

“Mine from ’33; yours from ’41”:
Translating Tragedy in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Poetry

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Introduction: Marianna Kiyanovska’s Critique of Competitive Victimhood

Babyn Yar, the site of the largest World War II massacre on Soviet Soil, was among the targets hit by missiles in the first week of Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Following this attack, President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the nation, saying “We all died again in Babyn Yar from a missile attack.” (Zelensky, Facebook post) That Ukrainians should identify with the attack on Babyn Yar as a national tragedy is due, in part, to a changed discourse, over the past decade, around Ukrainian collective trauma. In the years following the 2013-2014 Maidan Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian poets turned their attention to specifically Jewish trauma on Ukrainian soil. In 2017 the poet Marianna Kiyanovska published a cycle of poems written in the voices of the victims at Babyn Yar. In one passage we find:

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Tens of thousands of people were mass murdered by gunshot at the edge of the Babyn Yar ravine in late September 1941, on the outskirts of Nazi-occupied Kyiv. Up to 150,000 were killed there during the two-year Nazi occupation. Most of the victims were Jews, although Roma, Crimean Tatars, as well as Ukrainian and Russian Communists were among the murdered. But in this passage, Kiyanovska is, quite explicitly, unearthing competing buried traumas. By remembering the Jewish loss of 1941 – the year of the Babyn Yar massacre – alongside 1933 – the height of the Ukrainian famine (Holodomor, 1932-3), Kiyanovska is initiating a conversation about how Ukrainian and Jewish collective memories have developed, in part, in opposition to one another. The silences (movchannia), which have alliteratively replaced the languages (movy) of Babylon, are the silences of the dead, but they are echoed in the long absence of commemoration of these tragedies. She is also revealing what is at stake for Ukrainians in including Babyn Yar in a history of Ukrainian tragedies: remembering the multiplicity of

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² My translation consults Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rozochinsky, *Babyn Yar: In Voices*, pp. 46-47. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

community losses on Ukrainian soil means broadening an existing narrative of Ukrainian historical trauma, one that has, in the past, centered on the Holodomor.

Babyn Yar complicates a narrative of Soviet anti-racism, for the tragedy was compounded by the silence in the years that followed. The few Soviet acknowledgments of Babyn Yar commemorated the “peaceful victims of fascism,” occluding the genocidal nature of the massacre. (Kotljarchuk 7) When Soviet Jews initiated unofficial commemorative gatherings at Babyn Yar in the 1960s, the KGB condemned these as “antisocial” and “Zionist.”³ Despite the official Soviet promotion of national minorities in the interwar period, and the elaborate celebration of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, collective mourning by members of a single ethnic group was viewed as a nationalist betrayal of Soviet egalitarianism. Following Ukraine’s independence in 1991, plans emerged to erect a more expansive memorial at Babyn Yar. However, as Vitalii Nakhmanovich has suggested, these projects stalled in part because of the competition between “various NGOs, informal groups, and local authorities with the goal to monumentalize the memory of ‘their own’ victims.” (Nakhmanovich 144) Plans for a large-scale memorial complex began to be realized in earnest after the 2013-2014 Ukrainian “Euromaidan” uprising, although this effort, too, has been mired in competing interests and controversy. Independent artistic and literary reappraisals of Babyn Yar, however, have simultaneously called to task the Soviet legacy of collective forgetting, and the competitive victimhood that arose with the post-Soviet national awakenings across Eastern Europe. Kiyanovska’s *Babyn Yar* is an important example of this kind of reappraisal, for her poems participate in a discussion of the Nazi genocide, Soviet revisionist history, and a post-Maidan conversation about identity and citizenship.

How does Ukraine’s post-Soviet reassessment of community and past trauma fit into a global conversation about anti-racism? Kiyanovska, like other Ukrainian writers of her generation, is rejecting the Soviet narrative of inclusivity that, paradoxically, led to ethnic competition. This narrative of Soviet inclusivity has been coopted by the Kremlin in its frequent assertions that Ukraine, by moving further from Moscow, is nationalist. By addressing the erasures of the Soviet period and focusing on Ukraine’s minority groups, Kiyanovska is aligning herself with global movements toward anti-discrimination that have grown since 2013 with the Black Lives Matter movement. This article is an attempt to parse Kiyanovska’s poetry about other groups’ suffering by situating it in the context of civic pluralism in twenty-first century Ukraine. At around the same time she wrote *Babyn Yar*, Kiyanovska also wrote poems about the struggles of the Crimean Tatars. These poems about Ukraine’s minority groups might easily be dismissed as appropriative. However, by writing, in the midst of the Donbas war, about the past struggles of Jews and Tatars, Kiyanovska offers a complex understanding of Ukraine’s traumatic history, one that acknowledges the multiple, and sometimes competing, losses on Ukrainian soil. I shall propose here that these poems dedicated to Ukraine’s minorities should be read as appeals to a Ukrainian readership to broaden the understanding of Ukrainian identity to include Ukrainians of diverse backgrounds. To explain this phenomenon, I will use the concept of the poetic “password,” which I have defined elsewhere as a “culturally coded word, name, or phrase that conveys group identity.” (Glaser 3) Kiyanovska presents “1933” as a Ukrainian historical password to admit Jewish trauma to this collective experience of Ukrainian

³ In 1969, the KGB identified the activities at Babyn Yar as provocative actions, including “Laying a Zionist star, lighting candles and handing out leaflets.” (Nakhmanovich 137)

tragedy. In this poem, 1933 – the height of the Ukrainian famine – is evoked to compel her readers to consider the Holocaust part of Ukrainian history. Through *Babyn Yar*, Kiyanovska is rejecting the East European competitive victimhood that was often associated with a strictly ethnic understanding of Ukrainian identity.

Kiyanovska's application of a majority password to broaden Ukrainian identity can also be understood through the concept of disidentification, which Jose Esteban Munoz defines as the "recycling and rethinking [of] encoded meaning." According to Munoz, disidentification references a "code of the majority [...] as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture." (Munoz 31) Kiyanovska, who has often reiterated her privileged membership in the dominant (Ukrainian) culture, is using tropes from the dominant Ukrainian culture to create a language for a more inclusive Ukrainian public sphere. We may therefore consider Kiyanovska's poem to be part of what many have called a "Civic Turn" in Ukrainian culture. Following the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests, which led to the ouster of then-president Viktor Yanukovych, scholars observed "a transition from an ethno-cultural conception of Ukrainianness to its civic counterpart," to borrow Marko Pavlyshyn's words. (Pavlyshyn 76) Kiyanovska's poetry suggests that in Ukraine, the ethno-national competition that defined post-Soviet nation building has begun to shift toward a more inclusive conversation about the collective ownership of history.

