

CHAPTER FIVE

ROBINSON CRUSOES, PROSTITUTES, HEROES? CONSTRUCTING THE ‘UKRAINIAN LABOUR EMIGRANT’ IN UKRAINE

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“Every year, seven million Ukrainians leave Ukraine in search of work abroad.” Such was the official resolution adopted by the 14th All Ukrainian Congress of Narodnyi Rukh (People’s Movement) in March 2004 as signed by its Head, now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Borys Tarasiuk.¹ Though not necessarily a careful representation of the real scope of current mass labour migration from Ukraine, by 2004 this statistic has been routinely recycled in politicians’ speeches, newspaper articles, and peoples’ conversations. Should we read these figures as suggesting that the Ukrainian labour force (those between sixteen and sixty years old) of approximately 21.29 million people² (out of forty-seven million inhabitants) will entirely disappear within three years if the trend continues?

Of course, this stark assertion on the state of labour migration from Ukraine has been contested by others. Specialists—academics and policy makers—speak of two to seven million Ukrainian nationals working legally or illegally abroad in any given year. The realists (mostly among the academics and policy analysts) tend to settle on two or three million (Malynovska 2004a, 2004b; Sushko n.d.), while pessimists opt for more dramatic claims.

Though the original surge in Ukrainians’ departures abroad is an outcome of the collapse of socialism, a massive exodus of Ukrainians in search of labour began in the mid 1990s. Labour migrants’ destinations ranged from close neighbours to distant states, from former

¹ “On economic policy of a current government and its outcomes—poverty, unemployment and destitution of the Ukrainian nation.” March 24, 2004. <http://www.nru.org.ua/about/documents/?id=33>

² http://www.gesource.ac.uk/worldguide/html/1051_economic.html

socialist countries to countries of the European Union, Middle East, North America and beyond. Today, the most conservative estimates point to one million Ukrainian nationals working in Russia, up to three hundred thousand in Poland, two hundred thousand in Italy and Czech Republic, a hundred and fifteen thousand in Portugal, one hundred thousand in Spain, thirty-five thousand in Turkey, and twenty thousand in the USA (Malynovska 2004a:14).

In Ukraine, public debate on the ongoing mass labour out-migration, its meanings and outcomes began to emerge roughly in 2001–02.³ By 2004, the National Parliamentary Library of Ukraine listed at least 109 Ukrainian and Russian language academic and governmental publications, monographs, sociological survey reports, and analyses of legislative aspects of this phenomenon.⁴ On the internet, trying case variations of the word *zarobitchan/y/stvo*, produces, in the order listed, about 4,990 + 3,350 + 320 references, with *trudova/oi mihratsiia/ii* and *trudovi mihranty* (labour migration and labour migrants) combinations adding another 1,210 + 774 + 1,390 hits to the picture. Much has been written on different gender-related experiences of human trafficking and deteriorating institutions of marriage and parenthood which fail to withstand the pressures of separation and long-distance communication. New publications are regularly added to the existing bibliographies.⁵ The list is not exhaustive since this discussion on labour migration, like the phenomenon itself, is still gaining momentum.

Undeniably, within the last four to five years the phenomenon of labour migration has been given much attention in Ukraine. Yet the multi-layered and dynamic discourse generated by this attention and the dramatic impact which this discourse is having on Ukrainian society, the state, politics, and self-identity remain largely unexamined. Indeed, it is not just the phenomenon itself that affects society. The way this phenomenon is discussed and represented in numerous public narra-

³ See also the materials on the round table “The economic migration from Ukraine: the reasons and outcomes,” organized by the Institute for the Study of Diaspora (Kyiv, April 2003) summarized the original debate on the issue (Instytut Doslidzhen’ Diaspory 2003). Also, see Shul’ha (2001).

⁴ Among them are those by Malynovska including 2004a and 2004b, Prybytkova (2002, 2003), Hnybidenko (2001).

