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### Publication Date

2020

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Ballet in Ukraine: A Site of Tension Between Imperialism and Nationalism

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Ania Nikulina

March 2020

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

Dr. Jose Reynoso

Dr. Georgia Warnke

Dr. Heather D. DeHaan

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The Dissertation of Ania Nikulina is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Anthea Kraut, for her interest, patience and invaluable feedback throughout the duration of this project. I thank my wonderful committee members, Dr. Georgia Warnke, Dr. Heather DeHaan and Dr. Jose Reynoso, for their guidance and support. The interdisciplinarity of this project was driven by the classes and meaningful discussions I had with all my professors and I am thankful for this experience. I am grateful to all professors, graduate students, and staff of the Department of Dance at the University of California, Riverside for shaping a unique academic community dedicated to the study of dance. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to the faculty of Texas A&M Performance Studies Department, where I received my MA prior to beginning my PhD studies, in particularly Dr. Judith Hamera, who always believed in me and inspired me to pursue an academic career.

This project would not be possible without the support from Kyiv State Ballet School ballet teachers, who have agreed to give interviews and invited me to their classes and performances during my ethnographic project. I am grateful for their openness and sincerity throughout the long interview hours, their patience and desire to share their histories. I also thank contemporary dance choreographers, Anton Ovchinnikov, Kristina Shyshkareva, and Alexander Manshyn for their eagerness to help establish initial connections with the Kyiv State Ballet School and Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts and my friend Anna Kotyk for helping me draft my initial introduction letters in perfect Ukrainian. The interconnectedness and sociality of dancers and choreographers in Ukraine nurtured my hope that this project might be meaningful not only to “ballet

people,” but to dancers, dance-makers and scholars, working in various disciplines and philosophies. I want to extend my gratitude to Kyiv’s cultural actors, who have shaped this project and offered a space for meaningful personal conversations. I thank ballet critic Polina Bulat, who edited my performance reviews in Kyiv’s *Ballettristic* magazine, photographer Sasha Zlunitsina, theatre producer Irina Zapol’ska, and professor Sergei Borisenko. I also thank the librarians and archivists of Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts; I will never forget their kindness and openness in offering advice, consultation, tea and coffee.

As many students of Kyiv State Ballet School, I would not survive without the support of the school’s staff. In particular, I thank Kyiv State Ballet School’s medical assistants for attending to my injuries, when I fell and severely sprained my ankle during one of my walks to the school. I thank the doctors and pharmacists of Kyiv who have provided advice in dealing with severe allergies that nearly derailed my project. I am thankful to my babysitters Veronika, Kate, Tanya and Natasha for helping me balance dissertation research while caring for my daughter. I also would like to thank painter and instructor Angela Anderson and her online acrylic tutorials that helped me through the dissertation writing process. Angela’s approach to different stages of painting was particularly helpful; I am very grateful for her idea that paintings can hang in their “ugly stage” for some time before they become “not ugly.” Applying this approach to my writing process and carrying the hope that one day my chapters might become “not ugly” was instrumental in constructing this text.

I am immensely grateful to my husband Alex for his love, care, and patience.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the dancers in my life, my husband Alex, and my daughter Taia, whose unconditional love and support guided me throughout this project.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ballet in Ukraine: A Site of Tension Between Imperialism and Nationalism

by

Ania Nikulina

Doctor of Philosophy, Critical Dance Studies  
University of California, Riverside, March 2020  
Dr. Anthea Kraut, Chairperson

My dissertation project focuses on the structure and particularities of classical ballet in Ukraine, where this art form emerged as a contested space between Russian cultural imperialism and Ukrainian national revival. In my study, I analyze both acceptance of and resistance to imperial and national ideologies on and off the ballet stage, as Ukrainian ballet transitions from an element of Soviet high culture to an important practice, forging an independent national identity. I explore Ukrainian state ballet as a platform for cultural dialogue and as a space for navigating and examining historical and contemporary influences of imperial and national frameworks.

My dissertation contains four chapters. The first chapter provides a historical overview of the ballet development in Kyiv, Ukraine since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Eastern and Central of Ukraine fell under the rule of Russian Empire. The second chapter is based on my ethnographic study of the ballet community of the Kyiv State Ballet School, an institution closely affiliated with the National Opera of Ukraine. In the third chapter I investigate a previously unexplored collection of nation-



themed librettos, written in the 1930s, when Russian imperialism frameworks were largely re-established by the Soviet state. In the fourth and final chapter, I explore the system of ballet archivization and examine Soviet personnel files of Ukrainian ballet artists and the construction of the nationality category.

To date, few studies focused on how geopolitical tensions influence cultural institutions, defining them as sites of conflict between imperialism and nationalism. My study seeks to provide insight into the attempts of Ukrainian ballet artists to establish, define, and historicize Ukrainian national ballet, countering persistent neo-imperial efforts define all classical ballet in Ukraine as inherently Russian. In my work I attempt to de-center ballet history's accepted focus on Russian ballet and Soviet Studies' attention to Moscow-based archives and Russian-language literary sources. In this, my project connects Critical Dance Studies, Soviet History and Performance Studies to trouble disciplinary boundaries while offering multi-faceted insight into the cultural frameworks of imperialism and nationalism.

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## **Preface**

As I was engulfed in my dissertation research and writing, I considered the fundamental questions that Critical Dance Studies facilitated through its scholarship. What is the relationship between dance and politics and between dancing bodies and broad political structures, movements and ideologies? How are social, national and cultural struggles reflected on the bodies that dance, choreograph, perform and teach? Who consumes and sponsors these bodies and for what reason? How do dance, historic and cultural memory relate to each other? Here, I present my positionality through different experiences to offer glimpses of personal and political contexts that influenced this research. Each story closes with an opening question, provoking and performative, to contextualize my arguments and conclusions and offer a space for empathy.

Susan Foster, Lynn Garafola, Susan Manning, Anthea Kraut, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Jose Reynoso, Judith Hamera, Clare Croft, Jens Richard Giersdorf, Priya Srinivasan, Anusha Kedhar and many others have described the profound and complicated relationship between state and body, race and body, dance and memory, law and movement practices, nationalism and ideology. As I did my PhD work, it was fascinating to see how the connections between these phenomena were clear and evident to the dance scholars, and how they were often absent and silent in non-dance scholarly and public discourses. I could almost hear my dissertation advisor's words, that as dance scholars, we would have to learn how to position ourselves, explain and defend the discipline, its scholarly contributions and its ideas throughout our lifetime. I have felt those words resonate with me many times and especially when my own family would

directly disavow any significance of my work through the statements of “Dance by definition cannot contain any political messages,” “All dancers do is develop their bodies [and not minds],” “Ballet is not interesting at all.” Ironically, these narratives exist precisely due to the interconnection of politics and dance, where choreographic works, dance companies, artists and techniques are often trapped in particular sponsorship, propelled ideologies, differentiations and stereotypes that fuel and generate the nation-state(s). The palpable discrepancy between this public perception of dance, rigorous discourses, dominating dance scholarship, and personal uncertainty of how to inscribe myself into my research permeate through the academic fabric of this project.

This dissertation started in February of 2014 at Texas A&M University’s physical therapy center, as I was channeling my own anxieties as of a graduate student and a just-retired professional dancer through the monotonous and soft sound of an elliptical exercise machine. This “gym time” was the time when I would check in with reality of my own body and with the world outside of my MA Thesis. As I worked out throughout the gloomy February mornings, CNN was reporting an “unknown” military intervention in Ukraine’s Crimea peninsula, perpetrated by a well-choreographed, yet unmarked force of “little green men.” They spoke Russian with a distinctly northern Russian accent, had unmistakably Russian military equipment, including new heavy trucks and armored vehicles, yet CNN anchors continued to identify them as “unidentified armed groups.” But while journalists, diplomats, and political commentators attempted to present an “unbiased view” on the mysterious military force seizing key roadways and infrastructure in Crimea, there was nothing mysterious about this situation to a dance scholar on a

treadmill in College Station, TX that morning – this was live coverage of a Russian invasion of neighboring Ukraine.

And while the situation was absolutely clear, it also made absolutely no sense to me. Growing up in Western Siberia, I never registered any discourses of Ukraine as a potential enemy of Russia. When I socialized with the Russian-speaking communities of Houston and College Station it seemed like this social circle was equally comprised of students and migrants from Ukraine and Russia, always talking to each other as if everyone was from “one country.” These communities of Post-Soviet migrants, coming from different backgrounds, sub-cultures and professions, served as the evidence of propelled and forced “brotherhood” of Ukraine and Russia – the narrative that still lives in and decorates Soviet literature. These social circles satisfied nostalgia for the lost Post-Soviet home through communal language and common cultural practices. Throughout the spring of 2015, I was fascinated by how quickly such communities can collapse in the face of conflict, as previously significant friendships disappeared in weeks. Public death threats directed at Ukrainian-born immigrants, critical of Russia’s intervention, from their Russian-born friends followed. It was that spring that I felt the power of nationalism and the very global scale of Vladimir Putin’s reign. *Is there nationalism without politics?*

News of further military intervention and open conflict in Ukraine, coupled with continuous denial of Russia’s involvement by its political leadership, made my understanding of the political climates in Russia and Ukraine foggier, but at the same time clearer. I visited Russia and my home town just prior to the appearance of “little green men” in Crimea to see my friends and family. In my hometown I got a strange

feeling that it was not the same as I left it. Everyone seemed agitated, angry, and intolerant. Many cafes were closed, and the stores were empty, the first signs of the current economic crisis, particularly significant in small Siberian towns, where historically food was either unreasonably expensive or simply absent. I did not recognize my hometown that seemed to be always different from other Russian cities and always filled with sociality, kindness and vitality of a Siberian college town. At the same time, I saw the country and the hometown from perspective of my grandparents, the survivors of Stalinist repressions, for whom Siberia was a territory of great loss, poverty, and political repressions. “The nostalgia vaccine” that I got during my pre-annexation visit to my hometown was further solidified through news feed and annexation-inspired internal conflicts of the Post-Soviet Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking American communities upon my return to Texas. *When does the state need political enemies?*

Five years later, during my 2018 ethnographic study in Kyiv, I attended Zelyonka Fest, the largest platform for contemporary dance in Ukraine. As I talked to Anton Ovchinnikov, Zelyonka’s founder and director, during one of the performances, he told me quietly about the set of pre-paid master classes he had to cancel due to the inability of Alexander Andriyashkin, his colleague, to “enter” Kyiv and teach them. Alexander Andriyashkin, a Russian citizen, was denied entrance into Ukraine in Kyiv’s airport due to his previous visit to the now-annexed Crimea, where he also taught dance master classes in 2017. While Andriyashkin was Ovchinnikov’s “best friend,” he was also a very familiar figure to me, as Andriyashkin’s contemporary dance company was prominent in Siberia. The gossip and myths about this choreographer were profound in the

contemporary dance studio of Novosibirsk State University, where both Andryashkin and I got our BA degrees and contemporary dance education. Even though separated in time, I was intimately acquainted with Andriyashkin's choreographic works through the work with his students, instructors and friends.

I felt Ovchinnikov's overall dissatisfaction with how politics can affect friendships and collaborations. As Andriyashkin's classes were cancelled in Kyiv, I realized, again, that dance, as a cultural practice, depends on the political climate and relationships between nation-states. State-sponsored or not, dancers and choreographers *are* seen as elements and symbols of their nation-states, despite their efforts to take their art beyond state ideologies. As we talked, Maria Pyatkova, also a Siberian contemporary dancer and choreographer, anxiously smoked her cigarette aside – she already knew. After our conversation, we went to see Ovchinnikov's choreographic work *Sand*, based on the collected oral histories of refugees from Eastern Ukraine and their post-2014 relocations to Kyiv. *Is there dance not affected by politics?*

Almost a year later, in February of 2019, I visited Kyiv's National Military History Museum, where the top floor exhibition is fully dedicated to the current hybrid war with Russia. I was struck by the exhibition of ammunition and equipment, imported by Ukraine from Russia prior to the current hybrid war. It was all defective, meaning that it was made to fail. I saw anti-tank rockets with carefully sealed exhaust vents to explode as they were launched to injure or kill the operators and boxes of Russian-made ammunition filled with wrongly calibrated rounds, meant to damage firearms. In another pile were defective helmets and body armor with counterfeit quality control paperwork

stamped by Ukrainian officials, with a sign above the exhibit reading simply “Corruption Kills.” These and other exhibits served as artifacts and evidence of the carefully planned early unseen stage of hybrid war, which started much earlier than unidentified soldiers appeared in Crimea. Later that day, as I stopped for lunch in a small café, there was an announcement on the television reading that day’s war losses – fallen soldiers’ names and the names of their surviving relatives. I did not know how they died, but having seen the exhibits earlier in the day, I felt that they were betrayed – by a cunning enemy that exploited the carefully constructed framework of Russia as Ukraine as “brother nations” and by their own state officials willing to go along with this narrative.

Nearly every day I was in Kyiv, I had to proceed with my own graduate student life, research and related performances with the backdrop of an ongoing conflict just a few hours east of the seemingly peaceful center of historical Kyiv. In February of 2019, I came to the National Opera of Ukraine that featured the performance of Virskii ensemble, the most prominent company, specializing in Ukrainian folk dance. The dance company’s annual performance at the opera theatre started with the backdrop-size video of Ukraine’s crop fields, filmed from a drone. As a camera flew by, it captured fields of yellow wheat under a perfectly blue sky, a clear reference to the Ukrainian yellow-and-blue state flag. Dozens of young folk dancers poured on the stage. Ukrainian folk stylized music, ballet-influenced folk-dance technique and its virtuosity were met with thundering applause by the audience. There were no empty seats in the theater. I was surrounded by cheering fans, happy dancers and romantic video, placing rurality, earth, and the Ukrainian land together with young Ukrainian bodies, folk dance and cheering smiles. I could locate



only one thought in my mind – that someone (all the current war victims) will never see this. I cried heavily throughout the show, unable to hide my tears. *Is there politics without dance?*

In June of 2018, I witnessed the Kyiv LGBT Pride March. There were nationalist paramilitary groups that openly planned violence against LGBT activists, and the Ukrainian state organized a massive security operation to prevent violence - increasing police presence in the city, closing many streets in the center and building temporary riot walls, so that no one could get inside the parade space without a thorough security check. The march was set to start at the National Opera of Ukraine, where I was working that day, and where riot police formed a line of contact between marchers and protesters – one side of the large building became separated from the other. The feeling of the march was very strange; displayed police and military power did not resonate with the festive atmosphere of the Pride March. While half of the officers guarded the constructed, temporary walls, another half was waiting, leaning their tired bodies against the external walls of National Opera. It was spectacular, the way police and military officers merged with the building, like chameleons, resting on their trees. They felt at home. National Opera of Ukraine, like many other Post-Soviet theatres, always big, spacious, and centrally located, offered a refuge for all – tired state police officers, journalists, protesters and counter-protesters, state artists and administration. When I was taking pictures of the police, I asked if I could take one with the Ukrainian flag, held by one of the officers, and another jokingly said: “Definitely take the picture of the flag, it is the only unprotected thing here.” After I had taken the pictures, I had to sneak into the

building to sit in a regular ballet class, held for the artists, as I promised to be there to one of the ballet teachers. There was no trace or discussion of the outside event inside the building, no talk about it, though noise could be heard from the street. About fifty state artists, half of the ballet troupe, trained in absolute concentration, as a sea of politically charged people surrounded the building. *Is there a state without theatre, dance and ballet?*

## Introduction

### Ukrainian Ballet as Site of Conflict Between Imperialism and Nationalism

Russian imperialism has attracted scholarly attention throughout its history, particularly so in the past decade, as Russia renewed its ambitions of global influence and geographical expansion.<sup>1</sup> Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent sponsorship of a hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine can be seen as a prime example of a new wave of Russian imperial expansion.<sup>2</sup> While most public and scholarly discourse concentrates on political and military actions of this hybrid conflict, the very pervasive strategies of neo-imperial cultural expansion have gone relatively unnoticed.<sup>3</sup> One such sphere of cultural influence is ballet, an art form traditionally held in high regard in Post-Soviet countries. My project seeks to provide insight into the historical and contemporary workings of Russian cultural imperialism on the classical ballet stage as a key element of a broad hybrid expansion, encompassing cultural, political and military aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, I aim to analyze Ukrainian resistance to Russia's cultural aggression, as Ukrainian ballet transitions from an accepted element of Soviet high culture to an important practice in forging an independent Ukrainian identity. I explore the complex history and present condition of classical ballet in Ukraine and reveal it as both a contested cultural space and as an important cultural barrier to political

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of Soviet imperialism, see Francine Hirsch's *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge*

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of hybrid warfare, see Kofman, Michael, and Matthew Rojansky. *A Closer Look at Russia's Hybrid War*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term neo-imperial to refer to the scholarship that examines Post-Soviet Russia as an empire and highlights its differences from Soviet imperialism. For an extended discussion of Post-Soviet imperialism, see Vyatcheslav Morozov's *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and Marcel van Herpen's *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

radicalization, successfully resisting its cooptation by both neo-imperial and nationalist ideologies.

Ukrainian ballet institutions preserve cultural memory of three major political periods in Ukrainian history. The first ballet theatres in Ukraine were created under the rule of the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century, most affiliated ballet schools were established during the Soviet period, and classical ballet remained in the realm of state-supported art following Ukrainian independence in 1991. In my analysis of Ukrainian ballet, I address the following research questions: What is the historical and current relationship between the Russian and Ukrainian state ballet systems and their respective state authorities? How do the Ukrainian state, Ukrainian ballet artists, and Ukrainian ballet teachers theorize ballet as an element of national culture, and how are notions of nationalism manifested across the state ballet system? How is the relationship to Russian cultural influence incorporated into ballet training and the education of artists and audiences? If there is resistance to this influence, how does it operate within ballet as a part of state system? These questions framed my research efforts and exposed me, as a dance scholar, to highly complicated and non-linear phenomena of nationalism and imperialism on and off the classical ballet stage. Given a series of political regime changes in Ukraine's recent history, the questions of identity, resistance, and relationships to the state are particularly complex, requiring attention to archives, oral narratives and to the very bodies that are working in and for the state.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term bodies here to refer to various state employees; this term encompasses communities of dancers, ballet teachers, students, choreographers, musicians, administrators, librettists and dance critics.

## Summary of Dissertation Methods and Research Processes

This dissertation utilizes ethnographic and archival methods to examine the current complexity of cultural and political tensions within the site of state-sponsored Post-Soviet ballet schools and theatres of Ukraine. The need for both methods became evident during my preliminary research that showed that the majority of Soviet-era secondary sources were politically influenced and largely devoid of any particularities or details relating to the process of ballet production. For example, Ukrainian ballet historian Yurii Stanishevsky's works offer a conventional Soviet historical approach, fixing productions' and artists' names in the text and listing them in chronological order, but providing no analysis of productions or spectatorship. Stanishevsky re-published his Soviet-era works in a more recent 2002 monograph, leaving aside any shifts or changes in Ukrainian ballet or offering any dance analysis of the productions in different cities. Other secondary sources related to the later Soviet period, like the 1978 *Zustrichi s Baletom [Meetings with ballet]* feature stunning photography, revealing of training regimens, ballet bodies and practices, but also generate inaccurate facts and narratives that firmly position the history of Ukrainian ballet solely in the Soviet period.<sup>5</sup>

The relative emptiness of the dance analysis in secondary sources, and the politically-influenced manipulation of dates and narratives contained within them, pushed me to utilize both ethnographic and archival approaches in my study. This approach is particularly valuable in highly-censored societies, where both secondary sources and

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of such inaccuracies include omissions of key ballet figures and performances that were staged prior to the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, incorrect dates of theater establishment, and false claims of complete theatre evacuations during the Second World War. I provide a more detailed discussion of these phenomena in Chapter 1.

original documents were politically influenced and used to alter historical and cultural memory. However, as I will demonstrate, there wasn't always a clear delineation between where ethnography ended, and archival analysis began in my project. As a result, I switched between archival analysis and ethnographic work throughout the course of this study. In using this dual methodology, I position myself within the framework of other scholarly works that encountered similar field conditions, such as Priya Srinivasan's *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* and Jacqueline Shea Murphy's *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*. Thinking about these works that also utilize a combination of archival and ethnographic methods proved to be particularly valuable when there was little information or scholarship on the examined phenomena. As I will show, the cultural context of Ukraine, as a former part of Russian Empire, a former Soviet republic, and as an independent nation required this mixed approach.

Initially, in January of 2018, I turned to the collections of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library (NYPL) to establish the historical and contemporary cultural and political context of Ukrainian ballet production. The NYPL hosts the largest and most comprehensive archive in the world devoted to the documentation of dance. My first chapter is largely based on various secondary sources housed in the NYPL's collections of "Russian ballet" and "Soviet ballet" and allows me to set up an external view on what Ukrainian ballet appears to be from afar. Following this literature overview phase, in the Spring of 2018, I undertook a two-month ethnographic study of Kyiv State Ballet School in Kyiv, Ukraine. I picked Kyiv State

Ballet school as my main site because it is the key training institution that recruits its graduates to the Ukrainian state ballet theatres and schools and thus produces ballet bodies for the national and ballet repertoire. During this two-month period I observed classes, attended the school's performances and talked to the ballet school's teachers, artists, administrators, musicians, workers and students. I was able to conduct fifteen deep interviews, ranging in length from two to three hours, to examine the questions and themes of my dissertation project.

In addition to requiring a unique combination of archival and ethnographic methods, my project became a space and a practice for thinking and theorizing performances and archives, their relationship and mutual influence. My original ethnographic project helped establish my working network of choreographers, artists, dancers, related to and employed by the Ukrainian state structures – public and private schools, colleges and universities. This network became instrumental in my second phase of archival research, conducted during the 2018-2019 academic year. In the winter and spring months of 2019, I consulted primary source materials housed at the National Opera of Ukraine archives, located on the territory of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv. These archives are central to my research and connect with my ethnographic project, as Kyiv State Ballet School is the main institution, educating and training the artists for National Opera. While I was able to locate a great variety of primary and secondary sources at the planned sites for my archival research, it was precisely through the connections, established earlier, that I was able to locate the archives of the National Opera of Ukraine that were kept in an archive-museum of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv. In sum, this

dissertation is driven and influenced by both the interconnected realms of archive and repertoire, both theoretical critical frameworks that I discuss in detail below.

### **Methodology and Research Frameworks**

This dissertation looks at the phenomena of imperialism and nationalism and the ways these are constructed in cultural memory through oral narratives or textual materials. This project is inspired by the findings and theories of performance studies scholars Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, who have troubled the binaries between archive and repertoire, texts and performances. I do not attempt to subvert the edges between the different sites for scholarly research; instead my project benefits from the intersection of research framework of both scholars. Specifically, my second chapter examines oral narratives and narrative construction, while my second and third chapters are based on archival materials. At the same time, the writing of the ethnographic chapter is still based on my own constructed archives – fully transcribed interviews that became a 180-page document, my field notes, diaries, and photographs that teachers shared with me. My last chapter, in turn, which is based on the ballet artists’ personnel files, examines the documents stored in these files as performances of state power, analyzes their performativity and explores a possible effect that these documents had on the artists who filled them out and the bureaucrats (and researchers) who read them. While Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider appear explicitly only in the last chapter of this dissertation, their frameworks and approaches live in all the chapters and my own perception of this research.



The second chapter examines oral narratives about dance, the state, history and nationalism, as well as daily rituals of training regimes and everyday conversations recorded at the Kyiv State Choreography School in the Summer of 2018. My ethnographic methodology was influenced by the political economy of the current Ukrainian context and the instability of the state's support for the school, which drastically decreased after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The late spring months of April, May, and June are really the only months when a scholar could come for a visit or a study as this is also the time when the school is relatively "open" for visits. Throughout my ethnographic research it seemed like there were "forbidden topics" that teachers had decided not to reflect upon or might have been instructed to keep silent about by the school's administration.<sup>6</sup> For example, the topics of winter closure, lack of financial support from the government, salary cuts and delays seemed to arise briefly and bleed into the conversations but were never fully discussed. I later learned that in the winter months of 2019, the School was completely shut down because of a financial dispute between the power company and the Ministry of Culture, which accumulated a large debt for heating its ballet school. Careful wisps of sentences about the winter closure, visible from the transcripts of my spring interviews with teachers, have only proved the significance of these topics.

Madison remarks that "the researcher points to those moments, large or small, that we take for granted as 'ordinary talk,' while, instead, they connect realms of

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the significance of silences in interviews and oral histories, see Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance*. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012); Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (University of Michigan Press, 2013); *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollock (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

associations that we have not otherwise considered or simply did not know.”<sup>7</sup> Following this guidance, this work pays attention not only to what has been said during the interviews, but also to silences, jokes, in-between sentences with no start and no end, and everyday talk that occurred in-between the interviews and classrooms. Critiques of the state (Ukrainian, Soviet, or Russian) would come up in the sudden jokes, like “Oi, you, above!”, adopted from the Soviet pop star Alla Pugacheva’s 1985 song “Ei, vy tam, naverhu! [Oi, you, above!]”, meaning that one could not complain about the government in the same way one could complain about upsetting neighbors to the police. These critiques also came up in rhetorical questions and melancholic statements, like “Well, this is our only chance to tell some truth about ourselves,” meaning that impressive Soviet and post-Soviet volumes or ballet performances have not done it yet. Statements and silences about the absence of state support for the ballet school from the very state that created it tapped into the censorship of works on ballet, and the very discrepancies between the recorded history and cultural memory of artists. Such works as James Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* and Paul Connerton’s *How Societies Remember* informed this research and facilitated critical relationship towards secondary and primary sources, including my interviews. While this is not a study of cultural memory, scholarship on memory partially inspired this research and informed the attention to details of oral narratives that I encountered in the interviews and in everyday conversations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 36.

<sup>8</sup> For more information about scholarship on cultural memory, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*

The key site for my archival research effort was discovered and accessed as a direct result of assistance from the ballet dancing community of Kyiv. Prior to the start of my dissertation research, I had never been to Ukraine, and building a working network of artists, choreographers, journalists, dance critics, ballet teachers and students was instrumental to finding my major archival site. While on the surface, ballet communities do not intersect with other dancing communities, such as the modern dance or contemporary dance communities, and neither of those interact with archives, it was precisely the interpersonal contacts and long-term ties between these three communities that became a safety net and a bridge, linking my archival research study with ethnographic study. The series of interpersonal connections that ultimately enabled this project is quite remarkable in its length and intricacy, where a single missed link could have interrupted or delayed my research effort. I describe this network below as a way to both showcase its complexity and acknowledge each person who contributed their social capital to enable this project to move forward.

My first and only contact in Kyiv was Anton Ovchinnikov, a leading contemporary dance choreographer and a recipient of a grant from the US Embassy in Kyiv to study in the US, where we first met. Anton first invited me to attend an April 2018 contemporary dance festival (*Zelyonka Fest*), where he introduced me to Alexander Manshylin, another contemporary dance choreographer and a professor of contemporary dance in many colleges in Kyiv. Later in 2018, Alexander Manshylin introduced me to

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(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Maurice Bloch, *Anthropology and Cognitive Challenge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jonathan Ritter, "Complimentary Discourses of Truth and Memory: The Peruvian Truth Commission and the Cancion Social Ayacuchana," in *Music, Politics and Violence*, ed. Susan Fast and Kip Pegley (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

the archivists and librarians of Kyiv National University of Arts and Cultures. Finally, in 2019, one of the university archivists, Tamara Vasil'evna, introduced me to the Kyiv-based historian Sergei Borisenko, who took me to the State Central Archive-Museum of Literature and Art and its employees. This archive-museum had the majority of the original government documents related to the National Opera of Ukraine, a major employer for the graduates of the Kyiv State Ballet School. While, on paper, connections between different cultural and academic institutions seem “natural,” in reality they do not intersect or come together. All three institutions are relatively closed systems and many archives I analyze in my work were never looked at before, explaining why the majority of secondary sources on Ukrainian ballet do not interact with or analyze primary sources. To put it plainly, while the present and the future of ballet in Ukraine is located at the National Opera of Ukraine and Kyiv State Ballet School, its past is carefully hidden in a centrally-located and yet unnoticeable archive-museum, which I describe in the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation.

### **Post-Soviet Studies of Russia-Ukraine Relations and Nationalism**

Academic studies of Post-Soviet Ukrainian national identity largely consider language, ethnicity and political affiliation along the East-West (Russia-EU) axis as central factors in attempting to describe “being Ukrainian.” Interestingly, Post-Soviet scholars only mention the impact of the cultural sphere in passing and largely dismiss it as a distraction from more “serious” academic debates focused on polling data, GDP

numbers and election results.<sup>9</sup> However, after an extensive analysis of existing literature on the history and politics of Post-Soviet Ukraine, which I present in my first chapter, it is clear that a significant effort is required to understand the complicated history of the cultural transition from the Ukraine as a key Republic of the USSR to an independent Ukraine.

Cultural spheres and practices play a pivotal role in formulating what it means to be Ukrainian in a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic country positioned at a critical historic intersection. From my own assessment and observations in the field, contemporary Ukrainian cultural practices represent a conglomerate of national traditions, both authentic and centrally-designated, remnants of centralized Soviet culture, as well as large swaths of newly-acquired “global” practices, which can be broadly described as “Western.” This diverse cultural landscape formulates a myriad of fault lines, where Ukrainians can argue for hours, as to the role of Nikolai Gogol in Ukrainian, Russian and World literature. But this same diversity also forms an invisible connective tissue for Ukrainian society, which serves as both a common cultural platform, and in Lieven’s term, a “radicalization barrier.” Remarkably, in this diverse yet unified cultural framework, classical ballet now serves as a point of intersection, rather than division, and provides a platform for cultural dialogue.

Throughout the political turmoil of recent Ukrainian history, classical ballet remained among the only cultural institutions to survive and develop throughout the violent political

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of this academic misbalance, see Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001) and Marta Dyczok, *Ukraine: Movement without Change, Change without Movement* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000).

and military power struggles that engulfed Ukraine in the last century. State-sponsored ballet was established as an element of “high culture” in the Russian imperial period, became closely aligned with the Soviet state throughout the Soviet period, and maintained its central place in the cultural landscape of independent Ukraine. And while the physical building of the National Opera of Ukraine has remained in the same place in downtown Kyiv since 1867, the development and aesthetics of its performances were guided by the political realities of every given period.<sup>10</sup> It is remarkable to consider that in some form, Ukrainian ballet remained an active art form throughout two world wars, two revolutions and multiple regimes changes, where each successive government sought to be in place for an eternity.

### **Dancing Bodies and National Constructions**

Existing dance scholarship shows that dance training and performances were consistently utilized to embed a state’s narratives and ideologies, with a frequent counter-current of artistic resistance to state ideologies embedded by the artists and choreographers. Susan Foster, Anthony Shay, Jens Richard Giersdorf, Randy Martin, and others have shown that dance represents a very specific sphere, where state collision and power are evident on the level of the bodies.<sup>11</sup> From Susan Foster’s concept of dance

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<sup>10</sup> The former Soviet-era names of National Opera of Ukraine include Libknecht’s State Opera Theatre (1919-1926), Kyiv’s State Academic Ukrainian Opera (1926-1934), Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre of USSR (1934-1939), and Taras Shevchenko Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre (1939-1991). In contemporary Ukraine, National Opera of Ukraine has a second official name, Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine, used in print culture and public discourses.

<sup>11</sup> For an extended discussion of state’s manifestation in dance and dancing bodies, see Clare Croft’s *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), Susan Foster’s *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet’s Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996) and Randy Martin’s “Between Technique and the State: The Univers(ity) in Dance,” in *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998). Other important scholarship on the relationship between state and dance

technique as a discipline and a regime, to Andre Lepecki's notion of choreography as tyranny, dance scholars have positioned dance as an important site to understand how the state manifests its power.<sup>12</sup>

One of the first Dance Studies works to examine the connection between ballet and nationalism was Susan Foster's *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire*. Foster traces the coupling of ballet and nationalism in nineteenth century France, starting with an analysis of the development of "ballet d'action" in the 1760s. According to Foster, this ballet movement, pioneered by Jean-Georges Noverre, attempted to focus on the dancers' emotions and their expression through bodily movement and gesture. This shift toward expression of the interior emotions implied several new frameworks – telling a story, using bodily movement; positioning ballet as autonomous from the opera and a divorce with the disciplinary understanding of ballet.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, action ballet became a space and method for the expression of "interiorized subjectivity" that was essential for the rise of French nationalism and the formulation of France as a nation-state – frameworks that implied that individual bodies become connected through their own political choices. Foster argues that the notion of nation-state implies an existence of individuated bodies that can control their behavior.

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includes Gens Richard Giersdorf's *The Body of the People: East German Dance since 1945*, Ilyana Karthas's *When Ballet Became French: Modern Ballet and the Cultural Politics of France, 1909-1939* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015) and Janice Ross's *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of technique as a regime and choreography as tyranny, see Susan Foster, "Dancing Bodies," in *Meaning in Motion*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) and Andre Lepecki, "Choreography as Apparatus of capture," *TDR: The drama Review* 5.2 (2007), 119-123.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Foster's *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire*, 254.

Anthony Shay presents another connection between dance and nationalism in *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power*, which examines six state-sponsored folk ensembles, their choreographies and performances. Shay focuses particular attention on the notions of essentialization and particularization, where essentialization entails imagining the company as a singular national entity and particularization strives to show the diversity of national characters within both the company and, by extension, the country of origin.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, deconstructing the projected national identities, the author points out that state folk dance companies may romanticize their country of origin – presenting a non-existent image of what “folk” life is truly like.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while not investigating nationalism specifically, Shay highlights the connection between state-sponsored choreographies, romanticization and essentialization. Critically, while Foster points to the importance of action ballets in awareness of the existence of “individuated bodies” and in the rise of nationalism in France, for Shay, nation-states and their sponsored choreographies, staged by folk ensembles, mold dancers’ bodies into one singular representation of the imagined nation-state.

While Shay is largely concerned with misrepresentation through the polished and romanticized image of the nation-states, Jens Richard Giersdorf’s *The Body of the People: East German Dance Since 1945* examines dance as a means of state propaganda and, more specifically, as an embodiment of Socialist ideas. Crucially, the author accentuates that folk dance became a medium for cultivating national identity first in

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<sup>14</sup> To provide an example, Shay traces essentialization in the works of Moiseev Dance Company and particularization in the works of Ensemble for Folk Dances and Songs of Croatia (LADO).

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Shay, *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 50.



Nazi Germany and then in Socialist East Germany, occupied by the Soviet Union.

According to Giersdorf, folk dance became a medium for the cultivation and imposition of nationalism through the standardization of “folk” across the country and mandatory structured performances. Giersdorf further discusses the ways in which the meaning of folk dances and movements were fixed by the production of manuals and detailed instructions for folk dance performance and interpretation in DDR. Ultimately, folk dance was seen as a medium for “transforming practitioners into better East German citizens.”<sup>16</sup> These examples of cultivating national identity in Nazi Germany and later, in East Germany, point to dance as a disciplining and unifying tool in national identity construction. Thus, interestingly, while Foster argues that the disappearance of this framework of the “metadisciplinary status of dance”<sup>17</sup> was vital for the cultivation of nationalism and national identity in nineteenth century France, it seems, according to Shay and Giersdorf, that the twentieth century saw a return of this framework and its ubiquitous utilization by the nation-states.

The notion of dance as a critical element of national identity is further explored in the works of Randy Martin, who sees dance as a unique medium to embed and spread ideals associated with traditional and modern nationalism. For Martin, dance, while underappreciated within the performing arts, has the unique potential to create a moment in space and time and bring the transnational public together. In "Between Technique and The State: The Univers(ity) in Dance" Randy Martin theorizes technique as a product of authority that develops a connection between dance pedagogy and national identity.

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<sup>16</sup> Giersdorf, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Foster's *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire*, 254.

For Martin, while there is a common notion of mastering technique in the sphere of dance, in fact, it is technique that masters the body. Teaching (through gestural and verbal commands) becomes a method for technique transmission and its organization of bodily movements in dance. Martin states, “teaching is not done by example but with the word, for technique is a vocabulary that carries choreographic will and insists on apparent translatability of what is otherwise untranslatable between different media of expression.”<sup>18</sup>

Dance scholars whose works focus on ballet and nationalism draw connection not only between ballet and the processes accompanying nation-state building, but also frame dance as a connection between different epochs and, often, different spaces or communities. If for Martin dancers’ bodies carry national ideas within the context of neoliberal economy and its greater mobility, Ilyana Karthas draws connection between the 19<sup>th</sup> century France, Imperial Russia that appropriated and consumed many French practices, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century France that has hosted Ballet Russes. Karthas then complicates Martin’s statement by arguing that ballet as a part of nationhood (French in this case) can be brought by dancers, coming from a different nation state.<sup>19</sup> This argument, that the dancer’s body can hold or generate attachment to more than one nation state is presented in Jose Reynoso’s “Choreographing Modern Mexico: Anna Pavlova in Mexico City (1919).” Reynoso states that Anna Pavlova, her works and her dance technique, became a symbol of western modernity, and that the Mexican audience

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<sup>18</sup> Martin, Randy. "Between Technique and the State. The Univers (ity) in Dance," in *Critical Moves. Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham/London (1998): 151-179, 137.

<sup>19</sup> Ilyana Karthas, *When Ballet Became French: Modern Ballet and the Cultural Politics of France, 1909-1939*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015)

members came to relate themselves to the imagined European upper class and modernity through seeing her performances. According to Reynoso, as Pavlova presented a purified version of Mexican vocabularies in the series *Fantasia Mexicana*, the ballerina helped to generate mestizo modernity and mestizo identity in modern Mexico that was directed simultaneously at Mexican cultural heritage and European elites.<sup>20</sup> Jose Reynoso's work further complicates Randy Martin's and Clare Croft's narratives of dancers functioning as ambassadors of only the country of their origin and its nationalism.

I position ballet training in Ukrainian state ballet schools as a site of collision between the ideologies of neo-imperialism and nationalism, expressed in contested technique, teaching philosophies, and even language of instruction. In my project I unveil how the technique(s) of "Russian" ballet and their interpretation in Ukrainian schools might be used to articulate aspects of Ukrainian and/or Russian nationalisms. As I further explain in my first chapter, many historians and political scientists argue that the central cultural divide in Ukraine lies in the sphere of language and its connection to political ideologies, as the use of Russian and/or Ukrainian languages depends on the specific region. It is precisely the historic use of Russian language as a spoken language in Ukraine and as the language in which ballet technique is transmitted that makes Ukrainian state ballet schools an important site for examination of national constructions through dance.<sup>21</sup> As I will show, the relationships between language, culture and political

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<sup>20</sup> Jose Reynoso, "Choreographing Modern Mexico: Anna Pavlova in Mexico City (1919)". Editor Carrie J. Preston, *Modernist Cultures* 9.1. Edinburgh University Press, May 2014: 80-98.

<sup>21</sup> For more information on the ambivalence of language use, see Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 148. According to Solchanyk, in Post-Soviet Ukraine Russian remains a language of convenience for 55% of Ukrainians. Furthermore, Solchanyk writes, "... Another way of looking at language affiliation is to gauge its use in the

allegiances are considerably more complicated, when considered in combination with institutional cultural histories, memories and relationship with the state.

As my project attempts to examine dancing bodies, educated by state ballet schools, it is of particular significance to attend to the notion of how identity might be inscribed onto the dancing body. As Anthea Kraut has highlighted, the body is the “primary locus for the construction of identity” and, as Janice Ross accentuates, it is a “bearer for social meaning and a marker of cultural authenticity.”<sup>22</sup> When thinking about the body as fostering one’s identity, the notion of inscription needs to be considered. In “The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance,” Sally Ann Ness theorizes inscription specifically as a process that influences and constructs one’s body. Borrowing the framework of pragmatic semiotics and, specifically, Charles Peirce’s theory, Ness postulates that dance gesture as inscription leaves marks on the body throughout everyday practice.<sup>23</sup> For example, definite marks of ballet training often are highly-arched feet (that demonstrates the practice of extension and rotation) and straight backs (that showcase the centrality and verticality of the spine).<sup>24</sup> Ness’s argument rests on the definition of inscription as place-seeking and modifying operation that happens outside of spectatorship and the perceived meanings of dance. In *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, Andre Lepecki fosters an idea of inscription as social

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family setting. The polls show that between 32.4 and 34.5 percent converse exclusively in Russian; another 26.8 to 34.5 percent use both Russian and Ukrainian depending on circumstances” (148).

<sup>22</sup> Anthea Kraut, “Between Primitivism and Diaspora,” 436; Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Sally Ann Ness, 12.

<sup>24</sup> For the discussion of historic significance of centrality and verticality of the spine, see Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

inscription; according to the Lepecki, one's history, race, gender and sexuality are inscribed on the body.

The cultural context of Ukrainian ballet schools, especially ones that use Russian as the language of instruction, further complicates the ways technique is inscribed onto dancing bodies. While ballet technique leaves particular marks on students' bodies, according to Ness, it does so in a nominally foreign language. Borrowing Randy Martin's words, technique "masters the body" through Russian language. The connection between technique and language is heightened particularly in Judith Hamera's *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City*, which defines dance technique *as* a language. Importantly, Hamera underscores technique as a "signifier of affiliation" and outlines it as a "useful synecdoche for the complex web relations that link performers to particular subjectivities, histories, practices, and to each other."<sup>25</sup> In the context of Ukraine, and given the significance of language as the dominant signifier of national allegiance and ideology, this relationship between the imposed technique and imposed language is critical. Thus, Ukrainian ballet students are initially tied and inscribed into officially foreign Russian history, aesthetics and ideologies.

I will argue that continued instruction in Vaganova-style ballet technique (or what came to be understood as such) is used in Ukrainian schools to cultivate economically attractive dancing bodies, compatible with the hiring demands of Russian ballet

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<sup>25</sup> Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City*, 5.

companies.<sup>26</sup> With the help of Susan Foster's notion of “hired body” I examine the School’s adherence to Vaganova method of teaching ballet technique, the reasons behind the teachers’ loyalty with it and its interpretations. Attending to Susan Foster's essay "Dancing Bodies" and, specifically, to her notion of the “hired body” may help to answer the question of why Russian ballet theaters continue to be considered as possible and prestigious employment centers for the graduates of Ukrainian state ballet schools. Susan Foster’s notion of the “hired body” refers to the recent demands in the American dance economy, where the most “hirable” dancers are the ones who can attend to various techniques and display “talent” in them – on a choreographer’s demand. Foster writes, “It [the hired body] does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles but, rather, homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface. Uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire: it trains in order to make a living at dancing.”<sup>27</sup> While Foster’s theorization of “hired body” responds to the particular homogenization of ballet and modern dance aesthetics, it also refers to the increased “scientization” of the body: “Through this scientific language of the body, the body’s character is reduced to the principles of physics: it can be enlarged here, elasticized there” (255). This observation directly applies to the context of the Post-Soviet ballet economy, where the schools initially select bodies with the greatest strength and flexibility.

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<sup>26</sup> I provide a detailed description of Vaganova technique in Chapter 1.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” in *Meaning in Motion*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 255.

My attention to bodies contributes to the scholarly conversations on the manifestation of imperialism in ballet and its effect on the attempted construction of Ukrainian national identity. As I will show in my first chapter, while there are a variety of studies of Russia-Ukraine relations, cultural connections and nationalism, there is little attention to the current cultural practices and their impact on the nation-state building processes. At the same time, studies of nationalism and imperialism rarely turn to or consider the contributions of Dance Studies to understand the work of nationalism. This dissertation project bridges these fields and absorbs major theories and concepts from both. My analysis reveals the ways in which imperialism and nationalism operate on a “small” scale, leaving particular imprints in personal memories, documents, performances and librettos, ballet’s literary traces. This research unveils the long-term effects of imperial practices and nationalism construction and connections between different Soviet and Post-Soviet generations that construct contemporary Ukraine.

### **Recent Studies of Soviet Ballet**

The complex the relationship between Soviet state-sponsored ballet and its sponsoring state has only recently become a topic of research in dance studies. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, most scholarly works on Soviet ballet examined performances of Russian and Soviet ballet artists with a general focus on perceived virtuosity and acting performance. Such works as Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovskii’s *Ulanova and the Development of the Soviet Ballet* and Gennadii Shmakov’s *The Great Russian Dancers* relate Soviet ballet aesthetics to the principals’ performances, but

mostly analyze them through the prism of essentialization, to borrow Shay's term. In that regard, not only do such works fail to offer critical analysis of ballet works and their relationship to historical and political contexts, they also tend to notice the work of ballet principals as the only agents of ballet development. More recent works by Christina Ezrahi, Janice Ross and Clare Croft recognize the mutual reliance between ballet artists and state authorities. While each scholar theorizes different aspects of Soviet ballet, it seems that this dependence or "interplay," to borrow Ezrahi's term, is a point of convergence between these works.

Christina Ezrahi's *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* theorizes the relationship between the state and Soviet ballet as a "complex interplay" to re-draw attention from the framework of the Soviet artists, silenced and repressed within a totalitarian society.<sup>28</sup> In her study, Ezrahi argues that many Soviet dancers have used the Soviet system of state sponsorship to their own advantage by balancing between staging required classical ballet repertoire and developing independent choreographies. In the chapter "Enfant Terrible: Leonid Yakobson and *The Bedbug*," Ezrahi examines the production of Yakobson's ballet *The Bedbug*, based on Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem that was banned by the Soviet authorities in the 1930s, 1940s and the early 1950s, all while Yakobson remained employed by the state as a leading choreographer. In her examination, Ezrahi complicates the narratives of Soviet ballet as simply a part of the repressive Soviet system of cultural production and points to Soviet ballet companies as

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<sup>28</sup> Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 165.



unique communities, whose artists skillfully navigated the artistic expectations of the state and their own artistic vision.

Janice Ross develops Ezrahi's construction of artistic resistance further in *Like A Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia*. In this work, Ross examines Yakobson's works in relation to his Jewishness and very particular acting methods, developed by the Russian Yiddish Theater in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>29</sup> Tracing Yakobson's cultural background and artistic ties to Jewish communities and theaters, Ross disrupts the Soviet ballet historiography that privileges the state archives, produced by the Soviet Ministry of Culture. Focusing additional attention on the ballets on Jewish themes that Yakobson created during the years of aggressive anti-Semitism and Yakobson's diaries, Ross explains why certain ballet works were seen and framed as culturally subversive by the authorities. Thus, Ross shows that even though artistic resistance existed throughout the Soviet era, ballet artists were tied to the state authorities in terms of the content of their works, production process, tours and funding.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, theorized within the frameworks of state repression and artistic resistance, Soviet ballet is depicted by dance scholars as a contested field where artists either submit to or resist the state's policies and narratives in their works. This description echoes more recent studies of the overall social fabric of the Soviet state itself, which was previously simplified by many Western scholars as a binary framework of regime victims and regime beneficiaries. In her work, *Stalinist City Planning: Professionals, Performance, and Power*, Heather D. DeHaan introduced a notion of a "hybridized figure" to describe

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<sup>29</sup> Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 25.

Soviet technical professionals working for the state, who “became agents of the Party program, even as they resisted many of the trappings of Marxist ideology.”<sup>31</sup> DeHaan describes a social contract between the Soviet state and its technical and engineering elites defined by a mutual interdependence – the State relied on its elite workers to drive Soviet modernization and industrialization efforts, while Soviet engineers, architects and planners relied on the State for employment and material resources. A similar social contract, applied to cultural, rather than industrial production is evident in the relationship between the Soviet state and its cultural elites, specifically the Soviet ballet “industry.”

The dependency on and submission to the state is highlighted by dance scholars through connection drawn between ballet bodies and military bodies in Ross’s *Like a Bomb Going Off* and Jennifer Homans’s *Apollo’s Angeles: A History of Ballet*. In the section “The Corps de Ballet and Militarism,” Ross traces how this connection between synchronicity in ballet and military rituals was historically fostered not only by dance historians, but also by contemporary ballet masters and choreographers. According to the author, the connection might be traced back to the nineteenth century when ballet master and choreographer Arthur Michel Saint-Leon “made ‘numerous allusions to military formations’ and even advocated for a separate class de corps de ballet whose organization should be *quasi military*.”<sup>32</sup> In *Apollo’s Angeles: A History of Ballet*, Jennifer Homans

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<sup>31</sup> Heather D. DeHaan, *Stalinist city planning: Professionals, performance, and power*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 11.

