cut off people’s heads. They told him, “We need someplace to carry our anger.” The rage from bereavement when grieving the loss of a loved one impelled them to headhunt, he was told. It took the death of his wife and his feelings of rage amid grief to understand the Ilongot. Rage, born of grief, impels violence, he finally understood. Unexpected reminders of painful loss unleash that rage.

For a long time afterward, Veisberg did not want to go to the Maidan. “It’s a cemetery,” he said, “Many people were killed there. Only after many months could I cross that line, the line where the barricades were.” He crossed it after several friends approached the National Museum to arrange an exhibit of his Wall painting series. The museum is located near where some of the worst stand-offs took place and next to buildings that doubled as a hospital and shelters, which hardly makes it a neutral space to exhibit paintings depicting the Maidan.

The museum staff began to hesitate and complain that the works were not in a museum format. They are unframed, and Veisberg proposed hanging them in a straight line like a wall. He described himself and his friends at this time as “short-tempered” and “cut to the bone.” He grew furious and exploded at their hesitation and trite concerns. As he stormed out, he yelled to the staff, “You don’t exist for me anymore!” Returning to that space by crossing those lines with those paintings and encountering that reaction prompted both grief and rage. But it was rage that dominated his feelings, thoughts, and actions that day. He noted sarcastically that reservations about formatting did not preclude the museum from exhibiting Yanukovych’s famous paperweight, a two-kilo loaf of bread made of pure gold. The golden loaf was a gift to Yanukovych on his birthday in 2013 from Vladimir Lukyanenko, a Russian oligarch with investments in the oil and gas industry. “That was interesting to them,” Veisberg said despondently with equal measures of grief and lament.

All interpretations, especially of someone’s emotional inner life, are made by anthropologists who are positioned subjects, able to grasp certain innuendos,
gestures, and tones, but not others. I cannot say to what degree Veisberg or visitors to the Maidan feel grief or rage at the shrines and during encounters that involve memories of the Maidan. I can only tell of the fury of an otherwise calm and thoughtful man. I can attest to the fact that every time I visit the Maidan, and I have done so many times over the course of years and always with camera in hand, I observe people captivatedly staring at these chapel-like shrines. They seem to study the photographs and objects for clues as to who each was and what motivated them to risk their lives on that day in February 2014. Are the faces in these gravestone portraits victims, martyrs, heroes, or just dead bodies? The only thing that is not disputed is that the heart of the city is now a site of mourning and that the project the Maidan launched, the pursuit of dignity, has been sidelined by a war in a country that has been truncated and divided once again.

**Never Will We Be Brothers**

Veisberg used painting as a medium to express his emotions in response to the Maidan. Anastasia Dmytruk, a twenty-three-year-old student in Kyiv at the time, decided to stand outside on a dark wintry night in 2014 and recite a rhymed poem she penned while a friend recorded it with a cell phone. She wrote the poem in Russian for Russians after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and released it soon after Vladimir Putin delivered a speech to the Russian Duma on March 18, 2014. Much as he did later during his 2021 historical essay, Putin refers to Russia’s “special calling,” a phrase the Russian Orthodox Church uses, to assert its leadership over the organic unity of Eastern Slavs as one people under a common Orthodox tradition. “Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride,” Putin says, “This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. . . . Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valor.” In other words, the graves of Russian soldiers in Crimea justify the territory as Russian.

Dmytruk sought to give voice to the sting of betrayal that annexation of Crimea brought. The poem went viral and within two months, it had already been viewed over one million times, and over three million times a year later (Stahl 2015, 450). The poem sparked extensive discussion in Ukraine and revealed fissures in attitudes, experiences, and political views toward Russia and the Soviet past more broadly among neighbors, kin, and across generations within families. Some found the poem unnecessarily combative, even Russophobic, and others found it
refreshingly honest. Titled “Never will we be brothers,” the poem draws on the familiar trope of Ukraine and Russia as “fraternal nations” (bratskie narody in Russian). Socialist and Soviet propaganda, as well as Russian Orthodox theology, posits that there is an “unbreakable unity” among peoples who share “fraternal ties” and that this natural, almost Herderian, form of solidarity is eternal and can never be destroyed (Rakowska-Harmstone 1977, 75). The poem takes issue with such claims of relatedness and the unequal hierarchical relationship on which they are based, and the obligations of loyalty and reciprocity they imply.