⁵ For the discussion on labour migration and family relations see Ternopil Non-Governmental Youth Organization *Share Warmth* (2003), Ternopil Regional Centre for the Employment (2002).

tives has an important impact on Ukrainians as well. Labour migration discourse, with its own discursive principles, techniques and themes, re-organizes Ukrainians' understandings of their country, their awareness of the world order and their perceptions of Ukraine's position within various social and political hierarchies. This discourse also constructs an unique imagery of the *zarobitchan-yn/ka*, a national agent that is nowhere to be seen in Ukraine. The intensity and continuity of this debate points to an important current in the ongoing revisions of Ukraine's own historical narrative—a narrative in which accounting for the post-socialist transformations of Ukrainian society is inevitable. Journalists and popular historians are already placing *zarobitchanstvo* in the chronology of historical misfortunes of Ukraine as yet another genocide, or ethnocide of the people of Ukraine.⁶ We also hear politicians echoing this vision. For example, as early as 1994, *Narodnyi Rukh* listed “migration policy, aimed at a continuous diminishment of absolute and relative numbers of Ukrainians in the population of Ukraine,” along with forced collectivization, artificial famine, deportations of Crimean Tatars and the Chernobyl tragedy, as the main crimes of the Soviet regime against the Ukrainian nation.⁷

In this paper, I would like to revisit this flourishing discourse which by now has grown into a unique sociocultural and political phenomenon of its own. Instead of outlining what and when various analysts, both from the academic and policy making circles, contributed to this new meta-theme of the Ukrainian national narrative (this has yet to be attempted as well), I would like to concentrate on how and to what purpose various kinds of labour migration discourse in Ukraine ‘handle’ and appropriate the figure of the labour migrant.

The figure of *zarobitchan-yn/ka* today appears to be manipulated by a variety of cultural, political, and commercial powers within Ukrainian society and beyond, each for their own political and commercial goals. Each of these discourses, now readily available to the general public, continually projects on the public its own interpretations of

⁶ “Ukraina bez Ukraintiv: tolerantnyj henotsyd abo politkoretznyj etnotsyd.” *Narodnyi Ohliadach*. 24.05.2004.

⁷ “Z prohramy narodnoho rukhu Ukrainy: Natsional’ni vidnosyny v Ukraini v 20 st. (From the Program of the People’s Movement: National Relations in Ukraine in the 20th century).” *Collection of Documents and Materials*. Kyiv: 1994, 513:514. Cited in Malynovska (2004a: 18).

zarobitchan-yn/ka.⁸ As a result, within the last three to four years, the figure of the zarobitchan-yn/ka has been transformed with the help of this debate into one of the most ambivalent protagonists of the contemporary Ukrainian historical narrative.

How did this discourse develop? The vernacular, and regionally contained, discourse on labour migration has been part of a local scene in Western Ukraine since the mass economic exodus of the rural population from Western Ukrainian lands to South and North America in the later 19th century. Rohatynskyj (1972) and idem (2003) has discussed, each in a different context, the long term continuity of zarobitchanstvo tradition in local economies of many western Ukrainian communities. Zarobitchanstvo supported communities, constructed specific zarobitchanstvo lifestyles, and fed local imaginations of the world outside of these communities. This phenomenon was somewhat transformed under Soviet rule. Long-term migration gave room to seasonal labour. In the 1980s, when the Soviets loosened up the rules for emigration based on family reunion, another round of departures abroad of kinfolk and neighbours began in these regions. Zarobitchanstvo discourse revived. Family stories about divided kinship, the problems and dilemmas facing new international migrants and the pros and cons of working abroad grew up within communities and family networks throughout the Western Ukrainian regions (Shostak 2003).

The growing number of these family stories in the early 1990s contributed to the birth of a new kind of folklore, with its distinct narratives of the labour migrant—an absentee household member, a father or a mother—who ventured into far lands in search of cash for their households, families, and the children they had left behind. This new lore is recreated at the intersection of both traditional and modern imaginations of the world, as well as in traditional and modern discursive practices applied to the locals' discussions of these experiences of separation, labour migration, and local integration into the global economy. My own ethnographic research in the long-distance family networks and long-term separation of kin as practiced in rural Western Ukraine confirms the existence of a unique body of local lore which deals with the matters of kin absence and presence, families' split

⁸ This discourse also offers different perspectives on gendered experiences of labour migration. For the purposes of this paper (and due to the lack of space) I will not be addressing these differences here.

between 'here' and 'there,' and absentee kinfolks' financial contribution to local economies (Shostak 2002).

