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On the Frontiers of the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Polish Theater in Russian-ruled Kyiv before the 1863 January Uprising

Historians of modern nation-forming processes and imperial policies in the nineteenth-century East European imperial borderlands rarely treat musical theater as an important political and social institution.¹ This inattention to musical theater is surprising. After all, the theater was an important site of cultural politics in all contested border areas of the empire, and the imperial authorities considered the promotion of Russian theater the best way to foster national feelings and loyalist sentiment.² Despite direct imperial interventions, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the city as modern metropolis, and theatrical life became more inclusive and cosmopolitan. Before the emergence of mass entertainment, sport, and cinema at the turn of the twentieth century, the theater was the main site of urban sociability. Under the political conditions of the Russian empire, the theater was also the main forum for the formation of an urban public that included both educated elites, and less educated lower classes. Non-Russian as well as Russian theater provided an instrument for surveying and regulating socio-political order and became an important forum for negotiations over contested issues of national identity and political loyalty.

In the early nineteenth century, the theatrical stage became a central cultural institution in the city of Kyiv (Kijów, Kiev). After the second (1793) and the third (1795) partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Kyiv became the administrative center of the newly created Russian imperial South-Western provinces (*Iugo-Zapadnyi Krai*, nowadays the central part of Ukraine), which consisted of the

three provinces of Kyiv, Podolia and Volhynia. Because Kyiv played an important symbolic role in the Polish-Russian and then Ukrainian-Russian national conflicts, Russian educated elites and authorities increasingly saw it as the »golden-domed« historical center of medieval Riurikid Rus', the »Jerusalem of the Russian lands« and the »mother of Russian cities.«

Although the Russian historical and cultural identity of Kyiv was intensively shaped in this period, its everyday cultural practices did not totally correspond to an exclusively national representation. Pro-Russian elites sometimes lamented the lack of social and patriotic activism in the city and even scornfully called it »characterless and multinational.«³ Through the nineteenth century Kyiv grew significantly from ca. 23,000 in 1817 to 50,000 in 1845, and then to 127,000 in 1874 and 248,000 in 1897; by the end of the nineteenth century the city had become one of Eastern Europe's metropolises with a vibrant public life.⁴ This accelerating growth of Kyiv cannot be attributed to its industrial development, but rather to its newly acquired administrative, cultural and commercial functions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Kyiv also began to play an important role in the empire's agricultural trade. Jewish migration from the small towns of Right-Bank Ukraine, which had been restricted before the 1860s, also strongly contributed to the growth of Kyiv. Consequently, the growing population of Kyiv had a distinctly heterogeneous character: in 1874, about 46% of city dwellers claimed that they spoke »literary Russian« or »Great Russian,« 32% »Little Russian« (Ukrainian), 10% »Jewish« (Yiddish), and 7.7% Polish.⁵

Although Poles were a minority in nineteenth century Kyiv, the key role the Polish landowning elite played in the province made the Polish impact on the political, social, cultural and academic life of the city significant, if not dominant. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Polish nobility (*szlachta*) made up about 7% of the population of the South-Western provinces.⁶ Also, the Poles dominated the student body of Kyiv's Saint Vladimir University throughout the 1830s and into the 1850s. Poles were 62.5% of the student body in

3 See the telling comment in »Narodnosti i partii.« This and all following translations of quotations into English are mine (OS).

4 On its various aspects see the only English-language study on the history of Kyiv: Hamm, *Kiev*.

5 These calculations are made on the basis of data provided in Shamrai, »Kyivs'kyi odnodennyi perepys,« 367-368.

6 Bovua [Beauvois], *Rosii'ska vlada*, 47.

1 The theatrical sphere is not analyzed in the main studies of imperial and national politics in the region, such as Bovua [Beauvois], *Sbliakhtych*; idem, *Bytva za zemliu*; idem, *Rosii'ska vlada*; Weeks, *Nation and State*; Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy*; Miller, »Ukrainskii vopros.«

2 Petrovskaia, *Teatr i zritel'*, 24-27.

1839 (165 students), 55.6% in 1849 (363 students), and 52.6% in 1859 (507 students).⁷ The chief role of the Polish social and cultural elites was recognized and tolerated by the imperial government until the 1860s, when Russian publicists and tsarist authorities began to challenge it. Competition with the Polish nobility over the national character of the South-Western provinces agitated Russian patriotic circles throughout the empire.

This article focuses on various dimensions of the equally contested theatrical life in Kyiv in the middle of the nineteenth century, which was then increasingly seen as a terrain of competition between the main nationalities that inhabited the city: Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. The urban cultural sphere could not be easily divided into national segments, and the perspectives of the agents of competing national projects could be quite distorting. Therefore, this article explores the contributions of Kyiv's Polish theater both to the social life of its national community and to that of the city in the culturally polycentric context of an Eastern European borderland. Particular attention is paid to the period of relative liberalization at the end of the 1850s, when the imperial administration not only tolerated the Polish theater, but tried to involve itself in the cultural and social life of the city's Polish elites. The shifts in theatrical policy between 1858 and 1863 correspond to important changes in Russian imperial policy. The imperial idea, notions of dynastic and state loyalty, and the common interests of the upper classes gave way to a policy defined as »bureaucratic nationalism« by Polish scholar Witold Rodkiewicz.⁸ The latter insisted on the direct intervention of the imperial bureaucracy on behalf of the Russian Orthodox people (including Ukrainians) against non-Russians (including the upper classes). Adherents of both conceptions were interested in strengthening the Russian Empire and, in particular, in promoting Russian culture in the borderlands. Yet they chose either integration, or restrictions and discrimination.