<sup>32</sup> Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 32.

describes Soviet ballet aesthetic as “quasi-military display of strength and glamour produced on the lavish scale.”<sup>33</sup>

It seems that this understanding of ballet bodies as military or quasi-military bodies epitomizes the connection between the state and ballet in dance scholarship. As such, this understanding disrupts a naivety that many ballet critics share in theorizing ballet as a pure aesthetic that exists across societies and times, independently of political frameworks and regimes. In “Ballet as Ideology: Giselle: Act.2,” Evan Alderson argues that the perceived “purely aesthetical” consideration of ballet masks an underlying ideology that structures a social experience popularly associated with romantic ballets and its dancers. According to Alderson, the very argument that romantic ballet is “purely beautiful” can be interpreted as a deeply ideological defense – describing the subject technique in such terms normalizes it as “natural and inevitable.”<sup>34</sup> While this view adds to the militarism in ballet framework and allows for recognizing the presence of ideologies, carried by ballet and its bodies, this outlook precludes the recognition of diversity and difference within ballet companies and communities.

### **Central Argument and Chapter Outline**

My central argument is that Ukrainian ballet functions as a robust platform for deconstructing, examining and critiquing both nationalism and imperialism through its staged performances, training system, and related documents. In exploring this argument, my dissertation treats Ukrainian nationalism and Russian imperialism as opposing yet

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<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 363.

<sup>34</sup> Evan Alderson, “Ballet as ideology: Giselle, Act 2,” *Meaning in Motion*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 122.

related forces, where one phenomenon can function as a facilitator or deterrent for the other. This dissertation investigates how both phenomena were incorporated into and resisted by the ballet state system in the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine. Due to the historically complicated and contested relationship between Ukraine and Russia, research into these phenomena produced contradicting, non-linear findings that require unconventional, non-linear and non-chronological writing. I follow the methodology of Priya Srinivasan's *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*, where the realities of political economy and availability of the archives provoked and pre-conditioned hybridization of archival and ethnographic methods for investigating different epochs and connections between them. While my context is not directly related to Srinivasan's work, it greatly assisted my work with the non-linearity of data that I gathered throughout the last two years.

In the first chapter, I consider and relate the histories of Ukrainian ballet and Ukrainian nationalism and argue that pre-Soviet and early Soviet Kyiv was a unique site for dance development, dissemination of imperial ballet practices and provoking critiques of them. I show that while historical studies generate a specific focus on the emergence of Ukraine as an independent nation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a type of cultural vacuum formed as Ukraine struggled to replace Soviet cultural institutions with a stable set of national cultural symbols, traditions, institutions, or even language. My historical overview demonstrates that there are considerable differences in what it means to be "Ukrainian" without clear delineations associated with language, ethnicity or political identity. I show that classical ballet in Ukraine was particularly influenced by

Soviet-era cultural policies in terms of its integration into the realm of centrally-supported Soviet art. Specifically, I show that following the Second World War, the artistic development of ballet in Kyiv was largely influenced by the Russian-based Vaganova school of classical ballet. I argue that in the years following Ukrainian independence, Ukrainian ballet largely remained integrated into the Russian system of ballet training, mirroring other Ukrainian political, economic, and social institutions.

My second chapter considers the current state of ballet training in Kyiv and looks at the repercussions of the Soviet centralized hiring system that pierced ballet art in Ukraine. While officially situated in the current moment of independent Ukraine, it goes back to the Soviet epoch through the examination of teachers' narratives and memories of the Soviet ballet past. I show that while contemporary ballet teachers and choreographers show adherence to and acceptance of Russian and Soviet imperialism and its cultural influences, they also resist the new wave of Ukrainian nationalism driven by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. More specifically, I argue that ballet teachers' Soviet nostalgia circles around the memories of the partially lost ballet communities, robust in the Soviet past, and functions as resistance to the most recent wave Ukrainian nationalism. I find that Kyiv State Ballet School in many ways operates as a contemporary Ukrainian state itself – functioning as an independent entity but relying on the Soviet-era educational system and professional connections.

My third chapter looks at nation-themed ballet librettos, written during and shortly after the terror hunger campaign waged by the Soviet regime against the population of Ukraine in the 1930's. I position these archival documents as contested

cultural materials and discuss archival practices that both effectively limit access to their study and allow for their preservation in original form. I specifically focused on the archive-concealed libretto of *Lileya*, which I was able to locate and analyze. This ballet libretto by Vsevlod Tchagovets is based on the literary work of Taras Shevchenko, widely considered to be among the founding figures of Ukraine's national identity. As such, *Lileya* is popularly considered to be the representative national ballet in the classical ballet repertoire of contemporary Ukraine. I reveal that the original libretto of *Lileya* contains both veiled and direct criticism of Soviet imperial practices related to social disruption and land repossession. Reading this libretto as a subversive document critical of Russian and Soviet imperial practices and juxtaposing it with other Soviet-era and contemporary ballet librettos, I explore how ballet was and could be resistive to imperial practices of the past and present.

My fourth chapter analyzes documentation associated with the everyday operation of Soviet-era National Opera of Ukraine, with a particular focus on state-defined archival supervision and control exercised through the construction, maintenance and archiving of artist personnel files. I theorize the process of creation and maintenance of personnel files as performances of the Soviet state power and as a part of Soviet cultural imperialism framework. Through the examination of the personnel files of Soviet ballet artists, I show that centralized hiring system and archivization of state employees' family histories worked together to ensure cultural influence and implantation of some Russian ballet repertoire and training methods. I further show that silences, corrections, and omissions present in the personnel files relate to the performance-like function of these text. I argue

that Soviet-era personnel files acted as a stage for the state to investigate its subjects and, conversely, could be a platform for a Soviet citizen to negate or resist investigation, frequently with implicit support from the very bureaucracy structuring these documents.

In addition to ethnographic and archival analysis, this dissertation looks at different language practices that have influenced the ways the ballet body of Ukraine looks, feels and thinks. For example, my second chapter examines language oral practices, historically and currently framing and defining ballet instruction and memory and my fourth chapter unveils the very particular use of written Russian language in creating ballet artist as the Soviet subjects through hiring documentation. Ultimately, this project shows that Ukrainian state institutions, such as state-sponsored schools and ballet companies, can resist the state itself and its ideological frameworks, historical or contemporary. At the same time, these state institutions serve as microcosms of the nation itself, attempting to function independently and break free from the cultural, political or economic influences, imposed by both the Ukrainian and Russian state actors. My project contributes to the fields of Dance Studies and Post-Soviet Studies through simultaneous consideration of how imperialism and nationalism get inscribed through the “ballet body” that is so closely associated with the state and how ballet communities may resist such ideological framing.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Historical Intersections of Ballet and State Power in Ukraine and Russia**

#### **Introduction**

To understand the tension between the broader forces of imperialism and nationalism and their interplay throughout Ukraine's history it is important to briefly consider the political history of Ukraine as a territory of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and as an independent state. In the first half of this chapter, I will briefly discuss and introduce these periods of Ukrainian history, including specific historical events, as they form a shared historical perspective of Ukraine as a country and, to a large degree, help to both formulate and solidify Ukraine's cultural identity. First, I will situate Ukraine as a former region of the Russian Empire and discuss the inception and development of Ukrainian nationalism, which occurred during this time, leading to a brief period of independence following World War I. I will then focus on the subsequent integration of Ukraine into the USSR as a key Soviet Republic and the continuing socioeconomic and cultural ramifications of this period. Finally, I will discuss the political development of independent Ukraine following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its transformation into a largely democratic national state. In this historical overview, I will rely primarily on historical studies dedicated to Russian, Soviet and Ukrainian history, published both in the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods.

In the second half of this chapter, I situate the Kyiv State Ballet School within the Ukrainian cultural landscape and examine its history as an imperial, Soviet and independent national institution. Specifically, I explore the impact of the centralized



Russian imperial and Soviet systems of ballet training on formulating common pedagogic practices and ballet philosophies that positioned the Kyiv State Ballet School as an element of Soviet ballet. My own archival research reveals that Ukrainian ballet was imagined as a central element of Ukrainian culture, but also as a cultural thread connecting Soviet imperialism to its Russian predecessor.

By positioning the history and artistic development of the Kyiv State Ballet School, as a state-sponsored cultural institution, within the broader context of political history of Ukraine, I show that the Ballet School became both adaptive and at the same time resilient to political pressures to adapt its aesthetics in terms of training and repertoire. Formed as a flagship institution meant to showcase Soviet cultural superiority, the school remained dedicated to developing a largely classical ballet body, introducing elements of Ukrainian culture to its artistic aesthetic, throughout the Soviet period. Conversely, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of Ukrainian independence, the school largely maintained its own artistic independence from the new demands of Ukrainian cultural authorities, despite being fully integrated into the system of state-sponsored cultural production. I will further show that while the school acted to officially break its ties with its former “centers” Moscow and St. Petersburg, it continues to maintain unofficial channels of communication and artistic collaboration with Russian ballet schools and companies. In this, I argue that the Kyiv State Ballet School serves as an artistic microcosm, largely representative of contemporary Ukrainian society, and faces some of the same questions of identity, political alignment and independence.

## **Part I: Historical Perspective of Ukraine as an Imperial satellite, a Soviet Republic and as Independent Nation**

### **Ukraine as Part of the Russian Empire**

The national framework of Ukraine emerged in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century during a historical period commonly referred to as the Ukrainian National Revival.<sup>35</sup> This period followed the partitioning of Poland and the annexation of Ukrainian territories by Austro-Hungary from the West and Russia from the East. This rise of national consciousness during this period might seem contradictory, as what is now the territory of Ukraine was split between the Russian and the Austrian Empires. Yet, leading historians such as John Armstrong, Serhy Yekelchuk, and Alexander Motyl correlate this period of relative political stability to the formulation of Ukrainian national consciousness driven by the formalization of the Ukrainian language, the emergence of Ukrainian literature and the definition of Ukrainian cultural and aesthetic norms in regions under the political rule of the Russian Empire.

This rise of nationalism during a period of effective assimilation of Ukrainians into the Russian Empire may be attributed the tsarist ideology of “Pan-Slavism,” which, according to Armstrong, “based its authority on symbols of universality, rather than national exclusivism.”<sup>36</sup> Essentially, the Russian Empire was initially organized as a supranational political structure, under the rule of “divine” power of the Tsars. Although the center of tsarist power was geographically located in St. Petersburg and the tsars

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<sup>35</sup> For more information on this historical period, see Ivan Rudnytsky, *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> John Armstrong, *Ukrainian nationalism, 1939-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 10.

themselves were nominally Russians, there was some effort to avoid ethnocentrism as a mode of governance. In accordance with this policy, new Ukrainian bureaucracies were drafted from local graduates of newly established Russian state colleges and universities. And while the new elites were educated in Russian and held positions in the Russian-backed government, it was precisely this new intellectual class that would subsequently define Ukraine as a nation in terms of language, tradition and history. According to Yekelchuk, “The writers, journalists, and historians of the nineteenth century first envisioned Ukraine as a modern nation. They made a connection, at first an implicit one between common language and culture – and the right to political sovereignty.”<sup>37</sup>

However, while official imperial governance doctrine remained focused on inclusivity and assimilation, socioeconomic separation between the largely Russian-speaking urban class and the majority ethnic Ukrainian peasantry became defined just prior to the First World War. According to Armstrong,

The Ukrainians were, with the exception of a small *intelligencia*, almost entirely peasants; the landowners and officials were Poles or Russians, while the commercial bourgeoisie was largely Jewish. Under such circumstances, any nationalist movement was likely to become a class movement as well, a movement whose leaders would stress agrarian reform and liberation of the peasant from “exploiting groups.”<sup>38</sup>

As a result, the formulation and formalization of a national consciousness in Ukraine coincided with the de facto segregation of Ukrainian society along ethnic and class lines

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<sup>37</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52.

<sup>38</sup> John Armstrong, *Ukrainian nationalism*, 10.

during the late stages of the Russian Empire. As it will become evident in later sections of this study, this partition of Ukrainian society along ethnic, linguistic and class lines continue to influence social and political movements today, as Ukraine emerges as an independent nation.

### **Revolution and First Independence 1917-1920**

The disastrous entry of the Russian Empire into the First World War in 1914 resulted in military losses, hunger, and subsequent political chaos in St. Petersburg. In February of 1917, the tsarist government was overthrown by a broad coalition of political parties, which formed a largely democratic provisional government. This regime was short-lived, in part due to an unpopular decision to continue Russia's involvement in the war; in October of 1917, an armed Bolshevik takeover of the Russian capital marked the October Revolution and the start of the Russian civil war, which lasted from 1917 to late 1921. Eventually, the Bolshevik government emerged victorious and the October Revolution was designated as the beginning of the Soviet era (though Soviet Union not formed until after the Civil War). However, in the fall of 1917, a Bolshevik victory in the civil struggle highly uncertain, and the endurance of the Russian empire deemed a distant possibility, given the Empire's distant provinces were not under Bolshevik control and were, for a time, largely left to determine their own political fate. In Ukraine, this brief period marked the first time that the Ukrainian nation became a defined state.

In March of 1917, a parliamentary body known as the Central Rada was assembled in Kyiv and in June 1917, the formation of an independent Ukrainian state was

proclaimed, to become known as the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR). The newly-formed nation was structured as a parliamentary democracy, with Ukrainian as the official language, its own currency, and state symbols, including the recognizable blue and yellow flag. Ironically, these symbols would outlive the very country that they were meant to be associated with, as the UNR soon became engulfed in civil and military conflict, which doomed the young state. According to historian Alexander Motyl:

Ukrainian and other non-Russian elites were completely unprepared for the demands of statehood. They lacked armies, bureaucracies, and citizenries willing to defend their borders. As a result, Ukrainian leaders generally improvised. They reacted to events in Russia, they squabbled over utopian schemes, they shifted positions and changed alliances, they fought on several fronts – and in the end they lost.<sup>39</sup>

Despite initial popular support for the proclamation of Ukrainian independence, what followed the 1917 declaration of Ukrainian independence was a series of revolts, military takeovers, and foreign interventions, rather than the critically needed years of peaceful nation building. Ultimately, Ukraine fought a war with a resurgent Bolshevik Russia, which sought to regain control of all “lost” tsarist territories and was able to mobilize well-equipped and well-coordinated Red Army against the “separatist” UNR. Following a series of military defeats, Ukraine was re-integrated into the now-Soviet empire as a de-jure autonomous Ukrainian Socialist Republic, but a de-facto province of Soviet Russia.

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander Motyl, *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism* (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993), 31.

UNR leadership, for the most part, fled abroad, leaving behind their dreams for an independent Ukrainian nation.

While a large volume of literature exists on the relatively short history of UNR and this thesis does not seek to provide additional insight on the history of Ukrainian nationalism, it is critical to understand the core reasons behind its brief rise and ultimate failure.<sup>40</sup> It appears that, initially, the correlation between class, ethnicity and language across communities in Ukraine provided the nationalist movement with a unique opportunity to challenge the Bolshevik narrative of overarching class struggle during the turmoil, following the disintegration of tsarist rule in 1917. In essence, the national state sought to bring political power to the masses of Ukrainian peasants, the group largely overlooked by the tsarist government, and provide political power for ethnic Ukrainian elites representing them. However, nationalism in Ukraine was challenged for the same reasons that it was able to initially mobilize Ukrainian society - there was considerable resistance from within Russian and Russian-speaking urban communities, who became largely aligned with the Bolshevik ideology. In part, urban resistance to Ukrainian nationalism was driven by ethnic and language differences, but also because the Bolsheviks proclaimed the urban proletariat as the new dominant class. Critically, following Ukraine's re-integration into USSR as a Soviet republic, this class, language and ethnic rift persisted and became even more pronounced, setting up tremendous social and political challenges for modern Ukraine.

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<sup>40</sup> For additional information on the formation, history and demise of Ukrainian National Republic, see Paul Magocsi *A History of Ukraine: the Land and its Peoples* (University of Toronto Press, 2010).

## **Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic: 1920-1991**

Forced integration of a portion of today's Ukraine into the Soviet Union in 1920 presented the Soviet leadership with a number of political and social challenges in terms of integrating and assimilating ethnic Ukrainian population into the Soviet project. Ironically, to achieve this goal, the Soviet approach was to enforce cultural and language assimilation policies similar to ones used by the very tsarist rulers that the Soviets claimed they liberated Ukrainians from. This process was designed to both reward those who were seen as more loyal to the Soviet state, the aforementioned urban proletariat, and punish the Ukrainian peasant class, who were seen as a largely hostile social group. Critically, assimilation and russification of Ukrainians was done in parallel with a proclaimed effort to preserve and develop Ukrainian culture to promote the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Soviet state.

Here, it is important to briefly consider the dilemma of territorial inheritance, faced by the Soviet authorities following the October Revolution of 1917, and a hard-fought internal conflict that followed. The young Soviet state inherited the vast Russian empire, a territory stretching across Europe and Asia and incorporating multiple ethnic and religious communities. This inheritance from the "old regime" presented a serious challenge to the political theories embraced by the Bolsheviks.<sup>41</sup> Critically, Soviet ideology was anchored in opposition to the imperialist capitalist powers and re-claiming centralized rule over vast territories seemed to re-establish Russian imperial control over what could very well be

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<sup>41</sup> On the inheritance of Russian Empire territories and "Soviet colonization," see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: NY, Cornell University Press), 2005.

characterized as its colonial realm. A new framework of governance was needed in order to simultaneously preserve control over the now-Soviet territories and demonstrate the inherent non-imperialism of the Soviet state.

Russian Studies historian Terry Martin coined the term *affirmative action empire* to describe the unique condition of the Soviet state, where the territory of the Russian Empire was theorized as an inherently anti-imperial and anti-colonial state and where the central government appeared to put emphasis on local national communities to form the system of governance. According to Martin, Soviet leaders understood that in the age of nationalism and growing resistance to colonial rule, the possibility of perception of the USSR as an empire by its national minority communities presented an immediate danger to the young state. As a result, considerable efforts were made to initially appease and further empower the national minorities, by fostering and, in some cases, regenerating local national culture, tradition and language. Martin, however, is careful to point out that a hard line of centrally-controlled repressions of national elites existed in parallel to “positive action” work meant to promote national identities and empower local political participation.<sup>42</sup>

Martin outlines three broad historic periods in the early Soviet epoch in relationship to politics of national identity: the New Economic Policy period of 1923-1928, the Socialist Offensive/Cultural Revolution period of 1928-1932, and the Great Retreat period of 1932-1938. Each period was characterized by a very different set of approaches to the issue of “minor” nations of the Soviet Union and their relationship with the central authorities of

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<sup>42</sup> For more information, see Terry Martin’s *Affirmative Action Empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).



the USSR. The first period was broadly characterized by efforts to foster local national consciousness among minority national communities of the former Russian empire. Critically, throughout this period, emphasis was placed on distancing Soviet policies from that of the Czarist regime and the notion of “Great Russian chauvinism” was to be avoided at all cost. The second period marked a shift from down-up construction of national identities to an up-down directed and centrally managed program aimed at constructing a very particular image of each of the multiple Soviet nationalities. As part of this effort, national republics of the USSR were essentially labeled “backward” in terms of their “cultural level” and a concentrated effort was made to foster “cultural progress.” Finally, the third period of the Great Retreat was marked by the onset of national policy aimed not only on empowering nations but the definition and subsequent repression of “enemy nations” – those nationalities and national minorities seen as potentially disloyal and not trustworthy within the framework of Soviet state.

Following the conquest of Ukrainian lands by the Red Army, the Bolshevik government introduced grain requisitioning policies in the guise of class war – with poor peasants (and the workers’ state) seizing the grain of supposedly rich peasants. Across the future Soviet Union, wherever the Bolshevik army had control, this grain requisitioning and ban on private trade aimed to convey rural harvest to urban centers to supply the Bolshevik-leaning urban working and administrative classes. This process gave birth to multiple peasant rebellions across the USSR, most notably in Russia itself, including the Tambov uprising in 1920-1921 and the 1921 Kronstadt mutiny, and the Nestor Makhno rebellion in Ukraine, all of which were ultimately brutally crushed by the Red Army.

While grain expropriation was attempted across the Soviet Union, including areas with majority-Russian peasant population, in Ukraine the process of armed expropriation of lands and harvests took on an element of an ethnically-charged mass atrocities. The reasons for this were, again, grounded in the social realities of Ukraine, where the majority of the rural population was ethnically and linguistically Ukrainian, while the benefitting urban centers (and those engaged in the enforcement of *prodrazverstka* directive) were ethnically and linguistically Russian. As a result, Ukrainian resistance to the Soviet war communism policies took on the appearance of a nationalist movement, empowered not only by class, but also by powerful ethnic and cultural motives.

The popular resistance to grain requisitioning put the Soviet state on the verge of collapse and resulted in a rollback of the harshest elements of these policies, including the *prodrazverstka*. A New Economic Policy (NEP), envisioned by the Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin in 1921, was meant to revive the stagnating economy by liberalizing small and medium business regulations, allowing private farming and foreign investment. In Ukraine, recognizing the volatility of the situation, a special effort was made to diffuse the class and ethnic tensions that arose in previous years. In Ukraine, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, NEP policies included both economic and cultural liberalization, meant to address the obvious cultural rift and fully integrate Ukraine into the USSR. According to historian Volodymyr Bandera,

Consolidating its political control, the regime allowed socioeconomic and cultural innovation. The policy of Ukrainization promoted the Ukrainian language in administration, education, and business. Overall the NEP

elicited support from the peasantry and the technical and administrative cadres. Historians generally agree that the NEP period was favorable to the formation of modern Ukrainian nationhood.<sup>43</sup>

The policies of NEP had an overall positive effect on the economic situation across the USSR and, in the case of Ukraine, led to greater social content and acceptance of the Soviet rule, which seemingly allowed for greater national and cultural autonomy. In fact, many historians point out that it was during this time that the process of national formation that began under the Russian Empire was taken to completion. Yekelchuk writes: “Whatever their real intentions and subsequent reservations, Soviet authorities effectively sponsored the completion of the nation-building process in Ukraine by creating full-fledged national high culture, education, and administrative apparatus.”<sup>44</sup>

Despite the economic success of the NEP, many in the Soviet leadership saw the economic liberalization period as a tactical retreat, a step necessary to stabilize the Soviet regime and ready it for a full transition to communist economic policies. NEP remained vulnerable, because as a policy it relied on an alliance with the peasants, on the assumption that they would “grow into socialism,” though they were – by Marxist definition – the petty bourgeoisie, or class enemy. And by 1928, the Party—by that point, largely under Stalin’s control—moved to put an end to it, opting for collectivization. And while collectivization policies were applied across all regions of the USSR, their implementation in Ukraine took on brutal elements of genocide, culminating in mass

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<sup>43</sup> Volodymyr Bandera, *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 3 (1993).

<sup>44</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 94.

anthropogenic famine of 1933, which Ukrainians remember as Holodomor – Terror Hunger.

As part of the Stalinist economic course mapped following Lenin’s death, socialized farming communities with centrally-determined production targets were set to replace private farming across the USSR. With agricultural exports remaining the main source of convertible currency, needed to purchase industrial equipment for Stalin’s rapid industrialization plan, in 1931, the Central Committee of the Communist Party published a decree declaring all-encompassing collectivization of farms.<sup>45</sup> The Soviet propaganda machine accompanied this effort, designating collectivization as a class warfare project and designating anyone who resisted this effort as a kulak – a wealthy labor-exploiting landlord. According to Serhy Yekelchuk, “The term kulak (kurkul in Ukrainian) had never been clearly defined, anyone resisting collectivization could be branded one.”<sup>46</sup> Suspected kulaks were executed by military units, deported to Siberia or, if seen as less politically dangerous, deprived of their land and property. By 1934, more than a million Ukrainian peasants were “dekulakized.”<sup>47</sup>

A targeted destruction of the peasant class combined with a severe drought in 1931 ultimately led to a smaller harvest than anticipated by the central planners. However, the demanded grain quota from Ukraine was never lowered; instead the low harvest was blamed on internal enemies and grain hoarding by the peasants. A series of violent repressions followed, where grain was requisitioned from farming communities

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<sup>45</sup> Decree of Central Committee of VKP(b) from August 2, 1931

<sup>46</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 108.

<sup>47</sup> Stanislav Kulchytsky, *Ukraina mizh Dvoma Viinami, 1921-1939 [Ukraine between Two Wars, 1921-1939]* (Kyiv: Alternativy [Alternatives], 1999), 152.

by military units, including both winter supplies and planting seeds to meet the republican quota. According to Yekelchuk:

The Ukrainian peasants were already starving in the fall of 1932, when troops and party activists descended on the countryside to ensure the fulfillment of the republic grain quota. Recent archival research and oral history projects provide terrifying glimpses of the last kernels of grain (and the last morsels of food) being taken from villages during the violet house-to-house searches, swollen children dying from malnutrition and even cases of cannibalism.<sup>48</sup>

The brutal *dekulakization* and subsequent direct terror hunger campaign ultimately led to the death of over 3 million Ukrainians. Throughout the Holodomor, Stalin continuously blamed Ukrainian nationalists “infiltrating” the Ukrainian Communist Party and acting to sabotage his economic plan. In particular, records of communications between Stalin and his economic advisors, recently discovered by historians Valerii Vasyliiev and Yurii Shapoval,<sup>49</sup> indicate that Stalin specifically blamed the post-revolutionary cultural policies of Ukrainization of politics and culture. As a result, according to Yekelchuk, “For the Stalinists, peasant resistance in the Ukraine, whether real or imagined, was associated with Ukrainian nationalism.”

It was during the Holodomor years that many historians see the beginning of a concentrated attempt by the Soviet authorities to de-nationalize Ukraine and assimilate its

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<sup>48</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 111.

<sup>49</sup> Valerii Vasyliiev and Yurii Shapoval, eds., *Komandyry Velykoho Holodu [Commanders of The Great Hunger]* (Kyiv, Heneza, 2001), 310-313.

population into the Russian national and cultural framework that continued throughout the Soviet period. According to Armstrong:

Communists were frequently forced to use non-Ukrainians, Russians and Jewish intellectuals, workers from the towns, where they had real support, or persons imported from Russia itself in order to carry out collectivization. Consequently, it is probable that the suppression of the nationalist intelligencia at this time was at least in part a precautionary step to destroy a group which was of limited danger itself yet might have presented a real threat to the Communists if it could have utilized the discontent of the peasants to turn them to nationalism.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of this targeted policy, prior to the outbreak of World War II, ethnic lines in Ukraine became increasingly blurred. As peasants migrated to the cities to escape the hunger and terror of collectivization, many chose to hide their national and ethnic roots and assimilate into the ethnically and culturally Russian population of urban centers.

While Martin's work ends with the beginning of the Second World War, the shift set forward by the period of the Great Retreat continued with a renewed focus on reverting back to Russian nationalism as a unifying theme for the Soviet society. David Brandenberger traces the Soviet response to the failure to mobilize the population in the war scare of 1927 in what he sees as a re-deployment of a national identity policy based on the notion of russocentrism. Brandenberger points out that, following a failure to unite the population of the USSR based on class-based solidarity between different ethnic groups,

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<sup>50</sup> John Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism* (Portland, OR: Libraries Unlimited, 1990), 11.

“Stalin was visibly rejecting a multiethnic history of the Russian empire of a historical narrative that would implicitly focus on the Russian people’s state-building across time.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, according to Brandenberger, adoption of Russian history as the official history charter of the Soviet education system helped shift the focus from the politically contentious period following the Revolution, where yesterday’s heroes quickly became today’s enemies of the state and disappeared in the purges of the 1930s.

Following World War II, state-approved Russian history and centrally constructed Russian identity became a safer alternative to the class-based and national-identity based cultural construction attempts of the early Soviet period. In Ukraine, this largely coincided with a targeted devastation of the largely Ukrainian agrarian communities during the Holodomor, Stalinist repressions of the late 1930s, World War II and a post-war cultural policy targeting assimilation of Ukrainian identity. According to Yekelchuk:

While transforming Ukraine into a modern industrial society, Stalin's revolution from above crushed the two social strata that have traditionally been the backbone of the national movement - the peasantry and the intelligentsia. Collectivization and the Famine devastated the former, while the terror decimated the latter. Other nationalities residing in Ukraine experienced a similar decline. At the same time, as Moscow centralization drive took away much of the republic's economic sovereignty, the Russian culture began regaining its privileged position.

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<sup>51</sup> David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002), 47.

The Soviet state no longer emphasized Ukrainian nation building, and its actions smacked of imperial absorption.<sup>52</sup>

According to Brandenberger, following World War II, reliance on Russian identity as the cultural backbone of Soviet identity went as far as to result in suspicions of collaboration of other nationalities with the Germans in the post-World War II years. According to the author, “the perception that non-Russians were somehow less committed to the war effort than their Russian counterparts spawned a substantial Russian chauvinist subculture during the war years.”<sup>53</sup> In all, though fueling Russian identity during years of conflict contributed to the morale and dedication of the Red Army, there was a clear skewing of Soviet identity towards that of Russian national identity that now formatted the overall framework of how the Soviet citizens perceived themselves. Brandenberger proposes the notion of National-Bolshevism to describe a peculiar dual allegiance that formed as a result of first a careful adaptation and then a complete reliance of the Soviet regime on Russian national identity that permeated the later Soviet period.

### **Independence: 1991-2018**

In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the proclamation of independence by all of the fifteen Soviet Republics, including Ukraine. Yet, while for the first time in modern history, Ukrainian independence became a reality, to an outside observer, the country seems to remain divided along ethnic, linguistic and cultural lines.

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<sup>52</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 120.

<sup>53</sup> David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 178.



Post-Soviet Studies literature generates a specific focus on the emergence of Ukraine as an independent nation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the centrally-enforced “Soviet” set of cultural norms and practices. However, as many recent publications suggest, the nominal disappearance of the Soviet ideology did not signal a rapid transition to a pre-existing monolithic set of ethnic, language or cultural norms across culturally diverse regions of Ukraine.<sup>54</sup> In fact, studies point to considerable differences in what it means to be “Ukrainian” without clear delineations associated with language, ethnicity or political identity.<sup>55</sup>

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, independent Ukraine is viewed by many scholars as a loose confederation of ethnically, culturally and linguistically distinct regions largely unbounded by an overarching Ukrainian identity. Critically, Russian authorities adopted the concept of Ukraine fracturing along ethnic, cultural and linguistic divides as a central part of military strategies. Following the successful annexation of Russian-speaking Crimea in 2014, Russian forces infiltrated Eastern Ukraine, where they attempted to trigger a popular uprising against Ukraine’s

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<sup>54</sup> Marta Dyczok, *Ukraine: Movement without Change, Change without Movement*, 101; Anatol Lieven, *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry* (Washington, DC: The Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace, 1999), 49; Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 224. This argument is also perpetuated by the studies of post-socialism that question the overall framework of multi-faceted change after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For an example of post-socialism observations in Ukraine, see Kathryn Cassidy, “Performing the Cross-Border Economies of Post-Socialism,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 31, (2011), 632-647.

<sup>55</sup> According to Solchanyk, “Ukrainians and Russians account for about 95 percent of the total population. The remaining 5 percent includes Jews, Belarusians, Moldovans, Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Poles, Hungarians, and Romanians, all of whom number one hundred thousand or more, and numerous smaller groups. For more information, see Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia*, 145.

central government.<sup>56</sup> This strategy anticipated a domino effect in mainly Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine. However, as the ensuing conflict quickly revealed, allegedly “Russian” regions, though united by a common language, ethnicity and apparent cultural connections to Russia, were quick to resist Russian-led aggression and demonstrate unity with Ukraine.<sup>57</sup>

The language question is central to studies of post-Soviet Ukraine, and many scholars frame the construction of Ukrainian as the official language to replace Soviet-prescribed Russian as part of Ukrainian nation-building. In *The Ukrainians: An Unexpected Nation*, Andrew Wilson dissects the language question and its critical importance to a broader question of whether Ukraine is imagined as post-colonial nation. According to Wilson, Ukrainian nationalists argue that Ukraine remains in recovery from years of Soviet occupation and needs to re-establish its national identity in a form of a common and distinct language. Their critics, on the other hand, argue that the Soviet period must be accepted as a part of a shared cultural experience that actually shaped the country in its present borders, and that Ukrainian identity should be separated from the strict bounds of language. As a result of these tensions, Wilson argues that a third option emerges – Ukraine as “a culture of multiple influences,” where Ukrainian identity becomes precisely that of diversity and multiculturalism.<sup>58</sup> Critically, Wilson claims that

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<sup>56</sup> Lucian Kim, “Should Putin Fear the Man Who “pulled the Trigger of War in Ukraine?” *The Great Debate*, *Reuters*, November, 25, 2014. Web. <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2014/11/25/should-putin-fear-the-man-who-pulled-the-trigger-of-war-in-ukraine/>

<sup>57</sup> Crimea remains land-locked largely due to the fact that pro-Russian rebellions failed in cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol. For extensive analysis, see Svyatoslav Homenko, “Khar’kovskaya Neudavshayasya Respublika [Kharkiv’s Failed Republics],” *BBC, Russkaya Sluzhba [Russian Service]*, April, 8, 2015, Web. [http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2015/04/150408\\_ru\\_s\\_kharkiv](http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2015/04/150408_ru_s_kharkiv)

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainians: An Unexpected Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 217.

this “Other Ukraine” is in fact representative of a type of silent majority, whose “loyalties are not yet clear.”<sup>59</sup>

Questions of ethnicity and resulting political loyalties are also prominent in Post-Soviet studies focused on understanding the politics of Ukraine since the disintegration of the USSR. As with the language issue, ethnicity is not a central fault line along which Ukraine split or defined its national identity. Partially, this has to do with the fact that in the context of Ukraine, ethnicity is not physicalized in a visible way to allow rapid distinction between those nominally Ukrainian-Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian. As Anatol Lieven argues in *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*, “In the past, when the state was dominated by Russia, the lack of clear [ethnic] distinction between Russians and Ukrainians contributed to Ukrainians easily becoming Russified. Today, with the state being Ukrainian, this lack of distinction is helping more and more Russians become to a considerable extent Ukrainianized.”<sup>60</sup>

According to Lieven, ethnic fluidity forms a type of radicalization barrier, which, interestingly enough, irritates radical Ukrainian nationalists and Russian imperialists alike. As a consequence of its multi-ethnicity, as Roman Solchanyk points out in *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition*, Ukraine was largely able to avoid ethnic-line violence that plagued many of the Post-Soviet Republics in Central Asia. In place of a clear ethnic divide, Ukraine has been theorized to be divided along a cultural fault-line that dominates the popular discourse of national identity. Specifically, Solchanyk postulates that Ukraine remains divided along an unseen cultural rift, where Eastern

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<sup>59</sup> Wilson, 217.

<sup>60</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*, 2.

Ukraine gravitates towards Russia, while its Western regions are seen as leaning towards European values and cultural norms. Critically, Solchanyk derives a notion of a remnant “Soviet identity” that, according to the author, continues to permeate Ukrainian social structures.

In essence, Solchanyk describes Soviet identity as a sense of nostalgia for the perceived economic and social stability of the late USSR. Solchanyk admits that there is, in fact, an east-west orientation of the prevalence of Soviet nostalgia, with a clear “center” in post-industrial Eastern Ukraine. However, the author also points out that this “Soviet identity” fails to directly correlate to an allegiance to Russia as an “heir” of the USSR. Solchanyk states that “Ukraine’s regional diversity and the related issues of ethnicity, language and identity are far more complex than the conventional east-west, or Ukrainian-Russian paradigms” and argues that the greatest challenge to independent Ukraine is “forging a modern, post-Soviet national identity that is grounded in civic ethos.”<sup>61</sup>

In sum, the field of Post-Soviet studies tends to frame contemporary independent Ukraine as divided by a set of linguistic, ethnic and cultural fault lines, where each division should pose a grave danger to the young country. Yet, as the authors argue in their conclusions and as Ukraine’s resistance to Russian aggression ultimately showed, it appears that Ukraine’s society is bounded together by much stronger cultural ties than might be otherwise assumed. Solchanyuk refers to “Soviet identity” as a possible cultural foundation for common understanding and civic tolerance of difference, yet also points to

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<sup>61</sup> Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: the Post-Soviet Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 143.

the necessity of going beyond this common framework as a pre-requisite to structuring an independent Ukrainian identity.

## **Part II: Developments of Ukrainian ballet during Imperial, Soviet, and Post-Soviet periods**

In the next section of this chapter, I will explore key developments in Ukrainian ballet and make the important connection to historical events of recent Ukrainian history. I will begin with the Russian imperial period, discuss the transition to the Soviet period, and end with a brief discussion of the state of Ukrainian ballet following the declaration of Ukrainian Independence in 1991. I will demonstrate that Ukrainian ballet aesthetics were molded to satisfy the political ideology of every given period. At the same time, I will show that elements of the aesthetics persisted beyond the historical epoch when they were formulated. Specifically, I will demonstrate that the Soviet ballet aesthetic incorporated multiple elements of the Imperial ballet and that modern Ukrainian ballet, in turn, incorporated many characteristics of the Soviet ballet aesthetic, which persisted for nearly thirty years following Ukrainian Independence. I suggest that that attention to cultural practices like ballet blurs the strict periodization that historians ascribe to Ukrainian history, making the temporal dividing lines become less clear and pronounced.

### **Classical Ballet in Ukraine in the Russian Imperial Period**

Classical ballet in the Russian empire has traditionally held a role of a court dance. As a result, the main training centers were part of the imperial Court in St Petersburg. However,

artists from St. Petersburg were expected to tour and perform across the “periphery” of the empire. Over time, Imperial theaters were established across the main cities of the Russian empire, meant to promote Russian culture, language, and aesthetics. At the same time, repertoires of these theaters were carefully monitored to include at least some aesthetic elements of local culture, to demonstrate the nominally accepting nature of Russian imperial rule, echoing Susan Leigh Foster’s argument that colonial powers presented a framework of “universally shared sympathy” to legitimize their rule. Foster states, “The premise of a universally shared sympathy further rationalized conquest by enabling a colonial presence to be moved by the plight of local inhabitants and to respond by working to ‘improve’ their situation”.<sup>62</sup> In Ukraine this process was particularly significant, due to the economic and political importance of Ukraine to the Russian empire as both a source of economic and human resources.

The first recorded performance of ballet in Ukraine dates to 1780, when a small group of about 20 ballet dancers performed “choreographic miniatures” in Kharkiv, under the guidance of Peter Ivanitsky, a former dancer with the St Petersburg ballet.<sup>63</sup> Throughout the 19th century, a culture of ballet tours, featuring imperial artists from Moscow and St. Petersburg, became a prominent feature of Ukrainian cultural landscape. The first full-length ballet performances, featuring European classics such as *Esmeralda*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Giselle*, date back to the 1867 season and correlate to the establishment of the Kyiv Opera

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<sup>62</sup> Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographing empathy." *Topoi* 24.1 (2005): 81-91.

<sup>63</sup> In the context of this historical period, choreographic miniatures refer to short court ballet performances that took place in-between opera acts, rather than one-act ballet performances, which emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are typically thought of when the term choreographic miniatures is used in dance scholarship.

Theater, marking the beginning of a permanent presence of state-sponsored ballet in Ukraine's cultural landscape.

Until the events of the Russian Revolution, the Kyiv Opera House offered a combined repertoire of Russian and European classics, such as *Swan Lake*, as well as works rooted in Ukrainian national culture, such as *Shoreline*, *Carnival* and *Harvest in Ukraine*. These works incorporated national costumes, elements of Ukrainian music into the musical scores and offered a *balleticized* interpretation of national dance.<sup>64</sup> This cultural appropriation and adaptation of nominally Ukrainian culture into the ballet repertoire was largely reflective of the overall policy of pan-Slavism, embraced by the tsarist regime, as it highlighted both the centrality of Russian culture, its implicit connection to Western European culture and an important emphasis on the peaceful incorporation of Ukrainian national culture, meant to highlight the nominal coexistence of these cultures within the Russian Empire.

The state's general acceptance of ethnic differences during much of the nineteenth century created both economic opportunity and a risk of cultural dilution for Ukrainians. Individually, they could make careers anywhere in the Russian Empire as they could not be easily distinguished from members of the dominant nationality. As a group, however, they could not develop their independent culture, publish books in Ukrainian, establish Ukrainian organizations, or distinguish Ukrainian ballet from the Russian ballet school. This dichotomy was particularly pronounced in imperial ballet productions in Ukraine's National Opera.

According to ballet historian Yuri Stanishevsky:

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<sup>64</sup> For additional discussion of folk balletization, see Leslie Norton, *Léonide Massine and the 20th Century Ballet* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2004).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kyiv ballet stage was mostly staffed by dancers of the Russian ballet school, specifically artists from Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as artists from Polish ballet schools. Choreographers of the Warsaw opera theater, H. Nijinsky, S. Lenachevsky, K Zalevsky, and A. Romanovsky initially aligned their productions with foreign ballet productions (specifically French and Italian ballet), yet during their work in Kyiv were positively influenced by the artistic development of Russian ballet theater. They referred to productions staged in Moscow and St. Petersburg, incorporating achievements of Russian theater and ballet art. Polish ballet companies were likewise staffed by graduates of Moscow and St. Petersburg ballet schools, as well as Ukrainian artists.

A number of critical observations arise from Stanishevsky's relatively short description of imperial ballet in Ukraine prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. First, the National Opera of Kyiv was staffed by outside choreographers and dancers, who either came from the "established" Warsaw opera, or from the imperial theaters of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Secondly, the imperial administration saw Kyiv as a cultural melting pot, where Polish choreographers would be brought into close contact with "positive influences" of Russian ballet. Thirdly, Ukrainian dancers and choreographers are only mentioned in passing, as recruits for Polish dance companies. Finally, Stanishevsky, who many see as a definitive source on Ukrainian ballet, clearly delineates French and Polish ballet canons as "foreign," while theorizing Russian ballet as an overarching artistic framework incorporating the Poland, Ukraine and Russia. In essence, throughout the Imperial period of Ukraine's history, classical ballet was structured as an important element of colonial culture, which positioned



Russian ballet at the top of the dance hierarchy, centered in the ballet academies of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

### **The Revolution – The Kyiv School of Movement of Bronislava Nijinska**

While the tsarist regime came to an end with the February Revolution of 1917, the revolutionary period in ballet began a few years earlier, with the formation, tours, and astounding European success of the *Ballet Russes* under the artistic management of Sergei Diaghilev. In the year prior to World War I, the *Ballet Russes* largely defined the new format of classical ballet in terms of choreography, technique, and aesthetics, which largely persists to this day. Specifically, Diaghilev's ballets de-emphasized the importance of turnout, previously considered as a critical element to classical ballet.<sup>65</sup> Conversely, the *Ballet Russes* focused on choreographic experimentation and inclusion of parallel positions previously seen as antithetical to classical ballet. While academic works, dedicated to the *Ballet Russes*, largely consider the central roles that Sergei Diaghilev, Mikhail Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky played in the aesthetic development of the company, the critical contribution of Bronislava Nijinska, a key choreographer and dancer of the *Ballet Russes* is somewhat forgotten.<sup>66</sup> In large part, her absence relates to the years she spent away from the Paris scene, which she departed at the breakout of the First World War, accepting a prima contract with the Kyiv State Opera. During the turbulent time of revolution, war and civil unrest that engulfed the vast territories of the Russian Empire, Kyiv became an island of relative peace, where dance

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<sup>65</sup> Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed history of the *Ballet Russes*, see Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998).

blossomed as both an independent, but also as a collaborative art form. And, as the new Soviet authorities experimented with political, economic and social policies in the first years of Bolshevik rule, ballet in Kyiv also saw a period of experimentation, largely associated with the work of Bronislava Nijinska.

In many ways, Nijinska's biography is exemplary of the efforts of the imperial ballet system to extract talented dancers from across the Russian empire, train them in the centrally located ballet academies and appropriate their talent as a symbol of imperial cultural superiority. Born to family of Polish dancers in 1881, Nijinska went on to train in the imperial Ballet Academy of St. Petersburg. In 1908 she graduated as a top student in her class, receiving a much-sought-after position of an imperial court dancer, which came accompanied with full state salary and pension. What for many students would be the apex of success became just the first step in Nijinska's artistic career, as she took on a position of a touring prima with the *Ballet Russes* in the famous Paris seasons of 1909 and 1910. Her decision was largely driven by the success of her brother Vaslav, who graduated the Imperial Academy two years before her and went on to join the *Ballet Russes* in Paris, where he quickly rose to prominence as a leading dancer.<sup>67</sup> Despite his rise to fame in Paris, however, he was not well received in the largely conservative walls of the imperial ballet in St Petersburg and he was soon dismissed for "impropriety" from his position with the court ballet. At this moment Nijinska chose to follow her brother to Paris and leave behind the comfort and security of an imperial position. However, in 1913, following the personal and

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<sup>67</sup> For a detailed biography of Vaslav Nijinski, see Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky: A Life of Genius and Madness* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012).

professional conflict between Vaslav and Diaghilev, she decided to return to Russia to continue her independent career.<sup>68</sup> Yet, her court position was no longer hers to return to, and following a number of months of touring performances, Nijinska accepted an offer from the “provincial” theater in Kyiv, which many saw as a downward step in her career.

Ironically, the relatively small Kyiv theater, despite its distance from the “cultural capitals” of St. Petersburg and Paris, gave Nijinska what neither the imperial ballet theater nor the innovative *Ballet Russes* could give - freedom to create and redefine ballet as an art form. Despite the choreographic innovations of the *Ballet Russes*, Diaghilev’s company remained largely grounded in traditional gender relationships between choreographers and dancers, where choreography was seen as primarily a man's job and only dancing was reserved for women. Famously, Diaghilev remarked “What a choreographer Bronia [Bronislava] would have been if only she was a man!”<sup>69</sup> In Kyiv, Nijinska redefined this narrative, becoming the first woman choreographer, teacher and performer. A critical step in this direction was taken by her with an establishment of “The School of Movement,” where Nijinska sought to fully change the overarching narrative of ballet as a technical skillset of movements and reframe it as a kinesthetic philosophy, where movement was meant to express wide range of emotions.

On January 19, 1919, the advertisement for the new school was published in the Kyiv “Latest News” newspaper, a copy of which remains in the Central Archive of Kyiv:

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<sup>68</sup> For more information, see Sjeng Scheijen, *Diaghilev: a Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>69</sup> Andre Levinson, “Ou en sont les ‘Ballets russes’”, *Comedia*, 18 June 1923; Jean Cocteau, *Theatre Serge de Diaghilev; Les Facheux* (Paris: Editions des Quatre Cheminins, 1924), quoted in Lynn Garafola, “Bronislava Nijinska: A legacy uncovered.” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 3.2 (1987): 78-89, 78.

School of Movement (theater and ballet) of Bronislava Nijinska. Program: School of movement of the Nijinska system. School of "classical" dance. Expression in motion (body mimicry). Style in motion. Character dances. Music theory. Theory of dance and recording movements of the musical system. Conversations about art and creativity. For opera and drama artists: school of movement, expression in movement (mimicry), style in movement, characteristic dances, staging of individual dances by A. Kochetovsky. Admission to the school from January 23 (10) from 1 to 2 PM. Fundukleevskaya St 21, apt. 1, tel. 5-82.<sup>70</sup>

This modest announcement marked the beginning of a truly revolutionary change in the understanding of what ballet meant to its dancers, choreographers, and their audiences.

During her work in Kyiv, Nijinska questioned the main paradigm of imperial ballet - the subordination of the body to choreographic ideals, and the subordination of the choreography itself to the literary and mythological narratives of the past. According to Lynn Garafola, who completed an extensive review of Nijinska's diaries stored in the Library of Congress, it was during her years working in Kyiv, that Nijinska fully reconsidered the meaning and understanding of ballet as an element of culture. Garafola writes:

She worked with visual artists at the cutting edge of the era's avant-garde and with theater directors challenging the conventions of the dramatic stage. She created solos and group works and presented her first full evenings of choreography. She taught in studios identified with the artistic left and with Jewish and Ukrainian cultural organizations. She trained her first company of dancers in an atmosphere of

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<sup>70</sup> "Shkola Dvizheniya (Teatr I Balet) Bronislavy Nijinskoi [School of Movement (Theatre and Ballet) of Bronislava Nijinska.]" *Poslednie Novosti (Latest News)*, January 19, 1919, Kyiv, Ukraine.

high excitement and creative exploration that she later sought to reproduce wherever her largely itinerant career took her. And it was in Kyiv that she made the formal and theoretical breakthroughs that culminated in *Les Noces* [*Svadebka*, or *The Wedding*], her ground-breaking, now classic work produced in 1923 by Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*.<sup>71</sup>

In her work, Nijinska was able to integrate ballet into the cultural ecosystem of Kyiv through artistic collaborations with by leading dancers, but also prominent artists and writers, who gravitated to the relatively peaceful Kyiv away from the political turbulence and violence that engulfed the imperial capital in St. Petersburg following the October 1917 Revolution. In part, this became possible precisely because of the fundamentally new philosophy of dance derived by Nijinska in her school - movement, as a natural continuation of emotions.

