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## **‘Die Ukraine – vom Rand ins Zentrum’: An Academic Perspective**

The collected volume ‘Die Ukraine – vom Rand ins Zentrum’ (‘Ukraine – From the Margins to the Center’), edited by Peter Deutschmann, Michael Moser, and Alois Woldan, offers a multifaceted analysis of Ukraine’s cultural, linguistic, and historical depth. The work is particularly relevant for those seeking to understand Ukraine not only as a geopolitical actor but also as a dynamic cultural and linguistic space – a perspective that is essential for analyzing Ukrainian mass and popular culture. As a sociolinguist specializing in language policy and minority languages, particularly through my dissertation on the 2019 Ukrainian Language Law, I found many important foundational insights and connections in this volume. The book originated from a lecture series organized by the ‘Austrian Society for Slavic Studies’ (‘Österreichische Gesellschaft für Slawistik’) in the summer semester of 2022. Its goal is to make Ukraine’s history, culture, and language accessible to a broader audience, especially given the attention Ukraine has received since the Russian invasion in 2022. The collected volume addresses central themes of Ukrainian identity formation, combining historical and linguistic perspectives with literary and cultural analyses. On a smaller scale, it also includes media analysis.

The chapters by Andreas Kappeler, ‘Konkurrierende Narrative der vorsowjetischen ukrainischen Geschichte’ (‘Competing Narratives of Pre-Soviet Ukrainian History’), and Dieter Pohl, ‘Die Ukraine im sowjetischen und postsowjetischen Kontext’ (‘Ukraine in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Context’), provide necessary historical context for understanding Ukraine’s linguistic and cultural developments. Kappeler analyzes the competing narratives of Ukrainian history and shows how they have been instrumentalized in current geopolitical conflicts. Pohl’s contribution examines the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, which are of central importance to contemporary Ukrainian popular culture – whether through the deconstruction of Soviet narratives or the processing of post-Soviet identity questions. Particularly relevant is how these narratives are taken up by media and literature to create new identities

that distance themselves from the Soviet past and emphasize European values. Alois Woldan, in 'Ukrainische Geschichte im Spiegel der Literatur' ('Ukrainian History as Reflected in Literature'), highlights how Ukrainian history can be filtered through literature, which often serves as a more accessible source for non-historians, offering insights into differences with Russian culture.

The contributions by Michael Moser, 'Grundzüge einer Geschichte der ukrainischen Sprache' ('Outlines of a History of the Ukrainian Language'), and Tilmann Reuther, 'Sprachen und Sprechen in der Ukraine: Verbote, Gebote und die Realität im 21. Jahrhundert' ('Languages and Language Use in Ukraine: Prohibitions, Regulations, and Reality in the 21st Century'), address the history and current developments of Ukrainian language and language policy. Moser's discussion demonstrates how deeply rooted linguistic conflicts are in Ukraine's history and how significantly they continue to be shaped by political and cultural power struggles. Reuther examines the reality of these conflicts and the effects of language policy measures, particularly in the context of everyday linguistic practices in public spaces. This tension between language policy and linguistic everyday reality is a crucial point of reflection, critically examined by Reuther.

In the literary domain, the works of Stefan Simonek, 'Die ukrainische Literatur und ihre Positionen gegenüber Europa' ('Ukrainian Literature and Its Positions Toward Europe'), and Mariya Donska, 'Ukrainische Gegenwartslyrik nach 1991: eine Annäherung' ('Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry After 1991: An Approach'), contribute to understanding the cultural 'Europeanization' of Ukraine. Donska's analysis of contemporary poetry highlights how literary works address societal upheavals and identity questions – topics often echoed in Ukrainian popular culture. The issue of language also plays a key role here. Contributions such as these underline what is Europe's cultural perception of Ukraine. Literary analysis illustrates how modern poetry and prose process political and social issues, which also recur in popular culture. These topics range from post-colonial identity questions to reflections on the war.

Andrea Zink and Eva Binder explore depictions of Chernobyl in literature and film in 'Tschernobyl in Literatur und Film' ('Chernobyl in Literature and Film'). This inevitably brings to mind the acclaimed HBO series from 2019, which addresses a historical trauma of Ukraine reinterpreted in modern times with Russian blame-shifting.

