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The Transnational Family Novel as Memory Form: Mnemonic Migration in Marina Frenk and Sasha Marianna Salzmann

Introduction

Historical novels as a mobile or exportable form play an essential role in the migration of memory (Rigney 2005, 25–26). The family novel is one subgenre of historical fiction that can invoke individual and collective historical experiences that occurred in one country and let them resonate with contemporary experiences in another. As a genre, the family novel shapes memories and imbues them with literary knowledge that transcends national literatures (Dimock 2007). The family novel can be seen as the preferred genre for conveying mnemonic migration and for navigating fraught historical and transnational identities, and the transnational family novel fuses local language and literary genre traditions from, say, German, English, and Russian with the extraterritorial experience, which may be Soviet, Jewish, post-dictatorial, or migrant. In the opinion of Franco Moretti (2013), it is the genre, rather than the content, that is truly transnational. Authors writing a family novel can apply an established genre to give voice to the unique experience of transnational families and to multiply the perspectives on history and memorial cultures. The family novel comes with its own genre memory in different literatures, as Russian authors evoke the novels of Tolstoy and Dovlatov, which serve as "'contacts' with the genre" (Morson and Emerson 1990, 295–297) that add to the meta-narrativity of the books, while German authors refer to Thomas Mann and Walter Kempowski.

The texts discussed in this article are those created by Jewish authors born in or after the Soviet Union whose families hailed from the former Pale of Settlement, which spans parts of today's Baltic states, Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine that were later incorporated in the Soviet Union, and who emigrated to Germany, the US, or Israel from the 1980s onwards. The family novel here is not a metaphor for a greater national collective but designates a place where identities are shaped by migration, exile, and alterity and a shared cultural history. Contemporary literature by these authors does more than recreate a family's historical and migration-

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al trajectory in fiction, as it also engages with different attitudes towards history and different concepts of Jewish identity. Prominent examples are Alina Adam's *Nesting Dolls* (2020), Boris Fishman's *A Replacement Life* (2014), Marina Frenk's (*A Very Long Time Ago and Not Even True* (*ewig her und gar nicht wahr*, 2020), Lena Gorelik's *Who We Are* (*Wer wir sind*, 2021), Jan Himmelfarb's *Star Divination* (*Sterndeutung,* 2015), Katja Petrowskaja's *Maybe Esther* (2018, *Vielleicht Esther*, 2014), and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Glorious People* (2024, *Im Menschen muss alles herrlich sein*, 2021). They are representative of an ever-growing corpus of texts in English and German, and also in Russian since the family novel as a form of memory also appears in contemporary Russophone literature that explores transnational memories, as is evident in Sergei Lebedev's *The Goose Fritz* (2022, *Gus Fric,* 2018), Maria Stepanova's *In Memory of Memory* (2021, *Pamiati Pamiati*, 2017), or Lyudmila Ulitskaya's *Jacob's Ladder* (2019, *Lestnitsa Yakova,* 2015) (Tippner 2019b).

The transnational family novel as a memory form moves between story and history. These novels weave historical and contemporary storylines and meander between Germany, the US, and the Soviet Union, and also through modern Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Russia, dislocating the past and locating it elsewhere. Transnational family novels bring different historical experiences into contact and translate them, relying on fiction where history fails. They are rooted not only in the migration of memory but also in the effects of migration itself. The parents in these novels are doubly victimised, first as former citizens of a now defunct authoritarian state and then again as migrants. Their children acquire the new language in the country of destination much faster than the parents and then serve as translators or interpreters for them, and the trouble the parents have in adapting to the new circumstances strongly affects the generational order and reverses the power balance between parents and children. It is no coincidence that many of the narrators in these stories work with language and are professional fabulists, artists, writers, translators, or journalists. They focus on aspects of the Soviet and post-Soviet past like antisemitism, the Great Terror, and the Gulag, but also on the Holocaust by Bullets of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union, invoking a history that is less present in the Western public discourse and stressing its significance for the protagonists in the novels. Tracing family histories is not straightforward for these authors since the thorny Soviet past often obfuscates family histories. While family histories written in Russian are often conceived of as counter-histories (Tippner 2019b, 203), the transnational versions in English or German often strive rather for self-understanding or to give voice to experiences and memories that are marginalised in the culture of translocation.

So these transnational family novels reconstruct a family past that has taken place not only a long time ago but also in another country, another society and an-

other language. The authors often opt for a meta-memorial and translational approach, stressing the communicative aspects of memory transmission and omission, since family secrets are as important as the stories that are told. They also stress what is lost in translation, highlighting different means of expression, and presenting the reader with different forms of mnemonic migration. Commemoration of family histories invariably leads to hybrid forms of attachment and belonging in these texts.