Никогда мы не будем братьями
ни по родине, ни по матери.

Духа нет у вас быть
свободными—
нам не стать с вами даже
сводными.

Вы себя окрестили
“старшими”—
нам бы младшими, да не
вашими.

Вас так много, а, жаль,
безликие.

Вы огромные, мы—великие.

А вы жмете . . . вы всё маетесь
своей завистью вы подавитесь

Воля - слово вам незнакомое,
вы все с детства в цепи
закованы.

У вас дома “молчанье—золото”,
а у нас жгут коктейли Молотова,
да, у нас в сердце кровь горячая,
что ж вы нам за “родня”
незрячая?

Never will we be brothers,
not by motherland, not by
mothers.

You have no spirit to be free—
not even step-siblings can we be.

You are “older” than us, you say,
younger perhaps, we hold you
at bay.

You are so many, but, sadly,
without face.

You are enormous, but we are
great.

You wear yourselves out, mad
and zealous,
you will choke from being so
jealous.

Freedom for you is unattained,
since childhood you’ve all been
chained.

In your house “silence is
golden,”
but we throw Molotov cocktails
emboldened.

Yes, our heart is seething with
blood,
you blind ones are no kin to us!
А у нас всех глаза бесстрашные, Our eyes are calm and unalarmed,
без оружия мы опасные. We are dangerous even unarmed.
Повзрослели и стали смелыми We’ve grown up and become fighters
все у снайперов под прицелами. while being shot at by snipers.
Нас каты на колени ставили— The henchmen forced us to the ground,
мы восстали и всё исправили. but we stood up and turned things around.
И зря прячутся крысы, The rats are hiding, in vain
молятся— they pray,
они кровью своей умоются. with their own blood they’ll be washed away.
Вам шлют новые указания— They are sending you new orders,
а у нас тут огни восстания. but our uprising burns and smolders.
У вас Царь, у нас - Демократия. You have a Tsar, we have Democracy,
Никогда мы не будем братьями. and never will we brothers be.

A Lithuanian vocal group, Klaipeda, instantly set the poem to music. The group had significant commercial success with the song. Singing in solidarity in accented Russian, they claimed the song was a protest to the annexation of Crimea. As a small neighboring country, Lithuanians also see themselves as vulnerable to Russian aggression (Klumbyte 2019: Ozolina 2019). In the music video, with the final line, “Never will we brothers be,” the five-member group arm-in-arm turns their backs to the camera in a gesture of finality and stares out to the open sea.

Rather than endorsing an impending permanent fracturing of Slavic brotherhood, others countered with their own rhymed responses. Over one hundred performed, filmed responses to the poem were posted on YouTube within a year (Stahl 2015, 450). Some Russians picked up a guitar and sang a response from their living room and condemned the impulse to dismiss them all as Moskali, a derogatory label for Russians. Others, through implication or direct reference, asserted that Russians and Ukrainians were both victims and instigators of the tragic events that have defined their shared history. The poems of still others
insisted on the irreversibility of a shared fate. Like it or not, shared Slavic blood means that they have always been and will always be “brothers.” The trope of the glory of the Soviet period, particularly with regard to the Soviet victory during the Great Patriotic War over fascism, was already present in some poetic responses, although it would take on even greater meaning in the years to come. These poems noted that such victories were achieved thanks to cooperation among fraternal nations, and this inspired them to endorse the Russo-Ukrainian relationship. And, finally, some capitalized on the patriarchy and male privilege inherent in the notion of brotherly nations to agree that the two countries will never be brothers because Ukraine is a sister.

