

Re/Locating Transcultural Memory: Engaging with Place-
based Memory as a Form of Worldliness in Contemporary
German-language Literature

Jade Marie Lawson

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines five examples of contemporary German-language literature written by authors who have migrated to Germany from countries in the former Soviet Union and explores how these texts reconfigure the relationship between place and world through their recreation of transcultural memory narratives. It demonstrates how the focus in contemporary Memory Studies on how memories travel in our interconnected globe has resulted in insufficient attention being paid to memory's rootedness and to the facilitating role of 'place' in the reception, adaption and recreation of transcultural memory. In response, this thesis develops an original theory of place-based memory which marries theories of memory with concepts of place as developed in Human Geography scholarship. This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the thesis and a literature review of the theoretical fields that have inspired this research, whilst chapter two explores the role played by literature in the reproduction of cultural memory. The first chapter of close reading, chapter three considers how place-based memory is mobilised in two novels by Olga Grjasnowa in order to highlight the need for new forms of political cosmopolitanism focused on individual rights within and beyond the state. The fourth chapter explores how in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* the protagonist's engagement with place-based memory can be seen as enacting a form of rooted, ethical cosmopolitanism. Chapter five shifts the focus from anthropocentric to planetary forms of cosmopolitanism in exploring how, in Nellja Veremej's novels, the excavation of place-based memory represents the simultaneous excavation of (world-)ecological or ultimately planetary memory. In chapter six, this thesis concludes with a discussion of how, in their imagination and attempted enactment of more worldly forms of consciousness, the selected novels can be seen as examples of a new world-making literature that is written in the German language.

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Chapter One

Re/Locating Transcultural Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Place-based Memory

From the increase in mass migration, to the constant movement of wealth, products, and trends within the flows of global capital, to the alarming rate of climate change, our daily lives in the twenty-first century are unquestionably shaped by forces beyond our immediate sphere of existence. As Ulrich Beck has recognised, this situation ‘urgently demands a new standpoint, the cosmopolitan outlook, from which we can grasp the social and political realities in which we live and act’ beyond what he refers to as ‘the national outlook’ or ‘methodological nationalism’.¹ Academic research has certainly not been slow to acknowledge this need and over the past decades scholars working in various fields have turned their attention to concepts of transnationality, transculturality, and globalism, as well as to the relationship between the micro- and macro-levels of human existence: the neighbourhood and the locality on the one hand; the globe, the world, even the planet on the other. The cosmopolitanised world is characterised by mobility within and between these scales of existence. Lives are increasingly being led across national borders and in response scholarship has emerged in many disciplines that attempts to reconceptualise how individuals today forge new identities and communities that are simultaneously local yet borne of mobility and which bypass received notions that the ‘imagined nation’ is the primary source of collective identity formation.² Indeed, for many migrant individuals who feel marginalised by their exclusion from ethno-nationally based models of collective identity, the locality in which they live can offer a space in which to foster and express rooted, cross-cultural identity formations that bridge the gap between the local and the distant and which bypass the nation as a structuring principle.³ In light of this, in this thesis I will build upon scholarship from the disciplines of Memory Studies and Human Geography in order to explore how the relationship between place and world can be (and in many ways is being) productively reconfigured without necessary mediation by the nation.

This is not to say that the rhetorical construction of the nation as home to a collective of ethnically-homogenous individuals possessing supposedly shared cultural values is a thing of the past, however. Indeed, the emergence of new and diverse identities and communities has done little to assuage fears of the threat of the constructed ‘Other’; rather, this threat has

¹ Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, trans. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 2.

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³ See Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 135.

often been amplified in public discourse. The paradox of what Beck terms our ‘World Risk Society’ is that, despite transnational co-operation being a necessary precondition of acting against the now truly global nature of economic, security, and environmental threats, national governments have often responded instead with a tightening of national borders in the name of protecting their citizens – or rather, those individuals who are perceived to fit within a narrow ideological definition of the national populace.⁴ Conditions of globalisation do not automatically result then in an elective cosmopolitan outlook amongst national governments or sections of the general public.⁵ Instead, bureaucratic and literal barriers are being erected at sovereign borders to prevent the entrance of those who do not fit outdated, homogenised and increasingly ethnicised ideas of who ‘belongs’ in a respective national populace. Such essentialist nationalism denies both present-day, diverse reality, as well as historical forms of social, political, and cultural interconnectedness, in favour of a selective or even falsified narrative of the past that presents ‘the nation’ as a self-contained, natural entity rather than as the social construct that it is.

In this thesis, I am concerned with how these contradictory processes of cosmopolitanisation are reflected upon in contemporary German-language literature written by authors born in the former Soviet Union, as well as how this literature begins to reconceptualise the relationship between (local) place and world via a remediation of memory. In many ways, this literature demonstrates a cosmopolitan outlook that not only moves beyond the concept of the nation but in fact seeks to write this concept out entirely. As a country, Germany is becoming increasingly demographically diverse. Indeed, Angela Merkel recognised this fact in 2015 in her counter-pronouncement of Helmut Kohl’s famous 1991 assertion that ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’.⁶ Beginning with the influx of intended temporary workers under the *Gastarbeiter* programme in the 1960s and 70s, Germany has seen successive waves of immigration over recent years. This has included the arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union, refugees fleeing the violent breakdown of former Yugoslavia, and more recently the arrival of refugees from the Middle East, most notably Syria. According to the United Nations Population Fund, Germany is in fact host to the

⁴ This term is taken from Beck’s book of the same name: Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Malden: Polity Press, 1999).

⁵ See Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, pp. 33-34 for his differentiation between cosmopolitanisation as a forced condition of living in the interconnected, globalised World Risk Society and the cosmopolitan outlook as a way of actively viewing oneself as both part of a shared, threatened world and as simultaneously part of local communities and histories.

⁶ ‘Merkel: “Deutschland ist ein Einwanderungsland”’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 June 2015 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/angela-merkel-sieht-deutschland-als-einwanderungsland-13623846.html>> [accessed 16 November 2016].

second-largest number of international migrants worldwide, behind only the United States.⁷ In 2017, out of a population of 82.8 million people, 19.3 million had some form of ‘migration background’, 10.6 million people lived in Germany as *Ausländer* and 1.7 million people were living in Germany as asylum seekers.⁸ Yet, at the same time as its population is becoming increasingly cosmopolitanised, vestiges of nationalism that had been strictly taboo since the catastrophic event of the Holocaust are increasingly edging into the social and political mainstream. This was made clear by the recent success of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) which became Germany’s third-largest political party in the September 2017 elections, gaining 12.6% of the vote.⁹

The success of the AfD has largely been to the expense of Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, with the rise in far-right sentiments being seen in part as a response to Merkel’s decision to open Germany’s borders to millions of refugees fleeing the war in Syria. In interviews, Merkel frequently alluded to the German Nazi past and the Holocaust when speaking of her decision to welcome large numbers of asylum seekers, emphasising that this history impelled Germany to demonstrate its commitment to human rights, primarily that of granting refuge to those whose lives are threatened by war and persecution. The memory of the Holocaust unsurprisingly still looms large over German society and is often invoked as a moral lesson or rather moral warning as to the tragic potential consequences of ethnic nationalism. As Imré Kertész asserts: ‘The Holocaust is a value because it has led to incalculable knowledge through incalculable suffering, and hence represents an incalculable moral reserve.’¹⁰ In this case, the past and memory are mobilised not as vehicles for exclusion but rather as impetuses to extend a cosmopolitan welcome to Others rendered vulnerable by force of circumstance. In this thesis, I consider to what extent memory can be re-written and mobilised as a productive force in the imagination of new forms of collectivity that are simultaneously local yet extend beyond national boundaries and are thus more suited to an increasingly cosmopolitanised world. Such a consideration is vital in the context of the rise in far-right, nationalistic sentiments in Europe and elsewhere

⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International Migration Report 2015: Highlights* (New York: United Nations, 2016), p. 1

<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf> [accessed 16 November 2016].

⁸ ‘Migration & Integration’, *Statistisches Bundesamt*
<<https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/MigrationIntegration.html;jsessionid=B59E19EC0933DA621C2CA22D08E54F28.InternetLive1>> [accessed 3 December 2018].

⁹ ‘Alle Ergebnisse und Grafiken der Bundestagswahl im Überblick’, *Die Welt*, 25 September 2017
<<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article168883713/Alle-Ergebnisse-und-Grafiken-der-Bundestagswahl-im-Ueberblick.html>> [accessed 18 June 2018].

¹⁰ English translation quoted in Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 111. Original German source: Imre Kertész, *Die exilierte Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 8.

which often spring from a nativist desire to keep out rhetorically-constructed outsiders and ward off the mobile threats they have been made to symbolise in certain strands of political discourse.

Germany is no different in this regard. Indeed, Merkel faced political criticism from within her own party and its sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) for her generous refugee policy, leading to her government reinstating border controls only a few weeks after her insistence that Germany was open to refugees. The influx of largely Muslim immigrants from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East has been capitalised upon by the AfD and the protest group Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida), who, in the aftermath of sexual assaults perpetrated by foreign men on women in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015, have suggested that all (male) Muslim refugees pose a potential danger to German women and to western values. The CDU's losses and AfD's gains in the 2017 federal elections led to the emergence of a largely unstable coalition between the CDU, the CSU and the Social Democrats, with repeated threats made by the CSU to withdraw support for Merkel's refugee policies. In the context of such political tumult, in October 2018, Merkel announced that she would not stand for re-election as Germany's chancellor.

Amongst the general public, sentiments towards Merkel's refugee policy have been equally mixed. Open hostility has erupted in some quarters, with acts of violence being perpetrated against individual refugees and asylum-seeker hostels being attacked. In September 2018, neo-Nazi violence erupted in Chemnitz following the murder of a Cuban-German by an Iraqi and a Syrian. In the aftermath of the murder, large anti-refugee rallies were held which were, however, met by pro-democracy counter-demonstrations.¹¹ Meanwhile, in the October 2018 state elections in Bavaria and Hesse, the increase in support for the AfD was matched by significant gains for the pro-refugee green party. Such polarisation of opinion amongst the general public and the resulting political splintering seen in Germany is today a recognisable trend in many nations.

In the current climate, we urgently need to find new ways to overcome such polarisation in order to collectively respond to global threats which require equally global solutions. This, in turn, requires thinking through how individuals from all manner of backgrounds relate to their immediate environment and – importantly – how they may imaginatively transgress their locality and come to think of themselves as part of a supra-national, even world community. In this thesis, I argue that examining and re-conceptualising the notion of 'place' can play a vital role in this re-imagining. It may seem paradoxical to suggest that a

¹¹ Louise Osborne, 'Chemnitz to Host Anti-racism Gig as Germans Urged to Take a Stand', *Guardian*, 2 September 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/02/chemnitz-to-host-anti-racism-gig-as-germans-urged-to-take-a-stand>> [accessed 3 December 2018].

new conceptualisation of a world community requires a return to specific, local places. Yet, as many sociologists have recognised, the increasing interconnectedness of local and supra-local scales of existence in a globalised age means that we cannot speak of locality without reference to the globe or world and vice versa.¹² Local places are the social arenas in which people live their daily lives, in which they encounter or ignore Otherness, and where they see concrete, local evidence of wider global threats. Many issues in our contemporary world may at first seem difficult to conceptualise and respond to by virtue of their sheer scale, for example, migration crises or climate change. Seeing such challenges – as well as their causes, consequences, and the ensuing responsibilities they entail – as being tied together by the fact of their happening between various places at various times allows us to plot their local effects in relation to one another, as well as their cumulative global effect. In this, complex issues are re-scaled to a level that is more accessible and conceivable. Similarly, focusing on local expressions of global threats allows for the recognition that while we inhabit one world, various social, economic, and political factors mean that we are all positioned differently in relation to both global power structures and to each other as twenty-first century citizens. We can consider how individuals within specific localities relate to and are affected by global issues by virtue of their positioning in *a* particular place at *this* particular moment. Understanding both how we are positioned by local and supra-local power structures, as well as how we position ourselves within these structures and in relation to Others seems a necessary precondition to conceiving of potential new collectivities that extend beyond national borders.

How then can place be seen as a productive arena in which to foster a sense of cross-boundary collectivity and how does this relate to memory? By drawing on theories from the discipline of Human Geography, I suggest in this thesis that individuals are not just affected by the places they inhabit; they simultaneously have an effect on these places by virtue of the novel, affective, and ultimately personal connections they build with their local surroundings. Throughout a person's life, they may make affective connections with a number of specific places. These connections do not automatically vanish when a person leaves a place. It follows then that past places and experiences come to bear on the connections an individual makes with a new place which they come to know. Individual memory is therefore a vitally important consideration when using the idea of 'place' to conceptualise how individuals transgress their locality and develop a supra-local identity: people relate to a specific local place through experiences and memories from other places

¹² See, for example: Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2000); Roland Robertson, 'Glocalisation: Time-space and Homogeneity-heterogeneity', in *Global Modernities*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 25-44.

and other times. In turn, places themselves hold traces of the pasts to which they have borne witness, visible through physical markers such as dilapidated or abandoned buildings, bullet holes in walls or the marking of a particular location as a place of loss through the laying of flowers or personal mementos. Such pasts-in-place must also inevitably be accounted for in processes of relating to and coming-to-know a particular place. I argue that charting an agent's interaction with place(-memory) is an ultimately productive, novel way of theorising how new constellations of transcultural memories are created by individuals in their daily lives. As a consequence, I argue that how individuals use memory-in-place to transgress closed local or national narratives of memory may prove to be a productive example of the imaginative leap necessary to conceive of oneself as part of a larger world community. In this thesis, I explore the productive potential of the relationship between place and memory-making in the imagination and creation of new forms of collective identity. I thus attempt to conceptualise how the concepts of place, memory, and identity may be brought together and mobilised in the process of psychical boundary-crossing and the fostering of a 'cosmopolitan outlook in which people view themselves simultaneously as part of a threatened world and as part of their local situations and histories'.¹³

While theories of 'place' in Human Geography provide an in-depth examination of how individuals forge a symbiotic, affective relationship with their localities, Memory Studies has largely been more concerned with theorising the detachment of memory from specific places in favour of focusing on the creation and travel of what have variously been termed as transnational, transcultural or global memories. In marrying and developing ideas from both fields, in this thesis I develop an original theoretical account of the relationship between place and memory, locality and world. In order to do so, I will draw on select works of contemporary German-language literature by authors born in the former Soviet Union, namely *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012) and *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (2014) by Olga Grjasnowa (born in Azerbaijan), *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) by Katja Petrowskaja (born in Kiev, modern-day Ukraine) and *Berlin liegt im Osten* (2013) and *Nach dem Sturm* (2016) by Nellja Veremej (born in Russia). In their content, themes, and aesthetics the authors of these novels hold a mirror up to the contemporary world in which they are writing, exploring its complexities and contradictions. Each writer of the works analysed has personal experience of migration; namely, moving from countries in the former Soviet Union to Germany. While being careful not to carelessly label these texts as 'migrant', 'minority' or 'intercultural' literature (or any other problematic categorisation that suggests a reading of these novels solely through their authors' biographies), I do contend that their authors' transnational life experiences are to an extent reflected in their

¹³ Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 48, emphasis added.

undoubtedly equally transnational literary perspectives. In this, these novels are ideal works through which to examine the conditions, flows, and paradoxes of a contemporary globe that is at once increasingly interconnected yet also increasingly closed. Equally, each novel examined in this thesis shares a common preoccupation with ‘place’; namely, with how individuals move from and into specific places and how they forge novel place-connections that often break down received conceptions of national belonging and identity. The imaginative leaps and connections made by their authors between seemingly disparate places and memories mark these novels out as prime examples of how we can break down reified forms of thinking and look beyond the nation to re-imagine ourselves as part of a larger, world community. While these novels share a common language, I argue that they are not examples of ‘German literature’ per se; rather, they are examples of a new world literature that happens to be written in the German language.

In the rest of this chapter, I seek to introduce and contextualise the central premises of this thesis. I will provide a literature review of recent scholarly developments in the field of Memory Studies, as well as expound upon what I believe to be the limitations of research on transnational, transcultural, and global forms of memory. Drawing on scholarship from Human Geography, I attempt to correct Memory Studies’ preoccupation with how memory travels by demonstrating how, even in an increasingly mobile world, memory retains some sense of ‘rootedness’. Building on this assertion, I seek to develop an original, interdisciplinary theory of place-based memory and consider how such place-based forms of memory may function as vehicles to imaginatively connect with Others.

Literature review

Memories on the move: from the national to the transnational

Over recent decades, there has been a proliferation of research on memory, with many scholars focusing on the paradigm-shattering event of the Holocaust as a catalyst for such research. Dominick LaCapra asserts for example that the horrific events of the Holocaust crossed a threshold beyond which ‘the standard opposition between uniqueness and comparability is unsettled’ meaning that, after this event, we must redefine how we approach history and memory.¹⁴ Much research has focused on how to memorialise this unique historical event, particularly as times passes and the number of first-hand witnesses diminishes. As Azade Seyhan recognises: ‘Perhaps the single greatest force behind the rise

¹⁴ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.7.

of memory studies in the last two decades [the 1980s and 1990s] has been the anxiety about the eventual erasure of the memory of the Holocaust.’¹⁵ Elsewhere, scholars such as Andreas Huyssen have suggested that, in the context of the increased mobility and compressed temporality of the ‘global postmodern’, memory represents a way ‘to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload’.¹⁶ The mobilisation and study of memory is seen to perform two major roles: firstly, to remember or bear witness to past traumas and their victims who must never be forgotten; secondly, and not unrelated to the first role, to provide a sense of anchoring or orientation in a seemingly fragmented, confused present and/or to provide moral direction for the future. Indeed, it is this latter role which forms the basis of Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider’s conceptualisation of the Holocaust as a form of cosmopolitan memory.¹⁷

The study of memory is not, however, a purely recent phenomenon. Indeed, in her 2011 article ‘Travelling Memory’, Astrid Erll recognises three distinct phases in the development of Memory Studies as a discipline.¹⁸ The first stage comprises work on the notion of collective memory and begins in the early twentieth century with the pioneering work of Maurice Halbwachs, who asserted that personal memories are formulated in – and are to an extent constrained by – our immediate social context.¹⁹ For Erll, a second phase of ‘national memory studies’ began with the publication of Pierre Nora’s writings on *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984-1992).²⁰ This phase came to end with what Andreas Huyssen has termed the age of the ‘global postmodern’ which, for the cultures of Western societies, ‘marks a significant shift in their cultural memory which can no longer be safely secured along the traditional axes of nation and race, language and national history’.²¹ In line with the wider turn towards ‘transcultural studies’ in academia, Erll recognises a third wave of Memory Studies scholarship at the beginning of the twenty-first century which seeks to account for this change in circumstance. Moving away from the ‘methodological nationalism’ that Ulrich Beck diagnoses as characteristic of earlier scholarship focused on developments in ‘modern society and modern politics’, scholars are now viewing memory as a transnational,

¹⁵ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 40.

¹⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 9; p. 7.

¹⁷ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, *Parallax*, 17 (2011), 4-18.

¹⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925).

²⁰ Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 6.

²¹ Huyssen, *Twilight*, p. 9.

transcultural or even global phenomenon.²² Succinctly put, memory is no longer viewed on the same terms as it has been in the past. As the editors of the 2017 collection *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* express it:

Previously thought to be anchored in particular places, to be lodged in particular containers (monuments, texts, geographical locations), and to belong to the (national, familial, social) communities it helped acquire a sense of historical continuity, memory has, in the last few years, increasingly been considered a fluid and flexible affair. In a globalized world, memories travel along and across the migratory paths of world citizens.²³

In late 2017, Stef Craps contended that we are perhaps entering a fourth phase of Memory Studies: one which is in a very early stage of development and which seeks to respond to our positioning in the age of the so-called ‘Anthropocene’, the period of profound human influence on our planet. Elsewhere, Craps has previously criticised the focus in contemporary Memory Studies on event-based forms of trauma, which he argued is highly Eurocentric and fails to account for ‘collective, ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence’ that disproportionately affect non-Western and minority groups.²⁴ For Craps, such an event-based approach to memory is equally incapable of apprehending the slow, environmental violence wrought upon our planet and its inhabitants. Perhaps for this reason, he argues, Memory Studies has rarely engaged with the notion of the Anthropocene, remaining problematically anthropocentric and failing to interact in any useful way with the more ecological notion of the ‘planetary’ (as opposed to the more economic or social concepts of the ‘global’ or ‘transnational’).²⁵ This fourth phase is, for Craps, yet to be mapped out or conceptualised. The research undertaken in this thesis is located at this juncture between the third and fourth waves of development in Memory Studies: the third and fourth chapters consider the transnational or transcultural status of contemporary memory as characterises the third wave; the fifth chapter meanwhile intervenes in the mapping of a fourth wave of development by suggesting how we may productively bring together the disciplines of Memory Studies and Environmental Studies in order to not only be able to conceive of the planetary and the non-human but in fact to see them as agents and bearers of productively resistant memory.

²² Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 24.

²³ *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, ed. by Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), p. 1.

²⁴ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 4.

²⁵ Stef Craps and others, ‘Memory Studies and the Anthropocene: A Roundtable’, *Memory Studies* (2017), 1-18 <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1750698017731068?journalCode=mssa>> [accessed 5 January 2018] (p. 3).

Theorising memory in the global age: the overlooked significance of ‘rootedness’

The field of Memory Studies is not short of rich, theoretical models which seek to grapple with the complex nature of memory in an increasingly mobile globe. As Astrid Erll has recognised, ‘transcultural memory’ has recently emerged as the dominant research perspective in this field and consists of ‘a focus of attention [...] directed towards mnemonic processes unfolding *across* and *beyond* cultures’.²⁶ A brief overview of the dominant theoretical models of memory in recent decades appears to affirm this claim, from Andreas Huyssen’s take on ‘diasporic memory’,²⁷ to Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider’s ‘cosmopolitan memory’, Michael Rothberg’s ‘multidirectional memory’,²⁸ Astrid Erll’s ‘travelling memory’, Max Silverman’s ‘palimpsestic memory’,²⁹ as well as influential work on transnational, transcultural, and global memory by prominent scholars such as Aleida Assmann and Ann Rigney. These theories have in common a focus on the deterritorialisation of memory – that is its uprooting from specific spaces, sites, and objects – and its subsequent travel beyond its originary national or cultural realm of articulation. As a transcultural process, memory is seen to be constantly mobile, moving between specific places, scales, and agents and being consistently transformed by and through this perpetual motion as it enters into new social realms and comes into contact with other memorial narratives.

Borrowing Anne Fuchs’ concept of political ‘impact events’, Astrid Erll recognises that it is often such traumatic happenings which seem to ‘develop a great centrifugal force’ in the realms of memory.³⁰ This is because, she argues, memories of traumatic events such as the Holocaust and Apartheid represent shared narratives that have a ‘virtually global reach – and an equally broad range of localized appropriations’.³¹ Indeed, the circulation, articulation, and adaption of traumatic memories is a central concern for many scholars working on transcultural memory and this travel is often seen to have positive, productive results in terms of facilitating conversations about difficult memorial events. As Michael Rothberg asserts in his conceptualisation of ‘multidirectional memory’, the recognition of traumatic memory’s travel and ultimate interactivity allows us to look beyond its potentially

²⁶ Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 9, emphasis in original.

²⁷ Andreas Huyssen, ‘Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts’, *New German Critique*, 88 (2003), 147-64.

²⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Michael Rothberg, ‘Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings: The Case of Post-Holocaust Germany’, in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* ed. by Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 123-46.

²⁹ Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

³⁰ Anne Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing: Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

³¹ Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 13.

antagonistic, competitive nature and conceptualise it rather as ‘subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing; as productive not privative’.³² Elsewhere, Levy and Sznajder have argued that the deterritorialisation of the traumatic memory of the Holocaust and its subsequent entrance into, adoption by, and reinterpretation within various national contexts (of memory) have made of it a ‘cosmopolitan memory’ that has become a ‘moral touchstone in an age of uncertainty’ and which has the potential to ‘become the cultural foundation for global human rights politics’.³³

While it is undeniable that memory does indeed travel, it is equally undeniable that it also has a tendency to remain rooted or to be re-rooted as its agent travels and re-settles in a new environment. However, the apparent conflation of the terms ‘transcultural’ and ‘mobile’ detectable within contemporary Memory Studies means that insufficient attention is often paid to memories that can be described as both transcultural and (re)rooted. As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, local places offer an ideal context in which to explore the simultaneous travel and rootedness of memory, home as they are in the contemporary world to heterogeneous inhabitants who bring to these localities experiences and memories from other places and times. That memory’s travel across borders logically involves its travel between particular places and localities remains largely overlooked in the field of Memory Studies. Memory is not an agent in and of itself; it travels with the individuals to whom it belongs – and these people are inevitably ‘rooted’, however temporarily or precariously, in a particular place at a particular time. As Susannah Radstone astutely reminds us: ‘even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever *instantiated* locally, in a specific place at a particular time.’³⁴ For Radstone, it is these local instantiations of memory that have yet to be explored in any detail in Memory Studies. In light of this recognition, in this thesis I address Radstone’s concerns by rethinking the discipline of Memory Studies in approaching the study of memory through the lens of its locatedness in and between specific places. While some memory scholars have indeed considered that memory can be held in or by particular places, the full implications of this recognition have yet to be thought through in any significant depth. This is particularly true in light of its significance for our understanding of how average individuals draw upon and productively contribute to the re-writing of memory as they travel between and settle in different places. In what follows, with reference to contemporary memory scholarship I briefly consider the importance of grounding travelling

³² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 3.

³³ Levy and Sznajder, p. 18; p. 3.

³⁴ Susannah Radstone, ‘What Place is This? Transcultural Memory and the Location of Memory Studies’, *Parallax*, 17 (2011), 4-18 (p. 117).

forms of memory in particular contexts before gesturing towards the absence of any rigorous engagement with the scale of the locality – or ‘place’ – in this discipline.

Theorising memory as ultimately mobile inherently involves some form of abstraction which, if not countered by a rigorous consideration of specific, more local instantiations of memory, proves problematic. Firstly, conceptualising memory solely as unrooted, unbounded, and deterritorialised risks it becoming but a free-floating, abstract signifier that is no longer relevant to or representative of the local, lived circumstances of its agents. Focusing solely on memory’s travel from a specific national or cultural context (where the latter have often been seen as contained within national borders) to the transnational, transcultural or global realm renders it largely impossible to account for the power structures that constrain memorial practice in more local contexts. As Susannah Radstone argues, the recognition and assumption of the fact that memory ‘travels’ stands in for a thorough articulation of why certain memories travel (and others do not), as well as for an examination of questions of subjectivity, power, and representation in each specific case of (non-)travelling memory.³⁵ Indeed, revisiting his own theory of ‘multidirectional memory’, Michael Rothberg reflects upon this concern, admitting that he did not make clear enough that ‘the forms of dialogue, connection, and translation that take place in multidirectional encounters do not take place on an even playing field’.³⁶

Secondly, if attention is focused only upon the emergence of particular transnational or global memories as positive impetuses to open memorial dialogue, this implies that insufficient attention is being directed towards a consideration of the negative aspects of such ‘travel’ – for instance, how such ‘transnational’ or ‘global’ memories may simultaneously serve to block other instances of less recognised, more localised forms of traumatic memorial practice from view. Aleida Assmann picks up on such a concern in regard to the emergence of the Holocaust as a ‘globalised’ or ‘transnational memory’, and in particular of Levy and Sznajder’s designation of its status as a ‘cosmopolitan memory’. Assmann comments that while the Holocaust has emerged as a ‘transgenerational and transnational memory’ that has provided the EU with a ‘foundation myth’ and ‘moral yardstick for new member states’, the traumatic memory of Stalinist Gulags has all but disappeared from Soviet and Western political memory.³⁷ At the same time as it emerges as a dialogical opening into questions of historical responsibility and morality, the memory of the Holocaust simultaneously functions as a screen for other memories of historical trauma.

³⁵ Radstone, p. 120.

³⁶ Michael Rothberg, ‘Locating Transnational Memory’, *European Review*, 22 (2014), 652-56 (p. 655).

³⁷ Aleida Assmann, ‘Transnational Memories’, *European Review*, 22 (2014), 546-56 (p. 552).

In regard to Levy and Sznajder's theory of the Holocaust as a 'cosmopolitan memory', Assmann is particularly concerned with their attribution of this emergence to new communication technologies and with what this then implies for the status of the individual human agent of memory, their personal relationship to the past, and their unique present circumstances. She states:

Change is attributed to technological structures evolving according to the self-propelling progress of modernisation going global. Within this rather abstract conceptual framework, there is little room for human agency. [...] Memory is taken all too easily beyond all boundaries if we focus directly on a cosmopolitan community that is composed of none other than humanity itself.³⁸

The way in which individuals relate to their own pasts and other memorial narratives is a highly unique process that often takes place in the local, tangible context in which a particular person lives, yet this uniqueness is often lost in abstract theorisations of 'transnational' or 'global' memory. Equally, this abstraction fails to account for the local and national power structures that place limitations on an individual's ability to exercise their agency in daily contexts. As Assmann highlights, any memory can be made to seem relevant to any individual if we focus purely on its significance in the context of human rights, for instance. However, while the fact of being human implies a certain universality, how this human status is experienced differs widely across the world due to a variety of political, social, and economic constraints. That memory is not immune from such differentiation can be accounted for only in a Memory Studies discipline that examines the 'processes of encountering, negotiation, reading, viewing and spectatorship through which memories are, if you like, brought down to earth'.³⁹

In this regard, Astrid Erll recognises that 'much of the semantic shape that travelling memory takes on will be the result of the routes it takes in specific contexts and of the uses made by specific people with specific agendas'.⁴⁰ Michael Rothberg meanwhile praises Susannah Radstone's insistence upon memory's persisting 'locatedness' for 'help[ing] to ground the transnational turn in memory studies in uneven material conditions'.⁴¹ However, considerations of context in the discipline of Memory Studies rarely extend to the specific local places or neighbourhoods in which everyday individuals live their lives.⁴² Indeed, Rothberg takes pains to emphasise that the transcultural turn in Memory Studies must be 'distinguished from a return to some notion of the purely *local*', where location is reduced to

³⁸ Assmann, 'Transnational Memories', p. 548.

³⁹ Radstone, pp. 110-11.

⁴⁰ Erll, 'Travelling Memory', p. 15.

⁴¹ Rothberg, 'Migratory Settings', p. 128.

⁴² A notable exception to this comes from Rothberg himself, in conjunction with scholar Yasemin Yildiz: See Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz, 'Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Remembrance in Contemporary Germany', *Parallax*, 17 (2011), 32-48.

a spatial point that is disconnected from external processes of mobility.⁴³ In Memory Studies, the problem appears to be that the ‘transcultural’ and the ‘local’ are conceived of in opposition when, in fact, examples of transcultural memory-work can just as easily be found in the diverse localities of our twenty-first century world as in the abstract circuits of global mobility. It seems then that, while aware of the need to contextualise memory’s travel, Memory Studies insufficiently engages with the locality as a point of departure and lens through which to explore processes of transcultural memory; a framework which, in short, accounts for how the scales of the local and the more-than-local intersect in the realm of memory, as well as what factors accelerate or hinder such interactions. In the following section, I review Memory Studies research that has touched upon the concept of ‘place’ but demonstrate how this has remained a largely peripheral concern whose full implications have yet to be consistently thought through in any depth.

Considerations of ‘place’ in Memory Studies

In recent years, a number of memory scholars have begun to turn their attention to the link between place and memory, even if this link has not yet been sufficiently theorised in a necessarily interdisciplinary fashion. In Max Silverman’s theorisation of ‘palimpsestic memory’, it could be argued that he sees works of literature, as well as the fictional worlds they create, as potentially productive, metaphorical ‘places’ of memory. He argues that the deliberate insertion of cross-temporal references in works of literature illuminates previously unseen connections between seemingly disparate events of memory. For Silverman, this condensation

takes the form of a superimposition and interaction of different temporal traces to constitute a sort of composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and transformed by, another [...] producing a chain of signification which draws together disparate spaces and times.⁴⁴

What is particularly significant about Silverman’s theorisation of ‘palimpsestic memory’ is that he advocates for a close-reading of literary texts while at the same time does not lose sight of how the memorial constellations they create stand in relation to the wider world outside the text. Equally, his insistence that the new constellations of palimpsestic memory which emerge in particular texts represent a condensation not the rendering same of the specific and heterogeneous pasts involved is another vital recognition.⁴⁵ Indeed, the homogenisation of heterogeneous pasts poses three major problems: firstly, it enacts a form

⁴³ Rothberg, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 129, emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ Silverman, pp. 3-4; p. 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

of violence by rendering impossible a rigorous consideration of the material specificities of each particular past event on its own terms; secondly, it collapses forms of identity anchored in having experienced a traumatic past event, which is particularly problematic in cases where memories and group identities have been historically marginalised or even erased from view; and thirdly, it destroys the essential novelty of ‘palimpsestic memory’ in which new constellations arise when ‘one layer of traces can be seen through, and transformed by, another’.⁴⁶ Such recognitions hold huge significance for a thesis which seeks to explore the productive manner in which disparate places and memories are brought together in contemporary literature. In this thesis, I develop Silverman’s theory of palimpsestic memory by focusing not on the abstract literary text as palimpsest but specifically on the recognisable, twenty-first century places represented and reimagined as palimpsestic arenas of memory in the literary texts under study. In drawing on Human Geography scholarship, I suggest how the imaginative constellations of place-based transcultural memory created in this literature mirror real-life processes of place- and memory-making and thus bring together in an immediate fashion the literary worlds created by their authors with the wider world outside their texts. In examining how these texts draw upon memory as a resource through which to intervene in forms of world-making, I consider whether the emergence of new constellations of transcultural memory in a literary text can be seen as evidence of its status as a piece of specifically world-making literature as opposed to World Literature in the traditionally understood sense of the term. I define World Literature here as a purely descriptive term used to designate the study of how literary works circulate beyond national borders, whereas I use the term ‘world-making literature’ in Pheng Cheah’s normative and distinctly specific sense of world literature as literature that actively intervenes in processes of world-creation through temporalisation – in the case of this thesis, through the re-imagining of transcultural narratives of memory.⁴⁷ In the first case, literature is the object of study; in the second it is both an object of study and – vitally – also becomes a subject, an active force in the world.

Elsewhere within the field of Memory Studies, Aleida Assmann is perhaps one of the only scholars to have directly engaged with otherwise overlooked questions surrounding the role of individual agency in the recreation of memory, as well as how individual agents interact with specific places on the basis of their personal memories. In her theorisation of ‘places of

⁴⁶ Silverman, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Proponents of the first model of ‘World Literature’ include David Damrosch, *What is World Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), pp. 54-68, Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2014). See Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016) for more on world literature as an active force in the world.

trauma’ – of which her prime example is Auschwitz – Assmann argues that such places are constituted by the fact that they bring together a multitude of emotions attributed to this site by human agents on the basis of particular stories of personal or collective trauma. A ‘place of trauma’ becomes ‘everything one seeks from it, knows about it, associates with it. The perspectives are as many and varied as the [place] itself is real and solid’.⁴⁸ For Assmann, what brings people to such places are emotional, personal narratives which are seen as connected to the geographical site, whether this be a familial connection to the atrocities which took place there or a personal interest in the place’s emotionally-charged histories. What is particularly pertinent for the argument advanced in this thesis is the definitional difference she designates between ‘memory of place(s) and ‘place(s) of memory’, which she expresses as follows: ‘Whereas the memory of places is firmly fixed to one particular location from which it cannot be separated, places of memory are distinguished by the very fact that they are transferable [to other places and times].’⁴⁹

For Assmann, a ‘memory of place’ approach assumes that the memories evoked by a particular place will be directly linked to events that have occurred at this site. A ‘place of memory’ approach meanwhile accounts for the fact that memories which visitors may bring to and affectively transpose onto a particular site may not be directly linked to the crimes committed there but rather are stories of trauma and loss that have occurred elsewhere but whose resonance is evoked by that site’s affective aura. In this sense, it can be argued that ‘places of memory’ function like a map in their status as the physical meeting point of various heterogenous and personal memories of different traumas that are affectively transposed onto these sites by their agents. Memories of events that have occurred in distant geographical places become partially unbound from their place of origin and become connected to a new place: the ‘place of memory’. Such a recognition is vital for my consideration in this thesis of how agents with transnational biographies re-locate their personal memories in a new place, contributing to the emergence of new narratives of place-based yet transcultural memory.

Where Assmann’s consideration of place and memory falls short in light of the research undertaken in this thesis is that, like most other scholars of memory, she does not insist upon a definitional difference between ‘place’ and ‘site’ but rather uses them interchangeably. Cultural Geographer Karen E. Till has diagnosed this definitional oversight in Memory Studies as representing a lacking ‘biography of a site’ approach, where the field is largely only concerned with ‘provid[ing] detailed descriptions of how *national* histories, memorial

⁴⁸ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilisation: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 314.

⁴⁹ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, p. 296.

cultures and shared stories are remembered and forgotten *in a given country*’ at sites of memory rather than analysing in any depth the overlooked memory-work occurring in lived places.⁵⁰ This distinction goes back to Pierre Nora’s work in the late 1980s, in which he argued that *lieux de mémoire* (or ‘sites of memory’) such as monuments and museums create a mythologised and static version of national memory that becomes an artificial substitute for real *milieux de mémoire* or lived ‘environments of memory’ which provide a sense of communal identity through shared, daily experience.⁵¹ Since ‘[n]ationalist memory describes a *geography of belonging*, an identity forged in a specific landscape’, such spaces or sites of memory serve for Katharine Hodgkins and Susannah Radstone as a ‘bond’ between memory and nationalism. This is because ‘in nationalist movements and in achieved nation states alike, the appeal to memory articulates the narrative of the nationalist past, and enjoins its subject to recognise and own it’.⁵² In this manner, constructed sites of memory propagate nationalist narratives of the past, functioning as gate-keeping mechanisms to those viewed as outsiders to national history and the present national populace. Such gate-keeping can also function at a supra-national level, with Aleida Assmann asserting that the memory of the Holocaust located in sites such as Auschwitz has, in some cases, been mobilised as a ‘moral yardstick’ for entrance into the European Union and is thus perceived from the outside ‘as a hegemonic instrument to export Western values and to expand the range of Western influence’.⁵³ In both cases, memorial narratives expressed at/through particular sites of memory serve an exclusionary end and negatively impact those with transnational biographies who may be placed outside of the national or European community (of remembrance).

Seen in this light, a Memory Studies discipline that does not distinguish between ‘sites’ and ‘places’ of memory is highly problematic in the context of a thesis which examines how authors with transnational biographies reimagine specific *places* as the origins of novel, transcultural narratives of memory. In response to this, I insist upon maintaining a definitional difference between a ‘site’ and ‘place’ of memory. I view a ‘site’ of memory as an institutionalised memorialisation of a particular past that has generally been conceived

⁵⁰ Karen E. Till, ‘Artistic and Activist Memory-work: Approaching Place-based Practice’, *Memory Studies*, 1 (2008), 99-113 (p. 102); Karen E. Till, ‘Wounded Cities: Memory-work and a Place-based Ethics of Care’, *Political Geography*, 31 (2012), 3-14 (p. 7), emphasis added.

⁵¹ Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoires’, *Representations*, 26 (1999), 7-24 (p. 7).

⁵² Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, ‘Part III: Patterning the National Past: Introduction’, in *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, ed. by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2006), pp. 169-74 (p. 169), emphasis added.

⁵³ Assmann, ‘Transnational Memories’, p. 552; Aleida Assmann, ‘The Holocaust – a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community’, in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices, Trajectories*, ed. by Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 97-117 (p. 113).

and created by a particular nation or nations with a particular ideological aim in mind. In contrast, I define a ‘place’ of memory as an embodied social arena in which the daily rhythms of life unfold but in which, in the material traces they have left on the landscape, vestiges of the past traumas that have occurred there are still detectable. In this thesis, I focus exclusively on memory work that occurs in places which are populated by demographically-heterogeneous inhabitants from various national and cultural backgrounds. I argue that it is precisely their heterogeneity that make such places potentially fertile grounds for the emergence of new transcultural memorial connections which, in turn, may lead to the emergence of new cosmopolitan social identities and collectivities. That the terms ‘site’ and ‘place’ have been used interchangeably in Memory Studies to refer solely to site-based memory has meant that local places have often been overlooked as potential arenas of rooted, transcultural memory-work. I propose that drawing on scholarship in the field of Human Geography, in which the concept of ‘place’ has understandably received much attention, would provide Memory Studies with a theoretical vocabulary by which to distinguish between ‘site’ and ‘place’, as well as provide theoretical tools through which to re-conceptualise the inherent potential of specifically place-based memory-work. In what follows, I explain the significance of my attempt to rethink Memory Studies through focusing specifically on the concept of ‘place’, as well as consider how such an interdisciplinary approach may serve to illuminate the as yet underexplored potential inherent in what may be termed memory’s transcultural rootedness.

Memory’s ‘locatedness’: an interdisciplinary approach

In this thesis, I argue that ‘place’ is an underexplored concept in the field of Memory Studies. If, however, we are to consider how memory may be re-written and mobilised as a productive force in the imagination of new forms of collectivity in our increasingly cosmopolitanised world, it makes sense to firstly consider how individuals foster both a sense of belonging to the local places they inhabit on a daily basis as well as a sense of connection to those with whom they share such social arenas. Even in an age of increased mobility and intermingling, being ‘in place’ – however temporarily – remains a universal condition, even if this condition is experienced in widely diverging ways depending on an individual’s political, economic, and social status. People enter and leave particular places in which they must live their lives, interact with others, and encounter both the local and global power imbalances that mark such places. By drawing on Human Geography scholarship, I suggest that local places are not just passive backdrops to their residents’ lives, however. Rather, as meaning is attributed to place by individual inhabitants, it becomes an arena of

affective belonging as people form emotional connections both with their physical surroundings and with proximate others performing similar acts of affective attribution. This affective, individual-yet-communal connection with place is largely unrecognised within the field of Memory Studies, in which local places are generally bypassed in favour of a focus on forms of mobile memory. In this thesis, I propose that this omission is to Memory Studies' detriment and argue that examining processes of place-based memory creation is a productive way to think through questions of agency, community formation, and rooted yet cosmopolitan forms of collectivity.

In a short but provocative 2008 article, Karen E. Till questions Memory Studies' approach to the concept of 'place' and argues that the field's understanding of the term must be broadened to account for the emotional meaning places hold for their inhabitants. She states: 'I call for a memory studies agenda that remains sensitive to the ways individuals and groups understand their pasts and possible futures through the relationships they and others have with place.'⁵⁴ This is a call that has until now largely fallen on deaf ears, with much recent research on 'place' in Memory Studies focusing on institutionalised memory sites rather than on 'places [as] embodied contexts of experience', as I have argued earlier.⁵⁵ In this thesis, I take up Till's call and endeavour to re-think the concept of place as it relates to the study of memory. In order to do so, I attempt to supplement contemporary theories of memory with scholarship from the field of Human Geography, which widely theorises 'place' as an embodied, affective arena of human-made meaning. In this, I take an approach described by Till elsewhere as 'geo-ethnograph[ic]', that is 'an approach that focuses on why people make places to create meaning about who and where they are in the world, and how, in the process of place making, they communicate feelings of belonging and attachment'.⁵⁶

As contemporary memory scholars contend, interdisciplinary perspectives are vital to ensure that Memory Studies as a field is able to respond to the complex challenges of our twenty-first century world.⁵⁷ Yet, as Bond, Craps, and Vermeulen point out Memory Studies seems as yet to be stuck at a transdisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary stage.⁵⁸ Jeffrey K. Olick illuminates this differentiation when he states that:

Interdisciplinarity is a concept that has never really fulfilled its promise, even in this most 'trans-disciplinary' field. We all write a lot about how we need to take the work of other

⁵⁴ Till, 'Activist Memory-work', pp. 101-02.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 11.

⁵⁷ See Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

disciplines seriously, but rarely does this go beyond reading and citation. [...] We need to think more about genuine interdisciplinary cooperation, cooperation that is beyond the level of mutual referencing.⁵⁹

In bringing disciplinary frameworks from Human Geography into the field of Memory Studies, this thesis constructs a novel, interdisciplinary approach to memory which is capable of accounting for both its tendency to travel and its persistent, agent-propogated rootedness in place. I suggest how drawing upon Human Geography research on embodied places as shared arenas of affective meaning can be seen to productively intervene in the discipline of Memory Studies; namely, in overcoming its apparent insistence on the antithetical nature of transcultural memory and rooted place.

Reflecting upon the significance of place and its central role in the creation or recreation of transcultural memories provides, I argue, a means of theorising the relationship between place and world as it is mediated through memory. Places as ‘embodied contexts of experience’ contain echoes of the memories of their previous inhabitants as well as provide an interactive social arena for their present inhabitants.⁶⁰ People move into places and, through fostering affective connections with their surroundings, both impart their own experience and memory on place as well as interact with the memories and experiences contained therein. Places are thus perpetually transformed through processes of dialogical memory creation: they become palimpsestic places of memory. In an age of increased mobility, places have come to contain memories from agents who have travelled from across the globe. Finding affective points of connection within a new place (of memory) allows agents to imagine themselves as part of a new community (of remembrance) in this place which may be far removed from their previous home. Local places become arenas of transcultural exchange; the meeting point of heterogeneous memories. The local becomes affectively linked to the more-than-local.

In this thesis, I consider how such processes of place-based transcultural interaction allow agents to imagine how their lives link to those of Others with whom they share a particular place. Extrapolating from the locality, I explore how these processes of affective memory recreation may serve to facilitate the imagination of new forms of community at the larger scales of the world and eventually the planet. This connection forged between local and world communities via transcultural memory has, I argue, the potential to bypass the nation as a frame of reference entirely. If we see the continual re-making of places (of memory) through processes of affective investment as the imaginative creation of new (metaphorical)

⁵⁹ Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘“Collective Memory”: A Memoir and Prospect’, *Memory Studies*, 1 (2008), 19-25 (pp. 23-24).

⁶⁰ Till, ‘Activist Memory-work’, p. 105.

places and new affiliations to these places and their inhabitants, we can see the transcultural locality as the logical origin of forms of cosmopolitan affiliation that have the potential to foster a sense of a shared world or planetary ‘place’; a ‘planet-thought’ or sense of ‘planetarity’ in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s terms.⁶¹ If memory is located in place and mobilised there to create affect, by tracing its expansion through various scales of human society we eventually arrive at the level of the planetary. Thinking about place in relation to memory thus ultimately allows us to conceptualise the connection between memory and environmentalism with which contemporary Memory Studies scholars appear to be struggling. Memory paradoxically becomes planetary in any meaningful way only via its affective rooting in a particular local place: a connection that is likely to be missed in a field that overlooks place and locality as conceptually significant.

Given that the literary works I will analyse through the framework of place-based memory I outline above is written by authors born in the Soviet Union yet now living in Germany and writing in German, this thesis also raises the question of the role of migrants in these processes of place- and memory creation or recreation. Much research has been undertaken in the field of Memory Studies on the subject of migration and memory, in particular on how memorial interventions by migrants challenge established discourses of national memory by productively complicating and pluralising existing memorial landscapes.⁶² In this thesis I build upon this research by focusing on the less considered aspect of migration i.e. resettlement and what may be termed a ‘re-rooting’ in place and place-memory. Focusing on the transcultural places created through migration instead of on migration as mobility serves two main theoretical purposes. Firstly, while nevertheless remaining conscious of claims to power and belonging in specific cases, this approach attempts to move beyond the nation as a structuring mechanism. Politically speaking, migration is generally characterised as travel across nation-state borders rather than as an act of settlement in a particular, often diverse locality far from one’s previous home. In this case, speaking of migrants, or particularly ‘minorities’ can easily become synonymous with national non-belonging – it implies a sense of ‘outsiderdom’ from the national population. Even if dominant political discourses promote a narrative of national homogeneity, the falsity of this narrative is contradicted by the mere existence of heterogeneous localities within national borders in which diverse populations live side-by-side on a daily basis. Equally, attempts to foster a sense of national identity through promoting a homogenised ‘national memory’ of the past are challenged by

⁶¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 73-74.

⁶² See, for example: Huyssen, ‘Diaspora and Nation’ for his conceptualisation of ‘diasporic memory’; Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, ‘Introduction’, in *Memory in a Global Age*, ed. by Assmann and Conrad, pp. 1-16, particularly (pp. 2-3); Rothberg, ‘Migratory Settings’; Rothberg and Yildiz.

the presence of migrants whose experiences and memories are rooted in places and times beyond the immediate national present. However, the idea that migrants are merely entering into and complicating existing national memorial discourses does a disservice to the role they may play in the creation of new constellations of memory that in fact circumvent such reified narratives. Focusing on ‘place’ allows for the recognition of such ‘bottom-up’ forms of memory creation.

Secondly, seeing local places as arenas of transcultural interaction allows for forms of living beyond the nation that do not necessarily involve any form of movement. In this, I take inspiration from Anna Ball’s reconceptualisation of the notion of ‘rootedness’ as not signifying a sense of stasis and parochial entrenchment in a (past) place and its cultures, language or traditions but rather as ‘a possibility of drawing a sense of connection with others based on a commonality of belief and behaviour’.⁶³ This conception of ‘rootedness’ is as equally applicable to those who move to a new place and those already inhabiting this same place: both parties have the potential to relate to one another via either pre-existing commonalities or through dialogically fostering new forms of belief and commonality as they co-exist and interact in this embodied location of social interaction. ‘Rootedness’ in this conception ‘[...] is not so much about staying put as branching out and forming connections with others.’⁶⁴ Transculturality can paradoxically be experienced through a particular form of ‘rootedness’ that does not necessarily involve the mobility and movement of all involved parties; receiving and interacting with newcomers from distant places in one’s current place is such an experience. Only a theory of memory that accounts for the potentially facilitating role of place and of ‘rootedness’ as a form of connection can conceptualise migration and movement as one form of transcultural experience rather than as the only form – even if it is the most common.

Concepts of ‘place’ in Human Geography: affect, embodiment, agency

I have demonstrated in this literature review how research in Memory Studies focuses largely on the detachment and travel of memory in the global age, as well as overlooks the important definitional difference between the terms ‘site’ and ‘place’. In this section, I suggest how applying conceptualisations of ‘place’ from the discipline of Human Geography to the study of memory allows us to think through the important yet often overlooked

⁶³ Anna Ball, “‘Here is Where I Am’”: Rerooting Diasporic Existence in Leila Aboulela’s Recent Novels’, in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*, ed. by Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 118-27 (p. 122).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

processes of located, transcultural memory creation that occur as different memories and experiences are brought together in one place by its heterogeneous inhabitants. In Human Geography, the individual sits at the centre of place- and community-making. It is the individual's construction of a personal, affective relationship to the places they inhabit day-in, day-out that bring them closer to both the memories contained in this place and to those other inhabitants with whom they share this place. In this regard, I consider how Human Geography research on the affective relationship between the individual and the place, and consequently the individual and the place-based community, can be productively applied to considerations of the processual, agent-propagated, and ultimately place-centred recreation of new constellations of transcultural memory and the concomitant emergence of new place-centred communities (of remembrance). My understanding of 'affect' here is that of a 'force of encounter' that is visceral, intimate, and often partially unconscious yet cannot be separated completely from cognition and conscious thought.⁶⁵ 'Affect' implies potentiality: that of the body being (un)consciously affected by the embodied place and that of the body consciously affecting the place through how they choose to act on this affect.

In the 1970s, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan provided a ground-breaking and in-depth conceptualisation of 'space' and 'place', attempting to theorise the affective bond between people and places as well as considering how culture and topophilia respectively interact with the environment in their mutual constitution of values.⁶⁶ Literally meaning 'love of place', Tuan defines 'topophilia' as referring to 'the human being's affective ties with the natural environment'.⁶⁷ In his view, space contains the potential for place: in other words, space is a 'blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed', with space becoming place as it acquires a definition and social meaning from the humans who inhabit it.⁶⁸ Place is thus the result of human agency. Examining environmental perceptions at the level of the individual, the group, and the species, Tuan argues that how we see a particular place and our relationship with it affects not only our values and attitudes towards this particular place but also towards the environment at its largest scale i.e. our shared planetary 'place' – the Earth. From our attitudes and affective connection to the places we inhabit come our attitudes and imagined connection to the wider environment; our conception of the supra-local is rooted in our affective experience of the local. This recognition is one of the central tenets of this

⁶⁵ Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-28 (p. 1).

⁶⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) and *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

⁶⁷ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 93.

⁶⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 54; p. 136.

thesis and will provide the basis for the theoretical link I establish between memory and the environment in chapter five.

Importantly, Tuan also has something significant to say about the complex relationship between movement and positionality in place, as well as about the function of place for memory. Tuan conceptualises this relationship between movement and position as that between time and place, arguing that ‘if time is conceived as flow or movement then place is pause’.⁶⁹ That is not to say that Tuan necessarily sees place as a static location of uni-temporality, nor does he suggest that ‘pausing’ in place induces a blindness to the passing of time. On the contrary, pausing in place paradoxically allows us to see the passing of time more clearly, to feel it more intensely. That pausing in place induces a form of reflexivity is inherent in all three of the approaches Tuan puts forward to conceptualise what he describes as the ‘intricate problem’ of the relationship between place and time, namely:

Time as motion or flow and place as a pause in the temporal current; attachment to place as a function of time, captured in the phrase “it takes time to know a place”; and place as time made visible, or place as memorial to times past.⁷⁰

It is into this latter conception that we may read the role of place as the location of memory. Working from Tuan’s theorising, the ‘pausing’ he sees as an inherent characteristic of the human engagement with place allows a pause for breath, as it were: a chance to reflect, in the present, on the past (memories) of this place. Places become productive meeting points of the past and present, of memory and current, lived experience.

For Tim Cresswell, the productivity of place indeed lies in its status as a material reminder of lost pasts, stating that ‘places have the power to force hidden and painful memories to the fore through their material existence’. Not only does this ‘place-memory’ constitute a passive reminder of (lost) memories, it also gestures towards a more active role for place in the creation of new memories: that is, ‘the ability of place to make the past come to life in the present and thus contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory’.⁷¹ Places both bear witness to their pasts and facilitate their inhabitants’ active production of new constellations of memory as they affectively transpose their own personal memories onto the existing ‘place-memory’. How then can Human Geography concepts of ‘place’ be productively incorporated into the field of Memory Studies? In research characteristic of Human Geography’s ‘non-representational turn’, ‘place’ is considered as a physical arena of cross-temporality whose meaning is constructed through performative and embodied

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 198.

⁷⁰ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 179.

⁷¹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015), p. 123; p. 121.

practices of self-landscape interaction performed by its present-day inhabitants.⁷² While the former, cross-temporal characteristic of places has been shown in this literature review to have been widely recognised in Memory Studies, the latter focus on the individual in processes of place- and memory-creation has been largely neglected. I would suggest that this theoretical oversight is perhaps blinding Memory Studies' scholars to the rooted yet transcultural memory-work being undertaken in place by individuals in their local communities and that this is an oversight that can be rectified by recourse to Human Geography theories of 'place'.

Human geographer Owain Jones' work is of vital importance for this thesis since he emphasises the significance of individual memory in processes of place-making, arguing that an individual's 'immersion' in a particular place is both 'temporal and memorial as well as performative/embodied and spatial'.⁷³ From this, it follows that theorising how individuals, if you like, come to 'be-in-place' must necessarily involve a consideration of memory: both of the place itself and of the individual fostering an affective connection to this place. As people come to embody places, they are interacting simultaneously with these places' already existing tangled webs of multiple pasts and presents, as well as imparting their own personal pasts on such places. Writing of this link between place, memory and identity, Jones and Garde-Hansen astutely summarise:

Memory is inherently geographical in two senses: that of being of past spaces and places as well as past times, and in terms of the prompting and practice of memories by and in current space [...]. *We are quite literally formed of past practices in past (passed) places and spaces.* How memory folds into the practice of ongoing identity is a complex interplay between the space and practice of the present and the spaces and practices of the past.⁷⁴

This quotation illustrates precisely that which Memory Studies appears to struggle to accept: processes of place-making and of place-based, individual memory creation can occur in the nexus between mobility and rootedness. Playing on the homonyms 'past' and 'passed', Jones and Garde-Hansen typographically capture the possible yet seemingly paradoxical

⁷² This term is taken from Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen, 'Introduction', in *Geography and Memory: Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming*, ed. by Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-18, (p. 5). Threads of this thought can be traced back to Tuan, *Topophilia and Space and Place*, as well as to Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and his later article: Michel de Certeau, 'Practices of Space' in *On Signs*, ed. by Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 122-45. More recent examples include: Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan, 'Embodying Emotion, Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5 (2004), 523-32; Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (Routledge: London, 2007); Hannah MacPherson, 'Non-representational Approaches to Body-Landscape Relations', *Geography Compass*, 4 (2010), 1-13; Owain Jones, 'Geography, Memory and Non-representational Geographies', *Geography Compass*, 5 (2011), 875-85; Cresswell.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 879.

⁷⁴ Jones and Garde-Hansen, p. 19, emphasis added.

simultaneity of locatedness and mobility in place- and memory-making. This mobility is true of places as they change over time and of individuals who ‘pause’ in a specific place, create a personal connection to and personal memories of this place, and then perhaps move elsewhere to another place. Significantly for this thesis, in this conception, attention can be given to both movement between places and the effects of movement (change) within places over time, accounting for both their spatial and temporal nature.

In his own research and in conjunction with Garde-Hansen, Jones argues for the ultimate centrality of the individual in processes of place- and memory-making, even as these personal experiences and memories are bound up in ‘ecologies of memory’ that exist between individuals and groups as well as link to wider public memorial narratives.⁷⁵ This valorisation of the individual in the creation of place and memory is significant for this thesis in two primary ways, both linked to the fact that I focus on processes of migration and of migrant relationships to (and re-writing of) place and memory. Firstly, concentrating on the individual illuminates rooted, migrant experiences and memories that may otherwise be lost within and indeed marginalised by, in the first instance, exclusionary discourses of national memory, and in the second, by a Memory Studies discipline that focuses largely on forms of travelling ‘global’ memories. Secondly, by viewing memory practices in place as a form of becoming or identity creation, an individual’s creation of memory becomes a future-oriented, productive means to foster and assert one’s identity as a form of resistance to imposed narratives of national memory. As Jones asserts, memory can be ‘fundamental to becoming, and a key wellspring of agency, practice/habit, creativity, imagination, and thus of the potential of the performative moment’.⁷⁶ Developing Damasio’s concept of the ‘autobiographical self’ in relation to memory, Jones argues that:

Affective becoming *does* make us transient entities of the present moment, and yet, at the same time, we have an ‘autobiographical self’, a ‘non-transient collection of unique facts and ways of being of systemised memory. [...] Memory (of one kind or another) is then a fundamental aspect of becoming, intimately intertwined with space, affect, emotion, imagination and identity.’⁷⁷

Later, with Garde-Hansen, Jones develops this idea of the ‘autobiographical self’ to conceive of an ‘autogeobiography’ or the process of ‘writing the self into the landscape’.⁷⁸ Arguably, such a process implies a potential quality of resistance if, as is often the case with migrant actors, one’s experiences and status of belonging are questioned by dominant societal actors who seek to define the national space and memory along ethnic lines. Such a

⁷⁵ See *ibid*, pp. 2-3; Jones, p. 878.

⁷⁶ Jones, pp. 875-76.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 880, emphasis in original.

⁷⁸ Jones and Garde-Hansen, p. 16.

resistance is found in a forceful clinging to one's own lived, complex identity as developed through past experiences in past places, even if one's present landscape (defined by imposed social norms) contradicts the self's multi-faceted identity and affective experience of this present place. In this conception, it becomes clear that while 'sites' of memory (as theorised in Memory Studies) are often locations of static, constructed, and at times exclusionary national memory, places of memory are, like their inhabitants' identities, constantly in a state of becoming, taking shape through processes of affective attribution, contradiction, and resistance. By amalgamating 'site' and 'place', Memory Studies as a discipline cannot sufficiently account for the productive potential that is specific to places of memory as locations of daily, lived, and embodied experience.

This oversight has significant implications when it comes to questions of memorial agency, particularly in terms of who can challenge and re-write memorial narratives. Constructed sites of memory such as memorials, monuments, or museums are more often than not sponsored by specific national governments or particular social groups who seek to shape a specific narrative of the past that reflects a desired self-image. Even when memorials are campaigned for which commemorate specific victim groups of historical traumas, the decision to erect such a monument as well as decisions pertaining to its design are often made in the final instance by the national government on whose territory it is to be built. Karen E. Till describes this problem as such: 'Social memory and place-making [here I would add that Till is speaking rather of 'site-making' in the terms of this thesis] activities tell us more about the people building a memorial than the peoples and pasts being commemorated.'⁷⁹ Options for agency are, in the case of 'site-making' very low, and, certainly in the case of memorials to 'national' pasts, this is especially true for migrants. In the case of places of memory, however, this situation is somewhat different. As Tim Cresswell reminds us, '[o]ne of the primary ways in which memories are constituted is through the *production of places*.'⁸⁰ While Cresswell also refers to what I insist in thesis are sites of memory in his definition of 'place' (museums, monuments, building preservation), I would argue that reading this statement as referring only to 'places' as I define them (embodied localities of daily life shaped by individual processes of affective attribution) allows us to conceive of their status as potential locations of memorial agency for all of their inhabitants regardless of how they are positioned within/by national memorial discourses .

Insisting upon individual agency has important consequences for how we envisage 'place' to come about and how new constellations of memories within place arise. Most places today

⁷⁹ Till, *The New Berlin*, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Cresswell, p. 119, emphasis added.

are demographically heterogenous: they are marked by processes of mobility and re-settlement of diverse social actors from a variety of nations and cultures. As we have seen with recourse to Human Geography, memories emerge in conjunction with processes of place-making. We can thus argue that memories and the new constellations that arise in shared places serve to eventually create new places (of memory) themselves. Place and memory are mutually constitutive, and they are both equally dependent on human agency for their construction. Memories that are present in particular places do not exist prior to their inhabitants; rather, memory in place – and place as a product of memory – are processual. They resist fixed, reified definition and are constantly complicated, adapted, and transformed as different individual agents with heterogeneous personal memories enter such places. Accepting that an affective ‘coming-to-know’ of a place involves the attribution of one’s own past experiences to this landscape suggests that all individual inhabitants in theory have the potential to transform place(-memory), regardless of their status as ‘migrant’ or not.

Indeed, in their conceptualisation of the ‘memoryscape’, Hamza Muzaini and Brenda Yeoh examine in this manner how ‘top-down’ forms of remembrance are contested by what we may call ‘grassroots’ forms of remembrance. Muzaini and Yeoh assert that the ‘memoryscape’ can be defined as the ‘complex landscape upon which memories and memory practices move, come into contact, are contested by, and contest other forms of remembrance’.⁸¹ The implicit link they draw between memories coming into contact in a particular memoryscape and the consequent contestation of other forms of remembrance allows us to conceptualise how the dialogical creation of new constellations of memory in a particular local place can be an act of contestation or resistance by virtue of its very existence. Acts of place- and memory creation in particular transcultural localities contest the idea of imagined national containers of memorial belonging and provide alternative conceptions of belonging in the cosmopolitanised world in which we now live. As I argue in chapter two of this thesis, the representation of forms of place-based, transcultural memory creation imagined by authors with transnational biographies resist such imposed narratives of national memorial belonging by extrapolating from the locality to re-write the relationship between place and world via memory. In this, they imagine new forms of belonging that spring from processes of affective, localised yet transcultural place-, memory-, and identity-creation.

