

## Editorial

# Crossing Borders: Representations of Ukrainian Diasporas

In writing about Ukrainians on the move, Yuriy Bilan argued that “In Ukraine, external migration is not a situational phenomenon, but a historical and traditional one.”<sup>1</sup> The first migrants started to cross the borders of their land for different economic, political, social, and cultural reasons. They all have had to adapt to new surroundings and simultaneously deal with their past: either manifesting it or silencing, transforming or forgetting it. In this issue, we claim that once an emigrant crosses a border of his or her native land he or she is engaged in a permanent process of ordering his or her former or new identities, experiences, and memories. Speaking about an immigrant as a mirror phenomenon, we will concentrate on processes of othering and negotiating differences. When a border(s) is crossed, it stays inside the minds and bodies of migrants.

This volume of papers aims to tackle Ukrainian Diaspora while applying Cultural Border Studies lenses toward problems of representing Ukrainian experiences in new cultural, political, and economic environments. As is known, representation is a term to designate the ways in which texts of culture structure images of the world. Its constructivist nature was developed by structuralists in the 1970s and led to the creation of so called typical images of the group. Ann Rigney noted that “‘representing the group’ through language is not only a (more or less) accurate reflection of existing states of affairs, but also a way calling that group’s identity into being.”<sup>2</sup> That is precisely what is happening to groups of Ukrainian migrants abroad: only through representation of their experience of crossing borders they can create the connectedness with the homeland and with the similar experience of migrants from other countries. This process not only creates the feeling of being a part of a globalized world but also helps to identify new types of discursive mixed identities such as the Ukrainian diasporic identity.

Later, post-structuralists placed emphasis on the ‘limits of representation’ noting that “experience continuously escapes the discursive forms that try to structure it” and that “the power of representation is limited by experience itself.”<sup>3</sup> This idea helps to digest the problematic nature of narrating Ukrainian migrants’ experience of crossing the borders. Even if migrants do this voluntarily, the decision to leave the homeland is always controversial. Moreover, in historical perspective, leaving the home country is more often forced by external factors such as war conflicts, pressure from totalitarian regimes, persecutions of different nature, religious and gender issues, etc.

Immigration is not just a simple change of dwelling, but it is associated with disorientation, feeling of loss, and trauma. It explains that crossing a border is not a momentum event but a permanent process of re-thinking and re-representing a migrant's past, present and future. At this point, we will look at a border as a constitutive element of the migrant's self.

In a traditional way, borders divide states and nations and they have been depicted as separating lines on maps. For ages these territorial lines were treated as more or less static divisions marked with specific material objects: natural, such as rivers, oceans, mountains, etc.; and/ or manmade – walls, fences, trenches, etc. But at the end of the 20th century, the new discipline Border Studies shifted the attention from “actual borderline, its geography, its delimitations and demarcations, to cover a variety of forms and types of social boundaries, both in their material and symbolic dimension.”<sup>4</sup> Nowadays, scholars interpret borders from a dynamic perspective rather as bordering, an ongoing process of emergence, becoming, crossing, waiting, and in Robert J. Kaiser's words “in many ways event-driven.”<sup>5</sup> Borders are understood as liminal zones that “should also be considered as a location of contact, the negotiation of cultural values and of relational identity.”<sup>6</sup> All in all, an event of crossing a border legitimizes a border itself but also leads to re-approaching old and new socio-cultural norms, codes, patterns of behavior, and re-negotiating a migrant's identity which functions as a space of encounter and intersections. In this process of bordering and ordering different signifiers, a migrant has to re-approach among other aspects the very performativity of their own minds and bodies and establish a permanently updating set of repetitive practices through which those signifiers can materialize as things in the world and can cause changes. In other words, a migrant needs a language that would function as a form of social action.

Questions concerning Ukrainian migrants have already been at the center of global scholarly attention. Thus, to name just a few milestones, in 1988, Dmytro Blažejovskij started to analyze religious aspects of the Ukrainian Catholic Diaspora;<sup>7</sup> in 1995, Ann Lencyk Pawliczko shifted the focus to demographic and sociological aspects of the homeland and its Ukrainian Diaspora;<sup>8</sup> in 2003, Vic Satzewich analyzed historical aspects in his classical monograph *Ukrainian Diaspora*;<sup>9</sup> in 2008, Lindy Anne Ledohowski published the outcomes of her PhD research in Ukrainian-Canadian literature;<sup>10</sup> in 2015, Natalia Khanenko-Friesen explored folk traditions developed in the Ukrainian Diaspora and in Ukraine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>11</sup> etc. These academic publications have chosen the Ukrainian Diasporas as a main subject of their inquiry while only sporadically looking at themes concerning borders and border crossings.

