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# Literary History, Field-Formation and Transnational Spaces of Possibles

## Literature in the Space of Belarus in the 1920s

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### **Introduction: About the Project *A Literary History of Belarus***

The starting point of this article is the thesis that Belarusian literature (as a literature shaped by discontinuity, multilingualism, colonialism and de- or extra-territoriality) might provide a substantial contribution to the current struggle for a theoretically grounded and problem-oriented restoration of literary historiography<sup>1</sup> and to the development of an adequate model<sup>2</sup> after the comprehensive scepticism of post-modernism<sup>3</sup> has subsided.<sup>4</sup>

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1. KOHLER, 2014; KOHLER & NAVUMENKA, 2019.

2. See BUSCHMEIER, ERHART & KAUFMANN, 2014; TIHANOV, 2014.

3. WELLEK, 1973; PERKINS, 1996; GUMBRECHT, 2008.

4. See BUSCHMEIER, 2011.

Due to changing disjunctions of state, culture and language,<sup>5</sup> the central, but certainly not the only, problem of Belarusian literature is its “smallness,” and therewith its marginality: the share of the current Belarusian area in the (for its time very modern) Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the so called Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; the non-simultaneous constructions of national literatures ensuing from this cultural region (especially the Polish, in part also the Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Russian, and only very late the Belarusian), and as a consequence the “reinterpretation” of this space as a twofold equally “annexed” and “displaced” space of the north-western or respectively eastern periphery (*severno-zapadnyj kraj* from Russian imperial perspective, *kresy wschodnie* from Polish perspective); its religious-confessional as well as multilingual specifics; the division of the area and again its non-simultaneous integration in the Soviet apparatus, etc. Such changing incongruities of ethnicity, language(s), cultural space and state territory require a revision, reevaluation (for instance in the context of Polish and Russian literary historiography) and, last but not least, the confrontation with current theoretical discourse.

In other words, what generally is conceptualised as “Belarusian literature” in the sense of a historical continuity has, as such, never (or hardly ever) existed. Instead, the literature that developed in the area of the current Republic of Belarus or that refers to this area has at nearly all times been part of wider, superior pre- or transnational linguistic, cultural and literary spaces. Its transfer to parameters of “national literary” narratives now and again have generated aporetic conflicts in view of the splitting of the previously “common” cultural capital (authors and texts but also literary and cultural centres and others) into competing “national cultures.” Due to the absence of a Belarusian national movement and therefore of the development or construction of a specific “Belarusian” cultural capital in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the literary phenomena in the area of today’s Republic of Belarus were marginalised and absorbed otherwise. In this context, exemplary reference should be made to the so called “Belarusian School” in the Polish literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup> and to the conceptualisation of Vilnius as a centre of the “Polish” elite.<sup>7</sup>

Similar processes of marginalisation, disjunction and extra-territoriality can also be noticed in earlier and later development phases of “Belarusian” literature (for example, the multilingualism of literature(s) of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

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5. KOHLER, NAVUMENKA & GRÜTTEMEIER, 2012; KOHLER & NAUMENKO, 2013.

6. See CHAŮSTOVIČ, 2012.

7. See SNYDER, 2003.

or the *Rzeczpospolita* [the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth] in the 15<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>8</sup> the split of Belarusian literature into a Soviet-Belarusian and a “Western-Belarusian” branch, due to the political division of the country in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>9</sup> *émigré* literature,<sup>10</sup> and more). They characterise not only the current situation of Belarusian literature, which has split into a Belarusian-language and a Russian-language branch and is not clear about itself: the model of a multilingual “Literature of Belarus” stands in competition with the model of a “Belarusian Literature” in national language.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the case of Belarusian literature, whose sheer historical existence could be doubted with some reason (except for the short phase of constitution as a “national literature” at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), emphasises the eminently constructed character of “national” literatures in an exceptional way. Consequently, the traditional Belarusian literary historiography exemplifies that the making of a coherent “history of national literature” goes along with the construction of continuity, the smoothing of discontinuity, the levelling of disparities, the suppression of ambiguity and the reinterpretation of “incompleteness.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, when re-concepting Belarusian literary history, a model of literary historiography must be designed that does not withhold, level or reinterpret the outlined *aporiae*, disjunctions and disparities, but instead focuses on them as a central category of literary development in the transitional space of Belarus. Such a re-conceptualisation does not need to (and should not) begin at zero. Theoretical reflections on literary historiography, but also various practical implementations with “history of events,”<sup>13</sup> “entangled history,”<sup>14</sup> “history of space,”<sup>15</sup> “history of

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8. See KAVALĚŮ, 2010; NEKRAŠĚVIČ-KAROTKAJA, 2011.

9. See KOHLER, 2015a.

10. See McMILLIN, 2002.

11. See KOVALEV, 2013.

12. Concerning Ukrainian literature, see, for instance, TSCHIŽEWSKIJ (1975) and GRABOWICZ (1981). Gerd Jan Johannes discusses similar phenomena from the Dutch perspective (JOHANNES, 2001).

13. For instance, WELLBERY, 2004 or HOLLIER, 1993.

14. A recent example is CORNIS-POPE & NEUBAUER, 2004-2010. Unlike Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, Annette Werberger considers the potential of “entangled history” for literary historiography from a theoretically grounded and methodologically reflected point of view (WERBERGER, 2012).

15. For instance, ZEYRINGER & GOLLNER, 2012. For a theoretically grounded discussion, see LAMPART, 2014.

mass media,”<sup>16</sup> just to name a few, provide various models that can fruitfully be used in the attempt to break up the “big narrative.” Recently, a growing acceptance has developed towards a transnational perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding Belarus, though, a significant discrepancy becomes visible: Whereas the post-Soviet *History of Belarusian Literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Minsk 1993-2015) constructs this very “big narrative” and emphasises the identity of ethnicity, language and space (while this narrative has largely lost its persuasiveness elsewhere), Cornis-Pope’s and Neubauer’s *History of the Literary Cultures* lacks even a glimpse on Belarus. Covering the wider area from Albania to Lithuania, this *History* yet does not dedicate a single article to Belarus, even though the neighbouring cultures of Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine are addressed. The fact that in the wide transnational mosaic of literary culture(s) of central and eastern Europe mapped out by the editors, Belarus, of all areas, is missing, shows that the “blank-space Belarus” (Martin Pollack) may in a decisive way be seen as symptomatic. It indicates that the “transnational view” reproduces exclusion mechanisms, and this reproduction seems all the more questionable as the transnational approach is supposed to be resistant towards such “old” exclusion mechanisms. Supporters of the transnational perspective would surely do well to ask the question, why a literary culture such as the Belarusian one remains disregarded in a transnational *History* such as the one mentioned above. The reasons might have to do with the nature of international scientific networks upon which projects such as this one are reliant. However, the question must be asked whether a transnational approach of this dimension does not, despite everything, reproduce the dichotomy of “big” and “small” literatures,<sup>18</sup> even if on a different level. The question of whose requirements must be fulfilled to become “visible” in a transnational perspective seems even more urgent. If one of the central purposes of a literary history is still to provide orientation, then the transnational view may be more dependent than one realises on established (and internationally “accepted”) “national narratives” that, in a sense, are transferred to a transnational model to be dissolved in it and by it only in a second step. The “blank-space Belarus” in Cornis-Pope’s and Neubauer’s *History* could in that case be understood as creating evidence for the need to initially make the narrative “Literature of Belarus” visible.

How could such a narrative look nowadays—a narrative that captures the outlined specifics and problems, makes discontinuity visible, works towards a

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16. NOVAK, 2012.

17. STURM-TRIGONAKIS, 2007.

18. *sensu* CASANOVA, 2004.

transnational perspective and at the same time offers orientation, without walking into the “big-narrative-trap?”

The projected *Literary History of Belarus* links several currently prevalent approaches and is essentially based on three central categories that will be outlined below:

- . *Cultural space*: As a history not of “Belarusian literature” but of the “literature of Belarus,” the narrative is conceptualised as a history of the space of Belarus.<sup>19</sup> Thereby, there will be no attempt to create the “cultural space of Belarus” as linear or constant or distinctively “Belarusian” (whatever that may mean).<sup>20</sup> Space, on the contrary, will be understood as *variable* in its territorial expansion as well as in its character, hence, concerning its distinguishing parameters.<sup>21</sup> This can be illustrated by the following example: The cultural space that mediaeval Belarus is assigned to exceeds later ones (namely, as space lying within the culturally, especially ecclesiastically dominated area of the Kievan Rus’). At the same time, for example, entanglements or transitions between *Slavia latina* and *Slavia orthodoxa*<sup>22</sup> in this specific space usually are not considered sufficiently: Up until now, Belarusian mediaeval studies conceptualise the culture of the Middle Ages in the space of Belarus primarily as “orthodox.” On the contrary, the cultural space of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century is considered as mainly “Latin” space with a clear emphasis on the paradigms of Humanism, Renaissance, Counter-reformation and Baroque, whereas regional parcelling and centres seem to be given little attention.
- . *Chronology*: Analogous to the substitution of a fixed and clearly defined territory by using a flexible cultural space as a reference, the category of time structure is also carefully softened. With complete literary periods missing<sup>23</sup> and the non-simultaneousness of literary development in the

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19. It thus accounts for the fact that already in previous literary *Histories* something different is conceptualised as “Belarusian literature” in virtually every given period.