The family novel and mnemonic migration

The family novel or family chronicle as a memory form makes use of the position of families as "actors in the historical process", as the historian Paul Ginsborg (2014, xiii) noted. Since the fall of communism, the genre has steadily gained in popularity in Russian texts, as well as in English and German texts, with authors exploring the relationship between individual history and collective history in times of radical change. Many transnational family novels take the writer's family history as their starting point, trying to reconstruct the cultural context that shaped their grandparents, their parents, and themselves, even if they barely remember anything about it directly. Most of these texts are written by authors who emigrated as children with their families from the Soviet Union, Ukraine, Russia, or Belarus to Germany, which is a biographical point that they share with their protagonists.[1]

The family novel's status was complicated in Soviet times, not least because the status of families in the Soviet Union was complicated. One of the defining aspects of Soviet family politics was the immense pressure put on family structure in the times of societal transformation and terror since "there could be only one primary allegiance and it was to the state, not the untrustworthy family" (Ginsborg 2014, 417). Focusing on family matters and family history could thus be seen as disloyal, individualistic and bourgeois. Starting from straight after the Russian Revolution, collective violence and persecution fragmented families and often destroyed the natural generational order. The (il)logic of persecution confronted family members with the tragic choice of whether to associate themselves with the party line and protect their personal safety or to stay loyal to their loved

1 This is a generational pattern that also applies to transnational authors writing in English like Boris Fishman, Irina Reyn, or Gary Shteyngart. Like their German-language counterparts Lena Gorelik, Olga Grjasnowa, Jan Himmelfarb, Slata Roschal, or Vladimir Vertlib, they explore complicated questions of identity in their novels about different aspects of Soviet history ranging from the siege of Leningrad and the Great Terror to the Holocaust and antisemitism.

ones and risk persecution. The creation of literary genealogies also had to contend with the challenge that pre-revolutionary grandfathers and grandmothers often did not fit easily into the communist genealogy. The same holds true for transnational families. Transnational or rather non-Russian affiliations, be they Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, or other, were a cause of discrimination and sometimes persecution, especially in Stalin's times.[2] Thus it was only during late socialism that transnational and ethnic family chronicles or novels gained prominence again, with a few exceptions like the works of Aleksandra Brushtein and Frida Vigdorova, since these novels allowed historical events that were often suppressed in public discourse, like state terror, the Gulag, or the devastation by hunger, to be highlighted in a private frame. The late Soviet and post-Soviet rise of the family novel is a part of the new-found interest in memoirs and fictional texts that try to come to terms with the Soviet past (Paperno 2009; Balina 2015). In its transnational generational guise, the genre is primarily motivated by the wish of children to understand the world their grandparents and parents came from. Gaining a deeper understanding of Soviet history means that the children also gain a deeper understanding of their parents. A secondary motivation is to integrate the specific post-Soviet perspective into the memorial cultures of Western European literatures. These novels recount family events alongside Soviet and post-Soviet histories that are rarely remembered in Western European literatures, thus enriching, and diversifying the knowledge of readers about European history.

Despite the pressure on real families and the attempts to weaken the ties within the family unit, the family served as a core metaphor and model for conceptualising the multinational Soviet Union. Soviet discourse "focused on primordial attachments of kinship and projected them as the dominant symbol for social allegiances" (Clark 2000, 114).[3] The "symbolic family" of Soviet ethnic groups and nationalities was built around "fathers", who were political leaders and mentors in places of work, and "sons", who were the young guard. The Soviet family order placed Russians as the more senior members of the Soviet ethnic family, and they were mainly described as benevolent older brothers. The focus on "ethnic brotherhood" (Clark 2000, 118) may also explain why generational differences receded into the background. Despite the horizontal organisation of a nation of brothers, the ethnic axiology placed Russians on the top, and other nationalities below them, with Jews, Germans and Central Asian ethnic groups at the bottom.

2 Olga Lavrenteva's graphic novel *Survilo* can be seen as an example for writing transnational family histories in a Russian context, featuring memories of persecution due to nationality (Tippner 2024).

3 Katerina Clark points out that "leaders became 'fathers' […], the national heroes, model 'sons', the state a 'family'" (2000, 114).

Though this master narrative has long been discarded, its after-effects are still visible in the geography of post-Soviet family narratives and language choices, and in how history is constructed and translated into other languages and literary contexts. The authors who were children of Soviet Jews who lived in the periphery, like Grjasnowa from Azerbaijan, Frenk from Moldova, Salzmann and Himmelfarb from Ukraine, or Friedmann from Belarus, grew up with this mindset and continue to criticise it through their literature. Although they were all born outside Russia proper, Russian and not Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Yiddish was the language of choice for their parents.

