

Canadian–American Slavic Studies

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CANADIAN–AMERICAN SLAVIC STUDIES

Aims & Scope

The peer-reviewed quarterly journal *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* is edited and published to provide information about Slavic and East European (including Albania, Hungary and Romania) culture, past and present, in a scholarly context. The journal began publication in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1967 and then continued publication in the USA in 1971. It publishes articles, documents, translations and book reviews in English, French, German, Russian and Ukrainian languages. It also features special issues about specific topics prepared by guest editors. Most of the material has featured contributions about history and literature, but the journal welcomes contributions in all areas of the humanities and social sciences.

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Introduction

Serhy Yekelchyk

University of Victoria

The idea for this special issue goes back to early 2008, when the prominent Ukrainian cultural critic Mykola Ryabchuk, who was spending that academic year in Edmonton as Stuart Ramsay Tompkins Visiting Professor at the University of Alberta, agreed to give a talk in Victoria, British Columbia. To take full advantage of this opportunity, the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at the University of Victoria invited three Ukrainian specialists from nearby universities in British Columbia and Washington state to come as well. Ryabchuk's visit in March 2008 thus turned into a small but very productive one-day workshop on "Ukrainian Culture after Communism." By the end of the day, the idea for this collection was born.¹

Additional papers were then solicited from colleagues working on various aspects of contemporary Ukrainian culture. The resulting special issue is an accurate reflection of the changing landscape of academic work on Ukrainian culture. What was once the domain of diaspora literary scholars teaching in Slavic departments of Western universities is now a global and interdisciplinary field. In addition to Ryabchuk, four other contributors were educated in Ukraine, Poland or Russia, subsequently adding North American Ph.D.s to their East European degrees. They continue publishing and giving talks in Ukraine, which, in a sense, they have never left. The same is true of our Western-born colleagues, who after the collapse of state socialism became a notable presence in Ukrainian Studies in Ukraine. These days, a conference held anywhere in the world is likely to feature a mix of academics from Ukraine and from the West. There are few conceptual and methodological

¹ I would like to thank the journal's editor, Charles Schlacks, Jr., for supporting the idea to produce this special issue, Marta D. Olynyk for stepping in on short notice to help with the copy-editing of several articles, and Dr. Maria Rewakowicz for helping to arrange double-blind refereeing of my own paper.

differences today between the works produced by Ukrainian scholars and their colleagues abroad. In other words, the field has gone global.

It has also gone interdisciplinary, in terms of the participants' academic affiliations and training as well as their approach to the study of Ukrainian culture. The disciplines represented in this special issue include Slavic Studies, Comparative Literature, History, Sociology, Anthropology, Folklore, and Religious Studies. The traditional narrow understanding of Ukrainian culture – the Ukrainian language, literary works in Ukrainian, and other high culture clearly marked as “Ukrainian” by either language or its connection to the folk tradition – has given way to a much wider concept, including mass culture, new media, political tropes, and societal attitudes. What is Ukrainian about Ukraine's mass culture in the post-communist era can be a difficult question, but pondering it is the only way to understand contemporary Ukraine.

The eleven articles in this special issue reflect the full range of cultural phenomena in post-Soviet Ukraine, from political rhetoric to folk stories to literary works to pop music. The issue opens with a contribution from Mykola Ryabchuk, who examines Russo-Ukrainian relations as a struggle between the discourses of imperial dominance and national liberation. The author proposes postcolonial theory as a tool that could help Russians and Ukrainians to overcome, respectively, imperialistic stereotypes and anti-colonial obsessions. Ryabchuk's methodology is explicitly modern, but his subject matter is traditional for Ukrainian intellectuals – the struggle against Russian political and cultural dominance. This comes out clearly in Marko Pavlyshyn's article, which is devoted to the views of Ivan Dziuba, the famous Ukrainian dissident of the 1960s, who briefly served as the minister of culture after independence. Dziuba's vision of a fully developed Ukrainian culture as an essential attribute of a modern Ukrainian nation and something a Ukrainian state has an obligation to support, can be traced back to Enlightenment ideas and Ukrainization policies of the 1920s. Since his concept of Ukrainian culture is language-based, however, for Dziuba present-day Ukrainian culture remains frustratingly “incomplete” – because Russian still predominates in mass culture – and eroded even further by global, English-speaking mass culture.

Catherine Wanner implicitly problematizes such an understanding of a Ukrainian nation and its culture by devoting her article to the people who left Ukraine precisely for the English-speaking world during the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods. Evangelicals and Jews from Ukraine, who were accepted in the United States as refugees, maintain little contact with Ukrainian diaspora organizations, dominated as they are by nationalistic and anti-Soviet postwar émigrés. But these new arrivals also lack a clear identity of their

own: Ukrainian Jews in America by and large avoid any institutional structures that could have united them, while the so-called “Slavic” evangelical communities – whose members include Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians, and Poles – are not based along ethnic lines.

In Ukraine, too, the replacement in the early 1990s of the Soviet ideological canon with a no less ossified nationalist mythology did not result in the universal spread of Ukrainian patriotism, but caused some young Ukrainian (and Ukrainian-speaking) intellectuals to rebel against the new certainties, just as they had rebelled against the old ones. The playful, satirical undermining of the new canon, as Myroslav Shkandrij shows in his article, was at the heart of the Bu-Ba-Bu phenomenon in general and the poetry of Oleksandr Irvanets in particular. In any case, as the reader learns from Maria Rewakowicz’s article, throughout the independence period regionalism in culture, never mind regionalism in politics, did not facilitate the construction of a unified Ukrainian national imagination. This, however, may be a good thing for both the nation and its literature because the global and the local, as well as the national and the regional, are not antithetical concepts, but complement each other. The authors of urban fiction portray their cities very differently, sometimes in a fantastic key, and not all of them write in Ukrainian, but they all identify with Ukraine, and the imagined Ukraine of their prose is a cultural mosaic loosely similar to the real Ukraine. Vitaly Chernetsky’s article adds an important component to this cultural puzzle – young Ukrainian writers can live (or spend extended periods of time) abroad and engage topics and literary models without appearing to be assisting the nation building that is so dear to traditional Ukrainian intellectuals. Yet by staking out their presence on the global cultural scene, they are contributing in an unexpected way to the national culture’s “completeness,” the concept at the heart of Dziuba’s writings.

In her article Natalie Kononenko takes the reader from the world of modern literature to that cradle of Ukrainian culture, the village. However, the author travels there not to marvel at the continuation of the Ukrainian folk tradition, but to analyze the recent changes in story-telling by pious female villagers. Kononenko finds that elderly peasant women, who had previously been controlled by male collective farm chairmen, now find themselves marginalized by other males: priests. Recounting sometimes unorthodox religious stories helped these elderly Ukrainian women to come to terms with the new social realities of post-Soviet transition that they experienced as a time of economic uncertainty and confusing change of authority as represented by educated men – not as an exciting period of freedom and cultural efflorescence. In her contribution to the issue, Alexandra Hrycak also deals with the position of

women in present-day Ukrainian society, but these are educated activist women whose achievements she also compares to the position of women in Russia and Belarus. In the Ukrainian case, the author points out a curious inconsistency between the official, patriarchal, nationalistic rhetoric of the Yushchenko administration stressing motherhood (a Ukrainian woman as the *berehynia* of the nation) and actual policies promoting gender equality and the creation of women's NGOs – an important barometer of the development of civil society. The next article, by Maryna Romanets, only deepens this sense of disparity between the progressive policies Hrycak describes and the popular stereotypes used in politics and mass culture. Romanets analyzes, in particular, the use of sexually explicit imagery in Ukrainian historical films and political propaganda during the Orange Revolution, in both cases as an effective answer to the former imperial master, but also the Russian attempt to turn the weapon of “political” pornography against Ukraine's female Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Themes of sexuality and postcolonial condition are interwoven in the author's analysis, bringing the reader back to the themes raised in earlier articles by Ryabchuk and others.

The Russian-Ukrainian cultural divide, which is often less than clear, but almost always divisive in present-day Ukraine, is also the topic of an article by Laada Bilaniuk. She examines the language politics of a popular Ukrainian TV show, where the hosts and guests can speak either Russian or Ukrainian, or even switch languages in the process. A widespread practice on Ukrainian TV since the late 1990s, such bilingual shows have allowed producers to get around state requirements for the use of the “state” language and also neutralize the explosive language issue, but it is actually the spur-of-the-moment decisions by participants and their implications for national identity in which Bilaniuk is most interested. Serhy Yekelchuk continues this theme in his study of Verka Serdutchka, a gender-bending and language-mixing Ukrainian pop star, who for a long time was equally popular in Ukraine and Russia, but recently disappointed his/her Russian fans with a rather unorthodox political statement. The author uses Serdutchka's example to discuss the larger context of post-Soviet change in national identities and to question the traditional borders of inclusion and exclusion in regard to Ukrainian culture.

Overall, the articles in this special issue present a view of contemporary Ukrainian culture as vibrant and intellectually exciting, appealing in its various incarnations to global audiences and mass-culture consumers, as well as to more conservative connoisseurs of national high culture. Cultural phenomena originating in twenty-first-century Ukraine do not always fit easily into the traditional concept of what Ukrainian culture is, but revising old concepts

may be a better solution than rejecting unorthodox cultural products. Owing its very existence as a state to nineteenth-century ideas of linguistic nations entitled to self-rule, modern Ukraine is nevertheless not a country where everybody constantly listens to folk choirs and reads the national classics. Ukrainian citizens manage to preserve allegiance to their land while being immersed into the multilingual, digital, global culture, as well as when they are consuming the native, postmodernist cultural product, which deconstructs the traditional notion of Ukrainianness. This collection is but one step towards a better understanding of just how they manage to do so.



The Ukrainian “Friday” and the Russian “Robinson”: The Uneasy Advent of Postcoloniality*

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Abstract

The paper addresses the problem of Russian-Ukrainian asymmetric relations as revealed in the struggle of two discourses—the discourse of imperial dominance and the discourse of national/nationalistic resistance and liberation. Critical discourse analysis is applied to deconstruct the imperial discourse as a major obstacle for the normalization of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Postcoloniality is suggested as a desirable condition for both Russian and Ukrainian cultures to achieve internal freedom and eliminate colonial stereotypes and anti-colonial mobilization, respectively.

Keywords

Ukraine, Russia, postcolonialism, imperial discourse, identity

Forty years ago, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the prime minister of Canada, famously declared that living next to the US “... is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly or temperate the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.”¹ Ukrainians probably have even more reason to complain in this regard because the “elephant” next to which they live has never been temperate or friendly to them as a separate nation. This may sound paradoxical since most Russians enthusiastically proclaim their love for Ukraine and Ukrainians, refer often to their own Ukrainian roots and connections, and sometimes even perform a Ukrainian folk song to prove their sympathy

*¹ I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and one of them for taking the time to help with the stylistic editing of this text. I also appreciate the final round of copy-editing by Marta D. Olynyk.

¹ Ludovic Kennedy, *In Bed with an Elephant* (London: Corgi Books, 1996), p. viii.

and know-how. In this regard, they seem to differ radically from Ukraine's other neighbors and former masters, the Poles, who are typically very cautious about Ukrainians, often file historical grievances against them and, in various opinion surveys, place them at the very bottom of the list of the most/the least sympathetic nationalities.²

Another paradox, however, is that for many Ukrainians Polish unfriendliness is more bearable and acceptable than Russian "love." The Poles, even if they dislike Ukrainians, usually recognize them as a separate nation – however rough and unsympathetic. Russians typically treat Ukrainians as a subgroup of their nation; they "love" Ukrainians as themselves, as an imperial myth, which is hardly acceptable for Ukrainians since it leaves no room for the latter's separate national identity (not just a regional one, within the Greater Russian identity). In other words, the Polish view of Ukrainians, however biased and distorted, usually does not question the essence: the existence of a separate Ukrainian identity and nationality. The Russian view of Ukrainians, however friendly and seemingly sympathetic, typically denies this very essence, thereby making any dialogue between the two nations as equal sovereigns virtually impossible.

From a postcolonial point of view, Russian-Ukrainian relations may be compared to the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday: every

² When placed on the scale between –3 (antipathy) and +3 (sympathy), Ukrainians were rated by Poles at –0.54, i.e., below the great majority of nations, including Serbs, Russians, and Belarusians, above only Jews, Arabs, Romanians, and Roma (Gypsies). It should be recalled, however, that ten years earlier Ukrainians were rated at –1.28. See *Czy Polacy lubią inne narody? Komunikat z badań*, no. 2846 (Warszawa: Centrum badania opinii społecznej, January 2003), <http://www.cbos.pl/PL/Raporty/2003r.php>, accessed March 15, 2009.

After the Orange Revolution, Ukrainians substantially improved their image in Polish eyes and moved from the bottom to the middle of the list of the most/least sympathetic nationalities, but still the rating is rather negative: –0.30. See *Sympatia i niechęć do innych narodów. Komunikat z badań*, no. 144 (Sept. 2007): 3–5; <http://www.cbos.pl/PL/Raporty/2007r.php> (accessed March 15, 2009). See also *Ukraine-Analysen*, no. 25 (June 2007): 12–13; www.ukraine-analysen.de (accessed March 15, 2009); and *Polen-Analysen*, no. 14 (June 2007): 11; www.polen-analysen.de (accessed March 15, 2009).

By contrast, their image in Russian eyes has badly deteriorated. In January 2009, according to a nation-wide survey carried out by the reputable Levada Center, only 29 percent of Russians had a "very positive" or "rather positive" attitude to Ukraine, while 62 percent declared their "very negative" or "rather negative" feelings. See <http://www.levada.ru/press/2009022501.html> (accessed March 15, 2009). For the dynamics of Russian attitudes towards Ukraine, see the Levada Center Yearbook, *Obshchestvennoe mnenie – 2008* (Moscow: Levada Center, 2008), p. 127, <http://webfile.ru/2612342#> (accessed March 15, 2009).

Robinson “loves” his Friday – but only as long as Friday follows the rules of the game established by Robinson, accepts colonial subordination, and does not question the superiority of Robinson and his culture. But as soon as Friday dares to rebel – to declare himself sovereign and equal to Robinson and to demand equal respect for his language and culture – he becomes Robinson’s most hated foe. Such a Friday is deemed a priori abnormal – either a bourgeois-nationalistic traitor, in the phraseology of communist propaganda and KGB prosecutors, or a “nationally obsessed” pervert, in the terms of popular chauvinistic discourse that alludes scornfully to the quasi-medical formula “sexually obsessed” (*seksualno ozabochnyyi*). In the first case, such a deviant should be imprisoned as a dangerous criminal, and in the other, he should be placed in a mental hospital or at least ostracized and marginalized, and certainly not treated seriously no matter what he says.

Sadly enough, the majority of Russians do not like the real Ukraine and try, by all means, to undermine and marginalize it in their consciousness, since it challenges and denies the virtual Ukraine that exists in their historic imagination – as an exotic “singing and dancing Little Russia” with no intellectual strength and political ambitions.

Some time ago I witnessed a funny and, in a way, revealing episode at the international meeting of editors of East European cultural journals. All the participants had the opportunity to exhibit their periodicals, so I brought a copy of the Ukrainian monthly *Krytyka* that I was co-editing at the time. Predictably, it attracted keen attention from my Russian colleagues, who leafed through it with mixed feelings. On the one hand, as professionals, they clearly liked it. On the other, as Russians, they apparently had a psychological problem with recognizing that Ukrainians, their stereotypical “village cousins,” could produce something trendy, artistically attractive, and intellectually viable. Ultimately, they found a satisfactory explanation for this abnormal phenomenon. On the final page of the journal, among various technicalities printed in small font, they discovered a note that *Krytyka* collaborates with the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI).

“Ia tak i znal, chto eto amerikanskoe!” (“I knew it was American!”), happily exclaimed one of my Russian colleagues. His mythical world, which had been shaken for a moment by the appearance of *Krytyka*, returned unshattered to its firm foundations. In this world, no Friday can ever match a Robinson, until and unless he happens to be assisted by some other Robinson – an American one in this case. I did not know at the time that the same logic would eventually be applied to virtually all Russian interpretations of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution. The Ukrainian Friday, most Russians believe, did this not for the

sake of his freedom and dignity, but merely as a result of manipulation by sinister Western Robinsons – primarily the Americans – to do harm to his legitimate Russian master.

The mythical character of Russian images of Ukraine and Ukrainians is not the sole consequence of the protracted colonial relations between the two nations and of intensive imperial myth-making in academia, the educational system, the media, literature, and other spheres where the dominant discourse is produced and enforced. Students of postcolonialism note that the colonized group gradually accepts and internalizes the negative self-image imposed upon it by the colonizers. The subjugated group adopts the whole system of alien, degrading, and essentially humiliating images of themselves as barbarians, primitives, sub-humans, and bearers of chaos.³ Their own cosmos collapses, demolished under the pressure of negative stereotypes-cum-self-images, and the colonized group plunges into a chaos from which it can exit only through assimilation into the cosmos of colonizers, into an alien and basically hostile civilization – or, alternatively, keep on performing the chthonic, destructive, subhuman role assigned to them by the colonizers.⁴

Ukraine, however, differed profoundly from the “traditional” colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas: here, the main difference between the dominant and subaltern group was cultural and linguistic (and, of course, social), but not racial. Ukrainians were alleged to speak a “wrong,” “uncultured” language of kolkhoz slaves. The Ukrainian language was their “black” skin that could be relatively easily changed for “white” skin, i.e., respectable Russian. It was also a sign of loyalty and normality. Nobody cared much if kolkhoz slaves spoke Ukrainian. But commitment to a “black” language was deemed incompatible with education and social progress. In this case, public use of Ukrainian was a clear proof of deviation, disloyalty, and bourgeois nationalistic defiance.

³ The leading Russian nineteenth-century literary critic Vissarion Belinsky described Ukrainians as “iron-headed” savages. In Ukraine today, it is mostly urban Russians who belittle mostly rural Ukrainians by animalistic nicknames like “*byki*” (bulls), “*kuguty*” (cocks), “*raguli*” (horned), or by nicknames that refer to some human shortcoming, like “*zbloby*” (greedy-guts), “*selo*” (village bumpkins), “*kolkhoz*” (uncouth kolkhoz slaves).

⁴ See Oxana Grabowicz, “The Legacy of Colonialism and Communism in Ukraine: Some Key Issues,” *Perspectives on Contemporary Ukraine* 2, no. 2 (March–April 1995). Remarkably, this purely academic presentation elicited enormous reaction and was published in the Lviv daily newspaper *Ratusha*, and later reprinted by the Warsaw Ukrainian weekly *Nashe slovo*, the Kharkiv monthly *Berezil*!, and the Kyiv quarterly *Arka*.

The Ukrainian language was not forbidden in the Soviet Union, unlike in the Russian Empire, but its public usage was effectively undermined and restricted by mostly informal rules and practices. This peculiarity of the Soviet system was aptly noted in 1987 by the American political scientist Alexander J. Motyl:

Language use has a potent symbolic quality in a politicized linguistic environment: it immediately assigns the user to one of two sides of the ideological barricade. ... The use of Ukrainian, they realized, is tantamount to opposition to the Soviet state ... Although no laws forbid deviations from this behavioral norm (as one Soviet Ukrainian representative once told me, no one “is holding a gun to their heads”), non-Russians in general and Ukrainians in particular appear to understand that insistence on speaking one’s native language – especially among Russians – will be perceived as rejection of the “friendship of peoples” and as hostility to the “Soviet people.” Few Ukrainians are audacious enough to risk such unpleasantness as public censure, loss of employment, or even jail for the sake of linguistic purity. As a result, they signal their loyalty to the state and sidestep chauvinist reactions by speaking Russian.⁵

Ukrainians as individuals were not discriminated against either in the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire. Many of them made brilliant careers in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Empires usually care much more about loyalty than nationality. Ukrainians, Georgians, Muslims, or Jews could advance everywhere as long as they managed to prove their loyalty to the Russian communist (or Russian Orthodox) empire. They merely had to be more Russian than the Russians. They had to adopt a “white skin” and abandon their black one; accept the superiority of the imperial language, culture, and ideology and, implicitly or explicitly, the inferiority of their native cultures and languages. None of them could claim equal cultural and linguistic rights with the dominant Russians; none of them as a group could ever question their non-sovereign, subordinate, and culturally inferior position within the empire. Their group rights – as Ukrainians, Muslims, or Jews – were highly restricted in both the Russian and Soviet empires, formally and informally. As a group, as members of a separate nation (or nationality) they were strongly discriminated against, but this ambiguity remains largely ignored by scholars who emphasize the lack of racial difference between Ukrainians and Russians and the virtual absence of ethnically-based discrimination at the individual level.

⁵ Alexander J. Motyl, *Will the Non-Russians Rebel?: State, Ethnicity and Stability in the USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 100-01.

The simple truth is that Ukrainians were not discriminated against as *Little Russians*, i.e., as loyal members of a Russian regional subgroup, who recognize their subordinate position and do not claim any specific/equal cultural rights. But as *Ukrainians*, i.e., as members of a nationally self-aware and culturally self-confident group, they were not merely discriminated against, but also politically persecuted as dangerous “nationalists.”

Perestroika loosened propagandistic pressure and secret police coercion against the “nationally obsessed” but did not eliminate the bureaucratic, socio-economic, cultural, educational, and – last but not least – psychological mechanisms of Russification. Nor have they disappeared after Ukraine gained its independence. One of these mechanisms, an extremely significant if not absolutely determining factor in Russian-Ukrainian cultural relations, requires more detailed scrutiny.

Discourse of dominance

The last decade brought to the Ukrainian book market (and the intellectual milieu) a number of important translations that have facilitated the development of postcolonial studies and encouraged Ukrainian scholars to apply Western poststructuralist methodology to the analysis of Russian colonial and Ukrainian anti-colonial discourses. This includes the classic works of Edward Said (*Orientalism*, originally published in 1984; Ukrainian translation: 2001, and *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993 and 2007), Michel Foucault (*L'archéologie du savoir*, 1969 and 2003, and *Surveiller et punir*, 1975 and 1998), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (*In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 1987 and 2007), and a few books where this methodology is applied to a specific analysis of the Russian Empire – first of all, Ewa Thompson's *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (2000 and 2006) and Myroslav Shkandrij's *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times* (2001 and 2004).

Within this theoretical framework, Russian-Ukrainian relations are deconstructed as relations of cultural subjugation/emancipation, relations that are supported, on the one hand, by the dominant imperial discourse, and challenged, on the other, by a “nationalistic” counter-discourse of native counter-elites. The imperial discourse about Ukraine consists of a number of myths that are broadly accepted as “scientific truth” and/or common knowledge. All of them aim at the cultural undermining and political subordination of Ukraine, legitimization of imperial dominance, and an eventual mystification

of the true nature of these relations. The constituent elements of those myths are ideas of the “triune” Russian nation as purportedly consisting of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians; the close proximity, near-sameness, of today’s Russians and Ukrainians; some unique and essentialized Russian spirituality as opposed to alleged Western soullessness and mercantilism; and the mesmeric greatness of the Russian Empire, supposedly so attractive for all the nations around it that they cannot but join it eagerly and voluntarily.⁶ Hence the special mission of the Russians, authorized either by God or History, to unite all the Slavs and, at times, non-Slavs; to promote true Christianity, to rescue the world and, of course, to establish due order in its near and not-so-near abroad, completing a classical imperialist *mission civilisatrice*.

This imperial discourse was born with the empire, in the symbolic deeds of Peter I and the quasi-historical writings of his Ukrainian apologist Teofan Prokopovych. But it achieves true brilliance only in the nineteenth century, in the age of Romanticism, which coincided with the age of the Napoleonic Wars and the spread of modern nationalism throughout Europe.

Ukraine’s initial representation in the imperial culture largely resembled the representation of the exotic southern and eastern imperial borderlands and, more generally, the representation of all “oriental” lands in classic Western texts. Like any colonized land, it was portrayed as wild, or semi-wild, amorphous, archaic, anarchic, populated by highly primitive communities, beyond real time and real history, i.e., imperial. This view of Ukraine had been thoroughly elaborated by the leading Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky, who based his interpretations partly on the works of Gogol, Pushkin, Kvitka-Osnovianenko, and other writers of the time, but much more on his own, Hegel-inspired, ideas about the Spirit of History and historical/non-historical nations.

The “orientalist” representation of Ukraine, however, encountered strong resistance from the very reality it tried to represent, and required a substantial correction within the framework of imperial discourse. First, Ukraine was no “East” *vis-à-vis* Russia. Rather, for more than a century, it had been a major source of Western influences and an important agent of Europeanization of the Muscovite tsardom and its transformation into the Russian Empire.

⁶ Consider the following statement by the contemporary Russian nationalist writer Stanislav Kuniaev: “Nationalism is for small peoples who fear extinction. Russians are a great people . . . Russia speaks like Christ used to speak: Come to me and share my spirit” (*La Repubblica*, Jan. 27, 1990). Quoted in Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 197.

Secondly, the empire itself was not certain about its own identity and European credentials. It was still heavily orientalized in West European discourse, for instance in the famous travelogue by the Marquis de Custine. Finally, and most importantly, Ukraine could not have been something completely alien to the empire – not only because of its Orthodox Christian and East Slavic consanguinity, but also because of its Kyivan Rus legacy that was to be seamlessly incorporated into the imperial history as presumably “our own,” natural and organic.

Therefore, Ukraine was represented in Russian discourse rather ambivalently. It was a country both kindred and alien, friendly and hostile, mild and wild, idyllic and dangerous.⁷ To avoid logical contradictions between these representations, Russian historiography elaborated a sophisticated model of the “triune” Russian nation. Ukrainians were assigned the role of a regional branch in this model, which had been broken away from the “Russian” tree by some evil historical forces, but now regrafted, to thrive once again with the whole tree. Ukrainian ambivalence acquired a rationale: everything that is good in Ukraine and Ukrainians comes from the common Rus/Russian legacy. Everything that is bad comes from evil, alien influences: Polish, Catholic, Jesuit, Uniate, or Tatar, Jewish, German, and so on. Interestingly, Polish influences in this model have never been cultural or civilizing in nature. Instead, they have brought about destruction, social and religious oppression, spiritual decline and moral degeneration. Even though Ukrainians had borrowed some elements of European civilization from Poles, their impact was deemed rather negative. The Western system of education and Polish republican institutions proved arguably their inefficiency, leading Poland into complete chaos and forcing its neighbors to partition it and establish parental guardianship. In most cases, however, the imperial discourse tried to exclude Polish influences. All its political and military ambitions notwithstanding, the Russian Empire felt rather uncomfortable *vis-à-vis* Poland in cultural and civilizational terms. So, in order to culturally undermine the Ukrainians, it hinted primarily at “Tatar” and, generally, “Asiatic” influences on them, rather than Polish ones.

One may refer, for instance, to Pushkin’s long poem *Poltava*, in which the Ukrainian hetman Ivan Mazepa (who switched sides during the Russo-Swedish war) is portrayed as a semi-oriental operetta-style stock character, a clear

⁷ Maria Todorova notes a similar ambivalence in Western attempts at “orientalizing” the Balkans. See her *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 3-37.

opposite of the “true European” Peter the Great. One may refer also to Belinsky’s notorious description of Ukrainian Cossacks as some sort of “Tatars” or to Pavel Svinin’s lesser known but no less curious ruminations about Ukrainians in his 1830 foreword to a Gogol short story:

Little Russians are closer in appearance [than Great Russians] to the splendid inhabitants of Asia [resembling Asians in their] facial appearance, frame, shapeliness of figure, laziness and carefree nature, [but] Little Russians...do not have those stormy, untamable passions characteristic of believers in Islam: a phlegmatic unconcern appears to serve them as a defense and barrier from uneasy disturbances; and often from under their thick eyebrows a fire flashes; a bold European intelligence penetrates; a passionate love of the motherland and ardent feelings, clothed in pristine simplicity, fill their breasts.⁸

The discourse is rather ambivalent: on the one hand, it is driven by a genuinely artistic need to represent Ukraine and Ukrainians as something curious, exotic, different, peculiar; on the other, it follows the political imperative of imperial homogenization and assimilation of the colonized land. The differences between the Ukrainians and the Russians might be interesting from an artistic point of view, at the level of folklore, habits, and appearance, but from the political point of view they should not be too excessive, too substantial; they should not hinder the domestication and subjugation of the country, its integration into a grand imperial project. All their peculiarities notwithstanding, Ukrainians should remain, in the imperial discourse, a regional subgroup of the Russians, material for empire building rather than for artistic exercises.

Prince Dolgoruky’s sketches from his 1810 trip to “Little Russia” exemplify major features of this discourse:

Khokhol appears to be created by nature to till the land, sweat, burn in the sun and spend his whole life with a bronzed face. ... He does not grieve over such an enslaved condition: he knows nothing better. ... He knows his plough, ox, stack, whisky, and that constitutes his entire lexicon. ... He willingly bears any fate and any labor. However, he needs constant prodding, because he is very lazy: he and his ox will fall asleep and wake up five times in one minute. ... I dare think, if this entire people did not owe a debt to well-mannered landowners for their benevolence and respect for their humanity, the *khokhol* would be

⁸ Quoted in Vladimir Zviniatskovskii, *Tainy natsional’noi dushi* (Kyiv: Likei, 1992), p. 172; translated into English by Myroslav Shkandrij in his *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Univ. Press, 2001), p. 79.

difficult to separate from the Negro in any way: one sweats over sugar, the other over grain. May the Lord give them both good health!⁹

Dolgoruky's arrogant condescension *vis-à-vis* the "khokhol" is of a social rather than ethnic nature. In the early nineteenth century neither Russian nor Little Russian (Ukrainian) noblemen reckoned themselves and their serfs to be members of the same nation. Prince Dolgoruky could have certainly written in the same scornful way about a Russian or any other peasant. But discursive forms have adhesiveness and continuity. They not only reflect and explain reality, but also create and distort it. Perhaps unwittingly Dolgoruky envisaged the classical model of Russian-Ukrainian relations for years to come. Whatever his intention, the next generation of either Russian or Ukrainian intellectuals could not but discern a clear imperialistic message in those kinds of statements.

Very likely, Dolgoruky's imperative was first and foremost aesthetic: to give his readers something exotic, amusing, and entertaining. The "wild" Caucasus and the "singing and dancing" Little Russia provided the Romantics with much more attractive material than Russia proper. But there was also an important political imperative, at least implicitly: to ensure political and economic dominance of the empire in the newly acquired territories, to make the "khokhols," first in symbolic representations and then in actuality, harmless, domesticated, adapted, and adjusted to the needs of the empire (the needs of "khokhols" themselves were obviously of little if any concern).

Dolgoruky's text graphically exemplifies the nearly complete merger of political and aesthetic imperatives. All the peculiarities of "Little Russians" are presented in a manner and to a degree that is needed to legitimize their imperial enslavement and exploitation. Khokhols are said to be peasants like any other but a bit lazier, so they require a bit more supervision and compulsion. To the credit of more talented authors, however, we must recognize that the conflation of political and aesthetic imperatives remained noticeable in their works and, at times, explosive. An early example comes from Kondratii Ryleev's Romantic poem *Voynarovsky*, where the Ukrainian hetman Ivan Mazepa is depicted not as a traitor (according to the dominant imperial discourse) but rather as a rebellious freedom fighter, according to the poet's own artistic intuition.

⁹ Quoted in Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, pp. 79-80. *Khokhol* is a slightly derogatory Russian term for an ethnic Ukrainian.

Another, even more important, example comes from the “Ukrainian” tales of Mykola Hohol (Nikolai Gogol). Aesthetically, these short stories, despite the author’s unquestionable loyalty to the empire, played a rather ambiguous, if not quite subversive, role *vis-à-vis* the empire. By the very force of his talent, Hohol brought the contradiction between the imperial need for Ukraine’s political subjugation (through its imperial homogenization) and its aesthetic liberation (through the exposure of its cultural uniqueness and richness) to a dangerous point, after which this country with its glorious past and rich heritage could evolve separately, by its own trajectory, in spite of the homogenizing and unifying efforts of the empire. As a loyal imperial subject, Hohol denied this possibility, stressing the view that his Little Russia was just a museum, a glorious past that was no more, a project that could be accomplished now only within the common empire of which both the Ukrainians and the Russians were co-owners. As a Ukrainian patriot and a great writer, however, he created a myth that acquired a separate life in the imagination of his successors. Little effort was needed to revitalize and reinterpret the myth of a beautiful and glorious but defunct Ukraine.

The emergence of counter-discourse

It was Taras Shevchenko who created a new myth that was polemical but also successive *vis-à-vis* that of Hohol.¹⁰ His Ukraine was not dead but just asleep, buried alive, yet ready to be awoken and resurrected. Shevchenko merely re-created the Ukraine that had been created but prematurely announced deceased by Hohol and other imperial loyalists of his time. However duly Shevchenko is praised as the spiritual father of modern Ukrainian nationalism, he would have had hardly anything to build upon if his “Little Russian” predecessors had not completed the groundwork and provided him unwittingly with all the major elements for the eventual development of a powerful nationalist discourse.¹¹

¹⁰ Hryhorii Hrabovych [George Grabowicz], “Hohol’ i mif Ukrainy,” *Suchasnist’*, no. 9 (1994): 77–95; no. 10 (1994): 137–49.

¹¹ An apt analysis of the implicit contradiction between things politically “imperial” and aesthetically “national” in early modern Ukrainian literature can be found in Marko Pavlyshyn, “The Rhetoric and Politics of Kotliarevsky’s *Eneida*,” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 10, no. 1 (1985): 9–24.

Shevchenko did not invent Ukrainophilism: there was already a long tradition, exemplified most vividly by Hohol. But Shevchenko made the new Ukrainophilism incompatible with imperial loyalty: Ukraine has not died yet, but she will certainly die, he implied, if she does not get rid of the imperial yoke. A utopian confederation of free and sovereign Slavic nations was suggested as an alternative. This admittedly naïve idea of pan-Slavic unity might have evoked benevolence in the imperial establishment if it did not entail the subversive ideas of republicanism and Ukrainian sovereignty. The Ukrainian movement was crushed, Shevchenko exiled for twenty-five years to the Urals and Central Asia, his friends imprisoned, but this was just the end of a battle, not the war. Nation building, however delayed, was not aborted, and the cultural emancipation of Ukrainian intellectuals from the imperial framework was basically completed by the end of the nineteenth century. As Oleh S. Ilnytzkij writes:

Th[e] gradual and initially almost imperceptible intrusion of the West as a model into Ukrainian cultural consciousness displaced the ubiquitous, defining presence of the empire. The imagining of Ukraine in a European framework – and the corresponding rejection of the all-Russian/imperial context – was a profound paradigm shift that allowed Ukrainian culture to view itself not as a subsystem or a complement, but as a complete world in its own right, equivalent (if not in fact, at least potentially) to all other self-contained European national cultural systems. By embracing Europe as a point of reference, Ukraine symbolically transformed itself from a dependent provincial culture in an empire to an independent national culture within a European framework. Ukrainian culture could now be imagined as accommodating both the “high” and the “low” within itself.¹²

Surprisingly, this transformation remained largely unnoticed by the great majority of Russian intellectuals. As late as the Revolution, the attitude of enlightened Russians towards Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian issue in general remained virtually the same as in the 1830s and 1840s, in the age of Belinsky and Khomiakov. Neither competence in the subject nor the level of argumentation changed substantially. The popular attitude either followed the conservative paradigm, which denied Ukrainian high culture and literature as a dangerous deviation, or mimicked the liberal paradigm, which allegedly

¹² Oleh S. Ilnytzkij, “Modeling Culture in the Empire: Ukrainian Modernism and the Death of the All-Russian Idea,” in *Culture, Nation, and Identity. The Ukrainian-Russian Encounter, 1600-1945*, ed. Andreas Kappeler *et al.* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2003), pp. 314-15.

tolerated that local extravagance, but only as a regional/dialect kind of Russian culture and literature. According to Myroslav Shkandrij:

Ukrainian literature was still considered an aesthetically degraded medium and Ukrainian consciousness a manifestation of provincialism. The scholarly discourse concerning Ukraine had penetrated Russian literature only feebly, and the most forceful articulation of the counter-discourse remained largely unavailable. As a consequence, Russian intellectuals marginalized Ukrainian issues. In literary portrayals Ukrainian characters were almost never allowed any depth, nor were their cultural concerns treated seriously. Ukrainians did appear in Russian realist fiction in the second half of the century (embodied, for example, in the various horse-grooms, gardeners, and rank-and-file soldiers identified as Ukrainians in Tolstoi's works), but they were distinguished from Russians only by their "dialect." Although Anton Chekhov and Ivan Bunin jokingly identified themselves as *khokhly*, they assigned no political importance to this characterization.¹³

This astonishing blindness and deafness of the imperial culture *vis-à-vis* its closest and largest neighbor exemplifies the self-sufficiency and dramatic inertia of the imperial discourse, which affected even such great writers as Mikhail Bulgakov, Vladimir Nabokov, or Joseph Brodsky with petty chauvinism. The discourse of dominance that throughout the whole nineteenth century domesticated, emasculated, and marginalized Ukraine has basically not changed even today. It carefully selects voices, facts, and events and represents only those that reinforce it. It silences and marginalizes everything that contradicts the colonial image of "provincial" Ukraine and subverts the idyllic patron/client model of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Empire authorizes itself to speak on behalf of its subjects because it believes it knows their thoughts and feelings much better than they themselves do. A great many Russians who have never read a single Ukrainian book have no doubt that there is nothing worth reading – just because, as Prince Dolgoruky put it long ago, "the khokhol appears to be created by nature to till the land, sweat, burn in the sun," and certainly not to produce any books, films, or operas.

Remarkably, though, all the immense power of the imperial discourse proved to be insufficient to neutralize the anti-imperial counter-discourses that emerged during the nineteenth century. Despite total government control over publishing, education, public activity, and academic exchange, the empire failed to curb its nationalist rivals by merely discursive means. It had to embark, predictably, on censorship and coercion. The competition between

¹³) Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, p. 166.

the two cultures once again proved to be a struggle between the culture that had an army and a secret police and the culture that had absolutely nothing, not even an officially recognized language and the possibility to use it in print. The view of Ukraine did not differ much among the Russian elite, be it left-wing or right-wing, liberal or conservative, monarchist or republican, repressive or intellectual.

Postcolonial liberation?

Colonialism is harmful to both the colonized and the colonizers. It creates neurotic resentment on the one side and deeply entrenched prejudice on the other. Internet forums, where Ukrainians and Russians exchange their views on today's topical issues, are depressing sight. Nobody listens to the arguments of the other side; nobody even tries to articulate them in a comprehensive and non-insulting way. The state of intellectual discussions is not much better. In most cases, if they happen at all, conversations resemble monologues of deaf people.

It is a postcolonial approach, some scholars suggest, that may heal colonial wounds and dispel mutual grievances:

Postcoloniality recognizes the teleological quality of colonial and anticolonial positions, and therefore also their exclusivity and violence, whether historically demonstrated or merely potential. For that reason it maintains a highly skeptical attitude to all schemata and symbols of imperial, as well as anti-imperial, glory. At the same time, however, postcolonialism recognizes the realities of history: on the one hand, the reality and pain of injustices suffered, and on the other – the impossibility of thinking the present without also thinking all elements of its prehistory, both anti-colonial and colonial. Postcoloniality in culture is open and tolerant; it creates the new, utilizing as its source the full spectrum of culture past. It is cautious with regard to categorical slogans, simple categories, unambiguous historical narratives and myths that purport to explain all, preferring, rather, a world-view marked by irony. Notwithstanding what has just been said, it is not the destructive mockery of nihilism that is the philosophical background of postcolonialism, but a wish to avoid all forms of violence or domination. Postcolonialism does not seek to replace the domination of the colonizer with a new hierarchy of power, but with a condition of freedom and convenience shared equally by all.¹⁴

¹⁴ Marko Pavlyshyn, "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 6, no. 2 (1992): 42–46.

Ukrainian culture of the last two decades demonstrates postcolonial *Weltanschauung* and innovative cultural practices in a great variety of genres, from the non-verbal – music, painting, or performance – to the verbal and hybrid – literature, film, and theater. In the latter, however, the advance of postcolonial freedom, openness, and ideological disengagement remains much more problematic primarily because of the heavily politicized and still unresolved language issue. In many cases, language use still has a noticeable symbolic quality; it still tends, as Motyl wrote in 1987, to assign the user to one of two sides of the ideological barricade.

Ukraine is basically a bilingual country where virtually everybody understands both Ukrainian and Russian and where a great majority (about two-thirds of respondents, according to various opinion polls) claim to be nearly fluent in both languages. The problem stems from the fact that a significant and, importantly, influential minority retains a profound bias against the Ukrainian language, culture and, in some extreme cases, statehood. As the primary descendants of the Soviet elite (which was territorial rather than national), they inherited substantial administrative resources and accumulated enormous wealth. Not a single Ukrainian oligarch, remarkably, speaks Ukrainian in private. Russians and Russophones dominate most urban centers, the key branches of the economy, the major media and, to a great extent, the political arena. By and large, they promote an ambiguous ideology that combines old imperial anti-Ukrainian (“anti-nationalist”) stereotypes, still supported and disseminated across the border by Russian culture and media, and a kind of local, Creole-type, patriotism-cum-statism that employs some national (“native/aboriginal”) symbols and narratives to legitimize political independence of the “settlers’ state.”¹⁵

This combination is a difficult task because the constituting elements are largely incompatible. As a result, the dominant ideology as well as the symbolic representations and cultural policy of the post-Soviet Ukraine are highly

¹⁵ The term “Creole” is employed here in reference to cultural phenomena resulting from the mixture of colonizers and colonized in Ukraine and Belarus since their incorporation into the Russian Empire. It refers to a hybrid cultural, territorial, and national identity that has developed among the part of the Russophone population in Ukraine that identifies neither with Russia proper nor with the identity, cultural codes, and historical narratives of the non-assimilated autochthones. One should be aware, however, that the social and cultural distance between the Russian settler and the Ukrainian or Belarusian indigenous population was never as significant as it was in Latin America, where the term originated. See my *Vid Malorosii do Ukrainy: Paradoksy zapizniloho natsiietvorennia* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2000).

ambiguous, vague, incoherent, eclectic, and contradictory. They are products of permanent bargaining, negotiations, concessions, and compromises between the dominant “Creole-type” minority and the socially/culturally marginalized “indigenous” majority. In political terms, it makes the state more or less viable and relatively pluralistic. In cultural terms, however, it produces deep dissatisfaction on both sides. The Russophile group feels that concessions to the Ukrainophiles (“nationalists,” in the standard imperial discourse) have gone too far and may eventually subvert their dominance. The “aboriginal” Ukrainian-speaking group, on the contrary, feels the concessions are mostly symbolic and insufficient since they do not change the essence of the colonial relations, nor do they challenge effectively the social and cultural/linguistic dominance of the “settler” (“Creole”) group. This provokes strong anti-colonial resentment that still is noticeable in today’s Ukrainian writing. It substantially complicates the professed advent of a bright postcolonial future since it chafes colonial wounds and instigates anti-imperial mobilization. Russia’s aggressive (“assertive,” in EU diplomats’ terms) policy in the “near abroad” further aggravates the problem.

As a result, Ukrainian postcolonial culture, especially literature, encounters two problems that would barely hinder its impressive development, but may impose some serious limitations and distortions on its functioning within the society. The first is the problem of language, which does not mean a poor command of Ukrainian within the society at large but, rather, a protracted imperial bias that a priori disqualifies any “native” cultural product as inferior to the product imported from the imperial center. One may compare this to the situation in nineteenth-century America, where many white readers likely rejected any book by a black writer.

The second problem is one of political context. The unresolved issue of decolonization and minority/majority relations, as well as multiple conflicts with the former colonial master, perpetuate a sense of insecurity, the “siege mentality,” and national mobilization. This combination of an internal “Cold War” and an external siege promotes misreading and misinterpretation of any texts, especially those texts that are deliberately ambiguous, playful, ironic, and provocative.

A minor but graphic example of a double – both colonial and anti-colonial – misreading of an apparently postcolonial text comes from popular criticism evoked by two poems by Oleksandr Irvanets, styled purposefully as parodies of nationalist and Socialist Realist scribbling. One poem, “Love Oklahoma!” alludes to Volodymyr Sosiura’s classic “Love Ukraine!” Irvanets took all the naïve clichés of populist poetry from the conventional Ukrainophile text and

applied them to different American states and realities. Thereby, their complete inanity became simply too obvious and ridiculous.¹⁶

However, this rather innocent and funny joke was interpreted in a number of Ukrainophile periodicals as a blasphemous profanation of a sacred text and, more generally, as another attempt of sinister colonizers to ridicule and humiliate Ukrainians.

Another poem by Irvanets, “Ode to the Hryvnia,” provoked a similar misinterpretation, albeit from the opposite side. The hryvnia is the new Ukrainian currency that was introduced in 1996, after the years of hyperinflation, as a symbol of the independent state (the word “hryvnia” hearkens to the Kyivan Rus period, when this currency was used), but also as a hopeful sign of economic and financial stabilization. In his parody, Irvanets played with both nationalistic rhetoric and the Socialist Realist tradition of ode writing. In fact, he explored the compatibility, fusion, and propensity for mutation of both the old and new graphomanias.

Shortly afterward the eminent critic Lada Fedorovskaia published a long article in the respectable Moscow weekly *Literaturnaia gazeta* under the title “Bilingualism, Kiev Style,” to expose the excesses and stupidity of the forceful “Ukrainization” allegedly being carried out in Ukraine.¹⁷ The poem was featured as a key example of the “officially approved vulgarization” of patriotic feelings. “A certain Mr. Irvanets,” she wrote about the noted Ukrainian writer whose works have been translated into many European languages, “flying high on patriotic passion, has produced an ‘Ode to the Hryvnia’.” Then she quoted a fragment and noted reasonably that it looks like a parody. “But it is not a parody!” she reported to readers, because it was published in a journal founded by the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine and, moreover, in a rubric entitled “Read This on Scene.” A post-imperial critic, thus, misread postcolonial irony in a poem offered for reading by stand-up comedians for a serious nationalistic statement to be read solemnly at official concerts!

These amusing and bizarre arguments hide an assumption that is more important and self-evident to both the author and her readers: Ukrainians cannot parody themselves simply because they are not a nation like any other, with their own sages and fools, heroes and villains, poets and scribblers. They are not a nation at all, just a band of “nationally obsessed” provincial intellectuals, a Friday that has suddenly gone crazy.

¹⁶ See also Myroslav Shkandrij’s article in this issue.

¹⁷ *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 27, 1997.

Without a doubt, this context influences Ukrainian writers, no matter how uninhibited, disengaged, and committed to the postcolonial way of writing they are. Even the most renowned and internationally established leader of this generation, Yuri Andrukhovych, cannot escape from the daunting context that is much more neo- than postcolonial. As a Swedish critic aptly notes:

The national theme is exploited to varying degrees in all the novels by Andrukhovych and with ever greater seriousness and stronger commitment to the independence of Ukraine and to defense of his country against Soviet and Russian hegemony and imperialism. At the same time all his novels, and not only *Moskoviada*, are dedicated to the deconstruction of the nationalistic rhetoric. This defense of Ukrainian independence and simultaneous criticism of nationalistic propaganda is a very important feature of the novels of Andrukhovych as well as of the works of other Ukrainian postmodernist writers.¹⁸

In sum, one may conclude that contemporary Ukrainian culture, however rich and versatile, and riding high on the postcolonial momentum, still encounters the serious problem of its colonial legacy and the even more serious challenge of neocolonial reality. Like any challenge, it may be daunting, and harmful – even fatal. But it can also be – and seems to be – thought-provoking, encouraging, and energizing.

¹⁸ Per-Arne Bodin, “The End of an Empire: On Iurii Andrukhovych’s Novel *Moskoviada*,” *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective*, ed. Janusz Korek (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2007), p. 100.



Defending the Cultural Nation before and after 1991: Ivan Dziuba*

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Abstract

The Ukrainian literary and cultural critic Ivan Dziuba (b. 1931) exerted his greatest impact on Ukrainian public life as a dissident in the 1960s and as a public intellectual from the late 1980s onward. Throughout his writings Dziuba has urged state and society to develop Ukrainian culture proactively and to defend it against encroachment by dominant cultures allied to politically and economically dominant powers.

Keywords

Ivan Dziuba, Ukraine, Ukrainian, dissent, culture, nation-building, intellectuals

The question of which political models were available for the conceptual and practical structuring of the independent Ukraine that emerged when the Soviet Union collapsed has received some discussion in the scholarly literature. The consensual view is that the new state was shaped to serve the interests of the old elite, which in its quest for a legitimacy alternative to that of Marxism-Leninism camouflaged itself with the trappings of a national ideology.¹ Such a notion of the continuity of a self-interested power elite makes

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¹) See, e.g., the accounts of this transition in general histories: Paul Robert Magosci, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 672-73 and Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 194 and 200-01. See also Marta Dyczok, *Ukraine: Movement without Change, Change without Movement* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 2000), pp. 55-60 and Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2002), pp. 161-65.

sense insofar as it is coherent with the features of Ukraine's political, social, economic and cultural development that appear most salient: the emergence of a weak state easily co-opted by special interests; the frailty of the nascent legal framework and the parallel institutionalization of corruption and cronyism; and the disingenuousness and ineffectiveness of initiatives for nation-building and cultural decolonization.

Interest in what has actually happened in emergent independent Ukraine has, understandably, overshadowed interest in proposals for its reshaping that have not borne fruit or have had limited impact. Yet the thought of leading exponents of the “national intelligentsia” deserves attention, not only for its own sake, but also as a source of ideas that had some influence on public policy in the 1990s and on the outlook of the part of the educated sector of the population that is Ukrainian-speaking and politically and culturally oriented toward the West. It was this social group among whom the Orange Revolution of 2004 had, perhaps, its most ardent supporters.

It is the intention of this article, therefore, to examine the work of one of the most prolific and highly regarded of Ukraine's intellectuals of the period commencing in the 1960s and continuing into the 2000s, Ivan Dziuba – literary critic and historian, cultural commentator, author of the seminal Ukrainian dissident text of the 1960s *Internationalism or Russification?*, and a consistent contributor to the debate on culture and cultural policy in independent Ukraine.

Dziuba was born in 1931 in a village in the Donbas *oblast*, a part of Ukraine whose bicultural character in the 1930s Dziuba was at pains to emphasize in later years, when the alleged contrast between a culturally Russian East and a culturally Ukrainian West had become one of the dominant topoi of analyses of the Ukrainian cultural and political predicament. Dziuba studied philology at the Donetsk Pedagogical Institute and was a graduate student of the Institute of Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR in the 1950s. In the 1960s he was one of the most visible, eloquent and charismatic members of the Ukrainian dissent movement.² His condemnation of the arrests of members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia at the premiere of

² The dissident Ievhen Sverstiuk would write subsequently of Dziuba's centrality to the oppositional movement, “there was no Ukrainian name that was as frequently and ubiquitously invoked” (Sverstiuk, “Ivan Dziuba – talant i dolia,” *Kur'ier Kryvbasu*, nos. 85-86 (1997): 53, while Iryna Zhylenko would recall that “we were ready to lay down our lives for Dziuba. He was the master of our thoughts and harbinger of the truth. He was crystal-pure and wholly free of ambition, pose or vanity” (Zhylenko, “Homo feriens,” *Suchasnist'* 1 [1995]: 153).

Paradzhanov's film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* in 1964 and his speech at Babyn Yar in Kyiv condemning anti-Semitism were among the most celebrated acts of dissident defiance in Ukraine. *Internationalism or Russification?* was completed in 1965 and published abroad in 1968. Imprisoned in 1972, Dziuba wrote in the following year what most took to be a recantation of his earlier views. Permitted to publish anew from the late 1970s onward, Dziuba wrote mainly literary studies, especially ones dedicated to the non-Russian literatures of the USSR. His work scrupulously conformed to official Soviet nationalities policy until the advent of *glasnost*. From 1986 onward Dziuba's published writings began to return to the themes of the 1960s, advocating universal human rights and values on the one hand and, on the other, condemning the neglect of Ukrainian language and culture by Soviet officialdom and by much of Ukrainian society at large. The long essay, "Do We Conceive of National Culture as a Complete System?" (1988) reflected Dziuba's renewed preoccupation with the obstacles to, and opportunities for, a renaissance of Ukrainian culture in a context where political liberalization and official benevolence toward Ukrainian culture would go hand in hand. From November 1992 until August 1994 Dziuba held the post of Minister of Culture of Ukraine, though he was unable to do much to advance the policies that he advocated in his writings. Dziuba's output in the fields of literary history and literary and cultural criticism has continued to be prodigious to the time of the writing of this article (2008).

Until the late 1980s it was the apparent breach between Dziuba the dissident and Dziuba the conformist after 1973 that focused the attention of commentators. Yet there is a striking continuity of world-view in Dziuba's writings of all periods.³ Dziuba is a recipient of the heritage of the Enlightenment as filtered through the Marxism-Leninism that underlay his formal education. The central values for Dziuba are always human dignity and happiness, which are to be achieved through the full development of the potential of each human being and every human society. The human being for Dziuba is always individual and fascinating in its uniqueness. Indeed, many of his most memorable publications are his studies of the lives and works of poets and writers. At the same time, the human individual is (and is to different degrees aware of being) a member of many communities. The community to which Dziuba attributes the greatest significance is the nation, a collective that, in his view,

³ This continuity between the pre- and post-1973 Dziuba was already observed by Mykhajlo Savaryn in his discussion, "Why Capitulate?: Ivan Dziuba's Trauma," *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies* 2, no. 2 (1977): 54-61.

is capable of mobilizing the finest capacities of the human being, and yet one that, on the battleground of *Realpolitik*, is often repressed or denied. Not the dominance of one's own culture over others, but its right to a place among equals is the guiding objective of Dziuba's thinking about nation. "My concern is above all for Ukrainian culture," said Dziuba at a conference on Russian-Ukrainian dialogue in 1996, "not because I do not appreciate the interconnectedness of world cultures, but because, of the cultures in question, the Ukrainian is the more threatened. If Russian culture were in this position, my chief concern would be for it."⁴ It is this ideal of equality among the world's nations, large and small, that underlies Dziuba's studies, characteristic of his "conformist" period, of Belarusian, Lithuanian, Armenian, Tajik, Kabardin, Ingush, Yakut, Mansi, and Nanai literatures.

Dziuba's ideas, like those of his other contemporaries among the generation of the "Sixtiers," were imprinted by the Marxism-Leninism of the official culture in whose context they arose. Paradoxically, it is in *Internationalism or Russification?* that Dziuba insists most emphatically on the Leninist basis of his stand on the issue of nationality. Lenin's position on nations and the nationalities problem – or, more precisely, Dziuba's interpretation of this position – served as a basis for Dziuba's critique of Soviet practice with respect to the non-Russian nations, and especially cultures, of the USSR.

Writing about *Internationalism or Russification?* in 1990, Dziuba identified three categories of reader for whom the work had been intended: the party and state leadership that bore responsibility for the implementation of nationalities policy in Ukraine; people who were ostensibly indifferent to the national question, but whose indifference objectively contributed to Russification; and finally, people concerned for the welfare of Ukraine and therefore willing to be informed about the health or otherwise of its nation and culture.⁵ Two other categories of reader, however, turned out to have a more direct influence on Dziuba's fate: foreigners (outside the USSR the work was published in Ukrainian, Russian, English, French, Italian and Chinese), and readers in the Soviet police organs. The publication of the book in the West, as well as the fact that many of its readers there found in it confirmation of their critical

⁴ Ivan Dziuba, "Vzaiemodiia dvokh kul'tur ta stereotypy ii retseptii," paper presented at the international conference "Diiialoh ukrains'koi i rosiis'koi kul'tur iak chynnyk mizhetnichnoi zhody v Ukraini" (Kyiv, October 24-25, 1996), rpt. in Ivan Dziuba, *Mizh kul'turoiu i politykoiu* (Kyiv: Sfera, 1998), pp. 38-46, here p. 46.

⁵ Ivan Dziuba, "Vid avtora: Z vidstani chverti stolittia" [Foreword, 1990], *Internatsionalizm chy rusyifikatsiia?* (Kyiv: Vydavnychiy dim "KM Akademiia," 1998), pp. 16-20, here pp. 18-19.

attitude toward the USSR, became grounds for accusing Dziuba of anti-Soviet intentions. In retrospect, Dziuba claimed that his aim in writing the treatise was not subversive – rather, it was to draw attention to aspects of the implementation of nationalities policy that required reform.⁶ Be that as it may, *Internationalism or Russification?*⁷ constituted a radical challenge to the regime, accusing it of acting to destroy the Ukrainian nation (not only its culture and identity, but also its population), of continuing the Russificatory policies of tsarism, and of distorting the tenets of Leninism in an effort to justify its odious practices.

The treatise covers a wide expanse of subject matter and is complex in its argumentation. At the theoretical level Dziuba condemns as anti-Marxist any apologia of policies to assimilate minorities or deprive them of their national identity. He approves of the Soviet nationalities policy of the 1920s, especially the Ukrainization policy, praises its achievements and condemns its discontinuation:

This was a truly internationalist Leninist policy which safeguarded the interests and the full development of the socialist Ukrainian nation. But after only a few years this policy came to an end and the men who had been implementing it were removed. [. . .] There began a policy of destroying the achievements of the previous period, a policy of physically destroying the Ukrainian nation, especially its intelligentsia. [. . .] Besides everything else, this Stalinist policy was calculated to knock out of the Ukrainian people any trace of national sentiment and national consciousness. A taboo has weighed upon these for some thirty-five years, so it is not at all surprising that they are so little developed among a considerable part of the Ukrainian population [. . .].⁷

Dziuba objects to a situation where any expression of dissatisfaction with the position of Ukraine in the USSR attracts severe official sanction, while recurrences of Russian chauvinism are tolerated. He challenges the myth of the equality of the nationalities of the Soviet Union, citing evidence of the privileging of Russians and Russian culture. In the print media, Russian materials outweigh non-Russian ones far more than could be justified by the ratio of Russians to non-Russians in the population of the USSR; persons of Russian ethnicity are disproportionately represented in higher education and in professions requiring high qualifications; obstacles are placed in the way of

⁶ Ivan Dziuba, “Z vidstani chverti stolittia” [Afterword, 1990], *Internatsionalizm chy rusyfikatsiia?* pp. 204–26, here p. 204.

