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Exophony as Practice of De- and Reterritorialization: Spatial and Linguistic Displacement in Early War Diaries from Ukraine

1. Introduction

Wilhelm von Humboldt posits that languages are worldviews (von Humboldt 27). Consequently, languages imply certain perspectives on historical events, specific narratives and systems of symbols and values. At moments when individual and collective biographies undergo a caesura, these worldviews begin to change and can be accompanied by language crises. A notable example of such a transformation is provided by the experiences of many writers in Ukraine, who have witnessed a profound shift in their country's geopolitical situation following the Russian invasion in February 2022. Numerous writers were compelled to relocate, either to other regions within their own country or to more distant geographical locations outside of Ukraine. Not only did these writers experience a crisis of space, they also encountered a crisis of language, as they had to find new words to describe the traumatizing horrors of war and their experiences as refugees – a situation compounded by the fact that the aggressor claimed to be going to war to help the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine and thus legitimized military actions in the name of a language spoken and written by several of these Ukrainian writers.

The present article explores these correlations between spatial and linguistic crises. It demonstrates how in autobiographical texts by Ukrainian writers written in the first months after February 24, 2022, there is a language shift from Ukrainian or Russian to German or English. It analyzes the significance

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of this language shift against the backdrop of the spatial displacement of the writing subjects. The analysis is based on a corpus of three diaries published shortly after the onset of the full-scale invasion. In *Diary of an Invasion* (2022), the Russophone Ukrainian writer Andrey Kurkov recounts his experiences as a refugee from Kyiv in the Ukrainian-Slovakian borderland – in English. Yevgenia Belorusets' *Anfang des Krieges* (*War Diary*) (2022) compiles the experiences of the Ukrainian writer and photographer after the Russian attack in Kyiv – in German. Jelena Jeremejewa, a Berlin-based filmmaker and author, recounts in her diary *Seit September will ich nach Kiew* (*Since September I have been wanting to go to Kyiv*) (2022), how war has reached her during a visit to her hometown of Kyiv – also in German.[1]

This article argues that all three texts, by employing exophony, engage in the de- and reterritorialization of existential territories, and thus distance themselves from established national and cultural contexts and symbolic systems, aiming to generate new meanings and identities. Thereby, the study offers a novel perspective on exophony in the context of spatial and linguistic crises, that are triggered by political conflicts, which exploit language(s) to legitimize military actions.

2. Exophony as a Practice of De- and Reterritorialization

Exophonic literature refers to literature written by authors not in their first language or, in the case of multilingual individuals, in their first languages, but in a language that the authors learned as a 'foreign' one, including a reflection on the nature of literature written in such a situation (cf. Pajević 8; Arndt, Naguschewski, Stockhammer). In this context, exophonic literature is "a privileged field for the understanding of multilingual processes, since writers necessarily engage with language in a more conscious manner, and thus reflect more on their linguistic condition" (Pajević 8).

The language shift inherent in exophonic literatures can serve various functions (see also: Kremnitz 117–170; Lamping 33–48). It allows authors to distance themselves from the traditions of their first language(s), from specific cultural taboos, and myths, thereby creating a liberating distance from their 'culture of origin' (Palej 140). At the same time, it integrates the literary text into 'other' cultural contexts (Palej 141). Overall, however, exophonic literature creates the possibility of questioning the static constitution of concepts such

1 Since the specific use of language is important for my argumentation, I am working with the original editions of both Belorusets' and Jeremejewa's texts, not with the English editions.

as homeland, mother tongue, or nation, and can be understood as a means of resistance against a dominant monolingual paradigm (cf. Trepte 248; Roussel 63). Through stylistic ruptures, linguistic errors, or syntactical variations, fluid linguistic structures are generated, making possible a meta-discourse on language (cf. Ivanovic 25). Exophony as a writing practice disrupts language (cf. Roussel 64), its inherent multilingualism works delimitatively (cf. Pajević 8), creating space for the negotiation of identity(ies), particularly for individuals who have experienced forced migration, enabling a repositioning in the context of involuntary displacement (cf. Bachleitner et al. 7).

