

first publication

#### Introduction

Based on an analysis of two major Ukrainian pop icons, this paper seeks to examine the consumer culture portrayal of Ukraine abroad, to which both artists have responded rather differently. The choice of these celebrities is based not only on the level of their success and the vividness of their stage personas, but was also made because they have both built a significant part of their international popularity on an emphasis of their ›Ukrainianness‹. Ruslana has become popular all over the world as a »Hutsul princess of the wild dances«, while Andriy Danylko with his female stage persona - Verka Serduchka - became a popular jester personage of a pop star from the Ukrainian boonies.

On the surface, there is little ground for a comparison of Ruslana and Serduchka. Their performance styles and target audiences are very different. Serduchka's comic art is impossible to understand without an intimate familiarity with post-Soviet realities. Nevertheless, I will look for an ideological background that contributed to Serduchka's wide popularity in Russia even more so than in Ukraine. Similarly, Ruslana's project was specifically targeted to succeed internationally, and in Europe in particular. This paper will demonstrate how Ruslana responded to European fantasies of a wild, exotic and unexplored Eastern Europe. The success of both artists demonstrates that they have been able to strike a chord with their intended audience; and it is this particular chord that is the focus of the paper.

Although I will analyze these respective artists' portrayals of the hallmarks of ›Ukrainianness‹, I do not aim to evaluate these images in terms of accuracy in depicting contemporary Ukrainian realities. Instead, I am interested in tracing the demand for these respective portrayals of Ukraine outside of the country. Specifically, I am interested in uncovering why the image created by Ruslana found such a vivid interest in Europe, while Serduchka has remained a favorite of Russian TV and music shows for years. Through the images created by these artists, the article seeks to explore how constructions of ›Ukrainianness‹ are influenced by consumer culture outside of Ukraine.

#### Markers of Popularity

The popularity levels of both Serduchka and Ruslana in Ukraine are rather similar. Both are overwhelmingly popular among children. Ruslana is also extremely popular with young teenagers, while Serduchka dominates public spaces such as markets, shopping malls, discos, and weddings. However, this research paper seeks to demonstrate that Ruslana receives much greater appreciation in Western Europe, while Serduchka enjoys incredible success in Russia. To measure a concept as subjective as an artist's popularity, I focus on a few very concrete indicators of Ruslana's and Serduchka's popularity.

According to Ruslana's official website,<sup>1</sup> out of sixty-two events Ruslana participated in in 2005, nineteen took place in Ukraine, over thirty-five in Europe, China, Israel, etc., and only two in Russia. She received the *World Best Selling Ukrainian Artist Award* at the *World Music Awards 2004*. Moreover, her single and album *Wild Dances* has reached Gold and Platinum status in Belgium, Greece, the Czech Republic, Cyprus and other countries. These statistics illustrate that Ruslana's most attentive audience is in Ukraine and Europe, the Mediterranean and parts of Asia. In addition, Ruslana actively promoted the single *Wild Dances*, holding an exhaustive series of performances throughout Europe in the year prior to *Eurovision 2004*. Conversely, it is interesting to explore the relative coldness of Russian audiences towards Ruslana. Russia is a consumer of global pop culture just like any other country, but it has somehow remained unresponsive to Ruslana, despite the singer's sweeping popularity in neighboring Ukraine and in the international market.

Andriy Danylko's website does not provide any information regarding the number of Serduchka's CDs sold in Ukraine or abroad. However, the following facts can also serve as indicators of Serduchka's degree of popularity in Russia: For New Year 2006, Serduchka was invited to participate in five New Year musicals and musical shows on several major Russian TV channels, such as *First Channel*, *RTR*, and *NTV*.<sup>2</sup> Various Russian websites indicate that

<sup>1</sup> All information in the following paragraph is taken from Ruslana's official website at [http://www.ruslana.com.ua/main\\_eng.html](http://www.ruslana.com.ua/main_eng.html) [Last visited: 07.04.2006]

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Andriy Danlko's official website at <http://v-serduchka.com/news.html> [l.v.: 07.04.2006] New Year musicals and musical shows are one of the most prominent spots in Russian TV in the year.



3 Cf. Gala.Net of 15.11.2005: <http://news.gala.net/?cat=10&id=204755>.  
[l.v. 07.04.2006]

Serduchka was twice asked to represent Russia in the *Eurovision Song Contest*, although she declined each time.

