5 Historical Memory

5.1 Place-name Gymnastics

The Soviet Union was adept at branding, and it changed the names of places under its control at will, most famously replacing certain czarist-period names with new names that honored the Bolshevik Revolution (Wanner, 1998, pp. 172-199). For example, in 1924 Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg and named at first after the name saint of Peter the Great and then after the Russian czar himself) became Leningrad after Vladimir Lenin, the revolution’s main leader; in the same year Yekaterinburg, named after Catherine the Great, became Sverdlovsk to honor Bolshevik leader Yakov Sverdlov; and in 1925 Tsaritsyn, meaning “the czar’s city,” became Stalingrad, “the city of Stalin.” In the industrial district of Donbas in eastern Ukraine, a growing city founded in 1869 that was named Yuzovka (Yuzivka in Ukrainian) after John Hughes, a Welsh entrepreneur who opened coal mines and built a steel plant in the region, was renamed Trotsk after Leon Trotsky for a few months in 1923, and was then quickly renamed Staline and then Stalino. All of these cities were eventually renamed, some as early as the de-Stalinization of 1961: Stalino became Donetsk, Leningrad reverted to St. Petersburg, Sverdlovsk went back to Yekaterinburg, and Stalingrad became Volgograd. Furthermore, during the years of struggle for communist rule, young revolutionaries in their prime rebranded themselves personally: the man who was born Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili became Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, or simply Stalin (man of steel); while the man born Lev Davidovich Bronshtein in a small town near Kherson in the south of Ukraine eventually changed his name to Leon Trotsky. The new names, of course, are the names they took to their graves.

Instability of place-names has marked spaces within cities, too, with politically important changes being made at critical times to the toponymy of streets, urban districts, parks, squares, schools, factories, subway stations, and many other elements of the urban landscape. There are directories published for individual cities, including Kyiv, that help residents keep track of both newly approved names that they should learn and the banished names they should avoid, as well many traces in the cityscape itself of place-name transition. For instance, one often sees “ghost” lettering of a previous long street name if the new name is shorter, as well as instances where a new address marker with a new street name has been installed directly over the old address marker with larger
dimensions. Furthermore, there are quite a few instances of “place-name wars” to be seen in which opponents of a given street name paste a printed sticker with a preferred name over the one they dislike, and then where opponents of the opponents either tear way the graffiti sticker, or slap one of their own atop it.

In Kyiv, the disputes tend to reflect different visions of the past and different roads to the future. Is the Soviet past to be honored with the street name January Uprising Street, or is the new name, Ivan Mazepa Street, a better choice? The latter honors a 17th- and early-18th-century Ukrainian Cossack leader who battled against the Russian Empire and was declared anathema by the Russian Orthodox Church. For some citizens, the one name is a painful memory, while for others the insult is in the other name (Figure 5.1). Table 5.1 gives examples of shifting names for some prominent streets, squares, and landmarks in Kyiv before and after independence. Additionally, I note from a guidebook published in Kyiv in the deep Soviet year 1965, that the main hotels in the center of the city also had very “Soviet” names: in addition to hotels named Ukrainia (Ukraine), Dnipro, Kyiv and Teatralna (Theater), there were hotels named Intourist, Moskva
(Moscow), Leningradskyi (Leningrad), Chervona Zirka (Red Star), and Persho-travenskyi (First of May).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prominent Streets</th>
<th>Name at End of Soviet Period</th>
<th>Name after Independence</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lenina</td>
<td>Bohdana Khmelnytskoho</td>
<td>From Lenin to Bohdan Khmelnytskyyi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirova</td>
<td>Mykhaila Hrushevskoho</td>
<td>From Kirov to Hrushevskyyi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sichnevoho Povstannya</td>
<td>Ivana Mazepy</td>
<td>From January Uprising to Ivan Mazepa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engelsa</td>
<td>Luteranska</td>
<td>From Engels to Lutheran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhdanova</td>
<td>Petra Sahaydachnyoho</td>
<td>From Zhdanov to Petro Sahaydachnyi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karla Marksa</td>
<td>Arkhytektora Horodestkoho</td>
<td>From Karl Marx to Architect Horodetsky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landmarks</th>
<th>Name at End of Soviet Period</th>
<th>Name after Independence</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ploshcha Zhovtnevoi Revolutsiyi</td>
<td>Maidan Nezalezhnosti</td>
<td>From October Revolution Square to Independence Square</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chervona Ploshcha</td>
<td>Kontraktova Ploshcha</td>
<td>From Red Square to Contract Square</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union</td>
<td>Park Nyvky</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters Communist Party, Ukrainian SSR</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Hammer and sickle symbol at cornice covered over with Ukrainian “trident” symbol.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Lenin</td>
<td>Ukrainian House</td>
<td>See Chapter 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several excellent case studies about the political geography of monuments and place-names across Ukraine in the text edited by Lyudmyla Males, et al. (2010). The collection includes a study of World War II monuments by Andriy Portnov (2010); politically symbolic place-names in the city of L’viv by Viktoriya Sereda (2010); a study of state-sponsored historical memory in Donetsk by Oksana Mikheyeva (2010); and reflections about the renaming the city of Zhdanov-Mariupil by Yulia Soroka (2010). Also on this topic are the analyses of Kharkiv by Volodymyr Kravchenko (2009) and L’viv by Liliana Hentosh and Bohdan Tscherkes (2009) that are chapters in Czaplicka, Gelazis, and Ruble, eds., Cities after the Fall of Communism (2009).
5.2   Remembering the Great Patriotic War