I believe it is no coincidence that almost all the authors who use the family novel as a genre template write from a peripheral standpoint that involves migration or dislocation. That these family histories are grounded in diasporic and migrational experiences and internal displacements imbues the narration with a degree of "exterritoriality" (Kilcher 2002)[4] both before and after emigration from the Soviet Union, which is typical for hyphenated Jewish literatures. This disintegration process was set into motion by the Great Terror and the Second World War and exacerbated by exile and migration, which further dispersed family members. The spatial and temporal distancing from emigration and the collapse of the Soviet Union combine with fictionalisation to enable the narrativisation of these family histories. Authors like Salzmann, Frenk or Himmelfarb situate their protagonists simultaneously across German and Soviet or post-Soviet memory cultures in Russia or Ukraine, allowing them to assess and reassess family histories within different cultural frames. They ask their readers to reflect upon their vantage point over history and think differently about their preconceived memories. The family is, in this context, the main locus of the transmission of disputed and conflicted memories.

Most literary theories situate family-focused narratives at the intersection between history, life-writing, and fiction or autofiction. The genre-dividing line between various autobiographical novels and family-centred autofictions is often difficult to draw, but in any case these fictions use "the family as the individual's personal connection to history, as the vehicle for the transmission of tradition and heritage" (Mason 1981, 18). Mason states: "The family […] [novel] treat[s] the responses the members of a family make, [to crisis but also to the] change of time. The family [novel] stratifies time in an almost geological fashion, generation by generation, and this stratification becomes […] a structural device […]" (1981, 2). As noted above, the natural familial and generational order was fractured in the

4 Kilcher uses this term for the German-Jewish experience, but it holds true for the Jewish experience in Russian literature, too. The literature on Russian-Jewish authors does not usually stress this point as much though, see Murav 2011.

Soviet Union, and this is apparent in Frenk's and Salzman's texts, which are written from a post-Soviet, transnational generational standpoint that they share with other authors. Even so, family history proves to be a uniquely suitable device for writing the Soviet-Jewish historical experience into German or other literatures.

In addition to the fracturing of the family structure in the Soviet Union, migration creates a complex contemporaneity of historical narratives. The novels use different mnemonic templates to access the family histories. Frenk presents the reader with a lived and inhabited family memory that is passed on orally in a seemingly uninterrupted flow, layering story upon story, while Salzman shows us a family memory that is suppressed and must be researched in books to resurface again.[5] In all the texts, the geological strata result in layers of family lore and memories, documents and documentation, and historical events that invade the private sphere. The main disruptive historical events are the Second World War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent decade of transformation and upheaval. Against this backdrop, the post-war Soviet years, especially late socialism, are viewed by contrast as a time of peace and security. The narrators use documents like photo albums or letters, and political events like the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the military conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or the annexation of Crimea to start to excavate their family history and its secrets.

Like the author herself, the first-person narrator of Frenk's debut *A Very Long Time Ago and Not Even True*, Kira Liberman, was born in Moldova in 1986 and came to Germany with her Russian-Jewish parents in 1993. The autobiographical foundation of the novel is underlined in the dedication, which reads: "I am grateful to my dispersed family and its stories which I transformed" (Frenk 2020, 235),[6] stressing at once the fictionality as well as the factuality of her writing.[7] Reflections on Kira's own past of emigration from Moldova, arrival in the Ruhr region, her crises as a painter, her first relationships and a traumatic miscarriage, her fraught relationship with the father of her son, and her role as a mother, are interspersed with episodes from the lives of her grandparents and parents under fascism and communism. In dream-like passages, Frenk superimposes the experiences and catastrophes of her family with her own life and traumatic experiences in a time frame that runs from Moldova in the late 1930s to present-day Berlin and the suburbs of Haifa. Both the past and the present are linked by motifs of homelessness and loss and the search for identity and belonging. Like the German third-gener-

5 Salzmann's and Frenk's novels could also be classified as "autobiographically based generational novels" (Fulda and Jaeger 2019, 9–14).

6 All translations from German in this chapter are mine.

7 It may be noted that the author links the autobiographical and the literary in the paratext too, citing family members as well as authors as source and inspiration (Frenk 2020, 235).

ation authors recounting the stories of their grandparents who were Nazi perpetrators or Jewish survivors, these transnational authors see the origin of their own identity troubles in the lacunae in their family history, epistemologically and aesthetically linking memory and identity in their writing, while also addressing more contemporary issues of gender roles. To understand her parents, the writer reads historical research and witness accounts. In the end she is none the wiser but has got closer to her parents and transcended the generational estrangement. Even so, she wonders what these emigré parents see "when they stare through their net curtains with their Soviet eyes into the streets and backyards of a medium-sized East German town. Why they tilt their heads to the side. Why they wear those clothes. That make-up." (Salzmann 2024, 185).

