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Timm Beichelt, Susann Worschech (eds.)

TRANSNATIONAL UKRAINE?

Networks and Ties that Influence(d) Contemporary Ukraine

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Acknowledgements

This book arose from a conference in November 2015 that was based on a challenging idea. Only shortly after the Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, the start of the war in Eastern Ukraine, scholars from various disciplines gathered at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), just a few steps away from the German-Polish border. Against this scenery of a symbolically charged border, about twentyfive scholars discussed how to conceptualize and analyze contemporary Ukraine. Our ambition was to acknowledge the huge and courageous societal change within that country, but also to include the multifold and ambivalent external links of a space that by definition seems to be a borderland: «україна».

In this context, the idea was born to edit some of the papers presented at the conference under the heading "Transnational Ukraine". We chose transnationalism as an analytical starting point because of a core research area at European University Viadrina on the interplay of borders and orders in contemporary Europe (https://www.borders-in-motion.de/). Transnationalist perspectives seem to be appropriate in constellations in which nation states and their borders retain importance, but are challenged and transgressed by actors, practices, and ideas. The conference led us to the insight that Ukraine represents a paradigmatic case when thinking about the porosity of borders in a world where some actors have more powers or resources than others to question these borders.

The conference was co-financed by the German Association for East European Studies and European University Viadrina. We like to thank both institutions greatly for having facilitated that debate. In particular, we want to express our special thanks to Ulrike Sapper and Gabriele Freitag for their excellent preparation and organization of the conference. We really enjoyed this great cooperation.

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Part I:
Introduction

Transnational Networks in and around Ukraine: Theories and Practices

Timm Beichelt and Susann Worschech

The text deals with different objects and perspectives of transnationalism research and their attribution to Ukraine. Starting from a typology from Steven Vertovec, we identify three approaches to border-transgressing phenomena: socio-structural, symbolic, and practice related transnationalism. These approaches are then crossed with spatial, social, and temporal aspects of transnationalism and applied to the Ukrainian case. From this framework of analysis, several expectations with regard to the character of transnationalism in Ukraine are developed. First, we expect that migration will most likely bear the character of transmigration, which fuels a re-nationalization of identities. This means, second, that national symbols will become even more relevant, but in contested ways. Third, we expect practices of transnationalism to be fuzzy, volatile, and liquid. The chapter closes with an outlook on the other manuscripts of this book.

1. Introduction

The so-called *Revolution of Dignity* and the subsequent events in Southern and Eastern Ukraine propelled a new self-perception of Ukraine as a nation of unity and togetherness, on the one hand. On the other, the de-facto break-off process of some Donbass regions fuels a different a narrative of Ukraine as a nation between two alternative orientations: Europe or Russia. Within the first narrative, the European Union (EU), and sometimes NATO, are portrayed as guarantors of Ukrainian independence. The counter-picture presents Ukraine as an entity with limited self-determination because of the country's intertwinement with Slavonic culture and, ultimately, because of its subordination to Russian power. Both narratives of unity and bipolarity, we argue, are far too schematic to grasp the character of the huge transformation of Ukrainian society since 2014.

The contributions to this volume have the aim to break with both narratives. The manuscripts were first presented at a conference at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder (Germany) that focused on Ukraine's historical and con-

temporary interlockings. During this conference, a nuanced perspective on Ukraine during and after Euromaidan evolved. The argument was developed that Ukraine, despite its status as a nation with newly gained political independence, is characterized by multiple fragmentations and belongings that link the country—its society, its regions, its culture—to different areas and powers at different points in time. These fragmentations and belongings underline Ukraine's long-standing and multiple ties beyond its borders. In this book, the conference's findings are reformulated into the argument that contemporary Ukraine can be better understood by focusing on its transnational characteristics. Accordingly, concepts and theories of transnationalism are used to analyze a country that is not situated between two blocks but that draws its richness from roots that go beyond national categories.

For many scholars of contemporary Europe, these findings should not come as a surprise. For several decades, the political structure of Europe has been characterized as part of a postnational constellation in which nation states alone lack autonomy and are subject to both European integration and globalization (Habermas 1998). This situation was and is not a property solely of Western Europe or member states of the EU. Many sources indicate that Eastern Europe has also become a part of globalization in cultural, economic, and social terms since 1989 (Kovacs 1999; Janos 2000). Therefore, on the one hand, placing Ukraine within the context of a Europe of increasing permeability of national borders and reference areas does not constitute a scientific breakthrough.