⁷ Ivan Dziuba, *Internationalism or Russification?: A Study in the Soviet Nationalities Problem*, 3rd ed. (New York: Monad Press, 1974), p. 53.

bringing to public attention the historical and contemporary achievements of cultures of the USSR other than the Russian; as far as language use is concerned, Ukrainian is discouraged in all prestige-conferring contexts, while Russian is encouraged.

The treatise gained much force from Dziuba's systematic appeal to the authority of Marxist-Leninist thought combined with a wealth of empirical material gathered through painstaking research.⁸ The fragmentary experience of intellectuals who confronted instances of Russification on a daily basis could now be understood as symptomatic of a general phenomenon. What further added to the persuasiveness of the treatise was the sociological breadth and historical depth of its argument, as well as the author's readiness to breach taboos by giving shocking names to phenomena that were not supposed to exist in the USSR: "Russification" and "Russian great-state chauvinism." The topicality of *Internationalism or Russification?* did not diminish over the decades following its composition. The main motifs of Ukrainian protest journalism of the period of *glasnost* in many instances sounded like paraphrases of Dziuba's classical study.

No longer explicitly claiming a connection to Marxism in the 1980s and 1990s, Dziuba nevertheless continued in his analyses of texts and other cultural phenomena to pay attention to social and economic context and to apply the category of class. He remained a critic of the excesses of the free market and an advocate of the leading role of the state in the planning and guidance of human affairs. Later his scepticism would extend to the phenomenon of economic and cultural globalization.⁹ He remained, throughout, an adherent of the idea of the transformation of human beings and human society and the fullest possible development of their potential.

Such transformations could be achieved, Dziuba believed, if they were grounded in rational and general principles and if, in pursuit of these achievements, humans were guided by generally agreed norms that were also maintained and defended by society's leading institutions. In the 1960s Dziuba demanded that this role be performed by the Soviet state and the Communist Party, in the 1990s – by the newly-independent Ukrainian state. Dziuba's harshest invective is reserved for instances where the state acts illegally or in

⁸ Dziuba outlined the methods by means of which he and numerous collaborators gathered the material on which *Internationalism or Russification?* was based in an interview for the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1988): 8-9.

⁹ See, especially, Ivan Dziuba, "Hlobalizatsiia i maibutnie kul'tury," *Slovo i chas*, 9 (2008): 23-30.

contravention of the principles that, in Dziuba's view, it should uphold. In 1963, when the authorities disrupted the nonconformist intelligentsia's commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the writer and dramatist Lesia Ukrainka, Dziuba condemned the state's contempt for "normal civic and administrative procedures" and the "norms of civil life."¹⁰ In *Internationalism or Russification?* Dziuba viewed the domination of the Russian culture over the Ukrainian in Ukraine as an aberration from proper Leninist norms and from the practices of the golden age of Ukrainization in the 1920s which, as he saw it, instantiated those norms. Likewise, the failure of many citizens of independent Ukraine to support the Ukrainian language by employing it in their lives, and the failure of governments in independent Ukraine to create conditions favourable to an efflorescence of Ukrainian culture, were criticized by Dziuba in the 1980s and 1990s as actions and behaviors that were wrong according to criteria that he regarded as objective.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s the main value upheld by Dziuba's systematic thinking, as well as his criticism and polemics, was *tselisnist* – "wholeness" or "completeness." Phenomena had value if they possessed a systemic quality – if their variety and complexity were harmonized into a coherent whole, each of whose parts had meaning in relation to the others. A culture that possessed "completeness" displayed a fullness of interrelationships between its elements (rather than each element of that culture having its primary points of reference in some other culture); it was a source of autonomous values and criteria; and it possessed its own identity and participated on equal terms with other cultures in the overarching culture of humankind. Such completeness, in Dziuba's view, is threatened by totalitarianism and colonialism, and cultures emerging from the thrall of these evils typically aim to restore it.

A first step toward the restoration of the completeness of a culture is the destruction of stereotypes of its inferiority. Dziuba favors the comparative study of cultural phenomena because it undermines such evaluative hierarchies. He studies Shevchenko in the context of Schiller and Victor Hugo,¹¹ Olha Kobylianska in the tradition of Madame de Stael and George

¹⁰ "Do Spilky Radians'kykh Pys'mennykiv Ukrainy (Poiasnuival'na zapyska pro vechir pam'iaty Lesi Ukrainky v Tsentral'nomu parku kul'tury i vidpochynku m. Kyieva – 31 lypnia 1963 roku)," *Suchasnist'*, 8 (1968): 87-94.

¹¹ The second volume of Dziuba's collected works, *Z krynytsi lit* (Kyiv: Vydavnychi dim "Kyievo-Mohylians'ka Akademiia," 2006), commences with essays that examine Shevchenko in relation to Sándor Petőfi (1965), Aleksei Khomiakov (1989), Friedrich Schiller (1996), Victor Hugo (1997) and Juliusz Słowacki (2000).

Sand and in the context of Ibsen, Carlyle, Ruskin and Nietzsche,¹² demonstrating that works of Ukrainian literature not only participated in European dialogues and debates, but also sustain analysis and judgment by the same criteria as works belonging to better known European traditions. At the same time, the idea of the normative completeness of cultures throws into bold relief the phenomenon of the *incompleteness* imposed upon cultures by external causes: in the Ukrainian case, by tsarist prohibitions of Ukrainian-language publishing in 1863 and 1876, by the murder of a generation of creative people in the 1930s, and by the intimidation and persecution of the most original and principled writers, artists and intellectuals throughout the Soviet period.

Awareness of these travails, according to Dziuba, imposes upon activists of Ukrainian culture an obligation to restore its completeness. The focus of such activity must be language, which Dziuba considers to be the essential attribute of a nation and the seat of its difference from others. He demands proactive government policies to encourage citizens of Ukraine to speak Ukrainian; he appeals directly to his readers to become vehicles for the renaissance of the Ukrainian language; he satirizes those who are indifferent to their native language.¹³ Dziuba's prioritization of language as a key element of the post-Soviet transformation of Ukrainian society is nowhere explicitly justified, but it can be read as part, on the one hand, of his overall commitment to the restoration of historical justice and of equality among nations and, on the other, of his essentially Herderian conviction that nations possess personalities shaped by common historical experiences and expressed in their unique cultures.

In one way or another, the notion of completeness figures in almost all of Dziuba's works of the late 1980s and 1990s. His writing during this period belongs to two main genres: studies of the works and lives of activists of Ukrainian culture, especially those of his own generation; and broad inquiries into cultural and social questions that often culminate in proposals for implementation by officialdom and in calls to the well-disposed public to modify its cultural behavior.

After his long detour through studies of the less well known literatures of the Soviet Union, Dziuba returned to the theme of Ukrainian writers and

¹² Ivan Dziuba, "Chytaiuchy Ol'hu Kobylans'ku (Kil'ka zistavlen')," *Z krynytsi lit*, Vol. III (Kyiv: Vydavnychiy dim "Kyievo-Mohylians'ka Akademiia," 2007), pp. 223-53. The article was written in 1965. Part of it was first published in *Suchasnist'* 5 (1969). The version printed in *Z krynytsi lit* is identified there as the first complete publication.

¹³ See, above all, Ivan Dziuba, *Bo to ne prosto mova, zvuky . . .* (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1990).

artists, especially those of his own generation. His essay on Mykola Vinhranovskyyi, one of the poets who rose to prominence in the 1960s, contains a memorable description of the Sixtiers' generation. It was characterized, according to Dziuba, by "an inimitable, heartbreakingly touching and pathetic mixture of misery, great ambitions, naïveté, tenacious energy, low material expectations and possibilities but high spiritual ones, minimal claims on life but elevated ideals, and a craving for beauty and truth."¹⁴ Dziuba's studies of the life, work and thought of members of this generation, previously known to the Soviet public only through those of their works that did not conflict with Soviet norms, may be read as part of his strategy to restore the completeness of the culture that the Soviet experience had so destructively truncated. Thus, among the figures to whom Dziuba devoted attention were Ivan Svitlychnyi, the literary critic who, by general consensus, was the focal point of dissent in Kyiv in the 1960s; the poet Ivan Drach, also a literary debutant of the 1960s, who became a significant political player on the eve of, and following, Ukraine's declaration of independence; the prose writer Yevhen Hutsalo; the poet Vasyl Stus, one of the most principled of dissidents, who perished in the Gulag in 1985; and Oles Berdnyk, an eccentric writer and political dissident whose science fiction offended Soviet propriety by sailing too close to the shoals of mysticism. The priority of completeness may be discerned as one of the drivers behind Dziuba's decisions to research earlier writers who had been overlooked by Soviet scholarship (e.g., the poet Volodymyr Svidzinsky) or ignored as enemies of the Soviet state (e.g., the poet, translator and critic Mykhailo Drai-Khmara and the émigré prose writer and journalist Ivan Bahriany). Dziuba's quest for completeness was also in keeping with his participation in the collective authorship of the new *History of Ukrainian Literature in the 20th Century*, a large survey work whose editor, Vitalii Donchyk, declared its objective to be, "apart from achieving completeness and objectivity, [. . .] the representation of Ukrainian literature [. . .] as a whole, not cut up into class and other 'camps.'"¹⁵ The chapters that Dziuba contributed to this *History* included the survey of the period of Ukrainization, when Ukrainian literature, written in the Ukrainian SSR, in Poland and in the emigration, was more than ever characterized by a wealth of often conflicting movements and by heated ideological and theoretical disputes. For Dziuba

¹⁴ Ivan Dziuba, "Dukhovna mira talantu," in Mykola Vinhranovskyyi, *Vybrani tvory* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1986), p. 6.

¹⁵ Vitalii Donchyk, "Vstup," in *Istoriia ukrains'koi literatury XX stolittia* (Kyiv: Lybid', 1993), 1: 3-8, here p. 7.

this variety was evidence, not of fragmentation, but of the fact that Ukrainian literature at the time was conceived of by its makers as part of a shared, if variegated, project: the development of a national culture as part of the development of the good society. It was driven by an “energy of national self-affirmation that historical circumstances did not dissipate.”¹⁶

The vision of the 1920s as a golden age for Ukrainian literature underlies much of Dziuba’s theoretical writing of this period, especially the long essay “Do We Conceive of National Culture as a Complete System?” (1988). The title is a rhetorical question, as was the case in *Internationalism or Russification?* – and the self-evident answer is in the negative: of course we do not (and that is a bad thing). Dziuba commences his analysis with a qualification. It is a truism that every thing can be regarded either as complete in itself, or as part of some other whole, and thus any culture can be regarded, trivially, as a whole – as a sum of the phenomena that comprise it. Dziuba, of course, wants a more demanding definition of cultural wholeness: he believes that such wholeness is present if the various components of a culture can be regarded as interacting and influencing each other. Dziuba identifies six “levels” (*rivni*) at which the completeness of a culture may be discerned. In all six, he judges Ukrainian culture to lack completeness. In fact, Dziuba’s levels do not form a logical hierarchy, but are a framework for reflection on diverse, if related, issues. The first four are connections and mutual influences between the various arts. The fifth level of completeness comes into being when “the whole artistic sphere is affected by certain deep and necessary tendencies,” as was the case in Ukraine in the Baroque period and again in the 1920s. The sixth is achieved when the national culture functions as a system, that is, when it is expressed not only through art and high culture, but also through “the everyday life of words and thoughts, through countless acts of the spirit in the word.”¹⁷ This distinctly Hegelian relationship between a spirit and its presentations in cultural phenomena has failed to come into being in the Ukrainian case due to the destructive consequences of colonialism. Dziuba implies that Ukrainian culture does not possess completeness because completeness has been monopolized in its milieu by Soviet culture – or, to be precise, Russian culture in its Soviet inflection. The incompleteness of a culture is a symptom of the incompleteness of the nation to which it belongs, and incompleteness

¹⁶ Ivan Dziuba, “Khudozhnii protses: 20-30-ti roky,” in *Istoriia ukrains’koi literatury XX stolittia* (Kyiv: Lybid’, 1993), 1: 134.

¹⁷ Ivan Dziuba, “Chy usvidomliuiemo natsional’nu kul’turu iak tsilisnist’?,” *Ukraina: Nauka i kul’tura*, 22 (1988): 313.

is a step toward non-being. Awareness of this, Dziuba believes, imposes a mission upon the Ukrainian intelligentsia:

... those who identify themselves as activists of Ukrainian culture must not neglect defending its national distinctiveness, for what is at stake is the historical fate of the people – because only the national distinctiveness of a culture guarantees the future of a people as a nation.¹⁸

The term used here, *vyznachenist* (“distinctiveness”), signals a concern with difference, separateness and maintaining boundaries. Dziuba is worried about the inadequacy of the links between the parts of the Ukrainian cultural whole, especially when compared to the weight of their links to the culture of the colonial centre; these links to the old metropolis ignore the cultural specificity of Ukraine and contribute to its erasure. A significant part of the essay is dedicated to enumerating elements of this imbalance: the shrinkage of the functional sphere of the Ukrainian language, the growing dominance of Russian over Ukrainian in the print media, the reluctance of artists to draw on native folk sources, the absence of national characteristics in architecture, the scarcity of Ukrainian theatre and cinema, the lack of a Ukrainian-language mass culture or youth subculture, and the rift between villages, where Ukrainian is still spoken, and the Russian-speaking cities. The essay concludes with a list of concrete initiatives that might counteract this decay of national cultural completeness. The agent of these initiatives must be the state: it had introduced Ukrainization in the 1920s, it had been for decades the only active force in society, and it remains, in Dziuba’s view, the sole institution capable of driving cultural change.

Other essays by Dziuba from this period (“The Cultural Heritage and the Cultural Future,” “Independent Ukraine and Problems of Culture,” “Ukraine on the Path of State Formation”)¹⁹ have a similar structure: a description of the cultural (and therefore national) malaise and the identification of colonialism as its cause are followed by a list of proposals. What is to be done? First of all, clarity must be reached about the real assets of Ukrainian culture (as distinct

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁹ Ivan Dziuba, “Kul’turna spadshchyna i kul’turne maibuttia,” *Ukraina: Nauka i kul’tura* 24 (1990): 9–106; Ivan Dziuba, “Nezalezhnist’ Ukrainy i problemy kul’tury,” in *Ukraine in the 1990s: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Ukrainian Studies Association of Australia, Monash University, 24–26 January 1992*, ed. Marko Pavlyshyn and J.E.M. Clarke (Melbourne: Monash Univ., Slavic Section, 1992), pp. 3–26; Ivan Dziuba, “Ukraina na shliakhakh derzhavotvorenna,” *Literaturna Ukraina*, Aug. 27, 1992, pp. 1–2.

from its colonial image, which trivializes even those cultural achievements that have been possible in a thoroughly uncongenial environment). Second, there is a need to recover the cultural heritage, bringing back into the public ken the cultural treasures that have been proscribed, destroyed, or deliberately ignored. Mechanisms for the publication and diffusion of these formerly repressed components of the culture need to be established. There is a need to reassess, not only the elements of culture that have thus been returned, but also those that commanded reverence in the Soviet period. In this process of re-evaluation it is necessary to purge oneself of the stereotypical images of one's culture that have been engendered in the process of colonial dominion: the stereotypes of Ukrainian culture as predominantly rural, bookish, archaic, bereft of an elite stratum, and derivative.²⁰ Later Dziuba would point to the fact that the problem lies not in self-stereotypes alone, but in stereotypes of Ukrainianness in the collective imagination of the former colonial master.²¹

In order to combat old and pernicious ideas, new and better ones are needed. The complex of such ideas Dziuba calls a new conception of Ukrainian culture. This conception is not normative in the narrow sense of the word. It does not comprise a set of prescriptions for the content and forms of an ideal Ukrainian culture. Rather, it is a list of attributes that, from Dziuba's perspective, would be desirable for the Ukrainian culture that is in the process of being formed. This culture should be aware of the whole of its history; it should be open to, and ready for dialogue with, the rest of the world; it should be able to generate objects of aesthetic value "that have meaning for humankind as a whole: this last, in particular, is the sign of the maturity of an ethnos."²² In order for such a conception to have a chance of being translated into reality, an "infrastructure" provided by the state is necessary: legislation should ensure sufficient budgetary support for state initiatives to support Ukrainian culture and should defend the producers of Ukrainian culture against excessively powerful competitors.

Such recommendations, of a piece with the cultural protectionism practised in many parts of the world, might seem reasonable for a recently independent country seeking to shrug off the burden of colonialism. In Ukraine, however, even during the brief period of Dziuba's tenure of the post of minister of culture, they proved impossible to implement – in part due to the weakness, both financial and political, of the nascent Ukrainian state, in part

²⁰ Ivan Dziuba, "Nezalezhnist' Ukrainy i problemy kul'tury," pp. 13-20.

²¹ Ivan Dziuba, "Vzaiemodiia dvokh kul'tur ta stereotypy ii retsepsii," pp. 39-42.

²² Ivan Dziuba, "Nezalezhnist' Ukrainy i problemy kul'tury," p. 21.

because of the lack of a sufficiently broad social consensus, and therefore of political will, in their favor.

Culture in the new Ukrainian state experienced changes in its social role that had not been anticipated by the generation of the Sixtiers. Its members welcomed the demise of the cultural monologue sanctioned by the party-state. But many new developments they found deplorable: the collapse of the close relationship that the cultural sector had enjoyed with the state; the appearance of a rift between “serious” culture and mass culture and the declining authority of the former; the subjection of culture – especially popular culture – to market forces and, accordingly, the burgeoning influence of American and Russian mass culture; and even the fragmentation of the now reduced and marginalized cohort of friends of “high” culture into bickering cliques divided by ideological and stylistic orientation or even by birthplace or age.

In these circumstances, were one to apply Dziuba’s criteria, Ukrainian culture would appear not merely to have failed to establish itself as complete, but to have rejected completeness as a value altogether. And yet, Dziuba did not add his voice to the choir of neoconservative denunciations of the new cultural environment, perhaps because he found interesting and engaging many of the works generated by the “incomplete” (or perhaps merely multifarious) Ukrainian culture of the 1990s. However that might be, it is a fact that under Dziuba’s editorship the journal *Suchasnist*, which moved its place of publication from New York to Kyiv in 1992, remained one of the leading forums for challenging works of the new high culture and for cultural critique based on non-traditional theoretical models.

Dziuba’s writings of the second half of the 1990s and 2000s indicated that he was alert to the shifts in the role of culture that accompanied and followed the demise of the Soviet system. In the ideologically monopolist state, culture, though subordinate to the needs of propaganda, had at least been unquestionably *important*. This state of affairs could not survive a transition to more pluralist arrangements, where not the state, but the tastes of the statistical majority began to determine the supply of cultural goods. In cultured Ukrainian circles there was widespread chagrin at the popularity of Russian-language pulp (*chtyvo*) and low-brow cultural products generally (*popsa*). Such disapproval, however, reflected not so much a negative aesthetic or even political assessment of the phenomena in question, but bewilderment in the face of the decline of the social authority of high culture. This decline was especially unnerving, as it signalled a radical reduction of high culture’s capacity to contribute to the nation-building project. In the meantime it became clear that

under certain circumstances phenomena of popular culture – Ruslana’s victory in the Eurovision Song Contest of 2004, the Europe-wide popularity of the boxers Volodymyr and Vitalii Klychko, or the unexpected successes of Ukraine in the football World Cup of 2006 – could contribute to the evolution of a sense of national solidarity. This solidarity, however, had little in common with a national identity rooted in a shared veneration of the monuments of a national high culture.

Another shift, no less momentous, affected the social role of the intellectual. The classical function of the European intellectual was to be an articulate member of civil society, a contributor to the communications within the Habermasian public sphere that generated consensus as to the social good and the strategies for achieving it. In the imperial polities of Eastern and Central Europe during the nineteenth century, all of them more or less illiberal, intellectuals were more often than not adversarial in their relationship to the state. In the Soviet Union the mainstream intellectual was reduced to a service function, but the traditional role of critiquing the status quo remained the prerogative of the few who defined themselves as dissident. The coming of independence presented Ukrainian intellectuals with a dilemma: should they switch from opposition to the role of supporting the new mainstream (as suggested, after all, by the logic of their former position) in the hope of helping shape a polity congruent with their vision of the good society and state, or should they remain in opposition, reacting critically to the ever more troubling behaviours of the new country’s political leadership? For Dziuba the dilemma was especially acute. His critical and polemical brilliance notwithstanding, his primary impulse was constructive: to contribute to the building of the good society. Clearing away the intellectual debris of the old structure was important, but more important still was the task of producing blueprints for the new one. Dziuba found that he could preserve both of these components of the intellectual’s brief by focussing on a new key concept: that of identity. If in the early days of independence the object to be constructed had presented itself to him as culture in its condition of completeness, this now seemed a premature ambition, and a preliminary operation, the production of a national identity in the community at large, would command Dziuba’s expository and polemical skills.

Though culture played a central role in Dziuba’s writings from the 1960s onward, he never attended explicitly to its definition. It is clear, however, that the term “culture” for Dziuba subsumes two related, but distinct, concepts. At times, “culture” means the sum of human behaviours learnt in the process of socialization. More often, however, “culture” is high culture – those parts of

literature and the other arts that require for their production and reception a certain level of education, and that are deemed to have meaning and purpose beyond the function of entertainment, which is the domain of popular culture. It is to high culture that Dziuba ascribes a determining role in the creation of the nation. The terms “culture” and “nation” acquire in Dziuba’s writings after 2000 a mystical patina reminiscent of writings of the Romantic period:

Culture becomes a means for expressing national identity and for making manifest the meaning of a people’s existence. Moreover, culture is the self-reproduction of the nation in time and space. [. . .] The culture of a particular nation is the creative process through which, using nature and history as materials, it recognizes and asserts itself; it is, in the most general terms, the embodiment of its historical destiny.²³

The genealogy of such reflections includes Herder with his ideas of the unrepeatable genius and equal dignity of nations and Hegel, for whom nations, alongside other expressions of the human, are expressions of Spirit on its path toward consciousness of itself. For Dziuba, however, the Romantic notion of culture as the collective property of a nation is augmented by the idea that this shared culture imbues the thought and feeling of each individual member of that nation. Culture is, to be sure, a product of the people, but at the same time, “at the deepest, most fundamental level, it is the motive force of individual behaviour.”²⁴ Culture is “not merely the collective product of spiritual activity, but a deeply individual, profoundly intimate phenomenon. The creation of culture is the most organic form of the self-realization of the personality, and the ability of human beings to move freely within the sphere of culture is the most reliable guarantee of their spiritual sovereignty.”²⁵

It is from such formulations that Dziuba’s understanding of identity can be abstracted. Human identity is so wholly integrated with culture, and culture so firmly connected to nation, that every discussion of identity for Dziuba becomes a discussion of *national* identity. Dziuba concedes in his article “Ukraine in Quest of a New Identity” (2002) that identity is “multifaceted, mutable and dynamic,”²⁶ and yet the aspects of identity that he names

²³ Ivan Dziuba, “Iakym bude mistse ukrains’koi kul’tury v Ukraini?,” in Ivan Dziuba, *Spraha* (Kyiv: Ukains’kyi svit, 2001), pp. 135-240, here pp. 224-25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

²⁶ Ivan Dziuba, “Ukraina v poshukakh novoi identychnosti,” in Ivan Dziuba, *Ukraina: Kam’ ianystyi shliakh do demokratsii* (Kyiv: Zapovit, 2002), pp. 5-35, here p. 5.

here – the historical, political, territorial, linguistic and cultural – are components not of human identity in general, but of national identity. Such a point of view is, of course, idiosyncratic: national identity, important though it is in the opening decade of the twenty-first century, is but one of the possible layers of human identity. Furthermore, as a broad literature has demonstrated, national identities arose in particular historical circumstances in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; national identity is not given to human beings *a priori*. But it is national identity that Dziuba presents to his imaginary interlocutor as identity *per se*.

Given this starting point, it is scarcely surprising that what Dziuba perceives as the absence or inadequate development of national identity he judges to be a defect. Dziuba repeatedly offers historical explanations for such “incompleteness” of identity among many of his compatriots, returning to the narrative of tsarist and Soviet measures against Ukrainian culture and, especially, against its key symbol, the Ukrainian language. These narratives are generally offered in partial exculpation of the carriers of such imperfect – from Dziuba’s standpoint – identities. At the same time – and this, too, is as characteristic of Dziuba’s texts of the 2000s as it was of his writings in the late 1980s and early 1990s – Dziuba repeatedly plies his chief implied addressee, the Ukrainian state, with lists of what needs to be undertaken to promote Ukrainian national identity among citizens of Ukraine: initiatives in education and media policy, and moderate protectionism with respect to Ukrainian-language publishing and other parts of the Ukrainian culture industry. As in the past, Dziuba continues to see the state, for all its weakness, as the sole plausible instrument for strengthening national identity. The state’s primary function, from the Dziubian perspective, is to further the dignity of the nation and bring to realization its potential; this can occur only through culture, which, in turn, exists through the works and acts of people endowed with an adequate sense of national identity. The belief that this may actually happen is grounded in Dziuba’s fundamental social optimism: “the social mechanism has great reserves of self-healing,” he wrote in 2001.²⁷

But, in addition to forms of national identity able to propel the transformation of culture, nation and state, there also exist forms of identity inadequate to this task. In Dziuba’s texts, and in reference to the Ukrainian situation, we encounter evaluative labels for them: *malorosiistvo* (“Little Russianness,” the

²⁷ Ivan Dziuba, *Ukraina pered Sfinksom maibutn'oho* (Kyiv: Vydavnychy dim “KM Akademiia,” 2001), p. 29.

sense of provincial inferiority relative to an imagined Russian metropolitan culture), *zrusyfikovanist* (the condition of having appropriated a Russian identity), *zdeukrainizovanist* (the condition of having lost an originally Ukrainian identity), *nedosformovanist* (the condition of not having a fully formed identity). Also regrettable is the fact that “there exists a large mass of humanity that is permanently inert with respect to culture in any form.” Such people in the Ukrainian context, according to Dziuba, often use a hybridized Russian-Ukrainian form of speech, the “so-called *surzhyk*.”²⁸ A situation where a significant proportion of the population of Ukraine regards itself as having a relationship to Russian culture is problematic for Dziuba; Russian identity should be based in what Dziuba would concede to be an adequate and appropriate grasp of Russian culture. “Only a few individuals in Ukraine,” he asserts,

... have an adequate apprehension of Russian culture and ‘have the right’ (an essential right, as distinct from a psychologically grounded subjective one) to identify themselves with it. ... The remainder of those who orientate themselves toward Russian culture do so in a state of sweet self-delusion, satisfying themselves with random contacts and accidental impressions.²⁹

Such passages illustrate Ivan Dziuba’s normative pathos. The acceptance of things as they are would mean, for him, accepting as natural and legitimate the consequences of historical injustice and violence. Over two centuries, an imperial culture was artificially, strategically and maliciously imposed in pursuit of particular state interests. The cultural consequences of such colonial oppression are in no way “natural,” though they may well be widespread and widely apprehended as natural. For this reason it is the duty of the Ukrainian state, and of people of good will, to create for the autochthonous culture conditions at least equal to those that continue to exist for the culture of the former colonizer.

And yet, there are passages in Dziuba’s writings where the struggle between the ideal norm and the imperfect reality on the front of national culture is temporarily suspended. One such place is Dziuba’s memoir “A Life Viewed Not In Isolation” (2006), where the description of images of childhood and youth spent in the Donbas brings to light, in a non-judgmental way, different combinations of the (national) identities discussed above: only Ukrainian,

²⁸⁾ Ivan Dziuba, *Spraha*, p. 143.

²⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

only Russian, and various permutations and intensities of the two.³⁰ Dziuba incorporates into his memoir texts authored by him at this time – some in Russian, others in Ukrainian. Perhaps this unusual neutrality is a concession to the experience of the Orange Revolution of 2004, which vividly illustrated the ability of people of different cultures to conceive of themselves as members of a single political nation.

This, however, is one of the exceptions that throw the rule into even sharper relief. In general, the guiding thesis of Dziuba's work is the fusion of the destinies of individual and nation, and its guiding imperative – the full development of both through the full development of national culture. Nowhere is this union more profoundly embodied for Dziuba than in the life and works of the most venerated figure of Ukrainian culture, Taras Shevchenko. Placing Shevchenko into historical context and disclosing the relevance of his opus for present times was a task to which Dziuba repeatedly returned. In 1989, when it was still politically risky to do so, Dziuba discussed the relationship between Shevchenko and nineteenth-century Russian nationalism³¹; in 1995, in the aftermath of the Russian-Chechen war, he offered a brilliant political reading of Shevchenko's satirical masterpiece, "The Caucasus."³² Finally, in 2005, there appeared Dziuba's 700-page treatise *Taras Shevchenko*, dedicated to the task of revising the tradition of Soviet Shevchenko scholarship and placing at the centre of attention a dimension of the poet's work and influence which that tradition had denied or ignored: Shevchenko's impact on the evolution of Ukrainian national identity. In his book on Shevchenko Dziuba brought into play the two devices that had always served him well: the broad presentation of context, based on profound erudition and research; and detailed attention to the words of texts. At the same time, Dziuba avoided giving rise to the impression that his treatise belongs to the narrow field of literary scholarship. The implied reader is the ordinary person, armed with common sense and a curiosity about things of contemporary importance. Likewise, the implied author does not for a moment conceal his political engagement behind a mask of scholarly objectivity. He writes about Shevchenko because, from his

³⁰ Ivan Dziuba, "Ne okremo vziate zhyttia. Dokumental'na povist'," *Kyiv* 1 (2006): 15-137 and 2 (2006): 33-113.

³¹ Ivan Dziuba, *U vsiakoho svoia dolia (Epizod iz stosunkiv Shevchenka zi slovianofilamy)* (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1989).

³² Ivan Dziuba, "'Zastukaly serdeshnu voliu . . .'" (Shevchenkiiv 'Kavkaz' na tli nepromynal'noho mynuloho)," *Suchasnist'* 3 (1995): 80-94 and 4 (1995): 96-112.

perspective, the narrative of the maker of a unifying Ukrainian national identity is a narrative of the twenty-first century no less than of the nineteenth.

Besides symbolising the union of the individual and the national, Shevchenko embodies for Dziuba the identity of the national and the universal, which becomes evident when the fruits of a fully developed national culture need no mediation to take their place as elements of world culture: “Shevchenko belongs not to Ukraine alone, but to humanity at large, though every word of his is about Ukraine.”³³ No sentence could more simply or compactly express Ivan Dziuba’s fundamental beliefs and explain his historical, aesthetic and moral judgments: the entity that commands highest respect and calls for constant development is triune, and its three facets are the person, the nation, and humanity.

³³) Ivan Dziuba, *Taras Shevchenko* (Kyiv: Al'ternatyvy, 2005), p. 698.

Religion and Refugee Resettlement: Evolving Connections to Ukraine since World War II

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Abstract

Several waves of Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the United States since 1945, each following a remarkably different resettlement and assimilation path. This article offers a comparative analysis of the role of religious affiliation and transnational religious organizations and networks in shaping processes of resettlement, ethnic group formation and the creation of attachments to Ukraine to explain the lower than expected levels of engagement of the last two waves with the Ukrainian diaspora and with Ukraine. Evolving global forces and the social structures within them render diasporic identities, which are closely associated with a territorially anchored sense of national culture, less appealing than the highly fluid transnational networks of religious groups. The role of religious-based resettlement organizations and their networks in the United States is likely to exert an ever greater effect on refugee resettlement and migration more generally.

Keywords

refugee, religion, immigration, resettlement, Ukraine

Several waves of Ukrainian refugees immigrated to the United States after World War II. Each had distinctive religious affiliations: post-World War II Ukrainian refugees tended to be Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic; beginning especially in the late 1970s, numerous Soviet Jewish refugees arrived; and, in the final years of Soviet rule, refugees from various evangelical faiths settled in the US.¹ In spite of cross-cutting cultural, linguistic, and ethnic

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the SSRC Migration Fellows Conference, and I thank all the participants who offered comments, especially Caroline Bretelle. I also thank Bruce Grant, Wsevolod Isajiw, Valentina Pavlenko, Nancy Ries, and Svitlana Slipchenko for their thoughtful suggestions on an earlier version. The best studies that address religion and refugee outmigration from Soviet Ukraine include: Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Russian Refugee: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), Fran Markowitz, *A Community in Spite of Itself: Soviet Jewish Emigrés in New York*

commonalities, these three waves of refugees have followed very different assimilation trajectories once in the US. They have had minimal contact with each other although they have settled in concentrated urban locations, initially New York and Philadelphia, and more recently in the Pacific Northwest.

In this article I comparatively examine why refugees in the last two waves have not joined the ethnic communities and ethnically-based organizations that post-World War II refugees formed to the degree that many had expected. In a broader sense, I consider what the experiences of these three waves of refugees can tell us about the types of links and attachments émigrés have formed – or have not formed – to Ukraine after the collapse of communism and offer an explanatory analysis as to why. I consider how the transnational organizations and networks of each refugee group have shaped the pathways to incorporation in American society and laid the groundwork for identity formation, feelings of attachment and allegiance to Ukraine, their country of origin, after the collapse of communism. I argue that because of evolving global forces and the social structures located within them, diasporic identities that are closely associated with a nation-state and a territorialized sense of culture are likely to exert shrinking appeal compared to the transnational organizations and networks that ethno-religious and non-ethnically-based religious groups can offer, not just to refugees but to migrants more generally.

Ukraine is a particularly compelling site from which to comparatively examine the role of religion in refugee migration. In many ways, Soviet Ukraine was a microcosm of the multi-confessional, multi-national USSR. With a history of pronounced nationalist sentiment and exceptionally high levels of religious participation, many living in Soviet Ukraine incurred the wrath of Soviet authorities, which contributed to the high number of refugees from Soviet Ukraine compared to other former republics of the USSR. The US government does not track refugees according to religious affiliation or categorize the nature of political repression that led to the granting of refugee status. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the exact number awarded refugee status because of their religion. Yet, there is an undeniable

(Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), Vic Satzewich, *The Ukrainian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2002); Myron B. Kuropas, *The Ukrainian-Americans* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1991), and Lubomyr Luciuk, *Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000). All of these studies focus almost exclusively on the settlement side of the migration issue.

pattern of ethno-religious and religious affiliation among the last waves of refugees from the USSR. It is essential to note that I focus on the histories, migration, and settlement patterns of Ukrainian refugees, not on Ukrainian immigrants more broadly. The trauma of displacement that is usually associated with the awarding of refugee status generally yields a greater attachment to and ongoing engagement with the homeland after resettlement. Therefore, it becomes all the more pressing to explain the lower than expected level of engagement among the last two waves of refugees from Soviet Ukraine with the Ukrainian diaspora, as well as their evolving connections to Ukraine.

Both the existence and collapse of the Soviet Union have made the concept of homeland elusive to articulate for refugees, and this is the first of several factors I will analyze. Many are from a state that did not exist when they emigrated (Ukraine) or will never exist again (Soviet Union). Convulsive changes after the collapse of communism meant that the “homeland” of these refugees has evolved into something they never knew. Although migration disrupts notions of identity and belonging, religious belief is often a continuum. For all three waves religious-based organizations and networks have shaped the resettlement process, ethnic group formation once in the US, and attachments to Ukraine after emigration. If anything, belief for many deepened in the process of relocation, as is common among migrants to the US, prompting some scholars to call migration a “theologizing experience.”² David Laitin reminds us of Alexis de Tocqueville’s early observation of American political culture, namely, that “there is a deep-seated belief that linguistic diversity is harmful but a strong belief that religious diversity is healthy.”³

Diasporic attachments are a critical element determining the vitality of refugee groups and the extent of their simultaneous activity with co-ethnics in their adopted country and in their homeland. The involvement of global voluntary organizations, and particularly religious organizations, I will argue, in shaping attitudes and involvement in one’s homeland after migration is a

² R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1998). See also Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002) and Kenneth J. Guest, *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York’s Evolving Immigrant Community* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2003).

³ David Laitin, “The De-cosmopolitanization of the Russian Diaspora: A View from Brooklyn in the ‘Far Abroad,’” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 5–35, here 8. In this article, because so many of the “Russian” Jews under consideration are from Ukraine and neither *russkie* (Russian by nationality) nor *rossiane* (citizens of Russia), he refers to this population as “Russian-speaking Jews.”

deepening trend throughout the twentieth century, albeit one that has received insufficient attention from scholars. These organizations, although not always overtly political, have the power to expand the possibilities to migrate by interfacing with state bureaucracies to facilitate, expedite, and even encourage migration.⁴ In doing so, they have played a critical role in setting the stage for the “mode of incorporation” that has shaped resettlement patterns for these waves of refugees.

A great deal of immigration research has focused on the experience of acculturation, of being an ethnic “other” as it preceded – for white migrants – assimilation to mainstream culture. This focus placed enormous emphasis on the racialization of difference and forfeited consideration of ongoing ties to a migrant’s place of birth. Globalizing forces of communication and transportation have created new ways of crafting multiple levels of identity that are manifest in community allegiance. Several scholars have explored how “long-distance nationalism,” in evidence among postwar refugees from Ukraine, has tied immigrants to vibrant networks and political, charitable, and cultural projects in their homeland.⁵

Little research has been done, however, on how religious affiliation and the modes of incorporation it offers can begin to structure identity after resettlement and forge allegiances to a homeland as well as to transnational communities and networks. Nina Glick Schiller, Ayse Çaglar, and Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen have argued that changing global forces and social structures have yielded new pathways to integration and new objects of migrants’ allegiance. As a result, they conclude, “Comparative studies are needed to more fully theorize the frequency and distribution of different pathways of migrant incorporation, including various types of nonethnic pathways.”⁶ By examining the resettlement of Jewish and evangelical émigrés from Soviet Ukraine to the US, including their relationship to the Ukrainian Diaspora, we see that for certain groups the locus of allegiance toward the end of the twentieth century

⁴ Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori, eds., *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

⁵ The best studies of “long-distance nationalism” are Linda G. Basch and Nina Glick Schiller, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Post-Colonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Westport, CT: Gordon & Breach, 1993); and Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001).

⁶ Nina Glick Schiller, Ayse Çaglar, and Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen, “Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality and Born Again Incorporation,” *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 4 (2006): 612–33, here 626.

is shifting. Perhaps the nation-state as an informant of identity and feelings of belonging after migration is waning precisely because the connection between a particular culture and a territorial anchoring has also been seriously weakened thanks to increased migration and communication. Participation and membership in transnational organizations and global networks (religious and nonreligious) constitute another focal point for the allegiance of émigrés. The recognition of this dynamic goes a long way in explaining why the last two waves of refugees from Soviet Ukraine have not followed the wave of refugees before them, as well as prior immigrants, and joined the Ukrainian Diaspora and diaspora communal, charitable, educational, and political organizations to the degree one could have expected.

The political underpinnings of refugee emigration: The role of Cold War politics

Although the collapse of communism and the comparative religious freedoms that are found in Ukraine today have all but eliminated the possibility to apply for refugee status, this was emphatically not the case as recently as two decades ago. The decision to emigrate may be an individual one, but the *option* to emigrate depends on social and political circumstances that are created or foreclosed by individual states. After World War II, US policies toward Soviet refugees were clearly a function of foreign policy interests that played out against the backdrop of Cold War ideological competitions between political and economic systems. The strong geopolitical implications of Soviet refugee resettlement take it out of the traditional rubric that considers refugees and migration in tandem with issues of development or conflict.

The adversarial relationship certain groups had to Soviet authorities ensured that the US government would view them favorably. Given the vibrancy of religious life in the US compared to other Western democracies, it is perhaps not surprising that groups from the Soviet Union who sought to emigrate in the name of religious freedom were preferentially selected for refugee status. Refugees from the former USSR provide a particularly dramatic example of the extent to which a receiving society can shape the geography of migration by selectively accelerating the inflow of refugees from certain areas of the world or grinding it to a halt. It also illustrates the compromised agency of individuals in determining equal treatment from state bureaucracies.

The experience of refugees from Ukraine mandates that we consider displacement on three distinct levels: foreign policy priorities that make

migration politically feasible; individual agency that capitalizes on this; and social institutions that affect the adaptation and incorporation processes. There is a mutually constitutive relationship among individual agency, the groups recognized as refugees, and their social institutions. Religious institutions have played a particularly prominent role among refugees from Soviet Ukraine by balancing the contradictory tensions between the inclination to assimilate and the desire to maintain cultural differences to keep a distinct identity attractive and allegiances to an ethnic community strong.

Cold War tensions partially explain the preferential treatment Soviet citizens received, along with the fact that they are Caucasian, of Judeo-Christian background, and educated or skilled. For Americans, defections from the socialist Soviet Union to the capitalist United States were an affirmation of the righteousness of the West's economic and political systems in spite of its social ills and shortcomings. For Soviet citizens, emigration had other equally significant politicized meanings. It was an emphatic rejection of the Soviet system, one of the few possible forms of overt political protest.

The focus on refugees from Ukraine also sheds light on the ramifications of statelessness for community formation. The Soviet state's practice of assigning each citizen a "nationality," such as Ukrainian or Jewish, *and* a supranational citizenship-based identity (Soviet) facilitated state-sponsored discrimination and ultimately expanded the possibilities to appeal for refugee status. It also complicated the dual processes of establishing a rapport to a homeland and maintaining an ethnic identity after relocation. The legacy of Ukrainian statelessness, combined with Ukraine's position as a "borderland," a buffer zone wedged between larger empires, meant that immigration officials over time often misidentified Ukrainians as Russians, Austrians, or Poles.⁷ Ukrainians tended to self-identify in religious or regional terms to compensate for the disjuncture between their civic and national identities. Ukrainians were usually – and to this day still sometimes are – labeled "Russians," reflecting the widespread misconception that the multinational Soviet Union was a Russian state. Much like the blanket designations "Hispanic" or "Asian," "Russian" has become a projection of general regional origin and linguistic ability often mistakenly projected onto all three refugee groups, which creates the illusion of perceived cultural commonality among Soviet refugees where little often existed.

⁷ Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (1978):1155-85.

Trauma and diaspora formation: Post-World War II refugees

The classical concept of Diaspora has been linked with Jewish and, later, Greek and Armenian traditions, and is used to evoke a group that has been subject to catastrophe, which resulted in forcible dispersion. In spite of this catastrophe, or perhaps because of it, the group maintains strong ties among ethnic kin and to the homeland which is manifest, in William Safran's words, in a "political obligation, or the moral burden, of reconstituting a lost homeland or maintaining an endangered culture."⁸ Not surprisingly, postwar Ukrainian refugees who were forcibly expelled and fled Ukraine during the horrors of war felt, and continue to feel, this moral burden more acutely than other migrants, and more so than the latter two waves I am considering here, who relocated in part thanks to economic and professional incentives to emigrate. The post-World War II wave of refugees and subsequent generations constitute the core of the Ukrainian Diaspora.

To understand how the postwar wave of refugees crystallized into a diaspora that continues to maintain ties to Ukraine one must consider how and why they became refugees in the first place and which pathways for incorporation to the new society were available to them. This wave is distinct from the following two in several key respects. When Ukrainian Displaced Persons (DPs) began to arrive in the US after World War II, they encountered numerous immigrants who had already relocated from ethnically Ukrainian lands in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russian Empire, and later from Poland and other Eastern European countries. Prior to the closing of the Soviet borders in 1926, Ukrainian immigrants were primarily economically motivated, seeking to escape poverty and discrimination. The economic "push" factors that motivated earlier and subsequent migrants to immigrate did not compare, however, with the trauma of war and the imperative to flee during and after World War II.⁹ The extent of displacement and devastation as a result of the war in Soviet Ukraine was utterly massive. Over 5.3 million people died, or one in six Ukrainians, and an additional 2.3 million Ukrainians were sent to Germany to perform forced labor. Over 700 cities, 28,000 villages, 16,000 industrial

⁸ William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83-99, here 85.

⁹ On this point especially, see Wsevolod W. Isajiw, Roman Senkus, and Yuri Boshyk, eds., *The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons after World War II* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992).

enterprises, and 28,000 collective farms were partially or totally destroyed, leaving over 10 million people homeless.¹⁰

In February 1945, the Allied powers signed a repatriation agreement guaranteeing the return of all displaced Allied nationals on a reciprocal basis, using force if necessary. The agreement defined Soviet nationals in terms of the Soviet border as of September 1, 1939, which qualified Ukrainians from Polish Galicia and Volhynia for resettlement as Displaced Persons, as these territories had been annexed to the Soviet Union. Ukrainians from further east, who were confronted with a policy that categorized them as “Soviet” and mandated forced repatriation to their “homeland,” the USSR, fought to gain recognition as refugees. They argued that they were a persecuted Ukrainian minority, subject to cultural Russification via the annihilation of their language, ideological Sovietization, and official state policies of atheism that were particularly punishing to their religions because of their alleged nationalist agendas and subversive political activity.

Both the 1951 United Nations definition of a refugee and the current one refer to “a person who has fled his or her country of origin” because of past persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.¹¹ The DP wave, which constitutes the core of the Ukrainian Diaspora, was granted refugee status because they actually fled their homeland. Of the 1.3 million Ukrainians who arrived in the US throughout the twentieth century, only a small percentage arrived as refugees. Most of the other Ukrainian immigrants to the US were subject to the limitations that the National Origins Quota System, a policy that regulated immigration from 1924–1965, imposed on admittance. Refugee status guarantees significant material benefits from the receiving state, which are usually denied to immigrants.

Of the 352,000 people admitted to the US under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, 15 percent were Ukrainian and most of these were Ukrainian speakers from Western Ukraine.¹² The Refugee Relief Act, passed in 1953, allowed an additional 210,000 refugees in Western Europe to relocate to the US and flatly stipulated that priority should be given to “refugees from communism.”

¹⁰ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 480.

¹¹ Jeremy Hein, “Refugees, Immigrants, and the State,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 43–59, here 44.

¹² Myron Kuropas, *The Ukrainian-Americans: Roots and Aspirations, 1884–1954* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 404.

By 1955 only about 250,000 of the 2.3 million Ukrainians displaced because of World War II were allowed to relocate abroad.¹³

The trauma of forced displacement sets this wave of refugees apart from others by fundamentally forging group solidarity, informing their engagement with their homeland, and creating reluctance among many to shed an “ethnic” identity in America. Members of the Ukrainian Diaspora had a common experience: internment in postwar refugee camps in Germany and Austria. During this hiatus period, which lasted for up to five years, the DPs recreated many religious, cultural, and athletic organizations and arrived in the US with networks anchored in them. The two Ukrainian national churches, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church¹⁴ and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church,¹⁵ were institutional bases for material assistance, ethnic identity retention, and ongoing political activity to protest Soviet rule in Ukraine. Although these religious communities validated the concept of nation-state and served as institutional bases for collective political action of a nationalist nature, like all others, they served as a means to divide Ukrainians by denomination, class, and political orientation. However, in recognition of the postwar rivalries between the two confessions, some postwar diaspora organizations were not church-based and took the form of professional, educational, artistic, or regional groups.

During the Soviet period, contact between the Ukrainian Diaspora and Ukrainians in Ukraine was highly limited. The impermeable borders of the Soviet Union crystallized a diasporic identity predicated on a frustrated desire to return home. The closed nature of Soviet society meant that efforts to affect change in Ukraine had to operate via influence on US politics. “Long-distance nationalism” became nationalist-inspired political activism in the US while Ukraine was under Soviet rule. Glick Schiller and Fouron define long-distance nationalism as a “claim to membership in a political community who stretches beyond the territorial borders of a homeland. It generates an emotional

¹³) Satzewich, *The Ukrainian Diaspora*, p. 86.

¹⁴) This denomination formed when part of Ukraine was under Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth rule. It incorporates Orthodox rituals and congregational structure under papal jurisdiction. Ukrainian Catholic priests marry and therefore expand religious diversity in North America by strengthening an eparchy of Catholicism.

¹⁵) Following the nation-state institutional structure of Orthodox denominations, in 1917 the nascent Ukrainian state prompted the creation of a nationalized Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This church was heavily persecuted by Soviet authorities and eventually outlawed and driven underground in the 1930s. It thrived, however, in North America where it built a significant following among Diaspora Ukrainians.

attachment that is strong enough to compel people to political action that ranges from displaying a home country flag to deciding to “return” to fight and die in a land they may never have seen.”¹⁶

Two projects of long-distance nationalism among many stand out for their current political significance in Ukraine today. The Ukrainian Diaspora spurred the US government to undertake an extensive oral history of the 1932-1933 Famine in the Soviet Union that killed over 7 million Ukrainians. This effort laid the groundwork for ongoing Diaspora initiatives, supported by the current President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko, to have the Famine recognized as “genocide,” thereby beginning to redefine the relationship of Ukraine to the Soviet Union and Ukrainians to Russians. In a related effort, the Diaspora also launched a fierce campaign to recall the Pulitzer Prize from Walter Duranty, a *New York Times* reporter, who covered the Soviet Union in the 1930s and neglected to report on the Famine.

Other especially visible projects in which members of the Ukrainian Diaspora are engaged include the Children of Chernobyl, a program to offer medical assistance to children affected by the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in 1985, as well as several educational initiatives, such as the founding and expansion of the Ukrainian Catholic University, which is led by American-born Rev.-Dr. Borys Gudziak. In addition, several members of the Diaspora are directly involved in politics in Ukraine, including the first lady of Ukraine, Kateryna Yushchenko, who is from Chicago, and several who have been elected as representatives to the Verkhovna Rada.

Over the decades, Diaspora Ukrainians also strove to preserve and protect “real” Ukrainian culture, especially as it concerned religion, language, and history, from the ravages of Soviet ideological projects that threatened to transform it into something unrecognizable. The forced separation of Diaspora Ukrainians from Ukrainians in Ukraine over decades complicated the reunion process after the fall of the USSR. Scholars who have studied the encounters between Ukrainians and Diaspora Ukrainians after the fall of communism have argued that “diasporic tourism” and the “rituals of homecoming” ultimately reinforced a diasporic consciousness among these émigrés most of all.¹⁷

¹⁶ Glick Schiller and Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Satzewich, *The Ukrainian Diaspora*, pp. 201-22; Natalia Shostak, “Making Ukrainian House Calls: On Diasporic Tourism and Rituals of Homecoming,” in *Ports of Call: Central European and North American Cultures in Motion*, eds. Susan Ingram, Markus Reisenleitner, and Cornelia Szabo-Knotik (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 121-51; and Natalia Shostak, “Zustreech or the Encounters of a Transnational Kind: Negotiating Ukrainianness in Western Canada,” *Ethnologies* 25, no. 2 (2003): 77-106.

Perhaps this should not surprise us. The experiences of this wave of refugees are as distinct as they are traumatic. Shared experiences yield solidarity, but it is largely a generationally-bound sense of solidarity. The inability to fully imagine these experiences separates this wave, not only from the next two I will examine, but also even from Ukrainians in Ukraine today. The traumatic events of World War II created a temporally and generationally bound Diaspora consciousness based on a “blood and tear-soaked heritage.” The pain of exile, combined with feelings of victimization, created common repositories of meaning and common goals among World War II refugees that not only tied them to political projects to liberate Ukraine but to each other around the world as well. These same experiences and goals separated them from their children and grandchildren. The dream of realizing a nation-state homeland was not always as meaningful to successive generations given the social mobility most World War II Ukrainian refugees experienced. As white immigrants, they easily assimilated to the broader culture.

Although language fluency has waned among successive generations, for those of the second and third generations who retain a diasporic consciousness, religion continues to play a pivotal role in cultivating Diaspora loyalties. The nationalized denominations are inextricably linked with a Ukrainian identity and are firmly established in the countries these refugees and their successive generations have adopted. Ultimately, religion has played a key role in the reterritorialization, or the rerooting, of cultural identities and practices on new soil more so than it has in forging ties to Ukraine. Among second- and third-generation postwar refugees, the combination of religious affiliation and migration has yielded commitments to a nationalized vision of the homeland, often manifest in projects of long-distance nationalism. It has also kept alive memories of a scarring historical event that resulted in diasporic exile as well as changes to the religious landscape in the US.

Discrimination and “privileged identities”: Soviet Jewish refugees

Along with the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel, many Jews count the outmigration of 1.3 million Soviet Jews among the three watershed events for world Jewry in the twentieth century. Approximately 57 percent of the total number of Jews who left the USSR were from Soviet Ukraine.

From 1948 to 1970 Soviet authorities restricted emigration to family reunification, and an average of only 2,700 refugees left annually.¹⁸ Jews who were denied permission to emigrate became known as *refuseniks*. A compendium of pressures, including mounting international protest especially coming from the US over the growing number of *refuseniks*, prompted a change of policy. From 1970 to 1997, the key years of Soviet Jewish outmigration, over 422,000 Jews were allowed to leave Ukraine and another 308,500 left Russia.¹⁹

Until 1973 Zionism, religious activism and a desire to live in a Jewish state motivated Jews to leave, but the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and growing awareness of the difficulties of life in Israel among Soviet Jews dampened their enthusiasm. In response, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) began to offer the controversial option of settling in the US in 1976. The following year half of the Soviet Jews granted an exit visa chose to relocate to the US. Outmigration peaked in 1979 as 51,000 Jews emigrated, 28.7 percent of whom were from Soviet Ukraine.²⁰ By 1981, there were nearly 100,000 Soviet Jews living in New York City alone, and momentum to emigrate among Jews continued to mount.

Soviet authorities responded to the mass outmigration of Jews in the 1980s by cutting by 40 percent the number of Jews admitted to higher education, which, of course, only fueled the desire to emigrate.²¹ As the noted *refusenik* Alexander Voronel said, “Having exchanged their traditions for this one value – education – when they are deprived of it, they are deprived of everything. When intellectuals who have built their lives on professional achievement perceive barriers to their advancement, they find themselves in a crisis that is tantamount to loss of the meaning of life.”²² Fran Markowitz has argued that Jews were primarily motivated to leave the USSR, not because of anti-Semitism, which of course existed, but because, even when they shed their Jewishness and felt Russian, they could never fully assimilate because of state-assigned “national” identities that labeled them as Jews, making them forever

¹⁸ Annelise Orleck, *The Soviet Jewish Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 53 and Yaacov Ro'i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration, 1948-67* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p. 327.

¹⁹ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), p. 262.

²⁰ “Data of the Ministry of the Interior on Jewish Emigration,” in Boris Morozov, ed., *Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 234-36.

²¹ Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, p. 185.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

vulnerable to discrimination.²³ At any moment, their ability to advance educationally and professionally could have been compromised. In short, the initial émigrés were politically and sometimes even religiously motivated to live in Israel, whereas later refugees were progressively drawn to greater educational and professional opportunities abroad.

By 1989, 97 percent of Soviet Jews had asked for asylum in the US. Faced with a potential flood of refugees as the economic situation deteriorated in the Soviet Union, the United States reversed its policy of granting automatic refugee status to all Jews. After 1989 the primary means to relocate to the US with permanent residency status became “direct emigration” based on family reunification. Jews who chose the US over Israel tended to be secular and had little commitment to Israel, which frequently strained relations with the activist American Jewish communities that provided vocational counseling, English language training, and other resettlement services.²⁴ These services were available because these refugees were Jewish. Their country of origin was irrelevant in determining their eligibility. There are now approximately 400,000 Soviet Jews living in the US, and they constitute 6 percent of the American Jewish population.²⁵

Overall, Jews from Soviet Ukraine have had little contact with the Ukrainian Diaspora and even comparatively little contact with each other, prompting Fran Markowitz to call them “a community in spite of itself.”²⁶ They avoided institutional structures that could have united them, including Russian-language synagogues, because of their experiences with Soviet bureaucracy and its demands for “mandatory, voluntary” participation. Wary of hierarchical organizations, they preferred to rely on informal networks of friends and family to complement the considerable aid they received from NYANA and other agencies funded by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. Given the

²³ Fran Markowitz, “Criss-Crossing Identities: The Russian Jewish Diaspora and the Jewish Diaspora in Russia,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 4, no. 2 (1995): 201-11, here 203. See also Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004).

²⁴ Tanya Basok and Robert J. Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Resettlement in the 1990s* (Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1991), and Rita J. Simon, ed., *New Lives: The Adjustment of Soviet Jewish Immigrants in the United States and Israel* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985).

²⁵ For a comparative study of how Soviet Jews have fared in the US, Canada, Israel, and Germany, see Larissa Remennick, *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration and Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006).

²⁶ Fran Markowitz, *A Community in Spite of Itself: Soviet Jewish Émigrés in New York* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

skills of working-age refugees, tight family networks, and the various forms of assistance they received, these refugees were generally able to find satisfying jobs and become self-supporting in a relatively short period of time.²⁷ In a global marketplace, the valued skills Soviet Jews possessed allowed them to join the transnational professional workforce, staffing academic institutions, laboratories, and engineering facilities around the world. While there were certainly “push” factors prompting Jews to migrate, these existed alongside powerful incentives to emigrate created by religious-based charitable and social service organizations that actively eased resettlement. Zvi Gitelman has argued that, among the welter of paradoxes that characterize post-Soviet Jewry, precisely at a time when Jews enjoy more political, economic, and cultural freedom than at any other time in history, they are leaving in droves.²⁸

Even though they were allowed to emigrate because they were Jewish and the majority came from Ukraine, they, too, have also been labeled “Russian” once in the US, as they have been in Israel, Germany, and elsewhere that Soviet Jews have settled. Soviet Jews have a particular understanding of Judaism, largely devoid of religious content but shaped by the historical particularities of East European Judaism; of Russianness, clearly their cultural identity; and of being Soviet, now a unique experience that successive generations of immigrants will not know. They are not only Soviet Jews, not only Jews from Ukraine, not only Russian Jews, and not only Russian-speaking Jews, but some mixture of all these influences. Coming largely from major urban centers, these Jewish refugees from Soviet Ukraine tended to be Russian speaking and far more embracing of markers of Russian identity, such as the *kulturnost* that an intimate knowledge of Russian literature was thought to bequeath to members of the intelligentsia.