20. The territorial basis is not the State of Belarus; such a literary history could start at the earliest in 1918 – and without restrictions only in 1991.

21. Compare ZEYRINGER & GOLLNER, 2012.

22. See GARZANITI, 2007.

23. “Belarusian romanticism,” for instance, if at all could be mentioned only in the frame of the “Polish Romanticism”-paradigm as “Litvian School.” “Realism” or “Modernism” as a

space of Belarus, structuring into epochal terms turns out to be obsolete from the beginning. Instead, an *open chronology* will be followed. It is based on the literary-historical perspective of the indeed random but largely objective division into centuries. Their borders, though, will be understood as “fluent” and will be defined separately. This allows for extensive conceptualisations in the sense of a “long 16<sup>th</sup>,”<sup>24</sup> a long 18<sup>th</sup><sup>25</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup><sup>26</sup> or also a “short 20<sup>th</sup> century,”<sup>27</sup> such as for the modelling of shorter periods, single incidents or of blank-space-periods. Beside the “great linearity” on a macro-level, non-linear processes, compressions, repetitions, overlaps, non-simultaneousness, leaps, discontinuities and “breakpoints” become depictive.<sup>28</sup>

- . *Institutions*: If reference area and time structure are conceptualised as changeable, contingent categories, a firm approach is needed within the *Literary History* that makes disjunctions, rejections and overlaps “measurable.” That is why the operative approach to the material that should be transferred in a “narrative of discontinuities” will follow the perspective of field theory<sup>29</sup> and will focus on the literary-historically assessed institutional access developed in the wake of Bourdieu.<sup>30</sup> This is not the place to address the objections that might be made from the side of both cultural studies and field theory against the attempt of merging “cultural space” and “literary field.” Both concepts are fruitful at different levels: the concept of “Space” on a political, social and cultural macro-level (as a substitute for “Belarus”), the concept of decidedly heuristically understood “Field” on the level of literary communication and production. An approach consistent with the framework of cultural studies probably would give preference to the concept of “Geopoetics,”<sup>31</sup> surely offering a brilliant base for transnational

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period could not be talked about at all.

24. BRAUDEL, 1972.

25. BAINES, 2004.

26. HOBBSAWM, 1962, 1975, 1987.

27. HOBBSAWM, 1994; see also HOBBSAWM, 2004.

28. Compare HOLLIER, 1993; WELLBERY, 2004; see BERTRAND & GAUVIN, 2003.

29. BOURDIEU, 1996.

30. VAN REES, 1987; see GRÜTTMEIER & LEUKER, 2006.

31. See MARSZALEK & SASSE, 2010.

entanglements. At the given time and considering the outlined complexity of the matter, it seems nevertheless to make more sense to give preference to the institutional approach that allows, by focusing on the changing of literary institutions, to create objectivity and comparability between periods and to clearly diagnose discontinuities and blank spaces.

In a broader sense, however, field theory itself creates a bridge to “cultural space,” namely through the concept of the “Space of Possibles.”<sup>32</sup> The field (as well as a field that according to Bourdieu does [not yet] count as such) can also be understood as a space in which certain literary actions are possible at a given time—or not.

Let us briefly explain this on an equally prominent and problematic example. In the case of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it cannot be about attempting to assign Adam Mickiewicz—who was born in the historical region of “Lithuania” (“Litwa”) on the western periphery of the Russian Empire and who was a representative of the social elite that since the 17<sup>th</sup> century considered itself part of the Polish culture (*szlachta*)—to “Belarusian” literature (which *de facto* did not exist yet at that time), as is sometimes undertaken by Belarusian scholars.<sup>33</sup> Instead, a depiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century must reconstruct the complex entanglement of regional, linguistic, confessional, social, institutional, individual biographical and poetological aspects. These aspects elucidate the processes of shifting, exclusion and absorption that precisely do *not* make it possible to construct Mickiewicz as an author or even a founder of a “Belarusian” literature. In reverse (in the sense of Bourdieu’s concept of “space of possibles”), they make him apprehensible as being one of the constitutive factors of its (im)possibilities to develop in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup>

The present article stands in the context of the outlined project of a *Literary History of Belarus*. It attempts to explore the benefits and limits of a transnational view on the literary “spaces of (im)possibles” from an institutional perspective using the example of the 1920s. That is to say, this article will specifically ask for the transnational potential that is usually blanked out by the traditional view on Belarusian national literature. To make this undertaking plausible, we will first briefly outline the space of Belarus in the 1920s.

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32. BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 234-239.

33. BRUSEVIČ, 2008; HAJBA, 2011.

34. See KOHLER (2014a, 2014b). These aspects have also to be correlated to models of Polish national literary historiography (for example, to the “szkoła białoruska” ([belarusian school]; see JANION, 1991; JACKIEWICZ 1996), or to the “literatura kresowa” ([borderland-literature]; see HADACZEK, 2011).



## Transnational? The Space of Belarus in the 1920s

### *A "Divided Space"*

The space of Belarus in the 1920s was initially characterised by two borders: On the one hand by the state border between the Belarusian Socialist Republic and the Second *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, drawn in the Peace of Riga, which subdued literature emerging (or not emerging) in this space (meaning literature in Belarusian) into two different legal-normative systems. On the other hand, this territorial state border split the social space into two ideologically opposed hemispheres, which were designed for the elaboration and consolidation of two opposing models of society—proletarian or socialistic on the one side, bourgeois-national (or capitalistic) on the other side of the border.

For Belarusian literature (again: literature in Belarusian) of the 1920s, which had passed through a first (!) foundation and consolidation phase before the outbreak of First World War,<sup>35</sup> this meant the following under general viewpoints:

1. The two threads of Belarusian literature now developing further in separate systems had a common reference-spot in the aforementioned “foundation phase” (1905-1915), which was, however, modelled by the two systems in an antagonistic way—as a spot of historical imitation in one case, and as a rejection point in the other. Besides, the macro-systems that were established on each side of the border ascribed a respectively opposing status to literature. Whereas in the Soviet part of the country Belarusian literature—as one to be moulded as “proletarian”—programmatically was assigned a major role in the construction of the “new society,” in the framework of the Polish state it was—as “nationally” oriented—reduced to the status of a regionally limited “minority literature.”
2. The division of the space of Belarus also produced two literary centres: Vil'nja, on the one hand, was anchored as capital of the “national” literature not just in collective memory,<sup>36</sup> but also in the institutional “field-memory.”<sup>37</sup> In reality, however, Vil'nja, now situated within the Polish state, was unable to regain its former charisma as Belarusian cultural centre in the 1910s.

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35. See UNUČAK, 2008; VABIŠČEVIČ, 2009; NAVUMENKA, 2012.

36. LUCKEVIČ, 2006.

37. KOHLER & NAVUMENKA, 2012.

Minsk, as the capital of the BSSR, on the other hand, experienced a significant institutional boost in the 1920s, literary and cultural institutions included. At the same time, as a literary centre (and not only as such) it was subordinated to the Soviet super-centre of power, Moscow.

3. So far, to literary historical conceptualisations of the 1920s and 1930s the ongoing processes on both sides of the ideological and state border seemed to differ so much that they established the model of “Western Belarusian literature” as being fully distinct from Soviet Belarusian literature. This conceptualisation is symptomatic. Whereas the Soviet interpretation<sup>38</sup> emphasised the interplay of revolutionary literary forces between Western Belarus and the BSSR in order to literarily legitimate the unification of Western Belarus with the Soviet part in 1939 as an “organic” literary affiliation to Soviet literature, the post-Soviet modelling<sup>39</sup> emphasised the “autonomy” of Western Belarusian literature in order to profile it as a stronghold of “humanistic” and national ideals withstanding Soviet literary perversions. It actually seems more appropriate to look at Western and Soviet Belarusian literature(s) as two interacting (sub)systems that were both significantly controlled by Vil’nja (pre-war national movement’s infrastructure maintained in the 1920s), by Minsk, but also by Moscow.<sup>40</sup> Looked upon as a whole, the literary system definitely stands under the tension of a (not less than) double competition between a national and a transnational as well as between a national, a transnational and a regional-minority literature model. Thereby, the separate models also imply differently profiled literary communication spaces.

