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A Section on Ukrainian Studies at the German Congress of Slavists

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[zprávy—kronika]

The German Congress of Slavists is the central conference of German-speaking Slavic studies. Researchers who investigate topics from the fields of literature, cultural studies, media studies, linguistics, or didactics concerning the Slavic world present the results of their studies at this event. Every three to four years, this conference takes place at a German university with a Slavic Studies department. This time the event was hosted by the Ruhr University Bochum from September 21–24, 2022, and we would like to thank the organizers for their efforts.

Within the framework of the conference, a two-part section was dedicated to the presentation of the *UNDIPUS* project. This project, entitled “(Un)Disciplined: Pluralizing Ukrainian Studies—Understanding the War in Ukraine (*UNDIPUS*)”, is a research network comprising five subprojects, four disciplines, and three locations in Germany. These are the Universities of Greifswald, Regensburg, and Giessen. Funded by the *German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)* within the funding grant for “small disciplines”, it pursues several goals. Thematically, the project was designed to understand the “frozen conflict” in Donbas(s), investigate its long foreplay and cultural dimensions, and, most importantly, the impact of the war on Ukrainian society and identity discourses. Methodologically and institutionally, its goals are pluralization, networking, and thus the consolidation of Ukrainian studies in Germany and internationally. Of particular significance for the project’s collective are the critical perspectives on the interplay between nation-building and Ukrainian studies and the attempts to “discipline” and instrumentalize them, especially in times of war. At the Bochum conference, this project and its goals were presented and discussed with colleagues.

The *UNDIPUS* project was presented at the conference as follows. Alina Strzempa and Oleksandr Zabirko, both staff members of the University of Regensburg, referred at first to overall goals of their subproject “*Poetics of Industrial Landscapes: Comparing the Donbas and Upper Silesia*”. Albeit the Donbas is now a venue of an ongoing war, its self-identification (similar to that of Upper Silesia in today’s Poland) revolves primarily around the tension between modernization and globalization. How does fictional literature react towards this tension and how does it shape it? And more importantly, how the poetics of industrial(ized) localness can be approached by literary studies? Relating to the prose of the 2010s, Strzempa und Zabirko introduced the notion of “affective landscape” as a possible theoretical framework for their future research.

In his paper “*Vatnycja in L’viv? Has’ka Shyian’s Novel Behind the Back (2019) and its Critical Reception*”, Alexander Chertenko from the University of Giessen focused on the chances and limits of an “emancipatory” construction of female subjectivity “at war” that tends to question the primacy of military masculinity and counteract a nationalization of femininity concepts. To this effect, he analyzed the discontent of (mostly conservative) Ukrainian literary critics with Has’ka Shyian’s novel, which is very much paradoxical, since, despite Shyian’s provocative depictions of the female body, her novel rather seems to confirm the model of “hegemonic masculinity”. This paradox was interpreted as a consequence of the changed cultural situation around 2019, which brought about the consolidation of explicitly nationalist, masculinocentric narratives as the only way to narrate war.

Roman Dubasevych (University of Greifswald) spoke about “*Heroes Don’t Die’: Heroism and Masculinity since Euromaidan*”. His ideas deal with Ukrainian discourses of victimhood and heroism, updated first by the conflict in the Donbas and then by Russian aggression against Ukraine. He focused on the impact of the war on the dynamics of gender identities—their militarization and polarization. Despite the liberal and democratic agenda of a post-Maidan Ukraine, a worrying shift has taken place over the last few years: The bohemian and intellectual protagonists from the novels of the 1990s (cf. Iurii Andrukhovych, Taras Prohas’ko), or “queer” pop stars like the travesty diva Andrii Danylko (aka “Vierka Serdiuchka”) have been replaced by the “men of action”, which is nationalist guerrillas (e.g., Vasyľ Škljar, Oksana Zabuzhko) and new heroes like “Heavenly Hundred”, “cyborgs” or Ukrainian soldiers (cf. Natalka Vorozhbyt, Serhii Zhadan). A canon was thus constructed that postulated male honor, self-sacrifice, and uncompromising attitude as the highest cultural values. The entanglement of new gender identities with the cult of heroes is analyzed with the help of psychoanalytical concepts of “chosen trauma” (following Vamik Volkan), “humiliated masculinity” (Nancy Chodorow), and death drive (Sigmund Freud).