After the war, the Soviet Union spared little effort in memorializing the fight against the Nazis. There were monuments built in virtually every city and town, including on Soviet territory far beyond the zone of fighting. Some of the monuments were truly enormous and awe-inspiring, for example, those I have seen personally in Minsk, Kaliningrad, and St. Petersburg, and the memorial to the fallen at the Battle of Stalingrad that was erected at Mamayev Kurgan in what is today Volgograd (Adams, 2008). Twelve Soviet cities, including four in Ukraine – Kyiv, Odesa, Sevastopol, and Kerch – were designated “Hero Cities” for their valiant defense against the invaders. In addition, medals for heroism were pinned on the chests of soldiers, factory workers, and farm workers whose sacrifices made victory against the Nazis possible. All of these actions and more acknowledged the cause of the Great Patriotic War, as World War II is known in the former Soviet Union, and helped the Soviet cause afterwards by building a feeling of Soviet national solidarity vis-à-vis the enemies that had just been defeated and the new enemies of the Soviet state in the Cold War.

In Hero City Kyiv, we see a wide array of World War II memorialization. Among many examples, there is Kyiv’s longest street (11.2 km) named Prospekt Peremohy (Victory Prospect), Victory Square at a key intersection along that street, and a high obelisk monument at that square that honors Kyiv’s status as a Hero City; the beautiful and solemn Park Slavy (Park of Glory) on a hill overlooking the Dnipro in Pechersk District where another soaring obelisk honors the Unknown Soldier; and statues around the city that honor such heroes as Soviet military commander Nikolai Vatutin, the young war hero Zoya Kosmodemyanska (1923-1944), and the brave Kyiv

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metro Stations</th>
<th>Name at End of Soviet Period</th>
<th>Name after Independence</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leninska</td>
<td>Teatralna</td>
<td></td>
<td>From Lenin (Street) to Theater (Street)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chervona Ploshcha</td>
<td>Kontrakotva Ploshcha</td>
<td></td>
<td>From Red Square to Contract Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komsomolska</td>
<td>Chernihivska</td>
<td></td>
<td>From Komsomol to Chernihiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pionerska</td>
<td>Lisova</td>
<td></td>
<td>From Pioneer to Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zavod Bilshovyk</td>
<td>Shulyavska</td>
<td></td>
<td>From Bolshevik Factory to Shulyavska</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
footballers who played the legendary “Death Match” against the German squad Flakelf. There are also place-names such as Heroiv Dnipra (Heroes of the Dnipro), memorial tanks on pedestals, and countless memorial plaques affixed to older buildings all over the city. A map that I have that was published in 1982 lists a total of 79 monuments, memorial plaques, and museums in Kyiv that memorialized the Great Patriotic War. Even if not all of them still stand, it is not possible to spend time in Kyiv and not be reminded often about what transpired in 1941-1945.

Without question, the most dramatic reminder in Kyiv of 1941-1945 is the Great Patriotic War History Museum and the enormous steel-sheathed statue of a heroic female figure that rises above it (Portnov, 2010). It is called Batkivshchyna Maty in Ukrainian and Rodina Mat in Russian. While it may well be that Kyiv’s greatest wonders of the built environment are the glorious golden domes of ancient churches and monasteries, it is also true that this particular museum and its statue, whose name means “Mother of the Fatherland,” are extraordinary wonders, too (Figure 5.2). The museum and its grounds are awe-inspiring examples of the best socialist realist art and design, and the statue itself, well, what is there to say except to let one’s jaw drop. Set dramatically on a high hill on parkland overlooking the Dnipro River and covered in high-quality stainless steel, the Mother of the Fatherland soars to the heavens, and whether lit by daylight sun or at night by flood lamps, it positively glistens. She stands erect in a heroic pose, with a sword held upright in her right hand and a shield emblazoned with the hammer and sickle emblem of the Soviet Union in the left, and looks protectively at the river and the endless flat lands of Ukraine beyond. In size, it ranks among the highest statues in the world. She is 62 meters tall and stands atop a 40-meter, three-story pedestal-museum, making this monument the 15th-tallest statue in the world, the third highest in Europe (after the crazy Peter the Great monument by Zurab Tsereteli in Moscow and the aforementioned World War II monument in Volgograd), and the 4th-tallest nonreligious statue in the world (after the two Russian monuments mentioned above and a statue of two former emperors of China that stand in Henan Province). The statue would have been a bit taller, but the tip of the sword was diplomatically lopped off at the time of construction so that it would not rise above the highest cross atop a church dome at Pecherska Lavra on the same bluff just upriver.

