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Travelling with Geopoetics: A Revue on Migration Management

> These persistent repetitions and these incessant returns suggest that the conclusion about the discursive 'nature' of identities and feelings, which seemed so irrefutable in the 1990s, is unable to 'subdue' the amorphousness of traumatic experience. Neither identities nor feelings have become less discursive, of course, but trauma research has exposed their 'verbal' insufficiency.
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> Эти настойчивые повторы и эти непрекращающиеся возвращения свидетельствуют о том, что вывод о дискурсивной 'природе' идентичностей и чувств, который казался столь неопровержимым в 1990-х, не в состоянии 'подчинить' себе аморфность травматического опыта. Менее дискурсивными от этого ни идентичности, ни чувства, конечно, не стали, однако исследования травмы обнажили их 'словесную' недостаточность. (Ushakin 2009, 41)

Trauma writes to you from within. It keeps you in the prison of words. In the case of writers who have emigrated from the former Soviet Union to Germany, the prison consists of a language that they – we – have had to appropriate but which will always remain bigger than you as it is a language.

It is painful to tell your story. It is a luxury. You have to be able to afford it. Even more so to write it in your first language, your mother tongue. You have to have time for it. Trauma knows no time. The mental work of writing around it requires a hell of a lot of breaks.

I recall how I started recalling my childhood in the USSR and in the young Ukraine, how the text grew inside me long before I wrote it down in 2014, and how it continued to grow inside me after the book was published in 2015. How several people inspired me, even when they were trying to do the opposite: it was a fellow Slavicist with the same background, from a Jewish-Soviet family, who first said – in 2008 – that it would be interesting to collect the memoirs of Slavicists in Germany and edit them in a volume. I thought: yes, this would take them more seriously as they try to assimilate for professional reasons (good positions are mostly filled by native Germans). It would explain the urge to deal with your first mother tongue at university: in a scholarly context our foreign, not always welcomed language and culture are useful, and knowledge about them even gains value and provides you with a status. It would illuminate their thematic choices and analytical perspectives, such as memory cultures, polyphony and identity narratives.

I urged my colleague to organise and edit such a volume. She preferred to leave it at that. Now, at almost 50, she has finally been given a permanent posi-

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tion. Interestingly, she is researching authors who write in Russian, mixing it with other languages, and who live outside Russia. Interestingly, she prefers not to publish in Russian.

In 2012, another colleague, an established professor, asked me to write an essay about my childhood in socialist Crimea. The essay was intended for an edited volume. I wrote it. They ignored it. After a year I asked them why. They said I should better write a scholarly article on childhood in Ukrainian literature, with examples from three authors. I wrote it. They ignored it. After a year I asked them why. They said I should write an academic article on childhood in Ukrainian literature, with examples from a single author. I wrote it. Years passed, the volume seemed to be forgotten. I ignored the power game, sent the articles to journals and published both.

The autobiographical essay they had asked me to write went on. It shook me. I remembered things I had repressed. That I wanted to jump off a skyscraper because I felt out of place in Berlin. That in Berlin my first husband strangled me because he felt I was not who he wanted me to be. I recalled the concept of geopoetics, about which I heard a lecture in Berlin. That professor seemed dedicated to enriching plurality of analyses on cultural and aesthetic phenomena, and the university seemed like the perfect environment to pursue this goal.

1 Геть From Expectations

It takes time to write about changing countries when the change has been difficult. It takes energy to remember, to delve into all the ambiguous feelings, events, words and faces. It is no coincidence that autobiographical novels about migration from the former Soviet Union to Germany did not appear immediately after the authors' migration in the 1990s. It took an individual two decades to find a language, to make space for memory and the process after recalling. Do we tell our migration stories the same way as comparable writers from the former Yugoslavia do? Has Dubravka Ugrešić (1993; 1998) already told everything on migration from Eastern Europe? Do women tell their memories more often? Is there a female memory poetics? Can we generalise the works of Olga Martynova, Olga Griasnova, Lena Gorelik, Sasha M. Salzmann, Alina Bronsky?

Do we read each other? Not sure, although we are a kind of self-help group, a family of far-flung relatives. We could have met at a "Russendisko" in Berlin organised by Vladimir Kaminer. We could have stopped writing about our migros after reading his over 20 books, ten CDs and numerous newspaper columns. Kaminer's easy-to-read, anecdotal prose is probably our father; he inspired us with

the courage to write about all that what we shamefully hid. He dared to be who he was, a Jewish-Russian foreigner telling Germans about how he lives in Berlin, how his mother cooks and how cool it is not to be completely German! I think he even faked his Russian accent for a long time, though he could speak without it. It was him, his trademark. His books consist of short chapters that entertain us like a TV show: fast, funny, floppy. He succeeds within the framework of capitalist book culture, Berlin aura (hip in the sense of Prenzlauer Berg) and a certain charisma wraps his migrant identity in the fancy popular culture. In a way, this is radical.

The other colleagues write more traditional novels with a comfortable plateau of tension around the main protagonist, their family members, partners, friends and pets. The entertaining task remains dominant, whether in Lena Gorelik's or Alina Bronsky's novels – they offer something between a milieustudie of Jews and a stereotypes collection of Russians, "fast and amusing" (Willms 2013, 80–81).

In my opinion, I write meditations (Gofman 2015; Hofmann 2022). To make it easier to sell, the first publisher called the first one, *Sewastopologia*, a novel, perhaps in the sense of a stream of consciousness, a steam of unconsciously accumulated memories. It is more an essay and a Dadaist poem, a letter to someone after I have died. In fact, when writing it, I felt like dying and giving birth to another me.

Most of us came to Germany as children. Our families took us with them. We are Jewish quota refugees from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. We are very grateful to Helmut Kohl for inviting us and to our parents for organising the move. We try to be humorous like Kaminer, but we often sound sad. We get stuck in the new language, in projections onto ourselves, in old and lingering expectations. Lena Gorelik puts it this way in her novel *Who We Are (Wer wir sind)*:

> In Russland zeigten sie mich vor, meine Tanten besonders gerne, Lenotschka, sagten sie, liebevoll, aber eben auch mit einem erhobenen Zeigefinger. [. . .] Ich gab mir Mühe, so zu sein, wie sie mich sahen. Dann gab ich mir Mühe, so zu sein, wie ich nicht war, jetzt bin ich zu müde, um mir Mühe zu geben. (Gorelik 2021, 33)

> In Russia they showed me off, my aunts especially liked to show me off. Lenochka, they said, lovingly, but also with a raised index finger. [. . .] I made an effort to be the way they saw me. Then I made an effort to be what I wasn't. Now I'm too tired to make an effort. (Transl. T.H.)

Part of this "no longer being what you are not" is the tender approach to your family history – Gorelik dedicates a chapter of her novel *Who We Are* to each member. I would add that part of this process is an approach to the records in your head and your body, including the first feeling in the landscapes тогда и

там. It is easier to say than to do. It is easier to avoid it, to postpone such texts and to distance oneself from all those people and places. The means of distancing is, first of all, the foreign language, which you have definitely mastered, it is a matter of honour but somehow German remains as hard and rough as it sounds. There is a glass between you and what you compose anyway.

Another means of distancing is fiction, either autofiction or just fiction, and also analysing the narratives of others. It helps to control your own memories, losses and feelings that you actually do not understand. You find something of yourself in patterns of others. You seem to understand them.

A pattern I look back on is: you return to the non-verbal parts of yourself, your body, by interacting with the landscapes that remind you of your past. Then you return to your first language, then you can afford to approach those first parts of yourself.

Gorelik returns to Russian, writing some lines in transliterated Russian, some in Cyrillic, always with a German translation:

> "Учиться, учиться, учиться! Lernen, lernen, lernen!" (Gorelik 2021, 90).
> "Учиться, учиться, учиться! Learn, learn, learn!" (Transl. T.H.)

