

Hybrid Memorial Culture: Moving Beyond Rigid Interpretations of Ukrainian Memorial Culture  
at Babyn Yar.

by

Alicia Ward  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2022

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and X̱wsep̓səm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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## **Abstract**

As the most recognizable symbol of the Holocaust in Ukraine, Babyn Yar's culture of memory has long been of interest to Western scholars of history and memory. Despite this interest, little has been done to approach Ukraine's post-Soviet Holocaust memorial culture through a postcolonial lens. Once a silenced memory subsumed into the broader Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War, memory of the Holocaust only officially entered Ukraine's mnemonic space in 1991. At the core of the existing scholarship over how Ukraine has approached the memory of the Holocaust is what Michael Rothberg has referred to as a logic of scarcity. This logic assumes that the emergence of other previously banned memories such as Stalin's man-made famine, also known as the Holodomor (1932-1933), and the anti-Soviet activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), have automatically pushed memory of Holocaust out of the mnemonic space. Scholarly literature targeting English-speaking audiences has utilized this competitive logic, following an assumption that post-Soviet Ukrainian presidents have continued the Soviet culture of denial, while simultaneously suggesting the presence of wide-spread ethnic nationalism introduced by the state. This thesis contends that Holocaust memory in Ukraine is more complex than the rigid binaries articulated in previous literature. By taking a postcolonial and multidirectional approach to Babyn Yar's official and non-governmental memorial culture, this project demonstrates that a new humanistic and hybrid model of Holocaust memory has developed in the post-Soviet space; a model that is neither the former Soviet culture of denial, nor an overall reinterpretation of the past. Rather, it is a new model of memory that blends the intersecting and multiple layers of memory at Babyn Yar.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is dedicated to the examination of the evolution of Ukraine's Holocaust memorial culture up to the present moment through a case study of Ukraine's most prominent Holocaust memorial site Babyn Yar. Western literature dedicated to the study of Babyn Yar as a site of memory tends to approach Ukrainian memory politics through a competitive lens, often emphasizing the state's failure to adopt a European framework for Holocaust memory, and the lack of commemorative space dedicated to the Nazis' attempted destruction of the Jewish population. These studies often divide Ukrainian memory into the Soviet and post-Soviet period. On one hand, they highlight the Soviet method of commemorating their triumphant victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, and the universalization of civilian suffering that suppressed the Holocaust's specificity. On the other, attention is paid to the post-1991 attempts to cultivate an ethnic national memory that adopts new, and previously taboo subjects into Ukrainian cultural memory. Despite the value of these previous works on Ukrainian memory studies, they have facilitated a rudimentary and divisive understanding of how both the Soviet and national memorial cultures operate in the post-Soviet memory space, and the numerous factors that have hindered the transition towards post-Soviet cultural memories. Moreover, sources written in English shape an inaccurate illusion that after 1991 the deeply embedded Soviet war memorial practices were immediately replaced by nationalist memory politics. Inspired by Ukrainian historian Andrii Portnov's assessment of the impact of the Soviet and nationalist cultural memories in Ukraine, this thesis analyzes the interaction and fusion of the above-mentioned models of memory, as well as the role of Jewish memorial culture at Babyn Yar. Through this analysis we can see that Babyn Yar's memorial culture has evolved since 1991 into a dynamic memorial space, one that has developed from the interaction

between the different models and layers of memory.

At the same time, this thesis seeks to respond to the broader question of how to properly commemorate the events that took place at Babyn Yar and during the Holocaust in Ukraine. In doing so, my research will discuss several conflicts that have arisen in the public sphere over how to commemorate Babyn Yar, and highlight how Ukraine continues to navigate questions around memorializing the darker chapters of the twentieth century in the face of Russian aggression and foreign pressure.

### ***Historical Background***

Today, Babyn Yar is infamously known as the largest site of mass execution during what has become known as the Holocaust by Bullets. However, Babyn Yar's story began long before the Nazis' invaded Ukraine in 1941. The historical territory of Babyn Yar and the surrounding region was previously composed of a multi-ravine system, running through modern day northwestern Kyiv. Due to its natural resources and defined slopes, the site often served as a protective barrier in battles dating back to the Kyivan Rus period (9th to 13th centuries).<sup>1</sup> By the mid-twelfth century, local land development saw the territory become home to the Church of St. Kyrilivska, which was subsequently followed by the development of an eponymous monastery, various charitable centers, medical institutions, and cemeteries for different religious groups to bury their dead. Kyiv's Jewish community began to access the land near the end of the 19th century, with Kyiv's local authorities approving the allotment of several plots of land to build a Jewish hospital and the Lukianivka Jewish Cemetery, on the condition that the sites were funded by the Jewish community itself.<sup>2</sup> During the early phases of the Soviet regime, the institutions

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<sup>1</sup> Mykhailo Kalnytskyi, "Babyn Yar in Time and Space," in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 5-7, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Kalnytskyi, "Babyn Yar in Time and Space," 19. Over the following years, cemeteries for the Muslim and Kariate communities were created nearby.

and cemeteries previously created slowly began to be repurposed for the needs of the new order, leading to the Jewish cemetery closing altogether in 1937.<sup>3</sup> Today, the legacy of the Soviet interwar period generates radical counter-memories at the site. A small fringe group of Ukrainian writers have argued that before the Holocaust, victims of the Holodomor, Stalin's man-made famine that claimed the lives of an estimated 3-3.5 million Ukrainians during 1932-1933, and the victims of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) throughout the 1930s were buried en masse at Babyn Yar. Mykhailo Kalnytskyi in his research on Babyn Yar's history throughout time has debunked these claims, pointing to evidence that Babyn Yar and the surrounding region was slated for the extraction of raw materials, as well as a site for leisure activities. Although no evidence supports claims of the Soviet regime's victims being buried at Babyn Yar, many victims were in fact buried in the nearby Bratske cemetery.<sup>4</sup> Arguments over the identity of the so-called first victims at Babyn Yar highlight not only the complex nature of memory, but also the challenging task of navigating questions around the memorialization of the events that took place in what Timothy Snyder has coined the "Bloodlands."<sup>5</sup>

As previously mentioned, Babyn Yar is best known for the Nazis' mass shootings of Kyiv's Jews during the German occupation between 1941 and 1943. On 29 and 30 September 1941, members of the German special-execution squad, Einsatzgruppe C, shot 33,771 Jews after they were rounded up and escorted to the ravine by the local police.<sup>6</sup> Mass shootings, body-dumping, and the attempted destruction of evidence continued at the site until the Red Army liberated Kyiv in November 1943. In addition to local Jews, thousands of civilians, including Roma, the mentally and physically disabled, members of the Organization of

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<sup>3</sup> Kalnytskyi, "Babyn Yar in Time and Space," 26.

<sup>4</sup> Kalnytskyi, "Babyn Yar in Time and Space," 29. Before the invasion of the Soviet Union, Babyn Yar was slated to become home to a new ski and leisure center.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140.

Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) and other groups deemed undesirable by the Nazis were murdered at Babyn Yar. While the exact numbers of victims is not entirely clear, scholars place the number of victims at Babyn Yar around 100,000.<sup>7</sup> As the Red Army started to advance on Nazi-occupied territory in 1943, the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) issued orders for all evidence of Nazi crimes to be destroyed. Paul Blobel, former commander of Sonderkommando 4a and key orchestrator of the Babyn Yar massacre in 1941, tasked his deputy SS Strumbannfuhrer Hans-Fritz Sohns with gathering teams to destroy mass grave sites and oversaw the establishment of two units: 1005a operating out of Kyiv starting mid-August 1943, and 1005b operating out of Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) in late August 1943.<sup>8</sup> Using old tombstones from the former Jewish Cemetery, 1005a consisting of Soviet POWs from the nearby Syrets camp, joined by members of 1005b on 10 September, constructed a series of “funeral pyres” to unearth and burn the remains of the victims. The process continued until 30 September 1943. Although several prisoners managed to escape, on 30 September 1943, the Germans killed the remaining workers and ended their activities at Babyn Yar.<sup>9</sup>

After the brutal Nazi occupation of Kyiv, new layers of memory at Babyn Yar continued to develop. With liberation, the Extraordinary State Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes (ChGK) had begun investigating crimes committed during the Nazi occupation, including those committed at Babyn Yar. However, it quickly became clear that despite the overwhelming evidence of the Nazis’ racial policies and extreme brutality, the Soviet authorities had no intention of memorializing Jewish victims specifically. While the ChGK’s original 1944

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Naimark, “The Many Lives of Babi Yar,” *Hoover Digest* no. 2 (2017): 177, <https://www.hoover.org/research/many-lives-babi-yar>.

<sup>8</sup> Karel Berkhoff and Dieter Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 267.

<sup>9</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 268-269. Between September 28 and 29, 1943, over a hundred prisoners tried to escape after dark. Only 15 survived.

draft on the crimes committed in Kyiv acknowledged the massacre of Jews at Babyn Yar, the final report underwent a series of revisions by the Propaganda and Agitation department of the party's Central Committee in Moscow, with the ethnic component of the crimes being fully omitted and all of the victims were labeled as "peaceful Soviet citizens."<sup>10</sup> The Soviet policy of universalization of the Nazis' civilian victims was a result of a series of factors, and although this thesis does not seek to explore the full practice of Soviet memory politics, it is useful to highlight two important features. First, due to recent memories of Soviet violence and repression, the return of Soviet rule was not universally celebrated. To draw the support of Ukrainians, the government sought to present itself as liberators and defenders, utilizing the ChGK's investigation documents to emphasize the crimes committed against Ukraine by the "fascist bandits," and to underscore the Nazis' suppression of Ukrainian culture.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, despite the powerful Great Patriotic War commemorative culture that would develop in the 1960s, in the early post-war period there was an overall ambiguity towards civilian non-combatants who had suffered and died during the war.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the war itself was less significant in Soviet memory politics, with Soviet leaders opting to avoid the less flattering aspects of Stalin's approach to Nazi Germany and the early phases of the Nazi invasion. Rather, it appeared easier to move forward from the past. For example, by 1947, the 9 May celebrations for Victory Day were drastically reduced, and state propaganda was shifted towards promoting rapid reconstruction of the post-war state.<sup>13</sup> This push to leave the war in the past and favour state reconstruction can be seen in Kyiv's city officials' decision to transform Babyn Yar into a large industrial dumping zone for the nearby Petrovsky brick factories. This practice continued from

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<sup>10</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 348.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018), 90.

<sup>13</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory*, 89.

the 1950s until 13 March 1961, when the years of dumping culminated in a devastating mudslide that flooded a large swath of land, killing numerous civilians in its wake.<sup>14</sup> Following the mudslide, authorities continued to launch projects for a new urban landscape, leading to the former ravine and adjacent cemeteries (Jewish, Karaite, and Muslim) either being built over or outright destroyed.<sup>15</sup> The large historic Orthodox Christian cemetery nearby was closed but remains protected as a place of historical and architectural heritage. Today, ongoing alterations to the physical topography of the site plays an important role in understanding the many layers of memory at Babyn Yar, further underscoring the complex nature of Babyn Yar as a symbol of Ukrainian memory. At the same time, it would be wrong to suggest that there was no desire on the side of Ukrainian authorities to commemorate the violence that had taken place at Babyn Yar. Almost immediately after liberation, the local authorities commissioned the city's chief architect Oleksandr Vlasov to construct a memorial at the ravine, with support for the project lasting until 1947.<sup>16</sup> The decision to abandon Babyn Yar's memorialization was a result of a series of factors, but scholars tend to agree that it was due to an overall increase in state antisemitism, which culminated in Stalin's anti-cosmopolitan campaign leading up to his death in 1953.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1960s, memory of the Great Patriotic War came to feature prominently in the Soviet memoryscape. Official discourse on the war emphasized the triumphant victory of the Soviets over the "fascist bandits," creating little space for civilian casualties, and solidified the unique experience of the Jews being subsumed into the latter category as just another example of the Nazis' brutality. As a result, Babyn Yar became a site also marked by an emerging culture of

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<sup>14</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 308.

<sup>15</sup> Vitaliy Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar: A Place of Memory in Search of a Future," in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 394.

<sup>16</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 350.

<sup>17</sup> Andrii Portnov, "The Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, ed. Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, and Tatiana Zhurzhenko (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 350.

counter-memory, featuring memory activists drawing attention to the failure of the authorities to acknowledge the Holocaust. This period in Babyn Yar's long history is by far the best studied in western academia, with an emphasis on the role of Soviet literary activists and their works including Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem *Babi Yar* and Kyiv-born Russian writer Anatoly Kuznetsov's novel *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*. In response to the increasing counter-memorial culture at Babyn Yar, the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR) issued a resolution on 5 July 1965 titled "About Holding a Closed Competition for the Creation of Designs for a Monument in Honour of Soviet Citizens and Captive Soldiers and Officers of the Red Army Who Died at the Hands of the German-Fascist Occupiers during the Occupation of the City of Kyiv."<sup>18</sup> This resolution resulted in a series of failed competitions starting in December 1965, with officials rejecting submitted drafts based on alleged failures to capture the essence of the war, and in several cases, accusing designers of promoting Zionist propaganda.<sup>19</sup> These competitions should be understood as the state's attempt to control the nature of memory by creating an alternative to the counter-memory that was taking shape at the site.

During the 25th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre in September 1966, counter-memorial activity peaked with nearly a thousand Jewish and non-Jewish activists gathering at the site. Community members and literary activists, including Soviet writer Ivan Dziuba, gave speeches and called for Babyn Yar to be officially commemorated, while urging Ukrainians to fight against antisemitism. Following a series of arrests and persecution of the rally's attendees, a granite obelisk was erected between Dorohozhytska and Melnikov streets with an inscription that read: "A monument will be erected here to the Soviet people who were

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<sup>18</sup> Iryna Klimova, "Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting," in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 354.

<sup>19</sup> Klimova, "Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting," 357.

victims of the atrocities of fascism during the temporary occupation of Kyiv in 1941-1943.”<sup>20</sup> Reacting to unsanctioned rallies, authorities also began their own annual commemorative events at Babyn Yar, which were initially designed to suppress grassroots rallies and regain control over the mnemonic space. Attendees of the official commemorations listened to a series of speeches intended to reinforce Soviet ideology and propaganda, continuing the process of effacing the memory of Nazi racial policies and the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup> Nearly a decade after the commemorative marker was placed at Babyn Yar, officials unveiled a large bronze monument in 1976. Although this was an important symbol for the memory of Babyn Yar, the monument's design continued the Soviet process of universalization by putting men, some of them in Soviet uniform, at the front of the statuary. The memorial was dedicated to the “peaceful Soviet citizens” on a granite stone at its base.<sup>22</sup> Its construction established the dominance of the Soviet memory model over the memorial space.

More consequential for this thesis is how Babyn Yar has been shaped as a symbol of the Holocaust in the post-Soviet Ukrainian memoryscape. Just a month after Ukraine declared independence, authorities commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre and marked the beginning of a slow, sometimes halting, process of integrating the memory of the Holocaust into the deeply rooted war memorial culture. The defining moment of this milestone in Ukrainian memory came with Ukraine’s soon-to-be first president, Leonid Kravchuk, publicly acknowledging the importance of remembering Babyn Yar’s Jewish victims and their unique position in the Nazis’ genocidal policies and condemning past Soviet policies that had

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<sup>20</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 354.

<sup>21</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory*, 176. Antisemitic repressions continued throughout the Soviet period and as a response, Soviet Holocaust sites of memory (including Babyn Yar) saw increasing protests and unsanctioned commemorations.

<sup>22</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 357-358.

silenced Babyn Yar's memory for decades.<sup>23</sup> Shortly after the 50th anniversary, various non-governmental groups and members of civil society started to seek representation at the site for their "own" victim groups. With the newfound freedoms in the cultural sphere, Ukrainian, Jewish, and nationalist (not to be confused with official Ukrainian) memory models were for the first time allowed to enter the physical space, bringing attention to the existence of several layers of memory, and sometimes contested memory, at Babyn Yar. Due to the emergence of differing memorial cultures in the public sphere, the site began to witness dynamic interactions that have aided in a new and constantly evolving perception of the past at Babyn Yar and Ukraine more broadly.

Today, there are no less than three dozen monuments and plaques scattered across the former ravine's landscape. Critics of the site's fragmented design suggest that the lack of coherence in Babyn Yar's memorial plans points towards Ukraine's unwillingness to come to terms with Holocaust memory. Rather, I contend that we must avoid the all-too-simple assumption that the multiplicity of monuments is a result of an unwillingness to recognize and commemorate the Holocaust. I argue that with this so-called fragmentation, visitors come face-to-face with a hybrid memoryscape; one that represents Babyn Yar's many voices and layers.

### ***Literature Review***

Since the Nazis were defeated in 1945, Babyn Yar has become a global symbol of the Holocaust by Bullets, capturing the attention of scholars and students of history around the world. Despite the centrality of Babyn Yar as a symbol of the Holocaust in Ukraine, Western analysis has failed to provide adequate examinations of the many nuances and complexities in

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<sup>23</sup> Naimark, "The Many Lives of Babi Yar," 184.

Ukrainian Holocaust memory. Although notable scholars in Holocaust and genocide studies have made important contributions to understanding the Holocaust in Ukraine, including Karel C. Berkoff, John-Paul Himka, Wendy Lower, and Timothy Snyder, there have been few attempts to capture the many layers of memory that need to be unpacked in order to understand how Ukraine can navigate questions regarding the development of its post-Soviet memorial frameworks.<sup>24</sup>

Norman Naimark has provided English-speaking audiences with an easily accessible and informative overview of the history of commemoration at Babyn Yar, but the overarching theme in Western scholarship tends to depict the site as somehow deficient, examining Babyn Yar's different mnemonic actors in terms of competitive memory, rather than analyzing how differing memories interact and influence each other at the site and across Ukraine more broadly.<sup>25</sup>

Aleksandr Burakovskiy, Jacqueline Cherepinsky, Jeff Mankoff, and Sam Sokol have all followed similar models in their examinations of Babyn Yar's memorial culture, focusing on the well-documented struggle for Jewish recognition at Babyn Yar.<sup>26</sup> Emphasis is placed on state-antisemitism in the Soviet Union, unsanctioned grassroots commemoration, non-Jewish literary works, such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem *Babi Yar*, Anatoly Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, and the controversial 1976 monument dedicated to "peaceful Soviet citizens" at Babyn Yar. In addition to each author's assessment of the Soviet period,

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<sup>24</sup> Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Snyder, *Bloodlands*.

<sup>25</sup> Naimark, "The Many Lives of Babi Yar," 176-187.

<sup>26</sup> Aleksandr Burakovskiy, "Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine: Memorialization of the Jewish Tragedy at Babi Yar," *Nationalities papers* 39, no. 3 (2011): 371-389, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/00905992.2011.565316>; Jacqueline Cherepinsky, "Babi Yar: The Absence of the Babi Yar Massacre from Popular Memory," In *The Holocaust Memories and History*, edited by Victoria Khiterer, Ryan Barrick, and David Misal, 143-173, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2014), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/reader.action?docID=1676269&ppg=163>; Jeffrey Mankoff, "Babi Yar and the Struggle for Memory, 1944-2004," *Ab imperio*, no. 2 (2004): 393-415, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/imp.2004.0019>; and Sam Sokol, "Babi Yar as a Symbol of Holocaust Distortion in Post-Maidan Ukraine," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2017): 34-46, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/23739770.2017.1315694>.

analysis is focused on the early stages of independent Ukraine's memorial culture, discussing the alleged failure of the Ukrainian authorities to create an appropriate memorial space dedicated to the Jewish tragedy, and the early attempts of the Jewish diaspora to build a memorial at the site. Interestingly, these arguments about the political failures and memorial fragmentation overlook the opportunity to assess the impact of different layers of memory on Ukrainian commemorative practices, and the way in which these layers have become a divisive issue among different Jewish organizations and leaders. Thus, this failure to examine the nuances of Babyn Yar's complex memorial culture and the ambivalent feelings in Ukraine towards the past has created a knowledge gap in the literature easily accessible to English audiences.

Scholarly discussions have also addressed independent Ukraine's development of an ethno-nationalist memorial culture at Babyn Yar and other sites of memory. In part, due to the slow drift from Soviet-era memory politics between 1991 and 2004, analysis in English overwhelmingly focuses on the seemingly radical policies of President Viktor Yushchenko and his "memory wars." During Yushchenko's presidency (2005-2010), developing a national memorial culture that could unite all Ukrainians in commemorating the past played a key role in his policies. Examinations of Babyn Yar during this period lean into an argument that the Ukrainian government neglected commemorative projects at Babyn Yar in favour of developing a national memorial culture centered around the Holodomor and the rehabilitation of the deeply controversial leaders of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). I contend that although these details are important for understanding the complexities of Ukrainian memorial culture, there is a failure to critically examine the nature and political context of President Yushchenko's policies, leading to conclusions that lack nuance and ignore other equally important aspects of the former president's memory politics. This has in turn

created a distorted image that there was a universal and outright denial of the Holocaust or explosion of antisemitic sentiment within Ukraine. The resulting work perpetuates the existence of a rigid binary between the Soviet and nationalist memorial cultures, casting a dark shadow over the introduction of Jewish memorial culture, among others, at Babyn Yar. In doing so, an incorrect and detrimental view of Ukrainian memory politics has been cultivated in the scholarship accessible to English audiences. For example, Israeli journalist Sam Sokol has contended that with the inclusion of the OUN and UPA in the post-Maidan Ukrainian memoryscape, there is a distortion of Holocaust memory both at Babyn Yar and throughout Ukraine.<sup>27</sup> What is problematic here, is that arguments against the presence of nationalist symbols in Ukraine fail to unpack the complex nature of the nationalists' history throughout the 20th century, which also creates a skewed understanding of the semantic meaning these symbols play in Ukraine today. Moreover, these works facilitate false impressions of the conflation between ethno-nationalist and Ukrainian national narratives, which is highly detrimental in the context of Russia's ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine.

The rehabilitation and inclusion of the OUN and the UPA into the post-Soviet memoryscape has received significant scholarly attention. A broad range of academic literature exists on both the OUN and UPA's activities during the war, their re-emergence in the post-1991 memoryscape, and the appropriation of their symbols amidst ongoing Russian aggression. Historian David R. Marples has provided a detailed overview on the emergence of nationalist commemoration in Ukraine in his *Heroes and Villains: Creating National Memory in Contemporary Ukraine*, while John-Paul Himka has detailed the history of collaboration between

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<sup>27</sup> Sokol, "Babi Yar as a Symbol of Holocaust Distortion in Post-Maidan Ukraine," 34-46.

the Nazis and nationalists, and the subsequent debates over the nationalists' involvement in Nazi atrocities.<sup>28</sup>

In 2015, Jessica Rapson brought attention to the potential for applying Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory to the study of Ukrainian memory politics in *Topographies of Suffering*. Rapson's work dedicated three brief chapters to Babyn Yar, with the first drawing attention to the competitive nature of commemoration between the Holocaust and the Holodomor. She pays particular attention to the methods used by President Viktor Yushchenko and the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM) in memorializing the Holodomor. As a response to the increased desire for recognition of the Holodomor as genocide and a national tragedy, Rapson argues for the use of a multidirectional approach to overcome the zero-sum assumptions about the competition among commemorative projects, as well to cultivate a deeper understanding of the Holocaust among the Ukrainian public.<sup>29</sup> While Rapson does provide an important contribution to the broader field of memory studies, her discussion on the nature of commemorative culture in Ukraine is quite limited. Partially due to minimal examination beyond the works discussed above, her analysis fails to highlight the importance of the evolution of the general war memorial culture in Ukraine and that scholars in Ukraine are already working towards an approach that addresses the multiple layers and directions of memory at Babyn Yar.

