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Tourism as Memory-Making
Russian Tourism in the Shadow of Empire

Alena Pfoser

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The nascent field of Memory Studies emerges from contemporary trends that include a shift from concern with historical knowledge of events to that of memory, from 'what we know' to 'how we remember it'; changes in generational memory; the rapid advance of technologies of memory; panics over declining powers of memory, which mirror our fascination with the possibilities of memory enhancement; and the development of trauma narratives in reshaping the past. These factors have contributed to an intensification of public discourses on our past over the last thirty years. Technological, political, interpersonal, social and cultural shifts affect what, how and why people and societies remember and forget. This groundbreaking series tackles questions such as: What is 'memory' under these conditions? What are its prospects, and also the prospects for its interdisciplinary and systematic study? What are the conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools for its investigation and illumination?

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I was very lucky to work together with Simon Schlegel and Guzel Yusupova as research associates. Simon and Guzel conducted interviews and participant observations in Kyiv and Almaty in summer 2019, worked with me on the data analysis and co-authored journal articles and reports, which presented the first findings of the project. My wonderful colleagues Dr Elena Nikiforova and Dr Olga Brednikova, from the Centre for Independent Social Research in Saint Petersburg, conducted additional online interviews in early 2021 with tourists, making it possible to gain

deeper insights into tourists' perceptions. Liza Rekhtman provided excellent support with the analysis of selected qualitative data. Brigita Valatinavicuite helped with reviewing literature and referencing.

I conceived the idea of working on memory production in Russian tourism almost ten years ago. Having written my PhD on contested memories in the Russian-Estonian borderland, I had spent several weeks learning Estonian in Tallinn and became interested in the large number of Russian tourists in the city. Their relations to Tallinn's, and in extension Estonia's, sites of memory appeared different, more positive, and light hearted, than those of the local Russian-speaking community that I was studying. I was intrigued. A small grant from Loughborough University's School for Social Sciences and Humanities, received together with my colleague Emily Keightley, helped to fund a pilot study on Russian tourism in 2016. A New Investigator Grant from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ES/R011680/1, January 2019–February 2022) made it possible to expand the study to two further cities and to hire Simon and Guzel, and later Elena and Olga to support the data collection and analysis. A year-long University fellowship in 2021–2022, awarded by Loughborough University, relieved me from teaching and administrative duties and enabled me to start working on this book.

The world looks very different today since the conception of the project and the data collection. In early 2020, less than a year after our fieldwork, the Covid-19 virus disrupted tourism flows. The tourism industry had not yet recovered from the pandemic when Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 shocked the world and made me scroll through news and social media feeds, struggling to believe the unfolding horrors. It was difficult to carry on the research, and when I eventually picked up work on the book, I looked at the data differently: the tourism encounters I was studying were now historical, but also provided insights into imperial nostalgia and vernacular international relations that had acquired a new significance as the past was repeatedly used by Russia to justify the aggression.

During the long process of writing this book, colleagues and friends shared insights, thoughts, and literature, and asked questions, read draft chapters, and supported me in other ways. Apart from the invaluable inputs from Simon, Guzel, Elena, Olga, and Liza, I benefitted from being surrounded by a wonderful group of scholars in the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at Loughborough University. I am very lucky to

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A research stay at RECET at the University of Vienna during my research leave provided time and space to conceive the book in its current form. Interrupted by a Covid lockdown, it nonetheless was the basis for important conversations with Jannis Panagiotidis, Stephanie Weiss, and other colleagues, which helped shape the book. I was delighted when Andrew Hoskins and John Sutton accepted the book for the Memory Studies Series, a home to many great books in the field.

A huge thank you also goes to my friends and family for all their support, encouragement, and necessary distraction. My daughters Maya and Sara, now 6 and 3 years old, were both born while I worked on the research for this book and have been the most astonishing companions. My mother Kristina, father Alfred, and sister Paula were there for me all the way on the phone and in person. My husband Pawas listened to many stories

about Russian tourists. His belief in the book and his encouragement in moments of doubt helped me to finalise the manuscript. All errors and omissions are of course mine.

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Ethics Approval This research has adhered to the UK Economic and Social Research Council's Research Ethics Framework and Loughborough University's ethical guidelines and has been approved by Loughborough University's Research Ethics Committee. All participants have been informed about the purpose and intended use of the research. The data has been anonymised; the names of tour guides and tourists used in the book are pseudonyms.

Praise for *Tourism as Memory-Making*

"This book makes a timely and much anticipated intervention in scholarship on tourism and memory-making. Alena Pfoser's insightful, illuminating and rigorously researched analysis of Russian encounters at three former Soviet destinations demonstrates the methodological and conceptual potential of *taking tourism seriously* in our efforts to comprehend contemporary cultural memory."

—Dr Jessica Rapson, *King's College London, UK*

"Alena Pfoser's book is a thoroughly researched account of the cultural politics of Russian tourism in three former Soviet states—Estonia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. It is an important study of cultural memory contestations and their consequences at the turning point in the political life of these states."

—Prof. Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, *The University of Edinburgh*

"Tourism as memory-making is particularly good at untangling the complexities of heritage and nostalgia by showing that the question 'whose heritage?' shifts constantly in the uncertain landscape of places that used to be part of the Soviet Union."

—Prof. Alison Rowley, *Concordia University*

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About the Author

Alena Pfoser is Senior Lecturer in Communication and Media Studies at Loughborough University, UK. She studied social sciences and Russian and Eurasian studies in Vienna, Krasnodar, St Petersburg, and Loughborough. After working as a Marie Curie Experienced Researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig, Alena returned to Loughborough as Lecturer in Communication and Media Studies in 2015. Alena's research focuses on cultural memory, heritage, and identities in a transnational arena including on memories and territorial borders, tourism and heritage industries, and migration and place-making. It has been published in leading peer-reviewed journals such as *Memory Studies*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, and *Social Media + Society*. She was the Principal Investigator of the ESRC New Investigator Project 'Tourism as Memory-Making: Heritage and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Cities' (ES/R011680/1, Jan 2019–Feb 2022) on which this book is based.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 'Favourite tourists' in a Heated Memory Space

In early August 2022, over five months after the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine and at the height of the holiday season, a political debate broke out on whether countries supporting Ukraine should deny entry to Russian tourists. Earlier, shortly after the invasion had started, Russia's aviation sector had been ostracised. Flights to Russia had been suspended, and several countries, including the EU, US, and Canada, had closed their airspace for Russian airlines (Coffey, 2022; Jankowicz, 2022). Rail links with Russia had also been cancelled as part of the international condemnation of Russia's unprompted military aggression. However, Russians continued to enter the EU by road or via plane connections from other countries: some for political reasons, disgusted by Russia's brutal war, and fearing persecution in an increasingly hostile environment at home. Others were seeking business opportunities, now cut short in Russia, or wanted to avoid military draft. Still others, those living in border zones as well as those further afield, continued travelling for short-term pursuits, engaging shopping, leisure, or visiting friends and relatives abroad. In this context, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for the West to extend the international sanctions against Russia. Russians should "live in their own world until they change their philosophy" (Walker, 2022). Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas backed Zelensky's call. Together with political leaders from countries such as

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Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, she tightened Estonian visa rules. From 25 August 2022, Russians with Estonian-issued Schengen visas were banned from entering the country. Estonia advocated for other EU countries to do the same. In an interview, Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu said that ordinary Russians "bear also moral responsibility for the passivity of legitimising this regime to act"—and the decision to ban them from entering Estonia also aimed to put pressure on them to act against the regime, while also protecting the country's security interest (Rescheto, 2022).

A few years earlier, in summer 2019, when I travelled to Estonia to conduct fieldwork for this book, Russian tourism was spoken about in an entirely different way: Russians travelled to Estonia in large numbers and constituted the second largest international tourist group after Finns, 11 per cent of the visitor total (Alamets, 2020). They also spent on average more money than tourists of other nationalities and arrived outside of the typical peak periods, such as over the Russian Christmas holidays in early January, when Western tourists ordinarily stayed at home. Russians were her "favourite tourists", the head of Tallinn's tourist information centre told me, a description that resonated with others. As guides and tourism managers told me on different occasions, Russian tourists were valued in Estonia because they were well-informed and better prepared than other tourists. This favourable perception of Russians was not only put forward by those with clear economic interests; others, such as an Estonian dissident and history educator I interviewed, spoke highly of most Russian nationals who visited Estonia. Russians were thought to understand the country better than others, as the shared history of the Russian empire and Soviet Union created an intimate basis for tourism encounters that tourists with other national backgrounds lacked.

Based on these two moments, it would be easy to describe a dramatic shift in relations between Russia and its post-Soviet neighbour: from tourism to war, from hospitality to animosity, from intimate connections to security concerns. However, thinking about these two moments in time in such a way puts forward too simplistic a picture. Since the restoration of Estonian independence in 1991, there had been geopolitical tensions between the two countries in the context of divergent geopolitical visions and nation-building projects. These tensions had also affected the tourism industry. During my fieldwork in summer 2019 and an earlier pilot study in 2016, I heard about provocative questions from Russian tourists on guided tours that made working with them unpredictable. Particularly memories of the Soviet past had emerged as a battleground. Histories of

repression, deportations, and other forms of political violence had left a deep mark on the region and had publicly resurfaced in Estonia after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The material heritage of cities was reshaped, emphasising national victimhood alongside the ancient roots of nations, new national heroes, and other regional influences, which stood in sharp contrast to Soviet nostalgia and an increasingly aggressive imperial nationalism in Russia. In conversations with guides and other tourism workers the past appeared as a slippery terrain that had to be carefully navigated, while tourists also reported feeling anxious about their travels: how would locals perceive them? Were Russians, once fellow Soviet citizens, seen as (former) 'occupants' and 'colonisers'? Were they still welcome? In the shadow of the Russo-Soviet empire and current geopolitical confrontations, tourism encounters were shaped simultaneously by personal connections and a sense of cultural intimacy, and by political tensions and deep-seated anxieties, leading to complex and often unpredictable dynamics between hosts and guests.

This book provides the first English-language account of the cultural politics of Russian tourism to cities that used to be part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and are now located in the independent nation-states bordering Russia. It focuses on the production and contestation of cultural memories in transnational encounters between Russian tourists and their hosts. In contrast to memory production in educational and cultural institutions, political debates, and media texts such as films and TV productions traditionally seen as shaping cultural memories, memory-making in tourism is based on direct and embodied encounters with places and people. Tourism offers an opportunity for encountering and engaging with historical narratives *in situ*, including with difficult and contested episodes of the pasts and those shaped by different national historiographical traditions. Focusing on the mnemonic interactions between tour guides and tourists as important but largely overlooked memory actors, this book provides an in-depth examination of memory-making in tourism. It asks: what cultural memories are co-produced in direct encounters between tour guides and tourists? How do tourists relate to destinations through their memory practices? What are the consequences that memory-making in tourism has for identities and international relations in the post-Soviet region today?

I answer these questions drawing on a multi-sited study of three contrasting tourism destinations: Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty. Estonia's capital of Tallinn is famous for its well-preserved Hanseatic Old Town, its church

architecture, and narrow lanes, as well as its advanced European consumer infrastructure. In contrast, Kazakhstan's old capital Almaty is a Russian imperial city with a Soviet outlook, where Russian material heritage is presented to tourists alongside an emphasis on its pristine surrounding environment and new business opportunities. Finally, Ukraine's capital Kyiv was the capital of the medieval Kyivan Rus, the first East Slav state that both Ukraine and Russia claim successorship to; it is famous for its Orthodox churches and monasteries, while being also the site of the 2014 Euromaidan revolution that ousted President Victor Yanukovich and was followed by the annexation of the Crimea and the Donbas War. The three cities used to be part of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, but are shaped by distinct histories and local traditions, and differ significantly in their place in historical Russian imagination. There are also pronounced differences in the current geopolitical relations between Russia and the three countries in which they are located. At the time when the fieldwork for this book was conducted, Russia was waging a proxy war in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, there were moderate geopolitical tensions with Estonia, while relations with Kazakhstan were friendly. Through engaging with these contrasting case study cities, we can thus identify similarities and differences in remembering in the post-Soviet space.

The bulk of ethnographic data on which this book is based was collected in summer 2019, and additional interviews were conducted in early 2021. As a consequence, the subject of the book is of course historical—tourism as it was practised and experienced at the time of the field does not exist in this form today. When I was halfway into writing this book, Russia started to bomb Kyiv, killing, injuring, and terrorising the city's residents on an almost daily basis and destroying its cultural heritage. While a war was already waging in 2019, during the fieldwork for the book, this was limited to the Donbas region. Despite a clear presence of the conflict in the form of often improvised memorials, photographs of the fallen, or destroyed military equipment (Wanner, 2019), Ukraine's capital Kyiv had been spared by the fight, and Russians continued—in significantly smaller numbers but nonetheless—to travel there. Russia's full-scale invasion brought death and destruction to Ukraine, and also dramatically changed Russia's relations to other countries in the region: while Russian language tours are still offered in Tallinn today, visitors have been effectively barred from entering from Russia. Kazakhstan, traditionally friendly to Russia, has shown frictions in its relation to Russia, and debates about Russian colonialism have gained traction. More generally, the sanctions and international climate mean that many Russians prefer to stay at home (Foltynova,

2022), or travel within Russia or to destinations considered politically 'safe'.

Despite these changes, I contend that the book's insights into Russian tourism can also be illuminating for the present and future of the region. Firstly, the study of Russian tourism to post-Soviet cities provides us with an interesting lens to study the vernacular dynamics of remembering and the mundane relations between Russians and their neighbours. There has been considerable scholarly and public interest in understanding Russia's shifting geopolitical relations to its neighbours in the context of competing geopolitical visions and confrontations, in relation to NATO's eastward expansion, discussions about a new Cold War, and more recently in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. However, the examination of Russia's relation to its post-Soviet neighbours has usually been limited to the areas of international politics and policy-making (e.g. Abzhaparova, 2021; Arakelyan, 2017; Berg & Ehin, 2016; Spechler & Spechler, 2019; Toal, 2017). In recent years, the analysis has been expanded to include cultural relations and, less frequently, everyday experiences and perceptions. Studies on public diplomacy and nation-branding, cultural productions, and internet platforms have provided insights into the role of culture and symbolic politics as important fields for the production and negotiation of international relations (e.g. Blacker et al., 2013; Fedor et al., 2017a; Rutten et al., 2013; Velikaya & Simons, 2020); and other studies have aimed to 'ground' geopolitical relations by studying the perceptions of 'ordinary people' alongside official discourses (Gentile, 2019; Rutten et al., 2013; Toal, 2017; Zhurzhenko, 2010). The bulk of literature has, however, ignored people's voices beyond a narrow circle of political and cultural elites. In the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and the political instrumentalisation of memory, a focus on vernacular memories offers insights on how ideological state discourses are perceived by people and the potential of tourism encounters to form the basis for the formation of counter-memories.

Moreover, through a deep exploration of tourists' memories, the book also provides a corrective to homogenising views of 'Russians' that have been articulated in the context of the war. The war has drawn attention to important questions over the legacies of Russian imperialism and the persistence of imperial mindsets not only in the Kremlin but among liberal voices and the wider population. As Kassymbekova and Marat explain, "[T]he Kremlin's propaganda builds on seeing Russia as both victimised by the West and entitled to regional dominance in the former Soviet territories. In such Russian imperial imagination, enforcing the Russian

language, culture, and rule on non-Russian populations is not colonialism but a gift of greatness" (Kassymbekova & Marat, 2022, n.p.). This perspective is common also among the intellectual and liberal elites as well as the wider public who "tend to shy away from questioning Russia's imperial identity" (Kassymbekova & Marat, 2022, n.p.; Pomerantsev, 2023). This book takes inspiration from such analysis, revealing the persistence in imperial mindsets among tourists. At the same time, its bottom-up perspective highlights the diversity of memories and relations between Russians and their neighbours. This differentiated account is not meant as an exoneration of Russians, but instead aims to reveal the specificities of relations to different countries within the region as well as to account for significant variations among tourists.

1.2 Understanding Memory-Making in Tourism

Alongside an exploration of the cultural politics of tourism in the post-Soviet space, this book seeks to use the case of Russian tourism to make an intervention into research on memory and tourism and advance a number of general theoretical arguments. It is based on the assumption that in today's societies, tourism industries have become increasingly important in producing popular knowledge about the past. Despite the evolving climate crisis, international tourism is bouncing back from its dip during the COVD-19 pandemic, with 1.286 billion international visitors travelling in 2023 (UNWTO, 2024a). In tourism promotion, the past has been used as a valuable resource to highlight the uniqueness of destinations and make them stand out on a global tourism market, and heritage tourism has been considered one of the industry's fastest growing subsectors. Despite the significance of tourism for producing cultural memories and the parallel, and intersecting developments of a tourism boom and a memory boom over the past five decades, tourism has been largely disregarded within the field of memory studies (Marschall, 2012b; Pfoser & Keightley, 2021; Pfoser & Stach, 2024). Memory studies has attracted growing scholarly attention over the past three and a half decades, reflected in large, dedicated scholarly conferences, several academic journals and book series, and a vibrant and interdisciplinary scholarly community that drives the field forward. The dearth of research on tourism (Marschall, 2012b) in the field is particularly surprising in the context of the transnational or transcultural turn in memory studies since the 2010s, which has put memories' mobilities at the centre of theoretical debates and empirical scholarship. While acknowledging memories' necessity to "'travel', be kept in

motion, in order to 'stay alive', to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations" (Erll, 2011, p. 12), tourism as a central way of how mobilities are organised in today's societies has been largely left out of scholarly discussions. The limited consideration of tourism in memory scholarship is reflected not only in the number of contributions on the topic but also in a thematic and conceptual limitation of existing work (cf. Pfoser & Stach, 2024).

Specifically, a narrow focus on (difficult) heritage sites, 'commodification anxiety' (Macdonald, 2013), and a conception of tourists as either consumers or learners has limited the area of inquiry and has led to an underestimation of the political significance of tourism for shaping social relations and cultural worldviews. Against this backdrop, this book aims to provide a novel conceptual framework for memory-making in tourism, contributing to a fuller and less normative understanding of tourism's role in the production of popular knowledge of the past. The conceptual framework developed in this book is based on four propositions: (1) an emphasis on memory-making as a process, (2) a transnational approach that situates memory-making in a wider political context, (3) a consideration of the diverse cultural forms that memory-making takes, and (4) a focus on the (geo)political implications of memory-making in tourism.

Firstly, the book proposes to adopt a processual approach to memory-making in tourism, based on two significant developments in the literature on memory and tourism research: On the one hand a shift from "'sites' to 'dynamics'" (Rigney, 2008, p. 346) has meant a move away from static accounts of memory, characteristic of foundational studies, towards an interest in social processes of remembering. On the other hand, a turn towards practices in tourism studies has highlighted the embodied and sensual nature of these processes, including tourists' interactions with material environment. Building on these discussions, the book is not concerned only with the curation of the past and creation of marketable cultural meanings at the macro or institutional scale but is interested in processes of memory-making through which cultural memories are reworked and brought to life in tourism encounters (Pfoser & Keightley, 2021). This processual understanding of memory highlights the malleability of the past as well as the importance of individuals in memory-making, and the ways they use, interpret, and change cultural forms.

Moreover, building on a transnational turn in memory studies, the book situates processes of memory-making in tourism in relation to transnational processes of remembering. Memories are embedded within larger meaning frameworks, those promoted by the tourism industry and larger

public discussions on the meaning of the past. Whereas the focus on particular heritage sites has led to an interest in how the communication of the past is shaped by national ideologies and professional discourses (Smith, 2006), the book sees the nationalisation of memory as one but not only characteristic form of memory-making in the tourism industry.

Examining the dynamics of memory production in transnational tourism encounters, the book draws particular attention to its cultural forms and political outcomes. It reveals characteristic modes for engaging with the past in the context of wider interpretative frameworks and transnational memory debates. In contrast to the focus on ethico-political modes of remembering on one hand and conflicting memories on the other as key modes of remembering across borders (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b; Levy & Sznaider, 2006), this book draws attention to politically more ambiguous modes of remembering that have attracted less scholarly attention in the context of the transnational turn. In particular, the book identifies three broad modes of engagement—nostalgia, the production and consumption of national difference, and memory diplomacy—which are highlighted as key patterns of touristic memory-making.

This book dedicates one chapter to each of these modes of remembering and analyses internal variations and alternatives such as the role of cosmopolitanism in Russian tourism. Out of the three modes, nostalgia has so far received most attention in memory studies scholarship, connoted with problematic characteristics due to its "reactionary, sentimental or melancholic" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 919) nature, often also ascribed to memory-making in tourism as a whole. The book builds on these discussions alongside more specific debates on imperial nostalgia while seeking to provide a more differentiated discussion about nostalgia's forms and politics. The production and consumption of national pasts forms another significant mode of remembering that has received some attention in adjacent literatures in tourism studies, studies on nation-branding, and the commodification of ethnicity, discussions which will be brought here into dialogue with memory studies scholarship. Finally, 'memory diplomacy' is a concept that I use to characterise the communication of difficult pasts in the service industry. Unlike other studies that focus on reconciliation and the creation of cosmopolitan memories, memory diplomacy is oriented towards conflict avoidance while also offering some capacity for dialogue and exchange about contested aspects of the past. Due to the normative underpinnings of much scholarship and the disregard of tourism as a subject area, the pragmatic and 'messy' practices

of dealing with difficult topics in a commercialised environment have so far not received sufficient attention by memory scholars (cf. Schlegel & Pfoser, 2021).

Finally, this book also makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the political nature of tourism, revealing the wider (geo)political implications of memory-making in tourism. Questions about politics and power relations are of significant concern in the scholarly literature but have been raised largely in relation to tourism impacts on local communities—the exploitation of local heritage and traditions for economic purposes—or by analysing representations of the past as a political phenomenon. Drawing on the emerging literature on tourism geopolitics (Mostafanezhad et al., 2021; Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016), the book proposes to widen the inquiry and to consider the work memory-making does for international relations, showing how tourism memories frame destinations as part of Russia's wider homeland and reproduce hierarchical constructions, but also how these memories are shaped by mutual recognition and empathy. Throughout the book memory's transnational dynamics and outcomes are approached from a post-imperial perspective, bringing Russian tourism into conversation with the wider literature on post-colonial/imperial tourism (cf. Koplatadze, 2019).

1.3 'Russian tourism': What Is It?

To understand the political significance of memory-making in Russian tourism, we must also turn to the question of what exactly 'Russian tourism' is, including who can be an international tourist in Russia. Until recently the Russian Federation used to be one of the world's largest markets for outbound travel (cf. Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014, p. 9). According to the World Tourism Organisation, in 2019 Russians made 45 million trips outside of their country (UNWTO, 2024b), a large-scale movement that was only cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic and the international sanctions imposed on the country after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

International tourism emerged as an important leisure activity for Russians after the break-up of the Soviet Union, but it took some time until it became truly accessible. Already during the Soviet period, tourism had developed as a mass phenomenon, distinct from its Western counterpart, but also characterised by heavy restrictions on cross-border travel—those who were allowed to travel internationally were carefully screened and monitored (Gorsuch, 2011). One of the early paradoxes of

post-Soviet tourism was that while the mobility controls were lifted—with the crowds climbing over the Berlin Wall as a powerful icon for the opening up of the world—the crumbling currency and standards of living in Russia (as well as elsewhere in the former Eastern Bloc) meant that most citizens could simply not afford to travel (Koenker, 2013, p. 11). In early post-Soviet Russia, three groups emerged as relevant mobile populations: wealthy upmarket travellers who were after luxury hotels and restaurants in exclusive locations; mid-market travellers who went to warm seaside resorts such as Cyprus, Finland, Egypt, and Turkey that had become accessible; and shuttle traders who went to China, Turkey, and other locations to buy goods for resale (Pavlenko, 2017). In particular, the transfer of assets from state into private hands created a new wealthy class of New Russians who did take advantage of the open borders created by the abolishment of exit visas for foreign travel on 1 January 1993 (Pavlenko, 2017, p. 388). As Russia recovered economically after the financial crisis of 1998, due to economic reforms and rising oil prices, GDP and average income increased rapidly and made foreign travel affordable for people with lower incomes (Pavlenko, 2017). The increased availability of affordable holiday packages and low-cost flights tourism also helped to expand it to lower income groups (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014, p. 9). Tourism began to grow rapidly, with Russia becoming one of the world's fastest growing outbound markets. As a consequence, new travel destinations have come into reach—with Turkey, Thailand, Greece, Italy, and Spain, among the most popular. Swathes of tourists from Russia, not only the visible superrich but also middle classes, transformed beach and skiing resorts as well as cities such London, Milan, and Vienna. Wanting to cater to this new group of tourists, tourism entrepreneurs in these places responded with the creation of a Russian language service sector, with menus, ads, and shop window signs in Russian as well as Russian-speaking hotel receptionists and tour guides (Pavlenko, 2017; Muth & Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017, p. 381). Moreover, destinations that had been accessible earlier, those that used to be part of the Soviet Union, had their relations reconfigured in the context of national independence, leading to "new forms of geographical imaginations" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2019, p. 252) for Russians.

The narrative of a linear expansion of Russian tourism into a mass movement post-1991 is however too simple: not only has movement been curtailed in the context of the Ukraine war and the international sanctions, earlier events such as the war in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea and the COVID-19 pandemic had already led to significant dips in

outward travel. Additionally, even at the height of mass travel, the percentage of Russians who travelled abroad remained limited. In 2018, according to a representative poll conducted by the sociological institute Levada Centre (Levada, 2018a), only a third of Russian citizens had ever travelled abroad. While these numbers are a significant increase from the 1990s (in 1996, only 16 per cent of respondents said they had ever been abroad), if we compare them to Western counterparts, they remain low: in comparison to a third of Russians, 71 per cent of US Americans (Silver, 2021), 73 per cent of Brits, and 82 per cent of Germans (Ferrari, 2018) said they had ever travelled abroad. The comparatively small percentage of Russian outward travellers is reflected in the number of citizens who currently hold a valid international passport, only a quarter of the population in 2018. Rather than travelling abroad, many Russians spent their holidays in their dachas (24 per cent), stay at home (36 per cent), go to visit relatives and friends (7 per cent), or engage in local tourism (4 per cent) (Levada, 2018b). As would be expected, there are significant differences in who can travel abroad, with metropolitan and financially better-off populations finding it significantly easier to engage in tourism. The highest share of travel abroad was recorded in Moscow (62 percent) and cities with more than 500,000 residents (45 percent). In the Russian capital of Moscow, the number of those who had ever travelled abroad was twice as high (Levada, 2018a). This bias towards the urban middle classes is also reflected in the interviews used in this book. While I, together with my team of researchers, spoke to tourists from different generations, geographical origins, and professional backgrounds, it was predominantly an urban middle class from Moscow and Saint Petersburg and other larger cities[1] whom we met during the fieldwork and in follow-up interviews in Russia.

Alongside the question of who can be a tourist in Russia, a definition of 'Russian tourism' must also explain what a 'Russian' tourist is. The label of 'Russian tourism' sounds more straightforward than it is. In Russian language, there exist two terms for 'Russian'—an ethnically defined *russkie* or a civic *rossiane*, associated with the state and encompassing different

[1] The geographical proximity of the destination also shaped tourists' profiles. In comparison to Tallinn and Kyiv, which attracted mostly tourists from St Petersburg and Moscow and cities in Russia's Western region, Almaty was also visited by travellers from Siberian provincial cities.

ethnic groups within Russia (Tolz, 2001). Moreover, when studying tourism offers in Russian language, these are frequented by an even broader range of populations, including Russophone (*russkoiazychnye*) groups from the Baltic States, Central Asia, Ukraine, and Belarus, as well as Russian-speaking Americans, Israelis, or Canadians, and other tourists who have learnt Russian as a foreign language and attend Russian language guided tours for the lack of tourism offers in their own language. While the scholarship in Russian studies has rightly opened up to study these different groups and constellations, pointing to the diversity of Russophone communities and cultures in a transnational context (Byford et al., 2020; Platt, 2019), this book is interested in Russian tourism as a vehicle to gain insights into mnemonic and geopolitical relations between Russia and its neighbours. As a consequence, it has an explicit interest in tourists originating from Russia (*rossiane*). However, when doing fieldwork and engaging with tourism offers in Russian language in the three destinations, it was clear that these were directed at a broader audience of Russophone visitors, and sometimes also included local Russian-speakers. While the book reflects on this broader orientation in its analysis, it retains an analytical focus on relations between Russians and their neighbours.

The focus on Russian tourism more generally helps to account for a tourist group that has received relatively little attention. In comparison to several important studies on the history of Russian imperial and Soviet tourism (Gorsuch, 2011; Koenker, 2013; Layton, 2021; McReynolds, 2002), contemporary Russian outward-bound tourism has only been studied in a few journal articles (Muth & Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017; Pavlenko, 2017; Ryazanova-Clarke, 2019). This is also a reflection on the Western-centric nature of tourism studies. Studies on non-Western, particularly Asian, tourism have started to emerge since the 2000s (Hendry, 2000; Mo, 2021; Winter et al., 2008), recognising the need to account for the diversity of tourism globally, to problematise established historical accounts and developments deemed universal, and to account for the pluralisation of tourist gazes (cf. Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014; Bracewell & Drace-Francis, 2008; Urry & Larsen, 2011). This book adds to the body of scholarship by discussing specific cultural dynamics of Russian tourism to former Soviet cities, as well as the historical, political, and economic contexts that shape tourism, contributing to a better understanding of how Russians relate to the world.

1.4 Data and Methods

As mentioned earlier, the book is based on a comparative study of memory-making in three cities that have been selected due to their significant historical and present-day differences. Methodologically, the study was conceived as a comparative ethnography, building on recent efforts of developing ethnographic comparison within qualitative social inquiry (Scheffer & Niewöhner, 2010; Sorensen, 2010) as well as earlier developments within ethnography, which have marked a departure from a single contained fieldwork site (Falzon, 2009; Gille & Riain, 2002; Marcus, 1995).

Multi-sited approaches have been developed in the 1990s and 2000s in ethnography. Being based on a spatially dispersed field through which the ethnographer follows people, connections, associations, and relationships across space, they marked a turn away from an understanding of spatially bound cultures that was inherent in traditional ethnography. Moreover, approaches such as "focused" (Knoblauch, 2001) or "short-term ethnography" (Tileagă et al., 2022) have proposed shorter research stays that focus on particular interactions and social relations in place of the examination of a whole field. These developments are partly driven by pragmatic reasons—the problems of going on extended periods of fieldwork in contemporary academia—but also a response to theoretical discussions that have problematised ideas of the fieldwork site as closed container into which the ethnographer gains holistic insights.

Based on these considerations, the data collection for this study was more focused than in traditional ethnographies. Prior to the fieldwork, I had decided to examine guided walking tours and the perspectives of guides and tourists, based on participant observations and interviews, to allow for comparison of memory-making between case study locations. A focus on commercial walking tours, a popular tourism format, allowed to study mnemonic interactions between tourists and hosts in practice.[2] Interviews offered additional insights into working practices and professional identities of guides as well as providing important insights on tourists' perceptions and experiences of place.

The data collection took place across three fieldwork sites in the summer of 2019 and was conducted by myself and two research associates, Dr

[2] The interest in local perspectives on memory and international relations at the vernacular level meant that organised tours from Russia that brought their own guides along were not studied. Such groups constitute a comparatively closed setting for memory-making and are characterised by different dynamics than walking tours offered by a local guide.

Simon Schlegel and Dr Guzel Yusupova (cf. Pfoser et al., 2020 for an overview of the data set). Additional interviews with tourists were conducted online in 2021 by Dr Olga Brednikova and Dr Elena Nikiforova to complement the interviews conducted in the field. In total, the book is based on participant observations and GPS recordings of 39 guided city tours, 65 interviews with tourists, some of them involving two or three travellers interviewed together, as well as interviews with 38 guides and 14 tourism managers.

Despite our focused approach to the field, our research team embraced the openness of the ethnographic method, taking some time to orient ourselves in the research sites, having conversations with a range of stakeholders, and adjusting the framework to allow justice to be done to the local contexts in which the different cases are embedded. For example, in Almaty, the tourism infrastructure was not as developed as in the other two cities. Conducting fieldwork in Almaty, Guzel Yusupova observed tours that led to the mountainous areas outside of the city and participated in inner-city walking tours dedicated to particular times and topics such as the history of space exploration, alongside more traditional city tours. In comparison, in Tallinn and Kyiv, where a large range of tours was offered, we were more selective and concentrated largely on overview tours in the city centre.

It was easy to gain access to guides. Working as professional communicators, who regularly interacted with strangers, they usually did not need much convincing to be interviewed. Many agreed for their tour to be recorded, although in a few instances, we relied on our notes when guides did not give the permission to record. It was more difficult to find tourists for interviews. We spoke to those attending the tours, but exchanges were often short. Additional interviews expanded the frame of the study beyond walking tours. Coffee houses, restaurants, the tourist information centre, or points of departure such as train or bus stations, and the Tallinn cruise ship terminal turned out to be good sites for interviews as tourists were not rushed to move on. Additional interviews recorded online allowed us to gain in-depth insights into perceptions and experiences during their visits.

Within memory studies, a cross-country investigation of memory-making is still relatively rare. This can be partly explained by the preoccupation in the field with "theoretical scene-setting" and "critical commentary" (Pickering & Keightley, 2013, p. 2) as well as a predominance of case-study focused research, based on the roots of many scholars

in the humanities, who might fear the decontextualisation and loss of complexity that come with comparative research (for a critique cf. Mihelj, 2017). If comparative, cross-country research is used it is usually adopted by political scientists who usually use the state and its institutions as units of analysis, focusing, for example, on official memory, memory laws, and official commemoration. This book is an attempt at undertaking a cross-country study from a cultural studies perspective, shifting the interest to the level of vernacular encounters and the patterns and dynamics of memory-making emerging from them. While the focus on three cities at times means the sacrifice of scope for depth, there are significant advantages of cross-country research over mono-cultural research: it allows us to widen perspective, facilitate awareness of cross-national differences (Livingstone, 2013, p. 417), as well as identify shared patterns of post-Soviet, post-imperial remembering in the tourism industry (cf. Chap. 8).

1.5 Structure of the Book

This book is structured as follows: Chap. 2 fleshes out the conceptual framework of the book. It provides a critical discussion of what I see as limitations in existing work on memory and tourism and outlines how a conceptualisation of tourism as memory-making helps to overcome these. I discuss how tourism as memory-making acknowledges the multiple, dynamic, and generative nature of cultural memories in tourism. In particular, I focus on the role of tour guides and tourists as memory-makers, the transnational construction of memories in international tourism, the role of commodification, and the political consequences of tourism memories.

Chapter 3 discusses the specific transnational context in which memory-making in Russian tourism unfolds, based on the idea of the post-Soviet space as a post-imperial space. The chapter provides an overview of Russia's history as an empire, the intersection of empire and tourism, and variations in (post-)imperial relations and the development of tourism industries, focusing on Estonia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, that is, the three countries that form the case studies examined in the book.

Chapter 4 maps the tourism offers in Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty and provides an empirical examination of key principles of memory-making in guided city tours. While the official tourism promotion in the three cities is characterised by a (partial) nationalisation and derussification of the past, the analysis of guided tours reveals an emphasis on multilayeredness

of history and heritage rather than a focus on national narratives: a relational adaptation of tours to tourists' interest, and, to some extent, a critical, deconstructive take on symbolic politics of past and present rulers. The chapter argues that a dichotomic analysis focused on identity politics versus market principles is too simple to provide an understanding of the production of the past in the tourism industry. Instead, it argues for the need to pay attention to practices of meaning making and shows the significance of the service orientation of guided tours as well as conventions of the genre, material environment, and audiences in shaping memory-making on tour.

Chapter 5 focuses on nostalgia as a key mode of remembering in tourism, examining tour guides and Russian tourists' engagement with Soviet and Tsarist pasts. Nostalgia has often been discussed in relation to the commodification of particular products and experiences in tourism, a mode of aestheticising the communist past for Western consumption, or as a restaging of exoticising imagery in former colonies. I show that despite the absence of tourism offers explicitly promoting imperial nostalgia, tour guides implicitly buttressed nostalgic interpretation of the past by mobilising cultural intimacy and encouraging tourists to see destinations as part of a formerly shared homeland. Among tourists, nostalgia was a common mode of remembering but was linked to a diversity of interpretations, complicating simplistic assumptions about imperial nostalgia.

Alongside their interest in familiar imperial pasts, tourists were also attracted by the destinations' different histories and heritage. Chapter 6 argues that to understand the promotion and consumption of national histories in the tourism industry, we need to distinguish between antagonistic and commodified difference. Tour guides communicated national difference through easily digestible stories about distant pasts and recent histories of economic progress and tolerance, while minimising antagonistic difference. I show how tourists made sense of experiences of difference, drawing on globalised conceptions of alterity as well as established Russian imaginaries including of 'Asian' Kazakhstan, or Tallinn's Europeanness or provinciality. Ultimately, memories of difference perpetuated established tourist stereotypes, working against tour guides' intention to minimise antagonism.

Chapter 7 focuses on the role of difficult and contested pasts in Russian tourism and analyses how they were dealt with by guides and tourists. Russian tourists displayed different attitudes to sites associated with memories of imperial violence and (national) victimhood, ranging from a

cosmopolitanism to pluralist positions and conscious avoidance. Confronted with transnational memory conflicts and heterogeneous audiences, tour guides used a range of strategies to communicate difficult pasts, aiming to avoid and neutralise contested topics, but also to create understanding and exchange. The chapter discusses these strategies as part of diplomatic approach to memory, which is seen as a key way of dealing with difficult pasts in a contested international arena. It argues that diplomatic approaches to difficult pasts deserve more scholarly attention and highlights both their advantages and limitations.

Chapter 8 provides a concluding reflection on memory-making tourism. It summarises key elements of the cultural politics of Russian tourism and identifies patterns of remembering between the cities. Moreover, it discusses how the conceptual framework of this book can help to further advance scholarship on tourism and memory. It finally reflects on the future of Russian tourism memories in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine.

CHAPTER 2

Tourism as Memory-Making

2.1 Introduction

From the early history of tourism to the recent past, tourist destinations have been promoted as providing a journey into the past, promising an experience of a time stood still or turned back (Groebner, 2018; Stach, 2020). Travel promotion regularly lures tourists with marvellously preserved old towns, traditional rituals and culture, and untouched nature. Iconic heritage sites such as Stonehenge, the Egyptian pyramids, and the Eiffel Tower are visited by millions of tourists each year. But also the more recent past has increasingly been incorporated into the heritage industry, offering journeys into communist rule and Cold war bunkers, explorations of past industrial production, and histories of sewerage systems, brutalist architecture, and social housing. The popularity of what is promoted as 'time travel' is also evident in the surge of historical festivals and 'traditional' rituals that tourists are invited to take part in. As Hannam and Knox write, "[I]t seems that virtually everything these days has to be somewhat old if it is to be interesting. More correctly, everything has to have heritage stories attached to it—if it is to be considered worthy of the tourist gaze" (Hannam & Knox, 2010, p. 141). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) highlights that tourists adopt an 'ethnographic gaze', seeking to consume (obsolete) traditions and rites, which the heritage industry breathes new life into. The heritage stories attached to objects and rituals, which Hannam and Knox (2010) refer to, promise stories of a simpler life,

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ancient traditions, and wisdom as well as stories of the macabre and shocking, all of which stand in contrast to the modern, fast-paced, and comfortable lives that tourists inhabit. While heritage stories are diverse, what unites them is that they are part of the commodification of culture, the process of selling old sites, artefacts, and rituals to tourists for economic revenue.

The history of travel is full of evidence for a fascination with the past, from affluent Romans travelling to ancient Greek ruins (Lowenthal, 2015) and pilgrimages to holy sites in the Middle Ages (Groebner, 2018) to the Grand Tour taking aristocratic young men in Europe to see the legacy of Classical Antiquity and Renaissance, and an interest in ruins by the Romantic movement. In our age, memory-making in tourism has acquired specific forms (cf. Reynolds, 2018; Sturken, 2007, 2008): not only has expanded to include a wider range of tourists and a growing number of sites, becoming an "all-pervasive industry", "ubiquitous in our late-modern cities and urban and rural landscapes" (Harrison, 2013, p. 69). It has also distinct qualitative characteristics, showing "particular manifestations of memory culture" including the "integral relationship between memory culture and global consumer networks" (Sturken, 2008, p. 76). Commodification and consumerism but also increased access and participation of the wider population in heritage processes, an emphasis on experience, performance, and sensual engagement with the past, and the role of digital media and new technologies such as virtual reality have shaped and transformed memory-making. In this sense, the much-diagnosed memory boom of the past decades is manifesting itself in tourism and is also reinforced by it (Stach, 2020, p. 3; Marschall, 2012a), as our fascination with the past is fed by an industry that finds ever so diverse ways of selling the past to visitors.

The growth of the heritage industry has also created a vibrant field of study for scholars working at the intersection of tourism, memory, and heritage studies, fields that have expanded significantly over the past decades. However, as I have argued elsewhere, there has been surprisingly little concern with tourism in the field of memory studies while adjacent fields of tourism and heritage studies often tend to work with a limited account of remembering processes (Pfoser & Keightley, 2021; Pfoser & Stach, 2024). In this chapter, I discuss the book's approach to the study of cultural memory in tourism, bringing together existing research from these three fields. Rather than providing a discussion on the emergence and transformation of the heritage industry, I outline a particular

conceptualisation that, as I argue, allows us to better understand the multiple, dynamic, and generative nature of cultural remembering in tourism. In doing so, I also provide a critical discussion of what I see as shortcomings of the existing literature on the subject.

2.2 Towards Tourism as Memory-Making

The title of the book already provides an indication: rather than focusing only on memory as a (commodified) product, the book's main interest is in memory-making, the processes through which cultural memories are created, circulated, and reworked. Such a processual approach recognises the dynamic and often contested nature of remembering in a context shaped by commercial interests and ideological narratives; it also centres attention on the actors who do the remembering as well as the particular forms and modes of memory they produce. The approach is based on two significant developments in the scholarship on memory and tourism: on the one hand, in the field of memory studies a shift from "'sites' to 'dynamics'" (Rigney, 2008, p. 346; cf. Olick & Robbins, 1998; Olick, 2007) has meant a move away from static accounts of memory towards an interest in social processes of remembering. While foundational studies in the field have used notions of 'collective memory' or 'memory sites' as if they were stable and contained 'things', the study of memory has increasingly turned towards cultural dynamics, examining movements between different scales of remembering or how sites gain or lose significance, how they are altered and invested with meanings. As Ann Rigney writes:

> Although it has proven useful as a conceptual tool, the metaphor of "memory site" can become misleading if it is interpreted to mean that collective remembrance becomes permanently tied down to particular figures, icons, or monuments. As the performative aspect of the term "remembrance" suggests, collective memory is constantly "in the works" and, like a swimmer, has to keep moving even just to stay afloat. (Rigney, 2008, p. 345)

Other authors have similarly adopted a processual approach to memory: Marita Sturken puts forward a dynamic perspective on cultural memory when defining it as a "field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history" (Sturken, 1997, p. 1). Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton emphasise that

> new knowledge emerges when we consider memory—in its spatial, material, public dimensions—not simply as latent in the social fabric, nor only in top-down efforts by the state to encode preferred memory, but also as it is mindfully deployed by individuals and groups in attempts to provoke, enable, and transform. (Lehrer & Milton, 2011, p. 3)

This means to go beyond a consideration of heritage sites as texts, considering them "also as sites of practice", that involve contemplation and discussion but also meaning-making through "commodification, graffiti, and vandalism" (Lehrer & Milton, 2011, p. 7). The focus on memory 'in the works' has been particularly prominent in the work on transnational or transcultural memory, a body of literature that has focused on memory's cross-border flows and travels. Providing a "better understanding of our own globalizing age, in which memory travels high speed across, and increasingly beyond, boundaries" (Erll, 2011, p. 16), writings on transnational memory are particularly significant for a study of international tourism, and I will return to them later in the chapter.

