Local Identities in Ukrainian Polesia and Their Transformation under the (Post-)Soviet Nuclear Economy

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SUMMARY

The essay deals with the transformation of local identities between 1965 and 2015 in three regions in rural Ukrainian Polesia where the USSR built nuclear power plants, each with its own satellite city. These included the Chernobyl NPP and the city of Pripyat (1970-1986) in Kyiiv Polesia, the Rivne NPP and the city of Kuznetsovsk (since 1973)/Varash (since 2016) in West or Great Polesia, and the Khmelnitskiy NPP and the city of Netishyn (since 1980) in so-called Little Polesia. The essay is based on data from field work carried out in these regions from 2016 to 2018, which primarily involved interviewing eyewitnesses and experts and doing research in local museums, archives and libraries within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and in Kyiv, Varash and Netishyn. The author analyzes the local identities in these three regions during the early stages of nuclear industrialization and their transformation during the nuclear modernization. She also looks at the formation of new urban identities in the monoindustrial cities, which were situated in rural areas, and at the construction of new self-images and images of others among the new urban and old rural local populations. The common history of these three regions came to an end with the Chernobyl catastrophe. The author examines the impact of the catastrophe, the trauma of the following involuntary resettlement and how it affected local identities in Polesia after 1986. The essay also deals with the impact of the Ukrainian post-Chernobyl anti-nuclear movement, the following moratorium on the construction of new nuclear power plants, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the role of Ukrainian independence in the transformation of urban identities in Kuznetsovsk/Varash and Netishyn, where the nuclear power stations are still in operation. Lastly, the author investigates how new identity-forming factors as Ukrainization, decommunization, and social inequality, have played an important role in post-Soviet identity building.

KEYWORDS: identities, transformation, nuclear power plant, labor migration, language politics, Polesia, Chernobyl

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Introduction

In 1966, the Council of Ministers of the USSR decided to build a number of nuclear power plants (NPP) in the Soviet Union, including in Ukraine.[1] Consequently, three NPP were established in Polesia, each with its own satellite city:

- the Chernobyl NPP and the city of Prypiat’ (1970-1986) in the Kyiiv region, 17 kilometers from the city of Chornobyl’[2] and 11 kilometers from the Belarusian border;
- the Rivne NPP and the city of Kuznetsovs’k (since 1973) resp. Varash (since 2016)[3] in West Polesia, also called Great Polesia, in the district of Volodymyrets within the province of Rivne, directly on the border to the Volhynia region;
- the Khmel’nyts’kyi NPP and the city of Netishyn (since 1980) in the so called Little Polesia[4], in the Khmel’nyts’kyi province, directly on the border to the province of Rivne and 10 kilometers from the city of Ostroh.

Following the catastrophic accident in the No. 4 reactor of the Chernobyl NPP, the populations of the city of Prypiat and all other towns within a 30 kilometer radius of the disaster site were evacuated. The Rivne and Khmel’nyts’kyi plants are still in operation today and the cities of Varash and Netishyn remain urban centers within what are otherwise very rural regions.

As part of the project “Ukrainian Polesia as Nuclear Landscape and the Transformation of Local Identities, 1965-2015”[5] I carried out ethnological fieldwork in these three locations from 2016 to 2018, which primarily involved interviewing eyewitnesses and experts as well as doing research in local museums, archives and libraries within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and in Kyiiv, Varash and Netishyn.

The main terms used in this study are “region,” which refers to the three sites around the NPP and their satellite cities in the sub-regions of Polesia, specified as “East,” “Central” and “West” Polesia, or as “Great” and “Little”

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[1] ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: Nuclearizing Ukraine, Ukrainizing the Atom: Soviet Nuclear Technopolitics, Crisis, and Resilience at the Imperial Periphery, in: Cahiers du Monde Russe 60 (2019), 2-3 (forthcoming). The State Agency of Ukraine for the Exclusion Zone: Siting, URL: https://chnpp.gov.ua/ru/about/history-of-the-chnpp/stroitelstvo-i-ekspluatatsiya (2019-09-02).

[2] The NPP name had a Russian spelling “Chernobyl’” of the the nearby Ukrainian town of Chornobyl’, so in this essay the Russian name will be used for the nuclear power plant and the Ukrainian name for the city.

[3] In 2016, Kuznetsovs’k was renamed “Varash” as part of decommunization, cf.: Istoriia mista [The Town’s History], URL: http://varash.rv.gov.ua/misto/istoriya (2018-04-11).

[4] Little Polesia is separated from Great Polesia by the Volhynia Highlands, including the Rivne Plateau. Little Polesia forms a depression within this relief and is predominantly covered with forest.

[5] https://www.herder-institut.de/projekte/laufende-projekte/polesien-als-interventionslandschaft-raum-herrschaft-technologie-und-oekologie-an-der-europaeischen-peripherie-1915-2015.html (2019-04-28).

Polesia, and "local identity," which refers to the associated self-concepts and group identities that exist(ed) in these places. They have been shaped by region-specific conditions and transformed by the nuclear economy. From that starting point, this essay aims to answer the following three questions: Which local identities existed in the three locations under consideration when construction of the NPP began?[6] Which historical, economic, social and cultural factors were responsible for their construction? What kinds of transformation took place within the local ways of life and identities under the conditions of the nuclear economy, i.e. due to changes within the "traditional" living environment. Did new models of living and identities emerge during this nuclear and social modernization in the new satellite cities and, if so, how did they interract with the old rural modes of living and constructions of identity? These questions are new within the field of existing research on Polesia, which was conducted primarily in the late Soviet period by Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian linguists, ethnologists and Slavicists. While Russian, Polish and Soviet rulers regarded Polesia as a periphery, a landscape characterized by forests, swamps, rivers, peat bogs, alluvial forests and meadows, lakes and sand dunes that was difficult to access, isolated and unprofitable for industrial and agricultural use[7], for ethnographers and Slavicists, the region represented a treasure trove of archaic (eastern) Slavic cultural elements and was considered the "original homeland of the Slavs."[8] From this perspective, Polesia was a specific historical cultural landscape where every-day life was still shaped by a remarkable and ancient culture with a rich material and spiritual heritage, special customs, numerous dialects and diverse religious practices, some of which were still clearly pre-Christian.

Up until 1939, the Polish state and Polish science and reseach institutions tried, in the interests of their own political agendas, to separate the local population from the other East-Slavic peoples and registered them in the censuses of 1921 and 1931, not as Ukrainians or Belarusians, but as a separate ethnic group called *tuteshni* (Polish *tutejszy*). In local dialects, however, this term does not denote an ethnicity, but simply means "local people."[9]

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[6] In the regions of Chornobyl' and Varash, this was the period at the end of the 1960s / beginning of the 1970s, in Netishyn it was at the end of the 1970s / beginning of the 1980s.

[7] V. KUBIJOVYČ, I. STEBELSKY, I. SYDORUK-PAULS: Polisia, in: DANILO HUSAR STRUK (ed.): Encyclopedia of Ukraine. Vol. 4: Ph-Sr, Toronto 1993, pp. 104-112, here p. 110.

[8] MAX VASMER: Die Urheimat der Slawen, in: WILHELM VOLZ (ed.): Der ostdeutsche Volksboden: Aufsätze zu den Fragen des Ostens, Breslau 1926, pp. 118-143; V. K. BONDARCHIK et al.: Obshchestvennyï, semejnyï byt i duchovnaia kultura naseleniia Polesia [Social and Family Life and the Spiritual Culture of the People of Polesia], Minsk 1987, p. 3.

[9] JOSEPH OBRĘBSKI: Dzisiejsi ludzie Polesia i inne eseje [The People of Polesia Today and Other Essays], Warszawa 2005, p. 119; KUBIJOVYČ/STEBELSKY/SYDORUK-PAULS (as in footnote 7), p. 109.

Soviet scientists, on the other hand, saw the Polesian population as ethnic subgroups of the Ukrainians and Blearusians and were mainly interested in examining the entire Polesian culture as having a single East-Slavic, i.e. Ukrainian-Belarusian-Russian origin.[10] Thus, from the 1960s on, the Institute for Slavonic and Balkan Studies of the USSR's Academy of Sciences in Moscow, the Institute for Art History, Ethnography and Folklore of the Academy of Sciences of the Belarusian SSR in Minsk and the Rylskyï Institute for Art History, Folklore and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR in Lviv conducted regular field research in Ukrainian and Belarusian Polesia. These studies resulted in numerous publications.[11]

This field research continued to be carried out and documented in the post-Soviet era as well. Thus, the so-called ethno-linguistic *Polesskii Arkhiv* (Polesian Archive) was established in Moscow in 1994.[12] Between 1994 and 2004, the Enthological Institutes of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in L'viv and Kyiiv conducted regular fieldwork in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and in other radioactively contaminated parts of Ukrainian Polesia in order to preserve and document artefacts of the region's traditional culture.[13]

In summary, previous research on Polesia in Soviet and post-Soviet times has focused on linguistic and ethnographic studies in order to document and describe the elements of the "traditional" culture and customs, but not on the transformation of this culture or the identities of the local population.[14] This essay aims to bridge this gap and to reconstruct, from the perspective of local actors, the perception of the technical and social modernization of Polesia as brought about by the developing nuclear economy.

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[10] BONDARCHIK, Obshchestvennyï (as in footnote 8), p. 3.

[11] Ibidem, passim; IDEM et al. (eds.): Poles'ie: Material'naya kultura [Polesia: Material Culture], Kyiiv 1988; numerous essays were published in the year books: Slavyanskiï i Balkanskiï Folklor [Slavonic and Balkan Folklore], Moskva 1978, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989, and later 1992, 1995, 2000, 2006, and Polissja Ukraïny: Materialy istoryko-etnohrafičnoho doslidžennja [Ukrainian Polesia: Materials of Historical-ethnographic Research], Lviv 1997, 1999, 2003.

