



# Khlebosolny/Bread and Salt:

## A time-travelling journey to Eastern Europe (and back)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** In this article, I describe a journey my sister Rebecca and I made in 2012 to Eastern Europe, part diasporic return/roots journey and part artistic residency, during which we developed artworks in the form of ritual, performative practices with bread and salt. Our diasporic Jewish family had little knowledge of their place of origin, a village in Lithuania. The artworks that we made on the trip explore connections between bread, salt and memory, through the haptic qualities of touch and taste. Documenting these artworks and re-enacting family photographs calls into question the veracity of “roots” and the role of memory in the present. Through reflecting on our journey and art practices, I ask how individual subjectivities are identified and how dialogue between self and other is revealed and concealed, where those others may be in the past, and have left little trace in the present. I also ask how pasts and presents are negotiated in the making and unmaking of subjectivities, and how these contested relationships between past and present may be traced, acknowledged and surfaced. And I connect our personal history with wider heritages, ones that are currently contested and politically charged. We used bread and salt in a threshold ritual, *Khlebosolny* (2012) in which the materiality of bread and salt became tools to fill absences, and to embody different kinds of meaning. Through ephemeral memorials using salt, we left residual traces in particular places. The work we made in Vilnius and the Lithuanian villages is remembrance as an act made present, and I suggested that this ongoing process of mediation in the present can be seen as attaching specific meaning to memory by enacting it. Therefore, a choice is continually being made about how this memory and heritage is reproduced, in the present day.

**Keywords** family history, memory, postmemory, migration, diaspora, roots journey, contested heritage, ritual, performance art, photography, indexical, salt, bread

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on chapter 2 of my thesis '*Détour and Retour: Practices and poetics of salt as narratives of relation and re-generation in Brixton*', submitted in April 2018.



## Introduction

My great-grandparents, Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe and Russia, left their homes in the late 1800s and early 1900s, never returned, and through a series of migrations ended up in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> From discussions with my family, I understood that, through stages of assimilation, aspects of our connection to our past had become less visible. While personal records of family history were kept, religious and cultural practices were not. And languages and voices had been lost too: no one spoke Yiddish or Russian anymore, although my father knew a few words in Hebrew. The fate of distant family members who had not left Eastern Europe was not something with which our immediate family seemed to feel a direct connection. I felt that there had been a deliberate attempt in our family to leave aspects of Jewish culture behind, and that they preferred the comfort of assimilation. That they escaped the fate of those who stayed behind was not something openly spoken about.

In this article, I describe a journey my sister Rebecca and I made in 2012 to Eastern Europe, part diasporic return/roots journey and part artistic residency, as part of which we developed artworks in the form of ritual, performative practices with salt; through these practices, I ask

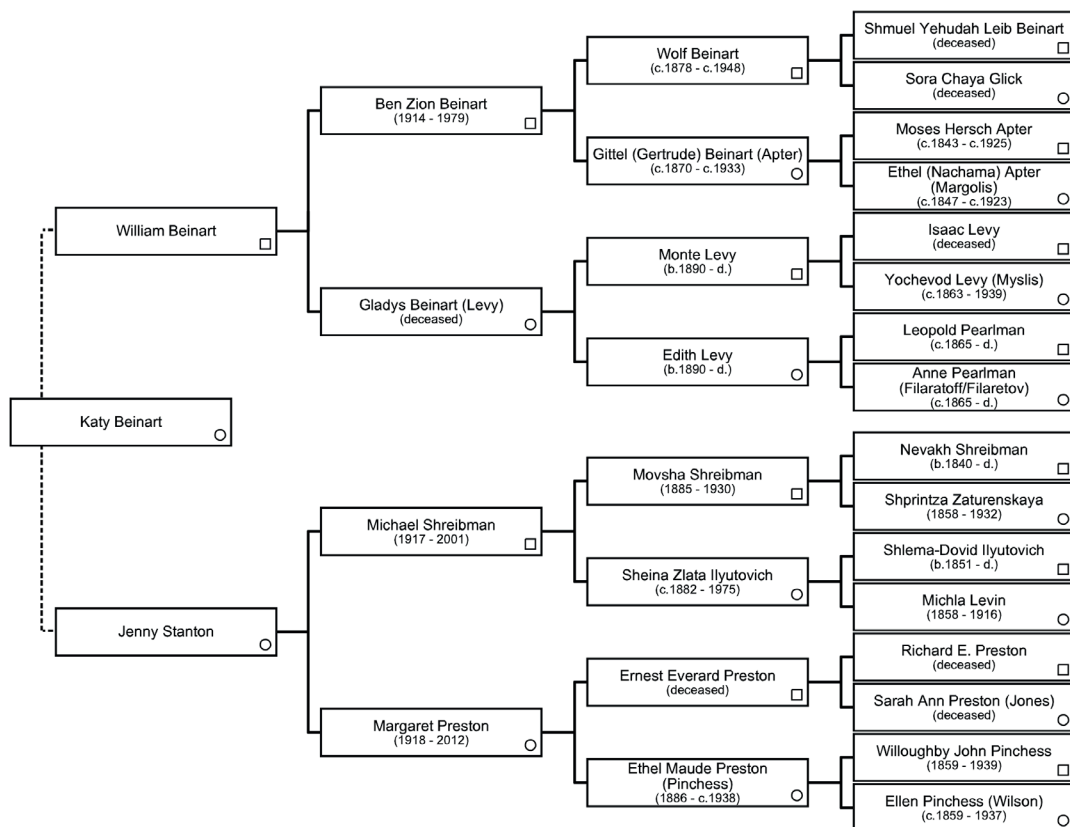


Figure 1: Family tree. Source: author.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to my father's side of the family here, and have written elsewhere about my mother's side of the family, one side of whom were Jewish migrants from what is now Belarus and the other from the English midlands.

how individual subjectivities are identified and how dialogue between self and other is revealed and concealed, where those others may be in the past. I also ask how pasts and presents are negotiated in the making and unmaking of subjectivities, and how these contested relationships between past and present may be traced, acknowledged and surfaced.



We knew that Woolf Beinart, our great-grandfather on our grandfather Ben's side, had grown up in or near to a small town in north-eastern Lithuania called Rokiskis, and that further back some family had lived in the capital Vilnius. We also knew that Anne, our great-great-grandmother on our grandmother Gladys's side, was born in St Petersburg in 1865. She had travelled with her father Nicolas Filaratoff from St Petersburg to Hamburg around 1873 and the family then settled in Hull ten years later. Anne married Leopold Pearlman in Hull and our great-grandmother, Edith Pearlman, was born in Hull in 1891. Leopold, Anne and Edith emigrated to South Africa in the early 1900s, as did Woolf.

Edith and her daughter Gladys (my father's mother) had kept quite good records of the family's period in, and later connection with, Hull. But little survived from the period before. We had a few pieces of evidence: studio photographs of Anne in Hamburg, family reminiscences, and a war medal from Russia (figure 2). In summer 2012, Rebecca and I travelled to Lithuania and St Petersburg to do further research into our family history, and make artwork together, as a mobile, unstructured residency. We hoped that this journey might enable us to fill some of the gaps and absences in our family's story.



Figure 2: Potrait and medal of Anne. Source: author.



In a conversation between Eva Hoffman, Sadiya Hartmann and Daniel Mendelsohn, all of whom have taken roots journeys, Hoffman said:

“I do think there is a need to sort of locate, locate something, locate the past which you have known about, but which you don’t know. I’m actually thinking about Freud’s formulation of melancholia, a sort of depressive melancholia. He says that mourning in which you know the object of your mourning can come to an end, but mourning in which you don’t know the object you have lost cannot come to an end. And in that sense, the second generation was placed in a melancholic position, a kind of placelessness, a kind of nameless, placeless loss. So you know, I think that locating something does matter a lot.”<sup>3</sup>

In locating the past, emotions are often brought forth. Hartmann describes how her act of journeying along the slave route required her “to be the receptacle for foreclosed and prohibited emotions – rage and grief and disappointment”.<sup>4</sup> Disappointment echoed with us too, as we struggled to find a concrete link to our family’s past. We had also met with disappointment in the process of undertaking this journey, as our original plans had to be reshaped. Discomfort was another emotion that emerged on the trip, both in the physical sense of ongoing travelling, and in the awkwardness of not knowing languages or the right words to try to explain what we wanted to find out.