Exophonic writing, operating with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of deterritorialization (cf. Deleuze, Guattari 3–25), thus acts deterritorializing by dissolving static, stable cultural constructs. In the context of war-induced refugee waves, it also signifies a shift in the cultural orientation of a society in its relation to territory. At the same time, it should be understood as a practice of reterritorialization, as it can recode cultural or linguistic logics. This understanding of exophonic literature becomes plausible when territory is not viewed merely as a geographical entity but when existential territories – formed along semiotic, linguistic, discursive, and non-discursive components – are included in the definition (cf. Nigro, Raunig 81; see also: Kreff 43). Literary exophony then becomes a deterritorialization of control over cultural and identity-related constructs. At the same time, it functions as a search for reterritorialization, questioning the "how and where of the new space" (Nigro, Raunig 82; trans. A.S.) and of new symbolic systems.

In the context of this article, these considerations on exophonic writing practices are particularly relevant since Ukrainian authors have been grappling with choosing the language in which to produce literature for a long time. As Anna Olshevska writes in an article from 2012, the choice of language as a literary language should be understood as an internal and external marker of identification for Ukrainian writers (Olshevska 123). Ukrainian authors writing in Ukrainian would be considered Ukrainian writers, while authors writing in Russian would be regarded as Russians living (and writing) in Ukraine (Olshevska 124) – despite the fact that nearly half of Ukrainians in 2012 still declared Russian as their first language (cf. *Шосте*…).[2] While decisions regarding a literary language shift are influenced by numerous factors (cf. Kremnitz 171–217), it is not surprising that, in this context, some Russophone Ukrainian

2 Between 2012 and 2022, the figure dropped to 20%, according to a survey by the Ukrainian opinion research institute (cf. *Шосте*…). However, the timing of the survey on March 19, 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion, may have influenced respondents' answers.

authors, such as Svetlana Lavochkina or Katja Petrowskaja, had chosen to write in a language other than their first language even before the military conflict with Russia, which began in 2014. The use of a 'foreign language' allowed them to detach their literary work from local identity-related debates.

After February 24, 2022, Russophone writers who defined themselves as Ukrainian authors found themselves in a new problematic situation, as the Russian military aggression was more than ever fueled by a mindset of superiority, legitimized by the hegemony of Russian over Ukrainian culture. Many Russophone Ukrainian authors now found themselves in an unwanted alliance with the invader, not least because the president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin cited the threat to the Russian language as one of the main reasons for the invasion of Ukraine (cf. Putin, accessed 2025).

In the following sections, I will analyze how Kurkov, Belorusets, and Jeremejewa engage with this novel linguistic context, employing the de- and reterritorializing properties of exophony to both inscribe themselves into the new reality of war and to forge lines of flight that move away from their previous social, cultural, and linguistic identities. This aesthetic approach reflects the caesural dimension of their physical dislocation, the psychological experience of difference and disintegration of identity, as well as their search for new modes of literary representation and the construction of alternative identities.

3. Exophony and Linguistic Displacement: Andrey Kurkov's *Diary of an Invasion*

Andrey Kurkov is, as he describes himself, an ethnic Russian who has lived his entire life in Kyiv (cf. Kurkov 14). He typically writes his literary works in his first language, Russian, but he defines himself as a Ukrainian author (cf. Chernetsky 58) and is recognized as such by the public (cf. Olshevska 124). However, for *Diary of an Invasion*, a public diary in which he chronicles the months leading up to and following the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine (until July 2022), he switches to English, a language that is present in his private realm, since his wife is a U.K. citizen and speaks English with their children (cf. Kurkov 137), but has never been employed by Kurkov in his literary work.