In 2005, Danylko did declare his intention to take part in the *Eurovision Song Contest*, this time representing Ukraine, but he later rescinded his application. While Russian journalists affirm Danylko's patriotism, Ukrainian nationalists want no affiliation with Danylko. Russian online sources referred to a statement issued by the *Young Nationalist Congress*, the youth arm of the *Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists*, which demanded that Danylko give up his Ukrainian citizenship and apply for Russian citizenship.<sup>3</sup> This reportedly occurred after Serduchka appeared on TV wearing a T-shirt with the portrait of Taras Shevchenko, a Ukrainian poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and one of the most central figures in Ukrainian literature and national discourse. Leaving aside the evaluation of this incident, the minor mass media dispute that arose around this issue indicates particularly well that Serduchka's image is not free of the national dimension. Despite the entertaining function and genre of Danylko's Serduchka, she is seen as a national representation, and definitely associated with national stereotypes on both sides of the Ukrainian-Russian border.

### Analysis of the Images

While both Ruslana and Serduchka implore a gender analysis of their images, I deliberately will not emphasize a gendered perspective, predominantly because it is in and of itself a topic for a full-length article. Instead, I will try to stay within a discussion of their varying depictions of national identity. However, the issue of national identity in Ukraine is often strongly associated with gender imagery, specifically with femininity. On the one hand, the internal national discourse of victimization and the historical inability to realize its national state-building aspirations, portrays Ukraine as a plundered motherland, which has been burdened by occupation throughout its history, and currently grieves over the fate of its sons and daughters scattered all over the world. On the other hand, external gender associations are enhanced by rather widely circulating stereotypes of Ukrainian mail-order brides and trafficked sex-slaves, making a female representation of Ukraine much more appealing abroad, as opposed to a male one. In fact, it is rather difficult to imagine a strong Ukrainian male figure capturing the hearts of the world's audience.

Both Ruslana and Danylko, featured as his female heroine Serduchka, respond to this demand for a gendered representation of Ukraine. In this section, I will examine Ruslana's and Serduchka's public personas for the legacy of the stereotypes to which they respond. Therefore, in the section on Ruslana, I will explore her emphases on folk elements in her work, and will also analyze how this influences the perception of her image abroad and in Ukraine. In the section dedicated to Danylko's Serduchka, I will explore the image created by the artist in the light of historic stereotyping of Ukrainians and Russians in both countries, and therefore analyze the implications of these portrayals both in Ukraine and Russia.

### Ruslana

A typical response in the western press after Ruslana's victory at *Eurovision* in 2004 reads as follows:

With her whip and skimpy leather outfit, Ruslana took *Eurovision* by storm. It may have looked like a gimmick, but Ruslana's inspiration comes from an ancient mountain tribe who live in Western Ukraine. [...]»We use mystical elements of Hutsul music. They give you energy and people all over Europe are feeling that vitality now« Ruslana says.<sup>4</sup>

The response demonstrates several important aspects that are indicative of how Ruslana's image was popularized internationally. The first aspect is the implication of exoticism and authenticity preserved through the remoteness of this part of the world from modernity (here: »ancient tribes in Western Ukraine«). Secondly, the report leaves no doubt about the journalist's interpretation of the exoticism of the culture, and she supports her position directly with Ruslana's own commentary. Thirdly, the authority of the source (here: BBC) and the general remoteness of the listener (consumers of these news around the world) from Ukrainian ethno-cultural realities make it difficult not only to evaluate the factual information, but also the analysis and judgments presented.

4 Fawkes, Helen. »Eurovision triggers Ukraine folk revival« in BBC News, 1.9.2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3542148.stmb> [l.v. 21.04.2006].