We had first proposed this trip in 2008, before our South Africa journey and residency, but we ran up against discouragement: “as you may imagine the emigration is a very over-used and active topic in Lithuania”.<sup>5</sup> It is old news, travelling back to find one’s Jewish roots in Eastern Europe. We were just two more pilgrims on a well-worn trail.<sup>6</sup> In the context of others travelling on roots journeys, here I will specifically refer to the work of the South Africa-born writer Dan Jacobson, whose book *Heshel’s Kingdom* is about a journey he undertook in search of his grandfather Heshel Melamed, similar to our journey to Lithuania.<sup>7</sup> In this article, I also draw on texts which hold memories of the life of the Jewish communities prior to World War Two and are known as *Yizkor* books, which, according to the JewishGen website:

“were written after the Holocaust as memorials to Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust. They were usually put together by survivors from those communities and contain descriptions and histories of the community, biographies of prominent people, lists of people who perished, etc.”<sup>8</sup>

This search for roots felt more obscure and unknown than a previous trip to South Africa we had made in 2010.<sup>9</sup> Our connection to Eastern Europe was tenuous, based only on the handed-down fragments of family stories. But it also felt necessary and obsessive, a calling we

3 Sadiya Hartman, Eva Hoffman and Daniel Mendelsohn, ‘Memoirs of return’, in *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), edited by Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, pp. 107-23, at pp. 116-17.

4 Hartman, Hoffman and Mendelsohn, ‘Memoirs of return’, p. 115.

5 Email correspondence between author and curator, September 17, 2009

6 I write more extensively on the literature of roots journeys in Chapter 1 of the thesis.

7 Dan Jacobson, *Heshel’s Kingdom* (London: Penguin, 1998).

8 ‘Yizkor Book Project: Frequently Asked Questions’, JewishGen website: <<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/>> [accessed 10 August 2017].

9 See: Katy Beinart, ‘Origination: Journeying In The Footsteps Of Our Ancestors’, in *Sacred Mobilities: Journeys of Belief and Belonging* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), edited by Avril Maddrell, Alan Terry and Tim Gale, pp. 165-180.



were drawn to carry out. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller write of the “seduction of the quest for a direct link to deep roots and family bloodlines”, and they ask “how in particular does a feminist subject negotiate the intensities and contradictory impulses of diasporic return?”<sup>10</sup> Inherent within this impulse to journey back to places of origin is, Hirsch and Miller argue, a contradiction, which they present as, on the one hand, a performative cultural self-construction that would seem to allow for the self-construction of a roots story, and, on the other hand, “the elaboration of new identities secured by the evidence of science and genetics” that would seem to suggest a roots journey as directed by orthodoxies of race and specific locations of origin.<sup>11</sup>

Departing on this trip, I was aware of certain contradictions between my present situation and those of my ancestors in the past, between our (my own and my sister’s) known identities, and the uncertain identities we hoped to connect with. In the context of this journey, Rebecca and I were travelling as independent, unmarried, working artists and academics. Although ostensibly a roots journey, the implicit difference was our interest in uncertainty and in the contradiction described above between genetic roots and self-constructed roots. We both felt that finding out where we came from would not necessarily give us answers to our current identities, and that the present state of the places we were travelling to may hold little connection to their pasts.

On my father’s side, our family story had dual origins. On Woolf’s side, the family’s origins were in Eastern European Jewish shtetl life, a life unknown to me; for example, I knew little about how a woman of my age would have lived and the roles and identities which she would have assumed. That shtetl life was long gone, and the Jewish community had been devastated by the Holocaust in the 1940s, so that the reality of these places held an uncertain image for us. On Edith’s side was a relatively successful St Petersburg-based Jewish business family, which later managed to sustain a middle-class lifestyle, first in Hull, England, and then in Pretoria, South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

Hirsch and Miller use two key terms to develop a critical dialogue within these contradictions between a cultural self-construction and a genetically evidenced, historically based identity. Hirsch’s idea of ‘postmemory’ understands the legacies of the past as “always already inflected by broader public and generational stories, images, artefacts, and understandings that together shape identity and identification”, while Miller discusses how the ‘transpersonal’ recognizes that the personal is necessarily political, and emphasizes links that go not just backwards but also sideways in the present, as ‘a zone of relation that is social, affective, material, and inevitably public’.<sup>13</sup>

Hirsch and Miller also refer to the poet Adrienne Rich, who wrote in the mid-1980s: “I’ve been thinking a lot about the obsession with origins, it seems a way of stopping time in its tracks. Don’t we have to start here, where we are?”<sup>14</sup> Rich’s comment suggests that, in thinking about journeys of return, we need to start from where we are and understand how our own identities and social relations in the present relate to, and shape, our ideas of origin.

Subsequently, I want to ask: how do our auto-ethnographic explorations into familial, pri-

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10 Hirsch and Miller (note 3), *Rites of Return*, pp. 2-3.

11 Hirsch and Miller, *Rites of Return*, p. 2.

12 See figure 1: Family tree.

13 Hirsch and Miller, *Rites of Return*, pp. 4-5.

14 Adrienne Rich, ‘Notes towards a politics of location’, in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 210-32.



vate realms relate back to the wider society and culture we exist in?

Therefore, an important aspect for Rebecca's and my journey was to develop our work with visibility and to make specific acts or rituals that would allow us to mark the past while acknowledging the choices of our family to leave that past behind. The difficult relationship that can exist between past and present when certain aspects of the past do not want to be acknowledged is something I seek to explore in this article. In order to reflect on this further, I include short texts written at the time of making the artworks (which we wrote as part of an online blog<sup>15</sup>) alongside later reflective writing that brings in relevant theory to understand the meaning of the artworks, so that within the text there is a layering of voices from different moments in time.

Performing rituals in sites of our family history gives voice to the past in the present, allowing what Karen Till has termed 'spectral traces'<sup>16</sup> to resurface, and past generations to be heard in the here and now. This article describes our trip in search of the personal absences within our family story. On the trip, rituals and practices are developed which become a means to remember, and to embody absence; the materials of bread and salt become a means to fill absences, and to embody different kinds of meaning. Our bodies become a means to establish a link to the past, making forms of memorialisation which are ephemeral and transient.