Beginnings of Polish theater and the annual fair in Kyiv

The first permanent theater building in Kyiv was erected around 1803 for itinerant troupes that performed during the annual fair (*kontrakty*) of the local provincial Polish nobility and city merchants. The fair had



The First Kyiv City Theater (ca. 1803-1851). Hordii Pshenychnyi Central State CinePhoto-Phono Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv.

regularly taken place from January to March since 1798, when the annual fair in Dubno lost its regional significance because of the third partition of Poland-Lithuania.⁹ The author of a unique study on the Kyiv fair, Henryk Ułaszyn, described the dynamic and vibrant cultural atmosphere that formed in Kyiv during this period. For the two winter months, Polish landowners dominated the Kyiv public sphere, which in other seasons had a mostly Ukrainian-Russian character. The fair provided an occasion for various commercial negotiations that were centered on sugar production and trade and became an important forum for the Polish public by stimulating intensive social, cultural and intellectual communication. Occasionally, prominent cultural figures attended the fair. Adam Mickiewicz, for example, attended one in February 1825.¹⁰ It is thus not surprising that the poet mentioned the fair in his famous work *Pan Tadeusz* (Sir Thaddeus). Thus, according to Ułaszyn, through the 1840s and 1850s Kyiv became the leading Polish cultural center in the Russian-controlled regions of the former Commonwealth. Public events during the fair period could be marked

⁷ Tabiś, *Polacy*, 34.

⁸ Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy*, 13-16.

⁹ Ułaszyn, *Kontrakty Kijowskie*, 14-15.

¹⁰ Koropeckyj, *Adam Mickiewicz*, 62.

by Polish-Russian polarization or by Polish-Russian rapprochement, depending on the political atmosphere and attitude of the provincial administration.¹¹ The City Theater was long embedded in the social environment of the fair. This close connection between the theater and the fair that attracted local landowning nobility was not unique to Kyiv; it also existed in Austrian-ruled Lviv (Lemberg, L'viv, Lwów).¹² It was not surprising that the decline of trade and the repression of the Polish theater in Kyiv occurred in the same short period after the 1863 uprising.

Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century the theater building was used mostly by Polish troupes directed by several private entrepreneurs. More lasting was the role of Aleksander Lenkowski, who first performed in Kyiv as an actor and then directed his own troupe between 1823 and 1829. The original texts of plays did not survive, but a collection of theatrical posters from the 1820s gives information about the theater's repertory. The posters are mostly in Polish, with only short Russian translations of the plays' titles. The repertory included various drama performances as well as musical plays, comedies, vaudevilles, operas and ballets. In November 1827, the Kyiv theater troupe under Lenkowski staged for the first time *Cyrulik Sewilski* (The Barber of Seville) by Gioachino Rossini, only two years after its Polish première in Warsaw.¹³ The Polish theater in Kyiv continued to be closely connected with Polish theatrical life on the other side of Russian-Austrian imperial border to the extent that the success of *Cyrulik Sewilski* in Kyiv was considered »a triumph of the actors performed on the Cracow stage.«¹⁴

The prominent local Polish writer Aleksander Groza described in his novel *Pamiętnik nie bardzo stary* (A not very old diary) how attending *Cyrulik Sewilski* might become the main cultural experience for those who were in Kyiv during the fair. When the protagonist of his novel Władysław N. arrived in Kyiv in order to help his friend sell a village during the fair, he decided to attend the city theater rather than spend time at a restaurant. The theater was badly decorated and lighted, yet the immature audience reacted passionately and sincerely to the unexpectedly powerful performance of *Cyrulik Sewilski*.¹⁵ Groza com-

pared reactions of the audience in provincial Kyiv to those of audiences in a capital: in the former »representation is taken for reality,«¹⁶ in the latter the public is not dominated by true feelings. But whilst the comic opera entertained and the leading actors were generally admired by the public, a drama performed on the other evening was more educational and displayed the ruining consequences of gambling.

As in other Polish provincial theatrical centers, like Austrian Lviv, where »audiences continued to favor light entertainment over heavy intellectual drama,« and the repertory was dominated by farces and comedies,¹⁷ the plays on the Kyiv stage were mostly entertaining comedies, often translated from other European languages (mainly French and German) and adapted to local circumstances. But the plays sometimes dealt with serious and controversial issues of Polish historical tradition and political loyalty in the borderlands. In Kyiv the Polish dramas and musical plays of Wojciech Bogusławski, Ludwik Dmuszewski, Józef Elsner, Karol Kurpiński, and other prominent playwrights and composers sometimes received interpretations and meanings that differed from those construed in Habsburg-ruled Lviv or Cracow.