5 From the Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture, <http://www.rusyn.org/?root=rusyns&rusyn=ethnography&article=107> [l.v.: 21.04.2006]: »Hutsuls – an ethnographic group living mainly in Ukraine along the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. [...] The origin of the word Hutsul is unknown. Some ethnographers derive the term from *kochul* (nomad); some claim it is derived from the name of an ancient Turkic tribe called Utsians or Uzians; others argue that it is derived from *hoŭul/hoŭ*, which in Romanian means a highway robber or brigand. Still others believe that the ancestors of the Hutsuls were the East Slavic tribe of Ulichians. The Hutsuls were first identified as a distinct ethnographic group by writers in Galicia at the end of the eighteenth century and described in some detail by the Polish writers Kazimierz Wójcicki (1840) and Józef Korzeniowski (Karpaccy górale, 1843), among others. Traditional Hutsul society is characterized by patriarchal social relations and its economic life with transhumance, i.e., the seasonal movement of sheep between high mountain (*polonyna*) and lowland pastures, as well as with mountain agriculture and forestry.«

6 Cf. Ruslana's official website.

7 A type of mountain horn used mostly for carrying messages and communication. Occasionally, it was used as a musical instrument.

8 Cf. Ruslana's official website.

9 Fawkes 2004.

10 Owens, Louis: *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma P. 1998, p. 70.

Significantly, Ruslana actively cultivates this kind of ›mysticism‹ in her image. Overall, the language of her official website, which describes her *Wild Dances* project, overflows with words like: *real, authentic, original, ancient, wild, exotic, mystic* – all to describe the Hutsul elements in Ruslana's music, shows, and costumes. Ruslana poetically mentions that »in the very heart of Europe in the majestic kingdom of the Carpathian mountains, there live an ancient people, the Hutsuls«.<sup>6</sup> At another time, she refers to »colorful Hutsulean musicians, sparkling rhythms and wild dances«, »mystical sounds of the mountains – the voice of the *trembitas*«,<sup>7</sup> and even shares that:

One wonders what it would be like revealing all mysteries [of the universe] [...] I like to believe that there is a whole lost world on the top of that mountain, and to find it you have set on your own journey. Climb that mountain, get on top of it and you will know what I know. This will bring freedom...<sup>8</sup>

There is little doubt that Ruslana's project is a well-constructed PR move, developed with a good understanding of what sells well. The project is very commercial, professional, user-friendly, colorful and catching. Ruslana's image seduces the audience with the promise of discovery, mystery and exoticism. She, in fact, managed to present a gray, post-Soviet space known as Ukraine as a mysterious land of old and colorful rites, a shaman closeness to nature, a place that has remained untouched by the industrial and pragmatic march of civilization. Her rendition of Ukraine is colorful and thrilling, and, unlike previous Soviet analogues, unthreatening in the sense that it uses familiar images and the language of pop culture. What makes it particularly attractive is that it invites Ukraine to be explored, promising adventure and authenticity in the very heart of old and well-explored Europe.

One familiar discursive framework employed in Ruslana's project is that of exoticism, known to many countries from the history of colonialism, Manifest Destiny and other imperial projects. In such a discourse, the language of stereotyping places a group of people and their cultural practices into ›another time‹, denying them continuity and variety by classifying culture as either authentic or ›non-authentic‹ (original/non-original, real/non-real), positioning them essentially in opposition to civilization by labeling their culture as wild, exotic and ancient, even if meant in the most positive sense of these words. Unfortunately, this discourse has been employed far too often, particularly in the context of colonial advance. While this depiction is safely familiar for consumers, its history should also evince a cautionary tale about the potential consequences.

Ruslana's reference to the Hutsul population as a »tribal people«<sup>9</sup> is reminiscent of the tribal people of the Americas, who are haunted by the ›authenticity‹ of Hollywood Indians even today. In the case of the Native Americans, the »vanishing Indian« stereotype designates a glorious place to the Indians in the past of America; they are mystified as a people close to nature, noble savages, and shamans, who due to the advances of the modern age have to vanish along with their culture. The parallels with the imagery used by Ruslana are striking. Louis Owens, a Cherokee-Choctaw-Irish writer, in his book *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* talks about how »the Indian is valuable as a bit of color, as an invaluable link to the stolen landscape of America, as an index to the Euroamerican's lost ›mystical‹ self«.<sup>10</sup> Exoticism discourse has popularized Indians all around the world, and even turned them into a trademark of the American Wild West adventure. However, it neither recognized the plentitude and diversity of many indigenous American peoples, nor gave them an opportunity to speak for themselves, to reflect the change and continuity of their cultures.