> "dort warten wir auch auf Eltern, die immer zu spät kommen, immer eilend, mit Einkaufstauschen beladen, immer mit derselben Stimme: 'Ну, пошли!' – 'Nu, lass uns gehen!'" (Gorelik 2021, 89)
> "There we also wait for parents who are always late, always hurrying, laden with shopping bags, always with the same voice: 'Ну, пошли!' – 'Now, let's go!'" (Transl. T.H.)

Her imperative invites us to follow our parents' advice. What allows to follow our memories? What allows our first language to enter our minds and bodies? Step by step, the first landscapes appear. Word by word, broken parts of the past rearrange themselves. Moving through nature allows me to retrace the autobiographical journey back to the Soviet Union. All the languages I learnt, all the places I loved find their way into a text. Visualisation: I see the Black Sea, I see the balconies of our flat, I see my grandparents' house. Revitalisation: I feel the smell, the taste of the food, the voices, the touch, the sunny yellow on white stone of the houses that you see on telegram channels now hit by missiles.

Exercise: As often as I need to, as often as the memory takes you there – you can go there and you can come back. Your mind practises this exercise for a year or two until the effect sinks into your body. Then your lost memory is your gained new experience. Then the destroyed houses hurt less.

Lena Gorelik's story begins in St. Petersburg: in 1992, a young girl travels with her parents, grandmother and brother to Germany. She leaves behind almost everything that connects her to her childhood. In the West, the 11-year-old realises that she is now someone else, a "foreigner".

Lena Gorelik's story is also my story and our story, the story of Jewish refugees (at least sufficiently Jewish to be accepted at the German embassy). It's a story of assimilation. What she indicates and I emphasise is the potential of deassimilation. That's where geopoetics can lead to, as I'll explain below – or dream of it.

Our story begins with a sudden change of location: we ended up in hostels for asylum seekers, felt alienated and unwelcome in Germany, were bullied at school as children without any knowledge of German, and witnessed a professional and social downfall with our parents, from which they could not free themselves as we did by writing. In the 1990s there were hardly any German courses for children, and instead of a "culture of welcome" (*Willkommenskultur*) there was often an unspoken culture of 'go home'.

The fact that Gorek's parents were engineers in Russia (like mine) counts for nothing in Germany – their Soviet certificates and diplomas are not recognised. The father in her book works as a casual labourer, the mother as a cleaner. My mother cleaned at the Humboldt University in Berlin, proudly telling declaring her daughter will not clean but study there. We read about the shame of her parents' low social status, their embarrassment in German offices and their "suffocating" love for their daughter, and how the author "reconciles" herself with her origins by writing for dignity. *Who We Are* refers to parts of German immigration history that have not been prominent in public discourse, and it also rewrites the buried and lost traditions through an image made up of multiple identities. Lena Gorelik finds a symbol for all this in a small glass cabinet which, like a reliquary, preserves the beautiful but also painful memories of her life.

I found a symbol by moving around outside in the Swiss hills. Walking, jogging, swimming in nature reminded me of the places in Crimea where I grew up. These moments were my reservoir of soothing images and memories. At least, I decided to find something comforting in them.

Literary scholars idealise literature as some migrants idealise their first home, but in fact the moments in nature have healed me much more than reading, writing and analysing. Diving into my childhood and the consequences that the forced change of places and people had on my adolescence and (im)maturity was deeply re-traumatising. After my autoethnography *Sewastopologia* (2015; Russian version 2017) was published, I couldn't say why my heart was beating like crazy for months, until I was diagnosed with a post-traumatic condition that took years to fix – outdoors.

Reading and analysing all kinds of art is a way of approaching one's own past. Besides, the practice of geopoetics turned out to be a technique to immerse the body and mind in the atmosphere of the places I missed, to turn longing towards there into a belonging to there *and* here. Mind travelling between this

adult and that child proved to be a workable compromise. Identity is constructed, right? When you get too tired of assimilating, when you see that autoethnography and oral history from your family members is just as interesting as historical sources in textbooks or bookshops, you are ready to de-assimilate. Then you understand that a large part of your target identity – being German, being successful – is a role that strives for recognition from outside. That you have learned to play this role well but you don't need to play it all the time.

Landscapes do not play. They will not greet the influential professor with a winning smile and small talk, ignoring less important people around. Instead, they welcome everyone in the same way that depends from the weather, from the time of the year and of the day. In your memory they remain with their atmosphere. In your visits back they might have changed. They mediate between there and here, between you from there and you from here.

2 Complex Trauma, There and Here

Isn't it fun to change countries? To travel from the grey, totalitarian Soviet Union to the land of freedom and chewing gum?

In the 1990s, migration felt like you will never come back. We had no social media, no cheap flights, no money. The series of losses, first and foremost the loss of money, began before the travel countries in the 1990s.

After the collapse of the socialist system in 1991, dysfunction prevailed: my family and I experienced hyperinflation, hunger, lack of drinking water and electricity, robberies. In the newspapers, radio and television: post-imperialist revanchism, nationalism, conflicts and wars, eruptive religiosity. Unemployment, poverty and crime, including homicide, skyrocketed. Psychologically, this situation led to high rates of depression and suicide. Among the social consequences was the neglect of children. As a parent myself, I know that my parents simply did not have the time and mental capacity to look after their three children. They both worked, stood in endless queues looking for food and they were worried.

While in the West the end of socialism was recognised as a progress towards democracy, my parents found themselves in the Middle Ages. Not knowing if and when you could buy food, water and clothes for your family stressed them to the moon. My mother developed hypertension, my father hypotension. One of my brothers reacted by running away, the other by starving himself until he was hospitalised. No wonder that later on, consumerism and food were always compensated with a full wardrobe and a well-stocked fridge.

The value of the Soviet wo/man has been shattered: if before they have been heroes close to the people, believers in progress, rational, good-hearted, selfless, helpful, and nourished by love of country as a sense of community, after 1991 they left the country in his millions, and those who remained acted as speculators and were called *homo sovieticus*. This title of Aleksandr Zinovev's novel of the same name (1978) devalues people from the Soviet Union. Yuri Levada also used the term prominently, explaining to his German readers that the *homo sovieticus* was a mass phenomenon without individuality, controlled by the state, primitive, unevolved and easy to manage (Lewada 1993, 9). That is why we need the Germans to educate, civilise and provide us with their ideas, products and subsidies. The modernising perspective on the barbaric Eastern Slavs has a long history. It still seems to be there, reproduced by Western and Eastern European intellectuals.

With an even wider reach, the originally Soviet author Svetlana Aleksievich, who became a Belarusian, has collected hundreds of interview excerpts with people from the Soviet Union who have left the country or who have lived in the countries that have changed in the intervening years. The result, her book *Vremia second-hand* (2013, *Secondhand time*), is a pastiche of examples of post-Soviet misery. After receiving the prestigious prize, the press and academia praised her work as therapeutic and her authorship as authentic (Horodecka 2019, 189).

For me, her docufiction remains in a cabinet in an exhibition. The author functions as an organising instance, not as a person with her own Soviet and post-Soviet autobiography. This leads to the overall impression of an uninvolved author who stands above the pieces of oral history presented. The fragmented excerpts from the interviews, about which we don't know how they were conducted, form a kaleidoscope of wounds (is this polyphony, a dialogue?). All in all, they speak to their audience with one message: everything there was and is shit. Such writing can be neither a historical documentary source for further analysis nor a constructive way of emotional work. Readers in the West may be able to put up with it, because they have enough biographical distance to this "reportage". In my opinion, her books have a more shocking effect, provoking a compensatory nostalgia that looks for all the good things in a cupboard to save them, as Gorelik does in her novel.