[12] Baza dannyh "Polesskii arkhiv" Otdela etnolingvistiki I folklora Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk [Database "Polesian Archive" of the Department for Ethnolinguistics and Folklore at the Russian Academy of Sciences], URL: https://inslav.ru/publication/baza-dannyh-polesskiy-arhiv-otdela-etnolingvistiki-i-folklora (2019-04-29).

[13] STEPAN PAVLIUK: Nach dem Reaktorgau: Wissenschaftler dokumentieren die kulturellen Traditionen der Polissja, in: EVA GERHARDS, SVETLANA BOLTOVSKAJA (eds.): Tschernobyl: Expeditionen in ein verlorenes Land, Freiburg 2011, pp. 27-37; LUDMILA BULHAKOVA: Expeditionen in das verlorene Land, ibidem, pp. 146-147; Narodoznavchi zoshyty / The Ethnology Notebooks (2006), 3-4.

[14] Although the Soviet monographs listed above contain obligatory chapters on the successful modernization of traditional Polesian culture during the Soviet era, they focus almost exclusively on traditional economic and construction methods, hunting and fishing techniques, tradtitional clothing, nutrition, religious beliefs and rituals, folklore and dialectology.

"Identity" and "region" are understood here as social and cultural phenomena, i.e. the investigation does not just deal with Polesia as a purely geographical space, but as a socially constituted and constructed space, consisting not only of natural conditions, objects and relations, but also of local actors and their social practices.[15] The term "region" and its characteristics in contemporary research on East Central Europe is often defined as follows: "Regions are formed by functional, formal, or vernacular parameters, i.e. by administrative devices, political and economic factors, by a shared language, culture, and/or religion, and by social structures, by 'the spatial perception of average people' and the 'mental maps of the population'. The connotation associated with the specific area, the memories and emotions it evokes in the individuals as well as his or her relation to, and identification with, its elements, constitute a region."[16]

Local identity is understood here as the difference between, and interaction of, the descriptions of oneself and others, which are constructed in terms of their distinction from one another and are therefore dependent on each other. To define something as "one's own" relies upon the existence of "foreignness" and vice versa. Historical developments and constellations determine how the concepts of "one's own" and "other" are perceived and allow certain images of self and others to emerge in everyday life as well as in politics, science and research, education and media. These images then shape the way individuals think and influence public opinion and social interaction. The changes in the political, economic and social life of a local community also change the perceptions of "one's own" and the "other," which are then rethought and reconstructed. The term "self-image" primarily refers to personal identity, which is based on the interaction between the view one develops of oneself and the external images of those with whom one interacts.[17]

At the same time, the individual self-image is connected with one's identification with a group, with a "we-consciousness." This image is also the result of social processes, and of the interplay and synthesis of self and external attribution. Images of others are constructed as antitheses to images of self by distinguishing that which is "one's own" from that which is "alien." Thus, a different social or ethnic group or a group living in a different place is attributed certain characteristics that distinguish it from one's "own" group. Those who belong to a certain group are not simply "different", but instead turn into "the others." The members of this group are then confronted with these attributions and construct their identity so as to either adapt to or resist these alien attributions, whereby identification criteria such as space or common history, but also langauge, education or gender roles are retained or redefined.

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[15] CHRISTOPH WAACK: Transregionale Räume: Zwischen europäischer Integration und regionaler Identität, in: STEFAN GARSZTECKI, IDEM et al. (eds.): Regionale Identität und transnationale Räume in Ostmitteleuropa, Dresden 2012, pp. 17-26, here p. 18.

[16] SIBYLLE BAUMBACH: Conceptualising "Region," "Identity" and "Culture," and Mapping Approaches to Regions of Culture and Regions of Identity, in: EADEM (ed.): Regions of Culture—Regions of Identity / Kulturregionen—Identitätsregionen, Trier 2010, pp. 1-14, here p. 2.

[17] PETER WAGNER: Soziologie der Moderne, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, p. 58.

Since the population of Polesia is a territorial but not a homogenous ethnic group, the term “identity” refers here primarily to the subjective feeling of “belonging” or “demarcation”:

> “The term ‘identity’ is used to refer to a sense of belonging. It denotes the process of identification and thus it is understood to be essentially in the making, shaped not only by ancestry, ethnicity, gender and upbringing but also by political and social environments, cultural and personal history and especially narratives […] Personal identity, the answer to the riddle of who people are, takes shape in the stories we tell about ourselves. Narratives allow us not only to organize experiences from the past but also to position ourselves in relation to the world around us.”[18]

Every individual can have several identities that overlap and complement each other: ethnic, professional, gender-related, national etc. This study mainly focuses on local group identities in the areas around the three NPP sites and in the cities affiliated with them. Ethnological oral history methods were used to gather data for the study, particularly narrative biographical interviews with contemporary witnesses and group discussions.[19]

The research design was based on the thesis that people can be found locally who are professionally or voluntarily engaged in the work of preserving and constructing local identities. These are employees of the National Chernobyl’ Museum in Kyiiv, the local museums in the exclusion zone and in the regions around Varash und Netishyn[20], as well as local journalists and activists who were interviewed as experts and who put me in contact with other contemporary witnesses. I took care to conduct interviews with both male and female witnesses from three generations, i.e. from the generation who were living before the introduction of the nuclear economy, the generation of the *pervoprokhodtsy* (pioneers of NPP construction) and the generation of people who were born and socialized in the nuclear cities.[21] A total of around 54 narrative biographical interviews and group discussions were held and digitally recorded and around 64 hours of recorded material was subsequently transcribed.[22]

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[18] BAUMBACH (as in footnote 16), p. 6.

[19] GABRIELE ROSENTHAL: Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte: Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen, Frankfurt a. M.—New York 1995; FRITZ SCHÜTZE: Zur soziologischen und linguistischen Analyse von Erzählungen, in: Beiträge zur Wissenssoziologie, Beiträge zur Religionssoziologie 10 (1976), pp. 7-41.

[20] Among others, the Polissia information center in Varash, the history museum of the Rivne NPP and the city of Varash; the museum of local history in Netishyn; school museums in Varash and in the village of Stara Rafalivka as well as the private church museum in the city of Chornobyl’.

[21] Among the older generation, the majority were women due to their higher life expectancy. The interviews relating to Prypiat’ and Chornobyl’ were conducted in the restricted zone and in Kyiiv, where my interviewees had been resettled after the accident.

Polesia and Local Identities Prior to the Advent of the Nuclear Economy

Polesia's isolated geographical location and harsh natural conditions determined the economic and social life of the region's rural population, who, even during the Soviet era, were initially oriented towards self-suffiency. While the sandy and swampy land was not suitable for efficient large-scale agriculture and livestock farming, forest-based activities like hunting, fishing, mushroom, berry and herb gathering and beekeeping formed the livelihood of the average family, alongside small-scale gardening and handicrafts. These activities determined the traditional cuisine, nutrition and manner of dress. At the time the NPP were established, local people were still making their own tools, household utensils and clothing out of wood, clay, straw, hay, linen and hemp using old methods. Until the 1980s, the majority of the local rural population still lived in traditional wooden houses (*khata*) with earth floors and straw roofs.[23] For many, horse-drawn carriages and wooden boats were still the most important means of transport.[24]

After the Second World War, the region's farms and villages were organized into *kolkhozes*, which grew potatoes, grain, flax and hemp and where livestock farming took place on a small scale. Fishing also played an important role.

Depending on their size, villages in the 1960s had a primary or middle school, an administration building for the *kolkhoz*, a club or community house with a library and sometimes an emergency medical center with a medical assistant. However, (ritual) customs and the patriarchal family structure still strongly determined the life of an individual. The Slavic carneval (*masle-*

Their children and grandchildren were already socialized in Kyiiv and have only a symbolic connection to the family history in the Chornobyl' region.

[22] These inteviews are archived at the Herder Institute, some on DARIAH-DE: Research data from the project "Ukrainian Polesia as a Nuclear Landscape 1965-2015," URL: https://www.herder-institut.de/holdings/?hol=HI000013&lang=de (2019-09-03); SVETLANA BOLTOVSKA: Research data: Ukrainian Polesia as a Nuclear Landscape and the Transformation of Local Identities, 1965-2015, https://doi.org/10.20375/0000-000b-d552-8.

[23] *Khatas* of this kind with thatched roofs are still a common sight in the Chernobyl' Exclusion Zone, even directly in front of apartment blocks in the abandoned city of Prypiat'.

[24] Local people living in Polesian villages in the direct vicinity of the nuclear power plants still use horse-drawn carriages. They are even a common sight in the nuclear cities of Varash and Netishyn when farmers from neighboring villages come to shop in the cities' supermarkets.

nitsa)[25], the “Week of the Nymphs” and Ivan Kupala Night[26] in the summer were tolerated by the Soviet powers and seen as part of cultural tradition and folklore. Sometimes, such traditional celebrations were even promoted as leisure activities and amateur theater. Traditional singing was particularly encouraged by the state and concerts and public competitions were very popular.[27] The Orthodox Church and a number of Protestant movements remained important for the population despite anti-religious propaganda and they continued their work, albeit underground. Family rituals, in particular weddings, funerals and commemoration of ancestors after Easter, were also preserved.[28]

Another very important factor in the formation of identity is shared history and the collective memory and narratives that develop around it. Due to its geographical isolation, Polesia became a refuge for various ethnic and religious groups and was therefore a region of intensive, everyday inter-ethnic encounters. Orthodox-Christian Ukrainians and Belarusians, Orthodox Jews, Russian Old Believers, Catholic Poles, and Czech and German Protestants lived here side by side.[29] Shtetl formed regional centers at the three sites where the NPP would later be built. In the early modern period, the city of Chornobyl’, which was first mentioned in written records in 1193, was a major traffic and trade hub connectimg the Baltic region with Kyiiv. Since the eighteenth century, it had also been the center of the Hasidic Twersky Dynasty. In 1897, Chornobyl’ had 10,800 inhabitants, 59.4 per cent of whom were Jews.[30] The shtetl Rafalivka[31], founded in 1647, had a similar position in the part of West Polesia where the Rivne NPP would later be built.[32] The city of Ostroh, which first appeared in records in 1100, was even a supra-regional Slavic and Jewish educational and cultural center in Little Polesia.[33]

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[25] *Maslenitsa* (week of butter) marks the end of winter and the imminent beginning of work in the fields. SVETLANA BOLTOVSKAJA: Der natürliche Rhythmus des Lebens: Jahreszeiten- und Familienrituale der Poleschuken, in: GERHARDS/EADEM (as in footnote 13), pp. 95-107, here p. 96.