Sasha Marianna Salzmann's second novel *Glorious People* tells the stories of four women. They are Lena, who witnesses the collapse of the Soviet Union and eventually emigrates to Germany with her Jewish husband; her daughter Edita or Edi, who is trying to make her way as a journalist in Berlin; Tatjana, Lena's best friend, who also emigrated from Ukraine to Germany; and Tatjana's daughter Nina. The mothers' lives in the Soviet Union of late socialism are told, with flashbacks to their grandparents' experiences that recall the war, the Holodomor, and the Shoah. Despite their radically different backgrounds, where one is Jewish and a hairdresser while the other is Russian and a doctor, they form a new elective family in emigration. Their mutual bond is based on their shared past in Soviet and then post-Soviet Ukraine, their alienation from German society, and their marital problems.[8] The mothers' biographies, especially the hidden truths and their former life in Ukraine, encroach upon their life in Germany, blocking out the here and now in favour of the "past or the future" (Salzmann 2024, 187).

"When I look at the reminiscences of former Soviets, I have the feeling they've never spoken to each other and have no idea how different their realities were—what totally different lives they led [...] They won't ever find out, either—not as long as their only communication with each other is through quotes by long dead writers." (Salzmann 2024, 186). This passage from Sasha Marianna Salzmann's novel echoes the title of Marina Frenk's novel *A Very Long Time Ago.* Both quotes hint at the unreliability of pasts that are reconstructed through the family frame and translated into a new cultural environment. Being aware that the "tropes of testimony, witnessing, belatedness, trauma, postmemory are [exhausted]", as Leslie Morris (2018, 69) wrote, the authors expand the discursive frame of contempo-

8 This is reminiscent of the many patchwork families and "elective" families in Lyudmila Ulitskaya's novels, which also stress affinity over genealogy. In Salzmann's novel, the biological fathers are absent; in Edi's case her father is substituted by a loving Jewish father, in Nina's case her German birth father is just absent.

rary commemoration through fictionalisation, transcending the already formulaic approach to documentation and research in the family archive. Frenk in particular explores confabulation as an way of filling in the gaps in the family history, fictionalising aspects of Soviet-Jewish history and using dream sequences to insert her family in these suppressed histories. These novels are marked by multiperspectivity that results from their different focuses, temporal on then or now, spatial on Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, or Germany, or cultural as Soviet, German or Jewish. The Jewish perspective is especially evident in Frenk, who incorporates the Holocaust, antisemitism, Jewish culture and the significance of Israel in her book, while Salzmann's narrator is estranged from this side of her biography.

Frenk and Salzmann position their protagonists in theory, translation, and transition following their own biographical experience. It is of significance that neither Nina nor Edi nor Kira has ever been to Ukraine or Moldova as adults. Edi does not get assigned to report from Donbas as she wishes, and Kira's first attempt to go back on her own is aborted because she has forgotten her passport (Frenk 2020, 153). Their country of origin consequently retains an imaginary quality for both of them. It is filled with stories taken from the family archive and from literature, and thus the motif of confabulation is already present in the stories told by their parents and grandparents quoting Russian literature. The narrators in both texts point the reader towards this, indicating the fictionalisation. When Kira cannot describe Moldova, she is told to "make it up" (Frenk 2020, 41). Her novel is the literary answer to questions about the Soviet Union from her German friends and lovers, or in Edi's case from her editors and colleagues.

Soviet histories – experienced and acquired, contested and fused

History in these texts is located somewhere else, as it lies in the Soviet past rather than in the German past. These texts do not narrativise the immigration into German history that Andreas Huyssen (2003, 154) described for Turkish-German literature but rather a transfer of other histories and pasts into a German history that becomes transnational (Tippner 2019b). They introduce history on two planes through the memories and stories of the Soviet-born parents and grandparents about their life and the stories their children have created about this past, which is already fictionalised. In a fashion that is typical of Russian post-catastrophic texts, these novels view the Holocaust and Soviet state violence in the Holodomor or the Great Terror as entangled, not just chronologically but also ideo-

logically.[9] The stories allude to traumatic events but rarely explore the darker sides of the family history, refraining from addressing those in the genealogy who perpetrated such events.[10] In this aspect, they depart from a trend in third-generation German authors who try to revise their family history by including perpetrator histories (Agazzi 2005, 134–166) that were often left out of second-generation texts. In this aspect they are more aligned with contemporary Russian literature, which also tends to subdue acts of perpetration in the family narration. The authors integrate memories of the Holocaust, antisemitism, the Second World War, and the Holodomor alongside love stories, creative endeavours, everyday life, and transnational dynamics, describing the past and the present in equal measure. As is evident in texts by Fishman or Vertlib, authors with a Soviet and post-Soviet background do not necessarily understand the Holocaust as an incomparable event or as the most important one in twentieth-century history, but they rather conceptualise it as one of several violent events that mark the Soviet Jewish experience. They thus contest the dominant Western narrative and offer a contrasting vision of the twentieth century and its after-life for both German and post-Soviet audiences, but they also in a paradoxical way repeat the Soviet narrative.