In many ways, they were the first wave of refugees from Ukraine to participate in the globalization of identity and globalized cultural, economic, and political activity. They arrived in the US as stateless refugees, already deracinated from a traditional, religiously based, linguistically distinct, and geographically bound Jewish community. First imperial and then Soviet russificatory policies promoted a Russian cultural identity among Jews, including those living in Ukraine, and at the same time assigned them a genetically-based, inherited Jewish identity. The Soviet Jewish encounter with America

²⁷ Rita J. Simon and Julian L. Simon, “Social and Economic Adjustment,” in Rita J. Simon, ed., *New Lives*, pp. 13–45.

²⁸ Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, pp. 253–66.

has inevitably shaped a self-conscious awareness of being a Soviet Jew, but to a modest degree. Furthermore, any solidarity this sense of common background might have generated has resisted geographic concentration and institutional bases. If anything, their sense of simply being Jewish has been enhanced by the emigrant experience.²⁹

In essence, Jewish refugees from Soviet Ukraine exemplify the fragmentation and displacement that has come to characterize postmodernism. They have little in common with Diaspora Ukrainians, American Jews, and even with each other. After relocation, they formed loose diasporic ethnic enclaves, linked to each other in multiple countries and to Ukraine through informal, personal networks that largely lack institutional bases. Other than kinship, these networks are dependent on a common language, Russian, and on common knowledge of literary works, past and present, written in this language. It will be difficult for successive generations to retain a diasporic consciousness of Soviet Jewishness, distinct from understandings of an assimilated, secular Jewish culture in their adopted country. Yet, for the first generation, it is precisely such a consciousness that connects the informal social networks of friends and family spanning multiple countries back to the country of their birth, back to Ukraine.

A moveable feast: The Soviet Christian emigration movement

Evangelical believers had long been subject to discrimination in education, employment, and housing before Nikita Khrushchev launched his antireligious campaign in 1959, proclaiming, “We will see the last believer!” to the Presidium of the Communist Party’s Central Committee. As active and persistent practitioners of their faith, Baptists and Pentecostals were lumped together in the popular Soviet imagination and administratively as “sectarians.” Heightened concern with the exposure of children to religious doctrine prompted authorities to revive a policy, initially aimed at Orthodox underground groups and then applied more widely to Baptists and Pentecostals, of forcibly taking children from their parents and placing them in state-run boarding schools to prevent religious indoctrination. For some believers this form of harassment prompted a more determined withdrawal from society and an even more strident reliance on God for protection. For others, as one

²⁹ Laitin, “The De-cosmopolitanization of the Russian Diaspora”, p. 32.

of the last and most unbearable raw forms of coercion used by Soviet state authorities, it prompted a worldly solution – emigration. Approximately 500,000 Soviet Evangelicals relocated.

After the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Accords in 1975, agreeing to allow emigration and to respect freedom of conscience, 52 Pentecostals claiming to represent 20,000 others made a direct appeal to the pope for Christian unity and support for persecuted religious minorities in the USSR. Another appeal was presented to the World Council of Churches in 1976. Ninety-seven Pentecostals signed their names to a 48-page appeal to emigrate, but these actions yielded no tangible results. Just as Ronald Reagan assumed the US presidency in 1980 and became a powerful spokesperson for the interests of conservative Christians, Boris Perchatkin organized the “Christian Emigration Movement in the USSR,” and amassed 30,000 members, most of whom were Pentecostals or Baptists striving to practice their religion elsewhere.³⁰ They staged a five-day hunger strike to coincide with the first week of the Helsinki Review Conference in Madrid in 1981.

This nascent Soviet Christian Emigration Movement vitally depended on affirmation from the West, which was not forthcoming. Its organizer, Boris Perchatkin, was rearrested in 1980, after escaping from prison the previous year, and received a new two-year sentence. From 1979–1981 thirty Pentecostals were arrested, some for refusing to serve in the Soviet Army but most for involvement in the Christian Emigration Movement. And in 1983, after a five-year residency in the US Embassy, a group that was dubbed the “Siberian Seven” was allowed to emigrate through exceptional means. Nonetheless, the overall campaign to emigrate failed and was extinguished in 1988 when, because of President Reagan’s direct intervention, its organizer immigrated to the US.

The general aversion to meddling in worldly affairs among evangelicals further reduced any impetus among Westerners of similar faith to respond to the plight of Soviet evangelicals. The lack of Western response was not to be the end of their quest to emigrate, however. A sea change occurred as the Soviet Union prepared for the millennial commemoration of Christianity in Kyivan Rus. In 1987 Mikhail Gorbachev took the bold step of announcing that all victims of religious persecution could apply to emigrate as part of his greater campaign of *glasnost* (openness). Soon thereafter, in 1989, the US Congress

³⁰ William C. Fletcher, *Soviet Charismatics: The Pentecostals in the USSR* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), p. 136.

passed the Lautenberg Amendment, which made religion the cornerstone of Soviet refugee policy and extended the benefits Soviet Jews received to evangelical Christian, Ukrainian Catholic, and Ukrainian Orthodox believers. Anyone affiliated with one of these denominations who could demonstrate “well established histories of persecution” under the Soviet regime became eligible to emigrate to the US as refugees if they had family ties or some other form of sponsorship – usually a religious organization – in the US. Notably, Soviet evangelicals were not required to prove fear of *future* persecution, merely *past membership* in a persecuted religious group. Half of the over two million officially registered Baptists and Pentecostals lived in Soviet Ukraine.

Remarkably, in 1989 the Soviet Union was willing to let its citizens go and the US was willing to let them in. Approximately 500,000 Soviet Evangelicals relocated. In addition to economic decline, other linkages to the US were operative at this time. A barrage of American missionaries promising salvation, American media and popular culture displaying images of glamour and wealth, and American multinational corporations offering a plethora of longed-for consumer goods also served as magnets, as cultural bridges, transporting Soviet citizens from the “proletarian paradise” to the perceived land of milk and honey.

Soviet Ukrainian evangelicals settled extensively in Sacramento, California. Beginning in the 1950s, a radio station based in Sacramento hosted a Russian-language evangelical broadcast. For the earliest evangelical refugees without family ties, this suggested that Sacramento might be a hospitable new home. With this new influx of Soviet refugees, Sacramento became the site of the largest Slavic evangelical refugee community, followed by Portland and Seattle. This wave of refugees also settled in established Ukrainian enclaves, such as Philadelphia, where there are now thirteen Slavic evangelical congregations.³¹ Overall, this wave is quite distinct in the scale of the cities they chose to settle in. Whereas postwar refugees and Soviet Jewish refugees settled mostly in “global” or “gateway” cities, such as New York or Philadelphia, notable for their cosmopolitan character, myriad economic opportunities, and histories of immigrant reception, the last wave of Soviet refugees consistently has privileged mid-level cities in choice of resettlement.

This last wave of refugees from Soviet Ukraine, compared to the two preceding waves discussed and other immigrant groups more generally, has lost

³¹ For a more comprehensive look at this last wave of Soviet refugee outmigration, see Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007).

extraordinarily little in the process of relocating, prompting a Jewish émigré to claim enviously that they have a “moveable feast.”³² Highly favorable emigration policies allowed nearly the entire membership of many Soviet congregations to relocate rapidly, preserving their tight webs of family, residential, and communal networks, which offer a continuum of meaningful social relationships. The last Soviet refugees were the first that could realistically entertain the prospect of returning home, temporarily or permanently, and of maintaining unencumbered contact with family and friends. Yet, no one practices “flexible citizenship,” the way Aihwa Ong documents the Chinese capitalize on twofold economic and residential opportunities.³³ The goal for this last wave, as for the two others, was for the entire multigenerational family to leave and establish permanent residency elsewhere. The new possibilities for retaining ties to Ukraine and for returning there, combined with heightened consumer expectations, have stimulated outmigration in all its forms.³⁴

As committed religious practitioners, Soviet evangelicals distanced themselves as much as possible from the secular Soviet world, including education, and were in turn discouraged from pursuing higher education. Therefore, they arrived in the US having received minimal education for several generations and were prepared to hold manual labor jobs. Given the low incomes and large families evangelicals usually had, they chose to settle in smaller cities where the cost of living, especially housing, might be more manageable. Many evangelical men have worked in construction brigades for companies that were started by a handful of evangelical entrepreneurs, and when necessary for other entrepreneurs from the former USSR. The women have usually been employed in minimum wage jobs as chambermaids, restaurant staff, or domestic servants.

Congregations serve as an effective institutional base from which to reproduce an ethnicized, religious identity that embraces multigenerational families and maintains feelings of belonging and connections to a homeland in the face of disruption to daily life brought on by migration. Clergy and informed networks of family and friends quickly connected recent arrivals

³² Interview with the author, May 6, 2001.

³³ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: Cultural Logistics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999).

³⁴ Even though I focus on legal migration of a permanent nature to the West over the postwar period, since 1991 migration patterns from Ukraine are now dominated by “shuttle trade” (usually to Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, or China) and contract work (often to Portugal and Italy and to East European countries, such as Poland and the Czech Republic).

with government programs to help the working poor. Acquainting new non-evangelical immigrants with such services became a means of exposing them to the congregation, demonstrating the usefulness of church affiliation, and creating debt obligations.

The Southern Baptist Convention supports a Ukrainian pastor in Philadelphia whose specific job is to develop ethnic congregations by sponsoring and assisting immigrants from Ukraine who have no religious affiliation. The pastor meets them at the airport and spends a full week helping them find an apartment, gets children registered for school, helps parents find jobs, and shepherds them through the state social service sector by helping them qualify for government programs. The Pennsylvania state government gave a \$25,000 annual grant to support a full-time social worker who is an evangelical believer from the former Soviet Union to help new immigrants resettle from the former Soviet Union who have no family in the US. The immigrants assisted by this program are not necessarily evangelicals, and not even always Ukrainians. The Southern Baptist Convention and individual evangelical communities have been able to attach religion from the start to the process of resettlement in the US. Individual communities assist new families with food and other basic necessities, such as furniture. In this way, new arrivals, most of whom are nominal Orthodox Christians, are evangelized and religion is made a fundamental part of their immigration experience.

The infusion of refugees after 1989 breathed new life into established Slavic evangelical communities that had formed throughout the twentieth century but had seen their memberships swell and depleted within the span of a generation thanks to assimilation. Current memberships of most evangelical communities are made up of Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians, and Poles. Any tensions over the use of Ukrainian versus Russian are dwarfed by the intrusion of English into communal life because of assimilatory pressures and the “outreach” impulse. In other words, churches adopt a national orientation, without being nationalist. Language becomes the central feature that distinguishes refugee and immigrant churches from other evangelical churches, and language forms the basis upon which they organize exchanges with other immigrant congregations and upon which they structure missionary activity. Yet, any militancy on issues of language or politics more generally is frequently overridden by the ever-present priority to expand membership. It is this impulse that often prompts some communities, especially those located outside Sacramento, to label themselves as “Slavic” as opposed to a narrower national or regional self-identifier.

Missionary activity in the contemporary period is a highly effective means of forging transnational ties that has received very little attention from the scholarly community. For evangelicals who emigrate, the obligation to proselytize remains. Migration and the ensuing language and cultural barriers turn the missionary impulse toward the country of origin and situate this basic activity in a transnational social field. Commitment to the homeland becomes the rationale for an extensive roster of missionary activities in Ukraine and helps maintain the ethnic character of the community. Nostalgia for Ukraine finds its outlet in charitable activities, which were sharply prohibited in the USSR, and have now become the centerpiece of ethnic communal life in the US.³⁵

Religious organizations are allowed to distribute charitable assistance directly in Ukraine, and are not obliged to involve state authorities. Numerous Slavic congregations send parcels of goods, clothing, and foodstuffs at regular intervals to Ukraine as part of their charitable activities. In this way, ethnic congregations in the US supplement the resources of the state that serve the poor and disenfranchised in Ukraine. Individual congregations also make contributions to building infrastructure, including new churches, to expand evangelical religious life in Ukraine.

Almost all churches have a plethora of short-term missionary programs. Youth groups travel once or twice a year to Ukraine to work in evangelical summer camps, to “witness” in orphanages, prisons or hospitals, or provide some other kind of assistance, usually to children. While not mandated, a missionary trip is often something of a rite of passage. Individual missionaries deliver money, medicine, information, and other forms of charitable aid to evangelicals in Ukraine and thereby strengthen these social relationships. Given transnational familial networks, missionizing projects, youth group exchanges, and other connections, at virtually every church service, here and in Ukraine, there is extensive and ongoing informal transmission of information among believers who emigrated and those who stayed.

Migration combined with evangelical practice creates morally-empowered networks on a global scale that deliver a sense of identity and belonging that is at once grounded in a specific space and operative around the world. In this way, Ukrainian believers are integrated into a community that includes a

³⁵ If religion is the factor that made it possible to choose to emigrate, interestingly, it is also the factor that is almost always evoked to explain the choice not to emigrate. Those refusing to emigrate often claimed that the need for evangelization in Ukraine was more pressing because of the wounds inflicted by socialism. This overrode any desire for increased material comfort or fears of renewed religious persecution.

national component and integrative, global elements of a religious-based identity. Belonging in a transnational religious community that frequently meets face to face strengthens the allegiance members feel to each other.

Committed to responding to the current material needs of coreligionists and to the potential spiritual and material needs of would-be converts, these Ukrainian believers ultimately become more than emigrants. They become transmigrants. Gluck Schiller, Basch, and Blanc define a transmigrant as immigrants “whose daily lives depend on multiple and consistent interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.”³⁶ Their allegiance is to their faith but their cultural identity makes realization of this allegiance possible through interaction with other Ukrainian believers – on whatever continent they might find them. This commitment fundamentally structures their daily lives, their sense of self, and their connections to Ukraine.

Religion, displacement, and transnational social fields

After resettling in the US, religiously affiliated refugees from all three waves struggle to locate home. The main factor that has determined where they belong and feel at home is social networks of family and friends that are often inextricably embedded in religious communities. Religious institutions function as the nodes in interlinked networks that unite migrants spread across several continents. Assuming a particular religious identity, even if it is one gutted of religious content as we saw with Soviet Jews, is a powerful factor expanding the social relations and connections to a homeland that characterizes the lives of refugees from Ukraine in the second half of the twentieth century.

For the waves of dispersed peoples from Ukraine described above, their shared experiences of persecution, deciding to leave and refusing to return means that they are united by fate, even as they are divided by faith. Post-World War II Ukrainian refugees share several characteristics with other cultural diasporas: they have become dispersed due to negative circumstances; they retain collective historical and cultural memories; and they exhibit ongoing interest and support for their homeland, primarily in the

³⁶ Nina Gluck Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995): 48–63, here 48.

form of projects of long-distance nationalism. For these reasons, the communal organizations they formed, in addition to religious communities, meshed with those created by earlier immigrants from ethnically-Ukrainian lands. They had every hope that subsequent migrants from Ukraine would join their organizations and work for improvements in the lives of Ukrainians in Ukraine. Consideration of the role of religious organizations in shaping resettlement of subsequent waves of refugees from Ukraine helps to explain why this hope has not been fully realized.

Soviet Jews opted to emigrate because of entirely different circumstances, and this has shaped their mode of incorporation into American society. For Soviet Jews the decision to emigrate included consideration of some “push factors” but was also in response to “pull factors” in the form of greater educational and professional opportunities. As a deracinated, deterritorialized, Russified, and largely secularized group, membership in a globalized, professional workforce became extremely meaningful. Their access to ethno-religious organizations, services, and forms of assistance to realize these goals was predicated on their Jewishness, not on their country of origin. A sense of a common past filled with shared challenges formed the bedrock of informal social networks that span several continents and link Soviet Jews from Ukraine to other Russian-speaking Jews from the USSR.

The last wave of refugees rapidly relocated entire congregations and the multigenerational families that constituted their memberships. They have demonstrated a commitment to maintaining a broadly ethnic or “Slavic” church in the US and to providing charitable assistance in the former Soviet Union and engaging in evangelization there. They exhibit little or no desire to return to Ukraine permanently, but a strong commitment to return frequently to missionize.

Even though there is a growing tendency among scholars to refer to all dispersed peoples as constituting a Diaspora because of mounting possibilities to maintain connections with a homeland, a typology or further refinement of the concept is nonetheless mandated, one that takes into consideration cultural resources as well as the socio-political circumstances driving displacement. As this comparative study of Ukrainian refugee resettlement illustrates, even within the span of several decades, one cannot assume that refugees from a particular region will form a single Diaspora and embrace a single vision of home. Here, inter-confessional tensions were magnified by unequal access to resettlement assistance provided by religious organizations to coreligionists. Relocation is increasingly mediated by religious institutions or ethno-religious organizations, which are quite resilient. Supranational religious

denominations, such as Judaism and Evangelicalism, have brought Americans and American culture into the life of refugees, whereas the Ukrainian Orthodox Church or Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has linked ethnic coreligionists to a far greater degree to Ukraine.

Certain supranational religions, such as Judaism and Evangelicalism, lend themselves to forming “travelling cultures.”³⁷ Replete with cultural practices and forms of social organization that are not tied to a specific place, these “traveling cultures,” once embraced, deterritorialize identities, feelings of belonging, and communal membership. As groups become deterritorialized, states become borderless. Space becomes redefined and informs identities and allegiances in new and largely unbounded ways. The importance of religion and its transnational linkages as a force shaping the dynamics of diasporic migration and resettlement was considerable in the latter half of the twentieth century for Ukraine and for Ukrainians. Religion has fundamentally informed the vibrancy, intensity, and frequency of connections to Ukraine. The importance of religion for migration and resettlement patterns lies in the fact that it operates at multiple levels, forging intersections between the ethnic and the religious, the local and the transnational, the home and the adopted country. Ethno-religious communities incorporate new members alongside firm boundaries of exclusion. Transnational religious groups have collided with Soviet socialism to create highly dispersed mediated cultures and global religious communities of Ukrainians around the world. Massive outmigration of refugees and other migrants has created new transnational institutional linkages that have shaped new understandings of community and commitment in Ukraine and to Ukraine after communism.

³⁷ Catherine Wanner, “Conversion and the Mobile Self: Evangelicalism as ‘Travelling Culture,’” in *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms, and Technologies of Faith*, ed. Mathijs Pelkmans (London: Berghahn, 2009), pp. 165–82 and James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).



The Shifting Object of Desire: The Poetry of Oleksandr Irvanets

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Abstract

Oleksandr Irvanets produced some of his best known works shortly after Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991. The writer's irreverent, ironic, and humorous reworking of the Ukrainian self-image is analyzed. Using the writings of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan, the author argues that the poems surprise the reader by dislocating the object of desire from its expected, "traditional," place, and relocating it in another, wholly unexpected, one. In this way Irvanets reveals existing fantasy structures both in the patriotic poem and in the Soviet cliché. He questions their validity and suggests the need for a new sense of identity.

Keywords

Ukrainian literature, post-independence, new identity, Oleksandr Irvanets

Oleksandr Irvanets (along with Yuriy Andrukhovych and Viktor Neborak) is a member of the Bu-Ba-Bu trio that achieved fame in the late eighties and especially around the time of Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991. The group is best known for its irreverent, ironic, and often humorous reworking of the Ukrainian self-image. As Andrukhovych has admitted, the outdated attitudes and pieties on display in the nation's cultural life were too attractive a target to ignore: "literature directed and tempted us with undomesticated nooks, unpopulated spaces, and outdated taboos that we wanted so much to break."¹ Bu-Ba-Bu, whose name is formed from the Ukrainian words for buffoonery (*bufonada*), farce (*balahan*), and burlesque (*burlesk*), aimed at shattering, among other things, populist culture's naïve self-image: a picture of innocence, purity, and modesty "so becoming in every young miss" but less appropriate in an older woman when she is beginning to "age and dry

¹ Iurii Andrukhovych, "Ave, 'Kraisler'! Poiasnennia ochevydnoho," *Suchasnist'* 5 (1994): 7-8.

out.”² This attitude drew the trio into a playful, deflationary and “deconstructivist” literary game in which they turned accepted and sometimes revered images inside out. Around the year 1992 Irvanets produced some of his most amusing and best known “deconstructivist” lyrics, bringing great delight to many readers and outraging others. How these poems achieve their effect has rarely been given consideration. Beyond some critical examination of their erotic imagery and their impact as political satire, they have not attracted close analysis. It is suggested here that many of the poems derive their strength by dislocating the object of desire from its expected, “traditional” place, and relocating it in another wholly unexpected one, with results that can be both hilarious and disturbing, depending on how wedded the reader is to a “traditional” form of expression.

Take, for example, the author’s most often anthologized poem, the now famous parody of Volodymyr Sosiura’s “Liubit Ukrainu” (Love Ukraine, 1944). Sosiura’s poem became a cause célèbre, when in 1951, during a clamp-down on expressions of Ukrainian patriotism in the post-war period, it was denounced for expressing love for “some primordial Ukraine, Ukraine in general” rather than the actual Soviet one. The decision to parody this classic expression on love for one’s homeland was already a provocative act. Irvanets models his own “Liubit!” (Love, 1992) on Sosiura’s earlier lyric, employing the same distinctive phrasing and meter. However, he enjoins readers to love not Ukraine, but Oklahoma, Indiana, Northern and Southern Dakota, Alabama, Iowa, California, Florida, Nevada, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Montana, Louisiana, Arizona, Alaska, Nebraska, and Virginia. The list of states, all of which have feminine endings in Ukrainian, suggest a list of female lovers. The poem hints at the need to share one’s affection generously, even to the point of promiscuity. In this way it achieves precisely the opposite effect to the one intended by Sosiura’s work, which exhorted readers to love Ukraine particularly, if not exclusively, not to be ashamed of this love, nor to dissolve it in a wider entity, such as the USSR, communism, the Soviet way of life, or Russia. When it appeared in 1944, Sosiura’s message was a bold departure from what had previously been allowed writers as a statement on wartime suffering. It was only allowed publication because during the war the regime briefly supported the expression of both a Russian and a Ukrainian patriotism as part of a drive to mobilize the population. Irvanets, however, calls upon

² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Ukrainians to love all American states. As the poem develops, readers realize that they are being instructed in a rather didactic, earnest style to repeatedly shift the object of their love from state to state, and – incongruously and inanely – to concentrate their love exclusively on the USA (perhaps also its women). The parody is shocking because Sosiura’s “Liubit Ukrainu,” after being introduced into school curriculums in late Soviet times, now enjoys canonical status in the pantheon of patriotic statements. Its treatment by the regime in 1951 attached to it a further subtext: national persecution in Stalin’s time. Ukrainian readers would not be unaware of this subtext. And yet, patriotism and victimhood are precisely the parody’s target. Moreover, the poem appeared immediately after the declaration of independence, a time when there was an outpouring of national pride, and many readers would have expected sentiments and a form of expression appropriate to a celebratory, solemn moment.

The poem achieves its effect by taking Sosiura’s message quite literally and making explicit some underlying but unspoken assumptions. Sosiura urges young women and men to consider the fact that their prospective partners in life might not love them if they do not love their homeland. This warning is repeated by Irvanets who makes the message even more direct by reducing it to an injunction: suppress sexual instincts in favour of love of patria. As he puts it in his most unsubtle manner, young men should cultivate a love that is “stronger than the lure for the vulva” (*sylnishu, nizh potiah do vulv*). The object of desire has here shifted disconcertingly not only from territory to territory, and perhaps person to person, but also from love to sexual desire. Moreover, by moving to a lower register – the language not of love, but of sex – Sosiura’s strategy of blackmailing lovers is made to look ridiculous. Irvanets is in fact laying bare the working of an ideological ritual: the declaration of love for the homeland, the eroticization of this patriotism, and the threat of being denied a sex life if the ritualistic sentiment is not accepted. This structure of thought and feeling is sustained by a hidden fantasy: the link between patriotism, love, marital bliss, and sexual satisfaction. However, it is only a veiled formulation in Sosiura, an ideological message that cannot entirely be acknowledged openly. Irvanets challenges not so much patriotic convictions and desires, but the external ideological ritual of declaring one’s love of nation, and the formulaic and insipid sentiments that inevitably results from any institutionalized and repeated recitation. When patriotism demands such ritualistic recitations, it is ineffective; the partially suppressed fantasy that nourished the original poetic expression begins to appear feeble and ridiculous. The poems of both

Sosiura and Irvanets can be found alongside their English translations in the recent anthology of Ukrainian poetry compiled and edited by Olha Luchuk and Michael M. Naydan:

Любіть!

Присвячую В. М. Сосюрі

Любіть Оклахому! Вночі і в обід,
 Як нььку і дедді достоту.
 Любіть Індіану. Й так само любіть
 Північну й Південну Дакоту.
 Любіть Алабаму в загравах пожеж,
 Любіть її в радощі й біди.
 Айову любіть. Каліфорнію теж.
 І пальми крислаті Флориди.
 Дівчино! Хай око твоє голубе, –
 Та не за фізичнії вади –
 Коханий любити не встане тебе,
 Коли ти не любиш Невади.
 Юначе! Ти мусиш любити стократ
 Сильніше, ніж любиш кохану,
 Колумбію-округ і Джорджію-штат,
 Монтану і Луїзіану.
 Любити не зможеш ти штатів других,
 Коли ти не любиш по-братськи
 Полів Арізони й таких дорогих
 Просторів Аляски й Небраски.
 Любов цю, сильнішу, ніж потяг до вульв,
 Плекай у душі незникому.
 Вірджінію-штат, як Вірджінію Вульф,
 Люби.

І люби – Оклахому!

Love!

Dedicated to V. M. Sosiura

Love Oklahoma! At night and at supper.
 Love your mom and your dad quite equal.
 Love Indiana. And the very same way
 Love Northern and Southern Dakota!
 Love Alabama in the red glow of fires,
 Love her in joy in misfortune,
 Be sure to love Iowa. And California, too.
 And the branchy palms of Florida.
 Teenybopper! It's not for your eye so blue,

And not for your physical defects,
 If you stop loving Nevada
 Your love will stop loving you too.
 Hey guy! You have to love a hundred times
 Stronger than you love your Love,
 The District of Columbia and Georgia the state,
 Montana along with Louisiana.
 You can't love any other states
 If you don't brotherly love
 The Arizona fields and the charming
 Alaskan Nebraskan wide open space.
 This love is stronger than the lure for the vulva,
 Cultivate the eternal in your soul.
 Love Virginian the state like you do Virginia the Woolf,
 And be sure to love – Oklahoma!³

A similar need to break with outworn sentiments and empty forms is the motivating force in other works. In one short story entitled “Lvivska brama” (Lviv Gate, 2002) a character finds himself in the house of a man who has a strange personal museum. The collection of historical objects includes the beard of Mykhailo Hrushevsky, the Chairman of the Central Rada in 1917 and Ukraine’s most distinguished historian, whose works laid the foundation for later scholarship in a number of fields. The collection also includes hair from Avhustyn Voloshyn (the President of the Carpathian-Ukrainian state in 1939), from Yaroslav Stetsko (a leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists at the time of the Second World War and in emigration), and from other leaders of the government in exile of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (1917-1920). There is no demand for this esoteric collection of artifacts, but the owner keeps a few hairs from each figure “just in case.” Readers might see in this a humorous comment on the importance of Hrushevsky, whose entire beard has been preserved, and the lesser significance of other figures, from whom only a few hairs have been kept. There is also a large package of old papers called the Ukrainian Idea, which the collector asks his unexpected guest to transport to Kyiv. The latter does so, but accidentally drops the enormous bundle into the Dnipro, where it sinks. The collection of artifacts could be interpreted as a comment on the fossilization of Ukrainian history, which, because it only survives in museums, has a limited impact on

³ Oleksandr Irvanets’, “Liubit’!,” in *A Hundred Years of Youth: A Bilingual Anthology of 20th Century Ukrainian Poetry*, ed. Olha Luchuk and Michael M. Naydan (Lviv: Litopys, 2000), pp. 640-41.

contemporary life. The fact that his guest loses the bundle of papers underscores this point: the collector clings to preserving only the hollow forms of the past, slowly fading expressions of past idealism. Contemporaries are saddled with these forms and must pass them on to others, until the time comes when they can finally be jettisoned. The contrast between two ideologies – one contemporary and one frozen in the past – and the attachment to the formal structures each generates, is also the basic organizing principle of his novel *Rivne-Rovno* (2002). This work describes the writer's hometown as separated by a kind of Berlin wall: one half belongs to the West and lives a modern existence, while the other remains stuck in the Soviet zone and maintains all the characteristic features of the communist era.

The desired objects in Irvanets's poetry might be seen as elements in the mediating screen of fantasy that is thrown up between the desiring subject and the inaccessible Other. According to Slavoj Žižek's reading of Jacques Lacan, a fantasy teaches us how to desire. It provides a "schema" according to which certain objects in reality allow us to project desires upon them.⁴ The structuring of fantasy is of primary importance. In "Liubit!" Irvanets takes the formal symbolic structure of the patriotic poem, as provided by Sosiura, and then shifts between various objects of desire. Readers are allowed to fill in the blanks with their own eroticized desire, perhaps as they imagine how and why they should love Oklahoma, Indiana, Northern and Southern Dakota, and so on. The author's strategy is to fragment and deterritorialize the object of desire, in this way questioning its validity. In the same way readers of the short story and novel are confronted with and made to ponder the fantasy life that has produced such strange phenomena as the collection of artifacts or the museum-town of Rovno. If a literary work is to be effective, Žižek has argued, the desire that animates it has to be partially suppressed, to remain "implicit" and to maintain a distance from the explicit symbolic texture it sustains. Too close and obvious an identification destroys the literary work's power.⁵ For this reason even the most harmonious art is a priori fragmentary and allusive; it always relies on the distance from fantasy. According to such a reading, by bringing the erotic fantasy into the open, often in the most direct manner, Irvanets breaks the artistic spell and produces a humorous reaction. He undermines the ideological edifice by making an identification that is too literal, and thus deliberately erodes the required minimal distance from explicit statement. By fragmenting the object of desire, by displacing it in time and place, and – in

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the case of his “Liubit!” – by making the sexual content too explicit, Irvanets throws into question the homogeneity and solidity of some historical and cultural constructs.

There is of course a deeply subversive element to this kind of parodic literature, as the strong reactions among some readers to Irvanets in particular and to the Bu-Ba-Bu group as a whole testify. At issue here is not so much the literal content of a given poem or a particular interpretation, but the fact that the work makes available the underlying fantasy sustaining a whole structure of thinking and feeling, and exposes how this fantasy is constructed. Discovering this procedure can be disconcerting, because, for one thing, it suggests that the desire and fascination are not absolutes, but can easily attach to something entirely different: “desire is, of course, metonymical; it shifts from one object to another; through all these displacements, however, desire none the less retains a minimum of formal consistence, a set of phantasmic features which, when they are encountered in a positive object, make us desire this object. . . . In a slightly different way, the same mechanism regulates the subject’s falling in love: the automatism of love is set in motion when some contingent, ultimately indifferent, (libidinal) object finds itself occupying a pre-given fantasy-place.”⁶

There have been many debunkers and “anti-patriots” in Ukrainian literature. Ivan Franko, Petro Karmansky, and Yevhen Malaniuk are among those who have in different ways denounced compatriots for speculating on national sentiments, or for clinging to outmoded, insincere, and unconvincing narrative patterns and imagery in an attempt to describe why they “love” their country or people. Edvard Strikha did a similar parodying of bombastic revolutionary and futurist poetry. The imagery of patriotic love has at different times focused on a glorious, heroic past; a village idyll replete with cherry orchards and beautiful maidens; a people who have suffered greatly and who have been denied their identity; and so on. But the parodic works of Irvanets and the Bu-Ba-Bu are perhaps subversive in a deeper way, since they draw attention to changing schemas and suggest the fundamental instability of any libidinal fantasy. By doing so, these works hint that those who accept the schemas are making themselves into willing instruments of the fantasy’s realization, committed believers who turn themselves into tools of a “big Other” that is hiding in the background. This “big Other” can be seen as a hidden mechanism that generates and directs fantasies; it has been

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

compared to an invisible agency pulling the strings and running the show behind the stage curtains. It can be “divine Providence in Christian ideology, the Hegelian ‘cunning of Reason’ (or, rather, the popular version of it), the ‘invisible hand of the market’ in the commodity economy, the ‘objective logic of History’ in Marxism-Leninism, the ‘Jewish conspiracy’ in Nazism, etc.”⁷ The role of such a hidden mechanism can vary: “It can function as a quieting and strengthening reassurance (religious confidence in God’s will; the Stalinist’s conviction that he is an instrument of historical necessity) or as a terrifying paranoid agency (as in the case of the Nazi ideology recognizing behind economic crisis, national humiliation, moral degeneration, etc., the same hidden hand of the Jew).”⁸ From this perspective, the “big Other” that hides in the background and constructs the fantasy-life of nationalists can be identified as the dream of community solidarity, the interests of the homeland, or the organicist metaphor of a single people who live and breathe as one body. By bringing to light this powerful fantasy and by showing how it sustains an entire literary structure, Irvanets demystifies it and – for patriots at least – demonstrates the need for new literary structures capable of replacing it.

When an underlying fantasy structure is exposed, according to Žižek, the effect is similar to what viewers experience at the ending of Chaplin’s *City Lights*. The young woman has regained her sight. She has long fantasized about the man who provided her with money for the operation that allowed her to do so. All along she has expected him to be rich and the owner of a car. In the final scene, when she is able to touch and hear the voice of the tramp, she finally understands that her Prince Charming is in reality a wretched vagrant. When the young woman’s identification can no longer coincide with the object, the symbolic order (her world of linguistic communication, social relations and conventions) is destroyed. Throughout the film her gaze (the way she sees and understands being seen) has been aimed not at the tramp, but at someone else, a figure created by her own fantasy. As soon as she becomes aware of her mistake, she must deal with a disturbing and confusing reality, the “stain” presented by the tramp.⁹

Something similar occurs in several poems by Irvanets. “Aine klaine nachtmusik” (*Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, 1992) exemplifies this disillusioning

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 4.

procedure. The poem begins with some typical patriotic sentiments: Ukraine is described as a vast country and a nourishing mother (*nenka*). The exalted phrases recall songs that are sung as an affirmation of national solidarity or identity. References to well-known quotations set the tone and mood: “From the Don to the Sian” (*Vid Donu do Sianu*) expresses national political aspirations for a united Ukraine. Irvanets reverses the words in the line, which are “Vid Sianu do Donu.” “The Sun is low in the sky, the evening is near” (*Vzhe sontse nyzenko, Vzhe vechir blyzenko*) is a love song and aria from Mykola Lysenko’s operetta *Natalka-Poltavka* (1889). There follows another often expressed sentiment, the encouragement to include every member of the nation in the great family: “let us recall everyone” (*Davai spomianemo vsikh*). After such an opening, the reader expects a continuation of lofty civic feelings. However, this call to include every member of the nation is taken quite literally. The speaker begins enumerating the citizenry: astronauts circling the earth, amateur doctors (*kostopravy* also suggests thugs: people who “reset” bones), pederasts, millionaires, officers in the army, prostitutes – all of whom go about their daily lives without devoting much thought to being part of the “family.” This imagery of the motherland and its citizens cannot be idealized in any uncomplicated manner, since it is both “bitter and immaculate, sacred and hated” (*hirka i prechysta, sviata i nenavysna*). By interpreting the idea of community as quite literally all-inclusive, the poem exposes and punctures the unexpressed fantasy that underpins the solemn and ritualistic phrase “let us recall everyone.” The eclectic mixture of lines from different works and figures from different walks of life produces a pastiche whose intent is parodic.

The poem “Uroky klasyky: Tsykl” (Lessons in the Classics: A Cycle, 1992) achieves its effect in a similar way. Each of the poem’s three sections is a revelation of what is suppressed when a common phrase or cliché is spoken. The first such cliché is the instruction to “Squeeze the slave out of oneself, drop by drop” (*Po krapli vydavliuvaty z sebe raba*). The phrase was first used by Anton Chekhov in a letter to the publisher and journalist A. F. Suvorin on January 7, 1889. It is frequently used in order to express the need to “walk tall” or “straighten one’s spine,” and suggests that the servile behavior instilled in people by a long legacy of serfdom and imperial rule must be overcome.

Irvanets takes the well-known phrase and develops it, once more quite literally, elaborating it, in a way that resembles one of Maiakovsky’s long, “realized” metaphors. (Maiakovsky would take a metaphor such as “being on fire with love” and then describe in some detail the arrival of fire engines to put

out the towering human inferno.) The effect of such literalism is comic and bathetic:

Повільно з себе видушувати,
Та все на папір,
На папір ...
Вичавлювати, витискувати,
Як пасту з тюрбика ...¹⁰

Slowly squeeze it out of yourself,
Right onto the paper,
Onto the paper ...
Force it out, squeeze it out,
Like toothpaste from a tube ...

Far from developing an elevated sentiment and tone, the “realization” of the metaphor associates it with the physical and personal, suggesting in fact some sort of unpleasant medical operation.

The second cliché is “A human being is born for happiness, like a bird for flight” (*Liudyna rodytsia dlia shchastia, iak ptakh dlia polotu*). By describing specific birds, the author elaborates and concretizes this aphorism, which occurred in Vladimir Korolenko’s essay “Paradoks” (Paradox, 1894) and then in Maksim Gorky’s story “Starukha Izergil” (Old Izergil, 1895). However, the birds Irvanets mentions mostly do not fly at all or are not associated with gracefulness – either in flight or on the ground – and the resulting effect is once more comic bathos:

Як птах ...
Як індик,
Як півень,
Як деркач на болоті?
Як страус,
Як ківі,
Як ему,
Чи як марабу?¹¹

Like a bird ...
Like a turkey,

¹⁰ Oleksandr Irvanets’, “Uroky klasyky,” in *Bu-Ba-Bu* (Lviv: Kameniar, 1995), p. 91.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Like a cockerel,
 Like a bittern in the mud?
 Like an ostrich,
 Like a kiwi,
 Like an emu,
 Or like a marabou?

And, finally, the third cliché, “Everything in a human being has to be beautiful” (*V liudyni vse musyt buty prekrasnym*), is taken from Chekhov’s *Diadia Vania* (Uncle Vania, 1899), in which Doctor Astrov says: “Everything in a human being ought to be beautiful: the face, and clothing, and spirit, and thoughts” (*V cheloveke vse dolzhno byt prekrasno: i litso, i odezhdha, i dusha, i mysl*). This overworked phrase is made to look ridiculous when taken quite literally:

В людині все мусить бути прекрасним:
 Думки й почуття,
 Пальто і сорочка,
 Шкарпетки й підтяжки,
 Зачіска, брови, вії,
 Губи і зуби,
 Ротова порожнина, слизова оболонка,
 Волосся на голові,
 В паху і під пахвами,
 Нігті, шкіра, мозолі на п’ятах,
 Кров, лімфа,
 Шлунковий сік,
 Геніталії і фекалії.
 Усмішка її єдина,
 Очі її одні.¹²

Everything in a human being has to be beautiful:
 Thoughts and feelings,
 Coat and shirt,
 Socks and garters,
 Hairstyle, brows, eyelashes,
 Lips and teeth,
 Oral cavity, saliva coating,
 Hair on the head,
 On the bosom and under the armpits,
 Nails, skin, calluses on the heel,

¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Blood, lymph,
 Stomach juices,
 Genitalia and fecalia.
 Every person's smile is singular
 Their eyes unique.

All the phrases in the above poems were used in the Soviet school system with a frequency that emptied them of any richer meaning. The mind-numbing repetition of these celebrated phrases was often meant to “explain” literary classics by condensing them into a single phrase, and by squeezing them into the only acceptable paradigm of class struggle in which all characters were assigned positive and negative characters. The effect was often to turn pupils away from the classics. This perhaps is the message conveyed in the ironic title to the three poems of the cycle.

The fantasy background that sustains the latter imagery in the poems is a humanist idealism (the conviction that each individual has a unique beauty), a boy-scoutish morality, and a call to individual self-improvement. There is also another literary structure that underpins the expression of this fantasy. It can be found in Vasyl Symonenko's poem “Ty znaiesh, shcho ty liudyna” (You know that you are a Person). Symonenko's poem is one of the classics of the 1960s and exemplifies the high-minded, rather didactic tone that inspired some of the best poetry from this period. In the post-independence, postmodern world of the nineties the outdatedness of this fantasy background is revealed. Real life details – the ugly, the banal, and the disgusting – intrude to show how much has been omitted from both the fantasy and the literary structure it parodies.

Irvanets delights in playing with various forms of “national” imagery, exploring both language and the way individuals imagine themselves by drawing on canonized authors like Sosiura and Symonenko, figures like Hrushevsky who championed Ukrainian independence, oral traditions, and earlier writers whose aphorisms are now used unconsciously as part of the language. He forces readers to review the unconscious feelings behind accepted imagery and the way clichés govern how we like to present ourselves to others. Since our understanding of ourselves and others is profoundly shaped by the use of language, the latter requires careful scrutiny. We identify with an image that represents what we would like to be. At the same time we are conscious of the place from where we are being observed, and from where we look at ourselves so as to appear likeable. We should therefore ask ourselves for whom we are playing a given role. There is a gap between the way we see ourselves and the point from which we are being observed in order to appear likeable. Irvanets

plays on this disjuncture when he takes a commonplace symbolic identification, which is initially presented in the form of what appears to be an acceptable, if somewhat hackneyed, phrase or thought pattern. Almost immediately, usually in the second or third line of a poem, the reader realizes that Irvanets has twisted the commonplace into something entirely different. The point of observation has shifted radically.

In allowing censored, silenced, and overlooked details to be seen, Irvanets undermines the entire symbolic structure of an “elevated” poem and the fantasy that breathes life into it. This kind of demystificatory operation is also directed against the clichés of Soviet life. In “Deputatska pisnia” (A Deputy’s Song) he mocks typical Soviet slogans: “Stay close to the laboring class” (*I blyzhchym bud do trudiashchykh*) and “Give everything for the struggle” (*Vse viddai borotbi*). In “Pisni skhidnykh slovian” (Songs of the Eastern Slavs) he makes fun of the Russian self-image, which constructs itself as messianic and victimized. It is messianic in so far as it sees itself being continually called upon to rescue the world from tyranny, fascism, and foreign invasions; and it is victimized in to the extent that it sees itself as the persistent object of Western aggression, and of Ukrainian and Jewish treachery. According to this self-image, Russia must periodically step out of its apathy and put an end to the surrounding disorder, thus saving the world. The parodied text here is Aleksandr Pushkin’s *Pesni zapadnykh slavian* (Songs of the Western Slavs, 1834), a collection of poems with anti-Moslem and anti-Semitic overtones. Pushkin had translated Prosper Mérimée’s so-called “Illyrian” poems. These were fakes which purported to be folk poetry of the Balkans. The Russian writer initially believed them to be genuine folk ballads that express the popular view of a tragic and violent history. At the time Irvanets wrote his poem, Liudmila Petrushevskaia in her *Pesni vostochnykh slavian* (Songs of the Eastern Slavs, 1990) also produced an ironic version of this collection. Pushkin was targeted for parody not only because of his untouchable position as a national mythmaker, but also because the anniversary of his birth occurred at this time and was being celebrated with great pomp. It is ironic that his poems were translations of supposed translations of non-existent folk poetry. However, a fake reveals the desire that a certain work should exist; the fantasy life of educated Europeans in Pushkin’s time created the imagery of a wild Balkans and then attributed this imagery to the people of the region. Irvanets suggests that a different kind of wish-fulfillment, one of imperial violence justified by a sense of entitlement, has formed and continues to form a pattern in Russian fantasy-life.

Demystificatory verse does not exhaust the Ukrainian poet's repertoire. However, the moment of Ukraine's political independence in 1991 appears to have given birth to a particularly strong mood of iconoclasm and a need to destroy illusions. In the year after independence, censorship disappeared, contacts with the rest of the world increased, and a flood of new images, texts, and cultural products appeared. Erotic imagery became widely available. A radicalized youth culture became acceptable in the public realm. Rock festivals took place at which young people delighted in expressing more liberal and open attitudes toward politics, sexuality, drugs, and cultural diversity. The Bu-Ba-Bu and other avant-garde groups were prominent participants in this process. Bu-Ba-Bu's high point came during the Chrysler Imperial performance at the Lviv Opera Theatre in 1992 which drew sold-out crowds for two days. The trio demonstrated a particular allergy to sentimentalism and to romanticized notions of women, youth, poets, love, and nation. Why did they feel obliged to publicize this allergic reaction precisely at the moment of the great national love-in that followed independence? In large part, the answer lies in a reaction to overworked imagery and stale forms. For a century and a half, Ukrainians had been fed a sentimental-romantic picture of a beautiful land, virtuous people, and mellifluous language, and had been enjoined to love their country in facile, didactic poetry. This "sweet Ukrainian style" and saccharine "poetic embodiment of the national project" irritated the younger generation because it suggested provincialism and moral hypocrisy.¹³ At the same time, a marked shift occurred away from the populist notion that art's purpose was the expression of the national idea. Instead, young writers showed a strong interest in articulating individual identity. Moreover, "the national" had for too long been associated with the village and the peasant community, and the new generation was determined to break the connection with this spent paradigm. When it did speak of the collective, it linked Ukrainian culture with modernity, urban life, and Western models. The moment of independence therefore led to a wave of linguistic experimentation and stylistic play that aimed at creating a new identity.

The ironic tone evident in many works by the Bu-Ba-Bu and other avant-garde groups was experienced as a refreshing and bracing gust of fresh air. It has, perhaps, been insufficiently remarked that their manner of challenging received notions exploded the fantasies that nourished these notions. When

¹³ Solomea Pavlychko, "A Catfish for Your Thoughts: Ukrainian Literature at the Turning Point," *Agni* 39 (1994): 191-99, here 195.

investigated from this perspective, the work of Irvanets yields a deeper questioning of identity than is often supposed. His poetry is a biting critique of the national imaginary. It belongs to what has been described as the new “intentionality” of contemporary Ukrainian writing, one that has never before expressed itself in such a concentrated, panoramic, and demonstrative manner.¹⁴ This literature declares its spiritual and intellectual independence from social habit and “constructs alternative concepts, models, and paradigms” in an effort to reform the language and aesthetic tastes.¹⁵

The poems from 1992 in particular provide not only great humor, but also stir some disconcerting and disquieting feelings. Some readers found unsettling the idea that the “target” of desire is an unstable, ever-moving and ever-evolving object. The suggestion that enjoyment or ecstatic delight, even if it can be caught in different ideological fields, still remains free-floating, poses a challenge to any iconic narrative. Žižek has put it this way: “The enthusiasm of fans for their favourite rock star and the religious trance of a devout Catholic in the presence of the Pope are libidinally *the same phenomenon*, they differ only in the different symbolic network which supports them.”¹⁶ This is a more subversive message than the debunking of a particular icon, the rejection of kitsch, or the eruption of the carnivalesque. By revealing the link between the political and the erotic, and by exposing unconscious assumptions behind language, Irvanets, like others in the post-independence avant-garde, asks readers to question the way fundamental belief systems are constructed.

¹⁴ Iaroslav Holoborod'ko, *Artegraund: Ukrains'kyi literaturnyi isteblyshment* (Kyiv: Fakt, 2006), p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 50.

Geography Matters: Regionalism and Identities in Contemporary Ukrainian Prose

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Abstract

This paper examines the representations of four Ukrainian cities (Kyiv, Rivne, Chernivtsi, and Lviv) in a few selected fictional narratives by four contemporary Ukrainian authors. Each of these cities represents not just concrete urban settings, but also provides a certain set of beliefs, myths, and historical accounts. The sense of belonging to the local territory is underscored, yet the sense of belonging to the nation and the world is not dismissed. Kurkov, Irvanets, Kozhelianko, and Vynnychuk celebrate the city as a generator and site of identity, simultaneously regional and national.

Keywords

Ukrainian post-Soviet literature, literature of place, regionalism, urban fiction, Ukrainian identity

Since independence, the geography of belonging has played a crucial role in Ukrainian literature.¹ In fact, a decentralization of the literary process on the one hand, and a tendency by a number of writers to heighten regional differences in their texts (along with attendant cultural identities), on the other, emerge as some of the chief characteristics of the post-Soviet period. One could say that this literary trend toward regionalism and decentralization echoes similar discourses in the political and economic spheres of post-independence nation-building activities. Yet, behind this seeming espousal of geographic and cultural difference in works of imaginative writing, there is, it

¹ See, for example, Marko Pavlyshyn, “The Rhetoric of Geography in Ukrainian Literature, 1991-2005,” in *Ukraine, the EU and Russia: History, Culture and International Relations*, ed. Stephen Velychenko (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 89-107.

appears, a larger concern among authors. Often colored by their specific historical conditioning, it is mainly a concern for the well-being of Ukraine as one unified country. It is somewhat reflective of what Jim Wayne Miller contemplates about a similar process in America:

With a better understanding of the role writing has played in creating our national identity, it should be possible to take a different view of regional writing today. We should be able to understand that, contrary to the conventional belief that regions belong to the past and are forever passing away, our various regions in America are still forming. Their parameters may shift, but they endure – and they may become even more distinct, rather than less so, as time passes. It should be possible, then, to view regional writing (and the life such writing is concerned with) not as a remnant of a colorful past, nor as disquieting alien life within the national boundaries, nor as a quaint refuge from the rest of the country (or from the wider world), but rather as indicative of the process by which the country continues to become a land and a people.²

Miller further elaborates the point that regions and regionalism do not need to be viewed as divisive or opposing national unity, but, to the contrary, may be contributive to the centralization process precisely by allowing the exploration of cultural and regional diversity.

It is important to note, however, that Miller's apologetic tone and defensive posture stem from his willingness to refute the perception of regionalism as reactionary, or "associated with backwardness and limitation."³ But the latter viewpoint, it seems, is already dated and largely dismissed by the postmodernists. Roberto M. Dainotto, for example, invoking Homi Bhabha's "location of culture" as the new episteme of place and Edward Said's call for "concrete geographical identity" as a mechanism against the imposition of cultural unity, contends that "regional literature is a most illustrious protagonist of this *fin de siècle* project of localizing the aesthetic."⁴ Furthermore, for Dainotto, regionalism is "an attempt to find a *new* place from which to study literature and from which to engender a different, "changed ecology" of cultural production."⁵ While Dainotto's foregrounding of regional difference in literature as a

² Jim Wayne Miller, "Anytime the Ground Is Uneven: The Outlook for Regional Studies and What to Look Out For," in *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines*, ed. William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Hously (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1987), p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ Roberto M. Dainotto, *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

positive development coincides with that of Miller's, they differ in their understanding of the role regionalism plays in forming the cultural unity of national literature. In Dainotto's approach regionalism "depicts itself as some kind of liberation front busy to set marginal and vernacular cultures free from an all-equalizing nation".⁶ In Miller's approach regionalism, while appreciative of local life and traditions, does not dispense with its relationship to the national life. Miller believes that "the local and global, regional and national, the particular and the universal, are not antithetical concepts; rather, they complement each other."⁷

How do these theoretical considerations apply to decentralized contemporary Ukrainian literature? As I have already implied above, Miller's approach fits the Ukrainian paradigm better than Dainotto's in the sense that it does not dispense with the relationship between the local and the national. Literary production in post-Soviet Ukraine provides ample examples of regional perspectives. In fact, the two main schools of prose writing since 1991 bear the names of two Ukrainian cities, namely the Zhytomyr School and the Stanyslaviv or Stanislav (also called Galician) School.⁸ Yet, contrary to Dainotto's premise, the preoccupation with the local life and culture of the members of each of these schools has not neutralized the need for cultural unity of the national literature. It seems that rather than deny such a need, both schools strive to construct and impose their own particular understanding of what the national literature should constitute.

Another divergence from Dainotto's theoretical proposition worth mentioning is the reliance among Ukrainian writers on history, or, to be more precise, on local branches of national history. Dainotto views regionalism as "the figure of an otherness that is, essentially, otherness *from*, and against,

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁷ Miller, "Anytime the Ground Is Uneven," p. 17.

⁸ The Zhytomyr School, comprising such writers as Yevhen Pashkovsky, Viacheslav Medvid, Volodymyr Danylenko, Mykola Zakusylo, Valerii Shevchuk, and others, represents the "nativist" tendencies in Ukrainian literature, celebrating the richness of the language, including dialects, and views the Western orientation of the Galician School with skepticism and disdain. The Stanyslaviv School (Stanyslaviv is the old name of the city of Ivano-Frankivsk), refers to the group of writers gathered around the magazine *Chetver*, which is considered as the main proponent of postmodernism in Ukrainian literature. The two best-known writers of this school, Yuri Izdryk and Yuri Andrukhovych, in their philosophy and outlook have aligned themselves with the European cultural identity. For more on this, see Ola Hnatiuk, "Nativists vs. Westernizers: Problems of Cultural Identity in Ukrainian Literature of the 1990s," *Slavic and East European Journal* 50 (2006): 434-51.

history.”⁹ Moreover, he promotes the turn from history to geography as “a true reevaluation of all values” and believes that “the goal posited by the literature of place is therefore an ethical one: to replace the “insufficient” historical remedy with the geographical cure.”¹⁰ I will argue that the literature of place and region, as represented by four contemporary Ukrainian writers, does not have to exclude history from its consideration. On the contrary, history becomes inextricably linked to a particular place, and the consideration of that place is presented through a specific historical lens. Ukrainian urban fiction provides interesting examples where spatial and temporal parameters do not clash, but rather complement each other.

The city as protagonist

While the discussion of regionalism in Ukrainian literature since 1991 is no doubt warranted, especially when one looks at the totality of works by Yuri Andrukhovych, Taras Prokhasko, or Yuri Vynnychuk (all three coming from the Halychyna, or Galician, region in western Ukraine) as well as at the existence of numerous literary groups in various Ukrainian cities,¹¹ in this paper I want to narrow my focus to the representation of a few concrete cities in a few selected fictional narratives. The four cities under investigation are: Kyiv, Rivne, Chernivtsi, and Lviv.¹² One can question whether or not it is reasonable on my part to conflate the city with the region,¹³ but each of these four

⁹ Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹¹ Like, for example, *Chervona Fira* in Kharkiv, *Propala Hramota* in Kyiv, *Luhosad* in Lviv, or the most famous *Bu-Ba-Bu*, consisting of three members: Yuri Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak, and Oleksandr Irvanets, coming respectively from Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Rivne. For more on this, see Hnatiuk, “Nativists and Westernizers” and Michael M. Naydan, “Ukrainian Avant-Garde Poetry Today: Bu-Ba-Bu and Others,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 50 (2006): 452–68.

¹² The scope of this article does not allow me to analyze other interesting examples of belletristic representations of Ukrainian cities in contemporary Ukrainian literature. Arguably, Zhytomyr, Kharkiv, Odesa, and other urban centers deserve as much attention as the four cities mentioned above. This particular choice of places and authors is just a case study that gives me an opportunity to discuss the intricate relationship between the regional and the national, on the one hand, and to elucidate an intriguing convergence of geography and history, on the other.

¹³ In fact, Dainotto opposes these two entities: “In search of a shared communal identity, region is the rhetorical opposition to the modern city” (*Place in Literature*, p. 22). However, it is questionable whether it is at all possible in the globalization era to ascribe pristine, ethnic purity to any geographical enclave.

cities represents not just concrete urban settings, but also provides a certain set of beliefs, myths, and historical accounts that emanate beyond their boundaries to exert an impact on the adjacent surrounding territories. These geographical entities, from the most cosmopolitan city of Kyiv, through the provincial outposts of Rivne and Chernivtsi, to the arguably most European city among them all, Lviv, become symbolic *loci* of sorts, caught up in some myth, and through which, nonetheless, a specific historical reality unfolds, often with a considerable dose of fantasy, utopia, and/or dystopia.

Andrey Kurkov, Oleksandr Irvanets, Vasyl Kozheliianko, and Yuri Vynnychuk, all construct visions of the city, in which the relationship between people and their places is explored against the background of “the wider world,” as Miller puts it. The sense of belonging to the local territory is underscored, yet, the sense of belonging to the nation and the world is not dismissed. Perhaps the most fascinating element in the writings of the above authors is their uncanny way of presenting the city as a space facilitating a contiguous coexistence of differences inscribed on the template of a distinct historical period, with numerous references to the contemporaneous political and social situation. Their use of history does not prevent their celebrating the city as a generator and site of authentic identity, simultaneously regional and national.

The city depicted in Kurkov’s novels, Kyiv, is a city of the post-Soviet period and thus the most contemporary of all the places discussed. Arguably, it yields the most realistically construed picture of Ukraine’s capital, but it is often a city with an invisible criminal underground network in the first half of the 1990s, and its actual urban places are introduced and displayed through consistently dark lenses. Irvanets, on the other hand, uses his hometown of Rivne to invoke the relatively recent Soviet past, and the title of his novel *Rivne/Rovno* (giving both the Ukrainian and Russian pronunciations) comes as a warning of sorts. His vision of the city is a divided, dystopian place where totalitarian rule coexists literally behind the wall but can in no time encroach on and destroy the Western democratic half. Kozheliianko’s hometown of Chernivtsi brings yet another historical reality into the forefront, namely the period of World War II. There is a clear attempt on Kozheliianko’s part to instill a new sense of gravitas for Chernivtsi by shedding its periphery and transforming the city into a center of Ukrainian nationalism. Finally, Vynnychuk presents Lviv as a mythologized place nostalgically rooted in the Austro-Hungarian past. His city comes across more as a point of reference rather than a topographical entity. It is a center somewhere out there but not here, yet its presence stimulates and engenders a strong sense of local (regional) identity.