### ***Methodology***

To approach the complex memorial landscape at Babyn Yar, I utilize a combination of

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<sup>28</sup> David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Central European University Press, 2007); John-Paul Himka, "Debates in Ukraine over Nationalist Involvement in the Holocaust, 2004-2008," *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 3 (2011): 353-70, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/00905992.2011.565315>; John-Paul Himka, "The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Ukraine," *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, edited by John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ddr8vf.25>. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Jessica Rapson, *Topographies of Suffering: Buchenwald, Babi Yar, Lidice* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

methods. For my analysis, I examine both primary and secondary sources, including the current memorials and monuments at the site; official memorial websites; government documents; news articles from Ukrainian, North American, and Israeli media outlets; and scholarly articles and monographs. Two documents prepared by organizations seeing themselves as stakeholders in the memorialization of Babyn Yar play a significant role in this thesis. The first is, *The Concept for the Memorialization of the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve* (hereafter, *Concept*) produced by the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, the Institute of History of Ukraine and the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve. Released in 2019 and revised in 2021, the *Concept* was written in collaboration by Ukrainian scholars as a project designed to commemorate Babyn Yar in 2016.<sup>30</sup> The *Concept* (both in its 2019 and revised 2021 versions) provides not only historical information on Babyn Yar as a multi-layered site of memory from the Ukrainian perspective but also relays information on the goals and scope of the author's proposed memorial design. The second document is *Babyn Yar: Past, Present, and Future*, developed under the aegis of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC) in 2021. This 380-page volume consists of the Center's original 2018 Basic Historical Narrative, written by former members of the center's international Academic and Scientific Council. In addition to information regarding Babyn Yar's long history, the book is divided into different sections through a chronological order of the historical events as discussed in the Basic Historical Narrative, with each section providing detailed images and descriptions of the historical and

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<sup>30</sup> Academic Council, "Concept of the Memorialization of the Babyn Yar with Extension of the Borders of the National Historical Memorial Preserve Babyn Yar," *The Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*, Kyiv, 4 June 2019, <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0014671>; and Academic Council, "Concept for the Memorialization of the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve, Second Revised and Expanded edition," *The Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*, Kyiv, 25 March 2021, <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0015711?fbclid=IwAR1RqNiTjktEs0f3ugjgnKN3qEyYegQ-VwCOVBH-fWn2D6eYbFgyryIFXm8>. Both versions of *Concept* have been developed through the collaboration of an academic authoring team, with the 2021 version being additionally reviewed by a generous list of reviewers.

current memorial space from acting members of the BYHMC.<sup>31</sup>

Information from the Concept and Basic Historical Narrative is supplemented by the multi-essay volume *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*.<sup>32</sup> Funded by the Canadian-based Ukrainian Jewish Encounter (UJE) and released as part of the commemorations for the 75th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy, the collection of essays from Ukrainian and international scholars brings together a detailed analysis of the history of the site. Each scholarly contribution provides highly valuable information on the political and cultural history of Babyn Yar. This thesis would not have been possible without the images, toponyms, and descriptions of Babyn Yar's physical topography provided in the Concept, the Basic Historical Narrative, and *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*. Vitaliy Nakhmanovych's explanation of the history of the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve, and illustrative approach to the memorials at the site in his contributions to *Babyn Yar: History and Memory* were invaluable to this research. Finally, Dr. Serhy Yekelchuk provided crucial information about Babyn Yar's location, monuments, and surrounding geography. Due to my inability to visit Ukraine for field research, key discussions and descriptions in this thesis would not have been possible without all of these sources.

### ***Theoretical Approach***

Concerning the most universally accepted model of Holocaust memory in Western society, a distinction is often made between approaches to memorializing the Holocaust in Western and Eastern Europe. In the former, memory of the Holocaust is considered a foundational narrative, whereas the latter tends to face criticism for a lack of state-sponsored

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<sup>31</sup> Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody, eds., *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021). The multi-page volume utilizes scholarly research conducted by members of the former academic board of the memorial center and their subsequent publication of the Historical Narrative that can still be found on the center's website. Additional texts and images by new members, including the former controversial artistic director Ilya Khrzhanovsky, and different members of the museum's staff are included in the book.

<sup>32</sup> Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi eds., *Babyn Yar: History and Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023).

Holocaust memorial practices, or in some cases, accusations of historical revisionism. A key aspect in understanding the differences between Western and Eastern memorial cultures is how memory discourse and collective practices shape the memorial landscape. In 1925, Maurice Halbwachs persuasively argued that collective memory was a product of the social distribution of beliefs, feelings, moral judgments, and knowledge about the past. More specifically, Halbwachs asserted that memories “are built up, developed and sustained in interaction with others.”<sup>33</sup> Over the years, academics interested in the study of memory as it relates to identity have adapted Halbwachs arguments, with German Egyptology researcher Aleida Assmann asserting that differentiating memory between the individual or collective level was too vague for understanding memory. To distinguish between the various dimensions, intersections, and overlap in memory, Assmann proposed breaking memory into four different formats: individual memory; social memory; political memory; and cultural memory. While all four of the above-mentioned formats are equally important, for the purpose of this research I focus on the role of political and cultural memory. According to Assmann, political and cultural memory is produced “from above,” with both formats relying on the support of various forms of media, symbols, monuments, museums, and ritual practices to ensure that the chosen narrative captivates society.<sup>34</sup> Through this reinforcement, groups or societies then develop feelings of community, unity, and connections based on a common past.<sup>35</sup> In the case of both political and cultural memory, a selection process ensues where “useful” memories are separated from the “non-useful” memories, determining which narrative will form the state’s “active memory.”

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<sup>33</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 48; Aleida Assmann, “Memory, Individual and Collective,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford University Press, 2006), 213; and Aleida Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory: Collective Memory and Collective Identity,” *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972052>.

<sup>34</sup> Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory,” 55.

<sup>35</sup> Assmann, “Memory, Individual and Collective,” 220-221.

However, while both political and cultural memory are constructed from above, Assmann argues that unlike political memory which is defined by its homogeneity, addressing members on a group level, cultural memory is multifaceted, allowing for individuals to continuously reinterpret or reassess the memory in question. Specifically, Assmann highlights how political memory binds individuals into a unified community centered around a specific narrative. Rather, cultural memory privileges individual forms of participation which brings members of the group into a “wider historical horizon.”<sup>36</sup>

When considering how the concept of political and cultural memory applies to the case of Babyn Yar, two very distinct eras of memory appear. First, the post-war Soviet era from 1945-1991; and the second starting with independence in 1991 to the present. Of course, within these distinct periods there are further degrees of separation with different leadership periods defining the official memory discourse. During the post-war Soviet period, no state-sponsored memory of the Holocaust was produced. Rather, the state oversaw the production of the Great Patriotic War myth as a political memory and the central feature in official Soviet memory. Due to the nature of the myth, one that emphasized heroism and triumph, the Holocaust was subsumed by the universalization of civilian suffering.<sup>37</sup> As a result of this still powerful Soviet legacy, and an ongoing ambivalence towards the past, developing a post-Soviet cultural memory in Ukraine that privileges individual forms of participation has been contentious and uneven. There are many reasons behind Ukraine’s slow, if not at times reluctant, transition towards integrating memory of the Holocaust into the mnemonic landscape, including economic crises, overall ambivalence to a painful period of the past, and navigating relations with the West and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Lina Klymenko, “World War II or Great Patriotic War Remembrance? Crafting the Nation in Commemorative Speeches of Ukrainian Presidents,” *National Identities* 17, no. 4 (2015): 390, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2014.990956>.

Russia. While all these reasons are relevant, I am interested in how Ukrainian authorities oscillated between adopting aspects of the so-called “European” or “Western” practices, while at the same time continuing to navigate complex historical narratives, at times opting for the maintenance of the status quo, since 1991.

As with all scholarly works, this thesis is limited in scope and cannot facilitate a full discussion on Ukraine’s relations with the West and Russia, but in terms of Holocaust remembrance, differing outside mnemonic influences warrant a brief discussion. During the immediate post-war years, the Soviet Union and its Western allies adopted a similar approach to acknowledging the Holocaust. On both sides, crimes committed against Europe’s Jews simply served as one of the many examples of Nazi atrocities. Only beginning in the 1960s, with a series of cultural and political events, such as the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi official and organizer of the Holocaust, did the Western approach begin to shift.<sup>38</sup> Over the course of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s the transition continued, solidifying in the institutionalization of Holocaust memory through different European agents of memory, notably the European Union (EU) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) disseminating a humanistic model of memory across Western countries and their allies. This culminated in Western Holocaust memorial culture evolving into a symbol for global human rights.<sup>39</sup>

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the former Eastern bloc, this Western model of memory has come to play an important factor in how the countries that formerly fell behind the Iron Curtain were granted admission into the “European” community. Considered a formative event to impact all European countries, scholar Tony Judt describes “Europe’s recovery of the

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<sup>38</sup> Marek Kucia, “The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 30, no. 1 (February 2016): 97, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/0888325415599195>.

<sup>39</sup> Kucia, “The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe,” 98.

memory of murdered Jews as the definition and guarantee of Europe's restored humanity,” arguing that in the post-communist era creating a national Holocaust memory became an unspoken “entry ticket” for those aspiring to join European organizations.<sup>40</sup> Embedded within this process of developing Holocaust memorial projects, was the belief that Holocaust memory would cultivate more humanistic and democratic values in the East. This belief and mnemonic code are important when considering how Ukraine’s memorial practices have evolved between 1991 and the present, and represent the previously mentioned concept of political memory. While countries that aspired to join “European” organizations carved out space for Western inspired mnemonic practices, others including Russia, continued to champion the myth of the Great Patriotic War, with the Holocaust playing little to no role in official memory. Given the differences between the Western and Russian approach to memory of the past, establishing a Holocaust memorial culture in Ukraine (a country that has differed in its approach to both its Western and Russian neighbours over the years) has become a key marker in Ukraine’s drift towards the West, as well as a tool (among many) to differentiate between Ukraine and Russia in the post-Soviet space.

Although there can be no debate that the institutionalization of Holocaust memory has facilitated a growing awareness of the Holocaust as a historical event, and provided a valuable framework for the promotion of human rights, Aleida Assmann has commented that this official transnational memory has in some ways become a “hegemonic instrument to export Western values and to expand the range of Western influence.”<sup>41</sup> I contend that it is dangerously reductive

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<sup>40</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 804-805; and Jelena Subotić, *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Aleida Assmann, “The Holocaust – A Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community, in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 113.

to apply the Western model of Holocaust memory to the complex circumstances of Ukraine, especially as Western representations of the Holocaust overwhelmingly tend to focus on imagery of the Nazis industrialized killing centers such as Auschwitz.<sup>42</sup> Through these representations, the murder of Jewish and non-Jewish civilians by mass-shooting, now known as the Holocaust by Bullets, and Nazi policies in the east have been displaced from popular understandings of the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup> The emphasis on the gas chambers at the notorious death camps is indicative of the fact that in the production of a “Europeanized” Holocaust memory narrative, heterogeneous memories have been shaped into a homogenous, generic, and easily reproduced narrative. Imposing an overly generalized approach to Holocaust memory risks not only diluting the events experienced by European Jews and non-Jews; it undermines the complex memory and intersecting histories that took place during the Second World War and Holocaust, and hinders opportunities for the development in Ukraine of a country-specific culture of Holocaust memory and that of the Nazi occupation.

In the Ukrainian context, this Europeanized memory of the Holocaust is both unsustainable and unsuitable due to the fact that as a multi-ethnic state subsumed within the Soviet Union and occupied by the Nazis, Ukraine’s historical experience of the Second World War was distinct from that of Western European countries. Cullen Goldblatt in his book *Beyond Collective Memory: Structural Complicity and Future Freedoms in Senegalese and South African Narratives* explores the problematic nature of understanding the past and one's role in it through a national collective memory, and argues for more attention to be paid to the vehicles of

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<sup>42</sup> Emily-Rose Baker and Isabel Sawkins, “Introduction to the Issue: Coloniality and Holocaust Memory in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Holocaust Studies* 29, no. 4 (2023): 492, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2022.2116538>.

<sup>43</sup> Norman Naimark, “Introduction,” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), vii.

memory that operate outside the bounds of the collective narrative.<sup>44</sup> For Goldblatt, collective memory as a means of understanding the past threatens to generate an oversimplified or more “digestible” idea, which, while easily repeated and reproduced, fails to come to terms with the entirety of the events that took place and our role as a society in remembering those events. Goldblatt’s argument applies to the case of Babyn Yar when considering the multi-ethnic and complex layers of memory associated with the twentieth century more broadly, and Western expectations for the adoption of the “Europeanized” Holocaust narrative. Through the production of any over-simplified and generalized memory, Ukraine would be unable to properly come to terms with the tragic events that took place during the Second World War and the Holocaust on Ukrainian soil.<sup>45</sup>

As an alternative to adopting a homogenous discourse based on Western memory practices, I contend that Ukrainian Holocaust memory as represented at Babyn Yar should be approached as a site of memory that facilitates what Michael Rothberg refers to as multidirectional memory; a site where different, and at times conflicting memories, encourage productive conversations about one's own history, while understanding the memory of another. This approach reflects and inculcates the democratic and humanistic principles preached by proponents of the Western model, while at the same time commemorating the different experiences that have unfolded on Ukrainian territory. In his 2009 book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Rothberg calls on students and scholars of memory to abandon competitive memory platforms, arguing that through a

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<sup>44</sup> Cullen Goldblatt, *Beyond Collective Memory: Structural Complicity and Future Freedoms in Senegalese and South African Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 2.

<sup>45</sup> Goldblatt, *Beyond Collective Memory*, 3-5.

multidirectional approach history and memory become subject to “ongoing negotiation, cross referencing and borrowing.”<sup>46</sup>

Rothberg’s argument is crucial in developing a new understanding of Ukrainian memory politics as the country’s former and present memory regimes have consistently been characterized as promoting a national memory that either seeks to ignore the memories of minority groups that may not fit nicely within a homogeneous vision of Ukraine, or more radically, seeks to erase memories unsuited to its national narrative. This is especially the case for Western scholars writing on Babyn Yar. When analyzing Babyn Yar through a competitive lens, their works display a Western assumption that Ukrainian memory must follow what Rothberg describes as the logic of scarcity.<sup>47</sup> For example, if Ukrainians commemorate the anti-Soviet activities of Ukrainian nationalists or memorialize the Holodomor as a national tragedy and genocide, arguments based on competitive logic would suggest that Ukraine is intentionally neglecting memory the Holocaust in favour of a different narrative. Although there is justification for critical analysis of the reluctant approach to memorializing a painful past, assuming that one memory will automatically push another from the memroyscape has grave consequences for how non-Ukrainians perceive Ukrainian Holocaust memorial culture.

Multidirectional memory in the Ukrainian case can demonstrate how memory culture can transcend the one-dimensional understanding of existing competition between the Soviet, post-Soviet, and Western narratives, allowing for a more nuanced hybrid approach to Ukrainian memorial culture; a memorial culture that represents multiple historical narratives and underscores their dimensions and intersections. At the same time, using Rothberg’s concept facilitates fruitful discussions around Ukraine’s rich and complex history, including the

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

landscape of memory that was created through the ongoing struggle for independence, and the wars and occupations that led to the Holocaust and other tragic historical events. Rothberg argues that memory of the Holocaust has contributed to communities across the globe finding a way to articulate their own histories.<sup>48</sup> This thesis demonstrates that through the Western institutionalization of the Holocaust and the development of a transnational memory, Ukraine has been able to find a way to articulate other atrocities and genocide such as the Holodomor both on a national and international stage. Admittedly, using the Holocaust as a framework to bring to light other atrocities is not without criticism, but Rothberg suggests that this framework for articulation is not a one-way street.<sup>49</sup> Genocide and crimes against humanity committed on Ukrainian soil during the 20th century, and more recently during Russia's ongoing invasion, have created memory triggers that serve as a catalyst for emerging memory and memorial culture of the Holocaust in Ukraine and at Babyn Yar more specifically.

Lastly, this thesis draws on postcolonial studies to examine the nature of Babyn Yar's commemorative culture. Scholars Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Yuliya Yurchuk recognized the value of analyzing Ukraine's memoryscape through a postcolonial lens in their work on the memory of World War II (WWII) in post-Maidan Ukraine.<sup>50</sup> Noting that postcolonial theory is not without criticism in Ukraine, the two scholars demonstrate the significance of using this approach due to centuries of cultural oppression in Ukraine. Even with the advent of independence, Soviet and Russian culture continued to remain deeply rooted in the country, which has made narratives about the past so important in Ukraine. Surprisingly, little has been done to examine how ambivalence to the past in Ukraine has led to the emergence of what

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<sup>48</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Yuliya Yurchuk, "Memory Politics in Contemporary Ukraine: Reflections from the Postcolonial Perspective," *Memory Studies*, 12, no. 6 (2019): 701, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/1750698017727806>.

postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha describes as a form of memory hybridity.<sup>51</sup> Examining Ukrainian Holocaust memory as hybrid helps to understand how Babyn Yar's memory and commemorative practices have developed through an ongoing interaction between the different layers of memory and the agents of memory associated with the multi-ethnic historical narratives at Babyn Yar. Hybridity is even more relevant when analyzing the site's monuments, and history of unrealized and competing memorial-center projects. Through an examination of the existing models of memory in Ukraine and the Babyn Yar memorial park, I contend that these monuments demonstrate the existence of several layers of memory, multidirectional memory, and how they can be seen as a new hybrid model for commemorating the difficult chapters of Ukrainian history.

To address the emergence and role of different mnemonic agents at Babyn Yar, I consider Leela Gandhi's influential work on the common characteristics of the postcolonial condition. Gandhi's discussion on the role of nationalism and postcoloniality in the cultural sphere aids in unpacking common misconceptions about the Soviet and nationalist memory models at Babyn Yar, which further illustrates how the post-colonial hybrid memoryscape has been formed.<sup>52</sup> As Törnquist-Plewa and Yurchuk have argued, cultural memory can be employed as a tool in the process of rejecting former hegemonic narratives imposed by the oppressor, with a process of national historical self-invention, which tends to feature the establishment of new national heroes and often tends to blur the lines of historical truth.<sup>53</sup> This is seen in the erection of memorials dedicated to the members of the OUN, and the annual commemorations held at their locations.

Examination of the above mentioned postcolonial characteristics fails to appear in most Western analyses of Babyn Yar leading to the ongoing misunderstanding of the space as a site of

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<sup>51</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 24-25.

<sup>52</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 111-118.

<sup>53</sup> Törnquist-Plewa and Yurchuk, "Memory Politics in Contemporary Ukraine," 700-701.

memory for Ukrainians. At the same time, there is a false impression that Soviet, post-Soviet, nationalist and other memorial cultures exist in complete opposition to one another. It is important to acknowledge that adopting a new identity and cultural memory in Ukraine was not a linear process, and the process happened in different stages and times across Ukraine. On the one hand, there has been a rejection of the Soviet narrative with the reorientation and adoption of national heroes; on the other, features of the Soviet model of memory remain deeply embedded in Ukrainian culture and continue to influence memorial practices after independence. Due to the emergence of new Western-inspired cultural practices and the continued influence of Soviet memorial culture, Ukraine has seen what Bhabha has described as the emergence of “third space,” in which there is communication, negotiation, and translation between the two. In this place of hybridity, Bhabha argues that a new identity is formed, one that represents neither the one nor the other.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, as the Soviet grip on memory faded and censorship was lifted, other models of memory, including the Western model of Holocaust memory, came into contact with the Soviet and post-Soviet models.

### ***Structure of the Thesis***

Chapters One through Three develop a discussion of the main arguments of this thesis. Chapter One provides an overview of the Nazis’ racial ideology that guided their racial policies and mass murders following the invasion of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent occupation of Ukrainian lands. Due to the space limitations of this thesis and the complex division of Ukrainian territory and different zones of occupation, Chapter One will only feature a discussion of the Nazis’ actions in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine (RKU), with specific attention paid to Kyiv. This chapter also surveys the evolving memory of Babyn Yar from 1943 to 1991. Chapter Two is

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<sup>54</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 25.

divided into two sections: the official and public memorial approaches to Babyn Yar after 1991 and the current memorial landscape at Babyn Yar. The former explores the main official and non-governmental activities regarding memorial culture at Babyn Yar from 1991 to the present. The latter provides details of the memorial landscape at Babyn Yar, while discussing the various monuments and their meaning. Chapter Three examines the changing memoryscape of Babyn Yar after the 75th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy in 2016, focusing on the emergence of two competing commemorative projects at Babyn Yar intended to establish a new Holocaust memorial culture in Ukraine. This thesis closes with a brief conclusion that summarizes the main arguments of my project.

As Russia continues to wage its war of aggression and illegally occupy parts of Ukraine, developing more accurate approaches to understanding Ukrainian history and culture of memory have never been more important. Although my thesis represents a single contribution to a complex and evolving topic, I hope to inspire future scholars to examine Ukrainian memory politics through non-traditional approaches and discover the nuances and complexity in memorializing the past.

## Chapter One: A Brief History: Babyn Yar Between 1941 and 1991

Today, the Holocaust is viewed as one of the defining moments of the twentieth century. Historians around the world have worked tirelessly to produce an ever-expanding catalog of literature dedicated to the Holocaust and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. At the same time, both government and non-governmental actors have actively participated in the process of integrating Holocaust memory into the local, national, and global memoryscape with increasing intensity since the 1990s. Understood as a crucial element in the development of a democratic and humanistic society, making sense of the Holocaust has been approached through the plethora of different vehicles of cultural transmission. The Western-centric representations and images of the Holocaust that serve as universal symbols have facilitated the emergence of a transnational understanding and memory of the Holocaust, which often conflates a diverse range of experiences and characteristics of those impacted by the attempted destruction of European Jews. This process of merging specific stories of the Holocaust in different countries into a generic, concise narrative has produced widespread understanding that the Holocaust consisted of key moments including the segregation and ghettoization of Jews, the deportation of Jews in cattle cars, and ultimately, the Nazis' sending European Jews to be murdered in gas chambers, most notably, the German industrial killing center at Auschwitz-Birkenau in occupied Poland.

Yet, the history of the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet Union does not fit this familiar model. Although there were cases of Ukrainian Jews being deported to ghettos and death camps, the defining feature of the Nazis' campaign of annihilation in the east was that executions were carried out through mass shooting.<sup>55</sup> Unlike the Nazis' assault on Western Jews, which was usually carried out in secrecy, the execution of Soviet Jews, and non-Jewish locals, often took

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<sup>55</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015, 207-208.

place in broad daylight, with the local residents witnessing violence firsthand and the local police often assisting. As Auschwitz has arguably come to be the most recognized symbol of the Holocaust, cultural memory of the Holocaust by Bullets has been subsumed into the broader narrative of the Final Solution that took place after 1942. In reality, the Nazis' attempt to murder European Jews began to take its gruesome form following the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, prior to the decision to implement the Final Solution at the Wannsee conference on 20 January 1942.