Ruslana's depiction of the Carpathians, as a »land lost in space and time«,<sup>11</sup> as well as her mystification of the Hutsul people creates an image evocative of a reservation of the living past, and offers the possibility of going back in time by traveling geographically. Thus, anyone who went to the Carpathian mountains would discover the land lost in time, authentic and untouched by high-tech progress. Contrary to her intentions for popularizing Hutsul culture, such imagining of the Hutsul people leaves them out of place in modern, present day Europe. So far, this kind of displacement has not had an impact on the everyday life and self-identification of Hutsuls, as it has after decades of implementation in North America. However, it does not provide the groundwork for Ukraine's integration into Europe, as Ruslana would like to achieve. On the contrary, it solidifies the image of Ukraine as a European Other, and a mere exotic setting.



### Ruslana: Analysis

<sup>12</sup> E. Morgan Williams: Ruslana Wins! Ukraine Wins! in: The Action Ukrainian Report website from 16.05.2004, <http://www.artukraine.com/events/index.htm>. [l.v.: 21.04.2006].

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ruslana's official website.

In the case of Ruslana, it is important to contextualize her pro-European project *Wild Dances* in the context of her previous work. Long before Ruslana became known abroad, she used her music for many social projects, e.g., *Last Christmas of the 90s*, *Christmas legends*, *To Lviv for Christmas*, *Tour around the castles of Ukraine*. Like *Wild Dances*, each of these projects had a larger social goal, e.g. the revival and popularization of folk music traditions, regenerating pride and interest in Lviv urban culture and architecture, in the history and the development of castles all over Ukraine. Similar to *Wild Dances*, all of these projects involved not only Ruslana, but included a number of Ukrainian artists, rock and folk musicians, choirs. They were aimed at creating a trend, a fashion, and an artistic and cultural space of Ukrainian music. Significantly, all of these projects had a romantic and a mythical touch, e.g. in the first Ukrainian animated-cartoon music video *Ballad about Princess* from Ruslana's first album *The Moment of Spring*, in which she featured as a medieval princess.

From this perspective, *Wild Dances* was a continuation of Ruslana's style of blending her music projects with a larger social agenda. Creating the *Wild Dances* project, Ruslana mixed the aforementioned social goals of cultural revival and involved a significant number of musicians, artists, and craftsmen, all in order to bring Ukraine «into fashion». Significantly, the imagery and language she uses were chosen to assure a positive response from her foreign audience. To secure such a positive response, Ruslana had to use a language familiar to this audience and the imagery of mysticism and exoticism that would appeal to them. A *Reuters* report from Istanbul after Ruslana's victory at the *Eurovision Song Contest* quoted an ecstatic Ruslana saying at a news conference after the show that, «all of us are making a positive image of Ukraine. I want my country to open up before you with friendship and hospitality ... I would like you to forget about Chernobyl!».<sup>12</sup>

Chernobyl associates Ukraine with a much larger political stereotype, in which Ukraine is a part of the Soviet monolith known as the USSR. Ruslana's success at the *Eurovision Song Contest* and the excited responses from her foreign audience were meaningful for many Ukrainians, especially in light of the resilient dull stereotypes about and dominantly negative associations with the country. That Ruslana's first comments after her victory were aimed at making people «forget about Chernobyl!» is crucial for understanding the positive associations with her victory. Indeed, broad expectations about what would come from Ruslana's successes far exceeded a simple fascination with her music. For example, the following excerpt from the *Action Ukraine Report* (an American-hosted website on all aspects of life in Ukraine) evaluates Ruslana's performance at one of the local festivals.

One could only feel good about the future of Ukraine that night in Vyshnytsya hoping those young people would take that same energy and excitement with them in the future as they work to build a strong, independent, prosperous, post-genocidal and post-Soviet Ukraine, operating under the rule-of-law with a large, private, market-driven economy, totally integrated into Europe.<sup>13</sup>

After the collapse of the USSR, Ruslana emerged from a relatively unknown and unremarkable space called Ukraine as a colorful explosion of energy, declaring the existence of an exotic and exciting land, untouched in its authenticity, «lost in the very heart of Europe».<sup>14</sup> Her energy, openness, and ease with the western standards of show business was far removed from other durable, but less favorable, stereotypes of Russian criminals, the gray, faceless, and dull *homo Sovieticus* or, for that matter, submissive family-oriented catalogue wives for foreigners, more broadly associated with Ukraine and the post-Soviet space.