[26] Even today, nymph rituals are practiced by the communities who had to move away from the exclusion zone. These celebrations take place in their new homes, ibidem, p. 98.

[27] Maria Shuryberko from the village of Sopachiv, who worked as a librarian in the *kolkhoz*, ran a village singing group, took part in several concert trips and competitions and was even allowed to perform civil marriage ceremonies in the village library as traditional Polesian weddings. Interview with Maria Shuryberko, in the village of Sopachiv, October 2016. The interview is available at the Herder Institute library.

[28] BOLTOVSKAJA, Der natürliche Rhythmus (as in footnote 25), pp. 102-107. Between 2016 and 2018, interviewees from Varash and Netishyn also reported that a trip back to one’s home village in spring to take part in the commemorative rituals for the dead was still an absolute must for them. During this time, there is an enormous rush to the cemeteries in the Chernobyl’ Exclusion Zone.

[29] ROMAN CHMELIK: Die Polissja und ihre Bewohner, in: GERHARDS/BOLTOVSKAJA (as in footnote 13), pp. 39-51, here pp. 42-43.

[30] MYKOLA CHERNIHOVETS, NATALIIA CHERNIHOVETS: Chornobyl’, Kyiiv 2011, p. 61.

[31] A settlement built around the railway and police station in 1902 was named Nova Rafalivka in 1927, and the shtetl founded in 1647 was thenceforth called Stara

The local populations in these three regions of Polesia had similar, though not always concurrent, experiences of survival under different political regimes, namely, the Russian Tsarist Empire, Poland-Lithuania, German and Austrian occupation during both world wars and, above all, Sovietization with its forced collectivization of the economy, waves of repression and deportation, especially during the 1930s.

Eastern Polesia and areas of Little Polesia already became part of the USSR in 1922. In the following years, *kolkhozes* and factories were established there and schools were built. In Chornobyl', a Jewish *kolkhoz* named "Neue Welt" was even established, officially as a kolkhoz for ethnic minorities. But there was also mass repression of kulaks, clergy, "counter-revolutionaries," "spies" and "bourgeois nationalists." The majority of Poles, Czechs and Germans were banished to Kazakhstan between 1936 and 1938.[34] Western Polesia belonged to Poland until 1939 and came under permanent Soviet rule in October 1944.[35] In 1941, the *Wehrmacht* occupied Polesia, which belonged to the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*. The Jewish population, which had already suffered significant losses in the progroms of the civil war, was wiped out.[36] Many young people were deported to Germany as forced laborers and a partisan war broke out.

After the war, a period of rebuilding began. Chornobyl', affectionately referred to as "Little Kyiiv," remained the regional center with several large and small industrial operations, a port and a number of secondary and vocational schools. Little Polesia was restructured administratively, which meant that the village of Netishyn, where the NPP would later be built, was officially assigned to the Kam'janec'-Podils'kyï province and then later to the Khmel'nyts'kyi province. The city of Ostroh, which had been a trade and cultural center for the former village Netishyn, remained part of the Rivne

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Rafalivka. G. BUKHALO: Rafalivka, in: Istoriia mist i sil Ukrainskoï RSR, Kyiiv 1973, pp. 164-171.

[32] LARYSA PINCHUK: Istorychne mynule sela Varash [The Historical Past of the Village of Varash], Kuznetsovs'k 2008, pp. 21-22.

[33] VASYL VYKHOVANETS': Shtrykhy do davn'oii Istoriii sela Netishyna [Remarks on the Ancient History of the Village of Netishyn], in: Visnyk Netishynskoho Kraieznavchoho muzeiu (2014), 5, pp. 4-11.

[34] KATE BROWN: A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland, Cambridge/MA 2005, p. 2; CHERNIHOVETS (as in footnote 30), p. 105.

[35] BRITTA BÖHME: Grenzland zwischen Mythos und Realität—Real- und Ideengeschichte des ukrainischen Territoriums, Berlin 1999, p. 346.

[36] Only a small number of Jews who survived the Holocaust in the Red Army or due to evacuation returned after the war. In 1970, only 150 Jewish families still lived in Chornobyl'. CHERNIHOVETS (as in footnote 30), p. 62.

province so that administrative boundaries continued to separate towns from each other.[37]

Until the 1950s, western Polesia continued to be plagued by a partisan war between Soviet security forces and the remaining armed Ukrainian nationalist units. Stara Rafalivka, Varash and other villages became part of the Dzerzhinskii *kolkhoz* and the region around Rafalivka was assigned to the neighboring district of Volodymyrets'.[38]

By now, all three regions were officially part of the USSR, but remained peripheral because of the new administrative borders and the old boundaries separating languages and dialects. The region had also lost its ethnic diversity—due to the years of war, mass exterminations and repression, most of the Jews, Poles and Germans were no longer there. Because ethnic identity alone could be a reason for persecution in the USSR during the Stalin era, descendents of mixed marriages continued to conceal their Polish, Jewish or German ancestry. But the local population remained and remains to this day multilingual, with some people able to speak Polish or Belarusian as well as their own village dialect and the obligatory Ukrainian or Russian.[39]

Polesia remained a very poor region until well after the war ended and many people moved away. In Kyiv Polesia, a number of villages along the Prypiat' River had been bombed during the war and their inhabitants continued to live for a long time after that in earth huts. In Varash in the 1960s, most houses still had earthen floors and no electricity. The members of the *kolkhozes* were not paid in cash, but instead their earnings were based on how many *trudodni* (days of work) they had completed in the *kolkhoz* and they were paid in kind.[40]

In order to prevent a mass exodus from poor rural areas, the Soviet powers began in the 1930s to limit the freedom of local rural people to travel and settle where they wanted. Until the end of the 1970s, *kolkhoz* farmers had no domestic passports and needed special permits for private travel. It was only when the "No. 677" decree of the Council of Ministers was introduced on 28 August 1974 that members of *kolkhozes* were able to receive domestic passports. These had to be issued before 1 January 1976, but in some areas the process took until 1989.[41] If a *kolkhoz* farmer was stopped by the police during an unauthorized trip he could receive a heavy fine and, in the case of a repeat offence, he could even face imprisonment. Nevertheless, the post-war generation sought better education, work and improved living conditions away from home. There were several legal ways to do this during the Soviet era. All healthy men had to complete a period of compulsory military service in the army and were sent to various parts of the USSR for two to four years. Many stayed in the places they were stationed because they found work or training opportunities there. Young men and women who showed promise at school could attend a boarding school in order to complete their leaving certificate and were then free to enter an apprenticeship or study in larger cities where they could then receive a passport when they reached the legal age. A number of the interviewees from the postwar generation emigrated from Polesia to Siberia, the Urals and Kazakhstan. Some of them even travelled illegally, without a passport or school leaving certificate, via family networks. The introduction of passports for *kolkhoz* members further accelerated this migration.

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[37] TARAS VYKHOVANETS: Chastynka istoriii [A Piece of History], Netishyn 2016, p. 47.

[38] PINCHUK (as in footnote 32), p. 28.

[39] CHMELIK (as in footnote 29), p. 42.

[40] N. OSIPOV: Nekotorye voprosy oplaty truda v kolchozakh [Some Questions about Pay in Kolkhozes], in: Federal'nyi pravovoi portal "Yuridicheskaya Rossiya", URL: http://www.law.edu.ru/doc/document.asp?docID=1127893 (2018-12-11).

[41] V. POPOV: Pasportnaia sistema sovetskogo krepostnichestva [The Passport System of Soviet Serfdom], in: Novyï Mir (1996), 6, URL: http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1996/6/popov.html (2018-04-11).

The mass emigration out of poor rural regions affected the entire rural USSR and the Ukrainian SSR. The peculiarity of Polesia was that it was the most sparsely populated region of Ukraine, especially its marshy part. 1987, the population density in Ukrainian Polesia was 43 persons per square kilometer, and in its wetland areas as low as 25. Polesia had also the lowest level of urbanization in Ukraine—less than 50 percent in 1989, when the urbanization of Ukraine as a whole was 67 percent. Only in in 1956 did the Polesian population reach the prewar level of 1939, despite the high birth rate and the return, both of forced laborers from Germany and the rehabilitated victims of Stalinist repression from Siberia and Kazakhstan.[42]

Neither the Ukrainian, Polish or Russian, nor the Soviet national idea penetrated Polesia to any significant degree until the post-war period. “Because of their isolation the inhabitants of Polisia never had a strong sense of national identity. They always felt and continued to feel that they are different from their neighbors the Poles, Russians, and Jews, and usually referred to themselves as ‘locals’ (*tuteshni*), ‘simple folk’ (*prosti*), or ’Orthodox’ (*pravoslavni*). The names *polishchuk* and *pynchuk*, derived from place-names, were usually used by outsiders.”[43]

Clichés about the “Polishchuks” circulated among Polish and Russian officials. They were seen as wild, uncouth people who did not aspire to culture and were at a lower stage of development than neighboring groups. That is why the Polesians found this label derogatory and offensive and why, to this day, they almost never refer to themselves as “Polishchuks.”[44] A 61 year-old interviewee in Varash spoke about how her parents, both school teachers, would only use the term during marital disputes: “You uncouth Polishchuk.”

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[42] KUBIJOVYČ/STEBELSKY/SYDORUK-PAULS (as in footnote 7), p. 110.

