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"Acts of Translation": Travelling Postmemory of the Holocaust in Ukraine

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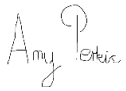

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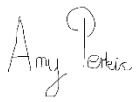

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Abstract

This dissertation utilises the concepts of travelling memory and postmemory to analyse three 21st century narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine by members of the Ukrainian Jewish diaspora: Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), Katja Petrowskaja's literary memoir *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (Maybe Esther: Histories) and Dash Art's performance piece *Songs for Babyn Yar* (2020-2022). Literature and fictional media have been seen as important containers of historical memory by scholars such as Marianne Hirsch, whose concept of 'postmemory' emphasises the role of imaginative investment in processing the traumatic memories of previous generations. This dissertation links postmemory with Astrid Erll's 'travelling memory', unpacking how the chosen works use physical and metaphorical travel to process family histories of the Holocaust in Ukraine. Across three vectors of analysis, *Travels through Space, Travels through Time* and *Travels across Traumatic Borders*, I examine the complex process of accessing cross-border and multi-lingual histories, showing how travel forms part of a wider process of 'working through' and opens up possibilities for imaginative time travel or the creative remixing of difficult histories. With the 'Holocaust by Bullets' still relatively marginalised within both Ukrainian memory and global Holocaust narratives, I also argue that these creative works provide models for subverting paradigms of competitive memory and incorporating the Holocaust in Ukraine within European and trans-Atlantic Holocaust narratives.

Keywords: Postmemory, travelling memory, Holocaust in Ukraine, Holocaust by Bullets, multi-directional memory, *Everything is Illuminated, Songs for Babyn Yar, Vielleicht Esther/Maybe Esther*

Streszczenie

Niniejsza rozprawa wykorzystuje koncepcję wędrującej pamięci i postpamięci do analizy trzech XXI-wiecznych narracji o Holokauście w Ukrainie, których autorami są członkowie ukraińskiej diaspory żydowskiej. Są to odpowiednio powieść Jonathana Safrana Foera *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), pamiętniki literackie Katji Petrowskaji *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (Eng. *Maybe Esther: Histories*) i przedstawienie teatralne w wykonaniu Dash Arts *Songs for Babyn Yar* (2020-2022). Literatura i fikcyjne media są wykorzystane jako ważne zasoby pamięci historycznej przez badaczy takich jak Marianne Hirsch, której koncepcja postpamięci podkreśla rolę wyobraźni w przetwarzaniu traumatycznych wspomnień ubiegłych pokoleń. Niniejsza rozprawa łączy postpamięć z wędrującą pamięcią, będącą propozycją Astrid Erll, i ukazuje, w jaki sposób narracje o przeszłości wykorzystują fizyczne i metaforyczne podróże do przetwarzania rodzinnych wspomnień o Holokauście w Ukrainie. W trzech częściach analitycznych pracy, tj. w (1) podróże w przestrzeni, (2) podróże w czasie i (3) podróże poza traumatyczne granice, pokazuję złożony proces dostępu do transgranicznych i wielojęzycznych historii, i piszę, w jaki sposób podróże stanowią część szerszego procesu 'przepracowywania' pamięci, przez co powstają możliwości wyobrażonej podróży w czasie lub twórczego i wtórnego opowiedzenia trudnych historii. Zważywszy na fakt, że '*Holocaust by Bullets*' jest nadal marginalizowany zarówno w ukraińskiej pamięci, jak i globalnych narracjach o Holokauście, twierdzę, że wspomniane dzieła literackie i teatralne dostarczają modeli, jak przekraczać paradygmaty 'konkurencyjnej pamięci' i włączać Holokaust w Ukrainie do europejskich i transatlantyckich narracji o tym traumatycznym wydarzeniu.

Słowa Kluczowe: postpamięć, wędrująca pamięć, Holokaust w Ukrainie, *Holocaust by Bullets* , pamięć wielokierunkowa, *Everything is Illuminated, Songs for Babyn Yar*, *Vielleicht Esther/Maybe Esther*

Contents

"Acts of Translation": Travelling Postmemory of the Holocaust in Ukraine[1]

Introduction

'There is no monument over Babi Yar', begins the poem *Babi Yar* by Soviet writer Yevgeni Yevtushenko, one of the first depictions of the Holocaust in Ukraine to travel beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.[2] Yevtushenko's poem, translated into seventy languages and eventually set to music by Shostakovich, drew the attention of Soviet and global audiences to the silenced tragedy of the Holocaust in Ukraine, including the massacre of an estimated 33,711 Jews by Nazi shooting squads at the valley of Babyn Yar in September 1941.[3] However, it was one of the few literary sources to do so in the Soviet period, during which the authorities refused to acknowledge the Jewish Holocaust as distinct from the generalised wartime suffering of Soviet citizens.[4] Even in the 21st century, the 'Holocaust by Bullets', or what Roma Sendyka has called the 'dispersed Holocaust', remains less known in global Holocaust narratives.[5] Meanwhile, while multiple monuments now exist on the site of Babyn Yar, Jewish memory is still relatively marginalised in Ukraine itself, due in no small part to the wide-scale displacement of the remaining Jewish population after World War Two.[6]

In general, the scholarship reflects this state of affairs, with the body of academic work on the Eastern European 'Holocaust by Bullets' representing a small part of wider academic work on the Holocaust, especially in the realm of literature and culture.[7] This dissertation aims to make a small contribution to this relative lacuna through examining three 21st century diasporic narrativisations of the Holocaust in Ukraine: the 2002 novel *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, 2014 literary memoir *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (Maybe Esther: Histories) by Katja Petrowskaja, and the 2020-2022 music and performance

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[1] Title quotation adapted from Shelly Frisch's English translation of *Maybe* Esther: Katja Petrowskaja, *Maybe Esther*, trans. Shelly Frisch (London: 4th Estate, 2018), 80.
[2] Yevgeny Yevtushenko, "Babi Yar", CULTURE.RU, accessed July 3. 2023, https://www.culture.ru/poems/26226/babii-yar.
[3] Katja Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022), Georgiy Kasianov, "Holodomor and the Holocaust in Ukraine as Cultural Memory: Comparison, Competition, Interaction", *Journal of Genocide Research* 24, no. 2 (2022): 219 https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2021.1968146.
[4] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 185.
[5] Roma Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets: Expanding the Field of Holocaust Art", European Holocaust Research Infrastructure Website, 19 April 2016, accessed July 2. 2023, https://www.ehri-project.eu/holocaust-bullets.
[6] Anna Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet Ukraine", in *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine*, eds. Anna Wylegala and Małgorzata Glowacka-Grajper (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020): 183-205.
[7] Sue Vice, "Beyond words: representing the 'Holocaust by bullets", *Holocaust Studies* 25, no. 1-2 (2019): 88, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2018.14728.

piece *Songs for Babyn Yar,* produced by theatre company Dash Arts. Specifically, I examine these texts through the interrelated lenses of two recent concepts in memory studies – travelling memory and postmemory – seeking to answer the question '*How do memories travel in diasporic postmemorial narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine?'* and the sub-questions:

- Along which vectors do memories 'travel' in these texts?
- How are these vectors portrayed as a means for processing (post)memory?
- How might these vectors of travel disrupt competitive/pillarised memory?

Within the field of cultural memory studies, literature and other fictional media have increasingly been conceptualised as an important vector of memory: as a means for the transferal and creative remixing of memories of trauma (Marianne Hirsche's *postmemory),* 'thickening' the relations between different groups across borders (Ann Rigney on *travelling memory* and the European Project) and forming productive links between seemingly conflicting histories (Michael Rothberg's *multi-directional memory).*[8] To unpack the way in which my chosen texts have used physical or metaphorical travel to narrativize the Holocaust in Ukraine, this dissertation draws especially on Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which 'describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before', and Astrid Erll's model of travelling memory, which posits that 'all cultural memory must 'travel' in order to 'stay alive, to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations'.[9]

The dissertation explores the links between travelling- and postmemory in the work of creators with Ukrainian Jewish heritage who incorporate experiences of travel into their narratives. I hope to advocate for the importance of cross-border approaches to Ukrainian Jewish history and heritage, looking at the ways in which these texts acknowledge the horrors of the Holocaust in Ukraine while also pointing towards the possibility of Ukrainian-Jewish reconciliation based on cultural exchange and interpersonal communication across borders, histories and languages. I believe that such an approach is especially necessarily in the

[8] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", *Poetics Today* 29, no.1 (2008): 103-128, https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019; Ann Rigney, "Transforming Memory and the European Project", *New Literary History* 43, no.4 (Autumn 2012): 607 – 628, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23358659; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009).
[9] Hirsch, "Generation of Postmemory", 106-107; Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory", *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (October 2011): 2. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

context of widespread Russian propaganda against Ukraine founded on the ahistorical and misleading characterisation of contemporary Ukraine as an antisemitic neo-Nazi state.[10]

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, including a literature review, methodology section and a three-part analysis. Across a comparative literary analysis of the three chosen texts, I investigate the ways in which memories travel and are transmitted in these narratives, and how these vectors of travel might offer alternatives to competitive or pillarised forms of memory. Based on my assessment of the main vectors of memory transmission in these narratives, this analysis is divided into three sections, including:

1. *Travels through Space*, which encompasses physical travel and the interlinked vectors of language, translation and technology. In this chapter, I find that *Maybe Esther, Everything is Illuminated* and *Songs for Babyn Yar* conceive of travel as a vital means for accessing inherently cross-border and multi-lingual histories, while also allowing for the possibility that travelling to sites of memory does not grant unique access to historical 'truth', or 'authenticity'. Instead, travel is part of a wider process of creative 'working through', opening the possibility for sites themselves to move, or be taken on tour, in the form of literature and theatre.

2. *Travels through Time,* focusing on inter-generational travel, testimony, the archive and imagination. Here I address the complex process of mnemonic travel between generations, arguing that the postmemorial process looks different for the third generation of Holocaust survivors as compared to Hirsch's second generation, or 'generation after'.[11] The chapter explores the active effort required by third-generation postmemorial creators to access memories which have travelled across time and distance, and the ways in which the texts counter this distance through creativity, 'remixing' and imaginative time travel.

3. *Travels across Traumatic Borders,* which refers to the multi-directional and inter-personal transmission of memories. This final section of analysis addresses how the

[10] Leonid (Leon) Gershovich, "Anti-Semitism in the Propaganda and Public Discourse in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus during the Russia-Ukraine War (February-August 2022)", *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism – ACTA* 42 (2023), accessed July 3. 2023, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/actap-2023-2001/html.
[11] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 106

texts travel between different traumatic histories and aspects of the Holocaust. I argue that these texts provide potential models for undermining pillarised or competitive memory through inter-personal exchanges which acknowledge the complexity of heritage and identity, while working to reincorporate the relatively marginalised 'dispersed Holocaust' in European and Transatlantic memory.

Throughout my analysis I argue for the inter-connected nature of post-, travelling- and multi-directional memory in these texts, where the process of physical travel across borders plays a crucial role in the creative process of engagement with difficult histories. Travels to sites of historical trauma are not only an end goal but fulfil a variety of roles, initiating creative 'travels through time' or creating opportunities for the formation of shared memories across nationalities, languages and borders. Through their literary and performative depictions, sites of the Holocaust in Ukraine are even uprooted to metaphorically travel themselves, offering opportunities for their incorporation within personal, community and international perceptions of the Holocaust across borders.

A Note on Spelling and Translations

The Ukrainian term for the valley of Babyn Yar (Бабин Яр) is used throughout, apart from when quoting directly from authors who use the Russian namse, Babi Yar (Бабий Яр).

All translations from German (in the case of *Vielleicht Esther)* and Russian (Yevtushenko's *Babi* Yar) are my own unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1

Uprooting Memory Studies in Eastern Europe and Beyond

The 21st century 'boom' in memory studies has given rise to a number of new theories of cultural memory, many of them focused on the fluid, trans-cultural and trans-national nature of collective memory-making in an increasingly globalised world. This dissertation draws especially on the recent concepts of 'postmemory' and travelling memory', which are explored in the first part of this literature review, alongside the role of literature and mediated memory in contemporary cultural memory studies. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to the specifics of Ukrainian Holocaust memory, examining the state of the field and arguing for the benefits of looking beyond a 'national' and 'competitive' characterisation of the Ukrainian memory space, before outlining the proposed scholarly contribution of this dissertation.

1.1 From Cultural- to Post-Memory

For much of the 20th century, memory studies was rooted in a sense of embodiment, physicality and place. As conceived by the 'father of collective memory studies', Maurice Halbwachs, in *Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire,* collective memory was limited to bounded social structures such as the family, who shared collective memories across up to three generations.[12] As the field developed, conceptions of 'embodied' memories expanded, crucially to encompass geography and space; in the 1980s, Pierre Nora's highly influential work on *Lieux de Mémoire*, (or *Places of Memory)* – specific locations where 'memory crystallises and secretes itself' – fostered an interest in the way that physical locations serve as a locus of specifically national memory.[13] In recent years many scholars have challenged the conception of memory as rooted in physical space or within the boundaries of the nation, symbolically uprooting memory studies to focus on factors such as diaspora and migration, globalisation, the internet and portable/transnational media.

These changes in the field of memory studies are indebted to the work of German cultural scholars Aleida and Jan Assman, whose development of cultural memory theory and practice

[12] Rigney, *"Transforming Memory"*, 616
[13] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.

underpins many later developments in the field.[14] In 2002, Aleida Assman proposed her model of *Four Formats of Memory* – individual, social, political and cultural – where individual and social memory are defined by embodied human interactions, while political and cultural memory are defined by symbolic representation at the national, institutional or societal level. [15] Assman's definition of cultural memory as 'a system of values, artefacts, institutions and practices that retain the past for the present and the future' is relatively broad, and certainly less concrete than the more boundaried individual, social and political forms of memory.[16] But for many contemporary scholars, attempting to define what cultural memory *is* misses the point; practitioners such as Erll, Rigney and Jessica Rapson suggest instead that memory is 'always in production and never produced'.[17] Advocates for a conception of memory as *process rather than product* have emphasised that 'cultural memory is a collective activity, and not a thing…it involves the ongoing production, reproduction and dissemination of narratives with a capacity to reconfigure social relations', and 'may take the form of continual evolution between individuals and groups', often with no concrete resolution.[18] Common themes that have emerged as part of memory studies' fluid 'cultural turn' have included the mediation of cultural memory, the impact of mediated memories and the negotiation of memories between communities and individuals.