Kurkov's diary entries are directed at an international audience, as evidenced by his efforts to elucidate the political situation in the region (cf. Kurkov 30–34) and the specificities of Ukrainian culture (cf. Kurkov 27–30). Given that this information would likely be self-evident to Ukrainian readers, these passages underscore the role of exophony in conveying the 'Ukrainian situation' to foreign audiences. This function becomes even more apparent when Kurkov includes critical commentary on the lacking support Ukraine has received from

other nations, which can be interpreted as an implicit appeal for increased military aid (cf. Kurkov 136).

For our context, however, the language shift becomes relevant on a different level, as it is connected to something Kurkov also addresses in his diary entries: his discomfort with his first language. Even before February 24, 2022, Kurkov mentions the significance of the Russian language in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in his diary. "Russia is ready to defend all Russian speakers – not just Russians alone – anywhere in the world," (Kurkov 56) he writes on January 30, 2022. A day before the invasion, he critically references the statements of Alexander Kabanov, a Russophone Ukrainian author who, while promoting both Russian- and Ukrainian-language literature, expresses concern about the future of the Russian language in Ukraine (cf. Kurkov 79). However, in the same entry, Kurkov still acknowledges the importance of the Russian-speaking Ukrainian literary scene, citing the Kyiv Bulgakov Museum, which has long supported Kyiv's underground culture but has also been a gathering place for Russophone Ukrainian elites (cf. Kurkov 79–80). Kurkov appears to acknowledge the intricate relationship between Russian culture and imperialism. Concurrently, there is an indication of a promotion of Russian as an integral component of Ukrainian culture.

This ambivalent relationship toward Russian language and culture continues even after the war's onset. On March 9, 2022, Kurkov writes, "This war is not about the Russian language, which I have spoken and used in writing all my life" (Kurkov 123). While this statement can still be interpreted as a distancing from the role of the Russian language and culture in the ongoing war, the author gradually intensifies his detachment from his linguistic heritage as the diary progresses. Only four days later, on March 13, he reflects on the change of his attitude towards the Russian language:

> I have been made to feel ashamed many times of my Russian origin, of the fact that my native language is Russian. I have come up with different formulae, trying to explain that the language is not to blame, that Putin has no ownership of the Russian language… Now I just want to be quiet. (Kurkov 137)

In this context, the preference for remaining 'quiet' does not necessarily mean that Kurkov distances himself from Russian as literary language. It can also be read as a distancing from an understanding of the Russian language as completely detached from Russian state propaganda. However, the following diary entries make the former interpretation more plausible, since they reveal

a further disassociation from not only Russian language, but also Russian art and culture, which Kurkov increasingly describes as complicit in the Kremlin's political agenda to extend the dominance of 'The Russian World' on a global scale (cf. Kurkov 215). It is therefore not coincidental that, in his entry from May 1, 2022, titled "Ukrainian Culture at War" he declares that he no longer wishes to engage with Russian culture in general (cf. Kurkov 217) – a shift from his March 23 entry, where he noted a disinterest in contemporary Russian culture, while still expressing an appreciation for Soviet authors (cf. Kurkov 153). This shift away from defending the status of Russian culture in Ukraine corresponds with the inability of the author to continue his literary production, a fact he also records in the diary entry from May 1: Upon arriving at his refuge in Transcarpathia, where he had fled with his family, he realizes that he could no longer write fiction (cf. Kurkov 217) – fiction that he had usually written in Russian. The impossibility of writing points to an (at least temporary) abandonment of Russian as a literary language, signifying a rupture in his literary production and reflecting a crisis in his linguistic identity.