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38. KOLESNIK, 1977, p. 122.

39. LIS, 1999, p. 280.

40. NAVUMENKA, 2015; KOHLER, 2015a; KOHLER, 2015b.

### *Multilingual System*

Another aspect instantly raises the question of literature's transnational potential: From 1924 on, four equal state languages—Belarusian, Russian, Polish and Yiddish—were official, with Belarusian as the language of the quantitatively prevalent ethnicity being given preference in official communication.<sup>41</sup> An exceptional position, even if not as “state language,” was given to Lithuanian and Latvian, as well. This multilingualism initiated by Moscow was institutionalised in political organisation (national sections or offices within the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Belarus (KP(b)B) as well as in education (national sections in the Council of People's Commissars (SNK) that organised the school and higher education of national minorities, the founding of Jewish and Polish pedagogical institutes or respective departments in the State Pedagogic Institute of Minsk). But mainly it became relevant on the level of cultural organisations (respective departments in the Institute for Belarusian Culture (IBK), the precursor of the Academy of Sciences, as well as in the State Theatre, in the founding of newspapers and journals, libraries or respective sections, etc.).<sup>42</sup> Hereby, multiple literary communication spheres were at least potentially revealed.

This nationalities policy stood in an unclear relationship of tension with the policy of the so called “Belarusizacyja.”<sup>43</sup> Primarily, though, it was under the sign of an inherent misunderstanding regarding its political motivation. What representatives of national minorities as well as nationally disposed Belarusians perceived as a possibility of national self-realisation (and maybe even more), actually solely served the maximally effective and extensive ideological re-education of the population.<sup>44</sup> This is proven not only by the destruction of traditional cultural micro-structures and by “anti-religious propaganda” such as the closing or re-purposing of Talmud schools and synagogues going on simultaneously, but also or even particularly by the recalling of the subsidies policy (closing of the aforementioned institutions, enforcing Russian as compulsory language in school lessons, and more) from the late 1920s, or, at the latest, from the early 1930s, and,

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41. Compare PLATONAŨ & KORŠUK, 2001, p. 129.

42. See ZACHARKEVIČ (2009, p. 240f.). Beyond this, the nationalities policies also extend to the agricultural area (founding of national kolkhoses, national representations in the village administrative bodies, the Polish minority receives an autonomous region, etc.), and also take into account the minorities of the Roma (“cyhany”) and Tatars (*ibid.*, p. 245f.).

43. See PLATONAŨ & KORŠUK, 2001.

44. ŠYBEKA, 2003, p. 250.

last but not least, by the fate of the protagonists involved in subsidising nationalities policy and Belarusization in the second half of the 1930s. The actual motivation of the nationalities policy (not only concerning the BSSR) is revealed in a letter from Stalin to Lenin in 1922:

We are experiencing such a band of development, when form, law, constitution cannot be ignored, when the young generation of communists in the borderlands refuses to accept the game of independence as a game, stubbornly understanding the words about independence at face value, and also stubbornly demanding us to bring the letters of the constitution of the independent republics to life.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the space of Belarus in the 1920s is to be understood as an extremely complex configuration equally characterised by territorial and ideological division and by poly-ethnicity that stood under multiple tensions of national differentiation and ideological homogenisation, especially in the area of culture. Before this background we will try to understand in how far literary fields overlapped in the outlined specific conditions, which literary spaces of (im)possibility resulted from these and whether, and to what extent, transnational aspects can be exposed.

### **Field Borders and Interference of Fields in the Space of Belarus from an institutional viewpoint**

Where are the borders of a literary field and how can it be defined? In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu implicitly assumes a literary field whose “spatial” expansion coincides with state borders.<sup>46</sup> Under this premise, he defines the borders of the literary field primarily on the vertical axis, that is to say, through the differentiation between literature and not-literature. Bourdieu only marginally reflects “horizontal” interactions between (national) literary fields, using the example of Belgian literature and initially denying it the character of a (separate) field.<sup>47</sup> As a reaction to

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45. «Мы переживаем такую полосу развития, когда форма, закон, конституция не могут быть игнорированы, когда молодое поколение коммунистов на окраинах игру в независимость отказывается принимать как игру, упорно признавая слова о независимости за чистую монету и также упорно требуя от нас проведения в жизнь буквы конституции независимых республик», STALIN, 1989 (22.09.1922), p. 199.

46. BOURDIEU, 1996.

47. See BOURDIEU, 1985.

Casanova's considerations,<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu later specifies the case of Belgian literature as an example for "specific literary dominance" and states: "One can be free politically while remaining literary dominated."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, one has to admit that field theory has so far contributed little to the conceptualisation of spatial field borders and overlappings of fields.<sup>50</sup> Especially against the background of the rather hazy categories of "field logic" and "field effects"<sup>51</sup> and bearing in mind the modelling of Casanova (2004), the question could be asked whether the "World Republic of Letters" in its core is not thought of as one single, autonomous, internationally acting "French field" whose logic is implicitly or explicitly used to measure all other fields.

Among others for this reason, it seems reasonable to draw close to the question—whether in the space of Belarus of the 1920s and under the conditions of division, poly-ethnicity and ideological regulation one or more literary fields function, and if the latter is the case, how these fields interact with each other—pragmatically from the perspective of the institutional approach.

### *Western Belarusian and Soviet Belarusian (Sub-)Fields*

In connection to the hypothetical division of Belarusian literature into a Western Belarusian and a Soviet Belarusian (sub)field, respective research is already going on. The institutional comparison leads to the preliminary result, that, on the one hand, "there can be no question of a 'Western Belarusian literary field,'" but also that, on the other hand, "a model of Western Belarusian literature as a 'sub-field' of the Soviet Belarusian literary field for now [cannot be made] sufficiently plausible." At the same time, the cross-border field effects prove themselves as

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48. Casanova reflects spatial aspects, namely in the sense of arrangements of (again: national) fields alongside the "literary Meridian." She marginally considers interferences of fields when investigating "small" literatures as literary dominant spaces (CASANOVA, 2004). With regard to Belgian literature she defines the catchphrase of "Belgian anger" (« La colère belge »). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Brussels has the role of the "capital of the second chance towards that Paris that dominated the whole literary world" (« capitale de la deuxième chance contre ce Paris qui dominait le monde littéraire tout entier »; DUBOIS & BOURDIEU, 1999, p. 13; see CASANOVA, 1995, p. 13-17).

49. « On peut être libre politiquement tout en restant dominé littérairement »; DUBOIS & BOURDIEU, 1999, p. 12.

50. On the problem of national modelling of social fields, see SAPIRO, 2013, p. 70-85.

51. BOURDIEU, 1996; BOURDIEU & WACQUANT, 2006, p. 124-147.

too obvious for it to be justified to finally put aside reflections on an integrative model. Thus, the preliminary result must read that the field theoretical approach—and especially the methodological focus on the question of field effects evoked by institutions and protagonists—can provide the necessary analytical apparatus, but that the model allows for no systematic place to which the result of the study could be conceptually assigned to. Unless this place is exactly the one that Bourdieus model with its laconic tautology leaves to itself— precisely the border of the field.<sup>52</sup>

“Transnationality,” as it seems, might, in a way, be stated here in a reversed sense: Here we have a field (or two “sub-fields”) that basically crosses state borders and at the same time is integrated into two superior and antagonistic macro systems (or macro-fields).

### *Transnational literary field?*

Unlike the interrelation of Western Belarusian and Soviet Belarusian literature, the question of possible interactions between literature(s) written in the four official state languages within the BSSR—Belorussian, Russian, Yiddish and Polish—has so far not, or hardly, been stated in this clarity. First, we need to clarify to what extent these four languages or literatures were institutionally secured, and in which literary models, spaces—and not least markets—they actually participated or potentially could participate.

The quantitative distribution of population of the BSSR in the year 1926 was composed as follows:

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52. „[...] allzu augenfällig, als dass es gerechtfertigt wäre, Überlegungen zu einem integrativen Modell abschließend ad acta zu legen. So muss der vorläufige Befund wohl lauten, dass der feldtheoretische Ansatz – und insbesondere der methodische Fokus auf die Frage nach durch Institutionen und Akteure hervorgebrachten Feldeffekten – wohl das analytische Instrumentarium bereitzustellen vermag, dass das Modell aber keinen systematischen Ort vorsieht, dem das Ergebnis der Untersuchung sich konzeptuell zuweisen ließe. Es sei denn, dieser Ort ist eben jener, den Bourdieus Modell in lakonischer Tautologie sich selber überlässt – eben die Grenze des Feldes“, KOHLER, 2015a, p. 170.