On the other hand, at least since the rise of the inner-soviet independence movements in the late 1980s, scholarship on Ukraine has constantly referred to a national framework. Major contributions regarding post-soviet developments in Ukraine turned to issues that contrasted with the idea of an ever closer Europe as—idealistically—attributed to the European Union. Ukraine was analyzed with regard to nation building and to the dilemmas in Ukrainian-Russian relations that followed from that nation building (Wolchik & Zviglyanich 2000; Kuzio 1998; Motyl 1993). The Orange Revolution of 2004 was celebrated as a landmark that separated a Ukrainian way of transformation from most, if not all, other post-soviet transitions (Christensen et al. 2005; Karatnycky 2005). The hitherto largest protest movement of independent Ukraine highly benefitted from training and organizational support provided by Western civil society organizations. This fact was interpreted by many observers as a legitimate form of international cooperation that strengthened

Ukrainian independence vis-à-vis Russia and its ambitions of influencing Ukrainian politics (Wilson 2006; McFaul 2007).

Since Ukrainian independence, the geographic area outlined by Lviv, Prypyat, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Sevastopol, and Odessa has been characterized as a 'nation', although this 'nation' has been portrayed as an entity with varying sources, aspects, and serious ruptures. In social and economic terms, Ukraine has been analyzed as an area that is heavily interlinked with Russian history. Political developments, however, only partially reflect these cultural and economic overlaps. Political and economic elites in the EU as well as in the United States advocated a simultaneous democratization and capitalist marketization of Ukraine—a political aim that has become increasingly incompatible with the course Russia has taken since Putin's coming to power in 1999/2000.

In the years after the Orange Revolution, Ukrainian elites tried to close ranks with the West and fostered the narrative of Ukraine as an independent nation in order to facilitate Western support, following the pattern of the Central European transition countries. The argument of a coherent Ukrainian nation turned into a political tool to secure the success of democratization. It would be an interesting endeavor to analyze to what extent scholars have been part of the epistemic drift from (inherently open) democratization to (inherently teleological) nation building. We have the impression that very few experts on Ukrainian politics and its transformation have not—at one time or another—been part of the supervising business around Ukraine, its democratization and/or Western integration. Many scholars involved in this discourse are part of civil society organizations, think tanks or agencies that depend on grants from the EU, the USA or other Western governments.

However, it is not our main point to criticize scholars for an alleged lack of impartiality.[i] Politically, we sympathize with the argument that an aggressive and authoritarian Russia plays a destructive game of destabilization in Ukraine. At the same time, we also want to argue that this normative position bears the danger of an epistemological dead corner. While sympathizing with the political goals of most elites and civil society organizations, we run into the danger of overlooking important conjunctions in Ukraine. Within the context of this book, this means that while it may be politically questionable to adopt (Russian) narratives that cast doubt on the teleology of coherent nation building in Ukraine, it is scientifically necessary to insist that the heterogeneity of Ukraine may also point to different directions than a stable nation state. This heterogeneity mainly concerns Ukraine's

contemporary and historical intertwinement with Russia, but also Poland, Lithuania, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Soviet Union.

In this book, we try to replace the narratives of nation building, democratization, and capitalist marketization by perceiving contemporary Ukraine as a transnationalist entity. Applying transnationalism as a scientific paradigm is not without problems because of its inherent fuzziness and its one-concept-fits-all appeal. However, while the approach "seems to be everywhere, at least in social science" (Vertovec 2009: 1), a coherent transnational perspective on Ukraine has not really been established yet. Transnationalism generally refers to situations or processes in which borders of nation states are transcended by social activities (Pries 2010: 9). A major motivation of transnationalism studies is and was to escape the "methodological nationalism" inherent in much social science (Amelina et al. 2012). By applying categories that have been developed to analyze social practices taking place within nation states, there is a danger of tacitly taking over assumptions that are exclusively linked to nation states. One such assumption, for instance, is to imagine political activities and practices predominantly in relation to national governments or institutions that depend on central governments. In this introduction and the subsequent texts, we want to show that a more open view on political, economic and societal practices and their interrelations can further our understanding of contemporary Ukraine.