On the other hand, similarly to memory studies, in tourism scholarship a turn from products to practices has taken place. This change of perspective involved a shift from a semiotic study of tourism towards a consideration of tourism as a performative practice that highlights its embodied and sensual nature, including tourists' interactions with the material environment. There is a longer-standing phenomenological tradition in tourism studies, focusing on the tourist experience and encounters from a micro-perspective (Cohen, 1979). In more recent scholarship, this perspective has been renewed by scholars drawing on practice and performance theory, research on affects and emotions, as well as non-representational theory (Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Crouch, 2002; Edensor, 2001; Haldrup & Larsen, 2009; Urry & Larsen, 2011). While works differ in emphasis and theoretical grounding, they are similar in challenging studies, which see tourists' actions and perceptions as overdetermined by the industry. As Haldrup and Larsen write, work on tourism performances "destabilizes semiotic readings in which places and objects are seen as signifying social constructs that can be unveiled through authoritative cultural readings rather than in terms of how they are used and lived with in practice" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009, p. 3).

Tourism scholars have emphasised the role of emotions, affect, and embodied encounters with places and people which are crucial for our understanding of engagement with the past and heritage (Crang &

Tolia-Kelly, 2010). The concern with embodied practices also means to go beyond the visual sense that has long dominated scholarship on tourism to include other senses and sensual experiences (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Smell, sound, and taste all contribute to a sense of place. For example, as Cuthill writes, "eating and drinking out are important performances in the consumption of place" (Cuthill, 2007, p. 64), as tourists relate to places through its food culture. The embodied and sensual nature of tourism encounters then matters not only in immersive heritage sites and tourists' involvement in historical performances. It is significant on a more fundamental level—as a way of comprehending the tourist as a "whole person" (Graburn & Barthel-Bouchier, 2001, p. 149).

Building on these discussions in memory and tourism research, the book focuses on *processes of memory-making* through which cultural memories are reworked and brought to life (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021). Memory-making involves communicative processes that draw on and synthesise mnemonic forms and contents and make connections across temporal and spatial planes. It encompasses particular media and genres (such as the guided tour or 'dark tourism', cf. Macdonald, 2006), agents (curators, tourism managers, guides, tourists), and institutional and sociopolitical contexts in which they take place (i.e. private, communally, or state funding forms of political control and economic regulation). More specifically, I study memory-making through the lens of *tourism encounters*, considering the complex intersections of how memories take place in relation to immediate and embodied encounters with other places and people (Gibson, 2010, p. 521; cf. Crouch et al., 2001) while simultaneously being mediated by transnational debates and imaginaries of the past, present, and future.

A processual lens to the study of memory and/or heritage can be found in some of the growing scholarly literature on travel to sites connected with difficult and painful pasts that provide a closer examination of different forms of spectatorship and emotions in relation to the past. Existing studies can be broadly divided into two different categories: on one hand, remembering in tourism is conceived as having a cosmopolitan or agonistic orientation, creating empathy and solidarity (Cento Bull & Hansen, 2016; Radonić, 2021; Lehrer et al., 2011); on the other hand, it is suspicious because of its sensationalism, as it is seen as commodifying suffering (Lennon & Foley, 2000) and feeding existing sociopolitical divisions (McDowell, 2008). Focusing on Jewish visitors in Krakow's Jewish neighbourhood Kazimierz, Lehrer (2010) shows, for example, how memory

practices in tourism have the potential to foster exchanges and solidarity. West (2010) examines forms of dialogical memorialisation at Gallipoli where Turkish tour guides produce historical interpretations by interweaving different accounts and aim to create mutual understanding. Other authors, in contrast, show tensions over the interpretation of the past, and how tourism can contribute to entrenchments and animosities. Studying memories of slavery in planation museums in the US, Ebron highlights a conflict between Southern history supported by regional and national allies, on the one hand, and slave history that has "the public force of transnational memory work" (Ebron, 2014, p. 163), on the other. As audiences are less willing to accept the stories of the plantation owners, the transnational memory of slavery has gradually changed the memory in plantations in favour of more critical approaches. McDowell (2008) considers political tourism in Belfast and shows how guided tours about the Troubles can contribute to the reproduction of the conflict as community-based groups use the tour to propagate political perspectives. While a cosmopolitan and dialogic orientation is often attached to public institutions, and sensationalism to commercial dark tourism, research such as the studies cited above has complicated this picture, highlighting the commercial pressures experienced by public institutions (e.g. Cento Bull & Hansen, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2016) as well as the ability of commercial projects to "give voice to marginalised groups" (Nisbett & Rapson, 2020, p. 5) and encourage ethical readings of conflict heritage.

This literature provides important insights into actual forms of remembering in tourism. However, due its focus on sites and tours dedicated to difficult pasts, tourism offers that do not share the same focus remain underexplored. The problem is not only that this leaves a significant part of the sector out of the analysis but also that it privileges particular modes of remembering over others. Moreover, in relation to the communication of difficult pasts, it takes, as Rivera observes, "acknowledgment as a given" (Rivera, 2008, p. 614). As a consequence, other communicative strategies such as "social practices of avoidance" (Tileagă, 2018) are not sufficiently theorised (cf. Schlegel & Pfoser, 2021). The book goes beyond these approaches by studying memory-making outside of specialised heritage sites. It focuses on commercial city tours that are meant to provide tourists with a historical introduction to the cities or particular neighbourhoods. In addition, the book also considers tourists' general meaning-making practices in relation to their visits. In doing so, the book takes into account a broader range of memories—nostalgia, memory diplomacy, and the

production and consumption of national pasts—that are discussed as *modes of remembering*. These are seen as key modalities of engaging with the past in tourism that add to the focus on cosmopolitan and antagonistic modes of remembering in much of the literature in memory studies. Although the book addresses the communication of difficult past, it does so outside of specialised sites. It focuses on a commercial tourism offer that adopts a different way of dealing with controversial issues, which is—as Chap. 7 will show—messier and fundamentally pragmatic in its orientation.

The following sections outline the processual understanding of memory-making in more specific ways. I firstly focus on tourists and tour guides as memory-makers and argue for the need to widen the inquiry beyond the study of institutional heritage sites, accounting for memory-making as an integrative practice that draws on different sites and places. I subsequently situate memory-making within a transnational field in which mobile images and narratives are circulated and mediate processes of remembering, and thirdly draw attention to the generative nature of remembering in tourism, engaging with the 'commodification thesis', a concern that has been central to discussions on memory-making in tourism. I argue that while tied up with commercial interests, tourism rearticulates memories of the past, rather than diminishing them. I finally turn to the political implications of memories created in tourism: tourism produces not only memories but also is constitutive of identities and social relations. I point in particular to the geopolitical relevance of tourism memories being constitutive of international relations at the vernacular level, drawing on the emerging body of literature on tourism geopolitics.

2.3 Tour Guides and Tourists as Memory-Makers

A focus on processes of remembering brings with itself an attention towards the people who do the remembering: the memory-makers. Traditionally, the power to produce memory in the tourism industry has been located with heritage experts, conservationists, curators, heritage managers, and the creators of promotional campaigns who produce authoritative memory texts that pre-structure tourists' perceptions of a place and its past. Laurajane Smith has analysed the power of "authorised heritage discourses"; such discourses focus "attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations 'must' care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to

nebulous future generations for their 'education', and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past" (Smith, 2006, p. 29). Authorised heritage discourses are shaped by experts, "stewards of the past" (Smith, 2006, p. 29), who educate audiences about its significance. Given the close link between heritage and nationalism, they also tend to be aligned with national interest, using heritage to convey symbolic representations of identity (cf. Park, 2011). The interest in the creation of such heritage discourses has meant that the scholarship has focused on institutional processes, the creation of narratives and marketable cultural meanings within heritage sites. As Arnold-de Simine points out, heritage sites such as museums are significant to study as they are "the main contemporary institutions in which the rituals of remembrance and commemoration are performed in public and where the collective nature of the activity of remembering is acted out" (Arnold-de-Simine, 2013, p. 11). More than that, museums have also been described themselves as society's memory, storing and circulating what a society deems valuable about the past. They are also advantageous to research from a purely pragmatic perspective: museums and other heritage sites offer easily accessible and contained fieldwork sites, a "well-trodden ground of analysing exhibition content and curatorial intent and their assumed impact on visitors" (Smith, 2021, p. 3; e.g. Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007; George & Reid, 2005; for a critique cf. Staiff et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2012). While to some extent justified, this focus has meant that significant actors who mediate memory and heritage remain overlooked.

This book uses a different perspective to studying memory-making in tourism. It focuses on two sets of actors, tour guides and tourists, whose memory work has received comparatively less attention. Through this focus the book also takes the study of memory-making outside of institutional heritage sites to look at how guides and tourists engage with urban landscapes more broadly.

While some studies have drawn attention to guides working in museums and heritage sites (e.g. Katriel, 2013; Macdonald, 2006; Modlin Jr et al., 2011), guides outside of these sites such as freelancers or guides working for private tour companies are differently situated, as they are to a greater degree dependent on positive reviews from satisfied customers. Moreover, working outside of bounded sites, they navigate a wider, more heterogeneous material landscape that gives them greater narrative flexibility. Feldman and Skinner (2018) highlight the significance of tour guides to tourists' encounters with the 'host culture', which is usually

limited to specific members working in the service industry. Tour guides act as important cultural and mnemonic brokers who inhabit this contact zone (cf. Bruner, 2005). Tour guides are conceived here as *mnemonic intermediaries*, navigating a complex terrain of physical movement and virtual imagination (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021). According to Irwin-Zarecka's early conceptualisation, memory intermediaries are concerned with the "editorial framing of raw materials, … giving sense and structure to physical traces, records, tellings" (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 175). Through processes of selection, translation, and the channelling of cultural sensibilities, they are involved in "shaping and reshaping of popular thinking on the subject" (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 189) and creating relations between past, present, and future. Tour guides research the city or a particular neighbourhood to develop their narrative and then perform this work of mnemonic mediation in direct encounters with tourists. Salazar, for example, conceives of tour guides as cultural brokers who manage the encounter between hosts and guests and facilitate encounters with a place and heritage, actively helping "to (re)construct, folklorize, ethnicize, and exoticize the local, 'authentic' distinctiveness" (Salazar, 2005, p. 642). By doing so, they perform a double role as both representative and mediator of the culture of the host country. This is a rather complicated task as it requires tour guides to present their own culture while at the same time demonstrating knowledge of and connecting with the experiences of visitors (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021).

The conceptualisation of tour guides as mnemonic intermediaries builds on both Irwin-Zarecka (1994) and Salazar (2005); it acknowledges that tour guides seek to create understanding and mediate between hosts and guests. At the same time, it foregrounds the mnemonic practices that these acts of cultural translation involve: tour guides engage in mediation work across space and time, select particular pasts, offer interpretations, and navigate potential conflicting meanings. This work of mediation is highly interactive and performed in relation to audiences and the material environment (for a detailed discussion cf. Chap. 4). Tour guiding is a "spatial practice" (Wynn, 2012, p. 337), and urban landscapes shape the crafting and telling of narratives. As Wynn writes, "[N]arrative takes on a spatial form in the case of the walking tour as buildings become protagonists and city blocks become paragraphs, and a winding spatial thread replaces temporal linearity" (Wynn, 2012, p. 340). Cultural memories are often performed in an improvised way, taking into account this material environment but also interacting with those who attend the tour. Tour

guides adjust their narrative in relation to both actual audiences and imagined ones, based on the judgements of the tour guide about who is attending their tour and what their expectations are. Interactive media such as smart phones and staged attractions may render the role of tour guides less important, but the multiplication of guided tours in many tourist sites show that guided tours remain an important genre as the "the full-bodied performance of the guides *in situ* provides tourists with a sense of 'being there' that they cannot get from the screen" (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 10).

No study of memory-making in tourism is complete without a consideration of the tourist. Yet their role has been often conceived as passive, as consumers or learners of pre-configured messages about the past (cf. Smith, 2021, p. 75) rather than as creative memory-makers themselves. Assumptions about tourists are grounded in early scholarly discussions on commodification and mass culture. As Graburn and Barthel-Bouchier show, when tourists first emerged as sociological subjects in the 1960s and 1970s, they were "stereotypically wealthy, free-spending, without taste or agency" (Graburn & Barthel-Bouchier, 2001, p. 148; e.g. Boorstin, 1992) and were seen as having negative social, cultural, and ecological impacts on destinations. As empirical research on tourists increased, this has also led to more differentiated accounts, highlighting different kinds of tourists and diverse forms of engaging with the past. At the same time, many studies focus on tourists' practices of consumption and learning within institutional environments and are based on a "transaction–consumption nexus", examining if and how the messages curated by heritage experts are received (Watson et al., 2012). The binary division between memory producers, on the one hand, and memory consumers, on the other, not only assigns tourists a passive role. It also maintains a hierarchy of meaning-making, with heritage seen as a passive authentic object that is best served by experts (Smith, 2012, 2021). The dismissing of tourists as memory-makers can thus also be seen as an act of distinction, "ensuring the maintenance of certain cultural values and meanings, and the political and cultural hierarchies that they underpin" (Smith, 2012, p. 213).

While tourists are not experts in the same way tour guides are, they actively and creatively engage in processes of remembering, acting as co-constructors of memories. Participation and interactivity are embraced by tour guides and also by heritage institutions which are being reconceptualised as "contact zones" (Clifford, 1997) and "sites of practice" (Lehrer

& Milton, 2011, p. 3; cf. Arnold-de-Simine, 2013) in which visitors are invited to dress as prison guards, immerse themselves into the life of a factory worker or aristocrat, play interactive games, or share their own memories and experiences. Moreover, cultural studies scholarship has more generally argued that the act of consumption needs to be seen as active and creative, "simultaneously one of production, of reinterpreting, reforming, redoing, of decoding the encoded" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009, p. 4). It is not limited to the reception of institutional environments but takes place before, during, and after a trip. Tourists can draw on their biographical memories, such as memories of previous travel or of migration and family memories when making decisions of where to travel, what Sabine Marschall has called "personal memory tourism" (Marschall, 2012a). Furthermore, cultural memories of past events and periods shape tourists' perceptions. They are part of collective images of self and other, influence what tourists expect to encounter in destinations, and how they make sense of the heritage sites and the wider urban environment (Dekel, 2013; Marschall, 2012a). Studying these processes of memory-making—the reception of cultural memories, the mediation between the personal and cultural—provides important insights into how memories come to life, or in Kansteiners words, how "potential memories are turned into actual collective memories, when a selection of the large stock of standard narratives and images about the past is produced and embraced" (Kansteiner, 2002, pp. 196–197; cf. Törnquist-Plewa et al., 2017).

In her critique of the scholarship on memory and tourism, Sabine Marschall (2012b) has pointed towards such a fuller conceptualisation of memory in tourism that takes tourists as agents of memory seriously. As Marschall points out, memory-making in tourism "does not necessarily require the presence of monuments and precious cultural objects, but relies on embodied memories that evoke emotions" (Marschall, 2012b, p. 2217). Marschall's call to extend the focus of inquiry points to the possibility of doing research beyond specific institutional contexts and forms of heritage tourism. In a different context, Staiff et al. (2013, p. 9) have warranted against overestimating the significance of heritage sites. Unless they are iconic, heritage sites are often not the main attraction for tourists and are often encountered as part of a visit to a place (Staiff et al., 2013, p.9). To get at the overall narratives and impressions taken away from visit, a broader perspective is needed that takes into account that memory-making often incorporates different objects and sites. A broader perspective that goes beyond particular heritage sites has also the advantage that it allows to include tourists who do not visit these sites and miss the

opportunity to be moved and transformed by their messages. While these tourists would ordinarily be left out of an analysis that focuses on particular sites, they are nonetheless significant actors in the construction of memories of a place.

2.4 Situating Tourism Encounters in a Transnational Memory Space

To understand the process of memory-making by tourists and tour guides, the book situates them within a wider discursive and sociopolitical context, or what I call a transnational memory space. A consideration of this transnational memory space allows to examine how memory-making tourism is shaped by globally circulated images and narratives as well as transnational debates over the interpretation of the past that have been the subject of a growing body of literature on transnational or transcultural memory (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021).

Over the course of the last two decades, there has been an increasing critique of the methodological nationalism that has dominated the early years of memory studies research. As de Cesari and Rigney point out:

> [T]he national has also ceased to be the inevitable or preeminent scale for the study of collective remembrance. By now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it has become a matter of urgency for scholars in the field of memory studies to develop new theoretical frameworks, invent new methodological tools, and identify new sites and archival resources for studying collective remembrance beyond the nation-state. (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b, p. 2)

Indeed, the importance of recognising the mobility of memory, its articulation at local, regional, and supranational scales, as well as in contested territories between national borders has become increasingly apparent. Works on transnational memory (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014a), multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), and "memories on the move" (Erll, 2011) have put forward alternative lenses that have called into question assumptions of the boundedness of memory and attend to its movements across and beyond borders.

In the first instance, this body of research has emphasised the role of communications technologies and media texts in the movement of cultural memory across time and space. From Landsberg's concept of

prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004), which emphasises the role of films to allow subjects to imaginatively access the experience of distant others, to Reading's globital memory, which attends to the ways in which the movement of memory adheres to a set of global-digital dynamics (Reading, 2016), a significant strand of work in contemporary memory studies has focused on the nature and practices of memories' movements in a global context (Erll, 2011). As de Cesari and Rigney have noted, the analysis of memory flows has, however, largely focused on the macro-level and involved the analysis of universalist narratives around which human rights discourses can be built (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b, p. 14; cf. Assmann & Conrad, 2010; for a critique cf. Bisht, 2013).

Of course, on the one hand, an analytic focus on the macro-political is essential to understanding how, for example, memories of oppression, discrimination, and violence circulate and gain traction in contemporary public discourse, and how redistribution and recompense are legitimated. On the other hand, this leads to significant limitations in the conceptualisation of transnational memory and has contributed to the neglect of leisure and tourism as relevant subjects for researchers working in the area. As Amine and Beschea-Fache (2012) have argued, macro-conceptualisations are often based on a privileging of global memories, which are pitted against the local. Focusing on the direction from the local to the global, practices of transnational remembering that are located in the familiar and perhaps even the banal, but nevertheless constitute for many people the most common mode of remembering in a transnational context, are routinely overlooked.

Research on transnational memory has evolved over time towards actor-centred approaches and multiscalar conceptions of memory (Bisht, 2018; de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b; Törnquist-Plewa et al., 2017; Wüstenberg, 2019) that are also helpful for conceptualising memory-making in tourism encounters. These approaches draw attention to the "mutual construction of the local, national and global" (Glick Schiller, 2012, p. 23, as cited in de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b, p. 5) and provide a lens for the study of the intersections between transnational memories and embodied and intimate practices and forms of knowledge. The transnational is then conceived "not as a horizontal spread or as points or regions on a map but as a dynamic operating at multiple, interlocking scales and involving conduits, intersections, circuits, and articulations" (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b, p. 6). Scholars have also been increasingly critical of the focus on movement and mobility alone, which carries with it an attendant

risk of eliding what remain the "highly specific and located processes" in which globalised mnemonic encounters occur (Radstone, 2011, p. 114). Susannah Radstone, for example, has argued for a study of memories' located engagements that examines "processes of encountering, negotiation, reading, viewing and spectatorship through which memories are, if you like, brought down to earth" (Radstone, 2011, pp. 110–111). Keightley and Pickering (2017, p. 120) have similarly argued that an approach that focuses on movement alone brings the risk of abstracting memory from the creative social practices within which it is embedded. Analysing tourism encounters in relation to transnational memory spaces allows to attend to the complexity of transnational remembering—the ways in which they operate at the intersection of scales, the ways in which they are structured by public discourses, but also by more prosaic economic conditions, professional practices and conventions, personal and collective experiences, as well as the material environment in which they are articulated.

Publicly circulated memory narratives and images form resources for memory-makers to draw on to make sense of the past; these narratives "interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making devices, mediating how people act, cognise and value the world, and helping them to form identifications of Self and Other" (Salazar, 2014, p. 212, as cited in Feldman & Skinner, 2018, pp. 8–9; cf. Salazar, 2012). They can be purposefully constructed by memory entrepreneurs in host destinations as part of tourism campaigns and heritage sites but are better conceived as "multimedia collages" (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 190): part of fluid constellations which include mobile media such travel guides, images and scenes from photo albums and postcards, discourses, oral accounts of visits as well as place-based experiences and interactions with information boards, audio guides, and social media. Tourism scholars have repeatedly highlighted the significance of narratives and imaginaries for the tourist experience. MacCannell saw tourism as an "ideological framing of history, nature and tradition: a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs" (MacCannell, 1992, p. 1). Urry's (1990) conception of the tourist gaze sees it as socially patterned and learnt, framed by different pre-existing narratives and discourses that shape how tourists consume places (for a critique of an exclusively semiotic perspective, cf. Waterton & Watson, 2014; cf. Urry's response and later revision of his work, Urry & Larsen, 2011). Not controlled by host countries, tourism narratives also encompass multiple, contradictory, and

also openly conflictive interpretations of the past. For example, discussions on cultural restitution and repatriation of heritage (Hicks, 2020), conflicting memories (Blacker et al., 2013; Fedor et al., 2017a; Mälksoo, 2015), or narratives of guilt and victimhood (Olick, 2007) that have been subject to international debates can be brought into conversation in tourism encounters.

Situating tourism encounters within a transnational memory space then creates a more complex picture than the transactional model of production and consumption: it acknowledges the existence of plural narratives and images and recognises that memories that matter in tourism encounters are "not just those which press upon us in our here and now, but those that we have accumulated over time and which are internalised forms of knowledge and knowing" (Staiff et al., 2013, p. 9). This is particularly significant when examining the dynamics of contested memories in an international context where tourists' perceptions are shaped by interpretative templates disseminated in their own country and can show irritation or confusion when being presented with an alternative story (cf. Gillen, 2014).

2.5 Commodifying Memory

So far, the book has left aside one of the most significant debates in relation to tourism and memory, that of commodification. Simply put, commodification refers to the process of turning heritage from something with intrinsic use and meaning to a product with an exchange value to be promoted and sold to tourists. This process of commodification of heritage is central to the tourism industry. As Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emphasise, mass tourism routinely "recycles dying industries, dead sites, past colonial relations and abandoned aboriginal tropes to produce industrial parks, living historical villages and enactments" (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2005, p. 33). Objects, sites, and rituals that were relevant for the lived practice of communities are being transformed into heritage that is repackaged and marketed to global audiences. The rather trivial process of turning the past into a marketable good has been the subject of what Sharon Macdonald (2013, p. 110) has called "commodification anxiety", the concern,

> not just that there is money to be made from marketing the past, but that, deluged by a proliferation of standardised historical forms produced for

> tourists, Europe's populations will lose their sense of their own identities as they are manipulated into putting on performances of themselves or their pasts for commercial ends. Real diversity will be swept away in a barrage of predictable forms of superficial difference. Historically themed places will be manufactured as part of an essentially standardizing identity industry. (Macdonald, 2013, p. 109)

This commodification anxiety, as Macdonald characterises it so vividly, reflects an uneasiness about the pairing of the seemingly antithetical realms of heritage, on the one hand, invested with cultural significance and seriousness and, on the other, that of industry, evoking familiar concerns over mass culture, inauthenticity, and the Disneyfication of the past. It is part of a general concern over what happens to memory in late modernity as 'lived', 'authentic' memories rooted in communities are seen as losing their significance, causing fears of cultural amnesia (Nora, 1989).

In his influential book *The Heritage Industry*, Hewison (1987) put forward a sharp critique of the economic and political exploitation of the past, criticising the capitalist and ideologically conservative heritage values that determine what is seen as worth preserving. Rather than being informed by historical value, what is promoted as heritage is dependent on market forces, raising concerns over authenticity and ethics. Moreover, Hewison saw the fascination with heritage as a dangerous distraction from present-day concerns, instilling in publics a nostalgia for a sanitised version of the past that ignores complexity and political debate and conflict. While Hewison's book has emerged out of a particular historical context—a Thatcherite Britain that was seen as using heritage legislation to revive patriotist sentiments in the context of the Falklands war and class divisions—the dismissal of a "heritage industry" has older roots, resonating with the critique of the culture industry by the Frankfurt School of Social Sciences and the condemnation of tourism as superficial and exploitative practice, as for example in Magnus Enzensberger's conception of tourism as mass fraud (Enzensberger, 1962, as cited in Confino, 2000, p. 107; cf. Graburn & Barthel-Bouchier, 2001). Furthermore, there is a long-standing debate over authenticity in tourism that expresses concerns over the alteration and destruction of authentic heritage by tourists' presence (cf. MacCannell, 1999; for a discussion Macdonald, 2013, pp. 109–136).

Already this brief overview indicates the multiple perspectives from which a critique of commodification has been articulated. It can usefully be grouped into three-related concerns: firstly, a concern over

commodification itself and the threat it poses for the authenticity of heritage objects and sites that now are consumed by (large groups of) tourists rather than the users originally designed for. Secondly, there are concerns over representation—as commodification diminishes the complexity of the past and translates complex realities into easily digestible, trivial stories to be consumed by tourists. In particular, this critique has been articulated in relation to dark tourism and sites of suffering which are seen as being incapable to deal with the profundity of past atrocities (this is particularly articulated in the critique of Holocaust tourism, cf. Reynolds, 2018). Finally, we can observe a concern over tourists and their motivations to engage with history and heritage, with tourists seen as voyeuristic and unable to critically and reflexively engage with what is presented to them. Linked to that point is a more general concern over the consequences of commodification for the cultural identities of heritage consumers who are in danger of losing a sense of who they are.

As Watson, Waterton, and Smith argue, this critique of commodification "has tended to fizzle out" (Watson et al., 2012, p. 2), not least due to its defeatist and elitist stance, seeing all commodification as inherently problematic and articulating a desire to keep heritage in the hand of educated guardians and protect it from the 'masses'. However, concerns continue to be raised in debates on heritage and representations of the past. In her book *Tourists of History*, Marita Sturken (2007), for example, acknowledges the diversity of contemporary tourism and tourist experiences, but nonetheless uses the tourists as a figure to "make sense of how American culture succeeds in creating a depoliticized and exceptionalist relationship to the broader issues of global history and politics" (2007, p. 11). Commodification anxiety can also be seen as an underlying reason why research on transnational memory has so far disregarded tourism as a field of investigation, as tourism continues to be associated with a danger to heritage sites but also to memory in itself, diminishing and trivialising the past (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021).

In her book *Prosthetic Memory* (2004), Alison Landsberg offers an important counterpoint to such perspectives. Focusing on the potential of fiction films for circulating memories of the past, Landsberg argues that the development of media technologies and the emergence of mass culture are part of modern societies' expansion of memories from private recollections into publicly transmitted ones. From her perspective, rather than diminishing memory, commodification plays a crucial role for the increasing significance and expansion of the past as once circulated to

wider audiences, memories can become collectively useful: "Commodification (…) is precisely what makes images and narratives widely available, available to people who live in different places, come from different backgrounds, from different races and from different classes" (Landsberg, 2004, p. 21). As a consequence, in an age of mass culture, people come more easily into intimate contact with cultural memories and can feel a personal connection and affective relationship to the past, even though they have not lived through it themselves.

In Landsberg's understanding the consumption of commodified memory texts actively encourages empathy, as they can "create or make available frameworks in which people can experience a sensual, processual form of knowledge" (Landsberg, 2004, p. 130) across temporal and geographical boundaries. Particularly the sensuous experience of watching films allows visitors to personally experience events that they did not live through and can become "the basis for mediated collective identification and for the production of potentially counterhegemonic public spheres" (Landsberg, 2004, p. 21). Similar to mass media, tourism makes memories accessible to a wider range of people—allowing them to learn about and sensuously experience 'other' pasts.

The experience of tourism is inevitably caught up with commercial practices as the circulation of memories to wider audiences means to translate them into easily comprehensible stories and to reduce historical complexity. At the same time, commodification can only be a starting point rather than the end point of investigation: in what ways is the past simplified? What exactly is remembered, and what is forgotten? What particular narrative and performative forms does it take, and what modes of engagement does it entail? What consequences does it have for identities and social relations?

Landsberg's account of the progressive power of commodification is of course deeply optimistic. It is informed by an emphasis on the agency and creativeness of spectators and disregards both texts and modes of reception that are less progressive and enabling for memory production. However, the alternative—the a priori condemnation of the tourism industry—is not a good option either. Memory is not a reproduction of the past, nor does tourism simply defile the past. Instead, research on memory-making in tourism should take some of the basic principles of the process of remembering seriously: that memory is always done from the present. It is a reconstruction rather than a reflection of the past and is "reconstituted in spaces, objects, and knowledge formations, which are

renarrativized and given new signification" (Schwenkel, 2006, pp. 21–22). The task of a memory scholar is therefore not to ask about whether memories are true or false, but about how the past is represented and performed in tourism. Acknowledging the productive nature of tourism should also include a critical perspective on the limitations of these representations including what is left out and forgotten.

2.6 The (Geo)politics of Tourism Memories

Tourism is generative for remembering in two ways: firstly, it generates new cultural forms and modes of remembering. Secondly, tourism memories are also politically consequential, enabling identities to be confirmed or reworked and social relations—between guests and hosts, locals and strangers, but also between travel companions—to form. Questions about politics and power relations have been of significant concern in the scholarly literature on memory and tourism but have been raised largely in two ways: scholars have either attended to tourism impacts on local communities, examining the destruction and exploitation of local heritage and traditions for economic purposes, or they have analysed representations of the past as a political phenomenon, looking for example at the politics of memory of museums and exhibition spaces. This book proposes to widen the inquiry and to consider the work memory-making does for international relations, drawing on the emerging literature on tourism geopolitics (Mostafanezhad et al., 2021; Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016; cf. Pfoser & Yusupova, 2022).

The scholarship on tourism geopolitics is a growing body of work that examines the nexus between tourism, space, and power and offers a useful lens to explore the geopolitical significance of memory-making. Tourism geopolitics is part of critical geopolitics (Dodds, 2007; Tuathail & Dalby, 1998), a body of scholarship concerned with spatial assumptions embedded in geopolitical discourses and practices. Originally focused on the analysis of foreign policy as well as ideas constructed by political institutions and think tanks, writings in popular and feminist geopolitics have subsequently widened the field of study: they have shown the significance of popular representations in producing the spaces of world politics (Dittmer & Gray, 2010) and highlighted the connections between international politics and intimate ways of relating to others (Hyndman, 2004). Some authors have focused on the geopolitical use of tourism by states—for example, through visa regimes and travel bans or sponsored forms of

mobility. Others, inspired by the developments in the field, have understood geopolitics in a broader sense, as "a discursive practice that represents international politics as a social landscape comprised of heterogeneous constellations of people and places" (Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016, p. 226) and have examined discourses and practices generated in tourism for their geopolitical significance.

Traditionally, international tourism has been conceived in positive terms, a benign form of mobility that brings together people from across the world and promotes peace and understanding. As Lisle summarises, tourism has been conceived as "force for productive and peaceful cross-cultural understanding that helped to break down barriers, create powerful moments of recognition, and bring diverse groups together" (Lisle, 2016, p. 183; cf. Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014, pp. 142–151. For this reason tourism has been promoted systematically since the end of World War II by the United Nations.

The lens of tourism geopolitics has been used to question these positive assumptions, pointing out how war and (neo)colonialism (Lisle, 2016), nation- and state-building (Gao et al., 2019; Gillen, 2014; Rowen, 2014, 2016), as well as the regulation of mobility and documentary regimes (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014) are articulated in the field of tourism. Scholars have shown how tourism played a significant role in the making of empires, generating particular representational patterns and practices of looking that also involve reference to the past. Moreover, literature on post-colonial and post-conflict tourism has highlighted the troubling effects of tourism such as the reproduction of colonial relations, and racial and civilisational taxonomies embedded in them. It shows how tourism is built on structures of exploitation and power inequalities and can reinforce ethnic conflicts. Researchers have shown the political implications of tourism for identity constructions and its use as a tool for politicisation, and in some instances, its part in fuelling sectarian conflicts. In Northern Ireland, for example, the commodification of conflict heritage like military installations, insurgent memories, and murals has been used to propagate particular political views, and resulted in an exacerbation of conflict (McDowell, 2008). As such, tourism is entangled with political tensions and conflicts rather than being the opposite of them. In this context, addressing the (geo)politics of tourism helps, in Lisle's words, to contribute "to a wider project of opening up registers that were previously unacknowledged or assume to lie outside of the political—registers that include the everyday practices of leisure and tourism" (Lisle, 2016, p. 9).

Within the scholarship on tourism geopolitics, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the geopolitical significance of everyday, intimate, and 'micro-political' encounters that tend to go below the radar of researchers (D. Hall, 2017; Mostafanezhad et al., 2021; Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019). Rowen (2016), for example, has researched state-scale politics in tandem with embodied aspects of tourism encounters, analysing how geopolitical programmes are articulated in embodied encounters. Particularly Gillen and Mostafanezhad have drawn attention to the tourism encounter as "an everyday, fleeting, and interactive experience" that "is part of the coproduction of political, economic, cultural, social and/or geopolitical assemblages" (Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019, p. 71). These insights on the everydayness of tourism geopolitics draw attention to geopolitics as a mundane exercise of power, as well as to its "diffuse and relational" nature (Dittmer & Gray, 2010, p. 1665) being exercised by multiple actors such as governments but also tourists, service workers, border guards, or other locals.

Combining these insights into tourism geopolitics with the reflections on tourism as memory-making allows us to consider the political consequences of memory-making in tourism: memory in tourism is part of what Hollinshead, Ateljevic, and Ali call the "world-making function of tourism", the idea that "tourism does not just axiomatically reproduce some given realm of being (…) but commonly makes, de-makes or re-makes" it (Hollinshead et al., 2009, p. 428). When tour guides and tourists engage with the past, for example by identifying familiar material features in an urban landscape, by making comparisons between 'here' and 'there', or by remembering histories of violence and suffering or modernisation and conviviality, they actively produce international relations at the vernacular level. Tourism can promote understanding and feelings of empathy and solidarity through engagement with the past, as research on hopeful tourism (Pritchard et al., 2011) has indicated, but also articulate geopolitical hierarchies and power relations by constructing other places as less developed or timeless places outside of modernity. An analysis of the (geo) political relevance of tourism memories not only draws attention to these specific effects but more generally alerts us to the political significance that tourism has as it brings people from different places into direct contact with each other. Tourism continues to be seen as a soft and inconsequential subject to study but, as this book argues, it is one of the key practices through which we get to know and make sense of the past of Others. It enables encounters that can also—in specific forms and depending on the circumstances—reconfigure ways of relating to each other.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the conceptual framework that the rest of the book builds on. Studying tourism as memory-making means to approach it as social processes that are embodied, materially situated, and generative in the cultural forms and social relations it produces. A processual approach to cultural memory in tourism is not new and builds on wider developments in memory, tourism, and heritage scholarship that started in the 1990s. However, as I have pointed out throughout the chapter, much research on tourism memories remains conceptually and empirically limited: focused on the past as text, with museums and heritage sites as central institutions for circulation of the past. If tourists are considered, then it is in the role of either consumers or learners of pre-configured messages about the past, rather than as active memory-makers who bring their own memories and expectations to destinations and engage in meaning-making activities, which may reflect those of curators and mnemonic intermediaries or lead to their own or additional conclusions (cf. Smith, 2021, p. 81). Moreover, with the focus on specific sites also often comes a focus on difficult heritage that limits the consideration of modes of remembering considered relevant.

This book is an attempt not only to bring tourism more centrally into memory studies literature, overcoming negative associations and 'commodification anxiety' that still haunt the field. It also aims to open up the ways how tourism memories are usually studied (cf. Pfoser & Stach, 2024): to consider other, non-site-based forms of memory production, connecting the discussion on memory production in tourism with scholarship on transnational memory, and highlighting different modes of remembering produced in the tourism industry and their political consequences. Such a programme can be based on different research designs and empirical foci. For this book, I have opted to centre the analysis on commercial tour guides and tourists who have so far received comparatively limited attention as memory-makers. While guided tours—seen as transient, experience-oriented, or even to some degree old-fashioned format of memory-making—might appear an unconventional choice, I will show that they offer fascinating insights into the practice of translating memories in a transnational commercial setting. Accompanied with the perspectives of tourists, the book then aims to offer significant revelations into today's memory cultures at the intersection of politics and the economy.

CHAPTER 3

Travelling Across a Post-imperial Space

3.1 Introduction

In a powerful speech at the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies Association on 8 April 2022, just over a month after Russia's full-scale invasion, the writer and director of the Ukraine Institute London, Olesya Khromeychuk, spoke about Ukraine's place in Western mental maps. In her speech, she warned about the political implications of the use of existing terminology such as 'post-Soviet', arguing that

> we need to equip ourselves with appropriate terminology to discuss the region not just as "post-Soviet", but in ways that will reflect the different trajectories taken by the former republics in the three decades since the collapse of the USSR and how each tackled the legacy of the Russian as well as Soviet empire over this time. (Khromeychuk, 2022, p. 29)

Khromeychuk's speech indicates the problems of labels for the region, which have usually been described through the lens of the Russian Federation's official narratives (cf. Düvell & Lapshyna, 2022). Rather than 'post-Soviet', this book uses the label of 'post-imperial' to characterise the transnational mnemonic space in which tourism encounters take place. One could argue, with Khromeychuk (2022), that this term similarly glosses over differences and perpetuates a logic of looking at the former Soviet republics from an assumed Russian 'centre'. Moreover, in the face

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of Russia's neo-imperialist practices and a war that resembles colonial tours of conquests, the appropriateness of the prefix 'post' is debatable: can we still talk of a post-imperial space and post-imperial tourism?

There are important reasons why I maintain that 'post-imperial space' is a useful analytical term in the context of this book. Firstly, the book uses the term 'post-imperial' as it deals with the legacies and memories of bygone empires, the Soviet Union and the Russian empire, which play a significant role in tourism memories as well as in the justification of the current violence. Memories of these periods are routinely produced in tourism encounters, and past centre-periphery relations and patterns of relating to the Other shape encounters between Russians and their neighbours, for example in the articulation of great power fantasies in nostalgic memories. As postcolonial scholarship has repeatedly emphasised, the prefix 'post' does not suggest that empire is a thing of the past; instead, reference to the 'post-imperial' is meant to evoke the legacies of empire including the persistence of imperial 'habits of thought' and their manifold expressions (Schwarz, 2000; Hall, S., 2017; Carby, 2019).

Moreover, in examining memory-making in the post-imperial space, the book seeks to critically examine, rather than reproduce, a Russian imperial gaze. Examining relations between Russians and their neighbours in the shadow of empire, I draw attention to the legacy of the Russo-Soviet empire that Khromeychuk evokes in her speech. As part of this analysis, I also seek to account for the voices of those living in Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty rather than simply framing these cities and their populations through a Russian perspective. I examine the organisation of the tourism industries and memory-practices of tourism workers, who use tourism as an active way of representing the places they live in. Tourism encounters are relational and based on dynamics between guests and hosts. Accounting for these dynamics, their frictions and local particularities, helps us move beyond a one-sided and homogeneous perspective that solely focuses on Russian perceptions, whose centrality in the scholarship on the region has been rightly criticised.

In what follows, the chapter provides a detailed outline of the historical and present-day contexts in which the tourism encounters take place. After discussing the notion of 'post-imperial space', I provide a short overview of the history of Russian tourism, before outlining key differences between the case study cities Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty. I focus on differences in their histories and imperial centre-periphery relations, contemporary memory conflicts and relations to Russia, as well as differences in the

development of local tourism industries. As I will show throughout the book, these differences shape the patterns of memory-making in Russian tourism (cf. Chap. 8, Sect. 8.3, for a summary).

3.2 A Post-imperial Space

The Russian empire is usually dated back to Ivan the Terrible's conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan in the mid-sixteenth century. From that period through to the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian empire expanded with astonishing speed—at the rate of around 50 square miles per day (Pipes, 1957, p. 1, as cited in Laitin, 1998, p. 37). The most significant expansion took place in the seventeenth century, both in the East towards Siberia and in the West when the Eastern portion of Ukraine including the city of Kyiv was annexed. A second major period of expansion occurred after Peter I's victory over Sweden in 1721 when the territories of today's Estonia and Latvia came under Tsarist protection. It was Peter I who assumed the title 'imperator' for the first time and called Russia an 'imperiia', asserting Russia's place among the European imperial powers (Hosking, 1997, p. xxvi). The lands of northern Kazakhstan were brought under Russian control in the eighteenth century. Alas, like other states, Russia grew through territorial expansion characteristic of imperial rule. This expansion meant that local peoples became subject of an alien imperial administration that governed them from afar.

In comparison to European overseas empires, the Russian empire was a land empire, and the boundaries between homeland and colony were less clearly defined (Condee, 2009; Suny, 2001). As Gerasimov, Glebov, Kusber, Mogilner, and Semyonov summarise:

> This type of continuous or continental empire is characterized by more porous boundaries and less clear-cut distinctions between the imperial centre and periphery, by the centrality of dynastic and nondemocratic rule combined with subjecthood and differentiated citizenship, by multiethnic populations, and by the more articulate contestation of the imperial space by national imaginations. (Gerasimov et al., 2010, p. 8)

Not divided by sea and huge distances, there was no formal distinction between 'Russia proper' and 'the imperial hinterlands'. These comparatively diffuse boundaries also meant that the elites of new territories could be inducted into the imperial nobility, which included not only Russians

but also Baltic Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, and Tatars (Laitin, 1998, pp. 37–38; Geraci, 2018). The Romanovs were a multinational aristocratic elite that served the dynasty rather than a particular ethnicity. Consequently, "cultural hybridity, ambiguity, and contested boundaries [were] scripted into landscape and ritual" (Condee, 2009, p. 24), even though there were significant differences in the relations between centre and peripheries and racial hierarchies shaped the perception of its population (cf. Sect. 3.4).

After the October revolution (1917), the empire was significantly reconfigured. The western and northern regions including Estonia became independent nation-states whereas regions in the south-west, south, and east including (Eastern) Ukraine and Central Asia remained within the newly formed USSR. Inheriting these territories from the Russian empire, the Bolsheviks' aim was not to restore imperial rule but to carry out an internationalist revolution. They recognised the desire for autonomy or independence among the non-Russian nationalities and used it to legitimise their rule. The Soviet Union that the Bolsheviks formed was established as a declaredly anti-imperial state, a multinational federation that campaigned the case of national self-determination (Beissinger, 2002; Martin, 2001). Following a modernist developmental model, within this newly formed Union, all lands and peoples should be developed and modernised to lead them into a shared socialist future (Hirsch, 2003, p. 684). As part of this, the Bolsheviks' nationalities' policies supported the development of national languages, cultures, elites, and territories. The indigenisation (*korenizatsiia*) policy of the 1920s directly promoted minority nationalities deemed to have been oppressed by Tsarist rule, including the creation of written languages (where non-existent), the production of books, newspapers, and other cultural outputs as well as the training and promotion of new national cadres. Furthermore, based on the principle of self-determination of nations, nationalities were granted with their own ethnoterritorial homeland within the Soviet Union, creating complex system of territorial units reaching from Soviet Socialist Republics at the top to smaller units of Autonomous regions (Brubaker, 1996; Martin, 2001; Slezkine, 1994). The long-term goal of these policies was the development of distinctive national identities within an all-union socialist culture that would supersede these identities and eventually render them insignificant.

