

15 Multilingual Ghost Signs: Dissonant Languages in the Landscape of Memory

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The Ukrainian city of Lviv is the world capital of multilingual *ghost signs* – signs that no longer serve their original purpose. Every time prewar buildings are renovated – or when paint or plaster crumble off from old age – more ads for forgotten brands, obsolete goods, and defunct businesses come to light. Andriy Pavlyshyn, a Ukrainian translator and journalist, once described his native city as “this beautiful place where one could always find lots of strange things. Old bits and pieces in the attic written in an unknown language; walls where the plaster peeled off and names made up of foreign words appeared – later I learned that it was Polish, Yiddish, German” (in Lewicka, 2008, pp. 214–215). The tacit agreement in the city is to let them be. On the surface, so to speak, the consensus is not surprising: All cities cherish their heritage, right?

“Ghost signs,” explains William Stage (1989) in a book that launched the term, “are the most interesting of all wall signs. Faded to the point of illegibility, they linger on old buildings, echoing the robust commerce of times past” (p. 71). For some building owners they are an eyesore, but the ephemeral signage has long had a dedicated fan base: eagle-eyed ghost sign hunters who scout the streets to spot new apparitions, hang from rooftops and fire escapes to capture their spectral outlines from the right angle in the best light, and share their treasured finds via social media, websites, online forums, walking tours, and glossy books about the fading ads of Dublin and London, Montreal and Detroit, Philadelphia and New York.

Scholars who study ghost signs have identified several reasons behind their popular appeal: the sense of continuity with the past, nostalgia for the bygone era, fascination with history, the retro cool of vintage aesthetic, fondness for quality handicraft (Schutt et al., 2017). Sign spotters have their own rationales: the thrill of the quest, the joy of discovery, the giddiness of being “transported back to an earlier time” (Passikoff, 2017, p. xvi). Pavlyshyn adds a new perspective that highlights the difference between Lviv signs and their counterparts in Australia, the USA, UK, and France (cf. Schutt et al., 2017): in

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Fig. 15.1 Ads in Polish and Yiddish for Halpern's fabric store and warehouse, *Skład towarów bławatnych*, on Nalyvaiko Street, 13 (at the turn of the twentieth century the street – then known as *Rzeźnicka* – was inhabited primarily by Jews). Lviv, September 2019. Photo by the author.

Lviv, their languages are 'strange,' 'unknown,' and 'foreign' because its residents are not the descendants of people who created the ads.

Lviv is one of Europe's 'repopulated' cities, alongside Breslau/Wrocław, Danzig/Gdańsk, Königsberg/Kaliningrad, or Czernowitz/Chernivtsi: in the wake of World War II, Polish Lwów became Ukrainian Lviv (for an in-depth discussion of such cities, see Blacker, 2019). The drastic rupture turned its built environment into *dissonant heritage* (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) and its former languages into *dissonant tongues*.¹ The discontinuity raises an interesting question: If Ukrainian history is not a factor, what are the signs in Yiddish, Polish, and German doing on Lviv streets? More generally, what do urban authorities do with dissonant heritage?

15.1 Dissonant Heritage in the Landscape of Memory

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and creation of the European Union (EU), dissonant heritage came into prominence in discussions of a common

¹ Other 'repopulated' cities also display dissonant ghost signs: In Wrocław in 2021 a team of enthusiasts published a map of over 200 ghost signs in German.

European identity and the voids left by World War II. Many Polish, Czech, German, Hungarian, and Slovak towns are still struggling to overcome mutual resentments and memories of deportations (cf. Kurnicki & Sternberg, 2016) and in some places, silence and erasure are the only responses to the troublesome past (Bartov, 2007). Acknowledgment of dissonant heritage is also fraught with ambivalence, as seen in the case of the Jews. In the 1990s, many European cities opened Jewish museums, erected Holocaust memorials, restored Jewish cemeteries, placed plaques on former synagogues, and organized festivals of klezmer music and exhibits on Jewish history. Several joined a project, initiated in 1992 by the German artist Gunther Demnig, where brass plates with the names and life spans of Nazi victims were embedded in the streets as *Stolpersteine* – stumbling stones. Gruber's (2002) brilliant analysis revealed the complexity of this commemoration, where sincere desire for atonement intersected with political calculation and commercial exploitation, as in Krakow's Kazimierz, an old Jewish quarter redeveloped as a tourist Yiddishland with Jewish-themed cafés and souvenir stalls selling hook-nosed, side-curved toy Jews (see also Burdin, 2021).

The studies to date highlight four trends in the management of dissonant heritage: (a) invention of a 'noble past' that foregrounds positive events and erases or downplays events that shed negative light on patriotic 'national' history; (b) commodification of the past as a spectacle or 'historytainment'; (c) exoticization and stereotyping of vanished 'others'; and (d) exclusion from the decision-making process of the very people whose heritage we are invited to celebrate (Bartov, 2007; Bechtel, 2016; Blacker, 2014, 2019; Boll, 2020; Burdin, 2021; Calderwood, 2014; Corsale, 2021; Flesler & Pérez Melgosa, 2008; Godis & Nilsson, 2018; Narvselius, 2015).

Burdin (2021) adds a new dimension to this work by highlighting the role of the newly made – and often ungrammatical – signs in Yiddish and Hebrew that index Jewishness and add faux 'authenticity' to Krakow's Kazimierz. In what follows, I will extend this exploration to other dissonant signs that (re-) appeared on European streets. Some are still dilapidated, others restored, yet others manufactured anew but all have one thing in common: their languages are long gone from local repertoires. At first glance, their roles are similar to those of Kazimierz signs – just another way to commemorate lost 'others' and add 'authenticity' to visitor experience and 'historicity' to the urban façade. My aim in this chapter is to show that multilingual ghost signs are also multitasking in ways that are less obvious, benign, or banal.