⁸¹ Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda Yeoh, *Contested Memoryscapes: The Politics of the Second World War Commemoration in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 10.

I have suggested in this literature review how particular places are complex arenas of daily life which are in a constant state of ‘becoming’, constituted through the affective interaction between people and the place(-memory) they inhabit. People can be said to ‘know’ a place when it holds some form of emotional meaning for them; meanings that can be as wide and varied as the population inhabiting such places. Individuals each possess their own ‘autogeobiography’ that they bring to a specific place, and which they use to affectively relate to – and in the process contribute to – the constantly evolving and mutually constitutive place and place-memories.⁸² Places contain multiple and overlapping temporalities that, over time and through processes of migration, become linked to distant, supra-local places (of memory) via the new constellations of memory created by their diverse inhabitants who travel from elsewhere and re-settle in new places. I have argued that abstract conceptualisations of transnational, transcultural or global memory in the field of Memory Studies can be made more inclusive and relevant to daily life by focusing on the individual as the locus of affective place- and memory-creation, as is the case in non-representational theories of Human Geography. If, however, I am to argue that such individual processes of concomitant place-, memory-, and identity-creation lend themselves to the imagination of new forms of global or cosmopolitan collectivity, a question remains to be answered. Namely, if the productive force of memory is localised in the nexus between the individual, their affective and personal experiences, and the place (of memory), how can we bridge this gap between the individual, the place-based collective, and an imagined, supra-local collective? I would argue that the answer lies again within the notion of ‘place’ – namely, the simultaneously individual and shared social meanings that come with the establishment of the place itself.

As Tuan reminds, ‘space’ cannot become ‘place’ unless a form of shared social meaning can be established for this location.⁸³ This establishment of meaning is an intensely affective, social process yet, as Tuan takes pains to make clear, the affective meaning that surrounds a shared social place cannot be experienced in an identical manner by all its inhabitants. That is, while all inhabitants of a place share an affective relationship to this place, this relationship can take many forms – a place will mean different things to different individuals. As he states:

An armchair or a park bench can be an intensely personal place, yet neither is a private symbol with meaning wholly opaque to others. Within a human group experiences have sufficient overlap so that an individual’s attachments do not seem egregious and incomprehensible to his peers.⁸⁴

⁸² Jones and Garde-Hansen, p. 16.

⁸³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 147.

The shared place provides, so to speak, a sort of grammar through which individuals can communicate and be understood by others sharing this place, yet each mobilisation of this grammar (or place) remains unique to each individual. Michel de Certeau makes a similar argument when he argues how the personal act of walking through a city-space is an act of agency, an appropriation of a shared topography, which realises the space in a personal, ultimately unknowable yet identifiable manner.⁸⁵ Such a recognition is significant for this thesis since it suggests that while individual use of and affective connection to a specific place may be unique, it is still understandable by others who inhabit and intimately know the shared locality.

Equally, de Certeau's claim that the act of walking is a potential tool of political resistance in that can disrupt expected and encouraged use of the city-space (by city planners, local authorities, etc.) is important in the context of this thesis. As I have argued, fostering a sense of collective belonging can be rendered fraught for migrant individuals who feel marginalised by narratives of (memorial) exclusion propagated at a national level. For de Certeau, any meaning that is insistently attributed to local places, whether recognised or not in exclusionary national political discourse, constitutes a form of resistance by virtue of its pure existence. Local place, in this sense, can become a politicised arena in which individuals defying expected meanings of place(-memory) can foster a sense of political collectivity with similarly disenfranchised others. Indeed, this process of localised resistance lies at the core of Fatima El-Tayeb's notion of 'translocalities' as places in which a sense of collective resistance can be fostered amongst migrant individuals from various ethnic and national backgrounds who feel marginalised in the present by their exclusion from the national body politic and narratives of 'national' memory.⁸⁶ In such 'translocalities' migrants draw upon a common affective experience of exclusion as a mobilising force, working together with other heterogeneous agents in their local place in order to resist imposed present and past homogeneity of experience and challenge exclusionary narratives of selective national/European memory.⁸⁷ In this case, individual, affective embodiments of place become collective through elective affinity in the name of politicisation.

In this instance, individual memories of exclusion evoked in place are not merely directed to the past but rather are mobilised to envisage new forms of political collectivity in the present day and to imagine new forms of more equal 'being-in-common' for the future. Such action affirms the move in non-representational theories of Human Geography towards recognising the body and the place/landscape as 'dynamic and dependent entities that can be usefully

⁸⁵ De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', p. 129, emphasis in original.

⁸⁶ El-Tayeb, p. 135.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 172.

thought through together’ in their productive co-enactments of agency.⁸⁸ Jo Lee argues in this vein that ‘the landscape is not just a palimpsest [...], a historical layering in which the present is merely the sum of past episodes, but it is also an *active*, present future-oriented engagement with the environment’.⁸⁹ The sense in which Lee evokes the term ‘environment’ here is that of the natural world; however, it is also true that place-based (memorial) activism could also be a ‘present future-oriented engagement’ with or challenge to the environment in a political or social sense of the term (i.e. ‘milieux’). By incorporating Human Geography conceptualisations of ‘place’ into Memory Studies, this thesis attempts to illuminate the potential of political, place-based enactments of memory as a present and future social force. I argue that such potential would be overlooked in a memory discipline that often risks underestimating ‘the dangers of exaggerating mobility and footloosedness’.⁹⁰ For cultural geographer Kevin Dunn, such dangers can only be countered by taking an embodied approach to mobility, which he terms ‘embodied transnationalism’. In adopting such an approach, we can not only re-individualise personal experience but also vitally ‘engage the settings and contexts in which immigrants and their descendants live *as well as the reaction of those people to the settings*’.⁹¹ As I have demonstrated in this section, taking a Human Geography-inspired approach to memory can account for individuals’ embodied experiences of the places they come to inhabit, as well as for the way they react to their ‘settings’ and mobilise such affective place-attachments.

To bring my argument pertaining to place-based memory as the potential origin of new forms of being-in-common in the contemporary world to a close requires a final consideration. Namely, how place and memory can help bridge the psychical gap between locality and world, or, in other words, how individual agents can draw upon lived, affective experience in their daily, heterogeneous localities in order to begin to conceive of themselves as part of a largely abstract world community. K. Anthony Appiah’s theorisation of what he terms ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ is particularly useful in this regard. Appiah argues that any form of tenable, ethical cosmopolitanism must grow from the particular – the Self and the local context – towards the universal – global Others – in order for it to appeal to the all-too-human impulse to feel more intensely and emotionally connected to that which is most familiar and immediately proximate to our own experience. Such a tenable form of ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ would ‘take seriously the value of human life, and the value of

⁸⁸ Macpherson, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Jo Lee, ‘Experiencing Landscape: Orkney Hill and Land Farming’, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23 (2007), 88-100 (p. 89).

⁹⁰ Kevin Dunn, ‘Embodied Transnationalism: Bodies in Transnational Spaces’, *Population, Space and Place*, 16 (2010), 1-9 (p. 1).

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 2, emphasis added.

particular human lives, the lives people have made for themselves, within the communities that help lend significance to those lives':⁹² in other words, encourage individuals to conceive of the universal value of human life through their own particular experiences of immediate, emotional meaning-making in the local surroundings. In terms of place, local contexts can be seen as the daily, visible, and affect-laden settings in which universal rights, commonalities, and communities come to acquire their significance. This recognition becomes particularly pertinent in chapter four of this thesis in regard to my analysis of the protagonist's interaction with, and recreation of, place-based memory in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*.

Place, as defined through this literature review, is the affective arena in which heterogeneous memories and experiences are brought together in new constellations but – vitally – are not collapsed into one homogenised, 'collective memory' (of place). Importantly for this thesis, individual memory, or more specifically what Jones and Garde-Hansen may refer to as our 'autogeobiography', prevents the amalgamation of the Self and Other as well as their heterogeneous experiences. Karen E. Till astutely summarises this function of memory thus:

As humans move through and come to inhabit local worlds, bodies are connected to other bodies (including non-human lives and matter) in complex ways, even as the distinction between self and other is maintained through memories of intrasubjective experience.⁹³

This multiplicity of memorial experience in a particular locality is often overshadowed in the discipline of Memory Studies by scholarly research which tends firstly to exaggerate memory's travel across the larger-scale boundaries of nations and cultures and secondly to overlook the fact that 'in the end, collectives of memory are woven out of the myriad narratives of individual histories which are lived from within'.⁹⁴ In this literature review, I have suggested that drawing upon theories from Human Geography allows us to reconceptualise how we can approach the study of transcultural memory from a distinctly rooted perspective. I have demonstrated the scholarly benefits of examining in more detail the facilitating role of 'place' in processes of rooted transculturality performed by its inhabitants as they engage in individual and communal acts of place- and memory-making. I bring this chapter to a close by proposing that local places (as defined in this thesis) should be seen not as containers of a necessarily homogeneous collective memory (of place); rather, they should be seen as the origin of truly transcultural 'collectives of memory/ies'. The emphasised plurality of this term reflects the plurality of both the past events held in memory by heterogeneous social actors residing in a particular place, as well as of the

⁹² K. Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 222-23.

⁹³ Till, 'Activist Memory-work', p. 105.

⁹⁴ Jones and Garde-Hansen, p. 2.

inherent multiplicity of individuals' memories of any one particular historical or present happening. In this thesis, it is through the latter characterisation of place as the affective origin of 'collectives of memory/ies' that I will approach my analysis of the literary texts selected. In the following chapter, I will consider the role played by literature in the creation or recreation of cultural memory and contextualise the novels analysed in this thesis with reference to contemporary scholarship in the fields of German-language literature and World Literature.

Chapter Two

German Literature or World Literature? – Reimagining Place-based Memory as a Form of Literary Worldliness

In the previous chapter, I contextualised and outlined my focus in this thesis on the representation of contradictory processes of cosmopolitanisation in selected works of contemporary German-language literature, as well as on how these texts reimagine the relationship between place and world via the medium of memory. Performing a literature review of the field of Memory Studies, I highlighted how while memory scholars have engaged with the idea that memory can be held in or by particular places (or rather ‘sites’), the full implications of this recognition have largely remained underexplored. In an original theoretical move, I suggested how applying theories of ‘place’ from the discipline of Human Geography to the study of memory facilitates a more in-depth exploration of the potentially revolutionary role played by daily, lived localities in the creation of transcultural memorial narratives. In this chapter, I turn to a consideration of literature as a memorial device. While being careful not to carelessly label the texts analysed in this thesis as examples of ‘minority’ or ‘migrant’ literature, I contend that their authors’ transnational biographies are to an extent reflected in their equally transnational literary perspectives. In this, these novels offer an opportune context in which to explore how the act of bringing together seemingly disparate places and memories in one ‘place’ or text may result in the emergence of new, transcultural forms of memory. After considering the role played by literature in the creation of cultural memory, I will engage with the debate surrounding what has variously been termed *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, *interkulturelle Literatur* or *Migrationsliteratur* in the field of German literary studies – that is, literature written in German by migrants to Germany or their descendants. By tracing developments in contemporary German-language literature, as well as referring to recent scholarly conceptualisations of World Literature, I consider how the texts analysed in this thesis can be seen as marking the emergence of a new form of world-making literature written in the German language.

Literature and the production of cultural memory

In the field of Memory Studies, much consideration has been given to the important role played by literature in the creation of cultural memory.¹ In its status as ‘both a mirror and a

¹ Literary scholar Astrid Erll’s work forms a large part of this research, in works such as: *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2008); Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sarah B. Young (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Astrid

reflective space, but also an experimental field for human existence', literature has been shown to at once portray, challenge, unearth and create new narratives of memory.² For Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, literature plays three roles in the production of cultural memory: '1) literature as a medium of cultural remembrance; 2) literature as an object of remembrance; and 3) literature as a medium for observing the production of cultural memory'.³ While I am interested in this thesis in how the literary texts analysed in many ways seek to reshape our view of the past (function 1 in Erll and Rigney's definition), I am more so concerned with how this re-shaping suggests at their function as mediums through which to observe the production of new forms of specifically *transcultural* memorial narratives (function 3). Indeed, as Erll recognises, literature and memory share a historical commonality in their – oft forgotten – inherent transculturality. For centuries, literary texts have been shared between social groups (of which nations are a relatively modern, large-scale incarnation) and received by distant others whether in their original language or in translation, with their formal, aesthetic, and cultural contents read, borrowed, and re-incorporated in the production of new texts. These distinctly transcultural processes raise questions pertaining to the viability of the idea of 'national literatures' perhaps even before the nation-state model was established as the dominant social formation.

This forgotten transculturality of literature has implications for contemporary studies of memory since, as Erll asserts: 'It is actually since ancient times that contents, forms and technologies of memory have crossed the boundaries of time, space, and social groups, and *been filled in different local contexts with new life and meaning*'.⁴ Just as the transculturality of the medium (literature) questions the existence of 'national literatures', so too does the transculturality of the cultural content of this literature (including narratives of memory) question the viability of 'national memory' and the predominance, until very recently, of the idea of the nation as the primary container of memorial narratives. Erll's statement appears to lend credence to my assertion in the previous chapter that it is both the travel and re-location of memorial narratives that are integral to its transcultural character. The literature I analyse in this thesis pays heed to this duality of travel/rooting through excavating the

Erll, 'Traumatic Pasts, Literary Afterlives, and Transcultural Memory: New Directions of Literary and Media Memory Studies', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 3 (2011), 1-5; Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction', *European Journal of English Studies*, 10 (2006), 111-15. Elsewhere, theories of memory have been elaborated with reference to literary works in, amongst others: Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Silverman.

² Elisabeth Herrmann, 'How does Transnationalism Redefine Contemporary Literature?' in *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature*, ed. by Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), pp. 19-42 (p. 20).

³ Erll and Rigney, p. 112.

⁴ Erll, 'Traumatic Pasts', p. 4, emphasis added.

forgotten transculturality of local places of memory. In this, its production of ‘new’ forms of transcultural memory performs rather a re-remembering of a historically ever-present yet often ignored transculturality.

This re-imagination of new forms of transcultural memory is significant when we consider the role played by memory in processes of identity-creation, both personal and collective. For Birgit Neumann, one of the most significant functions of literature is its ability to explore this relationship between memory and identity, as well as to use this link to imagine new forms of identification that are then disseminated through its publication. In other words, literature presents its readers with alternative narratives of memory and, relatedly, with alternative forms of identity-creation:

Narratological approaches draw attention to formal-aesthetic characteristics of literature and thereby bring into view the fictional possibilities for world- or memory-creation. [...] True, literature draws upon the extra-textual reality. However, as a deprivatized medium, it represents a constructive way to encounter the world, and creates its own memory worlds with specifically literary techniques.⁵

This process of ‘world- or memory-creation’ prefigures Pheng Cheah’s conception of the ‘normative force’ of literature and its ability to ‘world a world’ that is an affective rather than spatial concept: world as ‘a form of relating, belonging or being-with’.⁶ I will return to the relevance of Cheah’s conceptualisation of world and of world-making literature to the specific texts analysed in this thesis later in this chapter, but mention it in this context to highlight literature’s ability to imagine new forms of relating to and identifying with Others precisely through its fictional examination and recreation of memorial narratives. Of course, literature cannot itself be the agent of such re-imaginings; rather, it is the author who performs this action. In the following sections, I consider the figure of the author and specifically the role of the ‘minority’ or ‘migrant’ author and of ‘minority’ or ‘migrant’ literature in general in relation to the re-writing of memory and re-imagining of identity.

‘Minority’, ‘migrant’ or ‘transnational’ literature?

Writing in 1975, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduced the concept of ‘minor literature’, defined as literature written in a major language by social actors deemed to be minorities in the realm of this language.⁷ ‘Minor literature’ has three primary characteristics: firstly, it performs a deterritorialisation of the major language in both geographical and

⁵ Birgit Neumann, ‘The Literary Representation of Memory’ in *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll, pp. 333-44 (pp. 333-34).

⁶ Cheah, p. 42.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka : Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1975).

cultural terms; secondly, it is necessarily political; thirdly, it serves as a form of collective enunciation of the ‘minority’ group or culture.⁸ Deleuze and Guattari thus ‘locate in minor literature the repressed and censored dimensions of the major language [and its culture]’: that is, the inherent ‘Otherness’ that lies both within ourselves and within our assumed, supposedly homogeneous national, cultural, linguistic, etc. collective(s).⁹ While the pluralisation of perspectives and presentation of alternative identities in ‘minor literatures’ is of itself a necessary development, the structural premises upon which the concepts of ‘minor’ or ‘minority’ rests are inherently problematic. As Doris Wilkinson has argued, ‘[a]n abstraction most often regarded as virtually synonymous with race, “minority” is actually non-scientific and devoid of conceptual clarity and empirical validity.’¹⁰ The concept of ‘minority’ does not account for the historical presence of minorities in societies across the globe, nor can its employment as a descriptive term encapsulate the diversity in lifestyles, history, and culture of the individuals and groups to which it is applied.¹¹

Of primary concern in regard to the political force of ‘minor literature’ is the fact that the dichotomy minor literature/major culture reinforces the imbalance of power that has in the first place led to the labelling of identities and practices that do not conform to the national cultural ‘norm’ as minoritarian. Indeed, ‘minority’ identities are often viewed as standing alongside – or even in antagonistic opposition to – the majority culture rather than enacting an intersection with or transformation of this culture. In this case, minority identities as expressed in literature are emptied of the political power envisaged by Deleuze and Guattari due to their reception in the majority culture as a chance to encounter otherness from a safe distance but not to engage with it or permit its acceptance into the ‘major’ culture. While the original concept of ‘minor literature’ may have been envisaged as a counter-mobilisation of the negatively attributed tag ‘minority’ in a more positive, empowered fashion, this does not change the fact that power relations remain negatively skewed towards the major culture: conditions of reception are still circumscribed. In the German context, Maria S. Grewe has argued in this vein that ‘minority literature in Germany is often seen as an exotic cultural artefact’ while the ‘mechanisms through which the foreign functions as a constitutive factor in the production and reception of German minority literature’ remain concealed.¹² The

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16-17.

⁹ Seyhan, p. 26.

¹⁰ Doris Wilkinson, ‘Rethinking the Concept “Minority”’: A Task for Social Scientists and Practitioners’, *The Journal of Sociology and Welfare*, 27 (2000), 115-32 (p. 115).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹² Maria S. Grewe, ‘Imagining the East: Some Thoughts on Contemporary Minority Literature in Germany and Exoticist Discourse in Literary Criticism’, in *Germany and the Imagined East*, ed. by Lee Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), pp. 69-79 (p. 73; p. 72).

category ‘minority’ in this case functions as a blanket term for all things ‘foreign’, as defined by their distance from the supposedly homogeneous German national culture.

The idea of a distinctly German *Leitkultur* embodies the intrinsic link between language, culture and nation in the German context – a triumvirate that is seen as the result of Germany’s founding as a ‘Kulturnation’ with a shared language and cultural heritage long before its political establishment as a nation-state in 1871. Elke-Sturm Trigonakis argues that this history is perhaps why ‘German scholarship shows a high degree of resistance against the integration of a culturally and linguistically foreign literary discourse into the traditionally monocultural German one’.¹³ Indeed, the proliferation of terms within German literary scholarship to describe works written by authors with an ethnic or familial background in countries other than Germany seems to suggest a reluctance to adopt into the German canon any literature that may pluralise this distinctly monocultural space. Terms such as *Gastarbeiter-*, *Ausländer-*, *Migrations-*, *Migrant/innen-* or *interkulturelle Literatur* in scholarly and public discourse, as well as the specifically scholarly ‘literature of migration’ or ‘literature of settlement’ all suggest a sense of purposeful separation of such literature from the literary production of ‘ethnic’ Germans.¹⁴ As Leslie Adelson recognises in regard to what she terms the ‘Turkish Turn’ in contemporary German literature, literary and cultural works by Germans with Turkish heritage are often conceptualised as sitting ‘between two worlds’: that is, they are seen as not quite German, but not quite Turkish either.¹⁵ The insistence upon imagined nationality as the categorical frame of reference for defining literary works is outdated when we consider that many Turkish-German novels ‘involve a *preponderance* of interventions into and beyond national archives of twentieth-century German culture’.¹⁶ That such interventions are largely overlooked suggests that the German model of national identity based in a shared past, ethnicity, and (mono)culture blinds society to its contemporary, diverse reality, in which social actors deemed to be ‘minorities’ are attempting to re-write what it means to be German in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

This situation is as equally true of fictional, literary narratives as it is of ‘minority’ interventions into discourses of German memory – a keystone of contemporary German

¹³ Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, ‘Contemporary German-based Hybrid Texts as New World Literature’ in *German Literature as World Literature*, ed. by Thomas Beebee (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 178-79; p. 183.

¹⁴ See Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Tom Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (New York: Camden House, 2007), respectively.

¹⁵ Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12, emphasis in original.

identity. As Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz recognise, there exists a paradox in German memory culture, namely that:

It has seemed necessary to preserve an ethnically homogeneous notion of German identity in order to ensure Germans' responsibility for the crimes of the recent past, even though that very notion of ethnicity was one of the sources of those crimes.¹⁷

This situation has created difficulties for those German citizens who have familial roots outside of Germany and who are consequently positioned as unable to relate to the affective legacy of the Holocaust as an event which must be commemorated through expressions of guilt for forebears' crimes. For Rothberg and Yildiz, the construction of such a memorial narrative places non-ethnically German residents in a 'double-bind' in which 'migrants are simultaneously told to stay away from the Holocaust and [particularly for Muslim migrants] then castigated as anti-Semitic for their alleged indifference to its remembrance.' This indifference is 'alleged' because, as Rothberg and Yildiz show, migrants are relating to the legacy of the Holocaust in Germany but in a distinctly multi-directional fashion that is not yet recognised by German society at large, resulting in the emergence of 'an alternative migrant archive' of Holocaust remembrance.¹⁸

For Leslie Adelson, literature is one arena in which these alternative archives of memory may come to light. Writing of Zafer Şenocak's political essays, Adelson argues that Şenocak 'write[s] a new subject of German remembrance into being' while his 1998 novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* 'defies various taboos and unsettles multiple cultures of memory from the vantage point of Turkish migration to Germany'.¹⁹ Despite – or perhaps because of – this originality, Adelson laments the fact that Şenocak remains largely overlooked by the German media and German literary criticism, speculating that the reason for this lies in the fact that 'his literary prose offers no Turkish figures that lend themselves to easy consumption, imitation or "edutainment"'.²⁰ The scholarly and public insistence on recognised forms of German national (memorial) identity and the labelling of literature based on the demographic 'minority' status of its author often serves to obscure the originality of what one particular piece of literature is attempting to achieve, leading Adelson to question: 'At what point does the literature of migration acquire contours more German than Turkish in structure, more transnational than national, more postnational than

¹⁷ Rothberg and Yildiz, p. 35.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 36; p. 37.

¹⁹ Leslie A. Adelson, 'Back to the Future: Turkish Remembrances of the GDR and Other Phantom Pasts', in *The Cultural Afterlife of East Germany: New Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by Leslie A. Adelson, vol. 13 (Washington D.C.: The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 2002), pp. 94-109 (p. 103); Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, p. 105.

²⁰ Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, pp. 106-07.

anything else?’²¹ The term ‘minority’, whether applied to people, cultures or literatures, relies on a taken for granted assumption that ‘the nation’ is monocultural, monolingual, and ethnically homogeneous, and suggests that anything which does not conform to this uniformity must be held separately at a safe distance from the majority culture. In light of this, and implicit in Adelson’s question, is the necessity to somehow look beyond the nation as a structuring mechanism by focusing on what it is that we have in common as contemporary citizens of a shared world despite our immediate and personal differences.

Indeed, in recent years, the constructedness of the nation as well as of the concept of ‘national literature’ has been questioned by a wave of scholarly interventions exploring the theme of transnationalism. As Paul Jay argues, ‘[s]ince the rise of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism.’²² In the German context, works such as Azade Seyhan’s *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001), Petra Fachinger’s *Rewriting Germany from the Margins: Other German Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (2001), Leslie Adelson and Tom Cheesman’s studies on Turkish-German literature (2005 and 2007 respectively), and volumes such as *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature* (2015) and *Transnationalism and German-language Literature in the Twenty-First Century* (2017) reflect this turn towards the concept of transnationalism.²³ While this development is welcome in terms of undermining the structuring concept of nationality, it does not necessarily follow that the increased attention paid to transnationality as a common way of life in the twenty-first century results in the erasure of the term ‘minority’, nor of the separation of those deemed to have ‘minority backgrounds’ from so-called *Biodeutsche*. This stands as true in the realm of society where minorities are often still marginalised as outsiders as it does in the realm of literature where the assumption is often made that ‘minority’ or ‘migrant’ authors are uniquely placed and indeed uniquely able to thematise transnationality in their works. As Stuart Taberner argues:

Transnationalism, in effect, may appear to be something that ‘transnational writers’ are born into, acquire when they arrive elsewhere, or create in the act of crossing borders, rather than as a social reality that applies as much to those who do not travel as to those who do.²⁴

²¹ Ibid, p. 12.

²² Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p.1.

²³ Seyhan; Petra Fachinger, *Rewriting Germany From the Margins: Other German Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*; Cheesman; *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature*, ed. by Herrmann, Smith-Prei and Taberner; Stuart Taberner, *Transnationalism and German-language Literature in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²⁴ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, pp. 53-54.

The term ‘transnational writers’, when applied solely to those with a so-called *Migrationshintergrund*, functions as but another way to separate such authors from the ‘German’ literary canon or *Leitkultur* rather than as a means to move away from the determining force of author biographies in the reception of literary works.

Recognising this tendency, Elisabeth Herrmann argues for a new approach to contemporary German-language literature that refrains from defining a given piece of literature based on its author’s biography and instead examines its literary content, style, and aesthetics. Proposing that a new trend for ‘*trans-national*’ or even ‘*non-national*’ identity has emerged as a theme in recent works of German-language literature, she argues that transnational concerns and aesthetics are present not only in ‘migration, minority, diaspora or hybrid literature’ but can be found across a plethora of contemporary texts written in German by authors from a variety of national, social, and cultural backgrounds.²⁵ For Herrmann, contemporary texts can be defined not by their authors’ biographies but by their common concern with a shared, global twenty-first century moment. Contemporary literature ‘comes to serve as a means of identity formation that refers to a specific time and collective centre of reference, the latter of which can be located *within or across nations*’.²⁶ From this, we can infer that Herrmann is suggesting that some literary texts written in German today are not ‘German literature’ in the sense of a distinctly national literature forming part of the German *Leitkultur*; they are rather transnational texts that just happen to be written in the German language. This would reflect Stuart Taberner’s suggestion that today, ‘the German Novel’ would best be conceptualised rather as ‘The Novel in German’.²⁷

As I will argue presently, the texts analysed in this thesis could each be seen as examples not of contemporary ‘*trans-national*’ literature, but rather of ‘*non-national*’ or specifically world-making literature that use the German language as their chosen form of expression. The term ‘*trans-national*’ literature remains inevitably bound to the (idea of the) nation it nevertheless purports to transgress; the distinctly *non-national* or world-making literature analysed in this thesis serves to not only move beyond the nation as a psychical structuring principle but rather erase it entirely through productively reconfiguring the relationship between locality and world in a manner that bypasses the national scale of reference. As regards this thesis’ concern with place, these novels begin in this manner to break down the assumed link between national territory, language, and literature by demonstrating how new world-making literary works written in German share more commonalities and concerns

²⁵ Herrmann, p. 25; p. 24, emphasis in original. See also: Stuart Taberner, ‘Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Fiction by Nonminority Writers’, *Seminar*, 47 (2011), 624-45.

²⁶ Herrmann, p. 23, emphasis added.

²⁷ Stuart Taberner, ‘Introduction: The Novel in German since 1990’, in *The Novel in German since 1990*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-18 (p. 3).

with one another than with any national canons to which they are defined as belonging.²⁸ In the following section, I introduce and contextualise the texts analysed in this thesis and suggest at how they begin to envisage place-based memory as a form of worldliness that transcends national boundaries.

Transnationalism in contemporary German-language literature

In this thesis, I will analyse five pieces of contemporary German-language literature written by authors who were born and spent part of their lives in countries of the former Soviet Union before moving to Germany, acquiring German citizenship, and beginning their literary career writing in German. These authors are: Olga Grjasnowa, born to a secular Jewish family in the Russian-speaking minority in Azerbaijan before moving to Germany as a child; Katja Petrowskaja, also born into a Jewish family in Kiev, modern-day Ukraine, before moving to Germany as an adult; and Russian-born Nellja Veremej, who also relocated to Germany as an adult. I will dedicate one chapter of this thesis respectively to: Olga Grjasnowa's 2012 debut *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and her 2014 *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*; Katja Petrowskaja's to-date only book, *Vielleicht Esther*, which was published to critical acclaim in 2014; and Nellja Veremej's 2013 debut *Berlin liegt im Osten* and her 2016 *Nach dem Sturm*. That these novels were published within a four-year time span and are written exclusively by female authors, two of whom come from Jewish families and all of whom have lived experience of the former Soviet Union, may appear to suggest that the reasons behind their grouping is self-explanatory. However, in line with Herrmann's suggestion that contemporary literary criticism of German-language texts must move away from a sole focus on author biography in favour of an engagement with the content of the texts themselves, my reason for analysing these novels in conjunction with one another lies neither with questions of a shared gender nor shared religion, ethnicity or 'national origin'.²⁹ Rather, I am interested in these authors' preoccupation with the facilitating role played by local places (of memory) in agents' re-creation of truly transcultural memories, as well as how they envisage this process as the catalyst to imagining more worldly forms of consciousness.

I will gesture in the chapters on Grjasnowa and Petrowskaja towards these authors' engagement with their Jewish heritage in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and *Vielleicht Esther* respectively, and of the thematisation of migration and/or exile as a distinctly Jewish

²⁸ This argument is paraphrased from Sturm-Trigonakis' consideration of the connections between what she describes as 'New World Literature'.

²⁹ See Herrmann, pp. 24-25.

condition in particularly Petrowskaja's text. However, I do so through this thesis' main focus on how place-based memories are mobilised in a distinctly transcultural or 'worldly' manner in all five of the novels analysed; Grjasnowa and Petrowskaja's shared Jewish heritage contributes towards but is not the sole focus of the argument made in this thesis. The status of being Jewish in contemporary Germany and, equally, of the relationship between gender and memory (given that all the authors analysed are female) could have provided the basis of other, equally interesting thesis-length projects. Indeed, in a concluding chapter I will briefly sketch out the directions such studies could have taken in the context of contemporary German-language literature's engagement with the contemporary moment. In what follows here however, I will briefly contextualise the novels analysed in this thesis against the background of the transnationalisation of contemporary German-language literature and in relation to explorations of transnationality, memory, subjectivity, and 'place' in this literature. Secondly, I will define my approach to these novels and their authors in the context of debates surrounding 'minority', 'migrant', and 'transnational' literatures in German literary scholarship by considering how these texts can in fact be seen as heralding the development of a new world-making literature written in the German language – one whose authors use literature as a means to rewrite the relationship between place and world via place-based memory.

For Brigid Haines, the texts analysed in this thesis would form part of what she has diagnosed as the 'Eastern turn' in contemporary German-language literature, characterised by a proliferation of texts written by authors who have migrated to German-speaking nations from countries in Central and Eastern Europe.³⁰ These authors include, but are not limited to: Katerina Kroucheva and Ilja Trojanow (Bulgaria); Maxim Biller, Milena Oda and Zdenke Becker (the Czech Republic); Terézia Mora (Hungary); Artur Becker, Radek Knapp and Magdalena Felixa (Poland); Carmen Francesca Banciu, Florian Catalin Florescu, Herta Müller and Richard Wagner (Romania); Lena Gorelik, Wladimir Kaminer, Julya Rabinowich, Alina Bronsky and Vladimir Vertlib (Russia); Adriana Alteras (Croatia); Saša Stanišić (former Yugoslavia).³¹ Perhaps unlike the approach to German-language literature criticised by Tom Cheesman as obsessed with its authors' national 'origin' and of these authors as somehow representative of their respective national cultures,³² Haines' interest in these authors' biographies is borne of exploring transnational commonalities both within

³⁰ Brigid Haines, 'The Eastern Turn in Contemporary German, Swiss and Austrian Literature', *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 16 (2008), 135-49.

³¹ References taken from Taberner, *Transnationalism*, pp. 60-61. See *ibid* for a fuller list of such authors.

³² See Cheesman, p. 33, where he argues that Turkish-German authors, once defined as a group, are 'obliged to represent Turkish Germans and Turks to Germans; Turkish Germans and Germans to Turks; and all three to others, on the international stage'.

literature of the ‘Eastern turn’ and with (sub-)national literatures written in other languages. Indeed, elsewhere Haines argues that German-language literature written by authors of the ‘Eastern turn’ resists easy categorisation, sharing as it does themes and tropes with ‘other’ literatures, examples of which include: shared experience of life in the former Eastern Bloc with the literatures of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania; shared experience of communism with the literature of East Germany; shared experience of marginalisation and re-defining what it is to ‘be German’ with Turkish-German literature.³³ Literature of the ‘Eastern turn’, Haines tentatively suggests, shares ‘five common scenarios’, all of which – importantly for this thesis’ concerns – are closely linked to themes of traumatic memory and identity in-and-across particular places. These include: the lived reality of communist rule; the alienating experience of moving westwards; the ensuing disillusionment with life in an economically and politically changed East; conflicts in former Yugoslavia; disorientation with life in post-Cold War Europe.³⁴ In this literature, lived experience in a particular place is transnationalised through its expression in a language other than that of the nation in which it was originally experienced.

This what we may term ‘translation’ of traumatic experiences and memories into another language and national context leads Stuart Taberner to consider such novels as contributing to a ‘literary archive of transnationalism [that] is largely an archive of trauma.’ He explains:

Whether the focus is on transnationalism as a lived reality for asylum seekers, migrants, refugees, or on the broader context of the regional conflicts, historical entanglements, or social, economic, and political injustices that often trigger movement across borders – or both at the same time – these authors excavate, narrate, and record transnational histories of conquest and colonization, of multiple languages and ethnicities living side by side, and of racial prejudices and, ultimately, genocide.³⁵

Such literature brings into the German language and cultural realm narratives of trauma previously unexpressed in this cultural space and, at times, brings them into connection with more familiar traumatic narratives such as the legacy of the Holocaust. Saša Stanišić’s *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* (2006) and Adriana Alteras’ *Titos Brille* (2011) engage, for example, with the brutality of the Balkan wars which sent refugees fleeing to Germany whilst Catalin Dorian Florescu’s *Der kurze Weg nach Hause* (2002) and his *Der blinde Masseur* (2006), and Dana Grigorcea’s *Das primäre Gefühl der Schuldlosigkeit* (2015) primarily thematise traumatic Romanian history. Elsewhere, texts such as Vladimir Vertlib’s *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* (2003), Ilja Trojanow’s *Macht und*

³³ Brigid Haines, ‘German-language Writing from Eastern and Central Europe’, in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 215-29 (p. 228).

³⁴ Haines, ‘The Eastern Turn’, p. 139.

³⁵ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 65; p. 63.

Widerstand (2015) and Marjana Gaponeko's *Wer ist Martha?* (2012) bring the German Nazi past into contact with traumatic histories from Soviet Russia, Bulgaria and beyond into the entire European continent respectively. For Taberner, such literature provides an exploration of historical trauma across borders and/or the present global condition of twenty-first century transnationality as a shared but simultaneously vastly divergent experience.³⁶ As Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie-Smith Prei, and Stuart Taberner assert, the concept of positionality is key to any exploration of transnationalism as a contemporary condition of life since 'the fact that *all* are implicated in transnationalism does not mean that all experience it in the same way'.³⁷ In imagining and portraying the specific lives, experiences, and memories of particular characters in and across particular places in the contemporary world, the abstract condition of transnationality is in such literature 'brought [back] down to Earth' as a lived reality.³⁸

This function of literature is, of course, nothing necessarily new. As Stuart Taberner argues of the post-1990 fiction of the Berlin Republic, the *du jour* themes of integration, normalisation, and globalisation are, in this literature, removed from abstract public-political discourse and confronted with the lived experience of the people with whom they purport to be concerned. He states:

Above all, contemporary writing in German, almost irrespective of the subject matter of particular texts, explores the lived experience of its protagonists and examines issues of subjectivity, memory and identity in a manner that is only indirectly contingent on a particular political context or an ideological or philosophical position taken with respect to this context in earlier decades.³⁹

The literary excavation of personal, subjective, lived experiences often lost within abstract concepts such as globalisation and transnationality shares an obvious parallel with the argument I make in this thesis pertaining to the necessity of excavating the decidedly heterogeneous, located experiences and memories of particular individuals that are equally often lost in abstract scholarly considerations of transnational memories. Similarly, the idea of a literary archive of transnational trauma proposed by Stuart Taberner shares with my pluralisation in this thesis of 'collective memory' into 'collectives *of* memory/ies' a concern with imagining ways of being-with and relating to Others' memories that do not automatically assume the (ethno-)nation to be the primary source of collective memory, nor assume that this collectivity comes from the remembrance of the same event. Where,

³⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 62-64.

³⁷ Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner, 'Introduction: Contemporary German-language Literature and Transnationalism', in *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature*, ed. by Herrmann, Smith-Prei and Taberner, pp. 1-18 (p. 4), emphasis in original.

³⁸ Radstone, p. 111.

³⁹ Stuart Taberner, 'Introduction: Literary Fiction in the Berlin Republic', in *Contemporary German Fiction*, ed. by Taberner, pp. 1-20 (p. 3; p. 11).

however, does the concept of ‘place’ – the integral concept of this thesis – come into the equation? How does the presentation of fictionalised, transnational narratives of memory in German-language literature affect our conceptualisation of what constitutes ‘a place’ – that is, a shared social space whose meaning has been co-determined by its inhabitants – in reality?

Disrupting conceptions of ‘place’ in contemporary German-language literature

Arguably, the primary way in which the notion of ‘place’ has been disrupted in contemporary German-language literature is precisely through its portrayal of transnational lives and memories which question the status of the nation itself as an imagined, metaphorical place of (non-)belonging, premised upon the idea of one shared ethno-national identity and a homogenised, closed national past. In the German context, this link between memory and national identity is particularly strong, built as it is upon an ethnic responsibility to pay heed to the crimes of forebears who were or may have been implicated in the tragedy of the Holocaust.⁴⁰ In this case, the role of contemporary German-language literature thematising transnationalism has been in many ways to break down the conception of the German nation as a ‘place’ of distinctly, or even solely, German memory by introducing into the German literary space memories of trauma originating beyond the German national border. Not only does such literature bring into the German linguistic space traumatic memories that have perhaps not yet been expressed in this realm, they also work to bring these new memories into contact with those already well explored in the German language (such as the legacy of the Holocaust), illuminating their transnational relevance and gesturing towards the inherent historical interconnectedness of supposedly closed, ‘national’ histories and memories. For Margaret Littler, the affective power of such memories of trauma is precisely the factor which underpins their transnational relevance. This shared affect-across-borders allows recent literary works in the German language to deterritorialise particular traumatic memories and bring them into contact with other equally traumatic narratives, loosening ‘the links between memory and identity’ and arguably, in the context of this thesis, also between memory, identity, and imagined nation-as-place.⁴¹ That Littler gestures towards shared affect as the primary point of connection between traumatic memories originating in geographically distant locations is hugely significant for this thesis

⁴⁰ See Rothberg and Yildiz, p. 135.

⁴¹ Margaret Littler, ‘Cultural Memory and Identity Formation in the Berlin Republic’, in *Contemporary German Fiction*, ed. by Taberner, pp. 177-95 (p. 177).

since affect plays a key role in the theorisation of place-based memory developed in the previous chapter.

Contemporary German-language literature has in the manner described above been largely concerned with disrupting the idea of the German nation as a metaphorical ‘place’ in itself; one shaped by the imposition of top-down narratives of national memory and identity. The literature analysed in this thesis is, however, more so concerned with local, diverse places of everyday life as containers and sources of new narratives of transcultural memory. Rather than attempting to ‘undo’ the idea of the German nation by introducing transnational narratives into the German literary space (thus still remaining with the structuring principle of the trans/national), the novels analysed in this thesis attempt to create narratives of transcultural memory by moving in the opposite direction: that is, towards the locality and conceptions of rootedness. In this manner, they arguably represent a new development in contemporary German-language literature in their attempt to re-write the relationship between locality/place and world/place via the medium of memory *without* necessary mediation by the nation as a socio-geographical scale and psychical structuring principle. This attempt is premised upon a recognition that appears to be largely overlooked in Memory Studies – that rootedness in place and transculturality are not antithetical concepts and, in fact, it is only by taking the locality as our frame of reference that we can recognise the emergence of transcultural forms of memory that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Particularly in German-language literature written by authors who themselves have transnational biographies, local places often feature for their mobile protagonists as affective entry points into their new social surroundings or as physical reminders of lost memories or past experiences that have personal significance. The protagonist of Turkish-German author Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998), for example, manages to orient herself in her new, German surroundings by affectively transposing her own personal memories onto the physical space of Berlin as she slowly comes to feel at home. The geographical location of Berlin does not become a ‘place’ as such in this novel until the protagonist comes to know her surroundings and affectively connect to them. Berlin as the novel’s setting and Berlin as a ‘place’ in the novel are not one and the same: Berlin as ‘setting’ exists outside of the novel whereas Berlin the ‘place’ is created within and through the novel by both author and protagonist. As Silke Schade argues of the protagonist’s creative re-writing of the city:

[She] creates a personal topography of the city of Berlin, weaving the geography of selected physical spaces she inhabits into her own identity, and connecting her own life

with the physical surroundings. In doing so, she creates a sense of home in the foreign city spaces she enters.⁴²

The Berlin created within this novel then is a distinctly transcultural place that comes of a particular agent's interaction with and metaphorical transformation of the existing physical location, already the embodiment of the lives and memories of those inhabiting this location before the protagonist's arrival.

The re-creation and preservation of place-memory by literary protagonists as a form of identity creation also features in Sabrina Janesch's *Katzenberge* (2010) and Adriana Alteras' *Titos Brille* (2011), in which their protagonists' attempt to piece together their familial histories in the former German territories of Galicia and Schlesien, and to locate themselves and their family in the tumultuous recent history of former Yugoslavia respectively. These novels raise the question of what happens to both personal and collective memories when the regions or nations to which they purport to belong are wiped off the map during periods of historical tumult and war. In *Katzenberge*, the protagonist embarks upon a quest to recover her family's history in Central Europe, a journey which takes her from her current home in Berlin back to her familial home in Schlesien and ultimately onto Galicia from which her grandfather was displaced in the aftermath of the Second World War. Following a similar narrative drive as Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*, whose protagonist journeys across Eastern and Central Europe in an attempt to reconstruct her lost Jewish familial history, *Katzenberge* emphasises in a similar manner the sticking power of affective place-based memory even after attempts have been made to erase particular geographical localities off the map. The Central European localities that hold such familial significance for Janesch's protagonist no longer exist in the form known by her ancestors, yet when she returns the historical traumas undergone by family members remain for her etched on the landscape. Through detailing her protagonist's search for her cross-border familial history, Janesch captures in literary form the historical transnationality of particular Central and Eastern European localities as lived, previously diverse places whose characters were fundamentally altered by the often violent re-drawing of national boundaries.

In Özdamar, Janesch, and Altaras' novels, the excavation of personal, place-based memories functions to undermine the idea of the nation as a metaphorical place of belonging, as well as the idea of national memory, by (in the case of the latter two novels) tracing the historical interconnectedness and inherent transnationality of past experiences of trauma and displacement. Janesch and Altaras, in Litter's terms, deterritorialise traumatic memory in a distinctly unique and seemingly paradoxical fashion – that is, by returning to and exploring

⁴² Silke Schade, 'Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Berlin: Linking Migration and Home in *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*', *Focus on German Studies*, 13 (2000), 21-33 (p. 22).

rooted forms of place-based memory in a transnational context. However, like much contemporary German-language literature, while they question the status of the nation and of national memory, they still ‘rarely [think] *beyond* the nation’ and thus struggle to mobilise place-based memory in such a way as to ‘[elaborate] a genuine cosmopolitanism or to “[world]” a world, to use Pheng Cheah’s intentionally normative term’.⁴³ In other words, while they problematise the idea of the nation, they struggle to offer an alternative form of place-based belonging. In the penultimate section of this chapter, I will suggest how the texts analysed in this thesis – when read through the Human-Geography inspired framework of place-based memory elaborated in the previous chapter – do in fact succeed in imagining necessarily cosmopolitan forms ‘of relating, belonging or being-with’ both local and distant Others by mobilising place-based memories as a means to negotiate the relationship between locality and world without necessary mediation by the nation.⁴⁴

Place-based memory as a form of literary worldliness?

Writing of the complex interplay of temporalities embodied in landscapes, Jo Lee reminds us that: ‘The landscape is not just a palimpsest [...], a historical layering in which the present is merely the sum of past episodes, but it is also an *active*, present future-oriented engagement with the environment.’⁴⁵ In a similar manner to environmental landscapes, lived places as dynamic arenas of landscape-inhabitant interaction are characterised by the multiple, overlapping temporalities of past, present, and future. That the authors under analysis in this thesis imagine and excavate lived places of memory in their texts is precisely the factor which allows them to mobilise place in a novel, productive manner previously largely unachieved in contemporary German-language literature. This is because they not only portray memory(-in-place) as inherently transcultural but also acknowledge that the recreation of place-based memory is a perpetual process borne of the complex interaction between people and the places they inhabit. In this manner, the pasts that they excavate do not remain impotently lost to history but are rather situated within their present-day, lived context or ‘place’ (of memory). Vitality, this allows them to begin to imagine how these pasts can be mobilised by the place’s present-day inhabitants in the name of fostering a sense of future-oriented collectivity that comes of relating to one another via the affective sharing of and relating to memory-in/of-place.

⁴³ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 305.

⁴⁴ Cheah, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Lee, p. 89, emphasis in original.

By bringing memory ‘back down to Earth’ and re-rooting transcultural memory in particular lived places, these texts not only shed light on memories and experiences that may otherwise have been overlooked but they also ground the (non-)acknowledgement of such memories in present-day structures of power and representation, as propagated by Susannah Radstone.⁴⁶ Transcultural memory-in-place is mobilised in these texts to reclaim the local as a potential origin of resistance to imposed narratives of memory, as well as to reflect on historical systems of structural inequality that have led us to situation of the present day. In this manner, memory is not necessarily an anachronistic tie to a time that will not pass. Rather, the mobilisation of personal memory in temporally-overlapping and affectively charged local places results in the collaborative emergence of new collectives of memory/ies around which new present-day identities and forms of collectivity can emerge. Transcultural memory both resides in place and is recreated through perpetual processes of place-making, the latter of which inherently involve the fostering of new communities (of remembrance). In their initial stage, these processes rely on a shared, affective bond forged between heterogenous inhabitants as they engage with the traces of memory in a shared locality while simultaneously transposing their own memories onto this place. The novels analysed in this thesis suggest that it is through taking part in rooted processes of transcultural memory creation as a form of transcultural collective-building that individuals gain the affective point of reference necessary to extrapolate beyond their immediate locality and imagine forms of more worldly being-in-common. This extrapolation consists in the bringing-into-being of more metaphorical, supra-local ‘places’ of affective communal significance, established through the creative re-imagining of the past, memory, and the present day as the shared inheritance of all twenty-first century citizens in an inescapably interconnected and mutually dependent world. In this construction, memory and place are mutually constitutive and are thus equally invested with revolutionary potential as regards the bringing-into-being of new ‘worlds’ (of remembrance).

By tracing, reimagining, and portraying the memorial connections between geographically distant localities in our interconnected twenty-first century globe, the authors whose novels are analysed in this thesis perform a simultaneous re-rooting and cosmopolitanisation of memory. Local places, as imagined and written in these novels, are not simply arbitrary geographical containers but are rather more radically reconceptualised as productive sources of local-and-world belonging when affectively engaged with in all their transcultural complexity. In Pheng Cheah’s conception of the term, I argue in this thesis that these novels ‘world’ new worlds by bringing into relation memorial narratives and local places that were otherwise presumed to be unconnected, constrained as they often were by their supposed

⁴⁶ Radstone, pp. 110-11.

belonging to distinct, separate nations. That the new memorial connections made in these texts come of an imaginative transgression of boundaries that is premised upon rooted, affective, communal forms of place-and-memory making at both a local and supra-local level suggests that they are attempting to imagine and bring-into-being new ‘form[s] of relating, belonging, or being-with’, that is, new ‘worlds’.⁴⁷

In this sense, and in the sense that they reconfigure the relationship between locality and world without necessary mediation by the nation, I argue that these texts are prime examples of a new world-making literature that is written in German but cannot be classed as ‘German literature’ in the traditionally understood sense of the term. On the one hand, I acknowledge these authors’ biographical background as migrants to Germany and equally recognise the potential for their introducing into the German language experiences and memories of the past that can be brought in a novel fashion into contact with narratives more widely thematised in German-language literature. On the other hand, I refuse to conflate these authors’ transnational biographies with their novels by attributing to them the tags ‘minority’, ‘migrant’ or ‘intercultural’ literature – an act I would see as reintroducing the nation as a structuring concept into the reading of texts that distinctly attempt to write the nation out of the equation. In this case, I approach these novels with a mind to Elke Sturm-Trigonakis’ conceptualisation of ‘New World Literature’ as ‘a taxonomical and analytical tool for approaching culturally and linguistically hybrid contemporary texts usually considered to be minor parts of their respective national literatures.’ For Trigonakis such texts are characterised by an alienation from the idea of fixed nations and cultures and consider instead the dynamic interplay between globalism and transnationalism, and regionalism and localism in twenty-first century contexts.⁴⁸

The novels analysed in this thesis are indeed concerned with this dynamic interplay, as well as with the various conditions and consequences of transnationalism in the twenty-first century. However, what is specific about these particular texts – and indeed what provides their ultimate revolutionary potential in their reconfiguration of the local-world relationship – is their common preoccupation with place-based memory and their contextualisation of the local conditions of contemporary transculturality within a shared world past. These novels are largely concerned with excavating memories of trauma yet, unlike most contributions to what Taberner sees as ‘a literary archive of transnational trauma’, they have a dual temporal focus.⁴⁹ That is, they concentrate not only on past instances of trauma but also examine instances of present-day structural violence as potential sources of future traumatic

⁴⁷ Cheah, p. 42.

⁴⁸ Sturm-Trigonakis, p. 177; p. 186.

⁴⁹ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 60.

memories, as well as the connections between the two across time. In these novels, the traumatic legacies of processes of colonisation, the Holocaust, the breakdown of the former Soviet Union and ensuing fall of communism, and the violent Balkan wars are variously brought into contact with contemporary forms of physical and indirect violence such as the wars in the Middle East which have displaced millions of people from their homes, the consequences of global capitalism and of neoliberal policies which have entrenched forms of economic and social inequality, and of the threat of climate change which poses an existential threat to all life and indeed our planet itself.

That I categorise these texts as representing a new form of world-making literature hinges on the distinction between the ‘world’, or rather ‘globe’, as a spatial category and ‘world’ as a temporal category in Pheng Cheah’s sense of the term.⁵⁰ As opposed to designating the study of how literature travels across national borders – the traditionally understood sense of ‘World Literature’ – these texts’ status as world-making literature comes of their active intervention into processes of *worlding* that originate in processes of place-making through memory. This distinction between ‘globe’ and ‘world’ is hugely significant in terms of conceiving of how the discipline of World Literature can productively overcome its continuing fixation with the centrality of the nation or national literatures and their movement across borders; a fixation Spivak disdainfully terms an ‘arrogan[t] [...] cartographic reading of world lit. in translation’.⁵¹ For Cheah, ‘the world made by globalization is in some way mediated through the nation’, therefore, in taking ‘world’ to signify a purely spatial, capitalised realm of exchange – as do the majority of world literature scholars – the discipline of World Literature remains equally inescapably mediated by the nation as a frame of reference.⁵² It is thus only by thinking ‘world’ as a temporal category, as I do in this thesis in my definition of new, world-making literature, that we open up the possibility for the discipline of World Literature to look *beyond* or even erase the nation as a frame of reference. By considering how the texts analysed in this thesis intervene in processes of world-creation through temporalisation – in this case through their rewriting of place-based transcultural memory – we can consider how they innovatively ‘world new worlds’ through illuminating previously overlooked memorial and present-day connections between distant localities and their inhabitants.⁵³ As examples of a new form of world-making literature, these texts manage to reconfigure the relationship between (local) place and world without necessary mediation by the nation; a distancing from the national frame

⁵⁰ Cheah, p. 2.

⁵¹ Spivak, *Discipline*, p. 73.

⁵² Cheah, p. 211.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 42.

of reference that is otherwise largely unachieved in contemporary theories of World Literature.

What is it then about contemporary literature written in German by authors with biographical links to the Soviet Union that makes it an interesting case study for analysing processes of place- and world-making that transcend the national frame of reference? As Spivak argues, any comprehensive new approach to the study of world literature must leave behind the ‘old postcolonial model – very much “India” plus the Sartrian “Fanon”’ and ‘take into its sweep [for example] the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector’ in order to account for contemporary ‘heterogeneity on a different scale and related to imperialisms on another model’.⁵⁴ For Spivak: ‘Postcolonialism remained caught in mere nationalism over against colonialism. Today it is planetarity that we are called to imagine – to displace this historical alibi, again and again.’⁵⁵ I would argue that the German-language texts analysed in this thesis, whose authors have a background in the ‘new postcolonial’ space of the post-Soviet sector, not only move beyond the boundedness of nationalism; rather, they succeed in writing the nation out of the equation altogether. The memories of the oft-violent and virulently nationalistic breakdown of the Soviet Union that appear in these texts alienate their protagonists from the concept of ‘the nation’ and lead them (and their authors) to begin to conceptualise ways of being-in-common that transcend ethno-national models of collectivity. That these authors write in German serves to break down the assumed link between language, ethno-national identity, and nation-state territory, opening up space for the imaginative construction of memory narratives and personal identifications that decentre the nation as *the* constructed space of belonging. This is particularly true of Katja Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*, in which the protagonist employs the German language as a vehicle through which to express previously untold narratives of cross-boundary place-based memory that take the individual *human* – not the imagined national collective – as their subject. In considering how we, as located individuals, are positioned in relation to one another, both today and throughout history, these texts re-imagine how we relate to those once deemed to be ‘Other’. They thus attempt to refind the common humanity that Spivak describes as having been ‘defamiliarised’ by the historical processes of colonisation, decolonisation, and the condition of postcoloniality.⁵⁶

It is these texts’ insistence upon memory’s rootedness in place but simultaneous resonance beyond the immediate locality that is integral to their ability to map the consequences of past traumas and present global power structures on specific individuals within and across local

⁵⁴ Spivak, *Discipline*, p. 85; p. 84.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 75.

places, as well as their ability to express the commonalities and specificities of these consequences depending on one's positioning in the local, national or global order. Equally, from a 'bottom-up' perspective, insisting on memory's locatedness in place is shown to offer a means to resist the imposition of various forms of societal power and definitions of belonging through illuminating affective forms of place-and-memory making that result in the imagination of new, more equal forms of worldly being-in-common. The idea that memory resides in place but is also integral to the imagination of new, metaphorical, supra-local 'places' allows us to conceptualise how, through observing the progressive scaling-up of memory and/in place, we can track the emergence of new forms of worldliness that are cognisant of the various scales of unequal social life existing in the twenty-first century. We can also conceptualise how these new forms of worldliness offer an alternative to such inequality by enacting the opening of (a) new world(s) premised upon an understanding of traumatic memory as both a transcultural inheritance and an impetus to foster new, more just forms of being-in-common. Eventually, the scaling-up of memory as a form of worldliness brings us to the scale of the planet itself as our ultimate shared 'place'. As I explore in chapter five of this thesis in my analysis of Nellja Veremej's novel *Nach dem Sturm*, it is the idea of memory as an inherently place-based yet simultaneously multi-scalar phenomenon which allows us to conceive of how memory (studies) can for the first time be productively related to the environment, potentially allowing us to rethink humanity's relationship to the natural world in the age of the so-called Anthropocene. Equally, the distinction made in the text between the abstract, economical concept of the 'globe' and the more concrete, ecological place of the 'planet' gestures towards Spivak's concept of planetarity, allowing us to conceive of how it engages in forms of world-making that appreciate the ethical potential inherent to recognising and accepting the condition of planetary alterity.

This scaling-up of memory offers a rough structuring principle for the remainder of this thesis, in which I consider the texts by Olga Grjasnowa, Katja Petrowskaja and Nellja Veremej and suggest how these texts move from an engagement with place-based memory as a means through which to, respectively: highlight the need for new forms of political cosmopolitanism focused on individual rights within and beyond the state (Grjasnowa); imagine new forms of ethical cosmopolitanism premised on the human as subject and on our shared humanity (Petrowskaja); imagine new forms of necessarily planetary cosmopolitanism in an age of environmental crisis (Veremej).

Thesis structure

The following chapter of this thesis performs a close reading of Olga Grjasnowa's 2012 novel *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and her 2014 novel *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*. In my analysis of these texts, I argue for the importance of grounding supposedly transnational memories in local, affect-laden places. Set in an age of accelerated globalisation, I explore how Grjasnowa's novels demonstrate that while for privileged individuals national borders have become increasingly meaningless, a seemingly paradoxical rise in nationalism has meant that mobility for less privileged migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers has become increasingly constrained. In *Russe*, memories which are recognised as having 'global' resonance – such as that of the Holocaust – are shown to travel across borders with relative ease due to their supposedly 'universal' nature. While this travel may serve to illuminate previously unseen connections between memories of historical traumas, Grjasnowa suggests that it also runs the risk of transforming concrete, specific memories into abstract tropes which are not directly relevant to the lives of those individuals who remain in specific localities, away from global attention. In *Russe*, engagement with traumatic place-based memories results in the emergence of new transcultural communities of remembrance, even if this is a temporary phenomenon. If *Russe* is all about remembering I argue that *Ehe*, conversely, is all about forgetting. In Grjasnowa's second novel, I argue that her privileged protagonists' transnational travels between European nations is characterised by a selective amnesia of their own complicity in forms of nation-state border policing that exclude less privileged yet similarly mobile individuals. In Grjasnowa's novels the question is raised then as to what extent the choice to engage with place-based memory is but another form of privilege bestowed upon those who are not more preoccupied with the more immediate facts of their potential statelessness or even survival.

In chapter four, I analyse Katja Petrowskaja's 2014 autobiographically-inspired literary text *Vielleicht Esther* and explore how her protagonist's engagement with place-based memory results in the emergence of a form of rooted, ethically-inspired cosmopolitanism. Drawing on scholarship from the fields of Memory Studies and Human Geography, I introduce and theorise the concept of "traumatised places". I define such "traumatised places" as the otherwise mundane places of everyday life that have at one time borne witness to particular traumatic events and which are consequently marked by palimpsestic memories of human loss. In *Vielleicht Esther*, the protagonist's mobilisation of familial and historical knowledge, affect, and imagination allow her to situate her own familial past within the context of the ultimately human narratives of trauma embodied in palimpsestic traumatised places. Engagement with place-based memory becomes a means through which to move affectively closer to the lives and memories of Others traceable in the embodied landscape.

In performing what Fatima El-Tayeb has termed the ‘queering of ethnicity’, I argue that the protagonist of *Vielleicht Esther* undermines reified nationally- and ethnically-based models of collective remembrance by excavating and discursively bringing together the palimpsestic layers of memory in evidence at traumatised places in new constellations of ultimately human memory. In this, Petrowskaja gestures towards the potential emergence of a new form of ethical cosmopolitanism, in which the rooted particular (the mobilisation of a personally significant memory of trauma in a specific place) provides the necessary emotion and concrete reference point with which to conceptualise the ultimately universal significance of narratives of human loss.

In chapter five, I perform a comparative analysis of Nellja Veremej’s two novels: *Berlin liegt im Osten* from 2013 and *Nach dem Sturm*, published in 2016. Engaging with what has begun to be conceptualised as Memory Studies’ ‘planetary turn’, in this chapter I argue that in her novels Veremej mobilises place-based memory in order to conceptualise how the micro- and macro-levels of human existence (in this case, the locality and the planet) are inextricably bound together in an age of environmental limit-breaching.⁵⁷ I argue that if in *Berlin liegt im Osten* Veremej’s protagonists’ preoccupations with ultimately anthropocentric forms of memory prevent their engagement with the insidious, visible warnings of environmental degradation in their Berlin locality, in *Nach dem Sturm* Veremej’s fictional setting of Gradow allows for a thorough excavation of the slow violence enacted against both human and extra-human natures by the capitalist world-system. I suggest that reading these two novels in conjunction with one another illuminates Veremej’s criticism of the oft largely anthropocentric focus of memory which she presents as distracting attention away from the project of piecing together the world environmental memory that may help us to recognise and consequently mobilise against the forces which are destroying our shared planet. In contrast to the forms of human-centred cosmopolitanism sketched out by Grjasnowa and Petrowskaja then, I argue that in her novels Veremej mobilises place-based memory in the name of imagining forms of planetary cosmopolitanism which take as their subject both human and extra-human natures.

In chapter six, I conclude this thesis by restating the aims of this research, summarising and interpreting the analysis that has been undertaken, and providing a chapter-by-chapter summary of the thesis in order to clearly demonstrate the development of my argument. I consider how the interdisciplinary approach taken in this thesis has facilitated interventions into the disciplines of Memory Studies and World Literature and explore the scholarly

⁵⁷ See Craps and others; Lucy Bond, Ben De Bruyn and Jessica Rapson, ‘Introduction: Planetary Memory in Contemporary American Fiction’, *Textual Practice*, 31 (2017), 853-66.

implications of this by suggesting potential avenues for future research in these areas. In this regard, I also acknowledge the limitations of my own research and briefly consider alternative approaches I could have taken in my analysis of the selected novels. I bring the thesis to a close by considering how, in their reconceptualisation of the relationship between 'place' and 'world', as well as in their attempts to imagine and enact more worldly forms of consciousness, the authors under study can be seen as contributing to the emergence of a new world-making literature that just happens to be written in the German language.

Chapter Three

Trans/Nationalism as a Form of (Memorial) Privilege? Transcultural Remembering vs. Selective Amnesia in Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*

Olga Grjasnowa was born to Russian-Jewish parents in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1986. The family moved to Germany in 1996 as part of the Jewish *Kontingentflüchtlinge* policy, active in Germany between 1991 and 2005.¹ She has studied variously at the German Institute for Literature in Leipzig, where she completed her Bachelor's degree in creative writing, at the Free University of Berlin, and at institutions in Poland, Russia (at the Maxim Gorki Literature Institute) and Israel. Her debut novel, *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* was published to critical acclaim in 2012; it has since been translated into English as *All Russians Love Birch Trees* (2014), as well as into numerous other European languages, among them French, Italian, Danish, Dutch, and Czech. *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* was long-listed for the 2012 *Deutscher Buchpreis* – the same year in which Grjasnowa was awarded the Anna Seghers Prize. In 2014, Grjasnowa's second novel, *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* ('the legal haziness of a marriage') was published, for which she won the 2015 Adelbert von Chamisso Prize. Her third novel, *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* ('God is not shy') was released in 2017 and provides a timely literary portrait of the ongoing Syrian civil war and the ensuing so-called refugee crisis.