The shift to English, therefore, serves not only as evidence of the intended target audience of these texts. It reflects Kurkov's distancing from his first language and creates a space for searching for a new linguistic and cultural identity between the static poles of Ukrainian and Russian identity constructs. As such, it avoids the connotations that the use of either of the two languages would entail in the given situation: switching to Ukrainian as a literary language would signify a complete negation of Russian, while continuing to write and publish in Russian would imply complicity with the imperial cultural project of the Russian Federation.[3] English, a language that is both familiar (from Kurkov's private life) yet foreign, serves as a neutralizing and deterritorializing discursive device. Through its use the diarist establishes a neutral space, which can only be attained by escaping both languages and, by extension, both linguistic and cultural identities. In this 'other' space, however – and this is where

3 In this context, Catherine O'Neil's findings are also relevant. They show that since 2014, Kurkov has increasingly focused his literary efforts on the international market, as Russian aggression has diminished the relevance of Russophone Ukrainian literature in Ukraine, and as Russian is more widely spoken in the 'West' and Kurkov's works are more popular internationally than domestically (cf. O'Neil 665–666). Kurkov's transition to English can thus also be interpreted as a definitive reorientation of his literary oeuvre towards an international readership, perhaps even as an economic decision, given the further diminishing importance of Russophone literature in Ukraine during the ongoing war.

the reterritorializing aspect of exophony becomes evident – the negotiation of a new linguistic identity becomes possible.

Kurkov's exophonic writing practice thus allows the author to navigate his personal identity crisis as a Russophone Ukrainian writer by distancing the writing subject from static, conflicting linguistic identities. On the one hand, this diary dissolves existential territories by breaking with monolithic, language-based identity constructions; on the other hand, it manifests the search for new cultural and identity-based orientations.

4. Exophony and the Experience of Difference: Yevgenia Belorusets' *Anfang des Krieges*

Yevgenia Belorusets also changes her literary language in her war diary *Anfang des Krieges*. While the Berlin- and Kyiv-based author usually writes in Russian and Ukrainian, in her diary entries – which were originally published as written and audio-blog entries in German media – she switches to German. In an interview from September 2022, Belorusets herself posits that in her diary she utilizes German as a medium to articulate that which she perceives to be absent in her 'native' language in the context of war (cf. *Postsoviet Cosmopolis…*). The foreign language, she states in another interview, allows her to distance herself from the events and horrors of war (cf. Belorusets, Ostashevsky); it becomes a kind of protection, a space of productive alienation (cf. Perepadya). However, in contrast to Kurkov, she does not contextualize her linguistic shift within the framework of Russian culture's complicity in the Russian military project.[4] Instead, for her, it is the disruption of normality and the experience of spatial trauma that serves as the motivation to create a disruption in language through an exophonic writing practice.

Belorusets emphasizes this rupture in her normal urban life from the very outset of the diary. She meticulously documents the emerging urban practices and spaces, articulating that since its outbreak, the war has become a total and all-encompassing way of life (cf. Belorusets 55). The new urban logic is

4 In the already quoted interview from the beginning of 2023, Belorusets even states that the Russian language to her "has little to do with Russia" and emphasizes its integrative function within her own biography: "[The Russian language] connects me to my childhood. It prevents me from experiencing my life as some constantly but violently interrupted unfolding of history" (Belorusets, Ostashevsky). This claim lends further support to my argument that the author's linguistic shift to German mirrors the disruption of normality and spatial trauma, rather than representing a caesura within the author's linguistic identity.

completely different from that experienced prior to the war. Belorusets seeks to capture this transformed way of life through both her writing and her photographic activities, yet, as she notes, she is no longer able to approach her own city (cf. Belorusets 39), even as a semblance of normalcy seems to return in April 2022 with the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Kyiv region:

> Jeden Tag öffnet eine neue Tür, ein neues Caféhaus, eine neue Bäckerei oder ein Lebensmittelladen. "Neu" bedeutet in diesem Fall "wieder," aber in meinen Vorstellungen wurde das frühere Stadtleben unterbrochen und alles, was jetzt wieder zu existieren beginnt, startet von Neuem, blickt mit den Schaufenstern und geöffneten Türen auf eine absolut andere Realität. (cf. Belorusets 165)[5]

This irreversible rupture in urban reality and identity is mirrored in the exophonic writing practice and is further manifested through stylistic and grammatical dissonances from standard German (cf. Belorusets 154).[6] Linguistic and spatial alienation thus overlap. The place in which the author finds herself undergoes such profound transformation that a linguistic shift and the accompanying linguistic ruptures become necessary to adequately describe it.