In what follows, I will examine the roles of dissonant signs in four cities designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as World Heritage sites. Primary data comes from my fieldwork, which included site visits, participation in tours in relevant languages, interviews with tour guides and foreign visitors, and analyses of

UNESCO reports, tourist guides, media, and travelogues. The aim of the critical discourse analysis was to compare academic histories with city marketing narratives, where “the urge to remember and commemorate is tightly bound with the need to suppress and forget” (Bartov, 2007, p. 173). Politicians, business owners, architects, historians, activists, and tourist guides are seen in this analysis as *memory actors* and restoration and installation of signs as *practices of collective remembrance* that promote, contest, or erase certain versions of the past (Huysen, 2003; Lähdesmäki et al., 2019; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). Drawing on my findings and on published research, I will try to answer four questions: Who are the memory actors behind dissonant signs? What images are they trying to project? What historic and linguistic realities do the signs conceal? And what does the resurrection of the multilingual past say about us?

15.2 Toledo

In 2018, a new plaque was affixed in a little Toledan alley Callejon de San Pedro: a list of its previous names, most of them Arabic, going back to 1187 (Fig. 15.2a). The plaque is the latest addition to the growing number of signs that invoke the city’s Islamic and Jewish past. Local museums display Hebrew and Arabic inscriptions, the boundaries of the *Judería*, the old Jewish quarter, are identified by tiny tiles with menorahs and the Hebrew word *Sefarad* [Spain], and the historic center abounds in Spanish-English signs that clarify the origins of place names like Alcántara, Arabic for bridge, and Zocodover, once a cattle market, *suq al-dawab*.

The city’s exotic heritage long fascinated curious foreigners, like Albert Calvert (1907), whose poetic guide to Toledo features 500 photographs, including Hebrew inscriptions of the Ha-Levi synagogue and the Arabic frieze of the ibn Hadidi mosque converted into the church Cristo de la Luz (Fig. 15.2b). Regular visitors were scarce – Spain wasn’t on the Grand Tour. Genteel Europeans snubbed it as a bigoted, ignorant, and intolerant backwater ever since the 1492 expulsion of the Jews (indignant Spaniards dubbed the libelous image the Black Legend).

In the mid-twentieth century, historian and philologist Américo Castro (1954) proposed an alternative view: Spanish culture was a hybrid shaped by centuries of *convivencia*, a peaceful coexistence of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. In academia, the idea triggered a heated – and still ongoing – debate but tourism authorities sensed an opportunity: in the wake of Franco’s death, Spain was rebranded as the cradle of medieval tolerance. Following the renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel (1986) and facing the 500th anniversary of the expulsion (1992), several Spanish cities unveiled Jewish heritage sites and in 1995 formed a network, *Red de Juderías de España* (Flesler & Pérez Melgosa,

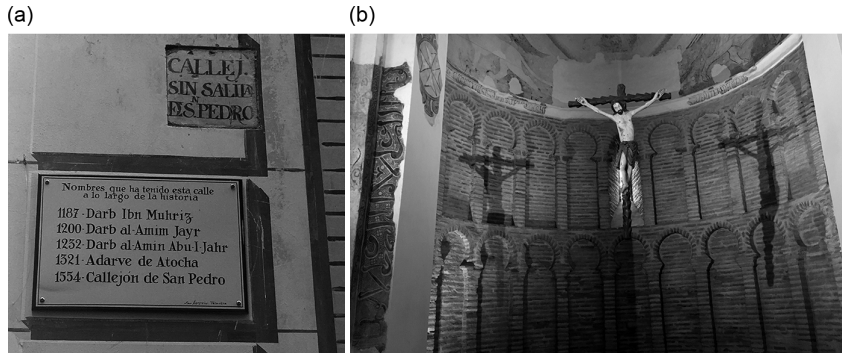


Fig. 15.2 Arabic in Toledo: (a) Street plaque with former street names, installed in 2018. (b) A Kufic sign on the apsidal arch of the church Cristo de la Luz, offering a formulaic blessing *al-yumn wa al-iqbal* [fortune and prosperity]. Toledo, September 2019. Photos by the author.

2008; Lacave, 2004). International exhibits promoted *convivencia* to the general public (e.g., Mann et al., 1992), and Muslims were offered tours of al-Andalus with Islam-friendly services, featuring halal food (Boll, 2020; Calderwood, 2014).

By the twenty-first century, Spain had become one of the leading destinations for Jewish heritage tourism, ‘halal tourism,’ and urban visitors at large. This tourism, argue Flesler and Pérez Melgosa (2008), solved a national riddle: Why care for dissonant heritage in a country whose very identity is predicated on the erasure of Muslims and Jews? Among the greatest beneficiaries of the multicultural turn was the city of Toledo, designated in 1986 a World Heritage site:

All of the civilizations which contributed to the grandeur of Toledo left there amazing masterpieces which expressed both the original beauty of a highly characteristic style and the paradoxical syncretism of the hybrid forms of the Mudejar style which sprang from the contact of heterogeneous civilizations in an environment where for a long time the existence of three major religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – was a leading feature. (UNESCO, 1986, pp. 1–2)

Ever since, municipal authorities have made impressive efforts to restore medieval buildings, open museums in former mosques and synagogues, and market Toledo as *La Ciudad de las Tres Culturas* – the city of three cultures. Endlessly recycled in promotional materials, the story begins with the ‘Reconquest’ of Muslim Tulaytula in 1085 and celebrates its conqueror, Alfonso VI, as the Emperor of Two Religions, who respected all faiths,

“giving rise to a cultural interchange of great importance”² (see also Pérez Monzón & Rodríguez-Picavea, 2001). The reality was more prosaic: Tulaytula surrendered without resistance after a symbolic siege and an offer of a new kingdom for its ruler – Valencia. Most Muslims followed the king and so did some Christians and Jews. Shortly after, the Great Mosque was converted into a Christian cathedral (Beale-Rivaya & Busic, 2018). Still, Alfonso VI did grant *fueros*, self-governing privileges, to ‘Old’ Christians, and later on to Castilians, Franks, Muslims, and Jews (Garcia-Gallo, 1975).