From this perspective, Chapter One provides a brief introduction to the Holocaust by Bullets and Nazi occupation of Soviet Ukraine. I discuss the experience of Jewish and non-Jewish locals that found themselves in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine (RKU), with a particular focus on Kyiv. At the same time, while Ukrainian territory was divided into different districts and administrations that experienced the war and tools of genocide differently, this thesis approaches the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine as a tragedy of modern Ukrainian history, which the Ukrainian state and society need to remember as part of the national past.<sup>56</sup> I begin with a brief introduction to Nazi racial ideology and the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism. Hitler's colonial goal of eastward expansion, as well as his plans for the local Slavic population, is also addressed in this regard. I examine how racial and ideological beliefs resulted in the acceleration of violence against the Jews to include women and children, which rapidly escalated into the annihilation of entire Jewish communities in occupied Soviet territory. The massacre of

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<sup>56</sup> In the case of Soviet Ukraine, the Germans divided their conquests into several districts and administrations. For example, the territory formerly known as Galicia (now divided between Ukraine and Poland) was incorporated into the General Gouvernement in August 1941 as the Distrikt Galizien, while Volhynia (now part of Right-Bank Ukraine) was incorporated into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Other regions of post-war Ukraine such as Crimea and the easternmost parts of Ukraine fell directly under military administration, with others still such as Transnistria and Carpatho-Ukraine under the control of Romania and Hungary respectively. This division of territory is particularly important to consider when analyzing how Ukrainian memory of the Holocaust and the war is represented today. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, "Introduction," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, testimony, memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington WA: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010), 2.

Kyiv's Jews at Babyn Yar on 29 and 30 September 1941 serves as the main focal point to highlight the violent nature of the German occupation in the east. Hereafter, I discuss Soviet post-war policies that saw Jewish suffering subsumed under the Soviet policy of universalizing the ethnic identity of the Nazis' victims. Post-war Soviet state-antisemitism, and the ban on Jewish memorial activities at Babyn Yar, as well as repressions and violence against Jewish culture more broadly are of particular importance to the story this chapter tells. Finally, I address the emergence of unsanctioned public commemorations at Babyn Yar that lasted until the Soviet collapse, with special attention to the 25th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacres.

### ***Nazi Ideology and the Occupation of Soviet Ukraine***

At the most elementary level, Nazi ideology subscribed to principles that emphasized deeply antisemitic, xenophobic, and revanchist values. At the heart of this ideology was the belief in a racial hierarchy that viewed the Aryan, or German, race as superior to all others. Different ethnicities were categorized through this barbaric hierarchy, with Jews being omitted based on the belief that all Jews were sub-human. Alongside the designation of sub-human status, the Jewish population was considered both a biological and political threat to German men and women.<sup>57</sup> On one hand, Jews threatened the health of German and other so-called "healthy" Europeans. On the other hand, there was the belief that all Jews, both in Germany and abroad, were responsible for German defeat in World War I, as well as being part of an international conspiracy against the Germans.<sup>58</sup> This view was supported by the particularly paranoid myth of Judeo-Bolshevism. Born out of age-old antisemitic beliefs that had fused with post-1917 conspiracies that correlated Jews and revolution, Judeo-Bolshevism during the Nazi era was a sinister transnational ideological construct that drew on false theories of Jewish

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<sup>57</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

communists and Jewish financiers collaborating to pursue control and domination over the world.<sup>59</sup> Judeo-Bolshevism only reinforced the racist belief that Slavic peoples were racially inferior, lacking culture, and uncivilized.<sup>60</sup> Nazi propaganda could present East Slavs as victims of the Jewish Bolsheviks, while also seeing them as sub-human. Doing so helped Nazis to imagine Ukraine and European Russia as the future area of German colonization.

Alongside racial ideology and paranoid conspiracy theories, Hitler and his loyal followers had a strong desire to create an empire that stretched across Europe into the Soviet-controlled east. Hitler envisioned that this new Europe would be free of all individuals deemed racially inferior and detrimental to the “healthy” German race. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, racial ideology and the perceived threat of Judeo-Bolshevism became instrumental as Hitler’s henchmen sought to achieve a policy known as *Lebensraum* or Living Space.<sup>61</sup> For Hitler, *Lebensraum* was necessary to secure the survival of the German race.<sup>62</sup> While wartime experiences should never compete in a hierarchy of suffering, here it is important to understand that based on the Nazis’ principal beliefs, from the outset, the character of the Nazis’ occupation of Soviet territory was intended to have an entirely different impact than the occupied western territory. Ukraine, considered to be the breadbasket of Europe, was slated to serve as an agricultural hub for feeding the German population and army regardless of the impact it would undoubtedly have on the local population. Acquiring Ukrainian agricultural riches also meant that in the short-term

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Hanebrink, *Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 4. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism found fertile ground across the European and North American continents, including the late Russian Empire. Emerging from a long history of antisemitic beliefs, the idea was not exclusive to Nazi Germany. Rather, Hitler capitalized on the idea and utilized it as a propaganda tool. See Hanebrink, *Specter Haunting Europe*, 28-32 and 83-121.

<sup>60</sup> Igor Shchupak, “On the Eve of Babyn Yar,” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 32.

<sup>61</sup> Shchupak, “On the Eve of Babyn Yar,” 32-34.

<sup>62</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 1.

non-Jewish Ukrainian peasants would serve as a labour force to secure the Nazi's short-term goals. In the long-term, the German race would replace the Slavs in this new eastern colony, where there could be a return to the Germanic agrarian roots.<sup>63</sup> It was this combination of antisemitic beliefs, racial ideology, and colonial ambition that aided in the acceleration of the Nazi's genocidal policies in occupied Soviet territory.

Prior to launching Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi leadership had outlined how Jews and other so-called undesirables were to be treated by the advancing troops. On 19 May 1941, guidelines for this treatment were distributed among the various military and special units, which called for extreme measures to be taken against all agitators, partisans, saboteurs, and Jewish communists. This was followed with the infamous Commissar Order on 6 June 1941, which outlined that all political officers be killed.<sup>64</sup> The order created a chaotic landscape, with most German troops unable to distinguish Soviet military and political ranks, often aiding in the indiscriminate murder of Soviet Prisoners of War (POWs).<sup>65</sup> As discussed by Karel C. Berkhoff, POWs who were not immediately shot were forced on to death marches through the countryside towards transit camps. Testimony from surviving prisoners in the 1941 Kyiv encirclement detailed how the Germans forced them to walk hundreds of miles without food or water and forbade the local population from providing any assistance to the POWs. Those who failed to keep pace faced brute force and were often shot on the spot. In the cities, abusing the POWs in public was used as a tool to generate fear among the masses. For the prisoners who arrived at camps, the conditions were no better. Unlike POWs who were captured in the west, such as the French, British, and Americans, Soviet POWs had a significantly lower chance of

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<sup>63</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 182. Despite only remaining in effect until 6 May 1942, the Commissar Order is seen as a pivotal moment in the escalation of violence against Jews.

<sup>65</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 91-93.

survival, with between 2.8 and 3 million Soviet POWs being murdered.<sup>66</sup> The ideological construct of Judeo-Bolshevism proved to be especially deadly for Jews as it conflated all Jews with communism. However, it was also implicated in the murder of other Soviet POWs.<sup>67</sup>

During the summer of 1941, the Nazi leadership also expanded their violent mandate against all male Jews to include Jewish women and children. The precise date is not entirely clear, but it is generally agreed upon that after high-ranking Nazi, and one of the Holocaust's main instigators, Heinrich Himmler toured across occupied Soviet territory between July and August, he ordered that all Jewish women and children be included in killing actions. The order led to the destruction of entire Jewish communities by late summer 1941.<sup>68</sup> Himmler's orders were taken up with great enthusiasm, culminating in the murder of approximately sixty thousand Jews in occupied Soviet Ukraine between late August and early September alone.<sup>69</sup> Today, the best-known mass murder of Jews in Ukraine during the Holocaust by Bullets is at Babyn Yar on the outskirts of Kyiv in late September 1941, but countless other massacres took place across occupied Soviet territory.

Just days after the Wehrmacht's Army Group South captured Kyiv on 19 September 1941, explosive devices left behind by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD)

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<sup>66</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 89-113.

<sup>67</sup> The Nazi leadership also urged its troops and members of the Einsatzgruppen, to encourage and support antisemitic violence. For example, Timothy Snyder comments on how the Nazis were able to utilize the hostile climate in western Soviet Ukraine (formerly Eastern Poland) with members nationalist groups including the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and the many individuals who sought to distance themselves from connections to the previous Soviet regime. See Snyder, *Black Earth*, 152. German encouragement for local violence was a factor in many pogroms across occupied eastern territory, including the well-known Lviv pogrom which broke out on 30 June 1941 and lasted into early July after news of the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) having massacres Ukrainians in Lviv's prisons and German propaganda accusing the "Jewish Bolshevik" of murdering thousands of Ukrainians was spread throughout the city. For more information on local anti-Jewish violence see Wendy Lower, "Pogroms, Mob Violence and Genocide in Western Ukraine, Summer 1941: Varied Histories, Explanations and Comparisons," *Journal of Genocide Research* 13, no. 3 (2011): 217-46, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/14623528.2011.606683>; and John-Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941-1944* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2021).

<sup>68</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 197.

<sup>69</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 198.

and military personnel went off on 24 September in the city center, causing a fire that burned for over a week, destroying the newly-established Nazi administrative offices, and killing several Germans.<sup>70</sup> Having planned to murder the city's Jews prior to their arrival, the German leadership seized on the bombings as an opportunity to blame local Jews and "justify" retaliation against them.<sup>71</sup> On 28 September, members of the newly-formed Ukrainian police were tasked with hanging tri-lingual posters across the city that demanded all Jews in the vicinity appear the next morning before eight a.m. in a designated location near the Babyn Yar ravine with all their valuables and documents. The order, printed in Russian, Ukrainian, and German, stipulated that any Jew who disobeyed would be shot, as well as warned non-Jews against looting empty Jewish homes.<sup>72</sup>

The next morning, on 29 September 1941, thousands of Jews, mostly women, children, and the elderly, poured into the intersection at Melnikova and Dehtiarivska Street, located near the old Jewish and Orthodox cemeteries.<sup>73</sup> Due to the rumours spread by the Nazis and Soviet failure to widely broadcast the extent of crimes being committed against Jews, many believed that they were being deported to a different location. This idea was further supported by the fact that the gathering location was within close proximity to the Lukyanivska freight railway station.<sup>74</sup> After arriving at the checkpoint, Jews were forcibly stripped of their documents, valuables, and warm clothing. Although it is impossible to know exactly what the victims were thinking at this moment, testimony based on the small group of Jews who survived indicates

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<sup>70</sup> Karel C. Berkhoff, "Dina Pronicheva's Story of Surviving the Babi Yar Massacre: German, Jewish, Soviet, Russian and Ukrainian Records," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, testimony, memorialization*, ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010), 291.

<sup>71</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 201.

<sup>72</sup> Anatoli A. Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, trans. David Floyd (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Press, 1970), 91; and Berkhoff, "Dina Pronicheva's Story," 292.

<sup>73</sup> Berkhoff, "Dina Pronicheva's Story," 292. A large portion of male Kyivian Jews had already left the city either through joining the Red Army or by escaping.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

that by this point, many sensed that they were about to be killed.<sup>75</sup> The scene was violent and chaotic, with Kyiv's Jews being herded through a German-constructed cordon lined with violent policemen and their dogs. As the city's Jews were pushed towards a sand quarry next to Babyn Yar's southwestern spur, they were forced to take off their shoes and remaining clothing by screaming Germans and local policemen.<sup>76</sup> Finally, the Jews were moved further into narrow passages located at the center of the southwest spur, where they came face-to-face with killing teams from the SS squadron, Sonderkommando 4a, a unit belonging to Einsatzgruppe C, the 45th police battalion, and members of the Ukrainian auxiliary police.<sup>77</sup> The German killing squad lined the entire length of the ravine's southwestern spur, where they shot the Jews from behind en masse. As recorded in Dina Pronicheva's testimony, one of the very few to survive the massacre at Babyn Yar, drunken policemen walked along the mass grave as the day closed, firing random shots into the pit of bodies to make sure their victims were dead.<sup>78</sup> Those who had survived the first day of executions were herded into nearby garages, where they were held until shooting commenced again the next morning. According to a contemporary report, the German forces shot 33,771 Jews on 29 and 30 September 1941.<sup>79</sup>

Babyn Yar continued to operate as a center of mass murder for both Jews and non-Jews until 30 September 1943. Thousands of Ukrainians, including psychiatric and medically ill patients, Soviet POWs, Roma, disabled children, members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and others deemed unworthy of life were either murdered at the site or dumped into the ravine after being executed elsewhere. Although the exact numbers are not

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<sup>75</sup> Karel Berkhoff and Dieter Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 73.

<sup>76</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 113.

<sup>77</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 114; and Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 106.

<sup>78</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 110-111.

<sup>79</sup> Vitaliy Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar: The Holocaust and Other Tragedies," in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 75; and Berkhoff, "Dina Pronicheva's Story," 292.

entirely clear, historians tend to agree that the number of victims is likely around 100,000.<sup>80</sup> These executions continued at the site against a backdrop of regular repression and violence against the local population.

Non-Jewish Ukrainians residing in the RKU often lived with the constant threat of danger. For example, flogging and public hangings, not to mention the all-too-common sound of mass shootings, were a regular feature in daily life. This culture of fear was intensified through artificially produced famines.<sup>81</sup> During periods of food shortage, the Nazi administration mandated police cordons be constructed to thwart the “free” or “illicit” trade of food between city dwellers and peasants who had greater access to foodstuffs.<sup>82</sup> As a result of the German-engineered food crisis, thousands of Ukrainians died of starvation during the occupation. Non-Jewish Ukrainians were also slated for the *Ostarbeiter* (workers from the east) slave-labor program. The Nazis launched the program in 1942 to secure a labour force for the Third Reich. Initially promoted as a volunteer-based program, news from participants quickly spread of the brutal conditions in Germany, leading to local commissions being forced to round up civilians and deport them against their will.<sup>83</sup>

On the eve of Kyiv’s liberation, Babyn Yar entered its final chapter under Nazi rule after the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) issued orders for all occupied Soviet territories to be cleared of any evidence of the crimes committed against the Jews and local population.

Beginning on 18 August 1943, numerous corpses at Babyn Yar were exhumed and burned by

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<sup>80</sup> Naimark, “The Many Lives of Babi Yar,” 177.

<sup>81</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 179.

<sup>82</sup> Berkhoff, “Ukraine Under Nazi Rule,” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 70. Despite better access to food, the Nazis found other ways to abuse the Ukrainian peasantry, opting to maintain the Soviet collective farm system, which featured violence, racism and threats of arrest. For more information on the experiences in the rural countryside in the RKU see Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 114-140.

<sup>83</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 253-259; and Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140. The Nazis ended up sending over 2.3 citizens to Germany as part of the *Ostarbeiter* program.

Sonderkommando team 1005a, which was primarily composed of POWs from the nearby Syrets Camp working under the supervision of security police officers. Prisoners were forced to use old tombstones collected from the nearby Jewish Cemetery to build “funeral pyres” to burn the corpses. To speed up the process, Sonderkommando 1005b was sent to aid in the destruction of Babyn Yar on 10 September 1943.<sup>84</sup> Realizing that they were to be murdered after destroying the evidence, a few dozen prisoners attempted to escape on 28 September 1943, but only 15 survived. On 30 September, those who remained at Babyn Yar were shot, bringing this chapter of Babyn Yar’s dark history to a close.<sup>85</sup>

### ***The Soviets Return***

After the Red Army liberated Kyiv on 6 November 1943, the Extraordinary State Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes (ChGK), established in 1942 to investigate and inform the public about German crimes, began to collect evidence of the crimes committed during the Nazi occupation, including the massacres at Babyn Yar.<sup>86</sup> From the outset, the ChGK acted as a state propaganda tool, with their top priority being the concealment of Stalinist crimes rather than coordinating a thorough investigation and providing honest information about the atrocities committed against Jews.<sup>87</sup> After intense oversight and censorship, the final report on Babyn Yar saw the ethnic identity of the Nazis victims omitted and stated that the “Hitlerite bandits herded thousands of innocent Soviet citizens to Babyn Yar on 29 September

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<sup>84</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 267-268. The Syrets camp opened in May 1942 and served primarily as a so-called “Labour Education Camp,” where prisoners were exploited for labour, and often died of disease and starvation. Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 234.

<sup>85</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 269.

<sup>86</sup> Vladyslav Hrynevych, “Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar,” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 149. In a draft of their 1944 report that had utilized testimony from surviving members of Sonderkommando 1005a and 1005b, the ChGK initially acknowledged that Babyn Yar had been a site of Jewish massacre. However, strict state censorship led to a series of revisions by the Soviet Propaganda and Agitation department.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

1941.”<sup>88</sup> Investigation reports like the one on Babyn Yar were exploited by the Soviet authorities to emphasize how the “fascist bandits” had committed crimes against Russians and Ukrainians, and as one of many tools in attempts to relegitimize the Soviet government. On the one hand, this approach underscored the very real Nazi brutality and repression, as well as the attempted erasure of Russian and Ukrainian culture. On the other hand, the murder of Soviet Jews simply because they were Jews was omitted entirely.

Discussions over the need to commemorate Babyn Yar and other Holocaust sites had in fact started prior to the end of the war. On the official level, memorial activity in Kyiv was considered the responsibility of the government of Soviet Ukraine. As such, the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv enforced the official Soviet policy of referring to those murdered by the Nazis as “innocent Soviet citizens.”<sup>89</sup> Despite this unwillingness to address the ethnic dimension of Nazi crimes, the government did initially envisage building a memorial at Babyn Yar in the immediate post-war years. The Ukrainian Republic’s Council of People’s Commissars and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CC CP(B)U) issued a resolution on 13 March 1943 titled “About the Construction of a Great Monument to Those Who Perished in Babyn Yar,” which called for the use of a design created by Oleksandr Vlasov, chief architect of Kyiv, and for the construction to take place between 1945-1947. However, the project faced a series of delays, and was shelved in 1947 against the backdrop of government bans on all Jewish Holocaust memorials across Ukraine.<sup>90</sup> There were, however, grassroots petitions and proposals to memorialize the lives lost at Babyn Yar and across the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 154-155.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 168. On 4 January 1960 the resolution titled “About the Ordering of Affairs Pertaining to the Construction of Monuments on the Territory of the Ukrainian SSR,” officially rescinded the 1945 resolution that had called for the construction of a monument at Babyn Yar. The resolution cited the so-called financial burden associated with conducting anti-erosion efforts. Hrynevych, “Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar,” 168.

Soviet Union, which came primarily from the Jewish community, and were often pursued on a local level.<sup>91</sup>

Early efforts to memorialize Babyn Yar on both the official and grassroots level coincided with outbreaks of antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence. Much as in the case across Europe, the return of surviving Jews created tense relations with the locals. For example, property and belongings of the Jews who had fled Kyiv before the arrival of the German army, had fallen into new hands. Conflicts often erupted as the returning survivors sought to reclaim their homes and property.<sup>92</sup> In the context of the everyday strains of living in a war-torn city, and the legacy of previous ethnic tensions, antisemitic violence broke out in the immediate post-war years.<sup>93</sup> One such example in Kyiv was when the Jewish-Ukrainian Lieutenant of the Security Service of Ukraine (NKGB) Iosif Rosenstein killed two men with his sidearm after they had verbally and physically assaulted him on the street during the evening of 4 September 1945. During the funeral procession for the two men, nearly 300 rioters participated in open antisemitic violence, with hundreds of Jews beaten, some of which died.<sup>94</sup>

Although the existence of antisemitism provided the Soviet authorities with a convenient tool to “justify” banning public memorial activity, the Soviet authorities had already banned all public activity at Babyn Yar before the third anniversary of the massacre on 29 September 1944.<sup>95</sup> For example, leading up to the third anniversary, Yiddish poet David Hofshstein made attempts to organize a memorial event at Babyn Yar, but the local authorities claimed that it might “provoke antisemitism.”<sup>96</sup> While the ban was cited as a measure to avoid

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<sup>91</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory*, 228-230.

<sup>92</sup> Victoria Khiterer, “Unwelcome Return Home: Jews, Anti-Semitism and the Housing Problem in Post-War Kyiv,” *Eastern European Holocaust Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 159. <https://doi.org/10.1515/eehs-2022-0001>.

<sup>93</sup> Khiterer, “Unwelcome Return Home,” 161-162.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Blackwell, *Kyiv as Regime City: The Return of Soviet Power after Nazi Occupation* (Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 161-163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc16j8x.13>.

<sup>95</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 350.

<sup>96</sup> Khiterer, “Unwelcome Return Home,” 163.

outbreaks of antisemitic violence among the local population, authorities were concerned that grassroots ceremonies would undermine the official narrative that referred to the Nazis victims as “peaceful Soviet citizens.” However, it should not be overlooked that manifestations of antisemitism, which on occasion broke out into full-scale violence, were in fact on the authorities radar.<sup>97</sup> In her research on the housing crisis and the return of Jews to post-War Kyiv, Victoria Khiterer suggests that it is likely that the mood among the local gentile population was considered by the Soviet authorities' as they were shifting towards adopting a policy of state-antisemitism.<sup>98</sup>

State-antisemitism was most visible in Stalin’s antisemitic campaigns during 1948-53, which focused on removing alleged “rootless cosmopolitans” from their position in Soviet society and fostered a rampant rise in state-antisemitism until his death in 1953.<sup>99</sup> Chief among Stalin’s targets were members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), which was founded in 1942 with a mandate to build relationships with international Jewish communities and visit allied countries to appeal for war-time aid to the USSR.<sup>100</sup> Among their activities, members of the JAC worked on compiling a collection of documents and witness testimony about the Nazi genocide of the Jews in the east, known as *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*.<sup>101</sup> Despite having initially been supported in their work during the war, by May 1952, members of the JAC were put on trial in secret with thirteen of them receiving the death penalty.<sup>102</sup> State

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<sup>97</sup> Blackwell, “Tashkent Partisans,” 161-163; and Khiterer, “Unwelcome Return Home,” 163-166.

<sup>98</sup> Khiterer, “Unwelcome Return Home,” 172.

<sup>99</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 350.

<sup>100</sup> Hrynevych, “Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar,” 170-171.

<sup>101</sup> Asia Kovrigina, “Babyn Yar in Personal Accounts,” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 232. Much as in the case of the formation of the JAC, the Black Book had initially received the support of Soviet leadership.

<sup>102</sup> Hrynevych, “Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar,” 173-175. Anti-Jewish repression continued until Stalin’s death, with the head of the JAC Solomon Mikhoels murdered in January 1948, and various other campaigns against members of the Jewish community, including the “Doctors Plot” in early 1953, which saw Jewish doctors accused of malpractice.

attacks such as these were not limited to the JAC. Members of other Jewish cultural groups and organizations, especially those who sought to preserve the memory of Babyn Yar and the Holocaust, were also targeted.

After the death of Stalin, Babyn Yar and Holocaust memorial activity remained taboo. Moreover, several plans for the non-commemorative use of land at Babyn Yar were discussed by the authorities throughout the early 1950s. Some called for the site to be turned into a place of recreation, taking advantage of pre-war proposals. However, it was decided that Babyn Yar would best serve as an industrial dumping ground. Over the 1950s, a mixture of industrial pulp and water was regularly dumped into the ravine from the nearby Petrovsky brick factories.<sup>103</sup> Authorities refused to address civilian and worker complaints over the factory's unsafe dumping practices, and on 13 March 1961, a large wave of mud flooded around 30 hectares of land and destroyed residential and administrative buildings in the Kurenivka district downhill from Babyn Yar.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, officials were initially silent on the extent of the damage caused by the disaster, with news only being broadcast by international media outlets until 16 March 1961.<sup>105</sup> Official Soviet data set the number of casualties at 145, but unofficial sources place the number as high as 1500.<sup>106</sup> Following the mudslide, Babyn Yar as a physical site continued to be forcibly altered through the construction of new streets, a sports complex and television tower. These projects saw alterations to the Lukyanivske Cemetery and liquidation of the Jewish, Muslim and Karaite Cemeteries.<sup>107</sup> In the case of any physical remains found at the site of Nazi crimes, the Kyiv municipal council arranged to have the corpses moved to the

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<sup>103</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 308.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar," 179. Anatoli Kuznetsov discussed how after the mudslide the locals appeared to become superstitious over the site, stating that the phrase "Babi Yar takes its revenge" began to take root. Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 474.