Unfortunately for Ukraine, which aspires to become a part of the European Union, the sense of pride and recognition generated by Ruslana's victory has all too easily overridden the issue of a fair representation of the Hutsul culture. In the short term, the Hutsul people, who have throughout their history faced derogatory treatment and labeling as uneducated mountain people, also seem to have benefited from Ruslana's success and positive imagery; the region started to draw more tourism to the Carpathians by virtue of Ruslana's romanticized image.

Ruslana's language of objectification through exoticism, authenticity and the construction of the uncivilized and mythic Other, is familiar in post-colonial Europe. However, in Ukraine, which was recently subject to a different form of colonization, European colonial language does not necessarily constitute the same sense of threat. Conversely, it is Serduchka who



operates using more familiar images, drawn from a more immediate form and context of colonization in Ukraine than Ruslana's discourse of exoticism.

### Serduchka

<sup>15</sup> Such as major song writer and composer Igor Krutoj or major figures of Russian (Soviet) pop music as Yosif Kabzon, Valerij Leontiev, Lev Leshchenko, Alexandr Serov and Natasha Koroliova.

<sup>16</sup> To illustrate the situation with Ukrainian language in the context of Russification policies of the USSR I can provide the example of Ivano-Frankivsk, which due to its western location in Ukraine, is considered to be one of the strongholds of the Ukrainian national idea and language. At the turn of the 1990s the city had only 3 secondary Ukrainian schools (meaning schools where the lessons were held in Ukrainian language). The other 22 secondary schools and all levels of education above secondary school were held in Russian, with the Ukrainian language being taught as a separate language course, sometimes the only elective course in the whole bulk of obligatory classes. Therefore, in the 1990s one's inability to speak Russian could mean either a very strong political statement or, most often, a lack of education beyond elementary schooling and the proximity to rural communities.

<sup>17</sup> Ja Semjus', Ja Popala Na Ljubov, Tuk, Tuk, Tuk, Chitta Dritta, Gop, Gop. In: Andriy Danylko's official website.

Unlike Ruslana's imagery, which reiterates the discourse of the familiar European colonial adventure, Serduchka's imagery is deeply rooted in the context of localized Russian and Ukrainian stereotypes that have developed over centuries. Her humor employs many episodes in the Ukrainian identity discourse, which have been the battlefield of assimilation policies, Soviet totalitarianism, and more recently, nation-state construction.

Serduchka's art is a folk, ›low-culture‹ reference; she is burlesque and over-the-top with everything, a reminder of medieval farce in the modern age of show business, with its money, opportunities, and power. However, given the historical context of the politicizing of Ukrainian identity discourse, and the particularities of Ukrainian-Russian relations, her imagery bears a few clear markers of the above-mentioned battles over identity.

In contrast to her success and popularity in Moscow, Serduchka's image emphasizes the provinciality of Ukraine vis-à-vis Moscow. Ever since the Soviet period, when Moscow was envisioned as the mega capital of a new Soviet nation, Moscow's position has always been superior. Recognizing Moscow as a place of opportunities, Serduchka comes to Moscow to become a real *STAR*. In fact, in her performances she follows a path that is reminiscent of many of ›Russia's‹ most famous stars,<sup>15</sup> many of whom, as a part of a larger ›talent drain‹ from many parts of the USSR, came from Ukrainian towns and cities to gain access to opportunities and carrier growth that only Moscow could provide at that time. Serduchka, when she reaches Moscow, also becomes a mega star, as only Moscow can provide her with the resources, opportunities, and the life style appropriate for this status. As she reaches the TOP, she changes her outfits from a railroad uniform and cotton tights to designers' clothes, diamonds and fur coats. Significantly, she is bursting with money and luxuries, which, it is implied, only Moscow can provide. In this way, Serduchka in a sense flatters Moscow by reflecting Moscow's own over-the-top luxuries; tasteless, but truly impressive grandeur, which is accessible at no other place.