Missing in the guidebooks and the tours are linguistic aspects of *convivencia*, including the fact that ‘Old’ Christians, nicknamed Mozarabs, refused to give up ‘the tongue of the oppressor’ – they were equally proud of their resistance to Islam and their mastery of the language of the Quran. For two centuries after the ‘Reconquista’, Toledo’s Mozarabs maintained their native Arabic and so did its Muslims and Jews. Archival records also retain the names of Franks, Gascons, and Galicians who learned Arabic and adopted names, like Abd Allah bin Gilbert (Moreno, 2012). Medieval Toledo was a city where Kufic writing had pride of place in the churches and synagogues, dual names were par for the course, and transactions between the Catholic church and Mozarabs, Muslims, and Jews were documented in Arabic, according to Islamic notary manuals, complete with the *bismillah* “In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate” (Beale-Rivaya, 2012; Beale-Rivaya & Busic, 2018; Witcombe, 2018).

Mozarab reluctance to relinquish Arabic does not fit well with the popular narrative of ‘the triumph of Castilian’ perpetuated by patriotic Spanish scholars and by popularizers who follow in their stead. One recent ‘biography of Spanish’ denies Mozarabs spoke Arabic at all, even under Islamic rule. “Despite their name – which suggests the opposite,” contend Nadeau and Barlow (2013), “Mozarabs spoke a form of Ibero-Romance, not Arabic” (p. 39). Popular histories also erase Mozarabs as a group. Nowadays, Toledo still has a Mozarab community with two parishes, but if you think the heirs to the city’s oldest Christian tradition feature prominently in the booklets and the tours you would be wrong. Not only tourists, “some people in Toledo don’t even know anything about us or that we even exist,” complained a local Mozarab. “Some think we are the Moors”³ (see also Beale-Rivaya’s chapter in this volume).

You also won’t find an explanation of how Arabic came to an end. The 1492 expulsion of the Jews is familiar to all – its 500th anniversary witnessed a public apology by King Juan Carlos and a joint prayer with the Israeli

² www.lacerca.com/noticias/turismo/toledo-ciudad-tres-culturas-23725-1.html.

³ <https://ordoromanusprimus.wordpress.com/2008/02/07/rediscovering-the-mozarabs-of-toledo-the-defense-and-survival-of-mozarabism-depends-basically-on-us/>.

president Chaim Herzog. In 2015, a parliamentary act made it easier for descendants of Jewish exiles to obtain Spanish citizenship. In contrast, the 1609 expulsion of Moriscos – the forcefully baptized Muslims and their offspring – was never mentioned in the tours I followed and neither was the campaign to eradicate Arabic described in the introduction to this volume (see also Giménez-Aguibar & Wasserman Soler, 2011). As of this writing, no apology has been issued to descendants of Moriscos – in Spain, Islamophobia still runs deep (Beale-Rivaya, this volume; Boll, 2020; García-Sanjuán, 2018).

The list of Arabic names in Callejon de San Pedro (Fig. 15.2a) isn't an apology but it is not a regular touristy sign either – San Pedro is a blind alley off the beaten visitor path. Paid for and installed by a prominent local artist and historian Fernando Aranda Alonso, the plaque endows the neighborhood with a memory of its Arabic-speaking past.⁴ The dates and names, derived from old charters, are a reminder that Arabic was in use long after the 'Reconquista'. The juxtaposition of crucified Jesus and Kufic writing in the museum-mosque-church Cristo de la Luz (Fig. 15.2b) is meant to be educational as well: the formulaic blessing was painted *in* and *for* the church, on the apsidal arch added after the conversion of the mosque (Hutcheson, 2014). Foreign visitors I talked to missed these subtle hints – they left Toledo with the repackaged image of three cultures, 'separate but equal,' interacting in shared Castilian.

15.3 St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg is a destination that doesn't need marketing. The designation of the city as a World Heritage site in 1990 was a recognition of its magnetic appeal. Municipal authorities are eager to preserve the charm – new construction is banned in the historic center but restoration is welcome, as seen in the case of two elite department stores – *Passage*, reopened in 2012 (Fig. 15.3), and *Au Pont Rouge* [At the Red Bridge], reopened in 2015 (Fig. 15.4).

Passage, an elegant shopping arcade on the Nevsky Prospect – St. Petersburg's answer to the Champs Elysées – was first opened by Count Essen-Stenbrock-Fermor in 1848. Covered by glass and steel, the gallery was a novelty – one of the world's first shopping malls, alongside London's Burlington Arcade and Parisian Passage du Caire and Galerie Vivienne.⁵ What the visitors took for granted were the French signs announcing its boutiques, cafés, and pâtisseries. *Français* was *de rigueur* on the Nevsky, and Russians, Germans, Estonians, and Finns also advertised their tailor shops as *à la mode* and their hair salons as *de Paris*. "All of the shop signs on the Nevsky Prospect

⁴ <https://realacademiatoledo.es/los-sucesivos-nombres-del-callejon-de-san-pedro/>.