Despite the spatial-temporal and cultural distance from the Soviet era, no visible moral distance divides the generations. In contrast to the literature by the second and sometimes third-generation authors who address the Holocaust from a German or Austrian perspective, these texts are devoid of accusations and criticisms or expressions of shame and guilt. Conflicts are played out on the personal level of life choices, and questions of parenting or sexuality, but less on a societal level of discussing historical agency and complicity in state organisations. Parents and grandparents are predominantly depicted as victimised and bathed in a benevolent light, in which little quirks and irritating traits are mentioned, but problematic involvements in historical events are not commemorated or questioned. Alexander Etkind (2013, 2014) has pointed out the differences between the German and post-Soviet Russian memory cultures, stressing the shared refusal in Russia today to engage critically with the past.

Where German second-generation authors might take the moral high ground in confronting the past, the narrators in Frenk's and Salzmann's novels are too in-

9 Boris Fishman's *Replacement Life*, Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter* (2020), or Lyudmila Ulitskaya's *Jacob's Ladder* for example. For the concept of post-catastrophic entanglement, see Artwińska and Tippner 2021.

10 Ulitskaya is an exception here, as she does not shy away from addressing the fact that most Soviet families contained not only victims but also perpetrators. In *Jacob's Ladder* she writes about the denunciation of the protagonist's grandfather, a writer, by his own son, something that Nina, the protagonist of the novel, discovers in the KGB archives.

vested in their family's past to distance themselves in this way. This attitude is often found in the children of parents who suffered through late socialism and the transformation. Kira remarks that even as a child, she subdued her questions and avoided causing problems since "mum and dad had enough problems and suffering of their own" (Frenk 2020, 148). Kira, Nina, and Edi see the after-effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union in their parent's disorientation and their inability to put down roots and their refusal to let go of the past: "The only sure thing is that there are still aftershocks" (Salzmann 2024, 184–185). This sentence echoes how the collapse of the Soviet Union is assessed and the very different interpretations of this event in the narration. The Holocaust, though also present in the family narrative, recedes into the shadow of a distant past and does not gain the importance it has in the novels written by German generational counterparts. The memory politics at play here may be an effect of belonging to the third generation after the Holocaust while being "generation 1.5" (Suleiman 2002)[11] in the context of migration and exile. Another explanation resides in the make-up of these families, as both Frenk and Salzman have not only Jewish family members but also a Ukrainian or Russian one, and not all of the inner circles of their Soviet families experienced Nazi persecution.

Of particular importance are the conflicting attitudes towards Ukraine that are shaped by the Soviet experiences and Russian hegemonic attitudes of the older generations, and the views of their Europeanised children. The texts do their share towards translating these experiences into German literature and de-stereotyping Western attitudes towards Eastern Europe, but they rarely reflect on the inherent principles of the Russian imperialist and colonial attitudes towards Ukraine or Moldova that the parents voice, and so the authors do little to deconstruct the implication of their parents in the Soviet system. Even though they have lived in Germany for more than twenty years, the older protagonists inhabit a predominantly Russian-speaking environment in which they watch Russian television, read the Russian classics, and dream of their hometowns, their youth, and their holidays on the beach at the Black Sea.[12] This way of life infuses their children raised in Germany with a distorted vision of the past and of present-day Ukraine and Moldova. The parents have an ambivalent mix of nostalgia and haunting memories of persecution and turmoil during late socialism and the transformation era.

11 Suleiman (2002) developed this generational distinction with regard to child survivors of the Holocaust.

12 One exception to this is the cuisine, which conveys the transnational family set-up and the Ukrainian influence, as they eat foršmak, salo and blini.

Their children try to make sense of these confusing images by confronting them with prosthetic memories as they watch films and videos, read literature, and study history books. Here again, it is evident that the meta-reflexive approach is a means of distancing; instead of engaging directly with the Soviet past of their parents, the narrators absorb texts and stories, viewing their parent's histories also as stories, with Edi then turning them into journalism and Kira into art.[13] Trying to make sense of the contradictory stories that her parents tell, Nina muses:

> I still can't make head or tail of it all. There was a housing shortage in the USSR, but some people had their 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 (Salzmann 2024, 185).