TABLE 1

	Total	Belarus.	Jews	Rus.	Polish	Ukrai.	Latv.	Lith.	other
Count	4 983240	4 017301	407059	383806	97498	34681	14061	6864	
in %	100	80,62	8,19	7,7	1,98	0,69	0,28	0,14	0,42

Composition of the population of the BSSR 1926 (according to ethnicity)<sup>53</sup>

Needless to say, ethnicity is not indicative of language use.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the groups differ significantly in their social composition, regional distribution, cultural homogeneity, social-political affinities and, last but not least, in their “literary potential.” Keeping these reservations in mind, the numbers introduced above shall serve as a point of reference for the sake of orientation.

Differences between the ethnic groups were also apparent in the manner and extent of their institutional representation. At the Institute for Belarusian Culture [Instytut Belaruskaj Kul'tury], founded in 1922, a Jewish and, since 1925, a Polish department (both with further commissions), as well as, since 1926, a Latvian and then a Lithuanian section were represented (but no Russian, factually proving that Russians living in the BSSR were not considered a “national minority”). Among these departments or sections, the Jewish one was by far the biggest and most productive.<sup>55</sup>

53. According to PRACHARĚNJA, 2017, p. 225 and [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr\\_nac\\_26.php?reg=3](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/ussr_nac_26.php?reg=3) (21.06.2019).

54. For example, in urban and administrative life Russian is factually prevalent, and Russian or Jewish-Russian employees of the party apparatus not rarely defy the Belarusization measures (ŠYBĚKA, 2003, p. 251).

55. Special importance is ascribed to the Jewish department. Its founding was justified by Balicki in 1924 in front of the SNK as follows: “In various places and different corners of Belarus, *Jewish culture is so intertwined with Belarusian that the study of one demands the imperative study of the other.* [...] That is why the organisation of a Jewish department in the Institute of Belarusian culture does not only not divide the tasks of the IBC, but also gives this organisation a special symmetry and harmony” («По различным местечкам и другим уголкам Белоруссии *еврейская культура настолько переплелась с белорусской, что изучение одной требует непременно изучения другой.* [...] Вот почему организация при Институте белорусской культуры еврейского отдела не только не раздваивает задач Инбелкультва, но придает этому учреждению особую стройность и гармонию»; quoted from SKALABAN & TOKARAŪ, 2011, p. 64; highlights GK/PN). In the report to the first half of 1925, the following is stated: “The Jewish section has developed very widely due to

The Jewish section published the specialised journal *Zeitschrift*, a scientific almanac mainly (but not only) in Yiddish, which marginally also touched literary issues.<sup>56</sup>

### *Multilingual Production in the Belarusian State Publishing House*

In view of the literary productivity of the four language groups and the question of their interrelation, the decisive institution was printing and publishing. Generally, two publishing channels for literary texts were available for the authors of the BSSR in the 1920s, the Belarusian State Publishing House [Belaruskaje Dzjaržaŭnae Vydavectva] and literary, as well as non-literary periodicals.<sup>57</sup>

In the Belarusian State Publishing House (BDV), which held a *de facto* monopoly,<sup>58</sup> multilingual production was programmatically promoted. Actually, the languages used in the space of Belarus were virtually institutionally merged in BDV:

According to the production plan of 1924, BDV was supposed to begin publishing literature in accordance to the national needs in the following proportions: Belarusian—68%, Jewish—15%, Russian—10%, Polish—5%, Latvian and Lithuanian—2%.<sup>59</sup>

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a bigger number of suitable employees and has already outgrown its projected frame. It has already founded several sub-sections (theatre and Art, folklore) and has constituted several new commissions. The work of the Polish section so far consists only of three permanent commissions due to the lack of suitable employees, whereby a new ethnographic commission has been founded to explore the Polish population in the area of the BSSR” («Яўрэйскі аддзел развіўся, дзякуючы прысутнасці большага ліку належных працаўнікоў, вельмі шырока і перарос ужо сваі запраектаваныя рамкі. Ён выдзеліў некалькі ўжо падсекцый (па тэатру і мастацтву, па фальклору) і склаў некаторыя новыя камісіі. Праца польскага аддзела, за адсутнасцю адпаведных працаўнікоў, вылілася зараз толькі ў тры сталыя камісіі, прычым заснавана новая этнаграфічная камісія, вывучаючая расселенае па БССР польскае жыхарства»; *ibid.*, p. 111-112). In the context of the reconstruction of the IBC in 1927, five commissions are allocated to the Jewish sections, including one for the research of Jewish literature. The Polish section is divided into three commissions in 1927, also including one for the investigation of Polish language and culture (*ibid.*, p. 194). In 1926, 121 of 206 employees of the Institute are Belarusian (58,7%), 45 Jewish (21,8%) and 23 Polish (11,2%); *ibid.*, p. 155.

56. See FILATOVA, 2012, p. 162.

57. Publishers or periodicals outside of Belarus, especially in Vilnius but also in Moscow, Warsaw, Kiev, L'viv, Prague, Berlin and others offer another option.

58. NIKALAEŪ *et al.*, 2011, p. 206.

59. «Згодна з выдавецкім планам 1924 года, БДВ павінна было пачаць выпускаць літаратуру ў адпаведнасці з нацыянальнымі патрэбамі ў наступных суадносінах:



Once again, the numbers prove the prominent position of Yiddish, compared to Russian and Polish. However, they refer to the respectively total publishing activity of BDV, whose lion's share is made up of political or propagandistic texts with artistic literature ("fiction") playing a clearly inferior role. Also, target figures are usually not fulfilled, as is documented in BDV's report from May 1927:

TABLE 2

Language	Branch	planned	fulfilled
Belarusian	Textbooks	350	353
	Artistic literature	170	116
	Farmer's literature	80	59
	Lenin	120	202
	Political literature	70	55
	Komsomol	60	35
	Children's/Pioneer's literature	40	28
	Women's literature	20	13
	War	-	15
	<i>Total</i>	910	876
Yiddish (Jaürejski)	<i>Total</i>	188	167
Polish	<i>Total</i>	63	56
Russian	<i>Total</i>	100	55

Planned and fulfilled production of the BDV in the four state languages 1926/1927<sup>60</sup>

беларускай – 68%, яўрэйскай – 15%; рускай – 10%; польскай – 5%; латышскай і літоўскай – 2%»; ПРАЧАРЭЊА, 2017, р. 227.

60. The table does not include the so called "commercial literature." The figures refer to print sheets [*arkuśy*] and are partially rounded. The depiction in the report differentiates between "published" [*izdana*] and "in review" [*na prahljadze*]. The balance, though, counts all three as "carried out" (NARB, f. LA 17, op. 1, d. 18, l. 91-99).

The BDV's catalogues from 1925 to 1929 also confirm the weak status of artistic literature in book production. The jubilee catalogue presents the multilingual production as a clear success:

Before the Revolution no books were printed in Minsk, but now *three hundred book titles in Belarusian, Yiddish, Polish, Russian and Lithuanian are simultaneously worked on daily.*<sup>61</sup>

The efforts, though, were primarily directed at the production of functional books (designed for practical application), and only to a small extent to artistic literature. Hereby we see that the development of single segments and especially of artistic literature exhibits even opposed dynamics in the various languages: there was a noteworthy increase in the specifically literary production (*mastackaja litaratura*) not only for Belarusian but especially for Yiddish.

TABLE 3

		1924/ 1925	1925/ 1926	1926/ 1927	1927/ 1928	1928/ 1929	Total for 5 years
In Belarusian	Textbooks	863	593	501	714	727	3.398
	Mass literature	330	275	183	240	620,5	1.648,5
	Belletristic	98	117	67	148,5	129	559,5
	Children	15	10	23	240,5	166	454,5
	Periodicals	26	30	16	15	7	94
	Other	99	27	14	122	111,5	373,5
	Total	1.431	1.052	804	1.480	1.761	6.528

61. «У дарэволюцыйны час у Менску аніякіх кніх [sic!] не друкавалі, а цяпер у друкарні БДВ штотдня ідзе работа над трымастамі назвамі кніг на беларускай, яўрэйскай, польскай, расійскай і літоўскай, мовах адначасна» (*Кніhas'pis za pjac' hod*, 1929, p. VII; highlights GK/PN).