<sup>107</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 394.

Orthodox Lukyanivske Cemetery.<sup>108</sup> It should be noted that in the case of Jewish victims, many bodies would have gone unclaimed, as family members who would traditionally claim a body had either been victims themselves, or long since fled the region.

During this period of forced physical reconstruction and erasure, a new counter-memorial culture emerged on the literary and cultural scene. Shortly after the Kurenivka mudslide, Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, accompanied by the Kyiv-born Russian writer Anatoly Kuznetsov, toured Babyn Yar, which resulted in some of the most important pieces in Soviet Holocaust literature. Yevtushenko's poem *Babi Yar* brought local and international attention to the government's failure to erect a memorial at the ravine. The poem opens with the thought-provoking line: "No monument stands over Babi Yar," which not only called attention to the crimes committed at the site, but also to the impact of state-antisemitism and the Soviet policy of silence. The poem proved powerful enough to inspire Soviet composer Dmitrii Shostakovich to produce his haunting *Symphony No. 13* in December 1962; its first movement was based on the poem.<sup>109</sup> Both Yevtushenko's poem and Shostakovich's symphony faced intense criticism from the Soviet authorities, which hindered their official circulation in Soviet Ukraine. For Kuznetsov's part, having grown up in Kyiv near Babyn Yar, he compiled notes that he had written over the years and produced his *Babi Yar: A Documentary in the Form of a Novel*. The novel features several passages of testimony from Babyn Yar's survivors and describes how the site continued to be subjected to a policy of organized forgetting.<sup>110</sup> As mentioned above, these cultural figures faced intense criticism and

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<sup>108</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar," 179.

<sup>109</sup> Natalia Symonenko, "Babyn Yar in Music," in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 2023, 376-378. The premiere of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 13* took place in Moscow in December 1962, and it was also performed in Minsk. It was only in 1988 that the symphony was heard in Ukraine for the first time. There are other musical works dedicated to Babyn Yar, but *Symphony No. 13* is the best known.

<sup>110</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, 1. Kuznetsov was only able to publish his full uncensored novel in 1970 after gaining political asylum in England in 1969. Kovrigina, "Babyn Yar in Personal Accounts," 225-231. The Soviet version of

ensorship from the Soviet government, but their work helped thrust the memory of Babyn Yar onto the local and international stage despite Soviet censors attempting to hinder their messages. Today, these pieces serve as important vehicles of cultural transmission that draw on the Holocaust in Ukraine, as well as the different layers of history and memory that exist at Babyn Yar.

On the heels of these cultural works, government officials opted to return to the idea of building a monument at the former ravine as the 25th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre was approaching. Continuing the official party narrative, the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR issued a resolution on 5 July 1965 titled “About Holding a Closed Competition for the Creation of Designs for a Monument in Honour of Soviet Citizens and Captive Soldiers and Officers of the Red Army Who Died at the Hands of the German-Fascist Occupiers during the Occupation of the City of Kyiv.”<sup>111</sup> Nearly 60 entries were submitted to the competition, which was showcased in December 1965 at Kyiv’s House of Architecture. Unsurprisingly, every blueprint was rejected by the committee, with several branded as “representations of Jewish nationalism.”<sup>112</sup> Shortly after, another competition was announced titled “Road, Death, and Rebirth to Life.” The competition produced a winning design with the Soviet Union of Architects approving of its “socialist style,” but ultimately, the piece still failed to please party officials, leading to yet another rejection.<sup>113</sup>

At the same time as Soviet officials were considering monument designs, Ukrainian and Jewish grassroots activism was growing in the background. On 29 September 1966, close to a

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the novel was published in a heavily censored form in 1967. In 1970, Kuznetzov published an uncensored “polyphonic” version of his novel, which includes the use of three “voices”: the Soviet version in ordinary writing; the voice replacing text that was cut under Soviet censorship in italics; and that of a writer free from censorship which appears in square brackets.

<sup>111</sup> Iryna Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 354.

<sup>112</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 352.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

thousand people gathered for an unsanctioned rally and memorial at Babyn Yar. Among the crowd were Jewish and non-Jewish Ukrainians, including nationally-minded Ukrainian artists and writers who gave moving speeches about the need to fight against antisemitism. Ukrainian literary critic and activist Ivan Dziuba marked a new chapter in Ukrainian-Jewish relations when he emphasized that Babyn Yar was a shared tragedy of the Jewish and Ukrainian people, while highlighting the importance of fighting antisemitism and the need to work together in defense of ethnic cultures.<sup>114</sup> For the first time, a conversation opened between Ukrainians and Jews that went against the Soviet ideological and mnemonic code.<sup>115</sup> As Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern points out in his examination of symbolic meaning underlying Babyn Yar's 25th anniversary, Dziuba laid out the building blocks for a new chapter in the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Ukrainians.<sup>116</sup>

Soviet officials were deeply angered by both the public demonstration and the attempt to claim Babyn Yar as a site of a Jewish and Ukrainian national tragedy. Responding to the grassroots demonstrations, party bosses in the Ukrainian republic took several steps, two of which I will address here. First, shortly after the 25th anniversary the Central Committee called for a commemorative marker to be placed at Babyn Yar. The granite stela was inscribed with the following statement: "A monument will be established in this place to commemorate the victims of fascism, Soviet citizens who were executed during the temporary occupation of the city of Kyiv in 1941–1943."<sup>117</sup> Second, to prevent future grassroots demonstrations at the site, the authorities began to hold state-sponsored commemorations intended to support the official

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<sup>114</sup> Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "A Paradigm-Changing Day: The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Babyn Yar and Ukrainian-Jewish Relations," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 38, no. 3/4 (2021): 235, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48733662>.

<sup>115</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, "A Paradigm-Changing Day," 236.

<sup>116</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, "A Paradigm-Changing Day," 237.

<sup>117</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, "A Paradigm-Changing Day," 248.

Soviet narrative, often featuring party activists and loyal workers. Beginning in 1967 through to the 1980s, these commemorative activities attempted to thwart independent Jewish and non-Jewish activism. Moreover, the authorities pursued a campaign of intimidation against individuals who participated in the 25th anniversary memorial rally.<sup>118</sup>

The Soviet stela remained the only memorial at Babyn Yar until 1976, when a large bronze monument with the inscription “To the Soviet citizens and captured soldiers and officers of the Soviet army who were shot by the German occupiers in Babyn Yar” was placed at the site.<sup>119</sup> Designed by renowned Ukrainian sculptor Mykhailo Lysenko and a team of his assistants and architects, the monument was a product of intense party oversight and scrutiny from the beginning of its inception.<sup>120</sup> Over the long course of construction different figures were added to the monument, including the addition of figures typical of Soviet monuments: a worker, a soldier, and a sailor raising clenched fists above their heads before being shot. Additional figures included a young woman balancing between life and death, a group that included a little girl weeping over the body of an old man, and figures of two naked people who were falling backwards, symbolizing the executed people falling into the ravine. Authorities even weighed in on the placement of the monument. Originally, the monument was suggested to be placed at the heart of the shallow ravine suspended in mid-air, but that plan was changed owing to party sensors believing that the six spurs of the ravine could be seen as symbolic of

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<sup>118</sup> Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Babyn Yar was also a gathering place for activists to protest against Soviet repressions against the Jewish community. Protests and counter-protests occurred at the site until the late 1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev’s wave of liberalization saw the legalization of oppositional movements and removal of obstacles faced by individuals seeking to immigrate. Hrynevych, “Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar,” 203; and Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory*, 176. At the same time authorities were responding to increasing demands for Jewish emigration with a widespread, mass propaganda war against “international Zionism.”

<sup>119</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 357.

<sup>120</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 358.

the Star of David.<sup>121</sup> After undergoing several alterations in order to capture what officials referred to as “the triumph of life over death,” and further disruption to the remaining natural territory at Babyn Yar, authorities held a private unveiling event, without acknowledging the creators, nor inviting them to attend.<sup>122</sup> After the monument was revealed, a wave of criticism from members of the Jewish and wider Ukrainian community followed. Many believed that the monument was not only tone deaf in regard to the events that had taken place between 1941-1943, but also that the location, nearly half-kilometer from the original proposed site, was an attempt to offset the meaning of the monument.<sup>123</sup> Today, one can still see this exceptionally large bronze statuary, representing young Soviet men and women facing execution. The Soviet monument in the post-Soviet space will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Only in 1991 on the eve of Ukrainian independence did Babyn Yar finally receive its first official monument dedicated to the Nazis’ Jewish victims in the form of a large stone menorah. Standing beside the menorah at the 50th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre, Ukraine’s soon-to-be first president, Leonid Kravchuk, discussed the importance of remembering Babyn Yar’s Jewish victims and acknowledged their unique position in the Nazi’s genocidal policies.<sup>124</sup> This historic moment marked the beginning of Ukraine’s official politics of Holocaust memory. Since the erection of the menorah, a variety of memorials have been constructed at the Babyn Yar park, including memorials for the *Osterbaiters*, Ukrainian Orthodox priests, Roma, members of the OUN, children, and others. They will be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>121</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 358-359. The artist's names were not included on the monument (but mentioned in specialist publications), and they experienced intense criticism from the general public and intelligentsia for their work.

<sup>122</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 359.

<sup>123</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 358.

<sup>124</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 356.

In this chapter, I began by discussing key features of Nazi racial ideology to demonstrate how the war against the Soviet Union and the Nazi policies in Soviet Ukraine from the outset were intended to be violent and genocidal in nature, particularly for the Ukrainian Jews. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism served to produce an environment where communists and Jews were treated as one and the same, allowing for an escalation of violence as the Nazi war machine took over Soviet Ukraine. The expansion of guidelines for killing Jewish women and children signaled a new phase in the persecution of the Jews that had not been seen in occupied Western countries. While this chapter focused on the destruction of Kyivian Jews at Babyn Yar, similar places of mass shooting can be found elsewhere in the regions of the former Soviet Union that had been occupied during the Second World War.

This chapter has demonstrated that following the Nazis' executions in the ravine between 1941 and 1943, Babyn Yar became a site where the Soviet government suppressed Jewish victimhood. Until Ukraine gained independence, Babyn Yar was subject to a policy of physical erasure, one that saw the site's natural landscape altered through a series of industrial dumping and construction projects. Jewish and non-Jewish memory activists, artists and members of the literary community actively fought to preserve the site's Jewish history and multiple layers of complex memory. As a result of the layers of remembrance and its suppression that developed between 1941-1991, a multidirectional memory approach is crucial for the development of Holocaust memory in Ukraine. As Dziuba argued during his famous speech at Babyn Yar in September 1966, Babyn Yar is a site of Jewish and Ukrainian tragedy, an event that should be understood as a tragedy for Ukraine. In the following chapter, I will address Holocaust commemoration in independent Ukraine under various presidents. From there, I will examine Babyn Yar as a memorial landscape with its numerous monuments

established by various agents of memory. At the same time, I will demonstrate how the different eras in Ukrainian politics also impacted non-governmental commemorative projects at Babyn Yar, and the subsequent development of a hybrid memorial culture.

## **Chapter 2: Memory, Fragmentation, and Ambivalence: Independent Ukraine and the Memory of Babyn Yar**

In the wake of Ukrainian independence in 1991, Babyn Yar received its first monument dedicated to the memory of Jewish victims. At a public ceremony held in front of a large stone menorah, Ukraine's soon-to-be first president, Leonid Kravchuk, discussed the importance of remembering Babyn Yar's Jewish victims and acknowledged their unique position in the Nazis' genocidal policies.<sup>125</sup> This historic moment marked the beginning of independent Ukraine's Holocaust memory politics. Despite the potential for integrating Babyn Yar into the Ukrainian memoryscape, the inclusion of Holocaust memory remained fairly limited in the years after the 50th anniversary commemorations in 1991 until well after the turn of the century. However, with the Soviet grip on Babyn Yar's commemorative space having been lifted and independent Ukraine lacking capacity for state-guided memorial construction, non-governmental actors took the initiative to insert themselves into the memorial landscape. Since the erection of the menorah in 1991, over thirty memorials have been placed at Babyn Yar, including monuments dedicated to the memory of the murdered children at Babyn Yar, members of the Soviet and nationalist underground, Roma, and more.

As examined in the previous chapter, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, public memorial activity dedicated to the complex history of Babyn Yar and the Holocaust was treated as an unsanctioned, if not anti-Soviet, memory activism. After a referendum on Ukrainian independence in December 1991 confirmed the country's political choice, the once heavily censored and controlled memoryscape opened to different interpretations and perceptions of the past. Despite differing, and at times divisive, approaches to memory taken by Ukraine's

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<sup>125</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, "Basic Historical Narrative," 356.

presidents between 1991 and the present, Western analysis of Babyn Yar's memorial culture tends to assume that the leadership of independent Ukraine continued to cultivate the Soviet culture of denial. Western commentators also assumed that Ukrainian leaders were nationalists who approached this locale through a lens of competitive memory. In the post-Soviet memorial landscape at Babyn Yar, the presence of memorials reflecting the collective memories representative of the Nazis' many different victim groups, as well as multiple layers and dimensions of history, are treated in the West as evidence of Ukraine's unwillingness to officially commemorate the Holocaust.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Ukraine's independence, the once tightly controlled public sphere opened to previously forbidden memories and interpretations of history. At the same time, Ukraine did not undergo an immediate and all-encompassing change in official memory practice. Rather, Ukraine has continued to face a series of challenges in regard to shaping a post-Soviet state, with obstacles relating to identity, history, and language. Andrii Portnov argues that this has made it all the more difficult for Ukraine to navigate questions regarding how society should integrate the history and memory of the Holocaust into official and public discourse.<sup>126</sup> I argue that despite ambivalence to the past, each president of Ukraine, either directly or indirectly, contributed to the emergence of a hybrid memoryscape and memorial culture at Babyn Yar that can be identified today.

Chapter Two examines the memorial approach to Babyn Yar in Ukraine since 1991 from a new perspective by focusing on the complex interaction among the Ukrainian authorities and several influential groups of memory activists. Due to Babyn Yar being considered the primary symbol of the Holocaust in Ukraine, I also address the approach in Ukraine to Holocaust

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<sup>126</sup> Portnov, "Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," 353.

memory more broadly. This chapter begins with an examination of how the integration of Holocaust commemoration into Ukraine's official memorial culture has unfolded between 1991 and the present day. I am particularly interested in the different pathways taken towards memorialization at Babyn Yar by Ukraine's different presidents. Hereafter, I discuss the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve as a memorial space, in which I contend that a multidirectional and hybrid memoryscape has emerged. I am particularly interested in the symbolism of the numerous monuments there, as well as those memorials and practices viewed as alleged symbols of Ukraine's unwillingness to commemorate the Holocaust. Finally, through an examination of several monuments, I will discuss the continued "Soviet" commemorative practices and infusion of different mnemonic codes at Babyn Yar.

### ***Official Memory Practices at Babyn Yar***

A month after the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR passed the Declaration of Ukraine's Independence on 24 August 1991, Ukraine marked the 50th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre between 29 September and 6 October 1991. Official commemorative activities included an international conference on "Babyn Yar: History and Its Lessons," and the opening of a first of its kind Jewish exhibition in Kyiv.<sup>127</sup> The exhibition itself foreshadowed how the Soviet emphasis on heroism and sacrifice during the Nazi occupation would be infused with previously silenced memories. In addition to these events, Ukrainian authorities took part in an unveiling ceremony for Yurii Paskevych's Jewish menorah monument at Babyn Yar. Standing beside the menorah on 5 October, surrounded by members of the local and international community, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR and soon-to-be first president of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk acknowledged that Babyn Yar had been a site of Jewish

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<sup>127</sup> Himka, "Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Ukraine," 646.

massacre. Kravchuk was the first high-ranking official in Ukraine to publicly acknowledge how the Jews were targeted by the Nazis simply for being Jewish and issued an official apology for the atrocities that had taken place on behalf of Ukrainians to the Jewish community.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, Kravchuk referenced the memory of the many Ukrainians, Soviet partisans, members of the underground movement, and other nationalities that were later murdered by the Nazis at Babyn Yar, beginning a long tradition of acknowledging all of the Nazis' victims at state-sponsored commemorations.<sup>129</sup>

However, for the remainder of Kravchuk's term, Babyn Yar and the Holocaust remained on the sidelines of official domestic policy.<sup>130</sup> Despite the first president's overall ambivalence towards adopting a state-sponsored memorial culture at Babyn Yar, the commemorative approach taken by Kravchuk during the 50th anniversary should not be reduced to an attempt to close a chapter of the Holocaust in Ukraine altogether. While on the surface it appears that Holocaust memorial practices in particular were static, historian Georgiy Kasianov notes that during the initial years of independence, Ukraine's new leaders and institutions sought to address historical memory just enough to demonstrate they were adapting to the general needs of the moment, not solely in regard to the Holocaust.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, high ranking officials attempted to avoid any drastic shift in historical memory unless it was necessary for their own political legitimation. The economic landscape must also be noted, as despite the initial high

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<sup>128</sup> Georgiy Kasianov, "The Jewish Question: Why Babi Yar, 80 years Later, Remains the Territory of a War of Ideas and Meanings," *Focus*, 29 September 2021, <https://focus.ua/opinions/493965-evreyskiy-vopros-pochemu-babiy-yar-80-let-spustya-ostaetsya-territoriy-vovny-i-dey-i-smyslov>.

<sup>129</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar," 206.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 210. In 1993, Kravchuk did speak in Israel on the crimes committed against the Jews and emphasized his regret for the events that had taken place in Ukraine, but scholars have generally reduced this to the former president's attempt to cultivate stronger relations in the international community.

<sup>131</sup> Georgiy Kasianov, "History, Politics and Memory (Ukraine 1990s–2000s)," In *Memory and Change in Europe*, ed. Małgorzata Pakier, and Joanna Wawrzyniak (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2022), 196. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/reader.action?docID=4007290&ppg=207>.

hopes for a smooth economic transition, post-Soviet Ukraine faced a series of economic obstacles.<sup>132</sup> In light of this poor economic climate, and rapidly deteriorating quality of life, the resources to facilitate the construction of new memorial centers were not available. Therefore, it is more fruitful to view Kravchuk's approach to Babyn Yar in 1991 as a foundational stepping stone in the slow process of moving beyond the rigid Soviet narrative of wartime events. By acknowledging the many different ethnic and political victims at Babyn Yar, Kravchuk rejected the Soviet practice of universalizing the Nazis' victims, which for several decades had seen Jewish and Ukrainian victimhood narratives subsumed under the all-encompassing Soviet narrative. Furthermore, with the removal of restrictions on public memorial activity at Babyn Yar, other formerly silenced voices began to enter into the memorial landscape, creating opportunities for multidirectional memory pathways, as well as a hybrid memoryscape.

Official discourse on Babyn Yar and the Holocaust remained largely static under Ukraine's second President Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005). Kuchma's two presidential terms were marked by the Ukrainization of the already deeply rooted Soviet myths, especially that of the Great Patriotic War. Drawing on the old Soviet model, Kuchma approached memory of the war by emphasizing Ukrainian heroism in the Red Army. For example, Victory Day formally became a Ukrainian state holiday in 2000 under his tenure.<sup>133</sup> All of the former president's war-related memorial speeches, including his speech during the 60th anniversary at Babyn Yar, harkened back to the Soviet era with omissions of Jewish suffering and the Holocaust more broadly. However, near the end of Kuchma's term, his administration continued the practice initiated by Kravchuk in acknowledging the different ethnicities targeted by the Nazis and played a pivotal role in bringing the formerly silenced memory of the Roma genocide into the

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<sup>132</sup> Yekelchuk, *Ukraine*, 197-207.

<sup>133</sup> Portnov, "Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," 353.

public sphere. Similar to the Soviet restrictions on Jewish narratives of wartime experiences, public acknowledgement and memorialization of the Nazi crimes committed against the Roma, also known as the *Porajmos*, or “great devouring” in Romani, was equally taboo. In a groundbreaking moment for the Ukrainian and international Roma community, the Ukrainian parliament passed a resolution in 2004 officially designating 2 August as a National Day of Remembrance for the Romani genocide. Since the passing of the resolution, Ukraine became the first (and only) post-Soviet state to officially use the term Roma rather than the politically incorrect term “Gypsy,” and today is home to some of the memorials dedicated to the memory of the Roma that are exceedingly rare in Europe.<sup>134</sup>

Kuchma was also involved in several important grassroots memorial activities at Babyn Yar. In 2001, along with other Kyivian officials, the president participated in the unveiling of a haunting monument dedicated to the memory of the murdered children of Babyn Yar. In addition, he initially supported the proposal for a Jewish memorial center launched by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in 2000, which proposed to construct the Spadshchyna (Heritage) Community and Cultural Center at Babyn Yar.<sup>135</sup> Plans for the cultural center consisted of two main features. First, the center was intended to be a central site of Jewish presence in Kyiv. Secondly, the project aimed to transform Babyn Yar into a space of revival for the Jewish community in Ukraine. On 30 September 2001, President Kuchma and then-mayor of Kyiv Oleksandr Omelchenko, took part in a ceremony to lay a granite stone,

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<sup>134</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk, “The Memory of the Roma Holocaust in Ukraine: Mass Graves, Memory Work and the Politics of Commemoration.” *Disputed Memories*, ed. Tea Sindbæk Andersen, and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, 149–74 (Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 158.

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/reader.action?docID=5119739&ppg=155>.

<sup>135</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 409–411. With the support of local authorities, the JDC launched an international design competition with the aim of finding a suitable proposal to create a memorial complex and Jewish community, which was ultimately won by an Israeli team of architects with the vision that the space would be a symbol of life, death and the rebirth of the Jewish community in both Kyiv and Ukraine.

which was inscribed in Ukrainian, English, and Hebrew.<sup>136</sup> For Kuchma, international and private donors proved to be highly beneficial, because, as in the case of Kravchuk's presidency, the economic climate was weak. Through this proposed private initiative, the president could claim credit for a Babyn Yar memorial without allocating the funds necessary for construction.

From the very beginning, the JDC project and its supporters faced intense criticism. By late winter 2002 the project had already become divisive among Jewish and non-Jewish Ukrainians, as well as internationally. For some members of the Jewish community, the proposal was viewed as distasteful and inappropriate, with critics arguing against a center being built on the site of a mass grave, which went against Jewish law. For non-Jews and some Jewish groups, although many critics voiced concern over building at a site of murder, the chief issue was the intention to transform Babyn Yar into a specifically Jewish site of memory.<sup>137</sup> There was a belief among nationally minded critics of the center that Jews had no right to dominate the space as a large number of Ukrainians and Russians were also murdered at the site. Critics included the head of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD) of Ukraine, Josef Zissels, the head of the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies, Dr. Anatoly Podolsky, historian Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, writer and dissident Ivan Dziuba, and many others, including prominent secular Jewish leaders.<sup>138</sup> Ultimately, the project failed to come to fruition

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<sup>136</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 409. Important to note here is that the stones varied in their inscriptions. The Ukrainian stone stated: "This stone was laid on the 60th anniversary of the mass killing of Jews in Babyn Yar to mark the intent to construct on this site the Spadshchyna Community and Cultural center." The English and Hebrew stones read: "this cornerstone of the Jewish heritage community center was laid on the 60th anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre." These stones also feature the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee logo and Kyiv's emblem, a shield depicting archangel Michael which is symbolic of the cooperation between Kyiv and the committee in this project.

