



Khanenko-Friesen, Natalia.

*Ukrainian Otherlands:
Diaspora, Homeland and
Folk Imagination in the
Twentieth Century.*

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What happens when people leave their homelands in search of a better life? How do decisions aimed at the avoidance of danger or the improvement of well-being shape people's identities, change their memory of the places they left, and form the image of the places they have come to? These questions are ambiguous; being issues, important in spheres such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, economy, and law. They are also the subject of Natalia Khanenko-Friesen's study *Ukrainian Otherlands: Diaspora, Homeland, and Folk Imagination in the Twentieth Century*.

Natalia Khanenko-Friesen is an Associate Professor of cultural anthropology and Head of the Department of Religion and Culture at St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. From the time of her PhD work, she has analyzed Ukrainian-Canadian cultural intertwining through folklore and oral history. Natalia Khanenko-Friesen has done significant fieldwork, collecting oral history, correspondence, and conducting interviews with senior citizens and young émigrés.

In her latest work, *Ukrainian Otherlands: Diaspora, Homeland, and Folk Imagination in the Twentieth Century*, she explores oral genres of Canadian Ukrainians and cultural practices such as homecomings, the creation of genealogical trees, correspondence, etc. They are reflected as the aftermath of the socio-historical changes that affect both Ukrainians and Ukrainian-Canadians personal, national, international lives, and the life of communities in general.

The book consists of an introduction, seven chapters, and an epilogue. In the introduction, the author draws the reader's attention to the beliefs and narratives both of diaspora and homeland cultural heritages. Factors like the image of self and homeland affect different levels of personal representations and personal and interpersonal communication. Consequently, specific diaspora connections, beliefs

and narratives deserve special attention. The first three chapters are dedicated to the complex and rhizomatic phenomenon of separation. Natalia Khanenko-Friesen describes political realities and thoroughly explores everyday experiences of migrations at the end of the 19th century, the way they influenced people's daily lives and public discourses for several generations. Separation as a personal experience appears in Ukrainian and Canadian-Ukrainian folklore. However, the transformation from personal space to public discourse happened only in Canada, as public manifestations and personal communication with the diaspora were suppressed in Soviet Ukraine. Those prohibitions lead to a mainly distant existence of Ukrainian-Canadian relationships, relegating them to a symbolic realm. Khanenko-Friesen terms this kind of relationship between members of one culture as a *present absence*.

Chapters 4–6 introduce analyses of such cultural practices as homecomings, the creation of genealogical trees, and correspondence. Being separated, people exploit cultural practices to maintain or create connections with their (extended) family abroad. Natalia Khanenko-Friesen examines the influence of new developments, ideas, and experiences of homeland and the ways of connecting with it. Noting, that in the Soviet period correspondence and visits were forbidden or limited, despite these restrictions they became indispensable rituals that affirmed the differences between kinship and provided interaction.

Overcoming the limits of space, the last chapter explores the vernacular practices of modern Ukrainian diasporas in Portugal and Italy, specifically poetry writing, where features of 19th century migrations can be found. Comparing different waves of migration, the author notices that there was no reduction of separation trauma, despite a rapid development of new technologies that made communication easier. In addition, Natalia Khanenko-Friesen demonstrates that an absorption of numerous other contemporary diasporas into Ukrainian culture occurred, which helped them overcome the traumatic experience of separation. The author mentions other types of closure she discovered in her research, all of them outlined in the epilogue, along with other related features and the meaning of the studies for further research.

This research deepens the understanding of the diaspora, interpreting it as a more complex and universal phenomenon—the cultural binomial of the homeland-diaspora as a realization of displacement and separation. The author points out that for a profound understanding of the mentioned binomial both Canadian and Ukrainian cultures should be examined. Another important feature of the book is development of such terms as *diasporic dimension of ethnicity*, *diasporic consciousness*, and *diasporic imagination*. Despite their poignant role in active sense-making in Ukrainian-Canadian culture, these concepts have previously been used in research without detailed clarification.

The author surveys the Ukrainian 19th century diaspora in Canada as a cultural construct with its own unique features and universal significations, which can be a source of in-depth understanding of contemporary migrations. It is rare that scholarly research focuses on a diaspora's world perception through non-institutionalized explications. Therefore, this study is not abstract, but full of experiences and fates of

living human beings. Implementing the theory of narratology, the author successfully exploits storytelling techniques, making the book more universal and grasping.

The book not only outlines the main theoretical discussions in its field of interest, it requires and encourages some pre-knowledge, and provides a stimulus for further research. Filled with unique and valuable oral stories, letters, examples of homecomings that illustrate the researched topic, *Ukrainian Otherlands: Diaspora, Homeland, and Folk Imagination in the Twentieth Century* can be useful reading not only for historians, sociologists, and cultural scholars absorbed by questions of migration and displacement, but also for readers interested in the lives of Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians or in phenomenon of migration. As academic research, the book demonstrates a keen interest in the simple and meaningful routine elements of people who have radically changed their lives, preserved intelligible semiotic systems, and faced the questions: *Who are we and What is this world?*