

“THEY BELIEVE THE DAWN WILL COME”: DEPLOYING MUSICAL NARRATIVES OF
INTERNAL OTHERS IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the roles of internal others in constructing a Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian national identity. I begin with an analysis of the *kobzars*—a group of blind, itinerant minstrels who performed across Ukraine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, before they disappeared entirely during Stalin’s Great Terror in the 1930s. First, I explore the ways in which the Ukrainian *bandura*, an asymmetrical lute instrument, has become a site for documenting epistemologies of blind musicians in Ukraine. I then examine how these ways of knowing blindness have been influenced by myths of blind musicians in Ukraine that seek to demystify these internal “others.” Furthermore, I discuss how these myths continue to influence 21st century depictions of blind minstrels through an analysis of the 2014 Ukrainian film, *The Guide*. Finally, I turn my focus to the Eurovision Song Contest in order to examine how narratives of internal others are deployed in order to negotiate Ukraine’s position in 21st century Europe and in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. I then reflect on the ways in which deploying these narratives of internal others does not draw these groups into the mainstream, but instead emphasizes and exploits their difference for the purpose of rejecting external hegemony in Ukraine.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union has cast a dark shadow over Ukraine: In the early 1930s, 7-10 million innocent Ukrainian citizens died as a result of a famine artificially created by Soviet authorities; The 1930s also led to the disappearance of the kobzars—blind Ukrainian minstrels whose music was deemed propaganda for its Ukrainian nationalist content; In the mid-1940s, the forced exodus of ethnic Tatars from the Crimean Peninsula led to the death of nearly half of the Tatar population. Stalin’s Great Terror or Great Purge of the 1930s led to the arrest of many minority groups—including the kobzars and the Tatars—under accusations of treason, and many of those who were arrested were executed with little evidence supporting these accusations. The kobzars disappeared almost entirely by mid-20th century, but stories of blind minstrels still pervade Ukrainian nationalist narratives in the 21st century. The ghosts of the persecuted Tatars echoed on the stage of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2016, when ethnic Tatar Jamala, told her family’s story in the song “1944.” In addition to these historic events, Jamala’s performance also critiqued the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia in 2014—demonstrating that Ukraine’s neighbor to the East still cast a shadow over the nation. Despite the century dividing Jamala and the kobzars, the narratives of these oppressed groups are connected by a common thread: these minority groups—or internal others—have given rise to crucial questions about what it means to be Ukrainian under Russian hegemony.

In his chapter in *Western Music and its Others*, Phillip Bohlman argues that “Europe is unimaginable without its others. Its sense of selfness, of Europeanness has historically exerted itself through its imagination of other and, more tragically, through its attempts to control and

occasionally to destroy otherness.”¹ Key to Bohlman’s statement is that narratives of internal others are unavoidable in Western music and, as Bohlman later points out, this is largely the result of the colonial mentalities that produced such language as West and East—another manifestation of this being discourses of “self and other” brought to light in post-colonial scholarship.² However, how do European nations decide who is “self” and who is “other?”

The kobzars, now widely viewed as national Ukrainian icons, came to be known as such through many cultural interpretations of these blind minstrels: The 19th century nationalist poet, Taras Shevchenko, came to be known as the founder of modern, written Ukrainian after he published his poetry collection titled *The Kobzar*. Kobzars were known for singing songs of the Cossacks, who are widely known as symbols of resistance to external influence in Ukraine. The condemnation of kobzar music during the Soviet Union led blind minstrels to be viewed as icons of resistance to the Soviet Union at a time when the Ukrainian identity was in danger of disappearing. Literature, mythology, and state agendas have served as crucial elements in shaping the kobzars into icons of Ukrainian nationalism.

Although kobzars and Ukrainian Eurovision performers are separated by years of significant sociocultural change, the musicians discussed in this thesis hold a common role as internal others in Ukraine, and—following Bohlman’s argument—these others are integral to the Ukrainian identity. Additionally, these internal “others” are mobilized in the context of transnational conflict for the purpose of renegotiating the Ukrainian national identity. Narratives of the kobzars were deployed to resist attempts to stamp out Ukrainian culture in the early years of the Soviet Union so as to clear the way for a homogenized Soviet culture. This was

¹ Philip V. Bohlman. “Composing the Cantorate: Westernizing Europe’s Other Within,” in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000) 188.

accomplished by paralleling the perceived “suffering” of the kobzars with the “suffering” of Ukraine under Soviet rule. In the context of Eurovision in the 21st century, narratives of internal others continue to be deployed as a means of resisting Russian influence in the post-Soviet context. These internal others voice a narrative in which their “suffering” is emphasized as the direct result of Russian actions against these “others.” This was also true of the kobzars to a certain extent—a crucial element of their “suffering” narrative is their condemnation by Soviet officials—except that blindness was still seen as an overarching cause of their hardships.

Whereas scholars such as Natalie Kononenko, William Noll, and Victor Mishalow have written a great deal about the history of the kobzars, their songs, their instruments,³ and their role in Ukrainian society,⁴ I will add to scholarship on the kobzars by analyzing these blind minstrels through the lens of music and disability studies to determine how cultural perceptions of blindness impacted the lives of the kobzars, and shaped the narratives of these internal others in the wake of Soviet occupation of Ukraine.

Furthermore, Eurovision scholarship has not failed to recognize the ways in which the Eurovision Song Contest has served as a significant stage for articulating national identities.⁵ However, my analysis will add to this scholarship by examining the ways in which narratives of the other are utilized in this space not only to articulate national identities, but also to resist external influences by defaming the actions of other nations—in the case of Ukraine, Eurovision performances mobilize narratives of internal others to resist Russian hegemonic influence in Ukraine in the context of the 21st century Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

² Edward Said’s *Orientalism* being one of the early post-colonial texts.

³ See Kononenko 1979, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1998; Mishalow 2012.

⁴ William Noll. “The Social Role and Economic Status of Blind Peasant Minstrels in Ukraine.” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1993). 45-71.

⁵ See Bohlman 2011; Mizhevich 2012; Tragaki 2013.

By examining the ways in which narratives of internal others are deployed, I will argue that these narratives of Ukrainian others do not uplift or draw these groups into the mainstream, but they instead emphasize difference in a way that allows that difference to be exploited to suit other political agendas. For the kobzars, their blindness was exploited to demonize those Soviet officials who sought to oppress kobzar music in order to achieve a homogenized Soviet culture—in this case, the kobzars were viewed primarily as helpless victims to Soviet condemnation. In the case of Ukrainian Eurovision performances, the internal others who are chosen to represent Ukraine on this international stage are selected for their adherence to European values, meaning that performers who do not meet the criteria for being “European,”—such as the singer Gaitana (2012), whose African-Ukrainian identity is viewed as dominantly African, and not European—are not viewed favorably. Furthermore, Eurovision performances exploit the perceived “suffering” of these others for the purpose of evoking empathy from their audiences, as is the case with Yuliya Samoylova (2017), whose disability is utilized as a strategic political tool for demonizing Ukraine, in response to their demonization of Russia in performances such as those by Jamala and Verka Serduchka (2007).

My methodologies rely on reframing the research of previous scholarship on the kobzars and Eurovision in the context of recent events surrounding the Ukraine crisis. Furthermore, this text reframes previous ethnomusicological research by applying the concept of internal others—proposed in the edited volume, *Western Music and its Others* (2000)—to a European nation whose political currents have shifted significantly since the turn of the millennium. Additionally, I engage in cultural texts through my analyses of the Ukrainian film, *The Guide*, and of a televised song competition. The former is supplemented by a personal interview with Ukrainian-American actor, Anton Greene, and his parents, pianist Arthur Greene and Ukrainian-born

violinist Solomia Soroka. These cultural texts serve as my primary sources as I navigate the roles that internal others play in 21st century Ukraine.

In Chapter 2, I will utilize Megan Rancier's framework positioning the musical instrument as national archive⁶ in order to explore the ways in which blind minstrel music has been crystallized as an icon of Ukrainian nationalism through the sound, image, and discourse of the *bandura*. I will engage in scholarship on the musical tradition of instruments played by blind people⁷ through an exploration of the instrument they are most often associated with, the bandura,⁸ in order to demonstrate how the bandura has come to serve as an archive that documents epistemologies of blindness in Ukraine. This chapter will lay the foundations for studying the kobzars' iconic national status in Ukraine, and will explain the roles these blind minstrels played in Ukrainian society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In Chapter 3, I continue my discussion of the kobzars by examining the many myths that pervade narratives of blind minstrels in Ukraine. More specifically, I will examine myths regarding kobzars' associations with religion, the supernatural, and themes of martyrdom in order to determine how narratives about blind minstrels were deployed in opposition to Soviet influence in Ukraine. I will then discuss the ways in which these myths have persisted in 21st century depictions of blind minstrels through an analysis of the 2014 Ukrainian film, *The Guide*, in order to determine how narratives of these internal others have been reframed in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

⁶ See Megan Rancier. "The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh *Qyl-qobyz*." *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 3 (2014): 379-404.

⁷ See Kononenko 1979, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1998.

⁸ See Victor Mishalow. "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument." PhD diss., Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012.

In Chapter 4, I will shift my focus from kobzars to Eurovision in order to analyze the ways in which Ukraine's internal others have been deployed on a global stage. These narratives, like that of the kobzars, are also mobilized for the purpose of resisting Russian influence in Ukraine, but also serve to position Ukraine closer to the European Union and European values, while simultaneously renegotiating the nation post-Soviet identity. Jamala's "1944" uses historical events surrounding the genocide of Crimean Tatars in the Soviet Union to critique Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula, while Verka Serduchka utilizes the camp aesthetic often associated with queer performance to critique Russian policy and engage in what Catherine Baker refers to as Queer International Relations.⁹ This chapter will also discuss which populations of internal others are deemed suitable for engaging in international dialogues, drawing on Gaitana's 2012 Eurovision performance, and the controversy that arose in response to the choice of a black artist to represent Ukraine on a global stage. Finally, I will consider recent events surrounding Yuliya Samoylova, the Russian representative for 2017 who has been banned from performing in the contest—to be held in Ukraine this year—because she entered Crimea illegally in 2015. I will discuss how Samoylova's entry relates to a phenomenon known as "inspiration porn,"¹⁰ and evokes audience empathy to demonize Ukraine for preventing a singer with a disability from performing—a controversial decision by Ukraine, considering this year's Eurovision slogan: "Celebrate Diversity." Ultimately, I will argue that each of these narratives of internal others do not bring these groups into the mainstream, nor do they shrink the gap between Ukraine and its internal "others." Instead, these performances emphasize difference

⁹ See Catherine Baker. "The 'Gay Olympics'? The Eurovision Song Contest and the Politics of LGBT/European Belonging." *European Journal of International Relations*. 23, no. 1 (2016): 97-121.

¹⁰ See Kate Ellis. *Disability and Popular Culture: Focusing Passion, Creating Community, and Expressing Defiance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

and deploy it in such a way as to widen this gap, and bring into question what it means to be Ukrainian in the context of transnational dialogues and geopolitical conflict.

CHAPTER 2: ARCHIVING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLIND MUSICIANS UNDER SOVIET RULE IN THE UKRAINIAN BANDURA

The kobzars—blind minstrels of Ukraine—have been associated with more than one instrument over the course of history, including a hurdy-gurdy called the *lira* and the lute-like *kobza*. Although the latter instrument constitutes the namesake of the kobzars, as their art form developed over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these minstrels largely shifted to performing with the bandura—an asymmetrical necked bowl lute—which became the most commonly used instrument around the early 20th century. While each kobzar-associated instrument is unique in its own way, they all share a common lineage of instruments once predominantly played by blind musicians. Today, the bandura is still played, but almost always by sighted musicians. Despite the fading of the blind tradition of bandura performance, this instrument is nonetheless inscribed with the histories of the blind kobzars. Since the bandura was closely tied to the blind tradition of minstrelsy, it has been inscribed with cultural information that can assist scholars in forming an historical narrative of the kobzars and their experiences with blindness. In Megan Rancier's case study on the Kazakh *qyl-qobyz*,¹ points out that “not only can a musical instrument figure prominently as a participant or referential symbol within larger social histories; it can also serve as an interactive archive of those histories.”¹ Rancier’s work thus builds on previous scholarship in organology² to discuss the role of the *qyl-qobyz* as an archive for national identity, I will examine the bandura as an archive for another kind of identity as well, encapsulating Ukrainian epistemologies of disability from the perspectives of both the blind kobzars and their sighted audience.

¹ Megan Rancier, “The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh *Qyl-qobyz*,” *Ethnomusicology* 58 no. 3(2014): 380.

² Bates, 2012; Kartomi 1990; Nercessian 2001; Racy 1994; Quereshi 1997, 2000; etc,

Drawing from research on the history and development of the bandura³ and minstrel repertoire⁴ I will apply Rancier's concept of musical instruments as national archives to argue that the bandura serves as an archive for a subculture within the Ukrainian nation—in this case, a group of itinerant musicians who operated within a culture of blindness in rural Ukraine. Stored in this archive are the changing perceptions and expectations for blind musicians in Ukrainian society, as well as the ways in which the kobzars perceived their own disability. Rancier argues that "the narratives conveyed by musical instruments contribute significantly to musical discourses about 'how music means' and *what* music means, to particular groups of people at particular moments in time." Engaging in narratives about blind musicians in Ukraine, I suggest in my study that the cultural information archived within the bandura demonstrates not only *what* bandura music meant to the kobzars historically and what it means to Ukrainians today, but also *how* it has been used to convey those meanings. Following Rancier's framework, I will analyze the ways in which these narratives are stored within the 1) the instrument's physical form, 2) its repertoires, 3) its performance practices, and 4) in discourses between performers and non-performers.⁵ Finally, I will illustrate the ways in which the narratives and meanings accumulated by the bandura have been interpreted by modern Ukrainians—both sighted and blind—and subsequently reinterpreted and deployed in the context of Soviet and post-Soviet conflicts in Ukraine.

³ Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012).

⁴ Grabowicz 2011; Kononenko 1990, 1992.

Physical Form of the Bandura

In terms of physical appearance, the bandura had no standard form during the height of the kobzars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead, it has varied widely in its shape, form, and even the number of strings on the instrument. The number of variations were reduced as the bandura transitioned to a concert tradition after it captured the interest of Ukrainian and Russian intelligentsia in the first half of the 20th century, and such “contemporary” instruments came to be defined by the region in which they were made (Kharkiv, Kiev-Chernihiv, Lviv, etc.) and whether they were tuned diatonically or chromatically. However, banduras that were played by blind kobzars—which I will henceforth refer to as “traditional” banduras—continued to vary much more widely, and were often unique to the kobzar to whom they belonged.⁶

There is something to be said for the diversity of banduras played by the blind kobzars, as each instrument would have been specially made for its specific kobzar, and only as needed. This is due to the weak public interest in the bandura before its popularity among the Ukrainian intelligentsia. In this sense, the shifting shapes and forms of the bandura reflect how the instrument was, for a time, unique to this blind minstrelsy tradition. Additionally, with each bandura being unique to its owner, a kobzar’s instrument largely became part of the musician’s individual identity. For example, Natalie Kononenko has pointed out that the varying degrees of care shown to the instruments demonstrate the mixed feelings that many musicians had about the blind minstrelsy tradition and the bandura. Some kobzars would grieve if forced to sell their instruments to make ends meet, demonstrating an emotional attachment to their instrument and opportunities provided for them through their music—especially the opportunity to earn an

⁵ Megan Rancier, “The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh *Qyl-qobyz*,” *Ethnomusicology* 58 no. 3(2014): 380.

honest living as a blind person.⁷ On the other hand, many kobzars left their instruments in neglect, which Kononenko reads as a show of disdain for being forced into the life of a minstrel because of their disability.⁸

In this way, each bandura's state of repair can document how a kobzar felt about the life of a minstrel, a life of both freedom and metaphorical imprisonment. In a rural society that was largely dependent on agriculture, heavy labor was the norm, and blind Ukrainians were usually limited to tasks that could be completed while stationary, such as making rope. For blind Ukrainians, minstrelsy represented a supplemental source of income that was perceived as slightly more dignified than begging for alms. By serving as a means for earning one's daily bread, minstrelsy provided some agency for the kobzars. However, this agency was limited, as the kobzars were nonetheless stereotyped as beggars and drunkards by many, and were only held to a slightly higher regard than an average mendicant. While some kobzars were born blind, others would become blind later in life due to disease or injury. For the latter group, music might have provided meager solace in the face of an acquired disability and the experience of having one's role in society change abruptly and significantly. While narratives of the healing power of music pervade many music cultures and many personal accounts from kobzars express this idea,⁹ music did not necessarily serve as a source of solace for all blind minstrels. When Ostap Veresai decided to become a minstrel in the late 19th century, he nonetheless expressed anxieties regarding the quality of the life he would lead:

⁶ Victor Mishalow, "A Short History of the Bandura," *East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology*, 6 (1998): 77.

⁷ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 15.

⁸ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 15.

⁹ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 54.