To summarise, the trauma of disintegration, loss and violence began for our generation, as well as our parents, older siblings, aunts and grandparents, before leaving Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Turkmenistan and other countries in the early 1990s. Additionally, it is important to note that cognitive practices like writing and reading may not be sufficient in coping with the profound social and psychological consequences of migration.

3 Magic of Landscapes

In considering literature as a kind of art therapy, I am not saying that literature and art must be useful, especially geopoetics, as I would like to introduce it here. What I am saying is that it can be part of self-development after not voluntary migration.

For someone it will be the Carpathians, for someone it will be the Caspian Sea, for me it will be the Crimea – when a landscape resonates with you, its energy appears between consciousness and subconsciousness, like a daydream: a déjà vu. Whether it is a deep breath, a small smile or a tear, such experiences provide a key to coping with self-alienation. In my opinion, we cannot heal the latter just by telling it. Narrating takes it out of you. Then it is sent away – and it is no longer part of you. Perhaps we continue to write it, writing a text in several books.

On the contrary, without any computer nor pen, being in nature alone or with your family or friends, and looking curiously for the awareness of the feelings you have in the interaction between your movement and your environment, you are performing your writing again and again. Without words. Without activating your mind, yet with calming it down. Spaziertherapie.

You know in such a moment when you feel the landscape, it caresses the sad part inside you – your soul if you like to call it this way. The more you feel it, the more you like it. Suddenly you have your lost landscape, city or house inside you. You will feel similar when you see a similar landscape or think of it. It allows you to bridge different lives. It allows you to come unstuck: as soon as you see your old, "holy" space being reminded of, as soon you stop projecting. Being in the given here and now you are free from the past. You do not need to hide it, you also do not need to rescue it, you do not need to idealise it neither your parents. You take it as it is. As it was. As they are now.

So maybe we do need to project again, in the very romantic sense, in order to survive past migrations and current dramas, previous wars and the ongoing ones.

I would like to conceptualise geopoetics in aesthetic and aisthetical terms: not only the poem, the novel or the film that deals with the culture(s) of a geographical space but also an experience in nature, in urban and rural space, whether in the forest or in a café, as long as this place can be transformed into a personal *lieu de mémoire*. Geopoetics, in my definition, refers to an engaged perception of space and its modelling (shaping, reshaping, overlapping, erasing) in artistic as well as cognitive, physical actions alone and with people whom you can trust. They can be staged publicly as art but they can also remain private, intimate "art" – your own perception. Geopoetics thus supports the process of reassem-

bling one's identity after experiences of alienation, overassimilation and inner growth. The concept of identity encompasses cultural, social, professional, gender and personal taste and choice. A feeling of "I know who I am and I do not need to tell it to others."

Geopoetics does not seem to be about gender but about appropriation, about a power setting of "let this environment be mine, let me access it, let me possess it for the moment, let me enjoy it". However, it is about gender when it comes to the re-appropriation of those spaces that allow a person to shape their identity in the way they choose. Then the selection of a cultural identity to perform can be an act of liberation from societal expectations of who one should be, similar to the liberation from traditional gender roles, biological preconditions and unhealthy family or work environments, whether patriarchal or matriarchal.

Moreover, the (artistic) appropriation of space is often motivated not only by displacement from home but also by the symbolic regulation of sexual desire and power relations. Let me recall, for example, some famous men who travelled to the Crimea and dreamed of places they were passionate about. Their famous poems, written in Russian, Ukrainian and Polish, refer to the same legend located in the Khan's palace: Alexander Pushkin's *Bakhchissaraiskii fontan* (1822, *The Fountain of Bakhchysarai*) evokes an orientalised world of a harem with a dramatic love triangle between the Tatar Khan, his Polish wife Maria and his Georgian wife Zarema. A few years later, his Polish counterpart Adam Mickiewicz, who had also been exiled to the Crimea by Czar Alexander I, dedicated some of his Polish-language *Sonety krymskie* (1825, *Crimean Sonnets*) to the landmarks of Bakhchysarai. While in Mickiewicz's poem Mary personifies Poland's fate under foreign, including Russian, rule, the Ukrainian version of the poem (*Marii Potockoi*, 1843) by the Russian-Ukrainian historian Mykola/Nikolai Kostomarov transforms the Polish prisoner into a suffering Ukrainian woman. Kitsch? Camp? Romantic? The Fontaine in Bakhchissarai remains a *lieu de mémoire* for tourists of different cultural backgrounds and for literature tourists as well.

Taken individually, each poem manifests a version of the power relations in favour of Polish, Russian and Ukrainian national desires that have been strongly expressed since Romanticism. The protagonists' relations to each other and to the local and transnational topography reveal different perspectives on transcultural (be)longings. Read as parts of a multicultural urban text of Bakhchissarai, the centre of the Crimean Tatar khanate, the three poems allow for a discussion of cultural constellations, including the Tatar and the unheard Karaim (Jews). It is the reader's perspective that allows a dialogue between a geographical space and the texts that refer to it. Such a multilingual geopoetic perspective can help to analyse a multilingual phenomenon across cultures.

If we look closely at each poem, we find an individual geopoetics. Adam Mickiewicz, the famous Polish-Lithuanian poet, missed his native landscape terribly when he was in the Crimea. The Mediterranean landscape, the Black Sea and the Chatyrdag mountain did not touch him much. He poetically insisted on his forests, marshes and childhood, which not only resonated with his lyrical self but above all with his autobiographical migration in the fourteenth sonnet "Tschatir dagh" ("The Pilgrim") in a translation by Edna Worthley Underwood (1917, 25):[1]

> I dream of distant places, pleasures dead.
> The woods of Lithuania I would tread
> Where happy-throated birds sing songs I know;
> Above the trembling marshland I would go
> Where chill-winged curlews dip and call o'er head.
> A tragic, lonely terror grips my heart,
> A longing for some peaceful, gentle place,
> And memories of youthful love I trace.
> Unto my childhood home I long to start,
> And yet if all the leaves my name could cry
> She would not pause nor heed as she passed by.

Obviously, their poems provide some relief for the authors, for their constructed lyrical selves and for their readers. This effect of relief not only fulfils expectations of romantic style, it also releases hidden desires. It may seem old-fashioned to yearn for a "home landscape". It is as old-fashioned as the idea of eternal love. In times when "everything is constructed" we can construct this missing space poetically, can't we? Certainly more often in our heads than in a poem. Reading, dreaming and perceiving – considered as meditations they all support an inner arrangement with the loss of the former environment.

It does not matter which national literature you belong to or which language(s) you use: whether it is German literature from East or West Germany, whether it is Fontane's Mark Brandenburg or Goethe's Italy, whether it is Ukrainian or Russian post-Soviet literature. In general, arts are concerned with modelling spaces and connecting them with previous literature, art and film: Petersburg, Moscow, Ural, Altay, Siberia, the Caucasus, the Carpathian Mountains and the Crimea, they all have a rich multimedial existence parallel to their geography.

In the end, it does not matter what kind of landscape it is, what countries it concerns. What matters is the magic moment that the landscape creates between the readers and the texts (films, pictures), between you and the read space, and

1 The original poem can be found at https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/sonety-krymskie.pdf, with the quoted sonnet on pp. 10–11.

even more between you and the experienced geography. That kitschy touching moment. I think we can collect these moments, and we can also use them. You can experience "landscape bathing" consciously in reading, in writing and most intensively outdoors in nature and in urban landscapes. The projection of space fosters the digestion of space change, its transformation into the current phase of life. At the very least, it can be fun. On an intellectual level, it can be a postcolonial tool for thinking about identity and a local, glocal, home-like hybrid space in our global world.