In this chapter, I seek to provide a comparative reading of Grjasnowa's first and second novels: *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (hereafter *Russe*) and *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (hereafter *Ehe*). *Russe* is narrated from the perspective of twenty-something Maria 'Mascha' Kogan and follows her life trajectory which takes her from Azerbaijan, to Germany, and finally onto Israel. Born in Baku, in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan to a Jewish mother and Russian father, Mascha and her family are caught up in the civil unrest which erupted there in 1988 and which profoundly traumatised the youngster. As a result of the growing mortal threat, Mascha and her family relocate to Germany where Mascha is plagued by what she has witnessed in Azerbaijan and struggles to adjust to life in her German school, in which staff and pupils 'kannte[n] Migranten ausschließlich aus der Springerpresse und dem Nachmittagsfernsehen' (*Russe*: 38). Quickly learning that 'Sprachen Macht bedeuten' (*Russe*: 37), Mascha is, at the time of the novel's narration, studying to become an interpreter at Frankfurt university. After the untimely death

¹ This 'quota refugee' policy was active between 1991 and 2005 and permitted any Jewish persons or descendants of Jews who were living in post-Soviet states to gain residency permits in Germany.

of her German boyfriend, Elias, however, Mascha struggles to control her grief and the trauma she underwent as a young girl returns to haunt her. Despite the best efforts of her ex-boyfriend, Sami – born in Beirut – and best friend, Cem – of Turkish descent – Mascha remains in a state of depression and arranges with her university professor to take up a position at a German charitable organisation in Tel Aviv, Israel. Catapulted into the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Mascha's own personal traumas start to blur with the traumas recounted to her by the people she meets in Israel and further evoke in her mind the trauma suffered by her grandmother as a Jewish woman living in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. The narrative ends ambiguously, with Mascha standing in the West Bank, plagued by intense flashbacks of her Nagorno-Karabakh trauma and imagining Elias there by her side.

Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe narrates the love triangle which develops between Leyla, Altay – both born into privileged families in Baku, Azerbaijan – and Jonoun, a Jewish American. Leyla and Altay are both queer yet enter into a heterosexual marriage in order to avoid persecution by the blatantly homophobic, post-Soviet Azerbaijani authorities. As a teenager, Leyla attended the prestigious Bolshoi school of ballet in Moscow, until an ankle injury led to her quitting her ballet career. Altay meanwhile undertook and successfully passed his medical degree and became a qualified doctor, gaining a position at a Russian hospital. Soon however, the homophobic and 'anti-foreigner' atmosphere of the post-Soviet society becomes too much for the dark-skinned Muslim Altay – who is often the target of his colleague's racist and homophobic comments – and the couple relocate from Moscow to Berlin. Once settled, they indulge in the party lifestyle of Berlin's queer scene and Leyla embarks on a relationship with the previously solely heterosexual Jonoun. After Jonoun has lived with the couple for a number of months, their relationship starts to come under strain and eventually breaks down – one of the factors that leads Leyla to return to Baku. Once there, she indulges in the mindless 'pretend' rebellions of the elite Azeri youth and is arrested for taking part in illegal car racing. As a result, Altay follows his wife to Azerbaijan, bringing Jonoun along for the ride. After Leyla's freedom has been bought, the two women embark on a journey through the post-Soviet states of the Caucasus region, while Altay begins a relationship with the son of a prominent Azerbaijani politician. Eventually, under pressure from their family and the ever-present authorities, Leyla and Altay make the decision to return to Germany; Jonoun having already flown on to Istanbul alone.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how both novels are ultimately about places – real or symbolic – and about what happens to specific identities, histories, and memories as their agents travel between these places in our increasingly mobile globe. My focus here is on how memories are imposed upon specific individuals based upon an assumption of their belonging to a

specific national, ethnic, or cultural collective, and how this imposition and assumption of homogeneity can be undermined by mobile individuals who travel between specific localities and contribute towards what Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas have referred to as a ‘thickening’ of place.² That local places are ‘thick’ with heterogeneous memories is key to the argument I make in this chapter, which is that recognising and engaging with such ‘thickened’ places undermines the homogenising tendency of national memory and illuminates new, cross-boundary memorial connections that have previously gone unnoticed. I argue that in *Russe*, daily, lived localities are the affective arenas in which new constellations of truly transcultural memory can emerge between previously distant Others who share their experiences of trauma and thus relate to one another across national, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. In a close-reading of this novel, I refer to the work of Memory and Cultural Studies scholars such as Susannah Radstone and Michael Rothberg. By engaging with theories of Human Geography, I seek, in particular, to develop Rothberg’s work by considering how the rooting of his distinction between transnational and transcultural memory in ‘place’ facilitates a more grounded, in-depth conceptualisation of how the two relate to and work against one another.

In the second half of the chapter, I consider whether the ability to travel between places and engage in the rewriting of transcultural memorial narratives is, however, a form of privilege accessible only to those with the means to travel safely and securely across nation-state borders. In an increasingly hostile world, where nation-states are tightening their borders against ‘undesirable’ migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, being part of a nation – regardless of whether it may be considered anachronistic and provincial in contrast to a mobile, transnational existence – is the ultimate desire of such individuals because it implies a security and protection that they are currently being denied. In this case, privileged forms of transnationality are, realistically, only an option for those who – paradoxically – ‘belong’ to a nation and enjoy all the political privileges this belonging bestows. By drawing upon work by postcolonial theorist Simon Gikandi and on Jasbir Puar’s theory of ‘homonationalism’, I explore how *Ehe*’s queer protagonists Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun’s interaction with specific, local places as they travel between nations is premised not upon their engagement with present or past trans/national realities, tensions, and inequalities. Rather, they are more concerned with moulding their bodies in line with nation-state norms in order to receive symbolic access to this political space, all the while forgetting that the norms to which they adhere exclude those most in need of this state protection i.e. the global underclass. In *Ehe*, the transnationality demonstrated by Leyla and Altay is paradoxically

² Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas, ‘Introduction: Migratory Settings’, in *Migratory Settings*, ed. by Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 7-32 (p. 7).

premised upon their alignment with national norms, and – far from providing the conditions for the emergence of new transcultural narratives of memory – is premised instead upon the erasure of memory, a selective amnesia. In Grjasnowa's novels, the choice to engage with place-based memory is in fact shown to be but another form of privilege reserved for elite transnational actors who are immune from the vulnerability incurred by less privileged yet equally mobile individuals who are more immediately preoccupied with the risk of statelessness or even mortality as they attempt to cross nation-state borders.

If *Russe* is all about memory, then *Ehe*, conversely, is all about forgetting. I argue that reading the two novels against one another uncovers the disparity between an optimistic or even utopian take on the potentially subversive outcomes of movement across borders and the troubled reality of the political act of border crossing itself. On the one hand, *Russe* advances idealistic notions of a transnationality in which cross-boundary, affective connections are forged between global individuals through place-based memory work. On the other hand, in *Ehe*, we are shown the unfortunate reality of today's twenty-first century moment in which the continuing power of the nation-state has very real, often devastating effects on the lives of both those living within its borders and those who want – and indeed, whose lives depend upon – access to the protection afforded by politically 'belonging' to a nation. Only in considering these novels together can we grasp how Grjasnowa moves from an 'ideal' to hard reality, using literature to hold a mirror up to today's unequal globe and to force us to notice – or perhaps, remember – overlooked mechanisms of societal control. In other words, how her novels uncover the forgotten experiences, narratives, and memories of those transnational actors who are today rendered most vulnerable by their rejection from any nation and the securities this affords.

Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt: 'travelling memory' vs. memory 'brought down to earth'

In *Russe*, local places are thick with heterogeneous memories which counteract the homogenising tendency of national memory. Yet, as I have suggested in the introductory theoretical chapter of this thesis, memory's rootedness in place has often been overlooked in a Memory Studies discipline that has focused largely on memory's travel across national borders. However, as Susannah Radstone reminds us: 'even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever *instantiated* locally, in a specific place and at a particular time', implying that this instantiation is inextricably bound up with questions of power, subjectivity, and

representation specific to each particular case.³ Any transnational or transcultural approach to memory – alongside paying attention to how memory travels – must thus, vitally, recognise the locatedness of memory, both in the past and present. Recognising the significance of past localities ‘and, particularly, memories of “home”, for the meaning-making and affective dimensions of life in the present’, Radstone argues that instantiations of memory do not only – or rather, exclusively – pertain to the past; its persistent ‘rooted’ character also brings past places and times into the present time/location.⁴ Memory research should then address itself to specific ‘pasts in the present’, which would allow for a consideration of both the content of specific memories – how the past is remembered in each context – and how each instantiation of these memories is performed, managed by, and read within present networks of power and representation.⁵

For Michael Rothberg, this dual focus on the ‘past in the present’ is particularly important in our contemporary world, in which migration has disrupted the equation that one place = one past = one collective identity.⁶ As he states, migration ‘brings disparate histories into contact with each other, reconfigures individual and collective subjects, and produces novel constellations of remembrance and commemoration in which heterogeneous *pasts* jostle each other in an unsettled *present*’.⁷ Drawing on Radstone’s work, Rothberg argues that new theories of transnational memory must be ‘located’ – that is, they must think about how different layers and scales of memory co-exist and interact in specific contexts, whether in productive, novel ways or in a more negative non-progressive fashion. This distinction between ‘layers’ and ‘scales’ forms the basis of Rothberg’s distinction between ‘transcultural’ and ‘transnational’ memory, which he defines thus: ‘Transcultural memory refers to the hybridization produced by the *layering* of historical legacies that occurs in the traversal of *cultural* borders, while transnational memory refers to the *scales* of remembrance that intersect in the crossing of *geo-political* borders.’⁸ In this framework, transnational memory is specifically about memories which cross scalar boundaries – that is, from locality, to nation, to supra-nationality, whereas transcultural memory practices can occur both between such scales or within one particular scale (e.g. the locality) – the defining factor being that cultural boundaries are crossed and result in the emergence of trans-cultural memory.

³ Radstone, p. 114; p. 117, emphasis in original.

⁴ Ibid, p. 109; see also: Jones; Jones and Garde-Hansen.

⁵ Radstone, p. 114.

⁶ Rothberg, ‘Migratory Settings’, pp. 129-30.

⁷ Ibid, p. 125, emphasis added.

⁸ Ibid, p. 130, emphasis in original.

While recognising that transcultural memory can emerge within specific localities, Rothberg remains tentative in defining ‘the local’ as a primary context of analysis for tracking the interplay between transcultural and transnational forms of memory. This is largely because, as a Memory Studies scholar, Rothberg appears to be conceptually bound by the discipline’s assumption that taking the ‘local’ or ‘place’ as a site of analysis automatically involves sacrificing a thorough engagement with what is happening beyond this locality at a national or supra-national level. In this chapter however, I suggest that the locality or ‘place’ is the ideal – if not only – arena in which to truly track the interplay between the transcultural and the transnational in the realms of memory. In this case, ‘place’ is defined through theories of Human Geography as the container of a variety of affective memories brought to this place by long-term inhabitants and migrants alike, as well as the arena in which the consequences of imbricated national and transnational power structures are themselves brought down to earth and experienced by the place’s inhabitants on a daily basis. Via a thorough engagement with particular places we can examine both the internal processes of transculturality that emerge in the sharing of affective memories within diverse localities i.e. the layering of memory, as well as examine the external pressures imposed upon place and its inhabitants, which determine the recognition or ignorance of particular, transcultural memories and present experiences beyond their immediate locality i.e. their travel (or not) across the scales of locality, nation and supra-nationality. Only a Human Geography-inspired definition of ‘place’ as a diverse arena in a state of constant flux that is largely determined by its inhabitants’ interactions with both one another and the place itself can contribute to the envisioning of the ethics of memory outlined by Rothberg as: ‘*located* and attentive to the forms of *thickening* that take place in transcultural encounters without reimporting the organic visions of collectivity that often accompany imaginations of locality and community’.⁹

In terms of my analysis of *Russe*, it is Rothberg’s category of ‘transcultural’ memory that is most relevant to the memory work undertaken by Grjasnowa’s protagonist, Mascha. Although it is the crossing of national scales which facilitates this memory work in distant places, it is the layering of transcultural memories in specific localities – or places – which is of most importance in understanding how Grjasnowa’s novel undermines constructs of homogenised national identity, national memory, and the idea of the nation itself. Turning to (literary) ‘places’ and envisaging the possibilities for transcultural memory work in these places allows Grjasnowa to explore the building of affective connections between people who are neither members of the same nation, nor necessarily share any particular affective or political connection to the nation to which they each supposedly ‘belong’. Focusing on the

⁹ Ibid, p. 127, emphasis in original.

forging of affective connections between global Others in specific places – connections based on the sharing of personal traumatic memories from other places and other times – allows for an acknowledgement of the ‘locatedness’ of instantiations of memory and for how it affects and is affected by present social conditions. Furthermore, setting her novel in specific local places across our interconnected globe allows Grjasnowa to create a myriad of characters who contradict, complicate, and pluralise the notion that supposed ‘belonging’ to a specific nation(-state), ethnic or religious group necessarily involves subscribing to that group’s ‘communal’ memory. In this way, she suggests that people can – and indeed, do – relate to supposedly ‘national’ or ‘global’ memories in ways that are perhaps unanticipated, and which contradict expectations that are rooted in the assumption that memory is, above all, a way of expressing a particular form of political, national, cultural or religious group affiliation.

Rothberg’s somewhat abstract distinction between transnational and transcultural memory is, I argue, an insufficient theoretical model through which to fully account for the central role played by specific places in facilitating the complex, rooted memory-work undertaken by Mascha in *Russe*. In order to grasp its novelty and full affective significance requires engaging with theoretical conceptualisations of ‘place’ in the fields of Human Geography. Taking inspiration from Edward S. Casey’s notion of ‘place-memory’, read by Tim Cresswell as suggesting at ‘the ability of place to make the past come to life in the present and thus contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory’,¹⁰ I argue that in *Russe* the material condition of specific places not only plays a role in the evocation of traumatic memories through their association in the agent’s mind with other places and memories from their pasts. Rather, these places are also the arenas in which new constellations of transcultural memory emerge through the affective sharing of memories of trauma originating in various localities and their association with one another *in this place, at this time*. In this, these places could be characterised as examples of what Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas theorise as ‘migratory settings’. In their edited collection of the same name, they argue that:

Migration not only takes place between places, but also has its effects on place, in place. In brief, we suggest a view on migration in which place is neither reified nor transcended, but “thickened” as it becomes the setting of the variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations that experiences of migration, of both migrants and native inhabitants, bring into contact with each other.¹¹

¹⁰ Cresswell, p. 121.

¹¹ Aydemir and Rotas, p. 7.

Similarly, I argue that in *Russe*, the places through which Mascha passes are neither subsumed into the nation of which they are a part, nor are completely transcended. Rather, in their material, symbolic, and affective dimensions, they are a vital component of the subversive memory work undertaken by Grjasnowa's protagonist. This work does indeed 'thicken' such places by bringing into their midst experiences, stories, and memories from distant times and locations, providing an opening for the emergence of new, transcultural forms of memory.

In what follows, I provide a close reading of *Russe*, focusing firstly on how the novel demonstrates and then seeks to undermine the persistence of reified tropes of national belonging based upon notions of shared ethnicity and the equation that one place = one collective = one memory. In this, I consider how Grjasnowa's protagonist mobilises memory in specific, heterogeneous places in order to counteract these reifications and how she thus provides a new framework for thinking through the subversive potential of a paradoxically located memory-across-borders. In a final section, I consider the limitations of *Russe*, focusing primarily on the problems inherent in Grjasnowa's selection of such a comparatively privileged protagonist, as well as on how the novel's insufficient attention to how trans/national power structures prevent the cross-boundary recognition of located transcultural memories hinders a thorough examination of the dynamic interplay between what Rothberg terms the layers and scales of memory.

'National' and 'global' memories: memories that travel too easily?

Russe is a novel about transnational travel between places and about how individuals attempt to settle in the new places they come to call home. While the memory work Mascha indulges in ultimately comes to undermine notions of fixed nationality, the nation-state nevertheless figures as a shadowy, insidious power structure which – for some global individuals – dictates the possibilities for remaining in and travelling across its borders. Indeed, the various national contexts through which Mascha travels are marked by traumas that are the product of an often violent brand of nationalism. From the territorial and ethnic Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Azerbaijan, to the persisting shadows of Nazism in Germany, to the increasingly virulent nationalism demonstrated by the state of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the 'nation' figures in *Russe* not as a benign force of communal identity, but rather as the sole cause of trauma, displacement, and violence. What is common across all three localities through which Mascha travels is the presence of migrants who have been displaced from their homes by state-sponsored violence: the fleeing Armenians in Azerbaijan; Jewish populations who, having fled to the Soviet Union to escape Nazi persecution, in turn flee to

Israel from increasing Soviet anti-Semitism; Kurdish refugees such as Sibel, Mascha's first girlfriend, who fled Turkey for Germany; Palestinians fleeing Israeli violence, and so on.

Russe not only engages with the practical consequences of violent state nationalism, however; it also explores how the idea of 'the nation' as a common ethnic identity has equally dangerous psychical consequences. It explores, in other words, how 'nation-states seek to retain hegemony by producing purified memories of home, homeland and *Heimat*', and how these mental structures create a purified image of who can 'belong' to an ethnically-defined national populace, and consequently who is excluded from symbolic membership of the national body.¹² For all its rhetoric of acceptance and image as a liberal, welcoming nation, Germany does not escape criticism in this regard: for Mascha, it is a country that is far from 'postmigrantisch' – a term she herself views with cynical contempt (*Russe*: 12). Particularly for those characters who appear visibly 'Other': Cem, born in Germany to Turkish parents; the Muslim Kurd, Sybil; and the 'Arab' Sami (who in fact grew up in Paris before moving to Frankfurt at thirteen), Germany is a space in which their claims to belonging are constantly challenged. Mascha recounts how Sibel was rejected by her German friends' families due to their fear of 'violent' Muslim men (*Russe*: 81), while Cem is branded a 'Kanake' and 'ein Illegaler, [der] [p]rofitiert nur von unserem [deutschen] System', who is driving on 'deutschen Straßen' as a 'Gast', by a German man whose car he crashes into during an argument with Mascha (*Russe*: 155). Here, the term 'Gast' appears rooted in the historical category of *Gastarbeiter*: foreigners who came to Germany in the 1950s to early 1970s and were awarded temporary work permits to help rebuild and maintain the German economy in the aftermath of the Second World War – many of whom were Turks. Although many Turks remained permanently and have since become German citizens, the man's juxtaposition of 'German streets' with Cem's supposed 'Guest(worker)' status suggests that the presence of those with a foreign ethnic descent in Germany is only permitted by a generous ethnic German hospitality that may be revoked at any second.

This fear and rejection of the Other is not exclusive to the German national context: we see how Sami is placed in limbo, waiting for the renewal of his American study visa which is delayed multiple times over the course of the narration. As Mascha states cynically: 'Normalerweise war so etwas eine Sache von zwei Wochen, aber wenn im Pass ein arabischer Name stand und als Geburtsort Beirut vermerkt war, konnte selbst die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft wenig ausrichten' (*Russe*: 110). In this case, supposed ethnicity trumps political nationality and Sami is reduced to being categorised as an Other who is just too different – and in the context of post-9/11 America, and as 'an Arab', too much of a threat to

¹²Rothberg, 'Migratory Settings', p. 129.

the American nation – to even be readmitted across its borders. This mania with an individual's 'true' identity, often coming down to a blood-based notion of ethnicity, is prevalent throughout *Russe* – at times overlapping with a related mania with an individual's nationality, or rather what an individual's ethnicity 'should' mean in terms of nation-state affiliation. A case in point here is Mascha's Jewishness – a facet of her identity which she herself does not necessarily see as being the defining part of her identity. Yet, her Jewish ethnicity is presumed to result in an affiliation for the Israeli nation-state by Daniel, a German 'philosemite'. On the other hand, Sam, a Jew born in Berlin before making Aliyah to Israel, derides Mascha for living in Germany (the 'nation of perpetrators') and, after attributing 'Russian' nationality to her, informs her that 'die Russen [sind] keine richtige Juden' (*Russe*: 179). Ethnicity and nationality, far from being benign concepts by which to define one's own identity, are, in *Russe*, shown to be anachronistic, homogenising, and politically-motivated constructions imposed upon individuals to suppose their affiliation with a specific collective and their supposedly shared ideologies, identities, and motivations. Concomitantly, they serve to draw a clear line between 'us' and 'them', excluding those deemed to be external to the ethno-national community.

In the context of the argument of this chapter, what then does this attribution of ethnic and national identity upon migrants imply when we speak of memory? In this case, I will focus specifically on the 'global memory' of the Holocaust and its related national resonance in the German context.¹³ It is important to note that, in the novel, Mascha herself does not necessarily engage with the memory of the Holocaust in any extended fashion. Aside from a few brief mentions of the fact that Mascha's maternal grandmother is a Holocaust survivor, the only real, personal engagement Mascha undertakes in relation to this legacy is right at the very end of the narrative – and this engagement is premised upon and facilitated through an engagement with her own, personal traumatic experiences in Baku. Of course, it goes without saying that the shadow of the Holocaust provides inevitable context to a novel written by a Jewish author in the German language and which is set partially in both Germany and Israel. What is perhaps meaningful in this context then is Mascha's – and indeed the novel's – lack of overt engagement with the memory of the Holocaust. I would suggest that the way Grjasnowa deals with this legacy in her novel suggests how supposedly 'global' or 'national' memories travel too easily and that this travel is premised upon their recognisability, homogenisation, and detachment from the complexities and intricacies of

¹³ For more on migrant identity and the memory of the Holocaust in this novel, see: Jonathan Skolnik, 'Memory without Borders? Migrant Identity and the Legacy of the Holocaust in Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*', in *German Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Katja Garloff and Agnes Müller (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), pp. 123-45.

‘the palimpsestic overlays, the hybrid assemblages, the non-linear interactions, and the fuzzy edges of group belonging’ which exist to contradict simplistic tropes of memory.¹⁴

For Zafer Şenocak, a new approach is needed for dealing with the German National Socialist past that is inclusive of migrant perspectives i.e. one that can account for what the German past means in the context of an increasingly diverse German society – accounting for, in Radstone’s terms, ‘pasts in the present’.¹⁵ Şenocak argues: ‘Remembering must today become again an experience that – beyond the rituals of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastering the past) – also reaches young people and can effect an important corrective against romanticising and archaic imaginations of identity.’¹⁶ It is this recognition of the time that has passed since the horrific events of the Holocaust – and the resulting changes in the fabric of societies across the globe in an age of increasing migration – that a number of characters in Grjasnowa’s *Russe* fail to achieve. A prime example of this is Daniel, a ‘lefty’, liberal German of the third post-Holocaust generation, who Mascha charges with having taken her on as his ‘persönlichen Teddyjuden’ with her only flaw being ‘dass [sie] nicht gradewegs aus einem deutschen Konzentrationslager kam’ (*Russe*: 64). Assuming that Mascha ‘als Jüdin’ and ‘aufgrund eures kollektiven [Jewish] Traumas’ would naturally support the political regime of Israel, Daniel reduces Mascha to the sole facet of her Jewishness and defines her supposed identity as being rooted in some form of Jewish group allegiance which collapses Jewishness into Israeli nationalism and assumes her present-day political views to be defined by her ‘Jewish’ relation to the memory of the Holocaust: the desire for ‘die praktische Emanzipation der Juden vor der permanenten Vernichtungsdrohung’ (*Russe*: 65).

Mascha’s jaded insistence that she is not a de facto representative of the Israeli state due solely to her Jewish ancestry and her rejection of any personal affiliation with the Israeli nation is encompassed in the apathy she shows during a disagreement between Daniel and Sami – the latter viewing the former as a philosemite; the former, the latter as an anti-Semite. Mascha, for her part, wishes ‘sie hätten mich damit in Ruhe gelassen’ (*Russe*: 64), retreating from a heated discussion of a history to which she – via her Jewishness – ‘should’ be connected, but which seems but a distant, even unrelated event, when compared with the primary trauma she herself underwent in Baku. Daniel’s adherence to tropes of German perpetration and Jewish victimhood – while of course historically accurate – fail to account for the complex ‘on the ground’ realities which complicate an individual’s present-day

¹⁴ A. Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, ‘A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory’, in *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory between and beyond Borders*, ed. by Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 31-38 (p. 32).

¹⁵ Radstone, p. 114.

¹⁶ Translation from Şenocak’s German original taken from Rothberg, ‘Migratory Settings’, p. 124.

relation to supposedly universal, travelling memories such as the Holocaust, regardless of how they may be positioned in relation to such a memory by others.

The very real dangers of relying on fixed tropes of memory – and their supposedly ‘universal’ lessons – becomes clear towards the end of the novel with the character of Maya, the young mistress of the director of the charitable organisation for which Mascha works. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder argue that the memory of the Holocaust has the potential to become a form of cosmopolitan memory that could transcend ethnic and national boundaries and ‘facilitate the formation of transnational memory cultures, which in turn have the potential to become the cultural foundation for global human-rights politics’.¹⁷ However, as the work of Radstone reminds us, this potential is damaged should such an approach fail to account for the instantiation of such a form of cosmopolitan memory in specific cases and localities. In *Russe*, Maya employs tropes of cosmopolitan Holocaust memory – as an abstract (and arguably over-simplistic) code by which to define ‘good’ and ‘evil’ – in a way which fails to account both for the specificities and complexities of the ‘on the ground’ reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and for her own complicity in forms of slow violence produced by the global capitalist system: violence which facilitates her opulent lifestyle and feeds her voyeuristic desire to see ‘eine von den Siedlungen, [darüber sie] schon so viel [...] gelesen [hat]. Diese Ungerechtigkeit’ (*Russe*: 248).

Without any inclination towards engaging with the political reality of the conflict, Maya states:

“Wenn man das hier sieht, diese Ungerechtigkeiten in den Abendnachrichten, kriegt man einen richtigen Hass auf die Juden. Es ist doch klar, wer der Schwächere ist, das Opfer. [...] Was die alles mit den Palästinensern gemacht haben, dabei müssten sie es doch besser wissen.” (*Russe*: 251)

In this equation, not only are Jews and Israelis falsely collapsed into the same identity category, but Maya also is able to claim a position of moral superiority in coming from a Germany that – seemingly in this narrative – has successfully dealt with the legacy of genocide and war crimes and as a result produces citizens who have the moral authority to cast judgement on the policies of other nations. Not only that, but she infers that the experience of being in a German concentration camp should have instilled some sense of perverse morality into ‘the Jews’ as an ahistorical, non-national collective. This simplistic employment of ‘cosmopolitan’ memory is compounded by the creation of a binary between ‘bad’, perpetrating ‘Jews’ and ‘good’, Palestinian victims – failing to account for the fact that violence has been perpetrated, and trauma suffered, by individual members of each

¹⁷ Levy and Sznajder, p. 4.

supposed identity group throughout the conflict. The narrative created by Maya stands in direct contrast to the nuanced, complex picture of the conflict which Mascha uncovers during her stay in Tel Aviv.

In *Russe* then, ethnic and national identities are imposed upon particular individuals and these identities are both assumed to form the basis of those individuals' relation to specific narratives of memory and are used to draw boundaries between specific interest groups, as well as to define who is permitted to belong to such groups. The idea of a 'national identity' or a 'national memory' becomes but another gatekeeping mechanism by which an individual's acceptance into or rejection by the nation-state is decided. As suggested by Daniel, Sam, and Maya's tropes of homogenised collective identity and memory, such narratives are pervasive and eventually come to structure the thought processes of those who 'belong' to such collectives. Indeed, even Mascha and her friends – who themselves lead lives which cross boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion etc. – are not immune from the powerful lure of group identity narratives. Watching CNN coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict showing Israeli aggression against Palestinians in a Frankfurt bar, Mascha states: 'Ich hatte das Gefühl, etwas verteidigen zu müssen, was ich unter anderen Umständen kritisieren würde' (*Russe*: 59). This, despite the fact that she later rejects to Daniel any form of association with Israel and the Israeli state. Elsewhere, Sami is surprised that Mascha cannot speak Hebrew: 'Wieso denn nicht? Du bist jüdisch. Deine Familie lebt in Israel' (*Russe*: 143).

Grjasnowa, it seems, is suggesting that imagining a world with no assumptions of identity based upon supposed group allegiance is but a utopic endeavour: such mentalities are so pervasive that they persist even when ample evidence exists to discredit the narratives they create. What she infers however, is that we should strive for an openness to our very human assumptions being wrong, as well as an equal willingness to accept our errors in judgement and to alter our perspectives accordingly. This is something a number of Grjasnowa's characters struggle to achieve in *Russe*, preferring instead to persist with their attempts to understand the contemporary globe through tropes of identity, nationality, and memory that are becoming increasingly anachronistic. In the following section, I show how Grjasnowa's depiction of Mascha's engagement with traumatic memories in specific localities complicate and contradict such restrictive tropes.

Memory's locatedness: forging new constellations of transcultural pasts in place

So far, I have explored how in *Russe* national identities and memories are imposed on individuals based upon their supposed membership to a specific collective. In what follows,

I consider how Mascha's travel between specific places that have been 'thickened' by migration and her engagement with the multitude of memories present in these localities highlights and undermines the homogenising tendencies of national histories. According to Susannah Radstone, if we are to explore the significance of memory's travel and rerooting for particular individuals, we must approach memories as 'pasts in the present'.¹⁸ That is, we must account for the fact that the significance of particular memories will often change for their agent depending on the circumstances of their present 'locatedness'. Indeed, in *Russe*, the material and symbolic places through which Mascha travels facilitate different (non-) interactions with her own memories of trauma. Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen recognise this connection between geographical location, memory and identity, stating that: 'how memory folds into the practice of ongoing identity is in a complex interplay between the *space and practice of the present and the spaces and practices of the past*.'¹⁹ As *Russe* progresses, Mascha's relationship to her past and the concomitant identities she creates for herself on the basis of this interaction are in a constant state of flux. What remains consistent, however, is that when she interacts with her memories, she is always 'rooted' in a specific place at a specific time. Recognising this consistency allows for a way of mapping how Mascha's interaction with the specific places she enters seems to affect how she relates to both her own past and to Others who share her current place. In this, we can start to conceive of 'place' or of specific localities as the origins of potential new constellations of transcultural memory and as material prompts which – when they present agents of memory with a sense of uncanny familiarity – evoke that agent's past.

The local places with which Mascha engages contradict notions of national homogeneity, and present more so as being characteristic 'migratory settings', as defined by Aydemir and Rotas. While the nation-states of Azerbaijan, Germany, and Israel may seek to impose homogeneity in their cultivation of a 'national' identity, the localities of Baku, Frankfurt, and Tel Aviv are presented in *Russe* as being homes to heterogenous populations with equally heterogenous pasts. It is furthermore to the locality – even down to a specific neighbourhood – and not the nation that Mascha feels an affective connection, a sense of being if not truly 'at home' then at least settled in some fashion. Visiting Mascha in Tel Aviv and encouraging her to return to Frankfurt where she can be surrounded by her family as she fights her mental traumas, Cem makes this distinction between a symbolic national home and a true, rooted 'home' that is on a scale with which, as a human being, we can concretely identify in our daily lives:

¹⁸ Radstone, p. 114.

¹⁹ Jones and Garde-Hansen, p. 19, emphasis added.

“Komm nach Hause!” [Cem]

“Deutschland? Zu Hause?” [Mascha]

“Ich spreche nicht von Deutschland, was da los ist, das weißt du ja selbst. Ich meine Frankfurt, Gallus.” [Cem]

(*Russe*: 223)

It is in these localities – these ‘rooted’ places – that the contradictions and nuances which are missing from tropes of national identity and national and global memory are visible in all their complexity, and which are explored by Grjasnowa through the character of Mascha.

Mapping how the places Mascha enters into seemingly affect her (non-)interaction with her memories necessitates looking more closely at the novel’s structure and progression. *Russe* is split into four parts: the first three of which are of a relatively equal length; the fourth is much shorter and with a much quicker narrative pace than the preceding three. In the first two sections, Mascha is based in Frankfurt and the narrative revolves around the death of Elias and Mascha’s recounting of their shared past, as well as of her own traumatic past in Baku. In these earlier two sections, Mascha appears to be more concerned with running away from her past than working through it, embodied in her refusal to talk to Elias about the events in Baku because ‘[sie] wollte nicht, das ein Genozid nötig ist, um [sie] zu verstehen’ (*Russe*: 150). Significant in this regard is the idea that Mascha did not want a homogenised memory narrative to define her own personal past. Equally significant here is the term ‘Genozid’ (in this context referring to Nagorno-Karabakh) which inescapably contains shadows of the events of the Holocaust – the universal memory trope of genocide – and which elsewhere in the novel was used by others to attempt to define Mascha despite her own comparative non-engagement with this legacy. The latter two sections narrate Mascha’s stay in Israel, and it is here that Mascha begins to move ever-closer to her own trauma through engaging with the traumatic memories of the people she meets in Tel Aviv and who are living the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Mascha’s increasing engagement with her own trauma is mirrored in the structure of the narrative itself. The narration of the first two sections is fragmented and non-chronological, jumping between chapters which exclusively deal with past or present events. This style of narration – suggesting at the clear distinction between past and present in Mascha’s mind – stands in contrast to the largely chronological flow of the second two sections, in which past and present merge rather than existing as two separate entities.

It is in the first section of the novel that Mascha first partially narrates the trauma she underwent while in the place of Baku. Confirming the conflict as above all an ethno-national war, Mascha states:

Die Menschen hatten keine Gesichter, keine Augen, keine Namen und keine Berufe mehr – sie wurden zu Aserbajdschanern, Armeniern, Georgiern und Russen. Menschen, die sich ein Leben lang gekannt hatten, vergaßen alles über den anderen. Nur die vermeintliche Nationalität blieb. (*Russe*: 47)

The violence was premised upon the erasure – or forgetting – of the transcultural character of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in favour of a belief in ethnically-homogeneous, dehumanised nationalities. Indeed, Mascha's paternal grandfather died of a heart attack three days after being beaten by a group who falsely presumed him to be Armenian. After his death, Mascha is sent with her father to her maternal grandmother's house nearby and on the way experiences the primary trauma which haunts her throughout the narrative: 'Als ich bei ihr [her grandmother] ankam, war es mit meiner Kindheit vorbei' (*Russe*: 47). At this point in the novel, we do not know the exact details of this primary trauma. It is only in the second part of the novel that the events of that day return to Mascha in the form of flashbacks. It is seemingly the emotional turmoil of losing Elias that brings Mascha's original trauma back to mind, as she describes how the image of Elias' dead body transforms into the body of a young woman in a blue dress, bleeding from her abdomen (*Russe*: 104). A few pages later, Mascha describes the original scene in greater detail – how, as Mascha ran towards the young woman shot in the tumult of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a pool of blood ran from her body and stained the six-year-old Mascha's shoes (*Russe*: 107). The image of this dead woman plagues Mascha and returns to her mind at various points in the novel during times of intense emotional distress, becoming a symbol of Mascha's repression of this trauma throughout her childhood and early adulthood in Germany.

If Mascha attempts to largely repress this trauma while in Frankfurt, even as she struggles to deal with her grief following Elias's death, it is when she moves to Tel Aviv – a place in the midst of another nationalist conflict – that this repression starts to falter. Arguably, this is partly due to the material conditions of specific localities in the place of Tel Aviv itself, which Mascha herself comes to recognise late in the narrative that she associates heavily with Baku: 'Ich bat den Fahrer entlang des Strandes und durch das ärmere südliche Tel Aviv zu fahren, bis ich merkte, dass ich zu Hause mit Orten assoziierte, die mich an Baku erinnern' (*Russe*: 232-33). Engaging with diverse places (of memory) in *Russe* serves then two main purposes: firstly, it complicates tropes of 'national' or 'global' memory which assign particular affiliations to specific individuals based on their supposed group membership; secondly, certain places serve to evoke in Mascha's mind repressed memories of trauma and it is this re-evocation which provides an opening for the transcultural memory work characteristic of particularly the second part of the novel, set in Israel and Palestine.

Uncovering the complexity of transcultural memory in local places

I will explore firstly how the locality of Tel Aviv is a place in which Mascha uncovers narratives of memory that contradict and complicate the easy tropes other characters such as Daniel and Maya adhere to. The complexity of such narratives contradicts the simplified, fixed categories of identity with which Mascha is faced on her arrival in Israel and which almost prevent her traversal of the Israeli border. Having had her computer confiscated by security due to the Arabic sticker attached to the device, Mascha must undergo an interrogation and evokes suspicion due to her proficiency in Arabic and her lack of proficiency in Hebrew. In this instance, language is taken as an important mark of national identity and political affiliation. Furthermore, even after Mascha informs security that her boyfriend has recently died, she is still faced with confirming whether ‘er [war] Araber, Ägypter oder Palästinenser’ (*Russe*: 164). In death, the only marker of Elias’ existence becomes his assumed nationality and of what this nationality signifies in the current Israeli political context. It seems then that Mascha’s possession of a German passport, her proficiency in Arabic, and her – at this moment, unknown – Jewish ancestry is too complex an identity to be neatly situated into a binary which pits ‘us’, the Israelis, against ‘them’, the Palestinians. This is of course both due to her proficiency in Arabic – in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and due to her German passport – in the context of post-World War Two Israeli-German relations and the memory of the Holocaust. Indeed, when she returns to the airport later in the narrative and her Israeli friend, Ori, reveals her Jewish ancestry, the very same employee remarks in surprise: ‘Ach, Sie sind gar keine Schickse [the pejorative term for a non-Jew]?’ (*Russe*: 241).

Once Mascha is permitted to leave the airport and thus cross the Israeli border, she embarks upon her new life in Tel Aviv and it is as she enters the daily, lived places of Israel, meets its inhabitants, and listens to them recount the memories of their pasts that she encounters individuals whose identities and manner of relating to their pasts negate the simplistic tendency to equate presence in a nation-state with a particular sense of nationality and necessary support of its state policies. Indeed, Mascha’s own family are a case in point. Her aunt and uncle fled the increasing anti-Semitism of the post-Soviet states in 1990 and, with no money to buy their own flat, moved into one of the biggest Israeli settlements, Ma’ale Adunim in the West Bank. However, ‘Was eine Siedlung eigentlich war, hatten sie damals nicht verstanden, denn sie sprachen nur Russisch’ (*Russe*: 172). Mascha’s family themselves show no sign of supporting the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, nor demonstrate any particular hostility towards the Palestinian population – they do not live in an Israeli settlement to make any form of political statement; rather, it was the only space available to them when they themselves arrived as immigrants.

It is in conversation with her aunt that Mascha's own presumptions pertaining to the supposed significance and pedagogical nature of the memory of the Holocaust are challenged. For Mascha, the shadow of the Holocaust remains distant despite her grandmother's personal experiences of trauma as a Jewish woman living in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Indeed, whenever the topic is raised – whether by Daniel, or by her own family – Mascha appears reluctant to engage with the trauma, perhaps at some level due to her desire to avoid her Jewish ancestry being enforced as the defining part of her identity. When Mascha visits the Yad Vashem memorial with her aunt and cousin Hannah, her aunt wants to talk to them about Mascha's grandmother's flight from the encroaching Nazi troops during the Second World War. Mascha, however, quickly tells her aunt that she knows all the details, 'denn [sie] befürchtete, nie mehr aus Yad Vashem fortzukommen' (*Russe*: 193). The following dialogue then ensues:

“Wir dürfen [the Holocaust] nichts vergessen”, sagte Tante #13.

“Natürlich nicht”, sagte ich [Mascha]. “Allerdings reicht das alleine nicht.”

“Wie meinst du das?”, sagte Hannah.

“Selbst die fanatischen Siedler gedenken des Holocaust”, sagte ich.

“Ich bin auch eine Siedlerin”, sagte Tante #13.

Ich biss mir auf die Zunge.

In this instance, Mascha appears to be invoking the Holocaust as a global, 'cosmopolitan memory', as theorised by Levy and Sznajder: that is, as a memory that can provide the foundation for the creation of transnational memory cultures founded upon a commitment to honouring global human rights. Here, Mascha sees a contradiction between the remembrance of the Holocaust as commitment to the human rights of all the world's citizens, and the actions of 'fanatischen Siedler' who, in supporting the Israeli state, deny Palestinians the human right to a secure home. In this equation, Mascha's 'Siedlerin' aunt's remembrance of the Holocaust – in the context of the Holocaust as a 'cosmopolitan memory' – faces being delegitimised by her 'occupation' of part of the West Bank.

This particular, located instance of memory work complicates somewhat the Holocaust's memorial function 'as a model for “good” and “evil” or “guilt” and “innocence” in general'.²⁰ In this case, Mascha's aunt – rather than being either “good”/“innocent” or “evil”/“guilty” – can more so be described in terms of Michael Rothberg's 'implicated subject': that is, a subject who may 'enable and benefit from traumatic violence without

²⁰ Levy and Sznajder, p. 132.

taking part in it directly'.²¹ While Rothberg conceives of this 'implication' as being at a temporal or geographical distance from the production of social suffering, it seems a pertinent category through which to read the local instance of implication in this case. Her aunt's 'accidental' implication in Israeli violence is alluded to by Mascha who states that by the time her family realised what a 'Siedlung' was, 'war es bereits zu spät. Sie hatten den Zweiten Golfkrieg miterlebt, und ihre Kinder dienten in der Armee' (*Russe*: 172); they became implicated in violence which, while not free of potential traumatic consequences for themselves, still awards them, as Jews, a significantly more beneficial social and political status than the beleaguered Palestinians. The complexities unearthed in this localised instantiation of memory challenges Mascha's own unconscious assumptions pertaining to the meaning and significance of memory in today's globalised world. This speaks to Radstone's reminder that even when memory travels, 'it is only ever *instantiated* locally, in a specific place and at a particular time'.²² Indeed, it is in paying heed to the locatedness of memory work – of 'pasts in the present' – that we can account for situations in which a variety of historical events, transnational migrations, and state policies have complicated the ways in which specific individuals in specific places relate to the past – in this case, of the Holocaust.

The materiality of place: facilitating the emergence of transcultural memory

Throughout the novel, and particularly in its latter half set in Israel and Palestine, Mascha engages with complex, located narratives of the past in a manner that challenges simplistic tropes of memory and identity. In the first three sections of the novel, Mascha's behaviour is nonetheless characterised by an overt non-interaction, or rather repression, of her own, personal trauma which occurred in Baku. She chooses instead to become a receptacle for the traumatic memories of others, recounted to her as she travels through specific localities seemingly on the run from her own past. That is not to say that she successfully escapes this past: indeed, she is plagued by flashbacks of the bodies of both the unknown woman in Baku and of Elias in the Frankfurt hospital. These flashbacks increase in frequency and intensity after Mascha's arrival in Israel despite her attempts to counter this escalation with a cocktail of alcohol, recreational drugs and medication. It is only in the novel's fourth section that Mascha begins to engage for the first time with this repressed past, becoming an active participant in the creation of located, transcultural narratives of memory which are facilitated

²¹ Michael Rothberg, 'Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine', *Profession*, (2014) <<https://www.mla.org/Publications/Bookstore/Profession/Profession-2014>> [accessed 27 November 2018].

²² Radstone, p. 117, emphasis in original.

both by her interaction with the material place in which this section is set and by reciprocally sharing past memories with the Palestinian, Ismael.

This fourth section is set in the Palestinian cities of Ramallah and Jenin, places that bear traces of both their traumatic pasts (for example, the Six Day War of 1967 and the First and Second Intifadas) and the present-day precarity of Palestinian life in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Prior to her entrance into Palestine, Mascha has come to realise that she attributes the affective-laden notion of being ‘at home’ to places that remind her of Baku: ‘ich merkte, dass ich zu Hause mit Orten assoziierte, die mich an Baku erinnerten’ (*Russe*: 253). In geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s terms, Mascha turns the impersonal, empty-of-meaning ‘spaces’ through which she travels into places of affective meaning when they remind her of the ‘home’ she first had in Baku.²³ In evoking in Mascha the sensation of being ‘at home’, the ‘ärmere südlichere Tel Aviv’ (*ibid.*) and, later, Ramallah and Jenin also evoke all the memories, feelings, and – in this case – traumas associated with this ‘home’ in Baku. In this, Mascha’s past places and personal memories come to be affectively re-inscribed on the places she passes through in her present and become inextricable from these present places and the memories instantiated therein by the people who inhabit them daily. It is the places of the poor Tel Aviv locality and of Ramallah and Jenin themselves that play a vital role in the re-evocation of the traumatic memories that Mascha spends the entire narrative trying to avoid. ‘Places [thus] have the power to force hidden and painful memories to the fore through their material existence.’²⁴

It is not only the materiality of Ramallah and Jenin that re-evokes Mascha’s personal trauma and consequently facilitates Mascha’s attribution of affect onto this place. As a place in itself, Mascha can indeed see visible signs in the landscape which remind her of Baku and of her experiences there. However, it is also through listening to Ismael’s memories of Jenin that its traumatic pasts are brought life in the present for Mascha. Ismael is arguably the only character in the novel with whom Mascha engages in a reciprocal memory dialogue: she doesn’t merely listen to his memories of trauma, but also shares with him elements of her own, personal past. Ismael is a former member of the Palestinian nationalist organisation, Hamas, however, after having been shot in an unknown incident and becoming disillusioned with the group’s politics, he left the organisation. Unlike other characters in the novel, Ismael takes Mascha at face value, bothered neither by her muddled nationality (‘du siehst gar nicht deutsch aus’, *Russe*: 265) nor by her Jewish ethnicity (‘Ist immerhin nicht ansteckend’, *Russe*: 274). Indeed, the two find a mutual affinity in the fact that both their

²³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 54; p. 136.

²⁴ Cresswell, p. 123.

parents were once fierce communists and laugh over Ismael's childhood punishment of having to recite the communist manifesto by heart (*Russe: 275*). Rather than be plagued by misattributions of identity or prejudicial judgement, the pair's conversations are characterised rather by an openness, tolerance, and seemingly genuine interest in the lives and traumatic pasts of the other regardless of their national, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences.

Importantly in this regard, Ismael's recounting of his traumatic memories of the second Intifada in Jenin is prefaced by an indirect plea for Mascha to listen to his narrative without reading it through existing personal or societal prejudices that may be expected in an interaction between 'a Jew' and 'a Palestinian Muslim' in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ismael begins his story by recounting how in 2002 the Israeli army marched into the Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin, at which point Mascha interrupts and replies that this action was prompted by the Hamas 'Passover attack' of 27 March that year: the deadliest attack against Israelis during the Second Intifada. In this, Mascha seemingly reproaches the former Hamas member, Ismael, indirectly suggesting that he is occluding some of the facts in order to somehow excuse the Hamas attack. Ismael, however, rejects Mascha's assumption, stating: 'Ja, nach einem Attentat der Hamas, sogar nach mehreren Attentaten der Hamas. Hör zu, ich will hier nichts beschönigen oder entschuldigen, ich will dir nur erzählen, was war' (*Russe: 277*). Here, Ismael appeals to Mascha to listen to the recounting of his traumatic memories as a fellow human being, putting aside all presumptions of group loyalty and national, ethnic, and religious affiliation.

It is the place of Jenin itself – described by Ismael as 'das Gebiet, in dem es während der zweiten Intifada die meiste Gewalt gegeben hat' (*Ibid*) – that prompts his recounting of the traumatic, personal, place-based memory which appears to evoke in Mascha a reconnection with her own traumatic past in Baku. Jenin as a place of historical trauma is brought to life by Ismael's personal memories. In turn, it is through listening to Ismael's personal, place-based memories without any form of prejudice that Mascha comes to affectively relate to both Ismael's past and to Jenin as a material place of trauma via the attribution of her own personal memories of her Baku trauma onto this location. Indeed, as Ismael describes the carnage of the Battle of Jenin (1-11 April 2002), we as readers can recognise the echoes of Mascha's earlier narration of the violence which traumatised her in Baku: tanks crushing flat all that which lay in their path (*Russe: 48; 277*); the destruction of public infrastructure and homes (*Russe: 49; 277*); human bodies so mutilated that they could not be identified in the aftermath of the violence (*Russe: 45; 277*); and all this a battle over historical ethnic, national and religious claims to land. For Mascha, the intense similarities between Ismael's place-based trauma and her own, as well as the material similarities she can see around her

between the Jenin of today and the Baku of her past collapse the past and the present and re-voke the traumatic memories Mascha has spent the entire narration seemingly running from. In other words, Mascha draws upon the material place of Jenin as well upon a previous stranger's memories of this place in order to re-connect with her own past: an act of rooted transcultural memory.

It is in the final pages of the novel that Mascha's own traumatic memories, narratives of familial trauma, and the traumas witnessed by the place of Jenin – evoked by Ismael's recounting of his own traumatic past – come together in a climatic and distressing denouement, reflected in the racing, seemingly disconnected prose. Grjasnowa intersperses Mascha's consciousness of the affectively-laden, traumatic place of Jenin and the physical sensations she is experiencing in this present – 'Ich hatte eine Gänsehaut, die nicht wegging, und mir war übel' (*Russe*: 280) – with her memories of her trauma in Baku, evoked by the materiality of Jenin itself. Thus, the photograph of Saddam Hussein in the window of Jenin's 'Café Baghdad' reminds Mascha of a similar portrait that hung in the room of the parents of the childhood friend in Baku with whom she constantly fought, describing their relationship as her 'persönliches Bergkarabach' (*Russe*: 92). This image transports her back to the day of the 'Schlachten' in which she underwent her primary trauma and the reader finally discovers Mascha's full memory of that fateful day. Mascha's affective transposition of her own, previously repressed trauma onto the traumatised place of Jenin, itself marked by the heterogeneous traumas of its inhabitants, brings into contact previously disparate narratives of trauma in an enactment of place-based, transcultural memory.

Equally, it is during this act of recounting that Mascha finally engages on a personal level with her Jewish ethnicity. As Mascha narrates her memory of her flight to her grandmother's house during the war in Baku, her personal memories of this primary trauma become interspersed with the enduring traumatic legacy of the Holocaust. Mascha recalls how, before she left her home, her mother removed from her scarf the Star of David 'den [sie] seit [ihrem] dritten Lebensjahr trug' (*Russe*: 281). As a child, Mascha protested this symbolic removal of her Jewish identity without seemingly comprehending the danger of being marked out as 'different' in the ethno-national battle literally raging on their doorstep. It is this trope of supposed, fundamental Otherness and the mortal threat it poses for those to whom it is attributed in ethno-national wars and conflicts – from the Holocaust, to the Nagorno-Karabakh and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts – that Grjasnowa thematises at the end of *Russe*, as she collapses both place and time in her narration of Mascha's place-based reconnection with her repressed personal and familial traumas. Indeed, Mascha recalls how in Baku her grandmother's house was searched by a soldier suspecting her of hiding Armenians: 'Meine Großmutter schloss die Tür wieder ab. Sie sank auf dem Fußboden.

Alles wiederholt sich, murmelte sie. Alles wiederholt sich. Alles wiederholt sich' (*Russe*: 283, italics in original). The italicisation of this particular refrain speaks to Grjasnowa's thematisation of temporally- and spatially-distant conflicts that – while with their own particular facets and contextual particularities – are underwritten by a pervasive brand of ethno-national violence that appears to repeat itself across the entire globe.

Through the complex character of Mascha and via an insistence upon excavating the particularities and contradictions of the diverse places of today's globalised world, Grjasnowa acknowledges the simultaneous transculturality and rootedness of traumatic memory. In focusing on the micro-level of human life – the individual and the local places they call or have called home – Grjasnowa opens up the possibility of seeing beyond tropes of 'national' memory and belonging to the complex ways in which people define their identities and senses of local, national, and supra-national affiliation based on both past and present contexts and experiences. In the words of Aydemir and Rotas, places in *Russe* are 'neither reified nor transcended, but "thickened"' as they become the location of the sharing of [traumatic] memories between particular agents, in a particular place, at a particular time.²⁵

Privilege in *Russe*: what about the transnational?

For Michael Rothberg, analysing any instantiation of memory requires an examination of how the transcultural and the transnational co-exist, interact or work against one another in each specific case. Thus far, I have argued that Grjasnowa successfully examines processes of memorial 'layering' in specific places; processes that result in the emergence of transcultural memories of trauma. In demonstrating the pervasiveness of dominant tropes of national and global memory, as well as how these are undermined by rooted, transcultural memory work, she also touches upon how the scales of memory intersect, challenge, and at times obscure one another. However, if there is one potential blind spot in *Russe*, it is Mascha's own privileged transnationality in being politically and materially able to cross borders with ease. In Susannah Radstone's terms, Grjasnowa succeeds in *Russe* in emphasising the fact that 'even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever *instantiated* locally, in a specific place and at a particular time'. Yet, I argue, she only partially succeeds in addressing 'this precise 'event' of memory's instantiation, as well as [...] the *relations between [other] such events*'.²⁶ Grjasnowa certainly suggests how the presence of, for example, 'events' of national memory can serve to obscure other, more local 'events' of

²⁵ Aydemir and Rotas, p. 7.

²⁶ Radstone, p. 117, emphasis in original; p. 118, emphasis added.

memory. However, it remains to be explored how Mascha's own privileged transnationality awards only temporary attention to the local 'events' of memory she uncovers and participates in. In other words, it is only Mascha's presence in the places she enters – permitted by her German passport – that brings the local narratives of memory with which she interacts to supra-local and supra-national attention. As soon as Mascha chooses to disengage with the traumatic memories shared with her and to move on to a different place, these located, traumatic memories – like their under-privileged agents – recede from the transnational consciousness facilitated through her presence. As Mascha moves from place to place then, each new local 'event' of memory she participates in overwrites any previous such events in past places from view. In *Russe*, Grjasnowa perhaps fails to capture how local events of memory work against one another in the transnational context.

That Mascha has the choice to disengage with local events of memory is vital for the argument I am attempting to make. The trajectory of Mascha's adult life has largely been dictated by her attempts to flee the legacy of her traumatic past by moving from place to place. That is, as soon as Mascha feels overwhelmed by the burden of her past, she relies on the privilege bestowed upon her by her German passport to be able to 'escape' elsewhere. For the characters Mascha meets in the Palestinian cities of Ramallah and Jenin however, this is not an option: they must remain in the places in which they have been – and still continue to be – traumatised due to their political belonging to a nation-state whose very existence and legitimacy has been the subject of intense debate in recent years.²⁷ Indeed, Angela Merkel reaffirmed Germany's non-recognition of the Palestinian state in 2011, stating that Germany will never recognise Palestine's claim to statehood so long as it is declared without Israel's acceptance.²⁸ The lives, memories, and traumas of the people Mascha meets in Palestine remain visible at the transnational level only for as long as she chooses to engage with them.

²⁷ As of September 2015, 136 of the 193 member states of the United Nations had recognised the existence of the state of Palestine (70.5%). Source: 'Is Palestine a Country?', *World Atlas* <<http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/which-countries-recognize-palestine-as-a-country.html>> [accessed 3 November 2017]. Notable exceptions in this context include Germany, the United States, and the UK. The latter only recognises Palestine's status as a 'Non-Member Observer State' of the UN, a status awarded after a 2012 UN vote (41 abstentions and 9 votes against, including the US and Canada). Source: 'General Assembly Votes Overwhelmingly to Accord Palestine 'Non-Member Observer State' Status in United Nations', *United Nations* <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/ga11317.doc.htm>> [accessed 3 November 2017].

²⁸ Richard Connor, 'Merkel Will Not Recognise Unilaterally-declared Palestinian State', *Deutsche Welle*, 7 April 2011 <<http://www.dw.com/en/merkel-will-not-recognize-unilaterally-declared-palestinian-state/a-14974756>> [accessed 3 November 2017].

This fleeting attention awarded to the pasts and present of the traumatised locals of Jenin is encapsulated in the angry outburst Ismael's sister, Haifa, directs towards Mascha towards the end of the novel:

“Ich verstehe euch [Friedensaktivisten] nicht. Ihr kommt als Freiwillige hierher und denkt, dass ihr euch hier so benehmen könnt, wir ihr wollt, nur weil ihr so nett sind. So fürchterlich nett. Ihr interessiert euch einen Scheißdreck für uns, wir sollen einfach nur leiden”. (*Russe*: 279)

Mascha is in fact no peace activist and is herself traumatised by her own experience of ethno-national conflict. However, in this light, and in the context of Mascha's at times self-indulgent melancholy throughout the novel, we may come to wonder whether Mascha's rooted memory work throughout the narrative is less about fostering an identification with an equally traumatised Other and more so takes the guise of what Stuart Taberner has termed 'a more egotistical longing for consolation'.²⁹ Certainly, Mascha's disengaged declaration 'Israel oder Palästina, mir war egal. Ich hatte genug' (*Russe*: 274) and her appeal to Sami via phone to come and take her back to Germany as she stands in the midst of the West Bank at the end of the novel, suggests that Mascha is very aware – and willing to take advantage – of the privilege bestowed by her possession of German nationality. In so doing, she leaves behind the cross-boundary, rooted, transcultural memory work evidenced earlier in the novel in favour of the securities afforded by the comparatively safe and stable German nation-state.

This of course raises questions as to what extent Mascha's transcultural engagement with the traumas of the other characters she interacts with throughout the novel represents an affective investment in the lives of Others or is a means by which to variously repress or revoke solely her own traumatic past. Similarly, we may question to what extent the affective connection Mascha fosters with places of traumatic memory such as Ramallah and Jenin is a purely self-serving process. In this case, the traumatic stories she hears would represent less potential material for the fostering of cross-boundary, rooted memory work and more so material to be used by Mascha, as and when it so suits her, to attempt to make sense of her own past. Indeed, Mascha's reliance on her relative privilege to extract her from the precarious West Bank at the end of the novel suggests that her interaction with its inhabitants' memories of trauma are merely temporary. However, given that the narrative ends with the reader not knowing how and even if Mascha 'escapes' the precarity of the West Bank, we cannot judge whether her flight does indeed result in her forgetting the people, traumas, and memories she has engaged with during her stay. Furthermore, it would

²⁹ Stuart Taberner, 'The Possibilities and Pitfalls of a Jewish Cosmopolitanism: Reading Natan Sznajder through Russian-Jewish Writer Olga Grjasnowa's Novel *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*', *European Review of History*, 23 (2016), 1-19 (p. 13).

be somewhat cruel to judge Mascha – a traumatised person who as a child knew what it meant to not have access to the security afforded by citizenship of a ‘safe’ nation-state – for this time choosing to utilise such political privilege.

There is no doubt that Grjasnowa is aware of the privilege bestowed upon her protagonist by her German passport, nor that she thematises how the awarding and denying of the privilege of transnational movement defines the lives of particular global individuals. At the same time, there is undoubtedly space for a more thoroughgoing excavation of the historical, societal, and economic processes through which statehood is awarded and denied and precarity unevenly distributed across the globe, as well as what this means for the recognition of the plight, experiences, and memories of traumatised populations around the world. However, such an excavation is not necessarily what Grjasnowa sets out to achieve in *Russe*. Ultimately, I would argue, *Russe* is a novel that is about undermining the pervasive mentality of nationalism by highlighting the rooted, cross-boundary engagements individuals undertake on a regular basis and which are obscured by imposed tropes of ‘national’ and ‘global’ memory. In this, it undeniably presents an optimistic rather than descriptive vision of our twenty-first century world. By attending to travelling memory’s simultaneous ‘rootedness’ or ‘locatedness’, Grjasnowa attempts to imagine ways of being-in-common that circumvent the inherent exclusionism and violence of the nation-state model. Her main focus in *Russe* is thus the meaning-making processes that occur in transcultural localities within the nation; processes which are at once located yet simultaneously transgress the locality.

If *Russe* focuses largely on processes of located transculturality, in her second novel Grjasnowa considers the intersection of local, national, and supra-national power structures (the scales of transnationality), emphasising that even in an age marked by global processes, movements, and power structures, the nation-state still has ultimate say over who is afforded its protection and validation. Read on its own, *Russe* faces charges of idealising engagement with transcultural forms of memory to the detriment of deeply engaging with the reality of the continuing political power of the nation-state. Read in tandem with *Ehe*, however, the optimism created through the portrayal of processes of rooted transculturality in *Russe* is checked by Grjasnowa’s exploration of insidious trans/national power structures in her second novel. In the second half of this chapter, I turn to a close reading of *Ehe* and consider how Grjasnowa’s removal of memory as a key theme in this later novel highlights how trans/national privilege is premised upon an amnesia – or selective forgetting – of the historical inequalities which produce such privilege, as well as how this inequality affects the lives of those most vulnerable to its adverse consequences. In *Ehe*, the ethical potential inherent in attending to memory’s locatedness within various scales of power is effectively

closed off by the purposeful obfuscation of these same power structures by those who stand to gain most from their continued existence. In this case, we may consider whether (non-) engagement with memory is in itself a form of privilege since those who are most adversely affected by trans/national power structures are often more concerned with the pure fact of their present-day survival. Engagement with place-based memory becomes for *Ehe*'s protagonists irrelevant since they exist in the privileged transnational circuits of non-memory.

Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe: privileged trans/nationality

Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan conceptualises the difference between space and place as a question of human agency: if space is a 'blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed', a specific place or specific places come into being once they have been attributed affective meaning by the humans who inhabit them.³⁰ This suggests that 'space' or 'spaces' are devoid of meaning, lacking in affect and existing as spatial and temporal vacuums. We do not inhabit spaces, rather we pass through them on our way to a particular destination. If place implies a sense of rooting, of a conscious and affective connection with our environment, its inhabitants and its (past) character, space implies the opposite: a sense of perpetual movement that does not allow for a pause to take stock of how we get to our final destination as well as what aids us in getting there. In *Ehe*, the localities through which its protagonists pass do not become places of localised transcultural memory as they do in *Russe*. Rather, the localities – and nations – through which Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun pass are political entities to be negotiated and traversed in their peregrinations through the privileged transnational space of the global elite. The transnational journeys they undertake are premised upon numerous forms of forgetting, chief of which is the paradox that their privileged transnationality is made possible only through their adherence to nation-state norms which determine whether access to political citizenship is conferred or denied. Whereas in *Russe* Grjasnowa attempts to theorise an optimistic vision of how we could think beyond the nation by engaging in process of transculturality, in *Ehe* she 'confirms that the nation[-state] remains indispensable as a space within which rights and protections are guaranteed or denied.'³¹ Transnationalism in *Ehe*, far from holding connotations of a potential ethical opening out to the world, is shown as a political or economic project that continues to be underwritten by the lingering power of the nation-state and its eternal – and often trauma-inducing – exclusionism.

³⁰ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 54.

³¹ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 274.

The concealment of the lingering power of nation-state apparatuses is nothing new. As cultural theorists such as Susannah Radstone and Simon Gikandi have argued, the increasing focus on and valorisation of transnationality tends to obscure the continued existence of national and local networks of power, as well as the ‘competing material and psychical realisms of location’.³² As Radstone states, the idea that something ‘travels’ stands in for the articulation and thorough examination of the processes that facilitate this mobility, often borne of a form of privilege. This is where, she argues, it is an important ethical move to attend to the persisting ‘locatedness’ of certain lives and memories in their wider contexts: for example, trans/national power structures, ‘politics of subjectivity and [...] the temporal, psychical, affective and representational dimensions of culture and experience’.³³ In so doing, we can understand how and why certain lives and memories move into view whilst others are elided from sight. The likelihood of such an ethical move is, however, for Simon Gikandi, damaged by the fact that the comparatively local networks of power hidden beneath the veneer of the abstract concept of ‘transnationalism’ are precisely those which abet an elite transnational lifestyle for the privileged global minority.