And I thought to myself, “Oh my God, what if I live a long time? Oh my God! My father may be blind, but at least he knows how to play a fiddle. He’ll go and play at someone’s wedding and then those people will come and plow his fields for him. But what about me—how am I going to live in this world? And what if God gives me a long life and I outlive my father and my mother? What will I do in this world then?” I would lie down to sleep, and I—I can’t sleep! As soon as I start to think, I start to cry...¹⁰

Although Veresai often expressed a great love for music, this personal account demonstrates that the soon-to-be minstrel was nonetheless distraught by his acquired disability, and his love for music was no longer at the forefront of his mind. A similar pessimism regarding the healing powers of music continues to appear in personal accounts of musical interactions following the acquisition of a disability. For example, William Cheng has argued against this in an account of his personal experience with music after his life was changed by the onset of chronic pain:

I haven’t been capable of showing such virtuosic transformation during pain. My inability to translate suffering into artistry has in fact made me doubt how much I care about music—a queer thing for a musicologist to wonder. If I loved music enough, shouldn’t music sometimes *be* enough to comfort and care for me? Or, to frame this as the three-word inquiry people ask about difficult relationships: *Is love enough?* As my body and worldview came undone, it wasn’t a huge stretch for me to start questioning my relationship to music. Playing music didn’t serve as a magical security blanket, and listening to it couldn’t help me sleep. Music wasn’t exceptional. It was just one more thing excised from daily activities, one more broken luxury in a life falling silent.¹¹

Cheng’s confession to the lack of solace provided by music is somewhat dismal and contrary to popular, beloved narratives of the healing power of music—Orpheus’s lyre could soothe savage beasts, and David played the harp to remedy King Saul’s bouts of depression. However, Cheng’s account is ultimately situated within his reality. This text reveals that not all musical experiences are alike, and that music does not necessarily signify transcendence from painful (both physically and emotionally) and visceral experiences. In the case of the kobzars, while music did provide an

¹⁰ Quoted in Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 54.

¹¹ William Cheng, *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), Accessed April 4, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9293551>.

avenue for these kobzars to earn their daily bread with some dignity, the differing ways in which these musicians responded to their instruments—and to the lifestyle forced upon them by their disability—demonstrates a lack of universality in their experiences. For many kobzars, music was clearly seen as valuable, and selling a bandura might be a cause to for them to grieve. For others, the bandura was viewed as a ball and chain tethering kobzars to a lifestyle that they did not ask for, but nonetheless adhered to out of obligation. Ultimately, these physical aspects of the bandura—including the unique qualities of individual instruments—demonstrate the ways in which the bandura embodies epistemologies and narratives of blindness and blind musicians in Ukraine. The information stored in this instrumental archive reveals the status of blind musicians in Ukraine, and illustrates that the kobzars did have a role in Ukrainian society, but this role was very specific, very limited, and ultimately prescribed to them according to cultural expectations in rural Ukraine.

Bandura Repertoire: Begging Songs

The kobzar's position in Ukrainian rural society is further articulated within the bandura's repertoire, a site Rancier deems as crucial for documenting cultural information within an instrumental archive. Bandura repertoire comprises begging songs, religious songs, and epics or *dumy*.¹² The purpose of the begging song is exactly as it sounds—these were performed to ask for some form of alms, and usually appealed to the listener's sense of pity or fear of the divine. This category also included songs of gratitude to show thanks for any alms received.¹³ “The Begging Song of a *Lirnyk*” represents the typical content of a begging song:

I'm not asking my mother,

¹² There are additional genres of song in the bandura repertoire, including historical and satirical songs. For this purpose of this analysis, however, I will limit my discussion to begging songs, religious songs, and *dumy*.

¹³ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 211.

I'm not asking, my flower,
For either silver or gold, or fine raiment,

I only ask and weep,
With a low bow,
With the word of Gods and Angels,
In the name of Jesus Christ.
So my mother, if you have,
So my flower, if you have,
A towel or a coin,
In praise of God,
To be collected for a shirt,
Then I will, my mother,
Walk the wide earth,
And gather coin upon coin,
And pray to the Lord for your sake.¹⁴

Begging songs such as this usually opened any performance by a kobzar, and songs of gratitude usually closed any performance where the kobzar sang repertoire other than begging songs. If a performance consisted only of the begging song, it would be ended with a prayer.¹⁵ In this way, a kobzar's entire performance could be framed by begging songs, effectively premising and concluding any performance with the reminder that no matter how well or beautifully the kobzar played, his performance was ultimately a form of begging.

In addition, begging songs often appeal to the listener's sense of pity while simultaneously evoking shame for the musician in the form of an apology for seeking alms, as Kononenko illustrates:

Most begging songs have a section where the performer apologizes for seeking alms, emphasizing that he has no choice, and describing the plight of a blind person by listing what he cannot see: the dawn of day, the coming of night, the seasons, the beauty of nature. The minstrel says that his eyes are sealed, as if covered by the leaves of an oak tree, and complains that he depends on someone else's eyes to see where he is going, on someone else's work to provide his livelihood. Sometimes the singer adds that blindness

¹⁴ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 212-13

¹⁵ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 211.

is so awful, it would be better to be dead, to never have been born, to have rotten in the mother's womb. The singer states that if he had any other choice, if he could work, he would much rather ask the listener for employment than for charity. This section too, is often followed by statements to the effect that the supplicant is asking only for a small donation.¹⁶

Another common trope in begging songs is the request for a piece of cloth to cover the minstrel's eyes or his nakedness. Cloth was likely valued due to its endurance (food was also a common offering, but would only be temporarily useful to the minstrel before it rotted or was consumed), as well as its potential work as an item to be sold at the market.¹⁷ The use of pity as a tool here is interesting, as it represents both a means of earning a small income, but at the expense of the minstrel. To earn their alms, the kobzars demean themselves by painting their existence as pitiful, even going as far as to say that they would be "better off dead," as seen in the above quote. Furthermore, asking for a cloth to cover their eyes tells the listener that blindness is something to be ashamed of—something to be covered and hidden away from the world—while the musician is simultaneously laying bare their disability in the hopes of eliciting an emotional response from the listener. In this way, the disability is displayed as something to be stared at, but also something to be hidden away from everyday life.

Additionally, begging songs place the kobzar in a position of dependence, in which the performer requires the patronage of his audience for his livelihood. The kobzar is asking for goods in return for his services as a musician, but the content of the begging song nonetheless paints a kobzar performance as a form of begging. While minstrelsy was seen by many as a form of "honest work,"¹⁸ stereotypes about the kobzars nonetheless painted these musicians as people of low morality—due to both their status as blind people and as individuals in poverty, both of

¹⁶ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 17.

which were expected to lack moral fiber.¹⁹ In this way, the kobzar is neither a beggar nor an honest worker, but positioned somewhere in between. Thus, the kobzar is effectively excluded and othered from societal roles occupied by sighted Ukrainians, and are instead placed in a position of ambiguity that is neither disgraced nor dignified. As we will see, this sense of ambiguity and homelessness characterizes many aspects of the kobzar lifestyle.

Bandura Repertoire: Religious Songs

As we have already seen in begging songs, religious content is prevalent in kobzar repertoire, especially that which encourages saint-like generosity and appeals to the listener's fear of God. The promise of prayer in exchange for alms is particularly interesting here, as the kobzars were sometimes described as being God's messengers, or vessels of God's word. As such, religious songs were an important element in the minstrel's repertoire, and minstrels strove to learn as many of these songs as they could.²⁰ Often, the content of religious songs went hand in hand with that of begging songs, as religious songs were used to inspire the fear of God in their listeners. Religious songs frequently show the consequences of greed or the benefits of generosity. For example, the song "Guardian Angel" (*Anhelu Khranyteliu*) tells of an angel who "awakens a sinful soul" to warn them that God's judgement is coming soon, and that the sinner must change his ways lest he be turned away from the pearly gates:

When you stand at the pearly gates, oh soul,
They will bind your hands, oh soul, and your feet,
They will cast you down, oh soul, to rest in Hell,
To rest in Hell, to suffer fire and torment!
You will burn, oh sinful soul, from now and forever.
At that point the sinful soul aroused itself.

¹⁷ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 17-18.

¹⁸ Kononenko 1998, 55.

¹⁹ Kononenko 1998, 28-9.

²⁰ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 220.

It called out unto the Angel with its voice:
 “Oh Angel, oh Angel of God my savior,
 Do not let me be cast into fire and torment!”
 Then the Angel answered solemnly:
 “And where have you been hiding, oh sinful soul?
 That you did not listen to the morning and the evening prayers,
 That you did not pay services or prayers for the dead,
 That you did not give wax for the candles,
That you did not invite distant travelers into your home [my emphasis],
 That you did not visit those who were ill or those in prison,
 That you did not help support orphans and widows,
 That you spent your time in great luxury,
 That you enjoyed sweet drink and liquors,
 That you fell into Hell and eternal torment!”²¹

The line “That you did not invite distant travelers into your home” is particularly interesting here, as the kobzars themselves are itinerant musicians who often preferred to travel to villages other than their own to perform. In this way, religious song can be seen as supplemental to the begging song, as it warns the listener of the implications of greed, thus encouraging them in that particular moment to be more generous. In this way, religious songs also assisted the kobzars gathering alms from their audiences.

Religious song also plays a crucial role in aligning the kobzars with the Christian faith, and perpetuating the mythical belief that these blind minstrels were messengers sent by God to spread his word. The sense of divinity prescribed to the kobzars, as Kononenko points out, did not necessarily paint the kobzars as being divine or saint-like in their own right:

The other reason why minstrels must be forced into accepting their profession is the belief that they are divinely inspired, that poetry is godspeech, and that the poet is the chalice for the word of God. If it is believed that the real actor in the process of poetic creation is God, with the poet serving only as intermediary, then, of course, the process must be initiated by God rather than by the servant...His will and becomes [sic] subject to divine compulsion.”²²

²¹ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 227.

²² Ibid.

Again, we see how the kobzars are both given agency and denied that agency in the role they have been prescribed: they have been uplifted to the realm of the divine, but the divinity is not their own. Instead, the kobzars are placed in an ambiguous position in which they embody the divine, but are not inherently divine themselves. In this way, the kobzars are only seen as divine in the moments where they are conveying the word of God (i.e. in musical performance). Outside of performance, however, the kobzars are no longer acting as vessels for the divine, and return to roles as itinerant mendicants.

Bandura Repertoire: Epics (*Dumy*)

Although epic songs, or *dumy*, were not sung as frequently by the kobzars as early scholars have led us to believe,²³ they nonetheless warrant a discussion for their persistent popularity amongst the intelligentsia, as well as their well-known connection to the kobzar tradition. These epics were more serious in nature and usually revolved around stories of historical figures, conflict, and everyday life. Unlike most of the kobzar repertoire, *dumy* were not sung, but instead chanted in a recitative-like fashion. This was largely because the words and content of the song were often valued more highly than the music itself.²⁴

Duma (*dumy* being the plural) is term originally coined by scholars; kobzars usually referred to their epic songs as “Cossack songs” or “captive songs” –referring to epics about soldiers captured by the enemy²⁵—and viewed them as the Cossack version of religious songs. This is largely because the Cossacks were known throughout Ukraine as soldiers who came to be known as “defenders of Orthodox faith” for their efforts during the Cossack uprisings, and were

²³ Victor Mishalow, in discussion with the author, January 15th, 2017.

²⁴Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 23.

thus seen as religious martyrs.²⁶ In fact, scholars once believed that the kobzars originated from the Cossacks, and that the primordial blind minstrels were warriors blinded by battle wounds. Although we now know this to not be true,²⁷ the idea that the kobzars came from a Cossack lineage is interesting, as it attributes a heritage of martyrdom to these minstrels.²⁸

Additionally, the saliently “Ukrainian” content of *dumy* have led these songs to be viewed as icons of Ukrainian culture. During Soviet occupation, *dumy* came to be known as expressions of Ukrainian nationalism. In fact, many bandurists were convicted of some form of treason by the NKVD (The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) for their performances; they were often accused of spying for enemy countries, or of singing songs of resistance in opposition to Soviet rule. There is little evidence to support the former accusation. There are some accounts, however, of bandurists singing *dumy* as a means of resisting Soviet hegemony. For example, Haruki Kuromiya has suggested that the song “*Duma* About Marusia from Bohuslav” could have been used as a song of resistance. Although it originally told the story of Cossacks in Turkish captivity, Kuromiya argues that it could also be interpreted as a reference to Ukrainian national heroes in Soviet captivity.²⁹

On the Black Sea,
On a white rock,
There stood a dungeon of stone,
In this dungeon there lived seven hundred Cossacks,
Poor captives,
They had languished in captivity for thirty years,
And they saw neither the Lord’s daylight no the righteous sun.³⁰

Kuromiya also brings attention to a *duma* about 17th century Cossack chief, Ivan Bohun:

²⁶ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980):156.

²⁷ Victor Mishalow, in discussion with the author, January 15th, 2017.

²⁸ See (Kononenko, 1980) for an exploration of themes of martyrdom in religious song.

²⁹ Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin’s Great Terror in the 1930s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 116.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

All the Cossacks
 And soldiers
 Stood in ranks,
 And shouted with all their might,
 And as they spoke,
 The kobzars were playing,
 They were plucking their strings,
 And with their songs they were praising
 Bodhan and Bohun.³¹

The Cossacks being well-known icons of Ukrainian history and culture, the nationalist content here is undeniable. Because of this, bandurists who sang songs about Cossacks would have been viewed by Soviet officials as conveyors of Ukrainian national histories, as well as perpetuators of cultural pride. Considering Rancier's investigation into the *qyl-qobyz* as an embodiment of Kazakh national identity, I argue that the bandura serves as a location for documenting a Ukrainian national identity. This sense of nationalism is also documented in narratives that depict the kobzars as icons of resistance to external hegemony in Ukraine. These archives continued to be accessed by 21st century bandurists and their audiences, who have interpreted and inscribed new meanings into these repertoires based on changing social contexts, as is the case with kobzars condemned in the early years of the Soviet Union. Many of those persecuted bandurists, however, were sighted musicians who adapted the bandura performance. Curiously enough, many modern narratives of those persecuted bandurists choose to remember these martyrs as blind kobzars, as I will discuss later. Nonetheless, *dumy* continue to be associated with the repertoire of the blind kobzars, and came to be known as vital sites for storing, accessing, and reinterpreting information on Ukrainian culture.

³¹ Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Great Terror in the 1930s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 116.



Fig. 1: “Poltava Kobzar Mykhailo Kravchenko.”

Bandura Performance Practice

Rancier’s framework for instrument as archive also cites changing performance practices as a site for archiving cultural information, and the case of bandura performance practice is arguably unique: Changing bandura techniques and schools of playing demonstrate changing perceptions of blind performers, and document the instrument’s transition from the favor of blind performers to that of sighted performers. Although various schools of bandura playing have developed over the years—some favored by blind performers and others by sighted performers³²—for the sake of this analysis I will organize these approaches by broadly referring to the differences between performance techniques favored by blind bandurists in the late 19th

³² See (Mishalow 2012) for an overview of these different schools and an in-depth look at the development of the Kharkiv tradition.

and early 20th centuries in contrast to those developed by sighted bandurists starting in the early 20th century. Many bandurists who were active during this transition divided performance styles in this way. Bandurist, Herohy Tkachenko, believed there to be only two styles of playing—“blind” and “sighted” styles—each differentiated by the physiological and mental capabilities of their respective performers.³³

Approaches to bandura technique, however, are more diverse than this dichotomy would lead one to believe. For example, although many blind bandurists played with their instruments facing forward, a photograph of Mykhailo Kravchenko shows this kobzar playing with his bandura facing him (Fig. 1). Based on the way that he leans his head forward and down, it is possible that Kravchenko used this technique to enable a more aurally-focused approach to performance, rather than relying on visual cues (e.g. watching his fingers) to guide his playing. These differences not only demonstrate the lack of homogeneity in the performance styles of sighted or blind musicians, but also reveal the varying ways in which these performers experienced or responded to blindness.

Many “blind” styles of performance were also more physically reserved and required minimum movement. For example, Victor Mishalow has described why certain aspects of the Chernihiv style³⁴ were suited for blind musicians:

All strings were played using a rest stroke often referred to as an “*udar*” i.e. the angle of the string attack by the fingertip meant that the tip of the finger fell onto the adjacent string... This method of string articulation is very suitable for the blind because the hand has a solid reference place regarding where it was located on the instrument after the

³³ Victor Mishalow, “The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument” (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 224.

³⁴ As Mishalow discusses, bandura performance techniques are often named after the city in which they were developed. Thus, the “Chernihiv style” refers to that which was developed in Chernihiv. The same goes for the Kiev style, the Kharkiv style, etc.

string is struck...This influenced the development of kobzar music where most melodies moved in steps with few interval jumps.³⁵

Note that these decisions regarding technique also affected the sonic elements of kobzar repertoire. Compare this more tactile method for plucking the string to the contemporary Kyiv technique, in which "...the finger 'plucks out' the string without touching or resting on adjacent strings."³⁶ Through this comparison, we can begin to understand how the bandura's changing performance practice has documented the instruments transition from the kobzar tradition to its popularity among sighted performers. In addition to these changes, we also have some documentation of critical perspectives from blind and sighted performers on these differing techniques. For example, Herohy Tkachenko criticized the sighted bandurists for favoring the Chernihiv style:

This method allows sighted players to see the strings they were playing and became popular because of its initial simplicity...Sighted bandurists are impatient, and desire to master the instrument as soon as possible, without going into its nature and philosophy, because intellectuals sought in vain a simple method to learn quickly.³⁷

On the other hand, sighted performers criticized techniques used by the blind kobzars for the ways in which they were believed to limit the repertoire. Olekandsar Minkivsky, director of the Kyiv Bandurist Capella, wrote the following in 1962:

The basic playing technique in this style of bandura playing [the traditional style, used by kobzars] is concentrated on the right hand...At the same time the left hand is limited to playing only on the basses, and then only within [the range of] a single octave. In this regard, often there is a large break between the registers. In addition, the position of the left hand does not allow chords to be played on the bass strings (you can produce only one sound at a time). The limited range of the bass strings...eliminates the possibility of

³⁵ Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 50.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

³⁷ Quoted in Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 52.

performing technical passages, and requires the simplifying of the bass part impoverishing the texture of musical works, and sometimes resulting in primitivism.³⁸

Minkivsky's criticisms of the kobzars' "primitive" style of playing come from a moment in time when the bandura was being performed almost exclusively by sighted performers who sought to bring the bandura into the classical concert hall. This criticism reflects an audience and body of performers accustomed to classical music genres. That the kobzars' music seemed "primitive" to this demographic demonstrates a sense of ableism characterized by the supremacy of sighted performance practice over "blind" performance practice. Additionally, the bandura had been groomed for concert hall performances, and was therefore being played by sighted performers for an upper class, Russian audience. Minkivsky's comments demonstrate that despite these changes in audience and venue, sighted bandurists were interacting with data documented by the bandura in the form of performance practice. Calling back to Rancier's framework, musicians such as Minkivsky interacted with the bandura's instrumental archive by engaging in dialogue regarding bandura performance practices. These musicians acted as "historians,"³⁹ who interpreted older performance practices, while simultaneously inscribing the bandura with additional information and new approaches to the instrument. In this way, these "historians'" interpretations of bandura performance practice both draw from and contribute to the archive by expanding on documentation regarding performance practice, while simultaneously engaging in discourses about blind musicians in Soviet Ukraine. These discourses have also been documented within this instrumental archive, thus storing dialogue that reveals epistemologies of blind musicians at this particular time and place in history. By observing such interactions, we

³⁸ Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 44.