President Almazbek Atambayev of Kyrgyzstan delivered a speech at a summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in Moscow in May 2014. The event was attended by presidents of Armenia, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Russia, the main participants in the Eurasian Customs Union. His remarks reveal understandings of the organic solidarity inherent within “fraternal” nations. He said,

> It is a grave misfortune when fraternal nations, who fought together for victory in World War II begin to split... Sovereignty is good, but we should make all efforts to make our borders as borders of friendship and fraternity. We see how fraternal nations, who used to fight together, begin to split. We know well what will happen if ethnic split exacerbates. It would be very hard to stop it then. It hurts a lot to see this split now. I wish conflicts and misunderstandings between fraternal nations, who stopped plague and fascism together once, would leave. We should put friendship and fraternity forefront.  \(^{10}\)

“Fraternal nations,” as Kolstø and Rusetskii remind us, is a concept that normativizes and naturalizes power differentials among groups. It creates a seemingly unchanging perception of one’s own country vis-à-vis a stronger, larger, more powerful, neighboring country so as to fix an expectation, and even a realization, of inequality (2012, 140–41). This is captured in the Soviet-era anecdote of two men discussing how to share a single apple. The Russian says, “Let’s share it in a brotherly way” (po-bratskii in Russian). “No, let’s share it 50–50,” the Ukrainian replies. The concept of fraternal nations also finds echoes in the Russian World, which posits that a Slavic brotherhood enshrined and morally validated by Orthodoxy and led by the Russian Patriarch, who sits at the helm of this theo-political space, will safeguard traditional values against corrupting, foreign encroachment.
From Maidan to Monastery

Many members of the Maidan Self-Defense units, the impromptu groups that formed to protect the protesters from Ukrainian special forces, subsequently joined the volunteer Territorial Defense Battalions to fight in Eastern Ukraine. It has become a tradition for volunteer fighters, soldiers, and others actively engaged in the war effort to come to the Maidan to light a candle near the portraits of the slain as a form of blessing before they head to the front. Deaths that result from fighting in the war are commemorated with the same aesthetics of portraiture, the same mournful song that celebrates a mother’s protection, and religious motifs. Those who see the Maidan protests as an event independent of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war object to the conflation of their commemoration.

Originally, there were even shrines to slain soldiers alongside those to protesters. However, when the number of soldiers killed in the East continued to mount, those shrines had to be relocated. Tributes to soldiers killed in Eastern Ukraine were relocated in 2017 to the exterior wall of St. Michael’s Monastery, which was where protesters took refuge during the Maidan protests. The monastery was then affiliated with the UOC-KP and now is the seat of the OCU and residence of the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine. The same aesthetic practice of using close-up portraits and biographical details to create a sense of familiarity was maintained to commemorate dead soldiers. Rows of photos of “defenders,” as the soldiers became known, were mounted on the exterior wall of the monastery facing the main artery that leads to the Maidan. The site is called the “Wall of Remembrance for those Fallen for Ukraine.”

The use of personalization here is much like the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, which was so controversial when it was built and yet is considered successful now. Early objections were that the monument was a “black gash of shame and sorrow,” “a tombstone,” and a “wailing wall.” Now the Vietnam Memorial is considered an accomplishment because it emotionalizes memorial space and affects viewers by making them feel the loss. The endless listing of names humanizes the soldiers and gives a stark sense of the magnitude of deaths. At both memorials, people leave photographs, texts, and other objects for the dead as if they were there and as if it were possible to communicate with them. Yet, the Vietnam memorial is also considered controversial because the over 58,000 American causalities pale in comparison to the three million Vietnamese who lost their lives during this conflict, a fact that remains unacknowledged.

As of late 2020, the official pronouncements of Ukrainian Army casualties numbered approximately 5,000, with another 5,000 on the separatist side. If
civilian casualties are added, the total tops 13,000 in the first seven years. Aesthetic styles that link the death of protesters on the Maidan with the death of soldiers become ensnared in growing dissatisfaction with the slow pace of reform and a persistent lack of trust in state institutions. This resentment combines with anxiety over the state’s ability to defend Ukrainians in this hybrid war as the fighting grinds on, leaving ever more corpses and refugees in its wake. As the frontiers of war become hardened and even normalized in this increasingly frozen conflict, religion and the history of the recent past are weaponized to fortify the cultural boundaries and securitized to strengthen the political borders separating Russia from Ukraine. Be they protesters-turned-victims of Ukrainian state aggression or slain soldiers from a war in separatist regions, the impulse to mourn the dead brings the frontiers of war into the everyday lives of Ukrainians and generates grief that can easily morph into rage.

