Withold Bonner

Another Museum of Abandoned Secrets: *Im Menschen muss alles herrlich sein* by Sasha Marianna Salzmann

Brigid Haines (2015, 145) proclaims an "Eastern European turn" in contemporary German-language literature as a follow-up to the "Turkish turn".[1] An important part of the literature of the Eastern European turn has been contributed by authors with a migrant background in the Soviet Union and its succession states. They emigrated, mostly to Germany, during the final years of the Soviet Union or shortly after its breakdown. Just to mention a few, the women authors include Alina Bronsky, Lena Gorlik, Olga Grjasnowa, Olga Martynowa, Katja Petrowskaja, Anna Pritzkau, Nellja Veremej and Sasha Marianna Salzmann. Here, I focus on Salzmann's latest novel *Im Menschen muss alles herrlich sein* (2021), translated by Imogen Taylor into English as *Glorious People* (2024).[2]

Glorious People oscillates around the lives of four women, Lena with her daughter Edita, called Edi, and Tatyana with her daughter Nina. Both mothers speak Russian and were born in Soviet Ukraine where they grew up and lived as adults until they decided to leave in the early 1990s, Lena and her baby daughter Edi with her Jewish husband Daniel, and Tatyana, already expecting Nina, with her German boyfriend, who would abandon them right after their arrival in Berlin. While the frame story, starting and concluding the novel, is told by Nina as a first-person narrator, the lives of Lena and Tatyana in Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine are told by a nearly omniscient third-person narrator.

To dispel any possible misunderstanding, *Glorious People* is not an autofictional novel where autobiography and fiction mingle. This becomes very clear when we briefly compare the author's biographical data with those of the key protagonists, Lena and her daughter Edita. Sasha Marianna Salzmann was born in 1985 in Volgograd and grew up in Moscow, with some of her relatives living in Ukraine. In 1995 she emigrated together with her parents as Jewish "contingent refugees" to Germany while the fictitious Lena was born in 1967 in Gorlovka (Horlivka) in Soviet Ukraine. Around 1993 Lena emigrated to Germany with her Jewish husband and their daughter. While in the plot Edita is a trainee with a Berlin

1 The "Turkish turn" was introduced by Leslie A. Adelson in 2005 (cf. Adelson 2005).

2 All quotations from texts by Salzmann have been translated by the author of this chapter, except the quotations from *Glorious People* which are indicated with page numbers only.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111389165-004

newspaper, Salzmann was writer in residence at the transcultural, transgender and postmigrant Gorki Theatre in Berlin and artistic director of Gorki's studio theatre Я before she started to write novels. Her 2017 debut novel *Außer sich* (*Beside myself*) was shortlisted for the German book prize and to date it has been translated into 15 languages. *Glorious People* was longlisted for the German book prize in 2021.

In the following, I first explore how the novel is narrated using the concepts of trauma and postmemory. Further on, I identify which memories of the Soviet Union the novel transports into the cultural memory of German-language literature and what alternative history of the twentieth century it tries to establish there. Finally, I explore the novel in relation to Astrid Erll's concept of transcultural memory.

1 Trauma and Postmemory

As mentioned above, the frame story is told by Nina. At the beginning of the novel, she observes how Edi, knocked around by some local youths, lies on the ground in front of a building in the East German town of Jena. In that building her mother is just celebrating her fiftieth birthday. In the yard Edi is surrounded by her mother and Tatyana, all three of them crying, gesticulating and shouting at each other but not talking. This scene reminds the reader of the following description of trauma, developed by Cathy Caruth in the context of the story of Tancred and Clorinda as told by Torquato Tasso: "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 1996, 4). As Caruth continues, the accident "does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility" (Caruth 1996, 6). Not only the wounded Edi cries out; so do Lena and Tatyana, representatives of different generations. The speechlessness and materiality of these expressions of trauma as well as the characters' belonging to different generations connect them with postmemory which is, according to Marianne Hirsch, a structure of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience: "Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch 2008, 106).

For Hirsch, these behaviours are constituted by the language of the body rather than by precisely articulated acts of recalling (Hirsch 2008, 109).