In order to shed more light on numerous connections between migration and bordering, our publications argue that in those diverse representations which Ukrainian Diasporas have developed through centuries a border(s) has stayed

visible on different levels and often the border itself has contributed to the creation of specific language practices and strategies of their representations. Our volume identifies such encounters, making visible the instances and moments of cultural exchange between Ukrainian Diasporas, Ukraine and those countries which Ukrainian migrants have chosen as their new homes. Thus, the main contribution of our volume to the field is a bordercrossing vector of analyzing cultural representations/limits of representations of Ukrainian migrants in diachronic and synchronic perspectives. For the future we need a better understanding of the role of Ukrainian Diasporas in cultural exchange processes between the west and the east, the north and the south. It would be very productive to trace the blends between migrants' past socio-spatial norms and future space which is always "an open potentiality"<sup>12</sup> and borders are always "events of becoming."<sup>13</sup>

The six articles compiled in this volume are arranged in two sections which highlight different thematic aspects. The first includes essays in which the imagery of a Ukrainian woman migrant intersects with established stereotypes, old and new cultural norms, expectations of both migrants and communities they left as well as those they entered. The second part consists of three papers in which authors give insights into the lives of Ukrainian Diaspora communities in Georgia, Germany, and Canada.

The first section of the volume explores challenges of migration through the eyes of women artists belonging to different waves and generations of migrants. Marina Lewycka and Marusya Bociurkiw were born in the families of Ukrainian refugees after World War II. They represent Ukrainian Diasporas in British and Canadian literatures and cultures respectively. In contrast, Anna Kosarewska and Lia Dostlieva are two faces of the present day flow of Ukrainian migrants to the West, but if the first follows the patterns of 'a nomadic-becoming woman,' the second was displaced from her home in the Donbas region and positions herself and her works as 'Others' in European cultural discourse.

The contributors working with these personalities and their artistic representations of the selves (most of analyzed works include transparent autobiographical references) and cultural representations of Ukrainians actually prove that "every perception of national identity is implicitly or explicitly gendered."<sup>14</sup> Thus, in the opening essay "Marina Lewycka, Women's Work, and the Figure of the Ukrainian Woman as Economic Migrant," Heather Fielding uses Anca Parvulescu's ideas about east-west economic migration as a "traffic in women's work" to analyze stereotypes about the Ukrainian woman as hypersexual and hyper-materialist in Marina Lewycka's two novels *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* and *Various Pets Alive and Dead*. The researcher claims that these novels connect the stereotype of the Ukrainian woman migrant to anxieties about contemporary global capitalism after the financial collapse of 2008.

In her essay "Ukrainian Canadian B/Orders: Culinary Remembrances and Queer

Bordercrossings in Marusya Bociurkiw's *Food Was Her Country*" Astrid Fellner discusses narratives by Ukrainian Canadian queer writer Marusya Bociurkiw, showing that culinary remembrances in her texts figure as powerful symbols of ethnicity, crossing various borders of nationality, ethnic belonging, and sexuality. Zooming in on her most recent work *Food Was Her Country: The Memoir of a Queer Daughter* (2018), she argues that Bociurkiw's ethnic culinary narratives can be read as queer border narratives, which engage the complex narratives of home, belonging, and crossing boundaries. Astrid Fellner places this Ukrainian Canadian writer both within the tradition of ethnic Canadian writings and also transcultural queer writings.

Furthermore, Iuliia Lashchuk's essay "Bord(h)ers. Why gender matters in migration and art?" is an attempt at dialogue with Heather Fielding on the representation of contemporary Ukrainian female migrants only as 'hypersexual and hyper-materialist' workers and European established stereotypes of Ukrainian women as clearing and caring staff. The scholar analyzes the pull and push factors behind the migration of Ukrainian female artists to Europe, Poland to be precise. She identifies contradictions and proves the ambiguity of Ukrainian women representations abroad. Among artistic self-representations, the researcher distinguishes two types. The first type is those who are migrating by their own will and for whom bordercrossing is simply a style of life. In their performances and art projects this choice is represented as a specific type of enriching experience that connects them to global problems and makes them citizens of the world. One such artist is Anna Kosarewska. Another pattern of border thinking is found in artistic projects by Lia Dostlieva as reactions to her forced loss of the homeland. She explores different types of borders among which is a conventional border between human and animal bodies as a metaphor of constant transformation. In the second part of her paper Iuliia Lashchuk presents her own art-research project *Bord(h)ers* in which she maps Ukrainian female migration aims, roots and languages they develop to become heard and visible in multi-voiced European socio-cultural discourse.

All in all, three papers explore women's writings and strategies of representing women's experiences in exile. These voices challenge the established stereotypes about Ukrainian women migrants. They also look for specific discursive potential of their artistic languages to overcome the limits of representations. All the cases illustrate well the transgressive nature of border literature and art.

