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Introduction

Throughout history, Russia has been one of those countries from which people have emigrated or been expelled but to which they have also returned. There is an obvious link between the large social, economic and political transformations from the *perestroika* of the late 1980s and early 1990s to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the renewed restrictions of civil rights such as freedom of speech, and the increased mobility out of Russia. These transformations have greatly intensified emigration from the former USSR, especially during the first half of the 1990s. Migration scholars estimate the wave of emigration in 1991–1994 as the “largest in Russia’s post-Soviet history” (Aleshkovski, Grebenyuk, and Vorobyeva 2018, 145).

This book starts from these 1990s transformations to examine how individual women with various ethnic backgrounds reflect on and recall their own and their families’ past lives in the Soviet Union or Russia from the perspective of a new country of residence, such as Germany, Austria, Israel, the USA or Finland. The chapters intertwine migration, memory, and gender studies, which the scholars apply to analyse the literary presentations as mirrors, puzzles or kaleidoscopes, terms coined by the women themselves for their reflections on identity. The focus is on texts written by women who share the history of (e)migration and a past in the Russian/Soviet society, if only as part of their family history, as is the case with the generations of postmemory. Migrant voices from Eastern Europe, in which private and collective histories intermingle, offer us a means to understand post-Soviet societies today, as well as explanations and historical contextualisation for the dramatic developments related to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which is currently causing a new wave of migration.

The material discussed in this volume encompasses a wide range of texts and genres, such as novels, short stories, and graphic novels, poetry, autofictional essays and memories written and published from the 1990s to the early 2020s. They voice and discuss experiences of migrant women from Russia and the former Soviet Union. These are mostly works of fiction by writers who left the USSR and have lived abroad; some of these authors were born outside the USSR or Russia or left when they were very young. The chapters deal with works by Sasha Marianna Salzmann, Lena Gorelik, Valery Tscheplanowa, Kateryna Mischenko, Katja Petrowskaja, Lara Vapnyar, Dina Rubina, Olga Grushin, Anya Ulinich, Yelena Akh-tiorskaya, Katia Kapovich, Sofi Oksanen, Katharina Martin-Virolainen and Anna

Soudakova.¹ The book also comprises authorial essays by Tatjana Hofmann, a Slavic scholar born in Crimea and now living in Switzerland, and a Finland Russian author, Dess Terentyeva.

Many contributions to research on emigration from Soviet Russia in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are sociological and historical (e.g. Iontsev, Ryazantsev, and Iontseva 2016; Ryazantsev 2018). Previous research encompasses the former Soviet Union and Russia both as remembered and imagined reality (e.g. Gan 2019; Kopnina 2005; Gitelman et al. 2017; Rubins 2021), and emigration has also been studied through gender and memory studies (e.g. Hausbacher et al. 2012; Morgenshtern 2019; Solari 2018). Our volume intensifies and complements issues raised in the previous research.

We suggest that literary discourses are a central site for negotiating memories and traumatic experiences of migration. Literature created in the context of migration creates a variety of possibilities for reflecting on individual and collective history, in terms of themes and motifs as well as linguistic and aesthetic techniques. As most of the chapters show, literature offers an inside focus on psychological processes arising from bodily senses and childhood memories, framed by the microhistory of everyday life that these women authors experienced and narrate. In this process, the authors generate transcultural knowledge of their experience due to their spatial and temporal distance from the Soviet Union/Russia, experience of displacement, and double cultural affiliation (Kopnina 2005; Siegelbaum and Moch 2015; Nikolo and Carment 2017; Pivovar 2021).

The contributions combine the research areas of women's migration and memory culture. The volume addresses the issue of travelling memories and cultural traumas from a gender point of view: we ask what happens when women's recollections of traumatic experiences in Soviet history travel through time and space across social, linguistic, and political borders. The concepts applied include postmemory (Hirsch 2012); multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009); performative, communicative, and cultural memory (Winter 2010; Assmann 1992; Assmann 2008); travelling/transcultural (ErlI 2011) and born translated memory (Walkowitz 2015; Laanes 2021); and postmemory fictionalized narratives or acquired memory (Bosmajian 2002). Memory is discussed in close connection with issues of gender; linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identity; and class and generation. Cognizant of the intersectionality of women's life experiences, the authors pay attention to the individual and collective, cross-cultural, multiethnic, multilingual and transnational aspects of memory and migration. To analyse and interpret the representations

¹ Authors' names are transliterated according to the conventions of the countries in which they write.

of diaspora, in-betweenness, displacement and integration, we use tools of literary and cultural research on narration, life-writing, intermediality, textual and thematic embodiment.

We are interested in the specifics of women's migration and female modes of memory, especially in the context of transgenerational family narratives, female genealogy and female figures (daughter, mother, grandmother). The generation narratives described in the chapters testify to the gap between mothers and daughters, standing for the silence between generations and the displacement brought about by migration. The mothers keep silent about their traumatic past in the Soviet Union while the daughters growing up in a different country are unable to understand the silence and body language of the mothers, as pointed out in the chapter by Withold Bonner on Sasha Marianna Salzmann's novel (see also chapters by Simona Mitroiu and Marja Sorvari). Family genealogies are often thematised through autofictional stories and narratives, linking the personal and familial with cataclysmic historical events, as is the case with Dina Rubina's and Valery Tscheplanowa's texts, discussed by Henrietta Mondry and Eva Hausbacher, respectively. In her chapter, Mondry discusses how Rubina "employs various modes of memorial writing, including familial and associative postmemory as well as embodied performative memory, as means to transmit the traumatic past of not only Russian but also European Jewry across generations". An alternative literary form of memory is poetry, as pointed out by Tora Lane in the chapter on Katia Kapovich's bilingual poems, which "take the form of intimate conversations" with the past self and others, similarly to Anna Akhmatova's *Poem without a Hero*. Lane discusses the important question of how language frames the writing of memories, that is, how in Kapovich's poetry written in Russian or English, the past is made present in different ways. Jenniliisa Salminen's chapter on the Finland Russian writer Dess Terentyeva presents an exception as Terentyeva does not programmatically engage with autofictional (in the sense of realistic autobiographical) texts but mainly writes fantasy novels. In the fantasy trilogy *Neon City*, Terentyeva and her coauthor Susanna Hynynen create an imaginary space called Elm where the Finland Russian characters "negotiate and build their identities in ways that are not possible in a more realistic genre".

The texts analysed here are mainly written by established, professional writers, but in their chapter, Arja Rosenholm and Natalia Mihailova focus on autobiographical entries in a 2016 essay competition, while in Maria Yelenevskaya and Ekaterina Protassova's chapter, the focus is on autobiographical interviews with women emigrants. Moreover, in autobiographical essays in the section entitled "In Her Own Voice", Tatjana Hofmann and Dess Terentyeva reflect on their own experiences as women writers migrating from the East to the West, and the challenges they have faced in their path to publication in German and Finnish, respec-

tively. According to researchers of cultural transfer and transmission, migration “contributes to cultural change both in the origin and in the destination countries” (Rapoport, Sardoschau, and Silve 2020, 6).

The varied yet coherent body of textual material in our volume allows scholars to acknowledge migrating women as significant mediators of information, ideas, and memories in trans- and cross-cultural contexts. The migrating and writing women introduced in the volume are “cultural transmitters” who, according to Broomans (2009, 1–20), actively create nomadism between cultures where writing and texts move in reciprocity. The prerequisites for this transmission are both personal and professional, depending on various cultural, social, and economic means, but many of our studied authors take on various transmitting roles and positions – as literary authors, translators, critics, journalists, scholars, teachers, and travel writers. These multiple, though literature-based roles, and the fact that many of the studied authors are established in the host country, motivate discussion about the concept of literary canons and the varying definitions of national and minority literatures (Broomans and Ronne 2012, 117–130). While until the 1990s literature produced in the context of migration was considered a marginal phenomenon, it is now at the centre of the literary field, challenging national literary paradigms and dynamising the development of literary narratives and aesthetics.

Fictional and life stories have the potential to address the silenced past and collective traumas of twentieth and twenty-first century Soviet and Russian history, and to participate in related political and cultural discourses. Through their publications, and since most of them do not write only in Russian but also in the language of their residence country, the migrating women authors discussed in this volume contribute to multi- and transnational discussions, as witnessed in the “Eastern cultural turn” (Haines 2008) in German-speaking Europe. Simultaneously, the fact that many of the authors are writing in Russian but are not of Russian ethnicity makes the case for decentring Russian literary history and rethinking the legacy of the Russian emigree narratives beyond the (Russian) homeland of origin into transnational context. This deconstructing approach, suggested in the *Redefining Russian Literary Diaspora, 1920–2020* (Rubins 2021), is supported by the observations made in our chapters.

The authors discussed in this volume transmit knowledge through memories of migration. Several chapters discuss how, through their literary work and medial presence, the migrating authors have contributed to public debate in their countries of residence. Their recollections have moved memory discourses further East and contributed to a greater presence of international politics in the literary field. This has been the case especially for authors writing in German, as noted in chapters by Withold Bonner, Eva Hausbacher and Sabine Egger. Focus-

ing on works by women authors from Ukraine – Katja Petrowskaja, Kateryna Mishchenko and Oksana Karpovych – Sabine Egger demonstrates how the authors link Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 with German and Russian/Soviet memory discourses of the Holocaust and Second World War. Both Mishchenko and Karpovych use Holocaust and Soviet history as reference points in post-Soviet European history to fill the epistemic gap in the West regarding their experiences as women from Ukraine. By concentrating on women as actors and mediators, bringing in voices and memories of the marginalised, from below, one key task of this book is to incorporate viewpoints and experiences through versatile text-based knowledge about the meanings and consequences of war for rewriting Soviet and post-Soviet cultural history. By taking an intersectional approach to the literary material, our book contributes to “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988, n.p.) that not only aims to decolonise Western thinking about Soviet cultural history and memory narratives (see Chernetsky 2024, 23–24) but also contribute to decolonising reflection on the Russian and Soviet past, a most urgent task today (see e.g. Tlostanova 2012).

The aim of this volume is to provide new insights into women’s contribution to cultural transfer, in the widest sense, and to mobility of memories, in particular, in this context of women’s migration from the former Soviet Union and their memory work. Although relevant studies published in the 2000s focus on the transnational aspects of Soviet/Russian migration literature and the (re)mediation of the cultural memory of Soviet repression (Hausbacher 2009; Wanner 2011; Saramo and Savolainen 2023), women’s literary voices and memory as a form and tool to work through both individual traumas and collective tragedies deserve more attention within modern Russian and post-Soviet migration history. In this book, we seek to remedy this shortfall by asking two questions. The painful past becomes part of the present in ways women speak about migration, but who has the right to address national traumas and talk about history: citizens living in or outside the country, the generation of parents as subjects of repressions or the “generation after” bearing to the trauma of their families that they remember only through the stories, images and behaviours among which they grew up? How are recollections employed: do narrated memories contribute to inventing “official” national narratives or do microhistories experienced by women deconstruct them?

We suggest that the migrating women reflecting upon Soviet/Russian history implicitly experience distance from their Soviet background, which makes them more sensitive to how the past affects the present, for generations. As Eva Hausbacher argues in her chapter, “migration and the view from a distance that accompanies it [. . .] promotes the writing of memory culture”. Henrietta Mondry writes in her chapter on Dina Rubina that: “Strikingly, being away from the

homeland activated her own interest in the destinies of relatives of previous generations”. The past can be recalled for different reasons, depending on the individual and collective context of writing. Migration results in cultural diversity and pluralisation, which can lead to upheaval in the culture of memory. Transcultural “literature offers a *histoire croisée* (Werner and Zimmermann 2002), i.e. the possibility of overcoming national-historical perspectives, because it draws attention to the overlaps and commonalities of histories that were previously analysed separately”, writes Hausbacher. At the same time, the narrative of a nationally unified memory can become stronger through migration and compensate for loss and alienation, as pointed out by Arja Rosenholm and Natalia Mihailova. They note that feelings of estrangement experienced in emigration call forth idealised memories of the Soviet past: in particular, memories of childhood serve as “an anchor of the identity and the life story and ha[ve] a therapeutic effect in a moment of uncertainty”.

The experience of displacement and a new cultural context leads to shifts in perspective on private and individual (family), public and (post-)Soviet history. Furthermore, migration, displacement and view from a distance unsettle and change gender roles, as demonstrated in the literary texts about women migrating from the East to the West. Scholarship on Russian American and Russian German women authors has shown how writing outside the nation offers new subject positions and writerly opportunities for women writers. Migrating women are situated between cultures and countries, which unsettles the conventional gender roles of Soviet Russian culture, where Russian nationhood is identified as feminine and the figure of a woman as stable, motherly and domestic. Gender roles become deconstructed and hybrid in many ways in migrating women’s writing as they are free from “the patriarchal constructs of the homeland” (Ryan 2011, 64). Moreover, as Kristen Welsh shows in her chapter on Yelena Akhtiorskaya, Olga Grushin, and Anya Ulinich, the representation of female characters’ bodies as ugly, refracted, distorted in their texts – “the unbeautiful body” – reflects “the displacements of immigration”. Women writers from the former Soviet Union have brought a “change of paradigms” to migration literature (Finkelstein 2022, 193) by establishing “a distinct female presence” (Furman 2018, 274) in the Western literary field. For instance, these women authors foreground “specifically female subjectivities” and discuss immigrant experiences from “a decidedly female point of view” (Finkelstein 2022, 194; see also Hausbacher 2016). Contemplating the phenomenon of fluctuating gender roles and the emphasis on specifically female subjectivities in the literary material, our book makes it clear, as Eva Hausbacher notes, that the “doubled experience of alterity as a woman and as a foreigner [. . .] forces [women writers] to come to terms with it in their artistic and literary endeavours”.

While gender roles are negotiated and redefined by women authors in the new cultural environment, many of the chapters indicate how “travelling memory” is gendered. The process of remembering in the family passes down through the female line: this is especially the case for women who have migrated as children with their families and who as adults become interested in the “fate of their mothers and grandmothers, about which they know only very little”, as pointed out by Withold Bonner in the chapter on Sacha Marianna Salzmann’s novel *Glorious People*. The same observation holds true for the texts by several other authors discussed in the chapters, including Lara Vapnyar, Lena Gorelik, Valery Tscheplanowa and Anna Soudakova. According to Mihailova and Rosenholm, female genealogy is brought about in transgenerational memories when the daughters recall the past; their nostalgia concerns primarily their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts.

It is as if the daughters carry the story of their mothers and grandmothers, as expressed by Salzmann: “My story is her [my mother’s] story”. This notion overlaps with Simona Mitroiu’s observation that in texts by the Russian Jewish American writer Lara Vapnyar, fictional mother-daughter relationships come to epitomize the immigrants’ connections with their Motherland, the past and the present. Mitroiu analyses how the characters deal with their mothers’ sickness and final death, which she reads as “a symbol of their way of coping with their displacement, searching for meaningful connections between American life and their memories and experiences”.

Geopolitical, cultural and psychological distance and the sensitivity of the memory work done in the texts may lead to a shift in how the (Soviet) history is recalled; they make it possible to imagine different events, new frames and alternative histories which are not available in the collective official state memory. The literary works strive to make the Western public more aware of the Soviet regime’s atrocities to its citizens, including ethnic and sexual minorities, and to carve out space for an alternative historiography of the twentieth century, to counter the hegemonic historical narratives (Hausbacher 2020). Especially in German cultural memory, Eastern European migrant authors who write in German about historical events in former communist countries “expand the German framework of memory from a national to a transnational one”, as pointed out by Sabine Egger. Their writing integrates the exploration of interconnections between the Holocaust and the Gulag, as Timothy Snyder has done in *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2010).

Common narratives of Soviet history are revised to reveal the intertwining of individual or “small” and collective/societal or “big” history. In many texts, which are often autobiographically motivated, the author’s family history is interwoven with the “big” history of the twentieth century. These texts create and are regarded as media of cultural memory. Readers and critics usually suppose that the

author conveys her “own” (fictionalised post)memory that stems from her ethnocultural identity; memories she co-creates in her fiction are supposed to be either lived herself or heard from her parents or other relatives. The Finnish Estonian writer Sofi Oksanen, writing in Finnish, not only “inherits” the memory of the repressions experienced by Estonians throughout the twentieth century under both Soviet and German occupation but also translates it, linguistically and culturally. Hence her competence, authenticity of the memories and experiences she draws on, accuracy and “correctness” of the historical events she refers to have been questioned and contested. Despite various criticisms, Oksanen has opened up debate, in Finland and more generally, about the memory culture of the Gulag and the experience of the people living under Soviet imperialism in the “bloodlands” (in her case, Estonia), which makes her novels fit the definition of what Marek Oziewicz (2016) has called “bloodlands fiction”. Oksanen’s take on the subject is strongly gendered, dealing with the issues of sexual violence faced by several generations of women.

The chapter authors highlight the relevance of women’s travelling memories as a literary trend for recalling and working through the Soviet, especially Russian, past. They ask how the texts are designed due to their transcultural perspective, and what is meant by a “diasporic identity” (Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Rubins 2021), also in relation to the imperial aspirations of the Soviet past and the Russian present. Most case studies of families belonging to ethnic minorities within the USSR (such as Ingrian, Estonian, Finnish, Jewish or Ukrainian) convey the idea that in response to disruptions and displacement caused by migration, migrants construct transcultural identities showing complex and multiple belongings. Caught in-between cultures, transcultural memory and transcultural identity constructions provide a spatial and mental sense of “being out of place”. Being “on the move” brings both alienation and potential growth, as several chapter authors point out. Where they exceed national borders, traumatic events and experiences (whether Holocaust, Holodomor, Gulag or terror) become comparable; Eastern European memory and narratives highlight the shared (European) history of trauma, which has left the Gulag out of the discussion for such a long time.

Transcultural identification is linked to the question of who the migrating writers are writing for. Many languages and multilingualism play an important role in the literary material for this book. Many migrant writers from the former Soviet Union write in the language of their new country, thus “translating” events from the Soviet past into a new literary language. In this respect the language of the old country can influence the new literary language on very different levels. Through analysis of interviews conducted with Russian-speaking immigrant women, Yelenevskaya and Protassova explore how “linguistic practices

encompass a variety of language use patterns, including code-switching, language maintenance, and language shift”. Jenniliisa Salminen discusses the multilingual environment in the works of the Finland Russian author, Dess Terentyeva, “since she uses Russian extensively in some of her works and language is clearly one of the main defining features of her characters”. Sabine Egger notes that for Katja Petrowskaja writing in German – for her as a child the language of Bach and Nazis in war films – allowed her to transcend stereotypical roles of victims and perpetrators dominating Soviet and post-Soviet discourse. Writing in German, rather than in Russian or Ukrainian as her first and second languages, thus allows Petrowskaja to create her own narrative space and open new perspectives on European history.

Tora Lane discusses the bilingual poetry of Katia Kapovich, noting how the past is addressed differently in poems written in Russian and in English, which makes the past present in different ways. In Kapovich’s Russian-language poems, Lane distinguishes “considerable proximity, even to the point of sentimentality” while “the lure of the English language lies in its distance”. The sense of proximity in Russian stems from the world of childhood and youth, where the language of communication was Russian, whereas the experience of exile to the USA is articulated in English. Ona Renner-Fahey discusses the complex use of verbal and visual language applied by the Russian Jewish American writer and artist Anya Ulinich in her novel, *Petropolis*, with illustrations by Ulinich. The illustrations reveal a surprising amount about the protagonist’s diasporic experiences.

A further question bound to language concerns the effects of (post)Soviet migration (literature) on the target cultures. The chapters cover several cultural areas: in addition to the Nordic and German-speaking countries, we include texts from the USA and Israel. With their narratives, the authors not only bring in new memories and family stories but also new ways of narrating and cultural traditions that are little known in “Western” literatures, thus triggering important media reflections on one’s own and the other’s history and on common (auto)stereotypes in the East-West discourse.

The unspoken part of communication reflecting the traumatic experiences is the language of bodies. As Marja Sorvari puts it in her analysis of two works: “The novels employ a critical and reflective perspective on the experiences of migration, highlighting differences between generations as well as making women’s bodily experiences of migration visible.” Most analyses show the body as a means of communication mediating inherited traumas of postmemory or, as Hausbacher puts it, the authors “negotiate the role of the body in the process of gender-specific memory”. Kristen Welsh applies the term “geocorporeality” to point to “the *limited* exchange value of the female body, especially the immi-

grant female body: that body is valuable to its new community as an often-exoticized sexual partner and as a potential mother, a producer of heirs”.

The volume is divided into five sections. In Section I, Eva Hausbacher, Simona Mitroiu, Withold Bonner and Sabine Egger focus on *Mediating Eastern Memory Discourses* in the German-speaking world and – with the exception of the Russian Jewish American author Lara Vapnyar – deal with texts by authors with an Eastern European background who have been very successful in contemporary German-language literature. In Section II, *Travelling Memory and Ethnocultural Identity* is the thematic umbrella for Henrietta Mondry, Marja Sorvari, Viola Parente-Čapková and Riitta Jyttilä. In addition to questions of ethnocultural localisation, the (Russian German, Russian Jewish, Finnish Estonian and Ingrian Finnish) authors and protagonists of the texts discussed here are processing trauma through postmemory. In Section III, *Language Belongings and Bodily Identities*, Tora Lane, Ona Renner-Fahey, Kristen Welsh and Jenni-liisa Salminen ask questions about the effects of migration and displacement on women’s linguistic and bodily identities. Besides the Finnish Russian author Dess Terentyeva, their contributions focus on US authors of Eastern European origin. In Section IV, *Displacement and Integration*, Natalia Mihailova and Arja Rosenholm, Maria Yelenevskaya and Yekaterina Protassova focus on life writings by women of the “last Soviet generation” abroad. The final and fifth section, “In Her Own Voice”, brings together autobiographical essays by two women writers who(se families) migrated from the Soviet Union, the Finnish Russian fantasy author Dess Terentyeva (discussed in Jenni-liisa Salminen’s essay) and writer and scholar Tatjana Hofmann. These two essays add fascinating dimensions to the scholarly discussions and conclude our volume with the voices of women writers.

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