⁵ <https://passage.spb.ru/o-passazhe/>.



Fig. 15.3 French in St. Petersburg: (a) *Passage* in 1902. Wikimedia Commons. (b) Restored French sign. *Passage*, Nevsky Prospect 48, St. Petersburg, September 2018. Photo by the author.



Fig. 15.4 (a) *Au Pont Rouge* in 1913. Wikimedia Commons. (b) Restored bilingual signs. *Au Pont Rouge*, Moika Embankment 73. St. Petersburg, September 2018. Photo by the author.

are in French and rarely, here and there, with translations into Russian,” grumbled Yegor Rastorguev, author of a popular guide *Strolls along the Nevsky Prospect* (1846):

It’s doubtful that in Paris there is even a single sign in a foreign tongue, while in the Russian capital, not only on the Nevsky but on all the main streets of Petersburg, all

signboards, all inscriptions are in French, as if Petersburg were not a Russian city. (Rastorguev, 1846, pp. 40–41, translated from Russian by A.P.)

By the time Belgian businessman Stefan Esders and his Dutch nephew Karl Scheefhals opened *Au Pont Rouge* in 1907, laws demanded translation and that's exactly what the shoppers saw on the Art Nouveau façade: gilded signs in Russian and French. Russia's first multistory department store, in the grand tradition of Selfridges and Galeries Lafayette, *Au Pont Rouge* was so chic that even empress Alexandra was among its clientele.⁶ The 1917 revolution brought the business to an abrupt end. *Au Pont Rouge* was taken over by a garment factory, and *Passage* reopened as a Soviet department store. French signage was stripped – alien tongues were of little use behind the Iron Curtain and their mastery aroused suspicions of espionage and sabotage.

After the collapse of the USSR (1991) and in anticipation of the 300th anniversary of the city's founding by Peter the Great (2003), the imperial past came back in vogue, as seen in the name change from Leningrad to St. Petersburg. As visitor numbers went up, the city's tourism industry expanded its offerings from museums and theaters to tours of German, French, Italian, English, Muslim, and multinational St. Petersburg. The highlights of the multinational tour include one of Europe's largest synagogues (opened in 1893), the Tatar mosque (1913), and Nevsky Prospect, where an Orthodox cathedral stands in close proximity to a (former) Dutch church, a German Lutheran church, a Catholic church, and an Armenian church.⁷

The itineraries also feature the city's historic tongues. On the French tour, you may see the restored *Français* of *Passage* and *Au Pont Rouge* and on the German tour the headquarters of the city's first newspaper, *Sankt-Petersburgische Zeitung* (1727–1914), the city's first school, *Petrischule*, the first Lutheran church, *Petrikirche*, bilingual street signs installed in 1768 on the orders of Catherine the Great, and German tablets commemorating the flood of 1824 (Fig. 15.5).

What you don't hear about is the Russification campaign. By the 1880s, the dependence on Baltic German officials and foreign tongues became a source of embarrassment for imperial authorities, and Russification expanded from Poland and Western provinces to Baltic provinces and St. Petersburg, where the brunt was borne by the city's German colony (Henriksson, 1993). After the 1917 revolution, out-migration, purges, and deportations of Germans and Finns in the 1930s and 1940s eliminated the remaining diversity (Roanova, 2012). In 2010, Russians constituted 92.5 percent of St. Petersburg's population and Russian speakers 99.7 percent.⁸

⁶ <https://aupontrouge.ru/en/history/>.

⁷ <https://eduvpiter.ru/2020/1204>.

⁸ <https://petrostat.gks.ru/VPN2010>.



Fig. 15.5 German in St. Petersburg: (a) Russian–German sign for Pochtovaya Street, installed in 1768. Dvortsovaya Embankment 34. (b) Flood tablet in German “The height of water on November 7, 1824,” Grazhdanskaya 19. St. Petersburg, September 2018. Photos by the author.

It is all the more surprising then that in 2008, municipal authorities adopted a law to protect the rights of the Russian language.⁹ Articles 4–6 require all signs to be in correct Russian. Foreign languages, accompanied by translations, are allowed in special cases. Cultural heritage is one such case – hence, the gilded French. The threat to the Russian language is unnamed but isn’t hard to guess: in 2006–2008, the city saw a spike of labor migration from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and an upswing in anti-migrant demonstrations, campaigns, leaflets, and graffiti (Rozanova, 2012). The municipal response was twofold. In 2006, city authorities, headed by Valentina Matviyenko, unrolled the Tolerance-1 (2006–2010) initiative, followed by Tolerance-2 (2011–2014). Both programs featured well-intentioned round tables and public events but tolerance for accented Russian and migrant languages wasn’t on the table – instead, the city tightened restrictions, as seen in the 2008 language law, signed by Matviyenko.

Not surprisingly, studies of the city’s linguistic landscape reveal a uniformly Russian façade and negative attitudes toward migrants’ ‘unintelligible mumbo-jumbo’ (Baranova & Fedorova, 2019, 2020). The only exceptions are the ads in English and Chinese, aimed at foreign visitors, and historic signs in German and French. Their restoration may invoke imperial nostalgia, but it is not a nostalgia for being surrounded by foreign tongues.

15.4 Lviv

In 2012, Lviv, a cohost of the European soccer championship, was spruced up in preparation for an unprecedented influx of visitors (for analysis of the city’s

⁹ www.assembly.spb.ru/ndoc/doc/0/706137974.