The main approach to the museum and grounds is from the direction of Pecherska Lavra. One walks past displays of tanks, planes, cannons, and other weaponry, to an enormous concrete chalice in which the “flame of glory” burns each year on Victory Day (May 9), and then with
accompaniment by echoes of heroic martial music, through a solemn, cavelike stone chamber with oversized reliefs of determined soldiers and Soviet citizens in action against the Nazis. As is the tradition, the bronze automatic rifle of one soldier has been rubbed so often by visitors that its barrel glistens. When you emerge from this “underground” passage there are more oversized heroes in action poses, but now they are bathed by sunlight, and above them the awesome steel sight of Batkivshchyna Maty, much higher and brighter than anyone could be prepared for. As we come closer on this particular holiday, we see huge posters with images of still-living heroes of that war, elderly men and women with chests full of medals, and biographical sketches that tell of exploits as sharpshooters or grenade throwers, or workers in munitions or uniform-sewing factories, or in other critical industries. The posters are adorned with enormous bouquets of flowers and great ribbons, attesting to the reverence that citizens today have for those who had fought for the cause.

The museum itself occupies three stories and is made of chamber after chamber of exhibits about the war: the Nazi front across the Soviet Union,
the rings of defense around Kyiv, the occupation of the city by Nazi troops and the resistance by Kyiv's civilians, the heroic recapture of the city, the death camps of the Holocaust, Soviet prisoners of war, and other topics. There are displays of crashed planes and shot-up jeeps, enormous maps of battles and landscape reliefs, dioramas, and tens of thousands of artifacts, photographs, propaganda posters, and cards with printed explanations. At the top level we enter a high, sunlit cone atop which stands the Mother of the Fatherland. All around us on the walls are the names of Heroes of the Soviet Union and Socialist Labor – thousands of them. As is the case with each of the other chambers in the museum, this one is watched over by an elderly woman museum attendant. These attendants usually sit passively on chairs in the corner of the room, but here where the chamber is circular, this attendant has no corner and becomes part of the display. This particular babushka amply occupies a sturdy wooden chair along a curve of the room and faces a simple wooden table atop which is just one thing: a solitary red rotary telephone.

One quiet day inside the museum, I listened in as a professional guide gave a personal tour to a young girl, aged about 10. The girl was accompanied by her father, but he hardly spoke. It was just the voice of the twentysomething male guide that the father had engaged for the tour and the occasional comment or short question from the girl – a private history lesson on dad's day to be with his daughter. In the last chamber of the museum before the top-floor chamber with the retro hotline, the 17th, a large and very sad room adorned with thousands upon thousands of genuine photographic portraits of soldiers and civilians who had perished in the war affixed along walls on either side of a seemingly endlessly long empty dining table lined with empty dishes and cups in place-setting formation, I heard the guide sum it up: “All of these people died for us. They died so that we could live today in peace, be with our families, and have the nice life that we have.” Little “Lena” scanned the room and showed with her eyes and a nod that she understood; my own eyes were transfixed on these three people who were indeed the beneficiaries of great sacrifices and welled up.

When the museum opened in 1981, the top-most name in the top chamber was that of Leonid Brezhnev, Mr. Chestful-of-Medals himself, a top Soviet official from 1964-1982. However, his name was removed after Ukrainian independence as one of several post-Soviet changes. In addition, there is now a blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag behind the statue of the soldier who stands in the lobby and looks over the broken remains of a Nazi eagle-and-swastika statue; there are printed explanations about the exhibits in Ukrainian rather than Russian; and new displays about Ukrainian nationalists and
their own war against the Nazis. But all in all, this is still a Soviet show that is much respected and admired for technical competence, overall impact, and unforgettable lessons about the worst of all wars. I am glad that they built this museum and gave Kyiv the image of Batkivshtyna Maty as an icon. The alternative, discussed seriously in the big-thinking 1950s, would have erected twin statues of Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin on the same hill, both some 200 meters high – more than three times the height of Batkivshtyna Maty and by far the highest statue in the world. It would have been quite a job in 1991 to dismantle them.

5.3 Babyn Yar

The other “most important” World War II memorial in Kyiv is that at Babyn Yar, a ravine in Kyiv where the Nazis carried out a series of massacres of Jews and others during their occupation of the city. The place is also known as Babi Yar, from the Russian, and in both languages means “old woman’s ravine.” This is where 33,771 Jews, representing most of Kyiv’s Jewish population, were marched to be shot and buried in mass graves on September 29-30, 1941. It was the first mass crime of the Holocaust and its largest single mass killing. The Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, who was one of several prominent speakers at the site in 2006 on the 65th anniversary of the executions, suggested that history may have been different had the world paid greater attention at the time:

Maybe I am not a historian, but maybe, say, this Babi Yar was also a test for Hitler. If on September 29 and September 30, 1941, Babi Yar may happen and the world did not react seriously, dramatically, abnormally, maybe this was a good test for him. So a few weeks later in January 1942, near Berlin in Wannsee, a convention can be held with a decision, a final solution to the Jewish problem. We are a problem, of course. Maybe if the very action had been a serious one, a dramatic one, in September 1941 here in Ukraine, the Wannsee Conference would have come to a different end, maybe.19