Holocaust Studies has a tenuous relationship to current discussions of anti-racism. While Jews enjoy white privilege in the United States, Jews constitute a visible minority ethnicity in the former Soviet Union that has long been racialized. The term, "natsional'nost," meaning both ethnicity and nationality, allows for slippages, which have called Jews' citizenship into question. Moreover, cases of Jewish/Slavic alliances in understanding the history of European Antisemitism offers a usable, if imperfect, analogue for the movement toward pluralism and accountability in the face of American racism – a movement that has become more visible, and more salient, since the 2014 protests against racially motivated killings by police officers in Ferguson and Baltimore. Fascinatingly, in the years immediately following the Maidan, we witness a broad reckoning, in Ukraine, with the multiethnic history of the country, including efforts to think critically about the erasure of non-Ukrainian groups' trauma. This has taken place alongside ongoing discussions of the Soviet erasure of Ukrainian suffering, particularly the Holodomor, the largely state-engineered famine that killed millions of peasants in the early 1930s. This emerges as part of a broader conversation about the nature of Ukrainian identity, and an effort to support Ukraine's ethnic and religious minorities. What many have called a "civic turn" in contemporary Ukrainian identity-formation has taken place alongside a global movement to examine privilege and trauma. In the first section of this article, I will argue that Kiyanovska's introduction of images and terms familiar from descriptions of the Holodomor help her to integrate *Babyn Yar* into Ukrainian collective history. In the second section, I will elaborate on how this fits into the civic turn in Ukrainian society. In section three, I will discuss Kiyanovska's "Crimean Letters," a cycle that serves as another poetic case study in this civic approach to collective trauma. Contemporary poets like Kiyanovska have sought to revise a persistent Soviet Cold-War narrative that presented Moscow as a model of egalitarianism and Ukraine as dangerously nationalist.

1. Babyn Yar and the Holodomor: Against Competitive Victimhood

Although official rhetoric around Babyn Yar has been distorted by suppressed national mourning (in the Soviet Union) or overwhelmed by competing national grievances (in post-Soviet Ukraine), more generative conversations about Babyn Yar have emerged in the work of independent writers and artists. Since the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests, Ukrainian poets have integrated Babyn Yar into their work, integrating it into a story of Ukraine's rich multiethnic past – a past that both Socialist and nationalist official histories have failed to present in its full complexity. Born in 1973 near the western city of Lviv, Marianna Kiyanovska has been widely recognized as a significant voice in post-Soviet Ukraine since her first book appeared in 1997. Her work has been translated into over a dozen languages, and, in addition to numerous prizes for her poetry, she has been recognized for her translations from Polish. Kiyanovska was praised for crossing boundaries, in her early work, for depicting, for example, female sexuality. But her recent poems have been provocative in more historical ways. The sixty-four poems Kiyanovska included in *Babyn Yar: Holosamy (Babyn Yar: In Voices)* channel the imagined, primarily Jewish, victims of the massacre. In one poem, we find:

тисяча сто двадцять вісім зі мною впали сам я зробився як динаміт і вибухнув сам присипав усіх землею і сам проріс майже посеред яру там де вода вимила вирву (Kiyanovska, <i>Babyn Yar</i> 8)	one thousand one hundred and twenty-eight fell with me I turned into a stick of dynamite and exploded I covered everyone with soil and I sprouted near the center of the pit hollowed out by water ⁴
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Although this passage does not explicitly reference the Ukrainian famine, Kiyanovska's image of fertile soil is familiar from other poems about the famine. This theme has been especially prevalent in the work of poets of Kiyanovska's generation and younger since the outbreak of the Donbas war in 2014. The poet Halyna Kruk similarly references the Ukrainian earth, opening a 2020 poem: "ми давно вже не копаємо глибоко" [we stopped digging deep long ago]. Kruk's poem continues, "бо можна викопати різне небажане: людські кістки, кінські голови, невибухлі міни" [because all kinds of junk can turn up: human bones, horses' heads, unexploded mines]. In a 2019 poem, Kateryna Kalytko describes a character lying „ у пирозі землі, / що людьми фарширований щедро” [in a mud pie/ that's been stuffed to the brim with people.] And in one early poem the poet Ilya Kiva enumerates the country's multiple tragedies: "Вот страна. Она помнит Чернобыль и голодомор, Бабий Яр, диссидентов, красной звезды огонек" [Here's a country. Remembers Chernobyl the Holodomor/Babyn Yar, dissidents, and the glowing red star.] (Kiva, "Ukrainskii vitrazh") The Holodomor is explicitly or implicitly present in Ukraine's artistic language of mourning: Ukraine's life-giving earth is also a mass grave. Scholars estimate that close to four million Ukrainians perished of starvation during the Holodomor of 1932-33 alone, alongside the mass death of livestock due to lack of feed.⁵ Arriving on the heels of rural collectivization, which was enforced in the late 1920s, the Great Famine was in part the result of poor harvests, but in large part also

⁴ My translation consults Kiyanovska, *Babyn Yar*. Trans. Maksymchuk and Rozochinsky, 38-39

⁵ For a discussion of extant scholarly estimates, see Oleh Wolowyna, "Comments on the Demographic Consequences of the Holodomor," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* V. 30, N. 1/4 (2008), pp. 243-250

the direct result of unattainable production quotas set by Moscow. Lev Kopelev, who served as a Party delegate working, in the early 1930s, on what he called “the grain front,” later wrote a painful account of his ideological disillusionment after enforcing the delivery of quotas from Ukraine to the Soviet government. “Our party, our state,” he writes, “waged war on the peasantry.” Kopelev recalls a woman’s protests during a raid for hidden grain: “Oy, that’s the last thing we have! That was for the children’s kasha! Honest to God, the children will starve!” (Kopelev 256.)⁶ Serhiy Plokyh has shown that, although famine affected many regions of the Soviet Union, the death toll was the highest in central Ukraine. (Plokyh 128) The Holodomor has been central to Ukrainian identity formation since the 1930s, in part because of the lack of wide recognition this tragedy has received. The writer Volodymyr Dibrova has observed that, in contrast to the Holocaust, “The world was not sympathetic to the victims [of the Holodomor], but treated them at best, as collateral damage, as if they were somehow responsible for their suffering.” (Dibrova 268) These events have been remembered and un-remembered at multiple points in Ukraine’s political history. Alexander Motyl recalls that, in contrast to former president Viktor Yushchenko, who made the Holodomor central to Ukraine’s national identity, his successor Viktor Yanukovich “deleted the link to the Holodomor on the president’s official website.” (Motyl 25)