On September 27, 1823, the coronation day of Emperor Alexander I, the popular opera *Król Łokietek, czyli Wiśliczanki* (King Lokietek, or the women of Wiślica) by Dmuszewski and Elsner was performed. The opera was devoted to the early promotor of the Polish-Lithuanian union King Ladislaus the Short (Władysław I Łokietek), who had restored the Polish kingdom in the fourteenth century. The opera had been staged for the first time in Warsaw in 1818, and since then had often been performed on Polish stages in other theatrical centers of former Commonwealth. Jolanta Pękacz argued that in Austrian Galicia the opera was very successful due to the patriotic feelings it evoked in the audience.¹⁸ But four years later, in Kyiv, nine new »live pictures« or scenes stressing Polish-Russian rapprochement and loyalty to the empire's monarchy were added to the play. In one of them, the Russian hero appeared and shook hands with his Polish counterpart. In the last scene the inhabitants of Wiślica went down on their knees before the imperial coat of arms of Alexander I.¹⁹ The play under new circumstances stressed the importance of another political union, this time the Polish-Russian union. It is noteworthy that the piece was for-

11 Ułaszyn, *Kontrakty Kijowskie*, 78-79.

12 Ther, *Center Stage*, 94.

13 Zahaikevych, »Muzychno-teatral'ne zhyttia,« 21.

14 Estreicher, *Teatra w Polsce*, vol. 1, 107.

15 Groza, *Pamiętnik*, 40-42.

16 Ibid., 41.

17 Ther, *Center Stage*, 95.

18 Pękacz, *Music in the Culture of Polish Galicia*, 97-98.

19 P.T., »K istorii pol'skogo teatra,« 535.

bidden in Warsaw after 1822 because it intensified national-patriotic feelings promoted by performances of *Król Łokietek*, in particular usage of traditional religious hymns to express a new historical sense of Polishness.²⁰

It has to be stressed that from the very beginning of the theater in Kyiv linguistic division between Polish, Russian and Ukrainian troupes was not entirely fixed. The same troupe could sometimes perform both in Polish and Russian – for example, in 1823 the Polish troupe of Lenkawski performed Russian comic operas and operettas eight times.²¹ Ukrainian plays were especially ambivalent, as the Ukrainian culture and tradition was incorporated into both pan-Polish and pan-Russian cultural heritage. Therefore, both Polish and Russian troupes in Kyiv performed popular plays in the Ukrainian vernacular. Bilingual Polish-Ukrainian plays with both Polish and Ukrainian characters – such as *Ukrainka* (1823) subtitled »the great comic magic opera in the Little Russian and Polish dialects« or various versions of *Rusalka*, an adaptation of the famous *Danube Mermaid* by Ferdinand Kauer – figured prominently in the repertory of the Polish troupe.²² At the same time the classical Ukrainian operetta *Natalka Poltavka* was performed by the Ukrainian-Russian troupe of Ivan Shtein (with the famous actor Mikhaïl/Mykhailo Shchepkin), which visited Kyiv during the fair in 1821.²³ All in all, through the first third of the nineteenth century the theatrical stage in Kyiv represented not only social dominance of the Polish elites, but also contested the cultural and political character of the province.

Theater and twists of imperial cultural politics between the Polish uprisings

After the Polish November uprising of 1830 Polish-Russian relations were marked by growing tensions. As a result, imperial policy in the borderlands was profoundly reassessed, and the local landowning Polish gentry lost its social, educational, and cultural autonomy. In the sphere of theatrical politics, the imperial authorities began to provide regular administrative and financial support for the Russian theater,

which henceforth was regarded as an important educational – in fact, nationalizing – institution. Already in 1842, Emperor Nicholas I had ordered the city of Kyiv to grant 3,000 rubles per year for the »support of a private Russian theater in Kyiv.«²⁴ In reality, the annual subsidy was not paid regularly; some entrepreneurs did not receive the subsidy at all. The official support notwithstanding, the Russian theater was consistently boycotted by the Polish public and, in spite of the subsidy, regularly faced financial problems.²⁵

Probably the most successful company was the Russian-Ukrainian itinerant troupe under the above mentioned Ivan Shtein, which was again invited to Kyiv in the early 1830s.²⁶ In 1835 it was followed by a French troupe that mostly played vaudevilles and musical comedies. This invitation of a foreign company was meant by official circles to reconcile Polish-Russian relations in the city.²⁷ In contrast, at the turn of the 1840s the new Governor General of Kyiv, Dmitrii Bibikov, personally attempted to bring the Russian troupe from Moscow to Kyiv as a permanent Russian drama theater.²⁸ In spite of strong governmental support and guest performances of several famous Russian actors, it faced a cold reception by the Kyiv public and ended in bankruptcy immediately after the first season of 1842/43.²⁹

It was Paweł Rykanowski/Pavlo Rekanov's'kyi who personalized the multicultural character of theater and society in Kyiv. He had earned a good reputation in both Polish and Russian itinerant troupes and was known for a perfect command of Ukrainian-language roles. As an entrepreneur he brought a Russian-Polish troupe to Kyiv in the 1840s that dominated the Kyiv theatrical stage until the end of the existence of the old wooden City Theater in August 1851. Until 1863 Rykanowski set new standards of theatrical life: His troupe consisted of two parts, Russian and Polish, but sometimes the actors played interchangeably in Polish, Ukrainian and Russian plays. Throughout the second third of the nineteenth century, Russian audiences complained that Polish actors lacked a sufficient command of the Russian language.³⁰

24 TsDIAK, fond (f.) 442, opys (op.) 75/1842, sprava (spr.) 209, arkush (ark.) 1-2.

25 Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 24.

26 Lysiuk, »Antrepyza Ivana Shteina,« 26.

27 Lysiuk, »Frantsuz'kyi teatr,« 30-31.

28 »Melochi iz arkhivov,« 85-88.

29 Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 29.

30 Quoted in *ibid.*, 30.

20 Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 239-242.