My contention is that all four writers use the idea of place (here: the urban place) in conjunction with history in order to assert the uniqueness of a concrete geographical territory and, at the same time, in order to put forth the idea of a regional identity, which, in their judgment, is compatible with the idea of a national identity being formed in independent Ukraine. To illustrate this argument I will examine several novels written and published in the last decade and a half. In the case of Kurkov and Kozhelianko, I will focus on more than a single work by each; in the case of Irvanets and Vynnychuk, I will discuss two specific texts, namely *Rivne/Rovno* (2002) and *Malva Landa* (2003), respectively.

Kurkov's Kyiv

Andrey Kurkov, who was born in Leningrad in 1961 but has resided in Kyiv since he was two years old, introduces a unique dimension into Ukrainian letters. Kyiv is his hometown, and even though he writes in Russian, he considers himself a Ukrainian writer. And this is not without significance considering his commercial success in the West. Interestingly, no other contemporary Ukrainian author writes about Kyiv with such fealty and devotion as Kurkov does, especially in those novels that have been translated into English to date. Ukraine's capital city is the hero in these works. In fact, in one of his interviews Kurkov admitted that he made a conscious decision to resurrect Kyiv on the world literary map:

When it comes to Kyiv, seven years ago I decided to put it back as a place of action on the world literary map, or at least on Europe's map. And I believe that thanks in large measure to "Picnic on Ice"¹⁴ and "A Friend of the Deceased"¹⁵ I succeeded. There were quite a few funny situations connected to this. For example, when a former ambassador of Belgium came here, I got a phone call, a meeting was arranged, and then he told me that before leaving for Kyiv, he was advised by the Belgian foreign service people to see the film "A Friend of the Deceased."¹⁶ Not to mention the fact that for the last three or four years quite a few tourists from Germany and Switzerland come here and use my books as guides around Kyiv (on some occasions I accompany them).¹⁷

¹⁴ Known in English translation as: *Death and the Penguin* (2001).

¹⁵ Known in English translation as: *A Matter of Death and Life* (2005).

¹⁶ A movie directed by Viacheslav Krishtofovich (1997) and based on Kurkov's novel.

¹⁷ Andrey Kurkov, "Narodzhennia novoho bez stresu ne buvaie," *Den'*, Nov. 26, 2004, www.day.kiev.ua/290619?idsource=128181&mainlang=ukr (accessed September 11, 2008). The

The strong sense of belonging to a concrete place (Kyiv) that permeates Kurkov's works cannot but affect his overall national affinity and self-identification. Clearly he rejects a narrow, ethnic ("blood-and-soil") type of national identity in favor of a civic type, which promotes the idea of national identity as a rational association of citizens bound by common laws and a shared territory.¹⁸ That, however, does not mean that issues of cultural identity, including the language question, are not close to his heart. Despite his using Russian as a medium of artistic expression, he is against the introduction of Russian as a second state official language, a position advocated especially by those politicians concerned with election votes in the southeastern region of Ukraine. Moreover, he is fluent in Ukrainian, uses the language in interviews with Ukrainian journalists, and is well versed in contemporary Ukrainian literature produced by his Ukrainian-language colleagues.¹⁹ In an interview with BBC correspondent Bohdan Tsiupyn, Kurkov even stated that he is Ukrainian because his mentality is Ukrainian.²⁰ In the same interview Kurkov promoted the idea of national literature that is not confined to the language factor alone. He believes that everything created on Ukraine's territory belongs to Ukrainian culture:

Most importantly, I believe that all that is being done on Ukraine's territory belongs to Ukrainian culture. For example, a literature written in Tatar, Hungarian or Yiddish, the latter being used by Joseph Burg, the oldest writer who still writes in Yiddish and lives in

original reads: "А що стосується Києва, то сім років тому я поставив собі за мету повернути Київ як місце дії на літературну карту світу або хоч би Європи. І вважаю, що – завдяки переважно "Пікніку на льоду" та "Приятелю небіжчика" – мені це вдалося. Було дуже багато кумедних ситуацій, пов'язаних із цим. Наприклад, коли сюди приїхав попередній посол Бельгії, мені одразу зателефонували, він зі мною зустрівся і сказав, що йому в бельгійському МЗС порадили перед тим, як їхати сюди, подивитися фільм "Приятель небіжчика". А вже три чи чотири роки сюди приїжджають літературні туристи з Німеччини чи Швейцарії, які за моїми книжками мандрують (іноді я їх супроводжую) Києвом." (All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.)

¹⁸ Cf. Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: Univ. of Nevada Press, 1991).

¹⁹ See his 2006 J. B. Rudnyckyj Distinguished Lecture, presented at the University of Manitoba on February 23, 2006: "Independent Ukraine as a Function of Soviet Inertia," http://umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/grants/rudnyckyj_lecture/lecture_13.html (accessed September 11, 2008).

²⁰ Bohdan Tsiupyn, "Andrii Kurkov v hostiakh u Bi-Bi-Si," interview with Andrey Kurkov, November 5, 2005, http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/forum/story/2005/11/051113_kurkov.shtml (accessed March 10, 2007). In the original: "Я за ментальністю українець."

Chernivtsi – all this belongs to Ukrainian culture. Of course, one can be an ethnocentrist and state that only Ukrainian-language literature is truly Ukrainian, but this is beyond logic because every ethnicity that is active, every nationality produces its own cultural product, which belongs to Ukraine.²¹

It would be hard to deny a Ukrainian character to Kurkov's fiction. Most of his works, at least thematically, hover around issues and situations, whether political or social, that arose in post-Soviet Ukraine after 1991. Another common thread is that regardless of where plots take their protagonists – East, West, or Antarctica, all action originates and ends in Kyiv, a place beloved by Kurkov and his heroes alike. This is especially true of the novels *Death and the Penguin* and *A Matter of Death and Life*, both originally published in 1996. These works concentrate on the economic and social absurdities that were created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The protagonists in both novels, males in their early thirties, face isolation, the lack of a social network, and difficulties in adapting to new economic realities, and sooner or later find themselves implicated in criminal enterprises.

In a typically Kurkov manner there is always an element of surprise in the otherwise straightforward suspense stories. For example, in *Death and the Penguin* it is the hero's unusual pet (a penguin named Misha) that seems to act with more dignity than humans themselves, not to mention that in the end it is the penguin's owner, Viktor, who, after arranging for Misha to be taken back to Antarctica, "becomes" the bird, fleeing to the icy continent to escape the mafia and possible assassination. ("The penguin," said Viktor bleakly, "is me."²²) In the novel *A Matter of Death and Life*, by a strange twist of fate, the main character, who at first wants to die because of personal failures and hires an assassin, changes his mind and hires another assassin to kill the first one. In the end, wracked by guilt, he marries the murdered man's widow. Unlike Kurkov's later works, these stories unfold entirely in Kyiv. The writer's attention to the city itself, naming streets and familiar places, turning Kyiv

²¹ *Ibid.* The original reads: "Але головне – я вважаю, що все що робиться на території України, це належить українській культурі. Наприклад, якщо це література татарською мовою, угорською, на мові їдиш, якою пише письменник Йозеф Бург, найстаріший письменник, що пише мовою їдиш і проживає в Чернівцях – це все належить українській культурі. Звичайно, можна бути етноцентристом і казати, що тільки україномовна література є українською, але це поза логікою, бо кожна національність, яка є активна, кожна національність продукує свій культурний продукт, який належить Україні."

²² Andrey Kurkov, *Death and the Penguin* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 228.

into an implicit character, is what foreign readers seem to notice and like in Kurkov's *oeuvre*.

The two other novels translated into English, *Penguin Lost* (2004) and *The Case of the General's Thumb* (2003)²³ expand geographically beyond the confines of Kyiv. In the sequel to *Death and the Penguin* we find the protagonist, Viktor, in Antarctica where he ended up fleeing the mafia. Determined to find Misha at all costs, he returns to Kyiv but is forced to travel first to Moscow and then Chechnya, all in an effort to trace his penguin. Only now, beyond the borders of Ukraine, the issue of national identity comes into play. While in Chechnya, the hero does not forget to emphasize that he is from Kyiv, Ukraine, not from Moscow, in order to secure better treatment for himself from the Chechen fighters.

Marko Pavlyshyn rightly observes that while giving “symbolic weight to an unexpected spatial nexus between Ukraine and Antarctica, it [*Death and the Penguin*] does not confer any special meaning upon the familiar connection between Ukraine and Russia, thereby decoupling the Russian language from its colonizing role.”²⁴ However, both the sequel *Penguin Lost* and *The Case of the General's Thumb* do, in fact, bring Russia into consideration. While the former novel constitutes (among other things) an implicit commentary on the cruelty and absurdity of the war in Chechnya, the latter highlights competing interests between the Russian and Ukrainian secret services. But, again, Pavlyshyn correctly contends that Kurkov writes in Russian “in a way that does not claim Ukraine as part of a Russian cultural space.”²⁵ Ukraine's relationship with Russia is not portrayed in Kurkov's works as anything other than one between equal international partners.

Kurkov's focus on contemporary issues and his ruminations on the difficulties of the economic transition in post-Soviet Ukraine in the early 1990s through the prism of his observations of the local life in the capital city give his fiction some deserved esteem. In its significance, Kurkov's Kyiv seems to overflow its urban boundaries and becomes larger than just the central metropolis of Ukraine. In a way, Kurkov depicts the capital city as if it were some kind of a macro-region synonymous with Ukraine itself. Whatever transpires in Kyiv, Kurkov asserts, it also reverberates on its near and far edges.

²³ These dates refer to the first English editions. In the original they were published in 2002 and 2000, respectively.

²⁴ Pavlyshyn, “The Rhetoric of Geography,” p. 92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Irvanets's *Rivne/Rovno*

Oleksandr Irvanets, a member of the famed *Bu-Ba-Bu* group and, like Kurkov, born in 1961, is perhaps better known as a poet and playwright than a fiction writer. In 2002 he published his first novel *Rivne/Rovno*, which received some attention, thanks in part to its explicit commentary on competing identities in a newly independent Ukraine. *Rivne/Rovno* reads like a warning against the reestablishment of Soviet authoritarian rule, yet does not offer too much comfort and confidence in the supposedly democratic and pro-Western regime. The scenario that Irvanets imposes on his hometown of Rivne, the provincial capital of Rivne oblast, bears a striking resemblance to the one that existed in the divided Berlin during the Cold War era. Just as in the case of Berlin, the wall erected between the two different ideological halves of the city plays a crucial role and in the end prompts the main character to act seemingly against his convictions.

Paradoxically, it is not an ideological chasm of the divided Rivne that dominates the plot of the novel. The dystopian framework of the narrative merely offers its author a pretext to tell the story of his city, the city he remembers mostly from his childhood and youth. In that respect Irvanets's Rivne is mapped considerably more rationally than Kurkov's Kyiv. To start with, Irvanets provides his readers with a detailed map of Rivne's downtown, showing all the main streets and the precise contour of the wall. Moreover, the text of *Rivne/Rovno* is interspersed with a dozen or so photographs, highlighting places captured not randomly but according to the story line. There is a correspondence between the selected images and the protagonist's whereabouts. All of this points to the fact that there are only two main characters in the novel, the playwright Shloima Etsirvan and the city of Rivne.

It is probably no coincidence that the name of the hero is not a Ukrainian one. The writer seems to promote the idea that attachment to locality transcends ethnic descent (quite in line with what we find in Kurkov). After all, local patriotism is largely blind to ethnic difference. And even though one can easily see in Etsirvan an anagram of Irvanets, it is not possible to follow the same route as Shloima. One can only speculate whether this is just a playful postmodernist device on Irvanets's part or whether there are other subtle intimations with regard to this name.

We are introduced to Shloima Etsirvan as he prepares for the premiere of his play in the western part of Rivne. We also learn at the outset that the main protagonist ended up in the democratic half of the city by coincidence. He just happened to be visiting a friend when the war that divided the city into

separate eastern and western sections first began, thus preventing him from returning home. On the day of Etsirvan's premiere he receives an invitation and the necessary permit allowing him to cross the wall and visit his relatives. He does not want to pass up this opportunity and makes a journey to the eastern part of his hometown. What happens after that is rather predictable to all those who are familiar with Soviet totalitarian practices. The hero is under constant supervision, his movements are restricted, and even when he manages to escape for a brief moment to visit his mother and sister, he ends up being beaten in a park and returned to the custody of his guards. As it turns out, his subsequent stay in the hospital and forced participation in a meeting, arranged earlier by his former colleagues from the Union of Writers, leads to some unwelcome consequences. Shloima is instructed to help the authorities unify the divided city by opening the door to the underground sewage system located under the wall, so that the military can enter the western section. The protagonist, eager to return to West Rivne in order not to miss his premiere, agrees to the plan. After his initial hesitation about carrying out the imposed mission, together with the manifestation of some strange circumstances indicating that resistance is futile, the hero of *Rivne/Rovno* completes his mission.

This plot, however, does not adequately convey the interaction between Etsirvan and the city. His journey/flight through the streets, parks, schools, and hospitals of the Soviet section of Rivne elicits memories of his childhood and adolescence. Passing the House of Ideological Work, he recalls at what cost this building was erected (the destruction of the Jewish cemetery); crossing the central Lenin Square, he contemplates the fact that an entire section of the city had to be leveled to allow for the realization of the new Soviet vision in urban planning; sitting in the park, he remembers walking with his friends through its alleys, using them as shortcuts to downtown; or, finally, seeing the building in which his high-school sweetheart used to live, he loses himself in memories, daydreaming of his first love.

These reveries about Etsirvan's past, which is inextricably linked to the places, streets, and buildings of his hometown, underscore the hero's deep attachment to the local ambience regardless of its ideological and/or political line. It virtually prepares the reader to accept the unthinkable in the end, that is, loss of freedom and democracy in exchange for having this city, Rivne, as one undivided entity. At the same time, the author devotes quite a bit of energy to parodying the Soviet way of life, including laughing at the empty and pompous statements of Soviet writers, Etsirvan's former colleagues, whenever they are given an opportunity to speak. This also gives Irvanets a chance to incorporate into the text real literary characters, writers, and groups that are

being excessively criticized by the Soviet functionaries of East Rivne. But the final chapter reads like a hymn to the beauty of the city. The hero's joy when he sees the city as one undivided whole seems to justify the act of his earlier betrayal.

As the author has it, the goal of unification takes precedence over the nature of a political regime. This fictional dystopia invokes the real historical event that also resulted in the unification of most of the Ukrainian lands. I am referring here to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which made it possible for Stalin to annex Halychyna (Eastern Galicia) and make it part of Soviet Ukraine. This was not an event greeted by Western Ukrainians at the time. In fact, many perished during the NKVD's reign of terror, but for the first time in a long while Ukraine was unified as a political entity (even if not quite sovereign).

The novel is mostly devoted to the character's journey through East Rivne, but we also get a glimpse of life in the western part of the city. Here life could not be more dynamic and prosperous, but it becomes evident quite early on that this part of the city has foreign forces stationed in it. Moreover, we learn that Ertsivan's play, the premiere of which is staged by a German director, with a German actress in the main role, imitates life, but through the presence of foreign guests it unfolds as an event of transnational significance. It almost seems as though the sense of national identity is deliberately muddled. In *Rivne/Rovno* Irvanets skillfully maneuvers through layers of hypothetical situations and in the process he avoids straight answers. The ambivalent character of his dystopia disturbs rather than placates, but this is precisely what might be expected from a gifted writer.

Kozhelianko's Chernivtsi

Vasyl Kozhelianko (1957-2008) published seven novels in the past decade, but made his reputation mainly thanks to *Defiliada v Moskvi* (A Parade in Moscow). It came out in 2001 as a separate volume, after first being serialized in the journal *Suchasnist* in the second half of the 1990s. Kozhelianko is also known as a writer who uses a device in his texts that he calls "alternative history." By mixing real events with products of his imagination, the writer creates a new historical reality – the sole purpose of which is to underscore the significance and power of the Ukrainian state. Here we are dealing with an interesting reversal: it is Ukraine rather than Russia that becomes the new center. Foregrounding nationalism and transforming Ukraine into a new

empire (an underlying theme in Kozheliianko's prose) can be read as both a psychological compensation for the colonial past and a stark warning against authoritarian and nationalist tendencies in any political reality.

I have argued earlier that inherent in Kozheliianko's fiction is a deep-seated ambivalence about the importance of nationalist preferences in any nation and state building.²⁶ On the one hand, in a typically postcolonial gesture, the writer dismisses the old metropolis (Moscow) as a valid center and undermines that empire's historical significance; on the other, Europe also does not figure as a viable alternative. This is somewhat reminiscent of what Irvanets implies in his *Rivne/Rovno*, namely, while the persistence of the Soviet-style regime and its attendant cultural identity are loathed and disrespected, the presence of Western forces on Ukrainian territory is also implicitly criticized. Bart Moore-Gilbert rightly concludes in his work on postcolonial theory: "Because colonialism has taken many forms and has many histories, and is accompanied by a plethora of at times internally and mutually contradictory discourses, decolonialization has been similarly multiform and complex – and its discourses may therefore at times be incommensurable with each other – as well as complementary."²⁷ It is quite possible that the ambivalent and often contradictory realities found in Kozheliianko's texts are only his mechanisms for coping with the process of decolonization. By questioning the power of the supposed center (i.e., Russia), he also undermines the validity of the colonial inferiority complex. Juxtaposing these two perspectives and playing them off against each other are what make Kozheliianko's work fresh and intriguing.

There is another aspect worth mentioning: Kozheliianko's parodic and equivocal approach to history places him squarely in the center of the post-modern camp. His method clearly adheres to Linda Hutcheon's take on post-modernism: "What I want to call postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political."²⁸ By ascribing imperialistic views to his protagonists, Kozheliianko risks appearing chauvinistic, if not for the fact that he wraps his narrative in a light, even humorous, tone. There are plenty of typically postmodernist devices in his prose, including self-referential passages, as well as pastiche and parody. These techniques

²⁶ See Maria G. Rewakowicz, "Alternative History, Science Fiction and Nationalism in Vasyl Kozheliianko's Novels," *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 63 (2007): 70–78.

²⁷ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 203.

²⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 4.

neutralize and deconstruct otherwise clearly exposed nationalistic sentiments. And this is precisely what is so intriguing about Kozheliianko: he always leaves an ambiguous trace with regard to his own views on nationalism. But there is nothing ambiguous as far as his narrative of place is concerned. The city of Chernivtsi lies at the center of most of the author's story lines. However, it is not contemporary Chernivtsi that fascinates the writer by and large, but Chernivtsi on the eve of and during the World War II period. Examining the significance of place in Kozheliianko's fiction, I will focus on two of his novels, namely *Defiliada v Moskvi* and *Sribnyi pavuk* (Silver Spider, 2004), his next to the last novel to date.

The plot of *Defiliada* begins in November 1941 with a train approaching the Chernivtsi railway station. We are introduced to the main character, Dmytro Levytsky, an officer of the victorious Ukrainian Army, who is traveling back home to visit his aging father. Walking from the train station Levytsky contemplates the changes in his hometown: "It was tempting to observe Chernivtsi in its Ukrainian lineament. Signs on stores and cafes here and there were still in Romanian, but on the City Hall one can see the blue and yellow flag flapping . . ." ²⁹ This is one example of Kozheliianko's alternative history and, by this logic, Ukraine is victorious and independent in 1941. In his fiction the writer insists on making events that were in fact transient – like the proclamation of Ukraine's independence by Stepan Bandera on June 30, 1941 – permanent fixtures of Ukrainian history. ³⁰ He seems to be fixated on emphasizing glorious rather than defeatist occurrences in the Ukrainian past. Or, alternatively, he concocts history in such a way as to create an impression of Ukraine's supremacy on the world's stage. In *Defiliada*, Joseph Stalin is captured by Ukrainian agents working in cooperation with Hitler's forces. Georgia overthrows the communists and aligns itself with Ukraine, which is considered a mighty partner. This mightiness continues well into the future. When Kozheliianko introduces a futuristic scenario in *Defiliada*, it points to the exceptional role of Ukrainians in defending planet Earth from unidentified flying objects.

²⁹ Vasyli' Kozheliianko, *Defiliada v Moskvi* (Lviv: Kal'variia, 2001), p. 10. The original reads: "кортіло придивитися до Чернівців в українській іпостасі. Вивіски на крамницях і кав'ярнях ще подекуди були румунські, але на міській ратуші вже розвівався синьожовтий прапор. . ."

³⁰ Incidentally, Kozheliianko refers to this day as Ukraine's "real" Independence Day in more than one novel.

It goes without saying that Chernivtsi in *Defiliada* plays a significant role; after all, the main character comes from that place. The city, however, even though presented in its multiethnic complexity, is depicted as fully Ukrainian and part of a greater Ukraine. In this sense the identity presented here has a national rather than a regional dimension. But the chapter devoted to the review of one issue of the Chernivtsi newspaper *Dzygarok* underscores specifically Bukovynian local events. Its heroes, writers, and local history (like the Romanian occupation) are recounted and discussed.

In his penultimate novel, *Sribnyi pavuk*, Kozheliianko even more nostalgically describes the place and time first introduced in *Defiliada*, and the author's hometown of Chernivtsi plays an even more pronounced role than in his first work. Similarly to what we encountered in Irvanets, Kozheliianko concludes his work with a section of photographic images of Chernivtsi, titled "Visions after Text." But unlike Irvanets, these are not contemporary pictures. "Visions after Text" is an interesting hodge-podge of newspaper clippings in the German language, photos of the city, and people from a number of different epochs: from the Habsburg period through the interwar period to the postwar period. But the time of action at the novel's outset is the eve of World War II. *Sribnyi pavuk*, however, does not dwell as much on the historical intricacies of the war as was the case in *Defiliada*. This novel is more of a detective story than a commentary on historical events. The writer, as before, consistently employs the familiar mix of science fiction and history. One almost feels that the devices he so skillfully introduced in his earlier works have exhausted themselves, and the author stands at the threshold of a new writing phase. But the detailed emphasis on the city landscapes is new and noteworthy. Through one of his protagonists Kozheliianko expresses his admiration for the city in which he grew up but not without a humorous twist: "In a few decades a legend will be born that Chernivtsi is such an awe-inspiring city, so exotic and romantic, so artistic and refined that janitors sweep sidewalks with roses. . . ."³¹ By borrowing and incorporating many elements of popular genres, such as science fiction, romance, and suspense, Kozheliianko's novels represent highly accessible and readable commentaries on nationalism, regionalism, and identities.

³¹ Vasyl' Kozheliianko, *Sribnyi pavuk* (Lviv: Kal'variia, 2004), p. 11. The original reads: "А через кілька десятків років складеться легенда, що, мовляв, Чернівці – це таке дивовижне місто, таке екзотично-романтичне, таке артистично-вишукане, що там навіть двірники підмітають хідники трояндами . . ."

Vynnychuk's *Malva Landa*

Yuri Vynnychuk, born in 1952, is a prolific and quintessentially Lviv author, who epitomizes this city as no other writer in contemporary Ukrainian fiction.³² Active in the 1970s and 1980s literary underground, he began to flourish as a man of letters only in independent Ukraine, publishing a number of allegorical short stories and novellas that often foreground totalitarian absurdity and parody former Soviet rule. Vitaly Chernetsky, in his book *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, focuses on two aspects of Vynnychuk's *oeuvre*, namely, on the writer's bent for magical realism ("of a more macabre type," as he puts it) and daring sexuality,³³ but Vynnychuk's narratives also present an excellent case study for those interested in the literature of place. *Malva Landa*, a bulky novel published in 2003 (though written in the early 1990s), offers a snapshot of Lviv in its local color not so much in visual as in emotional terms. Vynnychuk's Lviv unfolds before our eyes as a symbolic place, with deep roots in myth and history, yet preserves the basic tenets of verisimilitude through language (employing a specifically Lviv jargon),³⁴ people's attitudes, and the local ambience. These aspects remain constant throughout and survive a considerable dose of fantastic elements interwoven into the narrative of the novel, which render actual city landscapes as secondary ones.

Discussing the properties and uses of place in literature, Leonard Lutwack dismisses writing that celebrates places for their own sake and insists on the importance of symbolic value:

As with all literary materials, place has a literal and a symbolical value, a function serving both geographical and metaphorical ends. But the literal and geographic aspect of place is always under the strain that all literature feels to attain the condition of poetry, of symbol, and it is difficult to avoid the proposition that in the final analysis all places in literature are used for symbolical purposes even though in their descriptiveness they may be rooted in fact.³⁵

³² See, for example, his *Lehendy Lvova* (Lviv: Piramida, 2000). Vynnychuk was born in Stanyslaviv (Ivano-Frankivsk) but lives and works in Lviv.

³³ Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 201-02, 250.

³⁴ In fact, at the end of the novel he includes a short dictionary of words existing only in the Galician dialect. See "Slovnychok halytshymiv," in his *Mal'va Landa* (Lviv: Piramida, 2003), pp. 534-37.

³⁵ Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1984), p. 31.

This is particularly true for Vynnychuk and his treatment of place in *Malva Landa*. He starts his novel in contemporary Lviv but soon transfers the action to its periphery, first to the garbage dumps outside the city and then to the provincial town of S. He transforms those places into mythical enclaves where space and time function according to a different set of laws. The peripheral place becomes a refuge, in which the main protagonist discovers his heroic potential and heals his ego from the wounds inflicted by the circumstances in the “real” Lviv. Moreover, a shift in place also triggers a shift in time (and there are numerous time displacements in *Malva Landa*). It is as if “a geographically remote place awakens the memory of remote times.”³⁶ Indeed, the mountains of trash outside Lviv constitute a peculiar universe, which remembers the past of the Habsburg Empire and in which historical memory continues to exist as symbolic formation and metaphor.

The hero of the novel, Bumbliakevych (we never learn his first name), a single, not particularly attractive, middle-aged man, pretends to his controlling mother that he is dating women (his mother desperately wants him to get married) and when pressed for details, he invents Malva Landa. But since his mother soon insists on meeting her, he is forced to make up a story of her illness and subsequent death. As it turns out later, Malva Landa happens to be not just a product of Bumbliakevych’s imagination but also the pseudonym of a female poet, who published two collections of verse before World War II. Bumbliakevych, who has read both of them, admires her poetry and is on a mission to find out more about her as a person. In the meantime, his mother dies and he is free to devote his time to his favorite pastimes without anyone controlling his life. The hero manages to locate a friend of Malva Landa’s, who maintains that she is still alive but advanced in age. The remainder of the novel is devoted to Bumbliakevych’s quest to find Malva, and the leads he gathers direct him to the landfills outside Lviv.

Vynnychuk skillfully and with considerable humor uses the universe of Lviv’s trash heaps as a place where various transformations are not only possible but also desirable. One of the characters whom Bumbliakevych meets there at the beginning of the novel warns him about the place, saying that this is a labyrinth from which no one has ever been able to extricate herself/himself. But receiving some hope that he will find Malva there, Bumbliakevych continues his journey. In a way, it almost feels natural that the protagonist, while rummaging through layers of garbage, finds himself in a different era, and moves backward in time a hundred years or so. This Bumbliakevych,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

unlike the one in Lviv, is extremely successful with women, and in the typical Vynnychukian manner the novel depicts numerous copulations: sexuality is out there, front and center. But in the end, Bumbliakevych's search for Malva becomes a path of creative self-discovery for the hero. She evolves into his muse, inspiring his creative urges, and the novel ends with Bumbliakevych becoming a writer and preacher to the inhabitants of Lviv's landfills. He finds love and a purpose in life outside the space and time offered by the real city of Lviv.

What is interesting to observe is that in Vynnychuk's fiction mythological reality and symbolic value take precedence over the need to depict the urban life of contemporary Lviv. At a certain point in the novel, Bumbliakevych manages to escape the labyrinth of trash and returns to Lviv but soon discovers that six years have passed since he embarked on his journey, making him that much older, a fact he finds difficult to accept. No wonder, therefore, that time and space offered by the universe of trash is so much more appealing than the dreary reality. This spatio-temporal dimension moves slower (or is even timeless) and presents possibilities otherwise unachievable for such average mortals as Bumbliakevych.

Ultimately, *Malva Landa* is also a novel about writing and has all the attributes of a typical postmodern metafiction. Vynnychuk playfully juggles characters, epochs, sexual taboos, and literary allusions, all in an effort to nostalgically capture the essence of the region of which he is so enamored, that is, Halychyna. The novel ends with Bumbliakevych scribbling a poem on a blank page and signing it "Malva Landa." He has merged his identity with that of his muse. Vynnychuk, on the other hand, having started the action of the novel in Lviv, ends it on the city's periphery, in a utopian trash space, where memory lives on, where everyone is welcome to dig layer upon layer in search of bygone days, but where, more importantly, all dreams come true – the writer's and his heroes' alike.

Conclusion

Among the four authors discussed above, the most realistic treatment of place is unquestionably found in Kurkov. His Kyiv not only faithfully reflects the city of the 1990s but also avoids mythologizing or stepping into the fantastic.³⁷ His fiction is also the most straightforward and, arguably, the least

³⁷ However, choosing a penguin as the hero's pet makes the story somewhat unusual.

demanding in terms of form. On the other hand, Kyiv emerges here as a tangible place, one that actually attracts with its simplicity and “everydayness.” Irvanets’s Rivne, first divided and then unified, while topographically accurate, represents a dystopian and consciously constructed place, which comes both as a cautionary symbol against the return of Soviet-like rule and a metaphor against a divisive mindset among his compatriots (e.g., the discourse of two Ukraines). Kozheliianko’s Chernivtsi fascinates with its complexity and colorful past. The writer presents it as a multiethnic place where the traces of all previous rulers are visible and all non-Ukrainian inhabitants are acknowledged, from German (Austrian), Romanian, to Jewish, but his Chernivtsi also comes across as a place that nurtures Ukrainian nationalism. Finally, Vynnychuk’s Lviv retains local color but is synecdochically represented by the city’s landfills. His Lviv, by focusing on its rummage, morphs into a symbolic, if not allegorical, place reminiscent of utopia.

All four cities emerge in these works of fiction as sites of historical memory, both regional and national, and originating either in the more recent or more distant past. The interplay of place and time constitutes an important element of these narratives and becomes an effective tool through which to channel the question of identity. Kurkov’s fiction only peripherally touches upon the question of national belonging, and his Kyiv is undoubtedly the most cosmopolitan of all the cities under consideration here. But the issue of identity with Kurkov is inherently present simply because he is the writer who chose Russian as a medium of expression but who considers himself part of the Ukrainian cultural space. Irvanets seems to convey the idea that the sense of national unity should trump its ideological divisions. Kozheliianko’s novels often read as off-hand guides on how to overcome colonial inferiority complexes. Everything Ukrainian is inflated and, according to him, nothing could be more enticing than assuming Ukrainian identity. Vynnychuk is perhaps the most regional of them all, but his Lviv, while it is first and foremost the cultural center of Halychyna, nevertheless offers a vast reservoir of things Ukrainian, ready for consumption and emulation everywhere else in the country.

If there is a common thread that connects the writings of these authors it is the element of journey, which is present in all four novels. The narrative of a journeying hero provides ample opportunities for exploring various places. And this is precisely what occurs on the pages of fiction created by these four writers. Whether it is Kurkov’s Viktor, whose determination to find Misha, his penguin, prompts him to travel as far back as Chechnya, or Irvanets’s Shloima, who rediscovers his past and love for Rivne as he wanders through its streets,

or Kozheliianko's Levytsky, who travels all over Europe but yearns for his hometown Chernivtsi, or, finally, Vynnychuk's Bumbliakevych, who rummages through Lviv's garbage dumps to discover his dharma in the process – in all these cases not only do we find interesting plots but also extensive descriptions of the places that become centers for the presented action but also centers of respective regions, all in their own right. These places are sometimes geographically accurate and sometimes not; sometimes they convey urban settings in all their verisimilitude, and at other times they are merely products of a writer's imagination. Whatever preference is cherished by any particular writer, one thing is clear: regionalism has penetrated Ukrainian contemporary prose to such an extent that it is impossible to ignore it in any critical assessment of the post-Soviet literary output.

From Anarchy to Connectivity to Cognitive Mapping: Contemporary Ukrainian Writers of the Younger Generation Engage with Globalization*

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Abstract

This article discusses several Ukrainian writers who gained prominence during the post-Soviet period, in particular Vasyl Makhno, Serhii Zhadan, Andrii Bondar, Natalka Sniadanko, Oksana Lutsyshyna, and Dmytro Lazutkin. Grounded in theoretical models of cultural globalization, the analysis focuses on these authors' strategies of engagement with the rapidly changing global contexts in texts ranging from philosophical poetry to counterfactual fiction and appropriations of mass-culture forms.

Keywords

Ukrainian literature, contemporary writing, globalization, cultural diversity

For nearly two decades now, since the beginning of the 1990s, a prolific debate has been raging concerning globalization as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Many of the participants in this debate have focused on the ways globalization as a political and economic tendency has been impacting the cultural sphere and, conversely, on the effect of “becoming cultural” on many aspects of global social reality. As Imre Szeman has noted in a recent essay, while the concept of globalization “offers us a way to comprehend a set of massive changes . . . that have radically redefined contemporary experience,” at the same time it continues to generate confusion: while “globalization is at one level ‘real’ and has ‘real’ effects, it is also decisively and importantly rhetorical, metaphoric

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and even fictional – reality given a narrative shape and logic, and in a number of different and irreconcilable ways.”¹ From the outset, however, a division emerged between the views on globalization grounded in politics and economy versus those drawing primarily on cultural anthropology. The former, frequently with a (post-) Marxist inflection, lead to a model which emphasizes identity rather than difference. As usefully summarized by Fredric Jameson in his influential essay “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue”:

... this model stresses the rapid assimilation of hitherto autonomous national markets and productive zones into a single sphere, the disappearance of national subsistence . . . the forced integration of countries all over the globe into [a] new global division of labor . . . a picture of standardization on an unparalleled new scale; of forced integration as well, into a world-system from which “delinking” . . . is henceforth impossible and even unthinkable and inconceivable.²

Conversely, the “culturalist” model offers an overwhelmingly positive view of postmodern “celebration of difference and differentiation.” Viewed through the prism of this model, all the cultures around the world find themselves “placed in tolerant contact with each other in a kind of immense cultural pluralism” which, Jameson notes:

... would be very difficult not to welcome. The logic of this model links the celebration of cultural difference with a celebration of emergence of a whole immense range of groups, races, genders, ethnicities, into the speech of the public sphere; a falling away of those structures that condemned whole segments of the population to silence and subalternity; a worldwide growth of popular democratization . . . which seems to have some relationship with the evolution of the media, but which is immediately expressed by a new richness and variety of cultures in the new world space.³

However, problems arise when the two visions, as it were, “invade” each other’s territory. An “economist” interpretation of cultural globalization, as one may expect, posits the contemporary cultural condition as “the worldwide

¹ Imre Szeman, “Globalization, Post-Modernism and Criticism,” in *Metaphors of Globalization: Mirrors, Magicians and Mutinies*, ed. Markus Kornprobst, Vincent Pouliot, Nisha Shah, and Ruben Zaiotti (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 167-83, here 168-69.

² Fredric Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), p. 57.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

Americanization or standardization of culture, the destruction of local differences, the massification of all the peoples on the planet.” By contrast, the “culturalist” vision of the global economy stresses “the richness and excitement of the new free market all over the world.”⁴

The problem – or perhaps the richness – of the contemporary situation is that each of these models has a degree of validity, and a productive approach would be in an attempt to see the vying and tension between these opposite forces, as it has been argued that one of the key characteristics of the contemporary social condition is the “becoming cultural” of the economic and the “becoming economic” of the cultural. Jameson hopes that the clash of these visions generates a productive “flying of sparks.” Could this standoff be resolvable after all?

While it is beyond my scope here to offer an interpretative model for economic aspects of globalization, I believe that many of the analytical insights of the discourse on globalization grounded in cultural anthropology could provide a productive set of tools for analyzing some of the processes at stake in the work of many Ukrainian authors of the younger generation, authors who rose to prominence in the post-1991 era, the so-called *deviatdesiatnyky* (generation of the 1990s) and *dvokhtysiachnyky* (generation of the 2000s). In his pioneering study *Hybrid Cultures*, Néstor García Canclini advanced a vision of contemporary global culture as constituted by eclectic multidirectional contacts and borrowings that encourage the proliferation of new cultural forms.⁵ Arjun Appadurai, another prominent anthropologist who has focused on the complex socio-economic developments associated with globalization, has stressed that in the face of the West’s, and the United States’ in particular, “endless preoccupation” with itself (with either positive or negative value judgments attached), we need to maintain continuous awareness that “globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even *localizing* process. Globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization,” as “different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently.”⁶ To be able to appreciate that one needs to be aware that “the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

⁵ See Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1995), originally published in Spanish in 1990.

⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 17 (Appadurai’s emphasis).

only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes,” rather than get entrapped in “a confusion between some ineffable McDonalidization of the world and the much subtler play of indigenous trajectories of desire and fear with global flows of people and things.”⁷ Thus, while many cultural critics rightly lament that within the global economy of the cultural industry we may speak of the triumph of “market realism” that ought to be resisted as much as socialist realism was resisted back in its heyday,⁸ others seek out hopeful signs in emergent trends of “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below.”⁹ A productive path for such a project is suggested by John Tomlinson, who in his study *Globalization and Culture* stresses that the singular defining aspect of cultural globalization is what he terms “complex connectivity,” namely “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life.” To grasp the direction and scope of contemporary cultural transformations, he argues, it would be productive to inquire “how globalization alters the context of meaning construction: how it affects people’s sense of identity, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, how it impacts on the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally situated life.”¹⁰ This approach does not necessitate a conflation between culture and its technologies that is observable in the work of some scholars: literature is as much of a valid focus for such concern as the mass media or the Internet.

A hypothesis advanced by Tomlinson is that in contemporary context, displacement – long an important focus of studies on literary discourse – now generates experiences not so much of alienation, but of ambivalence: “people ‘own’ local places phenomenologically in a sort of *provisional* sense.” While we are all, as human beings, embodied and physically located, contemporary transformations, in his opinion, suggest that locality has now become a more complex cultural space. Within this context, what practitioners of culture may aspire to, given “the uncertainties of global modernity,” is not so much “a heroic ideal of global citizenship” but a “low-key, modest cosmopolitanism”

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁸ For more on this, see Tariq Ali, “Literature and Market Realism,” *New Left Review* 199 (May-June 1993); 140-45.

⁹ See Arjun Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,” in *Globalization*, ed. Appadurai (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 1-21.

¹⁰ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 2 and 20.

resulting from “the deterritorialization of mundane experience that increasingly opens the world to us, along with the drive to self-realization in lifestyles which are themselves ‘open’ to an expanded mutuality.”¹¹ The first Ukrainian writer whom I would like to consider in the light of this hypothesis is Vasyl Makhno (b. 1964).

Within contemporary Ukrainian literature, Makhno stands out in several respects. The beginnings of his literary career in the early 1990s can be seen as somewhat typical for poets of his generation, with an emphasis on the search for buried and suppressed traditions of Modernist innovation and a “yearning for world culture” of many Ukrainian authors active between the two world wars; however, already his earlier efforts testify to a powerful impulse of “complex connectivity” in his literary endeavors. In fact, it could be argued that the high point of Makhno’s activities in the 1990s came with the publication of the anthology he compiled, *Deviatdesiatnyky* (Poets of the Nineties), and a scholarly study of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych, the iconic figure of the great promise of Ukrainian Modernism cut short for many Ukrainian intellectuals who came of age in the final years of the Soviet Union’s existence.¹² Both these books signal the importance for Makhno of a project of cognitive mapping – in Jameson’s well-known definition, a “culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system.”¹³ In the case of his study of Antonych, Makhno’s major focus was on the poet’s artistic model of the world (*svitobudova*), while in the anthology he sought to map out the principal features and trends of his generation of Ukrainian poets. Many similar concerns can be observed in Makhno’s third poetry collection, *Liutnevi elehii ta inshi virshi* (February Elegies and Other Poems, 1998), which includes selections from his earlier volumes and serves as a summing up of his first period of literary activity. The connectivity impulse is at the core of the book, as most poems in it are addressed to specific individuals, while several also address other national cultures – Polish, Jewish (both diasporic and Israeli), and French. The choice of authors with whom Makhno proclaims an especial affinity is highly significant. On the one hand, Makhno frequently invokes Zbigniew Herbert, whose poetry he also translated extensively into Ukrainian; on the other, he enters a dialogue with

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207 (Tomlinson’s emphasis).

¹² See Vasyl Makhno, ed., *Deviatdesiatnyky* (Ternopil’: Lilcia, 1998); Makhno, *Khudozhnii svit Bohdana-Ihoria Antonycha* (Ternopil’: Lilcia, 1999).

¹³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1991), p. 54.

Saint-John Perse, the French-Caribbean poet whose work epitomized both the vicissitudes of exile and their obverse, the openness to world's cultures in all their diversity. A great paradigm shift, however, occurred in Makhno's life and creative work when he left Ukraine for the United States in 2000, settling in New York City. While New York was a major center of Ukrainian diasporic writing during the preceding generations, at present Ukrainian-language literary voices are few in number in this hyper-heterogeneous city. While Makhno's initial experience of America and New York, especially given his limited command of English at the time, was that of alienation and not fitting in, in the years since then he has been experiencing a major burst of literary creativity. His poetry has transformed, shedding many of the late-Modernist formal strictures and embracing the heterogeneity of contemporary urban experience. In many respects, it now builds upon the aesthetics of American poets of the New York School, such as Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery, whose work had earlier reached Ukrainian poets via the Polish "O'Haraist" poets of the late 1980s-1990s generation. These texts explore locales that are both fragmentary and interconnected, some anonymous, others firmly "embedded." One of the best-known poems from his New York years, "Na kavi u 'Starbucks'" ("Having Coffee at a *Starbucks*"), while reflecting on the march of economic globalization across our planet (chain stores, the commercial Christmas music they play in December), also offers a melancholy exploration of a self in a Brownian movement mixed with an observation of a street scene in downtown New York, powerfully captured in a few precise strokes.¹⁴ Another key image of Makhno's recent writing, appearing both in his poetry and in his essays – indeed, providing the title of his recent book of essays, is the statue of Gertrude Stein in New York's Bryant Park, next to the New York Public Library. The ironic title of the essay collection, *Park kultury ta vidpochynku imeni Gertrudy Stain* (The Gertrude Stein Memorial Culture and Recreation Park), blends an iconic New York locale with vocabulary and imagery from the author's Soviet-era childhood and youth. The book's essays explore Makhno's heterogeneous affinities and interests within the web of "complex connectivity" of global culture: poetry in New York (with the emphasis on the New York School and on Garcia Lorca's New York sojourn); the author's travels and literary friendships in Serbia and Romania; the figures of Witold Gombrowicz and Nichita Stănescu, epitomizing writers as cosmopolitan outcasts and gadflies of their national cultures; and the Lemko region in what is now southeastern Poland,

¹⁴ "Na kavi u 'Starbucks'," in Vasyl' Makhno, *Cornelia Street Café: Novi ta vybrani virshi 1991-2006* (Kyiv: Fakt, 2007), pp. 132-33.

with its legacies of Antonych and the philosophical poetry of Janusz Szuber, another author whose work Makhno has translated into Ukrainian.¹⁵ Many of these themes also reverberate in Makhno's poetry of the New York period, both saturated with global heterogeneity and bursting with photographically precise yet surreal descriptions of, for instance, Astor Place, Tompkins Square Park, McSorley's Old Ale House, and the La MaMa Theater – all of them iconic locales in the East Village – as well as the nearby Cornelia Street Café, a well-known poetry reading space whose name provides the title of the comprehensive collection of Makhno's poetry that came out in 2007. This emphatic emplacement meshes in his texts with an active and restless ongoing search for affinities with authors past and present from contexts whose range and diversity is truly breathtaking in the context of Ukrainian letters. Makhno's recent writing thus can be seen as an example of cultural globalization as Americanization in the best and noblest sense – namely, an embrace of global heterogeneity of contacts and flows and a celebration of New York's additively vibrant cultural energy that is nevertheless tinged with bittersweet irony, a palpable melancholy, and an acute awareness of the fleeting and fragmentary nature of interaction in this vortex-like megalopolis. This expansive, observant, melancholy yet hopeful against all odds cultural project makes Vasyl Makhno's writings, especially of his New York period, a veritable breakthrough in the practice of Ukrainian letters.

Makhno's introspective, contemplative approach of globalization that retains so much of the "yearning for world culture" of the high Modernist era emphatically contrasts with the defiantly countercultural and aggressive literary and public self constructed by Serhii Zhadan (b. 1974), who swiftly rose to high acclaim as a poet in the 1990s and has since been propelled to international renown also as an innovative prose writer, becoming arguably the best-known Ukrainian author of his generation.

Zhadan is a remarkable example of a writer-activist; he was, in fact, a prominent figure in the events of the Orange Revolution, serving as the head of the tent camp in the main square of his home city, Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest. While Vasyl Makhno has sought affinities among poet-philosophers and urban flâneurs, reaching back to the venerable Modernist lineage begun by Baudelaire, Zhadan eagerly and doggedly embraces the image of writer-as-rebel. He therefore aligns himself with the spectrum ranging from Rimbaud and the Futurists to various Western countercultural youth

¹⁵ Vasyl' Makhno, *Park kul'tury ta vidpochynku imeni Gertrudy Stain* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2006).

movements of the past several decades and, in Ukraine, to that other Makhno, Nestor, the famous anarchist leader. Zhadan's writing, consequently, brims with rebellious energy, and invests heavily into the (quasi-)autobiographical mode, be it in poetry, fiction, or nonfiction. In the course of his literary career, however, Zhadan underwent a rapid evolution, beginning with a style of poetry has been seen as a re-adaptation of Futurist poetics for a new era, then shifting to a meditative intellectual style that made critics draw comparisons with Joseph Brodsky; in his more recent poetry, Zhadan reinterprets the legacy of American Beat poets. His best work of fiction, the novel *Depeche Mode* (2004), is a stunning tour-de-force of stream-of-consciousness writing technique, set among a gang of working-class youths in the early 1990s – an explosive hybrid of *Ulysses*, *Trainspotting*, and modern Ukrainian realia.

The countercultural impulse, along with a nod to the legacies of leftist position in both art and politics, remains a central aspect of Zhadan's literary persona. The nearly 800-page thick tome of his collected writings published in 2007 bears the loaded title *Kapital*, thereby brilliantly updating for the present the daring gesture of Mykhail Semenko, the leader of the Ukrainian Futurists, who titled the 1924 volume of his collected writings *Kobzar*. Zhadan's gesture is thus akin to Semenko's provocative inscribing of himself into the center of Ukrainian culture of his time by reclaiming the classic title that had been previously exclusively, and deferentially, reserved for Shevchenko's oeuvre. Earlier, Zhadan's first poetry collection, published in 1995, and a 2005 volume of his collected poems bear the title *Tsytratnyk* (A Book of Quotations), alluding to Mao's "little red book," *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tong*. Yet these and other titles of Zhadan's books also play with the vocabulary of global commodity culture: next to nods to Marx and Mao, as well as the earlier mentioned *Depeche Mode* and *Anarchy in the UKR* (2006, referencing "Anarchy in the UK," the first single released by the celebrated British punk rock band *Sex Pistols*), we find books titled *Pepsi* (1998), *Big Mak* (Big Mac, 2003), and *Maradona* (2007). Therefore, if one were to judge Zhadan by the titles of his books alone, one could well assume that he is quintessentially a canny exploiter of the signifiers of globalized mass media.

Yet such an assumption would sell this outstanding author short, as Zhadan is truly a restless and energetic figure. While some have criticized his work, especially his more recent prose, as perhaps too hastily and roughly written, here too the influence of the American counterculture is a key guiding principle. On the one hand, he seems to take to heart Allen Ginsberg's famous

dictum, “first thought, best thought”¹⁶; on the other, Zhadan’s writing, especially *Anarchy in the UKR*, owes a significant structural debt to Kerouac’s *On the Road*. The paradigm shift in Zhadan’s aesthetics is visible in the name of the authors whom he has been translating in recent years into Ukrainian – an explosive combination of Paul Celan, Charles Bukowski, Marcin Świetlicki, a leading contemporary Polish poet himself much influenced by postwar American poetry, and last but not least, Yaroslav Mogutin, a Russian émigré countercultural and openly queer poet and artist based in New York.

Zhadan’s texts from the 1990s are first and foremost outstanding examples of “the biographical turn” and “new sincerity”¹⁷ heralded in many national literatures after the densely allusive, intertextually playful writing that characterized much of the postmodernist literature of the preceding period. In this respect, despite the provocative title of his first book, Zhadan’s early poetry is anything but citational. Gradually, however, the poet engages in an ever more active intertextual dialogue, at first mostly with well-known figures from earlier periods of Ukrainian literature (Shevchenko, Antonych, Volodymyr Sosiura). Then, the collection *Balady pro viinu ta vidbudovu* (Ballads about War and Reconstruction, 2001) shifts tone and comes to include a series of provocative texts that explore a project of cognitive mapping through mending and molding the space-time continuum, saturating it with Zhadan’s

¹⁶ To be more specific, this phrase, popularized by Ginsberg, was a key principle preached by his Buddhist teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. See Chögyam Trungpa, *First Thought, Best Thought*, intro. by Allen Ginsberg (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1983).

¹⁷ “The biographical turn” as a concept originated in the discourse of social sciences but has since been increasingly used in the humanities as well; it is described as an effort to unite theoretical inquiry or creative endeavors with biographical experience (see e.g., “Biographical Turn,” in Thomas A. Schwandt, *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, 3rd ed. [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007], p. 22). The term “new sincerity” originated in cultural criticism to describe a response to the heavy favoring of an ironic mode by the dominant streams of postmodernist culture. See Jim Collins, “Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and New Sincerity,” in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Ava Collins, Jim Collins, and Hilary Radner (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 242–64. Wikipedia contains a surprisingly detailed entry on “new sincerity” in Anglo-American music, film, philosophy, and poetry at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Sincerity (accessed December 15, 2008). In post-Soviet countries, especially Russia, the term is used fairly frequently in discussions of contemporary literature and art. See e.g., Mikhail Epshtein [Epstein], “Katalog novykh poezii,” in *Moderne russische Poesie seit 1966: Eine Anthologie*, ed. Walter Thümler (Berlin: Oberbaum, 1990), pp. 359–67 (available online at http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/pm_katalog_poezii.html [accessed December 15, 2008]), Valerii Savchuk, “Ideologiya postinformatsionnoi iskrennosti,” *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* 30/31 (1999) (available online at <http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx30/xx3005.htm> [accessed December 15, 2008]).

trademark raw emotionality. Thus, “muzyka dlia tovstykh” (“music for fat people”) imagines Yuri Andrukhovych (b. 1960), a prominent Ukrainian writer of the generation immediately preceding Zhadan’s and the leader of carnivalesque rebellion associated with the Bu-Ba-Bu group and the wider literary phenomenon, as a seventy-year-old resident of a nursing home, “niu-iork fakin siti” (“new york fuckin’ city”) gives us a melancholically observed late-fall urban landscape, and the remarkable longer poem “islam” mounts a powerful protest against war and violence.¹⁸ A lyrical rebel is gradually morphing into a mordantly witty and melancholy poet-philosopher.

An even greater shift, however, takes place after Zhadan’s year-long sojourn in Western Europe (primarily in Vienna) in 2001-2002. His poetry moves ever more radically toward free verse; it is increasingly dominated by impulses of narrativity and, as Andrii Bondar has noted, of cinematic structure.¹⁹ Even more radically, though, Zhadan shifts to prose that joins his trademark emotional intensity with an exploration of a transnational “lost generation” of urban youth that has been feeding the countercultural movements since the punk era in 1970s Britain. The texts comprising his first book of prose, *Big Mak*, are quasi-diaristic, fragmentary, frenetic products of a stream-of-consciousness account of the author’s peripatetic wanderings across the European continent that prompt a rethinking of his identity in the here-and-now of the swiftly changing contemporary world. The novel *Depeche Mode* that followed this first prose effort continued explorations of the stream-of-consciousness technique, but this time filtered through the workings of memory (writing from the vantage point of 2003 about 1993) and the concomitant evolution of the authorial self. Despite the book’s emphasis on the locally grounded setting (Kharkiv and its surroundings), *Depeche Mode* succeeds as a participant in the global cultural dialogue by endowing with a voice a previously unrepresented identity: eastern Ukrainian urban déclassé youth in the early post-Soviet years. The hypnotic flow of its prose contains a ringing testimony of the rise of a critically thinking self in this radically inhospitable environment, evoking a comparison with such classics of fictionalized odysseys through urban underworlds as John Rechy’s debut novel, *City of Night* (1963).

Zhadan’s third and fourth books of prose, both published in 2006, are radically different in structure and style. *Anarchy in the UKR* is comprised of

¹⁸ See Serhii Zhadan, *Kapital* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2006), pp. 613-14, 616, 636-44.

¹⁹ See Andrii Bondar, “Nebesnyi kinematohraf Serhiiia Zhadana,” in Zhadan, *Istoriia kul'tury pochatku stolittia* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2003), pp. 77-87.

several “riffs” on a group of related topics: part one is a Keorucian narrative relating the author’s trip from Kharkiv to Nestor Makhno’s hometown, Huliaipole, with a stopover in Zhadan’s own place of birth, Starobilsk, a small town in the Luhansk region in the east of Ukraine; part two is a collection of the author’s reminiscences of his childhood and teenage years; part three is an exploration of Kharkiv’s main square, where Zhadan headed the tent city of protesters during the Orange Revolution of 2004; and the fourth, final part, consists of ten sketches bearing the titles of the songs (all of them classics of rock music) the author claims he would like to hear at his own wake – a heterogeneous “mix playlist” of mini-stories set in New York, essayistic reflections, and (quasi-)autobiographic accounts. By contrast, *Himn demokratychnoi molodi* (The Democratic Youth Anthem, 2006) is a tightly organized collection of stories where a new incarnation of skaz-like narrative sometimes drips with sarcasm, sometimes approaches prose poems, and at other instances resembles paranoid drug-induced ramblings. The combination of these textual modes serves to describe the roller-coaster world of post-Soviet Ukraine, the striking survival skills of its population, and the impossible criminal schemes and mind-boggling adventures they sometimes generate, as evidenced by colorful, intentionally shocking titles of individual stories, e.g., “Sorok vahoniv uzbetskykh narkotyktiv” (“Forty Train Cars of Uzbek Drugs”) and “Osoblyvosti kontra-bandy vnutrishnikh orhaniv” (“Peculiarities of Smuggling Internal Organs”). Tireless rebel, radical drifter, prolific lyrical chronicler of the violent contradictions of the rapid changes experienced by contemporary Ukrainian society, Zhadan has found a voice and place of global anti-establishment solidarity that informs his writing to a degree unprecedented in the history of Ukrainian letters.

It might not be immediately obvious to a non-Ukrainian reader what a remarkable breath of fresh air it is to read the poems of Andrii Bondar, especially from the 2004 collection *Prymityvni formy vlasnosti* (Primitive Forms of Ownership), his third. Bondar is of the same age as his friend and colleague Serhii Zhadan, yet the two of them exemplify quite different paths of poetic development. While Zhadan’s roots are in the often brutal countercultural rebellion of the Rimbaud – Futurists – Beat poets tradition, Bondar began as a reviver/reinventor of high Modernism cut short by Stalinization of Ukrainian cultural life in the 1930s. In the afterword to his 2001 volume *Istyna i med* (Truth and Honey), Yuri Andrukhovych rightly invokes the names of Lorca, e.e. cummings, and crucially, the early Mykola Bazhan, the author of intense, challenging expressionist poetry (and later, Rilke’s Ukrainian translator).

Bazhan did capitulate to the Soviet regime, but Bondar, Andrukhovych asserts, picked up the lineage of this difficult, “other, desirable Bazhan.”²⁰

Prymityvni formy vlasnosti, Bondar’s latest book of poems to date, is much closer in its tone to the American poets of the New York School (notably John Ashbery), and also to their followers, the group of post-communist era Polish poets known as “the O’Haraists.”²¹ Their “creative misreading” of O’Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler and others is, in turn, “creatively misread” by Bondar. His poems are rooted in the autobiographical here and now, their voice is bold and fresh, refreshingly open, fragile, and unaffected. Perhaps most importantly, Bondar’s new poetry manages to combine, in a truly impressive fashion, the rootedness in all the problems, complexes and neuroses of the post-Soviet/postcolonial double bind, in which Ukrainian culture finds itself, on the one hand, and the emphatic engagement with the processes of cultural globalization, on the other.

Bondar’s poems are uniquely his, and his only, yet they also provide an excellent insight into the hopes and anxieties of the Ukrainian intellectuals of his generation. They are characterized by intimate energy and vigor, and a feature I would describe, borrowing a phrase of Perry Anderson’s, as “a sense of lucid enchantment with the world.”²² Such texts as “Choloviky moiei krainy” (“The Men of My Country”), “Jogging,” and “Tilky ne vidshtovkhui mene” (“Just Don’t Push Me Away”)²³ display a refined, melancholy sensitivity and a remarkable openness to “complex connectivity,” profound emotional kinship with a wide range of others. A similar sensitivity and introspection can also be found in Bondar’s acclaimed short essays that have been appearing as a column in *Hazeta po-ukrainsky*,²⁴ as well as in his diverse translation projects.