<sup>137</sup> Burakovskiy, "Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine," 380.

<sup>138</sup> Yuri Radchenko, "Babyn Yar: A Site of Massacres, (Dis)remembrance and Instrumentalisation," *New Eastern Europe*, 11 October 2016, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2016/10/11/babyn-yar-a-site-of-massacres-dis-remembrance-and-instrumentalisation/>. Supporters of this project included the Ukrainian businessman and president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress Vadym Rabinovich, the president of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, Ilya Levitas, and the head of the Ukrainian Anti-Fascist Committee, Alexander Shlayen, with the country's rabbis, who are mainly orthodox, supporting the plan.

after intense public debate.

In stark contrast to the memory politics of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma who avoided taking radical steps toward shaping a new national memory, Ukraine's third President Viktor Yushchenko engaged in mnemonic practices that proved to be a source of deep contention among the local and international community. On the one hand, Yushchenko was the first president to use the term "Holocaust" in his official speeches, as well as ordered the Cabinet of Ministers to examine "the question of creating in the due order the Babyn Yar Historical and Cultural Preserve" on 23 September 2005, which ultimately bore symbolic fruit on 1 March 2007 when the Cabinet of Ministers approved the relevant resolution. Still, the designation of Babyn Yar as a site of national heritage was only given in 2010 near the end of Yushchenko's presidency, and the memorial preserve faced continuous obstacles obtaining the official transfer of land.<sup>139</sup> His presidency also saw the 65th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre marked at the state-level, with a wide variety of commemorative events. Most notably, the Ukrainian government co-sponsored an international forum under the motto "Let My People Live," with the World Holocaust Forum and Yad Vashem. Speaking in front of a large international audience at the event, Yushchenko stressed that Ukraine would not accept national or religious intolerance.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, as Western scholarly discussions of Babyn Yar's fragmented and peripheral memorial activity tend to highlight, his seemingly radical policies concerning the appropriation of Holocaust memory as a framework were aimed at having the

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<sup>139</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 413. In 2010 members of the World Jewish Congress called on then President Yushchenko to intervene in the proposed construction of a hotel at Babyn Yar to house guests visiting for the 2012 Euro Football match. Plans to build the hotel were halted by Mayor of Kyiv Leonid Chernovetsky after he vetoed the proposal. During the mayor's address to Ukraine on the 68th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy in 2009, he pledged to prevent any impiety to the Babi Yar victims. He also promised "a proper protection of the burial site." For more information on the scandal, see "Kiev mayor vetoes plans for hotel on massacre site," *World Jewish Congress* (29 September 2009), <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/kiev-mayor-vetoes-plans-for-hotel-on-massacre-site> (accessed: 8 June 2024).

<sup>140</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar," 214-215.

Holodomor, which killed approximately between 3 and 3.5 million Ukrainians during 1932 and 1933, recognized as genocide.<sup>141</sup>

Even more controversial, Yushchenko has been accused of the displacement, if not at times revisionist approach to Ukraine's more uncomfortable history, such as the involvement of locals and nationalist groups in the Holocaust.<sup>142</sup> This is considered especially problematic in the case of Babyn Yar due to the history of nationalist collaboration with the Nazis.<sup>143</sup> Although Yushchenko's memory regime was imperfect at best, it would be a disservice to the history of Babyn Yar's memorial culture to frame his mnemonic practices purely as competitive memory. If we consider Michael Rothberg's argument that one of major stumbling blocks to a more just and inclusive memoryscape is the belief that one's own history, culture, identity are separate and a unique thing, it would be wrong to dismiss what can be seen as Yushchenko's engagement in a multidirectional approach by drawing on the different memory triggers embedded in Ukraine's complex layers of history.<sup>144</sup> For example, by attempting to raise awareness of the crimes committed against Ukrainians between 1932 and 1933 through the Holocaust paradigm,

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<sup>141</sup> Kasianov, "History, Politics and Memory," 198; Serhy Yekelchuk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47-49; Portnov, "Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," 353-354. It should be noted, however, that Yushchenko's position on this issue was in some respects more moderate than that of the Ukrainian diaspora in North America. In the diaspora the Holodomor has been labeled the "Ukrainian Holocaust." Yushchenko avoided using this manipulative term, though it was taken up by some of his nationalistic allies. Yushchenko also proposed to criminalize the denial of both the Holodomor and the Holocaust.

<sup>142</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar After Babyn Yar," 213.

<sup>143</sup> Berkhoff, "Ukraine Under Nazi Rule," 72-73. What continues to be a major source of controversy and tension in contemporary Ukrainian memory politics is the involvement of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in the Nazis' policies. At the same time, the nationalists and the Nazis did not have a positive relationship, nor did they continue to work together over the course of the war. For instance, by the summer of 1941, members of the OUN-B faction, including their controversial leader Stepan Bandera, were persecuted and arrested. By 1942, members of the OUN-B set up the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), another controversial historical group, which ended up fighting against both the Germans and the Soviets.

<sup>144</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 7. A great deal of parallels between the Holocaust and the Holodomor can be found in Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Documentary in the Form of a Novel*. Constant parallels are drawn between the two occupations, and through these tragic events and the further discussion of the Holodomor as genocide against the framework of the Holocaust, Ukrainians can find solidarity through memory of atrocities committed on Ukrainian lands. Anna Chebotareva, "Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet Ukraine," *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine*, ed. Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper and Anna Wylegała (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020), 187.

Yushchenko was able to bring further attention to the Holocaust in Ukraine. Moreover, Yushchenko continued the tradition of acknowledging the many different victim groups at Babyn Yar, building on the public memory of the Roma genocide, as well as initiating an annual ceremony at a wooden cross dedicated to members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) beginning in 2007.<sup>145</sup> Today, this ceremony has proven difficult to overlook due to the former president's failure to discuss how members of the OUN and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) who had, for however short of a period, collaborated with the Nazis and engaged in violent acts against the Jewish community. The 2007 ceremony also coincided with the highly controversial Commander-in-Chief of the UPA, Roman Shukhevych, being awarded the Hero of Ukraine medal. Ukrainian leaders including Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and the head of Ukrainian parliament Arsenii Yatseniuk have also taken part in commemorations at the cross.<sup>146</sup>

In the case of memorial activity commemorating members of the OUN and the UPA, it is admittedly difficult to approach their role in contemporary Ukrainian memory politics. This thesis does not seek to untangle these complexities. However, to overly generalize the attempted rehabilitation of Ukrainian nationalists between 2005 and 2010, as well as during 2015-2019, results in several misguided perceptions: 1) that all Ukrainians universally support radical ethnic nationalism and the rehabilitation of its proponents, when in reality, the rehabilitation and commemoration of the nationalists has from the outset been a politically charged and a deeply divisive issue at Babyn Yar and across Ukraine; 2) that the symbolic meaning of Ukraine's nationalist organizations and fighters has remained static since World War II. Overarching

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<sup>145</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuk, "Babi Yar and the Nazi Genocide of Roma: Memory Narratives and Memory Practices in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 3 (2022): 461. During President Yushchenko's address for the International Day of the Roma Holocaust in 2009, he argued for the Roma genocide to be included in the national memory of WWII, and highlighted the nature of the Nazis' policies that targeted the Roma community.

<sup>146</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar," 214-215.

generalizations in Western analysis of Yushchenko's attempt to reorientate the nation toward lionizing nationalist groups and their leaders fail to adequately address the context in which their symbolic use has emerged in independent Ukraine's public sphere. Furthermore, upon a closer examination of Yushchenko's divisive motion to posthumously award Roman Shukhevych, leader of the UPA, and Stepan Bandera, leader of the OUN-B faction, the Hero of Ukraine medal in 2007 and 2010 respectively, one can see that the president's approval ratings and popularity by then had dropped quite low, and his move can be viewed, at least in part, as a calculated move to maintain his support in western Ukraine.<sup>147</sup>

Western-centric discussions of Yushchenko's multi-pronged approach to memorial activity also casts an unfortunate shadow over the evolution of memorialization practices at Babyn Yar during his presidency. For example, attention is focused on the official memorial projects that were launched to commemorate the centenary of Ukrainian poet and OUN-M faction member Olena Teliha on 22 May 2006, with the poet being posthumously awarded the Hero of Ukraine in 2006.<sup>148</sup> Official cultural events mandated by a presidential decree took place between July and September 2006, culminating in the government supporting a plan to design a monument between 2006 and 2008 to replace the large wooden cross erected in 1992 to honour members of the OUN killed at Babyn Yar.<sup>149</sup> Some Ukrainian historians believed that Teliha was either shot at Babyn Yar or her body was buried there. However, the memorial in Teliha's honour *only* came to fruition in 2017. A topic of lesser discussion, and overshadowed by the memorial activity for Teliha, is how Yushchenko also posthumously awarded Tetiana Markus, Jewish and Soviet underground member who had been murdered by the Nazis in 1943, the Hero of Ukraine on 21 September 2006 just six days apart from Teliha. Moreover,

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<sup>147</sup> Yekelchuk, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 56.

<sup>148</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar," 214.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 214-215.

non-governmental Jewish memorial activists were able to propose and *successfully* open a monument honouring Markus at Babyn Yar in December 2009.<sup>150</sup> The construction of the monument to Markus, versus the nearly decade-long delay for the monument to Teliha, would have been impossible without the support of the Kyiv city council, underscoring that the period was more dynamic than traditional interpretations suggest.

In one of the lower points of independent Ukraine's memorial activity at Babyn Yar, Ukraine's fourth president, Viktor Yanukovich, based his memory politics on a return to the old Soviet model. Reminiscent of Leonid Kuchma's practices, Yanukovich attempted to revive the myth of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>151</sup> For instance, drawing on former Soviet discourse, during the 70th anniversary commemorative event at Babyn Yar Yanukovich omitted the ethnic identity of the Jewish victims from his speech and emphasized the mass murder of the civilian population. Moreover, the president opted to avoid using the term "Holocaust" altogether.<sup>152</sup> However, despite his attempts to reverse course, Yanukovich was unable to fully restore the former Soviet mnemonic code that had slowly been eroding in favour of a hybrid memoryscape. For example, before Babyn Yar's 70th anniversary, in July 2011 the Verkhovna Rada approved a resolution entitled "About the 70th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar Tragedy," recognizing the different ethnic identities and political orientation of the victim groups. In addition, 27 January was formally established as Holocaust Remembrance Day, bringing Ukraine in line with the approach taken by other European nations, which stood in stark contrast to Yanukovich's attempt to return to the former Soviet narrative.<sup>153</sup> As a result of numerous agents of memory operating in Ukraine's memoryscape, and the previous steps to bring new voices into the public

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Kasianov, "History, Politics and Memory," 210. At the same time, Viktor Yanukovich sought to reverse course on the memory of the Holodomor, arguing that it had not been an act of genocide.

<sup>152</sup> Portnov, "Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," 354.

<sup>153</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar," 215-217.

war-memorial space, Ukrainians had already been exposed to memories that had run counter to the former Soviet model. Yanukovich's presidential term also saw the emergence of a new private initiative to build a memorial center at Babyn Yar. Back in 2006, Jewish businessman and president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, Vadym Rabinovych, established the Memory of Babyn Yar Foundation, which sought to build a museum, religious and educational complex at Babyn Yar.<sup>154</sup> After years of planning, members of the foundation and foreign guests gathered at Babyn Yar on 2 October 2011 for a ceremony and laid a small granite stone in a section of the former Jewish cemetery.<sup>155</sup> However, unlike Kuchma, Yanukovich did not attend the event. Similar to the above-mentioned JDC-sponsored project, the proposed memorial center faced intense criticism, although the non-Jewish community was less involved.<sup>156</sup> As in the case of the JDC project, the proposed memorial failed to come to fruition.

Babyn Yar's memorial culture underwent one of its most dynamic shifts after the inauguration of Ukraine's fifth president Petro Poroshenko. Inspired in part by the desire to finally integrate Ukraine into various European institutions, Poroshenko embarked on a campaign to acknowledge the importance of Babyn Yar as a site of memory at the state-level. In August 2015, Poroshenko announced the decree "Concerning Measures in Connection with the 75th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar Tragedy," which brought Babyn Yar's memory and the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine to prominence at the state level.<sup>157</sup> Following his monumental decree, Poroshenko spoke in Israel's Knesset in December 2015, where he emphasized the importance of Babyn Yar to the Holocaust and discussed the murder of 1.5

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<sup>154</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 412.

<sup>155</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 411. The stone was inscribed with the following text: "On the sad 70th anniversary of the shootings at Babyn Yar the first stone in the building of the Babyn Yar Memorial and Museum complex was laid in this place."

<sup>156</sup> Radchenko, "Babyn Yar."

<sup>157</sup> Naimark, "Many Lives of Babi Yar," 177.

million Ukrainian Jews, who were targeted solely because of their Jewish identity. At the same time, he took the important step of acknowledging Ukrainian wartime collaboration, stating that “unfortunately, collaboration existed practically in all European countries that were occupied by the Nazis, helping those monsters to implement the ‘final solution to the Jewish question’,” and apologized to the children and grandchildren of Ukrainian Holocaust victims on behalf of the Ukrainian nation.<sup>158</sup> Through his acknowledgment of local collaboration during the Holocaust, Poroshenko was also able to successfully raise awareness of the heroic acts of Ukraine’s Righteous Among the Nations, therefore opening a new page in Ukraine’s official memorial culture. In his address, the president was memorializing both the Holocaust’s victims and heroes, adopting a hybrid humanistic approach that commemorates the victims of the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity during the occupation, with the memory of heroes and their resistance against the Nazis. At the same time, this new feature of memory in Ukraine highlighted the repressive nature of Soviet memory discourse: state-sponsored antisemitism and the overall erasure of the Holocaust from official discourse, which also prevented Soviet citizens from openly discussing their experiences during the occupation, hindering their ability to access the honorific title of Righteous.

During the official ceremonies for the 75th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy Poroshenko continued the expansion of Babyn Yar’s memorialization and announced the creation of a privately funded memorial and museum dedicated to the victims of the Babyn Yar massacres that would be unveiled by 2021.<sup>159</sup> Shortly after Poroshenko’s announcement, a second memorial project began to be formulated, with both proposed memorial centers entering

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<sup>158</sup> Portnov, “Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine,” 355.

<sup>159</sup> Tamar Pileggi, “75 Years After Babi Yar Massacre, Ukraine Reexamines its Dark History,” *Times of Israel* (3 October 2016), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/75-years-after-babi-yar-massacre-ukraine-reexamines-its-dark-history/> (accessed: 16 September 2022).

the public sphere and competing for government and public support. An analysis of these two projects will follow in Chapter Three.

Lastly, Ukraine's current president Volodymyr Zelensky has continued the transition of memorial culture at Babyn Yar into a humanistic and hybrid model open to multidirectional paths of memory. Elected in 2019, Zelensky has played an instrumental role in the development of new commemorative projects representative of the different layers of memory and cultures of memory at Babyn Yar, actively participating in projects hosted by the privately funded Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC). Much as in the case with the previous private initiatives at Babyn Yar, the BYHMC has proved to be divisive among Jewish and non-Jewish stakeholders, but has provided Ukrainian authorities with an opportunity for a memorial center to be constructed in Babyn Yar without state funding. However, the issue of private funding itself has contributed to the debate over the memorial center. President Zelensky's position on the development of the BYHMC will be discussed further in the following chapter.

In addition to Zelensky's support of a memorial center at Babyn Yar, since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the president has drawn on global memory of the Holocaust in his international call to action to stand up against Russian aggression. On 1 March 2022, when a Russian rocket intended for the nearby television tower hit close to Babyn Yar, the president called on the West to do more to prevent Russia's attacks, using symbolic language associated with Western mnemonic discourse by posting "What is the point of saying 'never again' for 80 years, if the world stays silent when a bomb drops on the same site of Babyn Yar? At least 5 killed. History being repeated..." on the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.<sup>160</sup> Not without controversy, the president continued in his

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<sup>160</sup> Tiffany Wertheimer, "Babyn Yar: Anger as Kyiv's Holocaust Memorial is Damaged," *BBC News*, 3 March 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60588885> (accessed 28 September 2022). Initially, reports alluded to the

attempts to access memory triggers associated with the Holocaust during the early stages of the war, including during his address to the Israeli Knesset in March 2022.<sup>161</sup> Today, even in the face of the ongoing war and Russian aggression, Zelensky participates in all annual commemorations dedicated to the memory of Babyn Yar, the Holocaust, and more recently, for Ukraine's Righteous Among Nations, which became an official day of commemoration on 14 May 2021.<sup>162</sup> Through his active participation in multi-layered memorial activity in Babyn Yar, Zelensky has underscored the development of a new memorial culture in Ukraine; a commemorative culture that is hybrid, humanistic, and representative of different layers and dimensions of memory.

### ***Babyn Yar as a Memorial Landscape***

In 2005 President Viktor Yushchenko initiated the process of designating Babyn Yar as a memorial preserve. A substantial portion of the site was allocated to the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve after a multi-year, and at times stagnant, process. As discussed in detail by Vitaliy Nakhmanovych, the sections of the geographical territory of Babyn Yar had already been broken up by the allocation of territory to separate groups. This included a portion of the Jewish and Karaite cemeteries that had already been acquired by the Babyn Yar Memory Foundation Project, which, as mentioned above, proposed building a memorial center after years of planning in 2011, but later transferred the land lease to the BYHMC in 2017, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>163</sup> In his contribution to *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*,

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memorials at Babyn Yar being hit by the rocket, when in reality the bomb hit the nearby television tower, which is located in close proximity to the Jewish Menorah at the site, as well as other memorials for the Jewish community.

<sup>161</sup> Masha Gessen, "The Holocaust Memorial Undone by Another War," *New Yorker*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/04/18/the-holocaust-memorial-undone-by-another-war> (accessed 15 September 2022).

<sup>162</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, "Comment by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day," 27 January 2024, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/komentar-mzs-ukrainy-do-mizhnarodnoho-dnia-pamiati-zhertv-holokostu5#:~:text=On%2> (accessed 1 February 2024).

<sup>163</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 413.

Nakhmanovych describes the territory allocated to the Preserve as three separate sections: the first, an area that is located at the summit of Babyn Yar, near the 1976 Soviet monument; the second, an area located behind Melnikova Street and the Dorohozhychi subway station; and third, an area comprising of three elements: the former Kyrylivske Orthodox cemetery (where the menorah monument is located); a small section of the “old” Jewish Cemetery; and the “Road of Grief” leading from the Melnikova Street to the Menorah.<sup>164</sup> In addition, the original allocation of land did not include the highly sought after former office of the Jewish Cemetery, which was the only remaining historical building at Babyn Yar.<sup>165</sup> Its former office at 44 Melnikova Street has long been a source of contention between competing projects and will also be discussed in the following chapter.

Located on the outskirts of Kyiv between the Lukyanivska and Syrets neighborhoods, next to the Dorohozhychi subway station, the Preserve resembles a city park, surrounded by busy roads, shops and cafes that have popped up in the area since the end of the war. Due to the Soviet authorities’ numerous attempts to erase Babyn Yar’s landscape, the precise location of the mass shootings until recently was hard to pinpoint. Fortunately, new information has been provided through an ongoing land survey and modeling project initiated by the BYHMC and the Center for Spatial Technologies led by Maksym Rokmaniko.<sup>166</sup> Visitors encounter a landscape that houses over thirty monuments and memorial plaques. These monuments represent a variety of design approaches and aesthetics, as well as the differing narratives in Ukrainian memorial culture. Among the most prominent narratives of memory at the site are the Soviet, Ukrainian, Jewish, and nationalist, but other mnemonic communities such as the Roma

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Maksym Rokmaniko, “The Models,” in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 89.

are present as well. Upon examining the many monuments at Babyn Yar, we can find intersections of memory and similarities in symbolic style. While many argue that Babyn Yar is a site of competitive memory, I argue that these monuments demonstrate the existence of several layers of memory, multidirectional memory, and how they can be seen as a new hybrid model for commemorating the difficult chapters of Ukrainian history.

Andrii Portnov has argued that one of the greatest obstacles in the development of Ukraine's post-Soviet cultural memory has been the existence of two popular narratives: the deeply embedded Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War; and the previously forbidden nationalist narrative. The Soviet model, which began developing in 1943 and acquired its final shape in the 1960s, has undoubtedly remained a key element in post-Soviet Ukrainian memory politics. In contrast, the nationalist narrative champions the anti-Soviet underground movements and supports the controversial glorification of the OUN and UPA. As previously mentioned, support for the nationalist memory model has varied across Ukraine, and due to significant political and regional differences in the media coverage of this issue, a national consensus on it has never been reached.<sup>167</sup> Although both the Soviet and nationalist models of memory feature prominently in Western interpretations and examinations of Babyn Yar's memorial culture, the discussion of Jewish memorial culture at the site is largely based on the 1991 menorah, and the previously mentioned failed private initiatives to build memorial centers, which overlooks the other monuments that represent Jewish memory. In addition to the more obvious mnemonic codes embedded in the site's monuments, several others demonstrate the continued mutual influence and intersection between the different memorial cultures. I contend that while the existence of Soviet and nationalist models of memory at Babyn Yar is an important feature of

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<sup>167</sup> Portnov, "Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," 349-350.

commemorative culture in Ukraine, the integration of Jewish commemorative culture at Babyn Yar has, together with other memorial cultures, created a hybrid memorial landscape.

Soviet memory at Babyn Yar is most visible in the massive 1976 monument dedicated to “the Soviet citizens and captive soldiers and officers of the Soviet Army who were shot by the German fascists in Babyn Yar.” Standing as the only monument erected on the site during the Soviet period, the large bronze statuary overlooks a portion of the park, reflecting several aspects of Soviet memory politics, including the depiction of the “fearless” Soviet citizens who fought through pain and suffering in the great victory over fascism, as well as the history of Soviet repression and censorship.<sup>168</sup> In its original form, the monument was accompanied by a plaque laid at the base of the monument with the Ukrainian inscription “Here, in 1941-1943, the German fascist invaders executed over 100,000 citizens of Kyiv and POWs,” only to be joined by separate Russian and Yiddish plaques in 1989.<sup>169</sup> Today, the Soviet monument remains an important site of gathering during official commemorations at Babyn Yar, with annual commemorations including wreath ceremonies at the statuary.

Jewish commemorative culture is undeniably most recognizable in the iconic 1991 menorah located at the former boundary of the former Lukyanivske, Jewish, and Kyrylivske Orthodox cemeteries. Unlike the Soviet monument, at the time of construction, the menorah was understood to be closer to the original site of the mass shootings. To symbolize the Jewish massacre, the monument's architect Yurii Paskevych, in collaboration with designer Yakym Levych, artist Oleksandr Levych, and engineer Borys Hiller, designed some of the branches to include faceless figures, with other branches portraying human figures placed in a line, while other human figures were standing with their hands raised in the air. At the base of the

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<sup>168</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 399.