By allowing the Holocaust and Holodomor to coexist as two manifestations of genocide, Kiyanoska resists the competitive victimhood that emerges, as Dominick LaCapra has argued, when rhetoric about trauma becomes rhetoric about uniqueness.⁷ Kiyanoska’s reflection on non-Ukrainian victimhood in the wake of the Maidan is in dialogue, in unexpected ways, with contemporaneous antiracist movements throughout the world. This Ukrainian revision of a national narrative is not specifically socialist, but rather, post-socialist. As Anna Wylegala and Małgorzata Glowacka-Grajper have written, “What modern Ukraine inherited from the states that once ruled the various parts of its territory were not only different political and cultural traditions but also different experiences and assessments of crucial historical events.” (Wylegala and Glowacka-Grajper 5) By reclaiming the concept of multiethnicity Kiyanoska, like many of her contemporaries, is simultaneously demonstrating the fallacy of Soviet nationalities policy, which dictated the terms of national self-expression, and responding to Russia’s weaponizing of the remains of this failed policy.

A dialogue between Holocaust and Holodomor memory enables a reconsideration of identity categories that were established in the Soviet period, a time when, as Francine Hirsch makes clear, “Nationality had become a fundamental marker of identity, embedded not just in the administrative structure of the Soviet Union, but also in people’s mentalities.” (Hirsch 145) As scholars including Francine Hirsch, Yuri Slezkine, and Terry Martin have shown, the same Soviet ideology that sought to alleviate racism and the oppression of workers often fostered competition between individual ethnic groups, which persisted into the post-1991 reconstruction

⁶ Further, Kopelev writes, “The population of the Ukraine did not increase from 1932 to 1938, as it had in the preceding years, but actually fell by one million.” (Kopelev 235)

⁷ As La Capra has written, of Holocaust history, “To say that in fact the limit was reached only once changes the sense of uniqueness and may even banalize it, notably by prompting a dogmatic assertion of absolutes, a grim competition for first place in victimhood, or the type of research into similarities and differences that easily becomes diversionary and pointless.” (La Capra, *History and Memory*, 26)

of East European borders. Twenty-first century Ukrainian artists and intellectuals who have chosen to focus on the traumatic history of Ukraine's ethnic minorities are advocating for a new form of pluralism that embraces an internationalist ethos, while rejecting the identity politics that inadvertently facilitated the growth of competitive victimhood in the Soviet period. Whereas, at many points in modern history, Ukrainian identity has been bound up with Ukrainian language, Ukrainian forms of Christianity (both Orthodoxy and Uniate), and collective experiences of trauma as Ukrainians – particularly the Holodomor –, the Euromaidan led to a reassessment of what it means to be Ukrainian.

Stalin defined a nation as "a people with its own territory, economy, language, and collective mentality or culture," and, within a decade of the Bolshevik Revolution, this definition had informed the Soviet government's implementation of its nationalities policy. (Hagadorn, Linssen, and Tumanov 42) Terry Martin has explained that this policy was an urgent means of addressing the multiple nationalist movements that had arisen in the early twentieth century. Ukrainians made up over 45% of non-Russians in the USSR and the Ukrainian nationalist movement was, according to Martin, "particularly unnerving." (Martin 2, 22) Soviet encouragement of multiethnicity and condemnation of nationalism initially gave long-awaited autonomy to the Soviet Republics. It also promoted an anti-racist ethos abroad, particularly in its criticism of Jim Crow in the United States.⁸ However, in the Soviet Union, the progressive aspects of the nationalities policy soon yielded to a de-facto Russian hegemony. Although, as Martin writes, the USSR "set out to systematically build and strengthen its non-Russian nations, even where they barely existed," it would eventually undermine these nations in other ways. (Martin 9, 19)⁹ The post-Maidan Ukrainian interest in the country's multiethnic history is focused, in part, on coming to terms with a core paradox of Soviet nationalities policy: namely, that nations were celebrated to the extent that they could help the Soviet Union, but could quickly be demonized as nationalist.

The Soviet denial of Ukrainian and Jewish loss meant that commemorating tragedy became a means of opposing Soviet homogenization. During the Soviet period, the recognition of this official silencing created a point of Ukrainian-Jewish solidarity. In 1966, the historian Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern has observed, the 25th anniversary of the Babyn Yar Massacre coincided with the centennial of the officially suppressed Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushev'sky. This double anniversary became a fortuitous occasion for Jewish-Ukrainian dissident solidarity. Petrovsky-Shtern writes that "To visit both Hrushev'sky's grave and Babyn Yar was a slap in the face of the regime that stifled both the Jewish and Ukrainian ethno-national versions of history, and which criminalized ethnic voices as bourgeois-nationalist." (Petrovsky-Shtern) Paradoxically, despite this Soviet Ukrainian and Jewish dissident solidarity, in post-Soviet Ukraine, attempts to commemorate the Holocaust have been complicated by the

⁸ As Steven Lee observes, "Soviet approaches to countering racism still provide useful, estranging counterpoints to the now-globalized discourse of American ethnicity." (Lee 28). As Krista Goff has explained, in her study of the treatment of non-titular ethnic groups under Soviet Nationality policy, in the early 1920s, Stalin prioritized "guarding against dominant nationalities taking advantage of others." (Goff, 37)

⁹ For example, Martin notes further that in the late 1920s, although official Soviet policy encouraged the teaching of Ukrainian language and literature as part of its indigenization project in the late 1920s, "At the same time, a terror campaign was launched against Ukrainian 'bourgeois nationalists.'" (Martin 23)

anxiety that ethnic Ukrainians, who had lost millions of family members a decade earlier, might have their own history elided. Simultaneously, attempts to commemorate the Holodomor as a form of genocide were viewed as suspect by Jews who feared this might replace Holocaust memory.