These affirmative action policies were—as Terry Martin (2001) highlights—unique for the Soviet Union as they promoted national minorities

rather than the majority group. As a former 'oppressor nation', Russians were suspicious of great power chauvinism and were, at least initially, not granted preferential treatment. However, after 1933, Russian people and culture were rehabilitated, and the Stalinist party leadership started to selectively use symbols and imaginary from the Tsarist regime and co-opted its heroes, myths, and iconography (Brandenberger, 2002; Martin, 2001). David Brandenberger has called this change in policy and rhetoric "national Bolshevism", a "russocentric form of etatism" (Brandenberger, 2002, p. 2) that combined communist ideology with "statist ambitions reminiscent of tsarist 'Great Power' (*velikoderzhavnye*) traditions" (2002, p. 6). The status of Russians was different from other nationalities. Russian culture and language were mobilised as a connecting force in the Soviet Union to forge a friendship of peoples (Brandenberger, 2002). Without a clearly defined territory, own party, or national academy, Russians were considered more Soviet than other nations and obtained privileged status as 'first among equals'. Russians from this perspective had a right to be proud of national achievements and provided brotherly help for non-Russians, expecting gratitude in return.[1]

Despite its distinctiveness in organising multiethnicity the Soviet Union was, as Martin also emphasises, an "extraordinarily invasive, centralised, and violent state" (Martin, 2001, p. 18). Similarly, Toal makes clear that "while its efforts at co-optation and consensus were considerable, this was an empire underpinned by the reality of totalitarian state machinery and military interventionism" (Toal, 2017, p. 63). This showed in multiple forms of state violence such as its territorial expansionism, mass deportations, the persecution of national elites and movements, and the destruction of nomadic culture in Central Asia, among others. As Toal notes, the Soviet Union was an "empire of conquest" (Toal, 2017, p. 63): facing the threat of the Nazis, Stalin made common cause with them and expanded the Soviet Union following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. These conquests were made permanent, and the Soviet influence was expanded to Western parts of Ukraine, the Baltic States including Estonia, as well as Eastern Europe and East Germany after the Red Army emerged victorious in the war against Nazi Germany. These histories of conquest and state

[1] This did not mean that the Soviet Union was dominated by Russian national interest. Instead, Russians were encouraged to identify their national interests with Soviet interests, and non-Russian identities continued to be cultivated, leading to feeling of resentment among some Russians who felt that the people in the periphery lived better and had more advantages than the people in the metropole (on the changing and ambivalent role of Russians in the USSR, cf. Slezkine, 1994; Vujačić, 1996; Martin, 2001; Plokhy, 2017).

violence had a long-lasting impact on the region, leaving behind personal and cultural traumas that could only fully emerge into the public sphere after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The notion of a post-imperial space is helpful to understand tourism encounters and memories in several ways: it firstly centres the attention on Russia's, and the Soviet Union's, *historical status as empire and its relation to its former territories*. This allows for a close examination of the *current tensions and political struggles* and the *role of the past* in them. Ann Marie Stoler (2016) uses the term 'imperial duress' to think about the legacies of empire in the present. Imperial duress draws attention to the enduring effects of imperial knowledge and power in the form of material remnants, practices, and modes of thinking and feeling. As Walton explains:

> [I]mperial pasts continue to inspire nostalgia, identification, pride, anxiety, scepticism, and disdain in the present. Material remnants of empire, both monumental and mundane, are cues and canvasses for reflection and refraction. Successor nation-states, their citizens, erstwhile subjects, and antagonists extoll and vitiate imperial legacies. Indifference, by contrast, is nearly impossible to sustain. (Walton, 2019, p. 353)

The 'hot' afterlife of empire, that Walton evokes in his quotation—where "indifference is nearly impossible to sustain"—is evident in the territories of the former Soviet Union (cf. Moses & Rothberg, 2014, p. 32). World War II, the Holocaust, imperial violence and repressions, the Stalinist campaign of terror, and executions, among other events, have been the subject of explosive memory events, memory laws, and securitisation processes. But the region also holds other, less violent and less instrumentalised, memories of everyday life and leisure, of organising multiethnicity, and of distinct forms of sociality. These also draw from the "repository of images" that empires provide that can be captured through a post-imperial lens (Walton, 2020).

Secondly, the notion of a post-imperial space is useful as in comparison to the 'post-Soviet space'; it is based on a longue durée perspective that includes the history of the Russian empire alongside the Soviet Union. This expanded time frame is important as this period has significantly shaped the material landscapes of cities under consideration, and many Russian tourists are attracted to sights built during this time. Moreover, as I will discuss in more detail below, established patterns of relating to the

Other trace back to this period, such as assumptions about Estonia's superior development, the backwardness of Kazakh tribes, or the unity of East Slavs.

Finally, the idea of a post-imperial space helps to highlight *parallels with other regions* in terms of how the past is made meaningful in tourism encounters. The divergence of the Russo-Soviet imperial projects from other colonial models has made a translation of postcolonial scholarship to the region comparatively difficult, as it unsettles the generalisations built on the study of western European overseas empires (Khalid, 2000; cf. Koplatadze, 2019). At the same time, postcolonial perspectives sensitize us to the ways in which tourism encounters and distinct patterns of remembering are shaped by the legacies of empire, including but not limited by exoticism, imperial nostalgia and the understanding of unequal power relations that are also significant in the post-Soviet region.

3.3 Histories of Empire, Histories of Tourism

Several historical studies (Brüggemann, 2011, 2018; Layton, 2021; McReynolds, 2002; Mulevičiūtė, 2021) show how domestic tourism during Tsarist rule made a significant contribution to the creation of imperial consciousness among the Russian population. According to Layton, "Russia's status as a multinational continental empire gave domestic tourism an extraordinary, indeed 'uniquely imperialist role' that shored up 'relations of power and privilege' between ethnic Russians and the empire's minority peoples" (Layton, 2021, p. 19). In Russia, the conditions for the development of modern tourism emerged in the mid-1880s, in parallel with industrialisation, the development of railroads and steamboats, urbanisation processes, and the growth of the middle classes who could afford to go on a holiday (Layton, 2021, p. 8).

While Tsarist tourism remained limited to the aristocracy, wealthy cultural elites, and the upper middle classes, the Soviet state subsequently sought to democratise tourism. To signal the victory of the proletariat after the October revolution, sanatoriums and rest homes opened their doors first of all to industrial workers, the new ruling class. In an attempt to create a superior form of socialist vacationing, the Soviet Union put forward a distinct understanding of tourism. Different from the capitalist emphasis on pleasure, relaxation, and consumption, Soviet tourism was characterised by a great degree of purposefulness (Gorsuch, 2011; Koenker, 2013). It had two distinct forms. Firstly, rest or *otdykh* focused

on medical treatments and recovery, and was taken in a sanatorium or a rest home in nature. The second form was *turizm*, understood as a purposeful physical activity that focused on self-improvement, strengthening one's body and educating oneself. It was meant to not only improve public health but also lead to cultural uplift, creating loyal and patriotic subjects.[2] Tourism, usually confined to domestic tourism to avoid dangerous exposure to foreign places, was there to remind its citizens of the superiority of the socialist system. It also played an integrative role, connecting different places with each other and constructing them as part of a larger homeland (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 39).

Accounts of non-Russian nationalities minimised their particularities and cities were marked as Soviet through the selection of images and recommended tourist routes, focusing for example on monumental buildings in Stalinist-neoclassical styles and sites associated with industrial progress. In this way, even distant and seemingly 'exotic' places were made "part of the central circulatory system of the Soviet Union" (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 39), and multiethnic populations of the Soviet Union were integrated into narratives of a shared Soviet homeland. At the same time, following the principle of national in form, socialist in content, ethnic and cultural differences were also exhibited, "intended as a way of taming these unpredictable places and minorities" (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 41). Historical studies on Soviet internal tourism (cf. Sklokina, 2021, on Ukraine; Gorsuch, 2011, on Estonia) highlight also the agency of local populations and how they used tourism to emphasise their cultural differences and push the boundaries of what was permissible. As Ann Gorsuch argues, this should however not mean losing sight of power relations:

> [I]t was the centre that appropriated Estonia's resources—the oil shale fields but also the Old Town—not Estonia that willingly bestowed them. And it was travellers from the centre who confirmed their sovereignty, even in their admiration, by publishing their accounts of travel in the margins of the central press. (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 78)

[2] The emphasis on purpose did not mean that pleasure was insignificant, but at least initially, it was "the purposeful that was meant to give pleasure" (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 10). Over time Soviet tourism underwent significant changes: gradually it became more experiential and entertaining, more about sun, sand, and sea and shopping, in addition to physical exercise and cultural education (Koenker, 2013).

3.4 Comparing Cities

While reference to the history of Russo-Soviet empire can help to understand shared imperial legacies, we also need to consider the significant differences between the case study locations. Philipp Ther remarks on the differences between post-socialist cities when writing that such scholarly comparisons frequently lead to questions of whether one is comparing "chalk and cheese" (Ther, 2014, p. 176). Indeed, while having been part of the Russian empire and Soviet Union, the destinations are marked by different histories and different post-1991 national trajectories, highlighted by Khromeychuk (2022). These differences are broadly outlined in the table (cf. Fig. 3.1) and will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections. It is precisely because of these differences that the cities have been chosen as fieldwork sites, as they provide insights into patterns of memory-making across the post-imperial space.

	Tallinn	Kyiv	Almaty
History and material heritage	Different Hanseatic heritage, Danish, Livonian, Swedish rule	Similar Tsarist and Soviet heritage, important sights from Kyivan Rus	Similar Founded as Russian imperial fort; sights from Tsarist and Soviet periods
Centre-periphery relations (cf. Laitin, 1998) and place in Russian imaginary	High cultural autonomy (integralist model) Culturally and economically superior	Blurred boundaries, co-optation (most favoured lord model) Comparable economic development Appropriation as part of Russian culture	Subalterns under Russian control (Colonial model) Culturally and economically inferior
Memory politics and geopolitical relations	Antagonistic	Antagonistic - violent conflict	Friendly
Tourism industry	Developed	Developed	Emerging

Fig. 3.1 Differences across the case study cities

Diverse Histories and Centre-Periphery Relations

Among the key distinguishing features between the case study sites are their different histories which have shaped their material heritage (cf. Figs. 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4). Tallinn emerged from a fort built on the Toompea hill around 1050 AD. The city's pre-Russian histories—including Danish (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), Teutonic/Livonian (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), and Swedish rule (1561–1710), as well as the influence of the Baltic Germans—have shaped the material heritage of the historic centre. Particularly in the time between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries the city flourished as it became a significant trading centre of the Hanseatic League. Tallinn's Old Town is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site as it is an "exceptionally complete and well-preserved medieval northern European trading (…) the lower town preserves to a remarkable extent the medieval urban fabric of narrow winding streets, many of which retain their medieval names, and fine public and burgher buildings, including town wall, Town Hall, pharmacy, churches, monasteries, merchants' and craftsmen' guilds, and the domestic architecture of the merchants' houses" (UNESCO, 2024).

In contrast to Tallinn's 'European' histories, Ukraine shares a long and entangled history with Russia. Officially founded in 482 BC, Kyiv acquired significance as the capital of the medieval Kyivan Rus, the first East Slav state, between 879 and 1249. Several significant heritage sites in the city are associated with this period, including St Sophia's Cathedral, St Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery, St Andrew's Church, the Cave monastery, as well as the city's Golden Gates. The Ukrainian nation claims successorship to the Kyivan Rus, and the period is treated today as a Golden Age for the city. At the same time, Kyivan Rus formed an important myth of origin for Russia, contrasted to its Mongol past, and later on, informing a particular imperial understanding of Russian nationhood that included today's Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians along with russified elites with non-Slavic background (Plokhy, 2017, p. ix).[3] Alongside this heritage, much of Kyiv's urban landscape has been shaped during Russian imperial and Soviet rule, particularly the history of *fin-de-siecle* Kyiv is significant due to the richly decorated *Dokhodnye Doma* (apartment houses) that dominate the inner city.

[3] The idea of East Slav unity and the assumption that Ukraine's history and culture is an integral part of a broader Russian culture are also mobilised in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine when Ukraine is denied an independent history and nationhood.

Figs. 3.2–3.4 Cityscapes of Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty, reflecting their different histories. Top left: Tallinn (Source: Juho Luomala, Unsplash), top right: Kyiv (Source: Glib Albovsky, Unsplash), bottom: Almaty (Source: White Noiise, Pexels)

Almaty has a much younger history than Tallinn and Kyiv. While archaeological finds have identified traces of settlements dating back to the Bronze Age, the foundations of the city were laid by the Russian empire. The imperial city of Vernyi (Almaty's name until 1921) developed out of an imperial fort, built in 1854, in the context of the colonisation of nomadic tribes known as the Kazakh khanate by Tsarist Russia from the late eighteenth century onwards (cf. Ubiria, 2015, pp. 49–51). An earthquake destroyed most of the city in 1887, and as a consequence, buildings in the city centre have a more recent history, originating from late Russian imperial rule and the Soviet period when most of the city was built.

Alongside differences in their histories and material heritage, cities have also been shaped by different centre-periphery relations under Russian and Soviet rule and have occupied different places within Russian popular perception. Laitin's (1998) distinction between three different patterns of Russian state control that spanned Tsarist and Soviet rule provides a useful entry point to understand these differences (see also Toal, 2017, p. 59). According to Laitin's model, Estonia was characterised by a high cultural autonomy (*integralist model*), while in Ukraine elites had rights and privileges, similar to those of the centre, thus meaning that the country was on comparatively more equal political terms with the centre (*most favoured lord model*). In contrast, Kazakhstan followed a colonial model as subalterns under Russian control (*colonial model*).

The territory of Estonia was conquered by Peter I in the early eighteenth century. Despite integration in the structure of imperial Russian administration, the Baltic provinces did not become completely russified after Russia's victory in the Great Northern War—Estland like the other provinces in the region retained a certain autonomy during the Russian empire, and the Russian rulers confirmed the rights and privileges of the Baltic German nobility as the Swedes before them had done (Hosking, 1997, pp. 35–36). While russification policies in the Baltic Provinces during late Tsarist rule sought to diminish German dominance (cf. Raun, 2001; Thaden et al., 1981), Germans continued to exercise local political hegemony until the establishment of an independent Estonia in the aftermath of World War I and the Russian revolution. The region's different history also manifested itself in higher literacy rates and higher levels of economic development that were also apparent during Soviet rule. Unlike Ukraine and Kazakhstan, Estonia was forcefully annexed and incorporated into the Soviet Union, after a 20-year period of independence, following the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Different historical traditions,

advanced development and consumer cultures meant that "Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians under the Soviet rule felt themselves superior to Russians" (Annus, 2012, p. 346). This superiority was widely acknowledged in Soviet popular culture (Annus, 2012, p. 346; cf. Gorsuch, 2011) and coexisted with pejorative assumptions about Estonia as a peasant nation and the modernising and enlightening role of Russo-Soviet rule, narratives that can be found also among today's tourists.

Laitin's model, which assumes Ukraine to be historically on comparatively equal terms with the centre, is problematic as it glosses over unequal power relations. At the same time, he rightly notes the blurring of ethnic boundaries including successful incorporation of elites during the Tsarist and Soviet periods. Co-optation, as Laitin points out, was relatively easy due to the proximity of the languages and similar levels of development (Laitin, 1998, p. 65) and was beneficial for Ukrainians as it meant access to power and resources. At the same time, there was a hierarchy inscribed in the relation between Ukrainian and Russian cultures. While the USSR recognised Ukrainians as separate nationality and sought to promote Ukrainian culture together with other national cultures, already in 1930, less favourable attitudes emerged. Ukrainian nationalism was condemned, and official historiography began to perpetuate the idea of Russian and Ukrainian cultural and historical unity, making "any talk of Ukrainian uniqueness more subversive than was the case with the other, non-Slavic nationalities" (Tolz, 2001, p. 221; cf. Plokhy, 2017). Ukrainians then were closer to Russians than other nations but, as Tolz (2001) notes, from a Russian perspective, Ukraine has been either appropriated as part of Russian culture, denying an existence of separate Ukrainian traditions. Alternatively, it has been seen as inferior to a (Europeanised) Russian culture, captured in the understanding of Ukraine as a 'peasant nation'.

In comparison to Estonia and Ukraine, Kazakhstan resembled most closely a colonial model and was treated as a subaltern territory different from other regions (Laitin, 1998, p. 65). Tsarist rule was characterised by exploitation and exclusion of steppe nomads as second-class imperial subjects. The nomads were regarded as *inorodtsy* (aliens, non-Russian/Slavic population), an inferior legal status conveying their difference and 'unassimilability' in comparison to other subjects of imperial rule (Dave, 2007, p. 30). The Bolsheviks subsequently classified the nomadic groups as oppressed and culturally backwards and targeted them with compensatory nation-building and developmental policies, actively constructing the

Kazakh nation (Dave, 2007; Ubiria, 2015).[4] The attempts to redress the wrongs of colonialism through modernisation policies however perpetuated the idea of Soviet Russia as superior imperial nation. As Dave writes:

> Nomads and the Muslims were seen as lacking a history, a record of material and cultural achievements, and categorized as the "most backward people" (*ranee otstalye narody*), "people without scripts" (*bespis'mennye narody)*. By taking on a role as champions of the "oppressed" nations and classes, the Bolsheviks exaggerated the dichotomy between the supposed lack of cultural and material achievements of these groups and the high modernist developmental objectives espoused by the Soviet state. (Dave, 2007, pp. 21–22)

More than in Estonia and Ukraine, colonial practices based on established concepts of backwardness, passivity, and dependence that perpetuated cultural superiority of Russians persisted in Kazakhstan (cf. Sarkisova, 2017, pp. 162–198, on the articulation of centre-periphery relations in cultural representations).

Historical studies show us how tourism contributed to constituting these different patterns of centre-periphery relations. For example, as Layton shows, Russian imperial tourism to non-Slavic territories such as the Caucasus perpetuated imperial stereotypes and assumptions about Russia's civilising mission (Layton, 2021). Following familiar stereotypes, natives were framed as exotic savages, lazy or tricksters on whom Russia bestowed the gift of civilisation. While the state's project to modernise and civilise the periphery was embraced by some travellers, others craved authenticity and adopted a romantic view of a pre-capitalist other. In comparison, the empire's Western borderlands tended to be seen as 'our West' by the metropole. The city of Reval (Tallinn's historical name until 1918) promised an authentic European experience with a romanticised medieval landscape. Rationalising their sense of backwardness vis-à-vis European cultural wealth and scientific progress, Russians used the empire as a mechanism of compensation, taking pride in their possessions of a vast

[4] Efforts were also made in eradicating illiteracy and developing national cadres, while at the same time fighting against traditional social institutions and practices that stood in the way of the creation of modern and secular nations. The modernising policies came at a very high price for the nomadic populations of the steppe, eradicating traditional customs, institutions, and communities, as well as causing suffering and loss of human life, exacerbated by the persecution of the local intelligentsia during the Stalinist terror.

continental empire that placed them in one club together with European colonial powers (Layton, 2021, p. 27). Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a shift in emphasis as travellers framed destinations not so much as different from Russia and enhancing its diversity but as an integral part of the Russian state. Imagining the empire in increasingly nationalistic terms, the Baltic region became more Russian and was perceived as backward in comparison to modern St Petersburg (cf. Brüggemann, 2018).

Trajectories of Nation-Building, Memory Politics, and Geopolitical Repositioning

Alongside different histories and historical centre-periphery relations, the case studies are also shaped by diverse trajectories of nation-building, memory politics, and relations to Russia after 1991. The break-up of the Soviet Union was followed by intense contestations over territory, minority rights, geopolitical orientations, and the interpretation of the past, both within the independent nation-states that were created in place of the Soviet Union's national republics and between these states, particularly in relation to Russia. This reconfiguration can be understood as process of nationalisation, directed at filling the states "with national content, bringing population, territory, culture and polity into the close congruence that defines a fully realized nation-state" (Brubaker, 2011, p. 1786). It also affected the material environments of the case study cities, where new buildings and monuments have been erected and old ones removed, street names have been altered, and new museums added to the city's heritage landscape. Again, there are significant differences across post-Soviet states in the intensity and form of nationalisation, memory politics, and relations to Russia (cf. Brubaker, 2011; Laitin, 1998; Kudaibergenova, 2020).

The break with the Soviet past and geopolitical reorientation—framed as 'return to Europe'—has been particularly pronounced in the Baltic states, including Estonia where the 50 years of Soviet rule were declared an 'illegal occupation'. In contrast to other post-Soviet states, Estonia could look back at a history of independence that was present in the living memory of many of its citizens. Declaring its independence, the focus for Estonia lay on the *restoration* of statehood and the return to the pre-war republic, mitigating the negative influences of the Soviet period as well as reintegrating Estonia into the West, based on its earlier historical

connections (cf. Pettai, 2007; Budrytė, 2005, pp. 65–101; Smith et al., 1998).[5] In terms of foreign policy, Estonia sought integration into the Western camp, joining NATO and the European Union in 2004 and refusing to be part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) created as a successor organisation in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Nation-building processes and memory politics in Ukraine and Kazakhstan have been more complex and contradictory. In contrast to Estonia, Ukraine initially "lacked a clear path […] toward separation from the USSR" (Shevel, 2014, p. 147). Blurred ethnic boundaries and significant regional divisions in Ukraine complicated the political reorientation post-1991. Opinions regarding the adaptation of nationalisation policies, interpretation of the past and geopolitical orientation of the country, diverged along regional divides between Russian-speaking south-east and Ukrainian-speaking centre-west. While scholarly analysis has highlighted the complexity of Ukrainian identities beyond a simple regional division in two parts (Riabchuk, 2003, 2015; Shevel, 2014), it would be wrong to downplay the role of internal differences in organising Ukrainian society, at least until relatively recently. In this divided society, memory has been instrumentally used by politicians "as instruments of division, rather than consensus" (Portnov, 2013, p. 248), preventing the development of a consistent Ukrainian narrative. Political changes have gone hand in hand with changes in memory politics: while President Kuchma's approach (1994–2005) tried to balance between the positions, the Orange Revolution in 2004–2005 polarised society into a nationally conscious western part and a hybrid/pro-Russian eastern part and brought a rise of nationalist and pro-Western forces. This was replaced again by a pro-Russian tendency under Yanukovich (2010–2014), which was interrupted by the 2013 Euromaidan movement. However, scholars have noted that divisions are increasingly overcome in the face of Russian aggression. The Euromaidan protests led to a strengthening and institutionalisation of memory focused on resistance and victimhood, and contested issues such as the memory of the Organisation of Ukrainian

[5] This was perceived as particularly important in the context of the large number of Russian-speakers from other Soviet Republics, who by the late 1980s made up for almost one third of Estonia's population, causing a fear of denationalisation and loss of Estonian language.

Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army[6] have been popularised as part of an anti-Soviet and anti-imperial memory (Budrytė, 2021; Siddi, 2017; Zhurzhenko, 2021).

In Kazakhstan, nationalisation has been comparatively weak, as the country has sought close and friendly relations with Russia.[7] Ambiguous national narratives have combined an inclusive civic nationalism that promotes equal rights for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, with the promotion of ethnic Kazakhs as a core ethnic group of the nation (Laruelle, 2016; Sharipova et al., 2017). While the multiethnic character of the state is regularly emphasised in official speeches and media representations, there are several important examples showing an emphasis on ethnic Kazakhs as a core ethnicity and on Kazakh ethnic heritage. Memory politics has focused on 'rediscovering' the ancient roots of the Kazakh nation and discussing the colonial dimensions of Russian and Soviet rule (Kudaibergenova, 2016; Kundakbayeva & Kassymova, 2016; Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023). At the same time, Soviet and imperial pasts as well as histories of earlier nationhood compete for the imagination of the Kazakh national community (Bekus, 2017; Norris, 2012), and are indicative of the failure to completely break with the socialist past (Bekus, 2021).

The different forms of nationalisation have also been reflected in different mnemonic relations with Russia: antagonistic in the case of Estonia and Ukraine, and friendly in the case of Kazakhstan. Russia has itself undergone significant changes over the past decade. Different from other post-Soviet states, Russia could not detach itself from the Soviet past or the imperial history, as it did not have a history of national independence and a national identity founded in a period other than the imperial past. Defining itself as a successor state of the Soviet Union, Russia saw itself as a guarantor of security and stability in the region and wanted to protect its status as a geopolitical power, as well as a positive memory of the Soviet

[6] Together with the memory of the Holodomor, an artificial famine in 1932 and 1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians, the memory of two wartime nationalist underground organisations, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which collaborated with the Nazis in the killing of Ukrainian Jews and the ethnic cleansing of Polish villages in Volhynia and Galicia, has been the subject of intense political debates in Ukraine and in Ukraine's relation with Russia (Siddi, 2017; Yurchuk, 2017).

[7] Kazakhstan not only joined the Commonwealth of Independent States but also became a member of the Eurasian Economic Union launched in 2015. The political proximity also became evident when protests erupted in Almaty in January 2022 that threatened the political stability of the country; President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev could rely on Putin's help to preserve his power (Andechi, 2022).

past and victory in World War II. Especially with the beginning of Putin's third presidency (2012), Russia has used civilisational and nationalist narratives to support "imperial 'holding together' strategies" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017, p. 106). Particularly with Estonia and (since the Euromaidan Uprising) with Ukraine, memory conflicts have heated up, becoming increasingly politicised and securitised. References to fascism have been used in Russia as a powerful tool for constructing a sense of existential threat. By condemning (neo)fascism in the Baltic States and Ukraine, Russia has positioned itself as defender of European values and can relive its 'geopolitical triumph' of its victory against Nazi Germany (Gaufman, 2023; Zhurzhenko, 2007). Russia has also repeatedly used memories of empire to legitimise the confrontation with Ukraine, denying the existence of a Ukrainian nation (Snyder, 2022). In contrast to Estonia and Ukraine, mnemonic relations between Russia and Kazakhstan have remained largely friendly. Memories of Tsarist and Soviet rule have not obtained the same negative colouring in Kazakhstan, even though in the context of the war on Ukraine, discussions on Russian and Soviet colonialism have gained some traction, showing frictions in the mnemonic relations with Russia.

Established, Reconfigured, Emerging: Post-Soviet Tourism Industries

At the same time as former Soviet states engaged in nationalising processes, they also sought to reorganise their economies, transitioning to capitalist market economies that also affected organisation of the tourism industry (Hall, 1991; Rozite & Klepers, 2012, p. 61). This process involved integration into international tourism markets, modernisation of tourism infrastructures, and an increase in institutional capacity, often with the help of foreign investors. Alongside the historical and contemporary differences mentioned above, there are significant differences in the development of tourism industries in the three case study cities: Tallinn and Kyiv's tourism industries are well-established; in comparison, Almaty is a more recent and emerging destination. Figure 3.5 shows the numbers of total arrivals in the three countries, which also need to be seen in the context of the size and population numbers. Kazakhstan's territory is 60 times larger as Estonia's, and its population almost 14 times larger.

The tourism sector in Estonia has a long history going back to the Russian empire with the nobility enjoying spa tourism on the Baltic Sea

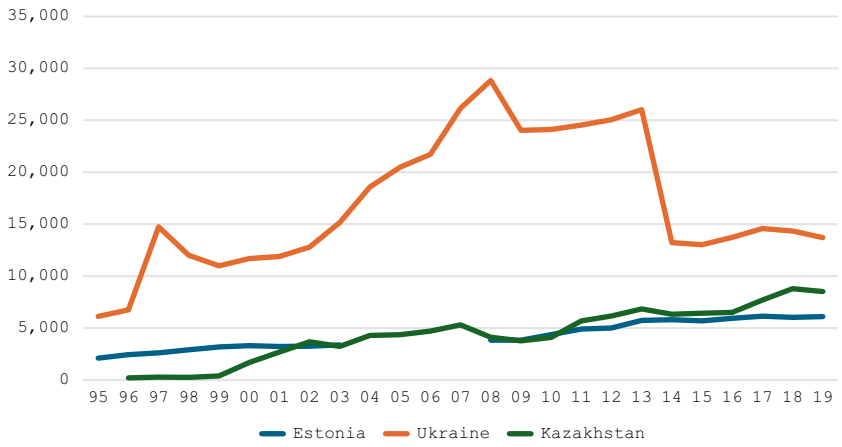

Fig. 3.5 Inbound tourism to Estonia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan (in thousands, based on total arrivals) (Data: UNWTO, 2022)

coast. After 1991, it quickly developed and turned towards European and American visitors. In 1994 only 0.2 per cent of all visitors came from Russia due to the economic crisis in Russia and the newly introduced visa regime, leading to the conclusion that "with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the geography of Estonian tourism with reference to Russia has taken a 180° U-turn from East (Russia) to West (Europe)" (Jaakson, 1996, p. 623). However, the number of Russian tourists slowly recovered and became a significant part of a diverse customer base, the second largest group of foreign travellers, and one specifically targeted in tourism promotion.

While countries such as Estonia turned westwards, others remained oriented towards the Russian market. Until the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas in 2014, Russian tourists were the main group of foreign visitors to Kyiv. With the violence between Russia and Ukraine, the cancellation of direct flights between Russian airports and Kyiv, and the upgrading of border security in late 2018, the Russian market plummeted, leading to a diversification of Kyiv's tourist base. In terms of numbers, Russians were surmounted by Belarusians, Israelis, Americans, and Germans. Russians had, however, by no means ceased to travel to Kyiv. At the time of the fieldwork, they still made up over 10 per cent of international visitors.

Unlike Estonia and Ukraine, Kazakhstan did not inherit a developed tourism infrastructure from the Soviet state (Werner, 2003). Since 1991 attempts have been made to expand and diversify the industry as part of a national strategy to diversify Kazakhstan's oil- and resource-based economy (cf. Werner, 2003). In 2017, Kazakhstan created a special committee on tourism industry under the Ministry of Sport and Culture which highlighted a need for the development of ecotourism and adventure tourism including promotion of ethnic heritage as well as better marketing of the Silk Road brand. Almaty is one of ten national priority sites for tourism development. At the time of the fieldwork, city authorities had launched ambitious plans to develop Almaty as a base for a mountain tourism cluster (Almaty Mountain cluster project) as well as developing existing city attractions and building new ones linked to Kazakh ethnic heritage in order to increase the city's attractiveness (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought out to map key contextual factors that structure memory-making in Russian tourism encounters, showing not only a complex and fraught landscape, characteristic for post-imperial contexts, but also one characterised by significant historical and contemporary differences between the case study cities. I have particularly highlighted the cities' different histories and material heritage, historical centre-periphery relations, as well as differences in post-1991 nation-building, memory politics, and relations to Russia.

That post-Soviet cities have until recently been among the favourite destinations for Russian tourists has not only to do with their vicinity but also the shared history, cultural proximity, and intimate connections between Russia and the former Soviet republics created during centuries of Tsarist and Soviet rule. The Russo-Soviet empire has left a mark in the architecture and urban landscapes of cities, in local practices including the widespread use of Russian language as a lingua franca, as well as shared cultural and historical experiences that remain significant today. Taken together, these legacies create a landscape of traces and room for connections and projection among Russian tourists. At the same time, as this chapter has outlined, the relations between Russia and its neighbours have been characterised by significant violence, power inequalities, and ethnic and racial hierarchies, which have become, with different intensity, subject of memory conflicts. The subsequent chapters will provide a detailed

analysis of forms and patterns of remembering in Russian tourism in the three cities. I will start with an overview of memory-making in tourism promotions and guided city tours, before discussing nostalgia, the production and consumption of national difference, and the memory of difficult pasts as key modes of remembering.

CHAPTER 4

Tour Guiding as Business and Practice

4.1 Introduction

One of the questions that interested me most when I first embarked on the research for this book was whether tourism industries in post-Soviet cities conveyed new national memory narratives to Russian tourists. With tourism being one of the main arenas for the circulation of cultural memories, did it form an opportunity to communicate one's own interpretation of the past to visitors after the Soviet control had been lifted? Or did market logics dominate, and the tourism industry glossed over memory conflicts and presented the shared past in a positive light? I was equally interested in what stories tourists were told during their visits and how they were told: what language was used, how were they structured, and what, if any, adjustments were made to different groups of tourists.

The literature provides us with a contradictory picture on the production of cultural memories in tourism that can be summarised as different takes on the relation between identity politics and market principles. Scholars have analysed how identity politics and the economy work together in tourism promotion. Literature on place-branding has shown how cities compete to attract diverse international publics such as investors, migrants, scholars, and tourists who can bring their economic, social, and symbolic capital to a place (Aronczyk, 2013; Kaneva, 2011; Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023). Place-branding involves "creating, sustaining, and shaping a favourable place identity" (Boisen et al., 2018, p. 5). It is an

A. Pfoser, *Tourism as Memory-Making*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83738-8_4

economic tool that directly draws on identities and cultural memories to create a distinct and unique image which is then projected to external audiences. Studies have also looked at how these identities reshape the perception of Self and Other, for example by revitalising and reinforcing neglected national traditions at home (Pawłusz & Polese, 2017, pp. 866–867). In the post-Soviet region, place-branding projects have been in line with the national reshaping of identities and cultural memories in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union (Young & Light, 2001; Forest & Johnson, 2002; Diener & Hagen, 2013; Flynn et al., 2014; Vlasenko & Ryan, 2024). They have marked a break from a negatively associated socialist past, seen as an aberration from the normal path of development. Pre-socialist histories and traditions and new national symbols have been used to project a new national image to the international community (Pawłusz & Polese, 2017; Kaneva, 2011; Dzenovska, 2005).

At the same time, scholars have also emphasised the tensions between identity politics and the economy, highlighting the dissonant character of cultural memory production in post-socialist and post-imperial cities. International tourists are often interested in pasts that are at odds with national identity politics: Light (2000) highlights the tensions between an emphasis on new national narratives and Western tourists' interests in the socialist heritage that cities want to leave behind. Transnational demands such as Jewish heritage tourism can also contribute to tensions and contestations (Murzyn, 2008; Lehrer, 2013). Dissonances have also been observed in Western tourism to former colonies (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008), as tourism promotion regularly builds on established images of exoticism and otherness to cater to tourists' desires. As a consequence, the representation of destinations (Bryce, 2007), as well as the staging of hotels and other tourism spaces (Kothari, 2015; Peleggi, 2005), reproduces colonial patterns. Based on his analysis of the commercial re-launch of colonial-era grand hotels in South-East Asia, Peleggi argues that "in the name of development, the hospitality industry is afforded some leeway with regard to national history" (Peleggi, 2005, p. 264). Similarly, Light (2007) and Bryce and Čaušević (2019) note how branding campaigns can perpetuate orientalist and Balkanist stereotypes in post-socialist countries, such as the Dracula myth in Transylvania or the construction of Ottoman heritage as non-European.

The following chapters of the book will illuminate the production of memory in the post-Soviet tourism industries in detail, discussing key

modes and patterns of remembering in Russian tourism. This chapter starts this analysis by introducing guided city tours as a popular tourism offer. Situating city tours in the context of the wider tourism industry and official promotional narratives, I identify key characteristics of guides' work and principles of memory-making on the tour. Following Diener and Hagen's call to dedicate more attention to "processes through which symbolic meanings and ideological objectives are embedded, diverted, or subverted by bodily practices" (Diener & Hagen 2013, p. 508), I show the significance of the service orientation of commercial tours as well as conventions of the genre, material environment, and audiences in shaping memory-making. I argue that the guided tour is a flexible performance created in interaction with material environment and audiences; rather than solely conveying national narratives, or siding with audience expectations, tour guiding combines different elements and is characterised by ideological flexibility and indeterminacy.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the business of tour guiding in the context of the post-1991 deregulation of the sector. I identify ideas of providing a good service and having a passion for the job as key elements of tour guides' work. I then situate tour guiding in wider context of a restructured tourism industry. This is followed by an analysis of key principles of memory-making on the tour, examining how guides work with space, particular sites, and audiences. I conclude with a reflection on characteristics of commercial tour guiding at the intersection of identity politics and the economy.

4.2 The Business of Tour Guiding: Passionate Service Providers in a Changing Industry

Guided city tours are an important part of cities' touristic infrastructure. As a basic format of sightseeing, they are attractive to those visiting a destination for the first time but also to visitors who want to gain deeper insights into a city and its history. New formats such as bicycle or Segway tours, culinary tours, tours focusing on legends or ghost stories, and tours for children have been recently added to the tourism offer; such diversified forms of guiding can be seen as part of the differentiation of the industry and particularly the rise of tourism as an experience economy (cf. Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Prentice, 2001). Guided tours are expected to provide reliable information about a city but do so in particular ways: they involve

movement through the city, allowing tourists to experience history in situ. Through specific narrative and bodily practices, guided tours animate urban landscapes, sights, and streets, and transform them into "spatially and thematically structured arrangements of historical knowledge" (Hochbruck & Schlehe, 2014, p. 8, as cited in Stach, 2021, p. 78). Traditionally, city tours had the reputation of conveying information in a dry, didactic way. Their new popularity can also be explained by the fact that tours increasingly aim to address people in an emotional-experiential way. More than other media of remembering, they provide lively, intimate, and 'authentic' insights into cities, seeking to move tourists and immerse them in the local culture and history drawing on first-hand local experiences (cf. Stach, 2021; Feldman & Skinner, 2018).

As noted earlier, there were important differences in the development of the tourism markets in the three cities— at the time of the fieldwork in summer 2019, Almaty's tourism market was only emerging, while Tallinn and Kyiv had mature markets, with the latter undergoing significant restructuring since the beginning of the Donbas war. These differences were also visible in the guided tour offers. In the case of Tallinn, it was hard to overlook the popularity of guided walking tours in the Old Town: guides with badges, colourful hats, umbrellas, or mascots on sticks were followed by small and large groups of tourists, crowding some of the centre's characteristic narrow lanes. Tour guiding was a vibrant business that provided income for several hundred guides. Two free walking tours in English were offered every day. In addition, several drop-in tours in Russian language started on the city's central Town Hall Square, prebooked tours including in Russian language were advertised in the tourism information centre and on webpages, and the cruise ships, which every day brought several thousand passengers to the city, offered guided tours including in Russian to their passengers.

The frequency of encountering guided tours in Kyiv was lower, as the city's historical centre stretched over several neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, tour guiding was a thriving industry. Already in 2018, the overall numbers of tourists visiting the city had bounced back to the level of before the Euromaidan protests with 850,000 yearly visitors, even though fighting was continuing in the Donbas area. While English and German were now popular languages of guided tours, among all tourist groups there was a substantial number of native Russian speakers, from Belarus, the Baltic States, Germany, and Israel, among others. Although their numbers were significantly smaller than previously, Russians also

continued to travel to Kyiv. On a typical day, Russian-speaking visitors could choose between tours offered by several dozens of firms from morning until late at night.

In Almaty, guided city tours were less common. Most tours on offer were bus tours taking customers to nature reserves outside of the city. Tours to the city's attractions, heritage, and history were mostly prebooked bus tours by already established groups of tourists. Initiatives offering walking tours had been established only recently: a group of Russian-speaking female entrepreneurs had been offering thematic tours since 2018, focusing for example on the city during Russian imperial rule and the history of the local space industry, which were usually attended by a combination of locals and tourists. Three further companies had started their businesses in spring 2019, four months before the data collection, benefitting from the pedestrianisation of parts of the city centre, the area of the 'Golden Square' where many historical buildings are located.

The differences in the development of the tour guiding sector also affected the work available for tour guides, as well as how they oriented themselves: in Almaty, guiding was mostly a part-time job or a hobby, while in Kyiv and Tallinn, several guides worked as full-time tourism professionals. In Kyiv, several guides had used the drop in Russian tourists to prepare new specialised tours in Russian and Ukrainian languages; some of them also offered tours for locals. Despite these differences, there were remarkable similarities in the organisation of tour guiding: in all three cities tour guiding was a deregulated sector, with little to no state interference, driven by the idea of providing a 'good service'.

During the Soviet period, tour guiding used to be highly regulated—both in terms of its organisation and the ideological control exerted on guides. Guides worked for state organisations including *Inturist*, the Central Administration of Foreign Tourism under the USSR Council of Ministers, or *Sputnik*, a state travel agency created in 1958 to deal with international youth tourism. These organisations provided secure and stable work, which was fairly divided between guides. Malle, one of the few guides in Tallinn who had started her work during the Soviet period, recalled:

> [T]here was a state agency which ran the courses (…) they were paid for and had a different structure than today. Now this is pure entrepreneurship of private individuals. (CS1-Tour guide interview 8, 28.06.2019)

Guides needed to attend courses run by state companies, pass exams, and get accreditation; as part of this process, guides had to submit their written lectures for review, which were then scrutinised for factual and ideological correctness (cf. Koenker, 2013, p. 80). A tour guide in Kyiv who started working for the Bureau of International Youth Tourism of the Komsomol of Ukraine, when she was 16 years old, remembered:

> We were expected to extol the Soviet ideology. (…) When you were leading a sightseeing tour, you needed to show photographs of the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, or the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, who are connected with Kyiv, who come from Kyiv. There were a lot of Ukrainians in the leadership of the Communist Party. Further, when I drove past the arsenal, I always showed photographs of those who fought against the Central Council, participants in the January Uprising of 1918 [a Bolshevik armed uprising during the Soviet-Ukrainian war]. (CS2-Tour guide interview 2, 3.07.2019)

While tourism evolved in the Soviet period from an ideological tool of the state towards a mass socialist leisure industry that allowed the presentation of local identities and 'ethnic culture' (Zake, 2018; Gorsuch, 2011), it remained under the strict ideological oversight of the state. This changed after 1991: training courses previously provided by state organisations started to be organised on the private market. Licences for guides, issued by the state, became optional, a marker of quality and a source of pride among guides rather than a necessary professional qualification. In this deregulated context, tour guides were increasingly free to compose their own scripts. Some tour guides could adjust to this new situation, and started to work as freelancers or founded their own company, but many dropped out of the market, partly due to the difficulties to adapt to the new system and the nationalisation processes. In Tallinn, an experienced Russian-speaking guide remarked about how some Soviet guides were pushed out of the job as guides belonging to the Russian-speaking minority needed to show Estonian language skills to be able to continue to work. Training courses were also held in Estonian, and guides could not obtain a licence without knowledge of the language. In Kyiv, generational change was named as the main reason why guides from the Soviet period dropped out of the business, although a number of those working today still had experience under the old system. In Almaty, due to the relatively

recent development of the tourism industry, guides were comparatively young, and almost all of them had started work in the industry after 1991.