In addition to the well-documented case of the 33,771 murdered Jews, Babyn Yar was also the place of death for an additional 100,000 to 150,000 victims of the Nazi killing machine: more Jews, plus Ukrainians, most especially

19 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8topGeyXaE
621 members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Russians, communists, a large fraction of Kyiv’s Roma population, and civilian hostages. The bodies of patients who had been gassed at the Ivan Pavlov Psychiatric Hospital in Kyiv were dumped into the ravines, too. A detailed count of the number of victims is no longer possible because before they retreated from Kyiv, the Nazis ordered chained prisoners to dig up the corpses at Babyn Yar and burn them, and then to scatter the ashes and other remains over the farmlands of Kyiv oblast. Among the Ukrainians, the most prominent victims were poet and activist Olena Ivanivna Teliha (1906-1942) and her husband, the bandura player Mykhaiko Pavlovych Teliha (1898-1942). Before she was killed, Teliha wrote her last words on a wall in her prison cell: “Here was interred and from here goes to her death Olena Teliha.”

The main memorial at Babyn Yar was designed by M. Lysenko and other sculptors, and was erected in 1976 in an area between the killing-ground ravine and the concentration camp in Syrets where many of the Jews and other victims were held before their deaths. It takes the form of intertwined and anguished human figures reaching skyward and stands on a high pedestal with a stairway for walking up to the base, as many people do with offerings of flowers. There are side-by-side plaques in Russian, Ukrainian, and Hebrew that read that at this place more than 100,000 citizens of Kyiv were shot at the hands of German-Fascist invaders in 1941-1943. No mention is made of ethnicity or the Holocaust, and there are no additional explanations. Once when I wanted to photograph the monument and got tired of waiting for some teenagers who had climbed amid the human figures to drink beer and do some kissing to finish and climb off, I asked them if they knew where they were. They seemed like nice kids from the neighborhood, and they responded to me with politeness. No, they did not know what the “statue” was, they said, and they looked embarrassed when I gave them a brief synopsis. The monument is not a great piece of art and it does a poor job of education, but at least it is there. In 1961, fully 20 years after the first killings at Babyn Yar, the Russian-Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko (b. 1932) began his now-famous poem, “Babi Yar” with these shocking words:

No monument stands over Babi Yar.
A steep cliff only, like the rudest headstone. (1998)

It has been a sore point among many Jews (and others) that the monument does not single out Jews as special victims of Nazi murders, and that it treats the 100,000-plus victims only as one. It has further rankled Jews and others that the monument does not stand at the ravine where the killings
actually took place (Burakovskiy, 2011). That ravine is on the far side of a busy road that cuts through the park that contains Babyn Yar and is deep in a forest. Therefore, in 1991, as soon as Ukrainian independence made it possible, a second monument was unveiled at Babyn Yar, this one closer to the killing ground and in the shape of a Jewish menorah. Then, in 2001 another monument was constructed, this one close to the subway station that serves the park, in honor of the many children who perished at the site. Still later, in 2007, a simple wooden cross dedicated to Olena Teliha and other Ukrainian nationalist victims was erected on the Babyn Yar grounds as well. Yevtushenko’s admonition was heeded, but now it seems that there are competing monuments and still no public education about what happened. The richly illustrated Ukrainian-language booklet by L. Ye. Drob’yazko, Babyn Yar: Shcho? De? Koly? (Babyn Yar: What? Where? When?) is a welcome step forward (Drob’yazko, 2009). There are frequent calls to build an information center and museum on the grounds and, as of 2010, a fund-raising effort to support construction of still another Babyn Yar memorial. There is a design competition under way at this writing, and at least one proposal for what might be called the ultimate Babyn Yar memorial, a deep pit lined with the concrete shapes of piles of human corpses. In a case of grossly irresponsible reporting, the UK newspaper The Guardian reported incorrectly on September 24, 2009, that Kyiv authorities were planning to build a hotel for Euro 2012 football tourists on the site of the 33,771 Jewish deaths. That is how that article phrased it (Beaumont, 2009), inflaming emotions and hurting the reputation of Kyiv and Ukraine.

While Kyiv waits for its monument to the Holocaust, a superb Holocaust Museum has opened in the large industrial city of Dnipropetrovsk located south east of Kyiv. The museum is within a building called Menorah, the world’s largest Jewish community center. Opened officially on October 21, 2012, the structure is a sprawling 22-story complex of 50,000 square meters (538,000 square feet) that, thanks to many substantial private donations, most especially from billionaire Jewish community leaders Hennadiy Boholiubov and Igor Kolomoisky, vanguards the revival of the Jewish community in Ukraine. In addition to the museum, the complex includes a four-star hotel with 80 rooms, shops that sell Jewish religious goods, a concert hall, meeting and business facilities, and space for various Jewish organizations. The city’s main synagogue, the historic Golden Rose that dates to the 19th century when the city was named Yekaterinoslav, is incorporated into the architecture of the complex. The building is called Menorah because with seven individual towers, the structure resembles the traditional Jewish candlestick. The museum is as expert in its displays and
annotation as any educational museum anywhere, and it presents not only the Holocaust and crimes against Jews at Babyn Yar and in Dnipropetrovsk, but also lessons about the Jewish faith, Jewish customs, and Jewish history, and about the revival of Jewish life in Ukraine. Interestingly, even though Dnipropetrovsk is a largely Russian-speaking city, the language used in the museum to explain its displays is Ukrainian; there is no Russian, no English, no Hebrew – just Ukrainian. As the Holocaust Museum expands, it will include sections dedicated to other holocausts, including the Holodomor, the tragic subject to which we now turn.