For me, such a key moment of connecting projection was induced by the lake, and moreover by a step that I had to take to the University of Zurich:

> Beim Hinaufsteigen der Treppe am Schienhutweg steigt ein Déjà-vu mit hinauf. Es hat sich in heller Freude am Bellevue geäussert, als das Erinnerungsalbum endlich klickt und ein Foto sich ergibt, das den alten den Charakter einer Serie verleiht: Ich habe genau so eine Treppe zur Schule Nr. 1 in Sewastopol erklommen, sie hat sich mitten in der Stadt auf einem Hügel befunden, und der schöne Ausblick auf den See, nun, er ersetzt, falls das jemand vergessen haben sollte, den Blick auf die berühmte Bucht, die nicht einnehmbare, die, wo im Krim-Krieg Schiffe versenkt wurden, Feinden den Zugang verwehrend. Die Postkarte: Ein morgens betrunkener Schwimmlehrer schmeisst Kinder in den Heimathafen. (Gofman 2015, 240)

> Climbing up the stairs on Schienhutweg, a sense of déjà vu comes up with me. It expressed itself in bright joy at Bellevue when the memory album finally clicked and a photo emerged that gave the old ones the character of a series: I climbed just such a staircase to School No. 1 in Sevastopol, it was in the middle of the city on a hill, and the beautiful view of the lake, well, it replaces, in case anyone has forgotten, the view of the famous bay, the impregnable one, the one where ships were sunk in the Crimean War, denying access to enemies. The postcard: A drunken swimming instructor throws children into the home harbour in the morning. (Translation by T.H.)

There are also the 20 years I spent in Berlin, a city that was supposed to be cool, artistic, edgy, multicultural, and which I experienced as a concrete wall that separated me from my friends, my language and any ability to smile. In the chapter "Zur_ich", my aesthetic and poetic solution was to actively project the layer of my first home town Sevastopol and of Berlin onto the lake of Zurich, which reminded me of a port on the Black Sea. Geopoetic excercises turn the uncontrolled process of being reminded of something by something into an active one: I remind myself of something. I evoke the poetry of the first home on another planet.

This effect disappeared with time. The less the wound cries, the more the magic goes. Just as estrangement, *ostranenie*, diminishes when a style becomes familiar, a raffinesse too foreseeable. Then writers seek new ways to surprise their readers. Similarly, if the landscape no longer speaks to you, move on. Look for the trees, the mountains, the hills, the prairies that speak to you – probably

about something else than the childhood. Where you can sit and stare and be. Where you could write poems. But you do not need to. Look for the places where you feel good, where it is enough to be there. It is not about writing, it is about being.

Such acts of appropriation hurt no one, but be careful, it can hurt you if you go there too quickly – you need distance from sessions of returning to lost places. In Switzerland, the contrast between the historically bloody Crimea and the peaceful landscapes is reassuring. Seeing a wounded place on a safe one reduces the negative energy of wars and vanity fairs.

4 Geopoetics as Entrance Ticket to the First Home

Crimea is both hell and paradise, a place of wars and a place of writers, artists, nudists, childhood and holidays. A place of hate and a place of love. Crimea was also the place where the concept of geopoetics was coined in the Eastern European context by the Ukrainian-Russian biologist, curator of the Krym Club (Krymski klub) and author Igor Sidorenko who wants to be called Sid. Around the publications he promoted, the theory and practice of written and artistically performed geopoetics grew until it was forgotten – or silenced. This geostrategically important peninsula should no longer be a place for visits and dreams but rather for bombing.

I was not supposed to go there after 2014 when Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation, although I was mentally ready to face the origins of our migration. Nevertheless, I went there with an academic alibi: I went there in search of the Crimean Club, a platform for intercultural dialogue. This return led to my travelogue *Explorations on the Edge of Europe* (*Krim. Erkundungen am Rand Europas*, 2022). The book actually traces the avoidance of dialogue. It performs the concept of geopoetics through narration and photographs. It documents how I found new friends where I lost my first ones, how I found my language, reconciling with German, and how I found my genre of essayistic meditation. The book avoids propagandistic political narratives and I do not want others to impose them on it. The period between 2014 and 2022 saw Crimea subjected to discursive marginalisation. However, one day the peninsula will be a place for relaxation, imagination, artistic practice, and multicultural hybridity again. At least in a movie, in a book and in our heads.

This book was supposed to accompany the documentary film *Crimea Between Art And Crisis* (2024), which my Swiss colleague Cyril Venzin and I made in Crimea. The material for this film was recorded either at the first Bosporan forums

in the 1990s or during our research stay in Crimea in 2016. We were looking for the history of geopoetics in Crimea, about which we were really curious.

Sid not only wrote theoretical texts on geopoetics (Sid 2017), he also founded and organised the Bosphorus Forum, one of over 200 other events and event series of Sid's so-called Crimean Club. I came across Sid's work when I was writing my PhD on contemporary Ukrainian and Russian literature. It was Sid who invited me to take the plane and to visit Crimea.

The Bosphorus Forum was a recurring festival with artistic and academic participants. They came from different countries to Simferopol, the capital of Crimea, where the Forum would begin in the Historical Museum. The group then travelled by bus to Kerch, the easternmost city between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The Forum included performances, readings, installations, drawings and social activities such as organised excursions and spontaneous walks along the beach and archaeological excavations. For Sid, geopoetics means artistic and everyday practices that draw our attention away from geopolitical power towards the aesthetics of territories.

A total of six forums took place between 1993 and 2015. They attracted dozens of writers, poets, painters, performers and interested local participants from Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Belarus but also from Western Europe, the USA and even Australia. Each time, in the face of the conflicts since the 1990s between the Ukrainian government, the Russian-speaking population and the Crimean Tatars who had returned home, this gathering pleaded for the depoliticisation of the region. For at least a week, it promoted joyful diversity instead of resentful division. Individuals from various styles and artistic schools gathered to showcase their works, read and participate in conceptual performances but most importantly to explore the cultural history of the area and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of a creative community.

For a brief moment, Crimea was the centre of the world, not the periphery of Europe. For a brief moment, Crimea's margins – Kerch and its Bosphor, the little brother of Istanbul's Bosphor – became a place of self-determination, a place with a vision of a peaceful, prosperous future. Artistic reconciliation upon the wounds of a cruel past. Crimea has already seen several major wars, including attacks from the Ottoman Empire and from Western Europe (1853–56), two world wars and a civil war after the October Revolution with brutal starvation, the deportation of Crimean Tatars and other minorities, and a collapse into poverty and crime in the early 1990s. In spring 2024, military sites in Crimea, including Sevastopol with its naval bases and Kerch with its bridge to the Russian mainland, are under daily attack from Ukrainian forces using Western European missiles.

Sid's Bosphorian Forum coincides with the ecological commitment of Kenneth White's geopoetic philosophy (White 1988). The Whito-Sidian concept has

been used by other authors and also by literary studies and human geographers (Adamek-Schyma 2012). If the geopoetic approach means analysing fiction and essays about cities, regions and landscapes, literature related to the Crimea can also be called geopoetic. The so-called Crimean literary text (*Krymski tekst*, cf. Liusyi 2003), with its rich intertextual fundus, includes several languages – Tatar, Turkish, Russian, Ukrainian, Hebrew, to name some. The parallel universe of literature remains an open space for the negotiation of political programmes and cultural identifications.