[43] Ibidem, p. 109.

[44] CHMELIK (as in footnote 29), p. 47, as well as testimonies of several interviewees.

The majority of the Polesian population was officially registered in the Soviet Union as Ukrainians, Russians or Belarusians. However, the entry in Soviet domestic passports showing a person’s affiliation to higher-order ethnic groups did nothing to change the local population’s feeling of otherness and separateness from the other Slavs. Even though “Polesia” appears in the names of many local *kolkhozes*, newspapers[45] and leisure centers, the people here continue to identify themselves according to their origin and local affiliation, thus distinguishing themselves from their neighbors. So instead of “Polishchuks,” they refer to themselves as residents of a particular town, for example, as *Chornobyl’iany*, *Varashany*, *Rafalivtsi*, *Netishyntsi*, *Dorohoshchany* etc. People also identify themselves as belonging to a particular family, farm or a specific part of a village and its surroundings, which may have their own local names.[46] In the case of personal names, it is still common practice, as in other rural regions of the world, to first clarify the origin of a person’s family and parents. Family names alone, therefore, allow locals to identify the village and area that their conversation partner comes from.

The village community to which one belonged was ascribed certain positive characteristics, while the neighboring village was ascribed certain negative characteristics. In principle, the same model of hierarchy existed in all three regions of Ukrainian Polesia under investigation: among several towns that were otherwise on a par with eachother, one would be regarded as a clearly identifiable economic and educational center. The inhabitants of this town could claim to have, or could achieve, a better education and thereby a higher level of social status than those who lived elsewhere. The history of a place and, above all, the fact that it had a school (or, in earlier times, possibly its own church) played an important role in this. The type of school (primary school, school with seven grades or a complete middle school) depended on the size of the village and determined, in turn, the position of the village within the neighborhood. In Prypyat’ Polesia, the city of Chornobyl’ was a center of local economy, culture, and education, an imaginary and real window to the outside world for the local population. Within the immediate area around the site of the future Chernobyl NPP, this role was played by the village of Novoshepelychi, which had its own village council and a boarding school. The village of Stara Rafalivka, the former shtetl, had a smiliar status in the area where the Rivne NPP would later be built as it had a school that children from the surrounding settlements attended and also because the inhabitants of Rafalivka, which had once been granted Magdeburg Law, still considered themselves as "more civilized" than people from neighboring villages.[47]

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[45] E.g. *Chervone Polissia* [Red Polesia], the name of Chornobyl’’s local newspaper (1930-1952), and of one of the *kolkhozes*, or the name *Trudivnyk Polissia* [The Polesian Worker], a local newspaper in Little Polesia, or the “Polissia” cinema, later NPP information center and city museum in Varash.

[46] OLEKSANDR ROMANCHUK: Toponimy sil Netishina i Solov’ia ta mista Netishyn [Toponyms of the Villages of Netishyn, Solov’ie and the City of Neteshyn], in: Visnyk Netishyns’koho Kraieznavchoho muzeiu (2014), 5, pp. 16-20.

The Peaceful Atom, Soviet Socialist Modernization and Urban Immigration

At the end of the 1960s, when the inhabitants of Kyiiv and West Polesia saw the first geologists and surveyors in their mosquito nets navigating their local forests and swamps in the search for a suitable site for the NPP, they reacted with a mixture of curiosity and skepticism. These outsiders with their technical equipment and their prophecies of a great future of technological advance at first appeared to the locals as aliens from a newly landed spaceship.[48]

A NPP site had to fulfil the following requirements: a suitable water supply, land with low agricultural productivity that could be expropriated and built on, access to a transport network and a railway line and, lastly, geographical proximity to large industrial energy consumers. The sparsely populated rural areas of Ukrainian Polesia, landscapes characterized by an abundance of water, forests, swamps and rivers, located in the middle of the European part of the USSR but scarcely developed in terms of industry and infrastructure, fulfilled these requirements prefectly.[49]

Soon, swamps at the sites chosen for the new settlements were drained and then stabilized with huge quantities of sand, cement and soil. Forests were also cut down, sand dunes removed and pits dug to create artificial lakes. In accordance with the five year plans, nuclear facilities and urban infrastructures were constructed at the same time. The new nuclear cities were to become socialist model cities with NPP that would function as great enterprises giving them a purpose and meaning, and they would be characterized by the exemplary organization of urban space and a high quality of living and prosperity for those who lived there.[50]

In 1966, a site was chosen for the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station on marshy fields by the Prypiat' River. It was located near the village of Kopachi (4 kilometers) and the Ianiv railway station, and was also close to the Belarusian border (11 kilometers) and the city of Chornobyl' (17 kilometers), which gave the plant its name. The villages of Semykhody and Nahortsi were demolished to make way for the nuclear city of Prypiat’. Construction began in 1970 and, by 1979, it had already gained official status as a city. In 1986, when the catastrophe occurred, four units were in operation at the NPP and a further two were under construction, making it the largest power plant in Ukraine. In 1971, a site was found for the West Ukrainian NPP on the Styr River, directly on the border to the Volhynia district. It was located near the village of Varash, part of which had to be demolished to make way for the new city, and was also close to the villages of Stara Rafalivka and Nova Rafalivka. Construction began in 1973 and Kuznetsovs’k was granted city status in 1984. In 1986, the Rivne NPP had three units in operation and another one under construction.

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[47] Interview with the Orthodox priest Sergej Prokopchuk, Stara Rafalivka, September 2017.

[48] Testimonies of several contemporary witnesses who lived in the villages around Prypiat' prior to 1986, Interviews in Kyiiv in April-May 2017.

[49] The State Agency of Ukraine for an Exclusion Zone: Siting, URL: https://chnpp.gov.ua/en/about/history-of-the-chnpp/chnpp-construction (2019-09-03).

[50] ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: Inventing the Atomograd: Nuclear Urbanism as a Way of Life in Eastern Europe Before and After Chernobyl, in: THOMAS M. BOHN, THOMAS FELDHOFF et al. (eds.): The Impact of Disaster: Social and Cultural Approaches to Fukushima and Chernobyl, Berlin 2014, pp. 261-288, here p. 263.

In 1975, the site of the Khmel’nyts’kyi NPP in Little Polesia was decided on. It lay in the district of Khmelnickyj on the Horyn River, near the village of Netishyn and the Kryvyn railway station, directly on the border to the Rivne province and only ten kilometers from the city of Ostroh. The nuclear city was given the same name and was established next to the village of Netishyn, which was mostly left intact and integrated into the new urban suburb.

The new urban residential district was organized into hierarchical structures: the apartment block, the residential district and the city as a whole with a distinct city center. The new socialist settlement was to be a place of work, leisure and recreation for its residents. Parallel to the construction of the NPP, standardized high-rise buildings of various heights were built using the latest methods and prefabricated steel and concrete structures. Children’s playgrounds, parks and wide streets were laid out and kindergartens, schools, administrative buildings, supermarkets and *kolkhoz* markets were built, along with food combines, cinemas, music schools, sports facilities, swimming pools, hospitals, hotels, cantines, restaurants, cafés and, later, also vocational schools, where NPP and construction specialists could be trained locally. The NPP produced electricity and hot water for the city. In order to prevent a mono-industrial structure and to create a broader spectrum of jobs, the “Jupiter” radio factory and a greenhouse were built in Prypiat’. Furthermore, the cooling ponds in Prypiat’ and Netishyn were used for fish farming. Prior to 1986, plans were also made for other companies to be established in Kuznetsovs’k and Netishyn.

During the Cold War, these nuclear cities served as evidence of the “peaceful atom.” This distinguished them from the secret cities of the Soviet nucelar weapon industry like, for example, Chelyabinsk-40, which Kate Brown describes in “Plutopia.”[51] Both Soviet and American nuclear cities provided their inhabitants with a high quality of life, but were also kept strictly secret from their own people. A city of the “peaceful atom,” on the other hand, was to serve as a model of Soviet socialism, which was proudly presented to the public. The media regularly reported on construction progress and numerous documentaries and reportages were shot there up until 1986.[52]

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[51] KATE BROWN: Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters, Oxford 2013.

The large-scale construction projects required large numbers of qualified and unqualified workers, who were not available locally. A rapid migration began, which transformed these three areas of Polesia from emigration regions into immigration regions within the space of a few years. The technical elites for the construction and nuclear power industries came from Soviet industrial and research centers (Kyiiv, Moscow, Leningrad, Cheliabinsk, Tomsk, Kursk etc.). But the nuclear project also needed thousands of construction workers, electricians, truck drivers as well as cooks and cleaners. Thus, young people from all over Ukraine and the entire USSR flocked to these so-called *udarnaia stroika* (shock construction projects). After building work began, many young people from the areas around the sites of the future NPP, who had completed their apprenticeships, degrees or military service in the Soviet army elsewhere and afterwards had stayed on in these other places, now returned to their Polesian homeland. Local school graduates continued to move to cities for tertiary education and training, but would return having gained their qualifications. When vocational training institutions were later built in the nuclear cities themselves, these young people could learn the skills needed for sought-after professions without moving away.

Locals who were not directly involved in the building work also benefited from this urbanization. Since there was a lack of accommodation during the initial phase of construction, the first migrant workers rented rooms in the nearby villages. Parallel to the NPP, a transport infrastructure was established in the region. Maria Barash from the village of Chapaiivka, which has been inside the Chornobyl' Exclusion Zone since 1986, recalled in 2017:

> "They built them [the local population] ashphalted roads. People were happy about that. When work began on the nuclear power plant, they put down asphalt in all these villages so that cars could be driven there. Before that time, cars would would get stuck in the sand dunes and ditches—there wasn't a single road you could drive on. We had no civilization, you understand? Civilization only arrived when the nuclear power plants were built."[53]

The local *kolkhoz* farmers could also sell fruit and vegetabes from their own gardens in the markets of the nuclear cities and earn extra money this way. In the cities' new supermarkets they could also now buy groceries, consumer goods and home appliances that were not available in their local rural stores.