The incomprehensibility of traumatic experiences and the difficulty of its transgenerational transmission is also pointed to in a dream that Nina has had over and over again. In this dream mothers and daughters are queuing up naked. One stands behind the other, tapping the shoulder blade of the woman in front of her with her forefinger. She looks back, "but just as she glances back, the woman who's been tapping or clawing her glances back at the woman behind *her* – her daughter – and so the women's eyes never meet" (178). That they are mothers and daughters, Nina understands from how they miss each other with their glances. "But they're looking *for* one another, too – seeking each other out with their eyes" (178). This dream of Nina about herself and her mother is about individual trauma, the incomprehensibility of traumatic experience and its transgenerational transmission. At the same time, by multiplying mothers and daughters into an endless row of women, the dream refers to trauma as a collective experience, which requires a closer look at the difference between individual and collective trauma, as defined by Erikson:

> By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively [. . .]. By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bond attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (Erikson 1976, 153–154)

Collective trauma is not naturally existing but rather constructed by society (cf. Alexander 2004, 2). According to Alexander the concept of collective trauma illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action (cf. Alexander 2004, 1). But how can individual and collective traumatic experiences be passed on from generation to generation when the glances of mothers and daughters do not meet and "not memories" (Hirsch 2008, 109) keep erupting in flashes of imagery: in abrupt but broken refrains, transmitted through the language of the body? As Hirsch (2008, 107) emphasises, postmemory's "connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation".

In *Glorious People* an image, the painting of a giraffe by "naïve" Georgian artist Niko Pirosmani (1862–1918), functions as metaphor for undertaking the imaginative and creative work of postmemory. Edi comes across the painting via her date Dea who had it tattooed on her arm. As Dea explained, Pirosmani had never

seen a giraffe in his life. “But he’d heard about this animal called a giraffe and he decided to paint it. He got it all wrong – the proportions, the colouring – but it doesn’t matter; what matters is that he wanted to paint it and he did” (206). As she continues, “Pirosmani doesn’t say: *This is how it is*, but: *This is how I think it might be*” (207). Later on, Edi remembers Pirosmani’s giraffe, “that strange, haphazard creature born of the belief that it wasn’t worth trying to see the world as it was, that it wasn’t ever possible” (269). She feels that everything around her had been exactly as incoherent as this painting. She learned about incidents and experiences, she “heard” first one thing and then another, she assembled them with the help of imaginative investment, projection, and creation. “If she’d tried to draw or paint that ‘whole,’ it would have ended up as a short-necked giraffe with black spots on a white coat.” (269–270)

The impossibility of communication due to traumatic experiences is mirrored not only in the imaginative and creative work of postmemory but also in the narrative structure of the novel. The proceedings during the first part of the frame story, the speechless prelude full of crying and shouting, as well as the final chapter, which covers the events leading up to Lena’s birthday party, are witnessed by Nina. As the novel’s only first-person narrator, she cannot make much sense of what is happening. Since the mothers and grandmothers are unable to tell their daughters and granddaughters about their traumatic experiences during the Stalinist terror, the Holodomor, and especially during the final decades of Soviet Ukraine and the first chaotic years of independent Ukraine, the mothers’ and grandmothers’ experiences are transmitted to the novel’s readers by a heterodiegetic narrator in internal focalization. Additionally, a gap in the narrative encompasses the years from Lena’s arrival in Germany with her family around 1993 until her fiftieth birthday in 2017. On the one hand, this gap stands for the silence and growing distance between mothers and daughters. The latter, growing up in a different country under different circumstances, are unable to understand and interpret their mothers’ experiences, expressed in speechless looks and body language. On the other hand, this gap closing in 2017 stands for the now adult daughters’ growing interest in the fate of their mothers and grandmothers, about which they know only very little.

2 Salzmann’s Museum of Abandoned Secrets

To explain her attempt to uncover the reasons behind the collective trauma of the elder generation, Salzmann compares it with a passage from *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, a novel by Ukrainian author Oksana Zabuzhko:

> "Secrets" is the name of an Ukrainian game, where children dig a hole into the ground and throw into it everything colorful they could find – blossoming flowers, glittering stones, dazzling scrunchies, shimmering dolls' clothes – then they cover the pit with a glass pane, carpet it with soil, and run away. They do not return before feeling unobserved, then they uncover the site and look at their secret treasures.[3,4] (Salzmann 2022)

According to Salzmann, Zabuzhko ascribes this game to the time when the Bolsheviks took power in Ukraine and the women buried their icons. Because of this, "secrets" became a girls' game. Consequently, the stories that Salzmann uncovers in her own Museum of Abandoned Secrets are also women's stories: we have seen that the four protagonists of *Glorious People* are all female. These stories are the result of interviews Salzmann had conducted with female Russian and Ukrainian emigrants from her mother's generation. Not surprisingly, these stories deal with the Holodomor and the well-known curses of Soviet society and politics such as the Gulag, corruption, racism, antisemitism or forced psychiatric treatment of dissidents. But finally, the reader is confronted with a probably less expected topic.