Serduchka's provinciality is thick and rife with comic possibilities. One of the most obvious markers of Serduchka's provinciality is her manner of speaking. Danylko invented Serduchka as a part of his act as a stand-up comedian, and her way of speaking initially propelled Danylko to popularity, and eventually allowed him to transform Serduchka into a pop music star. Serduchka uses a funny mixture of the Ukrainian and Russian languages called *surzhyk*. It was an incredibly widespread phenomenon in the earlier years of Ukrainian independence and acquired a threatening scale in terms of usage and penetration into all spheres of life, including schools and governmental institutions. *Surzhyk* is widely considered to be a strong marker of both a lack of education and provinciality. It is also more frequently used in territories and by social groups of Ukrainian roots most exposed to Russian assimilation. It also marked the person's inability to speak either Russian or Ukrainian, which could mean either lack of schooling or the fact that the person simply never left their villages and towns to learn proper Russian.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it was a particularly painful phenomenon throughout the years of Ukrainian early independence, as it signified a certain ›post-assimilation mutation‹, people's disorientation, and a lack of education, national pride and identity. Similarly, for Serduchka, the use of *surzhyk* is a clear marker of her place of origin in a cultural and social province. Serduchka's official biography states that she comes from a village in the Poltava region, her *surzhyk* marks it as a small place with a lot of local flavor but rather confused in terms of identity.

Another marker of Serduchka's provinciality is her family. In many of her music videos,<sup>17</sup> there is a loud crowd of distant relatives, who often come to visit her in Moscow without warning. They are always noisy and often embarrass Serduchka in ›society‹ with their total lack of tact, manners and understanding of the significance of Serduchka's position. This is also a great source of potential comic situations. Significantly, within this group, rather diverse in terms of age and gender, some always wear embroidered shirts (a traditional element of Ukrainian folk dress), as if to make sure that the audience does not mistake them for people from *just any* province, but recognizes them as *Ukrainians*. Serduchka, no matter how famous she is, cannot get away from her relatives; she is often embarrassed and burdened by them,

they sometimes put her in her place in front of other celebrities. They always remind her where her roots lie.

Serduchka's image is built on more than one historic and cultural legacy. Thus, Serduchka's comedian genre is reminiscent of the famous comedian duet of Shtepsel' and Tarapun'ko. The humor of this duet, which was popular throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, was based on a comic contention between an educated, well-spoken and progressive-thinking Russian-speaking Shtepsel' and a street-smart, very soundly-thinking, and folk-wise Ukrainian-speaking Tarapun'ko. Shtepsel's image was that of a Russian-speaking urban intellectual, while Tarapun'ko, although he questioned the authority of the progressive urban knowledge with his folk wisdom, was hopelessly rural and provincial. This reference sums up to a general, centuries-long established stereotype of the Ukrainian as an uneducated simpleton, who has a lot of life energy and is not overburdened with the problems of modern educated sophisticated city-dwellers.

### Serduchka: Analysis

The incident mentioned earlier in the introduction, when the *Young Nationalist Congress* (MNK) requested that Danylko give up his Ukrainian citizenship is rather telling about how some Ukrainians perceive Serduchka. For some, Serduchka seems to mock nationalistic values and national symbolism; the irritation of Ukrainian patriots also demonstrates that the issues Serduchka tackles are much more fresh and painful than those employed by Ruslana. And though in her performances and songs Serduchka does not directly talk about Ukraine, this does not keep the content and images associates with her public persona from feeding many Russian biases and stereotypes about Ukraine. Some of these stereotypes are discussed below.

Serduchka's image is hopelessly provincial, which seems to correspond well with Russia's century-long elder-brother ambition, which was manifested too clearly on many occasions in pre-Soviet references to Ukraine as »Small Russia,« and in the Soviet era through the paternalistic ideology of the Russians as a titular nation. A stereotype tied closely to the idea of Russians as the elder brother is the preeminent position of Moscow in the Russian Federation. It is seen as the real capital of all eastern Slavs, a luxurious pearl in the crown of the Russian empire. Moscow, which is the place to receive most of the state's investments at the expense of other cities in Russia, is also a place of opportunities, real recognition and money. In the shadow of the carefully cultivated image of Moscow, other places in Russia remain provincial, while Ukraine and also Belarus, are often viewed as »small« and »white« Russia, are the younger rural provinces on the edge of Russia.

MK, one of the popular Moscow newspapers wrote, »Verka Serduchka is a new symbol of Ukraine along with pig's fat, borshch, vodka, and *Kobzar*«. <sup>18</sup> Serduchka, in this light, is only the most recent addition to the image of Ukraine that begins and ends with pig's fat, borsch, vodka, and the most widely referenced book written by the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. The disparaging intonation of the comment does not explain whether it is pig's fat and vodka that are raised to the level of Shevchenko's poetry, or it is his poetry that is brought down to the same level of value as pig's fat and vodka; in each case, Russia seems to be very eager to maintain an image of Ukraine as a backward, rural space. In the light of such derogatory comments from the Russian side, it becomes clear why the *Young Nationalist Congress*, and even people less radical, would feel touchy about Serduchka's use of national symbols.