Competitive victimhood in post-Soviet Ukraine was still present in the post-Soviet years. President Viktor Yushchenko's unveiling of the Holodomor Victims Museum-Memorial Complex in Kyiv in 2008 was overshadowed for some by the unveiling of a monument to Stepan Bandera, the leader of the anti-Soviet OUN-B who had briefly collaborated with the Nazis.¹⁰ What the historian John-Paul Himka has called Yushchenko's promotion of "the cult of OUN and UPA" made it difficult to separate the commemoration of civic Ukrainian history from the commemoration of ethno-national history. (Himka 64) In 2012, Eleonora Narvselius observed, critically, that "Generally ... in Western Ukraine discussion on the war is still entrapped in the tenets of national discourse." (Narvselius 490) Although many Ukrainian scholars have criticized the canonization of Bandera, critics of the 2013-14 Euromaidan have attempted to discredit the country's movement away from Russia by viewing Ukraine's efforts at self-determinacy through a lens of World War II, and, preposterously, considering all Ukrainian activists to be neo-Nazi fascists.¹¹ Since 2014, there has been a concerted effort among Ukrainian poets and scholars to separate the commemoration of tragedy from the valorization of historical nationalism. By simultaneously discussing the Ukrainian famine and the Holocaust, Kiyanovska is bringing Jewish trauma in a Ukrainian collective memory, an act that resists the identity categories that became entrenched in the early Soviet Union, and the competitive victimhood that was, in some cases, part of the fallout from the breakup of the USSR. Embracing an inclusive "We" in post-Maidan Ukraine is a way for Ukrainians to address multiculturalism on its own terms. Marci Shore has summed up the views of leftist intellectuals who participated in the Maidan as a newfound hope in a progressive anti-totalitarian democracy, which also foregrounded a multiethnic rapprochement: "the Maidan was a place where a truly civic Ukrainian patriotism came into being. The history of Ukrainian-Jewish relations was a dark one. The Maidan opened a new chapter." (Shore 80)

2. Toward an Inclusive "We": A Collective Understanding of Trauma

Long before writing *Babyn Yar*, Kiyanovska spoke of the need to reconsider Ukrainian identity. In a 2014 interview with the journal *Chas i podii*, Kiyanovska stated that, "For me, especially after the Maidan, although certain things had evolved before that, it suddenly became clear that all this is actually 'we,' it's a multilevel 'I.'" (Kiyanovskya, Franko) She spoke further in the same interview about consciously using the political category, "Citizens of Ukraine," rather than the ethnic/volkish label of "Ukrainians." In the years since the 2013-14 Euromaidan uprising and the outbreak of the Donbas war, Ukrainian social scientists have observed a gradual shift in Ukrainian identity definition. The social psychologist Karina Korostelina observed that of the

¹⁰ Bandera eventually parted ways with the Nazis. He was assassinated by a KGB agent

¹¹ As the political scientist Volodymyr Kulyk has put it, "When the time to select common heroes for all Ukraine, it may happen that Bandera will not be among them." Kulyk, "Neunyknyni Bandera," 14. Cited in Narvselius, 477.

many national narratives presented by activists on the Maidan, what she calls the “civic-multicultural narrative” represented a new shift away from both an ethno-national Ukrainian narrative, which was bound up with language, religion, and mono-ethnic Ukrainian history, as well as from the Soviet-influenced narrative, which continues to place Russia at the center of its collective consciousness.¹² Similarly, Volodymyr Kulyk has written, “The Euromaidan protests of 2013–14 and the subsequent Russian military intervention in Crimea and the Donbas brought about a perceptible change in ethnonational identities, as many people felt both stronger attachment to Ukraine and stronger alienation from Russia.” (Kulyk, “Shedding Russianness”) Benedict Anderson maintained that novelists were important agents who helped to imagine the modern nation across continents. In other contexts, poets have taken on this role of national mythmaking. (Anderson 25)¹³ In the period since the Maidan, poets have assumed the role of reimagining national identity,

and their presentation of Ukrainian history in a multinational light puts pressure on the Soviet myth of equality.

The ongoing conversation in Ukraine about civic nationhood is in direct opposition to rhetoric that has come out of the Kremlin. In 2014, Putin provocatively called the Maidan movement a “pogrom,” a statement that key Kremlin figures and allies have parroted.¹⁴ In an October 2021 article published in the journal, *Kommersant*, former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev suggest that, as a Jew, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky should not align himself with a Ukrainian nationalist cause, writing that he must “maneuver between Nazis, Muslims, apolitical Ukrainians and Russians, and other ethnic groups.” (Medvedev) Medvedev’s suggestion, which echoes the Kremlin’s public approach to Ukraine since the 2013-14 Maidan movement, is that, unlike its neighboring Russia, with its history of combatting Nazi Germany, Ukraine is both dangerously multiethnic, and inherently antisemitic. Despite Stalin’s brief alliance with Hitler, the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II remains, to this day, the basis for the Kremlin’s juxtaposition between Russia and the perceived Nazi threat of the former republics, including Ukraine. Russia’s accusations against Ukraine, while based in historical conflicts between Jews and Christian Ukrainians in the region, are taken out of context and used to serve an agenda of political and geographical domination. But they have, paradoxically, also driven Ukraine to earnestly reassess its own relationship to nationhood.

Kiyanovska’s choice to write in the voice of the murdered Jews of Kyiv may be read in the context of other non-Jewish authors who have empathized with Holocaust victims, from Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy” to Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s “Babyi Yar.” Inta Ezergailis wrote in 2000 of non-Jewish poets in the Baltic countries who, confronting the Holocaust as a subject, negotiated between the ethics of memory-formation and the appropriation of other groups’ suffering, which has been of particular concern around Holocaust commemoration:

The ethical questionability of the poet’s appropriation can reach from a critique of, say, Sylvia Plath using fascism and the Holocaust as an archetypal association to express a more private pain, to the appropriative gesture of

¹² Korostelina observed that the Maidan included representatives of, primarily, three forms of national narrative – “Fight for Ukrainian Identity, Acceptance of Ukrainian Identity, and Civic-Multicultural narrative.” (Korostelina 277)

¹³ On the role of poets in the imagining of a Ukrainian national identity in the nineteenth century, see also Grabowicz and Finnin, “Nationalism and the Lyric”.