**Memory Lane**

Given the tremendous importance of monuments for marking urban space and structuring interactions and encounters, I have always been curious as to the process of deciding what gets commemorated and how. I was invited to join a commission in 2016 to discuss how to commemorate the Maidan. At first a raucous group of nearly fifty urban activists, artists, leaders of NGOs, government and city officials, architects, urban planners, and others met in a downtown building on the fifth floor for hours at a time to discuss what was needed. During these meetings, I was struck by the willingness to hear the thoughts of young people and to cater to what they articulated as their preferences.

As the actual planning of the competition took shape, the group whittled down to about two dozen urban planners who met at the Presidential Administration Building in plush surroundings. There was agreement that the process had to be transparent, and that this monument needed to reflect the extraordinary character of the Maidan by being an un-monument monument. An open competition generated proposals that were publicly displayed on the Maidan. A small group of commission members selected an official design in February 2018, exactly four years after the event. To underline the swiftness of the commemorative process in Kyiv, for the sake of comparison, consider that discussions to commemorate 9/11 began five years after the event, and a monument opened nearly a decade after that in 2014.

The winning design was submitted by two Ukrainian women, one who lives in Lviv and the other in Rotterdam. Their design featured a “Memory Lane,” a quiet garden-like allée, with almost a monastery-like atmosphere of peace and
contemplation. The design formalized the atmosphere and patterns of movement already established. Key portions of where the shrines are located had already become pedestrian zones and created a firm separation between the noise and life from the harried vehicular traffic of Khreshchatyk Street below and the quiet, contemplative shrines up on the hill. For many reasons, including the swiftness of the decisions involved, the monument has still not been constructed and the shrines remain the commemorative focus of the Maidan.

However, this aesthetic has been replicated in the first official monument built to commemorate the Heavenly Hundred in Lviv, a city in Western Ukraine. It features a similar sense of sacrality, created by emplacement in a quiet, set-apart space, using the same contemplative aesthetic as in Kyiv. Numerous ideas were proposed to commemorate the Heavenly Hundred, including making a formal hymn from the signature song of accompaniment, A Duck Floats on the Tysyn River; commissioning a symphony; building a pedestrian bridge over a gap linking two hillsides, as was done in Kyiv; and creating a pedagogical program for school children about the Maidan. A competition in 2017 resulted in a jury selection and a formal monument opening in 2019. The monument was built up on a hill, above the historic part of the city, in a park-like setting. It is preceded by a long walkway with panoramic terraces from which, as plaques note, ten churches are visible. The terraces are integrated into a long path that snakes around the monument and down to the street below. Following the pattern established by shrines and the Wall of Remembrance to soldiers in Kyiv, the Lviv monument features an extended wall of portraits of those killed during the Maidan with biographical details. The portraits are etched on metal plates that are mounted on a deep rust-colored wall in the shape of a wide-open V that is meant to be an allegory for barricades. There are three rows of such portraits with an inscription above that reads, “Do not let your heart harden—for then the person in you shall die” (Ne dai zacherstvity sertsiu—bo todi pomre u tobi liudyniu in Ukrainian). In other words, keeping grief alive is a means to retaining humanity. The atmosphere of both these commemorative zones in Lviv and Kyiv is awe, sorrow, and perhaps sometimes rage as these sacred, set apart spaces recall collective attempts to pursue dignity in life and dignity in death. At the same time, by establishing a single aesthetic, an atmosphere of homage to sacrifice using religious and national symbolism, and replicating it in multiple urban locations, an integration of public space across the country grows.

Enshrining Memories

In this war of information, crosses, and arms, the first causality to prevent is the ability to write one’s own narrative of what happened and why. The Ukrainian
Institute of National Remembrance, with support from city and state authorities, created a commemorative memorial of the Maidan protests to instruct the public on the succession of events and their consequences in advance of an official monument. The exhibit attempts to build consensus as to what, how, and why events unfolded as they did. Social media played a pivotal role in sparking and sustaining the protests. Therefore, panels in the open-air exhibit feature some of the most poignant and revealing posts of the time, including the one by Mustafa Nayyem, which is credited with starting the Maidan in the first place. One in particular resonated with me because I had heard so many versions of the same sentiment. The exhibit on the Maidan drew heavily from an article published in 2015, in which a Facebook post made by Olena Babakova was reproduced. Although she gave permission for the post to be included in the article, she only learned that her post had been mounted and incorporated in an exhibit on the Maidan when several acquaintances visited the Maidan, saw it, and contacted her in mid-2019. I spoke with Olena Babakova on New Year’s Eve in 2019, almost six years after she penned the original post and several months after she learned it had been included in an exhibit on the Maidan.