21 P. T., »K istorii pol'skogo teatra,« 536-537.

22 Zahaïkevych, »Muzychno-teatral'ne zhyttia,« 22-24.

23 Ryl's'kyi, *Ukrains'kyi dramatychnyi teatr*, 89; Senelick, *Serf Actor*, 47.

Notwithstanding occasional imperial interventions, the theatrical stage in Kyiv was diverse and multicultural through the 1840s and 1850s. The most remarkable performances were those of a French troupe in the 1841/42 season; those of a Polish-German troupe from Vilnius (Wilno) by Wilhelm Schmidkoff, which some scholars consider »the first professional opera troupe in Kyiv,« in the 1845/46 season;³¹ and those of an Italian troupe from Odessa in 1848.

Imperial modernization of the city saw the construction of the new stone building of the City Theater. The City Theater contributed significantly to the creation of a new cultural and educational urban center around Bol'shaia Vladimirskaia Street. The street, which was planned according to the first general plan of Kyiv adopted by the imperial government in 1837, connected Saint Sophia Cathedral and the ruins of the Golden Gates (a symbol of Riurikid Kyiv, discovered in 1832), with the newly built St. Vladimir University. The new district, which grew along the traditional trade district of Podil and the administrative-military district of Pechers'k, clearly represented the new Russian identity of the city as being both supra-ethnic and rooted in the pre-Polish past. Several new governmental and educational institutions located along the street, such as the province administration and the first *gymnasium* for boys, were built in the 1850s in the late Classicist style.

The architectural design of the theater by the Russian architect Ivan Shtrom was approved by Nicholas I in 1850. The leading publisher and journalist of Kyiv in the 1850s and 60s, Alfred von Junk, praised the »second« City Theater in Kyiv as an architectural miracle and the best theatrical building among those that existed in the province centers of the Russian Empire.³² The theatre could host about 850 visitors; the majority of them (about 530) were to sit in 76 separate loges.³³ This arrangement of the theater's interior indicated a dominance of aristocratic and noble families that expected to be separated from members of lower social strata. The theatrical curtain represented the »Italian landscape«; musical instruments and theatrical masks were painted on the ceiling; a golden double-headed Russian imperial eagle was depicted above the pit. A contemporary travel book classified the overall style of the theatre as »Italian.«³⁴ The coexistence of Classicist Italian



The Second Kyiv City Theater (1856-1896). Photo ca. 1885, Hordii Pshenychnyi Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv.

and imperial symbols and the lack of clear Russian (or Polish) national references indicated an attempt to locate the cultural space of the City Theatre in a seemingly »neutral« sphere of the universal high arts.

The opening of the new theater in 1856 was indicative of new shifts in Russian imperial policy, which underwent another transformation in the 1850s. Anti-Polish measures were reduced in a period that marked the beginning of the imperial Great Reforms. In local politics the shift was associated with the figure of Governor General Prince Illarion Illarionovich Vasil'chikov. He was praised by the Polish nobility as well as by urban society as a »kind boy«³⁵ who aimed at closer cooperation of Russian officialdom with the Polish elites. Prince Vasil'chikov's personal soft line represented the general trend in imperial policy associated with the reform-oriented young emperor Alexander II. For a while the tsarist government was trying to find a *modus vivendi* with the traditional Polish elites of the region, but it did not totally abandon its integrationist Russifying policy.

All in all, prior to 1863 imperial rule in the province continued to rely on the integration of local elites, rather than on restrictions or

31 Zahaikevych, »Muzychno-teatral'ne zhyttia,« 25.

32 Quoted in Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 39.

33 *Ibid.*, 40-41.

34 Sementovskii, *Kiev*, 111.

35 Makarov, *Kievskaiia starina*, 54-55.

discrimination. Therefore, Polish, Italian as well as other non-Russian troupes were admitted to the main theater building. In fact, the opening program of the new City Theater on October 4, 1856 consisted of both Russian and Polish light plays: Dmitrii Lenskii's *Striapchii pod stolom* (The lawyer under the table), Petr Grigoriev's *Doch' russkogo aktera* (The Russian actor's daughter), Józef Korzeniowski's *Doktor medycyny* (A medical doctor), and a dancing »divertissement,« consisting of *tarantella* and *Cracovienne* (*krakowiak*).³⁶ Interestingly, in the mid-nineteenth century the dance idiom of *Cracovienne*, popularized by the Polish national operas, was perceived as the expression of the musical Polishness.³⁷ To the dismay of the Russian patriotic public, the opening program included none of the contemporary Russian historical patriotic plays of Nikolai Polevoi or choral singing of the imperial anthem *Bozhe, Tsaria khrani* (God, save the King). The lightly entertaining and nationally mixed character of plays notwithstanding, the opening evening in the new theater was attended by Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich and Prince Vasil'chikov.³⁸

In the imperial capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow, all public entertainment, not to mention theatrical performances, was managed by the Directorate of the Imperial Theaters. In Kyiv the central governmental figure in cultural affairs was the Governor General. The Civil Governor of Kyiv, a subordinate of the Governor General, was responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the City Theater. In 1856, just before the new building of the theater was finished, Governor General Prince Vasil'chikov ordered the Civil Governor to establish a new administrative system for the City Theater and to ensure equal proportions of Polish and Russian troupes.³⁹ Following the order, the Kyiv Civil Governor convened the theatrical committee in March 1856. The committee consisted of six members: four were appointed by the Governor General, one was elected by the provincial nobility, and one by the Kyiv City Duma. Two members of the committee, which existed with some changes until 1868, served as directors of the theater.⁴⁰ Yet although the Russian administration consolidated control over the

Kyiv City Theater in the middle of the nineteenth century, it did not totally marginalize the Polish theatrical tradition in the province.