The parental view on Russia's hegemonic claims is shaped by their Soviet experience and clashes with Edi's and Nina's view of the war in Donbas and the occupation of Crimea. The opinions are formed by the very different emotional and political attitudes towards empires and autocracies and the place of Russia and Ukraine in modern-day Europe. Kira's grandparents tell her that Odesa is the capital of crime (Frenk 2020, 93). Lena's and Tatjana's families constantly voice their derisive attitude towards Ukraine and Ukrainian, denying their children the chance to Ukrainian, a language which their own mothers in Soviet times deemed to be a "relic" and "not important" (Salzmann 2024, 61); using the Russian names for Ukrainian towns;[14] siding with Russia in the question of the occupation of Crimea and the Donbas; and ripping up their Ukrainian passports on arrival in Germany (Salzmann 2024, 311).[15] Edi says of such opinions, "OK, he had some crazy views sometimes, but who didn't?" (Salzmann 2024, 280). All the while, her parents believe her to be too German to understand anything at all when it comes to the Soviet Union or Ukraine today. Similarly, the memories that Kira's parents and grandparents have of Moldova and Ukraine are shaped by antisemitism and their deeply ingrained fears of persecution and insecurity. Kira explains to her German friend,

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13 It must be noted that both ways of coping are deemed faulty and deficient by their creators.
14 For example, Gorlowka instead of Horlivka, Dnepropetrovsk instead of Dnipro, or Kiev instead of Kyiv.
15 For a similar attitude see Dmitrij Kapitelman's novel *Eine Formalie in Kiev* (2021). Here the narrator recalls a conversation with his parents about the annexation of Crimea: "'Crimea has always been Russian! The people of Crimea want that', my mother shouted at me. 'Everything you take away from those thieving goats in Kyiv is something saved! But you Germans don't understand that!' On that day in March, I realised abruptly that I didn't want to understand it at all. That, on the contrary, I coveted the German passport to separate myself from Vera and Leonid" (Kapitelman 2021, 28). The same accusation of being "too German" can be found in Salzmann.

Nele: "My parents ran away from independence, which can sometimes be dangerous and unpredictable" (Frenk 2020, 43). This fear has been transmitted by the parents to their daughter not rationally but viscerally, and it haunts her dreams.

Sasha Marianna Salzmann's dramatisation of her novel, which premiered at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg in October 2022, can be seen as an attempt to counter this bias in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[16] Two Ukrainian songs frame the dramatised text. Salzmann uses "Tyolky" by DakhaBrakha and Dakh Daughters' "Other Places" (*Inshe Misto*) as the prologue and epilogue to her drama, and scales back the parental anti-Ukrainian sentiment and introduces Ukrainian language elements into the textual world that is otherwise interspersed with Russian (Salzmann 2021, 3, 86).[17] Edi's attitude towards her mother and Lena in the play still highlights the clash of present convictions about Russia, Ukraine and the USSR though. It is evident that the eyewitness generation have lost their authority as they no longer have the power to dominate their children's view of the Eastern European past. Their memories and assessments are not aligned with the wider German memorial or political discourse, which has become that of their children, and the translation has stopped halfway. The parents of Kira, Edi and Nina are the living proof for the dictum of Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll that official memory culture can clash with embodied memories and unconscious memories through "cultural templates and schemata, [that are] often embodied, [and] even unconscious and often not explicitly articulated, [creating] cultural constraints for memory production and reception and shape[ing] cultural frames of memory dynamics" (2017, 11).

This becomes even more complicated for the Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union, since the official memorial cultures in the USSR, in Ukraine, and in Russia today are widely different to that in Germany and to the lived experience of contemporary witnesses. While the Second World War was an integral part of Soviet memorial culture and is still weaponised in Russia today, the Holocaust was never made part of the public discourses about the past. The competing experiences, memories, and discourses call for narrative and interpretative frameworks that can reduce complexity and make these life experiences consumable and comprehensible for the offspring of the migrants. The rise of the family novel as a memory form, and also the deconstruction of it, is the ultimate result of this mnemonic migration. The contested and conflicting memories based

16 The play premiered at Thalia Theater in Hamburg on 27 October 2022 under the direction of Hakan Savaş Mican. I would like to thank *Verlag der Autoren* for providing the unpublished manuscript of the dramatisation.

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qlkz2UmBrY; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMCpKrYuxQI.

in mnemonic migration set these transnational family novels written in German apart from their more strictly German counterparts.