The media of memory have been defined by Erll and Rigney as the 'symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time'.[19] The potential methods of transferal for cultural memories are many, encompassing visual and verbal signs, institutions of learning, media, monuments and commemoration

[14] Rosanne Kennedy, "Trauma and Cultural Memory Studies", in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, eds. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 59.
[15] Aleida Assman, "Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past", in *Cultural History and Literary Imagination*, eds. Christian Emden and David Midgely (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002): 19 - 37
[16] Aleida Assman, "Cultural Memory", in *Social Trauma – An Interdisciplinary Textbook,* eds. Andreas Hamburger, Camellia Hancheva and Vamik D. Volkan (Springer Link, 2021) Published Online 24 November 2020 https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-47817-9_3
[17] Jessica Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering: Encountering the Holocaust in Landscape, Literature and Memory" (PhD diss., Goldsmiths University of London, 2012), 7.
[18] Rigney, "Transforming Memory", 619-20; James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roedinger, "Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches", *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 320, https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434.
[19] Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics", in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory,* eds. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1.

rites.[20] Alexander Etkind has suggested dividing these carriers of memory into two forms – hard and soft – where '*soft memory* consists primarily of texts (including literary, historical and other narratives), whereas *hard memory* consists primarily of monuments, laws and court decisions.[21] Both hard and soft mnemonic forms are rooted in memory narratives; even monuments tell stories. However, the fictional narratives contained in novels, films and theatre have a unique role in the development of historical memory. [22] The importance of literature as a 'mnemonic art' is emphasised by Renate Lachmann, who asserts that 'when literature is considered in the light of memory, it appears as the mnemonic art par excellence. Literature is culture's memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions.'[23]

Turning specifically to Eastern European memory, Etkind and Uilleam Blacker have asserted that literature and the creative arts – 'soft' memory – have particular relevance in a space where 'memoirs, novels, films, and fast-moving public debates about the past have outpaced and overshadowed monuments, memorials, and museums', making the region 'a fascinating laboratory in which to study cultural memory in action.'[24] In the case of Ukraine, Tanya Zaharchenko has linked the 'tangled state of memorialisation' and 'short supply' of monuments in the Eastern European space to what she describes as the literature-centricity of Ukrainian society – the 'fundamentally central and defining role literature plays in a country's intellectual and cultural life'.[25] In the context of ongoing memory contestation in Ukraine and beyond, cultural memory is more productively viewed as process rather than product, what art scholar Griselda Pollock describes as a 'working-toward', where 'emotions [and] affective states, […] arise and find physical expression and/or associative connection',

[20] Aleida Assman, "Transformations between History and Memory", *Social Research* 75, no.1 (2008): 55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972052.
[21] Alexander Etkind, "Hard And Soft In Cultural Memory: Political Mourning In Russia And Germany", *Grey Room,* 16 (2004): 39. https://doi.org/10.1162/1526381041887439.
[22] Tamara Zaharchenko, "While the Ox is Still Alive: Memory and Emptiness in Serhiy Zhadan's *Voroshylovhrad*", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 55 no. 1-2 (2015), 48, https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2013.11092726.
[23] Renate Lachmann, "Cultural Memory and the Role of Literature", *European Review 12* no. 2 (2004): 172. https://doi.org/10.1017/S106279870400016X.
[24] Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, "Introduction" in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe,* eds. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5 -10.
[25] Zaharchenko "While the Ox is still Alive", 49.

characterised by a refusal of fixed meaning or boundaries.'[26]

Conceptions of creative memory-making as a 'working toward' or 'body of commemorative actions' reflect a new scholarly interest in performance, building on Paul Connerton's work on performance as history 'made afresh, bodies enacting new visions of a collective past'.[27] This performativity can be seen literally in the prevalence of historical narratives on the stages of Europe; Miliha Gluhovic suggests that the devastating events of the world wars and the Holocaust have been especially 'widely rehearsed' in Western Europe, where they are 'often positioned within a specific memory discourse in which [theatrical performances] intervene'.[28]

However, performativity is also a vital concept off the stage and on the ground, with tourism studies increasingly interested in the role of performativity at historical sites of memory. Originally, performativity theory was applied to physical sites and attractions as cultural performances, but today tourists themselves are increasingly characterised as performers. As Cohen and Cohen explain, radical performativity theory assumes that people are always 'performing' in front of a public, '[expanding] the concept of performativity beyond utterances to include non-lingual symbolic acts, such as gestures, salutations or prostrations' which take place at historical sites.[29] The notion of performance could also encompass the subsequent narration of travel through travel reports, memoirs and reflections, which can be interpreted as 'products or traces of tourist performance'.[30]

The idea of travel narratives as touristic performance can to an extent be applied to the works examined in this dissertation, two of which are fictionalised accounts of real-life journeys. However, it is worth bearing in mind the complicated nature of 'tourism' regarding Holocaust sites, including the ambiguity of what designates a 'tourist'. The way in which sites of trauma have been re-packaged as 'tourism products' has contributed to the development of terms

[26] Emily Holt and Grace Mahoney, "Rupture and Call: Famine Encounters from Contemporary Irish and Ukrainian Women in the Arts", *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 7 no. 2 (2020): 71 -75, https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus612.
[27] Colin Counsell, "Introduction" in *Performance, Embodiment and Cultural Memory,* eds. Colin Counsell and Roberta Mock (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 6.
[28] Miliha Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics and Politics,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013), 2.
[29] Erik Cohen and Scot A. Cohen, "Current sociological theories and issues in tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research* 39, no. 4 (2012): 2182.
[30] Sabine Marschall, 'Touring memories of the erased city: memory, tourism and notions of 'home', *Tourism Geographies*, 17:3 (2015): 338, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2014.1000957.

such as ‘dark tourism’ or ‘thanatourism’ to describe the touristic processes associated with visiting sites of death or destruction.[31] The commercialisation of dark tourism for a wide variety of audiences has often clashed with the experiences and goals of visitors with personal or family links to these sites, who have been analysed under various labels including roots-, personal heritage- and ancestral tourists.[32] These groups, including the creators examined in this dissertation, often do not self-identify as tourists, and may object to such terms which serve to ‘trivialise and commodify their journey’, even as they are regarded as ‘typical tourists’ by local residents or the heritage industry.[33]

I therefore choose to identify the creators explored in this dissertation as ‘travellers’ rather than tourists, utilising Marianna Hirsch’s concept of postmemory to describe their relationship to the Jewish past in Ukraine:

‘the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images and behaviours among which they grew up […] Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation.’[34]

The concept of postmemory applies to people who are not themselves survivors of traumatic historical events, but are closely tied to them through their personal heritage. Hirsch focuses on the ways in which the ‘inheritors’ of Holocaust memory work through this troubled inheritance through the creative process, producing writing which often manifests ‘album-like procedures […] collage-like style, displaces temporality and a documentary impetus.[35] These procedures represent the ‘imaginative investment’ which is an essential part of Hirsch’s model of postmemory; the creative process is situated as a vital means for processing generational memories.

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[31] J. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster,* (London: Continuum, 2000), 3; Duncan Light, “Progress in dark tourism and thanotourism research: An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism”, *Tourism Management* 61 (2017), Accessed July 1. 2023, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.01.011

[32] Heather Kennedy-Eden and Ulrike Gretzel, “Personal Heritage Tourism”, in *Handbook of Niche Tourism,* eds. Marina Novelli et al. (Northampton MA: Edward Elgar, 2022), 144-157.

[33] Marschall, “Touring memories”, 336.

[34] Hirsch, “Generation of Postmemory”, 106-107.

[35] Anna Artwińska and Anja Tippner, ‘Postcatastrophic Aesthetics’ in Artwińska and Tippner, *The Afterlife of the Shoah in Central and Eastern European Cultures,* (Routledge: New York, 2022), 10.

As texts which utilise imaginative investment for exploring the experiences of 'those who came before', postmemory serves as an important lens for examining *Maybe Esther, Everything is Illuminated* and *Songs for Babyn Yar.* However, while the concept of postmemory has mostly been applied to the 'second generation' of Holocaust survivors – children who were born after the war to parents who had survived the Holocaust – the creators discussed in this dissertation have a more varied relationship to the Holocaust past. [36] Katja Petrowskaja's father survived the Holocaust in Ukraine but at a very young age; meanwhile for Jonathan Safran Foer it is his grandparents who experienced the Holocaust. The two are therefore more closely related to the 'third generation', of Holocaust survivors, although the boundaries between the two are permeable.[37] These younger postmemorial creators have decreased access to survivor and eyewitness testimony compared to Hirsch's generation, but still conform in many ways to Hirsch's description of postmemory, which centres personal heritage, mediation and the processing of the past through imaginative and creative processes. With the twenty-first century seeing a transition from first-hand WWII memories to a more mediated and 'increasingly ritualised' cultural memory, examining these texts is an opportunity to explore the ways in which (post)memory both changes and stays the same with increased temporal distance from the Holocaust.[38] Here I hope to contribute to the field of third-generation Holocaust studies, which has seen relatively few publications in comparison to the rich body of research focused on the second-generation.[39]

Given that the term 'postmemory' has been applied to a variety of contexts, and has been expanded by Hirsch herself since its genesis in the 1990s, it is also worth articulating exactly how the term will be utilised in this dissertation. While Hirsch originally conceived the term to describe the experiences of 'the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma', she later expanded it, describing postmemory as a 'not an identity position, but a space of remembrance more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely

[36] Yad Vashem, "Survivors, Second Generation of", SHOAH Resource Centre Online, Accessed June 30. 2023, https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206058.pdf.
[37] Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein, and David Slucki, eds. *In the Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2016).
[38] Maria Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory: The Holocaust in Contemporary German-Language Jewish Literature*, (Rochester, New York: Camden House, an imprint of Boydell and Brewer inc., 2020), 7.
[39] Ibid., 11-14.

individual and personal, acts of remembrance'.[40] This change has faced criticism from scholars such as Rapson, who argues that Hirsch failed to recognise the limitations of her own concept.[41]

While this dissertation is interested in how creators with Ukrainian Jewish heritage might *open* spaces of remembrance to wider audiences, I mostly conform to Hirsch's original generational concept, situating personal Ukrainian Jewish heritage as a vital starting point for postmemory of the Holocaust in Ukraine. However, I do expand the term in two key ways. Firstly, I interpret the 'generation after' as encompassing both the second and third generations of Holocaust survivors, inspired by the work of Efraim Sicher which touches on the ambiguity between these two groups.[42] Secondly, while I do not here follow Hirsch's most open-ended definition, I do interpret postmemory as encompassing not only blood relatives, but also the close personal (but not necessarily familial) ties between younger and elder Ukrainian Jews. This is most relevant to *Songs for Babyn Yar,* where the generation of Ukrainian Holocaust survivors is represented by Rachil Blankman, a close friend and congregation member of cast member Svetlana Kundish, who serves as kantor in a synagogue in Braunschweig. Through this expansion, I aim to recognise the importance of inter-generational friendships outside of conventional family structures, while preserving postmemory's focus on how memories of trauma are shared and re-imagined throughout generations.

In addition, while I necessarily touch on the concept of trauma, following Hirsch's definition of 'the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma'', this dissertation does not explore the notion of 'traumatic transfer', or the idea that trauma can be '[passed] on' by means of stories, photographs or other media.[43] This idea of a transferal of trauma, developed by Hirsch and also discussed by Cathy Caruth, has been criticised by Maria Roca Lizarazu and Amy Hungerford, among others, for being 'abstract in the extreme', equating the structure of genuine psychological trauma with its mediated depiction without enough

[40] Marianne Hirsch, "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy", in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present,* eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 1998), 8-9.
[41] Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering", 44.
[42] Efraim Sicher, "'Tancred's Wound': From Repression to Symbolization of the Holocaust in Second generation Narratives", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 5, no. 2 (January 2006): 189–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725880600741557.
[43] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 108; Sorvari. *Displacement and (Post)memory,* 6.

attention to how trauma might be physically transmitted.[44] While acknowledging the grief and difficulty inherent in processing difficult family histories, I follow Lizarazu and Hungerford in acknowledging the difficulty of proving the existence of a mediated transfer of *trauma* itself, especially in the realm of humanities (rather than psychology) scholarship. Thus, my use of the concept of trauma is mostly limited to a) the acknowledgment of historically bounded traumatic events and their associated geographical sites and b) my usage of Terri Tomsky's concept of 'travelling trauma' (discussed in next section), which addresses how trauma is circulated and sold as a 'transcultural capital and commodity'.[45]

Rather than focusing on the transmission of trauma, I instead focus on the aspects of postmemory related to the transmission and creative re-imagining of *social knowledge, memories and identity*, which Diana Taylor has followed Paul Connerton to argue may be transmitted through performances as 'vital acts of transfer'.[46] While seeking to avoid equating lived experiences with their fictionalised mediations through the notion of second hand trauma, I am nevertheless interested in how personal and historical narratives might inspire their audiences to develop more personal relationships with 'past events through which [they] did not live', and the power of these experiences to 'challenge their audiences historical imagination and renew their affective engagement with [the past]'.[47]

Crucially, I aim to draw out the connections between postmemory and travelling memory, following Rigney's assertion that narratives and texts have a unique 'capacity to circulate across linguistic and national borders […] thanks to the experiential and reflective dimensions […] that ensure that they have a value in themselves for the reader that is independent of their initial relevance'.[48] Having provided a review of the foundational concepts of cultural and postmemory, the next section of this chapter will turn to the

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[44] Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory,* 19; Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen, "Introduction: Memory on the Move" in *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, eds. Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 10.
[45] Terri Tomsky, "From Sarajevo to 9/11: Travelling Memory and the Trauma Economy", *Parallax* 17, no. 4: 51, https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605578.
[46] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas,* (Durham, North Carolina; London: Duke University Press, 2003), 1.
[47] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2; Miliha Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics and Politics,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013), 2.
[48] Ann Rigney, "Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance", in *Narrating the Nation: The Representation of National Narratives in Different Genres,* eds. Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas andAndrew Mycock (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 92.

travelling memory literature, exploring the recent shift in cultural memory studies towards 'fluid', 'transnational' or 'cosmopolitan' memory.

1.2 Uprooting Memory Studies

The term 'travelling memory', coined by Erll in 2011, was conceived by her as a 'metaphorical shorthand, an abbreviation for the idea that in the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents and practices are in constant, unceasing motion.'[49] Erll argues that memory travels through several 'dimensions of movement', including *carriers* (people on the move), *media, contents* ('shared images and narratives), *forms* ('symbols, icons or schemata') and *practices* (commemoration traditions').[50] These dimensions serve as a key inspiration for this dissertation's focus on the 'vectors' along which memories travel in the chosen texts and the wider post-Holocaust and post-Soviet context. I also follow Rigney in attempting to view memory practices in 'productive, performative and dynamic turns', seeking to understand how the dynamics of travelling memory might complement or complicate the postmemorial creative process.[51]

The travelling memory literature can be characterised by its rejection of methodological nationalism and problematisation of the inherent link between landscape and memory proposed by Nora, with some scholars even proposing that landscape itself symbolically 'circulate[s] as a medium of exchange' through transportation, replication or the migration of attitudes emerging from specific landscape practices.[52] Migration – of people, narratives and media – plays a significant role in these discussions, with Erll suggesting that migrants and diasporas have been carriers of memory since ancient times.[53] Indeed, anthropologist Stephen Vertovec's definition of diaspora suggests that diaspora groups have an inherent role in the preservation of identities and culture: 'diaspora combines the characteristics of structural, conscious and non-conscious factors in reconstructing and reproducing identities and socio-cultural institutions among groups outside some place of origin'.[54] Here, I am especially

[49] Erll, "Travelling Memory", 12.
[50] Ibid., 12-13.
[51] Rigney, "Transforming Memory", 610-611.
[52] Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering", 20.
[53] Astrid Erll, "Travelling Narratives in Ecologies of Trauma: An Odyssey for Memory Scholars." *Social Research* 87, no. 3 (2020): 533-563.
[54] Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of "Diaspora", Exemplified among South Asian Religions", *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (Winter 1997): 277. https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.6.3.277.

interested in the ways that narratives travel from and may return to their place of origin; hence the selection of creators with lived or familial experience of migration or displacement from Ukraine. As argued by Marja Sorvari, these experiences of displacement are particularly relevant to the aftermath of the Soviet era, where 'displacement' relates not only to spatial dislocation but also to 'loss of meaning […] marginality or placelessness'.[55]

While migration stories can be traced back to the ancient world, the recent scholarly interest in 'travelling' memory can be attributed in part to globalisation and the accompanying rise of communication technologies, migration mobility and transnational actors, all of which have facilitated 'circulation, production and conflicts of memory' on a global scale.'[56] These factors are emphasised by Anna Reading, who argues that digital media and globalisation are two major dynamics affecting memory practices today, and Andrew Hoskins, who uses the term 'connective turn' to describe the new role of communications technology in memory making.[57] However, the media of travelling memory also include more traditional narrative forms such as theatre and literature, which today can be translated, tour and proliferate more quickly than was previously possible. Rigney is a key advocate for the ability of fictionalised media to transverse physical and metaphorical borders, arguing that globally, and within multi-lingual Europe, 'the site of a dense network of exchanges across various borders', literature is a key means for involving people in the 'lives of others'.[58] Imaginative writing, she argues, has the distinctive potential to act as a 'mediator or connector between different mnemonic communities.'[59]

A scholarly approach emphasising the power of carriers of media, and the images and narratives they help distribute across borders, has the potential to undermine the centrality of the modern national state as a default conceptual framework, encouraging us to pay attention

[55] Marja Sorvari. *Displacement and (Post)Memory in Contemporary Russian Women's Writing* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 2-3.
[56] Nadine Blumer. "Expanding Museum Spaces: Networks of Difficult Knowledge at and Beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights." *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 37, no. 2-3 (2015): 129, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2015.1028831.
[57] Anna Reading, "Memory and Digital Media: Six Dynamics of the Globital Memory Field", in *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age,* eds. Motti Neiger,, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 241- 253; Andrew Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn, *Parallax* 17, no.4: 19-31, https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605573.
[58] Rigney, "Transforming Memory", 621 – 622.
[59] Ibid.

to a wider range of 'imagined communities' at both the global and regional level.[60] Indeed, in *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age,* Levy and Sznaider suggest that the 'container of the Nation State…is in the process of being slowly cracked.'[61] Levy and Sznaider's model of a cosmopolitan Holocaust memory transcending national and ethnic boundaries has been supported by a variety of scholars including Wulf Kansteiner, who argues that Holocaust narratives and iconography have been 'one of the most successful cultural inventions of the post-Second World War Era' in Europe and the US.[62] The idea of a transnational, ethically-motivated Holocaust memory has been vital to the European project, with Marek Kucia defining the Europeanisation of Holocaust memory as 'the process of construction, institutionalisation, and diffusion of beliefs regarding the Holocaust and norms and rules regarding Holocaust remembrance and educational at a transnational, European level since the 1990s.'[63]