Fig. 15.6 Café Sztuka, with restored Polish and Yiddish ads for groceries and haberdashery. Kotlyarska Street 8. Lviv, September 2019. Photo by the author.

marketing campaign, see Godis & Nilsson, 2018). The famous ghost signs also received a new coat of paint, including at Café Sztuka [Polish for ‘art’], opened in 2009 in a former Jewish store (Fig. 15.6). “The signs in different languages illustrate not only a wide selection of goods,” explains its website, “they are evidence of the tolerant coexistence of Ukrainians, Poles and Jews and show the multinational character of old Lviv”¹⁰ (translated from Ukrainian by A.P.).

The city’s leading ghost sign hunter and blogger Areta Kovalska, an expat from the USA, couldn’t agree more. “Ghost signs are lovely,” enthuses Kovalska (2020):

They add charm to the city, help us feel the city’s old atmosphere. They are a reminder of a different era – not only of when the landscape was void of neon lights and bulky plastic signs, but of the city’s multicultural and multilinguistic past.

The signs, in other words, create a welcoming and cosmopolitan atmosphere, as do Viennese-style cafés that invoke the city’s Habsburg past. Sztuka,

¹⁰ <https://shtuka.net.ua/history/>.

for one, has become a popular stop on the tours of Jewish and multicultural Lviv.¹¹ Yet the equation of multilingual signs and tolerance is not as unproblematic as it seems – the first thing you notice is the absent Ukrainian.

Founded by a Rus prince, Daniil of Halych, in the fourteenth century, Lviv was taken over by Polish kings and remained in Polish hands until 1939. For most of its history, Lwów was a Polish city, where Jews and Rusyns (modern Ukrainians) were a minority, at times restricted to a single street, and Cossacks a terrifying enemy force. Jews first appeared in the city records in 1348 (Bartov, 2007) and, as time went by, their numbers grew, despite the periodic pogroms. In the 1930s, the era many ghost signs come from, 50.4 percent of the city's population was Roman Catholic (what we see as 'real' Poles), 31.9 percent Jewish, and 15.9 percent Greek Catholic (a confession common among Rusyns). Language-wise, 63.5 percent declared Polish as their mother tongue, 24.1 percent picked Yiddish or Hebrew, and 11.3 percent Ukrainian or Rusyn/*Ruski* (not the same as Russian/*Rosyjski*, also in use) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1937).

The interwar Lwów had some Ukrainian ads, but Ukrainianization began in earnest in 1939 when the Red Army annexed the city to Ukraine under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Ukrainians became the titular nationality and their language the official tongue. To celebrate the 'reunion' of east and west, the authorities put up a monument to Stalin's constitution in front of the Opera House inscribed in Ukrainian, Polish, and Yiddish. This wasn't what the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) had in mind: their dream was an ethnically pure Ukraine, and their hopes for making it happen were pinned on Hitler. In preparation for the German invasion, on June 30, 1941, OUN plastered Lviv with posters "Ukraine for Ukrainians," leaflets calling on Ukrainians to destroy Poles, Muscovites (Russians), Hungarians, and Jews (Himka, 2011; Mick, 2011) and banners glorifying Hitler and OUN leader Stepan Bandera (Fig. 15.7a).

These banners are a poignant reminder that bilingual signs do not invariably signal tolerance. The Nazi takeover of Lviv was followed by the cold-blooded Jewish genocide, perpetrated by German troops, with the help of Ukrainian militia and the Ukrainian battalion Nachtigall. Ukrainian veterans of Nazi troops vehemently deny participation in anti-Jewish activities but documentary evidence, films, and photographs speak to the contrary (Himka, 2011; Mick, 2011). By the time Waffen-SS Division Galizien was formed in 1943 with Ukrainian volunteers, OUN leaders had a new goal – to cleanse 'Ukrainian lands' of Poles. The division took part in the ethnic cleansing of Galicia and Volhynia led by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) (Snyder, 2003). When the Red Army retook the city in 1944 Yiddish was no more.

¹¹ <https://wildeast.blog/en/jewish-lviv/>.



Fig. 15.7 (a) German–Ukrainian banners in the city of Zhovkva, near Lviv, in 1941: “Heil Hitler! Glory to Hitler! Glory to Bandera!” Wikimedia Commons. (b) Monument to OUN leader Stepan Bandera (1909–1959), erected in 2007. Lviv, September 2019. Photo by the author.

Polish disappeared shortly after, when remaining Poles were deported to Poland as part of the Soviet-Polish population exchange. Ironically, many refugees from Lwów ended up in Breslau, emptied of its German inhabitants to become Polish Wrocław. Lviv, stripped of most of its prewar population, was repopulated with Ukrainians from the surrounding countryside, repatriates from Poland, and newcomers from eastern Ukraine and other regions of the USSR. Ukrainian and Russian became official languages; Polish, German, and Yiddish signs were painted over; streets were renamed; and all but four Polish monuments removed. Alongside the inevitable Lenin statue (1952), the authorities installed monuments to Ukrainian writers Franko (1964), Stefanyk (1971), and pro-Soviet Halan (1972), assassinated by Banderites in 1949.

When I first went to Lviv in 1980, it was a Ukrainian-speaking city, where Russian was official but unwelcome. Nationalist Ukrainians treasured the memory of Bandera and his dream of independent Ukraine, and when it did come true, Lviv was promptly de-Sovietized: Russian signs were stripped with alacrity, streets renamed, Soviet monuments taken down, and public space repopulated by a pantheon of Ukrainian heroes, among them the national bard

Taras Shevchenko (1992), the founding father of Ukrainian history Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1994), medieval founder of Lviv Daniil of Halych (2001), soldiers of the UPA and SS Division Galizien (2008, Lychakiv cemetery), and Stepan Bandera (2007), viewed as a national hero by western and diaspora Ukrainians and as a Nazi collaborator by eastern Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, Jews, and western scholars (Amar, 2011; Blacker, 2019; Rossoliński-Liebe, 2014). Russian speakers responded by leaving the city: between 1989 and 2001 the proportion of Ukrainians jumped from 79.1 percent to 88.1 percent, while that of Russians dropped from 16.1 percent to 8.9 percent and Jews from 1.6 percent to 0.3 percent.¹² No one was sorry to see them go, said my Jewish interviewees.