Gikandi argues that the valorisation of transnationalism as an aspirational, ‘cosmopolitan’ lifestyle doubly disenfranchises the most vulnerable of global citizens: migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Firstly, the celebration of transnationality and exile in European narratives as an elevated, cosmopolitan form of living beyond the parochialism of the nation obscures the very real fact that the equally transnational lives of refugees and asylum seekers are more so characterised by precarity and statelessness, thus denigrating their longing for belonging to a nation (due to the political security this affords) as backwards. Secondly, the focus on living beyond the nation obscures the simple fact that this transnationality is made possible only through the apparatuses of the nation it derides as parochial – an obvious, practical example of this being the possession of a passport.³⁴ Elites benefit practically from the nation and its requirements for belonging (requirements which simultaneously keep out less ‘desirable’ transnational migrants) while attempting to erase this simple fact by philosophically rejecting the nation-state model as out of sync with an increasingly global world.

It is Gikandi’s consideration of the figure of the postcolonial elite which is most salient for bringing the discussion of privileged transnationalism back to the question of memory, or rather forgetting. Writing of the tension inherent in the self-identity of a postcolonial elite

³² Radstone, p. 109.

³³ Ibid, p. 120; p. 113.

³⁴ Simon Gikandi, ‘Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality’, in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*, ed. by Cristina Sandru, Janet Wilson and Sarah Lawson Welsh (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 22-35 (pp. 27-28; p. 29)

who has embarked upon a transnational life by leaving the home nation, Gikandi argues that this move was in the first place only made possible by their privileged class, position or education in the home nation. More often than not these privileges were accrued within a system of inequality and corruption, meaning that postcolonial elites ‘were beneficiaries of the nationalism they would later come to scorn’.³⁵ Rather than directly engaging with the historical and political conditions which enabled their privilege, and because they cannot claim any moral legitimacy from any association with the nationalist project they benefitted from, Gikandi – quoting Antonio Gramsci – argues that ‘postcolonial elites come to “see themselves as autonomous and independent of the ruling social group”’.³⁶ In other words, postcolonial elites enact an erasure of – or rather employ a selective amnesia towards – the real material and historical conditions of their privilege by defining themselves through their present status as transnational, ‘cosmopolitan’ actors. This amnesia has both a spatial and temporal dimension: in the first instance, obscuring the imbricated nature of national and transnational privilege; in the second instance, demonstrating a presentism that cannot but fail to account for the historical conditions which have come to structure our daily lives, at a global, national, and local level.

Gikandi’s ‘postcolonial elite’ is in many ways a suitable figure through which to read the characters of Leyla and Altay in *Ehe*, who were born and raised in Soviet Azerbaijan (Leyla also having spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Moscow, training for the Bolshoi ballet). This is not to suggest that postcolonialism and post-communism may simply be seen as two sides of the same coin; however, in recent years scholars researching the post-communist condition have begun to consider how the theories and methodologies of postcolonial studies could be usefully applied to the study of present-day Central and Eastern European spaces, particularly with reference to concepts such as neocolonialism, orientalisation, and transnationalism.³⁷ Leyla and Altay were both raised in wealthy homes by parents who were – and in Leyla’s case, very much still are – prominent members of the Azeri elite. Even though largely shielded from the worst of homophobic prejudice in Azerbaijan due to their privileged societal positions, the pair nevertheless choose – after a period of residency in Moscow – to relocate to the Western metropolis of Berlin. As with Gikandi’s ‘postcolonial elite’, their relocation and emergence as transnational subjects is

³⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

³⁶ Ibid. Original quote taken from: Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), p. 120.

³⁷ See, for example: *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. by Violeta Kelertas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism: Intersections and Overlaps*, ed. by Monica Bottez, Maria-Sabina Draga-Alexandru and Bogden Stefanescu (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2011); *‘Postcolonial Europe?: Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*, ed. by Dobrota Pucherová and Robert Gáfrík (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

made practically possible only through the economic and social privilege accrued within the vastly unequal and corrupt state system in their native Azerbaijan. Leyla and Altay take advantage of a corrupt nationalism in order to align themselves with the axes of transnational privilege, celebrating a system of cross-border ‘freedom’ that secures their elite lifestyle while denying even basic human rights to less ‘desirable’ migrants whose lives across borders are marked by displacement and statelessness.

‘Homonationalism’: another form of forgetting?

In *Ehe*, the imbrication of national and transnational systems of privilege takes its most obvious form in what cultural theorist Jasbir K. Puar has termed ‘homonationalism’. Puar argues that in a post-9/11 world, the incorporation of some queer bodies into the previously heterosexual imagined national community is a political move designed to allow ‘liberal’ America and Western Europe – via its rhetorical acceptance of queerness – to define themselves in opposition to a ‘homophobic’ Islam. The ‘acceptable’ queer subject – who otherwise adheres to nation-state racial, gender, kinship, and class norms – is folded into the national community at the expense of those who cannot fulfil these requirements. As such, Puar argues that ‘some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from them’.³⁸ As with Gikandi’s post-colonial elite, Puar’s homonational subject is – by adhering to nation-state norms in order to access privileged national belonging – complicit in a system of at times violent exclusionism which obscures its own inner workings.

The privileged transnationalism indulged in by *Ehe*’s protagonists is a political or economic project which depends on the imbrication of national and supra-national systems of power, as well as a selective forgetting of the structures of prejudice and repression upon which they rest. For Puar, the global capitalist system provides the nexus through which access to homonational and transnational spaces of privilege can be negotiated, mutually imbricating the two. Drawing a parallel between the enveloping of previously excluded queer and racialised populations into the nation, Puar argues that in the age of global capital, ‘the market is a foil for the state, producing consumer subjects [...] that simulate (and experience simulated) affective modes of belonging to the state, modes that assuage the angst of unrequited love [for the state]’.³⁹ Thus, what Susan Koshy describes as ‘whiteness as power through [...] class aspirations’ places white, queer subjects, and (queer) racialised subjects in

³⁸ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 26.

a shared, privileged transnational community based upon class and power-through-wealth, even if they may not identify with whiteness as culture.⁴⁰ In contrast to the rooted, place-based transcultural communities created in *Russe* via an affective sharing of memories of trauma then, the transnational community as represented in *Ehe* is built upon privileged access to a global capitalist market and the ability and willingness to adhere to exclusionist nation-state norms which create new traumas for those individuals unable to meet these standards. '[This] seduction by global capital is conducted through racial *amnesia*, among other forms of *forgetting*', namely of the very located, material conditions of hardship and precarity suffered by the global underclass who cannot access these spaces of trans/national privilege.⁴¹

Selective amnesia of trans/national privilege

In *Russe*, the transcultural memory work attempted by Grjasnowa's characters is built upon a shared experience of trauma borne of being caught up in ethno-national conflicts which dictate one's potential life trajectories. Such experiences are alien to the protagonists of *Ehe* who, by virtue of the wealth and power of their prominent Azeri families (Leyla and Altay) or of present residency in and political citizenship of 'safe', Western nations (Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun), have lived a life free of such trauma even if their nations have been engaged in conflicts at home or abroad. The trio's seemingly endless perambulations across nations and between localities is characterised by a privileged transnationalism which largely shields them from the often brutal realities of nation-state border policing and its consequences for the 'Arme, Flüchtlinge und Asylanten' who find themselves on the wrong side of fortified European borders (*Ehe*: 103). In the first instance, this relates to Gikandi's figure of the postcolonial elite: Leyla and Altay's mobility and entrance into Europe is made possible through the wealth and prestige associated with proximity to Azerbaijani state power. The couple's arrival in Berlin is initially a chance to free themselves from state-sponsored homophobia (although not from the riches gained from this same state) and indulge in the queer transnational spaces of the Berlin gay scene:

Berlin [war] eine Stadt des Exils, alle kamen hierher – die von der deutschen Peripherie Verschmähten, die Parisier, die sich ihre Stadt nicht mehr leisten konnten, die Israelis, die ihren Stadt nicht mehr ertrugen, Italiener, Skandinavien, Griechen, Spanier, Amerikaner – nur Arme, Flüchtlinge und Asylanten sollten Europa nicht betreten. (*Ehe*: 103)

⁴⁰ Susan Koshy, 'Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness', *boundary*, 28 (2001), 153-94 (p. 186).

⁴¹ Puar, p. 26, emphasis added.

It is through entering this transnational circuit that Leyla initially meets Jonoun, who becomes her lover and eventually moves in with the married couple. As Stuart Taberner recognises, this unusual set-up does ‘not just undermine the legalistic heteronormativity of [the trio’s] German setting’ and the norms of the German nation in which they live; it shows that ‘they are in fact [at first] entirely indifferent to it’.⁴² As the novel progresses, however, the lure of the privilege associated with their incorporation into the German nation as homonormative subjects means that fractures begin to develop within the previously transgressive relationship established between the three protagonists. This metaphorical – and paradoxically transnational – ‘return to the nation’ not only refers to the trio’s negotiation of German homonational norms but also to Leyla’s literal return to the ‘home nation’ of Azerbaijan halfway through the narrative.

The insidious presence of the nation and the inevitability of the trio’s return to the retractable privileges it bestows is written into the structure of the narrative itself through Grjasnowa’s unusual partitioning of the novel’s temporality. *Ehe* is a novel of two parts, the first of which is preceded by a short prologue – a ‘flash forward’ of sorts – entitled ‘0’ (zero). The first section of the novel then consists of a series of relatively short chapters, starting with chapter ‘-29’ and counting down to the narrative present as established by the prologue ‘0’. The narrative jumps between the narrative present in Berlin, and the trio’s individual pasts in Baku, Moscow (Leyla and Altay), and America (Jonoun). The second half then unfolds chronologically from this ‘0’ moment, taking the form of similarly short chapters which build up to the novel’s conclusion in chapter ‘29’, mirroring the numerical sequencing of the first half. From this point on, the novel remains in the narrative present and recounts the protagonists’ return to (Leyla and Altay) or discovery of (Jonoun) Azerbaijan and the Eastern European/West Asian borderlands.

In the prologue ‘0’, Leyla is in prison in Baku, having been arrested for taking part in the illegal ‘Autorennen’ indulged in by the elite ‘Goldenen Aseri-Jugend’ who are as indifferent to the circumstances of their privilege as they to the fact that passers-by are often killed in the course of their mindless street races. This crime of ‘Rowdytum’ is one of the only infringements ‘die sich nicht mit Geld regeln ließen’ (*Ehe*: 9) since the Azerbaijani government fear it may be seen as a form of political revolt against state power and thus desire to make an example out of its perpetrators. Having the ‘zweifelhafte Ehre’ of being the first woman arrested for such exploits, Leyla receives the ‘dazugehörigen Behandlung’: that is, she is not only repeatedly beaten but also sexually assaulted (*Ehe*: 13). The prologue sets up a number of the themes which undergird the remainder of the narrative: nation-state

⁴² Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 123.

power and violence; body and gender politics; and the fluid boundaries of national privilege. It furthermore frames the first half of the novel, in which Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun firstly experiment with a relationship that ‘queers’ even the homonational norms of their new German setting, before seemingly starting to yearn for the structure and privileges associated with being folded into the nation – whether as heteronormative subjects in Leyla and Altay’s home nation of Azerbaijan or as homonational queer-consumer subjects of the German state.

The majority of the first half of the novel alternates between past and present, describing the three protagonist’s pasts and contrasting these snapshots with their lives in present-day Berlin. For all three, the queer transnational spaces of the German capital initially provide a feeling of liberation; a chance to distance themselves from the sexual and other norms of the nation-states in which they previously lived. For Leyla, this liberation equals freedom from the overt homophobia of Baku and Moscow and from the bodily rigours of her ballet career at the Bolshoi (the latter respite being only temporary as she later joins a state-ballet troop in Berlin). For Altay, freedom from heterosexual norms is also matched by liberation from the racial barbs of his Russian colleagues. Jonoun, for her part, has had a distinctly less privileged upbringing than Leyla and Altay. She was raised by her grandmother after her own mother, later diagnosed with schizophrenia, abandoned Jonoun to her spiritual travels around the globe. Married young to an older, patriarchal professor, Jonoun’s body was moulded, dressed, and controlled in order that she fitted into the elite circles in which her husband moved (*Ehe*: 32). This marriage lasted 4 years, after which Jonoun attempted to make a career in art only to find that she could not compete against the ‘rich kids’: ‘Sie kamen aus weißen, kulturbeflissenen Mittelstandsfamilien, ihre Väter waren Zahnärzte, Rechtsanwälte und Anlageberater, die das Feuilleton am Frühstückstisch ungefragt ihren Gattinnen reichten’ (*Ehe*: 34). For her, the move to Berlin then is a chance for a fresh start, away from the bourgeois elitism of capitalist America and from a failed marriage which offered financial security in return for full control over her body and (sexual) appetite.

Initially, Altay is happy to accommodate Leyla’s relationship with Jonoun, however quickly becomes resentful when Jonoun begins to spend an increasing amount of time at the couple’s flat, eventually moving in. This permanent intrusion into the private space of the marital home and the concomitant disruption this poses to conventional kinship norms still demanded of the homonational subject becomes a source of contention for Altay, particularly after his identity as a gay Muslim is questioned by a German one-night stand who sees homosexuality and Islam as being mutually exclusive (*Ehe*: 50-51). Altay eventually tells Leyla to ask Jonoun to move out; the breakdown of her relationship with Jonoun and the unsettlement this causes being one of the reasons Leyla later chooses to return to Azerbaijan. This tension between distance from and reconciliation with nation-state

norms in the first half of the novel is thus underwritten and anticipated by the events of the prologue: as readers we know that Leyla chooses not only metaphorically but literally to return to a nation in which – aside from her period of unquestionably traumatising incarceration – she is both hugely materially privileged and protected from the worst of state homophobia through her transactional marriage to Altay. When the time comes to make the choice between on the one hand working at leading a transgressive lifestyle which symbolically opens up new forms of living beyond those recognised by trans/national norms, and on the other hand choosing to reinforce these norms in order to align oneself with the axes of privilege, Leyla seemingly opts for the latter. Demonstrating her ‘Bereitschaft, sich in eine vorgegebene gesellschaftliche Rolle einzufügen’ (*Ehe*: 103), Leyla sells herself out and becomes a commodified body to be utilised by the nation in its own process of self-branding.

In the context of a now entrenched capitalist world economy, nation-states have themselves arguably become commodified: governments ‘sell’ the idea of the imagined nation both to their citizens and to a wider, transnational audience. Nations have become brands whose reputations are determined by their buying and selling power in the global economy and, in the context of the emergence of a post-Holocaust ethical cosmopolitanism, by their supposed human rights credentials.⁴³ The consolidation of a positive national image depends upon ultimate state control even at the micro-level of human existence i.e. the individual body and its incorporation within or exclusion from the national body politic (depending of course upon whether an individual will improve or damage the national image). As Puar demonstrates in her theorisation of homonationalism, the successful branding of Western nations as liberal, cosmopolitan, and economically powerful often relies on such highly politicised forms of exclusionism, as well as upon an imposition of a particular form of Western moralism on other nations and a simultaneous obfuscation of the human rights failings of Western states themselves. In *Ehe*, Leyla and Altay celebrate the fact that in ‘liberal’ Germany they can express their homosexuality openly and in public. This stands in direct contrast to the often violent repression of homosexuality in post-Soviet Azerbaijan and Russia (from which they, as prominent citizens, are nevertheless largely shielded). What emerges through the novel as Grjasnowa tracks how her protagonists mould their bodies to fit with nation-state norms however, is that Western states and what she partly satirically refers to as ‘böse’ or ‘fragwürdige’ (*Ehe*: 152; 256) non-Western states alike impose gate-keeping mechanisms to keep undesirable individuals outside the body politic, externalising the threat they pose to the project of national branding.

⁴³ See Levy and Sznajder on the emergence of ‘cosmopolitan memory’ in a post-Holocaust world.

The intersection of the national and the transnational as captured through the project of building a national brand to be sold in the global capitalist economy is manifested at the micro-level in the character of Leyla. A professional ballet dancer by training, Leyla's body is from its earliest days manipulated, moulded, and disciplined in line with the expectations placed upon her as a would-be Bolshoi ballerina. The control Leyla must exert over her body in order to be accepted into the ballet as a cultural representative of the Russian nation becomes a metaphor for the moulding her body must also undergo in order for her to later fulfil the requirements of a homonational queer subject in Berlin. The dehumanising effect of moulding one's body in line with the nation-state's criteria for being 'folded into life' are established early in the novel, in which Leyla's mother's desire for her to become a ballerina springs from her wish to make of her daughter a 'verantwortungsbewusste sowjetische Wesen' (*Ehe*: 27, emphasis added).⁴⁴ The starvation, extreme training, and controlled manipulation Leyla's body undergoes during her years of ballet training in Moscow becomes a symbolic form of nation-state violence, reinforced by the description of the Bolshoi as the 'russische Staatswappen' (*Ehe*: 28): a weapon both used as a form of cultural propaganda 'im kapitalistischen Westen' (*ibid*), and turned against its own citizens in the name of creating a national brand that will accrue transnational prestige. For Leyla, however, this price is apparently worth paying in return for being 'Teil einer *staatlichen* Kompanie [...], mit einem festen Gehalt und einem Stab an Balletmeistern, Kostümbildern, Pförtnern, Technikern, Masseuren und Physiotherapeuten' (*Ehe*: 62, emphasis added). In other words, in return for having direct access to the privilege offered as an at least publicly acceptable face of the nation-state.

This policing of bodies in the name of consolidating a national brand is in fact – as Leyla's move to Germany shows – a transnational phenomenon. After quitting ballet following an operation on an ankle injury and moving to Berlin, Leyla is freed from the bodily constraints imposed upon her by her ballet career and, symbolically, by the Russian nation of whom she was made a representative. If we read Leyla's new life in Berlin through the lens of Puar's theory of homonationalism however, it becomes clear that her move to Berlin represents less the freedom from all forms of bodily constraints imposed by nation-state norms in return for acceptance into the body politic and more so a refashioning of these in the context of her entrance into a Western, capitalist nation. Grjasnowa's narrator comments: 'Der Körper [...] unterliegt Geschmäckern, Moden und Werturteilen. Er steht zur Disposition und zum Verkauf' (*Ehe*: 59). Leyla, benefitting from the material privilege accrued via the corrupt systems of power in her home nation of Azerbaijan, possesses sufficient wealth to be folded into the life of the nation via participation in the capitalist market which, according to Puar,

⁴⁴ Puar, p. 10.

becomes for acceptable queer subjects ‘a foil for the state’: a simulation of affective modes of belonging otherwise denied to ethnic or sexual Others. Leyla and Altay become part of a commodified, transnational queer elite, who ‘lechte nach dem Schoß der Nation’ (*Ehe*: 103) and are indeed accepted as homonational subjects via their ‘fitness-within-capitalism’ and in return for their depoliticised loyalty to the national brand and its gender, kinship, and racial (i.e. whiteness-as-power-through-wealth) norms.⁴⁵

Selective amnesia: egotistical memory

In the context of the argument of this chapter, how then does Leyla and Altay’s adherence to homonational norms relate back to the question of memory and its connection to a sense of place – or rather, in this instance, the lack thereof? The key consideration in this regard is their selective disavowal of the traumatising effects of nation-state norms which fix the boundaries of acceptable deviation from the imagined ideal national subject. In *Ehe*, this trauma manifests for Leyla and Altay as a series of potentially damaging inconveniences rather than life-threatening trauma, in that they disavow the lives they would perhaps otherwise lead were they less preoccupied with aligning themselves with the axes of trans/national privilege. For those unnamed yet spectrally-present members of the global underclass who populate the peripheries of Grjasnowa’s Baku, Moscow, and Berlin, this trauma does, however, potentially manifest as a threat of mortality. Jasbir Puar formulates this dualism of traumatic inclusion/exclusion as such:

The cost of being folded into life might be quite steep, both for the subjects who are interpellated by or aspire to the tight inclusiveness of homonormativity offered in this moment, and for those who decline or are declined entry due to the undesirability of their race, ethnicity, religion, class, national origin, age or bodily ability.⁴⁶

It is not only the case that Leyla and Altay must indulge in a selective amnesia of these costs in order to clear their consciences; rather, their inclusion in the bodily politic as homonational subjects depends upon it. Indeed, Puar’s insistence on the narrow ‘inclusiveness of homonormativity offered in this moment’ alludes to the temporary and ultimately precarious nature of the folding into life experienced by Grjasnowa’s protagonists – especially for Altay, a Muslim living in post-9/11 Europe. The pair originally left Moscow after the homophobia and racism Altay experiences in his job at a Moscow hospital leads him to conclude that his position has become untenable. However, on arrival in Berlin it seems that his potential acceptance as a homonational subject is again complicated by his

⁴⁵ Puar, p. 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 10.

ethnic and religious Otherness. In one episode, Altay goes home and sleeps with a German man, Niko, who becomes aggressive and declares that “‘unsere Kulturen passen einfach nicht zusammen’” after discovering Altay is Muslim (*Ehe*: 50-51). Later in the narrative, after Leyla has left the marital home to return temporarily to Baku, Altay faces a further instance of racialisation when a patient whose life he has saved the previous night questions him about his ethnicity: “‘Was bist du eigentlich? Araber? Jugo? Türke? Ja, du bist bloß ein Türke’” (*Ehe*: 141). To the German patient, Herr Amsel, Altay’s unknown ethnicity and his profession as a nurse in a Berlin hospital seemingly places him in the simplified category of ‘immigrant’ and certainly does not suggest at the privilege Altay enjoys in Azerbaijan nor as a member of a queer transnational elite. In this instance, Altay is made to feel as out of place as he did back in the hospital in Moscow, where he was derided as a sexual and racial Other – ‘unser Gastarbeiter’ – by his colleagues (*Ehe*: 101).

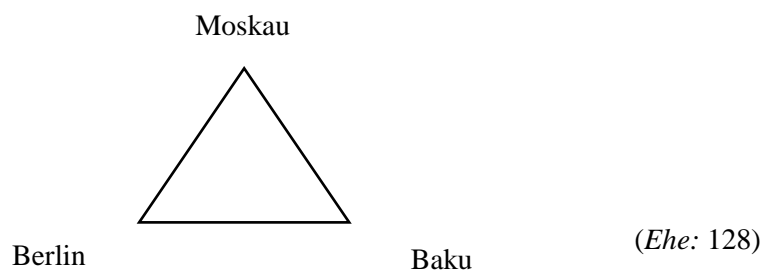
As soon as Altay breaks with accepted kinship structures or ventures outside the queer space of transnational privilege afforded through his folding into the state-as-market, the elements of his identity which are obscured by his incorporation as a queer subject – his ethnicity and Muslim religion – place him once again in a position of precarity vis-à-vis his acceptance into the national body politic. In order to stake his claim as a homonational subject, Altay must undergo what Puar terms a ‘fractioning’ or ‘fractalizing’ of his identity as a gay Muslim, enacted through his ‘disassociation or disidentification from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favour of consolidation with axes of privilege’.⁴⁷ Through his relationship with Leyla and via the material and social capital accrued within the corrupt national power structures of his native Azerbaijan, Altay is variously able to align himself with such axes of privilege. In order to do so, however, he must perform a selective amnesia of the fact that this alignment with national heteronormativity and/or Western homonationalism, means that he becomes complicit with the exclusionary mechanisms by which other racial, sexual, and religious Others who cannot buy their way into the capitalist national brand are excluded. In the manner of Gikandi’s postcolonial elite, Altay denies – or chooses to forget – the historical and material conditions of his privileged entry into Western homonationalism, itself rooted in a corrupt Azerbaijani nationalism.

This is not to say that the theme of memory is entirely absent from *Ehe*; rather, the mobilisation of memory (and forgetting) by Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun is different to the manner in which it is mobilised in *Russe*. That is, the mobilisation of memory in *Ehe* is undoubtedly egotistical and is underwritten by a sense of shrewd calculation which allows its agents to perform a type of ‘cost-benefit’ analysis in order to determine what the most

⁴⁷ Puar, p. 28.

favourable course of present action would be based on their own past experience. This is particularly the case for the indulgently narcissistic and self-centered Leyla. As I have suggested, being part of a national ballet troupe largely makes Leyla privately immune from nation-state norms – a fact of which she herself is more than aware and which she is willing to exploit to her own advantage, even to the detriment of those closest to her. Prior to Leyla’s return to Baku and after Jonoun has moved out of the marital home, Leyla and Altay have an argument in which Leyla blames her husband for her own indecision regarding her ballet career and her relationship with Jonoun: “‘WAS WAR DENN SO SCHLECHT AN MOSKAU? Du hast mich hierhergebracht. Das alles habe ich nur dir zu verdanken!’” (*Ehe*: 95). Just as Altay’s enfolding into the nation as a racialised queer subject relies upon the selective forgetting of his complicity with national mechanisms of exclusion, so too does Leyla’s apparent immunity from nation-state norms make her entirely indifferent to the precarity these very same norms represent for other individuals. In this case, once she becomes bored with the novelty of publicly acceptable homosexuality in Berlin, from Leyla’s perspective the localities of Moscow and Berlin become interchangeable. Her egotistical and selective employment of memory leads her to yearn for the higher prestige with which she was held in the comparatively more publicly repressive Moscow, regardless of the fact her own husband was made to feel marginalised because of his skin colour, religion, and a homosexuality that was not mediated by public incorporation into the national body politic.

For Leyla, memory of place is coloured by how comparatively easy or difficult it was/is for her to align herself with the axes of state privilege in her past and present location. Her transnational travels are not a search for ‘freedom’ from repressive state norms but are rather calculated movements designed to provide her with the best possible political, economic, and social benefits at the least personal cost. Indeed, this becomes increasingly clear after a further ankle injury cuts short her re-discovered ballet career in Germany. Without the disciplining function of ballet – and the concomitant immunity from nation-state norms this provides – Leyla begins to reflect upon her life and how it has led her to Berlin in the current moment. In a bizarre attempt to make sense of her life trajectory, Leyla maps out a triangle (illustrated in the novel itself) whose corners are labelled with the places Moscow, Berlin, and Baku:



Grjasnowa's narrative voice gives the reader an insight into Leyla's thoughts as she reflects on this diagram:

Moskau war eindeutig das Zentrum, was sie sich nicht wirklich erklären konnte. Vor allem, da Dreiecke kein Zentrum im eigentlichen Sinn hatten, sondern eine Spitze. Sicher war Leyla nur, dass Berlin sich nicht wie die Zielgerade anfühlte, und da sie keine andere Idee hatte, beschloss sie, wenigstens zum Ausgangspunkt zurückzukehren. Nachdem sie diesen Entschluss gefasst hatte, fühlte sie sich zum ersten Mal seit Wochen ein wenig besser. (ibid.)

For Leyla, Moscow appears as the 'apex' (*Spitze*) of the triangle, which she seems unable to justify. In Moscow, Leyla was at the 'apex' of her ballet career; this place subconsciously seems to represent the pinnacle of her privilege as an acceptable representative of the nation-state who nevertheless – or perhaps because of this – is awarded private space in which to negotiate these restrictions. This location and the privilege therewith associated are now in Leyla's past, not only literally due to the couple's relocation to Berlin because of the abuse Altay's receives in Moscow, but also metaphorically now Leyla has once again been injured and her ballet career postponed or even ended. Berlin does not feel to Leyla like the 'home stretch' of her transnational journeying. Her attempts to ingratiate herself into the German nation via ballet has stalled due to her injury and her incorporation as either a heteronormative or homonational subject appears too pedestrian for Leyla, who enjoyed her own status as the 'apex' of two relationships: a set-up contravening acceptable kinship norms. She thus decides to return to her point of departure or 'origin' (*Ausgangspunkt*), where her privilege is determined by her birth, and her security and welfare determined by the status and wealth of her family.

Dissatisfied with her current situation, Leyla chooses to return to the 'home nation' of origin and the privilege borne of a corrupt Azerbaijani state. This decision represents a position that is the antithesis of Gikandi's postcolonial elite who emerges as a transnational, 'cosmopolitan' subject and attempts to morally detach themselves from the home nation while still benefitting materially from its corrupt state systems.⁴⁸ Leyla's disenchantment with her elite transnational life and her egotistical desire to align herself with the axes of national privilege speak to a complete disregard for any form of morality, illustrated in the novel through her choice to not only remotely benefit from Azerbaijani state corruption but to literally return to the nation-state itself. Leyla not only chooses to forget the trauma-inducing national exclusionism with which she is complicit in Baku, Moscow, and Berlin alike; she is in fact apparently completely indifferent to it. Localities are, for Leyla, not individual, unique places whose character, populations, and conditions are to be engaged

⁴⁸ Gikandi, p. 29, emphasis added.

with, but are rather microcosms of the nation-state whose bureaucracy and political conditions for acceptance are to be negotiated only by those with the required capital.

Leyla's – and indeed, to an extent Altay and Jonoun's – indifference to the historical conditions of their privilege, as well as towards its present consequences for the global underclass, is manifested by Grjasnowa at a textual level in the second half of the novel which begins with Leyla's privileged re-entry into the Azeri elite. In contrast to the temporal structure of the first half of the novel, which jumps between its protagonists' pasts and present, part two remains firmly anchored in the narrative present. Leyla and Altay's literal return to the home nation in part two of the novel represents the termination of any engagement with the pasts that are threaded through *Ehe*'s first half. This presentism textually represents the selective amnesia of – or in Leyla's case, indifference towards – not only their own memories of the exclusionary mechanisms of the nation-state, but also of the historical conditions of their own privilege: a privilege rooted in an inequality that has potentially traumatising effects for the asylum seekers, refugees, and members of the precariat who spectrally populate Grjasnowa's novel. In the second half of *Ehe*, Grjasnowa's erasure of the narrative past illustrates how her protagonists have 'dissociat[ed] or disidentifi[ed] from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favour of the consolidation with axes of privilege' through repressing not only their own memories of exclusion but also their own complicity with these exclusionary mechanisms.⁴⁹

The material reality of place: antidote to amnesia?

Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun's travels between localities and across nations is characterised by a privileged form of transnationality which depends on numerous forms of forgetting, and which overshadows the very real inequalities nevertheless apparent in the places they traverse. For Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun, the local places through which they pass with ease are merely microcosms of their respective nation-state: they are bureaucratic spaces to be negotiated, the passive backdrops against which their lives play out – not to be engaged with in their material reality. However, '[p]laces have the power to force hidden and painful memories to the fore through their material existence.'⁵⁰ In *Ehe*, Grjasnowa successfully employs a third-person narrative perspective in order to situate the superficial, amnesia-ridden surface interactions her protagonists have with the places they pass through in the context of the real, material conditions of these places, which themselves serve as physical reminders of the historical and present systems of inequality and exclusion Leyla, Altay, and

⁴⁹ Puar, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Cresswell, p. 123.

Jonoun would rather forget. The privileged transnationality of her protagonists is thus set against what Gikandi would argue to be the more common experiences of displacement: trauma; statelessness; and precarity.

All of the places through which the trio pass are marked by the existence of a two-tier society: of those privileged individuals accepted into the national body politic and those who remain on its periphery as unwanted elements of society. Belonging to this latter category are not only the migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who attempt to cross sovereign borders, but also those citizens who are national subjects by birth yet who, by virtue of their simultaneous belonging to a growing global precariat, damage the national 'brand'. In Moscow, the A&E department in which Altay worked temporarily is described as 'der Albtraum eines jeden russischen Bürgers', populated by individuals from the various states created after the collapse of the Soviet Union: 'Flüchtlinge aus Tschetschenien und russischen Soldaten, die dort gedient hatten, [...] ein Aserbaidshaner, [...] ein Armenier, [...] ein Dagestaner, [...] ein georgischstämmiger Regierungsmitarbeiter'. In the context of this new post-Soviet Russian nationalism, the patients are separated by ethnicity: 'Alle, deren Hautfarbe Altays gleich, wurden von ihm behandelt'. Meanwhile, the psychiatric ward to which Altay later moves is used to house the 'Abschaum' of post-Soviet society: 'Trinker, Sexarbeiter, Arbeitsmigranten, missbrauchte Ehefrauen, pickelige Skins, Homosexuelle' (*Ehe*: 97). The A&E department and psychiatric station become transnational spaces in which all those deemed damaging to the emergent image of a new post-Soviet Russia are literally removed from society and locked away, hidden from view. In contrast to the privileged transnationality indulged in by Grjasnowa's protagonists – which depends upon simultaneous inclusion in the nation – the transnationality of the hospital ward is premised upon exclusion from the Russian nation-state: it becomes a form of enforced, metaphorical statelessness.

The chapters on Altay's life in the Moscow hospital serve as a point of contrast for the chapter that follows, recounting Leyla and Altay's new life in Berlin. Grjasnowa's pointed structuring of this very short chapter once again draws attention to the existence of an equally two-tier society in the German capital. In a first section, Grjasnowa describes the euphoria the pair initially feel as they are incorporated into the German nation as apolitical, homonational subjects: 'Berlin war wunderbar – Homosexualität und Menschsein schlossen sich in europäischen Großstädten nicht mehr aus' (*Ehe*: 103). The second short section describes the bureaucratic hoops Altay must jump through in order to gain his 'Arbeitserlaubnis' – working in the meantime as an apprentice and learning German at evening school. Despite having to prove that 'seine Ausbildung der deutschen *gleichwertig* war' (*Ehe*: 104, emphasis in original), Altay eventually gains a post as a junior doctor. The

comparative ease with which he negotiates German bureaucracy and initially gains symbolic access to both the German nation and the queer spaces of Berlin contrasts with the underprivileged experience of the ‘Arme, Flüchtlinge und Asylanten’ (*Ehe*: 103) for whom political recognition as citizens of Germany remains highly precarious.

The final section of this chapter details how Altay quickly becomes bored of his job as a doctor of psychosomatic illnesses in a middle-class area of former West Berlin, developing a superiority complex over his patients who are disparagingly referred to as ‘Magersüchtigen und depressiven Hausfrauen’. He later transfers to a substance abuse department in the multicultural Wedding district, which ‘fühlte sich an wie ein Moskauer Basar’ (*Ehe*: 104). That Grjasnowa does not elaborate on this description of Wedding is telling: the reference to Moscow suggests that the conditions at the Wedding substance abuse unit are very similar to the conditions she earlier described at the Moscow hospital at which Altay previously worked. Indeed, just as post-Soviet Moscow is characterised as being home to members of the various, newly created Eastern Europe nation-states who find themselves on the wrong side of the huge income disparities in the former Soviet Union, so too is the multicultural Wedding area of Berlin one of its poorest districts, with one of the highest unemployment rates. In this chapter, Grjasnowa draws a direct contrast between the privileged transnationality of Altay and other, less privileged forms of transnational living which often receive insufficient attention despite existing in numerous localities across the globe.

This comparison is once more evident when Altay returns to his home town of Baku, now as a member of a mobile, privileged elite, entering the city on a flight on which ‘[d]ie meisten Passagiere waren bleiche Männer mittleren Alters mit gutsitzenden Anzügen, iPads und massiven Eheringen’ (*Ehe*: 156). Returning to Baku, Altay views the obvious corruption of the state with contempt, forgetting – or perhaps rather repressing – that he has himself materially profited from this corruption. Indeed, while Leyla and Jonoun decide to go on a road-trip around the Caucasus, Altay embarks upon a relationship with the son of the leader of the Azerbaijani opposition party, Farid. When a police officer sees the pair engaging in a mildly sexual act in Farid’s car, they are released without charge when the officer realises who Farid’s father is: “‘Bitte gehen Sie”, sagte der Polizist leise, “und erzählen Sie Ihrem Vater nichts. Ich habe eine kleine Tochter”” (*Ehe*: 243). Due to the power held by Farid’s father, Altay is rendered immune to the regular mechanisms of homophobic exclusion enforced by the Azerbaijani state: he becomes implicated in a form of state violence which affects only those who already live in a state of precarity due to their economic and social underprivilege.

Yet, when Altay describes the poverty he sees on the streets of Baku, it is with the detached and often disdainful manner of a Western outsider, deriding the ‘backwardness’ of a city whose airport is described as having a ‘gewissen Dritte-Welt-Charme’ (*Ehe*: 157):

Am Bahnhof tummelten sich die ärmlichen Massen aus der Peripherie, Männer mit sonnengegerbter Haut und offenen Hemden, Frauen mit Goldzähnen und schreienden Babys in den Armen, von bettelnden Kindern umzingelt, die nie eine Schule von innen sehen würden, überall Tüten, billige Klamotten, Plastikblumen, selbstgedrehte Zigaretten, warme Fanta und Weißbrotlaibe. Not, Armut, Gestank. (*Ehe*: 212)

While he selectively erases his implication in this severe inequality, Grjasnowa’s consistent comparison of her protagonists’ privileged mobility with the material reality of the places they traverse draws attention to – or ‘re-remembers’ – this precise collusion with the exclusionary mechanisms of the state. Her narrative thus serves the ‘function of literary art [which] is to give visibility to intimate experiences, including those of places’.⁵¹ By drawing attention to the inequalities apparent in the places through which Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun travel, Grjasnowa both demonstrates and simultaneously counteracts her protagonists’ desire to forget their own implication in corrupt forms of trans/nationalism which perpetuate these localised injustices.

Indeed, the trip which Leyla and Jonoun take across the nations of the Caucasus region in the second half of the novel is but another example of how their privileged transnationality stands in direct contrast to the static and precarious existence of the locals who must inhabit these nations day-in-day-out. The trip itself is some kind of faux-spiritual journey upon which Leyla embarks after her father, Nazim, recounts to her the gist of the Sufi epic by Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, which tells of thirty birds who set out on a search for mystical and spiritual enlightenment. In fact, this story is but a façade for the real reason Nazim sends Leyla on this journey; in order to give her and Jonoun privacy away from the eyes of the state authorities of whom Leyla has already run foul. The excursion represents less a spiritual quest and more a privileged holiday of sorts, in which the pair travel between luxury private destinations and turn a touristic gaze towards the localities through which they pass: ‘Jonoun hatte es sich nicht nehmen lassen, auch ihre Fotoausrüstung und ihre Zeichenblöcke mitzunehmen’ (*Ehe*: 190). Their transnational peregrinations – just as throughout the novel as a whole – are premised upon the symbolic worth of their respective German and American passports, which allow them to cross troubled borders (such as that between Georgia and Armenia) with an ease that would be unthinkable for the locals of this border zone (*Ehe*: 230).

⁵¹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 162.

As earlier in the novel, the pair's traversal of nations and local places is marked by their privilege: they speed through the hinterlands of the nation with barely a passing glance at the reality of local life, stopping only at the seemingly identical oases of privacy that populate the elite tourist circuits of the region. From the home they rent in a holiday resort in the village of Ilisu on the Dagestan-Georgia border which is 'vor fremden Blicken geschützt' (*Ehe*: 205) to the Armenian hotel populated exclusively by Europeans and elite Russian businessmen (*Ehe*: 231), Leyla and Jonoun are geographically proximate yet above and completely protected from the vestiges of national and ethnic conflicts whose consequences are very much still inscribed on the landscape outside of these transnational oases of calm. Indeed, in every nation through which the pair pass, Grjasnowa's prose draws attention to the visible, local remnants of trauma with which her protagonists refuse to engage, preferring rather to avert their eyes and move onto a new private, safe accommodation where they can forget what they have just briefly seen. The luxuriousness of their holiday home in Ilisu is thus contrasted with the scenes of desolation they drive through on their way out of Baku: the unused oil fields, the rubbish-filled landscapes, and the pack of wild dogs which Leyla 'beobachtete [...] sorgenvoll und drängte Jonoun, wieder einzusteigen' (*Ehe*: 192).

Similarly, their journey from Georgia to Armenia takes them through places which eerily suggest at their violent, traumatic pasts:

In diese Landschaft, grün und grün wuchernd, *hatten sich die Spuren vom Krieg eingeschrieben*: niedergebrannte Häuserskelette und einige Dutzend Kilometer weiter Kolonnen von identischen Häusern, nebeneinander aufgereiht wie auf einer Perlenschnur. *Diese Häuser umgab eine Aura des Unglücks*. Jonoun bat Leyla, schneller zu fahren. (*Ehe*: 220, emphasis added)

As with the place of Jenin in *Russe*, the landscape has itself been inscribed with the trauma to which it has borne witness. As an embodied place of memory, this location – and the histories it suggests – induces in Jonoun an affective reaction to her surroundings. Rather than engage with this rooted memory of trauma, however, Jonoun – as is typical for *Ehe*'s protagonists – prefers to distance herself as quickly as possible from this site, asking Leyla to drive faster towards their next stopping point: Leyla's grandmother's old house on the black sea, in the affluent and popular tourist resort of Batumi (*Ehe*: 219). As soon as the pair come close to being confronted by the reality of daily life in the places they travel through, their automatic reaction is to retreat back into the privileged, amnesia-ridden space of the transnational elite.

Indeed, towards the end of their trip they travel increasingly closer to the Iran border, to the 'Rande der Zivilisation' (*Ehe*: 247) – the point at which the pair would leave the Europe-Asia borderlands of the Caucasus and enter the turbulent Middle East. It is at this point, on the very border of Europe, that the two choose to end their trip and seemingly also their relationship.

When the pair return to their hotel room, an Azerbaijani government official is waiting for them with a gift of pearl-laden jewellery and a cryptic message: “‘Perlen symbolisieren Tränen und sind nicht für die Ewigkeit. Ein kleiner Gruß an Ihren Ehemann, wenn Sie verstehen, was ich meine. [...] Fahren Sie nach Hause’” (*Ehe*: 254). The pearls symbolise the end of both Leyla and Altay’s queer, extra-marital relationships while Leyla’s return to her husband symbolises their reincorporation into heteronormative Azerbaijani and European kinship norms. Leyla travelled with Jonoun to the ‘edge of Europe’: both literally on their elite peregrinations and metaphorically to the edge of accepted, heterosexual kinship norms. However, just as their privileged road-trip was premised upon an erasure of the material reality of life in the local places they passed through, so too does Leyla choose to return to the security of life within national norms and accept the selective amnesia that this implies. The novel closes with a pregnant Leyla returning to Germany with her husband; Jonoun having already flown on to Istanbul alone. As Leyla states regretfully: “‘Wir träumten von einer unmöglichen Liebesbeziehung. Alle drei’” (*Ehe*: 265). The initial subversiveness of the trio’s relationship ends with a re-enforcement of a heteronormativity that affords Leyla and Altay a comfortable bourgeois lifestyle through their folding into life as German national subjects.

Conclusion

As I have argued throughout this chapter, *Russe* and *Ehe* are both ultimately novels about places and about what happens when individuals move from one place to settle in another – a phenomenon that is increasingly familiar in a twenty-first century world characterised by large scale migration. I have shown how, in their materiality, the places imagined by Grjasnowa contain traces of their traumatic pasts which can be mobilised by individual agents to bring these oft forgotten pasts back into present consciousness, as well as to situate them within the context of present-day trans/national power structures. Applying Human Geography conceptions of ‘place’ to the study of memory has suggested that diverse localities are in fact the ideal arena in which to examine the interplay between transnational and transcultural memory dynamics, rooting Michael Rothberg’s somewhat abstract theorising in concrete local contexts of everyday life. In an unequal, globalised world, trans/national power structures often elide their workings and their consequences for the most vulnerable members of our global society. In this case, engaging with local places (of memory) and the varied experiences of their inhabitants presents a potential antidote to such a selective ignorance or indeed amnesia. However, as I have suggested in this chapter, perhaps the choice to engage with place-based memory is in fact another form of privilege reserved for the secure, global elite whilst those less fortunate are more so preoccupied with

the immediate vulnerability that comes of being excluded from nation-state belonging and concomitant protection.

In *Russe*, it is true that Mascha's engagement with place-based memory grounds supposedly 'transnational' or 'global' memories in rooted localities and problematises simplistic, homogenising narratives of the past by illuminating their heterogenous, real-life meanings for various individuals across the globe. Equally, the act of sharing her trauma with others and the working through of this trauma provoked by the material memory which resides in the affective, trauma-laden localities of Israel and Palestine serves to illuminate previously unrecognised connections between memories of historical trauma. This transcultural, place-based memory work begins to undermine the prevalence of the nation as the primary source of identity and individual memory, and to imagine potential ways of being-in-common that circumvent the exclusionary tendencies of the nation-state. However, as I demonstrated in my analysis of *Russe*, Mascha's own comparative privilege in belonging to a recognised nation-state blinds her to the plight of other less privileged individuals who are today continually traumatised by the consequences of statelessness. The conclusion of *Russe*, in which Mascha desires to leave Palestine and forget all she has witnessed, confirms selective amnesia as a choice open only to those who can return to the relative security of the nation-state whose passport they hold. Indeed, this indulgence in selective amnesia underpins the attitude of Grjasnowa's protagonists in *Ehe*, who from the offset undermine the material realities of place through being complicit with nation-state exclusionism. The narrow and presentist outlooks of Leyla, Altay, and Jonoun flatten both time and space, collapsing the individuality, material reality, and heterogenous pasts of specific localities into a homogenised nation-state entity whose norms are to be negotiated in order to align themselves with the axes of privilege. Rather than being mobilised as resistant arenas of cross-boundary affective connection to diverse Others, local places in *Ehe* are erased from the protagonists' consciousness via a process of selective amnesia: they are non-places of forgetting not places of memory.

Importantly for this thesis, what can be taken from a comparative reading of these novels is that places – and their use or abuse by those who pass through them – are of vital symbolic and intellectual significance. This stands true in the first instance for any conceptualisation of the messy, intertwined nature of transnational and national power structures in the globalised twenty-first century. It is equally salient for an understanding of how individuals in localities across the world are politically constrained by, yet simultaneously construct identities and forge connections that transgress, the mechanisms of the nation-state. As a primary source of identity, memory is a key factor in this process. My analysis of these two novels has gestured towards how Grjasnowa has successfully imagined and mobilised local

places as arenas in which to trace the dynamic interplay and frictions between transnational and transcultural forms of memory in the context of a globalised world undergirded by pervasive trans/national power structures. While Grjasnowa's novels point towards the importance of place in both the recreation of transcultural memories and identities, and in exploring how and why these memories do (not) move beyond the local scale into the trans/national realm, they nevertheless perhaps fall short of conceptualising alternative ways of political being-in-common in the twenty-first century world: ones which do not systemically privilege certain lives and memories over other, less privileged forms. The following chapter of this thesis considers Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* in the context of this shortcoming, arguing that her narrator's interaction with what I term "traumatised places" represents a different, less privileged, and more enduring engagement with memories of human trauma that cross numerous national, ethnic, and religious boundaries.

Chapter Four

From Fractured to Human Memories: “Traumatised Places” and the Queering of Ethnicity in Katja Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*

In the previous chapter, I analysed two works by Olga Grjasnowa and began to develop the hypothesis that even in an increasingly mobile world, particular rooted places still play a significant role in the creation of transcultural memory. In this chapter, I build upon this argument through an analysis of Katja Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*. Born in Kiev in 1970 to Russian-speaking parents, Petrowskaja studied literature in Estonia and completed her Ph.D. in Moscow before moving to Berlin in 1999, where she has since worked as a journalist and writer. Her first and to-date only book, *Vielleicht Esther*, was written in German and published to critical acclaim in 2014 – it has now been translated into 19 languages; an English translation, *Maybe Esther*, was released in 2018.¹ For her debut book, Petrowskaja has been awarded the Ingeborg-Bachmann prize (2013), the Aspekte Literature prize, the Ernst Toller prize (both 2015), and – in Italian translation – the Strega European prize (also 2015). *Vielleicht Esther* is ultimately a literary exercise in memory. The book traces Petrowskaja’s search for her Jewish family history, which was all but erased by the catastrophic events of the Holocaust. The death of the narrator’s elderly maternal aunt Lida at the beginning of the narrative underlines the transition between communicative and cultural memory that takes place as the eyewitnesses of this tragedy pass away and their unspoken stories and memories are forever lost to history.² The material with which Petrowskaja’s first-person narrator has to work are fragments of legendary family stories passed down over generations, as well as what little – if any – information she can find in the various national archives she visits on her quest to piece together her family’s biography.

In the course of her research, the narrator embarks upon a transnational journey, visiting specific places she knows to be associated with her ancestors. Disappointed with the various absences contained in the archives she visits, these places come to be invested with significant affective meaning: they are, in most cases, the only connection she retains to her lost relatives. *Vielleicht Esther* is then ultimately a book about places: that is, about the affective connections we make with specific places that are personally meaningful and about how we mobilise these affect-laden places in an attempt to recreate memories that have been lost to time or purposely destroyed. Departing from her home in Berlin, the narrator travels

¹ ‘Foreign Rights: Katja Petrowskaja, *Maybe Esther*’, *Suhrkamp Insel* <http://www.suhrkamp.de/buecher/vielleicht_esther-katja_petrowskaja_42404.html?d_view=english> [Accessed 29 September 2016]; Katja Petrowskaja, *Maybe Esther*, trans. by Shelley Frisch (London: Fourth Estate, 2018).

² See Jan Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, in *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Erll, pp. 109-18, for his differentiation between communicative and cultural memory.

to Poland (where her maternal great-grandfather led a school for deaf-mute children), to the Russian archives in Moscow (to find information on the trial and execution of her paternal great-uncle, Judas Stern), back to her birthplace of Kiev and the site of the 1941 Babi Yar massacre (where her maternal great-grandmother and great-aunt, and paternal great-grandmother were killed), and finally on to Austria, where she visits the Stalag XVIII C prisoner of war camp near Salzburg and the Mauthausen concentration camp in which her Ukrainian, non-Jewish maternal grandfather was interned as a Soviet POW.

The places that the narrator visits and engages with are the geographical points of convergence of various scales of memory: they are at once personal and familial, Jewish, national, transnational, and – in some cases, as the location of Holocaust crimes – arguably ‘global’ places of memory.³ As I intend to demonstrate in this chapter, the complexity of the various – and sometimes competing – memories associated with such places at first complicates and indeed renders impossible the narrator’s attempts to piece together a linear, complete family biography. Yet, as the narrative progresses, these places are shown to be productive arenas in which the narrator is able to situate personal, familial history in the context of human history, reaching beyond the Self to affectively engage with the traces of the Other’s trauma also memorialised in these places. That the narrator does not succeed in answering all the questions she has about her own family history is, by the end of *Vielleicht Esther*, perhaps secondary to the fact she has succeeded in coming closer to imagining a place-inspired archive of human memory which is just as fragmented, complex, and contradictory as the workings of memory itself. This archive of human memory may not be ‘factual’ in the sense that it can be verified by historical evidence or archived as historical documents; its ‘truth’ comes firstly from the fact that it has a real, personal meaning to those who contribute to it and secondly in that it does not purport to be an objective, complete, and exclusive version of history.

Indeed, this blurred line between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ is not only a central concern within the narrative, but also in any discussion about the book itself. Unlike the novels analysed elsewhere in this thesis, *Vielleicht Esther* is primarily an autobiographical text whose narrative is structured around Petrowskaja’s research into her own family tree. The ‘facticity’ of the text is manifested at a textual level with the insertion of documentary-style evidence such as photographs of Petrowskaja’s relatives from the family archive, images of street graffiti in Warsaw taken by Petrowskaja herself, and photocopies of documents found in national archives or at memorial sites. This melange of the factual and the literary has led Elin Nesje Vestli to categorise *Vielleicht Esther* as a ‘Rahmenerzählung’, in which the

³ I allude here to Levy and Sznajder’s theory of the Holocaust as a ‘global’ memory.

narrator's factual research builds a narrative framework for the text that is then enriched with literary, or fictional, additions.⁴

This mixture of factual evidence and literary fiction is not just a structural novelty of Petrowskaja's text, however. In fact, in its literary form, *Vielleicht Esther* demonstrates something fundamental about the workings of memory itself: namely, it is a composite structure that is by its very nature an inaccurate, fictionalised version of a supposedly verifiable historical 'truth'. This dual relationship that literature and memory have with both fact and fiction has been theorised by Elisabeth Herrmann as endowing works of literature with a productive status as 'both a mirror and a reflective space, but also an experimental field for human existence'.⁵ Elsewhere, Aleida Assmann has argued in a similar vein that: 'Artistic creation plays an important role in the renewal of memory, in that it challenges the firmly drawn border between what is remembered and what forgotten, continually shifting it by means of surprising compositions.'⁶ In this chapter, I argue that *Vielleicht Esther* challenges in this manner the erasure of certain lives and memories from the historical record, employing the affective pull and palimpsestic nature of specific places of memory and utilising the facility of imagination to renew – or even rewrite – existing, exclusionary, and nationally-inflected narratives of memory. Both as a text and within its narrative, *Vielleicht Esther* demonstrates that the question of whether memory is based in 'fact' or 'fiction' is perhaps secondary to whether these memories hold emotional significance for their agents, as well as whether they can be mobilised to both give meaning to an individual's life in the present and to affectively connect to others across socially-constructed boundaries.

Drawing on research in the disciplines of Memory Studies and Human Geography, in this chapter I theorise the relationship between memory and place and consider how the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* engages with specific places in a manner that begins to undermine the binary thinking that separates an individual's or supposed collective's history and memory from those of another. Taking inspiration from research in Human Geography which diagnoses a definitional oversight in a Memory Studies discipline that conflates the terms 'site' and 'place', I introduce the concept of "traumatised places" and argue that such ordinary, embodied places of daily life which nevertheless bear traces of their traumatic

⁴ Elin Nesje Vestli, "Mein fremdes Deutsch": *Grenzüberschreitungen in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur: Katja Petrowskaja's Vielleicht Esther*, in: *Language and Nation: Crossroads and Connections*, ed. by Guri Ellen Barstad and others (Munich and New York: Waxman Verlag, 2016), pp. 143-60 (p. 150).

⁵ Herrmann, p. 20.

⁶ English translation of Aleida Assmann from the German taken from: Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 79.

pasts allow for a more personal, individual, and affective engagement with memory than do the institutionalised sites of memory that are often the subject of Memory Studies research. In the beginning, the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* attempts to make a connection to her lost family past by developing an affective connection to traumatised places she knows to be significant for her ancestors. After realising that a full recuperation of this lost, personal past is largely impossible, she begins to mobilise these places as affective entry points into the lives and memories of unknown Jewish others, connecting to their legacies and fates through a process of what I term a place-based “subjunctive modality of remembrance”.⁷ Whilst demonstrating the emotionally challenging nature of memory-work and raising ethical implications of appropriation, I argue that the employment of such an imaginative subjunctive modality of remembrance in traumatised places brings the narrator affectively closer to the memories of others whose family members shared a similar fate to her own. As the narrative progresses, this transgressional potential of place-based memory eventually provides the protagonist with the psychological foundations for moving closer to the memories of unknown national, cultural, ethnic, etc. Others whose lives and memories equally mark such traumatised places.

By focusing on the narrator’s co-operative attempts to excavate traces of the past in traumatised places with the help of national and cultural Others, as well as on her purposeful employment of multilingualism, I argue that she enacts what Fatima El-Tayeb has termed a ‘queering [of] ethnicity’. In travelling between and fostering an affective connection with specific traumatised places geographically located in various nations, I suggest that *Vielleicht Esther*’s migrant narrator contributes towards a new ‘migrant archive’ of memory which finds its origins in place-centred memory-work, affect, and imaginative investment in the lives of Others.⁸ In its queering of ethnicity, this ‘migrant archive’ undermines the concept of national history/memory by positioning memory as an ultimately human enterprise and human responsibility. I close the chapter by arguing that the place-based, transgressional subjunctive modality of remembrance engaged in by *Vielleicht Esther*’s protagonist gestures towards a form of cosmopolitan memory that is paradoxically – and necessarily – rooted in place. In this, cosmopolitan memory is shown to be both universal – travelling across borders and including all forms of human memory – and also particular – it

⁷ See also Maya Caspari, ‘There Are No ‘Other’ People’: A Conversation with Katja Petrowskaja’, *LA Review of Books*, 7 March 2018 <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/there-are-no-other-people-a-conversation-with-katja-petrowskaja/>> [accessed 19 March 2018], where brief reference is made to a ‘kind of subjunctive remembering’ in relation to *Vielleicht Esther*.

⁸ The term ‘migrant archive’ is borrowed here from Rothberg and Yildiz.

is also necessarily rooted in place and depends upon an individual's affective response to and mobilisation of the distinctly human memories in evidence in this place.

The creation of such a 'migrant archive' of rooted cosmopolitan memory is undoubtedly novel and ultimately promising; however, I argue that Petrowskaja does not present such an endeavour as without its shortcomings. Indeed, towards the end of the text, it appears that questions still remain as to the feasibility of what we may come to conceive of as 'humanity's memory'. If we take into account the large, likely unimaginable scale that the term humanity implies, can we reasonably expect individuals to affectively relate to such an abstract concept? Does this abstraction furthermore serve to conceal the inevitable blind spots of memory that come of being human – namely, the tendency to shut one's eyes to unsavoury historical revelations that potentially incriminate our ancestors? As a book, *Vielleicht Esther* arguably raises more questions than it sets out to answer. However, I suggest in this chapter that it is the process of memory illustrated in the text that is of more significant importance than the answers it (does not) provide. In what follows, I draw upon the fields of Memory Studies and Human Geography to set out the theoretical premise of my argument before dedicating the remainder of the chapter to a close reading of the book.

“Traumatised Places”: collective memory vs collectives of memory/ies

Place has been recognised as a multi-layered site of preservation and memorial interaction by certain scholars of memory. Aleida Assmann even goes as far as to question whether places themselves can become agents and bearers of memory due to their potential 'mnemonic power' and the fact that 'what time has made invisible through removal and destruction is still mysteriously retained by place'.⁹ Of particular interest for the argument advanced in this chapter are what Assmann has variously termed 'places of trauma' or 'traumatic sites'. 'Places of trauma' are, Assmann asserts, characterised by their 'multi-layered complexity [...] [which] arises not least from the heterogeneity of the perspectives of those who claim the place as theirs and who come to visit it'.¹⁰ Assmann's description of 'places of trauma' is indeed just as relevant to the places with which *Vielleicht Esther*'s protagonist engages as is her characterisation of 'traumatic sites' as emotionally-charged, palimpsestic, and overdetermined yet multi-perspectival.¹¹ However, while Assmann appears to use the terms 'place' and 'site' interchangeably to refer solely to preserved, institutional sites of memory such as museums and memorials, I insist in this chapter on

⁹ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, p. 281; p. 294.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 313.

¹¹ Assmann, *Shadows*, pp. 191-93.

designating a definitional difference between such constructed sites of memory and lived, embodied places of memory.¹² This insistence is of considerable significance since I argue that it is not necessarily preserved sites of memory (such as the concentration camps Auschwitz and Mauthausen) that provide the affective material drawn upon by *Vielleicht Esther*'s protagonist to create new narratives of place-inspired human memory. It is rather the affective connection that she fosters with otherwise mundane and embodied neighbourhoods of daily life that facilitates this process.

As Karen E. Till has recognised, the interchangeable use of the terms 'site' and 'place' when referring to specifically institutional, constructed sites of memory is a widespread phenomenon across the field of Memory Studies. This has resulted in the development of a somewhat lacking 'biography of site' approach to memory which largely overlooks the vital status of everyday, lived 'places [as] embodied contexts of experience'.¹³ For Jeff Kelly, this situation has resulted in 'site' and 'place' being understood as interchangeable terms rather than as designating two fundamentally different psycho-social arenas that may or may not co-exist at the same geographical location. He describes their connection as such:

Places are what fill [sites] out and make them work. Sites are like maps or mines, while places are the reservoirs of human content, like memory or gardens [...] Places are held in sites by personal and common values, and by the maintenance of those values over time, as memory.¹⁴

In this definition, it is places as embodied locations of personal, human experience that are key to the emergence of personal and common values which, maintained over time, result in the emergence of shared narratives of memory. It is such places of memory – whether overlapping or not with institutionalised sites of memory – that I argue are key to the emergence of new narratives of transcultural memory in *Vielleicht Esther*. If Assmann's work on 'places of trauma'/'traumatic sites' theorises the relationship of the visitor with sites of traumatic memory, I argue in this chapter that work on 'place' in Human Geography can help theorise the relationship of the individual with traces of memory in embodied day-to-day localities.

Nuancing Assmann's 'places of trauma'/'traumatic sites' and taking inspiration from geographer Karen E. Till's concept of 'wounded places' as 'places [...] understood to be

¹² Compare the term 'traumatic sites' in *Shadows*, the English translation of the German original: Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2011), p. 219, which refers to 'traumatische Orte'. 'Orte' can mean both places and sites in English translation – here it is translated as 'site' c.f. Assmann *Cultural Memory*, where reference is made to 'places of trauma'.

¹³ Till, 'Activist Memory-work', p. 102; p. 105.

¹⁴ Jeff Kelly, 'Common Work' in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. by Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), pp. 139-48 (p. 142).

present to the pain of others and to embody difficult social pasts',¹⁵ I introduce and theorise the concept of "traumatised places" as a means by which to describe the memory-saturated places engaged with by *Vielleicht Esther*'s protagonist. In selecting the term traumatised places, I gesture towards its theoretical inspirations and origins in the fields of both Memory Studies and Human Geography. My concept of traumatised places underlines that traumatic memory is not only present at memorialised sites but is also found in places where it may not at first be apparent and where people go about their daily lives. What renders these places 'traumatised' is that they retain traces of the traumas to which they have borne witness; traces that can be uncovered by those with a personal connection to, or knowledge about, them. This act of uncovering, I argue, creates an affective relationship between the agent and the place. My understanding of 'affect' here is that of a 'force of encounter' that is visceral, intimate, and often partially unconscious yet cannot be separated completely from cognition and conscious thought.¹⁶ 'Affect' implies potentiality: that of the body being (un)consciously affected by the embodied place and that of the body consciously affecting the place through how they choose to act on this affect.

In *Vielleicht Esther*, the narrator is both affected by the emotions which arise as she encounters the personally meaningful traumatised places of her family's past and simultaneously affects these places by uncovering their lost memories of trauma and mobilising them to affectively relate to the traumas of Others also in evidence at these locations. In Human Geography scholarship, places are defined as embodied landscapes that consist of a dynamic convergence of the environment, the individual, and the other presences (people and memories) that exist at this location and which take on personal and collective significance as an individual comes to 'know' a place and ascribes to it affective meaning.¹⁷ That places also inevitably contain traces of their pasts invests them with huge memorial significance, crossed as they are by multi-temporal narratives and histories that overlap to create novel and unexpected constellations of memory.¹⁸ When individuals (un)consciously interact with a specific place and imbue it with personal affective meaning, they cannot but interact with the various pasts whose traces inherently mark this place. In affectively interacting with the place, we affectively interact with the memories of the Other that have already been imparted on this place. While institutionalised sites of memory often contribute to the production of a homogenised narrative or supposed 'collective memory' of one particular past, in the introductory chapter of this thesis I suggested how places of memory – as embodied social arenas in which a multitude of pasts are brought together by

¹⁵ Till, 'Activist Memory-work', p. 108.

¹⁶ Seigworth and Gregg, p. 1.

¹⁷ See Macpherson; Jones.

¹⁸ Silverman, p. 2.

their diverse inhabitants – house rather ‘collectives of memory/ies’ which memorialise a number of different traumatic events as well as the heterogeneous personal experiences associated with such events. Such collectives are formed as individual agents affectively attribute their own personal, heterogeneous memories to shared social places as they interact with and come to know their surroundings.