For a unique historical moment, Kyiv became the center of artistic collaboration between different art forms, where ballet emerged as a natural platform for creative experimentation both with technique and repertoire, previously tightly protected by imperial ballet practices. According to Stanishevsky, “Kyiv of the late 1910s and early 1920s lived a rich artistic life, giving an impulse to daring creative discoveries on its artistic stages, while civil war, military intervention and economic devastation surrounded it on all sides.”<sup>72</sup> The success of the School of Movements, as a unifying creative platform, was furthered by active cooperation between Nijinska and Kyiv-based theatre artists, primarily Les Kurbas, the leading Ukrainian avant-garde director. Like Nijinska, Kurbas saw the liberation of the actor

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<sup>71</sup> Lynn Garafola, “An Amazon of the Avant-Garde: Bronislava Nijinska in Revolutionary Russia,” *Dance Research* 29.2 (2001): 109-166, 109

<sup>72</sup> Yuri Stanishevsky, *Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine* (Kyiv: Musical Ukraine, 2002), 125.

from the axioms of the "literary theater" as his goal, and sought a transition to the theater of emotions, conveyed through expression and movement.<sup>73</sup> Kurbas saw movement as an important element of actor training; according to the director, movement could incorporate complex emotions that could not otherwise be conveyed. According to theatre historian Roman Koropecyk, "Kurbas's theater was the product of a remarkable series of collaborations with such outstanding creative personalities of the day as Alexandra Exter, Bronislava Nijinska, Vadim Meller, and Iulii Meitus, all of whom found, for a time, the multi-cultural, somewhat anarchic atmosphere of post-Revolutionary Kyiv conducive to their experiments in the arts."<sup>74</sup>

Kyiv gave an opportunity to bring together the acting school of the Young Theater of Kurbas and the Nijinska School of Movement. In the short-lived period of Ukrainian independence, Nijinska, her artistic collaborators, and students of the School trained, studied and absorbed the unique culture of the multinational and culturally diverse Kyiv, which remained an island of relative peace throughout the years of revolutionary changes across the former Russian Empire. In fact, the connection between Nijinska's dance art and Kyiv's artistic ecosystem became so strong that Garafola writes, "Nijinska herself embodied the city's ethnic and cultural mosaic, as well as its cosmopolitanism." In sum, the School of Movements became one of the most significant creative sites for those who found themselves

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<sup>73</sup> For more information on artistic collaborations in post-Revolutionary Kyiv, see Makaryk, Irena R. and Virlana Tkacz, *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation*, (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Roman Koropecyk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation (review)", *Modernism/Modernity*, 18 (2), April 2011, pp. 475-476 (Review)

in Kyiv during the revolutionary period and have found the strength to create and redefine art and performance practice.

Unfortunately, no one has succeeded in avoiding the influence of politics and war on artistic life and as the brief period of Ukrainian independence came to an end, so had the era of modernist culture in Kyiv. In 1920, after the final (third!) transition of Kyiv under the control of the Bolshevik government, the situation in the city changed dramatically. Hunger, devastation and fear of the new government descended on artistic community of Kyiv, as the Bolsheviks, having finished with external enemies, began rooting out internal dissent. Despite the onset of political repressions ushered in by the new Bolshevik regime, the School of Movements remained open, and, initially Nijinska was able to cooperate with the new government. Garafola quotes Nijinska herself, writes that, initially, “Nijinska marveled at the possibilities opened by the Revolution. 'Everyone who wanted to work and had the desire to create something new in art received every possible help from the new government.’”<sup>75</sup> In fact, during her last two years in Kyiv Nijinska was actively involved in both the creative and the administrative processes, working alongside and at times leading Bolshevik efforts to reconstruct theater and ballet as a “people’s art.” However, after a series of interrogations, culminating with a house search by the feared Bolshevik secret police, it quickly became obvious to Nijinska that it was time to leave Kyiv. It is not completely clear exactly how she made this decision, for her diaries for this period do not contain reflections on this matter. Yet in 1921, Nijinska left Kyiv and crossed the border into Poland, leaving Ukraine forever. Soon, she triumphantly returned to *Ballet Russes*, where as early as 1921, her ballet *The*

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<sup>75</sup> Lynn Garafola, “An Amazon of the Avant-Garde: Bronislava Nijinska in Revolutionary Russia,” *Dance Research* 29.2 (2001): 109-166, 144

*Wedding* absorbed all the ideals of the School of Movements and became a classic of modern ballet.<sup>76</sup>

Ballet historians largely overlooked the years spent by Nijinska in Kyiv, partly due to the fact that the ballerina herself, having emigrated from Ukraine in 1921, reluctantly recalled them. After all, following the fall of Kyiv under the control of the Bolsheviks in 1919 and prior to her departure from Ukraine in 1921, her School of Movements was actively involved in building a new communist dance aesthetic. This part of her biography did not fit well with the political émigré image later created by her in Paris following her escape from Soviet Ukraine in 1921. It is important to note that Nijinska's collaboration with the Soviet authorities was not limited to just creative experimentation. In February 1919, after the fall of Kyiv under Bolshevik control, she briefly joined the Central Committee for the Nationalization of the Kyiv Opera Theater and the City Council. This episode marked the beginning of a new era – the transfer of ballet back into the realm of state property. Nijinska maintained a lifelong silence on her Kyiv years, echoed by an equal silence by the Soviet cultural and political authorities in Ukraine. It wasn't until 1927, after almost a decade following Nijinska's departure from Kyiv, that Les Kurbas acknowledged the influence of the Nijinska's school on the development of "plastic dance" in Ukraine and expressed regret for her departure.<sup>77</sup> A decade after this admission, Les Kurbas would be arrested, exiled, and subsequently executed for "counter-revolutionary activity" in November 1937 along with

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<sup>76</sup> Nancy Van Norman Baer. "The Choreographic Career of Bronislava Nijinska." *Experiment* 2.1 (1996): 61-76.

<sup>77</sup> Les Kurbas, *Papers and Memoirs on Les Kurbas: A Literary Heritage*. (Moscow: Art, 1987), 403



over 100 representatives of Ukrainian arts and culture.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps understanding the possible repercussions for her Kyiv collaborators, Nijinska remained silent until the end of her life about her work with Kurbas and other Soviet" artists. Nearly coinciding with her departure, a new political reality descended on Kyiv's artistic scene as the Soviet state placed all the arts, including ballet, under strict state supervision, censorship, and control.

### **The Soviet Ballet Aesthetics**

Following the formation of Ukrainian SSR, it quickly became clear that the new Moscow-based government assigned high value to all aspects of cultural production, with a special emphasis on classical ballet. As early as 1919, while the Russian Civil war raged on all fronts, Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin signed a decree to nationalize and "bring to the masses" all Imperial theaters, including the flagship Mariinsky and Bolshoi theaters in St. Petersburg and Moscow, as well as all "provincial" theaters, including the Kyiv Opera and Ballet Theater. A laser-sharp Soviet focus on classical ballet might seem puzzling, considering the implicit connection between classical ballet and royal courts, which seems antithetical to the communist ideology proclaimed by the USSR. Yet there was something about this art form that formed a mutual attraction between the new regime and the

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<sup>78</sup> Halyna Hryn, "The executed renaissance paradigm revisited." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27.1/4 (2004): 67-96.

“classical” art of the empire, making it, according to the famed Soviet ballerina, Maya Plisetskaya, “the de facto official art of the state.”<sup>79</sup>

The reasoning behind the Soviet state embracing classical ballet was largely located in two cultural and, by extension, political services that classical ballet could provide to the Soviet state – imperial continuity and aesthetics of conformity. According to ballet historian Jennifer Homans:

Under Communist rule, the whole purpose of ballet changed. It was no longer enough to entertain or to mirror court hierarchies and styles; ballet had to educate and express “the people” – and it rose to prominence in part because it was thought ideally suited to the task. Unlike theater, opera, or film, ballet had the virtue of being a Russian performing art that did not require Russian to be understood or appreciated. No matter its Imperial roots, it was a universal language accessible to anyone, from barely literate workers to sophisticated foreign ambassadors - and especially (during the Cold War) the Americans.<sup>80</sup>

In essence, ballet offered the Soviet state a cultural and historical connection between the two imperial realms – the former Russian and the emerging Soviet Empire. To this effect, Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Lenin-appointed commissar of education and cultural affairs, wrote that the proletariat must not cast away, but rather appropriate and further elements of bourgeois culture, including its jewel – Russian ballet.<sup>81</sup> And while some of the classical works were revised and contemporary works by the *Ballet Russes* were disregarded, classical

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<sup>79</sup> Maya Plisetskaya, *Ya, Maya Plisetskaya [I, Maya Plisetskaya]* (Moscow: Olma Media Group, 2015), 140.

<sup>80</sup> Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 342.

<sup>81</sup> Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Revolutionary Silhouettes* (London, England: Penguin Press, 1967), 13.

ballet assumed a central place on the cultural landscape of the USSR for the entirety of Soviet rule.

The second reason for ballet's triumphant rise to the top of the Soviet cultural production pyramid is more complex and is largely correlated to what was seen in its training and dance aesthetic by the leader of the Soviet state, Joseph Stalin. Following the turmoil of the civil war, the years of the NEP and the ascent of Stalin to political power, Stalin sought to reign in and control not only the economy and political forces, but also all elements of cultural production. Ballet was a natural target, because, as Homans writes:

Of all the performing arts, ballet was perhaps easiest to control. In the worst years of Stalin's rule – when a line in a poem could lead to arrest or execution – writers, composers and even playwrights could retreat into inner exile and work privately; they could secretly stow their work in the desk drawer, to be retrieved in gentler times. But ballet had no desk drawer; it lacked a standardized written notation and could not be reliably recorded, much less scribbled down and set aside. Dancers and choreographers thus had little recourse.<sup>82</sup>

Ballet was a lucrative target, as its aesthetic presented a unique vessel to carry and transmit an ideological charge, without being associated with Soviet propaganda.

In “Ballet as Ideology: Giselle: Act.2,” dance scholar Evan Alderson argues that the perceived “purely aesthetic” consideration of ballet masks an underlying ideology that structures a social experience popularly associated with romantic ballets and its dancers. According to Alderson, the very argument that romantic ballet is “purely beautiful” can be

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<sup>82</sup> Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 343.

interpreted as a deeply ideological defense – describing the subject technique in such terms normalizes it as “natural and inevitable.”<sup>83</sup> Soviet ballet was precisely that – pure and beautiful on the outside, upholding all the classical canons of Russian imperial ballet, yet hiding a strict ideology of discipline in its training and authoritarian artistic hierarchies. Within the Soviet ballet hierarchy, a strict set of artistic and social norms were defined for all artists involved in ballet production, with defined rewards for loyalty administered by the very state that structured the system of Soviet ballet training. According to Homans,

We are left with a seeming paradox: dance and dancers thrived in a repressive, ideologically driven police state. Worse, as we shall see, they produced their best and most lasting art in its cruelest years. It is easy to assume that art demands freedom that creativity and the human spirit flourish only when individuals can openly express themselves, unfettered by outside authority and an oppressive state. But the Soviet example suggests otherwise: dance succeeded there because of the state, not in spite of it.<sup>84</sup>

By the late 1920's, the cultural construction of Ukrainian Soviet ballet was complete, only to be refined in the years to come, with any artistic dissent brutally crushed and those in compliance lavishly rewarded by the state. Once proven, tested and refined in the “central theatres of Moscow”, the Soviet regime sought to replicate the success of the central ballet productions across the vast territories of the USSR – from the Far East to the Western borders of the state. It was during the darkest days of Stalinist repressions that ballet theaters

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<sup>83</sup> Evan Alderson, “Ballet as ideology: Giselle, Act 2,” *Meaning in Motion*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 122.

<sup>84</sup> Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 345

and ballet academies were erected in major Soviet cities and republican capitals. Physical construction was supported by a newly created myth of the originality of Soviet ballet classicism, with Soviet ballet historians erasing all memories of Ukrainian ballet productions that came before Soviet ballet was formalized as a state-sponsored and state-defined cultural practice.

In an introduction to *Zustrichi s Baletom [Meetings with Ballet]*, Soviet ballet historian Irina Potapska transparently states the new Soviet version of ballet history in Ukraine:

The first Soviet Ukrainian Theater of Opera and Ballet was opened on October 3, 1925 in Kharkov. Three weeks later, on 25 October of the same year, Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* was performed in the theatre. This date is considered the birthday of professional ballet in the Ukraine.<sup>85</sup>

In the same text, Potapska lays out the official version of classical ballet's origins, noting its deep connection to Russian culture and its role in the Soviet state, including its relationship to national forms of dance.

Ballet as such was born in the palaces of Italian aristocracy. In France it became an independent art which later spread to other European countries, including Russia. But it was precisely in Russia that ballet was born anew. The victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution gave a powerful impetus to the development of multinational Soviet art. Ukrainian classical ballet was formed under the strong influence of the Russian school

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<sup>85</sup> Irina Potapska, *Zustrichi s Baletom [Meeting the Ballet]* (Kyiv, Ukraine: Art, 1978), 10.

of choreography. As an integral part of Soviet music and the theatrical stage, Ukrainian ballet adopted the best choreographic attainments of other Soviet republics.<sup>86</sup>

This short introduction by Potapska is a crystalized version of multiple other Soviet-era academic and popular works on Soviet ballet, which largely repeat the same description of Soviet ballet as an extension of Russian traditions in ballet, strengthened and reinforced by the Soviet system of training and production.

In 1938, a mere five years following the *Holodomor* terror hunger in Ukraine, the Kyiv State Choreography School opened its doors to the first class of students brought in to become future ballet stars of Soviet Ukrainian classical ballet. Students would be trained by a new generation of Soviet teachers, graduates of the “central” schools of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Furthermore, as pointed out by Homans, admission into the Soviet ballet world, meant entry into the Soviet elite which carried the promise of both material benefits and an elite social status:

Many [dancers] came from poor backgrounds and the state saw to their every need: as dancers they were fed, sheltered, and educated, and enjoyed privileges and prestige beyond the wildest dreams of ordinary Soviet citizens. Star dancers had dachas, cars, access to food and medicine, and (after the war, with strict restrictions) foreign travel.

In essence, the ballet world opened up a gate into the elite class of Soviet citizens – those involved in cultural production at the service of the state, under its patronage and protection.

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<sup>86</sup> Irina Potapska, *Zustrichi s Baletom [Meeting the Ballet]*, 11.

For many students, admission to the school would become not only a source of education and ballet training, but also a sanctuary, protecting those inside from the realities of Soviet life outside its walls.

While many students probably never imagined they would require physical protection, just two years after the opening of the ballet school, the Soviet Union entered into the Second World War and in a matter of months Kyiv became a front-line city. In September of 1941, following a series of disastrous military defeats of the Red Army, Kyiv fell into the hands of the advancing Nazi armies. During the Battle of Kyiv, the Soviet high command decided to evacuate key government offices, industries and defense industry specialists to prevent their capture by the German. Remarkably, select ballet artists of the Kyiv National Opera and students of the Kyiv State Choreography School were among the first to evacuate away from the war to the Siberian cities of Irkutsk and Ufa. Here, they would continue their training and stage performances as part of morale-boosting efforts for Soviet workers and soldiers of the Red Army. Unfortunately, the evacuation and occupation period of Ukrainian ballet remains largely undocumented and the constraints of this dissertation project do not allow exploring it in any meaningful depth, though it undoubtedly deserves scholarly attention. It is my hope to return to this period in a future research project, while this work will return to Kyiv in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and consider the development of Ukrainian ballet from 1945 to 1991 in the next section.

### **Ballet and State in the Post-War Period of 1945-1991**

While this historical period covers the most years, I would argue that in terms of key developments and turning points, the post-war Soviet period was largely a continuation of the trajectory that Ukrainian ballet was set on in the pre-war years. In essence, throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and prior to the political turmoil in the aftermath of Ukrainian independence, Ukrainian ballet became closely intertwined with the Soviet state, becoming both its symbol and its tool of both internal and international cultural diplomacy. In this section, I will discuss three important events that occurred during this period that continue to have a lasting impact to this day. First, I will discuss the rebuilding of Kyiv's ballet theatre and school following the end of the Second World War and the vector to further bring Ukrainian ballet into the realm of Russian ballet. Second, I will discuss the establishment of the Kyiv State Choreography School and its relationship to both the National Opera in Kyiv and its integration into the broader centralized network of Soviet ballet training centers. Finally, I will discuss international tours of Ukrainian ballet companies in the context of international cultural diplomacy conducted by the Soviet state.

Following the destruction of the Second World War, large territories of the Soviet Union were in ruins in the aftermath of "total war" between Nazi Germany and the USSR. Ukraine suffered some of the highest losses both as a result of direct military actions and as a result of Nazi terror waged behind the front line, only to be followed by Soviet repressions against those seen, perceived, or suspected as Nazi collaborators in the aftermath of Soviet victory. Because of the evacuation of Kyiv's ballet institutions early in the war, ballet artists and students came back as "unmarked" by the public shame of having lived under Nazi occupation and were, as a result, seen as the most loyal cultural actors, critical to rebuilding



Soviet ballet in the Ukraine. Their work was once again perceived as a critical task in consolidating the population around the Soviet political system, which continued on its pre-war path of cultural centralization. Notably, as a clear sign of Soviet commitment to state-sponsored ballet, Stalin included a premiere of Prokofiev's *Cinderella* as part of the official celebration of Soviet victory in the war. Of course, for such an event, the story of an oppressed orphan meeting her prince was wrapped into all the appropriate political metaphors. According to ballet historian Simon Morrison:

*Cinderella* was, allegorically, a perfect Soviet nationalist ballet, just as the *Cinderella* staged at the Bolshoi in the 1830s had been a perfect tsarist nationalist ballet, with a heroine an enduring symbol of Mother Russia no longer willing to be a maidservant to Europe. Her years of neglect and disrespect had come to an end through the defeat of Napoleon in the nineteenth century, Hitler in the twentieth.<sup>87</sup>

From 1944 and leading up to Stalin's death in 1953, Ukrainian ballet largely continued to solidify as Soviet imperial institution of culture, further strengthening its connection to the central ballet schools in Moscow.

The evacuation years spent by Ukrainian artists in Russia greatly advanced the imperial narrative of a common Russian core to all classical ballet. According to Stanishevsky, "Leading Russian choreographers played a key role in the overall advancement of professional ballet culture key to the artistic rebirth of Ukrainian ballet companies

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<sup>87</sup> Simon Morrison, "Prokofiev: Reflections on an Anniversary, and A Plea for a New Critical Edition," *Iskusstvo Muziki. Teoriya i Istorija*. 16, 2017, (10).

returning to their homeland liberated from fascist invaders.”<sup>88</sup> However, Stanishevsky also acknowledges that the war took a heavy toll on Ukrainian ballet, with many of its artists drafted into military service, or re-assigned to other Soviet ballet companies. According to Stanishevsky,

In October of 1944, when the theater began its first post-war season, the problem of young soloists became particularly acute. During this time, lead soloist O. Sobol, who was transferred to Moscow and danced in the Bolshoi ballet company from 1937-1939, returned to his home company in Kyiv.<sup>89</sup>

In his work, Stanishevsky lists multiple other artists who were transferred to Kyiv to support the ballet theatre, with most names associated with either Moscow or Kirov (St Petersburg) ballets. And while this effort can be seen as through a purely artistic lens of rebuilding a struggling ballet company, it also had the cultural effect of Russifying Ukrainian ballet both in language and culture, which persists to this day.

The second structural element of rebuilding the Soviet ballet scene in Kyiv was the re-opened and re-staffed Kyiv State Choreography School, which was primarily tasked with training and educating ballet students for Kyiv’s National Opera, yet with an implicit assumption that the most talented of its graduates would move on to train or perform in the “premiere” academies and theatres of Moscow. In a big change that largely mirrored the state’s staffing strategy for the main ballet stage of the National Opera, the school’s instructional staff was now also primarily sourced from ballet academies based in Russia. Specifically, Soviet ballet icon Agripinna Vaganova personally structured the school’s

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<sup>88</sup> Yuri Stanishevsky, *Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine*, 375.

<sup>89</sup> Yuri Stanishevsky, *Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine*, 375.

training method and provided guidance on examination and hiring of ballet teachers for the program. Adoption of the “Vaganova Method” marked a turning point in Ukrainian ballet development and in the next section I briefly introduce its core principles.

### **The Vaganova Method**

Nearly all Soviet ballet historians stress the importance of Vaganova’s 1934 text *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet* as the defining ballet manual of the Soviet training system. Major Soviet ballet historians Vera Krasovskaya and Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovskii theorize the teaching method, outlined by Vaganova, and accompany it with analysis of memoirs by Vaganova’s students and colleagues. Both Krasovskaya’s 1989 *Vaganova: A Dance Journey from Peterburg to Leningrad* and Bogdanov-Berezovskii’s 1962 *Articles on Ballet* highlight general focuses of the method’s technical precision, understanding of rationale of every movement, connection between the movements and bodily parts, and the simplicity of the syllabus for younger student groups.

According to both Krasovskaya and Bogdanov-Berezovskii, Vaganova’s method’s innovation was in simplifying and slowing down movement combinations for young students, as well repetition of basic movements and combinations at the barre. Bogdanov-Berezovskii theorizes Vaganova’s method as an inductive one:

Strict adherence to the inductive method, transitions from simple to more complex, from particular to generalized, from generalizations of a smaller range

to wider - this, according to Vaganova, is the principle of the progressive development of the student's artistic consciousness and dance technique.<sup>90</sup>

In essence, Vaganova's method would not allow students to learn ballet movement combinations until all the elements, used in a given combination, were polished and studied for a prolonged period of time. This meant that each year within the eight-year school system, introduced by Vaganova, would have a different syllabus, and the next one would incorporate and complicate the previously learned movements and combinations.

According to Krasovskaya, Vaganova's "principle of progressive development," was novel and unusual within the Imperial Russian or Soviet state ballet schools in the 1920s. Krasovskaya writes about Vaganova's first years of teaching:

It took a long time before Vaganova students began to pay close attention to her. At first, the obstinate youngsters did not accept their new teacher and decide not to listen to anything she said.

"The first few lessons only intensified our protest. We were particularly angry when Vaganova's corrections clearly contradicted everything we had learned before," wrote Kamkova in a collection of articles in memory of Vaganova.

Vaganova's numerous daily corrections slowed the lessons, with constant repetitions of what the students believed they had properly learned before. They were told that they were holding the barre incorrectly, either pushing away from it

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<sup>90</sup> Valerian Bogdanov-Berestovskii, "Pegagogicheskaya Sistema Vaganovoi [Vaganova's Pedagogical System]." In *Stat'i o Balete [Articles on Ballet]* (Leningrad: Sovetskii Kompositor [Soviet Composer], 1962), 129. Translation mine.

or leaning on it. Vaganova told them the correct way to lower the elbows and lightly rest the hand on the barre.<sup>91</sup>

Krasovskaya's explanation of Vaganova's teaching method taps into Vaganova's desire to go back to ballet basics and reserve ballet technical complexities for older, more experienced students, nearing graduation and ballet career. The underlying philosophy focused on building a strong dancing body that could train, balance its moves and dance without relying on the barre.

According to Krasovskaya, while Vaganova graduated from the same class Anna Pavlova did, key choreographers, like Petipa were not particularly impressed by Vaganova's technical virtuosity and vigor, as perceived femininity and elegance was of greater value in Imperial Russia. However, citing Marina Semenova, one of Vaganova's first students, Krasovskaya highlights the importance of ballet movement structure to the Vaganova training method, which ultimately would become its most recognizable attribute:

Her students forgave her even more offensive remarks. Any of them would agree with what Semenova wrote in her article, "A teacher and Friend." She wrote that Vaganova's main goal was to instill a conscientious approach to work, and added, 'She taught her students adroitness, agility, quick reaction, and coordination of movements. All this was new to us.'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Vera Krasovskaya. *Vaganova: a Dance Journey from Petersburg to Leningrad*, trans. Vera Siegel. (Miami: University Press of Florida, 2005), 97.

<sup>92</sup> Vera Krasovskaya, *Vaganova*, 102.

Reading these excerpts from Vaganova's students' works, I reflected on my own training with Galina Balashova, the former prima of Novosibirsk State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet and a graduate from the Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet academy. While Balashova criticized Vaganova harshly during our classes for introducing the "sticking-out" forefinger to ballet, her teaching method was closely aligned with Vaganova's. She would often ask us the question "Why do you dance?" meaning to ask if there is a larger meaning to studying dance and ballet and highlighting the importance of recognizing it. When she asked me that question, for some reason I could not immediately respond to it, but she offered an answer herself: "You dance to become free." Thinking about the ballerinas, who trained in the times of Russian revolution and its aftermath, throughout the interwar period and during the Second World War, I wonder if they incorporated their political views, hopes and anxieties into their teaching philosophies.

In her *Basic Principles of Classical Dance*, Vaganova stressed the importance of individual approach to students and flexibility a ballet teacher should possess:

If in the specific class or student group I notice tiredness, and if I know they are swamped with work, then I give very easy light exercises at the ballet classes and approach students very carefully, giving them a couple of weeks [to navigate school's assignments]. But when they have no exams or performances, then I make my classes very hard and I try to make it as difficult as possible. In sum, you have to be very perceptive and adoptive to the conditions that surround your work so that training would not bring any harm... Our students are like industrial plant workers, they polish their skills in the theatre. You cannot establish any

boundaries or norms in this respect. In dependence of the performance requirements, often my students do the elements that are not allowed in their class. There should not be any prohibitions or rules in this respect. Theater has certain requirements for the ballet school and it is possible to satisfy them, while not bringing any harm to students, if a teacher is perceptive enough; at times, while something is difficult for one student is perfectly fine to perform for another one. Choreographer should seek advice of a ballet teacher as to how distribute roles among ballet students and how to incorporate them in the performances.<sup>93</sup>

Looking at this excerpt from Vaganova's work, an individual approach to students and a teacher's skill to communicate with theater administration and state choreographers was a part of teaching methodology. Knowing what to teach and how to do it throughout the academic year and across students' bodies would depend on the upcoming productions and ballet repertoire. An ability to incorporate students into the theater system that could potentially hire students for long-term contracts was a significant skill. In a way, then, Vaganova made her students "fit" contemporary Soviet productions through building bodily strength and agility in advance to satisfy particular requirements for a production or a role in it.

Notably, Krasovskaya writes, that Vaganova particularly enjoyed working with the students, who were eager to learn rather than with students who had the "appropriate" body type: "Feisty by nature herself, she admired feistiness in a student who might not be particularly well-built... She knew how to bring the individuality of a dancer, polishing it

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<sup>93</sup> Agrippina Yakovlevna Vaganova. *Osnovy Klassicheskogo Tanca [Basic Principles of Classical Dance]*. (Moscow: Iskusstvo [Art], 1948),13. Translation mine.

like a precious stone, often a hidden raw talent taken for a piece of ordinary glass by most observers”<sup>94</sup> This characterization resonates with Kyiv State Ballet School’s teachers’ responses to my question of what constitutes an “ideal ballet body,” that I would ask during the interviews. As Molly, one of the teachers, stated, “Well, of course, there is a perfect ballet body with x-shaped long legs, small head, small torso, arched feet... But, an ideal body is not always a dancing body.” During my ethnographic study, as I sat in Molly’s class for graduating female students, I saw very different body types, but all of them were strong and proud to wear the acquired ballet technique.

Critically, ballet scholars highlight Vaganova’s methodology as not only a dance training manual, which it certainly was, but also as a philosophy of approaching movement in ballet class and outside of it. I specifically highlight three key features of Vaganova’s training methodology. First, a strive for gradual learning, simple-to-complicated approach to studying ballet technique throughout eight years and a hard accent on building bodily strength and agility. Secondly, an individual approach to students and teaching finding special meaning to dance in general and its particular elements, escaping mindless reproduction and thinking through each small movement and detail of the class. And, finally, Vaganova underscored teachers’ ability to adjust to the current state productions and find possible ways of incorporating students in them and getting their careers started early. Looking at these features of methodology, one could say that Vaganova in a way democratized the ballet body, paying special attention to students, eager to learn, and striving to produce agile thinkers and makers of ballet.

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<sup>94</sup> Vera Krasovskaya, *Vaganova*, 100.



In Kyiv, the re-opening of ballet academies in the aftermath of the Second World War is synonymous to centralized implementation of Vaganova ballet training, coordinated by Vaganova herself. According to Vaganova's student and protégé Halina Berezova, who was appointed as the artistic director of the Kyiv State Choreography School in 1944:

In 1944, following Ukraine's liberation from the fascists, I was appointed to lead the Kyiv State Choreography School. Vaganova took on an active role in its organization: she sent training manuals in special disciplines to Kyiv, gave instructions as to how to structure admissions to the school and examine its students. All candidates for teaching positions were discussed with her.<sup>95</sup>

In just five years following the re-establishment of the ballet training program in Kyiv, Vaganova personally oversaw the graduation concert of the program she helped re-create. Soviet ballet historian Vera Krasovskaya describes this moment as a culmination point in Vaganova's efforts to reformat Soviet ballet:

Vaganova was sixty-nine when she arrived at the school in Kyiv to chair the state examination committee. On August 13, 1949, the newspaper *Radyanske Mistestvo* [Soviet Art] published her article "Tradition and Life," describing her impressions of the school. She wrote, "I could not imagine that, in four years of the school's existence, it was possible to achieve such significant results. Most of the students display excellent

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<sup>95</sup> Halina Berezova, *Agripinna Yakovlevna Vaganova. Papers, Memoirs, Materials*. (Moscow: Art, 1958), 375, 162.

training.” Of course, it was the training based on her methods, but she did not mention that.<sup>96</sup>

In essence, just four years after the re-establishment of ballet training in Kyiv, its underlying principles of training and technique were structured to be fully compatible with the Russian Vaganova method and sanctioned as such by Vaganova herself. With ballet instructors continuously being brought in from similar Vaganova-style academies across the USSR and the construction of a student dormitory in 1964, in many ways the school developed into a cultural island, where Vaganova training continues to be replicated by students and teachers. As I will discuss in greater detail in the second chapter of this dissertation, the post-war designation of Kyiv State Choreography School as a Vaganova technique academy persists to this day, opening up both opportunities and presenting challenges for its teachers, choreographers, and students.

While highly problematic within the cultural imperialism discourse, the conversion of Ukrainian to Soviet ballet aesthetic norms set forward by Vaganova and other Russian ballet artists and administrators allowed Ukrainian ballet to quickly rise in the hierarchy of Soviet ballet. By the 1960s, Kyiv’s ballet companies were approved for their first international tour, traveling to Paris France to take part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Ballet Festival. Here, according to Potapska,

The results were unexpected. Competing against famous representatives of Italian, French, American and British schools of choreography, the Ukrainian dancers proved to be the best ballet company and were awarded the Gold Star.

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<sup>96</sup> Vera Krasovskaya, *Vaganova*, 247.

The soloists Iraida Lukashova and Valeryi Parsegov received the Grand Prix of Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinski.<sup>97</sup>

The 1964 Paris Festival was truly a triumph of Soviet-era Ukrainian ballet on the international ballet stage. Not only were the finalists a product of the Soviet system of ballet training, they were both graduates of the post-war Vaganova-restructured ballet academies in Ukraine, with Lukashova graduating from the Odessa State School of Choreography in 1953 and Parsegov graduating from the Kyiv State Choreography School in 1955. Furthering this artistic victory was the political symbolism associated with receiving the prize named for the two world-renowned artists – Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinski, widely interpreted as a political victory over ballet associated with the “old regime.”

More international tours of Ukrainian ballet companies followed the successful 1964 Paris debut, with Ukrainian ballet artists seen as perfect symbols of the superiority of Soviet classical ballet, and, by extension, the Soviet political order. Specifically, Ukrainian ballet was meant to symbolize the harmonious relationship between Russian high culture and Ukrainian national culture. A critical part of this effort was the development and staging of so-called national ballets, which were meant to showcase aesthetic influences of Ukrainian folk culture, threaded into classical ballet technique and wrapped into ideological constraints of socialist realism. As I will discuss in the third chapter of this dissertation, these ballets played an important role in both Soviet attempts to define Ukrainian national culture through ballet and were used as a medium for artistic resistance to this definition.

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<sup>97</sup> Irina Potapska, *Zustrichi s Baletom [Meeting the Ballet]* (Kyiv, Ukraine: Art, 1978), 13.

In sum, by 1991, Ukrainian ballet became was integral to the system of Soviet cultural production in terms of its system of training, aesthetics, and repertoire. Choreographic colleges across Ukraine, including Lviv, Kyiv, Odessa, Kharkiv and Donetsk, trained within a common Vaganova-defined system, with teachers regularly attending All-USSR ballet conventions and seminars to maintain a common platform of dancer training and education. As a result, aesthetically, few differences could be found across nominally distant ballet communities across the vast territories of the Soviet Union. This compatibility in training protocols and overall style allows Moscow academies and ballet theatres to easily recruit the most talented dancers and teachers to the “main stage” of the USSR. In turn, ballet theatres based in Republican capitals, like the Kyiv National Opera, recruited promising dancers from smaller cities in Ukraine to maintain a stable repertoire of Russian and Soviet classics, as well as a number of carefully-negotiated national ballets. This framework, where the integral element was state sponsorship and oversight, largely remained unchanged in the post-war period leading up to Ukrainian independence in 1991. I further argue that decades of state sponsorship generated a particular popular view of ballet, where classical ballet is by definition considered state property, and should remain in this realm regardless of the political power in charge. In the next section of this chapter, I will briefly discuss ballet development in Independent Ukraine and show that despite the nominal dissolution of the USSR nearly three decades ago, the framework of state sponsorship *and* the imperial network of ballet recruitment largely remained in place until the most recent armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

## Independent Ukraine

Following the declaration of Ukrainian Independence in 1991, the new state needed to decide what to do with its Soviet cultural heritage, which ranged from small and large museums to theatres, and the crown jewel of this cultural inheritance – a vast system of ballet theatres and training centers. Unlike some of the other Former Republics, where the collapse of the Soviet Union triggered an immediate cultural distancing from the former Imperial power, independence in Kyiv did not immediately trigger an economic, social or cultural rift with Russia. Close economic and cultural ties continued to exist between the two nations, in part driven by a commonality of language, but also, to a large degree by a largely shared cultural heritage, which of course included intense pride in “the best ballet in the world.” Audiences in Kyiv and across the Ukraine did not perceive “their” ballet theatre as an element of an imperial cultural construction, but rather as an integral part of the Ukrainian high culture. The same held true for Ukrainian leadership, which perceived classical ballet as a key element of national pride and identity, culminating with the first president Leonid Kravchuk signing a decree to nationalize the Kyiv Theatre of Opera and Ballet on September 21, 1992 and give its present official title of The Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine <sup>98</sup>

Following Ukrainian independence, there were specific steps taken by Ukrainian ballet leadership to forge an independent ballet identity. Firstly, there was a concentrated effort to revive and stage pre-revolutionary nationally-themed ballets, most notably *Taras Bulba*, based on the writing of Taras Shevchenko, which was premiered on the same date as

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<sup>98</sup> Yuri Stanishevsky, *Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine*, 527.

the presidential decree establishing the National Opera. Secondly, there was renewed interest in the work of ballet modernists who were largely written out of Ukrainian ballet history during the Soviet era, most notably Bronislava Nijinska and her student and leading dancer of the *Ballet Russes* Serge Lifar.

In 1944, the Serge Lifar Dance Competition was founded in Kyiv as a way to commemorate his contribution to the independent spirit of Ukrainian dance. According to Stanishevsky:

The Competition gathered tremendous international attention, returning Serge Lifar's name to his homeland, where it was forgotten and forbidden during the Soviet era. Serge Mikhailovich Lifar, who was born in Kyiv in 1905, attended musical school and ballet studio at the Kyiv Opera, where he was instructed by Bronislava Nijinska, sister of the legendary Vaslav Nijinsky, also a Kyiv native.<sup>99</sup>

The message of this competition was clear – Ukraine was reclaiming its independent identity on the ballet stage in honoring the contributions of dancers and choreographers written out of the history of Soviet ballet in Ukraine. Somewhat ironically, however, the head judge appointed by the competition committee was Bolshoi Ballet's artistic director Yuri Grigorovich, most famous for staging grandiose Soviet-era productions of *Spartacus*, for which he received the title of The Peoples Artist of Russia and the Soviet Union and the Lenin Prize. In 2004, for his work in establishing and judging the Serge Lifar competition, Grigorovich received a Presidential Order of Merit from Ukraine's second President Leonid

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<sup>99</sup> Yuri Stanishevsky, *Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Ukraine*, 546.

Kuchma and a Medal of the National Opera of Ukraine marking the 100th anniversary of Serge Lifar.

In all, following the declaration of Ukrainian independence in 1991, there was a nominal effort to separate Ukrainian ballet into the national realm, countered by a nearly equalizing force of cultural inertia. In essence, just like many other nominally national art, Ukrainian ballet did not have a national heritage to easily fall back on, as it was essentially a functioning element of the Soviet ballet system. In nationalizing Ukrainian ballet there was never an attempt to re-staff the ballet companies, or any significant effort to change or modify the training or education process in the ballet academies across Ukraine. Furthermore, the verticalized structure of ballet recruitment remained intact, with a center of gravity still located not in the capital of Ukraine, but in the capital of Russia, where some of Ukraine's most talented dancers continued to be recruited. As I will discuss in great detail in the next chapter of this dissertation, in many ways post-Soviet Ukrainian ballet continues to exist within the Soviet cultural context, both in terms of the framework of state sponsorship, but also through its narratives and traditions carried on by ballet descendants of Vaganova and her students.

## Chapter 2

### **Ukrainian State Ballet Training: Between Soviet Nostalgia and a Revolution**

This chapter is dedicated to describing and analyzing existing cultural tensions between nationalism and neo-imperialism through the prism of oral narratives of ballet training in Post-Soviet Ukraine. I present and reflect on the results of a two-month long ethnographic field study, which took place at a primary state-sponsored ballet school in Ukraine – the Kyiv State Ballet School. Founded in 1938 and expanded in 1967 in honor of the 50th anniversary of Soviet rule, the Kyiv State Ballet School (the School) has survived the turmoil associated with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and has been since incorporated into Ukraine’s educational system. On the surface the School appears effectively grounded in its Soviet heritage – the language of instruction, the technique methodologies and practices are largely retained from the school’s days as a state-supported and state-monitored element of Soviet ballet culture. However, a close consideration of The School’s training practices and oral narratives reveals that it operates as a fiercely independent dancing community, where adherence to the classical technique is balanced by modifications to the training regimen aimed to spare its students the physical and psychological traumas associated with Soviet and Russian ballet training. I argue that because the School largely functions outside both state support and ideological supervision, it has transitioned from an element of Soviet propaganda into a cultural radicalization barrier, referenced by the journalist Anatol Lieven. I further argue that because Ukrainian ballet training is equally resistant to incorporation into the



ideological frameworks of Russian neoimperialism or post-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism, it may serve as a unique platform for cultural dialogue and reconciliation.

The School operates as a closed educational institution with its own boarding facility, music school, middle and high schools, and theater – a structure modeled after key Russian state ballet schools and designed in a similar way. Hidden between two city streets and two large parks, the school creates a seemingly separate space for its workers and students within the city of Kyiv. There are two other boarding schools nearby – a military academy and a visual arts school – and, again, this co-location taps into the notion of Soviet ballet as an art form drawing from military discipline and artistic inspiration and in this the key art form responsible for the construction and dissemination of Soviet culture. In apparent defiance of a recent Ukrainian ban of Soviet symbols, a hammer and a sickle engraving at the entrance of the state dance academy greets all visitors.<sup>100</sup> In another apparent demonstration of Soviet-era policies, access to the school is tightly controlled. Normally, the only way to visit the school is to take the entrance exam that consists of ballet technique, a medical examination of “bodily capacities” or “natural abilities” and a hearing test. Ten-year-old prospective students take these entrance exams in almost complete nudity for the verification of body type and assessment of hip rotation, flexibility, proportions between the length of the upper and lower body, length of legs, arms, and the head size. In this, the school mimics and

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<sup>100</sup> In April 2015, a formal decommunization process started in Ukraine after a set of laws were passed by the Ukrainian parliament and signed by president Petro Poroshenko. Among other acts, this set of laws outlawed communist symbols, including the hammer and sickle. Violation of the law carries a penalty of fines and/or prison sentences up to five years.

replicates the strictest Soviet ballet admission policies, where students were initially selected based on their physical “data,” rather than artistic abilities.

On the surface, strict adherence and enforcement of Soviet-era visual, gender and aesthetic ideologies of contemporary Ukrainian ballet system may strike any researcher as defining the school as a remnant monolith of Soviet culture, challenging Ukrainian efforts to nationalize and de-Sovietize its cultural landscape. Since my first day working at the school, I was struck by the sameness of dancing bodies in their shapes, outfits and gazes, and even the same angle of heel rotation during various barre exercises. While I was extremely lucky to gain access to classes, exams, and final concerts and performances, at first, I felt out of place looking at the initially selected and technique-constructed “perfect” bodies, thin bodies, relatively silent and submissive bodies, aligned in geometrical shapes and figures, moving across the space of classrooms.

After four years with the PhD program in Critical Dance Studies, I was in a way pre-conditioned to seek a different kind of ballet and ballet training, unique to independent Ukraine. I sought to see an aesthetic reflection of Ukraine's fierce resistance to Russian military aggression, its political course to join the European Union and detach itself from the Soviet past. As a dance scholar I hoped to find resistance within ballet, given the history of dance's potential to be a force that can resist the policies of written and spoken word of political and cultural institutions. After initially walking through the front door, I spent more than three months collecting interviews with the faculty, students and staff of the School. And in these interviews, a deeper, more complex and nuanced understanding of Ukrainian ballet emerged – an image of daily internal struggle to define

and re-define ballet, to preserve and innovate, to align with aesthetics of the past, yet look to the future.

In this chapter, I introduce, discuss, and theorize cultural tensions between Ukrainian Soviet imperial and Post-Soviet national identities as they play out in the living narratives and oral histories of The School. The structure of this chapter is meant to mimic my own ethnographic experience and it will lead the reader on a path from tiresome predictability, to sheer confusion, and, ultimately to a multifaceted understanding of the complications, inconsistencies and disagreements that define a defiant and truly independent Ukrainian ballet identity. I will begin with a description of the ballet training process, as presented by its teachers and administrators in initial conversations and during their classes, framing The School as just a broken-off piece of the once-whole Vaganova-defined Soviet ballet. I will then show that teacher narratives interrelate, misplace, and at times confuse notions of the State, Ukraine, Russia, the Soviet Union, and even Imperial Russia, creating a sense of utter confusion as to where they locate ballet and their own identity. I will explore the origin of this confusion, which I locate in the disappearance of state guidance, state support and also state control with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. I will show that in the absence of centralized artistic oversight characteristic of the Soviet period, the actual training methodology of the school lays significantly outside the Vaganova canons both in terms of technique and strict enforcement of ballet body standards defined in Soviet ballet. As result, in the nearly three decades since The School was inherited and subsequently neglected by the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, The School transformed into a unique independent

community dedicated to maintaining its role as a cultural institution. I will demonstrate that despite nominal state support and state oversight, The School exists in the virtual absence of both, with its teachers, students and administrators relying on official and unofficial channels to maintain its training curriculum, artistic engagement, and daily operation. I will argue that in its three decade-long struggles to maintain ballet identity, The School has secured artistic independence, from both its Soviet past and Ukrainian state-defined present, emerging as an unlikely symbol of Independent Ukraine of the future.

### **Part 1: Just a Broken-Off Piece of the Chain?**

Walking through the front door of the school felt like walking through a time travel portal. Except it seemed that beyond the front door, time has stopped and the all the calendars should display the year 1988 rather than 2018. There were loud footsteps on old linoleum, quiet sounds of piano emanating from distant ballet classrooms and thin, nearly-identical students quickly moving between classes. An older guard checked my ID with the seriousness of a KGB officer, telling me to “wait right here” while he used a rotary phone to call Alexander, the school’s teacher, who I had previously arranged a meeting with. And as we made our initial introductions, I was offered to take a walk with him in the park nearby the school, which most likely was a first initial “interview,” set up prior to letting an outsider into the school’s facilities. Only after this initial discussion, and Alexander’s questions about my reasons of coming to Kyiv, Ukraine to study this specific ballet school and a mini-lecture about its history, I was offered a tour of The

School's facilities – its training classes, lecture halls, teachers' lounge, theatre and cafeteria.

Everywhere we walked, there was a flurry of activity – students training, learning, laughing under the supervision of mostly senior instructors. Immediately, I noticed that despite this being a state institution and all my initial correspondence with the administrators having been conducted in Ukrainian, neither the teachers nor the students spoke Ukrainian. The language of instruction and hallway conversation was Russian, and I could sense a certain degree of defiance in the way it was spoken, with nearly perfect structure, punctuation and pronunciation, comparable to Oxford English in its over-the-top correctness of linguistic norms. I also sensed that there is a pride of this institution, its history, artistic accomplishment and “classic tradition.” I would hear “tradition” mentioned multiple times as teachers described their class technique and training regimen. Time and time again, Vaganova technique came up – in conversations, instructions, even in jokes about a student being likened to the great ballerina in the way they carried their lunch plate at the cafeteria.

As part of this initial introduction, I went to see all the ballet classes taught at the school to students ranging from ten to seventeen years of age. Teachers who saw me for the first time clearly wanted to demonstrate their students' potential to the fullest. While I felt very fortunate to see the training that I have previously only read about, it was hard for me to sit through the long classes, as live piano music was in discord with the ongoing disciplining of the ballet body. At times I had an urge to close my eyes and just listen to the music instead of desperately trying to look for differences in the school's practice of

Vaganova-style ballet training. When examining my initial field notes, I noticed a recurring narrative of The School's "quiet repression," even more visible in conjunction with the soft classical music, accompanying it:

*Beautiful, heavenly classical music, smooth and slow, adagio... and discipline... Only now I realize how perverted this is ... Quiet repression: "What is this? Is this fifth? Are you not feeling well or something?" All the combinations are very simple; just very slow, the music – unbelievably beautiful, slow, huge windows are open, gigantic trees outside, I can feel the outside breeze, very tall cypress trees, slowly swaying in the wind, it's so beautiful outside... Tense muscles; creaking ballet shoes on the floor, creaking wooden sticks; hard breath; all I can see and concentrate on are sweaty buttocks; ballet bodies and clothes are wet except for the triangle-shaped part where the thong is. Why do they wear them?*

The monotony of watching and witnessing ballet training and the predictability of it forced me to either go into my own thoughts about unrelated issues or notice seemingly insignificant details. This boredom would be often coupled with guilt, originating from the feeling that I should be doing the barre with the students, suffering with them. It just seemed unfair to just watch students go through physical exhaustion while I was just watching. I felt this way especially when witnessing collective punishment consisting of twenty push-ups, as it immediately resonated with my own ballet training days. I could almost feel the discomfort of sweaty tights and leotards as they constrained the young bodies on the floor pushing off with their slender hands.

Rotation and positions seemed to be at the core of the School's training. As one of the teachers said: "While many other dance companies in Ukraine might have more complicated acrobatic tricks or technical elements, it is the positions of the body that we focus on [in the classes for children ages 10-13]." <sup>101</sup> I have observed the importance of position and rotation in all the dance classes, as the majority of teachers would come earlier to class to work on flexibility of their students to guarantee the 180-degree rotation in the hips and the feet. Some would come 15 minutes earlier, others would come an hour earlier to give a flexibility class to their students. Some teachers would borrow these stretching exercises from their own ballet training, some would borrow them from sports gymnastic practices. In one class, I observed how students started warming-up barre exercises behind the bar. Standing in the first and then second positions, facing the wall and touching it with the front muscles of their bodies, students would dive into the demi- and grand-plies, while holding on to the barre. Their hands stretched behind them, as the students were facing away from the barre, would provide extra pressure driving their bodies into the wall while doing the *plies*. This extreme exercise would insure the 180-degree rotation in the hips and the feet. Observing this would also remind me of the interview with another female teacher's response, stating that it is "much more interesting and rewarding to work with kids, as they are like dough, you can make anything out of them."

While rotation seemed like the main thread in the practiced teaching methods, it would also have various verbalizations in different classes. Teacher commands and

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<sup>101</sup> Odette, Interview by Ania Nikulina. May, 20, 2018

comments ranged from “put your ass in front of your thighs; push through the fourth [foot] finger!” and “insert your thigh, insert your buttocks” to “there should be a pit in your buttocks! Lead [the leg movement] with you heel!” and “push your coccyx forward.”<sup>102</sup> I wondered about the reasons for the teachers’ over-focus on the buttocks and its necessary “inserting” or “pushing forward.” It seemed like 180-degree rotation in the feet, which was already achieved for all the students, did not matter as much and the hip rotation was much more significant. One of the teachers would rhythmically repeat the term *svody* [vaults] endlessly, interrupting and accompanying the music, to signify the importance of rotated hips as a base for the proper ballet posture.<sup>103</sup> Her tone, performatively irritating and harsh, would make me want to leave the classroom immediately. I later learned that some of her students either transferred to another teacher’s class or left the school and their ballet career altogether.