The unsuccessful attempt at a Polish-Russian theatrical union

In 1858 the catastrophic financial condition of the theater prompted the governmental administration to turn to a new private entrepreneur. The Polish marshal of the Kyiv nobility at this point was still powerful, and he could influence the appointment. Consequently the Kyiv Theater was entrusted in December 1858 to a Polish actor and entrepreneur from Austrian Galicia, Teofil Borkowski, who since September 1858 had performed with his troupe in Kyiv.⁴¹ Borkowski agreed to pay the huge debt of the theater and was given much leeway regarding the repertory and the composition of the Polish and Russian troupes.⁴² Borkowski's tenure opened a short but very dynamic period in the history of both the theater and urban public life in Kyiv, which lasted until the 1863 January uprising.

The core of the new Polish troupe in Kyiv consisted of actors who came to Kyiv with Borkowski from Galicia: Emilia Gadomska, Borkowski's daughter Eugenia Natorka and the latter's husband, Leon Natorka. Borkowski also directed the Russian troupe, but his relations with the Russian actors soon became very troublesome. As in the previous years, the Kyiv stage hosted several prominent actors from the Russian Imperial Theater, and also a visiting star Ira Aldridge in 1861, who at that time had earned a real fame across Eastern Europe. The official newspaper *Kievskie gubernskie vedomosti* (Kyiv provincial gazette) provided detailed information on the Polish repertory between January 15 and February 4, 1859, the most intensive three-week period of the fair during Borkowski's first season in Kyiv. Only one play, the comedy *Mieszczanie i kmiotki* (City dwellers and villagers) by Fryderyk Kaiser, translated from German into Polish, was staged twice. All other plays – thirteen altogether – were performed only once. Interestingly, the 1859 repertory of the theater in Kyiv consisted of plays that were already a part of the repertory of the Polish theater in Cracow.⁴³

⁴¹ Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 43.

⁴² TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/2a, ark. 86-90 (contract between the Kyiv theatrical committee and Borkowski, December 18, 1858).

⁴³ Got and Orzechowski, *Repertuar teatru krakowskiego*.

³⁶ Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 41.

³⁷ Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 235.

³⁸ Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 42.

³⁹ TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/1, ark. 21-22 (Kyiv Governor General Vasil'chikov to Kyiv Civil Governor Hesse, March 4, 1856).

⁴⁰ Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 38; TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/1, ark. 23-24 (Kyiv Civil Governor Hesse to Kyiv Governor General Vasil'chikov, March 12, 1856).

The directorship of Borkowski more and more incensed the pro-Russian elements of the Kyiv public, which used patriotic discourse to become more visible in public life. In the late imperial period the discourse continued to be used by several Russian historians of the Kyiv musical theater, who unconditionally supported Russian art and identity in the region. In his influential book on the late nineteenth century history of dramatic theater in Kyiv, N.I. Nikolaev depicted Teofil Borkowski as a typical treacherous Polish activist who abused the trust of the imperial authorities and exploited the theatrical stage to prepare the anti-Russian uprising.⁴⁴ In a similar vein the Polish public was portrayed as a consolidated patriotic group, and the Polish-Russian theatrical relations in the city as increasingly conflictual.

This discourse originated in the agitated atmosphere of the Polish uprising in 1863 and its aftermath. The following quote gives a vivid example how the unification of Polish and Russian theater troupes under Borkowski, which was meant to symbolize unity and loyalty of both Russians and Poles in Kyiv, was recalled after the uprising by a Russian patriot:

[S]treets leading to the theater were brightly illuminated. The theater shone. Poles drove to the theater with a feeling of triumph, the sound of Polish speech [...] dominated over the Russian language [...] The Polish ladies were the first in the loges. The orchestra played Polish national music. I suffocated in the theatrical hall, I felt sorrow for the Kyiv society and for everything that humiliated the dignity of the Russian people. Finally, the curtain was raised. Borkowski in the black tail-coat, with a long pipe, came to the stage. Like a director he measured it by his steps; after a few minutes the Russian actors began to appear one after another, desiring to join his troupe. Borkowski haughtily received every actor and immediately examined his talent by prompting him to sing or to recite the best monologue from a certain tragedy. Actors who were liked by the public received a cigar from Borkowski [...]. When *Pan* [Sir] Borkowski accepted the last Russian actor to his troupe, the Polish actors came to the stage and standing hand in hand with the Russian actors sang *Bozhe, Tsaria khrani*. The union in the Kyiv Theater was accomplished, the majority ignorantly triumphed, but truly Russian people deeply grieved [...]. They had no other choice but to wait for the better times.⁴⁵

44 Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 56.

45 N. Ch. »Teatral'naia unia v Kieve.«

Nikolaev created the impression that the repertory of Polish plays – unlike the Russian ones – was rich and diverse, and that even the plays that were prohibited in Warsaw and Wilno could be freely staged in Kyiv. At the same time even the classical Russian plays were ignored by the theater-going public, as for example in February 1860, when the crowd gathered in the theater only at the end of the *Revizor* (The government inspector) by Nikolai Gogol, just before the play was followed by a masquerade ball. In the opinion of Nikolaev and many other patriotic Russian theater critics, »Russian society« of Kyiv was skillfully deceived by the »Polish patriots« who intended to make the Kyiv Theater a political forum.⁴⁶ Nikolaev described with clear disapproval how the chief ballet-master Maurice Pion, former director of the Warsaw ballet,⁴⁷ was called to Kyiv from Warsaw in 1859 with his ballet troupe in order to perform Polish dances, and how the Polish audience was excited to watch Cracovienne and mazurka. According to him, the plays were used by the Polish public as an occasion to discuss the future uprising.⁴⁸ These complaints were clearly meant to justify the later Russifying measures as a legitimate reaction to the anti-imperial activities of Polish insurgents.