<sup>169</sup> Berkhoff and Pohl, “Basic Historical Narrative,” 354.

monument there are two standing memorial plaques representing Jewish matzevahs, which are traditionally laid at the head of the grave to commemorate the dead. Inscribed in both Hebrew and Ukrainian, the stones read: “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”<sup>170</sup> The memorial also features a pathway called “The Road of Grief.” The pathway extends from the menorah monument to the former office of the Jewish Cemetery.<sup>171</sup> Today, the menorah, along with a recent synagogue in the design of a pop-up story book, are central sites for commemorative gatherings on the state-level. Since its opening, the menorah has served as a site where foreign dignitaries visiting Kyiv paid their respects to the victims, and it continues to feature in local memorial activity.

Several other monuments at Babyn Yar, either explicitly or inexplicitly, serve to represent Jewish memory, such as the 2001 monument dedicated to the murdered children at Babyn Yar. The design consists of a little girl sitting in between two figures: to her left the fairy-tale clown Pierrot with his head hanging low; and to the right, a doll with his hands raised towards heaven wearing a kippah (a brimless cap traditionally worn by Jewish males) on his broken head.<sup>172</sup> Although the kippah references Jewish memory, the monument to the murdered children at Babyn Yar can be seen as a hybrid mnemonic tool as it infuses the memory of all the children from different ethnic backgrounds and political groups that either perished or lost their childhood at Babyn Yar. One such example is the Roma, who as previously discussed, also remained on the sidelines of official memorial activity until 2004.

Other elements of memorial culture infusion can be found across the park, such as a granite stone that was installed in 2011 at the intersection of Melnikova and Dorohozhytska

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<sup>170</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 395.

<sup>171</sup> Klimova, “Babyn Yar in Sculpture and Painting,” 365. There are currently plans to build an “Avenue of Martyrs” alongside the pathway. Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 395.

<sup>172</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 401.

streets which reads “Here began the ‘Road to Death,’ along which on 29 September 1941 the fascist occupiers drove the Jews to be shot in Babyn Yar.”<sup>173</sup> Today, this marker plays a central role in the annual commemorative march towards the menorah monument organized by members of the Jewish community in Kyiv on the last Sunday before Yom Kippur.<sup>174</sup> What is overlooked is how the stone infuses different memorial language by acknowledging the ethnic identity of the Jews, while simultaneously adopting familiar Soviet language such as the phrase “fascist occupiers.” Here we can see an intersection of the Soviet memory discourse with Jewish commemorative culture, underscoring the hybrid nature of memory at Babyn Yar.

The strongest example of Jewish and Soviet infusion is found in the monument dedicated to Jewish Soviet underground member Tetiana Markus. It is unclear where Markus was killed or buried, but some Jewish-Ukrainian activists wanted to place a monument dedicated to her at Babyn Yar. Initiated by Ilya Levitas, head of the Jewish Council of Ukraine and the Memory of Babyn Yar Foundation (not to be confused with the Memory of Babyn Yar Foundation organized in 2006 by Vadym Rabinovych), the funding for the statue was provided by the then-head of Kyiv’s City Council Leonid Chernovetsky and Sergei Makimov, co-president of the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine.<sup>175</sup> The monument was unveiled in 2009 near the summit of Babyn Yar, on the corner of Olena Teliha and Dorohozytska streets. The mnemonic code represented in the statue is two-fold. On one hand, the monument contributes to Jewish representation at Babyn Yar. On the other hand, although Markus was a victim of the Nazis, her activity as a member of the Soviet underground highlights not only her heroism, an important characteristic of the Soviet narrative, but the influence of Soviet memorial culture on modern Jewish Ukrainian memorialization. She strikes a heroic pose, with her fists clenched,

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<sup>173</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 402.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 403.

and her head is held high.<sup>176</sup> It is telling that rather than focus solely on victimhood, memory activists chose to highlight heroism and sacrifice, characteristics that were heavily emphasized in the Soviet model of memory.

Lastly, Jewish and Ukrainian memory (not to be confused with nationalist memory) merge in the memorial dedicated to the Kyivian writer Anatoly Kuznetsov. Having lived near Babyn Yar as a child and witnessed the Nazi occupation, Kuznetsov played a pivotal role in raising international awareness of the Jewish massacre at Babyn Yar. This memorial honours not only the memory of those who perished at Babyn Yar, but the pathways of multidirectional memory that connect Nazi and Stalinist brutality in Ukraine, as well as the post-war Soviet campaign to obliterate the memory of Babyn Yar, and the commemoration of those who fought to keep its memory alive. The 2009 monument depicts a boy looking up at a metal tablet with two inscriptions. The first reproduces the initial Nazi order issued to the Kyivian Jews on 28 September 1941. The other reads: “In order for the past not to repeat itself, find the courage to look it in the eyes: the whole truth is in *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* by the eyewitness of events Anatoly Kuznetsov (1929-1979).”<sup>177</sup> In commemorating the work of the political émigré from the Soviet Union, a person with a Russian name, but raised by his Ukrainian mother and grandparents, intersections of the different layers in Ukrainian history are brought together at Babyn Yar, drawing on both Jewish and Ukrainian cultural memory.

Just as Jewish memorial activity became legal, so too did other manifestations of memory. After 1991, agents of memory supportive of the formerly suppressed nationalist narratives sought to have their voice included in Babyn Yar’s memorial landscape. The nationalist model is most clearly represented by the construction of two monuments dedicated

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<sup>176</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 402.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 406.

to members of the Melnyk faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-M) and the poet Olena Teliha who belonged to that faction as well. On 21 February 1992, the 50th anniversary of Olena Teliha's murder, nationalist memory activists sponsored the construction of a large wooden cross near the 1976 Soviet monument. At the base of the large wooden cross is a plaque with the Ukrainian coat of arms and an inscription reading "In 1941-1943, 621 members of the OUN anti-Nazi underground resistance were executed for the independent Ukrainian state in occupied Kyiv. Famous Poet Olena Teliha was among them. Babyn Yar became a communal grave for them. Glory to the Heroes!"<sup>178</sup> Two larger granite stones stand next to the cross, with names of nationalists who were murdered by the Nazis inscribed. As discussed in the previous chapter, with support from and by decree of President Viktor Yushchenko, plans were made to commemorate the centenary of Teliha's birth on 22 May 2006, and to build a monument dedicated to her between 2006 and 2008. However, the statue was *only* unveiled on 25 February 2017.<sup>179</sup> Located near the 1992 cross, an impressively large statue of Teliha stands with two large slabs of granite behind her. The inscription reads: "The monument to Olena Teliha and her fellows who perished for the independence of Ukraine." Upon examination of the monument, several notable Soviet-style features appear, including the text highlighting her courageous heroism, and the grand-scale and heroic pose of the statue itself.

In the face of continued Russian aggression, the monument to Teliha has taken on an additional layer of memory and commemorative practice, highlighting the dynamic nature of sites of memory and the transformation of the symbolic nature of nationalist figures in Ukrainian culture. On memorial days associated with the OUN and Teliha's birthday, both

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<sup>178</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 402.

<sup>179</sup> Hrynevych, "Babyn Yar after Babyn Yar," 213.

Teliha's statue and the wooden cross serve as a rallying point for officials, as well as soldiers who have been fighting in the Donbass and Luhansk region since 2014.<sup>180</sup> While Western media and scholars have often referred to the emergence of nationalist symbols in an alarmist light, in present-day Ukrainian culture, the legacy of the nationalists serves as a symbol of anti-Russian resistance. Since the 2014 annexation of the Crimea and outbreak of war, non-Jewish and some Jewish Ukrainians have adopted nationalist symbols to protest Russian aggression.<sup>181</sup> In the case of Babyn Yar, the memorialization of OUN activists struck a nerve because of their collaboration with the Nazis, however brief, during World War II. At the same time, the nationalists were later persecuted by the Nazis and did engage in anti-Nazi partisan and underground activity. Moreover, including the complex layers of history in Ukrainian memorial practice serves as a critical opportunity for discussing the past. When approaching Babyn Yar as a site representing different layers of history, it is to be expected that different perspectives come into contact with one another. This is especially true in the case of memorialization of twentieth-century history of Ukraine. Popular approaches to distinguishing between the victim, perpetrator, and bystander are particularly difficult in the context of Ukrainian history, as the line that designates one as victim or perpetrator was often blurred and could change from day-to-day. The presence of the nationalists' history and memory in Babyn Yar's most recent memorial activity will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

So far, I have discussed the three best-known memorial cultures present at Babyn Yar, but a variety of different mnemonic groups can be found at the site. The Roma community for example, has for a long time fought for representation in Holocaust memorial projects in Europe. Similar to the Jews, the Roma were persecuted on racial grounds, with the Nazis

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<sup>180</sup> Nakhmanovych, "Babyn Yar," 403.

<sup>181</sup> For more information on the appropriation of nationalist memory in the context of anti-Russian sentiment see Törnquist-Plewa and Yurchuk, "Memory Politics in Contemporary Ukraine."

claiming that the Roma were detrimental to society due to their alleged criminal lifestyle and spread of disease.<sup>182</sup> In the case of independent Ukraine and Babyn Yar, during the early 1990s NGOs representing the Roma community campaigned for a monument to be established at the site, which resulted in the installation of several commemorative markers, and more recently, the monument in the form of a “Roma Wagon” being transferred to the site. The wagon was initially built by a sculptor of Romani background specifically for Babyn Yar, with funding through private charitable donations, but was ultimately rejected by the Kyiv City Council on the basis that it was “incompatible with the overall design of the memorial ensemble.”<sup>183</sup> Rather, the wagon was installed in the western Ukrainian city of Kamianets-Podilskyi, another site of mass Nazi atrocity against the Jews and the Roma, and a small commemorative marker was placed at Babyn Yar in lieu of it. Due to constant vandalism, the marker was replaced in 2010 by the state with a marker that read: “In memory of the Romani who were shot in Babyn Yar.”<sup>184</sup> Finally, after ongoing protest by the Roma community, Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman, himself Jewish, announced the opening of the Roma genocide memorial at Babyn Yar, and the renovation and transfer of the 1990s Roma wagon to the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve in time for the 75th anniversary of Babyn Yar in September 2016.<sup>185</sup>

Other monuments at Babyn Yar memorialize the different experiences and layers of memory at the site. For instance, the importance of Babyn Yar as a symbol of the Nazi occupation in Ukraine can be seen in the 2005 monument dedicated to the *Ostarbeiters*. Erected by the Kyiv municipal administration near the 1976 Soviet monument, the modest monument

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<sup>182</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 59.

<sup>183</sup> Kotljarchuk, “Babi Yar and the Nazi Genocide of Roma,” 461.

<sup>184</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 404.

<sup>185</sup> Kotljarchuk, “Babi Yar and the Nazi Genocide of Roma,” 461.

features two sides. On one side, in bold inscription is the OST badge, worn by the *Ostarbeiters* during the war and an inscription that reads: “Memory for the sake of the future.” On the other side, the text reads: “To the world maimed by Nazism.” Standing next to the monument is a granite stela acknowledging the memory of the “Three million Ukrainian citizens who were forcibly deported during World War II to Nazi Germany.” The inscription details at length the abusive conditions faced by those forced to work in the slave-labour program.<sup>186</sup> Although the *Ostarbeiters* did not perish at Babyn Yar, the monument makes clear that Ukrainians also recognize Babyn Yar as the principal site of commemoration for the civilian victims of all Nazi crimes.

Several other important markers at the site that I have not discussed are scattered across the memorial landscape, including but not limited to, those dedicated to the memory of the patients killed at the Pavlov Psychiatric Hospital (now the Kyiv Municipal Clinical Psychoneurological Hospital), Orthodox priests, the Soviet POWs killed or who died of starvation and disease at the Syrets concentration camp, and the 1961 Kurenivka mudslide. Just as in the case of the *Ostarbeiters* monument, these different monuments suggest a hybrid memorial practice is taking place at Babyn Yar, where the site has come to represent many different memories due to its complex layers of history. Although this thesis does not discuss the symbolic meaning of all the other monuments, they equally contribute to the emerging hybrid nature of Babyn Yar, adding depth to the memorial landscape and providing continued opportunities to understand the past through multidirectional pathways.

Chapter Two has examined the emergence of a hybrid memorial approach to Babyn Yar since 1991. This chapter addressed how the integration of Holocaust commemoration into

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<sup>186</sup> Nakhmanovych, “Babyn Yar,” 406.

Ukraine's official memorial culture unfolded between 1991 and the present day, highlighting the steps that fostered the development of a multilayered memorial site. Through a case study of Babyn Yar as a memorial landscape, I have demonstrated the existence of mnemonic fusion, which highlights both the different layers of memory at the site, and their hybrid nature. The existence of hybridity and the opportunities for understanding the past through multidirectional pathways open up a discussion on how to create a memorial center and museum at Babyn Yar that would fully represent its complexity as a site of memory. Chapter Three will examine the two responses that emerged to this question beginning with President Poroshenko's announcement of the construction of a memorial center during the 75th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacres.

### **Chapter 3: Babyn Yar After 75 Years and the Emergence of Two Competing Memorial Centers**

Spanning over two decades of Ukrainian independence, Babyn Yar was the subject of varied commemoration practices and prospective memorial designs. As a site of memory, privately funded and internationally sponsored projects were the main source of proposals aimed at developing memorials commemorating the tragedy of Jewish people at Babyn Yar. These projects were plagued by debate and controversy, with leading members of civil society, academics and stakeholders in the Jewish community either throwing their support behind the various proposals or outright opposing their creation. Considered highly problematic was the use of private funding, perceived Jewish exclusivity in memorial plans for this site of mass-murder also claimed by other groups, and the question of whose memory should be included in any prospective project at Babyn Yar. For the government's part, official decrees to designate Babyn Yar as a national preserve were mainly symbolic. For example, the initial 2005 announcement about the creation of the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve was the result of a slow and daunting process, which continued to serve as a cause of disagreement among competing memory activists seeking to establish their vision of a comprehensive memorial at the site. Moreover, Babyn Yar's so-called fragmented memorial landscape as discussed in Chapter Two, has been utilized by Western observers and critics as proof of Ukraine's unwillingness to memorialize the Holocaust, or more radically, attempts to minimize its significance to national history. In reality, factors such as Ukraine's economic climate, ambivalence to the past, and the ongoing shifts in the government's approach to a post-Soviet national history and identity have all contributed to the character of the memorial landscape at Babyn Yar. Furthermore, due to the numerous and deeply rooted layers of history and memory

embedded at the site, a search for an official memorial culture at Babyn Yar with unanimous support has been divisive and difficult. With that being said, after President Viktor Yanukovich left his post in 2014, and President Petro Poroshenko was elected in 2015 on a platform that promoted a stronger relationship with the West, Babyn Yar and Ukrainian Holocaust memory entered a new phase.

From this perspective, Chapter Three examines the evolution of Babyn Yar as a site of memory since the 75th anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacre. I begin with a brief discussion of the preparation of memorial events for the 75th anniversary, which culminated in President Petro Poroshenko announcing the creation of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC). I address how the anniversary is considered a key event in the evolution of Babyn Yar as a site of memory. Hereafter, I focus on the development of two memorial projects that became adversaries in the pursuit of building a memorial center at the site. I am interested in the reaction of Jewish and non-Jewish memory stakeholders towards the two projects and will unpack key events that unfolded in the public sphere between 2017 and 2021. Three questions arise here: Whose memory should be included at the memorial center?; Should the Ukrainian state or private investors be responsible for financing a memorial center at Babyn Yar?; And, should individuals with ties to the Russian Federation be allowed to contribute to the development and operation of a memorial center in Ukraine? Finally, I will discuss how Babyn Yar's memorial practices transitioned into a new phase in the face of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and explore the emergence of new multidirectional memorial practices that are connecting memory of the past to the current war in Ukraine.

### ***Babyn Yar's 75th Anniversary as a Catalyst for Change***

As discussed in Chapter Two, when Petro Poroshenko became the fifth president of

Ukraine, memory of Babyn Yar and the Holocaust entered a new phase. In August 2015, just over a year before the 75th anniversary of the initial massacre, Poroshenko announced the decree “Concerning Measures in Connection with the 75th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar Tragedy.”<sup>187</sup> In November 2015, a subsequent decree was announced that called for the creation of a National Organizing Committee, which was to be responsible for developing plans for the state's large-scale commemoration of the anniversary.<sup>188</sup> The committee was composed of a diverse group of government actors; Ukrainian scholars; Jewish memory activists including Andrei Grigorovich Adamovsky, Vice President of the World Jewish Congress and co-president of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (VAAD); as well as controversial Ukrainian memory activists, such as Volodymyr Viatrovykh, then Head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM), who was widely known for his sympathies towards the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).<sup>189</sup>

President Poroshenko also gave his patronage to the Canadian-based organization the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter (UJE), funded by a prominent Ukrainian-Canadian benefactor. In cooperation with the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and other Ukrainian and international NGOs, the UJE had initiated a project back in 2014 intended to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Babyn Yar through a series of events that would span over a week in Kyiv between 23 and 29 September 2016.<sup>190</sup> Featured as a key aspect of the 75th anniversary's events,

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<sup>187</sup> Naimark, "The Many Lives of Babi Yar," 177.

<sup>188</sup> Petro Poroshenko, "Presidential Decree No. 625: About the Composition of the Organizing Committee for the Preparation and Conduct of Events in Connection with the 75th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy," *Official Website of the President of Ukraine*, 20 October 2017, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/3312017-22866> (accessed 16 July 2024); and Paul Robert Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, ed. Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 418.

<sup>189</sup> Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," 418.

<sup>190</sup> Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," 417.

the UJE had launched an international competition intended to find a design for transforming the Babyn Yar memorial landscape into a sacred necropolis. In contrast to the private projects that were proposed in the early 2000s, or that of the soon-to-be discussed Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC), the UJE and its supporters had no desire to build a large-scale monument or museum at Babyn Yar.<sup>191</sup> Rather, supporters of the design competition sought to create a space intended for reflection, a site that would be sacred and free of invasive construction in the areas that had been home to cemeteries prior to the Nazi invasion, zones of mass destruction during the Holocaust and Nazi terror, as well as the already drastically altered landscape courtesy of the Soviet policy of physical erasure. Here, it must be stated, that despite the UJE and its supporters' high hopes for the potential outcome of the design competition, the competition was only meant to provide a proposal for the authorities to consider in their pursuit of a future memorial. As discussed in an interview with Ukrainian journalist Iryna Slavinska, Professor Paul Robert Magocsi of the University of Toronto, working with the UJE on plans for the 75th commemoration, acknowledged that there was no state agreement to accept or build the winning design.<sup>192</sup> Understandably, due to feelings of Babyn Yar's grand-scale memorialization being long overdue, and the unusual cooperation between different memory activists with very different visions for the site, combined with the watchful eye of critical onlookers, the design competition led to a scandal over how the anniversary would unfold, which seeped into the international media. Israeli journalist Sam Sokol discussed at length the initial language used to outline contest rules for the design competition arguing that "Ukraine was again attempting to revamp the site, and transform it into a generic symbol of human

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<sup>191</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, interview by Iryna Slavinska, "How Will Kyiv Commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar Tragedy?" *Hromadske Radio* posted on the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter website, <https://ukrainianjewishencounter.org/en/hromadske-radio-how-will-kyiv-commemorate-the-75th-anniversary-of-the-babyn-yar-tragedy/>, accessed: 14 August 2024.

<sup>192</sup> Magocsi and Slavinska, "How will Kyiv Commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy?"

suffering,” highlighting that the initial competition rules asked all contestants to “focus on overcoming the *problem* of the discrepancy between the world’s view and Jewry’s exclusive view of Babi Yar as a symbol of the Holocaust.”<sup>193</sup>

During the week of commemorative events Poroshenko presided over an official ceremony at Babyn Yar, hosting members of the international community, including German and Israeli presidents, as well as representatives for the United States and the European Union (EU).<sup>194</sup> Events planned by the UJE included several educational roundtables, youth events, a public symposium on the UJE’s 2016 book *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, the multimedia exhibition *Babyn Yar: Memory Against History’s Background*, an award ceremony dedicated to the winners and participants of the above mentioned international design competition, as well as a ceremony co-sponsored by the UJE and the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine to honour Soviet dissident and activist Ivan Dziuba with the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Medal, acknowledging his unwavering determination ever since the 1960s to commemorate the events that had taken place at Babyn Yar.<sup>195</sup> However, the official commemorative events did not entirely unfold without controversy. During the former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin’s visit to Ukraine, he spoke of crimes committed against the Jews by Ukrainians. Highlighting the activities of the UPA in particular, Rivlin commented on how the nationalist organizations had collaborated with the Nazis in hopes of gaining support for Ukrainian statehood. Although he

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<sup>193</sup> Sokol, “Babi Yar as a Symbol of Holocaust Distortion in Post-Maidan Ukraine,” 37; and Sam Sokol, “Ukraine Backtracks on Babi Yar Plans Amid Accusations of Holocaust Revisionism,” *Jerusalem Post* (8 February 2016), <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/ukraine-backtracks-on-babi-yar-plans-amid-accusations-of-holocaust-revisionism-444268> (accessed 5 October 2023).

<sup>194</sup> Jadwiga Rogoza, “Ukraine’s Disputes Over the 80th Anniversary of the Babi Yar Massacre,” *Center for Eastern Studies*, no. 22, 10, 22 October 2021, 4.

<sup>195</sup> Magocsi, “In Lieu of an Afterword,” 417; “Babi Yar 75th Anniversary Commemoration,” *World Jewish Congress Media Release* (29 September 2016), <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/events/babi-yar-75th-anniversary-commemoration-10-3-2016> (accessed: 12 August 2024); and Magocsi and Slavinska, “How will Kyiv Commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy?”

did acknowledge the efforts of the Righteous Ukrainians, his speech produced discontent among some figures in Ukraine.<sup>196</sup> Nevertheless, the anniversary's events ultimately helped demonstrate not only the importance of Babyn Yar as a national and global symbol of the Holocaust, but also the desire to highlight its significance for Ukrainian identity more broadly.

As the anniversary reached its climax, President Poroshenko and the Mayor of Kyiv Vitali Klitschko joined an official ceremony to announce the creation of the BYHMC, which was to be funded by a group of private donors. The ceremony saw an official declaration for the center signed by Ukrainian and international stakeholders, including Natan Sharansky, former Soviet dissident and Israeli politician, and the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine Yaakov Dov Bleich.<sup>197</sup> In his speech, Poroshenko stated that the center would open by 2021 and emphasized that “the creation of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center is very significant for the whole of humanity,” as “the Jewish massacre at Babyn Yar was both a national and global tragedy.”<sup>198</sup> The announcement for the BYHMC's creation was all too soon followed by the declaration of its opponents about their plans to create a memorial center, which also was supported by the president, ultimately emerging as a competing project. The first project, officially called the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, became widely known as either the “private” or “Russian” project, and was developed under the sponsorship of private benefactors, most of them Jewish-Russian oligarchs, under the aegis of several Ukrainian and Israeli politicians. The second project, which has since become referred to as either the “state” or the “Ukrainian” project, was launched in 2017 when President Poroshenko tasked the Ministry of Culture with

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<sup>196</sup> Pileggi, “75 Years After Babi Yar Massacre.”

<sup>197</sup> Alexandr Voronovici, “At the Crossroads of Memory Wars: Recent Debates on the Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center,” *The Cultures of History Forum* (7 August 2018), <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/at-the-crossroads-of-memory-wars#fn-text15> (accessed: 16 October 2023).

<sup>198</sup> Pileggi, “75 Years After the Babi Yar Massacre.”

considering the appropriate commemoration of Babyn Yar. The ministry assigned the Institute of the History of Ukraine, in collaboration with the UINM, the task of developing a proposal for an all-encompassing Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve.<sup>199</sup> The institute's first proposal draft, named the Concept of the All-Inclusive Memorialization of Babyn Yar with the Extension of Borders of the National Historical Memorial Preserve Babyn Yar was released in 2019. From here, this thesis will employ “the Center” or “BYHMC” when discussing the “private” project, and “the Concept,” or when necessary, the “state” project for the government-sponsored one.