¹⁴ See for example V. Putin, RIA Novosti, 2013

Degutyte, Ivask, and others in blending the fate of the victims of Stalin in the Baltic with those of the Holocaust. (Ezergailis 439)

As the European parliament emphasized the importance of Holocaust memory, establishing, for example, a “Resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, antisemitism and racism” in 2005, many countries in Eastern Europe attempted to redirect the conversation toward Soviet crimes against East European communities. As Yelena Subotic has written, the centrality of the Holocaust in Europe was “soundly rejected across much of post-communist Europe (some of the early leaders of this counter-memory were Poland and the Baltic states) because of its perceived elevation of Jewish victimhood above the victimhood of other regional majority ethnic groups – a move that is increasingly openly resented.” (Subotic)¹⁵ Subotic observes that some countries implemented alternative commemorations, which she terms “*memory appropriation*, where the memory of the Holocaust is used to memorialize a different kind of suffering, such as suffering under communism, or suffering from ethnic violence perpetrated by other groups.” This competition between post-Soviet Ukrainian and Jewish national mourning echoed the post-War “historians dispute” in Germany, between left wing scholars who focused on the uniqueness of Nazi crimes, and German historians on the right, who used Stalin’s atrocities as an example of similar crimes, therefore minimizing German culpability. As Dominick La Capra has observed, in the case of Holocaust commemoration in post-unification Germany, the risk of comparing Auschwitz to other crimes, in particular Stalin’s Gulags “tended to relativize, normalize, or even ‘air-brush’ Auschwitz in order to make it fade into larger historical contexts and out of conscious focus.” (La Capra, *History*, 50)

Ukrainian writers like Kiyanovska, who have recentered the Holocaust in a discussion of Ukrainian memory, are confronting this tendency among post-Soviet East Europeans to relativize the Holocaust. To be sure, we may view her claiming of names and voices as an act of artistic appropriation in the sense that she is writing in the voice of murdered Jews. What is essential to note is that Kiyanovska is not using Babyn Yar to draw attention to Ukrainian suffering during, for example, the Holodomor, but rather is using the Ukrainian Holodomor as a touchstone to convince her Ukrainian readers of the importance of the Holocaust. Let us return to the passage cited above from Kiyanovska’s *Babyn Yar: In Voices*.

<p>іван каже наві: дивися це місце немов вавилон але тут у нас перемішано не мови а мовчання і кості хоча деякі не перемішано я зі своїми із тридцять третього ти зі своїми із сорок першого ви тут були новенькі (Kiyanovska, <i>Babyn Yar</i>, 12)</p>	<p>ivan says to navah: look this place is like babylon except here what’s mixed up isn’t languages but silences and bones although some aren’t mixed at all me with mine from thirty-three you and yours from forty-one you got here later¹⁶</p>
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The relationship between the fictionalized Ivan’s “Mine from 1933” and “yours from 1941,” imagines a resurrected conversation. Here, Kiyanovska is presenting significant collective traumatic events – two acts of genocide – as untranslatable passwords. The signifier for such an event carries with it an impasse that bars access to those on the outside. But significantly,

¹⁵ Subotic cites the European Parliament “Resolution on Remembrance of the Holocaust, Anti-Semitism and Racism.” 27 January 2005.

¹⁶ translation consults Maksymchuk and Rozochinsky’s translation of *Babyn Yar*, 46-47.)

this untranslatability is precisely what allows Kiyanovska to use the year '33 as a password for gaining access into the equally untranslatable world of 1941. For Kiyanovska, '33 is a version of what Derrida, writing about Paul Celan, has referred to as a cipher for an otherwise inaccessible experience, "the word that opens the possibility of mourning what has been lost without remainder." Kiyanovska in turn uses this cipher – 1933, together with another historical cipher – 1941 – to grant Jews access to the collective experience of Ukrainian loss.

LaCapra has discussed the problem of the "founding trauma" that can serve as a "legitimizing myth of origins," that later helps to justify an ideology. (LaCapra, *Writing History*, xii) By placing Babyn Yar alongside the Holodomor – which has long served as a founding trauma in Ukrainian identity formation – with the inclusion of "mine" and "yours," Kiyanovska is introducing a challenge to this founding narrative, one which allows for a more complex narrative of identity formation. In her use of passwords to liken the untranslatable experiences of Ukrainian and Jewish trauma, Kiyanovska is doing something similar to Irina Klepfisz (b. 1941), an American poet born in the Warsaw ghetto who, in her 1987 poem, "East Jerusalem," re-rendering of the Zionist Oath (Psalms 137:5) to declare a commitment to Palestinian Arabs:

...If I forget thee
Oh Jerusalem Jerusalem Hebron
Ramallah Nablus Qattana...
...may I forget
My own past my pain
The depth of my sorrows. (Klepfisz 240)

Klepfisz here uses the memory of the Holocaust as a password to gain access to Palestinians' suffering under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. Adrienne Rich writes, of Klepfisz, "this poetry asks fundamental questions about the uses of history. That it does so from a rootedness in Jewish history, an unassimilated location, is one part of its strength, but history alone doesn't confer this strength; the poet's continuing labor with Jewish meaning does." (Rich 143) For Ukrainian poets today, as for Jewish poets like Klepfisz attempting to bridge an unbridgeable divide separating her from Palestinian women, poetic passwords are a way to redraw the boundaries of a community, to create a new form of collective "We."

Kiyanovska likens her Ukrainian and Jewish subjects in the language itself. "Ivan" and "Navi" are palindromic anagrams of one another in the Ukrainian dative case.¹⁷ They are mirror images who represent separate collective tragedies (although, we may observe, it is the Ukrainian Ivan who initiates this particular conversation). What these names lead to is the observation that rather than Babylon – a place of languages, we are left with silences. The proximity of the sounds in the words is important. "Nemov" (resembles) leads to "Movy" (languages), which in turn into "Movchani" (silences). Just as Navi mirrors Ivan, language resembles silence.