### The journey to Eastern Europe

In order to trail our family's migrations, we planned to travel as much as possible over land and by sea, but not to stick exactly to our family's routes. This was for several reasons: we did not know their exact routes; we were re-enacting multiple journeys by family members; and it was not always possible to access the same routes they had taken (for example, sea travel from Hamburg to Hull no longer operated). We therefore planned to travel overland to Hamburg (where the studio photographs of our great-great-grandmother Anne were taken), before taking a ferry from nearby Kiel to Klaipeda in Lithuania. We would

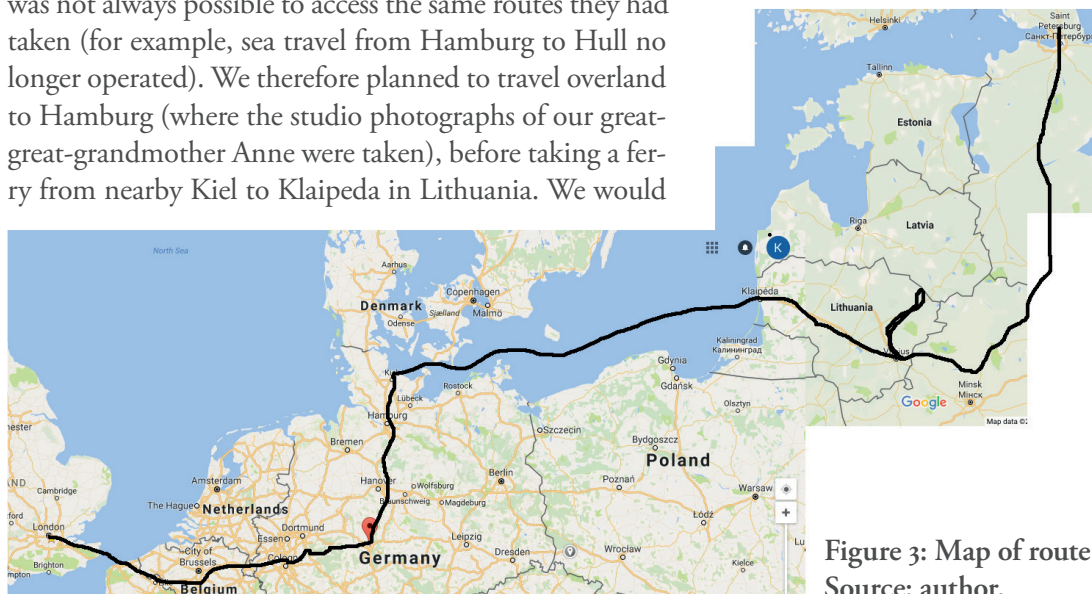


Figure 3: Map of route.  
Source: author.

15 Beinart, Katy and Rebecca, *Origination* (blog), (2008-12). Project Blog at AN Artists Talking, <<https://www.a-n.co.uk/blogs/origination/>>

16 Karen Till and Julian Jonker, 'Mapping and excavating spectral traces in post-apartheid Cape Town', *Memory Studies* September 2009 vol. 2 no. 3, pp. 303-335.



then travel over land by bus to the capital Vilnius where we would meet our father William, who would be accompanying us by car to Rokiskis. Finally, we would catch a sleeper train from Vilnius to St Petersburg, returning to the UK by air (see map, figure 3). In our luggage, we took our starter culture mix for bread-making, and the salt we had collected in the salt pans in South Africa, with plans to re-enact our *khlebosolny* threshold ritual of sharing bread and salt at points on our journey.<sup>17</sup>

### Hamburg: *Finding Anne* (2012-17)

*“We spent Saturday roaming the streets of Hamburg, following the very faint trail of our great-great-grandmother Anne Filaratoff, and her father Nicholas. We believe they came to Hamburg from St Petersburg in the 1870s and stayed for up to a decade before leaving for Hull (and Anne eventually for South Africa). Katy had scanned two portrait photographs of Anne, with the address of 19th-century photography studios on the back. So we began our day searching for these addresses, negotiating a large triathlon that blocked many of the city centre streets. Opposite the Rathaus, we found the first address, which had a serendipitous advert for a photo service in the window. The second address was now a shiny clothes shop, and we took photographs at each location posed as Anne had, 120 years ago.”<sup>18</sup>*

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17 Beinart, ‘Origination: Journeying In The Footsteps Of Our Ancestors’, p. 167, 170.

18 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, ‘Hamburg-Veddel’, *Origination* (blog), 26 July 2012. Project Blog at AN Artists Talking, <<https://www.a-n.co.uk/blogs/origination/>>

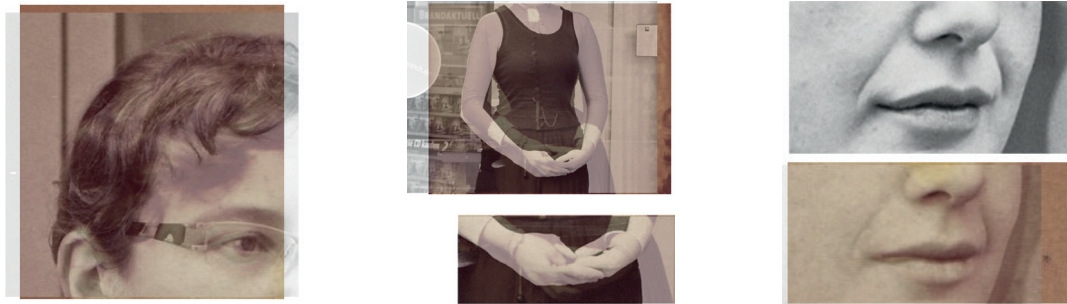


Figure 4-6: Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Finding Anne*, 2012-2017. Source: author.

Later, looking at these photographs alongside the originals, there seemed so many incongruities: the informality of the clothes we were wearing compared to Anne's formality, the differences between her tightly held-in waist, hourglass-shaped body, and our unbound bodies, the formality of the studio compared to the shiny shop window full of advertisements for photographic services where we photographed ourselves (figure 4). And yet I could see traces of gestures, in the shape of the lips, the eyes, a disobedient fringe (figure 5). In one photograph, Rebecca wears a photograph of Edith, Anne's daughter, around her neck in a direct echo of Anne's necklace. In gazing off somewhere else, my expression is not unlike Anne's, and my folded hands and arms are positioned exactly as hers were, leaning casually on an ornate stand (figure 6). The elaborately detailed architectural elements of the studio lend gravitas to Anne's pose, even though she is very young in the photographs, while next to me the rucksacks and the woman smiling with a card suggest a more slapdash, less serious self-presentation.

In our guise as tourists, recreating a family photograph from another time, the intentional act of reconstruction highlights the mixture of excitement and disappointment at finding the location one has been searching for, but where nothing actually remains of what one had been looking for. We could not find any remnants of the studios Anne had had her picture taken in, but the act of taking the photographs made us look more closely at the original photographs and begin to imagine the intentions behind them. The photographs probably date from the late 1870s or early 1880s. Anne looks about 17 or 18 years old, which would make the date 1883, when she departed for England. We know she was staying there with her father, and he may have taken her to have the photographs done for an occasion. Perhaps they marked her arrival into womanhood?

In his account of a journey to Lithuania in search of his grandfather Heshel Melamed, whom he never met, Dan Jacobson carries a studio photo of Heshel taken just before he was due to depart for America:

"There is just one photograph of Heshel Melamed in my possession. It is in front of me now. It is not large – about six inches by four inches – and is printed in the sepia tints of the time ... Looking at them [his eyes] I can still see today, reflected in his eyes, the light that once shone in some photographic studio in Kaunas (Kovno to him) or Siauliai (Shavel to him). The reflections bear indisputable witness to the consciousness that was then his. Obedient to the photographer's command, he had self-consciously stiffened his gaze and directed it into the back lens of the camera."<sup>19</sup>

19 Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*, pp. 9-10.





Jacobson is aware that the photograph refers to a precise moment in time, a moment that Heshel Melamed had recorded as a marker of a change in his life, a record of departure.

Roland Barthes writes of the photograph as a ‘certificate of presence’.<sup>20</sup> Although he strains at first to ‘find’ his mother in the collection of photographs he has of her after her death, Barthes finally discovers her presence in one particular photograph, of her as a little girl aged five in the ‘Winter Garden’ of the house in which she was born:

“These same photographs, which phenomenology would call ‘ordinary’ objects, were merely analogical, provoking only her identity, not her truth; but the Winter Garden Photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, the impossible science of the unique being.”<sup>21</sup>

Barthes terms this photograph a *punctum*, or a wounding.<sup>22</sup> He felt that this wounding hit him directly with his mother’s presence as he gazed at this particular photograph.