By the late 1990s, these original circuits of personal stories expanded as out-migration reached unusually large proportions. Local media picked up the matter. Stories on laboring abroad began appearing in Ternopil, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Chernivtsi media, often in the form of personal correspondence sent by the migrants and the returnees' personal reflections. For example, between 1995 and mid-2003 (the time when I researched this question), *Ekspress*, *Postup* and *Lvivs'ka Hazeta*, all reputable Lviv-based newspapers, published various personal recollections, diaries, family correspondence, and other impressionistic reflections on the meanings and experiences of migrants abroad. More analytical publications came later, roughly after 2000. Such extended media attention endowed the experiences of illegal migration, originally seen as clandestine, with a profound sense of legitimacy.

Since then vernacular and media narratives of labour migration began to be augmented by growing academic, and subsequently political discussions on its scope, dynamics, meanings and outcomes for Ukraine, its economy, politics, demography, and culture. The debate reached both central and eastern Ukraine, resulting in conferences, seminars, policy recommendations, as well as parliamentary and governmental resolutions.⁹

How and with what purpose did these various kinds of discourses concerning labour migration in Ukraine 'handle' the figure of a labour migrant her/himself? Whether she or he is seen as a beneficial investor in or as a betrayer of the nation, as an active agent of her own fate or as a (fallen) victim to global trafficking and the cause of Ukraine's economic deterioration, or even as a prostitute who has to be erased from the nation's memory, depends on who is doing the talking, and when and where this talk is taking place.

On one hand, we observe the construction of the positive image of an active economic subject of her homeland, and thus, a welcome member in the Ukrainian nation, albeit literally absent from its terrain. Such imagery was first promoted in western Ukrainian regional media and later in central Ukrainian outlets. Regional investigators in western Ukraine spoke of the monetary value of the *zarobitchan-yn/ka's*

⁹ For example, the IATR Centre in Sumy in 2002 held an academic methodological seminar entitled "Labour Migration in Ukraine: methods of research and the use of contemporary informational technologies, led by Iryna Prybytkova.

absence, pronouncing labour migrants to be the largest investors in the regional and later in the national economies. In 2004, the Director of Ternopil Oblast Employment Office reported to the regional Press Reform Club that labour migrants from Ternopil oblast annually send home 100 million USD (2002).¹⁰ Chernivtsi and Uzhhorod-based research echoes the same statistics for their regions as well. In Bukovyna, the regional banks reported a surplus of 3 million USD in 2002, since they bought 9 million USD from the population and sold only 6 million USD back.¹¹ The national statistics also point to the large-scale currency injections that Ukraine receives annually from its ‘sons and daughters in absentia’ working sometimes legally but mostly illegally abroad. The labour migrants, according to some sources, earn 400 million USD monthly and most of it is transferred back to Ukraine.¹² Many claim that if it were not for the migrants’ regular remittances, the local economies would long ago have collapsed.¹³

Much has been said about the additional ostensibly positive effects of labouring abroad, such as exposure to western economic and cultural practices, which supposedly emancipate Ukrainian migrants—who upon their return home would apply newly gained western entrepreneurial skills in local economies. In other words, we can see how in such kinds of discussions, the labour migrant is further endowed with presumably positive qualities, which are, again presumably, going to be helpful for the growing democracy and recovering economy of Ukraine.

On the other hand, the same investigators and commentators talk about the decreasing labour force. Those 7–15% of employable age working abroad are seen as an ‘economic loss’. Encoded linguistically in negative terms, the idea of loss is further promoted in popular commentary. In various internet chat-rooms and forums, *zarobitchany* are routinely blamed by some of their compatriots for ceding to escapism, abandoning their homeland in difficult times, and betraying the nation.¹⁴

¹⁰ http://ternopil.cure.org.ua/dbm.php/archive/2004-09-07_78

¹¹ <http://www.ria.ua/view.php?id=3316>

¹² Cited from http://free.ngo.pl/nslowo/puls_ukrajiny/ukr_trudovi_mihranty.htm. Similar data is regularly reported from the office of the Ombudswoman of Ukraine Nina Karpachova.

¹³ <http://www.ria.ua/view.php?id=3316>

¹⁴ “Ukrainian (female) slaves: a criminal issue or the matter of worldview? Ukrain’ski rabyni: problema kryminaly chy svitohliadu?” (online forum topic, *domivka.forums*. May 5, 2004).