Levy and Sznaider identify the Jewish and Catholic religions as long-term examples of memory beyond national borders, while Erll also identifies 'Jewish memory in exile' as a primary example of her 'carriers of memory', the 'individuals who share in collective images and narratives of the past'.[64] Since the early medieval period, Jewish tradition in Central and Eastern Europe has evolved at the local or transnational level more than at the national level, with Jews often excluded from the 'imagined community' of the bounded nation. In the wake of the Holocaust, the concept of travelling memory may also serve to reflect the experience of many Holocaust victims, millions of whom were displaced either through forced deportation to concentration and murder camps by the Nazi regime, or after the war through migration out of the 'bloodlands' of Central and Eastern Europe.[65]

In the case of Holocaust memory, some scholars and activists have therefore suggested that the attempt to move beyond methodological nationalism is an ethical necessity. As noted by

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[60] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[61] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*: *Politics, History, and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 89.
[62] Levy and Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory,* 88; Wulf Kansteiner, "Sold Globally – Remembered Locally: Holocaust Cinema and the Construction of Collectives Identities in Europe and the US" in *Narrating the Nation*: *Representations in History, Media and the Arts,* eds. Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas and Andrew Mycock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 154.
[63] Marek Kucia, "The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe*." East European Politics and Societies* 30 no. 1 (2016): 97.
[64] Ibid., 89; Erll, "Travelling Memory", 12.
[65] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

Rapson, hyper-nationalistic notions of the 'centrality of the bounded nation and intimate connection between Blut and Boden' (blood and soil'), existed at the heart of Nazi ideology, and today serve to illuminate the ethical pitfalls of a 'nationalistic, superorganic lens'.[66] In this light, the questions raised in Levy and Sznaider such as – 'What happens when an increasing number of people in Western mass-consumer societies no longer define themselves (exclusively) through the nation or their ethnic belonging?' – have ethical as well as theoretical relevance.[67] However, travelling memory models are not always utopian; Terri Tomsky's concept of 'travelling trauma' draws attention to the 'economic, cultural, discursive and political structures that guide, enable and ultimately institutionalize the representation, travel and attention to certain traumas'.[68] Tomsky is interested in the ways in which memories of trauma, including the Holocaust, are valued and revalued during the process of travel, with different historical traumas perceived differently on the global 'market'.[69]

In this dissertation, I aim to be aware of the ways in which Jewish Holocaust memories are portrayed as cosmopolitan or international in the chosen narratives while also recognising how these memories may be commodified. In particular, the notion of the trauma economy is applied to the ways in which different aspects of the Holocaust have been valued differently on the international scale, an issue discussed further in the next section through Roma Sendyka's conception of the 'dispersed Holocaust'.[70] The final part of this chapter will review the scholarship on Ukrainian Holocaust memory in particular, outlining the state of the field and this dissertation's proposed contribution.

1.3 Ukraine, the 'Dispersed' Holocaust, and Competitive Memory

In examining narrativisations of the Holocaust in Ukraine, I have sought to be aware of the relatively marginalised status of this aspect of the Holocaust both on the world stage and within Ukraine itself. On the Ukrainian scale, the relationship between Ukrainian and Jewish memory has often been characterised as one of 'competing victimhoods', where Jewish history (and Ukrainian violence towards Jews) are marginalised in contemporary Ukrainian

[66] Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering", 18.
[67] Levy and Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory,* 88.
[68] Tomsky, "From Sarajevo to 9/11", 53.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets".

memory.[71] Meanwhile, Ukraine's 'Holocaust by Bullets' also represents part of the 'dispersed Holocaust' – the two million murders taking place outside of 'symbolic' camp locations which dominate cosmopolitan Holocaust memory.[72] This section of the literature review will explore this double marginalisation of the Holocaust in Ukraine and review the state of the scholarly field on Ukrainian Jewish memory, the Holocaust and the Ukrainian diaspora, suggesting that the default conceptual framework of the nation state utilised in much of the research neglects the nuances of memory at the regional Ukrainian, European and global levels, obscuring vital cross-border fluidities and connections. I then unpack the concepts of 'multi-directional' and 'polyphonic' memory as potential alternatives to the scholarly paradigm of 'competitive' Jewish-Ukrainian memories, before outlining my proposed contribution to the field.

If, as already discussed, 'never again' narratives of the Holocaust became a lynchpin of Western European identity in the second half of the twentieth century, this conception of the Holocaust has been defined on the whole by the Western and Central European phenomenon of the labour and death camps, with Auschwitz serving as a symbol for the diverse experiences of the Shoah.[73] However, estimates suggest that more than a third of Jewish victims of the Holocaust were murdered outside camps by mobile killing units which 'obliterated entire communities in a few days or even mere hours'.[74] In Ukraine alone, the 'Holocaust by Bullets' is estimated to have claimed between 1 and 2 million lives, including at the valley of Babyn Yar in Kyiv, where an estimated 33,711 members of the city's Jewish community were shot to death in September 1941.[75] Sites of Jewish massacre exist across Ukrainian space, from the Botanical Gardens of Dnipropetrovsk, where 10,000 Jews were killed by the Nazis in October 1941, to the now non-existent Volhynian Jewish village of Trochimbrod, or Sofievka, the obliteration of which is chronicled in *Everything is*

[71] Jonathan Huener, "Shared History — Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939-1941 (Review)", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no.2 (Fall 2011): 305-308.
[72] Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets".
[73] Vice, "Beyond Words", 88.
[74] Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets".
[75] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 183; Kasianov, "Holodomor and the Holocaust": 219.

Illuminated.[76] Overall, one in four victims of the Holocaust was murdered in Ukraine.[77]

Roma Sendyka has described the numerous individual deaths in towns, villages and the 'narrow streets of lesser ghettos' as the 'dispersed Holocaust'.[78] This term encompasses the notion of the 'Holocaust by Bullets' used by Patrick Desbois to describe the mass shootings which took place in Ukraine between 1941 and 1945, with Sendyka arguing that Desbois' work 'allows seeing beyond the powerful figure of the extermination camp that usually – and justly – focuses the attention of scholars in the field of Holocaust studies.'[79]

While Auschwitz left few survivors, the Holocaust by Bullets left even fewer, while the fast and brutal way in which victims were killed within the space of days or hours often precluded the leaving of art, witnessing or documentation.[80] This is worth consideration not for the sake of any ethically problematic numerical 'competition', but because the small number of Jewish witnesses has influenced the subsequent cultural depiction (or lack thereof) of the dispersed Holocaust. The most widely-known cultural images of the Holocaust – the camp, the transport train, the barbed wire – are less applicable to the Holocaust by Bullets, which remains relatively marginalised on the scale of European memory, cultural production, and even within Holocaust studies itself, especially when it comes to cultural and literary analysis.[81]

While the Holocaust by Bullets in Ukraine remains marginalised on a global scale, much of the academic literature asserts that Holocaust memory as a whole is also marginalised in Ukrainian space. A substantial body of scholarly work has been devoted to the European 'memory wars' which emerged at the fault line of 'Auschwitz' and the 'Gulag', assuming a model of 'competitive memory', where, as Michael Rothberg writes, 'the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and […] the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for

[76] Andrii Portnov, "The Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine", in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, eds. Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 366.
[77] Alexandr Burakovskiy, "Holocaust remembrance in Ukraine: memorialization of the Jewish Tragedy at Babi Yar", *Nationalities Papers* 39, no.3 (2011): 373.
[78] Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets".
[79] Ibid.; Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 2009).
[80] Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets".
[81] Vice, "Beyond Words", 88; Hanna Loewy, "The Mother of All Holocaust Films?", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no.2 (2004), 180, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199211869.003.0030.

pre-eminence'.[82] In this context, Ukrainian historian Andrii Portnov has argued that the fate of the Jews during WWII 'remain[s] on the margins of public discourse in Ukraine', due both to comparisons with Ukrainian suffering under the Soviet regime, and concern about muddying heroic Ukrainian memory with the difficult issue of Holocaust collaboration.[83]

Particular attention has been paid by Portnov and the Dutch scholar Johan Dietsch to the marginalisation of the Holocaust in Ukrainian school textbooks, especially in contrast to the 1932 – 1933 Ukrainian famine, or Holodomor.[84] The two tragedies have often co-existed and conflicted with each other in 21st century public discourse, with former president of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko seemingly attempting to 'surpass' the number of Jewish victims by suggesting that between 7-10 million people died during the Holodomor.[85] The Holodomor has become an integral narrative of post-Soviet Ukraine, with Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko reminding us that Ukrainian interpretations of WW2 are directly related to post-colonial attempts to define national identity and create 'counter-narratives' against Russian oppression, especially in a contemporary context where Russia actively seeks to alter and erase Ukrainian history.[86]

The 'memory wars' model is also prominent in the work of Yulia Yurchuk, and Sarah Fainberg on Ukrainian commemoration of the Holocaust, the OUN and the UPA, which suggests a state of conflict between a heroic nationalist image of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), and a Holocaust memory which 'works through' the complicity of these organisations in the murder of Jews.[87] This state of seeming competition reflects the assumption that Jewish and Ukrainian history exist in a wider conflict with each other, a perspective summed up by Henry Abramson when

[82] Máté Zombory, "The anti-communist moment: competitive victimhood in European politics", *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* 2, no.3 (2020): 23; Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3.
[83] Portnov, "Holocaust in Public Discourse".
[84] Ibid., 347-356.
[85] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 188.
[86] Julie Fedor, Simon Lewis and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Introduction: War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus", in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, eds. Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 17.
[87] Yuliya Yurchuk, "Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past: OUN – UPA Memory Politics and Nation Building in Ukraine (1991 – 2016)", in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus,* eds. Fedor, Julie, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila and Tatiana Zhurzhenko, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 107 – 139; Sarah Fainberg, "Memory at the Margins: The Shoah in Ukraine (1991–2011)", in *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Geroge Mink and Laure Neumayer, (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2013): 86-102.

he asserted in 1994 that 'the centuries-old mutual history of Ukrainians and Jews is unique in that most of the heroes of the former are the villains of the latter'.[88]

Outside the borders of Ukraine, Himka has detailed the ways in which the anti-Soviet Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and beyond have emphasised memories of the Holodomor and Ukrainian resistance, often while actively seeking to obscure or compete with Holocaust narratives.[89] Conversely, the scholarship has drawn some attention to the role of the international community in Holocaust memory in Ukraine itself; from interventions by organisations such as the U.S.-based Joint Distribution Committee, accusations of Russian interference and the role of external memory pioneers such as French Catholic Priest Patrick Desbois, author of *The Holocaust by Bullets.*[90]

However, such cross-border approaches have been relatively few and far-between, with little detailed study into the impact of these interventions, and certainly little attention paid to the complex identities of 'external' actors with Ukrainian links. The treatment of 'Jewish' and 'Ukrainian' as separate and mutually exclusive terms in much of the scholarship elides the possibility of these identities co-existing. Meanwhile, the focus when it comes to the Ukrainian diaspora has mostly been on Ukrainian nationalism, with little research on the Jewish diaspora who left Ukraine after WWII. Scholarship on how Ukrainian Holocaust memory relates to wider pan-European and trans-Atlantic memory formations also remains constricted by a model of national comparison, where the state of Ukrainian Holocaust memory is compared to its European neighbours and found lacking.[91] This comparative national framework treats Jewish and Ukrainian identities and histories as mutually exclusive, while obscuring the ways in which Ukrainian Holocaust memories have been incorporated or excluded from the wider cultural- canon of European Holocaust memory.

One scholar who acknowledges the complexity Ukrainian Holocaust memory is Anna Chebotarova, who in her 2019 chapter, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet

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[88] Henry Abramson, "The Scattering of Amalek: A Model for Understanding the Ukrainian-Jewish Conflict." *East European Jewish Affairs* 24, no. 1 (1994): 40, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501679408577763.
[89] John-Paul Himka, "War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora", *spacesofidentity* 5, no. 1 (2005): 9-24.
[90] Jeff Mankoff, "Babi Yar and the Struggle for Memory, 1944 – 2004", *Ab Imperio* 2 (2004): 393-415; Kasianov, "Holodomor and the Holocaust": 220.
[91] Kucia, "The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory"; Grzegorz Rossolinski Liebe, "Introduction: Conceptualizations of the Holocaust in Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine: Historical Research, Public Debates, and Methodological Disputes." *East European Politics and Societies* 34, no. 1 (2020): 129-142, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325419852149.

Ukraine", argues that Eastern European Holocaust memory 'should be understood in the dynamics of both competition and multi-directionality'.[92] Chebotarova is here referring to Michael Rothberg's influential model of multi-directional memory, which aims to challenge the conception of memory as 'a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources', instead considering memory as 'subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative'.[93] In a context where borrowing, cross-referencing and comparison – between Holocaust and Holodomor, Nazi and Soviet oppressions or WWII and the contemporary war in Ukraine – are common, Rothberg provides a potential alternative model for understanding memory dynamics related to the Holocaust in Ukraine.

Rothberg recognises comparative approaches as an almost inevitable part of struggles for justice, challenging the assumption that the struggle to achieve recognition of certain memories and identities must necessarily exclude other narratives.[94] This is not to say that all cases of comparison are necessarily productive; the multi-directional memory model recognises the potential for multi-directional memory to '[function] in the interests of violence or exclusion, warning especially against dynamics of 'competition, appropriation or trivialisation'.[95] Rothberg suggests that discourses of complete equivalence – "These two things are *exactly the same"* – and complete uniqueness – where certain events are separated from other histories of collective violence – can both be damaging.[96] The model therefore problematises the explicitly competitive approaches exemplified by memory actors such as Ukrainian diaspora memory entrepreneur Yaroslav Bilinsky, who in 1983 argued that the Holocaust and Holodomor were 'equivalent…We must finally write a basic history of Ukrainian martyrology, which would at the very least match in quality Hilberg's work on the destruction of the Jews'.[97] However, the model also leaves open the possibility of more nuanced interpretations of the interactions between these narratives.

Multi-directional memory, defined by Rothberg as 'irreducibly transversal' with the ability to cut across genre, borders and time, relates closely to travelling memory,[98] In the Ukrainian

[92] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 187.
[93] Rothberg, "Multidirectional Memory", 3.
[94] Ibid., 29 & 3.
[95] Ibid., 12; Michael Rothberg, "From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory", *Criticism (Detroit)* 53, no. 4 (2011): 525, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23133895.
[96] Rothberg, "Multidirectional Memory", 9.
[97] Himka, "War criminality", 11-12.
[98] Rothberg, "Multidirectional Memory", 18.

and Eastern European context, the concept also productively reflects the reality that many people or families have been affected by multiple traumatic histories; the 'memory wars' scholarship often obscures the fact that the Nazi and Soviet terrors were not mutually exclusive; many people living today have family histories deeply intertwined with both of these historical traumas. As Rothberg concisely puts it – 'memories are mobile; histories are implicated in each other' – there is no easy way to establish a '*cordon sanitaire'* between events which happened in the same region, or even in the same families.[99] This dissertation utilises multi-directional memory in the final chapter to explore how it might complicate the notion of 'pillarised memory' – 'the belief that each population's group is the custodian of its own heritage', which Chebotarova argues is a common tendency in Ukraine – instead suggesting potential links between seemingly dissonant histories.[100]

Considering, as Etkind points out, that 'there cannot be two monuments on the same spot', 'soft' formats of memory, including literature, theatre and poetry, may be more conducive to accommodating multi-directional or dissonant memories than 'hard' formats.[101] In his work on the narrative organisation of collective memory, James V. Wertsch argues that 'narratives are always half someone else's', raising the question of how more than one voice can be incorporated into narrative performance.[102] Literature and other creative narratives have the capacity to accommodate multiple dissonant voices far more easily than national or institutional narratives; in fact, literature scholar Alessandro Achilli argues that there seems to be a 'new penchant for collective memory' in the Ukrainian literary space.[103] Achilli adopts Robert Traba's term 'polyphony of memories' *(polifonia pamieci)* to refer to 'the dialogical encounter of different or partially different fragments of memories that are able to be harmonized, notwithstanding the potential for conflict between them'.[104] This 'polyphonic memory model' also relates closely to travelling memory, suggesting that literature can serve as a shared space for memories brought together from a diverse range of locations and sources.