³⁹ Megan Rancier, "The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh *Qyl-qobyz*," *Ethnomusicology* 58 no. 3(2014): 385.

can get a glimpse of how these blind kobzars were perceived and how their blindness was understood within an early 20th century, Soviet society.

Discourses Between Performers and Audiences

We have already seen some of the discourses that have taken place between performers regarding the bandura's transition from a "blind" style of playing to a "sighted" one. There is more to be said, however, about some of the dialogues between blind bandurists and sighted bandurists. As the bandura grew increasingly popular among sighted musicians and the Ukrainian intelligentsia, many kobzars were invited to play for a larger audience in concert settings. These performances were temporarily halted by the Russian-made Ems decree (1876), which severely restricted use of the Ukrainian language and forbade "stage performances in the Little Russian⁴⁰ dialect (Ukrainian language) and songs in this dialect."⁴¹ Kobzars would be kept from performing on the stage for almost 26 years, until they would return to the concert hall to perform for the 22nd All-Russian Archaeological Conference in 1902. This meeting consisted of performances and a paper presentation by sighted bandurist, Hnat Khotkoveych, who spoke out on the repression of the kobzars in recent years, and the state of their music tradition in Ukraine.⁴²

The 22nd Archaeological Conference demonstrates that the bandura was viewed as a saliently "Ukrainian" tradition by the intelligentsia, and that blind minstrels embodied this tradition. Although sighted bandurists had already shown interest in the bandura by this time, those

⁴⁰ Russia's previous use of the term "Little Russia" to refer to Ukraine exemplifies the hegemonic attitude towards the nation during this period.

⁴¹ Quoted in Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 87.

⁴² Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 87.

bandurists being asked to perform in the concert setting were usually blind. Furthermore, inviting performers of an active tradition to an “archaeological” conference suggests that this tradition and its performers were viewed more as historical artifacts to be studied, rather than a living and continuing tradition. The way the kobzars were gathered to perform resembles a folkloricization more than a concert performance: The kobzars were gathered and positioned on stage by Khotkoveych, who then proceeded to talk about the kobzars to a curious audience. Although such presentations were given in the interest of promoting and preserving Ukrainian culture, and sought to reveal how the Ems decree and over-policing by Soviet officials oppressed the kobzars and their art, Khotkoveych nonetheless spoke in place of the kobzars, and served as the curator of this museum exhibit. Interestingly, by placing these kobzars in a concert context, which was entirely new for many of the musicians involved, Khotkoveych expressed that many of the kobzars seemed to feel liberated of their disability:

The performers were no longer recognized as being blind...They were so excited: with a powerful sense of joy that overflowed and overwhelmed their hearts. For a time they forgot they were blind, they were now living their life to the full. I was happy to see their fulfilled faces.⁴³

Khotkoveych’s observation demonstrates a perceived dichotomy between “blind” music tradition and “sighted” music tradition: As discussed above in regards to performance practice, the concert hall was understood to be a location for refined and complex music, and the traditional style of bandura attributed to blind musicians was deemed too “primitive” for this space. By bringing this “primitive” way of playing to a concert setting, Khotkoveych viewed the kobzars as having transcended their disability; these musicians were no longer confined to the street by their blindness and the limitations it placed on their music, in the eyes of sighted musicians. In this

⁴³ Quoted in Victor Mishalow, “The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument” (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 88.

way, the bandura's origins in the traditional style have been documented not only as essentially "blind," but also as being exemplary of the experiences of blind people in Ukraine, and the limitations placed on those people by social models of blindness within that culture.

Furthermore, discourses between bandurists show that blindness was understood as being "authentic" to the bandura. When Hnat Khotkoveych attempted to organize a tour of blind kobzars, a young, sighted performer and former guide—Vasyl Potapenko—appeared at Khotkoveych's door and expressed interest in performing on this tour. Although Khotkoveych was having trouble acquiring the funds to provide transportation for the blind kobzars that the public wanted to see, Khotkoveych turned him away, as a young sighted man did not fit the public's image of the old, blind kobzars. Upon realizing that his sightedness was preventing him from performing, Potapenko attempted to blind himself with acid.⁴⁴ This extreme act of self-mutilation demonstrates the extent to which the bandura was associated with a specific blind culture, as well as the extent to which blindness was once viewed as being a crucial element of bandura performance.

Although the kobzar tradition declined and eventually disappeared due to the persecution of blind minstrels under Stalin's regime, modern musicians continue to act as historians who interact with and interpret these narratives through bandura performance. Bandurist, Pavlo Stepanovych Suprun,⁴⁵ has demonstrated an interesting interpretation of the kobzar narrative in his performance career. Suprun, who was blinded at age six by a World War II land mine, "trie[d] hard to live up to the image of a traditional minstrel," according to Kononenko, by wearing traditional embroidered shirts in performances and maintaining a long "Cossack"

⁴⁴ Victor Mishalow, "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 118-19.

mustache.⁴⁶ Besides emulating the kobzars through his appearance in performance, Suprun also interpreted the narratives of blind minstrels by describing the bandura as a musical “weapon” of sorts, as Kononenko discusses:

In the past, Suprun told me, kobzari [In Ukrainian, the plural form of “kobzar”] fought Ukraine’s enemies along with the Cossacks. The Cossacks fought with weapons; the kobzari, because they were blind, fought with words. But for Ukraine’s enemies the words of a kobzar were worse (*shche hirshe*) than the sword...I am convinced that Pavlo Stepanovych [Suprun] was trying to provide spiritual leadership, spiritual ammunition, like the kobzari of old. When students were staging an anti-government hunger strike in October Square...Suprun was there to sing to them and not just to entertain them and help them pass the time, but to provide them with spiritual and moral strength.⁴⁷

It is interesting to note that in performances such as that at October Square, Suprun often sang *dumy*, as he believed the kobzars of old once sang to boost the morale of the Cossacks for battle. Kononenko, however, points out that *dumy* are usually more tragic than inspiring, as many of these songs involve heroes dying in battle. In this sense, the element of *dumy* that Suprun found inspiring was likely not the content of the *dumy* themselves, but the archived narratives of the kobzars stored within the *dumy*—narratives of resistance in the face of oppression and acts of martyrdom in the name of Ukrainian rights and independence. In this sense, Suprun’s bandura performances were influenced by narratives of national pride and duty that have been inscribed into the bandura over the course of time, and stored within that instrumental archive. These narratives of resistance and martyrdom, however, are largely attributed to blind minstrels, when in fact many sighted bandurists opposed Russian hegemony through bandura performance. That the narratives inscribed in the bandura persistently assert blind minstrels as martyrs is interesting, as it parallels disability with self-sacrifice. Kononenko points out that “As expressions of

⁴⁵ Suprun was the subject of Natalie Kononenko’s fieldwork starting in 1987.

⁴⁶ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 133.

mourning, *dumy* of the past had to be sung by those who themselves had suffered, meaning the blind.”⁴⁸ Building off this argument, I would argue that Ukrainians paralleled the suffering of the kobzars (which Ukrainians perceived as being primarily caused by blindness), to the pain inflicted on Ukraine by Soviet rule. In this sense, the kobzars are seen as an embodiment of Ukraine, and their blindness an embodiment of Ukraine’s suffering under Soviet hegemony. This model of disability as a form of suffering pervades the narratives of the kobzars, and is inscribed in the bandura’s instrumental archive through the prevalence of narratives of suffering in its music, especially in the persistence popularity of *dumy* in bandura repertoire. In this way, the bandura documents a Ukrainian national identity that is characterized by resistance to external hegemony through narratives that express the negative impact of external influence in Ukraine. Russian and Soviet hegemony is thus demonized by paralleling the suffering of Ukraine under Soviet rule to the perceived suffering of blind minstrels. This parallel is then stored within the bandura’s instrumental archive, and subsequently accessed and interpreted by modern musicians and audiences in new sociopolitical contexts.

Narratives of suffering and martyrdom continue to be interpreted and reinterpreted in Ukrainian culture outside of performance. One such interpretation is the 2014 film, *Povodyr* (The Guide). This film tells the story of a young boy, Peter (Anton Greene), on the run from the NKVD for being in possession of secret Soviet documents. Peter encounters a blind kobzar, Ivan (Stanislav Boklan)—a soldier who was blinded in battle while fighting in the Ukrainian War of Independence. Ivan helps Peter run from the NKVD, going so far as to use himself as bait to lure Soviet police away from the boy. With Ivan’s assistance, Peter eventually finds safety. Ivan,

⁴⁷ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 140.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

however, does not survive the journey, and is killed by Soviet officials. Although, before his death, Ivan successfully hides Peter's secret Soviet documents in the kobzar's bandura, which the boy takes with him to safety.⁴⁹ I will discuss the narratives of disability in this film in Chapter 2, but for now will simply point out that *The Guide's* depiction of the blind kobzars favors a depiction of the blind as martyrs, rather than the sighted. Additionally, narratives of suffering and loss pervade the film, an example being the following song, which is sung near the end of the film by a group of kobzars being taken by train to a firing squad:

Bends the oaks.
 A kozak [Cossack] sits on a grave,
 And asks the wind...
 A kozak sits on a grave,
 And asks the wind,
 Tell me wind,
 Storming wind,
 Where is our kozak's Freedom?
 What is our Fortune?
 Where is our Hope?
 Where is our Freedom?
 Where is our Glory?
 What is our Fate?
 Where is our Hope?
 Where is our Freedom ?
 Where is our Glory?
 And the wind answers
 I know, he says
 I know.
 Your kozak's fate
 is in a far away land.⁵⁰

The image of a Cossack sitting on a grave demonstrates a sense of grief for what this soldier has lost. The content of the song supports the kobzars' narrative in the film, as they are condemned

⁴⁹Український фільм [Ukrainian Film]. "Поводир [Povodyr], the Guide." Youtube video. Original film directed by Oles Sanin. 1:59:43. Posted May 30, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHpkdDUa_UU.

⁵⁰"The Guide English Subtitles." Trans. by rkononenko. *Opensubtitles.org*. Uploaded Feb 2016. <http://www.opensubtitles.org/en/subtitles/6439858/povodyr-en>.

by the Soviets and sent to their death under the accusation of using music as propaganda. This interpretation of the martyr narrative has a different nuance from previous narratives, however, as the kobzars' suffering is not primarily caused by his disability, but by the political situation in Ukraine under Soviet rule. Blindness is depicted as a part of that suffering, but the root of that suffering is Russian hegemony, as I will discuss further in the next chapter.

It is important to note that this film was released during a time of intense political friction between Russia and Ukraine: The winter of 2013 and 2014 marked one of the most violent events in Ukraine's history, the Maidan protests. These events started out as peaceful protests speaking out against corrupt Ukrainian politicians, who some Ukrainians believed to be mere puppets of the hegemonic Russian government. The protests escalated when the local militia began attacking protestors, under Yanukovych's orders, and Maidan transformed into a war zone. Roughly one hundred protestors, now known as the "heavenly hundred," were killed by their own government in Maidan square—a government that was believed to be controlled by the Kremlin. Furthermore, in March of 2014—while Ukraine's capitol was still recovering from the violent events at Maidan—unmarked Russian soldiers began to appear in the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine, and eventually annexed the peninsula for Russia—a move which has been deemed a violation of international law. In light of these events, it appears to be no coincidence that Oles Sanin would release *The Guide*—a film that decidedly demonizes Russian hegemony through its narrative—in November of the same year.

In this sense, Ivan's blindness becomes a symbol of the suffering inflicted on Ukraine by Russian hegemony, both during and after the Soviet era. That this notion is demonstrated through

a recitative-style performance—reminiscent of *dumy*—in *The Guide* illustrates that these narratives are effectively inscribed in the bandura’s history and tradition, and that modern Ukrainians continue to interact with these narratives when they encounter bandura and bandura performances. In this way, the bandura continues to serve as a site for archiving information regarding the kobzars. These archives document the kobzars as icons of resistance in Ukraine and—as exemplified by bandura performance in *The Guide*—the information stored in those archives continues to be accessed by “historians” who interpret that information in new sociopolitical contexts.

The kobzars have held many changing roles in Ukrainian society since the birth of their tradition. Additionally, these kobzars have had numerous, widely varying experiences with their disability. Although history has left us with few personal accounts detailing the life of a kobzar (and those that we do have were not written by their own hand), we can nonetheless access those experiences through the information stored in the bandura’s physical form, repertoires, performance practices, and in discourses between performers and audiences. While the bandura can by no means replace the voices of the kobzars themselves who held these roles and had experienced blindness, these cultural documents nonetheless only allow us to glean information on the experiences of the kobzars, their ambiguous and dynamic role in society, and the ways in which their blindness was understood by Ukrainians. This information continues to be accessed, interpreted, reinterpreted, and deployed by modern bandurists and audiences, who continuously negotiate the cultural narratives of blindness in new contexts. That the bandura continues to be used to access these narratives demonstrates not only the cultural significance of this instrument to Ukrainians, but its significant ties to understanding blindness in Ukrainian culture. In this way,

the bandura can give us some insight into the lives of these enigmatic musicians whose voices have long been silenced.

CHAPTER 3: OPPOSING SOVIET INFLUENCE THROUGH INTERPRETATIONS OF DISABILITY, RELIGION, AND MYTHS OF THE KOBZARS

Chapter 2 discussed how the Ukrainian bandura has and continues to serve as an archive for documenting epistemologies of blindness and blind musicians in Ukraine. The bandura repertoire—one of the locations in which cultural documents are stored—has revealed the kobzars' connections to religion in Ukraine, or more specifically, with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Due to these ties with Ukrainian Christianity, the kobzars and their disabilities have been understood in a religious framework. These religious models of disability often view bodily difference as punitive or something to be transcended.¹ In the case of the kobzars, however, the religious framework through which their blindness is interpreted is not limited to these ways of knowing disability. In fact, myths about blindness and ties with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have led the kobzars to be understood not only as messengers of God, but as vessels for the divine.² These myths have expanded the religious model for interpreting disability to denote bodily difference as a signifier for one who embodies divinity. This divinity is not chosen, but prescribed to the individual by a sighted population.

In addition to myths surrounding the kobzars' religious affiliations, blind minstrels have also been prescribed myths of martyrdom. These myths are largely based on their perceived ties to the Cossacks—a self-governing military group that has come to be known as a salient symbol of patriotism and resistance to external hegemony in Ukraine. These ties have led to the kobzars being used as a symbol of resistance to Russian and Soviet hegemony in Ukraine. By engaging in scholarship that explores the kobzars' affiliations with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church³ and

¹ See Straus, 2011; Pal, 2013; Hogan, 2015.

² See Kononenko 1979.

³ See Kononenko 1991.

the Cossacks,⁴ myths of blind bards,⁵ and the condemnation of religion and symbols of Ukrainian nationalism in the Soviet Union,⁶ I will discuss the ways in which myths about the kobzars have led to their use as icons of resistance in modern Ukraine. I will then explore the ways in which these myths are utilized in modern Ukraine through an analysis of the 2014 Ukrainian film, *The Guide*. This analysis has been largely informed by conversations with Anton Greene—an American-Ukrainian actor who acted in the film’s title role—and his parents, Arthur Greene and Solomia Soroka. Ultimately, I will argue that by prescribing narratives of religious and patriotic martyrdom to these blind minstrels, the suffering of the kobzars—which is perceived as being inflicted by both their disability and by Soviet or Russian hegemony—has come to be seen as a metaphor for the suffering of Ukraine under Russian and Soviet influence, thus transforming the kobzars into icons of resistance to external hegemony in Ukraine. As a result, this minority group of blind minstrels becomes crucial in articulating a Ukrainian national identity, and demonstrates the role that internal others play in determining what it means to be Ukrainian.

Religious Myths of the Kobzars

The kobzars’ affiliations with Ukrainian Christianity stretch back to the late-19th century, when the Ukrainian Orthodox Church served as a primary support for people with disabilities,⁷ and its institutions could serve as a home base for a kobzar guild (*sekhy*) or brotherhood (*bratstva*). These guilds usually held headquarters in a church, where a portion of the members’ collected alms were donated towards maintaining an icon, such as a candle, in that church. Each guild also dictated who could beg and perform in a certain area—often related to the location of

⁴ See Kononenko 1990, 1991, 1998.

⁵ See Kononenko 1979.

⁶ See Gabel 2005; Kuromiya 2007; Powell 1975.

the church it was tied to. Performing or begging in the territory of another guild or as someone who had not completed their apprenticeship would lead to penalty in the form of violent beatings or cutting the strings of the guilty musician's instrument.⁸ Because of these practices, the kobzars' musical activity was largely centered around physical manifestations of the church.