²⁰ Yuri Andrukhovych, “Sim istyn stosovno Andriia Bondaria,” in Andrii Bondar, *Istyna i med* (Odesa: Astroprynt, 2001), pp. 57-59.

²¹ For more on these poets, see Joanna Nizyńska, “The Impossibility of Shrugging One’s Shoulders: O’Harists, O’Hara and Post-1989 Polish Poetry,” *Slavic Review*, 66, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 463-84, the bilingual anthology edited by Anna Skucińska and Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese, *Carnivorous Boy, Carnivorous Bird: Poetry from Poland* (Brookline, MA: Zephyr Press, 2004), and *New Polish Writing*, a special issue of *Chicago Review* 46, nos. 3-4 (2000).

²² In his book *The Origins of Postmodernity* (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 76, Anderson uses this phrase to describe Fredric Jameson’s writing.

²³ Andrii Bondar, *Prymityvni formy vlasnosti* (Lviv: LA “Piramida,” 2004), pp. 13-14, 69-71, 55-57. For these and other poems by Bondar in English translation, see <http://ukraine.poetryinternationalweb.org/> (accessed December 15, 2008).

²⁴ Available online at <http://www.gazeta.ua/index.php?rid=38> (accessed December 15, 2008). A selection of short essays by Bondar and three other regular columnists from *Hazeta*

It has not been uncommon for many prominent Ukrainian writers to dedicate significant amounts of energy to translation activities; both in their choice of texts and in their approach to translation they have continued the work of their predecessors who strove to expand the field of Ukrainian letters and effect a paradigm shift in the prevailing approaches and tastes. These efforts proceed sometimes by way of careful nudging, sometimes by open provocation. For Bondar, this has manifested in his work on translating some of the most difficult Polish-language prose, such as Witold Gombrowicz's Modernist masterpiece *Ferdydurke* and *Lubiewo* by Michal Witkowski, an innovative text by a radical homosexual author, for which Bondar had, in essence, to "design" Ukrainian-language homosexual slang. Given the near-absence of homosexual voices in contemporary Ukrainian letters, the turn of Bondar and Zhadan, two heterosexual but homosexual-friendly writers, to foreign queer texts in their translation efforts has thus given a voice to a virtually silent segment of contemporary Ukrainian society. By helping the Ukrainian culture speak in a multitude of diverse voices, they help take the Ukrainian nation-making project to a new level, making it an integral part of a non-hierarchical and open project of cultural globalization.

The lyrical intellectualism of Bondar contrasts sharply with the ironic prose of Natalka Sniadanko (b. 1973). Best known for her 2001 novel *Kolektsiia prystrastei* (A Collection of Passions), which has become a bestseller in several languages, Sniadanko offers a cheeky subversion of numerous stereotypes of choices and behavior, ranging from educational to sexual, expected from a young woman from a "good" western Ukrainian family, particularly in the clash of enduring patriarchal views and a somewhat disorienting encounter with cultural globalization. The success of Sniadanko's highly readable prose, which leads the readers to consider a wide range of social issues by first "hooking" them on with an outspoken discussion of sexuality, follows in the footsteps of Oksana Zabuzhko's famous novel *Polovi doslidzhennia z ukrainskoho seksu* (Field Work in Ukrainian Sex, 1996); however, the tone and style of these two authors' writing could not be more different. Sniadanko's prose pointedly rejects Zabuzhko's emotional charge; the narrator-protagonist's view of the world and of herself in it, while refreshingly skeptical and sarcastic, even a bit aggressive, eschews the utopian impulse at the core of Zabuzhko's novel and opts instead for a distanced, detached perspective. Rather than working through the traumatic experiences, the narrative deflates them

po-ukraïns'ky, Svitlana Pyrkalo, Mykola Riabchuk, and Vitalii Zhezhera, was recently published in book form: *Avtors'ka kolonka: Zbirka eseiv* (Kyiv: Nora-Druk, 2007).

through laughter and a keen feeling for the absurdity that is present in our lives. Sniadanko's later writing has shared these concerns. Her 2005 short story collection, *Sezonnyi rozprodazh blondynok* (Seasonal Sale on Blondes), continues the diverse and observant irony of her debut novel, while her second novel, *Syndrom sterylności* (The Sterility Syndrome, 2006), is an absurdist satire savaging the close-minded provinciality of some Ukrainian intellectuals. Sniadanko's latest book, *Chebrets v molotsi* (Thyme Soaked in Milk, 2008) is a Proustian recollection of the sensory experiences of the author's childhood and youth years where she uncharacteristically forgoes her trademark irony. While Sniadanko's recent original writing has not so far enjoyed the critical success of her debut novel, like many of her colleagues, she has been lauded for actively helping Ukrainian letters through her translation projects. Sniadanko's primary focus as a translator has been on German-language authors, resulting in particular in her acclaimed rendition of Kafka's *The Castle* (2006).

A far more radical instance of gender-inflected engagement with cultural globalization has been provided in the work of another woman writer, Oksana Lutsyshyna (b. 1974). Similarly to Vasyl Makhno, she moved to the US (Florida in her case) in the early 2000s; however, Lutsyshyna has also combined her creative writing activities with academic work, focusing in particular on postcolonial women's writing and producing a comparative study of the work of Zabuzhko and the Algerian author Assia Djebar.²⁵ While she has two previous books to her name, critical recognition came to Lutsyshyna with the near-simultaneous publication in 2007 of two volumes of her writing: a collection of short stories, *Ne chervoniuchy* (Without Blushing), and shortly thereafter, a novel, *Sontse tak ridko zakhodyt* (The Sun Sets So Rarely).²⁶ Lutsyshyna's stories in particular have sparked a lively controversy among Ukrainian critics, as her encounter with assertive feminist writing from around the world led to her own exploration of textuality emphatically grounded in a woman's corporeal experiences, from childhood and the relationship with parents to sexuality, childbirth, and interpersonal relations in all their diversity. The programmatic refusal of "blushing," in other words, of self-censorship guided by restrictive social mores, stems from Lutsyshyna's interest in psychoanalysis, as well as from her keenly felt "complex connectivity" with feminist writing worldwide. She also demonstrates a readiness to deconstruct the stereotypes of femininity and motherhood while confronting the traumatic

²⁵ Available online at http://kong.lib.usf.edu:8881///exlibris/dtl/d3_1/apache_media/72368.pdf (accessed December 15, 2008).

²⁶ Both released by Fakt publishing house.

experiences resulting from the crisis of contemporary masculinity (both Ukrainian and Western). In this respect, while Sniadanko's intellectual position and aesthetics are to some extent a direct opposite of the vision of women's writing that has been championed by Zabuzhko, Lutsyshyna displays a pronounced affinity with her older colleague's aesthetics and cultural politics, pursuing a radical feminist textuality that signals a strongly felt kinship with a vision of *écriture féminine* as articulated by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, answering Cixous's now-classic call, in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," that "woman must write her self" and "put herself into the text . . . so that other women . . . might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs." By "writing her self," Cixous argued, "woman will return to the body that was more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into an uncanny stranger on display," and this process "will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty."²⁷

These interwoven concerns also continue in Lutsyshyna's novel which cuts between the stories of multiple characters, Ukrainian and Western, trying to make sense of their lives and find a meaningful realization of their dreams: one, a university graduate in foreign languages languishing in uninspiring office jobs in a provincial town, trying to escape through dreams of literary success, and finally leaving for graduate studies in the West; another, a small-town ingénue let down by urban experiences; and last but not least, a mafia don's lesbian daughter on the run from her father in the midst of the Everglades in Florida. In the end, the braid-like interweaving of the three narratives produces, like in Lutsyshyna's book of stories, a sober, intriguing, and open-minded vision of contemporary world grounded in women's corporeality.

The focus on the corporeal and the openness to heterogeneous global cultural influences has also been a dominant feature of the work of the youngest writers currently active on the Ukrainian literary scene, the twentysomething *dvokhtysiachnyky* (generation of the 2000s). Among them I would single out in particular Dmytro Lazutkin (b. 1978), who writes energetic elliptic poetry²⁸ while traveling the world as a sports commentator for Ukrainian television, the Kharkiv-based poet and novelist Sashko Ushkalov (b. 1983) whose

²⁷ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), pp. 1090-1102, here 1090-91 and 1093.

²⁸ A representative example: "zabuv pin-kod / i vsi pomerly" ('forgot the pin code / and everyone died'), in Dmytro Lazutkin, *Benzyn* (Kyiv: Fakt, 2008), p. 30.

counterculturally inflected writing confidently follows in the footsteps of Zhadan, several promising young women writers, notably Sofia Andrukhovych (b. 1982), Tania Maliarchuk (b. 1983), and Irena Karpa (b. 1980), and the *enfant terrible* of current Ukrainian writing, Liubko Deresh (b. 1984). The latter two, Karpa and Deresh, have been particularly prolific. Deresh's entry into contemporary Ukrainian literature with the novel *Kult* (Cult, 2001) at the tender age of seventeen sent shockwaves around the country and proved that a major new talent has arrived; he has been publishing prolifically since then, and has been widely translated into other languages as well. Karpa, besides her quasi-autobiographical writing (five books out to date) is also an acclaimed rock singer. Deresh's and Karpa's prose offers a vibrant postmodernist pastiche of naïveté and graphic eroticism, countercultural rebellion and appropriation of mass culture imagery, intertextual play and a provocative simulacrum of confessional narrative. Most importantly, they, like their peers and older colleagues, provide eloquent testimony to the vibrancy, energy, intellectual excitement, and aesthetic pleasure that readers everywhere can derive from contemporary Ukrainian literature – a national literature which in the years since the collapse of the Soviet empire has been eagerly seeking out heterogeneous worldwide affinities to an unprecedented extent, and has endeavored to stake out an impressive presence on the cognitive map of global culture.

How God Paired Men and Women: Stories and Religious Revival in Post-Soviet Rural Ukraine

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Abstract

Religious stories told by Ukrainian women who are active in the revival of village churches seem to be coded protestations against gender inequality. Examination of the narratives in context reveals that they are a way of coping with a shift in authority from civil to religious. Also important is performance. Women feel deprived because they no longer act as celebrants of religious rites, especially funerals and baptisms.

Keywords

Ukraine, religion, gender, reflexivity, post-Soviet, narrative, fieldwork

What does it mean when, as folklore fieldworkers, we ask our respondents for information and they tell us stories instead? What are the people we are studying trying to tell us? By choosing a performance format, what are they trying to do? As Robert Georges and Michael Jones tell us, many unexpected things happen in the course of fieldwork.¹ When it comes to performance, Richard Bauman states:

It is part of the essence of performance that it offers to the participants a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication. Through his performance, the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value his performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. When this happens, the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience – prestige because of the demonstrated

¹ Robert A. Georges and Michael O. Jones, *People Studying People: The Human Element in Fieldwork* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980).

competence he has displayed, control because the determination of the flow of the interaction is in his hands.²

If we follow Bauman, then by choosing to perform a narrative rather than answer questions, my respondents were taking control of the situation. They were guiding the interaction between us and giving me information that they wanted me to hear. And they were trying to involve me emotionally with that information so that it would have greater impact. On a number of occasions I was told stories and they included many types: folktales, legends, stories about house spirits, stories about the return of the dead.³ One category stood out, however. Religious stories, a genre I knew only from books, a genre that I thought had been driven out of existence by Soviet anti-religious campaigns, were told to me time and time again, and by a number of different people. This made religious stories seem especially important, at least in the interaction between my interviewees and me. These stories did have an impact and, following Elaine Lawless in her efforts to let the people that we work with guide our research,⁴ I will examine those stories here.

The story about God pairing men and women was one of the first religious stories that I heard. I first recorded it in 1998 and have recorded it many times since. The story tells about God and the Apostles walking the Earth. In one version, God's companion is John the Evangelist. As they go down the road they see a young woman working in her garden. She is clean and neatly dressed. Her garden is a marvel to behold. All the rows are even and they are free of weeds. The crops are magnificent. They walk further down the road and see another young woman. Both she and her garden are a mess. She is unkempt. Her garden is overgrown with weeds, and she is leaning on her hoe and day-dreaming instead of working. They walk further and see a young man mowing hay. He is handsome and his work is impeccable. As he mows the hay, piles of it fall in neat and even rows. They walk onward and there is another young

² Richard Bauman, *Verbal Arts as Performance* (Prospect Hills, IL: Waveland Press, 1977), p. 43.

³ See my field recordings at <http://projects.tapor.ualberta.ca/UkraineAudio/>. The site contains the sound recordings I made, in indexed form.

⁴ Elaine Lawless, "I Was Afraid Someone Like You ... An Outsider ... Would Misunderstand: Negotiating Interpretive Differences between Ethnographers and Subjects," *Journal of American Folklore* 105 (1992): 302-14; Elaine Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

man. He should be mowing, for a scythe is propped up against a pear tree. But he is lying under the tree gazing up, hoping for a pear to fall in his mouth.

God then asks the Apostles, or John the Evangelist, how these young people should be paired. The Apostles respond that like should go with like, and the industrious woman should marry the industrious man. But God says, no, the industrious man should have a lazy wife and the industrious woman should have a lazy husband. If two lazy people married, God explains, they would both die. This cannot be allowed. But two industrious people together are also not good because such a couple would become very rich and forget God.

I was first told this story by a woman in her sixties, who lived with her daughter and helped take care of her family and an older widowed brother. She was typical of the people who told religious stories. My encounter with her came as a result of the fieldwork practices that I used. The summer of 1998 was the time that I began doing extensive fieldwork in the villages of Ukraine. I had worked in Ukraine several times before, but all my earlier trips were arranged through official government exchanges.⁵ It was only in the late 1990s that I could choose my own itinerary and work in the countryside instead of in archives located in urban centers. My topic was family ritual, the rites connected to marriage, birth, and death. I traveled with a companion, someone from an official Ukrainian institution, such as a museum or an academy.⁶ I paid for the transportation and my companion got a free trip during which she did her fieldwork while I did mine. When we would arrive in a village, we would report to the village authorities, such as the village head, *holova silrady*. We would then ask either the municipal officials or villagers whom we encountered on the street to recommend people who could tell us about weddings and babies and funerals. We were usually directed to women in their sixties or older, who were recognized locally as ritual experts. Many belonged to women's groups, local singing groups that performed at weddings and were generally interested in local culture: songs, stories, embroidery, and other crafts. A number of these groups had become the choirs of revived religious

⁵ During the Soviet period, work outside major urban centers was out of the question. When I was awarded an IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) grant in 1987, I received a list of cities that I could visit and a list of archives that I could use. Deviation from my prescribed program was prohibited. All work had to be done in major urban centers where it could be overseen by officials assigned to track foreign scholars.

⁶ My field partners have been Halyna Kornienko from the museum in Cherkasy (Kraieznavchyi muzei), Oleksandra Britsyna, and Nataliia Havryliuk, both from the Rylsky Folklore Institute of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kyiv.

congregations. Many had been active in the local *klub*, a Soviet educational and cultural institution that became widespread in villages during the Khrushchev Thaw. Where the *klub* had not ceased to function because of the financial difficulties that beset most villages in the 1990s, many of the women's groups continued to meet at and work with the *klub*.

My first trip was followed by many more. I have been going to Ukraine almost annually since 1998. When I visit a new location, I follow the procedure described above. There is also a circuit of villages that I visit regularly. In these villages I am known, and I usually stay with the same people. When I go to these places, I sometimes travel alone, sometimes with family members, sometimes with the people from museums and folklore institutes who were my original field partners. In those places where I have worked previously, I revisit people from whom I have collected materials in the past. Sometimes I find new informants, or villagers themselves invite me into their homes so that I can interview them.

Even with all my experience in the villages of Ukraine, I still remember that hearing my first religious story took me aback. It was not that I failed to see the connection between the narrative and the questions about weddings that I was asking. It was that I expected people to conceal religious knowledge. In the late 1990s the countryside was just opening up to foreigners, and most people were very wary and quite careful about what they told me. Certainly, people were reluctant to admit to knowledge that had been proscribed during the Soviet period, such as various folk healing practices. If someone did tell me about whispering or performing an egg ceremony over a sick child, another person in the room would typically tell the speaker to hush and be careful. The fact that my companion could be seen as a representative of officialdom compounded the problem. Villagers could not guess just how "Soviet" someone from an institute or a museum might be. Therefore, in this context respondent-initiated religious stories were a surprise, and their performance was polished, indicating frequent telling.

My initial encounter with religious stories was followed by many others, both during my first year in the field and especially on subsequent trips. As I learned later, religious stories were typically told by the women who were my respondents either in private conversations in the home or at the women's groups to which many of them belonged. It was there that people shared songs, crafts, and stories, including religious stories. But because these stories were addressed to me, as something I needed to hear, I will examine them, not in the context of the women's groups, but in the context of my fieldwork. I will look at the stories as part of the life of the women who told them to me,

especially their ritual lives, those involved with weddings, and funerals and baptisms, because that was the subject matter of our conversations. In the selection of narratives, I have been guided once again by my respondents. All the stories presented here were told by more than one performer and most were told multiple times, with some performers telling me their stories on more than one visit. I have included all religious stories that were told more than once, leaving out only such narratives as those about a wonder-working icon specific to a particular village.⁷

As someone trained in North America, I first reacted to religious stories as narratives about gender issues. I saw in these stories the “coding” that Joan Radner and Susan Lanser describe when they write that, “in the creations and performances of dominated cultures, one can often find covert expressions of ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings, and attitudes that the dominant culture – and perhaps even the dominated group – would find disturbing or threatening if expressed in more overt forms.”⁸ I wanted to read the story about God pairing men and women as a feminist statement of sorts, an expression of resentment for being burdened with husbands who did not do their fair share of the work. The women who acted as my respondents were typically artistic, creative, accomplished, and hard-working. Some did have laggard husbands, and I wanted to see this real-life situation reflected in the narratives they told. I wanted to see an assertion of female competence and strength. Elizabeth Fine, writing about an Appalachian Lazy Jack story told by a female performer, sees in it the gradual discovery of women’s power as Jack’s wife realizes that she is stronger and faster than him.⁹ I wanted to see a similar discovery of strength and competence in both the religious story summarized above and even more so in other narratives that I heard subsequently. The gender issues are certainly there, as is an attempt to rationalize the economic woes that beset villages after the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ The stories can also be understood as

⁷ An icon of St. Nicholas that had saved a boy from drowning in a well in Ploske.

⁸ Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser, “Strategies of Coding in Women’s Culture,” in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture*, ed. Joan N. Radner (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 1-29.

⁹ Elizabeth C. Fine, “Lazy Jack: Coding and Contextualizing Resistance in Appalachian Women’s Narrative,” *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 3 (1999): 112-37.

¹⁰ In the religious stories, materialism leads to bad consequences. In the story summarized above, two industrious people cannot live together because they would become too wealthy. In the story about God’s visit, a woman refuses to share with the needy. In the story about who should be head of the household, the woman again does not want to share with uninvited

addressing the terrible uncertainty about the future that emerged when savings became worthless and the delivery of medical services ceased. Traditional narratives are typically “multi-functional” and convey many meanings.

As I reviewed my field recordings, however, the discussions that preceded and followed the religious stories made it clear that one very important aspect of these narratives was not female subordination to male authority per se but change in male authority. When it came to ritual life and the performance of rituals, the women who told religious stories were accustomed to dealing with Soviet officials. Suddenly the men exercising authority over them as ritual experts were no longer the *bolova silrady* or the party officer. They were members of the clergy, priests assigned to newly reopened churches. Adjusting to this new form of dominance was one of the reasons for the wide telling of religious narratives, and one of the reasons that they were performed for me. Patricia Sawin says that “esthetic performance is a central arena in which gender identities and differential power based on gender are engaged. It is precisely in performance that these apparently stable identities are either temporarily stabilized through reinstantiation or disrupted and transformed.”¹¹ The problem for the women I was listening to was lack of stability. Identities had changed, not in terms of male domination, but in terms of the locus of power within the male realm. Thus, the women were not trying to reaffirm hegemonic norms or to challenge them. Rather, through the stable, traditional, and seemingly ancient form of the religious story they were trying to come to terms with the new political and social realities.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a situation where there was much joy – and also great distress. In many situations there was nothing that people could do to resolve their powerful and conflicting emotions and calm their fears. Galina Lindquist has written about spirit healers in Moscow. These women and men performed rituals and “conjured hope,” giving people the ability to overcome negative emotions and get on with their lives. Similar healers flourished in Ukraine after the collapse of Soviet power and many still ply their skills.¹² But there were many ways of dealing with change and, for some

guests. This aspect of the religious stories may be connected to the disappointed expectations of prosperity that came with Ukrainian independence.

¹¹ Patricia Sawin, “Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire,” *Journal of American Folklore* 115 (2002): 28–61, here 48.

¹² See Galina Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope: Magic and Healing in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). Several of my acquaintances in Ukraine are such healers. The Ukrainian healing ceremony uses wax in the western part of Ukraine and eggs in the eastern and central

people, it was traditional stories that helped make the emotional adjustment to drastic changes in their way of life. Such is the case with my respondents.

Of the women who were presented to me as village ritual experts, not all told religious stories and not all were interested in religious matters. Among the people to whom I was referred, performers of religious stories were a special subset. They were pious women, who in post-Soviet times were typically involved in the church choir (as a *pivcha*). They acted as an altar guild of sorts, helping to clean the church and maintain the grounds. After Ukraine became independent, when churches were being reintroduced into villages, these women had helped gather ritual towels (*rushnyky*) and icons to decorate the church. When the new clergyman came to town, they had helped set the priest up in a new home and get his household running by donating household items, helping with the garden, and so on.

The groups of pious women did not suddenly come into being with independence and the return of the church. Such women existed as a category in the Soviet period, although they were not referred to by an official title, such as *pivcha*. To understand the position and the functions of these women we need to look at the stories they tell about themselves, something called personal narratives by folklorists. When I began my fieldwork, at first I did not ask about religious activities during the Soviet period because I was concerned that I might cause difficulties for my respondents, either on a personal or an official level. Open expressions of faith were dangerous. As William Noll points out, the church held enormous political sway in the village and also possessed considerable wealth. Both of these factors made it a prime target for Soviet persecution.¹³ Both Noll's interviews and mine show that churches were demolished. Only a very few remained standing and even fewer continued to function. In most of the villages that I regularly visit, churches were pulled down and the building materials recycled. Some churches were converted for other uses. Noll mentions that they were turned into clubs or houses of culture.¹⁴ Some became granaries. This happened to a two-hundred-year-old

parts. The egg ceremony is called *vykachuvannia iaitsem*. Descriptions appear in my interview database. The database is online at <http://projects.tapor.ualberta.ca/UkraineAudio/>. For the wax ceremony, see Sarah D. Phillips, "Waxing Like the Moon: Women Folk Healers in Rural Western Ukraine," *Folklorika* 9, no. 1 (2004): 12–46; Rena Jean Hanchuk, *The Word and Wax: A Medicinal Folk Ritual among Ukrainians in Alberta* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1999).

¹³ Vil'iam Noll [William Noll], *Transformatsiia hromadianskoho suspil'stva: Usna istoriia ukrains'koi selians'koi kul'tury 1920-30 rokiv* (Kyiv: Rodovid, 1999), pp. 269–71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 271–75.

brick and stone church in Yavorivka, a village that I visit often. A floor was put in under the dome and the upper level was used for grain, while the lower level was used for hay. The building is now a church again but grain still continues to drift down from the rafters.¹⁵ Clergymen were arrested, and often not just the priest but his entire family were taken.¹⁶ With this degree of repression, my pursuing the topic of religion did not seem wise.

In many instances, however, people spontaneously told me that religious belief did not suddenly die with the introduction of communist rule or the destruction of churches. On the contrary, faith in God continued for the duration of the Soviet period. While most churches were closed or destroyed, the old wooden church in Velykyi Khutir being the one exception in the villages I know well, private expression of faith was not necessarily banned.¹⁷ If the *holova silrady* was not particularly zealous about enforcing the policy of atheism, people kept icons in their homes. Some fairly ardent supporters of the Soviet system found no contradiction between communism and their religious faith and displayed icons even as they embroidered pictures of Lenin (Zina Ivanivna Litovka, Ploske). Many people went to the cemetery to celebrate religious holidays commemorating the dead, although they did not include religious activities, such as the singing of psalms, in these celebrations.

From the religious point of view, the beginning and the end of life were especially important. While marriages were seldom celebrated in church because a church wedding might have an adverse effect on the careers of the young couple, people did try to be buried according to Orthodox practice and to baptize their children.¹⁸ Noll agrees that weddings were exclusively civil

¹⁵ See <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/uvp/pages/media/churches/index.htm?menu=4-2:5> for a virtual image of this church. Other Ukrainian churches are also on the <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/uvp/> site.

¹⁶ Noll, *Transformatsiia*, pp. 276–78.

¹⁷ In 2007 the Velykyi Khutir church celebrated its 125th anniversary on July 12, the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, to whom the church is dedicated. The celebration was huge and involved clergy from as far away as Kyiv precisely because there are so few churches that have been in continuous operation for this long. A three-dimensional virtual image of the Velykyi Khutir church is available at the URL above.

¹⁸ In Mokhnach I recorded a particularly poignant story about a couple who did not marry because of a conflict over religion. The woman's father wanted her to be married in church, but the young man wanted a civil wedding because he was afraid of damaging his career. The couple arranged a civil wedding, hoping that the father would relent once he saw that everything was in place. He did not and the couple did not marry. They eventually married other people but

affairs. He also gives many examples of sanctions against religious activity, such as threats of dismissal from work or denying children educational opportunities. Whether he was looking for evidence of the destruction of pre-Soviet practices or because he did not inquire about women's roles, he says that baptisms and funerals were not practiced because there were severe sanctions against them.¹⁹ My informants told a different story, often without my prompting. According to them, open religious practice was avoided but, as I was told both by pious women and other individuals, much was done in secret. People would have crosses hidden inside the obelisks called *tumbochky* which became widely used grave markers during the Soviet period. Most of these are hollow, and it is easy to imagine how a cross might be placed inside. People would have the graves of their relatives "sealed" (*zapechatuwaty*) in secret. Normal sealing (*zapechatuwannia*) involves the priest making four cuts in the shape of a cross into the sides of an open grave before the coffin is lowered into it and the grave is covered over. An alternative type of *zapecha-tuwannia* was taking dirt from a grave that was already closed up, carrying it to one of the few churches that were still functioning, and having it blessed. This dirt was then carried back to its source and sprinkled on the grave in the shape of a cross.²⁰ Religious practices included reciting the Psalter over the deceased while he or she lay in the home.²¹ They also included the baptism of children who were surreptitiously taken to churches or baptized in mass outdoor ceremonies conducted in a copse or other secluded place by one of the few remaining priests.

All these references to secret religious practices led me to ask: who and how? The answer was that elderly women, usually the ones who had been part of the choir or the altar guild or were otherwise affiliated with the church and familiar with its rituals, took it upon themselves to do what was needed. With time, the persons who performed religious functions were simply older women, usually in their sixties and older. From the point of view of the Soviet system, these women were marginal and thus not worth persecuting. Whether viewed

ended up working together, so that they were always reminded of the wedding that had not taken place and the life that might have been.

¹⁹ Noll, *Transformatsiia*, pp. 278–80.

²⁰ Natalie Kononenko, "Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine," in *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. John-Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 46–75.

²¹ Noll agrees that religious practice during funerals, as long as it was entirely confined to the home, did take place.

as superstitious persons who clung to old ways and were beyond reeducation or as people who were no longer productive workers and thus could not be affected by any job-related sanctions, older women were outside the Soviet hierarchy – or beneath it. As insignificant people, they could engage in behaviors that were not tolerated in others. Noll, who does not ascribe to women the function of taking over religious services, nevertheless gives an example where an older female family member was instinctively linked to religious practice. In this example, an official was accused of baptizing his children, and his immediate response was to blame his mother-in-law.²² The official experienced further difficulties, but the account says nothing about the mother-in-law, as though she could not be considered a responsible party. Noll's account may not give the woman credit for performing a religious service, but it does assign blame.

Up to this point, I have viewed performance as a desirable thing. It has the power to engage and even to control, as Bauman, cited earlier, states. Sawin, looking at performance as a desired activity, says that women are often barred from it, and if they are not barred, then they are devalued in some way, one typical method being to label them as loose women or even prostitutes.²³ But not all performances are valued in all contexts. From the point of view of Soviet officialdom, the performance of religious acts was a sign of backwardness and a reactionary mentality. It was neither desirable nor powerful; if anything, it put the performer in a bad light. Women may be barred from performances that are prestigious. When an activity is devalued, however, as religion was in Soviet Ukraine, then it can easily pass to the domain of women. In the Soviet period having women perform religious rites was not a threat to the power structure but an enactment of it.

Older women took on religious functions for other reasons as well. In traditional folk practice, in ritual activity that has been recorded since the middle of the nineteenth century and likely predates that period, a great many ritual actions that are not directly related to the church accompany birth and death. All of these were the domain of post-menopausal women. Prior to the introduction of hospitals specializing in delivery (*roddom*), babies were born at home with the assistance of a midwife. The midwife facilitated the delivery and assumed a great deal of ritual responsibility. She was supposed to insure the well-being of the baby in various ways, such as by binding the umbilical cord with the appropriate type of unspun hemp so that the child would have

²²) Noll, *Transformatsiia*, p. 276.

²³) Sawin, "Performance at the Nexus."

children of his or her own. She bathed the child in an herbal bath containing love so that he or she would be loved. She appeared at important events in the child's life, such as baptism and marriage. In some areas, notably the Polissia region, the midwife baked a special kasha (cereal) for the baptismal celebration that was supposed to insure the physical soundness of the child. The midwife was even allowed to act as a substitute priest of sorts in an emergency. If the infant was stillborn or about to die at birth, she could "baptize" the child, essentially by conferring the name Ivan if it was a boy and Maria if it was a girl. In this way the infant avoided the stigma of dying unbaptized, something that meant burial outside the cemetery and without the services of a priest.²⁴

In order to become a midwife, a woman had to have been a mother herself so that she knew about babies. At the same time she had to be past childbearing age so that she would not be jealous of the infants she delivered. The midwife was called a *babka*, a word derived from *baba*, meaning grandmother, and she was seen as a grandmother of sorts. She became social kin to the women she delivered and to their babies, the women becoming social daughters and the infants, social grandchildren. The relationship between the midwife and her clients was analogous to a family relationship. It was subject to incest taboos, and on holidays all of the midwife's "daughters" and "grandchildren" visited her and brought gifts of food.²⁵ The ritual and familial functions of the midwife were deemed so important that, when babies stopped being delivered at home and the *roddom* became the normal locus of birth, the institution of the *nazvana babka*, or designated midwife, was introduced. This woman did not actually deliver the baby, but she did perform the ritual obligations of the midwife.²⁶

The situation with the funeral was similar. Prior to Soviet rule, there was a religious service for the deceased conducted in the home, at the church, or at graveside, or some combination of the three. But there were also many ritual acts that were deemed essential to the repose of the soul but which had little

²⁴ Olena Boriak, "The Midwife in Traditional Ukrainian Culture: Ritual, Folklore, and Mythology," *SEEFA Journal* 7, no. 2 (2002): 29-49; N. K. Gavriliuk [Natalia Havryliuk], *Kartografirovaniie iavlenii dukhovnoi kul'tury (po materialam roditel'noi obriadnosti ukrainitsev)* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1981); Pavlo Chubyn's'kyi, *Mudrist' vikiv: Ukrain's'ke narodoznavstvo u tvorchii spadshchyni Pavla Chubyn's'koho* (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1995), 2 vols.; Kononenko interviews.

²⁵ See the works cited in the previous footnote.

²⁶ Kononenko interviews.

direct connection to the church. These were performed by older women. Pious post-menopausal women washed the body and prepared it for burial. They kept vigil over the deceased while the corpse lay in the home. They helped the family prepare the home for the funeral, cleaning the house and cooking food for the meal served after the burial. They had many magical responsibilities, such as making sure that the water used to wash the deceased was thrown out in such a way that no harm would come to any living creature.²⁷ In the case of the funeral, all women who performed ritual acts had to be post-menopausal because it was believed that contact with a corpse would “deaden” a woman’s reproductive capacity and prevent her from bearing any more children.²⁸ If reproduction can be viewed as analogous to production in the work force, then long before Soviet rule women who were outside the productive sphere were charged with caring for birth and death.

Everything pointed to women assuming religious roles when there was a need for religious services and no clergy to perform them. Older women were outside the Soviet system and not threatened by its sanctions. Many were already affiliated with the church and thus familiar with church ritual. The folk rituals connected to birth and death were conducted by post-menopausal women and had been for as long as we have had ethnographic records. Older women may have been dismissed and denigrated in the Soviet world, but, as marginal people, they had ritual power and could perform religious duties for their fellow villagers in relative safety. Their taking over religious duties was easily accepted by their fellow villagers on the basis of the precedent set by folk ritual. For the women who secretly baptized children and sealed graves in Soviet times, accepting low status in terms of the Soviet world meant gaining status in terms of religion. It allowed them to feel useful, even important, by being able to perform important rituals and meet the spiritual needs of their fellow villagers. William Beeman says that he views “ritual and ceremony as the most serious form of performance, because the consequences for participants result in real and permanent change to the human condition.”²⁹ Thus women who assumed responsibility for religious rites, even when they

²⁷ Chubyns’kyi, *Mudrist’ vikiv*, 2: 189-208; Gavriiliuk, *Kartografrovanie iavlenii*; V. Hnatiuk, *Pokhoronni zvychai ta obriady* (Lviv: Drukarnia NTSh, 1912); Anne Marie Ingram, “The Dearly Not-Quite Departed: Funerary Rituals and Beliefs about the Dead in Ukrainian Culture” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1998); Kononenko, “Folk Orthodoxy”; Kononenko interviews.

²⁸ Kononenko interviews.

²⁹ William O. Beeman, “The Performance Hypothesis: Practicing Emotions in Protected Frames,” in *The Emotions: A Cultural Reader*, ed. Helena Wulff (New York: Berg, 2007), p. 287.

performed only a portion of the ritual, such as reading the Psalter, or enacted a substitute ritual, such as sealing the grave by blessing soil taken from it, were exercising a great deal of power.

Much of this status disappeared when the church came back to the village. On the one hand, women were no longer made fun of for their religious practices. Quite the contrary, their efforts to preserve religion in spite of Soviet dictates were vindicated. After all, the religious faith that women had sought to preserve did survive and the church was reinstated. By the same token, many of the women's duties, many of their performance opportunities, had disappeared. They still had all the folk practices to enact, and they were still asked to wash the corpse and perform the rites of the *nazvana babka*, but now there was no need to baptize children in secret. Babies were baptized openly and young people gladly served as godparents for their friends. There was no need to collect dirt from new graves at night to perform surreptitious *zapechatuvannia*. Clergymen were now available to conduct funeral services and there was no problem arranging for a priest to seal a grave. When religion regained status, men took back the performance of ritual. In religious ritual, the only performances women were allowed were those orchestrated by priests. They could no longer control performance; they sang or recited only when told. On top of it all, women were seldom thanked for the great and sometimes risky efforts that they had made during the Soviet period to keep religion alive. Some of the new clergy even criticized women for resorting to non-canonical practices, for substituting folklore for scripture. Folk belief did indeed thrive. I recorded numerous prayers that had been banned at various points in history. One example is the Dream of the Mother of God that tells how Christ's mother foresees His crucifixion, tells her dream to her son, and then listens as He explicates the meaning of what she has seen. This has been documented as an amulet, as a verbal text, and as an icon³⁰ and, although it is quite innocuous, has been criminalized by both civil and religious authorities as non-canonical.

Especially disturbing for my respondents was the fact that, in some cases, the new priests were not examples of moral rectitude. The need to produce clergymen quickly created problems. Some of the newly ordained priests are wonderful and caring human beings, who are fully dedicated to their parishioners. But this is not true in all cases. In the circuit that I normally visit I heard many stories of misconduct. One priest was said to have a wife in the

³⁰ W. F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (University Park, PA: Penn State Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 298-300.

village to which he was assigned and another back in the city where he had served previously. The sexual indiscretions of another priest were far worse: he was accused of seducing the wife of one of his parishioners and fleeing with her from the village, never to be seen again. Priests were accused of collecting money for renovation projects and other major expenditures and disappearing with it. I was told that they stole the few valuables still left in the village church. In short, most accusations had to do with either sexual misbehavior or with theft.

Accusations of greed and licentiousness seem to be typical when clergymen are criticized. Noll was able to interview some people who recalled the time prior to the persecution of clergy and the demolition of churches. Many told of priests who were stingy or who tried to cheat their parishioners.³¹ It should be noted that the accusations against clergymen which I heard not only took customary form, being similar to the accusations voiced in the past, they were also voiced openly, in ordinary speech rather than through stories. Traditional folktales about clergy misconduct do exist. Classic folk narratives collected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tell of greedy priests who tried to cheat their hired hands and of lustful priests who either seduced their parishioners or tried to force them into having sex.³² But there seems to have been no need to revive these traditional narratives, no reason to emotionally involve me in the censure of this behavior. One reason may be that the misbehavior of the clergy was not so unexpected and, while troubling, not that difficult to handle. It is also possible that the men in power over pious women in the Soviet period, namely municipal officials, were seen to be equally greedy and licentious. The characterization of men in power had not changed and this was not the problem that required the performance of story.

Stories like the one about God pairing men and women might seem at first to be about gender relations within the family only. Indeed, they were often precipitated by my questions about courtship and marriage. But the fact that they typically led to other religious stories and were surrounded by accounts of clergy misdeeds told in ordinary speech indicates that they were something more. The stories parallel the situation in which the pious women found themselves after independence. They show that, just as the industrious woman in the story gets an undesirable man instead of credit for all her hard work, so the pious women who told the story got young and sometimes foolish or even

³¹ Noll, *Transformatsiia*, pp. 261–64.

³² Jack V. Haney, ed. and trans., *Stories of Clever Fools*, vol. 7 of *The Complete Russian Folktale* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006).

immoral priests as a reward for their perseverance. Sometimes they got priests who were more interested in their personal welfare than in the welfare of the church. For women who had preserved the faith through years of ridicule, this was hard to accept. The story allowed them to voice this sentiment in the guise of the logical view of God's human companions, namely that hard work should be rewarded and that those who do nothing should not profit from their sloth. But the story ends with God imposing a solution that reflects Divine rather than earthly wisdom and is beyond logic. Indeed, the post-Soviet world seemed illogical, with the only reward being the one that comes in the afterlife.

The stories that typically followed "How God Paired Men and Women" approached the same issues from somewhat different perspectives, offering a nuanced view. In another favorite narrative, God and St. Peter argue about whether the man or the woman should be the head of the household. Saint Peter says that it should be the woman because women bear children and are responsible for ritual. God says, no, it should be the man. When St. Peter asks why, God promises to show him. St. Peter and God then set out to walk the Earth. When it gets dark, they try to find a place to stop for the night. They ask the woman of the first house they come to for lodging, but she drives them away saying that she does not have enough for herself, let alone guests. They try several more houses and each time the woman of the house drives them away.

The story sometimes ends at this point with the woman's refusal being reason enough for her subordinate position. Usually it goes on to the following episode: It is getting quite dark when St. Peter and God finally manage to convince the woman of the last house they approach to let them stay, saying that they would be no trouble, that they would sleep in the entryway with one on the bench and the other under it, and that their staffs would remain by the door.

They lie down for the night as planned, with St. Peter on the bench and God underneath it. In the morning the woman of the house returns from milking the cow, carrying a bucket of milk. As she enters, she trips over one of the staffs and spills all the milk. Furious, she grabs the staff, pulls St. Peter off the bench, and gives him a sound thrashing. She finally lets him go, saying that she needs to get a rag to mop up the milk. As soon as the woman leaves, St. Peter turns to God and begs Him to switch places because he cannot endure another beating. God agrees and lies down on top of the bench while St. Peter gets under it. The woman returns and starts mopping up the milk. As she works she spots St. Peter and says, "I thought there were two of you!" She then

pulls him out from under the bench and beats him again. When she leaves, St. Peter turns to God and says that, yes, indeed, he agrees that the man should be the head of the household.

A feminist reading of this story is particularly tempting. The narrative is not overtly feminist, of course, since it concludes by asserting that women should be subordinate to men by Divine decree. However, if one follows Radner and Lanser and looks for a seemingly hegemonic narrative with a twist that delivers a countervailing message then, indeed, a feminist point of view does appear, at least to Western eyes. Here it is precisely the strength of the woman that leads to her being assigned a subordinate role. Furthermore, the woman is not only physically strong but assertive. In the version above, she initially refuses hospitality to her visitors. In other versions, God and St. Peter approach the man of the house. He wants to take them in but his wife says no. The man disobeys his wife and lets the travelers stay. The wife, discovering the unwelcome guests in the morning, administers a beating, spilt milk or no spilt milk. The woman in this version possesses a strong and determined character, as well as physical power. In terms of the post-Soviet situation in Ukraine, the story, in whatever version, says that women's strength and determination, displayed in their efforts to keep religion going through the many years of Soviet rule, places upon them the burden of assuming a subordinate position to men – and to the priests assigned to their villages. This narrative allows women to boast of their strength. After all, the strength needed to subdue a saint must be formidable indeed. At the same time it articulates the real situation that women face, namely entering a position where they have to be subservient to male clergy regardless of or, as the story implies, because of, all the fortitude that they had displayed during the Soviet period. The story can be said to allow recognition of women's determination, while also saying that this same strength of character obliges women to do more and to exercise humility.

While the desire for some recognition may be felt by my informants, this hardly makes them feminist. Elaine Lawless, looking at women preachers in Missouri, found that while she wanted to give their strength, determination, and assertiveness a feminist reading, they themselves did not and downplayed their abilities, attributing any accomplishments to the Lord.³³ Religious faith discourages the women I talked to from holding feminist views. Furthermore, in Ukraine and other parts of the Slavic world the myth of the powerful female

³³) Elaine Lawless, *Handmaidens of the Lord: Pentecostal Women Preachers and Traditional Religion* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Lawless, "I Was Afraid Someone Like You."

mitigates against women's rights. Sue Bridger has argued that the pro-natalist policies of the 1970s encouraged women not only to produce biological children, but to mother men, leading men to be irresponsible and blame women for all problems, whatever the cause.³⁴ Marian Rubchak has decried the lack of a feminist movement in post-Soviet Ukraine. According to her view, the double myth of the Christian Mother of God and the pagan Berehynia (protectress) has led women to assume that they must be strong and tolerate everything, placing their own issues and rights in the background.³⁵ Thus talk of strength is not an assertion of women's equality to men. Rather it is used, as in the story, to support women's subordination.

In the village context, subordination seems to have been less of an issue. What troubled the women who told religious stories was uncertainty. Their question was: subordination to whom and what type of subordination? During the Soviet period the situation was clear. The women who read the Psalter and sealed the grave were in an antagonistic position to authority figures, meaning civil officials, and they were subordinate to them in civil matters only. When it came to religion, they were pretty well on their own, subordinate only to the power of God. After Ukraine's independence, the church women were of little or no interest to the village head and other office holders. However, there was suddenly a church hierarchy, both the village priest and higher church officials located in urban centers far away, and they were very concerned with the women. The relationship with them should have been a cooperative one. But it was not always so. When there was antagonism, priests and other church officials sought to establish control over their *piuchi* by accusing them of bringing the folk practices of midwifery and folk burial rites, what had always been the domain of women, into the religious sphere. I witnessed debates over the use of rye berries (*zhyto*) in funerals and the singing of psalms that did not come out of the Psalter. Some clergy found the psalms quite acceptable, and others thought they belonged in the same category as the dream of the Mother of God and other prayers that have been labeled as charms and incantations.³⁶

³⁴ Sue Bridger, "The Return of the Family Farm: A Future for Women?," in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 241-54.

³⁵ Marian Rubchak, "Christian Virgin or Pagan Goddess: Feminism versus the Eternally Feminine in Ukraine," in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, pp. 315-30.

³⁶ One priest who will not be named and who encouraged the singing of psalms changed his mind about them over the several years of my interaction with him, presumably at the direction of his church superiors. Once when I requested an interview on the topic of psalms, he traveled

Much of the debate revolved around written versus oral texts. During the Soviet period, keeping religious publications, such as a Psalter or a Bible, was dangerous. Some municipal officials turned a blind eye to such activities but others did not, and having a religious book in one's home could always become tangible proof of being reactionary and anti-Soviet. As a result, the women who performed religious services relied on oral tradition. Some had hand-copied Psalters, while others had notebooks filled with psalms. Most, however, relied on memory. This opened the door for all sorts of accusations from new clergymen. If women could not produce the written text that they had followed in Soviet times, they could be accused of any number of deviations from the Scriptures. Sensitivity to the power of the written text came up any number of times in my interviews when women would insist that the religious stories they were telling me came from books. They would deny oral sources and insist that what they were telling me was something they had read in booklets circulated by the church. When I asked to see the booklets, they were either lost or given to a friend, or borrowed from a friend and then returned. I do not doubt the existence of such booklets and thought I had even found one³⁷ until I saw that none of the religious stories in it matched the ones I was hearing. While the stories may have appeared in print at some point, the fact that all of the ones mentioned here are international tale types attested in Ukrainian and other folk traditions indicates that they are oral in origin and that the booklets may have drawn on oral sources for the texts that they produced.

While the women's insistence on their having drawn their religious stories from church publications is an assertion of their validity, it also speaks to a measure of doubt about what constitutes reliable information. Religious stories themselves speak powerfully to the issue of not knowing what is holy and what is not. Folk narratives typically carry multiple meanings, and the story about why the man should be the head of the household is as much about not knowing, or being unable to recognize, what is holy as it is about gender relations. The woman in the story beats St. Peter, and, in some versions, God as well because she does not recognize them. Her failure to realize that these are heavenly personages leads her to behave as she does. The implication is that, had she known better, she would not have behaved so arrogantly and would

to the nearby urban center to consult with his superiors, after which he would no longer discuss this topic.

³⁷ M. K. Dmytrenko, ed., *Ukrains'ki mify, demonologija, lehendy* (Kyiv: Muzychna Ukraina, 1992).

not have lost her dominant position in the household.³⁸ The inability to tell what is right and what is wrong beautifully characterizes the confusion of the post-Soviet world, and not just in terms of recognizing the sacred. For seventy years people were told that the communist system would lead them to a glorious future and that capitalism was the bane of the workers' existence. Now the market economy was the ideal toward which Ukrainians were urged to aspire. For seventy years being religious was considered superstitious and backwards. Now the church was back and the clergy were men of high standing, but some of the priests were hard to recognize as religious men. What is more, what was proper religious practice was open to a great deal of doubt. Some of the very prayers that women had preserved in oral form because keeping books, such as a Bible or a Psalter, was dangerous were now being called non-canonical folk incantations.

A woman's failure to recognize the true nature of holy things is pivotal to the following story. Often called "How God Came for a Visit," it tells of a very pious woman who wants to see God. She prays and asks God to let her see Him. One night she hears God's voice and He says, "Tomorrow I will pay you a visit." The woman is delighted. The next day she cleans and cooks as much as she can. Midmorning there is a knock at the door. She opens it to see a sorry-looking young woman standing on the doorstep. The stranger asks for something to eat and the woman of the house chases her away saying, "I have nothing for you. Can't you see that I'm expecting an important guest?" The housewife then goes back inside and waits for God. A few hours pass and there is another knock at the door. This time it is a bedraggled man, who holds out his hand and begs for something to eat. The woman drives him away, too, saying that she has nothing to give because she is expecting an important guest. The woman waits and waits. Toward evening there is a third knock. This time it is an old beggar with a staff who requests food. The woman says, "What is this? What brings all of you today of all days? I have nothing to give you. I'm waiting for an important guest." And she drives the beggar away. Midnight comes and the woman starts to pray to God, asking Him why He did not come as promised. God answers, "I came to you three times today and each time you drove me away."

This story, too, has multiple meanings. On the one hand, it articulates the dilemma of trying to figure out what truly is religiously correct. On the other

³⁸ This story is often entitled "Why Women Lost Their Rights." See Jack V. Haney, ed. and trans., *Russian Legends*, vol. 5 of *The Complete Russian Folktales* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 68-69.

hand, this story speaks to the need to respect the lowly. Just as the woman of the story fails to recognize God when he is in the guise of the destitute visitors, so the women who accepted low status and even mockery during Soviet times so that they could perform religious services may feel that they are unrecognized. The story allows them to utter a plea for acknowledgement of the important work that they did.

But it was not just lack of recognition that was troubling or even one's own inability to discern who was what; it was a powerlessness to do anything. At least during the Soviet period the women had an active role, and now that role was taken away. Frustrated desires to take action are the subject of another religious story. This one also starts with God and St. Peter traveling the Earth. As it grows dark, they start to look for a place to stay. They come to a farmstead, where the man of the house tells them he would be happy to have them stay except that his wife is in labor and will soon give birth. God and St. Peter see a driver with his oxcart standing in the yard. They say to the man that, if it is alright with him, they will just sleep under the oxcart; all they want is some shelter so as to be safe from attack by dogs.

God and St. Peter go to sleep under the oxcart. In the middle of the night a light comes on in the house. God says to St. Peter, "I think our mistress has given birth. Go look through the little window near the stove and you will see the fate of the child." When St. Peter comes back, "Well, what did you see?" asks God. Saint Peter says that the woman has given birth to a fine and healthy boy but that the boy will drown on his wedding day.

The oxcart driver is lying in his cart the whole time, listening to this conversation. He does not know that it is God and St. Peter talking. The next day he goes to the house and tells the new parents that he wants to be the godfather of their child. The parents argue at first, saying that he is from far away and will not be able to be a real godparent. But the man swears that he will be the best godparent possible. Also, it is a sin to refuse a "first-met" godparent, a person who wants to perform this office for your child. So the parents agree and the oxcart driver becomes their son's godfather. The man does as promised and fulfills all his duties.

The young man grows up strong and healthy. His wedding day arrives. The godfather comes to the wedding. He checks everything and makes sure that the river is far away. The only water that he sees is in the well, so he covers it up with canvas and then hammers plastic over it just to make sure.³⁹ The

³⁹ This is an example of a thoroughly modern touch added to an old, traditional story that has been recorded since the nineteenth century.

wedding proceeds smoothly. Everyone goes outside. Suddenly there is a down-pour. The drunken groom slips and falls and drowns in a puddle.

Here, knowledge does no good because even if someone knows a child's fate and even if that fate has been revealed by God Himself, humans are still powerless to alter what must be. There are many other interesting aspects to this story. This is the only narrative where the central human protagonist is male rather than female and, with the switch in gender, the story inverts other messages. Knowledge is not connected to power here. The male oxcart driver may have knowledge, but he is powerless nonetheless. Approached from this perspective, the story downplays the knowledge that men (or newly ordained priests) may claim. The clergy may be properly trained, as opposed to the women who performed religious functions during the Soviet period. And they may assert that this is canonical knowledge, derived from God, but its source does not affect the course of human life regardless.

This story is distinctive in other ways. While it is framed as a religious story in this telling, it is more widely known as a narrative connected to midwifery. In most versions, the midwife, hurrying to assist the birth, makes the mistake of looking through the little window by the stove and sees the ill fate of the child she is about to deliver.⁴⁰ Upset by the prospect of losing the boy on his wedding day, she does everything she can to save him. He drowns nonetheless and it is usually in a well, something that the oxcart driver takes extra precautions to cover. If it is correct that women's ritual functions, such as those of the midwife, helped set the precedent for women assuming religious roles in Soviet times, then this story says that, had men taken over women's ritual functions the way women took over men's, they would have been no more effective.⁴¹ And men did take over, or rather take back, ritual performance, not during Soviet times, but when religion was reinstated. If the story about God coming for a visit expresses doubt in women's knowledge, this story extends the doubt to men. A slight variation on this reading would be to equate women's folk practices with religion. This reading would emphasize that St. Peter does not decree the fate of the child but merely foresees it, the way a midwife might. Accordingly, male religious figures have no greater knowledge and no greater power to alter the future than female ritual celebrants.

⁴⁰ Boriak, "The Midwife," p. 34.

⁴¹ The close parallel between the midwife story and the religious story here would indicate that contemporary performers of the religious story are familiar with the older midwifery narrative. It is especially telling that the oxcart driver takes special precautions with the well, the locus where the groom drowns in most midwife stories.

The link between the content of religious stories and the situation in which pious women found themselves in post-Soviet Ukraine is clear. But why did the women need to express their issues through stories, and why did they need to tell them to me? Contemporary folklore scholarship demands reflexivity, being aware of one's position in the data collecting situation.⁴² If I look at my role in the complex interactions of doing fieldwork in post-Soviet Ukraine, I can see three reasons for my being the target of religious stories. One reason is the performance factor that I have emphasized throughout this paper. With the return of clergy to villages, women were deprived of important and valued performance venues. They sought substitute performance venues, and acting as competent tellers of religious stories before people in positions of prestige, as I, being a foreigner, and my companion from an official institution or institute certainly were, did much to affirm their competence in the religious sphere. When two women, such as a professor from the West and a folklorist from an important Ukrainian institution, found their stories valuable, my respondents received the affirmation that they sought. Another important factor was access to written text. The clergymen newly assigned to villages often criticized the various substitute religious services that the women had performed during the Soviet era for being folk instead of canonical, and the women for following oral tradition instead of scripture. As an educated person writing books and articles based on the information I collected from my respondents, I provided a gateway to the world of the published text. I would put the things that the women told me into written form. I would quote their words and they would appear in print. I remember going back to Yahotyn and showing my respondent the chapter in a book based on her descriptions of the afterlife.⁴³ She cried and kept repeating: "My words, my words!" and ended up forcing on us a large quantity of vegetables from her garden to thank me for publishing her words about matters of faith. The third reason is that, like the religious stories the women told me, I encapsulated the situation that the women were trying to deal with, acting almost as an embodiment of transition. I am a member of the Ukrainian diaspora. My parents left Ukraine and I was born in a displaced persons camp in Germany. Fluent in Ukrainian, I am neither Canadian- nor American-born. Yet, because I grew up in the United States and now live in Canada, I am part of the West and of North American

⁴² Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. DelNegro, "Bauman's Verbal Art and the Social Organization of Attention: The Role of Reflexivity in the Aesthetics of Performance," *Journal of American Folklore* 115 (2002): 62-91.

⁴³ Kononenko, "Folk Orthodoxy."

culture. Thus, I represent the past because my family left Ukraine a long time ago, and the future because I am from the West, the locus of the capitalist system on which Ukraine is to model its new self. If the women whom I was interviewing could involve me emotionally in their lives through performance, as they did, if they could control the interaction between us through their assuming the role of performer instead of respondent, as they did, then perhaps they could take control of their lives in the very turbulent and confusing post-Soviet world. If in some small way I facilitated their dealing with Ukrainian independence, then I can be proud that I gave something in return for the powerful religious stories that my respondents shared with me.

Appendix 1: List of Narrators

Dziuba, Nina Antonivna, b. 1938, Yahotyn, Yahotyn region, Kyiv oblast, interviewed June 5-6, 2000. Joined on the second day by Khodorivska, Nina Arsenivna, b. 1936.

Knukhalo, Marfa Yakymivna, b. 1905, village of Domantove, Zolotonosha raion, Cherkasy oblast, interviewed August 13, 1998 and 2001.

Kobets, Olha Mykhailivna, b. 1941, village of Dobranychivka, Yahotyn raion, Kyiv oblast, interviewed in 2000 and subsequently.

Kompanets, Yevdokiia Serhiivna, b. 1914, village of Ploske, Nosiv raion, Chernihiv oblast, interviewed 2000 and subsequently; her stories also appear in O. Britsyna and I. Golovakha, *Prozovyi fol'klor sela Ploske na Chernihivshchyni: Teksty i rozvidky* (Kyiv: Instytut mystetstvoznavstva, fol'klorystyky i etnologii im. M. T. Ryl's'koho NANU, 2004).

Krasovska, Yevdokiia Fedosivna, village of Svidyvok, Cherkasy raion, Cherkasy oblast, interviewed August 16, 1998.

Kryvorit, Oksana Fedirivna, b. 1918, village of Velykyi Khutir, Drabiv raion, Cherkasy oblast, interviewed 1998 and many times subsequently.

Latysh, Polina (Paraskeva) Yakivna, b. 1927, village of Iavorivka, Drabiv raion, Cherkasy oblast, interviewed 2000 and many times subsequently.

Levchenko, Tetiana Oksentivna, b. 1923, village of Korolivka, Makariv raion, Kyiv oblast, interviewed November 10, 1998.

Litovka, Hanna Serhiivna, b. 1915, village of Ploske, Nosivka raion, Chernihiv oblast, interviewed May 22, 2000.

Perepechai, Motria Andriivna, b. 1923, village of Ploske, Nosivka raion, Chernihiv oblast, interviewed in 2000 and many times subsequently. Her stories are also in Britsyna and Golovakha, *Prozovyi fol'klor*.

Pidhaina, Tetiana Stepaniva, b. 1927, village of Yabluniv, Kaniv raion, Cherkasy oblast. Interviewed August 18, 1998.

Shakun, Maria Mykytiva, b. 1940, village of Kropivne, Zolotonosha raion, Cherkasy oblast, interviewed August 11, 1998.

Shkliar, Hanna Vukalivna, b. 1916, village of Vovchyk, Lubny raion, Poltava oblast, interviewed June 14-15, 2000.

Shtyka, Antonina Mykolaivna, b. 1927, village of Yablunivka, Bila Tserk-va raion, Kyiv oblast, interviewed November 11, 1998.

Vashchenko, Kateryna Pavlivna, b. 1929, village of Korolivka, Makariv raion, Kyiv oblast, interviewed November 9 and 11, 1998.