I noticed that in the classes that felt more repressive than others, my mind would go to the previously experienced hierarchies that shape my own experience as a student. As I watched young bodies train and sweat, listen and proceed, my notes would say:

*I just want to fall on the bench that I am sitting on straight... I am thinking about Carol from the graduate school and trying to understand why they are not providing daycare funding to graduate students who are doing research outside of US. This is so unfair... And why did she write: “... we cannot grant an exception as this is part of the criteria to be eligible for*

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<sup>102</sup> Gabi, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 19, 2018). Here, I omit the students’ age group to protect teachers and the promised anonymity. Odette, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 21, 2018) Erin, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 21, 2018)

<sup>103</sup> Erin, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 21, 2018)



*the program. It is also a concern that you are not in the US for your TA position. I realize it is on on-line course but leaving to conduct research may make it difficult for you to communicate with your students. I'm surprised your department is ok with you leaving." You get support from the system, only if you work for the system...*

*Teacher [to the student]: What are you thinking about? About your own female feelings?[meant as a joke]*

*Student: Can I go out [to the restroom]?*

*Teacher: I guess you are not coming back after all? [meant as a joke]*

*Student: I will*

*Teacher: I wouldn't say so by looking at you... Where are we going to get energy? In the supermarket? [meant as a joke]<sup>104</sup>*

In a way, in addition to my own graduate school “drama”, ballet classes of The School shaped my own background thinking, reminding of the hierarchies of the academia, which were just more visible and refined in the context of ballet class. After all, I was not the only one in the room thinking about “my own female feelings” and feeling distracted. Often, I would notice that students would look out of the window, or into the giant mirrors, or quietly gossip during classes, which may have reflected ballet training, notorious for its repressive atmosphere, or framed the first signs of resistance to it.

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<sup>104</sup> Field notes

After the first week, I had a moment of panic – there was nothing of academic interest here! Young slender bodies, disciplining voices, soft piano music, and boredom – the very essence of “Russian ballet training,” as imagined and described to me by generations of US suburbanites. And had I come for a week or two to observe classes at The School, I would have come away with a straight-forward conclusion – this institution strives to re-create and preserve Soviet-era ballet technique, closely aligning with the traditions of Russian Imperial ballet, both in its training regimen and technique. This would have been a simple and straight-forward conclusion, backed up by observational evidence and a number of straight-forward descriptions offered by both teachers and student. This straight-forward and seemingly apparent conclusion would also be an incomplete and a very misleading assessment of the much deeper and much more complicated process playing out inside the walls of the School. To see this process, it would take me many months of interacting with member of this dancing community, to understand its unique philosophy of resilience, unity, and independent spirit.

### **Humor as a Relaxation Technique**

Through time, as the students and teachers became used to my quiet presence in their classrooms, something aside from pure discipline began revealing itself – humor. Specifically, I witnessed the coupling of humor with of what I have previously referred to “quiet repressions”, an intimate combination hidden from outsiders and infrequent observers of ballet training. While having to discipline young bodies, teachers continuously tried to make students laugh, using contextual jokes that tapped into the

temporality of training. While humor, functioning together with discipline, is hard to translate, as it is highly contextual and language-specific, it is important to note its significance. For instance, in their jokes, teachers would position The School as a very specific place, separating it from the daily public interactions, happening outside its walls, in supermarkets or other public places. During one of the classes, a teacher stated: “Zhenya, we are not doing anything with empty legs. It is only at the night club where you can dance with empty legs. Your base leg cannot be bent. You can die but you can’t dance with a bent leg!”<sup>105</sup> While writing this joke into the academic space of my dissertation makes it seem demeaning and dark, in the context of the “sterile” piano-dominated ballet room, this teacher’s joke made the “offender” the teacher herself, and all other students laugh with the happiness of teenagers, hearing an inappropriate joke for the first time. Here, dark humor was meant to provide moral support to the students, to contrast with the strive for perfection in dance, to provide emotional and physical release. Teacher provocations, like “Katya, why are you falling like a stone from the fifth floor?”<sup>106</sup> or the previously cited “I guess you are not coming back [to class from the restroom]?”<sup>107</sup> were meant to relieve the students from the responsibility of performing barre exercises and dance combinations perfectly, and laugh with them together at the inconsistencies and collisions of human body, inherently “imperfect,” and the always “ideal” ballet technique.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Erin, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 31, 2018)

<sup>106</sup> Gabi, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 30, 2018)

<sup>107</sup> Alexander, “Classical Ballet” (class, Kyiv State Ballet School, Kyiv, Ukraine, May 30, 2018)

<sup>108</sup> For more information on the notion of the dancing body and its relationship to technique, see Susan Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” in *Meaning in Motion*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 237-256.

Jokes that functioned as mediators between teachers' requirements and students' anxieties have a special place at The School. At the end of each year, students prepare a theatrical performance where they roast their teachers, through imitation of their teaching styles, walking and dressing habits. They set up a special time with their teachers to watch the video recordings of these performances together in the teachers' lounges. During one of these meetings, I was surrounded by the sweaty bodies of male students and put next to the 85-year old teacher, who was the subject of the mockery. The student, considered the most "talented" by his peers, depicted his teacher through the wobbly walking across the stage and carrying his "crooked" body. The student appropriated a large scarf, usually worn by the teacher, and a manner of sitting still on a chair for an extended period of time without saying a word. The teacher's sudden jumps on the chair "to have a better view from the above" and fights with pianist also got attention in the student's satire. It was particularly interesting to see the recorded performance after witnessing the classes and particularities of this class. My field notes traced the function of humor inside and in-between the dialogues.

*The musician Ariana is trying to adapt to every student during the solo jumps, at times speeding up and at times slowing down the tempo, to give a chance to every student to go along the music*

*Vincent [ballet teacher] is yelling at the pianist: Don't mess with him [with student's rhythm]!*

*A: I don't. Even Roma [one of the students] says you are making difference accents, and that I play in the same way.*

*V: Roma said that?*

*A: Yes, he did. I opened these notes for the second time in my life.*

*Yesterday, I opened them for the first time! [VA orders specific music to play during the classes]*

*V: Get rid of this chord!*

*A: Which chord does not satisfy you?*

*V: It's ugly!*

*A: Was I ugly?*

*V: There is an ugly chord!*

*Everyone is resting, stretching, talking, gossiping*

*V: Where is my boy [the favorite student]? Roma?*

*V to another student: Have you seen how he [Roma] puts his legs [into positions]?*

*Another student: How?*

*V: Beautifully. And what about you?*

*Another student: Well, what can I do, he [Roma] has beautiful legs!*

*Everyone laughs [Roma's beautiful legs]. Later, everyone practices long very-complicated adagio; two groups, V. Does not always give a chance to the second group to practice. Another fight with a pianist:*

*V: There was a meow! [a weird cat sound]*

*A: There was no meow!!! Rachmaninoff [Sergei Rachmaninoff] has wrote everything down!*

*VA: Rachmaninoff could not have written this!*

*A: I am playing from sheet music. I am nervous, I need to learn it!*

*VA: Don't torture Rachmaninoff!!*

*A: I play in the way it is written in the sheet music!*

*VA: People play like that in the Odessa market! What are you, Moldovan<sup>109</sup>?*

*A: Roma says I play in the same way, it is you who puts different accents in the same choreography!*

In the interviews, Arianna has been described as the best musician at the school, and to me she played perfectly. However, the arguing, cited above, does not only involve the authenticity of Rachmaninoff's music, but also a power re-location from the ballet teacher to the pianist and to the students. It is the students who advocate for the pianist, gather around the piano and try to establish communication between the teacher and the musician. It is the students who help to locate the "ugly chords" and modify Rachmaninoff's music to fit the adagio. The stakes are relatively high in these dialogues, as the whole class, including the contested adagio, is to be performed as a part of the graduation exam in ballet technique. Recorded music for the classes or exams was out of question, it seemed to me, and the balance between the teachers' combinations and musicians' adaptations of famous pieces was necessary. The fighting itself functions as comic farce and realizes itself through a variety of inappropriate comparisons and

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<sup>109</sup> Due to the geographical closeness of Moldova to the Odessa region of Ukraine, many farmers from Moldova travel to the markets of Odessa to sell their produce. Odessa markets, in turn, are popularly referenced to as festive environments, home to live music and dance performances.

metaphors. The arguing is meant to be funny through the comparison of a trained classical musician's play to a cat's sounds, through the comparison of young male student's lateness to the image of the Sleeping beauty, and through the comparison of the leg shapes of different male students. The effect was achieved; students, laughing, gossiping, looking at each other seemed more relaxed, while sweating during the barre exercise. It almost seemed like the constructed and performed miniature-drama in between the barre exercise and center combinations meant to relieve everyone's tension and anxieties. Somehow, the exam was about Rachmaninoff and the notes, rather than the actual exam and technique.

## **Interviews**

In parallel with observing ballet training classes, I conducted a series of deep interviews with the teachers of the school, to record their oral narratives associated with the transition of The School from a Soviet institution of high culture to its current state. Prior to my visit, I constructed ordered sets of questions for the school's teachers and students. My interviews would start with the questions of "How did you start dancing?" or "how did your ballet career start" and then proceed with my adaptation of the questions and their order to the particular interview. Each time, I meant to shape my interviews like conversations that would become interesting not only to me, but to the teachers and students as well. In these conversations, I sought to learn about particularities of ballet method in Ukraine and how Ukrainian training differed from other Republics of the former USSR. My interview with Alexander, the most senior of The

School's ballet instructors, was of particular significance. Alexander studied ballet in The School and immediately after graduation was offered a job in Lviv Opera, located in Western Ukraine, popularly considered to be the most culturally distinct city in Ukraine. Alexander's artistic path seemed particularly valuable for location and identification of particularities of ballet repertoire and technique in Ukraine:

I: What comes to mind when you think of your work in Lviv?

Alexander: There was a lot of work. We had performances practically every day, *The Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *Spartacus*. There was no *Sleeping Beauty*. I need [to?] remember what we danced, this was twenty years ago. There was a ballet work called *The Big Waltz*, staged to Straus's music. Do you remember what was the name of that choreographer from Odessa? No, not Golovanov. No, not Ryzhenko, this was earlier, no not Petukhov.<sup>110</sup> I forgot the name of this choreographer, this was a good ballet about Straus's life.

I: How would you describe the differences in the ballet repertoire of Lviv's theatre from the one that was here?

Alexander: Well, naturally, not all the theatres take up on creating their own choreographic works. There, choreographers, assigned to each theatre, and many of them did their own productions of famous ballets... And you can take the same production of *Spartacus* and *Giselle* and make a new production. For example,

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<sup>110</sup> Here, Alexander refers to the Russian ballet choreographers Viktor Golovanov and Urii Petukhov, who had training or professional ties with Ukraine. For example, Golovanov, a Moscow-based Soviet the Russian ballet choreographer, Urii Petukhov, who started his training in Kyiv State Ballet School in 1964 and transferred to the ballet school in Perm, Russia in 1966. Petukhov started his prominent career as a choreographer in St. Petersburg in 1979.



Shekera made his own production of *Spartacus* in Lviv and in Kyiv, he was the main choreographer of the Kyiv's National Opera.

I: And, at that moment, 20 years ago, when you got the job in Lviv, did you notice any particularities in ballet production or technique from the ones, introduced to you in Kyiv?

Alexander: Well, I can't say that something was different. Nothing [was different]. It would be the same as if you would come to New York City or Las Vegas, you know what I mean?

I: Right.

Alexander: It was just a new atmosphere to me, new people

In this small excerpt of my interview with Alexander, a number of important observations can be drawn about the structure of the centralized Soviet ballet system and its impact on artists' perception of how ballet is defined. While clearly pronouncing the observed absence of differences in response to my questions, Alexander remembered his five-year work period in Lviv through the names of the Russian ballet choreographers Viktor Golovanov and Urii Petukhov, who had training or professional ties with Ukraine. Golovanov, a Moscow-born and Moscow-based Soviet and Post-Soviet ballet choreographer, was the leading choreographer at both the Kyiv and Odessa ballet theaters since 1977. Nataliya Ryzhenko, also initially from Moscow, was a choreographer for Ukrainian ballet theatres since 1977 and the major choreographer of Odessa Theatre of Opera and Ballet since between 1977 and 1989. Finally, Urii Petukhov started his training in Kyiv State Ballet School in 1964 and transferred to the ballet school in Perm,

Russia in 1966, subsequently establishing himself as a choreographer in St. Petersburg in 1979.<sup>111</sup>

What struck me in my first attempt to gain an understanding of the specifics of ballet training and repertoire in Ukrainian cities was a straightforward denial of even a possibility of such differences in many of the interviews. This reluctance to recall Soviet-era productions Alexander danced in, coupled with marking the names of choreographers, signaled the very state control of ballet itself and of political views of Soviet citizens and the Stalinist repressions that have affected many artists' lives. For Alexander, Soviet productions were a part of ballet that comes and goes, while the choreographers and their names are part that stayed in the cultural memory of ballet artists. To him, it was not the ballet productions or technique that mattered, but people who "made" them. The last reference in this interview excerpt, Anatolii Shekera, initially from Vladivostok, Russia, was the leading choreographer of Kyiv's National of Opera of Ukraine from 1966 to 2000. Shekera, who was trained in and graduated from the Perm' ballet school, Russia staged a great variety of ballet works in Ukraine from Imperial-era ones, like *The Nutcracker* and *The Swan Lake*, to the Soviet-era ones, like *Spartacus*, to the Ukrainian nation-themed ballets, like *Lileya* in 1964 and *Dawn Lights* in 1967. In a

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<sup>111</sup> These Russian choreographers, who had ties to Ukraine, were prominent, but at the same time they shared or were intimately familiar with the histories of Stalinist repressions. Golovanov, initially Smirnov, had a father, repressed in 1946, and changed his last name in the 1960s. Nataliya Ryzhenko, a graduate of the Moscow ballet school, affiliated with the Bolshoi Ballet Theatre, was a long-time student of Sulamif' Messerrer, an aunt of the prominent ballerina Maya Plisetskaya, adopted by Sulamif' after the death of Plisetskaya's father, repressed in the late 1930's. Petukhov was a leading dancer and a choreographer of the St. Petersburg' ballet of Leonid Yakobson, a famous Soviet-era subversive Jewish choreographer, explored by Janice Ross in *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as A Resistance in Soviet Russia*.

scholarly article “Anatolii Fedorovich Shekera – The Master of Ballet Symfonism and Choreographic Polifony,” E. Kovalenko argues that Shekera was one of the pioneers of the innovative genre of “symphonic dramaturgy” and “dramatic polyphony” that came to be known as Shekerian original choreographic style. Interestingly, all the choreographers Alexander listed as those shaping Ukrainian ballet in Lviv and Kyiv in the late Soviet and Post-Soviet periods had Russian background and training, but came to be famous through their contribution to the Ukrainian ballet. Critically, all of them were somehow acquainted with or directly promoted innovative or nonconformist movement.

When I attempted to gain a better understanding of how his references intersected with Alexander’s ballet career and his own methodology and philosophy, Alexander would shift the subject to his long-time work in the Kyiv’s Children’s Musical Theatre, where he accepted the position as it offered better living accommodations than the Lviv Opera.<sup>112</sup> When I tried to softly go back and ask about the choreographic works created by these choreographers, Alexander responded:

A: Well, no, choreography was different, say, if Kyiv had one staging of *The Swan Lake*, Lviv had a different version, but in a sense that the consequence of movements was a bit different; it was like a word play.

I: Do you think that a different movement sequence affects ballet works, their content or characters?

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<sup>112</sup> Alexander, his wife and his daughter occupied one small room in the Lviv’s dormitory for ballet artists, working at the Lviv Opera, also called today Lviv National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre named after Solomiya Krushelnytska. As, according to Alexander, Kyiv Children’s Musical Theatre provided better salary and benefits, UA moved back with his family to Kyiv.

A: I believe that in this particular case – no. But, overall you have to watch ballets in a way so that you would get a content line, supported by ballet. For example, every ballet has to have a libretto, as people say here, a libretto can be “*kazennoe* [state-issued],” “*kazennoe* - it means, for example, a production by Petipa.”<sup>113</sup>

Interestingly, while in the first round of my questions about choreographic differences Alexander directly offered “nothing [is different],” in the second round he admitted that there was a different movement sequence, which depended on the libretto, as a base for any ballet.

This uncertainty in terms of how to talk about and how to position Lviv’s repertoire and technique in relationship to Kyiv’s ballet particularities speaks to Alexander’s special care when responding to the questions. However, one of the most interesting and complicated parts in this excerpt is the last sentence, where Alexander speaks about the notion of “*kazennoe*” that people use “here.” According to my interpretation, “here” would refer to the contemporary Ukraine, and “*kazennoe*” libretto – a libretto, belonging to the Russian state, as Petipa was hired by Imperial Russian authorities. While on the surface sounding like a confusing statement, it tapped into the highlighted influences of the Russian-trained choreographers on Ukrainian ballet and the persistence of Imperial-era and Soviet-era ballets, still constructing the ballet repertoire in Ukrainian theatres.

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<sup>113</sup> A Russian term “*kazennoe*” or “*kazennyi*” means “belonging to the state.” For more information, see Tolkovyj Slovar’ Ushakova [Ushakov’s Explanatory Dictionary]. <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ushakov/829310>. I examine Soviet-era librettos of the Ukrainian ballets and their significance in Chapter Three.

## **State of Confusion**

The ongoing “confusion” between the Russian, Soviet, and Ukrainian states and their verbal entanglement when referring to a concept of the state was prominent in many other interviews. This was particularly pronounced in my interview with Gabi, who stated:

... There was Russia. What is left from it? Where are all the industrial plants? Ten thousand of them disappeared, people were not paid in the 1990s. My husband and I survived only because we worked second jobs. Every month K., he worked at the theatre [National Opera of Ukraine] would go the Germany, France, Italy, and only these trips brought us money. I worked as a ballet tutor, teaching students at my own place. I had a lot of students in the 1980s and 1990s.

Here, even though Gabi and her husband K., also a ballet teacher at the school, have always worked in Kyiv, Ukraine, Gabi locates herself and her family in “Russia,” most likely meaning the Soviet Union or Soviet Ukraine and refers to the economic crisis of the 1990’s that have followed the collapse of the USSR. At the same time, Gabi puts the previously mentioned Erin’s and Alexander’s critiques of the salary delays and cuts into a historical perspective and connects it with more broad economic forces that affected Post-Soviet institutions.

It seems that, partially, the Russia and Ukraine term mix-up, evident in Alexander’s statement about the “state’s librettos,” and Gabi’s discussion of the effect of the USSR’s collapse on the school, relate to the “mixed” backgrounds and complicated

family histories and migrations of the interviewees. Gabi offered her brief family history and intersected it with Soviet, Russian and Ukrainian identity:

The thing is that my great-grandmother has lived in Chernihiv [Northern Ukraine], and my great grandfather in Poltava [Central Ukraine]; and then they moved to Siberia.<sup>114</sup> A different grandfather on my mother's line lived in the city of Yelets, this is in *Orlovskaya Guberniya* [Oryol Governorate, a central district in Imperial Russia]. So, everyone has come from here [from Ukraine]. The thing was that there was railroad construction and everyone worked there. One grandfather was a train driver and he was a member of VCIK – The Central Executive Committee. There were not many of them. He did not drink, he did not smoke. He was of a very upper-class background. My great grandfather and my grandfather were both train drivers, it was back then like an astronaut today. But, my mother's grandfather – he was the one who made [participated in] the Revolution [1917 Revolution] happen. I remember him very well and he said that Ukraine – was not the country one should move to... How do I tell this to you? Ukraine is a place of death, because it is constantly attacked by various politicians... My father is Russian, but he hated, clearly hated everyone, who would discriminate against any nationality.

Looking at Gabi's narrative in textual form, the terms' mix-up is even more evident; the teacher lists the places of her ancestors' background, where some are located in Central

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<sup>114</sup> Chernihiv, a city and a center of Chernigov Province, belonged to the Russian Empire since 1503, was a part of the Soviet Union and Ukrainian Republic since 1918 and became a part of independent Ukraine since the collapse of the USSR. Poltava is a city in the central Ukraine and was a part of *Poltavskaya Guberniya* [Poltava Province] that belonged to Russian Empire since 1802 since the liquidation of *Malorossiskaya Guberniya*. Both provinces, Chernigov and Poltava, share borders with the Kyiv district.

Ukraine, some in Northern Ukraine, and some in Central Russia; however, she summarizes this list with a sentence, “so, everyone is from here.” Another interesting detail comes to mind, looking at the use of pre-Soviet Imperial name of *Orlovskaya Guberniya [Oryol Province]*, inscribing her family history into Russian Imperial and Soviet histories, which is understandable, given that both Poltava and Chernihiv provinces were part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. However, her use of the phrase, “so, everyone was from here,” is very ambiguous, not clearly outlining what she means by “here.”

In the middle of my three-hour interview with Gabi, it seemed like the notions of Ukraine and Russia came together when Gabi initiated a conversation about Ukrainian nationalism and its support coming from the American and Canadian governments:

Gabi: ... And it was Canada that came here first, that sent its ambassadors to pay money to local authorities so that they would support everything Ukrainian. But, the overall framework circulates around the fake logic that we don't support everything that is Ukrainian. However, we support it, we have worked for this country, we have learned the language.

I: Well, there is a belief in the US and Canada that the USSR was an empire

Gabi: Of course, it was an empire! It was, it still is, and it will be! It is not going to go away!

Thinking about this excerpt, the reason for the Ukraine and Russia mix-up in the oral narratives seems to be related to the broad narrative that Ukraine still is a part of an empire.

The terms “The Soviet Union,” “Ukrainian Republic,” and “Russia” were often interchanged in other interviews. At times, I would have trouble understanding what country or what ballet teachers talked about. While, at times, the countries’ names were just switched inside one sentence, clouding my perception and understanding of how teachers identify themselves, at times, they would lay out these terms logically for me. For example, in the interview with Alexander, the teacher asked me:

Alexander: Are you looking for particularities because now it’s Ukraine?

I: I guess, yes, I am trying to understand

Alexander: Well, but I am telling you that we were one whole [with Russia or the Soviet Union]

At this moment, our conversation was interrupted by another teacher, who prior to this interruption seemed to have been pre-occupied with making her tea in the Teacher’s Lounge, but was clearly paying attention to every detail of our interview.<sup>115</sup>

Erin: Ukraine, as a country, has not created anything.

Alexander: As ballet artists, we did not find anything new, you see? What we had from the past century has stayed.

Erin: The main task for today is to save and develop, not create anything new [ballet].

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<sup>115</sup> The reason Erin is present in the interview with Alexander is again related to the context of my field site. None of the teachers, except for one, agreed to talk outside the school, in a café, or any private space where no one could interfere. Somehow, teachers felt more comfortable with their colleagues present in the rooms, and at times, my interviews transitioned into round-table discussions, or into teacher duets, like this one, where I would be an outsider with my strange assumptions about interview privacy. In this duet the fact that “we were one whole” mattered more than “now its Ukraine.” At the same time, the significance of the past and a lack of attention to the present resonated with ballet pedagogies elsewhere, always directed at the past, rather than the present or the future.



I: Well, I am thinking, there should have been the artists, working specifically only in Ukraine? Could they have their own methodologies?

Erin: What kind of methodology? Where would it come from? The method is one only and the same one. We don't have our own methodology; we push off from a common methodology.

I: Well, maybe there are special secrets to ballet art here?

Erin: No, I see you are disappointed

I: No, not at all

Erin: There are no secrets. Everyone teaches according to their knowledge of a common method.

The very popularization and near-fetishization of the “common” Soviet Vaganova method might serve as one of the examples of ballet technique oriented towards and aligned with the past. In the second part of the interview, Alexander discussed his work with New Zealand's ballet school, where he worked for ten years. Alexander admitted that he got the job precisely due his experience in the Vaganova method of teaching. Later, however, my interview of the Erin and Alexander had a particularly telling discussion of Vaganova's methodology and its pedagogy at the school:

E: You cannot rip it apart [Vaganova's method from the school practices]

They have ripped certain structures apart, I don't know, I don't want to politicize you, but we all know that they ripped our Soviet Union apart, provoked its collapse, and what it is being going on today with all these revolutions, this is all the influence of outside forces. For today, we are all

ripped apart. But this is not really possible to do, we are bonded together with scholarly connections, and even if you will raise the next generation in hatred to Russia, this is not possible.

A: We are connected with one chain...

E: Yes, with chains, that is. There is no way we will leave Vaganova's method, because no one came up with anything better. This is the only way. At the same time, our theatre always had artists, who were sent here from St. Petersburg during the times of Tsarist Russia. As we [Ukraine and Russia] existed as one state, they have sent people here, they have opened the theater, they have built it. The theater was built not by the people, but by the Tsar; the authorities have managed the building of the theatres across the country [Imperial Russia].

Apart from the very problematic character of these statements and my disappointment, noticed by Erin, these are the opinions shared by many other pedagogues at The School. I argue that the Vaganova method, Russia, and the Soviet Union serve as metaphors for one another. The ripping apart narrative spins around the categorical couples of "Russia and Ukraine" and "Vaganova method and the school's method." The duet's narrative is also resilient; it attempts to resist the "ripping apart" part in the sphere, where teachers have control. Through their support and practice of the Vaganova method in the same way that it was practiced before the collapse of the USSR, teachers seek to maintain a connection to the past, or at least a past they have constructed and theorized.

Throughout the interviews, narratives of Ukrainian ballet theatres as “initially and inherently Russian” are very pervasive and at the same time performative, as if meant to convince the audience of this unbroken relationship. However, there is a clear lack of agreement on what exactly constitutes this supposedly uniform “Russian” ballet style among the very teachers claiming its totality and uniformity. Throughout my interviews, I asked the central question of: “How would you describe the training system you have here, in Kyiv State Ballet School?” and immediately most teachers equated the training system to the systems of Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow and Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg. One of the teachers explained: “I would say that we have the same system, the same training that exists in Moscow and St. Petersburg. I cannot say there is something new here [since the collapse of the Soviet Union].” Yet, as I tried to clarify how ballet teachers access and practice Vaganova method canons, the ballet teacher immediately referred to the Soviet Union, and to Ukraine as one of the former 15 republics, and the centralized system of hire when choreographers and teachers from the cultural centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg were hired to work and live in Kyiv, Ukraine: “They would finish the ballet schools there and come here, so naturally, you have a ballet connection. Right now, we exist as a separate country [from Russia or the former Soviet Union], however before and prior to the 1992 we were one entity [with Russia].”

In this seemingly non-problematic response and a belief in the unity and sameness of ballet training across the former Soviet Union and current Post-Soviet spaces, teachers referred to the archive, Soviet-era pedagogical materials on ballet technique, and the

repertoire of common practices, ensured by the system of Soviet re-distribution of young specialists, including ballet artists.<sup>116</sup> In response to the question of: “So, most of ballet teachers here received their training in Moscow and St. Petersburg?” One of the teachers replied: “No. But they have been trained within the same method, the method of Vaganova’s book. She has written down and deciphered all the movements and all the republics – Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan – have studied by this book.”

A unique situation emerges, as Diana Taylor’s notions of archive and repertoire come together in this narrative, describing ballet practice as a completely unified technique that is taught through Vaganova’s text and as not having any variations or diversions within different republics and their Post-Soviet spaces. To illustrate this merger of archive and repertoire, I want to share a telling moment that occurred during the interview. As the teacher who I was talking with responded, another teacher who happened to walk into the lounge interrupted this narrative of generic sameness and uniformity of technique, which I will relay with all the passion that was put into this interruption:

What are you saying? What book? Listen to me, Vaganova’s text is far, far away from the method. The one who has organized the method is May, and not Vaganova. – ...I know. You have studied it, and I have studied it too. – Do not interrupt me. In the period when Vaganova danced and taught, it was the period of Revolution and there were a number of

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<sup>116</sup> Here, I refer to Diana Taylor’s notions of the archive and the repertoire to highlight that apart from practiced methods there are published texts, written by Vaganova and her students, that are accessible through the school’s library system.

ballet schools – a French one, Russian one, with its own traditions, and a Dutch one. And when the Revolution was happening, our country created new art forms. They inhaled all the best things that existed, and Vaganova has done this as well - either by herself or she got an assignment to do this. But her little book was not fundamental because it is very brief. The method itself was created by her students, it is not just us, but generations of her students. Bazarova, Kostrovitskaya, Pisarev –they were all her students and we use their books as well in our training.”<sup>117</sup>

In attempting to critique and unmask the response of interviewee, this teacher followed the same structure as that constructed by the first one - between ballet training in Kyiv and Moscow and St. Petersburg and the overall cultural space of the Soviet Union. The USSR and its cultural centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg function in the teachers’ narratives as a first point of reference to the origins of Vaganova technique, yet its continuity is attributed to generations of dancers who were not necessarily located in Russia.

I was initially stunned with the easiness of a drawn connection between a state ballet school of independent Ukraine and the training system sketched out by the Soviet ballerina Vaganova in the 1930s. While dance scholars acknowledge and critique dance’s ephemerality and possibility of interpretation, dance teachers of Kyiv State Ballet School seemed convinced of the authenticity and vitality of Vaganova’s training translated through the students’ bodies and texts even though practically a century has passed since

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<sup>117</sup> Erin. Interview with Ania Nikulina, June, 20, 2018

the publication of “the book.” Yet, in an interview with Arianna, the previously-mentioned classical pianist, in response to my question about the changes in the training system and the method in the past decades, I received a very interesting and telling response, comparing Vaganova’s method to a Bible:

You know that everyone reads the Bible in a different way, and so there is a variety of interpretations of Vaganova’s method. Some ballet instructors teach in ways that are completely opposite to other instructor. For example, some decide that the barre is not very important, and they skip it because they did not like it when they studied dance, they move very quickly towards the jumps, some like to stick to the barre as long as possible within a class.<sup>118</sup>

Here and across my interviews with both students and teachers of the Kyiv State Chorography School, it became clear that in their dedication to the preservation of the classical Vaganova method, the Kyiv State Chorography School has, in fact, become a site of contested technique, as multiple visions of “classical,” “Russian” and “Soviet” ballet aesthetics find their way into the classrooms of the school. Yet without strict guidance from the centralized agency, such as the Soviet Ministry of Culture, as to what does and does not entail “correct” technique, I argue that a wholly new ballet technique may emerge in the contested cultural space of Ukrainian ballet, as a new generation of dancers and teachers inevitably takes center stage.

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<sup>118</sup> Arianna. Interview with Ania Nikulina. June, 23, 2018.

The School emerges as a unique site, where state-sponsored ballet appears to be culturally detached both from the Ukrainian state sponsoring it and also temporarily detached from the collapsed Soviet state its technique is associated with. Finding that in Ukraine, ballet teachers, as former state artists, and students, as future ones, relate to Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union to a greater extent than to the current Ukrainian state was at the very least unexpected for me as a dance scholar. My initial ethnographic results complicate scholarly ideas about the notion of state in dance by highlighting that state artists might build allegiance with a different state, not necessarily the native one that hosts and sponsors them, and even with states that exist only as a distant memory.

### **Insight through Interruption**

Prior to my ethnographic trip to Kyiv, I had an idealistic picture in my mind of interviewing teachers and students of the school in a space that would provide academic intimacy and comfort, where I could talk to my interlocutors one on one. I soon realized that my ethnographic effort will be unlike anything I envisioned through an academic prism, specifically that the interview process would be far different from a simple one-on-one question and answer session in the privacy of a faculty office. I realized that when planning the trip and the interview process, I approached it as a US graduate student and subconsciously positioned myself and those who I would interview within the frameworks of a US university, where interview privacy is meant to correlate to participant safety and anonymity. It quickly became apparent that in the context of Post-Soviet Ukraine and within the confines of a state ballet school, nearly the opposite held

true – nearly no one wanted to meet or talk in complete privacy, choosing semi-public spaces at the School to talk to me.

At first, an apparent disregard and disdain for privacy puzzled me, but, as I will discuss further in this chapter, there seem to be important underlying reasons for this choice of interview spaces by my participants, namely that publicity remains an important defense mechanism in a close and intimate dancing community of the school. Throughout the time I spent at the School, the majority of the interviews took place at the Teacher's Lounge, a semi-private space, in the sense that it provided a door that could be closed to initially create a sense of privacy, but at any moment this door could open and any number of people could appear in the room. At this moment the interview would take on a new life – becoming a form of communal interaction, where the person being interviewed would exchange a greeting with those walking in, talk about the interview questions and their answers, seeking input, or asking others about their experiences.

Initially, I saw constant interruptions as an impediment to the interview process and would stop the interview as soon as the space of the Teachers' Lounge was no longer private. I soon realized that this was, in fact, part of the process, equally important to those I was interviewing. I felt that even with the unexpected interruptions, the important elements of the interview – trust and sincerity – were always there, even though the actual space of the interviews went against all my expectations, shedding light on the particularities of the school as a part of a ballet community. To provide an example of this, I want to cite my interview with Alexander, which had, perhaps, the most spectacular and also meaningful interruptions that revealed a wealth of information about



the inner workings of the School and its communities. During this interview, just as I was transitioning from general questions to more specific ones, a crowd of teachers came in into the teachers' lounge. Just as Alexander was describing the city of Lviv, his first place of work, teachers Molly, Odette, Vincent, Erin and Mateo interrupted our quiet dialogue:

Alexander: You know, Lviv is a miniature Western city, it is nothing like Kyiv, or Moscow; that is, very small streets, tramways.

*Molly came in, then everyone else – Odette, Vincent, Erin*

Odette to everyone: Just look, what did he do with my scarf! [...] To Vincent: I will stop by your class right now and talk to your Aron [Vincent's student], the thing is – the shoes [Aron's mother made] did not fit to my Dan's feet. One [shoe] is bigger than the other, one has an arch, another has a pit, he [Dan] says it is not comfortable. (discusses the jazz shoes she bought from Aron's mother, who makes them for many students in the school)

Vincent: Alexander, when should I give you money for the water?

Alexander: Vincent, you are the next one

Erin to Odette: These shoes that you bought are for yourself?

Odette: No, for my son

Vincent to me: Aron's mother makes them. Do you know Aron?

I: I have met him, it hard not to notice him [I laugh and everyone else laughs too], he did such good turns yesterday, I think he did a septuple turn, seven tours in one turn!

Odette to Vincent: Well, let's go, I will assist you. Did you have your coffee today?

Vincent to Odette: I did, thank you.

*Everyone talks to each other. Molly comes in. It is not clear whom she talks to.*

Molly: Well, yesterday you know, Roma couldn't lift her – I told him: Come on, she will do the tours, you will take her into a “fish,” he said I will do that, and he couldn't do it. Anyways. He did not come to the rehearsal today, he can't hold her with his right hand.

Alexander: What I have seen from the concert – He throws her, than holds her like this, and then transitions into a “fish.” No, you listen to me, he pushes her, she goes down, he holds her too high and then he looks for...

Molly: But it's already too low.

Alexander: Of course! Because, you have to hold at the hip line minimum!

Molly: But the boys say he has to do it with his right hand

Alexander: It seems like he can't catch her at the moment of push

Molly: But she jumps by herself, she flies there

[Everyone discusses the duet]

*Then the school's pianist, Arianna, comes in.*

Molly to Arianna: Everyone is already on stage, and you are wandering around?

Arianna to Molly: Well, excuse me [with sarcasm], that I am wandering around, I just finished playing for the class [that Vincent teaches].

*Everyone still discusses the duet. Arianna opens the window and goes away.*

Mateo about Arianna: Well, this is our Arianna, she opened the window and walked away! This is our Arianna! The kitchen is right below and all the smells are coming up.

Molly: I tell her, “You can jump on his shoulder by yourself, he will catch you”

Alexander: Yeah, aha. Still, he kind of needs to catch her [meant as a joke]

Mateo: Or, she can fly across him and fall [meant as a joke]

*Molly further critiques the duet, discusses the school’s schedule for the final exams and rehearsals, using a poem-reading-like tone:*

Molly: On Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday they have no rehearsals, they have ZNO. Next Monday – they have no class, no rehearsal either, on Saturday – it’s the last day, no rehearsal either, there is no class, and just in two days they have state exams...[Continues]

*Erin comes in. Her leg seems to be hurt, it is covered in zelyonka [antiseptic ointment of bright green color]*

Alexander: Hey, Erin, how are you? Are you all right?

Erin: I am fine

Alexander: Well, you came in so quietly and calmly

Erin: You see, my bag has ripped [on top of hurt leg].

Alexander: So what, it’s not a leather one, is it?

Erin: That’s the thing – it is leather, and who knows how I fixed it, just with a needle.

I: Maybe, you could take it to the bag repair?

Alexander: It would be probably easier to buy a new one for her, she has a new bag every week.

Erin: They don't pay salary here [at the school]

Alexander: Wait, don't tell about our good life here [with sarcasm]

The excerpt is revealing of both daily personal interactions and economic transactions that take place within the school community. In this short excerpt of an interrupted interview, a few things become evident. First, the familiarity and profound knowledge of each other's lives, schedules and events. For example, Odette usually makes coffee for Vincent, the oldest teacher, and assists him in walking toward the classroom. Alexander cares for Erin, who most likely fell, as her ankle had a large laceration and had to be disinfected. Molly reveals the particularities of her rehearsals, complains and looks for advice. Vincent asks Alexander when it is his turn to pay for the water and Odette plans to return the jazz shoes, made for her son by one of the Vincent's student's mother. From my understanding, Mateo, a younger male teacher delivers filtered water to other teachers as a way to make additional income. Vincent's student Aron's mother makes ballet and jazz shoes for the school for the same reason. Throughout my time at the Kyiv State Ballet School, I often times saw monetary exchanges between teachers, administrators and students, meaning that the school has its own internal economy and an inner exchange of ballet and non-ballet goods.

Empathy and acts of care for each other, such as the act of making coffee, assistance in walking to class, or professional advice, continuously impressed me throughout my time at the school. Conversations, chaotic on the outside, contained

logistical questions and answers. More importantly, a critique of the school as an institution came up in these seemingly chaotic dialogues, and both times it was offered in a theatrical manner. First, Molly announced the modified schedule for her graduating students that had no space for ballet classes and rehearsals within the period of two weeks despite the “graduation concert” functioning as a final exam for ballet technique. While Molly read her critique in a poem-like manner, loudly and putting rhythmic pauses in between the phrases, Erin quietly inserted a short phrase “They don’t pay salary here”, which is met with Alexander supportive comment, “Wait, don’t tell about our good life here.” These brief comments and the mutual critique were meant to be noticed and confirmed by everyone present in the room. Yet, critique positioned inside a conversation about the ripped leather bag, this criticism is not meant for consumption outside of this room. At the same time, given that everyone knew I was recording the interview and writing down my observations, it seemed like this critique was meant to be relayed beyond the Teacher’s Lounge.

Recent works on Soviet ballet, like Christina Ezrahi’s *Swans of the Kremlin* and Janice Ross’s *Like a Bomb Going Off*, shed light on the particularities of relationships that arise within the state-sponsored art. They consider cases when the state sponsorship is profound in its influence over the artists’ lives and works. I came to Ukraine and started my fieldwork with this assumption that if ballet is state-sponsored, the state provides everything that is needed to the theatres and affiliated ballet boarding schools. However, my encounters with ballet teachers at The School disrupted this assumption with narratives like, “It’s been two months since we received our monthly salary,” “There

is no hot water in the school and the boarding facility,” “The school was not heated for two months during winter, the students had to train in freezing temperatures” or “I do not go to Kyiv National Opera [to see the ballets] anymore.” It seems that partially due to disruption in funding, and partially due to the relatively infrequent hires by the National Opera, the relationship that was initially built and presumed as a symbiotic one is currently disrupted.

### **Leadership and bridging the gap between the state and the school**

There is an apparent disconnect between the designation of The School as a state-sponsored educational institution and the reality that the school is only partially funded in terms of instructor salary and virtually unfunded in terms of required facility repair and upkeep. What I soon discovered is that the financial gap that needs to be covered to keep the school open is bridged by private sponsorship. These partnerships are largely negotiated by the current artistic director, himself a graduate of the school, Nathan, in a way that is oddly similar to the informal ways that ballet shoe repair, water delivery, and coffee shifts are negotiated in the Teacher’s Lounge. Below, I provide a longer excerpt of my interview with the school’s artistic director to offer insight into the school’s particularities and contradictions as a state institution:

I: How long have you been working at the school and teaching duet?

Nathan: Five years already. I would love to teach classics [classical ballet technique], but I don’t have any time, administrative work takes over. I work a lot, I have a lot of projects here, but all of them are privately sponsored. I haven’t

gotten anything from the state in these five years...I have established my own ballet festival, invited Vladimir Malakhov to stage *Coppelia* specifically for the school to be performed in National Opera. I had to do it all by myself. When I came here five years ago, you couldn't train here, the temperature inside the school was -3 degrees Celsius [27 degrees Fahrenheit]

I: When was this?

Nathan: When I came here, six years ago. But I was lucky, I had my partners, Ukrainian and German sponsors who support the school and my ideas. Because the school did not have anything.

I: What do you mean?

Nathan: People lived here and they taught children the same way they did fifty years ago, there was nothing new. You see, you have to keep traditions alive, but the ballet world is not standing still either.

I: I see.

Nathan: I saw the lack of interest from the students, when I came here. And, so I started to invite famous, internationally known, choreographers, like Vladimir Malakhov, so that they would come to the school, give master-classes, stage ballet works for the students. We perform at the National Opera [of Ukraine] six to eight times a year right now, before [Nathan's appointment at the school], the school would give one or two concerts [at the opera]. He has been working with us for four years now. In November, we have *Coppelia* in National Opera, and then – in Lviv, Kharkiv and Odessa.

I: That's great! I was wondering, you were saying that you have sponsors, what are these organizations?

Nathan: These are private sponsors. It is hard to talk to them, but they do see results. Everyone is happy that the school moves forward, and most importantly, the kids are happy too.

I: Well, to have private sponsorship in a state's institution like that – this is very innovative thinking. How did you come to that?

Nathan: You see, when I came here, I had no idea how bad the school's conditions were. When I studied ballet here during the late 1980s and early 1990s, I thought it was bad. In 1991 the Union [USSR] collapsed, since then there were no repairs or any kind of restoration. I realized that I would have to do all this work – repairs, new ballet works, etc. I installed the new windows in the ballet classes and put dance linoleum, put new bathrooms [in the boarding school's facility]. These were the main things. Now I invest into costumes.

I was impressed by Nathan's narrative, given its specifics and openness to my questions about the sponsorship. I also felt a genuine empathy and care for the school from Nathan, and was particularly stunned by his statement, "I got nothing from the government in these five years," given that it was 26.6 degrees in winter. At the same time, I was confused about the lack of support of the school's physical facilities, given that the school is the main training center for Ukrainian state ballet artists and given that National Opera had a full house during every performance. As I found out later, Nathan did not tell me about the absence of heating through the months of winter during the 2017-2018



academic year, and during the next winter, when I came back for my archival research. Minimal support from the Ukrainian government for the young students who are meant to represent the future of Ukrainian ballet, the old Soviet-era schedule and requirements coupled with private sponsorship of the school seemed surreal to me. In combination with previously highlighted salary cuts and delays, the school was presented to me as a surviving-but-caring, state-but-private institution, functioning only due to the private sponsorship and Nathan's navigation of it and at the same time, offering free-of-charge education to its students.

### **The Workings of Soviet Nostalgia and Soviet Policies**

In the previous sections of this chapter I examined the narrative of a common methodology that binds the teacher community of The School. According to many teachers, like Erin and Alexander, their training method has not changed since the “previous century,” or the Soviet era. I also showed that the teachers coupled “Russia,” “Ukraine,” and the Vaganova method like mutually interchangeable notions, as existing in the symbiotic relationship to one another. These categorical couples usually come together with teachers' Soviet nostalgia and longing for the past economic stability of the school, associated with the Soviet-era state's sponsorship. However, the constructed connection between Ukraine and Russia, the school's practices and the Vaganova method, comes up not only through responses about ballet practices and methodologies,

but also through the questions about the repertoire and ballet personalities. For example, in a July 2018 interview, Molly stated:

The performances were on a spectacular level, the leading dancers were amazing, ballet tutors were just fantastic.

I: What time are you referring to?

Molly: I mean, when I started to work in the theatre [National Opera of Ukraine] in 1975 and until the time, when I retired in 1995. I would say that five years prior to my retirement [during the collapse of the USSR], when the administration started to change, everything came into the destruction. But prior to this time [of destruction] it was a wonderful time [for the National Opera of Ukraine]. The tutors were amazing, directors and choreographers were talented. The repertoire was colossal.

I: Could you give some names of people you are thinking about?

Molly: Tutors: Kruglov, Leonid Ivanovich, Akhikyan, Tatyana Lukinishna, Sirkova, Zoya Vladimirovna – the last one and Kruglov are not alive anymore. Kalinovaskya, Shekera. But they are not alive. But these ones [contemporary, Post-Soviet choreographers and tutors] – I cannot say anything...

Here, Molly's narrative of a "wonderful time" prior to the "destruction," brought by USSR's collapse, resonates with Nathan's narrative of the "bad" times during *perestroika* and the times, when everything was even worse, "very bad," in the 2000s.

While Molly spoke about the National Opera of Ukraine, which she critiqued profoundly in the interview, and Nathan about the school's operational conditions, the

institutions were and still are connected, as the Kyiv State Ballet School serves as one of the training ballet centers for the National Opera and other ballet theatres of the country. Molly's and Nathan's perspective of the Post-Soviet times as the times of destruction also echoes Alexander's and Erin's views. In response to my question about ballet communities and about how they communicate, both Molly and Alexander stated that there is no connection or interaction between the ballet theatres and ballet schools of various Ukrainian cities. Molly remembered how during the 1970s and 1980s she and other National Opera artists would often perform at the local middle and high schools in various Ukrainian cities and towns. These performances were free of charge, in a way functioning like Soviet-era charity evenings.

When Molly talked about performance trips and their audience, more attentive and thankful than the ones in Kyiv, her eyes lit up. Alexander contemplated the Soviet-era All-Union meetings for ballet artists and choreographers, where ballet theatres and ballet schools of various republics would get visibility through given performances and seminars. Furthermore, Alexander shared a very personal story of how as a 10-year old boy, he was chosen to perform a Ukrainian folk duet with a same-age girl at the celebration of Ukrainian Art in Moscow.

I: Do you remember this trip to Moscow?

Alexander: Yes, I do. You know, back then, everything was very well organized. I would even say in a communistic way, contemporary generation does not know what it means. There was a train that would go from Kyiv to Moscow, organized specifically for artists, and there were many ensembles that were invited to

perform in Moscow. There were not only pre-professional and semi-professional companies, but also very famous artists, who were scheduled to perform there too. When we were on this trip, it was 1969, there was Dmitrii Gnotyuk with us on a train, he was a People's Artist of Ukraine, Gulyaev, he was in Kyiv back then prior his move to Moscow, he was a famous singer, also People's Artist of Ukraine. We all lived in the hotel "Russia" in Moscow and performed at the State Kremlin Palace. When you are ten and you do trips like that, it makes a big impression on you.

Nostalgia for the Soviet times functions a bit differently in all the narratives, but it always catches the memories of professional connections. For Molly, it was a connection with "fantastic" tutors at the National Opera, where she danced from 1975 to 1995, and inspiration from the non-Kyiv audiences during the "charity" ballet evenings. For Alexander, connection was exemplified through the Soviet-era meetings, scheduled for ballet teachers and choreographers from various cities, and All-Union ballet festivals and trips, where pre-professional dance ensembles traveled and performed together with prominent artists.