She is a journalist who has lived in Warsaw since 2008. In the post she wrote that her reaction to a multitude of violent episodes during the Maidan was stoicism. She did not cry, not even when she witnessed police brutality, saw dead bodies, and heard the mounting number of causalities. She simply continued to report on the uprising. However, one day in the Warsaw metro, three people stopped her. They had seen an interview she gave on Polish television and wanted to know how they could donate money to the protesters. At that moment, the chance expression of empathetic concern by strangers in Warsaw contrasted so sharply with the loud silence and stinging lack of empathy from her own family, friends, and colleagues in Russia that she was overcome by sorrow. She realized that, although her phone, email, and Facebook page were filled with expressions of concern and words of support from strangers and friends, near and far, none were from her family, friends, or colleagues in Russia. How should she understand this silence? Is it indifference? A fear-induced inertia?

She posted in Russian: “NOBODY from Russia, wrote to me saying that they felt sorry for the families of the dead or that they wanted to somehow help the people who were grieving. I read only angry comments about what nationalistic beasts do with peaceful law enforcement agents and unfortunate regional officials. I will not try to explain what is happening in Ukraine now—anyone who has ears has already heard everything.” With a profound sense of sincere disappointment, she ended her post by writing, “I will only say that we measure our humanity by how much we are able to feel compassion.” Her indictment included some of her own family members living in Russia, who, much to Olena’s
chagrin, condemned the Maidan protests and endorsed the annexation of Crimea.

When I interviewed her in 2019, she noted, “most of the people I know in Russia are from Moscow and St. Petersburg; they spend their vacations in France or Italy; they speak foreign languages; they have money; and many have sent their kids abroad to become educated. But still they think that Putin is right about Ukraine and Crimea. It is not a good decision for Ukraine to be part of the EU because European civilization is not as spiritual as Russian civilization is.” In other words, the superior religiosity that Orthodox civilization offers needs formal recognition through political and ecclesiastical unity. To this end, although these Russians can compare Europe and Russia, they still insist on keeping Ukraine in Russia’s orbit as a brotherly nation in the name of maintaining this spiritual civilization. This made her realize that the problem is not an inability to understand but rather a lack of willingness, which forecloses the possibility of empathy arising. If there are no longer shared values and aspirations, then familial, friendship, and professional bonds become devoid of compassion and are permanently lost.12

“If we are talking about history as a narrative, it is the context that gives that narrative its meaning,” she explained. “This exhibition on Maidan is really nice from a human point of view. But is it good from a professional historical viewpoint? I’m not so sure. The context has changed.” Her perspective on empathy and antipathy has changed in tandem with earthquake-like changes in the circumstances. “I don’t want to say that when I was writing these words in 2014, I wasn’t sincere. I was sincere. That was what I felt at that moment. I felt the support of Polish civil society and felt abandoned by the Russian one. This reflects the picture I saw from my angle at that time. Reactions in 2013–14 were very emotional. But it is high time to no longer be emotional. That would be my message today.”

She, too, condemns the rush to embrace suffering at the hands of others and calls this phenomenon the “Central European Victimicity Festival.” She refers to the penchant for seeing geographic proximity as automatically leading to solidarity among the “especially offended” (osoblivo obrazhenyi in Ukrainian). It is understood that these nations are offended by Russians. Topping the list are Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Georgians, and others. They are expected to feel solidarity and have empathy for Ukrainians for the suffering they have endured, as evidenced by the commercial success of the poem set to music in Lithuania. Shared victimhood creates forms of relatedness and an empathy-induced reimagining of geopolitical alliances. Characterizing historical experience in terms of victimhood serves two purposes, she argues. Such a perspective does not oblige the victim to consider the experiences and perspectives of others in a conflict situation, which means any grievances separatists in Eastern Ukraine
might have are illegitimate and therefore dismissed. Further, the focus on victimization exonerates the victim from responsibility for any miscarriage of justice he or she might have perpetrated and allows for a sense of moral purity and purpose even as it perpetuates grief. In other words, expressions of a shared past based on victimization and suffering articulate new boundaries that validate separation of the victimizer from the victimized.