As Salzmann states in her lecture on Poetics, *Dunkle Räume* (Dark Spaces), everything that she can feel is conditioned by narratives and codes that conveyed security in early childhood and simultaneously inscribed fears. She continues:

> The songs sung to me, the rhymes and jokes about blondes, Asians, gays and Tatars, for example (I grew up in the Soviet Union, you can't imagine a long enough list of puns and pejo-

3 When I presented a first draft of this paper at the conference "Out of the USSR: Travelling Women, Travelling Memories" in Turku in February 2023, the Russian participants were unanimous that "Secrets" is not an especially Ukrainian game. Instead, it had been played all over the Soviet Union. But this misinterpretation does not challenge the significance of the metaphor.

4 The corresponding quote from Nina Murray's English translation of Zabuzhko's novel reads as follows: "Sure, I have stories like that too. And now, think how you made a secret. First you dug a little hole in the ground and lined it with something shiny, like a foil wrapper from a chocolate bar – and actually, such glimmering backgrounds that provide a deeper perspective are common for folk-art icons, the late ones, from the end of the nineteenth century, when they were being made by factory co-ops. You can still find some out in the country." A page later the novel comes back to the girls' game: "So you have this shiny silver or gold background, and you lay out your design – with leaves, pebbles, whatever junk you could find, as long as it's brightly colored: Candy wrappers, pieces of glass, beads, buttons – there were lots of fun buttons back then, everyone sewed, knitted, crocheted, you had to be crafty. You could add flowers – marigolds, phlox, daisies – usually to make a kind of a decorative frame, a border, which is also a common practice in Ukrainian folk art. So you had a little collage piece of sorts, whatever struck your fancy, and then you took a bigger piece of glass, like the bottom of a bottle – remember that those factory-made icons also came framed and under glass – and set it on top of the hole and buried everything again. Then, when you came back later and brushed the dirt off that spot, you'd see a tiny magical window into the ground, like a peephole into Aladdin's cave" (Zabuzhko 2012, 51–52).

> ratives, it starts with Vovochka's torture cellar, in which he and his friends play Gestapo, and extends to all conceivable amusements about rapes and humiliations of women), all this is in my DNA, is part of my and the collective consciousness from which I write. (Salzmann 2019, 49)

This has an inevitable impact on the language in which Salzmann tells the stories of the novel's female protagonists and it is mirrored in its English title, *Glorious People*. The original German title, *Im Menschen muss alles herrlich sein*, could be literally translated into English as "everything about a person must be glorious", a quote from *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov that functions ironically as a contrast to the experiences of the novel's female protagonists.

Lena finds out – rather indirectly – about the Holodomor in Ukraine as a child when she arrives at the *Small Eagle* pioneers' camp for her summer vacation. The camp's Avenue of Heroes is lined with young men's busts. One of them represents Pavel Morozov. As the pioneers are told by their guides, Morozov had informed the kolkhoz authorities that his parents had been hoarding and hiding livestock and crops (41). In the early 1990s, when Lena is a practising doctor treating skin and venereal diseases, an elderly female patient tells her more about the great famine:

> You'll know nothing of those times, but your grandmother and grandfather will. Ask them. They'll remember. You'll see it in their faces. I'm talking about the times when the Russians decided to let us Ukrainians starve, and the farmers felled their fruit trees and slaughtered their livestock and sent their grain to Moscow. Everything went to Moscow. Every living thing vanished; the fields were empty. Only lookout towers stood on the bare land, so the children could spy on their own parents. (156)

But Lena would never have been able to ask her grandfather because there was only her grandmother, with whom she had spent her childhood vacations in Sochi. The very few times that Lena had asked about her grandfather she did not get any answers. The adults just tried to sidetrack or told her things that she could not understand (33). She would not get any closer to the Stalinist purges or the Gulag.