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[99] Ibid, 313.
[100] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 198.
[101] Etkind, "Hard And Soft In Cultural Memory", 57.
[102] James V. Wertsch, "The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory." *Ethos* 36, no. 1, (Berkeley, 2008): 122, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20486564.
[103] Alessandro, Achilli, "Individual, Yet Collective Voices: Polyphonic Poetic Memories in Contemporary Ukrainian Literature", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 62, no. 1 (2020): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2019.1708532.
[104] Ibid., 7.

However, despite 'soft' memory's important role in this area, there has been very little scholarly attention devoted to the depiction of the Holocaust in Ukraine in literature and fiction specifically. A notable exception is a March 2023 dossier by the journal *Eastern European Holocaust Studies*, which touches on the relationship between travel and the Holocaust in Ukraine through Anna P. Ronell's geo-critical analysis of Gorenstein's *Travelling Companions,* a novella tackling the theme of the Holocaust in Ukraine through a chance encounter on a train.[105] 'Jessica Rapson's PhD 2013 thesis *Topographies of Suffering: Encountering the Holocaust in Landscape, Literature and Memory,* also contributes to the field through examining how Ukraine's Holocaust landscapes have been mediated and interpreted through literature, and the way this literature has radiated outwards to influence landscapes as disparate as Denver, Canada, Khojaly, Azerbaijan, and Stoke on Trent, UK.[106]

This dissertation aims to further contribute to this lacuna, alongside the relative lack of investigations into third-generation Holocaust literature, through examining three 21st century narrativizations of the Holocaust in Ukraine. *Songs for Babyn Yar* has yet to receive scholarly attention, while *Everything is Illuminated* and *Vielleicht Esther* have been previously analysed within the framework of postmemory but with little focus on the texts' relationship to travelling memory and how these two vectors of memory might be connected in these works.[107] The relationship of these texts to the specificities of the Holocaust by Bullets, other narrativisations of the Holocaust in Ukraine, and the post-Soviet context has also been overlooked.

This dissertation aims to firmly situate the chosen texts within the historical context of the Holocaust in Ukraine. I also hope to contribute towards wider scholarly questions about the relationship between travelling and postmemory, addressing how travel might both complement and complicate the postmemorial creative process. Through tackling the cultural memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine as a complex, cross-border phenomenon, I advocate for the relevance of a trans-national, travelling memory approach to the field of Ukrainian

[105] Anna P. Ronell, "On the Journey Through Ukraine: Representations of the Holocaust in Friedrich Gorenstein's *Traveling Companions*" *Eastern European Holocaust Studies* (2023), accessed July 3. 2023, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/eehs-2022-0014/html
[106] Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering".
[107] See for example Ștefan Ionescu Ambrosie, "Tattered Photograph": Challenges to Postmemory in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*", [*Inter]sections* 21 (2018): 104-118 https://intersections-journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/6.-Ionescu-Ambrosie-article.docx-1.pdf; Maria Roca Lizarazu, "The Family Tree, the Web and the Palimpsest: Figures of Postmemory in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*" *The Modern Language Review* 113, no.1 (January 2018): 168-189 https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.113.1.0168

memory studies, countering the conceptual nationalism of much of the scholarship in this area and investigating how these narratives might serve to disrupt competitive memory models. The next chapter will provide a methodological overview of my analysis, including an introduction to the chosen texts, methods of comparative literary analysis and a brief discussion of the limitations of this MA research.

Chapter 2
Methodology and Structure

This dissertation takes a qualitative, literary analysis approach to the question: *How do memories travel in diasporic postmemorial narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine?,* and the following related sub-questions:

- Along which vectors do memories 'travel' in these texts?
- How are these vectors portrayed as a means for processing (post)memory?
- How might these vectors of travel disrupt competitive/pillarised memory?

This chapter will give an overview of my chosen texts, outline my approach to their analysis and discuss some limitations of this research.

2.1 Overview of Selected Texts

This dissertation is based on a literary analysis of three 21st century narrativisations of the Holocaust in Ukraine. I have defined these texts as postmemorial based on their creators' Ukrainian Jewish heritage and their personal approach to the topic, following the history of family members or close friends from the older generation through a combination of documentary research and 'imaginative investment'.[108] As this dissertation seeks to address the interrelated facets of travel and migration, I also sought out texts which a) were written by authors who are members of the Jewish diaspora from Ukraine, with either personal or familial experience of migration or displacement, and b) incorporate travel as a means by which to explore or propagate memory. Finally, as outlined in the previous chapter, I selected narratives from 21st century creators who belong to the third generation (or between the second and third generations) of Holocaust survivors, in order to contribute to a relative lacuna in the study of this group.

The primary sources which were selected are the semi-autobiographical novel *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, Katja Petrowskaja's literary memoir *Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten* (Maybe Esther: Histories) and the Ukrainian-British performance piece *Songs for Babyn Yar,* produced and performed by Dash Arts between 2020 and 2022.

[108] Hirsch, "Generation of Postmemory", 108.

Everything is Illuminated, published in 2002, takes the form of a fictionalised account of a trip Safran Foer made to Ukraine as a twenty-year old in search of the history of his Ukrainian Jewish grandparents.[109] The novel is narrated in part through letters from a fictional Ukrainian guide, Alex, who chronicles their search for Safran Foer's family and the disappeared Jewish village of Trachimbrod, also known as Sofievka. This contemporary narrative is interspersed with Safran Foer's imagined history of his ancestors' life in the village, from the late 18th century to the destruction of the village by the Nazis in 1942. The novel was selected due to its status as a postmemorial account of Ukrainian Jewish history told by a descendant of Jews forced to flee the Shoah in Ukraine, and for its inherent link with travelling memory as an account of a journey to and throughout Ukraine in search of 'illumination' about Safran Foer's family history.

Everything is Illuminated is well suited for comparison with my second source, ***Vielleicht Esther: Geschichten (Maybe Esther: Histories),*** Katja Petrowskaja's German-language literary memoir. Published in 2014, the text also chronicles the author's journey in search of family history; in this case the Jewish Ukrainian Petrowskaja's travels through Poland, Austria and Ukraine, on the trail of her family and their role in 20th century history, including the death of her great-grandmother at Babyn Yar. The text conforms structurally to Hirsch, Artwińska and Tippner's characterisations of postmemorial literature, with a 'collage-like' and disjointed structure, exploring Holocaust memory through meditations on travel, tourism and difficult heritage.[110]

Dash Arts' theatre piece ***Songs for Babyn Yar*** (also referred to throughout as *Songs)* represents a collage of languages and experiences, telling the story of Babyn Yar through songs and stories in Ukrainian, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Roma and English. Produced by a team of Ukrainian, Ukrainian Jewish and British Jewish artists in collaboration with dramaturg Yael Shavit and Babyn Yar survivor Rachil Blankman, the production is relevant for its portrayal of diverse stories about the Holocaust in Ukraine and its relationship to travelling memory as a touring production performed in Germany, Ukraine, the US and UK. I

[109] John Mullan, "Book Club Week Three: Jonathan Safran Foer on the origins of Everything is Illuminated", *The Guardian Website,* 20 March 2010, accessed July 1. 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/20/jonathan-Safran Foer-everything-illuminated.
[110] Artwińska and Tippner, "Postcatastrophic Aesthetics", 10.

was granted access to *Songs for Babyn Yar* via a video recording and script which Dash Arts kindly provided; these are not currently available to the public.

2.2 Approaches to the Texts

This dissertation takes the form of a comparative literary analysis of the three chosen narratives, investigating the vectors along which memories 'travel' in the texts, how these vectors allow for the processing of (post)memory, and the ways in which these conceptualisations of memory might disrupt 'national' or 'pillarised' conceptions of memory. My analysis is informed by the methodology of comparative literature studies, where literature is studied across national borders, time periods, languages and genre, based on the assumption that, as argued by Armand Niville: 'literatures are – diachronically and synchronically – so much intertwined that it seems almost arbitrary to view them separately.'[111] Comparative literary analysis is well-suited to investigations of cultural and travelling memory due to its cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach, focus on 'literature within the context of culture' and interest in the relationships between literature and other forms of artistic expression, including poetry and theatre.[112]

Comparative literary analysis has in some cases focused predominantly on comparison between various nation states or cultural traditions. [113] However, here I am more interested in using the texts to examine a variety of complementary or contradictory approaches to Holocaust memory and the ways in which they may interact or influence each other, as opposed to seeing the texts as representative of a specific national perspective. This approach is inspired by German literary scholar Reingard M. Nischik's vision of a comparative literature approach which 'advances from a Eurocentric, national- monocultural perspective to a postcolonial, inner- and international/trans-national, multicultural, global perspective, and from a formally aesthetically oriented focus on texts to a culture-oriented, socio-historically contextualizing, interdisciplinary orientation.'[114]

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[111] Rohib A. Sangia, "Comparative Literature: An Overview." OSF Preprints, September 30 2018, 1, https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/esmzh; Reingard M. Nischik, *Comparative North American Studies: Transnational Approaches to American and Canadian Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 18-19.
[112] Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application,* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 13-16.
[113] Mary Louise Pratt, "Comparative Literature as a Cultural Practice", *Profession* (2006): 33 https://www.jstor.org/stable/25595388.
[114] Nischik, *Comparative North American Studies*, 20.

Through a close reading of the three texts I extracted key vectors along which memories 'travel' in these narratives, or along which narrators must travel in order to access the past. Inspired by Erll's 'dimensions of movement', these vectors overlap with Erll's to some degree, encompassing notions of *carriers/people on the move* (physical travel) and *practices* (language, intangible heritage).[115] However, the combination of vectors which emerged from these texts is also specific to these narratives, Ukrainian Holocaust history and the post-Soviet context, including: physical travel, language/translation, technology, inter-generational travel, testimony/the archive, imagination, intangible heritage, inter-personal and multi-directional travel. Having extracted these vectors, I divided them into three key thematic areas, which form the three chapters of this dissertation.

Firstly, Travels through Space encompasses physical travel and the interlinked vectors of language, translation and technology. This theme relates most closely to travelling memory as laid out by scholars such as Erll and Rigney, and the chapter examines the role of travel, migration and displacement in how memories are carried or uncovered in these texts, as well as themes related to tourism and heritage.

Secondly, Travels through Time encompasses inter-generational travel, testimony/the archive and imagination. This chapter deals most directly with postmemoriality in the texts, examining how memories travel across time and through generations through testimony, media and intangible heritage, and the way that this process is influenced by migration and displacement. Following Hirsch's emphasis on the role of imagination and creation in postmemory, this chapter also explores how the metaphor of travel relates to the creative process as outlined in the texts.

Finally, Travels across Traumatic Borders relates to the multi-directional and inter-personal travel of memory, investigating how memories are shared and communicated across geographical borders and the artificial borders created by 'competitive memory.' Inspired by Rothberg's work on multi-directional memory, this chapter looks at the ways in which the texts explore or advocate for inter-personal communication, empathy and shared travel as a means to counter pillarised memory.

[115] Ibid., 12-13.

Limitations of the Analysis

As a qualitative, literature-based study, the themes and answers which emerge from this dissertation are not universal. In order to be able to carry out an in-depth analysis I draw on a small pool of sources, which while reflecting some important themes from the wider literature on the Holocaust in Ukraine, naturally only represent a small corner of this literary corpus. My language abilities have also limited the sources which I am able to analyse, leading me to texts originally written in English (*Everything is Illuminated)* and German (*Maybe Esther). Songs for Babyn Yar* incorporates a wide breadth of languages, crucially including songs sung in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ukrainian and Russian, with English subtitles or translations. The spoken sections of the script have been performed in both English and Ukrainian, so it is worth noting that I worked from the English-language version of the script, and am unable to speak to the ways in which the piece may have differed when performed in Ukrainian in Kyiv. The other major source limitation is that I was not able to see *Songs for Babyn Yar* in person; while I did have access to a video recording there may be details missed in the production, which was intended to for live viewing.

Finally, it is important to note that this dissertation was written during a period when the situation in contemporary Ukraine is changing rapidly due to Russian aggression. Russia's war against Ukraine has greatly affected the relevance and resonance of WWII and Holocaust memories in Ukraine and beyond, and this evolution is still taking place. As my sources were produced before the outbreak of full-scale war in 2022, this aspect remains mostly beyond the scope of this MA dissertation; However, I recognise the ways in which the war in Ukraine may influence the reception and interpretation of these texts in the present day and in the future.

Chapter 3

'From Town to Town': Travels in Space and Migration

'Far have I travelled, from town to town/And from village to village, with fire and flame/Deep in my heart' (Yiddish Folk Song performed in Songs for Babyn Yar)[116]

The 'fundamentally geographical nature of many of the events of the Holocaust' is reflected in the fundamentally geographical nature of *Maybe Esther, Songs for Babyn Yar* and *Everything is Illuminated,* which utilise travel across contemporary European space as a way to access and understand inherited histories of displacement.[117] This chapter explores how physical travel, and the linked vectors of technology and translation, are portrayed in these texts, arguing that travels in space are depicted as both productive and ambiguous means for processing (post)memory, fostering connection with the past while simultaneously contributing to renewed feelings of alienation and physical displacement for these second- and third-generation artists. Ultimately, travels to and between spaces of trauma serve not as the realisation of a final destination, but as the beginning of a creative and imaginative process. Mnemonic travel through space, language and technology also highlights the inherent internationalism of Jewish and post-Soviet memories, which cannot be fully comprehended on a purely national scale.

'Rootless Cosmopolitans': How do Memories Travel through Space?

As already mentioned in the theoretical overview, displacement was an experience shared by millions of Holocaust victims who were evicted from their homes across Europe, many to be transported to death camps or, in the case of Ukraine, murdered in public spaces ranging from town halls to municipal gardens.[118] Crucially, the displacement of Europe's Jewish community did not end in 1945. While Ukraine lost around 51% of its Jewish population during WWII, this figure continued to increase after the end of the war, as much of the surviving Jewish population attempted to leave the place where they had been persecuted.[119] Jewish culture became even more marginalised, in some cases disappearing completely as

[116] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar,* Performance Script. Accessed with kind permission of Dash Arts Theatre Company.
[117] Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering", 11.
[118] Ibid., 30
[119] Sergio DellaPergola, "Reflections on the Multi-National Geography of Jews after World War II', in *Postwar Jewish Displacement and Rebirth 1945-1967*, eds. Françoise Ouzan and Manfred Gerstenfeld (Westmont: BRILL, 2014), 15.

Jewish settlements disappeared from the map.[120] Meanwhile, many Jewish Displaced Persons spent months or even years living in temporary conditions in displacement camps, waiting to receive immigration documents for Palestine or the USA.[121] Many of those who did return to Ukraine after fleeing to Russia found themselves displaced from their old lives, their homes reoccupied or ransacked by their neighbours. Sidney Zabludoff estimates that only 20% of pre-war Jewish possessions were ever returned.[122]

Displacement therefore serves as a central theme and pre-condition for the postmemorial narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine being examined in this dissertation. With the exception of *Songs for Babyn Yar* performer Mariana Sadovska, the creators/performers of these narratives come from Jewish families living historically in Ukraine, with displacement a crucial aspect of this inheritance. In *Everything is Illuminated,* the fictionalised version of Jonathan Safran Foer travels from the USA to Ukraine to searching for the history of his grandfather, Safran, who lost a wife and baby in the Holocaust but was saved by his Ukrainian neighbours. We learn that his grandmother fled Ukraine before the war, losing most of her family; The two eventually emigrated to America, where they met. Displacement also lies at the heart of Katja Petrowskaja's family story, as she searches for the history of relatives scattered across Germany, Poland, Russia and Ukraine by the tides of history; during the research chronicled in *Maybe Esther,* she discovers previously unknown relatives in London and the United States. Her literary memoir explores displacement as an inescapable legacy of Eastern European Jews, caused by stigma and yet productive of further mistrust; at one point she discusses how Soviet Jews 'were stigmatized as homeless cosmopolitans, perhaps because they were killed regardless of borders, they who maintained forbidden relationships abroad.'[123]

Alongside forced displacement, more recent migration also serves as a crucial factor in the transfer of memories for Petrowskaja and the cast of *Songs for Babyn Yar.* Petrowskaja herself emigrated from Ukraine to Germany after the fall of the USSR, something she holds in common with the cast of *Songs,* who are all Ukrainian emigrants to Germany. Throughout

[120] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 196.
[121] Manfred Gerstenfeld and Françoise Ouzan, "Introduction – Diverging Groups of Jewish Displaced Persons", in *Postwar Jewish Displacement and Rebirth 1945-1967*, eds. Françoise Ouzan and Manfred Gerstenfeld (Westmont: BRILL, 2014), 2.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 188-189. This and ongoing translations from German my own.

the performance, the cast reflect on their own experience as members of the Ukrainian diaspora while incorporating the story of cast-member Svetlana Kundish's friend Rachil Blankman, a 93 year old who survived Babyn Yar by fleeing to Siberia, and today also lives in Germany.