Around the time she began sharing her poems from Babyn Yar to her Facebook page, Kiyanovska posted, "People are asking if I'm Jewish. I'm not Jewish. I don't think any Jewish blood flows in my veins. But I'm human. ... That's why I write: "I am Rachel". ... And yes, I left this suitcase on the road today amid the smoke. And all I brought to Babin Yar was my Jewish name and a lot of pain." (Kiyanovska, Facebook) Kiyanovska's metaphorical identification with

¹⁷ I thank Margaret Litvin for pointing out this mirroring to me.

the Jewish victims of Babyn Yar can be read as a version of what Michael Rothberg has called “solidarity-via-identification.” Rothberg has discussed the well-meaning American antiracist declaration, “I am Trayvon Martin,” which circulated on social media following George Zimmerman’s killing of the innocent Black teenager in 2012. Although this statement of solidarity was important, Rothberg has discussed the choice, by some white allies to the black community, to instead write “I am not Trayvon Martin,” a statement that Rothberg views as “an occasion to mark another kind of belonging: the speaker’s implication in the conditions that contributed to Trayvon’s murder.” (Rothberg 22) Kiyanovska’s “I am Rachel,” uttered alongside her assertion that “I am not Jewish,” fits into a similar space between identification and disidentification. Ukrainians who are confronting a history of antisemitism on Ukrainian soil must constantly negotiate between the occasional role that Ukrainians played in anti-Jewish violence, and the mass loss of Ukrainian lives and limitations on Ukrainian freedom that has played an important role in current conceptions of Ukrainian nationhood.

Kiyanovska is addressing Jewish history at a moment when this is at once necessary to Ukraine’s civic identity and politically complicated, given the strong association between the ongoing Donbass war and Russia’s historical violence against Ukrainians, including during the genocidal Holodomor. The poet Iya Kiva has written, of Kiyanovska’s Facebook post, “У цьому дописі Кіановська актуалізує важливе для мистецтва питання — ... право на інтерпретацію чужого досвіду. ... Чи ми готові ховати лише «своїх» мерців і оплакувати тільки власних небіжчиків?” [Kiyanovska reinforces an important question for art – ... the right to interpret someone else’s experience. ... Are we only prepared to bury “our own” dead and to mourn our own victims?” (Kiva, “Plach”) Whereas Kiva, like Rothberg, sees the value in writing consciously about another group, many of the responses that Kiyanovska’s contacts shared on social media suggest a general inability to separate Jewish trauma from Ukrainian trauma. One reader responded to this post that “in every Ukrainian flows a bit of Jewish blood.” Kiyanovska rejects the impulse to claim Jewish suffering through shared genetic material, by responding with the dismissive, “Оу Боже” [Oh God). For Kiyanovska, it is significant that identification and responsibility should be separate from individual family lineage. Responding to a poem, another reader writes: шедевр для пензля Шагала.... [a masterpiece worthy of Chagall’s brush). (Kiyanovska, Facebook)

Naive as these comments may be, they indicate an emerging conversation in Ukraine. In an interview in 2017, Kiyanovska suggested that until recently, it was physically (she uses the term “biologically”) impossible to think about Babyn Yar during the Soviet period.

я є перше покоління ... які прийшли в університет вже в незалежну Україну –
яке мало допитливість, не прибиту біологічним страхом, мовляв, якщо я
поцікавлюся іншими знищеними, то мене вб’ють. (Kiyanovska, Slavinska)

[I am the first generation ... who came to the university in independent Ukraine -
who had a curiosity, not tied to a biological fear that dictated that if I inquire about
others’ destruction, I will be killed.]

The legacy of Soviet discourse around genocide, Kiyanovska suggests here, left little space for empathy with other groups.

This history of competitive victimhood, during a time of limited space for national self-expression, meant that, following independence, Ukrainians prioritized the commemoration of specifically Ukrainian loss. She described, in the same interview, a renewed interest in studying multiethnic Ukrainian history following the Maidan.

Після 2014 року я почала свідомо вивчати історії євреїв, кримських татар, поляків, силезців, які тут масово працювали в нас, на Західній Україні в епоху Австро-Угорської імперії, як спільного середовища, яке разом творило Україну. ... В той момент Голокост для мене став частиною історії України. (Kiyanovska, Slavinska)

After 2014, I began to consciously study the history of Jews, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Silesians, who came here to work en masse in Western Ukraine during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as a collective environment that together created Ukraine. ... In that moment the Holocaust became part of Ukrainian history for me.

Kiyanovska's distinction between those who came to work "among us" (v nas) and the Ukrainian "us" suggests a distinction that is still present between native Ukrainians and others. And yet her vocal interest in learning to problematize history has allowed her to reimagine Ukrainian identity even as her language still betrays a distinction between "us" and "others."

Ukrainian poets addressed Babyn Yar long before Kiyanovska. Mykola Bazhan, in 1943, described human remains in the muddy earth.¹⁸ In 1966, the Ukrainian poet Ivan Dziuba delivered a speech at the unofficial Babyn Yar memorial, in which he acknowledged the persistence of antisemitism in Ukraine and called upon fellow Ukrainians to fight against it. Yohanan Petrovsky Shtern has argued that, "After 1966 Babyn Yar became a litmus test for Ukrainian dissidents, a sign of their commitment to national democratic values and to the high standards established by Dziuba's speech." (Petrovsky-Shtern) Dziuba explicitly blames Stalin for the animosity between Jews and Ukrainians:

А в часи Сталіна були одверті, очевидні спроби зіграти на взаємних упередженнях частини українців і частини євреїв, спроби під виглядом єврейського буржуазного націоналізму, сіонізму тощо — обрубувати єврейську національну культуру, а під виглядом українського буржуазного націоналізму — українську національну культуру. Ці хитро обмислені кампанії завдали шкоди обом народам і не сприяли їх здруженню, вони тільки додали ще один прикрий сполин у тяжку історію обох народів і в складну історію їх взаємин. (Dziuba)

[And in Stalin's time there were open, blatant attempts to play upon the prejudices of some Ukrainians and Jews, attempts to diminish Jewish culture under the guise of Jewish bourgeois nationalism, Zionism, etc., and Ukrainian culture under the guise of Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism. These cleverly designed campaigns harmed both ethnicities and did not facilitate their friendship, rather they added yet another sad memory to the painful history of both peoples and to the complicated history of their relationship.]

¹⁸ A number of Jewish poets have written poems about Babyn Yar. These include Liudmila Titova, Leonid Pervomaiskii, Ilya Ehrenburg, among others.

Is Kiyanovska, with her post-Maidan tribute to Holocaust memory, simply reentering a dissident tradition initiated by poets like Dziuba, or is her generation doing something different? If Dziuba made important headway in acknowledging the difficulty facing Jewish and Ukrainian memory formation in the Soviet period, a post-Soviet generation of writers has found the space and language to build a genre around a pluralistic Ukrainian society.