During her university studies Lena discovers that her fellow student Inna had attended the same school at Mariupol as Alina, who had been Lena's best friend during many summers at the pioneer camp. Alina had been different than the other girls and she became a kind of role model for Lena who felt deeply attracted to her. Inna tells Lena that at school, Alina had burned her pioneer scarf. Thereupon Alina had been taken to a psychiatric hospital, or in Inna's words: "They put her in the loony bin – didn't you know? Schizophrenia's a serious business. Now she's being pumped full of whatever psychdrugs it

takes – apparently that helps with cases of ideological sabotage. You're the neurologist, you'll know." (104)

Like a common thread, corruption runs through Lena's Soviet life. Without it she would not have been admitted to the pioneers' summer camp, and without it and some relations she would not have been admitted to medical school, although she would have passed the entrance examinations easily. According to the deal that her mother made with the head of the local hospital, Lena would work for a year as his secretary, then he would make a phone call to the university: "The thought that she'd got the place because of her connections rather than her achievements was like a punch in the gut. She felt as though someone had spat in her mouth. No, not someone – her mother" (82–83). Years later Lena needs to use bribery to stay in hospital with her perilously ill baby daughter. But the worst experience with bribery was the corrupt doctor, who for years had treated Lena's mother's headache deliberately with a wrong but very expensive medicine that was sold illicitly to her family. Finally, Lena's mother dies and the family is robbed of nearly all their savings.[5] Even Lena herself profits from bribery later on, when her superior at the hospital appointed her to receive private patients, mostly to treat syphilis or other venereal diseases. In return, Lena was to share the bribes with her superior.

Lena is confronted with antisemitism, especially during her university studies.[6] The narrator explains that the most important consideration, more than what might come up in the exam, was the degree to which some fellow student might be Jewish and "thus had parents with enough cash to send them to the right university" (85). A fellow student's husband collected his wife's clothes from the dormitory after she had given birth, arriving with a flabby mastiff called Sarah. In response to Lena's question, whether the dog's name was really Sarah: "'Yes,' he said. 'Sarah, like all fat Jewish girls'" (109).

While the Soviet Union understands itself as a society based on international solidarity between its different peoples, this ideal turns out to be far from the reality. The streets of Dnepropetrovsk are increasingly patrolled by men with red armbands who ensure that Soviet values are observed, that is, that people from

5 This was the main reason that Lena wanted to study neurology. But her professor felt it would be better to change her major because neurology would be too close to Lena's family tragedy.

6 First experiences with the exclusion of Jews go back to Lena's childhood. Later on, Lena would remember a summer when she had not gone to the pioneer camp, where the neighbors gathered in the yard and the children frolicked. Meanwhile, a couple including their daughter was sitting on the balcony, reading, and not coming down. When Lena asked her mother why they didn't come down too, she replied, "I don't know. Maybe they're Jewish" (86). Lena did not inquire further.

the Caucasus do not show their "mugs" in places where they have no business to be (99). One of these Caucasian faces belongs to the Chechen Edil, one of Lena's patients, with whom she falls in love. But their relationship turns out to be anything but easy. Regularly he reproaches her for thinking that she is too refined for a Chechen (e.g., 117). Edil will not introduce Lena to his family, nor will she present him to her friends. When Lena gets pregnant, Edil will not marry her. Instead, she has sex once with Daniel, whom she had met at a mutual friends' house and whom she marries shortly thereafter. It is finally with her Jewish husband Daniel that Lena leaves post-Soviet Ukraine for good. But Edita, the name Lena gives her daughter, reveals her lingering feelings for Edil.

Finally, the less expectable topic in the long row of Soviet curses relates to delivery wards in Soviet Ukraine. When Tatyana is expecting Nina, she asks her mother what she remembers about giving birth. According to her mother, her experience was typical. In the hospital she was welcomed with the common phrase: "Used to spreading your legs, eh? Well, you can close them again for now – no one here wants to see that" (263). In the hospital, the woman in the bed next to Tatyana's mother had given birth to twins too early. Right in front of their mother, a nurse put the babies into a bucket of water and placed the cover on top. The mother screamed, until she was taken away (262).[7]

For Nina these stories, told by a heterodiegetic narrator, must remain at least to some extent unknown. Nevertheless, she wonders about the contradictions in the stories that she hears her own and Edi's mothers and other elderly emigrants tell about their lives in the former Soviet Union.