Barthes discusses how photographs are direct referents to the real, unlike other systems of representation.<sup>23</sup> This is made certain in part through the pose (the photograph as evidence of a moment when the pose took place, ‘something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever’<sup>24</sup>) but in larger part through the recording of light and the chemistry of the photograph:

“The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here, the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.”<sup>25</sup>

Hirsch, writing about Barthes in the context of family photography, argues that he “intensifies the indexical relationship when he speaks of the photograph as a physical, material emanation of a past reality; its speech act is constative: it authenticates the reality of the past and provides a material connection to it”.<sup>26</sup> If, as she says, reference for Barthes is not content but presence, what is indexed through the photograph is the presence of a moment in time.

The photo Rebecca and I have of Anne contains a recording of light at a precise moment in time: the light in a studio in Hamburg, at a moment in her life on the cusp of adulthood, emigration and change. The image of Anne acts as a referent not just to her own departure for a new life, for it also holds within it a point in our family story, a decision to leave for England (we don’t know why), which becomes crucial to her identity and much later to our own. We also do not know who the photographs were taken *for*.

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20 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 87.

21 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 71.

22 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 27.

23 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 76.

24 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 78.

25 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 80-81.

26 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 6.



Figure 7: Photograph of Nicholas Filaratoff. Source: Bryan Levy.



Figure 8-9: Photograph of Anne as a girl; reverse of Photograph. Source: Bryan Levy.

At the time we made this trip, we had no photographic image of her father, Nicholas, but had heard that an image of him in furs, probably taken in Russia, existed (see figure 7). Several years after our trip, Brian, a cousin of my father and the eldest son of Edith's son Magnus, sent me a digital image of this photograph which he had in his house in Sydney, Australia. Brian was planning his own trip to St Petersburg on the family history trail and had found a few photographs that he received from his father. He also sent us a picture of a young girl, taken in a studio in St Petersburg (figures 8 and 9). I could see the resemblance to the photographs of Anne and deduced that it was likely to be her as a young girl. But in all these pictures, there is the absence of a mother – Anne's mother. This is an incomplete family unit in an incomplete family tree.

In *Finding Anne*, Rebecca's and my re-enactment of Anne's photographs in Hamburg, and my layering of these images, the question of the referent is complicated.

Looking at our images, there is the referent of ourselves in the moment of taking our photograph, but there is also the referent of Anne's image in the past. An image that, to me, is consciously unauthentic – a deliberate recreation that is impossible to make accurate or authentic – becomes a new moment and a new relationship between viewer and referent, so that in a sense we are making memories for the future. We can tell stories and put on record our search for a place in which Anne was only fleetingly present, and on which multiple memories and identities have since been layered.

### Jatkowa Street, Vilnius, Lithuania: *Ar pamenate i Meisels?* (2012)<sup>27</sup>

Arriving in Vilnius, where we were staying with an artist friend, we explored the old city, which was also the location of the former Jewish Ghetto. A memorial plaque showed the location of the ‘small’ and ‘big’ ghettos (figure 10), but few other physical remnants of the heritage of the Jewish community remained in these sites. Historically, Vilnius had been the centre of a large Jewish community and a focus of Judaic religious culture in Europe; it was known as “the Jerusalem of the north”.<sup>28</sup> According to the 1897 census, Jews constituted 38.8 per cent of the city’s population, amounting to



Figure 10: Ghetto map, Vilnius.

Photograph: Katy Beinart. Source: author.

64,000 individuals.<sup>29</sup> By the early twentieth century, half of the city’s population of 120,000 were Jews, most of whom spoke Yiddish. The city was also a focus for the Yiddish language, and it was home to the famed Yiddish Institute of Higher Learning (YIVO), which was relocated to New York in 1940,<sup>30</sup> as well as the Strashum Library, which housed the world’s largest collection of Yiddish language books.<sup>31</sup> Under the Nazis, Jews were corralled first into the ‘small’ ghetto and later into the ‘big’ ghetto, from where they were subsequently taken to be liquidated.<sup>32</sup>

We had been in touch with a distant relative on a family tree website who had told us that we had ancestors, the Meisels, who had lived in the old city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rabbi Moishe Meisels, Rebecca’s and my fifth great-grandfather, was born in the city in 1759 and was a renowned rabbi, leading the Chassidic community in Vilnius until 1816 when he emigrated to what was then Palestine.<sup>33</sup> According to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, Meisels also acted as a spy for the Russian army during the Napoleonic wars, and was fluent in German, Russian, Polish and French.<sup>34</sup> In the local archives we found records

27 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Ar pamenate i Meisels?*, performance, photographic documentation, 27 July 2012.

28 Carmelo Lisciotto, ‘The Vilnius ghetto: Jewish life in Vilnius/Vilna’ (Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team, 2007), Holocaust Research Project website: <<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/vilnius.html>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

29 Lisciotto, ‘The Vilnius Ghetto’.

30 YIVO website: <<https://www.yivo.org/History-of-YIVO>> [accessed 10 July 2017].

31 Lisciotto, ‘The Vilnius Ghetto’.

32 Lisciotto, ‘The Vilnius Ghetto’.

33 See ‘Bonaparte-and-the-Chassid’, Chabad website: <[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1155/jewish/Bonaparte-and-the-Chassid.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1155/jewish/Bonaparte-and-the-Chassid.htm)> [accessed 10 July 2017]; originally published in Yanki Tauber, *Once Upon a Chassid: The Wisdom and the Whimsy, the Fire and the Joy: Stories, Anecdotes and Sayings* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1994).

34 ‘Bonaparte-and-the-Chassid’.



of the Meisels's addresses in Vilnius, on Jatkowa Street in the 'small' ghetto area. For the first time in our journey, a site of our family story intersected with a site of the Holocaust. The first attempt to locate their home on the street drew a blank – one side of the street was no longer there. Many buildings had changed. The Jewish quarter then was not the Jewish quarter now.

Our experience of locating our ancestors was frustrating and disappointing. The archive records were often held only in Russian, a text we could not read.

*“As we attempt to locate and decipher traces of our ancestors, we hit many problems. We have to negotiate multiple languages and translations, from Lithuanian to Russian to Yiddish to Hebrew, moving round and around in a never-ending circle of confusion. Names have been recorded in one language, translated to another, then another, through several scripts. We hit on using Google translate in a playful advertising campaign around Vilnius old town, pretty sure that the mistranslations offered by a cybernetic interpreter reflect the truth of our search.”<sup>35</sup>*

We decided to make a performative and intuitive response to Jatkowa Street, in a two-part artwork we titled *Ar pamenate į Meisels?*<sup>36</sup> ('Do you remember the Meisels?' in Lithuanian). For the first part, I dowsed with a crystal I had brought with me on the journey, stopping at each doorway on Jatkowa Street, asking it to indicate the threshold of our ancestors' home (figure 11). When we had found what we thought was their doorway, I sprinkled salt we had carried with us from South Africa onto the grass (figure 12). This salting of the earth was both a ritual act and a form of memorial. It was the first act of marking the absences, which became increasingly familiar on our journey.

At the thresholds along Jatkowa Street, archways lead off to courtyards. Under the arches, we had seen noticeboards layered with advertisements, which we couldn't read. For the second part of the artwork, we created an advertisement asking:

*Do you remember the Meisels?  
If you have any information you can share with us, please contact us at:  
Beinart\_beinart@hotmail.com*

35 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, 'De-Ciphering', *Origination* (blog), 3 August 2012.

36 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Ar pamenate į Meisels?*, performance, photographic documentation, 27 July 2012.



Figure 11-12: Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Ar pamenate i meisels?*, 2012: Dowsing in Jatowska street, sprinkling salt on threshold. Photograph: Rebecca Beinart. Source: author.

Figure 13: Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Ar pamenate i meisels?* advert, 2012. Photograph: Katy Beinart. Source: author.