5.4 The Holodomor Museum

While the Soviets were keenly aware of the advantages for nation-building of pointing to the crimes of the Nazis, they were expert at hiding their own atrocities and omissions, and they punished those who brought them to light. With the exception of occasional hints of truth or half-candid admissions, the Soviet Union was a world of official secrets and lies for 70 years. When the state began its final disintegration in the late 1980s, all sorts of previously forbidden topics entered the public discourse and the Soviet version of history began to be rewritten. Since then, previously closed archives have opened, new documents have been unearthed, and countless numbers of eyewitnesses have stepped forward to tell what they saw and, in some cases, what evils they did. Some of the most horrific stories are about the Soviet Gulag and many millions of innocents who were sent there to die, and about the names and locations of concentration camps in the north of Russia and Russian Siberia whose existence was previously only whispered. Other Soviet crimes took place in its war against religion and included the savage demolition of ancient churches, looting or destruction of priceless church art, and the killing of priests and other martyrs of the faith.

In Ukraine, the worst of all Soviet crimes, however, was the Holodomor. This is the famine that took place in 1932-1933 on the richest Ukrainian farmlands during the time when farmers were forced into collectives and all grain and other foods were confiscated by government officials. It was a man-made disaster that took several million lives, not just in Ukraine but also across the border in Russian territory. The most often cited estimates of the death toll in Ukraine range from about 2 million to 5 million, with a demographic loss (i.e., an additional deficit of births) of about 6 million more. Among the informed interpretations for why this happened is an attempt by Stalin to break the spirit of Ukrainian nationalists and counter
any threats that might be brought as a result to the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union, as well as the creation of an opening for the settlement of Russians into depopulated Ukrainian lands. Despite millions of deaths and countless emaciated corpses of innocent men, women, and children on the streets of even the largest cities such as Kyiv and Kharkiv, the tragedy was treated as a secret. Even the most prestigious media outlets in the West, e.g., the reporting from the scene by Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Walter Duranty for the New York Times, propagated Soviet lies and denied that a famine existed, much less reported the truth that the hunger was orchestrated deliberately by the top leadership of the Soviet Union (Conquest, 2001). Even decades later, the history of the famine was hushed up while the Soviets still ruled.

Now the climate has changed. The single-most important, most elaborate, and most expensive monument in Kyiv to the crimes of the Soviet Union in Ukraine is the Holodomor Monument (Figure 5.3). Inaugurated on November 22, 2008, by President Viktor Yushchenko, this striking memorial is located on a prominent bluff-top site overlooking the Dnipro River about midway between the Park of Glory obelisk that honors fallen Soviet soldiers of World War II and the domes of Pecherska Lavra. The stainless steel of Batkivshchyna Maty rises just beyond, making the Holodomor Monument a new centerpiece for the iconic landscape of Kyiv that one sees from the Left Bank. Its design is not at all subtle and perhaps a bit over the top, in my opinion reflecting a deep-seated need to tell all about this most gruesome tragic period. The main part of the structure is shaped like a white memorial candle capped with a golden flame. There are grieving angels at the gates and bronze cranes taking flight from behind iron bars. The pavement suggests a plowed field. Everywhere, there are millstones, and in front is an enormously sad statue of a young girl with braids, emaciated with hunger, and holding five scrawny stalks of wheat. Her oversized eyes are those of an adult who has witnessed more than enough of the world’s evil.

One enters the monument by descending along the walkway and going through two sets of doors into a large circular room where the light is faint. Candles flicker in the center of the room. We are invited to light a candle of our own. Looping black-and-white documentary footage is projected onto the walls and is accompanied by commentary alternating between Ukrainian and English. The names of countless towns and villages in Ukraine that were decimated by the hunger appear in font size that accords with the death tolls, and around the perimeter there are memorial books by Ukrainian oblast in which are given the names of victims arranged by where they had lived. Visitors were diligently poring over the books. I observed that
some of the older visitors appeared to be survivors; they searched the lists for the familiar names of neighbors and family members and to seek out other memories. Lingering in this somber, darkened space seems natural, and when we finally do emerge into the daylight, it is through a door opposite
the way in and (on some days) into blinding sunlight. A view of the Dnipro and the exceedingly fertile flat lands of Ukraine stretch before us, and a large bell overhead is ready to ring in a new beginning.