When I came back to Kyiv for my archival research six months later, in December of 2018, I encountered the documents relating to the All-Union meetings and celebrations of Ukrainian art in Moscow, when I worked at the State Central Archive for Literature and Art. In the personnel folder of Elena Veselova, a Stalinist-era ballerina, I found a variety of documents, such as her 1936 and 1951 passes, given to her as a performer of the *Decade of Ukrainian Art and Literature* in Moscow to attend all the

events, associated with the decade. Additionally, the folder contained many other passes, like her 1936 and 1951 passes for State Academic Theatre of opera and Ballet in Leningrad (now, Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg) and June 1951 pass to the Kremlin Theatre (now State Kremlin Palace) in Moscow. These passes were sharing space in the ballerina's personal folder with legal documents confirming her as a recipient of the Stalin Award for Honored Labor and Contribution to the Defense Effort in the Second World War, given for Veselova's performance in front-line theaters for soldiers of the Red Army. Looking at all these documents made me think she was a very prominent artist in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Available photographs of her in the leading roles start with the 1936 picture of her as of a local Ukrainian girl with an inscription on the back of the photo "Ukrainian Dance from *Zaporozhets za Dunaem*. Veselova," taken during the first Decade of Ukrainian Art and Literature in Moscow in 1936. The most recent 1954 picture of her, in a Russian Costume, possibly from the *Nutcracker's* "Russian Dance," had an inscription on the back: "To my beloved dear 'retiree' from the upcoming 'retiree.' Elena Khalatova."<sup>119</sup>

### **Soviet and Russian Imperialism and its Unpredictability**

Even though Veselova was never mentioned in the interviews with Kyiv Ballet School's teachers, her file serves as an archival connection with the teachers' narratives

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<sup>119</sup> Veselova has changed her maiden name to her husband's last name and switched to Elena Khalatova at some point. However, 1951 documents still feature the ballerina as Veselova. There was an additional inscription with a different pen, saying Gorskomy [To Gorskii], which possibly meant that Veselova gave the picture to her father-in-law, famous actor Mikhail Gorskii. There was an additional inscription with a different pen, saying Gorskomy [To Gorskii], which possibly meant that Veselova gave the picture to her father-in-law, famous actor Mikhail Gorskii.

about All-Union meetings and festivals, including *Decade(s) of Ukrainian Art and Literature* in Moscow. Considering Veselova's passes to multiple events and various theatres of Moscow and St. Petersburg, it seemed like these decades worked in a way to not only familiarize Ukrainian artists with the central theatrical and ballet spaces of Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also to emotionally attach artists to those. The effect Alexander mentioned in the interview, when, in 1969, as a 10-year-old boy, he traveled to represent the Ukrainian Republic at the State Kremlin Palace and reside in the prestigious "Russia" hotel, could correspond with the experience Veselova had, travelling through all the central theatres of Moscow and St. Petersburg and performing in them to the Soviet audiences. I would assume that to organize a train from Kyiv to Moscow in the centralized Soviet economy and to book a Moscow hotel for a week was not that expensive to the Soviet authorities, given that the decade was organized once in fifteen years. However, the effect it could have on the invited or selected artists and their subsequent stories about such trips could be profound.

In *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941*, Michael David-Fox examines the Soviet authorities' reception of scientists and artists, coming to visit the Soviet Union from Western Europe and the United States. The author looks at the phenomena of the subsequently generated texts, glorifying the early Soviet Union, that were inspired by the performance of constructed prosperity and equality in the hidden economic crisis, hunger, genocide and discrimination. To consider these successful efforts in constructing the ideal image of the Soviet Union, the organization of the *Decade of Ukrainian Literature and Art* could be

like a small banquet to the skilled Moscow apparatus. I still sometimes feel as if contemporary Post-Soviet scholars are following in the steps of their predecessors, while elevating the USSR as a progressive state and disavowing the significance of repressions. Thinking back to Veselova, despite her outstanding career, multiple state awards and the marker of the People's Artist of Ukrainian Republic, the artist did not get the place of a tutor with The National Opera of Ukraine that leading ballerinas usually secure for themselves. Veselova did not get the less prestigious, but respected position of a teacher in Kyiv State Ballet School either. Her official work history book, which I was not allowed to copy, traces disappearance with a 9-year gap between 1954 and 1963, when she was hired for a year as a teacher in the public pre-school. What stood out even more in her personnel file were the hand-written letters from the director of the Porkhov Museum of the Local Lore of Russian city of Porkhov. In these letters, Veselova was politely but insistently asked to send her husband's belongings over to the museum, as the museum was in the process of organizing a permanent exhibition for Porkhov-native Khalatov.

Independently from the experienced Soviet nostalgia for the good times of connection between various dance communities and the past feelings of inclusion, Kyiv State Ballet School has a few teachers who feel differently. Nathan comments on his own introduction to Soviet ballet:

I: So, how did your dance career start?

N: Well, I was born to a ballet family. I was born in the Kyoto city, Kyoto and Kyiv were considered cities-brothers, right? ... My parents have danced there, in

1972 they have opened their ballet school, Terrada School, and since 1973 they started to socialize with artists from the Bolshoi Ballet Theatre, Mariinsky Theatre, National Opera, and in 1976 Kyiv State Ballet School and Terrada School became schools-brothers. In 1986 there was a visit from Gorbachev to Kyiv, and they have decided to send a boy to the Soviet Union, so that our countries [Japan and USSR] have become closer to each other. And I was chosen as this first Japanese boy to go study in the Soviet Union. I was the first and the last one, because in 1991 there was no Soviet Union.

These very words that came out of Nathan's lips were shocking to me. While I briefly knew about his history, I did not anticipate talking about his move right away. I feel that just this statement by itself encapsulates to what extent Soviet ballet was a part of the ideology, propelled by the Soviet leaders, and to what extent the human body mattered for ballet as a means of ideology. Taking a small young body of a Japanese boy and making a Soviet one out of it would signify the main idea of the Soviet Union – that communism and socialism had to happen around the world as the only righteous path to the societal strive for happiness. Giving myself a break from hearing a part of Nathan's story, I started to ask about the repertoire in the Japanese theater, where Nathan's parents danced; however, it felt like the break was meant for myself rather than Nathan. A bit later in the interview, I came to his background:

I: Do you know who decided this trip for you? Was it your parents? Or Politicians? Or together?



N: I think, they decided together. It was parents, it was politics, you understand?

The whole country [Japan] said good-bye to me, because in 1987 it was still the USSR. Japanese people were afraid of going to the Soviet Union, Americans were afraid of it too, for everyone this was something new.

I: You remember how the whole country said good-by to you?

N: I do. Newspapers, TV.

I: Did you arrive to Kyiv by plane?

N: Yes. Tokyo-Moscow, Moscow-Kyiv.

I: Do you remember the first day you spent here, at the school or the city?

N: You know, I was 11. I did not know any language whatsoever. But there was the task to send me here, prior to that I was invited by the embassy of the Soviet Union – they would tell me that the Soviet Union has the greatest education and that is it, I believed them. In 1987 there was perestroika here, very difficult time. I somehow thought that it [my move here] was normal. I was manipulated, probably. I understand it now [that it is not normal] – I have studied as a Soviet child here. I was accepted into pioneers, I had to dress appropriately. I was told that I could not be dressed as a Japanese boy. That I have to eat and dress like the Soviet one.

I: Do you have any memories of your first weeks or months here?

N: It was very difficult. I think I was in shock. You do understand – when I came here there was no one Japanese person, no Japanese embassy. I lived in the dormitory, there were eight of us in the room.

Ballet and body-in-ballet as a site and target of Soviet imperialism are prominent in Nathan's personal story. Nathan's narrative serves as a different side of the ubiquitous Soviet state's attention to and sponsorship of ballet.

While listening to Nathan, I was fascinated how his background of a Japanese Sovietized boy intersected with tremendous efforts to help the school, to complete the needed repairs, to stage new productions, to fight for the Kyiv State Ballet School's inclusion into the National Opera of Ukraine. Being a product of imperialism, Nathan also knew exactly how it functions and that past connections with the Russian centers often played beneficially for the school. According to my interview with him, The School was scheduled to perform at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games Ceremony, however, the school's performance was cancelled as "the war [with Russia] has started a week later." While this opportunity to expose the school to the global audience was missed, according to Nathan, the connections with Russia and Russian ballet theatres are still there. According to him, the very sponsors who donate money to the school also function as sponsors for the Bolshoi Ballet and Mariinsky theatres. From my understanding, Nathan, as an entrepreneur, utilizes his various connections with Russian-language and Russian ballet artists, sponsors and administrators that he acquired during his years with The National Opera of Ukraine and the tours it allowed for.

As Molly stated in response to my question about the desired future for her students and possibilities of employment, "I promote them to the enemy theatres," meaning Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow and Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. While none of her students went to the "enemy theatres" in 2018, she had a list of students who

accepted these positions throughout her teaching career. In 2018, one of her students got a leading artist position in Kosice, the largest city in Eastern Slovakia. To me, it seemed like the question of desired employment was not formed around the concepts of “Russia” or “Ukraine,” which are in very complicated relationship in the teachers’ narratives and memory, but around the purpose of getting students into the good theatres with stable salary and good contracts. In all these efforts, brought together to make the school a better place and give the students the best training and possibilities, Kyiv State Ballet School reminded me of the current nation itself – striving for independence, yet utilizing past connections for the best outcomes.

Prior to Russia’s 2014 aggression, Ukraine remained largely integrated into the post-Soviet economic and cultural sphere, where the center of economic activity and cultural production remained in Russia, despite de-facto independence of all former Soviet Republics. Because Soviet Ukraine was heavily involved in the Soviet political, economic, and cultural systems, there is a great sense of separation and broken unity between modern Ukraine and the USSR, manifested in the notion of “Soviet nostalgia”, referred to by Yekelchik. However, as Yekelchik points out, the sense of Soviet nostalgia does not necessarily imply a sense of allegiance with modern Russia, as most people see the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation as two unrelated political entities. The School serves as a prime case study in this phenomenon: while much of its history is grounded in Soviet heritage and there is a clear sense of nostalgia for its “glory days,” there is an equally clear distinction that is drawn between institutional memory and its future as an independent institution.

## **“The Outside Forces”**

When I first came to Kyiv in April of 2018 to establish my first connections with the school, I saw a giant poster, stretched across one of the central building at Independence Square that burned during the 2014 Revolution. The poster featured a broken chain and a slogan written in English: “Freedom is Our Religion.” While it was not clear why it was there, who sponsored it, why it was in English and not in Ukrainian, in the aftermath of 2014 revolution and the contemporary context of hybrid war with Russia, the message was clear: “Freedom [from Russia] is our [Ukrainian] Religion.” When in June of 2018, Erin and Alexander used the chain metaphor but for a different message, meaning that Ukraine and Russia should be one whole [again], at least through ballet, I was deeply puzzled. Despite that confusion that I experienced as a researcher, I am thankful to the teachers for their honesty and connections they drew between dance repertoire, technique, teaching methodologies and political processes.

In the same month of June, I met with Oliver, a high-ranking US diplomat at the US Embassy in Ukraine. I wanted to personally thank him for putting me in contact with Kyiv’s contemporary dance choreographer Anton Ovchinnikov in the fall of 2017, when I did not have any contacts in Ukraine and when I was anxious about the school not responding to my initial e-mail. I felt that without Oliver introducing me to this choreographer through e-mail, I would have never meet Anton, who was in residence in the US that fall and who initially helped me to establish the first contact with the school. In our conversation that covered many topics, Oliver stated that the US Embassy in Kyiv

works particularly hard on the integration of internal migrants from Eastern Ukraine, who were moving to Kyiv and other cities of Central Ukraine away from the war. Oliver attributed the resurgence of economic activity partially to US Embassy sponsorship of small businesses, Ukrainian food chains in Kyiv and to the establishment of American service providers, like Uber and Uber Eats, and help in creating similar local companies like Ukrainian Uber clone, “Uklon”.

At the time of my conversation with Oliver, and later, I could see the impact of these integration efforts. Often times, Uber drivers shared their stories with me, and many came from Eastern Ukraine due to the destruction of their homes, loss of income, and loss of relatives. New service jobs, like Uber, provided a quick “transition” and offered a temporary job to the internal migrants. At the same time, I was a bit troubled by the cafe networks, like “Pizza Veterano,” that seemed to capitalize on the ongoing war through the names and prices of the alcohol beverages, like “Crimea.” While this network hired Ukrainian veterans, providing job opportunities, it was unclear who would be the audience of the café, as the price scale seemed to target only Kyiv’s upper class or tourists. While cafes like this one offered public visibility to the hybrid war, at the same time, they also seemed to glamorize and advertise the ongoing conflict. Despite this, many cultural actors that I have talked to also noticed economic growth in the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the start of the hybrid war in 2014. For example, Kyiv State Ballet School’s photographer Alesha stated that she witnessed an economic boom in the spread of the nation-themed or folk-inspired brands; however, she did not correlate it with war or American sponsorship.

Thinking about American investment into Kyiv's economy and the US Embassy work on integration, I wonder if teachers at the school knew about the American policy of Ukrainian nation-branding, realized through the support of particular food networks, specific clothes brands and possible sponsorship of building-size posters. And as I kept thinking about what Erin could have meant by the influence of "the outside forces," I wonder if she meant the US Embassy, located right across the school's building? After all, shaping the economy through the sponsorship and support of one type of product and not the others, nation-themed fast food chains and not local stores and cafes, might seem like an outside intervention to many, even if there are clear positive economic outcomes. In other interviews the American involvement emerged in a more direct form, rather than Erin's phrasing of "the outside forms":

Gabi: Russians have to learn a lot from Americans, Americans have to learn from Russians. But I think American people cannot even imagine how this country survives [Russia or Ukraine?] – there is an ongoing corruption, it should not be happening all the time! If you read about the revolution, it's not the Russians who made it, it was Germans, and American millionaires. Of course – not all of them. A few millionaires invested millions here, they molded their money [into Ukrainian economy], they would give it to people. You see, they could give it for education instead.

I: You think that 2014 revolution was not real?

Gabi: Of course, not

I: I am not a political analyst, but I have read [did not allow to finish]

Gabi: NO, no, with every year the things were getting worse in Ukraine and people just came out

I: Worse – in what way?

Gabi: Very small pensions, salaries, closed industrial plants. Ukraine was a prosperous country, the wealthiest republic in the USSR!

While, on the surface, this excerpt sounded somewhat chaotic and disorganized, somehow it resonated with Oliver’s statement about American policy on state investment into Ukraine, its integration and independence. Apart from mixing the terms of “Russia” and “Ukraine,” there is a clear doubt of the inspiration behind the 2014 Revolution and its “realness.” This narrative corresponds with Erin’s conspiracy theory about “the outside forces” that ripped “our Soviet Union” apart. Gabi’s statement that “You see, they [American investors] could give it [money] for education,” and Erin’s “No one pays salary to us here” come together in the critique of the school as an institution, having salary cuts and delays. For teachers as state employees, knowing that the school is officially listed as a budget item for the Ministry of Culture, both Ukrainian government and American investors make wrong choices.

During our meeting, Oliver mentioned that the Ukrainian government currently “gives money” only to the Ministry of Defense and The Ministry of Infrastructure, leaving the Ministry of Education and The Ministry of Culture virtually with no resources. In my review of the budget of Ukraine, I discovered that the Ministry of Culture’s operational budget was 6.4 billion hryvna (\$250 million) for the 2018 fiscal

year, compared to a combined budget of 207 billion hryvna (\$8.3 billion) spent in the defense category and roughly 100 billion hryvna (\$4 billion) spent on infrastructure projects.<sup>120</sup> In relative terms, the budget for the entire Ministry of Culture of Ukraine was less than a quarter of the \$1.08 billion operational budget of the University of California at Riverside for the same fiscal year.<sup>121</sup> That would explain the salary cuts and delays the public schools of Kyiv, including the Kyiv State Ballet School, but who would offer such explanation to the teachers, who might understand the macroeconomic and international political processes? While the unclear present and even more uncertain future puzzled the teachers, the clear Soviet and Imperial pasts, where their salary was paid, and theatres were built, emerged like a ballet and social utopia across most of the interviews I conducted.

## **Conclusions**

At first glance there is a clear disconnect between the observed reality of Vaganova-style ballet training and the cultural designation of the Kyiv State Ballet School as an institution tasked with promoting a distinctly Ukrainian ballet culture. As I have shown, on the surface, the School remains dedicated to self-proclaimed adherence to Soviet-era Vaganova technique. This is evident both in terms of training regimen and ballet aesthetics, but also in terms of the language of instruction, system of physical conditioning, and yearly committee examinations of dancer progress, all remnant

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<sup>120</sup> Legislative Document “On the National Budget of Ukraine for 2018”, *Rada Parliamentary Bulletin*, 3-4, 26.

<sup>121</sup> “UCR Budget Primer 2017-2018,” University of California, Riverside. Retrieved 2019-10-01



elements of Soviet-era ballet training. Furthermore, as I revealed through the course of the interviews, there is a distinct sense of nostalgia among the staff for the Soviet-era prioritization of ballet by the state as a key element of Soviet high culture. Specifically, this nostalgia related to the established system of All-Union festivals, competitions, performances and internships that allowed ballet students and teachers a greater sense of cultural, professional and social mobility. To the teachers, traveling across the geographical territories of the USSR and across the social and professional circles was the element, missed in the “now” of contemporary Ukrainian ballet.

In my work, I also revealed key characteristics that distinguish The School as an independent dancing community and set it apart from its original role as a peripheral training academy in the verticalized system of Soviet ballet. Primarily, I observed an *individualized, rather than standardized* instruction in the Vaganova technique, with different teachers emphasizing or, conversely, deprioritizing elements of training, depending on their interpretation of “Vaganova’s little book”. Secondly, there is clear evidence in both my observations of the school’s training routines, and in the oral narratives of its inhabitants, that the relationships between the School’s teachers, students, and administrators changed from a state-defined hierarchy in the Soviet era to a tightly-knit dancing community, characterized by artistic and economic cooperation between its members. Thirdly, in the near-absence of state support and state oversight, the dancing community of The School adapted to the realities of Post-Soviet Ukraine by seeking out private sponsorship and relying on collaborative economic activity to maintain its operations. Finally, while there is a sense of nostalgia for the state of ballet in

The School's Soviet past, no interviews referenced nostalgia for the political regime of the USSR or appreciation of the current neo-imperial political course charted by Russia.

Based on my observations and interpretations of oral narratives, I argue that the state of The School and its dancing community is highly emblematic of the broader political forces shaping Ukrainian society, as it transitions from nearly key Soviet Republic to an independent nation. In this transition, the mainly Russian-speaking Vaganova-style School appears to resist the acceptance of a straightforward and uncomplicated version of Ukrainian identity offered by nationalists, where language, ethnicity and traditional aesthetics a play pivotal role. However, according to Lieven:

It would be a mistake to follow radical Ukrainian nationalists in assuming that just because Russian-speaking Ukrainians or the Ukrainian “Russians” themselves speak Russian, they are ipso facto antinational or anti-Ukrainian. Intellectuals from these backgrounds say that they do not have a “weaker” Ukrainian feeling than the Galicians [Ethnic Ukrainians from Western Ukraine], but a different and equally legitimate one.<sup>122</sup>

I extend Lieven's argument to Ukrainian ballet training and contend that the dancing community of The School is highly representative of an emerging inclusive Ukrainian identity, referenced by Alexander Motyl as a more stable and sustainable platform for Ukrainian nation-building. According to Motyl, the greatest challenge for the independent Ukrainian state is to “create an inclusionary Ukrainian national identity, one that permits all ethnic groups to consider themselves bona fide members of a Ukrainian

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<sup>122</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*, 2.

nation and reinforce the already existing variety of inclusionary Ukrainian nationalism, as an ideology that encourages all of Ukraine's peoples to participate in state-building."<sup>123</sup> Within this framework The School is a uniquely inclusive cultural platform, facilitating dialogue and collaboration between ballet students and educators of different ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds. I argue that in the effort to maintain and uphold its ballet traditions through collaborative efforts of its dancing community, The School echoes the defiant spirit isolated by Ukrainian nationalists as being central to Ukrainian national identity. Finally, as I will show in the next chapter of this dissertation, Ukrainian ballet's resistance to political pressures may be traced not only in its most recent history, but in its history as a Soviet cultural institution, countering a common perception that ballet was a compliant partner of the Soviet state in the realm of cultural production.

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<sup>123</sup> Alexander Motyl, *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, 74.

### Chapter 3

#### **Librettos as Ballet Archives and the Experience of the Central State Archive**

I first came to Kyiv in May of 2018 to conduct my ethnographic research and collect the oral histories of long-time teachers and instructors working at Kyiv State Ballet School (The School). It was in my analysis of these interviews that a common narrative emerged – a continuous reference to The School’s institutional connection to the National Opera. According to the teachers and staff I interviewed, ballet students were regularly dancing in the National Opera, Ukraine’s largest theater. Furthermore, many teachers whom I have interviewed graduated from The School, danced with the National Opera, and then returned to start their teaching career back at The School. Because of this, the narratives of continuous participation and working in the theater since the start of their education at the school are prominent. Phrases like, “We danced in the productions all the time,” “We practically lived in the theatre,” “The repertoire was so rich back then, there were so many different productions, and we all were involved in it [theatre’s life],” clearly indicated that there was a well-defined connection between the ballet school and Ukraine’s National Opera. Guided by Soyini Madison’s advice to follow the ethnographic “bread crumbs,” I came back to Kyiv in December of 2018 for a prolonged round of archival research to identify and analyze the artistic connections between The School, the National Opera, and Ukrainian ballet in general.

In structuring my archival research effort, I have followed the critical ethnography methods developed by Madison in her *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance*. In her work, Madison advances the research method of going back and

forth between archival study and ethnographic research efforts. In particular, according to the author, attempting to establish connections through the ethnographic research, it is productive to follow them in the archival analysis and look for more. This approach compelled me and was increasingly appropriate, given that I did not have any previous artistic or professional connections in and to Ukraine in general, and Kyiv in particular. I have started this study “from scratch,” as a complete stranger and an outsider to the archives, dance communities and ballet schools in Kyiv. In a way, the archive provided a historical context for my ethnographic study, and, more importantly, became an archival prism for watching contemporary productions of the National Opera of Ukraine.

At the onset of my archival study, I found that the task of locating primary sources, or, in fact, any materials on Ukrainian ballet is not an easy task even in close spatial proximity to the subject of my research. I began my search in the archives of The School itself. The majority of the materials I located here were Soviet-era, Russian-language monographs of ballet history in the USSR or biographies of famous Soviet artists, like Galina Ulanova, Maya Plisetskaya and many others. In short, these materials did not have much methodology or meaningful analysis in them, as they were largely meant to be read as a fairy tale of a young girl, who “made it,” or a happy history of Soviet ballet - the same in its beauty across all Soviet republics, cities, and towns. In this, Soviet ballet’s accompanying academic and historical literature furthered the role of this art form as a tool of political propaganda, framing it as a space of possibilities, creative, and professional success. These Soviet-era Russian-language texts always portrayed

ballet as non-problematic and largely focused on its public side, without any details on the process of ballet training and production prior to staging.

Fortunately, I thought I had access to a larger archive housed at the Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, through a professional connection I made with one of the University's professors earlier in 2018. I met several contemporary dance choreographers at Kyiv's *Zelyonka*, the major contemporary dance festival in Ukraine, which I was invited to attend by Anton Ovchinnikov, my initial contact in Ukraine. There, I asked a few choreographers for an interview. Alexander Manshylin was the only one who agreed, while everyone else politely declined. As Manshylin was a professor of contemporary dance at Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, we met there, in the professors' lounge for an interview. After a two-hour interview, he introduced me to the university librarians and archivists, who worked at the University's library and the book depository. The University was located at some distance from the Kyiv State Ballet School, in a different district of the city, its campus surrounded by new 30-floor apartment buildings, with multiple small businesses housed in them, forming a lively cluster, much different from the relatively isolated location of the Ballet School.

What I soon discovered was quite discouraging. Despite having more resources, the University's library collections on ballet were just as limited and rigidly defined as those of the Kyiv State Ballet School's library.<sup>124</sup> While having an equal abundance of

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<sup>124</sup> The collection of the materials, kept by the Kyiv State Ballet School's library, include: Boris Asaf'ev. *O Baletе. Stat'i. Recenzii. Vospominaniya*. [About Ballet. Articles Reviews. Memories] Ed. A.H. Dmitriev (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974); N.E. Arkina. *Balet I Literatura* [Ballet and Literature] (Moscow: Znanie [Knowledge], 1987); Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovskii. *Stat'i o Baletе* [Articles About Ballet] (Leningrad: Sovetskii Kompozitor [Soviet Composer], 1962); Lidiya Blok, *Klassicheskii Tanets: Istoriya I Sovremennost'* [Classical Dance: History and Contemporary Times] (Moscow: Iskusstvo [Art], 1987); Urii

Soviet-era monographs on Soviet and Russian ballet and a few on ballet in Ukraine, the university had just a few primary source collections.<sup>125</sup> This was particularly striking, as it revealed a clear discrepancy between the high level of public interest in ballet and a near-total lack of archival materials on Ukrainian ballet production available to University scholars. Manshylin's response to my concern was as follows: "Ania, we don't have this discipline [critical dance studies] or dance history, you need to start digging somewhere else."

After a month of working at the Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, I attempted to change my place of "digging." I contacted the major ballet critic in Kyiv, Polina Bulat, the editor of *Balletristic*, Kyiv's major dance magazine, and as the name indicates, an editorial policy tilted towards ballet.<sup>126</sup> Bulat's response to my question about ballet archives was equally striking: "Oh, Ania, you are going to the libraries?! I have never done that! This is so fascinating; I have never been to a library in Kyiv and

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Bakhrushin. *Istoriya Russkogo Baleta [The History of Russian Ballet]*. (Moscow, Enlightenment, 1977). The last text by Bakhrushin had a preamble on the title page "Recommended by the Ministry of Culture's Management of Higher Education Institution for the Art Colleges, Theatre and Choreographic Colleges and Culture-Enlightenment Colleges." I suppose that the collection partially depended on the state sponsorship and the Ministry of Culture's recommendation to use particular materials.

<sup>125</sup> During my work at the book depository, I found that the collections of the materials on Ukrainian folk dances were more developed than the ones about ballet, and these materials often draw connections between Ukrainian folk dances and Soviet ballet. As this topic of possible balleticization of folk dance and mutual influence is outside this my main research questions, I have copied these texts and left my ideas and observations for the future use.

<sup>126</sup> Kyiv's photographer Sasha Zlunitsina, who also is the Kyiv State Ballet School's and *Balletristic's* photographer, has advised me to contact Polina at some point. I have met with Polina Bulat personally to discuss my possible contributions to *Balletristic* after Polina has offered to try this in our Facebook chat. During my four-month trip, I wrote essays and reviews of the ballet performances for *Balletristic* to connect with dancing communities in Kyiv. During this time, I have realized that writing reviews for state ballet companies is a very tricky process, where one cannot be fully honest and offer direct criticism if somehow future work or possible projects depend on one's positionality and one's relationships with artists. Importantly, Polina Bulat is a point of contact and a medium for conversations for many dancers in Kyiv in dependence of their practice.

never searched for anything in the archives.”<sup>127</sup> This response offers a glimpse into the very detachment between ballet productions and the training it involves and the print culture that historically covered it.

I would soon realize that archival policies guarding original documents and primary sources do not always come together and align with public or scholarly interest in them, and the archives of Kyiv are exemplary of such misalignment. Here, the abundance of archival rules for the readers and a multi-layered guarding of the archival materials create an archival bubble that artists and audiences are discouraged to break.<sup>128</sup> It is important to consider whether part of the apparent disinterest and archival apathy lies in an attempt to resist the Soviet past, Soviet culture, and Soviet-era materials, known as propaganda-washed and heavily critiqued in the Soviet and Post-Soviet times.<sup>129</sup> During my ethnographic and archival research effort, I would hear the phrase “there are people, who still live in the past” – an indirect criticism of the Soviet mentality that often comes up in various personal conversations.<sup>130</sup> I wonder if this kind of archival apathy and rejection might relate to this idea of *not* living in Soviet past, but in the propaganda-free future.

It was at this moment of near surrender that I witnessed how the system of insider access operates. One day, Tamara, a librarian at the Kyiv National University of Culture

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<sup>127</sup> Bulat, Polina (Chief Editor and Founder, *Ballettristic* magazine). Personal conversation with Ania Nikulina. December, 22 2018.

<sup>128</sup> I further examine and elaborate on the archival bubble and closeness of the State Central Archive of Literature and Art in the next Chapter Four.

<sup>129</sup> Here, I refer to the interviews, incorporated in the recent documentary film *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom*, produced by Evgeny Afineevsky in 2015.

<sup>130</sup> Zapolska, Irina (Producer, *Teatr DAKH [Theatre DAH]*, Curator of *Gogol'fest [Gogol'fest]*, the manager of the program “Possibilities of Studying Dance in Childhood” of Art DIM [*Art House*]). Personal conversation with Ania Nikulina, December, 28 2018.



and Arts began a seemingly disinterested chat with me, which developed into a full-scale interview. She began with a chat about weather and quickly progressed to asking about my academic interests, my life in the US, my reasons for coming to Ukraine, my ethnic background and the whereabouts of my family. She included all sorts of delicate and awkward questions, like: “Whom do you like more – Russians or Ukrainians? Do you think there is a difference? How do you like Ukrainians? Do you like Kyiv? Now, do you like Moscow?” Each of these questions was complex; my responses clearly had to fit within her political framework, of which I knew very little, as in previous weeks we have not had many conversations. Yet, apparently, I passed her test, and following a moment of triumphant gazing at me, she declared, “Ok, Ania, let me introduce you to someone.” The very next day, Tamara introduced me to a history professor of the National University, Sergei Borisenko, and her introduction came with a personal request to help me to “find materials.” The day following this introduction, Borisenko took me to the Central State Archive of Literature and Art, located at St. Sophia’s Cathedral in the heart of historical Kyiv, and it was at this moment I felt I was becoming an insider.

I met with Borisenko at the Golden Gate metro section to walk with him to the Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art. This was my first introduction to this archive, located on the territory of St. Sophia Cathedral and it was one of the first warm and sunny days after a prolonged winter in Kyiv, much of which was spent under the constraints of martial law introduced by President Poroshenko in December of 2018, which provided greater authority to the Ukrainian state security services and limited civil

rights protections for Ukrainian citizens and foreign visitors<sup>131</sup>. On our short walk over from the metro station to St. Sophia, Borisenko told me about Ludmila Leonidovna, the director of the reading room – his college friend, who worked in the archive when Borisenko examined materials for his own dissertation, which focused on the history of Stalinist repressions in 1930's Ukraine. Borisenko spoke of his extensive work at this archive and the archive of Secret Service of Ukraine (SBU). Specifically, he recalled finished chapters of his dissertation that existed only on his computer, as neither the SBU nor his advisor allowed him to publish them. The reason for publication restriction was the specific time framework of his study – the period of Stalinist repressions of the late 1930s and 1940s, periods that remains very problematic for Post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine. When we approached the first entrance into St. Sophia's Cathedral, I was surprised by the overly-polite tone Borisenko used with the guards and their non-welcoming reaction to his request to let us in. This seemed so strange given that he worked there for a long time and he knew that the entrance to the Cathedral was free of charge if going to the archive.

Once we were past the security post, I noticed the much warmer welcome offered to Borisenko by Ludmila Leonidovna, the director of the reading room. The two of them reminded me of the central characters of the famous Soviet-era subversive and banned novel *Master and Margarita*, written by Mikhail Bulgakov between 1928 and 1940, and banned by the Soviet authorities until 1967. Borisenko, who was unable to publish

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<sup>131</sup> For more on the December 2018 introduction of martial law in Ukraine, see Maass, Anna-Sophie. "From Vilnius to the Kerch Strait: wide-ranging security risks of the Ukraine crisis." *European Politics and Society* (2019): 1-15.

chapters of his dissertation, reminded me of Master, a Soviet writer forbidden to write, depicted in the novel. Ludmila Leonidovna, in turn, reminded of Margarita, Master's passion in the novel. I still wonder why Borisenko told me about the unpublished and practically prohibited chapters of his work, but these conversations framed my first introduction to the archive. These initial interactions and their tone also made me realize that there are people who work *for* the archive and there are people who work *at* the archive. While the interaction between these communities constructs and justifies the archive's very existence, the relationship between the archival guardians and their academic guests is not linear or simple by any stretch of the imagination.

In my relatively short time in Ukraine, I realized that the country operates on dual insider-outsider tracks, a framework applicable to a range of visitors – from tourists, to business interest, to academic researchers. An outsider sees what is meant and designed to be seen – the beautiful architecture of the city, the cozy cafes, and the equally cozy archives of academic and public libraries of Kyiv. An insider sees what is hidden behind the façade – dilapidated Soviet-era buildings on the outskirts of Kyiv, distant metro stations not found on tourist maps, and archives that are only accessible by those who have been there already. And the insider and outsider binary in Kyiv goes beyond tourist versus non-tourist distinction. To become an archival insider, one has to go through a quasi-ethnographic study, at least a brief one, to understand where the materials are and what is at stake when accessing them. It took me at least a month to create an active network of experts to work my way to the archive, connecting from contemporary dance choreographer Anton Ovchinnikov to an academic professor of dance Alexander

Manshylin, to the book depository's archivist Tamara Vasilievna, to history professor Sergei Borisenko, and finally, to the director of the reading room Ludmila Leonidovna. Mutual interests and trust have to be at the core of these relationships. Being native to Ukraine or being from Kyiv most likely would have helped initially, though not necessarily. In the summer of 2018, I talked personally to Dr. Anastasiya Lyubas, comparative literature scholar, initially from Lviv, Ukraine, and despite her origin and a focus on Ukrainian literature, she did not include this archive in the set of libraries that she recommended to visit. Thus, an insider-outsider binary in Kyiv works slightly differently; it is not necessarily based on one's origin and background, but more so on the active professional connections, trust and mutual interests.

The Central State Archive of Literature and Art is hidden in plain sight. It is located on the territory of Kyiv's most notable cathedral, and because of this co-location, it is absent from any digital mapping service. The archive's building is situated behind the Cathedral, almost hiding in the shade of the church's high bell tower, the rich green colors of its walls and surrounding trees - the archive's building seems more like an older storage building. And, in another twist, it hosts materials that are hard to describe as being related to its official designation as an archive on art and literature – namely personnel files, official documents, and librettos of the National Opera, the very primary sources that appear missing from every other archive I have visited. Without an insider introduction to the archive, it is unlikely that anyone would be able to identify and locate these materials, though nominally, access to this archive is restricted only through a passport check-up. I further realized that an archivist's and librarian's ability and desire

to help find materials and guide a researcher through the bureaucracy of archives location highly depends on the first trip to the archives and the introduction of the researcher to the space. Namely, on my first day visiting the archive, Sergei Borisenko's introduction went as follows: "This is Ania, she is American, but she speaks Russian like one of us." I realize now that this very phrase meant "Even though she an outsider, please, treat her as an insider."<sup>132</sup> A box of chocolate candy, presented to the librarian by my introducer at the time of the introduction, further signified that helping me would not be her job, but rather a favor to him, an established insider.

Following my initial introduction, a forty-minute passport check followed. A female worker appeared without introductions; she simply took a copy of my passport and assisted me in filling out a request for a reader's card. During this filling-out procedure, Borisenko exercised his skills in conducting small talk conversations with administration apparatus embodied by the nameless female worker. As I was filling out the request-questionnaire and trying to understand how to spell my name in Ukrainian, I missed the details of the conversation, only remembering how Borisenko went from an official dialogue to unofficial one and ended up calling the administrator Anechka and asking about her family story. There was some resistance to put my name in Ukrainian in the request, as, according to the female administrator, "there is no such a name in Ukraine." I was offered "Ghanna" or "Hanna," the closest official name to mine, but I refused this kind offer. The administrator did not mind "Anechka," but "Ania" did not exist.

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<sup>132</sup> My first trip to the archive took place on February 4, 2019.

Then, there was some confusion as to why my passport name had no patronymic name; and, after I stated that I don't have one, I heard, "well, but you do have a patronymic name," meaning "we all know where you are from, so tell us your patronymic name." I simply replied, "I do not have a patronymic name, I am just Ania." I had to hold on to my American identity. Later, I was "attacked" in the same way by the archive guards, some of who demanded to leave it in the journal of visitors. For the most stubborn ones I left a made-up one. At times, there was a special request from the director of the archive to include my patronymic name when filling out the requests for taking copies of the materials, when I thought that "we" were past "that." It was fascinating to see to what extent my post-Soviet identity mattered to this institution and how deeply and profoundly post-Soviet citizens' desire to recognize another post-Soviet identity, despite Ukraine's fight for independence from Russia and the Soviet past and possible inclusion in the EU.

After all my information was scanned into an unspecified system, I received my yearly archival access pass and was shown to the nearly-empty reading room.<sup>133</sup> Borisenko went with me to introduce me to the director of the reading room. As we were approaching the reading room, I felt how his movements and words became more confident, stronger, losing notes of fear that I felt when he talked to the guard. This fear might have been related to his experience at the Secret Service archive, where he was

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<sup>133</sup> My official documents, related to the archive, went missing, once I got from Kyiv's Boryspol airport to New York City's JFK airport. Thoughtfully, I have put the copies of the archival materials, my field notes, and the transcripts of the interviews in the small bag to take with me to the airplane. But, all the documents – the requests to look at the materials and separate requests to copy them, my yearly pass, all signed by the director of the archive – were packed in my checked-in luggage; this was the last time I saw them. I am still thankful that I did not take my chances of placing the archival copies and my field notes in the checked-in luggage.

denied permission to publish his dissertation chapters or based on their archives. I could not imagine the desperation and anxiety one might feel, when barred from including their analysis even into the dissertation, and particularly so, given the state's archival bureaucratic mechanisms. When we sat together in the reading room, he told me to be very careful and not talk over the phone about my research or about any materials I would work with, as, according to him, "we all were under their oversight."<sup>134</sup> He meant that the state workers listened to the phone conversations and, perhaps, used other means of observation. At the same time, I could still feel his passion for archival research through his loud, inspired whisper when looking over original documents. The combination of fear of the archival workers, thirst for archival access, and adaptive strategies in conversation defined his personality for me.

Throughout my work at the archive, I did not reveal the topic of my dissertation and its focus on classical ballet as a contested site between nationalism and imperialism. From my ethnographic research I realized that for many in Kyiv, this argument is outside of the accepted framework of ballet and dance in general. When I talked to Ludmila Leonidovna, I simply stated that I study the history of ballet and I wanted to see what kind of materials exist at the archive. I asked to look through the archive's metadata catalogs. She gave me National' Opera of Ukraine's *opisi* – hand-written books that had information on the kept documents. Borisenko sat next to me to look through them; he was quite inspired. Loudly whispering, he claimed that I could write thousands of dissertations based on these archival materials. I felt uncomfortable; the uncertainty about

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<sup>134</sup> Borisenko, Sergei. Personal conversation with Ania Nikulina. February, 4 2019.

what I was trying to find there and the uncertainty of how I could examine this vast variety of bureaucratic texts, pertaining to the history of ballet in Ukraine, tortured me. Borisenko's loud whisper about the vast possibilities of archival work did not help.

Each file at the archive contained a sheet of everyone who has ever checked out these materials, listing names and dates. Throughout my time at the archive, I rarely noticed any other names, dates or signatures, except for my own, and the majority of files I looked at had clean access sheets. For any ballet historian, clean archival access sheets signify that the located materials constitute archival treasure. But locating these files was also just the first step. As I will discuss in the next chapter, there are specific requirements of working with the archives that further restrict their use. On one hand, these archival particularities told a story of a document's life; a reader could look into a history of a document's audience. On the other hand, these sheets could be used as a method of control and supervision, or for creating an illusion of such control. After all, Borisenko's fear of control over his publications, my passport check, performative doubts about the realness of my name and my intentions, come together. I experienced the archive as an institution of the multi-layered control and supervision that affect one's perception of the materials and, ultimately, the interpretation and writing process.<sup>135</sup>

While looking through the *opisi* documents I saw that the archive holds a collection of Soviet-era librettos. Within the sea of meeting protocols and volumes of correspondence between the Soviet Ministry of Culture, The Ministry of Culture of Ukrainian Republic, and National Opera of Ukraine, touring plans, anniversaries'

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<sup>135</sup> I investigate the archival control in Chapter Four through the examination of the Soviet-era personnel files.



procedures, librettos seemed like a relief. There were two types of ballet librettos listed, those initially created in Imperial Russia and Soviet-era librettos of nation-themed ballets written for the National Opera.<sup>136</sup> While I knew about them from the few secondary sources materials, the available libretto of *Lileya* stood out for me, as it was specifically mentioned in the interviews I took, and this was the one national ballet teachers advised me to see.

From my past interactions with the ballet communities of Kyiv, I knew that *Lileya* is framed as *the* national ballet of Ukraine. Performed only once a year, on March 9<sup>th</sup>, the annual staging of *Lileya* is meant to commemorate the birthday of Taras Shevchenko, a Ukrainian poet and writer, widely considered the father figure of Ukraine as a nation. In this commemorative performance, the National Opera, which is actually short for The Taras Shevchenko National Opera and Ballet Theatre of Ukraine, recognizes *Lileya* ballet as the major balletic symbol of Ukraine and yet, oddly, restricts public access to it by staging the ballet only once a year. This dichotomy troubled me throughout my research, as all the Imperial-era ballets, including *Swan Lake*, were staged nearly every month, in different productions.<sup>137</sup> Given that choreographers and dancers have the power of modifying choreography, technique, costumes, decorations and embedded messages, I would argue that this is precisely why National Opera of Ukraine or the Ministry of Culture, sponsoring it, restricts the access to it. After all, access to this production, as to an only-once-a-year performance, is restricted not only to audience members, but in a

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<sup>136</sup> In the Soviet-era documents, the National Opera of Ukraine is different name – Kyiv’s Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Honor of T.G. Shevchenko

<sup>137</sup> In fact, *Swan Lake* is the only ballet of the National Opera staged in the off-season, in the middle of July, while all other performances are on pause.

way to the makers of it. While most likely, the records of *Lileya* are stored in National Opera of Ukraine, it is the upcoming performance and scheduled rehearsals that open an opportunity for changes and shifts.<sup>138</sup> As I discovered during my research, *Lileya* has lost the edge of the political critique, embedded in its initial libretto, but it is still visible if one reads the libretto text. Given that the Ukrainian state has to be mindful of how it positions itself in relationship to Russia, perhaps the Ministry of Culture is cautious in following the original libretto? Perhaps maintaining a delicate balance between continuing to show this ballet and hinting towards Russian imperialism, rather than openly criticizing it, is precisely what that the National Opera of Ukraine is trying to do.

As I would soon discover, the *Lileya* libretto offers a point of connection between the old Soviet and new Post-Soviet repertoire, and between the location of an idea of nation in a local female body in different times. In this chapter, I will offer a reading of the *Lileya* libretto and demonstrate that it contains narratives of national suffering and resistance that openly and metaphorically highlight Ukraine and its communities as targets of imperial aggression. I will proceed to trace these narratives in other nation-themed librettos and show that together, they have come to shape both the ballet archive and repertoire.

### **Theorizing Librettos and their Significance in the Soviet Context**

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<sup>138</sup> Throughout all the performances I have attended in the spring and summer months of 2018 and winter and spring months of 2019, there was always an operator, recording live ballet performances. Thus, it would be safe to assume that these and many other recordings should be stored somewhere. According to Kyiv's photographer Sasha Zlunitsyna, it is very hard to get official permission to take pictures and videos of the National Opera of Ukraine's performances. However, excerpts of video recordings of *Lileya* (legal or not) can be found on *YouTube*.

Ballet performances (like any other) are commonly theorized as ephemeral – disappearing in the moment they are (re)created on stage, not to be repeated or captured in the archive.<sup>139</sup> Within this framework of disappearance and ephemerality, ballet librettos serve as unique documents that attempt to at least partially capture the possible future scenario, choreography, technique and acting on stage. A ballet libretto is a concept of a ballet that often precedes the physicality of its dancing bodies and the materiality of its staging, costumes, choreography and many other elements. First appearing as literary companions to ballet productions of 19<sup>th</sup> century France, librettos were written as short narratives meant to capture the central plot of the ballet, provide choreographic guidance to artists, and a roadmap for audiences.<sup>140</sup> Once created, librettos served in subsequent re-stagings of ballets, allowing for continuity of the ballet archive and repertoire. Russian Imperial ballet adapted the French libretto tradition and functioned as an initial concept or a motive for any ballet production. According to ballet historian Olga Kolpetskaya, “the text of libretto is a kind of starting point, which stimulates imagination of the composers and the choreographer.”<sup>141</sup> In Soviet and post-Soviet ballet productions, librettos play an important role as connective tissue between the archive and repertoire, and between different epochs or regimes.<sup>142</sup> As I will show in

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<sup>139</sup> Here, the idea of ephemerality is a source of inspiration and has no direct function in this chapter. For a greater discussion of performance disappearance and ephemerality, see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* and Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*.

<sup>140</sup> For more information see Marian Elizabeth Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>141</sup> Olga Kolpetskaya, “Ballet Poem ‘Angara the Beauty’ by L. Knipper and B. Iampilov,” *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences*, 1 (2014 7) 94-102.

<sup>142</sup> Some Soviet ballet historians theorize that ballet was a method for Soviet generations to reflect on the Imperial past and Soviet present and future. For example, in her 2015 lecture at UC Riverside Lee Singh theorized that the very arabesque line and its construction symbolized a collective memory of the Imperial

this chapter, librettos also became a contested space, where ballet could be structured to reflect or erase ideas of national identity, challenge or promote imperial narratives, and connect or disconnect ballet from the sphere of politics.

Due to their unique power to both structure ballet repertoire and archive ballet productions, librettos are of particular significance in attempting to understand Soviet and post-Soviet ballet in Ukraine and their use as both a tool of imperial propaganda and national resistance. The primary way of using librettos to control ballet was their strict structuring in form and content, as defined by the Soviet Ministry of Culture. In *Swans of the Kremlin*, Christina Ezrahi states that ballets were divided into “classical” or “modern,” with librettos either tied to classical works of Russian and world literature, or to literary products of Soviet socialist-realism.<sup>143</sup> According to Ezrahi,

By providing a basis for librettos, classical literature was supposed to replace ballet’s “frivolity” with high-minded seriousness. Literary works by writers such as Pushkin, Gogol, and Shakespeare and contemporary propaganda topics - especially plots glorifying the freedom struggle of Soviet nationalities – became the libretto source of choice. Ballets on different nationalities in the Soviet Union provided a plausible excuse for using folk dance as inspiration and fulfilled the requirement of *narodnost’*, contributing to the government’s propaganda goal of creating an image of brotherhood between the different nationalities<sup>144</sup>

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past, through a working leg stretching to the back, and hopes for the future in the Soviet epoch, through a working arm, stretched forward.

<sup>143</sup> For a detailed discussion of these Soviet ballet terms, see Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*.

<sup>144</sup> For a greater discussion of the political use of *narodnost’* and *natsional’nost’* categories, see Francine Hirsch, *The Empire of Nations*, also discussed in this dissertation’s “Chapter Four.” Ezrahi, *Swans of the*

Thus, the libretto in the Soviet context had a few specific goals: it connected the archive (Imperial or Soviet literature) with repertoire (dance or ballet), and also it connected various communities and nationalities in libretto-texts and on ballet stages. The libretto became a method to present and rationalize Soviet policies on nationalities, famously conceptualized as a brotherhood of nation, and to control ballet or at the very least its official messages at the initial stages of production.

Ballet historians Christina Ezrahi and Janice Ross both partially locate ballet's censorship in librettos and examine the starting point of this censorship – a 1929 libretto competition. Ezrahi reproduced a competition announcement in the journal *Zhizn' Iskusstva [The Life of Art]*, which clarifies and mystifies the libretto meaning in the early Soviet Union:

The libretto of contemporary ballet is not just an accidental frame for the display of dance that lacks inner cohesion and does not issue from the basic activity – but the libretto is a choreographic drama, obligated to satisfy all the demands laid upon Soviet dramaturgy in general... To write a really contemporary scenario for ballet is to take a first step along the way in the path of creating a Soviet choreographic theatre.<sup>145</sup>

While Ezrahi examines the abstract part of the announcement that refers to the notions of Soviet dramaturgy and Soviet choreographic theatre, Ross analyzes its eight specific

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*Kremlin*, 63. Here, Ezrahi refers not only to the Soviet ballet's censorship, but also to the long-time critique of ballet as a part of Russian Imperial court's culture. To exemplify this critique, the author cites prominent Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, jokingly playing with the words "sylphides" and "syphilis" in his texts, stating that the first term derives from the second and mocking the performed female fragility and weakness as a result and a symptom of a syphilis disease.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Ezrahi, 45.

points or criteria, originally published in the Ministry of Culture's *Zhizn' Isskustva* journal, for a successful libretto that in a way clarified terms of Soviet dramaturgy and choreographic theatre as Soviet ballet's necessary elements:

A libretto presented to the contest must satisfy the following requirements:

- 1) Revolutionary theme. ...
- 2) Themes must be developed on the level of a concrete perception of reality, and not by constructing abstract dance forms loaded with symbolic or allegorical meanings
- 3) It is desirable to build a spectacle on mass movements. ...
- 4) It is necessary that intrigue in the scenario be sufficiently uncomplicated for it to be understood as a whole from pantomime. ...
- 5) It is necessary that the librettists take into account the achievements of contemporary theatrical technique. ...
- 6) Not presenting any kind of categorical demands concerning genre of scenario, The State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet points to the possibilities of use of the following genres: contemporary reviews (Soviet revue, lyric-heroic poems, choreographic comedies and satires, contemporary fairy-plays).
- 7) It is desirable that the scenario of the ballet gives the ballet master material for pantomime..., but also new forms of dance: acrobatics, physical culture and others – and new pantomime gestures

- 8) The scenario of ballet must be calculated as a whole evening performance  
(two or three hours of pure activity) <sup>146</sup>

What seems remarkable when looking at these eight rules is the seemingly all-inclusive framework of everything-goes-in: pantomime, physical culture, gestures, mass movement, Soviet revue, lyric-heroic poems, choreographic comedies and satires, contemporary fairy-plays. These drastically different genres and bodily practices coming from very different spheres of theatre, dance, physical culture, and Imperial ballet were all welcome in the libretto competition. At the same time, to me as a dance scholar, it looked like these rules include a variety of contradictions that I examine below.