The text of the advertisement was translated into Lithuanian, Russian and Hebrew, and it featured an email account we had set up temporarily (figure 13). We pinned the advertisement to the board, not with any real hope that we would get a response, but rather as a temporary memorial and marker of our ancestors' former home. The inevitability that the salt would absorb into the grass and that the advertisements would get overlaid by other advertisements was an intentional part of the artwork and action.

Anke Bangma has written about remembering as 'an act in the present' that does not just 'reflect past reality "as it was" but acts upon reality by organizing it and attaching specific meaning to it.'<sup>37</sup> This ongoing process of mediation in the present attaches specific meaning to memory through enacting it. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests an understanding of heritage as something produced in the present but with recourse to the past. In her writings on the cultural production of heritage, she looks at heritage as something that is not "lost or found,

37 Anke Bangma and Steve Ruston (eds), *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment* (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute; Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2005), p. 14.



stolen or reclaimed” but that is rather “a mode of cultural production in the present”, producing something new, at the same time as offering a ‘second life’ to an existing place or object.<sup>38</sup> James Clifford comments that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s concept of the second life of heritage “allows us to focus on the specific processes of transformation: how elements from the past are being made and re-made in specific relational contexts”.<sup>39</sup> So, as cities, streets and buildings are regenerated, either in a deliberate process of renewal or through gradual change over time as new owners take possession, heritage and memory must be reproduced in order to continue to be made present.

In the act of salting the earth at the place we think may be the threshold of the Meisels’ home, the salt is a marker for an absence: it temporarily demarcates a space, rapidly vanishes, but subtly affects the ground into which it mixes. Leaving our adverts on the noticeboards, we returned later that week to find they had already been covered over by other notices. But were we remaking memory, performing heritage, or doing something slightly different when we performed these ritual actions in Jatkowa Street? There was no direct link between our actions in Jatkowa Street and those of our ancestors, as we did not know what kind of actions they had performed. Our artwork could be seen as a form of re-making, rather than a direct re-enactment of a known heritage. These actions resurface of the spectral traces of our ancestors as a kind of return of the repressed, and try to think through the past and its relation to the present. And our actions could be seen as seeking to establish a direct connection to the past through the body, a sort of presencing of the past in a similar sense to the way Steve Pile has written about the body in cities engaging ghost-like presences or phantasmagoria.<sup>40</sup>

Having made a personal connection to a place that had since become a public site of Holocaust memory in Vilnius, we then found more specific details of the Holocaust in Rokiskis, a town in north-eastern Lithuania that was our destination in search of our family. Our father William had just arrived in Vilnius. We decided to visit the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and its adjunct display on the Holocaust in a separate building, housed in an old green house on Pamėnkalnio Street. These museums had been set up in the 1990s, reinstating a post-war Jewish Museum as well as pre-World War Two Jewish museums and cultural collections which had previously been plundered and destroyed.<sup>41</sup> Visiting the green house, the home of the Holocaust museum, we were following in the footsteps of Dan Jacobson in *Heshel’s Kingdom*, who wrote of visiting this museum and becoming suddenly aware that ‘the worst of the pictures had been taken by the killers themselves. Or if not by the men who were actually firing the rifles and machine guns at any one moment, then certainly by their companions and accomplices.’<sup>42</sup>

In the first room of the museum, Jacobson describes “an enlarged photocopy of an official summary by Karl Jaeger (the SS Standardfuhrer, and head of Einsatzkommando 3) of his activities in Lithuania over one particular period”.<sup>43</sup>

38 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Theorizing heritage’, *Ethnomusicology*, 39 (1995), pp. 367-80, at p. 370.

39 James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 277.

40 Steve Pile, *Real Cities: Modernity, Space and the Phantasmagorias of City Life* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 165.

41 For further details of the history of the Jewish Museums in Vilnius, see <<http://www.jmuseum.lt/en/about-the-museum/>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

42 Jacobson, *Heshel’s Kingdom*, p. 129.

43 Jacobson, *Heshel’s Kingdom*, p. 126.

Blatt 2.		
	-übertrag:	3 834
29.7.41 Kaseiniai	254 Juden, 3 lit. Kommunisten	277
30.7.41 Agriogala	27 " , 11 " "	38
31.7.41 Utens	235 " , 16 Jüdinnen, 4 lit. Komm. 1 zweifacher Raubmörder	256
11/31.7.41 Wendziogala	13 Juden, 2 Mörder	15
<u>Monat August:</u>		
1.8.41 Ukmerge	254 Juden, 42 Jüdinnen, 1 pol. Komm. 2 lit. NKWD-Agenten, 1 Bürgermeister von Jonava, der den Befehl zum An- sünden der Stadt Jonava gab	300
2.8.41 Kauon-Port IV	170 Juden, 1 USA-Jude, 1 USA-Jüdin, 33 Jüdinnen, 4 lit. Kommunisten	209
4.8.41 Panevezys	362 Juden, 41 Jüdinnen, 5 russ. Komm. 14 lit. Kommunisten	422
5.8.41 Kaseiniai	213 Juden, 66 Jüdinnen	279
7.8.41 Uteha	485 " , 87 " , 1 Litauer, war Leichenfledderer an deutschen Soldaten	571
8.8.41 Ukmerge	620 Juden, 82 Jüdinnen	702
9.8.41 Kauon-Port IV	484 " , 50 "	534
11.8.41 Panevezys	450 " , 48 " , 1 lit. 1 russ. E.	500
13.8.41 Alytus	617 " , 100 " , 1 Verbrecher	719
14.8.41 Jonava	497 " , 55 "	552
15. und 16.8.41 Rokiskis	3200 Juden, Jüdinnen und J-Kinder, 5 lit. Komm., 1 Pole, 1 Partisane	3 207
9. bis 16.8.41 Kaseiniai	294 Jüdinnen, 4 Judenkinder	298
27.6. bis 14.8.41 Rokiskis	493 Juden, 432 Russen, 56 Litauer (alles aktive Kommunisten)	981
18.8.41 Kauon-Port IV	698 Juden, 402 Jüdinnen, 1 Polin, 711 Intell.-Juden aus dem Ghetto als Repressalie für eine Sabotage- Handlung	1 812
19.8.41 Ukmerge	298 Juden, 255 Jüdinnen, 1 Politr. 88 Judenkinder, 1 russ. Kommunist	645
22.8.41 Dünaburg	3 russ. Komm., 5 Letten, dabei war 1 Mörder, 1 russ. Cardist, 3 Polen, 3 Zigeuner, 1 Zigeunerin, 1 Zigeu- nerkind, 1 Jude, 1 Jüdin, 1 Arme- nier, 2 Politrucks (Gefängnis-über- prüfung in Dünaburg)	21
	-übertrag:	16 152

Figure 14: Jaeger Report, excerpt. Source: The Holocaust History Project: 1-9. The document is available at: <<http://phdn.org/archives/holocaust-history.org/works/jaeger-report/hm/img002.htm.en.html>> (13th July 2017).



The document, known as the Jaeger Report, has the official title *Complete tabulation of executions carried out in the Einsatzkommando 3 zone up to December 1, 1941* (figure 14).<sup>44</sup> The document lists towns in Lithuania in one column, followed by dates in a second, number of Jews in a third and numbers of women, children and others in a fourth. The horror of reading this ordered, comprehensive list of murders carried out over a short period of time in 1941 was overwhelming. Without wanting or intending to, we found out while reading the list that Rokiskis featured as one of the sites. Over the course of two days, 15–16 August 1941, ‘3,200 Jews, Jewesses, and Jewish Children’ were murdered (in addition to more than 1,000 who had been killed in the preceding two months).<sup>45</sup> And in other sources we found out that over 1,000 Jewish people were also killed at nearby Obeliai, where Beinarts also lived.