What geopoetics means in the context of the Crimean Club can be found in the statement of Sid. Born in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine), he now lives partly in Moscow and partly in Kerch, where his archive is located. Sid has been trying to move to Madagascar or India since 2022. In his commentary after the first screening of our film about "his" forum, which took place on 7 February 2023 as part of the workshop at the Collegium Helveticum, he summed it up, now with reference to the Russian war of aggression that has been going on since February 2022:

> The Bosphorus Forum has shown us all that two opposing concepts are possible in relation to Crimea. The first is the generally accepted and valid one: a relationship to the territory as an object. It then becomes an object of manipulation – aesthetic, ecological, ideological and, ultimately, geopolitical.
>
> However, the Bosphorus Forum, and with it geopoetics – a mode that we have developed in the process, a practical, projective geopoetics – assumes that there are far more connections between people and landscape, between people and territory, much stronger projections than with objects.
>
> An example of this is Maximilian Alexandrovich Voloshin, who settled in Koktebel over 100 years ago. Shortly afterwards, a piece of rock broke off near his house. We can now see Voloshin's profile in the newly created silhouette of the coast. How can this be explained? We can say: Man and landscape are mutual projections. If we think in this way, then landscapes and territories can also be understood as subjects with their historical choices, their directions of development. This also means that space can become a territory of international dialogue, where global tendencies are discussed. This was the basis of our idea to turn Crimea into a global cultural laboratory.
>
> [. . .]
>
> If we don't succeed in organising the Forum next year, then in 20 years' time, in 2043, when the Forum celebrates its fiftieth anniversary (and I would be 80 years old). Then it would be interesting to revive this project, which seems right and promising to me. The idea of this film also seems right to me. If the work of the Bosphorus Forum had not stopped in 2015, if we had continued our dialogue between intellectuals from all over the world who think differently, perhaps this war would not have happened. It divided the world. But everyone knows that it could have been prevented. (Translation by T.H.)

Spatial poetisations encourage creative work with landscapes and their meanings. The Bosphorus Forum adds social interaction as a premise. Only the meeting of participants in physical space reminds the artistic and scientific spheres as their common denominator, the desire for exchange that comes from engaging with the atmosphere of places, cultural histories and biographies – a collaborative encounter there that cannot be replaced by Zoom. Will Sid's efforts continue after the war?

For our collaborative ethnography, Cyril and I met the people who remained in Crimea after the annexation in 2014. The last forum was held in 2015. We hoped to witness another forum but its revival has not yet happened. The release of the film has not happened either. Cyril is still postponing it, afraid of negative reactions to a positive, emphatic film on Crimea.

I had to go back to experience its diversity beyond my geographically narrow memories. The peninsula's history could not be more geopolitically charged. At the same time, its multicultural layers are imbued with historic poetics: Cimmerians, Taurians, Scythians, Greeks, Romans, Goths, Sarmatians, Byzantines, Huns, Khazars, Karaites, Tatars, Venetians, Genoese, Ottomans, Russians, Ukrainians – they all claimed Crimea as their homeland. Even now, isolated by political correctness and the ongoing war, it is a multicultural place that transcends national loyalties. Crimeans see themselves first and foremost as Crimeans, крымчане. I felt I was one of them. I understood that krymchane are hardly seen or heard, unless they actively support either Russian propaganda or the Western narrative of Russian oppression of all Crimeans.

The people we talked to have been to previous forums. They spoke to us in Russian. Most of them have Russian and Ukrainian passports, some have European and Israeli passports. Are they Ukrainian, Russian, Polish or Jewish? We stopped trying to categorise mixed heritage, identities and nationalities.

Patriotic Ukrainians left the peninsula in the 1990s. People who condemn the annexation left after 2014, regardless of their passports. Those who wish to be recognised as liberal, whether in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Berlin or Zurich, adhere to the dogma of sanctions and do not visit Crimea after 2014. The same applies to most of the participants in recent forums. Famous Ukrainian writers such as Yuri Andruchovych, who was invited several times, did not want to take part in the forum on the grounds that Crimea is illegally occupied.

Going to Crimea in the time between 2014 and 2022 seemed to be a performative action under harsh political judgement. Sometimes we were called naïve. Sometimes we encountered hatred. We were a screen of projections here and there. We asked ourselves: what did these forums mean to their participants and to the local population? Looking to the future, will geopoetic efforts build a bridge from the now isolated and condemned Crimea to the rest of the world?

After 2014, the optimism of the Forum has been frozen. We hoped to witness the reincarnation of the Forum but instead the frozen state has infected us too. We were stuck. The discourse of isolation was hard to break through – we could not assess if such a journey would be dangerous. In 2019, when we finally had the money and the courage to go on another field trip, a family member died, Covid broke out, another family was born, the Russian full-scale invasion took place. All this led to a blockade of mind and body that prolonged for me in a way the shock of migration. Should we really finish the film? Would we be discriminated as Crimea-friendly? On the other hand: aren't we already performing geopoetics in our own way by visiting the traces of the Bosporian Forum, writing the book of essays, editing the film and inviting our audience to participate? And why not?

It took me years to overcome the frozen till anxious state of overassimilation, together with the fear of returning that was partly rational as I was in charge of Cyril who has never been to Eastern Europe and who was my employee in that small artistic research project. I knew I need to compare my memories with the realities of people living in Crimea instead of with books on the shelves of German or Swiss libraries. I found new colleagues and their ideas, their hope and enthusiasm, and also the ease of speaking Russian again. I gained my first language back.

My biographical as well as my academic work has been strongly influenced by geopoetics. Studying Russian and Ukrainian literature has allowed me to reconnect with my native region from an analytical distance, through the indirect route of texts, films and art, along with their contexts. This has enabled me to maintain a connection without physically returning. Texts communicate with each other rather than with their readers. However, as a reader, you can still engage by taking action, reading texts together, against each other, with each other. Kenneth White and Igor Sid have inspired me to add another text to the existing ones, to write down my travel memories and revisit the places I call(ed) home, continuing to create new memories and a new connections.

5 The End of Geopoetics

Let's examine the origins of this concept and its different interpretations. This will enable us to understand geopoetics as an academic tool for analysing the modelling of space in literature and art. This will also enable us to observe how ideas migrate between Eastern and Western Europe, between artists and academics, and how they are absorbed by various discourses – scholarly, careeristic and

political. Finally, we can see why this notion has an impact beyond documented arts as a mental tool, at least in my quasi-pantheistic experience.

Less normative than ecocriticism, geopoetics is concerned with the representation of geographical spaces in literature. Its perspective draws on poststructuralism when it assumes the made nature of space in the sense of a free "feasibility" of its re-structuring but also ignores it in texts that aim to repair ruptures of identity. In part, this involves constructive compensation for the non-experience of certain spaces, as in Herodotus (cf. Urban 2012, 144), and in part it involves the semantic co-creation of newly formed territories, as in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After being appropriated from fiction, essays and performative art, geopoetics was shortly established as an object of study and an epistemological category in Slavic literary studies (cf. Marszałek and Sasse 2010), returning back as a scholarly perspective to Moscow/Crimea (Sid and Dajs 2013). The concept has also found its way into German (cf. Schellenberger-Diederich 2006; Rohde 2007) and French (cf. Brandt 1997; Bouvet 2008) literary studies, largely independently of research on Eastern Europe. In the latter, it critically turns away from the Francocentric view in favour of transcultural literature (cf. Urban 2012, 145).

Originally, geopoetics came to prominence through the environmental awareness of the Scottish-French poet and philosopher Kenneth White. His derivation of the term can be understood as a natural, quasi-religious and esoteric worldview. For him, geopoetics is a coveted instrument of an ecological pantheism that exercises an anti-urbanist critique of civilisation (White 1988).

In addition, White's concept of geopoetics emphasises the poetic-creative engagement with experienced spaces: they should not only be preserved but also artistically renewed. In the reception of White by Eastern European writers such as Sid and the West Ukrainian writer Yuri Andruchovych, geopoetic texts and actions are intended to counteract the geopolitical power structures of the post-Cold War era. According to the "scientific" definition, which affirmatively adopts the term from artistic definitions of cultural identity, geopoetics describes its own genre of text: geopoetics interweaves political, spatial-aesthetic and biographical designs in mixed genres such as the essay and positions itself against the nation-state reorganisation of post-Soviet space (cf. Marszałek and Sasse 2010, 45).