In *Vielleicht Esther*, embodied traumatised places are home to collectives of memory/ies. As such, these places cannot be separated from the diverse stories and lives of, and affective relationships built by, human agents in their interaction with the landscape. The imbrication of memory and place fostered through human agency is formulated by Karen E. Till thus: ‘When people feel personally and culturally haunted by the past, they may evoke ghosts *by making places* that commemorate, question, remember, mourn and forget.’¹⁹ For Till, there is a distinct difference between returning to a place one has known personally in the past, and a more metaphorical ‘return’ of individuals to places that are significant for their ancestors but of which they themselves have little or no personal memory. This latter form – referred to by Till as a ‘postmemorial return’ – is characteristic of the protagonist’s ‘returns’ to traumatised places in *Vielleicht Esther*. For Till, such ‘postmemorial returns’ are borne of a desire to know who one is by searching for one’s identity in a familial past. This endeavour is, she adds, generally destined to result in failure because ‘there are no answers. Nothing can be recovered because the past one attempts to visit is haunted by someone else’s ghosts and secrets’.²⁰ However, what Till sees as a limitation becomes in *Vielleicht Esther* a source of potential: traumatised places ‘haunted’ by others’ ghosts become places in which the narrator – unable to reconstruct a complete, insulated family biography – mobilises the located traces of Others’ traumas in order to engage with traumatic legacies as ultimately human traumas. In this, the memory-work undertaken by the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* becomes a productive example of how we can ‘do’ memory in a manner that accounts for the day-to-day, visceral ways in which the past continues to haunt both people and places in the present, as well as how these hauntings can be mobilised to situate our own pasts in the context of wider, human history.

Prescribed memory: national archives and institutionalised sites

Paradoxically, the reason the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* gives to explain her sudden desire to trace her family history is the precise factor which makes the fulfilment of this desire impossible: absence. Even as a child, she felt a distinct sense of loss or rather lack (*VE*: 22)

¹⁹ Till, *The New Berlin*, p. 9, emphasis added.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 16.

due to the smallness of her family and the fact that her grandparents were older than her classmates' great-grandparents, as though 'in den Wirren der Zeit sei eine Generation verlorengegangen, übersprungen worden' (VE: 21). This feeling of loss was compounded by the fact that little familial knowledge remained of her ancestors other than their names and minimal scraps of information about their lives that were passed down as family legends. Rather than provide the building blocks to excavate a lost familial past, this list of names in fact serves for the narrator to illuminate the discrepancy between what little has been retained and what has mostly been lost over time: '[meine Verwandten] standen in einer dicht gedrängten Menge vor mir, ohne Gesichter und Geschichten, wie Leuchtkäfer der Vergangenheit, die kleine Flächen um sich herum beleuchteten, ein paar Straßen oder Begebenheiten, aber nicht sich selbst' (VE: 25). The evocative simile 'like fireflies of the past' conjures a poignant image of how these small, fragile illuminations of the past are dwarfed in scale by the overwhelming darkness of the unknown, which over time threatens to extinguish these glimmers forever.

In response to this overwhelming lack, the narrator turns to sources that are in the public domain: to national archives, museums, and preserved sites of memory such as the Auschwitz and Mauthausen concentration camps which she visits during the narrative. Far from providing the answers she seeks, however, these sources are instead similarly characterised by an absence of relevant information that could allow the narrator to recreate her family biography. On the one hand, the archives are in some ways too broad. Initially, the narrator considers attempting to trace any unknown relatives by searching for her original family name, 'Stern', in population records (her paternal grandfather changed his name to avoid being associated with his brother, Judas Stern, trialled and executed for shooting a German delegate in Moscow in 1932). Given the sheer volume of people with this not uncommon surname, this course of action appears to the narrator to be ethically problematic. She reflects:

Die Meinigen sind nicht zu unterscheiden von Hunderten anderer, die genauso hießen, dabei wäre es für mich nicht möglich, die Meinigen von dem Fremden zu trennen wie den Weizen von der Spreu, es wäre eine Selektion gewesen, und ich wollte keine, nicht einmal das Wort. (VE: 27)

The use of the colloquialism 'den Weizen von der Spreu zu trennen' suggests at the banalisation of the lives of those unwanted 'Fremden' that would take place should the narrator reject them as irrelevant to the task at hand. Indeed, any memory work based upon such a *Selektion* would replicate the violence that led to the erasure of her Jewish family history in the first instance: the act of determining the (un)worthiness of certain lives based on a hypothetical bloodline. Petrowskaja's pointed use of the historically-loaded noun *Selektion* in a German-language text in itself directly evokes connotations of the

extermination of Jewish life, associated as it overwhelmingly still is with the process by which prisoners arriving at Nazi concentration camps (the majority of whom were Jews) were either deemed to be fit for work and assigned labour or were sent directly to their deaths. Listed as one of ten pieces of ‘Stigmavokabel’ carried over from the Nazi period on the website of the Federal Agency for Civic Education, the connotations of the term *Selektion* would not be missed by the average German reader and would likely invoke an intense affective response to Petrowskaja’s allusion.²¹

On the other hand, the archives the narrator consults are rather too narrow: in their construction of an incomplete narrative of the past they impede rather than provide access to the information the narrator seeks. Dora Osborne describes in this manner how the narrator’s encounters with archival material and ‘archival spaces’ act as ‘stumbling blocks’ in her attempt to trace her family biography. For Osborne, these encounters show the archive to be ‘a site of power and violence’, where what remains is underwritten by what is missing and why this is so.²² In *Vielleicht Esther*, the violent extermination of the narrator’s Jewish ancestors is replicated by the absence of any traces of their lives – let alone circumstances of their deaths – in the archives that remain. Indeed, when the narrator travels to the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Centre in Warsaw and – in a rare moment of discovery – finds evidence of an unknown family member (her maternal great-grandfather’s first wife, Estera Patt) in the archives, she is told by a Centre employee that she is ‘lucky’ that her family were not originally from Warsaw as ‘von Warschauer Familien sei kaum etwas erhalten, alle Archive wurden zerstört’ (VE: 106). Elsewhere, the German-language reports on the trial of her paternal great-uncle, Judas Stern, are found wanting by the narrator who suspects that the crime for which he was blamed was in fact orchestrated by the Soviet government. The reports in the archive, tainted by bias and only once including direct testimony from Stern, are, however, the only documents available to the narrator and she must therefore accept that this is all that remains: ‘Vielleicht sagt [Stern] auch etwas anderes, aber so steht es in der Zeitung, und wir haben nur diese Worte’ (VE: 153). Similarly, the records she finds on her maternal non-Jewish grandfather Wassilij at Mauthausen concentration camp is false: he is detailed as a Russian civilian rather than a Soviet Officer (VE: 241). The narrator surmises that in an effort to survive, her grandfather – who was in fact Ukrainian not Russian – played down his high-ranking role in the Soviet

²¹ Thorsten Eitz, ‘Zehn Stigmavokabel’, *Bundeszentrale für politische Ausbildung* <<http://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/sprache-und-politik/42744/stigmavokabeln?p=all>> [Accessed 4 October 2018]. The noun ‘Selektion’ is described here as a ‘bis heute gebrauchten Schlagwort, in dem die menschenverachtende industrialisierte Massenvernichtung von Menschen durch die Nationalsozialisten komprimiert wurde’.

²² Dora Osborne, ‘Encountering the Archive in Katja Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*’, *Seminar*, 52 (2016), 255-72 (p. 257; p. 258); (p. 256).

system which was at the time waging war on his German captors. In both cases, what is absent from the archive tells us more about the workings of power at the time of Judas and Wassilij than does the material it contains.

Osborne sees in these limitations and absences an almost paradoxical form of potential. Namely, that archival absences force the narrator to come to see her own and others' familial histories as inescapably intertwined: for Osborne, she comes to realise that 'she cannot draw neat distinctions between "victims" and "perpetrators", or between her own family and those with whom she has no personal connection'.²³ It is the incompleteness of the archives that is key to Osborne's argument, which is that these gaps in verifiable historical knowledge open up a space in which the narrator can engage in an imaginative investment that brings together her own familial experiences with the experiences of other families at that time. What Osborne perhaps overlooks in her determination on the centrality of the archive is that, in *Vielleicht Esther*, it is arguably the narrator's engagement with the physical places outside of the archive – not just her encounters with the archives themselves – that facilitates her ethical engagement with the history and memories of Others. In other words, I would argue that it is not the absences contained in the archives themselves that provide the impulse for the narrator's engagement with the traumas of Others. Rather, the archival absences encourage the narrator to look to what remains of history i.e. to the physical traumatised places of her familial past; it is her engagement with these places themselves – marked by the traumas of Others – that facilitates this imaginative investment.

In their physical materiality, places may also provide a more resilient connection to lost pasts than can the archive since 'what time has made invisible through removal and destruction is still mysteriously retained by place'.²⁴ In comparison to the ease by which archival documents can be destroyed or deleted, the physical materiality of place means that it is comparatively harder to erase all signs of a specific past from the landscape in which it played out. Indeed, the ephemerality of archival documents is symbolised in the book by the aged newspaper reports on Stern's trial, which disintegrate in the narrator's hands before she has chance to read their content (*VE*: 151). While in *Vielleicht Esther* absence in the archive tends to denote a total loss of memory, absence or loss of memory in place is partially counteracted by the presence of physical, resilient traces (*Spuren*) of the past that can be uncovered by those with knowledge of these lost pasts.

Before examining precisely how the narrator successfully mobilises the memories of traumatised places, I will consider one instance in the narrative in which the narrator's non-

²³ Osborne, p. 258.

²⁴ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, p. 294.

interaction with site-based memory – like her encounters with the archive – actually serves to prevent her engagement with traumatic memory. In this, I would argue that the text itself sets institutionalised, constructed sites of memory against embodied, local places of memory; a distinction I have argued is vital for recognising the potential of specifically place-based memory. Early in the narrative, the protagonist describes her 1989 visit to Auschwitz concentration camp – an institutionalised site of memory or, in Assmann’s terms a ‘traumatic site’. Like her later visits to the traumatised places of her family’s past, this trip appears to be for the narrator a form of postmemorial return: ‘Ich erinnere mich an den Blick aus dem Fenster auf die flache Landschaft, die mir vertraut schien, als wäre ich gar nicht verreist’ (VE: 57). However, while her later visits to traumatised places are characterised by intense remembering, the narrator reports how she recalls nothing of her visit to Auschwitz aside from the surrounding landscape of the site and a shop located at the entrance to the town of Oświęcim:

Als ich die drei Ketten [from this shop] gekauft hatte und vor dem Tor von Oświęcim stand, machte mein Gedächtnis halt. Von diesem Augenblick an erinnere ich mich an nichts. Ich habe mehrmals versucht, mein Gedächtnis durch das Tor schleichen zu lassen, nur zur Besichtigung – vergeblich. Keine Spur. (VE: 58-59)

The narrator’s visit to this preserved site of memory, as a descendent of Jews killed during the Holocaust, appears to provoke a loss rather than recuperation of memory.

This loss – or rather, repression – of memory is understandable when considering how the narrator’s visit to Auschwitz as a descendent of Jewish victims of the Holocaust is undoubtedly a different, much more affective experience of the site than would normally be the case for a typical tourist with no personal connection to the memorial. She cannot visit the site ‘nur zur Besichtigung’ – as a preserved tourist site of educative historical memory – but seems rather to be overwhelmed by the emotions that she feels on encountering the *Gedenkstätte*. The memory of her visit is repressed and what does remain in her mind – her act of buying the three necklaces from the shop at the entrance to the town – functions to screen what she actually saw and felt that day. This screen is reflected textually in the fact that the narrator never once refers to Auschwitz by name; rather, the reader is to grasp her location through reference to the town of Oświęcim and her allusion to the infamous ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ sign which appears on the entrance gates of the camp: ‘Ich weiß genau, was über dem Tor steht und dass ich deswegen die Arbeit so hasse, selbst das Wort’ (VE: 60).

Traumatic sites such as Auschwitz are often overdetermined by the meanings attributed to them in their construction as museal and monumental spaces.²⁵ As Karen E Till argues, this overdetermination can prove overwhelming for those with familial connections to such sites

²⁵ Assmann, *Shadows*, p. 193.

since ‘visiting a place may disturb [an individual’s] ideal of what the place should be or, even worse, the emotional attachments they believe they should have in the presence of a sacred past/site’.²⁶ For the narrator, the emotions she perhaps would expect to feel at this traumatic site seem to be somewhat overdetermined by the inner turmoil she suffers as she attempts to justify her ‘investment’ in the three silver necklaces. Despite her attempts to rationalise this purchase as pragmatically in-line with the entrance of Eastern Europe into the capitalist economic system, textual references to the intense emotions felt by the narrator during this act of consumption – ‘Begierde’; ‘Scham’; (lack of) ‘Würde’; ‘bereuen’ (VE: 57-58) – gesture towards an intense discomfort at the marketisation and resultant cheapening of the memorial site: ‘Doch je mehr ich mich selbst davon zu überzeugen versuchte, desto schneller wuchs die *Zerrissenheit* und das *Gefühl*, dass Pragmatismus hier fehl am Platz sei’ (VE: 58, emphasis added).

In this context, Petrowskaja’s assertion that ‘Arbeit’ as a word can never be bought free (‘freikaufen werden’) from its association with the slogan ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ appears to be a pointed reference to the problematic commodification of memory that is risked at sites of traumatic memory when they enter what Terri Tomsy has referred to as the ‘trauma economy’.²⁷ For the narrator, the act of purchasing the necklaces could have functioned to unconsciously protect herself from the traumatising emotions she may have experienced at this site of Jewish memory. For the average visitor with no personal connection to the atrocities perpetrated at the camp however, any encounter with the place of Auschwitz is in danger of becoming but an interaction with the traumatic site as a commodity in itself. Aleida Assmann touches upon this problem when she considers how such sites are both authentic and staged, emphasising that it is vital that we recognise this duality ‘in order to avoid their becoming pernicious tourist attractions.’²⁸ She cautions: ‘Whoever places too much emphasis on the site’s power of memory runs the risk of confusing the reconstructed commemorative site of the visitors for the historical site of the prisoner.’²⁹ In other words, if the visiting tourist is not able to recognise the difference between the preserved site of memory and the historical place as it was at the time of the trauma, then the traumatic site becomes not an impetus to affectively remember but rather works to conceal memory.

The narrator’s experience at the Auschwitz *Gedenkstätte* demonstrates that enduring narratives of memory are not necessarily an automatic product of an interaction with a particular site of memory. Rather, the creation of memory depends upon the visiting

²⁶ Till, *The New Berlin*, p. 15.

²⁷ Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11: Travelling Memory and the Trauma Economy’, *Parallax*, 17 (2011), 49-60.

²⁸ Assmann, *Shadows*, pp. 191-92.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 192.

individual being able and willing to mobilise knowledge and affect in a manner that moves beyond inscribed narratives of overdetermined traumatic sites. Whereas the narrator is apparently overcome by the affective aura of the traumatic site of Auschwitz, she later successfully mobilises the affective relationship she builds with traumatised places to engage with rather than repress the shared, traumatic memories located therein. That these traumatised places are otherwise unpreserved memorial locations where the rhythms of daily life have overwritten the most obvious signs of their past traumas paradoxically appears to facilitate the narrator's attempts to connect with these lost pasts. This is true in two primary ways: firstly, while her connection with such traumatised places involves the mobilisation of intense emotions, this affect is not necessarily overdetermined by hegemonic narratives that one may expect at institutionalised traumatic sites; secondly, the local, lived nature of these traumatised places allow the narrator a place in which to firstly confront the past at an intimate, personal level and secondly to map how place-based forms of transcultural memory are intersected and contradicted by imposed, homogenised narratives of national or transnational memory. In this light, I consider in the following section how the narrator's interaction with the embodied traumatised place of Warsaw facilitates an affective investment in the lives and memories of others, leading to the emergence of new place-based narratives of transcultural memory.

„Das alte Warsawa gab es nicht mehr’: uncovering intertwined pasts in traumatised places

In comparison to overdetermined, linear narratives of the past that often characterise institutionalised sites of memory, traumatised places in *Vielleicht Esther* mark the point of convergence of a variety of multi-layered traces of personal trauma which undermine the idea that memories of any past event can easily be collapsed into one unified narrative. While traumatic sites of memory have been constructed to reflect a specific narrative of the past and thus serve to obscure memories which contradict this unified account, traumatised places exist as material reminders that presence always entails absence; inclusion always entails exclusion. In *Vielleicht Esther*, traces of the past in traumatised places function as resistant, physical reminders of lost experience and memory – they insist upon a presence that they are otherwise denied in dominant narratives of the past. Yet, in their very nature as traces that can – and indeed in the book are – overlooked by an average inhabitant of a particular traumatised place, they also gesture towards the irretrievable loss of an historical version of the place and consequently of all the embodied experiences and memories of this lost place's inhabitants. To notice and engage with these small, physical traces of the past in traumatised places necessarily requires both basic historical knowledge of the past lives of a

particular place, as well as a willingness to recuperate that which is absent from the historical archive.

The narrator's impetus to engage with traces of the past in traumatised places is a personal one since they are often the only connections she retains to lost ancestors about whom little is recorded in national archives. During the same 1989 trip to Poland in which she visits Auschwitz, the narrator also visits the city of Warsaw where her maternal grandmother, Rosa, was born in 1905. Walking through the redeveloped city centre, the narrator notes somewhat melancholically that: 'Das alte Warszawa gab es nicht mehr' (VE: 74).

Nevertheless, as she passes through the neighbourhoods of present-day Warsaw, her desire to find in the cityscape a connection to her familial history draws her to the otherwise obscured, half-destroyed houses standing at the end of the street. For the narrator, these houses are physical symbols of lost, embodied pasts, suggested by her personification of the decaying buildings which are described as standing 'naked', turned outwards towards the sky, freezing in the sun. She ponders how these ruins look to her like open books whose spines and binding are the only things that remain intact while 'der Inhalt war herausgerissen'. Here again, presence is underwritten by absence; the physical traces of the past serve to highlight the loss of their affective, meaningful 'Inhalt'.

That these half-demolished houses stand alongside 'gesichtslosen' high-rise flats creates an eerie sense of discontinuity between a past that refuses to vanish from the cityscape and a present that nevertheless averts its eyes from these physical reminders, looking forwards rather than backwards. This discontinuity is a key feature of what Aleida Assmann has termed 'places of commemoration' which are

marked by rupture and discontinuity, signalling an abyss between past and present. Such places show that a particular story, far from continuing, has come to a sudden, perhaps even violent end. This abrupt discontinuation has its material form in ruins and relics, which stand out against their surroundings – alien structures, fossilized, unconnected to the local life of the present.³⁰

For Assmann, in order for such places to survive and maintain their relevance as reminders of a particular past, a new story must be constructed about the events that occurred there: 'The shattered fragments of a lost or destroyed way of life are used to authenticate stories that in turn become reference points for a new cultural memory.'³¹ The relationship between Assmann's 'places of commemoration' and my concept of 'traumatised places' can be explained as follows: if 'places of commemoration' mark the often violent end of a particular history or story that remains lost, the narrator's interaction with traumatised places marks the successful writing of a new story based on her affective mobilisation of traces of

³⁰ Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, p. 292.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the past and their incorporation into a new place-based narrative of memory. Such a successful mobilisation at first depends on the narrator's ability to find an affective point of entry into a traumatised place's past based upon its connection to her familial past.

On the narrator's first visit to Warsaw, she struggles to find such an affective point of entry into this 'place of commemoration'. While she successfully looks beyond the present place and notices the half-demolished houses of the past, she struggles to construct an affective connection with this place as a location of familial significance. Her grandmother, Rosa, left Warsaw many years prior to the Nazi take-over of the city at the beginning of the Second World War. Yet, this 'place of commemoration' is unavoidably overwritten by its traumatic past as the site of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto, with the anti-Semitic slogans of the time still visible on the decaying houses. While the narrator succeeds in looking beyond the present-day cityscape to locate the 'Spuren fremden Lebens' on the ruins marking this traumatic past, she fails to locate her own familial history at this 'place of commemoration': '[the anti-Semitic slogans] hatte ich mir in dieser Stadt nicht vorstellen können, in der Hauptstadt meines ersten Auslandes, Heimatstadt meiner Großmutter, auf den verwunderten, wehrlosen Häusern' (VE: 74). The narrator cannot see beyond the historical traces of virulent anti-Semitism and imagine how her Jewish grandmother could have ever lived in a city that has since become associated with the annihilation of Jews during the Holocaust. The narrator's earlier reference to the loss of 'alte Warszawa' (the Polish name of the city) rather than 'alte Warschau' (its German name) symbolises her inability to relate this place to her own family history: this old *Warszawa* is just as unfathomable to the narrator as is the Polish language – her grandmother's mother tongue – which is incomprehensible to her as a Russian, German, and English speaker.

This particular 'place of commemoration' remains then an inaccessible site of Jewish rather than familial memory, alluded to by the title of this narrative section: 'Mogendavid'. This fact becomes a stumbling block for the narrator who, while coming from a Jewish family, struggles to relate to Judaism as a form of personal identity. Just as she does not understand the sign language in which her ancestors (teachers of deaf-dumb children) were so proficient, so too does she feel disconnected from the Jewish part of her family heritage: 'Unser Judentum blieb für mich taubstumm und die Taubstummheit jüdisch. Das war meine Geschichte, meine Herkunft, doch das war nicht ich' (VE: 51). Unable to find a personal – familial or Jewish – connection to this 'place of commemoration', the narrator struggles to affectively relate to the traces of the past present at this location. Equally, she cannot find a framework through which to weave these fragments into a new place-based narrative of the past which could provide a reference point for a new cultural memory: the rupture between

past and present is not bridged; this fragmented ‘place of commemoration’ does not become a traumatised place of reflective memory-work.

If the narrator’s first visit to Warsaw is characterised by an inability to connect to this place’s traumatic pasts, her second visit provides the first example of how the narrator successfully mobilises familial memory to affectively connect to what becomes a reflective traumatised place of memory. This second visit is described at the beginning of chapter three: ‘*mein* schönes Polen’ (VE: 89, emphasis added), with the possessive pronoun ‘*mein*’ indeed suggesting that this time the narrator will succeed in finding a personal affective entry point into the Polish localities that she visits. In this case, the narrator visits a specific street in Warsaw that she already knows to be connected to her family history: the site of her maternal great-grandfather, Ozjel’s, school for deaf-dumb children at ‘Ulica Ciepła, 14, Warszawa’ (VE: 101). Chapter three begins with the narrator recounting the life of Ozjel – his birth in Vienna and his life as a teacher of deaf-dumb children in Koło, Kalisz, Limanowa, Warsaw, and Kiev. This act of committing to paper all she knows of Ozjel’s personal and professional life, illustrated in the book with photographs of Ozjel and his pupils, appears to function for the narrator as a means by which to work through her own contradictory feelings about her familial connection to Poland and to prepare her for her next visit to the Polish capital. Indeed, having gleaned all the information she can from newspaper articles, personal letters, and familial photographs, the narrator travels back to Warsaw in the apparent hope that visiting the streets in which her ancestors lived and worked will somehow bring her closer to her familial past: ‘Ich wollte hin, wenn auch nur, um die Luft zu riechen’ (VE: 101).

At first, the narrator’s attempts to find out more about the history of this street is, as on her first visit, obstructed by its geographical location in the former Warsaw ghetto: a past that appears to override any other memories associated with this place, ‘als ob ein mathematischer Vorgang wäre, Warschau plus Juden gleich Ghetto’ (VE: 102). However, unlike her first visit to Warsaw, the narrator’s engagement with this particular place is now bolstered by two interlinked facilitating factors: firstly, knowledge of a certain familial connection to this particular street (the ‘trace’ she is following being the address of her great-grandfather’s school: ‘O. Krzewin. Taubstummschule, Ulica Ciepła 14, Warszawa’); secondly, a determination to use this knowledge to excavate and re-construct an alternative memory of this traumatised place – one that should sit alongside, not be completely obscured by, the trauma of the Ghetto. She states: ‘Ich reiste in ein Warschau, das zwei Epochen zuvor existiert hatte. Um überhaupt etwas sehen zu können, musste ich die Trümmer ignorieren, die zwischen mir und jener Zeit vor hundert Jahren lagen’ (VE: 101).

Key to the emergence of this new memory narrative is the connection the narrator makes with the embodied traumatised place itself.

Human geographer Tim Cresswell reminds us of the imbricated nature of place- and memory-making, affirming that: ‘One of the primary ways in which memories are constituted is through the [active] production of places.’³² It is through literally producing a new topography of the former ghetto that the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* attempts to re-map this traumatised place as a location of familial memory:

Die Ulica Ciepła fand ich auf die Karte des Ghettos. Ich zeichnete mir dazu *meinen eigenen Plan*. Sechs Linien horizontal und sechs vertikal, in der zweiten Spalte von unten, ziemlich in der Mitte, machte ich ein Kreuz für *unser* Haus, Ciepła 14. (VE: 103, emphasis added)

This topographical document, designed to inform its users of this location’s past as the site of the Warsaw ghetto, is transformed by the narrator into a personal (‘mein’/‘unser’) map of familial memory. Orienting herself using this map, the narrator proceeds to repeatedly walk up and down the length of the street, ‘als ob [sie] durch dieses Pendeln ein Ritual vollziehen würde, das [sie] dabei selbst ertastete und ersann, in der Hoffnung, die Umrisse der Zeit zu erkennen’ (VE: 103-4). This ritual of place-making is an embodied act in which the narrator attempts to come affectively closer to her surroundings by literally becoming part of the cityscape as she walks the length of the street over and over, hoping that by some logic this will reveal a shadowy past that lies dormant under its present-day façade. The alliterative combination of the verbs ‘ertasten’ (to feel), and ‘ersinnen’ (to devise/think out) underlines the imbrication of (un)conscious emotion and conscious thought in the process of an individual’s coming-to-know a new place i.e. their attempt to foster a connection with their surroundings. In this moment, the narrator feels however that the old houses on this street will not yield the traces of the non-traumatic familial past for which she searches since ‘dafür ging es [ihr] noch nicht elend genug’ (VE: 104). For the narrator, any affective connection she fosters with this place as a location of familial memory is still overshadowed by the traces of misery left in the wake of its more recent traumatic past.

It is at this point that the narrator visits the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Centre, where she meets an employee, Anna, who helps her navigate the surviving records of Jewish families from the area. Here, the narrator discovers a long list of maternal relatives whose existences were largely unknown in her family and also comes across a record of Ozjel’s son, Zygmunt, born to his first wife and left behind in Warsaw when his father left for Kiev in 1915. Zygmunt and his wife, Hela, were deported from the ghetto to different Nazi concentration camps: Zygmunt to Lublin where he was shot in 1943; Hela to Treblinka

³² Cresswell, p. 119.

where she was killed in 1942. This discovery provides for the narrator incontrovertible evidence of something which she had up to this moment repressed – namely that any known maternal ancestors who remained in Warsaw were likely murdered by the Nazis: ‘Ich verstand nicht mehr, wie ich mir jemals hatte einbilden können, ich sei verschont geblieben’ (VE: 109). Insisting on her familial connection to Warsaw before the Second World War is revealed at this moment to have perhaps been a psychological defence mechanism to deflect from a personal connection to this place’s later, more traumatic past. This is suggested by the fact that the narrator’s apparently instinctual response to the deportation records of Zygmunt and Hela is to cling to her earlier, comparatively less traumatic familial connection to this place – the house in which Ozjel lived and worked in at the turn of the twentieth century:

Ich brauche noch mein Haus, sagte ich rasch zu Anna. Plötzlich wirkte alles sehr langsam, wie in Zeitlupe. Stara Warszawa, Anna zeigte mir eine Webseite, das Warschau der Vorkriegszeit. Hier ist ein Foto der Ulica Ciepła, allerdings nicht von dem Abschnitt, den Sie brauchen. (VE: 108)

On her earlier visit to Ulica Ciepła, the narrator had almost constructed two versions of this street in her mind, separated by time: one from the beginning of the twentieth century, the safe yet inaccessible personal place where her ancestors lived; the second marked by its geographical location as part of the Warsaw ghetto, a traumatic place of Jewish memory that the narrator constructed as unconnected to her familial past. In the quote above, the artificial separation she created collapses in an emotional moment of recognition that she is personally connected to these two historical Ulica Ciepłas which are, in fact, but temporal layers of the same traumatised place. That the photo of the street does not contain the house for which the narrator searches (the ‘safe’ personal connection) leaves her with the other, more traumatic personal connection – one that cannot be separated from this street’s simultaneous status as a place of traumatic Jewish memory. In this, she comes to realise that her own familial memories of this street are inextricably bound with the lives and memories of others similarly connected to this traumatised place via familial/Jewish history.

This realisation of the imbricated nature of self-other memories at particular traumatised places is key to the imaginative investment which allows the narrator to engage with histories and memories that are not ‘hers’ to claim and to bring these memories together to create a new, multi-layered, and multi-temporal place-based narrative of memory. Equally, it is the scale and intimacy of local places that make this imaginative investment feasible. At the outset of her family research, the narrator is concerned about being guilty of ‘versuchter Diebstahl’ (VE: 29) – of ‘stealing’ a history that is not necessary hers to recount i.e. that is unconnected to her familial history. After visiting Ulica Ciepła and coming to see this traumatised place as the location of palimpsestic, interwoven memories however, she starts

to consider the difference between ‘stealing’ a memory – as in, negatively appropriating it –, and of recounting another’s forgotten or lost memory in order to reclaim its subjects’ historical existence. After the narrator’s discovery of Zygmunt and Hela’s deportation records, Anna sends her to another employee of the Center, Janek, who believes he may have a photograph of her ancestral home from 1940, bought off Ebay from a former Wehrmacht employee. While pleased to come across photographic evidence of the house, the narrator is nevertheless perturbed by how the photograph places her in the position of the photographer, towards whom she imagines the people on the streets are looking with fear: ‘als wäre ich der Fotograf, ein Täter’ (VE: 109). The narrator initially feels as if the act of witnessing this historical scene through the image somehow implicates her in the trauma she feels she can see in the eyes of its subjects: placing oneself in the shoes of another feels ethically problematic, even a potential form of violence.

This unease is abated when the narrator interacts with the photograph as a snapshot of people living in a place to which she feels an intense affective connection. Again, this interaction is at first obstructed when she finds out from her mother that her ancestors lived at number 14, not number 16 – the house depicted in the photograph. The narrator is disappointed, feeling at once ‘Betrogene und Betrügerin zugleich’ for claiming some sort of affective ownership of this photograph which she believed to have depicted her ancestral home, even if forty years after her family had left. She considers the absurdity of returning the photograph to Janek and telling him he must take the photo back ‘weil [ihre] Verwandten vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg in der Nummer 16 gelebt und gearbeitet hatten, nimm deine Toten bitte zurück, du stehst vor dem falschen Haus in der falschen Zeit’ (VE: 114). Indeed, she begins to wonder whether this temporal disjuncture actually makes much difference to the story she is attempting to tell about her ancestral history. Even if her ancestors who once lived in this house were not residents in 1940, other members of her family lived elsewhere in Warsaw and hence probably shared the fate of the people depicted on this photograph. After studying the image more closely, the narrator realises that the house next door – her ancestral home at number 14 – is after all marginally visible: ‘Sie sind beide da, ich besitze zwei Häuser und die Menschen, die davor stehen’. The affective connection she feels with this traumatised place, as well as her consideration of how its residents shared a similar fate, allow her to metaphorically reach through time and imaginatively invest in the traumatic memories of others embodied in this place. Rather than an attempt to ‘steal’ a history that is not her own, the narrator’s memory work at this traumatised place becomes a historical responsibility – salvaging lost existences and weaving their fragments together into a new narrative of place-based memory.

In this instance, the narrator's active decision to claim a history that is not 'hers' stands in direct contrast to her fear of the ethical implications of such a move earlier in the narrative. This switch in perspective can be noted textually in Petrowskaja's differential employment of what may be termed a subjunctive modality of remembrance. In chapter one of the book, the narrator visits the museum of German history in Berlin and is perturbed when her daughter asks 'wo sind wir hier?' in reference to a table detailing the Nuremberg Laws (*VE*: 45). She replies that the question should not take the grammatical form of the present or imperfect but rather the subjunctive: 'wo wären wir gewesen, [...] wenn wir jüdisch gewesen wären und damals hier gelebt hätten.' In this case, the subjunctive is used as a distancing technique which serves to allow the narrator to avoid claiming a particular historical ethnic or national positionality that she feels is not hers to take. This act would, she believes, run the risk of wrongly presenting imagination as a historical 'fact': 'die Vermeidung des Konjunktivs macht aus einer Vorstellung eine Erkenntnis oder sogar einen Bericht'. The inference here being that institutionalised sites such as museums deal only in the supposed 'facts' of history, free of any bias or selective narrativisation that may tinge an individual's subjective remembering of the past.

By her second visit to Warsaw however, the narrator has begun to question whether history can ever be considered a factual enterprise, particularly in light of her encounters with absence-ridden archives. In her affective encounter with the traumatised place of Ulica Ciepła, she comes to understand that in the absence of 'factual' records of history, imagination is perhaps the only way to re-connect to and recover lost pasts. By considering the shared fates of those who lived in this particular neighbourhood in the Second World War, the narrator is able to imagine what 'could have happened' to her maternal ancestors who remained in Warsaw and indeed to her great-grandfather and his family had they still lived in the city at that time. Rather than serving to distance oneself from histories and memories that are not one's own, the specifically *place-based* subjunctive modality of remembrance employed here by the narrator becomes a way to move closer to them. Thinking about what 'could have been' allows the narrator to emotionally relate to the lives marking this traumatised place: she can imagine that their lives 'could have been' analogous to those of her family given their shared historical positionality – the people on the photograph 'could have been' her own family. Indeed, the idea of fate, coincidence, and luck are recurring motifs throughout the book (*VE*: 109; 165-66, for example). If it is sometimes luck or a coincidence that makes the difference between life and death, is it beyond the realms of possibility to imagine that the fate of another could quite easily have been the fate of our ancestors? In this instance, using personal memories to emotionally invest in the places which tie the stories of the self and the familial, national, etc. Jewish other together

creates an affective arena which somehow brings us closer to historical traumas that are not necessarily – or not completely – ‘ours’.

The Soviet, German-speaking narrator’s imaginative investment in the memories of Jewish others at this traumatised place in Poland pays heed to historical victims and – more innovatively – creates a new social framework for memory and commemoration that is not nationally, culturally or socially defined. The recreation of these forgotten narratives of place-based memory create in themselves a new form of ‘truth’: not in the sense that their contents can be verified by historical documents but in that they are plausible narratives that mean something to those who help create them. These new narratives depend upon the employment of the place-based subjunctive modality of remembering practised by the narrator in her encounter with (the photograph of) Ulica Ciepła. Indeed, Petrowskaja has in interviews stated: ‘[it is] [t]his kind of [subjunctive] modality [that] we have to work *into* our history. “Maybe” and “perhaps” makes our truth certain. This is the level of “truth” we can gain.’³³ In *Vielleicht Esther*, this working in of the subjunctive modality is contingent upon both the narrator’s willingness to look beyond her own immediate family history as well as upon the facilitating role of traumatised places that provide the context and reference point for such an endeavour.

As I have argued in this chapter, the narrator’s affective engagement with, and imaginative investment in, the traumatised place of Ulica Ciepła allows her to step outside her own, unknown familial past towards the traumatic memories of Jewish others embodied in this place. The question is then raised as to whether this act of investing in the place-based memories of such Jewish familial and national others provides a framework through which to subsequently engage with the affective memories of more distant ‘Others’ with whom the narrator does not share a common Jewish ethnicity. In the following section, I consider how encounters with traumatised places in *Vielleicht Esther* do indeed gesture towards this possibility, facilitated through what Fatima El-Tayeb has termed the process of ‘queering ethnicity’.

‘Queering ethnicity’ in *Vielleicht Esther*

In her monograph *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, Fatima El-Tayeb considers the marginalisation of migrants of colour in European metropolises and argues that this is founded upon the false idea that there exists an ‘exclusionary fictive European ethnicity’.³⁴ She argues that this notion is a logical extension of Etienne Balibar’s

³³ Caspari, emphasis in original.

³⁴ El-Tayeb, p. xiii.

‘fictive ethnicity’, in which nations ‘are represented in the past or future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture, interests, which transcends individual social conditions’.³⁵ While it is to be noted that the situation of migrants of colour differs widely from that of white, Eastern European migrants, El-Tayeb’s theorisation of how migrants resist the imposition of homogenised narratives of nationality, ethnicity, and national memory by actively constructing new forms of identity that are not based upon racial identification is highly relevant to an analysis of *Vielleicht Esther*. While Dora Osborne argues that the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* co-opts the absences contained in national archives in order to subvert the narratives of memory constructed therein, I would argue in line with El-Tayeb that *Vielleicht Esther* goes one step further. Namely, the narrator creates a new ‘migrant archive’ of memory altogether;³⁶ one which finds its origins in place-centred memory work, affect, and imaginative investment in the lives of Others.

The notion of queering ethnicity shares an affinity with the emphasis upon the facilitating nature of specific local places in both this chapter and indeed this entire thesis. Namely, that the queering of ethnicity emerges in specific places or ‘translocalit[ies]’ which temporarily bring heterogenous migrant individuals together in a shared social place of meaning.³⁷ That such ‘translocalit[ies]’ are arenas of non-recognised, hybrid national or cultural forms (in *Vielleicht Esther*, of memory) endows them with a resistant quality. El-Tayeb argues that migrant actors ‘queer diasporic memory’ by returning not to a supposedly shared ethnic origin, but rather by returning to the point in time at which a dominant national or ethnically-based narrative of the past was imposed by/upon the present-day European nations or communities in which such heterogeneous migrant actors live.³⁸ My theory of traumatised places being the origins of ‘collectives of memory/ies’ in *Vielleicht Esther* makes a similar argument: that the migrant narrator returns to traumatised places and, in investing these places with her own personal, heterogeneous memories, challenges reified narratives of the past that seek to define such places as locations of primarily national or ethnic collective memory. As El-Tayeb acknowledges, individual experience can still exist while the individual becomes part of a community or collective of resistance. Similarly, the memory-work engaged in by the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* shows how memory is individual and personal, yet – in a traumatised place or ‘translocality’ – is also the affective catalyst through

³⁵ Etienne Balibar, ‘The Nation Form: History and Ideology’, in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. by Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 86-106 (p. 96), emphasis in original.

³⁶ See Rothberg and Yildiz for their term ‘migrant archive’.

³⁷ El-Tayeb, p. xxxvii.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 172.

which she relates to Others' affective traumas, creating new transcultural constellations of place-based memory or collectives of memory/ies.

The narrator's visit to the city of Kalisz – where her maternal ancestors lived before they moved to Warsaw – is a prime example of this process. Her journey represents an attempt at a 'totale Rückkehr' to what the narrator sees as the origin (*Quelle*) of her familial history. This attempted return to a preserved familial past is from the beginning viewed with a degree of scepticism by the narrator, who admits that she does not know if the 'Zuhause' she seeks lies 'in der Sprache, im Raum oder in der Verwandtschaft' (VE: 128). The narrator's visit to the Kalisz archive – as is characteristic of her search – raises more questions than it indeed answers and she begins to lose any hope of imaginatively investing in this place of familial significance without any knowledge of her ancestors' lives there: 'Ich sollte spinnen, beherrschte aber keine Handarbeit' (VE: 134). As the narrator reaches the end of a frustratingly unproductive trail, reinforcements (*Verstärkung*) appear in the form of a young, Muslim tour guide, Pani Ania, who is described as 'loving' the city of Kalisz and is indeed highly knowledgeable about its traumatic past. Ania draws the narrator's attention to and explains the historical significance of the remnants of Hebrew letters that can be found on the streets of Kalisz: during the Second World War after all the Jews of the city had been deported, Jewish gravestones were taken from their cemeteries, cut into pieces, flipped upside down in order to hide their Hebrew lettering, and then used to pave the roads. A few years before the narrator's visit, the roads were re-laid using the same stones, yet care was not taken to ensure that they remained flipped, meaning the Hebrew symbols were unearthed and now remain visible as traces of this place's traumatic past.

The knowledge exchange the narrator undertakes with Ania illuminates the traces of a traumatic past that she would otherwise have overlooked. Just as the paving stones were literally excavated to accidentally reveal an otherwise repressed past, so too does Ania's knowledge of this past allow the narrator to find an affective point of entry into this traumatised place: 'Pani Ania zeigte mir ein paar [of the Hebrew letters], und ich versuchte weitere zu finden' (VE: 135). In other words, Ania uncovers for the narrator lost traces of its traumatic past, which she then uses to map an affective connection with the streets over which her ancestors may have walked a century before. In her previous engagement with the traumatised place of Ulica Ciepla, the narrator mobilised traces of the past as affective entry points into a place of specifically familial memory i.e. her ancestral home located in the former Warsaw Jewish ghetto, from where she imagines her previously unknown ancestors were deported. In Kalisz however, the narrator engages with a traumatised place of Jewish memory that is not directly relevant to her familial biography. As the narrative progresses,

the narrator's investment in place-based memories of trauma takes her beyond her initially self-directed excavation of lost, familial narratives and encourages her to situate her familial history in a wider context – here, of an experience of loss common to many European Jewish families.

What is particularly significant about the uncovering of this specific place-based memory as regards the queering of ethnicity is that it is made possible by the Muslim Ania. The narrator states: 'ausgerechnet Pani Ania zeigte mir die jüdischen Buchstaben im Straßenpflaster von Kalisz' (VE: 134), with the adverb 'ausgerechnet' emphasising the perhaps unexpected fact that it is a Muslim 'Other' of all people upon whom this Jewish memory depends for its remembrance. In this interaction it is the Muslim Ania who illuminates the (Polish) Jewish history inscribed on this traumatised place to the Soviet Jewish narrator, whose family once lived in Poland. For the narrator, this history is at once 'hers' – as a descendent of Jews killed during the Holocaust – but at once 'Other' – in that she is of Soviet-Ukrainian national descent and now lives in Germany. The complexity of this transnational memory is demonstrated by the many claims that could be made as to its 'ownership' or of whose responsibility it is to carry this event in remembrance: it is at once Jewish (the victims and subjects of remembrance); at once Polish (the place itself lies in Poland); at once German (the historical occupiers and perpetrators of the Holocaust).

To complicate matters further, this forgotten memory is recounted by someone who herself – as a Muslim – is seen in dominant discourses as unable to 'own' or affectively relate to the memory of the Holocaust. As Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz argue, relating to the memory of the Holocaust is premised in the German context upon a form of German ethnic guilt for the crimes committed by perpetrating ancestors; an ethnic identification that is denied to particularly Muslim migrants regardless of their political status as German citizens. El-Tayeb captures this exclusion when she states that: 'In Europe, migrants and their descendants are often denied access to this common [national] history. At the same time, they live with the national past as much as the native population, while frequently simultaneously functioning as its Other.'³⁹ That Ania plays a facilitating role in the Soviet, Jewish narrator's excavation of a lost narrative of Jewish memory at this traumatised place is significant in this regard as it speaks back to unfounded claims that (Muslim) migrant individuals are unable – or unwilling – to engage with memories in which they themselves have no vested ethnic or religious interest. Ania willingly chooses to engage with the traces of trauma literally inscribed on this place not as a member of a particular national, ethnic or

³⁹ El-Tayeb, p. 4.

religious collective but as an individual who has an interest in both the place of Kalisz and in the human traumas to which this place has borne witness. This act of willing undermines received notions that a person's fictive ethnicity determines whether they can relate to a particular memory, deconstructing the binary artificial separation of the Self from the Other. As the narrator states: 'Sie [Ania] war die perfekte Andere, fremd und doch wie ich, und ich dachte, mit solche Menschen ist Polen tatsächlich nicht verloren' (VE: 134).

What is important here is that both individuals, regardless of whether they possess an immediate familial or ethnic connection to these lost Polish Jews or not, are willing to engage with these remnants of trauma in order to re-commit their existence to memory. Indeed, they are the only two people in the vicinity pausing to pay any attention to the overlooked Hebrew letters while everyone else rushes by, caught in the rhythms of daily life (VE: 135). In this instance, memory and identity are not static, ethnically-based constructs which preclude a relation to the Other's past, but become a process of choice, of elective affinity.⁴⁰ The affective memory-work undertaken jointly by the narrator and Ania bring together two otherwise 'Others' in this traumatised place and gestures towards 'a reconceptualization of memory as transcultural that leaves behind residually and unwittingly ethnicized models of remembrance and founds itself instead on a social and political form of collectivity'.⁴¹ This performance of memory promotes a 'new [way] of being-in-common'⁴² that finds its origin in present-day, heterogeneous, and transcultural places of the twenty-first century world and that comes of a commitment to uncover new narratives of equally overlapping, transcultural pasts.

This act of re-visiting the past with an eye to present-day circumstances is for Owain Jones the key to memory's potentiality to facilitate new cross-cultural alliances in its status as a matter of ethics formed 'through [...] how we live with each other [now] and each other's past lives'.⁴³ What may be conceptualised as the narrator and Ania's queering of memory at this traumatised place seemingly leads the narrator to question if, in her original aim to uncover an exclusively familial history, she is in some ways remaining stuck in an ultimately unrecoverable past. In this manner, she is perhaps failing to consider how to live with these fragments of memory in the present day, as well as how to mobilise them as an 'active, future-orientated engagement with [their] [transcultural] environment'.⁴⁴ The narrator's

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. xxx.

⁴¹ Rothberg and Yildiz, p. 34.

⁴² Ibid, p. 35.

⁴³ Jones, p. 882.

⁴⁴ Lee, p. 89.

search for the re-surfaced, fragmentary Hebrew letters in Kalisz is a literal enactment of the more metaphorical pursuit of her family biography and it is the former act which encourages the realisation that her research into an exclusively familial past is preventing her from living in the present, let alone from mobilising these memories as future-oriented ethical impulses. Describing her search for these Hebrew letters as ‘ein Memory für Erwachsene’, the narrator gestures towards the oversimplification enacted by focusing blindly on specific traces of memory without being aware of their wider, present-day context or significance. Immersed in searching for these letters, the narrator is desensitised to her current surroundings and unaware of the danger posed to her by the cars travelling down the road that she is examining: ‘Ich war so auf meine Buchstaben fixiert, dass ich die Autos nicht hupen hörte’ (VE: 136).

The act of searching for these letters – whose existence was uncovered through a present-day, place-based interaction of ‘queering memory’ – leads the narrator to reflect upon how she previously undertook her familial research, as well as what she did (not) do with the material she finds:

Ich ging von Haus zu Haus, von Stein zu Stein, hier hatte jemand der Meinigen gewohnt, dort ein Kino, eine Druckerei, ein Buchstabe, es nieselte, ich sammelte, noch einer, hier wieder einer, ich unternahm eine fragwürdige Restitution von verschwundenen Dingen, die ich nicht haben und nicht deuten konnte. (VE: 136)

The narrator and Ania’s co-operative attempt to situate place-based traces of a lost past within a new narrative of memory that is both past- and present-oriented confronts the narrator with the simple fact that a complete family history is irretrievably lost to the past. Immediately after this narrative episode, the narrator recalls a dream she had as a child and describes how in this dream she was given a task which would be impossible to complete. She was guided by two shadowy presences towards a church in her hometown of Kiev in which there should have been a book that would give her the information she sought. Yet, where this promised book should stand remained only an ice floe – the narrator recalls: ‘Ich verstand, dass ich zu spat kam, das Wissen war verlorenggegangen, und es stand nicht in meiner Kraft, es zurückzuholen’ (VE: 137). While the past cannot indeed be ‘retrieved’ in its entirety, what the narrator’s encounter with Ania has suggested is that this irretrievability can to an extent be by-passed by weaving incomplete traces of the past into a new narrative of future-oriented, transcultural memory. This new narrative of memory, in reaching beyond ethnic (both familial and ethno-national), cultural, and religious borders, accounts both for past events and for the present-day heterogeneity of the local places in which these traces remain, as well as of a twenty-first century world that is characterised by large-scale migration and resettlement (of memories). Approaching the memorialisation of the past in

such a manner moves us beyond arbitrary categories of social belonging and towards what may be conceived as an ultimately human memory of the past.

An ultimately human memory? Queering ethnicity through language

As has been explored in this chapter, the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* successfully mobilises the affective power of traumatised places in order to move closer to the traumas of Others and to bring these together in new place-based narratives of transcultural memory. To be able to speak of the resultant narratives as examples of ultimately human memory requires a consideration of how the narrator 'others' the Self so as to see the past through another's perspective. This othering of the Self is largely performed in *Vielleicht Esther* through language: that is, through exploring the past in a language that is not one's mother tongue. Arguably, the narrator employs language in a similar manner as she does the affective power of traumatised places – as an embodied means by which to move beyond the Self and towards the Other, creating the opportunity for a co-operative re-creation of memory beyond socially prescribed boundaries. That the text itself is written in its Russian-speaking author's second language of German is particularly significant in this regard. As Elin Nesje Vestli asserts of Petrowskaja's employment of the German language to construct the text's narrative voice: 'Dabei handelt es sich nicht um einen einfachen Sprachwechsel, [...] sondern es entsteht eine metapoetologische Reflexionsebene, die die Begrenzung – oder gar Unmöglichkeit – einfacher Zuschreibung thematisiert.'⁴⁵ Petrowskaja's narrator frequently recognises that her Russian mother tongue is too easily marked by opinions and biases internalised from national narratives of the past present in post-Second World War Soviet society or from hearing family members speak about their personal experiences. In this, the Russian language is forever coloured by the emotions and (anachronistic) opinions of others. The over-simplified narratives of the past that she has encountered in her mother tongue clash with the complex cross-boundary, multi-faceted memories she encounters and recreates in her engagement with traumatised places across Europe.

In this context, her employment of the German language both frees her from these over-simplified, nationally-coloured narratives and forces her – at both the level of form and content – to intensely reflect on the memories to which she is literally giving voice in a language that she has consciously learnt as an adult:

⁴⁵ Vestli, p. 149.

Ich wollte auf Deutsch schreiben, auf Teufel komm raus Deutsch, ich schrieb und versank unter dem Gewicht des aufquellenden Sprachfutters, als wäre ich Kuh und ungeborenes Kalb zugleich, brüllend und muhend, gebärend und geboren, all der Mühe wert, meine unübersetzbaren Leitsterne wiesen mir den Weg, ich schrieb und verirrte mich auf den geheimen Pfaden der Grammatik, man schreibt, wie man atmet, trist und Trost habe ich stets versöhnen wollen, als könnte mir diese Versöhnung einen Schluck Meeresbrise schenken. (VE: 79)

In this intensely embodied process, the narrator is at once producing and being produced by her own re-writing of the past in the German language. Petrowskaja's employment of numerous verbal adjectives suggests the physical effort involved in this process, while the intensification enacted by their oft alliterative quality emphasises the metaphorical pain undergone by the narrator as she is 'born again' – her identity torn apart and re-created as she 'others' herself through her employment of the unfamiliar German language. That the 'guiding stars' which illuminate her path through the shadows of the past are untranslatable emphasises the necessity of their re-writing in a new context: one that lies beyond versions of the past passed down in one's mother tongue and which too easily run the risk of perpetuating biased national narratives. Narrating the past through a second language becomes in this case an embodied means by which to challenge one's own sense of Self by attempting to view the past through another's eyes. In this case, it is possible to view language itself as a metaphorical traumatised place in that it facilitates the sharing of heterogeneous, transcultural memories of trauma amongst those willing to express themselves in an idiom that is not 'their own'. Language in this case becomes less an expression of national or ethnic belonging and more so a vehicle to facilitate the sharing of human memories of trauma.

Just as the physical traumatised places the narrator encounters facilitate an imaginative investment in the memories of Others, so too does entering and using another language encourage her to imaginatively enter memory discourses that offer different historical perspectives. Indeed, this is the case with Petrowskaja's uncovering of German-language reports on the trial and execution of her great-uncle, Judas Stern, in Moscow. Her family were always sceptical of the verdict but were barred from further examination of the evidence by a Soviet block on access to the records of the trial; it is Petrowskaja's own proficiency in German which gives her access to information that has previously been inaccessible in the Russian language. While the German records she accesses do not provide a complete picture of the trial, Petrowskaja's narrator finds sufficient inconsistencies in the prosecutor's account that credence is lent to her family's contention that the proceedings were doctored by the Soviet authorities. Petrowskaja herself has in interviews touched upon how the imaginative space opened up through entering a second language allows an individual to question taken for granted assumptions about the past by engaging with

memory discourses to which, without this linguistic flexibility, they would otherwise not have access. Speaking of Soviet memory discourses surrounding the Second World War, she reflects:

Wenn man über diese Zeit auf Russisch schreibt, ist man unweigerlich in einem moralischen Diskurs von Sieg und Opferschaft gefangen. Von der gleichen Begabtheit in deutschen Worten zu berichten, bedeutete hingegen, sich ein deutsches Gegenüber zu imaginieren. Und so konnte ich davon erzählen, dass die Geschichte von Opfer und Täter für mich passé ist.⁴⁶

Recounting specific pasts in a language that is not one's mother tongue requires the individual to consider memorial perspectives that often lie outside of the narrative frameworks of this first language. An engagement with memory through another language causes the agent to reflect upon the past as a site of emotionally-charged multi-perspectivity, while the re-writing of past narratives in a second language requires more focused attention being awarded to how this narrative is shaped and expressed i.e. in the employment of less familiar grammatical structures and vocabulary. This process is ultimately then an exercise in self-reflection in which the Self's previously unquestioned linguistic positionality is othered, opening up space for the imaginative construction of memory narratives that cross national boundaries and consequently de-centre the nation as the constructed site of belonging. Language thus queers ethno-nationally constructed memorial communities.

This queering of memory through language does not only undermine ethno-nationalism however. Rather, like the physical traumatised places with which the narrator engages, it attests to a completely new way of thinking about identity, community, and memory as constructs that are inherently contradictory, processual, and transgressive of socially-imposed boundaries. As the narrator states of feeling 'perfekt verloren' in her second visit to Warsaw:

Ich dachte auf Russisch, suchte meine jüdische Verwandten und schrieb auf Deutsch. Ich hatte das Glück, mich in der Kluft der Sprachen, im Tausch, in der Verwechslung von Rollen und Blickwinkel zu bewegen. (VE: 115)

Rather than being overwhelmed by this lack of concrete belonging, the narrator instead questions socially-imposed boundaries as she records in German her engagement with and re-creation of memory in the traumatised places she visits, demonstrating a form of 'kosmopolitisches Denken' in which there is 'Platz für Gleichzeitigkeiten und Widersprüche innerhalb einer Person und eines Lebenslaufs'.⁴⁷ In this sense, the narrator translates the

⁴⁶ Heimann.

⁴⁷ Hannes Schweiger, 'Polyglotte Lebensläufe. Die Transnationalisierung der Biographik', in *Polyphonie – Mehrsprachigkeit und literarische Kreativität*, ed. by Michaela Bürger-Koftis, Hannes Schweiger and Sandra Vlasta (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2010), pp. 23-38 (p.36). See also Andree

opening of her own consciousness to synchronicity and contradiction into words, ‘queering’ the German language by using it as a vehicle through which to express previously untold narratives of cross-boundary place-based memory. The narrator’s appropriation of German dissociates it from restrictive tropes of national memory and belonging and literally re-writes it as a vessel through which to share the transcultural memories she excavates in traumatised places, often with the help of ‘Others’ such as Pani Ania. In facilitating the narrator’s othering of the Self, German becomes the language – and metaphorical traumatised place – of human memory.

Of course, the irony that the Jewish protagonist of *Vielleicht Esther* releases German from its association with national forms of memory and mobilises it as a language of cosmopolitan affiliation is not lost even to the narrator herself. Historically associated in German-Jewish literature with the perpetration of the Holocaust, in *Vielleicht Esther* the German language is characterised by the self-professed ‘russisch und nicht religiös’ narrator as the ‘Sprache des Feindes’ not due to its status as the language of anti-Semitic perpetrators but as the language of the Soviet enemy in the Second World War (VE: 78; 80). Her employment of this ‘enemy language’ allows her to achieve ‘ein Gleichgewicht gegenüber [ihrer] Herkunft’ in the sense that it creates a sense of distance from the circumscribed, nationalistic Soviet memory of the Second World War expressed in her mother tongue of Russian but from which, due to their Jewish ethnicity, her family’s experiences would anyway likely have been excluded (VE: 78). Paradoxically, the narrator’s engagement with the German language provides a way to both move closer to her family’s Jewish past (her maternal ancestors, the Krzewins also having practised their teaching in Vienna in both Hebrew and German) and to begin an excavation of the past that eventually results in a cosmopolitan, affective investment in the lives of various Others at specific traumatised places.

Traumatised places as locations of human memory?

Throughout *Vielleicht Esther*, the memory-work undertaken by the narrator in various traumatised places consistently undermines ethno-nationally-based preconceptions as to what constitutes ‘my’ versus ‘your’ memory. Traumatised places have been shown as locations of overlapping personal and familial, Jewish, and transcultural memory. In this section, I consider how the narrator’s visit to and interaction with the Babi Yar ravine as a

Michaeles-König, ‘Multilingualism and Jewishness in Katja Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*’, in *German-Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. by Garloff and Müller, pp. 146-168, for more on multilingualism in *Vielleicht Esther*.

traumatised place of human memory is arguably the central episode of the book; the culmination of the narrator's engagement with and consideration of the ethical potential of place-based memory. The massacre of Babi Yar took place on the night of the 29-30 September 1941, during which around 30,000 Jews were murdered. Estimates suggest that a further 100,000-200,000 people – including Jews, Roma, Soviet POWs, communists, and Ukrainian nationalists – were killed at this same location during the entire German occupation of the area.⁴⁸ Despite searches of the area taking place after the War, this particular traumatic past was erased from historical records by the Soviet authorities who even went as far as to attempt to erase the physical ravine itself by filling it with waste from a nearby factory (the dam later broke in 1961 killing 1500 people – an event that also went unacknowledged for many years). Remembrance and acknowledgment of responsibility for these events remains contentious, even after memorials to the Babi Yar massacre began to appear in the early 1990s after Ukraine gained independence during the breakdown of the Soviet Union. For the narrator, these memorials are in themselves problematic since each one is dedicated to a particular group of victims (e.g. Ukrainian nationalists, 'Ostarbeiter', Romani victims), suggesting that 'sogar im Gedanken setzt sich die Selektion fort' (VE: 191). Here, Petrowskaja's re-employment of the emotively-loaded term *Selektion* suggests that she sees something disturbing in the fact that in the commemoration of an event with transnational traumatic consequences, the remembrance of victims is predicated upon the same erection of ethno-national boundaries which led to its enactment in the first place.

As is the case throughout the book however, the narrator is less concerned with this location as a constructed site of memory and more so interested in the landscape itself as an embodied traumatised place. She describes how the location of the massacre has over the years been enveloped by the urban sprawl of Kiev and now lies in a city park where signs of life (joggers, people playing football and drinking beer) co-exist with traces of traumatic loss (VE: 183). Dissatisfied and somewhat sceptical of the various nationally- or politically-inspired monuments commemorating the massacre, which for the narrator cloud the historical significance of this traumatised place as the location of human trauma, she shifts her attention towards the embodied landscape. Armed with city plans of the area, she enters the park with the express purpose of finding the exact location – the embodied place – of the Babi Yar ravine itself. What sets this particular excavation of palimpsestic place-based trauma apart from the narrator's engagement with other traumatised places throughout the narrative is that she approaches the place of the Babi Yar massacre not in the name of re-mapping its significance for her familial history; rather, she approaches it from the outset

⁴⁸ Paul Robert Magosci, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 633.

with the express intention of re-claiming this particular traumatised place as a location of ultimately human memory.

In this sense, it is perhaps the paradigmatic example of the narrator's memory work throughout the book, captured in a sentence at the beginning of the chapter in which she visits the ravine:

Bleibt ein Ort derselbe Ort, wenn man an diesem Ort mordet, dann verscharrt, sprengt, aushebt, verbrennt, mahlt, streut, schweigt, pflanzt, lügt, Müll ablagert, flutet, ausbetoniert, wieder schweigt, absperrt, Trauernde verhaftet, später zehn Mahnmale errichtet, der eigenen Opfer einmal pro Jahr gedenkt oder meint, man habe damit nichts zu tun? (VE: 183-84)

The listing of verbs formally captures in one sentence the palimpsestic nature of this traumatised place, textually replicating the layering of the historical events that have occurred at the Babi Yar ravine. This sentence symbolises then the process of excavation performed by the narrator at every traumatised place with which she has engaged throughout the entire book as she has buried down through the separate layers of these places' pasts and attempted to bring them into contact with one another by unearthing their transtemporal and transcultural significance. In so doing, she has come to realise the ethical potential of moving affectively closer to the place-based memories of Others in order to see beyond reified, often nationally-propagated versions of the past and open herself up to new perspectives. This act of distancing from oneself – whether through employing a place-based subjunctive modality of remembrance or code switching – has served to forge new metaphorical spaces of reflection in which previously unrecognised memorial connections have facilitated the emergence of new, place-inspired narratives of memory.

Indeed, it is this act of stepping outside of oneself that is key to her engagement with Babi Yar; for the first time in the narrative, the narrator attempts to approach this traumatised place not solely as a descendent of familial or Jewish victims, but as a human being confronted with the horrific past of this embodied place. She reflects:

Ich möchte von [mein]em Spaziergang so erzählen, als ob es möglich wäre zu verschweigen, dass auch meine Verwandten hier getötet wurden, als ob es möglich wäre, als abstrakter Mensch, als Mensch an sich und nicht nur als Nachfahrin des jüdischen Volkes, mit dem nur noch die Suche nach fehlenden Grabsteinen verbindet, als ob es möglich wäre, als ein solcher Mensch an diesem merkwürdigen Ort namens Babij Jar spazieren zu gehen. Babij Jar ist Teil meiner Geschichte, und anderes ist es mir nicht gegeben, *jedoch bin ich nicht deswegen hier, oder nicht nur*. Irgendetwas führt mich hierher, denn ich glaube, dass *es keine Fremden gibt, wenn es um Opfer geht. Jeder Mensch hat jemanden hier*. (VE: 184, emphasis added)

As suggested by the subjunctive tense, the narrator never can – nor perhaps would want to – deny her Jewish heritage at this place of such historical significance, or indeed at any time. Rather than serving to suggest its factual impossibility however, the employment of this modality suggests more so another form of subjunctive or elective remembering that momentarily puts to one side any personal, familial connection to the trauma memorialised in favour of engaging with this traumatised place as a location in which human beings – regardless of their national, ethnic or religious affiliations – lost their lives in such tragic circumstances. The choice the narrator makes here is not a denial of her own identity per se; rather, it serves to circumvent the all-too-human impulse to identify more easily with victims that are ‘like us’. While we can never fully leave behind our own identities and personal histories, our voluntary choice to other the Self is vital if we are to transgress memorial boundaries. The narrator’s memory-work in this instance is both particular (as a descendent of Jews at a location of Jewish genocide) and universal (in her engagement with victimhood as a shared human status).