In Belorusets' case, exophony enables the author to distance herself from the concepts and linguistic constructs of her first language and creates an 'other' space in which, unlike Kurkov, not a new linguistic identity is negotiated, but rather an attempt is made to express the absolute 'other' of everyday life during war. The fact that this 'other' reality requires an 'other' language of representation than the local one(s) becomes particularly clear when Belorusets finally leaves Kyiv. In Warsaw, she notices how her perception of urban space in general has changed. When she encounters a group of men in uniforms, she is surprised to see that they are not carrying weapons, before she realizes that there is no war in Warsaw (cf. Belorusets 180). Belorusets cannot adapt to this urban reality that represents peace and decides to escape to less frequented parts of Warsaw, where she feels more 'at home' because they resemble Kyiv's emptiness:

5 Trans. A.S.: "Every day a new door opens, a new café, a new bakery or grocery store. 'New' in this case means 'again' but in my imagination, the former city life has been interrupted and everything that is now beginning to exist again is starting anew, with the shop windows and open doors looking out onto a completely different reality."

6 Belorusets also attempts to express this difference in the photographs that accompany the diary and in which the absence of people indicates the absence of normal everyday urban life (cf. Korowin, 52–53).

> Die Luft war kühl wie in Kyjiw, wahrscheinlich werde ich in einem Stadtteil übernachten, wo es nicht viele Spaziergänger gibt. Jenen Teil der Straßen, der leer ist, erkenne ich als einen vertrauten und verständlichen. (Belorusets 181)[7]

This entry is the last of the author's daily entries, which she writes until the beginning of April. However, it seems that German no longer meets its purpose here. German, the language with which Belorusets wanted to emphasize the absolute exception, a language of peace, which had an alienating effect when used to describe war and thereby created a difference, becomes obsolete in the description of landscapes, where war isn't present, and therefore loses its function, which leads to an abrupt ending of the diary.

Of course, the embedding of the experiences of a Ukrainian person in the German-speaking public discourse also plays a role in Belorusets' texts, which were initially produced for a German-speaking audience.[8] Much more frequently than Kurkov, she addresses the public in her entries and appeals for increased military support for Ukraine (cf. e.g. Belorusets 129, 150). On a political level, she thus uses exophonic writing to integrate her entries into the socio-political discourse in Germany and thereby influence the latter.

On an aesthetic level, the exophony of Belorusets' text with its de- and reterritorializing function serves the process of finding a new spatial-symbolic identity. By changing the language, Belorusets creates a distance between herself as a writer and the unfamiliar space with its new rules and logics. At the same time, the language shift enables her to express the alienation she feels at the beginning of the war and the transformation of her identity as an urban individual. In this way, Belorusets works on a deterritorialization of former city-related existential territories, meaning the dissolution of former urban practices and correlating symbolic orders. On the other hand, she reterritorializes them by finding a new language to describe the new order, creating space for a renegotiation of normality, which must be rethought and newly established.

7 Trans. A.S.: "The air was cool like in Kyiv, I will probably spend the night in a part of town where there are not many people walking around. I recognize the part of the streets that is empty as a familiar and understandable one."

8 Ksenia Robbe and Dorine Schellens delve deeper into this facet, underscoring that by personalizing the war experience in her diary, Belorusets establishes dialogical pathways for individuals beyond Ukraine, thereby fostering a "relation among strangers" (Robbe, Schellens 432).