Yet before 1863, the attitudes of the Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking public in Kyiv were far from uniform, and the governmental policy towards Polish culture was still not exclusively restrictive. For example, in December 1858, the *Kievskie gubernskie vedomosti* commented with satisfaction on the variety of »public pleasures« during that winter, and the Polish troupe was favorably compared to the poor Russian one.⁴⁹

Russian and Polish plays were often performed on the same evening, evidently for the same audience, as on January 16, 1859, when the Russian vaudeville *Ketli ili vozvrashchenie v Shveysariu* (Ketli or the return to Switzerland) was followed by the Polish comedy *Mieszczanie i kmiotki*,⁵⁰ or on January 21, 1859, when the Polish comedy *Pułkownik z roku 1769* (The colonel from 1769) was followed by the Russian vaudeville *Doch' russkogo aktera* (The daughter of the Russian actor) and by a tambourine dance.⁵¹ Sometimes the interludes between the

46 Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 44, 55.

47 Pudelek and Kosicka, »The Warsaw Ballet,« 219-273.

48 Ibid.

49 »Kievskaiia letopis'«

50 *Kievskie ob'iaвления*, January 16, 1859, 4.

51 *Kievskie ob'iaвления*, January 21, 1859, 19.

Russian plays consisted of Polish and Ukrainian dances, as on January 26, 1860.⁵² Still, Polish was the dominant language, at least during Borkowski's first theatrical season in Kyiv: there were many evenings when exclusively Polish plays were performed. But the delineation between the Polish and the Russian parts of the troupe was permeable and not directly defined by the national identification of the actors. As mentioned before, the same actors played secondary roles in both Polish and Russian plays, and many of the Polish actors who played in Russian performances could not speak proper Russian. The leading actress of the Russian troupe, Fabianskaia (then Fabianskaia-Nikitina), had acted in the Polish theater in Zhytomyr, before joining the Russian troupe in Kyiv in May 1857.⁵³

Clearly, the imperial administration was worried by the dominance of Polish in public life and wanted to secure the first or at least an equal place for Russian. A typical incident occurred when the Governor General Vasil'chikov visited the City Theater on February 7, 1860 in order to attend an amateur charitable concert. The musical numbers were to be played and performed by some local Polish nobility, as well as by an amateur chorus and orchestra. The program included fragments from several operas: the »Great Mazurka« from the opera *Halka* by Stanisław Moniuszko, selected parts of *Il Trovatore* (The troubadour) by Giuseppe Verdi, and *Der Freischuetz* (The free-shooter) by Carl Maria von Weber, a one-act play by Korzeniowski, and also several Polish songs, and musical pieces by Joseph Haydn and Giulio Alary. The poster consisted of two parts: Russian and Polish; however, the Russian part contained very little information. The titles of the works were not translated into Russian as had been the rule even before the 1830s. Furthermore, contrary to what the poster said, the musical pieces performed were allowed by imperial censorship to be staged in Warsaw and the Polish Kingdom, but not in the South-Western provinces of the empire.

Disturbed by the fact that theatrical poster, printed in the official gubernia printing house, was predominantly in Polish, and especially intrigued by the fact that the time of the event was different in the Russian (7 pm) and Polish (8 pm) parts of the poster, Vasil'chikov arrived in the theater at 7.30 to find the theater building empty and dark. Consequently, by the request of the Governor General an official investigation followed the concert. The Civil Governor, Pavel Hesse,

received an order to convene the theatrical committee and to rule that all posters henceforth shall be printed in Russian including the titles of Polish plays that afterwards could be printed in Polish with the names of the actors. The order was implemented within a couple of days: The theater entrepreneur Borkowski was called in by the theatrical committee and informed on the language regulations, and the poster editor, a certain Chernyshev, was punished for his negligence by a three-day arrest. In addition, Vasil'chikov reprimanded the officials who had allowed the poster to be published and demanded that all posters henceforth be published in both Russian and Polish.⁵⁴

After this incident the imperial government tried to find support against the Polish elites in the growing strata of urban dwellers who generally took a pro-imperial stance. Yet the Kyiv urban cultural public was not a homogenous body. Who constituted the theatergoers in Kyiv and what exactly they preferred to see on the stage of the City Theater remained an open and sometimes much debated question. The official rhetoric tended to ignore the preferences of Kyiv's rather heterogeneous public. For example, when in June 1857 theater director Nikolai Kobylin in his report to the Governor General justified his attempts at expanding the Russian troupe and reducing the Polish troupe, he argued that »as a Russian city and as the mother of Russian cities, Kyiv has the full right to have only a Russian troupe«, but he admitted that »the majority of the public consists of the Polish nobility.«⁵⁵

When in 1860 dismissed Russian actors reported to the Governor General on how they were mistreated by the Polish entrepreneur, the Governor General appealed to the Civil Governor, who reminded Borkowski that if the Russian troupe ceased to exist, the Polish troupe would also be banned.⁵⁶ It is interesting that Borkowski, in his turn, attacked the rebelling actors on Russian patriotic grounds. According to his report, the Russian actors had demanded high salaries, and while he had given them full freedom and expected them to stage »new original Russian plays with patriotic interest,« the Russian actors instead continued to perform translated French vaudevilles that did not satisfy the public. Borkowski then claimed that he had decided to replace

54 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 37, spr. 150, ark. 1-6.