The narrator’s distinctly human-centred memory-work at Babi Yar appears to transgress the physical ravine itself and leads her to consider how the various traumatised places she has visited are somehow connected by their statuses as embodied locations of human tragedy. Babi Yar arguably becomes symbolic of all traumatised places across the world in which ethno-national or political violence has claimed the lives of human victims. Reflecting upon the recurrence of large-scale violence throughout history, within and between all nations, the narrator reflects: ‘und es gibt keinen ort mehr, wo es kein verderben und kein verbrechen gibt’ (*VE*: 178, nonstandard grammar in original). Her assertion then that at Babi Yar there are no strangers amongst victims because ‘[j]eder Mensch hat jemanden hier’ suggests that the palimpsestic layers of its own located traumatic pasts echo with other past and present traumas the world over in which human lives are lost to violence. This echo of other pasts-in-place is perhaps what Maria Roca Lizarazu has in mind when she argues that the narrator’s ‘travels create entanglements between various places’, creating ‘palimpsestic topographies’ that cross space and time.⁴⁹ Seeing it in these terms allows us to conceive of how the place-based memory-work undertaken by the protagonist in this instance becomes equally past-, present-, and future-oriented. Interacting with Babi Yar as both a physical and symbolic traumatised place of human memory seemingly ignites the narrator’s consciousness of other instances of historical violence or repression that have occurred up to the present-day.

⁴⁹ Maria Roca Lizarazu, ‘The Family Tree, the Web and the Palimpsest: Figures of Postmemory in Katja Petrowaskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther* (2014)’, *The Modern Language Review*, 113 (2018), pp. 168-89 (p. 184; p. 183).

Approaching the embodied, place-based memory of the Babi Yar massacre as but one – if an extreme – exemplary trauma in a long succession of historical human tragedies seemingly allows the narrator to construct a human archive of suffering that extends across time and space. This archive poses ethical questions pertaining to whose responsibility it is to remember such tragedies and to channel this remembrance as a force in fighting instances of present-day injustice, prejudice, and aggression which continue to perpetuate the historical condition of violence. Looking at the monuments at the Babi Yar memorial site, the narrator reflects upon this ethical quandary as such: ‘Was mir fehlt [in these memorials], ist das Wort Mensch. Wem gehören dieser Opfer? Sind sie Waisen unserer gescheiterten Erinnerung? Oder sind sie alle – unsere?’ (VE: 191). What the narrator’s interaction with the traumatised place of Babi Yar has suggested is that these victims should indeed be ‘alle – unsere’ by virtue of their condition as human victims of violence. What must be acknowledged here, however, is that Petrowskaja’s focus on the status of victimhood and her depiction of all humans as potential victims does run the ethical risk of eliding the fact that all cases of historical trauma are inflicted by equally human perpetrators. Associations with and claims to victimhood are not always enacted in the ethically-motivated manner demonstrated by the narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* but may rather be a means by which to erase one’s own implication in acts of perpetration. Indeed, this more problematic performance of the status of ‘victim’ is engaged with by the narrator herself towards the end of the book; a fact to which I return in the final section of this chapter. However, what the narrator’s engagement with the traumatised place of Babi Yar gestures towards in its focus on common victimhood is the potentially unifying power of relating to the ‘disasters of the 20th century as a common narrative, as our common ancient story’ – in other words, as a shared human memory for which we all bear responsibility regardless of our personal identifications.⁵⁰

A form of paradoxically located cosmopolitan memory?

Certainly, there is in this outlook the beginnings of what may be best characterised as a form of cosmopolitan memory which emerges from an engagement with memory-saturated, local places, yet in its perspective reaches beyond ethno-national, cultural or religious boundaries to focus on a connection that we all share by virtue of our common humanity. Given the predominance of particularly Jewish memories of the Holocaust in *Vielleicht Esther*, Levy and Sznajder’s theorisation of the Holocaust as a form of cosmopolitan memory appears to be a perhaps obvious point of reference for the protagonist’s memory work. Levy and

⁵⁰ Petrowskaja quoted in Caspari.

Sznaider argue that it is precisely the abstract nature of the Good vs Evil paradigm symbolised by the Holocaust that makes this memory applicable as a tool for interpreting contemporary acts of injustice and violence, as well as engendering an ethical imperative to prevent future human rights contraventions. This cosmopolitan memory emerges in the interplay between national memory discourses and those which circulate via the pathways of mass media and global culture: it is a supra-national memorial vocabulary that is adopted and nuanced within particular national contexts. The specific form of cosmopolitan memory that emerges in *Vielleicht Esther* clearly diverges from this conception in a number of ways, however. Indeed, Petrowskaja's narrator remains critically sceptical of the power of mass media and the use of digital algorithms on the Internet to predict individual interests and provide correspondingly tailored content. As she reflects as early as the book's prologue:

Google wacht über uns wie Gott [...] wie soll Demokratie funktionieren, wenn man nur kriegt, was man schon gesucht hat, und wenn man das ist, was man sucht, so dass man nie allein fühlt oder immer, denn hat man keine Chance, die anderen zu treffen. (VE: 12)

If we remain permanently contained within our own on- or off-line communities of interest, Petrowskaja seems to ask, how are we to ever come across Others whose experiences and memories so contrast our own? Without even being aware of these other ways-of-being, how can we even conceive of the Other, let alone relate to them as a fellow human being across socially-imposed boundaries? Supra-nationality – in this case via the pathways of global mass media – does not always function to facilitate a cosmopolitan openness towards Others.

In *Vielleicht Esther*, the narrator's cosmopolitan outlook comes of her engagement with located, affect-laden places of memory, suggesting at a form of what K. Anthony Appiah has termed 'rooted cosmopolitanism'. In Appiah's view, any tenable form of ethical cosmopolitanism must 'take seriously the value of human life, and the value of particular human lives, the lives people have made for themselves, within the communities that help lend significance to those lives': in other words, it must be premised upon the understanding that individuals can only conceive of the abstract universal value of human life through their own particular experiences of immediate, emotional meaning-making and connection to Others in their familiar, local surroundings.⁵¹ In *Vielleicht Esther*, the narrator mobilises particular narratives of personal memory in order to foster an emotional – or what Appiah may term a 'thick' – connection with her immediate local surroundings in particular traumatised places. Excavating traces of traumatic pasts at these locations brings her to consider how her own familial memories – previous bedrocks of her identity – are in fact

⁵¹ Appiah, pp. 222-23.

mutually imbricated with those of unknown Others in these shared social arenas. As the book progresses, the protagonist begins to narrativise the ultimately shared memory of these traumatised places, in the process stepping beyond reified, assumed categories of group-based identification and developing an identity for herself as a member of an ultimately human collective of remembrance. Engaging with the multi-layered memory of traumatised places encourages the narrator to philosophically reflect on how forms of ‘rooting’ (in both particular places and one’s own self identity) are not necessarily barriers to a cosmopolitan engagement with the Other; they are, in fact – by virtue of the emotional attachments they facilitate – vital components of this engagement.

Much as Appiah is sceptical of the inherent good of supra-national forms of identification, the place-based, ‘rooted’ cosmopolitan engagement with memory performed by *Vielleicht Esther*’s protagonist does not naively presume the inherent good of human nature. Indeed, the narrator’s memorial journeys certainly bear witness to the evil humans can and do perpetrate against one another. However, what it does serve to achieve is to present the book’s readership with an alternative way of viewing memory: that is, not as a static construct imposed upon individuals to shape their sense of belonging to a particular ethno-national collective, but as material with which to actively engage in the processual, co-operative construction of individual and collective identities more accurately representative of the present, transcultural twenty-first century world. It presents an imaginative possibility, ‘an invitation to [its readers] to respond in imagination to narratively constructed situations’.⁵² What makes *Vielleicht Esther* such an effective piece of literature is that it does not merely posit imaginative forms of cosmopolitan memory and identification as abstract ideals towards which we should strive. Rather, as itself an exercise in memory, it provides a blueprint for the complex, emotionally-fraught, and often painful process of voluntary self-othering the individual must undergo in order to be able to make the leap from the particular to the universal. The narrator of *Vielleicht Esther* does not take the role of a detached intellectual commenting on memory’s cosmopolitan potential in our twenty-first century societies but rather offers herself up as a case study for how these principles may be actualised in the real world.

This facilitating interplay between the particular and the universal is realised in the narrator’s primary engagement with the traumatised place of Babi Yar as an embodied location of ultimately human memory before she elaborates this place’s significance for her own personal history. As Appiah suggests in his theorisation of ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’, it is the interplay between the particular (a personal connection to this particular location) and

⁵² Appiah, p. 257.

the universal (this location's significance as a metaphorical place of generalised human suffering) which causes the narrator to reflect upon how she – and indeed humans in general – employ and narrativise memory as a means by which to generate both individual and collective identities. The narrator recounts the story of the paternal great-grandmother she never met but who, her father recalls, may have been called Esther. When the family fled Kiev prior to its Nazi occupation her great-grandmother was left behind as she was too frail to make the trip. After notices were displayed commanding all Jews to assemble at the Jewish cemetery (to be taken to Babi Yar) and despite her frailty, her great-grandmother followed the instruction but was shot dead in the street by German officers as she stopped to ask directions. Of all the familial narratives recounted in the book, the narrator admits that this story of her great-grandmother's murder is the most fabricated due to the fact there were no known eyewitnesses to the event.

Indeed, it is this story of the eponymous 'vielleicht Esther' which epitomises the central message of the book: facts become lost to history; memory is a human attempt to salvage meaning from these lost pasts through narrativising and thus inescapably fictionalising history. It is through returning to the traumatised place of *vielleicht* Esther's death and imagining what 'perhaps' happened to the great-grandmother who she never met that the narrator attempts to feel an affective connection to this lost relative. In this instance, however, the particular is for the narrator somewhat overshadowed by the universal significance of Babi Yar as an embodied location of ultimately human traumatic memory and she begins to reflect: 'Wer flüstert uns Geschichten ein, für die es keine Zeugen gibt, und wozu? Ist es wichtig, dass diese alte Frau die Babuschka meines Vaters ist? Und was, wenn sie nie seine Lieblingsoma war?' (VE: 221). If imagination and the affective power of particular traumatised places can be mobilised by the narrator to produce a factual-yet-fictionalised narrative that somehow brings her affectively closer to this elderly woman who she never met but who happens to be her relative, is it beyond the realms of possibility that memorial narratives which seek to re-write traumatic pasts as universal stories of human loss may function to open up space for the imagination of new forms of individual and collective identification which are ultimately cosmopolitan in nature? This question is as directly relevant to the entire narrative as it is to this particular episode since every instance of rooted memory work engaged in by Petrowskaja's narrator has consistently presented her readers with alternative modes of identifying with previously unknown Others via a joint affective investment in the same traumatised place. In this, the literary work itself provides 'an experimental field for human existence' by imagining forms of memorial being-in-common

that are ultimately cosmopolitan in nature yet still firmly rooted in recognisable contexts of daily life with which its readers can identify.⁵³

For Appiah, it is the human capacity for narrativising – to order and tell stories – which allows us to both make sense of our own lives and experiences and to imagine the possibility of cosmopolitan experience since it is the ‘grasp of narrative logic that allows us to construct the world to which our imaginations respond’.⁵⁴ Story-telling is both rooted and particular (about our own lives) and abstract and universal (it is a shared human trait and the way we learn about lives and experiences distant to our own). If we become less focused on the particular stories we tell ourselves about our past and more focused on the act of story-telling as a universal human trait, we begin to see the potential of narrativisation to bring our disparate particulars together in one universal yet multi-perspectival narrative of human memory. In *Vielleicht Esther*, it is a ficus plant that signifies the simultaneous particularity and universality of story-telling. This ficus plays an important role in the narrative that the protagonist constructs for herself about her father’s wartime survival: the plant was removed from an already overcrowded truck of Jewish refugees fleeing Kiev in order to make room for her father, at the time a young boy. The narrator assumes her father has told her this story yet, when she later asks him about the ficus, he confesses that he cannot remember it ever existing. For the narrator, this ficus is a vital component of her identity as the child of a Jewish survivor, plagued as she is with the thought that her father’s contemporaries who remained in Kiev perished while he survived. She comes to realise that the ficus functions in her narrative as a screen, relieving her postmemorial survivor’s guilt with the thought that it was at least a plant and not another person who was left behind in her father’s stead. The ficus’ existential importance for the narrator results in her struggling to grasp that it may have been a figment of her imagination: ‘Ich war auf den Fikus fixiert [...] Der Fikus scheint mir die Hauptfigur, ja, wenn nicht der Weltgeschichte, dann meine Familiengeschichte zu sein’ (VE: 219).

As Hannah Tschentke argues, the apparent gap between the narrator’s family history and the ‘Weltgeschichte’ to which she refers is significantly bridged by this ficus as the simultaneous symbol of particularity and universality. For Tschentke, that the narrator refers to this ficus as the potential protagonist of world history underlines the fact that ‘Weltgeschichte’ is nothing more than a collection of particular, fictionalised narratives of memory that individual people and their families or communities construct to make sense of their lives in the present: ‘Weltgeschichte wird so zur willkürlichen Ansammlung von

⁵³ Herrmann, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Appiah, p. 257.

vorhandenen und vergessenen Erinnerungen.’⁵⁵ Considering the narrator’s own particular, rooted ‘ficus story’ in the universal context of ‘Weltgeschichte’ seems to suggest the revolutionary unifying potential of seeing the narrativisation of memory as an ultimately universal, human enterprise. Given that the book is autobiographically-inspired, the narrator’s fictional placement of her own family history in the context of world history is also Petrowskaja’s real-life enactment of the cosmopolitan perspective developed during the narrative through the figure of her protagonist: the text both develops the idea of a particular form of cosmopolitanism and provides an example of its performance. As the narrator’s father suggests: ‘Manchmal ist es gerade die Prise Dichtung, welche die Erinnerung wahrheitstreu macht’ (*VE*: 219). Narratives of the past become ‘true’ when they are employed to give meaning to a person or community at a particular time, in a particular place and when they are believed to foster a related sense of individual or collective identity. In the process of writing her literary text and considering the relationship of her fragmented memories with the spatial and temporal realities of the contemporary world, Petrowskaja has demonstrated an allegiance to a truth (*Wahrheitstreue*) which recognises its own infallible nature and inextricable rooting in a particular time and place, upon which its ‘truth’ is contingent.

In this, it is possible to see Petrowskaja’s excavation of the particular-yet-universal memories of the traumatised places with which her narrator engages as attempts to create new memorial narratives that have the potential to become bedrocks for new forms of cosmopolitan, collective identity. In this, her German-language text bridges the gap between personal and world history/memory and becomes a piece of distinctly world-making literature in its enactment of a form of ‘worlding’ that ‘puts all beings into relation [and without which] we would not have access to [such] other beings [...] [meaning] no value could be formed’.⁵⁶ Just as the physical traumatised places with which the narrator engages in the text provide concrete arenas in which she can move closer to the lives and memories of o/Others, so too does Petrowskaja’s description of this place-based process make of her text itself a metaphorical ‘traumatised place’ which in turn provides a literary receptacle for and imaginatively brings into contact heterogeneous individual yet fundamentally human memories and experiences.

⁵⁵ Hannah Tschentke, ‘Motive der Verschränkung von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit in Katja Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*’, in *Erschriebene Erinnerung: Die Mehrdimensionalität literarischer Inszenierung*, ed. by Sanna Schulte (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2015), pp. 270-86 (p. 285).

⁵⁶ Cheah, p. 9.

A brief note of caution

In *Vielleicht Esther*, the narrator's interaction with traumatised places provides an example of how we may begin to harness memory's potential to be a source of rooted cosmopolitan identification. However, the book ends with a note of caution in this regard. Petrowskaja appears to be distinctly aware that barriers to cosmopolitan thinking do still exist – chief of which is whether an individual is able and willing to engage with such a worldview. In the first instance, engaging in forms of cosmopolitan thinking is in itself a form of privilege, premised as it is upon the assumption that the Self's immediate concern – for whatever material or political reason – is not the pure fact of one's own survival. Elsewhere, increasing levels of nationalism and xenophobia in countries across the world, as well as the apparently increasing inability or unwillingness in some quarters to critically reflect on one's own implication in past or present violence, pose significant threats to such cosmopolitanism. Indeed, these facts are not lost on *Vielleicht Esther's* narrator. At the end of the book, she visits Mauthausen concentration camp, where her non-Jewish grandfather was held as a POW for 16 days at the end of the Second World War. This traumatic site of memory is characterised, like Auschwitz earlier in the narrative, by its bureaucratic, impersonal nature which limits rather than facilitates an engagement in the traumatic pasts memorialised there.

Prior to her visit, the narrator describes how her grandfather was presumed dead after the War; her family only learning of his survival when he finally returned to the Soviet Union shortly before his death 40 years later. After his return, he spoke neither about his war experiences nor about his prolonged absence, leading the narrator to wonder if he may have perpetrated some form of crime against Jewish inmates in order to survive the camps and due to his guilt could not face his own Jewish family members. The narrator fears that she may uncover information at Mauthausen that would incriminate her own grandfather in the anti-Semitic violence of which her family had historically always been the victims. In this case, the shift in historical positionality – from descendent of Jewish victims to descendent of potential non-Jewish perpetrator – raises difficult questions of implication that seemingly make her reticent to delve into this site's past. When she visits Mauthausen's archives, she comes across camp records from the time of her grandfather's internment and consequently encounters the possibility of coming across information that may confirm his suspected perpetration. Rather than engaging with this material, she stops reading and instead chooses to photocopy the pages 'for later reference' despite admitting she is not likely to ever consult them again. In this case, the act of photocopying represents a partial excavation of the past, becoming a substitute for any full working-through of the emotionally-fraught questions of

implication raised by the narrator's suspicions. As she admits: 'ich kopierte, bis ich zu ahnen began, dass ich wieder *e* von *ä* nicht unterschied, gerettet, Geräte, und in diesem Gerät Rettung suchte, unbedacht' (VE: 274). Her refusal to engage with these memorial sources as an act of self-preservation stands in direct contrast to her earlier thoroughgoing excavation of place-based traumatic memory. In choosing to let her grandfather's potential crimes remain unknown, she herself creates one of the archival absences she sees as a form of violence at the beginning of the narrative. This all-too-human reflex to shut one's eyes to difficult past truths which shatter one's own sense of identity gestures towards a potential limitation to a truly open, cosmopolitan engagement with memory, as well as with one's own potential implication in forms of historical violence.

Like the traumatic site of Auschwitz earlier in the narrative, for the narrator Mauthausen as a site facilitates a repression of – not engagement with – the traumas it memorialises. Unlike the embodied, traumatised places she has visited on her journey, this memorial site fails to provide a space in which individuals can engage with traumatic pasts via the processual construction of a personal, affective connection to the location through its significance as a traumatised location of human memory. Indeed, it rather seeks to represent its traumatic past as an understood, objective fact which is evoked not through the affective power of place but represented by the number of victims whose lives were lost there. In the narrator's eyes, this reliance on statistics overwhelms its visitors with the sheer incomprehensible scale of the violence, resulting in a desensitisation to – not affective rapprochement with – the horrific events to which this site has borne witness. The fostering of a particular, affective connection to specific traumatised places provides for the narrator the vital reference point through which she comes to read place-based memories as having ultimately universal significance. Her ability to create a particular, affective connection to the site of Mauthausen is, however, prevented in the first instance by her repression of her grandfather's potential implication in its violence. Any further attempts to connect to this location as a traumatised place of memory are thwarted both by the bureaucratic nature of the site (and the fixed narratives created about its past) and the desensitisation she undergoes as she attempts – and fails – to comprehend the universal significance of this past through the number of its victims. Questioning the ethics of this move, she states:

1 [victim] verstehe ich, 10 auch, 100 mit Mühe und 1000? [...] Bei welcher Zahl verschwindet der Mensch? [...] Durch Zahlen sind wir verwöhnt und verdorben, von der Vorstellung der Gewalt vergewaltigt, wenn man diese Zahlen versteht, akzeptiert man auch die Gewalt. (VE: 268-69)

For the narrator, the use of statistics to quantify the scale of a particular trauma is but a replication of the violence which led to the deaths of these millions of individuals in the first

place. In assigning a numerical value to represent these deaths, the focus is shifted from the particular – each individual person killed at this site – to the event itself, which, in its sheer scale, cannot be comprehended in its abstract totality. The alliterative quality of the harsh ‘v’ sound in the quote above formally replicates this severe violence, while the use of the verb ‘vergewaltigt’ suggests how this violence penetrates social representations of trauma, implicating the individual who attempts and fails to affectively relate to the traumatic memories of Others. Repression of unsavoury aspects of memory – whether by the individual or through collective representations of the past – is shown in *Vielleicht Esther* to be an ever-present obstacle to the realisation of truly cosmopolitan forms of memory. However, this note of caution does not undermine the revolutionary potential of a place-based or ‘rooted’ engagement with memory as a means by which to conceive of more cosmopolitan forms of identification in our shared twenty-first century world – rather, it is something of which we must be aware in striving for this cross-boundary worldview.

Conclusion

Building on the argument advanced in the previous chapter of this thesis, I have continued in this chapter to theorise the significance of particular places in the process of rediscovering and re-writing new narratives of transcultural memory. Whereas Olga Grjasnowa’s privileged protagonists’ interactions with place-based memory presented but a fleeting and at times superficial engagement with the past, I have argued that in *Vielleicht Esther* Petrowskaja’s narrator succeeds in mapping new constellations of transcultural, ultimately human memory between the various places she visits by remembering and remaining conscious of the heterogeneous place-based traumatic memories with which she comes into contact throughout her journey. In this, the protagonist of *Vielleicht Esther* – unlike those of Grjasnowa’s novels – explores to what service memory could be put after its excavation; namely, how place-based memories can potentially be mobilised in the name of moving out of the Self and towards the Other, creating new cosmopolitan communities of remembrance. Drawing on theories from Memory Studies and Human Geography, I introduced the concept of traumatised places and argued that at such locations the narrator employs a place-based subjunctive modality of remembrance in order to move affectively closer to the memories of o/Others which are present there. What becomes ultimately clear in *Vielleicht Esther* is that discovering and fostering an initially personal, affective relationship to one’s own memories and one’s own surroundings is a vital precursor to the imagining of an affective connection to the lives and memories of Others: the particular becomes a gateway to the universal.

Vielleicht Esther is in many ways an exploration of the imbricated nature of memory and identity, as well as of the potential inherent in this connection. It is through the narrator's engagement with traumatised places that she becomes aware of the equally imbricated nature of the Self and the Other's memory, and the 'queering of ethnicity' that she performs in such places serves to question the status of reified, fixed memorial discourses as sources of closed categories of identity premised upon ideas of a common nationality, ethnicity, culture or religion. The process of excavating and re-narrating the memories of particular traumatised places serves for the narrator as a simultaneous process of the re-writing of her own identity in light of the cross-boundary, affective connections she succeeds in making with the memories of Others at these places. The importance of seeing the individual and memory as affectively linked to the environments in which they originate or develop is a core tenet of Human Geography scholarship on place. In *Vielleicht Esther*, the identity fluctuations the narrator undergoes as she interacts with and re-writes specific place-based memories provides an example of how one's sense of Self and one's past (the particular) is both imbricated in, and provides a framework within which to conceptualise, the universal. Her memory-work can thus be categorised as a form of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' which encourages her to conceive of the universal value of human life via her own particular experiences of immediate, emotional, and cross-boundary meaning-making in local traumatised places.

As Karen E. Till asserts of the ultimately fictional, creative potential of memory: 'It is a process of continually remaking and re-remembering the past in the present rather than a process of rediscovering objective historical "facts".'⁵⁷ In *Vielleicht Esther*, this creative potential is employed in the service of re-writing and re-conceptualising traumatic memory as a potential inspiration for the building of cosmopolitan collectives that may work together to prevent such atrocities occurring in our future. Imagining such collectives becomes in this manner a way of potentially bringing them into being. Narrativisation of the past in the name of particular present- or future-orientated goals is key to such an endeavour and it is the narrator's re-telling of the transcultural pasts of traumatised places that allows us to conceive of how they are both particular (located, specific to this place) and also universal (their tales of human loss and trauma is – as shown throughout the book – a universal story that occurs across the world). This mapping of the particular and the universal serves to remind us that we are descendants of personal traumatic memories that are but one part of a larger archive of shared, human trauma; an archive for which we all bear responsibility. The past is brought into the present as a reminder of our co-existence with, and ethical responsibility towards,

⁵⁷ Till, *The New Berlin*, p. 11.

other human beings. As we are reminded by Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, ‘Through stories about places, they become inhabitable. Living is narrativising.’⁵⁸ In *Vielleicht Esther*, the narrator re-narrativises stories about particular individuals in particular places in the name of rendering comprehensible and making inhabitable a rather larger place: our shared world. In this sense, it could be seen an example of world-making literature in Pheng Cheah’s sense of the term as ‘literature that worlds a world’ through temporalisation i.e. by reminding us of what exists before and beyond the individual.⁵⁹ Engaging with place-based memory becomes a means by which to conceive of the world beyond one’s own immediate sphere of existence.

In *Vielleicht Esther*, the idea of mobilising the affective nature of place-based memories as a means by which to engage with the Other gestures towards an outlook premised upon a form of cosmopolitan ethics which propagates the Self’s ethical responsibility towards the Other, as well as an openness and willingness to engage with various forms of Otherness. In this, it demonstrates an ethics of alterity theorised by Spivak as turning not on the idea of responsibility as obligation – that is, of ‘the self-driven political calculus as “doing the right thing”’ which only reinforces the structures of societal power that define Otherness or alterity – but rather of responsibility as right, in which the ethical engagement with the Other is premised upon the creation of space for ‘openness toward the imagined agency of the other’.⁶⁰ While this is indeed a novel, inspiring take on the potential of memory, it is undeniable that in a world of increasing border security and suspicion towards the Other there still exists many obstacles to the widespread realisation of such a worldview. As is clear across the globe, it is too easy to turn one’s attention from the suffering of Others when it does not impact one’s own daily life.

In the following chapter, I turn to novels by Nellja Veremej which gesture towards another form of cosmopolitanism, namely what Ulrich Beck has termed ‘cosmopolitan realism’.⁶¹ Beck reminds us that today’s human condition is inescapably cosmopolitan in that ‘the risks of modern society are, as a matter of their internal logic, transnational’.⁶² In Veremej’s novels this mutual independence is thematised through her engagement with the catastrophic consequences of climate change. If *Vielleicht Esther*’s call for a place-inspired ethical

⁵⁸ Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, ‘Ghosts in the City’, in *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*, ed. by Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, trans. by Timothy J. Tomasik (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 133-45 (p. 142).

⁵⁹ Cheah, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Righting Wrongs’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103 (2004), 523-81 (p. 541); Sangeeta Ray, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 82.

⁶¹ Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 15.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 18.

cosmopolitan towards the Other requires a positive choice on the part of individuals, the cosmopolitan realism apparent in Veremej's texts suggests that the time for voluntary action has passed – we must all now act as one to save ourselves and our planet from destruction. In what follows, I consider how Veremej mobilises place-based memories in the name of constructing a planetary memory which traces the *longue durée* expansion of global capitalism, as well as to explore its catastrophic consequences for the natural world – of which humans are an inescapable part.

Chapter Five

Sense of Place, Sense of Planet? Anthropological vs (World-)Ecological Memory in Nellja Veremej's *Berlin liegt im Osten* and *Nach dem Sturm*

In the previous two chapters of this thesis, I have considered how local, lived places play an integral role in the creation of transcultural memorial narratives. In chapter three, I argued that while in Olga Grjasnowa's novels local, affect-laden or 'thickened' places are shown to be potential arenas of cross-boundary, transcultural memory-work, the ability to travel between places to engage in such a rewriting of memory is ultimately presented as another form of transnational privilege open only to those able to safely cross nation-state borders. In chapter four, I built upon the apparent productiveness of daily, lived places for transcultural memory creation by considering how the narrator of Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* engages with what I term traumatised places in a manner that queers ethno-nationally inflected narratives of memory and reconceptualises place-based memory-work as a form of rooted cosmopolitan that consists of an affective imaginative investment in the life and memory of the Other.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to Nellja Veremej's two novels, *Berlin liegt im Osten* ('Berlin lies in the East') and *Nach dem Sturm* ('After the Storm'). Veremej was born in the Soviet Union in 1963, where she completed her university studies at the Saint Petersburg State University (then known as Leningrad State University). She completed her studies in journalism in Novi Sad, Serbia, and since 1994 has lived in Berlin where she has variously worked as a Russian teacher, translator, journalist, and now a full-time author. In 2010, she won the *Newcomer-Preis* and the *Publikumspreis* – prizes awarded alongside the *Literaturpreis Wartholz*. Her debut novel, *Berlin liegt im Osten* (hereafter *BLO*) was released in 2013, described by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as 'a wonderful Berlin-story, a worldly-wise *Wenderoman*, a melancholic symphony of this raw capital'.¹ Veremej's debut was longlisted for the 2013 *Deutscher Buchpreis*, and in 2014 she was awarded the *Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Preis*, as well as the *Förderpreis* of the *Friedrich-Hölderlin-Preis*. Her second novel, *Nach dem Sturm* (hereafter *Sturm*) was published in 2016.

BLO is set in contemporary Berlin and follows the life of Russian migrant, Lena. Lena grew up in a provincial Russian town during the height of communism in the Soviet Union, before

¹ Sabine Berking, 'Wem der Osten noch am Gaumen klebt', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 June 2013 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/nellja-veremej-berlin-liegt-im-osten-wem-der-osten-noch-am-gaumen-klebt-12207057.html>> [accessed 18 June 2017]. Translation my own, from the original: 'eine wundervolle Berlin-Geschichte und ein lebensklugen *Wenderoman*, eine melancholische Symphonie dieser rauhen Großstadt.'

moving to St Petersburg to embark upon university study and later fight for the reformation of Soviet society in the immediate pre-*Perestroika* period. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lena and her husband, Schura, become distinctly disillusioned by the hardships *Perestroika* brings them and decide to relocate to Berlin. At the time of *BLO*'s narration, the middle-aged Lena has been living in Berlin for some time, working as a nurse for Berlin's elderly and living alone with her teenage daughter, Marina, after the breakdown of her marriage to Schura. The main focus of the narration is the relationship Lena strikes up with one of her elderly patients, Herr Ulf Seitz, an East German whose childhood was marred by the end and aftermath of the Second World War and who spent most of his adult life under socialist East German rule. Lena and Herr Seitz's relationship is an intimate, if at times fraught and confusing one: she is, at various points in the novel, an *ersatz* friend, daughter, and at one point, lover. As she learns more about Herr Seitz's past, Lena re-narrates Ulf's memories, interspersing his traumatic memories of his father's death at the hands of the Gestapo, his mother's rape by Soviet soldiers, and the later breakdown of his marriage with the anti-GDR Dora, with her own memories of her Soviet childhood and early adulthood.

Set in post-Holocaust, post-Socialist Berlin, the city's memorial spaces – both public and private – are woven into the fabric of the narrative. Berlin becomes a site of both public, commemorative memory inscribed by city planners and architects, as well as – and perhaps more importantly for Lena and Herr Seitz – an arena of personal, affective, and intimate memory formed between individual agents and the embodied places they occupy. While Lena and Herr Seitz are solely preoccupied with their own anthropocentric memories, this is not the only level of narration occurring within *BLO*. Indeed, Veremej crafts a second, underlying narrative which alludes to what Wai Chee Dimmock has termed 'deep time', described by Richard Crownshaw as 'a postnationalist form of historical thinking that produces analyses and narratives of the long durée', including the interwoven histories of, amongst other things, the formation of languages, religions and the 'social, cultural, and political practices of our species'.² This underlying level of narration consists of seemingly extraneous references to climate change, the advent of the 'modern' world and concomitant industrialisation, pre-modern sources such as the Bible and Greek mythology, and to extra-terrestrial phenomenon such as astrology and planetary movements. Such allusions appear peripheral to the main anthropocentric thrust of the narrative, even if – particularly in the case of climate change – they serve as recurring motifs throughout the course of the novel.

² Richard Crownshaw, 'Speculative Memory, the Planetary and Genre Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 31 (2017), 887-910 (p. 897; p. 898).

The narrative of *Sturm* revolves around the fictional town, Gradow, and of the sixty-something, Ivo's, life there. Struggling to find his feet in a post-Communist world and having fallen in love with Mira, his son Boris' girlfriend, Ivo senses himself drifting away from his family and feels lost in the capitalist world order which has commodified the town of his youth. Ivo, his wife Milly, and his two children, Boris and Anna, are drifting increasingly apart, with their hometown of Gradow being one of the only things tying them – and the narrative – together. After Boris – a proud capitalist and employee of the marketing department of the multi-national corporation, AKRO – is injured in a car crash for which he was responsible, Ivo's family is temporarily brought back together. However, Ivo's melancholic longing for a familiar past – and for Mira, who is undertaking research into Gradow's pre-modern founding – serves to further distance him from his family. The novel is structured around two levels of narration: one in the present day, describing today's Gradow and the lives of its inhabitants in this embodied place; the other recounting the mythical founding story of Gradow, based on Mira's research. This research unearths forgotten historical documents whose contents, in Mira's opinion, is the stuff of legends: 'Nach diesem Muster wird Geschichte geschrieben' (*Sturm*: 227). Far from being simply the backdrop to her human characters' lives, the town of Gradow is arguably the main protagonist of Veremej's second novel, with her description of its historical development, entrance into the capitalist world-system, and steady environmental degradation becoming symbolic of the locally-experienced yet truly planetary consequences of capitalism as a world-ecology.

In this chapter, I argue that Nellja Veremej's novels take the idea that local places can be containers of transcultural memory one step further, allowing her to achieve something that neither Grjasnowa nor Petrowskaja manage in their novels. In Veremej's work – specifically in *Sturm* – she succeeds in envisaging how interacting with place-based memories in a specifically ecological fashion allows us to comprehend not only how our own localities link to specific distant Others or places; it also allows us to envisage how our own localities are situated within world or planetary history and memory. Veremej's novels are to be read within the context of Beck's conception of the 'World Risk Society', particularly his consideration of the global environmental risks faced by humans in an era of unprecedented climate change. I argue that Veremej suggests how the oft human-centred nature of memory prevents a thorough excavation of a more planetary form of ecological memory that can account for spaces and times beyond individual human lifespans. In both of Veremej's novels, lived, affective places of memory play a vital role in the emergence of new narratives of cross-boundary memory: in *BLO*, the German capital of Berlin and, in *Sturm*, the fictional Balkan town of Gradow. Place-based memory is, however, mobilised in each novel in different ways, resulting in *BLO* in the emergence of transnational yet distinctly

anthropocentric narratives of memory and, in *Sturm*, in the emergence of transcultural or even planetary ecological memory. By introducing and exploring the concepts of the ‘Anthropocene’ and the ‘Capitalocene’, I examine how, while the memory-work performed in *BLO* can be read in light of the former, anthropocentric concept, the memorial narratives that emerge in *Sturm* take as their point of departure the truly planetary effects of the capitalist world-system on imbricated human and extra-human natures, making it a narrative of the ‘Capitalocene’. In what follows, I set out the theoretical premise of the chapter by differentiating between the ‘Anthropocene’ and the ‘Capitalocene’, explaining their relevance to my analysis of Veremej’s novels and considering their implications for the study of memory in our contemporary moment.

‘Anthropocene’ vs ‘Capitalocene’: memory in the age of existential environmental threat

Since it was first proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000, the concept of the ‘Anthropocene’ has gained remarkable traction across the disciplines of science, geology, and cultural theory, as well as in public discourse. The term ‘Anthropocene’ designates a move from the previous age of the Holocene – ‘the name given to the last 11,700 years of the Earth’s history [...] since the last glacial epoch’ – and ‘describes the primacy of human agency in shaping the planet’s chemistry, engendering complex transformative processes over which humanity’s geophysical agency has little control’.³ Crutzen and Stoermer date the start of Anthropocene to the latter part of the eighteenth century; a date which ‘also happens to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784’.⁴ While the fixing of the supposed date of the Anthropocene’s emergence is still debated, the majority of scholars using the term Anthropocene favour the period of the Industrial Revolution as the decisive moment at which we entered a new era of environmental breakdown: one initiated by the *Anthropos*, or humanity.⁵ The reasons for my pitting the ‘Anthropocene’ against the ‘Capitalocene’ will shortly become clear, as I set out my argument for this chapter below. For now, I would like to briefly turn to a question which is central to this thesis: what does our current age of environmental breakdown mean

³ ‘The Holocene Epoch’, *University of California Museum of Paleontology* <<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/quaternary/holocene.php>> [accessed 28 November 2018]; Crownshaw, p. 888.

⁴ Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, ‘The Anthropocene’, in *IGBP Newsletter*, (41) 2000, 17-18 <<http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf>> [accessed 16 July 2017] (pp. 17-18).

⁵ Jason W. Moore, ‘The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44 (2017), 594-630 (pp. 594-95).

for memory, as practice and as a scholarly discipline? As the planetary consequences of climate change become increasingly salient, we are faced with the uncomfortable threat of wide-ranging species – and this includes humans! – extinction: in other words, we are faced with the prospect that various forms of plant, animal, and human life may themselves become but a mediated memory for future life on Earth. How does this affect how we conceive of our status as humans in an age of environmental limit-breaching?

As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, comprehending the crisis that human beings are faced with requires an understanding of the consequences of global warming for human life on Earth; an undertaking which implicitly requires a rethinking of the status of the human in both the present and throughout history. This reconceptualisation, he contends, necessitates ‘think[ing] of humans as a form of life and look[ing] on human history *as part of the history of life on this planet*’.⁶ In other words, it requires a re-fashioning of how we think about the human past in a wider context, and locates the planet as the shared ‘place’ at the centre of this rethinking. Some scholars have seen in such a radical rethinking of the status of the human in the age of the so-called ‘Anthropocene’ an opportunity to decentre the implicitly human subject of memory. Timothy Clark, for example, has argued that climate change has necessitated a shift towards a planetary perspective; a shift he views as altering the anthropocentric scale of history.⁷ Others are less than convinced of this possibility. Tom Cohen has argued that Memory Studies as a discipline has almost always been premised upon a humanist grounds of remembrance, which prevents recognition of the imbrication of human and non- or more-than-human worlds. For Cohen, a memory studies that remains bounded by these epistemological frames will necessarily fail to think ecologically.⁸ Elsewhere, Eileen Crist has proposed that the theory of the ‘Anthropocene’ itself is necessarily anthropocentric: nowhere is this clearer than in the naming of this geological era after ‘humanity’, or rather ‘man’ as a gendered abstract collective – the *Anthropos*. She argues that the greatest significance of the Anthropocene discourse resides in what it excludes: that is, the possibility of challenging presumed human rule over nature and the idea that humans will be able to use technology to overcome the consequences of environmental degradation through their own genius.⁹ Seen in these terms, the hope that the

⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2009), 197-222 (p. 213), emphasis added.

⁷ Timothy Clarke, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁸ Tom Cohen, ‘Introduction: Murmurations – Climate Change and the Defacement of Theory’, in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, ed. by Tom Cohen (Ann Arbor MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012), pp. 13-42 (p. 15).

⁹ Eileen Crist, ‘On the Poverty of Nomenclature’, in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. by Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), pp. 14-33 (p. 14; p. 15).

age of the ‘Anthropocene’ will go some way towards decentring the anthropocentrism of both dominant historical accounts and of Memory Studies as a discipline looks bleak.

This is where Jason W. Moore’s conceptualisation of the ‘Capitalocene’ as ‘a *multispecies* assemblage, a *world-ecology* of capital, power, and nature’ proves highly productive in conceiving of a new method of ‘doing’ memory in our current era.¹⁰ For Moore, the concept of the ‘Anthropocene’ is fundamentally flawed. He admits that the popularity of the term and the way that it has been adopted into popular discourse has succeeded in drawing public attention to our current environmental crisis; however, he adds that this popularity is largely due to the fact that ‘it is a comforting story’ that ‘nestles comfortably within a conventional narrative of modernity’.¹¹ For Moore, the problem largely lies with the fact that the Anthropocene conforms to a typical ‘Green Arithmetic’ that ‘human action’ plus ‘nature’ equals ‘planetary crisis’: that is, it perpetuates a Cartesian dualism that sets Humanity against Nature, placing humans as acting agents upon nature rather than seeing humans as part of nature themselves.¹² Furthermore, it proceeds from the assumption that humanity is a single, homogenous acting unit and, consequently, does not account for all the historical, cultural, social or class differences that separate and award greater power to certain individuals and groups over others. Other scholars add that naming our current age the ‘Anthropocene’ ironically demonstrates the anthropocentrism that originally led us to this moment, while yet others rightly criticise the ‘Anthropocene’ for its abstractness, technological and temporal determinism, apolitical nature, and its propagation of a ‘whig’ view of history: that is, as if history were one endless story of human progress and enlightenment.¹³ As a result of this, Moore suggests, we should think of our current age not as the ‘Anthropocene’ – the age of man – but rather the ‘Capitalocene’ – the age of capital. Moore argues that the Industrial Revolution is but one event in a longer history of capitalist exploitation of nature, both human and extra-human. In order to be able to answer the ‘how’ and ‘why’ we have got to where we are today, we need then to consider capitalism as a ‘world-ecology’ whose origin lies much further back in time, in the mid-1400s.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jason W. Moore, ‘Preface’, in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. by Moore, pp. xi-xii (p. xi), emphasis added.

¹¹ Jason W. Moore, ‘Introduction’, in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. by Moore, pp. 1-11 (p. 2); Moore, ‘Capitalocene, Part I’, p. 595.

¹² Moore, ‘Introduction’, p. 3; see also ‘Capitalocene, Part I’.

¹³ Crist, p. 14; Daniel Hartley, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and the Problem of Culture’, in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. by Moore, pp. 154-65 (pp. 155-58).

¹⁴ See Moore, ‘Capitalocene, Part I’ and Jason W. Moore, ‘The Capitalocene, Part II: Accumulation by Appropriation and the Centrality of Unpaid Work/Energy’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45 (2018), 237-79.

Here, we can bring the discussion back to how the concept of the ‘Capitalocene’ can be used to conceive of a productive new way of ‘doing’ memory in the context of environmental limit-breaching. In his 2003 article “‘The Modern World-System’ as Environmental History”, Moore notes the emergence of ‘world environmental history’ and argues that this burgeoning but undertheorised field holds huge potential for synthesising theory and history in a study of *longue durée* social change. Moore argues that ‘world environmental history’ is usually the preserve of historians, being strongly historical but weakly theoretical. It also often occludes the issue of geography and of geographical scales: an issue Moore sees as vital in understanding the *longue durée* socio-ecological change engendered by capitalism as an expansionist (non-)logic.¹⁵ In this chapter therefore, I intend to demonstrate how the premises upon which the argument of this thesis as a whole rests – a Human Geography-inspired theorisation of Memory Studies – can be productively combined with Moore’s idea of the ‘Capitalocene’ in order to provide a useful framework through which to understand the challenges inherent to conceiving of forms of truly planetary memory, as represented in Nellja Veremej’s novels.

In what follows, I will firstly undertake a close reading of *BLO*, focusing on how the protagonist, Lena, mobilises place-based memories of Berlin in a manner which pluralises the dominant memoryscape of the German capital. However, I will also demonstrate how she fails to mobilise memory in a planetary fashion since the novel’s setting in the memory-saturated and well-known cityscape of Berlin results in the pervasive undertones of climate change and capitalist exploitation remaining but a peripheral distraction to the immediate anthropocentric concerns of its protagonists. In a second section, I will turn to *Sturm* and demonstrate how Veremej presents place-based memories as a lens through which to understand the truly global capacity of capitalism as a world-making ecology and to grasp the consequences of this on a simultaneously local and planetary scale. In this later novel, Veremej positions the fictional locality of Gradow as the frame through which local individuals can come to comprehend their position within the geographical planet and the temporal (world-)ecological history of the Earth. In this, I show how *Sturm* may be considered a piece of ‘world-ecological literature’ which weaves together disparate histories, memories and places and succeeds in providing an intimate yet critical portrait of the real-life effects of capitalism’s degradation of both human and extra-human natures, localities, and the planet itself.¹⁶ If *Sturm* sets out the revolutionary potential of understanding oneself

¹⁵ Jason W. Moore, “‘The Modern World System’ as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism”, *Theory and Society*, 32 (2003), 307-77 (p. 307).

¹⁶ The concept of ‘world-ecological literature’ is taken from: Sharae Deckard, ‘Mapping Planetary Nature: Conjectures on World-Ecological Fiction’, 1-27

as part of a wider planetary system then, *BLO* hints at the still existing and very real barriers to the realisation of this potential: namely, nationalism, selfishness, and anthropocentrism.

Anthropocentric place-based memory in *Berlin liegt im Osten*: disrupting a distinctly German memoryscape

As scholars and literary critics such as Zafer Şenocak, Leslie Adelson, Michael Rothberg, and Yasemin Yildiz have pointed out, interventions made into German memory discourses by those with ethnic backgrounds outside of the German nation often remain unrecognised due to the persisting prejudice that German history (particularly that of the Holocaust) can only be fully appreciated by those with an ethnic link to this past: the German memoryscape remains very much an ethno-national one.¹⁷ The saturated memoryscape of Berlin, in which *BLO* is set, is arguably no different. The proliferation of scholarship which seeks to deal with how Berlin's – read: Germany's – traumatic pasts should be memorialised does little to dispel the amalgamation of city and nation.¹⁸ As Dirk Verheyen reminds us, in spite of the 'rich diversity of historical inheritance' in Berlin, 'it is usually the narrower legacy associated with Germany's twin totalitarian experiences that receives most attention'.¹⁹ Furthermore, he continues, the commemoration of this history remains national in implication and significance: 'The *city's* past is, more than can be said for most other German cities, at the same time also very much the *nation's* past.'²⁰ Set in the memory-laden cityscape of Berlin, the manner in which Veremej's Russian protagonist, Lena, engages with and mobilises embodied places of memory in *BLO* opens up an affective means by which she can relate across national boundaries to the memories of her charge, the aging East German, Herr Ulf Seitz. In this, *BLO* presents us with a potentially novel attempt by a migrant to enter a distinctly German narrative of the past, with Lena's place-based memory work indeed making (potentially scandalous) interventions into Berlin's – and by extension Germany's – memoryscape, as I demonstrate in this section of the chapter.

<http://www.academia.edu/2083255/Mapping_the_World-Ecology_Conjectures_on_World-Ecological_Literature> [Accessed 5 November 2018].

¹⁷ Zafer Şenocak, *Atlas of a Tropical Germany: Essays on Politics and Culture, 1990-1998*, trans. by Leslie A. Adelson (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*; Rothberg and Yildiz, p. 35.

¹⁸ Scholarly examples include: Huyssen, *Present Pasts*; Till, *The New Berlin*; Dirk Verheyen, *United City, Divided Memories?: Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008). Popular examples include the intensely public political debate surrounding the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which opened in Berlin's city centre in 2005.

¹⁹ Verheyen, p. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 26, emphasis in original.

The affective memory-work Lena undertakes in attempting to relate to the East German, Herr Seitz's, memories demonstrates, as Stuart Taberner aptly phrases it, a 'perhaps unexpected alignment of both "ethnic [East] German memory" and "minority memory"'.²¹ As argued in this thesis, new constellations of cross-boundary memory have the potential to spring from an individual's attribution of personal meaning to an embodied place that is already saturated with layers of palimpsestic memory; Lena's memory-work in *BLO* is no different. As she walks with Herr Seitz through Berlin, the latter's recollection of his personal memories evoked by specific streets, neighbourhoods, and monuments allow Lena access to a 'new' Berlin: one traceable in Herr Seitz's personal memoryscape. The journey undertaken by the pair recalls Michel de Certeau's consideration of how an individual's experience of a familiar cityscape often varies greatly from the meanings and uses of the space intended by city planners. Herr Seitz's memories do not necessarily fit the narratives of memory symbolised in Berlin's public, 'official' memoryscape. Rather, the walk he and Lena take around Berlin as an embodied place forges a new topography of memory that comes from Herr Seitz's individual experience and specific, lived knowledge of the city. As De Certeau states, while city planners and governmental bodies can seek to control the place – and equally the narratives of memory located there – it is 'in fact spatial usage [that] creates the determining conditions of social life'.²² For Lena, the 'outsider' memory embodied in Herr Seitz's alternative East German topography of Berlin's past (as an *Ossi* in a distinctly Western, capitalist Berlin) is perhaps a memory she can relate to as a fellow citizen of a former communist state, regardless of fact that its contents are still a nationally 'German' memory and thus 'off-limits' to a Russian. In Herr Seitz's Berlin, Lena can find – through their joint historical experience of living under socialist rule – a potential access point to a German city-space in which previously her claims to belonging were nullified by her national minority status. As she states, through Herr Seitz's eyes, 'sehe ich diese Straßen anders, erobere und bewohne sie neu, mache sie mir zueigen' (*BLO*: 168).

As they walk around Berlin, Lena mobilises her status as a national Other to challenge and undermine the notion that migrants cannot, nor want to, intervene into exclusively 'ethnic German' memories – particularly of the Holocaust. Lena not only narrates Herr Seitz's memories as he – their East German 'owner' – sees them. Rather, by mobilising Herr Seitz's and her own affective memories at specific places in the cityscape of Berlin, she challenges official German narratives of the past by discursively creating new ways of viewing what are in fact transnational traumas. At one point, Lena and Herr Seitz come across Karl

²¹ Stuart Taberner, 'Memories of German Wartime Suffering: Russian Migrant Nellja Veremej's *Berlin liegt im Osten* in Context', *Monatshefte*, 110 (2018), 406-27 (p. 407).

²² De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', p. 129.

Biedermann's 'The Memorial to the Deserted Room' located at Koppenplatz, which memorialises the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. The memorial embodies the rush that occurred as Jews were forced to leave their homes and reproduces the eerily touching image of a just-left room, symbolised by the upturned chair in the installation. Lena states that 'es ist ein Denkmal für die *Berliner*, die aus ihren Wohnzimmern weg in den Tod gezerrt wurden', while Herr Seitz is reported as believing 'dass die Plastik ohne die Inschrift absolut nichtssagend ist – solche Kunst kratzte nicht an seiner Seele, sie sei weder schön noch informativ' (*BLO*: 174, emphasis added). By referring to the memorial as commemorating Berliners – not just Jews – Lena is performing a potentially scandalous abstraction which collapses German suffering in World War Two with that of (German) Jews during the Holocaust. Meanwhile, the ethnic German Herr Seitz who, according to German memorial norms would be expected to venerate all forms of official Holocaust remembrance, dismisses the memorial as meaningless due to its apparent aesthetic inferiority and inexplicit historical context.

As Aleida Assmann recognises, the theme of German suffering in World War Two represented, until recently, a huge taboo in German memory culture and continues to be a difficult theme to express even so many years after the event.²³ Stuart Taberner nuances this by highlighting the danger of placing a taboo on German suffering: namely, this runs the risk of allowing the theme to be misappropriated by the far right. Still, he continues, by following the 'fail-safes' of expressing German suffering – restatement of German perpetration and showing empathy for individual Germans not the German nation at large – this taboo can to an extent be bypassed.²⁴ While the empathy Lena shows for Herr Seitz's German suffering during the war throughout the novel is of course directed at a specific individual, in the case above she tests the limits of acceptable empathy by making a case for the suffering of abstract *Berliners* and not restating German perpetration. As I have argued, the traces of national history still present in Berlin's memoryscape render it a distinctly German space: by referring to the suffering of 'Berliners', Lena comes dangerously close to expressing empathy for the German national populace. While it is difficult to amalgamate the German national populace with the idea of the symbolic German nation, it would be interesting to see how reactions to Lena's comments – and, by extension, Veremej's writing – would differ were she an ethnic German character envisaged by an ethnic German author.

Lena does not stop at this, however. Of the memorial, Lena says to Herr Seitz that it should mean something to him personally because when his father was arrested by the Gestapo for

²³ Assmann, *Shadows*, pp. 155-56.

²⁴ Taberner, 'Memories', p. 410.

supposedly criticising Nazi rule, the chair he was sitting on tipped over as he stood up due to weight of the coat hung over its back – mirroring the scene in Biedermann’s memorial (*BLO*: 175). When Herr Seitz replies that he indeed did tell her the story of his father’s arrest but made no reference to a chair or coat, Lena insists that this is how she sees his memory in her mind. As readers, we can see how Lena has imported elements of Biedermann’s memorial into her own version of Herr Seitz’s memory and we can also recall where the image of the ‘Mantel’ originated. Earlier in the novel, Lena remembers that as a child, she made herself learn a poem called ‘Vaters Mantel’ by heart (*BLO*: 82). In the poem, a young girl is polishing the buttons on the coat of her late father who died in the War. The coat as a symbol of a lost father – for Lena, in an aviation accident for which her father was responsible (the accident happened during WW2 but involved civilians and was not caused by battle); for Herr Seitz, his father’s disappearance and presumed murder after his arrest in Nazi Germany – serves in this instance as an affective link which brings the pair’s memories together in Lena’s mind. At the place of Biedermann’s memorial then, Lena brings German (Herr Seitz) memory, Jewish memory, and her own (Soviet) memories into an unexpected – if controversial – constellation. In the terms of Tim Cresswell’s reading of Edward S. Casey’s ‘place-memory’, Biedermann’s memorial ‘make[s] the past come to life in the present’ for Lena who, in attributing her own personal, affective meaning to it, uses this place to ‘contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory’.²⁵

What facilitates this constellation is the removal of the victim/perpetrator binary: neither the German Seitz junior (Ulf was the one who reported his father to the Gestapo, naively hoping it would prevent him from being sent to War) nor Lena’s Soviet father are overtly recognised for their implication in the loss of human life in wartime. The memorial at Koppenplatz becomes, in this instance, not only a symbol of Jewish victimhood and suffering. Rather, it becomes a repository for other non-Jewish – and controversially even ethnic German – suffering (the death of a father). Here, it is not just Jewish, German or Soviet trauma that is being commemorated; it is, in the manner of Beck and Levy’s ‘cosmopolitan memory’, human trauma in times of tumult, insecurity, and failing human rights that is the subject of remembrance. It is at this point that Lena’s place-based memory work comes as close as it perhaps ever does to toying with the idea of a global memory of transnational, human trauma. Of course, this is not to suggest any form of comparability between instances of victimhood during World War Two and the Holocaust – particularly with regards to the immeasurable suffering inflicted upon persecuted persons, such as the Jewish victims memorialised at Koppenplatz. Similarly, calling for a move away from historical perpetrator/victim binaries can easily be capitalised upon by those seeking personal atonement or, in the worst case, a re-

²⁵ Cresswell, p. 12.

writing of the past. For sure, the motives behind Lena's apparently cosmopolitan memory work at this site remain somewhat questionable. As Herr Seitz states: 'Das [the connection between the memorial and Ulf's father] haben Sie sicher dazu gedacht, nur weil es Ihnen gerade ins Konzept passt!' (*BLO*: 175). As we see elsewhere in the narrative, Lena has struggled her entire life with being the daughter of a pilot who drunkenly caused an aviation accident in which numerous people lost their lives. By abstracting this accident into a narrative of transnational – or cosmopolitan – wartime suffering, Lena is attempting to claim a form of (illegitimate?) victimhood for her father: one in which he, like many others, was struggling to survive the structural conditions of wartime, causing him to turn to alcohol. In this case, the supposedly cosmopolitan constellation of memory Lena creates is more so aimed at personal satisfaction than towards building a common memory of global trauma for which we all, in the shared twenty-first century moment, can take responsibility. Furthermore, this distinctly 'global' – not planetary – memory work remains event-based and distinctly anthropocentric.

Indeed, the particularly anthropocentric and increasingly nationally-inflected bent of Lena's memory work elsewhere in the novel does little to foster a sense of hope of the possibility of mobilising place-based memory in the service of comprehending an individual's imbrication in a planetary community of risk. At various points in the novel, we see how the individual identity of specific characters is often subsumed by their belonging to a specific national community, and associated cultural, social, and historical legacies. Thus, Lena takes an instant like to Herr Seitz, precisely 'weil er sehr deutsch auf mich wirkt', while Herr Seitz 'geht davon aus, dass [Lena] wie alle Russen Kaviar mag' (*BLO*: 39; 52). More sinister than these perhaps banal attributions of nationality is the fractious relationship between Lena and her presumed mentally-ill German neighbour, Elisabeth, who come to blows when Lena fails to welcome Elisabeth into her home for her birthday gathering. Elisabeth's automatic reaction is to allude to national history – within which Lena represents all Russians – precisely in order to designate Lena's otherness and explain what Elisabeth views as her selfish, ungrateful attitude: 'Ihr [Russen] habt alles vergessen, wie wir Fresspakete für eure Perestroika schickten!' (*BLO*: 80). Precisely what Lena is meant to be grateful for in the present day remains unsaid, however, we can assume that the implicit suggestion is that she is – as a 'Russian' – lucky to have been allowed to settle in the German nation. Tellingly, in this antagonistic evocation of history, the event of *Perestroika* – the result of increasingly transnational disaffection with socialism across Eastern Europe, demonstrated in East Germany by civil protests at the turn of 1989/1990 – becomes a solely Russian (*eure*) problem. In this case, this historical event of transnational significance is evoked not as a shared past, but as a means by which to perpetuate national antagonisms. Elisabeth, Lena, and Herr Seitz are not part of a world community of remembrance capable of mobilising a collective past in order to respond to present and future

planetary threats; rather they remain in an imagined world in which human-centric national pasts remain antagonistically separate.

It is not just Elisabeth who employs tropes of national history in order to comprehend the present-day traces of historical trauma in Berlin's memoryscape, however: Lena is also guilty of this to some extent. In a separate instance, Lena and Herr Seitz visit the Lustgarten park in Berlin and are discussing the bronze figures, designed by the Columbian artist Fernando Botero and which were displayed between 25 September to 25 November 2007 (*BLO*: 167). Herr Seitz enthuses about the merits of classism and 'schwärmt vom 19. Jahrhundert, [...] von der großen Liebe zwischen den Hohenzollern und den Romanows' and the intellectual exchanges which took place between German and Russian elites. When Herr Seitz remarks that copies of the cast-iron handrails from the Berlin Schlossbrücke were gifted to St Petersburg, Lena remarks joyfully: 'Erst als Herr Seitz mich darauf hinwies, habe ich mich erinnert, dass ich die gleiche Tritonen und Seepferdchen so oft auf Newskij Prospekt gesehen hatte!' (*BLO*: 168). In this instance, while Herr Seitz's memories function as a point of transnational affective entry into a distinctly German space, this entrance is paradoxically facilitated by an otherwise retrenchment in shared national cultural legacies. The connection forged between Lena and Herr Seitz, and thus between Lena and the city, rests here upon an existing intellectual and cultural tradition between the two nations of whom they still seem to be representatives, rather than a transcultural affinity fostered between two individuals on the basis of their individual memories.

Seen in this light, Lena's 'Eroberung' of Berlin's cityscape evokes less the entrance of a migrant individual into a pluralised Berlin; rather it evokes problematic connotations of nationalist – or even colonial – conquest. This impression is cemented with Lena's ensuing question: 'Gibt es auch ein Wort ‚Stadtnahme‘ als Pendant zur ‚Landnahme‘?' (*BLO*: 168). The connotations of conquest, seizure, and occupation or settlement of land here hardly gestures towards a more open, cosmopolitan attempt to pluralise 'German' memory and its oft ethno-national resonance, as opposed to 'conquering' it. The choice of the word 'Landnahme' appears particularly pertinent in this context, owing to its loaded employment in, amongst others, Rosa Luxemburg's theorisation of the workings of capitalist exploitation.²⁶ Indeed, this intertextuality is reinforced by Veremej's employment of a quote from Luxemburg's political work elsewhere in *BLO* itself (*BLO*: 96). Evoking connotations of colonialism and land seizure, Luxemburg employed the term 'Landnahme' to describe the process by which the capitalist system employs previously non-capitalised territories – by this can also be meant

²⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals. Ein Beitrag zur ökonomischen Erklärung des Imperialismus* (Berlin: Paul Singer, 1913).

metaphorical territories, such as specific areas of society – in the service of perpetuating the accumulation upon which it depends. In the context of this section of the novel, history has already been commodified through the exchange of gifts and ‘friendship’ between the German and Russian nations, symbolised by the cast-iron handrails. For Lena, an equivalent *Stadtnahme* seems to imply that she herself is commodifying history, selecting only those parts of Berlin’s memoryscape to which she can relate through her still existing retrenchment in national cultural legacies. In this instance, she gains symbolic access to the city of Berlin not the nation of Germany (demonstrated in the distinction between ‘Land’ – which can mean ‘country’ as well as ‘territory’ in German – and ‘Stadt’). Far from criticising the capitalist world-system whose consequences are traced throughout the underlying narrative of the novel, Lena actively participates in the selective appropriation of territorial spoils (in this case, place-based memories) in a rather selfish, anthropocentric manner that is so characteristic of this system.

The selective appropriation of anthropocentric, personally-relevant, and narrowly local traces of palimpsestic memory in Berlin’s cityscape is nowhere more evident than in Lena’s non-engagement with the local traces of world-ecological memory which posit humanity as part, and not master, of nature. These traces are evoked in the first instance through references to Alfred Döblin’s 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which are included in the novel itself and are both literally – in the inscription of quotes from this text on an Alexanderplatz office block – and metaphorically – in Lena’s overhearing of a tour guide’s reference to Döblin as she walks across Alexanderplatz – part of Lena’s interaction with Berlin. Early in the novel, Lena overhears the tour guide relaying one particular quote: ‘*Die Natur lässt sich nicht betrügen! Wer glaubt, aus entwertetem Weizenmehl hergestellte Brote und Backwaren durch künstliche Zusätze verbessern zu können, der täuscht sich und die Verbraucher. Die Natur hat ihre Lebensgesetze und rächt jeden Missbrauch*’ (BLO: 66, emphasis added). Döblin’s novel here echoes Friedrich Engel’s assertion that we should not:

flatter ourselves over much on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory takes its revenge on us. Each of them, it is true, has in the first place the consequences on which we counted, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first.²⁷

Through the inclusion of this quote in her novel, Veremej alludes to a much wider spatial, temporal, and multi-species planetary context than Lena is capable of envisaging in her narrow focus on personally relevant, narrowly local traces of memory in Berlin. In her reference to the capitalist process of ‘Landnahme’ and a Döblin quote which alludes both to nature’s

²⁷ Frederick Engels, *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), p. 18.

‘revenge’ and the equally capitalist process of ‘Herstellung’, Veremej nevertheless gestures towards the consequences of capitalism as a world-making ecology. However, the strong presence of Veremej’s human characters and Lena’s lack of engagement with the traces of world environmental history present in Berlin’s cityscape, like elsewhere in the novel, overshadow the insidious threats scattered throughout *BLO*.