The poet Serhiy Zhadan, in his review of Kiyanovska's book, recognizes Kiyanovska's goals of taking responsibility for remembering Ukraine's Jewish community and connecting two traditionally separate national experiences. Zhadan observed that "our historical traumas ... are strongly interconnected." [вони, наші історичні травми ... міцно між собою пов'язані.] Zhadan, who compares Kiyanovska's cycle to Paul Celan's "Todesfuge," writes explicitly of collective memory:

"Втім, є щось важливіше й більше за біль — це наша пам'ять. Вона здатна вмістити в собі все — і гострий біль своїх та чужих травм, і навіть можливість його, цього болю, подолання. Голоси потребують оприявлення, завдання поета — вміти слухати. Себто, вміти любити." (Zhadan)

[Yet there is something more important and bigger than pain - this is our memory. This has the capacity to contain everything - the sharp pain of their own and others' injuries, as well as the possibility of overcoming this pain. Voices need to be revealed, the poet's task is to be able to listen. That is, to be able to love.]

Cathy Caruth, writing specifically about empathy, has observed that trauma "may lead... to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound." (Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 8) Whereas Dziuba was protesting against the policy of an existing Soviet state, Zhadan and Kiyanovska have a broader social goal: listening for others' suffering, they suggest, will help Ukraine to move forward as an independent civic state.

3. What About Kaffa: Kiyanovska's "Crimean Letters"

Kiyanovska's writing about collective loss goes beyond her interest in the Holocaust. She has written about the losses of Ukraine's non-Slavic communities broadly. In 2017, the same year she published *Babyn Yar*, she published a collection, *Hematomagavafa: zhyvi peretrovennia* (Hematomagavafa: living transformations). Unlike the tightly-unified sections in *Babyn Yar*, this book combines poems on broad ranging themes, from religion to poetry, as well as a cycle of "Crimean Letters" (Krymskie Listy). In this cycle, Kiyanovska describes the contemporary frustration and exile of many Tatars following Russia's occupation of Crimean in March of 2014. "Letter, written from Theodosiia" (List, *napysanyi iz Feodosii*) describes the history of conquests of the Crimean town that sits on Tykha Bukhta (Calm Bay) on the Southeast of Crimea.

я тут переважно проїздом коли в Коктебель бо літала над Тихою бухтою і ніколи над невільничим ринком та раптом	I was just passing through on the way to Koktebel because I flew over Tykha Bukhta –Calm Bay and never over the slave market and I suddenly
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<p>подумала а як же Кафа палімпсести анексії це всього лише переписані шкури бидлятокі (Kiyanovska, <i>Hematohavafa</i>, 99)</p>	<p>thought what about Kaffa palimpsests of annexations It's all rewritten on the skins of the poor</p>
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Founded by Greeks in the Sixth Century, the resort city of Theodosia/Kaffa was later colonized by Genoese settlers, becoming a large Christian city that prospered from its slave market within a land ruled by the Golden Horde. Over the last millennium the city has been captured by the Ottomans, the Zaporozhian Cossacks, the Russian empire, and the Nazis. Before the end of World War II, the Soviet Union exiled the large Tatar population from Crimea to Central Asia, on the pretext that Tatars may have collaborated with the Nazis. The Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to the peninsula only in the late Soviet period, in 1989. As Rory Finnin has called Crimea a “land of three alienations:” the Tatars who faced discrimination after returning from exile, the ethnic Ukrainians who now represented the state; and the ethnic Russians who aligned themselves with post-Soviet Moscow. (Kiyanovska, *Hematohavafa*, 99)

In her poems of Crimea, as in her Babyn Yar poems, Kiyanovska uses anagrams to mark historical identification and disidentification. Kiyanovska allows the name Rym (Rome), which is embedded within Krym (Crimea), to recall the embedded nature of Crimea’s cultures, many of them remnants of violent imperial conquests.

<p>Крим як Рим не Третій Рим і не Другий і далеко не перший анаграма не дуже повна бракує повітря бидляткам їхні шкури такі переписані Тиха бухта якщо добре подумати залишилася Тихою всі інші пішли на фронт (Kiyanovska, <i>Hematohavafa</i>, 99)</p>	<p>Crimea is like Rome not the Third Rome and not the Second and not even close to the first an incomplete anagram there's not enough air for the poor their skins rewritten Tykha Bukhta – Calm Bay –, if you think about it, is still Tykha. everyone else left for the front</p>
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The Crimean poor, with their eternally “rewritten skins” [shkury perepysani], are history’s text and its casualty. Restoring a more complete historical narrative is a way of redefining Ukraine’s history, its multiple communities, and its boundaries. This restoration involves mourning the ethnic and religious subcultures that have lost their historical homeland. Towards the end of “A Letter, Written from Theodosia,” the persona describes a capacious mourning, for peoples, as well as for the Black Sea wildlife.

<p>третій рік оплакую Крим слізьми яких не видно назовні сорок мечетей Кафи оплакую грецькі вірменські квартали всіх грузинів болгар сербів румунів всіх дельфінів і риб жертвопринесених коли всі інші пішли на фронт і в підвалини небі (Kiyanovska, <i>Hematohavafa</i>, 99)</p>	<p>three years now I've mourned Crimea with tears invisible to the outside mourned the forty mosques of Kaffa the Greek Armenian quarter all the Georgians Bulgarians Serbs Romanians all the dolphins and fish sacrificed when everyone else left for the front and for the cellars of heaven</p>
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The poor of Crimea, a group that has seen centuries of domination by religious and political regimes, largely overlapped with the Crimean Tatar community. In another poem from this cycle, “A Letter from Dzhankoi,” Kiyanovska makes this explicit:

<p>мені казали колись усі тут були татари і вишні були татари а на вишнях хрущі татари і солов'її (Kiyanovska, <i>Hematohavafa</i>, 99)</p>	<p>they told me once everyone here was a Tatar and the cherries were Tatars and the beetles on the cherries were Tatars and the nightingales</p>
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This poem describes the painful loss of cultural memory that accompanied the loss of land. While this loss is, most overtly, the direct result of Stalin’s deportation of the Tatars in 1944, Kiyanovska’s poem of mourning also acknowledges Ukraine’s failure to adequately support the Crimean Tatar community in the post-Soviet period. As Finnin has noted, in the 1990s Kyiv alternately referred to Crimean Tatars as “the greatest Ukrainians in Crimea” and disenfranchised them politically and culturally. (Finnin, *Blood*, 202)

The cultural and linguistic amputation is mirrored in the sudden geopolitical amputation of the peninsula in 2014. The poem ends with a mournful desire for healing.