In Yiddish	Textbooks	12	20	25	52,5	41,5	151
	Mass literature	30	24	28	2	34	118
	Belletristic	6	3	3	12	42,5	66,5
	Children	3	-	9	43,5	57	112,5
	Other	12	-	-	-	-	12
	Total	63	47	65	110	175	460
In Polish	Textbooks	-	20	24	7	17	68
	Mass literature	11	12	15	15	8	61
	Belletristic	2	10	2	6	12	32
	Children	-	-	-	5	15	20
	Other	4	-	-	-	-	4
	Total	17	42	41	33	52	185
In Russian	Textbooks	27	5	-	3	-	35
	Mass literature	30	14	7	16	3	70
	Belletristic	-	8	5	-	5	18
	Other	15	-	-	-	-	15
	Total	72	27	12	19	8	138
In Lithuanian and Latvian	Mass literature	-	-	-	3	1	4
	Belletristic	-	-	-	1	4	5
	Total	-	-	-	4	5	9

Statistics of the publications of the BDV sorted by languages and segments 1924-1929<sup>62</sup>

62. Data in thousand copies (*Knibas'pis za pjac' hod*, 1929, p. XIV). The total production of fiction in all languages develops as follows (in thousand copies): 1924/25: 106; 1925/26: 138; 1926/27: 77; 1927/28: 169,5; 1928/29: 189. That means, in five years altogether 680, which amounts to about 9,3% of the total production of BDV (textbooks account for almost fifty per cent of the total production of copies). The quantitative drop in all segments in 1926/27 is due to the paper crisis that forces BDV to reduce the production by 20% (NARB, f. 4p, op. 1, d. 2904, l. 1-29).

This observation is further relativised by the titles themselves, as recorded in BDV's catalogue. They document a particularly poor original literary production (for Polish only single works of Waclaw Pański-Solski, Adolf Stankiewicz and W. Noskiewicz, a few small plays (published without an author's name), as well as small anthologies (including *Idziemy*, a publication of the Polish sector of the Belarusian Association of Proletarian Writers).<sup>63</sup> The Yiddish language authors published in the BDV are, in addition, by no means typical for the Yiddish literature of Belarus—important authors such as M. Kulbak, I. Kharyk, Z. Akselrod, E. Savikoški and others are missing here (at least in the 1920s).

The striking discrepancy between the programmatic multilingualism of BDV's production and its realisation in the area of literature, implies that the (part-) literatures are either not sufficiently productive in the 1920s or in their productivity do not comply with the BDV's orientation.

*"National" literary groups and literary journals*

Literary journals or periodicals with a noteworthy literary proportion were an important publication option for literary texts in the 1920s, among other reasons because most periodicals were organs of literary groups.<sup>64</sup>

- . For Belarusian writing authors these were particularly the journals *Maladnjak* [Saplings], *Polymja* [The flame] and *Uzvyšša* [Excelsior] (each tied to the group of the same name).
- . Yiddish writing authors were organised in a Jewish section of the group "Maladnjak," which founded the trans-regionally received literary journal *Štern* [Star] in 1925. In 1926 the newspaper *Junger Arbejtër* [Young worker] emerged, which is tied to the group of the same name.<sup>65</sup>

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63. From altogether sixteen titles named under the category "Literatura piękna" in the catalogue, only three were published before 1928; nine are original Polish texts, seven are translations (three from Ukrainian, four from Belarusian; *Knihab'pis za pjac' hod*, 1929, pp. 145-146).

64. General figures of periodicals in 1927: 11 trans-regional newspapers, including four in Russian, three in Belarusian, two both in Polish and Yiddish. Regional newspapers are all in Russian. Among 11 journals four are in Belarusian, three in Russian, two in Russian and Belarusian, two in Yiddish (ŠYBĚKA, 2003, p. 252).

65. BASIN, 2003, p. 18-38. Reliable research on Jewish or Yiddish language literature and culture in the 1920s focusing on groups and periodicals hardly exists. The meagre information is contradictory regarding title, type and publication period of the periodicals.

- . Russian-writing authors were also organised in a section of “Maladnjak.” In 1925 the group “Zven’ja” was founded, from which the group “Minskij pereval” split off in 1926.<sup>66</sup> Various periodicals were at the disposal of these authors (for example, the newspaper *Zvezda*, which included a literary column), but the authors did not run their own literary journal (in 1926 the almanac *Zven’ja* is published).<sup>67</sup>
- . Authors of the Polish minority organised themselves in a section of “Maladnjak”<sup>68</sup> and published their texts in the weekly newspaper *Orka*, published since 1926 (edited by the Central Committee of the KP(b)B).<sup>69</sup> An author’s own proper literary group, let alone a literary journal in Polish, did not succeed.

It so seems that the Belarusian and Yiddish authors are the best organised, whereas Polish authors are the weakest, probably also because most of them are orientated towards Moscow.<sup>70</sup>

From an institutional perspective, the aforementioned literary journals are of an essential significance, because they virtually “structure” the literary field.<sup>71</sup> In this light, it is important to note that neither the journals in various languages nor the

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A contemporary description is given by ARŠANSKI (1929). A general introduction gives RELES (2006).

66. “In November 1925 the literary organisation ‘Zven’ja’ appeared, uniting authors writing in Russian. [...] In 1927, 7 authors emerged (mainly farmer authors) who organised the literary Association ‘Minskij pereval,’ which aspired to work according to the “Declaration of the All-Union Association of worker and peasant authors ‘Pereval’” («В ноябре 1925 года возникла литературная организация „Звенья“, объединявшая литераторов, писавших на русском языке. [...] В 1927 году из „Звеньев“ выделились 7 литераторов (в большинстве крестьянских), которые организовали литературное объединение „Минский перевал“, ставившее своей целью работать согласно „Декларации Всесоюзного объединения рабочих и крестьянских писателей „Перевал“»; [о.А.А.], 2014, p. 41).

67. The absence of a Russian literary journal can probably be accounted for by the lack of demand: Those who read “Russian” literature are surely primarily interested in the well-known ‘Russian’ papers (especially as *Krasnaja Nov’*, *Pereval* and *LEF* are actively advertised for in the Belarusian periodicals), and not in the literary production on the periphery.

68. SIEROCKA, 1967, p. 419.

69. In 1929 the collection of poems *Idziemy* is published in Minsk.

70. SIEROCKA, 1967, p. 420.

71. KOHLER, 2016, p. 211.

groups exhibited a noteworthy interrelation with one other.<sup>72</sup> This suggests that the four language groups largely kept to themselves. A differentiation took place only, if at all, *within* the respective language groups (most distinctly in Belarusian). There were few cases of a language transcending mutual perception, let alone mixing with other languages. This seems to be true even for national sections within “Maladnjak.”<sup>73</sup>

Regarding the questions of the transnational potential of the literature(s) in the space of Belarus in the 1920s, the following result can be derived from the outlined aspects: On the one hand, the hypothesis of a *transnational potential* is clearly confirmed by the coexistence of four (more or less) literary prolific languages and their evidently institutional funding. On the other hand, it becomes apparent that, especially in an institutional perspective, this transnational potential *was not or was hardly realised*. Instead, we see a configuration, where Belarusian (the Belarusian language) literature clearly dominates the field quantitatively and qualitatively, while the other three part-literatures played a marginal role in 1920s Belarus. They seem to neither stand in a noteworthy exchange relationship with the dominating

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72. This finding, which should be verified in deepened research, results from an excursive examination of Belarusian literary journals regarding the reception of non-Belarusian publications. On the other hand, literary groups express themselves personally accordingly on the occasion of a survey by the SNK: “Maladnjak” declares: “All the time, the Central Board strives to establish a permanent cooperation with other literary organisations. In this process, ‘Uzvyšša’ takes up an especially hostile relation to ‘Maladnjak’” («ЦБ все время стремится наладить постоянное сотрудничество с другими литературными организациями. В этом направлении особенно враждебную позицию в отношении к „Маладняку“ занимает „Узвышша“» (NARB, f. 4р, op. 1, d. 2895, l. 16-17); “Uzvyšša” writes: “The group maintains a connection to the Ukrainian organisation ‘VAPLITĚ’” («Группа поддерживает связь с украинской организацией „ВАПЛИТЭ“»; *ibid.*, l. 24); “Zven’ja” declares: “A connection to ‘Pereval’, ‘Maladnjak’, ‘Vzvyšša’ and ‘Junger Arbejtër’ exists” («Есть связь с „Перевалом“, с „Маладняком“, „Взвышей“ и „Юнгер Арбејтер“, постоянная связь пока не установлена»; *ibid.*, l. 27); “Junger Arbejtër”, finally, answers: “Excerpt for ‘Ju.-A.’ there are no further Jewish authors’ organisations in Belarus. There are no official connections to non-Jewish authors’ organisations” («Кроме „Ю.-А.“, других еврейских писательских организаций в Белоруссии нет. С нееврейскими писательскими организациями официальной связи нет»; *ibid.*, l. 28).