International and local NGOs, which have publicly fought trafficking in women since the early 1990s, claim that up to four hundred thousand Ukrainian women are trafficked annually into sex and domestic slave industries worldwide. They have understandably portrayed these women as victims of the global sex and slave industry. This victimization and objectification of the trafficked female lured to the West is projected on rather receptive minds, for in Ukraine the sense of national victimhood has been long cultivated by post-Soviet Ukrainian popular culture and popular historians. In many ways this sensitivity underlines post-Soviet Ukrainian citizens' understandings of themselves and their nation.¹⁵

Thus, we are clearly dealing with an imagined migrant who is essentially victimized, oppressed and stripped of personal agency, whose fate depends on external circumstances but not his/her own will. Newspapers and web publications' titles reveal dramatically this kind of narrativization.

The following titles were used between 2000 and 2004 in papers I closely researched (*Ekspres*, *Vysokyj Zamok*, and *L'vivs'ka Hazeta*) as well as in other publications I looked at:

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 2000 | Eternal Robinson Crusoes:
Every unemployed Ukrainian
is a potential illegal alien ¹⁶ | (Sept. 26, 2000, <i>Den'</i>) |
| 2001 | Emigration's Passive Betrayal
Pasyvna zrada emihratsii | (Sept. 25, 2001, <i>Polityka i Kul'tura</i>) |
| 2002 | Died in slavery
Pomer na panshchyni | (No. 30(135), July 2002, <i>Rabota</i>) |

¹⁵ In some instances, the *zarobitchan-yn/ka*'s sense of agency, and especially that of a female labour migrant, has also been understood in overly simplistic terms by various interpreters. Female labour migrants have been claimed to be themselves responsible for any misfortune that happened to them since they chose their own path on their own will. Representing the political establishment of his time, former president Kuchma went even further. In 2002, while on his visit to Italy, one of the main host-countries of this mass labour migration, during an interview with the Italian media, the president found himself on a slippery path, commenting on the Ukrainian women illegally working in Italy as whores who didn't want to work in Ukraine.

<http://www.yabluko.org.ua/yabl-cgi/view.cgi?golos/105431230104>; http://www.samvydav.net/index.php?lang=u&material_id=65303&theme_id=3412&page=material

¹⁶ The translation of this and the following titles are mine (N.S.).

- 2003 People for Cheap // the
Migration Flood // Livestock
Liudy za beztsin' //
Mihratsijna povin' z Ukrainy
// Zhyvyj Tovar (Feb 6–12, 2003, Postup)
Labour Migration smothers
Ukraine
Trudova mihratsiia dushyt'
Ukrainu (April 2, 2003, Vysoky Zamok)
- 2004 By Sweat and Blood
Potom i krov'iu, (Jan 22, 2004, L'vivs'ka Hazeta)
- The Price of Dignity
Tsina hidnosti (April 1, 2004, Halychyna)
- Ukrainian (female) slaves: a
criminal issue or the matter of
worldview?
Ukrains'ki rabyni: problema
kryminaly chy svitohliadu? (online forum topic, domivka.
forums. May 5, 2004)
- Ukraine without Ukrainians:
A tolerated genocide or
politically correct ethnocide?
Ukraina bez ukraintsv:
tolerantny henotsyd abo
politikorektny etnotsyd? (May 24, 2004, Narodnyi Ohliadach)
- Money did not bring happiness
Hroshi ne prynesly shchastia. (online forum topic, <http://ukraine.cz>, Sept. 2, 2004)
- 2005 Wait for your Penelope,
Odysseus: Labour Migration
Ruins Ukrainian Families
Chekaj Odyseiu svoiu
Penelopu: zarobitchanstvo
ruynuie ukrains'ki sim'i (March 26, 2005, Ukraina Moloda)

The regional divide has also been observable in Ukraine's debate on labour migration, with western Ukrainians being generally sympathetic towards their own folk, and eastern Ukrainians being more hostile towards zakhidniaky migrants, the 'westerners'. This divide owes much to the resurgence during the 2004 presidential election campaign of

counter-propaganda on labour migration in the east of the country, endorsed by the pro-governmental camp.¹⁷