The following three papers mainly deal with temporal-spatial aspects of Ukrainian migration while applying several key ideas from Border Studies theory. Thus, the term *contact zone* was coined in works of Mary Louise Pratt,

*Contact zone refer(s) to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually evolving conditions of coercion,*

*radical inequality, and intractable conflict... By using the term “contact”, I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters [which] ... emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other.<sup>15</sup>*

Ultimately, the relations of power in contact zones are asymmetrical, so marginal ethnical groups / groups of immigrants have to find ways to legitimize their past and negotiate their present hybrid culture and identities mainly through interaction and improvisation. Alongside this, the result of prolonged contact may be characterized with the help of the term “borderland” offered by Gloria Anzaldúa, who writes that

*borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition.<sup>16</sup>*

Within years the idea of borderlands has become very productive, and borderlands are treated widely as “zones of cultural overlap characterized by a mixing of cultural styles.”<sup>17</sup>

With attention to above-mentioned theories Olga Dorokhina’s paper “Borderlands of Georgian Ukrainians” both clarifies those concepts and also introduces an idea of “cultural borderlands” as a type of third hybrid culture created by communities of migrants. She traces historical routes, reasons and waves of mass migration of Ukrainians to Georgia since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The researcher identifies the ways in which Georgian Ukrainians manifest their ancestry, how this community is integrated into modern Georgian society, and which institutional structures are promoting Ukrainian culture. Comparatively, Kateryna Kobchenko presents an overview of Ukrainian emigration in West Germany in its development after WWII during two periods – first as *Displaced Persons* (1945-early 1950s) and then as the exile group in the Federal Republic of Germany. Her contribution focuses on the Ukrainian transnational community’s cultural self-representation as well as the peculiarities of Germany as a country of residence. She claims that the Ukrainian community’s existence was centered on political activities, and the cultural and intellectual aspects of its life in exile formed the basic precondition for its self-identification as a national group. In the last essay “Overcoming the boundaries: strategies of cooperation among Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian diaspora groups in responding to Ukrainian crisis. Case of Canada and Turkey” Milana Nikolko and Fethi Kurtiy Şahin examine the dynamics and fluctuations of the Diaspora’s symbolic boundaries by studying the cooperation between Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar diaspora groups in Canada and Turkey. The comparison draws on representative examples of Diaspora reactions and collective actions during the unfolding of the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014-2016.

They argue that the complicated ornament of ethnic collective traumas, caused by Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and the recent crisis, fuel Diasporas efforts to recalculate their separate goals and to proceed, even temporarily, with a common agenda. The authors conclude that by overcoming traditional boundaries, Diaspora groups are devising new collective strategies to achieve common goals as a response to the crisis in the homeland.

By and large, this volume has carved out just a few cases of theoretical and practical interaction between Ukrainian Diaspora representations and bordercrossings as one of the constituent factors of migration itself. We do hope it will pave way for further interdisciplinary research on the problem and facilitate the ordering of the Ukrainian experience constituted in and by its relations to old and new homelands, other states, and other Diaspora groups.

This volume is the outcome of interactions between members of different countries. Based on a collaborative project between the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, and Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Ukraine, these articles are the results of an international workshop that took place in May 2019. During this workshop, participants from Ukraine, Georgia, Germany, Poland, Italy, Great Britain, and Canada discussed a wide range of questions. The essays included here are selected papers of this workshop. The editors of this volume would like to thank contributors for their collaboration and their willingness to make revisions. Our thanks also go to our publisher *Euxeinos* and to the editors of the journal series for including this volume in their series. Our volume of essays is the product of yet another fruitful cross-university research project, which continues to be a testimony to the importance of transnational collaboration between Ukrainian Diasporas, their old and new homelands.

**by Tetiana Ostapchuk**

## Endnotes

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- 3 Ibid., p.416.
- 4 Sevastianov, Sergei V., Line, Jussi P., and Kireev, Anton A., ed. 2015. *Introduction to Border Studies*. Valdivostok: Dlanauka, p. 7.
- 5 Kaise, Robert J. *Preformativity and the Eventfulness of Bordering Practices*. In: *A Companion to Border Studies*. Ed. by Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan. 2012. Blackwell Publishing, p. 523.
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- 12 Kaise, Robert J. *Preformativity*, p. 523.
- 13 Ibid., p. 524.
- 14 Beller, Manfred and Leerssen, Joep, ed. 2007. *Imagology*, p. 330.
- 15 Brady, Mary Pat. 2002. *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, pp. 6 – 7.
- 16 Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands: The new mestiza = La frontera*. San Francisco. Aunt Lute Books, p. 5.
- 17 Donnan, H. 2015. *Anthropology of Borders*. In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier. Amsterdam, p. 1290.