

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The project “**Migrant Memory: Post-Soviet Jewish American Literature**” looks at novels, short stories, memoirs, and graphic novels by writers who immigrated as children to the United States and Canada in the 1980s and 1990s from the Soviet Union or former Soviet Union. Since the early 2000s, these writers have been producing biographically-informed fiction in English that centers on immigration, Jewishness in North America, and the Soviet Union as a place of origin. This grouping includes the names of writers who co-initiated this subgenre in the early-mid 2000s: Gary Shteyngart, David Bezmozgis, Lara Vapnyar and others, such as Ellen Litman, Anya Ulinich, Keith Gessen, Sana Krasikov, Irina Reyn, Michael Idov, Nadia Kalman, Yelena Akhtiorskaya, Boris Fishman, Julia Alekseyeva.

Thanks to awards they received and their publishing in the national media, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times*, these writers have become visible Jewish voices in the US and, in some cases, broadly recognizable in the mainstream. Their works have been translated into foreign languages, including Polish (fiction by Krasikov and Shteyngart, and Ulinich’s novel). Literary critics have also noticed their singularity. However, they have been mostly studied by Russian studies scholars in the US. This project adopts a different perspective: because these writers function within the American literary market and academia and firmly address Jewishness, this project attempts to read their works as a part of Jewish American literature. Yet, their works do not quite correspond to what is commonly thought of as Jewish American literature, centered on a specific memory of the Holocaust, Israel, and religiosity. It is this dilemma that this project addresses and attempts to answer by looking how this writing represents memory and migration (or “migrant memory”) together.

To accomplish this aim, this project will look at four areas. First, I will ask how the memory of the Holocaust is represented in this fiction and how it interlocks with the memory of the Stalinist terror. Second, I will explore how these authors write about Eastern Europe because for them it is not (or not only) the distant, different, post-Shoah space, as it is quite often in other Jewish American literary works. Third, their texts also create memory of the Soviet Union itself and I will ask what is remembered in this respect and what is rather forgotten. And fourth, I will look at this literature as ethnic literature in the US and think how and why so many Asians and Asian American appear as characters in this fiction. The result will be a book manuscript that will offer a comprehensive framework of how to think about this group of writers between the Soviet past and American present, between memory and migration.

Researching writing by post-Soviet Jewish immigrants is socially significant because Russian-speaking Jews or the immigrants from the Soviet Union or former Soviet Union constitute about 10% of American Jews, with an estimated 25% in New York City. In this way it may help to make visible the cultural experience of a significant segment of the Jewish population in the US and reflect on what being Jewish means in the US today. Also, I believe that speaking about the Soviet Union and post-socialist Eastern Europe in the context of the US may help to modify some unspoken assumptions of cultural studies research on memory and migration.