Additionally, narratives of the kobzars are largely influenced by myths based on Christian stories and beliefs. As Natalie Kononenko discusses, blind minstrels were viewed as "spiritual descendants of Christ by way of the Apostles,"⁹ and this lineage assigned the kobzars the task of spreading God's word. This belief is partially due to myth surrounding the biblical legend of David, and the supposed origins of the *lira*—an instrument played by the kobzar's predecessors, the *lirnyky*:

The *lira* is the zither of King David. King David took pity on the disabled and gave them a mountain of gold so that they might mine it and thus support themselves. The son of Solomon said that this was not right, that this was not appropriate to the disabled because then people would kill them for it (meaning the gold). One should give them the "volot" and the "zakharbet" (the horse and the begging bag) so that they might travel throughout the world, walking (sic) from village to village, and from house to house begging for alms. Thus they would support themselves and no one could take this from them. They would go from house to house praising God and thus supporting themselves.¹⁰

Another explanation for the kobzars' role as vessels of God's word comes from the belief that poetry is a result of divine inspiration, or "godspeech."¹¹ Through this model, however, the kobzars music and poetry is not their own, but that of God; the kobzars were not viewed as the primary creators of their music, but vessels through which another's music could be

⁷ Sarah D. Phillips. "There Are No Invalids in the USSR!": A Missing Soviet Chapter in the New Disability History." *Disability Studies Quarterly*. 29 no.3 (2009): 3.

⁸ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 67-72.

⁹ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 133.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

disseminated to the Ukrainian people. In this sense, the kobzars lacked ownership over their own art form, because that art was being credited to another being: God. This way of understanding disability is interesting, as people with disabilities were seen as both an embodiment of the divine, and vessels that channeled divine knowledge while remaining discreet from the divine being they embodied. Additionally, this divinity was only perceived in the kobzars when they played music. In this sense, a blind kobzar may be treated with respect when they are working as a musician, but would not receive the same respect in their every day, non-musical activities. This notion is made apparent by numerous stigmas surrounding the kobzars, which depicted these blind mendicants as drunks and thieves.¹² Due to these stereotypes, Kononenko notes that minstrels were viewed as “deformed not only physically, but also morally.”¹³ Building off Kononenko’s argument, I would argue that the blind body itself is viewed as an immoral and fractured object that is only perceived as whole when it is understood to be under the control of a divine entity. In this way, divinity played a crucial role in the performance career of a kobzar, and made their roles as musicians inseparable from religious beliefs in Ukraine.

The kobzars’ ties to divinity are also the result of the religious thread that has run through the narratives of many famous poets, such as Homer and Milton.¹⁴ Homer, whose *The Odyssey* has come to represent the pinnacle of poetic epic, is widely known to have been blind (the bard protagonist of *The Odyssey*, Demodokos, was blind as well). When John Milton became blind, he “almost welcomed blindness as a sign to greatness” and in *Paradise Lost*, claimed that “he

¹¹ Natalie Kononenko, “Homer, Milton, and Asik Veysel: The Legend of the Blind Bard,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3-4, no. 2 (1979): 527.

¹² See Kononenko 1998, 27-32.

¹³ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 28.

¹⁴ See Kononenko 1979.

and the bard of Ancient Greece [Homer] were equal in fate and renown.”¹⁵ Similarly, the Turkish minstrel, Âşık Veysel, was seen as more famous than his peers “because his blindness made him appear to be a more ‘proper’ bard.”¹⁶ Famous figures such as these likely led to the belief that blindness served as a signifier for artistic talent. Such is made apparent in the autobiography of Behçet Mahir, a minstrel who claimed to have experienced a period of temporary blindness that led him to pursue the life of a minstrel. According to Mahir, three dervishes came to him in a dream and called on him to be a singer. When he refused, the dervishes vanished and returned to him in two more dreams. When he refused again in the third dream, they blinded him, and he claimed to be blind for three more years until he finally submitted to their will and became a minstrel.¹⁷ Such stories not only emphasize on the role that blindness has played in evaluating artistic quality, but also illustrates the life of a minstrel as prescribed in some sort of divine or supernatural intervention—in the case of Mahir, minstrelsy was assigned to him by the three dervishes. In this sense, minstrelsy is seen as something that is “given” by a divine or supernatural entity. Additionally, the “gift” of musical or poetic fluency is often framed as being “given” in compensation for the “suffering” of blindness. As Kononenko has argued:

It is possible to argue...that any hardship--be it physical, economic, or emotional--stimulates artistic sensitivity, because to suffer is to live more intensely. Pain cuts so deeply that it sharpens the ability to feel all other emotions, just as a wound is more sensitive to all stimuli than ordinary flesh.¹⁸

¹⁵ Natalie Kononenko, “Homer, Milton, and Asik Veysel: The Legend of the Blind Bard,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3-4, no. 2 (1979): 520.

¹⁶ Natalie Kononenko, “Homer, Milton, and Asik Veysel: The Legend of the Blind Bard,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3-4, no. 2 (1979): 521.

¹⁷ Natalie Kononenko, “Homer, Milton, and Asik Veysel: The Legend of the Blind Bard,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3-4, no. 2 (1979): 521.

¹⁸ Natalie Kononenko, “Homer, Milton, and Asik Veysel: The Legend of the Blind Bard,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3-4, no. 2 (1979): 528.

Following Kononenko's argument, pain is viewed as the price that a minstrel pays for the "gift" of poetical or musical aptitude. In this way, both religious beliefs and perceptions of the "suffering" attributed to disability are deeply intertwined, and directly influence the ways in which the kobzars were interpreted by Ukrainian society.

Tied up in these intertwining religious elements are the Cossacks—Ukrainian soldiers who have historically fought against external hegemony in Ukraine. One such case was the Cossack rebellion of 1648, in which these soldiers fought to free Ukrainians from the dominance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Coupled with dissatisfaction for their socioeconomic situation and a desire to practice Ukrainian Orthodoxy rather than the Commonwealth's official religion—Roman Catholicism—Ukrainians took up arms in rebellion. The church brotherhoods served as crucial political nodes in this uprising, as "they served as a channel through which the Cossacks reach out to all Ukrainians, from all walks of life."¹⁹ These church brotherhoods would later serve as models for the kobzar guilds and brotherhoods, and tied the kobzars to a societal construct that once served as a site of rebellion.²⁰ In this way, the kobzars' ties to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church largely contributed to narratives of the kobzars as defenders of Ukrainian culture, whose music fought Soviet influence much in the same way that the Cossacks fought the hegemony of the Commonwealth.

It is also interesting to note that the kobzars were often associated with superstitious belief and prescribed mythological or supernatural characteristics. For example, Ostap Veresai—a well-known kobzar in the early years of the Soviet Union—offers the following explanation for his acquired blindness:

¹⁹ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 135.

Ostap Versai claims that blindness was the result of the “evil eye” (*oslip z prystritu*). He says that, when he was little, a journeyman carpenter came to his house, asked ridiculous questions about his mother, then cast an evil spell by hammering several times on the side of the house as he left. Veresai developed a headache, then his eyes became sore, and finally he lost the ability to see. Veresai says that he knew the carpenter must have cast a spell because the man had “bad, mean eyes.”²¹

Although it is likely that Veresai acquired his blindness from disease—as was the case for many kobzars²²—Veresai’s account is interesting in that it reads a kobzar’s blindness as the result of malignant forces manipulated by a human, rather than the act of a divine entity. In this sense, blindness in Ukraine was not universally accepted as God’s work or intent, but was interpreted in diverse ways by different people. Many of these interpretations, however, seem to follow a narrative in which the kobzar has acquired some additional talents or abilities as a result of their blindness. For example, Hnat Khotkoveych—a sighted bandurist—seemed to believe that blind minstrels had an innate musical ability that sighted bandurists should strive to imitate in their own studies:

The kobzar draws his energy through his bare feet from the earth whereas we, cultural [sighted] singers walk in shoes...The kobzar will sing 50 measures, playing some five chords accompaniment--and you listen, and he continues to sing--and you listen. Whereas when a refined singer repeats the same musical phrase, not 50, but only 10 times, and on the 10th you start to yawn.²³

Khotkoveych’s comparison of blind and sighted bandurists demonstrates the belief that blind minstrels possessed some otherworldly abilities that differentiated them from sighted musicians—the kobzar has the ability to take energy from the very earth “through his bare feet.”

²⁰ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 134-7.

²¹ Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: ...and the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 48.

²² Ibid.

²³ Victor Mishalow, “The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument” (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 131.

This belief aligns with common theories of “compensation” associated with disability, in which the person with a disability acquires some other extraordinary skill set that “compensates” for the “limitations” placed on the individual by disability. Additionally, Khotkoveych’s description ties in well with Kononenko’s above argument that “suffering” is believed to result in heightened artistic sensitivity, and demonstrates the widespread belief that the kobzars’ musical talents were the result of some otherworldly influence—whether it be divine, evil, or supernatural. Such beliefs prescribed a sense of “otherworldliness” to the kobzars, in which their blindness and musical abilities were seen as the result of some supernatural force.

These cases of “othering” widen the sociocultural gap between perceptions of ability and disability by attributing disability to a force outside of our world—the “otherworldliness” of their disability denotes blind minstrelsy as something that, literally speaking, stems from some other world. By inscribing these beliefs into narratives of the kobzars, their narratives became inseparable from religious and superstitious belief in Ukraine, therefore aligning the kobzars with those beliefs. Because of this, the kobzars would come to be seen as icons representing distinctly Ukrainian beliefs and values that would be put on trial with the rise of the Soviet Union.

Resisting Religion in the Soviet Union

The kobzars’ numerous associations with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—coupled with their ties to resistance with a basis in religion—led Soviet officials to view these minstrels as a potential threat to the Soviet regime, and for several reasons. To the leaders of Soviet Russia, religion was viewed as the result of a cultural attachment to a distinct, national identity. Especially in the case of Ukraine, whose autocephalous Orthodox Church—organized in 1919 following the rise of the Soviet Union—required priests to “pledge their love for ‘independent

Mother Ukraine.”²⁴ This led religion to be viewed as a threat to the Soviet regime, which sought to homogenize the cultures of its satellite states in order to form a unified, Soviet-Russian culture. The Bolsheviks tolerated the Ukrainian Orthodoxy at first, but in 1929 Stalin began a purge of Ukrainian nationalists that included the condemnation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the fissures it had created in the Soviet Union.²⁵ In an attempt to shut down this nationalist route for resistance, Soviet officials disseminated a significant amount of Soviet propaganda that denounced religious tradition as contributing to “backwards views” resulting from a lack of “advanced socialist ideology.”²⁶ This was an issue that Soviet officials took very seriously, and viewed as paramount to the success of the regime, as can be seen in the following quote from a 1967 issue of *Pravda*:

The struggle against religion is not a campaign, not an isolated phenomenon, not a self-contained entity; it is an inseparable component part of the entire ideological activity of Party organizations, an essential link and necessary element in the complex of communist education.²⁷

This notion largely emerged from Marx’s famously misinterpreted quote denoting religion as “the opium of the people.” “Religion is the opium of the people,” would come to serve as a pivotal phrase in the anti-religious propaganda that emerged shortly after the ratification of the Russian Constitution of 1918.

As anti-religious sentiment grew in the late 1920s, the kobzars held a precarious position in the atheistic Soviet ideology. Religious belief was crucial to their music, and to its success as well. In the previous chapter, I discussed how begging songs relied on religious belief and fear of the divine as a tool for evoking sympathy and generosity from the listener. Also discussed was

²⁴ Paul Gabel. *And God Created Lenin: Marxism vs. Religion in Russia, 1917-1929*. (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005), 133.

²⁵ Paul Gabel. *And God Created Lenin: Marxism vs. Religion in Russia, 1917-1929*. (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005), 144.

²⁶ David Powell. *Antireligious Propaganda In Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion*. (MIT Press, 1975), 140.

the prominent role that religious song held in the kobzar repertoire. These factors led the music of the kobzars to be viewed as largely antithetical to the atheistic mindset of Soviet sympathizers. Additionally, the kobzars ties to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—through myth and through their ties to the church brotherhoods and guilds—denoted these musicians as direct contributors to the divides created by the Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

It is also interesting to note that Soviet condemnation of religion included the abolishment of superstitious beliefs. Stories, such as Ostap Veresai's account of acquiring blindness from the evil eye, would have been viewed as another form of religious belief, thus another form of "opium for the people," that demonstrated a lack of "advanced socialist ideology." Therefore, Veresai's claims would have been viewed as a false narrative that further drove a wedge into the fissures created by non-atheistic thought in Soviet society.

The kobzars' alignment with Ukrainian religious and superstitious belief would have led these blind minstrels to be viewed not only as an opposing force to Soviet homogenization, but as a group of people lacking what was deemed to be a more pragmatic, atheistic philosophy. Because of this, many Soviets viewed the kobzars to be blind in two ways: Physically or medically, and ideologically. This perspective is characterized in the following excerpt written by anti-religious journalist, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, in 1934:

Religion acts as a bandage over the eyes of man, preventing him from seeing the world as it is. It is our task to tear off this bandage and to teach the masses of workers and peasants to see things correctly, to understand what does exist and what does not.²⁸

This understanding of religion as something that "blinds" the individual and prevents them from "see[ing] things correctly," compounded with the physical manifestation of blindness in the

²⁷ David Powell. *Antireligious Propaganda In Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion*. (MIT Press, 1975), 1.

²⁸ Paul Gabel. *And God Created Lenin: Marxism vs. Religion in Russia, 1917-1929*. (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005), 352.

kobzars would have made the kobzars a convenient site for opposing religious belief in the Soviet Union: Their disability would have been viewed as a physical manifestation of religion's obscuration of reality, therefore serving as "evidence" for the ways in which religion, in a very literal sense, "blinded" the masses. So, to the anti-religious Soviets, the kobzars were blind both in the sense that their sight was physically impaired and in the sense that they held a skewed perception of the world in their adherence to Ukrainian Orthodox belief.

Although the kobzar's perceptions may not have necessarily deemed them a serious threat to the Soviet regime, their polarizing religious ideologies would have been viewed as a deadweight slowing down the dissemination of Soviet ideologies. In this way, they were not dangerous, but they were also not contributing to the progress of Soviet society, which would have led Soviets to view the kobzars as antithetical to socialism. This notion would have also been reflected in the kobzars' role as "invalids" in Soviet society—a word that, in Russian, originally referred to veterans, but was later used to denote people who could no longer work.²⁹ From the communist perspective, the kobzars could not fully contribute to communist society—due to both their physical disability and their religious beliefs that opposed the goals of the Soviet regime. The former would have denoted these minstrels as having a low labor value, and thus having a low rating for "usefulness in society."³⁰ In this way, the kobzars may not have been viewed as a serious threat to the success of the Soviet regime, but they were not contributing to its progress either. It is this view of the kobzars that would have led to their condemnation by the Soviet regime as well as the eventual disappearance of this traditional form of blind minstrelsy.

²⁹ Phillips, Sarah D. "'There Are No Invalids in the USSR!': A Missing Soviet Chapter in the New Disability History." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2009): <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/936/1111>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The Fall of the Kobzar and the Rise of a Martyr

While the kobzars were tolerated in the early years of the Soviet Union—even somewhat popularized after they piqued the interest of the culturally-curious Russian intelligentsia—by the 1930s, kobzars were viewed as an oppositional force in the Soviet Union, and many blind minstrels were arrested under the suspicion that they were participating in an anti-Soviet rebellion. This led to some resistance from bandurists such as Hryhory Kytasty, who expressed frustration with new Soviet policies regarding music censorship:

In the years 1930-34 an extreme struggle was launched on ideological grounds everywhere. Instead of repertoire that people wanted to listen to, they were offered Bolshevik garbage and with this garbage the workers of culture had to entertain the public. The so-called 'ideological struggle' had reached its ultimate absurdity, not only in music, but also in all state and civilian institutions. For example: public dances were banned, because it was through dance that bourgeois ideology is spread. The use of lipstick was banned, as was powder, cologne, bracelets, earrings and necklaces--as remnants of savage traditions and also of uncultured bourgeoisie...³¹folk songs, especially songs with historic content were banned. The repertoire committees removed not only specific items, but all of the creativity output of one particular composer or other. By 1930 the political noose was tied. This is the year of the government's reaction to the process of SVU (Union of Liberation of Ukraine). From that period, for the use of concert groups only a miniscule portion of folk songs with exclusively lyrical or humorous texts were allowed. A ban was placed not only on Ukrainian composers, but also on Russian composers, such as a Tchaikovsky and others.³²

Kytasty's account demonstrates the degree to which Soviet policy limited what music the public could engage with, as well as the frustration that this caused for many musicians. For Ukrainians, these policy changes also signified the silencing of many saliently Ukrainian musics, including much of the kobzar repertoire. Although traditional blind minstrelsy—including its guilds and rituals—had mostly died out by the 1930s, performances featuring blind minstrels were still being organized by individuals such as Hnat Khotkoveych, who wanted to preserve this

³¹ Quoted by Victor Mishalow. "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 194.

distinctly Ukrainian tradition. Those individuals who attempted to perpetuate these musical performances, however, were often arrested under accusations of treason, as Hnat Khotkoveych recalls:

Blind people are not arrested by the police, but if that man learns to play the bandura and sing songs which he may have sung before but without the accompaniment of the bandura, and suddenly he becomes an anti-state element and the object for administrative actions.³³

Khotkoveych was constantly struggling against the restrictions placed on him and the performances that he organized,³⁴ and was eventually arrested and sentenced to death in 1938 on the basis of a false confession obtained through brutal interrogation and torture.³⁵ Although Khotkoveych was not himself blind, his role as a leader and organizer of blind minstrel ensembles and performances would cause his death to reflect the broader condemnation of all blind Ukrainian minstrels under Soviet rule.

Although scholars contest whether the infamous Kharkiv Conference of 1939 actually took place,³⁶ it is worth mentioning the idea of the events that may have taken place there, as well as the persistence of these stories despite a lack of evidence suggesting that such a conference took place. It was to this conference that Stalin is said to have summoned all kobzars, only to have all who attended executed by Soviet officials. The story of the Kharkiv Conference, regardless of its verity, is emblematic of many of the anti-Soviet (and later, anti-Russian) dialogues that pervade kobzar narratives. These narratives are characterized by interpretations of

³² Quoted by Victor Mishalow. "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 195.