73. The founding of national minorities’ sections (Jewish, Polish, Russian) within “Maladnjak” is decided on the plenary meeting on the 23.03.1925 (compare [o.A.A.], 1925, p. 33). In 1929, the deepened dialogue with the Jewish section of “BelAPP”, a successor organisation of “Maladnjak” (and the Belarusian analogue to Russian “RAPP”) is named as an urgent desideratum in a resolution (see [o.A.A.], 1929, p. 123-125). As a result, for example, translations of Jewish authors or reviews of foreign language publications increase distinctly after 1929 in *Maladnjak* and *Polymja*, even though nationalities policy is officially closed at the end of the 1920s.

segment, nor to transgress or to question the field borders in the direction of the neighbouring fields (the Polish and the Russian field). This result seems to confirm the predominantly “programmatic” character of a “multi-national Soviet literature”<sup>74</sup> that, at least in the 1920s, remains widely within national categories: From an institutional perspective, at any rate, the space of Belarus seems to be realised as a *multinational* but not as a *transnational* literary space. We can conclude, that transnational entanglement in the sense of *crossing* national parameters may be identified, if at all, on the level of the protagonists.

### Transnational Spaces of Possibles?

Bourdieu's concept of the space of possibles, as the “potentially realisable in the field,”<sup>75</sup> mediates between the objectively given structure of existing positions or accomplished position-takings in the field, on the one hand, and objectively—but also subjectively—*possible* position-takings, on the other:

The relationship among positions and position-takings is by no means a relationship of mechanical determination. Between one and the other, in some fashion, the space of possibles interposes itself, [...] that is, as an oriented space, pregnant with position-takings identifiable as objective potentialities, things “to be done,” “movements” to launch, reviews to create, adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be “overtaken” and so forth. [...] Thus the heritage accumulated by collective work presents itself to each agent as a space of possibles, that is, as an ensemble of probable *constraints* which are the condition and the counterpart of a set of *possible uses*.<sup>76</sup>

The concept is to be understood as a “necessary theoretical-conceptual addition”<sup>77</sup> of Bourdieu's field model that makes it possible “to have regard for fundamental changes in practice.”<sup>78</sup> It nuances Bourdieu's occasionally mechanical-seeming model, mainly in view of explaining literary transition, and is therefore especially

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74. HAYWARD, 1980, p. 185.

75. „[...] das im Feld potenziell Realisierbare“ (DÖLLINGER, 2017, p. 248; see also SPELLER, 2011, p. 65).

76. BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 234-235; highlights from the original.

77. „notwendige theoretisch-konzeptionelle Ergänzung“ (DÖLLINGER, 2017, p. 256).

78. „fundamentalen Veränderungen in der Praxis Rechnung zu tragen“ (*ibid.*).

interesting from a literary-historical perspective. What *a posteriori* becomes visible as “new” in the field, are specific realisations of what is, at a certain point, virtually laid out in the logic of the field in the form of “*structural lacunae*,”<sup>79</sup> but has so far not been realised.<sup>80</sup>

Here we will consider the question whether, or to what extent, the Belarusian literary field of the 1920s constituted institutionalised “multinational” transnational spaces of possibles—and who was able to realise such virtual possibilities.

### *Choice of language and Space of possibles*

It has become obvious that the options available to the literary field of this time and hence to its protagonists are substantially pre-structured by the “language” and “literary corporation” parameters. Thus, the transnational perspective has already complemented a significant aspect to the knowledge of literature of Belarus in the 1920s, because Belarusian studies—including literary-historic—have so far paid attention mainly to the literature in the Belarusian language in this period.<sup>81</sup>

It has also become obvious that the language groups and the literary groups largely remain isolated from each other on the institutional level (cf. note 72). *In reality*, this means that the primary language choice opens up to the protagonists a respectively differently structured ideological and poetological-aesthetic space of possibles. This space of possibles is differentiated unequal for each of the language groups in 1927:

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79. BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 235, 239.

80. Speller criticises Bourdieu’s concept of the space of possibles that creates a too weak connection between the “space of the oeuvre” and the “space of the positions” (SPELLER, 2011, p. 70).

81. This stands in contrast to other (former) periods of literary history in Belarus, where the same “exclusively Belarusian” viewpoint would merely meet his object. In those periods a transnational perspective becomes compelling to make it possible to say anything about the literature of the space of Belarus.



TABLE 4

Belarusian <sup>82</sup>			Yiddish	
Maladnjak	Polymja	Uzvyšša	Junger Arbeiter	Maladnjak: jaür. sekcyja
Russian			Polish	
Maladnjak: ras. sekc.	Zven'ja	Minskij Pereval	Maladnjak: pol'skaja sekcyja	

Institutional choice possibilities (languages and groups)

All of these organisations were at least *formally* (programmatically) subordinated to the model of “proletarian” literature serving the construction of socialist society, and were committed to the formula “national in form, proletarian in content.”<sup>83</sup> The internal differentiation between the journals can therefore not be revealed at first glance.<sup>84</sup> It is important to note that to all authors an affiliation with the group “Maladnjak” stood open consistently, as “Maladnjak’s” national sections ensured the extensive implementation and enforcement of the “national in form, proletarian in content” model. Choosing the group “Maladnjak” therefore implied a subordination to a literary model that—as a *proletarian model*—was orientated *internationally*, and whose national variants were to be understood in the function of “proletarian internationalism.”<sup>85</sup>

In view of the *realisation* of transnational spaces of possibles in relation to the institutionally designated *possibilities* of choice, it is symptomatic that the

82. Only the most important groups are mentioned here. Small, short-lived splinter groups (see PLATONAŪ, 1999, p. 6) and regional groups have been left out.

83. See, for example, manifestos or programmatic texts of “Maladnjak” ([o.A.A.], 1926, p. 9) as well as of “Uzvyšša” ([o.A.A.], 1927a, p. 169).

84. Internal differentiation partly depends on generations, partly it is, on a very general level, connected to the status attributed to the aesthetic quality of the text in relation to its ideological orientation, partly, again, inter- and transnational networks and literary models seem to play an indeed very hazy role (see “Uzvyšša’s” contacts to Ukrainian “VAPLITE”, the by far trans-regional radius of the journal *Štern*, the proximity of “Minskij Pereval” to Russian “Pereval” etc.). A systematic comparative study to the complex internal differentiations between the journals in Belarusian language continues to be a desideratum (see KOHLER, 2016, p. 236).

85. In this respect, the association “Maladnjak” in a certain way “copies” the “Soviet-Union-model” with the difference that the leading role is taken over by the Belarusian core group.

language choice and the appropriate trajectory options do not naturally correlate imperatively with authors' ethnicity. This particularly applies to Jewish authors, for whom the "institutionally designated" Yiddish is far from being the only option. Instead, Jewish authors were represented in the Russian speaking group "Zven'ja"<sup>86</sup> as well as in Belarusian-speaking groups and journals.<sup>87</sup> Transnational space of possibles thus seems to have been revealed especially for and by them—in view of a "Jewish" as well as of a "Belarusian," and for a proper "Transnational," literature that both connects and crosses borders.

In the given context of a *Literary History of Belarus* we are for now especially interested in those spaces of possibles that result from the orientation of Jewish authors towards literature in Belarusian language.

***Case study: Jewish Authors in Belarusian Language—Samuil Plaŭnik***

Samuil Plaŭnik (1886-1941) was born to a poor Jewish family in the village of Pasadzec, about 70 km north of Minsk. Plaŭnik nowadays is considered to be one of the central "classics of Belarusian literature,"<sup>88</sup> known under his main pseudonym Zmitrok Bjadulja. He thus is probably the most prominent proof of a transnational space of possibles in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Plaŭnik received a traditional Jewish school education in a Cheder and was then sent to the Yeshiva, which he left one and a half years later without a degree. He wrote his first literary texts in Hebrew, then in Russian,<sup>89</sup> but then, unlike, for example, Běr Aršanski, Izi Kharyk or Majsej Kulbak, who connected to the

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86. NARB, f. 4p, op. 1, d. 2895, l. 27.

87. See, for example, [о.А.А.], 1927b, p. 93; NARB, f. 4p, op. 1, d. 2895, l. 16. Bemporad indicates that the Jewish population of the BSSR critically looked upon the orientation towards the Belarusian language. She describes Jewish authors who turned towards Belarusian as an exception: "It should be noticed that while Jews generally opposed Belorussian, there were a few Jewish writers who opted for Belorussian as the language of their literary activity" (BEMPORAD, 2007, p. 103). Factually, though, there were more authors than the ones she names.