However, the aesthetic hybridity of spatially related and biographically or politically coloured narratives is not a unique selling point. Although the interweaving of spatial and ego exploration is characteristic of the transformation period of the 1990s and 2000s, it characterises media products in liminal historical and spatial contexts in general, without being limited to Eastern and Central Europe. Sid's other activities go beyond Eastern Europe and concern Africa. Separately, the travel poetry of the contemporary poet André Velter, following White,

can be described as geopoetic (Bauer 2015, 393). For sure, a lot of other examples can be found in world literature. As in the case of ecocriticism, it is also possible to establish a canon of texts that have a spatial-aesthetic component without their authors having explicitly worked with the term.

Geopoetics is not just a descriptive category for the "typical" Eastern European way of writing. Instead, it is a global concern for literature and other arts that engages with the semantics of geographical spaces. Geopoetics, in a narrow sense, can be understood as a text-immanent reading method that focuses on the text's spatial representation processes. As such, it examines means of evoking and shaping space, motifs, topoi, mythopoetic strategies, narrative patterns, chronotopoi, strategies of semantic spatial charging, the modelling of boundaries and the dynamics or statics of space (cf. Frank 2010, 27). This perspective is productive in literary spatial studies and is increasingly linked to cultural and media studies.

Thus, geopoetics has jumped from a self-description for literature and creative actions to a name for an academic label and back again: the question of geospatiality in literature generates corresponding literary responses with territorial references that seem to be in response to political events or were even explicitly commissioned. Yuri Andruchovich, for example, has staged his writing as geopoetic (cf. 2003; 2007) in order to suggest that (West) Ukraine is a landscape that culturally belongs to Europe and in the future to the EU, which he legitimises in terms of spatial history. The Russian discourse is concerned with the rediscovery of local spatial representations, such as the Ural text (cf. Abashev 2000). Both support the national cultural ideology through regional valorisation. Interdisciplinar links, e.g. to studies of nationalism and regionalism and to urban anthropology, are obvious here, but have not yet been pursued to any great extent.

While Igor Sid called his umbrella "organisation" the Crimean Club in analogy to the Club of Rome, the project of the Tyumen Club of Careless Travellers, also called the Club of Emotional Journeys, combines art, ecotourism and local history in the Siberia of the 2010s. Its young members organise community-building events in the sense of local anthropology (kraevedenie) in the city and nearby villages for a wide audience. Participants are encouraged to experience the power of the places, to write geopoetic texts during such excursions and to develop positive feelings about their hometown or region: "Writing reports, however, in which the main focus was on capturing and describing the subjective meaning and beauty, was a mandatory requirement for participation in the trips. Thus, there was an intellectual and aesthetic development of the landscape, its intimisation, overcoming the stereotypical and mechanical perception of one's own existence." (Bogomyakov 2017, 109)

Geopoetics is a concept found in literary studies, deriving from prose, poetry, performance, and land art. What is particularly intriguing is that it can also be

seen as an artistic-social practice rooted in the fundamental principle of ethnography: sensory experience, evocative (re)writing and meaningful understanding, with an interest in local history, phenomenological perception and joy that can be shared with a community of participants: what distinguishes geopoetics in Sid's version is its play with toponym meanings, inclusive accent.

In summary, Sid's Club of Crimea performed the concept of geopoetics, which Slavic literary studies appropriated to label the narrative accentuating, modeling and reinventing of geographical places in novels, essays and documentary prose (Marszalek and Sasse 2010). After 2014, these literary scholars choose to ignore Crimea and to dismiss pleas for peace as naive.

After conducting research on the peninsula with Cyril, I turned my Crimea from a *lieu de mémoire* to a Kraftort. Afterwards, I no longer felt at home at my department because of the omnipresent power games that very much reminded me of Soviet power oppression to all the people under the few privileged ones while at the same time subversive soviet and contemporary Russian art has been the most popular research topic there. However, this was part of my experimental journey to explore the consequences of such a return. We should have the freedom to travel to our childhood homes, meet indigenous people there – intellectuals but not only them – and engage with their ideas, even if they are considered politically controversial or less progressive than our Western ones.

Long story short, back in Switzerland, my colleagues at that time dismissed our artistic research as naive, even though it was them who had appropriated Igor Sid's geopoetics 15 years previous. To make matters more absurd, I have found out that Sid's work was excluded from an academic project on performance art in Eastern Europe, arguing that poetic language cannot be used to discuss Crimea during times of war. During times of war, ignorance and opportunism become even more performative strategies for self-marketing.

Sympathising with people in or from Eastern Europe, seeking connections with territories and locals, especially on the fringes of Europe, may seem naïve today. However, it leads to an open result, even if there is a risk of getting stuck, of an identity turn, of not finding a willingness for dialogue or of being dismissed at home. The latter happens all too often anyway, even when the issues are not politicised. Such acts of stabilisation of power are empty, they are above all a ritual: they mark the area of superiority within an existing hierarchy. They tell you that you have to give in, adapt and play the game. What geopoetic art and studies are about, for me, is the opposite. This is also what migration management is about.

6 Integrating Your Pasts

Geopoetics helped me to close the "gestalt" of migration. Learning from this, I would like to differentiate the concept as follows:

1) geopoetics applies some narrative, rhetorical, medial means of modelling space in art; accordingly, as described above, a methodological approach on conceptions of space provides insights into how such works are organised and on their historical dimensions;

2) community-building performative actions like the Bosphorus Forum, even if it exists as an idea of the past for the future;

3) individual performative actions that stimulate a state of meditation, such as travelling, walking, reading, writing. Here I would like to emphasise the role of conscious projection of places, atmospheres and of going into memory with all the senses and, if you are ready, even to follow the memory back revisiting the first place.

4) Meditative projection allows you to see the past partly again, you visualise it. You may hear something from there and then, together with some olfactory and haptic reminiscences. This process can be valuable if it happens within a controlled framework of zooming in and out. Then it is not overwhelming. You decide how much you want to remember – you can stop and mentally return to the here and now. As long as it happens step by step, projective micro-geopoetics allows old and new spaces and bodily sensations to connect. It is a punctual beaming back and beaming the past into the present, transforming it into a present entity.

5) It does not replace a particular way of life but it allows you to come home and feel that you have had several homes. They are all yours, your history and your town, your forest, your sea, your hill, your family and friends even if you are far away from them, even if it is a cut forever. You do not cut them off, you do not have to choose between then and now. It is a celebration of childhood as part of you and as a perspective: naivety, curiosity, authenticity are allowed. You do not have to be a successful somebody to enjoy looking around for impressions that you respond to. At the same time it is a party with you as an adult. By selective projecting and "landscape bathing" you re-evoke your first loves and fall in love with the new environment.

6) This perception is fostered by travelling through your memories and by arts. One encounters oneself when reading the migration stories of others. I am somehow Lena Gorelik. She is me. We even have the same hair!

7) Space meditations can be introduced through physical activities such as walking, yoga and jogging. For me, jogging through the hills and lakes of Switzerland was like meeting a perfect version of the Crimea. I was no longer playing the role of a particular cultural identity. I felt as if the images of all the countries I had lived in were overlapping, creating something hybrid, alive, and actually safe and beautiful, waiting for a new chapter.

Trauma does not know time but it does know space. Certain landscapes, cities, even glimpses of places and their names can trigger anxiety: they capture the felt memory over long and short periods of time. Involuntary memories can be interrupted by focusing on the space around you. This can be achieved by engaging your senses, for example by touching a nearby object, smelling a leaf or flower, or listening to the sounds of animals, people and vehicles passing by.