The memories explored in these texts are therefore inherently memories of, or informed by, the travel, migration and displacement experienced by the older friends and relatives of the creators, with space serving as a crucial vector of travel for the transfer of memory. In the case of *Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar,* migration is not only an inherited phenomenon; the status of these creators as migrants themselves also speaks to the displacement caused by the fall of the USSR, recalling Marja Sorvari's argument that 'the concept of displacement symbolizes how the end of the Soviet Union as well as of socialist rule […] produced an existential experience of loss and estrangement'.[124] Post-Soviet countries saw a staggering population loss following the collapse of the USSR, with more than 6 million Ukrainian citizens leaving the country since Ukraine gained independence in 1991.[125] These postmemorial creators who experienced Soviet rule therefore potentially inherit a double-displacement; both the ostracization of their Jewish ancestors and the existential and physical displacement sparked by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their experiences, and the histories of their ancestors, encompass multiple countries and multiple languages; they cannot be limited to the 'container of the Nation State'.[126]

Displacement, migration and travel exist as distinct but interwoven vectors along which memories can travel in these narratives, with the creators of all three works bringing 'travelling memory' into the present either by travelling to access family memories (Safran Foer and Petrowskaja) or to bring the past to new audiences (Songs for Babyn Yar). Safran Foer and Petrowskaja's texts are both based on the real life journeys undertaken by the authors; Safran Foer in search of the Ukrainian village of Trachimbrod (also known as Sofievka) where his grandfather escaped massacre by the Nazis; Petrowskaja throughout Poland, Austria and Ukraine. Meanwhile, the cast of *Songs for Babyn Yar* travelled throughout Europe and to the USA as part of their performance tour, which they brought to

[124] Sorvari*, Displacement and (Post)Memory*, 4
[125] Li Ping Luo, "Demographic Divergence", *Radio Free Europe,* Accessed June 15. 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/27927989.html.
[126] Levy and Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory,* 89.

Berlin, London, Kyiv and New York in the hope of spreading awareness about Babyn Yar. These creators' voluntary displacement thus becomes a potential means through which the experiences of their ancestors may be better accessed and understood; on the personal level by them, and on a wider level by their audiences.

Travel is established as a potential means to create the 'living connection' with the past which Hirsch outlines as a goal of postmemory; a type of 'working through' with the potential to bring the past closer to the present.[127] Travelling through space becomes a way that the creator-protagonists of these texts can facilitate their own imaginative travel through time (a theme explored further in the next chapter), and restore the voices of relatives marginalised or displaced by history, left, like many in Petrowskaja's family, 'without faces or histories […] fireflies of the pasts shining small lights into the space around them, illuminating a few streets or events, but not themselves.'[128]

Performance photo, Songs for Babyn Yar (Used with permission from Dash Arts)

Travel through space as an aid to memory is in all three works closely linked with technology and language, which also serve as vectors along which memories travel in a globalised, trans-medial world.[129] *Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar*, the more recent of the texts, especially highlight the ways in which media technologies can move quickly across borders and are 'appropriated and localised as technologies of memory'.[130] A product of the Covid-19 era, *Songs for Babyn Yar* was created in part using Zoom as a virtual rehearsal room. Some members of the cast did not meet the director until the end of the rehearsal process, describing instead their 'long-distance

[127] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 42; Simona Mitroiu, *Women's Narratives and the Postmemory of Displacement in Central and Eastern Europe.* Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 7.
[128] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 25.
[129] Reading, "Memory and Digital Media'.
[130] Erll, 'Travelling Memory', 12.

relationship'.[131] The performance is interspersed with recordings of video-call conversations with 93-year old Babyn Yar survivor Rachil, whose story lies at the heart of the play and who was digitally present for much of the rehearsal process.[132]

Meanwhile, Petrowskaja relies on the connective power of technology to the degree that she conceives of her mobile phone as her 'umbilical cord to the universe', using it navigate, communicate with newfound relatives and connect to stories of the past, for example through the email newsletter she receives every Friday from a former Soviet prisoner of war.[133] As per the 'connective turn' of memory, technology allows memories to be transmitted faster than ever before, facilitating connection between mnemonic actors and communities across borders, something Petrowskaja draws our attention to when she wonders 'who reads these letters together with me, every Friday at 7AM in bed; who shares my Friday ritual with me?'[134]

The transcendence of time and space allowed by technology is in this case also a transcendence of language, thanks to the volunteers who give their time to translate these letters. Language as a vector for memory both facilitates and obstructs understanding in these texts. Petrowskaja's fluency in multiple languages facilitates her travel even as it complicates her sense of identity: 'I was lucky to be able to move in the gaps between languages, switching roles and points of view. Who conquered whom, who was one of mine and who was one of the others, which shore is mine?'[135] Conversely, the fictionalised Safran Foer of *Everything is Illuminated* is restricted by inability to speak and understand Ukrainian, reliant on tour-guide Alex to translate his own history back to him. In her article dealing specifically with the role of translation in Maybe Esther, Barbara Breysach suggests the relevance of Derrida's understanding of culture as a process of continuous translation, questioning cultural centrism and understanding travel as a 'basic cultural dynamic'.[136]

In the context of inherently multi-lingual histories, travelling can be understood as a basic dynamic for both the expansion and the understanding of Eastern-European Jewish and

[131] Dash Arts, "Songs for Babyn Yar: The Making Of", Dash Arts Podcast, accessed June 15. 2023, https://www.dasharts.org.uk/podcast-1/songs-for-babyn-yar-the-making-of.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther*, 249.
[134] Ibid, 241; Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor".
[135] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht* Esther, 115
[136] Barbara Breysach, "Lost and Saved in Translation: Katja Petrowskaja's *Maybe Esther: A Family Story"*, in Artwińska and Tippner, *The Afterlife of the Shoah*, 223.

Holocaust memories. The continuous process of translation which is necessary to understand the cultures of both the past and present also undermines the idea that memories can be the 'exclusive and unalienable property' of any one individual, group or nation, given the multiplicity of linguistic and cultural understandings necessary to access the past, and the speed with which technology can communicate narratives across space.[137]

'I won't get Lost': Processing Memory in the Ruinscape

The idea of travel as translation, and translation as travel, is applicable to all three texts, which present travel through space as a complex and fallible means of accessing difficult histories, leading to a complex mix of homecoming and displacement, connection and alienation. Petrowskaja constantly invokes the feeling of being lost, slipping through the cracks between languages and places. Meanwhile, a large section of Safran Foer's narrative is devoted to the difficulties of finding even a small trace of the village where his grandfather used to live, especially when reliant on others for cultural and linguistic translation. As Foer and his 'guides' drive in circles around the countryside, the locals are unable or unwilling to help them: 'not one of them knew where Trachimbrod was, and not one of them had ever heard of it, but all of them became angry or silent when I inquired.'[138] The internet, photographs and 'old maps' the travellers bring with them ('the places we're looking for aren't on new maps') consistently lead them astray.[139] Petrowskaja similarly clings to maps and physical objects in an attempt to ground herself in space, to ward off her feelings of displacement: 'I won't get lost here, I have several maps with me, even one from 2006 made for doing Sport Orienteering in Babyn Yar'.[140]

The tourist industry surrounding places of trauma both ameliorates and heightens the sense of being adrift. Safran Foer's Ukrainian companions initially treat him with derision at the same time as they seek to exploit him, with his tour-guide Alex expressing deep-held prejudice against Jewish tourists:

'Father toils for a travel agency, denominated Heritage Touring. It is for Jewish people, like the hero, who have cravings to leave that ennobled country America and visit humble towns

[137] Aleida Assman, "Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past", in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe,* eds. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay M. Winter, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 36, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048512027.
[138] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 114.
[139] Ibid., 62.
[140] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 183.

in Poland and Ukraine. Father's agency scores a translator, guide, and driver for the Jews, who try to unearth places where their families once existed… I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains. This is because all I knew of Jewish people was that they paid Father very much currency in order to make vacations from America to Ukraine.'[141]

These prejudices reflect a common issue experienced by roots tourists who are often regarded by locals as 'typical tourists' despite not self-identifying as such; what represents an important pilgrimage for postmemorial travellers may be interpreted very differently by the outside world. [142] Foer's behaviour and goals as a traveller are constantly questioned by his guides, who struggle to understand why he would leave a privileged life in the United States to traipse in circles around the Ukrainian countryside. Meanwhile, Petrowskaja sees herself set apart from the 'typical' tourists she encounters throughout her journey, shocked to encounter holiday sites while she searches for the stalag (prisoner of war camp) where her grandfather was incarcerated.

Not only is the journey challenging, but the travellers' encounters with their destinations are also highly ambiguous. When Safran Foer finally discovers the last traces of the village he has been seeking, all that remains of the community is an unnamed Jewish woman who devotes herself to preserving its memory as a self-imposed penance for surviving the massacre that took place there. At the site of the village itself there is nothing at all, as Alex describes:

'There was nothing. When I utter "nothing" I do not mean there was nothing except for two houses, and some wood on the ground, and pieces of glass, and children's toys, and photographs. When I utter that there was nothing, what I intend is that there was not any of these things, or any other things. "How?" the hero asked. "How?" I asked Augustine. "How could anything have ever existed here?" "It was rapid," she said.'[143]

Foer's experience at the site of former Trachimbrod is similar to what tourism scholar Sabine Marschall has described as 'encountering the ruinscape' – the experience whereby survivor travellers or their descendants travel to their country of origin only to be confronted with 'the destroyed or decaying remnants of their remembered home'.[144] Marschall suggests that this encounter often looks different for survivors, who may experience feelings of 'sadness or

[141] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated*, 3.
[142] Marschall, "Touring memories", 336.
[143] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated*, 184
[144] Marschall, "Touring Memories", 344.

desolation', and their descendants, who may instead feel a 'deep sense of authenticity' derived from the silence of the ruins, their 'lacks of explanation[…] interpretation […] and reconstruction.'[145] The importance of 'authenticity' to the fictionalised Safran Foer is clear in the way he collects earth from the site to return to his grandmother in the US, but this earth is his only memento; the physical artefacts he recovers from the survivor at the site are later stolen on a train, leaving him with almost 'nothing' to show for his travels.

The disappearance of Trachimbrod which lies at the heart of *Everything is Illuminated* can be contrasted with a different experience of 'disappearance' described by both Petrowskaja and the cast of *Songs for Babyn Yar.* The memoir and the performance piece incorporate reflections on the way that the valley of Babyn Yar seems itself to have moved, with Rachil in *Songs for Babyn Yar* reflecting on how there used to be 'no proper road there, no public transport, it was a difficult trip to make', while Petrowskaja is surprised to find that 'Babyn Yar is no longer on the outskirts of town – Today you can travel to the valley by subway. The city of Kyiv enveloped Babyn Yar long ago.'[146] Kyiv has moved to meet the valley, or the valley to Kyiv; what used to be an inaccessible outpost has been transported to the centre of the city, and yet remains discursively marginalised despite the seeming proliferation of memory on-site.

Visits to the valley are fraught with strangeness and contradiction. Petrowskaja's trip to Kyiv lies at the heart of *Maybe Esther,* while the *Songs for Babyn Yar* cast and director describe in a podcast how they visited the site in the midst of their performance tour. In both cases, as visitors well-informed about the history of Babyn Yar, its current state as a public park seems to be an affront in the face of the horror that took place there. Viewing the experiences of Petrowskaja and *Songs for Babyn Yar* cast member Svetlana Kundish side by side, the similarities are striking:

'*Was it really here? People are out walking, chatting, gesticulating in the sun… Would I prefer it, if today Babyn Yar looked like the surface of the moon? Exotic? Toxic? The people consumed by grief? Why don't they see what I see? ….] When I look today for the magnificent ravine […] I cannot find it. For ten years a brick factory pumped all its waste –*

[145] Ibid.
[146] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 183.

sand, clay and water – into the valley; The Soviet regime wanted to liquidate Babyn Yar as a place as well.'[147]

(Katja Petrowskaja, *Maybe Esther*)

'Um, so going to Babi Yar I wasn't sure that I have to go, I wasn't sure if I want to go. I was afraid of getting overwhelmed right before we had to play the show which is already emotionally very hard for me. But my worries weren't right. (Laughs) Because, because when you're there, the devastating and the ugly truth that, that Soviet Union regime managed to cover this place with concrete and create a park, where people are walking their dogs, where you cannot really make the connection between what happened here and the place that your feet are standing on, and where there is no space for silence and just being and remembering. It's a place which made me very sad for different reason, you know what I mean? [sic] '[148]

(Svetlana Kundish, *Dash Arts Podcast: Going to Kyiv*)

While the scholarship on Holocaust sites generally suggests that 'a certain level of respect and solemnity are seen as part of a suitable approach to the site', here educated visitors such as Kundish and Petrowskaja seem to be reading from a different script to those around them.[149] Performativity is a vital part of the analysis of touristic sites, including not just linguistic utterances but also symbolic acts such as gestures and salutations, but in this case radically dissonant performances co-exist in the same place.[150] In one especially surreal section of the text, Petrowskaja encounters a group of *Lord of the Rings* re-enactors using the valley of Babyn Yar as backdrop for the performance of an imaginary battle, their re-creation of a faux-medieval history at odds with the reality of the site as a grave for members of Petrowskaja's family less than one hundred years ago. In the face of the unexpected normality of the site, Petrowskaja and the cast/crew of *Songs for Babyn Yar* struggle to connect to the personal meaning the place holds for them; as director Josephine Burton puts it, 'I couldn't feel the memory. I couldn't feel the horror in that place.'[151] Instead of heightening a sense of connection to the past, interactions with the ruinscape here seem actively antagonistic to the act of remembrance.

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[147] Ibid., 186 & 189
[148] Dash Arts, "Songs for Babyn Yar: Performing in Kyiv", Dash Arts Podcast, accessed June 15. 2023, https://www.dasharts.org.uk/podcast-1/songs-for-babyn-yar-performing-in-kyiv.
[149] Thomas Thurnell-Read, "Engaging Auschwitz: an analysis of young travellers' experiences of Holocaust Tourism", *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice* 1, no. 1 (2009): 36, http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/11527.
[150] Cohen and Cohen, "Current sociological theories", 6.
[151] Dash Arts, "Performing in Kyiv".

The physical and emotional busyness of Babyn Yar, with its proliferation of competing monuments, dog-walkers and cosplayers, stands in stark contrast to the 'nothingness' at Trachimbrod, but the emptiness of the former Jewish village and the 'filling in' of Babyn Yar similarly result in obscuring the sites' difficult histories. Physical encounters seem at first to have failed as a vector of communication with the past. However, the texts produced by these postmemorial creators ultimately suggest that reaching these destinations is only part of the journey, and could even be construed as its beginning.

If, as Steinmetz suggests, the power of ruins lies in allowing their viewer to reconstruct what is invisible, the 'nothing' which lies at the end of Foer's journey serves in some ways as the starting point for the fantastical envisioning of the Ukrainian Jewish past which forms a crucial part of *Everything is Illuminated.*[152] The fictionalised Safran Foer begins the narrative in search of a concrete landscape, a decisive closure to the story of his grandfather. The finished form of this polyphonic novel, with its focus on imagination and narrative unreliability, suggests the author's shift from a focus on product to process. To follow Marschall, 'the erased cityscape becomes a blank canvas for the reconstruction of the past in the mind of the beholder.'[153] Similarly, Petrowskaja's encounter with Babyn Yar serves as a jumping off point for an imaginative journey into the last hours of her great grandmother, who may or may not have been called Esther.