The deregulated and commercial character of the capitalist tourism industry in the former Soviet republics was reflected not just in guides' employment situation but also their self-positioning, with guides seeing themselves as flexible and dynamic service workers. Guides worked either for private tourism companies or as freelancers, although the boundary between the two was blurred, as in many instances freelancers also worked with tourism companies, often several at a time. In addition to gaining work through companies, freelancers routinely used Internet platforms such as *Tripster*, *Tourister*, *Excursio*, *Tonkostitourisma.ru*, and *Tripadvisor*. Social media such as Instagram and Facebook were also used to advertise their services, alongside professional and personal networks based on recommendations. Self-employed guides particularly emphasised the need to build a positive reputation, getting positive reviews on social media, ensuring that clients returned, and recommended the guides to family and friends for further business. Both freelance guides and those working for tour companies shared a strong orientation towards the dynamics of the tourist market, as well as the preferences and demands of the clients. As two guides explained:

> In many ways, a successful job depends on how satisfied your tourists are. (…) We are service workers, we work in the service sector. And I am fully aware of this. I'm not a university professor, I'm a service worker. (CS2-Tour Guide Interview 17, 6.08.2019)

> An excursion is not just about the historical part, it's much more than that. I believe that when we talk about the ideal service, it is about giving a person more. (CS2-Tour guide interview 2, 3.07.2019)

Alongside the service orientation, tour guides also emphasised that they perceived their work as a vocation—a calling rather than solely a profession. Many guides in the three cities had at least initially worked in another job, often unrelated to tourism, and gradually moved into guiding due to their passion for local history and/or travelling. When asked to reflect about their work, guides used expressions such as "I love my work" and "job for my soul", with some indicating that devotion and pleasure were equally important than the money they were paid for their work. The discourse of 'love' was also used in relation to the city, with many tour guides

positioning themselves as local patriots and passionate historians who sought to share their knowledge and enthusiasm.

It is important to note that most guides offering Russian-language tours in Almaty and Tallinn belonged to the local Russophone minority, and in many cases were ethnic Russians. Although in Estonia Russian speakers were usually brought up with narratives associated with Russian cultural memory, living and working (and going to school) in Estonia, guides had become familiar—and often explicitly aligned themselves—with Estonian narratives.[1] Interviewed tour guides did not position themselves as members of a discriminated minority but as professionals with distinct assets, language, and cultural skills who possessed a particular transnational sensibility, an awareness of cultural memories of both tourists and hosts. In Almaty, where the Russian language was associated with higher prestige and Russian speakers locally constituted a majority, Russian-speaking tour guides expressed a natural confidence in speaking for the city and being its 'face'. In comparison national and language categories were more complex and blurred in Kyiv. Most tour guides were fluent bilinguals, often offering tours in both Ukrainian and Russian. Only one of the interviewed tour guides identified as Russian, although many reported family relations to Russia.

4.3 Deregulation and Nation-Branding: Situating Tour Guiding in the Wider Tourism Industry

Tour guides in the three cities operated in a wider context of a restructured tourism industry that after 1991 involved privatisation and internationalisation. Destinations were integrated into international tourism markets and had to compete for visitors and resources with other destinations. The restructuring also led to a modernisation of the industry, supported by international companies and investors who helped to build the first large business class hotels in post-Soviet cities (Rozite & Klepers 2012, p. 63; Hall, 1991). The changes also had an ideological dimension:

[1] In Estonia, Russian speakers make up more than a quarter of the population, living in Estonia largely as a result of Soviet-era industrialisation and russification attempts. Their status after the break-up of the Soviet Union has been hotly contested: they have been denied automatic citizenship rights in independent Estonia and are seen to undermine the stability of the national community. Research has however shown the diversification of narratives among this population (Pfoser, 2014; Cheskin, 2013; Cheskin & Kachuyevski, 2019).

they showed that post-Soviet states were ready to join the international community and allowed them to communicate new national identities to foreign audiences. Promotional campaigns presented destinations in a positive way, highlighting their distinctiveness including their ancient national traditions and local and regional heritage prior to the Tsarist and Soviet periods.

Analysing Estonian tourism campaigns, Pawłusz and Polese note "a well-defined attempt to establish the legitimacy and 'authenticity' of pre-Soviet identities and to link them symbolically to the post-Soviet time" (Pawłusz & Polese, 2017, p. 874). Focusing on ancient culture and traditions, Estonian nation-branding has used culture as "a validation and anchor of the nation's ancientness, timelessness, and, therefore, Europeanness before the Soviet invasion" (Pawłusz & Polese, 2017, p. 879). This was also evident in Tallinn's tourism promotion, where national and European memories and identity narratives based on the city's 'European' Hanseatic heritage dominated brochures and webpages. Together, with an emphasis on folk heritage and handicrafts and Tallinn's character as a vibrant and modern destination, this heritage worked to signal the city's national identity and European outlook.

Historical and cultural heritage were also central to Kyiv's image, in particular the city's ancient history and its role as a spiritual centre. The declared goal of Kyiv's tourism development programme was to firmly establish the Brand "Kyiv—the city, where everything begins" as well as Kyiv's image as "the birthplace of Slavic spirituality" (Kyiv City Council, 2018, p.7): a brand image that was also evident in the centrality of Kyiv's churches and the Cave monastery in marketing materials. Heritage was used to emphasise the city's wider regional significance while drawing on Ukrainian symbols and identity narratives (cf. Fomenko, 2023). This included the assumption that Ukraine statehood dated back to the medieval Kyivan Rus and the idea of Ukraine as a European country—one that is "peaceful, a victim of past foreign incursions, different in political culture to Russia, with a tradition of democratic institutions, and a long history that legitimizes its independent statehood" (Kuzio, 2002, p. 52, as cited in Vlasenko & Ryan, 2024, p. 255).

Almaty's official tourism promotion has also deemphasised the imperial and Soviet past. However, it has focused less on history and heritage than on the promotion of nature-based tourism in the city's surroundings and the city's significance as a financial and cultural centre. In recent years, tourism managers have also started to promote Kazakh ethnohistories

based on ancient legends and nomadic heritage (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023). In line with the nationalisation processes at the national level, Almaty adopted a city logo incorporating traditional Kazakh patterns and colours as well as an apple as a traditional symbol of the city. Moreover, the city administration had plans to develop ethnic tourism, through a newly established artisan centre Qazaq Oner and the building of an 'ethno-city', both dedicated to Kazakhstan's traditional (nomadic) heritage. At the time of the fieldwork, in summer 2019, the 'Kazakhisation' of the city was, however, still at the planning stage rather than being a visible and clear part of city identity.[2]

Despite the emphasis on national symbols and heritage in place-branding initiatives in all three cities, guided city tours presented highly heterogeneous narratives, reflecting the deregulated character of the tourism industry. In conversations with local tourism managers, it also became clear that their concern was more with the creation of a high-quality offer than the ideological oversight of guided tours and whether they projected official memory narratives. A representative of Department of Tourism from the Kyiv city administration noted that "the focus should be first and foremost on what the tourist wants to see" (CS2-Expert Interview 5, 13.08.2019), adding that tourism in Kyiv offers a great variety of activities that cater to different interests such as offering visits to historical heritage sites, museums, and art galleries, experiences of religious tourism, river cruises on the Dnieper, historical reenactments of medieval battles, and excursions to the Chernobyl exclusion zone for which Kyiv is the stop-over. Similarly, while medieval Tallinn was a key attraction, a diversification of the tourism programme was seen as key to an attractive offer that helped Tallinn to defend its position in a competitive market. This included the promotion of food culture and a diverse set of leisure activities, but also sites of socialist and imperial Russian heritage, such as the Kadriorg Park, erected by Peter I, and the nineteenth-century industrial heritage in the Rottermann quarter. Thus, while city branding offered particular memory narratives, tourism offers 'on the ground' provided a more diverse and heterogeneous picture.

This was a result not only of the service orientation of the industry but also of the internal diversity of urban heritage, which had been actively

[2] One of the difficulties in developing this particular trajectory of city branding is Almaty's well-established identity as an imperial Russian settlement and a multinational Soviet capital and a relative lack of Kazakh ethnic narratives (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023).

integrated into tourism offers.[3] Tourism offers also drew on the continuity of urban landscapes, some of them "heavily conditioned by the socialist experience" (Diener & Hagen 2013, p. 503; cf. Bekus, 2017; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008; Vlasenko & Ryan, 2024), as tourism workers needed to work with available mnemonic resources within the city space. The subsequent sections illuminate key principles of memory-making in guided tours, showing how tour guides engaged in the process of mnemonic intermediation (Chap. 2; cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021) by working with the urban space, particular sights, and their audiences. Through this discussion tour guiding emerges as a flexible process that seeks to animate the urban material environment and make it remarkable for visitors.

4.4 Understanding Mnemonic Intermediation on the Tour

Working with Urban Space

All guided walking tours follow certain conventions: they involve a guide who leads a group for a designated time, moving from one location to another and providing information on the way. In contrast to a lecture which is delivered in one piece and involves listening, guided tours rely on a combination of walking and stopping for storytelling, collective gazing, taking pictures, experiencing and interacting with a place (Macdonald, 2006, p. 127). Wynn (2012, pp. 337–338) refers to guided tours as "spatial practice" or as "spatial narrative", acknowledging the centrality of space in tour guiding. Space has a double role in the guided tour: it premediates the narrative account but is also used by tour guides as a medium for storytelling as guides anchor their narrative in sites and use them as "important cultural tools and 'theatres of memory'" (Smith, 2021, p. 28)

[3] For example, the socialist past has been integrated into tourism offers in different ways, including in the form of histories of Soviet occupation, based on tales of victimhood and resistance as in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, or as stories of antifascist resistance, some of which are in line with official narratives of the past. Moreover, heritage professionals in the region often emphasise pluralist attitudes in relation to heritage protection. For example, Riin Alatalu, an expert on Estonian heritage, explained that a greater confidence in relation to its national identity has made the need to tell a particular story about the past less urgent, and meant that heritage protection is characterised by a greater openness towards different historical periods including the preservation of Soviet heritage (personal conversation, 22.06.2016).

that are mobilised to construct and authorise cultural memories and identities.

The urban environment pre-structured the tour in significant ways. As outlined in the previous chapter, the histories of post-Soviet cities differ significantly as cities were founded at different periods in time and developed, shaped by different regional influences, historical events, and periods including the growth of the settlements and their populations but also destructions through wars, earthquakes, or politically motivated urban restructuring. Based on when cities had been built and altered, there was often one or more dominant temporal layers that shaped the urban material environment. Tallinn's medieval history as a significant centre of the Hanseatic League in the thirteenth to sixteenth century is clearly evident in its Old Town, while significant parts of the centre's Upper Town were built under Tsarist rule. In Kyiv, guided tours take tourists through a city shaped by Russian imperial and Soviet rule. In particular, the history of *fin-de-siecle* Kyiv is significant due to the richly decorated *Dokhodnye Doma* (apartment houses) that dominate the inner city. The Stalinist ensemble of the Maidan and Khreshchatyk, Kyiv's central road, are also often mentioned. Another important temporal layer is the Middle Ages, represented by Kyiv's rich churches and monasteries as well as the city's Golden Gates that offer anchors for telling the story of the medieval Kyivan Rus. In Almaty, buildings in the city centre originate from late Russian imperial rule and the Soviet period when most of the city was built. Significant sights include the 1907 built wooden Ascension Cathedral, the Abay Opera House, built in 1941, and Jambyl Kazakh State Philharmonic from 1936, both Stalinist empire style, as well as the Memorial of Glory, commemorating the Great Patriotic War. While city promotion also used this material urban heritage as mnemonic resource, tour guides were less selective as they had to work closely with the urban environments on their routes. Although city branding in Kyiv and Almaty had deemphasised Russian and Soviet histories, most walking tours spent significant time talking about these histories due to their dominance in the urban environments (cf. Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023).

On the other hand, it is important to note that city spaces are complex and multi-layered and could be used by tour guides to convey a range of different narratives. Despite the dominance of some temporal layers, urban centres are what Tim Edensor calls "heterogeneous tourist spaces" (Edensor, 2001, pp. 63–64). Unlike enclavic tourist spaces, which are carefully planned and managed spaces, heterogeneous tourist spaces have multiple functions and characteristics. Tourists, residents, passers-by, and

workers mingle in them; they include shops, offices, and residential buildings alongside sights and are characterised by "an unplanned bricolage of structures and designs" (Edensor, 2001, pp. 63–64). This heterogeneity is also reflected in the co-existence of multiple temporalities in the city space that provide the basis for temporally diverse and complex tour narratives.

Guides used two sets of mnemonic practices when working with urban space: practices of spatial manoeuvring and practices of storytelling. Firstly, as choreographers and pathfinders, tour guides selected routes and structured the rhythm of the tour. As part of their training when obtaining their licence or working for a company, tour guides learnt standard routes through the city centre using a script. While less experienced tour guides continued to draw on these pre-established narratives, most guides had developed their own tours, selecting suitable routes and stops on the way. The tours usually coalesced around the historical city centre and incorporated key sights such as the Town Hall Square in Tallinn, or Almaty's 28 Panfilov Guardsmen Park in the city centre. At the same time, as Figs. 4.1,

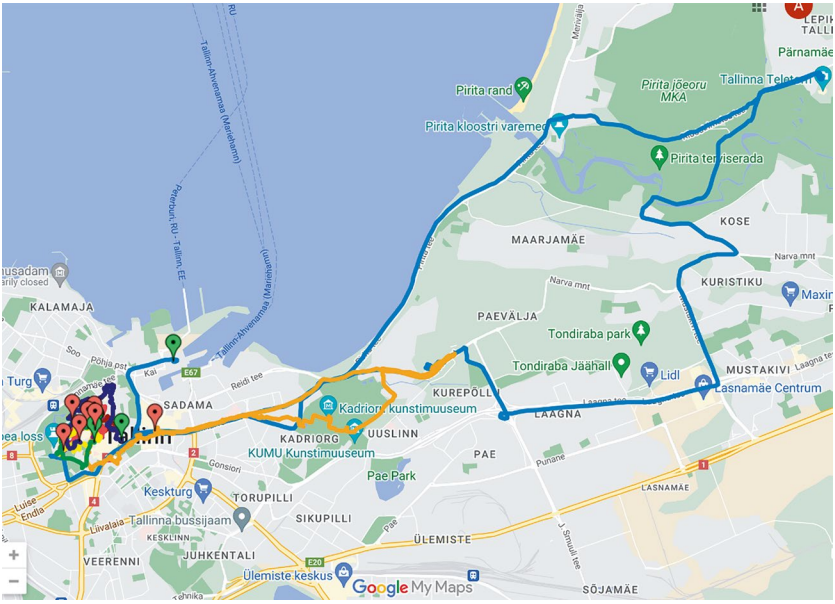

Fig. 4.1 Map of selected tour routes in Tallinn (Data: GPS-tracked guided tours, Google)

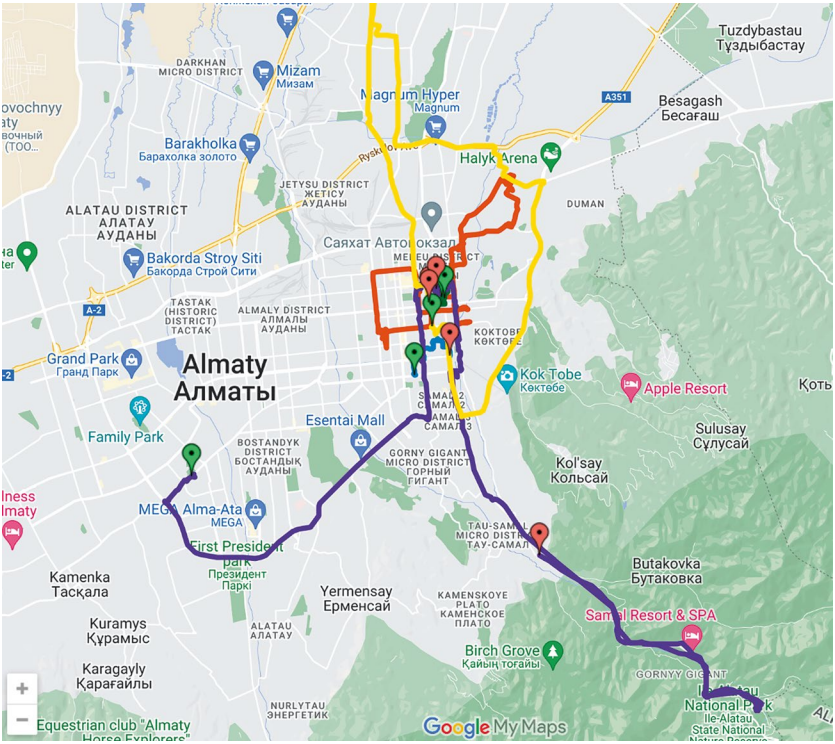

Fig. 4.2 Map of selected tour routes in Almaty (Data: GPS-tracked guided tours, Google)

4.2, and 4.3 show, guides took a range of different routes through the urban space. In Almaty and Tallinn, some tours included visits to sights outside of the centre that were reached by tram or bus, such as to Tallinn's Kadriorg Palace and Song Festival Grounds or to Almaty's famous high-altitude ice-skating rink Medeu built in 1949–1951, thus stretching to larger areas of the city (cf. Figs. 4.1 and 4.2). In the case of Kyiv, where the historical centre is larger than in Tallinn and Almaty, tours usually focused on one or two neighbourhoods such as the Upper City, the Lower City (Podil), the area around Kyiv's central Khreshatyk Street, or the Cave Monastery (Pechersk Lavra), all historically significant neighbourhoods in the centre (cf. Fig. 4.3).

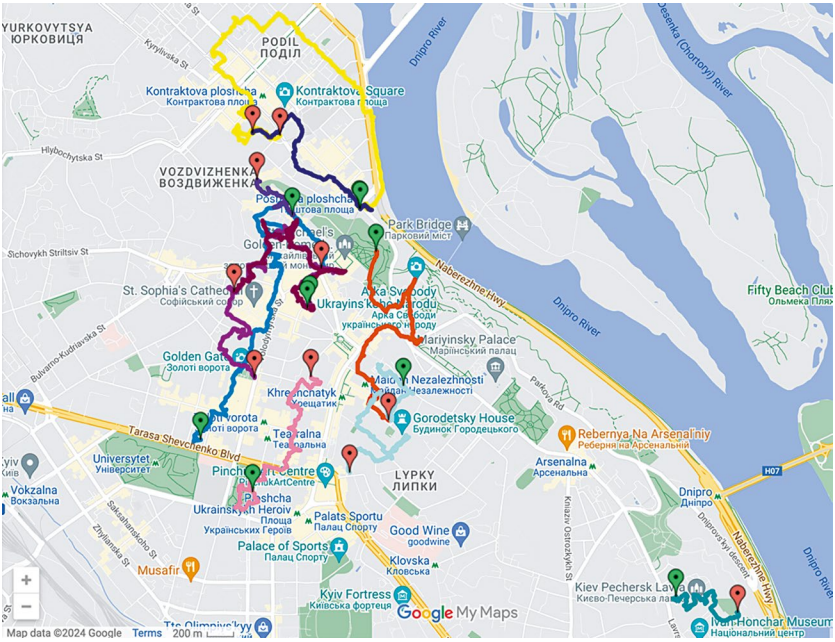

Fig. 4.3 Map of selected tour routes in Kyiv (Data: GPS-tracked guided tours, Google)

Guides also used rhythm to shape the tour: when developing the tours, stops needed to be planned at regular intervals. Tours were expected to cover key attractions but there was significant flexibility where to stop and for how long. Tour guides often adjusted how much they talked in one place, depending on the group's perceived interest. Furthermore, they could also use movement strategically to energise the group and create suspense—promising to continue a story later on, or alternatively cutting it short. When it came to sensitive or controversial sites, guides could also decide not to stop at a site or mention it only in passing to avoid potential controversies (cf. Chap. 7).

Alongside strategies of spatial manoeuvring, guides engaged in practices of storytelling and interpretative work in relation to the city space. Supported by bodily practices such as gesturing and pointing, they used narrative to "weave together the near-infinitive possibilities of cultural objects into a theme (…) as a way to understand and analyse the city"

(Wynn, 2012, p. 344). City tours usually aimed to offer a broad overview of the city, covering stories from ancient history to the present day. They made references to architecture, arts, and literature but also to political, social, and church history, to memorial places, achievements in science, engineering, and sports, and the contemporary life in the city. Some guides had a special interest in architectural or social history that was reflected in the tour; others offered specialised tours focusing on one particular historical period or on legends and ghost stories. For example, in Almaty, the tour companies *Light House* and *Almaty Tour Studio* offered several tours through the inner city that focused specifically on the Tsarist history ('In the footsteps of the city of Vernyi', 'Almaty—City of Vernyi'), the Soviet period ('Cosmic Almaty'), or the recent history when Almaty was the capital of Kazakhstan (1991–1997). Working with the urban environment guides could thus flexibly adapt their accounts, allowing them to incorporate multiple stories.

The conventions of guided tours—moving from location to location in a multi-layered urban environment—meant that narratives performed in guided tours were usually based on additive storytelling (cf. Stach, 2021): as the group moved from stop to stop, buildings provided narrative anchors to tell stories about the site or a historical event or personality linked to it. Narrative connections could be made in the beginning of the tour or between stops; for example, life in the medieval city, churches and church architecture, or the development of the city as a Russian imperial outpost were among the themes that ran between stops. At the same time, new themes, unconnected to the earlier ones, were regularly introduced as the group walked to the next stop. In comparison to homogeneous tourist environments of museums or heritage sites, the narratives of guided city tours therefore tended to be fragmented without a clear chronological or causal narrative.

Working with Sights

The flexible nature of guided tours becomes further apparent when looking at the ways in which tour guides worked with sights on their route, as guides could emphasise different aspects of a sight, use it to tell different stories about different periods in time. Tour guides both reproduced dominant historical narratives and questioned them, using the processes of sight sacralisation and façade-peeling.

Tourism routinely makes reference to what is 'most important' about a place, what makes it unique and appealing, and uses the past to highlight this significance. Historical narratives about the city as well as its heritage are social constructions that require institutional support (MacCannell, 1999, pp. 43–45; Waterton & Watson, 2014, pp. 32–52). MacCannell refers to the process of constructing sights as sight sacralisation, a process that is based on five stages: firstly, naming—marking a sight off as worthy of preservation; secondly, framing and elevation—putting it on display; thirdly, enshrinement; fourthly, mechanical reproduction—creating prints and photographs of the object; and finally social reproduction. Meanings of sights are usually constructed through authorised systems of knowledge—such as in the case of Laurajane Smith's authorised heritage discourse (2006) which uses heritage to attach meaning to national identity. At the same time, meaning-making activities are plural and ongoing, even the construction of authorised or systematised meanings relies on a continued performance, including by tour guides.

The process of sight sacralisation is useful for understanding the work of tour guides: guided tours, particularly those providing an overview tour of the city, stopped at what were considered significant location in the city, reproducing assumptions about their significance and authorised meanings. Guides engaged in processes of naming, framing, and elevation, imparting knowledge about a sight's features and historical background and personalities linked to it. Moreover, they also used what Fine and Haskell Speer (1985) call 'expressive discourse' to convey the historical and aesthetic value of the sight and move tourists emotionally. This is illustrated by the following quotations from city tours in Tallinn and Almaty:

> This typical Tallinn house is a wonderful opportunity for us to show off again. We can see a heating system from the Middle Ages here. The main building material of the entire city and this region is limestone, from which the entire Old Town is built. Look at the Town Hall. Raw stone, unplastered, thick and difficult to process. (…) They build the houses with it. Inside, on the lower floor there was a fireplace from which the fire was heated. Holes in the floors allowed the hot air to rise to the top and heat the entire house. (CS1-Tour guide narrative 3, 18.06.2019)

> Look at this wall. See how well it is preserved? On this site where we stand used to be a tower with a gate. (…) We have preserved a very long wall, we

> have almost two kilometers of the medieval wall preserved and 26 towers. In Vilnius they have one tower, in Riga one and a half, we have 26. We can boast of great wealth. (CS1-Tour guide narrative 2, 15.06.2019)

> My dears, please come closer, I will give you time to take pictures in just a few moments. Here you see the significant monument dedicated to the one of the most important periods of our history and of your history. Most of the people are talking about it as the Great Patriotic War, which is the part of the Second World War which lasted 4 years from 1941 to 1945. (CS3-Tour guide narrative 9, 28.08.2019)

These excerpts are interesting for several reasons: firstly, they provide examples how guides constructed sites as attractions by using adjectives and phrases such as "significant", "well-preserved", and "most important". The significance of sights lies in the authenticity and uniqueness of material structure—the historical and aesthetic values associated with it—but also the history linked to it, such as in the case of Almaty's war memorial ("the most important period"). Other frequently evoked meanings were awe and respect, for example for the achievements associated with a sight (cf. Chap. 5). These frames involved formulaic language including recurring superlative adjectives and reference to pride as well as comparisons to other places to highlight uniqueness. The first quotation provided above was from a tour guide in Tallinn (CS1-Tour guide narrative 3) who repeatedly spoke about "showing off" local sights to her small tourist group; she said this in a colloquial tone that was tongue-in-cheek but also evoked local pride. The construction of sights moreover involved drawing on expert knowledge, such as by referencing architectural and other features of buildings or the authenticity of sight and its preservation.

The excerpts also signal how guides worked with the tour group to elevate the site, directing tourists' gazes or encouraging them to take pictures. While tour guides also appealed to other senses—such as listening and touching—most commonly they asked tourists to engage in exercises of collective gazing. Sight sacralisation in this sense involved visualisation work (Urry, 1990), referring to particular parts of the material environment while explaining their significance. Sight sacralisation was used in relation to sights associated with different periods. While in many instances it referred to sights that were in line with official historical narratives such as those circulated in tourism promotion, the third quotation refers to an instance of sight sacralisation in relation to a memorial from the Soviet

period. The period associated with it had been deemphasised in Almaty's tourism promotion but nonetheless the memorial was constructed as an important memorable sight in the city, reflecting Kazakhstan's ambiguous memory politics and its significant continuity with the socialist past.

Alongside with sight sacralisation, another common technique used by tour guides worked in the opposite direction: rather than elevating sights, it asked tourist to see through space and read what was behind the visible surface (cf. Schlegel & Pfoser, 2023, pp. 383–384). Part of tour guides' role as mediators was to challenge their guests' first impressions through a technique that Sharon Macdonald calls "façade-peeling" (Macdonald, 2006, pp. 130–131; cf. Wynn, 2012). This can be done to support dominant historical narratives—for example, many guides make explicit reference to ruptures and changes in a city over time, drawing attention to landmarks that had disappeared, to changing names and functions of buildings, squares, and streets. This technique similarly involved visualisation work that could be assisted by using print-outs and tablets. Old maps, photos, and paintings were used to show tourists the space before it was destroyed or altered. The process of façade-peeling revealed hidden temporal layers; it added historical depth to the urban space, supported the recovery of ancient and medieval histories, and/or was used to condemn Soviet destruction in line with national narratives. For example, in her *Secret Kyiv* tour through the Upper City, tour guide Olga centred her narrative on the history of churches and monasteries that shaped this part of the city. She referred to the Soviet period as a tragedy, mentioning that "the years of '34, '35, '36 were fatal for Kyiv. Churches and monasteries were blown up to build the largest square in Europe" (CS2-Tour guide narrative 6, 14.06.2019). Olga then recounted the story of a historian, Nikolai Makarenko, who tried to save the St Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery by not signing the order to dismantle it but tragically failed, giving his life for it. In this short episode, justice is finally served in 1996 when the monastery is resurrected.

In some instances, tour guides also used 'façade peeling' to deconstruct currently dominant historical narratives and symbolic politics. For example, a tour guide regularly told a story on Kyiv's most famous square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), about the erection of the independence column for the 10th anniversary of Ukrainian independence (CS2-Tour guide interview 15, 25.07.2019). This column, a neo-baroque structure, is topped by a gilded statue of a female saviour figure in traditional Ukrainian attire. The 16-storey Stalinist high rise directly behind

the column is now called Hotel Ukraina, and together with the square's flagpole sporting a giant Ukrainian flag, the view across Maidan provides a panorama of national Ukrainian symbolism (cf. Fig. 4.4). However, when the column was built, the hotel behind it was called Hotel Moskva, which provided an inapt backdrop for the postcard image of the independence column. The hotel was hurriedly renamed to Ukraina in the days before the column's inauguration, although there was already a Hotel Ukraina in Kyiv, which consequently also had to change its name. According to the tour guide, telling this story about changing symbolic politics and its contradictions always made tourists laugh as it illustrated the transience of ideologies. One could see this technique as a critique of the present but it is better understood as a critical attitude towards power more generally. It can also be seen in sharp contrast to a Soviet sense of historical "inevitability and naturalness" (Solonari, 2003, p. 422) and the ideological expectations that guided tours had to fulfil earlier (cf. Schlegel & Pfoser, 2023).

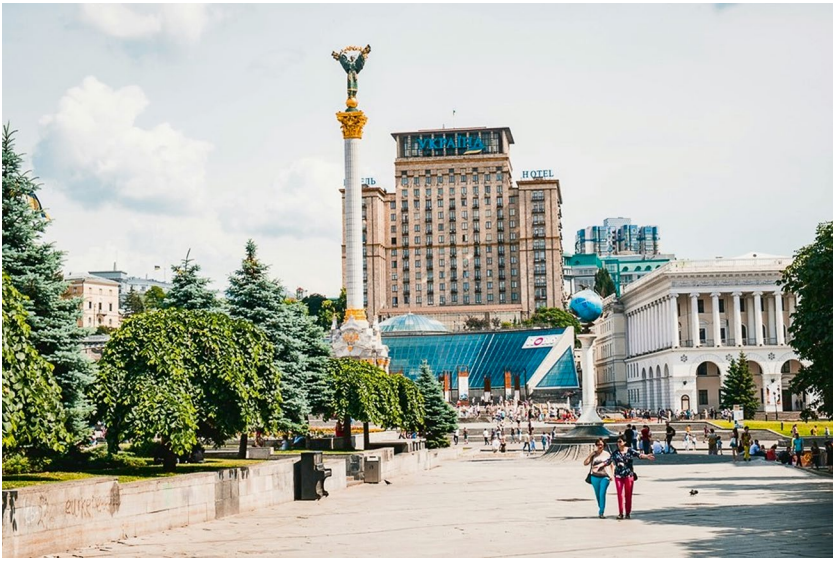

Fig. 4.4 Maidan Nezalezhnosti with Hotel Ukraina (Source: Silver Ringvee on Unsplash)

Working with Audiences

Alongside their work with the material environment and particular heritage sites, tour guides also structured their tours in relation to their audiences. As service providers who offered commercial walking tours that relied on recommendations and online ratings of their customers, tour guides were acutely aware of the significance of customer satisfaction. Their work with audiences involved different strategies including a particular way of storytelling that animated the streets and sights to make them interesting for tourists, the involvement of tourists in the co-production of memories, and an adaptation of the content of the tour to audiences.

Firstly, as guides emphasised, more than conveying a historical narrative, tour guiding is about bringing a place and its history 'to life' so that tourists take an interest in them. Guides mobilised 'secret' local knowledge, showed tourists secret passageways, and told them urban legends to personalise accounts. Others asked tourists to step into the role of historical detectives, asking them to contribute to the tour based on their observations of the city space. Posing questions such as "Why do medieval houses look like that? How do you know who lived in this house? What are the dragons on the town hall for?" invited tourists to actively participate in memory-making in the tour. More generally, tour guides' approach usually involved an emphasis on tourists' emotions and experiences. As a tour guide working in Kyiv highlighted:

> The most important thing is our desire to give ('podarit') people emotions. Because everything can be forgotten. You can forget the dates, you can forget the name of the guide … but you will remember whether you had a good time or not. This is the role of a guide—a person who is able to make you fall in love with a city. (CS2-Tour guide interview 10, 12.07.2019)

This resonated with tour guides across the destinations who repeatedly emphasised that they wanted to instil love for the city so "that people want to come back, want to stay for longer" (CS1-Tour guide interview 3, 14.06.2019).

Arlie Hochschild coined the term of 'emotional labour' to describe the work in the service industries. Emotional labour involves the "management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" which is "sold for wage and therefore has exchange value" (Hochschild,

1983, p. 7). The hospitality industry demands workers to express feelings of cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and friendliness, even if they may experience negative emotions. This was also reflected also in tour guides' emphasis on creating positive experiences and their work with audiences' emotions. There were differences in the emphasis on performative aspects and customer orientation among tour guides—with some guides seeing themselves as entertainers and others highlighting their educational and enlightening role. Despite these differences, tour guides emphasised the significance of emotional labour, remarkably different from the distinct didactic tradition of Soviet tour guiding, which aimed at instilling patriotic or moral messages onto tourists and restricted room for interpretation or debate. In her study on tour guides in Sevastopol in the pre-annexation Crimea, Brown outlines the continuities of the Soviet guiding tradition, with guides seeing themselves a "teacher figure which is respected and not questioned" (Brown, 2015, p. 218). In contrast, ideas of providing a good service and satisfied customers stood out in accounts of guides in Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty.

Good service also involved interacting with tourists and adapting the tours to their audiences. Guides routinely involved their clients by engaging them in conversations, asking them questions, and providing personal recommendations to make the tours more interesting and engaging. Research on guided tours has highlighted the dynamic and relational character of guided tours and how they are shaped by audiences, both the actual ones encountered on tour and those imagined by guides (Macdonald, 2006, p.123), when planning the tour. As Salazar highlights, tour guides' narratives are "open systems" that are adjustable to "what happens in actual encounters" (Salazar, 2006, p. 848; cf. Larsen & Meged, 2013), depending on the dynamic interaction between guides and tourists. This also involved the balancing act of inviting tourists to bring in their questions and views, while maintaining the role of an expert who holds the 'storytelling rights'.

One central aspect of the interaction with audiences was the adaptation of the tour content to match tourists' interests and backgrounds. Before or in the beginning of the tour, guides usually asked questions about the background of tourists in order to adapt it to their clients. Tour guides tried to consider tourists' interests and what tourists might already know based on their origin, as well as making references to the places where tourists came from. For example, in a guided tour for Russian-speaking Tatars, the tour guide pointed to several places in Tallinn connected with

Tatar heritage. Another one working in Kyiv with a group from Moscow highlighted the burial place of Yurii Dolgorukii (1099–1157), the founder of Moscow, in the Saviour Church, close to Kyiv's Cave Monastery. Making such connections was seen as an opportunity to make the city more interesting and familiar. It did not necessarily stand in competition with ideas of local uniqueness but could be used to support them, by highlighting for example how personalities or important events known to tourists originated locally (cf. Chap. 5). The principle of relational adaptation needs to be understood as feature of the capitalist service industry as tour guides aimed to provide a good service to satisfy their paying customers. More than this, it should be seen as an essential communicative principle that is part of face-to-face communication, shaped by the desire to hold the attention of the audience.

4.5 Conclusion

In the context of the development of advanced capitalist service industries and the turn towards an experience economy a diversification of the actors and sites involved in memory-making in tourism has taken place. This includes commercial tour guides who offer a range of different formats to experience the city. Guided city tours seek to mobilise authentic local knowledge and offer a personalised and engaging experience of the city, making them an attractive format for tourists.

The chapter has discussed guided city tours in the context of a restructured tourism industry in post-Soviet cities, characterised by new identity narratives and the economically driven desire to provide a diverse and high-quality offer in a competitive international context. Tour guides aimed to highlight the destinations' uniqueness and provide tourists with positive and memorable experiences of the cities. At the same time, this chapter has revealed the complex nature of commercial guided tours as a highly adaptable and heterogeneous form of memory work, oriented towards creating positive and interesting experiences in interaction with the urban environment, particular sights, and audiences. Guided tours are a mobile genre of memory-making that pulls together different sites into a spatial narrative. The material environment both pre-structures the tour and is flexibly manoeuvred and interpreted by guides. As heterogeneous, palimpsestic tourism spaces, cities lend themselves to a multiplicity of narratives that reflect understandings of what is unique and remarkable about a city, the preferences and specialisms of guides, as well as the expectations

of tourists to whom guides relationally adapt their memory work. Within this space, tour guides could put forward narratives in line with official national memories, side with audience expectations, or engage in a critical, deconstructive take on history as part of the practice of façade-peeling. In most cases tours were characterised by a combination of these different elements, or more generally an ideological ambiguity and indeterminacy that was reinforced by their narrative fragmentedness.

The following chapters provide more insights into memory-making in guided tours based on a detailed examination of distinct modes of remembering articulated in relation to memories of the Tsarist and Soviet periods, ancient and medieval pasts, new national histories, and contested pasts. The analysis brings tourists more centrally into the analysis, by illuminating how they rework tourism memories within their own frameworks of meaning-making.

CHAPTER 5

Remembering a Shared Homeland

5.1 Introduction

Nostalgia has been identified as a key mode of tourist memory, a significant point of convergence in the "tourism-memory nexus" (Marschall, 2012a, p. 327): offering journeys to a time long gone, tourism aestheticises and romanticises the past for tourist consumption. In reconstructed villages and buildings, living history museums, reenactment events, themed environments or retro souvenirs (Bruner, 2005), tourism provides an escape from the present through immersion in an 'authentic', better past (Groebner, 2018). In fact, Coleman and Crang describe the tourism/heritage industry as a "nostalgic semiotic economy" (Coleman & Crang, 2002, p. 4), providing opportunities to (re-)encounter long-lost objects and practices that offer comfort and refuge from complex modern life-worlds.

When it was initially conceived by the medical doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688, nostalgia was used to diagnose homesickness among Swiss mercenaries in France and Italy, combining the Greek words *nostos*—the return to the native land—and *algos*—suffering or affliction. Nostalgia has since then been transformed into a collective and more abstract diagnosis, a longing not for a particular place such as the childhood home but an idealised version of 'home' (Boym, 2001). It has been characterised as a distinctly modern malaise based on the experience of rapid social change and rupture. With notable exceptions (Cohen, 1979), classic sociological

A. Pfoser, *Tourism as Memory-Making*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83738-8_5

studies on tourism have conceived of the modern tourist as driven by nostalgic sentiments, conceiving travel as an expression of a longing for a less alienated life-world of pre-modernity (MacCannell, 1999). The tourism industry exploits such longing for an imagined better past, for example, in rural tourism, which recreates a disappearing rural life and contact with nature and allows tourists to experience a simpler, slower time (Bartoletti, 2010), or in roots tourism, which promises that tourists can reconnect with their ancestral homeland. Particularly post-imperial tourism is seen as catering to tourists' nostalgia, painting empire in glorious colours, recreating the colonial ambience of hotels and restaurants and allowing visitors to experience a colonial lifestyle (Bandyopadhyay, 2012; Buettner, 2006; Peleggi, 2005; Cheer & Reeves, 2015; Jacobs, 2016). The use of exoticising imagery and the perpetuation of hierarchical power relations has meant that tourism has been seen as a form of neo-imperialism that enables imperial relations to continue.

In this chapter, I use nostalgia as a lens to explore how the Soviet and Tsarist pasts are remembered in Russian tourism. This chapter contributes to discussions on nostalgia in tourism in two ways: firstly, instead of focusing on representational practices, sites and staged tourism experiences that are clearly associated with nostalgia, I highlight how the relational orientation of guided tours and ideas of 'good service' can *implicitly* buttress tourists' nostalgia. Despite the absence of a clear promotional strategy catering to Russian nostalgia and a diverse range of memories communicated in relation to these periods, tour guides routinely mobilised cultural intimacy and encouraged tourists to read the destinations as part of a largely positively connotated shared space.

Secondly, I challenge homogeneous accounts of imperial nostalgia by providing differentiated insights into how Russian tourists made sense of their encounters with Tsarist and Soviet heritage. Following Susan Stewart's conception of nostalgia as "a cultural practice, not a given content" (Stewart, 1988, p. 227) and Campbell, Smith and Wetherell's question on the work nostalgia does (Campbell et al., 2017, p. 609), I highlight nostalgia's polysemic nature and distinguish between different temporal orientations and imaginations of relations between Russians and their neighbours. In particular, I show how nostalgia for the shared past reflects the tensions between the egalitarian and hierarchical understandings of Russians as friends or good colonisers, inherent in the Soviet nationality policies. Overall, I demonstrate the relevance of nostalgia as a mode of remembering in Russian tourism while arguing against simplistic accounts of what it entails.

5.2 Tourism Industries as (Partial) Nostalgia Industries

In public commentary and academic literature, nostalgia is seen as a widespread phenomenon in post-socialist countries: the enthusiasm that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain gave way to a disillusionment with the present, propelled by the rise of inequalities, fragmentation of society, and disappointment in the fantasy of a capitalist Other. While post-socialist nostalgia is often belittled for its illusional nature and criticised for its anti-democratic potential, in Russia, it is seen as having an additional dangerous dimension—alongside the longing for a lost experience of stability and sociality, socialism is also mourned for the loss of territory, glory and great power status that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union (Nadkarni & Shevchenko, 2004, p. 496; Sharafutdinova, 2020). From the beginning of his presidency, Putin conceptualised Russia as a 1,000-year-old nation and a continuing great power with a distinct political trajectory different from the West (Malinova, 2018). Nostalgia for the Soviet past has been cultivated as part of this memory politics, selectively picking elements that fit a narrative of past national greatness and cleansing the past of trauma and suffering (Kalinin, 2011). While imperial consciousness has already been cultivated in Russian post-Soviet politics (on the rise of Russian imperial nationalism cf. Pain, 2016; Laruelle, 2017; Ponarin & Komin, 2018), the "national longing for Russia to reclaim its superpower status" (Gessen, 2019) has become painfully obvious in Russia's relation to Ukraine since the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, the war in Donbas and Luhansk regions, and particularly Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine since February 2022.

At the same time, there is an important discrepancy evident in post-Soviet tourism industries: the boom in socialist heritage that Eastern Europe, and to a somewhat lesser degree, the Caucasus and Central Asia, has experienced is directed at a Western audience from outside of the region (Light, 2000; Raab, 2010). In many formerly socialist cities, a nostalgia industry has developed, focusing on the selling of Soviet memorabilia at street stalls and flea markets, offering guided tours and visits to exhibitions, museums and bunkers that promise insights into everyday life under socialism. The commodification and consumption of this heritage has been interpreted as the ultimate victory of capitalism or as catering to the desire to consume an alternative way of life, different from the capitalist present (cf. Bartoletti, 2010). Other scholars have provided

differentiated analysis of the complex and even paradoxical interpretations of the past in these tourism offers (cf. Balcerzak, 2021; Stach, 2021; Pohrib, 2016; Janinovic, 2022). Focusing on communism tours, Stach, for example, argues that they "evoke both nostalgia for a simple, easily understandable world and a negative image of an unwanted, difficult past" (Stach, 2021, p.73).