Zaets, Olena Ivanivna, b. 1938, village of Lytviaky, Lubny raion, Poltava oblast, interviewed June 12, 2000 and subsequently.

Appendix 2: How God Paired Men and Women

Recorded from Motria Andriivna Perepechai, in Ploske, Nosiv raion, Chernihiv oblast, June 23, 2000.

Ну, це ... Євангелія оце ... про ці же, як Бог паровав. Дак з Євангелія Івана Богослова.

Бог їхав з Іваном, з цим Богословом, прямо по дорозі і даже коняка нарисована це у цій, оцей Біблії цій.

По праву сторону косить косар, красивий, молодий. А косить красиво (і косар нарисований), замашка така, дай Боже. А ... заді од його женщина так далеченько, така здорова, пузата і ... сидить, очі вилупила і сидить, а він косить. А вона сидить, нечого не робить.

А по другій стороні лежить такий лодар, нечого не робить, пузатий, гидкий і назва йому кучерявий Мацько. І водить, похитує, так рот роззявив пуд грушею, і водить, шоб йому рот ... шоб сама груша в рот упала, ви поміаєте, шоб упала в рот. Ну ж він, уже так водить головою, а на його стороні молодая дівка, красіва і така похватна жне жито. У два ряди лежать за нею снопи.

Дак Бог і каже: Ну як ми будемо, Іван Богослов, судить як ми парувати(мем) людей?

А Іван каже: Ваша Божа сила, як Ви хочете, так і паруйте.

А Бог каже: Ні, ти скажи Іван.

І він каже: Я так ... оце як гарного цього косаря да й отого женця (ту дівку) гарну, женщину. Це буде пара таких людей і од їх розмножця плем'я гарних людей. А оцього кучерявого Мацька (що грушу ловить, шоб в рот упала) да оцю, каже, товсту гладку дівку – це будуть старці і буде половина людей гарних, а половина таких.

Ні – попаровать так (це Бог каже): гарного косаря і ... оту гладку дівку. І поганого цього Мацька і гарну (дівку), гарного женця, оцю дівку.

Отак!

Appendix 3: Human Fate

Recorded from Evdokiia Fedosivna Krasovska in Svidyvok, Cherkasy raion, Cherkasy oblast, August 16, 1998.

Ну так вони пішли далі. Ідуть і йдуть, заходять у двір. Там чумак стоїть, воли, все, і на це ... а вони просяця, він і каже, чоловік:

– Я б пустив, та в мене жінка осьо, не сьо(го)дні-завтра буде рожать.

– Ну, вона ... то й рада, але ж чоловік(и), то, наче, невгодно ...

А вони кажуть:

– Та не нада нам, ми (чумак на возі), а ми під возом, аби шоб собаки нас не розгри(зли) ...

Так вони й зробили. Лягли, а цей же, Бог, і каже Петрові:

– Петре, дивись, засвітилося, у вікно, мабуть, наша хазяйка рожає.

Піди, – каже, – подивися, тіки в передпичне вікно, ти побачиш судьбу.

(Коли дитя родиця, тоді і судьба його родиця, шо вже йому на роду написано, не збіжить той человек ніде, ніколи. Ото кажуть, аби туди не пішов, аби туди не поїхав, ніго(го) не буде.)

Ну, Петро пішов, подививсь да й каже:

– Знаєте, – каже, що (не назива, що Бог), знаєте, шо, родився, – ка,

– син, богатир, але ж, – каже, – він під час свадьби втопиця.

– Як утопиця?

– Втопиця, – каже (а ... цей же каже, Бог).

(Ну, а цей же ж, шо на возі, чує, ну, не зна, шо це Бог, вони не називають, от ... не називають, хто). А він ... Оце ж сказав, та ці подякували зайшли, та поздравили із новонародженим та й пішли.

А цей же, шо оце чумак, та й каже ж:

– Я буду вашим кумом! – (Як оце ж ви й казали, встречний – до збирачів).

А вони ж:

– Та ви далеко живете, та нам шоб і дитинка знала ...

– Я хоч і далеко, але ж я буду справляця лучче, чим хто близько.

А вони ж і думають: “Боже, встречного беруть же!” От, а це ж од хреста не можна відказаця, коли набиваюця, й коли просять. Ну, й согласились.

Ну, й багато років пройшло, і як уже цей став син жениця, він свої обряди справляв, батько хрещений, приїжджав, справляв, обряди, от, і ... приїхав на свадьбу, все проверив, води поналивав, річки нема близько, нічого нема, колодязь – оббив, накрив брезентом, оббив пластиком, ну, таким, і всьо, він уже упруго зделав, уже і в колодязь не впаде, *він* уже вверений, шо йо(го) хрещеник все, – спасьон буде, ото ...

Коли ж де ... пили, гуляли, ви(й)шли, танцюють, гуляють, коли хмарка, тучка, – як лине ливень, як пішов дощ, і молодий підсковзаєця, головою води напиваєця. І вмірає.

І от доля, судьба і доля, человек рождаєця, і судьба з ним рождаєця, як би ти не хотів ...

Ну шо я хочу на цьому сказать, як на закінчення, шо Господь Бог і Петро, от, Петро согласився, і каже:

– Однине й повік: нехай глава буде сем'ї чоловік, а жена да покориця мужу.

Отак воно і состоїть.



Olha Kobets (far right) aids the new priest at a baptism by singing.



Yevdokiia Krasovska shows the contents of her funeral bundle.



Motria Perepechai shows the coat that she made.



Soviet era grave markers in the village of Lytviaky.



Sealing the grave in Ploske.



Orange Harvest?: Women’s Activism and Civil Society in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia since 2004*

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Abstract

Rising authoritarianism throughout post-Soviet countries has met with responses ranging from small-scale revolts to “electoral revolutions.” This article analyzes women’s activism to explore the impact of domestic political opportunity dynamics on the trajectory of civic organizing in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. The extent and form of state repression are shown to affect the development of women’s activism by influencing the number, scope and capacity of women’s nongovernmental organizations.

Keywords

civil society, women’s activism, Orange Revolution, electoral revolutions, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, NGOs

Introduction

Numerous recent studies that explore the development of public life in post-Soviet countries have come to the same conclusion: that despite a common experience of rising authoritarianism starting in the 1990s, civil society is stronger and more vibrant today in Ukraine than it is within this country’s closest neighbors, Russia and Belarus. This essay explores the consequences

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of divergent trajectories of civil society development for overcoming longstanding cultures of powerlessness that are one of the legacies of Soviet rule. It also analyzes the new civic cultures that are emerging in these three countries, asking how the Orange Revolution has shaped opportunities for civic engagement.

How does a healthy civil society open up space for articulating new rights? Scholars often assume that the strength of local civil society is an important mediator of efforts to empower marginalized groups of citizens and influence how the government addresses their needs. Public organizing and other forms of civic engagement are widely thought of as activities through which groups whose concerns are excluded from policy agendas can overcome “the problem of the powerless” and begin to develop the capacity to break through and develop political leverage.¹

When socialist states first began democratizing, domestic and foreign observers placed much hope in the growing power of civil society. There was widespread agreement that such new local associations as Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and Solidarity in Poland were building a new democratic social order. At first, the prospects for such groups seemed excellent in other post-communist contexts. But the revolutions of 1989 brought Western-style liberal democracy only to the western rim of the former communist world (central Europe and the Baltics). Much to everyone’s disappointment, over the following decade civil societies remained weak outside this core. Hope was renewed by a new wave of “colored revolutions” that spread from Serbia in the Balkans (2000) to Georgia in the Caucasus (2003) to Ukraine in Eastern Europe (2004) and finally to Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia (2005). Opposition movements and civic groups elsewhere, including Belarus and Russia, attempted to imitate these “electoral revolutions” but failed.

Accounts of the ongoing weakness of post-Soviet civil societies point to multiple sources. These include cultural attitudes that promote political apathy or cynicism among the broader population, poorly designed Western aid programs and corruption among aid providers and recipients, inadequate

¹ The following analyses of the “problem of the powerless” are particularly relevant to clarifying the dilemmas post-Soviet populations now experience: Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994); and Michael Lipsky, “Protest as a Political Resource,” *American Political Science Review* 62, no. 4 (1968): 1144–58.

access to resources to sustain new civic groups, as well as weak or incomplete legal and institutional mechanisms for civic as well as more broadly political activities.² Arguably, state resistance is the most important factor that has deterred the development of civil society and the consolidation of democracy in post-Soviet countries. Many domestic political regimes have resisted democratization and moved steadily in an authoritarian direction. Incumbent elites viewed new civic groups and political parties as their chief competitors. They have attempted to eliminate, infiltrate, or co-opt them through what theorists have called “preemptive authoritarianism.”³ Rather than undergoing transitions to democracy, such post-communist states as Ukraine under Kuchma and Russia under Putin became “hybrid,” or what Levitsky and Way call “competitive authoritarian” regimes, in which elections are regularly held, but “incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results” while spying on, threatening, arresting and in some cases, assaulting or murdering journalists and other government critics.⁴

² Strong, autonomous civic associations are believed to offer individuals and social groups channels through which to represent their interests in public life and before the state. Most civic associations in post-Soviet states are in the early stages of formation – they are contending not only with the pervasive cultural legacies of fatalism and civic disengagement that are the result of compulsory participation in Soviet official associations, but also with extreme uncertainty about basic resources needed to sustain an organization. There are few domestic funding sources for NGOs in part because post-Soviet countries have no established culture of philanthropy, but also because businesses and wealthy individuals as well as state agencies have few incentives to consistently fund civic groups. Consequently, most NGOs are only intermittently active and devote a great deal of their time to securing funding from abroad, mainly from Western foundations but also from international and regional civil society development projects. However, dependence upon foreign funding has had many negative effects on local civil society. For an analysis of the impact of foreign funding on NGOs in postcommunist countries, see Sarah Elizabeth Mendelson and John K. Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002).

³ See Vitali Silitski, “Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus,” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (Oct. 2005): 36–51; and *idem*, “A Year After the Color Revolutions: Preemptive Authoritarianism and Challenges for Democratization in the Former Soviet Union” (Georgetown University Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia [PONARS] 2005), PONARS Policy Memo No. 376, www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/pm_0376.pdf (accessed March 31, 2009).

⁴ For an elaboration of the theory of competitive authoritarianism, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 51–65.

Below, I use the women's movements in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia as sites for examining variations in the impact that preemptive authoritarianism and electoral revolutions have had on new civic associations in these countries. I focus on women's activism for three related reasons. First, many Western observers consider there to be a strong association between democratization and the strength of women's groups, treating the latter as an important barometer of the former. Second, as a consequence of such beliefs, women's groups in post-Soviet countries have received considerable encouragement and support from Western benefactors and international democracy observers. Lisa Sundstrom, for instance, argues that, "women's NGOs [non-governmental organizations] are an important sector to observe in Russian civil society" because they afford a context for analyzing the impact upon the capacity for self-organization of citizens not only of the activities of post-Soviet state authorities but also Western donors.⁵ But third, and perhaps most important, women's activism is useful for exploring some of the reasons why three neighboring countries that emerged from a common political order are now developing different civic cultures. Comparing the impact of different patterns of civil society development upon women activists in these three countries helps bring these new cultural differences into sharper contrast.

Post-Soviet authoritarianism and colored revolutions

The early 1990s were a time of great optimism regarding post-Soviet democratization. Government elites exhibited openness to mobilization by civic actors and relaxed prior restrictions on political life throughout the region. But by the end of the 1990s, with the exception of the Baltics, all post-Soviet countries had become noticeably more repressive, although to varying degrees. State repression of civic groups ranged from more moderate and intermittent in such countries as Ukraine and Moldova, to extreme in Belarus and later, Russia.

The political regimes that developed in Ukraine under President Leonid Kuchma, Russia under President Vladimir Putin and Belarus under President Aleksandr Lukashenka (prior to 1997) were competitive authoritarian.⁶

⁵ Lisa Sundstrom, "Women's NGOs in Russia: Struggling from the Margins," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 10, no. 2 (2002): 207-29.

⁶ See Lucan A. Way, "Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine," *World Politics* 57, no. 2

Incumbents competed against opposition groups for power. But while elections were regularly held, they were increasingly unfair. Incumbents manipulated their results by relying upon slanted coverage in the media and abusing state resources to coerce voters in state institutions, particularly prisons, hospitals, and military bases. Power holders at first used repression selectively against their critics and relied mainly on softer methods. However, over time, incumbents began to apply both hard and soft forms of repression more systematically and “preemptively.”

In 2004, state authorities in Ukraine initiated such a crackdown on civic groups, the media, and opposition politicians in order to rig the election that was to determine who would succeed Leonid Kuchma as president at the end of his second and final term of office. But this preemptive wave of repression backfired. When the regime announced that its handpicked candidate had won the election, it met with a massive outpouring of public protest in what came to be called the Orange Revolution. More than twenty percent of the adult population of Ukraine – over a million in downtown Kyiv alone – participated in this impressive display of nonviolent civil disobedience and people power.⁷

The Orange Revolution was widely interpreted as “the triumph of civil society” over Ukraine’s authoritarian regime.⁸ While it is debatable whether civil society itself was as strong and vibrant as observers of the inspirational displays of protesters on the Maidan (Kyiv’s central square) suggested at the time, after the Orange Revolution state authorities lifted preexisting administrative barriers to the functioning of civil society. Something close to a consensus has developed among international monitoring groups that since the Orange Revolution and the election of Victor Yushchenko citizens face few limits on their freedom to form groups concerned with civil rights or political opposition; that significant advances have been made regarding the freedom of citizens to hold political demonstrations; and that significant steps have also been made to diversify the viewpoints offered in the media. Most notably, progress

(2005): 231-61; and Lucan A. Way, “Kuchma’s Failed Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 131-45.

⁷ For an estimate of public participation in the Orange Revolution, see Viktor Stepanenko, “How Ukrainians View Their Orange Revolution: Public Opinion and the National Peculiarities of Citizenry Political Activities,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 4 (2005): 595-616.

⁸ See Nadia Diuk, “The Triumph of Civil Society,” in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. A. Aslund and M. McFaul (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), pp. 69-84; and Taras Kuzio, “The Opposition’s Road to Success,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 117-30.

has been made in removing direct censorship at the national level and in the press.⁹ Furthermore, state authorities at the national level have opened up more channels of cooperation with civic groups. And in contrast to the past, authorities no longer publicly accuse civic groups that criticize the government of serving as agents of Western governments. In short, the president elected through this electoral revolution has in fact discontinued many of the authoritarian practices of his predecessor. This is not to say that there are no violations of human rights and civil liberties in Ukraine.¹⁰ Monitoring groups, such as Freedom House, consider Ukraine to be a “hybrid regime,” in which some authoritarian elements remain but significant progress toward building democratic institutions can also be observed.

As “electoral revolutions” spread, speculation started that such protests would soon be imitated by opposition groups elsewhere, leading to the defeat of autocratic regimes in other countries, including Ukraine’s two closest neighbors, Russia and Belarus. But instead, repression significantly intensified in these countries as regime elites responded to the threat of “colored revolutions” with renewed preemptive authoritarianism against domestic opposition groups, human rights observers, and journalists, all of whom had already been subjected to increasing state repression in prior years.¹¹ Power holders also began to systematically restrict the activities of Western democracy and civil society programs, which were seen as having provided crucial support to domestic opposition groups that participated in successful electoral revolutions.¹² In other words, rather than spreading “colored revolutions,” electoral

⁹ Not only Freedom House but also many other monitoring groups have noted that the Ukrainian government now respects freedom of association and related civil liberties. See, for instance, “Ukraine,” *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine> (accessed November 8, 2008).

¹⁰ For an analysis of human rights violations in Ukraine, see “Ukraine,” *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2007 (Events of 2006)*, http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&td_id=4387 (accessed November 8, 2008). See also, “Universal Periodic Review of Ukraine,” *Human Rights Watch’s Submission to the Human Rights Council* (5 May 2008), <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/07/global18583.htm> (accessed November 8, 2008).

¹¹ The Russian government has restricted civil liberties and harassed civic groups since Vladimir Putin first came to power in 2000. For an overview, see Freedom House, “Russia,” *Freedom of Association under Threat: The New Authoritarians’ Offensive against Civil Society* (Freedom House, 2008), <http://www.freedomhouse.org/> (accessed November 16, 2008).

¹² For discussions of the crucial role of Western democracy programs, see Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, “International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 283–304; and Andrew Wilson,

revolutions in these cases triggered an autocratic backlash that further weakened civil societies and consolidated authoritarian rule.¹³

In Russia and Belarus, an immediate consequence of post-Orange Revolution preemptive authoritarianism was the development of new laws that allow state agencies “legally” to harass, persecute, or extort cooperative behavior from critics of the regime. For example, in 2006 a new law on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was passed in Russia. The 2006 Law on NGOs obligates foreign as well as domestic NGOs to submit extensive reports on their planned activities for the upcoming year, and enables authorities to shut them down if they appear to deviate from Russian “morals” or engage in activities that are judged to threaten the country’s national security. Since this law’s adoption, state authorities have used this law to subject both recipients and donors of foreign grants to increased scrutiny, particularly those organizations that are accused of promoting “anti-Russian” or “foreign values.”¹⁴ State authorities have also made clear that in the near future, they expect Western donors to leave the country and the state to become the main source of funding for domestic civic groups.

The new law has introduced stringent oversight of both domestic and foreign NGOs by the Federal Registration Service, a branch of the Ministry of Justice. This administrative structure has refused registration to thousands of civic groups and considers two thirds of the NGOs now registered in Russia to be in non-compliance with the law.¹⁵ The Registration Service has used the

“Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, NGOs, and the Role of the West,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2006): 21–32.

¹³ As a consequence of the general deterioration in the Russian state’s observance of democratic norms that has occurred since the Orange Revolution, in 2005 the monitoring group Freedom House changed the status of Russia from “partially free” to “not free.” Freedom House now considers Russia to be a “partially consolidated authoritarian regime” and expresses concern that state campaigns have the potential to transform Russian civil society into an extension of the state. It classifies Belarus as being a “fully consolidated authoritarian regime” and notes that “institutions securing the absolute presidential control over state, society, and the electoral process remain fully in place.” See Freedom House, “Democracy Score 2008 Rankings by Regime Type,” <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=438&year=2008> (accessed November 12, 2008).

¹⁴ See “Russia,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007*, released by the U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100581.htm> (accessed October 25, 2008). See also “Russia,” *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/russian-federation> (accessed November 8, 2008).

¹⁵ See “Nations in Transit 2008: Russia,” released by Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/> (accessed October 25, 2008).

NGO law as a pretext for harassing civic groups, in particular, those that monitor abuses within the armed forces, security service, and police.¹⁶ It also temporarily suspended the activities of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Republican Institute and more than 90 other foreign nongovernmental organizations.¹⁷ Extremely brutal harassment – including violence – has also been used against individual critics of the government, several of whom have been killed. Media smear campaigns reminiscent of the Soviet era have also been unleashed to de-legitimate opposition candidates and their supporters.¹⁸ Observers have interpreted all of these as preemptive efforts to prevent a domestic “colored revolution.”¹⁹

In Belarus, the regime’s crackdown on civil society was even more severe than in Russia. The Belarusian state has long subjected representatives of civic groups to extreme harassment, including physical attacks, arbitrary detention, and, occasionally, disappearances. Since the Orange Revolution, it has placed even greater restrictions on civic groups and intensified its pressure on opposition activists. In 2005 a new law was passed that in most respects resembles the Russian Law on NGOs. It requires NGOs to comply with extensive registration and reporting procedures, largely prohibits acceptance of foreign assistance, and allows authorities to deregister a group for minor administrative infractions. Numerous civic groups have disbanded or been deregistered. The groups that have managed to remain registered are in large part controlled by the government and engage only in activities condoned by state authorities. The operation of human rights organizations has become nearly impossible due to extreme harassment by security officials and other state authorities and new laws that impose sentences of up to two years for criticizing the government.²⁰

¹⁶ “Russia,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007*.

¹⁷ See RusData Dialine – Russian Press Digest, November 8, 2006, <http://www.lexisnexis/> (accessed April 21, 2009).

¹⁸ See “NGO Activist to File Lawsuits,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines*, Febr. 1, 2006.

¹⁹ See Thomas Carothers, “The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 2006; Yevgeny Volk, “Russia’s NGO Law: An Attack on Freedom and Civil Society” (The Heritage Foundation, May 24, 2006), <http://www.heritage.org> (accessed December 18, 2008); and James Sherr, “The Implications of Russia’s Elections: Relations with the ‘Near Abroad,’” released by the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden, April 2008, <http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/pp/08/js08implications.pdf> (accessed December 26, 2008).

²⁰ Public criticism of the government at home or abroad is no longer legal. Amendments to the criminal code introduced in 2005 call for harsh sentences for “discrediting the Republic of

The “colored revolutions,” particularly the Orange Revolution, marked a critical juncture for democratization in these three states, yielding greater openness to civic engagement and Western influence in Ukraine, but resulting in an authoritarian assault upon civil society and Western aid providers in Russia and Belarus. Since the Orange Revolution, authorities in both Russia and Belarus have created new legal as well as extra-legal measures to restrict the activities of civic groups. In such “managed democracies,” civic groups that publicly challenge the government are deterred by a broad range of obstacles that significantly raise the cost of civic engagement. The principal problems that civic actors face in such authoritarian contexts include: the state’s adversarial stance toward domestic civic groups and government critics, who are now the targets of considerable repression, particularly at election time; the state’s effort to starve civic groups of the crucial resources they need to sustain themselves; and the legal and regulatory environment, because new administrative and reporting policies allow the state to exert significant control over civic organizations. New laws are being used in both countries to limit the activities of non-state actors in public life. Civic groups can be shut down if they are accused of threatening “national values.” We would expect participation in public life to shrink in such a hostile political environment, as local elites “preemptively” crush the building blocks of civil society.

Within Ukraine, by contrast, state authorities attempted to repress their opponents and critics in a similar fashion but failed. Mass participation in the Orange Revolution forced the opening up of the political system. State authorities must now express greater tolerance and openness toward receiving input from civic groups, out of fear for what might happen if citizens once again draw together to overthrow their leaders. We would expect that this favorable shift in political opportunities, together with the public’s recent experience of successful civil disobedience, might contribute in Ukraine to a cascading

Belarus.” According to the new law, providing international organizations with “false information” on the human rights situation in Belarus is punishable by up to two years in prison. According to the IREX Media Sustainability Index assessment of freedom of speech in Belarus, “Amendments to the criminal code were introduced in December 2005 to add a new article, “Discrediting the Republic of Belarus,” that provides for criminal liability for submitting to international organizations “false information” on the situation in the country. Human rights groups, both domestic and international, believe the article’s vague wording makes it possible for the government to penalize anyone reporting negative information with detention of up to six months or imprisonment of up to two years. See “Belarus,” MSI Europe & Eurasia 2008: The Development of Sustainable Media in Europe and Eurasia (IREX, 2008), http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/2008/belarus.asp (accessed January 6, 2009).

process of “cognitive liberation” that would further open up the political system to new demands by groups that had previously remained political marginal. To determine how the Orange Revolution has reshaped citizens’ efforts to articulate interests and be heard, I next turn to examine the dynamics of women’s organizing before and after this event.

Women’s activism in Ukraine

The pattern of organizational development and political influence among women’s rights organizations in Ukraine resembles pan-Soviet trends. But it differs in key respects from Belarus and Russia as well as other post-Soviet cases. Just as in other post-communist countries, intellectuals and government leaders have promoted a local cult of domesticity and motherhood.²¹ It is expressed through a myth of the heroic, suffering Ukrainian woman (the *Berehynia*, or Hearth Guardian).²² This cult has created a strong foundation in public discourse for coding politics as a masculine endeavor. In contrast, women’s activism and, more broadly, civil society, are both coded as feminine.²³

Yet, domestic political elites have chosen to pass a number of laws and policies to secure equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace, protect women from gender discrimination, and promote equal involvement of men and women in the family. These efforts are not the result of a strong and united women’s movement fighting for such measures. Gender equity legislation has been promoted by a small group of domestic women’s rights NGOs that represent a tiny minority of the country’s numerous women’s groups. The reason why this policy trajectory has been pursued is that the lawmakers and government leaders who backed the Orange Revolution also support Ukraine’s entrance into the European Union (EU), which requires prospective members to harmonize their legislation with EU laws, including gender equity

²¹ Kathryn Verdery, “From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs – Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 8, no. 2 (1994): 225–55.

²² For a discussion of the cult of the *Berehynia*, see Marian Rubchak, “Christian Virgin or Pagan Goddess: Feminism versus the Eternally Feminine in Ukraine,” in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 315–30.

²³ Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 91–108.

directives.²⁴ The gradual victory of Western-leaning political forces in this country has consequently created greater openings for advocates of policies to protect women's rights.

Numerous new women's organizations emerged in Ukraine in the 1990s.²⁵ There were three main channels of recruitment into women's activism. The first was the Communist Party apparatus and, in particular, the Union of Women of Ukraine, the post-Soviet successor to the official Women's Council of the Soviet era.²⁶ The second was the independence movement, Rukh and its successors.²⁷ The third was Western initiatives to raise women's issues, such as the Soros-financed International Renaissance Foundation's Women in Society Program, the USAID-financed US-NIS Women's Consortium, and the UNDP's Project for Equal Opportunities.

The women's movement appeared in the early years of independence to be weak, disunited, and dominated by conservative voices.²⁸ No women's party succeeded in winning seats in parliament (in contrast to Russia, discussed further below). Indeed, there was no parliamentary women's caucus bringing

²⁴ Indeed, well before the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yushchenko and other Western-leaning policymakers began to support equal opportunity and gender mainstreaming policies, in the hope that this would help advance the country's case for entering the EU.

²⁵ The number of women's organization registered with the state increased from 575 in 1997 to 992 in 2000. See Oleksandr Sydorenko, "Zhinochi orhanizatsii Ukrainy: Tendentsii stanovlennia" (Kyiv: Center for Innovation and Development, n.d.). Available at <http://portal.uwf.kiev.ua/> (accessed December 15, 2008)

²⁶ After the Soviet Union collapsed, the women's councils' leadership established the Union of Women of Ukraine (Spilka Zhinok Ukrainy). Women's councils were dissolved throughout western Ukraine, but many regained their footing. Several later split off and reemerged under new names, typically in partnership with new politicians, political parties, and political party blocs in eastern and southern Ukraine that viewed women's issues as potential sources of electoral support.

²⁷ Women became active in Rukh out of anger over the Soviet state's cover-up of the Chernobyl nuclear accident and the mistreatment of Ukrainian soldiers within the Soviet military, and also in order to aid the revival of the Ukrainian language and traditions. After independence was achieved, the Women's Council was reestablished under a new name, the Union of Women of Ukraine. Meanwhile, some of the independent movement's women leaders began to develop agendas of their own, differentiating themselves from other groups and identifying new concerns for women as a population.

²⁸ See Solomea Pavlychko, "Between Feminism and Nationalism: New Women's Groups in the Ukraine," in *Perestroika and Soviet Women*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 82-96; and Solomea Pavlychko, "Progress on Hold: The Conservative Faces of Women in Ukraine," in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 219-34.

together lawmakers interested in women's issues.²⁹ Most women's organizations embraced a "maternalist" style of activism that focuses on improving the welfare of children or families. Several of the most publicly visible women's organizations took their inspiration from past forms of civic activism involving women in nation building rather than in campaigning for their rights. Atena Pashko, the wife of Rukh founder Viacheslav Chornovil, became the first leader of the Ukrainian Women's Confederation (Soiuz Ukrainok), which was based on an eponymous organization dating from the pre-Soviet era. Local scholars categorize such groups as "traditional" women's organizations to indicate that they do not challenge the gender system.³⁰ The Ukrainian Women's Confederation, for instance, openly expressed skepticism about whether feminism was relevant to furthering the political interests of Ukrainian women, who, Pashko argued, had been oppressed more by the consequences of statelessness and colonization than by Ukrainian men. Organizations espousing such a nationalist agenda grew in public prominence in the 1990s. As the regime became more concerned about controlling the outcomes of elections, women's groups that were allied closely with President Kuchma were also employed during election campaigns to influence voters by distributing

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of women's political representation, see Alexandra Hrycak, "Gender and the Orange Revolution," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 23, no. 1 (2007): 152-79.

³⁰ The designation "traditional" was widely used in this way by those I interviewed in Ukraine. It is also the main designation used by the primary local scholars of women's activism in Ukraine. It is used, for instance, in the only scholarly monograph that examines the role of different forms of women's activism in Ukraine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Liudmyla Smoliar [Lyudmyla Smolyar], ed., *Zhinochi studii v Ukraini: Zhinka v istorii ta shohodni* (Odesa: AstroPrynt, 1999). The vast majority of women's groups fall into this category. They typically focus on the welfare of children and families and view women's activism as an extension of maternal carework. Among the best known of these are such groups as the Soiuz Ukrainok (Union of Ukrainian Women) and soldiers' mothers organizations, but several other less publicly visible groups that were offshoots of Rukh and have remained closely allied with center right political parties and politicians also fall into this category. For explorations of the role motherhood and maternal values play in motivating participation in several different women's organizations, see Sarah D. Phillips, "NGOs in Ukraine: The Makings of a 'Women's Space?'" *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 18, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 23-29; Sarah D. Phillips, *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine: Development and the Politics of Differentiation* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008); Alexandra Hrycak, "Foundation Feminism and the Articulation of Hybrid Feminisms in Post-Socialist Ukraine," *East European Politics and Societies*, 20 (2006): 69-100; and Alexandra Hrycak, "Seeing Orange: Women's Activism and Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35 (Fall-Winter 2007): 208-25.

gifts to needy children and hosting events representing their party's commitment to family values. These efforts were intended to attract voters away from the Western-leaning political blocs that were vying for power against Kuchma.

In the mid 1990s, young scholars also laid the foundations for the first women's and gender studies centers and women's rights groups.³¹ But women's rights activism initially lacked public influence and made little impact on state policy. This changed in the late 1990s, as new access points were created by the rising political prominence of Western-leaning domestic political parties as well as by international pressure on Ukraine to address its worsening human rights record.³² A key initial outcome of these advocacy efforts was the passage in 1999 of new legislation against human trafficking that was viewed positively by international observers.³³ A second crucial outcome was the 2001 passage of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, the first legislation of its kind in the former Soviet Union.³⁴

Initially, few steps were taken to promote gender equity legislation and implement policies to protect women's rights. Several initial drafts of equal opportunity legislation were introduced in the Rada by Western-leaning lawmakers, but all were rejected due to the opposition of conservative lawmakers aligned with the left, who argued that Ukraine could not afford to adopt Western-style laws that placed women's equality before children's

³¹ Solomea Pavlychko, the daughter of Rukh leader Dmytro Pavlychko, helped to found the Women's Community (Zhinocha Hromada), which articulated commitments to both national liberation and women's rights. She and other Rukh-allied intellectuals went on to establish Ukraine's first gender studies centers.

³² Politicians such as Viktor Yushchenko, who, as prime minister from 1999 until 2001, began looking for ways to move Ukraine closer to joining the EU, learned that prospective members must show respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and harmonize their legislation with that of the EU. Domestic women's rights organizations that worked in close partnership with international organizations on anti-violence campaigns were very eager to help them start the European harmonization process through new policies protecting women's rights and laws based on gender equity principles.

³³ Olga Pyshchulina, "An Evaluation of Ukrainian Legislation to Counter and Criminalize Human Trafficking," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 403-11.

³⁴ The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence calls for the state to provide funding to nonprofit crisis centers, shelters, hot lines, and other facilities that provide medical and social rehabilitation services to victims of domestic violence. It specifies conditions under which temporary restraining orders are to be issued. It also requires perpetrators of domestic violence to attend training sessions on non-violent behavior patterns.

welfare.³⁵ Implementation of the provisions of the law on domestic violence prevention also did not occur at first. For instance, the law requires the government to operate a shelter and to support crisis centers in every major city, but in practice, during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, municipal authorities failed to do so. The few shelters or crisis centers that existed had been established prior to the law's passage through Western grants and supplementary funding from municipal authorities that were sympathetic to women reformers.

The situation changed for the better soon after the Orange Revolution brought Western-leaning political elites into power. After President Yushchenko assumed office, state authorities increased the number of state-run hot lines, shelters, and other forms of practical support for victims of domestic violence. They also opened six new shelters for victims of domestic violence, eighteen new crisis centers that provided a wide range of services to women going through crises, such as divorce or domestic violence, and twenty-four new centers for psychological and medical assistance. Gender equality legislation was passed, and gender advisory bodies were created within government ministries in order to provide expertise from women's rights groups on how to further harmonize Ukrainian and EU policies. Women's and human rights groups also were given the opportunity to discuss the shortcomings of the implementation of laws and policies with lawmakers and state authorities through a Parliamentary Hearing on Gender Violence held in November 2006.³⁶ In February 2007, the Ukrainian parliament held the first discussion of a new draft law to amend the law on domestic violence to bring it in line with the recommendations made by women's rights advocates and Amnesty International.³⁷ The Rada passed this law in 2008. The amendment was heralded by women's rights activists as an important step forward for protecting women from violence, as it deleted language which could lead women to be blamed for provoking violence, and thus permit perpetrators to avoid prosecution. The improved public climate has not resulted in a dramatic new wave

³⁵ A draft law "On the equal rights of men and women," prepared by the Gender Initiative Group of the Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada) with the participation of lawyers and women's NGOs, was first submitted in 2001 but failed to pass.

³⁶ Women's rights advocates were concerned by the lack of state support ensuring adequate short-term and long-term alternative housing for victims of domestic violence as well as elements of the original law that they deemed harmful to women.

³⁷ "Ukraine," *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine> (accessed November 8, 2008).

of women's activism. But the Orange Revolution appears to have encouraged a revival of interest in feminism, particularly among the "Orange Generation" of young women who participated actively in the Orange Revolution. Since the Orange Revolution, new forms of feminist-inspired women's activism have emerged within and around universities. In Kyiv, dramatic street theater performances have been used by a newly established group of university students, FEMEN, to publicize the impact of human trafficking on Ukrainian women. Discussions of feminism have entered public intellectual forums where feminism was treated with ridicule in the past. Courses exploring gender issues have been taught at every level of the educational system, including secondary schools. Women's and gender studies perspectives have been added to the university curriculum in such fields as American studies, sociology, journalism, and Ukrainian history. New gender textbooks have been published for use in a variety of academic programs.³⁸ Engagement with feminist principles is now reflected in discussions that young Ukrainian women and men conduct in various public contexts, including Internet sites and listservs (while only a few sites and listservs are devoted exclusively to feminism or gender studies, informal but in-depth and lively discussions of feminism and such issues as gender equality and women's reproductive health are now becoming common on Ukrainian discussion boards on LiveJournal). A new genre of creative writing called *zhinoche pysmo* (women's writing) has vastly expanded discussions among intellectuals of the complex, contradictory situation of women in Ukraine. And a new field of scholarly literature has come into existence that uses a gender lens to explore popular culture, Ukrainian literature, the women's movement, and the role of women in Ukrainian nation building and contemporary politics.

Women's activism within Russia

Efforts by women's NGOs to challenge gender subordination and engage women as citizens have experienced mixed success in Russia.³⁹ Several

³⁸) A 2004 gender studies text that was given an official stamp of approval (*bryf*) by the Ministry of Education is now officially recommended for use by all universities, where it is inspiring spirited discussions of whether it is better than comparable Russian-language sources. See Marta Skoryk, ed. *Osnovy teorii genderu: Navchal'nyi posibnyk* (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2004).

³⁹) See Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999) and Lisa Sundstrom, "Women's NGOs in Russia: Struggling

thousand women's groups have been established. Among the earliest groups were organizations of mothers concerned with the violent abuse of military conscripts. Hundreds of new groups were registered annually in the 1990s. Some of these have focused their activities on defending the rights of women or addressing long-ignored issues, such as domestic violence, although many more focus primarily on providing aid to families, particularly needy children.⁴⁰

Two distinct cohorts of women's activists became involved in challenging neotraditional laws. Women's rights activism, focused explicitly on improving the status of women, first emerged in the early 1990s within universities and academic institutes. In 1988, a small group of young scholars employed by the Russian Academy of Sciences founded the League for Society's Liberation from Stereotypes (LOTOS). In 1991, LOTOS became the basis for the Moscow Center for Gender Studies. That year, women representing the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, and over forty other new women's groups held the First Independent Women's Forum. The Forum was the first women's conference organized independently of the state. In 1992, the second such conference hosted five hundred women from nearly seventy groups.

A second and somewhat older cohort of women's activists emerged from Soviet official women's organizations. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, official women's organizations reorganized. In 1993, their leaders founded the Women of Russia party (WOR). The party won 8 percent of the vote and 22 seats in the Duma. WOR employed a neo-Soviet discourse focused on protecting motherhood and the family. Nevertheless, once it entered the Duma, WOR initiated important legislation to defend women's rights.⁴¹

from the Margins," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 10, no. 2 (2002): 207-29.

⁴⁰ Alexandra Hrycak, "From Mothers' Rights to Equal Rights: Post-Soviet Grassroots Women's Associations," in *Women's Community Activism and Globalization: Linking the Local and Global for Social Change*, ed. N. Naples and M. K. Desai (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 64-82.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the Women of Russia party, see Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia* and Amy Caiazza, *Mothers & Soldiers: Gender, Citizenship, and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Caiazza argues that the Women of Russia party and the Union of Russian Women, which utilized the national motherhood frame, focusing on the traditional cultural gender roles of women, took up much of the institutional space in Russia to women's organizations. Other groups employing different frames, such as the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, felt they had to work around them. Nonetheless, despite their differences, in the 1990s these two wings of the women's movement participated side-by-side in the articulation of crucial new policies and laws.

In 1994, for instance, WOR introduced the first draft law on the prevention of domestic violence. When conservative lawmakers later proposed changes to the Constitution and new policies that threatened to curtail women's rights (for instance, by defining the family, not the individual, as the basic unit of law), WOR proposed amendments and often succeeded in staving off curtailments of women's rights. But in 1995, WOR lost nearly all of its seats in the Russian Duma. At first, legislation continued to promote women's rights. In 1997, for instance, the chair of the Duma Committee on Issues of Women, Family and Youth, introduced the Legal Framework on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities, outlining legal strategies for achieving equal rights and opportunities for men and women. But later reforms stalled.

In the mid-1990s, despite considerable ideological differences, these two wings of the women's movement both worked on key legislation to strengthen women's rights and participated in shaping the government's policies dedicated to improving the status of women in the country.⁴² But as the country's political system became more closed and autocratic, the women's rights agenda became more marginal in public life and also lost its earlier political salience. Under the presidency and then premiership of Vladimir Putin, a pronatalist, nationalist discourse has become a central determinant of state policy toward women.⁴³ Rather than acting as an independent force representing women's interests, Women of Russia merged with Putin's party, United Russia, which has controlled the Duma for several years. Conservative lawmakers belonging to United Russia have introduced new restrictions on abortion and announced plans to introduce laws on behalf of "fetal rights." Women's rights organizations have done little to publicly challenge such moves.

Rising conservatism among lawmakers and growing state regulation of civic groups have made it more difficult to raise women's rights issues within state agencies. Women's advocates have not been able to draw the attention of state authorities to the issue of domestic violence, which for nearly fifteen years has

⁴² The 2001 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concluded that in Russia, women "had taken an active part in the reform process, resulting in the expansion of the women's movement, especially over the past three years. Women's non-governmental organizations had participated in all major national events and discussions on socio-economic and political issues." See "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations: Russian Federation (2002)," <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/cedaw/russia2002.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁴³ Janet E. Johnson, "Gender under Putin," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Convention, August 30, 2008.

been a central focus of many women's advocacy NGOs.⁴⁴ More than forty drafts of a civil law against domestic violence have been rejected by the Duma.⁴⁵ State funding of crisis centers and hotlines has been promised by state authorities, but remains woefully inadequate.⁴⁶ There are roughly twenty-five crisis centers and six shelters providing support for victims of violence. Not only are there too few such organizations to serve a population of 142 million people spanning eleven time zones, nearly all are NGOs. As foreign funding opportunities decline in response to Putin's new policies to discourage Western funding, and the rising conservatism has closed off earlier political access points, women's rights NGOs face an uncertain future. In 2007, the NGO Anna National Center for the Prevention of Violence reported that 22 of the 170 domestic violence prevention groups it works with in Russia had closed, primarily owing to lack of financing.⁴⁷

Western donors have helped women's NGOs develop and become more professional.⁴⁸ They have created institutional space for numerous women's initiatives, including gender studies centers, hot lines, and crisis centers. Through their support, representatives of the Russian women's movement have established ties with Western women's rights groups. Academics conduct research and advocacy work that contributes to understanding gender issues in

⁴⁴ Janet E. Johnson, *Gender Violence in Russia: The Politics of Feminist Intervention* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Russia," in *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence Against Women, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, Submitted in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/52* (New York: United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2006), p. 378.

⁴⁶ According to Amnesty International, in 2007 "Government support for crisis centers and hotlines was totally inadequate. No measures under Russian law specifically addressed violence against women in the family." See "Russia," *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/russian-federation> (accessed November 8, 2008).

⁴⁷ "Russia," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: 2007*, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100581.htm> (accessed November 14, 2008).

⁴⁸ Explorations of the impact of Western initiatives on women's activism conclude that, in some cases, they have also led to an artificial inflation in the number of women's groups, for instance, by encouraging the establishment of "paper organizations" by individuals who simultaneously operate several different organizations in order to maximize funding streams. Laura A. Henry refers to these as "NGIs," or non-governmental individuals. See Laura A. Henry, "The Greening of Grassroots Democracy?: The Russian Environmental Movement, Foreign Aid, and Democratization" (Berkeley, CA: Working Paper, Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Univ. of California at Berkeley, 2001), p. 10.

Russia. NGO professionals also provide new social services to help women and families. Through their support, Russian women's activism has sustained itself despite an inhospitable political climate.

Women's activism in Belarus

Women's organizations' efforts to challenge gender domination and empower women as civic actors have experienced little success in Belarus since the late 1990s.⁴⁹ Around forty non-governmental women's organizations have been founded to date in this country, twenty at the national and twenty at the local level.⁵⁰ The first new organization was the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers,

⁴⁹ For the most current information on women's rights activities in Belarus, I have relied on a 2005 report from the government of Belarus to the United Nations. See "Information from the competent bodies in the Republic of Belarus concerning the implementation of Commission on Human Rights resolution No. 2003/45," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/Belarus.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2009). I have also reviewed Amnesty International, "Belarus: Domestic violence – more than a private scandal" (Amnesty International, 2006), <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur490142006> (accessed December 26, 2008). It is difficult to get more current information because Belarus has not been conducting reports on its treaty compliance and obstructs the activities of human rights observers. Belarus is required to submit periodic reports detailing its compliance with and implementation of several international conventions that concern women's rights. Its First Periodic Report regarding the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict was due on February 25, 2008 and is overdue. The country's Fifth Periodic Report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was due on November 7, 2001 and is overdue. The country's Fourth Periodic Report on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was due on June 30, 1999, and the Fifth Periodic Report was due on June 30, 2004. Both are now overdue. Its Seventh Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was due on September 3, 2006 and is now overdue. The country's Fourth Periodic Report on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was due on June 25, 2000 and the Fifth Periodic Report was due on June 25, 2004. Both are overdue.

⁵⁰ See United Nations in Belarus, "Belarusian Women as seen Through an Era" (no date), <http://un.by/en/publications/thema/belwomen/19-02-04-4.html> (accessed October 29, 2008). See also Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirtieth session, "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (continued), Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6; CEDAW/PSWG/2004/CRP.1/Add.1 and CRP.2/Add.1), Summary record of the 643rd

focused on protecting military conscripts from hazing. In 1991, after the Soviet Union's collapse, the official women's organization (the Belarusian Committee of Soviet Women) renamed itself the Union of Women in Belarus. The Belarusian Popular Front served as a second crucial channel through which women entered public life. Women who first became active within the front later went on to establish or join new women's organizations as well as human rights organizations, such as the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.⁵¹

The peak of activity among women's organizations was the second half of the 1990s. During this time, programs funded by various Western governments, private foundations such as the Belarus Soros Foundation, and the United Nations Development Program acted as incubators for the country's nascent women's movement. With their assistance, in the mid- to late-1990s new women's organizations were founded. Conferences, seminars, and other public events were held to assess the status of women and examine gender discrimination in the workplace, domestic violence, and other problems that had been taboo in the Soviet era. New projects were developed to bring Belarus into compliance with its international treaty commitments regarding women's rights.

In the late 1990s, state repression intensified against civic associations and critics of the government. Harassment by state authorities forced the Soros Foundation to leave the country, cutting domestic groups off from a main source of funding. Women's rights projects continued to exist, despite increased restrictions, but made little impact on the state's handling of gender issues. For instance, in 2003 a draft law against domestic violence was developed by domestic advocates with assistance from UNIFEM. It called for measures that were consistent with the state's policies as well as with its neo-Soviet gender ideology, which define the state's main aim as protecting women in their capacity as mothers.⁵² However, this law was never passed because there was insufficient support among lawmakers for addressing the issue of domestic violence. In a 2004 review, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination

meeting held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, January 23, 2004, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵¹ See Valentina Kovtun, "Belarusian Women Defend Human Rights and the Environment," *Give and Take: A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 6, <http://www.isar.org/pubs/GT/GT2-1.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2008).

⁵² Amnesty International, "Belarus: Domestic Violence – More Than a Private Scandal," <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR490142006> (accessed October 29, 2008).

of Discrimination against Women noted that Belarus had made little progress toward meeting its commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as “any initiative to promote gender equality and equal rights comes up against traditional, stereotypical concepts of the role of women as being confined to the family, while professional activities are widely considered to be unfeminine or anti-family.”⁵³ Similarly, Amnesty International reports, “official documents and policies tend to reinforce the stereotypical view of women as mothers and wives rather than individuals in their own right.”⁵⁴

Since the Orange Revolution, women’s organizations have been subjected to systematic harassment by state authorities.⁵⁵ The government’s increasingly adversarial stance toward civic groups and their main sources of foreign support has compelled women’s advocates to cease, narrow, or redirect their activities to bring them into conformity with the government’s increasingly traditionalistic gender politics.⁵⁶ Since 2005, the United Nations Development Program – the main remaining local source of support for the women’s movement – has discontinued its activities promoting gender equality.⁵⁷ The

⁵³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirtieth Session, “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (continued), Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6; CEDAW/PSWG/2004/CRP.1/Add.1 and CRP.2/Add.1), Summary record of the 643rd meeting held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, January 23, 2004, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵⁴ See “Draft law,” in Amnesty International, “Belarus: Domestic Violence – More Than a Private Scandal,” <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR490142006> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵⁵ For an analysis of these difficulties, see “Belarus,” in *Women 2000 – An Investigation into the Status of Women*, International Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=1456 (accessed November 12, 2008).

⁵⁶ See “Obstacles faced by NGOs,” in Amnesty International, “Belarus: Domestic Violence – More Than a Private Scandal,” <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR490142006> (accessed October 29, 2008); see also Yuri Zagummenov, “Belarus Civil Society: In Need of a Dialogue” (Belarus Support Centre for Associations and Foundations, Civicus, 2001), p. 11, <http://www.civicus.org/new/media/belarus.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2008).

⁵⁷ “Women’s Empowerment” is one of the seven focal areas of the UNDP in Belarus. However, no new activities have been initiated to promote gender equality in Belarus since its earlier projects were concluded in 2005 and 2006 (see <http://un.by/en/undp/focus-areas/women/>, accessed April 1, 2009). Harassment of Western aid providers intensified at that point. In 2006, for instance, foreign women’s rights advocates from Sweden, Lithuania and Ukraine were detained and the organizer fined for organizing a seminar on gender equality in Belarus. See

government has permitted relatively few Western women's projects to remain active. Several small-scale international projects provide social and psychological services to victims of violence and human trafficking.⁵⁸ In the capital, one shelter and crisis center assists women and children who are the victims of violence.⁵⁹ There is also a mini-shelter for women victims of trafficking, with a capacity of two. It was established at the Belarusian Young Women's Christian Association in Minsk and operates with support from the anti-trafficking NGO La Strada, which is based in the Netherlands. Some state social service agencies provide assistance to women victims of domestic violence or trafficking.⁶⁰

Women activists that challenge the government's human rights record have been subjected to even harsher repression. Authorities have taken action to close down or restrict the activities of women's groups that are associated with the political opposition. On February 8, 2005, the Supreme Court of Belarus, acting upon a case filed by the Ministry of Justice, liquidated the "Revival of the Homeland Belarusian Women's Movement."⁶¹ In 2006, the activities of the Women's League of Belarus were suspended temporarily by a court order

"Public Activists from Sweden, Lithuania and Ukraine Detained in Mahilyou," (Radio Svoboda reported by Charter 97, November 27, 2006), <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/11/27/mogilev/> (accessed January 8, 2009).

⁵⁸ However, even social service projects have experienced severe pressure. In 2004, state authorities closed down a local association that worked with the International Red Cross to operate hot lines and other activities devoted to domestic violence prevention activities.

⁵⁹ It is located in Minsk and operated by Radislava, a voluntary association. The initial start up costs for this shelter were provided in 2001 by TACIS in order to aid battered women. The shelter later broadened its focus and currently works to aid victims of human trafficking. The costs of victims' stay in the center are covered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under the project entitled "Combating trafficking in women in the Republic of Belarus." See "Sluzhba pomoshchi grazhdanam, postradavshim ot nasiliia," <http://stopnasilie.org/> (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁶⁰ With the support of the IOM, a day-and-night care division has been established at the local social service center in Pinsk and a rehabilitation department for victims of violence and trafficking has been attached to the Mogilev oblast diagnostic center. See "Information from the competent bodies in the Republic of Belarus concerning the implementation of Commission on Human Rights resolution No. 2003/45," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/Belarus.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2009).

⁶¹ See "The Assault on Human Rights Defenders in the Russian Federation, Belarus and Uzbekistan: Restrictive Legislation and Bad Practices" (International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 2006), <http://www.ihf-hr.org/> (accessed December 26, 2008).

initiated after a Ministry of Justice raid revealed irregularities in the group's registration documents. The group was later issued a warning but allowed to resume its activities after submitting its registration documents for review.⁶² In 2007 state authorities closed down the women's party "Nadzeya" for failure to comply with registration requirements.⁶³ This wave of repression has been largely directed at regime critics, but it has also negatively affected academic projects to empower women. For instance, in 2004 the country lost its only gender studies program, the Center for Gender Studies, when the European Humanities University was forced to terminate its activities in Belarus and relocate to Lithuania.

A final manifestation of the assault upon women's activism is the invention of what scholars sometimes call a "virtual opposition" consisting of loyal civic groups that take the place of the challengers who have been driven out of public life.⁶⁴ Various new forms of government initiated "virtual activism" emerged after the "colored revolutions." Pro-presidential women's activism appears to focus on upholding the government's patriotic ideology while countering the concerns raised by women's groups. For instance, state-controlled groups of soldiers' mothers have been established to organize patriotic rallies in support of military service, thus countering criticism from independent groups of soldiers' mothers that have uncovered severe forms of abuse.⁶⁵ Even pro-presidential groups have come under more direct control from above. In 2006, for instance, the government appointed state officials to take over the leadership of the semi-official women's association, the Union of Women of Belarus.⁶⁶ Much like Soviet-era women's activism, official groups stage events that allow them to praise the government, for instance, for its "generous" support of "mother heroes" who have given birth to more than five children. The activities of such pro-presidential women's groups are featured prominently in

⁶² "Verkhovnyi sud priostanovil deiatel'nost' Belorusskoi zhenskoi ligi," September 22, 2006, <http://news.tut.by/society/74576.html> (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁶³ See "Nations in Transit 2008: Belarus," released by Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (accessed October 25, 2008).

⁶⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), p. 187.

⁶⁵ "Rally of Soldiers' Mothers Took Place in Mogilev" (Radio Belarus, March 27, 2007), <http://www.radiobelarus.tvr.by/eng/news.asp?id=3883&date=27.03.2007%2010:18:00#26> (accessed January 8, 2009).

⁶⁶ "Public Organizations Turn into State Ones," October 10, 2006, Charter 97, <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/10/10/gos> (accessed January 8, 2009).

the media, while the views of oppositional women's groups appear mainly on websites based outside the country.

Conclusion

In their influential analysis of post-communist countries, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman argue that the analytical category of gender helps to clarify general processes of change that occurred as state socialist countries underwent nationalization and marketization.⁶⁷ In their view, one could explain many puzzling aspects of national ideology, for instance, its power to mobilize support among publics that were deeply disengaged from politics, by showing how it relied on gendered metaphors of birth, death, and belonging to legitimize the re-imagining of political community. In addition, they note that a gender lens allow one to observe that the transition from socialist states to nation-states made very different demands on women and men as citizens or subjects. State socialist gender regimes premised on principles of abstract equality were consequently being fundamentally questioned, and demographic policies were among the first aspects of the political order that were challenged by novice post-socialist lawmakers. They also pointed to the countervailing tendencies introduced by Western and international policy models as well as ideas about “turning toward Europe.” And they predicted that, rather than adopting international or Western paradigms and converging on Western gender regimes that had no cultural roots there, Eastern Europe would remain true to the institutional foundations created by socialist states while selectively incorporating certain new approaches, such as hotlines for abused women.

Nearly twenty years after the transition started, we can see that notable differences have emerged, even among neighboring post-Soviet countries, in how new ideas about gender are being incorporated into civil society and political institutions in post-socialist countries. The gender regimes that are being established in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine differ from each other as well as from the Soviet gender regime in key respects. A return to a quasi-Soviet gender regime has occurred in Belarus under Lukashenka. The understandings of gender institutionalized in the legal and criminal justice system remain substantially the same as in the Soviet era. But in contrast to the Soviet era, women

⁶⁷ Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*.

face an increasingly patriarchal public culture that views motherhood as their primary role. Nongovernmental advocates of new women's rights issues exist but play no role in determining policy. Women are discouraged from becoming active in public life. Just as in the Soviet era, this country's government signs international treaties but does very little to implement them. Indeed, it supports virtual forms of activism undertaken by pro-presidential "civic" organizations that serve as its mouthpiece, and harasses civic groups and international organizations that monitor and assess the state authorities' handling not only of women's rights but also, more generally, human rights and civil liberties. The state and its definition of reality dominate public life, much as in the Soviet era. A culture of fear pervades all types of civic organizations, leaving them largely unable to challenge the government's monopoly on public life. Even those groups that are government controlled and act as extensions of the state seem to have suffered from the consolidation of authoritarian rule, as participation in them appears to be coerced.

Russia at first seemed to be developing in a very different direction. The official party-based women's structures and academic institutes served as a foundation for a relatively unified women's movement that gained considerable political leverage in the early years after the Soviet Union's collapse. Russian women reformers made significant positive steps toward empowering women and strengthening their rights. They introduced draft legislation against domestic violence many years before this occurred in Ukraine and Belarus. But after this swift rise, women's NGOs have plummeted in influence in recent years since the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, who has brought neo-traditional values back into policy domains and places limits on the independence and activities of NGOs that espouse "foreign" or "Western" values. In Russia, the gender regime is a hybrid of Soviet, neo-traditional, and Western elements. A culture of professionalism defines women's activism. NGOs work within specialized niches on donor-defined activities but they have not established broader ties to the public at large. New issues like protecting women from domestic violence have been raised by women reformers but have not, however, gained salience among state authorities or lawmakers. Consequently, in contrast to Ukraine, such issues are still not incorporated into the Russian legal or criminal justice system at the national level.

The case of Ukraine is no less surprising. There one can observe a convergence within much of the women's movement as well as among virtually all politicians and public figures on a patriarchal discourse stressing motherhood, yet policy has moved consistently in the direction of gender equality rather than following a logic of separate spheres and capacities for women and men.

The new gender regime that is taking shape is also a hybrid both more patriarchal (in so far as women are widely viewed through conservative gender stereotypes) and more Westernized than the Soviet gender regime.

What do these strikingly different policy regimes tell us about the relationship between the overall health of civil society and the capacity of women or other marginalized groups to overcome cultures of powerlessness and organize around their interests? The inspiration for policy regimes in these countries does not come directly from civil society. Indeed, it appears that the relative power of conservatives and Westernizers in the political system is a principal determinant of the geopolitical orientation of new policy regimes that emerged in the political contest between regional authoritarian regimes and their Westernizing opponents. However, once the geopolitical orientation of a country is established, it appears that opportunities for women's mobilization increase in pro-Western political cycles and shrink when the pendulum swings away from the West. Ukraine provides some support for expectations that a healthy civil society nonetheless indirectly creates a more conducive environment for certain kinds of women's empowerment. But this case also demonstrates that the shape of a country's gender regime is not in any simple way determined by the political discourse or culture that is most pervasive in public life. Indeed, the gender regime in Ukraine would look very different today had it not been that Western-leaning domestic political blocs – who very badly want to advance Ukraine's candidacy for the European Union – looked to women's rights as an easy way to signal to Europe that Ukraine embraces its values.

Both Belarus and Russia as cases suggest further support for the conclusion that a country's degree of openness to Western influence is an important determinant of its policy regime, perhaps as important as the collective action capacity of its women's organizations. Women's organizations in these two countries attempted to restructure state institutions along Western lines. Their progress toward achieving these policy reforms was determined by their ability to develop and maintain a presence in the legislature. Women reformers in Belarus failed to advance their legislative proposals because their closest allies were driven out of politics. Meanwhile in Russia, women reformers initially formed a party that advanced new legal interpretations of women's status. But progress toward further legal changes slowed and then stopped altogether after women reformers lost their parliamentary seats and decided to merge with United Russia, the incumbent's political party, which now controls both the legislative and executive branches of government. Once these conservatives came to power, both the Russian government and the Duma redirected policy in a more traditional direction.