For the team of *Songs for Babyn Yar*, their disappointing journey to the physical site of Babyn Yar also seems to serve as impetus and justification for their attempt to facilitate the travelling memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine through performance and personal connection. Addressing the cast during the podcast, Burton reflects on how the emotional emptiness she felt onsite reinforced the importance of the personal connection the team aimed to create through their art:

'I think I just felt that it was that personal connection that […] we had with Rachil and with this story, and you all have with the material in your own way […] I felt that that's the way to remember, not through great bits of concrete and parks. And so I felt, really kind of I think, going there and not having a personal – not feeling anything - made me realise the

[152] George Steinmetz, "Harrowed landscapes: White ruingazers in Namibia and Detroit and the cultivation of memory", *Visual Studies* 23 no. 3 (2008): 232. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860802489890.
[153] Marschall, "Touring Memories", 342.

importance and power of the work that we were doing to create something that felt more intimate and more personal.'[154]

The personal, creative nature of *Songs for Babyn Yar* is conceived as central to its power and vitality, affirming Sorvari's assertion that 'the connection of postmemory to the past […] is not created through the recollections of events and experiences as such, but through reflections and creative thinking about traumatic experiences'.[155] Using the inherently travelling medium of the touring production, the cast reflect throughout their podcast series on their desire to take audiences with them 'on this very difficult journey', spreading the word and encouraging them to discover more about the history of Babyn Yar on their own.[156] Through the media of music and performance, the site of Babyn Yar and its history is taken on tour, echoing Wylie's assertion that landscapes can not only 'be literally transported, but that values, beliefs and attitudes that work through and emerge from specific landscape practices and 'ways of seeing' can be seen to migrate through spaces and times'.[157] When the site itself does not feel like a place of memory, the travelling performance space becomes an alternative site of commemoration which can be shared by audiences across the globe, just as Petrowskaja and Safran Foer's texts condense their experiences into a portable, shareable and translatable form of memory; journeys to sites of trauma are not an end goal but the beginning of a process of continued motion.

Mitroiu suggests that **'**for the generation of postmemory, visiting physical spaces and places may become 'a medium of touching and entering the realms of memory of the past'[158] In these texts, however, 'touching' a vanished past proves difficult, and physical spaces do not always feel conducive to 'entering the realms of memory'. Vectors of memory associated with space, including physical travel, language and translation, are inconclusive, but they may be productive; interactions with the site are continued through the imaginative investment of novel- or memoir-writing, in the case of *Maybe Esther* and *Everything Is Illuminated*, or through performatively taking the site 'on tour' in an attempt to incorporate it within international memory, as with *Songs for Babyn Yar*. Horizontal travels therefore interact with

[154] Dash Arts, "Performing in Kyiv".
[155] Sorvari, *Displacement and (Post)Memory*, 6.
[156] Dash Arts, "The Making of".
[157] Rapson, "Topographies of Suffering*",* 20; John Wylie, *Landscape* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2007),122.
[158] Mitroiu, *Women's Narratives*, 20.

the postmemorial travels through time necessary to understand and ‘translate’ a complex past. This ‘vertical’ travel will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

"Nomadic with the Truth": Travels in Time and Imagination

'We are being very nomadic with the truth, yes? The both of us? Do you think that this is acceptable when we are writing about things that occurred?' (Everything is Illuminated)[159]

Having explored in the previous chapter how the physical realities of travel and migration serve as vectors for the transmission and reception of postmemory, this chapter examines how this 'horizontal' travel is closely associated in these texts with the 'vertical' travel of memory across time and through generations. If, as the cliché goes, 'the past is a foreign country', then – these texts suggest – the process of accessing it must have a lot in common with foreign travel, from linguistic misunderstandings to the process of getting lost.[160] Travel is invoked in the texts as a metaphor for memory and postmemory, while the imaginative process of filling the gaps left by media and testimony is also conceptualised as a kind of time travel by the creators and protagonists of these works. These imaginative journeys in memory, which Safran Foer explicitly links to travel with the phrase 'being nomadic with the truth', provide a powerful means by which postmemorial creators can supplement the process of physical travel, continue the creative journey begun at the physical sites themselves, and find resolution through 'aesthetic expression'. [161]

'Documents of Time': Testimony and Media as Vectors of Postmemory

The vectors by which memories are passed through the generations in these texts are varied and multi-faceted, but the most important include testimony, physical and mediated heritage and the intangible heritage of language and music, all of which must travel in both space and time in order to reach the second/third-generation creators of these texts. For Hirsch, postmemory is inherited through various forms of representation, including 'literature, photographs and eyewitness accounts', which are passed down through the generations and establish a 'living connection' with the past.[162] These 'eyewitness accounts' form an integral part of her own experience of postmemory; in her book *The Generation of Postmemory,* Hirsch discusses the impact of her parents stories on her own personal memory, describing

[159] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 179
[160] L.P. Harrison, *The Go-Between,* (London: Penguin, 2015), 1.
[161] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 111; Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 179.
[162] Sorvari, *Displacement and (Post)Memory*, 7; Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture*, 42.

how she was 'shaped by stories […] read and heard, by conversations [we] had had'.[163] The direct testimony of her family influenced her so greatly that she could 'recall particular moments from [her] parents' wartime lives in great detail' – to the extent that they seemed to constitute memories in their own right.[164]

To a certain extent, eye-witness accounts are also integrated into the texts being examined, especially *Songs for Babyn Yar,* which centres personal testimony through the story of Rachil Blankman, shared directly with the cast and later with the audience by means of a recorded video call. The importance attributed to Rachil's status as an eyewitness is highlighted in a conversation between her and Svetlana Kundish towards the end of the performance; when Rachil comments, 'Let me tell you, I doubt you learnt anything new', Kundish answers 'but it is not about novelty. It is about your story, your experience.'[165] Rachil is cast as what Aarons and Berger have described as guardians of the past, whose testimony and memories are passed to future generations, serving as 'a resistance to encroaching anonymity and obscurity'.[166] In this case, the connective potential of digital communication technology allows Rachil's memories to travel directly to both cast and audience, where they are translated via on-screen subtitles. Conversations with Petrowskaja's father also form part of *Maybe Esther,* with a crucial scene dealing with the dissonance between his account of escaping from Kyiv as a child and the records of the time.

However, the creators of *Maybe Esther, Everything is Illuminated* and *Songs for Babyn Yar* bear varied relationships to their families' pasts, demonstrating the ways in which 'greater temporal and special distance' from the Holocaust influences the ways in which memories travel and are received.[167] Hirsch belongs to what she termed 'the generation of postmemory' (elsewhere termed the second generation) - 'the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma', but the younger creators of these texts have a somewhat different experience.[168] Geographical and spatial distance make eyewitness testimony a difficult vector to access, with Petrowskaja reflecting that 'history begins when there are suddenly no more

[163] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture*, 4.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar.*
[166] Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History and Memory,* Illinois: Northwestern University Press (2017), 43.
[167] Erin Heather McGlothlin and Jennifer M. Kapczynski, *Persistent Legacy: The Holocaust and German Studies.* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2016), 5.
[168] Hirsch, "Generation of Postmemory", 106.

people to ask, only sources. I no longer had anybody who could answer my questions, nobody who could still remember these times.'[169]

Performance photo, Songs for Babyn Yar (Used with permission from Dash Arts)

The decreased access to testimony available to third-generation creators seems to foster a reliance on physical media. Postmemory as described by Hirsch is already a 'powerfully mediated' phenomenon, with memories transported through literature, film and photography.[170] For the new generation of postmemorial creators, left in some cases with 'no one left to question', mediation and the personal or familial archive may become a more vital part of mnemonic travel, even as time renders this archive increasingly difficult to understand. The important role of physical inheritance is highlighted vividly by the set of *Songs for Babyn Yar,* which is built almost entirely out of cardboard boxes, arranged in stacks around the performers, who sit in the centre of the stage. The set-up suggests both an archive and a house in the process of being packed up ready for moving, immediately evoking the processes of horizontal and vertical travel which are an integral part of the performance piece.

The first scene, during which shelves of vinyl records are projected onto the boxes, establishes these themes and plays on the double meaning of 'records' as performer Yuriy Gurzhy discusses how he brought his music collection with him when he migrated from Ukraine to Germany and the ways in which it provides a connection to both his former home and the past:

'Records make me happy. I really like to hold music in my hands. They are my link with the past. I am not after mint copies as record collectors call them. I enjoy records that have

[169] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 30.
[170] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*: *Writing and Visual Culture*, 33.

traces of time on them. Records are fantastic documents of time. Time leaves traces on them in different ways. '[171]

The intentional clutter of *Songs for Babyn Yar,* where boxes are used as a makeshift desk and screen for projected captions, song lyrics and hand-drawn images, has strong parallels with a scene from *Everything is Illuminated* which also outlines the role of physical inheritance to memory and postmemory. The sole survivor left at the site of Trachimbrod has attempted to archive the history of the disappeared village in her house, which is filled with stacks of boxes with increasingly esoteric labels: 'HAIR/ HAND MIRRORS, POETRY/ NAILS/ PISCES, CHESS/ RELICS/ BLACK MAGIC, STARS/ MUSIC BOXES, SLEEP/ SLEEP/ SLEEP, STOCKINGS/ KIDDUSH CUPS, WATER INTO BLOOD.'[172] The importance of collecting and keeping what she calls "Evidence. Documentation. Testimony" ties the woman to the fictionalised version of Safran Foer, who clings throughout the narrative to the few scraps of paper tying him to his grandfather: a yellowing photograph and a few old maps. Petrowskaja, too, has been left to make sense of 'scraps of memory, dubious notes and documents in distant archives.'[173]

Archival and familial records, carried across the world and through generations, often provide an unclear picture of a complex past. The impossibility of representation has been a central theme in the field of Holocaust studies, but in these texts the material difficulties of translation and comprehension are often as problematic as emotional comprehensibility, especially when trying to access the realities of everyday Jewish life before the Shoah. The effects of displacement and genocide leave sources incomplete and lacking; Safran Foer reflects on the unreliability of the historical sources which have reached the present and how those left out of certain documents by chance are denied a place in history: 'Only the various Trachimbroders who weren't, in Tova's estimation, worthy of an invitation were not at the reception, and hence not in the guest book, and hence not included in the last practical census of the shtetl before its destruction, and hence forgotten forever.'[174]

[171] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar.*
[172] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 150.
[173] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther*, 30.
[174] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 163

Meanwhile, the ways in which sources have travelled through the various 'translation zones' of Europe may leave them vulnerable to change.[175] Petrowskaja describes how the earliest source she could find on her family – an 1864 Hebrew-language article about her ancestor Simon Geller – now exists only in a later Russian translation and is therefore impossible to verify; today Petrowskaja finds herself translating the translation as she '[tells] the history of this family in German, without there ever having been a Russian original'.[176] Even as a Russian speaker, Petrowskaja sometimes finds herself stumped by the Cyrillic records of the past, stumbling over the notes and abbreviations scribbled on a family recipe: 'For a long time I could not understand what EBP.KBAC, which was written at the top of the piece of paper, could mean. I stared at this EBP, because the Cyrillic abbreviation could just as well stand for ЕВРопейский, JEWropejskij, europäischer, as ЕВРейский, JEWreysky, Jüdischer kvass…'[177]

While travel, displacement and migration can serve as means for the spread and internationalisation of memory, they therefore also create problems for third-generation creators trying to understand the media they have inherited. If, as argued by Marc Auge, 'memory is framed by forgetting in the same way as the contours of the shoreline are framed by the sea', then the inheritance or non-inheritance of certain languages, sources or modes of understanding frames what postmemorial protagonists are able to remember and understand.[178] Problems arise not so much from the difficulties of representing traumatic pasts as from the challenges of translating them.

'Something like Music': Remixing Intangible Heritage

Along with testimony and physical heritage, both of which prove challenging to interpret, an additional vector by which memory travels across generations in these texts is intangible heritage – 'the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities […] recognise as part of their cultural heritage'.[179] Most significantly, *Songs for Babyn Yar* explores the

[175] Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2006).
[176] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 53
[177] Ibid., 31.
[178] Quoted and translated by Jay Winter, "Thinking about Silence", in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*,* 2010), 3.
[179] UNESCO, "Questions and Answers: Intangible Heritage", UNESCO: World Heritage Convention, accessed June 15. 2023, https://whc.unesco.org/en/faq/40#.

archive of Jewish and Ukrainian folk-music, and *Maybe Esther* the sign-language that was passed down through her family. As established by the opening scene of *Songs for Babyn Yar*, the cast are collectors of music, whether that be 20th century records or historic Ukrainian and Jewish folk songs. The intangible heritage of music lies at the heart of the performance, which features a range of traditional and folk music in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, Ukrainian and Roma. Meanwhile, in *Maybe Esther* her family's tradition of teaching sign language in deaf-mute schools is inextricably linked in the text to their Jewish heritage; Petrowskaja reflects that 'Our Jewishness seemed to me to be deaf-mute, and deaf-muteness was Jewish'.[180]

To an extent, the texts' inclusion of these intangible forms of inheritance echoes the work of scholars such as Passerini and Hirsch, who argue that memory may be 'incorporated in gestures, images and objects', where they serve not only as 'recollection[s] of the individual's embodied memory [but also] of [their] feelings'.[181] However, while Hirsch has been criticised for portraying subsequent generations as 'passive receivers of their ancestors' traumas', which befall them through 'nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer', these texts instead show a range of modes of engagement with the intangible past which suggest that engagement with intangible heritage does not simply 'befall' these creator-protagonists; Engaging with it is a matter of choice and effort.[182]

In *Everything is Illuminated*, Safran-Foer writes that 'if we communicated with something like music, we would never be misunderstood […] This was the origin of Torah chanting and, in all likelihood, Yiddish—the most onomatopoeic of all languages'.[183] Here, music is cast as a universal language which does not need to be translated, communicating with feeling rather than words. However, in the specific post-Soviet context of *Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar,* we see how the system's attempts to clamp down on diversity has limited the ability of the protagonists to understand their own intangible heritage. While Petrowskaja sees sign language as part of her 'history and heritage' she is unable to understand it, separated from this heritage by the limitations placed on sign language in Soviet education settings, where 'it was considered a visible feature of a minority [where…] there were meant

[180] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 51.
[181] Sorvari, *Displacement and (Post)Memory*, 148.
[182] Roca Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory*, 19.
[183] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 203.

to be no more minorities'.[184] Meanwhile, in *Songs for Babyn Yar,* Gurzhy reflects on his alienation from Ukrainian language and traditions as a child, and his later realisation that the Soviet education system had deliberately alienated him from his mother tongue: 'I later realised that Ukrainian literature and culture at school was taught in a way that was as uninteresting as possible.'[185]

In this Soviet and post-Soviet context, it cannot be taken for granted that the embodied memories represented by language, 'signs' and 'gestures' will necessarily be able to travel through the generations unhindered.[186] *Songs for Babyn Yar* especially draws attention to the active engagement and effort required to connect with music and language as a medium of memory in an environment where both Jewish and Ukrainian culture was suppressed. The cast serve as not only performers, but also researchers, curators and creators, remixing rather than passively receiving the cultural heritage represented by music.

Much of the music in the show speaks powerfully to the darkness of the past, for example the traditional Hasidic song *Mipney Ma,* which asks 'Why, oh why did the soul descend from the highest height to the deepest pit?', and the final *Lullaby to Babyn Yar*, written and sung by Svetlana's teacher Nechama Lifschitz to commemorate the tragedy in 1959.[187] However, these songs are actively edited and re-arranged by the cast, who interweave their own melodies, lyrics and translations to bring new life to inherited music. The contrast between *Maybe Esther,* where sign language has been lost as a method of communication with the past*,* and *Songs for Babyn Yar,* where music is retrieved as a method of understanding, suggests that cultural heritage does not passively travel through the generations to be received; it is retrieved and made useable through effort and research.

Etkind and Blacker have associated the creative nature of postmemory with mourning rather than trauma, arguing that while both take the form of repetition, they relate to the past in different ways, with mourning an 'active, realistic and healthy' process which is '[limited] in time and intensity'.[188] While *Songs* moves in cycles, telling its story multiple times in different ways, the bounded nature of the performance promises an end to the repetition and

[184] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther*, 100.
[185] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar.*
[186] Sorvari*, Displacement and (Post)Memory,* 148.
[187] Dash Arts, "Programme: Songs for Babyn Yar".
[188] Blacker and Etkind, "Introduction", 9.

the promise of redemption, or at least what director Josephine Burton describes as an 'attempt to find some peace in the experience'.[189] To borrow from Stephen Frosch, the performance employs a form of creative repetition that 'moves things on by actively reworking the material that returns'.[190] Music is conceived not simply as a way to communicate with the past but as a coping mechanism, a means of 'working through' difficult heritage in an emotionally manageable and productive way. In their podcast series, the cast and director reflect on the link between music and emotion, with Gurzhy establishing a contrast between the warmth of the music and history books which are 'so calm, so abstract […] something which is not alive.'[191] Music becomes a medium through which the richness and pain of the past may be both preserved and processed, which Burton suggesting that 'music can open portals to that experience[…] the possibility of the kind of beauty within the music enables us to go to places of darkness, I think, and emerge from the other side[…] in a way different from other media'.[192] It is this emergence from the other side which distinguishes the performance of mourning from the performance of traumatic repetition; the music of the past may here be a tool to move towards a better future and fulfil the casts' aim of combating contemporary antisemitism.[193]

'Someone at the Window': Imaginative Time Travel

While *Songs for Babyn Yar* employs creativity through musical arrangement and composition, *Everything is Illuminated* and *Maybe Esther* employ an imaginative investment in the past which is often conceived of in terms of time travel. Jonathan Safran Foer has one of his characters refer to this imaginative gap-filling as 'being nomadic with the truth' making an explicit connection between travel, migration and imagination. Meanwhile, Petrowskaja at one point imagines herself as a traveller to the past who is forced to watch helplessly as her great-grandmother is murdered, to the point where she asserts 'I think that on the 29th September 1941 there was someone standing at the window.'[194] The creative process, often sparked by interaction with the sites themselves, grants postmemorial creators the power to

[189] Dash Arts, "The Making of".
[190] Stephen Frosch, *Those Who Come After. Postmemory, Acknowledgment and Forgiveness, (*Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 14.
[191] Dash Arts, "The Making of".
[192] Ibid.
[193] Dash Arts, "Performing in Kyiv".
[194] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 223.

fill in the gaps left by the postmemorial archive, even as they are left helpless to change the essential facts of violent pasts.