The scholarship on the touristification of socialist heritage, however, offers limited insights for understanding how this heritage is produced and consumed in Russian tourism. The first fieldwork impressions suggested that this heritage was not of much interest to Russian visitors as they knew the socialist past well because of the ubiquity of architectural heritage at home and the lived memories of travellers over the age of 35. "Russians have communist heritage at home, why would they be interested in seeing it here?", a tourism administrator working in the Tallinn Tourism Information Centre told me. While she was more positive in her assessment of Russians' interest in the history of the Russian Empire, Russians were not a priority group when it came to marketing the more recent Soviet past. Similarly, in Almaty, the local tourism administration saw Russian tourists as mostly interested in the city's natural surroundings and ethnic tourism, and several tour guides remarked that Russians were not interested in this heritage because "they know it too well" and "everything was the same, everybody knows what it was" (CS1-Tour guide interview 3, 14.06.2019; CS1-Tour guide interview 2, 12.06.2019). In the tourism promotion and tourism development plans of all three cities, this heritage did not figure prominently, as the emphasis was on national, ancient, and medieval histories and heritage (cf. Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3). Tallinn's plan covering the years from 2009 to 2027 (Tallinn City Council, 2008) did mention sites associated with Russian imperial and Soviet heritage—such as the imperial Kadriorg Park and Pirita or Tallinn City Hall, 'Linnahall',[1] a brutalist concrete structure formerly known as the Lenin Palace of People and Sports—but this was part of an encompassing strategy of heritage protection rather than a systematic plan to promote this heritage. The uneasiness on the part of post-Soviet destinations to cater to imperial nostalgia might have been an additional factor contributing to the lack of attention towards Russian tourists as heritage audiences. Authors have regularly noted tensions between Western tourists' desire to see socialist heritage and the impetus to leave this past behind (Light,

[1] At the time of writing, the plans for renovating Linnahall have been abandoned.

2000; Raab, 2010). These tensions were even more pronounced when it came to Russian tourists, whose nostalgia is seen as less 'innocent' than Western tourists'.

To assume that the tourism industry in post-Soviet countries has disregarded these pasts in relation to Russian tourists is, however, too simple. To understand how the Soviet and Tsarist pasts were remembered in Russian tourism, and to what effect, we need to broaden the analysis beyond sites, products, and experiences associated with a (socialist) nostalgia industry. Russians consumed these pasts in other sites, connected with Russian presence and shared historical experiences, such as by visiting the museum dedicated to the writer Mikhail Bulgakov in Kyiv, the famous Soviet high-altitude skating rink Medeu in Almaty, or memorials and museums dedicated to the 'Great Patriotic War', as the war against Nazi Germany on the Eastern Front (1941–1945) is called in Russia. Moreover, we need to consider how these pasts were routinely remembered in tourism. Particularly in cities where the material heritage from Russian imperial and Soviet rule dominated the urban space, it was simply not possible to forget about these pasts. The consumption of the shared pasts often occurred in an unplanned way, as tourists encountered not only the urban material heritage but also shared culinary practices, humour and values or experienced a more diffuse feeling of familiarity linked to a historically accumulated knowledge of and a cultural proximity to the Other. For Russians, this past might not be special, in the sense of an exotic otherness, but tourists were nonetheless attracted by it due to the pleasure of finding something familiar abroad and experiencing a shared cultural legacy. Before discussing the memories of Russian tourists, the subsequent analysis shows how tour guides working with Russian tourists capitalised on tourists' familiarity with these pasts. The service orientation of commercial walking tours facilitated particular readings of these destinations, implicitly buttressing nostalgic perspectives based on mobilisation of cultural intimacy rather than the practices of Othering.

5.3 'Our shared heritage': Remembering Tsarist and Soviet Pasts, Mobilising Cultural Intimacy

Madina works for a local tour company that organises inner-city tours in Almaty. On a hot August day, she gathered a group of 20 people, a combination of locals and tourists, to tell them about the old imperial city of Vernyi, starting with the establishment of a military fortification in 1854.

Alongside the focus on the city's imperial history, the tour also covered buildings and other landmarks from the Soviet period and Almaty's more recent history. Among our first stops was the Park of the 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, one of the most important tourist sites in the city centre. The park is named after the Panfilov heroes, 28 infantry soldiers, recruited mostly from the Kazakh and Kyrgyz Soviet Republics, who fought in the Red Army against the German invasion in 1941–1942. The soldiers were allegedly killed in action after destroying 18 German tanks and stopping the enemy attack on Moscow. They posthumously earned the title 'Heroes of the Soviet Union' and were written into the Soviet pantheon of war heroism (Balmforth, 2015).

Walking through the park, Madina provided an overview of its main sights: the wooden Ascension Cathedral in the middle of the park built in 1906, the Kazakh Museum of Folk Instruments in the park's eastern part, as well as a monument to the Kazakh socialist revolutionary Tokash Bokin, a memorial to those fallen in the war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), and finally, the memorial complex dedicated to those fallen in the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945). Madina guided the group towards this memorial, stopping in front of the spectacular socialist-realist Memorial of Glory (cf. Fig. 5.1), depicting the images of the Panfilov Heroes after whom the park had been named. She explained the significance of the war for Kazakhstan:

> When the terrible word "war" fell on the entire Soviet Union, here, in Kazakhstan, divisions were also formed (…) It was Panfilov who formed the 316th Infantry Division here from Kazakh and Kyrgyz soldiers. This division went through training maneuvers, and Panfilov, as an experienced commander, taught the soldiers not to be afraid of fascist tanks. (…) Four of the 28 miraculously turned out to be alive, they brought to us the truth about those harsh days near Moscow. And it is no coincidence that the Moscow anthem contains the words: "We will remember the severe autumn, the grinding of tanks and glints of bayonets, and your 28 bravest sons will live in our hearts". (CS3-Tour guide narrative 7, 20.08.2019)

Madina then explained the symbolism of the monument, and finally asked the visitors for a moment of silence "because there are many families for whom relatives did not return or returned wounded, crippled from the fronts of the Great Patriotic War". After a pause, the 20 participants gazing in silence at the monument, she thanked the group for paying "tribute

Fig. 5.1 Memorial of Glory, Almaty (Source: Dan Lundberg, Flickr)

to these people who created a peaceful sky and a normal life for us" (CS3-Tour guide narrative 7, 20.08.2019).

Madina's guiding practice is remarkable for several reasons: firstly, she abandoned the usually detached nature of guided tours and integrated a ritual of war commemoration into it, a practice common in battlefield tourism and visits to other sites of suffering. Moreover, she used the memory of the Great Patriotic War to connect Russia and Kazakhstan. At the beginning of the quote provided above, Madina used the memory of the war to describe Kazakhstan as an integral part of the Soviet Union which contributed to the collective war effort ("here, in Kazakhstan, divisions were also formed"). While highlighting the role of General Ivan Vasilyevich Panfilov, as an experienced commander leading the local soldiers, she also remarked upon the soldiers' bravery in the face of the enemy. She then mobilised this memory to create a bond in the present, emphasising that the deeds of the Panfilov soldiers are still recognised by Moscow today and constructing a community connected in grief and gratitude. The "us" she referred to in the end—when expressing how those fighting in the war had

laid the foundation for peace and normalcy "for us" today—encompasses both Kazakhs and Russians, locals and visitors, who together were on the tour. Overall, the success of Madina's request of respect lay in the familiarity of visitors not only with the myth of the 28 Panfilov guardsmen but also with the wider war narrative and commemorative practices and their assumed personal connections to this memory. Madina drew on the decades-long mythologised memory of the Great Patriotic War, which saw the Great Victory against fascism as the most glorious Soviet achievement while glossing over its traumatic losses and inhumane repressions (Tumarkin, 2003).

What is left out of Madina's account is not only the trauma of the losses but also the fact that the Panfilov story was debunked as a myth several years ago (Balmforth, 2015). A tour for an international student group from Russia, Georgia and Armenia provided a more accurate and critical account. Similarly to Madina, tour guide Liudmila emphasised the significance of the Great Patriotic War "for our culture and all Soviet heritage" and made a connection between guests and hosts, introducing the monument as "dedicated to the one of the most important periods of our history and of your history" (CS3-Tour guide narrative 9, 28.08.2019). At the same time, she also referred to the large wartime losses in Kazakhstan and the Soviet Union as a whole ('from Kazakhstan, we lost more than 600 thousand people') and recounted to tourists that, contrary to the Soviet myth, some of the Panfilov soldiers had survived by surrendering to the Germans. They had been arrested for treason when returning to the Soviet Union.

> You may ask me if everybody died in this battle? I can tell you that four of them were imprisoned. But it was not revealed for a long time because in the Soviet Union it was prohibited to be in prison [to surrender to the Germans]. Maybe you remember the story of Stalin's second son who was imprisoned by the fascists. And Stalin didn't agree to take him back to exchange for a fascist officer because he said: "I would never exchange the officer for the soldier." So his son died being imprisoned. That's why they were not heroes, it was recently revealed. But earlier it was a big example of heroism for all of the Soviet Union. (CS3-Tour guide narrative 9, 28.08.2019)

While reproducing idealised assumptions about war-time heroism, the Panfilov story in this second tour allowed the guide—and by extension the group—to reflect on silences in the war memory as well as war-time

Stalinism, including the expectation for soldiers to sacrifice their lives in battle.

The two stories about the Panfilov Monument are pointing to significant differences as well as similarities in what is being remembered when remembering the shared past in guided tours. On the one hand, significant differences exist in the accounts in how they *attribute agency* and engage in the *thematic framing and evaluation of historical events, figures, or actions*. For example, Madina and Liudmila's accounts assigned different agencies to the Russian general Panfilov and the local soldiers and framed war memory through the lens of heroism or victimhood. On the other hand, in framing the war as part of shared heritage, both accounts made connections between Russia and Kazakhstan and mobilised *cultural intimacy*. The following analysis discusses these points in detail, showing that despite a diversity of interpretations, the audience orientation of guided tours meant that tour guides emphasised communalities and connections, and encouraged nostalgic conceptions of a once-shared historical space.

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld coined the term 'cultural intimacy' to refer to areas of shared intimacy and common experience through which people recognise themselves as belonging to a collective. This can also involve transgressions, "sources of external embarrassment" and "secrecy" that "provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" (Herzfeld, 2005, p. 3). While Herzfeld developed the concept of cultural intimacy in relation to the nation-state, denoting a feeling of commonality among its members, it is equally useful for understanding post-imperial spaces. In their guiding practices, guides actively mobilised a sense of cultural intimacy between Russian-speaking tourists and the places and people they visited. In the case of the war memorial, the shared past was used to construct a common identity, referring to 'our heritage' and a 'we', benefitting from the deeds of those who had fought in the war. Even more often, cultural intimacy was, however, mobilised by guides implicitly, based on their unspoken understandings of visitors' (post)-Soviet backgrounds. This was done, among other things, through the relational adaptation of the tour to the audience, a principle taught in tour guide training (cf. Chap. 4). For example, Russian-language tours in Tallinn made more frequent references to Tallinn's Tsarist and Soviet past than tours in English or German, with the latter placing particular emphasis on the Baltic German imperial elite to make a connection with their German-speaking audience. Passing by the Orthodox Aleksander Nevsky Cathedral in

Fig. 5.2 'St Petersburg in Tallinn': Tourists in front of the Aleksandr Nevsky Cathedral (Source: Alena Pfoser)

Russian Revival Style (cf. Fig. 5.2) and the Neoclassical Estonian parliament building in Tallinn's Upper Town, tour guide Tatjana announced to her Russian-speaking group that this felt "as if we had arrived in Petersburg" (CS1-Tour guide narrative 2, 15.06.2019). This passing remark assumed tourists' knowledge of Russia's northern metropole and invited the visitors to recognise similar architectural features in Tallinn, thus rendering the city more familiar. The practice of connection-making was evident in the work of all guides, including those with a Russian background and those belonging to the ethnic majority. It was meant to stimulate interest among tourists and make people "grow closer" (CS3-Tour guide interview 3, 28.07.2019) and "feel what connects their nation and state with ours" (CS1-Tour guide interview 7, 25.06.2019).

Alongside making connections, guides also took into account what tourists presumably already knew based on their origin. Audiences from post-Soviet countries were seen as having the same 'cultural baggage', a shared stock of knowledge which was often evoked by guides and made it easy for guides to work with them. For example, tour guides in Tallinn

would regularly point to locations in the city where famous Soviet films were shot. "Look where did you see this street, in which film? What does it remind you off?", tour guide Svetlana asked when walking up a lane to the Upper Town. And after some hesitation, she added: "Paris?" A tourist guessed correctly: "D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers." "That's right", she said, visibly pleased. "Here the three musketeers ride down the street, signing 'Pora, pora poraduemsia' [it's time to rejoice]". Svetlana intonated the song, which tourists instantly recognised. "Look down here, remove the flag and the other decorations", she said, evoking tourists' memories of the famous Soviet film, which used Tallinn as a stand-in for the French capital. Drawing on memories of the film, Svetlana mobilised a sense of cultural intimacy and familiarity with the city (CS1-Tour guide narrative 1, 15.06.2019).

Aleksei, an experienced tour guide from Kyiv, explained the ease of working with Russians by referring to their ability to read the urban space in a different way than other tourist groups. For example, he explained, when they passed by a monument to Panikovsky, a protagonist from Ilf and Petrov's satirical Soviet novel *The Golden Calve*, Russians understood it without much explanation: "In many ways Russia is located in a close cultural context [to Ukrainians]. Sometimes Russians are arrogant, but they can orient themselves" (CS2-Tour guide interview 11, 16.07.2019). This shared stock of knowledge was partly dependent on the age of visitors: in particular, the Soviet school system was seen as constitutive of a cross-regional understanding. Due to divergent school curricula and media systems, some guides wondered about the slow fading of a common basis of understanding and remarked that young people did not have the same depth of historical knowledge. At the time of the fieldwork, references to a shared heritage and shared knowledge base in guided tours were, however, usually successful, as also the keeping of the minute of silence in front of Almaty's Memorial of Glory demonstrated.

While mobilising cultural intimacy, tour guides at the same time narrated the shared past in significantly different ways, including in how they attributed agency to historical personalities or, more generally, spoke about local vs imperial/Soviet/Russian influences. Imperial rulers, military figures, architects, and explorers who crisscrossed the Tsarist and Soviet space played a significant role in tour guide narratives, and tour guides often emphasised the life of these actors and their impact on cities. For example, Paul Gourdet, a Tsarist architect of French origin, played a significant role in guided tours of Almaty, as did accounts of the first

imperial settlers who founded the city. The beginning of a three-hour guided tour offered through the city is characteristic in this regard:

> So, let me start the history of our city. In 1853, the troops of Mikhail Peremyshl'skii came here and crossed the River Ili. And, imagine: there was nothing here. They swam across the river Ili and then they hired camels and horses from local residents to carry everything that they had with them … and the locals were shocked: because earlier they had experienced raids from Khoqands—now a part of contemporary Uzbekistan—nobody had ever hired anything from them, it was just taken from them… And when a couple of camels and horses died while crossing the river, they even paid the whole price for them. This was completely unexpected for the local people. In any case, this was the first encounter, and they liked that the military of the Russian Empire were reasonable people, they did not take anyone prisoner, they did not steal. Whatever they took, they paid for it. (CS3-Tour guide narrative 3, 4.08.2019)

This narrative promoted the idea of Russians as original inhabitants of Almaty by highlighting that the Russians founded it on empty land. Moreover, it also emphasised the specific relationships of incoming Russians with the local population, describing the Russians as 'kind' and 'good' colonisers, in contrast to the neighbouring Khoqandis. Particularly in Almaty, tour guides' stories often highlighted the historical agency of Russians and the Soviet/imperial rulers, focusing on their historic role as protectors and guarantors of the city's economic development in the Tsarist period or on their role in driving the modernisation of the city. At the same time, tour guides also told stories of well-known local figures and the significance of local influences on the city and the lives of ordinary people who experienced and shaped it. Tauri, a prominent Estonian educator and a self-labelled patriot, reflected on his account of Tallinn as a city shaped by different empires:

> When I introduce our city, I always talk about its multi-layered culture. About the influence of different nations. And that at every time of foreign rule, be it Danish, German, Russian, something creative was brought, which left a positive mark on the appearance of our city. Which is part of our heritage that we are proud of. I tell the Russians that you can also be proud that your Russian heritage is here, positive. (CS1-Tour guide interview 7, 25.06.2019)

In this account, Tallinn is constructed as a city shaped by different periods of foreign imperial rule. The foreign influence, which became part of the local heritage landscape, is framed as fundamentally positive and constructive ('something creative was brought'), disregarding violence and destruction brought by it. Tauri reflected on how he used this local multi-layered heritage to make connections with the tour group. At the same time, he added:

> On the other hand, I emphasise that, nevertheless, although we have a lot of foreign influences… Look at our architecture. It has its own character in the old town. Few decorations. Quite small windows to protect us from harsh winters. And the architecture is mainly made of this grey limestone, not brick. This gives our architecture the features of Gothic constructivism. When you walk here, you may not notice it on the first day, but if you stay here a little longer, you will feel that old Tallinn has its own aroma… That there is something of its own in this, something given by us, Estonians. And our natural conditions and our construction workers and materials. (CS1-Tour guide interview 7, 25.06.2019)

The emphasis on local distinctiveness and agency that Tauri evokes forms an essential part of tour guiding and can also be used to surprise tourists. As another tour guide explained:

> Sometimes tourists do not even suspect what emerged from here, that I talk about people who were born here, who used to lived here. They think they were Russians, for example Krusenshtern,[2] the Russian navigator…. When I tell them about him, they are surprised that he is connected with Tallinn and Estonia. (CS1-Tour guide interview 1, 11.06.2019)

Secondly, the period of a shared past covers a long and eventful time span, allowing tour guides to choose from a range of different stories and narrative framings. Accounts often focused on positively connoted stories—as Tauri's reference to the creative and positive impact of imperial rule on Tallinn suggests—but also covered moments of destruction, suffering and

[2] Ivan Fedorovich Krusenshtern (1770–1846, Adam Johann von Krusenstern in his original German name) was a famous navigator of whom most Russian tourists have heard. Krusenshtern served in the Russian imperial army before leading the first Russian circumnavigation of the globe. He was born to a Baltic German family in the Governorate of Estonia and buried in St Mary's Cathedral in Tallinn's Upper Town, and is an example of elite mobility in the Russian bureaucratic elite (Armstrong, 1984).

hardship. Particularly in Tallinn and Kyiv, tour guides made references to the suppression of local nationalism, as well as the cruel character and dullness of the Soviet regime, explaining, for example, why Estonians understood the Soviet period as occupation, or describing the Soviet destruction of churches or the Holodomor in Ukraine, the artificially created famine, that killed millions of Ukrainians in 1932 and 1933. Against the background of ongoing conflicts over the past, the integration of such histories of violence and suffering in guided tours could be slippery, harbouring potential arguments and tensions. As a consequence, these topics tended to be played down by many guides (for a detailed account cf. Chap. 7).

At the same time, cultural intimacy does not just thrive on positivity. In his work, Herzfeld emphasises the significance of unofficial, subversive, and unpleasant aspects of identity that form the core of a shared experience. Making ironic remarks about Soviet bureaucracy or experiences of scarcity also mobilised a sense of commonality and recognition that could connect tourists and hosts, as did references to shared experiences of victimhood. Particularly the Great Patriotic War, part of a Russian historical canon and mobilised by the Russian state as a "social glue" and "instrument of geopolitics" (Gabowitsch, 2021, p. 197), provided experiences of suffering and sacrifices that could easily be narrated in such a way to form the basis of a joint cultural identity. Despite lacking the emotional quality of nostalgic narratives, tour guide narratives then catered to a nostalgic view of the Tsarist and Soviet past as they turned the destinations into familiar places which were read as part of tourists' own history.

But how did tourists themselves respond to these constructions of the past? And what drove them to visit post-Soviet destinations in the first place? The following sections now turn to the role of nostalgia in tourists' memories. I show firstly that nostalgia was a common, but not the only, practice of how tourists related to this past. Secondly, I emphasise the polysemic nature of nostalgia among tourists. I highlight different temporal orientations of nostalgic sentiments, distinguishing between past-oriented and present-oriented nostalgia, and different constructions of proximity and distance between Russia and its neighbours in tourists' accounts.

5.4 Past- and Present-Oriented Nostalgia

Based on the widespread diagnosis of Russia's imperial nostalgia and writings on post-imperial tourism in other contexts, one might expect that Russians who travel to cities of the former Soviet Union viewed these cities through an imperial gaze and mourned both a shared homeland and a lost great power status. Interviews with tourists revealed, however, how encounters with sites of memory and the architectural heritage associated with the Soviet and Tsarist pasts stimulated a range of reflections among tourists, some shaped by nostalgic sentiments, others distanced and critical. These reactions differed significantly depending on the city, the political orientation, and the age of tourists; in particular, visitors over the age of 35, for whom the Soviet period was a time of personal significance, often remembered this time with sentimental feelings.

These differences were also apparent in tourists' engagement with Almaty's Memorial of Glory mentioned earlier. Tourists in Almaty often remarked upon this memorial—a site they visited on guided tours and on their own—noting the emotional impression it had on them as well as how it evoked not just the war but also a memory of past unity.[3] For 48-year-old Sergei, who specifically looked for Soviet war memorials in his travels in former Soviet countries, it was "the grandest and most stunning" of all memorials (CS3-Tourist interview online 6, 16.01.2021). Alina, a visitor in her mid-40s, also remarked on its visual appearance and soundscape, the Soviet music playing in the site, which threw her back in time:

> I experienced this particular atmosphere, visually, emotionally, acoustically. And I had such a wistful feeling inside. Well, some sort of nostalgia. When you understand that we have something in common, something we had in the past. And it is gone now. I think it's a similar feeling when you come to places where your ancestors lived. Much has changed, but they used to live there, it is somehow close to you. And you try to feel what happened to them there, how it used to be. (…) Here's a similar feeling, I immediately try to imagine, what was it like at that time, before the collapse… a positive feeling of something from the past that is still dear. (CS3-Tourist interview 10, 29.08.2019)

Alina recounted her experience as a moment of recognition: a sense of familiarity not linked to an actual earlier visit but grounded in a distinct

[3] This analysis draws on Pfoser and Yusupova (2022).

sensual atmosphere and repertoire of commemoration that evoked a space once inhabited together. The comparison to ancestral relations ("a similar feeling when you come to places where your ancestors lived") was not accidental as it was built on kinship metaphors often used to characterise relations of the Soviet people. While Alina experienced a sense of proximity, the irretrievability of the past, characteristic of nostalgia, was also clear from her account. The past was held dearly, but it was gone. The Soviet Union had collapsed and so had the project of collective belonging that was now being mourned.

Contrary to this sentimental interpretation of the shared past, Elvira, a social scientist of the same age, described her encounter with the moment in terms of a "disruption" and "cognitive dissonance": "here are the teeth of the Kremlin in the middle of Central Asia, what is it for?" (CS3-Tourist interview online 4, 26.01.2021). Such remarks on the ideological character of monuments, on histories of domination and violence could in particular be found among tourists with higher education and a liberal political sensibility. I will return to such critical accounts in the analysis in Chap. 7, focusing now on a closer examination of tourists' positive engagement with the shared past as expressed by Sergei and Alina, as these were more common for tourists' memories and deserve closer examination.

In her famous treatment of nostalgia, Svetlana Boym distinguishes between reflective and restorative nostalgia; the former focuses on longing, "wistfully, ironically and desperately" (Boym, 2001, p. xviii), the latter on a feeling of deficiency and aims to reconstruct home in the present. Boym further notes that the latter form is linked to collective political projects, evoking collective pasts and futures and offering "a comforting collective script for individual longing" (Boym, 2001, p. 42). Instead of Boym's reflective and restorative nostalgia, I use past- and present-oriented nostalgia to refer to different temporal orientations of tourists' nostalgic recollections, as this better captures their distinct form. Past-oriented nostalgia is contemplative and manifests itself in the form of childhood nostalgia and discourses of collective belonging. It is enacted in encounters with the urban space and its inhabitants, based on literary and other cultural references, and is encouraged by tour guides who ask tourists to make connections to their embedded cultural knowledge formed during socialism. Present-oriented nostalgia, unlike Boym's restorative nostalgia, was not directly linked to a political project—tourists did not make any suggestions to restore the Soviet Union—but was driven by what tourists

saw as lacking in the present, using an idealised past to criticise the current situation.

Past-oriented nostalgia was, in several instances, based on tourists' own memories of childhood and youth. Tourists who had visited the destinations, or had lived there during the Soviet period, were often explicitly driven by nostalgic sentiments, travelling to reconnect with the places they remembered fondly. Internal migration in the Soviet Union was not unusual, as people moved for work and to improve their livelihoods, to take up obligatory placements after finishing education, or to serve in the army (cf. Heleniak, 2008; White, 2007). Moreover, the break-up of the Soviet Union was followed by several waves of migration of Russian-speaking populations to Russia, who, as a consequence of the nationalisation policies, felt stranded in the newly independent countries or left because of economic opportunities offered in Russia. These movements played a significant role in creating kinship and friendship networks that many Russians today hold to places in the former Soviet space. A tourist in his early 70s told me during a guided tour in the Old Town of Tallinn that he used to be based in Estonia as a young Red Army soldier and had come to show his wife the city he had seen as a young man. He had had to move to Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union, but unlike many others feeling bitter about the nationalisation policies, he saw the city through an exclusively romantic lens, fondly remembering Tallinn's medieval narrow lanes, coffeehouses, and distinct, sophisticated atmosphere (cf. Gorsuch, 2011). As in the case of this former soldier, memories of childhood and youth often focused on a distinct atmosphere, as well as personal stories and memories made during trips. These recollections of childhood and youth were intimate accounts, usually lacking reference to collective notions of belonging. At the same time, they were embedded in a larger historical framework that enabled the experience of proximity that tourists could seek to reconnect with when visiting the destinations.

Alongside these memories based on personal experiences, past-centred nostalgic recollections were also based on an affective connection to a once-shared collective space, as part of a wider Soviet space once inhabited together—as evident in Alina's and Sergei's engagement with Almaty's Soviet war memorial. Visiting heritage sites and symbols associated with the Tsarist and Soviet periods, tourists usually remembered the shared past in positive terms as a time of economic and political progress and collective achievements. A tourist in Almaty recalled her visit to the Medeu ice skating rink (*Medeo* in Russian, cf. Fig. 5.3) in Almaty, the world's largest

Fig. 5.3 Medeu Ice Skating Rink, Almaty (Source: Big Element, Pexels)

high-altitude skating rink, as an opportunity to connect with a place she once admired:

> Medeo was always an icon for me. That is, I always knew that there is Medeo in Almaty. And, finally, I visited it for the first time. (…) This is a place that, at one time, was admired by many, about which they knew that it was a site so far away or inaccessible to you. And now I saw it and visited it. If I say this, many will share this feeling. (CS3-Tourist interview 9, 29.08.2019)

While some memories of symbols and sites focused on the state's efforts at developing the periphery, others highlighted the efforts of the Russian people, contributing to the construction of the cities, making them comfortable and beautiful, or remembered the distinct sociality of that period. Nostalgic sentiments were most pronounced in Kazakhstan's capital of Almaty, a city built largely during the Soviet period. The Soviet heritage in Almaty was seen as organically coexisting with the present. The architectural heritage has been treated with care, facades have been renewed, mosaics restored, Soviet symbols preserved, which, in tourists' perceptions, distinguished Almaty from other cities and republics of the former USSR and allowed some of them to experience their visit as 'time travel' back to the Soviet period. Some tourists remarked on Almaty's Sovietness in negative terms—as evidence of Russia's domination but also as a sign of Almaty's backwardness, a city frozen in time whereas Russia had already moved on. However, in the eyes of most visitors, the perceived care of the Soviet heritage added sympathy to the city.

In contrast to nostalgic sentiments that were oriented backwards and involved the contemplation over the shared past, present-oriented nostalgia mobilised the past to emphasise what was lacking in the present. Tourists used memories of the Soviet period to reflect on and critique the changes since the Soviet Union's breakup. Present-oriented nostalgia was often not based on an encounter with material heritage; it focused on what was missing, what had been wrongly removed and left to decay and expressed a wider critique of nationalisation processes. Estonia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan have adopted different memory politics in relation to the socialist past. While all destinations had undergone nationalisation processes, particularly in Tallinn and Kyiv, visitors were aware of the removal of Soviet heritage and the nationalisation of the urban space. As a consequence, the same nostalgic immersion into the Soviet past as in Almaty was not possible in Tallinn and Kyiv. In particular, in Kyiv, memories of the Soviet period were overshadowed by the ongoing violent conflict. Marina, a 60-year-old tourist from St Petersburg, remembered being touched by Kyiv's Motherland statue, a giant titanium statue commemorating the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany, during her visit in summer 2019, but her feelings and awe over the statue's monumentality were disturbed by the "broken military equipment scattered around [the monument] on which they fought in Lugansk" (CS2-Tourist interview online 2, 10.01.2021). Marina's dismay was, in many ways, characteristics of a particular type of tourist perception that contrasted the present militarisation

and nationalisation of urban space to a better Soviet or Russian past. Already in her childhood, Marina had regularly visited Ukraine, enjoying Kyiv's parks and visits churches and museums, particularly those dedicated to Russian art. For her, Kyiv was not different from Russia; it was "a Russian space. Russian and Soviet. In 70 years of Soviet rule, you can put an equal sign between them" (CS2-Tourist interview online 2, 10.01.2021).

Marina's idea of Kyiv as part of an integrated Russian space followed an imperial narrative in which Ukraine is part of a wider Russian land, disregarding ethnic and other differences. This understanding was used to criticise the departure from the Russian language and culture from Ukraine. Not only the perceived desacralisation of the WWII monument but also the insistence on Ukrainian language in a guided tour, the renaming of the Museum of Russian Art into Kyiv Picture Gallery, and negative comments about the Russian Orthodox Church, from which the Ukrainian Church had split in 2018, all contributed to what she saw as a general derussification of Ukraine, a process she characterised unambiguously as cultural degradation and decline.

> A generation begins to grow up, which was not brought up in Russian culture, and their literature is very meager. When I was talking to the guys there, 'Guys, can you name Ukrainian authors for me?' Do you understand? They can name one or two and that's it. There is no one else to name. (…) All the same, Russian literature, whether you like it or not, it is rich literature, you understand. What does Ukrainian literature mean? It's pretty poor there. (CS2-Tourist interview online 2, 10.01.2021)

While Marina frames the derussification as a loss for Ukraine, mobilising established tropes of Ukrainian culture as inferior and almost non-existent in comparison to Russia's rich cultural heritage (cf. Kappeler, 2014; Fedor et al., 2017b), we can read her emotional reaction as an expression of a felt betrayal of the once 'brotherly' nation which has turned away from Russia.

5.5 Good Colonisers, Friends, and the Politics of Nostalgia

Nostalgic memories, past- and present-oriented, are based on different models for imagining the relation between Russians and other nationalities, seeing Russians as either in the role of friends or, as in the case of

Marina, as carriers of superior culture and 'big brothers' in the region. These understandings reflect the tension between egalitarianism and imperial relations characteristic of the Soviet project and continue to circulate in discourses about Russia's relation with its neighbours. The Soviet nationalities policy explicitly sought to distance itself from the "great power chauvinism" of colonial models (Slezkine, 1994; Hirsch, 2003; Martin, 2001), which was seen as hindering revolutionary progress, while at the same time reproducing some of their imperial topoi and power relations. The idea of a 'friendship of peoples', which followed the affirmative action policies of the 1920s and 1930s, was introduced to the Soviet vocabulary in 1935. It became part of the new national constitution, an imagined community of the USSR that united different nationalities and emphasised trust, dependability, affection and reciprocity (Suny, 2012, p. 26)—it was essentially egalitarian in its construction of relations. Several tourists evoked the Soviet notion of the friendship of peoples in memories of the ethnic diversity of cities and warm welcome on earlier visits.

Thirty-year-old Maksim, an engineer from St Petersburg, noted that the Soviet period was the best time for Tallinn, as "everything was livelier … there were more people, more diversity, it was more fun" (CS1-Tourist interview 17, 2.07.2019). Another tourist in his twenties reflected on his mother's travel to Tallinn during the Soviet period, noting that earlier "we could travel without visas, without any problems, and we were friends for Estonians" (CS1-Tourist interview 1, 14.06.2019). Egalitarian assumptions were also found in tourists' memories of the joint struggle against fascism in the Great Patriotic War or general reflections about a formerly shared homeland and constructions of collective belonging in the form of a community of "Soviet people". Estonia and the other Baltic republics were traditionally more developed than other parts of the Soviet Union, having a European flair and a wider range of consumer goods, and thus appeared as relatively Western places. In his reflections on the history, Evgenii considers Estonia's status during the Tsarist and Soviet periods, emphasising the benefits of belonging to something "greater".

> It seems to me that they [Estonians] felt great. And they were quite an important part of the empire. (…) I don't know, in my opinion it's impossible to say that Tallinn and Riga withered, so to speak, after joining the Union. These were some of the largest cities in the empire, as far as I remember, both in terms of population and economic activity. In my opinion, they

> were glad that they were included in this empire. Because they would still be someone's part. (CS1-Tourist interview online 4, 19.01.2021)

The "empire" is constructed here as something beneficial, supporting economic development and increasing the city's political significance, by offering belonging to a larger polity. Tourists' memories also constructed hierarchical relations between Russians and non-Russian titular nationalities within this empire based on a developmental or civilisational model that posited Russia as economically and culturally superior. In this model, Russia was constructed as a great civilisation that modernised and (re)built the peripheries and made them cultured (Toal, 2017, pp. 72–80; cf. Lillis, 2019). Seeing Russians as 'big brothers', first among equals, this hierarchical understanding was used to make sense of relations across the post-Soviet space but was particularly pronounced in perceptions of Almaty, where the majority of tourists and tour guides supported the idea of Almaty as a product of a Russian colonial project in Central Asia. In this idea, Russians did not only build Almaty but also brought civilisation and progress to an "empty" land.

> Everything that we see around us is all built on the infrastructure of the Soviet Union, and by the people of the Soviet Union, without this there would be nothing here. If it hadn't been for the Tsar's decision back then, there would have been the Chinese here now. (…) China and Turkey were huge, strong civilisations and if they had wanted to seize these lands, they could just come here, and no one could have done anything. (CS3-Tourist interview 1, 5.08.2019)

Both the idea of Russia and the Soviet Union as benevolent states bringing infrastructure and statehood to Kazakhstan and the double standard in the perception of states are characteristic: whereas Russians came to protect and to develop the land in the interest of the local peoples, China and Turkey, here used in place of the Ottoman Empire, are constructed as potential exploiters. Pre-imperial times was in turn constructed as times when "nothing was there". It was outside of the understanding of tourists, a reflection of the fact that the nomad culture characteristic for the region is hard to understand and narrate, particularly in the format of a story about a city. Moreover, emptiness, as a common colonial trope, was also a reflection of a continuing imperial mindset.

There are several important points in how Russian tourists imagined the historical relations to their neighbours: firstly, while there were notable differences in imagining one's neighbours as receivers of Russian civilisation or as equal friends, there was also significant fluidity between these modes; egalitarian understandings were often overlaid on assumptions about Russians' superiority. Although the Soviet Union sought to distance itself from the colonial model through the promotion of multi-ethnicity, the discourse about Russians as a more advanced nation echoed Western European colonisers' self-fashioning (Koplatadze, 2019, p. 482). The tension, or dialectics, of Russians' status is apparent in a toast made by Stalin in 1938, saying, "Old Russia has been transformed into today's USSR where all peoples are identical … Among the equal nations, states and countries of the USSR, the most Soviet and the most revolutionary is the Russian nation" (as cited in Suny, 2012, p. 26). Also in tourists' memories, constructions of egalitarian relations based on mutual respect could easily slip into assumptions of Russians as superior 'big brothers'.

Furthermore, both notions of friends and good colonisers were based on the imagination of a positive relation between Russians and other nationalities in the past. Whereas past-oriented nostalgia reflected on this positive relation, present-oriented nostalgia articulated disappointment and resentment over its loss. These positive assumptions had significant blind spots; they masked inequalities between nationalities and overlooked the forceful character of the Soviet regime by silencing violence and repression, and reframing the military and economic domination as modernisation and rebuilding (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 87). While in tour guide accounts, experiences of violence, destruction, and 'dullness' were given some expression, these were usually absent in tourists' accounts (cf. Chap. 7 for a more differentiated account).

In his dissection of nostalgic discourses in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, Bruce Grant analyses citizens' nostalgia for its cosmopolitan past based on the experiences of living together peacefully in a socialist setting. At the same time, he notes that Baku is "a place where internationalism never came entirely by choice, and could be enjoyed by some more than others" (Grant, 2010, p. 131). Soviet rule involved violence and domination, in the form of repressions, artificial famines, deportations and everyday inequalities, to which nostalgic memories were oblivious. The reason for this selective memory lies not only in the tourism industry and its common focus on positive moments—exemplified in the guiding practices of commercial tour guides—but more generally in the challenges that a

negative memory involves. As Kevin Platt writes, Russians remembered the Tsarist and Soviet periods in positive terms because "the alternative is to identify with the role of the occupier who brings no gifts and leaves behind no benefits, but only humiliation and destruction" (Platt, 2013, p. 138). In particular, as a negative memory focused on histories of suffering and violence was not supported by the Russian state, it is not surprising that tourists remembered the shared past in positive terms when visiting their neighbouring states and expressed disappointment and resentment when these memories were not shared.

5.6 Conclusion

When the tourism industry is criticised for the limitations it imposes on memory, this critique is often framed as a critique of nostalgia—a distorted and idealised version of the past that tourists, as time travellers, can escape to. An examination of nostalgic practices in Russian tourism provides us with a more complex and ambiguous picture. Unlike in the case of Raj nostalgia in India or nostalgia in other post-colonial contexts, there was no dedicated industry that supported Russians' imperial nostalgia. The commodification of the socialist past in the form of memorabilia stalls, retro-bars and guided communism tours cater to Western tourists for whom the socialist past is a strange and fascinating Other. A sentimental relation to the past was nonetheless supported by commercial tour guides in less visible and coordinated ways. Positive memories of the shared past were routinely mobilised on the tour, evoking a sense of cultural intimacy. Tourists, who encountered traces of the shared past during their trip, experienced moments of affective recognition but, at the same time, were aware of the pastness of collective belonging, sharing a central characteristic for nostalgia, an acknowledgement that the past is irretrievable. Tourists contemplated the shared past and used memories—in the form of present-oriented nostalgia—to reflect and criticise what they perceived as the losses of derussification.

Nostalgia, as Boym (2001) acknowledges, can take different forms; it can be characterised by ambivalence, irony, and self-reflection, or articulated as a restorative dream that drives religious and nationalist movements. In their reflections on a shared material culture and cultural affinities, as well as their assertions of superiority and their desire to be recognised as a civilising force, Russian tourists also displayed different modes of relating to the past and imagined the historical relations between

Russians and local populations in different ways. I argue that tourists' sentimental relations to the past needs to be read as an imperial nostalgia understood in a broad sense as a sentimental attachment to an idealised and positively valued imperial past. However, the question of whether this imperial nostalgia is linked to fantasies for regaining great power status and facilitates a restorative agenda is less straightforward to answer.

Casting the shared history in a positive light, tourists' nostalgic memories had significant blind spots, obscuring histories of imperial violence, exploitation and oppression, and often came with inbuilt and unquestioned hierarchies that reflected European colonial narratives. In several instances, tourists' political sentiments were clearly articulated through their nostalgic memories; in others, this remained more ambiguous. While these memories were based on an idealised notion of the past as part of a wider/old "homeland", there was no clear geopolitical project behind them. Out of the 65 tourists interviewed for the book, and many others spoken to during the fieldwork, not a single one expressed explicit support of a restorationist and territorially expansionist geopolitical agenda. At the same time, in the context of an aggressive Russian neo-imperialism, it is evident that these memories can be easily incorporated into such a project—and that many tourists might be in favour of this political agenda. Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004) point to the difficulty of making an assessment about nostalgia's politics not only because nostalgia can have different meanings but also because it often directly claims to be non-political, an affective reaction to a familiar sound and smell, the material culture of everyday life and experiences of childhood. The politics of nostalgia are slippery as the memory of collective achievements "can easily be misread as a longing for the Empire's lost greatness" (Nadkarni & Shevchenko, 2004, p. 515). Nostalgia in tourism then not only reproduced established ways of remembering the shared past in a positive way but becomes complicit in reproducing established patterns of relating to Russia's neighbours that facilitate the current agenda of Russia's political elite.

However, as the chapter has alluded to, nostalgia was not the only mnemonic practice in tourism, not even in relation to how the Tsarist and Soviet past was remembered. Tour guides talked about histories of repression and state violence, Almaty's Soviet war memorial was interpreted as an ideological project, tourists travelled to Kyiv with sympathy for the Euromaidan Uprising and the decommunisation efforts, and engaged in a dialogue with guides about the notion of a "Soviet occupation". Before I

analyse the memory of contested and difficult pasts in tourism (Chap. 7), I will, however, focus on the discussion of another mode of remembering, centred around the production and consumption of national differences.

CHAPTER 6

Selling Difference, Minimising Antagonism

6.1 Introduction

The search for 'difference' is a crucial part of the tourist experience (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Salazar, 2013). As John Urry writes in his seminal work on the tourist gaze, "When we 'go away' we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so. In other words, we gaze at what we encounter" (Urry, 1990, p. 1). The tourist gaze is directed at scenes, sights, and landscapes that are perceived as out of the ordinary, in contrast to the everyday life the tourist is trying to escape. While this distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary has been questioned by scholars who emphasise continuities between being on holiday and everyday life (McCabe, 2002; Larsen, 2008), the desire to step out of the ordinary and to experience something unique and different is nonetheless a key driver of tourism. Be it the experience of a slower lifestyle, adventure, and thrill, new bodily and educational experiences, or encounters with other cultures, tourists expect their holidays to be different from what they usually do.

The past plays an important role in the production of difference in tourism: firstly, on a most general level, tourism presents us with the opportunity for 'time travel'. It allows us to experience the past, in L.P. Hartley's (1953) famous phrase, as "a foreign country" and follow its "manifold temptations […] to enjoy exotic antiquity, to inhabit a happier

A. Pfoser, *Tourism as Memory-Making*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83738-8_6

age, to know what actually happened, to commune with forebears, to reap the rewards of being modern among ancients, to correct the past or to improve the present" (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 63). 'Time travel' thus relieves us temporarily from the pressures of modern life.

Secondly, the production of difference also has a spatial dimension as tourism sells the past of other places to tourists. Works on tourism, place- and nation-branding have usually framed tourism as an opportunity for the transnational communication of national distinctiveness, focusing on the opportunities that tourism provides to communicate a story of the nation to an outside audience.[1] Countering perspectives that globalisation, market liberalisation and commercialisation destroy national peculiarities and traditions, scholars have pointed to a "myriad of ways in which modern nations and nationalism are being sustained and revitalized through the workings of the global economy" (Castelló & Mihelj, 2018, p. 559; cf. Bhandari, 2022; Geary, 2013; Kania-Lundholm, 2014).

This chapter examines how national pasts are produced and consumed in Russian tourism. Alongside their interest in familiar imperial pasts, Russian tourists were attracted to post-Soviet cities by their 'different' national(ised) history and heritage. Experiences of difference allowed them to access other forms of urbanity, enjoy new flavours, images and other sensual experiences, and share stories of these new experiences with friends and family back home. In particular, I examine the promotion and experience of ancient and medieval pasts, which have been highlighted in post-imperial nation-building processes, alongside an analysis of narratives of more recent developments since the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the case of Tallinn, ancient and medieval pasts encompass references to ancient tribes on the territory of Estonia as well as references to the Middle Ages, including the time of Danish (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), Teutonic/Livonian (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), and Swedish rule (1561–1710). In the case of Kyiv, it refers to the history of the Kyivan Rus, the first East Slavic state (late ninth to the mid-thirteenth centuries).