Eerily Leninesque, the Bandera monument symbolizes the replacement of Soviet myth-making with a new political and ideological project, conspicuous on the city's website: the reinvention of Lviv as an ancient Ukrainian stronghold, victimized by "the Polish authoritarian regime" and "Soviet totalitarianism" and free at last as "an indisputable capital of Ukrainian culture, spirituality and national identity"¹³ (as opposed to Ukraine's actual capital, Russophone Kyiv). Yet savvy politicians realized that nationalizing public space wasn't enough: to gain political goodwill in the west and become a tourist destination, Lviv had to be Europeanized. The Habsburg past, quintessentially European, became an asset in this pursuit and so did Polish and Jewish heritage, insofar as it didn't interfere with the patriotic narrative and implicate Ukrainians in morally reprehensible activities (Amar, 2011; Bartov, 2007; Blacker, 2019). The efforts paid off – in 1998 old Lviv was designated a World Heritage site, in part thanks to its past 'diversity':

The political and commercial role of Lviv attracted to it a number of ethnic groups with different cultural and religious traditions, who established separate yet interdependent communities within the city, evidence for which is still discernible in the modern townscape. (ICOMOS, 1998, p. 111)

Multilingual ghost signs are part of this discernible evidence – hence, the tacit agreement to keep the best ones on display. They also help with public relations. When two experts on Lviv's Polish inscriptions, Ksenya Borodin and Ivanna Gonak (2012), created a tour of the city's ghost signs, their goal was to challenge Lviv's reputation as a fascist and nationalist Banderstadt:

Some try to present Lviv as a "Bandera" city, where other nations are not respected and loved. This is not historically true and the signs show this to us.¹⁴ (translated from Russian by A.P.)

¹² <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/Lviv/>.

¹³ <https://lviv.travel/en/lviv-history>.

¹⁴ www.primetour.ua/ru/company/articles/-Lviv-po-polsku-zberezheni-napisi-polskoyi-dobi-vistavili-u-Lvovi.html.

The exploitative nature of appropriation of Jewish heritage was evident in the restaurant At the Golden Rose. Opened in 2008 next to the ruins of the eponymous synagogue, it was advertised as Jewish with the term *zhydivsky*, seen as a slur by Russian-speaking Jews, and offered its customers a full immersion experience. The visitors were greeted with *Shalom*, given price-free menus, and invited to haggle over the price of their (non-kosher) meals and to dress up as Jews with black hats adorned with fake sidelocks (Bechtel, 2016; Blacker, 2014; Narvselius, 2015). While many visitors were offended by the perpetuation of anti-Semitic stereotypes (as seen in Tripadvisor reviews), Ukrainian owners called their approach humorous but respectful and remained in business until the COVID pandemic forced them to close the doors in 2020.¹⁵

In noncommercial contexts, financial responsibility for dissonant heritage is less clear. Interviews conducted in 2019–2020 with heads of Lviv’s cultural institutions, administrators, managers, educators, and artists revealed that for many of these memory actors, Jewish, Polish, and Russian/Soviet legacy is “not our heritage” (Otrishchenko & Kozlova, 2020; for similar findings, see Corsale, 2021). Jewish memorials in Lviv are the work of its Jewish community and US, Israeli, and German groups, Polish signs are frequently vandalized, and when a gallows with a star of David was painted over a Yiddish sign in 2015 no one bothered to clean it up. When I visited the city in 2019, the anti-Semitic graffiti was still in place (Fig. 15.8).¹⁶

The reinvention of business ads left over from Polish Lwów as an emblem of Ukrainian tolerance and the emphasis on the city’s Austro-Hungarian past serve three city-marketing goals: to downplay historic antagonisms between Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews; to interrupt the continuous narrative of Lviv as a Polish city; and to direct attention away from the inglorious birth of Ukrainian Lviv. More importantly, while Lviv authorities are content to display Polish and Yiddish as a symbol of tolerance and love, the same courtesy is not extended to Russian, the language of the city’s largest linguistic minority, including its present-day Jews. Having roamed the streets for a week, I found plenty of Yiddish signs but of Russian there was no trace.¹⁷

The thoroughness of the erasure of Russian and Russians in the city’s linguistic landscape can be seen in the monument to Cossack Ivan Pidkova, Ivan Horseshoe, erected by Soviet authorities in 1982 (Fig. 15.9). The Ukrainian inscription on the plinth celebrated Pidkova as “the hero of the joint struggle of Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan peoples against Turkish

¹⁵ https://lviv.vgorode.ua/news/dosuh_y_eda/a1139578-ne-perezhila-karantinu-u-lvovi-zakrili-populjarnu-halitsko-zhdivsku-knajpu-

¹⁶ For discussion of anti-Semitism in Lviv politics of memory, see Blacker (2019, pp. 113–117).

¹⁷ On conscious erasure of Russian language, spoken by Russians and Russophone Ukrainians, from Lviv’s literary palimpsest, see Blacker (2019, pp. 32–33).