A final note on the role of protest in post-Soviet public cultures: Much has been said in discussions of post-Soviet public life about the cultural legacies of Soviet rule, in particular, about the prevalence among the majority of citizens of political alienation and what earlier scholars would have called anomie, or normlessness. A culture of “non-participation in politics” can, the above analysis suggests, be overcome. And, as many scholars have observed, the strength of civil society does seem to be an important factor in the emergence and development of new public cultures. The above analysis suggests that the healthier and more vibrant a civil society, the more complex and contradictory is a country’s public culture. Ukraine’s public culture is increasingly defined by patriarchal discourse that views women and men as fundamentally different kinds of citizens, even though the understandings of gender institutionalized in the country’s legal, criminal justice, and welfare systems are based on gender equity principles. During the Orange Revolution, hundreds of thousands of people on the Maidan responded to the calls of a nationalist discourse rooted in the family – they came together, in the words of the Orange Revolution anthem, as “sons and daughters of Ukraine.” Thus we see that democracy movements in post-Soviet countries draw on deeply resonant cultural themes and traditions that appear fundamentally patriarchal. Paradoxically, however, such public displays of national unity can also, in today’s geopolitical context, give birth not only to new patriarchies but also to new feminisms. Women (and perhaps, men) who participate in such solidarity-building protests might one day find themselves in a better position to achieve a new sense of solidarity through the mutual recognition of their confinements to a “separate sphere” that renders them second-class citizens. But again, ironically, before they can think of themselves as second class citizens, they have to become mutually aware of themselves as citizens.



Postcolonial On/scenity: The Sexualization of Political Space in Post-Independence Ukraine

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Abstract

The article focuses on the image-driven constructions of the political that bring sexual scenarios into the Ukrainian public sphere. The upsurge and incorporation of sexually explicit iconography into diverse popular cultural forms signify a strategic move against the sedimented holdovers from the Soviet totalitarian regime and are concomitant with the rise of a new social identity shaped in accordance with a changing societal structure.

Keywords

postcolonialism, power, identity politics, pornography, sexuality, visuality

The post-independence period in Ukraine represents a scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity that signifies liberation from different forms of oppression, including the systematized social repression of the body in the sterilized Soviet society in which the domains of “pleasure” were prescribed and thoroughly sanitized by the state. The infamous dictum “There is no sex in the USSR,” epitomizing practices of channeling the collective Soviet libido exclusively into the construction of communism, points toward a profound erosion of any comfortable sense of the body in the sphere of representations that constitute social identity. However, as Homi Bhabha argues, when theorized in postcolonial terms, the “body is always simultaneously (if conflictually) inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power.”¹

The eruption and incorporation of sexually explicit iconography into diverse popular cultural forms, which have become the venue for bringing

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 96.

sexual scenarios into the Ukrainian public sphere, are concomitant with the rise of a new social identity shaped in accordance with a changing societal structure. The pornotopia of sexual excess and its representations turn into what Linda Williams terms *on/scenity*, the “gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene.”² Increasingly eroticized political discourses in Ukraine transpose the issues of power struggle into the field of sexuality by conflating the sexual and the political and by restoring not only the political in the unconscious but also the unconscious in the political. To some extent, they replicate earlier European processes that were in part deferred owing to Ukraine’s colonial condition. Political pornography played a subversive social role, for example, in eighteenth-century France, where it “was used to attack the French court, the church, the aristocracy, the academics, the salons, and the monarchy itself.”³ Similarly, in nineteenth-century England pornographers had a broad political agenda – dismantling of the monarchy, parliamentary reform, and freedom of the press, among others – and “used these goals to create a political platform that attacked old sexual and social standards and promoted new possibilities for society through sexuality.”⁴ Besides, modern Western culture places sexuality, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick puts it, “in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge[;] it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know.”⁵ Yet, unlike in the West, with its well-developed and conceptualized pornographic tradition, in post colonial, post-communist, and post-totalitarian Ukraine, an overabundance of Western sexualized signs and images, which have quite recently invaded its cultural space, is processed, translated, and transmuted by means of post colonial mimicry.

² Linda Williams, “Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction,” in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), p. 4.

³ Lynn Hunt, “Pornography and the French Revolution,” in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), p. 305.

⁴ Lisa Z. Sigel, *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2002), p. 15.

⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), p. 3.

I will focus here on the image-driven constructions of the political as a social and cultural shift to the visual has been accelerating in the past decades. While acknowledging this “pictorial turn” (W. J. T. Mitchell), contemporary critical discourse has termed the modern-day image-saturated world as “hyper-visual” (Nicholas Mirzoeff) or as a “society of the spectacle” (Guy Debord), existing under the spell of the “frenzy of the visible” (Linda Williams), craving for “visual pleasure” (Laura Mulvey), and being continuously subjected to a “diabolical seduction of images” (Jean Baudrillard). Sexually explicit imagery made readily available to the public by media, communication, and information appears in multiple forms, which, in the framework of this paper, include film, performance, Internet and print images, and digital art, thus allowing for the inquiry into what Mirzoeff calls intervisuality, the “simultaneous display and interaction of a variety of modes of visibility.”⁶ This exploration of intervisuality further makes possible an inquiry into certain typology in both the politics of representation and representation of politics.

Yuri Illienko’s *A Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2002),⁷ Ukraine’s biggest-budget feature film since its independence, which has proven to possess political and historical explosive energies, provides an example of the obsessive desire to display culture’s sexually repressed material. It also demonstrates dissipation in a demarcation line between art and pornography. *A Prayer* has faced a semi-official ban in Russia, become a weapon in political disputes at home, and been persistently attacked for its excessive and brutal violence, nudity, and graphic representations of sexual scenes. Having chosen one of the most turbulent periods of Ukrainian history, Illienko focuses on the drama of Hetman Ivan Mazepa and the defeat of the Swedish and Ukrainian joint forces at the Battle of Poltava in 1709 that sealed Ukraine’s fate by politically decapitating it and signified its submergence into a supranational, imperial community. For Ukrainians, Mazepa has become a symbol of resistance and national aspirations; for Russians, an iconic traitor. Having been anathematized by the Russian Orthodox Church, Mazepa was then banned from Soviet official historiography that enforced celebration and glorification of the “reunification” of Ukraine with Russia. This glossed myth of unity was both actively promoted as the focal point of the period and relentlessly reduplicated in ideologically sanctioned heroic grand narratives. Illienko bends the straight line of

⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, “The Subject of Visual Culture,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

⁷ *Molytva za Hetmana Mazepu*, directed by Yuri Illienko (Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Studio, Creative Union “Rodovid,” Ministry of Culture and Arts of Ukraine, 2002).

imperial history into vicious circles to expose both its fictionality and the political dogma surrounding it. His work reveals the mechanisms of conversion whereby histories are erased but resurface as symptoms on the colonized body politic to be reread, reinterpreted, and rewritten.

A Prayer starts with the allegorical representation of the map of Europe as a female body, with Ukraine positioned, as the authorial commentary explains, in its “sweet womb that was desired by everyone and raped by everyone.”⁸ Here, Illienko utilizes the traditional “femininity” of colonized territory, which for centuries has served as the most enduring paradigmatic trope for colonial relations. As Ann McClintock contends, the “feminizing of the land represents a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy.”⁹ Simultaneously, the connections among conquest, colonization, and rape, and the use of a traditional Ukrainian poetic trope of the rape of Ukraine, symbolically represented as a woman, by the male aggressor,¹⁰ are made explicit in the film. By resorting to allegorical mystifications, the director attempts to construct what Alok Bhalla has aptly called “revenge histories,”¹¹ drawing on Frantz Fanon’s rethinking of the Nietzschean ethic of *ressentiment* in the colonizer-colonized dialectics and psychological uses of violence in anti-colonial context.¹² Since the history that the colonizer writes is not the “history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates,”¹³ the historical tormenter, from the viewpoint of *ressentiment*, is history as such, oppressive and unforgivable. In the process of creating his cinematic counter-discursive historical narrative, which is driven by the desire for representational vengeance characteristic of masculinist anti-imperialist discourses in general, Illienko both fixes and destabilizes the inherited gendered power matrix by hybridizing

⁸) *Ibid.*

⁹) Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 24.

¹⁰) The most iconic example is Taras Shevchenko’s poem *Kateryna* (1838) visually translated into his 1842 painting of the same title.

¹¹) Alok Bhalla, “A Plea Against Revenge Histories: Some Reflections on Orientalism and the Age of Empire,” in *Indian Responses to Colonialism in the 19th Century*, ed. Alok Bhalla and Sudhir Chandra (New Delhi: Sterling, 1993), p. 1.

¹²) See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 35-106.

¹³) Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967), p. 51.

the aggressive myth of both imperial and nationalist masculinities. His Ukraine – an object of desire to both exterior malefactors and interior benefactors and thus the symbolic mediator in the struggle between competing virilities – now appears as a half-naked submissive maiden, now as a dominatrix, now as a monstrous executioner. This essentialized female body also functions as a homoerotic link connecting the colonizer and the colonized, forming a kind of “erotic triangle” of male homosocial desire.¹⁴

The moment that sparked extremely hostile criticism in the Russian media and provoked the Ministry of Culture to consider banning *A Prayer* and declare that it “could damage relations between Russia and Ukraine”¹⁵ is Illienko’s representation of Peter I. This emblematic enlightened monarch of Russian history is transformed into a “sadist, a tyrant and a sodomite.”¹⁶ One of the most disturbing factors that most likely contributed to the wave of indignation in the generally homophobic Russian press is that Illienko forces Peter I out of the closet. Although the Russian tsar is commonly profiled among distinguished homosexuals on Western gay web sites, and one of the first historical references to his homosexuality is found, as early as in 1698, in the evidence of a certain Captain Rigby tried in England,¹⁷ the exposure must have been quite appalling for some Russians. A more subtle but strong undercurrent of both homosocial and homoerotic desire in the relationship between Mazepa and Peter, doppelgängers lusting and competing for power and domination, loving and hating each other, somehow went unnoticed.

Illienko, with his revisionist impulse, teams art with sex and violence to produce one of the film’s manifold shocks and to shake up historically amnesiac Ukrainian audiences. However, his transgressive porn infusions were used, with a boomerang effect, against his devotees during the parliamentary election campaign in the spring of 2002. Since *A Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* received exceptionally generous funding from the government of Victor Yushchenko, TV channels hostile to the then reform-oriented prime minister and his party repeatedly aired some of the most graphic and disturbing erotic

¹⁴ For a detailed explanation of these terms coined to describe the male-female-male homosocial paradigm and networks of male-male relationships, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985).

¹⁵ “Russia Considers Banning Ukrainian Film,” *From the Newsroom of the BBC World Service*, July 4, 2002, 16:57 GMT 17:57 UK, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/world/europe/2094360.stm> (accessed September 21, 2008).

¹⁶ Ievhenia Mussuri, “Movie Miffs Moscow,” *Kyiv Post*, July 19, 2002, <http://www.thepost.kiev.ua/main/11497> (accessed May 15, 2006).

¹⁷ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (Viborg: Gay Men’s Press, 1982), p. 98.

scenes from the film “in a clear attempt to embarrass [Yushchenko’s] supporters and discredit the bloc.”¹⁸

It is noteworthy that the figure of Mazepa continues to ignite political controversies because his status as an outstanding Ukrainian statesman, so powerfully represented in *A Prayer*, is being questioned by certain pro-Russian forces in Ukraine. Their resentment toward the hetman, based on his alleged “disloyalty” to the Russian crown, reflects the psychic stigmata of colonialism and demonstrates its greatest achievement: it made the colonized look at themselves through the colonizer’s eyes. Therefore, the Ukrainian “gratefully oppressed,”¹⁹ to use James Joyce’s famous phrase, seem to be still entrapped in a system of rhetoric and representation that forces them to face sets of ready-made images manufactured, hierarchically ordered, and imposed by colonial rule. The latest debates surrounding the commemoration in Ukraine of the 1709 Battle of Poltava²⁰ and Russia’s insistence on “shared” history, fixed unitary historical identification, and thus joint “celebration” of the event in the summer of 2009²¹ show that in the sphere of culture, decolonization is slowest in making an impact.

While the nationwide broadcasting of Illienko’s postmodern, violently beautiful eroticization of history highlighted the importance assumed by sex in political operations, other cases of pornographic routine entering the Ukrainian political playground turn out to be much less sophisticated. In March 2002, for example, while campaigning in the earlier mentioned election for the Ukrainian parliament, one of the candidates, the twenty-eight-year-old Olena Solod, decided to beat her opponents by stripping during a live TV show and exposing her Rubenesque figure in order to add a bit of fun and color to an otherwise drab debate. Becoming an instant celebrity, she is also said to have declared that when she becomes a legislator, she will recruit 200 male guards with specific physical characteristics: no less than 180 cm tall with no less than 18-cm-long penises.²² Paradoxically, owing either to

¹⁸ Mussuri, “Movie Miffs Moscow.”

¹⁹ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), p. 30.

²⁰ See, for example, Ol’ha Kovalevs’ka, “Mif pro Poltavu pislia 1709 roku,” *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 45 (Nov.-Dec. 2008), <http://www.dt.ua/3000/3150/64828/> (accessed February 8, 2009).

²¹ “Ukraina i Rossiia stolknulis’ pod Poltavoi: Dve strany poshli protivopolozhnymi istoricheskimi kursami,” *Kommersant* no. 49 (March 2008), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=871344> (accessed February 8, 2009).

²² Pavel Gres’, “V ukrainskii parlament lezut golye baby,” *Kompromat.Ru*®, <http://compromat.ru/main/kuchma/solod1.htm> (accessed September 21, 2008).

the shock value of the political stripper's media performance and the crude, odious posters and photos featuring different angles of the neo-suffragist that were circulated in her constituency or to some other reason (her program included the legalization of prostitution and marijuana), public opinion polls indicated that she was a leading candidate in the city at some point. She did not win, but the following fall she entered the race for a parliamentary seat again, having committed herself to putting on a striptease show in parliament if she succeeded.

Ms. Solod's political ambitions, which also involved the support of her husband's aspiration to become the mayor of Zaporizhia by posing with him for a porn placard, are a dwarfish reflection of the impressive parliamentary career of La Cicciolina. The Italian porn star, who founded a "porno-political model agency," *Diva Futura*, became a parliamentary representative of the Radical Party in the 1987 general election in Italy.²³ Then she rose to another level of stardom by collaborating with Jeff Koons in his notorious series *Made in Heaven* (1990–1991) that operated within the conventional codes of pornographic representation. A more current example is another Italian porn star, Federica Zarri, Silvio Berlusconi's *Popolo della Libertà* supporter, who decided to engage in big politics in 2007. She is reported to be the only feminist on Berlusconi's team, and she campaigns for the legalization of pornography and reform in the porn industry in Italy.²⁴

In light of these daring Italian lawmaking initiatives, the Ukrainian clumsy pornopolitical performance looks like an extravagant, though primitive, exhibitionist project. However, on a deeper level, it can be regarded as a counter-reaction to unmitigated totalitarian constraints, implemented through militant moralism and prudery and imposed by the Soviet state for its own political purposes. It is notable that the repression of sexuality often resulted in the sexualization of repression exemplified by Soviet criminal subcultures (a societal *id* of sorts), with their inscriptions of tattoo-texts on the bodies of convicts in the infamous Soviet labor camps and prisons. Thus, a 2003 publication, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia*, features part of a collection of more than three thousand tattoos, artful, distasteful, and sexually explicit, accumulated over a lifetime by prison attendant Danzig Baldaev. Featuring

²³ Brian McNair, *Mediated Sex: Pornography and Postmodern Culture* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 142.

²⁴ "Federica la pornopolitica contro i parrucconi del passato," *repubblica.it*, December 17, 2007, <http://pacsiamo.splinder.com/post/15166713/Federica+e+la+pornopolitica+co> (accessed September 28, 2008).

a wide variety of this type of “body-art,” the book includes a “pornographic tattoo . . . belonging to a member of a Russian Old Believer family . . . a ‘legitimate’ thief and ‘authority’ with several convictions.”²⁵ Created in 1952 in the best traditions of Socialist Realism, the tattoo depicts a “homosexual” ménage à trois: an Asian male is simultaneously being sodomized by a man wearing typical ethnic Russian clothing and performing fellatio on another no less explicitly Russian-looking male. The composition is accompanied by an extensive textual comment whose rhetoric is unambiguously imperialist and racist: “We Russians made you ugly non-Russian gits and yellow Buddhist monkeys into people and if it weren’t for us you’d still be up in the trees and you’d still have your tails!”²⁶ Similar views were commonly shared by Soviet “civic” society well into the 1980s, finding their expression in crude jokes denigrating non-Russians.

Nowadays, rapidly escalating racial hatred and xenophobic attitudes unleashed in Russia manifest themselves in numerous assaults on and murders of non-Caucasian people. For example, the 2006 report of Human Rights First, a leading human rights advocacy organization, states that although

... no official statistics are available, a leading Russian nongovernmental monitor of hate crimes documented 31 racist murders in 2005 and hate-based attacks on 413 individuals, while estimating that the real number of violent attacks is far higher. In the first four months of 2006, attacks appeared to escalate with 15 racist murders and hate-based attacks on 114 individuals. In April 2006 alone at least 9 people were victims of racist murders. One nine-year-old girl suffered multiple stab wounds but survived.²⁷

While Russian official data does not differentiate hate crimes from other “extremist” crimes, the EU-funded Moscow Bureau for Human Rights has registered, since the beginning of 2008, a “significant spike in xenophobic attacks nationwide, warning that if the trend continued through the end of the year there would be a 200 percent rise in the number of violent racist crimes compared with 2007.”²⁸ The motto “Russia for Russians” seems to be widely supported in society, and many political parties have been accused of “using racially tinged messages to appeal to voters skeptical of

²⁵ *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia* (Göttingen: Steidl/Fuel, 2003), p. 255.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Minorities Under Siege: Hate Crimes and Intolerance in the Russian Federation*, written by Paul LeGendre, ed. by Michael McClintock (Human Rights First, 2006), p. i.

²⁸ Matt Siegel, “Tracking Hate Crimes a Tricky Business,” *Moscow Times*, March 27, 2008, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2008-64-31.cfm> (accessed September 28, 2008).

foreigners.”²⁹ These racially motivated crimes and the intolerance toward minorities retrospectively reflect upon the essence of sexually nasty imagery in the fifty-year-old criminal tattoo, nourish the present-day quotidian racist discourse of white superiority, which intersects with a system of compulsory heterosexuality, and illuminate my upcoming discussion of the “erotic comedy” *Yulia*.

Although Ukrainians are generally perceived to be much milder than and not as aggressive as Russians, blatantly obscene imagery proliferated during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election. Numerous posters from a variety of web sites,³⁰ which primarily highlight identity aspects related to homosexuality, unequivocally transpose the issues of power struggle into sexual domain by accentuating the homology between the sexual and the political. It is ironic that in promoting anti-gay bigotry, the authors of these images seem to draw on views right out of the nineteenth century, which forged attitudes toward various sexual “deviations” formulated, for instance, in the pioneering studies in sexual psychopathology, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), by Richard Krafft-Ebing. His research was instrumental in limning the male homosexual’s composite picture, a “despicable, unacceptable male role that grew out of a degenerate masculinity, reflecting a pattern of behavior that was in total violation of assumptions about ‘normal males’; it was too suggestive of the dreaded female.”³¹ In addition to drawing upon “universal” homophobic and heterosexist generalizations about homosexuals, these images are also indicative of Ukraine’s (post)colonial condition since they appear to adopt the colonial strategy and rhetoric of effeminization – a process by which colonizing men apply feminine qualities to colonized men in order to delegitimize, discredit, and disempower them.³² The cult of masculinity traditionally rationalized

²⁹ Nick Paton Walsh, “Girl Aged Nine Stabbed in Face as Russian Race Tension Spreads,” *The Guardian*, March 27, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/mar/27/russia.nickpatonwalsh> (accessed September 21, 2008).

³⁰ The political posters under discussion throughout the article come from the most “comprehensive” but now defunct web site, www.ham.com.ua, which featured images, cartoons, and jokes caricaturing the pro-Yanukovich alliance and was regularly updated during the Orange Revolution and in its aftermath; some of them can still be found at www.fotki.com/kuchmadown.

³¹ John C. Fout, “Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Gender Crisis, Moral Purity, and Homophobia,” in *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 275.

³² For example, on the emasculation of the Irish colonized male, see Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), p. 44; or on similar gendered colonial politics in Africa, Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 8.

imperial rule by equating an aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness with racial, national, cultural, and moral superiority.³³ Thus Ukrainian political opponents used virtual reality to do to their rivals what the imperial Russian male did to them; this is the mentality of specific subaltern males who have experienced the emasculating effects of colonization and whom Oksana Zabuzhko calls the “guys who have been screwed from all possible angles” (*muzhyky, obiobani iak-tilky-mozhna z usikh kintsiv*³⁴). Masculinity here becomes a “topological site” on which, as Revathi Krishnaswamy writes elsewhere, “many uneven and contradictory axes of domination and subordination in colonial society are simultaneously constituted and contested.”³⁵ However, it was not only the colonizers who propagated the notion of effeminess, resting the entire structure of colonial homosociality on the ideologue of effeminacy, but also the Ukrainian elite that internalized such colonial representations, thereby providing fertile ground for discursive practices that display power in gendered and sexualized terms.

The progression of the 2004 presidential campaign consolidated the conceptual and visual parameters of the project of the “enemy’s” political castration. The debasement of political rivals through sexual allusions can be found in continuous references to Victor Yanukovych’s supporters as *bolubi* (azure, blue), the interplay of the emblematic color of the Party of Regions headed by Yanukovych and the colloquial equivalent to the English word “gay,” which highlights a potential continuity between the homosocial, homoerotic, and homopolitical. In one of the visuals, the don of Ukrainian politics himself is represented in a submissive posture being penetrated by Vladimir Putin, a scenario seemingly consistent not only with power relations but with the colonial paradigm as well. Russia’s then president’s memorable support and approval of a Ukrainian pro-Russian presidential successor has become representative of Russia’s intrusive policy and its neo-imperial ambitions regarding Ukraine, and Putin’s three-fold congratulations sent to Yanukovych on the occasion of “winning” the elections have become a laughing stock throughout the world. However, the transposition from a normative to a culturally marginal form of sexuality renders Putin, who is sexually paired with a man, as abnormal and abhorrent under the system of compulsory heterosexuality and thus compromises his power. Moreover, given Yanukovych’s criminal past and

³³ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 206.

³⁴ Oksana Zabuzhko, *Pol’ovi doslidzhennia z ukrains’koho seksu* (Kyiv: Zhoda, 1996), p. 140.

³⁵ Revathi Krishnaswamy, *Effeminism: The Economy of Colonial Desire* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 8.

Putin's customary lexicon that draws on criminal jargon, the picture implies habitual sexual practices of prison inmates, thus subverting the political legitimacy of both men.

Traditionally, the cluster of associations around homosexuality almost always have included effeminacy, which used to be the sign of degeneracy or mental instability and accompanied the disappearance of manliness and self-respect. Indicative of the distinct homophobic attitudes in society and bearing a pronounced derogatory label, the idea of femininity-in-masculinity, pathology more dangerous than femininity itself, is thus perceived as the final negation of a man's political identity. It also threatens to dismantle the heterosexual male self organized around phallic control. The pervasiveness of the male sexual fear of being abused and used like a woman reveals itself in the ridiculous persistency with which Yanukovych's supporters, in an attempt to negate their alleged effeminacy, were trying to counter the catchy association. Despite the fact that the color spectrum conventionally associated with the gay movement in the West is represented by a rainbow and that if the group were to be identified with any color, it would have been purple, Yanukovych's supporters continually stated that in North America orange is the emblematic color of gay communities.

These elaborations about color symbolism in sexual orientation are meant to sustain a masculine identification, representing a phallic shield of sorts, under the condition of the highly feminized status of the Party of Regions and, by extension, the hyperbolically masculinized status of the Orange camp. By constructing homosexuality as the fallen, failed, bastardized, or incomplete form of manliness, the political competitors seem to subscribe repeatedly to the idea that normative heterosexual masculinity can be achieved only through a repression of what Freud regarded as the feminine "pederastic element,"³⁶ meaning that the suppression of male homosexuality is the prerequisite for constituting manhood. As if taking a Freudian "ride," one of the above-mentioned posters alludes to Yanukovych as *pidor*, a Ukrainian equivalent for "faggot," denoting elemental humiliation.

The feminization of Yanukovych has been pushed further in images depicting him and former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma as transvestites in bathing suits. Thus men's bodies, which have not usually been interpreted in sexual terms, undergo gendered conversion. Moreover, there is another spin in their disempowerment because, as Valerie Steel argues in her book

³⁶ Robert Wilcock, *Mousetraps and the Moon: The Strange Ride of Sigmund Freud and the Early Years of Psychoanalysis* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2000), p. 150.

Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power, “the power that patriarchal society has attributed to the phallus . . . is symbolized by phallic clothing.”³⁷ By being forcibly stripped of their phallic mastery through a symbolic “disrobing,” both politicians are placed in submissive feminine roles, based on the power differential implicit in traditional gender stereotypes. In addition to explicit gender bending and to positioning both politicians as sex objects and drag queens on display, the tableau also implies a lesbian relationship. Yet, even a proper business suit cannot guarantee power position because the construction of Yanukovych’s sexuality in another picture deprives him not only of his manliness but his humanity by placing his happily beaming face next to a huge dog’s muzzle busily buried in the candidate’s scrotal area because, as the caption explains, “they love me.”

Another category of sexualized imagery from the www.ham.com.ua site represents a “straight” stream focusing unambiguously on particular body parts. For example, the well-known incident in which the “official” tough-looking candidate, Yanukovych, collapsed while being hit by an egg during his visit to Ivano-Frankivsk,³⁸ reverberates in a number of representations. They utilize the framework of official billboards – featuring the incumbent Ukrainian prime minister – with a standard heading, CHOICE 2004 BECAUSE, plus various reasons per poster why he should be elected. These fresh-faced billboards, which saturated Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities,³⁹ were refurbished for counter-campaigning on the Internet. One of the alternative posters depicts an egg-cup with a severed hairy male testicle (“egg” in colloquial Ukrainian) and reads: “because reliable,” while another, featuring a squirrel with huge hanging testicles, in a frontal upright position, explains: “because he has ‘balls’.” Yet another one alludes to the proverbial intellectual potential of the candidate – “Brain 2004 because there is brain” – and portrays a sizable penis with a few brain convolutions at its top. The derogatory transformation of the phallus, a powerful symbol in the patriarchal law of culture, into a pathetic prick and thus the demystification of its symbolic power are employed in a poster that depicts a semi-erect male organ, with a dripping drop of sperm,

³⁷ Valerie Steel, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 184.

³⁸ For jokes, anecdotes, and slogans on the egg episode, see O. Britsyna and I. Golovakha, “The Folklore of the Orange Revolution,” *Folklorica: Journal of the Slavic and European Folklore Association* 10, no. 1 (2005): 6.

³⁹ Walsh, in “Putin’s Kiev Visit Timed to Influence Ukraine Poll,” writes that pro-Yanukovych posters were also put up in Moscow (*The Guardian*, Oct. 27, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/oct/27/ukraine.russia> [accessed December 30, 2008]).

inserted in the place of the candidate's nose. It is supplemented with the caption written in the notorious *surzhyk*, a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian whose in-betweenness bears sociocultural characteristics of an undereducated, uncultured, boorish, and vulgar populace. It has become a proper linguistic medium for the product of the most revolting sociopolitical experiment carried out by the Soviet regime – hybridized Soviet people – to reflect the derangement and idiocies of Soviet life. In addition, the caption plays out the idea of emasculation and impotence by turning the candidate's name into a derivative of “eunuch” – Yevnukhovych. These, then, are just a few examples of the political production of the generally more cultured pro-Yushchenko body of voters.⁴⁰

While representing Yanukovych and his electorate in terms of sexual aberration, the supporters of the Orange Revolution re-imagine their leaders as heroic figures, as in the postmodern reworking of Eugène Delacroix's famous *Liberty Leading the People*. According to Jonathan Jones, Delacroix's painting represents the moment of

... anarchic freedom, when anything seemed possible. It is the most enduring image of what revolution feels like, from within: ecstatic, violent, libidinal and murderous. Liberty, her dress falling down to expose her big round breasts and muscular neck, holds up the tricolour, the flag of liberty (and now the French national flag) in a powerful arm. She turns in profile, as if oblivious to the madness around her. In her other hand is a rifle; it has a fixed bayonet, to spear the enemies of freedom at close quarters.⁴¹

The context of the French Revolution is customized in the contemporary Ukrainian image whose background depicts Kyiv's architectural landmarks, and the Liberty's face becomes that of Yulia Tymoshenko, who is holding the Ukrainian national flag. The markedly phallic props – a rifle and a bayonet – are simultaneously empowering and suggestive of castration. Among Liberty's followers are the male heroes of the Orange Revolution: Victor Yushchenko, Mykola Katerynychuk, Petro Poroshenko, and Yevhen Chervonenko, and the crushed enemies include the Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko and

⁴⁰ For more on the sociocultural characteristics of both groups of voters, see Taras Kuzio, “Everyday Ukrainians and the Orange Revolution,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Anders Åslund and Michael McFaul (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), p. 58.

⁴¹ Jonathan Jones, “Cry Freedom,” *The Guardian*, April 2, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/apr/02/art1> (accessed September 22, 2008).

the notorious Dmytro Korchynsky.⁴² Alongside the imagistic template, the Ukrainian version has inherited some ideological implications of its source painting. The 1830 French Revolution visualized by Delacroix is “usually remembered as the last time a united Paris expressed its will in insurrection,”⁴³ and the July Monarchy it inaugurated was born of a “complex series of negotiations, compromises and legislative maneuvers.”⁴⁴ These reverberate in the ill-famed constitutional reform passed by Ukrainian parliament in December 2004 – a cornerstone of the concession in the election standoff that paved the way for Yushchenko’s victory and resulted, together with other factors, in the failure to transform the assets of the Orange Revolution into a strong reform state and in the current disillusionment of the people, who demonstrated a powerful determination for change in the spectacular mass protests of 2004, because core Orange principles have been repeatedly compromised.

A more recent reworking of Peter Paul Rubens’s *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* has enlarged the gallery of Tymoshenko’s sexualized representations. Such appropriation allows for exploiting both the seduction and pre-existing meaning of an adapted artwork. According to Linda Hutcheon, the procedure of exploiting the power of identifiable images also “de-naturalizes them, makes visible the concealed mechanisms which work to make them seem transparent, and brings to the fore their politics, that is to say, the interests in which they operate and the power they wield.”⁴⁵ The work of the master, who defined exuberantly sensuous aspects of baroque painting, represents a triumphant depiction of sexual violence and the forcible subjugation of women by men, illustrating the story of the abduction of King Leucippus’s daughters by princes Castor and Pollux. According to Margaret Carroll,

⁴² The same idea is behind another example of a peculiar “unconscious” intertextual dialogue with Delacroix and the Ukrainian 2004 appropriation of a French masterpiece – cutting across continents and cultures in the age of mechanical, and not so mechanical, reproduction and globalization – which puts his painting to commercial use. The web site of Gold Apple Art, a wholesale company from China specializing in hand-painted oil paintings and reproductions, advertises its own version of *Liberty Leading the People*, featuring instantly recognizable cultural and political icons of the world superpower, the USA: Marilyn Monroe, the American flag in her hand and the Statue of Liberty in the background, surrounded by Bill Clinton, George Bush, Kofi Annan, Michael Jordan, and other celebrities.

⁴³ David P. Jordan, “Haussmann and Hassmannisation: The Legacy of Paris,” *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004): 113.

⁴⁴ Michael Marrinan, “Resistance, Revolution and the July Monarchy: Images to Inspire the Chamber of Deputies,” *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1980): 27.

⁴⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 42.

Rubens's work epitomizes the "absolutist conception of political rule" where "the relationship between a prince and the state is less in the figure of the prince as the head of the single (male) body of the republic than in the figure of two bodies: the prince taking forcible possession of a (usually) female body, the latter having no power to resist or make claims upon him."⁴⁶

The Ukrainian adaptation of *The Rape* celebrating ravishment offers a model of phallic economy by metaphorizing the sanctified, masculinized space of Ukrainian politics (it is noteworthy that there are only thirty four women – 7.5 percent – in the Ukrainian parliament⁴⁷) through the mutual imbrication of violence, eroticism, and power. The face of Tymoshenko replicated for the images of both sisters is serene and absolutely calm, contrasting with the ambiguous resistance represented by female bodies. The piece in general does not communicate danger but rather submission, thus complying with conventional representations of the erotics of mastery, with the unequal relationship between men treated as persons and women as objects deeply embedded in Western culture.⁴⁸ The contemporary Ukrainian painting once more asserts John Berger's contention that the "essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in quite a different way from men, not because the feminine is different from the masculine, but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him."⁴⁹

It is interesting that Tymoshenko, the most charismatic, passionate, and determined player in Ukrainian politics, the Ukrainian "Iron Lady," who is often said to stop at nothing in her drive for power, is inscribed as an object in the postmodern pastiche that appears to be motivated by a variety of conflicting homopolitical desires. They include, alongside a distinct ironic nod toward Western visual art tradition, the disguised male fantasy of omnipotence and total control of female bodies and woman's agency behind the representation of rape that hyperbolizes existing gender norms; the vain male yearning to possess, albeit virtually, the most powerful and desirable politician whose face

⁴⁶ Margaret Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 142.

⁴⁷ "Kak ukhazhivaiut za soboi pervye politkrasavitsy strany," *Obozrevatel'*, <http://www.obozrevatel.com/news/2008/9/26/260094.htm> (accessed September 27, 2008).

⁴⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), p. 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

has long been familiar from a thousand front pages and magazine covers around the world; and the desire to desecrate this political body by fundamentally stripping it of power, to name just a few interpretative possibilities. Moreover, Ukrainian politics has much invested in extreme notions of masculinity, or lack thereof, and thus rape may be a logical conceptual choice indicative of both compensatory fantasies and societal views on gendered politics that unfold within the continuum of power. Then, such representations extend and reverse the colonial emasculation project, dictating that former colonial men would, as Michelle Wallace writes, “define their masculinity ... in terms of superficial masculine characteristics – demonstrable sexuality; physical prowess; capacity for warlike behavior.”⁵⁰

Tymoshenko as an iconic figure of the Orange Revolution and its first prime minister has been under attack by different political forces, the most conspicuous being the production of a much-advertised pornographic film entitled *Yulia* (2005).⁵¹ Financed by Aleksei Mitrofanov, at the time the deputy leader of the Russian ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party, the deputy of the Russian Duma (parliament), and a close political ally of the nefarious Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, it has become a showcase of Russian neo-colonial drive translated into the language of pornography and drawing on gendered and racialized erotics of power. While conventional pornography, according to feminist scholars, degrades women, Mitrofanov’s film, which features Misha – instantly identifiable as President Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia – and the distinctively coiffed Yulia – no less aptly decipherable as the Ukrainian prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko – is a bizarre attempt at degrading two countries that drifted away from Moscow after the Georgian Rose Revolution and the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. As Kevin O’Flynn suggests, “Russia’s relations with Ukraine and Georgia may be less than ideal, but they could hit a new low with the shooting of a blue movie.”⁵² At the time when Mitrofanov announced his intention to shoot the film, *The Guardian* wrote that Ukrainian film directors meanwhile “have already decided to answer Mr. Mitrofanov’s film with their own blue, or rather orange, movie.”⁵³ This time the Russian president, Putin, and the leader of the Ukrainian opposition, Yanukovych, will be

⁵⁰ Quoted in Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 71.

⁵¹ *Yulia*, directed by Aleksandr Valov (ZTV International, 2005).

⁵² Kevin O’Flynn, “Making Love in a Cold Climate,” *The Guardian*, Aug. 13, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2005/aug/13/theeditorpressreview> (accessed September 21, 2008).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

portrayed in an explicit flick designed to poke fun at Mitrofanov's own patriotic leanings.⁵⁴ However, it looks as though the Ukrainian “answer,” in pornopolitical warfare, to Mitrofanov's oeuvre is still pending.

Mitrofanov made a number of pushy statements that his film “will take foreign relations to new heights – literally and figuratively....Political erotics are a new genre that I have discovered,” he said. “The film is about politics. It makes a political statement, they don't just [have sex].”⁵⁵ Although he remained vague about his film's message, Mitrofanov, who evidently has no doubts about his creative genius, rejected the idea that he was creating propaganda. “Is the film *The Interpreter* propaganda or big cinema?” he asked. “Is the film *JFK* propaganda or big cinema? Why is it that in America these films are considered big cinema but films like this in Russia are considered propaganda? This is big cinema and I am a great master.”⁵⁶ Mitrofanov ambitiously compares his *Yulia* to Sydney Pollack's *The Interpreter*, starring Nicole Kidman and Sean Penn, the political thriller about an FBI agent assigned to protect an interpreter who overhears an assassination plot,⁵⁷ and Oliver Stone's 1991 *JFK*, with Kevin Costner and Tommy Lee Jones, which offers conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination.⁵⁸ Still, his piece can bear comparison with the works of these two renowned film directors just as much as Elena Berkova, the Russian porn diva “starring” in *Yulia*, can be compared with Nicole Kidman. The idea behind Mitrofanov's sexually charged political scenario can be succinctly summarized, to borrow the idiom of the “great master” and his followers, as “fuck Ukrainians and Georgians and their revolutions.”

A more readily conceivable issue behind Mitrofanov's cinematic endeavors is that these “colored” revolutions, which are viewed in Russia as Western-backed “manufactured” democracy, undermined the expected pattern of political power distribution in the post-Soviet region and resulted in the feeling that it was the worst Russian foreign policy defeat since the collapse of the USSR. The Russian political elite obsessed over being encircled and entrenched by the West, which, by implementing political technologies, deprived the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Graeme Smith, “Ukraine, Georgia Fuming over Planned Russian Sex Film,” *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 15, 2005, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20050815/PORN15/TPInternational/TopStories> (accessed September 22, 2008).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ “Kidman Thriller Translates into US Chart Topper,” *The Guardian*, April 25, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/apr/25/news1> (accessed September 21, 2008).

⁵⁸ “Stone Begins Shooting 9/11 Drama,” *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/nov/03/news> (accessed September 21, 2008).

emerging Third Rome of its “rightful” claim to control post-Soviet states.⁵⁹ Mitrofanov then warned: “[I]f we lose Ukraine, that will set a precedent. We should understand that things won’t stop in Ukraine. Russia will be the next stop.”⁶⁰ In light of this statement, his representational tactics in *Yulia*, revealing manifest antagonism towards political opponents, explicitly renders the transmutation of the loss of dominance into aggression.

Unsophisticated and distinctly amateurish, *Yulia* is produced in keeping with the conventions of the pornographic genre. However, if in porn movies, as Williams argues, the money shot is crucial and is worked into a variety of narratives and sexual numbers⁶¹ because it “can be viewed as the most representative instance of phallic power and pleasure,”⁶² Mitrofanov’s film employs assorted sexual acts, but neither a literal nor a figurative money shot ever occurs, thus alleviating the surplus value of the male orgasm. This is not what might be seen as a playful recasting of the pornographic genre but rather a blatant statement about the characters’ sexual and, by extension, political impotence. Sexual numbers chosen by the filmmakers appear to follow pretty closely the checklist provided by Stephen Ziplow in his *Film Maker’s Guide to Pornography* and include masturbation, straight sex, oral sex (both cunnilingus and fellatio), ménage à trois, and orgy.⁶³ Their grotesque interplay, together with the utilization of Soviet-style stereotypical representations of the USSR’s constituent nations as the distinctly inferior Other, was probably meant to produce a comic effect. However, even though *Yulia* is described as an erotic comedy by its makers, it is far from funny since it probably brought only the coarsest and readiest of viewers to laughter and/or orgasm by apparently upholding the structure of imperial signification on the model of domination.

The soundtrack of the movie includes the song “Orange Sky,” which was made famous in the 1960s by a Georgian child prodigy, Irma Sokhadze, and is covered by Mitrofanov’s favorite Russian rock group “Min net.” The name of the group, which translates “No Mines,” clearly refers to the post-World War II period, when Soviet sappers were deactivating massive minefields aimed

⁵⁹ Graeme P. Herd, “Colorful Revolutions and the CIS: ‘Manufactured’ Versus ‘Managed’ Democracy?,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 2 (2005): 5–8.

⁶⁰ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: Univ. of California Press, 1999), p. 126.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 126–27.

at blocking enemy advances. When every inch of the land was carefully examined and there was an absolute guarantee that the terrain was deactivated, they placed no-mines signs to indicate safe passage. World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as it is called in Soviet historiography, was also a favorite time frame of Soviet literature and cinema that indefatigably drew their inspiration from the courageous past to romanticize and lacquer it in a heroic discourse as, for example, in the acclaimed 1965 Soviet-Yugoslavian film *Checked – No Mines* (*Provereno – min net*) about the Soviet sappers who rescued Belgrade by deactivating mines planted in the sewer system by the retreating Germans to wipe out the city in 1944. However, the name of the rock group suggestively combines a military warning sign with its homophone connotation – Russian *minet*, meaning fellatio – and it is this sexual aspect that bluntly factors into the film’s ideologies.

“Orange Sky” is also obtrusively used as an aphrodisiac that induces Yulia to masturbate continuously, as if all meanings are forged within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat because, as Hillel Schwartz explains, “repetition is the gospel of pornography, proving male virility or female insatiability.”⁶⁴ This representational stratagem, employed to depict both Yulia’s active and aggressive sexuality, draws on worn-out conventional misogynistic attitudes that historically perceived women as “lascivious creatures, fallen daughters of Eve, corrupted and corrupting.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, solitary pleasure has been traditionally regarded as pathology and as the sign of sexually deviant women, since through this act they signal their “rejection of the normative sexual order”⁶⁶ and thus social norms, and because clitoral *jouissance* stands outside the “reproductive teleology of male heterosexuality.”⁶⁷ Besides, the autoerotic excess to which Yulia’s fantasies, triggered by music, lead seems to be far more satisfying than sexual encounters with her Georgian partner, and in this, the film (if we can remotely suspect Mitrofanov of subverting patriarchal dogmatic views on sexuality) implicitly challenges the “stereotype of masturbation as an exclusively male activity,”⁶⁸ according to John Phillips’s conceptualization of this

⁶⁴ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likeness, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), p. 306.

⁶⁵ Ruth Perry, “Colonizing the Beast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England” in *Forbidden History*, p. 115.

⁶⁶ Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), p. 372.

⁶⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ John Phillips, *Forbidden Fictions: Pornography and Censorship in Twentieth Century French Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 181.

phenomenon in his inquiry into twentieth-century French erotic narratives, which appears to be debatable, though, in the light of Thomas W. Laqueur's *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*.⁶⁹

The Ukrainian-Georgian political duo is structured as an emblematic Other drawing on the discursive colonial convention that establishes the Self and its Other in an epistemological confrontation, on the binary of female sexual voraciousness, nymphomania – each time Yulia reaches orgasm through self-abasement – and male impotence and loss of libido, which are represented as ultimate signs of degeneration. While Yulia is obsessively masturbating, Misha is no less compulsively performing the Georgian folk dance, *lezginka*, to the same tune. In addition, the recurring emphasis of his love for money testifies to the fact that xenophobic attitudes in Russian society still draw on the tired ethnic stereotypes that were operative in the USSR.

The “Ukrainian” language spoken by the characters is a bastardized type of Russian, as if reinforcing the centuries-old Russian imperial maxim that Ukrainian is only a “dialect” of the great Russian language, and the subtitles in standard Russian seem to be aimed at emphasizing the absurdity of Ukraine's separate linguistic identity, as if recycling the infamous Valuev Circular (1863), which categorically stated “there was not, there is not, and there cannot be any separate Little Russian language.”⁷⁰ Tasteless, trite, repetitive, and crude, *Yulia* makes one wonder about what Russia is and where it is heading if this newly discovered “political erotics” so persistently publicized, promoted, and peddled by high-ranking Russian politicians and media is really one of the motors that brings Russian “foreign relations to new heights.” Without a doubt, *Yulia* represents one of the many links in a wide-ranging chain of the escalating information war launched by Russia against an independent Ukrainian state decades ago. This war reached blatantly propagandistic “heights” in the return of Soviet Cold War rhetoric after the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008 and during the latest gas dispute between Moscow and Kyiv in January 2009.

Drawing on similar pornopolitical tendencies, political technologists in Ukraine attempted to capitalize on the representation of forbidden pleasures by creating several web sites during the 2004 presidential campaign that featured the faces of Tymoshenko, Yushchenko, and other Ukrainian politicians,

⁶⁹ See Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*.

⁷⁰ Quoted by Roman Smal'-Stots'kyi, “Do povnoho obrusieniia (Peresliduvannia ukraïns'koï movy Moskvoiu),” *Slovo*, no. 1 (Febr. 1992): 3.

photoshopped onto bodies engaging in salacious hardcore activities. Furthermore, one of the local Donetsk TV channels advertised the premiere of a pornographic film depicting intimate sexual acts between Tymoshenko and former Ukrainian prime minister Pavlo Lazarenko,⁷¹ with whom she was closely associated in the mid-1990s and who was accused of extorting millions of dollars from his homeland, laundering more than \$100 million through US banks, and found guilty by a California court. Yet, this project never came to fruition.

In present-day Ukrainian political discourse, the word “pornography” is turning into hard currency. Looking through the recent titles of Ukrainian electronic papers, one would find that it has become one of the key words to define Ukrainian politics, as in the newest developments in the Verkhovna Rada: “Yatseniuk [the Speaker of the Parliament] and Porn: The Speaker realized that Ukrainian politics is only for adults” (STB); “Yatseniuk is sick and tired of pornography in the *Rada*” (Glavred); “Yatseniuk: one does not have to watch pornography, it is broadcast live” (Korrespondent.net); “Yatseniuk is tired of pornography and swine, and closes the Rada” (expres.ua); “Main news for yesterday: pornography in the Rada, salvation of coalition, Chernomyrdin for Luzhkov” (forUm); and “Yatseniuk declares that pornography is thriving in parliamentary assembly hall” (vsekommentarii.com). The following titles of articles posted on the *Ukrinformburo* site in 2008 add more variety to the above list: “Political pornography: ‘great masturbators’ of Ukrainian politics,” “Simple movements-2: political pornography goes on,” “Male activities of the female gender: Grandma Paraska as a sex symbol of Ukrainian politics,” and “Chinese Three R’s: politicians’ erotic statements arouse general interest again.”

The insistent presence of pornographic imagery and discourse in the Ukrainian political domain, which came into clear focus in the past presidential and parliamentary campaigns, and will certainly increase during the upcoming 2010 presidential election, which is predicted to become the dirtiest in the post-independence period, may be seen as a strategic move against the sedimented holdovers from an oppressive colonial regime that promises to lead to the establishment of a new order. However, the formation of such a “pornographic” political agency is always saturated with power dynamics and implicitly raises, as Judith Butler argues in her analysis of Michael Foucault’s

⁷¹ Taras Diakiv, “Polityka i pornohrafia,” *Lvivs’ka hazeta*, no. 155 (Sept. 2005), <http://www.gazeta.lviv.ua/articles/2005/09/01/8387> (accessed September 27, 2008).

genealogy of power, “the same political dilemmas as the repressive culture it was meant to liberate.”⁷² It appears that instead of prohibiting discourses of sexuality, current and newly created power structures insidiously incite and compel the integration of “sex-as-instrument-of-cultural-signification,”⁷³ among other matrices of control, into the production of a Ukrainian political obscene.

⁷²) Sarah Salih with Judith Butler, eds., *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 33.

⁷³) Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 47.

Cultural Politics on Ukrainian Television: Language Choice and Code Switching on “Khoroshou”

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Abstract

This article examines language politics in Ukraine through the analysis of interactional dynamics on a televised music-centered talk show. The episode analyzed here, which aired in the summer of 2002, provides an example of the non-accommodating bilingualism that had become widespread in both the media and everyday practice. The Russian language clearly dominated, but the continuous presence of Ukrainian language asserted the distinct Ukrainianness of the program in various ways.

Keywords

code switching, non-accommodating bilingualism, language politics, television, Ukraine

Language issues have been hotly debated in Ukraine since its independence.¹ Both policies and public discourse have focused on whether the Ukrainian or the Russian language should be used, but in practice often the situation is more complex than a choice of one or the other, as these languages are mixed in interactions through various forms of code switching and non-accommodating bilingualism. Here I take a closer look at language dynamics on Ukrainian television, through an analysis of the trends and implications of language choice in “Khoroshou,” a program that began airing on the Ukrainian music television channel M1 in the summer of

¹ I am grateful to the many individuals in Ukraine who helped me with this research, and to the colleagues who shared their insights with me at conferences and as reviewers of this article. My field research in 2002 was supported by a Fulbright-Hays Research Abroad Grant and an Individual Advanced Research Opportunity grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the U.S. Information Agency, and the U.S. Department of State). The views expressed are my own and not those of the agencies that generously supported my research.

2002.² A micro-analysis of interactions reveals how language politics play out in contexts where participants are under varying degrees of institutional constraint. My findings signal broader trends in Ukrainian media at this time, including the continued dominance of Russian in quantity of use, along with the increasingly positive symbolic value of Ukrainian.

The program I analyze here aired in 2002, during President Kuchma's second term in office, a period of increasing political centralization, media censorship, and increasingly overt control over the media in Ukraine by a small number of elites.³ After the 2004 Orange Revolution, freedom of the press and use of the Ukrainian language in the media increased. In 2009, as I am finding during my current field research in Kyiv, more talk programs than ever before have only Ukrainian-speaking hosts, but as many guests on these shows speak Russian, similar language dynamics to those analyzed here are still present. The issue of language in the media continues to be contested, although the roles and connotations of the two languages have shifted.

Efforts to raise the status and expand the use of the Ukrainian language formed the cornerstone of the movement that led to Ukraine's independence from the USSR in 1991. These efforts went against the policies and practices that had established Russian as the dominant language in the Soviet Union, relegating local republic languages, like Ukrainian, to a low, secondary status.⁴ Russian even became the primary language for many ethnic Ukrainians, as reflected in the 2001 census statistics: while 78 percent of citizens declared their ethnicity to be Ukrainian and 17 percent Russian, 68 percent declared their native language to be Ukrainian and 30 percent listed Russian.⁵ Actual use of Russian was higher, as documented in a 2006 survey, which found that at home 38 percent of people spoke only Ukrainian, 30 percent spoke Russian, and 31 percent spoke both languages, depending on the situation.⁶

² This program was no longer on the air in 2009, but I do not know when it ceased to be broadcast.

³ Marta Dyczok, "Was Kuchma's Censorship Effective?: Mass Media in Ukraine before 2004," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 2 (2006): 215-38.

⁴ Laada Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues: Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005); George Y. Shevelov, *The Ukrainian Language in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1900-1941): Its State and Status* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard Univ. Press, 1989).

⁵ <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/> (accessed December 11, 2008).

⁶ Oleh Medvedev, "Movnyi Balans Ukrainy" (unpublished manuscript circulated electronically); Oleh Medvedev, "U rosiis'komovnykh vse znachno krashche, nizh v ukrainomovnykh," *Obozrevatel'*, 3 March 2007, <http://obozrevatel.com/news/2007/3/20/161510.htm> (accessed December 11, 2008).

Since independence, the Ukrainian language has been supported by various laws, but the language issue has been consistently controversial and laws have been unevenly implemented. Some of these laws are ambiguous. For example, the 1993 Law of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting states that “TV/radio companies shall broadcast in the state language. Programs beamed to certain regions may be in the language of the numerically prevalent local ethnic minority.”⁷ While the state language is designated as Ukrainian, what it means to be a “numerically prevalent minority” is not specified, allowing for a wide range of interpretations of this law.

Ambiguities and contradictions are also present in the Constitution of Ukraine, one of the most significant acts of language regulation, ratified in 1996. The Constitution decrees that Ukrainian is the state language of Ukraine, confirming the state status for Ukrainian established by the 1989 Law on Language in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. However, there are many ambiguities and contradictions regarding the status and use of Russian. For example, Article 10 of the Constitution states that “Ukrainian is the state language,” and “the State ensures the comprehensive development and functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life throughout the entire territory of Ukraine”; but it also states that the “free development, use, and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine are guaranteed.” There is no specification of how the efforts to ensure the development of Ukrainian, Russian, and other languages will be balanced or coordinated. It is notable that Russian is the only language aside from the state language (Ukrainian) to be singled out by name. A similar lack of clarity exists in Article 53 of the Constitution, focusing on education, which states that “citizens who belong to national minorities are guaranteed [. . .] the right to receive instruction in their native language or to study their native language in state and communal educational establishments and through national cultural societies.” There is no definition of a minority and no explanation of when state resources would be provided for non-Ukrainian schooling. Even with this lack of definition, use of Ukrainian increased in education in Ukraine, albeit with pronounced regional differences: in 2006, 78 percent of pupils were studying in Ukrainian, up from 58 percent in 1996.⁸

⁷ Ukrainian and English excerpts of this legislation are available at: <http://www.minelres.lv/NationalLegislation/Ukraine/ukraine.htm> (accessed December 11, 2008).

⁸ Laada Bilaniuk and Svitlana Melnyk, “A Tense and Shifting Balance: Bilingualism and Education in Ukraine,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11, no. 3–4 (2008): 352–53; Ministry of Statistics of Ukraine, *Statystychnyi Shchorichnyk Ukrainy za 2005 rik* (Kyiv: Konsultant, 2006), p. 461.

While the overall increase in the status and use of Ukrainian since independence in 1991 is clear, the trajectory of language dynamics has not been smooth and unidirectional. While Kuchma did not fulfill his campaign promise to make Russian a second state language, during his two terms in office there was backsliding in the implementation of laws intended to promote Ukrainian in the public sphere. In addition to blatantly ignoring laws, the kind of bilingual programming that I analyze below was a way of appearing to observe the laws without fully doing so.⁹ Some pro-Ukrainian language intellectuals argued that “the bilingualism that was increasing on Ukrainian television during Kuchma’s second term was part of a policy of gradually shifting shows that were counted officially as ‘Ukrainian language programming’ to a de facto Russian-dominant position without doing so overtly (a sort of quasi-Soviet approach of plausible deniability).”¹⁰ Such bilingual programs could also be viewed as a balancing act between commercial viability necessitating Russian and legislation requiring some degree of Ukrainian.

During Yushchenko’s presidency, legislation was passed to provide clearer support for Ukrainian in the media. For example, a 2006 amendment of the 1993 law on broadcasting specified that national television channels should broadcast 75 percent of the time in Ukrainian.¹¹ Even when laws were clear, lack of enforcement led some to simply ignore regulations. A study of one week of broadcasting in November 2006 showed that on the six main television channels in Ukraine, 48 percent of broadcasting time was devoted to Ukrainian language programs, and 52 percent to Russian ones.¹² When including the three major channels in Russia that broadcast to much of Ukraine by cable, prime time television was 61 percent Russian and 39 percent Ukrainian.¹³ It is not clear how these statistics counted programs that included both Ukrainian and Russian speakers, or Ukrainian captions for Russian speech.

Russian channels rebroadcast over Ukrainian cable were the focus of another recent controversy. In September 2008, the National TV and Radio Broadcasting Council (NRTR, Ukraine’s media regulatory body) ordered

⁹ The opinion expressed by one of the reviewers of this article, also voiced by several Ukrainian scholars with whom I spoke.

¹⁰ This opinion was offered by one of the reviewers of this article.

¹¹ Inna Kiziridi-Kostryska and Gide Loyrette Nouel, “Television and Radio Broadcasting,” in *Ukrainian Law Firms: A Handbook for Foreign Clients* (n.p.: Iuridicheskaiia Praktika Publishing, 2008), <http://www.ukrainianlawfirms.com/areas/Media/> (accessed December 11, 2008).

¹² Medvedev, “Movnyi balans.”

¹³ *Ibid.*

cable networks to stop rebroadcasting three Russian cable stations by November 1, 2008 due to their noncompliance with Ukrainian laws. One of the problems was that these Russian channels were simultaneously broadcasting the same programming as Ukrainian channels, only in Russian, which was preferred by Russian-speaking Ukrainians. This eroded the advertising revenue of Ukrainian channels. Another Russian channel was banned due to its broadcast of negative and, according to the NRTR, untrue information, e.g., that there were secret CIA prisons in Ukraine and that Hitler dolls were being sold at toy stores in Kyiv.¹⁴ This is an example of how language regulation in the media is often tightly intertwined with economic and political issues. Proponents of the law denied discrimination based on language, pointing out that 65 out of 83 approved foreign cable channels broadcast in Russian, and that several Chinese, Belarusian, and British channels were also prohibited from being rebroadcast because of violations of copyrights and advertising rules.¹⁵

The enforcement of regulations depends to a great extent on local authorities. As one reporter wrote just before the law went into effect, the “NRTR will probably be disobeyed, especially in eastern and southern Ukraine, where the Russian language and the PRU [Party of Regions of Ukraine] dominate.”¹⁶ Indeed, soon after the law went into effect, several Crimean cities refused to stop broadcasting the problematic channels, and the Crimean Parliament issued a formal protest against this ban and other regulations that promote Ukrainian language in the media.¹⁷ While the ban was justified by legal issues, many media professionals regarded the abundance of Russian-language programming as a hindrance to the development of content within Ukraine, and so they saw the Russian cable broadcasts as part of “a war of information and propaganda.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Pavel Korduban, “Ukrainian Cable TV Networks Ordered to Drop Russian Channels,” *The Eurasia Monitor* 5, no. 27 (2008), http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373488 (accessed November 24, 2008)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ ITAR-TASS, “Crimeans Challenge, Ignore Russian TV Ban,” November 28, 2008, available through Transitions Online, <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=297&NrSection=1&NrArticle=20227&tpid=7&ALStart=8> (accessed December 15, 2008)

¹⁸ According to Kostiantyn Kvurt, chairman of the board of Internews-Ukraine, as reported in “Ukraine: Media Sustainability Index 2009,” *International Research & Exchanges Board* (IREX), p.10, http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/index.asp (accessed April 22, 2009).