[1] Memory-making and the production of difference can of course also be analysed in relation to minority groups, such as the memory and heritage of Jews, LGBTQ* communities, migrant and refugees or subcultures which have increasingly been incorporated into the tourism industry (cf. Hill, 2017; Huss, 2024). In Eastern Europe, the rediscovery and commercialisation of Jewish heritage has drawn particular attention, a consequence of its new accessibility after the break-up of the Iron Curtain (Lehrer, 2013; Feldman, 2008; Blacker, 2019), the globalisation of Holocaust remembrance, as well as the widening of dark tourism offers.

In the case of Almaty, it refers to the history of the Silk Road (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries) as well as references to the nomadic culture and prehistoric settlements.

The chapter puts forward two arguments. Firstly, I argue that to better understand the communication of national pasts, we need to distinguish between *antagonistic difference* and *commodified difference*. Antagonistic difference associated with nationalist politics has been emphasised in political analyses of nation-building in post-imperial spaces but is downplayed in the context of tourism industries. Instead, what is promoted is commodified national difference, a positively connoted difference that can be easily consumed by tourists as part of a positive experience of the Other. Commodified difference is used in tourism to displace or disguise antagonistic difference, based on the selection of positive and 'exotic' histories and heritage and the forgetting of potentially troubling episodes and dimensions.

Secondly, drawing on critical literature on nation-branding and tourism studies, I show how the communication of national pasts in the form of commodified difference is a double-edged process. On the one hand, it provides an opportunity to communicate uniqueness to tourists and exercise agency in the construction of national pasts. On the other, narratives built around commodified difference gloss over controversies and tensions as well as align with established tourism stereotypes, in this case reproducing images of superiority and inferiority, including stereotypes about cities' provinciality vis-à-vis Russia. Part of imperial hierarchies and power relations, these stereotypical images have the potential to keep controversies and tensions alive, despite glossing over them.

The chapter is structured as follows: I introduce the distinction between antagonistic and commodified differences based on a discussion of literature on nation-building and nation-branding processes. I subsequently provide a close examination of the communication of ancient and medieval pasts in commercial walking tours, followed by an analysis of how guides communicate more recent, post-Soviet pasts. I then focus on how tourists make sense of these pasts and draw on established frameworks of comparison, including globalised conceptions of alterity as well as established Russian imaginaries of centre-periphery relations. I conclude with a reflection on the consequences of the communication of commodified differences in tourism.

6.2 Selling Difference, Minimising Antagonism

The nationalisation of heritage and urban city spaces is crucial to understanding the construction of difference in post-imperial cities. It includes the rediscovery and production of histories and heritage associated with the nation following the establishment of national independence and involves the modification and creation of new museums, monuments, and heritage sites, as well as the dismantling of old ones (e.g. Diener & Hagen, 2013; Bekus, 2017; Pavlaković & Bădescu, 2019; Vlasenko & Ryan, 2024). Diener and Hagen highlight three dimensions that are crucial for urban reconstruction in post-Soviet cities: firstly, the construction and commemoration of the nation through urban space; secondly, the presence of local, minority ethnic and other forms of identity and heritage that complicate assumptions about urban spaces; and thirdly, new forms of regional and global integration and the broader influences of neoliberal globalisation and cultural hybridity that shape cities and turn them into arenas for multiple national and transnational players. They write that

> Although an important subtext throughout the socialist period and increasingly prevalent in its waning years, the overt "nationalisation" of urban space is one of the most striking features of the post-socialist urban milieu. Discourses, both material and symbolic, (re)asserting national identity and sovereignty are ubiquitous in both democratic and non-democratic contexts. (Diener & Hagen, 2013, p. 489)

Despite significant variations in the urban identity formation, the nationalisation of urban spaces and heritage has frequently involved references to ancient pasts, in which the nation is rooted, as well as references to other regional histories beyond the influence of the Russo-Soviet empire. Moreover, it has usually been described in tandem with decommunisation/derussification processes, reflecting a departure from earlier identity narratives as well as a desire for independence from the former imperial centre. This process has drawn much attention in memory studies scholarship on the region, in line with a traditional preoccupation with the politics of national heritage in memory and heritage studies, focusing, for example, on the production of official memories and authorised heritage discourses (Gillis, 1996; Smith, 2006), questions of selectivity and narrativity, the role of emotions and affect (Crang & Tolia-Kelly,

2010), as well as inclusion and exclusion (Littler & Naidoo, 2005; Ashley & Stone, 2023).

However, with its emphasis on memory politics and political nation-building much of this work overlooks the significance of the economy for the production of memory. In the literature on post-socialist cities, the role of neo-liberalisation and global competitiveness has been widely acknowledged in contributing to the re-making of urban landscapes, including heritagescapes (Golubchikov, 2010; Diener & Hagen, 2013; Frank, 2016). While Light (2000) has emphasised how identity concerns—the need to create new national identity narratives in the aftermath of socialism—are at tension with the desire to make money from tourism, work on nation-branding and commercial nationalism has emphasised the role of commercialism in the production and communication of national heritage (Castelló & Mihelj, 2018; Pawłusz & Polese, 2017; Kania-Lundholm, 2014; Kaneva, 2011; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). In their analysis of identity construction in post-Soviet spaces, Pawłusz and Polese suggest that "even if it [nation-branding] subjects the nation to the logic of neoliberalism, it is often seen as a way to enhance a nation's dignity, control its image, and foster its economic power" (2017, p. 876). Additionally, Kania-Lundholm (2014) has highlighted the intersections between the commercial and the national, with commercial businesses using nationalism to sell goods and services while states drawing on marketing techniques to turn nations into brands. Commodification and mass circulation are thus productive for national identities and traditions, simultaneously transforming and reaffirming them (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009, p. 20).

To make sense of the communication of national differences in the tourism industry, it is, therefore, necessary to both appreciate politically driven nationalisation processes and consider the contribution of economic forces and, specifically, the commodification of national heritage. To this end, I differentiate between antagonistic difference and commodified difference. Antagonistic difference has received significant attention in work on political nation-building and memory politics (Saryusz-Wolska, et al., 2022). The term refers to nationalist narratives of the past that, at a transnational scale, can be perceived as oppositional and exclusionary, and therefore tend to be downplayed or silenced in tourism offers. Commodified difference, in contrast, is difference with a commercial value that has positive connotations, being associated with authenticity, romantic or exotic images, and inclusivity. It is a difference that is easily digested by

audiences, aligning with their desire to learn about and experience the Other in a positive, non-confrontational way. Antagonistic and commodified differences need to be seen as intertwined factors that underpin the communication of national differences in tourism. Tourism workers aim to displace the former through an emphasis on commodified difference or seek to minimise it by removing negative characteristics, aiming to turn it into a sanitised commodified past. Despite this, as I show later, commodification is not entirely successful, as it enables antagonism and hierarchies to survive below the surface.

Tourism anthropology, as well as work on nation-branding, helps us to further understand the communication of commodified difference: Focusing on the presentation of Maasai traditions in Kenya for international and domestic audiences, Bruner (2001) highlights the multiple and contradictory ways in which heritage is constructed in tourism. While the Mayers Ranch, designed for foreign tourists, reproduced a nineteenth-century colonial image of Maasai men, in other sites, Maasai heritage was staged through the framework of Kenyan nationalism, or alternatively, the lens of globalised Hollywood pop culture. Bruner shows the role of the site and the audiences for whom heritage is staged play in the construction of heritage. He simultaneously highlights that audiences need to be conceived as "active selves that do not merely accept but interpret, and frequently question, the producers' messages" (Bruner, 2001, p. 899). Critical work on nation-branding has also shown potential tensions and ambiguities in the transnational communication of national distinctiveness. Drawing on Kaneva (2011), Castelló and Mihelj point to "the tendency for nation-branding to misrepresent and oversimplify the complexity of national cultures"; they argue that "the fact that the practice of branding, rather than helping peripheral nations achieve greater visibility, ends up reproducing existing hierarchies of power in the world arena" (Castelló & Mihelj, 2018, p. 561). This chapter uses these insights to analyse the multiple construction of national difference in guided tours, examining how guides select and present national pasts, as well as how they are made sense of by tourists. Moreover, I understand the construction of national difference in tourism not only as an identity opportunity for hosts—as work on nation-branding has emphasised—but also to draw attention to its limitations and, ultimately, its failure in undoing tensions and hierarchies.

The subsequent sections analyse the production of commodified difference in guided tours, focusing firstly on tour guides' narratives and performances of national uniqueness based on distant and uncontested ancient

and medieval pasts. This is followed by an analysis of how guides turn the period of post-Soviet national independence into a positive, sanitised tale. While the boundary between commodified and antagonistic differences is blurred and itself subject to negotiation, the focus on positivity overall leads to a downplaying of differences that could be perceived as negative. At the same time, as the analysis of tourist reception will reveal such accounts have significant limitations as they easily feed into established stereotypes that tourists hold.

6.3 Communicating National Uniqueness on Tour

Animating Ancient Pasts

Oksana is an experienced guide who has been working for Tallinn Guide Club for several years. Alongside booked group tours, she offers regular drop-in tours, which start from Tallinn's central square, Raekoja Plats or Town Hall Square, a cobbled square filled with outdoor cafés and restaurants that has been a marketplace and Tallinn's main square since the Middle Ages. The focus of Oksana's Old Town tours lies on the city's medieval history. She explains to the small group of three tourists who have come to her tour, a couple and a solo traveller, that she wants to show them the city's hidden stories, corners, and backyards. Of the two-hour tour, we spent approximately half an hour on the square, where Oksana tells detailed stories about the structure of the medieval city, the organisation of buildings, and everyday life. Then we move southwest onto the side lanes, where the second part of the tour leads us to workshops where craftsmen and women engage in traditional craft (cf. Fig. 6.1). We meet a craftswoman who specialises in stained glass windows, another who works with leather, and a third one drawing miniature paintings. Through her tour, Oksana presents Tallinn as a timeless city where traditional craft continues to be practised. Her account mixes the different temporal layers to such an extent that some tourists get confused about whether she is talking about the past or the present. When explaining the system of past local elections, tourists assume she is talking about today's city.

Oksana's tour, like other accounts of medieval and ancient histories, provides an opportunity for guides to emphasise the city's unique heritage and identity. These pasts have been integrated into the new national narratives in the context of post-Soviet nation-building, representing a point of (national) origin and Golden Age and allowing cities to emphasise their

Fig. 6.1 Craft workshops in Tallinn: stepping back in time (Source: Alena Pfoser)

historical roots and 'authentic' traditions. In Tallinn, references to the earlier imperial histories of Danish, Livonian, and Swedish rule, as well as the role of the Baltic Germans, who historically formed the majority of merchants, land-owning nobility and clergy, have helped to frame the city as part of Europe and a Baltic or Nordic region. In Kyiv, the medieval state of the Kyivan Rus has been treated as a Golden Age for the city and as the foundation of Ukrainian statehood (Kappeler, 2014), even though this is contested by Russia, which has also laid claims on this heritage.[2] References to this history and ancient legends form the basis for the construction of a mythical and ancient city, populated by legendary princes and Cossacks but also witches, spirits and other mythical creatures. Even in a city like Almaty, where a Soviet material landscape dominates, ancient pasts have

[2] Due to the entanglements of Ukrainian and Russian history, the question of what constitutes, and is promoted as, 'different' past is more complicated in Kyiv than in the other case study locations (cf. Chap. 3). While the question of who owns the heritage of the Kyivan Rus is not directly answered by tour guides, the time is treated as a Golden Age for the city, and some construct a continuity between the medieval East Slavic state and contemporary Ukraine.

played a significant role in the city's trajectory of 'Kazakhisation', in line with nation-building initiatives at the national level (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023). While for many guides these accounts are a normal part of the communication of uniqueness that they see as a crucial part of their role, it is also fed by (local) patriotism. Galiya, a Kazakh ethnic entrepreneur, explains what drove her to offer traditional folkloric tales for tourists:

> Suddenly, it became clear that in order to make Kazakhstan more attractive for tourists, it is necessary to find and offer some uniqueness. And this is not only about the infrastructure (hotels, cafés, restaurants, transport), or the visa regime and so on. First of all, it is about culture and history. And those people need to work hard, who are responsible for that cultural space, who have a vocation, a patriotic attitude and understanding of how to present the treasures that we have and that have been handed down to us from ancient culture in the best way. (Zorina, 2019, p. n.p.)

Galiya emphasises the importance of cultural heritage and history in tourism as a resource for her country. More important than infrastructural developments, culture and history help to attract tourists while simultaneously working to confirm national identities (cf. Pawłusz & Polese, 2017, p. 87). Tour guiding in this context appears as an expression of patriotism and care for one's own traditions.

Distant pasts are important for nation-building, providing resources for the creation of tradition, and helping to construct the nation as an age-old phenomenon. They also play a key role in the production of commodified difference as they usually are considered relatively uncontested and 'safe' to talk about. The production of ancient and medieval pasts took particular characteristics in guided tours: firstly, tour guides used distinct ways to animate them and bring them into the tour. As distant pasts, ancient and medieval pasts may be scantly documented, so guides' stories often relied on their own and their audience's imagination. Particularly in cities such as Almaty but also, to some extent, Kyiv, where ancient and medieval pasts are less prominent in the city space than other temporal layers, tour guides animated these pasts by reading out passages of legends, folk narratives, or poetry and by using different media such as old maps and paintings on print-outs or tablets (cf. Fig. 6.2). These media helped to visualise hidden or lost pasts in the urban space and appeal to visitors' imagination.

Since the 1990s, tourism has increasingly become an 'experience economy', centred around the staging of experiences that tourists seek to buy,

Fig. 6.2 Kyiv Tour Guide using a tablet to illustrate his narrative (Source: Simon Schlegel)

collect, and share (cf. Chang & Huang, 2014, p. 220; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). A focus on experiences also means an increased preoccupation with fantasy and the multiple senses through which tourists experience cities. One way in which tour guides stage unique experiences of the city is through the creation of atmospheres (Bille et al., 2015). As part of their guiding practice, tour guides create dense environments that enchant the city through narrative and the mobilisation of multiple senses. For example, tour guides asked tourists to listen carefully to the sound of a bell tower or to imagine a medieval procession through the city of Tallinn. Several guides working in Almaty used evocative oriental images of a caravan of camels carrying fabrics and spices along the Silk Road, which led through the territory of Kazakhstan.

Olga, who worked for the tour company *Interesnyi Kyiv,* offered several tours through the centre of Kyiv and explained that her tours are particularly focused on conveying emotions and a sensual experience of the city's uniqueness. In her tour 'Secret Kyiv' through Kyiv's Upper City (CS2-Tour guide narrative 6, 14.07.2019), Olga constructed Kyiv as an ancient and mythical city: on the first stop, she told the story of medieval

Kyiv—"Kyiv at that time was a huge European city"—and how it looked very different from today, pointing to the former hunting grounds in the Goat Swamp (*Kozyne Boloto*) in the area of today's Podol district and its main street *Kreshchatyk* that the tourists could peek down on. Through references to archaeological excavations, medieval monasteries, and churches, she emphasised the old age of the city and its different structure, but also the continuities to today. She showed tourists the St Michael's Golden-Domed monastery, built by the children and grandchildren of Yaroslav the Wise, destroyed by the Soviets and then rebuilt in 1996. Towards the end of the three-hour tour, she guided the group towards a viewing spot from which they could see the famous Bald Mountain (*Lysa Hora*), where, according to Slavic mythology, witches gather for their Sabbath. Here she constructed Kyiv as a place populated by mythical creatures. Witches and the devil, characters that Kyiv-born writer Mikhail Bulgakov wrote about, were framed as age-old inhabitants of the city.

The guided tour of Oksana through the Old Town of Tallinn, which was mentioned earlier in the chapter, also emphasised the atmosphere of the city. Presented as an introductory tour of the city, it was not aimed at providing a historical survey of Tallinn, but rather constituted it as a city of medieval craftsmanship and a site of romantic projection.

Alongside the creation of atmospheres, another important way in which the past was sensually produced and consumed is in the form of culinary heritage. Some Tallinn tours invited tourists to try the roasted nuts with 'medieval' spices sold by merchants in traditional clothing (cf. Fig. 6.3) and spoke about distinct culinary traditions in the Hanseatic town. In Almaty, some tours stopped at the Green Bazaar and invited tourists to stroll through it and try some offers before walking on.

After visiting the market, tour guide Liudmila asked the tour group whether they had tried some local food, noting that:

> Probably the Kazakh cuisine is one of the meatiest cuisines in the world. Everything is about meat. And we also joke that after wolves, Kazakh are the first who love to eat meat. And first of all, the main specialty is the horse meat. You also saw the horse sausages in the bazaar. It's a 100% natural product. We use intestines, and we fill them with meat and fat and spices. Then we close them and boil them for four hours. And then just slice them and serve in a traditional dish called beshbarmak. (CS3-Tour guide narrative 9, 28.08.2019)

Fig. 6.3 Experiencing the Middle Ages: tasting spiced nuts in Tallinn (Source: Alena Pfoser)

Culinary heritage is framed as a connection to history in the form of lived traditions and is present even in cities that do not have significant ancient material heritage. Food is sensually evocative, involving taste, smell, vision and touch; it is also grown and prepared in a particular location, creating powerful connections with place, becoming linked with ideas of local and national identity (Alymbaeva, 2020; Atsuko & Ranta, 2016). In contrast to specific culinary tours, which have become a popular tourism offer (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2015), conventional guided tours did not incorporate experiences of tasting food. Nonetheless they made regular reference to food cultures, providing recommendations and inviting tourists to taste traditional local cuisines as a way of experiencing the place.

The emphasis on medieval and ancient pasts and heritage is often linked to particular temporal narratives. Although guided tour narratives were often characterised by their fragmented, episodic character (cf. Chap. 4),

making it difficult to identify a clear narrative arc, it is apparent how references to ancient and medieval histories can serve to deemphasise or bracket Tsarist and Soviet histories, presenting the time of the Russo-Soviet empire as an anomaly of an otherwise determined, long and steady development from an authentic local culture towards modern nationhood (Marin, 2012, p. 193). In Oksana's guided tour mentioned earlier, the Tsarist and Soviet histories did not figure at all, implicitly constructing Tallinn as a medieval and firmly European city. Telling the story about Kyiv's medieval Saint Michael's monastery and its reconstruction, Olga also bracketed the Soviet past as a period of destruction which had been overcome in the present. However, tour guides' stories did not take overt political forms and largely fitted with tourists' expectations of differences and ways of rendering national cultures that could already be found during the Soviet period (Hirsch, 2003).

Moreover, the reference to ancient history did not necessarily privilege a particular vision of the nation and national histories. Stories of ancient pasts were told alongside other stories on the tour, and while some guided tours put forward a primordial understanding of the nation as a timeless essence, others clearly framed ancient histories and Middle Ages as pre-national eras, for example, describing the birth of the Estonian and Ukrainian nations as a modern phenomenon, or providing further contextualisation of imperial histories and hierarchies. In her popular tour through Tallinn's Old Town, Svetlana talked about medieval everyday life, including its distinct culinary heritage and gave tourists recommendations on where to eat the most 'authentic' Medieval food. Then she offered additional context:

> People ask me: "Where can we eat Estonian national food?" I say: "Nowhere". No one was interested in what the Estonian servants ate here, but it is known for sure what the Germans ate at the feasts in the town hall, in the guilds in the Middle Ages, so it is served here. (CS1-Tour guide narrative 1, 16.06.2019)

Despite such clarifications, references to ancient and medieval pasts nonetheless could be used to deemphasise Russian/Sovietness of a city and convey local, and in turn, national, distinctiveness. At the same time, such emphasis was not usually perceived as anti-Russian by tourists. In the form of commodified difference, it provided a valued contrast to the experiences of local Russian heritage and offered tourists distinct culinary experiences, photographs and souvenirs that could be taken back home.

Progress, Tolerance, Inclusion: Communicating Post-Soviet Pasts

Another common way of talking about national differences adopted by tour guides involved introducing tourists to recent histories of nation-building and national independence. Much like stories aimed at immersing tourists into ancient pasts, this strategy effectively minimised antagonistic differences by focusing on positive and inclusive aspects of nation-building. Tour guides highlighted the modernisations of cities, their economic and technological achievements, as well as diversity and tolerance, while glossing over exclusionary citizenship or language policies, the demolition of Soviet or imperial heritage and other contested events.

Elena started her drop-in overview tour of Tallinn by outlining some key features of the contemporary city, referring to Tallinn's diversity ('*multinationalnost*'): "Estonia has few inhabitants, 1.3 million. 900,000 of these are Estonians, the titular nation, over other 200 nationalities are the remaining inhabitants of the country. This is a multinational country" (CS1_Tour guide narrative 3, 18.06.2019). She subsequently mentioned the free public transport in the city and that Estonia's president Kersti Kaljulaid (in office 2016–2021), "is a woman, a beauty, 48 years old, […] a mother of many children, a very worthy president, the people love her". Overall, Elena conveyed the picture of a tolerant and progressive country, reflected in different dimensions of public life, including its gender relations, while at the same time appealing to conventional understandings of femininity.

Memories of the post-Soviet period evoked on tour differed in their elements and emphasis—for Almaty, the period of being Kazakhstan's capital between 1992 and 1997 stood out, while tours in Kyiv's Upper Town frequently recounted the re-erection of churches destroyed by the Soviet regime, and guides in Tallinn often emphasised the forward-looking character of the Estonian nation. Despite these differences, the post-Soviet period was in all case study locations recounted in terms of recovery of national identity, reflected in changes in the political and symbolic landscape, as well as the modernisation of cities and their urban and economic development, including the development of advanced service cultures. In line with the idea of commodified difference, stories of post-Soviet development did not project an exclusionary national identity but emphasised their city's historical and contemporary ethnic diversity, projecting an image of tolerance and multiculturalism.

At the beginning of her tour of Almaty city centre and the Medeu Ice Skating Rink, Liudmila provided an introduction to Almaty, recounting first its ancient history followed by a description of contemporary life. She referred to Almaty as "City of Thousand Colours", a slogan that had been used in recent branding campaigns, explaining it with reference to both the city's architecture and people:

> I think that the main interesting thing about the city is connected with the citizens, with the people living in that city. Thousand Colours tells us about the different ethnicities, different nationalities living in Almaty and Kazakhstan. More than 136 different nationalities live in Kazakhstan. Most of them moved to Kazakhstan during the Stalin era, so in the 1930s, '40s. So here we have a big minority of Koreans, of Germans, Greeks, Tatars and other ethnicities. About 65% are Kazakhs. (CS3-Tour guide narrative 9, 28.08.2019)

Liudmila emphasises the diversity of the city and Kazakhstan as a whole, in line with nation-building discourses built around the construction of a civic, multiethnic nation that incorporates minorities. That Russian-speakers, who currently make up a quarter of the city's total population and historically dominated the city (cf. Smagulova & Fleming, 2020; Bissenova, 2017), were not specifically mentioned is remarkable, although it is hard to tell whether this was an attempt to play down their significance or simply based on the assumption that the group knew about the city's significant Russophone population. Other tour guides explicitly included Russophone populations and culture in their constructions of diversity and tolerance. Tallinn guide Sofiia mentioned in her interview that one of her objectives was to counter the preconception that Russians are discriminated against in Estonia. In her tour, she made several references to the presence of Russophone cultural life in the city, referring to the Russian theatre and cultural centre in the Old Town and constructing Russophone cultural self-expression and exchange with Russia as a normal part of the city's everyday culture.

A similar expression of this positive and inclusive understanding of nation-building could be found in references to monuments. Guided tours focused on the re-erection of monuments and churches destroyed under communism rather than the decommunisation processes, the taking down of monuments to Soviet political and cultural figures, and regularly mentioned the care towards heritage in their cities. As her tour through

the inner city of Almaty stopped at a school building in Stalinist style, Ekaterina explained that a monument to Feliks Dzerzhinskii (1877–1926), a Bolshevik revolutionary and head of the secret police, used to stand in front of the building. She added, "Do not think that we somehow carelessly treat historical monuments. Many monuments that have been taken from the streets of the city or replaced by others, have been carefully preserved" (CS3-Tour guide narrative 8, 13.08.2019). The positively connoted language of tolerance and respect is extended here to a figure responsible for orchestrating the Stalinist terror.

Alongside the emphasis on such inclusive dimensions of the post-Soviet transformation, some guides also provided a more critical commentary, expressing ambivalences and critique regarding the nationalisation of urban landscapes and post-Soviet change, remarking upon the limited architectural value of recently built high rises, or economic and ethnic inequalities. Others commented on political decision-making and corruption as well as engaging in a critical commentary on nation-building projects, seeing the alteration of the urban space as driven by particular ideological values, comparable to earlier political regimes that tried to use space to manifest their power. In doing so, tour guides not only positioned themselves as a 'face of the city' but also as critical insiders who help to see behind the scenes.

Guides are expected to provide perspectives of the local people instead of a glossy marketing narrative or engaging in what Sharon Macdonald has called façade-peeling (Macdonald, 2006) while at the same needing to balance this with an overall positive account. In a tour, which focused on hidden corners of Kyiv, that was attended by locals as well as two foreign Russian-speakers and the researcher, a Swiss national living in the UK, tour guide Elena initially started to complain about city planning. She then looked at the tourists and the researcher and said to the group, "We have guests from abroad today, so we shouldn't be complaining too much, let's pretend all is good here" (CS2-Tour guide narrative 8, 20.07.2019). This ironic and self-reflexive remark—"let's pretend"—highlights the significance of positivity for guided tours, which remains its driving idea and principle. Commodified difference can integrate critical perspectives but ultimate relies on a positive rendering of what is seen. This positivity is also expected by tourists. They can ask tour guides questions or make remarks about the negative effects of economic restructuring and exclusionary nation-building, but overall, the positive image conveyed during the tour fitted what most tourists wanted to hear. The few critical remarks that the

interviewed tourists made about their experiences on guided tours were focused on instances where guides engaged in critical, political commentary, which was seen as inappropriate.

6.4 Here and There: Making Sense of Different Pasts vis-à-vis Russia

For most tourists, experiences of other pasts and heritage attracted them to the destinations and were one of the key reasons why they visit post-Soviet destinations. Tourists regularly noted the cities' interesting and unique architecture, their distinct food cultures and special atmospheres, and how tour guides helped to enhance or even create them. At the same time, they also reworked the positively connoted difference promoted by the guides, and the tourism industry at large, within their own symbolic frameworks: constructions of local and national differences were made sense of as part of a larger system of comparisons through which tourists made assessments about the destinations and their hierarchical positioning vis-à-vis other cities.

In her work on Russian tourists in Scotland, Larissa Ryazanova-Clarke observes that questions around Russia's place in the world emerge regularly in conversations with tourists, noting that "the emergence of the geographically mobile class in Russia has failed to frustrate existing master narratives" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2019, p. 269) about Russia's relation vis-à-vis Europe. Drawing on Salazar (2012), she distinguishes between cosmopolitan and provincial frames of imagination. The former "projects worldly knowledge of other landscapes and cultures that heightens the status of the tourist as a knowing and sophisticated individual" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2019, p. 259). Especially those who were well travelled have developed complex systems of comparison between cities—with other cities acting as frames of references for negotiating uniqueness and similarity. Provincial frames of imagination, in turn, have Russia and one's place of origin as a reference point, with tourists "seek[ing] visions and representations of otherness against a background of the familiar" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2019, p. 263). Similar to Ryazanova-Clarke's tourists in Scotland, those travelling to post-Soviet cities frequently made judgements about their own identity and Russia's place in the world (Neumann, 1999; Tolz, 2001) when recounting their experiences of the cities. They did so by

drawing on established images of civilisational progress and development vis-à-vis the former imperial peripheries.

Consuming Ancient Heritage, Escaping to a Simpler Time

In guided tours, references to ancient histories and cultures not only communicated distinctiveness but also 'rooted' the nation in a pre-imperial time, or in the case of Tallinn, a time marked by different imperial rule that helped to construct the city as part of a different, Western/European historical space. At the same time, tourists consumed these distant histories and traditional cultures in the form of traditional otherness that fed into established perceptions of destinations as exotic, romantic and mythical places to which tourists can escape. As the literature on post-colonial tourism has shown, tourism draws on images of a romantic or exotic otherness, seeing destinations as seemingly frozen in time and untouched by external influences. Salazar compares tourism to anthropology, arguing that "both involve essentially the same kind of symbolic representations, attempting to fixate the Other in a specific way" (Salazar, 2013, p. 675; cf. Bruner, 2001). Consuming commodified difference, tourists reproduced established centre-periphery relations and hierarchies, meaning that despite the displacing and glossing over difficult moments, commodified difference ultimately enabled the continuation of existing hierarchies of power.

"Seeing the beautiful Old Town" and its medieval heritage and "enjoying the beauty of the city" were mentioned by a large number of tourists when speaking about their expectations prior to visiting Tallinn. Particularly the Old Town of Tallinn was characterised as "mesmerising", "fabulous" and "cosy", with tourists making reference to its urban heritage as well as its small scale, and pace of life and noting the Old Town's "narrow lanes", "interesting buildings and facades", as well as the beauty of the Town Hall Square, elements that guides drew upon when enchanting the city and its history on their walking tours. Being guided through Tallinn's backyards and merchants' studios on Oksana's tour, tourists said it was like a "fairy tale" and how they loved Tallinn's Old Town and its little lanes and passageways. The preservation of the city centre, alongside medieval restaurants and the lack of ads in the city centre, were felt to create an authentic experience. Twenty-eight-year-old Tatiana, who was visiting the city for the first time, explained the allure of the city:

> The old little lanes, everything stands out. It's quiet, there is no rush, everyone is walking, relaxing. Saint Petersburg is much noisier, there are a lot of people on the streets in the centre, on Nevskii Prospekt, but here, in the Old Town, people have more space to spread out, and it is more comfortable to walk. (CS1_Tourist interview 8, 23.06.2019)

The old material heritage and distinct urban culture is framed here through a romantic lens and contrasted with a modern, nosier, and less friendly (metropolitan) Russia. Tallinn is seen as slower and less busy than the modern Saint Petersburg, and the city's relative slowness and less modern lifestyle are romanticised, valued by the tourists who seek to temporarily escape to a different kind of urbanity.

In Kyiv, too, the ancient heritage was positively valued as giving the city a distinct and mythical atmosphere. Tourists mentioned the old age of Kyiv and the history of the Kyivan Rus and emphasised the city's beauty as well as its historical and religious significance. One of the important and widespread images was that of an Orthodox and ancient Russian city, materialised primarily in the old churches and monasteries such as St Sofia Church, the cave monastery, and St Cyril's Church with Vrubel's frescoes, which were highlights on some of the walking tours. Sixty-year-old Marina, who worked as a medical doctor in Saint Petersburg, explained her programme during her last visit:

> I like ancient Russian painting, frescoes, cathedrals. Our cathedrals were blown up, but there only one was blown up, and for some reason the others were preserved. First of all, there is the Cave Monastery… there is Sophia, their central cathedral. Next, for me it was like this, I wanted to see Vrubel's frescoes [referring to the famous Russian symbolist artist Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel]. And there is the famous Saint Cyril Church. This is where Vrubel worked. Here, the famous Vrubel Madonna there. That's where I also took a tour guide. A smart guide, an academic, who wrote his dissertation on ornaments. There are ornaments from the 12th century, and he took me around this cathedral for two hours. (CS2-Tourist interview online 2, 10.01.2021)

For Marina, the well-preserved old churches were only one example of a traditional Slavic culture that she thought persisted in Kyiv. She recounted how she experienced the city like a better Russia, more authentic, with its traditional celebrations and impressive monuments, in comparison to the less authentic Russian reconstructions. Importantly, the city's mythical

character is framed here not as an expression of a different heritage but as part of her own culture—while she uses possessive pronouns such as 'ours' and 'theirs' to refer to the churches, they are seen as part of one cultural and historical space. The ownership of the heritage of the Kyivan Rus is contested—as both Russia and Ukraine claim it as a foundational period for their statehood (Kappeler, 2014). This contestation was not openly articulated in tourism encounters, as antagonism was glossed over. However, differences in the construction of heritage were nonetheless apparent: while the heritage of the Kyivan Rus was used by tour guides to construct local uniqueness and evoke continuity to present-day Ukraine, Russian tourists often framed it as part of their own culture. For many Russian visitors, experiences of Kyiv's old heritage were of particular cultural significance, which was also expressed in the famous phrase of Kyiv as the "mother of Russian cities" that several tourists used.

In comparison to Tallinn and Kyiv, a romantic or exotic vision of Almaty was less pronounced; tourists often remarked upon the pristine nature and unique environmental landscape surrounding the city while perceiving the city largely as Soviet or 'without much history'. Some however noted Almaty's distinct Asian atmosphere, evident in its culture and heritage, including its culinary traditions, hospitality, as well as the presence of mosques, bazaars (cf. Fig. 6.4), and other sites characteristic of non-European societies. Forty-nine-year-old Elvira from Saint Petersburg was struck by the "general atmosphere that the bazaar sets in the first place. And the mosque, it kind of immediately makes a reference to the region", referring to Central Asia's other regional histories and Islamic religious traditions. At the same time, she signalled how the perceived 'exotic' Asianness was fragmented and moderated by other constructions of difference, which existed parallel in her imagination. In comparison to other Central Asian cities, Almaty was "more Europeanised, as if not wanting to offend anyone" (CS3_Tourist Interview online 4, 26.01.2021). Interestingly, its different culture and heritage is here framed as potentially 'offensive' or alienating for the tourists, in contrast to a familiar (Soviet-)European cultural space that Elvira implicitly constructed herself as part of. Discourses of Almaty's Asianness thus strike orientalist tones as well as allow tourists to express their own cultural identities, including Russia's position vis-à-vis Europe (Khalid, 2000, p. 697).

Tourists' experiences of ancient and medieval heritage reflected different material urban landscapes of the cities, constituted at different times and shaped by different rules and cultural influences. They also reflected

Fig. 6.4 Almaty's bird market, one of the symbols of the city's Asianness (Source: Guzel Yusupova)

different relations between Russia and the destinations, drawing on established images of a (romantic) Europeanness, Asianness, as well as Slavic or Russian culture. This heritage was valued and even admired by tourists, but tourists' accounts also mirrored a widespread global tourism motive where destinations were temporally Othered. According to Fabian (1983), 'allochronism' creates a spatiotemporal distance as it places the Other outside of time. Using references to ancient and medieval heritage, destinations were constructed as exotic or romantic places and contrasted to a modern metropolitan, less authentic life in Russia. Despite finding pleasure and escape in the experience of difference, tourists' accounts nonetheless posited (metropolitan) Russia as being more advanced in comparison to the places they visited.

While in most accounts the traditional heritage was positively valued, some tourists perceived it solely negatively as a sign of the provinciality of destinations. For example, one visitor in Tallinn referred to the city's

alleged lack of cultural and civilisational sophistication with the words, "There is no Vienna Opera in Tallinn", while others remarked upon the traditional dishes and handmade products, provincial museums, as well as existing cultural institutions, noting that in the city's museums "everything is mixed up", making them look provincial. Particularly in Kyiv, where participants could claim the historical heritage, including that of Ancient Kyiv, as their own, tourists' accounts denied the existence of its own cultural heritage. Seventy-year-old Oleg, a retired university professor, used the language of postcoloniality to refer to Kyiv's cultural heritage, insinuating that if all what was Russian was removed from the city, nothing much would be left. He told an anecdote from a friend who works in the Middle East:

> Tourists arrive and are shown "this building from such and such a year, built by the British. This enterprise was built by the British, this hotel…". They ask him [the local guide]: "What about you, what did you do?". "We gave the British a hard time and kicked them out of here". In Ukraine it is the same story. That is, the main achievement is that "we freed ourselves from the imperial rulers". Let's just say it's paradoxical and tragic from the point of view of national identity. But it's the same thing. (CS2-Tourist interview online 10, 24.02.2021)

Ukrainian identity is seen here merely as a negative expression, denying the country's rich cultural and architectural heritage. Such constructions of provinciality and unculturedness were based on established imperial visions and hierarchies between a Russian centre and its underdeveloped peripheries, in line with the Russian historical self-image of a superior civilisation entitled to regional dominance (Kassymbekova & Marat, 2022).

Comparing Development: Admiration and Contempt

While assumptions about the relative development of destinations vis-à-vis Russia were embedded in the consumption of ancient and medieval heritage, comparisons were even more explicit when consuming the recent post-Soviet pasts. One of the central ways of how more recent post-Soviet pasts were communicated in the tourism industry involved the emphasis on the economic and cultural developments in the city, including advanced consumer infrastructures and new buildings, museums and heritage sites. Experiencing these developments, tourists regularly compared cities to the

current state of their places of origin, with destinations faring either positively as superior in their development or falling short in tourists' assessments. While visions of inferior development similarly reproduced hierarchical relations between a more advanced Russia and a provincial periphery, visions of superior development were framed in terms of a positively connoted difference that was advantageous to the consumer/tourist rather than being perceived in opposition to a Russian national identity project.

A vision of superiority was particularly pronounced in relation to Tallinn, a city which historically had been associated with superior development, not least due to its different 'European' heritage but also more recent histories of Europeanisation since the restoration of national independence. Tourists noted the city's modernity, perceiving it as developed, clean and flourishing. Several participants mentioned that Tallinn had a friendly service culture and excellent tourism infrastructure, transportation links and shopping opportunities. Also Estonians' embrace of information technology and new museums—such as the relatively new Estonian Maritime Museum which opened in 2012—were mentioned by tourists as exciting and unusual signs of an advanced European modernity.

Older tourists who had travelled to Tallinn during the Soviet period remembered how the city's superior development had been apparent earlier. Mariia, 70 years old, and Vadim, 77 years old, a couple from St Petersburg, had visited the city in the 1970s and 1980s, recounted their experiences:

Vadim: "The spirit, you know, was different. Women were not like ours. (…) The cafes… We came here to eat whipped cream, which we didn't have, you know? It's not that we didn't want it, it wasn't there. It was nice to sit outside with a cup of coffee. (…) Compared to where we lived, it was the West, understand? And now this West has changed, become European."

Interviewer: "Do you think that the city has become more western compared to Soviet times?"

Mariia: "It became a real European city, without the smell of a Soviet one, understand?" (CS1-Tourist interview 7, 23.06.2019)

The present difference is constructed here as a continuation of an earlier experience of progress, but the modernity that tourists encounter has also been reconfigured—not the "West of the Soviet Union" but "European"—with Europeanness standing for the European Union but also a specific experience of urbanity shaped by capitalist consumer and service culture that was also emphasised in tour guides' constructions of commodified difference.

In Kyiv and Almaty, visions of destinations' superiority were, however, more partial: Almaty and Kyiv were constructed by several participants as "cities with many faces", in particular, Kyiv—a city subject to intense comparison—was perceived as a patchwork quilt, where multiple temporalities co-existed within the same space. Due to its developed everyday culture, reflected in coffee houses, dress, youth culture, Kyiv was regularly regarded as a European city or a "space in-between" Russia and Europe. Marina, who travelled to Kyiv in appreciation of its ancient culture, also noted its contemporary developments, stating that in comparison to Russia, Kyiv "is closer to Europe than we are […] It is directly felt. How? You know, for one thing, they dress differently than we do" (CS2-Tourist interview online 2, 10.02.2021). In relation to Almaty, younger visitors, in particular, felt that it was a contemporary, postmodern city, similar to Western cities, describing it as "a Western civilisation put on topic of Soviet base" or as "Asian-European", arguing that its inhabitants "honour the traditions of Asia" but also "keep up with European innovations and trends" (CS3-Tourist interview online 10, 30.01.2021). Others noted Kazakhstan's national uniqueness and contemporary Eastern cultural influences, comparing it to Hong Kong, Beijing or Dubai: "Sometimes the city reminds me of a large Chinese city, for example Peking" (CS3_Tourist interview online 3), "somewhere in places it tries to look like, well, like Asian capitals. Taiwan, United Arab Emirates" (CS3-Tourist interview online 1, 15.01.2021). Highlighting its alternative urban modernity, these constructions put the association of Asianness with backwardness in question and reverse established civilisational hierarchies. However, as the qualifiers in talk about Almaty indicate ("sometimes", "in places", "it tries to look like"), for tourists, these characteristics were not consistently apparent. In the eyes of most, Almaty remained largely a product of the Soviet past, mixed with a degree of Asian difference.

The positive perception of national difference can be partly explained by the success of guides and the wider tourism industry in minimising antagonistic difference, as well as the composition of tourists, many of

whom positioned themselves as liberals, having a greater openness towards the Other. A few older participants noted how tourism has been turned into a mass industry and complained that "money rules everything", mirroring some of the tour guides' more critical account of urban restructuring. However, the resentment of superior development, including the condemnation of 'Western' decadence and the defence of 'traditional values' (Moss, 2017, p. 195) that has been a common motif in Russian identity discourse, was surprisingly uncommon in tourists' accounts. Importantly, tourists' reflections on the city's superior development were used to enhance tourists' own identity, associating themselves with positive characteristics as a traveller to these cities, rather than being articulated to express the inferiority of Russian cities. This is in line with an observation made by several studies that see the consumption of foreign culture and goods as a prominent marker of social distinction (Rössel & Schroedter, 2015; Castelló & Mihelj, 2018). Particularly in Russia, where foreign travel is not as widespread as in other countries, the status advantage of tourism as "a form of class-based practice" (Rössel & Schroedter, 2015, p. 80) should not be undervalued.

While the tourism industry framed the period of post-Soviet development in unequivocally positive terms, in the eyes of some tourists, destinations were also perceived as lagging, similarly to constructions of backwardness that were made when consuming ancient and medieval heritage. In particular, the cleanliness, technological development, and service culture of destinations were seen as key markers of development. Twenty-five-year-old Anna from Saint Petersburg summarised her experiences in Kyiv:

> I didn't like it - it was dirty. At some point [during the trip] it seemed to me that we have stepped further forward in terms of civilisation. In minibuses, people jump in, jump out during the drive - and this is normal. The driver smokes while driving. Well, we absolutely don't have that anymore (…) And when you ask to pay by card, they are like 'who are you, girl, did you forget to withdraw money?' (CS2-Tourist interview online 1, 6.01.2021)

Anna mobilised established spatial ideas of provinciality, constructing Kyiv as a periphery that was less developed than the Russian civilisational centre that had shed Soviet traditions and used more advanced technologies. In this case, the city's spatiotemporal otherness referred not to a traditional culture valued for its exoticism that enriched tourists' lives. Instead, the

encountered difference was perceived as a lack of expected comfort. Making sense of their experiences of difference, tourists thus posited the commodified difference central to the tourism offer within a system of hierarchical relations, assigning it different and nested values, using it to evaluate Russians' place not only vis-à-vis their neighbours but also in relation to European civilisation.