In the following talk with the title “*Homonationalism and Sexual Citizenship in Post-Maidan Ukraine*”, Olga Plakhotnik from the University of Greifswald explained the concept of homonationalism as a category of analysis for distinguishing practices between patriotic national sexual subjects (worthy of protection by the nation-state) and “others” (who differ by race, citizenship, gender performativity, etc.). The analytic focus of homonationalism in Central and Eastern Europe is shifting towards hegemonic EU politics of implementing LGBTQ rights in national states and its contradictory outcomes on the local level. Drawing upon Puar’s (2013) conceptualization of homonationalism as an analytic of power that grasps the process of a fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality, the research project studies how the entanglement of national, European, and global modes of homonationalism operates locally and produces specific imaginaries of

sexual citizenship in post-Maidan Ukraine. In particular, the identified dominant discourse of sexual citizenship is grounded in the single-issue identity-based activist agenda and presumes to inscribe LGBTQ people into the neoliberal model of obedient citizens as workers and consumers.

Martin Henzelmann presented a paper on “*Language Contact in Budžak (Ukraine)*”, referring to his linguistic research at the University of Greifswald. The historical region of Bessarabia is today geopolitically divided into a larger part located in the Republic of Moldova, and a smaller one called Budžak, which lies on the Ukrainian side. In the South of the Republic of Moldova, there is a very high concentration of minority languages. The same holds true for the extreme southwestern edge of Ukraine, the Budžak, where language diversity and language contact play a central role, but also Ukrainian language politics are an important vector. This southern part of the border region is a rural region where Bulgarian, Romanian, Gagauz, and Albanian settlements can be found, while Russian serves as the major language of interethnic communication on both sides of the border. As Kulyk (2021) assumes that the language policy in Ukraine is unique across Europe, this is not only related to the disproportion of Ukrainian and Russian in the country but precisely to the concentrated accumulation of minority languages in Budžak, which in turn evokes specific language contact situations. These have been illustrated by the example of Bulgarian, which is strongly influenced by the Russian language in both Moldova and Ukraine.

As an external participant from the University of Turku (Finland), Olga Simonova highlighted the mechanisms of creating the image of the Russian Civil War heroine (“*Constructing Heroine or Anti-Heroine: Women in Narrative about Civil War in 1917–1919 in Ukraine and South of Russia*”). She examined an example of two personalities: the image of Lyudmila Georgievna Mokievskaya-Zubok (1895–1919), the only famous Ukrainian female commander of the armored train and at the same time a political commissar who fought on the side of the Bolsheviks, and the one of Maria Grigorievna (Marusya) Nikiforova (1890–1919), the only female commander of a large partisan anarchist troop in Ukraine in 1917–1919. The presentation was based on lifetime material, such as letters, police investigative cases, and also on posthumous sources of images (obituaries, memoirs, works of art, films). The different levels of the formation of the “heroic” category were discussed. Moreover, the writer’s gender and personal relationship with the participant of the war used to be principal, and the genre of the text matters. Whereas some memoirists construct a Soviet asexual person, fiction writers, and even more so cinematographers, consider femininity as an important category. This talk also demonstrated the long-term effect of (de)heroization and illustrated whether these women remained in the state and cultural memory or not.

In sum, the section at the German Congress of Slavists organized by the *UNDIPUS* project proves that there is a remarkable public interest in Ukrainian studies. This is primarily due to the terrible war at present but also because of the need to critically reflect on what is happening in Ukraine and to analyze the contemporary social, political, historical, literary, cultural, and linguistic development in the country.

Martin Henzelmann

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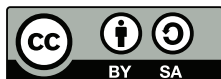
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Конференция AREA SLAVICA 4 в Остраве

15–16 сентября на философском факультете Остравского университета состоялась уже традиционная конференция Area Slavica, в этом году на встрече славистов отмечались семидесятилетие остравской русистики и тридцатилетие бакалавриата по русскому языку в Остравском университете.

На конференции Area Slavica 4 работа шла в четырех секциях, прозвучали доклады на трех славянских языках (чешском, польском, русском).