55 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/1, ark. 91 reverse (report of Kobylin to Kyiv Governor General, June 1857).

56 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 37, spr. 373, ark. 1 (Kyiv Governor General Vasil'chikov to Kyiv Civil Governor Hesse, March 26, 1860).

52 Dolzhikov, »Zametki teatrala,« July 16, 1860.

53 Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 46.

them with new young actors who would have greater respect for Russian literature and the Russian audience. Borkowski declared that his main task was »to keep the interests of the theater in total accordance with demands of the government and of local publics.« Characteristically, the last word was used in plural.⁵⁷ Based on Borkowski's report, the theatrical committee supported the Polish entrepreneur against the Russian actors.⁵⁸

After 1860 the political climate began to change substantially under the impact of Polish patriotic demonstrations in Warsaw and the resulting growth of Polish patriotic activities in Kyiv. The whole urban public space became a site of contested demonstrations with clear national-political meaning. At the same time the tone of official documents became more restrictive toward the Polish theater-going public. The discourse of »bureaucratic nationalism« began to dominate in the governmental papers.

Also a part of the Polish public, especially students, radicalized at the beginning of the 1860s, had only the Kyiv City Theater as the main public space where they could act as a group. In April 1861, the Civil Governor reported that students of university and *gymnasia* often shouted and hissed at Russian actors and especially Polish actors who acted in Russian plays. The government intervened, and *gymnasia* students were no longer allowed to enter the upper galleries of the theater. Henceforth they had to buy tickets for those sectors that were better controlled by the police.⁵⁹ Ignoring the orders, the student audience continued to »misbehave« in the gallery during the plays – for example, some would loudly demand the mazurka instead of a song at the middle of the Russian vaudeville.⁶⁰ Nevertheless the audience in the same gallery was praised in a short piece in *Kievskie gubernskie vedomosti* as the only »theatrical public« and the only »true connoisseurs of art« who were able to enjoy the performance of Aldridge, while other parts of the audience were evidently bored by the famous actor.⁶¹

57 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 37, spr. 373, ark. 3-5 (report of Borkowski to Kyiv Civil Governor Hesse, March 31, 1860).

58 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/2a, ark. 19-20 (Kyiv Civil Governor Hesse to Kyiv Governor General Vasil'chikov, July 12, 1862).

59 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 811, spr. 83 (correspondence between Kyiv Governor General, Kyiv Civil Governor and curator of the Kyiv educational district, April through November, 1861).

60 Nikolaev, *Dramaticheskii teatr*, 50.

61 Sheikovskii, »Kiev.«

In the early 1860s the pro-government and pro-Russian segment of society, which was represented by a growing group of Russian merchants, members of the intelligentsia, government officials, and military officers, became more visible in urban public life. In July 1862, Civil Governor Hesse argued that »in Kyiv a majority of the public is made up of Russians who attend exclusively Russian plays, and the Polish public in the city is rather insignificant. It consists of visitors who gather only during the Christmas Fair period.«⁶²

But the liberal Russian *Kievskii telegraf* (Kyiv telegraph, established in 1859) was ambivalent about the Polish theater and its director. It promoted anti-Polish rhetoric in regard to the cultural policy in the region, and the standard tone in regard to Borkowski and his troupe was rather dismissive. According to the newspaper, »Mr. Borkowski with his miserable repertory and home-bred actors«⁶³ favored the Polish troupe and ignored the Russian troupe,⁶⁴ and consequently »oppressed and killed everything Russian and beautiful.«⁶⁵ In contrast, in January 1863 a contributor to the same journal favourably commented on the bilingual character of the theater in the city, claiming that in no other provincial Russian city one could find two so well-formed troupes as in Kyiv. Borkowski was praised as someone who did not benefit from his entrepreneurial activity, but who in reality subsidized the theater out of his own pocket. The same author favorably announced the forthcoming amateur performance of Jewish students, which was expected to become a public success, bringing a large number of Jewish merchants to the city.⁶⁶

Although Borkowski succeeded in making the theater financially viable and even paid 2,000 rubles annually to the City Duma during the period from 1858 to 1864, he did not manage to keep his post during the turbulent times of the 1863/64 Polish uprising. In 1863 the authorities sent the Polish troupe to Odessa, and the Russian troupe received another director, who was independent from Borkowski. Nevertheless, the latter kept contractual control over the theater until the end of the 1863/64 theatrical season. Finally he was replaced in June 1864 by the director of the Italian opera, Ferdinand Berger, and an actor of

62 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/2, ark. 17 (Kyiv Civil Governor Hesse to Kyiv Governour General Vasil'chikov, July 12, 1862).