My idea was to follow this presence of remembered places that suddenly appear photographically sharp. To be there again, briefly. To allow memory to evoke pieces of the past up to a certain point and then to change the focus. To bring the criminal post-Soviet Crimea to a well-functioning Switzerland, where one can finally recover from the 1990s and the migration to Germany and the family drama it caused. Actually, this kind of self-exploration could help people in general who are suffering from smaller or bigger traumas. Bathing in the landscape makes the memory flow actively (in the imagination but also in writing, filming, telling). When you stop its involuntary flow you work – a little – with the unconscious, with what you really want and need. The resulting text, walk, run gives you a new experience, a new memory.

But first you have to go there again, step by step, regulate the memory and the return to the present. This can take much longer than writing the text. Deleting parts of it. Re-writing. Going back a bit, zooming in and out, and accepting that the process may absorb you regardless of time.

Displacement is not just physical, such as due to war, but also an existential condition of being uprooted from one's familiar environment. This is often a narrative condition for a character in fiction. The Russian word for displacement is "peremeshchenie". Therefore, "peremeshchennye prostranstva" refers to displaced spaces of one's own subjective perception. By looking at them, you can explore your different feelings about them.

In conclusion, regular imaginative use of geopoetical exercises can reduce post-traumatic stress disorder caused by migration (for more information on the latter, see Johnson et al. 2022). You can document, remember, or even intervene in desired territories using creative techniques such as montage, pastiche, soundover and stream of consciousness. This allows you to create a mental space that is entirely your own, free from the constraints of lost territories, violently shifted borders and the insecurity of permanent incongruence between state, nation and

cultural orientation in post-imperial territories, and free from the discoursive projections of Western policies.

7 De-Assimilation

The alternative ideology of first places, first foods, first loves was also a response to cultural violence. This happens when people with more symbolic power than you tell you which culture you belong to or not – either it concerns your ethnic, political or knowledge culture. My search for our family's Jewishness and Russianness ("russkost", in German a wordplay with "Russian food") coincided with a difficult time for Russian culture as well as for Russian studies.

Geopoetics as a tool of migration management is about a perspective that transcends the process of assimilation including its dictated political correctness that dares to look into suppressed (repressed) biographical "corners".

My writing allowed me to replace the loss of a sense of community with a kind of manifesto: *Sewastopologia* proposed an apology for Crimea in Western Europe as long as we want to see it as part of Europe. The landscape imaginations in this book helped me to transcend the German language by a language of associations between places, between times and between languages, as well as between foods. A leitmotif is the idea of my own Café Osthirn with all the food from my childhood and with readings there. It was also a manifestation of liberation from the Germanisation of Berlin. The searching for the right word, which is never right because it is German, because it is language, because it is memory, documents a process of integrating the "russkost" at least into the narrative.

This autoethnography follows the memory as well as the wordplays, the sounds – alliterations, assonances, associations between German and Russian – instead of a strict plot. Similarities are a bridge and at the same time they indicate that it is not the same. *Sewastopologia* is an apology for who we are, in this sense similar to Gorelik's novel of the same name. We are people of various languages, countries, foods and people of complex trauma. The book is a farewell to the expectation of being German only and the expectation of following the tradition of Bildungsbürgertum.

Explorations attempts to say: spaces are, they just are, with and without meaning, with and without you, but you can live outside of them and they can live within you. In *Explorations*, I also deal with traumatic elements of migration in a language of metaphors, puns, associations, achronological anecdotes and narrative stuck, shifting from details evoking memory to vagueness, from emotional to distant. Both books are passionate about geographical space(s), using this pas-

sion and even obsession to soothe the dilemma of loss and regain. They show a Crimea of Soviet childhood, perestroika, of imagination and of an overwhelming regional history with multiple collective traumata, a unique multiculturality and its multilingual representations in the arts.

Hence, I propose the state of being touched by the landscape for every displaced person. Geopoetics has inspired me to come to terms with migration from Ukraine to Berlin, from Berlin to Switzerland, from overidentifying myself with being German and with academic work to enjoying the diversity of my identity. First of all, it turned out to be an emancipation from what others think, and also a remigration to a comfort zone of speaking Russian without any national feelings.

All migration stories are individual. But most of them also have a collective dimension, probably even a comparable structure. In this universal narrative of migration, I think the liberation from external expectations – and what you think they might me – is crucial. It is not only about coming to terms with migration but also with the burden of becoming "somebody". The most measurable one will be highly valued in terms of money and recognition. That is why we have to become lawyers, doctors, professors, entrepreneurs or at least teachers. And this is where I see geopoetics as a means to free oneself from external parameters of value and to gain understanding for one's own story, including the struggle for compensation, attention and recognition. One step is to re-live, re-visualise and re-experience the first landscapes, and with them the first you, the first smells, and sounds, and to encounter them from the position of an exploring adult.

To conclude, I would like to recall the steps of my de-assimilation journey that geopoetic perception has induced. During this process I have moved away from its analysis to its implementation as an awareness exercise and a writing technique:

1) *Sewastopologia* led to a rehabilitation of the Jewish surname on my mother's side: Gofman (re-Germanised version: Hofmann) was hidden behind more Russian-Slavic names in our family. So I chose Gofman as my "pseudonym", which is actually a pseudo-pseudonym. It is a Russianised version of my mother's name. It is the name that my Jewish grandfather who grew up in Belarus used to hide behind his wife's Russian name all his life. The return to a hidden name reflects above all the desire for a comprehensible family history. But all that is gone, the grandparents are dead and the parents do not talk when they are asked, only when they suddenly want to talk. This, in turn, makes the name fictional. It stands for biographical possibilities and for lost stories. Its choice is also a reaction to being perceived as Jewish (philo-Semitism) as well as to anti-Semitism – a kind of "well, then I'll see how it is with my Jewishness and take this name first". There is

not much more as this surname; the narration remains on the surface of a completely repressed Jewish identity.

2) The "russkost" leitmotif allows for a deeper glance, for trying out a provocative simultaneity, a cultural feeling of diversity that includes the de-valuated, overpoliticised "Russianness" or how you might call the things, memories and feelings around Russian language, somehow Soviet food, and family biographies' connections to Soviet and post-soviet histories. It allows for abandoning the compulsion to decide in either/or. Comparisons, associations and the wide surface of languages establish connections between the familiar and the unfamiliar; it allows a simultaneity of the foreign and the own.

3) Documentation is a shaky business, it slips. Even where I consciously wanted to be precise and serious and documentary, it suddenly seemed absurd to me, funny, ridiculous, sad, hopeful. In writing, the real is fictional and the written is real because both are seen before the inner eye and experienced imaginatively – not much else, medially conveyed by and to oneself. The book does not make this distinction, it assumes something in-between, it moves between realities; it pushes the written reality into the lived reality, just as it tries to push the lived "facts" (key points, names, dates) into the text as markers of the authentic, the felt, the experienced. The result: documentary cornerstones and metaphorical spaces in between.