The actual sites of the murders were woods outside the town, and later I was able to find on a website called the ‘Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania’ the precise sites where the murders took place. The report in the museum notes that the victims “were taken 4.5 km from the town to woods outside the village of Bajorai”.<sup>46</sup> There is a short comment in Jaeger’s notes on how difficult it had been to locate the precise site of the murders and that it was only possible with the assistance of local Lithuanians. The note also highlighted the complicity of Lithuanians in the killings.

In the next room, I saw a photograph of one of these shootings, an image similar to the one described by Jacobson. A row of naked women carrying their babies, also naked, are lined up in a wood. The women are holding the babies in a protective way, as if trying to shield them from what is about to happen. They are about to be shot. Their nakedness makes them extremely vulnerable, and the onlooker must have been aware of the terrible truth of this when taking the photograph, as the women would have been facing a line of men with guns. Jacobson discusses how the photographs could not have been taken in an officially sanctioned way by any correspondent, neutral or otherwise: the German authorities wanted to keep these *Einsatz* actions secret, since they were afraid of the reactions from abroad, the possibility of Jews being forewarned, and the need to preserve the “decency and discipline” of their troops.<sup>47</sup> Jacobson posits that it was ‘sadistic prurience’ that animated the photographer – the photograph was a trophy for future examination.<sup>48</sup>

That the light from the bodies of the women and their babies in that moment was made permanent in the photographic image, which then acts as a referent to the event, seems an act of scarring. It is a trace that wounds and that retains its power to hurt. In wounding in this manner, this photograph is one of Barthes’s *punctums*. Barthes maintained that the *punctum* has an often-metonymic power of expansion. He describes how, on seeing a photograph by Andre

44 Karl Jäger, Commander of the Security Police and the SD, Einsatzkommando 3, *Complete tabulation of executions carried out in the Einsatzkommando 3 zone up to December 1, 1941* (1 December 1941); ‘The Jaeger Report: A chronicle of Nazi mass murder’ (English translation of the report along with scanned images of the original), *Kauen: The Holocaust History Project*, 1–9. The document is available at: <<http://phdn.org/archives/holocaust-history.org/works/jaeger-report/htm/img002.htm.en.html>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

45 ‘Documentation of the Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jewry by the SS Einsatzgruppen (Action Groups)’, from a Secret Reich Letter dated 1 December 1941, from the Remember website, <<http://remember.org/doccs.html>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

46 Ibid.

47 Jacobson, *Heshel’s Kingdom*, p. 129.

48 Jacobson, *Heshel’s Kingdom*, p. 130.





Kerterz (1921) of a blind gypsy violinist being led by a boy along a dirt road, he recognized “the straggling villages I passed through on my long ago travels in Hungary and Rumania”.<sup>49</sup>

The photograph of the women and their babies in the museum seemed in a horrible way to connect to the family photographs in my archive. In a family archive, a scene of a woman holding a baby might be a photograph that marks a happy point in their lives and the start of a new generation; but instead this photograph is a point of final departure, from which there is no return. More than the list, or the places I have visited on the trip, this image stays with me as knowledge of what our family avoided by leaving.

Later, I found a reference in ‘Out of the Depths’,<sup>50</sup> a document that lists members of the Lithuanian *Yeshiva* (religious schools) who were killed during the Holocaust, to a Shimon Leib Beinart who died, aged 20, in Panevezys, one of the sites listed in Jaeger’s report, in August or September 1941. He was born around the same time as my grandfather and his brothers. That my grandfather grew up in South Africa, and went on to become an anglophone Professor of Law in Cape Town, now seems to be an amazing feat of escape, one dependent on his father Woolf’s decision to migrate.

As we continued our journey, it became clear that the ownership of the tragedy of the Holocaust was a complex issue in Lithuania. The culpability of the Lithuanians who had aided the Nazi Einsatzgruppen in mass murder was often sidelined in favour of a narrative that tells of the genocide of Lithuanian people carried out by the Nazis during the war. The narrative continues with how the oppression carried out by the Soviets during the Russian occupation of Lithuania was felt by Lithuanians, rather than by the Jewish community specifically. Many Lithuanians were deported and, it is claimed, thousands were killed under the Soviet occupation.<sup>51</sup> This is now much emphasized in national history, and, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, it feeds into a narrative of Lithuanian nationalism and identity.<sup>52</sup> But perhaps because of Lithuanian collaboration, and the lack of a Jewish presence after the war, the voice of the Jewish community has been silenced.

Rokiskis Museum is a regional museum, housed in a former country manor and estate at the edge of the town. The museum emphasizes the oppression of Lithuanians by the Russians and the uprisings of Lithuanian nationalists.<sup>53</sup> There is little information provided about the Jewish families who constituted over half the population of the town before the Second World War and who had lived there since the eighteenth century.<sup>54</sup> However, one of the historians at

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49 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 45.

50 Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, ‘Out of the Depths (translation from *Mima’amakim*, published in New York, 1959)’, trans. Yocheved Klausner, p. 282; available from the JewishGen website, <<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/lithuania7/Lithuania7.html#TOC>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

51 See, for example, Dalia Kuodytė, a Member of the Lithuanian Parliament and former Director General of the Centre of Genocide and Resistance (LGGRTC), ‘The tragic story of one third of Lithuania’s population became victims of Soviet terror’, *Vilnews website*, <<http://vilnews.com/2010-12-the-tragic-story-of-how-one-third-of-lithuania-s-population-became-victims-of-soviet-terror>> [accessed 20 December 2017].

52 Daniel Brook, ‘Double genocide’, *Slate*, 26 July 2015, <[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/history/2015/07/lithuania\\_and\\_nazis\\_the\\_country\\_wants\\_to\\_forget\\_its\\_collaborationist\\_past.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2015/07/lithuania_and_nazis_the_country_wants_to_forget_its_collaborationist_past.html)> [accessed 13 July 2017]; Timothy Snyder, ‘Neglecting the Lithuanian Holocaust’, *New York Review of Books*, 25 July 2011, <<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/07/25/neglecting-lithuanian-holocaust>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

53 Museum text, Rokiskis Museum.

54 Raphael Julius, ‘Rokishok’ (translation of ‘Rokishok’, a chapter from *Pinkas Hakehillot Lita*) in *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), available from <[http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas\\_lita/lit\\_00646.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_lita/lit_00646.html)> [accessed 13 July 2017].



the museum told us that her husband knew the locations of the old Jewish cemeteries in the area, and he offered to take us to visit them. We had also been in contact with a genealogist in the United States, Philip Shapiro, who had given us a basic mapping of the town and the location of the Jewish community who once lived there.<sup>55</sup>

### Vilnius: *Starter Culture* and *Khlebosolny* (2012)

Before we left Vilnius to travel to Rokiskis, we had made bread with our *Starter Culture* mix, using our South African salt and Lithuanian flour and water (figure 15). The local flour added a new ingredient to the culture, which so far had been made in South Africa, in the UK, and on board ship. We made two loaves to take on our journey to Rokiskis and Obeliai, the town and nearby village from which our research showed that the Beinarts came, and to carry out the *Khlebosolny* threshold ritual we first performed at sea, en route to South Africa.<sup>56</sup>

Bread culture is a live organism that needs continual feeding and refreshing with flour and water.<sup>57</sup> When the bread is baked, salt is added not only for flavour but also to tighten the gluten structure, since it strengthens the dough. It also helps the loaf to hold on to the carbon dioxide gas that is formed during fermentation, thereby supporting good volume. A baking website further notes: “Salt also slows down fermentation and enzyme activity in dough. The salt crystals draw water away from their environment (salt is ‘hygroscopic’). When salt and yeast compete for water, salt wins and the yeast is slowed down.”<sup>58</sup> The balance of flour, water and salt is crucial, therefore, to the bread-making process and to the maintenance of the culture.