Fictionalising family histories

It may be worth mentioning at this point that the family as a stable heteronormative unit consisting of a mother, a father and children is already deconstructed in these texts. Edi's Jewish father is not her biological father, Nina's German father abandons his Russian lover and daughter when they arrive in Germany, and Kira's Jewish grandfather Yuri fathered two children during the war who he supports financially but refuses to acknowledge. Kira's own relationship with Marc, the German father of her son Karl is unstable to say the least, while the elective ties between Lena and Tatjana are perceived to be stronger than any blood ties. These complicated family ties result in lies and omissions that further destabilise the family history as an authoritative account and make stories of genealogy and identity almost impossible. Even so, it is the family bond or experience that triggers the interest in prosthetic memories in the first place.

Memories in these novels are formed in equal measure by prosthetic media such as literature and film, since the family is no longer the dominant "platform for the articulation and transmission of [...] memories" (Lizarazu 2020, 132). The family still provides a conceptual framework for the fictionalisation of the voids in public and private discourse around the catastrophic events in Soviet history that left few traces in the archive though. The scarcity of images and media representations of many of the most traumatic episodes of Soviet history like the Holodomor, the Great Terror, or the Holocaust by Bullets stands in marked contrast to other memorial cultures that have an abundance of archive material. Ann Rigney has stressed the importance of the historical novel as a "memorial form" that gives "access to marginalised aspects of the past [that] are not met by the availability of archival evidence" (2005, 22). Fictionalisation is thus a means to compensate this scarcity, but it is also a device for creating multi-perspectivity and split personalities who embody ambivalent attitudes towards the past. In contrast though to contemporary Holocaust literature, which adopts a "postfamilial" stance (Lizarazu 2020, 16) and transcends the family frame, the family still serves as a form for structuring the narrative in these novels. Fictionalisation in transnational family novels makes two marginalised experiences accessible; these are the aspects of the past that are marginalised by the dominant history regimes of an imperial and hegemonic state ideology, and those that are marginalised in the process of migration, ultimately introducing different historical narratives and viewpoints into literature. Here again, the genre of the family novel is a frame for looking

back and for organising the knowledge gained from different types of oral narrative, written documentation, and literature.

Marina Frenk takes the process of fictionalisation one step further by laying bare the constructed and random nature of her own family history. Kira, the protagonist, asks herself several times, "what if". What if we had stayed in Moldova? What person would I be? What life would I have had? These questions challenge the family narrative about the need to emigrate, ponder on the perils of living in a collapsing empire, and address the advantages of a better Europe in contrast to the deficient Eastern European version. Kira plans a journey to Moldova to test these assumptions, which makes her realise that she "would probably do the same things she does in Germany" (Frenk 2020, 152). This realisation contradicts the picture painted by her parents of the grim future she would have had if they had stayed, where she would be selling Chinese counterfeits at the market. She also realises that Moldova is really something other than "the better Europe of the EU" (Frenk 2020, 153) and that one day "it might be Russia again, just like it was the Soviet Union" (Frenk 2020, 153). Passages like these are important not only for their assessment of Eastern Europe but also because they extend the timeframe of the novel into the future, creating new perspectives and visions of history and identity, fusing memories and projections. One of the last chapters of Frenk's novel contains a dream sequence in which she imagines all the members of her extended family together with those of her German partner travelling together in a freight train that resembles the freight train that brought her Jewish great-grandparents and grandparents to relative safety in Central Asia during the war.

This image merges the Soviet and Germany histories, creating a shared past and future. The author thus recreates and questions the family memories as translations of larger historical discourses, since the wagons of the freight train are more reminiscent of those used for deporting Jews in the Reich than of those of Soviet rescue trains, and she envisages the creation of new discourses and futures in the condensed image of "a train filled with family [that] travels in an unknown direction, and no one can escape from this [...]" (Frenk 2020, 213). Passages like these, or the discussions at a festivity in the Jewish community centre in Jena in Salzmann's novel, illuminate the new chapter in the family history and its shortcomings. The new chapter narrates partial transformations, and the emergence of a new and hybrid life that integrates the German experience into a larger picture through partners, work life and literature. What is impressive in both novels is the cohesive narrative power of misunderstandings, jokes, and silences, which bind the family together despite their apparent flaws and distortions.

Conclusion

The transnational family novel proves to be a viable medium for mnemonic migration, since it departs from clichéd images of the Soviet Union and what happened "there", fusing together concrete images and memories that are grounded in the family archive with a memory discourse and literary images that convey multilayered and multifocal views of the past. Rather than telling straightforward family histories, these novels use confabulation and comment to convey uncomfortable truths about history and, to a lesser degree, about the author's own family. The generational divide in the transnational family novel is also a cultural divide that is not easily bridged, juxtaposing Soviet-raised parents and their German-educated children. As has been seen, the texts do not just "highlight the limitations and omissions of the cultural memory of the host country" (Ortner 2022, 12), they also point us towards the omissions of the cultural memory of the country of origin, resulting in fictionalisation and metamemorial and metaliterary writing styles.