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[52] The Center for Urban History in Lviv owns a digital collection of documentaries from Ukrainian nuclear cities, URL: https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/uvd/ (2019-04-29); WENDLAND, Inventing the Atomograd (as in footnote 50).

[53] Extract from the interview with Maria Barash, fomer resident of the village of Chapaivka in the Chornobyl' Exclusion Zone, recorded in Kyiiv (2017-04-17), research data from the project "Ukrainian Polesia as a Nuclear Landscape, 1965–2015", see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

At first, the migrant workers lived in a temporary camp or rented rooms in nearby villages, but the first dormitories were built very quickly and, after only a few months, which was an astonishingly short waiting period in the USSR, the construction workers and their families could move into their own apartments. The Lesnoi forest camp was built between the villages of Semykhody and Nahortsi to provide accommodation for construction workers and NPP employees. Within two years, the population of Lesnoi and, soon after, Prypiat', exceded that of all the surrounding villages put together.[54] In 1972, Prypiat' became officially recognized as an urban settlement. The railway station and the villages associated with it in the Novoshepelychi area were incorporated into the new Prypiat' village council. The residents of the village of Nahortsi and the Pidlisnyi farm were soon resettled into new apartments in Prypiat'. The two settlements were officially closed in 1978 and the site used for the NPP cooling pand. The small village Semykhody was mostly demolished to make way for Prypiat' and its residents were given apartments in the blocks of flats that were built in place of their houses. In 1976, the local administration complained that Semykhody could not fulfil its harvest plan because the *kolkhoz* had hardly any male workers left, probably because they had found new jobs on the construction site.[55]

The village of Novoshepelychi soon became a suburb of Prypiat', and the village main street ended directly in front of new apartment blocks. Although Chornobyl' remained the administrative center and an important transport junction between Prypiat' and Kyiiv, Prypiat' replaced Chornobyl' as the most important urban center of this region. People from the villages close to the NPP, who previously had had to travel a long way on buses or by foot to Chornobyl', now preferred to visit the stores and the market in Prypiat'. As Maria Barash from the village of Chapaiivka recalls: "My mother was the first in the village. In our village there was never a market and no one could sell anything there. But my mother could dig up potatoes or pick dill or whatever and go to Prypiat' to sell them."[56] Alexander Zhurba, who grew up in a village in the region around Kuznetsovs'k also remembers: "Here [in Kuznetsovs'k] there was an infrastructure, you could get supplies, you could buy food and wine from Hungary, and lard. When I was studying, I bought these things here and they were very cheap too … chocolate butter, wine, Hungarian chicken, there was a good supply here."[57] *Kolkhoz* famers were also able to use the cultural facilities such as cinemas, libraries, music schools and swimming pools in the new cities.

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[54] O. N. BARABANOV: Semikhody nad Pripiat'iu: Istoriia sela, razrushennogo pri stroitel'stve Chernobyl'skoi AES [Semykhody on the Prypiat: The History of the Village Destroyed during the Construction of the Chernobyl' Nuclear Power Plant], part 1, in: Prostranstvo i Vremja (2014), 1 (15), pp. 139-152, URL: https://space-time.ru/space-time/article/view/2226-7271provr_st1-15.2014.55 (2018-04-16); IDEM: Semikhody nad Pripiat'iu: istoriia sela, razrushennogo pri stroitel'stve Chernobyl'skoi AES, part 2, ibidem, 2 (16), pp. 264-271, URL: https://space-time.ru/space-time/article/view/2226-7271 provr_st2-16.2014.94 (2018-04-16), p. 265.

[55] Ibidem, part. 2, p. 266.

[56] Ibidem.

Evgeniï Fedorovich, a former teacher at the "No. 1" school in Chornobyl', recalled in May 2017 the extent to which Chornobyl' was affected by the exodus to Prypiat':

> "People started to hand in their resignations—you got paid more over in Prypiat'. For a normal, good day's work. It was a good salary for those times. And everyone was rushing to get a transfer and to quit their jobs here. We had entire assemble lines with no personnel to run them. It got to the point where the district committee of the party (and the district committee of the party was a God-like authority) had to make the decision to approve resignations only in consultation with the trade union committee and the company administration. Because it was becoming clear that the companies had lost all their workers."[58]

Similar to the situation in Semykhody near Prypiat', the houses in Varash were also torn down and their owners moved into the apartment blocks that were built in their place. The village of Varash was officially closed in 1977 and the new settlement that replaced it was named after the World War Two hero Nikolai Kuznetsov.[59] By choosing this name and also renaming the *Shevchenko Kolkhoz* the *Dzerzhynskii Kolkhoz*, the authorities gave a clear signal that the Soviet powers in this *banderovtsy* region had finally won.[60]

In 1978, there were already 5,500 people living in Kuznetsovs'k[61], a number that exceeded the total population of Varash and both Rafalivkas. Stara Rafalivka remained the administrative center of the *kolkhoz*, but it became a de facto suburb of the nuclear city.

The two villages of Netishyn and Solov'ie were merged in 1980 and formed the site of the Khmel'nyts'kyi NPP and a new town containing 802 houses and around 5,000 people, including members of the *kolkhoz* as well as NPP employees, town construction workers and their families.[62] For 1981, the

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[57] Extract from the interview with Alexander Zhurba, recorded in Varash (2017-05-14), see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[58] Extract from the interview with Evgenii Fedorovich from Chornobyl', recorded in Chornobyl' (2017-05-19), see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[59] Nikolaj Kuznetsov was a Soviet secret agent and partisan and died in 1944 while fighting against the Ukrainian UPA nationalists.

[60] In the area around Stara Rafalivka the partisans controlled the north, while the Ukrainian nationalists, who, in Soviet propaganda and in common parlance were named *banderovtsy* after their founder, controlled the south. Both groups were responsible for several massacres of local people. In 1943, almost the entire village of Stara Rafalivka was burnt down, and many of its residents died. PINCHUK (as in footnote 32), p. 22.

[61] Varas'ska mis'ka rada, URL: http://varash.rv.gov.ua/misto/istoriya (2019-09-03).

[62] The new highrises that had already been built for the nuclear power plant workers are not included.

Soviet authorities were already forecasting a demographic increase of 10,000 inhabitants or more.[63] Unlike in Prypiat' and Kuznetsovs'k, here the old name of the settlement was transferred to the new nuclear city. Urban development followed a similar pattern, but the village remained largely intact. In 1986, the neighboring village of Dorohoshcha was flooded to create a cooling basin for the NPP. Its residents were given apartments either in Netishyn or Ostroh according to their wishes. Even the graves of their ancestors in the old cemetery were exhumed and transferred, either to the cemetery in Ostroh or in Netishyn.[64]

Another special feature of Netishyn was that the Khmel'nyts'kyi NPP was intended by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (*Sovet Ekonomicheskoj Vzaimopomoshchi*, SEV) to produce elecricity for export to Poland. For this reason, 350 Polish guest workers lived in Netishyn from 1981 to 1991 as part of a bilateral agreement between the USSR and the People's Republic of Poland.[65] Although they lived in their own isolated district, which they built themselves and is today called *Varshavskyi kvartal*, contact between the foreigners and the locals was no longer strictly controlled. According to witnesses, the Polish guest workers used all the urban facilities together with their Soviet colleagues and some private friendships and relationships developed as a result.

A New Urban Socialist Soviet Identity

Regions of Polesia that had previously been isolated and ethnically homogenous now became Soviet melting pots as migrant workers from all over the USSR flocked to the young nuclear cities. Of course, there was no way that the new intensive inter-ethnic contact resulting from this sudden influx of people could leave the old local way of life unaffected. Nikolai Iakushin, who was born in Chornobyl' and is now a priest in the Iliia Church there, remembers:

> "People genuinely believed that this was 'the peaceful atom,' that everything was really good now, and that the nuclear power plant was creating new jobs. And indeed, when the plant was built—that period was not one-sided, what I mean is, there was a revival of trade and all areas of life. It really was an improvement. The only thing was, however, that the quiet lifestyle we had known before that time

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[63] VYKHOVANETS', Chastynka istorii (as in footnote 37), p. 49.

[64] The museum of local history in Netishyn exhibits objects relating to the history of the flooded Dorohoshcha in its permanent exhibition. See also the interview with a former inhabitant ("N.") of Dorohoshcha, recorded in Netishyn (2017-05-06): Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[65] When Polish guest workers left Netishyn in 1991, the local newspaper ran a special edition for the occasion on 1991-01-25, entitled "Energostroitel." The Netishyn City Museum has also dedicated a section of its permanent exhibition to Polish guest workers.

> came to an end. Our khatas had never even had locks on the doors. But when this new movement began, people started installing locks because outsiders were coming in. So the old quiet way of life was disturbed."[66]

The Soviet administration made a deliberate effort to settle issues around inter-ethnic contact in a peaceful way and to educate the local population in "matters of socialist internationalism." Thus, in 1973, the local district administration in Novoshepelychi and Kopachi organized discussions on the topic "how harmful are the remnants of nationalism?"[67]

Contact between the immigrants in the new nuclear cities and the local rural population was mostly peaceful; people lived, worked and celebrated together. However, the newcomers mocked the locals for their alleged "backwardness and stubbornness," while the latter criticized the immigrants for their "rootlessness" and "aggressiveness."[68]

The townspeople formed a new urban identity: "For some, Prypiat' was a second home, but for others it was also the first real home they'd known because they loved Prypiat' more than the places they came from, the places they'd been born."[69] A clear differentiation now arose between old local identities and the new urban identity of the nuclear city dwellers; they became separated into categories of "urban" and "rural," "modern" and "backward," "worker" and "farmer," "well-off" and "poor," "Russian" and "Ukrainian." The name of the city Kuznetsovs'k was quickly abbreviated by the locals to "Kuznia," meaning "smithy," emphasizing the character of the city as a melting pot. "Kuznetsovtsy" now meant urban and modern. The Russian word "Varashane," or in Ukrainian "Varashany," a neutral term for the inhabitants of the liquidated village, was used by the new city residents as a negative metaphor for "backwardness and stubbornness."[70]

The city population was very young—in 1986 the average age in Prypiat' was 26. In November 1985, 47,500 people from across more than 25 different ethnic groups lived in the city.[71] The situation in Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn was similar. Russian was prefered as an inter-ethnic language of communication at work and in everyday life. Local newspapers continued to be published in Ukrainian, but the new city and NPP newspapers and the operational documentation were in Russian. In newly established schools, pupils were taught in both Ukrainian and Russian. Because Russian teachers received a special bonus in their salaries, the subject was an attractive option for school leavers, including those from Ukrainian-speaking areas. This was part of a deliberate, state-forced policy of Russification, but it was carried out without coercion or oppression. Even without state propaganda, Russian acquired a higher status in the everyday life of the nuclear cities as it was considered the language of urban and technological modernization and also the language of social climbers. Ukrainian migrant workers from rural regions often chose to speak Russian in the city.