5.5 The Legacy of Chornobyl

The Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant (Chernobyl is from the Russian) is not far from Kyiv and never far away in the memories of Kyivans who are old enough to have lived through the scary and confusing times that followed the disastrous accident of April 26, 1986. One cannot write about Kyiv and not say at least a little about this event and its impact on the city. It is also important to mention that what happened at this site in the small town of Pripyat 93 kilometers (58 miles) north of Ukraine’s capital should be considered one last Soviet crime before the Soviet system fell apart altogether. It is a crime because the power plant was badly designed from the get-go and had engineering flaws that should have been avoided; because the evacuation of nearby residents and warnings to the public at large after the accident were insufficient and dishonest; and because so much damage has been done to human life and health and to the environment of a wide swath not just in northern Ukraine and neighboring Belarus, but across large parts of Europe as well. Now, more than 25 years later, a wide area around the power plant with a radius of about 31 kilometers (19 miles) is still a dead zone where habitation is excluded. What happened at the power plant is a crime also because when Soviet authorities realized the extent of the disaster, they first warned their own insiders to evacuate their families, and then a next circle of well-connected Communist Party nomenklatura before finally telling the public in Kyiv and other areas that they were in danger.

I will not retell the story of what happened at Chornobyl because it is a widely studied topic about which there are many sources. Regarding Kyiv, however, it is worth mentioning that the city is forever linked around the world with the tragic word “Chornobyl” or, alternatively, “Chernobyl” from the Russian, and that this fact cannot possibly be helpful to the city’s reputation or prospects for progress. Being in the shadow of the first great nuclear power plant disaster in the world is almost certainly a handicap for Kyiv, at least somewhat, as Fukushima is hurting Tokyo now. It would be an interesting project to examine this question further. The book by Iurii Shcherbak (1989), an acclaimed Ukrainian writer, physician, and
environmental activist, includes vivid descriptions of what it was like in Kyiv in the days after the disaster:

[The patriarchal, ancient city with its gold-topped cathedrals, preserving the memory of the ages, in about two weeks had changed unrecognizably, becoming closely united with the image of a new, atomic age ... The words “dosimeter check,” “radiation,” “decontamination,” and all those “millirems,” “bers,” “rads,” and so on firmly entered the vocabulary of the people of Kiev, and the appearance of a man in a special suit, with a gas mask on his face and a Geiger counter in his hands flashed everywhere, became usual, just like the jams of cars at the exits from Kiev: at all the control points there were dosimeter checks for cars. (p. 91)

[Kiev] was a city of excited crowds around railway and airline ticket windows. There were days when even people who had tickets could not get through into the railway station. You had to get the police’s assistance. The trains left with eight to ten people in four-seat compartments; speculators were charging up to a hundred rubles for a fifteen-ruble ticket to Moscow. (p. 92)

Second, Kyiv did pay dearly as a result of the accident with lives lost and damage to health, although that too is hard to quantify. Eventually, some 600,000 “liquidators” had been put to work to contain the damage at the power plant and undertake clean-up operations afterwards. They came from all over the Soviet Union, but Kyiv was a first and frequent source of labor for these dangerous tasks. Everyone in Kyiv who is old enough to have been there is close to someone who had been volunteered for Chornobyl duty, and who had either died an early death or suffers from resultant ailments. Another likely impact, although it too invites research investigation, is that the Chornobyl tragedy sped up emigration from Kyiv. The timing of the accident was when Jews were beginning to leave the Soviet Union for Israel, the United States, and other new homes. Kyiv was one of those cities from which such emigration was heavy because of its large Jewish population base; it would not be surprising if research documented that Jewish choices to leave were stepped up in the wake of the accident. Finally, it seems worth mentioning that there is a small economy of “adventure tourism” that has developed from Kyiv to the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. It is mostly Western and Japanese tourists who make the bus trek which centers on a visit to the abandoned town of Pripyat and a chance to photograph empty homes, schools, and playgrounds, and a lot of weeds. Many tourists, regardless of
where they are from, as well as many locals, purchase “Hard Rock Chernobyl” T-shirts from vendors of tourist memorabilia in Kyiv and other cities.

There are various monuments in Kyiv to Chernobyl victims, to firefighters who were at the front lines in Chornobyl, and to other heroes. The main memorial is a museum, the Ukrainian National Chornobyl Museum, located in an old firehouse in the Podil district of the city. It was opened on April 25, 1992, not quite a full year after Ukraine became independent, and it continues to be operated by the government of the country as a place where Kyivans and tourists alike can learn about the disaster. Funds from the government of Japan helped to open the museum and professionalize the exhibits. Groups of Ukrainian school children escorted by their teachers are a common sight. They ascend the stairs to the second floor exhibit rooms beneath road signs with the names of condemned settlements in the contaminated “zone of alienation,” and see various photographs and scale models of the plant at various stages of the disaster, an impressive topographic model of the area centered on the power plant, and thousands of photographs of liquidators and, in another room, their children. There are also spooky-looking figures in radiation suits and gas masks suspended from the ceiling and standing amid exhibits, considerable Orthodox religious iconography, and a centerpiece exhibit of a small wooden boat like a canoe that is suspended by chains from the ceiling and is filled with worn children’s plush toy animals. Beneath the boat is a glass surface that represents the water within which we see religious icons and beautifully embossed books of Holy Scripture. For me, a Philadelphian, it was especially interesting to see reproductions of two successive front pages of my hometown newspaper on exhibit. On April 28, 1986, two days after the explosion at the plant, the Philadelphia Inquirer’s headline blared: “Soviet Reactor Burning out of Control, CIA Says. Roof Is Blown Out. High Death Toll Feared.” In the next day’s headline, we see the beginnings of Soviet disinformation: “Soviets Report Nuclear Accident. Tass Says Some ‘Suffered Injury.’”