**Religious Engagement**

The Greek Catholic Church was particularly active, visible, and vocal in its calls for political reform on the Maidan and later in its efforts to address the conflict in the east. Continuing the tradition of formal portraits of army servicemen killed in combat on the outer walls of St. Michael’s Monastery, the Garrison Church in Lviv doubles as an exhibition site. The church houses the Center of Military Chaplaincy for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. In 2019, those who attended mass in this church were surrounded by material evidence of an ongoing war and the death and destruction it continues to bring to Ukraine.

Much like the shrines on the Maidan incorporated helmets, tires, and other materials used in defense, both outer aisles of the church were lined with spent rockets, grenades, and other discarded military weaponry, as well as national symbolism exemplified by uniforms, banners, and flags, as illustrated in figures 4.5 and 4.6. As has become common, the personalization of fighters was achieved through large close-up facial photos and biographical details. Even more poignant was a display of the remains of weapons designed to kill presented side-by-side with intimate, close-up portraits of children from the Donbas who have been forced to flee. The implication is that soldiers are protecting the next generation of Ukrainians. Such emotive renderings of war victims have led to the practice of people lining the streets on their knees when a dead soldier returns home for burial.

As I studied the serious expressions of parishioners who viewed the exhibit, I was haunted by the degree to which the integration of war debris in a church, side by side with the assertion of innocent children suffering, sanctified violence. Whereas an exhibit underlining the sinful and tragic nature of war might generate grief, at what point does grief turn to rage over the injustice of it all? When do otherwise compassionate people move beyond songs, paintings, poems, and grieving to express their sorrow? What might be the consequences of repeatedly seeing victims of violence in such familiar visual and biographical terms in a multitude of settings affectively communicating sacrifice, martyrdom, and loss?
The greater historical and political context is likely to suggest which way a viewer will interpret the material evidence of death and destruction.Acknowledging the offenses that led to woundedness is, as Gabodo-Madikizela writes, “a sign of ethical responsibility toward the other. It invites reflection on the historical circumstances that divide, and continue to divide, individuals and groups who are trying to heal from a violent and hateful past” (2008, 344; see also Kirmayer 2008). When a sense of a violated patrimony is framed by religiosity and mediated by the sacred, religious configurations suggest divine exaltation of sacrifice culminating in martyrdom as easily as they evoke the existence of evil forces and the demonization of others (Bakker 2013, 324).

The Ukrainian state, now together with the active participation of several denominations, commemorates the war in Eastern Ukraine in multiple ways. These actions also imply who is to blame: Yanukovych and his ruling clan, and increasingly all of Russia. Such demonization is potentially useful. Widespread popular disappointment with the slow pace of meaningful reform and deep concerns over the war fuel suspicions that commemorative efforts are simply governing authorities trying to coopt the righteousness of the struggle as their
own, even as they mine the legal gray zone for continued self-enrichment through corrupt governing practices. Nonetheless, this leaves the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in an increasingly precarious position because of its connection to the Russian Orthodox Church and inclusion of prayers for the Russian leadership during services.

The commemoration of World War II is shaping up to be a litmus test of allegiance, a defining moment and, therefore, a highly divisive issue. Victory Day commemorations of the end of World War II have held heartfelt meaning over generations, whether as tragedy, as triumph in the face of adversity, victorious grandeur, or some other interpretation. Moreover, for believers and Just Orthodox alike, clerical involvement in death rituals, be they funeral rites or commemorative ceremonies, remains an expectation. When combined, we have the makings of a polarizing moment.

The confrontation was on full view during a special session of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine’s parliament, on May 9, 2015, when a commemorative ceremony to mark the end of World War II was staged one year after the Maidan. Along with

**FIGURE 4.6.** Continuing the personalized commemorative aesthetic developed after the Maidan of honoring victims as recognizable heroes, the war exhibit features portraits of slain soldiers. Photo by the author.
acknowledging the sacrifice of World War II veterans, President Petro Poroshenko decided to include a reading of the names of soldiers who died fighting in Eastern Ukraine and would be posthumously awarded the “Hero of Ukraine” designation for their service to the country. When the lawmakers stood to honor the dead veterans of the Ukrainian Army, Metropolitan Onufrii, leader of the UOC-MP, and his delegation refused to stand. They were the only ones in the chamber who remained seated. Harsh criticism ensued. Metropolitan Onufrii later explained his seated posture as an indication of his opposition to war in general, and not the inclusion of war dead from the current armed conflict, an excuse that was widely discarded. Still, this moment signaled a sea change in attitudes among the different Orthodox churches toward death, sacrifice, burial, and salvation.