5. Exophony and Disintegration of Identity: Jelena Jeremejewa's *Seit September will ich nach Kiew*

The loss of normality also plays a role in Jelena Jeremejewa's diary *Seit September will ich nach Kiew*. On February 16, 2022, the Berlin-based author and director travels to Kyiv, her hometown, to attend to some personal business. However, this 'visit home' is interrupted by the war, whereupon she flees Ukraine with her father, brother and his wife, not to the unknown, but to her own four walls in Berlin, where her partner and children are waiting for her. This 'imperfect' refugee status preoccupies Jeremejewa in her diary, because on the one hand, due to the war, she cannot return to Kyiv, which she still considers her home (cf. Jeremejewa 3). On the other hand, she comes back from the war zone to her other home (in Berlin) in which she no longer seems to fit. Having arrived in Berlin after almost two weeks of travelling, she writes:

> Wir fahren Taxi durch den Frieden, durch die deutsche Normalität. Zu Hause warten die Kinder und freuen sich, dass ich wieder da bin. Dabei bin ich doch gar nicht da. Es sind Stücke angekommen, und Stücke hängen immer noch in der Wohnung [in Kyjiw] im 8. Stockwerk, hören den Schlag der Uhr, scannen den Himmel ab. (Jeremejewa 36)[9]

As illustrated by this quote, the juxtaposition of 'German normality' and the 'Ukrainian exception' engenders a profound internal conflict for the writing subject, giving rise to feelings of shame and guilt. However, a completely different sense of guilt associated with one's origins becomes apparent in Jeremejewa's diary, than in Kurkov's – a guilt that originates in the difference between the author's status as a non-refugee and at the same time a victim of military aggression. For Jeremejewa, a profound dissonance emerges between the way she continues to live as part of the peaceful Berlin community and the experiences of her fellow citizens. This dichotomy is exemplified in her entry of April 6 wherein she recounts her quotidian life in Berlin, which is abruptly disrupted by a vehicle emblazoned with the inscription 'ДЕТИ' (trans. children):

> Dann Zahnarzt und diese banalen Floskeln mit fremden Menschen, mit Müttern aus der Kita… mit der Frau an der Kasse und beim Späti… für

9 Trans. A.S.: "We take a cab through peace, through German normality. At home, the children are waiting and are happy that I'm back. But I'm not even there. Pieces have arrived, and pieces are still hanging in the apartment [in Kyiv] on the 8th floor, hearing the clock strike, scanning the sky."

> uns alle geht das Leben weiter… dann sehe ich das Auto in der Greifenhagener Straße und lese die kyrillischen Buchstaben… ДЕТИ (dt. Kinder)… ukrainisches Kennzeichen… Ich fotografiere den Bus, reflexartig, weil er wie ich zu einer anderen Wirklichkeit gehört und diese friedliche deutsche Morgenrealität in Stücke reißt. (Jeremejewa 44)[10]

The "mothers from daycare" and the woman at the Späti represent the German normality in which the author takes refuge, her "sealed" German existence ("meiner abgedichteten deutschen Existenz" [Jeremejewa 41]). However, the car with the lettering tears this stable identity out of its frame and lets it shatter into pieces. The cognitive dissonance that the author expresses here is reflected in the choice of language for her diary. By writing in German, she links the text to a language that represents normality for her and contrasts it with the state of exception that she associates with Ukraine. The use of German thus signifies security and the possibility, as with Belorusets, of distancing oneself from the manifestations of war. At the same time, Jeremejewa postulates the impossibility of blending into that normality, an impossibility which is mirrored on a linguistic level. Jeremejewa's formulations are not only syntactically fragmented, as the above quote reveals, in which the incoherence of the writer's identity reverberates. Jeremejewa's diary also exhibits grammatical and stylistic differences to standard German, much more so than Belorusets' diary (cf. e.g., Jeremejewa 41). At the same time, she repeatedly weaves Russian and Ukrainian sentences, song lyrics or words into her remarks – mostly in Cyrillic letters (cf. Jeremejewa 38–39, 50) – which leads to dissonances in the reading flow for those who cannot read Cyrillic and therefore have no access to the Ukrainian or Russian symbolic system.