Looking at Ezrahi's and Ross's reproductions of 1929 *Zhizn' Iskusstva's* announcement of libretto competition, I find that Soviet librettos were contested and fluctuating documents. Importantly, it is apparent from reading the rules of the libretto competition that they were mutually exclusive and, hence, depended heavily on a reader's interpretation. For example, the rules state that modern Soviet librettos were not to include "abstract dance forms loaded with symbolic and allegorical meanings," but were to consist of "pantomime gestures," even though any kind of gestures are allegorical or symbolical by definition. Ross makes the point that the stipulation that there was contradiction in the very demand for new through coming back to old. To Ross, "the whole evening performance (two or three hours of pure activity)" signified the return of the Imperial framework of long ballets and exclusion of short works, etude, and ballet

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<sup>146</sup> Ross, 107.

miniatures.<sup>147</sup> Mutually exclusive requirements, using both specific and abstract terms, signified a change in ballet and libretto choice, its alliance with Soviet politics and propaganda, and a linking of the Soviet and Imperial repertoire.

One way to address a disconnect between classical and new ballet productions in the USSR was an attempt to rewrite folk tales into librettos that would fall into the socialist-realist ideological framework. One such attempt is detailed by Simon Morrison in his 2016 work *Bolshoi Confidential: Secrets of the Russian Ballet from the Rule of the Tsars to Today*. Morrison describes a failed attempt by Ukrainian-born composer Sergei Prokoviev to write a libretto based on a folk story *The Tale of the Stone Flower*, originally recorded in the Ural Mountains region of Russia and subsequently made into the first Soviet color film in 1947.<sup>148</sup> According to Morrison, the attempt to transfer the otherwise popular folktale to the ballet stage failed three times due to the much stricter ideological requirements imposed on ballet, even compared to the film screen:

Ideologues imposed changes on the plot, the music, and the choreography, with the aim of pulling the ballet into the ideological center of socialist realism. Forget the hero's love of his bride and fear of the bailiff who would snatch her away: the ballet needed to refer to Marx and Lenin and communism too.<sup>149</sup>

As is evident from this short description, even in the case of *The Tale of the Stone Flower*, where the tale focused on the seemingly “politically appropriate” love triangle

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<sup>147</sup> Ross, 107.

<sup>148</sup> For more information, see Simon Morrison, *Bolshoi Confidential: Secrets of the Russian Ballet from the Rule of the Tsars to Today* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016)

<sup>149</sup> Morrison, *Bolshoi Confidential*, 157



between a girl, a stone quarry worker, and the bailiff, the ideological barriers set up by the Ministry of Culture were at times impossible to overcome, even for someone with an international reputation like Sergei Prokofiev<sup>150</sup>.

In the context of tight artistic and ideological control, the case study of the staging of *Lileya* in National Opera of Ukraine (or, rather, in its Soviet predecessor) is of particular significance, as it subverted the seemingly prohibitive rules set up by the Ministry of Culture. The guiding principle of any “national ballet” production was that it had to be “national in form and socialist in content.”<sup>151</sup> The enforcement of this principle is evident in the staging of other nation-themed ballets, where the central storyline was adapted to reflect “socialist reality”: the negative character became a local representative of the capitalist class and the commissar became the hero. For example, Ezrahi describes the libretto of *Partisan Days*, the ballet, exploring Cossack (predominantly Ukrainian) communities, which premiered in Kirov in 1937:

Based on pantomime and character dances and set in the area surrounding a

Cossack village shaken by the struggle among Cossacks, partisans, and White

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<sup>150</sup> The very fact that Prokofiev attempted to submit the libretto three times and every time received a rejection exemplifies the high level of censorship that was applied to ballet production and underscores ballet’s importance as a tool of Soviet propaganda. In *Swans of the Kremlin*, Christina Ezrahi traces a similar process of continuous libretto edition, re-submission and rejection, experienced by the Soviet Jewish ballet choreographer Leonid Yakobson. Sergei Prokofiev’s name has a symbolic meaning in Ukraine. Born in 1891 in the Donetsk region of Eastern Ukraine and widely recognized among the greatest 20th century classical composers, many Ukrainians see his life and work as exemplary of Russian imperial and Soviet policies of assimilation through promotion. Though born in Eastern Ukraine, Prokofiev was educated in St. Petersburg spent his career in Russia, composing multiple works that have become synonymous with “Russian” classical music and ballet, including “War and Peace”, “Peter and the Wolf” and “Cinderella”. In 2011, in honor of his heritage, Prokofiev’s name was given to the Donetsk International Airport, which later was the site of the bloodiest and longest battle between the Ukrainian armed forces and the pro-Russian separatists forces, widely believed to be backed by Russian regular forces.

<sup>151</sup> Oksana Palamarchuk and Vasyl Pylypiuk, *The Lviv Opera House*, (Lviv: Light and Shadow, 2000), 108.

Guards during the civil war period, the ballet revolved around the love triangle between a Cossack girl, her evil, rich Cossack fiancé, a noble Bolshevik partisan. Probably fearful of repeating the mistake of *The Bright Stream*, Vainoven [the libretto's author] traveled to the North Caucasus to study folk dances on location, reproducing the original dances for the stage.<sup>152</sup>

Here, Ezrahi provides an example of the nation-themed librettos that were favored by the Soviet central authorities, as they tapped into the idea of the Soviet Union as a utopian gathering place for nationalities and communities. Additionally, this example provides insight into how national communities were positioned relative to early Soviet power and its loyal supporters. Somehow, the Cossack's girl's local fiancé was "evil" and "rich," while the foreign Bolshevik partisan was the designated as the noble force of good in this love triangle. It is fascinating how clear the distinction was in this ballet, positioning the Bolshevik partisan on one end of the morality spectrum and the local Cossack fiancé on the opposing one.

Another detail Ezrahi briefly notes is that the author Vainoven travelled to the North Caucasus to bring local practices to the Soviet ballet center of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and present them through the Kirov's production as original ones. In the ballet librettos, Cossack community values of direct democracy, self-governance and semi-military way of life were associated with evilness and richness, exemplified through the local fiancé character. Thus, while Vainoven's travelling to Russia's region of North Caucasus was a way to nominally respect local dance practices and bring them

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<sup>152</sup> Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 63-64.

under the ballet umbrella of famous Soviet Kirov Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the libretto framed local communities and their way of life as inherently backward and oppositional to the Soviet state.

The librettos I have encountered at the Central State Archive of Art and Literature contain an opposing narrative to the central plot defining the centrally promoted *Partisan Days*. In Soviet-era librettos of Ukrainian national ballet, it was the foreign power, Russian, Polish or Turkish, that was framed as being rich, powerful, and determined to destroy local communities through destruction of the local way of life, represented by the union of the local female and male characters. Remarkably, all Ukrainian nation-themed librettos of the Soviet era subvert the state-approved narrative of class struggle, replacing it with national struggle, with *Lileya* being the most elaborate and descriptive.

Specifically, *Lileya*'s plot centers on a foreign prince as the negative character, thus positioning Ukraine as a victim of foreign interventions. Secondly, the prince's power is enforced with brutal violence, specifically targeting the destruction of traditional Ukrainian village life, attributing violence to an outside power. Finally, the libretto presents traditional Ukrainian life in a positive, rather than in a negative light, in an apparent contradiction to the norms of Soviet historical narratives, where the "Old Regime" is always presented as a time of suffering of the working and peasant class. Thus, librettos as literary works were addressed to the state authorities to be published and read and only then to the spectators to be seen. Having a double audience of the state and the public, they were of particular significance and, as I will show, functioned as a platform for both conformity and resistance.

### ***Lileya* as a primary national ballet**

Throughout my months in Kyiv, I attended each ballet performance at the National Opera at least once, and I was fascinated with the ways contemporary ballet choreography inscribed humor and sarcasm into national-themed ballets, like *Vechera na Hutore bliz Dikan'ki* [*Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*] and *V Pogone za Dvumya Zaicami* [*In Pursuit of Two Hares*].<sup>153</sup> These Post-Soviet ballets, both situated in a small village, barely touch upon the topic of imperialism, use humor to invert social, political and gender roles and describe the Ukrainian nation as a cheerful, creative, happy and spontaneous. However, as I will show, librettos of the first national ballets that I have located in the Central State Archive of Literature and Art are very different from the cheerful presentation of balleticized Ukrainian folk culture. In particular, one of the first national ballets, *Lileya*, stands out as a dark, mournful outsider among the otherwise cheerful national repertoire of the 2018-2019 ballet season, focusing on the destruction and demise of Ukrainian national identity at the hands of a Russian warlord.<sup>154</sup> In the pages that follow I will present a close reading of the *Lileya* libretto and its significance to the national repertoire. I argue that this Soviet-era libretto offers a nearly direct

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<sup>153</sup> Through the winter and spring months of 2018-2019 season, I went to see 17 ballet performances. I attended the December 2018 version of *The Nutcracker*, January performances of *Le Corsaire*, *Viennese Waltz*, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikan'ka*, *Master and Margarita*, *Spartacus*, *Tanets Yak Dolya* [...], *The Snow Queen*, *The Carmen-Suite*, *Chasing After Two Hares*, *La Dame Aux Camelias*, February performances of *Giselle*, *The Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Raymonda* and *Coppelia*. Seeing *Coppelia* was very special for me as it was performed by the Kyiv State Ballet School students and originally choreographed by the prominent choreographer Vladimir Malakhov in 2017. On March, 9 I went to see *Lileya*.

<sup>154</sup> According to Kyiv-based Post-Soviet dance critics, Maryana Oliynk and Larisa Tarasenko, ballet *Lileya* premiered in March, 1940. Two other nation-themed ballets *Chasing Two Hares* and *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikan'ka* contain the narratives of Russian Imperialism, but both works realize them through humor, sarcasm and the overall positive cheerful mood.

critique of Imperial practices, referring to both Imperial and Soviet subjugation of Ukraine. Based on a pre-Soviet poem, the libretto guides the reader through the history of Ukrainian society, ruled and influenced by external powers, and offers an indirect critique of the Soviet policies of land re-possession that mimicked and repeated in many ways Imperial policies in the Pre-Soviet era.

Just like *The Archive* itself, I found *Lileya* hidden in plain sight - in a folder marked 1955. While the document itself had no date of publication, *Lileya*'s yellow, semi-transparent paper looked much older than other librettos of the 1950s. It was also different in length, extending to twenty-eight pages, longer than any other librettos in the collection, which ranged from four to eight pages in length. The *Lileya* libretto further stood out in its significantly more detailed and prolonged narrative, and the physicality of its 28 particular pages, having no fixed date, possibly deliberately “misplaced” into a 1955 folder. However, this archival messiness – deliberate or not – taps into the historical significance of this narrative. Vsevolod Tchagovets's libretto, based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Taras Shevchenko's poems, was a tale of conquest of Ukrainian lands and subjugation of communities, and families, which was significant in the Soviet period, and still responds to the Post-Soviet political events of Russian neo-imperialism. Given that *Lileya*, even though re-staged, is still in the National Opera's repertoire, it is particularly productive to take a closer look at the libretto that might or might not be the original one, written for the 1939 production.

According to ballet historian Christina Ezrahi, there were two types of Soviet-era ballets – reworked imperial classics and new ballets inscribed with Soviet ideology.

Reconstructions or adaptations of Imperial-era ballets were meant to formulate a cultural connection between the Soviet State and the Russian Empire. Soviet-propaganda ballets, in turn, were meant to showcase the new Soviet aesthetics, both in technique and in themes, with a special focus on Soviet labor and war heroism. Within this binary framework of ballet as a force of Imperial past and ballet as a force of Soviet future, Ukrainian “national” ballets stand out on their own with an apparent focus on rural nostalgia. However, these ballets are not just a celebration of rural aesthetics, and as I will show, a second common theme that runs across Ukrainian ballets is the forced conquest of the land by an outside force. Both of these themes were highly problematic in the context of Soviet Ukraine, as they indirectly referenced both the destruction of Ukrainian village by Soviet policies of collectivization and the annexation of Ukrainian territories by external powers, including, by extension, Soviet Russia.

*Lileya* was the first major nation-themed ballet, written by Vsevolod Tchagovets in 1940, in the aftermath of the terror-hunger campaign that ravaged the Ukrainian countryside. The work was initially scheduled to be premiered to mark the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko’s birth, who is popularly considered to be the central figure of Ukrainian national movement.<sup>155</sup> The storyline of the ballet is based on Shevchenko’s poems, “Lileya” and “Marina,” which were written in 1846; in these poems Shevchenko detailed the fate of Ukrainian women taken by force from their homes by an invading army. The poems provide a graphic view of national suffering

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<sup>155</sup> The premiere of *Lileya* was scheduled for March, 9, 1939 to mark and celebrate Taras Shevchenko’s birthday of March, 9 1814. It is hard to underestimate the central position of Taras Shevchenko in the national culture of Ukraine. In essence he holds the absolute central place in the popular perception of Ukrainian national identity, similar to George Washington, or Abraham Lincoln in the United States. The central street of Kyiv, The National University, two museums and the National Opera all bear his name.

through the destruction of Ukrainian village and nature, brought on by an external power. Despite the fact that in Shevchenko's poems this external force was carefully veiled in terms of national origin, the poems' political context was clearly read into by the Imperial administration in St. Petersburg and in 1847 Shevchenko was drafted into the Russian army and exiled to a distant Russian army outpost in the Ural Mountains, with a strict ban on any subsequent writing, or even painting.

Tchagovets' *Lileya* libretto, while inspired by Shevchenko's poems, contains critical divergences in terms of its storyline. The three-act libretto is streamlined, graphic and considerably more violent than Shevchenko's poems. The twenty-eight-page text traces the story of a Ukrainian young rural couple, Lileya and Stepan, their separation by an imperial power, Stepan's brutal mutilation at the hands of his captors, and Lileya's subsequent death in captivity. While clearly taking inspiration from Shevchenko's poetry, the libretto diverges from them in specific ways – presenting a contrasting vision of prosperous Ukrainian countryside subsequently destroyed by the external military in the first act, specifying this force as Russian in the second act, and, finally, inserting a scene of popular revolt against the imperial power in the final act of the ballet. In the next sections of this chapter, I will provide excerpts from the libretto, using the text as evidence of these specific themes, which underscore the powerful political messages embedded in the libretto. I show that it was precisely these embedded messages of national identity threatened by imperial ambitions and a call for resistance, threaded into the *Lileya* libretto, that define this ballet as the core national ballet of Ukraine.

## ***Lileya* Act 1: Ukrainian village and Ukrainian Women as Defining National Symbols**

Tchagovets begins the libretto with a presentation of romanticized vision of Ukrainian village life, clearly meant to define what the author sees both as a national and an aesthetic ideal:

*It is the "Night of Ivan Kupala " [Summer Solstice Festival] on the outskirts of the village. On the right and on the left of the stage are the houses, drowning in green gardens. There are lights in all of the windows. In the center is a green pasture extending to the river, which sparkles in the back of the stage. Bonfires are burning, the moon is shining. Following a musical overture, the curtains open – a village celebration is in full swing. Girls wearing wreaths and dressed in festive clothes are playing games. From the hill, brave and strong young men enter the village to join the celebration - they jump over fires and play with the girls.<sup>156</sup>*

*.... Like spring streams, murmuring and falling in cascades, both groups merge in merry, a curly dance in which there is a barely perceptible attraction between Stepan and Lileya.<sup>157</sup>*

Apart from the overall romanticizing of rural life, there are a number of specific metaphors embedded in the opening scene of the first act of *Lileya*, namely those of a young local woman as a blooming flower, of dancing groups as ancient streams, and prosperous, happy life, symbolized by the houses, “drowning in flowers,” lights in the

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<sup>156</sup> Vsevolod Tchagovets, *Lileya*, libretto, 1939, Central State Archive of Literature and Art, Kyiv, Ukraine, p 4.

<sup>157</sup> Vsevolod Tchagovets, *Lileya*, libretto, 1939, Central State Archive of Literature and Art, Kyiv, Ukraine, p 5.



windows, sparkling river, and genuine and spontaneous love. Yet, it is not just the prosperity of the land that makes the village life “happy” – it is the local population that continues ancient rituals and holiday traditions.

The visual aesthetic of the first scene of the first act is meant to transfer a particular construct of an idealized Ukrainian village – mutual trust, kindness, cross-generational support, naïveté and sincerity – and situates these feelings in the context of Ukrainian village. Here, the connection between the young men and women thrives; while there is a lack of description of dance, there is a highlighted character of organic relationships. In dance, generations come together. First, younger dancers lead holiday games and rituals, and their gendered groups come together as “ancient streams, murmuring and falling in cascades.” Then, older relatives join them by playing historically Ukrainian musical instrument of *bandura*<sup>158</sup> and starting their dignified dance, then the youth joins elderly and dances to *bandura*, then more elderly join the group. Finally, after the parents’ blessing, Lileya blooms in her dance-tribute to love, “full of elegance and spring beauty.” In a way, this overall description of Lileya’s dance as a folk dance, inherently beautiful and elegant, resonates with Ross’s and Ezrahi’s examination of the libretto competition, mentioned above. More specifically, Tchagovets’s description responds to the necessity for the inclusion of folk dances in ballets on various nationalities to fulfill the box for diversity and acceptance of various communities into the over-arching umbrella of Soviet nationality and identity, explored by the state ballets. At the same time, the libretto resonates with Anthony Shay’s study of

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<sup>158</sup> A *bandura* is a large string instrument popularly perceived as an inherently Ukrainian musical instrument and has been associated with the poetry and songs of Taras Shevchenko.

folk dance and observed connection between various folkdance ensembles. According to Shay, glorification of rurality in folk dance is cross-cultural, and often acts to erase ethnic, cultural or racial difference, existing within a given nation.

In the context of Ukraine in the late 1930's, the very focus of librettos is allegorical in itself, given the period of collectivization and dekulakization in the 1920s, years of Holodomor in 1932-1933, and waves of industrialization that largely erased the traditional rural way of life in Ukraine. In a way, this very focus on the prosperity of Ukrainian village life, in reality subverted or destroyed by an outside authority, could have been a motive of resistance to the Soviet policies towards the formed Ukrainian republic. This connection of Ukraine to its land, traceable in all the other Ukrainian ballets, which all present the local girl as a flower, a symbol of Ukrainian land and the core of Ukrainian society. This society, in turn, is presented as prosperous and joyous, prior to forceful conquest by a foreign power.

As the second act progresses to Lileya's and Stepan's wedding, the ballet libretto, utilizing the happiness of folk dance, offers a daring and inherently resistive glimpse into the Pre-Imperial and Pre-Soviet past of the village that was largely destroyed by waves of violent repressions and purges by the time this libretto was written. In this, the timing and the relationship between what's happening on the ballet stage and what's happening beyond the walls of the National Opera, give particular meaning to *Lileya*. This is especially evident, as Tchaikovsky contrasts the tradition-inspired happiness of Lileya and Stepan at their wedding to the formal appearance of the Warlord, as he descends upon the wedding of the romantic characters.

*In the midst of the celebration, the warlord with his guests approaches the dancers. He is wearing a white wig, dressed luxuriously. After some hesitation, the guests are greeted by the elders, explaining the reason for the festivities. The Warlord approaches the newlyweds. Stepan gives the uninvited guest a frightening look. Their eyes meet. The Warlord sees Stepan's feelings for Lileya. However, he does not let anyone know about his observations, and, having finished the dance, he cheerfully welcomes the youth and the elderly... Suddenly, a guard appears with an order for Stepan to appear at the Warlord's palace in Zaporozhye... Everyone becomes silent, as the guards go away... Older Cossacks have decided to send Stepan to Zaporozhye, to an uncertain fate.<sup>159</sup>*

There are three specific characteristics that the author attributes to the Warlord as a symbol of Russian imperial power. First, his libretto-described dress seems inconsistent with his designation as a Warlord;<sup>160</sup> the white wig firmly places him into the “European” dress aesthetic adopted by Russia’s Peter I, long after the era of warring warlords has ended, and Russia consolidated as a political and military empire. Secondly, the specific geographical positioning of the Warlord in Zaporozhye further solidifies a connection of the Warlord to Russia. This region of what is now Eastern Ukraine was a key Russian military stronghold in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the time of Shevchenko’s original publication.

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<sup>159</sup> *Lileya*, libretto by Vsevolod Tchagovets, 1939, State Central Archive of Literature and Art, Kyiv, Ukraine, 7.

<sup>160</sup> In the libretto, the Ukrainian word used to signify the Warlord is “*knyaz*.”

Throughout the Soviet industrialization of the 1930s and the violence associated with forced collectivization, Zaporozhye became a symbol of Soviet industrial strength. In Soviet industrialization narratives, this region was closely tied to the construction of the highly-symbolic Dnieper Hydroelectric Dam (1927-1932), which in turn drove development of a heavy industry cluster in the region. Thus, associating the warlord with Zaporozhye carries a double reference – to both Russian Imperial and Soviet authorities, to initial military conquest and subsequent social destruction. Finally, in an almost eerie foresight of “hybrid aggression,” the libretto describes the warlord as both deceptive and violent, working in non-linear and non-evident ways to achieve his goals. Rather than reveal his true intentions at the wedding, where the Warlord and his guards are outnumbered and face a defiant Stepan, he proceeds to divide and conquer – separating Stepan from his homeland by imperial decree, as was done to Shevchenko’s characters by the fictional warlord, Shevchenko himself by the tsarist administration, the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians during the period of collectivization and subsequent Stalinist repressions.

### **Lileya. Act II – Imperial wrath**

The second act of the libretto further frames Russian Imperial power as unpredictable, violent, deceptive, and, also, unavoidable:

*Lileya goes to the gypsies to see the fortuneteller... She is told that there is no news of Stepan. Suddenly, thundering horses approach the gypsy encampment. The Warlord enters, along with his guards<sup>161</sup>.*

*Warlord: "Who gave you the right to camp here without my permission? Now, destroy the camp [to the guards]."*

*Gypsies beg the Warlord for forgiveness. In humility and tears, elder women ask to keep their belongings... One of the gypsy girls, Mariula, attracts the Warlord's attention with her dance and beauty... Lileya manages to run away into the deep forest...*

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*Stepan, in beggarly clothes, with a bandura in his hands carefully goes down the hill, holding a hand of a girl, guiding him... Lileya suddenly notices that he is blind. Desperation, mourning, and gentle feelings come together. She guides him to the nearest tree, trembling from horror; in horror she looks at his eyes. Anxiously looking around, she begs him to rest under the tree. She rests her head on his shoulder. Stepan starts to play the bandura, and a thoughtful melody starts,, as a sad novel about his blinding in enemy's captivity. Lileya, in deep mourning, kisses his eyes and looks at the lake... An orphan-girl [a guide] is running around the lake, as a careless butterfly, picking lilies one by one.*

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<sup>161</sup> The original Ukrainian term used for the Warlord's guards is "gaiduki" - a specific term that signifies Ukrainian cossaks in voluntary mercenary service to the imperial administration. These characters are absent from Shevchenko's poems and seem to be inserted into the librettos as markers of national treason.

*A few guards capture Lileya and Stepan by their hands. A short scene of a desperate fight. The Warlord captures Lileya, despite her resistance, and takes her into the deep forest. An orphan tries to hold Lileya by her hand, however, one of the guards kills her. Everyone goes away. Just the killed orphan-girl and Stepan, stunned by the blows, remain.*

Throughout the act, extreme violence of the Warlord and his guards is described by Tchagovets in parallel with a description of the Warlord's deception, flattery and efforts to divide the village. However, the libretto also demonstrates an understanding, or at least a recognition, of this dual strategy of Imperial conquest. In particular, this apprehension is seen as Stepan is sent to Zaporozhye at the end of Act One, in the parents' exclamation of "Come what may, whatever happens there!" which marks a point of understanding of the violent outcome that may follow a seemingly peaceful invitation of alliance with the Imperial power. This message is further embedded into the scene of the warlord's confrontation with the gypsies, a violent encounter between Imperial power and an ethnic minority group that "trespasses" on the Warlord's claimed land. Critically, positioning Lileya within the gypsy community at the time of their conflict with the Warlord, the libretto brings Ukrainian and Gypsy communities together, in a way equalizing their experiences with Imperial power.

### **Lileya Act III – Aftermath and Revolt**

The work of imperialism is evident throughout the short course of the ballet. When, in the third act, Stepan comes back to the village in search of community support, he finds the village destroyed.

*The peasants are coming back from the field; they are darker than the black Earth.<sup>162</sup> The mothers, with infants in their hands, wrapped in rags, go to their homes. Farmers move with their heads down; among them are gray-haired and gray-bearded old men, and young girls. Everyone is disheartened, sullen and desolate. Old men look at Stepan, but do not recognize him and he does not recognize the village he left behind.<sup>163</sup>*

In this narrative of village destruction coupled with Ukrainian peasants continuing farm work on its lands, the libretto indirectly refers to the period of collectivization, when Ukrainian peasant were obliged to give up their land to Soviet collective farms, while continuing to provide unpaid farm labor within the collective. During collectivization, taking or “stealing” anything from the field (privately owned in the past) was punishable by death or prison. I suggest that this scene specifically refers to Soviet collectivization of the Ukrainian land and the brutal repressions that accompanied it. The key target of Soviet collectivization of the 1930s was redistribution of natural resources to Soviet cities, specifically Moscow, which now functioned as the political and logistic center for “re-distribution.” The 1940 *Lileya* libretto comments on collectivization as the driving

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<sup>162</sup> “Black Earth” refers to the rich organic soils of Ukraine that have traditionally enabled lucrative agricultural yields in this region of Europe and have been seen as Ukraine’s greatest economic asset.

<sup>163</sup> Stepan’s comes home and re-discovers his land in shattering poverty and misery is reminiscent to the episode of the Gypsy community destruction in the previous act.

force behind the rapid impoverishment of Ukrainian farming communities, a tool of the *Holodomor* terror hunger campaign.

Remarkably, in the libretto, dance itself is almost invisible and the author barely provides any description of the technique or aesthetics of the ballet. However, at the same time, the narrative presents dance as a powerful performance and practice. If in the first act dance was a symbol and method for community ties and support, in the episode of the second act, a gypsy girl Mariula attracts the Warlord's attention away precisely so that Lileya can run. In the libretto, Mariula's dance is deceitful, resistive to the outside male power, and allowing different local communities to protect each other. And, finally, the libretto goes back to violence – one of the focuses of the narrative – to the “killed orphan girl” and blinded Stepan, stunned by blows. Here, disability and death are presented by the author as a method for installing individual and collective fear and for establishing the imperial Russian power as a legal one. However, even though both death and disability are still practiced by the current and former Post-Soviet Russian authorities, imperial or not, none of this violence is alive in the contemporary Post-Soviet production of *Lileya*.

### **The Post-Soviet *Lileya* - A Happier Tale of Love?**

I attempted to see the contemporary staging of *Lileya* in the Summer of 2018 at the National Opera. However, in the spring and summer months of 2018, during the ethnographic phase of my study, *Lileya* was not staged, and I was able to see it only in March of 2019, while engaging in archival research. As I have found, there are key differences between the Soviet and Post-Soviet production of *Lileya*, and remarkably, it is



the original Soviet score that appears as the more daring interpretation of Shevchenko's poems and its criticism of imperial policies towards Ukraine. In the contemporary ballet *Lileya*, (re-)written by Valeriy Kovtun, there is no narrative of Stepan being taken into captivity, injured or blinded, and released, prior to Lileya's abduction. On the contrary, Stepan comes to save his stolen bride in full health from the hands of violent warlord, who shoots Lileya by mistake, while aiming at Stepan. The 2019 *Lileya* program does not mention the origin of the warlord or the background, just saying that "The Prince arrives escorted by the courtiers. His eyes fix on Lileya. Charmed by her beauty, the Prince wishes to take the girl with him to the Court." No mention of the city of Zaporozhiye or any place of warlord's origins in the current version, which is particularly interesting given the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, the hybrid war and annexation of Crimea. *Lileya* could have been politically reflective and significant in the current context, but it is not, offering the audience yet another glossy version of rural Ukraine, similar to other national-themed ballets in the contemporary repertoire National Opera.

Maryana Oliynyk's "Lileya: A Simplified Version," published in the issue of Kyiv-based magazine *The Day* in 2003, sheds light onto the complicated history of *Lileya*, its belated staging in 1945 due to the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s, and the evacuation of the ballet company from Kyv during the Second World War.<sup>164</sup> In the article the author claims that *Lileya* was staged in August of 1940 just to be withdrawn in 1941 due to the evacuation. While the original performance and the premiere are a separate topic, it is important to recognize *Lileya*'s relative dislocation in time and all

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<sup>164</sup> Maryana Oliynyk, "Lileya: A Symplified Version." *The Day*, March 10, 2003. I found this source online, when looking for reviews of the Post-Soviet *Lileya*.

sorts of questions its history arouses.<sup>165</sup> If there were rehearsals in 1939, to what extent was the ballet ready to be premiered in 1939? Was it banned, restricted or just moved to be premiered in 1940, and, if so, for what reasons? Were there any modifications made on the part of the Ministry of Culture of Ukrainian SSR, National Opera's administration or *Lileya's* choreographers and their assistants? When it was revived in 1945, how different was the production from its forerunner of 1939? Was *Lileya* performed in the Siberian city of Irkutsk, where the ballet troupe was evacuated during the War and where the artists worked from 1941 until 1945?

I wondered about the dissonance between *Lileya's* planned premiere in 1939, which was re-scheduled for 1940, with its inclusion in the National Opera's repertoire in 1945, and the folder, framing the time of libretto publication as 1955 with a document that did not locate itself in the time period. However, the libretto looks like it is the original one: it has a title sheet with the names of the composer (Konstantin Dankevich) and the librettist (Vsevolod Tchagovets) and a preface, written from the "we" perspective. It is unclear if "we" in the preface signifies the double authorship of the composer and the librettist, or the librettist and the choreographer, or the presence of any other authors in the *Lileya* libretto-scenario. However, it is insightful to look at the part of "we"-written preface:

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<sup>165</sup> This information about the first staging of *Lileya* in 1940 by Galina Berezova is re-confirmed in a more recent March 2015 issue of *The Day* in Larisa Tarasenko's "A Non-Fading Flower: The National Opera of Ukraine Will Show Konstantin Dankevich's Ballet *Lileya* on March, 10." For more information, see Tarasenko, Larisa. "A Non-Fading Flower: The National Opera of Ukraine Will Show Konstantin Dankevich's Ballet *Lileya* on March, 10." *The Day*, March 6, 2015.

*The theme of a girl's fate is presented in the works of the magnificent poet in a great variety of situations and moods that can be revealed most successfully through the means of choreography.*

*In this scenario, Taras Grigorievich Shevchenko revealed an undeniable strength of his poetic inspiration ranging, from gentle lyrical ballads, framed by the veil of national Ukrainian romanticism, to the angry fire-breathing poems, which all focus on his favorite female character, striving for revenge for her broken life and warlords' violence.*

*However, to reveal this theme in its multi-faceted character, it wouldn't be enough to focus just on one literary work, and this forced us to ground ourselves on the synthetic image of "Lileya" in which various narratives of a suffering girl come together. "Lileya" stands for our poet's all female characters, managing to keep their pure spiritual beauty despite their tragic mournful lives.*

The "we" preface stands for itself, providing clarity to the libretto's interpretation of Taras Shevchenko's poems *Lileya* and *Marina*, heavily cited in the text. It is also written as if it is the first libretto of its kind – it does not mention any other productions and it treats literary works as national treasures that are put into the choreographic form for the first time. Independently of the document's origin and its contested date of publication and the "we"-authorship, this is the one that is kept and guarded by the Kyiv's State Central Archive of Literature and Art, in the same way that Kyiv's National Opera stages the contemporary Post-Soviet *Lileya* just once a year, on March 9th.

While some original librettos, like the 1940 *Lileya*, can present 30-pages of solid horror on the old transparent paper, they are contested literary products. They are about the authorship and about the silences, and also, about semi-silences. The program for the current production of ballet is semi-silent about the initial libretto – it mentions only Kovtun’s libretto, which I was not able to locate at the archive, and is silent about the existence of Tchagovets’s 1940 libretto. However, the program mentions the author, stating that the scenario is by Vsevolod Tchagovets and in a way re-directs all possible questions about any ambiguities to the initial author, who died in 1950. The current production of *Lileya*, with a scenario heavily modified and simplified, makes the dead author responsible for any edges, and not Valeriy Kovtun, whose libretto might be somewhere but not in the archive that guards them.

I consider librettos as archival documents, tracing the initial ballets’ concept, and providing a historical context of their significance. I argue that Soviet-era librettos remain contested archival objects, with their authorship frequently undetermined, contested or disputed, with *Lileya* libretto serving as a powerful case study of these processes. In the 1940 *Lileya* libretto by Tchagovets, the warlord comes from Zaporozhye – an industrial and cultural center that formerly belonged to the Russian Empire. In Kovtun’s libretto, the warlord seems to be from Poland. In Tchagovets’ libretto, Stepan, Lileya’s fiancé is taken into warlord’s captivity, where he is injured, but released after physical abuse. In Kovtun’s libretto, Stepan comes to the warlord’s palace to save Lileya. Tchagovets’ text culminates with Lileya running from the warlord’s army, hiding in the woods, and later finding blinded and injured Stepan, led by a village five-year old orphan, just to be found

by the warlord's servants, who first kill an orphan, further abuse Stepan, and finally abduct Lileya. In Kovtun's scenario, Stepan simply faces the warlord, who shoots at him and by accident kills Lileya, who took the warlord's bullet. The Tchagovets work finishes with a revolution, led by the blinded Stepan, and Lileya going mad and dying in her dance of madness. The Kovtun work finishes with Stepan going back to the community and putting a lily-flower nearby the lake for dead Lileya.

Overall, Kovtun's libretto is simpler and does not contain multi-faceted violence, exercised by the outside warlord, whereas Tchagovets's work is centered around the idea of how unpredictable, cunning, dark and violent the warlord power was, destructing not only the couple, but the community and the land itself. Thinking about the Soviet practices of libretto selection, and the Moscow-led strategy to pick the ones that present the local authorities in the republics as evil, greedy, and rich, it is not possible to look at the *Lileya* libretto and the contemporary *Lileya* ballet as conventional works due to both its direct and veiled critique of the imperial power. My reading of the performance and the libretto was troubled by the hybrid war context, martial law declared in December of 2018, increased military presence and ongoing protests against Russian aggression in Kyiv. To me, this context framed *Lileya* as an endangered archive, both in terms of its physical proximity to a new wave of imperial aggression and in terms of its embedded narrative of national resistance.

### ***Lileya*, its Forerunner and Descendants**

I dedicated this chapter specifically to *Lileya*, due to its popular designation as the representative national ballet, and the fact that it is the only national-themed ballet present in both the Soviet and Post-Soviet repertoire of the National Opera of Ukraine. According to the libretto archives, there were four Soviet-era nation-themed ballets exploring Ukrainian identity: *Rostislava*, *Bondarivna*, *Marusya Boguslavka*, and *Lileya*. The current repertoire of the National Opera of Ukraine features a different list: *Lileya*, *V pogone za Dvumya Zaicami [Chasing Two ...]*, *Vechera na Khutore bliz Dikan'ki v Nacional'noi Opere Ukrainy*, with *Lileya* standing out as the only nationally-themed Soviet-era work still staged. When I looked through the Soviet-era librettos, I noted that they follow a somewhat predictable plot of a violent external force interfering with a Ukrainian love story. Furthermore, all Soviet-era librettos focused on and positioned the central character of a local Ukrainian girl as a distinct, one-of-a-kind, innocent and kind yet strong and, in some cases, divine being. Through the course of the libretto, this girl is stolen, tricked or re-possessed by a foreign power.

Based on my archival analysis of national ballet librettos, I note that in national ballets of Ukraine, Ukrainian land is consistently symbolized by a local Ukrainian girl from the village, initially and always prosperous, until the girl's abduction by a male character – a warlord from Russia (*Lileya*), a pan from Poland (*Bondarivna*), pasha from Turkey (*Marusya Boguslavka*), and a Dragon (*Rostislava*). An abduction (and often – a death of a local girl) comes in parallel with the village destruction. These scenarios are highly recognizable and have a set of tropes and anti-postures: village-city; female-male; humiliation- power; and all them tap into the history of Ukraine as an entity, consisting of

the Western Ukraine, formerly Polish, and the Eastern Ukraine – historically being a part of Russian Empire. These tropes of a local girl and local land, stolen by an outside male power, tap into these histories, and also into the waves of industrialization and the influences of the cities (on the rural life), where Russian Imperial and Soviet authorities resided. All of them are tragic, too. Each, except for Rostislava, ends with a girl's death, which according to the symbolism of the librettos, meant much more – a death of local culture and the initial landscape of imagined Ukraine.

*Bondarivna* can be theorized as *Lileya*'s predecessor, initially produced in 1931 as *Pan Kanyovskii*, with a music by Mikhail Verikhovskii, libretto, by U. Tkachenko and choreography by Vasil' Litvinenko.<sup>166</sup> The libretto for *Bondarivna* is different in its assignment of foreign power, centering on a Ukrainian girl abducted by the Polish prince Pan Kanyovskii, who attempts to rape her in his castle. The ballet culminates with Bondarivna's suicide attempt and her fiancé Yarmuluchok coming for her and finishes with Pan Kanevskii, shooting Bondarivna, who steps in front of her fiancé. *Bondarivna*'s libretto is a shorter eight-page text with a considerably simplified narrative of a love triangle, without the added social significance of the land and village destruction that comes up in the 30-pages of *Lileya*. Interestingly, the final scene Lileya succumbing to madness, vividly described in Tchagovets' libretto, is not present in the contemporary production of *Lileya*. Instead, Kovtun's production replaces Lileya's ending scene with a

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<sup>166</sup> Here, I use the notion of a forerunner to signify that *Bondarivna*, most likely, was written prior to *Lileya*'s publication. At the same time, by calling it a forerunner, I do not disavow my argument that *Lileya* was the first nation-themed ballet to critique Russian imperialism specifically.

scene taken nearly verbatim out of *Bondarivna* - Lileya is shot by the warlord while embracing Stepan.

*Marusya Boguslavka* (1951) is *Lileya*'s Soviet Post-War descendant and derivation, with music by Svechnikov, a libretto by Vsevolod Tchagovets and N. Skorul'skii, and choreography, designed by S. Sergeev. In *Marusya Boguslavka* the outside power is male, too, but comes from Turkey. While the whole town of Boguslav is in preparation for Marusya's wedding, "Turkish people break in, rob goods, kill the elderly, capture the bride, her brother and his bride Lesya." In this libretto, Turkish power is also unpredictable and violent, however it ends where it starts, Marusya is able to run from the palace, freeing other Ukrainian prisoners. *Marusya Boguslavka*'s libretto is short, direct and has quick resolution; while Marusya runs from the palace, her community is coming to help her and protect from pasha following and persecuting her and her family. Here, an outside power is less deceitful than in *Lileya*, where it brings destruction slowly, but regularly, page by page; if *Lileya* feels like a scenario for a horror or thriller, *Marusya Boguslavka* has a feeling of an action movie with a strong female lead – Marusya is the one, who deceives the guard, captures the prison keys, runs and frees other prisoners. The libretto makes Marusya a national hero, and highlights *Lileya* as a national symbol of suffering.

*Rostislava* is *Marusya Boguslavka*'s contemporary; created in 1955, the libretto for this "ballet-fairy-tale" focuses on the Russian local girl Slavushka [a shot name for Rostislava], stolen by Korshun [an eagle] and korshuncy [an eagle's servants], who in the end protects and saves her community. Unlike other national ballets, *Rostislava* avoids



offering any specifics of the outside power, mystified and animalized by an abstract character of an eagle. *Rostislava* is an interesting addition to the *Brondarivna-Lileya-Marusya Boguslavka* cycle. I still wonder what audience it was directed for and what role it serves in these abduction-of-a-girl and destruction-of-a-village narratives. Is this a reference to the Russian-speaking rural communities or villages, living on the Russian territory, internal state repressions in the Imperial or Soviet period? It is hard to tell.

### **Conclusion and Thoughts**

Soviet-era librettos of the National Opera of Ukraine represent a unique archival asset, and their critical analysis offers insight into the process of ballet production that came to define contemporary Ukrainian ballet. As I have shown in this chapter, due to their particular political sensitivity, access to the archival files containing librettos remains tightly controlled through official, unofficial, and artificial barriers, requiring a researcher to obtain a designation of an archival insider to locate, navigate and work with these files. I argue that the rationale for this control is grounded in the clear connection between Soviet-era librettos of ballets, designated as national Ukrainian ballets, and their continued production as central pieces of the contemporary ballet repertoire of the National Opera. The very fact that some of the nation-themed ballets are still in the repertoire and have a full audience, despite the existence of the new Post-Soviet nation-themed ballets, is telling of the complicated connection between contemporary Ukrainian identity and past Soviet-era ballet history. This chapter's results reframe my past academic understanding of censorship and resistance in the sphere of dance and where

these processes can be located and manifested. I show that in the Soviet context, national resistance could exist not only on the stage, through embodiment, but also in and through the archive.

Archival narratives repeat, in the same ways as histories do. My reading of the librettos was heavily influenced by the context I lived in, and probably, if I would have had access to librettos in the US, my own narrative around them would be different. When living in Kyiv and working in the state central archive, I had a daily dilemma of which subway station to go in order to get to the Kyiv's archive. If I would turn right, after leaving my apartment, I would go to *Beresteiska* station, which was 22 minutes away. As I would walk, I would pass the old buildings of the Kyiv State Ballet School on my left, and the new, massive American Embassy complex surrounded by a high stone fence on the right. As I would pass this corridor, separating old and new, Soviet and American, buildings, I walk along *Beresteiska* street, lined with so-called "Stalinka" buildings, built during the Stalin era, many using forced labor. If I wanted to take a different train, I would turn left from my building and take a twenty-five-minute walk to the *Dorogzhichi* station, where I would walk along the national Baby Yar memorial, the location of the mass Nazi execution of Kyiv's Jewish and Gypsy populations, along with Soviet prisoners of war and mental healthcare patients in September of 1941. While this topic had no direct connection to my research, the space of Babyi Yar served as a daily reminder of the impact of state ideologies, including nationalism, that legitimized and directed atrocities and repressions and genocide.

Both of my daily path options to reach the archives were emotionally difficult to take and left the feeling of emptiness and helplessness; one due to the history of Nazi repressions, genocide and their materiality; another due to the historical and current position of Ukraine in between its Soviet and Post-Soviet identities. I saw the American Embassy with a high round stone fence and guards around it, as a manifestation of current hybrid war, cultural tensions and American involvement it provoked. Every time I walked along the embassy's fence my mind was reminiscent of the Department of Culture director's words about Ukraine as a country of high risk, high corruption and tired donors, referring to the economic and political crisis, hybrid war, and the lack of support from Europe to resist Russia's aggression. According to him, the majority of the Ukrainian state's funds go to the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Defense, leaving aside other departments and services, like the Ministry of Culture and the theatres, museums and schools it supports.

Thinking about the Russian neo-imperialism and its current war practices, Ukrainian state's domestic policy of funding and focusing on the defense and infrastructure, leaving aside cultural institutions, reminds me of *Lileya*'s very scenario of a death of a local girl, allegorical of Ukrainian local community and culture, due to the Russian warlord's re-possession of land, village and Lileya. Every time I took a subway escalator, I would ride along the posters, featuring photos of Ukrainian women, with no name of the photographer or the person photographed, coupled with a name of Ukrainian

district or region, like *Luganschina* or *Nikolaevshina*<sup>167</sup> Every time I wondered, how and why there were no names of these women, if they truly represent the local culture and its history. Why do the posters' authors and media campaign organizers silence this information and erase women's identities while presenting them as national symbols? And every time I thought of *Lileya*'s libretto, where Lileya appeared in the text first as "Lileya" in the brackets, signifying that the major female character had a real name, different from a pseudonym, at least in T. Shevchenko's ballad *Lileya*. And every day when taking the subway, every time I boarded the train car, there was at least one military man in the train car, with his identity concealed by the uniform. And every day, as I passed by the archival security guard's small TV set, I would hear on the news that last night, yet another Ukrainian soldier was killed in action on "the line of contact" in the East. And I would arrive to the archive with just one question: How many Lileyas and Stepanas are there, in Ukraine, today, and is there fate today, different from Shevchenko's literary characters?

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<sup>167</sup> These geographical regions refer to areas near the cities of Luhansk, currently under separatist control and Nikolaev, currently under the control of the Ukrainian government.

### **Intermission: Archival Chaos: Restrictions, Challenges and Adaptations**

In the context of the government-proclaimed “desovietization” of Ukraine, tight control over Soviet art archives and multiple conflicting rules on their use is truly remarkable. While Borisenko’s post-Soviet experience of Soviet-era archives, their accessibility and forced invisibility, could serve as one example, there are many more recent ones. During my first week of the archival research, I met a prominent former *New York Times* journalist and editor James Brooke, currently residing in Kyiv, where he manages and writes the influential *Ukraine Business News*. During one of our conversations, James advised me to explore the former KGB archives at the Secret Service archive and mentioned the name of John Grey, who wrote a dissertation based on them and graduated with his PhD from a well-known US university.<sup>168</sup> The inner reply in my mind to James’s suggestion was a straight “no” (“No way, under no circumstances will I ever go there”), though outwardly, I politely accepted his idea as great one. When James introduced us through e-mail, Grey provided a brief and clear reply to James and myself, explaining that if I wanted to complete part of my studies at the Secret Service archive, I would have to arrange my research three or four months in advance. Here is his

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<sup>168</sup> After my talk with Borisenko, going to Secret Service archive seemed like a historian’s horror story, but I checked the information on Grey (John grey is a pseudonym I use to protect his identity). The abstract of John Grey’s dissertation, published in April of 2018, is available the website, however the full-text was (and still is) under embargo. I could not locate any articles, written by him either, and his LinkedIn profile stated that he is a “program’s associate,” working in Washington DC since February 2019, after being a “program’s assistant” in 2018 in Washington DC, hired after his internship, probably within the “program,” in the fall of 2018. The profile also states that since April 2019 John has been a fellow of YFPF (Young Professions in Foreign Policy), which mission is in short “The world is a mess and getting worse... We engage, build, and amplify an international community of young, dynamic, diverse leaders from all sectors to accelerate their impact on critical global changes.” It is apparent is not only the Soviet government that uses abstraction when naming state “programs.”

answer in its entirety, with geographical and specific identifying information removed to protect Grey's identity:

Great to hear from you! I am back in the US now working in international development. The best advice on the SBU archives is to contact them early - three to four months ahead of time. Official correspondence with them has to be in Ukrainian, not English or Russian.

Also, please check out my recent article in the Well-Known Newspaper Best,

The contradiction between de-Sovietization and tight control over Soviet archives is practically in Grey's every phrase, despite the researcher's efforts to make his experience sound as neutral as it could be. First, I would have to contact the Secret Service archive three or four months in advance to get an access to the KGB materials. Immediately, a number of questions arose in my mind: "Why does the archive need four months to approve access? Is it needed for a background check of a researcher or some other procedures? Why can't one just come in and look at old KGB files if neither the KGB, or Soviet Ukraine, or the USSR exist in 2019? Why do these files matter so much?" Second, the correspondence has to be in Ukrainian, part of the de-Sovietization effort, but the materials are in Russian, which still dictates the Soviet past through archive. And finally, in a publicly available interview, which I located, Grey specifically mentions that he learned Russian as the primary language for his research. In the interview, he says, "I use Russian language a lot, especially translating my primary sources, which is a real struggle, but very rewarding now that I can understand enough

Russian to do very heavy research.” So, it appears that it was knowledge of Russian precisely that helped Grey in this “very heavy research.” Is the heaviness literal or metaphorical for Grey? Is it related to the physical weight of the documents (which I doubt) or the metaphorical heaviness of archival conversations?