Interestingly, there is also a linguistic twist to how the regional difference in perceptions and interpretations of the figure of *zarobitchan-yn/ka* is played out in various corners of the country. The Ukrainian word *zarobitchan-yn/ka* in western Ukraine is not perceived as a synonym to things and acts Ukrainian; after all, in the Ukrainian-speaking regions of Galicia, Bukovyna, and Volyn' it is just an indigenous word with a rather fixed meaning. *Zarobitchan-yn/ka* is someone who earns money away from home. In many Russian-language media discussions on current labour migration from Ukraine, the same Ukrainian word *zarobitchan-yn/ka* is used without being translated into the Russian language. The Russian language does not offer a direct equivalent of the word *zarobitchan-yn/ka*.¹⁸ Consequently, in southern and eastern Ukraine, where the local population is often Russian-speaking, such linguistic borrowing feeds local imaginings of *zarobitchanstvo* of the 1990s as being an ethnic-only, that is Ukrainian-only phenomenon. This view would be further promoted throughout the Orange months of 2004 and 2005 in eastern Ukraine, where the trope *zarobitchan-yn/ka* frequently was used in a derogative sense in vernacular contexts, similarly to how the tropes *zakhidniaky i zapadyntsi* (both meaning 'westerners') are used to describe western Ukrainians.

A major streamlining of these various perspectives, which at first glance may appear just a loose array of voices and opinions, began in 2002–2004. It was in 2001–02, with the parliamentary elections of 2002 approaching, that politicians discovered for the first time the huge gap in their western electorate. Between 12 and 20% of voters in various regions of western Ukraine alone were claimed to be abroad.¹⁹ A national debate on *zarobitchan-yn/ka* as voters began.

While the Ukrainian government continued to be reactive rather than pro-active in its efforts to regulate mass labour migration and negotiate its legalization in the countries of destination (Malynovska 2004a: 23), the opposition launched a new campaign. Their campaign

¹⁷ "Politicheskaia botanika ili eto sladkoie slovo apel'sin." <http://zadonbass.org/analytics/message.html?id=8537> (24 December 2004).

¹⁸ One can question here to what degree the absence of the Russian linguistic equivalent to the word *zarobitchanstvo* represents overall lower participation of the Russian ethnic population throughout history in major labour migration flows which differ from population flows related to colonial expansion.

¹⁹ <http://www.jar.ukrbiz.net/prtext.ukrbiz?prnum=6793>

was directed at legalization of labour migrants in Europe, and at implementing electoral reform at home to allow absent citizens to vote while abroad. Yushchenko's trip to Portugal in 2002 to negotiate this matter with Portugal's Prime Minister was one step in the political negotiation of this matter. Narodnyj Rukh's claim in 2004 that seven million Ukrainians leave the country in search of work annually, a careless misinterpretation of an already inflated but widely recited statistic on the extent of labour migration, is a good example of discursive battles for the hearts and minds of Ukrainian voters.²⁰

As Keryk has pointed out, the topic of *zarobitchanstvo* resurfaced during the election campaign of 2004. Both political camps (Yanukovych and Yushchenko) missed no opportunity to capitalize yet again on the phenomenon of labour migration and its protagonists, those absent abroad. Having realized the danger of not gaining all the votes in Galicia and Transcarpathia, since by 2004 between 7.9 and 13.57% of those electorates were labouring abroad,²¹ the opposition continued to attack Kuchma's regime and government for ignoring this issue. The Yanukovych camp, on the other end, prior to the presidential elections, was concerned with the potential vote fraud in western regions of the country, suspecting that the families of the migrants would use the absentees' internal passports to boost the opposition vote.

Thus, in 2002–2004, both political camps, pro-governmental and oppositional, in their debates with each other and with the government, and in appeals to their electorates, opened up a whole new chapter in the Ukraine's discourse on labour migration and ultimately, on Ukrainian nationhood.

This debate about *zarobitchany* (non)participation in the parliamentary elections of 2002 and later in the presidential elections of 2004 has assigned this absentee from the Ukrainian national scene a completely new meaning. Once seen as mere victims of macroeconomic processes, then recognized as absent agents of regional economies, the labour migrants were now coming home, metaphorically speaking, as active political subjects of their nation. Since the out-migration is not

²⁰ It in this discursive environment that Kuchma's offensive comments on Ukrainian women abroad, while largely unpublicized in Ukraine, provoked outrage amongst ordinary Ukrainians. Few shared Kuchma's views on labour migration. Some accused Kuchma publicly, in the form of an open letter to the president, of being himself 'an international pimp' responsible for the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian women into the West. See footnote 15.