5.6  Rebuilding Religion

The Soviets destroyed churches but since 1991 post-Soviets have been reconstructing them, be they (i.e., both the churches and the post-Soviets) in Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, or any other of the former republics of the USSR. In Kyiv, the main example of a rebuilt church is the beautiful golden-domed St. Michael’s Church on the bluff in what was once the oldest part of the walled city (Chapter 6), while in Moscow
there is the famous example of the Church of Christ the Savior. There is also considerable construction of new churches where there had not been churches before, particularly in larger cities, as in Kyiv and other urban centers entire new sections of urban terrain were developed during the Soviet period without provision for places of worship. Church-building is stimulated as well by a proliferation of different faiths and different splinter groups in post-Soviet society, including the religions brought to Ukraine and other newly independent countries by missionaries from abroad, and by the competition between various indigenous and newly imported religious groups for the attentions of post-Soviet citizens. In Kyiv, as in Kharkiv, L’viv, Donetsk, and other Ukrainian cities, as well as in Russia and other countries, one sees a landscape of new church buildings and of construction sites for churches underway. People are now free to worship and many do so with great enthusiasm. In stark contrast to the anti-religion ideology of the Communist Party, many leading politicians of today, including President Yanukovych of Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin of Russia, as well as candidates aspiring to public office, wear religion on their sleeves in order to impress voters and project the desired public image.

A generation ago, there were no churches in Kyiv’s suburban ring. The Soviets had done their best to eradicate religion in their territories, and they certainly made no allowances for the construction of places for religious worship in the sprawling mikroraion\textsuperscript{20} neighborhoods that they developed around the edges of Kyiv and other cities. In fact, from 1929 through the 1930s, Stalin carried out a war against religion and blasted into oblivion scores of churches in Kyiv, if not more than a hundred (Hewryk, 1982). At least 69 churches were demolished in 1934-1937 alone (Bilokin, n.d.). Among the many losses was the original St. Michael’s of the Golden Domes Church and Monastery which was looted and then dynamited in mid-1934. The few religious structures that were allowed to stand were converted to new, often expressly counterreligious uses. For example, the famous Brodsky Synagogue, the city’s largest place of Jewish worship, was confiscated in 1926 and was made, first, into a meeting place for crafts workers and then into a puppet theater, while the Orthodox St. Sophia Cathedral and the Monastery of the Caves were spared demolition at the intercession of historians and other scholars, and were redefined as museums of architecture and history.

However, since the end of the Soviet period, there has been a massive rebuilding of much of what was lost, including quite prominently the

\textsuperscript{20} A mikroraion (or microdistrict) is a type of residential complex that was a key component of residential area construction in the USSR and some post-Soviet states.
main parts of St. Michael’s, and reconsecration of sacred sites that had been made into secular places. This, of course, is in the older parts of the city that predated Soviet rule. The urban core also has a number of new churches where none had stood before. But in Soviet-built “suburbia,” where there had not been churches except perhaps village churches that predated \textit{mikroraion} construction, churches are being constructed for the first time. Like shopping malls, commercial billboards, and automobile salons, they are coming to be elements of the new vernacular of the residential ring. There are Orthodox Churches of the Ukrainian Patriarchate based in Kyiv, Orthodox churches that answer to the Moscow Patriarchate, and so-called Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox churches, as well as Greek Catholic (Uniate) churches, Roman Catholic churches, and many demolitions of Protestant and evangelical churches, including at least one of the Mormon faith. There are probably other new places of worship as well. The geography of what has been rebuilt after Stalinist destructions, what has been built anew and where, as well as what is planned for the future, is uncharted territory for research that, in itself, could be material for an entire book.

Some of the new churches are quite spectacular and reflect both the importance of religion for the congregations that built them and the prosperity of a rising middle class. Good examples of beautiful new churches include two Orthodox churches along the Dnipro in the increasingly upscale Obolon neighborhood (the Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God near the end of Obolon Bay and the Church of the Birth of Christ on Natalka Bay near the mouth of Obolon Bay) and another, the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, in Troyeshchyna, a bedroom community on the Left Bank across the Moskovskyi (Moscow) Bridge from Obolon (Figure 5.4). Likewise, Ukrainian Catholics have built the beautiful Church of St. Vasyl near the center of Kyiv off L'vivska Ploshcha (L'viv Square) that is, perhaps happily, greatly overcrowded every Sunday, and they have recently finished construction of their main cathedral for Ukraine, the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, near the Dnipro on the Left Bank, close to Livoberezhna Metro Station. That soaring construction has especially symbolic geography. The center of the Ukrainian Catholic Church has traditionally been in western Ukraine, and the leadership of the faith has been headquartered either in L'viv or in Rome. The Cathedral of the Resurrection, however, reflects a decision to move the center of the church to Ukraine’s capital, a city where the faithful in the Ukrainian Catholic Church had never comprised more than a small minority. What is more, the cathedral is set strategically on the opposite bank of the river, i.e., symbolically in the east of Ukraine.
where the church envisions a greater national presence for itself. This was a decision that the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church opposed, particularly the Moscow-based Orthodox Church, on the grounds that Catholics were making incursions onto their turf.