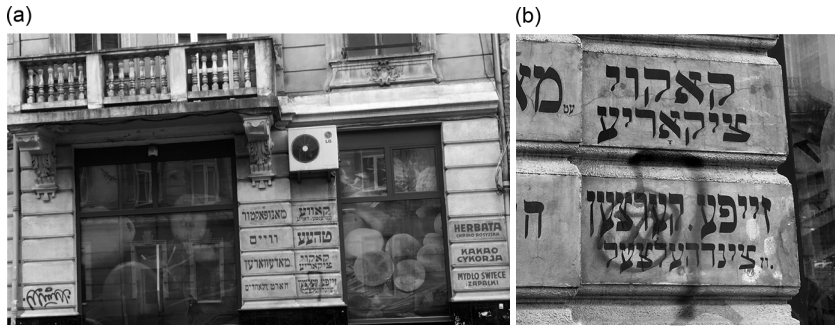


Fig. 15.8 Anti-Semitic graffiti, Kulish Street 1. Lviv, September 2019. Photos by the author.



Fig. 15.9 Monument of Cossack Ivan Pidkova with a small horseshoe plaque covering up the word 'Russians.' Lviv, September 2019. Photo by the author.

invaders, executed by Polish nobles of Lviv on June 16, 1578” (my translation). After the dissolution of the USSR, local authorities concealed the mention of Russians with white paint and then covered it up with a tiny, elegant horseshoe smack in the middle of text.

The contradiction between the absence of Russian and the abundance of Yiddish, no longer understood even by local Jews, suggests that Europeanization of Lviv may be one paint layer deep. The aim of the city’s administration was to attract foreign tourists and EU funding without adopting EU values, such as minority language rights (for discussion of Ukrainian language laws, see Csernicskó & Márku, 2020; Fiala-Butora, 2020; for a prescient analysis that linked compulsory Ukrainization to the threat of war with Russia, see Lieven, 2022).

15.5 Palermo

Palermo was once a popular stop on the European Grand Tour, but by the twentieth century, the decaying city, ruled by the mafia, scared off visitors. The turnaround began with the Maxi Trial of 475 mafiosi (1986–1992) and the election of a new mayor, Leoluca Orlando, a law professor known for his anti-mafia stance. His five terms (1985–1990, 1993–2000, 2012–present) ushered in the Palermo Renaissance. “Before I was elected mayor,” recalls Orlando, “people living in Sicily had no respect for the time, no memory of the past, no hope for the future” (in Majeed, 2012, p. 4). His aim was to restore the sense of hope and civic pride. Cutting the ties between the city government and the mafia, Orlando’s administration revitalized business and cultural life, paved roads, fixed sewers, built schools, planted gardens, reopened the Opera House, and renovated the historic center with the help of school children, given ‘adoption’ certificates for monuments they helped research, restore, and maintain (Bacon & Majeed, 2012; Orlando, 2001).

At the heart of the historic narrative is the Norman kingdom of Sicily that functioned in Arabic, Latin, and Greek (Johns, 2002). The UNESCO nomination dossier, signed by Orlando, opened up with one of its famous artifacts – a memorial plaque, commissioned in 1148 by the royal priest Grisandus, to commemorate his mother in Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Arabic in Hebrew script. The trilingualism was fairly short-lived, like the Norman kingdom itself, but the kings did leave behind an impressive artistic legacy, recognized by UNESCO in 2015:

Arab-Norman Palermo... bears witness to a particular political and cultural condition characterized by the fruitful coexistence of people of different origins (Muslim, Byzantine, Latin, Jewish, Lombard, and French). This interchange generated a conscious and unique combination of elements derived from the architectural and artistic techniques of Byzantine, Islamic, and Western traditions. (UNESCO, 2015, p. 239)

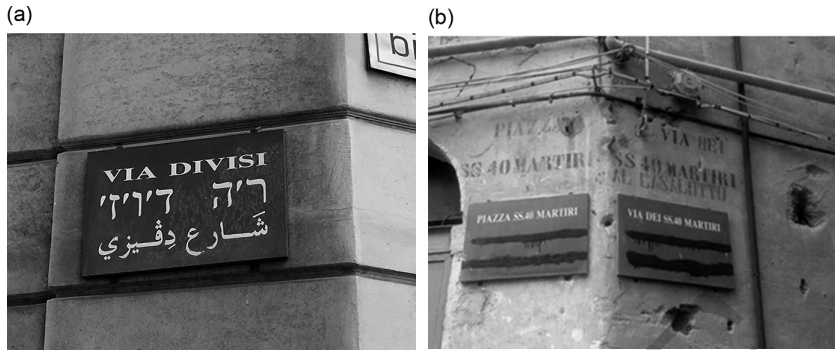


Fig. 15.10 (a). Street sign in Italian, Hebrew, and Arabic in the historic Jewish quarter, *La Giudecca*. Via Divisi, Palermo, April 2017. Photo by the author. (b) Defaced trilingual sign on Via dei Martiri. Photo posted on Facebook by mayor Leoluca Orlando, on April 3, 2017.

And when a scholar of Jewish history Titta Lo Jacono proposed to mark the Jewish quarter with trilingual signs (Fig. 15.10a), Orlando eagerly supported the initiative.¹⁸ For Orlando, these signs are not just a form of commemoration but a symbol of cultural change and a harbinger of things to come. When he was growing up in Palermo, diversity wasn't a part of life – the mafia kicked out everyone who was different. “Until I was 30,” confessed the mayor,

I had never seen a migrant on the streets. There were no people of color, Asians, Africans. The only migrants in Palermo were the distinct German ladies who were the governesses of children of the well-to-do families of Palermo. I too had a German governess, for me she was a migrant. (in Bercieux, 2017)

His new goal is to make the city a safe haven for migrants and to bring lost diversity back to the streets. Orlando's (2015) Charter of Palermo calls on the EU to abolish residence permits and recognize migrant mobility as a human right. The Global Parliament of Mayors he founded promotes the vision worldwide. The link between the vision of Palermo as a sanctuary city and trilingual historic signs is hard to miss: When on April 3, 2017, vandals spray-painted over Hebrew and Arabic (Fig. 15.10b), Mayor Orlando and civic organizations publicly decried the action as an expression of racism, intolerance, and hatred of migrants fueled by the media, and organized a cleaning campaign.¹⁹ When I arrived in Palermo on April 21, the signs were sparkling clean.