³³ Quoted by "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 218.

³⁴ See "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 218-23.

³⁵ "The Kharkiv Bandura: The Genesis and Development of a Ukrainian Folk Music Instrument" (PhD diss, Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, 2012), 222.

³⁶ William Noll. "The Social Role and Economic Status of Blind Peasant Minstrels in Ukraine." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1993). 45-71.

the kobzars as martyrs in the fight to preserve Ukrainian culture, and are largely influenced by many myths surrounding the kobzars. One such myth denotes the kobzars as having once been Cossacks who were blinded in battle, and no longer being able to fight in battle, chose to fight with music instead.³⁷ Although there is no evidence supporting the idea that any significant number of kobzars were once members of the military,³⁸ deeming the kobzars descendants of the Cossacks fits in quite poetically with religious narratives of the kobzars, as the Cossacks were known in Ukraine as defenders of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, thus were also seen as defenders of a Ukrainian way of life. In this sense, comparing the plight of the kobzars to acts of martyrdom by the Cossacks draws a parallel between historical condemnations of Ukrainian culture and the condemnation of the kobzars. Therefore, policies that oppressed the kobzars and their music were also perceived as policies that oppressed Ukrainian culture. In this way, connecting the kobzars to a Cossack lineage paints these minstrels as embodiments of Ukrainian culture characterized by acts of martyrdom in the name of Ukraine. This has led to the kobzars being represented as icons of resistance to external hegemony in Ukraine.

As I briefly discussed in the previous chapter, narratives of the kobzars as icons of resistance in Ukraine continue to be interpreted and deployed by musicians such as Pavlo Stepanovych Suprun, a blind bandurist with whom Kononenko has conducted research for many years. In her research, Kononenko has described the ways in which Suprun has strived to emulate the kobzars not only in his physical appearance, but also by providing “spiritual ammunition” for Ukrainians in the form of music. Suprun, who has expressed belief in myth of

³⁷ This origin story is used to summarize the history of the kobzars in the film *The Guide*.

³⁸ Victor Mishalow, in discussion with the author, January 15th, 2017.

the kobzars' Cossack lineage,³⁹ took up the bandura in the post-1950s, following the Khrushchev Thaw and the subsequent revitalized interest in the kobzars.⁴⁰ His career is largely characterized by a sense of “spiritual leadership,” according to Kononenko, and Suprun sought to use music as a means of meeting the “spiritual needs” of Ukraine.⁴¹ One such instance of this was the 1990 protest and hunger strike at October Square (now Independence Square or *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*) in Kiev. This anti-government protest was organized by students to express dissatisfaction with a lack of democracy and excess of Soviet influence in Ukraine. Suprun performed at these protests to “provide spiritual and moral strength” for the students involved,⁴² and performed original pieces including his song “Duma pro Chornobyl,” which openly critiques Soviet influence in Ukraine in its depiction of the Chernobyl disaster:

Oh, the black cloud
 Approached ancient Chornobyl'
 Like a wild Mongol horde
 Like a hostile force.
 And they began to tear out
 Chornobyl's grey hair,
 The way a flock of rooks
 Despoils the forest.
 They gnawed the earth, they chased the Pryp'iat⁴³
 But she, she didn't want to.
 Her banks moaned,
 Her banks shook in terror.
 Oh, how we have sinned—
 Nothing like this has ever happened to us,
 Even the Tatars and Mongols
 Did not oppress us so.
 They grey-haired father began to grieve

³⁹ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 144-5.

⁴⁰ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 140.

⁴¹ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 141.

⁴² Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 140.

⁴³ According to Kononenko’s footnote, a river that runs through Chernobyl.

And feel to the floor:
 “Forgive me, my daughter, I am helpless!”—
 He sobbed into his hands.
 They ruined Ukraine, they built
 Temples for the Devil,
 They befouled Ukraine
 This inhuman cohort,
 It was not Cossack burial mounds
 Which arose there—
 Evil forces in the reactors
 Were biding their time,
 And the little demons waited
 For that April night,
 When a raven could not even
 See the eyes of his chick.
 A cold rain was drizzling,
 It was as dark as in a grave,
 Chornobyl’ was sleeping, snoring softly,
 On his steep hillside.
 He slept, blanketed in silence,
 Only he did not know
 That he would awaken famous
 And forever accursed
 Even Kyi [founder of Kiev], in his grave,
 Turned over three times.
 And the dragon Horynych,
 The four-headed monster, escaped
 And started destroying everything with fire, —
 He was not expected.
 Those, who threw themselves at the Dragon,
 Perished in the flames,
 The others—went crazy—
 Like from Durman-herbs⁴⁴
 They fled across all Ukraine
 Seeking shelter,
 As if guilty of mortal sins,
 As if trying to save themselves.
 And after them, the phantom
 Flew and rolled,
 Ukraine was enslaved
 By that black cloud.

People of Chornobyl’, my brothers,

⁴⁴ According to Kononenko’s footnote, an herb from Ukrainian mythology that makes the hero or heroine forget everything.

What have you done?
 You have destroyed your city!
 You have poisoned the land!
 My dear Ukrainians,
 How can we continue to live?
 Will we really let Ukraine
 Descend into ruin?!⁴⁵

Suprun's song, considered in the context of the hunger strike at October Square, frames the Chernobyl disaster as a metaphor for the negative repercussions of Soviet influence in Ukraine. The "black cloud" over Chernobyl is used to represent the Soviet Union, by whom "Ukraine was enslaved." Suprun juxtaposes this black cloud to imagery that is iconic of Ukrainian nationalist culture: Cossack burial mounds, the founder of Kiev turning over in his grave, and the Durman herbs that frequent Ukrainian mythology. Furthermore, themes of martyrdom pervade Suprun's performance: Cossack burial mounds allude to those who have died in the name of Ukrainian liberty; when the dragon Horynych appears, people "threw themselves at the Dragon [and] perished in the flames;" those who did not throw themselves at the Dragon "went crazy" or fled. These lines depict Ukrainians not only as victims, but as martyrs of the Chernobyl disaster, which is understood to be the direct result of Soviet influence.

Suprun ends "Duma pro Chornobyl" with a call to action ("Will we really let Ukraine/Descend into ruin?!") which reflects Suprun's goal to provide "spiritual ammunition," while simultaneously articulating a sense of duty to Ukraine. This sense of duty was imparted not only on the audience of protestors, but also on the kobzars themselves. As Kononenko points out, Suprun's beliefs regarding the kobzars' Cossack lineage denote that the kobzars made music because they could no longer fight, and saw singing as a way of contributing to the cause of the

⁴⁵ Natalie Kononenko, "Duma Pro Chornobyl": Old Genres, New Topics," *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 135-6.

Cossacks.⁴⁶ Additionally, by referring this song as a “*duma*” about Chernobyl, Suprun associates his composition with other *dumy* in the kobzar repertoire. Although Kononenko points out that Suprun’s song lacks many characteristic features of *dumy*,⁴⁷ that Suprun deems his song to be part of the *dumy* repertoire demonstrates his belief that this work suited the values of the kobzar tradition, thus it was also believe to reflect the values of the kobzars.

Supernatural Myths of Blindness in *The Guide*.

In 2014, Oles Sanin released his film *The Guide (Povodyr)*, which tells the story of a young American boy, Peter Shamrock (played by Ukrainian-American actor, Anton Sviatoslav Greene), who travels to Soviet Russia with his father, Michael Shamrock (Jeff Burrell)—an American ex-patriot communist who worked to develop new farming technology in the Soviet Union. The film, which takes place in the 1930s, depicts the tensions between Soviet Ukraine and the USSR in the months leading up to the *Holodomor*—a mass famine induced by the seizing of Ukrainian crops by Stalin. In the film, Michael Shamrock unknowingly receives secret documents from anti-Soviet rebels. These documents reveal Stalin’s plans to seize Ukraine’s grain and begin an artificial famine in Ukraine. When the NKVD (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) discovers that these documents are in the hands of an American, the NKVD finds and kills Michael. Peter, upon seeing his father under attack by Soviet police, attempts to run away. The young boy only barely escapes pursuit by NKVD officers when he is pulled into a departing train by an old kobzar named Ivan Kocherga (played by Stanislav Boklan). Peter escapes unaware that he is carrying the secret Soviet documents that the NKVD seek inside a copy of Taras Shevchenko’s famous collection of Ukrainian poetry, *The Kobzar*. After his

⁴⁶ Natalie Kononenko, “Duma Pro Chornobyl’: Old Genres, New Topics,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 144-5.

escape, Ivan helps Peter by having the boy disguise himself as a mute, orphaned guide boy⁴⁸ to escape the NKVD, who have publicly called for Peter's arrest. In the film's conclusion, Peter manages to escape the NKVD at the cost of Ivan's life. *The Guide* serves as a fascinating manifestation of many myths of the kobzars that have persisted over the course of history, including mythical understandings of blindness, themes of martyrdom, and narratives that parallel the perceived "suffering" of the kobzars with the "suffering" of Ukraine under Soviet and Russian hegemony.

While several actors depict kobzars in *The Guide*, these narratives are largely imparted by the kobzar, Ivan Kocherga, as he helps Peter escape Soviet authorities. Ivan is immediately introduced by the film's narrator, an older Peter Shamrock, as "an old soldier" in reference to the time Ivan spent in the Ukrainian military before he became a kobzar. Over the course of the film, myths of the kobzars are applied to Ivan, whose character is used to construct a broader narrative that is applied to all blind minstrels and utilizes pre-existing beliefs of the kobzars regarding religion, the supernatural, and martyrdom.

Ivan's character does not explicitly use religious myths to build a narrative of the kobzars, although the kobzars' religious ties are alluded to in a few scenes. For example, while traveling with Ivan, Peter wakes up one morning to find Ivan saying a prayer: "Jesus, my dearest. Joy of my heart. You're my only sorrow and consolation. You're my delight. The salvation of my soul."⁴⁹ This scene informs the audience that Ivan holds Christian beliefs. In another scene, Ivan is looking for a place to sit and perform in a market, when he is approached by a local who asks

⁴⁷ Natalie Kononenko, "Duma Pro Chornobyl': Old Genres, New Topics," *Journal of Folklore Research*, 29, no. 2 (1980): 143.

⁴⁸ It was common for a kobzar to employ a child to act as a guide (*povodyr*) in their travels. These guides were usually orphans or had a disability that prevented them from contributing to agricultural labor.

⁴⁹ All quotes from *The Guide* taken from "The Guide English Subtitles." Trans. by rkononenko. *Opensubtitles.org*. Uploaded Feb 2016. <http://www.opensubtitles.org/en/subtitles/6439858/povodyr-en>.

if Ivan will be singing religious songs again. “I have no idea what are you [sic] talking about” Ivan responds, “I only sing military songs and laments.” Ivan then explains that these types of songs have not been banned by the Soviets. This scene alludes to the censoring of religious song following the condemnation of religion—and the Ukrainian Orthodoxy—by Stalin in the late 1920s. It is likely due to the timing of these events with that of the film—again, set in the 1930s—that religion is rarely mentioned in the film, and religious myth does not play a significant role in Ivan’s narrative. However, that these small instances in which Ivan demonstrates his religious alignment show that although religion is not paramount to Ivan’s character, Ukrainian Orthodoxy nonetheless goes hand-in-hand with the kobzars.

In lieu of religious myth, *The Guide* frequently depicts the kobzars as supernatural or otherworldly beings with exceptional and unexplained abilities. These abilities frequently aid Ivan and Peter in their quest to bring the secret documents to Moscow, and whether Ivan’s abilities are supernatural or not remains ambiguous throughout the film—some of his feats are easily explained, while others are not. The first instance of supernatural ability takes place after Ivan has pulled Peter onto a moving train to help him escape pursuit by the NKVD. Peter, who leaves Ivan’s company at the next station to find a train to Moscow, is attacked by a group of older boys. Immediately after the first hit is landed on Peter, the scene cuts to Ivan, who immediately reacts by turning his head. Ivan then gathers his things and begins moving towards the fight. When Ivan reaches Peter, he stops and stands very still—listening to his environment. When one of the older boys attacks Ivan, the kobzar easily incapacitates him before knocking out the remainder of Peter’s attackers with his walking stick. Before he even lowers his weapon, Ivan tells Peter to get up off the ground—but how could he know that Peter was lying down? The

boy was knocked to the ground long before Ivan arrived. While it is possible that Ivan was close enough to hear Peter hit the ground, the amount of time it took him to reach the fight suggests otherwise. The audience must assume that Ivan possesses exceptional hearing that would allow him to assess Peter's location amidst the chaos and clamor of a fight. That Ivan could successfully locate the fight, take out the assailants, and then immediately know Peter's position is somewhat possible without the aid of supernatural abilities, but also improbable.

A similarly ambiguous supernatural feat is suggested later in the film when Ivan attempts to escape the notice of an NKVD officer while he is passing through a village—at this point in the film, soviet officers have listed Ivan as a wanted man, and have instructed citizens to be on the lookout for a blind kobzar. Ivan, while smoking, is approached from behind by an NKVD officer. The officer asks Ivan if he will light his cigarette, and Ivan silently complies by holding his lighter over his shoulder. As a sign of thanks, the NKVD officer offers one of his cigarettes to Ivan by holding the pack in front of Ivan's face. Ivan, who remains turned away from the officer to avoid recognition (his blindness is made apparent by a scar and one eye gone white), immediately identifies the officer's cigarettes as the Ira brand, and politely declines by saying that this brand makes him sick. While it is possible that Ivan could identify the cigarettes by smell or by the sound of the box, that he was able to accurately name the brand without seeing them is an exceptional feat. In a later scene, Ivan discovers that the same NKVD officer came to his wife's home when he finds the butt of an Ira cigarette on the floor in her kitchen. The scene then cuts to a flashback showing his wife being interrogated, tortured, and then thrown into a well by Soviet police. After the audience sees these images, Ivan is immediately able to locate his wife's body in a nearby well—he does not actually find her body or even touch the well, but simply kneels by the well to mourn his wife. Again, Ivan is prescribed exceptional sensory

abilities that are possible, but highly improbable. In addition, the scenes depicting his wife's fate are deployed in such a way as to suggest that Ivan is seeing these events take place along with the audience, but it is unclear how Ivan could deduce all this information from what little evidence he had. In this way, Ivan is shown to have unexplainable—perhaps innate—knowledge from an unknown and perhaps supernatural source.

Ivan's supernatural abilities become more explicit in the second half of the film, when Ivan is being pursued by an NKVD officer, Vladimir (played by Aleksandr Kobzar). Vladimir, who has been pursuing Ivan and Peter over the course of the film, is researching Ivan's military history when he discovers that he was on the firing squad that injured Ivan, leading to his blindness. Upon realizing this, Vladimir immediately has a nosebleed. Later in the film, Vladimir manages to capture Ivan and brings him to an interrogation room. While Vladimir attempts to glean the location of the secret Soviet documents, Ivan—who knows that Vladimir was on the firing squad—attempts to intimidate the NKVD officer, by saying “I have returned from the underworld to find you in this world. And I found you.” As soon as Ivan finishes this phrase, Vladimir has another nosebleed. Again, it is uncertain whether the nosebleed is the result of Vladimir's physical reaction to guilt or panic, or if Ivan is causing the nosebleeds himself through some magical means—these are the only two instances in the film where Vladimir experiences this. Additionally, Ivan's claim that he has “returned from the underworld” attributes otherworldliness to the blind minstrel, and the subsequent nosebleed gives the impression that Ivan possesses special powers because of that otherworldliness. In this sense, *The Guide* suggests that blind minstrels possess supernatural abilities that sighted musicians do not possess—much in the same way that Hnat Khotkoveych believed that kobzars drew energy from the earth through their bare feet. The prescription of supernatural ability to blindness suggests that Ivan can move

freely about the world and pursue his quest to transport the secret documents only with the aid of special abilities obtained from another world. In other words, his agency as a blind person is largely dependent on otherworldly abilities and supernatural phenomena.

Themes of Martyrdom in *The Guide*

In addition to myths and allusions to the supernatural, Ivan's narrative in *The Guide* is largely influenced by themes of martyrdom. These themes are rooted in many myths of the kobzars that paint these blind minstrels as martyrs, such as myths of their Cossack lineage and Suprun's belief that kobzar music served as "spiritual ammunition" for Ukrainians. Before discussing Ivan's role as a martyr in *The Guide*, we must identify who or what martyrs Ivan, and for what cause. I suggest that the NKVD officer Vladimir, who serves as the primary antagonist of *The Guide*, is a character intended to embody Russia and its agendas for Ukraine. It is Vladimir who attempts to foil Ivan's plans in order to protect Soviet interests, and it is Vladimir's actions that lead to Ivan's death at the end of the film. I would argue that Russia specifically, and not communism, is the primary antagonist because socialism itself is not demonized in the film. In fact, the character Mykola Sytnyk—the Soviet official who passed the secret documents to Michael Shamrock—attaches a letter to the documents explaining their contents and why he is choosing to betray the USSR by attempting to reveal their contents to the public.⁵⁰ He concludes the letter by saying "I remain a communist and a Ukrainian," expressing that he still supports the socialist agenda, but not the actions of the USSR. In this sense, Russia is highlighted as the primary villain in this film, as well as the entity that eventually martyrs the kobzars, and Vladimir's character is established as an embodiment of Russia and Russian values, whereas Ivan embodies Ukraine. This role is established for Vladimir in several ways: For example, Vladimir's

character consistently speaks Russian in the film, even in conversations where the other person is speaking Ukrainian, and Russian is almost only spoke by other characters when they are speaking with Vladimir. Furthermore, Vladimir is frequently demonstrates Soviet values over the course of the film. For example, Vladimir is introduced in a scene where he is approached by a man handing out fliers for a conference that the man is proposing. The man claims that the conference will introduce a “new, socialist kobzarship,” and Vladimir appears to receive the man’s proposal skeptically, or at least with little interest. When the man’s pitch is over, Vladimir grants his approval for the event, but reminds the man that he will be “held accountable.” Throughout this scene, a radio announcement can be heard in the background, which says the following:

So comrades, I need your attention! Attention! Do not forget that music is a weapon to control the masses! It should be international in spirit and socialist in substance!
Comrades, we are performing for foreigners pre-approved music only, so absolutely no improvisations!