Thereby, Jeremejewa engenders an alienation effect on an aesthetic level. Exophony serves as a medium for her to articulate the disintegration of her identity. It deterritoralizes, as it delimits cultural-discursive symbolic systems by showing the privileged position of a Ukrainian émigré in Berlin, who is already part of the urban community, and, at the same time, the impossibility of participating in that very reality. The writing subject remains in a vacuum

10 Trans. A.S.: "Then the dentist and these banal phrases with strangers, with mothers from daycare… with the woman at the checkout and at the Späti… life continues for all of us… then I see the car in Greifenhagener Straße and read the Cyrillic letters… ДЕТИ (children)… Ukrainian license plate…. I take a photo of the bus, reflexively, because like me it belongs to a different reality and it is tearing this peaceful German morning reality to shreds."

between war and peace, a vacuum that she occupies and fills with meaning through her descriptions. Consequently, her exophonic writing can also be understood as an act of reterritorialization, because Jeremejewa works on consolidating a new identity – one, which is located in the discourse between absolute normality and absolute exception – thus generating a new existential territory.

6. Conclusion: Exophony as an Aesthetic Technique in War Diaries from Ukraine

In a context as globally relevant as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, it is hardly surprising that writers wish to share their experiences and thoughts with a broader audience, and therefore do not write in their first language, especially since the horrors of war are often understood by those who speak it. This act of recording the experiences of others for the awareness of a global audience itself can be seen as an act of deterritorialization.

However, in the case of the texts discussed in this article, the de- and reterritorializing potential of exophonic writing is also productively realized on an aesthetic level. Exophony becomes an attempt at deterritorialization, opening cultural and discursive symbolic systems. At the same time, it can be understood as a practice of reterritorialization, in that it recodes and repositions cultural, linguistic, and social identities. This mirrors the spatial displacement, psychological trauma and disintegration of the writing subjects on an aesthetic level, while simultaneously serving as a tool for overcoming these challenges.

Thus, the texts reveal an oscillating movement between the desire for security and continuity, and the compulsion for movement, change, and escape. They show that what was once familiar or normal, and which the writing subjects long for, has become obsolete. At the same time, the texts demonstrate that normality and the identities tied to it, as they existed before February 24, 2022, are irretrievably lost (for Belorusets and Jeremejewa) or no longer desirable (for Kurkov). All three authors use exophony to express the relationship between the old and the new, the familiar and the unknown. The delimitation of language contributes to a delimitation of symbolic orders and fosters the emergence of novel linguistic, spatial, and social identities.

"Language matters" (Kurkov 229), writes Kurkov in his diary, suggesting that it is politically significant whether one speaks Ukrainian or Russian in Ukraine after February 24. However, in light of the findings presented here, the choice of language becomes relevant on another level. The abandonment

of one's native language in literary production engenders opportunities for detaching from entrenched discourses and concurrently facilitates a symbolic reorientation that mirrors the experience of difference, dislocation, and disintegration of autobiographic writing subjects in contexts where language becomes a rationale for legitimizing warfare.

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| Abstract

Anna Seidel

Exophony as Practice of De- and Reterritorialization: Spatial and Linguistic Displacement in Early War Diaries from Ukraine

This article explores the spatial and linguistic crises faced by Ukrainian writers in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of 2022. Through the analysis of three diaries – Andrey Kurkov's *Diary of an Invasion*, Yevgenia Belorusets' *Anfang des Krieges*, and Jelena Jeremejewa's *Seit September will ich nach Kiew* – it examines the phenomenon of exophony, or writing in a foreign language, as a response to war and forced migration. The study shows how these writers, navigating both physical and linguistic dislocation, shift from Ukrainian or Russian to German or English. This linguistic shift symbolizes a productive break with national and cultural contexts and can be understood as a practice of de- and reterritorialization. The article offers new insights into the properties of exophonic writing in political conflicts, where language becomes a tool of resistance and identity transformation.

Keywords: multilingualism; war literature; Russo-Ukrainian War; migration; autobiography; identity crisis

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