²¹ <http://www.jar.ukrbiz.net/prtext.ukrbiz?prnum=6793>

likely to end soon, and competition for political power in Ukraine is far from over—the 2006 parliamentary elections are still ahead of us—the debate about zarobitchany is not likely to die soon. One can also speculate that this talk will soon begin to bear on how the Ukrainian nation will be imagined by Ukrainians in the near future. To this idea I will return later.

Another important dimension of the labour migration discourse began to appear recently—a dimension which allows us to talk about all these different discussions and debates as a discourse, in a truly Foucauldian sense of this term. Various local conceptions, stories, and social practices related to labour migration began to fill popular culture, the arts, literature, theater, and cinematography with new themes and imagery. This is another important route along which the absent and highly ambivalent figure of zarobitchan-yn/ka comes home.

Ukraine's writers and playwrights—the producers of fictive worlds and, thus, contributors to modernity's social practices of imagination—began to address and directly explore the phenomenon of zarobitchanstvo in their work. In 2003, the Lviv-based National Drama Theater staged a contemporary play by Nadia Kovalyk on today's female labour migrants in Italy, who constitute about 80% of all Ukrainian migrants in that country.²² "Naples: City of Cinderellas" not only has a suggestive name but perpetuates in its narrative existing Ukrainian stereotypes and cultural expectations about labour migrants' agency, ultimately reducing Ukrainian women migrants to modern Cinderellas, women who search for an Italian prince to rescue them from the misery of being illegally trapped as servants in Italian households. The play was successfully performed across Ukraine to full audiences and much applause, despite its reductionist message (Bovkun 2003). Another story about zarobitchanstvo was recently screened in Ukraine. Though *Prosta Vidpovid* ('Simple Answer') is not a fiction but a documentary movie on zarobitchanstvo, the film successfully raises important questions about the role, the destiny, and the fate of zarobitchan-yn/ka in today's Ukraine and today's Europe.

The literary field also offers numerous examples. The title of a novel by Orest Berezovskyj I picked up last summer in Ternopi's bookstore,

²² According to a survey conducted in March 2003 by the Western Ukrainian Centre "Women Prospects" among Ukrainian workers in Italy. See "Ukrainian middle class is growing in Italy." *ForUm*. March 30, 2003, <http://ukr.for-ua.com/analit/2003/03/27/105951.html>

Internaimychka: dochka chy paserbnytsia Evropy? ('An (international) hired hand: the daughter or stepdaughter of Europe?'), brings to mind once a cinematographic sensation of the late 1980s, then still a Soviet feature film by Pietr Todorovsky *Interdevochka* (1989). The movie followed the private and 'professional' life of a young Soviet girl, a nurse by day and a prostitute by night, who dreamed of and eventually succeeded at escaping the drudgery of Soviet life by marrying a Westerner. The movie attempted to instruct its Soviet viewers that achieving such goals would not be a guarantee one could find peace of mind far away from one's homeland, for the main protagonist remains quite unhappy in her posh new Western environment. Internaimychka advocates for a very similar homeland loyalty. In addition, *interdevochka* is a trope that suggests that the girl's character is immoral—the prefix 'inter' hints here at 'changing hands'. The Ukrainian word *internaimychka* produces a potentially similar effect on the reader. The word *naimychka*, a hired hand in someone else's family, is somewhat derogatory in the Ukrainian cultural context. To use *inter-naimychka* to describe a female labour migrant is to cast a shadow of immorality on her.

The novel is also an exploration of failed family relations between the illegal female migrant in Italy, her husband, and their two children, all left behind. The story of a wife's long-term absence is pieced together through chronologically arranged (fictive) letters exchanged by the spouses over the years. Though the rhetoric employed in the book reveals its author's rather traditional understanding of women's rights and roles, the novel serves as another good example of how Ukraine's contemporary public culture constructs its heroines, projecting ostensibly private stereotypes of labour migration onto the public and, thus, the Ukrainian nation, whose children, as in case of *Internaimychka*, betrayed her for the fictive kinship link with Europe.

But the most convincing evidence for the idea that the *zarobitchan-yn/ka* has established her/himself firmly in the public consciousness as an ambivalent if not a deviant figure is how the subject of labour migration and of *zarobitchan-yn/ka* is dealt with in *masova literatura*, or the "literature for the masses," and more specifically, in the genre of the detective novel, which is highly popular in Ukraine. With the collapse of the Soviet system, this genre, often seen by the critics as a short-lived kind of literature feeding the anxieties of the day, is indeed an amazing mirror through which one can observe numerous reflections of these anxieties. While the popularity of any quickly crafted detective novel is typically of limited duration, the popularity of this literature

produced for mass consumption has been increasing. Publishing companies specializing in this kind of literature are usually commercially successful and turn to detective novels to capitalize on and at the same time contribute to post-Soviet practices of imagination.