63 »Spektakl' 20 ianvaria.«

64 Junk, Alfred von, »Kievskaja letopis',« November 16, 1861.

65 Idem, »Kievskaja letopis',« May 7, 1861.

66 »Slovo o kievskom teatre.«

the Russian troupe, Nikolai Miloslavskii.⁶⁷ By that time the Russian troupe again included the above-mentioned actress Fabianskaia. Her reappearance on the Kyiv stage provoked the telling comment from a reviewer of the *Kievskie gubernskie vedomosti*: »Ms. Fabianskaia (a native Pole) has learnt in Petersburg how to speak Russian correctly and get rid of her Polish accent, which used to be so disgusting on the Russian stage.«⁶⁸

In the same issue of *Kievskie gubernskie vedomosti* the residents and citizens of Kyiv addressed a petition to the Emperor. Their declaration of total loyalty to the Russian monarch and to the Orthodox Church included the following statement: »We know in our hearts that our native province is the ancient Russian land.«⁶⁹ They obviously meant to compensate for the previously ambivalent national identity of the city and its public. The residents of Kyiv were to become Russians very soon, and the rapid Russification of the cultural and theatrical life of the city followed through the 1860s. In February of 1866 the Italian opera troupe left the city, and the next theatrical season consisted mainly of performances of Russian drama and ballet. While ballet was always more popular among the Kyiv public, the situation of the drama theater was close to a catastrophe. The theater was usually only one third filled, and thus the troupe was approaching financial bankruptcy. The main impetus for theatrical reform came from above, which resulted in the establishment of a permanent Russian opera house in the city in 1867.⁷⁰ As a result of systematic governmental efforts, the Polish theater existed only thirty more years, until 1897, when it disappeared from the city.⁷¹ Henceforth Polish opera performances were usually limited to *Halka* by Moniuszko, which stressed the conflict between Polish nobility and the peasantry, a conflict the Russian government liked to exploit.

Although the Polish theater disappeared from the city at the end of the nineteenth century, the main City Theater retained its cosmopolitan character through the 1870s and 1880s. As in other major cities of the Russian empire, the new urban middle stratum in Kyiv developed intensively in the period of the Great Reforms because of the

judicial reform and the opening of new educational and public institutions. The theater-going public, which by the mid-1860s mostly consisted of the Polish provincial nobility, integrated these growing groups of professionals, lawyers, doctors and educators. And although the elite Russian opera was promoted by the government and musical critics, such popular European cultural imports as Italian opera and French operetta dominated the musical theater in Kyiv.

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century Kyiv was a multicultural city that went from being a rather insignificant town located on the Polish-Russian border to being one of the most contested provincial centers of the Russian Empire. The Polish theater in Kyiv played an important role in the development of the Polish community within that modern urban context under the changing imperial rule. Attending Polish theater in the newly established Russian imperial provincial center became a social practice that facilitated belonging not only to a particular public, but also to a broader cultural communicative sphere that persisted within the borders of former Commonwealth, notwithstanding new imperial divisions. Until the 1863 January uprising, Polish musical theater in Kyiv belonged to the cultural map, which was structured around the Polish-dominated cities of Lviv, Warsaw and Cracow. Relations with the Polish theater in Austrian Galicia became especially prominent during the time of relative liberalization at the turn of the 1860s. With the radicalization of Polish-Russian relations, the Polish theater was increasingly seen as a threat to the pan-Russian identity of the city that imperial agents had forged and was expelled from the city after the 1863 January uprising. Consequently, from the late 1860s on, the musical theater in Kyiv became part of a bigger Russian operatic network, which was built around the imperial – both Russian and Italian – theaters in the capitals of St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The theatrical life of Kyiv proves that the traditional nation-centered scheme, according to which theatrical life was clearly divided by national criteria, must be rethought into more of a dynamic model. In the mid-nineteenth century the City Theater in Kyiv occasionally provided a forum for political unrest, but it also created a zone of intercultural and interethnic interaction, and often adapted to the changing political contexts of a culturally polycentric imperial borderland. The Polish musical theater coexisted with the Russian theater and even

67 TsDIAK, f. 442, op. 85, spr. 658/2a, ark. 56 (Kyiv Military Governor to Kyiv Governor General, June 26, 1864).

68 Dolzhikov, »Zametki teatrala,« July 6, 1863.

69 Ibid., 203.

70 Sereda, »Die Einführung der russischen Oper.«

71 Korzeniowski, *Za Złotą Bramą*, 458.

included certain elements of the emerging Ukrainian theater. At some points the theatrical stage also helped to facilitate the coexistence of Polish cultural identity with political loyalty to the Romanov Empire. All in all, the theater prominently contributed to the formation of the unique multicultural character of the city, which remained the highly contested urban center of a restive borderland through the course of the nineteenth century.

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Identity under Scrutiny

The First World War in Local Communities

As other post-1918 states of East Central and Southeast Europe, independent Poland represented a somewhat contradictory connection of a nation-state with a multiethnic society. While modern in many of its policies, it tolerated large enclaves of pre-modern traditions which had been inherited from the past empires of Russia, Austria-Hungary and the German Reich. The First World War and the postwar turmoil proved decisive in renegotiating the balance between such identities and the newly born state. This article will identify some of the mechanisms of the transition from the nineteenth century to the interwar, while focusing on territories of imperial peripheries.

Imperial loyalties

It would be an overstatement to say that the outbreak of the Great War was accompanied by general enthusiasm of the population of East Central Europe. This does not make this region an exception, though. Since 1918, many historians had painted the image of cheering crowds on the main streets of most European cities, a picture that has been verified in the last decades. But the so called Spirit of 1914 or *Augusterlebnis* (the experience of August 1914) looked different at *Unter den Linden* in Berlin or in the German university cities full of nationalist (and loud) students than in the worker districts of the Ruhr area (*Ruhrgebiet*).¹ Even in Europe's capital cities concern prevailed over enthusiasm as hope mixed with fear.

In the multiethnic territory of what would soon become the Second Polish Republic the general mood would probably be best described as one of loyalty. In Lviv (Lemberg, L'viv, Lwów), the capital city of Habsburg Galicia,

1 Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, 31-33.