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[66] Extract from the interview with Nikolai Iakushin, recorded in Kyiiv (2017-05-19); BOLTOVSKA, Research data (as in footnote 22); URL: https://repository.de.dariah.eu/1.0/dhcrud/21.11113/0000-000B-D554-6 (2019-09-03).

[67] BARABANOV (as in footnote 55), pt. 2, p. 266

[68] Extract from the interview with Nataliia Khodamchuk from Kopachi and Prypiat, recorded in Kyiiv (2017-04-18), see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[69] Ibidem.

[70] Interviews with several former villagers, recorded in Varash (April-May 2017).

[71] URL: http://www.pripyat.com/pripyat-and-chernobyl/podrobno-o-gorode-pripyat.html (2019-09-03).

A pioneering spirit prevailed in the new cities where young people worked and lived in a modern world that they had built with their own hands. They were among the real winners of Soviet socialist modernization and enjoyed all the benefits this system had to offer. Though the urban community was segmented according to education level, occupation and income—from the technical elite down to the so-called REKS[72]—, all social groups had a sufficient income.[73]

The new urban identity was young, ethnically and culturally mixed, Russified and propsperous. At first glance, they seemed to represent the exact opposite of the old, local identities of the rural population, who were considered archaic and backward. But in reality, the majority of the nuclear city residents still had very strong links to the places they came from. They stayed in close and regular contact with their relatives and preferred to spend their holidays in their home villages, where they regularly helped their parents on the land, rather than in a sanatorium at the Black Sea. In school holidays, they also sent their children to stay with grandparents in the countryside. The former farmers, who now live in blocks of flats, continue today to decorate the interiors of their apartments with traditional carpets, icons, embroidered scarves, pillows and blankets like in a typical khata village house.[74]

During the Soviet era, there were no churches in the nuclear cities. A visit to a church could cost a teacher or a party member their career, but people secretly baptized newborn babies in the village churches. Traditional Orthodox and pre-Christian rituals were observed, particularly at Easter and the following days for commemorating the dead[75] and a trip to one's home village was seen as obligatory for relatives living in the city, as it still is today. Protestant movements remained underground throughout the Soviet period and their membership even increased as most of the Orthodox churches were closed. Like other young people, many *piatidesiatniki* (Penticostals) moved away from the villages and settled in Kuznetsovs’k in search of better wages and living standards. The teachers in Varash reported that there were up to five children from Pentecostal families in almost every class and that teachers were obliged to keep a diary detailing the “atheistic education” of these children.[76]

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[72] "Plebs," an abbreviation of the ironic name *redkii ekzempliar kommunisticheskogo stroitelstva* (rare example of the communist construction).

[73] Interview with Aleksej Breus from Prypiat', recorded in Kyiiv (2016-10-04), see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[74] Observations made during the interviews in Kyiiv, Slavutych, Varash and Netishyn.

[75] In Prypiat' Polesia, this period of commemorating the dead is called *hrobki*, in western Polesia and in Little Polesia it is called *pomynal'nyi tyzhden'* or *pomynal'ni dni*.

The Chornobyl’ Catastrophe and Local Identities after 1986

Kyiiv Polesia

In 1986, the success story of Prypyat, the first Ukrainian nuclear city, came to its dramatic end on the night of 26 April 1986, when Unit 4 of the NPP exploded. The whole city was evacuated within a few hours on April 27. Between the third and seventh of May, the inhabitants of 43 other towns were resettled, including Chornobyl’ on the fifth of May. It took between four and eight hours to evacuate a village. In 1986 alone, 116,000 people from 188 settlements were resettled, 70,000 of whom came from villages.[77]

While the townspeople took part in the hasty resettlement in a very organized manner, many living in the countryside refused to leave voluntarily. The rural population resorted to partisan strategies familiar to them from wartime. In the village of Ilintsy alone, where there had been a collection point for forced laborers during the German occupation and many recruits had gone into hiding in the forest, up to 100 residents disappeared in the hours leading up to their scheduled resettlement.[78]

People from the Ukrainian part of the exclusion zone were resettled throughout Ukraine. The majority of the former residents of Prypiat’ now live in the Kyiiv highrise district of Troeshchina or in the nuclear city of Slavutych[79], which was built in 1988 in Chernihiv Polesia for the NPP employees and their families. Others settled in Kuznetsovs’k and Netishyn. Where possible, the rural population was resettled in the countryside in southern Ukraine, an area where the landscape and natural conditions are very different from Polesia. Many found it very difficult to adapt to their new environment. Hastily built accommodation was often unsuitable for living in. In most cases, one house was provided for two families. Older people, who had lived in their own houses for their whole lives, found it hard to suddenly live under the same roof as strangers. The established population, who had waited a long time for their new apartments or a place at the local kindergarten, now had to go without and often felt hatred and envy towards the Chernobyl refugees rather than compassion. Newcomers often felt unwelcome in their new communities.

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[76] Interviews with the former teachers A. Zhurba and M. Vorobei, recorded in Varash (May 2017).

[77] Denis Vishnevskii, Sergei Paskevich: Chernobyl’: Real’nyi mir [Chornobyl’: The Real World], Kyiiv 2011, URL: http://loveread.ec/read_book.php?id=53892&p=24 (2018-04-11).

[78] Interview with Denis Vishnevskii, recorded in Kyiiv (2017-04-14), see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[79] More information on this can be found in the essay by Natalia Otrishchenko, Iryna Sklokina et al.: Slavutych: Urban Practices, Memories, and Imagination, in this issue.

Even more unbearable for the resettlers was the intense longing they felt for their homeland, combined with trauma and loss of security. Some missed their familiar environment so much that they volunteered as liquidators to work on the clean-up within the exclusion zone just so that they could visit their home.[80] The urge to protect their own identity and preserve a way of life linked to nature was so powerful that, in the spring of 1987, a mass uncontrolled return to the exclusion zone began, later referred to as the phenomenon of the *samosely* (“autonomous settlers”). Of the 70,000 villagers who had moved away, 1,200 returned, i.e. 1.7 per cent of the resettled rural population. Considering that almost all of these people were retired or close to retirement age, it can be estimated that almost one in ten pensioners returned to their village or to Chornobyl’. Some came back illegally via partisan paths in the forest that bypassed police controls, while others found a legal way to return as state employees. The demand for labor in the exclusion zone was so high that the authorities initially tolerated this phenomenon. In 1990, *samosely* lived in 17 abandoned settlements within the exclusion zone, mostly in the same living conditions as a hundred years ago, completely automonous, dependent only on the natural world and the agricultural cycle.[81]

In people’s endeavor to come to terms with collective trauma and seek meaningful interpretation, religion once again came to play an important identity-building role. The name Chornobyl’ was originally derived from the Ukrainian term *Chornobyl’nik*, a common word for mugwort (Artemisia vulgaris) which is related to wormwood or absinthe (Artemisia absinthium). This caused many to interpret the Chornobyl’ catastrophe as the coming of the biblical prophecy of the end of time from the Revelation of Saint John.[82]

After 1986, a unique mythology and iconography surrounding Chornobyl’ began to emerge in Ukraine and in the USSR. While Soviet nuclear cities usually have nuclear symbols on their coats of arms, Slavutych’s coat of arms, which was designed after 1991, features a white angel, patron saint of the city, together with a star in waves of water, an allusion to the revelation of Saint John.

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[80] Interviews with N. Manzurova, Paris, March 2016, A. Breus, Kyiiv, September 2016.

[81] VISHNEVSKII/PASKEVICH (as in footnote 77).

[82] “And the third angel sounded the trumpet and a great star fell from heaven as it were a torch and it fell on the third part of the rivers and upon the fountains of waters: And the name of the star is called Wormwood. And the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter” (Revelation of St. John 8,10-11). EDGAR DÜRRENBERGER: Tschernobyl-Mythen, in: GERHARDS/BOLTOVSKAJA (as in footnote 13), pp. 141-142.