The precarious experiences of labour migrants and the conditions of their existence abroad are recreated in these narratives as intriguing social and often criminal backgrounds against which the sundry actions of the main characters take place. If they are the leading characters in the novels, they are either the victims of multifarious post-Soviet mafia clans fighting for control of illegal labour markets, or the villains who participate in these mafia networks themselves, as in the novel *The Masters of Bohemia* (Demchenko 2003). More commonly though, the theme of 'ours abroad' is just an environment, a setting in which the plots unfold. The mistress of the Russian detective novel, Alexandra Marinina, has filled her recent novels, widely read all over the former Soviet bloc, with very much the same backdrop, making all her Petrovka-based investigators act as Interpol agents (2004). Ukrainian pop singer Iryna Karpa uses zarobitchanstvo as a part of the setting for her new popular action-packed detective novel *Froid by plakav* ('Freud would have cried') (2004). On the one hand, the casual omnipresence of zarobitchanstvo in this everyday literature for mass consumption reflects the casual omnipresence of this phenomenon in the lives of today's Ukrainians, either on the horizon or at the core. On the other hand, these stories continuously feed people's stereotypes and imaginations on the subject of labour migrants and their ambivalent status in Ukrainian society. Ultimately, the casualness of these references and their repetitiveness speak about an important shift in public knowledge and conceptions of labour migration taking place within the last four to five years.

Each of these voices within the zarobitchanstvo discourse—vernacular, media, academic/analytical, political, and literary/artistic, as well as regionally defined Galician, eastern Ukrainian, and pan-Ukrainian—handles the issue of zarobitchanstvo and the labour migrant in its own way and for its own purposes, making this figure irreducible in Ukraine's contemporary national narrative.

The zarobitchan-yn/ka in these representations is the figure of absence. S/he is absent from her/his family, local community, and homeland. S/he is partially absent from the official narratives on labour migration. Illegal migrants are difficult to count and consequently, the analysts constantly come up with lower numbers of migrants than there

are in reality. Thus, s/he is semi-absent from Ukraine's official statistics. Until recently s/he has not been legally 'present' in the countries of their work; in the majority of cases their presence there has not been legalized.

But is s/he truly absent from her/his nation, as it might well appear? As discussed above, the migrants' absence began to be dramatically felt on the national level in Ukraine after 2001/02. Their absence was translated into a profound discursive presence. At each discursive level—first journalists picked the stories from vernacular circuits, then the analysts followed the journalists' stories with their research into the phenomenon and so on—we observe and experience the increasing pronunciation of migrants' metaphoric presence, asserted each time with even greater authority. Of course, their presence in Ukraine was not only discursive. Migrants' financial injections into the local and national economies brought them back home as active agents in the Ukrainian economy. Since they were a lost electorate, the politicians did not let them go either, transforming them in their speeches into political subjects responsible for Ukraine's future.

How would this narrative ambivalence of absence/presence affect the future incorporation of *zarobitchanstvo* into Ukrainian historical narratives and of *zarobitchany* into the Ukrainian nation?

Discourse, Foucault said, not only describes phenomena, it constitutes them. It forms our sense of reality and does so within the limits of its own discursive constraints (Foucault 1977: 199). Discourse is constituted by a set of sanctioned statements which have some authoritative force. Subsequently these statements have a profound influence on the way the individuals act and think. The more they are commented upon by others the more authority they exercise and the more we see these discourses as having validity and worth (Mills 1997: 67).

For example, in Ukrainian-Canadian discourse there has been an established practice to refer to another group of Ukrainian labour migrants—who arrived in North America some hundred and forty years ago—as victims of economic and political repression, with no means, no education, and no possibility of advancing themselves in their homelands. This vision of a poor and oppressed peasant in a long sheepskin coat constituted an important aspect, if not a founding one, of Ukrainian-Canadian myths of origin. It took almost a hundred years before a critical voice (that of John Paul Himka) attempted to revisit this thesis of an impoverished and uneducated peasant immigrant and to offer a different view on the 'founding fathers' of the Ukrainian-Canadian community. These immigrants, Himka claimed, were not

the poorest and the most marginal back in their home villages (1988). Still, the myth of immigrant success achieved despite the most humble origins is so strong and prevalent that many more academics and members of the diaspora community would have to contest this narrative before a more humane and less ideologically rigid interpretation of the founding generation might take root in the diaspora consciousness of Ukrainian Canadians.