‘Non-places’ of capitalist privilege

BLO does not comprehensively map capitalism as a world-making system due perhaps to its setting in a distinctly German, anthropocentric space. However, in an underlying and easy to overlook level of narration, Veremej does allude to its damaging effects on local environments, social systems, and individual (predominantly human) lives. We see how references to the Second World War and the fall of Communism are at times interwoven with references to the global history of imperialism, colonisation, and present-day warfare in the Middle East. Herr Seitz’s son, Marius, for example, went missing – presumed dead – in post-US invasion Afghanistan after entering the region as a representative of the *East Security Consulting* firm (*BLO*: 307). Elsewhere, Veremej places local manifestations of climate change – for example, torrential rain in Berlin, which Lena curses as caused by ‘verdammter Klimawandel’ (*BLO*: 57) – within a wider, planetary context. While the character of Lena herself is unable to see beyond her anthropocentric, locally-bound perspective, Veremej’s employment of an extract from a *Berliner Zeitung* article linking capitalist consumption with the planetary effects of climate change demonstrates Lena’s ignorance in this regard: ‘*Stabiles Konsumklima. Demnächst wird sich ein Riesengletscher von der Antarktis lösen. Verbraucher blicken positiv in die Zukunft, ihre Kauflust liegt immer noch auf hohem Niveau.*’ (*BLO*: 260, italics in original). Lena’s non-engagement with the terrifying reality of environmental degradation embodies the very human trait of burying one’s head in the sand when faced with existential threats that one struggles to comprehend. Indeed, it is distinctly likely that Veremej’s *BLO* does not comprehensively engage with capitalism as a world-making, planetary ecology precisely because the author is mirroring Lena’s own ignorance of such a planetary context. In other words, Veremej is demonstrating through the character of Lena that anthropocentrism, nationalism, and the melancholy longing for a closed, familiar, and compartmentalised past are huge obstacles to fostering the truly planetary consciousness necessary in our contemporary era.

In the novel, the structural violence of capitalism is incarnated in the worldview and actions of Roman who, with the ‘ruhige, besonnene Stärke eines rationalen westlichen Menschen’ seduces Lena (*BLO*: 212). Roman – whose name itself gestures at the fictions he pedals:

Roman being the word for novel in German – appears at a moment of emotional upheaval in Lena’s life. Displaced and othered in a capitalist German society, Lena continues to be haunted by traumatic memories of her difficult post-*Perestroika* life and ensuing attempted integration into German society. This turmoil is reflected in her fluctuating intimacy and distance with the elderly Herr Seitz who, for Lena, reminds her of her past and their shared alienation in a post-Communist age. Distressed both by this past and by the current twenty-first century moment, in which the transnational movement of people is producing ever-bigger social disparities between Berlin’s inhabitants, and in which her environmentally-engaged daughter, Marina, is warning her of the existential threat of global warming, Roman and his presentism offer Lena a refuge from the complexities of her past and the dangers potentially lurking in her future.

A climate change denier, Roman references the ‘mini ice age’ of the seventeenth century to assert that ‘es gab immer Klimaschwankungen’ and play down the catastrophic increases in temperature scientists have recorded over the past decades. Anyway, he continues, even if we are faced with unprecedented warming, this is hardly a problem for a human race that has achieved, in Roman’s eyes, technological supremacy (*BLO*: 212). Embodying what scholars have recognised as the anthropocentrism of the term ‘Anthropocene’ itself, Roman perpetuates an ideology of nature which asserts that Humans will always have Nature (as a separate entity) under their control; he believes that humans are of such intelligence that they can somehow cheat their way out of existential environmental destruction through technological advances. For Roman, ‘[s]owohl den Tieren als auch uns Menschen geht es heute viel besser als vor hundert Jahren’ (*BLO*: 213). This, despite the constant references Veremej makes throughout *BLO* to the slaughter of animals for human consumption – from the squealing of the animals in the Soviet slaughter house near Lena’s childhood home, to the excess consumption of meat at Berlin’s Christmas markets. Roman’s distinctly privileged, anthropocentric perspective erases the violence perpetuated against both animals and the labouring humans employed in capitalism’s service: what Moore would term ‘Cheap Natures’.²⁸

Not completely impervious to the social disparities she herself notices in Berlin, Lena remains at first unconvinced by Roman’s assertions. In one scene, the pair walk past an art gallery and pause to look at the doll on display in the window. Her skirt is a patchwork of images, ‘alle [...] in rot-orangen Tönen’, which depict a variety of scenarios. Although long, their description is worth quoting at length:

²⁸ See Jason W. Moore, ‘Capitalocene: Part I’ and ‘Capitalocene: Part II’.

Ein Pärchen küsst sich im romantischen Sonnenuntergang am Strand. Eine Explosion. Rote Brandwunden an den Händen, Roter Sonnenuntergang am Meer. Brennender Wald. Ein erregtes männliches Geschlecht, dunkelrosa angelaufen. Pfirsichrote Flamingos, in Ballerina-Posen erstarrt. Brennende Häuser, durch den Tsunami von Land gespült, schweben auf hohen Wellen. Blutroter Schnee bei einer Robbenjagd. Die schinkenrosa Schenkel eines Pin-up-Mädchens. Rotes Wasser beim Walfang. Purpurroter Sonnenaufgang, von einer Hotelterrasse aus gesehen. Die Explosion auf eine Ölplattform. Dünnbeinige Models marschieren auf dem Laufsteg mit orangefarbenen, federgeschmückten Roben. Brennende Fackeln auf Ölfedern – die nahtlos zusammengeklebten Bilder werden zu prachtvollem Brokat, rot wie Feuer, rot wie Fleisch, rot wie Brandwunden, rot wie Blut, rot wie die Abendsonne über dem Meer. (*BLO*: 213-14)

Lena seems at first concerned by what is ultimately a patchwork of images expressing the bodily and environmental violence of the (post-)modern world, or rather the capitalist world-system. Such a patchwork echoes the Benjaminian notion of montage and the shock factor inherent in the dialectical image. In this instance, a montage is created by taking the images above out of their original context and assembling them together in the doll's dress in order to connect apparently separate events and engender new political constellations, understandings, and meanings. As Buck-Morss argues, Benjamin's dialectical image consists of 'concrete, "small, particular moments" in which the "total historical event" was to be discovered, the perceptible ur-phenomenon [*Urphänomen*] in which the origins of the present could be found'.²⁹ The individual images of environmental, social, economic, and sexual structural violence referenced above are brought together in one montage in which, side-by-side, they give a comprehensive dialectical image of the present-day. In this, the doll's dress illustrates a clear visual representation of the capitalist world-ecology. With its rich intertextuality, it can be argued that *BLO* itself – as well as the image of modern-day Berlin in creates in its second, underlying level of narration – are themselves montages. The book itself becomes a space – or place – of world environmental history with which readers are invited to engage if they can see beyond the anthropocentric narratives that so blind Lena within the novel itself. Indeed, Lena's own continuing attachment to the past as an emotional, primarily national tie prevents her political engagement with the dialectical images depicted in the palimpsestic artistic space of Berlin which gesture towards a planetary memory of capitalist violence.

Roman, for his part, insists on the disconnection of these images from the real world (*Welt*), preferring instead to assert that it is a matter of perspective (*Optik*) (*BLO*: 214). From Roman's privileged position as a white, middle-class, capitalist male, these images are far removed from his daily, lived reality in which he is largely protected from such structural violence. Whether Roman comprehends the patchwork of images is almost irrelevant; regardless, he

²⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 71.

would actively choose not to engage with its political undertone. This patchwork is not only ethically uncomfortable for Roman in its portrayal of a system of global violence in which he, in Michael Rothberg's terms, is 'an implicated subject'.³⁰ Rather, the acceptance of and action against the capitalist-induced structural and unequal trauma represented in the doll's dress would present a threat to Roman's whole way of life. He chooses to reject these images precisely because his lifestyle depends upon the capitalist system that produces such violence. As Naomi Klein argues, if the planetary issue of climate change were taken seriously as part of the political agenda, the dismantling of the capitalist economy that this would require could serve to simultaneously reduce social inequality and create a fairer global structure. However, Klein argues, the potential of this reversal of the current order is being blocked by those who benefit most from the exploitation it performs.³¹

Roman's capitalist lifestyle means that he exists within privileged spaces of capitalism which are characterised by a presentism that erases all forms of memory: local, national, planetary or otherwise. In other words, he occupies what are perhaps best categorised as 'nonplaces' – transient, sanitised, and uni-temporal spaces – and is hence rarely confronted with the reality of the memory-saturated, multi-temporal, and ultimately damaged, lived places of a structurally-violent globe.³² Through her relationship with Roman, Lena is presented with another new topography of Berlin which consists entirely of these 'nonplaces': Roman's 'großzügig' yet minimalist and un-lived in home; the expensive restaurants in which they regularly dine; and tourist hotspots like the painstakingly created Oriental tearooms which is '[erwähnt] in jedem Reiseführer' (*BLO*: 222; 218; 204). This topography stands in direct contrast to the memory-laden topography of Berlin presented to Lena through Herr Seitz's eyes. It seems then, that the only way Lena can escape from the messy, memory-laden, and violent reality of Veremej's Berlin is by entering the privileged, unitemporal, and sanitised spaces of global capitalism which facilitate a selective amnesia of the structural violence she would rather not face. That capitalism engenders the erasure of memory is thematised elsewhere by Veremej in her description of how Berlin's memory-saturated landscape – and the traces of local, national, or planetary memory embedded therein – are erased as old buildings are cleared to make room for new shopping centres, bars, and restaurants. Tellingly, the quotes from Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* – which, as I argued earlier provided one potential injunction to an engagement with planetary memory – are being ripped down to make

³⁰ See Rothberg, 'Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects'.

³¹ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), p. 7.

³² Marc Augé, *Non-places* (New York: Verso, 1995).

room for such new constructions. Berlin's memoscape is itself being 'cleansed' in the name of capitalist expansion (*BLO*: 266).

Returning to Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image, the empty, homogeneous temporality of empty capitalist spaces prevents engagement with the 'chips of Messianic time' in which 'the true picture of the past flits by. [And in which] the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again'.³³ In the case of the patchwork dress, while originally perturbed by the dialectical image created by the montage, Lena allows herself to be literally pulled away from the symbolic flash of history visible in the Berlin art gallery window by Roman and chooses not to reflexively engage with the disruption of temporality that this dress-montage presents. In Yi-Fu Tuan's terms, she glosses over the jolting 'pause' engendered by this flash of 'Messianic time' made visible in place and misses the chance to reflexively interact with its true significance.³⁴ For her, 'die Nähe zu Roman lässt mich die Schwächen der Sterblichen großzügig übersehen oder gar verzeihen' (*BLO*: 215), aligning this presentist rejection of the true, located flashes of world environmental history with a distinctly unc cosmopolitan – even ignorant, cruel – outlook.

Lena's entrance into the privileged, transnational, capitalist strata of Berlin is, however, both temporary and contingent upon proximity to Roman. Two weeks after meeting, Roman reveals that he in fact has a German wife who will be moving to join him in Berlin and Lena senses that their extra-marital affair was premised upon Roman's interest in her as an exemplary 'exotic Russian' character with which German literature 'teems' (*BLO*: 220). Although part of a transnational, capitalist elite, Lena feels that Roman has only ever viewed her through the lens of nationality: that is, through a supposed German national stereotyping of the Russian, lower-class, economic migrant despite her well-educated, upper class status in the former Soviet Union. Detached from Roman's privilege, Lena must return to the lived reality of the two-tier, memory saturated Berlin she knew previously. Leaving Roman's flat in tears, she catches sight of herself in a shop window: 'Ich [sehe] mein fürchterliches Gesicht in den Scheiben gespiegelt [...], dahinter Menschen mit teuren modischen Schuhen und Anzügen, Menschen, die zu zweit oder zu dritt auf ihre Bestellung warten' (*BLO*: 227). In this image, Lena sees as if through a glass partition the world of capitalist privilege, into which – as a post-*Perestroika* Russian migrant to capitalist Germany – she can never enter on her own terms due to her Communist and national past. Post-Roman, Lena is wrenched from the reassuring presentism of capitalism and the feeling of immortality it creates and is firmly

³³ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', trans. by Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 253-64 (p. 255).

³⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 179.

catapulted back into reality when she learns of her mother's impending death and must return to Russia.

An inadequate solution: seeking refuge in the familiar nation

As I have argued in my analysis of *BLO*, Lena's place-based memory work in the cityscape of Berlin challenges the notion that interventions into the German memoryscape can be made only by those of ethnic German descent. This at times fraught and traumatic revisiting of the past is necessarily transnational in that it facilitates an affective connection with the East German Herr Seitz. However, it also remains distinctly anthropocentric and is premised upon a shared monocultural heritage. After entering and subsequently being ejected from the privileged nonplaces of capitalist amnesia, Lena is again confronted with the fraught burden of her own memory, as well as her present concerns about the imminent environmental threats her daughter warns her will be a significant presence in her – and the planet's – future. In this final section on *BLO*, I show how far from impelling Lena to politically engage with a world environmental memory, her return to the reality of contemporary Berlin rather results in a melancholy longing for a safe, recognisable, and still distinctly national and anthropocentric past.

In the immediate aftermath of her break-up with Roman, Lena learns that her mother is dying. She immediately travels back to Kema, the provincial Russian town in which she grew up, but misses her mother's death by forty minutes. Lena must remain in Kema until she is able to sell her mother's house and while there reflects upon the changes she can see between the town today and how she holds it in her memory. Increasingly marked by the inequalities of the expanded capitalist world-system, the Kema Lena once knew intimately has become a place of pronounced contrasts and is unrecognisable from the Kema in her memory:

Was ich sehe, wirkt bunter, rückständiger, östlicher als damals [...] – überall Kontraste, die in die Augen beißen: Burka versus Minirock, magerer streunender Hunde versus dicker Mercedes, edle blaue Tannenbäume und ein Stück faule, mit Sonnenblumenschalen und Perlmutscherven bedeckte Erde um die Mülltonne. (*BLO*: 238)

The uneven development of capitalism as witnessed in Kema is not dissimilar to the two-tier society of Berlin represented by Veremej, in which affluent wealth and capitalist commodification exist alongside extreme poverty and homelessness. Instead of thinking through the connection forged between the two distant localities of the equally uneven metropolitan Berlin and provincial Kema by the capitalist world-system however, Lena mobilises place-based memories of Kema in the service of lamenting on what its

transformation means for her own memories and national identity. She feels like ‘*eine Fremde*’, ‘wie eine Außerirdische geworden, die die Sorgen der Leute aus der Heimat nicht mehr verstehen kann’ (*BLO*: 238; 240, italics in original). Particularly in the German context, the emotively-loaded and anthropocentric term *Heimat* has been seen to possess distinctly nationalistic undertones. As Peter Blicke argues, despite the various uses of the term to describe the connections people feel with a variety of place-scales (local, regional, national, etc.), *Heimat* has continued to predominantly connote a ‘*völkisch* nationalism’ which harks back to an idealised ‘*Ur-nationalism*’ in place before the formation of modern nation-states. This conception of nationalism – based in a shared language and culture – is, Blicke argues, one of the foundations of the German idea of *Heimat*.³⁵ In this context then, the term *Heimat* suggests that the exclusion Lena feels is a primarily national one. At the same time, however, she describes herself as feeling like ‘*eine Außerirdische*’ – clearly invoking a planetary scale. Her alienation is both national – from her own Russian *Heimat* and, through her outsiderdom, from the German *Heimat* – and planetary: where does she belong on this planet if she is alienated from both of the two nations in which she has spent her life?

While interacting with Herr Seitz’s place-based, East German memories provided a way for Lena to enter and potentially intervene in a distinctly German memoryscape, this entrance was facilitated by an otherwise retrenchment in East German and Russian national cultural legacies respectively. In fact, the affinity which Lena and Herr Seitz found with one another was premised upon their joint mourning of ‘lost’ nations’ (of the Soviet Union and East Germany) and their scepticism towards a capitalist system which has become so entrenched in the new, post-War/Wall Westernised Germany. In other words, they are joined in their socio-political outsiderdom in the new capitalist German society, but still retain a ‘Russian’ and ‘[East] German’ mentality respectively. For Lena, Berlin is now ‘wie von [Herr Seitz’s] Erinnerungen imprägniert’ (*BLO*: 266), meaning that the only conceivable way for her to gain symbolic access to Berlin and its past is through the historical, ‘special’ national German-Russian intellectual tradition referred to earlier in the novel, as well as through their shared cultural aversion to the commodification of capitalist society. In her alienation from both the nationally-inflected localities of Berlin and Kema, Lena struggles with developing a new supra-national identity for herself. Instead of mobilising the place-based memories of these two localities in a planetary context in order to foster a new supra-national identity, Lena prefers to seek a melancholy solace with those individuals who share a similar life trajectory; she turns to the distinctly Russian place of her friend, Larissa’s, *Berlin Lebensmittelgeschäft*,

³⁵ Peter Blicke, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2002), p. 29, emphasis in original.

frequented by Russian migrants to Germany. Reflecting in a melancholic manner on the anachronism apparent in her actions, she states:

Es wird nichts mit dem neuen, heiteren Leben, mich zieht es zum alten, trägen – zu meinen Landesleuten. [...] Haben wir *dafür* Tausende Kilometer zurückgelegt? Um vor uns hinräuspernd in der Küche zu sitzen und von verlassenenen und *vergangenen* Orten zu schwärmen? (*BLO*: 257; 259, emphasis in original)

While the pace of present-day, capitalist Berlin accelerates towards an uncertain future, Lena, her Russian compatriots and the East German Herr Seitz are seemingly unable to keep up, dragged back into the slower, cumbersome recesses of their memories of the Communist era. At the beginning of the novel, Lena conceptualises her own and Herr Seitz's reflection in the tram window as resembling a 'Januskopf' (*BLO*: 50). In Roman mythology, the Janus has two faces: one looking to the past; one to the future. As a God of transition, the reference to Janus indicates both the historical transition from 'senilen Sozialismus zum pubetären Kapitalismus' (*BLO*: 234) which so marks Lena and Herr Seitz's memories, and of the political transition that is necessary in the present day to overthrow the ecologically-damaging capitalist world-system. Initially, Herr Seitz, with his 'anchronistisch schmaler Schnurrbart' and his flat filled with 'Vorkriegsmöbel' (*BLO*: 41), seems to embody the Janus face looking to the past, while the younger nurse, Lena, thinks she looks more to the future. However, as she struggles to reconcile her (post-)Soviet memories with life in present-day, capitalist, post-Wall Berlin, Lena attempts to shield herself from the insecurities inherent in our planetary risk society with a retrenchment in thoughts of a nostalgically secure national past before *Perestroika*, in which she regarded herself as comfortably 'upper class' and socialised with the best of 'russischen oder GUS-Staaten-Kunstlern' (*BLO*: 200, italics in original). In this, she does not mobilise the potentially productive nature of place-memory acknowledged by various Human Geography scholars, by whom the landscape is regarded as 'not just a palimpsest [...], a historical layering in which the present is merely the sum of past episodes, but [...] also [as] *an active, present future-oriented engagement with the environment*'.³⁶ In Lena's case, place-based memory is not mobilised politically in order to foster a necessarily cross-boundary planetary consciousness but rather is reminiscent of a melancholy longing for a national past that can never be retrieved.

In fact, Lena's nationally-inflected mobilisation of place-based memory in Berlin could be seen as not just ignorant of but also detrimental to conceiving of planetary memory and the consciousness of a cross-boundary, cross-species community. It is obvious that in their nationally- and ideologically-inflected memories, Lena and Herr Seitz equate globalism and the entrenchment of capitalism in Eastern Europe with Americanisation. Indeed, their affinity

³⁶ Lee, p. 89, emphasis added.

is based on a shared scepticism towards Anglo-American dominance, ideology, and questionable foreign policy. As Lena reflects on one of her shared conversations with Herr Seitz:

In diesem Moment wusste ich, dass er, wie ich, ein Fan der Kosmonauten war, und nicht der Astronauten, und dass er auch nicht an die Mondlandung der Amerikaner glaubt [...] Wir haben immer noch nicht kapiert, warum die sowjetische Invasion in Afghanistan Krieg war und die von der NATO als Friedensmission gilt. (*BLO*: 44)

For Lena and Herr Seitz, opening out to the globe comes to be equated with American political, economic, and cultural hegemony. In this context, globality is paradoxically nationalised: it becomes Americanisation. If economic modernisation is to mean Americanisation – as it appears to for Lena and Herr Seitz – the re-entrenchment in Russian and German national traditions respectively presents, by this logic, the opportunity for a counter-identity which rejects the social and environmental damage wrought by a particularly American form of capitalist globalisation. In the equation America = capitalism = economic dominance and social and environmental destruction, the finger of blame is pointed towards a specific nation not the global capitalist world-system.

Indeed, Lena's mother's stereotyping of Americans as water-, gas-, and water- guzzling meat-eaters who refuse to sign climate agreements (*BLO*: 14) is characteristic of Lena and Herr Seitz's antagonistic attitude towards America and Western nations at large. Directing blame for traumatic personal memories of the fall of Communism and for present-day social and environmental injustices towards Western nations – particularly America – seems for Lena to be a rather convenient way of looking at the past. It fits with her emotional and nationally-charged memories and reduces the guilty sense of implication she herself appears to feel throughout the narrative as she considers her own consumption habits and cosmopolitan credentials. While it is undeniable that Western nations bear the largest responsibility for the economic, social, and environmental ill-effects of capitalism, the national blame-game that Lena indulges in is hardly conducive to engaging with our present twenty-first century moment as the shared, complex, and contradictory result of capitalist world-making. Furthermore, it does not place enough significance on the inequalities within and not just between nations; inequalities which are highly characteristic of the uneven development of capitalism across the centuries – not just in the post-Cold War period. Lena's place-based memory work thus presents a distinct obstacle to piecing together a necessarily planetary memory i.e. a world environmental history that is at once more political, less anthropocentric, and potentially system-transforming.

In *BLO* then, Veremej presents us with the still existing and very real obstacles that block a consciousness of the scale of the planetary catastrophe with which we are currently faced. Her

protagonist, Lena, succeeds in mobilising place in order to affectively relate to the memories of the East German, Herr Seitz, and to challenge dominant prejudices which overlook migrant intervention into German memory discourses. However, this memory work remains distinctly localised, national, and anthropocentric. The novel's setting in the well-known cityscape of Berlin – with all the historical, event-based trauma this evokes – makes it a paradigmatic 'Berlin novel' and as such seemingly shuts off the narrative from a consideration of the wider, global or planetary context. Although the novel engages with the structural, slow violence of the global capitalist system in its underlying level of narration, its strong characters, and the limited consciousness of its protagonists means it remains a distinctly anthropocentric fiction. While Veremej does not shy away from alluding heavily to the world-making and indeed planet-destroying capabilities of capitalism, her protagonists' retrenchment in familiar national identifications blocks an engagement with the supra-national, planetary reach of global capitalism and damages the potential of fostering a consciousness of the self as a member of a planetary community – or rather, ecology. Veremej's critical appraisal of her characters' failings makes clear that engaging with place-based memories is not automatically productive; rather, it comes down to how these memories are mobilised and for what purpose. In what remains of this chapter, I firstly consider how the concepts of 'place' and of the 'Capitalocene' can allow Memory Studies scholars to develop the emerging notion of 'planetary memory', before moving onto to a close reading of *Sturm* in which I explore how specific local places may be mobilised in the service of piecing together a world environmental history, or planetary memory.

Situating Memory Studies' 'planetary turn' in the context of the Capitalocene

For Stef Craps, the existential threat of environmental breakdown demands a new approach to the study of memory: one that is as yet to be fully thought through in the discipline, focused as it remains on the scales of globality or transnationality as opposed to the ultimate scale of the planetary.³⁷ As the 2017 publication of an entire journal issue dedicated to the topic of 'Planetary Memory' attests, memory scholars are, however, beginning to move in this direction. As Bond, De Bruyn, and Rapson argue in their introduction to this issue, the age of what they term the Anthropocene has indeed challenged scholars from all disciplines to reimagine theory from a planetary perspective.³⁸ In the context of this chapter, a pressing question in this regard seems to be whether the study – and indeed, representation – of memory in literature can foster a sense of planetary togetherness, in which we all come to

³⁷ Craps and others, p. 3.

³⁸ Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, p. 853.

understand ourselves primarily in the context of our position in the natural world. In order to achieve such a consciousness, the focus on the *Anthropos* in memory must be necessarily decentred. That is, Memory Studies must not only focus on the history of humanity. Rather, it must account for the history of humanity-in-nature – what Jason W. Moore may refer to as ‘world environmental history’, whose development has been dictated by the workings of capitalism as a world-ecology since the mid-1450s.³⁹ Favouring the term ‘Capitalocene’ over the human-centred notion of the ‘Anthropocene’ serves in this regard to designate and name the shift from anthropocentric memory to a more planetary memory of humanity-in-nature.

Particularly salient in this context is the importance that Bond et al. place upon the change in emphasis engendered through the use of the adjective ‘planetary’ as opposed to ‘global’. This shift underpins the argument advanced in this chapter in two important ways: firstly, the adjective ‘planetary’ shifts the focus onto the Earth itself, countering anthropocentrism by decentring the implicitly human subject of theoretical inquiry; secondly, it emphasises a specific place (the planet) rather than focusing on the abstract realm of ‘the global’.⁴⁰ Susan Friedman astutely captures these significant implications in her assertion that:

Planetary [...] echoes the spatial turn in cultural theory of the twenty-first century. It is cosmic and grounded at the same time, **indicating a place and time that can be both expansive and local** [...] *Planetary* suggests the Earth as a place of matter and climate, life and the passage of time, and an array of species of which the human is only one.⁴¹

For Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, this shift in perspective from the ‘globe’ to the ‘planet’ is vital for understanding her ethically-inspired notion of ‘planetarity’. Spivak argues that whereas the ‘globe’ signifies an abstract realm of capital which is mapped on our computers and leads us to believe that ‘[n]o one lives there [...] [and] to think that we can aim to control it’, the more concrete, ecological notion of the ‘planet’ places the human subject’s present inhabitation of this realm ‘on loan’ into a wider historical context and opens us up to forms of alterity that include but vitally transgress those already imposed upon us throughout history. Engaging with the notion of the ‘planet’, for Spivak, inherently represents a transgressive engagement with alterity, since ‘in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is, indeed, specifically discontinuous’.⁴² This acceptance of the existence of alterity in a nevertheless shared planetary community allows us to conceive of how individuals may come to understand how their own located, heterogeneous experiences and memories

³⁹ Moore, ‘The Modern World System’, in particular pp. 322-23.

⁴⁰ Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, p. 854.

⁴¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 7-8. Italics indicate emphasis in original; bold indicates emphasis added.

⁴² Spivak, *Discipline*, p. 72; p. 73.

intersect with those of local and distant Others, as well as how such disparate experiences contribute to a shared planetary history or memory. For Bond et al., this implicit linkage of the micro- (local) and macro-level (planetary) further presents a productive opportunity to allow for the simultaneous expression of both individual and collective instances of event-based trauma and ‘slow [environmental] violence’, as well as how the two intersect.⁴³ As they assert: ‘Scholars of memory have yet to pay sustained attention to the complex imbrication of personal and planetary experience, or the diverse ways in which historical violence might be geologically inscribed.’⁴⁴ By focusing on the imbrication of specific place-based memories in a planetary history forged by capitalism as a world-ecology, I attempt to address such shortcomings in this chapter.

For Beck and Levy, our current age of the ‘World Risk Society’ represents a movement from the third age of temporality in which ‘national time had been caged as a unifying source and a central means for collective mobilisation’ into the cosmopolitan fourth age, characterised by fragmented time and lacking any dominant conception of temporality or futurity’.⁴⁵ For Madina Tlostanova, while such competing temporalities do indeed exist, they are somewhat overshadowed – if not erased – by the homogenised time of capitalist globalisation. This lack of temporal and spatial anchoring, she argues, has heralded the return to particular spaces – or places – in the forging of contemporary identities:

Rediscovering and re-habiting a certain space and the return of spatiality is an important tendency of contemporary cultures [...]. The frozen time of globalisation with its single remaining horizon of consumption forces people to turn to forgotten spaces – both local and global, to spatial histories and identities – real or imagined and constructed.⁴⁶

That places are both real and imagined, local and expansive is key to understanding the link between the micro- and macro-levels of human existence and the revolutionary potential inherent in this link. In reflecting on Jason W. Moore’s recognition that the words ‘economy’ and ‘ecology’ share a root in the same Greek word *oikeios* (meaning ‘household’ or ‘place’), Benjamin Kunkel sees this shared etymology as igniting Moore’s claim that it is imperative to understand how ‘societies and natural environments “co-produce” each other *in the same spot*’ i.e. in the same *place*.⁴⁷ While Ursula K. Heise warns of the dangers of

⁴³ The term ‘slow violence’ is taken from Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, p. 859.

⁴⁵ Ulrich Beck and Daniel Levy, ‘Cosmopolitanized Nations: Re-imagining Collectivity in the World Risk Society’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 30 (2013), 3-31 (pp. 8-9).

⁴⁶ Madina Tlostanova, ‘Postcolonial Theory, the Decolonial Option and Post-socialist Writing’, in *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures* ed. by Dobrota Pucherová and Róbert Gàfrik, pp. 27-46 (p. 33).

⁴⁷ Benjamin Kunkel, ‘The Capitalocene’, *London Review of Books*, 39 (2017)

<<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n05/benjamin-kunkel/the-capitalocene>> [Accessed 17th April 2017], emphasis added.

paying narrow attention to specific places as closed, bounded entities, she nevertheless advocates for a wider ‘ecocosmopolitan’ perspective which attends to how specific environmental risks cross local and national boundaries.⁴⁸ Moore’s concept of ‘world environmental history’ and his emphasis on understanding how in the capitalist world-system society and nature co-produce each other in the same spot indeed hints at how we can mobilise local places in the service of understanding planetary risks. Indeed, Bond et al. highlight how viewing memory in planetary terms allows us to join ‘macro-, meso- and microscopic practices’, as well as emphasise the importance of Memory Studies scholars recognising the ‘possibilities of reading the physical landscape as an index of environmental memory’.⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer reinforce this possibility in asserting that ‘studying a place or the idea of a place within its global [or, in this case, planetary] context does not negate the value of the local; *it rather intensifies that value by suggesting all that circulates through it*’.⁵⁰ It seems, then, that understanding memory as at once local-yet-planetary can allow us to situate our located experience of ‘being human’ in the context of a larger, planetary ecological system which has for centuries been shaped by capitalism as a world-making ecology.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere in this thesis, literature often plays a vital role in the emergence of new memorial narratives, and this is no different in the case of planetary memory. Literature can render visible and give form to under-represented or ignored memory cultures, ‘actualiz[ing] elements which previously were not – or could not be – perceived, articulated, and remembered in the social sphere’.⁵¹ Indeed, in the context of environmental literary fiction, Adam Trexler recognises that what he terms ‘Anthropocene fictions’ allow for ‘the capacity to interrogate the emotional, aesthetic, and living experience of the Anthropocene’. Yet, very few such fictions have succeeded in resolving the tension between literary immediacy and a robust examination of the multi-scalar social complexities of the Anthropocene age. He argues: ‘If the novel draws climate change closer to its readers, allowing them a surge of immediate experience, its mediations have also dissolved the economic and social connections of contemporary reality, letting any sense of urgency drift away.’⁵² Equally, Trexler’s ‘Anthropocene fictions’ are largely concerned with the reality of present or future conditions rather than exploring the historical events that have led us to such limit-breaching environmental conditions: they occlude rather than interrogate

⁴⁸ Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁹ Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, p. 859; p. 858.

⁵⁰ Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer, ‘Preface: Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies’, *American Literature*, 78 (2006), 677-90 (p. 679), emphasis added.

⁵¹ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 153.

⁵² Trexler, p. 6, emphasis added; p. 116.

memory. This is where the definitional difference and separate point of analytical departure between the concepts of the ‘Anthropocene’ and the ‘Capitalocene’ once more come into play. In contrast to ‘Anthropocene Fictions’, what we may term ‘Capitalocene fictions’ – and I argue *Sturm* to be a prime example of such a fiction – investigate climate breakdown as one example of the many adverse historical and present-day consequences of the capitalist world-system. In this manner, they can be seen as contributing to the development of what Moore terms a ‘world environmental history’.

Following Moore’s conjecture that capitalism is in itself a world-making ecology, Sharae Deckard proposes that any literature which mediates and maps capitalism’s remaking of the contemporary world system is necessary world-literature, or rather world-ecological literature.⁵³ As Deckard highlights, literature as a social product registers and renders visible the ecological regimes that shape the world-ecology; world-literature represents a powerful means through which to cognitively map the realities of the capitalist world-ecology. That is, literature can offer us an arena in which to make visible the ideologies and inequalities that capitalism seeks to naturalise and in which to imagine that which is not visible in our immediate vicinities.⁵⁴ Necessarily political, world-ecological ‘cartographic fiction’ is thus oriented ‘towards the critical mapping of the incommensurable geographies of the uneven development of nature across the whole world-ecology, connecting seemingly disparate parts and reconstituting the exploitative relations between core and periphery which shape socio-ecological relations’.⁵⁵ In this, literature arguably becomes planetary: it creates new topographies of history and memory which allow readers to reconceptualise how distant places are connected through the world- making processes of capitalism as a world-ecology.

In what follows, I explore how *Sturm* can be considered such a piece of ‘world-ecological literature’ through the way Veremej mobilises place-based memories of (capitalist) world-ecological history to connect the particular (locality) with the general (planet). It is precisely the novel’s setting in the fictional town of Gradow which allows Veremej the authorial licence to construct a text which truly engages with the planetary scale of life, history, and memory in the age of the ‘Capitalocene’. I argue that rather than being an ‘Anthropocene fiction’, *Sturm* is an example of a ‘Capitalocene fiction’ which seemingly professes what Elisabeth Herrmann has recognised as ‘the new desire [in contemporary German literature] for a German “non-national” identity’⁵⁶ – in this case, a distinctly planetary identity that

⁵³ Deckard, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 4

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Herrmann, p. 25, emphasis in original.

springs from a consciousness of the consequences of capitalism as a world-ecological system.

***Nach dem Sturm* as ‘world-ecological literature’?**

In the first half of this chapter, I argued that *BLO* highlights the obstacle posed by the continuing sway of and re-entrenchment in the idea of the nation or a national past to a reflexive engagement with the overlapping and mutually constitutive events of planetary history and their consequences for our ultimately shared habitat – Earth. In the second half of this chapter, I argue that in *Sturm* Veremej does not merely highlight the stumbling block of nationalistic thinking; rather, in this world-literary text, she in fact takes steps towards literally writing the nation out of the equation. Due to the fictionality of Gradow – which we only know lies somewhere in the Balkan region – this town cannot be definitely located in the ‘real world’, or rather, a real nation. The novel and the fictional world it creates become for the reader imagined places in themselves. In other words, the novel encourages readers to interact critically with its themes in a context that is distinctly ‘non-national’. Readers can overlay the fictional Gradow with their own localised experiences as they interact with the text, which itself becomes a metaphorical ‘place’ of reflection; an arena in which we can explore what ties us together as humans rather than that which drives us apart. Just as Gradow resists any fixed spatial definition, so too does *Sturm*: a German-language text, written by a Russian-born author, and set in a fictional Balkan town. In *Sturm*, Veremej skilfully weaves together various places, memories, and temporalities, succeeding in demonstrating how the idea of a closed, national history is and has been for centuries a myth: memory does not stop at national borders; it has just been constructed as though this were the case. Equally, her employment of a rich repertoire of intertextual references from a variety of supposedly national canons in the creation of her fictional Gradow mirrors the real-life creation of constructed ‘national’ senses of place, culture, and history, which are actually more often than not the result of transnational borrowing, incorporation, and intellectual exchange across borders. In *Sturm*, the excavation of memory performed by Veremej moves between the local and planetary context without necessary mediation by the nation.

Sturm opens with a short, three-page prologue which describes the arrival of a group of migrants at the site of the *Festung* which later becomes the centre of Gradow. When the migrants arrive, early settlers are already building this fortification but the town is not officially founded as a ‘königlichen Freistadt’ for another 50 years. In opening the novel with the settlement of the area, Veremej makes clear the premise upon which the rest of the narration is based: while the embodied place of Gradow rests upon its settlement by people

i.e. its recognition as a shared locality, the landscape or geography of the town existed prior to human settlement and will always outlive its human inhabitants. Closing her prologue, Veremej writes: ‘Drei Jahrhunderte verstrichen an diesen Ufern, mehrere Reiche verzehrten in stillem Fieber, die Festung aber, der Baum, die Brücke und die Stadt sind immer noch da’ (*Sturm*: 9). The novel opens then with a clear statement of the mutual dependence of humans and their environments on one another – of humanity-in-nature – and furthermore emphasises the importance of the place of Gradow for the narrative. Indeed, while Veremej’s human characters allow her to develop the novel’s narrative, we get the sense that as familial and social bonds start to break down, it is the characters’ shared locality of Gradow that is the most significant – and perhaps only – communal tie they still share in their fragmented twenty-first century lives. That *Sturm* is narrated in the third-person makes ultimately clear that the memories of Veremej’s human characters are intimately tied to the embodied place of Gradow itself; its landscape plays a formative role in their lives and sense of selfhood. As the memories of each human protagonist – Ivo, Milly, Ana, Boris, and Mira – are evoked in the narrative, the characters are described as remembering not only the event itself but also, perhaps unconsciously, that event’s physical setting. An example of this is the affective meaning Milly attributes to the church that sheltered the family from a particularly violent rainstorm which occurred in the week she was waiting for the results of a biopsy on a potentially cancerous lump in her breast, or the pull for Ana of the river in which she and her lover, Alan, bathed and where he was later found dead (*Sturm*: 121; 133-5). In this, *Sturm* is largely a novel which takes Gradow itself as its main subject: the ecological place of Gradow is arguably the novel’s main protagonist.

Veremej’s Gradow is not simply a passive backdrop to its inhabitants’ lives, however. It is rather a living, ecological locality that, in its fictionality, is symbolic of a wider, planetary ecosystem which consists of a variety of embodied localities – and their inhabitants – tied together in a global capitalist system and sharing this system’s truly planetary consequences. The town of Gradow is symbolised by its ecology, with the huge plane tree standing on the banks of Gradow’s river described by Veremej as the ‘atmenden Genius Loci’ of the town. This *Platane* embodies the life and past of Gradow and its inhabitants, providing a ‘container’ for the palimpsestic layers of the town’s history: ‘Sein hartes Fleisch ist nichts anderes als aufeinandergeschichtete Geschichte. Er hat keine Geschichte, er ist ihre lebendige Verkörperung’ (*Sturm*: 30). In employing the semantic field of human biology, Veremej succeeds in metaphorically decentering the human as the implicit subject of history and memory by pointing towards a conception of humanity-in-nature. Furthermore, she underlines how the ecological memory embodied within the environment persists over time as testimony to capitalism’s destructive effect not only on local ecologies but on the planet as a whole. In

other words, the excavation of Gradow's environmental history in Veremej's *Sturm* presents us with a possibility of how to employ memory in the service of mapping the multi-scalar and oft erased violence perpetuated by the capitalism world-ecology on our shared planet.

As Sharae Deckard argues, world-ecological literature must develop formal structures that are as multi-scalar as the system they seek to map. Furthermore, these structures must be able to 'navigate multiple temporalities and localities and escape the boundedness of character-led form'.⁵⁷ Deckard herself seems largely sceptical as to how the concept of 'place' can be mobilised to this end, arguing that in the 'noncontiguous, fluid, reassigned spaces of neoliberal capital' individual experience no longer necessarily coincides with place.⁵⁸ Elsewhere, however, scholars have argued that specific places can be mobilised productively provided that the places which are excavated are not just those localities that occupy hegemonic, core positions in the global system of capitalist power; attention must also be given to how the capitalist world-system structures core-periphery relationships between specific places.⁵⁹ Christopher Lloyd and Jessica Rapson, for example, argue of Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Flight Behaviour* that it responds to the challenges of representing climate change by 'charting interactions between local and planetary environments, prompting readers to contextualise the micro – geographically bounded human experience and memory – within the macro context of the Anthropocene'. They argue that by presenting readers with the local manifestations of planetary climate change in a peripheral Texan locality, Kingsolver's novel 'urges us to see ourselves within a planetary perspective without leaving our very human, localised attachments'.⁶⁰

Sturm works along similar lines, with Veremej encouraging her readers to conceive of necessarily ecological planetary memory through excavating Gradow's local, embodied, place-based memories. However, reading this text through the theoretical lens of the 'Capitalocene' rather than the 'Anthropocene' allows us to conceive of how her novel is much more radical than Kingsolver's. In both the fictionality of its setting and its mapping of the world-system of capitalist exploitation over the *longue durée*, Veremej does not only mobilise her text in the service of transgressing conventional understandings of locality, nationality or globality/the planetary; rather, she sets about re-writing them. In *Sturm*, localities are not just linked vertically to their shared, so-called 'Anthropocene' moment – that is, the similarities they share do not just come from their parallel experiences of the challenge posed to them by

⁵⁷ Deckard, p.5.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Trexler, p. 235; Heise; Christopher Lloyd and Jessica Rapson, "“Family Territory” to the “Circumference of the Earth”: Local and Planetary Memories of Climate Change in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*", *Textual Practice*, 31 (2017), 911-31.

⁶⁰ Lloyd and Rapson, p. 911; p. 913.

the planetary environmental risks of our contemporary twenty-first century age. They are rather also linked horizontally through the capitalist world-system. That is, their relative positioning in the Capitalocene is defined through how they are linked or set against one another in the temporally and geographically wide-ranging history of capitalist exploitation. This is why *Sturm* can be conceived of as a ‘cartographic fiction’ of world-ecological literature – it truly maps how specific localities are positioned in capitalism’s planetary ‘web of life’.⁶¹ Veremej’s Gradow is at once a specific, embodied locality whose particularities provide a point of affective connection for its inhabitants, as well as – in its fictionality – a symbolic marker of any town in the global capitalist world-ecology. In this, it provides a point of affective entry for all twenty-first century readers who can recognise the signs of capitalism’s world history in their own affective localities.

As Naomi Klein argues, our initial consciousness of ‘slower’ forms of global violence – such as climate change – springs from noticing the small changes we can see in our well-known localities: the early blooming of a flower, or an ‘unusually thin layer of ice on a lake’, for example.⁶² Indeed, it is Ivo’s noticing of the incremental increases in river levels, the increasingly erratic behaviour of the bats which live in the labyrinthine tunnels under the citadel, and the apparent bowing of the huge plane tree that piques his concern for the town which is ‘ihm vertraut wie die eigene Signatur’ (*Sturm*: 66). In viewing the planetary and the historical through the local lens of Gradow, Veremej creates a text capable of accounting for how ‘societies and natural environments continually co-produce each other in the same spot’, across time and under the influence of global systems of power.⁶³ In weaving together the personal and the intimate with the abstract and the planetary, new constellations of place-based memory are created which go further than to simply articulate and understand one particular event-based trauma through reference to another. Rather, the emergent *planetary* narratives of memory refer to a deeper sense of truly supra-national, world history and see both localised event-based *and* structural trauma – and their present-day repercussions – as the necessary consequences of capitalism as a world-making ecology. Both Gradow as a fictional place and *Sturm* as a piece of world-ecological literature become palimpsestic spaces in which working through particular layers of local memory simultaneously represents a working through of planetary memory; the local and the planetary are thought together without necessary mediation by the national.

⁶¹ Deckard, p. 15.

⁶² Klein, p. 159.

⁶³ Kunkel.

Mapping the capitalist world-ecology in/through place

As argued throughout this thesis, embodied places of memory are arenas in which we can pause to reflect upon the legacy of traumatic events whose traces can still be found at particular locations. In scholarly conceptions of specifically site-based memory, the focus is largely placed upon event-based forms of trauma, primarily the Holocaust. As Stef Craps reminds us, however, the Western tendency to focus on purely event-based trauma undermines the daily, structural violence and trauma that a large segment of the globe's population consistently suffers: the latter form of trauma – described by Rob Nixon as 'slow violence' – is often obscured by the more recognised legacies of one-off traumatic events.⁶⁴ In *Sturm*, however, Veremej's Gradow is a place marked by both forms of trauma: event-based and 'slow violence'. Ivo's family history is, for example, plagued by the event-based trauma of the Holocaust: his grandparents were both killed in the Theresienstadt concentration camp, leaving his mother to grow up in Prague's Jewish ghetto with her grandmother (*Sturm*: 32). This trauma is very much still in evidence in today's Gradow, in the intimate space of Ivo's home, on whose walls photographs of its former owners, the Tronks, still stand. The Tronks had to flee Gradow after Hitler's defeat due to their collusion with the Nazi authorities (*Sturm*: 37). For reasons unbeknownst to even himself, Ivo feels unable to remove their photographs from the walls of his home and this, alongside the fact the Tronks' descendants are now attempting to reclaim the home of their ancestors, ensures that Ivo is faced with this legacy on a daily basis.

With its traditionally human-centred narratives, literature often favours such anthropocentric and recognisable event-based forms of memory. One reason for this is perhaps that 'slower' forms of violence take place over such elongated timescales that they are harder to comprehend by humans whose lifespans are, in comparison, extremely short.⁶⁵ In *Sturm*, Ivo is concerned for the fate of the symbolic, giant plane tree which, to him, suddenly seems 'alterschwach'. He ponders: 'Vielleicht sterben Bäume so – Jahr um Jahr, von außen unsichtbar' (*Sturm*: 30). The generations of inhabitants who have lived and died in Gradow, with their relatively short lifespans, have no means by which to trace the slow yet progressive decaying of the plane tree; the deterioration of Gradow's ecology goes unnoticed. By placing Gradow as the novel's protagonist and excavating the environmental memory of humanity-in-nature in this local yet symbolically planetary place, however, Veremej's novel serves to achieve what the human inhabitants of Gradow cannot: rendering comprehensible and providing testament to the centuries-long slow violence of the capitalist world-system. She

⁶⁴ Craps, p. 4.

⁶⁵ See Chakrabarty, p. 204, where he argues that this is one of the reasons why man's relationship to the environment has rarely been taken as a subject of historiography.

reverses the anthropocentric trend of focusing on solely event-based trauma in favour of mapping the slow violence pervading the history of Gradow itself. As a symbolic locality in a long-standing global system of capitalist exploitation, the local memory of Gradow is simultaneously a planetary memory of world environmental history which can be used to track the expansion of capitalism as a world-ecology.

In this sense, the place of Gradow provides an analytical lens through which to trace the eco-historical slow violence perpetuated in the name of capitalist expansion. Veremej's Gradow has been shaped by successive waves of capitalist development, in the guises of colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism. As Moore argues, capitalism co-produces nature through its exploitation of 'Cheap Natures' – that is, the free labour of both environmental resources and human beings – and through its employment and exhaustion of particular localities in the service of production. Veremej's narrative traces the manifestation of capitalist power in Gradow back to the town's founding in 1715 but also hints at its exploitative global existence before this date. Following the founding of the town, Major Matti – the town's first mayor – enlists descendants of former African slaves from the Austria-Hungarian crownland of Dalmatia to build a new temple for Gradow: this father and son, whose ancestors were brought to the Adriatic coast during the era of slavery, are now swept along to the 'Hinterland des Balkans' within a new wave of colonialist imperialism (*Sturm*: 186). That Veremej's text works on a dual level of narration facilitates this comprehensive tracking of capitalism as a world-ecology. Furthermore, her employment of intertextual references to historical cultural artefacts widens the temporal remit of her novel further. In *Sturm*, we find references to the painting of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, which dates back to the fourteenth century and of which a copy resides hidden in Gradow's *Marienkirche*. Elsewhere, a reference to Albrecht Dürer's 1514 engraving *Melancholia I*, with its connotations of alienation from scientific knowledge and 'rationality' in a dawning capitalist age, emphasises that the destructive effects of capitalism were felt long before the Industrial Revolution. The research Mira is undertaking on the founding of the town alludes to colonialist battles and expansions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while a further intertextual reference to Ivo Andrić's Nobel Prize winning 1945 novel *Na Drini ćuprija* ('The Bridge over the Drina') invokes the flames of eighteenth and nineteenth century Balkan nationalism thematised therein. Lastly, in excavating the social and environmental effects of the fall of Communism and the advent of neoliberalism on Gradow and its inhabitants, Veremej brings her tracking of capitalism as a world-making ecology to the present day.

As in *BLO*, Veremej presents capitalism as a 'cleansing' ideology – one which promotes social amnesia in service of enabling its own survival. Indeed, Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat argue that the invisibility of the violence enacted by capitalism 'is not merely an absence, but an

active process of erasure'.⁶⁶ For Sharae Deckard, world-ecological literature can work against this erasure by narrating and revealing both the purposely amnesiastic qualities of capitalism, as well as its historical workings and the resultant violence.⁶⁷ In her third person narrative, Veremej does just this through setting Boris' ignorant partitioning of history against the reality of life in a Gradow which is – and has in fact for centuries been – imbricated in the capitalist world-system. Like any historical endeavour, understanding the development of capitalism as a world-ecology depends very much on both how we periodise time and how we partition the globe – in other words, the limits we set in terms of the temporal and spatial context of study.⁶⁸ Boris' conception of time and space is incredibly narrow. For him, history appears to begin in the mid-twentieth century which, with its series of dictatorships – 'Inquisition, Stalinismus, Faschismus' –, represents the unpleasant pasts against which today's present of 'neuen Freiheiten' supposedly brought with the 'advent' of Capitalism in post-Communist Eastern Europe represents nothing but historical progress (*Sturm*: 54). His conception of spatiality is equally narrow. For Boris, capitalism only 'arrives' in a specific locality once that locality has become a core centre of capitalist production; he thus remains oblivious to the historical globality of a capitalism that reaches beyond its immediate core and employs peripheral regions such as Gradow in its relentless pursuit of profit. In Boris' narrow conception of time and space, the uneven development characteristic of a global capitalism whose history reaches back to the mid-1450s is erased.

Veremej's novel, however, makes visible the violence capitalism and its proponents seek to obscure, thus demonstrating how 'literature [can negotiate] the inaccessibility of the means of production by offering the power to imagine that which is not apparent in one's immediate reality'.⁶⁹ Paradoxically, this global or planetary consciousness emerges from the excavation of world-ecological memory in a specific locality – that of the fictional Gradow. At a local level, Veremej imagines a Gradow in which the manufactured, sanitised, and wealthy spaces of Gradow's capitalist elite – the glass-walled *Paradies* complex in which Boris works or the new shopping centres proclaiming 'DAS EWIGE LEBEN' of its goods – sit alongside the dark alleys of the old town in which abandoned shops take on the appearance of fossils, and the poor 'Nachtmenschen' come to yearn for times past (*Sturm*: 44; 181; 179). Similarly, while the more well-off of Gradow live in the *Festung*, an elevated area renovated to attract tourists, Ivo's daughter, Ana, works in a children's home in the lower-lying settlement, where the

⁶⁶ Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat, 'Introduction', in *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*, ed. by Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat (Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2010), pp. 6-11 (p. 10).

⁶⁷ Deckard, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Moore, 'Capitalocene: Part I', p. 596.

⁶⁹ Deckard, p. 4.

inhabitants are impoverished and consequently condemned to living in cheaper housing located on the edge of the flood-prone riverbanks. The inequalities which plague Gradow's inhabitants are set against the destruction of Gradow's landscape, with the agricultural fields surrounding the settlement transformed into out-of-town shopping malls and the traces of human-induced climate change apparent in Gradow's slowly rising river levels.

Veremej does not stop there, however. Extrapolating beyond the locality, her narrative creates a global map of capitalism's slow violence against humans and their planetary environment by considering how the 'advent' of capitalism in one specific place (in this case Gradow) necessarily entails the exploitation of humanity and nature elsewhere as new sources of what Moore terms 'Cheap Labour' and 'Cheap Nature' in distant places are drawn into capitalism's commodity-producing web.⁷⁰ Thus, on Boris' office wall sits a map of the world in which he plots his company's next series of expansions into new, undiscovered markets (*Sturm*: 48). At the same time, images are beamed into Gradow showing queues of people at ATMs in Greece, and camps of refugee tents stretching along Europe's shores, inhabited by those fleeing wars, persecution, or economic, social, and environmental hardship (*Sturm*: 95). Gradow may be but one locality but it is simultaneously situated in what Moore terms capitalism's global 'web of life'.⁷¹ In this light, in imagining the present and historical effects of capitalism on the locality of Gradow, excavating the interconnections between localities in the age of the Capitalocene, as well as bringing to her readers' attention the forced mobilities that are a direct result of capitalism's world-ecology, Veremej simultaneously creates forms of local and planetary memory through piecing together capitalism's deleterious impacts on both human and extra-human natures.

An urgent warning: capitalism vs the climate?

Unlike a number of climate fictions, Veremej's *Sturm* is set firmly within our contemporary moment rather than in a dystopian future. In this, the world it charts retains a sense of familiarity for its readers and consequently serves to underline the urgency of responding to the shared existential crisis we can see unfolding before our very eyes now.⁷² Arguably, our contemporary moment presents us with dual, mutually constitutive phenomena: the threat that environmental limit-breaching poses to planetary life, and the threat it poses to capitalism as

⁷⁰ Moore, 'Capitalocene: Part I', p. 606.

⁷¹ See Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015).

⁷² See Trexler who argues that the temporal setting of many Anthropocene fictions in the distant future serves to alienate readers from the experiences they depict, as well as obscure the pressing need to act now, in their readers' present.

a world-system as the ‘Cheap Natures’ upon which its profits depend increasingly dwindle.⁷³ It is the dual limit-breaching characteristic of our shared twenty-first century moment which stands at the heart of *Sturm*. Apparent at the outset of the novel with Ivo’s initial concern about the health of the aging, symbolic plane tree, the impression that Gradow – and by extension the planet – is hurtling towards an unknown but sinister event that threatens utter destruction pervades the narrative. Ivo constantly dreams of being caught up in some form of unknown, local *Gefahr* that, from his imagined images of dried rivers, dead plants, floods, and earthquakes (*Sturm*: 208), obviously alludes to climate change. Indeed, the damp in his restaurant basement – which returns year after year is this time somehow different, more threatening: as his employee states ‘diesmal ist es anders, schlimmer’ (*Sturm*: 152). This warning comes immediately prior to one of the novel’s central events: Boris’ near-death experience when his car is crumpled by a combine harvester as he is texting at the wheel while driving through the agricultural periphery of Gradow.

In *Sturm*, Boris’ accident mirrors the trajectory of a capitalist global system rushing headlong towards its own demise. Driving through the hinterland of Gradow’s countryside, Boris disparagingly compares the ‘primitive’ local farming and the ‘stench like a cesspit’ with the ‘cleansed’ ‘kultivierte Landschaft, die [er] im Westen bewundert hat’ (*Sturm*: 124). It is as he is racing through the nature whose exploitation his lifestyle depends on that he is suddenly faced with his own mortality. Earlier in the novel, we find that Boris has been profoundly traumatised as a child by the death of a stray dog he befriends. The death of the dog, which bears an uncanny resemblance to a fox, causes Boris to obsess about his own mortality, paranoid that he will die before his parents (*Sturm*: 46-47). Tellingly, in the moments immediately before impact with the combine harvester, Boris believes he sees a fox springing from the path into the road (*Sturm*: 127). The animal – a symbol of death for Boris – represents perhaps the ‘revenge’ of extra-human nature after years of exploitation caught in the web of capitalism. This episode re-evokes memories of personal trauma – of his childhood obsession with his own mortality – that he has since attempted to repress by entering into the cleansed, unitemporal space of capitalist privilege also frequented by Roman in *BLO*. Boris’ belief in the rationality and technological capacities of humans to somehow avoid mortality is symbolised in how he felt as a child when his father first took him on a cruise liner: ‘Ihm schien, dass es an solchen Orten, wo jedes Detail, blank und fest, von zuverlässigen Menschen durchgedacht war, keine Krankheiten geben konnte. Kein Leiden, keinen Tod’ (*Sturm*: 126). However, as Boris’ near-death accident demonstrates, the sense of security and immunity from disease or pain is without foundation – the capitalist system which sells the idea of such

⁷³ Moore, ‘Capitalocene: Part II’, p. 279.

refuges to those who can afford to enter them is becoming just as precarious as the vulnerable ‘Cheap Natures’ upon which its survival depends.

Veremej sets up Boris’ accident as a symbol of the potentially decisive moment in the trajectory of planetary history: will this event – both for her characters and amongst her wider readership of the novel – facilitate a consciousness of the slow violence traceable in capitalism’s re-fashioning of the world-ecology and the human-nature relationship? Will this lead to the instigation of political activism to overthrow the inner workings of capitalism as an exploitative global system? Regarding the character of Boris, this seems to be a false hope; his accident appears to have made little difference to his outlook. Sitting in his wheelchair – described as a ‘Thron eines Herrschers’ – Boris sits across from his family, his ‘artige Untertanen’ (*Sturm*: 174), having become a heroic survivor of a brush with mortality. His response to his accident – and, by symbolic extension, the mortal peril faced by a global capitalist order in an age of environmental limit-breaching – demonstrates the same selective amnesia of responsibility that characterises his multinational company’s non-ethical, environmentally-damaging practice. Rather than opening his eyes to the reality of the existential threat posed to the climate by capitalism, and to capitalism by the ever-dwindling sources of Cheap Nature, his accident makes little difference to his erstwhile ethically-questionable attitudes and values.

Indeed, in the aftermath of his accident, Boris is faced with a court case that – due to his illegal use of a mobile while driving – he is likely to lose. In response, and through his father, Ivo, Boris bribes the impoverished farmer involved in the accident, Herr Kowal, into not mentioning his use of the phone. It is hardly controversial to assert that this kind of bribery takes place across the capitalist globe against any number of less privileged citizens. This overt exploitation of course often takes place away from the public eye making it an almost normalised, paradoxically openly hidden facet of the exploitative capitalist world-system. As a piece of world-ecological literature however, *Sturm* uncovers and renders comprehensible these usually hidden and very real local consequences of such exploitation. As the farmer’s wife recognises, the couple have no power in the face of the corrupt systems of local justice in which people can be bought off with money. Indeed, when their own son was killed by a drunk driver, they saw little justice – his death being marked by a small, ‘provisorisches Kreuz’ at the site of the accident (*Sturm*: 214). The word ‘provisorisch’ is of significance here. As Moore argues, the capitalist world-system thrives on ecological destruction, the most extreme form of which is human death.⁷⁴ That the farmer’s son’s labour can be seamlessly replaced by other sources of Cheap Labour makes his death insignificant to the capitalist

⁷⁴ Moore, ‘The Modern World-System’, p. 350.

system, symbolised in the ‘makeshift’ or ‘temporary’ nature of the cross which memorialises it.

For the farmer’s wife, this local incident – Ivo and Boris’ exercise of power – is but a symbol of the global inequalities permitted in the name of capitalist accumulation, in which capitalism is never in the wrong precisely because it writes its own rules – it creates its own ‘world-ecology’. She remarks disparagingly:

Natürlich, Diebe und Mörder, das sind immer die anderen, die Armen! Aber wie viel kann ein Taschendieb stehlen? Nicht vor den *armen Hunden* müssen wir uns fürchten, sondern von den Herren mit den weichen Händen und den schneeweißen Manschetten. Sie handeln immer nach den Gesetzten, aber diese Gesetze sind von ihren Anwälten gemacht. *Sie klauen nichts, sie machen Profite*. Äcker, Fabriken, ganze Länder verschwinden in ihren *bodenlosen Aktentaschen*. Ihrentwegen sind unsere Wiesen krank, unsere Milch ist bitter und wir können nichts tun gegen ihre Anwälte! (*Sturm*: 213, emphasis added)

There is much to be commented on in this short but densely rich paragraph. The labourers who work in the service of capitalism are referred to as ‘armen Hunden’, collapsing the human into the non- or extra-human and reflecting Moore’s definition of ‘Cheap Nature’ as all labour and resource commodities – both human and non-human – that are caught in capitalism’s web of exploitation. This inescapable web – symbolised in the quote above in the ‘schneeweißen Manschetten’ (note, again, Veremej’s reference to natural phenomenon in her choice of adjective) – dictates the lives of those it ensnares. Equally, the ‘bodenlosen Aktentaschen’ of these lawyers alludes to the process by which capitalism ensures its survival: the cyclical process of entering new, rich areas of Cheap Nature, exploiting all available resources until they have been depleted, and then moving on to new terrain, leaving destroyed local ecosystems in its wake. By encapsulating these abstract, complex, global processes in a fictional yet concrete and understandable daily-life situation, Veremej’s text succeeds in capturing and rendering visible the usually invisible workings of capitalist power and their socially and ecologically destructive consequences. It is through exploring the local, lived realities of this power – and Veremej’s allusions elsewhere in the novel to similar realities taking place across time and space – that she starts to build up a picture of the planetary impact of capitalism as a world-making system for her readers.

In the context of the overwhelming sense of inertia demonstrated by large segments of the population in the face of capitalism-induced climate change, it is worth, however, questioning to what extent Veremej’s attempts to evoke an awakening of consciousness amongst her readers may be in vein. Indeed, while comprehending the complex, planetary scale of the consequences of the Capitalocene is a necessary step in the fostering of a socio-ecological planetary consciousness, translating this consciousness into politically-inspired action presents an even bigger obstacle. In what follows, I consider how Veremej’s narrative voice

criticises her human characters for their oft melancholic, anthropocentric outlook in the face of existential planetary threats and how this close scrutiny serves to warn her readers of the dangers of remaining equally passive in our own lives.

Mobilising place e/affectively: the role of cultural products

Being aware of potential threats to one's locality, and by extension to the planet as a whole, is one thing. As Veremej suggests through her characters, however, taking action to mitigate these threats is another matter. Like Lena in *BLO*, Ivo is acutely aware of – and seemingly unconsciously plagued by – the economic, social, and mainly environmental changes he sees occurring in Gradow, yet the memory work he indulges in remains largely anthropocentric, melancholic, and temporally limited to events that have occurred in his own lifetime: the fall of Communism, for example. Unlike in *BLO*, however, Veremej's positioning of the place of Gradow and the socio-environmental changes it has undergone during the age of the Capitalocene as *Sturm*'s central narrative focus inescapably draws her readers' attentions to the ecological memory of the symbolic locality itself and, by extension, to the world-ecological memory of the planet. This raises a series of important questions pertaining to the role cultural products such as novels, poetry, and art can play in portraying, articulating, and rendering comprehensible complex and at times abstract situations or threats such as climate change as a by-product of the capitalist world-making ecology. In their imagination and portrayal of such threats, cultural products are equally capable of lending them a particular sense of immediacy and relatability that may be absent for readers who have been largely sheltered from their real-life adverse effects.

A richly intertextual novel, in *Sturm*, Veremej's portrayal of her character Ivo's interaction with Albrecht Dürer's sixteenth century engraving *Melancholia I* suggests how his rumination upon the meaning of this particular work of art jolts him – if temporarily – into a state of alert consciousness of the increasing fragility of local and planetary ecologies. Throughout the novel, Ivo's fleeting concerns for the ecological state of Gradow is largely characterised by a sense of melancholic inertia that results in his turning a blind eye to the ever more obvious signs of environmental distress. This attitude is encapsulated in the chapter significantly entitled 'Die Melancholie', whose events unfold temporally just prior to – and perhaps during – Boris' accident, yet narratively come after Veremej's readers have learnt of the crash. At the beginning of this chapter, Ivo is contemplating the engraving, which has hung in the office of his restaurant since he can remember. Tellingly, as the news of Boris' accident – of which the reader is already aware – is about to reach him, Ivo is literally engaging with/in 'melancholia' (the painting/feeling): just as his anthropocentric, melancholic retrenchment in memories of a

more familiar Communist past mutes his consciousness of impending environmental threat throughout the novel, so too is his consciousness of his son's brush with mortality preceded by the distraction of melancholia.