<p>якби я могла щось змінити я поклала б Джанкоєві руку на лоб і просила б так мовчки так мовчки як тільки я вмію просила б згадай згадай слова у своїй голові слова вишні і солов'я твоєю рідною мовою (Kiyanovska, <i>Hematohavafa</i>, 100)</p>	<p>if I could change anything I'd put my hand on Dzhankoi's forehead and ask silently as silently as I could I'd ask you to remember remember the words in your head the words for cherry and nightingale in your native language</p>
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How should we understand a Ukrainian poem instructing a Tatar subject to remember words that the poet herself does not know? In her poems of Crimea, Kiyanovska may be aiming to call attention to the disappearance of a history, but in the process she occasionally slips into a naïve glorification of national forms reminiscent of the Soviet nationalities policy. The poetic persona, wishing to silently heal her Tatar interlocutor, or flying above Theodosia en route to Koktebel', cannot truly identify with either Crimea’s present or past suffering. An ethnic Ukrainian living in Lviv, Kiyanovska can no more speak for Crimean Tatars than for the Jews killed at Babyn Yar. And yet her attempt to include diverse groups in a Ukrainian voice is necessary to Ukraine’s twenty-first century reassessment of its national character. This poetics of disidentification can be likened to what Cathy Caruth calls the “language of ashes.” (Caruth, *Literature*, 87) The literary figure of ash, Caruth writes, “refers us to events that may not have a simple referent, but are signs of the unimaginable past or the unimaginable future.” (Caruth, *Literature*, 88) Addressing the unimaginable losses faced by centuries of Crimean communities, Kiyanovska is attempting to describe the broad network that might connect the struggles of Ukraine’s ethnic and religious groups, but she simultaneously exposes her relative privilege as a Ukrainian living in mainland Ukraine: even in the midst of an ongoing war in Ukraine’s East, the poet has not experienced the cultural or geographical loss of her Tatar subjects.

Where does a reader draw the line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation? Iya Kiva, in her review of Kiyanovska’s *Babyn Yar*, suggests that Kiyanovska’s

practice of assigning names to individuals (128 by Kiva’s count) is part of a mourning process. As a surviving Ukrainian, and as a poet, Kiyanovska has taken upon herself the “процедурою впізнання трупа та перепохованням.” [Identification of the corpses and reburial.] (Kiva, “Plach”) Kiyanovska’s translators, Max Rozochinsky and Oksana Maksymchuk, acknowledge that *Babyn Yar* “raises questions about what it means to write witness-like poetry without bearing witness to the historical events the poems are about; about the distinction between giving voice to victims, and speaking *for* them; about cultural appropriation, historical projection, and the right to represent another; about a choice of language; about tone.” (Rozochinsky and Maksymchuk, “The Voices”)

Conclusion

Kiyanovska has said in interviews that *Babyn Yar* began as poems about the war in Donbass. “In July 2016, I started writing poems about Donbass,” Kiyanovska said in a 2020 interview with *Radio Svoboda*.

«Вони всі були про смерть, війну, вбивства, там було кілька віршів, присвячених реальним історіям. Бо з 2014 року їздила кілька разів із харківськими волонтерами на Донбас. [...] Спілкувалася з бійцями, які там по пів року не виходили з окопів. Вони багато розповіли історій. Я написала вірш і запостила, його сприйняли, як про трагедію у Бабиному Яру.»
(Kiyanovska, Tereshchuk)

[They were all about death, war, murder, there were a few poems about real stories. Because since 2014 I have traveled to Donbass several times with Kharkiv volunteers. ...I talked to soldiers who had not come out of the trenches for six months. They told a lot of stories. I wrote a poem and posted it, it was perceived as a tragedy in Babyn Yar.]

Memory is always political. The protracted military struggle on Ukraine’s border with Russia has accompanied an ideological struggle to resist a post-Soviet nationalist narrative in favor of a civic Ukrainian identity. Marianna Kiyanovska, by resisting competitive victimhood in her writing, is threading a needle between the Russian claim that Ukrainians are nationalist, and the actual nationalist tendencies of many Ukrainians. By attempting to embody the pain of others, she is imagining a new form of Ukrainian nationhood, one that is based on inclusiveness.

In certain lines there is a sense that Kiyanovska is talking not only about the past, but about the present, and perhaps even the future.

<p>у києві сталося щось не з жидами а з часом у часі не стало майбутнього в часі доби не стало години на спокій війна і облоги (Kiyanovska, <i>Babyn Yar</i>, 62)</p>	<p>in Kyiv something’s happened not to Jews but to time time’s lost its future tense and its daily schedule there were no set hours for truce and raids</p>
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This passage, written in a voice that could represent anyone living in Kyiv, reveals the importance of *Babyn Yar* to Kiyanovska. To understand the protracted war in twenty-first century Ukraine, beginning with the separatist movement in Donbass, Kiyanovska returns to other wars, claiming them as part of her history. Thus, the reclaiming of a multiethnic narrative

in Ukraine is of vital importance to a contemporary narrative. The Donbass war, and Russia's subsequent large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has made time out of joint.

Kiyanovska has spoken of a category of tragedy in Ukraine, which exceeds others:

Для мене в одному ряду тільки трагедії Голокосту, Голодомору, Волинської трагедії, Чорнобиль. ... Але найстрашніше в цих ситуаціях не те, що люди там гинуть, а те, що, коли йдеться про такі смерті, про смерті жертв, ці люди позбавлені гідності смерті. (Kiyanovska, NaKipelo)

[For me, only the tragedies of the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Volyn tragedy, Chernobyl are in the same category. ... But the worst thing in these situations is not that people died there, but that when it comes to such deaths, the deaths of victims, these people are deprived of the dignity of death.]

Rather than allowing the current war to supplant the earlier traumas of the Holodomor and Babyn Yar, poets have turned to historical struggles for a sense of national continuity, in the process bringing the experiences of Ukraine's multiple communities closer.

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