I would like to start this reflection by remembering a talk which took place in the Geography Department in Trinity College in the early 1980s. The speaker was a visiting professor from the University of Udine in the northeast of Italy. He was working on the Atlas Linguarum Europae project, which was mapping the use of language throughout Europe, and is still in progress. As the professor tried to explain the difficulties of mapping language use in the Udine region, a member of the audience asked, quite reasonably, if this wasn't simply a matter of using questionnaires and available census data to find out who speaks what in Udine and its environs. 'No', replied the Professor; it was not that simple. Before the second world war, the Udine region had contained a large Slovenian-speaking population, which was now much reduced. In nearby Trieste, many other languages, including Yiddish, had also been spoken. Over the border in Yugoslavia, conversely, there had been a considerable Italian-speaking population, which had now been reduced to a fraction of its former extent. Though questionnaires and census data would produce a map with a certain neatness – showing a strong predominance of Italian on the Italian side of the border, and a large Slovenian-speaking population in Yugoslavia – this map would erase the memory of many languages, cultures, and populations of the region. It would be true in a sense for the moment – true in the sense often favoured by governments and the mechanisms of state – but not true to the memories of places in which a multitude of tongues – in conflict, in contact, and in harmony – had once rung out in a multilingual world. The establishment of an independent Slovenia since the time of that seminar has brought the political border into sharper focus, but makes the question of linguistic memory no clearer.

We might better understand the nature of the cartographer's dilemma by considering the work of Czeslaw Milosz. Milosz is frequently quoted as having
said that ‘Language is the only homeland’.¹ Miłosz lived from 1911 to 2004, and is often referred to as a Polish poet, because his poetry was written in Polish. In legal terms, though, by the country of his birth, we could call him a Lithuanian. Miłosz himself wrote that ‘my family in the sixteenth century already spoke Polish, just as many families in Finland spoke Swedish and in Ireland English; so I am a Polish, not a Lithuanian poet. But the landscapes and perhaps the spirits of Lithuania have never abandoned me’.² Taking the long historical look, Miłosz also describes the lives of his ancestors in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania not in terms of a narrow symmetry of language, nation, and state, but as part of a multilingual world in which Polish, Lithuanian, German, Russian, Yiddish, French, Latin, and other languages have played their roles.³ Miłosz left Poland for France in 1951, and France for the United States in 1961. Should we also, therefore, call him a French writer? Should we call him an American writer? For though he wrote in Polish, his work in English translation, so much of which was written in America, speaks to the English-speaking world in a way that it would not if he had remained in the land of his ancestors. Or should we answer all these questions by referring to the centrality of Polish in his life and work – as proof that, regardless of the movement across national boundaries, historical accident, and the displacement of war and repression, language is indeed the only homeland?

I will come back to this theme at the end, but first I would like recall another set of conversations about language and place. These stem from my first fieldwork project as an undergraduate student in Fairhaven College in the United States. For this project, in 1976 and 1977, I spent 14 months in Galway. That first summer, I worked in a pub near the docks, which was owned by an Irish-speaker from West Galway who had served in the British Navy during the second world war. That pub was later sold and converted into apartments in the early days of the Celtic Tiger, so you cannot find it now.

Most of the people who I served in that pub were men, and most of the men were regulars who spent most of the day in the pub. Conversational topics followed certain well-worn paths. It was agreed that the men of Connemara were the true Irish men, the best of all. There was one favourite topic of disagreement, though, which concerned the exact location of where Connemara began. The Irish language was held in high esteem, and one elderly man from Long Walk was frequently pointed out as an excellent Irish speaker. He spoke very little to me, but he and the fishermen from the Aran Islands who came in on Thursday nights taught me enough Irish so that they could order their pints without having to speak any English to me. Many of the men in that pub had an attachment to Irish which was palpable. Some were in the minority who spoke Irish in preference to English, but although English was the language of everyday communication for the majority, Irish was tied to the land they lived in, and transformed the neutral space of nearby rocks and coastland into a place of culture and memory. It was telling that, by at least one man’s definition, the eastern boundary of Connemara was to be found in Long Walk.

Many years later, I made a trip to Greyabbey in County Down. Not that I was looking for Irish, but because I now study street signs and other signs in the public space. I had heard that following the Belfast Agreement and the initiatives to recognise the Irish language and Ulster Scots, Greyabbey now boasted street signs in Ulster Scots. A photograph of one of these signs forms the publicity photograph for this talk. What you will see on these signs, though, is not a simple parallel between the English name for a street and its name in Ulster Scots. Instead, the street name is given in English, as you would see anywhere in the United Kingdom, and an Ulster Scots name is given with the preceding word – ‘Formerly’. In other words, the names themselves are still given in English, but we should know how the roads were formerly referred to in Ulster Scots. Memory and place team up again.