4) Leaving Germany as an adult, enlarging and diversifying my family by remarrying a younger man of mixed ethnicity who considers himself Italian – perhaps this was a kind of realisation of a self-fulfilling prophecy: In order to recover, I needed the idealisation of Switzerland. For me, I decided, it had to be a place of growth, not a prison, as Dürrenmatt and Frisch said. In fact, it was easier to say that I came from the former Soviet Union, because people here breathe a sigh of relief when I tell them I am not German (they do not like Germans very much, and they do not have the heavy history with Eastern Europe that Germans do). It was in Zurich that I began to write about Crimea as I remembered it, and as the majority of Crimeans made up their minds to belong to it, in subversive resistance to the newspapers that seemed to know everything better, and to all the new Eastern Europe experts with a sudden deep specialisation in Ukraine. The opposite of idealisation is much more difficult: the professor who introduced me to Sid's geopoetic concept by transferring it to Slavic literary studies excluded this episode from their own work. I, on the other hand, cannot help continuing it, and for me it is also the acknowledgement of biographically driven research that has a positive effect on my health. It is not strategically wise, but it feels right. Is it possible to reconcile a career strategy with an emphasis on emigration from the

USSR? Looking at the latest books by the professor who supported me to the point of dropping me because of my Crimean past, I had the impression that their main interest was in strategy. If we all have our biographical research topics, this one is about power, the idea of controlling what people (might) think, while celebrating Bakhtin's ideal of polyphony and bashing Putin's system. The impression whispers: they use the same power strategies they criticise in their books. They use it in their imperial, authoritarian and "alpha" male way of making careers, in their style of writing and arguing, in their so-called promotion of young researchers and in their way of "leading" in general. It is taboo to name it as long as you have benefited or are benefiting from it. But the Kremlin also lives on the Olympus of Slavic studies. Putin lives in the patriarchs and matriarchs. In their alliances, in their institutions, in their strategies of silencing, in their distribution of breadcrumbs, in their buying of loyalties, in their betrayals, in all the mafia-like mechanisms. . . impression, you are certainly fiction. What can I know about other people? Let your own experience be your most reliable source. So part of my migration from over-assimilation was the book in which I tried to preserve the memory of my childhood, together with an exclamation mark on German migration policy: Slavs and Jewish Slavs were a kind of second-class citizens in the great tolerant multicultural Berlin of the 1990s! When I moved to Switzerland, I was reminded that I was a migrant, now a double one. It turned out to be a relief not to be under the pressure of Germanisation. In time, it became a relief not to be under the pressure of academisation – the feeling of having and being enough without the approval of professors from the Olympus. In the end, it was the feeling of freedom that I had missed most after leaving the Crimea, including the freedom to choose my own affiliation and not to be told that I was either a Ukrainian, a Jew, a German or a "satellite of the Slavic Department", even though I had contributed the most ideas and output year after year.

5) Travelling back, overwriting the memories with impressions from there two decades later.

6) I have started to speak Russian outside of my inner family with authors all over the world.

7) I changed my academic writing style to essay writing. I became interested in artistic research and I believe that there is such a thing as academic art. I became interested in the cultural history of the Crimea and the Black Sea region. I became interested in the knowledge cultures of Eastern European studies – largely a lacuna.

I realised that I was postponing this essay because the post-traumatic work of writing never ends. Because it is difficult to return to it. Because my mind tells me: it is already written. It is out, it is gone. Then it feels egocentric to write a reflection on something like geopoetics at a time of war between Russia and Ukraine – countries that I deal with as a literary scholar, countries that I am culturally connected to. In the hope that it might help other people, I have looked at my autoethnographic projects to highlight the crucial moments of my migration history and how migration impacts my perception in performative, poetic and academic terms.

In order to delve into things I've written out of my head, I could imagine teaching in a university, where controversial debates are once again welcome, without an ideologically given truth. I could imagine giving a lecture on women's migration literature. Isn't lecturing, the solid and even authoritarian role of a university teacher, also a strategy for stabilising the ego that has been shaken by migration between countries, between social levels, between traditional gender roles? Isn't academic language a suitable meta-language to gain control over the amorphous wound or a deeper insecurity? An opportunity to speak and write about oneself in a disguised way, with a guaranteed recognisation, pretending not to be writing about anything personal at all? Is playing the game in academia a particular symbolic repetition of the identity transition that moving countries in the 1990s required from you?

The substitute home of academia is fading. It is no longer the right time for Russian studies, nor for nuanced Ukrainian studies. You cannot criticise an author whose hometown is being bombed. You cannot read Dostoyevsky without thinking of the war, states Oksana Sabuschko (2022).

My autoethnographic journey with geopoetics has led me from (over)assimilation to emancipatory de-assimilation. From becoming German to getting out of it, to moving on. Travelling back has been a process of research: who is my family, what do I know, why do I know so little, what is Crimea, what is polyphony when intelligent people refuse to talk to each other, what is Ukraine today and what is happening with Russia, why do I know what I know and why do people there tell different things and why is discussion no longer possible, why is it not even possible to organise a Bosphorus Forum at the Black Sea?

Finally, geopoetics helps me to endure cognitive dissonance. After 2014, in parallel with assimilation pressures and polarised positions on Crimea, I was confronted with the postmodern aesthetics of blurred boundaries, deconstructed essentialism and fragmented narratives. In addition, the postcolonial discourse has gained popularity in Slavic Studies. Homi Bhabha (1994) stresses the importance of so-called "third spaces", blurred identities and all the surrounding ambiguities.

This is fine as long as you are not considering yourself a krymchanka and as long as you do not go to Crimea to talk to the homo sovieticus-like people there.

Nevertheless, the ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches appeal to me as productive ways of a) integrating an Eastern European background into one's everyday life as a Western woman, b) suggesting more democratic rather than authoritarian research methods for Slavic studies, and c) raising awareness of the actually very productive connection between biography and research, rather than hiding "problematic" parts of biographical narratives.

As I argue, assimilation also touches on our academic practices. For example, we often ignore or diminish the knowledge of colleagues in Eastern Europe, their methods and ways of working. We expect them to assimilate to our way of thinking, also in terms of research.

As the Slavic literary scholar Klavdia Smola suggests, strategies of habitus affirmation prevail in "asymmetrical epistemologies" and in "epistemological violence against the subject of our research":

> Is it viable to conceptualize a "third space" of scholarly perspective using expanded analytical tools and a differentiated, more dialogical theoretical approach? It is not about detecting a higher or a lower level of existing research tools inside or outside the (former) geopolitical boundaries, but rather about the incompatibility of our existing approaches. It is unconscious, because it is also about the prestige of writing this way and not another way, about scholarly authorities, established methodological schools (for example originating in the philosophy of deconstruction becoming an overall scientific tool in humanities since the 1990s), and even stylistic and rhetorical habits – closely related to Bourdieu's habitus, shared by the people with a common educational background – that offer us the reputation to which we aspire in our professional community and publications in distinguished university presses. (Smola 2024)

Ultimately, it is about symbolic capital, and this may be particularly necessary for us, adult migrant women in academia, to secure what are often structurally precarious positions.

In recent years I have had dreams in which I was reading unpublished works by Bulgakov. The strangest dream came at the end, when my closest colleague said to me: "Don't play the victim!" In these dreams I heard my professors, the established people from the Olympus, who promote polyphony, democracy and leftism, telling me to translate, although it had been agreed beforehand that I would moderate a reading with Ukrainian authors (they were afraid of my questions to them although I had prepared and sent them only non-political questions beforehand). I heard them telling me to do inappropriate research because I had gone to Crimea after 2014 to talk to people there. In another dream I heard them telling me to write the way they wanted me to write. In another dream I was forced to give a lecture on Ukrainian literature, even though I had no time to pre-

pare it because of my baby, and after I had prepared the lecture they suddenly forbade me to give it the day before, after someone told them that I was not against the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In another dream I heard them telling me that I would no longer receive funding ("you are no longer funded") while at the same time they were giving good jobs to fake smiling people. In another dream I was organising a reading and discussion with writers from the former Yugoslavia and those from Ukraine and Russia about the wars, but it was interrupted by a professor from the Olymp who shouted that it was "Putin-like".

I found myself writing a proposal for a project on "The End of Russian Studies. Cultures of knowledge in times of war" and one on "Biography Work: Ukrainian and Russian Migrants in South Caucasus".

I will continue to seek dialogue with people and places and among them. Perhaps I will organise the next Bosphorus Forum in the diaspora with Sid.

Emancipation is holistic. It resonates with being the woman you want to be and thinking the way you have reasons to think, not the way the peer group expects you to think, to act and to write. Perhaps the interruption of an academic career was a high price to pay for this freedom, but it feels right. The same feeling as when I sat down on the shore of Lake Zurich after moving from Berlin.

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