In the *Melancholia I* engraving, a melancholic human figure occupies the most prominent visual position. Scattered on the floor and mounted on walls are objects which can be seen to allude to the onset of capitalist modernity in what Immanuel Wallerstein termed the 'long sixteenth century' (1450-1640):⁷⁵ tools scattered on the floor, symbolising labour and technology; the compass in the hand of the central figure, symbolising capitalist imperialism's charting of the globe; the bag of money, symbolising capital and profit; the seemingly emaciated dog lying on the floor, alluding to 'extra-human' nature; and the bell and rapidly emptying hourglass attached to the wall, symbolising time running out. In the context of Moore's conceptualisation of the Capitalocene, it is not difficult to see how these symbols of capitalist expansion and of time 'running out' are relevant to Ivo's threatened Gradow – and by extension the planet – today. Throughout the novel, Ivo's anthropocentrism and melancholic inertia in the face of existing or impending catastrophe suggests that Veremej is drawing a connection between the central figure of this 1514 engraving and her character of Ivo, who, five centuries after the completion of this cultural artefact is equally paralysed by the consequences of capitalist expansion. In his own engagement with the engraving, Ivo indeed seems to recognise a connection between the temporal context in which this piece of art emerged and his present-day surroundings of Gradow. Bucking the trend of his usual anthropocentrism, Ivo's attention does not come to rest on his artistic alter-ego, however: in fact, he looks beyond the human figure and recognises the backgrounded settlement as the real centrepiece of the artwork, stating 'Aber gerade da [im Hintergrund] liegt der Fokus des Bildes' (*Sturm*: 151).

The settlement in the engraving is described by Veremej in very similar terms as she describes the town of Gradow: 'die kleine Stadt unter dem Kometen' in *Melancholia I* consists of 'das Ufer, der Baum und die Dächer und Türme', evoking Veremej's initial description of Gradow in *Sturm*'s opening pages (*Sturm*: 151; 9). From Ivo's present-day perspective – in which he (un)consciously worries for the survival of Gradow – Dürer's engraved town, threatened by the oncoming comet, somehow seems to speak to Ivo. In this context, Veremej's re-activation of this sixteenth century art work in a twenty-first century literary text clearly demonstrates *Melancholia I*'s relevance to the contemporary world. In textually activating this relevance, Veremej draws upon what Aleida Assmann may call the 'stored' memory of Dürer's engraving and, through its re-activation in a distinctly non-

⁷⁵ See Moore, 'The Modern World-System', p. 308.

national (con)text, starts to piece together a ‘functional’, place-based, world-ecological memory of capitalism’s deleterious impacts on the human and extra-human ecologies that make up our shared planet. For Assmann, cultural ‘functional memory emerges from a process of choosing, connecting, and constituting meaning’ from reserves of cultural ‘stored memory’.⁷⁶ It thus activates ‘stored’ texts and memories of the past in order to draw connections and evidence continuities between the past and present, and is selected based on its ‘relevance to a group [...], its relation to shared values and an orientation towards the future’, potentially fulfilling the purpose of present-day, communal identity creation based on shared values and common goals.⁷⁷ Ivo’s interaction with this German artwork in a temporally-removed, distinctly non-national context enables him to realise the danger with which Gradow – and by symbolic extension the planetary ecosystem – is faced. The world-ecological memory developed by Veremej through her re-activation of this artwork in a contemporary world-making novel gestures towards the potential emergence of new forms of consciousness and identification that are ultimately planetary in nature.

Melancholia I features in *Sturm* not only as an intertextual reference; the scene depicted in the engraving is replicated within the novel itself. When Ivo visits Herr Kowal again later in the narrative, the farmer is described as sitting with his elbows on his knees, his head in his left hand, looking out into the distance across the cornfields whilst a pair of plyers, a hammer, and a skinny dog lie on the floor around him (*Sturm*: 211). Having been bribed into silence by Ivo over the true circumstances of Boris’ accident, the melancholic farmer is apparently resigned to his fate in the global underclass created by the capitalist world-system. As his farm becomes increasingly less profitable and the peripheral, agricultural landscape surrounding Gradow is transformed into out-of-town shopping centres and other business developments, Herr Kowal half-heartedly considers following his neighbours who have moved abroad in search of work: ‘Unser Nachbar arbeitet in Deutschland, in einem Schlachthof, seine Frau putzt in Belgien. Andere arbeiten am Bau oder ernten in Italien Erbeeren, die man dann bei uns im Supermarkt verkauft’ (*Sturm*: 214). Herr Kowal and hundreds of others like him become the Cheap Labour upon whom capitalism’s web of global production depends, and whose lives are dictated and shaped by the flow of capital – and employment opportunities – towards capitalism’s core regions. Ivo, for his part, whilst distinctly uncomfortable in being faced with the daily struggles of the farmer against the structural violence of the capitalist system, nevertheless becomes an ‘implicated subject’ of this violence by buying the farmer’s silence and perverting

⁷⁶ Here, I am indebted to Astrid Erll’s reading of Aleida Assmann’s *Erinnerungsräume* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999): all English-language quotes here, translated from Assmann’s original German, are taken from: Erll, *Memory in Culture*, here: p. 35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the course of justice in favour of Boris.⁷⁸ Equally, he fails to recognise that this enactment of socio-economic violence and the immediate environmental precarity he became conscious of in his engagement with *Melancholia I* are mutually-constitutive consequences of the Capitalocene.

Apparently discomforted by his implication in an act of bribery which clearly exploits the socio-economic power imbalances created by the capitalist world-system, Ivo assuages his guilty conscience not by taking a stance against such inequality i.e. refusing to be complicit in Boris' bribery. Rather, he seeks solace – much to his own disgust – in the capitalist fictions pedalled by his son earlier in the narrative: “‘Das Leben ändert sich... und es wird auch immer besser’”, sagt Ivo ganz leise, wie für sich, als er in sein Auto steigt' (*Sturm*: 215). Set against the hospitality of the farmer and his wife who, despite having nothing, insist upon Ivo sharing their food and drink to toast their son's life, Ivo's half-hearted defence of the contemporary global order seems distinctly banal; it is a self-centred denial of his complicity in a distinctly unequal social reality. That Ivo does not believe in the fabled inherent good of capitalism professed by his son is evident throughout *Sturm*, primarily in his fleeting observations of the social, economic, and environmental inequalities visible in his Gradow locality. Nowhere is this more evident than after Ivo's second encounter with the farmer when he goes on a literal walk down memory lane and revisits particular places around Gradow that for him hold a personal, emotional connection. It is on this walk that Ivo begins to consciously register the environmental, social, cultural, and religious fragmentation that characterises twenty-first century Gradow and – by extension – our twenty-first century world. In other words, he begins to interact with the affective place of Gradow as a local symbol of shared, contemporary global and planetary phenomena.

Ivo revisits the site of his best friend, Adnan's grave, only to find that his body has been exhumed and reburied with his mother in the specifically Muslim graveyard – as the cemetery guard puts it: ‘am rechten Platz, unter den Seinen’ (*Sturm*: 217, emphasis added). On his way to the cemetery, Ivo recalls how on one particular street he and his father splashed in a well whose water was seemingly transformed by the sunlight into ‘fließendes Gold’. This same street is now bordered by ‘thirsty’ grass and bushes that are ‘ohnmächtig, erstarrt’ (*Sturm*: 215). The connection forged between a past in which water turned into flowing gold and a present characterised by parched plant-life gestures towards the employment and exhaustion of Cheap Nature – here, water – in the service of capitalist profit accumulation. A few pages later, Ivo comes across an informal marketplace, where the wearied vendors look ‘als wären sie Bettler’ (*Sturm*: 219). An old woman, selling red apples which look to Ivo as though they

⁷⁸ See Rothberg, ‘Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects’.

have ‘kleine Narben, [...] wie Wunden auf Menschenhaut’, encourages him to buy her products by pointing out that they cost ‘fast nichts’ (*Sturm*: 220). The anthropomorphic description of the ‘wounded’ apples draws a parallel between the destructive effect of capitalism on both humans and extra-human natures, while the fact that the apples cost ‘fast nichts’ underlines their status as further examples of Cheap Nature.

It is in this chapter, tellingly entitled ‘die Reise’ (into the planetary past?), that Ivo reengages with his memories of the local, embodied past of Gradow. From his current twenty-first century perspective however, both the place and his memories are overlaid with signs of the damaged local-yet-planetary Gradow of today. It is in this chapter in particular that anthropocentric memories become indistinguishable from those of the non-human place of Gradow – and by extension – largely planetary memories of a fractured world on the brink of ecological destruction. The lives of the farmer’s son and Adnan, for example, are – outside of limited human memory – evidenced only through marks on Gradow’s physical landscape: a wooden cross and concrete gravestone respectively. Just as the remembrance of these two young men rest upon the physical imprints made on Gradow’s landscape, so too – in the case of potential climate change-induced human extinction – will remembrance of the existence of humanity be evidenced only by the geological footprint they leave on an ecologically destroyed planet. For Ivo, this foray into his own and the local-yet-planetary memory of Gradow seems almost overwhelming: as the apple seller pours her wares into his car, Ivo is described as being ‘zu träge, um zu protestieren, der halbe Tag war so lang wie ein halbes Leben’ (*Sturm*: 220). In other words, he is too overwhelmed by the weight of his fleeting engagement with what Moore would term ‘world environmental history’ to protest the present state of mutually-imbricated local and planetary ecosystems.⁷⁹

As elsewhere in the novel, Ivo’s brief, conscious engagement with the traces of planetary memory evident in Gradow comes to end with his re-investment in the distraction of Mira’s research. After meeting him spontaneously in the park, Mira takes Ivo to a hidden room of the local church, in which she shows him a painting of the Black Madonna and reveals to him the ending of her narrative of the town’s founding. In her own words, she has attempted to universalise Gradow’s founding story by presenting it as an anthropocentric, tragic love story between Damir, the orphan boy who lives through the siege of the *Festung* and becomes Gradow’s youngest ever mayor, and Olga, the wife of *Hauptmann* Ottiz (the leader of the *Festung*’s defence), whose death is transformed by Mira into a legend of suicidal self-sacrifice (*Sturm*: 172). In Mira’s narrative, Olga is ‘pulled’ from the window by the supernatural force of the ‘gierig [...] weißen Schattenwesen’ of a bizarre mid-August snowstorm, as if her

⁷⁹ See Moore, ‘The Modern World-System’.

sacrifice is demanded by nature in return for the coming-into-existence of the town of Gradow. As Mira herself recognises, she originally set out to research the siege and eventual liberation of the town yet soon became more preoccupied with this supposed love triangle. In other words, her interest in place history soon became anthropocentric. Not only that, but she hints at the falsity of her findings, ultimately confessing to Ivo that her research was in fact a ploy designed to arouse Ivo's interest in her. Responding enthusiastically to Mira's attempt at seduction, Ivo is drawn in by a falsified yet comforting grand narrative of the town's 'legendary' founding which distracts him from the very real planetary, ecological history he flirts with throughout the narrative. This precise criticism of anthropomorphism in the face of ecological destruction is woven deftly throughout Veremej's entire narrative, defining *Sturm* as a piece of eco-critical literature.

Not only does Veremej criticise Ivo and Mira's anthropocentrism, however; her clever narrative also charges readers with potentially bearing the same human-centred outlook. In a chapter on Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*, Tim Clark argues that the novel's readership will be more easily drawn in and engaged by the human drama it contains than by the environmental and ecological concerns that are nevertheless woven into the narrative, leading him to question whether 'human imagination [is] really so depressingly enclosed, able to be captivated only by immediate images of itself?'.⁸⁰ In revealing the fictionality of Mira's anthropocentric research, which serves for Ivo as a welcome distraction from a threatening reality, Veremej achieves two things: firstly, she criticises the inherent self-centredness and inaction of Ivo; secondly, and by extension, she challenges her audience to reflect upon their own potential self-centredness. Has her reader been, like Mira and Ivo, sufficiently distracted by the human drama in the narrative to forget that the real protagonist of *Sturm* is Gradow itself – both as a local setting and symbolic marker of the planet as a whole? This is a significant question since the fact that the narrative of *Sturm* revolves around the fictional town of Gradow is key to the novel's revolutionary imagining of what may be termed 'planetary memory'. That *Sturm*'s setting has no 'real world' counterpart demands that its readers engage with the place of Gradow and with *Sturm* as a piece of literature as metaphorical places in and of themselves. That is, the text creates a place that lies beyond the 'real world' antagonistic order of separate nations and which, consequently, accurately portays the realities of our current twenty-first century world as ultimately shared, cross-boundary concerns. It is both subversive and true-to-life, offering us a new way to conceive of a shared planetary history that transcends national boundaries in its causes, implications, and necessity for a shared, communal response to its present-day consequences.

⁸⁰ Clark, p. 178.

What now?

It is in *Sturm*'s epilogue that the reader is faced with the potentially catastrophic environmental consequences of what may happen should we fail to heed Veremej's warning. At the end of the novel, Ivo's family are assembling in the *Festung* to celebrate his daughter Ana's birthday. The celebration is marred by an apocalyptic scene of carnage as Gradow's bridge – which connects the elevated *Festung* with the lower-lying part of the town, populated by Gradow's poorer population – is overcome by a flood:

Eine Lawine Kroch auf die Brücke zu. Autoreifen, Matratzen, Kinderwagen, Flaschen, Bildschirme, Sofapolster in einer Masse zähen ockerfarbenen Schlamms bildeten einen gigantischen Thrombus, hinter dem das gestaute trübe Wasser aus den Ufern trat und die Promenade hinaufstieg. (*Sturm*: 233)

The flood threatening Gradow and its inhabitants is described by Veremej as being caused by a build-up of capitalist consumer goods, which have eventually forced the river to break its natural banks and flood the bridge. Building a 'gigantischen Thrombus', these goods are swept into the power of the natural environment, with the raging river of goods now existentially threatening the locality of Gradow. As this scenario suggests, in an age of environmental breakdown, capitalism as a world-system – which for centuries has relied on the exploitation of Cheap Natures – is now confronting 'forms of nature that cannot be controlled by capitalist technology or rationality'.⁸¹ That capitalism has over centuries created a world-ecology whose negative environmental consequences have steadily increased in ferocity becomes ultimately apparent in this apocalyptic scene.

Ivo's reaction to the flood is particularly revealing. He is largely unconcerned for the fate of the lower-lying areas of Gradow since they are populated by its poorer residents, amongst whose numbers his family are not counted. However, realising that Ana is missing, Ivo enters into these vulnerable, flood-prone plains in order to look for her in the children's home where she works. On his way, he notices the remains of the giant plane tree: 'Da, wo die Platane stehen sollte, ragte ein morscher Stumpf aus dem Boden, der mächtigen Baumkörper lag daneben. Wann war das passiert?' (*Sturm*: 234-5). Symbolically, the destruction of this 'atmenden Genius Loci' (*Sturm*: 30) of Gradow – the ecological embodiment of its lived history – has gone unnoticed by its inhabitants. Meanwhile, although submerged by the flood, the town's bridge is still standing. At the beginning of *Sturm*, the plane tree and the bridge are described by Veremej as existing prior to the settlement and founding of Gradow by its human inhabitants, with the plane tree coming to represent over time the ecological life and history

⁸¹ Moore, 'Capitalocene: Part I', p. 598.

of Gradow as an embodied, inhabited locality. That the present-day flood has resulted in the fall of the plane tree and not the bridge is particularly significant. With the fall of the plane tree, Veremej seems to be alluding to the potential extinction of life in an ecologically-ruined locality or, by extension, planet. In this case, the physical structure of the bridge outlives not only the nomadic settlers that originally built it; it may potentially outlive the majority of all living organisms.

As Pieter Vermeulen argues, narrative in the age of environmental crisis ‘no longer only serves as a way of (cognitively) organising and emplotting human experience, but also as a way of (affectively) apprehending the end of possible human life’.⁸² While Vermeulen focuses on writing in the age of the Anthropocene however, I argue that Veremej’s text understands our current age more so through Moore’s definition of the Capitalocene, as ‘a system of power, profit and re/production in the web of life’ that wages violence against human *and* extra-human natures.⁸³ That is, she understands our current age of environmental breakdown as a severe by-product of a capitalist world-system which simultaneously entrenches forms of economic and social inequality. While she gestures in *Sturm* at the ultimately planetary consequences of climate breakdown, she nevertheless highlights that the consequences of environmental degradation are initially borne most heavily by those same individuals and living organisms that are already exploited and rendered vulnerable by the workings of capitalist power. Indeed, as Ivo descends into the lower-lying flatlands of Gradow, he notices how ‘je weiter er in die Siedlung vordrang, desto enger und krummer werden die provisorischen Straßen, desto tiefer die Schlammfüßen.’ (*Sturm*: 235). Gradow’s poorer population living in the low-lying, most exposed, and badly constructed housing – fashioned from wood, corrugated iron, and plastic – are the first to be affected by the very local effects of a planetary ecological system stretched to its limit by the capitalist world-system. As is the case worldwide, those most disenfranchised by the capitalist world-system are often also those most at risk of falling victim to the climate change-induced disasters that are equally created by and through this same system. In *Sturm*, Veremej suggests that avoiding the extinction of life on planet Earth necessarily and inescapably involves overthrowing the capitalist world-system which enacts violence against both the human and extra-human natures that make up local and planetary ecosystems.

While it would be easy to charge Veremej with a fatalistic attitude due to the almost apocalyptic nature of *Sturm*’s ending, this would be a rash analysis. A more nuanced reading of Veremej’s novel would suggest that she does not feel that all may be lost: *Sturm* is more a

⁸² Pieter Vermeulen, ‘Future Readers: Narrating the Human in the Anthropocene’, *Textual Practice*, 31 (2017), 867-85, (p. 868).

⁸³ Moore, ‘Capitalocene: Part I’, p. 595.

call to arms, an interpellation for her readers to act against the prevalent injustices forged by a capitalist world-ecology that is also rapidly bringing our planet to its knees. Indeed, Veremej's novel is based upon the notion of cyclicity: the breakdown of one era and the commencement of a new. In light of this, Veremej is perhaps alluding to the possibility that – in its rapid exhaustion of sources of Cheap Nature – capitalism is hurtling headlong towards its own destruction. Are we as readers and members of a shared planetary community going to sit passively by as it takes the rest of our natural world with it? Or, rather, will we act to ensure that at the end of this old era we can forge a new social order which will restructure the social, economic, and environmental conditions of both our local places and our shared place/planet, Earth? Most importantly, do we still have the time to do so?

Conclusion

Berlin liegt im Osten and *Nach dem Sturm* are both clearly concerned with how transnational events affect specific, rooted places and their inhabitants in our increasingly connected globe. In this, they both represent interventions into what Stuart Taberner calls the 'literary archive of transnational trauma' in their joint consideration of transnationalism as a lived reality, of how conflict and inequality encourage movement across borders, and in how they 'excavate, narrate and record transnational histories of conquest and colonisation'.⁸⁴ However, the memory work evidenced in the two novels mobilises 'place' in very different ways and ultimately yields very different results. In *BLO* – due to its distinctly German setting – 'place' is inescapably seen by what it, and the memories it holds, are and are not nationally. The local place of Berlin remains a distinctly national space in spite of its distinct and clear implication in global flows and power structures. Veremej's protagonist, Lena, succeeds in challenging dominant German discourses of remembrance by performing transnational memory work which positions her own Soviet and Herr Seitz's East German memories against 'liberal' Germany's apparent firm belief and entrenchment in the capitalist economy. However, although the novel at times engages with the slow violence of the capitalist world-system, the memory work evidenced by Lena remains distinctly national and largely anthropocentric. As a result, the cross-boundary problems alluded to in *BLO* – climate change and the social and economic injustices perpetuated through the capitalist world-system – are not fully graspable as truly historical, world-making processes which create inequalities within nations, not just between them. The remit of the novel remains in

⁸⁴ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 61

this manner temporally and spatially limited and fails to engage with the truly planetary scale of the threats which permeate the text.

Sturm on the other hand is, I argued, a prime example of world-ecological literature, a text of the Capitalocene. By placing the fictional, non-national place of Gradow as the protagonist of the novel, Veremej crafts a text that is far from anthropocentric. In *Sturm*, Gradow is constructed as a simultaneously local yet symbolically planetary place. In other words, the place-based memory work evidenced in *Sturm* uses the local place of Gradow as a lens through which to read the complexities, paradoxes, and global power structures of capitalism as a world-making ecology. In this ‘cartographic fiction’, Veremej maps the contours of capitalism’s ‘web of life’ through a narration whose references stretch back to the 1400s and whose remit stretches across the globe to encompass the truly planetary conditions of life in the twenty-first century.⁸⁵ In excavating the effects of capitalism’s long history of exploiting Cheap Natures in one typical locality (Gradow) and by situating this one place within the context of capitalism’s truly global reach, Veremej starts to construct a planetary, world environmental memory that inherently transcends the problematic nationalism of *BLO*. By moving beyond the nation, Veremej is able to map the truly uneven nature of a capitalist world-system which forges inequalities within as well as between nations. Veremej’s *longue durée*, supra-national approach thus succeeds in introducing ‘a different analytical fabric, throwing into relief trajectories and connections that might otherwise have been obscured’.⁸⁶ By simultaneously rooting her narration in a specific local place and successfully transcending this place by illuminating its links to the planetary, Veremej mirrors the phenomenon of climate change which, as Amitav Ghosh argues, creates ‘continuities of experience’ which ‘defy the boundedness of place’.⁸⁷ The catastrophic flooding at the end of *Sturm* proves a forceful reminder that we, as twenty-first century world citizens, need to recognise that we must equally ‘defy the [imaginary] boundedness of place’ if we are to provide the necessary response to the capitalist world-system that existentially threatens the one place/planet we all share – Earth.

⁸⁵ See Deckard; Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*.

⁸⁶ Wai Chee Dimmock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 4.

⁸⁷ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 62.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: A New World-making Literature? – Rewriting the Relationship between Place and World

In this thesis, I have sought to develop an original theoretical account of the relationship between place and memory, locality and world and have used this framework as a means through which to read five examples of contemporary German-language literature written by authors born in the former Soviet Union. The analysis undertaken has suggested that even in an age of accelerated globalisation, agents' interactions with local places and the memories contained there are integral to the creation of new constellations of transcultural memory. In response to criticisms which lament Memory Studies' lack of rigorous engagement with notions of 'rootedness', in an original theoretical move this thesis has drawn upon Human Geography concepts of 'place' in order to productively demonstrate that transculturality and rootedness are not antithetical concepts – a recognition that appears to be overlooked by many scholars of memory. Memory's travel across borders ultimately consists of its detachment from one specific place or context and its re-rooting in another. It is this dual process of the travel and re-rooting of memory in local places that has been the focus of this thesis. I have suggested how applying theorisations of 'place' in Human Geography to the study of memory is an ultimately productive means through which to explore what we may term place-based memory's rooted transculturality. This novel, interdisciplinary approach provides a framework through which we can re-imagine the relationship between the local/particular and the world/universal and understand how rooted individuals draw upon memory in processes of place-making, identity-formation, and collective-building that are equally transgressive of their immediate locality.

Focusing on five examples of contemporary German-language literature, I have explored how their authors challenge – and often re-write – nation-centric narratives of the past in a manner that newly cosmopolitanises time, history, and memory. In other words, their novels not only track the spatial cosmopolitanisation of the contemporary globe but, more radically, they both excavate and newly enact a cosmopolitanisation of temporality that Ulrich Beck judges to have been consistently 'bracketed out' of analyses of contemporary cosmopolitanism.¹ By reading these novels through the new theory of place-based memory developed in this thesis, my analysis has revealed their status as examples of a potential new world-making literature which holds up a mirror to the fragmented, contemporary world in which they are written and excavates the memorial connections between distant localities in the name of envisioning new, more worldly forms of consciousness. The imaginative leaps

¹ Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 76.

and connections made by the authors of these novels bring together apparently disparate places and memories, undermining reified notions of nationality, ethnicity, and culture, hence gesturing towards the possibility of affiliation with Others both within and across constructed borders. I have suggested how in their themes, content, and concerns, the literature analysed in this thesis is distinctly ‘of the world’. That is, these authors not only successfully decentre the nation as a concept and structuring principle of social life; rather they also begin to imagine new forms of worldliness that write the nation out of the equation entirely. Though written in the German language, the ‘worldliness’ displayed in these texts confirms that they should not be defined as works of ‘German literature’ per se, nor should their position in the literary system be dictated by their relation to or distance from the national canon.

Works by migrant authors are indeed often placed in a peripheral position vis-à-vis the cultural output of the nation in whose language they are written. This thesis has demonstrated that literature by such authors may need reconceptualising and re-centralising in their status as prime examples of what Elke Sturm-Trigonakis has termed ‘New World Literature’. ‘Perform[ing] polycentric spaces that simultaneously contain, in reality or virtually, other (urban or other) places’, this literature ‘explores globalized living conditions through the dynamic between globalism/transnationalism and regionalism/localism by sketching fictional persons, settings and times.’² Sturm-Trigonakis’ conception of ‘New World Literature’ certainly sketches out a framework through which we can recognise forms of place-making and place-transcending literary creativity such as those demonstrated by the authors analysed in this thesis. However, these authors not only successfully write the spatial dimension of the globalised, geographical world; they also capture the temporal dimension of our shared historical world. In this context, the world-making literature analysed in this thesis does not only concern itself with the spatial conditions of the contemporary globe; it is also concerned with mapping its temporal dimension i.e. excavating how past events have got us to where we are today. Sturm-Trigonakis’ characterisation of ‘New World Literature’ as literature that maps the exclusively spatial, present conditions of the contemporary globe perhaps overlooks this second facet of world-making literature. By bringing together the disciplines of Human Geography and Memory Studies, the theoretical framework developed in this thesis is capable of recognising how works of world-making literature such as those analysed here can explore and even re-write both the spatial and temporal conditions of the contemporary moment. The widening of Sturm-Trigonakis’ definition of ‘New World Literature’ to include the temporal dimension is vital since I have argued that it is these

² Sturm-Trigonakis, p. 188; p. 186.

texts' mobilisation and re-writing of place-based memories as part of a shared, worldly memorial inheritance which invites a recognition of the Self as part of an equally worldly community of consciousness in the twenty-first century moment. Place-based memory, in the world-making literature analysed in this thesis, is past-, present-, and future-oriented and therein lies its ultimate potential for inspiring the necessary collective responses to increasingly global threats.

Summary and interpretation of analysis

Chapter one of this thesis set out the theoretical premises upon which its argument is based. It situated this research within the context of a complex and contradictory twenty-first century moment in which the opening out towards an increasingly global world is matched by a seemingly paradoxical closing of borders and concomitant rise in nationalistic sentiments. In light of this contradiction, it posed the question of how we can overcome this resurgence of nationalism in order to build new cross-boundary collectives that are capable of responding to the ultimately global threats of the 'World Risk Society'. As a potential cornerstone of identity springing from the oft romanticised notion of possessing a shared past or shared past experiences, I considered memory to hold huge potential in this regard. Surveying recent scholarship on travelling memory, this chapter showed how reconceptualising memory as transnational or transcultural allows for the illumination of previously unrecognised connections between geographically-distant narratives of memory across national borders. Yet, I argued that in this focus on mobile memories, scholarship in Memory Studies overlooks an equally – if not more – important characteristic of memory; namely its rootedness in specific places and contexts at specific times. I demonstrated how this oversight is detrimental to the discipline in a number of significant ways: firstly, it overlooks the vital importance of place in processes of memory- and identity-creation in local, daily contexts; secondly, it marginalises those memories that do not reach global attention and consequently remain hidden from view; thirdly, its abstractness fails to evoke in individuals the emotional, affective response necessary to conceive of oneself as belonging to a collective that extends beyond one's immediate surroundings; fourthly, it fails to account for the individual, their personal memories, and how these memories are adapted as their agents move from place to place. Indeed, for the majority of the world's population, being 'in place', or 'rooted' – however temporarily – is the norm, and it is this sense of being in place which gives individuals a concrete point of reference from which to conceptualise their own personal connection to communities of belonging beyond this immediate context.

In an original theoretical move, I argued that applying concepts of ‘place’ from the discipline of Human Geography to the study of memory would serve to circumvent these limitations and provide a more robust, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary approach to the questions posed in this thesis. Indeed, ‘place’ in Human Geography is conceptualised as an embodied, affective arena of human-made meaning. Engaging with particular places thus implies engaging with the place-based memories contained there and – by extension – with the agents to whom these memories belong. In this framework, the connective potential of affective places (of memory) is made clear and their status as local, concrete arenas of meaning to an extent counter the inherent abstraction of Memory Studies’ focus on travelling memory. The contribution of this Ph.D. lies in its interdisciplinarity, through which conceptual and theoretical resources from different scholarly fields have been combined in a novel way and applied to the study of contemporary German-language literature written by migrants to Germany.

In Chapter two of this thesis, I considered the status of literature as a memory device and its function in the creation or re-creation of transcultural memory. Engaging with debates surrounding the marginalisation of German-language literature written by migrants to Germany and their descendants vis-à-vis the German national canon, I argued that the novels analysed in this thesis cannot simply be categorised as works of ‘minority’, ‘intercultural’ or ‘migrant’ literature. Rather, I suggested that they are examples of an emerging world-making literature that just happens to be written in the German language. I suggested that their inherent worldliness comes from their engagement with, and re-writing of, place-based memories in a distinctly transcultural or world context. I argued that their reconfiguration of the relationship between place/locality/the particular and the world/the distant/the universal not only demonstrated an ability to think beyond the nation – instead, it wrote the nation out of the equation entirely.

Chapter three provided the first chapter of close reading, analysing two novels by Olga Grjasnowa: *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012) and *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (2014). These novels consider the political status of the individual citizen in the globalised twenty-first world. In this, they thematise what Ulrich Beck has recognised as the forced ‘cosmopolitanization’ of society, which he characterises as an unwanted and unanticipated side-effect of processes of globalisation that have bound nations together in a state of inextricable interdependence.³ In an age of ‘non-state centered post-international risk politics’,⁴ the reduction in the nation-state’s power to independently protect its citizens from

³ Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, pp. 33-34.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 36.

threats that are now largely global in nature has, however, not always resulted in the enactment of more cross-boundary, cosmopolitan forms of governance. Rather, it has often led to the tightening of borders as nations have sought to protect their own self-declared interests against rhetorically-constructed outsiders. In Grjasnowa's novels, this contemporary predicament results in an increasing polarisation between those privileged enough to possess citizenship of relatively secure and prosperous European nations and those less privileged but equally mobile individuals who are denied entry into such nations as unwanted migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. I argued in this chapter that *Russe* and *Ehe* are both about places and, specifically, about what happens when particular individuals move from one place to attempt to settle in another. In *Russe*, Mascha's travel between specific localities serves to underscore the enduring importance of particular places as material reminders of the past traumas that have occurred there. Mascha's rooted, place-based excavation of particular narratives of memory and the connections this fosters with equally traumatised individuals in these localities stands in direct contrast to the oversimplified narratives of 'global' memories – such as the Holocaust – which are presented as travelling too easily. In *Russe*, such narratives become but abstract tropes that fix an individual's identity by their expected relation to a particular traumatic memory due to their supposed membership of a particular national or ethnic collective. The transcultural, place-based memory work presented in *Russe*, which illuminates the heterogeneous, real-life significations of traumatic memory for a variety of global individuals, undermines the prevalence of the nation as a primary source of identity and begins to imagine ways of being-in-common that circumvent sovereign borders.

In *Ehe*, meanwhile, Grjasnowa's protagonists' travel between specific places is marked not by an engagement with place-based memory but rather by its selective erasure. I argued that performing a comparative close reading of *Russe* and *Ehe* illuminates Grjasnowa's critical appraisal of the inequalities of the twenty-first century globalised world, as well as of those individuals who feign ignorance of their privilege and thus sustain the damaging status quo. This selective forgetting – of both present privilege and the historical circumstances which led to this privilege – allows Grjasnowa to present engagement with place-based memory as an ethical imperative and to position amnesia as a form of complicity in present-day structural violence. In *Ehe*, the selective amnesia indulged in by Grjasnowa's protagonists erases in this manner the fact that their privileged transnational lifestyles are premised upon their alignment with ultimately exclusionary and often violent national norms. It is these same norms – negotiated with ease by the materially privileged Leyla and Altay – that have very real and often devastating political, social, economic, and even mortal consequences for

those individuals who are judged to fall short of their standards. As Susan Suleiman reflects upon the historical memory/forgetting of the Holocaust:

To forget is human, but amnesia is an illness – or worse still, an alibi. The question can then be formulated as follows: If forgetting is salutary as well as inevitable, both individually and collectively, under what conditions does it become a reprehensible amnesia?⁵

Grjasnowa appears in her novels to pose a similar question regarding the (non-)remembering of all forms of historical trauma in that her protagonists' selective amnesia not only fails to memorialise past forms of violence but in fact, as a direct result, creates the context for the perpetuation of this violence in the present-day. Set against the political cosmopolitanisation of the twenty-first century globe, place-based memory is mobilised by Grjasnowa to counteract such reprehensible amnesia of forgotten traumas and to draw attention to the unequal conditions of life in our current moment. In this manner, she opens up a dialogue surrounding the potential of memory to inspire global political collectivity, even if she does not quite succeed in imagining what form this may take nor how we could ever avoid systematically privileging certain lives over others.

The text analysed in chapter four of this thesis, Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014), moves from a consideration of the potential of politically-inspired cosmopolitan collectives to explore the possibility of a form of ethical cosmopolitanism which may find its origin in discourses of human rights inspired by the (Jewish) memory of the Holocaust. In this chapter, I theorised in more detail the connective potential of particular places of memory by drawing on Aleida Assmann's work on 'places of trauma/traumatic sites' and combining her insights with scholarship from Human Geography which theorises the symbiotic relationship between individuals and the daily places they inhabit. Coining the term "traumatised places", I argued that memory not only resides at specific memorial sites dedicated to the remembering of particular past traumas (as in Assmann's 'places of memory/traumatic sites'); it is also found in otherwise mundane localities which have borne witness to past traumas but where daily life has nevertheless continued. I considered how, in Human Geography scholarship, places are considered to be palimpsestic, affective arenas that contain traces of the past events that have occurred there and the lives of their past inhabitants. In *Vielleicht Esther*, the protagonist's mobilisation of familial and historical knowledge, affect, and imagination allowed her to situate her own familial past in the context of a wider, human story of trauma at these shared, palimpsestic traumatised places. Through processes of 'queering ethnicity' – whether through employing a language that is

⁵ Susan Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 217.

not one's own, performing co-operative cross-boundary memory-work with local Others, or practicing what I termed a place-based "subjunctive modality of remembrance" – I argued that the narrator succeeds in mobilising located memory in such a way as to undermine reified national narratives of the past and to situate the memories embodied in the traumatised places she visits within new constellations of ultimately human memory.

The memory work engaged in by *Vielleicht Esther*'s protagonist is, I suggested, best categorised as a form of rooted cosmopolitanism, in which her mobilisation of particular, personal memories at particular, local traumatised places provide her with both a point of reference and the necessary emotion with which to conceptualise the universal significance of the ultimately human memories in evidence at these locations. Engagement with place-based memory becomes a means by which to move affectively closer to the Other's memories and to foster a sense of collective responsibility for their remembrance. In a way, I argued, the excavation of the past at a particular place becomes a form of not just familial but human duty. In a chapter on *Vielleicht Esther*, Hannah Tzschentke takes inspiration from Ruth Klüger's consideration of place in her autobiography *weiter leben* to express a similar contention: 'Generationen erleben unterschiedliche Formen des gleichen Ortes. Deshalb ist es die Aufgabe der Nachfahren, die die ursprünglichen Existenzform eines Ortes nicht kennen, von den Leiden, die an dem Ort geschehen ist, zu berichten.' For Tzschentke, this is less about the preservation of the place itself; what should be foregrounded is 'vielmehr die Erinnerung an die Geschichten der Menschen, die dort eingesperrt und ermordet wurden'.⁶ It is interesting here that while familial connection may provide the initial impulse to excavate and share a place's past (it is the duty of 'Nachfahren' to report on the previous happenings of a place), what are to be ultimately excavated are the stories of people (*Menschen*) – from a personal, familial impulse comes a place-based archive of human experience and loss. In this vein, I argued that in *Vielleicht Esther* Petrowskaja gestures towards an ethically-inspired form of cosmopolitan collectivity which commemorates past traumas and the loss of human life as impetuses to prevent further instances of human rights atrocities in the present-day. Place-based memory is mobilised in *Vielleicht Esther* to re-write the events of the catastrophic twentieth century as a shared past for which we all must bear responsibility and which should impel those of us with the privilege to do so to speak out in defence of the most vulnerable members of our global society who are at risk of becoming the subject of future memories of trauma.

Chapter five of this thesis performed a comparative reading of Nellja Veremej's two novels, *Berlin liegt im Osten* (2013) and *Nach dem Sturm* (2016). I argued that Veremej's novels

⁶ Tzschentke, p. 283

take the transcultural, place-based memory work demonstrated in Grjasnowa's and Petrowskaja's novels one step further by locating specific, local places of memory within a world-ecological history or memory of the planet. Both novels are recognisably set in our contemporary moment, in which the scale of environmental degradation is reaching unprecedented levels. In *Berlin liegt im Osten*, the seemingly peripheral references to climate change remain but a distraction to the distinctly anthropocentric memory-work undertaken by its protagonist, Lena. Lena succeeds in mobilising the memory-saturated place of Berlin in order to affectively relate to the memories of her East German charge, Herr Ulf Seitz, in the process performing at times potentially scandalous, cross-boundary migrant interventions into what is otherwise a distinctly ethnic German memoryscape. Yet, she fails to engage in any meaningful way with the structural, slow violence of the capitalist world-system thematised by Veremej in *Berlin liegt im Osten*'s underlying level of narration. In setting her protagonists' solely anthropocentric concerns within a context of planetary ecological destruction, I argued that Veremej suggests how the oft human-centred nature of memory prevents a thorough excavation of forms of ecological memory that extend beyond individual human lifespans.

In this chapter, I suggested how introducing and applying the concepts of the 'Anthropocene' and the 'Capitalocene' to an analysis of Veremej's novels allows us to clearly understand the differential ways in which place-based memory is mobilised in both texts. While the anthropocentric memory narratives that emerge in *Berlin liegt im Osten* can be read in light of the former concept, I argued that Veremej's excavation of unmistakably world-ecological place-based memory makes it a prime narrative of the Capitalocene. I suggested that when read in conjunction with one another, Veremej's novels demonstrate the danger of taking refuge in comforting yet anachronistic, anthropocentric, and nationally-bound narratives of the past in an era in which fostering a sense of collectivity across national borders is essential for our survival in an ecologically threatened world. Drawing upon Sharae Deckard's theory of 'world-ecological literature', I suggested how *Nach dem Sturm* mobilises place-based memory in the name of cognitively mapping the local-yet-planetary effects of the capitalist world-system on both human and extra-human natures. In this manner, I argued that Veremej mobilises place-based memories of world-ecological history to connect the particular (locality) with the general (planet). The world-ecological or planetary memorial narratives which emerge in *Nach dem Sturm* are borne of a thorough excavation of the effects of a global capitalist world-system on the fictional locality of Gradow. I concluded that Veremej's focus in *Nach dem Sturm* on a particular local-yet-planetary place and her *longue durée* approach to the world-making system of capitalism illuminates historical connections that may otherwise have been overlooked, creating a new

narrative of truly planetary world history and memory. Set in the context of looming environmental disaster, Veremej's texts – particularly *Nach dem Sturm* – call for what might be termed a form of realistic cosmopolitanism. For Veremej, such a cosmopolitanism appears to originate within eco-political collectives that seek to understand and overthrow late capitalism in the name of saving our planet and – in the process – improve the social, material, and political conditions of those living beings most vulnerable to the inequalities of this same system.

In its consideration of memory in an age of environmental threat, this chapter also suggested how this thesis' original application of Human Geography concepts of 'place' to the study of memory holds further scholarly potential: namely, in providing a framework through which to bring together the disciplines of Memory Studies and Environmental Studies. As Stef Craps has recently recognised, memory scholars have rarely directly engaged with questions of the environment, nor have they successfully managed to move 'beyond anthropocentric modes of cognition and representation' or from 'the transnational, transcultural or global to the planetary; from recorded to deep history; from the human to the non-human'.⁷

Conceptualising particular places as bearers of world-ecological memory both decentres Memory Studies' anthropocentric tendencies and provides a theoretical point of convergence ('place') for the disciplines of Memory and Environmental Studies. In the context of the 'Capitalocene', by focusing on the *longue durée* slow violence inflicted upon nature (of which humans are but an inseparable part) by the capitalist world-system we start to piece together a world environmental memory which accounts for all local places that form part of our ultimately shared planetary 'place' – Earth. The theoretical framework developed within this thesis productively re-conceptualises how the discipline of Memory Studies can develop a necessarily less anthropocentric, planetary perspective.

'Worlding a world': re-configuring the relationship between 'place' and 'world'

What connects these five pieces of contemporary German-language literature is their reconfiguration of the relationship between 'place' and 'world' via memory. This is achieved largely through their consideration of the connection between how individuals come to construct past and present attachments and identities in and with particular local places and how, extrapolating from these affective points of reference, they come to foster more 'worldly' forms of consciousness – and this without necessary mediation by the reified national frame of reference. Excavating place-based transcultural memory serves in these

⁷ Craps and others, p. 3.

texts as a means by which to uncover the false predominance of the national as *the* frame of social reference – a frame that, as Ulrich Beck has recognised, only gained traction during the nineteenth century.⁸ By mapping the connections between distant, local places (of memory) in the twenty-first century, these texts re-normalise historical world interconnectedness and cosmopolitanise the past whilst also suggesting at what is different or specific about the global interdependence of our current era in the context of the ‘World Risk Society’.

In an era of increasingly global threats, it may not be enough to speak of the potential for collective action to provide equally global responses if this just serves to replicate the unequal status quo of the capitalist world-system. Rather, our present moment calls for a radical re-imagination of how we can act both individually and collectively to bring into being (a) new world(s) that is premised upon values of social equity, planetary ‘being-in-common’, and preservation of our already damaged environment. As suggested by the title of Ursula K. Heise’s 2008 *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*, such a radical re-imagination of the world and of our individual role in this re-conceptualisation is likely to originate in response to the more visible, material conditions of our immediate surroundings: our local place, the metaphorical ‘world’ we inhabit on a daily basis. This sense of what may be termed a form of rooted moral imperative is similarly captured by Ulrich Beck in his assertion that in our interconnected twenty-first century moment:

Place, whether it be Manhattan or East Prussia, Malmö or Munich, becomes the locus of encounters and interminglings or, alternatively, of anonymous co-existence and the overlapping of possible worlds and global dangers, all of which requires us to rethink the relation between place and world. [...] Themes of global importance are [today] becoming an integral part of the mundane experience and the ‘moral lifeworlds’ of human beings.⁹

The place-based memory work presented in the texts examined in this thesis attempts to perform such a re-thinking of the relationship between place and world by examining past and present forms of global trauma which are both located in place yet transcend their geographical moorings in their historical causes and past and current consequences. By re-writing particular traumatic memories as world legacies for which we are all, as shared guardians of our common planet and its living organisms, ultimately responsible, these texts evoke a sense of moral obligation to ourselves, to others, and to our environments.

In these novels, local places are not simply geographical containers statically located in the world (and in the global systems of power that contour this world). They are, more radically,

⁸ Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10; p. 72.

re-imagined as productive sources of affective local-and-world belonging which, when engaged with in all their transcultural complexity, provide the psychical material for the imagination and eventual bringing-into-being of new worlds. In Olga Grjasnowa's novels, the engagement with past and present forms of political, economic, and social inequality both within and between particular localities across the globe calls for a re-imagining of the world in line with a political cosmopolitanism that recognises and seeks to aid those living less privileged forms of existence across borders – impoverished migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. In Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*, interaction with traumatised places as locations of ultimately human suffering suggests at the re-imagination of a world premised upon a form of ethical cosmopolitanism in which we bear responsibility for the prevention of human suffering at all costs. In Nellja Veremej's novels, this focus on the human is scaled-up to encompass all forms of organic life on Earth. Particularly in *Nach dem Sturm*, engagement with the ecological consequences of the capitalist world-making system on particular localities brings home the truly planetary scale of environmental destruction, calling for the making of a world inspired by a form of realistic, planetary cosmopolitanism.

The interpenetration of locality and world in the transcultural places imagined by these authors is the defining characteristic that allows us to conceive of their potential as the geographical origin of imaginable, collective forms of cosmopolitan consciousness. It is through engaging with and re-writing the memories of specific, local places as shared, transcultural, human or planetary legacies that these texts attempt to bring into being new ways of conceiving of a new cosmopolitan world in which we collectively take responsibility for these legacies or face the dire, traumatic consequences of non-action. In subverting nationalistic, territorial definitions of local places and mapping the connections between distant localities in our interconnected twenty-first century moment, these authors begin to contour the outline of a world that exists beyond its conception as a mere geographical collective of separate nation-states – that is, of the world as community, a point of shared consciousness and identity.

How then does this re-writing of place/world through memory allow us to see these five texts as examples of world-making literature, as I argue they undoubtedly are? Directly addressing this question, Rebecca Walkowitz reminds us that:

Literature makes worlds as well as enters into them. That place may be an outcome and not simply a context of the literary work has to change what counts as world literature, to be sure, and also how we count it.¹⁰

¹⁰ Rebecca Walkowitz, 'Close Reading in an Age of Global Writing', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 72 (2013), 171-95 (p. 172).

This attempt to ‘world a new world’ through the re-writing of the relationship between place and world is, I would argue, what makes these texts prime examples of world-making literature in Pheng Cheah’s sense of the term. For Cheah,

We should [...] understand world literature as literature that is *of* the world, something that can play a fundamental role and be a force in the ongoing cartography and creation of the world instead of a body of timeless aesthetic objects.¹¹

Arguing against the reduction of ‘world’ to a category of spatiality, Cheah defines the world as ‘a form of relating, belonging, or being-with’ and argues that the capitalist world-system undermines the sense of world community invoked in this definition through the conflation of ‘world’ and ‘globe’ as purely spatial realms for the circulation of goods.¹² Seeing the world as a primarily temporal category, Cheah argues, is imperative in order to counteract capitalism’s cartographical mapping of the world as a purely spatial realm. World-making literature’s force thus lies in its engagement with the world as a temporal phenomenon that is always in a state of change, of becoming, and of its active intervention in this process of ‘worlding’ in the name of reminding us what exists before and beyond the individual. As he reminds us, ‘without this opening [of a world] that puts all beings into relation, we would not have access to other beings and no value could be formed’.¹³

By exploring the supra-local significance of place-based memory, the literature analysed in this thesis not only engages with and tracks the development of the world as a temporal category. Rather, in their re-writing of these place-based memories as transcultural legacies, these novels enact a form of ‘worlding’ by bringing into relation narratives, places, and individuals that have previously been constructed as unconnected, separated by reified borders of nationality, ethnicity, or cultural and religious belief. ‘We can only create normative value if we exist in a world with other beings and have access to them’ and it is without a doubt that the portrait of our unequal, globalised yet increasingly closed twenty-first century moment painted in these five examples of contemporary German-language literature attempts to give readers such access to the lives, experiences, and traumas of near and distant Others in an attempt to open up new forms of worldly ‘being-in-common’ whose affective dimensions are contoured by our immediate, emotional relationship to the memories and places which define our own lives.¹⁴

¹¹ Cheah, p. 42, emphasis in original.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Thesis contribution, implications, and directions for future research

In this thesis, I have drawn upon disciplinary frameworks from the fields of Memory Studies, Human Geography and World Literature in order to develop an original theory of place-based memory which I have applied to my reading of the German-language texts analysed. This analysis has gestured towards the emergence of a new form of world-making literature, defined by its reconfiguration of the relationship between place and world via the medium of memory. As I will discuss presently, this cross-disciplinary approach has enabled this thesis to productively intervene in the disciplines of both Memory Studies and World Literature. Firstly, this research has sought to address the shortcomings of current Memory Studies research on transnational and transcultural memory by theorising how the application of Human Geography scholarship on ‘place’ can account for memory’s tendency to remain ‘rooted’ in place as well as to travel. This original approach widens the remit of Memory Studies by 1. providing a framework through which to understand how individuals develop a sense of individual and collective identity in conjunction with their own personal memories and the places that they inhabit and 2. elaborating a point of theoretical convergence between the disciplines of Memory Studies and Environmental Studies (namely, ‘place’) so as to understand the potentially productive role memory may play in thinking through the existential threat of climate change – a link that had yet to be successfully made in current Memory Studies’ scholarship. I demonstrated how recognising that memory is located and mobilised in place by local agents to imaginatively construct forms of affective memorial belonging that reach beyond their immediate locality is key to conceptualising the as yet unrecognised link between memory and environmentalism. If memory is mobilised in place as a means through which to imaginatively construct and affectively relate to progressively larger scale, metaphorical ‘places’ (of memory), the logical end-point of this scaling-up ultimately culminates in the largest-scale place imaginable – our shared planet. In this manner, the re-conceptualisation of the relationship between memory and place performed in this thesis provides a theoretical framework through which to conceive of the relationship between memory and environmentalism.

Applying the theoretical framework developed in this thesis to the study of these novels serves to highlight their originality as being simultaneously place-based, place-transgressive, and ultimately place-and-world-creating. The analysis undertaken in this thesis has, secondly, gestured towards the emergence of a new form of world-making literature. I have explored how these texts employ memory as a means to reconceptualise the relationship between place and world in our current historical moment, as well as how they attempt to shape forms of world consciousness that are transmitted to a twenty-first century public through the medium of literature. By reading these novels as works which attempt to write

and bring into being the world(s) we need or want to make real, this thesis contributes to an understanding of world literature as an active, potentially revolutionary force which attempts to intervene in and shape the creation of new worlds and new ‘form[s] of relating, belonging, or being-with’.¹⁵

In this light, this thesis contributes in an original manner to understandings of world literature in two primary ways: firstly, by linking world literature to place and place-making; secondly, and related to the first, in linking forms of place-making in world literature to the emergence of a new ethical perspective towards the Other which is grounded in the notion of futurity – of how we can work together to make a better world to-come. Following Cheah and Spivak, I have drawn a definitional difference between the oft-conflated terms ‘globe’ and ‘world’ and, in defining the latter as a primarily temporal category, have gestured in my analysis of the selected literary texts towards forms of place- and world-making that occur within and across the scales of our contemporary globe. In examining how these forms of co-operative place-making result in the ethical imagination of new forms of future-oriented, cosmopolitan collectivity, this thesis has considered the role that a world-making literature temporally situated in the ‘definitive future [anterior]’ can play in the ‘depoliticization of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come’.¹⁶ Importantly, this thesis has grounded the somewhat abstract notion of future collectivity in the past and present-day structural violence that should inspire its realisation through its theoretical anchoring in the discipline of Memory Studies and its rigorous consideration of the ethical potential of engagement with, and re-writing of, place-based memory. World-making literature, in the terms of this thesis, is equally past-, present- and future-oriented.

Thirdly, in this thesis I have applied this original theoretical premise to the study of contemporary German-language literature that is yet to receive much – if any – scholarly attention. In examining how this literature interacts with, explores, and re-writes narratives of place-based memory in their global/world/planetary significance, I have claimed that these novels not only question but – more significantly – bypass or erase the national frame of reference. In this, I have argued that they should not be seen as ‘minority’, ‘migrant’ or ‘intercultural’ German literature but rather that they form part of a new canon of world-making literature that just happens to be written in the German language. This recognition and contribution to the discipline of Literary Studies has been facilitated through my original choice of case studies which brought together new and closely related literary texts written in the German language, and through my theoretical approach to these texts as examples of a

¹⁵ Cheah, p. 42.

¹⁶ Spivak, *Discipline*, p. 6; p. 13.

new world-making literature which is characterised by forms of cultural circulation with no clear (national) centre.¹⁷ The analysis undertaken in this thesis contributes to scholarly discussions regarding the need to re-conceptualise what we consider to be world literature, as well as the imperative to avoid the automatic categorisation of literature vis-à-vis its relationship to the supposedly national canon of the language in which it is written.

The contribution made by this thesis to the disciplines of Memory Studies and (World) Literary Studies has numerous implications for scholarly practice in both fields and certainly indicates the need for future research in order to build upon the groundwork laid down here. Taking firstly the discipline of Memory Studies, the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis suggests that taking inspiration from the social sciences (in this case, Human Geography) would provide a more comprehensive approach to the study of memory: namely, in helping to account for how ordinary people draw upon both personal and collective memories in everyday contexts to order and make sense of their lives, identities, and relationships in a rapidly evolving and expanding world. How we understand the past comes to bear hugely both on the identities we build for ourselves in the present day, as well as upon the relationships we build with the places we inhabit or pass through and the people with whom we share these social spaces. The conclusions drawn from this thesis suggest, in this light, at place-based memory's ultimate potential as a cultural resource that may be mobilised in the name of reconceptualising the historical interconnectedness of the place and world (and their populations), as well as for understanding what is comparatively different and specific about twenty-first century interconnectedness.

For Ulrich Beck, the realisation of a cosmopolitan world or collectivity rests upon a cognitive integration of past, present, and future – that is, of the ‘construction of presently experienced future threats resulting from the self-endangerment of civilisation’ and ‘by imagining a transnationally shared past which takes on concrete form in the dialectic of memory and forgiveness’.¹⁸ As suggested in this thesis, only a Memory Studies discipline that rigorously engages with both the present state and past complexity of rooted yet interconnected, transcultural places can begin to account for the ways in which average individuals succeed or struggle to perform this integration. Indeed, as demonstrated in the fifth chapter of this thesis, personal, place-based memory has the potential to be a vital and much needed resource in terms of individuals’ recognition and comprehension of, and mobilisation against, the planetary threat of environmental destruction, for example.

¹⁷ See Lital Levy and Alison Schachter, ‘Jewish Literature/World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational’, *PMLA*, 130 (2015), 92-109 (p. 93), who argue that ‘Jewish Literatures’ similarly ‘present a model of cultural circulation with no clear center’.

¹⁸ Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, p. 78.

Noticing how our own local habitats have changed and, in many cases, deteriorated even in our own lifetimes and understanding this to be a consequence of a historical, exploitative capitalist world-system brings home our ultimately shared past, present, and future in the context of climate change. In this manner, the conclusions reached in this thesis suggest that further research needs to be undertaken within the discipline of Memory Studies in order to explore the potential of place-based memory as a valuable cultural resource that can be productively incorporated into Environmental Studies.

As for the discipline of Literary Studies, this thesis has cautioned against approaching specific pieces of literature as (not) belonging to the supposed national cultural canon in whose language they are written. Indeed, I have argued that the texts analysed are not examples of German literature per se; rather they are works of world-making literature that are written in the German language. This is of course not to say that they do not also engage with or productively intervene in debates on German memory and identity that have often been thematised in the German-language canon. This is particularly the case in *Berlin liegt im Osten*, which can be read as contributing to discussions surrounding, for example, German perpetration, the memorialisation of the Holocaust and the notion of *Ostalgie*. Yet, the interventions made by these novels into distinctly ‘German’ memorial discourses must necessarily be put into the context of their engagement with and creative re-writing of various supposedly ‘national’ memories as ultimately intertwined transcultural or even world or planetary memorial legacies.

In this thesis, I have focused on how the authors under study have begun to reconceptualise the relationship between place and world through re-imagining and rewriting narratives of transcultural memory. As acknowledged in its introductory chapter however, the texts grouped together in this thesis may elsewhere be pertinent points of study firstly for research on the question of German and/or transnational Jewish identity and Jewish literature in the twenty-first century, and secondly for an exploration of the relationship between sex, gender, and memory/identity-making (given that all the authors under study in this thesis are female). While such questions are beyond the scope of this thesis, I will briefly outline how the texts analysed in this thesis may be approached from such angles, beginning with the question of contemporary Jewish identity.

Two of the three authors whose works I have analysed in this thesis, Olga Grjasnowa and Katja Petrowskaja, are part of an increasingly numerous group of authors who were born in the former Eastern Bloc to Jewish families and now live in Germany and write in German.¹⁹

¹⁹ See chapter one of this thesis for more on the ‘Eastern Turn’ in contemporary German-language literature.

As recognised by Maria Roca Lizarazu, many of these young authors are beginning to write texts whose focal point is less that of the spectre of the Holocaust and more so the development of new transnational Jewish identities in contemporary Germany that are not nationally or ethnically-based.²⁰ Olga Grjasnowa's work is, I would argue, characteristic of such a shift in focus. Yet, if anything, Petrowskaja's search for her familial history in *Vielleicht Esther* moves back towards the memory of the Holocaust as both origin story and as a memory which should impel us to foster cosmopolitan collectives across borders in the name of 'Never Again'. How these authors differentially relate to and mobilise the memory of the Holocaust from a present, transcultural perspective raises interesting research questions pertaining to the link between Jewish memory and the emergence of complex and multi-faceted narratives of transcultural and cosmopolitan memory that call for further scholarly attention. Elsewhere, these texts would prove fruitful points of analysis in exploring the connection between Jewish literature and World Literature,²¹ and, related to this, assessing the purported correlation between Holocaust memory and world literary value.²² In the former context, Lital Levy and Allison Schachter have argued that Jewish Literature is in fact 'a microcosm of world literature in its local and global iterations' because Jewish writing 'cannot be understood as a single unified or national literature' and because it 'circulates and produces new social meanings in transnational and multilingual contexts'.²³

Similarly, in this thesis, I have argued that Olga Grjasnowa and Katja Petrowskaja's texts cannot be understood as pieces of German literature but, rather, are pieces of a new world-making literature that is written in the German language. Interestingly, out of the five novels analysed in this thesis, only two have been translated into English (and/or other European languages) since their original publication: Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*, meaning that they have entered global circulation and can be read in new contexts by readers of other languages. Any further research which approaches these texts as pieces of Jewish literature may consider why these particular two works have been translated in the context of this connection between Jewish/World Literature and the suggested correlation between Holocaust memory and the attribution of world literary value to a text. This is particularly pertinent in light of the fact that

²⁰ Lizarazu, p. 169.

²¹ See Levy and Schachter who have argued convincingly for the connection between Jewish Literature and World Literature, arguing that Jewish literatures from the eighteenth century onwards embody many of the key ideas informing world literary discourse.

²² This link is explored by Pieter Vermeulen, who argues that 'Holocaust memory is a key constituent in conversations through which world literary value is currently being produced'. See: Pieter Vermeulen, 'New York, Capital of World Literature? On Holocaust Memory and World Literary Value', *Anglia*, 135 (2017), 67-85 (p. 78).

²³ Levy and Schachter, p. 93; p. 95.

Grjasnowa's second novel, *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, which is less obviously concerned with questions of Jewish identity in post-Holocaust Germany/Europe and was released the same year as Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*, has not yet been translated. It would be worth reflecting upon the seemingly opaque criteria by which particular works are deemed to have world literary value based upon their content or aesthetics, as well as how this obscures other forms of literary 'worldliness' from view.

As regards the question of gender and memory, the texts analysed in this thesis raise interesting questions pertaining to the role of women as agents and bearers of memory. Traditionally, women have long been associated with the domestic, family sphere and, as such, have been seen as the bearers of familial memory. In German-language literature, the popular and much studied genre of the 'Familienroman', 'Familienchronik' or 'Generationenroman' produces autobiographical narratives that embed family histories in the history of the German nation, linking private, familial memory with the national context:²⁴ the post-war German family after National Socialism becomes the *lieux de mémoire* for German national memory.²⁵ If women are the agents and bearers of familial memory and familial memory in turn becomes the space in which national memory can be explored, created, and worked through, where does this leave the authors explored in this thesis whose memory work is distinctly transcultural? Arguably, Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* in many ways shares characteristics with the German 'Familienroman' in that the narrator uses familial memory as a way to explore wider sociocultural and historical realities at a more accessible, familiar level.²⁶ However, this exploration of familial history and memory, far from simultaneously constructing a sense of German national memory, adopts a distinctly transcultural perspective towards the memory of the Holocaust.²⁷

In this context, it is perhaps pertinent to ask what, if any, is the relationship between gender and transcultural memory – that is between gender and memory that emerges beyond the confines of the nation? As Anna Reading recognises, little research has been undertaken

²⁴ See, for example: Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); *Deutsche Familienromane: Literarische Genealogien und internationaler Kontext*, ed. by Simone Constagli and Matteo Galli (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010); Meike Herrmann, *Vergangenwart: Erzählen vom Nationalsozialismus in der deutschen Literatur seit den neunziger Jahren* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2010); Anna Souchuk, 'Forward: Special Collection: Reading between the Bloodlines: Reflections on the German -Language Family Story', *Modern Languages Open*, (2017) <<https://www.modernlanguagesopen.org/articles/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.135/>> [accessed 15 July 2018].

²⁵ Fuchs, p. 4; p. 12.

²⁶ See Souchuk.

²⁷ See Lizarazu, p. 169, who similarly remarks upon *Vielleicht Esther*'s simultaneous adherence to and divergence from the German genre of the 'Familienroman'.

which explores the potential existence of such a connection in any great detail.²⁸ On the basis of the books analysed in this thesis, I would argue that a future research project may in fact suggest that a simplistic connection between gender and (transcultural) memory is in the process of being undermined. Progress is being made in the deconstruction of rigid, norm-imposing categories of sex, sexuality, and gender even if this progress is unevenly distributed in societies across the globe. Similarly, I would argue that the novels in this thesis, while all written by female authors, are neither defined by this fact nor suggest at any implicit link between being female and the responsibility of bearing memory. Rather, I would argue, they suggest at the breaking down not just of national memory but also of reified social and cultural ‘norms’ of sex and gender, as well as the expectations that come with such categorisations. From the overt queering of gender, sexuality, and the heteronormative nation and national memory in Grjasnowa’s *Ehe*, to the transcultural approach to family memory evidenced in Petrowskaja’s *Vielleicht Esther*, to the female and male protagonists (of memory) in Veremej’s *Berlin liegt im Osten*, through to the novel, non-anthropocentric bearer of memory – the place of Gradow – in Veremej’s *Nach dem Sturm*, these novels break down rather than reconstruct any form of relationship between gender and national and/or transcultural memory.

In his recent monograph *Transnationalism and German-language Literature in the Twenty-First Century*, Stuart Taberner argues of contemporary German-language literature that it ‘rarely thinks beyond the nation, elaborates a genuine cosmopolitanism, or “worlds” a world, to use Pheng Cheah’s intentionally normative term’.²⁹ However, I have suggested that the particular texts analysed in this thesis succeed in re-writing the relationship between local and supra-local/world contexts without necessary mediation by the national. That is, they not only think beyond the nation; they largely succeed in writing it out of the equation. Furthermore, they do begin to envisage forms of ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ that spring from an affective engagement with the memories, places, and people in our immediate spheres of contact, and through this arguably envisage ‘new form[s] of relating, belonging, or being-with’: that is, they do envisage the possibility of new ‘worlds’ in Cheah’s sense of the term.³⁰ These insights were made possible through focusing on the micro-level of human existence – the local places we affectively inhabit – that are often overlooked in theoretical investigations in the field of Memory Studies. If literature can be seen as ‘a medium for observing the production of cultural memory’,³¹ then perhaps, based on the literature

²⁸ Anna Reading, *Gender and Memory in the Global Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²⁹ Taberner, *Transnationalism*, p. 305.

³⁰ Cheah, p. 42.

³¹ Erll and Rigney, p. 113.

analysed in this thesis, we can be somewhat hopeful that new memorial narratives are emerging that are less nation-centric, more open, and which suggest a more cosmopolitan attitude towards those we have previously defined as 'Other'.

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