The icon entitled “Savior of Chornobyl’” was painted by the painter Vladyslav Horetskyi, based on an idea proposed by Jurii Andreev, the president of the liquidator association “Sojuz Chernobyl.” It was consecrated in 2003 in the *Kyievo-Pechers’ka lavra* (Kyiiv Monastery of the Caves). The special feature of this icon is that, unlike elsewhere in the Orthodox canon, it depicts not only saints but also ordinary people, firefighters, liquidators and doctors. Volodymyr Pryshchepa was one of the 28 firefighters, who all came from villages around the NPP and were the first on the scene to fight the fire after the reactor explosion. Pryshchepa survived the acute radiation sickness, later became a priest and now heads a small parish on the edge of the exclusion zone.[83]

The Church of St. Iliia in Chornobyl’, which was abandoned in 1986 and later renovated by *samosely* and exclusion zone staff, developed into an identity-forming Orthodox pilgrimage site and meeting place. The biography of its priest, Nikolai Iakushin, named *Chornobyl’s’kyi batiushka* (The Father of Chornobyl’) is particularly noteworthy. One of his grandfathers was also the priest of this church and lost his life during Stalinist repression, while his other grandfather was a senior member of the CPSU Chornobyl’ City Committee. Born in Chornobyl’ in 1956, Nikolai Iakushin worked in a technical profession and led a typical Soviet engineer’s life. After 1986, he and his family, like many others, found increasing comfort and support in religion. In 1997, Iakushin was appointed by the Moscow Patriarchate to practice as a priest in the exclusion zone. He studied at the theological seminary and moved together with his wife back to Chornobyl’.[84]

As the number of *samosely* has rapidly fallen in recent years, this phenomenon will soon disappear. In 1992, 75 per cent of the *samosely* were more than sixty years old. Today, they are in their eighties or older—many will die in the next few years or are being taken out of the zone by their children so they can receive care. In May 2017, only ten houses in Chornobyl’ were still being lived in by *samosely*.[85]

In 1986, a new word came into use in the USSR—*Chernobyltsy*, a term for the people affected by the catastrophe, both the liquidators and those who were resettled. The former residents of Chornobyl’, however, continue to use the word *Chornobyliany*. Today, they are scattered throughout the world, but some are still linked via a number of closed groups on social media and have their own internet page.[86]

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[83] OL’GA TERESHCHENKO: Doroga k khramu [The Path to the Church], interview with Valdimir Prishchepa, in: PostChernobyl’ (2007), 23-24, pp. 1, 6-7.

[84] Interview with Nikolai Iakushin, Kyiiv, May 2017, URL: https://repository.de.dariah.eu/1.0/dhcrud/21.11113/0000-000B-D554-6 (2019-09-03).

[85] Interview with Denis Vishnevskii, Kyiiv, April 2017; interview with Evgenii Fedorovich, Chornobyl’, May 2017, see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[86] URL: http://chernobylpeople.ucoz.ua (2017-04-10).

The people who were resettled and today live in Kyiiv are between 60 and 80 years old. They are members of the *Zemliaki* (compatriots) association, which was set up for resettlers from Prypiat', and of the liquidators' association *Soiuz Chernobyl* (Union of Chernobyl). In the days that follow Easter, people here commemorate their ancestors, called *grobki* in the local dialect. They visit their village cemeteries, the ruins of their houses, Prypiat' and the church in Chornobyl'.

Great and Little Polesia

Kuznetsovs'k and its surroundings were contaminated by radioactivity in 1986. In terms of radiation control, these areas were declared Zone 3, which meant that evacuation was voluntary.[87] Netishyn was largely spared from Chornobyl' contamination.

Even though many residents of Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn worked as liquidators in the exclusion zone and the cities took in a large number of evacuees from Prypiat', life continued there as usual. There was a building boom and the population grew. But people's attitude towards the nuclear cities changed completely. After 1986, the Soviet nuclear economy was increasingly seen, also in Polesia, as a permanent and undesirable threat and the modernization of Polesia as part of a Moscow-led strategy to colonize Ukraine. As in other parts of Ukraine and in Belarus, the anti-nuclear movement had strong links to the national independence movement. Activists from neighboring towns came to Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn to protest against the nuclear economy and to block access to the NPP sites. The demonstrators spoke of the "radioactive genocide" and demanded that the plants be shut down. Today in Varash, scarcely anyone can remember this. There were hardly any reports about these events in the local newspapers. In Netishyn, on the other hand, there were heated protests. Activists from the Green Party and the Ruch Party in Slavuta and Ostroh came to Netishyn and regularly filled the entire city stadium. The residents of Netishyn were not actively involved but attended the demonstrations as onlookers and to become more informed.[88] The local newspapers reported on these events in detail.[89]

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[87] People living in this area could take part in a voluntary resettlement program, which only a few took advantage of. As part of this, they could receive compensation from the state in the form of a small Chornobyl' grant, popularly known as the *grobovye* (funeral allowance), and recreational trips for their children were also paid for. URL: http://portaleco.ru/ekologija-goroda/goroda-postradavshie-ot-katastrofy-na-chernobyl-skoj-aes.html (2018-04-11).

[88] Interview with Viktor Voikovs'kyi, who worked as a newspaper photographer at this time, Netishyn, October 2016; Interview with the online activist Ruslan Rudoms'kyi, Netishyn, May 2017; see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[89] Several reports in the newspapers *Netishins'kyi Visnyk* and *Trudivnyk Polissia* (Slavuta) from 1989.

The nationwide anti-nuclear protests led the Ukrainian government to impose a moratorium on the construction of new nuclear reactors from 1990 to 1993.[90]

Ukrainian Independence and New Identity-forming Factors after 1991

The halt to construction of new NNP, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the destruction of Soviet economic networks led to a total stagnation of urban development in Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn, as well as to job losses, interruptions in wage payments and problems in the supply of basic foodstuffs. People turned to self sufficiency by growing food in their dacha gardens or working on the land with their relatives from rural villages. Many qualified workers and their families emigrated to Russia, especially after 1991. In the 1990s, the Ukrainian state could no longer pay on time, and in some cases not at all, for the elecricity produced by the NPP so that neither the plants nor the associated companies had cash to pay their employees. The plants and construction companies connected with them began to issue their employees with vouchers printed on writing paper instead of money. These could be exchanged for food and other goods in the shops belonging to the NPP.[91]

In autumn 1993, in the face of an ongoing economic crisis, hyperinflation and numerous public protests, the Ukrainian parliament lifted the moratorium.[92] Construction of new NPP in Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn was resumed immediately. In 2000, the intact units of the Chernobyl NPP, which had continued to operate until then, were finally decommissioned. In 2004, Kuznetsovs'k commissioned the fourth reactor and Netishyn the second.[93] This led to a certain upswing in the economy that prevented further emigration.

As elsewhere in the Ukraine in the 1990s, the nuclear cities were severely affected by inflation, unemployment, poverty, drug addiction and crime. However, the population of these cities increased slowly but steadily during this period as the standard of living was higher here than in other regions of the country. At the beginning of 2017, the population of Varash was 42,700 and that of Netishyn stood at 37,000.[94] Around 8,000 people from Varash were employed at the NPP while around 5,000 people from Netishyn worked at the plant there. If we take family members into consideration, it can be estimated that around half of the population is directly dependent on the nuclear economy. In the mono-industrial nuclear cities, there are almost no alternative sources of income. While everyone who lived there during the Soviet period received a good standard of income, today those who do not work at the NPP feel disadvantaged.[95] Nowdays, economic and social difference determine people's living situations and sense of identity.

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[90] Plenary session no. 85 of the Supreme Council of the Ukraine SSR, 1990-07-31, URL: http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenogr/show/4428.html (2018-04-11).

[91] Examples of these can be found in the permanent numismatics exhibition in Netishyn's museum of local history

[92] Transcript of the plenary session no. 18-19 of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, 21 October 1993 URL: http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenogr/show/4916.html, http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenogr/show/4917.html (2018-04-11).

[93] Varash city council, URL: http://varash.rv.gov.ua/misto/istoriya; Netishyn city council, URL: https://www.netishynrada.gov.ua/town/dovidka (2018-04-11).

[94] Derzhavna Sluzhba statystyky Ukraiiny: Chisel'nist' naiavnoho naselennia Ukraiiny [The National Statistics Service of the Ukraine: Statistical Survey of the Population of Ukraine], Kyiiv 2017, pp. 60, 73.

The populations of the nuclear cities are also significantly older than in Soviet times. While, in 1986, the average age in Prypiat' was 26, today the population in Varash and Netishyn spans three to four generations. What has remained are the strong links between the city residents and their original rural homes, they travel regularly between the city and their old villages. On weekends and public holidays, the streets of the nuclear cities empty out as many of their residents leave to visit relatives in the countryside and to help them work in the garden or in the fields.

The first generation has now reached retirement age and these former "pioneers" now have grandchildren. Their shared narrative is dominated by the success story of nuclear modernization of their region. People prefer to recall the golden age of the nuclear economy and the entire post-Soviet period than the catastrophe. The younger generations take a more critical view and see the limits of living in a mono-industrial city.

The experience of total stagnation and the deterioration of living conditions in the nuclear cities resulting from the moratorium between 1990 and 1993 made the local population very pragmatic in their attitude towards the nuclear economy. Most people see no alternative to nuclear energy and condone the fact that their heating, water supply and the whole social sector of their cities as well as the Ukrainian economy are, today, dependent on the nuclear economy.[96] The majority of those I interviewed did not criticize the use of nuclear energy as such, but rather accepted as part of everyday life. However, they do have critical questions relating to radiation protection, reactor safety and financial support offered by the NPP to neighboring communities. With regard to the ecological situation, the city dwellers are more concerned about the intensive deforestation for charcoal production for the EU market as well as illegal amber mining, which is destroying the landscape and vegetation.

The process of "Ukrainization" that took place after 1991 was just as peaceful as Soviet Russification had been in the previous era. Schools, newspapers, media and administrative systems were gradually converted to

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[95] The wages paid by the nuclear power station enable a certain standard of living, while the pensions and wages of employees in the teaching and cultural sectors and in service professions are significantly lower.

[96] According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the nuclear power plants cover 47,04% of Ukraine's energy requirements, URL: https://pris. iaea.org/PRIS/CountryStatistics/CountryDetails.aspx?current=UA (2018-04-16).

Ukrainian during the 1990s. Today, the whole population is more or less bilingual, with Ukrainian being increasingly used as the everyday langauge of communication.[97]

As part of Ukrainization, local history began to be taught in schools and, in Varash and Stara and Nova Rafalivka, children also learn about the traditions of Polesia. The teachers, many of whom come from the region themselves, create learning materials and maintain ethnographic school museums. In Netishyn, on the other hand, Polesia no longer has any significance for the young generation—many are not even aware that they live in Little Polesia. Because the city belongs administratively to the Khmelnickyï district, which lies predominantly in Podolia, the school curriculum in Netishyn deals with Podolia and not Polesia.