### ***Competing Memorial Projects***

Plans for developing the BYHMC had started to take shape prior to the 75th anniversary, with non-government actors and businessmen financially supporting the Center. The BYHMC was defined as a place to memorialize the extermination of Kyiv’s Jews and to reflect on the attitudes of Ukrainian society and nationalist organizations during the Nazi German occupation. In the early stages of developing the BYHMC, design proposals included constructing a large complex meant to house a combination of different museums dedicated to the site’s long history. It would also facilitate construction of different exhibitions related to Babyn Yar’s history, educational and archival studies, as well as a research hub that would be responsible for conducting an oral history project.<sup>200</sup> The grand nature of the BYHMC called for the creation of various internal structures, such as a supervisory board that was composed of Soviet-Ukrainian born Jewish-Russian oligarchs Mikhail Fridman, German Khan, and Pavel Fuchs; the Ukrainian-Jewish oligarch Viktor Pinchuk; the Israeli politician and former Soviet

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<sup>199</sup> Katerina Sergatskova and Nastya Kalyta, “Since the Beginning of the Invasion, Babyn Yar Has Suspended Its Main Activities,” *Zaborona* (16 February 2023), <https://zaborona.com/en/since-the-beginning-of-the-invasion-babyn-yar-has-suspended-its-main-activities> (accessed: 17 October 2023).

<sup>200</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, “Since the Beginning of the Invasion.”

dissident Natan Shcharansky; Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine Yaakov Dov Bleich; the former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski; and several other international public figures.<sup>201</sup>

While the Center was to be largely financed by Fridman and Khan, the BYHMC financial mandate stipulated that funding for the center would be divided among several different groups, with Ukrainian citizens expected to cover 50% of the total budget. Ukrainian financial contributions came primarily from Viktor Pinchuk, who had an existing record for aiding in the preservation of Holocaust memory and other philanthropy projects in Ukraine, as well as Pavel Fuchs and former boxer (and brother of the mayor of Kyiv) Volodymyr Klitschko. The remaining 50% was to be divided with 49% covered by citizens of Russia and Israel, and the remaining 1% by American citizen Ronald Lauder, President of the WJC.<sup>202</sup> To give credibility to the project, an Academic and Scientific Council was formed to aid in the development of the center's overall historical approach and oversee the many different research and educational activities at the center. Members of the board included Dutch historian Karel C. Berkhoff, known for his important contributions to the field of Holocaust and Ukrainian studies. Berkhoff, in collaboration with Dieter Pohl and other scholars, was tasked with developing the center's Basic Historical Narrative, which continues to be a foundational document for the BYHMC today.<sup>203</sup>

In the hopes of facilitating open and transparent dialogue, the BYHMC held its first public hearing for their proposed concept of the future memorial center in February 2017. Spanning just over two days, Ukrainian and international researchers were invited to discuss the provisional concept and historical narrative for the center, where the topics such as Babyn Yar's geographical integrity and the main interpretive points were discussed at length. On the part of

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<sup>201</sup> Kinstler, "The Many Oblivions of Babi Yar," 36.

<sup>202</sup> Rogoza, "Ukraine's Disputes Over the 80th Anniversary of the Babi Yar Massacre," 4.

<sup>203</sup> Kotljarchuk, "Babi Yar and the Nazi Genocide of Roma," 463.

the BYHMC, members of the Academic and Scientific Council emphasized how important consensus among experts regarding this project was both for Ukraine and for the world.<sup>204</sup> After the meeting, a group of prominent Ukrainian historians (including Jewish-Ukrainian historians and the country's leading specialists on the Holocaust) published an open letter addressed to the BYHMC's Academic and Scientific Council, arguing that the project had caused a great sense of unease among Ukrainian historians, and outlined their alternative vision for a memorial center at Babyn Yar. The letter spoke against any new construction at Babyn Yar, the seemingly exclusive nature of Jewish memory at the site, the "isolation" of the Holocaust by Bullets from the rest of the Holocaust's history, and the need for two different museums to "reveal different aspects and different contexts of the tragic history of the 20th century."<sup>205</sup> All these ideas would go on to feature in the memorial center proposal released by the Institute of the History of Ukraine in 2019. During another public hearing and discussion organized by the BYHMC for the presentation of the completed Basic Historical Narrative in 2018, critics took the opportunity to voice their strong distaste and concerns over the center's discussion of Ukrainian collaboration during the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust.<sup>206</sup> Volodymyr Viatrovych was especially vocal in his opposition to the inclusion of Ukrainian collaboration, arguing that the BYHMC was creating a misleading narrative regarding local antisemitism and collaboration. At the same time, the Jewish-Ukrainian Holocaust scholar and memory activist Vitaliy Nakhmanovych raised his concerns that the narrative was perhaps "pro-Kremlin" and "anti-Ukrainian," and stated his belief that the BYHMC's historical narrative was harmful to Ukrainian national interests.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> "The First Meeting of Experts of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center Took Place in Kyiv," *Istorychna Pravda* (13 February 2017),

<https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2017/02/13/149532/> (accessed 3 February 2023).

<sup>205</sup> "Museum "Babyn Yar." An Open Letter of Concern," *Istorychna Pravda* (28 March 2017),

<https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2017/03/28/149652/> (accessed: 3 February 2023).

<sup>206</sup> Voronovici, "At the Crossroads of "Memory Wars."

<sup>207</sup> Voronovici, "At the Crossroads of "Memory Wars."

These arguments highlight not only the divisive nature of finding a solution to appropriately commemorating the complex history at Babyn Yar, but also the very real unease in exploring an uncomfortable aspect of history, that in the context of Russian aggression, is regularly weaponized and has long been utilized by the Kremlin as a tool of propaganda against the fight for Ukrainian independence.

Outspoken opponents of the BYHMC were already familiar faces in Babyn Yar's memorial activism, and long advocated against the construction there, namely due to the Judaic prohibition against disturbing human remains on ground considered sacred, and the failure to address the various victims and histories of Babyn Yar. Among the opponents were Director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies Anatoly Podolsky; former Soviet dissident Josef Zissels, co-president of Ukraine's Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD); as well as the previously mentioned historian Vitaliy Nakhmanovych; and former head of the UINM Volodymyr Viatrovych.<sup>208</sup> More divisive, was the concern over the "foreign" or "private" character of the BYHMC. On one hand, there was a general concern that the narrative and design of the memorial center would be imposed on Babyn Yar from outside. On the other hand, the involvement of foreign financiers whose wealth had largely been gained through business ventures in Russia created a concern over what, or whose, narrative would be told. This was further compounded by ongoing Russian aggression, which had been escalating since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following armed conflict in the Donbas. Critics argued that the BYHMC's primary financiers had gained their wealth in Russia, thus they surely had to be in Russian President Vladimir Putin's pocket.<sup>209</sup> With this, opponents felt that the BYHMC could become a tool in the Kremlin's hybrid warfare against Ukraine

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<sup>208</sup> Voronovici, "At the Crossroads of "Memory Wars."

<sup>209</sup> Josef Zissels, "What Is Happening around Babyn Yar Today?" *Human Rights in Ukraine* (4 September 2018), <https://khp.org/en/1536010583> (accessed: 35 October 2023); and Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," 418-419.

through the appropriation of memory and conveying a Kremlin-sponsored narrative of World War II (WWII), Ukrainian collaboration, and Ukrainian “fascism.” There was such a concern that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) investigated allegations that the Center was a threat to national Security; after a series of probes, it was determined that there was no basis for these allegations.<sup>210</sup>

In 2019, the “state” project, initiated back in 2017 at the request of Poroshenko, released the first draft of the Concept of the Memorial Complex of Babyn Yar with the Extension of Borders of the National Historical Memorial Preserve Babyn Yar, hereafter referred to as the Concept. Authors of the Concept incorporated and expanded on ideas proposed back in 2017 by Ukrainian scholars in their letter to the BYHMC Academic and Scientific Council, which called for the creation of a united memorial complex that would include two museums: the Babyn Yar Memorial Museum and the Ukrainian Museum of the Holocaust.<sup>211</sup> Both museums were intended to be tied into the memorial landscape of the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve. The museums would utilize ideas from the 2016 UJE international design competition and transform the zone of mass executions into a necropolis.<sup>212</sup> In the Babyn Yar Memorial Museum, the thematic plan would include history prior to the Nazi invasion of Ukrainian lands and subsequent occupation, a post-war history, and a section dedicated to hope for humanity where the memory of the Righteous of Babyn Yar and the post-war Soviet remembrance activists could be honored. In the Ukrainian Museum of the Holocaust however, Babyn Yar would be integrated into a pan-European tragedy of the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people.

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<sup>210</sup> “The SSU denied the accusations against the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center,” *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 2 February 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/331/sbu-sprostuvala-zvynuvachennia-na-adresu-memorialnoho-tsentru-holokostu-babyn-yar-dokument> (accessed: 23 July 2024).

<sup>211</sup> Academic Council, “Concept of the Memorialization of the Babyn Yar With Extending the Borders of the National Historical Memorial Preserve Babyn Yar,” *The Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*, Kyiv, 4 June, 2019, 10, <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0014671> (accessed: 13 May 2024).

<sup>212</sup> Magocsi, “In Lieu of an Afterword,” 421.

Events that took place on modern-day Ukrainian land would be represented through a Ukrainian vision of history.<sup>213</sup> At the same time, the authors of the Concept stated that they would establish protections against any further and unnecessary construction at Babyn Yar, as well as protections for areas considered sacred. In addition, they identified a list of territories in or surrounding Babyn Yar, as well as the existing monuments and memorials as a necessary component of the proposed complex. This is of particular importance, as over several decades, the territory at Babyn Yar and its surrounding land has been divided up among municipal land holders and private businessmen.<sup>214</sup> Lastly, the authors argued for the proposed institution to be primarily funded from the state budget, contrasting that of the BYHMC.<sup>215</sup>

Opposition to development of the BYHMC continued to escalate and became rancorous in November 2019 when the BYHMC hired Jewish-Russian director Ilya Khrzhanovsky, known for his controversial immersive and hyper-realistic projects, as the Center's artistic director. Khrzhanovsky immediately began the process of overhauling the BYHMC's artistic design and creating the "largest Holocaust Museum in Eastern Europe."<sup>216</sup> Among his top priorities was to develop a hyper-realistic space that would force visitors to experience a series of "intense emotional responses."<sup>217</sup> According to Khrzhanovsky, the new thematic design for the BYHMC landscape would see the creation of several museums: the Museum of the Babyn Yar Tragedy; the Museum of the Memory of the Victims; the Museum of the Oblivion of the Tragedy; the Museum of the Babyn Yar site itself; and the Museum of the History of the Victims."<sup>218</sup>

In response to Khrzhanovsky's ideas, several BYHMC staff and board members

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<sup>213</sup> Academic Council, "2019 Concept," 10.

<sup>214</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, "Since the Beginning of the Invasion."

<sup>215</sup> Academic Council, "Concept," 132-133.

<sup>216</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, "Since the Beginning of the Invasion."

<sup>217</sup> Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," 420.

<sup>218</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, "Since the Beginning of the Invasion."

resigned, including Berkhoff, who emphasized that he could no longer be part of the project as he no longer believed that it was ethical in nature.<sup>219</sup> Shortly after Berkhoff's departure the media leaked a provisional draft of Khrzhanovsky's proposal, which featured a broad range of multimedia, deep fake technology, and other immersive approaches designed to force future visitors to connect with Babyn Yar on a "deeper" level.<sup>220</sup> Perhaps adding gasoline to an already raging fire, Dieter Bogner, an art historian, who had previously worked at the BYHMC, went on to dub the new project as the "Disneyland of the Shoah," a phrase that came to be continuously recycled across local and international newsreels long after his initial publication.<sup>221</sup> Responding to the sea of backlash, Khrzhanovsky stated that the leaked plan was simply one of many ideas for approaching visitor experiences at Babyn Yar, and it was part of an effort to find a medium in which he could not only draw visitors to the site, but facilitate an ongoing discussion of the events that have transpired at Babyn Yar throughout its dark history.<sup>222</sup>

In April 2020, members of the Ukrainian cultural and academic community published another open letter on the online platform of the *Krytyka* magazine. The letter opened with a general statement emphasizing that the memory of Babyn Yar is a tragedy of the Ukrainian Jewish community and a tragedy of the entire Ukrainian people. Their letter appealed to current President Volodymyr Zelensky, Prime Minister Denys Shmygal, and Kyiv's Mayor Vitali

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<sup>219</sup> Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," 420; and Lisa Vapné, "Babi Yar: Which Monument(s)?" *k Magazine* (30 September 2021), <https://k-larevue.com/en/babi-yar-which-monuments/> (accessed: 28 July 2024).

<sup>220</sup> Kinstler, "The Many Oblivions of Babi Yar," 51.

<sup>221</sup> Vapné, "Babi Yar: Which Monument(s)?" It should be noted here that the use of "effects" at Babyn Yar was not introduced by Khrzhanovsky. A lesser known project proposed by Alexander Levin and the Jewish Agency *Sokhnut* in June 2013 aimed to create a memorial and community center that would feature an interactive center and recreate the events of 1941-1943 with the help of "Hollywood special effects." For more information on this project see: Radchenko, "Babyn Yar."

<sup>222</sup> Joshua Hammer, "Ukraine Planned an Ambitious Memorial at the Site of a Holocaust Massacre, Then War Came to Kyiv," *Smithsonian Magazine* (December 2023), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ukraine-babyn-yar-memorial-site-holocaust-massacre-war-kyiv-180983232/> (accessed: 16 March, 2024).

Klitschko to intervene in the memorial debate and make the creation of the Babyn Yar National Memorial Complex a priority of the state.<sup>223</sup> For its part, the BYHMC Academic and Scientific Council released a statement regarding the controversy. Their statement acknowledged disappointment and sadness over the council members who had departed but emphasized that the integrity of Babyn Yar's history would be maintained, as well as assured that all future discussions and the future artistic concept would be publicly and critically discussed, with the expectation that all concerns would be resolved before its final approval.<sup>224</sup>

Despite the ongoing controversy playing out in the public sphere and the departure of notable council members, the BYHMC continued to move forward with development plans. During the official 79th anniversary ceremony on 29 September 2020, members of the BYHMC, President Zelensky and other Ukrainian officials participated in the unveiling of a large audio-visual installation called the "Mirror Field" at Babyn Yar. Its design is based on large pillars that have been shot using the same caliber of bullets used to murder Jews and non-Jews at Babyn Yar between 1941 and 1943. Open year round, the installation uses an algorithm that converts the letters of the victims' names into a number, which is then used to set

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<sup>223</sup> "The Ukrainian Cultural and Academic Community's Appeal about the Commemoration of Babyn Yar," *Krytyka* (April 2020), <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/ukrainian-cultural-and-academic-communitys-appeal-about-commemoration-babyn-yar> (accessed 15 November, 2023). For more information on the discontent surrounding Ilya Khrzhanovsky's plans for Babyn Yar, see "Psychological Experiments and Simulations of Ethical Decisions Have No Place in a Commemoration of Babyn Yar: An Open Letter to the Board Members of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center," *Krytyka* (April 2020), <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/psychological-experiments-and-simulations-ethical-decisions-have-no-place-commemoration> (accessed 16 November, 2023); and Kinstler, "The Many Oblivions of Babi Yar," 50-53.

<sup>224</sup> "Statement of BYHMC Scientific Council," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, May 2020, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/8/zaava-naukovoi-radi-memorialnogo-centru-golokostu-babin-ar-traven-2020> (accessed: 22 July 2024). Their statement included the acknowledgement of two recently formed research institutes at the BYHMC: the Institute of Babyn Yar Territory and Memory Studies and the Babyn Yar - Eastern Europe Holocaust Research Institute, which would both work closely with the Scientific Council. The former, chaired by Vladyslav Hrynevych, was to support multidisciplinary research into the history of Babyn Yar, and the former, chaired by Andrii Rukkas, would focus on the history of the Holocaust and its legacy in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. For more information see: "Two Research Institutes Opened at the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center," posted on the *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 30 April 2020, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/10/na-bazi-memorialnogo-centru-golokostu-babin-ar-pocali-pracuvati-dva-naukovo-d-o-slidnih-institutu> (accessed: 22 July 2024).

the height of the sound pitch through an electroacoustic organ.<sup>225</sup> Compositions by modern Ukrainian composers, as well as Soviet composer Dmitrii Shostakovich's groundbreaking symphony *Babi Yar*, are superimposed into the background. The installation also plays audio recordings from Kyiv's archives, such as pre-war Yiddish songs, ritual biblical music, and Ukrainian songs.<sup>226</sup>

More important, following the unveiling of the "Mirror Field," Oleksandr Tkachenko Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, and Ronald Lauder, Member of the Supervisory Board of the BYHMC and President of the WJC, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in the presence President Zelensky.<sup>227</sup> This was followed by a presidential decree that revised the 2017 decree "On Additional Measures for the Future Development of the Babyn Yar National Historical and Memorial Preserve." Among the revisions was the new appointment of the Prime Minister of Ukraine and the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine as acting co-chairs of the Organizational Committee on the Prospective Development of the National Historical and Memorial Preserve "Babyn Yar."<sup>228</sup> Thus, the combination of the memorandum of cooperation and the revised presidential decree placed authority with the government in decisions regarding the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve, territory that was considered crucial in determining which memorial project would have the

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<sup>225</sup> Maksym Demidenko and Denis Shibarov, "Mirror Field," in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 182-188.

<sup>226</sup> "The Government of Ukraine and the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center Signed a Memorandum Of Cooperation in the Presence of the President of Ukraine," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 29 September 2020, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/2004/uryad-ukraini-ta-memorialniy-centr-holocostu-babyn-yar-v-prisutnosti-prezudent-a-ukrainu-pidpisali-memorandum-pro-spivpratsiu> (accessed: 22 May 2023). An additional fragment of the new audio installation was also set up alongside the Road of Sorrow and near the Menorah monument. See: Demidenko and Shibarov, "Mirror Field," 182-188.

<sup>227</sup> "The Government of Ukraine and the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center Signed a Memorandum Of Cooperation in the Presence of the President of Ukraine."

<sup>228</sup> Volodymyr Zelensky, "Presidential Decree No. 567: About Measures in Connection with the 80th Anniversary of the Babyn Yar Tragedy and Additional Measures for the Further Development of the National Historical and Memorial Reserve Babyn Yar," *Official Website of the President of Ukraine*, 15 December 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/5672020-36013> (accessed: 20 May 2023).

upper hand in developing a memorial center at Babyn Yar.

Access to Babyn Yar's territory had already begun to move in the favour of the BYHMC as early as December 2017, when the Jewish-Ukrainian oligarch Vadym Rabinovych transferred to the BYHMC the plots of land that he had leased from the City of Kyiv in his attempts to build a memorial center at Babyn Yar in 2011.<sup>229</sup> However, prior to the memorandum of cooperation between the BYHMC and the Ministry of Culture, there was still the question of territory that belonged to different organizations.<sup>230</sup> For example, a large portion of the territory belonging to the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve was under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and the UINM, which were not unanimously in favour of the BYHMC. Moreover, back in 2016, the former office of the historical Jewish cemetery, the only remaining historical building at Babyn Yar, came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, with further assignment to be transferred to the memorial preserve. As the only remaining building at Babyn Yar, and with its many layers of pre-war, Nazi occupation, and post-war period, the building was highly sought after by both memorial projects. According to Magocsi, it was only when Zelensky and the head of the President's Office Andriy Yermak got involved did the BYHMC receive the territory that they had sought for so long.<sup>231</sup> It should be noted here, that by the time of the decision of the Ukrainian president to support the BYHMC, the Center had, albeit controversially at times, attracted more high-level support both domestically and internationally than that of the so-called "state" project. For Zelensky, the

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<sup>229</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, "Since the Beginning of the Invasion."

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Magocsi, "In Lieu of an Afterword," 424. The former office of the Jewish cemetery was officially leased to the BYHMC at the end of 2021. Originally, the BYHMC promised to establish a museum here by 2026, but due to the 2022 Russian invasion and the flight or sanctioning of most oligarchic benefactors, the building's construction is sitting in limbo. If the center's plans for the former office are realized in the future, construction will include lifting the roof structure and excavating the foundation. Once complete, a memorial museum will be built within. Nick Axel, "Sensatheque," in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 298-300.

more advanced BYHMC project provided opportunities for Ukraine to have a state-of-the-art Holocaust memorial center, that not only allowed for a transition in national Holocaust memorial projects, but also would make Kyiv an attractive hub for foreign tourists and students seeking to visit Holocaust memorial centers.

The year 2021 saw several milestones for the BYHMC, beginning on 27 January at the official ceremony for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In honour of the memorial day, a commemorative installation titled “A Glimpse into the Past” created by Ukrainian artist and architect Anna Kamyshan was unveiled by the BYHMC, with the participation of President Zelensky and other Ukrainian officials.<sup>232</sup> Dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust, the memorial features two stone boulders with a large tree with broken branches lying between them. Embedded in the stone boulders are monoculars where visitors view photos taken by Nazi photographer Johannes Hähle at Babyn Yar, including a photo he took in the aftermath of the mass murder of 33,771 Jews on 29 and 30 September 1941. The symbolic nature of the broken tree is intended as a metaphor for the lives that were cut short by the Nazis at Babyn Yar. Broken trees are often used as part of a traditional Jewish tombstone, known in Judaism as *matsev*.<sup>233</sup> The memorial was the first in a series of 2021 installations leading up to Babyn Yar’s 80th anniversary. Several other important monuments and memorials were unveiled in 2021, including Ukrainian artist Oleh Shovenko’s “Brick and Mud” which was included in the A Glimpse from the Past collection, and dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the Kurenivka mudslide. The monument is made in the form of a 10-fold enlarged brick and features over 100

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<sup>232</sup> “The President of Ukraine unveiled new installation developed by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center and Dedicated to the International Holocaust Remembrance Day,” *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 27 January 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/327/prezydent-ukrainy-vidkryv-instaliatsiiu-prysviachenu-mizhnarodnomu-dniu-pamja-ti-zhertv-holokostu-vid-memorialnoho-tsentru-holokostu-babyn-yar> (accessed: 22 May 2023).

<sup>233</sup> Anna Kamyshan, “Glimpse Into the Past,” in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 99-106; and “The President of Ukraine Unveiled a New Installation.”

varieties of bricks found across Kyiv.<sup>234</sup>

On 14 May 2021, coinciding with the first ever Remembrance Day for the Righteous Ukrainians, Yermak and Shmygal, alongside members of the BYHMC, took part in a ceremony to unveil the Symbolic Synagogue at Babyn Yar which went on to win awards for its design.<sup>235</sup> The synagogue is located near the menorah and designed to operate and look like a wooden pop-up book, complete with patterns and texts of prayers that replicate the traditional interior of synagogues destroyed during the Holocaust in today's western Ukraine. The ceiling of the synagogue is painted with patterns in the form of a map of the starry sky, which allegedly reproduces the position of the stars on 29 September 1941.<sup>236</sup>

The success of the BYHMC solidified with the announcement by Shmygal and Yermak on 15 June 2021 about the co-sponsorship of the official commemorative events for the 80th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy.<sup>237</sup> During the official ceremony, Ukrainian authorities, and members of the BYHMC unveiled the "Crystal Wall of Crying" by the famous international artist Marina Abramović. Approximately 40 meters long and three meters high, the wall is built out of anthracite coal and crystals. The wall is intended to be understood as the symbolic continuation of the Wailing Wall of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>238</sup> As always, the Ukrainian

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<sup>234</sup> "Vitali Klitschko and Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center Unveiled a New Installation Dedicated to the Anniversary of 1961 Kurenivka Mudslide," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 12 March 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/348/vitalii-klychko-i-memorial-holokostu-babyn-yar-vidkryly-instaliatsiiu-do-rokovyn-kurenivskoi-trahedii> (accessed: 22 May 2023).