> The historical studies tend not to tally with the announcements and reports in the news portals; the blogs about the Pioneer camps are written in a silly fairy-tale language, practically in rhyme – campfire sing-song stuff. I still can't make head or tail of it all. There was a housing shortage in the USSR, but some people had homes of their own; they were all Communists but believed in God and money; they were Jewish and atheist at the same time. No one did their job properly, but everyone had a much better education than anyone in the West. (185)[8]

7 About these atrocities in Soviet delivery wards from one of her interview partners. A woman "recalled how a newborn was drowned in a bucket of water in front of the screaming mother in the bed next to her because the premature baby had been deemed not viable. It is hard for me to see the system behind these atrocities, but they are not isolated cases. Obviously, the motive is hatred of women, but also the desire to destroy something vulnerable, defenseless. The humiliation of someone at their most vulnerable moment" (Salzmann 2022, n.p.).

8 Salzmann gives an even more striking example of the way screen memory works in one of her lectures on poetics: "Recently I met a woman from the former Soviet Union who impressively told about the sound of car tires late at night in front of her house – she had heard the crunch of each pebble under the weight of the KGB car, she felt the breeze from the slamming of the car

These nostalgic recollections of living in the USSR, such as the times spent in a pioneers' camp or the far better education in Soviet schools, seem to work as screen memories. Freud defines the banal memory of the everyday as a screen memory that owes its value not to its intrinsic content but to the relation between this content and some other which has been suppressed. For Rothberg, screen memory stands in or substitutes for a more disturbing or painful memory that it displaces from consciousness (cf. Rothberg 2009, 13).

In order to get beneath these nostalgic recollections offered by the elder emigrants' screen memory, Nina shows no interest in classical Russian literature as stereotypical manifestation of Russian or Soviet cultural supremacy. Instead, Nina tries to find out about the popular culture her mother might have been confronted with during her youth in Soviet Ukraine. The same applies to the narrator who deliberately turns her back on the traditional Russian literary canon, with the only exemption taking a derogatory meaning: the quotation from *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov, which gives the novel its title.

The chief physician of Lena's hospital in Dnepropetrovsk used this quotation – "Everything about a person must be glorious" (107) – during the times of chaos in the early 1990s to criticise a young doctor who had dared to turn up at work wearing dark blue jeans and a black turtleneck. Later on, this colleague complains to Lena: "I can't hear this Chekhov crap any longer. These retards quote *Uncle Vanya* at every fucking turn. It's the same drivel my grandmother used to spout." He glared at Lena, as if she were the one who had come up with the line about glorious people. "Reactionary fools who can't accept their time is past." (107–108)

3 References to Soviet Popular Culture

Instead of canonical Russian literature the novel exhibits a multitude of intertextual references to Soviet popular culture. In order to get beneath the nostalgic recollections offered by screen memory, similarly to Nina's endeavour, the heterodiegetic narrator looks into different manifestations of popular culture that Lena and Tatyana encountered during Soviet times. For instance, Lena had once

doors, she did not know who would be picked up this time, who would be missing the next morning. She knew the reports of torture in prisons, of rape, of mass shootings in labor camps. But this knowledge did not stop her from moving almost seamlessly from the account of the night of terror into a nostalgic recounting of her childhood and youth, when, as she put it, it had still been possible to live like a human being" (Salzmann 2019, 49).

possessed an LP with songs by Vladimir Vysotsky, and while she was wandering with her father through the streets of Gorlovka she heard from far away an old song by Bulat Okudzhava. She compares her first unsatisfying sexual experiences with the way they are featured or rather not featured in the Oscar-winning nostalgic Soviet film *Moscow Does not Believe in Tears* (*Moskva slezam ne verit*, 1980) by Vladimir Menshov.

As a child in a pioneer camp, Lena had once seen a film, *Amphibian Man* (*Chelovek Amfibiia*, 1961) by Vladimir Chebotariov,[9] where a green-glowing human-animal with fins on its legs and an erect crest on its head, possessing both lungs and gills, was cutting fishing nets in the bay of a warm country, sinking boats and coming menacingly close to the shore (29). On the one hand Lena is afraid of this dangerous creature while on the other hand she hopes that he will drag her into lake: "Maybe shiny-scaled amphibian men with raised crests would come out of the lake and pull the children into the water" (40).