¹⁸ <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2004/04/28/noi-gli-ultimi-figli-della-giudecca-di.html>.

¹⁹ <https://palermo.meridionews.it/articolo/53647/ballaro-tolta-la-vernice-dai-cartelli-vandalizzati-i-media-alimentano-intolleranza-verso-migranti/>

Conclusion

On the surface, Toledo, St. Petersburg, Lviv, and Palermo have little in common, other than their status as World Heritage sites. A closer look, however, reveals a common thread. Once upon a time, all four cities had been ethnically and linguistically diverse and then underwent traumatic unmixing: Toledo and Palermo in the Middle Ages, St. Petersburg at the turn of the twentieth century, and Lviv during and after World War II. By the turn of the twenty-first century, homogeneity created a challenge for urban marketers, eager to promote their cities as ‘cultural capitals’ and ‘multilingual hotspots’ and to engage in ‘celebrations of diversity’ encouraged by UNESCO, the EU, and the Council of Europe (cf. Sokolovska, this volume).

Luckily for promoters, ‘multilingual’ is an ambiguous term. Luxembourg and Montreal are ‘multilingual’ because their inhabitants share two or more of the same languages, while London, Melbourne, New York, and Sydney vie for the designation of ‘the multilingual capital of the world’ based on the number of languages their residents speak and despite the fact that they rely on English as a lingua franca and are ruled by an unapologetically monolingual elite. In Toledo, Palermo, and Lviv, municipal authorities mobilized past diversity to achieve present-day aims, including the desired status of the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Nowadays, in all four cities, dissonant signs perform multifaceted identity work oriented toward the past, present, and future. When it comes to history, they help promote the appealing narrative of harmonious past diversity or, in the case of Lviv, appropriate someone else’s semi-tolerant past. The job of pseudo ghost signs in this context is to write Ukrainian language into the mix (Fig. 15.11). The present-day role of dissonant signs is to recontextualize the cities as ‘welcoming,’ ‘multilingual,’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ and to deflect attention from current suppression of minority languages, be it Uzbek in St. Petersburg or Russian in Lviv. Palermo reminds us that some signs are also oriented toward the future, and it is this orientation that elicits the greatest tensions and anxieties today, as seen in Vilnius, the capital of modern-day Lithuania.

In 2016, the city’s liberal mayor Remigijus Šimašius unveiled bilingual street signs in Yiddish, Hebrew, Tatar, German, Russian, and Polish that commemorated these communities on the streets where they once lived. “All these plaques are to celebrate our diversity,” said the mayor to the Reuters correspondent, echoing the Council of Europe discourse.²⁰ Not everyone was eager to celebrate: the Russian sign was smeared with paint within hours. The

²⁰ www.reuters.com/article/us-lithuania-streetsigns-idUKKCN11R1UC.



Fig. 15.11 Lviv's faux ghost signs with added Ukrainian: (a) Pawn shop with Polish terms for 'gold,' 'silver,' and 'watches' on the left and Ukrainian words for 'pawn shop' and 'money' on the right. Corner of Shpytalna and Koptyarska Streets. (b) Dairy store with a Ukrainian word for 'groceries' alongside ill-fitting cognates in Polish and German and a Hebrew term. Kulish Street 1. Lviv, September 2019. Photos by the author.

government's representative in the Vilnius county, Vilda Vaičiūnienė, had a bigger concern: historic signs might encourage Polish and Russian minorities to demand bilingual signage, made illegal in Lithuania. To stop them in their tracks, Vaičiūnienė filed a claim in court, arguing that the signs violate the Law on the State Language and may incite hatred and discord. When the lower court rejected the claim, she appealed to the Supreme Court. In 2019, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania made a binding ruling that the signs do not violate the law because they are decorative and not official.²¹

The stark contrast between the multilingual policies of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, discussed in the introduction to this volume, and aggressive monolingualism of modern Lithuanian, Russian, and Ukrainian language laws shows that linguistic nationalism has made us less pragmatic and rational and more ideologically driven and emotional and is, unfortunately, proving hard to unthink.

P.S. This is how I planned to end this chapter until President Putin ordered an invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, days before this volume went

²¹ www.baltictimes.com/lithuanian-court-rules-that-bilingual-street-signs-in-vilnius-do-not-breath-law/.

into production. In his speech, Putin justified the invasion by national security concerns and the need to protect Russian speakers in Ukraine against violations of their linguistic and cultural rights. This rhetoric made me think twice about the Lviv part of this chapter. The intolerance of Ukrainian language laws adopted between 2014 and 2021 (cf. Csernicskó & Márku, 2020; Fiala-Butora, 2020; Lieven, 2022) does not justify Russian aggression. Nothing does – the invasion of Ukraine is a violation of international law and a horrific war crime. Upon further reflection, however, I decided to leave the chapter unchanged for the sake of future scholars trying to understand the everyday workings of petty ethnic chauvinism and linguistic intolerance, weaponized by Putin’s government with disastrous outcomes for all Ukrainians, regardless of their mother tongue.

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