Post-socialist migrant family histories no longer serve as counter-narratives or correctives to the flawed and ideologically distorted history presented in the Soviet media of the past, and on Russian television today. Instead, as the quotes above show, they share these discourses one way or another. They are fused with a metamemorial narration that engages not only with memory as such but also with "the representation of these representations via the various institutions of cultural memory (such as historiography, museums, artistic engagements, political debates, etc.)" (Lizarazu 2020, 171). The characters use literature and works of memorial culture rather than their parents' biographies to get a clearer picture of history. Edi for example reads Oksana Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996, *Polovi Doslidzhennya z Ukrainskovo Seksu*, 1996) and Serhiy Zhadan's *The Orphanage* (2021, *Internat, 2017*) (Salzmann 2024, 191–192) to learn something about contemporary Ukraine; Kira cites a Romanian poem by Celan to evoke the Shoah in Moldova (Frenk 2020, 216) and refers to Svetlana Aleksievich as "inspiration" (Frenk 2020, 235). The protagonists rely partially on literature to provide them with a language for their own experiences and to help them translate their family stories from Russian or or the "mix of German and Russian words pressed into a more or less German syntax" (Salzmann 2024, 193) that has become their family language into a meaningful text, though one that is still tainted by lacunae and misunderstandings.

In a central episode in Salzmann's book, Edi is commissioned to write an article about the popularity of the far-right AfD[18] party among voters with Soviet

18 Alternative für Deutschland.

roots in the in the Eastern federal states. She is conflicted about this assignment, partly because she does not want to make her roots her "unique selling point" (Salzmann 2024, 192) as she writes ironically, but also because her beloved father is one of the AfD-voters, something she is loath to admit. Instead, she dreams about commenting in the editorial meeting on the assignment and the stereotyping of the politics of Soviet immigrants with a mis-remembered dictum about the war in Donbas that "sometimes […] you come to an edge, that just breaks off" (Salzmann 2024, 192) from Serhiy Zhadan's book *The Orphanage* (2017). The quote is a means of both countering the stereotyping and absolving her father, transforming this into something existential.[19] This passage points to the multiple and constant translations, often mistranslations, that the narrators are forced to perform, often losing themselves and the general meaning in the process. It also demonstrates that translations produce new forms of alterity, perpetuating new forms of alienation. It is a reminder that you can be discriminated against as Jewish or a migrant one moment, and then go along with colonial Russian thinking the next. The integration of mnemonic migration through the family novel allows for the admixture of the Soviet worldviews of the Soviet-raised parents to the contemporary stories of their German-educated sons and daughters. It seems to be easier for the authors to ignore their parent's stories about their Soviet life and the discrimination they faced than to engage with their questionable politics about Ukraine; safer to read contemporary Ukrainian authors such as Zabuzhko and Zhadan than to investigate the complicated mix of discrimination and feelings of cultural superiority in the Russian-biased views of their parents about Ukraine. It also places the family lore metonymically on the same level as fictional stories, underlining the emotional and cognitive distance of the 1.5 generation from the Soviet past of their parents.

The joint project of the narrators in these books is situated in a cultural space that emerges after memory theory and discourses of migration, assimilation, or hybridity. They integrate parts of that available discourse, including the discourse of memory studies, while refuting other aspects. The narrators veer between understanding and guarding their family history and trying to shape their memories without the staples of the Soviet memory culture that their parents, and by association they themselves too, grew up with, using not only the family mythology itself but also the media and historical discourse. This stands as a marked difference to similar family histories written for Russian audiences by Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Elena Chizhova, or Sergei Lebedev for example, who are highly critical of public

19 The most enthralling feature of Zhadan's text is the refusal to take sides and its ability to obscure allegiances to the point of making them almost irrelevant.

memorial culture and prioritise the family narrative as more authentic.[20] The novels also diverge markedly from the dominant national rhetoric used for commemoration in Russia today. It seems only logical then that only very few of the books discussed here that address multiple and hybrid audiences are translated into Russian or Ukrainian. Even though these texts themselves concern Russian and Ukrainian history, the memory form that they use, with the focus on Soviet history as only one identity-shaping factor alongside others such as gender or creativity, and so not as the defining one, puts these texts in conflict with Russian readers and contributes to their foreignisation (Laanes 2021).[21] Ironically then, these texts of mnemonic migration are unlikely to be translated into the discursive environment that their authors were born into.

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20 Especially in the Russian-Jewish context, the family history still serves as a corrective for the grand ideological narrative that omits the Jewish experience and other dissident and minority experiences. See Tippner 2019b; Urupin and Zhukova 2020.

21 Laanes has discussed the foreignisation of local memories in Sofi Oksanen's novel *Purge* in Estonia, but it works here, too.

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