Both texts at some point depart from the imaginative potential created by historical uncertainties. When Petrowskaja realises her father cannot remember the name of a grandmother who may or may not have been called Esther, she begins to refer to her as 'Maybe Esther', spinning out a variety of scenarios exploring her last hours in Kyiv. Safran Foer's family history departs from an accident which *maybe* happened to a long-ago ancestor: 'It was March 18, 1791, when Trachim B's double-axle wagon either did or did not pin him against the bottom of the Brod River.'[195]

However, radically different approaches are taken to the use of imagination in creating a personal archive. *Everything is Illuminated* celebrates creative license through its imaginative and richly textured depiction of Jewish life in Ukraine, with Safran Foer departing from the sparse available sources to create a version of Trachimbrod's past replete with feuding rabbis, lavish parades and heated religious debates – 'a month before there had been the question of whether it might send a better message to the children to plug, finally, the bagel's hole'.[196] The fictionalised Safran Foer fills the gaps in his grandfather's biography with stories of sex, romance and the theatre, to the chagrin of his Ukrainian tour-guide and friend, Alex. The question of being 'nomadic with the truth' arises when Alex critiques his approach to writing about his ancestors' past, suggesting Safran Foer has strayed too far from the 'true path':

'We are being very nomadic with the truth, yes? The both of us? Do you think that this is acceptable when we are writing about things that occurred? If your answer is no, then why do you write about Trachimbrod and your grandfather in the manner that you do, and why do you command me to be untruthful?'[197]

This debate between Alex and Jonathan about the acceptable level of deviation from the realities of the past spills over into the present as they consider how to depict their own journey across Ukraine, with Alex insisting that Safran Foer's comic tone makes their 'ennobled voyage […] appear very normal and second rate.'[198] As the novel reaches its climax and the realities of the massacre at Trachimbrod are revealed, positions are reversed,

[195] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 8.
[196] Ibid., 12.
[197] Ibid., 179.
[198] Ibid.

with Alex begging Jonathan to once again depart from the truth to obscure the complicity of the Ukrainian community, including Alex's grandfather, in the massacre: **'**I beseech you to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good'.[199] Even as the characters' physical travels throughout Ukraine lead them ever closer to the 'truth' about the past, the novel continues to play with the ways in which the creative process might change or circumvent that truth, right up to the very end, where the ultimate destruction of the village of Trachimbrod coincides with a deterioration of language for almost two pages:

'. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .They stayed there . . . . . .
. . . . . .'[200]

In a novel which seems deeply invested in the power of language and imagination, this last section instead evokes Adorno's prescription about the barbarity of poetry after Auschwitz, the idea that the Holocaust is 'beyond words'. [201] While creativity and imagination can restore the Jewish past briefly to vivid life, they are powerless to change the ultimate horror of that past.

While in *Everything is Illuminated* the fictional version of Safran Foer often seems more interested in imagination than the 'truth', *Maybe Esther* sees Petrowskaja searching for the reality of the past in the face of her father's contradictory accounts. Attempting to interrogate the discrepancies between her father's written and spoken accounts of his evacuation from Kyiv and the murder of his grandmother, Petrowskaja projects herself back to Kyiv in 1941, 'straining all the muscles of […] memory, imagination, and intuition'.[202] She becomes obsessed with her father's story of a ficus plant which he rescued from Kyiv in a bathtub, describing how in his diary from the time 'the ficus in the tub is missing. When I detect the loss, the earth gives out beneath me. The fixed point of my story is gone'[203]

In this case, Petrowskaja's father is the one being 'nomadic with the truth', a truth that has been changed and translated over many years and retellings, leading Petrowskaja to reflect

[199] Ibid., 145.
[200] Ibid., 270-271.
[201] Vice, "Beyond Words"; Sue Vice, "Trauma in Holocaust Literature", in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, eds. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 372.
[202] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 221.
[203] Ibid.

that ‘we owe our lives to a fiction’.[204] Fiction here is invested with an almost godlike power; a ‘pinch of poetry’ becomes ‘the very thing that makes memory truth’.[205] As Petrowskaja attempts to project herself into the past she observes this scene ‘like God out of the window of the neighbouring houses […] I sit up there and I see everything’.[206] And yet, just like Safran Foer, the power of her imaginative time machine is limited – no matter how much she tries to see the faces of her great-grandmother, and the officers who murdered her, she is unable to, just as she cannot escape the fact of her death. The creative process is a powerful means to fill gaps in the archive, but its power is limited and often doubted by the creators themselves. As Petrowskaja asks at one point – ‘You say that your text is the desperate attempt to establish [a] connection. But will it work?’[207]

‘The idea of transmitting intelligence from the world of the dead to the world of the living’ has been identified by translators Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky as both a major literary trope and a key part of translation.[208] In the process of travel between past and present depicted in *Everything is Illuminated, Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar,* this transmission emerges as a complex phenomenon where things may be lost in translation, changed or discarded, especially as the generation of ‘eyewitnesses’ begins to disappear. Ernst Van Alphen has critiqued the term postmemory for ‘using a term that implies connection to describe a situation that is really disconnection’, but here connection and disconnection are present in equal measure; testimony, artefacts and intangible heritage illuminate as much as they confuse.[209] Creativity, research and imaginative investment must be brough to bear to re-discover, and potentially remix, the past.

The complexity of the past makes it challenging to uncover alone; *Songs* relies on the varied linguistic and cultural expertise of its cast, while both Petrowskaja and Safran Foer at some points find themselves reliant on translators and guides to unlock the meaning of inherited media and testimony. The final chapter will explore the ways in which these connections

[204] Ibid., 220.
[205] Ibid., 219.
[206] Ibid., 221.
[207] Ibid., 174.
[208] Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky,, “Voices from the Edge: Translation, Memory and Mourning” in *The Voices of Babyn Yar* by Marianna Kiyanovska, trans. Oksana Makysmchuk and Max Rosochinsky, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), Kindle, 17.
[209] Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, “Memory on the Move”, 9-10 .

across borders and different histories facilitate not only the processing of postmemory, but the potential undermining of pillarised memory.

Chapter 5

'The Pain of Others': Travels across Traumatic Borders

'The Polish tragedy caused him pain, as though he might only recognise his own pain in the pain of others, in a kind of translation' (Maybe Esther)[210]

As explored in the first chapter, the relationship between Ukrainian and Jewish memory has often been reduced to the idea of 'competing victimhoods'.[211] While there remain cases of direct antagonism towards Jewish memory in Ukraine, for instance in the still-present trope of the 'Jewish Yoke', Chebotarova has argued that among the general public the marginalisation of Jewish history is caused by a number of factors including 'shield memory', lack of knowledge, and the prevalence of pillarised memory – 'the belief that each population's group is the custodian of its own heritage.'[212] Meanwhile, the Holocaust by Bullets has also been marginalised on a more global scale as part of the lesser-known 'dispersed Holocaust'.[213]

In dealing with this doubly marginalised topic, these texts counter pillarised memory in multiple ways, travelling across traumatic borders to address the ties between Jewish and Ukrainian history, exploring the role of travel in establishing more multi-directional memory approaches, and discursively re-incorporating the dispersed Holocaust within European and Trans-Atlantic Holocaust memory. At one point Petrowskaja reflects on how her father, a Ukrainian Jew, 'grieved magnanimously for Poland, – for the sewers, the Warsaw Uprising, the Polish partitions'.[214] She portrays her father's grief as a 'kind of translation', or what English translator Shelley Frisch termed an 'act of translation', through which he is able to process the pain of his own past.[215] This chapter will examine how such 'acts of translation' lie at the heart of all three postmemorial texts, and how themes of connection and communication allow the texts to subvert the paradigms of competitive memory.

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[210] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 93.
[211] Huener, "Shared History".
[212] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 198; Maria Montague, "For the first time, there is a Jewish Ukrainian Identity", *Ukrainian Institute London* February 12. 2019, accessed July 2. 2023, https://ukrainianinstitute.org.uk/for-the-first-time-theres-a-jewish-ukrainian-identity-and-this-is-something-to-cherish-summary-of-jews-and-new-ukraine-a-seminal-discussion-in-london/.
[213] Sendyka, "Holocaust by Bullets".
[214] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 92 – 93.
[215] Ibid.; Katja Petrowskaja, *Maybe Esther*, trans. Shelly Frisch (London: 4th Estate, 2018), 80.

'Together and not Apart': From Pillarised to Shared Memories

Translation lies at the heart of *Everything is Illuminated* in the relationship between the fictionalised version of Jonathan Safran Foer and his Ukrainian translator and eventual friend, Alex. Their budding friendship is initially hindered by a variety of factors, including difficulties in communication – Alex's English is shaky, Jonathan does not speak Ukrainian – and Alex's ignorance regarding Jewish history. However, through shared acts of translation and travel the two ultimately move towards a closer understanding, working together to translate their experiences together into the words which become the novel. This journey also sees Alex moving from a more pillarised to an increasingly shared form of memory.

At the start of the novel, Alex is characterised as at best unaware and at worst intolerant when it comes to Jewish history. When Jonathan suggests that the Ukrainians of the past 'were terrible to the Jews', Alex demands that he take it back, arguing that 'it does not say this in the history books.'[216] The early stages of the book see the two consistently talking at cross purposes:

'"I think you are mistaken," I told the hero. "I don't know what to say." "Say that you are mistaken." "I can't." "You must."[217]

Alex initially sees himself as disconnected from the history of this 'very spoiled Jew' while acknowledging that he has never met a Jewish person before. This resonates with Chebotarova's research suggesting that voids in awareness about Jewish history in Ukraine result in part from a lack of contact with the Jewish community, which today is under-represented in most areas of the country.[218] However, throughout the course of their travels throughout western Ukraine – what Alex himself ultimately refers to as their 'ennobled voyage' – we see Alex gradually transformed by his encounters with the 'ruinscape' of Trachimbrod and with Jonathan himself, as the two come to understand one another better.[219] Crucially, a transition takes place from speaking over Jewish history to creating discursive space for it – 'With my silence, I gave him a space to fill'.[220] Through their journey to and beyond the site of the Trachimbrod massacre, the two explore the means by which they 'can

[216] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 62.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 193.
[219] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 179.
[220] Ibid., 157

bring each other safety and peace', a process which takes place not just at the site of trauma itself, but at roadside cafes and railway stations.[221] The potential of redemption between the two, especially through their shared encounter with difficult heritage, hints at the possibilities of wider Jewish-Ukrainian reconciliation which may be accessed through travel to the sites of the Holocaust by bullets, existing at the geographical centre but the discursive margins of Ukrainian space.

Their journey therefore serves not only as a means for Jonathan to access the history of his own family, but for Alex to develop a new relationship with a history that he previously considered alien to him. An important part of this journey is the revelation that his grandfather, who also accompanies them as a driver, was directly implicated in the Holocaust by Bullets, betraying his Jewish best friend in order to save himself and his family. Memory here works both horizontally and vertically as Alex learns more about the Jewish past from Jonathan, while also discovering more about his family's complicity in that past, breaking down his attempts to construct a border between Jonathan and his own histories. Echoing Rothberg's rejection of 'pure and authentic' identities which delineate our relationships to the past, we see the blurring of identities between the two protagonists the longer they spend time together and become implicated in each other's histories, with Alex reflecting near the culmination of the novel that:[222]

'We are talking now, Jonathan, together, and not apart. We are with each other, working on the same story, and I am certain that you can also feel it. Do you know that I am the Gypsy girl and you are Safran, and that I am Kolker and you are Brod, and that I am your grandmother and you are Grandfather, and that I am Alex and you are you, and that I am you and you are me?'[223]

Alex's words resonate with one of the earliest artistic works addressing the Holocaust in Ukraine – Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko's *Babi Yar*, in which he aligned himself discursively with the Jewish victims of Babyn Yar:

Я —	I —
каждый здесь расстрелянный старик	Am every old man shot down here
Я —	I —
каждый здесь расстрелянный ребенок.	Am every child shot down here. [224]

[221] Ibid., 214.
[222] Rothberg, "Multidirectional Memory", 4.
[223] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 214.
[224] Yevtushenko, "Babi Yar".

Protesting against antisemitism in Soviet society, Yevtushenko chose to align himself with Jewish identity, an inherently multi-directional approach which is here consciously or unconsciously emulated by Alex, who comes to realise the relevance of Jewish history to his own troubled heritage and identity. The box of artefacts recovered by Jonathan from the site of the massacre is reconceptualised as part of a shared history for which Alex and his grandfather must also take responsibility: 'I know how momentous that box was for you, for *both of us'* (emphasis mine).[225]

Claiming this 'difficult knowledge' – what Yurchuk defines as 'knowledge about a group's past which is hard to position in the realm of glory, pride, or victimhood, in other words, in the space of positively laden affect' – coincides in the text with Alex taking responsibility for other areas of his life, including standing up to his abusive father.[226] The 'illumination' granted by the novels' journey is difficult and unsettling, but equally relevant for both the Jewish and Ukrainian protagonists; Alex's embrace of difficult knowledge empowers him to tackle patterns of generational violence within his own family. Meanwhile, Jonathan and Alex's complex friendship provides a model for reconciliation on a cross-border but inherently inter-personal, as opposed to trans-national, scale.

'Double Heritage' : Connecting the Jewish and Ukrainian Pasts

Meanwhile, *Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar* bring Ukrainian and Jewish histories closer together through their exploration of what it means to share and travel between both identities. In *Maybe Esther,* Petrowskaja follows these connections and disjunctions through physical space, traversing the distance between the valley of Babyn Yar and the site of her Ukrainian grandfather's internment at Mauthausen. *Songs for Babyn Yar* moves fluidly between the Ukrainian, Yiddish and Hebrew languages, emphasising the inherent internationalism and multilingualism of the artists' heritage. As one answer to the question raised by Rothberg of 'how to think about the relationship between different social groups' histories of victimisation', the texts remind us of the overlap between 'different' histories in

[225] Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated,* 23.
[226] Yurchuk, "Reclaiming the Past", 109.

the post-Soviet space and beyond, including the existence of dual Ukrainian and Jewish heritage and identity for some individuals.[227]

Both texts draw attention to the artificial separation of histories and identities in post-socialist space, exemplified by Petrowskaja's visit to Warsaw where 'as a tourist you have to decide which catastrophe you are concerning yourself with, the Warsaw Uprising or the Ghetto, as if there had been two Warsaws'.[228] Touristic structures in Warsaw comply with Tomsky's conception of the 'trauma economy', where trauma is repackaged and sold to tourists as a transcultural capital and commodity, with thick borders constructed between different histories.[229] Being forced to 'choose' between identities and pasts is also discussed in *Songs for Babyn Yar,* associated with a specifically Soviet mindset where national identity was instrumentalised to enforce homogeneity. Gurzhy reflects that when asked about his nationality at school he was forced to choose between his mother's Jewish and his father's Ukrainian identity in a system that did not recognise the potential to be both, only later learning to embrace this dual heritage.