Similarly, in twenty or thirty years, among the descendants of today's migrants, will current labour migration be constructed in terms similar to previous Ukrainian-Canadian versions? New Ukrainian diasporas would need to rely on their own story of origin and today's understandings of *zarobitchan-yn/ka* have all the potential to constitute the core of these diasporas' future mythologies.

And as for the migrants themselves, will they remain silent and victimized second-class alien Others in their new homelands as they are often perceived to be? I don't think so. Many women in the Ukrainian community of Rome, Italy, who I have talked with during my recent fieldtrip to Rome (2004) have developed a profound sense of agency while abroad, not without the support of the Ukrainian Catholic clerical community there. They, like Lida Dukas, current co-editor of the recently launched Ukrainian Italian magazine *Do Svitla*, and many others in Europe and beyond, have already begun their own organizational work, not unlike the work done by previous Ukrainian migrants throughout the last century.

And how will future narratives of the Ukrainian nation incorporate the story of modern *zarobitchany*? Will this story be transformed into a phase of a post-Soviet Ukrainian national narrative, which is continuously being constructed in terms of oppression and repression? Will discourse on *zarobitchanstvo* become another chapter in the history of Ukraine's suffering or will it be a story of Ukraine's expansion in the world? Given the proportions of the social phenomenon itself, the discursive formulas in which previous national losses were described (famine of 1933—up to seven million Ukrainian peasants starved to death; second World War—up to eight million Ukrainian civilians killed), and current discursive tendencies such as the deliberate inflation of statistics, it is not surprising that *zarobitchanstvo* is currently being constructed as yet another Ukrainian genocide.²³

²³ "Ukraina bez Ukraintsiv: tolerantnyj henotsyd abo politikoretknyj etnotsyd." *Narodnyi Ohliadach*. 24.05.2004.

Now, let me turn to the idea of the Ukrainian nation. It is not a novel thing to say that in the modern political context, with the changing order of the world, the nation-states though still official subjects of world politics have already begun to lose their hold over many globalized political, economic, and social processes. We call this globalization and we know it 'moves' populations across the globe, affecting the very idea of membership in nation-states. The Ukrainians gone west (or east for this matter), even according to the most conservative estimates, constitute millions. How soon will they cease to be seen in Ukraine as a part of the Ukrainian nation?

In 2006, Ukraine will once again hold parliamentary elections. Will the current government succeed in establishing and securing new voting procedures for its subjects abroad? Will Ukrainians abroad be allowed to vote, like those six million Mexicans outside of Mexico who since 1996 are allowed to vote in Mexican elections and who, thus, directly participate in the political life of their homeland?²⁴ If today's zarobitchany were allowed to do the same, should they not automatically be considered members of the Ukrainian nation?

Many Ukrainians will never return to Ukraine and they are the ones who will soon constitute a new diaspora for Ukraine. Will those remaining in Ukraine develop a similar kind of apprehension towards this new diaspora as they developed towards the existing North American Ukrainian diaspora? Would they welcome these absentees' active participation in Ukraine's internal affairs—at least for the time being?

In Ukraine, will we see discussions on the historical fate of the Ukrainian nation reinscribing this migration as another loss, genocide, and national tragedy? Or, in recognition of the ongoing transnationalization and deterritorialization of economic, cultural and political spaces, will the future Ukrainian nation see zarobitchanstvo as its own way of expanding beyond its national borders (something that it refuses to do now, by rejecting, thus far, the self-assumed right of the diaspora to interfere in national matters of the Ukrainian state)?

In any case, it seems that some upgrading of the Ukrainian historical narrative and of Ukrainians' sense of nationhood has begun to take place in Ukraine, both from above and from below. And the figure of zarobitchan-yn/ka, whether absent or present, along with current zarobitchanstvo discourse, are instrumental parts of this change.

²⁴ "A world of Exiles," *The Economist*, January 4, 2003. 41–43.

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