Esther Fuchs, however, takes us in a different direction in contemplating language and homeland. I apologise, by the way, for referring to her as Eleanor Fuchs in the abstract for this talk; this is what happens when you

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4 See photograph at the end of this paper.
work from memory. Fuchs was born in Israel, and in an essay from 2002\textsuperscript{5} she recounts the development of her thinking as what she calls an 'ex-Israeli' woman, the child of Holocaust survivors who takes issue with what she describes as a 'Zionist meta-narrative' that 'marginalised not just women, but Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian citizens'.\textsuperscript{6} She has lived in the United States since 1975, and in the 2002 essay she quotes in translation from a Hebrew poem that she published in 1993:

The Hebrew tongue and I am stuttering
Landscapes I no longer know.

Fuchs comments that 'I talk about the loss of language in geographical terms, in terms of landscape, because in exile, language becomes a substitute for place'.\textsuperscript{7} Fuchs does not take an uncritical loyalty towards the Hebrew language, which she also finds patriarchal. I think her point is more subtle and more complex. A person may be physically separate from their homeland, they may feel an ideological alienation away from it, and they may feel estranged from the language: but that does not stop the language from being a substitute for the sense of place. And unlike the physical homeland, it is a place that is with us wherever we go.

This theme of displacement brings with it a proliferation of ways of looking at language, place, and memory. Paule Marshall was born Valenza Pauline Burke in Brooklyn, New York in 1929. Her parents had come from Barbados to the United States shortly after the first world war.\textsuperscript{8} In her essay titled 'From the poets in the kitchen',\textsuperscript{9} Marshall describes the many hours of her childhood spent listening to adults talking of life, politics, dreams, and aspirations.

\textsuperscript{6} Fuchs (2002), p. 289.
\textsuperscript{7} Fuchs (2002), p. 282.
Speaking of the women she knew, Marshall says that their ‘freewheeling, wide-ranging exuberant talk functioned as an outlet for the tremendous creative energy they possessed’. For the transplanted Barbadian ‘women at the kitchen table’, language was, as Marshall quotes Czesław Miłosz, ‘the only homeland’.

But Marshall's own perspective is more complex than this statement might sound. Her memoir, *Triangular Road*, focuses on three points of special significance in her life: Brooklyn, Barbados, and what she calls ‘ancestral Africa’. The triangular reference is intentional, bringing to mind the so-called triangular trade which brought slaves from Africa to the New World and raw materials from the New World to the manufacturing centres of Europe. In an interview, Marshall describes the great sadness she feels in contemplating the Atlantic, which she describes as ‘an entire ocean permanently sitting shivah’, a reference to the Jewish traditional ritual of mourning for the dead. Thus while it is true that Marshall uses Bajan language to capture life and culture in the homelands of Brooklyn and Barbados, there is, especially in her later work, an awareness that the development of this culture came at a terrible price.

To make sense of how to reconcile the linguistic homeland with the burdens of historical memory, I turn in conclusion to Paul Celan. Paul Celan was born Paul Antschel in Czernovitz, Romania in 1920. Like many other Jewish families in the region, the Antschel family spoke German, and Celan, a polyglot who had also studied linguistics, wrote his poetry in German. His parents were killed during the German occupation, and after nearly two years in forced labour camps during the War, Celan eventually settled in Paris in 1948. Shoshana Olidort describes the contradiction in Celan’s work succinctly: Celan was ‘a Holocaust survivor [who] wrote in German, his

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mother tongue, but also the language of his mother's murderer's'.\textsuperscript{13} For Celan, reconciling this contradiction relied on a breaking of the very form of the language, engaging in what the translator Pierre Joris describes as a 'dismantling and rewelding' of language.\textsuperscript{14}

In Celan's address on the occasion of receiving the literature prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, Celan describes this rewelding of language.\textsuperscript{15} Following a brief reference to the vanished world of his youth in the Jewish landscape of the Hapsburg monarchy, Celan says that

'there remained in the midst of losses this one thing: language'.

'It, the language, remained not lost, yes, in spite of everything'.

But Celan does not simply return to German as a homeland, as a source of comfort – how could he? Instead, he tells us that language

'had to pass through its own answerlessness,

pass through frightful muting,

pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech.

It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened;

yet it passed through this happening.

Passed through and could come to light again, "enriched" by all this'.


\textsuperscript{14} Quoted by Olidort (2014).

\textsuperscript{15} In Celan (2001), pp. 395–396.
To conclude by coming back to Czesław Milosz, it may be that 'language is the only homeland'. But we cannot take this maxim in any simple sense. Language needs memory, for the language which is spoken in the place we are in today may not be the language of our ancestors. In this case, we are in the place, but we are not at home in our language. Language needs memory too, because when we leave our place, our language will fade, come into contact with other languages, and possibly even become an object of discontent as we become part of whatever new world we find ourselves in. If we leave the physical homeland, the relationship with the mother tongue as a homeland may not be a simple one. Yet despite these problems, the burden of memory cannot become so great as to stifle language itself. For Paule Marshall, a homeland lies in the living language of the community; for Paul Celan, a homeland could be found in breaking, reshaping, and rewelding the language itself. In these and many other cases, we find an infinite capacity of the human mind to develop new relationships of language and memory, space and place.

Publicity photo: