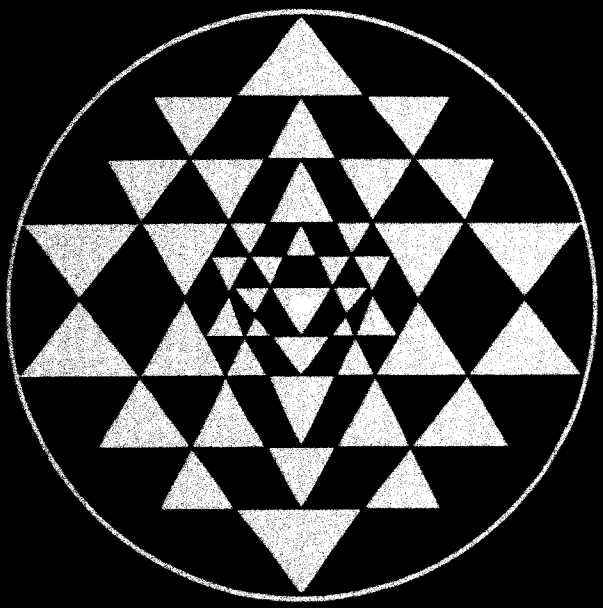
MASTERS OF PEACE 20

Christina Pauls

# Re-storying a past that lies between us

## An exploration of the legacies of German-Russian family histories in the Soviet Union



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## An exploration of the legacies of German-Russian family histories in the Soviet Union

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# Preface by Rebecca Gulowski
# Narratives and Trauma

Narrativity is inherent in all social phenomena. The space of possibilities, possible experiences, and possible perceptions is structured by narratives. In doing so, narratives place us in a specific relationship with the world that has already become, the others and ourselves. The form, shape, and structure of narratives, conversely, are contingent. On the one hand, narratives are not arbitrary and connected to already existing knowledge. On the other hand, events, experiences, and perceptions are always evaluated and interpreted within their current social reality. This is to say that narratives are rather lived and living stories between people, than stories told. Thus, a narrative is the simultaneity of the past, the present, and the future. The clinical professor of psychiatry, Daniel Siegel (2012), points out that it is the spatio-temporal structure of a narrative that can be consistently recognized in every form of human perception and activity thereby comprehending narratives' form and function, is revealing facets of the meaning of being human. On a historic-societal dimension, the German-American historian, Konrad Jarausch (2002), identifies metanarratives as possibilities to deal with long-term development processes by simplifying complex contexts into a basic pattern while integrating different stories into one big narrative. Metanarratives offer ideological instructions for political action and cultural identity concepts.

The concept of trauma seems to be in contradiction with the idea of narrativity. Characteristically, the so-called "speechless terror" —the inability to put terrifying experiences in words— goes often hand in hand with trauma. This inability is better understood while looking further on the aspects of *connectivity* and *time* under the conditions of traumatization.

Trauma is the encounter of an existential threat, which is perceived as a highly frightening and overwhelming experience that floods a person with raging emotions. Trauma is often associated with singular events. However, people can also experience multiple sequential events that, in their whole, are traumatic too. Child Neglect and abuse as well as war and expulsion are the common examples of sequential traumatic experiences. For Fischer & Riedesser (2020), trauma is a vital discrepancy between the threatening situational factors and individual coping options often accompanied by a feeling of helplessness and defenseless abandonment, which causes a permanent agitation in understanding the self and the world. It is not the event itself that is the trauma, but the individual's own experience of an event that is considered traumatic. Traumatic experience distorts spatio-temporal

structure of an event which otherwise helps us to understand, evaluate and integrate perceptions, experiences and action. Therefore, instead of being connected with the world, the others, and ourselves, Fischer & Riedesser (2020) describe trauma as a *rift* between the individual and the environment. They also emphasize the fundamental disruption that trauma brings to humans in their relationship to the world, its objects, and their fellow human beings.

The state during the traumatic experience can be described as a constriction of consciousness, a feeling of numbness and unreality in a way that the events and processes are perceived as if from the outside. Details of the event are only occasionally recorded and are often completely faded. Thus, remembering the traumatic situation does not follow a typical storyline with a clear delimitation of the prehistory, the course of events, and the end as well as the associated consequences. Moreover, the structure of time becomes blurred and the distinction between past, present, and future gets fuzzy. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) states that trauma comes back as a reaction and not as memory. In contrast to remembering, people react as a consequence of re-experiencing the traumatic episode. Re-experiencing is perceived as an actual event where the body reacts as if it is in the state of past traumatic incident and not in the present. Thus, there is a great fear of people, places, objects, or situations that can trigger memories of the traumatic experience. For this reason, such "triggers" are usually avoided, and the environment of traumatized people is changed for the sake of avoiding painful remembrance. With that, trauma has the potency to not only re-structure the life of the traumatized completely, but also of those around the main subject —i.e. family and friends as well as the generations to come. The condition in which trauma travels through generations is also called the transgenerational trauma.

Nothing has been more obvious on a closer look and yet unexplored than linking both narratives and trauma together as theoretical concepts. Christina Pauls in her book deals with the main research question: *in what ways are German-Russians living in Germany today affected by their families' experiences in the Soviet Union.* By doing so, she takes on the assumption of contradiction between narrativity and trauma and establishes a link between the two. Her systemic view on (narrated) history and trauma as well as family and individual identity —each two concepts often seen as mutually exclusive— allow her to name contradictions and exclusions without neglecting, prioritizing, or pathologizing the one or the other. Pauls uses a transdisciplinary approach on transgenerational traumas and transcends the boundaries between the conventional disciplines of history, sociology, and peace and conflict studies. Instead of just harmonizing singularized links between these disciplines, Pauls develops an epistemology of her own by

combining innovative concepts of time and language. She applies an advanced theory of time based on postcolonial theory and the Many Peaces' approach. Inspired by the kinyarwanda word "ejo" —which means both yesterday and tomorrow— Pauls notion of time is not linear but rather circular. This is not only a challenge to the *Western* time concept in narrativity theory, but it also opens new possibilities for trauma theory to get connected with the narrativity theory. At the point where traumatic experienced events or sequences of traumatic events lose their linear spatio-temporal structure of narrativity, the emergence of another structure can be traced. In order to grasp this structure, Christina Pauls combines her time theory with the theory of the 'languages of the unsayable' and develops an epistemology that appreciates the tacit knowledge. By doing so, she uses the contradiction between speechlessness and narrativity for her empirical analysis and offers a methodological way of collecting trauma-informed data. With a systemic perspective, all of her interviewees who she views as co-researchers —Elena, Katharina, Sasha, Tanja, Alexej, and Svetlana— reveal in their stories the traces of transgenerational traumatization. This underlines the relevance of a broader perspective on trauma and the need for contextualizing instead of individualizing and pathologizing trauma. Pauls empirical findings suggest that facilitating healing after trauma means to understand its effects on the family, affected groups, and the community so much so that trauma counselling is a community work. Pauls states that trauma counselling is "a *continuous and reciprocal interrelation between individual and system*" and views that it should not be underrated in either Trauma Studies or Peace and Conflict Studies. With this backdrop, it is fair to say that Christina Pauls work is a transdisciplinary contribution. Her results contribute to the theory and methodology of sociology of trauma that freed trauma from solely individualized fate and locate it on a communal level as well. Trauma is a challenge, but it is more of an assignment for the whole community. Christina Pauls offers us an approach to converge these 'in-between' spaces where trauma sets new structures and narratives for a person, his/her family, and the community at large. Moreover, with that, Pauls prepares the ground for seeds of conflict transformation.

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# Foreword

As I am writing these introductory words almost two years after the formal completion of the thesis procedure, my journey has kept unfolding backwards (towards the future).

During my recent visit to Kazakhstan, I comprehended with all layers of my being that I was born as child of imperialism, into a violent structure of Soviet oppression against native peoples and their cosmovisions. Due to a prior and ongoing sensitization for the workings of racism, I had this revelation when members of my paternal family urged me to stay away from an elderly native Kazakh woman in my birth village. Heartbrokenly, I began understanding that my husband would even here, in my birth country, be exotified, micro aggressed and devalued for the color of his black skin. I was disillusioned from my previously held belief in the Soviet Union as an alternative way to the colonial and capitalist modernity and now began seeing it as a failed attempt to "creating an alternative world, where nonetheless we can find the distorted reflections of all the elements of liberal capitalist modernity" (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009, 137).

As a child of imperialism, I began realizing that assumptions of collective traumatization of German-Russians in the Soviet Union lead to a temporal and group-based reduction. The temporal dimension concerns the settler colonial nature of German-Russian migration to the Russian Empire. I feel much more confused about the complexities of my family's stories and journeys and feel a deep need to address the heritage of settler colonialism that I carry with this legacy. The group-based dimension has me looking exclusively at German-Russian experiences in the Soviet Union, which represent my maternal family, while my paternal family is of Ukrainian descent. With a critical view of both of these reductions, I still find valuable insights in the process of digging deeper into my initial irritations. As unique and contextual as the gathered stories in this book present themselves, they keep knocking at my door with the reminder that 'specificity creates universality', as one of my teachers used to say.

While this current work is very much centered around the loci of enunciation of German-Russian descendants, it would be crucial to center narratives and perspectives of indigenous peoples when reflecting transgenerational traumatization in the former Soviet Union. At the time of writing, however, I could not see myself capable to doing such work unless I developed an understanding for the calling that has been urging me to work through some of the aspects that have been kept silent during much of my life. With the intention to dig deeper and learn how to transform our

collective pains, I firmly hope that their deeper understanding can disrupt continuing cycles of their reproduction, particularly but not exclusively among people from German-Russian families.

Lastly, I wish to remind us that with the longing for acknowledgement, truth, integration, and transformation of our own individual and group-based pain goes a relational responsibility to the wider (social) metabolism. May this journey be one among many steps to address the *Dark Cloud* which Adam Curle portrays in *The Fragile Voice of Love* (2006).

# Table of Content

# List of Illustrations

# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AFD | Alternative für Deutschland („*alternative for Germany*", political Party in Germany) |
| BVFG | Bundesvertriebenengesetz (*Federal Law on Refugees and Exiles*) |
| ECM | Elicitive Conflict Mapping |
| e.V. | eingetragener Verein (*registered charity or association*) |
| LMDR | Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland (*Landsmannschaft of the Germans from Russia*) |
| NOSC | non-ordinary state of consciousness |
| PTSD | posttraumatic stress disorder |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| Bolsheviks | большевики; members of the Bolshevik party and/or followers of the ideology of Bolshevism |
| Bolshevism | (from большинство – lit. majority) ideology of the Bolsheviks (a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party) under the leadership of Wladimir Iljitsch Lenin, which came to power in Russia during the October Revolution (1917) and founded the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Goal to establish the dictatorship of proletarianism through a complete and radical social revolution. |
| Elicitive Conflict Work | an approach to applied peace work that is based on relationality and therefore takes shape in the unique contexts of an encounter in a system. It was outlined by Wolfgang Dietrich in Elicitive Conflict Transformation and the Transrational Shift in Peace Politics (2013). |
| Elicitive Conflict Transformation | the process of transforming conflictive energies within an Elicitive Conflict Work approach. |
| German-Russians | Germans who emigrated to the Russian empire in the 18th and 19th centuries for diverse reasons. |
| Great Purge | (also: The Great Terror) designates a period between 1936 -1938 under Stalin's leadership, which involved a large-scale purge of the political leadership and society, including intelligentsia, kulaks and national minorities that identified with a homeland exterior to USSR. |
| Gulag | acronym of Главное управление лагерей и мест заключения ("Main Administration of Camps and Places of Detention"), which denotes the government agency in the Soviet Union that controlled the system of forced labor camps. |
| Kommandatur | (also: Sonderkommandatur) institutions to control and exploit the settlers in Siberia and Central Asia. Included mandatory, permanent surveillance by authorities, which had strict official requirements to register and move. |
| Kulak | (кулак – lit. fist) designates wealthy farmers who owned economies. Were seen as hostile class to the socialism, and were ordered to be liquidated. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mennonite | Protestant tradition of Anabaptism with a strong pacifist, Christian faith. |
| Micro-history | Research of history in a smaller unit such as the family or an individual. |
| Macro-history | Larger historical discourses that name trends and repetitions in world history. |
| Narrative | a social process of communication between a teller and an audience. |
| Socialism | ideology of social ownership, in which the community as a whole manages economy and politics. |
| Spätaussiedler | (lit. late emigrants) political term, codified in §4 of the German Federal Law of Displaced Persons and Refugees (Bundesvertriebenengesetz BVFG). The term denotes German nationals who suffered from a fate arising from consequences of war, and who are leaving the areas of settlement after the 31 December 1992 (§4 Abs.1 Nr.3 BVFG). |
| Stalinism | the ideology and policies adopted by Joseph Stalin, characterized as totalitarian regime with massive repressions and terror based on extreme centralization and the pursuit of communist ideology. |
| Trudarmiya | a forced labor system in the Soviet Union that was implemented as a working brigade to support the Second World War against the Third Reich. Prisoners were largely from the German minority and worked in coal mines, ammunition factories and refineries. |

# Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude goes to those who have given me the gift of encounter by being seen, touched and understood

to my son and my husband, for joining me on this earthly journey and providing my re-search with direction.
to Daniela Ingruber, for your generosity, wisdom and passion on every step along the way.
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to my family, particularly my mother and grandparents who have inspired and trusted me ever since.
to all the anonymous co-re-searchers who had the courage to share such intimate journey with me.
to my colleagues and friends at the Innsbruck School for Peace Studies, who are courageous enough to dare doing peaces differently.
to all those who was and those who will be, my human and non-human ancestors and descendants, my relatives from near and far...

# Preface

## Inheritance

the questions you pose
belong to generations
(and so it goes)
    you are the answer to questions that rose
    blown into the future
    a generation ago.
        And the answer to your question today
        absent-minded, incidental
        comes back, a generation away.
    For no question is in isolation
    not created, nor destroyed, rather transformed
    binding, lingering, energy in motion.
Seeping into another generation
that will ask questions, I suppose,
absent-minded and incidental (and so it goes).

*(Abebe and Saha 2015, 26)*

# 1. Introduction

My academic interest in the study of identity has a long history, even though I failed to see the immediate connection to my own biography for many years. Being part of a family that is neither native to Germany nor to Kazakhstan, I have been critical towards national and political boundaries and prone to constructivist schools of thought for a long time. During my undergraduate studies in political science, I specialized in the dynamics of guilt and victimization, caused by the politicization of collective identities in the African Great Lakes Region. That study has been insightful but has left me with further in-depth questions concerning the individual experiences of such social psychologies.

Writing with scientific objectivity about abstract topics now just appears like a projection of a deep inner conflict that I have carried with me for quite some time and for which I had not yet found ways of engaging with. I had escaped dealing with these dynamics intimately by approaching them with a postmodern lens of rationality and constant critique. It is only now that I understand what Naeem Inayatullah has expressed in his work on *Autobiographical International Relations*, precisely that

> [...] writing emerges from our needs and wounds. [...] Writing orbits what cannot be said, and it struggles with what we cannot articulate. Two forces shape this struggle: what we aim to produce in the work and what the writing writes back to us. Both are common experiences, and we are satisfied when in the course of writing we begin to uncover the motivating intuition through which we proceed to our goal (Inayatullah 2011, 8).

During my studies for the M.A. Program in Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation at the University of Innsbruck[1], I have come to uncover my very own motivating intuition that has pulled me toward identity-based peace and conflict research. For most of my life I had suppressed my geographical origin and my hybrid German-Russian[2] heritage, not being aware that pushing it into absence was precisely the mechanism that made the suppressed part of my identity formation[3] very present in my life. This insight has drawn me back to my roots, acknowledging that "what has been left out is what matters. Perhaps the stories that still need to be told are those of longings, of dreams, of prayers" (Pelias 2004, 30). I can physically

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1 The commonly termed 'Innsbruck School for Peace Studies' places high value on self-awareness of one's own physical, emotional, mental and spiritual limits as peace workers (Dietrich 2014, 54).

2 The term 'German-Russian' refers to people of German origin who have lived in the Russian territories for an extended period of time. It will be introduced and examined in more depth in chapter 5.1.

3 The term "identity" has widely been debated and will be contextualized in chapter 5.2.

feel the void that pulls me towards Kazakhstan, longing to understand why I was born to its vast land.

But before this journey began, I took a significantly longer detour to Rwanda where many of my old meaning-making systems were transformed into what the reader will find along and between the lines of this thesis. In retrospect, what pulled me to Rwanda was a touch of the fascination of high-scale identity conflict that culminated in the Genocide against the Tutsi which ultimately shattered the country in 1994, along with the challenges of healing and reconciliation that the inhabitants so inspiringly tackled.

After my first long-term stay in Rwanda my previous understanding of time had gone through a shift. I was confused by the Kinyarwanda word *"ejo"* which means both yesterday and tomorrow[4]. At times, I was not sure whether my conversation partners would mean the past or the future which pulled me towards frustration. Only over the years I learned that this linguistic peculiarity has a deep connection to an underlying energetic worldview which, as the Nairobi Peace Initiative (2002) expresses, holds that "time moves from the present toward the past and that collective memory is accessible through the wisdom of the elders"(Lederach 2005, 135). In contrast to modern understandings of time as linear and progressive this implies an energetic view of the past and future as "connected, like ends of a circle that meet and become seamless" (Lederach 2005, 136). John Paul Lederach, whose work significantly inspired the transrational peace philosophy, gives an insight to such circular view of time by citing Jebuwot Sumbeiywo with a metaphor from her native Kalenjin:

> [People say], 'the past that lies before me and the future that lies behind me. They point ahead of them when they talk about the past. [...] I understand that what we know, what we have seen, is the past. So it lies before us. What we cannot see, what we cannot know is the future'. Then she began to walk back ward. 'So the past we see before us. But we walk backward into the future. Maybe my grandparents' way of saying it is more accurate' (quoted in Lederach 2005, 135-136).

In the powerful metaphor[5] of a past that lies before us I have come to receive an added value of unlearning my modern mindset that is shaped by linearity and progress. Instead, a meaningful way to consider the past lies in acknowledging its presence and alive-ness in each moment with effects to the future. How can we walk backwards into the future confidently, however, when we close our eyes to the past and push it into absence?

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[4] Concretely, the term 'ejo' is sometimes followed by the addition 'hazaza' (coming) or 'hashize' (past) to stress the temporal orientation toward past or future.

[5] The central meaning of metaphors as fundamental mechanisms of mind has been described in depth in *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

## 1.1. Geographies of Belonging

As far as I can remember I have always doubted who I was, at least in terms of narrow ethnic or national identity labels. I was born as *Kristina Michailovna Patrakova* (Кристина Михаиловна Патракова) in a rural area in Northern Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, as second of three children to a German-Russian mother and a Ukrainian father. My family migrated to Germany in the summer of 1993, primarily motivated by family reunion to my maternal grandparents. I was raised disconnected from my birth identity; my name having been 'Germanized' to *Christina Pauls* upon our immigration (Panagiotidis 2015)[6]. What has been left behind when my name was changed? Has the attribution of a different label to what or who I was changed who I actually was? What was it that so urgently had to be wiped out from my identification documents?

Having lived in Germany for 20 years, I believe that a certain sense of rootlessness which I inherited through growing up amidst two languages and cultures has shaped much of my life. Synchronistically, during the time writing, I am living in exactly the same town through which most German-Russians had emigrated to the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century (Krieger 2015, 24). My family history, as a reflection of my own, is hence ridden with nostalgic imaginations of a homeland and quests for belonging in a globalized world that evades the logic of nation-states, while simultaneously neither feeling a genuine sense of belonging in one place, nor another.

Accordingly, I have neglected questions of national and ethnic identity and belonging, because I wanted to resist what I perceived as an essentialist tendency of self-identification within a *national container identity* that had so confused my family and eventually contributed to the divorce of my parents. Yet the exploration of precisely this suppressed aspect is a journey of locating myself in the world in a way that goes beyond geography, as "[p]lace represents the much deeper journey of relocating and recovering a sense of belonging" (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 59).

Belonging is not necessarily tied to place, yet place is part of the metaphors through which meaning is conveyed. Lederach and Lederach, in leaning onto the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), suggest to understand metaphors as tools of meaning-making, "deeply related to our ways of perceiving, understanding and interpreting the world" (2010, 43). From such premise, the metaphor of place can be understood beyond location, as a sense of connection and purpose:

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[6] This 'Germanization' of names has creatively been thematized by Eugen (formerly Evgenij) Litwinow in his collection of life stories and photographs of thirteen young German-Russians: http://mein-name-ist-eugen.de (last accessed 28 October 2018).

> This internal journey to find oneself – place as metaphor – represents the archetypal journey of health: when people find their place, when they touch, in and out, a sense of location, purpose and meaning, they experience a sense of health (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 62).

For many people, me included, these two aspects of the same have sometimes been confused. Just like many of my generation, I have been a wanderer, lusting for travel and constantly on the move while suspending the need to arrive.

This wanderlust, as expressed in popular language, sometimes ached me like an open wound and resembled a blind repetition of a pain that I could never truly grasp myself. I walk, run or use other tools of transportation, often without clear target, for the sake of movement itself, giving in to an urge that originates in my legs, so I have never really been able to cognitively make sense of my walking. Wandering entails a hidden process of escaping a deeper inner journey that requires patience, time and dedication beyond physical motion of travels and movement. In this context, travel disguises itself as quest for place while we are in fact really looking for identity, or the other way around: "'Where' we are, then, is always intimately tied up with working out 'who' we are" (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 60).

## 1.2. A Story of Dualities

Abebe and Saha, in the poem that frames my thesis, find a poetic way of saying that I am "the answer to questions that rose blown into the future a generation ago" (Abebe and Saha 2015, 26). My story is an answer to the questions of previous generations, the worries of my parents whether we would successfully build a life in Germany, their fears of whether we would see a stable vocational future, their increasing doubts of whether and how their own intercultural marriage can last in the storms of raging identity confusions, blown and shattered by winds of longing and belonging. My story is also an answer to residues of the Soviet system, to transnational movements of migration, to constant re-negotiation of social identities with all their baggage accumulated in the past.

The stories of my family need to be understood as embedded in the context of social and cultural production of larger historical narratives. I understand this interplay of micro and macro history in a similar fashion as Jacques Revel who argues "that the choice of a particular scale of observation produces certain effects of understanding useful in junction with strategies of understanding. Changing the focal length lens not only magnifies (or reduces) the size of the object under observation, but also modifies its shape and

composition" (Revel 1996, 495). Hence, it is from this theoretical background that I imply that it is not possible to "separate family relations from a history in which they exist and have meaning and in which that history does not simply serve as a backdrop to the familial relations rendered separately" (Walkerdine et al. 2013, 294).

### 1.2.1. Dual Foreignness

*There we have been 'Fascists', here we are 'Russians'.*

People of German-Russian origin have faced substantial challenges of a perceived sense of "dual foreignness" (Kel 2018; Panagiotidis 2017) which can be understood as a perception of being different from 'the natives', both in the former USSR and Germany. It manifests primarily as the dilemma of being imposed the label of German *there* and the one of Russian *here* and indicates the difficulty of integration on either side of national borders.[7] Kaiser argues that this perception emerges from a triad of origin, national belonging and externally imposed definition of the Self, a context in which identitarian self-definitions are leading toward certain re-positioning processes in the dominant society (Kaiser 2006, 20).

A significant amount of literature has stressed that people of German-Russian origin had historically developed and sustained a certain *German* identity, even over the course of hundreds of years living in the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union (Krieger 2015, Friesen 2001). Bergner and Luchterhand even go as far as classifying their collective experience in the Soviet Union as *the* crystallization point of German-Russian identity (2012, 9) which has been in a continuous process of negotiation ever since. Back in the Soviet Union, they had to balance between their identification with the role of perpetrator as ethnically belonging to Nazi-Germany and the social pressure to become a Soviet person. Their collective history as represented in current academic and public narratives (see chapter 5.1.) has profoundly been shaped by a structural discrimination they had endured in the Soviet Union. Since their migration to Germany, a place and culture they had imagined belonging to, this identity dilemma might have increased rather than vanished.

Being proficient in Russian rather than German, they were identified as 'Russian' immigrants. A lack of language proficiency and formal qualifications[8] initially hampered their integration in the German labor market. Sharing this

[7] *There* refers to a perspective from the former USSR, and *here* refers to a position that is located in Germany.

[8] This refers not to objectively measurable qualifications, but to those which were needed to be formally accepted in Germany.

collective fate albeit in different manifestations, my parents had to build a life from scratch upon their arrival in Germany. My mother's education as a music instructor had not been accepted in Germany and her beloved Violin had been taken from her at the customs of Moscow airport. My father had been working in public service in the local village community in my birthplace in Kazakhstan, but whilst entering Germany both of their professions had to be completely redefined. These patterns are common for the situations of migration in Germany and have impacted their sense of self-esteem.

Such barriers to the labor market were only one aspect of the notion of dual foreignness, yet one of the determining factors at the intersection of identity and class-based differences (Wallerstein 1988). The dual foreignness extended to all the layers of identity that reside in the facets of everyday life, such as language, culture, religion and politics.

In hindsight, experiences of discrimination at the intersection of geographical origin, class and language were more present in my own life than I had thought. It started with not being able to attend kindergarten due to financial restrictions and extended to several harshly formulated invitations to "go back to Kazakhstan," despite not really being able to identify with native Kazakh people. Occasionally, I was lauded for speaking German so well, given my Tartaric facial features. One of the prices I paid for successful integration was the loss of what I had perceived as my mother tongue Russian. I understand the term mother tongue as a social construct rather than as a pre-given, essentialist concept, mainly because the conditions and the linguistic identity of my own mother were a lot more complex than the concept of mother tongue suggests. My mother's main language and hence the first language that touched my ears and soul was Russian, the mastering of which, as a rather unwelcome minority in the Soviet Union, became a statement of integration:

> The notion of 'mother tongue' is thus a mixture of myth and ideology. The family is not necessarily the place where languages are transmitted, and sometimes we observe breaks in transmission, often translated by a change of language, with children acquiring as first language the one that dominates in the milieu. This phenomenon [...] concerns all multilingual situations and most of the situations of migration (Calvet 2006, 159).

After our migration to Germany we continued speaking mainly Russian at home, which sometimes evolved into a hybrid German-Russian mixture in which German and Russian words are used alongside each other in a single sentence. I recall happy evenings with my father and my sister singing to old Russian songs and dancing joyfully to this nostalgia. On the other hand, I also recall that I successively suppressed my linguistic Russian identity in favor of

German, as I felt excluded from the German way of life that other children in my surrounding embraced.

Language has been deemed a key factor to successful integration among German-Russians. In a quantitative study conducted by the Boris Nemtsov Foundation in 2016 it was concluded that "those respondents who are able to speak German are most likely to identify themselves as Germans" (Ipsos 2016, 4), therefore claiming that language skills are key to integration. The psychological and emotional layers underneath linguistic transformation, however, cannot be taken into account when measuring integration by language skills. Gazi Caglar points out that, while in relation to society, language skills do contribute to integration as they establish order, however, in relation to the individual experience can have ambivalent effects between relief and coercion (Caglar 2004).

De-activating the Russian language in my life was not a definitive decision, as I had the possibility to attend Russian language classes that were customized to native speakers with limited competences during my university studies. Much of my childhood, however, I lived through with my Russian language on hold. Along with the name change I underwent at a very young age, a time I cannot even remember, these incidents form an image of the 'Russian' past that is unwanted.

This double foreignness echoed through my adolescence and commonly expressed itself in feelings of shame and guilt for not belonging *naturally*. Being a migrant has psychological impacts that affect both directions of movement, as French-Lebanese writer Maalouf poetically portrays:

> If you have gone away, it is because there are things you have rejected – repression, insecurity, poverty, lack of opportunity. But this rejection is often accompanied by a sense of guilt. You are angry with yourself for abandoning loved ones, or the house you grew up in, or countless pleasant memories (Maalouf 2000, 38).

It is certainly difficult to argue that I have left behind countless memories in Kazakhstan, because I have no conscious memory of the first two years of my life. Nevertheless, an invisible bond remains, and be it only shaped by Russian cultural and linguistic influences during my childhood or be it a social bond that is undeniable. My paternal family, including my father, all live in Kazakhstan. For my maternal family which I relate to on a daily basis, Kazakhstan is not much more than a long distant past.

## 1.2.2. Dual Belonging

Writing about dual foreignness implies the existence of its reverses, dual belonging. It seems one-sided to me to be focusing exclusively on this rather shady side of identity, particularly when considering that writing about foreignness implies the presence of belonging. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida develops the concept of *Hauntology*, a neologism comprised by the words *haunting* and *ontology*. It is based on Derrida's method of deconstruction and delineates the presence of a ghost, a specter that is neither present, nor absent:

> What happens between two, and between all the "two's" one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost. [...] Even and especially if this, which is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, is never present as such (Derrida 1994, xvii).

More concretely, the dilemma of being German here, and Russian there, already contains the presence of both cultures, depending on the individual context and circumstances.

From such a perspective and a way I would locate myself at the present moment, the felt sense of dual foreignness has been intimately intertwined with the ability to establish a dual sense of belonging, or even a multiplicity of such. This rendered my efforts to integrate in Rwandan society more feasible than I had imagined, as my bilingualism had strengthening effects on my ability to learn a new language. Cultural awareness and respect for different ways of being accompanied my encounters while living in Rwanda. These qualities, I believe, stem from my personal background of living between two cultures that seem very close on the first glance, but have been increasingly divided by processes of *Othering* in the ideological battlefields of the Cold War and its residues.

A dual sense of belonging suggests an oscillating sense of belonging, one that is neither confined to a certain language, space nor culture, because it becomes possible to sustain relationships of any kind to the country of origin. It can be seen in context with the idea of transnationality which denotes the felt sense of belonging to more than one nationality without essentializing it (Schmitz 2017). Transnationality delineates both an individually lived experience of the "in-between" of two or more nations, but also has the potential to establish new social and cultural psychological categories, as it becomes increasingly common in the context of globalization and possibilities in the field of communication technology. Glick Schiller et al. have proposed a definition of transnationalism as

> [...] processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. [...] Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1-2).

The potentials that lie in such a process imply breaking free from the national container of identity formation. It also renders the German-Russians a third force that can mediate between German and Russian cultures in various roles, ranging from economy and politics to media, music and art (Kourilo 2006). Abebe and Saha describe this notion and the surrounding circumstances with their productive potential heartfeltly:

> [...] it can be difficult to feel settled when they have such ambiguous ties to both their countries of citizenship and origin. Often their social, cultural, and political lives are spread across multiple places, some of which they have never been to outside their imagination. While it may be challenging to live in this liminal space of 'in-betweenness', it can also be a beautiful and productive place ripe for creative thought and expression. It is a place from which one can observe the world through a lens of curiosity – a lens that can shift its perspective and proximity with greater ease than most (Abebe and Saha 2015, 19).

Nevertheless, Sanders argues that a transnational lifestyle is not as pronounced as for other migrant groups in Germany amongst the German Russians (Sanders 2017), which has reasons rooting in the context of their migration(s). When asked, members of my maternal family typically drop the Russian part of the label and self-identify as ethnic Germans. This is of no surprise to me, given the systemic understanding I have acquired of German-Russians in the Soviet Union developing a sense of *imagined* community and belonging to the *imagined* homeland of Germany during times of severe oppression. This coping strategy can be seen as assimilation-oriented approach of acclimatization (Kourilo 2006, 394) in which German-Russians stress their German-ness while decreasing contact with any forms of contact to Russia or Russian culture. Yet, the need to assimilate is often a direct reaction to the perceived double foreignness and the negative image that is still upheld in mass media and public society (Kourilo 2006, 394).

Most of German-Russians migrated to an imagined homeland of 'Germany', primarily connected to the linguistic identity of their ancestors. Often whole families migrated altogether, so that there were no direct social ties to the countries of origin anymore. Alongside these reasons, the political and economic situation(s) in Kazakhstan deteriorated in the early 1990s.

Infrastructure and basic needs could hardly be met, and German-Russians felt increasingly discriminated against in the light of growing national sentiments among the Kazakh population. Many of those emigrants turned their back on Kazakhstan and left "for good," without any intention of ever coming back (Sanders 2017). This might explain the tendency within my family to turn their back on the past by means of Germanization and an almost complete cancellation of social relations to my paternal family after my parents' divorce. I did not consciously push the Russian aspect of my identity into absence. It happened in a systemic framework of family system and social environment. The suppression of this long distant past is creating an artificial and superficial sense of 'peace' (Dietrich 2013, 71), which is reflected in the linguistic habit of German speakers 'Lass mich in Frieden' (lit.: "leave me in peace"). Such a notion of peace being a *status quo*, which would be disrupted by unpleasant new information, stands diametric to what I understand as processual, ever-evolving nature of life.

## 1.3. What lies Between

In the German-speaking part of my family, elders have begun writing down their experiences of life in the Soviet Union (Wilms 1993; Pauls 2011). In 2011, I happened to sit down with my grandmother to assist her in bringing to paper her narratives on her life. She was born in 1937 in a village of Mennonite settlers in Leninpol (Kyrgyzstan). When she was just a few weeks old, her father was sent to Gulag[9] where he eventually died from an untreated lung infection. Her mother had to serve in the Trudarmiya[10] for several years, leaving her elder sister in charge of herself and her brother. Amidst the harshness of her and her families' life, I was deeply concerned about a passage she narrated with tears in her eyes:

> One Morning, I was five years old, I found all sorts of stitching and cutting utensils – needles, a scissors, razor blades. I collected the things, showed them to my mother. "Do you want me to get hurt and die?" – I asked. My mom looked at me without a word. She just left. A few days later, all the

[9] Gulag is acronym of *Главное управление лагерей и мест заключения*, meaning "Main Administration of Camps and Places of Detention" which denotes the government agency in the Soviet Union that controlled the system of forced labor camps.

[10] In 1942, almost all German-Russian women older than 16 years were enlisted in the Trudarmiya, including my great-grandmother (Wilms 1993). The Trudarmiya was a forced labor system that was implemented as a working brigade to support the Second World War against the Third Reich. Prisoners worked in coal mines, ammunition factories and refineries. Living conditions in the Trudarmiya camps resembled those of the Gulags.

> things were in my bed again. This time, I took the things and put them back on their place without complaining. The incident has strongly shaped my character, because afterwards, I always wanted to prove that I have a worth, wanted to be the best, in every respect (translated by the author).

This narrative touched me deeply because I couldn't grasp the extent of hopelessness in the context of this memory that happened in Kyrgyzstan around the year 1942. As she expressed herself, I noticed a line of diminished self-worth and constant preoccupation with how one can prove her worth of being alive to close relatives, running through my own life and the lives of my close relatives. The meaning my grandmother extracted from this traumatic experience has entered the family system and crept in as a basic foundation of my life – the necessity to prove my worth in order to deserve to live.

Massive violence can have deep and lasting effects on collectives, their historical processes and their present understandings of who they are. It has been argued, as I will elaborate later, that trauma can be transmitted to descendants when it remains unintegrated.

In the context of living in the Soviet Union as a national minority, however, it becomes difficult to pin down collective experiences of German-Russians to a traumatic event. In this context, the concept of sequential traumatization (Keilson 1992) is more helpful to understand multiple sequences of events that might have had traumatic consequences for German-Russians. I introduce this concept in chapter 5.3., in combination with some historical context that illustrates the different sequences of traumatization.

German-Russians, with their historically institutionalized label of affiliation to the German nation, were said to be more likely to become victims of deportation, incarceration and forced labor in the Gulag. Jehanne Gheith, who analyses non-narrative coping strategies with individual trauma in the Gulags, argues that "it is harder to separate the trauma of the Gulag from the trauma of living in Soviet society (*or even to decide if trauma is the right word for this living*)" (Gheith 2007, 161). For many national and ethnic groups, even for the totality of the population living in the Soviet Union under Stalin (Baker and Gippenreiter 1998), the era of Stalinism encompassed massive societal problems that shook the social fabric dramatically.

# 2. The Question(s)

My primary motivation to conduct this research are the reverberations of a personal wound which expresses itself in a persistent notion of foreignness and the feeling of never having fully arrived. It results from the confusion of why my past, and the past of my family that relates to Kazakhstan, the former Soviet Union concretely, has been largely suppressed from my life, but still is overtly present through this narrative absence. This avoidance resembles an inner void that keeps knocking at my door, every time when I am being asked where I come from.

As I formulate the topic, the nature of the problem is as rich in diversity as are the individual stories of lived experiences as a person of German-Russian background: sometimes unspoken or suppressed, other times cherished and celebrated as unique, but always affecting the present and future in one way or another. These stories contribute to a shaking of the grand historical narratives of either German collective guilt or German-Russian collective victimization.

Naturally, as with all collectives, I am aware of the danger of a single story, particularly such narratives about a group, and members of it alike, that is heterogeneous and in a continuous process of integration and differentiation within the dominant German society. There are self-proclaimed 'German-Russians' living as German minorities in post-Soviet countries and those who live as 'post-Soviet migrants' in Germany; there are others who live in Argentina and Paraguay, and those who emigrated to Canada and USA. It is such diversity in lived experience that complicates a single valid description of *the* German-Russians. Olga Kourilo (2006) depicts this difficulty of cultural self-identification with the diversity of answers given from German-Russians living in Germany. Their answers range from "I am German" and "I am Russian" to more complex mixtures such as "one quarter German", "half Russian, half German", "German from Russia", "Volga German", "Swabian" (Kourilo 2006, 387, translated by the author). The impact of individual cultural and psychological differences that shape people's self-identification in terms of collective identit(ies) shines through such diversity of responses. It is legitimate to say that there is neither "the one" story nor "the one" lived experience of German-Russians, not least because of their diversity of socioeconomic life situations and individual life stories (Panagiotidis 2017).

When I therefore talk about topics that I assume to be connected with my partial identification as German-Russian, topics that have emerged at this very point in my own life, they do not necessarily hold true for others who identify (or are being identified) as German-Russians to whichever degrees. Therefore, my approach is explorative, not so much interested in causal connections, which can and often only does emerge *ex post facto*, but more in the meaning

and the transformative processes that surround an awareness of transgenerational legacies of family histories in the Soviet Union.

In a transrational framework that has shaped much of my academic journey during the past years, having explored this particular triggering observation of pushing parts of my and my family's past into absence is already part and parcel of the decision that brings me to my research question. Hence, I offer my personal perspective onto a specific aspect through a magnifying glass, but constantly keep in mind that this particular topic is merely part of a larger system in which other topics are equally important to look at. Wolfgang Dietrich, peace researcher and director of the Master's program for Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck, reminds us clearly that "if a single aspect is overemphasized in conflict work, for example security, then harmony will be undermined and truth and justice will be destabilized" (Dietrich 2013, 207). Despite this being an academic research project, it is also an application of Elicitive Conflict Work[11] and has facilitation character in its process of becoming. Hence comes my urge to the reader to keep in mind the larger system that lies beyond my topic.

I enter my research with the awareness that I do not research a collective ethnic or national identity, but rather a set of experience that has shaped German-Russian's individual and collective pasts profoundly, leading me to discourse and narrative as units of analysis that have both shaped and emerged from this shared experience (see chapter 5.2.3.). This awareness has resulted in the following research question and subquestions:

In what ways are German-Russians living in Germany today affected by their families' experiences in the Soviet Union?

What, if any, do they perceive as legacies of Transgenerational Traumatization in their own lives?

What are their strategies to integrate and transform these legacies and how do these strategies respond to individual needs but also shape the wider public ethos?

The main research question *In what ways are German-Russians living in Germany today affected by their families' experiences in the Soviet Union?* presents an explorative window into the depths of an engagement with the past, individual and collective identity as well as the possibility of transgenerational traumatization. While the explorative guiding question sets the frame for the following questions, I am aware of the dangers of projection and transposition of transgenerational traumatization in the interview contexts.

[11] Elicitive Conflict Work is the practical consequence of a transrational approach to Peace Studies

I will refer to these dangers in my chapter 3.3. on ethical considerations in more depth. For the moment, I wish to concretize that the full process of research depends on the course of data collection through the interviews and which topics the co-researchers[12] hold to be most relevant in their meaning makings of their family histories. The questions focus on concrete and contextualized cases for which I do not claim representability.

Choosing an explorative guiding question reflects my own interest, precisely not in a causal explanation or validation of the existence of transgenerational traumatization. Rather, I propose to focus research on the identification and analysis of practices through which transgenerational trauma is constructed as legacies of the Soviet past and attributed meaning to. Such an approach contributes to identify social implications and social mechanisms that create discourses on transgenerational traumatization.

My research question is concerned with *both* the inner world of individuals, in which meanings are made and unmade, *and* the outer world of social circumstances that shape meaning-making processes. It engages micro-history within a larger view on the past. Roger Chartier, in that line, captures the advantages of such a micro-historical approach, in which "we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of beliefs, of values and representations on the one hand, and social affiliations on another" (Chartier 1982, 32). Thereby, I look for the interplay between individual meaning-makings and social constructions of the past, but also of identity and trauma talk.

I was thankful when, in a family get-together, my grandfather approached me, believing that my topic read 'Legacies of Socialist Oppression'. "That is the most wrong thing you could possibly do", he said to me. "Socialism, when juxtaposed against Capitalism, is the better system". Our conversation reminded me of the coloring that has been inherent to study of history, particularly that of Cold War and its residues, which depicted the Soviet system as demonized *Other*. Yurchak (2005) studies, for instance, the perceptions and attitudes of the last Soviet generation which give valuable insights to meaning produced within, through and beyond the system.

With this in mind, I do not want to base my thesis on the premise that Soviet realities were oppressive or traumatic as such. I also acknowledge that the stories that precede migration to the Russian Empire may have reverberations on German-Russian's family histories. In order to keep my research project feasible, however, I choose to narrow down the topic to experiences in the Soviet Union. Therefore, I am neither interested in assessing the reasons for migrations to the former Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nor to Germany in the twentieth century.

[12] I understand my interview partners as co-researchers who offer their stories in a relational interview.

My aim to reconstruct experiences of members a minority such as Germans in the Soviet Union is based on an examination of existing literature and discourse, while it transcends and shakes this knowledge through an in-depth analysis of individual meaning making systems.

## 2.1. Limitations

As my research question is driving all the subsequent work, I recognize that it comes with certain limitations that I wish to clarify before going in depth within the main body of research.

With German-Russians as case study, I have departed from my own wound, yet chose to focus on the meaning-making of other people. I am aware that my external focus might imply a transference of my own processes. The choice, however, is rooted in my wish to explore a multifaceted account of the meaning of a collective past that includes the voices of German-Russians other than me. As my process has preceded the research project and is made explicit both in the Authors Perspective and interpretation of data, I consciously incorporate my voice both as a researcher and a 'researched' with a certain self-reflexivity. Having spent a significant amount of time and self-reflection on my personal perspective helped me gain awareness of my own story which I can consciously distinguish from others' stories. In general, I understand the borders of 'researcher' and 'research participant' as profoundly fluid, which is the reason why I acknowledge my interview partners as co-researchers rather than interviewees. This is a joint project which stresses as important outcome the "process – the making of collective intellectual endeavors" (McLeod and Thomson 2009a, 16). Through the research process I uphold continuous contact and exchange with the co-researchers, in order to represent their narratives ethically and draw from the collective knowledge that emerges from the research process itself. With this, I also acknowledge my own presence in eliciting, analyzing, interpreting and representing different narratives.

In this line, I also acknowledge the sensitivity of temporality, rooted in a "dynamic relationship between the past and present, characterized both by determination (the past shaping the present) and hermeneutics (the present constructing the past)" (McLeod and Thomson 2009a, 15). While I am in no position to resolve the tension of temporality, I aim to make visible temporalities throughout my research, particularly in data interpretation. Beyond this tension, I also see the sensitivity of temporality as a valuable resource to understand the *past that lies before us*, by cultivating "an awareness of the surfacing and diffusing of the past within the present" (McLeod and Thomson 2009a, 20). Hence, the focus is not the validity of

memory and narrative, but rather the interrogation of why and how we remember a long distant past that might not even be our own. Making meaning of the past is here seen as a direct function of the present, as Löwenthal suggests:

> The narrator's perspective and predilections shape his choice and use of historical materials. [...] The past we know or experience is always contingent on our own views, our own perspective, above all our own present" (Löwenthal 2003, 216).

Through this, the temporality of history can be seen not only as a problem, but as a resource for meaning-making narrations that are constantly subject to change, designating "a 'past' that has never been present, and which never will be" (Derrida 1982, 21). As a result, the engagement with such a past can contribute to the understanding of a larger social level of collective memory and suggest initiatives that emerge from the individuals to shape and transform them.

A last difficulty, which is perhaps a potential as well, is the social consequence of choosing a research topic that is hinting toward the subliminal assumption of collective victimization of all German-Russians. While in German dominant society public discourse has largely dealt with topics of collective guilt, right-wing movements tend to pick up on those narratives of victimization that distort this dominant narrative (Angelos 2017). Yet, as I will go in more depth with the exploration of meaning-making, the assumption itself is exposed to a shaking that emerges from the narratives of the co-researchers. Furthermore, as I theoretically engage with the social construction of labels such as perpetrators and victims, I reflect upon such dynamics of guilt and victimization within a systemic view, and thereby aim to weaken such instrumentalizations.

## 2.2. Relevance

'*Peace work is shadow work*' – this statement resonates and circles around my being since I heard it expressed in a workshop on embodied methods of Peace Research, voiced by Norbert Koppensteiner (Koppensteiner 2018a; 2018b, 67). It contains a reference to Carl Gustav Jung's approach to shadow work, understood as making visible and integrating unconscious aspects of the personality (Johnson 2009). Some scholars go beyond the personal shadow towards a collective shadow of society, which indicates those aspects of social life that are repressed or denied, thereby pushed into the collective unconscious (Jung 1976). Moreover, the statement acknowledges the deep

need to approach interpersonal peace by looking at what may not be wished to look at, as "[c]consciousness about the shadow, however, is not just important for personal development, but also a basic precondition for social peace and international understanding" (Dietrich 2012, 233).

On a more conventional level of analysis, but leading to the same consequences, Botcharova (2001) suggests that "a failure to attend to the deep need for healing from victimization of the parties in violent conflict" (2001, 280) is among the major impediments for peacebuilding. Memory processes and ways of remembering have the potential to contribute to either peace or conflict in the same system, depending on how these processes are constructed and conducted[13].

I choose to explore such processes of individual meaning-making in the context of family and social dynamics among members of the collective group of German-Russians for multiple reasons, some of which have become evident throughout my personal positioning in relation to the topic.

*Firstly*, questions of belonging and collective identity are relevant for every human being, even if it does not always affect each one consciously to the same extent. I believe that a deeper engagement with these topics can have representative character, even and especially if the German-Russians' stories are internally diverse and by no means an identifiable collectivity. Choosing a case study to explore these topics makes them more graspable as they can be contextualized and witnessed in the lived existences of human beings. Inspired by a seminar held by Norbert Koppensteiner on "The Researcher as (Re)source" (2018a), I found deep personal and academic meaning in Carl Rogers' insight of "[w]hat is most personal is most general" (Rogers 1961, 26). As an expert of my own stories and topics, I have begun to develop an acknowledgement for my lived experiences, overcoming the scientific urge to push my voice out of the spoken and written frame. I am choosing to enter a topic from my personal lived experience to give an account of the topic at large from the perspective of the researcher as a resource, because "existence cannot be subsumed under a unified ontological ground" (Koppensteiner 2018b, 63).

*Secondly*, having a German-Russian background myself, I intuit the potential of inner healing and transformation in the process of writing this thesis for myself. In Elicitive Conflict Work, I rely on self-awareness, particularly that of my own conflictive energies that, if left unnoticed, can easily be projected or transposited onto external parties (Dietrich 2013, 7-10). That awareness nourishes the development of this thesis, both because it illuminates who and why I am in the present moment, and because it helps me develop an understanding for similar processes that impact third parties,

[13] For an in-depth study on the effects on inclusive and exclusive victim consciousness, see Vollhardt and Bilali 2015.

thus cultivating a much-needed sense of empathy. Dietrich draws from Virginia Satir in affirming that the

> [...] majority of conflicts among human beings emerges from internalized images and ideas of other people and thus stands in the way of genuine communication is significant for conflict work. The first thing one encounters upon meeting someone new is his or her idea about the person. As a result, conflicts tend to be particularly frequent and severe among those who have not yet discovered who they are or who others are (Dietrich 2013, 44).

This insight is strongly related to processes of identity formation and its effect on relationality. It is in this context that the unconscious need to create bonds of belonging, or conversely distinctions from other human groups "can easily lead the conflict worker to construct artificial alliances and quasi-communities, which take the system even more off its balance" (Uibk 2018). Both in researching and applying Elicitive Conflict Transformation, a self-reflexive awareness of both conscious and subconscious factors is crucial in order to transform such imbalances.

*Thirdly,* and closely linked to the second motivation, the significance of learning, knowing and re-storying different accounts of history effects into how we relate with others in the present. As peace and conflict research is a transdisciplinary field of study interested in interpersonal and inter-societal processes of interaction, it is concerned with manifestations of the 'episode' through "encounter, communication styles, and the behaviors of contact boundaries at work" (Dietrich 2013, 200). What effects does a narrative exploration of the past, along with its significance for the present have? How do individuals re-story their historical identities in a larger social context? These are questions that touch the core of walking backward into the future.

# 3. Research Design

With my stated interest in the meaning-making of the collective past in the Soviet Union, I intend to elicit data in the form of narratives[14] told by German-Russians through in-depth interviews. This choice is rooted in an acknowledgement of the inherent capacity and tendency of human beings to make meaning and order their lives in and through narratives (Andrews, Squire and Tambokou 2008; Josselson 2004; Polkinghorne 1988). Some scholars assert that identity formation is intertwined and even enacted through narratives (Dillon 2011; Somers and Gibson 1994; MacIntyre 1984; Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992), recognizing their performativity.

A theoretical framework is preceding the data collection and analysis process, in order to provide preliminary lenses of analysis and interpretation within the academic sphere, peace and conflict research in particular. I draw from literature on trauma, family systems, identity and peace and conflict research in order to approach a theoretical framework that elucidates interpretive lenses for the subsequent data analysis. It is already in the theoretical framework that I include historical discourse on German-Russians in Germany in order to intertwine theory with the concrete process of meaning-making through social discourse from the onset of my research.

I then turn toward the empirical part of my research which is grounded in a narrative approach. My aim is, to put it with Josselson's words, "to begin with the phenomenology of experience, and then to try to puzzle out the dynamics and structures that may account for that experience" (Josselson 2013, 2). As such, Narrative Inquiry is grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology. Ellingson advocates "the use of multiple methods of analysis and representation that span artistic and scientific epistemologies" (Ellingson 2011, 595), which implies a view of qualitative methods as continuum, rather than categories of approaches. The tendency to such fluid framework of representation is grounded in the fluidity of meanings themselves, which are "fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly" (Riessman 1993, 15).

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[14] In the present work, the term *narrative* is understood as social process of communication between a teller and an audience. This process is co-created by the audience through imagination and interpretation and also shaped by the relationship between teller and audience which influence the rendition of the narration (Rubin & Rubin 2005). In distinction, *storytelling* is "a form of communication that expresses the dramatic code", typically fueled by desire (Truby 2007, 7). *Discourse* is a form of narrative, yet inherently imbued with power and resistance, as discourses are seen as attempts to stabilize attributions of meaning and orders of significations, thereby institutionalizing a collectively binding form of knowledge in a particular social setting (Keller 2004, 7).

Certainly, my study draws from a multitude of qualitative approaches, albeit firmly rooted in Narrative Research (Josselson 2011). Besides being concerned with the phenomenology of experience through narrative modes of knowing, it is also shaped by a constructionist approach due to my previous academic work, which becomes discernible in my attention to discursive and contextual structure and the co-construction of narratives. For identification and analysis of data, it borrows from thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), while eliciting these themes through mind mapping (Buzan 2012). Mapping is seen as useful framework for representation of realities by organizing, structuring and interpreting information. Nevertheless, maps also reduce a complex reality to a two-dimensional shape (Uibk 2018). Therefore, I am upholding a continuous communication with the co-researchers, in order to pay respect to their views and attitudes toward my processes of organizing and interpreting. Instead of promising generalizations, Narrative Research offers "the possibility of exploring nuances and interrelationships among aspects of experience that the reader might apply to better understand other related situations" (Josselson 2011, 239).

The collected data in form of narratives are offering a "window into the complexities" (Josselson 2011, 239) of German-Russian meaning-making systems that are often sketched by a hybrid convergence of both German and Russian cultures, as well as the 'in-betweens' (Bhabha 2004). By eliciting these stories, the continuous interrelation "between cultural canon and individual expression" (Hyvärinen 2008, 457) becomes more tangible. With its historical dimension, my analysis points toward the collectivity of history, that is imbued with individual stories that often break with a collective historical canon. Thus, on a metatheoretical level, these stories challenge the grand narratives that have been rejected by Lyotard and other postmodern thinkers, leading to a "gradual rehabilitation of the alternative, small, forgotten, and untold stories" (Hyvärinen 2008, 450).

## 3.1. Ontology

Before unfolding the methodological approach of my research, I am clarifying some basic ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie my academic approach. While acknowledging the postmodern condition of a plurality of ontologies, a systemic-relational lens contextualizes this multiplicity of ways of being in the relational condition of human existence. This corresponds to a transrational approach, which integrates into the postmodern insight of multiple ontologies the relational existence of all life as form of energetic interpretation. Such a view is mirrored in the accompanying anthropological assumption of the human being as "contact boundary at

work" (Echavarría and Koppensteiner 2018, 5), active at the interplay of interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of life. Such an ontology leads to the assertion "that the empirical behavior exhibited in an episode by the personae as socialized beings is codetermined by inner drives rooted under their ego layers as well as by external factors of supra-societal dimensions" (Dietrich 2013, 201). Grounded in such plurality of ontologies that are intersubjectively related, I consciously do not look for historical truth or facts, but rather understand that all narratives already "sit at the intersection of history, biography, and society" (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005, 132).

Narratives are understood both as ontological premises and epistemological phenomena. Clandinin and Caine define *Narrative Inquiry* as "both a view of the phenomena of people's experiences *and* a methodology for narratively inquiring into experience" (Clandinin and Caine 2008, 541; own italics). In line with understanding experiences as narrative phenomena, Somers and Gibson (1994) bring forth an understanding of ontological narratives as formative stories of ourselves, our place in the world and our history, hence ontological stories.

Herein, Narrative Inquiry shows some commonalities with the premises of discursive psychology, which aims to explain *how* meaning-making processes take place by investigating how subjective psychological realities are constituted through discourse (Shotter 1993; Wetherell and Potter 1992). Narrative Inquiry distinguishes itself from Discursive Psychology by its dedication to an approach of active listening (Rogers and Farson 1987), instead of deconstructing. Active listening requires an emptying of oneself from prior theories and attitudes so that the listener can fully attend to the narrator. Therefore, Narrative Inquiry "aims at understanding and making meaning of experience through conversations, dialogue, and participation in the ongoing lives of research participants" (Clandinin and Caine 2008, 541).

This does not imply that social and historical events do not exist outside the linguistic realm, but rather that the meanings attributed to such events are discursively and narratively constructed. Experiences are given specific meanings "by virtue of the words which are available, and the resulting meanings contribute to producing the experience rather than being merely a description of the experience or an 'after-the-event' occurrence" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 103). A limitation to the range of explicability through words, however, already implies that something might remain unspoken or even unspeakable, if no proper words are available for a specific situation or experience. The limits of narratives and the existence of unspeakable phenomena are therefore a consequence of the delineated ontological premises.

## 3.2. Epistemology

Epistemologically, I recognize the multiplicity of possible modes of knowing that has been expressed by postmodern research which altogether "launch an open investigation into the conditions of possibility for knowledge" (Koppensteiner 2018b, 63). While postmodern epistemologies emphasize differentiation of knowledges, a transrational approach suggests an ongoing differentiation and simultaneous integration into a synoptic view as a "permanently ongoing, open and dynamic process" (Koppensteiner 2018b, 65) of both integration and differentiation.

Transrational methodologies go further in their epistemological premises, by shifting "away from modern cognicentrism" toward other ways of knowing (Koppensteiner 2018b, 67) on Ellingson's continuum of qualitative research. Koppensteiner suggests a systematization of five different forms of knowing (2018b, 68):

1. "Somatic knowing through the body – *sensing*
2. Empathic and affective knowing through the heart – *feeling*
3. Intellectual knowing through the mind – *thinking*
4. Intuitive knowing through the soul – *intuiting*
5. Transpersonal knowing through the spirit – *witnessing*"

These multiple ways of knowing offer a rich account of exploration, particularly of the research topic of transgenerational trauma. Yet, such a plurality cannot be covered in the frame of a Master's thesis that is limited in scope and time. My pragmatic choice of narrative as primary data does not necessarily imply a reductionist confinement to intellectual knowing, because it can give insights into sensations and feelings that have been translated into words by the narrators themselves. By basing the framework in which I hold interviews on a relational approach, as proposed by Josselson (2013), I am shifting away from the focus on intellectual knowing toward an integrated epistemology that moves towards empathic knowing which is both cognitive and affective (Josselson 2013, 84). The invitation of other, alternative ways of knowing is a direct consequence of a holistic understanding of the human being who is thereby not merely restricted to intellectual knowing through the mind.

Therefore, I am encouraged to observe whether there are indicators that signify different ways of knowing during the processes of data collection and analysis. Josselson, in introducing the limitations of narrative, refers to the work of Annie Rogers on a language of the unsayable (Rogers et al. 1999) in which textual markers such as "negations, revisions, and smokescreens [...] mask feelings and experiences that cannot be put into words" (Josselson 2013,

167). While such work typically happens during analysis and interpretation, it becomes crucial to take notice of such processes during the course of the interview and ask for clarifications, whenever possible.

Furthermore, narrative research is embracing a hermeneutic epistemology, which recognizes a mutual constitution between the whole and the parts. Accordingly, when talking about experiences that happened in the past, "the past is apprehended through the subject" (McLeod and Thomson 2009a, 18). Additionally, my approach entails a constructionist epistemology that stresses the relational quality of knowledge production. It does, however, go further by integrating a systemic epistemology of transformation and participation through the very encounter. Gloria Anzaldúa finds poetic words for such transformative character of knowing:

> Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing", I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before (Anzaldúa 1999, 70).

*Knowledge-as-dialogue* can be traced to Paolo Freire's writings with an empowering connotation in a pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire 1970) and even beyond that to Plato's rendition of Socratic dialogue in *Republic*, applying a dialogic knowing to dismantle systems of thought. Despite not in the same contexts, I acknowledge that dialogue offers a way of knowing that emerges in the space in-between, and so I approach the interviews with a sensitivity thereof.

## 3.3. Ethical considerations

As my research is drawing from and based upon individual stories, ethical implications are at the core of my research. I endorse Ruthellen Josselson (2013) who offers a comprehensive account of conducting in-depth interviews in an ethical, relational manner. She incorporates the ethical call of research to provide "insight that befits the complexity of human lives" (Josselson 2006, 4). The central ethical difficulties of data analysis concern ownership and representation, as I am in a privileged position to elicit, interpret and analyze the narratives. In acknowledgement of this power imbalance, I have decided to let the participants re-read my analysis before submission, so that they can assess and comment on my interpretation of their narratives. I have done the best to incorporate their comments and adjust the text accordingly.

I am also aware of the sensitivity of temporality, acknowledging that meanings may change over time, and that the narratives produced in the context of this particular research project may diverge from future or past interpretations of the individuals. Their narratives are therefore understood as snapshots of their current states of narrative meaning-making in which "the present is privileged to make sense of the past" (McLeod and Thomson 2009b, 25), with the explicit aim to not confine their stories to a fixity of the narrative. I am aiming at making temporalities as visible as possible by accounting for my presence as researcher both in the process of data generation, as well as their analysis and interpretation.

Another ethical tension arises from how to interpret the data, either by privileging the voice of the participant, or looking for hidden meanings that have not been made explicit. Josselson, again, suggests to apply both an interpretation of faith and an interpretation of suspicion in tandem, suggesting a terminology that has less connotation as in hermeneutics of restoration and the hermeneutics of demystification (2004, 5). The first is defined by the aim "to re-present, explore and/or understand the subjective world of the participant and/or the social and historical world they feel themselves to be living in" (Josselson 2004, 5). The latter interpretation of suspicion assumes experience "not to be transparent to itself: surface appearances mask depth realities; a told story conceals an untold one" (Josselson 2004, 13). Therefore, the hermeneutics of demystification imply decoding the "implicit meaning that might go unnoticed in the first approach" (Kim 2015, 194).

## 3.4. Narratives

I resonate with a constructionist view that focuses on its performativity and relates narrative and storytelling practices to their respective contexts. In practical analytic terms, this means that narratives do not exist as fully formed 'stories' prior to their expression in the interview context. Certainly, interviews have their limitations and have been criticized for the artificial setting in which they are typically conducted, with the interviewer asking questions, and the interviewee responding to them (e.g. Potter and Hepburn 2005).

Therefore, I approach interviews as interpersonal encounters that aim to elicit stories from the co-researchers, shifting away from the interview as artificially and intentionally created situation that is framed by the agenda of the researcher (Attenborough and Stokoe 2012) and rather understanding the process of knowing as a dialogue between myself and the co-researchers. When I hence refer to interviews in the context of this thesis, I do not refer to common interview structures that are shaped by questions and answers, but rather by interviews that are open and dialogical, often oscillating between

dialogue and monologue of the co-researcher. Josselson describes the interview process as a "dance of creating shared understanding" (Josselson 2013, 81). Such a view relies heavily on attunement, active listening and awareness of not only verbal, but also nonverbal exchanges during the conversation.

The ever-evolving processual nature of narrative activity as sense-making process is not only contextualized by the concrete interview encounter, but also by larger social and cultural functions (Hyvärinen 2008, 453), which calls for a consideration of narrative environments that "challenge, as well as affirm, various stories" (Gubrium and Holstein 2007, 254). I aim to take account of this by contextualizing the narratives, thereby trying to explore and extract culturally significant meaning. Hence, I understand narratives themselves as sociopolitical processes, a claim that "alerts us to the power mechanisms or structures that permit certain stories to be told while silencing others" (Earthy and Cronin 2008, 426-427). In a wider macro-historical frame, the relevance of this notion lies in the expression of their experiences of oppression since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Ken Plummer (1995) studies the symbolic interactions inherent in the production of narratives, paying particular attention to "[t]he social role of stories: the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process" (Plummer 1995, 19). Such a sociology of telling holds that the expression of a narrative is only a "selective representation of life; it is not the life itself" (Earthy and Cronin 2008, 425).

Hyvärinen understands what is commonly referred to as cultural scripts as forms of discourse which permeate the smaller narratives, give them shape and limitations:

> [...] master narratives presenting normatively privileged accounts, counter narratives that resist and take distance from such culturally privileged ways of telling, and high narrativity of good stories that do not simply recount the cultural scripts. Because master narratives are seldom explicitly told by anyone, the more formulaic term "script" is preferred here to refer to the cultural and situational impacts on narration (Hyvärinen 2008, 455).

The choice of terminology has been inconsistent throughout scholarly debates, and the borders between 'narrative' and 'discourse' in particular appear porous. Gough suggests that the narrative turn "invites researchers to recognize how their particular forms of discourse are ordered as narratives: that is, to think of all discourse as taking the form of a story" (Gough 2008, 832). In a similar line, yet in direct connection to the topic of transgenerational traumatization, Carol Kidron, a descendant of Holocaust survivors herself, analyses the interrelation of cultural scrips and individual

meaning making of transgenerational trauma among second-generation Holocaust survivors:

> When collective trauma occurs in the distant past, both the individual and the collective become all the more reliant upon expert discourse, cultural key scenarios, narrative practices and communal sites of memory in order to access, frame and sustain the presence of the past. It is culture that must create the bridge to the past, in the form of culturally constituted descendant identities, mnemonic narratives and illness constructs of transmitted trauma, all functioning as conduits of memory (Kidron 2003, 535).

Kidron's analysis underscores the dominance of expert discourse and cultural construction of memory. Her analysis neglects, however, individual experience and meaning-making that is located under their ego layers, as she focuses on discourse as primary level of analysis. Shifting the focus on personal experiences and meaning-makings while enriching the data through discourse analysis of media and institutions, seems to offer more potential in linking individual with collective spheres, while acknowledging the agency of the individual by placing her in the center of research. Furthermore, the narratives are not only conveyed in a verbal manner, but also through non-verbal communication, the reference to artifacts, objects and media, as well as many more aspects that contribute to how the narrative reaches and touches me. Hence, the processes of analysis and representation cover much more than a textual form of narrative.

## 3.5. Inviting Empathy

Elicitive Conflict Transformation "works with the present realities and their complex systemic interrelations" (Dietrich 2013, 200). Yet a major pitfall may arise when I draw from my own personal wound (see chapter one) and transpose it on others. Research of transgenerational traumatization is even more so in imminent danger of transposition or projection, because the causal links between the long distant past and the expression of trauma are not clear. Therefore, I approach data collection with caution and sensitivity, looking for what is there rather than what my research topic suggests. While I aim at asking as few questions as possible, in order to allow for a natural unfolding of the conversation, I have formulated a set of guiding questions. These questions are foremost a personal guideline which may serve as a red thread during data collection, but shall not restrict the narrative unfolding by rendering it an artificial questioning. Instead, the interview is understood as an invitation for the other person to talk about her experiences and the meaning she attributes to her family history in the Soviet Union.

Data analysis has emerged as a main difficulty, where I realized the dangers of transposition in their full extent as I allowed my first interpretations to arise during the interviews that had a tendency to sound more like psychotraumatological diagnoses. I decided to write down my feelings, doubts, critique and embodied emotional expressions in a reflexive research journal, following what Ezzy identified as main challenge of qualitative interviewing, namely "to explicitly acknowledge that embodied emotional orientations always and inevitably influence the research process and to engage these in dialogue" (Ezzy 2010, 169).

It turned out that the process of written self-reflection enabled me to enter in dialogue with myself and my inner responses to the interviews that may have impacted the process of data collection and analysis. Beyond this, the confrontation with my own internal and visible reactions to certain narratives has been transformative in many ways. Hence, I decided to include data from my research journal in the analysis of interview because they add to a fuller picture of the research process through transparency.

# 4. State of the Art

Peace and Conflict Research has a pressing responsibility to work transdisciplinarily in order to bring together the fragmented pieces of the puzzle that constitute human relationships which, in turn, are the screens of expressions of peace and conflict. This is the main reason for my choice of a decidedly transdisciplinary approach to conflictive relationships that emerge in interpersonal and inter-societal processes. Such conflicts cannot solely be understood by an examination of individual, social, economic, military, legal, and political circumstances. They require a balancing act on the thin rope of Peace Studies that is spanned across the full reality of being human and in relation.

In this section, I am broadly introducing theories and concepts that inform my thesis and that relate to the broader areas of knowledge being considered. While their depth will be expanded within the next chapter that constitutes the theoretical framework of my research, the State of the Art contextualizes the knowledge my research aims to generate, and places it into dialogue on a macro/meso level.

The Peace Studies Program at the University of Innsbruck, in the framework of which this thesis is finding its voice, draws itself from a variety of disciplines that come together to inform its transrational approach. Transrationality understands peace as a holistic phenomenon, as it "appreciates and applies the rationality of modern science while it transgresses its limits and holistically embraces all aspects of human nature for its interpretation of peace" (Dietrich 2014, 48). I have thus been inspired and guided in approaching peace by Dietrich's trilogy of the Many Peaces (2012; 2013; 2018), Echavarría's practical application of these theoretical premises in Elicitive Conflict Mapping (2014) and the recent *Transrational Resonances* (2018) that reverberates these theoretical and practical foundations. Here, it is particularly Koppensteiner's contribution to transrational research methods that has widened my epistemological thinking.

John Paul Lederach has strongly inspired my ways of imagining peace, precisely through the *Moral Imagination* (2005) and *When Blood and Bones Cry Out* (2010), co-authored with his daughter Angela Jill Lederach. It is in his works that I found a basis for an enlarged view of time (chapter 5.1.) and the significance of metaphors for meaning-making processes. With metaphors, Lederach reflects the ground-breaking work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who analyze *Metaphors We Live By* and which has widened my understanding of meaning making in and through figurative language.

The acknowledgement of figurative thought and language as fundamental concepts of meaning-making has also emerged in literary theory through the study of *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and*

*Literary Theory* (Budick and Iser 1996) and has been adapted by Annie Rogers and her students within interview settings in *An Interpretive Poetics of Languages of the Unsayable* (1999).

Methodologically, Ruthellen Josselson highly inspired my own process. *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry. A Relational Approach* (2013) set the tone for the preparation, process and evaluation of interviewing. Her contribution on Narrative Research in the classical *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis* (Josselson 2011) provided a basis for my approach to Narrative Research that was complemented by the enlightening explanations of Catherine Riessmann (2008), Matti Hyvärinen (2008) and Jeong-Hee Kim (2015). Some reflections from Discursive Psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002) find consideration in my engagement with the research design.

My initially fragmented, yet personal knowledge of German-Russians has been enlarged by the works of Viktor Krieger (2013; 2015), who traces different labels that were attached to German-Russians over the past decades in *Colonists, Soviet-Germans, Emigrants (Kolonisten, Sowjetdeutsche, Aussiedler,* own translation*)*. Otto Luchterhand's essay on the question whether German-Russians are to be seen as a traumatized group (2012) sparked much of my interest and critique. The collection of essays in the volume *Foreign at home (Zu Hause Fremd,* own translation), edited by Ipsen-Peitzmeier and Kaiser (2006) has enriched my reflections on belonging among German-Russians in Germany that draws from new immigration theories.

In my theoretical reflections on individual and collective identity, I have long been drawn to a constructionist, relational approach as suggested by George Herbert Mead (1913), which has been fortified by thoughts of Stuart Hall (1996), Rogers Brubaker (2004) and Wolfgang Dietrich (2013). Brubaker, in *Ethnicity Without Groups* (2004), develops a processual understanding of groups, which has imprinted my understanding of German-Russian *groupness*. As transnational, transcultural processes emerge through analysis, I turn toward the enriching work of Homi K. Bhabha who developed an understanding of spaces 'in-between' dualities in *The Location of Culture* (2004).

Grounded in constructivism, my engagement with collective forms of trauma has grown through Jeffrey Alexander's *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012) and Vamik Volkan's elaboration of a *chosen trauma* (1998; 2001; 2007), as well as Carol Kidron's highly insightful work on the cultural construction of trauma descendant identity through "an ethnographic account of an Israeli second-generation support group" (Kidron 2003, 517) for descendants of Holocaust survivors. While research on transgenerational traumatization in and after the Soviet Union has been rather scarce in comparison to other cultural

contexts, Baker and Gippenreiter (1998) have examined the transgenerational legacies of the Great Purge of 1936-1938 on Russian families.

Altogether, this illustration of literature that has flown into my study is not exhaustive but provides the most significant cornerstones of the location and reflexivity of my thesis. While the literature provides the main theoretical framework of the research, and thereby guides further analysis of the narratives, the heart of this thesis are the meaning-making narratives of six individuals which will be introduced in chapter six.

# 5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework forms a conceptual basis for understanding the meaning of family history in interrelation with collective identity formation and derives from specific anthropological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions that have been made explicit in the research design. It is presented below in specific stages on time, individual and collective identity, and individual and collective trauma.

## 5.1. On Time

John Paul Lederach offers a diagram that illustrates "the past that lies before us" by symbolizing different layers in "a set of embedded circles that flow toward the past" (Lederach 2005, 141). Moving towards the past from the present, the layers are: recent events, lived history, remembered history, and narrative.

Despite his concrete application of that image to settings of violent conflict, I see the value of such a layered view of time for less volatile forms of conflict, such as 'identity' conflict as might be applicable to German-Russian's stories. The first circle depicts recent events that are typically most present and visible in contemporary discourses of a community. Media controversies around the "Case Lisa" (Wehner 2016; Jolkver 2017) can be assigned within this circle, pointing towards larger circles of the past that are more hidden.

### Recent Events: Projections

The "*Case Lisa*" stands for a multidimensional phenomenon, which coincided with a sociopolitical atmosphere in Germany tending toward 'securitization' (Buzan et al. 1998) of immigration at large. It refers to the story of a young German-Russian girl named Lisa, who went missing in early 2016. After her reappearance, different storylines were constructed around her experience, rendering the rumors of rape through refugees a medialized and politicized event. Russian media in particular stirred up xenophobic tendencies among German-Russians and motivated multiple demonstrations against Muslim refugees and immigrants. Despite the case having been proven otherwise, the xenophobia attributed to German-Russians through media has remained visible and prominent in public discourses.

In a larger context, electoral gains of the right-wing populist party *Alternative for Germany* (AFD) in the last parliamentary elections in 2017 have been partly attributed to German-Russians (Klimeniouk 2017; Friedmann

2017). The narrative of a right-wing political orientation of German-Russians is popular within the dominant society because it fulfills the prevalent need to externalize the *problem* of right-wing political parties that remains a shadow of Germany's history. The externalization of such images is not new to the discursive landscape of mass media in Germany. Since the early 1990s, political and scientific debates in Germany have established an intense confrontation with the "integration" of German-Russians (Darieva 2006, 349).

## Lived History: Post-Soviet Migration

That is where the second circle of "lived history" begins, which "tries to capture a more expansive view of time, which will vary from younger to older people" (Lederach 2005, 141). All the experiences that have shaped me during my lifetime, including migration, linguistic and cultural confusion, as well as the change of my birth name, fall under this circle. For my grandmother, her lived history spans a different amount of time decades ago. Lederach notes that lived "experiences that have flesh and blood attached to them, and more often than not, they are experiences that have repeated themselves into the next generation" (Lederach 2005, 142). This is how my own childhood difficulties that were a direct result of migration could recreate the sense of non-belonging that has been a central feature of the collective life of German-Russians in the past two centuries.

Between 1950 and 2017, roughly four and a half million people immigrated to Germany in the context of 'Spätaussiedlerzuzug'[15] (*influx of late emigrants;* BVA 2017), now constituting one of the largest, notably heterogeneous migration groups in Germany. By definition, *Spätaussiedler* have suffered consequences of war, and are thus, when employing this codification of law, collectively victimized. However, their immigration process to Germany produces a certain contradiction. Firstly, Spätaussiedler[16] obtain the right to immigrate by proving their German ethnicity or heritage (based on Article 116, paragraph 1 (GG) and §§ 1 and 6 BVFG). Secondly, in the same breath, the German government has tried to contain the immigration of Spätaussiedler through certain countermeasures, formulating the goal that "as many Russian-Germans as possible should stay in the CIS States" (Panagiotidis 2014, 115). The German government financed some measures that were supposed to motivate German-Russians to stay in their respective countries of residence and introduced a yearly quota of a maximum of

[15] "Spätaussiedler" is a political term, codified in §4 of the Federal Law of Displaced Persons and Refugees (Bundesvertriebenengesetz BVFG). The term denotes German nationals ("Volkszugehörige") who suffered from a fate arising from consequences of war, and who are leaving the areas of settlement after the 31 December 1992 (§4 Abs.1 Nr.3 BVFG).

[16] The term is here used as synonymous with German-Russian.

220 000 persons that are allowed to immigrate, accompanied by the implementation of an obligatory language test. These measures of structural exclusion intensified the felt impression of dual foreignness among German-Russians, because of the absence of acceptance as a symbolic part of the German nation (Darieva 2006, 355).

## Remembered History: Deportations and Oppression

Through the third circle of Lederach's graphic, we enter the sphere of "remembered history" which, in Lederach's words, refers to "history kept alive and present by what is remembered from a group's topographic map of time" (Lederach 2005, 142). In this circle, the concept of chosen trauma (Volkan 1998; 2001; 2007) can be located, which holds that collective identities are formed and sustained by "what its members remember and keep alive" (Lederach 2005, 142). Among German-Russians in Germany, some organized sub-groups take such chosen trauma as a point of reference to their political, social, and cultural agendas. The museum for Russian-German cultural history in Detmold[17] is dedicated to opening a space where the distinct cultural heritage of German-Russians can be explored and remembered. On the park cemetery in Berlin-Mahrzahn, a memorial symbolizes public acknowledgment of the German victims of the Stalin regime. A bronze sculpture by German-Russian sculptor Jakob Wedel depicts a desperate woman, her face distorted with pain, merges with a pile of stones, and is suggestive of her trying to hold that pile together. Her sculpture seems small and fragile in front of a grey granite block that is inscribed with the words "To the Germans who have suffered in the Soviet Union under Stalin's regime. Your patience was unlimited. Your sufferings were immeasurable. We will forever keep the commemoration of you' (Schererz 2016). The memorial was erected by 'Vision e.V.'[18], an association of German-Russians in Berlin with the pronounced intention to commemorate the murdered parents and grandparents in the Soviet Union.

The Landsmannschaft of the Germans from Russia (LMDR)[19] sees itself as representation of interest for the German-Russians, who are defined as Germans who were born in the territories of the former Soviet Union or its successor states, including their descendants (LMDR 2016, §1, 6). Its proclaimed goals are, among others, supporting all Germans from Russia in their immigration process, supporting the linguistic, cultural-ethnic, and religious identity of Germans in former Soviet republics, supporting the solidarity among German-Russians, and disseminating and popularizing the

[17] https://www.russlanddeutsche.de/en (accessed on 2nd July 2020)
[18] http://vision-ev.eu (accessed on 2nd July 2020)
[19] https://lmdr.de (accessed on 2nd July 2020)

history and culture of German-Russians. With these objectives, the LMDR also self-identifies as an aid organization that supports German minorities in representing and implementing their rights in the respective countries.

Moreover, the non-governmental organization Memorial e.V.[20] represents the collectively framed need to mourning these victims by publishing research on the past crimes of the Soviet regime. Memorial Germany is the national branch of an international structure that includes fifty-two national and regional organizations, most of them based in Russia and Ukraine. It emerged as a civil rights movement during Perestroika under the leadership of Nobel Peace Laureate Andrej Sacharow. Memorial e.V. is concerned with working through the past, mourning the victims of the Soviet Union, but also with the current human rights situations in the territories of the former Soviet Union. It maintains an online portal that documents the Gulag system[21] in detail, including its effects on the present. Recently, Memorial e.V. has published a study on intergenerational legacies of deportation, in which identities of second-generation German-Russians are at the center of their narratives (Cremer 2018).

These examples are by no means exhaustive, but rather they serve to illustrate the presence of a 'chosen trauma'[22] among German-Russian subgroups, which thereby "renews itself as part of the unconscious psyche of group identity and is passed down across generations" (Lederach 2005, 142).

## Narrative: Oppression as Formative Story

The fourth circle represents the deepest history that is manifest in narrative as "the formative story of who we are as a people and a place" (Lederach 2005, 142). In the realm of narrative, one can make sense of the desire of German-Russians to remigrate to their imagined *homeland* Germany, to which they were bound by narrative of times before their settlement in Russia from 1763 onward. This, however, is not the full narrative of German-Russians in Lederach's sense of the word. Because if it was the case that the German identity is their deepest narrative, then the need to sustain a specific German-Russian collective identity would subside. In my assessment, there are Germans from Russia who identify with this kind of narrative, and for them, their sense of groupness within the German-Russian context has declined (Brubaker 2004) or even vanished. I will come back to this assumption throughout the research process. Still, some remain attached to the German-Russian collective identity and thereby more oriented to a formative story that arose through the collective experiences as Germans in Russia.

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[20] https://www.memorial.de (accessed on 27 July 2020)

[21] http://www.gulag.memorial.de (accessed 27 July 2020)

[22] The term 'chosen trauma' is taken from Vamik Volkan and will be introduced in chapter 5.3.3.

Many Germans who emigrated to Russia had followed the invitation of Catherine the Great, expressed on 22 July 1763. They received land to harvest, first in the Volga region and later in Southern Russia, and were promised certain cultural, economic, and religious privileges such as the freedom to conscientious objection.

The process of migration to the Russian Empire was initiated by the recruitment of settlers through the empress Catherine the Great, whose reasoning was based on the cultivation of fallow land and territorial stabilization of the vast, multinational empire (Krieger 2015, 16-23). The Germans who settled in the Russian empire were initially recruited by certain recruitment agents and came from Westphalia (27%), Prussia and Northern Germany (18%), Hesse (17%), and Saxonia (13%). By 1766, recruitment was suspended due to the high costs and difficulties in housing the settlers in their respective areas in the Russian empire (Krieger 2015, 24). Later movements of migration largely consisted of Mennonites and Pietists from West Prussia who emigrated out of religious motivations to freely practice their religion and be exempted from military service (Krieger 2015, 32). The *Law on the Responsibility to Serve in War* had been introduced in Prussia in 1814, sparking the need to emigrate among these highly devout people.

Germans in Russia were not a unified ethnic group. They neither shared a common religious belief nor were they members of a homogenous social class. Their connection to Germany was rather a cultural-linguistic one, despite different local dialects. Over time, specific localized aggregations of settlers led to a new self-perception that was shaped by regional belonging, such as Volga Germans, Black Sea Germans, and Caucasus Germans. Friesen assumes that their sense of national belonging only began to take contours with the establishment of the German Reich in 1871 (Friesen 2001, 49). I believe that a more formative experience can be seen in the external circumstances of being a minority group in the Soviet Union, which contributed to their organic development into a social and cultural unity. With the proclamation of the Patriotic War against the German Reich and Germans in general by Tsar Nikolai (Nicolaus) II., the appealing power of the grand imperialist and nationalist ideologies in the context of the First World War became so intense that the Germans living under the Tsar were increasingly seen as a disloyal enemy of the state (Friesen 2001, 50 f.; Luchterhand 2012, 238; Krieger 2015, 58 and 74). When Lenin died from a stroke in 1924, Stalin took over political leadership and began

> [...] a vicious succession struggle [...] in which millions of people died as Stalin established his control over the government apparatus, the Party, and through "collectivization" of the relatively affluent stratum of the agricultural population (*kulaki*). Stalin generated nationwide waves of hysteria that led to massive societal xenophobia, paranoia, and denunciations, culminating in the Great Purge from 1937 to 1939 (Baker and Gippenreiter 1998, 405-406).

I believe that the larger scales of macro-history can be differently understood when shifting the lens to a micro-level. This specifically means that the story of my family is to be understood as embedded in the context of the social and cultural production of a larger historical narrative.

In 1930, my great-grandparents emigrated to Kyrgyzstan from the Volga Region, to escape the increasing threat of forced deportation (Wilms 1993). Wilms, the older sister of my grandmother, explains that her grandparents were supposed to be forcefully resettled as Kulaks, as was the fate for all German-Russians (Sinner 2005, 7). Her father managed to organize faked documents which declared them to be poor farmers, through which they were able to flee to Central Asia. They joined a village of Mennonite settlers in Nikolaipol / Leninpol (Kyrgyzstan), where my grandmother was born. By the outbreak of the Second World War, all German-Russians had been forcefully deported from their original colony in the Volga region to the dry steppe of Kazakhstan, the Ural, or Siberia. During and after the deportations, they remained confined to their respective Settlement in the Kommandatur system. Driven by the need to escape oppression and violence, pulled towards a like-minded community they could identify with, the formative story of German-Russians consists of diverse stories of migration and deportation across several generations, profoundly shaped by the need to belong. In this short historical summary, which lingers back to the 'narrative', the formative stories of German-Russians, I have argued that there are different ways of thinking 'narrative'. One that locates the formative history of German-Russians within the Soviet Union and their experiences of oppression and forced deportation (Krieger 2013); and another that locates their 'narrative' in belonging to German ancestors, or regional subgroups. These assumptions will be examined in more depth when I analyze the narratives in terms of temporality (chapter 7.1).

### 5.1.1. Renegotiating History and Identity

In assessing the multidimensional, long view of the past, as suggested by Lederach, "we shall come to recognize that the formation of group identity arising from the past, the construction of its future, and its very survival are about finding place, voice, and story" (Lederach 2005, 143). Finding place, voice and story is, in turn, highly dependent on public acknowledgement. In retrospect, my own transgenerational legacies have only moved from the unconscious sphere to consciousness when I listened to the stories of my grandmother. It is here where such legacies can be dealt with, where a mourning process can begin which completes the previous generation's inability to mourn (Dietrich 2013, 132).

Lederach further describes how the need to address remembered history is dependent on an "exploration of how chosen traumas involving whole communities and ethnic and religious identities emerge and are sustained" (2005, 145). In reference to personal correspondence with Jarem Sawatsky, Lederach notes that "addressing generational trauma must 'renegotiate history and identity'" (Lederach 2005, 145). This implies that personal healing is not sufficient to community peacebuilding which depends on a form of communal healing:

> This is exactly what is meant by "renegotiating history and identity," for it attends to the ways that historic trauma connected with specific violent events forms and shapes the identity of individuals and of whole communities, and how those events can be channeled toward constructive engagement that responds to individual needs but seeks to shape the wider public and even national ethos (Lederach 2005, 145).

While a narrative approach implies that, to put it in the words of Elliot Mishler, "[w]e continually restory our pasts, shifting the relative significance of different events for whom we have become, discovering connections we had previously been unaware of, repositioning ourselves and others in our networks of relationships" (Mishler 1999, 5), the concrete links of individual restorying and a collective form of restorying remain vague.

On a similar note, Elizabeth Krahn, who uses an autoethnographic approach to investigate legacies of Soviet Oppression among German-Russian immigrants in Canada, underlines the "importance of moving beyond individualizing trauma and, rather, contextualizing it, thus working with community systems to facilitate healing and change on many levels" (Krahn 2011, 23). These reflections on time, and the call for a renegotiation of history and identity, lie at the core of my research endeavor.

## 5.2. On Identity

### 5.2.1. Stories we live by

Stuart Hall, a pioneer of the Cultural Studies, frames 'identity' as "an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all" (Hall 1996, 2). I understand the 'old' way much like Dietrich traces 'modern' conceptions of 'individual' identity, which have produced the philosophical underpinning of the modern constitutional state (Dietrich 2012, 227-230). A systematic questioning of the existence of such an autonomous identity has opened possibilities for a relational view of 'identity' that takes into consideration its collective dimension.

The concept of 'identity' has extensively been studied in explanation of social and political phenomena, but also as an object of investigation itself (Côté 2006; Elcheroth and Reicher 2017). Despite the strong debates around the term, it remains contested until today, ambiguous and fraught with conceptual difficulties (Brubaker 2004). And still, it is a crucial human need to address and explore aspects of one's identity, as I have laid open in my personal perspective for my research process.

The social constructivist approach has taken a dominant place in contemporary academic debates, arguing for a construction of conceptions of identity in and through social relations (Mead 1913). In its most stringent application, however, constructivism leaves us without a tool to talk about identities at all. Such radical constructivism then fails to explain at least some sense of sameness that Erik Erikson, a key theorist of identity theory, identifies as the core problem of identity. It is the capacity of the ego to sustain such a sense of continuity over time, particularly in the face of changing fate (Erikson 1959). The conceptual question, however, is then, whether it is possible to be identical with oneself to any former point of life, given that experience and relations have shifted and shaped both intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. It is from the basis of such reasoning that Dietrich suggested re-thinking contemporary ideas of identity which are based upon the reasoning "what I think now that I have been once" (Dietrich 2016, slide 21).

Bamberg (2012) notes that any identity expression faces three dilemmas that begin with the "continuity/change dilemma" as expressed by Erikson, and then enter the dilemma of "uniqueness of the individual vis-à-vis others faced with being the same as everyone else", followed by a third dilemma of "agency as constituted by self (with a self-to-world direction of fit) and world (with a world-to-self direction of fit)" (Bamberg 2012).

The main concern of identity research resides in integrating and responding to these three dilemmas. A narrative approach, Bamberg argues,

> [...] combines "self-differentiation (self that can reflect upon itself) and narration (plotting a sense of characterhood across time) – in narratological terms: "narrating self" and "narrated self"—into an answer that addresses the three dilemmas of identity (Bamberg 2012).

McAdams et al. underline this defining, performative character of narratives in *Identity and Story* by claiming that "our narrative identities are the stories we live by" (McAdams et al. 2006, 4). Hence, narrative research can contribute to a relational and performative conception of identity by

> [...] documenting identity as a *process* of constant change that, when practiced over and over again, has the potential to result in a sense of constancy and sameness, i.e. big stories that can be elicited under certain conditions (Bamberg 2012).

This implies that fixation and repetition of something that is practiced consistently tends to become an aspect that is seen to have a sense of consistency. Such aspects then feed into certain identity labels that, in turn, are expressed or acted out as part of one's 'identity'.

A problem, however, of linking life to identity via biographical forms of narration, emerges from its dependency on a backward-looking perspective "that values life as reflected and discredits life as lived" (Bamberg 2012). I believe that an acknowledgment of *Languages of the Unsayable* (Rogers et al. 1999) can contribute to a better understanding of lived life underneath a plurality of narrated identities, particularly in the contexts of research interviews, as I am explaining below.

### 5.2.2. What cannot be said

Rooted in the meaning-making significance of metaphors and figurative language (Lederach and Lederach 2010; Lakoff and Johnson 1980), I approach what cannot be said through such creative windows into a language which open up spaces for multiplicity and variation (Rogers et al. 1999, 6). In this context, it is important to note that a focus on language, be it explicit or another form, is not aimed at reducing epistemological foundations to intellectual and narrative ways of knowing. It is rather seen an attempt to primarily focus on a central form of communication which presents a major screen of peace and conflict.

'Languages of the unsayable' designates a term that goes back to a collection of essays (Budick and Iser 1987) which explore ways in which negativity in speech and writing expresses the unspeakable in literature and

literary theory. Based on the work on Budick and Iser (1987), Annie Rogers et al. developed *An Interpretive Poetics of Languages of the Unsayable,* which applies the concept of 'languages of the unsayable' to research interviews. This step provides tools to explore the "psychological significance of such expression and also affirm the central role played by figurative thought in everyday speech" (Rogers et al. 1999, 4). Metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson, work in a similar way, as "a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (1980, 10). Metaphors are here understood as processes of "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5).

Their theoretical foundations go back to a relational anthropology that infuses structural linguistics, such as expressed by Donald Freeman (1996), acknowledging that speaking is a relational practice far beyond mere communication. It also relies on insights from visual arts that acknowledge the significance of negative space for the creation of meaning. Rogers et al. maintain that "[e]mpty space defined by shape and substance forms an integral part of what we 'see'" (Rogers et al. 1999, 4). Translated to a verbal form of expression, this insight concerns the use of contrasts being "integral to the meaning of positive statements" (Rogers et al. 1999, 8).

Rogers et al. acknowledge that the limitation of representing and analyzing languages of the unsayable are inherent in their very nature. Still it is possible, they argue, to "illustrate the doublings of meaning that mark the dynamic interplay between the said and not-said in moments of negation, evasion, revision, denial, hesitation, and silence" (1999, 4).

A *Poetics of the Languages of the Unsayable* takes the concept even further by incorporating it into a framework of poetry within qualitative research, defined as "a sensitivity and responsiveness to emergent images and the associative logic of poetry" (Rogers 1993, 268). Such a poetics is based on variation and multiplicity in figurative thought and language (Rogers et al. 1999, 6). Variation in both figurative thought and language is seen as enrichment rather than confusion. Multiplicity delineates the "human capacity to hold multiple interpretations simultaneously" (Rogers et al. 1999, 6). As features of a poetics of the unsayable, both of these hallmarks are dynamic and multilayered, embedded in the relationality and the evolving nature of human existence.

Languages of the unsayable can be understood as dynamic and evolving, which poses an analytical difficulty in terms of definition. I believe this is an appropriate assumption in the face of variation and multiplicity of experiences and meaning-makings, both inter- and intrapersonally. To capture such languages, Rogers et al. identify markers which may indicate such a language through non-verbal forms of expression such as "gesture, facial expression,

shifts in emotion" (1999, 5) and silence in particular. The unsayable can then be captured as

> [...] that which is read or understood in what is both said and not-said the unsayable stumbles along and tries to find words for its own inarticulate understanding, and it also tries to undo or erase understanding that is dangerous (Rogers et al. 1999, 9).

Rogers et al. suggest to view the unsayable in a dynamic continuum that ranges from the *unsaid* to the *unsayable* towards the *unspeakable*, as visualized below (Image 1). Negations, revisions, evasions and silence can be seen as indications of unsayable knowledge, offering entrance into the dynamic continuum of the unsayable:

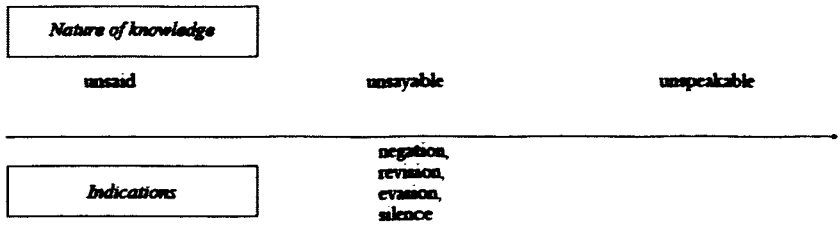


Image 1: The dynamic continuum of the unsayable. 2018. Own illustration.

While the unspeakable may point towards traumatic, dangerous knowledge (see chapter 5.2.2.), languages of the unsayable are not necessarily an expression of traumatic experience, but rather offer a window into life beyond narrative, expressing what is difficult to say.
Languages of the unsayable can create and express emotionally distressing situations that are inhabited by two or more conflicting contents. This communication dilemma has been examined in the Double Bind theory for interpersonal relations, an approach that goes back to Bateson (1956) and the Palo Alto group. 'Double bind' refers to the emotional dilemma of receiving two contradicting messages that may negate one another. Similarly, for languages of the unsayable, I understand this dilemma on an intrapersonal level, where

> [the] tension between what is known and what lies beneath the surface of conscious knowing, or what is spoken and what is known but not spoken, produces a phenomenon of double meaning that is common in our lives (Rogers et al. 1999, 9 - 10).

Schützenberger, a Russian-born French psychologist, analyzes transgenerational links across the family system by means of the genosociogram, which is a detailed form of a family tree. She asserts that complex bondings can partly be seen, felt or even guessed, but never truly grasped because they are not spoken about, part of the unspeakable, unthinkable and the unsayable (Schützenberger 2012, 18).

Languages of the unsayable in the context of research interviews can point toward knowledge that evades narrative expression. Such knowledge has been experienced, but not yet fully integrated. Certainly, an analysis of such languages of the unsayable within Narrative Research remains a superficial endeavor, as it can only point towards such knowledge. It opens, however, an opportunity to enter the vast realm of the unsayable. An acknowledgement of the unsayable hence widens rather than confines the epistemological ground of research, thus adheres much more to the richness of human 'felt' life as such than would an exclusively narrative-intellectual approach.

### 5.2.3. Collective Identity

Luchterhand suggests four factors that have shaped the collective identity formation process of German Russians (Luchterhand 2012, 247 f.). He lists the collective traumatization in the Soviet Union, their high performance in terms of agriculture resulting in contributions to economic development (Krieger 2015, 59 f.; Luchterhand 2012, 248). Thirdly, the strong religious anchoring that had been present during the first migrations of Germans to Russia, and was strengthened by their experiences of oppression. Lastly, Luchterhand assumes the historical consciousness and their orientation to Germany as formative for a German-Russian collective identity (Luchterhand 2012, 48). While these assumptions may be useful points of reference, they carry certain dangers that I am exploring below.

With a contested term such as individual identity, any conceptualization of collective forms of identity is even more difficult to attempt. Despite the constructivist dominance in contemporary academic discourse which assumes identity as fluid social construct, Brubaker identifies a "tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis" to which agency and interest can be attributed (Brubaker 2004, 8). Such anthropologization of collective entities, which is a common social category both in academia and everyday life, is naturalizing and replicating the very concept of collective identity. Brubaker invites us

> [...] to account for the ways in which – and conditions under which – this practice of reification, this powerful crystallization of group feeling, can work. But we should avoid unintentionally doubling or reinforcing the reification of ethnic groups in ethnopolitical practice with a reification of such groups in social analysis (Brubaker 2004, 10).

This reification is part of the practice of identity politics, but needs not to be part of academic analysis itself. I see a strong parallel between academic engagement with collective phenomena and how Bourdieu describes the performativity of representations:

> [...] struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to *make and unmake groups*. What is at stake here is the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of division which, when they are imposed on a whole group, establish meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and the identity of the group (Bourdieu 1992, 223).

Therefore, my approach to collective identity entails an ethical imperative which is aware of its performative character and may contribute to the production of social identities. It becomes fruitful to rethink group identity not as reified units of analysis, but in relational and disaggregated terms, "taking as a basic analytical category not the 'group' as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable" (Brubaker 2004, 11).

Such a processual understanding replaces identity as a fixed variable with processes of identification. With its discursive foundation, collective identities can emerge "through temporary 'closures' "of discourses (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 112), suggesting that even if collective identities have been formed, they are in a permanently unstable position, "since the closure that creates the identification with, and consequently constructs, the community is only temporary" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 112). German-Russian-ness can also be either self-proclaimed or externally ascribed, or both, but this research places emphasis on self-understandings.

## 5.3. The Canon: On Transgenerational Trauma

Transgenerational traumatization[23] acknowledges that trauma does not only affect those who have experienced it first-handedly, but that it has psychological and psychosocial effects on the relationships between people, and hence touches the lives of those who have not been directly affected significantly. Van der Kolk addresses that

> [...] traumatic experiences do leave traces, whether on a large scale (on our histories and cultures) or close to home, on our families, with dark secrets being imperceptibly passed down through generations (van der Kolk 2014, 1).

I follow a humanistic understanding of *trauma* (Greek, lit. *wound*) as a "wound left by an experience that disrupted the person's previous relationship to self, to others, and to the world" (Vachon et al. 2016, 180). Therefore, I see a difference between the first-hand experience of trauma and being faced with transgenerational effects of traumatization, which are not fixed at a specific point or experience in time but structurally entwined with interpersonal relationships.

### 5.3.1. Transmission within the Family

The modes of transgenerational transmission of traumatization are complex and operate on several layers. Among the literature, one may find several aspects of transmission, such as epigenetics, family dynamics, sociocultural processes of historical institutionalism and discourse (Fromm 2012; Wessels and Strang 2006), as well as through collective norms, conveyed in arts, institutions and commemorative culture (Danieli 1998). Here I refer to transmission and reproduction of meaning-making systems, irrespective of whether or not they actually exist in the outside world.

Danieli finds that traumatic experiences can be transmitted, "primarily through parent's posttrauma adaptational styles" (Danieli et al. 2016, 8), echoing the significance of the family as a core entity of 'identity' and personality formation. Ruppert goes even further, identifying a person at least as directly impacted by three generations. He believes that the quality of bonding between grandparents and parents is mirrored in the relationship between parents and children (Ruppert 2002, 167). On another note, Lederach

[23] In order to establish a terminological common ground, I distinguish between intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, the first being passed down directly from one generation to the next, while the latter can be passed across several generations (see Atkinson 2002, 125-127, 133-135).

recalls an encounter with an elder of the Mohawk nation who drew a more expansive view of transgenerational context which encompassed fourteen generations in total, as, in the words of the elder: "Decisions made seven generations ago affect us yet today, [...] and decisions we make today will affect the next seven generations" (Lederach 2005, 133). Accordingly, the concrete extent of an expanded view of time seems to depend on cultural particularities and cosmovisions.

A familial transmission of traumatization is, as Volkan concludes, more complex than "a child mimicking the behavior of parents, or developing his or her own ideas based upon the stories told by the older generation. It is the end result of mostly unconscious psychological processes that influence the child's identity and unconsciously give the child certain tasks"(Volkan 2001), who then, in the words of Reimann and König, "become the 'containers' of the past" (Reimann and König 2017, 4). The severity of these impacts depends on the extent to which a trauma in the past has been addressed or integrated, because

> [t]here is an emotional inheritance entangling the current generations in the traumata, neurotic conflicts, and defense patterns of previous generations. The more severe an unresolved conflict for an individual or one's family is, the stronger its impact will be on subsequent generations (Dietrich 2013, 125).

In their exploration of transgenerational effects of The Great Purge among Russian families, Baker and Gippenreiter ground their research in Bowen's Family Systems Theory (BFST)[24] "which postulates that a multigenerational transmission process provides a continuity of emotional functioning in families, as well as the communication of values and beliefs across generations" (Baker and Gippenreiter 1998, 404). Another concept of BFST is the *emotional cutoff* which is understood as a "process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away, or denying the importance of the parental family" (Bowen 1978, 383). This feeds into a multigenerational transmission process and blurs the origins of the cutoff which can be bridged by reconnection to the family system in combination with the differentiation of self.

From these reflections, it is argued that the severity of trauma through displacement and the loss of family members without knowing about their fate has the potential to impact subsequent generations to different extents. This depends on coping mechanisms within the family and individual responses to them.

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[24] Murray Bowen has developed a family system theory that is based on eight concepts, which altogether from the cornerstones of BFST. These eight concepts are namely triangles, differentiation of self, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, emotional cutoff, sibling position and societal emotional process (Kerr 2000).

## 5.3.2. A sequence of collective traumatization

Hans Keilson introduced the concept of *sequential traumatization* (Keilson 1992) in studying the fate of Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands. He identified a sequence of events and historical processes which altogether form sequential traumatization, thereby offering a definition of trauma that goes beyond the wound of a single event. Becker therefore suggests, in reference to Keilson, that "trauma concepts need to be continually reinvented and always contextualized within the specific social reality in which the traumatization occurs" (Becker 2004, 2). In order to locate processes of sequential traumatization of German-Russians, it is necessary to draw from discourse and macro-historical accounts. Here, it is primarily the works of Krieger (2013; 2015) that have contributed to my summary of what can possibly have been experienced as traumatizing sequences. Again, I wish to remind the reader that I only re-present historical interpretations here, in order to develop an understanding for the meaning of history as is represented through prominent historians.

### Pogroms and Erosion of Privileges

While the migrations to the Russian empire had in many cases been motivated by prospects of a special position imbued with privileges, these privileges have entered a process of erosion at the turn of the century. In 1871, in the context of modernization under Tsar Alexander II, their special position has been repealed (Krieger 2015, 45). Krieger argues that, contrary to common historian's assumption that this led to an abolishment of the autonomy of German colonies, the repeal has rather contributed to more integration into Russian political and social life, while upholding largely autonomous self-governing (Krieger 2015, 45).

A massive wave of transcontinental emigration to North and South America was triggered by the introduction of obligatory military service, which for many German-Russians was not compatible with their religious values (Krieger 2015, 47). In the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the German language was prohibited as teaching language in schools, and secular institutions were given control over religious ones. In an ambience of increasing national sentiments and general 'Germanophobic' politics (Krieger 2015, 88), a number of pogroms have been reported, specifically targeting Germans.

## Povolzhye Famine

During the Civil War (1917-1922), many were forced to serve in the "German working brigade" and could hence not contribute to the farming and agriculture of their families, which led to a massive crop failure. Accompanied by this, the so-called politics of war communism entitled the Bolshevik government to seize food and corn (grain and seed) which led to a massive famine, also known as the Povolzhye Famine (Nickell 2015) which claimed the lives of around one hundred thousand Volga Germans (Krieger 2013, 2). While estimations of the extent of this famine vary, the famine is known to have devastated the Volga region and decimated the population horribly, counting between three and five million victims (Haller 2003).

## Expropriations, Deportations and Forced Labour

The communist ideology, which was engrained by the *Bolshevik Revolution*, was based on the collectivization of agriculture, which led to the expropriation of wealthy farmers (*Kulaks*) and their liquidation as a class. Due to the propriety German-Russians are said to have accumulated, many of them were labelled as Kulaks. The years that led up to the Second World War were contributing to a heterogenization of the German minority in Soviet Union, as German institutions were being dissolved and transferred into the Soviet system (Krieger 2015, 234), which had contributed to an increasing alienation from their historical origin.

## Soviet Famine of 1932-1933

Resulting from the massive collectivization, another great famine took the lives of millions of people in 1932/1933 (Krieger 2015, 86). In Ukraine, the Holodomor has been acknowledged as famine-genocide which took the lives of millions of Ukrainians and is now commemorated across the world. In Kazakhstan, the famine decimated the Kazakh population dramatically and "rendered Kazakhs a minority within Kazakhstan" (Volkava 2012). The numbers of German-Russian victims to this great famine is not clearly known, but Krieger assumes tens of thousands of German-Russian victims across the Volga region and in Ukraine (Krieger 2013, 3). Among historians, there is now a common belief that Stalin used enforced starvation "as a tool to exterminate the so-called kulaks and other enemies of the people" (Sinner 2005, 7; also Luchterhand 2012, 240).

## The Great Purge 1936-1938

During Stalin's Purge, *Kulaks* were direct targets of extermination. The Purge was built on political-ethnically motivated cleansing of the population, targeting the German minority specifically due to suspicion of collaboration with the German Reich. Krieger alludes to estimations of tens of thousands of victims among German-Russians (2013, 3).

## 1941 – Key Memory

With the Decree of Presidium of a Supreme Soviet of the USSR from 28 August 1941, the Volga Republic was officially dissolved and all German-Russians were ordered to be deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. Krieger describes this date as a key event in the collective memory of the German-Russians (Krieger 2013, 3), as it represents the cancellation of their right to exist, both geographically, but also existentially. Many were forced to serve in the *Trudarmiya* or imprisoned in the Gulags, due to allegations of their collaboration with the German Reich.

## Long Silence and Kommandatur

After the Second World War, German-Russians were ordered to be exiled forever. This goes back to a Decree of the Supreme Soviet, in which the exile is codified 'forever' (LMDR 2018), and any exiting of the Kommandatur without permission would be punished with twenty years of Gulag. The 'Kommandatur' refers to a mandatory, permanent surveillance by authorities which had strict official requirements to register and move. Only by 1956 the 'Kommandatur' system was abolished and German-Russians were allowed to settle where they wanted, except for their original settlements. Yet the silence around the crimes of the Soviet Union lasted much longer, and, as the work of Memorial e.V. implies, partly until today.[25]

[25] This sequence of traumatizing events is based on Krieger 2013, 2-3; 2015, 51-58 and 100-140.

## 5.3.3. Collective Dimensions

The term 'collective trauma' refers to the long-term implications of group traumatization on the social fabric, including relationships, political, legal and economic practices, respective institutions, networks and collective memory. In the context of intergroup conflict, Volkan has introduced the concept of *chosen trauma* which "refers to the mental representation of an event that has caused a large group to face drastic losses, feel helpless and victimized by another group, and share a humiliating injury" (Volkan 1998, 4; also Volkan 2007). He stresses the role of representation, which is on the one hand an enriching contribution to a holistic understanding of how collective trauma arises. On the other hand, critics have problematized the terminology of a chosen trauma, as groups typically do not choose to be traumatized. Volkan takes up this critique in explaining

> [...] that it reflects a group's unconscious "choice" to add a past generation's mental representation of an event to its own identity, and the fact that while groups may have experienced any number of traumas in their history, only certain ones remain alive over centuries. A chosen trauma is linked to the past generation's inability to mourn losses after experiencing a shared traumatic event, and indicates the group's failure to reverse narcissistic injury and humiliation inflicted by another large group, usually a neighbor (Volkan 1998).

A similar understanding, rooted in a stronger social constructivist foundation, has been put forth by Jeffrey Alexander who, in his *Theory of Cultural Trauma*, maintains that "trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society" (Alexander 2004, 2), claiming that it is "the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves. Whether or not the structures of meaning are destabilized and shocked is not the result of an event but the effect of a sociocultural process" (Alexander 2004, 10).

Brunner is criticizing both Volkan and Alexander with their concepts of cultural and chosen trauma, implying that "both concepts simplify the analyzed phenomena and their complex interrelations of psychological and social processes by singling out one dimension only" (Brunner 2011, 201).

While I subscribe to the basic premise that, just like groupness, collective traumatization can be socially made and unmade, I perceive the downside of social constructivist theory in its self-restriction to intellectual knowing, leaving out all the other ways of knowing, through the heart, body, sense and soul. Also, the nature of traumatic experiences, as has been mentioned in the previous section, shifts large parts of its impact into unconsciousness where it is often inaccessible to the study of social processes.

Despite the complexity of collective trauma, a crucial implication of the collectiveness of trauma for interpersonal relationships is that it can be framed to provide meaning-making systems. Much in line with Alexander, Kidron (2003) uncovers how cultural practices shape and frame the way a traumatized identity is reemplotted (Ricoeur 1983). Based upon her findings, Kidron identifies several identity-making practices that constitute second-generation Holocaust survivor identity:

- "an intergenerationally transmitted PTSD as a discursive frame" (2003, 518)
- "key scenario of transgenerational effects as mnemonic tool" (2003, 520)
- "rewriting the life story to fit the scenario" (2003, 522)
- "learning to speak the language of second-generation identity" (2003, 524)
- "closing ranks and maintaining the boundaries of otherness" (2003, 525)
- "integrating the traumatic past into the future" (2003, 529)

Kidron concludes that, in her case of a Jewish-Israeli study, it is "the communal context of group memory work that allows the descendant to make the link between present problems and the Holocaust-related traumatic past" (Kidron 2003, 519). This context is based on a mutual interrelation between cultural mechanisms and social praxis that includes the agency of group participants (Kidron 2003, 535) through "the 'modeling of stories' (Ortner 1990), facilitator authority, peer pressure, a desire for belonging and positive responses" (Kidron 2003, 534). Kidron's analysis shows how a collective traumatization is formed in a small group, driven by both cultural mechanisms and social practice as conscious processes, but also intrapersonal needs of belonging and making meaning as subconscious processes.

Reimann and König, affiliated with the German Berghof Foundation, explain two different learning processes of collective trauma, one that reinforces the presence of a collective trauma, and another that integrates such trauma through 'resilience'. Within a self-reinforcing process of collective trauma, it has become a decisive identity marker. Transmission happens on a societal level when "a 'collective memory and narrative of victimhood' is transmitted through mental models from one generation to the next" (Reimann and König 2017, 4). Such a narrative of victimhood comes along with certain pressures on group members who are expected to enact the victimization, thereby rendering the victimization a process of its own.

Hence, the position of victimhood is not a direct consequence of traumatization, but comes into being via social construction. Once established,

a sense of self-perceived victimization can lead to cycles of prolonged verbal, physical and symbolic violence on both ends, expanding and rendering conflicts intractable (Botcharova 2001; Bar-Tal et al. 2009).

In contrast, another learning process is based on the integration of experiences, much in line with a humanistic foundation of trauma that opens possibilities of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). From such perspective, trauma shatters previous assumptions about oneself, community and life, and can be symbolized as a crack to the person, metaphorical for not only 'cracking broken', but also 'cracking open'.

Nevertheless, "while each individual in a traumatized large group has his own unique identity and personal reaction to trauma, all members share the mental representations of the tragedies that have befallen the group" (Volkan 1998). The importance of a collective, systemic approach and understanding of the trauma has shined through Erikson's account of the impact collective trauma has on social relations, and thus the obstacles that arise for individual healing when collective trauma persists.

Thereby, both individual and collective levels need to be assessed in their interrelation, as the systemic approach implies this reciprocity both through narrative and discourse. Any personal experience that is attributed meaning as traumatic by the individual can thus strengthen personal beliefs of traumatization and in turn reinforce narratives of victimhood.

# 6. Breaking the Canon: Interviews

"The Museum of Russian-German Cultural History in Detmold, the archive, overflows with experience reports. With biographies, autobiographies, and they are all in the same canon. There, they all become collective. You know, these stories, the stories of the individual humans and the individual families blur, because it repeats itself: 'And then we came there, and then that happened, and then this...', and so, it is always the same things, and in the same way that we try to save it from being forgotten, many people have that. On the one side, it is good, because then a basis remains. On the other side, it becomes so blurred"[26].

(Svetlana, personal interview on 20 August 2018)

In the above quotation, Svetlana assesses the collectivity of history as it is represented in the Museum for German-Russian history in Detmold. She notes the ambiguity of their sound like a *canon* which is known in the musical sphere as composition in which several voices sing exactly the same melody for an infinite amount of time, while beginning at different times. Using this metaphor, Svetlana addresses that the sound of the musical piece that is directed by the museum and co-produced by *us*[27], as well as all the families who want to save their stories from being forgotten, might sound harmonic but blurs the uniqueness of each voice. This chapter represents a break with the canon, as it takes the voices apart and provides the space for them to sing their solo, which sometimes invites my voice as a second voice, taking into consideration my personal role in the co-production of these narrative sounds.

In this chapter, I am first dedicating single subchapters to each co-researcher before diving into a categorical data analysis that looks at themes, patterns and layers across the narratives, orchestrating all references to the phenomenon of transgenerational traumatization across the narratives. This intermediate step serves to bring into awareness the distinct and unique narratives and their contexts, taking account of both their content and form.

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[26] „Das Museum für russlanddeutsche Geschichte in Detmold, das Archiv, quillt über vor Erlebnisberichten. Vor Biographien, Autobiographien, und die sind alle im selben Kanon. Da, die werden alle kollektiv. Weißt du, diese Geschichten, die Geschichten der einzelnen Menschen und der einzelnen Familien verschwimmen, weil das wiederholt sich. 'Und dann kamen wir dahin, und dann wurde das, und dann wurde dies ...', und also, das sind immer dieselben Sachen, und so wie wir versuchen, also das vor dem Vergessen zu bewahren, das haben ja viele. Einerseits ist das gut, weil dann bleibt doch eine Basis da. Andererseits wird das so verwischt" (own translation from original German).

[27] Here, *us* refers to those who seek a better understanding of the past and find stories of suffering. As is argued in the previous chapter on collective trauma, this suffering is often echoed and retold into the next generation.

I look at each narrative holistically, exploring the phenomenon of their German-Russian heritage within their lives. In order to represent their narratives adequately, I am using large sections of their narratives which I have filtered as major themes through mind mapping. For the reading flow, the quotes are included in their English translation, and are repeated in German, their original language, in the footnotes. In order to contribute to a vivid and fluent flow of language, I soften the transcripts by removing verbatim expressions that do not add significant value to the content, while keeping those that have meaning in the context of narration. I refer to the participants with pseudonyms, in order to pay respect to their privacy within the context of intimate personal information they have shared with me during the interviews. For simplicity and a fluid reading, I shorten the citation of each narrative and refrain from mentioning the interview as a source in each subchapter.

The subchapters are structured by a brief analysis of context, which reflects my personal relation and encounter with the person, also paying specific attention to the social and spatial context of the interviews, including how the research relationship came into being, and also pointing towards further information or reference that the research participants deem important as they include them in their narratives. What follows is an analysis of language and form of the interview in which I take a closer look at the sequence and structure of the narration and the language used, but also the contributions to the narrative of both researcher and participant. Then, I go into more depth with the overall characteristic of the narrative to identify the main topics that shape their narratives. I close each narrative outline with a self-reflexive autoethnographic account that describes my embodied emotions and reactions during data collection, acknowledging how these may have contributed to the creation of the narrative (as elaborated in chapter 3.4.).

## 6.1. Elena

Elena is a relative to me which made it a very intimate conversation in which I resonated on various levels, especially when she talked about her grandparents. I had not shared with her my own reflections on the topic beforehand, so that I wouldn't distort her narrative. But I did share with her afterwards, in order to avoid a one-sided impression of me questioning her about her interpretations while being reserved with my own. In general, in all of the interviews, I approached data collection with an openness and readiness to share fragments of my personal story, if asked for or if being of help in creating an equal relationship that fosters mutual trust.

We met in Elena's small garden, that is part of a complex of allotments which are known as *Schrebergarten* or Datscha (дача). This context had me reflect upon the meaning of the *Datscha* for German-Russians specifically, albeit the healing potential of gardening concerns all human beings in general. Nevertheless, in that moment it made sense to me to connect the German-Russian heritage of successful farming in the Soviet Union, their loss of homeland and their reliance upon nutritional self-sufficiency, to the 'Datscha' culture of German-Russians in Germany. Amidst the singing birds and the fluttering of leaves, we sat down on the porch of her Datscha where the interview took place, initiated by my entry question of the general meaning of her German-Russian background for her life at this moment and beyond.

Elena's language is impersonal at times, meaning that she narrates her own experience as if she talks about another person. The German language knows the pronoun 'man' for this which is comparable to the impersonal form 'one' in the English language. As an example, she expresses the difficulties of her German-Russian background with a form that contradicts the content, including the use of impersonal form as well as the expression of a different emotion than which shines through the content:

> Well, one was being teased very often just because of the name (*laughs*), right? So as a child I also had no feeling of home and somehow one felt a little bit out of place[28]. (Elena, personal interview on 31 July 2018).[29]

Elena also uses a prominent terminology of 'working' on herself, in order to describe self-exploration or inner processes that she has been going through, describing it as 'hard work'. The notion of inner work and self-development is common in Western culture, but also a residue of her family system which she describes as expecting a strict pathway of functioning and earning a merit.

Elena enters her narrative exploration with a description of difficulties during childhood that were rooted in her experience as a foreigner:

> So, earlier, it was rather a problem that you were from Russia and I also have a succinct name, so to say, (*laughs*) that they can recognize me again and again, that I am not from here, [...] my name reveals that and at school I always had a bit of problems for being (*laughs*) mocked with it.[30]

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[28] Naja, man wurde schon wegen dem Namen sehr oft gehänselt (*lacht*), näh, also als Kind hatte ich ja auch kein Heimatgefühl oder irgendwie man hat sich so ein bisschen fehl am Platz gefühlt.

[29] In this subchapter, all citations are referring to Elena's personal interview which took place on 31 July 2018 in Lübeck.

[30] Also früher war das eher ein Problem, dass man aus Russland kam und ich hab ja auch einen prägnanten Namen sozusagen dafür, (*lacht*) dass man mich immer wieder erkennt, dass ich nicht von hier stamme, [...] an meinem Namen kann man das halt erkennen und ich hatte da, in der Schule schon immer so'n bisschen Probleme, dass ich (*lacht*), dass ich damit aufgezogen wurde.

In this section, Elena's experiences of being different led to what she identifies as problems of being mocked. Yet, these problems have shifted over time, making space for a certain kind of exoticism that is being attributed to Elena, with people showing astonished reactions to her origin. Elena does not directly draw a connection between her own biography and the German-Russian background she has, saying that

> [...] it was then later never a problem with the German-Russian, except at school. Later that was rather my mentality or whatever. More of a problem was the protection or whatever I built up.[51]

Her reflectiveness on her own inner processes that stand in the center of her narrative is linked to processes of internal 'work' which she has been doing for the past few years. Before the interview, we talked about her recent experience visiting a shamanic ceremony, Ayahuasca, as part of a larger tendency to personal development she has been undergoing for the past few years. Ayahuasca is an indigenous brew, known to be used in the Amazon region in shamanic and spiritual ceremonies. It is said to open the human mind to Non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC). The ceremony seemed quite present, lingering and reverberating into her current state of being. She expresses:

> [...] right now I am dealing, more with myself, [...] and I believe there will be a time, in which I will have more time to reflect upon this, more about my origin and where I come from. But now it is rather important to me that I find relation somehow, to myself, and my calm and all (.) my feelings somehow to come to terms with. Or those, which I do not have, or which lie dormant somewhere.[52]

Elena describes her relationship with her mother as a 'loose ribbon that can tear anytime again' and relates her own difficulties with emotions to the example of her mother, saying that her feelings are not accessible for herself, because 'her mother also locked her own feelings up inside'. Nevertheless, she stresses that the relationship with her mother has improved since Elena dedicated herself to inner work.

Elena describes her father as 'mentally ill', despite not knowing concretely which diagnosis he had been given. What is certain to her is that her father was unable to relate to her and her sister, stating her doubt in having a

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[51] [...] es war dann nachher nie ein Problem mit dem Russlanddeutschen, also außer in der Schule. Danach war das eher meine Mentalität oder was auch immer. Eher ein Problem war der Schutz oder was auch immer aufgebaut hab.

[52] [...] ich habe eher gerade, eher mit mir zu tun. (...) und ich glaube, irgendwann kommt die Zeit, wo ich mehr über meine Herkunft, und wo ich herkomme, Zeit habe, darüber nachzudenken. Aber gerade ist mir eher wichtig, dass ich Bezug, irgendwie, zu *mir* finde, und meine Ruhe und meine (.) ganzen Gefühle irgendwie klarkomme. Oder, die ich nicht habe, oder irgendwo schlummern.

relationship to him at all. Elena believes that all of these disturbances led her to create an armor which helped her numb her feelings and lock them up behind a metaphorical door. This symbol has not been explained in her narrative, but she mentions it in the context of describing her Ayahuasca experience, in which she had the opportunity to 'open that door' but was hesitant out of fear:

> And that is how my feelings and my memories are split off of me, still. And therefore, that is what I am working on but I am not there yet and I think (*inhales*), once the door is open, all of my feelings will come to me. (*Smiles*) Naturally, I can retrieve them a bit more now, or, they are there too, they are probably there all the time, I just have no access. And I think, I have already worked a lot on it, but if I opened the door, I think, especially when then everything comes up, I would have to deal with that because, I do not know that. (*Smiles*). To perceive so much at once.[33]

The fear of what is behind the door seems very strong, overwhelming almost, because Elena anticipates that all feelings and emotions would come up at once. She explains that the split off of her emotions was a survival mechanism in her childhood, when she was trying to cope with the disturbances in her family system, as well as the difficult relationships with her parents.

In reference to the topic of transgenerational traumatization, Elena affirms the necessity of her personal inner process as a tool for re-learning empathy which, as she sees it, serves as the very basis for transgenerational communication:

> I learned a small spark, maybe, in the work with myself (*laughs*), but I, there is still a whole lot of potential that is just hidden, not accessible to me at the moment. [...] When grandma tells me something, it is so (.) very far away. When she then gets sad, I am also sad, but it is not a real feeling, that I now would really very strongly empathize with. [...] That her father was just imprisoned without (.) Yes; having done anything at all. And then simply did not return.[34]

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[33] Und so sind halt meine Gefühle und meine Erinnerungen abgespalten noch von mir. (.) Und darum, daran arbeite ich aber da bin ich halt noch nicht und ich denke (*atmet ein*) sobald die Tür auf ist, kommen auch meine ganzen Gefühle zu mir. (*Lächelt*) Ich kann sie natürlich jetzt so ein bisschen mehr abrufen, oder, die sind auch da, sie sind bestimmt auch die ganze Zeit da, nur ich hab halt kein Zugang. Und ich denke, ich hab schon viel daran gearbeitet, aber wenn ich die Tür, denke ich, aufmachen würde, auch wenn alles dann hochkommt, müsste ich damit ja klarkommen weil, ich kenn das ja nicht. (*Lächelt*) So viel auf einmal wahrzunehmen wahrscheinlich.

[34] Ich hab einen kleinen Funken vielleicht gelernt, in der Arbeit mit mir selber (*lacht*), aber ich, da ist noch ganz viel Potential, das nur verborgen ist, mir gerade nicht zugänglich. [...] Wenn Oma mir irgendwas erzählt, das ist so (.) so ganz fernab. Wenn sie dann traurig ist, bin ich auch traurig, aber es ist nicht ein echtes Gefühl, das ich jetzt wirklich ganz doll mitfühlen würde. [...] Dass ihr Vater einfach inhaftiert wurde ohne (.) Ja, dass er irgendwas getan hat. Und dann einfach nicht mehr wieder gekommen ist.

The loss of a father figure is a pattern that applies to Elena's childhood as well. For her, the absence of loving parents is at the root of her loss of the capacity to feel. With her mother being unable to love her for who she was, and her father being unable to relate at all due to his mental illness, the family system crumbled when her father left and returned to Siberia. She expresses a disturbed relationship to her parents which connects the lack of feelings to a lack of basic trust. This is verbalized by expressions such as 'not being caught', 'not being able to return home' and 'not being seen as a human being'. While rooted in childhood experiences, these notions are re-enacted through her family system which she describes as constraining her with general expectations of achievement, merit, and 'functioning'.

The personal relationship I have with Elena rendered the interview prone to transposition and projection. I literally 'caught' myself several times making connections and diagnoses with my own background knowledge during the interview. While I recognize this as a natural process, I noticed that my tendency to do so with Elena was much stronger than it was with the other research participants. Most of these processes happened in my mind, but they certainly shined through in the way our interview unfolded, for example by a little 'understanding' smile when Elena talks about her stepfather whom I know personally as well. Throughout the interview, I noticed my intrinsic interest in hearing her narrative, an interest that went beyond research interest as it has effects on the relationship we have beyond this thesis. I do feel that, at least from my side, the quality of our relationship has improved, merely because of this opportunity to listen to her.

## 6.2. Katharina

Having read one of her articles in an online newspaper, I had contacted Katharina via email with an interview request at an early stage of my research process. She responded with a general interest and referred to me the recent research conducted by *Memorial e.V.*, in which narratives of second-generation German-Russians were elicited. The findings were distilled in a booklet, which presents processes of identity formation in the light of the traumatic family histories of deportation and (non-)return (Cremer 2018). After one of the interviews, Katharina contacted me again to reconfirm her interest in contributing to my research, having herself been in contact with one of the interview partners to my surprise. I was hesitant at first because the form of interviewing Katharina would differentiate from that of the other interviews which I consciously held in person, while for Katharina, the spatial distance between us only allowed for a digital interview via Skype. Nevertheless, I came to perceive her offering as an important and valuable contribution to a

multifaceted collection of narratives in the frame of this research which led to a narrative interview via Skype.

Katharina expresses herself in a structured and sophisticated way. The clarity with which she narrates her meaning-making of the German-Russian aspects in her life indicates that she has been engaging with these topics before. It shines through the narrative that Katharina is eager to talk about her experience and her process of ancestry research and has a clear motivation to shape a wider public ethos with the expression of her narrative.

Katharina recalls that she began active family research in her time as a university student, which presented a new stage of life:

> [...] I did my high school degree in a small town, where everything German-Russian was shameful and uncomfortable for me. And then you choose a new stage of life. And maybe I already noticed unconsciously, okay: 'in your next stage of life, you can be who you really are'. And then I took the decision to study Slavic Studies, at least as a minor (Katharina, personal interview on 14 October 2018).[35] [36]

Here, Katharina indicates the significance of this choice at that particular point in her life, preceded by a time in which she was ashamed for her German-Russian background. By affirming to herself that, in her next stage of life, she would be 'who she *really* is', she decided to study Slavic studies, a subject that reconnected her to the German-Russian aspect in her life. She recounts:

> So then, it was really also through access to the Russian language. So in the frame of the studies that many things were awoken, as you also said, this language is not lost, it is somewhere in us, and when you deal with it, then it also awakens many childhood memories, because I have actively spoken the language until the ninth year of my life.[37]

With the symbolism of language as a gateway to the past, the study of Slavic studies marked a turning point in Katharina's life through which she could access childhood memories. Despite acknowledging German as her mother

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[35] [...] ich hab in einer kleinen Stadt Abitur gemacht, wo mir alles Russlanddeutsche peinlich und unangenehm war, und dann entscheidet man sich ja für einen nächsten Lebensabschnitt. Und vielleicht habe ich da schon so unbewusst gemerkt, okay: 'in deinem nächsten Lebensabschnitt kannst du die sein, die du eigentlich bist'. Und da habe ich die Entscheidung getroffen, dass ich Slawistik, zumindest im Nebenfach, studieren möchte.

[36] In this subchapter, all citations are referring to Katharina's personal interview which took place on 14 October 2018 via Skype.

[37] Also es war dann wirklich auch über den Zugang zur russischen Sprache auch. Also im Rahmen des Studiums, dass da vieles auch, geweckt wird, also wie du auch meinst, diese Sprache, die ist nicht verloren, die ist irgendwie in uns, und wenn man dann sich damit befasst, dann weckt das ja auch ganz viele Kindheitserinnerungen, weil ich ja die Sprache bis zum neunten Lebensjahr aktiv gesprochen hatte.

tongue, Katharina identifies Russian as her 'heart language' that evokes many feelings in her, although she has not actively used the language since her family's migration to Germany when she was nine years old.

At the center of Katharina's narrative lies a sense of healing and recovery of her identity through ancestry research and sociopolitical activism in history education and youth work. She draws sense and meaning from the engagement with the past, affirming that 'it is the right way for her and that these topics bring a lot of meaning into her life'.

Katharina tells me about serendipitous events that have arisen with her engagement that developed from fact-finding and family trees to the collection of narratives, saying that books fell into her hands and people came into her life which have left traces and 'contributed to more clarity' in her own life. She narrates:

> I am much more myself since I know where I am from, and who I am. I know exactly where I want to go and what is my, my role and what is my path in this life [...] I draw a lot of strength from this, because I know what my family has been through, and I am simply amazed that they have survived all of this, in fact not even with grief, and, and hate or so, I remember my grandmother well, and she has been through horrible things, and she was always kind and open-hearted and cordial, and, I do not know how you can remain human when you have experienced very inhumane things. And that is where I draw strength from and think, hey, they have made it, and my parents also achieved so much, and I am the descendant so to speak and also have this strength in me.[38]

In this section, Katharina's narrative reveals processes of sense-making in a transgenerational perspective. The strength she believes to have gained from ancestry research is one on the hand connected with knowing who she is by knowing her family history in a multigenerational timeframe but also stems from identifying the emotional strength of her grandmother who has kept human qualities of love and cordiality despite having been through what Katharina sees as inhuman experiences. She identifies a transmission of these qualities into herself.

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[38] [...] ich bin viel mehr ich, seitdem ich weiß, woher ich komme, und wer ich bin. Ich weiß genau, wohin ich möchte und was mein, meine Rolle und was mein Weg ist, in diesem Leben [...] ich schöpfe daraus ganz viel Kraft, weil ich weiß, was meine Familie erlebt hat, und ich nur staunen kann, dass sie das alles überlebt haben, und zwar nicht dann auch mit Gram, und, und Hass oder so, ich erinnere mich gut an meine Großmutter und die hat einfach grauenhafte Dinge erlebt, und die war immer lieb und offenherzig, und herzlich und, ich weiß nicht, wie man [...] Mensch bleiben kann, wenn man ganz Unmenschliches erlebt hat. Und, und daraus ziehe ich einfach Stärke und denke, hey die hat es geschafft, und meine Eltern, die haben auch so vieles geleistet, und ich bin die Nachkommin quasi und hab auch diese Kraft in mir.

Besides the notion of inner strength, Katharina also sees other family patterns as legacies of family history as embedded in a larger sociopolitical environment. The tendency to keep a low profile is one of these patterns:

> [...] this sadness, and this being oppressed, I still see that, especially and extremely in my mother. So she is also very discreet, and always has this...to duck, and never turn rebellious, and never...attract attention somehow, she certainly has that from her parents, who had simply learned in the village to obey, to keep a low profile, otherwise you can either be killed directly or you end up in... any Siberian prison for ten years.[39]

Another significant theme is the general relationship to food. Katharina notes that her mother's house is always stuffed with food, and she is highly concerned about having her children eat enough when they come to visit. She connects this behavior pattern to experiences of hunger in previous generations. For Katharina, the discoveries of these patterns of transmission are valuable and open questions about what and how they reverberate in her own life.

On another note, Katharina upholds physical proximity to both Kazakhstan and Ukraine, to places which are important stations in her and her families' histories. She recalls her first visit to Kazakhstan after 21 years in Germany, motivated by a sense of curiosity and an unexplainable longing towards her roots:

> Somehow, it pulls you back to your roots anyway, in order to find back to yourself, [...] it was in any case very moving, and I also felt it again, yes, that is also somehow my home. This country, there you feel different. How it smells, and how, in the village, in summer, all of these bushes, that is pure childhood.[40]

Here, Katharina's notion of home is connected with images from nature, as she explains the travel to Kazakhstan as part of a journey to her own roots. The vivid and sensuous memories of her childhood are found in the smell of the air and the 'presence of certain kinds of bushes'.

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[39] [...] diese Trauer, und dieses Unterdrücktsein, das sehe ich immer noch, also vor allem bei meiner Mutter extrem. Also sie ist sehr verschwiegen, und immer dieses so ... sich ducken, und bloß nicht aufmüpfig werden und bloß nicht ... irgendwie auffallen, das hat sie auf jeden Fall von ihren Eltern, die einfach in dem Dorf gelernt hatten, zu gehorchen, bloß nicht auffallen, sonst kannst du halt entweder sofort umgebracht werden oder landest in ... für zehn Jahre in irgendnem sibirischen Gefängnis.

[40] Irgendwie zieht es einen dann doch zu den Wurzeln um eben mehr zu sich selbst zurück zu finden, [...] es war auf jeden Fall sehr bewegend, und ich hab auch einfach nochmal gespürt, ja das ist auch irgendwie meine Heimat. Dieses Land, da fühlt man sich anders. Wie das da riecht und so, in dem Dorf, im Sommer, diese ganzen Sträucher, das ist halt Kindheit pur.

Her recent travel to Volhynia in Ukraine is embedded in a larger macro-historical perspective on her family history. She self-identifies both her family and the majority of her childhood village as Volhynia-Germans, a term that designates those Germans who had emigrated to Volhynia, a Ukrainian region close to the Polish border. Therefore, traveling to the land of her ancestors which was their home before their mass deportations to Kazakhstan, had significant meaning to Katharina. She expresses:

> [...] Ukraine then was, has totally flashed me, because suddenly I also had the feeling there, somehow, the region and the people and the food, that is also very familiar. And somehow like at grandma's. And then I also realized, of course, because grandma took her whole life from Ukraine to Kazakhstan, how she cooks, how she receives guests, how she sets up the house. Our house, that was built by my grandpa, in Kazakhstan, it looked exactly like all of the houses in Ukraine, in the villages we visited. So the, a special form of wood paneling around the windows and so...and, that had not been clear to me at all, how much Ukraine is in our family.[41]

Emotionally, Katharina describes the visit to Ukraine as very painful and 'having a lasting, strong effect on herself'. She channels these energies in her sociopolitical engagement, saying that 'it is a personal concern of hers to inspire the young generation for engagement with their history'.

In my conversation with Katharina, I was quickly carried away with her, because of the dedication and passion with which she talked about her experiences. The vividness in her descriptions of recent travels to Kazakhstan and Ukraine evoked in me a strong longing to travel to Kazakhstan as well. In many ways, I saw similarities within her and my ways of making meaning and reflecting upon certain themes, so that I noticed that I had to suspend identification with her story, in order to pay respect to each of the narratives and the individual meanings behind each story rather than sympathizing or presenting one narrative in a better light than others, simply because it resonates with me. This challenge, to me, is one of the most urgent challenges in my research process, and still, is being paid respect by a sincere reflection on my position.

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[41] Ukraine war dann, hat mich total geflasht weil ich da auf einmal auch das Gefühl hatte, irgendwie, die Landschaft und die Menschen und das Essen, das ist ja auch ganz vertraut. Und irgendwie wie bei Oma. Und dann ist mir auch klargeworden, ja klar, weil Oma hat ihr ganzes Leben aus der Ukraine mit nach Kasachstan genommen, wie sie kocht, wie man Gäste empfängt, wie man das Haus einrichtet. Unser Haus, das hat mein Opa gebaut, in Kasachstan, sah eins zu eins so aus wie die ganzen Häuser in der Ukraine in den Dörfern in denen wir waren. Also die, so ne spezielle Form von Holzverkleidung um die Fenster und so ...und, das war mir überhaupt nicht klar, wie viel Ukraine in unserer Familie steckt.

## 6.3. Sasha

I have known Sasha as a daycare person for some months before contacting him with the request to take part in my research. Like others, he expressed his doubt on whether he could be of any help for the topic at hand but agreed to take part when I told him that I am more interested in his personal story and what is there concerning his hybrid background. The interview took place at his workspace, a colorful little complex of rooms that constitute a daycare sphere, painted with green walls of trees and flowers.

After our talk, he told me that his father usually never talked about the past, but one day, Sasha assumes that it probably happened under the influence of alcohol, that his father sent him a weblink to a Youtube video about the collective past of German-Russians in the Soviet Union. Sasha told me the title of the video but declared that it didn't touch him because he couldn't relate to any of these people.

When I got home, I instantly opened my browser to look for this video entitled "Holy Land, Hated Land" (Trauptmann 2002) and was profoundly moved. It entailed extracts of videotaped narratives of Germans in Kyrgyzstan who tell about their experiences of deportation, forced labor in Gulag and Trudarmiya, and the emigration of many of their family members to Germany. One man explains that 'his son usually tells him that it is all long gone. He acknowledges that it belongs to the past, but in his heart, it is not gone' (Trauptmann 2002, 00:47:20).

As his narrative begins to unfold, I soon realize that Sasha's way of approaching the topic is one of telling as much as he can in a short amount of time. This reflects in the form of the narrative, which he dominates significantly at the beginning of the narration, where he covers a vast range of topics superficially in a short amount of time. Filling sentences such as 'what else can I say about it?' and 'what else can I tell?' indicate his intention to just say what he knows intellectually while omitting the major topics that are relevant to him in his German-Russian context.

The death of his mother shines through as one of the major topics of his narrative, circling hypothetical questions of how life could be with her still around. In framing his knowledge of the family history, he asserts that his father does not talk about it at all while imagining that his mother would have:

> Maybe... I am honest, I have grown so much into this place here, this country, that all of this gets lost, unfortunately...and also this I one heard indirectly expressed by my father, that he thinks it is a pity that the history is not being passed on... but if he doesn't tell anything, then it is his fault that nothing is being passed on. I believe, my mother would have told a lot. I believe, she would have told a lot, I will probably romanticize about her my

whole life. She would certainly have told a lot. (Sasha, personal interview on 02 August 2018).[42] [43]

The form of Sasha's narrative reflects the content, as the death of his mother marks a turning point both in the form and also in the content of his narrative. Her absence resulted in severe emotional damage to the social fabric of the family because Sasha describes his mother as a solid pillar of harmony:

> [...] from the emotionality, everything is a little bit damaged. And especially from the moment when my mum was not there anymore, anyhow. Because she has been holding it all together.[44]

Sasha's narrative implies that many things were left unspoken in his relationship with his father, whom he describes as a person who does not talk at all. Hence, his narrative is defined by both the absence of his mother and the non-communication that is signaled by his father:

> Yeah, about my parents... I don't know so much honestly.... My father does not talk at all. He was in the army back then, I have no idea where he was stationed, and for how long, and this and that ... he also experienced something there, that he probably hasn't worked through until today... and my father is very particular and very difficult, and the bond is also not a hundred percent. Has never been, also because I am not his natural child, is perfectly clear.[45]

At a later point in his narrative, Sasha explores the underlying causes for the defensive, sealed off attitude of his father by assuming psychological disturbances as the root cause.

> I am judging him as very particular, I have already had so many conversations with my siblings, nights of conversations, about my father, because we are firmly convinced that he is ill, that he, that he really has a

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[42] Vielleicht ... ich bin ehrlich, ich bin so reingewachsen hier, so in dieses Land, dass das alles leider so verloren geht ... und auch das hab ich mal, so ...indirekt von meinem Vater gehört, dass er das schade findet, dass die Geschichte nicht weitergegeben wird ...aber wenn er nichts erzählt, dann ist er selber Schuld, dass nichts weitergegeben wird. Ich glaub, meine Mama hätte viel erzählt. Ich glaub, die hätte viel erzählt, von der schwärm ich wahrscheinlich noch mein ganzes Leben. Die hätte bestimmt viel erzählt.

[43] In this subchapter, all citations are referring to Sasha's personal interview which took place on 2 August 2018 in Lübeck.

[44] [...] von der Emotionalität ist das alles so'n bisschen geschädigt. Und gerade ab dem Moment wo meine Mama nicht mehr da war, sowieso. Weil sie hat ja alles zusammengehalten.

[45] Ja über meine Eltern weiß ich nicht so viel, bin ich ehrlich. Also mein Vater redet überhaupt nicht. Er war damals bei der Armee, keine Ahnung wo er stationiert war, und wie lange, und hin und her ... er hat da auch irgendwie was erlebt, was er wahrscheinlich bis heute nicht verarbeitet hat. Und mein Vater ist sehr speziell und sehr schwierig, und die Bindung ist auch nicht 100 Prozent. Noch nie gewesen, auch weil ich nicht sein leibliches Kind bin, ist ganz klar.

> form of depression. Or somehow a form of such a stress disorder, which sometimes pushes his nerves in such a way, that he reacts so very odd, sometimes. Right? He would never say that it is like this, but we, from the perspective of a therapist, or so, my brother is also a therapist, and my sister... she also checks that, she knows what's going on, she deals with that, too. We are really firmly convinced that he actually needs help. But he will never make use of such help because he is too proud. And shows too little weakness.[46]

He later confirms that the talks with his siblings serve as a coping mechanism for self-therapy, portrayed in the following section:

> Sasha: Yeah. That is why I probably talk a lot about him with my siblings (*laughs*).
> Christina: There you analyze him?
> Sasha: Yes, we analyze him, yes, yes, ...right... so really... he is often the topic of conversation. Not even with a bad intention, but just to... to treat ourselves, and that...is quite good. It is better than to talk to him about it.[47]

Sasha's reference to self-therapy may be connected to the high level of responsibility that he assumed after the death of his mother because his father was incapable to fill this void and instead 'fell into a deep hole'. At the age of sixteen, he became responsible for family cohesion while his father succumbed to the numbness that was accelerated by the consumption of alcohol.

On an intrafamilial layer, something 'unspoken' seems to reside between his maternal grandparents and his father. This comes through in the following passage:

> Sasha: [...] and that maybe there in the subconscious it always... came up or so, I do not know, they could drink together well, celebrate well, it was always funny, too, and was always good, but still, there was always a healthy

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[46] Ich schätze ihn für sehr speziell ein, ich habe mit meinen Geschwistern so viele Gespräche schon, Nächte Gespräche gehabt, über meinen Vater, weil wir der felsenfesten Überzeugung sind, dass er krank ist, dass er, dass er wirklich ne Form der Depression hat. Oder irgendwie so ne Form von so ner Belastungsstörung, die ihn so manchmal auf die Nerven drückt, dass er so ganz komisch reagiert, manchmal. Nä? Er würde das nie sagen, dass es so ist, aber wir, aus Sicht eines Therapeuten, oder so, mein Bruder ist auch Therapeut, und meine Schwester, die checkt das ja auch, die weiß auch, was los ist, die beschäftigt sich damit ja auch. Wir sind wirklich felsenfest der Überzeugung, dass er eigentlich Hilfe braucht. Aber er wird diese Hilfe nie in Anspruch nehmen, dafür ist er zu stolz. Und zeigt zu wenig Schwäche.

[47] Sasha: Joa. Deshalb spreche ich mit meinen Geschwistern wahrscheinlich viel über ihn (*lacht*).
Christina: Da analysiert ihr ihn?
Sasha: Ja, wir analysieren ihn, ja, ja ... richtig ...so richtig. Er ist oft Gesprächsthema. Auch nicht böse gemeint, aber einfach um uns selber zu therapieren, und das ist ganz gut. Ist besser, als mit ihm darüber zu reden.

distance in between, where I think, something is there. But they have never, both of them, shown, even until today.
Christina: And still, this something remains.
Sasha: Yes, still remains, it is never spoken. For my father not anyhow, nothing is being spoken out. Things are not spoken out. Under the influence of alcohol, sometimes here and there, so very cautious, (*clears his throat*), but it is never spoken out.[48]

Sasha's assessment that there are unspoken things, and that may sometimes be spoken under the influence of alcohol, relates to him finding out that his father was not his biological father. He recalls the incident when his father, together with Sasha's maternal grandfather, screw up his courage and confronted Sasha with the truth, which was preceded by rumors within the family that Sasha was an orphaned child after the death of his mother:

> [...] my mother died, many talked: 'oh, now he is all alone, he is orphaned' – although my father was still around all the time – I actually was... orphaned, right? I have...he is just my stepfather, but still. Well and one day, they were on my maternal grandparents, grandma, grandpa were there, at my dad's place and then they also drank at ours, alcohol was always – yes, actually, every weekend, or even on weekdays, when people were somehow together, always when they sit down together, a bottle of vodka comes on the table, and this said weekend, it was the same, and, there they, I believe, exaggerated a bit, and then both (*laughs*) screw up their courage, somehow took courage, and (.) took me down, outside into the shed, and then I came out into the shed, and there they were sitting both, quite sad, somehow, down there (*laughs*) and they had to tell me something...so and that is what it came, and then they explained to me, how it is, and my father did not leave my side on that evening at all. He probably had such a bad conscience. I do not know. For me, it was all half as bad, (*pfff*) yes, and then they told me that, and (*laughs*) yes. I cried a bit, but as I said, that subsided quickly, and then it was okay again.[49]

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[48] Sasha: Nä und dass vielleicht da das im Unterbewussten immer wieder so hochkam oder so, ich weiß es nicht, die konnten miteinander gut trinken, gut feiern, es war auch immer lustig, und war auch immer gut, aber trotzdem war so ne gesunde Distanz immer dazwischen, wo ich mir denke, irgendwas ist doch da. Aber die haben es nie, beide nie gezeigt, auch bis heute nicht.
Christina: Und trotzdem bleibt dieses irgendwas.
Sasha: Ja, trotzdem bleibt, es wird nie ausgesprochen. Bei meinem Vater sowieso nicht, es wird alles nicht ausgesprochen. Dinge werden nicht ausgesprochen. Unter Alkohol, manchmal hier und da, so ganz vorsichtig, (*räuspert sich*), aber es wird nie ausgesprochen.

[49] [...] meine Mutter ist verstorben, viele haben geredet: 'oh er ist jetzt ganz allein, er ist Vollwaise' – obwohl mein Vater ja die ganze Zeit noch da war – Ich war ja auch ... Vollwaise, nä? Ich hab ... er ist ja einfach nur mein Stiefvater, aber trotzdem. Naja und ein Tag, da waren die auf meinen Großeltern von meiner Mutter halt, die Oma, Opa waren da, bei meinem Papa und dann haben die auch getrunken bei uns, war Alkohol immer – ja eigentlich, jedes Wochenende, oder auch in der Woche, wenn irgendwie zusammen, immer, wenn man sich zusammensetzt. Wenn man alleine sitzt, überhaupt nicht, immer wenn man sich zusammensetzt, kommt ne Flasche Wodka auf den Tisch, und an diesem besagten Wochenende war das auch so, und da haben die auch glaube ich ziemlich

Through this account, Sasha comes to the defense of his father, acknowledging that he stayed close to him and tried to be there for Sasha, following the talks. This raises the question in me whether Sasha seems to downplay the impact of him learning that he had been living his past life believing that his social father was his biological father. He repeatedly asserts that he cried just a bit and then it was all fine again.

Sasha believes that his maternal grandparents would rather have had his biological father as a son-in-law, an assumption that was conveyed to him by his father. In the context of talking about his biological father, he expresses:

> I do not know this person, I do not know anything about this person, I only know one thing (*laughs*) that the grandparents of... maternal would have rather had him as (*laughs*) than now the one... (*laughs*), that is the only thing I know...but my Dad always tells that in turn.[50]

His tendency to laugh dominates the lines above and produces a certain kind of confusion about the meaning of these laughs which arise in his relationship with his biological father.

In my talk with Sasha, I felt relaxed. I perceived him as a gentle spirit with a kind heart, soft voice, and empathic attitude. A few minutes in, I began feeling overwhelmed by what I perceived as information overload through his way of listing what were to me lifeless details of German-Russian cultural folklore. In re-reading the transcript, I realized that I unconsciously took up this pattern of describing superficial aspects of German-Russian culture by talking about food. In retrospect, I realize that I did so out of the intention to calm the emotional turmoil that had arisen concerning his mothers' death.

When that point arose, I felt frozen. I sensed a knot in my throat, feeling that I would not be able to continue asking. Yet, he continued speaking and thereby calmed my fear of opening what might have been an old scar to him. As he went on, I felt on the verge of suffocating because I couldn't allow in the mental justifications and the relativizations that he brought forward as the narrative unfolded. I understood that his capacity to take care of others might be connected to the urgency in his teen years to fill a missing link that had been left with the death of his mother. In the process of the interview, it then

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übertrieben, und da haben sich beide (*lacht*) ans Herz gepackt, irgendwie Mut gefasst, und (.) haben mich dann runtergeholt, draußen im Schuppen, und dann bin ich raus in Schuppen, so und dann saßen sie da beide, ganz traurig, irgendwie, da unten (*lacht*) und die müssen mir mal was sagen. Und so kam das dann, und dann haben die mir das erklärt, so wie es ist, und mein Vater wich mir auch an diesem Abend überhaupt nicht mehr von der Seite. Der hatte irgendwie wahrscheinlich so ein schlechtes Gewissen, ich weiß es nicht. Für mich war das alles halb so schlimm, (*pff*) ja, und dann haben die mir das halt erzählt, und (*lacht*) joa. Ich hab ein bisschen geweint, aber das hat sich wie gesagt schnell gelegt, und dann war es auch wieder okay.

50 [...] ich kenn diesen Menschen nicht, ich weiß nichts über diesen Menschen, ich weiß nur eins (*lacht*) dass sich die Großeltern von ... mütterlicherseits eher ihn gewünscht hätten als (*lacht*) als jetzt den ... (*lacht*), das weiß ich nur ... aber das erzählt mein Papa immer wiederum.

became a crucial task for me to suspend mental judgments and assessments and remain present for what and how Sasha expresses.

## 6.4. Tanja

I have contacted Tanja because I was interested in her narrative as a German-Russian born in Germany. She agreed to a meeting and when we realized that we were factual neighbors, I invited her over to my living room to hold the conversation on my couch. Among the toys of my one-and-half-year-old son, the topic opened in a quite general manner, but soon turned toward her struggles with identity and belonging in the light of her family history.

Her interest in participating in my research might have been colored by having known each other for a while. This might also increase the level of trust and a sense of being understood on both ends. I noticed her openness toward me when she showed a strong emotional reaction to the topic of transgenerational traumatization in her family which she claimed that she would not be able to express in that manner within her own family.

Tanja uses an impersonalized form of subject several times. Like Elena (chapter 6.1.), instead of talking of herself in the first person singular, she uses the German expression 'man' in combination with the third person singular, which is comparable to the English expression 'one'. Like Elena and Sasha, Tanja laughs a lot, in situations or contexts that seem not to give any reason for laughing because they are inherently sad or would rather invite other emotional expressions. A concrete expression of this is given in the following subchapter.

The distribution of talking shifts toward the end of the interview when I gradually take more space to talk about different ways of knowing and the metaphor of a circular view on time, as described by Lederach (2005). In retrospect, I understand that this shift was an indicator of Tanja's narrative coming to an end.

Tanja's narrative circles around the tension of her need to know more about her family history and the state of not-knowing, corresponding to a parallel theme of herself taking her own needs back for the sake of others' needs[51]. This is intimately intertwined with her sense of identity, part of which remains unknown to her due to her not knowing about her family's past in Kazakhstan. The severity of this ignorance and the accompanying fear of asking becomes manifest through her body, particularly through a pain in the belly that Tanja describes as rooted in fear:

[51] In this case, this confrontation of needs refers to her need to know facing the other's needs to keep knowledge for themselves.

> [...] someday, there was a teacher or some classmates who said: 'Yes, you Russians...', and so on, I then told it at home and then my mum said: 'No, we are no Russians, we are no foreigners, we are emigrants (*Aussiedler*)', and then they explained that the pre-ancestors sometimes had been German, and we therefore so to say came here. But the precise reason why my parents came here, I do not know, so earlier, I always had this bellyache and fear to ask, because I did not know what exactly was behind that (Tanja, personal interview on 07 August 2018).[52] [53]

Tanja finds herself in an ambivalent situation in between two different external definitions of a certain label that is ascribed to her, one of the 'Russian' and one of the 'emigrant' (*Aussiedler*). At a later point, she mentions feelings of discomfort and shame for not knowing what moved her parents to migrate to Germany. Such questions typically arise when people ask her about her family's origins and the reasons for their complex background, stating "I am always afraid that they dig deeper (laughs), and that I then have to admit that I actually do not know it"[54].

Overall, her narrative depicts the limits of narrative knowing, because the lack of knowledge, together with the limits of its verbalization, evokes strong emotional reactions for Tanja. The turning point which marks the expression of frustration lies directly at the beginning of the narrative when Tanja talks about her unsuccessful efforts to gather some more information upon the invitation I sent before the interview:

> Tanja: [...] in preparation for the conversation today, I just said: 'Yes,... I am meeting with Christina, and could you maybe tell me more about it, not that I am sitting there and (*laughs*) have no idea'. And then my Dad said that he does not want to tell at all and that the grandparents also do not like to talk about it (.) thus. That made me a little bit sad in a way, that they do not want to tell me about it because I would like to know, why in the first place, so that then also belongs to me. But it is also a relief for me that it is also okay to live with not-knowing. Previously, I blamed myself for not knowing why. Hoah, I am sorry (*cries*).
> Christina: Do you want a handkerchief?

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[52] [...] da meinte irgendmal so'n Lehrer, oder irgendwelche Mitschüler: 'Ja, ihr Russen ...' und so, das hab ich dann zu Hause erzählt und dann meinte meine Mama so: 'Nein, wir sind keine Russen, wir sind keine Ausländer, wir sind Aus*siedler*', und dann, haben sie das halt erklärt, dass die Vorvorahnen irgendwann ja mal deutsch waren, und wir deswegen sozusagen hierhergekommen sind. Aber den genauen Grund, warum meine Eltern hergekommen sind, den weiß ich nicht, also früher hatte ich immer so Bauchschmerzen und Angst, nachzufragen, weil ich nicht wusste, was steckt da genau hinter

[53] In this subchapter, all citations are referring to Tanja's personal interview which took place on 07 August 2018 in Lübeck.

[54] Ich hab immer Angst, dass die tiefer nachfragen (*lacht*), und ich dann gestehen muss, dass ich das eigentlich nicht weiß

> Tanja: No (*laughs*)... blamed myself, that I – such a bad conscience for not being interested in that, because I just have fear to know about it, but now I know that is okay that I do not know it. While I do not even believe that it is that serious (*laughs*).[55]

It is striking to witness the diverging emotional responses of laughing and crying both present in such a short paragraph. These contradictions in both form and framing of the narrative content point toward a language of the unsayable, located at a layer deeper than narrative can express. The extract above also illustrates that Tanja has a strong desire to know why her family returned to Germany and feels rejected by her father's reaction stating that he did not want to talk about that topic, at least in the frame of this concrete research project. Nevertheless, the burden of not knowing has been accompanying her throughout her life. She makes that point by referring to the funeral of her grandmother several years ago, with whom she had shared a close relationship:

> Maybe that sound also a bit macabre or so, but for instance when my grandma died, there is always this address given by the pastor, and, I was looking forward to it a bit, in order to, beforehand people have conversations, about what will be told, and then I was already relieved, that I could hear a bit more in that context, although now I cannot remember that anymore (*cries*).[56]

In the course of her narrative, Tanja expresses both verbally and non-verbally how the need to know is a crucial aspect for her experience of a sense of inner peace. She identifies how her parents deal with the topic of family history as determining for her manner to deal with it. Her longing to know is, in fact, a longing for inner clarity, the fulfillment of which could contribute to

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[55] Tanja: [...] in Vorbereitung auf das Gespräch heute, hab ich mal gesagt: 'ja ... ich treffe mich mit Christina, und könnt ihr mir vielleicht noch mehr davon erzählen, nicht dass ich dasitze und (*lacht*) gar keine Ahnung hab'. Und dann meinte mein Papa, dass er das gar nicht erzählen mag, so richtig, und dass auch meine Großeltern da nicht so gerne drüber reden (...) von daher. Das hat mich in einer Weise ein bisschen traurig gemacht, dass sie es mir nicht erzählen wollten, weil ich schon gerne wissen will, warum überhaupt, so das gehört dann ja auch zu mir. Aber es ist für mich auch ne Erleichterung, dass es auch okay ist, mit dem Nicht-Wissen zu leben. Früher hab ich mir so Vorwürfe gemacht, dass ich nicht weiß, warum. Hoah, Entschuldigung (*weint*).
Christina: Willst du ein Taschentuch?
Tanja: Nö (*lacht*) ... Vorwürfe gemacht, dass ich – so'n schlechtes Gewissen, dass ich mich nicht dafür interessiere, weil ich einfach Angst hab, das zu wissen, aber jetzt weiß ich, das ist okay, dass ich es nicht weiß. Wobei ich gar nicht glaube, dass es so schlimm ist (*lacht*).

[56] Vielleicht klingt das jetzt auch bisschen makaber oder so, aber zum Beispiel als meine Oma gestorben ist, dann gibt es ja immer diese Ansprache vom Pastor, und da hab ich mich ein bisschen drauf gefreut, um, also vorher werden ja Gespräche geführt, was denn erzählt werden soll, und dann war ich schon erleichtert, dass ich da noch ein bisschen mehr hören kann, wobei ich mich daran jetzt auch nicht mehr erinnern kann (*weint*).

her experience of peace. In response to my question of what would be different for her if she knew these things, she answers:

> So firstly, I would then be much clearer with myself, that I know that, just to have the assurance, but maybe then to be able to understand, why my parents, sometimes acted how they did in certain situations. So, I do not have an example, but, (.) that I just completely understood, so to speak, where I come from, and what constitutes my family.[57]

When Tanja began to cry, my heart became heavy for a certain sense of frustration that emerged while I saw her in this emotional confusion. Simultaneously, I felt relief in a way that I could not make sense of at that moment. In retrospect, I connect this relief to the acknowledgment of wanting to know toward the elders. Seeing and feeling how deep the not-knowing affected Tanja, I recalled an informal conversation I had with my grandmother just recently. She told me, repeatedly, that her cousin's father had been shot in the Gulag and that the whole family had not known this for decades, hoping and waiting for the man to return home without certainty. With tears in her eyes and a trembling voice, my grandmother added that "nobody cares about what happened to us". "You are wrong", I said. "I do. And beyond me, there is a veritable *remembrance culture* within German-Russian subculture brought forward by NGOs, museums and memorial sites across Germany". She looked at me with eyes wide open, stunned and in disbelief, "Really?". I felt like this was the first time in her life that she heard someone interested in both her and her family's story. Therefore, I highly valued Tanja's expression of her inner confusion and for her courage to express it so openly.

## 6.5. Alexej

Initially, I had first contacted Alexej's cousin to talk about his German-Russian background. But when news spread about his death from a tumorous abdomen cancer, besides the shock and the mourning process, I became hesitant whether to ask anyone of his larger family at this moment. Therefore, I decided to let the request rest for several weeks before contacting Alexej. I had known his cousin just as fleetingly as himself as a friend of my sister during adolescence. Yet, I believe that the prior acquaintance we had had, has

[57] Also erstmal wäre ich dann mit mir eher im Reinen, dass ich das weiß so, einfach nur die Gewissheit zu haben, aber vielleicht dann auch nachvollziehen zu können, warum meine Eltern mal in Situationen gehandelt haben, wie sie gehandelt haben. Also fällt mir jetzt kein Beispiel ein, aber (.) dass ich einfach komplett verstanden hab, sozusagen, wo ich herkomme, und was meine Familie ausmacht.

facilitated our encounter in the frame of this research project and contributed to his agreement to take part.

Like others, Alexej applies an impersonal form of talking occasionally. The depersonalization is enacted through the use of the second person singular. Thereby, Alexej's narrative creates a higher sense of understanding through empathy, because the listener feels put in his position as a six-year-old boy. Concerning the use of language, Alexej narrates:

> And there you have, as a six-year-old nipper, got a bit of fear, there you did not even want to talk to others, because you do not know, if you say something wrong, or... right? (Alexej, personal Interview on 08 August 2018).[58] [59]

In his choice of words, one expression sticks out to me, as he uses it several times. In utilizing the term "in the twenty-first century" Alexej is implying the underdevelopment of others while indicating that he has kept up with the times. Such 'development' language is present in other expressions throughout Alexej's narrative, for example, what he terms the 'Neanderthal' thinking, implicitly referring to a backward way of thinking. He concretely refers to 'people of the village who narrowly draw lines between their in-group and outside groups'. This has a reference to his personal experience of having been born to 'a mother who was from a town' and therefore being treated differently than the native villagers in his home village in Kazakhstan.

At the beginning of the interview, Alexej comes forward with a common, albeit rather essentialist understanding of his German-Russian background, stating that "German-Russian, is actually German for me, only that we were... virtually born in another country, raised in another country".[60]

Alexej defines his German identity through the bloodline. This comes through when he applies a metaphor to strengthen his definition, stating that 'when a cat is born in a pigsty, it is far from being a pig'. Using the imagery of animals, the value of cats for Alexej runs deeper than his metaphor. He had shared with me before the interview that he is the owner of two Bengal cats, whom he has to sell in preparation to move in with his girlfriend. Juxtaposing the highly valued cats with pigs appears like a devaluation of the pigsty, which stands analogous to Kazakhstan.

Staying with his initial understanding of a German-Russian background, this initial definition provides a crucial explanation and justification for the

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[58] Und da hast du dann als, sechsjähriger Steppke so'n bisschen Angst gekriegt, da wolltest du auch gar nicht, dich mit anderen unterhalten, weil du nicht weißt, ob du jetzt irgendwie was Falsches sagst, oder ... nä?

[59] In this subchapter, all citations are referring to Alexej's personal interview which took place on 8 August 2018 in Lübeck.

[60] "Russlandsdeutsch, ist für mich eigentlich deutsch, nur dass wir halt ...quasi in einem anderen Land geboren, aufgewachsen sind".

migration to Germany, which is rendered as a natural process of returning to his roots. In the course of the conversation, I believe co-created by the choice of my questions, this fixity changes and becomes much more fluid. Alexej then elaborates that he has brought along some specific Russian cultural patterns, indicating a hybrid form of cultural heritage.

As his narrative unfolds, Alexej states that he misses his life in Kazakhstan. Incorporating the dilemma of dual foreignness, he remarks that his childhood was better in Kazakhstan than in Germany:

> [...] there, we were insulted as Germans, shitty Germans, and here, in Germany, when you return so to say from Russia, you are insulted as shitty Russian, right? So, yes, it was not easy on either side. Right? Neither there nor here, but I thought as a child I had a better time over there.[61]

Missing Kazakhstan also becomes manifest in his desire to share some childhood songs and cartoons with his younger sister who was born in Germany. He recounts how he showed his half-sister songs and videos from his childhood:

> Alexej: I showed her songs then, so from my childhood, yes.
> Christina: Was that important for you, to share that with her?
> Alexej: Yes, for me it was. Because somehow it is part of it, because she is my half-sister, but a part is somewhere from us, that also means, from there. Right? And that is why I thought, why should she not see and know that, where her siblings come from and what they have seen there in childhood, what they have heard, and what they have been through, right?[62]

In this tension between an essentialist definition of his German-Russian roots and his acknowledgment and love toward cultural particularities that have shaped his childhood, I perceive a common ambiguity of personal experience and grand narratives that refer to nationhood, imagined communities in particular (Anderson [1983] 2006). I will further elaborate on this broader theme in the analysis and remain with Alexej's personal account for now.

In my perception, Alexej's narrative is strongly shaped by externalization of problems, followed by a projection of guilt onto others. This tendency

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61 [...] dort, wurden wir beschimpft als Deutsche, Scheiß-Deutsche, und hier in Deutschland, wenn du sozusagen aus Russland zurückkehrst, wirst du als Scheiß-Russe beschimpft, nä? Also ja, es war auf beiden Seiten nicht einfach. (...) Nä? Weder dort noch hier, aber ich fand als Kind hatte ich dort ne bessere Zeit.

62 Alexej: Lieder, hab ihr dann gezeigt, so aus meiner Kindheit, ja.
Christina: War das wichtig für dich, mit ihr das zu teilen?
Alexej: Ja, fand ich schon. Weil irgendwo gehört's ja dazu, weil es ist meine Halbschwester, aber ein Teil ist ja irgendwo von uns, das heißt auch, von dort. Nä? Und deswegen fand ich das so, warum soll sie das nicht sehen und wissen, woher ihre Geschwister kommen und was sie dort in der Kindheit dann gesehen, gehört haben, was sie dann da erlebt haben, nä?

shines through from the onset of his narrative when he declares that he didn't have any problem with his background, but the 'problem was his fellow human beings', who believed that he was Russian, not German. Upon further inquiry from my side, he states that it was annoying him to explain to his fellows every time, that he was not a foreigner:

> Alexej: On the one side, annoying. Right? Annoying, to explain to my classmates, my fellow humans what is even phase. Yes? What even is my history, where I am really from.
> Christina: Did you explain that in detail, every time?
> Alexej: Yes, I explained that every time, but this stubbornness of most of these people, I don't know, they were probably not capable of understanding that at all.[63]

To me, his reaction carried a connotation of condescendence toward the 'annoying' others, as Alexej implies that they were probably incapable of understanding his history. Such downgrading of others infuses his narrative, sometimes more subtly, other times rather concrete:

> How many, many other people nowadays also, have this Neanderthal thinking. Hold on to things, to faith, but that is also another topic. There where I think, yes, they have not quite arrived in the twenty-first century yet, yes.[64]

The externalization of problems, which comes along with a diminishment of others, is also reflected in intrafamilial discrepancies he identifies. Alexej states that he has never had a relationship with his paternal great-grandmother because she 'never tried to talk to him and avoided contact'. In his understanding, this avoidance was related to her rejection of Alexej's mother, who came from a city, while his father's family were villagers.

Alexej upholds a certain nostalgia for the early childhood years in a Kazakh village, which has been disenchanted when he was shown recent photographs of the very village he grew up in. Mourning the changes, Alexej believes that the Kazakh population that settled the village after their emigration downgraded the hard work of his ancestors:

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[63] Alexej: Auf der einen Seite, nervig. Nä? Nervig, meinen Mitschülern, meinen Mitmenschen, zu erklären, was überhaupt Phase ist. Ja? Was überhaupt meine Geschichte ist, woher ich eigentlich wirklich komme.
Christina: Hast du dann jedes Mal ausführlich erklärt?
Alexej: Ja, das hab ich jedes Mal erklärt, aber diese Sturheit dieser meisten Menschen, weiß ich nicht, die waren vielleicht nicht in der Lage, das überhaupt so zu verstehen.

[64] Wie viele, viele andere Menschen heutzutage auch, so dieses Neandertaler-Denken haben. Halten sich an Sachen fest, an Glauben, aber das ist auch wieder ein anderes Thema. Da wo ich mir denke, ja die sind noch nicht im einundzwanzigsten Jahrhundert richtig angekommen, ja.

> As I said, my ancestors, they built it all up, it was being cared for, and, we were hardly gone, then other people settled there and basically ran that down totally.[65]

Closely linked to his nostalgia around his early childhood in a Kazakh village, Alexej narratively paints a picture that harmonizes general life in that village:

> In the village we were among ourselves. There, we evidently did not insult each other 'You are a German', right? So, we were all one. We all understood each other. Right? There clearly was, I think, a much bigger cohesion.[66]

His presentation of his native village indicates a harmony that implies freedom from any conflict, as they were all one and all understood each other. Certainly, this might be colored by the lenses of childhood memories, but Alexej's view effects his present attitude towards that place. Discouraged by the photographs that show what Alexej understands as significant changes in the appearance of his birth village, he expresses his rejection of what the place might be today:

> [...] why should I look at something like that, right? Because it destroys my image from the past, then I prefer to have my image this way, that which I have in my memory, and that suffices. Then I do not have to see that in reality.[67]

Beyond his ambiguity toward his place of birth, I read a tension between cultural value systems in Alexej's narrative. Alexej constructs a critique toward patterns of behavior that accompany the society he lives in at the moment in distinction to the imagined village of his childhood. Such is the way, for example, he strengthens the value of harmony and social cohesion that he ascribes to his birth village by noting its absence in German society, stating that here, 'many people think about themselves first before thinking about others'.

During and after the interview with Alexej, my body was tense and I realized that my gaze kept shifting away from his eyes to empty spaces in the room. I notice this tendency whenever I feel uncomfortable with a person and not in a place where I can express my authentic self. In practices of *Active*

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[65] Wie gesagt, meine Vorfahren, die haben das alles aufgebaut, es wurde gepflegt, und kaum sind wir dort weg, haben sich andere Leute dort angesiedelt, und das eigentlich total runtergewirtschaftet.

[66] In dem Dorf waren wir unter uns. Da haben wir uns ja nicht gegenseitig beschimpft 'Du bist'n Deutscher', ja? So, wir waren ja alles eins. Wir haben uns ja alle verstanden. Nä? Da war ja auch, ich denk mal auch ein viel größerer Zusammenhalt.

[67] [...] warum soll ich mir dann so etwas da so angucken, nä? Weil es zerstört mein Bild von früher, dann hab ich lieber mein Bild so, das was ich in Erinnerung hab, und das reicht mir. Dann muss ich das nicht in Realität sehen.

*Listening*, I learned both the difficulty and the depth of gazing into the eyes of my conversation partner. While I had attempted to apply this knowledge in all interviews, it became increasingly difficult with Alexej, because I internally rejected some of his remarks. Therefore, I had to put much of an effort into suspending my judgments to be able to receive and acknowledge Alexej's narrative with an open heart.

## 6.6. Svetlana

I contacted Svetlana after having read parts of her Blog online, which deals with what she calls 'Collecting Shards' (*Scherben Sammeln*). In this blog, she approaches a diverse range of topics that are related to her German-Russian background, such as transgenerational trauma, identity formation, language, literature, and a sense of foreignness, among others. This context is quite different from that of the other research participants, as Svetlana belongs to another generation, i.e. she defines herself as the daughter of a primarily traumatized person. My research question, however, does not limit the exploration of the topic to a certain cohort.

She agreed to an interview at her place. Upon arriving, she warmly received me, offered me tea and cookies, and made a very open impression on me. Before the interview, she expressed her concerns about re-traumatization, because I have added a paragraph on this in my cover letter to her, indicating that I would either be able to refer to some trauma therapists in the Lübeck area or offer myself as a conversation partner if needed. For an instant, when she asked more details about who I could refer to, I was hesitant and acknowledged the ethical weight that accompanied this topic. I approached this hesitancy with openness and expressed the reason why I included such a paragraph in my cover letter, as well as her right to withdraw from the research at any point.

In the course of our conversation, Svetlana gave me two books, an act which symbolizes her affinity and choice of literature as a way of expression. One of the books is a collection of literature excerpts of German-Russians (Böpple 2018). The other book is a novel written by Natasha Wodin (Wodin 2017) and it pictures the journey of the authoress in discovering her family history. She passed the latter book to me with the comment that I would probably find myself between the lines of the novel.

Svetlana is an authoress, a profession that shines through on several occasions throughout the narrative in her use of metaphors, vivid poetic expressions, and cross-references to other artists, writers, and activists. She owns the narrative, as she does a lot of talking, often jumps between topics, and comes back to topics she had touched upon before. When she finished

telling me what she expressed as all there is, I came in with questions to deepen layers of her narrative, asking about the role of writing in her life, and the meaning of the victim-perpetrator dualism. Towards the end of the interview, it evolved much more into a conversation in which she began asking me about my motivations and life events.

Svetlana's narrative touches a vast array of topics that arise with transgenerational traumatization, yet from a bird's eye perspective, I identify a major theme in questions of the ownership of trauma, particularly her own stories that are overshadowed by her father's traumatization and the collective narrative of German-Russian traumatization. If we applied terminology from literature and theater, her narrative identifies Svetlana's father as the main character or protagonist of the drama of transgenerational traumatization in her own life. At the very beginning of her narrative, Svetlana pictures:

> [...] he suffered because the history of German-Russians was not known. And that he was received – or was not received – as an intruder, a stranger, someone who does not belong here. And that has strongly shaped our family life. So due to, so the atmosphere was naturally, and, he has uhm... not just raged, he also dealt with it artistically. So he painted, and has painted a lot of horrible images at the beginning in Germany, and drawings of the deportation, that means, as a child I noticed much more than was good for me. [...] at home that was topic, and was always present (Svetlana, personal Interview on 20 August 2018).[68] [69]

Svetlana later elaborates that her father has been affected both by secondary traumatization ***and*** by direct traumatization, having been forcefully deported as a five-year-old child, he also witnessed his mother being sexually abused. These effects of being caught in and by the past complicate any relationship with him:

> [...] and he is not just secondarily traumatized, but he is traumatized. The trauma destroyed him. So, or that, the experiences have – it is very difficult to live with him. [...] back then, when he was five years old, and they were displaced for the first time, to Siberia in the Kommandatur, so war, the end of the war, but also what came after that, had parts of him... it was impossible

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[68] [...] er hat darunter gelitten, dass die Geschichte der Russlanddeutschen ja nicht bekannt war. Und dass er als Eindringling, als Fremder, als nicht hierher Zugehöriger empfangen wurde, oder nicht empfangen wurde. Und das hat unser Familienleben sehr stark geprägt. Also durch die Stimmung war natürlich und, er hat ehm ... nicht nur getobt, er hat sich auch ***bildnerisch*** damit auseinandergesetzt. Also er hat gemalt und, hat in Deutschland sehr viele schreckliche Bilder gemalt am Anfang, und Zeichnungen von der Verschleppung, das heißt, ich hab als Kind schon mehr mitbekommen, als mir gut tat.[...] zu Hause war das Thema, und war immer präsent.

[69] In this subchapter, all citations are referring to Svetlana's personal interview which took place on 20 August 2018 in Hamburg.

> for them to grow. So he is in some, in some ways stuck on this level, a five-year-old, hurt child.[70]

It is also significant to witness that both Svetlana and her younger sister had come to study in the field of visual arts, with her sister now working as an art historian, and herself, holding a university degree in graphic design, has now turned to her passion for writing.

For Svetlana, reverberations of history, including traumatization, linger into the present in many different ways and details. She identifies an unexplainable eye disease in her early twenties as a psychosomatic manifestation of the urge to 'look at it', meaning the past. In her narrative, nightmares, anniversaries, self-destructive behaviors, and a disturbed sexuality have points of connection to a long distant past of her ancestors. A dominant theme that shines through in her representation of her experiences is guilt and the mental model of prohibition to feel happy, at ease, carefree in her own life:

> And they [the German-Russians] have worn this atonement – that is what my father talks about, he even only paints about it – without being guilty, and still, it is so amalgamated, even in his soul. So, guilt is a large topic. And (.) making mistakes. Because small mistakes can – could – lead to huge consequences in the wartime and its aftermath. You didn't pack something, your child froze to death, you didn't do something... so. And that seems to be internalized in us, that we do not allow ourselves any mistake.[71]

All of these aspects are layered around her own life and affect her to different extents. Yet underneath those layers of transgenerational traumatization, Svetlana identifies her own trauma as the relocation from Russia to Germany. She understands her upbringing in Omsk as typical Soviet childhood, but when her family migrated to Germany, the Russian part of her life, the Russian cultural heritage, and language, vanished over time in the shadow of the German-Russian suffering that has been so present in her family. She remembers the emigration:

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[70] [...] und er ist nicht nur sekundär traumatisiert, sondern er ist traumatisiert. Das Trauma hat ihn zerstört. Also, oder das, die Erlebnisse, haben – es ist sehr schwer, mit ihm zusammen zu leben. [...] damals, als er fünf Jahre alt war, und als sie das erste Mal verschleppt wurden nach Sibirien in die *Kommandatur*, also, Krieg, Kriegsende, aber auch was danach kam, hat Teile in ihm ... es war unmöglich, dass sie wachsen. Also er ist an manchen, mancher Hinsicht auf dieser Ebene geblieben, ein fünfjähriges, verletztes Kind.

[71] Und sie [die Russlanddeutschen] haben dieses Büßen – davon redet mein Vater, der ja malt nur darüber – angezogen, ohne schuldig zu sein, und dennoch ist es so verquickt, auch in seiner Seele. Also, Schuld ist ein großes Thema. Und (.) Fehler machen. Weil aus kleinen Fehlern können – konnten – in diesen Kriegszeiten und danach, riesige Konsequenzen entstehen. Hast du irgendwas nicht eingepackt, ist dein Kind erfroren, hast du irgendwas ... also, so. Und das scheinen wir verinnerlicht zu haben, dass wir uns keinen Fehler erlauben.

> And I accepted it. I swallowed it completely bravely. I did not cry. I barely said goodbye. We do not speak Russian anymore? Okay. No Russian books, no Russian films? Okay. So, you know, I participated in all of that, because I was a submissive child. And I think, that my incapacity to be rebellious in this case and to mourn, and to realize what happens when a door closes. You cannot go back there. [...] My trauma of changing from one country to another is (.) I had to leave my dog behind... so it may be a small trauma, compared to the traumata that others have endured, but it was mine. And one of the worst things in my life is that I could not express that and could not mourn that because it was good. To come to Germany. One had to burn the bridges.[72]

Besides the sudden loss of Russian language and culture, the loss of her dog she dearly loved remains an open wound until this day. She recalls a situation in which, serendipitously, she put on an old vinyl which was a gift from her aunt. It was a children song from her childhood, entitled *Пропала собака (lit.: "lost dog")* which deals with a dog that ran away. Upon listening to this song, Svetlana says that she burst into tears, both for the sudden relocation and the loss of her beloved dog.

The question of ownership also becomes a vehicle for Svetlana to let go of some of the burdens that come with the awareness of transgenerational traumatization.

> But, this, to accept it too strongly as part of oneself, so essentially, we need to say from time to time: 'You, this is yours...I was (.) born in another time, and my story is actually an other one. [...] Hey. You suffered. I can see that. And it should not have happened to you. That was bigger, that was stronger, that you would not... you did not deserve this. But it is over. And you, you are redeemed. And now you can also set me free. I do not have to re live that.' So. And that does not work all the time, but I believe the more I do it, the easier it gets to me.[73]

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[72] Und ich hab's hingenommen. Ich hab's total tapfer weggesteckt. Ich hab nicht geweint. Ich hab mich kaum verabschiedet. Wir reden kein russisch mehr? Okay. Keine russischen Bücher, keine russischen Filme? Okay. So. Weißt du, ich hab das alles mitgemacht, weil ich war ein gefügiges Kind. Und ich denke mal, dass meine Unfähigkeit, da aufmüpfig zu sein und zu trauern, und zu realisieren, was passiert, wenn ne Tür zugeht. Du kannst da nicht wieder zurück. [...] Mein Trauma des Wechselns von einem Land zum anderen ist (.) ich musste meinen Hund dort lassen... also es mag ein kleines Trauma sein, im Vergleich zu den Traumata, die die anderen erlebt haben, aber es war meins. Und eine der schlimmen Dinge in meinem Leben ist, dass ich das nicht ausdrücken konnte und nicht darum trauern, weil es war ja gut. Dass wir nach Deutschland gekommen sind. Man musste die Brücken abbrechen.

[73] Aber dieses, das zu sehr auch wieder an sich anzunehmen, also im Grunde brauchen wir ab und zu mal so. auch wieder zu sagen: 'Du, das ist deins ...Ich bin (.) in einer anderen Zeit geboren, und meine Geschichte ist eigentlich ne andere. [...] Du hast gelitten. Ich sehe das. Und das hätte mit dir nicht passieren sollen. Das war größer, das war stärker, das hättest du ... das hast du nicht verdient. Aber es ist vorbei. Und du, du bist erlöst. und jetzt kannst du auch mich freigeben. Ich muss das

Owning her story, and acknowledging the ownership of the stories of her ancestors, becomes not just the main theme of Svetlana's narrative, but an approach for her to cope with the presence of this transgenerational traumatization in her own life. In the final reflections on her narrative, she expresses:

> Also, maybe from the fate of my father, because I have always been such an attachment of him and his story and have seen myself as such, and that is just... his viewpoint, also his confrontation, in the way he can do it and that I cannot fight for him, maybe neither for my grandparents, or so. And... that liberates, that also feels good.[74]

In writing, Svetlana has found a way to channel her energies and to engage with these topics in her way. While she initially used writing as a tool to heal herself by 'writing things off her soul', a friend has noticed her talent and urged her to make some of her writings public. By creating a blog, Svetlana opened ways to share her writings and has established a standing in German-speaking literature. She notices the epistemological nature writing has for herself, saying "I cannot say that writing completely sets you free. It sometimes brings certain realizations which I wouldn't have got through mere thinking".[75] Furthermore, she underlines her personal need to access creative aspects of herself, through which 'she feels alive'.

I felt tense while she was talking, although I had come straight from a two-hour yoga class to her place, intending to be as present and cleansed from preconceived ideas and expectations as possible. Realizing that the tension in my body was not so much a result of fear or insecurity, but rather a certain shield that I erected to protect myself and to avoid transposition and projection, I held this shield around my heart while listening and receiving her story with active listening. She had this body language that reflects deeply, as she closed her eyes when she thought about some expression or word. At times, I felt mirrored, noticing that I could deeply resonate with what she said. This relation caused me to shed silent tears twice during the interview, when Svetlana talks about the confrontation with the past as responsibility towards the elders, being reminded of my grandmother.

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nicht nacherleben.' So. Und das funktioniert nicht immer, aber ich glaube, je öfter ich das mache, desto leichter fällt es mir auch.

[74] Auch vielleicht von dem Schicksal meines Vaters, weil ich immer so ein Anhängsel von ihm und von seiner Geschichte war und mich betrachtet hab, und das ist einfach... seine Sicht, auch seine Auseinandersetzung, wie er das machen kann und dass ich nicht für ihn kämpfen kann, vielleicht auch nicht für meine Großeltern, oder so. Und... das befreit auch, das tut auch gut.

[75] "ich kann nicht sagen, dass Schreiben dich total befreit. Es bringt manchmal so bestimmte Erkenntnisse, die ich sonst im nur Nachdenken nicht hätte".

After the two-hour interview with Svetlana, which was significantly longer than all of the other interviews, I felt exhausted. My mind was filled with information and impressions, but more crucially I noticed that I spent an extensive amount of energy on listening and seeing her with my whole being. I felt as if I had just crossed the finishing line of a Marathon.

# 7. Analysis

Following Riessman (1993; 2008), I enter the core process of narrative analysis with an acknowledgment of the theoretical and discursive foundations that have produced this study and co-produced the narratives involved alike. This theoretical framework emanates from a transrational perspective of the human being as a holistic entity, shaped by and in the constant process of interpersonal interaction and supra-societal dimensions. In this section, I turn toward the analysis of the narratives through the lenses I have derived from the theoretical framework. Analysis is here understood "as the process of separating aggregated texts (oral, written, or visual) into smaller segments of meaning for close consideration, reflection, and interpretation" (Ellingson 2011, 595). Rooted in a theoretical engagement with transgenerational traumatization, an enlarged view of time, and the fluidity of identity formation, the process that precedes analysis is colored by these lenses as well. Therefore, for external assessment of validity, I point towards Riessman's suggestion to focus on the notion of 'trustworthiness' rather than 'truth' (Riessman 1993; 2008) which, from a postmodern perspective, is a multiplicity in any way. Throughout my research, both in interaction with the co-researchers and my account of collecting and interpreting the narratives, I have intended to provide a high degree of transparency, both in describing procedures and research design and in my contributions to eliciting narratives.

My analysis of data follows a narrative approach that intends to understand present themes that reside within the data as interrelated and part of the whole (hermeneutic circle). Based on my theoretical framework, I apply the following interconnected analytic lenses: their construction of family history (*temporality*), languages of the unsayable (*unsayability*), and the collective dimension, looking at the notion of victimization in particular. I embed the analysis in an assessment of whether and how the co-researchers make meaning of the past and in which way their narrative representations affect their present.

## 7.1. On Time

In opening up space for the narratives to enter into dialogue with my theoretical framework, I am first locating the main themes of the respondents within Lederach's Doodle of "the past that lies before us" (2005, 141) in at least four different embedded circles, namely recent events, lived history, remembered history and narrative. Such assessment is helpful to identify the

temporal spaces which bind most energy for each individual and to look at the differences in content of the different circles of the past.

Having weaved some dominant sociopolitical narratives of the German-Russian groupness into the theoretical model. Now, facing personal narratives, I am looking at how the co-researchers represent their meanings of the temporal layers. I am specifically interested in looking closely at 'narrative' in Lederach's sense of the word- as "lenses that explore the interpretation and understanding of meaning in an expanded view of time and the development of group identity over generations tracing to the stories of origin, which are the approaches that are closest to this deeper reach into history" (2005, 143). The importance of this circle of 'narrative' lies in the multiplicity of perceptions that crystallized in my reflections on a collective German-Russian narrative, which leads to different ways of making meaning of collective stories respectively. What do the co-researchers present as formative stories of their German-Russian group identity? Which meaning do they attribute to them? These questions are guiding me in this analytic section on the construction of the past.

For most of the co-researchers, a distinct and explicit version of German-Russian history and culture was absent during childhood, despite probably embedded in their everyday lives and customs. They tended to have very little concrete knowledge about their family histories, indicating that their family memories have been blurred across the generations (Cremer 2018, 15). Sasha recounts:

> [...] what I still know from back then, my mum (*clears his throat*), she was with my grandparents in Russia for a long time, they lived in Sasnovka, and they had a small farm there with many cows, and she did much agriculture. And my father is from Alexandrovka, that is near Omsk, and he was also driver, he did much... as driver, truck driving, motorcycle driving, and has... also worked as a bodyguard, something like this he told me, and... exactly... so they also were largely self-sufficient. Self-sufficient, and over time, I also realize that today, my parents came here to Germany, they wanted to offer us a better future, somehow, especially reasonable learning, not so much tilling, not such physically hard work as they had had themselves, and therefore, because we have this German background – I do not know, but think it – it brought them back... here, or rather they thought, okay, we might have it easier to take root here again, due to this background, and... that also worked out wonderfully (Sasha).[76]

[76] [...] was ich halt noch weiß von damals, meine Mama (*räuspert sich*), sie war lange bei meinen Großeltern in Russland, in Sasnovka haben die gewohnt, und die hatten dort einen kleinen Bauernhof mit ganz vielen Kühen, und sie hat auch ganz viel so Landwirtschaft gemacht. Und mein Vater kommt aus Alexandrovka, das ist bei Omsk, und er war halt auch Fahrer, er hat ganz viel so ... Fahrer gemacht, LKW-fahrten, Motorradfahrten, und hat ... als Personenschützer auch gearbeitet, irgendwie sowas hat er mir erzählt, und ... genau ... also die haben sich da auch viel selbst versorgt. Viel selbst versorgt, und im Laufe der Zeit, das merke ich auch heute, meine Eltern sind

A central characteristic Sasha attributes to his German-Russian ancestors near Omsk is the notion of being self-supportive. This raises questions of their social relationships to other groups in the respective villages, as well as to the political system and the Russian culture in general. He then connects his parents lives in the Soviet Union with their decision to come to Germany, juxtaposing the physical work they had do to with the possibilities to offer a better future. For Sasha, the decisive aspect of his parents' decision was their own German background, which – he believed – they assumed would facilitate their re-taking root in Germany. Lastly, he evaluates that it has worked wonderfully.

In another part of his narrative, Sasha adds some details on what he knows about their lives in the Soviet Union from stories:

> [...] back then, it was so, so... from what I have heard, they all stuck together, it was about survival, about much money, about meat they had to sell there, and... Well, things like that. They were really self-sufficient, and that is why my father has these skills (Sasha).[77]

Here, Sasha reveals a bit more information about the interpersonal context, from what he knows through stories. They, probably referring to the German-Russians, had a strong intragroup cohesion, as it was largely about survival but also about economy. In this narration, I find indications of certain overlaps with dominant perspectives that depict German-Russians as loyal, hard-working, and resilient, being able to assert themselves in a difficult, harsh environment such as the Kazakh steppe (Luchterhand 2012; Krieger 2015).

For Sasha, more detailed information of *remembered history*, i.e. "history kept alive and present by what is remembered from a group's topographic map of time" (Lederach 2005, 142), is not accessible due to his fathers' reluctance to speak about it:

> Maybe... I am honest, I have grown so much into this place here, this country, that all of this gets lost, unfortunately... and also this I one heard indirectly expressed by my father, that he thinks it is a pity that the history is

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hierhergekommen, nach Deutschland, die wollten uns eine bessere Zukunft bieten, irgendwie, besonders vernünftiges Lernen, nicht so ackern, nicht so körperlich schwer arbeiten wie damals sie selber, und dadurch, dass wir halt diesen deutschen Hintergrund haben – weiß ich nicht, denk ich mir aber – hat es sie hier wieder her... zurück verschlagen, beziehungsweise haben sie sich gedacht, okay, wir haben's vielleicht einfacher hier wieder Fuß zu fassen, durch diesen Hintergrund, und... das hat ja auch wunderbar funktioniert (Sasha).

[...] damals, da war das so, so ... vom Erzählen, die haben alle zusammengehalten, das ging ums Überleben, um viel Geld, um Fleisch, was sie da zu verkaufen hatten, und... Naja.. sowas halt. Die waren richtige Selbstversorger, und deshalb hat mein Vater diese Skills (Sasha)

not being passed on... but if he doesn't tell anything, then it is his fault that nothing is being passed on. (Sasha).[78]

Here, Sasha becomes an eyewitness of the tearing away of a family thread of remembering, in which history ceases to be passed on to the following generations.

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Tanja recounts that the first twelve years of her life, her German-Russian heritage was 'nothing special to her' until she was confronted with her different background at school. She remembers how she first learned about the unique historical context of her family:

> [...] someday, there was a teacher or some classmates who said: 'Yes, you Russians', and so on, I then told it at home and then my mum said: 'No, we are no Russians, we are no foreigners, we are emigrants (*Aussiedler*)', and then they explained that the pre-ancestors sometimes had been German, and we therefore so to say came here. But the precise reason, why my parents came here, I do not know, so earlier, I always had this bellyache and fear to ask, because I did not know what exactly was behind that (Tanja).[79]

Here, an event in her lived history, a xenophobic remark at school, sparked a short explanation from her mother that clarifies the definitions that are relevant to her mother. Tanja's mother explains that they delimitate themselves from the definition of a foreigner and she insists on that of 'emigrant' (*Aussiedler*), adding the explanation that the pre-ancestors were originally German.

Overall, her narrative depicts a strong binding force that emanates from missing links between her lived and a remembered history, which has resulted in a longing for knowledge. Notably, the dominance of this circle has triggered a strong emotional response that lasted through the whole conversation, with frequent expressions through her tears. Tanja's experience

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[78] Vielleicht ... ich bin ehrlich, ich bin so reingewachsen hier, so in dieses Land, dass das alles leider so verloren geht ... und auch das hab ich mal, so... indirekt von meinem Vater gehört, dass er das schade findet, dass die Geschichte nicht weitergegeben wird ...aber wenn er nichts erzählt, dann ist er selber Schuld, dass nichts weitergegeben wird (Sasha).

[79] [...] da meinte irgendmal so'n Lehrer, oder irgendwelche Mitschüler: 'Ja, ihr Russen...' und so, das hab ich dann zu Hause erzählt und dann meinte meine Mama so: 'Nein, wir sind keine Russen, wir sind keine Ausländer, wir sind Aus*siedler*'. und dann, haben sie das halt erklärt, dass die Vorvorahnen irgendwann ja mal deutsch waren, und wir deswegen sozusagen hierhergekommen sind. Aber den genauen Grund. warum meine Eltern hergekommen sind, den weiß ich nicht, also früher hatte ich immer so Bauchschmerzen und Angst, nachzufragen, weil ich nicht wusste, was steckt da genau hinter (Tanja).

hints toward a veil of ignorance that separated her from gaining access to the larger circles of 'narrative' and remembered history.

* * *

Growing up in a Kazakh village that was largely populated by Volhynia Germans, for Katharina, it was 'always clear that her family was a German minority from Volhynia'. She does not make any reference to a time before settling in Volhynia, thereby rendering it a formative point of reference for her family's 'narrative'.

Through her process of ancestry research, Katharina has gained a comprehensive knowledge of a ***remembered history*** that is marked by multiple forced deportations. She re-tells:

> [...] during the first World War, my grandparents were deported from Volhynia with their families, because it was so close to the border region to Poland. Or rather, the border ran differently back then than it does today. That means, they were pulled off. And then they were in exile for approximately three years, I believe, but we have no concrete information about that. Unfortunately. And then they came back and got back up, and many things I also just know from history textbooks, so that, they have uhm... suffered hard. So they took their farms away, then the collectivization, but that applied to all Soviet citizens, so it was not just the Germans (Katharina).[80]

In her presentation of the past, Katharina contextualizes the regional context of Volhynia for a better macro-historical perspective. She confirms that much of what she knows is taken from history books, leaving her with a fragmentary story that nevertheless has a rough thread. Furthermore, she reflects upon the collective experience of all Soviet citizens, whose land and property were collectivized, thereby destabilizing a notion of exclusive German-Russian suffering (see chapter 7.3.).

Another experience of deportation happened in the year of 1936, where her grandparents were 'taken with their community from Volhynia and were

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[80] [...] während des ersten Weltkrieges sind meine Großeltern mit ihren Familien deportiert worden aus Wolhynien, weil die so nah im Grenzgebiet zu Polen gelebt hatten. Beziehungsweise, dass die Grenze verlief damals ja anders als heute. Das heißt, man hat die abgezogen. Und dann waren sie drei Jahre in der Verbannung glaube ich ungefähr, aber darüber haben wir keine genauen Infos. Also, leider. Und dann sind sie zurückgekommen und haben sie, dann halt sich wieder berappelt, und vieles weiß ich auch nur aus Geschichtsbüchern, also dass, das die da einfach schon ehm hart gelitten hatten. Also denen wurden halt Höfe weggenommen, dann kam die Kollektivierung, aber das betraf ja alle Sowjetbürger, also nicht nur die Deutschen (Katharina).

resettled to Kazakhstan, remaining in the original community'. Again, Katharina paints nuances of this rendition of history by noting that a part of Volhynia Germans stayed and was taken by the German *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War:

> But also not all, so a part remained there, and were later taken by the Wehrmacht to Germany during the second World War. And there, thousands of families were torn apart (Katharina).[81]

The experience of sitting on the fence between Soviet and German forces is also thematized by Svetlana in a more complex analysis of guilt and victimization which I will elaborate upon in chapter 7.3. Katharina, however, stresses the impact of a 'tearing apart of thousands of families'.

In this context, another historically relevant experience is the imprisonment into Gulags, the forced labor camps of the Soviet Union. These are stories that merge with the lived history of her grandmother, as Katharina narrates:

> [...] in Kazakhstan, the men were then, so the first husband of my grandmother came to the gulag and never returned. The second husband of my grandmother, my grandfather, was also in the gulag but returned after nine years. And...yes, so these standard stories, basically (Katharina).[82]

Katharina refers to the Gulag experiences as standard stories, implying that these stories were common and remain obscure because they were not officially talked about. When she later found a database of all Gulags that included dates of birth and conviction of inmates, Katharina felt a sense of 'relief to see the frame of her families' stories confirmed'.

* * *

Elena invokes a theme that is prominent in the broader sociopolitical discourse, yet which does not provide a formative story in the sense I am investigating within this chapter:

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[81] Aber auch nicht alle, also ein Teil, der ist dann dortgeblieben und ist dann später, während des Zweiten Weltkrieges von der Wehrmacht mit nach Deutschland genommen. Und da sind tausend Familien zerrissen worden (Katharina).

[82] [...] in Kasachstan, wurden dann die Männer, also der erste Mann meiner Großmutter kam in Gulag und kam nie wieder zurück. Der zweite Mann meiner Großmutter, also mein Opa, war auch im Gulag, kam aber nach neun Jahren zurück. Und ...ja, also so diese Standardgeschichten, im Grunde (Katharina).

> So, I can only imagine that this way, in Russia, one was German, and then in Germany, one is Russian, so approximately. It is somehow nothing half and nothing full (Elena).[83]

This account describes the migration dilemma, which I have introduced in chapter 1.2. (Kaiser 2006). Beyond this, Elena also recalls some narrations from her grandparents that describe their difficulties in the context of war:

> [...] how she suffered during wartime there, so to say, and they didn't have anything to eat, and (.) she was almost killed by her siblings, because they didn't have so much, so to say then also had to provide food for her. Yes, that it was simply terrible times, that one cannot comprehend that. That her father was simply imprisoned without (.) Yes, having done anything. And then simply did not return home. Grandpa had a comparably better (*laughs*) life. He only has four, three siblings still, there they were not as much, who needed food, I believe the father also earned a bit more. Then they could afford more than grandma. The family (Elena).[84]

Here, Elena's remembered history encompasses re-constructions of very different accounts of life, ranging from her grandmother's experience of extreme suffering on the verge of murder to her grandfather's 'relatively pleasant life'. This variety destabilizes a dominant 'narrative' in her own life, thereby contributing to a meaning-making system that is much richer in content than the dominant sociopolitical narratives imply.

* * *

Alexej enters his narrative by underlining that the label German-Russian is equal to that of German, with the only difference that he and his German-Russian community grew up in another country, saying that "German-Russian is actually German for me, only that we were... virtually born in another country, raised in another country"(Alexej).[85]

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[83] Also ich kann mir das halt nur so vorstellen, in Russland war man deutsch, und dann in Deutschland ist man Russe, so ungefähr. Es ist halt irgendwie nichts Halbes und nichts Ganzes (Elena).

[84] [...] wie sie sozusagen im Krieg, da, gelitten hat, und sie nichts zu essen hatten, und (.) sie eigentlich fast von ihren Geschwistern umgebracht wurde, weil sie ja nicht so viel, sozusagen, auch noch für sie dann Essen besorgen mussten. Ja, dass es einfach schlimme Zeiten waren, dass man das gar nicht so nachvollziehen kann. Dass ihr Vater einfach inhaftiert wurde ohne (.) Ja, dass er irgendwas getan hat. Und dann einfach nicht mehr wieder gekommen ist. Opa hatte dagegen ein im Vergleich schöneres (*lacht*) Leben. Er hat ja nur vier, drei Geschwister noch, da waren sie ja nicht so viele, die essen brauchten, ich glaub' der Vater hat auch ein bisschen mehr verdient. Dann konnten sich mehr leisten als Oma. Die Familie (Elena).

[85] **Russlandsdeutsch, ist für mich eigentlich deutsch, nur dass wir halt...quasi in einem anderen Land geboren.** aufgewachsen sind (Alexej)

As he had developed an interest in knowing where he came from, Alexej accessed information via the internet to construct a storyline that slightly deviates from the official narrative. He narrates in a short version:

> It all started with Catherine the Great. Catherine the Great, she, so she lived here in Germany, right? And she then, I don't know exactly when it was, she married a Russian Tsar, and, under her rule here in Germany, she has taken Germans with her to Russia. And they then dispersed everywhere. So and they also began building German villages there. Among them was my village (Alexej).[86]

Alexej's version of the history, which he 'validated by the confirmation of his grandparents', falls back on specific master narratives that tend to suffocate the alive-ness of local and lived stories of individual family members. For Alexej, there is a certain meaning in the way he constructs his understanding of German-Russian history, which legitimates his immigration to the country of his roots:

> I found my history for myself, which also fits, which also corresponds, and for me, it is like this, that I simply returned to my roots, right? (Alexej).[87]

The way Alexej makes meaning of the collective history of his family is construed as a form of homecoming to the land of the ancestors.

Alexej brings to the fore his childhood memories of life in a Kazakh village, which constitutes his *lived history*, the history he has directly experienced:

> We had a farm. And there I was quite active. I was milking cows, our cows, I was in the garden, picked the berries there, right? Have helped my parents to harvest potatoes on the field, was present when they slaughtered, I have seen animals being slaughtered, for food. Because one has to survive there like this. Yes. And here, everything was different. Here it was so, when you arrived and wanted something you eat, you went to the supermarket and bought it. Meat, milk, basically everything. The only thing we bought there, in Kazakhstan, were such things, like sweets, right? Or flour, sugar. Such things.

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[86] Das Ganze fing an mit Katharina der Großen. Katharina der Großen, die, also die hat ja, hier in Deutschland gelebt, ja? Und die hat ja damals, ich weiß jetzt nicht genau, wann das war, die hat einen russischen Zaren geheiratet, und hat unter ihrer Herrschaft hier in Deutschland hat sie Deutsche mitgenommen, nach Russland. Und die haben sich dann überall verteilt. So und die haben auch angefangen, dort deutsche Dörfer aufzubauen. Darunter auch mein Dorf (Alexej).

[87] Ich hab für mich meine Geschichte gefunden, die auch dazu passt, die auch so übereinstimmt, und für mich ist das so, dass ich einfach wieder zu meinen Wurzeln zurückgekommen bin, nä? (Alexej).

> Everything else, we all had it. We had grown vegetables, we had enough meat, we had eggs, we had everything there, right? (Alexej).[88]

The detailed and rich description Alexej provides here fills his narration with life. In the same line, he juxtaposes his lived experience in Kazakhstan with the material abundance he encountered in Germany. Through the lines, a certain sufficiency resonates that assesses circumstances in Kazakhstan as enough, not lacking anything.

* * *

For Svetlana, in contrast, the prominence of a 'narrative' of oppression infused her family life in an all-encompassing way. She narrates:

> [...] because he extremely grated against it and dealt with it. So, he suffered from the fact, that uh... the history of German-Russians was not known. And that he was received as an intruder, a stranger, as not belonging, or was not received. And that strongly characterized our family life. [...] Uhm, and what also happened was, that, because I had learned German faster, and even though he had his old German from the village and also the language school and so, always when he (*clears her throat*) wrote his angry letters to the Federal Presidents, over eight, nine, or ten pages, with accusations and also about that they should finally wake up and accept us, I was supposed to correct them. That means, at eleven years old I was already exposed to this until I then said one day – You, I cannot do it, I do not feel like it (Svetlana).[89]

A central catalyst for her father acting out of his frustration is the experience of being received, or, as Svetlana says, 'not received, as a stranger'. This

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[88] Wir hatten ja einen Hof gehabt. Und da war ich ziemlich aktiv. Hab Kühe gemolken, unsere Kühe, ich war im Garten, hab da Beeren gepflückt, ja? Hab bei meinen Eltern geholfen, auf dem Acker Kartoffeln zu ernten, war bei dem Schlachten dabei, ich hab gesehen, wie die Tiere geschlachtet wurden, zum Essen. Weil man da halt ja so oft überleben muss. Ja. Und hier war alles anders. Hier ging es so, bist du angekommen, und bis du da irgendwas essen wolltest, bist du in Supermarkt gegangen, hast es dir gekauft. Fleisch, Milch, eigentlich alles. Das einzige, was wir uns dort gekauft hatten, in, Kasachstan, das waren so Sachen, wie Süßigkeiten, nä? Oder Mehl, Zucker. Solche Sachen. Alles andere haben wir, haben wir alles gehabt. Wir hatten Gemüse angebaut, wir hatten genug Fleisch, wir hatten Eier, wir hatten, eigentlich alles dagehabt, nä? (Alexej)

[89] [...] dadurch, dass er sich extrem daran gerieben hat und damit auseinandergesetzt hat. Also, er hat darunter gelitten, dass die Geschichte der Russlanddeutschen ja nicht bekannt war. Und dass er als Eindringling, als Fremder, als nicht hierher Zugehöriger empfangen wurde, oder nicht empfangen wurde. Und das hat unser Familienleben sehr stark geprägt. [...] Ehm, und was auch passiert ist, dass dadurch, dass ich schneller Deutsch gelernt habe, und er zwar sein altes deutsch aus dem Dorf hatte und auch die Sprachschule und so, immer wenn er (*räuspert sich*) seine wütenden Briefe an die Bundespräsidenten geschrieben hat, über acht, neun, oder zehn Seiten, mit Anschuldigungen, und auch darüber, dass sie endlich aufwachen sollen und uns akzeptieren, die sollte ich korrigieren. Das heißt, mit elf hatte ich damit schon zu tun, bis ich dann irgendwann gesagt hab – Du, ich kann nicht, ich hab keine Lust (Svetlana).

experience of foreignness is accompanied by an 'unfamiliarity with 'the history' of German-Russians' among the German dominant society. Svetlana assesses the impact of how her father dealt with it on her own life, with the 'terrible visuals' of deportation and oppression already 'standing for more than was good for her'. Furthermore, her father also engaged politically by 'writing long and angry letters to the German Federal Presidents', which Svetlana, as eleven-year-old child, was 'responsible to correct'. Svetlana's experiences as a witness of her father's raging can be seen from a constructionist lens as an indication that, without personally experiencing the fixity of the traumatic events that her father recounts, she has grown up with the vocabulary (Kidron 2003) and the interpersonal effects of trauma within the direct family system. Her family life provided a frame for Svetlana to "emplot" (Ricoeur 1983) her biography in a frame of transgenerational traumatization (Kidron 2003, 521). Svetlana re-assesses the normalcy with which these topics were narrated at home:

> [...] it was topic at home, and was always present, sometimes at the breakfast table, where then they talked about dead bodies, so... sentences like...mh... Yes, in the winter, some people did not even return from... from the forest, and in springtime, when the snow had melted, uh...we found them. And that was a strange smell... so this way, such, but that was very, very ...present and also in an ungood way (Svetlana).[90]

Svetlana here establishes a notion of the topic around German-Russian history which was very present, albeit in an *ungood* way. This strong language of negation is preceded by the implicitness with which unspeakable experiences were voiced 'at the breakfast table'. One such experience is presented exemplarily when people did not return from the forest in the wintertime, while their corpses were only found later during springtime when the snow had melted-. It was probably the excessive, 'ungood' presence that led to Svetlana's aversion toward the German-Russian 'narrative' which was 'only suffering, cold, snow, and death'.

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When looking at the diversity and richness in each narrative, it quickly becomes transparent that 'narrative' in the sense of a formative story of German-Russian groupness is represented differently. Tanja, Sasha, and Alexej

[90] [...] zu Hause war das Thema, und war immer präsent, manchmal beim Frühstück, wo dann über Leichen gesprochen wurde, also ...so Sätze wie ...Mh .... Ja im Winter kamen manche gar nicht mehr zurück vom ...aus dem Wald, und im Frühjahr, wenn der Schnee getaut ist, haben wir die dann gefunden. Und dann war ein komischer Geruch ... also so, solche, also das war sehr, sehr ... präsent und auch auf eine ungute Weise (Svetlana).

refer to ties that bind the Germans from Russia to German national identity. Elena does not construct a 'narrative' explicitly but refers to ambiguity of remembered histories that differ between her grandmother and her grandfather. Overall, Elena points toward an 'in-between' by taking up the migration dilemma (Kaiser 2006) of German-Russian experience, being ascribed a label of foreignness in both countries respectively. This space in-between will be examined in more depth throughout the following subchapters.

Svetlana has grown up with a strong presence of a 'narrative' of oppression and victimization, which has resulted in a continuity of transgenerational traumatization throughout her own life. Katharina, on the contrary, has grown up without such presence but found personal healing and recovery of parts of her 'identity' by exploring her family history in more depth.

Also, the co-researchers have different relations to each of the layered circles of time, hence are bound to more or fewer extents to a certain temporal category in Lederach's sense. It should be noted that the binding force of a certain category of time is part of a fluid process of representation and meaning-making, hence illuminates what the co-researchers perceive as topics that emit this binding force at a certain point in their life with a certain intensity that itself, is subject to continuous change.

I identified these emphases through a mapping of each narrative and have found that most of the interviewees have little or no reference to aspects of remembered history or 'narrative'. This results from tendencies of history not being kept alive, as it is not being talked about. Across the co-researchers, it is only in the narratives of Tanja and Katharina that a strong desire to access parts of the distant past becomes tangible. This comes along with certain sociopolitical implications, as the negotiation of 'remembered history' requires a space where these histories can be voiced and acknowledged. Katharina's sociopolitical engagement needs to be contextualized within this perspective, because to her, it is a 'personal concern to excite the younger generation for their histories'.

In all other cases, 'lived history', "experiences that have flesh and blood attached to them" (Lederach 2005, 142), stand in the center of narration and paint a colorful and diverse snapshot of a crumbling German-Russian groupness that varies among individuals through the inaccessibility of remembered history and 'narrative'.

## 7.2. Languages of the Unsayable

In my analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts, I pay specific attention to 'languages of the unsayable', as described in chapter 5.2.2. With the growing research on the nature of trauma, languages of the unsayable acknowledge that the experience of trauma is resisting verbal articulation (Caruth 1995), even more so when it is transmitted in family systems and lacks clear causal connections (Schützenberger 2012).

### 7.2.1. Thematizing the Unsayable

The unsayable is thematized as an object of narrative exploration by Svetlana, who has spent many years of her life working through transgenerational traumatization that affected her in various ways throughout her life (see chapter 6.6.). Besides, what she calls the *ungraspable* is a recurring expression in Katharina's narration. She refers to it twice, in connection with visiting the residues of the village of her grandparents on the one hand, and with the multiplicity of 'homes' on the other. Katharina remembers her visit to Kazakhstan in 2013:

> [...] this village, in which my grandparents were, from '36 until they died, that doesn't exist anymore, so that is the old village and there are still one or two ruins. And that is ungraspable for me, that a village, in which almost 2000 deported people had lived, does not exist anymore. So that is something you simply cannot grasp. It is simply not there anymore (Katharina).[91]

Katharina draws from this *ungraspable* feeling of seeing the result of a process of dissolution of a place that was 'home' for her family, her grandparents in particular. For her, it is beyond explainability but pulls her back to that place, to 'arrive and sort things out'. The second time she refers to something ungraspable is when she explicitly talks about the meaning of 'home':

> And so I have the feeling, I simply have multiple homes as places and... I always try to approach the concept of home, because it is so un...graspable, this concept (Katharina).[92]

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[91] [...] dieses Dorf, in dem meine Großeltern waren, von '36 bis sie dann gestorben waren, das gibt's nicht mehr, also das ist das alte Dorf und da stehen noch ein, zwei Ruinen. Und das ist für mich unfassbar, dass ein Dorf in dem fast 2000 Deportierte gelebt haben, nicht mehr existiert. Also das begreift man einfach nicht. Es ist nicht mehr da (Katharina).

[92] Und so habe ich das Gefühl, ich hab jetzt einfach verschiedene Heimaten als Orte und ... ich versuch mich immer dem Begriff Heimat irgendwie zu nähern, weil er so un ...fassbar ist, dieser Begriff (Katharina).

Both of these expressions may be connected in her narrative, even though she does not explicitly mention 'home' in the first experience. When I read these passages that both thematize the *ungraspable,* I recognize the presence of an ungraspable nature of 'home' in both of them, while the first experience might indicate even more than a confrontation with 'home'.

* * *

As a creative writer, Svetlana struggles with giving the unsayable expression in short stories. She asserts that all attempts she had made to express the unsayable have left her 'very dissatisfied'. At a later point in the narrative, she reflects upon the implications of transgenerational trauma in her life and addresses the unsayable in a metaphoric context, as something larger than herself as a vessel:

> I will probably never get rid of my blockages or my passivities or my sad moments, ... because I just, also just carry this within myself, but that... I have to... I don't have to... as a vessel, I don't have to hold it completely, that is even too large than what I can hold. I can't even do it. And this, what you said, this unsayable, that is the most difficult. Where you think, that is not even a word, that might be a little breeze or something like that, but ... eh, that's not half bad (Svetlana).[93]

Svetlana here refers to herself as a vessel, an imagery that is borrowed from South Korean author Han Kang who describes the human soul as a glass vessel in *Human Acts* (2016).[94] The meaning that inhabits this metaphor implies that the human soul is fragile, precisely because it is made from glass. What happens if such a vessel breaks? And how is the *unsayable* contained within such a vessel, if at all? Svetlana describes the unsayable as 'non-word', theorizing about 'a small breeze of air' but with a 'heavy impact'. In Svetlana's description, it is historical trauma that inhabits this vessel, yet there is only so much it can contain. The image, therefore, conceals the concrete connection between the vessel and the breeze of the *unsayable.*

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[93] Ich werde meine Blockaden oder meine Passivitäten oder meine traurigen Momente wahrscheinlich niemals loswerden, weil ich einfach, das einfach auch in mir trage, aber das ...ich muss es ... ich muss nicht ein ...als Gefäß, ich muss das nicht komplett fassen, das ist auch zu groß als das was ich fassen kann. Das kann ich auch nicht. Und das, was du sagtest, dieses Unsagbare, das ist ja das schwerste. Wo du denkst, das ist ja noch nichtmal ein Wort, das ist vielleicht eine kleine Luft oder sowas, aber ...ey, das ist nicht ohne (Svetlana).

[94] This reference is taken out of the frame of the interview from a blog entry in which she elaborated on the notion of human souls as a vessel.

## 7.2.2. Uncovering the Unsayable

For analyzing the unsayable that is expressed as part of the meaning-making processes of the research participants, I use the concept of *Languages of the Unsayable* as an analytic lens. While not everything that is unsayable is *traumatic,* applying an interpretive lens of metaphors and languages of the unsayable has the potential to add to a fuller picture of interpretation, as "what is unspoken becomes an opening and a resource for exploring the layers of another person's experiences and understandings" (Rogers et al. 1999, 5).

The process of identifying such languages follows the suggestions of Rogers et al. (1999). After identifying and extracting languages of negation, languages of revision, languages of evasions and smokescreens, and languages of silence through multiple readings, I contextualize these languages to filter the most relevant in their respective contexts. Such a contextual reading acknowledges that not everything unsaid also presents a language of the unsayable. Where necessary, I also listened to the audio recordings again, especially when I wrote silences into the transcripts. While it remains difficult to gain an in-depth understanding of the unsayable from a single narrative interview, I invite the reader to look at my approach as scratching the surface of unspeakability, by offering an entry point into what may be unsaid in a research interview.

I understand all of the languages as a range of expressions that have fluid transitions (see chapter 5.2.2.). Some forms of expression can exist alongside others in concrete statements, so that I group my interpretations not according the language types, but thematically. These interpretations are guided by interpretive questions that inquire into what it is that is unsaid in relationship to the German-Russian past, and into the limits of what can be known together (Rogers et al. 1999, 13).

## 7.2.3. Dualities

Dualities, or the use of oppositions, are common discursive practices, pointing towards the imprints of societal dimensions, discourse in particular. Dualities simplify and conceal knowledge, especially the spaces in between, the various shades of grey that do not fall in either category. In poststructuralism, the dualities, termed 'binary oppositions' within structuralist traditions, are deconstructed:

> Any meaning or identity (including our own) is provisional and relative, because it is never exhaustive, it can always be traced further back to a prior network of differences, and further back again (Appignanesi and Garrat 2004, 79).

With *Hauntology*, Derrida has delegitimized an inherent logic in dualities which had been argued by structuralist thinkers. Rather, neither part of the opposition can exist without the other, as I have introduced in chapter 1.2. Derrida notes that dualities can only maintain themselves with some ghost, which is the reason for the call to deconstruct and face these 'ghosts' (Derrida 1994 xvii). To do so, I am looking at such dualities below.

I approach the existence of such dualities with sensitivity because the perceived dualities often correlate with mother and father images. In acknowledging that culture and history are carried and enlivened through human beings in relationality, I aim to go beyond the analysis of family systems but rather towards a more discursive understanding of the occurrence of such dualities.

The dualism that inhabits a mixed marriage between a German-Russian and a Russian parent is present in Elena's and Svetlana's narratives. Elena exemplifies this dualism through her associations beginning with the symbolical role of her father:

> Elena: Well, he is the Russian, definitely. The inveterate Russian for me. My mother is then rather the German, that is how I would see that as... divided.
> Christina: And what does he... the inveterate Russian stand for, then?
> Elena: Hmmm... (*inhales deeply*) yes, what does he stand for. Maybe for cold. For not being there. Yes, that is how I would say it.
> Christina: What then does the German stand for?
> Elena: Hmmm... yes for presence, definitely. For functioning (*laughs*).[95]

This extract describes much more than family structures. Between the lines, I read a general positioning toward the aspects of Russian and German cultural backgrounds, with the 'Russian' aspect being absent and conveying a sense of cold, and the 'German' aspect being present and representing functioning. When read in a more holistic stance, there is a certain dilemma in this duality, because the aspect of functioning has been a crucial motivation for Elena to

[95] Elena: Naja, er ist der Russe, auf jeden Fall. Der eingefleischte Russe für mich. Meine Mutter ist eher dann die Deutsche, so würd ich das so als ...zweigeteilt sehen.
Christina: Und wofür steht er dann, der eingefleischte Russe?
Elena: Hmmm ... (*atmet tief ein*) ja, wofür steht er. Vielleicht für Kälte. Für nicht Dasein. Ja. Würde ich so sagen.
Christina: Wofür steht dann die Deutsche?
Elena: Hmmm ...ja für Präsenz, auf jeden Fall. Für Funktioneren (*lacht*) (Elena).

break free from these confinements and find her path in between, thereby going beyond these categories.

* * *

Svetlana, whose mother is Russian, reflects that the 'Russian' aspect in her family was stifled by the strong presence of this German-Russian suffering:

> [...] and it is also like that, that in our family this German-Russian topic was totally present, but (.) Russia was not. So, only as the image of the enemy, perhaps, even though my mother is Russian, and that is this paradox, so we have, after two years, we did not talk Russian at home anymore (Svetlana).[96]

She identifies a 'paradoxical situation' in the identity of her mother as Russian which is being eroded by the slow but steady cessation of speaking Russian at home. Svetlana connects this paradox to the assumed positioning of Russia as an enemy image in the light of German-Russian suffering.

A language of negation signifies the profound sadness for Svetlana, one that emerges from the distorted image of excessive victimization and suffering that was conveyed in her childhood. She talks with a notion of regret that 'the German-Russian topic was penetrating, but the *Russian* aspect not'.

Throughout her narrative, Svetlana unfolds her love for Russian language, culture, and poetry, a love that had been forbidden by the clear messages of her father, who broke with the Russian past as part of claiming his 'identity'. Svetlana finds expression for this absence of the Russian culture, saying that she felt a deep sense of sadness at the age of eighteen, realizing that 'a part remained unsaid, or rather unlived'.

The strength of her emotional bond to Russian culture becomes tangible when Svetlana names the experience of migration as her trauma that protrudes in the break with Russian culture:

> I did not cry. I barely said goodbye. We do not speak Russian anymore? Okay. No Russian books, no Russian films? Okay. [...] one of the worst things in my life is that I could not express that and could not mourn that because it was good. To come to Germany. One had to burn the bridges (Svetlana).[97]

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[96] [...] und es ist auch so, dass in unserer Familie dieses russlanddeutsche Thema total präsent war, aber (.) Russland nicht. Also, nur als Feindbild vielleicht, obwohl meine Mutter Russin ist, und das ist so dieses Paradox, also wir haben, nach zwei Jahren wurde zu Hause kein russisch mehr gesprochen (Svetlana).

[97] Ich hab nicht geweint. Ich hab mich kaum verabschiedet. Wir reden kein russisch mehr? Okay. Keine russischen Bücher, keine russischen Filme? [...] eine der schlimmen Dinge in meinem Leben ist, dass ich das nicht ausdrücken konnte und nicht darum trauern, weil (.) es war ja gut (Svetlana).

The drama of her own traumatization, of her process of migration and the break with Russian culture, is accompanied by a strong paradox notion of a positive connotation, as the migration was seen as something positive, implying that she was not allowed to express her sadness or mourn the parting.

The meaning itself might not be what is actually at the core of such constructions of dualities, which may rather be a result of supra-societal discourses. Noting Elena's quotation, where my contribution to her narrative becomes visible in my asking questions of the meanings that lie behind these categorizations, it appears to me that her access to these meanings is shaped by discourse. But what if both her and Svetlana's meanings are rather located in spaces in-between the two constructed categories that stand as dualities?

### 7.2.4. (Not) Belonging

I have found that the use of languages of the unsayable is common across the narratives concerning positioning toward the concept of Russia. I am linking this tendency to experiences of not belonging, of exclusion, of foreignness, which altogether strengthen a sense of identity that is based on a need to belong, emerging from the socioemotional-communal layers. In all of the narratives, a language of negation formulates a delimitation to the concept of Russia, be it in cultural, national, or linguistic forms. Katharina's narrative differs from this delimitation, as she has found ways to reconnect to her past through the Russian language, and establishes a much more nuanced perspective on Russia. She distinguishes between language, the Russian government, Stalinism, and place, so that the concept of Russia as an entity does not play a role in her narrative.

A language of negation "expresses an idea or feeling through the explicit negation of its opposite" (Rogers et al. 1999, 10). Much in line with the idea of *Hauntology* (Derrida 1994), negations contain their opposites, thereby introducing "multiplicity into both the expression and the interpretation" (Rogers et al. 1999, 10). It is conjecturable that the *opposite* that is being expressed between the lines has to do with a sense of belonging. The conventional categorizations of nationalities, in this case, implicit as Russian vs. German, manifests as seeming duality that has not left much room for hybrid formulations of a 'national' identity.

* * *

Sasha repeatedly notes that, at home, they did not talk Russian with their parents, although his parents talked Russian among each other. Sasha expresses his appreciation for his decisively 'German' upbringing. Yet, he also ascertains that it is a pity he does not speak Russian. In his opinion, his parents probably 'did not mean to conceal anything by talking Russian'.

* * *

Elena recalls incidents in her childhood when her Russian family name was the major indication she was 'not from here'. She also reconstructs her early childhood from conversations with her mother, recounting that 'her paternal grandfather did not like Elena's mother because she was not Russian'. For Elena, the very concept of home is rooted in a language of negation. It is unsaid, or rather unfelt in this case, as Elena describes 'home' as a feeling. At the beginning of her narrative, she states that she 'does not feel Russian, but German, and still, despite what appears as a sense of clarity in national labels, a bit rootless'. This wording opens questions of whether it is even possible to *feel* a certain national identity, such as German or Russian. In contrast, *home* as a feeling is manifest through its absence. Upon my question what it means to her, Elena declares:

> Elena: I don't really know (*laughs*), I believe, what it means. Home. I believe that when, when you never felt it, you don't really know what it is.
> Christina: But it is still present in your life.
> Elena: Exactly. It is as if, exactly, as if you feel... that there is a kind of void space or nonexistent, or...this feeling is lacking. You long for a feeling which you don't even know. Of course, that is a bit difficult.
> Christina: But of which you know that it should be...
> Elena: Yes.
> Christina: ... there.
> Elena: Well, or you believe that it should be there, maybe. (.) Yes.[98]

This extract shows her processual definition of home as an unfelt *feeling*, which is defined through a language of negation. The process of defining 'home' is embedded in dialogical interaction, which indicates the construction

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[98] Elena: Das weiß ich gar nicht (*lacht*), glaube ich, was das bedeutet. Heimat. Ich glaube, wenn man das nie gefühlt hat, weiß man gar nicht, was das ist.
Christina: Aber es ist trotzdem präsent in deinem Leben.
Elena: Genau. Es ist als, genau, als ob man halt da fühlt, dass da irgendwie was leer ist, oder nicht vorhanden, oder (.) dieses Gefühl fehlt. Man sehnt sich einem Gefühl, dass man gar nicht kennt. Das ist natürlich ein bisschen schwierig.
Christina: Aber von dem du weißt, dass es da sein ...
Elena: Ja.
Christina: ... müsste.
Elena: Naja, oder man glaubt, dass es da sein müsste, vielleicht. (.) Ja. (Elena).

of knowledge, certainly fueled by my suggestive phrases. Because of my follow-up statement, assuming that she knows it should be there, Elena interrupts my sentence with approval. Next, she begins to question this assumption instantly, by saying that 'one believes that it should be there'. Thereby, she is questioning the idea of home as a feeling altogether. Nevertheless, she later reconfirms that 'her feeling tells her that there should be something more'.

These expressions strongly invite reflections around questions of belonging that remain difficult to express, in these cases unsaid and expressed between the lines of the narratives.

* * *

Svetlana remarks that she knew from an early age that 'her family was unlike others', but mentions twice that she has never been offended by any form of discrimination, neither as a German nor as a Russian. With distancing herself from both German and Russian national labels, Svetlana is pointing toward an in-between, which has also been shaped by her being raised as Soviet child. Not having been subjected to discrimination is mirrored by a behavior pattern that she identifies as prominent in her childhood when she tended to make friendships with 'misfits' rather than assimilating to pre-existing groups. Svetlana identifies this behavior as a positive aspect of her hybrid background, which she sees not just as a loss – in distinction to dominant narratives – but also as a win. Svetlana expresses that she cannot self-identify as Non-Russian:

> I cannot see myself as Non-Russian, even though I barely talk it, although I do not visit there anymore, although I then... but when I watch a movie, or listen to a song or a... oh, dammit, no matter it all, it is me (Svetlana).[99]

Here, a language of negation expresses the emotional weight that accompanies national identification. It seems like any identification would have conclusive and exclusive character, being Non-Russian would leave unsaid and unlived the emotional bond she has to Russian culture. Svetlana, despite barely speaking Russian or not visiting Russia, reacts strongly when she exposes herself to artistic media such as film or music that thematize Russia. The pre-given and exclusive mental categorizations of nationality lose their binding force and become meaningless.

* * *

[99] Ich kann mich nicht als Nicht-Russin sehen, obwohl ich das kaum noch spreche, obwohl ich damit da nicht mehr hinfahre, obwohl ich dann ...aber wenn ich ein Film gucke, oder ein Lied höre (...) oh, verdammt, alles egal, ich bin's (Svetlana).

In strong contrast, but still, by the use of a language of negation, Alexej appreciates bilingualism, saying that it is 'not wrong to master two languages'. Alexej says that he quickly unlearned the Russian language after their migration because his parents did not continue talking it at home. In contrast to Svetlana, Alexej explains that he has no emotional bond to the Russian language, for example in music, not feeling any different from English music. This strong view softens within his narrative, indicating a *language of revision* which creates multiplicity and unhides narrative processes of remembering, constructing, and reconstructing stories (Rogers et al. 1999, 11) when Alexej elaborates on how he showed Russian childhood cartoons to his younger sister:

> Alexej: I showed her songs then, so from my childhood, yes.
> Christina: Was that important for you, to share that with her?
> Alexej: Yes, for me it was. Because somehow it is part of it, because she is my half-sister, but a part is somewhere from us, that also means, from there. Right? And that is why I thought, why should she not see and know that, where her siblings come from and what they have seen there in the childhood, what they have heard, and what they have been through, right?[100]

The very act of choosing to show his sister these cartoons contains a personal bond to these media, as they convey where he comes from and what he experienced. Alexej explains that his half-sister is partly from them, hence remaining with the essentialist definition of family and kinship described in chapter 6.5. Yet, he draws the connection to a spatial bond that links his family to Kazakhstan. This statement relativizes the German-ness that he so explicitly affirmed in the beginning, as it combines his family history with a geographic orientation to Kazakhstan.

Upon my question what 'home' would mean to him and whether this was connected to his vivid and detailed description of everyday life in the village, Alexej elaborates:

> Alexej: [...] For me that was simply freedom, yes. You could go outside, on the other side of the village, there you could climb the hill and there was all just steppe. Right? No house far and wide, and you just looked into the distance.
> Christina: Is that symbolical for freedom, too?

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[100] Alexej: Lieder, hab ihr dann gezeigt, so aus meiner Kindheit, ja.
Christina: War das wichtig für dich, mit ihr das zu teilen?
Alexej: Ja, fand ich schon. Weil irgendwo gehört's ja dazu, weil es ist meine Halbschwester, aber ein Teil ist ja irgendwo von uns, das heißt auch, von dort. Nä? Und deswegen fand ich das so, warum soll sie das nicht sehen und wissen, woher ihre Geschwister kommen und was sie dort in der Kindheit dann gesehen, gehört haben, was sie dann da erlebt haben, nä? (Alexej)

Alexej: Yes, yes, yes.
Christina: Is that the same thing as home?
Alexej: Well, I, I... think this way, home is, where you are free. (.) There you feel, there you feel native.[101]

In response to my inquiry of 'home', I received, in Alexej's case, a description of freedom instead. Freedom is described as going outside, to the other side of the village, where you can climb a hill and look into the vastness of the steppe. Through my questions, I co-constructed the direct link between home and freedom, which results in a definition of home that designates 'a place where you are free'. I notice, however, that this link was there before, as his response to the question of 'home' was a vivid description of freedom. Such a notion is unconventional in the light of imagining 'home' as connected to belonging, rooting, and locating oneself. Instead, 'freedom' evades such commitment to a certain place, and rather implies the need for certain rights to be fulfilled, such as the freedom to move, the freedom to choose a base for oneself, and the freedom to travel. Therefore, Alexej's link between freedom and home is impressive, given the specific German-Russian collective history in search for freedom.

Simultaneously, it raises questions about which kind of freedom Alexej refers to. Freedom *from* something, for example, discrimination? Or the freedom *to* something, for example, the freedom to spend time crossing the village and watching the vastness of the steppe. The answer to these questions remains concealed between the lines.

The underlying idea of home which Alexej expresses shows many commonalities with Helen Taylor's notion of 'material homes' and 'temporal homes'[102]. Material homes designate "the organic matter which is central to the embodied meaning of home" (Taylor 2015, 88) which, for Alexej, manifest in the visual of the Kazakh steppe that represents a vast distance. The symbolism of this image may have deeper collective meanings, the exploration of which would be rather speculative at this point. With a holistic view of Alexej's very detailed narrations of his childhood, these material notions of home merge with a temporal notion of home that renders the childhood home a crucial reference point for all following understandings or feelings of home (Taylor

[101] Alexej: [...] Für mich war das einfach nur Freiheit, ja. Du konntest raus, auf der anderen Seite des Dorfes, da war... da konntest du, das weiß ich, bist du den Hügel hochgegangen, und da war alles, nur, Steppe. Nä? Kein Haus weit und breit, du hast einfach nur so in die Ferne geguckt.
Christina: Ist das Sinnbild für Freiheit auch?
Alexej: Ja, Ja, Ja.
Christina: Ist das das gleiche wie Heimat?
Alexej: Naja, ich denke mal so, Heimat ist da, wo du frei bist. (.) Da fühlst du, da fühlt man sich ja heimisch.

[102] Helen Taylor (2015) has extracted different meanings of home in the narrations of Cypriot refugees in London, notably spatial homes, temporal homes, material homes, and relational homes.

2015, 55). These two nuances of 'home' seem to have a stronger impact on Alexej's way of remembering and narrating than has a *localized* understanding of home which designates a specific place.

* * *

These three aspects of home (spatial, temporal, material) are also thematized by Katharina, who talks about her visit to Kazakhstan where the smell of summer and bushes reminds her of childhood and establishes a strong bond with her in all of these aspects:

> [...] I also felt it again, yes that is also somehow my home. This country, there you feel different. How it smells, and how, in the village, in summer, all of these bushes, that is pure childhood. So it is a large part of myself, which I have ignored for decades, in order to then consciously look at it and let it sink (Katharina).[103]

Katharina notes that the German-Russian heritage was burdensome during childhood, but became a source of enrichment and sense during and after university. After ignoring this part of her life for decades, she can now look at it consciously and let it sink, implying that the temporal distance to engagement with the affects the quality of how she looks at it.

* * *

Tanja begins her narrative by stating that the German-Russian background does not have a direct influence on her present. She explains:

> [...] it was no influence whether I was born here or there, so I believe if I were born there I would have, a very different relation to it, I would have much more knowledge and feelings about it, but because I do not have that at all, was not born there, not have been through this 'migration' so to say to here, uhm... I do not notice that... so anything about it, that I was born here and not... so (*laughs*) not born there (Tanja).[104]

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[103] [...] ich hab auch einfach nochmal gespürt, ja das ist auch irgendwie meine Heimat. Dieses Land. da fühlt man sich anders. Wie das da riecht und so, in dem Dorf, im Sommer, diese ganzen Sträucher, das ist halt Kindheit pur. Also es ist so ein großer Teil von mir, den ich einfach Jahrzehnte ignoriert habe. um dann ganz bewusst mir das anzugucken und das auch wirken zu lassen (Katharina).

[104] [...] es war jetzt kein Einfluss, ob ich jetzt hier oder da geboren bin, also, ich glaube wäre ich da geboren, hätte ich noch nen ganz anderen Bezug dazu, ich hätte noch viel mehr Wissen und Gefühle dazu, aber dadurch, dass ich das gar nicht hab, nicht da geboren bin, nicht diese 'Wanderung' sozusagen hierher gemacht hab, ehm ...merk ich das nicht, dass ...also irgendwas daran, dass ich jetzt hier und nicht ...also (*lacht*) nicht da geboren bin (Tanja).

In my reading, this quotation contains some contradictions that might indicate a layered language of the unsayable. I concretely identify *a language of negation*, and of *revision*, of re-doing knowledge. First of all, it contains a reference to knowing, which in the course of her narrative becomes her main emotional trigger. After first making the statement that it would have been irrelevant whether she was born in Germany or Kazakhstan, Tanja undoes this statement implicitly by assuming that she would have a different reference to the topic. She believes that this has to do with having been born in Germany so that she did not go through the migration experience. Eventually, it does seem to make a difference to her where she was born, contrary to what she expressed in the beginning. Additionally, it might also contain a *language of smokescreen,* which directs the attention to the positive said, rather than the negative unsaid, which is the ground of these reflections. The negative unsaid here refers to her experience of not being born in Kazakhstan, unlike her other family members. I, therefore, do see this paragraph as manifesting several languages of the unsayable to different extents. This indicates that her status as the youngest family member born in Germany comes along with certain emotional difficulties toward family identity and family history. While the collective identity of her family has been expressed in distinction to external definitions of them being Russian, Tanja inhabits another distinct space within the family. It appears that this outsider experience slightly feeds the larger topics of her narrative, which is not knowing.

### 7.2.5. (Not) Knowing

The language of negation in Tanja's narrative is very present in the form of the absence of knowing. This expresses her strong, comprising desire to know, that is, in her case, not being fulfilled, and hence unspoken, albeit not by herself. The term 'knowing', either in positive form or in negation, appears fifteen times throughout her narrative.

In reaction to her parents' reluctance to speak about the family past, Tanja expresses that she wants to know it, seeing it as part of (re)claiming her identity, and follows this strong statement by a relativization expressed through negation. Saying that 'it is okay to live with not-knowing', Tanja is taking the responsibility on herself, adding that she used 'to have a bad conscience for not being interested in the topic of family history, out of fear of knowing'. This is, besides negating her interest, also a language of smokescreen, which "direct(s) the attention of the interviewer and the interpreter to what is said, the positive spoken, rather than what is not-said, the implied unspoken" (Rogers et al. 1999. 11). This becomes visible through the contradiction between not knowing as a fear that even manifested

psychosomatically and the claimed lack of interest that caused a reluctance to ask.

With the terminology of family systems approaches, Tanja's experience can be seen as a *cutoff* in Bowen's terms, which is a "process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away, or denying the importance of the parental family" (Bowen 1978, 383). This *cutoff* is not one from family histories and experiences, but also the symbolic representation of her past (village, language, place). Similar processes of separation can be seen in other narratives to various degrees.

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For Alexej, *cutoff* is not as evident and sees a process of relativization in the course of his narrative. He begins with denying the imprint of his family history in the Soviet Union by underlining his German origin, and later narratively draws a spatial bond to Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, he appears to have turned away from representations of the past, after sighting recent photos of his childhood village.

• • •

Sasha's account indicates a dual *cutoff*, as he sees himself cut off from history both through the silence of his father and the loss of his mother, and cutoff from his biological father. In his narration, it becomes clear that he rejects any form of contact with his biological father, even if he would be able to meet him. On the other hand, his socialized father tells Sasha that his maternal grandparents preferably had wanted his biological father as son-in-law:

> [...] I do not know this person, I do not know anything about this person, I only know one thing (*laughs*) ... that the maternal grandparents would rather have had him than (*laughs*) the one now... (*laughs*), I only know this...but that is told by my father, in turn (Sasha).[105]

• • •

Elena's narrative also contains the *cutoff*, present in the disturbed relationship to her parents, and the absence of her father, both mentally, and later physically. The absence of her father has contributed to her cutting herself off from her emotions and childhood memories. Therefore, much of her present

[105] [...] ich kenn diesen Menschen nicht, ich weiß nichts über diesen Menschen, ich weiß nur eins (*lacht*) ... dass sich die Großeltern mütterlicherseits eher ihn gewünscht hätten als (*lacht*) als jetzt den... (*lacht*), das weiß ich nur ... aber das erzählt mein Papa immer wiederum (Sasha).

is concerned with working through these processes and re-establishing connections while upholding her sense of integrity.

These examples illustrate the limits of knowing about the *unsayable* because these topics involve family members. The limitations of knowing are certainly dictated by the family systems of the individual co-researchers, who can only 'know' parts of what has been transmitted to them and parts of what they feel ethically entitled to share. A situation of not-knowing, such as Tanja expresses, also produces a certain kind of knowledge, taking into consideration what 'knowing' means to Tanja herself. It is important, however, to approach such knowledge with caution, particularly in the context of a study on transgenerational traumatization, because, as all narratives have shown in their uniqueness, incidents and experiences within their accessible lived history are, in most cases, directly accessible and provide the major frames of reference for their narratives.

### 7.2.6. Silence(s)

Language of silence describes information "which might have been offered but was not" (Rogers et al. 1999, 11), particularly with relevance to topics that were covered in the narratives. Additionally, the silence that follows or precedes "forbidden or taboo knowledge and a fear of speaking may be interpreted as a silence that arises in response to something unspeakable" (Rogers et al. 1999, 11).

* * *

In Sasha's narrative, a literal silence points toward the damage caused by the death of his mother. After my invitation to talk about his parents, he claims that he doesn't know much about his parents. Sasha shifts toward explaining that his father is not his biological father and how that affected their relationship. Re-affirming that he cannot say much, he then turns toward his mother with a deep, long, almost unbearable silence that takes around fifteen seconds, before expressing that she dies when he was fifteen years old.

> Yes, I ... really, cannot say much. (.) And my mum ... what about my mum ... yea... (long silence, *00:09:15-00:09:30*) My mum died early (Sasha).[156]

This silence was not simply a literal silence that occurs in conversations and interviews now and then, but it was a long period in which I felt heavy,

[156] Ja ich ...wirklich, kann nicht viel sagen. (.) Und meine Mama ...was ist mit meiner Mama ... (*lange Stille*) Meine Mama ist früh verstorben (Sasha).

depressed, and unable to speak. His hesitance to talk about his mother straight away might be connected to Sasha's fear of whether he can entrust me with this topic at all. The silence also shows a significant turn in the narrative as such, because it opens a window to unlayering the deeper structure of his family that seems more fragile to him since the loss of his mother.

## 7.2.7. The Unsayability of (Non)Belonging

While looking for indications for any forms of unsayable knowledge, I witnessed the unfolding of a variety of narratives that all are connected, in one way or another, to questions of belonging in the context of migration experiences. Here, it is largely in the realm of language, that individuals walk paths that distance themselves from their family past in the Soviet Union. In the cases of Tanja and Elena, for example, language is but a channel of conveying a sense of "cutoff" from both the ancestral past in forms of family histories and symbolic forms of representing the past, such as time and space.

The narratives are heterogeneous, imbued with negations, revisions, and contradictions that relate to assessments of the dual background in the in-between of German and Russian identity. In most instants, self-positioning towards a specific German-Russian culture does not take place and hints toward a declining curve of groupness for some of the narrators (Brubaker 2004, 19). With clarity, I realize that these languages of the unsayable might also be a response to an ***unsayable*** in experiencing processes of migration and positioning toward a concept of 'home', both of which are seen as expressions of the need to belong.

## 7.2.8. Metaphors

Like Languages of the Unsayable, metaphors are ways of expression to capture nuances of emotions and experiences that have no common verbal vocabulary. The use of metaphors is quite vivid in the narrative of Svetlana, who offers a multiplicity of metaphors directly connected to the topic of transgenerational traumatization. One of these prominent metaphors is the dark cloud. Svetlana first mentions the presence of a dark cloud when she reflects upon her disturbed sexuality and the process of realizing that it might have to do with her grandmother's experience of rape, which her father, as a five-year-old child, was forced to witness. She recounts:

> Well, it is not necessarily the case, that something is wrong with me, but I have just been born into this strange, weird family, with this totally violent history. And, again, over years I have also had inner talks with the grandmother, or have then found a close proximity to her, and it is not like, it totally sets me free, so I still have the feeling that this dark cloud is above me, but it is not as threatening as it was (Svetlana).[10]

The dark cloud above her stands for the violent history and the collective suffering that are written in her family history. Putting into perspective her unexplainable feelings toward sexuality with the experiences of her ancestors has decreased the threat that emanates from the dark cloud. Taken as an image, however, the threatening connotation is just one aspect of the potential inherent in such a dark cloud, which might create dangerous lightenings that – albeit with a very low probability – can potentially strike a person. The metaphor of a dark cloud concerning transgenerational traumatization conceals the fundamentally live-giving qualities of dark clouds as producers of heavy rainfalls. Widening the frame, such rainfalls can wash away old baggage and hindrances of any kind, while it could also – depending on its force – wash away houses, settlements, human-made infrastructure. Moreover, one does not know whether the clouds appear after a heavy drought, in the case of which, the rainfall would ensure survival rather than threaten life. This thought experiment serves as an invitation to look beyond the apparent connotation of the metaphor, keeping in mind that metaphors, like languages of the unsayable, conceal certain knowledge.

In *The Fragile Voice of Love* (Curle 2006), Adam Curle paints a picture of the Black Cloud as a "compound of fear and misery is distilled and expelled by suffering humanity in the form of sad and muddled feelings" (Curle 2006, 1). He writes:

> We must always remember, however, that the Black Cloud is lodged in and expressed through the memories and emotions and the inherited traits of the men, women and, most sadly, the children of much of the world. In particular many of the vulnerable and receptive adolescents are sucked into an ambience of fear, anger, muddle and chaotic violence. There's little wonder that the young are deeply distressed and 'difficult'. Moreover, as time passes the different tragedies and miseries of the past blend confusingly with the afflictions of the present to challenge the skills of the most insightful therapist (Curle 2006, 8).

[10] Mensch, das ist nicht unbedingt so, dass mit mir was verkehrt ist, sondern ich bin einfach in diese verquere, komische Familie hineingeboren, mit dieser total gewalttätigen Geschichte. Und, auch wieder über Jahre habe ich zum Beispiel auch so innere Gespräche gehabt mit der Großmutter, oder hab dann zu ihr eine große Nähe gefunden, und es ist nicht so, dass mich das total befreit, also ich hab immer noch das Gefühl, dass diese dunkle Wolke noch über mir ist, aber die ist nicht mehr so bedrohlich. (Svetlana)

What Curle describes is a transpersonal atmosphere of depression that goes beyond a hereditary form of trauma, because it describes an atmosphere that surrounds humankind. In our conversation with Svetlana, I refer to this rather transpersonal notion of a *Black Cloud*. In direct response to my framing of the Black Cloud, Svetlana takes over by offering a story:

> Mh, but with the collective, I was in Spain, and there also was one, I do not know whether it was a real fortune-teller or just a Sinti and Roma or... someone addressed me, who, who was there with the people I was with, we met her somehow, in the evening when we went out or something, an older woman. We met her and she told me uh, outright 'Uh, your, I perceive something in your person, you should be a bit cautious and look at what it is, there is a grey cloud above you'. As if I, – I do not know, if this woman does not run around and tells this to everyone so that you then pay and she removes the cloud for you or so, but she did not want anything from me. She also did not, uh, do any consultation with me or so, she was just with the people, we were together with as well and said: 'You, in you I perceive that very clearly' and I could comprehend that, and I think, I also looked, or that was the first moment, when this dark cloud was not sitting on me, here in the chest, but when I thought, at least it is somehow just above me, and what is it? And when it is like that, you can look at it, but when it fulfills you, you can hardly look at it. And that was then an image for me, which I could work with. So and maybe this cloud is still there, but maybe it is rather like a kite, which sometimes is blown away by the wind, and... so sometimes it comes closer to you, and other times you can – Hui – blow it away a bit, or so. But uhm, this collective, and it might also be simply, that this crowd of German Russians, because so concentrated – so they always the strangers, and they were always teased here, harassed there and so, or at least in the official statement, right? – that thereby, this cloud is more tangible. And thereby also condensed and much more present in the people (Svetlana).[108]

[108] Mh, aber mit dem Kollektiven, Ich war in Spanien, und da war auch eine, ich weiß nicht ob es eine reelle Wahrsagerin war oder einfach nur eine Sinti und Roma oder ... irgendjemand hat mich angesprochen, die, die war da mit den Leuten, mit denen ich zusammen war, wir haben die kennengelernt, irgendwie, abends beim Ausgehen oder so, eine ältere Frau. Haben wir sie getroffen und sie hat mir auf den Kopf zu gesagt 'Huh, deine, ich nehme in deiner Person sowas wahr, du musst da ein bisschen aufpassen und gucken was das ist, über dir ist eine graue Wolke'. Als wenn ich, – ich weiß nicht, ob diese Frau nicht rumläuft und jedem das erzählt, damit du damit du dann bezahlst und sie dir diese Wolke wegmacht oder so, aber sie wollte ja nichts von mir. Sie hat auch keine Konsultation mit mir gemacht oder so, sie war nur mit den Leuten zusammen, mit denen wir auch zusammen waren und hat gesagt: 'Du, bei dir spür ich das ganz deutlich' und das konnte ich total nachvollziehen, und ich glaube, da habe ich auch geguckt, oder das war der erste Moment, wo diese dunkle Wolke nicht mehr auf mir saß, hier in der Brust, sondern wo ich dachte, immerhin, es ist irgendwie nur über mir, und was ist das? Und wenn das so ist, kannst du das ja angucken, aber wenn es dich erfüllt, kannst du dir das schlecht angucken. Und das war dann für mich auch ein Bild, mit dem ich arbeiten konnte. So und vielleicht ist diese Wolke immer noch da, aber vielleicht ist es ja auch wie so'n Drache, der mal vom Wind weg, und ...also, manchmal kommt es näher zu dir, und manchmal kannst es so – *Hui* –, ein bisschen wegpusten, oder sowas. Aber dieses Kollektive, und, es kann aber einfach sein, dass dieses Völkchen der Russlanddeutschen, weil es einfach so geballt – also die waren ja immer da die Fremden, und die wurden immer da gepiesakt,

For the analysis of this plot, I am working with the Labovian model of narrative analysis, adopted by Elliot Mishler (1995) that serves to identify the meaning that Svetlana gives to her experience. It consists of six components that I identify and analyze below.

The *abstract* leads to the plot and spark the interest. In response to my invitation to talk about collective forms of trauma, Svetlana invites me to record what she is about to say, thinking that I had stopped recording before. Her invitation to verify the recording process, as a hint to listen carefully, serves as prior notice that what she is about to tell is important to her. Giving an *orientation*, Svetlana locates the plot in Spain, probably during the time she completed a study term abroad. She describes the encounter with a fortune-teller who she met with the group she was going out with. The *complicating action* concerns the fortune teller addressing Svetlana outright with her perception of the presence of a 'grey cloud' above her. Svetlana responds with a course of thought acts that enhance the validity of the fortune tellers' assessment. She first doubts whether this might be an economic endeavor of the fortune teller, but excludes this possibility by noting that the fortune teller did not want something in return.

It appears that the reason the narrative is being told, i.e. the *evaluation* is given implicitly as it is embedded in a frame of collective suffering. Svetlana begins with introducing the plot as collective, and ends with the acknowledgment that the collective trauma of German-Russians is much more condensed. She explains that through the severity of suffering the cloud is more tangible and therefore much clearer to perceive for the fortune teller. Her narrative also includes an embedded evaluation in which she confirms the soothing effects of this encounter, as she begins viewing the cloud as located above her, rather than within her.

Besides this evaluation, there is no definite resolution to the plot because Svetlana is weaving the thread of her narration into another metaphor, that of conserved suffering:

> [...] this 'Not-being-allowed-to-talk-about-it', so these seventy, eighty years of keeping it a secret does something with it. So it, uhm, intensifies it, that is probably really like a can and not in the sense of conservative, and they are conservative – but this suffering has been canned, and is much, much more intensive in taste, as if you would eat a bit of it each week. Therefore I think we then evidently have a whole pantry, so to speak, with canned suffering (*laughs*) – in any flavor (Svetlana).[109]

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und da schikaniert und sowas, oder zumindest in der offiziellen Verlautbarung, nä? – dass dadurch diese Wolke auch greifbarer ist. Und dadurch auch verdichtet und in den Leuten einfach viel stärker präsent (Svetlana).

109 [...] dieses 'Nicht-drüber-reden-dürfen', also diese siebzig, achtzig Jahre Verschweigen macht was damit. Also das, ehm, intensiviert das, das ist wahrscheinlich wirklich wie ne Konserve – und nicht im Sinne von konservativ, und die sind konservativ – sondern dieses Leid ist konserviert worden.

With the metaphor of a pantry filled with conserved suffering, Svetlana introduces another aspect to her relationship with the past. She roots the establishment of the pantry back to 'Not-being-allowed-to-talk-about-it' in the Soviet Union, which lasted seventy, eighty years. During these decades of silence, the suffering can be seen to have been condensed and expressed nonverbally, symbolized by tin cans. I ask myself the question of what the tin cans stand for in our lives. Are they to be found in experience reports, literature and poetry, artifacts and memorials, or are they intangible, immaterial, and a rather invisible force of feelings and emotions? What about the pantry? Is it a place Svetlana enjoys to go to and taste a bit of the content from the tin cans, which have different flavors? Or is it a place to be scared of, where the density of suffering even keeps most from opening the door to the pantry? Generally, pantries have a positive, life-saving connotation, because they are places of storage, when food becomes scarce, pantries provide nutrition, even in cases of catastrophes. I, therefore, join Svetlana in her metaphor and ask:

> Christina: Do we have to eat it all, at once? (laughs)
> Svetlana: No, we don't have to. You... everyone is allowed to choose, I do not go into the pantry, I let it stand there. And when it...there is no guilt in handing it over to the other generations. You can only do it when you are stable enough. When you are in familial love, when you are in a situation, where you can look at it, either where you have no other choice, or where you can allow it to yourself.[110]

In this paragraph, Svetlana addresses the possibility to choose, whether or not you enter the pantry. To her, a certain level of emotional stability is needed to do so, a certain familial love, a stable structure. She does not clearly state how she entered the pantry, indicating either that she had no choice or that she allowed herself to enter. The presence of both of these options might indicate both of them as relevant in her motivations. Her family background hints toward her having no choice because she was born into a context where past trauma was present through talk, action, and relationality. Besides that, her continuing dealing with the topic, also in the frame of her authorship, points towards her choice in looking at it and working with it.

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und ist viel, viel intensiver im Geschmack, als wenn man jedes... jede Woche davon ein bisschen Essen würde. Darum denke ich, wir haben ja dann eine ganze Speisekammer, sozusagen von konserviertem Leid. (*lacht*) – in jeder Geschmacksrichtung (Svetlana).
Christina: Müssen wir das alles essen, auf einmal? (*lacht*)
Svetlana: Nee, müssen wir nicht. Du ...jeder darf auch entscheiden, ich geh nicht in die Speisekammer, ich lass das stehen. Und wenn es ... es ist keine Schuld, das auch an die anderen Generationen weiterzugeben. Du kannst nur das machen, wenn du stabil genug bist. Wenn du in einer familiären Liebe, wenn du in einer Situation bist, wo du dir das angucken kannst, entweder wo du nicht anders kannst, oder wo du es dir erlauben kannst (Svetlana).

* * *

Taking up the image of a mystical room, the closed door is a metaphor present in Elena's narrative as well. Here, it symbolizes the gate to an accumulation of feelings that have been locked behind the door. Elena connects the process of locking them with her childhood experience of lacking a relationship with her father:

> Elena: [...] I think, it has to do with how my father was. So... that, as a child, I probably was not able to cope with the feelings he showed, or none at all. Oder maybe I have assimilated that and therefore I have...I do not know why my body has done this, that is why I would like to find it out one day.
> Christina: You say, your body has done it. Could you elaborate a bit more on what you mean by that?
> Elena: Well, or my soul, I do not know. As a protection from what was there, because I could not cope with it maybe. [...] Yes, or this not-being-present from him and because I did not want to be confronted to it, I projected it onto not-feeling or have locked them up along with it.[111]

As Elena's process of inner work is oriented towards opening the door and accessing its content, the meaning she attributes to this metaphor is central to her present life. Elena voices her need to access what is behind of the door, the contents of which are not clearly known to her and remain assumptions. It remains uncertain whether what she will find behind the door are childhood memories, feelings or even possibly notions of transgenerational traumatization. In the moment of our interview, Elena focuses not so much on the inside of the room, but on the door, which stands metaphorical for her own inner process of shutting certain aspects of her life away. In a broader perspective, the process of locking away is intertwined with her process of cutoff from her father's ways of relating.

Another metaphor in Elena's narration, which is analogous to these processes of locking away is that of an armor. She mentions it in her description of childhood experiences at school, where she felt excluded for a variety of issues that resulted from her German-Russian background:

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[111] Elena: [...] ich glaube, dass es schon damit zusammenhängt, wie mein Vater war. Also ... dass ich wahrscheinlich als Kind damit nicht klarkam, welche Gefühle er gezeigt hat, oder keine. Oder vielleicht habe ich das, so für mich aufgenommen, und deshalb hab ich's ... ich weiß nicht, warum mein Körper das gemacht hat, darum würde ich das schon gern herausfinden, irgendwann.
Christina: Du sagst, dein Körper hat das gemacht. Kannst du ein bisschen mehr erläutern, was du damit meinst?
Elena: Naja, oder meine Seele, ich weiß nicht. Zum Schutz davor, was, was da war, damit weil ich damit nicht umgehen konnte, vielleicht. [...] Ja, oder halt dieses Nicht-Präsent-Sein von ihm und weil ich sozusagen nicht damit konfrontiert werden wollte, habe ich das sozusagen auf Nicht Fühlen projiziert oder hab die gleich mit weggeschlossen.

> Yes, so my strategy was, arrogance (*laughs*) probably, that is the childish aspect, when I am arrogant, then it is easier... , there simply were no foreigners. I was the only one who so to speak did not belong there, and I also didn't have these brand clothes that were required. The jeans and that, I couldn't offer that. And then I was a bit excluded. And because I created such an armor with a protective shield named 'arrogance', it was obviously not so easy (Elena).[112]

The armor supports Elena to numb feelings, particularly those which are unwanted, such as feelings of exclusion and otherness. These are here evoked through the inability to afford expensive clothes, as other children possess, and her experience of being the only foreigner in a class of local German children. She describes her armor as surrounded by a protective shield, which Elena identifies as arrogant behavior. Her experience of exclusion was thereby fortified through what seemed as arrogant behavior on the outside but was much more of a protection for Elena on the inside. This had direct consequences for Elena's ability to make friendships and relate to other children, as she assesses the difficulty of relating through this armor herself. Hence, the German-Russian background has had a significant impact on her childhood and youth, as it shaped how she relates to others. I see in both of Elena's metaphors, that of the closed door and the armor, vivid illustrations of inner processes that accompany her fear of being vulnerable. As she focuses on her mechanisms that create these metaphors, she gives us reference points to imagine how they can be unmade as well. Is it possible to let go of the need to open that locked door and let it be? What is needed to soften the armor that colors her relations to others, at least in her childhood? These are questions only Elena can answer, and in her choice of dedicating herself to inner work, she already formulates the answers to herself.

* * *

Alexej uses very thoughtful language and rather avoids figurative language such as metaphors. Nevertheless, he uses a very strong metaphor that shocked me at first but becomes much more understandable to me when taken in a broader context of his narrative. He introduces it while reflecting and refuting external attributions to his social belonging:

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[112] Ja, also meine Taktik war, Arroganz (*lacht*) wahrscheinlich, das ist so, das kindliche, wenn ich arrogant bin, dann ist es einfacher..., da waren einfach keine Ausländer. Ich war die einzige, die da nicht sozusagen dazugehörte und hatte auch nicht die Markenklamotten, die man jetzt brauchte. Die Jeans, und das, damit konnte ich halt auch nicht dienen. Und dann war ich schon bisschen außen vor. Da ich mir ja so ein Panzer mitm Schutzschild Arroganz angelegt habe, war das dann natürlich nicht so einfach (Elena).

> [...] this stubbornness of most of these people, I do not know, they were probably not capable to understand it at all. Yes. Then I also asked my teachers, back then in school time, whether they could not possibly try to teach the classmates some history. Such history. Not history about Tut Ench Amun, or whatever, but something like this. So that people can understand that. Right? I mean, when a cat is born in the pig sty, it is far from being a pig (Alexej).[113]

While I cannot assess whether he really means the metaphor or rather wanted to illustrate his perception by using a funny example which went another way, I give this metaphor meaning, because it appears to have for him. As I introduced in his personal chapter, cats have a special personal meaning in his life. So the choice of this metaphor is not very far-fetched, because he loves and takes care of his cats, as anyone generally does for the family. Similarly, the image of pigs is consistent with Alexej's description of how people who later populated his home village literally "downgraded" the hard work of his ancestors. Moreover, he self-identifies as a German who was born and raised in another country, so that the meaning that is behind the metaphor is consistent with the overall character of his narrative. In a broader context, therefore, taking into consideration the rest of his narrative, the metaphor can be seen as meaningful. While I do internally feel a resistance to go in-depth with the metaphor, because it appears as racist to me, I do so out of the need to understand the image.

What does it mean if a cat is born in a pigsty? First of all, the image implies the question of where does the cat belong and what brought her mother cat to the pigsty for giving birth. Was she seeking shelter? Is the pigsty part of a farm that the cats live on, and they have a very familial relation to all the other animals on the farm? Or are the circumstances rather dramatic and the cat had to give birth in a pigsty? What does it say about the pigsty, and the pigs? While these questions remain concealed in the metaphor itself, and Alexej's meaning of it, they arise within me when I take the metaphor seriously. My resistance to it results from the analogy that is rather implicit but resonant in the cats standing for Germans, the pigs standing for Kazakhs, and the pigsty standing for Kazakhstan. Whether or not this was meant is difficult to tell. But if so, such an image has significant implications for how Alexej views Kazakhstan and its people.

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[113] [..] diese Sturheit dieser meisten Menschen, weiß ich nicht, die waren vielleicht nicht in der Lage, dass überhaupt so zu verstehen. Ja. Dann hab ich auch damals in der Schulzeit meine Lehrer gefragt, ob die das nicht vielleicht, versuchen könnten, den Mitschülern, etwas Geschichte beizubringen. Solche Geschichte. Nicht Geschichte von Tut Ench Amun, oder was weiß ich was, sondern auch mal so etwas. Damit die Leute das auch einmal verstehen. Nä? Ich mein, wenn eine Katze im Schweinestall geboren wird, ist es noch lange kein Schwein. (Alexej)

## 7.3. Victimization

In the analysis of narratives, along with the objective of re-storying German-Russian family histories, the notion of victimization is closely linked to the social processes of traumatization and its acknowledgment. I have argued that victimization has the potential to turn into an autonomous process on its own when members of collectives are expected to integrate the traumatic past into the future (Kidron 2003, 529). Therefore, it can shape society decisively, feeding the continuation of conflicts that are based on different understandings of the past. One manifestation of such conflict can be found in Svetlana's witnessing of her father's rage against German political figures, the Federal Presidents in this case, which in turn have left dominant impressions on herself and her family (see chapter 6.6.).

Victimization is implicitly present in Alexej's representation of the difficulties that accompanied his German-Russian background. He narrates that his classmates had a problem with his origin, as they falsely assumed he was a foreigner. This caused him to feel annoyed by explaining his story to his fellow human beings. As a result, Alexej addressed his high school teachers with a request to study German-Russian history at school:

> Then I also asked my teachers, back then in school time, whether they could not possibly try to teach the classmates some history. Such history. Not history about Tut Ench Amun, or whatever, but something like this (Alexej).[114]

This example shows how an experience of 'injustice', in this case, the false accusations of his classmates about Alexej's 'identity', can result in specific courses of action, here seen in his request to study the German-Russian history rather than the proposed contents of the curriculum.

* * *

While in several narratives, the access to remembered history is limited, Katharina and Svetlana specifically deal with social topics of victimization, as I deepened some of their narrative explorations with a follow-up question that touched upon this topic. Svetlana sees herself, her family in general, as microcosms of notions of archenemies, saying

[114] Dann hab ich auch damals in der Schulzeit meine Lehrer gefragt, ob die das nicht vielleicht, versuchen könnten, den Mitschülern, etwas Geschichte beizubringen. Solche Geschichte. Nicht Geschichte von Tut Ench Amun, oder was weiß ich was, sondern auch mal so etwas. (Alexej)

> [...] that in my person, the Russian and the German comes together, so that two enemies face each other; that my parents are a couple from two enemy nations (Svetlana).[115]

This form of internal encounter might manifest as a dilemma or paradox, as Svetlana mentions before-, but can also open up new possibilities of integrating and transcending such dualities. At the same time, moral categories have little to no meaning to her, taking into perspective her family background which blurs such categories:

> [...] I cannot say the Russians are the bad ones, they are only the aggressors, they have raped, neither can I say, the Germans are the bad ones, they attacked Russia and so many people died (Svetlana).[116]

These categories are blurred precisely because of her multifaceted family histories. Svetlana mentions that she spent her whole life being raised with the belief that they were the victims. Nevertheless, she learned that her own uncle self-identified as a Russian soldier and died at the war front. Much later, she made what constituted a life-changing discovery for her by finding out about her grandfather's affiliation with the SS (*Schutzstaffel*), when she received

> [...] a photograph of a soldier in SS uniform. I said, wait a moment, how is that possible? I know about him, he was in Germany, okay, he was in the army, then in war captivity, I knew all of this, why does he have SS? So, SS were those, who made the conscious choice, and the ideology of Hitler, that was the Schutzstaffel and they have, SS have overseen the concentration camps. SS have conducted the executions. SS have... right? Why my grandpa, suddenly this? And then I dropped out, so... I also just ran around like a distraught chicken. I couldn't do anything. So, clearly, I also had a job, I went to work, clearly, I prepared sandwiches, clearly. So I was not myself anymore, because that did not fit together (Svetlana).[117]

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[115] [...] dass bei mir das Russische und das Deutsche zusammenkommt, also dass in meiner Person sich zwei Feinde gegenüberstehen; dass meine Eltern ein Ehepaar ist aus zwei verfeindeten Nationen. (Svetlana)

[116] [...] ich kann nicht sagen, die Russen sind die Bösen, die sind nur die Aggressoren, die haben vergewaltigt, ich kann auch nicht sagen, die Deutschen sind die Bösen, die haben Russland überfallen und so und so viele sind gestorben (Svetlana).

[117] [...] ein Foto von einem Soldaten in SS-Uniform. Hab ich gesagt, Moment, wie geht das? Ich weiß von ihm, der war in Deutschland, gut der war in der Armee, dann in Kriegsgefangenschaft, das wusste ich alles, wieso hat er SS? Also, SS waren doch diejenigen, die sich bewusst dafür entschieden haben, und die Hitlers Ideologie, das war doch die Schutzstaffel, und die haben, SS haben die KZ's beaufsichtigt, SS haben die Erschießungen gemacht, SS haben... nä? Wieso mein Opa, plötzlich das? Und da bin ich rausgefallen, also... ich bin auch nur wie ein verstörtes Huhn rumgelaufen. Ich konnte nichts mehr machen. Also, klar, da hab ich auch einen Job gehabt, bin zu meinem Job gegangen, klar, hab ich Brote geschmiert, klar. Aber ich war nicht mehr ich selbst, weil das ging nicht zusammen (Svetlana).

Svetlana conveys that, after the discovery, she was not herself anymore. The image of her grandfather as one of the 'bad' ones, who consciously chose to follow Hitler's ideology did not match with the self-understanding of victimization that Svetlana was raised with. In consequence, she underwent a personal process of dealing with these traces of guilt by connecting to a group of descendants of genuine Nazis. With her father being member of the LMDR, Svetlana found some macro-historical aspect that contextualizes this line of narrative in the journal 'Volk auf dem Weg'[118]:

> And then I discovered such things, for example, that the ethnic Germans, whether they wanted or not, were caught, even before they reached Germany, and... were classified. SS, Wehrmacht, or... another organization, because they ran out of soldiers. Especially forty-three, forty-four, they took young men between sixteen and... forty-six, in fact, they established mobile office rooms, in trains. And they drove along with the trains, where those came onto the treks, who have just fled, and said 'Okay, you are fighting for the fatherland' (Svetlana).[119]

These experiences contribute to a softening of dualities which are, in consequence, rather seen in a more systemic way. Svetlana identifies both German and Russian nations as victims of certain warmongers. Beyond the pitfalls of terms such as victimization, she assesses victimhood as expression for what is unspeakable, thereby needed to give voice to the unspeakable. In Svetlana's narrative, I notice some tension between holding on to a collective form of victimization and her own healing process that is based upon an acknowledgement of ownership. She recounts:

> In the first moment when I saw the photo and when I read about this general, I was so besides myself, because I thought, wait a moment, so my self-image began to slide, how can it be? We were persecuted? We were... it cannot be that we were those, who executed others? So, and that has been killing me, but... it was not us. Also, what happened to my grandmother, didn't happen to me. What happened to my grandfather, and what he did and saw, it is not me who saw and did that. And then, after having sorted that somehow, I felt better about it (Svetlana).[120]

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118 "People on the way" (translated by the author) is a magazine published by the LMDR.

119 Und dann habe ich zum Beispiel solche Sachen entdeckt, dass die Volksdeutschen, ob sie wollten oder nicht, abgefangen wurden, noch bevor sie nach Deutschland kamen, und ...eingeordnet. SS, Wehrmacht, oder ... noch irgendeine Organisation, weil den gingen die Soldaten aus. Besonders dreiundvierzig, vierundvierzig, die haben die jungen Männer von sechszehn bis ... sechsundvierzig, und zwar haben die so ...mobile Bürostuben eingerichtet, in Zügen. Und die sind mit den Zügen dahingefahren, wo die auf die Trecks kamen, die gerade geflohen sind, und haben gesagt 'Okay, du kämpfst jetzt für's Vaterland' (Svetlana).

120 Im ersten Moment, als ich das Foto gesehen hab und als ich über diesen General gelesen hab, war ich so außer mir, weil ich dachte, Moment, also mein Selbstbild ist ins Rutschen gekommen, wie kann es sein? Wir wurden doch verfolgt? Wir wurden doch ... es kann doch nicht sein, dass wir

These reflections show a central aspect of owning her story that runs through her narrative (see chapter 6.6.). She says that she started to feel better when she acknowledged that the actions and decisions of her grandfather are neither her own, nor that of her people. In the same line, what happened to her grandmother did not happen to her, referring to her grandmother's experiences of sexual violence.

On the other hand, upon my invitation to look at victimization as a socially constructed term, Svetlana underlines the particularity of German-Russian-ness, in the case of which 'victimization' is quite tangible.

> Yes, but that can also be quite (*snaps her fingers*) tangible. So, and you can see that in the case of German-Russians. They have been victimized systematically, I believe. Even if it is only constructed. And that continues. In the perception of those who were children back then. And even in the perception of the children and grandchildren. So this...victimhood... this slavish mindset is very difficult to get out of the personality (Svetlana).[121]

Hence, Svetlana portrays a tension between individual agency and ownership of trauma, and the collective imprint of traumatization and victimization, which is difficult to overcome. Her strategy of oscillating between deep engagement with transgenerational traumatization and conscious delimitation to the victimization of her ancestors appears like a dynamic balance or dance: sometimes fragile and volatile, other times more determined and significant.

* * *

Katharina distances herself from a self-perceived sense of victimization by assessing German-Russian groupness on a macro-level. She elaborates:

> So the German-Russians perceive themselves as a group, not individually, as biggest victims of Stalinism. [...] And still, this idea is widely spread, and it is partly true, of course it is true that German-Russians were treated differently, because evidently Stalin was waging war against Hitler. But moreover, people often forget that everyone, even the Russians, or what... the Georgians, so

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diejenigen waren, die andere erschossen haben? So und das hat, das hat mich total fertiggemacht aber ...es waren nicht *wir*. Auch das, das was meiner Oma passiert ist, das ist nicht mir passiert. Das was meinem Opa passiert ist, und was er getan und gesehen hat, das hab nicht ich gesehen und getan. Und danach, nachdem ich das irgendwie sortiert hatte, ging es mir besser damit (Svetlana).

[121] Schon, aber das kann auch sehr (*schnipst mit den Fingern*) greifbar sein. Also, und an dem Volk der Russlanddeutschen kannst du das sehen. Die wurden systematisch zu Opfern gemacht, finde ich. Auch wenn es nur konstruiert ist. Und das setzt sich fort. In der Wahrnehmung denjenigen, die damals Kinder waren. Und sogar in der Wahrnehmung der Kinder und Enkel. Also diese Opferhaltung ... dieses sklavische Denken ist sehr schwer rauszukriegen, aus der Persönlichkeit (Svetlana).

> everyone has suffered under communism, and Stalinism especially (Katharina).[122]

Her evaluation points toward an exclusive sense of victimhood that prevails among German-Russian groupness, as they see themselves as most affected by Stalinism. Still, Katharina mentions the sufferings of other groups, thereby shifting this perspective more toward an inclusive victim consciousness (Vollhardt and Bilali 2015), which reflects a more systemic view. Nevertheless, she affirms that the extent of suffering it is coherent with historical accounts. What bothers her is the underlying attitude of victimhood, which she explains with a passive mindset:

> [...] most people do not do anything actively, they simply want to be victims and startle more, and take this as a pretext to get back at Merkel and vote for the AFD. So that is totally dumb. Simply dumb. And that is why I just try in conversations with the people, so I believe every conversation can have effects, and that do not need to be big campaigns [...] sometimes I am annoyed, and I do not feel like telling my family history, but I do it anyway because it is important to me. And if someone is not interested in German-Russian history, but gets to know my history, he might have understood a little bit [...] everyone has the possibility to talk to other people, to tell one's story, yes and to not simply view oneself as a victim (Katharina).[123]

In her analysis, Katharina points toward the social implications of a passive attitude of victimhood, which, in her belief, serves as an excuse for German-Russians to withdraw from the political sphere and vote for the right-wing AFD out of protest. In consequence, she recommends seeing each conversation as a chance to leave an impact on society. Narrating a personal account of history through family history is not just destabilizing the discourse of foreignness, separation, traumatization, and victimization, but also, with its

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[122] Also die Russlanddeutschen sehen sich so als Gruppe, jetzt nicht individuell, so als die größten Opfer des Stalinismus. [...] Und nach wie vor, diese Vorstellung ist einfach weit verbreitet, und es stimmt zum Teil, natürlich stimmt es auch, die Russlanddeutschen wurden auch anders behandelt, weil natürlich Stalin den Krieg gegen Hitler führte. Aber darüber hinaus wird auch oft vergessen, dass alle, selbst die Russen, oder was ... die Georgier, also alle haben ja gelitten unter dem Kommunismus, und Stalinismus vor allem (Katharina).

[123] [...] die meisten machen gar nichts aktiv dafür, die möchten einfach nur Opfer sein und vergrämen sich mehr, und nehmen sich das als Vorwand, um dann eben Merkel eins auszuwischen und die AFD zu wählen. Also es ist halt total dumm. Einfach nur dumm. Und deswegen, da versuche ich halt einfach in Unterhaltungen den Leuten also, ich glaub jedes Gespräch kann Wirkung zeigen, und das müssen keine großen Kampagnen sein [...] manchmal bin ich genervt, und hab gar keine Lust meine Familiengeschichte zu erzählen, aber ich tue es dann trotzdem, weil ich es einfach wichtig finde. Und wenn sich jemand nicht für die russlanddeutsche Geschichte interessiert, aber meine Geschichte kennenlernt, hat er vielleicht doch ein bisschen was verstanden [...] jeder hat die Möglichkeit mit den anderen Menschen zu sprechen, über seine Geschichte zu erzählen, ja und sich eben nicht nur als Opfer zu sehen (Katharina).

empowering connotation, contributes to transcending notions of victimization performatively.

* * *

As victimization is seen as a social process, Tanja's narrative suggests that this process is blocked in her case. Because of her inability to access the past, she is narratively taking the responsibility for not knowing. She explains that she has not asked her parents because of a fear of what might be told. Similarly, the process of cutoff is affecting both Sasha and Elena, thereby blocking any form of victimization. Understanding this blockage from a larger perspective, taking into consideration Svetlana's remark that a sense of victimhood expresses the unsayable, victimization has not only negative effects but holds potential for individual and collective healing. Bar-Tal et al. mention increased empathy and pro-social behaviors as positive effects of a sense of victimhood, noting that

> [...] when group members experience harm, it tunes their sensitivity to suffering in general and under some conditions to perceived similarity with other groups' experiences, even including those of the rival in conflict. In turn, this empathy may facilitate courses of action that promote peacemaking, including various co-operative activities with members of the rival society who have had similar experiences and whose repertoire of beliefs and attitudes is similar (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 257).

When the process of victimization is blocked, mourning is impeded through the cutoff and therefore inhibits processes of healing, along with the above-mentioned effects. Tanja expresses her fear that underlies guessing what might be her family's history in the Soviet Union:

> [...] this certainty, that these people, my parents concretely, have endured something bad would make me very sad. (*cries*) Although, of course, it is bad then, for what happened to them, but I could not have changed it back then, or in the aftermath neither, but anyway to know. I think this would affect me (Tanja).[124]

[124] [...] diese Gewissheit, dass diese Menschen, also meinen Eltern was Schlimmes passiert ist, das würde mich sehr traurig machen. (*weint*) Obwohl, natürlich ist es dann schlimm, was denen passiert ist, aber ich hätte es ja auch nicht ändern können, oder im Nachhinein jetzt auch nicht, aber trotzdem, zu wissen. Ich glaube, das würde mich belasten (Tanja).

While she acknowledges that knowing the family history would affect her, it is also in the process of guessing that she confronts inner fears and worries about the past. This becomes apparent through her emotional reaction of crying.

* * *

Concluding, this engagement with victimization has provided a diverse account of attitudes and meanings. On the one side, it has shown that – at least among the co-researchers – externally attributed collective victimhood not always correlates with how the individuals perceive themselves. Tanja, Sasha, and Elena, for example, attribute little meaning to the impacts of their German-Russian background on their social positions, whereas Alexej takes a higher moral position concerning his environment. Working through processes of victimization and guilt, as in Svetlana's case, has set free energies to creative and impactful ways of dealing with the past, both for Svetlana and Katharina. Katharina observes a passive attitude of victimization among some German-Russians, which contributes to their protest votes for the right-wing populist AFD party.

On the other side, victimization not always manifests explicitly. In some cases, a strong social position can be associated with the experience of victimization, while I also reflected upon the implications that arise from a blockage of mourning. Seen within a systemic perspective, therefore, processes of victimization are a central aspect of a social system's negotiation of interpretations of the past.

# 8. Final Discussion

With my explorative research question of the legacies of German-Russian family histories in the Soviet Union, I have adapted a narrative approach, in which a total of six people of German-Russian origin from diverse backgrounds have shared the meanings of this heritage in their own lives. After an in-depth examination of the narratives and their contents, the richness of their experiences has become a central feature of further exploration and interpretation through analytic lenses of temporality, unsayability, and victimization.

## 8.1. Summary of Findings

In the inquiry of understandings and contents of time following Lederach's doodle of a *past that lies before us* (chapter 5.1.), my engagement with the different narrative understandings has incited my conclusion of perceiving a declining curve of groupness, as several interviewees focus the meaning-making of history on their lived histories rather than 'narrative'. Certainly, this tendency is not representative, but as I focus on tendencies of self-attribution to a German-Russian groupness, it remains a valuable insight to which Brubaker suggests that levels of groupness are typically rather the result of conflict than its underlying source, stating:

> Once ratcheted up to a high level, groupness does not remain there out of inertia. If not sustained at high levels through specific social and cognitive mechanisms, it will tend to decline, as everyday interests reassert themselves, through a process of what Weber (in a different but apposite context [1968 (1922): 246-54]) called "routinization" (Veralltäglichung, literally "towards everydayness") (Brubaker 2004, 19).

The so-called 'Veralltäglichung' which Brubaker introduces in this context is an important element of the tendency among young German-Russians to differentiate from German-Russian groupness, emphasizing their lived histories (Sasha and Elena) or a reference to German groupness (Alexej, and to a lesser extent, Tanja). This finding is much in line with a processual understanding of 'identity' and 'groupness' as elaborated in chapter 5.2.

On a further note, the narrative of Tanja has demonstrated the impact on a person's sense of identity and belonging in the case of absence, or even inaccessibility to deeper temporal layers such as remembered history and 'narrative'. Similarly, Katharina's narrative has revealed the healing potential she extracted for herself from engaging with a long distant past that had been

pushed out of the frame during her childhood. In contrast, Svetlana's narrative entails an opposite tendency, namely the healing potential of breaking free from the past. Alexej and Sasha locate their 'narrative' in the German culture and territory, while attributing little value to the period spent in the Soviet Union. Sasha elaborates on the technical skills his father acquired while working as a mechanic in Siberia. He identifies the resulting wish of his parents to offer a better perspective to their children as one of the catalysts for migration to Germany. Alexej underlines his German origin in multiple ways, particularly by distinguishing himself from native Kazakhs and stressing the particularities of Germans in Russia. This self-definition softens in the course of the narrative and makes space for nostalgic images of life in a German village in Kazakhstan. It is accompanied by an open critique of consumption and abundance which he has encountered in Germany.

Elena, on the other hand, is confronted with residues of the dualisms that have infused her family system. With her focalizing her lived experience, history in the Soviet Union is rather subordinate. Nevertheless, she expresses a sense of rootlessness and confusion of the external perceptions people have of her origin. While in childhood, her name and background were constructed reasons for mocking and exclusion, these notions have turned tables and her origin is now being exoticized.

In all cases, except for Sasha's and Svetlana's narratives, experiences of exclusion and forms of discrimination were present. Svetlana repeatedly underlines that she has never been exposed to any form of discrimination while noting that she was ashamed of her Russian background as a child. This creates a tension between interpersonal relations and her intrapersonal processes that led her to selectively mention or withhold information about her origin. Whereas Sasha does not provide any reference to childhood experiences of exclusion, he does focus on inclusion instead by pointing out that he speaks the German language without an accent. Again, this is one aspect that stresses his meaning of being firmly rooted in German language and culture, as he grew up speaking a German-Swabian dialect.

With *languages of the unsayable*, I entered uncharted waters by focusing on different forms of implicit knowledge. My engagement with this kind of knowledge has led me toward an 'in-between', a transcultural dynamic space between the concepts of 'Germany' and 'Russia'. Across the narratives, this space has taken a variety of facets and connotations, all colored by the lived experiences of each narrator, along with the research relationship with and interpretation by myself. Homy K. Bhabha, a key theorist of postcolonial studies and proponent of the *Third Space*, elaborates on the potentiality of 'in-between' spaces for 'identity':

> These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 1994, 1-2).

Bhabha's theory of the 'third space', a hybrid 'in-between' of originally colonial relations, can be applied to any context of transcultural positionality. It has implications that go far beyond the hybridity of German-Russian experience, as the 'in-between' has the potential to re-define society in an ongoing process of social interaction. Therefore, in applying a lens of languages of the unsayable, I encountered what Bhabha calls

> [...] the narrative uncertainty of culture's in-between: between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other, neither sexuality nor race, neither, simply, memory nor desire. [...] It is neither desire nor pleasure but between the two. Neither future nor present, but between the two. [...] It is an operation that both sows confusion between opposites and stands between the opposites 'at once' (Bhabha 2004, 127).

Bhabha here finds, with poetry and clarity at once, an expression for what I have identified as unsayable languages across the narratives. While questions of positioning oneself in terms of belonging are not consistently present in each narrative alike, it is still one of the major themes that emerged out of the unsayable. Certainly, I take into consideration to what extent these interpretations are colored by my own experience which I have thoroughly laid open in the first chapters. Unlike conventional approaches to research that claim 'objectivity' in all stages of the research process, I acknowledge my presence in all of them.

Therefore, it was surprising to me to not have found indications for a common transgenerational traumatization in viewing the narratives through the analytic lens of languages of the unsayable, but rather having encountered a common sense on the limits of narratives to express notions of 'home' and social belonging. I was surprised to encounter a longing for freedom as an expression of 'home' in Alexej's narrative, where I would have rather expected notions of security and stability, based upon my previous reflections on macro-level themes. On the other hand, Elena's perception of 'home' as an unfelt feeling has illuminated the dilemma of migration that runs through German-Russian histories. In the same tone, Svetlana and Katharina elaborate on how the recovery of an unlived aspect of their identities has sparked processes of healing. The inexpressibility of belonging for Sasha is not so much related to the concepts of Germany and Russia, but rather to the maternal and paternal sides of his family. He expresses his inner conflict with belonging on either side through the use of a metaphor of columns. As he

verbally paints the picture of two columns which stand for the maternal and the paternal family, he locates himself in the column of his mother, while wishing to belong to both columns equally. Tanja inhabits a distinct status in her family as the youngest family member and the only one born in Germany. This outsider experience nourishes her experience of not knowing and the tension between wanting to know and not being allowed to know.

As I examined the metaphoric language of Svetlana in more depth, I have come into contact with a much more tangible position of self-evidence of German-Russian suffering than I had gained through examining recent literature produced by and about German-Russians. The image of a dark cloud represents how she feels with the legacies of the past, while it implies a certain closeness to natural processes that are inherent to life. With the metaphor of a pantry filled with conserved suffering of the past, Svetlana opened up ways to realize one's freedom to choose whether or not one wants to address such topics or keep them in the pantry for now. Elena's references to a closed door and an armor has widened this imagery and offered a figurative language for the processes that may lead to cutting off and locking up certain aspects of life. Her metaphors also illustrate the interpersonal significance of such internal processes, as it became much more difficult to establish friendships in her childhood through this armor. Alexej uses a metaphor to distinguish himself from Kazakhstan, both culturally and hereditarily. While the image of cats and pigs initially evoked resistance in me, it provides a window to a better understanding of the processes of distinguishing himself from others narratively. These metaphors altogether contributed to a more in-depth understanding of mechanisms and implications of transgenerational traumatization in the widest sense of the word. Seen as a language that has the potential to give a figurative expression to the unsayable, metaphors have proven to be important aspects of narrative analysis.

Concerning victimization which I have chosen as a third lens of analysis, I noticed quite significant differences between narratives, emerging from their very different contexts and biographies. In most narratives, victimization was implicit, while made explicit only in the cases of Svetlana and Katharina who brought such a broader sociohistorical view along with them. In the narratives of Tanja, Sasha, and Elena, where processes of *cutoff* from their families' histories in the Soviet Union are dominating their narrative, victimization can be seen as a blocked process that inhibits personal healing and familial, as well as collective processes of mourning. Alexej gives an implicit, yet a graspable indication of the effects of victimization in interpersonal relationships. Svetlana and Katharina engage quite differently with the topic of victimization. Svetlana softens the borders between victim and perpetrator by taking her family system as an example of the complexity of violence in and

through the Soviet Union, particularly in the context of the second world war. Nevertheless, she believes that the acknowledgment of collective victimization channels the unsayability of experiences German-Russians and their families had to make in the Soviet Union in the past century. I perceive a tension between ownership of experience and imprints of victimization which results from a strong presence of a sense of victimhood in her childhood which in turn remains a formative story to her. This manifests in various sequences of her narration, where she identifies her family history as the root cause for unexplainable illness, inner disturbances, and personality traits. In the frame of her narrative, the tension between ownership and imprints of victimization remains unintegrated and raises questions on how this tension may be overcome.

With ownership of trauma, the whole topic shifts toward an individualized, modern understanding of transgenerational traumatization, while an acknowledgment of imprints through past traumatization is based in an energetic view, one that perceives all existence as "part and parcel of the larger relationality that, in turn, is ultimately a temporary manifestation of the primal energetic Oneness of all beings" (Echavarría 2014, 61). From a transrational perspective, a way to integrate this tension would go beyond both tendencies by acknowledging a plurality of truths and narratives, while re-integrating them with a spiritual, systemic understanding of relationality. In contrast to Svetlana, Katarina shifts away from her own experience and assesses German-Russians in Germany who tend to develop a passive attitude through this victimization. This is precisely what motivates her to take the reins in her hand by educating the young generation about their history.

## 8.2. Implications

My engagement with the narratives in light of my research question has led to several implications. First and foremost, regarding a transgenerational trauma perspective, I perceive certain social and ideological consequences of such perspective, particularly when enmeshed within a status of victimization which leads to a powerful position, as in Svetlana's case, or a need to take action, as in Katharina's case. The pitfall of a perspective of transgenerational traumatization is that it generally fails to differentiate micro-histories, as it tends to anthropologize collectives and attribute a certain experience of suffering to, in this case, German-Russians. This tendency stands diametric to what I have found across a small base of narratives which indicate a rather diverse collection of meaning-making systems and cannot be representative for all German-Russians.

Any allegation of a collective form of traumatization of a particular collective, therefore, may have performative character and rather constitute what it claims to describe, much more so as we see victimization and the collective aspects of transgenerational traumatization as social labels. This insight brings me back to Brubaker's critique of 'groupism' (Brubaker 2004). While he explicitly refers to ethnicity, the essentializing danger of social categories extends to victimization and transgenerational traumatization alike.

Another pitfall lies in its proximity to victimization which I define as a socially constructed image of self that arises in consequence of a 'trauma', in the sense of wound. Victimization tends to lead toward strong social positions that rely on a certain moral superiority (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 254), yet can also express an unspeakable sequence of experience, as Svetlana suggests. This also relates to the blockages that are present in the narratives of Tanja, Sasha, and Elena, in the cases of which their family histories lack such expression. In contrast, for Katharina, victimization appears like an excuse to draw back from society and remain unrelated to society and the political system specifically. In any way, victimization is a socially constructed label that affects social systems in their entirety.

For Peace Studies, therefore, the relevance of transgenerational traumatization lies in its acknowledgment as socially constructed systems of meaning for some, but not necessarily for others. In some cases, transformation, recovery, and eventual closure are needed, while in other cases an acknowledgment of their own personal lived histories is paramount, so that the individual can enter into authentic relationships with one another that are not unconsciously dictated by a distant past but by presence in the here and now.

Through engaging with time and temporal interpretations of the co-researchers, it has become evident that dealing with these topics is a profoundly individual endeavor. Some may have grown up surrounded by traumatization, others may not be in a position to face these topics at the moment. Time is not always right for such topics, and for some, they may remain a silent shadow throughout their life. Still for others, transgenerational traumatization may not even be relevant at all. Whether someone decides to face trauma, especially one which is not directly their own, is therefore a personal decision. Still, we shall keep in mind the systemic view that feeds this thesis which assumes continuous and reciprocal interrelation between individual and system. Hence, when a single individual is affected by trauma, this influences his or her family system which in turn has effects on the community.

From this in-depth engagement with narratives, I have learned that "the capacity of people to heal and 'restory' their identities and relationships requires more than the rule of law expressed as a remote bureaucratic

concern" (Lederach 2005, 145), manifest for example in receiving new 'Germanized' identities in the 1990s. This procedure may be seen as a symbolic welcoming home of the German-Russian migrants in Germany. Nevertheless, it also carries a connotation of the request to suppress aspects of their past that differ from German dominant culture, such as their name. Instead of such formal procedures, with all of their multiplicity in meaning, Lederach expresses:

> Healing requires proximity that touches the web of community life, which includes both the recent events and the lived histories of a community. The locus of the initiative is therefore placed in the context of actual relationships and community (Lederach 2005, 145).

The process of Narrative Research has been an embracing of such proximity, both in eliciting knowledge that is known together (*con-scientia*) and in destabilizing knowledge that has been the basis of our very socialization.

## 8.3. Recommendations

Any assumption of transgenerational traumatization must respect the individual meaning-makings that are located underneath an imagination of the collective. While both some of the interviews and history discourses indicate that German-Russians had indeed collectively been exposed to a structural form of violence in the Soviet Union, the formative stories for individuals may diverge from such an assumption. Certainly, this might be a result of processes of *cutoff*, but with such intimacy, I am entering realms that will need more attention by the individuals who themselves are affected by such cutoff. This touches the core of Elicitive Conflict Work, which understands itself as diametric to prescriptive, externally imposed diagnoses and approaches to conflict transformation, and instead orients itself on the needs of the people involved.

My findings are a decent reminder of the need to develop a sensitive attitude when facilitating conflict transformation in certain communities where forms of transgenerational traumatization are assumed or even expressed. As a main theoretical underpinning of my engagement with the legacies of family histories in the Soviet Union, groupness needs to be seen as a multilayered process of identification that touches persons to very different extents. Where transgenerational trauma might be formative for one person, it might have little to no relevance for the meaning in another person's life at the moment.

This leads me to another aspect that calls for an acknowledgment of the "constitutive power of one's personal and collective memories in defining.

shaping and transforming identity" (Kidron 2003, 513). Drawing from Brubaker's assessment of the implications of a critique of groupness, I identify an important parallel between my research process and his suggestion to recognize the role of organizations (Brubaker 2004, 19). While engaging with sociopolitical organizations that claim to represent concerns, interests, and *the* history of German-Russians, engaging with individual narratives has softened the image that has been produced by these organizations.

In shifting towards a critical understanding of transgenerational traumatization, both researchers and peace practitioners are faced with the importance to develop a sensitivity to the framing of the past through historical discourse and remembrance culture. Are accounts of history rather inclusive and display multiple truths or do they marginalize certain voices and thereby establish an order of discourse?

## 8.4. ...for no question is in isolation...

From the above reflections, I am approaching answers to my research questions. The primary and guiding research question asks: 'In what ways are German-Russians living in Germany today affected by their families' experiences in the Soviet Union?'

I have encountered what first seems as contradictory ways of meaning-making which ran against my first assumption of a collective form of transgenerational traumatization, obtained via the study of discourse and produced knowledge. For five of the six interviewees, access to their family experiences in the Soviet Union was denied or neglected for long times. The absence of family versions of history within the families needs to be seen in a broader process of migration and the wish to 'integrate' into an imagined German dominant society. Marit Cremer, affiliated with Memorial e.V., concluded in her recent study of second-generation German-Russians- that experiences of exclusion have been reproduced in Germany, so that people applied diverse coping mechanisms, ranging from social withdrawal, to remaining in a Russian-speaking network, to over-assimilation, particularly regarding raising their children (Cremer 2018, 40).

For Tanja and Katharina, their families' needs to integrate overshadowed important aspects of their sense of identity and belonging. While Katharina has embarked on a journey to recover parts of herself, Tanja experiences a cycle of being cut off, both from the past and from her family who does not want to talk about their experiences in the Soviet Union in the context of this research project.

Bowen's phenomenon of *cutoff* is significant in this context. Baker and Gippenreiter, in their analysis of legacies of the Great Purge in Russian

society, have early underlined this phenomenon and the need to study its effects on society:

> When deeply hidden secrets and the shames of the past, as well as access to knowledge and understanding of historical events, are "cut off" from succeeding generations, there may indeed be significant impact on societal functioning, on the ability of that society to care for its members, to generate effective leadership, and to keep a principled course in wider international political and environmental arenas (Baker and Gippenreiter 1998, 423).

This becomes even more relevant with the ongoing diversification that accompanies migration. People from different backgrounds are coming together with all their historical baggage and create new forms of societies, third places. If these new, hybrid forms are built on different processes of cutoff, however, I believe that questions of identity, traumatization, and victimization might become more salient than they appear today. Seen in the context of the biographies of interviewees who have produced this study, I realize that five of them were born in countries of the former Soviet Union and experienced the process of migration to Germany, while Tanja is the only one who was born in Germany, and at the same time appears to struggle most with questions of belonging and identity on an emotional level. This, again, shall not be seen as representative case from which larger assumptions can be derived. It does, however, provide a window into understanding Tanja's struggles with residues of her family history.

Another way the interviewees convey meanings of their families' histories in the Soviet Union is by use of representations. This tendency shines through in my analysis of languages of the unsayable where national labels form a cornerstone of a quest for belonging. In some cases, like for Svetlana, Elena, and Sasha, these representations are converging with intrafamilial dynamics that arise from 'transnational' marriages. With one parent Russian and the other German, the confusion is multiplied when seen in the light of dynamics of historical traumatization and victimization, as Svetlana narrates. Sasha's account is highly complex, as he sees himself cut off from history both through the silence of his father and the loss of his mother, which is increased by the cutoff from, and anonymity of, his biological father. He is assuming that his father is affected by forms of traumatization, but re-orients himself away from the past in the Soviet Union toward a 'narrative' of belonging to German society and culture. Similar mechanisms work in Alexej's narrative, where vivid childhood memories are overshadowed by a turn away from Kazakhstan in spatial terms, strengthened by the affirmation of historically being of German origin. In cases where 'narrative' relates to German heritage, family histories in the Soviet Union are attributed little to no meaning at all. These dynamics lay open that the interviewees are in processes of dynamic

positioning within a discursive field of power, identity, and language, where representations of history can be located. I hereby refer to the triangle of Cultural Studies (Marchart 2008, 34) which acknowledges that cultural constructions of social identities are embedded in power structures. In such a discursive field, 'culture' is seen both as the source of meaning that feeds into the articulation of identities, but also as a tool through which this articulation takes place (Marchart 2008, 33).

In the case of Svetlana who has been socialized in stories of traumatization and victimization, the effects of her family's experiences have been much more tangible, encompassing all fields of her life. This leads me to the second question which is depending on the meaning-makings that have been expressed in response to the first question. The second guiding question asks: 'What, if any, do they perceive as legacies of transgenerational traumatization in their own lives?'

Katharina who is in the process of discovering such topics draws a connection between what she heard from a friend who researches transgenerational traumatization among German-Russians (Cremer 2018) and typical behaviors in her own family. She identifies the tendency of her mother to be extraordinarily concerned about feeding her children and always keeping the fridge well-stocked as a residue of the experiences of hunger in the Soviet Union. Svetlana draws many of such connections. She mentions that her general interest in German-Russian histories began when she was overwhelmed by unexplainable sadness during specific periods of the year and began connecting it to death dates of family members. She refers to disturbances in her sexuality as effects of her grandmother's experience of rape which softened when she learned about this experience and entered into imagined conversations with her deceased ancestor. An unexplainable illness that almost took her eyesight represents, to Svetlana, an unspoken request to look at the past. Moreover, she recounts several situations of getting in her way, such as screwing up or getting late to job interviews or writing applications that serve to not get a scholarship. This, she believes, is part of a larger tendency among German-Russians to make themselves small, to subdue to a higher force, and lack the ability to stand up for themselves.

Again, in dependence on answers to the previous research questions, the last guiding question reads 'What are their strategies to integrate and transform these legacies and how do these strategies respond to individual needs but also shape the wider public ethos?'

This question has been inspired by Lederach's acknowledgment of temporality and his call to restory the past, by walking between memory and potentiality (Lederach 2005, 148). Guided by this question, the larger direction of this thesis is itself such an attempt to restory the past by providing space for young German-Russians to express their meaning-making systems, thereby

revealing what they perceive as current disparities. It is in this space that new perspectives emerge which challenge the official 'truths' altogether and thereby question established theories and allow for walking into a space 'in-between' certain imaginations of communities. This research attitude is addressing not only

> [...] implications and challenges of healing at the level of individuals affected, but also how responses to trauma and healing can be conceptualized as wider social processes. This is exactly what is meant by "renegotiating history and identity," for it attends to the ways that historic trauma connected with specific violent events forms and shapes the identity of individuals and of whole communities, and how those events can be channeled toward constructive engagement that responds to individual needs but seeks to shape the wider public and even national ethos (Lederach 2005, 145).

For Svetlana, a central channel to integrate and transform her energies that emerge from these legacies is to write. In blogging, prose, and poetry, she addresses multigenerational themes that accompany German-Russian histories, often with a systemic view that reflects upon the wider ethos and her position therein.

Katharina stresses a need for public acknowledgment, through which German-Russian histories could re-establish place, voice, and story for German-Russians. She has a particular concern for the younger generation who are often cut off from their family histories. Hence, Katharina calls for including German-Russian history into the study of German history, particularly in history books at school. Alexej expresses the same need, based on his experience of having to explain his story over and over again. Besides calling for an integration of German-Russian history into the school curricula, Katharina believes that youth work offers another access, particularly in transcultural settings that include people from different origins with different histories. In such settings, working on topics like commemorative culture would build the foundation for a society that integrates the past that lies before, and in most cases, between them. Maybe less conscious but still in touch with the wider public ethos, Elena, with the ambition to train as a Gestalt therapist, is carrying the potentiality of supporting others on their journeys, and Sasha who is a trained educator on pre-school level is a pillar in the development of children's personalities. Regardless of whether and how we see the diverse biographies of the interviewees as part of a process of restorying or not, acknowledging the effects of their journeys reconnects us to the creativity that restorying requires:

> To restory is not to repeat the past, attempt to recreate it exactly as it was, nor act as if it did not exist. It does not ignore the generational future nor does it position itself to control it. Embracing the paradox of relationship in the present, the capacity to restory imagines both the past and the future and provides space for the narrative voice to create. As such, the art of imaging the past that lies before us holds close the deep belief that the creative act is possible. To live between memory and potentiality is to live permanently in a creative space, pregnant with the unexpected (Lederach 2005, 149).

Inspired by the explicit courses of action to recover their narrative concerning German-Russian history, I summarize that dealing with the German-Russian past in Germany itself is seen as necessary among the co-researchers. The engagement with different interpretations of the meanings of family histories in the Soviet Union has given a taste of what Dietrich identifies as

> [...] the central question for transrational peace research and conflict transformation: how can destructive, violent narratives be retold in a new manner so that the relations, places in the world, and their own history heal? (Dietrich 2012, 264).

The ways with which this concern can be approached through courses of action are manifold, with Svetlana moving in the art of writing and Katharina focusing on transcultural youth work. Nevertheless, through simply opening a space for micro-histories to be voiced, as I have attempted through this thesis, dominant narratives of collective suffering are destabilized. Re-telling, therefore, entails cherishing the diversity of individual narratives, imbued with meaning that is fluid and non-permanent. Altogether, these strategies are expressions of spaces 'in-between' which are not only 'in-betweens' of national labels, but also of temporalities,

> [...] where difference is neither One nor the Other but, something else besides, in-between – find their agency in a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present (Bhabha 2004, 219).

With these words of Homy Bhabha, I wish to lastly underline the relationality of the past that affects interpersonal relations which are the very screen of peace and conflict. Emanating from Lederach's notion of a past that lies before us, we may well see that it is also a *past that lies between us.*

# 9. Conclusion

Engaging Narrative Research, to me, has bridged collective and individual spheres of narrating stories we live by. It has also connected what has often been urged to be separated – academic research and my personal biography. On a personal level, the engagement with different stories and their intrinsic meaning for the narrators has widened my perception and brought me a little closer to parts of myself that I have once silenced. My research encounters with both family members and the co-researchers have allowed me to enter spaces where I could witness not only their expression of meaning but also processes of re-storying in the making. Unlike other journeys I have undertaken which have often left me with a more intense longing than before, this research was an inner journey of transformation in which I found a personal acceptance of the past that lies between us.

As I have been in contact with the co-researchers throughout the whole research process, some of them also shared with me what our interviews have left in them. Elena, in an informal follow-up conversation, has described a second Ayahuasca experience after our interview where she encountered a feeling of wholeness and acceptance. She told me that she had been influenced by a feeling of being incomplete or insufficient which was the main reason that she had been struggling to peak behind and open her inner closed door. With a smile on her face, she underlined how the relationship to her mother has improved throughout the past years of dedication to self-discovery.

Svetlana has also shared her reflections on the interview with me by acknowledging her inner strength to face this large and difficult topic in her life. With this courage, she says that she has found relief and a sense of control over her life. As the days after our interview went by, she witnessed a heaviness as she felt that her turning towards the dead ones has made her lose sight of the matters of the living. She told me that it has been overwhelming for herself to give these topics too much space. I strongly resonate with this, feeling emotionally rather exhausted at the end of my writing process. Still, ending this research sparks a feeling of homecoming to a place where I cherish the stories of my family, rather than being ashamed of our background. Now I look at my family's stories differently, acknowledging their presence while still allowing them to go, to make space for new stories.

Retrospectively, restorying the past comes full circle with acknowledging that I am "the answer to questions that rose blown into the future a generation ago" (Abebe and Saha 2015, 26). But I am also the introduction to a new chapter that carries in itself the potentiality of healing a long distant past within myself by entering the creative space which Lederach locates between memory and potentiality (Lederach 2005, 149). To me, the eliciting,

listening, and working through personal narratives of the meanings of family histories in the Soviet Union was in itself expression of this creative space. I found that each person and each family has their own unique experience and story which affects them all to different extents. The unsayable space in the 'in-between' of migration, for many interviewees, me included, has left scars that have been confronting them with questions of social belonging. But if we take a leap of faith and trust in the emergence of the 'in-between' of countless transcultural encounters, all shaped by diverse, often traumatic stories, then we may re-interpret this unsayable space as an empowering space of creativity and potentiality. The birthplace of the here and now. With the metaphor of walking backward into the future, I realize the importance of looking at the past, working through it, and thereby re-storying it, so that the steps of the present become more grounded on our journey back to the future. This metaphor is lent from energetic cosmovisions of Eastern Africa that have touched and transformed me, but it also appears as a theme that runs across different cultural interpretations of time. Walter Benjamin, in his essay *On the Concept of History*, describes his encounter with the *Angelus Novus*, a painting by Paul Klee:

> There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned towards the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us, he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm (Benjamin 2006, 392).

Benjamin's interpretation of the Angelus Novus conveys the impact of the past that keeps the angel of history faced toward it. Yet, the storm that drives the angel backwards into the future is said to blow from Paradise, and identified by Benjamin as progress. I would not necessarily agree with Benjamin to understand the storm as progress, because this springs from a linear understanding of time. Rather, it may well be that this storm is the inevitable passing of time, reminding us of our mortality.

My research took me to spaces in between, where what happens can only maintain itself with a ghost, as Derrida says. In exploring the specters of life through a hauntological lens, I feel invited to learn to

> [...] live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But *with them*. [...] And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations. [...] It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born (Derrida 1994, xviii).

These ghosts are not just the in-betweens of dualisms and temporalities (Bhabha 2004, 219) but also the ghosts of a long distant and sometimes very graspable past. Hence, living *with* ghosts requires respect for both temporal directions, our ancestors and our descendants. This is part and parcel of the circular understanding of time which has guided my research. Living with ghosts also implies a leap of faith to acknowledge and accept their presence, irrespective of how it may look like. As the diversity of narratives has shown, everyone, at least all of the co-researchers including myself, lives with ghosts in the sense of *in-betweens*. A crucial step of this journey lies in facing the fears that seemingly separate us from these ghosts. I dearly hope that this research has contributed to a softening of such fears and therefore also potentially opens a perspective that transrational peace research proposes as well – to understand the illusion of separation as the main reason for conflict.

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**Personal Interviews and Notes**

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Sasha, personal interview on 02 August 2018. Lübeck, Germany. 59 min.
Svetlana, personal interview on 20 August 2018. Hamburg, Germany. 147 min.
Tanja, personal interview on 07 August 2018. Lübeck, Germany. 58 min.
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The journey of this book starts with irritations about belonging, silenced family histories and imposed changes of names. Setting sail, Christina Pauls explores narratives of second generation German-Russians living in Germany. She wants to understand how family histories in the Soviet Union still affect the descendants of minorities today. From the shores of assumptions of collective traumatization, the route unfolds through the lenses of temporality, unsayability and victimization. Through the storms of legacies of transgenerational traumatization Christina Pauls explores, together with six research partners, ways of re-storying violences of the past within an extended present. Eventually, at the horizon we can forefeel a destination where it becomes more comfortable to sit with these family histories and share a cup of tea while listening to them.