Tour guides' accounts and the wider tourism offer sought to minimise antagonistic difference; however, such antagonistic difference was not absent from tourists' accounts. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, tourists were also exposed to what they saw as signs of nationalistic identity politics and memorial projects during their visits or drew on wider discourses of anti-Russian sentiments and antagonistic relations between Russia and its neighbours. Encounters with antagonistic difference were also integrated into comparative evaluations of cities vis-à-vis Russia, seen as a sign of inferior and regressive cultural development. Aleksandra, a 49-year-old teacher from Moscow, expressed disappointment in what she saw as militaristic nationalism in Kyiv, criticising the presence of Ukrainian national dress and the new memorial culture that reveres the fallen from the Donbas war as Ukraine's new national heroes:

> Forgive me, it's generally very strange to me that in a European city of the 21st century we seem to be falling back to our roots. How very interesting, this kind of branding. Well, okay, let's say, because we live in a global society, and we want something like this… I want youth culture, and some kind of movement and drive, well, that's what I'm actually drawn to. And there it is absent. (CS2-Tourist interview online 3, 13.01.2021)

Positioning herself elsewhere as a liberal opposed to the Donbas war and annexation of Crimea, Aleksandra condemned any form of nationalism, wilfully ignoring the role Russia's aggression towards Ukraine plays in the significance of Ukrainian national identity display. Classifying nationalism as forms of backward expression, she constructed herself as a cosmopolitan citizen of the world, disregarding her complicity in the belittling of Ukrainian culture.

More generally, making sense of commodified differences within the frameworks of established stereotypes and hierarchical relations, tourists' accounts also, to some extent, turned commodified difference back into antagonistic difference. References to temporal otherness, provinciality, and exoticism that, as the discussion shows, accompanied the

consumption of national difference frequently reproduced imperial power relations and hierarchies that are at the core of the tensions between Russia and its neighbours today.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insights into how national heritage and identity are performed in the tourism industry as part of a global cultural economy—a "complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296) where Russians used to consume nationalised pasts alongside other visitors from the West, internal tourists, and tourists from other regions. Rather than dissolving local and national differences, global mobility and economic flows have led to their reinvigoration. Capitalising on a desire for difference, tourism industries provide a platform through which to turn the particularistic identities that have emerged since the break-up of the Soviet Union into profit. From this perspective, tourism has a double function: it presents an identity opportunity—to perform national heritage and uniqueness to others that in turn can confirm and strengthen national communities. It also brings economic revenue, reinvigorating local economies.

While political analysis has focused on derussification processes and the antagonistic orientation of identity politics, the chapter allows us to understand how national difference is not necessarily framed and understood as anti-Soviet/Russian. Through the production of commodified difference, antagonistic dimensions of identity project are displaced and minimised. 'Commodified difference' refers to memories that share several characteristics: they are easily digestible; they emphasise age-old authentic traditions, inclusivity, and tolerance; they focus on experience and sensual encounters; and they are depoliticised, glossing over internal and external divisions. Such memories thus fit within the neoliberal commercial frameworks of the tourism industry, as well as being a response to the specific mnemonic tensions that characterise contested post-imperial settings.

This chapter has highlighted both the significance of national memories for communicating national distinctiveness and its limitations, including their selective content and silences as well as their potential to reproduce existing hierarchies of power. The memories circulated in the tourism industry and in tourists' everyday encounters with difference fitted into romantic and exotic frameworks. They drew on established stereotypes, including orientalist images and ideas of provinciality, as well as earlier

conceptions of national traditions and heritage that have been shaped by Russian imperial and Soviet rule (Hirsch, 2003; Alymbaeva, 2020). Expressions of national forms that were already encouraged by Soviet nationalities policies were promoted in the form of ethnic folklore, national cuisines and other national traditions and heritage, fitting with tourists' expectations.

An analysis of tourist perceptions has also shown how tourists use national pasts to make sense of Russia's position vis-à-vis their neighbours. Alongside reflections on proximity or distance, discussed in the previous chapter, the former peripheries of the Soviet Union worked as a mirror against which Russia's identity and the success or failure of post-Soviet development were reflected upon. In tourists' perceptions, we could see constructions of superiority and inferiority that broadly aligned with established pictures of Europeanness and Asianness, where Tallinn finds itself at one end of the civilisational spectrum and Almaty at the other, and Kyiv's identity falls somewhere in between: closely entangled with Russia, hotly contested, and being the object of a particularly pronounced imperial mentality and denied its own identity by some tourists.

Considering both the role of tourism professionals and tourists in the communication of national distinctiveness thus creates an ambiguous picture: it acknowledges the hosts' agency in the communication of national distinctiveness. At the same time, an inclusion of the tourist perspective alerts us to the limits of this agency, as these stories do little to challenge established conceptions of alterity. Ultimately, considering how these stereotypical conceptions, at least to some extent, reproduced imperial hierarchies and fed into controversies and tensions, tour guides' attempts to diminish antagonism was only partially successful.

CHAPTER 7

Navigating Difficult Pasts

7.1 Introduction

While tourism industries are oriented towards creating attractive images of destinations, histories of violence and suffering have increasingly been incorporated into its offers and are often actively promoted by states and tourism organisations. Such tourism offers are often discussed as representing 'difficult pasts'—pasts that are "recognised as meaningful in the present but that [are] also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity" (Macdonald, 2009, p. 1). In tourism and heritage scholarship, they are usually studied under the umbrella terms of 'thanatourism' or 'dark tourism', referring to the travel to sites, attractions, and exhibitions which have suffering, death, or the macabre as their main theme (Hartmann, 2014; Lennon & Foley, 2000).

With visits to Pompeii and gladiatorial games in the Colosseum as famous pre-modern examples, dark tourism is not a new phenomenon. At the same time, the number of sites dedicated to difficult pasts, as well as visitor numbers, have been growing across the world. The rising interest has also been evidenced in specialised travel packages and a TV series on the subject. Different reasons are said to lie behind it. According to memory scholars, the concern with difficult pasts can be seen as part of the collapse of grand narratives (Huyssen, 2012), the rise of victimhood narratives, and negative identity narratives that acknowledge national

A. Pfoser, *Tourism as Memory-Making*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83738-8_7

responsibility and guilt (Giesen, 2004; Olick, 2007). Moreover, it can be linked to a general valuing of transparency in society. Similar to the rise of practices of confession at the individual level, transparency about collective atrocities and acts of violence has increasingly become a gesture of national moral strength (cf. Mihai & Thaler, 2014). Research on dark tourism has focused on yet another explanation for the interest in difficult pasts, mentioning people's fascination with death and suffering as a key driver for visits to dark tourism sites. Moreover, scholars have noted the accessibility of sites of Nazi atrocities in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the GDR after the fall of the Iron Curtain, as well as fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa as a reason for dark tourism's rise since the 1990s (Hartmann, 2014; Lennon & Foley, 2000).

Despite the expansion of dark tourism offers, the question of how to present difficult pasts continues to be seen as challenging. As Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) outline in their influential book 'Dissonant Heritage', heritage can generally be seen as a contentious issue, linked to competing identity projects and loaded with different values and interests. In the tourism sector, commercial and public stakeholders, tourists, and locals often have different perspectives on heritage, creating tensions that need to be managed. In the case of difficult pasts, there are additional challenges. The representation of heritage runs against conceptions of national identity traditionally formed around positive rather than negative heritage—as well as the drive of the tourism industry to create positive experiences (cf. Chaps. 5 and 6). Its representation is also usually subject to particular sensitivities or even controversy. Sharon Macdonald raises several important questions that curators and intermediaries such as guides confront in their work with difficult pasts:

> How much of the horror to show? Should a representation remain coolly factual or use more emotive forms of staging? Are there groups within society that might be offended or who might draw the wrong kind of political sustenance from what is said? How far into social, economic and political contextualisation should representation go? Does identifying individual perpetrators give them a kind of posterity or is it necessary for incriminating them? Should links be made with other atrocities or political events, including more recent ones? (Macdonald, 2015, p. 18)

The transnationalisation of memory—the phenomenon that memory-making increasingly exceeds national borders (Erll, 2011)—adds

additional complexity to the representation and staging of troubled pasts, as the conversation around how to interpret the past now also takes place at an international level between actors whose understanding of the past can be shaped by different national traditions of historiography.

This chapter examines the role of difficult pasts in Russian tourism to post-Soviet cities. The analysis of previous chapters suggested that Russian tourism offers produced memories that provided a positive experience and were affirmative for the identity of tourists: commercial guides at least indirectly promoted nostalgia for imperial pasts, as well as putting forward conceptions of a positively connoted national difference that could be easily consumed, minimising antagonism and conflict. While this captures some of the logics of memory-making in commercial tourism offers, the question as to how tour guides and tourists deal with contested and difficult topics deserves closer examination. Particularly in a context of transnational memory wars, many tourists were aware of conflicts, and difficult pasts were hard to avoid in guided tours, be it in the form of remarks or comments from tourists or memorial plaques, monuments, and other visible reminders of past violence and suffering in the urban space that were hard to ignore. Following the line of inquiry put forward in the book, this chapter offers firstly a broad examination of how difficult pasts are engaged with in post-Soviet tourism industries, and secondly reveals the specific processes through how such pasts are conveyed in commercial guided tours. In doing so, the chapter introduces 'memory diplomacy' as a significant but overlooked mode of dealing with difficult pasts. I argue that memory diplomacy captures the ambiguity and pragmatic character of memory-making in the tourism industry. Going beyond the binary of ethico-political accounts of remembering on the one hand, and memory conflicts on the other, modes of remembering privileged in the scholarly literature, it moreover makes a valuable contribution to writings on transnational remembering.

Existing studies on memory and tourism have offered detailed examinations of the curation, representation, and performance of difficult pasts in tourism, including in studies on Holocaust tourism (Reynolds, 2018; Rapson, 2015; Lehrer, 2013), battlefield tourism (West, 2022), tourism to sites of violent conflict and terrorist attacks (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011; Markham, 2018), plantation tourism (Ebron, 2014; Rapson, 2020) as well as communist repressions (Pastor, 2021; Frank, 2016; Jones, 2014). These studies also are reflective of the preoccupation with traumatic and difficult pasts in memory studies as a whole (for a critique, cf. Rigney,

2018a). However, as I argued earlier, the focus on dedicated sites and offers means that the ways in which difficult pasts are represented in more general tourism offers such as city museums or guided walking tours (Pfoser & Keightley, 2021) and tourism promotion (Rivera, 2008) have been left unexamined. This is problematic as this scholarship is often based on an implicit understanding of morally appropriate/legitimate forms of remembering and less appropriate/legitimate forms. Examinations of existing representational practices of difficult pasts often fall broadly within two categories: on the one hand, those that are shaped by cosmopolitan or agonistic orientations (Cento Bull & Hansen, 2016; Lehrer et al., 2011) and on the other, those that are sensationalist, commodifying suffering (Lennon & Foley, 2000) and feeding existing socio-political divisions (McDowell, 2008). In doing so, existing scholarship does not acknowledge the complexity of remembering, including the entanglement of different modes of memory in these sites (cf. Pfoser & Stach, 2024; Kidron, 2013, for an exception). Moreover, it fails to analyse alternative strategies of engagement—such as avoidance strategies and pragmatically oriented practices of remembering that are not captured by these binary accounts (cf. Schlegel & Pfoser, 2021). As this chapter shows, while dark tourism offers have risen significantly in post-Soviet destinations, not all tourists visit these sites, and some, including many tourists from Russia, consciously avoid them. In this context, it is worth examining if and how they inadvertently encounter difficult pasts while travelling, and how guides who offer guided tours for a general public deal with such pasts on tour.

This chapter is structured as follows: it firstly provides an overview of the role of dark tourism in the three case study locations and identifies different relations of visitors to heritage sites associated with difficult pasts. It subsequently introduces the concept of memory diplomacy and discusses what this entails practically, analysing how difficult subjects are navigated in commercial guided tours. I identify two broad sets of strategies of intermediating between competing versions of the past, which were shaped by guides' professional identities as well as relations to the audience. The first strategy deemphasised the contested past, particularly through strategies of narrative selection and spatial manoeuvring, as well as through an emphasis on neutrality and factuality. The second conceived the tourism encounter as a possibility for dialogue by explaining local positions, distancing the past from the present and/or using humour to create empathy. The latter strategy created the possibility for an opening of entrenched memory versions but involved more risks for tour guides and was largely

incited by tourists rather than forming part of an intentional educational strategy (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021). The chapter finally discusses the potential and limitations of this approach to memory-making. It argues that discussions on memory diplomacy will help to inform conceptual debates on transnational memory studies, which have often operated with normative understandings of memory and have so far neglected tourism as a subject area.

7.2 Difficult Heritage Sites in Russian Tourism

As collective identities and memories were reworked in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union, this entailed a shift towards narratives and representations that centred on national victimhood, but also involved the public rediscovery of histories of marginalised and repressed minority groups including those of Jewish communities, encouraged by transnational discussions (Radonić, 2021; Bogumił, 2018). New memorial sites and museums that have been added to the heritage landscapes across post-socialist countries reflected commemorative ideas centred on difficult pasts. At the same time, they differed significantly regarding their status and their touristification. In Tallinn, one of the most significant sites commemorating difficult pasts is the Museum of Occupations, which opened in 2003 in the city centre, with the mission to research and commemorate the Soviet (1940–41, 1944–1991) and Nazi (1941–44) occupations. It was renamed Vabamu in 2018 to emphasise a new, broadened focus on ideas of resistance, restoration, and freedom, and become a more future-oriented space for reflection and debate (cf. Weekes, 2017). Other notable sites include the Maarjamäe Memorial Complex, which since 2018 includes a Memorial to the Victims of communism, the KGB museum in Viru Hotel, which focuses on Soviet surveillance and control, as well as the Patarei prison, a symbol of Soviet and Nazi political terror, which at the time of the fieldwork in 2019 hosted the temporary exhibition "Communism is Prison" with plans to transform it into a "International Memorial Museum for the Victims of Communism" (Patarei Prison, 2023). While not figuring prominently in official tourism campaigns, these museums and memorials are nonetheless a popular part of Tallinn's tourism offer. They are advertised in tourism brochures and websites and have attracted large numbers of international visitors, showing their relevance not only as sites for the bolstering of national identity, but also as commercially successful attractions. According to Weekes (2017), 90% of

the over 22,000 annual visitors of Tallinn's Occupation Museum are foreign tourists.

Also in Kyiv, a range of museums and memorial sites are dedicated to histories of violence, terror, and oppression: the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide was established in 2008 near the Cave Monastery to commemorate the victims of the man-made famine of 1932–33 that killed millions of Ukrainians, following the 2006 act by the Ukrainian parliament to recognise the Holodomor as a deliberate act of genocide. Another significant site that commemorates difficult pasts is Babyn Yar, the site of the largest Nazi mass shooting, with an estimate number of victims of 100,000. However, as Blacker writes, "Nazi cover-up, decades of intentional Soviet oblivion, and post-Soviet inertia have rendered the site a commemorative jumble, with dozens of small memorials dotting the landscape, but no coherent narrative" (Blacker, 2020, n.p.). Since 2016, a memorial centre has been in planning but has been the subject of significant controversy (Blacker, 2020). Among tourists, the imposing Soviet-built memorial complex around the National War Museum where the monumental Mother Ukraine statue is located is particular attractive. Formerly named the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, its name was changed in 2015 as part of the de-communisation that outlawed the term 'Great Patriotic War'. The museum has subsequently been redesigned and updated. At the time of the fieldwork, the Donbas war had been incorporated in the display, featuring tanks, photographs of soldiers, and other war related objects (cf. Figs. 7.1 and 7.2). More broadly, the museum has been reconceived as a space to document and commemorate Ukraine's

Figs. 7.1 and 7.2 The Mother Ukraine statue in the WWII memorial complex (right). Tanks captured from Russian-backed separatists in Donbas on display (left). (Source: Simon Schlegel)

struggle for freedom, an effort that continues since Russia's full-scale invasion. Alongside such official commemorations of the war, improvised vernacular memorial sites for the Donbas war and the fallen Maidan protesters have also cropped up on various sites across Kyiv (Wanner, 2019).

In comparison to Estonia and Ukraine, difficult heritage has assumed less prominence in both the public memory culture and heritage landscape in Kazakhstan, although narratives of victimhood have also been used for nation-building and to gain capital in a global mnemonic arena (Bekus, 2021; Kudaibergenova, 2016). Histories of violence, like references to forced resettlements to Kazakhstan, have been integrated into national museums such as the Central State Museum of Kazakhstan in Almaty. A monument to the victims of the Holodomor, the famine of 1931–33, which killed several million people in Soviet Kazakhstan and forced many others to migrate, was opened in 2017 in Karagayly Square. It takes the form of a bronze and granite sculpture that shows a mother holding a child exhausted from famine. In other parts of the country, Gulag museums and memorial sites have opened in Kazakhstan since the mid-2000s (Lennon & Tiberghien, 2020, 2022) on the sites of the sprawling network of Soviet prison camps. As Lennon and Tiberghien note, the "relative profiles and levels of visitation has been low" (Lennon & Tiberghien, 2022, p. 479) as Gulag heritage till today remains relatively marginal for history education, tourism, and conservation efforts. However, current discussions in academic and cultural circles around Kazakhstan's postcolonial identity (Doolotkeldieva, 2023) might mean a change of direction in the future.

Russian tourists displayed different attitudes to these sites and the pasts they commemorated. Even if tourists did not know the historical details and specific points of contestations, most of them were aware of the commemoration of traumatic and difficult pasts in post-Soviet urban landscapes and heritage sites. This applied particularly to visitors in Tallinn and Kyiv, where memory conflicts had been more intense. In comparison, those travelling to Almaty had little knowledge of local discussions of Russian colonialism and the re-interpretation of Kazakhstan's past centred on national victimhood (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2023), with many tourists favourably commenting on the positive attitude towards Russians and the shared past.

A small number of tourists explicitly aligned themselves with the new memory projects and identities formed in the destinations. Tourists expressed sympathies with decolonialisation movements in Kazakhstan,

called the Soviet period in Estonia an 'occupation' and supported the latest wave of removal of Soviet monuments in Ukraine—this was a small but highly articulated group of tourists, all of them university educated, with liberal values. In Kyiv and Tallinn, where local memory politics had more decisively broken with Russian interpretations of the past, tourists were more inclined to acknowledge the significance of national independence for their neighbours and the violence inflicted by the Soviet and Tsarist regimes. Particularly those choosing to travel to Kyiv at a moment of ongoing conflict were often sympathetic with the Ukrainian national project, praising Ukrainians' "courage and strength to change themselves" (CS-Tourist interview 5, 4.08.2019). Some travelled specifically because of their interest and support for the Maidan Uprising and the Revolution of Dignity, which emerged as a response to President Yanukovich's decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013, choosing closer ties with Russia instead. Svetlana, a 62-year-old journalist from Moscow, was a regular visitor to Kyiv. Her son had relocated to the city, one of the reasons, why she had visited about 20–30 times in the past five years. She was happy to share her reflections about Ukraine's history and recent developments, saying that she held a lot of sympathy for Ukraine:

> Everything that happened in Kyiv during the Soviet period, happened in the shadow of Moscow. Now it comes out in a different way, and you see new things for example the mosaics of Olga Markish (Olga Rapay-Markish, 1929–2012, one of Ukraine's most famous ceramicists). […] I welcome the decommunisation, I think it is wonderful. I will be happy when last monument disappears. […] I think it's a wonderful victory for Ukraine and its departure from Soviet civilisation. Is it necessary to preserve the memory of this civilisation? Well, probably, just as in Germany they preserve the memory of Nazism, Nazi art is also sometimes exhibited somewhere, but no one brags about it, but it is considered, after all, in the context of history, and what the Nazis did to the world. I hope that it will also be like that in Ukraine. I don't know when this will happen in Russia, I probably won't live to see it, but it will happen someday. (CS2-Tourist interview 2, 25.07.2019)

In this quotation, Svetlana firstly articulated her discovery of Ukrainian national heritage after its independence, which for her had not been apparent during the Soviet period. Moreover, she expressed her admiration for the willingness to change, reflected in the removal of monuments to Soviet leaders in Kyiv. She compared the Soviet heritage to that of Nazi Germany,

and framed it as a part of a history that should be removed from the streets and commemorated in specifically designed heritage sites. The decommunisation efforts are conceived as part of a broader political change, with Ukraine being a role model for Russia, which "still has a long way to go".

Such cosmopolitan stances that identified with the Other, recognised past blind spots, and acknowledged histories of imperial violence, were however relatively uncommon. More frequently, tourists expressed *tolerance* in relation to new national memory projects, evidencing a pluralist attitude and a respect for national self-determination. Asked about the most important time in Tallinn's history, Nadezhda, a 55-year-old tourist from Moscow noted that "only Estonians, Tallinners can decide that for themselves" when the best time was, adding that "when Russia was the SSSR, we had the warmest memories, I can only say the kindest words. Fate divorced us" (CS1-Tourist interview 24, 4.07.2019). Nadezhda had travelled to Tallinn several times during the Soviet period and remembered these visits fondly, as part of her general positive perception of the relations between Russians and their neighbours. At the same time, while making clear that she did not share local memories, she nonetheless recognised the right of the local population to hold a different view on the past.

Similarly, 48-year-old Sergei from St Petersburg recognised the aggression on the part of the USSR following the Molotov-Ribbendrop pact, but emphasised the ambiguity of the Soviet occupation:

> Well, yes, I know that … uh [pause] uh, I know that there was a lot of violence in the relations between the countries, but it still seems to me that when we entered Estonia, we nevertheless liberated … in short, there is no such unequivocal thing that it was bad or good, I think. (CS1-Tourist Interview Online 6, 15.01.2019)

Sergei carefully chose his words, trying to find an adequate description for the Soviet occupation of Estonia, while in fact refusing to position himself. Such ambiguities or relativism—emphasising that multiple opinions are possible—showed the difficulty of speaking about this period. The framework of tolerance allowed tourists to avoid taking any cardinal positions. It recognised the Other's position as valid and moved beyond the idea of memory as a zero-sum game. At the same time, such a position was unable to work through memory conflicts, leaving them unresolved.

A significant number of tourists also expressed opposition to memories centred on traumatic and violent pasts in the destination, and actively

objected to engaging with them, experiencing such a confrontation as 'scary' and 'unpleasant'. Being asked about whether they had visited museums and memorial sites dealing with these pasts, tourists responded:

> This is not a place where I would go of my own free will. […] because it seems to me that it is extremely ideologised. This ideology annoys me. All this howl about the fact that the Soviet Union strangled the Baltic states there, this is for those who love it […] To walk there means to listen to all these cries. Well, I don't … I don't like the Soviet Union, but all this rhetoric, it doesn't impress me either. (Evgenii, 48 years old, on Tallinn's Vabamu museum, CS1-Tourist interview online 4, 19.01.2021)

> This new memorial, the one about the occupation … it's scary. (Iiulia, 30 years old, on Tallinn's Maarjamäe Memorial Complex, CS1-Tourist interview online 7, 15.01.2021)

> Here there are the games of history and the redefinition of history […] from the point of view of a tourist, this is somehow not particularly desirable, to be honest. (Olga, 43 years old, on Kyiv's history museums, CS1-Tourist interview online 2, 12.01.2021)

These quotes expressed deep-seated reservations and anxieties in relation to new and reconfigured memorial sites in post-Soviet cities. These sites were perceived as driven by an ideological agenda that consciously misrepresented the past and shaped it according to present-day interests. References to 'ideology', 'games of history', and 'cries' about the past reflected the perception of simplified, politically instrumentalised, and emotionalised representations in memorial sites and museums, which was posited against an objective account of the past 'as it was'. Implicitly, these quotations also referred to the anti-Russian character of heritage sites, assuming that narratives of victimhood such as the framing of the Soviet period as an occupation were directed against Russians, who were perceived as former occupiers or their heirs. Importantly, tourists saw a lack of objectivity only on the other side, not in relation to their own position and/or Russia's memory politics. Alongside the alleged misrepresentation of the past, the status of a tourist was used to justify the decision not to engage with these sites, evoking tourism's apolitical connotations and association with pleasurable experiences.

As the experience of those who chose to visit new memorials and museums showed, anxieties relating to a potential visit were to a large degree a

projection from tourists. Several of those who visited noted that they were surprised by their nuanced or inclusive representation of the past. For example, contrary to the expectations of some tourists, the new Memorial to the Victims of Communism in the Maarjamäe Memorial Complex in Tallinn was not ethically defined but included the commemoration of Russian victims to communism. Situated along the axis between memory competition and solidarity, visitors' opinions about difficult heritage sites were often formed without actually engaging with them, reflecting their political identities.

7.3 Memory Diplomacy: Understanding the Communication of Difficult Pasts Beyond Dedicated Heritage Sites

For commercial tour guides, the range of positions that tourists articulated in relation to the memory of difficult pasts presented a significant challenge, particularly when they worked with heterogeneous groups. When it came to pre-booked groups, guides could enquire in advance what aspects of the past tourists were interested in, and could adapt the tour to cover difficult pasts. This occurred particularly when tourists showed explicit interest in histories of violence and suffering, driven by their political identities and/or family history. In contrast, in open drop-in tours that were common in the case study cities, participants often had mixed backgrounds, differing in age, political views, ethnic identities, and places of origin. Tours were often attended by Russian nationals as well as Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russian-speaking Latvians, Israelis, and Americans. The diversity of these groups meant that tour guides approached them with particular awareness of potential disagreements.

Tour guides' approach to memory-making entailed a careful navigation of contested issues. I refer to this mode of remembering difficult pasts as *memory diplomacy* which I define as memory-making that is oriented towards transnational exchange and dialogue, when perceived as possible and productive. Memory diplomacy is characterised by pragmatism and measuredness, with the avoidance of conflict and confrontation being a key driver in the communication of the past. Despite differences in the emotional intensity with which memory conflicts were fought across the region, memory diplomacy shaped the communicative strategies of dealing with contested issues across the case study locations.

The notion of 'memory diplomacy' is a relatively recent coinage and can be seen as part of the scholarship on 'new diplomacy', a body of writing that has significantly widened the understanding of diplomatic processes and international relations by considering media, culture, sports, health, food, heritage, and everyday encounters as relevant fields of study. Memory diplomacy seeks to understand how cultural memory—and discourses and practices concerning it—intersects with the making of international relations and geopolitics (cf. Bachleitner, 2019; Clarke & Duber, 2020; Edwards, 2022; McGlynn & Đureinović, 2023). It is closely aligned with scholarship on cultural diplomacy and heritage diplomacy (Lähdesmäki, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Winter, 2015), two bodies of literature which have attracted comparatively more attention. One of the key questions of the scholarship is in relation to the actors and objectives of these new forms of diplomacy: in a narrow understanding memory diplomacy is closely related to nation-branding and the instrumentalisation of the past by state actors, or those operating on behalf of them. Memories from this perspective are used purposefully in strategic alliances to pursue foreign policy goals and project soft power (McGlynn & Đureinović, 2023, p. 228; cf. Winter's understanding of heritage *in* diplomacy, 2015).

While such an approach might be useful for a consideration of official memory politics, a focus on tourism encounters widens the pool of actors considered relevant for the study of memory diplomacy and allows a consideration of the processual and relational character of memory-making, in this case in the co-production of memories by guides and tourists. Such a reconceptualisation of memory diplomacy borrows from debates in cultural diplomacy and heritage diplomacy (Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022, p. 639; Isar & Triandafyllidou, 2021; Kolokytha, 2022) as well as writing on everyday diplomacy (Marsden et al., 2016; Henig, 2016). Scholars working in these areas have started to consider a wider range of actors including NGOs, artists, and heritage professionals as well as informal interactions and encounters at the international level as part of people-to-people diplomatic relationships. As Marsden, Ibañez-Tirado, and Henig outline, work on everyday diplomacy seeks to explore

> the ways in which historic and ongoing geopolitical processes are experienced by communities, and how such experiences form the ground upon which distinctively diplomatic skills, such as mediation, communication, persuasion, dissuasion and negotiation are enacted, instantiated and embod-

> ied, becoming salient aspects of individual and collective self-understandings, as well as of the affective and semiotic worlds such communities create and inhabit. (Marsden et al., 2016, p. 6)

This quotation already indicates a broader purpose of diplomacy that goes beyond instrumental accounts and includes mutual learning, joint reflection, and debate (Ang et al., 2015). Drawing on these reflections, I conceive memory diplomacy in relation to difficult pasts not as a one-sided political project. Instead, it is based on careful considerations of how to navigate contested topics in tourism encounters shaped by different national sensibilities and perceptions. The conception of memory diplomacy also draws on tour guides' own accounts, who frequently used the language of diplomacy to explain their role as intermediaries, who are aware of different positions and need to navigate them with sensitivity.

The discussion below outlines how memory diplomacy works in practice, focusing first on strategies of avoiding and neutralising contested topics, followed by a discussion on how tour guides seek to encourage dialogue and exchange.[1]

7.4 Avoiding and Neutralising Contested Topics

In a tour through the centre of Kyiv, Olga, a tour guide in her mid-50s, gathered a group of nearly 30 tourists in Hrushevskiy Street, where several Maidan protesters had been shot in February 2014, when protesting against President Yanukovich's decision not to sign the EU Association Agreement. As an improvised memorial, the shapes of the bodies as they fell had been painted on the pavement and were clearly visible to tourists. While standing on these shapes, Olga spoke about the street's buildings, their architects, and the time of the nineteenth century when they were built, without acknowledging the recent violent history that was painfully visible in the street. In the interview after the tour, she explained her silence: "I never touch it [Maidan] myself. If they ask me, I tell them honestly how it was. Probably, Maidan is the hardest part of the conversation with Russia" (CS2-Tour guide interview 12, 22.07.2019).

The Euromaidan Uprising, which began on 21 November 2013, is a hot memory, a recent violent event that resulted in the death of almost a

[1] The subsequent discussion draws on two earlier published articles (Schlegel & Pfoser, 2021; Pfoser & Keightley, 2021).

hundred protestors and 13 members of the police forces. Russian misinformation campaigns have alleged foreign interference in these protests, framing it as a staged coup. The Uprising was soon followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the Donbas war. Several Kyiv tour guides said they tried to avoid discussing 'the Maidan' in their walking tours as opinions tend to be polarised and mutually exclusive.

In general, tour guides working with Russophone audiences perceived the shared Tsarist and Soviet past as both an advantage and a burden. On the one hand, it allowed them to easily make connections to their customers and to provide deep and detailed accounts of the local history based on a shared stock of knowledge (cf. Chap. 5). On the other hand, guides were aware of the difficulties of remembering sensitive topics and the confrontations and conflicts this could lead to. Tour guides employed different strategies to navigate this difficult terrain. Like in Olga's tour, they could decide not to talk about controversial events, figures and periods. However, memories of the Maidan protests or, for example, the Soviet occupation of Estonia were what Charlotte Linde (2009, p. 197) calls "noisy silences", topics that were frequently discussed in public in other situations, that could lead to further questions from tourists. During the stop on Hrushevskiy street, tourists did not pose any questions, moving on with Olga to the next stop. However, comments and ('provocative') questions from tourists were not uncommon and could create uncomfortable situations for guides.

Sofiia, an experienced guide in Tallinn, who works with large groups who arrive by cruise ship, reflected on how she dealt with the memorial plaques that commemorate Tallinn's bombardment in 1944, during World War II, by the Red Army, killing at least 554 city residents and 171 soldiers and destroying historical buildings on Harju Street (cf. Fig. 7.3). During the Soviet period, the bombardments of civilian targets were blamed on the German Wehrmacht, and mentioning responsibility of the Red Army for the destruction can be sensitive today, as it touches the 'sacred memory' of the Soviet Union's Great Victory. Sofia explained:

> People come to relax, they come to have fun. Why would I tell them that in 1944, on 9th March, the Soviet army bombed Estonia… I know about it. That is, if we walk along this street, and they ask: "Why are there no houses here?", then I say that there was such a situation. And then someone agrees, someone begins to prove to me that it was necessary. If it's just a sightseeing tour, I try not to provoke people or stress them out. It is not my task to

Fig. 7.3 Memorial plaques commemorating Tallinn's 1944 bombardment by the Red Army. (Source: Alena Pfoser)

> enlighten them… on the contrary, I believe that my task is to smooth out and unite, rather than to set any boundaries. (CS1-Tour guide interview 3, 14.06.2019)

Similarly to Olga's strategy of dealing with "the Maidan", talking about controversial pasts happens only in reaction to tourists' questions. Sofiia mentions the risks associated with it, as it can lead to comments from tourists and can disrupt the positive and inclusive atmosphere that she tries to create. While she was aware of the historical events as well as the emotions attached to their memory, according to her, the engagement with difficult pasts lies outside of the purpose of the sightseeing tour. Similarly, in Almaty, the only guided tour explaining the history of the Holodomor was prompted by a tourist question about the monument that the group passed in the city centre.

Alongside with silencing these pasts in their narrative accounts, guides also used strategies of spatial manoeuvring to pre-empt potential conflicts, for example selecting a route that did not pass a site associated with a

controversial past, or adjusting the rhythm of the tour to pass it quickly. An alternative was to keep the narrative consciously short, or to remove controversial aspects from it. If the tour allowed for it, controversial topics could also be taken into a private discussion with individual tourists that allows for less restraint. During a guided tour through the Kyiv Cave Monastery (CS2-Tour narrative 12, 29.07.2019), the group passed through a room where several historical maps were on display. In front of a map of fifteenth-century Lithuania, a Russian-speaking guest said loud enough for the entire group to hear that a country named Ukraine was nowhere to be seen. In response, Serhii, an experienced guide working in the Monastery, pointed out that neither was there a country called Russia. He began to speak to the challenging guest in a volume audible only to immediate bystanders, guiding his attention to the land of the Golden Horde that covered most of modern-day Russia at the time. This regulation of the quantity of information given to the entire group and to a single, challenging guest avoided a discussion about whether or not Russia and Ukraine had existed at a point in time when the Golden Horde and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania dominated the region. In a conversation after the tour, Serhii emphasised that these episodes show the need to be cautious, as there was a war going on in the country, "unfortunately not only on the battlefield", and it was easy for guides to be conceived as one sided. Taking questions into a private conversations allowed guides to engage in an open discussion, in contrast to the narrative directed at the group where tour guides generally felt the need to retain their authority and storytelling rights (Feldman, 2007, p. 366).

To avoid a controversy, tour guides regularly emphasised factuality and neutrality. Most guides avoided giving their own opinion on controversial topics and chose words carefully to avoid engaging in a controversy. This included the words used to characterise a regime, which have been frequently subject to controversies: talking about Russian/Soviet colonisation or occupation implied a particular interpretation of the history that guides were often careful to avoid. Instead, guides tended to choose expressions that did not position them ideologically. Anna, a Russian-Jewish tour guide in her mid-30s, who worked with English and Russian-speaking customers in Tallinn, reflected on how she adjusted her representational strategies with visitors from Russia. For example, her 'crash course of history' that she did in the beginning of the guided tour was kept consciously short, listing the different occupying powers:

> I would say in 1940 we became part of Soviet Union, in '41 part of Nazi Germany, '44 again part of Soviet Union, and we stayed as a part of Soviet Union till 1991. So even though in my head it's occupation I don't use the word, not to provoke people. Just to feel safe. Better not to. You never know how they'll react. (CS1-Tour guide interview 5, 16.06.2016)

Based on her professional and cultural knowledge, Anna made assumptions about how tourists might interpret the past and react to particular framings. The dominant Estonian framing of the Soviet period as 'occupation' carried with itself the risk of a negative reaction, and she therefore replaced it what she saw as 'safe' expressions that did not offer any interpretation of the character of the regime. While troubled pasts were thus not necessarily left out of guided tour, contextualisations that would give more insights into the political regime, as well as questions of guilt and responsibility are avoided. Remembering practices based on neutrality and factuality did not privilege any interpretation of the pasts and conveyed an interpretative openness that allowed tourists to make their own meaning of the past (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021).

This emphasis on neutrality expresses the difficulty of finding a language which is not perceived as polarising and causing offence. Memory is seen as a zero-sum game, linked to competing identity positions that are impossible to reconcile and therefore are best not mentioned. In that way, tour guides' strategies also mirrored tourists' reasoning about the ideological nature of representations of the past that were perceived as offensive and therefore were best not engaged with. While tour guides usually had a clear position in relation to the interpretation of the past, they held back their own evaluations to create a basis for a positive, 'smooth', and amicable experience that was expected from a commercial walking tour. The potential risk of confrontation and the limited time available on a guided tour explained this strategy, but it also meant that the opportunity to open up a space for remembering differently was missed.

7.5 Creating Understanding and Dialogue in Tourism Encounters

As the previous section shows, the encounter between tourists and tour guides was fraught with tensions, leading to a situation where tour guides adopted strategies that minimised the risk of conflict to create a positive outcome. However, the "complex performance of the tourist encounter

itself" (Lisle, 2016, p. 198) also allowed for strategies of dealing with contested pasts that had the potential to encourage tourists to engage with the Other's perspective and to enter into a dialogue about the past. As mentioned earlier, some tourists were already sympathetic to local interpretations of the past, while others were simply curious and interested to find out more. Moreover, engagements with difficult pasts also were shaped by guides' professional identities: several tour guides conceived of their work as educational and enlightening in that they sought to widen tourists' understanding of the place they were visiting. Being diplomatic in this context similarly meant not to cause unnecessary conflicts, but in place of a negative strategy centred on avoidance, the tour was seen by guides as a space of possibility. Particularly in Kyiv and Tallinn, guides reflected on the impact of Russian propaganda and saw it as their job to show tourists how things 'really are'. Tatjana, a tour guide working in Tallinn, explained:

> It's very important to me to get this across [the history of the place]. Because in order to understand … when you don't know something, you are afraid of it and you don't like it. The more you know, the more you see and travel, then the more you begin to understand that you don't have that many enemies. […] And you know what, it is actually really quite easy to get this across to most people. (CS1-Tour guide interview 2, 16.06.2016)

In this excerpt, tourism carries the potential of learning about the Other: based on direct experiences of a place and interpersonal encounters between geographically separated groups, it creates the basis for mutual understanding and can help overcome entrenched positions (cf. Lehrer, 2010). In practice, this was, however, not easy to achieve and required careful intermediary work. There were several strategies that tour guides adopted to encourage a productive engagement with troubled pasts.

Firstly, tour guides used the tour to explain local interpretations and sought to enter a dialogue between competing versions of the past. On several occasions, tour guides referred to different interpretations of the past to give tourists a fuller picture of a controversy, explained local interpretations of the past and sought to work against myths and wrongful assumptions. On her tour through Tallinn's Old Town, Svetlana's group passed the memorial plaque to Members of Parliament who were killed by the Soviet terror (cf. Fig. 7.4). Stopping there, she explained:

Fig. 7.4 Memorial plaque to Members of the Estonian Parliament killed by the Soviet terror. (Source: Alena Pfoser)

> In 1939, according to Ribbentrop, these lands came under Russia's power [reference to Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the 1939 Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact with a secret protocol that partitioned Eastern Europe]. Russia presents an ultimatum. Don't let the troops in, or war will be declared on you. The Finns voted 'no'. The Russian-Finnish war of '39 begins. Estonians unanimously vote in favour. They hoped to avoid a war. In August 1940, the Soviet army entered here without firing a single shot. The so-called occupation. Pay attention to the years of death (Svetlana pointed to the memorial plaque). This is the Estonian government that unanimously voted for the entry of Soviet troops. They were all immediately arrested. Someone was shot here, someone died in Siberia. […] In total, during the years of Soviet power, more than 40 thousand people were deported from Estonia, of which 25 thousand did not return. For such a small country this is a lot. That's why the current Estonian government … well, you know the politics. They are very afraid that they will be occupied by Russia again. (CS1-Tour guide narrative 1, 15.06.2019)

Svetlana's narrative explained how Estonia ended up under Soviet control, busting myths about the voluntary nature of the annexation. Her narrative

also explained the significance of the events of 1940 and the Soviet terror for Estonians—that it included large parts of the population and did not spare even those who supported an annexation. The narrative account is kept factual and does not make any reference to her own personal position; references to the 'so-called occupation' and the remark on the contemporary politics ('well you know the politics') are consciously vague, being open to different interpretations. While offering a detailed explanation, Svetlana also positioned herself as a neutral translator and mediator between different interpretations of the past, rather than being implicated in the conflict as a representative of the local memory culture.

In a context where the storytelling rights of tour guides were potentially contested, tour guides could also actively seek to enact the role of an expert when dealing with potential memory conflicts. They did this by going deep into history or into details, by providing references to dates and names, and by referring to sources to support their narrative. Aigul, who works as a guide and university lecturer in Almaty, recounted a recent experience with four young visitors from St Petersburg, who she described as "educated" and "enlightened". She told them about the annexation of the territory of Kazakhstan to Tsarist Russia, referring to it as colonisation. Her account was directly questioned by a female member of the group, arguing that Kazakhstan joined Russia voluntarily. Aigul described her reaction: "So, firstly, we need to pause here. Not to say anything unnecessary." She subsequently explained how the history was reconsidered by historians who had access to new sources: "We studied the history of this territory in the archives of Iran, India, China, Russia, etc. I myself was in the Omsk archive", adding that "an archive is such a thing… you can't argue against it." (CS3_Tour guide interview 10, 16.08.2019). By explaining that her position is backed up by recent, systematic archival work from historians, including her own, the tour guide put herself in a position of authority that made it harder to contest. Her work as a university lecturer gave additional credibility to her account.

Alongside offering explanations for interpretations, another common strategy was to create connections between tourists and their 'hosts' by emphasising historical parallels and common experiences. Aleksandr, who had been working as a freelance guide in Kyiv for eight years, explained that he used references to shared experiences of victimhood among Soviet populations in his tour. When talking about the Holodomor, he always added a remark that "in every family there are victims [of Stalin's policies]" (CS2-Tour guide interview 4, 8.07.2019), suggesting that

memories of suffering are not an expression of nationalism but unite people based on shared experiences. While Stalinist terror specifically targeted ethnic groups who were accused of nationalism and/or collaboration with Nazi Germany, large numbers of ethnic Russians, including those who had earlier been perpetrators, were among the victims. What Alexander Etkind calls the self-inflicted, 'suicidal' nature of Soviet terror (Etkind, 2013, pp. 7–9) creates a complex foundation for historical reckoning in Russia today but simultaneously provides a basis for discourses of shared victimhood that tour guides could selectively draw on.

On other occasions, tour guides navigated troubled topics by distancing the past from the present, as Tatjana described in a conflict that she experienced over the Soviet bombardments of Tallinn:

> I had a big group, and somehow I mentioned, not very cleverly, that 'this area here was destroyed by Soviet aircraft during the war and then completely rebuilt'. And then when we were getting out of the bus at Kadriorg … it was a big group … they just started pecking at me. They started saying: "Look, about what you just said. It was war time". … They crowded me so much there … by this parapet, that I decided that I would no longer focus attention on it. Although, then, after we had gotten out of this situation, they had only just calmed down and we were back on the bus. And then we went to the monastery at Pirita. But the monastery at Pirita was destroyed by Ivan the Terrible's army during the Livonian war. This was in 1572. And I said: "And this was destroyed by Ivan the Terrible's army. Does that … does that offend you?" "No", they said. [Laughs] It was all quite friendly, and afterwards we parted happily. (CS1-Tour guide interview 2, 19.06.2019)

This excerpt shows how Tatjana dealt with a memory conflict, first by de-emphasising the contested past ("no longer focus attention on it")—similar to the strategies described in the previous section. Later, Tatjana used another strategy, which rather than trying to ignore the conflicting accounts, actively tried to tackle them by creating a distance between the past and the present, aiming to historicise World War II. The mentioning of Soviet war-time destruction was offensive to her Russian visitors as it questioned the Red Army's role as good liberators; Tatjana's strategy in this context was to make the destruction less significant for present-day identities. Referring to an earlier war on Estonian territory, she pointed out that negative historical events did not need to affect relations between Russians and Estonians in the present. While the role of mnemonic intermediaries is often to make the past personal and relevant to the present to

engage audiences (White, 1999), Tatjana's strategy on the contrary sought to work against the emotionalisation of history that formed the basis for entrenched identities. That Tatjana did this in a light-hearted way further contributed to a bridging of divisions. Her rhetorical question, "Does this offend you?", reached out to the tourists, aiming to form connections through laughter.[2] These two strategies, distancing the past from the present and using humour can both contribute to a deemotionalisation of the past and form the basis for empathy. As a tour guide in Kyiv also recounted his use of jokes to deal with politically charged topics in a humorous manner:

> The most common question from the Russians is "Can you speak Russian here?". If you start answering seriously, you can cause a rejection. And then you start with a joke that we speak in a whisper. When I turn on radio, one speaks loudly in Ukrainian, and the other in a whisper in Russian. And most importantly, in the theatre, actors also whisper. People listen seriously but understand that this is a joke. (CS2-Tour guide interview 15, 25.07.2019)

In Cohen's seminal understanding of tour guide, mediation has been seen as central to the work of the guide who must translate "the strangeness of a foreign culture into a cultural idiom familiar to the visitors" (Cohen, 1985, p. 15). Macdonald (2006) offers a deeper analysis of the process of tour guiding including the careful negotiations that tour guides engage in when conveying difficult pasts. Such understanding of the tour guides' role in mediating between past and present and guests and hosts is useful for understanding that tour guiding is relational work, working at deemotionalising contested topics while at the same time creating understanding and empathy.