88. «[К]ласік[] беларускай літаратуры» (КАВАЛЕНКА, 1985, p. 5). Compare also: "The great Belarusian author Zmitrok Bjadulja, whose name rightly stands beside the names of the great masters of the Belarusian artistic word – Janka Kupala, Jakub Kolas, Maksim Bahdanovič and Maskim Harëcki" («выдатны беларускі пісьменнік Змітрок Бядуля, чьё імя па праву стаіць побач з імёнамі буйнейшых майстроў беларускага мастацкага слова – Янкі Купалы, Якуба Коласа, Максіма Багдановіча, Максіма Гарэцкага»; *ibid.*, p. 6). Similar assessments are made by NAVUMENKA (1985, p. 237) and by KAZBJARUK (2006, p. 5).

89. KAZBJARUK, 2006, p. 5.

international Jewish literary space by using Yiddish, he switched to Belarusian as the language for his literary activity. His acquaintance with the Belarusian newspaper *Naša niva* [Our field] (1906-1915) is considered a milestone on his way to choosing Belarusian instead of “imperial” Russian.<sup>90</sup> A decisive factor for the shaping of Plaŭnik-Bjadulja's space of possibles therefore seems to be the fact that he grew up into the *constitution phase* of Belarusian (national) literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the choice of Belarusian as the “language of the people” in combination with the corresponding thematic orientation promoted by *Naša niva*, he was able to take up a clearly visible position in the developing literary space as early as 1912.

Thus, Bjadulja steps into the 1920s as a mature and recognised writer. On the one hand, as a representative of the “founder generation” of the national literary tradition, who, on the other hand and in contradiction to Jakub Kolas and Janka Kupala, specifically does *not* carry the label of a “Belarusian national poet” (this probably has to do with his Jewish background). This very specific position could be the reason why Bjadulja's trajectory of the 1920s “crosses” several institutional possibilities simultaneously. Beside his “natural” place (the journal *Polymja* which primarily gathered authors of the older generation around itself and in whose closer circle of collaborators he counted), Bjadulja at the same time chose a place that was actually “impossible” for him from a generational perspective. He became a member of the group “Maladnjak” (which was the “natural” place for young newcomers in the field who looked critically upon Bjadulja's generation). In “Maladnjak” he joined the central group settled in Minsk and writing in Belarusian—and not the so called “Jewish section.” When he left the group in 1926 together with the founding members of the group “Uzvyšša,” he explicitly excluded himself from their sharp criticism towards “Maladnjak.”<sup>91</sup> These “border crossings,” which manifest Bjadulja's compatibility with groups competing among themselves, document an outstanding flexibility of his space of possibles, further reinforced by his position as literary editor of the daily newspaper *Saveckaja Belarus'* [Soviet Belarus].

Furthermore, Bjadulja distinguished himself from an aesthetic and poetological perspective through a considerable eagerness to experiment: In the first half of the 1920s, his experiments with the “revolutionary theme,” the comparison of

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90. *Ibid.*, p. 5f. “It is unknown what Bjadulja's literary fate would have looked like, had Sosenski not shown him the newspaper in Belarusian” («Невядома, як бы склаўся літаратурны лёс Бядулі, калі б Сосенскі не паказаў яму газету на беларускай мове»; see MAKARĚVIČ, 2014).

91. See PLATONAŪ, 1999, p. 18.

the pre-revolutionary social reality with the new Soviet order, and his affinity to poetry, poems and small prose forms<sup>92</sup> made him compatible to “Maladnjak” and *Polymja*. As a member of the group “Uzvyšša,” again, he contributed considerably to the differentiation of forms of long narrative fiction, in which he critically reflects pre-revolutionary types under the new conditions.<sup>93</sup>

Only from the second half of the 1920s did Bjadulja emerge as a translator of Jewish authors (especially Sholom-Alejkhem, Kharyk und Kulbak, furthermore Godiner, Akselrod, Iudelson and others) into Belarusian (occasionally at first and more and more in the 1930s—thus in accordance to the institutional stipulations of an intensified mutual awareness (cf. note 73). Nevertheless, the attribute of a “mediator” could be given to Bjadulja only with reservation.<sup>94</sup> Instead, transnational moments come to bear at various places in his oeuvre, on a stylistic level (for example, in his lyric prose), as well as on the level of the personages, for example in the character Jazep Krušynski, where the traditional type of the Belarusian farmer is merged with that of a Jewish merchant.

But the transnational most explicitly emerges in his late autobiographic *apovesc’* “*U drymučych ljasach*” (“In the dense forests”; first published in *Polymja* 1939/8). Similar to Bruno Schulz, Bjadulja locates the lost Jewish world of his childhood in a mythical space (in the “dense forests”). It is the only (fictional or at least fictionalised) text in which Bjadulja explicitly positions himself (the first-person-narrator) as Jewish—doubly broken by the childlike-alienated distance to the cultural universe of Jewish faith (the commandments of Shabbat are personified for the child by the enigmatic “Queen Šabas”),<sup>95</sup> and through the temporal distance to childhood. In this *apovesc’* Bjadulja falls in line with the “transnational Jewish” (comparable to Bruno Schulz or Isaak Babel’), and at the same time anchors the narrative of Jewish life in Belarusian literature.<sup>96</sup>

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92. In the 1920s he published two collections of poems under his second pseudonym “Jasakar.”

93. He published his novels *Salavej* [‘The nightingale’] and *Jazep Krušynski* first in *Uzvyšša*.

94. An exception is the essay “Žydy na Belarusi” (“The Jews in Belarus”) published as early as 1918. Here Bjadulja gives a historical overview of the cultural and economic entanglement between Jews and Belarusians and explicitly positions the article as a stimulus for a deepened scientific debate on the theme—a task the Institute for Belarusian Culture attends to from the middle of the 1920s on (cf. note 55).

95. “I image Queen Šabas in the shape of our rich innkeeper’s wife Zlata [...] She watches that the Jewish lads do not collect berries in the forest” («Я ўяўляю сабе царыцу Шабас у выглядзе нашай багатай карчмарыхі Златы [...] Яна сочыць за тым, каб жыдоўскія хлопчыкі ягад не збіралі ў лесе»; Bjadulja, 2006, p. 245).

96. The sharp contradiction between the authoritative regulations in the Yeshiva and the

Bjadulja's oeuvre has so far not been viewed from a transnational perspective. A passage from the essay "Žydy na Belarusi" ([Jews in Belarus], 1918) suggests that this would be worthwhile beyond the aforementioned examples:

The Jews who recall Zion in their prayers three times a day, picture this Zion in their minds as a hilly elevation such as the ones that surround them here in Belarus. The Jewish child who dedicated his young years to the Bible in the Cheder, had before him the live Bible of Belarusian field farmers, of the quiet, calm Belarusian country with woods, forests, rivers and meadows. Without this Belarusian nature, which had taken possession of their soul since birth, they could not picture Palestine in their fantasy, which they imagine according to the example of the Belarusian country.<sup>97</sup>

This outline of a "Belarusian-Jewish world of life and imagination" that comes astonishingly close to modern conceptualisations of the "transnational"<sup>98</sup> does not only resonate in Bjadulja's *apovesc'* "U drymučych ljasach," which was to be written about twenty years later. It also casts light on Bjadulja's work as a whole: The Belarusian village itself that is always in the centre of his literary texts, and out of which his literary work virtually arises, *is*—at any rate for him—already a symbiotic transnational space.

## Conclusion

A transnational perspective thus seems to provide new aspects to a *Literary History of Belarus*, especially with regard to the question about the formation of transnational potentials in relation to the polyethnically-structured space of

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child's artistic-literary imagination is emphasised in the chapter "Miryjam." The burning of the book "Miryjam," which contains the child's poems, by the rebbe and the subsequent expulsion from the Yeshiva signify the end of childhood, but also the liberation to an independent study and literary creativity (BJADULJA, 2006, p. 295f.).

97. «Жыды, тры разы на дзень у малітвах сваіх успамянаючы Сіён, малявалі сабе ў думках гэты Сіён як нейкі ўзгорак-узвышчу, якія акружаюць іх тут, на Беларусі. Жыдоўскае дзіця, аддаючы ўсе свае маладыя гады Бібліі ў хедэрах, мела перад сабой жывую Біблію беларускіх ратаяў, беларускай спакойнай, ціхай зямелькі з лясамі, пушчамі, рэчкамі, лугамі. Без гэтай беларускай прыроды, што завалодала іхнай душой ад нараджэння, яны б не маглі ў фантазіі сваёй маляваць Палестыну, каторую яны маляюць, маючы ўзорам беларускую зямлю» (BJADULJA, 2006, p. 405).