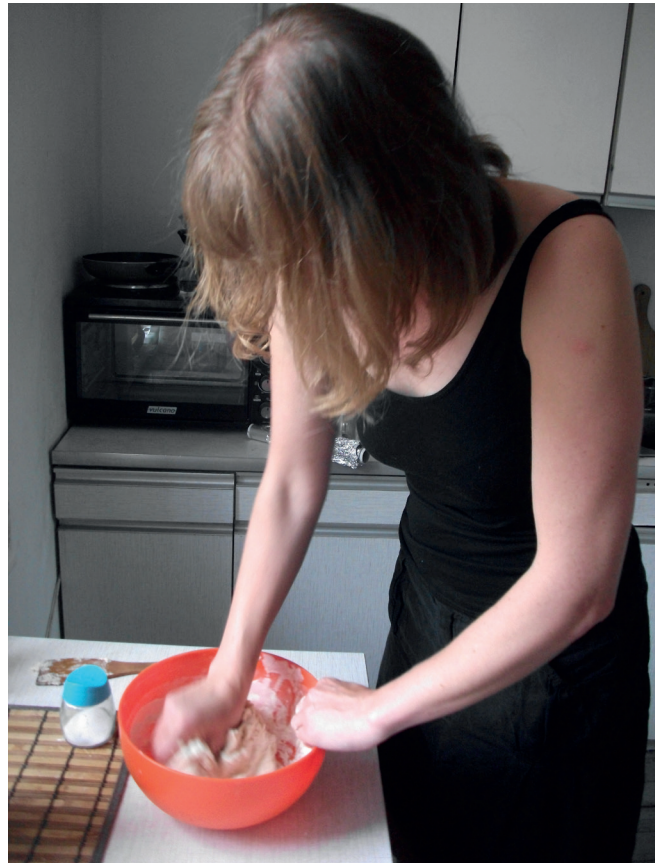


Figure 15: Baking bread in Vilnius.

Photograph: Rebecca Beinart. Source: author.

55 Conversation with Philip Shapiro via Skype, 27 July 2012.

56 See: Beinart, ‘Origination: Journeying In The Footsteps Of Our Ancestors’, p. 167, 170

57 Andrew Whitley, *DO Sourdough: Slow Bread for Busy Lives* (London: The Do Book Co., 2014).

58 Weekend Bakery website: <<https://www.weekendbakery.com/posts/salt-in-bread-baking-how-much-and-why/>> [accessed 2 August 2017].



As well as referring to bread and salt, *khlebosalny* or *khleb da sol* means a ceremony of welcome, using bread and salt.<sup>59</sup> In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy refers to “the bread and salt of hospitality”,<sup>60</sup> which writer Joanna Trew explains in relation to Slavic culture:

“Across the Slavic world, bread and salt is offered as part of a traditional welcome ceremony. A round loaf of bread is placed on a tray, with a salt-cellar placed on top, or in a hole cut into the bread. Both the tray and the loaf would be highly decorated. The tradition persists to this day, especially at weddings, and during state visits from foreign leaders, where local people dress up in national costume to present the bread and salt.”<sup>61</sup>

Later on our journey, visiting the Bread Museum in St Petersburg, we read that „when a Russian person made a new settlement, they ploughed up a field and sowed bread”,<sup>62</sup> or “sat down on the ground”.<sup>63</sup> In Russian homes, the bread was stored in a special *khlebnya*: “a round or oval box with densely closed cover, placed in a forward corner on a bench under icons. Only the owner of the house could take bread out from it.”<sup>64</sup>

“Bread enshrined both farming and gathering, and it also had certain almost magical properties.”<sup>65</sup>

When I mixed the ingredients by hand in our friend’s kitchen in Vilnius, I thought about the experience of touch. What kind of knowledge is generated through touch? How does touch bring about a different encounter with place, often with something that is visually less present? Making bread in a kitchen in Vilnius, as well as laying salt onto the grass, allowed me to imagine that I was making an intimate and direct connection with our ancestors. Through the action of making, I experienced the touching of substances and surfaces that they may also have touched, and I could understand this as a more direct encounter with the past. A direct encounter through touch has been termed *praesentia* by Kevin Hetherington.<sup>66</sup> According to Hetherington’s idea of *praesentia*, place becomes, through touch, an encounter rather than a representation. Via the material poetics of an artwork, the encounter acts as a reference to and a physical index of place. In the next stage of the journey, we took our bread and salt to the village our ancestors had left in the early 1900s, uncertain as to what we would encounter.

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59 Robert E. Smith and David Christian, *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 5.

60 Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. by Amy Mandelker, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 405.

61 Joanna Trew, ‘Review of Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*’, *Bookdrum website*, <<http://www.bookdrum.com/books/war-and-peace/9780199232765/bookmarks-401-425.html?bookId=730>> [accessed 2 August 2017].

62 Bread, meaning various grain crops, including rye, barley, wheat, oats and buckwheat. Source: Museum text, St Petersburg Bread Museum.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, p. 65.

66 Kevin Hetherington, ‘Spatial textures: Place, touch, and praesentia’, *Environment and Planning A*, 35 (2003), pp. 1933-44, at p. 1937.



### Rokiskis and Obeliai: *Offere II* (2012)

*“In the area beyond Synagogue Gatve, where old wooden houses are laid out along dusty un-tarmacked roads, we find Rokiskis Jewish cemetery. It is overgrown and neglected, mature silver birch trees grow out of some of the graves, the most recent of which date from 1940. The Jewish population ceased to exist here after that. The graves are hard to decipher, Dad traces the fragile letters with his finger, trying to make them out and trying to remember his Hebrew alphabet. Behind us is a hill, overgrown with very tall grasses and wild plants. Our guide Zigmias explains that this is also part of the burial ground. We pick our way gingerly between old graves, buried in vegetation, and half expect to see protruding bones.”*

*“We reach the windmill on the main road, and follow a small track into what seems to be someone’s allotment. Behind the vegetable patch is the Obeliai Jewish cemetery, marked by a wonky picket fence. It looks like a wildflower meadow.”<sup>67</sup>*

We returned to the Obeliai cemetery the next day and combed through headstones in the long grass. We could not find any with our family name. We made a performance, *Offere II*, walking towards each other through the headstones and flowers, and meeting in front of the gravestones to perform the *Khlebosolny* ritual, sharing bread and salt, in an echo of the film

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<sup>67</sup> Katy and Rebecca Beinart, ‘Offere II’, *Origination* (blog), 6 August 2012.

we made at the salt pans in South Africa (figure 16).<sup>68</sup> We did not know for certain if this was where Woolf Beinart was born, but he had lived there at one time and we had brought an offering of salt from the place to which he had emigrated.

After we shared the bread and salt, we sprinkled the rest of the salt from South Africa onto the ground by the gravestones (figure 17).



Figure 16: Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Offere II*, 2012. Photograph: William Beinart. Source: author. Figure 17: Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Sprinkling salt on graves*. Photograph: William Beinart. Source: author.

“The traditional bread and salt ceremony marks the crossing of a threshold, often to a new home. But perhaps we are re-enacting this tradition in reverse: bringing with us the histories of lives that stemmed from this place but were lived out in an unimaginable future. A threshold between different time zones, different possible fates, diverging paths.”<sup>69</sup>

Through the *Khlebosalny* ritual, we experienced space and time through touch and taste, an experience of *praesentia* that, as Hetherington says, mingles distance and proximity; presence and absence; secular and divine; human and nonhuman; subject and object; time and space; vision and touch.<sup>70</sup>

In the mingling of past and present, and of our own identities with others (our ancestors, and others’ ancestors), an understanding of how connected we are to one another develops. In this encounter, the salt (and bread) are indexical to a knowledge or experience of mingling, and of crossing a threshold of some kind. The taste of salt and bread in the ritual, in this site, provides a direct way (through the material) of encountering our ancestors. Tasting this bread and salt in the cemetery site was also a bringing back of a lost culture, which might be seen as a rebalancing act. Through this act, we then hold in our memories the connection to this specific site whenever we repeat the ritual in the future. This is a *praesentia* of memory: an encounter with touch (and taste) that is then sealed as a memory.