Within one year, the UOC-MP’s position on burial radically changed. They placed restrictions on conducting burial services for soldiers who died fighting in Eastern Ukraine and would no longer perform a funeral rite for anyone baptized in another Orthodox denomination. The issue became shrill when a two-year-old child in Zaporizhzhia was tragically killed by falling scaffolding. The child was baptized in the UGCC, but the UOC-MP predominates in Eastern Ukraine. The parents went public with their desperation over their inability to find a priest who would perform a funeral rite for their child. Feelings morphed into rage, first among the parents and then more broadly across the country, when baptism in another denomination was used as a justification to exclude a child from receiving a proper burial. Still, the incident illustrated the effectiveness of using burial as a means for the various Orthodox churches to distinguish themselves from each other, to advance the political orientations and allegiances they advocate, and to force the Just Orthodox to choose an affiliation with a particular denomination.

If the UGCC and other pro-Ukrainian denominations across the confessional spectrum would play a leading role in commemorating the tragic deaths from the war in Eastern Ukraine, the UOC-MP would claim the commemoration of death—and victory—resulting from the Great Patriotic War. The UOC- MP now hosts a mobelen, or special prayer, to commemorate Victory Day on May 9 as the Soviet Union always did, and not on May 8 as is done in Europe and now in Ukraine too in a newly renamed Day of National Remembrance and Reconciliation. For the UOC- MP, the Great Patriotic War is positioned as a battle with evil forces in which Orthodox warriors fought and triumphed. The UOC- MP commemorations of Victory Day feature processions of the cross in public space, the performance of Soviet war songs, priests in camouflage, and references to patriotism in the form of love for one’s land and love for God. Most notably, the UOC- MP increasingly asserts Victory Day as a second Easter, and as such,
a family holiday that centers on resurrection. It becomes a religious obligation to honor the fallen because they are kin. Participants in processions carry not only icons and religious banners but also photos and portraits of family and friends who perished in the war, replicating the aesthetic used to commemorate those who died on the Maidan and in the East. The UOC-MP, like the other denominations, displays its ability to forge transcendent bonds through ritualized behaviors that connect those who sacrificed in victory with the UOC-MP today. The church, as a mnemonic agent, promotes the idea of the Great Patriotic War as a holy war, a true victory over evil, in which our forefathers participated. It is a battleground and moral victory from which women are excluded. Military men performed it and clerical men commemorate it, which contributes to the militarized masculinity on the rise in both Ukraine and Russia (Martsenyuk and Grytsenko 2017; Mayerchyk 2014; Fomina 2017).

Commemorating World War II serves other purposes for the OCU, UOC-KP, and other religious organizations. Their commemorations of World War II position the war as an anti-Soviet struggle that involved occupation and national suffering. The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, long demonized in the USSR for their collaboration with Nazi forces against the Soviet Red Army, become defenders of Ukraine. They are also forefathers, but of an earlier generation of warriors for Ukrainian independence against Soviet forces that sought to denationalize Ukrainians and promote godless atheism. By linking their commemorations to Pomynal’nyi Den’, or the day after Easter when according to the Orthodox calendar the departed are remembered (also called Provody in Ukrainian; Radonitsa in Russian), a secular commemoration of veterans takes on religious overtones.