By far the widest space in this coursing through Soviet and Russian popular culture is occupied by the Russian fantasy film *Window to Paris* (*Okno v Parizh*, 1993) by Yuri Mamin. To Lena – and the narrator – this film seems to best represent the chaotic period of transition from the Soviet Union to its successor states in the 1980s and 1990s, the time of the "sovok", the shovel for the trash of history. In one scene of the film, as the narrator recalls it, a man walks alone through the streets of St Petersburg at night and destroys a telephone booth in passing without showing any emotion: "A moment later, he stops in front of a phone box, runs up to it and kicks in all the panes, tears the phone from the wall with his bare hands, dashes it to the ground, rips the metal frame of the booth into pieces, jumps up and down on the debris and then ambles off, hands in his pockets, as if nothing has happened" (159).[10]

In the times of "sovok" Tatjana, too, had her own encounters with Soviet popular culture. Working as waitress in a restaurant, one day she had to serve members of two competing mafia groups who suddenly started shooting at each other. During these days mafia groups were springing up everywhere. Shortly before this incident, which meant the end of her job as waitress, she had hummed a pop

9 During her internet search for films that her mother might have seen, Nina had also come across the *Amphibian Man*. For Nina the movie's protagonist expresses how she feels as a child of immigrants: "The main character has gills and lungs; he can't walk around the harbour for long, but he doesn't feel properly at home in the sea either, and of course everyone thinks he's a weirdo." (321).

10 In the movie this sequence lasts for about one minute (Mamin and Zalivalov 1993, 1:15:26–1:16:25).

song. Under these circumstances *Arlekino* by Alla Pugacheva got a completely new meaning:

> I'm just a clown, a harlequin, a joke,
> I have no name, I barely have a fate.
> Don't tell me that you care about such folk –
> We make you laugh and there's an end to it. (233)

Later on, when Tatyana lies sick in a Berlin hospital, she tells Edita that she needs an Allan Chumak (1935–2017), a miracle healer from the "sovok" period. Tatyana says that he had healed hordes of people with a single movement of his hand. Tatyana's grandmother, a great admirer of Chumak, used to drag a gallon of water into the living room, which he then blessed telepathically via TV. And, finally, he supported a party that had promised to board America like an enemy ship and sink it in the ocean (219).

This section has shown that, rather than canonical Russian literature, manifestations of popular culture create a clearer picture of the times of transition from the Soviet Union to its successor states and makes the reader understand why people like Tatyana or Lena had to leave the country.

4 Travelling Memories

According to Erll, memories do not hold still. Instead, they are constituted first of all through movement. "What we are dealing with, therefore, is not so much (and perhaps not even metaphorically) 'sites' of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, but rather the 'travels' of memory, les voyages or *les mouvements de mémoire*" (Erll 2011, 11). As conceived by Erll, transcultural memory is the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms and practices of memory, their continual travels and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders (Erll 2011, 11).[11] Indeed, the traumatic memories of Lena and Tatyana and the postmemory of their daughters Edi and Nina travel through time and space across social, linguistic and political borders, from the Soviet Union via independent Ukraine to reunified Germany.

What happens to memory when it travels through time can be seen from the changing roles of languages. In *Glorious People*, at least three different languages

11 Transcultural memory thus connects with the concept of multidirectional memory as promoted by Michael Rothberg (2009, 21), who reconceptualises collective memory in multicultural and transnational contexts.

are involved: Ukrainian, Russian and German.[12] Of these three, however, Ukrainian is conspicuous by its virtual absence. The only time that a Ukrainian voice is – indirectly – admitted to the novel is when the adult Edita reads *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* by Oksana Zabuzhko, but most probably in German translation. As long as Lena had lived in Ukraine, nobody seemed to speak this language – neither her family nor her fellow students or her colleagues in the hospital. The novel is not exclusively about Ukrainian victimisation but also about perpetration and Soviet Russian colonialism. While distancing herself from it, the narrator deliberately tells her stories from a distinctly Russian point of view. It is not by chance that all geographical names are given in Russian: Lena grows up in Gorlowka instead of Horlivka and she studies medicine in Dnepropetrovsk, not Dnipropetrovsk. Tatyana moves to Krivoi Rog instead of Kryvyj Rih. The subjugation under Soviet colonialism finds its symbolic representation when Lena's mother Rita decides that her daughter should stop learning Ukrainian at school because she does not see it as important: "No one needs Ukrainian these days. It's a relic. We have to move on" (61). This case shows what happens to memory when it travels in time. Abandoning the Ukrainian language, which seemed advisable then, becomes an example of Soviet and Russian colonialism.