Vladimir’s conditional approval of the kobzar conference—which is an allusion to the supposed Kharkiv conference of 1939—is juxtaposed to the radio announcement to tell the audience that Vladimir is wary of the kobzars and their music, and that his statement that the man “will be held accountable” is meant to denote that the kobzar’s music must adhere to the socialist policies outlined in the radio announcement. There is a certain irony in the conference proposer’s elated reaction to Vladimir’s approval, in which he exclaims “Thank you. You’ve saved them, you saved Ukrainian music!” Vladimir does the opposite, in fact—the kobzars who attend the conference are deceived by Soviet officials, and led onto a train meant to take the blind minstrels to a labor camp. However, before they arrive the train is stopped by Vladimir, who brings the

⁵⁰ Sytnyk instructs Michael to hand the book containing the documents to a journalist in Moscow, with the hope that he will publish the contents.

kobzars to a secluded place in the mountains. It is here that the final struggle takes place between Vladimir and Ivan, and both die along with the other kobzars, who perish in a demolition explosion planned by the Soviets. In this sense, Vladimir's narrative is written to parallel the narrative of the kobzars under the Soviet regime, who largely died out after the blind minstrels and their music were condemned by Stalin in the 1930s.

With Vladimir acting as his antagonist, Ivan serves as the protagonist of *The Guide*. Ivan is made a martyr in this film not only by his death in the film's conclusion, but also by the many threads of martyrdom that pervade Ivan's narrative throughout the story. When Ivan is introduced to the audience, the film's narrator describes Ivan: "His name was Ivan, but everyone called him Kocherga ["fire iron" in Ukrainian]. Maybe because he looked black [dirty], like he had been burned in a fire." In this way, Ivan's character is visually described as someone who has experienced some hardship in life and suffered for it—he was "burned in a fire." Ivan is also immediately introduced by the narrator as "an old soldier," in reference to Ivan's military history. As the film progresses, the audience discovers that Ivan's blindness was acquired during his time serving in the Ukrainian National Army. Even later, we learn that—as mentioned above—he was specifically blinded by a firing squad in which Vladimir failed to execute him, and Ivan managed to escape. Since Vladimir has been established as representative of Russia, Ivan's blindness is understood to be the direct result of Russian actions against Ukraine. Thus, perceived "suffering" as a result of his blindness is paralleled to the "suffering" of Ukraine under Soviet and Russian hegemony.

Furthermore, Ivan often talks about the kobzars in such a way as to prescribe martyrdom to blind minstrels. For example, when Peter asks Ivan why the kobzars are blind, Ivan tells him the following:

It's an old story son. Tsarina Kateryna wanted to destroy Kozak's homeland, the Zaporizhian Sich. And the big battle began. The Kozak fought a long time. They fought well, the swords did not cut them, the bullets did not kill them. And no one would ever have conquered them, if not for a traitor. But there was a traitor. At night he opened the gates, and led the Tsarina's army into the fortress. They attacked the sleeping kozaks...a traitor [here the scene cuts to an image of Vladimir]. But the Tsarina ordered them not to kill the Kozaks but instead to blind them.

This story is immediately followed by a sudden cut to a new conversation between Ivan and the luthier, Bodhan. Ivan is in a panic, yelling “They were children, you understand, children! It was me who should have died, not them, but me!” These exchanges demonstrate not only that Ivan has suffered as a result of actions taken by Russia, but that he wants to be a martyr in place of the soldiers who have already died. It is also worth noting the supernatural abilities attributed to the Cossacks (and the kobzars) in this story, when Ivan states that “swords did not cut them, the bullets did not kill them.” This serves as yet another example of supernatural abilities manifesting themselves in the kobzars.

Over the course of the film, Ivan’s narrative continues to develop towards his final moment of martyrdom but depicting Ivan as a force of resistance to Soviet hegemony. It is Ivan who discovers the secret documents that Peter has unknowingly received, and it is Ivan who immediately expresses a desire to organize upon reading the contents of these documents. Additionally, Ivan’s expresses direct resistance to assimilation into the Soviet regime when he tells Peter a story that directly parallels Ivan’s own origin story:

Once upon a time, here in this swamp, the enemy's army caught up with the Kozaks, and a big battle began...And during this battle one Kozak was separated from the rest, and enemies surrounded him. And the King arrived on the banks of this lake. He looked at the Kozak and said “I will grant you life, brave Kozak, if you put down your weapon and raise your hands.” But the kozak answered, “it will happen only when you, Glorious King, come to me and kiss my ass...” And the enemies started to shoot at the Kozak with the muskets, pistols, and cannons. When the smoke cleared, the King ordered them to retrieve the Kozak's body. They searched and searched and searched, but never found it. There was no Kozak. He was nowhere to be found. That's right.

This story and its similarity to Ivan's own history demonstrate that even when offered a chance at life, Ivan would refuse to submit to the Soviet hegemony. Further, Ivan's story represents yet another instance of supernatural or unexplainable phenomena surrounding the kobzars: The Cossack in this story (Ivan) disappears in a cloud of smoke, never to be found by the enemies. However, despite Ivan's impressive escape from the Soviets, his martyr narrative nonetheless plays out to its conclusion when Ivan dies defending Peter from Vladmir and the NKVD in the concluding moments of the film. Thus, the kobzars and their plight—which is now perceived not as due to their blindness, but to their exploitation by Soviet officials—becomes a narrative of Ukraine (Ivan) becoming a martyr because of actions taken by Russians.

As a final note on *The Guide*, the agency of blind minstrels is also brought into question by the personification of Ivan's bandura as the story develops. Throughout the film, the bandura is referred to in relatively humanizing terms: Ivan and his friend—a luthier named Bodhan—refer to the bandura's sound post as its "soul" (*dusha*), and Bodhan tells Peter that "Without a soul bandura doesn't sing. It doesn't have a voice." Furthermore, the bandura is often portrayed as a tool for anti-Soviet resistance. In one scene, Ivan draws the NKVD away from Peter by laying down in a boat and loudly singing and playing as he floats downstream, thus drawing them away from Peter and the secret documents. In another scene, while the NKVD is searching for Ivan and Peter, official broadcasts are released to the public via radio announcing increased restrictions on bandura performances. The advertisements say, "We remind you that the kobza and bandura are socially alien and inherently dangerous aspects of Ukrainian culture." This announcement labels the bandura as the source of the danger, not the kobzars themselves. Instead of attributing acts of rebellion to the kobzars, resistance and social impact are instead attributed to their instruments—the source of their music. In this way, the bandura is not only personified

as a character itself, but acts as a broader metaphor for all kobzar music. Thus, the ability to resist is given to the bandura and to music, but not the kobzar. This is made clear in an early scene of the film, in which Ivan is sharing news with his fellow blind minstrels:

When I played in Pyriatyn, the local teacher brought a man from the capital to me. He recorded my songs and asked questions about the ballads...and then said "Do you know that they want to invite all kobzars, from all over Ukraine, to Kharkiv? They will record our songs and will issue papers to give us freedom to sing anywhere, and protect us from the police" ...But I think, brothers, that it's a trap. They know our strength, and so want to destroy us." [Another kobzar responds:] "Come on, Ivan. Who will raise a hand against a blind man?"

This exchange tells the audience two things: First, that according to Ivan, the kobzars have enough power to cause Soviet officials to fear them. However, the responding kobzar seems to negate this by pointing out that few would go out of their way to harm a blind man. This response depicts the musicians themselves as being helpless. However, Ivan's statement suggests that the kobzars have power, but that this power is not available to all blind people. In this sense, the kobzars' influence is dependent on their music, and not on the blind musicians themselves. This is made apparent in the film's conclusion, when Ivan gives his bandura to Peter and fights off the NKVD while Peter escapes. Ivan eventually dies in this struggle. Despite Ivan's efforts to aid Peter and transport the secret documents to Moscow, the film concludes with the bandura completing the task. Therefore, the bandura—which embodies kobzar music—can be interpreted as the hero of the story in that it ultimately serves as the vessel that successfully carries the secret documents to Moscow. In this sense, *The Guide* may suggest that agency belongs discretely to kobzar music, and not to the kobzars themselves.

There is another way that one could interpret the personification of Ivan's bandura over the course of the film. As mentioned above, the bandura is not the only way the documents are carried and concealed over the course of the film. When Michael Shamrock first receives the

secret documents, they are inside a copy of Taras Shevchenko's *The Kobzar*. Taras Shevchenko was a Ukrainian poet who wrote texts in Ukrainian at a time when the language had been condemned and suppressed by Russia. This has led Shevchenko to be seen as an icon of Ukrainian nationalism, frequently evoked as a symbol of resistance to external influence in Ukraine. However, I would argue that in choosing to hide the documents specifically in a copy of *The Kobzar*, the film is insisting that it is largely up to the kobzar, Ivan, to carry these secret documents and their message of resistance to Moscow. These documents are then moved to the bandura at the end of the film, just before Ivan dies defending Peter. Following this act of martyrdom, the bandura—which in this analysis, represents music in a broader sense—is left with the task of transporting the documents, now that the kobzar, Ivan, is no longer able to. In this sense, the passing of the documents from *The Kobzar* to Ivan's bandura becomes a metaphor for the meanings that music carries when the musician can no longer carry those meanings themselves—hailing back to my previous chapter and Rancier's⁵¹ framework, the instrument becomes an archive in a literal sense. This notion is crystallized near the end of the film, when the story of the Tsarina and the origin of the kobzars is invoked once more: “Tsarina blinded the wounded Kozaks, but they did not surrender. Instead of swords they took up banduras, and began to sing songs about freedom. Understand? Because you can kill a kozak, but not his song.” In this sense, the personification of the bandura could also be understood not as the removal of agency from the kobzars, but as a beacon of hope that the narrative of the kobzars would be perpetuated by what they left behind—their music. While I cannot help but react to such optimism skeptically, I nonetheless find this narrative to be the most compelling, especially considering that it does not take agency away from blind minstrels by any means, but highlights

⁵¹ See Megan Rancier, “The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh *Qyl-qobyz*,”

the potency of their music and the meanings that it holds for Ukrainians in the face of Russian hegemony.

This meaning is combined with a sense of hope in the film's concluding words: In the final scene, Peter—who despite being able to run away, is temporary knocked out by the explosion that kills the kobzars—wakes up in a dream where he meets Ivan outside of a ruined Cossack fortress. Ivan turns to Peter and says “Do you know why flowers always turn to the sun? Because flowers also have eyes. They believe the dawn will come.” While saying this, Ivan lifts his gaze to look directly at the sun. This scene is then followed by a text epilogue explaining that Peter was found alive and that the documents did make it to Moscow, where they were made public. I am reluctant to believe that there is a healing narrative here—Ivan still possesses the scar indicating his blindness, and I do not believe that he literally “sees” the sun when he lifts his gaze. After all, flowers do not literally have “eyes,” but sense the sun at a chemical level so that they can adjust themselves to receive maximum sunlight. In this sense, the flowers do not need to literally “see” the sun in to react to it, but are able to do so in a different but completely valid way. Similarly, Ivan is not portrayed in this film as being limited by his disability, nor does he is understood as succeeding *despite* his disability, but accomplishes his goal through means that are different, but portrayed as valid. While this narrative is by no means free from criticism—Ivan still needs the aid of supernatural forces to overcome many of the obstacle he encounters along the way—it nonetheless portrays the blind kobzars not as helpless victims to Russian hegemony, but as vessels for a narrative of Ukrainian resistance to that hegemony and as a symbol of hope for Ukraine.

Understanding Ukraine Through the Eyes of Peter Shamrock

So far in my analysis of *The Guide*, I have yet to discuss in-depth the film's title role: that of the young guide, Peter Shamrock. As part of my research, I had the fortune of interviewing the Ukrainian-American actor who depicted Peter Shamrock, Anton Greene, and his parents, pianist Arthur Greene and Ukrainian-born violinist Solomia Soroka. The Greene family, who currently reside in Ann Arbor, MI, discussed the ways in which *The Guide* and Anton's appearance in the film were significant to them as Ukrainians in diaspora, particularly as Ukrainians whose ancestors suffered under the oppression of the Soviet Union. I also asked the Greene family to discuss the significance of Anton's character in the film. Anton Greene responded as follows:

Well...I think that the film is just really trying to show the truth about what happened to the kobzars, and they wanted to show it not from the perspective of someone in Ukraine—someone who knows about them—but from someone from an outside source...And so that's why the whole story's through the kid's [Peter's] eyes and how he perceives it.⁵²

According to Anton, Peter's character acts as the primary lens through which the events in the film are perceived—audiences see the film “through the kid's eyes.” In fact, the gaze of this character was as a focal point in the film, and played a crucial role in the casting process.

Solomia and Arthur explained to me that Anton was not initially selected to perform the role of Peter Shamrock, because the beginning of his audition tape made Anton appear too whimsical for the serious boy that director, Oles Sanin, had imagined for the part. Sanin's initial search for Peter Shamrock saw and rejected over 2,000 applicants for the role—none fit Sanin's precise ideal for the young guide. As the search for Peter Shamrock continued, Sanin carried on filming as many scenes as he could without the title role, still searching for the right boy to play Peter Shamrock. Solomia explained how Sanin eventually reconsidered Anton for the role:

⁵² Anton Greene, interviewed by Melissa Bialecki at Ann Arbor, MI, April 30, 2017.

And then he said that the beginning of September he was so desperate he had to finish this movie...and he still didn't have a title role. And so he started looking through old [audition] videos because first time he told us he didn't like Anton...so he dismissed him. But then he was so desperate he started looking back into old tapes, and he actually watched the whole video and watched Anton play [piano]. And he said...he saw Anton's face...transformed. And he said to us that he saw when he played he could see his eyes transform, his face and his whole soul. And he said that's what he wanted, he told his casting director "I need these eyes."⁵³

Solomia and Arthur articulated that the depth in Anton's gaze lent itself to the film by mimicking the depth of the situation that Peter found himself in, as a young American boy who spoke little Ukrainian and did not completely understand the web of political events taking place around him. Over the course of the film, Peter is forced to confront these events. That an American of Ukrainian descent was selected for this role is especially interesting: While Peter is forced to position himself within the political upheaval surrounding the Holodomor, Ukrainians in diaspora are simultaneously being asked to position themselves within Ukraine's post-Soviet identity as young generations of Ukrainians are confronted not only with current events surrounding the Ukraine crisis (which I will discuss further in Chapter 4), but also with the nation's Soviet histories.

In our interview, Solomia and Arthur shared the stories of many of their Ukrainian relatives who were impacted by Soviet oppression in the 20th century: Arthur's grandfather, whom Anton was named after, was forced to flee Soviet Ukraine after he was blacklisted by the NKVD. The family he left in Ukraine suffered from the Holodomor, and his two brothers were shot by Soviets. Solomia's grandmother spent 25 years in Soviet prison—she was an activist and founder of the Red Cross of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Solomia's grandfather was also imprisoned by the Soviets in a labor camp in Siberia, where he died after 31 years of captivity.

⁵³ Solomia Soroka, interviewed by Melissa Bialecki at Ann Arbor, MI, April 30, 2017.

When I asked Solomia what it meant to see her son act in this film, which explicitly spoke out against Soviet oppression in Ukraine, Solomia stated the following:

Solomia (SS): Anton grew up in this...situation, he knows the stories, he was constantly in this environment. And so I think that maybe Sanin, who is a very smart man... maybe he saw it in his [Anton's] eyes, I don't know...we think Anton *should* have gotten this role...I don't believe in coincidences that much...maybe it's arrogant to believe...that it's not an accident that Anton, that he was chosen as the title role for this film...as my mother put it, Anton...by playing this role, he kind of got some symbolic revenge for all his relatives.

Arthur (AR): For all his ancestors who were imprisoned and killed...

SS: Killed and repressed and so for that, this movie was an unbelievable success in Ukraine and so people went to it and people cried and people found out about this...the history, this part of the history too. So, for us it was also very symbolic as I said because it's what my grandparents and his grandparents...it's all about our history, that's what they did...

AR: And Anton did something that made a difference.⁵⁴

I was particularly stricken by Solomia and Arthur's comments regarding Anton and the role he played not only in this film, but in Ukrainian culture through this film. Ukraine's Soviet histories have placed a heavy burden on younger generations of Ukrainians, including those in diaspora. Stories such as those of Arthur and Solomia's relatives are tragically numerous, and confronting these histories has become crucial to situating Ukraine within the post-Soviet context. Peter Shamrock's situation in *The Guide* demanded that the character confront these histories, much in the same way that 21st century Ukrainians are asked to negotiate the remnants of their Soviet past.

In discussing the significance of Anton's character in the film, Arthur and Solomia described a scene that did not make the final cut of the film, but that both believed to be a crucial part of Peter Shamrock's narrative: After Peter successfully escapes the NKVD with the secret

⁵⁴ Arthur Greene and Solomia Soroka, interviewed by Melissa Bialecki at Ann Arbor, MI, April 30, 2017.

documents at the end of the film, there would have been a scene in which Peter is taken to a British Embassy. While at the embassy, Peter catches wind that the Soviets have been ordered to execute the kobzars, and the boy must decide whether he will return to America, or remain in Ukraine and attempt to save the kobzars. Had this scene not been cut, the film would have concluded with Peter escaping the embassy to save the kobzars. Arthur and Solomia commented on this:

AR: They ended up leaving out the crucial thing that would explain what was happening to the boy that he went, he got to this point and he had to make a decision, and he had decided to not go back to the United States, but to go back and save the kobzar.