In sum, all sides find a usable past when they seek to sacralize history and even weaponize it to advance—or destroy—the legitimacy of institutional religious connections. As mnemonic agents that shape recall and understandings of the past, religious institutions use performative rituals in public space to link certain people together and exclude others. By blending the love of God into the love of country with the willingness to sacrifice and defend them both against evil, religious institutions not only weaponize religion but history too for the advancement of their preferred politics of belonging. The past as a holy battleground between good and evil lends itself to the depiction of two camps of religious organizations and a bifurcated choice of a political future or a political past, Constantinople or Moscow, a patriarch in Kyiv or Moscow, the EU or the Eurasian Customs Union, and so on. It also bespeaks the unresolved trauma of a war fought over seven decades ago even as armed combat continues to deliver new dead bodies in need of burial, commemoration, and resolution.
Affect and the Power of Persuasion

Violence leaves traces, not just in the bodies and minds of those who experience it, but also in lived spaces. The mediating space of the city is a site where affect is generated in particularly concentrated and palpable ways inspiring bodily sensations, emotions, and recollections of an agentive nature. Such affective spaces shape the encounters that occur there and the meanings imparted to those experiences. The materiality of these commemorative spaces communicates the sanctity of the events, the spiritualized practices of recall, and the ritualized commemorations of the martyred dead in these set apart spaces and contribute to a certain atmosphere. Because of the sensations these experiences create, this atmosphere potentially has the power to persuade.

In taking such an analytical perspective, I acknowledge a form of agency, and even a certain power, in the built environment and the material things that adorn it over those who circulate in its affective spaces. Navaro-Yashin’s (2012) study of a divided Cyprus urges us to recognize the “codependence and codetermination” between the outer environment and the interiority of subjects and how this can serve to replicate divisions. The affective charge of the atmosphere, first from the Maidan and now from the war, creates experiences of grief and ritualized mourning with a common aesthetic. This shapes lifeworlds, including a shared sense of place and one’s place in the world. Once such emotive understandings are predictably fixed as signs that are part of a semiotic ideology, they can be made politically productive and carry ethical and moral connotations validating relatedness or a severing of relatedness.

This adds a certain fluidity, even volatility, to the forms of consciousness that might arise from an affective atmosphere. Affective spaces around shrines, monuments, exhibits, and commemorations are often intentionally designed to provoke certain sensations, only to see that the results produced are entirely different (Bennett 2001; Latour 1993; Navaro-Yashin 2012). These commemorative markers of death can prompt grief as easily as they can rage. Grief over sacrifice of life can yield rage that craves more violence. Mourning loss can evolve into venerating martyrs. As a mediating force between the ongoing processes of producing places and giving meaning to shared experiences that occur there, infrastructures of feeling link the living to the dead in new ways as easily as they can sever relationships among family members, friends, and colleagues who fail to understand grief and rage in the same way.

Revenge is all about recouping honor, which the embrace of dignity is meant to overturn in favor of developing a form of conscience and integrity (Sherman 2009, 76). Yet the alloy of grief and rage can linger for years when the loss is refreshed by an affective atmosphere that refuels the obligation to seek vengeance.
or to right a wrong. This is the burden of dreams that has long colored the life-worlds of Ukrainians, which I wrote about decades ago (Wanner 1998). By keeping victimizations of the past alive, does healing become elusive? Do the shrines and the spectrum of commemorative ceremonies draw out Paul Klee’s Angelus Novus? The angel is blown into the future while remaining fixated on the past, staring in wide-eyed horror, like those at the shrines, as the pile of wreckage and dead bodies from snipers and war grows.

Dmytruk’s poem asserts that an era has ended, an era that was characterized by “brotherhood,” the widespread use of Russian language, a warm embrace of aspects of Russian culture, and most important of all, expansive networks—familial, personal, and professional—connecting people in both countries in myriad ways. I think she is correct. The post-Soviet era has ended. We are now in a new period that is characterized by different norms of relatedness that find expression in political policies and the creation of new religious institutions. For many, the grief is tremendous over the collapse of social and familial relationships that spanned political borders that have dissolved in the face of mutual miscomprehension. Inevitably, commemorations recall these losses too and evoke even more grief. However, the lines separating grief from rage and the urge to mourn from the impulse to seek revenge can be precariously thin.

Is it surprising that rage is not far behind sorrow? These emotions are the ends of the spectrum that an affective atmosphere produces. The sacred shrouding of these shrines, monuments, and exhibits to exalt dead heroes and martyrs makes them either part of processes of healing from violence or glorifying and perpetuating violence. By magnetically drawing people into their sacred orbit, the shrines and monuments—through spiritualized practices of recall and mourning—shape political and religious subjectivities through the sacral framing of sacrifice, which informs the obligations of the living to the dead. Those who are moved by these deaths belong to this place and to these people.