2. Transnationalism as a Tool for Regime Analysis: Three Different Methodological Perspectives

Transnationalism serves many scientific goals simultaneously. It has served as a real-world diagnosis to overcome the focus on nations (Marjanen 2009), it has been used as a political tool in order to give a voice to persons who do not fit neatly within the framework of methodological nationalism (Brettell 2003), and it has been employed as a mind-map to differentiate economic, political and societal globalization (Pries 2008). With regard to Ukraine, all these approaches seem useful and maybe even necessary. Ukraine is both less and more than a nation because of its long-term, intense and formative historical entanglements with Russia in the north, east, and south, with Poland in the west, with Romania in the southwest, and with miscellaneous empires in the past. Contemporary political processes are transnational as well. The internal refugees from the *trans-border* war in Donbas and the millions of semi-forced Ukrainian migrants heading to the EU or North America

during the post-soviet economic crises certainly deserve more attention. Hence, there is more to Ukraine's blurring of boundaries than mere globalization—in fact, the country could serve as a blueprint for societies that have for one reason or another transcended politically given borders.

Yet, how can we proceed to systematize the various approaches of transnationalism? Steven Vertovec has suggested differentiating six different "takes" on transnationalism (Vertovec 2009). The first is the most general and concerns "social formation[s] spanning borders" (ibid.: 4). This approach focuses on networks of various kinds: social, cultural, economic, and political. The strengthening of border-transgressing networks goes along with an alteration of pre-existing interactions, thus "calling into question the traditional definition of the state" (ibid.: 5). Some authors who follow this way of defining transnationalism seem to be quite confident that the evolving networks lead to new transnational communities (see some contributions in Schiffauer et al. 2005). In this case, the state would somehow be replaced by one or several alternative entities that develop or even enforce new societal rules. However, there are other authors who are more pessimistic and insist on the necessity of building up genuine transnational, international or supranational institutions in order to compensate for the loss of political steering capacities (Castells 2000; Zürn 1998).

In the second dimension, Vertovec (2009: 5) identifies transnationalism as a "type of consciousness" that is specifically linked to diasporas. Diasporas show that border transgression alone is only one necessary condition of transnationalism. Another condition is the persistence of a reference community, for example, Jewish or Armenian. While such communities are formed by social ties, there also exists a strong subjective element that perpetuates the idea of the givenness of a community. As Brubaker (2005) argues, diaspora communities often share hybrid collective identities, thus blurring boundaries. Therefore, transnationalism as consciousness goes along with terms such as identity, collective memory, and shared imagination. Insofar as identities are open and live in limited conflict with their respective environments, the term "cosmopolitanism" is used to characterize a productive approach to consciousness creation (Vertovec & Cohen 2002; Beck & Grande 2004).

Third, transnationalism can be seen as a "mode of cultural reproduction" (Vertovec 2009: 7). This take focuses on practices that are employed to create or uphold the new transnational imagined communities—to paraphrase the title of Benedict Anderson's famous book on nationalism (Anderson 1983). Such practices

consist in the memory-enriched creativity of fashion, movies, fiction, and visual arts. The digital age is held liable for the emerging intensity of the new transnational culture production. Easy access to transnational communication and networks is seen as one precondition for multiple practices of mixing elements from different cultures, leading to "syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity" (Vertovec 2009: 7). Transnationalism in this mode is therefore marked by creativity of the unexpected.

The fourth dimension of transnationalism refers to economics. Specifically, economic transnationalism is associated with corporations that operate massively beyond borders. It is therefore quite closely linked to economic globalization and its inherent transnational business companies, such as Google, Goldman Sachs and eBay. The difference from international business consists in focus: Transnational corporations have developed routines that cannot be reduced to the national origins of a company and that involve practices rooted in a "transnational capitalist class" (ibid., 8) of its own right. Economic transnationalism is driven by economic motives and comprises actors involved in petty trade, micro-transactions and temporary labor migration. In a way, the approach is used as a sociology of border-transgressing economic activities and is demarcated against the approach of global economics that deals with open financial markets, international flows of trade, and foreign investment (a scholar who uses the globalization paradigm in this sense is Scholte 2000).

Fifth, Vertovec speaks of transnationalism as a site of political engagement (Vertovec 2009: 10). This dimension refers to actors that have political aims and pursue them by operating beyond borders. Again, the dimension is best understood by thinking of competing concepts. Transnational politics are not international politics (this would be the arena of international organizations like the United Nations), and they are not supranational politics (these would involve a powerful political center like in the EU). Transnational political actors are international NGOs, but they are also the often self-claimed political representations of diasporas or other sub- and transnational social groups. All kinds of nationalisms without a given "homeland" (Brubaker 1997) can be addressed within the framework of political transnationalism. Because of the lack of a central political authority in this highly politicized field, transnationalism is closely linked to the paradigm of international governance (Rosenau & Czempiel 1992).