SS: And it's not only that, there is a very—again, in this movie, one symbolic moment that I didn't know if people understood it. In the very last scene, when his adoptive father, his kobzar, is tied to this pole, and Peter runs to him to save him, and he said "I brought soul." So "soul," this sound post for the bandura. And that was very symbolic phrase, because the soul, the sound post is called "soul" in Ukrainian, so he brought not only the soul of the instrument, he brought his soul...He brought *his* soul. And so his soul he believes belonged here now, to Ukraine. So this transformation, the way he matured...but I think it was lost in the movie.

The kobzar, in his embodiment of the Ukrainian identity and values, thus becomes a crucial site in which Peter—who represents Ukrainians in diaspora—must confront the maelstrom of political upheaval surrounding the events of the Holodomor and Stalin's Great Terror. These events are paralleled to political events that took place shortly before the film's release—primarily the Maidan protests and the annexation of Crimea. In this sense, *The Guide* engages in events in Ukrainian history at a particular political moment in the present in order to renegotiate those histories in the post-Soviet context, and reimagine what it means to be Ukrainian in the 21st century.

Chapter 3 has provided an overview of the various myths surrounding the kobzars. These myths have created a narrative that shapes the kobzars as saliently Ukrainian icons of resistance

to external hegemony. Through a discussion of the kobzars ties to Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the condemnation of religion in the Soviet Union, combined with themes of martyrdom in kobzar narratives, I have argued that myths of the kobzars have framed the kobzars and their blindness in such a way as to shape these blind minstrels and their music into icons of resistance. These narratives have persisted long after the dissolution of the traditional kobzars, and have manifested themselves in the modern age in the Ukrainian film, *The Guide*. These myths of blind musicians have thus been used to create a kobzar narrative in which the perceived “suffering” of the kobzars—understood initially to be the result of their blindness, but later interpreted in *The Guide* as the result of their oppression under the Soviet regime—has been paralleled to the “suffering” of Ukraine, thus creating a narrative in which the kobzars embody Ukrainian culture and ideals. By deploying these narratives, *The Guide* asks Ukrainians to confront the nation’s Soviet past. In this way, we see how narratives of marginalized groups have and continue to play a crucial role in articulating national identity and what it means to be Ukrainian in both the Soviet and post-Soviet context.

CHAPTER 4: RESISTING RUSSIAN HEGEMONY THROUGH NARRATIVES OF THE INTERNAL OTHER IN EUROVISION

Whereas in previous chapters I have described the construction of internal others within Ukrainian culture in the context of the kobzars, this chapter will discuss how these internal others in Ukraine have been deployed on a global scale in the Eurovision Song Contest. An estimated 180 million viewers from countries across the world tune in to Eurovision every year to see performances by artists representing members of the European Union on a global stage.¹ Since the contest began in 1956, these performances have become crucial sites for voicing national identities and shaping international relations. Additionally, I will suggest that Eurovision has become a crucial site for engaging in dialogue with Europe's internal "others," and for determining the roles that those others hold in negotiating national identities.

Phillip Bohlman, in his essay titled "Composing the Cantorate: Westernizing Europe's Other Within," has argued that Europe's others play a crucial role in negotiating European identities:

The other within exists within the space also occupied by the self, thereby creating a situation of competition rather than awe. Competition for cultural resources and public attention is immediate, which in turn may lead to a sense of being threatened by the other... We can, therefore, view European history--and music history--as a dialectical conflict between selfness and otherness. A challenge to Europe's spaces results from this conflict and from the different ways in which otherness intrudes upon those spaces.²

Following Bohlman's argument, I will suggest that Eurovision serves as one of the sites in which self and other compete for cultural resources and public attention. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, I argue that Eurovision has also served as a stage for commenting on and

¹ "Facts and Figures. *Eurovision Song Contest*. Accessed on April 28, 2016. <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/timeline>.

² Philip V. Bohlman. "Composing the Cantorate: Westernizing Europe's Other Within," in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000) 191.

resisting Russian hegemony and political influence in Ukraine. Furthermore, Ukrainian Eurovision performances have utilized narratives of internal others to position Ukraine closer to the European Union and European values. This is accomplished by using narratives of others to highlight the ways in which these others have been oppressed as a result of Russian influence in Ukraine. By voicing these narratives of oppression, Ukrainian Eurovision performances openly resist Russian hegemony in Ukraine in order position the nation closer to the European Union and reshape Ukraine's post-Soviet identity.³ In this chapter, I will explore how artists representing Ukraine at Eurovision have deployed issues regarding Ukrainian politics, historical narratives of Ukraine, regional views on sexuality, and perceptions of race through those artists' representations of an internal "other." By analyzing Ukrainian Eurovision performances by Jamala, Verka Serduchka, Gaitana, and Yuliya Samoylova, and reactions to those performances, I will demonstrate the ways in which internal others are selectively deployed in the wake of transnational conflict in such a way as to characterize the marginalized groups that these performers represent as primary nodes for navigating a complex and dynamic Ukrainian national identity.

Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: The Orange Revolution, Maidan, and Crimea

To understand how Ukrainian Eurovision performances have engaged in these narratives, one must first know the political context in which those performances took place. Speaking in both geographic and cultural terms, Ukraine has been torn between Eastern and Western Europe. The nation's violent history with Russia, including attempts to stamp out Ukrainian culture in the early years of the Soviet Union, have led to a complex relationship between Russian and Ukrainian cultures. Although the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a new chapter in the

³ It is worth mentioning that the Soviet Union never participated in the Eurovision Song Contest.

history of Ukraine, the nation was by no means reborn anew. The aftershocks of Soviet occupation still reverberated across Ukraine, and these tremors resulted in a widespread distrust for Ukrainian politicians who were thought to be corrupted by Russian bribes and influences. This distrust would be voiced by Ukrainian citizens during the protests of the Orange Revolution in 2004. These protests took place following the 2004 elections, in which the pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was elected as president. During his campaign, Yanukovich was said to have posed as the “Ukrainian Putin,” and endorsed Russophile agendas, such as establishing Russian as a national language in Ukraine.⁴ When it seemed that Yushchenko may be elected over Yanukovich, authorities began adding ballots to the final counts. A 78.7% voter turnout grew to 80.7% overnight, and although the corrupt Election Commission declared Yanukovich the winner, exit polls showed that the vote had been rigged, and that the people had voted for Yushchenko.⁵ Outraged by this brazen display of fraud, and fueled by years of distrust and frustration, the Ukrainian people struck out to Maidan square in Kiev to stage a peaceful protest that would come to be known as the “Orange Revolution,” referring to Yushchenko’s chosen campaign color. These protests successfully resulted in another round of voting, which named Yushchenko the new Ukrainian president. Unfortunately, despite the people’s fight to seat Yushchenko as president in the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yanukovich would nonetheless rise to the presidency in 2010, and the so-called “Ukrainian Putin’s” time in office was marked by blood and disaster. Under his reign, the presence of Russian intelligence in Ukraine would grow significantly—a change that would lead to one of the most violent moments in Ukrainian history.

⁴ Andrew Wilson. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 318.

⁵ Andrew Wilson. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 318.

Between 2004 and 2007, the European Union saw large expansions that would bring their borders close to Ukraine. In response to these expansions, Ukraine began to negotiate trade agreements that would lead to a partnership with the EU. However, negotiations stopped in November of 2014, igniting outrage among those Ukrainian citizens who wished to join the European Union, and viewed the sudden stop in negotiations as the work of Russian politicians who had bribed Ukrainian politicians into dropping the trade agreements. In response to their frustration, the people of Ukraine struck out to Maidan square in Kiev once more to protest government corruption, but this protest would not be a peaceful stand-in like that of the Orange Revolution. Instead, the events that followed would come to be known as Euromaidan or the Winter War in Ukraine.

The 2014 protests on Maidan quickly devolved into a three-month bloodbath between Ukrainian citizens and the *Berkut* (local militia). At first, officials confronted the protesters indirectly—*Berkut* would kidnap or beat individuals away from protest territory and, as historian and political scientist Andrew Wilson points out, “away from the world’s cameras and smartphones.”⁶ Protesters chose to fight fire with fire by building fortresses and barricades that evoked images of French Revolutionaries. President Yanukovich responded to this outbreak of violence with a new set of anti-protest laws that restricted the people’s right to organize. These laws prevented citizens from wearing masks or hard hats in public, putting up tents or setting up stages in public, and participating in what was broadly deemed “extremist activities.” However, these laws only caused the violence to escalate, and Maidan Square soon become a war zone. Citizens were dodging bullets, throwing Molotov cocktails, and fighting for their lives in the streets. The protests would only grow more violent in the days to come, and the daunting number

⁶ Andrew Wilson. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2015), 348.

Ukrainian citizens who lost their lives at the hands of their own government came to be known as Ukraine's "Heavenly Hundred."⁷

After months of protests that tore the city of Kiev apart, on the February 21st an agreement was finally signed with the EU and an early election was announced for December of that year. The next day, Yanukovich fled the country and found asylum in Russia. Although Yanukovich's flight was initially viewed as a success for Ukraine, the people would only have a week to celebrate before unmarked Russian soldiers began to appear in the Crimean Peninsula, capturing strategic locations such as airports and military bases. On March 18, 2014, after unmarked Russian soldiers successfully took over the Supreme Council of Crimea, a pro-Russian leadership was established, and Crimea was annexed by Russia—a political move that significantly increased already-strained tensions between Russia and the European Union.

Voicing Narratives of Oppression: Jamala's "1944"

In 2016, Ukraine responded to Russia's controversial political move by selecting Jamala and her song "1944" to represent Ukraine. Jamala—an ethnic Tatar—delivered a moving performance that told the story of those Crimean Tatars who were deported to Central Asia under Stalin's orders in the early years of the Soviet Union. Included among those who were deported was Jamala's great-grandmother, who in the year 1944 was forced from the Crimean Peninsula along with her five children—at least one of whom would not survive the forced exodus. Over the course of six months, thousands of Tatar families were packed on trains originally intended for moving livestock, and Soviet officials would only unlock the train doors to dispose of those who did not survive the grueling journey. The Tatar families on board—fully aware of the events taking place in Nazi Germany at the time—feared that they were being sent to gas chambers. As

⁷ Andrew Wilson. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 349.

a result of this large-scale, forced deportation, the Tatar population was reduced by nearly half. Many of those who survived, like Jamala's great-grandmother, would never see Crimea again.⁸

Stalin's deportation of the Crimean Tatars effectively scattered what was left of the Tatar population, and the effects of this genocide continued to manifest themselves during Jamala's childhood. In 1983, Jamala's parents divorced so that her mother of Armenian descent could wipe her husband's Tatar name from her passport, allowing her move to the Crimean Peninsula and buy property—a feat that would have been impossible at the time if officials knew that she was married to Jamala's ethnic Tatar father. Meanwhile, Jamala lived with her father and sister in Soviet Ukraine, where she was forced to remain silent in regard to the oppression of the Tatars. When her family finally joined her mother in Crimea, Jamala continued to feel marginalized by her Tatar identity: “My sister and I were the only Crimean Tatar children in the music school... you know children are cruel...they use to repeat what their parents say behind closed doors...my classmates teased me - 'why did you come here, go back to your homeland.’”⁹

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Jamala has been barred from entering Crimea—where her parents still live—because of her Pro-Ukrainian political stance. Consequently, when Jamala's “1944” was announced as the Ukrainian entry for Eurovision in 2016, it brought about a great deal of controversy over whether her performance articulated a political position, considering Jamala's political alignment, the recent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and the overtly political content of the song's lyrics. While for a time, the singer insisted that her performance was simply intended to share her great-grandmother's story and that of these tragic, historical events with Eurovision audiences, Jamala would later express a

⁸ Will Stewart. “Stalin Forced My Parents to DIVORCE.” *Daily Mail*. Published May 16, 2016. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3592863/Stalin-forced-parents-DIVORCE-Eurovision-winner-reveals->

desire to bring awareness of Russia's actions oppressive actions in Crimea and against the Tatars to an international audience, stating that "It was hard for me to recall all these memories again and again, but I understand that it is necessary now...because now Crimean Tatars are desperate and they need support."¹⁰ In response to Jamala's heartbreaking story, many Eurovision interpreted "1944" as a lament for Ukraine's loss of the Crimean Peninsula two years prior. Additionally, Russian officials claimed that the song was meant as an attack against Russia, and suggested that the entry should be disqualified.¹¹ However, Jamala's entry remained in the contest, and would in fact go on to win Eurovision for Ukraine that year.

By selecting Jamala's "1944" as their Eurovision entry, the Ukrainian people effectively voiced a Ukrainian identity that openly resisted Russia's oppressive actions against the nation. The lyrics to "1944"—sung in a mixture of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar—voice direct opposition to Russia's invasive political activity in Ukraine, and the Tatar lyrics featured in the song's chorus make clear references to the annexation of Crimea as well as Jamala's upbringing in Soviet Ukraine:

When strangers are coming...
They come to your house,
They kill you all
and say,
We're not guilty
not guilty.

Where is your mind?
Humanity cries.
You think you are gods.
But everyone dies.

Soviet-dictator-tortured-great-grandmother-killing-baby-daughter-leaving-legacy-family-trauma.html.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Anna Poludenko-Young, "Ukraine's Eurovision 2016 Entry is About Stalin's Repression, and Russia Isn't Thrilled." *PRI*. Published March 1, 2016. <http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-01/ukraines-eurovision-2016-entry-about-stalin-s-repression-and-russia-isnt-thrilled>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Don't swallow my soul.
Our souls

Yaşlığıma toyalmadım [I could not spend my youth there]
Men bu yerde yaşalmadım [Because you took away my land]
Yaşlığıma toyalmadım
Men bu yerde yaşalmadım

We could build a future
Where people are free
to live and love.
The happiest time.

Where is your heart?
Humanity rise.
You think you are gods
But everyone dies.
Don't swallow my soul.
Our souls

Yaşlığıma toyalmadım
Men bu yerde yaşalmadım
Yaşlığıma toyalmadım
Men bu yerde yaşalmadım
Vatanıma toyalmadım [You took away my homeland]¹²

In addition to the lyrics' political content, the sonic elements of Jamala's performance deployed transnational narratives that expanded the Ukrainian identity into a global, modern sphere.

"1944" includes sounds of the Armenian duduk, influences from Azerbaijani *mugham* singing (according to Jamala),¹³ and lyrics in the Tatar language. Each of these elements denote intertwining aspects of Jamala's personal identity (her Armenian mother, Tatar father, and Muslim background), while simultaneously embodying a Ukrainian identity that is multifaceted and nuanced. Furthermore, Jamala's performance deployed a narrative of one of Ukraine's

¹² "1944." *Lyrics Translate*. Accessed April 13, 2017. <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/1944-1944.html-7>.

¹³ "Ukraine 2016: Jamala- '1944.'" *Eurovision World*. Accessed April 30, 2016. <http://eurovisionworld.com/?eurovision=2016ukraine>.

internal others to highlight the ways in which that other (the Tatar population) was oppressed under Russian hegemony.

By choosing an artist who identifies with the Tatar minority to represent Ukraine, the nation was asked to renegotiate what it means to be Ukrainian in the context of the Ukraine's conflict with Russia—Jamala's narrative of the oppressed Tatars became woven into Ukraine's overarching narrative of Russian oppression. In this way, Jamala's performance demonstrated how Ukrainian Eurovision performances have utilized narratives of marginalized groups to defame Russian political actions while simultaneously rewriting the nation's post-Soviet identity through the narratives of Ukraine's internal "others."

Representing the LGBTQ+ Community: Verka Serduchka's "Dancing Lasha Tumbai"

Another Ukrainian artist challenged its Russian neighbors in 2007 when drag queen, Verka Serduchka, took the stage to represent Ukraine with her song "Dancing Lasha Tumbai." Serduchka's entry was doubtlessly one of Ukraine's most eclectic Eurovision performances, and engaged in international LGBTQ+ politics by emphasizing on the camp aesthetic frequently utilized in Eurovision performances. Serduchka appeared on the stage clad in a glittery Dolce and Gabbana costume that included a large star on top of the singer's head. The performance featured campy choreography, a team of bedazzled backup dancers and seemingly nonsensical lyrics. Serduchka's over-the-top performance sparked controversy regarding its lyrics and use of Soviet iconography. The title lyrics, "Lasha Tumbai" were misheard by some Eurovision audiences as "Russia goodbye." The ease with which these lyrics could misheard as "Russia Goodbye" is suggestive and tongue-in-cheek, but ambiguous enough to avoid consideration as overtly political. In addition to its suggestive lyrics, the performance's campy aesthetics created a comic critique of Ukraine's Soviet past to clear the path for a reimagined post-Soviet identity

for Ukraine. Galina Miazhevich has pointed out that Serduchka's performance contains "references to the Soviet past,"¹⁴ including the seemingly meaningless phrase "*sieben siben ai lyu-lyu*" which Miazhevich credits to the Soviet film, *Diamond Arm*, in which these words are uttered by a Western prostitute who is offering her services to an "honest Soviet worker."¹⁵ Miazhevich frames Serduchka's quotation as "the ridicule of a failed Soviet utopia unfolding on the stage."¹⁶ This ridicule is multiplied by the large star on top of Serduchka's head, which Miazhevich reads as a reference to the star situated on top of the Kremlin clock tower. Building off Miazhevich's analysis, I would argue that Serduchka's costume presents the singer as an embodiment of the Kremlin, transforming the campy aesthetic typical of Eurovision performances into a comedic parody in which Russia is the punchline.