<sup>235</sup> "Head of the Presidential Office and the Prime Minister of Ukraine Unveiled the Symbolic Synagogue of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 14 May 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/355/hlava-ofisu-prezydenta-i-premier-ministr-vidkryly-u-babynomu-yaru-symvolichnu-synahohu-memorialnoho-tsentru-holokostu> (accessed: 6 August 2024).

<sup>236</sup> Laurence Peter, "Babyn Yar: Synagogue Opens at Nazi Massacre Site in Ukraine," *BBC News*, 14 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57114197> (accessed: 21 June 2024).

<sup>237</sup> "Ukraine Government Announces Official Commemorations Marking the 80th anniversary of the Babyn Yar Massacre," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 16 June 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/363/uriad-ta-memorial-holokostu-babyn-yar-oholosyly-plany-do-80-kh-rokovyn-rozstriliv> (accessed: 17 June 2024).

<sup>238</sup> "Crystal Wall of Crying" to be Unveiled in Babyn Yar," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 6 October 2021,

authorities, with the participation of international leaders, Jewish leaders, Holocaust survivors and Ukrainian Righteous Among the Nations, conducted an annual commemorative ceremony at Babyn Yar. At the same time, either unwilling to concede defeat, or simply resigned to doing things their own way, supporters of the “state” project chose to host a separate memorial ceremony for the 80th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy, with members from the UINM, the Institute of History of Ukraine, and the World Congress of Ukrainians on 29 September 2021. Led by Anton Drobovych, the current director of the UINM and former director of educational activities at BYHMC, leaders of Ukrainian confessions, including the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, the ruling metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and the archbishop major of the Ukrainian Catholic Church participated in an inter-religious ceremony at the menorah monument.<sup>239</sup>

But what of the “state” project? Undeterred in their efforts, the authors released their revised Concept in 2021 with the help of forty-four reviewers from around the globe. Reviewers included Dieter Pohl, who had previously worked on the Basic Historical Narrative for the BYHMC released back in 2018, and future members of the present BYHMC Academic Council, such as Norman Naimark.<sup>240</sup> Overall, the revised edition maintained its key points, largely refining their language and expanding on their vision for the thematic design of the

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<https://babynyar.org/en/news/457/u-babynomu-yaru-vidkryty-krystalichnu-stinu-plachu-na-vidkrytti-buly-prysutni-p-rezydenty-ukrainy-izrailiu-ta-nimechchyny> (accessed: 3 August 2024); and Marina Abramović, “Crystal Wall of Crying,” in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 259.

<sup>239</sup> Rogoza, “Ukraine’s Disputes Over the 80th Anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre,” 4; Magocsi, “In Lieu of an Afterword,” 424; The separate commemoration has since become an annual event. “We Continue the Tradition of Joint Interreligious Prayer on the Day of Remembrance of the Babyn Yar Tragedy,” UINM, 28 September 2022, <https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/prodovzhuyemo-tradyciyu-spilnoyi-mizhreligiynoyi-molytvy-u-den-pamyati-t-ra-gediyi-babynogo-yaru> (accessed 15 March 2024); and “Anniversary of the Tragedy: A Joint Interreligious Prayer Was Held in Babyn Yar 29,” UINM, September 2023, <https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/rokovynny-tragediyi-u-babynomu-yaru-vidbulasya-spilna-mizhreligiyna-molytva> (accessed 15 March 2024).

<sup>240</sup> Academic Council, “Concept,” 9.

memorial landscape and their expectation that all of the victim groups at Babyn Yar (Jews, Soviet POWs, Roma, Ukrainian nationalists, patients of the Pavlov mental hospital and others), as well as the complex layers of history be memorialized.<sup>241</sup> The authors renewed their call for state financial support, as well as for bringing the territory at and surrounding Babyn Yar under one entity. Although the “state” and BYHMC projects were adversaries, the evolving design of the BYHMC incorporated many themes suggested in the Concept due to the BYHMC’s continued calls for guidance from Ukrainian and international scholars on how to best perpetuate the memory of Babyn Yar. For example, the Center’s fall 2021 announcement about its plans for 2022 revealed that the BYHMC would launch an “open ideas competition” for creating a Master Plan, with the curator of the Architectural Advisory Board Nick Axel stressing the BYHMC’s desire to “generate and to develop as wide as possible range of approaches and ideas about how the territory of Babyn Yar can be conceptualized and structured.”<sup>242</sup>

Less than two months after the 80th anniversary, in November 2021, the Concept was officially submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament), and the Presidential Office for their consideration and approval.<sup>243</sup> Based on the appearance of the fruitful and growing relationship between the BYHMC and Ukrainian authorities, it seems unlikely that support for the BYHMC would dissipate in the foreseeable future. For the authorities, the BYHMC provided a solution to the issue of a missing memorial center at Babyn Yar, without state finances being impacted. Moreover, between 2020 and 2021, the BYHMC continued to sign memoranda of cooperation with international Holocaust research hubs

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<sup>241</sup> Academic Council, “Concept,” 136-145.

<sup>242</sup> “The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Presented Plans for 2022,” *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 29 December 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/478/memorial-babyn-yar-predstavyyv-plany-na-2022-rik> (accessed: 10 July 2024).

<sup>243</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, “Since the Beginning of the Invasion.”

including Israel's Yad Vashem and the German Bundesarchiv.<sup>244</sup> For foreign critics, the activities of the BYHMC have provided a solution for the perceived gaps in knowledge and recognition in Ukraine regarding the Holocaust through the August 2021 agreement of cooperation with the Ministry of Education.<sup>245</sup> At the same time, the contributions to the memory of Babyn Yar and the Holocaust by the Center's opponents cannot be overlooked. The "state" project and its supporters have added highly valuable resources to the field of historical education in Ukraine with projects including a documentary film, and publishing a guide for teachers on "*Babyn Yar: Memory and History*."<sup>246</sup> These projects can be found on the web site of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies along with other commemorative works such as the "Kyiv Stones" project, which is responsible for the placement of *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones), educational and research activities, and other commemorative projects dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust and genocide.<sup>247</sup> Although supporters of the two projects have opposed one another, the simultaneous efforts of both groups continued the tradition of hybridity and has

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<sup>244</sup> "Through the Cooperation with Yad Vashem, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center Will Restore the Memory of More Than a Third of the Victims of Babyn Yar," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 4 November 2020, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/2012/2012> (accessed: 2 August 2024). The BYHMC also signed a cooperation agreement with Centropa, a Jewish historical NGO based in Vienna, Hamburg, Budapest and Washington that works to preserve Central and Eastern European Jewish memory in October 2020. See "Announcing the new educational partnership between The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center and Centropa," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 13 October 2020, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/2008/2007>, (accessed: 2 August 2024); and "Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center Signed a Cooperation Agreement with Bundesarchiv," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 1 February 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/332/memorial-holokostu-babyn-yar-pidpysav-uhodu-pro-spivpratsiu-s-bundesarkhivo> (accessed: 12 September 2024).

<sup>245</sup> "A Memorandum of Partnership Signed by the Ministry of Education and the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 16 August 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/387/minosvity-ta-memorialnyi-tsentri-holokostu-babyn-yar-pidpysaly-memorandum-pro-partnerstvo> (accessed: 12 September 2024). The Memorandum, signed 16 August 2021, stipulated that the Ministry of Education and the BYHMC would co-sponsor a National Memory Lesson dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy for all school students. In addition, lessons on the Holocaust and Babyn Yar would become an annual feature for secondary students. This also included the development of materials, resources and educational events for teachers to foster a new historical awareness.

<sup>246</sup> Voronovici, "At the Crossroads of "Memory Wars."

<sup>247</sup> For more information on the multimedia exhibit "Babyn Yar: Memory Against History's Background, the Kyiv Stones project, and other memorial projects, see the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies website, <https://holocaust.kiev.ua/en/home>.

resulted in multidirectional memorial culture at Babyn Yar.

### ***Babyn Yar Since February 2022***

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine changed the existing balance of power and influence between the two projects. Construction and development of most commemorative activities at the site were suspended, and the war came to Babyn Yar when Russian missiles that were intended to hit the nearby television tower on 1 March 2022, but instead killed five citizens.<sup>248</sup> Russian oligarchs Mikhail Fridman and German Khan were sanctioned by Western countries for their connections to the Putin regime and its war effort, leading to their resignation from the Center's executive board, which immediately resulted in the steep reduction of financial support.<sup>249</sup> The Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Pinchuk continued to support the BYHMC, however on 17 March 2022 it was announced that the majority of the center's projects would be suspended, with the remaining budget being reallocated towards raising funds in collaboration with the Viktor Pinchuk Foundation for armored ambulances, medical supplies, and humanitarian aid.<sup>250</sup> Jewish-Russian director Ilya Khrzhanovsky halted his activities almost immediately and publicly announced his resignation in September 2023. In a detailed Facebook post, the controversial director offered an apology to everyone who had been "annoyed" with his presence in Ukraine and signed off with a patriotic slogan "Glory to Ukraine!"<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Wertheimer, "Anger as Kyiv's Holocaust Memorial is Damaged." The strike was met with widespread condemnation across the international community, at times causing confusion over where the missiles had exactly landed.

<sup>249</sup> Hammer, "Ukraine Planned an Ambitious Memorial at the Site of a Holocaust Massacre." Pavel Fuks had previously resigned from the BYHMC Supervisory Board on 23 June 2021 after sanctions had been brought against him by the National Security Council of Ukraine. "Pavlo Fuks to withdraw from the Supervisory Board of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre," *Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center News Archive*, 23 June 2021, <https://babynyar.org/en/news/365/pavlo-fuks-vykhodyt-iz-nahliadovoi-rady-memorialnoho-tsentru-holokostu-baby-yar>, (accessed: 2 September 2023).

<sup>250</sup> Sergatskova and Kalyta, "Since the Beginning of the Invasion."

<sup>251</sup> Ilya Khrzhanovsky, "Resignation," 4 September 2023, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0TpWvqkebkJaLvW61q1NjRfweRQUvq56LZDsnEJvZoTwjd7TGDfwnbSCep7x883Pl&id=100007607220534](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0TpWvqkebkJaLvW61q1NjRfweRQUvq56LZDsnEJvZoTwjd7TGDfwnbSCep7x883Pl&id=100007607220534) (accessed: 4 September 2023).

Remaining employees of the BYHMC have since dedicated their time to continuing key digital activities, such as the “NAMES” (IMENA in Ukrainian) project, which seeks to identify the victims who were murdered at Babyn Yar, and preserving documents related to Babyn Yar’s history. As previously discussed, beginning in 2020, the BYHMC had begun to digitize materials for an online database by cross referencing Yad Vashem’s databases, documents from the Ukrainian state archives, as well as several synagogue and military archives.<sup>252</sup> Today, the “NAMES” project consists of over 29,000 names and was recently awarded a grant through the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) to continue its work.<sup>253</sup> In the face of war and Russian aggression, a new project called “Closed Eyes” was launched under Anna Furman, the COO of the BYHMC, which uses materials such as digitized media records, oral testimony, and information provided state authorities to identify and compile a list of civilians who have been killed in Russian attacks since 2014.<sup>254</sup> Several staff members have also received training from Yahad-In-Unum, a Paris-based nonprofit founded by Father Patrick Desbois, the current head of the BYHMC Supervisory Board, in how to gather witness testimony for future war crime investigations.<sup>255</sup>

Based on the BYHMC’s pre-2022 activities, and the center's latest activities documenting Russian war crimes in tandem with its Holocaust focused projects, it is clear that a new multidirectional path has been opened at Babyn Yar. As a site layered with many different histories, and a diverse selection of victim narratives, the memoryscape at Babyn Yar has a vast

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<sup>252</sup> Hammer, “Ukraine Planned an Ambitious Memorial at the Site of a Holocaust Massacre.”

<sup>253</sup> Anna Furman, “Names,” in *Babyn Yar: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nick Axel and Nicholas Korody (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2021), 142; and “2023 IHRA Grant Call Winners,” 3 April 2024, <https://holocaustremembrance.com/news/2023-ihra-grant-program> (accessed: 6 April 2024). The IHRA has dedicated 25% of its grants to projects based in Ukraine, with the BYHMC functioning as the primary recipient for the NAMES project, and participating as a partner with other Holocaust research organizations in the Shoah Atlas 2 project.

<sup>254</sup> Hammer, “Ukraine Planned an Ambitious Memorial at the Site of a Holocaust Massacre.”

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

network of connecting and intersecting narratives. Through the often criticized numerous and fragmented memorials and monuments at Babyn Yar, the BYHMC's memorial activities, and proposed plans to build several museums dedicated to different aspects of the site's long history, Babyn Yar functions as a hybrid memorial landscape; a place that adopts pieces from all aspects of history to form a memorial landscape previously unseen; a site with multidirectional paths that connect complex and previously separated histories, which have the ability to aid in fostering a democratic society based on humanistic principles. As connections are made between these different periods of history, including but not limited to, the Holocaust, Nazi terror, Soviet repression, and the ongoing violence committed against Ukraine during the Russian invasion, Babyn Yar's memoryscape can serve as a site of both understanding between formerly divided groups, and a new national Ukrainian memory.

This chapter has examined in detail the evolution of Babyn Yar as a site of memory from the inception of the 75th anniversary's commemorative events, through to the site's current state. The 75th anniversary proved to be a catalyst for the launch of two competing memorial projects. I have explored the development of both the BYHMC and the "state" project in length. Through this examination, it has become clear that there is no simple answer regarding the questions over who should be responsible for the primary funding of a Holocaust memorial center at Babyn Yar. On one hand, private funding relieves the constraints imposed by a tight state budget, while opening endless possibilities for an elaborate center that would not only contribute to the culture of Ukrainian Holocaust memory, but make Ukraine an attractive hub for foreign visitors seeking a greater understanding of the Holocaust and the twentieth century. Moreover, since the Russian invasion, the BYHMC has been trying to position itself in Ukrainian society as a valuable establishment for the preservation and perpetuation of Babyn

Yar's memory, as well as Ukrainian history. Based on the BYHMC's current role in documenting the mounting evidence of Russian war crimes, and the center's approach to humanitarian and military aid throughout the war, it is safe to suggest that the BYHMC is not an agent of the Kremlin's hybrid warfare, if it has ever been one. On the other hand, whether the state should be at the very least partially involved in the financing of such an important space for national memory and identity still requires investigation. As demonstrated by both the BYHMC and the authors of the Concept, the case of whose memory should be included at a memorial center for Babyn Yar has been thoughtfully articulated through both project proposals calling for the creation of several museums honoring the many layers of history at the site. Through a commemorative approach that acknowledges all historical paths and connections at Babyn Yar, a better understanding of not only the twentieth century will be formed, but of the unique features of Ukrainian history.

## Conclusion

On 29 and 30 September 1941, the Nazis carried out one of the largest mass executions of the Holocaust at Babyn Yar, killing an estimated 33,371 Jews. The mass murder of Jews and other ethnic and political groups deemed unworthy of life continued at Babyn Yar until the Red Army liberated Kyiv in November 1943. Today the site serves as a reminder of the Nazis' barbaric policies, but also as a site of multiple layers of history and memory. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has navigated difficult questions over how to appropriately memorialize the complex history of the multiethnic state, which has often led to criticism and intense public debate in the local and international context.

Through an analysis of Babyn Yar's complex layers of history, I have demonstrated that Western literature on Babyn Yar needs to be approached from a different perspective. As articulated by Aleida Assmann, although the production of cultural memory comes from above, and is reinforced by various vehicles of transmission, it is multifaceted, which allows individuals to continuously reinterpret or reassess the memory in question. Unlike the previous Soviet narrative which utilized the homogenous model of political memory to bind individuals into a unified community centered around the myth of the Great Patriotic War, the often criticized "fragmented" nature of the post-Soviet memorial landscape at Babyn Yar has facilitated a more humanistic site of cultural memory.

Approaching the post-Soviet memorial landscape at Babyn Yar through Assmann's differentiation between political and cultural memory also provides a solution to the problematic nature of Western analysis comparing Ukrainian Holocaust memory to that of the widely accepted "European" model of memory. The Western-centric transnational model of Holocaust memory also homogenizes memories, neglecting the unique character of the Holocaust by

Bullets and Nazi occupation of Soviet territory. I highlighted the Soviet-Ukrainian experience in Chapter One through my discussion of Nazi ideology, namely, the racial hierarchy that was assigned to Jews due to a belief in their sub-human status, as well as the racist belief that Slavic peoples were racially inferior. These pre-conditions for the genocidal policies carried out by the Nazis demonstrate the need for an alternative means of memorializing the tragic events that took place on Ukrainian soil. Moreover, not only did both Jewish and non-Jewish Ukrainians experience Nazi occupation differently from that of their Western counterparts, those who survived the Holocaust and Second World War underwent a dramatically different experience under the return of the Soviet leadership. Today, Western depictions of the liberation of Europe depict a universal image of Europe's surviving Jews being freed during liberation. In reality, the return of Soviet authorities and reabsorption of Ukrainian lands into the Soviet Union did not end outright antisemitic violence, nor did the post-war landscape see an end to state-antisemitism. Rather, Jews faced a new wave of oppressive policies that sought to control memory of the war, in which Jewish victims were subsumed into a broader narrative, while non-Jewish Ukrainians who did not tow the official party line also faced persecution.

In Chapter Two I explored the emergence of the official post-Soviet memorial culture at Babyn Yar. Through an analysis of the varying approaches taken by Ukraine's presidents between 1991 and the present day, I illustrated how despite the differing, and at times divisive, approaches taken towards establishing a cultural memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine, this process facilitated the evolution of a new hybrid and multidirectional memorial culture. For example, each president acknowledged Babyn Yar as a site of many different victimhood narratives and layers of memory, which contributed to the implementation of new memorial narratives at the site and in Ukraine more broadly. These actions were instrumental in

acknowledging the unique experience of the Jews and the Holocaust, as well as the memory of the Roma. Hybrid memorial culture and the endless opportunities for understanding memory as multidirectional were highlighted in my examination of the monuments and memorials at the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve. By shifting away from viewing the memorial landscape as fragmented, I exposed how the different memory models have interacted with one another and influenced their meanings. Moreover, by abandoning competitive logic that forms the basis of previous scholarly arguments, these monuments can now be interpreted as evidence of the existence of several layers of memory and multidirectional memory, which can be understood as a new hybrid model for commemorating the difficult chapters of Ukrainian history.

Chapter Three specifically addressed the evolution of Babyn Yar as a site of memory after 2014. Through a discussion of the 75th anniversary of Babyn Yar in 2016, I was able to highlight the importance of the site for Ukraine as a symbol of national memory. The most important feature of the anniversary was the emergence of two memorial centers that became adversaries in the public sphere. In my discussion of the two memorial proposals, I addressed how questions over who should finance and create a Holocaust memorial, whose memory should be included at Babyn Yar, and how to best approach Holocaust commemoration in the twenty-first century are difficult to answer. The reaction of stakeholders on the local and international level, as well as within the Jewish and non-Jewish community demonstrates that there is no easy answer, and these questions do not just pose difficulties for Ukraine. Rather, the differing opinions among different stakeholders suggest that these questions deserve further sober research, as well as an openness of Western researchers to apply new approaches to the study of the post-Soviet mnemonic space.

Through an examination of the Concept (“state” project) and the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC) it is clear that a desire to memorialize the Holocaust in Ukraine is not lacking. Although the many contributors to these projects have been involved in public disagreements, their determination to shape Babyn Yar’s memorial landscape into a site representative of both the Holocaust in Ukraine, and the countless layers of history associated with the site, have contributed to the multidirectional and hybrid space. In the face of Russia’s ongoing war of aggression, Babyn Yar’s memoryscape can serve as a site of both the understanding between formerly divided groups, and a new national Ukrainian memory.

## Appendix: Suggested List of Illustrations to Supplement Reading

Illustration I: No Author. Monument Dedicated to the “Soviet Citizens and Prisoners of War Shot by the Nazi Occupiers” at Babyn Yar. No Date Available. Photograph. Yad Vashem Archives.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/babi-yar/historical-background4.html>.

Illustration II: Rinenberg Family. Menorah-Shaped Monument to the Jews Massacred at Babyn Yar. No Date Available. Photograph. Yad Vashem Archives.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/babi-yar/historical-background4.html>.

Illustration III: Zeltser, Arkadi. Monument Dedicated to the Children Murdered at Babyn Yar. No Date Available. Photograph. Yad Vashem Archives.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/babi-yar/historical-background4.html>.

Illustration IV: Dgri. Wooden Cross in Memory of 621 Ukrainian Nationalists Murdered in 1942. No Date Available. Photograph. Yad Vashem Archives.

<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/lesson-plans/babi-yar/historical-background4.html>.

Illustration V: Kobchenko, Kateryna. Monument Dedicated to Olena Teliha in Babyn Yar. No Date Available. Photograph. Ukraine.

<https://www.boell.de/en/2020/05/15/womens-faces-ukrainian-contemporary-memory-world-war-ii>.

Illustration VI: Kobchenko, Kateryna. Monument Dedicated to Tetiana Markus in Babyn Yar. No Date Available. Photograph. Ukraine.

<https://www.boell.de/en/2020/05/15/womens-faces-ukrainian-contemporary-memory-world-war-ii>.

Illustration VII: Timothy Fadek. Babyn Yar Synagogue. 2023. Photograph. Ukraine,

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ukraine-babyn-yar-memorial-site-holocaust-massacre-war-kyiv-180983232>.

Illustration VIII: Myzhanyu. Monument to Anatoly Kuznetsov. No Date Available. Photograph. Ukraine.

<https://ua.boell.org/en/2019/11/12/post-catastrophic-urban-text-and-memory-post-war-east-central-europe>.

Illustration IX: No Author. Memorial in Memory of the Romany Victims Killed Between 1941-1943. No Date Available. Photograph. Ukraine. <https://babynyar.gov.ua/en/gallery>.

Illustration X: Laurent Van der Stockt. Memorial Dedicated to the Memory of the Ostarbeiter. 2022. Photograph. Ukraine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/unesco-sounds-the-alarm-over-threats-to-ukrainian-cultural-heritage-180979686/>.

Illustration XI: Timothy Fadek. Mirror Field. 2023. Photograph. Ukraine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ukraine-babyn-yar-memorial-site-holocaust-massacre-war-kyiv-180983232>.

Illustration XII: Image by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. A Glimpse into the Past. 2021. Photograph. Ukraine. [https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/building-a-unique-holocaust-museum-at-babyn-yar-657816#google\\_vignette](https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/building-a-unique-holocaust-museum-at-babyn-yar-657816#google_vignette).

Illustration XIII: Image by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. Brick and Mud. 2021. Photograph. Ukraine. <https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-news/found/a-glimpse-into-the-past>.

Illustration XIV: Timothy Fadek. The Crystal Wall of Crying. 2021. Photograph. Ukraine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ukraine-babyn-yar-memorial-site-holocaust-massacre-war-kyiv-180983232>.

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