Even more than the big churches, there is construction across the residential terrain of Kyiv of smaller churches for local, neighborhood needs. A typical pattern is to see a green wooden fence that defines the construction site, while within it is a partially finished church and an assortment of construction materials that await the next step in the building process. Construction often takes years, as funds are gathered slowly and the labor is often provided by church members themselves. Father Nicoli, an Orthodox priest (Kyiv Patriarchate) whom I know quite well because of his charity work, has walked me through the process for the church that he is building in a very poor community at the western margins of Kyiv. He looks high and low for donations of building materials from other construction sites in Kyiv, and then relies on donated labor from parishioners, plus his own very capable hands, to make incremental progress. Such construction sites often have a temporary chapel, usually wooden, outside the boundary of the green fence where services are held during the construction period, as

Figure 5.4  Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, a new church in Troyeshchyna
well as signs on the fence that explain the construction project and show architectural renderings of what is to come.

The new churches in “suburbia” seem to be built on what had previously been public space. They often occupy public squares or parks, the green spaces between busier roads and the first line of apartment blocks set back from those roads, and the edges of new commercial developments. While there might be some protests from neighbors who oppose a loss of greenery in their surroundings or the inconvenience of construction activity, I am told that people generally welcome the presence of churches nearby because the grounds around them tend to be much cleaner and better maintained than neglected surroundings. Religion sociologist Anastasia Ryabchuk\textsuperscript{21} has told me that her research shows that clean church grounds are havens for mothers with young children, and that some churches are providing neighborhood-level social services such as preschool and children’s activities that had previously been the territory of the state.

I was fortunate enough to come into possession of two very detailed recent maps that show in great detail the pinpoint locations of all buildings in Kyiv that are, in one way or another, related to religion, as well as all such construction that is underway, all announced plans for construction in the future, and all religious buildings that have been lost over history for which reconstruction plans do not yet exist. The maps are at scales 1:10,000 with insets at 1:5,000 and are amazing for their thousands of details and complex cartography. The symbols on the maps come in all sorts of sizes, shapes and colors, and they are embellished with various numbers, asterisks, quotation marks, pound keys, and other “fontabilia” that add still more information. An enormous amount of work has gone into the making of this seemingly exhaustive inventory of religious real estate in Kyiv, but it also takes an enormous amount of work to make head or tails of it. The legends are incomplete and confusing, terminology is not defined, and there is no date on the maps nor information about the origin of the data. The identities of the cartographers are also not disclosed. The maps were simply given to me by someone who knew I would be interested. I assume that they originated with the Kyiv Department of City Planning and Architecture and that they are no more than two or three years old as determined by details of content.\textsuperscript{22} I spot-checked the maps with the field and consider them accurate.

\textsuperscript{21} National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy.

\textsuperscript{22} My benefactor for these maps is not affiliated with the Kyiv Department of City Planning and Architecture.
Despite the deficiencies of the legends and the enormous numbers of symbols piled atop symbols, I managed some counts of overall patterns. While I may have missed something here or there, it seems accurate enough to report that Kyiv now has 360 religious structures, including churches and other places of worship, seminaries or monasteries, religious schools, church administration buildings, and other categories of architecture for religion. Of that number, 150 belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate; 52 to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kyiv Patriarchate; 10 to the Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church; 11 to the Roman Catholic Church; and 8 to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The fact that the Russia-based churches outnumber all other combined is because this confession has been especially energetic in signing up new members. It is rumored that the Russian government subsidizes Russian Orthodox expansion in Ukraine as a way to maintain influence in the country and keep Ukraine at least partly colonial. In addition to the churches already enumerated, there are also 100 loosely defined “Protestant” churches, church schools, and other structures, including Mormon and evangelical facilities; 8 Jewish religious structures (3 of which are synagogues), and 5 that are associated with the Muslim faith. The balance (16) is other (e.g., Buddhist, neopagan Ukrainian, etc.). In many of the 360 cases, there are multiple buildings per “religious complex” such as a church, a bell tower, and a chapel as part of one location for religion. In addition to the 360 existing religious complexes, there are 32 proposed structures, an additional 6 that seem to have suspended in the course of construction, and at least 129 churches and other religious buildings that were destroyed in the past and have not been reconstructed. Finally, in addition to the total of 360, I counted 30 cemeteries that are affiliated with various religious confessions, and 23 more sites where religion-based cemeteries had been located in the past. I am not sure what all these numbers say as a whole except to conclude the following: (1) there is, indeed, a lot of new religion in Kyiv; (2) religion is coming to be, once again as it was in precommunist times, a major landowner and land developer; and (3) once again religion is playing a part in the long-standing political and cultural divide between Ukraine and Russia.