The collected volume also includes contributions from the cultural and artistic fields. In 'Genese des avantgardistischen Theaters in der Ukraine: das Werk von Les' Kurbas' ('The Genesis of Avant-Garde Theater in Ukraine: The Work of Les' Kurbas'), Larissa Cybenko describes the development of avant-garde theater in Ukraine, while in 'Nun hängt das aber alles an einem Faden' – Die Auswirkungen der Invasion auf Kunst und Kultur in Russland und der Ukraine' ('Now Everything Hangs by a Thread' – The Impact of the Invasion on Art and Culture in Russia and Ukraine), Herwig G. Höller discusses the impact of the war on art and culture in Ukraine and Russia.

Finally, in 'Der Ukrainediskurs 2014 und 2022: Ein Blick in russische TV-Talkshows' ('The Ukraine Discourse in 2014 and 2022: A Look into Russian TV Talk Shows'), Magdalena Kaltseis presents a media analysis, examining Russian media propaganda against Ukraine during the crisis years of 2014 and 2022.

The relevance of this volume for the study of Ukrainian popular culture lies particularly in its discussion of linguistic and cultural topics, as well as the deconstruction of Soviet narratives. The 2016 Media Law and the 2019 Language Law, which aimed to promote the dominance of Ukrainian in media and public life, had a direct impact on the language of mass and popular culture. The chapters by Moser and Reuther highlight how Ukrainian is actively anchored as an identity marker in the media and cultural landscape. These language policy measures not only promote cultural Europeanization, but also create new discourses reflected in popular culture. These policies represent more than just state regulations; they mark a new linguistic course that aims to encompass all spheres intensively, though this has not yet been fully realized. The increasing presence of the Ukrainian language in media plays a significant role in the Europeanization of Ukraine, while also creating tension with Russian-language popular culture, which is increasingly marginalized by the war.

The collected volume's historical analyses by Kappeler and Pohl provide a foundation for understanding the role of Soviet and post-Soviet narratives in popular culture. Soviet storytelling traditions are often ironically deconstructed or used as a contrasting framework to create a new national identity. These processes can be observed not only in high culture but also in popular culture: in films, series, or the music scene. For example, the Ukrainian music industry, which was often exported to the post-Soviet space and dominated by the Russian language, has taken a new direction. Many artists have translated well-known songs into Ukrainian and refuse to create new songs in Russian or perform the originals publicly. Soviet hero stories in literature or cinema can also be ironically subverted today or reinterpreted as symbols of resistance against Russia.

As with many collected volumes, 'Die Ukraine – vom Rand ins Zentrum' is heterogeneous in its content. While the chapters on language and history are in-depth and analytical, some literary and cultural contributions are more descriptive. A stronger thematic integration of the chapters could have enhanced the coherence of the volume, particularly in terms of how linguistic and cultural developments shape Ukrainian identity in the media and popular culture.

Nevertheless, the volume is compelling precisely because of its interdisciplinarity and, above all, its timeliness. It portrays Ukraine not only as a country in conflict but as an independent cultural actor whose linguistic and cultural dynamics are crucial for understanding Europe's contemporary reality. This reorientation of Ukraine – both internally and externally – concerns all of Europe and must, therefore, be examined in various contexts. The book's title already underlines the ongoing process of Europeanization: *vom Rand ins Zentrum* (from the margins to the center). The volume is primarily aimed at a Western audience with little prior knowledge of

Ukraine. It is designed as a handbook that conveys foundational knowledge rather than engaging in detailed specialized discussions, which could be considered insufficient for Ukrainian readers and experts.

‘Die Ukraine – vom Rand ins Zentrum’ offers valuable insights into Ukraine’s linguistic, cultural, and historical developments, which are of great significance in the context of current geopolitical events. The book is an indispensable work for German-speaking readers who want to understand Ukraine’s cultural and linguistic complexity. In particular, the contributions on language policy and narratives are highly relevant for analyzing Ukrainian mass and popular culture. They demonstrate how Ukraine’s linguistic Europeanization is closely tied to the development of national identity and the displacement of Russian influences – an aspect central to its expression in popular culture. At the same time, the volume encourages further exploration of the role of language and narratives in popular culture as dynamic forces of societal transformation.

What role does Ukraine’s new language policy play in establishing an updated national narrative in media and popular culture? While this question cannot yet be definitively answered, it is increasingly coming into focus.

Popular culture can, in a sense, be seen as an expression of change. Historically and to this day, it has often been used as a propaganda tool. Thus, Ukraine’s Europeanization is reflected not only in high culture but also in popular culture through language, literature, or modern media formats. In light of the war and the international attention on Ukraine, this book provides an important basis for understanding its cultural and historical depth. The contributions from recognized experts cover central aspects of Ukrainian identity.

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