What happens to travelling memories when they cross linguistic and political borders? As can be seen from the novel's structure and its protagonists, as well as from the above analysis of Nina's dream, it is first and foremost about daughters and their mothers who left the former Soviet Union for Germany. It is about a dialogue, or rather argument, between the two daughters and their mothers, about how the USSR failed. As the argument is conducted in Russian, the mother tongue on both sides, this dialogue becomes very personal and intimate, or, in the author's words: "I can't describe how it feels to ask your mother in your mother tongue, which family members had been to the Gulag Mama, kto iz nashikh rodstvennikov byl v gulage?" Salzmann connects this question in Russian to another question: "And what difference does it make to do it not in German"? (Salzmann 2019, 50).

Before trying to answer this latter question, it is necessary to examine some more implications of travelling memories, crossing the political and linguistic border between Russia and Germany. When memories cross these borders, especially where Russian and German are concerned, it is never a simple act of translation but is always connected with cultural and historical issues. As far as Russian and Russia are concerned, the author argues as follows:

12 Other languages, although not directly mentioned in the novel, might be Yiddish and Chechen.

> The songs sung to me, the rhymes and jokes about blondes, Asians, gays and Tatars, for example (I grew up in the Soviet Union, you can't imagine a long enough the list of puns and pejoratives, it starts with Vovochka's torture cellar, in which he and his friends play Gestapo, and extends to every conceivable amusement about the rape and humiliation of women), all this is in my DNA, is part of my and the collective consciousness out of which I write. Every one of my poems, every prose text and every drama is full of references to my social and cultural origins, even when there is nothing autobiographical about my writing. This origin can be read in the references, narrative perspectives, puns, and jokes. (Salzmann 2019, 49)

But German, the language Salzmann writes in, does not make it any easier for the Jewish author, because the history associated with the language attaches to the person using it. "For me as a Jew, German words like chamber, train, wagon, lamp or soap still evoke associations with extermination camps" (Salzmann 2019, 49–50). Accordingly, we cannot assume that Salzmann – inspired by the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – is starting to disclose Stalinist atrocities in Soviet Ukraine. It is rather the opposite. The novelist reminds her German audience of a country that they tended to forget when they spoke of the German invasion of Russia or about their sense of guilt towards Russia due to the atrocities committed there by German troops. Most of the German public had forgotten – or never understood – the fact that the German aggression in the USSR was first and foremost directed at Soviet Ukraine. This focus on Ukraine in *Glorious People*, published a year before the Russian war on Ukraine started in February 2022, makes the novel even more relevant to a German audience that still, at least partially, knows more about Russia than Ukraine.

Finally, it is time to return to the author's question, and reformulate it for another language: What difference does it make to do it not in Russian? The answer is twofold. In the first instance, the arguments between daughters and mothers in the novel remain a very private matter for the author, although they are not as intimate as they would be if these discussions occurred in Russian: "My story is her [mother's] story. It is about a woman who was chiselled into shape by the Soviet dictatorship for so long that she will be busy until the end of her days trying to break free from her deformation. Her rigidity is inside me, I carry it, I try to write it to the surface. To write her out of me." (Salzmann 2019, 51)

As far as the difficulty of dialogue between daughters and mothers is concerned, in their foray into postmemory, Edi – and her author – stay with Pirosmani's giraffe, "that strange, haphazard creature born of the belief that it wasn't worth trying to see the world as it was, that it wasn't even possible" (269). In the second instance, the life of Lena in Soviet and early independent Ukraine, told by a heterodiegetic narrator in internal focalization over 180 of the novel's 381 pages, is described with less difficulty to create a clearer picture of the past.

Here, the novel tries to raise the German public's awareness of the atrocities committed by Soviet colonialism in Ukraine, and the deformations it inflicted – not only – on the Ukrainian people.[13] *Glorious People* tries to establish an alternative historiography of the twentieth century, criticizing official memorial narratives, developing counter-narratives and integrating these into German cultural memory, as do so many other German novels by émigrés from the former Soviet Union (cf. Hausbacher 2020, 205, 214). As we have seen, memories do not hold still but travel across linguistic and political borders. While travelling through time and space, these memories continue to undergo transformations.

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13 These counter-narratives are definitely directed at a German-speaking audience, which becomes very clear from one of Salzmann's essays. As she states there, the Holodomor is not a secret anymore in Ukraine. It is taught in history lessons and guides tourists about the systematic murder of the Ukrainian people by hunger in 1932 and 1933. But if, "as in the case of Ukraine, it is a historical event, a genocide, then the secret is part of a collective experience that flows like lava under a crust of silence" (Salzmann 2022, n.p.).

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