More importantly, neither Sergei Borisenko nor Grey published their dissertations, in fact leaving their archival labor invisible. While I never set foot in the Secret Service archive, it was fascinating to see similar observed processes of “heavy research” and unpublished dissertations. Somehow, I felt that it was the archive that served as the cornerstone of these experiences and decisions. Despite its administrative barriers, the Central State Archive of Literature and Art is ultimately open for public audiences and is only two minutes of walking distance from its Secret Service archival neighbor, where both the barriers and academic stakes appear much higher. Within this spatial proximity, one could wonder if the archives, their workers and their building have anything in common, from their policies to practices to employees.<sup>169</sup>

The abundance of rules and their mutual exclusiveness formulated a vortex of daily archival chaos. For example, Soviet documents, falling under copyright rules, could not be self-copied, but one could request 20% of a document to be copied by the archive workers for a punishing price of 41 Ukrainian hryvnas (~\$1.50 per page), about 20 times the price of the same service outside walls of the archive.<sup>170</sup> It was very clear that the

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<sup>169</sup> While I could not provide an answer to this question, the next chapter offers some reflections on this question.

<sup>170</sup> This information was relayed to me in Russian. Ludmila Leonidovna, the director of the reading room, was a mediator between my requests to copy the materials and the decisions that came “from the top,” rejecting or approving my requests; these physical documents-requests were signed by the director of the archive. When I was allowed to copy the materials, in many cases just 20% of them, I had to proceed to the

administration of the archive attempted to find a balance between the guarding of their materials and extracting material profits from them. Every day, as the copying process began, I wondered: “They know that everyone using this service will scan the archive-made paper copies into electronic form the second they are outside the gate, especially given the fact that that each page costs \$1.50?” As the two silent men commenced copying, I watched with horror, as the fragile pages I requested were ripped out of bound archival folders to make them flat for the copy machine light table. Catching my horrified gaze, the more senior silent man broke the silence to explain that “copies need to be of good quality.”

It was when I looked at the folders and documents, ripped apart, for the sake of the archive-copy, I realized again that no one has ever looked at or copied them – there were no physical rip marks that would have been obvious if anyone had requested copies of these materials before. Often, I was the first person ever look at these documents, since they were archived here, and I was the only one who “ordered” them to be ripped apart. When I asked the librarian if that was ok that they had to rip the binder to make a copy, the answer that followed was, “Oh, but the restoration is included in the price.” Interestingly, after the first day, this was no longer the case: all subsequent bills calculated the price for the binder separately. Overall, in the time I worked there, the rules of copyright and copy-making process changed from day to day. For example, the official archival rules for copying Soviet-era librettos were as follows: if there was an author, automatically, copying was restricted by the laws of copyright; 75 years needed to

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accountant office first to pay the needed amount. There, while waiting for the credit card payment process, I would often stare at the printed pricing sheet; 41 Ukrainian hryvnias price was reflected there as well.



pass since the time of publication to make them available for self-copying. However, in my experience in the archive, this automatic availability of the documents after 75 years fully depended on the mood of the particular administrator. Even the director of the reading room once complained to her assistant about rule flexibility: “I don’t understand why rules cannot be followed, if you have a rule – then stick to it.”

Authored librettos with a deceased or absent author were restricted as well, with only 20% designated as publicly available. To obtain copies of these documents, a set of additional procedures had to be followed. First, a formal request, listing the desired pages of a document had to be specified and validated by my own signature and initials. This request had to be then approved by the director of the archive. Following the director’s approval, I would be presented with the bill and needed to proceed to the accountant office to pay it, then come back to the reading room to present the paid receipt. Following this waiting-walking-waiting-walking-waiting ritual, two men would come to the reading room and make copies; it was never the director of the reading room, nor one of her assistants. From my understanding, they did not have a right to make these physical copies at the archive – the reason for two men coming to the room to make the copies. Cameras, installed everywhere in the reading room, further underscored the distribution of power in the reading room and the archive.

Aside from their mere presence, the fluidity of archival rules was another constant of working with Kyiv archives. On any given Monday, I could take pictures of the “in a role” (performance) photographs of ballet artists with my phone camera as these rarely had an author. On any given Tuesday, I would not be able to do that. When I asked, “But,

there is no author here,” the reply of the administrator was, “Well, I have asked our lawyer and he said these materials fall under the laws of copyright.” I did not fully believe the lawyer’s narrative, given that there were two men who came in specifically to make copies, and it appeared that they had the ultimate executive authority in this process. These men looked and behaved differently than other guards and administrators who worked at the archive - their physical appearance, vocabulary, way of movement, and gestures were distinctly different from any other guards, administrators, or academics that inhabited the archive. While I cannot conclusively state that these men were affiliated with any of the multiple security services, I can state that their top priority wasn’t the content of the archive, but the security procedures regulating access to it.

For each requested and copied document, I had to provide my wet signature in a log book, registering made copies. This was a perfect chance to rehearse my signature, as usually I would leave 20-30 of them in the log book per day. This final document required a director’s signature as well; often I had to wait days to get it, to have the right to take the copies “outside.” I had to give one copy of this document to the guard at the entrance so that all the departments and offices of the archive would be aware of the materials being copied and taken. However, at the end my archival work, I had my treasures: 20% of the copied documents, empathy for the director of the reading room, pain and guilt for the ripped apart folders and documents, receipts from the accountant office, decorated with stamps and signatures, and, finally, a document that allowed me to take my hard-earned copies outside of the archive.

## Chapter 4

### **Soviet Personnel Files as Performances of Soviet State Power and National Identity**

When considering ballet in independent Ukraine, it is difficult to disregard or ignore its Soviet past. Elements of Soviet technique remain pervasive, appearing almost as an aesthetic residue of this bygone era, stirring up conflicting emotional responses in ballet artists and audiences - loved or hated, desired or despised. Whether considering personal narratives, explored in the second chapter, or ballet librettos, examined in the third chapter, the Soviet past of Ukrainian ballet remains an ever-present shadow. As a result, Ukrainian ballet and its bodies represent and bear witness to the legacy of the intersecting impacts of Soviet state repressions, state control and sponsorship. A critical element of the inextricable, troubled and highly complicated relationship of Ukrainian ballet to the Soviet state is the question of agency over national identity and the ways it can be assigned, negotiated or taken away from a ballet body through bureaucratic mechanisms. This chapter examines the state personnel files of ballet artists and teachers as documents that traced and negotiated the question of nationality and national identity between the body and the state.

Specifically, this chapter considers and theorizes personnel files and their key documents as performances of Soviet state power and national identity. As I will demonstrate, the contents of one's file served as the basis of a negotiation between the artists and the state; the file served not only as a record of artistic accomplishment, but, perhaps even more importantly, as a record of political loyalty. And while this dissertation does not aim to expose the particularities of artists' lives contained in their

personnel files, it seeks to understand how documentation of personal histories functioned, and to ask what room artists had to negotiate their histories. And, as this project focuses on issues of nationalism in ballet performances and training, the question of locating an artist in relation to the Soviet state is of particular significance. One of my key questions here is the following: to what extent could a specific national status be altered, erased or acquired through ballet archivization?<sup>171</sup>

In the pages that follow, I introduce the phenomena of Soviet personnel files and discuss their structure, significance and performative effect. I will then offer a reading of the performativity of personnel files as archives that structured and shaped Soviet ballet and theatre experience. I will examine ballet's textuality, publicly inaccessible in the past, as a method of state control, and treat textuality and performativity as phenomena that come together and become interdependent.<sup>172</sup> I will turn to the notions of performativity developed by John L. Austin and Judith Butler to examine personnel files' possible effect on artists' lives. I will highlight these documents as capable of producing an action or a change in the daily life of an artist through their textuality and performativity, while framing the ballet body as a Soviet subject. In my theorization of archival performativity, I rely on Rebecca Schneider's *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* and Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Following Schneider's argument about the similarities in the

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<sup>171</sup> I use the term ballet archivization to refer to the documentation practices that accompanied and influenced ballet as a dance practice under the Soviet regime

<sup>172</sup> I use the term ballet textuality to refer to the materiality of archives that resulted from documentation practices that included both publicly available texts and those restricted for the state use. If ballet archivization highlights the very process of documentation, textuality refers to its result and to the overall infrastructure supporting it.

ways texts and performances function and about the lasting effects of performances, I will consider personnel files as products of a particular state practice of archiving ballet bodies' histories and interpret these documents as performances.<sup>173</sup> Likewise, I take up Diana Taylor's theorization of the discrepancy between the phenomena of archive and repertoire and the author's presentation of both phenomena as mediated.<sup>174</sup> I attempt to examine personnel files as both an integral part of the repertoire of state-body negotiations and archived records of performances of state power.

I will show that Soviet-era dancer personnel files functioned like performances in terms of their structure and their spectatorship, where the state power was performed both for the artists, filling them out, and administrators, handling these documents. I also argue that personnel files are performative in the Austinian or Butlerian sense, in that they are meant to produce effect on the spectators. These two different strains of argumentation are very much related, hence both Diana Taylor's and Rebecca Schneider's works are significant in this study. When working with these documents, I kept returning to Diana Taylor's argument about the discrepancy between the archive and repertoire. The level of state interrogation associated with these archives goes against the Soviet-era framing of classical ballet as pure art, fundamentally disconnected from political or social meaning. Omissions and silences riddle seemingly monolithic personnel files, testifying to the discrepancy between the documents themselves and archivization processes that allowed

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<sup>173</sup> For a discussion of text versus performance, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011). More specifically, I refer to Schneider's work being compelled by the argument about the villainy of texts and the flexibility of interpretation that depends on the historical and cultural context of the reader.

<sup>174</sup> For a detailed discussion of the concepts of archive and repertoire, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

for these silences and corrections. Finally, the villainy of texts that Rebecca Schneider highlights in her work was ever-present throughout my work with these archives. While constructing artists and their bodies within rather rigid frameworks of ballet repertoire and ballet training, it is clear that the state perceived their documents and documents on them as flexible material, where modifications could be made to assign a ballet body a particular nationality, political or economic status.

### **Soviet Personnel Files: Exposing the Undercurrents of State-Sponsored Ballet**

While the artistic life of a ballet company can be seen on stage, studied through performance records and reviews, or investigated through interviews with leading artists or choreographers, its daily life remains largely hidden behind closed doors. This creates a number of challenges, and past studies have shown that a disconnect might form between oral or written narratives and documented histories of dance.<sup>175</sup> While ballet has been often analyzed through its corporeality and its icons, the political and logistic documentation that accompanied and actually framed the artists' daily lives and their work is rarely considered.<sup>176</sup> Ballet archives largely stay invisible and undertheorized in Performance Studies, partially due to the effects of public discourse of ballet as an independent language, clear of political rationale.<sup>177</sup> As such, many artists' works and

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<sup>175</sup> For the discussion of the disconnect between the documentation of Soviet ballet performances and their original and often hidden meanings, see Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014); Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>176</sup> I use political and logistic documentation here to refer to the infrastructure that rationalized and legitimized any "happenings" within the sphere of ballet through texts. See Appendix A for examples.

<sup>177</sup> For an example of the view of ballet, functioning as an independent form or language, see Jennifer Homan's *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*, where the author attributes her initial fascination with ballet

ideas remain misunderstood, in particular, in the context of USSR and its former republics.

As with any other Soviet-era state organization, the daily life of Ukrainian theaters, ballet companies, and training centers was heavily bureaucratized and subsequently systematically archived. As a result, Ukrainian ballet can be studied through the prism of archival analysis of operational documents archived in the Central State Archive of Literature and Art, an archive that covers a range of topics, from artistic development, to questions of ideology and ballet finances. It is through these records of daily operation that one can look past what is *meant* to be seen by a dance critic or scholar and construct a more complete picture of what precisely is entailed by the notion of “state-sponsored ballet.” Diving into the archive, which contains a variety of documents associated with the functioning of the National Opera, reveals new horizons of how one might think about dance and the archive and, in particular, about state-sponsored ballet and its archivization. And here, it is important to briefly address the location and functioning of the archive, as the experience of finding it in the first place, working with its extensive catalogs, and most importantly, interacting with its employee guardians, greatly influenced my perception of the complex relationship between the state, the archive, and the stage.

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to a gained understanding that ballet was “a hard science, with demonstrable physical facts” and that “getting it right was not a matter of opinion or taste”(xv). For an example of critique of the reading of ballet as an “absolute” or “pure” form, see Joann Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 33-43; Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Stripping the Emperor: The Africanist Presence in American Concert Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 332-34; and Evan Alderson, "Ballet as Ideology: Giselle: Act 2," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 121-132.

The State Central Archive-Museum of Art and Literature, originally founded in 1967, is located within the high-walled compound enclosing Kyiv's St. Sophia Cathedral – one of the capital's most-visited religious pilgrimage sites and among the top tourist destinations.<sup>178</sup> Yet, while the location of this major archive is seemingly central, it is remarkably well hidden on the territory of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, and as a result of this co-location it is absent from any searchable digital mapping service. A small sign right above the entrance door is the only indication that this site hosts a vast collection of archival documents pertaining to the arts, including those relating to the Soviet period of Ukrainian history.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, in the same way as one has to stumble upon the somewhat dilapidated building of the archive-museum, when walking through the gardens of St. Sophia, one has to stumble upon the personnel files once inside the archives.<sup>180</sup> As one of my colleagues and a long-time Kyiv educator noted, “people have a lot of faith in St. Sophia as a city's protector,” I wondered if the same kind of people's

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<sup>178</sup> The Central State Archive of Literature and Art of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) was founded by order of the Archive Directorate of the Cabinet of Ministers of USSR No.357 dated July 27, 1967.

<sup>179</sup> Thinking through my conversations with archivists and historians employed by the archive, the collections are extensive and stretch through the Soviet period and pre-Soviet eras, when the Eastern part of Ukraine was a part of the Russian Empire and Western Ukraine was a part of Poland. According to personal conversations, archivists themselves do not have full knowledge about all the nature and volume of the materials that are secured in the archive. According to the historian, who was transferred into the reading room as an archivist while I worked there, there is a great variety of boxes and folders that still require basic classification. In fact, at the time of the archive's original opening, the total number of received documents was never listed, only their net weight – 845 kilograms of archival documents.

<sup>180</sup> I located the names of these documents when looking at *opisi* [lists of documents] in the reading room. The archive has special *opisi* for the documents, related to the Nation Opera of Ukraine, that I had to manually browse through to understand what kind of documents I could have access to and which ones are more related to my topic. I assume that the archive does not contain all personnel files due to their restricted nature and others may be located elsewhere.



faith spreads to the relatively hidden documents of the relatively unnoticeable archive-museum, located on its premises.<sup>181</sup>

In Critical Dance Studies, multiple works have focused on various aspects of artistic control in the Soviet Union, such as production censorship, performance bans and media campaigns targeting dissident ballets.<sup>182</sup> These studies largely describe a verticalized and, importantly, centralized system of artistic management and associated ballet media archives. However, as I will show in this chapter, propaganda-washed monographs on ballet and ballet artists and politically-aligned coverage of ballet productions were not the only means of control over ballet in the Soviet Ukraine.<sup>183</sup>

For this study, I examined the personnel files of eight Kyiv National Opera artists and Kyiv State Ballet School teachers: Petr Baklan, Alexander Segal', Varvara Potapova, Sergei Sergeev, Tamara Vasil'eva, Galina Kirillova, Elena Veselova, and Anatolii Petrickii.<sup>184</sup> My focus on these artists was driven by their consistent presence in narratives of ballet teachers of KDHU[[Kyiv State Ballet School], connecting their oral

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<sup>181</sup> Kravchenko, Yuliya. (Professor, Small Academy of Sciences of Ukraine). Personal conversation with Ania Nikulina. May/1/2018. Personal electronic device.

<sup>182</sup> For a discussion of Soviet ballet censorship and dance's relationship to power, see Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015) and Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

<sup>183</sup> I use the term propaganda-washed ballets to highlight the focus of ballet historians on the framework that set the binary between ballets, used by the authorities as a means of propaganda, and subversive ballets that artists used to resist the state structures. For more information on ballet as a means of propaganda, see Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014) and Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>184</sup> Personnel files were files kept on the artists employed the Soviet predecessor of National Opera of Ukraine – “*Kyivskii Gosudarstvennyi Ordena Lenina Akademicheskii Teatr Opery I Baleta im. T. Shevchenko* [Kyiv State Order of Lenin Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, named after T. Shevchenko].” Personnel files on these artists contain detailed biographical, political and employment information about each artist and had important original documents relating to the details of one's employment.

histories with the Ukrainian Soviet-era ballet, as described in the second chapter of this thesis.<sup>185</sup> In other words, my archival strategy stems from my ethnographic research, and connecting the “repertoire” of oral history and the “archive” of documentation reflects the argument I make in this chapter about the interconnectedness of the two. As a result, the time framework of this chapter relates mostly to the post-WWII period of the 1950’s, 1960’s, and 1970’s, situating the chapter in the post-Stalinist and still-Soviet Ukraine era. I felt that if these artists’ names are alive in individual or collective memory of the School, it would be productive to consider these files, tracing their histories and correlating their oral histories to official Soviet state documents.

While each of the personnel files considered in this chapter has its own particularities, inconsistencies, mysteries and silences, each contains some portion of a relatively fixed set of documents: *anketa* [a questionnaire], *spravka* [a document, re-confirming employment at the theatre for the use by other Soviet institutions], *kharakteristika* [ a document, re-confirming employment and including a description of performed duties and moral obligations to the Soviet state], *pros’ba* [a document of request of salary raise or dismissal, authored by an artist], *nakaz* [an order, made by one of the Soviet institutions and related to an artist’s employment] and an artist’s brief autobiography. These files are not uniform in that some of them contained each type of

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<sup>185</sup> Partially, this chapter was driven by an interest in how oral and archival histories tell different stories about the same personalities, perceived by many teachers as points of connection with the past. In my ethnographic research, artists, considered in this chapter, came up as points of constructed personal connection with the Soviet Union and Soviet ballet infrastructure. For example, Galina Kirillova was a focus of one of the Kyiv State Ballet School’s teacher’s narratives; according to the interview with the teacher and the personnel file, she was the director of all state ballet schools across the Soviet Union and an empowered figure in Soviet ballet. For this teacher, narrativizing Kirillova’s biography in the interview and a close long-time friendship with her could be understood as a method to distinguish herself among other instructors as a descendant of the Soviet and Moscow-influenced school of ballet.

documents, while others lacked them, either because they were never produced, were not included, or were removed from the files at some point. For example, Alexander Segal's personnel file missed the *anketa* that often came as the first in the folder, which is a detailed and a basic document, complemented by the photograph of a person. Thinking about the *anketa* availability in all the other files, I do not exclude the possibility of the archive concealing or hiding Segal's questionnaire due to the possible sensitivity of information contained in the questionnaire.

I treat Soviet personnel as performances, both revealing and concealing information, depending on the viewer or the reader. It is precisely the preamble contained in the questionnaire that prohibits any omissions or incorrect responses that makes the empty spots significant. The emptiness could mean that artists conveyed their personal, professional and family histories partially through these silences, drawing attention to other details, or that archivists and bureaucrats allowed artists to make them despite the Soviet state's prohibition of omissions. Thinking about the overall duality of these documents, the very ambiguous archival status of being publicly invisible but central to ballet archivization frames the experience of working with them. The archival duality of the personnel files is multi-layered here: first, they reveal and conceal information, second, they are invisible to the outsider but internally function as a form of surveillance, and finally, they prohibit omissions but also, they allow them. I argue that is here, in the archive, invisible to most outsiders, that another layer of control existed that largely defined the daily existence and artistic careers of Soviet dancers and choreographers – their institutional personnel files. As I will show, these files, which were created as soon

as a dancer entered the training program at a Soviet dance school, contained information that could be used to both elevate or demote a dancer based on their reading by state authorities, without ever making an externally-visible archival trace.

Diana Taylor argues in *The Archive and The Repertoire* that certain narratives demand embodiment to accompany them and that particular ceremonies legitimize certain acts.<sup>186</sup> While Taylor coins the term *scenario* to examine the narratives of the texts of conquest and discover, the author also uses it to theorize the transfer from the repertoire (of state practices) to archive (that in turn legitimizes them). Thinking about the very existence of personnel files and the very requirements of the questionnaire and supporting documents, one thought comes to mind – that without the mandatory procedures of reading questions, writing down responses and signing all forms, personnel file as an archival document would not have value. The personnel file as an archival document, functioning like performance, was legitimized specifically during and through these procedures, (mandatory) participation in them and (forced) agreement to disclose the details of one’s personal, political and professional life. In the Soviet system of cultural production, state power was made to take the form of an archival document that functioned like a performance itself.

Rebecca Schneider has argued that texts function very much like performances – their interpretation depends on the context and the reader. The villainy of texts, highlighted by Schneider, is exemplified by the personnel file as a document, travelling from one administrator or bureaucrat to another, meant “to be there” in time of (state’s)

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<sup>186</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, 57.

need. Very much like Diana Taylor's scenario that "takes place in the here and now" to serve the future of the empire, personnel files documents were meant to have an effect on a reader, filling out a questionnaire, and an administrator, accepting and registering a file into the system. As such, following Rebecca Schneider's argument about performance's long life, personnel files as performances do not disappear; meant to produce effect "in the here and now," as well as later, they function as performances that can be pulled out at any time to re-produce and strengthen a constructed effect again. In this case, the performativity of these texts and their function as performances comes together in the accepted and normalized practice of archivization of personal histories.

### **The Experience of Working with Personnel Files**

When I first started my work at the state archive, I tried to avoid personnel files.<sup>187</sup> While they represent a kind of archival treasure, these documents seemed almost too personal for consideration. My choice of working with these files was ultimately influenced by my perception of Ukrainian state ballet as lacking personality in many of its staged performances.<sup>188</sup> And even though ballet in Ukraine is highly critical of its Imperial and Soviet past, it still does not unveil or recognize performers' histories,

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<sup>187</sup> I started working at the archive in January of 2019, following the recommendation of Sergei Borisenko, Kyiv history professor, who introduced me to the institution's archivists.

<sup>188</sup> I felt the lack of personality in ballet when watching many ballets of The National Opera of Ukraine during the winter and spring seasons of 2019 and when reading the programs that would only mention the names of the leading dancers. More specifically, the programs would only have a light-colored pencil-check by one of the leading dancers' names to signify who is performing what role, and at times the last name of a performer was written down with a pencil (with no first name to accompany it) and was hard to read. As I wrote the reviews for the Kyiv-based magazine *Ballettristic* to connect with dancing communities in Kyiv, I often had to go to the tickets office or ask my friends, as to who could be performing that evening, if the last names of the artists were illegible. The absence of artists' first names when their names were not initially printed in the program and the way the program's glossy thick paper rejected pencil marks was an additional challenge.

limiting coverage to a few sentences in the programs about the leading artists and usually leaving *corps de ballet* artists unmentioned.<sup>189</sup> The lack of recognition of dancers' labor on stage and the lack of individuality or personality in the public archives made me uncomfortable, as if I was skipping over people in favor of their stage characters. Attention to the personnel files responded to my inner questions of "Who were the people who created ballet in Kyiv specifically and Ukraine in general?", "Who were the people who were considered Honored Artists of the Ukrainian Republic?", "Who were the people who made ballet in Ukraine and influenced its spectatorship?", "How were they treated and perceived by the Soviet state?" and "What was expected from them?" While this chapter cannot fully answer all these questions, they were at the core of my inspiration and interest in considering personnel files.

When ordering the files, I felt morally flexed - I had a feeling of walking into and browsing through someone's personal effects, exposing their personal and artistic paths. The discomfort I experienced when working with personnel files was partially constructed by the way archivists reacted to my requests to look at the documents and the initial rejection of my request to make copies. While it is hard to describe the gaze and gestures that accompanied the files' transfer from the director's office to my table, I felt like it was "none of my business." Also, perhaps, I felt this discomfort as working with these documents has put me into a position of "surveilling" artists, whom I never knew personally. Lastly, my discomfort may have stemmed from the fact that my own family

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<sup>189</sup> National Opera of Ukraine repertoire features a few increasing critical ballet works. For example, *Vechera na Khutore bliz Dikan'ki* [Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka] mock the Russian Imperial court culture and highlight its hypocrisy and corruption through dance technique and costumes and *Master I Margarita* [Master and Margarita] provides a heavy critique of the Soviet regime and its focus on supervision, military economy and global influence.

has suffered from the Soviet supervision and Stalinist purges, when my great grandfather, a Siberian architect, was imprisoned and executed and my great grandmother had to “run” with two toddlers “somewhere in northern Siberia to stay in a village where no one would ask for documents,” as my mother describes. I think my own discomfort and fear of Soviet or Post-Soviet state was already there and came with my personal encounters of the long-time effects of repressions.

It appeared to me that everyone working in the archive knew that I was looking through the personnel files. The archive guard, always male and always present at the entrance door, would give me a judgmental look, complemented by the question: “So, what, Ania? Have you ordered the copies, again?” The director of the reading room would be summoned to the director’s office “on the matter of Nikulina.” And, every time when I would go in and out of the archive, the administrative staff would turn to look at me, as I passed by. The archival supervision was profound: double guarding of the archive (one at the entrance into St. Sophia cathedral space and another at the archive entrance), always-present director of the reading room and her assistant, and many cameras located across the reading room. Some of my Kyiv friends from contemporary dance community suggested: “Ania, just take the copies while they are not looking,” to which I have always replied “Even if I wanted to, I could not do that, the cameras are everywhere.”<sup>190</sup>

Thus, on one side, I was an object of archival supervision, perhaps in similar ways that the artists were: my passport was scanned into the system, multiple unofficial

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<sup>190</sup> Alexander Manshylin (Professor of Contemporary Dance, multiple colleges). Personal conversation with Ania Nikulina. Feb, 15, 2019.

“interviews” were conducted by the archivists to specify my institutional affiliation, dissertation topic, and cultural and national background.<sup>191</sup> At the same time, through my work with the files I have put myself into the shoes of an archivist or a bureaucrat who would read them. Given this duality of the research at the archive, with its ambiguity of being an object and subject of supervision, it was unclear to me how to respond to this ambiguity and behave as a scholar in the archive; it often felt like a mixture of self-humiliation, honesty and humor was key to a successful interaction.<sup>192</sup>

While I tried to look as neutral and as student-like as possible, it seemed like archival supervision was everywhere, enforcing strict rules of accessing, working in and copying archival materials. The Central State Archive of Literature and Art has its own policies, guarding archival items: I could not duplicate materials that had information on “nationality, education, family status, religion, health, material status, address, data on personal or non-property relations of a person with other persons, and particular members of family, also information about the events, that have happened or are happening in the everyday, intimate, personal, professional and other spheres of life...”<sup>193</sup> This rule, which may have been put in place following the archive’s adoption and expansion by Independent Ukraine, specifically seeks to protect personnel files and related documents,

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<sup>191</sup> To gain an access to these and many other documents, I had to provide an official letter, stating my institutional affiliation and the confirmation of my dissertation topic, signed by my advisor.

<sup>192</sup> An example of such interaction would be my response to a guard’s statement “Well, you do know that I have all the keys to the lockers [where the archive readers keep their personal belongings],” to which I have jokingly replied “Oh, that’s where this conversation is going.” Within the guard’s self-initiated conversation, the statement’s message was to highlight that readers’ personal belongings can be checked at any time, and mine’s message – that it was of no importance if the archive guard decides to do so. Another fine example would be another guard’s comment: “So, Ania, you are supposed to provide me with a signed permission to take the copies outside of the archive,” to which I always surprisingly replied: “I do?” In case if the guard would say that he was joking, I would leave the document in the pack of copies, and if the guard was serious I would provide the document. The rules and the guards changed daily.

<sup>193</sup> “The Reader’s Guide” – State Central Archive-Museum of Literature and Art



and according to document request logs, I was the first person to successfully complete all the bureaucratic steps needed to access these files.<sup>194</sup>

### **The Questions – Structuring Artists’ Experiences**

My choice of specific personnel files was based on the results of my ethnographic work, coming from an attempt to negate the feelings of guilt and archival pressure when accessing protected files. It seemed like the interviews, which mentioned certain ballet artists and pedagogues by name, legitimized my analysis of them. At the same time, I realize that the very feeling of the archive is related to the policies that often shift and construct the experience of it, depending on how “open” or “closed” materials and collections are. The majority of personnel files I examined were filled out in the 1950s, a few years prior to or shortly after Stalin’s death. For the files I worked with, the questionnaires’ dates are: Anatolii Petritskii (1954), Pyotr Baklan (1953), Rozaliya Minchina (1951), Varvara Potapova (1951), Vasilieva Tamara (1954), Galina Kirilova (1973), Sergei Sergeev (no date, even though “omissions are not permitted”). Alexander Segal’s and Elena Veselaya’s personnel files had no questionnaire that usually “opened up” the performance of state’s control and performative folders.

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<sup>194</sup> It is not immediately clear when and why the archival rules aimed at limiting access to personnel files were put in place and make a direct connection between the changing role of the state with the collapse of the USSR and its archival oversight. According to Ukrainian contemporary dance professor Alexander Manshylin, National Opera of Ukraine is prioritized in the budget of the Ministry of Culture’s, meaning that that Ukrainian authorities continue to locate national symbolism in ballet art and its bodies. Thinking about the long-time arguments, propelled by Clare Croft and other scholars about dancers as diplomats or dancers, as bearing the roles of national symbols, I would assume that the current Ukrainian state and its organizations, like the archive, are trying to protect the history of ballet in Ukraine and the histories of its bodies. While the rules of copyright certainly make archival research less comfortable, these rules attempt to secure originality and historicity of ballet works in Ukraine and its difference from ballet in Russia or other countries.

The core of each personnel file I considered is the *anketa* questionnaire. These forty-four-question-long forms were mandatory for completion at the time of one's employment in any Soviet organization. These are confusing and bizarre quasi-sociological state inquiries, targeted at the ultimate structuring and documenting of a person's life. Tellingly, the preamble in the top left corner consists of two numbered notes: "1. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, it is necessary to get acquainted with its questions to provide correct answers. 2. The answers have to be written in details, clearly and comprehensively, omissions are prohibited." In essence, the preamble sends a message of: "Think first prior to writing down your history – there are correct and incorrect answers when it comes to your personal life. Think twice before you tell us about yourself. Skipping the questions is not optional and clarity is your friend." The Soviet state's repression and supervision symbolized here by the phrase "omissions are prohibited," and relative flexibility in narrative performance, signified by the possibility to provide "correct answers," come together.<sup>195</sup>

Below, I provide the translated version of the *anketa* questionnaire to provide a performative space to the constructed questions, their structure and order, and to highlight artists' possible experience of looking at, reading and filling out such documents, where "omissions are prohibited." As Performance Studies scholarship suggests, repetition is

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<sup>195</sup> Here, I imply that artists could have some room for performance as well, and that these documents did not just function as the performances of state power. For example, the files of Sergei Sergeev, the contemporary leading choreographer, and Galina Kirillova, a former director of all the state ballet schools across the Soviet Union, provide more details in highlighting the ballets that they choreographed, the administrative work they have done and the places they traveled. In that, leaving less traces of personal or political background, they highlight and present themselves in the file as different artists, who do not need investigation.

necessary for performativity, and so I “repeat” the *anketa* questions here.<sup>196</sup> It is only fair to suggest the possible effect on artists, who filled out the questionnaire, if to experience the questions “here and now” and attempt to place oneself in a state ballet artist’s position. Following Diana Taylor’s argument about performances legalizing or strengthening archives, and Judith Butler’s statement about reality construction through repeating performances, I re-produce the *anketa* questionnaires as such performances.<sup>197</sup>

As I will show, while aiming at pure archivization of a state worker’s history, these questionnaires and recorded responses make archived history of dance even more muddled and surreal. As the first half of questions differs from the second in terms of their linguistic construction and the scale of interrogation, I structure their translation and presentation into Act One and Act Two. I show that the questions repeat themselves throughout the questionnaire, but also questionnaires repeat themselves throughout artists’ files. Some personnel files have two questionnaires (with identical questions), but different dates. In some cases, the gap was just a few years apart, not making it clear why or who initiated the second questionnaire. While the rationale behind document-repetition is often unclear, the very fact of it stands for the performance of power, control and relative subjugation of artists’ lives. I present the experience of *anketa* questionnaire as a two-act performance, mimicking the questions’ (and state’s) performativity and an attempt to produce an effect on the reader and the employee.

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<sup>196</sup> For a greater discussion of the repetition significance and its relationship to performance, see Vistor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) and Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, Number 4 (Dec, 1988), pp.519-531).

<sup>197</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, 57. Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” 527.

## Act 1. Archival Introductions and Language Violence

The central document of each personnel file is the four-page *anketa* (a blank *anketa* is demonstrated in Image X). The questions of the *anketa*, which I translated with an attempt to preserve its linguistic specificity, read as follows:

Full name and address of the institution; position held

1. Last name; First Name; Patronymic name
2. If a name change occurred, indicate the initial ones, reasons for name change, when and where did this happen
3. Year, month and date of birth
4. The place of birth (in accordance to the new naming and administrative structure): city; street; number of the house; *selo* [village]; *raion* [district]; *oblast'* [district?]

Indicate the dates of living at this address

5. Nationality
6. Social position
7. Profession
8. Party membership
9. What organization is admitted to the CPSU<sup>198</sup>?
10. *Partstazh* [Length of party membership], party id number or k. card
11. Work experience in the VLKSM<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union, frequently the Russian abbreviation KPSS (Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza) is used in Soviet Studies scholarship

12. Have you ever been in the CPSU? At what time?
13. Have you been a member of other parties?
14. What union are you a member of and since when?
15. Participation in public work (party, Soviet, union)
16. Education. [An empty space for education question is followed by a six-column table. The columns are: the place of educating institution; a detailed name of educating institution; dates of entrance and graduation; finished or not; if have not finished then why and which class dropped; what degree have obtained as a result of graduation.]
17. Do [you] have scientific works, degrees, inventions, which ones, time of publication<sup>200</sup>
18. Knowledge of foreign languages or *narodnosti* [nationalities'] languages of the USSR, a) foreign b) languages of *narodnosti* [nationalities]
19. Have they been subject to party / *komsomol* penalties?  
[This question is followed by a four-column table; the columns are: date of penalty (month, year); the method of party penalty; for what (the essence of the question), what party levy is imposed.]
20. Military service: in the old army starting since... the last achieved highest rank; in the Red Guard starting since ... in what positions... In the Red Army since ...until... the last achieved highest position

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<sup>199</sup> *Vsesouznyi Leninskii Kommunisticheskii Sojuz Molodezhi* [All-Union Lenin's Communist Youth Union], also known also as *Komsomol*.

<sup>200</sup> Some questions do not have question marks, which could be a psychological trick to reinforce question perception as a statement rather than a question.

21. Marital status (single, married, widowed). If widowed or divorced, indicate the surname, name, patronymic and nationality of the former wife (husband).

22. Citizenship. If [you] belonged to another citizenship or nationality, then in which one exactly and when [you] were accepted for USSR or Russian citizenship, and what documents were issued

Thinking about these first twenty-two questions, it is important to note there are many ways to construct a survey, and state questionnaires have their own particularities. However, Soviet documents not only carry out the sociological task of statistical data collection, but, as I will demonstrate, also deliberately act as a force of subjugation, performed through language. Soviet documentation frames a specific type of violent and depersonalized bureaucracy, through structuring its questions in stylistically incoherent and grammatically incorrect sentences, so-called “machine language.”<sup>201</sup> In doing this, the questionnaire attempts to further categorize the Soviet or rather *Sovietized* subject, while performing the constructed meaninglessness of one’s life and persona through linguistic norms used in the *anketa* question.

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<sup>201</sup>Vera Belkina (Professor of Russian and Soviet Literature, Novosibirsk State University), personal communication with Ania Nikulina, 2014. “Machine language” or “the production language” relates here to a particular Soviet style of literary language, constructed as a product of factory work. For example, a vast number of new nouns, constructed out of verbs, was introduced by the state newspapers, magazines and journals to replace previously existing nouns and highlight Soviet language as different from its Imperial predecessor. As conceptualized by Belkina, the problem of this Soviet style was an absence of linguistic flow, individuality, authorial voice and connection between sentences and paragraphs. For a greater discussion of Russian language shifts during the Soviet era, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, until it was no more: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

I argue that while using Russian language in Ukrainian national documentation was one form of violence, using incorrect, chopped sentences that disregard grammar is another method of state violence. Specifically, missed nouns and punctuation mark sentences like “finished or not” (instead of “Have you graduated from this institution?”) or “If belonged to another citizenship or nationality?” instead of “Have you had a different citizenship or did you have a different nationality?” indicate the overall framework of the state as rising above and beyond the notion of an individual or a citizen. Furthermore, there is an apparent avoidance of noun or pronoun [you] use in the sentences. The command-like manner of constructed questions, known in Russian language as *povelitel'noe naklonenie* [the imperative], further clarifies the message of state supervision, subjugation, and control. For example, the question demanding to indicate the initial names in case of name change uses the infinitive verb form “to indicate” (incorrectly) instead of just imperative form “indicate” or the stylistically correct and respectful request to “please, indicate.” This and other examples of bad/poor grammar that saturate the questionnaire performatively demonstrate the Soviet state’s disregard of the norms of language in its communication and structure it as a forceful interrogation, rather than an innocuous pre-employment survey.

Soviet Studies scholars have recognized the establishment of Russian language as the official language in all Soviet republics, including URSR [*Ukrain'ska Radyans'ka Socialistichna Respublika*], as a part of Russian chauvinism and Soviet imperialism,

developed and facilitated by Joseph Stalin in the late 1930s.<sup>202</sup> While this dissertation does not focus on the use of language in Soviet documentation, it is important to recognize how reading and responding to the state's mandatory questionnaires, constructed in Russian, could have an effect on ballet artists (or any Soviet state workers) during and after this procedure. Given that most of the other personnel files' documents, such as autobiographies, state orders and artists' requests, were also written in Russian, it is important to highlight the ubiquity and penetration of state-imposed language into the documentation of personal lives of ballet artists and their details.

## **Act 2. Question Construction, Repetition and Supervision**

The second part of any ballet is typically drastically different from a first act. Often, a second act features a culmination and a solution of a constructed gender (*Giselle*), economic (*Cinderella*), racial (*Bayadere*), or political (*Spartacus*) conflict.<sup>203</sup> While the first act sets up the context and storyline, the second act develops the narrative to produce an effect on the viewer and their subjectivity. And so do the Soviet questionnaires, which begin with "easy" questions on the first page, covering basic factual information about an individual, and proceed to the second part, where the questions are open-ended and cover political, professional and family affiliations. In this, they initially immerse the reader in their context, and then they strike with a developed narrative and acrobatic tricks of Russian written language, swaying from light and

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<sup>202</sup> For more information, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

<sup>203</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (New York: Psychology Press, 1998).



engaging linguistic vulgarisms to quasi-dignified requests to read through the lines of Soviet subjectivity and respond, and respond “correctly.”<sup>204</sup>

Interestingly, while still commandingly omitting “you,” as a noun, in many phrases, the second part of the questionnaire starts featuring this pronoun, completely avoided in the first part. However, “you” comes only in combination with “your relatives,” as if signifying that information about an artist would be significant only in the context of information about the artist’s family and relatives. The sudden appearance of “you,” always followed with “and your relatives” seems puzzling to an outsider, and yet it has its own rationale. After all, it is hard to request information about someone’s relatives without mentioning a person, required to fill out the questionnaire. The second part has a more direct political narrative within its question construction. If the questions in the first part seem more like suggestions, the questions in the second part are less ambiguous, functioning not only as interrogations, but also as warnings, as they unintentionally provide the “correct” answer. The second part reads:

23. Did you or your relatives belong to the anti-party organizations, were there any fluctuations in maintaining the CPSU party line, [have you] participated in opposition activity, where and when and what organization?

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<sup>204</sup> Though the *anketa* has 4 parts, located on four pages, the division between basic and open-ended line questioning begins on the second page, leading me to refer to pages 2-4 as the second act of the questionnaire.

24. Did you or your relatives serve in the White Army, what departments, where and when, the last achieved rank position, have [you] participated in battles against the Red Army, when and where.
25. Were you or your relatives at the White Army-held territory, where and what were [you] doing there.
26. Have you been at the territory, occupied by German invaders and their associates, when, for how long, where [you] worked during this time, and in what position.
27. Have you or your relatives been captured, cut-off from main Red Army forces or interned during the second World War against the German forces, when, where and under what circumstances, from which part of the Red Army were [you] captured, surrounded or were interned.
28. If you or your relatives faced trial or investigation, then when, where, and what was your sentence, what [was the] time of [your] imprisoning and where [were you] imprisoned.
29. If you or your relatives have been convicted, but were subsequently reinstated in your rights or the case was closed due to the lack of evidence –indicate when, where, by whom [you] were convicted, who made the final decision in your case.
30. Were you or your relatives deprived of voting rights? If yes - who, when, and what was the reason?
31. Have you or your relatives been abroad, where, when, for how long, what was your business and what was your reason for going outside [the USSR], what were

[you] doing, what funds used to support yourself, what was the reason of coming back.

32. Do you have relatives abroad? Where, since when, who (last name, first name, relationship), what is their occupation, do you have a connection with them.

33. Do you have relatives in foreign embassies or missions or their affiliated departments, business companies and among the foreign citizens. Indicate their last names, first names, patronymic names and dates of birth.

34. Did you take part in the revolutionary movement and have you been persecuted for revolutionary activity prior to the October Revolution (when, what reason, what [no noun, unclear to what the last “what” refers to]).

35. Did you take part in the partisan or underground movement (when [have you] entered, when, where and performed tasks).

36. Did you take part in battles of the Civil War or the Second World War (when, where, in what position).

37. The Information about Parents and Closest Relatives [The question is in the shape of 12-column table, meant to be filled out by an artist. The columns are:

1) [Your] relation [to a relative];

2) Surname, name and patronymic (to indicate the initial last name of [your] mother and [your] wife);

3) Year of birth;

4) Place of birth (village, district, region);

5) Nationality

- 6) Clan and social origin;
- 7) Party membership;
- 8) [Have you] owned any real estate, how, when and where;
- 9) [What was your] main occupation before the October Revolution and residence;
- 10) [What was your] occupation after the October revolution and residence;
- 11) Where [your relatives] were and what [they] did during the World War II of 1941-1945 (specify the detailed address and place of work);
- 12) [What is] Place of work and place of residence at the present time (exact address).

38. What is your position on military draft: *kategoriya ucheta* [listing category]; listing group; military rank; military-administrative duties; name of the military registration table or military registration and enlistment office where you are registered?

39. If you are not registered with the military draft committee, list the reason and provide supporting documentation.

40 State of health, do [you] have injuries, contusions, and when received

41. Do you have any military or civilian honors (which ones, what for, who provided these)?

42. Work history from the start of work activity, including education and military service. [The question is in the shape of seven-column table]. The columns are:

- 1) Date (month, year) of entry;
- 2) date (month, year) of leaving;
- 3) location of the institution, enterprise (city, village, district, region),
- 4) name of the institution or enterprise;
- 5) position;
- 6) reason for leaving;
- 7) Residence: city (street, house number), village, district, region

43. Questions, not considered by the questionnaire, but having significant meaning

44. Home address; date of filing out; signature.

Looking closer at the second part of the questionnaire, there are a few particularities that are significant. The commonalities between the first part and second part are in the missed nouns or pronouns, and even though “you” is mentioned in the beginning of most sentences, in conjunction with “your relatives,” most questions are complicated and consist of a number of sub-questions. The sub-questions, in turn, command a response through chopped phrases, imperative mood and an omission of the “you” pronoun. Another particularity, also present in the first part, is the overall shape of questions that never end with a question mark but rather with a dot, claiming and arguing a fact, not asking about it. For instance, such questions as “If you or your relatives faced trial or investigation, then when, where, and what was your sentence, what [was the] time

of [your] imprisoning and where [were you] imprisoned” claim the possible imprisonment and ask for details, rather than ask about the overall possibility of it.<sup>205</sup>

The interrogative form of *anketa* questions function through fear, creating a sense of unrelenting and ever-present supervision and control, and attempting to instill a feeling that the state already knows about one’s transgressions and that concealing this information will only make things worse. The interrogative questions-claims come in pairs; many questions are repetitive and appear in different forms. For example, the 28<sup>th</sup> question is followed by another one: “If you or your relatives have been convicted but were subsequently reinstated in rights or the case was closed due to the lack of evidence – to indicate when, where, by whom [you] were convicted, who made the final decision in your case.”

In its line of questioning, the second act of the *anketa* targets and attempts to frame the subject as a potential traitor, spy, convict or just morally unstable and unfaithful person. This can be clearly seen in the questions-claims about the possibility of serving in the White Army<sup>206</sup> during the Civil War or residing on Nazi-occupied territory and working for and with German troops during the Second World War. The document is tricky; at times the pairs of repeated or similar questions are evident, and sometimes they are not. For example, the question about the possibility of serving in the White Army

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<sup>205</sup> According to the “Memorial” research center, over 13 million people were at some point imprisoned in the USSR, a number that accounts *only* political prisoners and does not take into account criminal, administrative and “limited in rights” categories of punishment, which were frequently reserved for family members of “enemies of the state”, making this question investigate a particularly painful subject (lists.memo.ru)

<sup>206</sup> In the Russian Civil War, Bolshevik forces were referred to as the Red Army, due to the color of their battle flag, while their opponents, fighting for the preservation of Monarchy were referred to as the White Army, due to the white-blue-red pattern of the Russian flag (currently adopted by the Russian Federation as its state flag). While the Red Army became a well-known “brand” of the Soviet state, the White Army was largely forgotten, except in the Soviet questionnaires.

appears in question 20: “Military service in the Old Army<sup>207</sup>, last rank; military service in the Red Army, what position...” and then, later, in question 24: Have you or your relatives served in the White Army, what departments, where and when, the last achieved rank position, have [you] participated in battles against the Red Army, when and where. In the first one, questionnaire uses the term “The Old Army”, in the second repeated question – “The White Army.” Thus, the document uses synonyms and space to separate identical questions, arguably to provoke inconsistencies and fragility during the filling-out “ceremony.”

Unfortunately, personnel files have no information about the circumstances and the context of the filling-out procedure. When looking at the document, all sorts of questions come to mind. Where did the artists fill out the questionnaire? At home? In one of the administrative offices of the theatre or other institution? Could they have a break and call their relatives to ask if the information should be provided? Could the artists and other state workers modify it? What was the context of this archivization? Who looked at these files? How regularly? Where were they kept? With these questions in mind, I argue that the filling-out procedure was as important as the resulting document. The question-claims worked to create a sense of total state supervision and control, where any kind of personal information cannot be concealed. Just the phrase “you and your relatives” works in ways similar to prison trials; the phrase assumes that there are or there might be personnel files on the relatives already, and the information, given by an artist can be

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<sup>207</sup> The Old Army refers to Tsarist-era military service.

easily correlated and compared to responses provided by their relatives.<sup>208</sup> The phrase also implies possible punishment that might follow in case of “incorrect” answers; just the repetition of “you and your relatives” throughout the second part of the document performatively asserts the significance of the document not only for a person’s life, but also for their family. Thus, the very procedure of questionnaire filling-out and leaving traces of personal and family histories could work in both ways – affect a state artist, based on their relatives’ actions or political background, or affect an artist’s family members, based on their own history.

### **Ballet Bodies as Archives: Inconsistencies, Silences and Corrections.**

Here I turn to the artists’ responses covering the question about nationality, specifically questions of “place of birth,” “social position,” “*partiinnost*” [party membership], “what organization accepted [you] into CPSU ” and “education,” to understand how these categories structured state’s perception of a ballet artist and how the artists responded to this archivization. Practically all of the artists considered here have different nationalities; Pyotr Baklan (Ukrainian, initially from the village of Divin),

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<sup>208</sup> The state-reinforced connection between a personal history and family history, examined here, found its way in the construction of the Soviet terms “people’s enemies,” “wives of people’s enemies” and “children of people’s enemies” that were employed as official reason for imprisonment. The Soviet prison camps used this classification for camp construction, political stigma and separation of families with “untrustworthy” elements. While this structure of the questionnaires was used to locate criminals in the Soviet Union through construction of family tree and locating family members, it could also work in a reverse way – transferring political stigma from parents to children. The very existence of special prison camps for wives and children of people’s enemies in the Soviet Union highlight the constant supervision and danger of revealing persona and family information in the questionnaires. For more information on the Soviet prisons and prison camps, partially based on family affiliation criteria, see Michael Jakobson, *Origins of The Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917-1934* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), Veronica Shapovalov, *Remembering the Darkness Women in Soviet Prisons* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), Steven Barnes, *Death and redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton University, 2017).