98. For instance, as stated by BASCH, GLICK SCHILLER & SZANTON BLANC (1994, p. 7).

Belarus. In contradiction to traditional conceptualisations of Belarusian literary history that took these transnational potentials into account only in cases when they were needed to create a “great (national) narrative,” the general question could be asked by whom, and under what conditions these potentials are respectively realised in history, and how they manifest themselves.

Concerning “Western Belarusian” literature, transnational border-crossings in the complex constellation of antagonistic macro systems can be merely registered in the sense of a diffuse, mainly politically motivated interaction of two (equal) national subfields across a state border. The cursory study of the 1920s BSSR shows us that the institutional structure of the literary sphere is orientated towards the formation of transnational possibilities, mainly by the programme of the State publishing house BDV, but also by literary groups and associations. Factually, however, it does not go beyond a multinational coexistence of different language groups, among which the Belarusian clearly dominates. This can be discerned by the meagre interaction between the institutionally formed literary groups of the BSSR up to the end of the 1920s.

In the context of the generally binding model of a “proletarian literature” in the BSSR, it therefore seems possible to disclose virtual transnational spaces of possibles primarily in the concrete literary actions of individual authors. Thereby, the choice of language (and, independent thereof, the choice of the literary group) pre-structure these spaces of possibles in a different manner. Belarusian authors’ spaces of possibles are, on the one hand, the most clearly differentiated (as Belarusian is the literary dominating language). However, on the other hand, they are factually restricted by the constitutive tension of “not (yet) sufficiently accumulated cultural capital”—in other words: of a model of “national” literature. Authors adopting this model did not only make themselves suspicious if they tried to reconcile the “proletarian” with the “national,” but also if they ascribed more importance to aesthetic than to ideological principles. The repressions and the Great Purge of the 1930s, which hit Belarusian (speaking) authors in particular, prove this. Polish and Russian speaking authors’ spaces of possibles seem small—they are factually limited to the orthodox implementation of the proletarian model and in final consequence “lead to Moscow.” Thus, the most flexible possibility spectrum seems to have been offered to Jewish authors. Depending on the initial disposition, various languages are at their disposal that open up differently profiled but principally equally productive spaces—via the Russian language the connection to the superordinate literary system, via the Yiddish language the participation in an international (or virtually *per se* transnational) Jewish literature, and via the Belarusian language the affiliation with the (dominating) Belarusian literature.

The—necessarily sketchy—case study of Zmitrok Bjadulja (Samuil Plaūnik) shows that with the choice of Belarusian in combination with the generational disposition a space of possibles opens up that clearly exceeds that of “Belarusian” authors. The realisation of transnational potentials in this case releases the tension between the “national”-Belarusian and the “proletarian” model. The prominent case of Bjadulja illustrates that “Belarusian” literature can and must be understood as transnational—even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also (or maybe especially) in the context of a “multinational Soviet literature.”

Out of the reflections discussed here, the question arises whether the entanglement of a national and a transnational perspective would (or could) not be exactly the appropriate answer to former Soviet literary historiography. Be that as it may, a *Literary History* carving out—in careful confrontation with the (internationally widely unknown) “great narrative” of Belarusian literature—the productivity of changing multi-ethnic and multi-lingual configurations in the space of Belarus is a difficult but undoubtedly fascinating *desideratum*.

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Abstract: As a literature that develops in the historically multi-ethnic and multi-confessional transitional space between *Slavia latina* and *Slavia orthodoxa*, the literature of Belarus challenges the validity of the “grand narrative” in a special way. At the same time, as a “small” literature, the development of which has taken place over the centuries and until recent times in the spheres of dominance of neighboring “bigger” literatures (Russian and Polish), Belarusian literature seems to reveal some problems of a transnational approach, which perpetuates mechanisms of exclusion and absorption. Based on these considerations, the article first outlines an alternative approach for a “grand narrative” based on the parameters of cultural space, open chronology, and institutional development. Within the framework of this model is then systematically examined the transnational potential of Belarusian literature from an institutional perspective, using literary development in the 1920s as an example. This shows that the transnational potential resulting especially from multilingualism is superimposed institutionally and ideologically by the concept of the “multi-nationality” of proletarian literature, with different languages pre-structuring different “Spaces of possibles.” The realization of transnational spaces of possibles seems to be open above all to Jewish authors, as the case study on Samuil Plaūnik (Zmitrok Bjadulja) shows.

Keywords: Literary Historiography, Belarusian Literature, Twentieth Century, transnational, field borders, literary institutions, literary groups, Space of possibles, Zmitrok Bjadulja.

### *Histoire littéraire, formation d'un champ et espaces transnationaux des possibles. La littérature dans l'espace biélorusse pendant les années 1920*

*Résumé: la littérature de la Biélorussie qui s'est développée dans l'espace de transition historiquement multiethnique et multiconfessionnel entre Slavia latina et Slavia orthodoxa, remet en question d'une manière particulière la validité du « grand récit ». En même temps, il semble que ce soit justement l'exemple de cette littérature « mineure », dont le développement s'est déroulé pendant des siècles et jusqu'à récemment dans les sphères de domination des littératures voisines « majeures » (russe et polonaise), qui rende manifeste les problèmes posés par une approche transnationale, notamment la perpétuation de mécanismes d'exclusion et d'absorption. Prenant ces considérations comme point de départ, cet article esquisse d'abord une approche alternative d'un « grand récit » fondée sur les paramètres d'espace culturel, de chronologie ouverte et de développement institutionnel. Dans le cadre de ce modèle sera examiné ensuite systématiquement, d'un point de vue institutionnel et prenant l'exemple des années 1920, le « potentiel transnational » de la littérature biélorusse.*

*Il s'avère que le potentiel transnational résultant notamment du multilinguisme se superpose institutionnellement et idéologiquement au concept de « multinational » de la littérature prolétarienne : les différentes langues pré-structurent différents « espaces des possibles ». La réalisation d'espaces transnationaux des possibles semble ouverte avant tout aux auteurs juifs, comme le montre l'étude de cas de Samuil Plaŭnik (Zmitrok Bjadulja).*

*Mots-clés : historiographie littéraire, littérature biélorusse, XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, transnational, limites du champ, institutions littéraires, groupes littéraires, espace des possibles, Zmitrok Bjadulja.*

### *Literaturgeschichte, Feldformation und transnationale Möglichkeitsräume. Literatur im Raum Belarus in den 1920er Jahren*

*Zusammenfassung: Als eine Literatur, die sich im historisch multiethnischen und multikonfessionellen Übergangsraum zwischen der lateinischen und der orthodoxen Slavia entwickelt, stellt die Literatur Weißrusslands die Gültigkeit des großen Narrativs in besonderer Weise zur Diskussion. Gleichzeitig scheint sich gerade an dieser Literatur als einer „kleinen“, deren Entwicklung sich über Jahrhunderte hinweg und bis in die jüngere Zeit in den Dominanzsphären benachbarter „größerer“ Literaturen (der russischen und der polnischen) vollzieht, die Problematik eines transnationalen Ansatzes zu erweisen, der Exklusions- und Absorptionsmechanismen fortschreibt. Ausgehend von diesen Überlegungen skizziert der Artikel zunächst einen alternativen Ansatz für ein „großes Narrativ“, dessen Basis die Parameter kultureller Raum, offene Chronologie und institutionelle Entwicklung bilden. Im Rahmen dieses Modells wird anschließend am Beispiel der literarischen Entwicklung der 1920er Jahre das transnationale Potential der Literatur Weißrusslands aus institutioneller Perspektive systematisch untersucht. Hier zeigt sich, dass das insbesondere aus der Mehrsprachigkeit sich ergebende transnationale Potential vom Konzept der „Multi-nationalität“ der proletarischen Literatur institutionell und ideologisch überlagert wird, wobei unterschiedliche Sprachen unterschiedliche Möglichkeitsräume vorstrukturieren. Die Realisierung transnationaler Möglichkeitsräume scheint vor allem jüdischen Autoren offen-zustehen, wie das Fallbeispiel Samuil Plaŭniks (Zmitrok Bjaduljas) zeigt.*

*Schlüsselwörter: Literaturhistoriographie, belarussische Literatur, 20. Jahrhundert, Transnationalität, Feldgrenzen, Institutionen, Literaturgruppierungen, Raum des Möglichen, Zmitrok Bjadulja.*