While the narrative about Prypiat' in Kyiiv Polesia will always be overshadowed by the Chernobyl catastrophe and trauma, the history of the nuclear economy in West and Little Polesia, and also in current Ukraine, is still presented as a proud success story.[98] The hasty renaming of Kuznetsovs'k to Varash in 2016 as part of decommunization after the Maidan revolution caused a great deal of outrage and upset in the city. Like in Soviet times, the renaming was ordered by decree from Kyiiv and was not voted on in the city itself. The younger generations see the renaming as an acknowledgement of local history. For the elderly, who see themselves as pioneers of nuclear modernization, the name Varash still symbolizes the backwardness of the original village, with which they do not wish to identify.[99]

After 1991, religion once again became an important factor in the formation of local identity. While, during the Soviet period, the only village church in Kuznetsovs'k was torn down and only one Russian Orthodox church remained in Netishyn at the edge of the village, today there are 13 religious communities of different demominations registered in Varash and 15 in Netishyn, all of which own their own churches, prayer houses and meeting rooms.[100] The most important of these communities are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (after the church split in 1992) as well as various Protestant movements. The parish of the Pentecostal movement has about 1,300 active members who attend church services and other events several times a week.[101] The role of religious communities is even more active in rural areas, where they assume many social and cultural functions. Soviet anti-religious propaganda and technical modernization have not managed to eliminate the region's traditional religious beliefs and practices. On the contrary, the post-Soviet nuclear industry has adapted to the local religiosity. For example, the NPP have helped to finance the construction of new churches in Varash and Netishyn and invite Orthodox priests to blessing ceremonies at the inauguration of new units at the NPPs and to participate at city festivals. The NPP newspapers include well wishes to their readers on Orthodox holidays and regularly publish articles on the history of local churches and interviews with priests.

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[97] In the 1990s, technical documentation and communication at the Rivne and Khmel'nyts'kyi NPP were still conducted mostly in Russian. Today, administrative communication is conducted in Ukrainian, while much of the technical documentation is still to in Russian and oral communication is bi-lingual. This process of gradual Ukrainization took place peacefully, as many of the power plants' employees, including those in managerial positions, came from local areas: WENDLAND, Nuclearizing Ukraine (as in footnote 1).

[98] The Info Center "Polisia" is the museum of the history of the Rivne NPP and of the city of Varash, which is run by the Rivne Nuclear Power Station, URL: https://www.rnpp.rv.ua/en/info-centre.html (2017-10-10); Netishyn municipal museum of local history, URL: http://netishyn.osp-ua.info/index.php?ch=5&fl=muz (2018-04-16).

[99] The renaming remains a popular topic of both serious and ironic conversations in the city. Behind the parliament buildings in the city center, a piece of graffiti reads "Kuznetsovs'k—tse ne Varash!" ("Kuznetsovs'k is not Varash!").

Another new phenomenon has been the increasing labor migration[102] away from the nuclear cities, which were originally centers of immigration but, since 1991, have been affected by unemployment and a lack of prospects for young people.[103] Almost everyone who lives here now has family members and friends who live and work abroad.[104] This can be considered transnational migration as migrants do not give up their ties to home or deregister with the authorities, but move back and forth between their host country and their city or town of origin. The new experiences gained abroad are influencing the world view and way of life of people in Polesia—here, too, these are being increasingly globalized. Money from other countries is an important source of income. The labor migrants finance their family households and pay for the construction of new modern single family homes in the villages.

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[100] Religiïni hromadi mista [Town's Religious Organizations], URL: https://www.kuznetsovs'k-rada.gov.ua/gromadskist/religijni-gromadi-mista/37-religijni-gromadi-mista (2019-09-03); Netishyn city council, URL: https://www.netishynrada.gov.ua/town/релігійні-громади (2019-09-03).

[101] Interview with the deacon of the parish of the Pentecostal movement, recorded in Varash (2017-09-05), see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

[102] Labor migration has been an important development in the Ukraine since 1991. The rural regions of western Ukraine have been particularly affected. According to estimates by Ukrainian authorities and experts, three to five million Ukrainians work abroad. O. MALINOVSKA: Trudova Migratsiia [Labor Migration], Kyiv 2011, pp. 4-5.

[103] Educational migration is typical for mono-industrial cities. School leavers who do not see any propects for their chosen career in the nuclear industry move to other cities to study and stay there after graduating. The "Ostroh Academy" (*Ostroz'ka Akademiia*), which opened in 1994, has made it possible for school leavers from Netishyn to study humanities subjects locally, but the majority move to larger cities after graduating.

[104] Russia is still most people's destination of choice, followed by Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic, Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Belarus, and other European countries as well as the USA and Canada; results of several conversations with school children and inhabitants of Varash and Netishyn.

While people used to migrate from the village to the city, today wealthy city residents want to live in the suburbs as a single family house here promises a higher quality of life than an apartment in a block of flats. A large area of land between Varash and Stara Rafalivka is also being intesively developed, financed by wealthy NPP executives.

This more intensive private development has led to increasing confrontation between the old, established residents of the village, the *Starorafalivcy*, who strongly identify with the village and its history, and the wealthier newcomers, who are now officially registered as residents of Stara Rafalivka, but have no identification with the village at all and are not interested in the life of the village community.[105]

Conclusion

The advent of the nuclear economy changed Polesia to a greater extent than any previous modernization measures. Polesia was an economically underdeveloped rural region, whose population primarily worked in *kolkhozes* and was employed, but lived in poverty. Despite the restrictions on the freedom of establishment and on travel, young people moved away, both legally and illegally, in search of better life prospects. The few old townships like Chornobyl' and Ostroh were economic and cultural centers, but also rather rural. Since the majority of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust and the other ethnic minorities were exiled or had fled in the pre-war period of Stalinist repression, Polesia had less cultural and ethnic diversity before the introduction of the nuclear economy than at the beginning of the twentieth century. The local population did not have a strong Soviet, Ukrainian or Polesian group identity, instead people had a much more individual sense of identity that was characterized by a feeling of belonging to their local village community, a connection to the environment and familiar surroundings and was defined through their sense of being distinct and separate from neighboring settlements.

Soon after the arrival of the nuclear economy, three NPP sites and their satellite cities quickly became centers of immigration in Polesia. Already within the first years of construction, the populations of these cities had already overtaken the existing local population. Prypiat, Kuznetsovs'k und Netishyn rapidly developed into new urban centers. The township of Chornobyl' thus lost its significant role in the region.

Young people from the area also took part in the labor migration to the cities, which offered a much better level of income and a superior quality of life than they had known before, while still being close to their old homes. In the nuclear cities, these former farmers found themselves living in ethnically mixed communities made up of migrant workers from all over Ukraine and the Soviet Union. In these melting pots, a new Soviet, socialist, multi-ethnic urban identity rapidly emerged with Russian as the language of communication and work and which was underpinned by a shared spirit of *pervoprokhodtsy* (pioneers). The local populations in surrounding villages and townships benefited from the new infrastructure, but were also severely affected by the exodus of workers from the countryside into the cities. However, this did not fundamentally change the way the villagers lived or worked. The new city-dwellers also maintained close contact to their rural families and relatives back home and used their holidays and leisure time to help with the work on the land.

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[105] Interview with the priest Sergeï Prokopchuk, Stara Rafalivka, September 2017, see: Research data from the project (as in footnote 22).

The success story of the nuclear cities as models of Soviet socialist modernization came to a dramatic end with the Chornobyl' catastrophe. The entire population living within a 30 kilometer zone around the nuclear power station was resettled elsewhere. The local rural identity and people's attachment to their familiar surroundings were intensified by the trauma of forced resettlement and proved so strong in the years that followed that a new phenomena emerged with the *samosely*, the returnees who disregarded the official ban and came back to their abandoned homes. Religion played an important role in the processing of trauma and a specific Chornobyl'-based iconography and mythology emerged.

In Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn, construction continued intensively after 1986 and the population of both cities also continued to grow until the end of the Soviet era. In the post-Chernobyl years, we observe a shift in the attitude of the local people towards the nuclear cities, which was influenced by nation-wide anti-nuclear protests. NPP were considered a threat and perceived as part of a Moscow-led policy to colonize Ukraine. This led to a moratorium on the construction of NPP in 1990, which was abandoned in 1993, when attitudes towards nuclear power began to change again.[106] The construction freeze, together with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, brought about an economic collapse in Kuznetsovs'k and Netishyn, and many qualified specialists and their families emigrated away. This situation was only resolved in 2004 when the new units were put into operation.

The current population of the two cities, which now spans four generations, is united by a common urban identity that transcends ethnic, social and linguistic borders and is based on a common history and shared perspectives for the future. At the same time, several other identity-forming factors have become important in public life since 1991, including peaceful Ukrainization and intensive religious revitalization. It can therefore be argued that the Soviet-era nuclear economy and the modern urban identity associated with it, which was, among other things, supposed to Russify and Sovietize Polesia and to modernize its society, have, in the post-Soviet era, been successfully adapted to the local linguistic, religious and cultural environment.

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[106] WENDLAND, Nuclearizing Ukraine (as in footnote 1).

Nevertheless, social and economic differences today play a crucial role in the divisions between the city and rural areas and between the various strata of the urban community. Because the nuclear cities offer no real alternative sources of income outside of employment at the NPP, there has also been some labor migration away from these former urban melting pots to other regions of Ukraine and abroad, a phenomenon that was more typical for rural regions after 1991. Among the rural inhabitants of Polesia who have been affected by poverty since 1991, some have also turned to illegal income sources like illegal amber mining and unauthorized charcoal production. In contrast, the wealthy NPP executives and a small percentage of nouveau riches have been increasingly moving out of the city into the suburbs where they build single family homes. All this could also lead to new constellations and conflicts of identity in Polesia in the near future.

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