Rozaliya Minchin, (Jewish, initially from Kyiv), Alexander Segal' (Jewish, initially from Kyiv), Varvara Potapova (Russian, initially from Kuibyshev), Tamara Vasileva (Latvian, initially from Alma-Ata), Sergei Sergeev (Armenian, initially from Tbilisi), Galina Kirillova (Russian, initially from Sverdlovsk), Anatolii Petritskii (Ukrainian, Initially from Kyiv), Elena Veselaya (initially from Kyiv). This data about ballet artists, coming from various cities and republics, in a way corresponds with ethnographic data about ballet teachers, some being from Kyiv or other Ukrainian cities, and others from other republics, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Soviet Studies and particular works, such as Francine Hirsch's *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and The Making of The Soviet Union*, shed light onto the very construction of state categories related to one's cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Part of Francine Hirsch's work argues that nationality as a category was constructed by the former imperial ethnographers, re-hired by the Soviet authorities in an attempt to secure and categorize the former imperial lands, modify or solidify the borders.<sup>209</sup> Hirsch explores imperial ethnographers' scholarly activity mostly in relationship to the constructed categories of *narodnost'* and *natsional'nost'* [nationality], traces it back to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and argues: "Most frequently the ethnographers used the term

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<sup>209</sup> In the introduction to *Empire of Nations*, Hirsch clarifies that "Russian and early Soviet ethnography (*etnografiia*) was a broad field of inquiry, which included under its umbrella the disciplines of geography, archaeology, physical anthropology and linguistics." Hirsch examines the history of ethnography in Russian Empire and the transition of the discipline during the Soviet project. More specifically, in the first chapter Hirsch considers the scholarly activity of Sergei Ol'denburg, permanent secretary of the Academy of Sciences and chair of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society's (IRGO's) Ethnographic Division, and of Nikolai Nadezhdin, the founding member of the IRGO's Ethnographic Division. In her work, Hirsch follows a different periodization than the majority of works on the history of Soviet Union. Even though the re-hire period, considered in the first chapter, relates to the period of 1917-1924, the chapter embraces the interval from 1905 to 1924 to examine the pre-Soviet shifts and developments in the related fields of *etnografiia* [ethnography] and *antropologiia* [anthropology] and their subsequent adaptation to and "working relationship" with the Soviet authorities.

*narodnost*’ – which derived from *narod*, the Russian word for “people” or Volk. When Nikolai Nadezhdin argued in 1846 that Russia’s ethnographers should take *narodnost*’ as their primary category of study, what he meant was that they should study ethnographic materials reflecting the “essence” of the Russian people.”<sup>210</sup> In her work, Hirsch shows that *narodnost*’ and nationality questions were the core issues during the process of the making of the Soviet borders, cultural or geographical, and highlights that Lenin specifically “called for careful studies of the population’s ethnographic make-up, arguing that boundaries of a new Russian Socialist state could not be drawn to meet ‘the requirements of production’ alone.”<sup>211</sup> The Soviet project and the construction of nationality worked through ethnographic research and the accumulation of various communities across the former territory into *narodnosti* [peoples] and, in turn, *narodnosti* – into nationalities. Hirsch highlights that nominal nationality, prescribed by the Soviet authorities, could, in fact, relate to a specific *narodnost*’ or encompass a variety of them.<sup>212</sup>

Thinking through Soviet national categorization, based on the accumulation and classification of various communities, often initially related to as *tribes*, the very Soviet term of *nationality* becomes a mediated term, functioning as a mask for a rather complicated background. Thus, when considering artists’ personnel files, I do not assume

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<sup>210</sup> Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 36.

<sup>211</sup> Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 64. For a vivid archival example of *narodnosti* classification table, including synonym names and subgroups names, see Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 122.

<sup>212</sup> For the discussion of *narodnost*’ and *natsional’nost*’ categories, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

that a given or written-down nationality was “true “or “false,” and I leave open the possibility of artists having complicated cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. Given that the majority of files I located dated from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, this nationality question gets particularly complicated, considering mass migration and re-location during and after the Civil War, voluntary and forced relocations after the Second World War, and Stalinist repressions throughout the 1930’s, 1940’s and early 1950’s. In At the same time, I do not exclude the possibility that teachers could silence family histories of forced relocations. However, archival analysis also reveals silences; while fixing artists’ and teachers’ responses about family histories and related re-locations, archival materials fail to explain the underlying reasons behind these events.

Inconsistencies, silences and corrections drew my attention. The information contained in the questionnaires was complicated by the information in the artists’ autobiographies, *kharakteristika* texts (narrativized Soviet state’s cv of an artist), *spravka* documents (letters of confirmation of artists’ employment and good standing in the theatre or the party) and *nakazy* (state’s orders, related to artists’ employment, re-location, salary and rewards). At times, looking at *kharakteristika*, *spravka*, and *nakazy* documents made it easier to understand the questionnaire responses and the rationale behind them, and at times, it made things more confusing. For example, in the file of long-time Kyiv’s leading ballet dancer Tamara Vasil’eva, often mentioned in the interviews, her Russian nationality was crossed and corrected for Latvian with a different pen, and, quite possibly, at a time different from the filling-out date of March, 28, 1954. While it is unclear how, when exactly, and under what circumstances “Russian”

transitioned into “Latvian,” I wonder if this correction was made and initiated by the ballerina herself, or a state worker. In both cases, the rationale seems unclear and brings various questions to mind. Was it a matter of convenience? Was it a matter of prestige? Was it a matter of diversity? While it is clear that Russian was Vasileva’s initial response in the questionnaire, another document, the typed *kharakteristika* text, located in the personnel file, had “Russian” erased, most likely with an eraser, and “Latvian” carefully written in instead with the same pen and seemingly the same hand-writing, as used on the first page. This type of “correction,” including its uncertain origin, rationale, permission or direction makes it difficult if not impossible to establish an “original” or “true” national identity for artist considered a cultural symbol of Ukrainian ballet. Could it be that the nationality change in the *anketa* was related to the change in the *kharakteristika* text, dated June 11, 1956? Or did both changes occur later? While the hand-writing of “Latvian” in the questionnaire looks similar to Vasileva’s hand-writing overall and similar to the same in the box for her mother’s nationality on a different page, I wonder if it was her voluntary decision to access the file to change the nationality. If the nationality change was voluntary, then, was Latvian related to her self-identification, which became possible at some point? <sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> For more information on the subjects of nationality and ethnicity and their mediation by the Soviet state, see Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). While Northrop investigates a particular site of Stalinist Central Asia, the author argues that ascribing oneself to a particular ethnicity was often unsafe in the USSR if specific features were constructed as a part of “backwards” or “savage” cultures. For example, wearing a veil in Central Asia was often unsafe or non-beneficial for women and their families in many Sovietized districts and cities. Thinking about Soviet classification of ethnicities and nationalities, examined by Francine Hirsch in *Empire of Nations*, and the constructed social or cultural privilege of one ethnicity or nationality over another, Latvian was on an opposite site of the privilege spectrum.

Another interesting detail comes into focus when looking at the windows for Vasilieva's siblings and parents: all relatives, except for Vasilieva's mother, Vasilieva (Zvirtdyn') Marta Ivanovna, are assigned Russian nationality in the document. Interestingly, Vasilieva's spelling of the word Russian in the boxes for her father, Ivan R. Vasiliev, and three siblings reaches from the top left corner to the right bottom one, while the word Latvian for her mother's nationality reaches from the left bottom corner of the fill-in space to the upper left one, as if designed in a way to highlight her mother's Latvian nationality and origins. The table column of current address states that all the members of the family resided in Riga from 1945 to 1954, in the same apartment. So, was a change in nationality a convenient thing to do if staying and working in Riga, or something that was required? But, then why was a change from Russian to Latvian, recorded in the 1954 document, dated two months prior to the family re-location to Kyiv?

The nationality "correction" makes it clear that prior to the *anketa* date of March 28, 1954, Vasilieva most likely was officially listed as Russian, while living in Riga. Yet, according to the family history table, Vasilieva was born in 1928 in the city of Alma-Ata (the former name of current Almaty), the former capital of Kazakhstan, where the family migrated from the *Altaiskii Krai*, a Russian district in Siberia. Interestingly, Vasilieva omitted the place of birth of her older sister, leaving a Russian letter "g.," standing for a sort-hand of city, and an empty space. Another older sister has "g. Altaiskii Krai" for a place of birth, while Altaiskii Krai is the name of the district, larger than the state of California, not a city. While silencing the places of births of her two older sisters, Nina and Muza, and hence the location of the family in the 1920s, Vasilieva provided a

specific address in Almaty, Kazakhstan for the years of 1928 to 1944. According to the education and work history tables, shortly after finishing *Kazakhsкое Gosudarstvennoe Khoreograficheskoe Uchiliwe* [Kazakh State Choreographic College] in Almaty and graduating from it in 1945, the whole family moved to Riga for work. Careful omission of information, introducing nominally specific, but actually vague answers (place of birth) and factually specific, but largely meaningless information (former addresses) point to an effort to construct a straight -forward *anketa* narrative of the dancer's life journey, which was anything but standard.

While nominally graduating from Kazakh State Choreographic College, the ballerina received the last year of ballet education in Moscow, studying at the Bolshoi Ballet school, formerly known as *Khoreograficheskoe Uchiliwe pri GABT SSSR* [Choreographic College of State Academic Bolshoi Theatre of USSR]. According to the two-page auto-biography of the personnel file:

I, Vasilieva Tamara Ivanovna was born in 1928 in the city of Almaty. In 1935 I entered public school. Simultaneously, I studied at Almaty choreographic college since 1939. In 1944 [I] was transferred to Moscow for improvement in the choreographic school of SABT USSR. In 1945, finishing high school [in Almaty] and the course of self-improvement, I, given that my relatives were transferred to the city of Riga for work, also moved there for a permanent residence. In 1945, I was accepted at the State Theatre of Opera and Ballet of Latvian Republic.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Tamara Vasilieva, *Avtobiografiya* [Autobiography], personnel file of Tamara Vasilieva, April 17, 1954

This narrative excerpt, while making the personal history foggy and mysterious, resonates with data from my ethnographic study of Kyiv State Ballet School. In Chapter Two, I examined teachers' narratives and memories of studying in Moscow for "self-improvement." According to GM<sup>215</sup>, the one-year and two-year courses of self-improvement were designed to "bring ballet pedagogy and the training system to one denominator," and worked through the one-year and two-year internships, offered to ballet students and graduates from various cities and republics to Moscow. These internships realized and continued the Soviet imperial practices of educating and training students and young specialists from various districts to distribute state-validated ballet philosophy and pedagogy and silence or downplay the local dance practices ones. In this case, Vasilieva most likely was hand-picked by the Moscow ballet teachers, who travelled to various Soviet republics, districts, cities, and towns for gifted students "with abilities."

Personnel files reveal critical information about Moscow-based ballet internships, which is otherwise difficult to locate. I have only previously encountered it in in short essays, published in Soviet popular magazines<sup>216</sup>. Yet, these are critical narratives that imagine and position free ballet education as an "export" product of the Soviet culture and European enlightenment. In them ballet is revealed as a method of direct cultural diplomacy, directed at students from Kazakhstan and Mongolia as evidence of "friendship of the people" of USSR and Kazakh Republic, and USSR and its allied

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<sup>215</sup> As a reminder, I code the names of my participants to protect their identities.

<sup>216</sup> I have located a number of editorial essays on this topic (with no single author listed) in popular magazines, including *Ogonek* [Fire], and *Sovetskoe Foto* [Soviet Photo]

Mongolia. Soviet ballerina Galina Kirillova's personnel file registers all the trips outside of USSR and also reveals the ballerina's July 1973 trip to Mongolia for recruitment of Mongolian students into the Moscow Choreographic College [Bolshoi Ballet School]. While Kazakhstan, a Soviet Republic, was historically used as source region of natural resources by the USSR and also as a land of exile and labor camps, Mongolia, a Soviet ally since 1939 and a member of Soviet Council of Economic Mutual Help, functioned as a base for Soviet military forces since 1962 in political relationships of USSR, Japan and China. While it is difficult to compare the experience of expert ballet interns from Kazakhstan and other Republics to the experiences of young ballet students, initially hand-picked by the Soviet teachers from Mongolia, it is important to note a similar use of ballet as a method of cultural absorption in both instances.

Going back to the file of Tamara Vasilieva, a Russian and non-Russian-but-Latvian and Kyiv ballerina, it is significant to highlight re-locations, registered in the file. Initially from Kazakh Republic, Vasilieva had two residencies to Russia; first, as a Moscow Bolshoi Ballet intern, "sent" from Kazakh Choreographic College for self-improvement, and later, as a college student of Leningrad Conservatory, graduating in 1950. There were residencies in Riga as well; first, as a ballet artist in the theatre, after finishing the self-improvement year, and then, again, as a ballet artist and a ballet teacher from 1950 to 1954. Thinking about the final registered move of the family to Kyiv in 1954, after four years of work in Latvia State Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the re-locations of the ballerina hint toward Soviet artists' high dependence on domestic and foreign state policies. The rationale for the move from the Kazakh Republic to Latvian and from Latvian to



Ukrainian is almost completely silenced in the phrases like “relatives were transferred,” never assigning or claiming the agency in these decisions. While the narrative fails to provide the rationale behind the transfer, this seemingly random and spontaneous re-location could have been part of Stalinist Post-War re-location policies, when “unfaithful” Latvian citizens were forcefully re-located out of Riga, and the newly empty apartments were transferred to the “faithful” Soviet citizens of both Latvian and Russian nationality. It is not possible to prove if Vasilieva’s history was a part of this re-location policy, but that would be one of the few explanations.

According to the questionnaire and her autobiography, Vasilieva received a position in the Latvian Theatre of Opera and Ballet in 1945, following her Moscow ballet internship, where she worked as a ballet artist for two years after her “relatives were transferred to the city of Riga” in 1945. Going back to the nationality question and its change in the 1954 questionnaire and in her 1956 *kharakteristika*, given to Vasilieva, the very change or correction frames the nationality category as inter-changeable, flexible, erasable, and mediated. At times, nationality could depend on one’s current location (like Vasilieva’s work in Riga), and at times nationality could be resistive or independent from location (like Vasilieva’s initial Russian nationality, despite Kazakh Republic being a place of birth and long-time education).

Interestingly, another Kyiv ballet artist, Varvara Potapova, had a similar family history in terms of her nationality question. Initially coming from Kuibyshev, a city in Siberia, from a family of Russian father and a Latvian mother, Potapova had “Russian” as her response for the nationality question. The date of the filled-out *anketa* is listed as

October, 13, 1951, just prior to Stalin's death in 1953, and an open critique and revision of Stalinist policies of institutionalized Russian chauvinism and imperialism. Potapova's other siblings registered as Russian, as in Vasilieva's case with Popatopava mother being the only Latvian "outsider" in the family. Potapova's personnel file features *nakaz* #237 [the order #237] to accept the Potapova as a ballet artist to Kyiv's State Theatre of Opera and Ballet, starting September 13, 1951.

Both Vasilieva and Potapova entered Kyiv Theatre of Opera and Ballet practically at the same time. Yet, according to *nakazy* documents (the state's orders), they had different starting salaries. According to *nakaz* # 237, Potapova's salary was 900 karb, and, according to *nakaz* #134, Vasilieva's monthly salary was 1800 karb. per month. This difference in the starting salary might be related to different positions, as Potapova entered Kyiv theatre as "a ballet artist," which most likely meant a position in the corps de ballet, after graduating from Bolshoi Ballet School in Moscow in 1951, and Vasilieva had a higher education degree from Leningrad Conservatory on top of ballet school and six-year experience of work in Riga theatre. At the same time, Potapova's file claims that the ballerina graduated with a degree of "ballet soloist" from the Moscow school, while Vasilieva graduated just as a "ballet artist." These terms that might seem like words on paper to an outsider often related to the inner policies of ballet schools that presented some graduates as perspective leading dancers and the given degree of *solistka baleta* [leading dancer], received from the ballet school, guaranteed a preferential starting position with the artists new ballet company.

Potapova's file has its own silences, despite the state's prohibition of omission. If Vasilieva avoided mentioning the family's location in the 1920s prior to her birth in 1928 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Potapova included just one note in the education table, meant to encompass all the attended institutions. Despite a well-known fact that SABB choreographic college [Choreographic College of State Academic Bolshoi Theatre] accepted nine- and ten-years old students for an eight-year specialized ballet education, Potapova's file says that the ballerina studied there just for three years, from 1948 to 1951, graduating at age nineteen with a *solistka baleta* [leading dancer] degree. The omission of the previous institutions, attended prior to the age of 16, could mean an exclusive permission to avoid mentioning them, though this is difficult to establish with certainty. Given that Potapova was born in Kuibyshev, one could assume that she might have studied ballet there in the local Palace of Culture or House of Pioneers, or the closest to Kuibyshev state ballet school in Novosibirsk. The questionnaire response specifying time at initial address was left empty, only stating that Potapova's father died in Kuibyshev in 1943. The date of her father's birth is also missing. At the same time, the file registers the place of residence of the oldest sister, stating that the sister lives in Germany with her military husband. I wonder if Potapova could have spent some time with her older sister in Germany and if that could be a reason of omitting the school education prior to her entrance Bolshoi ballet school at 16 (usually the age of graduation from the institution)? At the same time, Potapova's file mentions a rather unique event: Potapova's participation in the festival in Berlin in 1951, which meant that the ballerina,

as a student, was in very high regard at the school that resonates with her *solistka baleta* degree.

At times, silences of the *anketa* are more telling than the presented information. In Potapova's case, the omission of her current place of residency and her location during the Second World War of her oldest sister Vera in the table of "information about the parents and relatives" comes together with a note "My sister Vera M. is in Germany with her husband, who is in the military," left in response to a question of "Have you or your relatives been abroad, where, when, for how long, what was your business and what was your reason for going outside [the USSR], what were [you] doing, what funds used to support yourself, what was the reason of coming back? Thus, while avoiding mention of her sister's location during the Second World War, the ballerina could not completely silence it in the other part of questionnaire. The fact that the father, a pre-revolutionary state's employee, died in the midst of Second World War in 1943 in Kuibyshev, leaving Potapova's mother with four children, leaves one to think that Potapova could have travelled and lived in Germany after the war with her oldest sister, prior to the rather late entrance into ballet school in Moscow and a rapid graduation just three years later in 1951. Thus, the omission of the previously attended institutions could be a way to conceal family location or activity during the War, which was a very problematic topic in the USSR.

Both Vasilieva and Potapova, became "Honored People's Artists of Ukrainian Republic," a title that framed a ballet artist as a national symbol of the Ukrainian Republic, despite both dancers having non-Ukrainian family histories. Hiring documents

further reveal particularities of the selection process of bodies designated as cultural material to represent the state to domestic and foreign audiences. For Vasilieva, the handwritten document states:

Meetings of the directing department of the ballet of the Kyiv Opera and Ballet

Theater March 19, 1954

Chairman of the meeting, chief choreographer of dance, People's Artist of URSR,  
Vronsky

Secretary-inspector of the ballet, Sobchak

Theater Director, comrade Shevchenko

Deputy Director, comrade Demchenko

Director of the ballet troupe, comrade Stepanenko

Assistant Choreographer, comrade Yarygina

Tutor, comrade Verekundova (Honored Artist of URSR)

Potapova E. (Honored Artist of URSR)

Gerasimchuk (Honored Artist of URSR)

Ershova (Honored Artist of URSR)

Apukhtin (Honored Artist of URSR)

Belov (Honored Artist of URSR)

Ivashenko (Honored Artist of URSR)

Party Secretary T. Vasilchukov

Listened: View t. Vasilyeva Tamara Ivanovna

Resolved: Accept into the position of korefeika [leading dancer]. Suitable to our theatre. (general opinion expressed).

Secretary Sobchak.

In this short document, Soviet archives are revealed as performative; not only do they capture ballet and its bodies in the archive, they also produce an action, an action of acceptance into a state and centrally-managed national identity structure. In this instance, the “our” pronoun in the phrase “Suitable to our theatre,” indicates a perception of the state theatre as a place of belonging and as a subject of possession. The audition and acceptance procedures and their archivization are complemented by the presence of bodies-of-power – chief choreographer, theatre director, deputy director, director of the ballet troupe, assistant choreographer and a tutor. Everyone had to be present, including the secretary-inspector of ballet, to signify that ballet was an art form that needed to be thoroughly inspected. And, everyone present had to see and agree to the new member, even if they were trained within the same system. While functioning as parts of state mechanism and centralized ballet economy, these documents, including *extracts from [audition] protocols* in a way highlight the theatre as an integral, distinct entity, as *our theatre*, that will take only the bodies *suitable* for its function.

I argue that the heavily politicized Soviet designations of *Honored Artist* and *Peoples’ Artist*, were designed to construct ballet artists as national symbols of a given Soviet republic, regardless of their actual national origin and ethnicity. In comparison with the official nationality marker that could be visible only in the state documents, Soviet artistic statuses structured artists’ experiences by functioning as a reward for

significant work and contribution to Soviet ballet and as a pathway to future success, salary raises and power positions, such as chief choreographer, ballet inspector, pedagogue-tutor, chief of training department, or ballet methodologist. When examining available Kyiv State Theatre of Opera and Ballet programs for the post-war decades, it was evident that the leading roles were always reserved for the ballet dancers who had either Honored Artist or Peoples' Artist status. Furthermore, in print and television cultures, artists with Soviet regalia continue to be presented together with national markers of the republic they were meant to symbolize.<sup>217</sup>

While in Varvara Potapova's and Tamara Vasilieva's cases, the status of Honored Artist of Ukrainian Republic overlapped with "majority" Russian nationality, other artists' initial nationality designation was of national minorities. For example, according to his *anketa*, Sergei Sergeev, the former chief choreographer of the Kyiv State Theatre of Opera and Ballet in the Stalinist period of 1939-1954, was Armenian by nationality and Honored Artist of Ukrainian Republic since 1940 and Peoples' Artist of Ukrainian Republic since 1946. Born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1983 to parents whose last names were different from his own, Sergeev's documents contain their own silences and inconsistencies. The first particularity attracting a reader's attention is Sergeev's

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<sup>217</sup> For example, in a recent *Sestry Potapovy* [Potapovy sisters] documentary, produced by Ukrainian TCH television channel in 2010, Varvara and her twin-siblings Anna and Elena, all of whom had long-term ballet careers in the Kyiv State Theatre of Opera and Ballet, producers specifically highlight their honored artist and peoples' artist statuses and reference their national ballet roles. Both ethnically Russian, furthermore coming from a Siberian city of Kuibyshev, the sisters are presented as key artists who constructed national identity in the Soviet-era Ukrainian ballet. And, interestingly, while Varvara, an Honored Artist, danced mostly classic variations of Cinderella (in *The Cinderella*), Juliette (in *Romeo and Juliette*) and Svanil'da (in *Coppellia*), her older sister Elena, a Peoples' Artist, danced leading roles in nation-themed ballets of *Lileya [Lileya]*, *Rostislava [Rostislava]*, *Lesnaya Pesnya [A Forest Song]* in addition to classic ballet variations. In this case, the status of peoples' artist of Ukrainian Republic symbolized Varvara's sister Elena Potapova functioning as a national symbol of a Ukrainian local girl, constructed by the above-mentioned ballets.

personnel file's education table that mentions two Tbilisi institutions, a gymnasium and the Perini ballet school. In the autobiography document, Sergeev highlights his parents' working class origins, and resulting priority acceptance into the Perm ballet school:

My father was a worker-carpenter, my mother – a stay-at-home mother.

Due to the father's low income, [I] was not able to receive a full high school education and transferred into the Perini ballet school, where I studied and simultaneously worked at the Tbilisi State Opera Theatre first as a worker. Then [I] was transferred into a ballet company and started working as a ballet artist. I worked as a ballet artist until 1924 and then, in 1924 I was assigned a position of a choreographer, where I worked as a choreographer and a leading dancer.

In 1927, based on the invitation of Comrade Arkanov, the director of Sverdlovsk Theatre, I accepted a position of chief choreographer in the city of Sverdlovsk [Russia]. In 1928 the administration of Tbilisi Theatre demanded my return to Tbilisi where I worked during the seasons of 1928-29 and 1929-1930. In 1930, according to the invitation of Sverdlovsk Theatre, I moved to Sverdlovsk, where I served for eight years until 1938. Since 1939 and until now I work in Kyiv Theatre of Opera and Ballet.

During the World War II, when the theatre was evacuated, I was transferred with the theatre and worked first in Ufa [Russia], and then Irkutsk [Siberia, Russia] and in 1944 returned back to Kyiv with the theatre company. During the evacuation years [1939-1944] I came many times with the ballet



company to work in the hospitals and Red Army departments.... Throughout my choreographer career, I have conducted the staging of the following ballets:

Tchaikovskii's Sleeping Beauty,

Tchaikovskii's Swan Lake,

Glazunov's Raimonda,

Minkus's Don Quixote,

Puni's Esmeral'da,

Delib's Coppellia,

Rimskii-Korsakov's Sheherezda,

Rimskii-Korsakov's Spanish Capricho,

Chopin's Chopiniana,

Shtraus's Shtrausiana,

Armegeimer;'s Prival Kavalerii,

Drigo's Magic Flute,

Music mix Carnaval,

Glier's Red Poppy,

Asafief's Bakhchisaraiskii Fontan,

Balanchinavadze's [Balanchine's] The Heart of Muntains,

Skorul'skii's Lisova Pesnya,

Jorgish's Bisova Noch',

Khachaturyan's Gayane,

Prokof'ef's Zolushka,

Morozov's Doktor Aibolit,

Chulaki's Junost',

Svechnikov's MArusya Boguslavka.

To the decade of Ukraine's re-union [I] staged choreographic work "The friendship of peoples" [autobiography's last sentence]

In Sergeev's brief autobiographical narrative, there is a clear effort to simultaneously present himself as an exemplary Soviet dancer, both in terms of dedication to the state and in terms of avoiding agency over his own career. First, I was struck by the scale of Sergeev's success, which was relatively hard to design and navigate during this particular Stalinist era, and, also, by the conjunction of success with "low" education. The response "low" to the question about education most likely meant that neither of the schools was finished, as ballet schools provided either *sredne-special'noe* [specialized-middle school] or a high school-equivalent diplomas. Second, one can detect an almost complete avoidance of agency in the first part, detailing and explaining the artist's relocations from one city to another, with the only exception of a note of Comrade Arkanov, who, according to Sergeev, initially invited the artist to work in Sverdlovsk theatre as a chief choreographer. Such phrases as "[I] was transferred," "[I] moved with the theatre," "[I] was evacuated," "the administration of Tbilisi theatre demanded my return" dominate the narrative, where Sergeev constructs himself as a by-product of someone else's decisions.

According to Sergeev's narrative, re-locations structured his life and artistic career, yet he never referenced his own desires to move. This narrative construction is

quite common among all the other autobiographies I have encountered; the very autobiographical style attributed agency to the state, when leaving and presenting artists as a mere inter-changeable mechanism in the system. Given that autobiographies I located had the same style of brief two to three-page documents, lacking any details, intrigues or particularities, I wondered about the conditions and the context of their creation. At the same time, the second part of Sergeev's autobiographical narrative highlights his participation in cultural production. In place of his final word in the autobiography, Sergeev leaves a sentence, "To the decade of Ukraine's re-union [I] staged choreographic work "The friendship of peoples," as if saying "don't you dare to forget that I was the one who actually did all these works, including the *Friendship of Peoples*, even though I never claimed them as my own." Neither the questionnaire nor the autobiography has dates; however, examining the autobiography it seems that the document is dated somewhere in between 1951 and 1954, at the end of the artist's career.

When considering the table of "information about parents and relatives," it is evident that at some point Sergeev refused his parents' last names and his family history; his father, Nikolai S. Vartantsov, and mother, Mariya S. Martirosova, both have different last names, neither corresponds with Sergeev's last name. Interestingly, while placing the time of parents' death – 1917 for the father, and 1916 for the mother, Sergeev put "don't remember" in spaces meant to register their birth dates. According to the questionnaire, Armenian nationality was the only thing Sergeev inherited from them. I wondered if the parents' last names refusal and the last name change for a recognizably Russian one, coinciding with his first name, corresponded with the phenomena of the

Soviet generation, refusing their parents, when the last ones were persecuted as peoples' [state] enemies<sup>218</sup>. Stalin's famous phrase of "A son is not responsible for a father's actions" comes to mind, as it reflected the policy of "forgiving" peoples' enemies' children, even though often they were still persecuted, just in less direct ways. Is it possible that Armenian nationality was the only mark Sergeev could keep as a reminder of his parents and their deaths? And, was the focus on the staged productions and his reference to various composers a way to disconnect his artistic legacy from the fate of the Soviet state?

Due to the questionnaire and autobiographies' formalism, it is hard to read between the lines. However, just looking at the personnel files, the theory of sedimented identity, developed by Judith Butler, comes to mind, postulating that one's identity is formed over their lifetime from a set of layered ("sedimented") experiences. I argue that Soviet national identity had a sedimented character, with base layers formulated by parents, nationality, and places of birth (not necessarily matching), with additional layers, relating to the republic of ballet education, and then, with the layers relating to the republic of work or career, and then, finally, Soviet-acquired regalia. After all, artists would be known and equated mostly with the republics, where their Honored Artist and Peoples' Artist designations were archived. In this, their personnel files present them as state bodies with fluctuating nationality and sedimented identity.

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<sup>218</sup> For more information about the treatment of the "children of the enemies of the people", see Corinna Kuhr, "Children of "Enemies of The People" as Victims of the Great Purges," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, pp.209-220.

## **Archives as Performance/Performative: Conclusions and Theoretical Implications**

In the field of Performance Studies Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* holds particular significance in the setting and critique of the boundaries of the archive and the repertoire. In her work, Taylor contends that the dominance of text over performance emerged as a result of text's ability to easily preserve and transfer knowledge, to create the *archive*, which has become juxtaposed to a live but ephemeral *repertoire* of culture. From Taylor's perspective, dance, by definition, is a part of the repertoire: "The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, signing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge."<sup>219</sup>

According to Taylor, ballet as a dance practice would be a part of repertoire, creating and re-constructing cultural memory through performance. However, my experience at the State Central Archive-Museum of Art and Literature crystalized the overarching notion of ballet archives as performances, which became the key concept defining this chapter. I argue that all ballet bodies involved in state-sponsored ballet production as individual-but-state bodies were archived through and in the personnel files. The process of archivization, in turn, was a vehicle to make a state body out of a ballet body. This process operated through three channels: through training within the state ballet school system and performing in the state-sanctioned ballet repertoire; through meticulously archiving artists' individual and family histories, and through artists navigating this system of archivization to advance their careers.

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<sup>219</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, 20.

In the case of state-sponsored ballet in Soviet Ukraine, ballet production required both archival permission and a set of official accompanying documents and approvals. Thinking about the list of documents (Appendix A), that accompanied ballet productions and all hires in the cultural economy of Soviet Ukraine, this very location of dance inside the field of repertoire is problematic. As I showed in this chapter, every artist was shadowed by the ever-present personnel file, which could be used to direct, reward or punish an artist for deviating from artistic and political directions of the state. And in this, the question remains open: is ballet in the archive or repertoire? I see the archive and repertoire, as Taylor's binary, even though they often operate together. It is precisely due to the restricted access to The Central State Archive of Literature and Art and the closed nature of The National Opera that ballet repertoire and its archives have to be recognized as separate phenomena. Thinking about Taylor's focus on cultural memory and its dependence on the interplay between the archive and repertoire, the very combination of and balance between the Imperial-era Russian ballets and nation-themed Ukrainian works taps into relationships between the cultural memory and state regimes. This balance in the repertoire relates to the Soviet nostalgia, explored in Chapter 2, and the examined mixture of the notions of Russia, Ukraine, USSR and Ukrainian SSR in oral narratives.

I argue that while it is impossible to locate dance and ballet in Ukraine within the archive-repertoire binary, as it exists in and as both, the binary itself is necessary for understanding Soviet and Post-Soviet ballet in Ukraine and the rift between them. It exists and is obvious in archival research, when the director of the reading room says: "Ania, copy more and write down less" and the archive guards' wacky phrases "I trust

you” (when looking at my reader’s card at the entrance) and “Were you making copies again?” (at the exit). Performances, like potent oral invocations, realize themselves through repetition; these two questions, repeated over and over by different guards throughout my four-month archival journey, construct the message – that they trust me with the archives, even they were not archivists, scholars, or librarians. Every time I thought to myself “I have a pass, for a reason;” however, a pass would mean a legal right to look and at times copy the materials. An archival power of the pass ended right there, at the archive, “I trust you” related to the next step – writing about these archives.

The binary between archive and repertoire permeated my ethnographic research as well. The very binary was a precursor for my first visit and study of Kyiv Ballet School, when at the first meeting I was confused by the ballet teacher's question "So, how did you find me? I saw your [printed] letter on my table [at the school], but I don't know how it got there." Naively, I thought that the teacher, my first contact, simply responded months later to my e-mail and a quest to conduct my research at the school. It was only later that I realized that Kristina Shiskareva, a contemporary dance instructor at the school and a close friend of Anton Ovchinnikov, (also a contemporary dance choreographer, initially recommended by the US Embassy as a point of contact), had left my printed letter on the table of this ballet teacher who then responded to my e-mail, dated months earlier.<sup>220</sup> While I have tried to describe the ballet school, the main training center for future employees of National Opera of Ukraine, as a relatively closed state

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<sup>220</sup> Ovchinnikov, Anton. (Expert for performing arts in Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, founder and artistic director of Zelyonka Fest Contemporary Dance festival). Personal Conversation with Ania Nikulina. Apr. 30, 2018.

institution, this serves as a salient example of just how isolated state ballet remains and the very rift between the archive and the repertoire. For example, without the repertoire of daily conversations that constructed my professional and personal connections in Kyiv, my letter to The School would not be delivered. So, my letter *is* the archive; and it *is* the repertoire. Without the existence and maintenance of a repertoire-driven community between dancers, this project would exist only in the archival form of an official, never answered e-mail that I sent to Kyiv State Ballet School in October of 2017.

Shortly after the completion of my ethnographic study, I attended a graduate research seminar organized by my funding agency, where I asked the question about copyright and the possible use of pictures in my dissertation. I almost choked at the response I heard: “You just e-mail the school and ask about the copyright.” It was then that I realized that the striking belief in the power of e-mail (or digitized texts) may be a notion that has virtually no basis in reality that I encountered “on the ground.” Put simply, no one would respond to my e-mail. However, it goes back to the question of prevalence – if the archive aids and affects the body-to-body transmission, or these transmissions and conversations assist or influence the archive.

The rift, noticed by Taylor, has been felt throughout all the stages of this research, from my neglected e-mail that somehow found its way to a particular table, continuing with the misplaced *Lileya* libretto, and silences and mysteries of the personnel files, considered here. The fluidity of the ballet archives taps into Rebecca Schneider’s critique of Diana Taylor’s constructed binary. As Rebecca Schneider states in her discussion of *Hamlet* and the similarities between how texts and performances function:



And so, here, the villainy that can occur between setting something down and taking it up again is not necessarily delimited to performance. The afterlife of the written word, set down and yet changing hands, jumping from body to body, eye to mouth, as text is interjected into text, is not entirely dissimilar to the promiscuous tracks of actorly acts.<sup>221</sup>

Schneider's troubling of the binary between archive and repertoire through drawing the connections in the way both function and pointing to the fluidity of interpretation relates to my consideration of personnel files here. I argue that the observed silences, corrections, and omissions relate to the performance-like function of the texts; these files performed the state's power to investigate thoroughly its subjects and at the same time they performed the Soviet citizen's right to negate or resist investigation.

Personnel files are performative in the sense that they are designed to bring about certain effects. According to Schneider, the archive is performative, and its performativity is realized through repetition. Now, thinking about the questions and questionnaire itself that stayed the same for the decades of 1950s-1980s, repetition was quite prominent and obvious. I provided a detailed analysis of questionnaire, the key part of any personnel file, and demonstrated its internal logic that denied Soviet state artists the right of silence and demanded full disclosure. Personnel files were performative in a sense that they materialized an artist's subjugation to the state through the very procedure or the ceremony of archivization of individual and family histories. The observed silences and corrections in this chapter relate to Schneider's consideration of archive as a tool of state power:

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<sup>221</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 88.

The demand for a visible remain, at first a mnemonic mode of mapping for monument, would eventually become the architecture of a particular social power over memory... That is, if ancient archives housed back-ups in case of the failure of localized knowledge, colonial archives participated in the failure of localized knowledge – that failure had become a given. The document, as an arm of empire, could arrest and disable local knowledges while simultaneously scripting memory as necessarily failed, as Ann Laura Stoler has amply illustrated. The archive became a mode of governance against memory.<sup>222</sup>

In the context of Soviet Ukraine, artists' personnel files did not "script memory" as necessarily failed. However, these documents framed state subjects as inherently disobedient, untrustworthy, disloyal and, possibly, dangerous to society.

The performative power and the effect of personnel files were meant to instill fear when thinking not only about the state but also one's family. In personal communication, theater historian Randall Halle noted that the omissions and silences I observed may be related to the lack of individual documentation during particular times within the Soviet era.<sup>223</sup> While the argument seemed compelling, it also reflected Schneider's observation of a state's framing of memory as "necessarily failed." More importantly, in this case, however, personnel files were mandatory for artists as state employees and, according to questionnaire preamble, omissions were not permitted. Omissions, visible in the personal files, could mean two things, that artists made these omissions on purpose and that the state allowed artists to make them. In that, omissions

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<sup>222</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 100.

<sup>223</sup> Randall Halle, personal communication, June, 25, 2019.

could be theorized as resistance to state documentation or as an alliance between government and ballet artists.

In *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* Janice Ross thinks through an increased archivization during the Soviet period within Diana Taylor's framework:

... In a conversation in 2000 at a ballet conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Russian dancer and choreographer Nikita Dolgushin suggested that this shift [in treating subversive Soviet ballets and choreographers] reflected how cultural officials were trying to reclaim their lost past, which included Yakobson.

What Dolgushin described is a process of belated recognition among official that the Soviets had degraded their collective cultural remembrances, in a process that scholar Diana Taylor would likely explain as corrupting the archives of the embodied practices and knowledge that performance produces. Taylor's paradigm is useful frame for considering how this belated recognition in the former Soviet Union has reversed ways in which political manipulation shrank Russia's cultural archive...<sup>224</sup>

Even though the context of Ross's discussion is Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia and the role of Jewish communities and culture in dance and ballet, the argument here is relatively clear – that Soviet state propaganda and the manipulation of archives was in many ways used to wipe out collective memory. Taylor argued that mediation goes across the archive and the repertoire, influencing and framing both spheres. While Ross's

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<sup>224</sup> Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 423.

argument goes along with Diana Taylor's argumentation about the predominance and power of the archive, it is important to state that in the Soviet Union it was not only the archive that was corrupt, but the repertoire as well.<sup>225</sup>

Going back to the personnel files, these documents were at the very center of a "ballet and power" alliance or mutual dependence, as theorized by Ross. These problematic texts that forcefully "archived" bodies into papers went along the power divide between the state organizations and the artists, serving the larger framework of Soviet imperialism. In *Watching Weimar Dance* Kate Elswit coins the new term "archives of watching" to examine the dance culture of Weimar era, discourses and subjectivities that shaped around it. In her text, Elswit refers to Rebecca Schneider's argumentation and the relationship between agency and performance: "The issue of agency in regulating access – as performance scholar Rebecca Schneider puts it 'who gets to make what explicit where and for whom' – is thus crucial to the negotiations of watching that follow."<sup>226</sup> While Elswit refers to Schneider in the very particular context of sexualized works by female performers, the reading of the archives, framing dance, requires us to think about the agency behind the textualized narratives – ones of the state or ones of the artists. Thinking about Ukrainian artists' personnel files as performances, and as performative texts, the issue of "who gets to make what explicit and for whom" is at the center of these documents.

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<sup>225</sup> Ross provides a detailed analysis of repertoire corruption in the chapter "Ballet and Power: Leonid Yakobson and Soviet Russia" in *Like a Bomb Going Off*.

<sup>226</sup> Kate Elswit. *Watching Weimar Dance*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 66.

## Conclusion

As I write this conclusion, I think through the significance of this study. I started this project on a grey winter day watching cable news reports of the unidentified “little green men” appearing in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, paralyzing Ukrainian state institutions, while Kyiv was rocked by protests and counter-protests. I am finishing this project to the backdrop of nearly daily breaking news from the country I spent nearly a year in and where everything seems connected – ballet and Javelin missiles, corruption and election interference, cozy cafes and mud-covered tanks, Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelensky, and Vladimir Putin. The now-famous transcript of the phone call between the US and Ukrainian president revealed Ukraine as a site for political, military, economic and cultural struggle between political superpowers, where Ukraine’s own destiny continues to be uncertain. If for Russia, Ukraine signifies a site of military aggression and imperialism, historic or current, for the United States it is a site for creating a particular political image of the American nation. The sponsorship and origins of the five-floor-building-size graphic poster “Freedom is Our Religion,” on Maidan Square, still puzzles me. But, the call, as a part of repertoire, and a transcript, as a part of archive, have specified and framed the notion of American support in a particular way of suggested if not demanded collusion.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, in the last decades and particularly in the last years, Ukraine has become a battleground of contested ideologies, similar to Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. Geographically, it is a key site, located between Russia and Western Europe and many see it as a natural buffer state between Western

Europe and Russia. Historically, it is a post-Soviet country, struggling for independence from Russia and inclusion into European Union and NATO with a fragile democracy that remains sensitive to any shock from both from outside and from within. Economically, it is an energy transit corridor from Russia to Western Europe and an economic corridor for European exports to Russia and Central Asia. Culturally, it is a site for both historical, professional, and personal connections to Russia and Western Europe, where no single definition of what it means to be Ukrainian exists and efforts to restrict this definition to a certain set of cultural, ethnic and religious markers have consistently failed. For now, it seems that Ukraine's national identity and independence are in its dependence and ability to balance between Soviet-era systems and connections, cultural or economic. In the same way, as old Soviet-era gas pipeline benefits Ukraine through the export of gas from Russia, Soviet-era ballet training and performances benefit its state ballet. While this comparison might not look convincing or appropriate, it is allegorical of the examined tensions and taps into the historical and unexplored connections between ballet, industrialization, machinery movement and its stability. As the older students of Kyiv State Ballet school and artists of Kyiv's National Opera perform as members of "Moscow Ballet" or "Moscow Festival Ballet" on tours to the United States, it is the economic benefit (to the school, to the National Opera and their artists) that matters in the times of war. Ballet cannot detach itself completely or partially from Soviet nostalgia, Imperial-era works, Vaganova training system and fostered in the past connections – for now all these things *are* critical for artists competing in the global ballet economy.

Andre Lepecki's notion of choreography as tyranny and Susan Foster's concept of dance technique as a discipline positioned dance as an important site to understand how the state manifests its power. Existing scholarship on the role of dance as an element of national culture shows that this art form traditionally served as a tool to embed state ideologies and narratives in an attempt to generate a ballet aesthetic visually recognized as an extension of the state. Randy Martin, Susan Foster, Clare Croft and many others have shown that dance represents a unique sphere, where power and ideology become evident on the level of the bodies. Critically, a number of past academic works explored ballet as an important element of cultural diplomacy, where ballet was so closely associated with the state that it became its cultural ambassador. While a number of dance scholars considered the diplomatic impact of Soviet and Post-Soviet international tours and artists' perception of them, there were no works tracing the effect of state-sponsored ballet on formulating domestic cultural policies, national and imperial identities. Furthermore, to date, few academic studies explored the lasting effect of Soviet-era cultural institutions, which continued their operation independently of the very political regime that defined them as inseparable from its existence.

My study has focused on classical ballet as a site of critical cultural tension between forces of nationalism and imperialism in Independent Ukraine nearly three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I relied on a combination of archival and ethnographic methodologies to understand the history and current state of Ukrainian ballet and its relationship to Russian state power, both as an avenue for imperial aggression and as a platform for national resistance. I explored the pervasive Soviet-era efforts to define,

create, and archive a common ballet dance practice across the former USSR and I examined state efforts to structure ballet training, repertoire and its relationships to other dance forms to replicate centralized Soviet ideologies of social mobility, economic distribution and cultural production. Finally, I discussed archival tactics and strategies, deployed by Soviet cultural authorities, to align Ukrainian ballet identity with an Imperial ballet aesthetic, framing Ukrainian dance as inherently peripheral and secondary in its training and repertoire. During my work in the state archives of Ukraine, I located Soviet state documents that revealed a persistent effort to effect and inscribe Ukrainian ballet repertoire and training into the Soviet ballet system as a second-tier cultural institution. I examined archival tactics that “disappeared” subversive national-themed ballet productions, re-assigned creative agency away from their creators and performers, and relocated talented Ukrainian dancers to Moscow and Leningrad.

While I was able to work with part of this collection, the time constraints of my research effort did not allow me to fully explore the extent of this phenomenon of archival control over ballet and ballet artists. In future work, I hope to complete my examination of these archives, focusing on documents such as librettos, meeting protocols, personnel files, and correspondence with political organizations to describe ballet’s textuality, publicly inaccessible in the past, as a method of state control. I further hope to turn to the state archives, pertaining to the development of folk dance during the Soviet period and the state’s effort to tie the development of folk dance in Ukraine to ballet training and repertoire. I hope to trace how and why Soviet texts framed and described folk dances as inherently related to and continuously benefitting from Soviet ballet. I intend to connect



these imperial narratives of folk dances, as needing development “from the top,” with other dance practices and genres that were under imperial influences. I hope to examine the narratives, created in and by the Soviet ballet texts, to frame and affect the public perception of local dance practices in Ukraine as a metaphor for the local practices in general, as inherently incomplete, imperfect and always-in-need of the state sponsorship and control. Finally, I intend to examine collections kept by the libraries and museums of state-sponsored ballet schools of Kyiv, Odessa, Lviv and Kharkiv. These collections, which remain largely undisturbed since the Soviet period, are uniquely reflective of localized attempts by the Soviet state to theorize and archive ballet as a state-propelled and state-sponsored throughout ballet training. Because these schools remain directly affiliated with state theatres, their instructional libraries are uniquely reflective of the ideology inscribed by their training onto ballet bodies that ultimately appear on the stage of Ukrainian national ballet theaters.

Russian imperialism demonstrated remarkable resilience to political regime change, as Russia transitioned from a monarchy under the Tsars, charted a course toward communism under Soviet rule, briefly built a flawed democracy in the 1990’s, and finally reverted to autocratic rule with the dawn of the twenty-first century. Throughout the turmoil of the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow was able to largely maintain control over most of its territories and in recent years renewed its ambitions of regional influence and geographical expansion. Currently, most public and scholarly discourses concentrate on Russia’s political and military actions, while its neo-imperial cultural expansion efforts have gone relatively

unnoticed. Yet, it was precisely the cultural rift, which placed Ukrainian Soviet imperial identity in opposition to Post-Soviet national identity, that was effectively exploited by Russian interests in the hybrid aggression against Ukraine in Crimea and failed to do so in Eastern, Central and Western Ukraine. I believe that my project shows the importance of historicizing the current complexity of cultural and political tensions within the site of state-sponsored Ukrainian ballet and provides insight into the role of classical ballet in formulating a common cultural sphere for Ukrainian ballet artists and audiences, a framework that remains in place and may act as both a platform for cultural imperialism, and as a cultural space for dialogue and reconciliation.

## **Appendix A**

### **Summary of document types located at the State Central Archive-Museum of Literature and Art**

- Librettos (to most productions)
- Correspondence with the Department of Arts of the Ukrainian SSR on the reconstruction of the theater (late 1930s)
- Operations accounting plans (most years)
- Correspondence with the Department of Arts of the Ukrainian SSR regarding the construction of the theater building (late 1930s)
- Annual economic activity reports
- Directors' orders for core activities and staff
- Workers' schedule and estimates of administrative and management expenses
- Decisions and orders of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR
- Correspondence with the head of the Office of Arts at the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and individuals regarding repertoire and new productions.
- Contracts with artists in the rank of Honored People's Artist.
- Production and financial plans
- Correspondence with the Central Committee of USSR and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR on theatre repertoire, new productions, staffing of the theater troupe, improvement of creative activity.

- Documents on the organization of the celebration of anniversaries of artists in the rank of Honored People's Artist
- Contracts with artists on the design and production of performances
- The act of acceptance and transfer of cases when changing the director of the theater
- Meetings of Art Council in conjunction with the participants of the productions
- Minutes of the meetings of the commission of leading theater artists
- Minutes and acceptance acts of ballet production meetings
- Minutes of the meetings of the theater staff
- Journal of the theatre host
- The plan of safety measures and the report on the victims of accidents
- Estimates for the supply of performances
- Orders of the Committee on Arts (most years)
- Passport of theater (most years)
- Transcripts of the Art Council meetings
- Documents on the tours of the theater
- Documents on the work of the directing and conducting committee
- Documents on the preparation for the Decade of Ukrainian Art Festival in Moscow
- Materials on the centenary of the founding of the theater and the celebration of the anniversary
- Plans for foreign artists to stay on tour in Kyiv (1957 and other years)
- Orders of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR and the USSR

- List of theater artists going on tour to Cuba in 1963 (and other countries, different years)
- Congratulatory letters and telegrams of the organizations and individuals to the theater and individual actors who came from the republics of the USSR and from abroad in 1964
- Correspondence with foreign theater organizations and individual artists on the tour of theater artists abroad

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