Often these strategies were prompted by tourists who brought questions about difficult pasts into the walking tour, wanting to mock, express their own views and concerns in relation to memory politics, or being driven by a genuine interest in hearing the other side of the story. In this context, tour guides explanations could facilitate tourists' understandings or at least disrupt established ways of interpreting the past by opening up new perspectives. Kseniia, a 35-year-old teacher from Tomsk, reflected on being surprised when learning Almaty's local history, contrasting Almaty to Saint Petersburg:

[2] The excerpts and quotes are taken from Pfoser and Keightley (2021).

> There were no expectations, because when you go, for example, to Saint Petersburg, yes, there are expectations, because there is a rich history, but here you don't know history, everything is new, so I looked at all this with open eyes and mouth. (CS3-Tourist interview 3, 13.08.2019)

This quotation mirrors allochronic discourse that place non-European places outside of history (cf. Fabian, 1983 on allochronism), while at the same time acknowledging that this is a misconception that tourism encounters could rectify. Similarly, 29-year-old Andrei (CS1_Tourist Interview 30, 28.08.2019), explained how his trip to Tallinn had altered his perspective on Estonian history. Andrei was a left-leaning IT worker who had travelled to Tallinn as part of a roundtrip to Riga and Kaliningrad. He was driven by what he saw as his long-standing interest in the Baltic region, wanting to see the cities that earlier belonged to Russia and how "it turned out with them". As part of this exploration, Andrei took guided tours and consciously sought out historical museums and memorial sites, despite having some reservations about their nationalist memory politics. He reflected on his surprise at not encountering Russophobia in museums and remarked upon how this trip had changed his overall view:

> I realised that the Baltic countries were a white spot for me, that is, I knew that the Swedes came, then the Germans came, then Russia came, but the fact that they had something of their own was a discovery for me. (..) Estonia is, to some extent, a country with a tragic history. (CS1-Tourist interview 30, 28.08.2019)

Kseniia's and Andrei's reflections show the educational and enlightening potential of tourism that can expand tourists' horizons and open themselves to new perspectives. It is noteworthy that these learning experiences, particularly in Andrei's case, were driven by tourists' curiosity and openness to the stories of the Other, as well as being based on multiple encounters rather than just a single conversation.

Overall, the analysis showed how tour guides as mnemonic intermediaries are also memory diplomats, who have developed different—proactive and defensive—strategies for navigating transnational memory conflicts. These strategies involved "mediation, communication, persuasion, dissuasion and negotiation", that Marsden, Ibañez-Tirado, and Henig have identified as "distinctively diplomatic skills" (Marsden et al., 2016, p. 6). These skills not only helped to avoid open conflicts between tourists and hosts but also—taken together with other experiences—could have a transformative effect on tourists' memories.

7.6 Remembering Differently? Potentials and Limitations of Memory Diplomacy in Tourism

The transnational turn in memory studies has emphasised normative models of remembering difficult pasts, which offer "a conduit to recognition and empowerment on the part of the marginalized and dispossessed" (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b, p. 11). Cosmopolitan memory (Levy & Sznaider, 2006) and memory agonism (Cento Bull & Hansen, 2016), rooted in the principles of radical democracy, offer different models for remembering, but both provide an alternative to antagonistic models of memory competition that see memory as a zero-sum game and functions "as an instrument of discrimination and a measure of exclusion" (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014b, p. 23). Empirical analyses on museums and heritage sites dealing with difficult pasts have shown a reconfiguration of cultural remembering over the past decades, highlighting the practical relevance of these new modes of remembering, evidenced in the shift from the (national) glorification of past deeds to an increasing acknowledgement of "negative pasts", histories of suffering as well as a reckoning with perpetrators.

However, while the focus on the ethico-political rendering of memory—as an alternative to memory competition—is certainly important, it also means that relatively little attention has been paid to the pragmatic, polyvocal, or ethically and politically ambiguous nature of mnemonic encounters in tourism. The idea of memory diplomacy therefore expands the understanding of memory work, drawing attention to the often pragmatic character of commercial tourism offers that are oriented at a general audience. Such offers are shaped by a careful consideration of both the potentials and risk in confronting difficult pasts, considering potential sensibilities of visitors.

Most travel is motivated at least partly by the desire to enjoy oneself—to step outside of the ordinary, be surprised and enchanted by a different place. Sindbæk Andersen and Ortner (2019) have highlighted how pleasurable and painful memories can be entangled in complex ways; however, many tourists still found them mutually exclusive and preferred not to be reminded of past conflicts and memories they find unsettling. Tourists might choose to visit World War II memorials—sites of dark heritage that occupied a central place in Russian collective memory and therefore was not considered troubling. However, sites that were associated with national victimhood and Russian/Soviet violence were often perceived as nationalistic and anti-Russian and consciously avoided as most tourists did

not want to visit heritage sites they perceived as potentially challenging. This finding is in line with Laurajane Smith's observations on the limited transformative potential of heritage offers, as tourists choose to attend those places that confirmed rather than questioned their identities (Smith, 2021).

In this context, the structure of a commercial walking tour—the limited time available, the positioning of the tour guides as service providers, the aim to provide tourists with an overview of the city—meant that tourist perceptions of difficul pasts often went unchallenged. Commercial tour guides knew about tourists' sensibilities and accordingly developed strategies that sought to minimise the risks associated with difficult topics. If and how tour guides talked about controversial topics was motivated largely by the desire to avoid conflicts and to create pleasurable and enlightening experiences without troubling tourists too much. This was also in line with the apolitical identity of a tourist that some of the visitors claimed, and their anxiety about being confronted with accounts that contradict their own.

While this seriously limited the ability of guides to engage tourists in a dialogue about the past, remembering practices could also follow a different route and encourage the opening up of established memories and identities. Driven by the tour guides' wish to educate tourists, as well as the tourists' questions and 'provocations', the guided tour could create a space for busting myths, and question established positions and encourage (limited) mnemonic dialogue. In her discussion of memory conflicts in Europe, Siobhan Kattago (2009) outlines a vision for a democratisation of memory based on a democratic debate about diverging historical experience. Drawing on Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin, her model of memory pluralism is grounded in the "respect for different memories of the past and recognition of historical difference" (Kattago, 2009, p. 16) to ensure that the diversity of meanings assigned to the past are seen as truly enriching and welcome. The mutual respect which forms the basis for this memory work could, however, not be taken for granted; the interviews with tour guides made clear that in the context of transnational memory conflicts, exchanges about the past required effort and bore the risk of escalation. Tour guides could choose to use the tour to confront difficult pasts and point to the complexity of the past—indeed many felt a responsibility to both their audience and the past they represented—but this

required experience and careful consideration, also for the limited time available on tour.

Memory diplomacy in relation to difficult pasts thus has significant limitations, and it is worth exploring how this mode of remembering manifests itself in more settled geopolitical contexts as well as how transformative it is with tourists. While it may cause fewer controversies, it also can easily go unnoticed as it tends to gloss over difficult issues and attempts to create dialogue can be limited to a few stops on the tour. At the same time, the analysis points to the fact that the guided tour should be seen as part of a wider tourism experience, which can shift perceptions of the Other, rather than analysing it in isolation. Moreover, it is worth considering other empirical contexts where acts of memory diplomacy can be observed—such as in migration contexts, in working lives or, possibly, on social media—to gain a fuller understanding of the transnational negotiation of difficult pasts beyond established ethico-political and antagonistic modes.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

From the outset, this book set itself two tasks. Firstly, it aimed to understand the cultural politics of Russian tourism, focusing on the production of cultural memories in tourism to post-Soviet cities. Based on an analysis of walking tours and tourists' accounts of destinations, the book drew attention to the practices through which cultural memories are performed in tourism encounters, as well as the forms they take. Being interested in the cultural politics of tourism, the book did not stop at a micro-analysis of tourism memories, but situated them in the context of a capitalist post-imperial space, shaped by commercialism and nationalisation processes as well as the histories and legacies of the Russo-Soviet empire. I highlighted how uneven and hierarchical relations and geopolitical tensions between Russia and its neighbours shaped tourism encounters, alongside a continued sense of cultural intimacy and connection on which the tourism industry capitalised. Through this analysis, I also sought to reflect on the social and political consequences of memory-making, and how tourism, to some degree, reconfigured conflicted international relations at a vernacular level.

Secondly, alongside an exploration of the cultural politics of Russian tourism, the book aimed to use the case of Russian tourism to make an intervention into research on memory and tourism more generally. It sought to provide new conceptual perspectives for studying tourism memories and to invigorate research in an area which has so far received

A. Pfoser, *Tourism as Memory-Making*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83738-8_8

surprisingly limited scholarly attention. Drawing on wider debates in the fields of memory, heritage and tourism studies, I outlined an approach to memory-making that considers memory in tourism as processual (rather than focused on its products alone), productive (rather than limiting or threatening remembering processes), transnationally constituted (rather than being solely concerned with the circulation of local and national memories), and political (as being constitutive of identities and international relations). This approach acknowledges the role of the economy in memory-making in tourism—the fact that commodification processes are crucial for the constitution of memory in the tourism industry—while avoiding deterministic assumptions about their consequences that continue to permeate writings on the "tourism-memory nexus" (Marschall, 2012a).

Overall, the book has highlighted the relevance of tourism for producing popular accounts of the past. The recovery of the industry since the Covid-19 pandemic, expected to reach pre-pandemic levels in 2024 (UNWTO, 2024a), has shown that our appetite for experiencing other places has not diminished. Despite political turmoil, new wars, and an escalating climate crisis—or possibly because of it?—those who can afford it, use their holidays to get away to relax, to experience something new, to seek distraction and comfort as well as to widen their horizons. Experiencing the past is part of the attraction of tourism, as tourism lures us to immerse ourselves in age-old cultures, participate in traditional rituals, consume authentic local food and visit not just other places but also other times. While the association with entertainment and fun has not helped the scholarship on tourism memories—tourism for many still appears hedonic, non-serious and thus inconsequential—it is a significant part of tourism's attractiveness. In this context, and following Chris Gibson's suggestion not to "dismiss fun as a possible site of analysis" (Gibson, 2010, p. 525), it is reasonable to bring tourism more centrally into the focus of research on memory and provide a close examination of how tourism produces and reconfigures the past in the present.

In this chapter, I will firstly summarise the key characteristics of memory-making in Russian tourism to post-Soviet cities, followed by a reflection on differences between the case study cities. I then outline key conceptual contributions of the book, and finally, provide an outlook onto the future. While I make a general case for considering the significance of tourism for memory-making, it is clear that Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has significantly changed Russian outwards mobilities. In this

context, I discuss the transformative potential of past tourism encounters and consider their role as a resource for counter-memories.

8.2 The Cultural Politics of Russian Tourism

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shown once more the political instrumentalisation of memory in the former Soviet space, and how memory can be utilised to strengthen national identity as well as images of the Other as a foe, "weaponizing memory in fighting yesterday's battles today" (Moses, 2022, p. 104). In the case of Russia, the political use of memory reaches beyond the symbolic sphere, using memory to mobilise for physical violence and military aggression. Memory conflicts in the post-Soviet space, the political instrumentalisation and securitisation of memory, certainly deserve scholarly scrutiny. At the same time, it is important to not forget about other arenas and forms of memory construction that are less visible and spectacular but nonetheless significant for the production of the past. As anthropologist Erica Lehrer alerts us, "conflict attracts disproportionate attention from scholars. But tolerance, just as its many opposites, is also created in the tiniest details of social life, of speech and action" (Lehrer, 2013, p. 18). A focus on tourism encounters provided a novel angle to debates on memory politics in the post-Soviet region: it allowed discussions to be rescaled, shifting the focus to mundane face-to-face encounters and vernacular memory actors brought together by transnational tourism mobilities. Secondly, it highlighted the role of the economy in the transnational production of memory, articulating and reworking the past in settings shaped by commercial imperatives. As this book has shown, memory-making in tourism is not free of conflicts and tensions, but it provides a more ambiguous account of mnemonic practices than those highlighted in the study of macro-political memory politics and conflicts. I have highlighted the ambivalent nature of tourism encounters in the post-Soviet space, between the projection of new national identities and the reproduction of established stereotypes, between progressive agendas and the continuation of imperial relations and power hierarchies.

To understand how memories are articulated and reconfigured in tourism encounters, I highlighted the contexts in which they are produced. The break-up of the Soviet Union has not only led to the creation of new identity narratives, focused on experiences of victimhood and repression, a recovery of the national traditions and the ancient 'roots' of the nation; it also meant a radical economic restructuring. Integrated into global

markets and competing for international capital and people, tourism industries were transformed into capitalist service industries, and tour guides became part of a new service class. Their flexible work arrangements, the emphasis on deregulation and ideological freedom, and ideas of providing a good service in a competitive market were crucial elements of their new working conditions and professional identities.

The book has shown how guides working in this service industry flexibly navigated the urban space to present their city's distinctiveness and create a positive impression of the destinations among tourists. The analysis identified four key strategies of how guides engaged in memory-making: Firstly, guides *mobilised cultural intimacy by emphasising commonality over what divides*. This involved actively drawing on shared histories, traditions and knowledge deriving from the time of the Russian empire and Soviet Union and emphasising transnational connections and entanglements between the destination and Russia. Secondly, guides mobilised positive, easily digestible memories and images, seeking to *enchant their cities* for tourists. Particularly in relation to distant and medieval pasts, sensual experiences including gazing, listening, and tasting, were used to produce a unique and impactful experience, while catering to established frames of romanticism and exoticism. Thirdly, *to create an impression of welcome and progress*, guides emphasised positively connoted events, personalities, and values from the city's recent history, emphasising diversity, tolerance, and economic development. Enchanting and positive tales were in line with national narratives of the past but drew selectively from them to minimise potential antagonism. Finally, when dealing with difficult and contested pasts, guides adopted strategies oriented towards *conflict avoidance* as well as *creating understanding and dialogue* by explaining local interpretations of the past and partially opening up a conversation about topics subjected to controversies and memory wars. This work needed to be carefully managed, involving the de-emotionalisation of past events, in contrast to their usual work of making the past relevant and engaging. Alongside the commercial orientation, guides' strategies were also shaped by the relational nature of tour guiding and their transnational context, with guides seeking to make the tour interesting for diverse Russophone audiences and anticipating, and flexibly responding to, tensions and anxieties through spatial manoeuvring and narrative framing.

Together with an analysis of the principles and strategies of tour guiding, I also highlighted the diversity of modes of remembering and relating

to the Other produced in Russian tourism, not just in the form of tolerance—highlighted by Lehrer (2013)—but covering a wider spectrum of modes of remembering. Heated conflicts around the relocation and taking down of Soviet and Russian imperial monuments in the region might suggest that what Russians were after when travelling to post-Soviet cities were heritage sites that reminded them of empire—allowing them to remember past achievements, great power status, and a greater homeland and to confirm the superiority of a Russian civilisation. Particularly in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine emphasis has been placed on the significance of imperial nostalgia. Imperial nostalgia sees Russia as entitled to regional dominance, linked to idea of Russia as having brought modernity and culture as civilisational gifts to former Soviet territories (cf. Platt, 2013). Moreover, this perspective conceives Russia through the lens of victimhood, based on its lost greatness, its shrunken territory, and economic woes compared to the wealth accumulated in other places.

The book has shown the relevance of these ideas among some of the tourists, and also how tour guides implicitly buttressed imperial nostalgia through the mobilisation of cultural intimacy. At the same time, imperial nostalgia provided only a limited framework for understanding the cultural politics of Russian tourism. Firstly, nostalgia had different meanings, and was not limited to the longing for past glory and greatness, but also included memories of childhood, of personal connections, and alternative forms of sociality. Secondly, alongside nostalgic memories of shared pasts, diverse national pasts, and, to a more limited extent, memories of difficult pasts played a significant role in tourism encounters. National difference was mostly consumed in the form of ancient and medieval pasts but also newer histories of post-1991 economic progress, architectural transformations, and diverse and inclusive city life. Many tourists were aware of different interpretations of the past and sought to avoid a confrontation with what they perceived as 'ideological' interpretations, while others demonstrated pluralist and cosmopolitan attitudes. Differences in political identities, generational positioning, and personal connections such as kinship and friendship ties to post-Soviet cities contributed to tourists' diverse memory practices.

Tourists' modes of remembering also entailed different ways of relating to their neighbours, or vernacular international relations. These can be summarised as operating along three axes: the *axis of antagonism and solidarity*, the *axis of proximity and distance*, and the *axis of superiority and*

inferiority.[1] The first axis articulated different positions within memory conflicts, stretching from solidarity and support for the Other to an antagonistic position that conceives memory as a zero-sum game in which there can only be one correct position, namely one's own. Memory diplomacy—a common practice not only among tour guides but also tourists wanting to avoid a clear positioning—sat in the middle of this spectrum, different from expressions of solidarity, but also staying away from confrontation.

The second set of relations articulated through tourism memories focused on the question of how close and amicable relations between Russians and their neighbours were. It was particularly prominent in nostalgic modes of remembering which constructed post-Soviet hosts as either friends and kins or as estranged neighbours and opponents. In the case of Ukraine, assumed proximity was in some instances so great that it led to the denial of identity, constructing Ukrainians as part of an imperial, pan-Slavic nation.[2]

The third axis that ran through tourism memories was based on the question of the destination's inferiority or superiority *vis-à-vis* Russia and was discussed particularly in how tourists made sense of national difference. Tourists compared levels of cultural sophistication and economic development between destination and Russia and through their cultural memories negotiated hierarchies between hosts and guests. Taken together these different axes of relating to the Other express a diversity of political affects and comparisons *vis-à-vis* Russia's neighbours, as well as different ways of imagining Russian national identity. Importantly, these memories and patterns of relating extend beyond imperial nostalgia. As historian Robert Saunders argued,

> the reliance on terms like 'nostalgia', as a placeholder for any relationship with the imperial past that can be regarded as pathological, has come at the expense of analytical clarity, occluding the many different ways in which

[1] The mapping of these relations draws in part on Michael Rothberg's discussion of multidirectional memory, which distinguishes between an axis of political affect (stretching from solidarity to competition) and an axis of comparison (stretching from equation to differentiation) (Rothberg, 2019, pp. 124–125). Rothberg uses these axes to map transcultural memory discourses in relation to experiences of victimhood and understand the political potential of different mnemonic positions. The relations described here draw on a broader set of historical experiences.

[2] Considering the axis of proximity and distance also adds to the characterisations of relations: while perceived distance easily translated into antagonism, this is not a given; and (past) proximity could also promptly slip into feelings of betrayal and antagonism.

> empire can be remembered and the different political projects which those memories can serve. (Saunders, 2020, p. 1142)

One of the important insights from postcolonial scholarship has been the emphasis on the ubiquity of imperial patterns of thoughts, which persist even after the demise of empire (S. Hall, 2017). Rather than assuming a dominance of imperial nostalgia, we can, with Saunders (2020) and other postcolonial thinkers, ask how post-imperial habits of thought and practices permeate memory-making in the post-Soviet space as a common cultural inheritance. This involves firstly a scrutiny of other practices of remembering, and secondly an acknowledgement of the specificity of the Russian imperial situation. In relation to the first point, we can see the perpetuation of imperial centre-periphery relations when consuming national pasts, or the struggle to find an adequate language to talk about past violence in tourism encounters, as examples of the persistence of imperial legacies beyond imperial nostalgia. Secondly, it is important to note that in the case of Russian tourism, we can find diverse patterns of constructing both inferiority and superiority, in contrast to post-colonial tourism that is routinely based on constructions of developmental inferiority, with destinations either looked down upon or idealised as having a better, simpler way of life. Constructions of both inferiority and superiority articulated Russia's vexed position as a 'subaltern empire', displaying imperial and orientalist attitudes while at the same time being perceived as inferior vis-à-vis Europe (cf. Moore, 2001; Morozov, 2013; Ryazanova-Clarke, 2019). The question of Russian subalternity is particularly evident in relation to 'European' Tallinn, but also, to some extent, in relation to Kyiv, where we can find intense preoccupations with the question of whether in coming out of a Russian orbit, Kyiv has advanced more than the former imperial centre—reflecting a diversity of considerations that goes beyond the political rhetoric of the Kremlin.

Overall, the book contributes to a better understanding of the nuances and diversity in memory-making in Russian tourism. It draws attention to mundane forms of remembering and helps to question homogeneous accounts of Russians that have dominated media reporting and public commentary particularly since the start of the Ukraine war. As Russia continues its aggression, the focus on geopolitics, security, and foreign policy led by governments, states, and international organisations—including their political use of memory—is understandable. Nonetheless, it is important to retain a focus on bottom-up and mundane activities and 'ordinary'

people as agents of remembering. Indeed, as Jeremy Morris has argued, "war and autocracy […] only intensify the need for the ethnographic study" (Morris, 2023, p. 97) of Russia's politics, helping to understand the support of political leaders, policies, and ideologies, as well as the existence of alternative practices and modes of thinking, running below international politics and media headlines.

8.3 Comparing Patterns of Remembering

Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty were chosen as case study locations due to their significant historical and present-day differences. Due to the thematic organisation of the book, these differences have at times been side lined. Rather than dedicating a chapter to each city, the book outlined overarching principles of memory-making, and how they could be found in all fieldwork sites. There are however distinct patterns in the organisation of modes of remembering between cities, that, together with their underlying factors, deserve further emphasis.

Patterns of remembering were shaped by three factors: firstly, the *material landscapes of the cities* have been formed by different local and regional histories and shape tour guides' spatial narratives. They provide a material environment through which guides tell their stories and also influence tourists' perceptions of the cities. Secondly, patterns of remembering are also shaped *by contemporary relations between Russia and its neighbours*, including the intensity of memory conflicts between countries. If a city is dominated by Soviet and tsarist material heritage and histories, either nostalgia or memory diplomacy are the most prominent modes of remembering, depending on the conflictedness of the past. A dominance of heritage from other periods and regional influences means a focus on the promotion and consumption of difference (cf. Fig. 8.1). The presence of this heritage allowed the foregrounding of national(ised) pasts rather than shared histories, and thus was less affected by memory conflicts. Thirdly, *historical centre-periphery relations and the place of destinations in the Russian imagination* were also influential for the formation of cultural memories, and shaped conceptions of superiority and inferiority and proximity and difference. Tallinn, Kyiv, and Almaty have distinct places in Russian popular imaginary, which have been historically shaped and which were actualised and reworked in the present by Russian tourists. Civilisational imaginaries based on a city's Europeanness, provinciality, or exoticism drew on discussions about the historical role of the Baltic

	Almaty	Kyiv	Tallinn
History and material heritage	Similar	Similar	Different
Memory politics	Friendly	Antagonistic	Antagonistic
Dominant mode of remembering	Nostalgia	Memory diplomacy	Production & consumption of different pasts
Dominant connotation and perception of destination's developmental status	Asian/ Soviet, 'stuck in time' Inferior	Russian/Pan-Slavic culture Ambiguous	European Superior

Fig. 8.1 Patterns of remembering across the case study cities

territories for Russia, Russia's civilisational mission in Central Asia, as well as its complex relations with Ukraine.[3]

Nostalgia as a mode of remembering was most common in Almaty, founded as a Russian imperial city and, due to an earthquake which destroyed much of the earlier architecture, was dominated by Soviet material heritage. The history and material heritage of this time pre-structured the narratives of tour guides and shaped the associations of tourists with the city. Moreover, the continuous positive relations to Russia since 1991 and ambiguous nationalisation processes that have aimed to include the Russian-speaking minority have meant that Russian imperial and Soviet past had been, in comparison to the other cities, least contested. This created a context where Russian and Soviet pasts were regularly highlighted on the tour, and nostalgic memories figured prominently among tourists and also some guides. Not aware of debates over Almaty's ancient roots and critical accounts of Kazakhstan's colonisation by Russia, tourists mobilised established patterns of remembering drawing on tropes of Russia as a good coloniser and moderniser, as well as of Almaty as a periphery lagging behind or stuck in time.

In the city of Kyiv, with its prominent *fin-de-siecle* architecture and Soviet material heritage, much of the urban material heritage has also been shaped by the history of the Russian empire and Soviet Union. At the

[3] There were other significant differences between the cities – in particular in relation to the development of the tourism industry and the tour guiding sector, which was least developed in Almaty. While these differences affected the tourism offer in the city, they did not significantly shape patterns of remembering.

same time, much of the entangled histories of Russia and Ukraine have been subject to intense memory wars, and have actively been drawn into a violent military conflict. Due to these heated memory conflicts, memory diplomacy was most pronounced in Kyiv, in comparison to other cities, with many tour guides working with Russian-speaking tourists, having long mental lists of topics that were considered sensitive. Meanwhile, tourists to the city were split between those clearly on the side of Ukraine, and those wanting to avoid a confrontation with controversial and conflict-ridden topics. Other modes of remembering such as the promotion of national pasts—in the form of the heritage of the Kyivan Rus, recent achievements and references to Ukraine's unique cultural heritage—could be found in many tours, while tourists more frequently constructed Kyiv, including the city's medieval heritage, as part of the shared cultural space and/or denigrated Ukrainian culture while lamenting the loss of amicable relations.

In contrast, Tallinn's different 'European' material heritage, shaped by Livonian and Swedish rule and the influence of a Baltic German elite, takes centre stage in guided city tours through the Old Town, which presents the city's Hanseatic heritage and its continuation in traditional craft and medieval food cultures. Tallinn also possesses significant material heritage from the time of the Russian Empire and the Soviet period, in the form of its imperial Kadriorg palace but also Soviet housing estates and the Song Festival Grounds associated with the Singing Revolution, built during the Soviet period. However, tourism narratives and the expectations of tourists to visit the city were dominated by the medieval heritage of the Old Town, alongside perceptions of its contemporary Europeanness, supported by Estonia's EU membership and historical place as the Soviet Union's Western periphery. In terms of the modes of remembering, this means the production and consumption of different (national) pasts were most pronounced in this city, although tour guides in Tallinn also regularly sought to make positive connections to Russia and engaged in memory diplomacy.

As I have shown throughout this book, these differences in patterns of remembering should not be thought of as stable and fixed to destinations. There is significant variation within each of the three cities, as different ways of making meaning of the past co-existed in guided tours and tourists' memories. In most guided tours, the promotion of different pasts was combined with positively connoted references to commonalities and connections deriving from shared imperial histories. And tourists enjoyed, for example, strolling through Tallinn's medieval streets and eating spiced almonds, while also wanting to discover, and take pictures, at locations

where their favourite Soviet films were filmed. Particularly in Kyiv but also in Tallinn, guided tours often included references to difficult and contested histories. Tourists in Kyiv could contemplate the smell and sounds of Kyiv's streets and the canopy of the chestnut trees during their Soviet childhood, while simultaneously expressing admiration for the determination and bravery of Ukrainian citizens in the fight for independence, viewing them as role models for a future democratic Russia that they longed for. In her ethnography of family tourism to Holocaust sites, the anthropologist Carol Kidron (2013) has pointed to the complexity of tourism memories by showing that even in a site of total terror and anguish, memories can be mixed and overlayered with different emotive moments. Her contribution is focused on an extreme case of difficult heritage but is relevant to other forms of tourism as it shows the entanglements of different modes of remembering in tourism.

In the case of Russian tourism in post-Soviet cities, the entangled memories encountered in guided tours and tourists' reflections allow us to draw multiple conclusions: they show that memory-making in tourism does not necessarily follow a strict division between the serious and the funny/everyday, between a confrontation with difficult pasts and more light-hearted topics. The intersections of different modes of remembering are also evidence of the complexity of meaning-making in palimpsestic city spaces shaped by multiple historical layers. And finally they are also a reflection of the multidirectional character of memory itself (Rothberg, 2009), moving in different, sometimes unexpected directions that cannot quite be contained by homogeneous narratives, whether driven by a nationalist or revisionist imperial agenda.

8.4 Researching Memory and Tourism

What lessons does this exploration of memory-making in Russian tourism hold for the wider scholarship in memory, heritage, and tourism studies? How can it be taken forward in other studies? Alongside a focus on the cultural politics of Russian tourism, the book developed a conceptual framework for the study of tourism memories based on writings in the field of memory, heritage, and tourism studies, also borrowing from debates on tourism geopolitics, commercial nationalism and cultural diplomacy among others. There are several key conceptual arguments and interventions that the book makes, arguing for: (1) a processual approach to the tourism-memory nexus and expanding the field of study beyond museums and heritage sites, (2) a transnational approach that situates

memory-making in a wider political context, (3) a consideration of the diverse cultural forms that memory-making takes, and (4) a focus on the (geo)political implications of memory-making in tourism.

Firstly, the book has highlighted the processual nature of memory-making, through an exploration of how tour guides and tourists engage in the production of cultural memories. This processual approach connects with concerns over materiality, relationality, embodiment, and narrativity. I showed how memory-making happens on the tour relationally to visitors as well as to the urban environment as bodies move together through the city. Tour guides selectively adapt the tours to the tourists, and use different narrative strategies, making references to uniqueness and authenticity, mediating between different versions of the pasts, making connections and engaging in avoidance strategies. Being away from home, tourism always involves heightened awareness towards sensual experiences on the part of tourists, and particularly with the post-Fordist turn towards experiences and emotions, these dimensions have become even more central to memory-making in tourism, as it has also become clear in discussions on how guides work to create atmospheres for tourists and invite them to experience cities sensually. A processual perspective allows us to bring together these different dimensions, drawing on scholarship in memory, tourism, and heritage studies.

Existing research on memory-making in tourism has tended to adopt a relatively narrow research perspective: focusing on heritage sites and museums, usually those dedicated to difficult pasts, studies have analysed how the past is curated and represented as well as how their intended messages are received by tourists. Such an approach is limited: it misses a range of other formats of memory-making, it usually does not account for the dynamism in remembering processes, and it provides a limited insight into the agents of remembering, and how they use, interpret, and reconfigure cultural forms. Taking tourists seriously as memory-makers, I moved beyond a consideration of the reception of cultural memories and instead saw tourists as (co-)producers of memory. Due to the relational and interactive orientation of guided tours, tourists shaped their content and form. Furthermore, tourists were also understood as memory-makers in their own right, making sense of their trip and the places they visited. Future studies could examine in more detail how different types of tourists engage differently with the past, for example by examining the role of generation, gender, or class in memory-making, and the difference between those having personal connections to destinations and those only drawing on

second-hand knowledge. The significance of tourism memories after the tour, once tourists return home, also deserves more scholarly attention as part of a wider examination of the social and biographical significance of tourism memories.

Secondly, the book was interested in studying tourism as part of a transnational approach to memory-making. In the case of Russian tourism, these transnational encounters take the form of post-imperial encounters, drawing on longer histories of imperial rule and patterns of centre-periphery relations, and being characterised by cultural intimacy as well as uneven and contested hierarchies of power and tensions where the Other takes the form of a 'familiar stranger' (Hall, 2017) or alienated friend or relative. The book sought to analyse the distinct characteristics of memory-making in this transnational field, understanding how wider images and narratives of the past were actualised and reworked in tourism encounters. Scholarship on the production of cultural memories in tourism has often focused on the dissemination of national discourses—as the ideas around the value and protection of heritage are often articulated within the framework of the nation. Focusing on memory-making in transnational encounters, the book has highlighted different scales and scalar processes that intersect in tourism, including that of the nation but not limited to it. Tourism can spread national memories within distinct forms, engage in transnational connection-making as well as being consciously selective and choose not to make connections, for example by choosing to evade political memory conflicts and focus on positive moments instead. To better understand these processes, it is time that the transnational turn in memory studies—declared almost 15 years ago—also took tourism mobilities seriously as a significant arena for transnational memory-making (cf. Pfoser & Keightley, 2021)

Finally, and being related to this point, the book has drawn attention to different cultural forms of memory-making, and their political outcomes. In doing so, I have highlighted the open-ended character of tourism encounters for the production of cultural memories, as well as, drawing on writings on tourism geopolitics, how they are generative for the formation of international relations at a vernacular level. Critical scholarship on tourism has always underlined the notion of tourism as a hedonic, light, joyful, and superficial experience and has highlighted the threat that tourism poses to memory: how the commercial exploitation of the past threatens the authenticity of the past, leads to its trivialisation and limits critical reflection and ultimately fosters forgetting. As the cultural analyst and

memory scholar Marita Sturken writes in her critique of US American memorial culture:

> The tourist is a figure who embodied a detached and seemingly innocent pose (…) for whom history is an experience once or twice removed, a mediated and reenacted experience, yet an experience nevertheless. Tourists visit sites where they do not live, they are outsiders to the daily practices of life in tourist destinations, and are largely unaware of the effects of how tourist economies have structured the daily lives of the people who live and work in tourist locales. Tourists typically remain distant to the sites they visit, where they are often defined as innocent outsiders, mere observers whose actions are believed to have no effect on what they see. (Sturken, 2007, pp. 9–10)

A critical perspective on tourism memories—such as the one provided by Sturken—is important. At the same time, as I have argued in the book, being critical of memories produced in tourism should not lead to a dismissal of tourism and a deterministic view of its outcomes, conceiving it implicitly or explicitly as diminishing memory, detaching it from the past and rendering it as inauthentic and trivial, or as promoting stereotypical conception of Self and Other.

In their critical examination of nostalgia in heritage research, Campbell, Smith, and Wetherell draw attention to "what nostalgia *does*, and the variety of ways in which it is *used* in everyday life by individuals and groups" (Campbell et al., 2017, p. 609, authors' emphasis) to better understand its complexity and empirical significance. Similarly, this book has shown what memory-making in tourism does, analysing its forms alongside its uses, and how it is constitutive of different social relations. Tourism memories often take other forms than those outlined by normative models of remembering: they are politically ambiguous, can be co-opted for problematic political agendas, and contrast with memories of hope and activism that have been at the centre of a 'positive turn' in memory studies. However, the political ambiguity of tourism memories and lack of fit to normative models makes them an interesting phenomenon to study, sensitising us to the messy, selective, pragmatic, and context-variable approaches to how the past is remembered in everyday, mundane encounters.

Finally, considering tourism as memory-making also points to two general conceptual lacunae in memory studies. The economic underpinnings of memory construction, including processes of commodification and economic infrastructures that support memory-making, need to be considered alongside memory's cultural, social, and political dimensions that

have so far taken priority in the scholarship. Works by Landsberg (2004), Sturken (2007), Reading (2014), and Allen (2016) have provided interesting discussions around the political economy of memory which deserve to be developed into a more systematic and sustained scholarly inquiry. A second area for future explorations relates to a stronger dialogue between memory, heritage, and tourism studies, fields that have developed largely separately from each other. The separation between memory and heritage studies is particularly peculiar due to the significant overlaps in research agendas, as well as a turn towards a processual understanding of heritage in heritage studies that often explicitly connects with ideas of memory. This book has shown how the distinct strengths of these fields, and their areas of preoccupation, can be effectively brought together. The concern with materiality, tourism performances, processes of commercialisation in tourism, and heritage scholarship were put into a dialogue with memory studies research with its focus on the politics of memory, transnationality, and mediation. More effort can be made in the future to encourage cross-fertilisation between these fields as they often offer complementary perspectives. This would be helpful not just for a better understandings of tourism memories but also people's engagement with heritage more generally.

8.5 The Transformative Character of Tourism Encounters: Or the Future of Russian Tourism Memories

It has felt at times strange and anachronistic to write a book on tourism since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russians come to Ukraine not as holiday makers but as soldiers with the intent to destroy and kill. Due to the international sanctions, visa restrictions and fears of being ostracised, tourism from Russia to EU countries including Estonia has been dramatically curtailed. Those travelling out of Russia today often do so to leave the country for political, economic, and/or personal reasons. Countries that did not impose sanctions, such as Kazakhstan, observed a significant rise of arrivals from Russia. Kazakhstan saw an increase from 494,000 trips from Russia in 2021 to 2.4 million in 2022 (Statista, 2023, based on data from the Russian Federal State Statistics Service). Many of these travellers are immigrants on a tourist visa, reflected in the decision of the Kazakh government to limit the number of days Russian citizens can stay as tourists in the country (Kiseleva & Safronova, 2023).

What, if any, significance do memories of past travel have in the context of a full-out war and mobility restrictions caused by sanctions? Are these memories forgotten or merely stored away as memories of pleasant experiences from a distant past, based on the presumably apolitical identity of the 'tourist'? Are the resentment and great power chauvinism, found among a proportion of travellers, reinforced or expanded in the current political climate, with memories of tourism encounters confirming stereotypical conceptions within populations and helping to mask an inferiority complex? Or can they form the basis for counter-memories, a resource, in a moment where mundane, non-violent encounters with the Other have become extremely limited?

To provide a (tentative) answer to these questions, we must consider the transformative potential of memory-making in tourism more generally. Tourism has often been conceived as a 'peace industry' facilitating cultural exchange, connectivity, and harmony, while more critical scholarship has shown how tourism facilitates exploitation and is in fact reliant on registers of difference that tend to reproduce power relations and hierarchies (cf. Lisle, 2016). From a different angle, heritage scholar Laurajane Smith (2021) has recently warned against overestimating the educational role of heritage sites by showing how visitors seek to confirm rather than challenge their own identities through their visits, limiting the transformative potential of tourism.

To some extent, the book has confirmed reservations about the transformative force of tourism: tourism was found to facilitate nostalgia for the shared past and reproduce stereotypical images of the Other when consuming national pasts. Furthermore, with its multiple offers and the adaptable performance of the tour guide, tourism provided the opportunity for different performances of memory that catered to the interests of different groups. Thus, in line with Smith's findings (2021), memories produced in Russian tourism tended to confirm tourists' existing political identities—not only of those expressing nostalgia for past stability, sociality, and greatness but also of those tourists with liberal sensibilities who valued freedom and pluralism.

Despite these general tendencies, this book has also pointed to moments when tourism encounters were indeed transformative. Disruptions of established mnemonic patterns did not only come from pedagogical moments during the tour and exposure to other experiences and forms of interpreting the past but also derived from the principles of hospitality and pleasure. It might sound paradoxical but the obvious limitations of

memory-making in tourism—the avoidance of controversial topics, the emphasis on positive connections—need to be considered as potentially transformative in the sense that they provided the foundations for amicable relations in the present.

Memory studies scholarship has traditionally tended to emphasise the importance of coming to terms with the past, or what Lea David (2020) calls "moral remembrance", with the principles of "facing the past", "duty to remember", and "justice for victims" as its key pillars (David, 2020, p. 1). The assumption is that histories of violence, genocide, and displacement need to be acknowledged and worked through to enable reconciliation and healing. Conversely, forgetting and silencing of a painful past is seen as problematic and perpetuating injustice and violence. A small body of scholarship has problematised these assumptions. Critical approaches to transitional justice have criticised the standardisation of memorialisation processes, in particular how the German model of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, of coming to terms with the past, has been posited as a norm in how to deal with painful past. In 'The Past Can't Heal Us', David (2020) highlights the practical difficulty of reconciliation—rather than bringing peace, remembering painful pasts can mean that the wounds never heal and that divisions get reinforced in the present. Moreover, ethnographic studies of post-conflict communities (Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012; Buckley-Zistel, 2006) have shown the different meanings and functions that the silencing of painful pasts can have, for example helping to form relationships across ethnic group boundaries, to "create a sense of 'normality' (…), attend to the concerns of the present and look forward" (Eastmond & Selimovic, 2012, pp. 504–505). Working on tourism in Northern Ireland, Dowler reflects on the geopolitical significance of experiences of hospitality, arguing that hospitality "promotes individuals' confidence and security while minimising fear in interactions not only between host and visitor, but also between once rival communities" (Dowler, 2013, p. 781; see also Henig, 2016).

We can also see this politics of hospitality at work in Russian tourism to post-Soviet neighbours. Many tourists, at least to some degree, expected to encounter nationalist sentiments and antagonism when travelling to post-Soviet cities. Instead, the unexpectedly warm welcome that many experienced provided opportunities for reflection. Rather than reconciliation or moral remembrance, Mihela Mihai's idea of 'mnemonic hesitation' provides an apt concept to understand this form of memory work. Mihai proposed mnemonic hesitation to capture productive moments that

"sabotage received ideas" and "open up a space for remembering and imagining differently" (Mihai, 2022, p. 46), disrupting the automation of socialised memories. While hospitality is often criticised for reproducing unequal power relations, in a space characterised by tensions, it could facilitate cordial encounters and support a pluralist outlook, which did not see the Other's differing standpoint as an attack on one's own.[4]

Having a negative effect on both the possibility of exchange and the willingness to listen, Russia's war against Ukraine has undone, or at least severely diminished, the possibility of these transformative encounters. While memories are malleable and can shift to adopt to a new political context, past travel experiences and histories of interaction can nonetheless form important resources for counter-imaginaries. Memories produced in tourism are imperfect, based on fleeting encounters, driven by pleasure and conflict avoidance, permeated by stereotypes. However, being based on overwhelmingly positive encounters with the Other, the memories of tourism and past hospitality have the potential to stand against the aggressive geopolitical agenda and binary accounts put forward in the news media, of neighbours as either loyal friends or traitors and fascists. Tourism memories provide a more heterogeneous set of memories linked to the Other and can help to see neighbours as victims of 'tragic histories', as role models in a struggle for an open society, or simply as people who have the right to hold different views on the past and to determine their own geopolitical futures. That some emigrants have left for countries that were formerly tourist destinations is an indication of the power of tourism to offer alternative perspectives and routes for escape, not just from a hectic modern metropolitan life but also from a political regime that has alienated and repulsed at least a part of the travelling class.

[4] This however worked differently in Almaty, where mnemonic relations were more settled and tourists perceiving Almaty as either a Russian/Soviet city or a place 'without much history' had little knowledge of alternative accounts. In this way, experiences of hospitality can only become a catalyst for mnemonic hesitation, when they counter confrontational images of the Other and are not part of what is expected. These findings are worth exploring in more detail, examining them empirically in other contexts as well as conceptually reflecting on the different kinds of silences in tourism (cf. Connerton, 2008).

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