Significantly, Serduchka's humor and travesty could indeed be a healing experience for many Ukrainians, especially in the light of special emphasis on the national revival, nation-state construction and re-thinking of one's history and national discourse, which have been going on in Ukraine since gaining its independence. However, in the light of Serduchka's support and recognition in Russia, Serduchka's simplistic portrayal of her Ukrainian roots not only does not challenge historical stereotypes, but also seems to feed the existing prejudice and bias in a neighboring culture.

Serduchka's art is not exported anywhere aside from Russia; Danylko's official website gives some information about Serduchka's concerts in Ukrainian and other post-Soviet emigrant communities in the USA, and about the recording of one of her songs in Polish with a Polish musician. <sup>19</sup> However, Serduchka's burlesque, carnival-type of art does not make sense for those unfamiliar with the cultural codes of Ukraine, and that also most likely contributes

18 Верка Сердючка и Андрей Данилко.  
Два в одном.  
[Verka Serduchka and Andriy  
Danylko. Two in One]. In MK,  
<http://www.rosconcert.com/action.php/1450?PHPSESSID=7b55bb4884236c90a1a3f2b8c47076e7>; [l.v. 07.04.2006].

19 Andriy Danlko's official website.



to his limited appeal outside Ukraine and Russia. Serduchka's incredible popularity in Russia also reveals that her particular rendition of ›Ukrainianness‹ is particularly appealing to the Russian perception of Ukraine.

### Conclusion

In similar ways, Ruslana's and Serduchka's images are exporting certain adaptations of ›Ukrainianness,‹ which in one way or another has also responded to the interests and preferences of their target audiences. They provide images of Ukrainians with which the audience is comfortable. Out of the two artists, Ruslana is trying to produce a very specific image that would promote recognition, interest in, and popularity of Ukraine. In any case, the popularity of both artists promotes a particular approach to national representation, which in the wider cultural and historical context creates very specific perception of Ukraine abroad.

A certain degree of misuse of Ukrainian imagery by the singers is definitely dictated by the consumerist character of mass and pop culture, in which both Ruslana and Serduchka strive to secure a place. Aiming at being represented in pop culture, the artists needed to simplify their message and to take into consideration the preferences and the background of their target audiences. Thus, Ruslana responded to the western idea of developing civilization, exoticising and sexualizing Ukraine as an object to be tamed and explored. Serduchka responded to the growing ideological chauvinistic paranoia of the Russian state; while the events of the last two years demonstrated a pressure for further opening and democratization of the society in Ukraine, Russia is undergoing an obvious homogenization of the society and consolidation of the central political power. Against the background of these diverse directions of the neighboring countries, Serduchka's image, so enthusiastically supported by Russian show business and audience, seems to be particularly soothing for the Russian fear and Russian denial of the political and ideological changes in Ukraine.

It is only unfortunate that in both cases, Ukraine seems to be represented as a land lost in time, an island of exuberant closeness to natural ways, and in a sense, a rural island in the high-tech Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the target groups of Serduchka and Ruslana are different, Ukrainian cultural strains are being exported East and West to satisfy the respective demands of the audiences. Based on the consumer culture's need for a simplified portrayal, Ukraine is exported to the West via a highly sexualized image of the Carpathian Amazon warrior Ruslana, and to the East via the buffoonery show of Serduchka.

While the problem of such representation is partially a problem of a mass culture dictated need for rather shallow portrayal, in the case of Ukraine it is also a problem of the rareness of any representation of Ukraine in mass culture. Thus, while we have a full range of, say, American pop stars ranging from the most scandalous to the most romanticized, Ukraine has mostly only that one international representation through Ruslana, which makes the audience quick to generalize their vision of Ukraine on that singular image. While Ukrainian culture should not be something exclusive and limited to high-culture art only, it is important to create the body of popular and mass culture that would reflect many aspects of life in Ukraine. It is only the multitude of voices from Ukraine that can make up for the lack of sufficient representation, and hopefully Ruslana and Serduchka will at least open the doors for many more artists.

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