This heritage requires grappling with the double history of victimisation represented by both the Holocaust and Holodomor. During the 21st century, successive Ukrainian regimes have been criticised for condensing these distinct events into a 'single genocide of the peoples of Ukraine', with little attention given to Ukrainian collaboration in the Shoah, especially during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko.[230] However, *Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar* remind us that for some Ukrainian Jews, the two catastrophes do exist as part of a single inheritance. While Petrowskaja's text focuses predominantly on the Shoah, she also reflects emotively at one point on the destruction wrought by the Ukrainian famine; the suffering of Ukraine as part of the Soviet Union looms over the text just as Petrowskaja recalls the 'monstrous' secret service headquarters looming over her childhood.[231] Part of *Songs* also sees the cast reflect on the context of Ukrainian trauma, including the Holodomor, Executed Renaissance and suffering under the Nazis.[232] The Soviet suppression of the Ukrainian

[227] Rothberg, "Multidirectional Memory", 1.
[228] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther",* 104.
[229] Tomsky, "From Sarajevo to 9/11".
[230] Stefan Rohdewald, "Post-Soviet Remembrance of the Holocaust and National Memories of the Second World War in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 44, no.2 (2008), 173, https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqn007.
[231] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 148.
[232] Uilleam Blacker, "Martyrdom, Spectacle and Public Space: Ukraine's National Martyrology from Shevchenko to the Maidan", *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no.2 (2015), 278.

language and culture is acknowledged alongside the erasure of Jewish languages and history; Ukrainian, Yiddish and Hebrew music are simultaneously brought to life in the performance as part of a dual cultural heritage.

In this case the discussion of Ukrainian suffering coexists with, rather than erases, the acknowledgment of Ukrainian Holocaust complicity. Asserting that 'there is no justification for collaboration', Sadovska reflects on the antisemitism she discovered within Ukrainian cultural traditions such as Vertep theatre, and the history of OUN collaboration with the Nazi occupation. However, the performers also acknowledge how OUN activists were victimised in their turn through the story of Babyn Yar victim Olena Teliha, which raises the question – 'When we remember the victims of Babyn Yar, should we also remember her'?[233] The question is left open, as is Sadovska's personal refection: 'How do I deal with this double heritage? To be a Victim and a Collaborator?'[234] However, *Songs* seems to find one potential answer in the way the project uses music and translation as tools for learning more about the heritage of the 'other'. The performance process saw Sadovska collaborate with the Ukrainian Jewish cantor Svetlana Kundish to arrange new, multi-lingual versions of Yiddish and Hebrew folksongs which are also sung in Ukrainian, while the whole cast, including Sadovska, sing together in Yiddish towards the end of the performance.

These acts of translation serve as a way to engage with difficult knowledge and counter a pillarised approach to history, while also providing a model for how Ukrainian culture can more ethically incorporate and interact with Jewish history in Ukraine. The casts' approach to traditional Ukrainian and Jewish music is inherently multi-directional, with the musical histories polyphonically fused together rather than treated as separate. Especially evocative is the musical piece '*Alleluya Nigun',* a synthesis of a Ukrainian Orthodox *Alleluya* with a Hasidic Nigun. The cast describe how they 'fantasised' about the ways in which these musical traditions might have influenced each other, weaving separate melodies together to explore 'the full breadth of Ukrainian-Jewish music and connections'.[235] While the synthesis between these two pieces might spring from fantasy, the fusion of musical traditions in *Songs for Babyn Yar* speaks to the inherent multi-culturalism of the Ukrainian past prior to the Holocaust and Soviet deportations, transporting us back to a Kyiv where, to borrow the words

[233] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar.*
[234] Ibid.
[235] Dash Arts, "The Making of".

of Maksymchuk and Rosochinsky, Ukrainian, Russian, Yiddish and Polish '[mixed] together, their roots entwined like the roots of trees in the same neck of the woods.'[236] In travelling between these languages and histories, the performance demonstrates the possibility of a space with 'real estate' enough for both Jewish and Ukrainian difficult history, while still acknowledging the specifically Jewish suffering of the Shoah.[237]

'A Ravine Near Kyiv' – Incorporating the Dispersed Holocaust

As well as exploring the potential connections between Ukrainian and Jewish history, these texts also work to reincorporate the Ukrainian Holocaust by Bullets into European and Transatlantic memory, resisting the pillarization of disparate aspects of Holocaust memory. *Songs* cast member Gurzhy discusses in the Dash Arts podcast how he wanted to inspire German, British and American audiences to find out more about what happened at Babyn Yar, while Petrowskaja draws her readers attention to German ignorance about the Holocaust in Ukraine as she plans her journey to Kyiv. When she requests books on the subject in a German library, the librarian asks if she instead means 'Baby Jahr' (baby year).[238] This attitude is captured in a quote used by Petrowskaja from the 1974 film *Der Nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* (Naked Man on the Sports Field):

'I'll say a word and you tell me what it means, yes? – Babi Yar –Does it have something to do with Indians? –Not quite. –What then? –It's a valley near Kyiv.'[239]

Babyn Yar is here situated as something mysterious and exotic; even in a country which has made Holocaust memory central to its identity, the Holocaust by Bullets is granted less 'transcultural value' than more well-known Holocaust stories and locations, making it challenging for even the victims' descendants to find and access.[240] Petrowskaja is able to challenge this marginalisation using her grasp of the German language, the 'language of the enemy', to transport memories of the Holocaust in Ukraine across Europe to Germany, an aspect of the text already addressed in more detail in Jessica Ortner's 'The reconfiguration of the European Archive in contemporary German-Jewish migrant literature'.[241]As Ortner reflects, Petrowskaja draws her reader's attention to the disjunction between Western and

[236] Makysmchuk and Rosochinsky,, "Voices from the Edge", 24.
[237] Rothberg, "Multidirectional Memory", 18.
[238] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 183.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Tomsky, "From Sarajevo to 9/11", 51.
[241] Jessica Ortner, "The reconfiguration of the European Archive in contemporary German-Jewish migrant literature", *Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 28, no.1 (2017): 38-54, https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.65912.

Eastern European memory; while Kyiv 'is as far away from Berlin as Paris', the mental distance appears much greater.[242] The cast of *Songs* articulate a similar experience, reflecting in their podcast that while the topic of the Holocaust is more 'present' in Germany overall, awareness of Babyn Yar and the 'Holocaust by Bullets' is relatively lacking, something they hoped to tackle through the project.

Both Petrowskaja and *Songs* cast member Mariana Sadovska connect this process with European identity. Petrowskaja reflects during her visit to Mauthausen that it allows her to 'imagine the European parliament better than in Brussels; Anyone who was in a concentration camp may also be in the EU.'[243] Written before Ukraine was granted candidate status to the EU in June 2022, the author here ties both Jewish and Ukrainian identity to the European Union as she visits the site where her Ukrainian grandfather was held as a prisoner of war by the Nazis. Meanwhile, Sadovska discusses the progress being made in Ukrainian Holocaust memory by 'a new generation of people who are ready, aware of their roots, but also humans, Europeans'.[244] If Holocaust memory represents a key facet of the European identity project, Ukrainian Holocaust memory is here discursively situated within European memory. And in a context where Ukraine has faced scholarly and diplomatic criticism from the EU side for '[having] a long way to go to develop [its] national memories of the Holocaust', these texts draw attention to the fact that while this may be true, the countries of the European Union also have a long way to go to incorporate memories of the 'dispersed Holocaust'.[245]

Opening up to the trans-Atlantic space, *Songs for Babyn Yar* was also performed in New York, while Safran Foer's novel works to transport the erased village of Trachimbrod back into American Holocaust memory. As the author himself has acknowledged, few narratives and artistic depictions now refer to this 'lost town', which has ceased to exist on contemporary maps.[246] *Everything is Illuminated* plays a small part in addressing this, creating space for Trochimbrod within the field of American Holocaust literature. Bringing his stories of Trochimbrod home, albeit in a highly fictionalised form, granted the topic wider

[242] Ibid., 48.
[243] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 268.
[244] Dash Arts, "The Making of".
[245] Kucia, "The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory", 114.
[246] Jonathan Safran Foer, "Preface: Next Year in Trochimbrod", in Avrom Bendavid-Val, *The Heavens are Empty: Discovering the Lost Town of Trochimbrod* (New York: Pegasus, 2010): xi – xvi.

public attention in a variety of media; a film version of the novel was released in 2005 while in 2010 Safran Foer wrote the introduction for new history of Trochimbrod *The Heavens are Empty,* by Avrom Bendavid-Val.

The aftermath of the novel saw the discursive transportation of historical Trochimbrod to the USA through the recreation of its community. Safran Foer's mother, Esther, reflects that the book 'gave [her] some of Trachimbrod, some of the shtetl, some of [her] family', and has spoken to the Jewish magazine *The Forward* about the ways in which the book tour created personal connections between their family and other Jewish-Americans related to Trochimbrod.[247] As Safran Foer wrote in 2010, 'the Diaspora cannot be run backward. And yet here we are, readers of this book, citizens of that place'.[248] Through its discursive migration back to the USA, readers of Trochimbrod's history are invited to become its 'citizens', fostering engagement not only with the village's past, but with the contemporary community represented by the Jewish diaspora from Ukraine.

Ukrainian Jewish identity thus lies at the centre of *Everything is Illuminated* and the community it created, but Safran Foer also offers up the story of Trachimbrod to new audiences, while the novel itself shows the power and relevance of its history for non-Jewish Ukrainians such as Alex. Petrowskaja also begins from a point of personal and familial Ukrainian Jewish identity but appears to gradually expand this space. While claiming at multiple points during the text that she needs relatives to feel connected to history, Petrowskaja also consistently undermines her own assertions about the importance of familial links, ultimately opening up Babyn Yar to all as a space of remembrance when she writes:

'Babi Yar is part of my history, I was offered no other, but I am not here for that reason, at least not exclusively. Something draws me here because when it comes to victims there are no strangers. Everybody has someone here' (emphasis mine). [249]

Songs for Babyn Yar also moves between the personal and the more expansive, exploring a variety of Jewish experiences of Babyn Yar while also opening up to Ukrainian and Roma suffering, including singing at one point in the Roma language. The cast reflect in the podcast that 'the truth about Babyn Yar is not that it happened eighty years ago, the truth about Babyn

[247] Marissa Brostoff, "Novel Illuminates Memories of Lost Shtetl", The Forward Online, Jan 30. 2008, accessed July 1. 2023, https://forward.com/news/12585/novel-illuminates-memories-of-lost-shtetl-01219/.
[248] Safran Foer, "Preface", xiii.
[249] Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther,* 184.

Yar is that it is still happening all over the world'. While the Ukrainian Jewish experience is its primary focus, the performance creates a space which resonates with Hirsch's broadest definition of postmemory: 'a space of remembrance more broadly available through cultural and public, not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance'.[250]

To conclude this final chapter, these texts portray or represent a variety of human interactions with the potential to counter pillarised or antagonistic formats of memory, ranging from the literary depiction of relationship-building across borders represented by *Everything is Illuminated* to the literal ways in which memories travel across European space in *Maybe Esther* and *Songs for Babyn Yar.* Ukrainian and Jewish memory are brought closer together through explorations of dual heritage, oppression and the importance of Holocaust acknowledgment for the contemporary Ukrainian community. Meanwhile at the European and Trans-Atlantic levels the texts highlight an aspect of the Holocaust which has been marginalised in these wider spaces, discursively transporting forgotten sites back into European and American memory. While initiated at the personal or familial level, all three texts gradually expand from this point of Ukrainian Jewish identity to offer up wider spaces of remembrance facilitated by creative acts and inter-personal exchange across borders.

[250] Hirsch, "Projected Memory", 8-9.

Conclusion

'Roots and Branches'

I would very much like to continue to be, to see the future, to experience each new day. Things are constantly changing, we use new words, the meanings are evolving, we gain new knowledge. (Rachil Blankman, Songs for Babyn Yar)[251]

How do memories travel in diasporic postmemorial narratives of the Holocaust in Ukraine? This dissertation has argued that these postmemorial texts show memories travelling across three key vectors: Travels through Space, incorporating physical travel, technology and language; Travels through Time, including inter-generational memory, inherited testimony and media, and imagination; and Travels across Traumatic Borders, referring to multi-directional and inter-personal mnemonic travels as a means to counter pillarised memory.

Over the course of three chapters structured around these key areas, the dissertation addressed how these vectors are portrayed as means for processing (post)memory. I argued that while travels through space can serve as a starting point for processing postmemory, encounters with the 'ruinscape' at sites of trauma often raise more questions than they answer, acting as impetus for a creative process which revitalises the past through imaginative 're-mixing' or 'time travel'. Travels through space also serve as means by which memories can be transmitted to wider audiences and sites themselves can be discursively transported across space and time through literary and performative acts. In the second chapter, I linked the idea of travelling memory more directly to Hirsch's concept of postmemory, exploring how third-generation Holocaust survivors' physical and temporal distance from the events of the Holocaust impacts how they inherit or process memories, especially in the post-Soviet context. The postmemorial texts in question depict the inter-generational travel of memories as a challenging process, where active effort, commitment and imagination are required to translate and interpret a now-distant past. The final chapter analysed the ways in which the texts move across mnemonic borders through their focus on dual Ukrainian Jewish heritage and the creation of more multi-directional memory through shared processes of travel and translation. I argued that these texts create the potential for discursively reincorporating the marginalised sites of the 'dispersed Holocaust' into European or American Holocaust memory, while *Songs* and *Everything is Illuminated* also provide potential models for Jewish-

[251] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar*.

Ukrainian reconciliation through personal exchange and increased cultural understanding and celebration of the 'other'.

This multi-directional, cross-border travel also related to my third sub-question: How might these vectors of travel disrupt the idea of competitive/pillarised memory? I showed throughout the dissertation that Ukrainian Jewish history is portrayed as inherently international in these texts, making it only recoverable through translation, travel and cross-border personal interaction. This approach challenges the belief that clear barriers can be established between 'different' national histories, or that each population should serve as 'the custodian of its own heritage.'[252] All three works depict a reality in which inter-personal exchange across borders is an essential part of the travel of memory in the modern world, far more than a trans-national memory taking place at the level of diplomacy between nations, or even a relatively vague 'cosmopolitan' memory.

Shared experiences of travel and translation are shown as means to foster more multi-directional and open forms of memory, something evoked by Marianna Sadovska in the Songs for Babyn Yar podcast when she describes a new generation of Ukrainians who are 'ready, aware of their roots' but also: 'humans, Europeans, we don't want any more to be catched in the cage of very narrow, nationalist thinking about ethnicity[…]to have strong identity and strong connection to your own roots and at the same time to be very open and not catched in this narrow understanding of roots' [sic].[253] Here Sadovska connects the verticality of the postmemorial connection to the past with the horizontal nature of travelling memory; roots for reaching down, and branches for reaching out. This research has demonstrated how these vertical and horizontal journeys are connected, with travels through time, space and across traumatic borders both complementing and complicating the processing and transmission of postmemory.

Through investigating these texts through the lenses of travelling memory and postmemory, I hoped to contribute to a scholarly lacuna in studying the cultural depiction of the Holocaust by Bullets and the Ukrainian Jewish diaspora, while advocating for the benefits of cross-border approaches to studying Ukrainian Jewish history and heritage, a topic which has often been restricted by the limiting model of 'competitive memory'. Looking to the future of this

[252] Chebotarova, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust", 198; Montague, "Jewish Ukrainian Identity".
[253] Dash Arts, "The Making of".

topic, cross-border and diasporic approaches to Ukrainian culture and memory may become increasingly relevant in the contemporary context; Russian aggression continues to force Ukrainians to flee their country, while the country is also working to develop closer European and transatlantic links. The effects of the conflict on Jewish Ukrainian identity, which Marina Sapritsky-Nahum suggests may be seeing a contemporary renaissance, are also yet to be fully investigated.[254] As Rachil Blankman tells the audience at the end of *Songs for Babyn Yar,* 'things are constantly changing, we use new words, the meanings are evolving, we gain new knowledge.' [255]

However, with conflict and displacement currently shaping contemporary life in Ukraine, the imaginative arts will likely continue to play a role in processing the violence of the past and the present, as in *Maybe Esther, Everything is Illuminated* and *Songs for Babyn Yar*. If displacement, as articulated by Sorvari, is 'aligned with the conditions of voicelessness, placelessness and marginalization', the deliberate journeys undertaken in these texts instead aim to enact an anti-displacement of marginalised history, re-centring it within personal, community or international histories.[256] Through travelling through space, time and across traumatic borders, the postmemorial creators of these texts give imaginative voice to people displaced by history, creating space for their stories while acknowledging the complexity of fully 'translating' traumatic pasts.

[254] Marina Sapritsky-Nahum, "Putin's War and the Making of a Ukrainian Jewry", *LSE Blogs,* March 2. 2022, accessed July 2. 2023, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2022/03/putins-war-and-the-making-of-a-ukrainian-jewry/.
[255] Dash Arts, *Songs for Babyn Yar.*
[256] Sorvari, *Displacement and (Post)Memory*: 4.

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