The anti-Russian undertones of Serduchka's performance combined with a cheeky yet discernable farewell to their Russian neighbors constructs an image of Ukraine that has been liberated from Russian control. Additionally, Russia's lack of tolerance for the LGBTQ+ community is widely known, and has been frequently contested in Eurovision performances. As Catherine Baker points out, Eurovision has served as an important venue for dialogue surrounding Queer International Relations—dialogues which revolve around a dichotomy of European vs. Russian values regarding LGBTQ+ rights.¹⁷ Serduchka's performance engages in these international discourses both through her role as a drag performer and through her performance's adherence to Eurovision's camp aesthetic, which is often attributed to the

¹⁴ Galina Miazhevich. "Ukrainian Nation Branding Off-line and Online: Verka Serduchka at the Eurovision Song Contest." *Europa-Asia Studies* 64, no. 8 (2012): 1513.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Catherine Baker. "The 'Gay Olympics'? The Eurovision Song Contest and the Politics of LGBT/European Belonging." *European Journal of International Relations*. 23, no. 1 (2016): 97-121.

LGBTQ+ community.¹⁸ By engaging in these dialogues, Serduchka argues for Ukraine's position in the global sphere, while simultaneously aligning Ukraine's position on LGBTQ+ issues with the more tolerant perspectives of the European Union. In this way, Serduchka's representation of the LGBTQ+ community deploys an aesthetic narrative of one of Ukraine's internal others in such a way as to align Ukraine with the European perspective on LGBTQ+ rights, thus rejecting Russian hegemonic influence in Ukraine.

Which Others Can Represent?: Perspectives on Race and Gaitana's "Be My Guest"

While Jamala and Serduchka's Eurovision performances found success and support on the Eurovision stage, not all of Ukraine's internal others have been met with the same support. In 2012, Gaitana—a Ukrainian born black woman, who spent part of her childhood in the Republic of Congo—was selected to represent Ukraine with her song "Be My Guest." Gaitana's entry shared several similarities with previous Ukrainian Eurovision performances, particularly through its use of nationalist iconography— "Be My Guest" featured sounds of the Ukrainian alpine horn, the *trembita*, and the singer appeared on the stage wearing a traditional Ukrainian flower wreath (a *vinok*). However, when Gaitana was announced as the representative for Ukraine at Eurovision, a great deal of controversy arose regarding whether a person of color should represent the nation on an international stage—an ironic issue, considering the message of acceptance conveyed in the lyrics of "Be My Guest":

Welcome
 Girl and boy
 Take my hand
 Let's enjoy
 From the bottom of my heart I wish you the best
 You can be my guest
 You can be my guest...

¹⁸ See Julie A. Cassidy. "Post-Soviet Pop Goes Gay: Russia's Trajectory to Eurovision Victory." *The Russian Review* 73 (2014). 1-23.

People be my guest
 Welcome, people, be my guest
 Welcome!
 Stay with me
 Be my friend
 You are free
 To live your life
 To share your love with world
 You can count on me
 Darling, I'm your friend
 I'll do anything for you
 From the bottom of my heart
 I wish you
 I wish you the best
 You can be my guest...

The controversy that arose, despite Gaitana's message of acceptance, was largely instigated by the far-right Ukrainian politician, Yuri Syrotyuk, who expressed concern over having a black artist perform for Ukraine. Syrotyuk is quoted as saying "Millions of people who will be watching will see that Ukraine is represented by a person who does not belong to our race... The vision of Ukraine as a country located somewhere in remote Africa will take root."¹⁹ It has also been noted that Syrotyuk favored Gaydamaky—a Cossack rock group largely influenced by various Ukrainian folk musics—to represent Ukraine, and that Syrotyuk expressed that "[Ukraine] want[s] to be accepted to the European Union, it could be our opportunity to show the Europeans that we are also a European nation. We need to show our originality."²⁰

Syrotyuk's comments seem to express the belief that black people do not constitute a Ukrainian nor a European identity, and the politician's justification for this belief is rooted in the association of blackness with African origins—because Gaitana is black, Syrotuk suggests that she cannot be European, because blackness is inseparable from Africa. Additionally, Adriana

¹⁹ Oleg Karpyak. "Ukraine's Eurovision Entry Gaitana 'Ashamed' by Racism." *BBC News*. Published May 23, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18162443>.

Helbig notes that Gaitana's status as a black woman in Ukraine is further complicated by post-socialist discourse regarding Africans, who were essentialized in Soviet society as "backwards and poor...based on Soviet development projects in the African continent."²¹ Although Gaitana's father is Congolese, the singer's mother is Ukrainian, and Gaitana has lived in Ukraine for the majority of her life. Gaitana's heritage aside, Syrotyuk's image of a uniformly white Ukraine is based in essentialist perceptions of what it means to be European, as Dafni Tragaki points out:

[Gaitana] was disapproved of in racial terms by the Ukrainian far-right as "non-organic," neither of Ukraine nor of Europe. In Gaitana's story the notion of fortress Europe converges with that of the Europe of assimilation: together they constitute a regime of debates and discourses over notions of "identity" driven by cultural essentialism and cultural anxiety. At the same time, both Gaitana's and several "mixed-origin" singer's Eurovision mediatic profiling was empowered by representing them as well-intentioned appropriated alterities, as Europeans "at heart" able to become *more* European and thus entitled to perform *as* Europeans.²²

Building on Tragaki and Helbig's analyses, I would argue that the controversy surrounding Gaitana demonstrates that the others who are included in broader national identities must be perceived as familiar in some way: The narratives of Jamala, Serdushka, and the kobzars all spoke to Ukrainian citizens' frustrations with government corruption that was perceived to be the result of Russian influence in Ukraine, thus these artists were perceived as having "suffered" in the same way that Ukraine was "suffering" under Russian hegemony. However, Gaitana's performance did not play into this narrative—her marginalization is the fault of Ukrainians alone, and is therefore perceived as unable to contribute to the desired narrative of external oppression, which positions Ukraine closer to the European Union by expressing dissatisfaction with its Russian neighbors. In this sense, Gaitana's narrative of an internal other was not

²⁰ William Lee Adams. "Ukraine's Eurovision Selection Marred by Right-Wing Racism." *Time*. Published March 5, 2012. <http://world.time.com/2012/03/05/ukraines-eurovision-selection-marred-by-right-wing-racism/>.

²¹ Adriana Helbig. *Hip Hop Ukraine: Music, Race, and African Migration*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 85.

received favorable for two reasons: First, her race is viewed as essentially African, not European. Second, the oppression that she experienced as a black woman could not be pinned on Russian influences, thus the performance could not be mapped onto the Ukrainian narrative in which internal others are the result of Russian—not Ukrainian—oppression and hegemonic influence.

Yuliya Samoylova and “Inspiration Porn”

The forthcoming (at the time of writing) 2017 Eurovision Song Contest, to be hosted in Kiev following Jamala’s winning performance in 2016, has already stirred up political controversy between Ukraine and Russia. The artist chosen to represent Russia, Yuliya Samoylova, has been barred from entering Ukraine for three years for travelling to the Crimean Peninsula through Russia, without going through Ukrainian channels, thus violating Ukrainian law. Due to this ban, Russia has been forced to pull Samoylova from the contest, and the country will not be participating in Eurovision in 2017. Ukraine’s decision to ban the singer has caused controversy not only for barring Russia from participating in Eurovision, but also because Yuliya Samoylova is a wheelchair-user, and barring her from the competition has been deemed a hypocritical decision considering the Eurovision 2017 slogan, “celebrate diversity.” Although Samoylova will not be participating in the competition, videos of her song “Flame is Burning,” have already been disseminated, and the song seems to exploit Samoylova’s disability for the purpose of evoking an emotional response from the audience by presenting Samoylova as an inspirational figure who has “overcome” her disability in order to achieve success:

If there’s a light then we have to keep dreaming
 If there’s a heart then we must keep believing inside
 Ohhh...

²² Dafni Tragaki. “Introduction,” in *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Dafni Tragaki (Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2013) 11-12.

After the night there's a light
 And in the darkest time a flame is burning
 It shines so bright
 Deep in the night love is alight
 And in the dark a flame is burning
 A flame is burning

All my life I'm searching for the meaning
 Now I've learned to seeing is believing
 I wish I knew where light is
 I wish I had the courage to go

If there's a light then we have to keep dreaming
 If there's a heart then we must keep believing inside

After the night there's a light
 And in the darkest time a flame is burning
 It shines so bright
 Deep in the night love is alight
 And in the dark a flame is burning

An open window for love
 And let the wind blow into the hearts
 And we're never apart and you'll know

After the night there is a light
 And in the darkest time a flame is burning
 It shines so bright

Deep in the night love is alight
 And in the dark a flame is burning
 A flame is burning
 A flame is burning²³

The hopeful message conveyed by Samoylova's song ("After the night there is a light," "we have to keep dreaming," etc.) is then juxtaposed to Samoylova's disability, which is made visually apparent by Samoylova's performance, in which the singer remains completely stationary throughout, emphasizing on stereotypes that a wheelchair limits, rather than accommodates,

²³ "Flame is Burning Lyrics." *Genius*. Accessed April 14, 2017. <https://genius.com/Julia-samoylova-flame-is-burning-lyrics>.

mobility. This combination of inspirational lyrical content and an emphasized disability constitutes what is often referred to as “inspiration porn,” a term coined by disability advocate, Stella Young, who described the phenomenon in the following way:

Inspiration porn is an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary—like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball—carrying a caption like “you excuse is invalid” or “before you quit, try.” Let me be clear about the intent of this inspiration porn; it’s there so that non-disabled people can put their worries into perspective. So they can go, “Oh well if that kid who doesn’t have any legs can smile while he’s having an awesome time, I should never, EVER feel bad about my life.” It’s there so that non-disabled people can look at us and think “well, it could be worse...I could be that person.”²⁴

In this sense, the inspirational message of “Flame is Burning,” juxtaposed with Samoylova’s visible disability, constructs a performance that is seemingly intended to evoke empathy in the audience. It is important to note that Samoylova may have chosen this song and its message because she wishes to be viewed as an inspiration. However, Russia has chosen an uncanny moment to place an artist with a disability on the Eurovision stage, and the discourse that has resulted from Samoylova’s entry and Ukraine’s ban have proven politically advantageous for Russia. Therefore, I would argue that Russia’s decision to choose a singer with a visible disability to perform at Eurovision could be read as Russia’s response to Ukraine’s use of the internal other to critique Russian influence in Ukraine. Russia has selected a performer who Ukraine has now othered by banning them from the contest. In this sense, Samoylova is seen as a victim to unfair actions taken by Ukraine to prevent the singer from performing at Eurovision. The empathy evoked by “Flame is Burning” is then channeled into Russian political discourse in such a way as to portray Ukraine as intolerant and oppressive, rather than Russia. In this sense, Samoylova’s performance represents another instance in which a nation’s internal other is

deployed so that a narrative constructed around their “otherness” can be exploited in order to contribute to a broader, national narrative. So, Russia’s deployment of “inspiration porn” can be viewed as an attempt at salvaging the nation’s history of intolerance while simultaneously undermining the victim narrative that Ukraine has constructed around itself in previous Eurovision performances. Thus, Russia’s Eurovision representative has been utilized to critique Ukraine’s “suffering” narrative while simultaneously turning that narrative on its head so that Russia may be viewed as the entity that “suffers” under oppression by Ukrainians who have prevented a singer with disability—and the nation—from competing in the contest.

We can now see how utilizing internal others does not necessarily draw these minority groups into the mainstream, but instead emphasizes their marginalization, to fulfill expectations of the ways in which they “suffer” as a result of their marginality—this is part of why Gaitana’s other narrative was not as widely accepted as those of Serduchka or Jamala, because Gaitana’s identity did not explicitly articulate a “suffering” narrative. In this sense, performances by internal others do not necessarily eliminate notions of difference, but emphasize difference. In doing so, these performances evoke sympathy for that other so that audiences’ sympathy may be channeled to contribute to other agendas, much in the same way that Samoylova’s bodily difference was utilized to construct a narrative of Ukrainian oppression against Russia. In this way, Eurovision has not only served as a stage for articulating national identities, but has also served as a site for engaging in dialogue with Europe’s internal “others,” who lead us to question what it means to be European in an increasingly globalized world.

²⁴ Quoted in Kate Ellis. *Disability and Popular Culture: Focusing Passion, Creating Community, and Expressing Defiance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) 150-1.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has explored the ways in which narratives about internal others have been shaped and deployed to articulate a Ukrainian national identity characterized by resistance to Russian hegemony. In the case of the kobzars, their “suffering”—which was perceived as the result of blindness—was paralleled to the “suffering” of Ukraine under Soviet hegemony. In the cases of Ukrainian Eurovision performances by Jamala and Verka Serduchka, these narratives resisted Russian political influence in Ukraine while simultaneously positioning Ukraine closer to the European Union and European values. However, these narratives ultimately emphasized difference, so that difference may be deployed to serve the purpose of nationalist agendas in Ukraine. Additionally, these performances emphasize difference and deploy it in such a way as to widen this gap, and bring into question what it means to be Ukrainian.

Not all internal others are welcome in these dialogues, as we saw in the case of Gaitana’s 2012 performance of “Be My Guest,” which many deemed uncharacteristic of the Ukrainian identity due to Gaitana’s ethnicity, which led her to be viewed as predominantly African, rather than European. Furthermore, emphasizing oppression and difference in narratives of internal others has led to harmful misrepresentations of these marginalized groups, as is evident in the case of Yuliya Samoylova, whose preliminary performance of “Flame is Burning” exploits disability to evoke an emotional response from audiences, so that those emotions may be channeled into other political agendas.

This thesis, however, has lacked the inclusion of crucial scholarship, due to my own limited access to Ukrainian and Russian-language literature—unfortunately, I can only claim a novice understanding of these languages at the this point in time. While scholars such as Natalie Kononenko and Victor Mishalow have helped fill these gaps in their analyses of primary texts,

there is a large body of literature in these languages that would be greatly supplement further research on the kobzars. Looking to the future of kobzar scholarship, little has been written, tragically, regarding women participating in the blind minstrel tradition in Ukraine—despite knowledge that women did indeed participate. I would encourage others to explore this largely unacknowledged area in Ukraine’s musical history, particularly to address why these women’s voices have been silenced for so long.

Furthermore, there is much to be said about the ways in which Eurovision is beginning to transform and dissolve the post-Soviet identity in Europe. In my conversation with the Greene family, we discussed the recent events of the war in Ukraine, and what it meant for their family to see these events unfold. Arthur Greene shared the following with me:

I mean, the fact that... before this nobody knew anything about Ukraine. And so when I was like, telling my father about it, I was getting married to a Ukrainian—well he knows about Ukraine but had a certain kind of impression of what it was, like “oh, part of Russia or something like that” and now it was the center of what was happening in the world, and the Ukrainians were standing up for something that I really believed in, I mean, they were standing up for democracy, for freedom, for getting rid of oppression and corruption, and they were dying for it, and it was so incredibly moving... The fact that it was Ukrainians doing it, and the fact that somebody was doing it because in the world these days there’s so little to... happening that you can actually believe in—there’s something, anything good that happens and this was something amazing...¹

I was particularly stricken when Arthur and Solomia brought up the issue of diversity in Ukraine, and mentioned that the first person killed in the Maidan protests was not Ukrainian, but Georgian. Earlier, Arthur had described Ukraine as the “bulwark” of Europe, and articulated that in the context of current events—Britain’s exit from the European Union, the forthcoming 2017 French election, and the possibility that French will leave the European Union if Marie Le Pen wins the election—the Ukrainian nation is becoming the glue holding together a slowly-decaying European Union:

Arthur (AR): There's always been this problem with the relationship between Ukrainians and Jews, as if ...Russia was protecting the Jews against the Ukrainians. But so many Jews have been involved in this Maidan, and actually the key spot is the Dnipropetrovsk. It's now just called Dnipro...but it's this city in Eastern Ukraine which is where Russians were moving towards Odessa, they thought they would get through, but there was this Jewish governor, he's the governor of that region [to Solomia] right? Kolo...

Solomia (SS): Kolomoisky.

AR: Who was just the most patriotic Ukrainian and he's very wealthy and he managed to hold the city together and fight off the Russians. So all the different diverse nations living in Ukraine and—actually, that's a strong point of Ukraine in general. Lviv, for example, has all these different areas...it used to be really diverse, but it has this tradition of diversity and that's one of Ukraine's strengths now, and that came to the fore in this whole Maidan

In this sense, the diverse ethnic groups who are coming together to resist Russian advancements in Ukraine are effectively serving as the glue that maintains Ukraine—the “bulwark” of Europe—in the face of Russia's slow and violent advancement towards Europe. The eyes of the world are on Ukraine during this pivotal political moment in Europe's history.

By deploying narratives of internal others as a means of resisting Russian influence, and renegotiating what it means to be Ukrainian, this nation—torn between East and West; between Russia and Europe; between self and other—seems to be relinquishing its transitional post-Soviet identity, and moving towards what some have begun to refer to as a “post-post-Soviet” identity in which former Soviet states have begun “clearing away the post-Soviet rubble...moving irreversibly into the West's orbit.”² While I do not believe that Ukrainians have arrived at such an identity, the open condemnation and abandonment of these remnants of the Soviet past in nations such as Ukraine demonstrate an exodus from a post-Soviet ontology, heralding new understandings of what it means to be Ukrainian—or more broadly, what it means to be European—after the fall of the Soviet Union. I am interested to see how these narratives of

¹ Arthur Greene, interviewed by Melissa Bialecki at Ann Arbor, MI, April 30, 2017.

internal others continue to critique Ukraine's Soviet past, and how these narratives will continue to shape the future of the nation as it moves into a post-post-Soviet way of being, and repositions Ukraine in the wake of transnational and geopolitical conflict.

² Vladimir Socor. "A Tale of Two Post-Soviet Countries." *The Wall Street Journal*. Updated December 19, 2003. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB107178830925301300>.

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