68 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Offere I*, 2010.

69 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, ‘Offere II’, *Origination* (blog), 6 August 2012.

70 Hetherington, ‘Spatial textures’, p. 1940.



Before we made the performance, we had set up a camera on a tripod, and William (our father) took photographs from this point. We had wanted to document our action in a replica of the film, *Offere I*, which we had made in South Africa.<sup>71</sup> Our idea had been to take a series of images that could form an animated sequence of our performance. Later, looking at the photographs, I am struck by the *fact* of our father's presence, as photographer, with his gaze on us, the subjects. What strikes me is the absence in a photographic image of the person who takes it, which leaves the viewer to imagine whose gaze it is. In a very different context, the photograph I saw in the Holocaust Museum in Vilnius begs the same question.

In the cemetery we were unable to discover the presence of our ancestors, and in the photograph the viewer is not offered a clue about the identity of the photographer. This lack of visibility of the viewer – his or her obscurity – is concomitant with the search for roots, which is ultimately full of dead ends and disappointments. Do the photographs my father took act as a referent? And if so, to what? They might act as a referent to the site of the cemetery, which stands in for the disappeared who lie in mass graves. They might act as a referent to the spectral traces of these ancestors whose history has been left behind.

Before leaving Rokiskis, we tried to find the memorial site we had been told about by Zigmąs, at Steponi forest, one of the sites where the Jews of Rokiskis and Obeliai were murdered and had been buried. The *Yizkor* book ('memorial' book) for Rokiskis described the locations of the sites:

"In the vicinity of Rokishok there are four communal graves (seven by another account); in Antanosa 5 Km. from Abel (Obeliai), about 200 metres from the left side of the road are buried 1,160 who were murdered on 25.8.1941; in the village of Rozonai about 200 metres to the left, on the road leading to the settlement of Juodupe, are buried 67, murdered in July 1941; in the town of Steponi 5 Km. from Rokishok about 150 metres to the right of the road in the direction of Swedishetz are 981 graves of those also murdered in July /August of 1941; in the forest of Valindova 5 Km. from Rokishok not far from the village of Baiorai, 400 metres to the right of the road which leads to the road to Juodupe, are buried 3207 men, women and children, who were killed on 25-26 August 1941. According to these facts the number of those murdered was between 4,700 to 4,800. After the war, those remaining from the surrounding villages erected monuments over the communal graves. In the Steponi forest the following is inscribed: 'At this spot are buried 981 citizens who were murdered by the fascist German occupiers and nationalist bourgeoisie between 27/6/1941 and 14/8/1941.'<sup>72</sup>

Zigmąs had given us directions, yet we were still unable to locate the site at Steponi. There seemed to be a silence about these sites, and a lack of signage.

On the 'Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania' website, which details locations and information about each site (figure 18), I found directions:

"Go from Rokiškis towards Čedasai. After about 3 km from the city you'll reach the village of Steponys. There are no signs. Pass the first homestead and turn right. The road will take

71 Katy and Rebecca Beinart, *Offere I* (2010).

72 Meilech Bakalczuk-Felin (ed.), *Yizkor Book of Rakishok and Environs*, translation of *Yisker-bukh fun Rakishok un umgegnit* (Johannesburg: Yizkor Book Pub. Council, 1952).

you into the forest. In the forest stay on the main road. After you turn left, go about 300 meters and turn left again. At the turn there's a sign prohibiting the burning of grass. The monument is 20 meters away.

Latitude: 56.003617 Longitude: 25.560800<sup>73</sup>

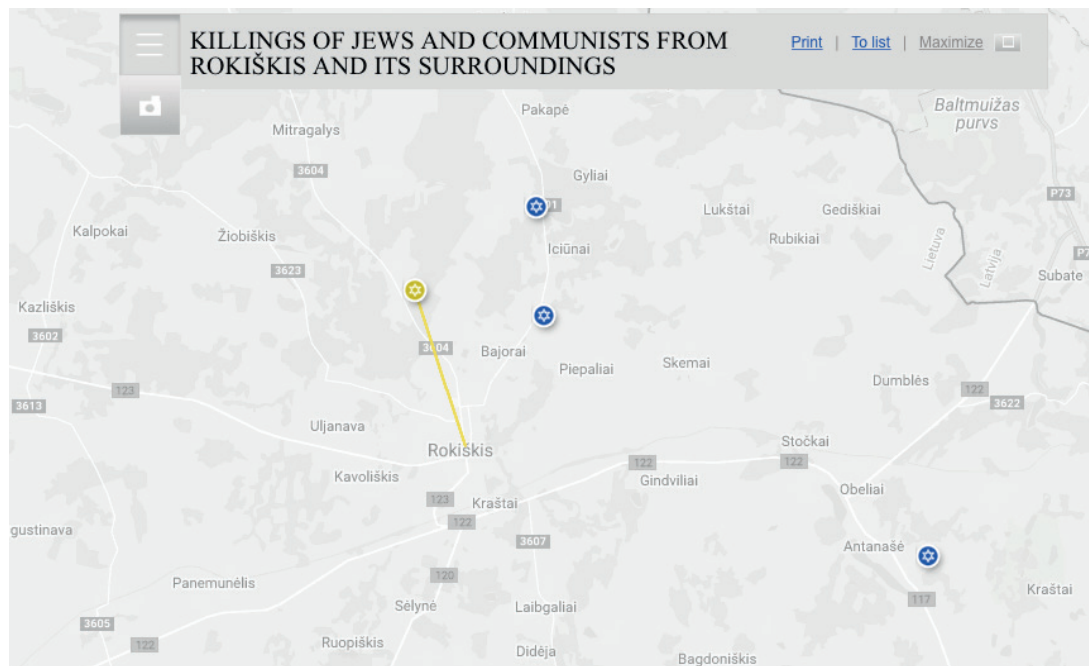


Figure 18: Killing of Jews and Communists from Rokiskis and surrounding area, The Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania (screen shot). Source: The Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania Website. <[http://www.holocaustatlas.lt/EN/#a\\_atlas/search//page/1/item/74/](http://www.holocaustatlas.lt/EN/#a_atlas/search//page/1/item/74/)> (9th August 2017).

This confirmation of the lack of signs reinforced the view I had developed of a wish to forget the Holocaust by contemporary Lithuanian society.

The main holders of the memory of the Jewish communities of Rokiskis and Obeliai remained the *Yizkor* books, which became the memorials, while the physical sites of Jewish homes and the places of their deaths lacked a visible presence of their lives as lived and ending. The *Yizkor* books on the internet are more accessible to a global network of interested people, reflecting the far-flung dispersal of Jewish people, who do not constitute a diaspora from Lithuania because they are not connected with it. The local sites are hidden, possibly suppressed memorials that few encounter, but they are significant partly because they are now known about and publicized online.

## Conclusion

Our actions became a form of postmemory that wove imagined and real histories together. They answered a felt obligation to continue the process both of uncovering the traces of the past

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73 (My emphasis in bold.) *The Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania Website*, <[http://www.holocaustatlas.lt/EN/#a\\_atlas/search//page/1/item/74/](http://www.holocaustatlas.lt/EN/#a_atlas/search//page/1/item/74/)> [accessed 9 August 2017].



and of viewing the past through the eyes of, and in relation to, the present. Using the simple ritual of sharing bread and salt in threshold spaces, we mingled the past and present of our own and others histories. Playing with photographs as documents overlapped pasts and presents, and questioned the photograph as referent instead highlighting the act of memory in making that a photograph offers. The disappointing truth of our journey was that no actual trace of our family remained, so instead we constructed our own story, one which perhaps relates more to the politics of the present day.

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