While there are laws regulating media language use, most popular media relating to television avoided discussing the language issue. During the summer of 2002 I could find no mention of the language of programs in television guides, advertisements for shows, or in news articles about new programs.¹⁹ One would have to view a program to find out what language was being used. In talk shows and game shows language use often varied depending on the preferences of the guests on these shows. The absence of discourse about language choice in promotional media related to television was in stark contrast to the heated debates surrounding language regulation.

In addition to avoiding the issue of language choice in promotional materials, as mentioned above, Ukrainian television stations found various ways to adhere to the laws that required Ukrainian language in broadcasting, at least partially, often through compromises that included some Ukrainian language in their programming without giving up Russian. Channels included shows in each language, provided Ukrainian subtitles on Russian-voiced shows, or had programs that combined both spoken languages. A common practice on talk shows that continues to be widespread in 2009 is an interactional regime that allows the languages to coexist and speakers to choose their preferred language. I call this “non-accommodating bilingualism.” In non-accommodating bilingual interactions, conversations may be carried on in two languages. Speakers do not accommodate to their interlocutors in language choice, even when they can. From the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, this practice had become increasingly more common in the media as well as in everyday interactions, to the extent that people sometimes seemed uncomfortable when someone did noticeably accommodate to their language, as this drew attention to language choice.²⁰

During the summer of 2002, non-accommodating bilingualism was practiced on many television programs in Ukraine, both impromptu (depending on guest language preferences) and institutionalized (on shows that had two hosts, one whose job was to speak Ukrainian and the other, Russian). Shows that had two hosts, one speaking each language, insured the presence of both languages, but this was often an unequal presence. I found five such shows in the summer of 2002. Three shows had a Ukrainian-speaking female host and

¹⁹ There is still no mention of the language of programs in television guides available in Kyiv as of 2009.

²⁰ Laada Bilaniuk, “Language in the Balance: The Politics of Non-Accommodation on Bilingual Ukrainian-Russian Television Shows,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (2010): 105-33.

a Russian-speaking male host: “Loto-zabava” (a lottery program), “Kokhannia z pershoho pohliadu” (“Love at First Sight,” a dating show), and “Medovyi misiats” (“Honeymoon,” a game show for newlyweds). On the lottery show, the hosts’ lines seemed quite scripted, and the Russian speaker simply had more lines assigned. The hosts of “Love at First Sight” were roughly equal in terms of how much they spoke during the first half of the show, but the Russian-speaking host was the only one leading the second half. Only on “Honeymoon” did Ukrainian seem to have a slight edge in the prescribed language use, as the otherwise Russian-speaking man always read the official questions in Ukrainian. But even in that show the Russian language prevailed overall, as most guests chose to speak Russian most of the time, regardless of whether they were spoken to in Ukrainian or Russian (thus supporting the view that bilingual programs were in fact supporting the Russian-dominant status quo).

Two of the bilingual programs with two hosts, “Khoroshou” (a music-focused talk show) and “Pidiom” (“Wake Up,” a morning talk show), were reversed in their pairing of gender and language: Both had a Ukrainian-speaking female host and a Russian-speaking male host.²¹ Here I focus on the dynamics of “Khoroshou,” a program where the hosts presented music videos, interviewed musicians, and interacted with the audience through phone calls that were broadcast into the studio. The title of this program is a play on the words “khoroshe/khorosho” (“nice, good” in Ukrainian and “good” in Russian)²² and “show” (borrowed from English). The two hosts were listed at the beginning of the program as Khrystyna Makovii, who spoke only Russian in the program, and Ilia Vinogradov, who spoke mostly Ukrainian (exceptions discussed below). It is interesting to note that the hosts’ surnames as presented on the show are ethnically marked, but they did not correspond to the host’s assigned languages: Makovii sounds Ukrainian (the suffix would be *-ei* in Russian), although her first name was usually pronounced in its Russian form on the program, as Kristina (which I will use hereafter). Meanwhile Vinogradov

²¹ As mentioned above, by 2009 “Khoroshou” was no longer on the air, while “Pidiom” then had three hosts, two men and one woman, who all speak primarily Ukrainian.

²² The most common way to say “good” in Ukrainian is “dobre.” “Khoroshe” has additional nuances that mean “nice, fine” and in some uses is close to the English meaning of “cute.” Thus the name of this program can be considered to be partly Ukrainian, but note that the Russian common word for “good” is written “khorosho,” pronounced “kharasho.” While “khoroshe” is technically a Ukrainian word, its closeness to the common Russian form is sometimes interpreted as Russified usage. Ultimately the title of the program is multivalent, as it can be both partly Ukrainian and Russian, and has an ending based on an English borrowing.

sounds typically Russian (it would be “Vynohradiv” in Ukrainian). The lack of correspondence between the names and languages used helped blur ethnolinguistic boundaries. The two languages were also both present visually on the program: a header at the top of the screen streamed textual information in Ukrainian, including horoscopes, weather, and some news. A bar at the bottom of the screen scrolled text messages that had been sent from the audience. These were predominantly in Russian, but sometimes in Ukrainian, and they appeared in both Cyrillic and Roman letters.

A microanalysis of the dynamics of interaction on programs, such as this one, reveals how daily practices embody larger-scale trends. The dynamics are shaped by existing values and can also exert their own sway on values through practice. The personalities of the people involved, their personal histories, and the existing and desired values of the language they use all come into play. The language use of the hosts is assigned, a result of political preferences, legislative constraints, and business decisions of the television station owners and managers. The performance of the hosts in their assigned language contributes to the social reputation of this language. Skilled and artful language use and the popularity of a particular person can “rub off on” and popularize the language he or she uses. For example, the language choices of a celebrity are often emulated by fans. Conversely, unskilled language use by unpopular characters can negatively affect the connotations of a particular language. The social connotations of a topic can also color the language associated with it, and vice versa. “Khoroshou” featured the latest music videos, interviews with celebrities, and youth-oriented discussion topics, and so it likely had some influence among Ukrainian youth, although its hosts were evaluated by one critic as having limited intellect.²³ The degree to which any particular show or the media in general influenced the language ideologies and practices of Ukrainians has yet to be researched.²⁴

During eight “Khoroshou” programs that I viewed and recorded in 2002, Kristina Makovii spoke Russian exclusively, never code-switching to accommodate guests or callers who spoke Ukrainian. Her Russian was very fluent and she never seemed to be at a loss for words. In contrast, Ilia Vinogradov, whose job it was to speak Ukrainian, was somewhat less fluent – his speech sometimes seemed to take more effort and he occasionally stumbled while

²³ Kateryna Diadiun, “Rozbir pol’otiv,” *Den’*, August 2, 2002, <http://www.day.kiev.ua/70105/> (accessed on April 21, 2009).

²⁴ For a discussion of the role of media in Ukrainian society, see Dyczok, “Was Kuchma’s Censorship Effective?”

choosing his words. Ilia also code-switched on occasion: while he would continue to speak Ukrainian with Russian-speaking guests from Ukraine, he would switch to Russian when speaking with guests from Russia or other countries. Thus overall the institutionalized language regime on “Khoroshou” favored Russian.

Much of the interaction on this program appeared to be only loosely scripted – the hosts had assigned topics to discuss, but they often appeared to improvise their discussions with false starts, self-corrections, and incomplete sentences, which were absent in scripted shows. Also, in contrast to more scripted shows, the interactions between Ilia and Kristina often appeared to be competitive. The hosts vied for the floor, talked over one another, interrupted one another, attempted to exert control over the topic, and sometimes argued over facts.

Owing to the language roles assigned to the hosts, the struggle for the conversational floor was also effectively a struggle over the presence of Ukrainian or Russian. When initiating conversations with guests and callers, the hosts’ competitiveness in initiating conversations was also an effort to define language choice, as some bilingual speakers did at first accommodate when deciding which language to speak. However, overall the guests and callers were predominantly Russian-speaking. Even some of those who initially responded to Ilya in Ukrainian would switch to Russian when answering Kristina, and then stuck to Russian for the remainder of the conversation. The episode that I examine in more detail provides an example of such an occurrence.

On July 24, 2002 Oleh “Fahot” Mykhailiuta, a singer from the Ukrainian hip-hop music group Tanok Na Maidani Kongo (TNMK),²⁵ appeared as a guest on “Khoroshou.” All the singers in TNMK sing almost exclusively in Ukrainian, and for that reason one might expect Fahot to prefer to speak Ukrainian. However, he and his band mates are from the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, where Russian and mixed Ukrainian-Russian surzhyk prevailed in their spheres of interaction. The singers of TNMK demonstrate that linguistic allegiance is often complex and that categorization of people as Russophone or Ukrainophone can be misleading. In his interview on “Khoroshou,” Fahot begins responding in Ukrainian, accommodating to Ilia (see transcript below, turns 2-3). Then he switches to Russian (turn 6), accommodating to Kristina, and conducts the rest of the interview in Russian, with only occasional insertions of Ukrainian words.

²⁵ Tanok Na Maidani Kongo means “Dance on Congo Square,” referring to Congo Square in New Orleans, known as the birthplace of jazz music.

“Khoroshou” Excerpt²⁶

Speakers: I: Ilia, K: Kristina, F: Fahot.

1. K: Шикарный клип!
A chic videoclip!
2. I: Тук, *i ми вже тут, ану давайте подивимось на Фагота. Твоє справжнє ім'я це, ти чим займаєшся в [групі]*
Knock, and we're already here, well let's take a look at Fahot. Is this your real name, what do you do in [the group]
3. F: Я, ну всім взагалі, всім всьо потрошку
I, well, in general I do everything, a bit of everything.
4. K: Подожди, подожди, давайте представим нашим телезрителям
Wait, wait, let's introduce him to our television viewers.
5. I: Ну я сказав, що Фагот
Well I said that it's Fahot
6. F: Всем здравствуй, всем привет
Hello everyone, hi everybody.
7. K: Это, это группа Танок на Майдани Конго, у нас в студии в гостях.
This, this is the group Tanok Na Maidani Kongo, a guest in our studio.
8. I: А, в однім обличчі
Ah, in one persona
9. F: Один из
One of

²⁶ Russian text is in normal type, Ukrainian in italics, and key code-switches are highlighted in bold type. Words that are bivalent (pronounced identically in Russian and Ukrainian) are identified the same way as the non-bivalent words in a particular utterance. Brackets indicate unclear passages, and explanatory material appears in parentheses.

10. К: Один из, да. А где остальные?
One of, yes. And where are the rest?
11. F: Где-то гуляют наверное. Может может наоборот, наслаждаются прохладной погодкой по одно время пока она есть, а может наоборот, ждут когда опять **спека**
They're probably wandering around somewhere. Maybe maybe the opposite they are enjoying the cool weather for a time while it's here, or maybe the opposite they are waiting for the **heat wave** again
12. К: Не любите жару?
You don't like the heat?
13. I: *Що, невже спека так пантеличить вас [unintelligible]*
What, don't tell me that the heat wave throws you off so much . . .
14. F: Не, ну, тьма для чего нужна, понимаешь. Я в принципе, но ты поняла, на тебе это написано, лучше наверное когда потеплее
No, well, what is darkness for, you understand. In principle I, well, you understand, it's written on you, it's better probably when it's warmer (her shirt says "sex instructor certified," in English).
15. I: *Секс-інструктор написано. Ну щож, в нас така тема сьогодні, знаєш про що думає*
It says sex instructor. Well then, we have such a topic today, you know what do (young people) think about
16. К: Я не инструктор.
I'm not an instructor.
17. F: Ты, ты просто секс! Ты просто **сумворіння** секса в этой программе (laughing)
You, you are just sex! You are just a **creature** of sex in this program (laughing)
18. К: Я, я . . . ведущая программы, я ведущая программы Хорошоу [unintelligible]
I, I am the host of the program, the host of the Khoroshou program

19. I: *Це моя сестра* (I. puts arm around K.)
This is my sister (I. puts arm around K.)
20. K: Давайте приблизимся не ко мне, а к нашей теме. У нас
Let's get closer not to me but to our topic. We have
21. I: *Наша тема а звучить так: про що думає сучасна молодь, і чи ти вважаєш сучасна молодь, що вона вже нічого не варта. Чи ти можеш це довести власним прикладом. Наприклад*
Our topic sounds like this: what do contemporary youth think about, and do you believe that contemporary youth is worthless? Can you show this through your own example? For example
22. F: Ну, ну как по большому счету все пере- все вообще по кругу идет, нельзя сказать что
Well, since in the grander scheme everything, everything in general goes around in a circle, one can't say that
23. I: *Що значить по колу?*
What do you mean, in a circle?
24. F: Ну потому что
Well, because
25. K: Мы не отвечаем
We do not answer
26. F: Всегда приходит, всегда приходит время когда люди говорят вот, что-то с миром творится, что-то не то происходит, посмотри какая моло-
There always comes, there always comes a time when people say look, something's happening with the world, something untoward is happening, look at what youth is like
27. I: *[unintelligible] молодь*
[unintelligible] youth
28. F: Не то что, вообще, посмотри какая молодежь сейчас, вот в мое время, когда-то вот было так и так, и очень будет плохо, если вот мы то-же через некоторое время точно так же начнем говорить.

It's not that, in general, look at what youth is like now, now in my time, it used to be such and such, and it would be really bad if we also started talking like that after some time

29. I: *Своїм дітям.*

To our children

30. F: Детям, внукам

To our children, our grandchildren

31. K: А так было интересно, что вот так было, что у них так было, я до сих пор понять не мо-

And that was interesting, that it used to be that way, that they had it that way, to this day I can't understand

32. F: Вот в том-то и дело, все ассоциируют свою молодость, знаешь молодость да, лучшие годы, побольш ну там

That's just what I mean, everyone associates their youth, you know youth, yes, the best years, mostly well there

33. I: *бурхливі роки життя*

The turbulent years of life

34. K: И ты считаешь, что в наш-

And you believe that our

35. F: все жаркое, восприятие обостренное мира вообще вокруг, впечатления первые какие-то яркие, ну узнаешь жизнь пока ты молодой то ты узнаешь жизнь и понятно потом, когда приходит время если человек закрывается, если он уже закрывается дальше для восприятия, ну часто такое случается, конечно это плохо, но часто случается

Everything is hot, there is a heightened perception of the surrounding world in general, some vivid first impressions, well you are getting to know life while you are young you are getting to know life and it is understandable that later when the time comes if a person closes himself up, if he closes himself up to further perceptions, well that often happens, of course that is

36. I: *про що думає*
what he thinks about
37. F: Он о своей молодости вспоминает с наилучшими впечатлениями и соответственно ему не нравится все, что происходит сейчас, потому что он уже закрылся, он уже не может что-то новое для себя воспринять, открыто
He remembers his youth with the best impressions and correspondingly he doesn't like everything that is happening now because he has closed himself up, he cannot comprehend something new to him, openly

[later in the interview:]

38. F: Пытаемся в жизнь воплотить проект, популяризация украинского языка, *тобто*, сделать на украинском языке несколько песен с английским прононсом, с французским, с французским уже есть [*unintelligible*], итальянский, испанский
We are attempting to bring a project to life, the popularization of the Ukrainian language, *that is*, to make a few songs in Ukrainian with English pronunciation, with French, there is already one with French [pronunciation], Italian, Spanish

While Fahot spoke predominantly Russian, a few times he inserted Ukrainian words, which served as symbols of his Ukrainianness (turns 11, 17, and 38). These insertions were especially significant given the prevailing ideology of purism, in which language mixing was stigmatized.²⁷ In the excerpts examined here, he seemed to emphasize the Ukrainian words and relish their pronunciation: *speka* (heat wave), *sutvorinnia* (creature), *tobto* (that is). The corresponding Russian forms are *zhara*, *sushchestvo* or *tvorene*, and *to est*. There is nothing to suggest that he did not know these forms, and when Kristina used *zhara* in turn 12, he did not pick up this term but continued the discussion with another related Russian form, *kogda poteplee* (when it's warmer, turn 14). It is interesting to note that while the first two examples of code-switches are nouns, the third (*tobto*) is a function word, showing use of Ukrainian not just as colorful vocabulary but also in a more functional manner.

²⁷ Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues*.

After Fahot's response in Ukrainian at the very beginning of the interview, his use of Ukrainian was minimal. However, Iliia's questions and interjections maintained a continuous Ukrainian presence in the conversation, supporting and echoing Fahot's occasional code-switches. When Fahot mentioned the heat wave (*speka*), Iliia repeated the term in his response: *nevzhe speka tak pantelychyt vas* (don't tell me that the heat wave throws you off so much, turn 13). Iliia's use of the uncommon term *pantelychyt* ("throws off, confuses") in this turn is an example of his occasional use of colorful words, which served to highlight the uniqueness and richness of the Ukrainian language. Another such example in this excerpt is the phrase *burkhlyvi roky zhyttia* (the turbulent years of life, turn 33). On other occasions Iliia provided the Ukrainian counterparts for terms uttered in Russian either before or after by Fahot, serving as an echo or almost-simultaneous translation, as in turns 8-9 (*v odnim oblychchilodin iz*), 22-23 (*po krugul'po kolu*), 26-28 (*molodezh/molod'*), 29-30 (*ditiam/detiam*). This Ukrainian echo/translation can also have a pedagogical function, reminding or teaching listeners the corresponding Ukrainian ways of saying the same things.

While the Russian language dominated overall, the continuous presence of Ukrainian revealed a constant effort to claim space for and to promote Ukrainian. This effort was successful to the extent that Ukrainian had a significant presence on the program, and its institutionalized presence supported further use of Ukrainian by callers and celebrity guests. However, the presence of a Russian-speaking host did ultimately support the presence of Russian, as that became the predominant language of discussion. If both hosts had spoken Ukrainian, Fahot would most likely also have continued in Ukrainian, as he sings in Ukrainian and has given interviews in this language on other television programs.²⁸ The institutionalized presence of Russian on this bilingual show supported the continued dominance of that language.

Conclusion

How does language use on television shape and reflect language statuses? What are the political, social, and ideological implications? By taking a close look at

²⁸ One example of Fahot's use of Ukrainian in a television interview is in a news program broadcast on November 9, 2008 on the channel "Inter," available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdALResy6DM> (accessed April 21, 2009). I would like to thank Jurij Dobczanskyj for forwarding this link to the AAUS list.

actual language practices, in this article I showed how struggles over language and identity played out in everyday interactions in Ukraine. In terms of discrete languages, we can say that while both institutionalized and individual practices were establishing a presence for Ukrainian in a field that was formerly exclusively Russian, in 2002 the Russian language still dominated television airtime, in the Ukrainian music “Khoroshou” program and overall. However, dominance in terms of quantity of airtime may not be the most significant indicator of trends. The continuous presence of Ukrainian elements in discourse throughout the program continually asserted the distinct Ukrainianness of the program, marking the fact that it was produced in Ukraine and for Ukraine. Russian speakers from outside of Ukraine would find significant portions of the program alien and unintelligible. The use of Ukrainian on “Khoroshou” also had a potential educational and popularizing impact by promoting familiarity with distinctive Ukrainian vocabulary. The fact that Ukrainian was heard not only from the host, whose job it is to speak this language, but also from a celebrity guest also served to mark Ukrainianness in discourse positively. Even though the celebrity guest only made occasional insertions of Ukrainian words into his otherwise Russian speech, these insertions were symbolically powerful in portraying this musician’s desire to mark Ukrainianness, when he could have easily avoided it. It is important to note that the switches into Ukrainian did not carry connotations of humor or irony; rather, they signaled a preference for the sound, appropriateness, or accessibility of the Ukrainian form to the speaker.

The non-accommodating bilingual format of the show allowed guests and callers to choose their preferred language, in some ways neutralizing the explosive language issue. But owing to the prescribed linguistic roles of the hosts, the presence of both languages was institutionally enforced. This undermined efforts to promote Ukrainian by ensuring the presence of Russian, which continued to carry the “common-sense” connotation of the preferred or “normal” language of urban public interaction.²⁹ The presence of both languages and apparent freedom of choice for guests created the potential for change, but it also allowed the Russian-dominant status quo to continue. This was demonstrated in the excerpt examined here, where the Ukrainian singer chose to speak mostly Russian. However, in a country where an ideology favoring

²⁹ Volodymyr Kulyk, “Constructing Common Sense: Language and Ethnicity in Ukrainian Public Discourse,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 2 (2006): 281–314.

linguistic purism has prevailed, it is notable that the celebrity chose to include Ukrainian words occasionally instead of adhering exclusively to Russian. The Russian language dominated the airtime, but Ukrainian had a significant and symbolically positive presence, and some tension was evident between the two languages. Thus in a few minutes of a television program we can find a microcosm of the language politics in Ukrainian popular culture.

What Is Ukrainian about Ukraine's Pop Culture?: The Strange Case of Verka Serduchka*

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Abstract

The Ukrainian cross-dressing and language-mixing pop star Verka Serduchka (played by male actor Andrii Danylko) is the most controversial product of Ukrainian post-Soviet mass culture. Ukrainian nationalists reject Serduchka as a parody of their nation, while Russians took umbrage at her 2007 Eurovision entry, which allegedly contained the words “Russia goodbye.” This article interprets the character of Serduchka as a jester, who makes audiences laugh at their own cultural stereotypes and prejudices, and at the same time as a representative of Ukraine's living folk culture reflecting an ambiguous national identity of this essentially bilingual country.

Keywords

Verka Serduchka, Ukraine, Russia, Eurovision, identity, pop culture

One of the greatest pop stars in present-day Ukraine and Russia, Verka Serduchka is also the most controversial product of Ukrainian mass culture. People tend to have strong opinions about this cross-dressing, language-mixing character, which is played by a male actor named Andrii Danylko. Ukrainian nationalists usually reject Serduchka as a parody of their national culture. Russian chauvinists recently switched from hearty laughter directed at Serduchka as the representation of their country-bumpkin Ukrainian cousins to boycotting the character as a political Ukrainian and a Russia-hater. Where does Serduchka belong, then? In this essay, I will trace Serduchka's evolving

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connection to Ukrainian culture as reflecting larger cultural processes in the post-Soviet space. I am proposing to see Serdutchka as a jester, who, perhaps unwittingly but very much in line with the Ukrainian cultural tradition, makes audiences laugh at their own cultural stereotypes and prejudices. In contrast to most other commentators, I also emphasize Serdutchka's generally positive, if highly unorthodox, take on Ukraine and Ukrainian folk culture. I go as far as to suggest that Serdutchka's folk-inspired performances may represent the living Ukrainian folk culture of today, a national mass culture in a bilingual country with an ambiguous national identity.

Surzhyk queen

The character of Verka Serdutchka made a grand entrance on the Ukrainian cultural scene in 1995 in television commercials for Privat Bank. The only sentence Verka uttered in this clip positioned her firmly among speakers of surzhyk, or the ungrammatical mixture of Ukrainian and Russian widely employed by less educated Ukrainians, especially in the central and eastern provinces: "Dividendy Pryvat-banku nam polieznishe, chym pianka! [Privat Bank's dividends will be better for us than drinking.]"¹ If the first part of this phrase sounded Ukrainian, the second used Russian words, sometimes modified with Ukrainian suffixes. Verka's very name screamed surzhyk. Although usually rendered in English as Verka Serdutchka, the spelling that the artist employs on his CDs and Web sites, the proper transliteration of the Cyrillic version would be Vierka Serdiuchka – neither the Ukrainian Vira/Virka nor the Russian Vera/Verka, with the family name also sounding like a folksy street nickname derived from the corrupted family name Serdiuk.² Verka's language-mixing persona became a runaway hit, in part because surzhyk was a marker of lower class and low culture, both things that the character clearly parodied early on. Yet, as Laada Bilaniuk notes perceptively, there was also a larger

¹ Oleksandr Hrytsenko, "Vierka Serdiuchka iak dzerkalo ukrainskoi kulturnoi transformatsii," in *Heroi ta znamenytosti v ukrainskii kul'turi*, ed. Oleksandr Hrytsenko (Kyiv: KT&KD, 1999), pp. 340-61, here p. 341.

² In interviews Andrii Danylko has revealed that Serdiuchka was the school nickname of his classmate and friend Ania Serdiuk, whom he even introduced to the public at his early concerts. See Olga Musafirova and Oksana Goncharuk, "Danilko stal Serdiuchkoi v pamiat' o shkol'noi liubvi," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, Dec. 4, 2003, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/23171/25154>; (last accessed March 15, 2009).

cultural context of the Ukrainian state gradually imposing linguistic purity on the society in which the mixture or situational use of Ukrainian and Russian was the long-established norm. Perhaps unwittingly, Danylko presented his audiences with a carnivalesque, liberating take on the very real cultural and political tensions caused by the imposition of linguistic correctness.³

Although still seen as the icon of surzhyk, Verka's character has evolved greatly over time, both socially and culturally. Danylko (b. 1973) first performed as Verka in the early 1990s, when she was first a saleswoman and later, a train car attendant, but always a crass lower-class person from Ukraine speaking a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian. Audiences in Ukraine loved the parody of low culture, while those in Russia also apparently enjoyed laughing at Verka as a stereotypical Ukrainian representing a provincial and accented variant of pan-Russian culture. In 1997, Danylko was invited on Ukrainian TV channel 1+1 to create the "SV Show," a talk-show where his Verka character interviewed various celebrities on the set built as a sleeping car (SV being the traditional Soviet railroad abbreviation for sleeping cars, as well as Verka's inverted initials). In 1998 the show began airing on Russian television (on TV-6 and RTR, later MuzTV) and proved so popular that it ran until 2002.⁴ Over the years, however, the host's persona became glamorized, and the object of Danylko's parody evolved from a low-class Ukrainian woman to something else entirely. If the early Serduchka was a rude and plainly-dressed woman usually wearing a man's jacket and mixing Ukrainian and Russian in equal proportion, Serduchka the show host spoke mostly Russian with occasional Ukrainisms and was dressed as a kitschy female pop star. No longer making fun at the expense of the common folk, Danylko now appeared to be targeting post-Soviet celebrities, both Russian and Ukrainian, as vain and shallow creatures. In order to justify such a social transformation, Danylko and his team came up with the slogan "Verka Serduchka, the Ukrainian Cinderella," which was the centerpiece of Serduchka's official Web site until it closed for reconstruction late in 2008. Serduchka also repeatedly referred to her rags-to-riches story during concerts and interviews.

Indeed, by the late 1990s Verka Serduchka was giving concerts as a singer rather than a stand-up comedian. The first three albums, the inaugural one having been released in 1998, received little notice, but the fourth one,

³) Laada Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues: Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005), pp.164-70.

⁴) <http://www.serduchka-club.com/about/biografiya-andreya-danilko> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

Kha-ra-sho! (Good, 2003) propelled Serduchka to the heights of stardom. Mostly cheesy and derivative pop, Serduchka's music owed its success to the character of Verka. Although the majority of Serduchka's songs are actually composed in literary Russian, the most popular ones usually include musical, linguistic, and visual (music videos) references to Ukrainian culture, thus positioning Verka at the intersection of cultures, in the ambiguous cultural space, where people could be amused with her act while actually laughing at very different things.⁵

Ukrainian pop

Attempts to marry Ukrainian folk tradition with mainstream mass culture have rarely succeeded in recent decades, in large part because since the 1970s Ukrainian mass culture has been dominated by Russian-language musical products. Just like Ukrainian books, contemporary songs in Ukrainian have had their audiences, western Ukrainians and patriotic intellectuals in the eastern oblasts, yet this was always a small cultural niche compared to the impressive reach of Russian books and music. Before the 2000s, the last notable success of Ukrainian pop music occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the young composer Volodymyr Ivasiuk wrote the immensely popular song "Chervona Ruta" (Red Rue, 1968), which became a household tune in Ukraine after it was featured in an eponymous musical film starring the young singer Sofia Rotaru (1971), who then created a group called "Chervona Ruta."⁶ Yet, like so many singers who owed their initial success to the successful blending of folk melodies and modern rhythms, Rotaru eventually went mainstream by switching in the mid-1970s to generic pop (later, for a brief period, to rock) and the Russian language. She continued to perform some Ukrainian and Moldovan folk pop on a side, but was known primarily as a Russian pop star.⁷

⁵ When a Western anthropologist asked his Ukrainian interviewees whether Verka was Ukrainian or Russian, 59 percent answered "Ukrainian" and only 8 percent "Russian," but many also proposed other designations, such as "hybrid" or "Russo-Ukrainian" (20 percent) or even "neither" (17 percent). See James Joseph Crescente, "Performing Post-Sovietness: Verka Serduchka and the Hybridization of Post-Soviet Identity in Ukraine," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2007): 419-20.

⁶ See <http://www.pisni.org.ua/songs/817373.html> (last accessed March 15, 2009);

⁷ On Rotaru, see David MacFadyen, *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2001), ch. 6 and Rotaru's official site (in Russian): <http://www.sofiarotaru.com/> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

This is the profile Rotaru maintains to this day. In a 2009 interview, she said, “I do not want my art to be limited by any one language or borders. My mission is to unite Slavic peoples.”⁸ (Ivasiuk, who stayed with folk pop, died under suspicious circumstances in 1979. Ever since his death there have been speculations that he may have been killed by the KGB because of his commitment to Ukrainian culture.)⁹

Later pop singers were never able to approach the degree of success Ivasiuk, and especially Rotaru in her “folk” years, enjoyed with Ukrainian audiences. The Ukrainian language reentered youth musical culture only with the disintegration of the Soviet political order in the late 1980s, when so-called protest rock acquired Ukrainian coloring on the wave of the national cultural revival in the republic. This Ukrainian rock movement, and especially the rock festival “Chervona Ruta,” where only songs in Ukrainian were allowed on the insistence of Ukrainian Canadian sponsors, generated some scholarly attention in the West, but its primary audience was in fact the same as that of Ukrainian books and music in the earlier period – western Ukraine and the Ukrainian intelligentsia in other parts of the country.¹⁰

Some Ukrainian rock groups founded in the late 1980s and early 1990s went on to build an impressive following, in particular Okean Elzy and Vopli Vidopliasova, or VV, as it is generally known. The nature of rock music, however, presented challenges to rockers wishing to establish clear links to the Ukrainian folkloric melos. Ukrainian texts in and of themselves did not necessarily mark rock music as “Ukrainian,” although VV’s simultaneous forays into folk and patriotic pop could serve as clear markers of national musical identity. What Ukrainian texts did accomplish, however, was to narrow down the band’s audience to a now wider but still limited Ukrainian-speaking audience. The Ukrainian hip-hop group TNMK, or Tanok na Maidani Kongo (Dance on Congo Square, a reference to the reputed birthplace of jazz in New Orleans) has come up with a more interesting recipe, which is somewhat

⁸) http://newsmusic.ru/news_3_14182.htm (last accessed March 15, 2009).

⁹) See <http://www.ivasyuk.org> (last accessed March 15, 2009); Ivan Lepsha, *Zhyttia i smert Volodymyra Ivasiuka* (Kyiv: Vii’s’ko Ukrainy, 1994); “Pravda cherez 30 rokov? Henprokuratura ponovyla slidstvo pro prychny smerti V. Ivasiuka,” *Ukraina moloda*, Febr. 11, 2009 (<http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/print/84/45/47481>, last accessed March 15, 2009).

¹⁰) See Romana Bahry, “Rock Culture and Rock Music in Ukraine,” in *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 243–96; Catherine Wanner, “Nationalism on Stage: Music and Change in Soviet Ukraine,” in *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 136–55, in particular p. 137 on Ukrainian Canadian sponsors and p. 150 on weak interest in eastern Ukraine.

similar to Serduchka's musical language. Mixing hip-hop with jazz, funk, and rock, and often using tongue-in-cheek lyrics, TNMK proved able to engage the Ukrainian musical tradition in a very modern way, as evidenced, for example, by their 2008 hip-hop remix of "Chervona Ruta" featuring Sofia Rotaru herself. In the video, Rotaru appears in a ball gown, while other singers wear eighteenth-century costumes on top of t-shirts and slacks, likely as a visual commentary on their encounter with the Ukrainian "classics."¹¹ Equally important, from its early years to the present, TNMK did not shy away from using surzhyk both to add a comic touch to their work and to challenge, sometimes directly in their songs, the fetishization of "authentic" literary Ukrainian.¹²

During the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, however, TNMK joined Okean Elzy and VV in supporting the Orange opposition, which positioned itself as the defender of national culture. The Orange Revolution gave a new and potent impulse to protest music in Ukrainian, often distributed via the Internet.¹³ Yet it would be a mistake to assume that all Ukrainian-speaking musicians, no matter what their producers' commercial interests and alliances, closed ranks around the oppositional candidate Viktor Yushchenko. In fact, by far the most interesting and successful attempt to fuse modern music with Ukrainian folk motifs came from a performer, who for most of the election campaign supported the official candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, although she switched to the Orange side later on. This was the pop superstar Ruslana (stage name of Ruslana Lyzhychko).¹⁴

Released in Ukrainian in 2003 and in English in 2004, Ruslana's song "Dyki tantsi," or "Wild Dances," was a hit in a number of European countries. With it, Ruslana won a landslide victory in the 2004 Eurovision pop contest and, although her home country could not vote for the song, Ukrainians bought 500,000 copies of the eponymous album. Since Ruslana's Eurovision triumph, literary scholars and musicologists have made some interesting

¹¹ <http://video.i.ua/user/478848/6218/51492/> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

¹² See Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues*, pp. 162-64 on TNMK's clever use of surzhyk's subversive and countercultural function.

¹³ See Bohdan Klid, "Rock, Pop and Politics in Ukraine's 2004 Presidential Campaign and Orange Revolution," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 23, no. 1 (March 2007): 118-37 and Adriana Helbig, "The Cyberpolitics of Music in Ukraine's 2004 Orange Re-volution," *Current Musicology* 82 (Fall 2006): 81-101.

¹⁴ According to Klid, "Rock, Pop, and Politics," p. 122, Ruslana supported Yanukovych until mid-November 2004 and even sang a Russian song with him on a campaign stop.

suggestions about her cultural strategies. Ruslana claimed to have been using the “authentic” (her term) folk tradition of the Hutsuls, the Ukrainian mountain people of the Carpathians, but this was really a rhetorical device that she employed to present her music as Ukrainian – and to glamorize the Ukrainian folk tradition within the idiom of modern show business. The use of traditional drums, and especially Hutsul alpine horns, or *trembity*, early in the performance of “Wild Dances” anchored it in the Ukrainian tradition, but what audiences perceived as Hutsul motifs in the music could in fact be references to a generic southeast European folk idiom. The dancers’ dresses (black leather and fur showing a lot of skin) likewise had little to do with the Hutsuls, but conveyed to a modern viewer the notions of primitive energy, noble savagery, and even sadomasochistic eroticism.¹⁵

Overall, Ruslana’s recipe for exoticizing and glamorizing the reinvented folk tradition worked extremely well with both foreign and domestic audiences. Her recognition in Europe may have also played a role in her success at home, where she was the first Ukrainophone singer in decades to enjoy success with the Russian-speaking mass listener. Yet it was a curious success because the residents of central and eastern Ukraine could not really identify with the Hutsul tradition of the extreme west; Ruslana’s mixing of Ukrainian and English must have sounded no less exotic to people who are more accustomed to the Russo-Ukrainian *surzhyk*. Except for one dancer’s Cossack-style shaved head with a scalp lock, “Wild Dances” had nothing to do either musically or visually with the history or folk tradition of east-central Ukraine, by far the largest and most populous part of the country.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian folk music was very much alive and well in east-central Ukraine. The songs performed by various professional and amateur groups were, of course, sanitized and nationalized versions edited by patriotic composers and transmitted back to the countryside by modern media. But along with the constructed Ukrainian national culture there was a living one, which was constantly evolving, mischievous, and averse to linguistic purity. For example, visitors to countryside discos in Poltava oblast in the late 1980s – the time and place where Andrii Danylko was coming of age – enthusiastically

¹⁵ See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXgaOTOCsU> (last accessed March 15, 2009). For a subtle analysis of Ruslana’s take on the Hutsul tradition, see Marko Pavlyshyn, “Envisioning Europe: Ruslana’s Rhetoric of Identity,” *Slavonic and East European Journal* 50, no. 3 (2006): 469–85 and David-Emil Wickström, “‘Drive-Ethno-Dance’ and ‘Hutsul Punk’: Ukrainian-Associated Popular Music and (Geo)Politics in a Post-Soviet Context,” *Yearbook of Traditional Music* 40 (2008): 61–88.

danced to a version of the Ukrainian folk song “Choboty z buhaia” (Bullskin Boots) complete with occasional Russian words, muffled obscenities, and generally irreverent content.¹⁶ Eminently danceable, this “unofficial” folk-pop hit of countryside dancing parties during the late Soviet period may have more to do with the origins of the Serdutchka phenomenon than the entire previous tradition of using folk elements in a musical idiom that was not itself based in folklore. In other words, Verka Serdutchka may have come straight from the Ukrainian village not just as a character but as a cultural happening as well.

Serdutchka the Ukrainian

Like most people moving from the Ukrainian-speaking countryside to Russian-speaking cities, Verka the character does not so much mix the two languages as use them situationally – something linguistic anthropologists would call “code-switching.”¹⁷ Ever since Verka the lowly train attendant became Verka the pop star, the proportion of surzhyk in her utterances diminished considerably. It is even less prominent in her songs. In fact, what Ukrainian and Western commentators often take for examples of surzhyk in Verka’s texts in most cases would not sound “right” to people who speak it. Surzhyk is, of course, not a random ungrammatical mixture of Ukrainian and Russian but a “fused lect,” with its inner logic of mixing and corrupting words.¹⁸ Passages that sound like “authentic” surzhyk are actually rare in Verka’s songs; much more common is occasional code-switching from the predominant Russian to Ukrainian or “surzhyk” aimed to establish the character’s ethnic identity or achieve a comic effect. Rarer still are songs in Ukrainian, although they are well worth analyzing for the cultural strategies the performer employs.

Serdutchka’s first hit album, “Kha-ra-sho!” (2003), was also the only one featuring two songs with predominantly Ukrainian lyrics. “A ia u hai khodyla”

¹⁶ There are many versions of this folk song, originally a wedding dance song, all of them equally robust and irreverent, usually with another word inserted in the text where an obscenity is an obvious rhyme. See, for example, <http://ketrin-in-ua.mylivepage.ru/wiki/496/2118> and a karaoke version at <http://karaoke.kerma-nn.ru/Singles/song9744.htm> (both last consulted March 15, 2009). In 2007 a new “ethno-disco” band, “Choboty z buhaia,” was created on the initiative of Oleh Skrypka, the soloist of VV. See http://pidkamin.ridne.net/choboty_z_bugaya (last accessed March 15, 2009).

¹⁷ Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues*, p. 121.

¹⁸ For an excellent analysis of surzhyk, see Bilaniuk, *ibid.*

(I Went to the Forest) actually uses a children's verse by the Ukrainian literary giant Lesia Ukrainka (1871–1913), although for contemporary listeners to recognize the text they would have to be people who in Soviet times went to elementary schools with Ukrainian as the language of instruction. Musical references are to children's musical evenings of the 1970s; this is a rare Serdutchka song featuring a piano as the principal accompanying instrument. There are no Russian or surzhyk elements in the text. It is a simple story about a child who sees a sleeping hare and wants to touch it. The song also includes a refrain in English and German: "La-la-la-la, love me / La-la-la-la, feel me / La-la-la-la, kiss me / La-la-la-la, give me / auf Wiedersehen." If this text were more recognizable and held sacred status in Ukrainian culture, one could see this song as Serdutchka's blasphemous attack on the Ukrainian literary classics, much in the way many patriotic intellectuals reacted in the late 1990s to Verka's rendition on the SV Show of Taras Shevchenko's famous poem "I Was Thirteen" as a street person's lament.¹⁹ Yet the musical idiom and the fact that it is a children's poem establish a different system of references. Instead of an affront to the Ukrainian classics, an allusion to Ukrainian-speaking childhood and the 1970s can be read into this song.

A second Ukrainian song from this album, "Liuta bdzhilka" (The Angry Bee) provides a rare example of Verka's code-switching from a predominantly Ukrainian text to surzhyk before returning to literary Ukrainian. After the Ukrainian first stanza, in which only the name of a Soviet holiday (May 1) is song in Russian and the word for buzzing or humming is a Russian word with a Ukrainian ending, the second stanza features typical surzhyk models, whereby the speaker uses Ukrainian-accented Russian terms for the concepts a Ukrainian speaker is likely to use with Russian-speaking officials: "familiia" (family name), "po otchestvu" (patronymic, here a hybrid of the Russian and Ukrainian words), and "v miru ia Danilka" (my real name is Danylko, "v miru" being a Russian ecclesiastical term used to indicate the surnames of monks and nuns, used here for comic effect). The only deviation from literary Ukrainian in the third stanza occurs in the first sentence, "Ia malenka bdzhilka / I zvaty mene Maia / Ia narodylas, khto ne pomne, / Piervago maia." If the beginning ("I am a little bee and my name is Maia. I was born") is perfectly Ukrainian, "khto ne pomne" ("for those who don't remember") features a Russian verb with a Ukrainian ending and the last two words, "Pervogo maia" ("on the first of May") are in Russian. Overall, this transition sounds very

¹⁹ See Hrytsenko, "Vierka Serdiuchka," p. 345.

natural, because this particular verb is indeed often used in such form by surzhyk speakers and because the names of Soviet holidays were also habitually used in their Russian form. Finally, the song ends with two separate refrains, one in Russian and another in Ukrainian.

Such songs were exceptional in Serduchka's repertoire, however, likely because the linguistic identity projected there did not fit with that of the pop music consumer in east-central Ukraine and Russia, where Danylko was making most of his money. "The Angry Bee" presented Ukrainian linguistic identity as the norm and surzhyk as a deviation from it, whereas Danylko's target audiences would see Russian as the norm and surzhyk as a comic deviation, if not a parody of Ukrainian identity as such. In his later albums, therefore, code-switching is rare, usually from the Russian base, and can be either to literary Ukrainian or to surzhyk (since the Russian-speaking listener is unlikely to distinguish between the two). Yet, no matter what the language, there is actually nothing in the texts to suggest the character's negative attitude to Ukrainian culture and identity.

A particularly controversial song, "Gulianka" (A Party) from the album "Chita-Drita" (2003/2004) can serve as a good illustration of the two points just mentioned. The music starts solemnly, as if it were an anthem, then the sound of broken glass follows, and the melody devolves into a fast dance tune based vaguely on folk rhythms. Amid party banter, Serduchka sings in Russian about the joys of partying, drinking, and singing. The refrain, however, features one line in Ukrainian: "Songs flow, wine flows / And the glasses clink in unison. / *Ukraine has not yet perished* / If we [can] party like that." "Shche ne vmerla Ukraina" (Ukraine Has Not Yet Perished) is both the title and the first line of the Ukrainian national anthem, so its very insertion into a Russian dance song may be considered sacrilegious, but does the text really project a negative image of Ukraine? A vibrant and joyful place, where people know how to party well, even if they do not always speak Ukrainian, are not exactly the associations that the Ukrainian national anthem normally evokes, but this is not ill-intentioned grotesque either. After all, in the last refrain the Ukrainian words change – Serduchka sings, "*You will live, Ukraine* / If we party like that."

Serduchka's music videos, likewise, may at first sight appear to project a derogatory attitude towards Ukrainian culture and identity, but a closer analysis dispels this impression. Thus, the video clip for the song "Hop-Hop" begins with traditionally-dressed women sitting around a table and singing, a capella, a song with a folkloric melody about unrequited love. Unexpectedly, though, this fragment ends with a muffled obscenity: "If they don't love us, so

good-looking and beautiful, if they don't love us, to . . . with them! [*to khai idut na . . .*].” The melody then changes abruptly to a fast dance tune, if still vaguely folkloric, this time carried by musical instruments. Serdushka (also dressed as a Ukrainian peasant woman) joins in with a humorous song almost entirely in Ukrainian, with only a few surzhyk inserts, calling on the women to party instead of lamenting their fate. The visual narrative features a beautiful young woman dodging kissing attempts by two males sitting around her and a drunken male villager kissing a roasted pig. Then entire party, all dressed in embroidered Ukrainian shirts, joins Serdushka in a fast group dance.²⁰ If there is a parody here, it is one of an ossified “folk culture,” purged and edited by folklorists, which is opposed by a popular culture in Ukrainian, which is very much alive and irreverent.

Another music video, although almost entirely in Russian with a couple of skillful surzhyk inserts, still manages to project a positive image of the Ukrainian countryside, as well as that of a national musical tradition. Taking its name from a popular folk dance, “Chita-drita,” the video begins with Verka (dressed as a pop star) arriving in her native village in a sparkling new car, an old Soviet Volga GAZ 21 model, thus suggesting that the visit takes place in the Soviet past – a generic reference here because this model was discontinued in 1970 and the rest of the clip’s imagery is from the 1980s rather than the 1960s. As Verka unpacks the gifts, she asks that the television be switched on for the kids, referring to the TV set as “Elektronik,” a name melding the 1980s Soviet television set brand (Elektron) and a popular children’s TV film from 1980 (*The Adventures of Elektronik*). The program on TV also suggests the 1980s, but late into that decade, because the host invites everybody to dance the Lambada (also known in English as Zouk-Lambada), a Latin American dance that became popular in Western Europe and the Soviet Union after the release in 1989 of the French pop group Kaoma’s video called “Lambada.”²¹ Thus, it is the generic late-Soviet past rather than any specific moment in time when the TV is switched on.

Verka, however, gets all worked up by the host’s suggestion and proclaims in Russian, “Losers (*lokhi*) dance the Lambada, but we dance the Chita-drita.” She then jumps into the television screen head first and teaches the host to dance the Chita-drita. The refrain is indeed based vaguely on the folk dance Chita-drita, and Verka dances against the background of a Ukrainian carpet

²⁰ See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpJ44NV6m-E> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

²¹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zouk-Lambada> (last consulted March 15, 2009).

hanging on the wall. Other “Ukrainian” visual clues also provide interesting material for analysis. One male character is an archetypal folkloric “Ukrainian,” mustached and dressed in a full Cossack traditional costume complete with baggy red pants, as if he belongs to some Ukrainian dance group, but the other two middle-aged males apparently represent Ukrainian intellectuals of the late Soviet period – they are sporting traditional embroidered shirts under formal jackets and wearing thick-rimmed glasses suggestive of the 1970s. (However, Verka tells one of them that he looks like Chikatilo in those glasses – a reference to Andrei Chikatilo, the infamous Russian serial killer, a Ukrainian by origin and a schoolteacher by profession, whose arrest was big news in 1990).²² At first, the two “Ukrainian intellectuals” look bewildered, but towards the end they are obviously enjoying themselves, approving Verka’s performance.²³ It is tempting to interpret these two village intellectuals as Serdushka’s tongue-in-check answer to her Ukrainian critics.

The Eurovision scandal

Soon, however, Verka was to acquire new critics on the opposite side of the post-imperial cultural spectrum – among Russian patriots. In 2007 Serdushka was selected, amid significant controversy, as Ukraine’s representative at the Eurovision song contest. Most of the opposition came from Ukrainian patriotic quarters, where the character was seen as denigrating Ukrainians on multiple levels – their folk culture, their linguistic identity, and the national feminine ideal.²⁴ In April 2007, some nationalist groups organized protest rallies against Serdushka’s selection to represent Ukraine. Western mass media, which did not take the Eurovision nearly as seriously as Europe-leaning Ukrainian patriots, saw the nationalist opposition to a cross-dressing and language-mixing pop singer as curious, so this news was reported widely, including BBC News and *Time* magazine. Even the *Kuwait Times* quoted the

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei_Chikatilo (last accessed March 15, 2009).

²³ See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPcD9GXef04> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

²⁴ See, for example, “Lviviany prosiat’ Yushchenka izoliuvaty Serdiuchku,” *OBOZ.ua*, March 13, 2007 (<http://obozrevatel.com/news/2007/3/15/160792.htm>), “Ivan Zaiets: Ukraina na Ievrobachenni povynna buty predstavlena naikrashchymy vykonavtsiamy, a Serdiuchka do nykh ne nalezhyt,” *ZIK*, Febr. 13, 2007 (<http://zik.com.ua/ua/print/2007/02/13/64023>) and “NRU: Vierka Serdiuchka – han’ba Poltav,” *Korespondent.net Ukraina*, May 22, 2007 (<http://ua.korespondent.net/showbiz/293240>, all last accessed March 15, 2009).

head of the youth wing of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, Vasylyl Popovych, as saying that “Verka Serduchka shows the post-imperial inferiority complex that some Ukrainians still suffer.”²⁵

Aside from Serduchka herself, however, there was little in her song entry that could give offence to patriotic Ukrainians devoted to traditional ideals. The music was generic pop; Serduchka and her backup dancers did not wear Ukrainian costumes or switch to surzhyk in order either to project or parody a Ukrainian identity.²⁶ Instead, Danylko performed in a futuristic silver costume with a metallic star on his head, probably suggestive of Verka’s star status. Rather, Russian nationalists immediately took exception to the song, and that was because of its lyrics. Entitled “Danzing Lasha Tumbai,” the song combined English, German, Russian, and Ukrainian phrases, but lacked a coherent story line. What mattered was the way the singer pronounced the English refrain, “I want to see lasha tumbai,” which on at least one occasion during the Eurovision performance sounded like, “I want to see Russia goodbye.” (Serduchka’s nonsensical claim that “lasha tumbai” was Mongolian for “whipped cream” was denied by the Mongolian Embassy in Moscow.) The song also featured some pro-Ukrainian statements in Ukrainian, which the character exclaims rather than sings: “Ukraine is cool, Ukraine is super” and “Dance, Maidan,” the last being a reference to Kyiv’s Independence Square, the main venue of the pro-Western Orange Revolution. To Russian nationalists, this sealed the image of Serduchka as a pro-Ukrainian Russophobe.

Russian disillusionment with Serduchka was even greater because so many patriotic Russians, who had trouble acknowledging Ukrainians as a distinct nation, used to enjoy her gigs as a parody of Ukrainian culture. They were now facing the painful discovery that Serduchka was really on the Ukrainian side, meaning that previously she had made them laugh at their own stereotypes rather than laughed with them at the Ukrainian culture as such. The jester’s removal of his mask caught them completely unprepared, hence their angry overreaction. Some Russian TV personalities issued calls to boycott Serduchka, which were picked up enthusiastically in the Russian blogosphere. By the

²⁵ See “Nationalist Controversy,” *Time*, May 10, 2007; Helen Fawkes, “Eurovision Act Angers Ukrainians,” BBC News, April 2, 2007 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pt/ft/-/2/hi/entertainment/6516927.stm>); “Ukrainian Drag Queen a Front-Runner at Eurovision,” *Kuwait Times*, May 13, 2007 (http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid+NTIzMTk2NzY1). All web sites last accessed March 15, 2009.

²⁶ See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkoU3lJymj4> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

summer of 2007, Serduchka's concerts in Russia and appearances on Russian TV decreased dramatically. Danylko's invitation to the popular "Novaia volna" song contest was cancelled, and his performance at the annual pop show "Slavianskii bazaar" was edited out of the televised version aired in Russia.²⁷

Painful as it was for Danylko's revenues, the Russian boycott forced the Ukrainian establishment to change its attitude to the artist. In a sense, the 2007 scandal "imposed" on Serduchka the identity of a political, if not cultural, Ukrainian. Verka did not become the favorite singer of President Yushchenko and nationalistic intellectuals, but at least she could no longer be dismissed as simply a pro-Russian parody of the Ukrainian national culture. Perhaps, she could even be useful as yet another Ukrainian "victim" of Russian imperial attitudes. In 2008, the Yushchenko administration awarded Danylko the coveted honorific title of "People's Artist of Ukraine."²⁸

Post-ethnic Serduchka

Following the Eurovision scandal, Danylko started exploring new political and cultural identities for himself and his character. He contemplated a run for the notoriously corrupt and splintered Ukrainian parliament as a candidate from his own party called "Against All" or, after the revelation that this name was already registered by another political group, "For Us." Some pollsters were giving his party two percent of the vote, but in the end Danylko did not run.²⁹ In 2008, a Ukrainian media ranking of Ukraine's 100 most influential people listed the character of Verka Serduchka in the 98th place, ahead of the former President Kuchma, who was number 100.³⁰ At the same time, late in 2008 Danylko (in the character of Verka) returned to the Ukrainian television to host Verka Serduchka's Show, a much tamer version of his SV Show

²⁷ See the transcript of the radio talk show on Russia's Svoboda Radio: "Boikot Verke Serdiuchke: Podelom li?" <http://www.svobodanews.ru/Transcript/2007/07/10/20070710120002013.html> (last accessed March 15, 2009) and Marta Dyczok, "Ukraine's Changing Communicative Space: Destination Europe or the Soviet Past?," in *Contemporary Ukraine on the Cultural Map of Europe*, ed. Larissa M. L. Zaleska Onyshkevych and Maria G. Rewakowicz (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), p. 382.

²⁸ *Fakty*, Aug. 21, 2008, p. 4; *Segodnia*, Aug. 21, 2008, p. 5.

²⁹ Andrei Okara, "Kak Andrei Danilko i Verka Serdiuchka ne stali deputatami Verkhovnoi Rady," APN, Aug. 28, 2007, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article17676.htm> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

³⁰ *Gazeta po-kievski*, Aug. 22, 2008, p. 8.

from the 1990s, which featured mostly reverent interviews with Russian pop and film stars, and very few elements of surzhyk or attempts at political humor. Verka was now dressed as an ethnically neutral pop star, often wearing her Eurovision headdress with a large shining star.

Serduchka's songs and music videos also changed after the Eurovision controversy. The image of a Ukrainian peasant woman disappeared along with Ukrainian musical references and the language games, which had positioned the character on the Ukrainian-Russian cultural divide. If Serduchka mixed any languages in her album "DoReMi DoReDo" (July 2008), they were more likely to be German and English than Ukrainian and Russian. Musically, Serduchka was no longer within the ethnically marked "world music" trend, but rather was undergoing a transition from generic pop to pop-punk. Danylko's producers now targeted audiences in France and Germany.³¹

Two songs from this album, however, may be viewed as a commentary on Verka's recent troubles in Russia and her new political identity. Both use text sparingly, though, each consisting of one or two sentences repeated over and over again. In the first case, it is "I am [the] Eurovision queen / I am [the] Eurovision queen" with the refrain "Russia tumbai." There is no doubt about the refrain's first word – in this song Serduchka is clearly singing "Russia" rather than "Lasha," which makes the use of the forcefully pronounced "tumbai" instead of "good-bye" even more powerful, almost a carnivalesque replacement of a swear word. In the second case, the entire song consists of a single phrase, "Mikhail Gorbachev / Thank you very much!" with an insert from the traditional Russian song "Kalinka" towards the end. Of course, Gorbachev remains extremely unpopular in Russia as the person who "destroyed" the mighty Soviet Union, but this is precisely the reason why people in the rest of the world remember him fondly. Post-Soviet countries other than Russia also trace their independence to the Soviet collapse, yet another reason to thank Gorbachev.

In other words, Serduchka reemerged after the Eurovision scandal as a post-ethnic cultural figure with a political agenda and commercial orientation towards Europe. Danylko did succeed in making his way back to Russian TV and the concert circuit, but his reputation there is forever tainted. Forced to position himself on one side of the Russian-Ukrainian political divide, Danylko has lost the opportunity to play on the cultural ambiguities that served as Verka's main attraction early on. He abandoned the Ukrainian image

³¹⁾ *KP v Ukraine*, July 10, 2008, p. 20.

and folk motifs because Russian audiences no longer trusted him as a performer of enjoyable parodies, and his Ukrainian audiences (now including some members of the political and cultural establishment) could perceive these gigs as offensive. This is unfortunate, because Serduchka's "ethnic" image with all its built-in ambiguities would have been a healthy critical antidote to the cultural and political "certainties" of the late Yushchenko period in Ukraine and the Putin/Medvedev era in Russia.

One possible way of analyzing Verka Serduchka's fall from grace in Russia is to argue that since the Orange Revolution the two countries have drifted apart "psychologically," that the post-Soviet and Russian-speaking cultural community is disintegrating.³² In other words, it has become impossible for entertainers like Danylko to straddle the cultural border while remaining popular with both Russians and Ukrainians. Logically, however, this would have to result in Serduchka's popularity collapsing in Ukraine, not in Russia. It would be Ukrainian audiences, with their new-found national consciousness, that would reject a parody act targeting their nation. What happened instead was Serduchka's rejection in Russia as a renegade jester, who revealed his (or her) true views after playing for years to the audience's stereotypes. I am not suggesting that from the very beginning Danylko had an elaborate plan to undermine the Russian stereotype of Ukrainians (shared also by many Ukrainians), but, like many gifted comedy artists, he could be guided in the evolution of his character by audiences' reactions. National self-parody can develop from the notion of inferiority imposed by an imperial master to triumph over a stereotype, when the indigenes reclaim it in a spirit of irony.³³ Perhaps, this is exactly what was happening to Verka Serduchka until politics led to the erasure – hopefully, not a permanent one – of the character's ethnic dimension.

³² Ilya Khineiko, "The Little Russian: Verka Serduchka," *Current Politics in Ukraine*, May 22, 2007, <http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2007/05/22/the-little-russian-verka-serduchka/> (last accessed March 15, 2009).

³³ See David Goldie, "'Will Ye Stop Yer Tickling, Jock?': Modern and Postmodern Scottish Comedy," *Critical Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2000); 7-18, here 11-13.